“Abandon fat all ye who enter here!”: (Dis)ordering the Male Body, c.1800-1910

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Lisa Coar BA, MA
School of English
University of Leicester
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Abstract

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Lisa Coar

‘For the convenience of the public’, declared the author of an 1889 article printed in *Punch*, ‘I would really suggest that the motto for ordinary busses should be, “Abandon fat, all ye who enter here!”’ Such pressing ‘abandonments’, as facetious as they might seem, were, in fact, patently central in shaping (meta)physical ideals, throughout much of the long nineteenth century. The ideological structures underpinning numerous cultural strands – from the social and sporting, to the scientific and sartorial – espoused a fierce anorexic logic. They placed more emphasis on (in)corporeal discipline, compulsive (non)consumption, and (dis)embodied panopticism than ever before. Through adhering to its own idyllic prescriptions, nineteenth-century culture implemented varying strains of the bodily disorder it sought to expel. The cultural and corporeal orderliness it pursued became itself disorderly. Of course, there already exists a substantial amount of research focused on (dis)ordering the too fat or too thin bodies of the nineteenth-century female. With fleshly embodiment and dis-embodiment being stereotypical female concerns, we often forget to ask about the fat-phobic dis-corporation of men. Surveying a variety of textual material, printed roughly between the years 1800 and 1910, this thesis intends to reconfigure man’s peripheral status in modern histories of diet, disorderly eating and fat shame. Dismissing the timeworn myth that fat is, and always has been, ‘a feminist issue’, it will explore how fat, body-image, and an intense desire to be slender became increasingly central to ideal constructions of the nineteenth-century male.
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Introduction

‘For the convenience of the public, I would really suggest that the motto for ordinary busses should be, “Abandon fat, all ye who enter here!”’

– ‘The Fat of the Land’, Punch (1889)

Writing of today’s fat averse, fitness-obsessed society, Roberta Pollack Seid argues (perhaps rightly) that many of us ‘pursue thinness and fitness in response to a now-invisible aesthetic and moral structure’.¹ This structure – though visible in much of the material I explore here – was implemented in the nineteenth century, and became progressively more integral to the era’s construction(s) of ideal masculinity. Of course, there already exists a substantial amount of research focused on (dis)ordering the too fat or too thin bodies of the nineteenth-century female.² The breadth and depth of scholarship on the physicality of her male counterpart, however, leaves much to be desired. Stereotypically, fat is, and always has been, to borrow the words of Susie Orbach, ‘a feminist issue’.³ Body-consciousness, dieting and slenderness are therefore largely presented as being female too. Men are often absent, or, at best, footnote material in modern histories of diet, disorderly eating and fat shame. This thesis intends to counteract the imbalance by surveying a particular cultural moment, roughly between the years 1800 and 1910, where fat, body-image, and an intense desire to be slender were very noticeably becoming the preoccupations of men. Such concerns with body size will be examined in myriad contexts: from the popular and mainstream, through to the sporting and sartorial. Though all four chapters will differ in approach and content, each will provide detailed insight into the (dis)orderly embodiments inculcated in the nineteenth-century male.

To argue that nineteenth-century culture advocated (and implemented) a ‘disorderly ordering’ of its male bodies seems – if not nonsensical, then – paradoxical, at best. However, given that the era’s promotion of rigid bodily ‘order’ coincided with the clinical emergence of various somatoform disorders, the etiological gap which separates these conflicting extremes is subsequently diminished. The clinical emergence of anorexia nervosa in the late 1860s provides the best example of how nineteenth-century culture inadvertently synthesised this order/disorder paradox. Anorexia is, in both popular and professional conceptions, perceived

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² Anna Krugovoy Silver, Gail Houston, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, Sondra Archimedes, Katherine Byrne and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, are among the most noteworthy critics to explore the issue of physicality in the nineteenth-century woman. See bibliography for full details.
to be a mental and bodily ‘disorder’: one that, ironically, indoctrinates neurotic levels of orderliness. To be sure, the anorexic is ritualistic and obsessive. Foodstuffs are categorised into the good and the bad, the safe and the unsafe. Their body is subject to intense spells of scrutiny; each pound of adipose flesh is weighed and obliterated with military precision. But this uncompromising orderliness quite obviously exceeds the bounds of their control and, as the illness takes hold, the anorexic begins to embody an albeit perverted form of the incontrollable disorderliness they seek to avoid or expel. In short, the anorexic’s behaviour becomes excessive, chaotic, and irrational – qualities that invert and counteract the order they crave.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the transitive verb form of the word ‘order’ as follows: ‘to classify; to manage, direct’; ‘to set or keep in proper condition; to adjust, arrange, or carry on according to rule; to regulate, conduct, govern’; ‘to bring into order or submission to lawful authority; to inflict disciplinary punishment on; to correct, chastise, punish’. It similarly defines the reflexive verb form as, ‘to conduct oneself, behave; to regulate or manage oneself’. These punitive renditions all mimic, in varying degrees, the moral and physical imperatives which came to underpin several of the manly ideals upheld by nineteenth-century culture: ideals that saw the bodies of its men as malleable and modifiable. From the beginning of the nineteenth century the human body was, to borrow the words of Michel Foucault, rendered ‘docile’, implicated in a ‘system of subjection’. A ‘docile body’, Foucault posits, is one that ‘may be used, transformed and improved’: ‘power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it’. The era’s dominant discourses of masculinity were, as many scholars and critics have noted, intricately structured around controlling metaphors of discipline. ‘Again and again’, suggests John Tosh, ‘control of the passions, restraint of the appetites and moderation in sex were emphasised. A man who would have authority over others must first master himself’. Andrew Dowling has likewise suggested that ‘metaphors of endurance, pain, reticence, and reserve’, flowed through many of the

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discourses which epitomised ‘Victorian manliness’. Modern conceptions of the ideal male body were built upon visions of coherent ‘harmony and measured movement’; upon the absence of anything incoherent or accidental: every part of his body must ‘fit into place’. In an era that has become renowned for its panopticity, for its visual proclivity to define, classify and categorise on a more all-encompassing scale than ever before, body-consciousness and an awareness of one’s ability to ‘fit’ became axiomatic to nineteenth-century constructions of its manly ideal.

Studies about the ways in which nineteenth-century masculinity pivots around ideas of self-mastery and negation, regulatory discipline and control are widespread. However, there has been little written about how men internalised the era’s maxims in a way that made them psychosomatically susceptible to illnesses which were, in fact, demarcated by the very same values outlined as ‘ideal’. Although Dowling has cast male anxieties about the body in this era as ‘perennial and endemic’, and whilst James Eli Adams has argued that, throughout the nineteenth century, there developed ‘a more inchoate anxiety over masculine self-display’, neither addresses the fact that men’s dis-ease with their bodies brought them in close proximity to the realm of pathology. The ‘inchoate anxieties’ explored by Adams and Dowling maintain a synergetic relationship with the notions of self-discipline and body-consciousness which, I will argue, were equally symptomatic of anorexia nervosa.

In the introduction to her seminal work on the anorexic body in Victorian Literature, Anna Krugovoy Silver argues that ‘anorexia nervosa [...] is deeply rooted in Victorian values, ideologies, and aesthetics, which together helped define femininity in the nineteenth century’. Using this conceptualisation of Victorian culture as a touchstone for my own work, I want to suggest, throughout this thesis as a whole, that these same values, ideologies and aesthetics, were also central to defining the nineteenth-century male. Whilst the ideals of Victorian womanhood – which dictated that females should be selfless and ethereal – mesh closely with the ideologies underpinning anorexia nervosa, the specifically ‘manly’ ideals and virtues of the era – self-control, discipline, steely drive and determination – are also uncannily close to the logic which informs the disease. Men, too, I will argue, were in fact susceptible to

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10 Dowling, Manliness and the Male Novelist, p.3.
the behavioural tropes of the illness, or at least, the ideologies which could (in extreme cases) lead to the potential development of it. Contrary to popular misconception, men were subjected to streamlined standards of embodiment, just as women were. And, like women, perhaps even more so, men could take drastic measures to ensure that they moulded to the appropriate orders of bodily form and fit.

In his 1864 lecture, Sesame and Lilies, John Ruskin presented disciplinary ‘shaping’ practices as being the exclusive forte of men. Excluding women, by choice and necessity, from all forms of ‘character’ moulding, Ruskin states:

There is just this difference between the making of a girl’s character and a boy’s – you may chisel a boy into shape as you would a rock, or hammer him into it, if he be of a better kind, as you would a piece of bronze. But you cannot hammer a girl into anything. She grows as a flower does, [...] you cannot fetter her; she must take her own fair form and way. 13

Here, Ruskin delineates a very precise set of prescriptions which largely adhere to and reinforce the era’s separate sphere dyad. Whilst the young female must ‘grow’, ‘take her own fair form and way’, the male is subjected to disciplinary rigour: his ‘character’ must be ‘chiselled’, or ‘hammered’ into preconceived ‘shape(s)’. Although Ruskin’s observations are about ‘character’ – as opposed to ‘body’ – formation, it is hard to ignore both the aggressive physicality of his language and the corporeal presence such physicality implies. In this passage, Ruskin endows male ‘character’ with a materiality that distorts and blurs the distinctions between temperament and torso, between moral essence and physical presence. Interestingly, such distortions were akin to the era’s conflated body/character discourses on a widespread scale.

Since the late eighteenth century, the ideal man had inhabited an ever more visually-oriented age. From the revival of classical sculpture and the innovative art of photography, through to the development of visual sciences such as physiognomy and phrenology, the male body was encoded as a medium that could be textually deciphered. 14 The new emphases placed on visibility subjected the male body to a readability which ensured that his non-visible or internal character became shaped by surface or external fixtures. In an article entitled ‘Character Reading’, printed in an 1882 issue of the English Phrenological Magazine, this newfound visibility was detailed in striking terms: ‘man may be considered in the light of a

placard’, the author began, ‘hung up on the wall to be read’. His ‘virtues, vices, excellences, […] or barbarism, can be seen by those who have eyes sufficiently educated to read and understand their external manifestations’.

As this extract confirms, a man’s internal nature, or moral ‘character’ – his ‘virtues’, ‘vices’, or ‘excellences’ – were determined by his outer, physical appearance. Far more than his female counterpart, who was generally sheltered in the domestic and private sphere, nineteenth-century males had to cultivate a public image that would serve them in the competitive arenas of business, sport, and, as my final chapter shall reveal, sexual and sartorial display. The competitive ethos which pervaded a man’s living, working, and recreational space ensured that he was plagued by superlative convictions which, following developments in evolutionary science and social Darwinism, encouraged him to thrive (and survive) by being the best, the fittest.

As these pressures indicate, ideal manhood carried immense symbolic weight. Equated with perfectionism, power and physical prowess, men were increasingly open to the charge – or, as John Tosh suggests, ‘the self-reproach’ – that they had failed to ‘measure up’. This idea of ‘measuring’, of abstract comparison, of weighted calculation was directly projected onto the male body, in both figurative and literal terms. In order to conform to standardised measurements, physically and metaphysically, man often had to thwart his most natural inclinations. In order to achieve even the semblance of an orderly ideal, he had to tame his natural perversity, repress his appetites, taper his sexual energy. Again, this persisting sense of reserve and restraint, of discipline and denial, parallels the logic which informs anorexia nervosa.

In her 1989 study, *Never Too Thin*, Roberta Seid argues that:

> anorexia nervosa has become the paradigm of our age, and we as individuals, as a nation, suffer because of it. Our national abhorrence of fat and flab is a difference in degree, not in kind, from the anorexic’s abhorrence of it. We, too, view with horror every ounce gained, every bit of subcutaneous fat. We, too, have come to see fat as an unnatural growth, akin to a cancerous tumour. We have come to see it as a disease and a disgusting disfigurement. And now we consider it dangerous, an actively invading enemy that can engulf body and soul. […] Our national abhorrence of fat is matched by our abhorrence of fat people. Prejudice against them keeps mounting. We stigmatize their “condition” because it has come to

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The language used by Seid to describe our modern aversions to fat here is, as we shall soon discover, uncannily close to that that employed by many nineteenth-century writers and thinkers. As my first chapter shall explore in some detail, fat was, in various accounts, rendered ‘evil’: an insufferable substance to be encountered with ‘horror’. It was simultaneously configured as a ‘disease’ (or at least the cause of it) and a ‘disfigurement’; a parasitical ‘plague’, and a ‘crime’. When reading these aversions in relation to the exalted value placed on notions of self-discipline and bodily abnegation, anorexia nervosa becomes the paradigm of the Victorian age, as much as our own.

Of course, as Seid goes on to caution, ‘finding evidence of individuals concerned about excessive fat does not mean that the culture from which the individual emerges has necessarily oriented itself around ideals of slenderness’. In the nineteenth century, however, this is generally not the case. Following an intensified stigmatisation of the fleshly, a collective dread of fatness came to persist as a pervasive, overvalued idea. Those individuals who attempted to rid their bodies of any excess were most probably doing so in reaction to newly emerging medical fears, or in order to fit to the era’s slender ideals. Throughout much of the long nineteenth century, a matrix of influences – social, medical, sporting and sartorial – converged to create an ideal body configuration which was, in large part, free of fat. To be fat was a fatal faux pas, in both clinical and cultural terms. The list of dangers caused by adipose tissue appears to have become more extensive and menacing as the era progressed, and, consequently, fears of fat became paramount in both popular and professional imaginations. Various forms of diet and exercise paraphernalia – be it in the form of conduct books, sports manuals, health recipes, or quack remedies – were reaching ever wider audiences until anorectic behavioural tropes prevailed.

In suggesting that some of the era’s males (and females) adhered to the prescriptions of an ‘anorexic logic’, I do by no means want to imply that the ideal look was emaciation. On the contrary, the body that was excessively slender often caused a great deal of concern, in medical, moral and military terms. With the exception of a few minor sects – most notably the Regency and fin-de-siècle era dandies – an excessively slender body configuration was not

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17 Seid, *Never Too Thin*, p.22.
18 Ibid. p.45.
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posited as ideal. Though accepted levels of fat fluctuated erratically and dramatically, a body devoid of any excess was conceived, on an impressively wide scale, not only to be ideal, but also the ‘norm’. Whilst the clinical anorexic’s aversion to fat was posited as an extreme, their behaviour was nevertheless situated on a long continuum: one that allowed for many individuals to share the symptoms of the illness without actually submitting to clinical categories. Individuals who were either mildly or moderately anxious about fat could thus be placed, by various cultural authorities, and in varying intermediate positions, amidst the same spectrum which separated ‘normal’ antipathies from those that adjoined the realm of pathology.

It is important to note, at this stage, that the primary intention of my study is, like Krugovoy Silver’s work before it, not to project today’s medical diagnoses onto individuals from a previous century. Instead, I will explore how the shared characteristics that exist between somatoform conditions – such as anorexia nervosa, and, to a lesser extent, body dysmorphic disorder – coexist with the physical and moral ideologies propounded by nineteenth-century culture. Anything posited as an anorectic ‘diagnosis’ is only meant to be conjectural and speculative: a metaphorical representative of the era’s widely prevailing behavioural tropes. In accordance with Susan Bordo’s work – which takes ‘the psychopathologies that develop within a culture [...] to be characteristic expressions of that culture; to be, indeed, the crystallisation of much that is wrong with it’ – my own research will analyse the largely symbiotic relations which came to exist between the nineteenth-century’s prevalent bodily ideals and the era’s metaphorical developments of, and clinical developments in, psychosomatic maladies. In reading anorexia nervosa (and, as I do in my final chapter, body dysmorphic disorder) metaphorically, my work reveals that the bodily ideals promoted in a number of the era’s cultural sectors subscribe to many of the same behaviours and characteristics which, today, concomitantly define the illness.

The year 1873 saw both the coining and first diagnoses of anorexia nervosa. Through their pioneering remarks on an increasingly prevalent and protean illness, the English physician, Sir William Withey Gull, and the Parisian doctor, Charles Lasègue nigh on simultaneously transformed the ‘common medical symptom, lack of appetite, into a full-blown medical disease’. When putting forth their theories regarding the illness, a sustained refusal of food and a subsequent loss of flesh came to be the condition’s most prominent characteristics. In 1868, Gull made a preliminary reference to what he called a ‘peculiar form

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of disease’ which occurred ‘mostly in young women’ and was ‘characterised by extreme emaciation’.\(^{22}\) He referred to this nervous stomach disorder as ‘Apepsia hysterica’: it took him five more years for him to decide that ‘“Anorexia” would be more correct.’\(^{23}\) Although Gull assigned a specific type to the illness, announcing that ‘the subjects of this affection are mostly of the female sex’, he did admit that ‘I have occasionally seen it in males’.\(^{24}\) It was for this reason that he rejected Lasègue’s labelling of the illness as l’anorexie hystérique, and, according to fellow physician Simon Wilks, ‘Sir W. Gull’ certainly deserved ‘congratulation [...] on his rejection of the word “hysteria”’.\(^{25}\)

Hysteria had long been nominated as ‘the quintessential female malady, the very name of which derived from the Greek hystereon, or womb’.\(^{26}\) Gull, however, made an assertive preference to tag ‘nervosa’ to anorexia, because this, he felt, would implicate ‘the central nervous system instead of the uterus’ and allow for ‘the condition [to] exist in males’.\(^{27}\) In comparison to today’s comprehensive list of symptoms, the diagnostic criteria devised by nineteenth-century physicians was relatively basic, and comparatively minimal. In addition to the persistent refusal of food and a rapidly diminishing body-weight (that could not be accounted for through organic illness), anorexia was generally attributed to ‘mental perversity’;\(^{28}\) or, in the more profane words of Dr Dowse, it was a condition that ‘certainly belong[s] to the borderland of insanity’.\(^{29}\) For Dr Fenwick, there was ‘no symptom that seems so inexplicable [...] as the constant activity they exhibit’,\(^{30}\) and, in the case of women, amenorrhea was usually the final means of signifying the illness.\(^{31}\) These preliminary criteria are obviously lacking any recognition of the fleshly ‘fears’ which characteristically pervade anorexia. However, pathological qualms about fat did not go entirely unnoticed. The Yorkshire-born practitioner, T. Clifford Allbutt, for instance, believed that, like the anorexic, the chlorotic

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\(^{23}\) Ibid. p.309.
\(^{24}\) Ibid. p.305.
\(^{27}\) Brumberg, Fasting Girls, pp.119-120.
\(^{31}\) Although most of the original nineteenth-century criteria are still included in basic diagnostic frameworks for anorexia, menstrual irregularities have ceased to be of central significance. Interestingly, it is only in recent years that endocrine symptoms, such as amenorrhea, have been played down in the condition’s diagnoses – presumably because delineating the absence of periods as a key diagnostic category resists the idea that the illness can exist in men.
patient’s extreme slenderness was often induced by a ‘panic fear of obesity’. This vivid image was also pointed out by the American psychiatrist, William Stout Chipley, who, in 1859, classified ‘Sitomania’, another anorectic-like condition which he typified as a subcategory of insanity that manifested an ‘intense dread of food’.

In accordance with both the tenth edition of the World Health Organisation’s *International Classification of Diseases* (2007), and the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (2013), anorexia is today defined by the following diagnostic characteristics: the ‘persistent restriction of energy intake’, and a ‘refusal to maintain body weight at or above a normal weight for age and height’. Either ‘an intense fear of gaining weight or of becoming fat, or persistent behaviour that interferes with weight gain’. A ‘disturbance in the way one’s body weight or shape is experienced’ or persistent ‘body-image distortion’, whereby ‘a dread of fatness persists as an intrusive, overvalued idea’. The ‘avoidance of “fattening foods” and one or more of the following: self-induced vomiting; self-induced purging; excessive exercise; use of appetite suppressants and/or diuretics’. These criteria will become persistent literary tropes, in various strains and guises, throughout the entirety of my thesis. Although these twenty-first-century diagnostics are noticeably absent in most nineteenth-century medical discourse on anorexia, the cultural presence of such symptoms indicates that they might have nevertheless formed a consequential part of the era’s unhealthy ideals. These twentieth and twenty-first-century diagnostics are therefore useful in providing a structured framework with which to further analyse, and reinforce, the idea that the ideals which came to shape nineteenth-century culture bordered the realm of pathology.

It is not, of course, coincidental that it was during the nineteenth century – with its developments in medicine, as well as its anxious conjunctions of ‘conspicuous consumption’ and disciplined restraint – that anorexia developed into a clinical category. Nor is it a

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35 With industrialisation and mass-mechanisation, with railways and new water systems, the inhabitants of the nineteenth century appeared to be well on their way to mastering nature, to producing a new sense of temporal freedom and spatial mobility. This new sense of mastery affected the human body: like a machine, it was to be serviceable, well-regulated and efficient; capable of streamlined movement, devoid of fleshly impediments, or fatty excess. As Seid puts it, ‘technological innovations, economic
coincidence that much of the medical literature on the illness is devoid of cases in men. This does not necessarily mean, however, that men did not suffer from anorexia. There are, indeed, various clinical reports (though, admittedly few) of the disease in men. What this lack does potentially imply is that the era’s (predominantly male) medical establishment was wary of—and even reluctant to expose—the psychosomatic vulnerability of its male population. With so much cultural emphasis placed on the integrity of ‘order’ to ideals of masculinity, to admit that its men were affected by a predominantly female disorder would be akin to admitting failure and defeat. The ideal man, strong, and capable of withstanding orderly imperatives, was expected to master and control his body, without transgressing the thin line which distinguished ideals of order from bodily disorder.

That men’s obsessions with rigid bodily (dis)ordering were not widely discussed in clinical accounts of anorexia is possibly the most pressing challenge of this work. It is a challenge in that it threatens to weaken my argument that the era’s men could be affected by a prototype of masculinity founded on pathological principles. However, this lack of clinical material has, in many ways, enriched my study exponentially. For a start, it has led me to uncover a diverse range of related medical (and non-medical) material on diet, exercise and material excess. As this in itself suggests, my work here actively embraces an interdisciplinary, cultural-historical approach—reading the era’s popular, scientific, medical and professional texts in tandem with canonical literary works. Though clinical evidence of men suffering from anorexia nervosa is limited, evidence of men participating in anorectic types of behaviour outside of the realm of pathology is widely documented, implying that desires to mould and shape the ideal body were adopted by more than a small minority.

As a literary scholar I intermittently consign this thesis to an examination of various novels in order to uncover and reflect upon the era’s social ethics and veracities. Throughout changes, and the ideology of efficiency all conspired to reinforce the slenderised ideal. The human body—both male and female—was to be as efficient, as effective, as economical, and as beautiful as the sleek new machines, as the rationalized workplace’. Seid, Never Too Thin, p.81.


37 All of the clinical reports on male cases that I have found have excused the afflicted on account of idiocy and lunacy.
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each of my four chapters, I examine the disorderly ordering of male bodies in a variety of works, by authors such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, H. G. Wells and J. M. Barrie. For the most part though, my investigation will centre on nineteenth-century discussions and descriptions of the (dis)orderly bodies found in the conduct and etiquette literature of the era, its medical books, periodical material, news articles, advertisements, satirical cartoons, and scientific theories. In adopting this multidisciplinary approach I will paint a fuller, and more nuanced, picture of the pressures nineteenth-century males had to face, from varying angles and perspectives. I will likewise demonstrate the extent to which interest in (and concerns for) the subject switched from popular literature to specialist medical and scientific writing interchangeably.

While conduct and medical books provide illuminating insight into the social and clinical prescriptions surrounding ideal constructions of the masculine physique, popular fiction, as well as news and periodical articles, reveal the extent to which nineteenth-century culture was willing to digest the subject on a mass scale. The very fact that such a wealth of body-focussed content circulated in numerous contexts – from medicine to fashion, and from science to sport – demonstrates the full extent of men’s engagement with the era’s often unattainable ideals, as well as the diversity of prescriptive options available to them. We should, of course, be careful of accepting prescriptive literature, in all its various forms, as evidence of practice. Nonetheless, through reading the various diary extracts, journal entries and letters provided as case studies for this work, we can, in fact, see evidence of real-life practice being implemented, albeit on an individual scale. My explorations of personal life-stories, read in concurrence with advice literature, aim to reveal that prescriptive literature and practical experience could be correlative, each informing the other.

As one might expect, the era’s prescriptions were neither static, nor monolithic. Various fads moved in rapid succession of each other, ensuring that the specificity of the period’s variable and heterogeneous ideals fluctuated as quickly as the weights of the dieters who adhered to the latest directives. It is for this reason that the span of my project is chronologically wide-reaching. If my study focussed on the dietetic intricacies and the specific ideals of a decade, or even two, it would not be able to convey the enduring persistence of bodily (dis)ordering throughout the nineteenth century as a whole. Nor could it portray the true extent of its cultural, temporal and sequential scope. That said, much of the material explored from my second chapter onwards was published after 1860. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, from the middle-decades of the century, expansions in consumerism
The issues of control and abnegation which chaffed against the era’s inflated material appetites consequently became more visceral. Secondly, the debates that emerged in response to mid-century scientific and evolutionary theories – particularly those surrounding ideas of the ‘survival of the fittest’ – amplified the cultural value placed on notions of individual health and generational longevity, as well as creating an ongoing dialogue with interceptions between personal reform and national prowess.

These ideas of nationhood quite obviously introduce us to dimensions of race and class. This study will focus predominantly upon the British (and to a lesser extent, European) middle-classes: those who had the means to shape their bodies through will-power and conscious choice; who abstained from food and engaged in laborious physical activity through personal preference, as opposed to through work or financial necessity. This is not to say that the bodies (healthy or otherwise) of the era’s working-class males were not important to discourses of physical and national efficiency. Towards the end of the century, many working-class men – as well as many clinical and cultural authorities – were, in fact, becoming increasingly conscious of their bodies. In addition to the intensified focus on middle-class corporeality, there was, as George Mosse suggests, ‘a surge of support for building and disciplining the body among British working-class men as well’. This, it was hoped, ‘would help adjust the working class to normative manliness, and aid its members in becoming more productive’. Nonetheless, following the assumption that upper-middle and middle-class men were, generally speaking, both the authors and the targeted readership of most prescriptive literature on diet, my study will not focus in any detail upon class differentiation and hierarchies. Instead, it will concentrate upon those who could afford to buy into the era’s

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38 Thomas Richards suggests that ‘The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the first outburst of the phantasmagoria of commodity culture. It inaugurated a way of seeing things that marked indelibly the cultural and commercial life of Victorian England and fashioned a mythology of consumerism that has endured to this day’. The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p.18.

39 According to Krista Lysack, the Great Exhibition of 1851 was not only a historical moment that ‘marked Britain’s revolution in retailing’, but one that also ‘ushered in cultural anxieties about the woman shopper’s relationship to the vicissitudes of consumer appetite’. These anxieties about female consumption, I would argue, were equally applicable to the nineteenth-century male. Lysack, Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women’s Writing (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), p.2.

40 In 1864 Herbert Spencer coined the phrase, ‘survival of the fittest’ in relation to Darwin’s theories on Natural Selection. It was not until the publication of the fifth edition of his 1859 text, On the Origin of Species that Darwin adopted the phrase himself. See Richard Michod, Darwinian Dynamics: Evolutionary Transitions in Fitness and Individuality (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.140.


42 Mosse, The Image of Man, p.137.
Introduction

The first chapter of my thesis lays much of the theoretical groundwork which will come to shape this study as a whole. It will begin by outlining and tracing the cultural and clinical ascendency of Victorian fat phobia between the years 1800 and 1910. In doing this, I will ask how and why fat – a once ‘motherly’ substance which nurtured and protected the body from harm – came to be seen as a heinous parasite. Allowing for a detailed examination of the various (con)texts which helped shape society’s perceptions of and fixations with fat, as well as the preferred absence of it, this preliminary chapter will reveal the extent to which nineteenth-century culture evinced an ongoing fascination with the limits of male body size and human proportion. It will discuss man’s increasingly prevalent craze for public weighing-machines; examine the advent of amateur forms of lipo-surgery; and analyse the incongruent reciprocities existing between the era’s burgeoning consumer appetites and the simultaneous validation of anorectic restraint.

Chapter two, ‘Lightweight and Little’, will examine how anorectic principles and modes of behaviour were ingrained in Victorian and Edwardian boys from an early age. Beginning with the disciplinary injunctions of Ruskin it will explore how concepts of boyhood greed and moral censure at the dinner-table quickly filtered into the era’s novels and popular fiction. The remaining sections of this chapter will take two of the period’s most notoriously ‘boyish’ figures – J. M. Barrie and Lewis Carroll – as case-studies. In examining the lives and works of each of these men, I will further evaluate the importance of individual fears of fat in relation to their widespread prevalence and scale. In addition to examining the ways in which these men use calorific intake as a manipulative tool, or how their figurative ‘chiselling’ mimics the era’s surgical developments, this second chapter will begin to explore how the ideal male was thought to be vigorously active and physically industrious.

Continuing to build upon these discussions of physical activity, chapter three will assess the ways in which nineteenth-century culture adopted sport and exercise as effective means of weight manipulation. It will situate male body anxieties in relation to physical hyperactivity. The chapter will then split off into three broad subdivisions. The first will examine the epoch’s anorectic fantasies of flight in relation to aerial gymnastics. In the second section, I will discuss the life story of Fred Archer, whose steadfast adherence to his lightweight job description resulted in an eating disorder and untimely death. Lastly, I will explore how the era’s now potent strains of fat-phobia, as well as simultaneously emerging theories of degeneration, began to intercept with desires to re-build the individual body, and, by extension, the social body of the nation.
Having placed a great deal of emphasis on the specular dynamics patent in the sporting body, my fourth and final chapter will provide additional space to explore more broadly how the nineteenth-century male came to exist in a highly visual culture of glances, poses, and physical fixation. It will examine how the era’s disciplinary ethos of panoptical looking gave rise to the clinical findings of Enrico Morselli, who, throughout the 1890s, advanced his psychological theories on ‘Dysmorphophobia’. Combining discussions of sartorial culture and mirrored consciousness, this closing chapter will explore how a heightened awareness of male body-image interlaced not only with the behavioural characteristics of anorexia nervosa, but also with sex and science. It will re-examine the ways in which the highly self-conscious lifestyles endorsed by men could be underwritten by prescriptive authorities and publications that made the beauty and health of the human body their central focus.

As a whole then, this thesis will provide a detailed insight into the persistent (dis)ordering of male bodies – as well as their diet, exercise, dress and consumer habits – throughout much of the long nineteenth century. In doing so, it will interact with the existing scholarship on nineteenth-century masculinity which, for the most part, seems heavily invested in undervaluing, and even denying, men’s psychosomatic vulnerabilities. By and large, I will contend that public discourse on men’s engagement with (dis)orderly restraint was far more significant, dynamic, and complicated than has thus far been acknowledged. I will demonstrate that, by adhering to its own idyllic prescriptions, nineteenth-century culture was, not without huge irony, encouraging its men to become living manifestations of the disorderly types it invariably held with caution. In assessing the nineteenth-century male’s bodily disease, as well as his rigid adherence to the era’s physical and fashionable ideals, my study will begin to close the gap in existing scholarship which generally renders men anomalies in – or, entirely excludes them from – studies focused on nineteenth-century corporeality. Through my varied textual explorations of the human body, I will reveal that increasing numbers of nineteenth-century men were, in actual fact, profoundly affected by the era’s (dis)orderly imperatives: imperatives that taught him to slim down, shape up and “’Abandon fat all ye who enter here!’”
Chapter 1 – From Byron to Banting: Charting the Rise of Victorian Fat-Phobia

‘The epitome of welfare, is leanness; while the origin of evil, nay, evil itself, is fat’.

– ‘The Art of Unfattening’, Household Words (1857)

‘Fat’, declared the author of a 1914 article printed in the Saturday Review, ‘is now regarded as an indiscretion, and almost as a crime. Only the very strong-minded dare to be fat, and there are few indeed who glory in corpulence’. It would be Interesting, he went on, ‘if some student of manners would trace with precision the process whereby what finicking people call “embonpoint” came into general discredit’. It is the aim of this preliminary chapter to do just that. Of course, contrary to the implications of this chapter’s title, the history of diet and the stigmatisation of fat stretch far beyond the reach of either the Romantics or the Victorians: ‘from the days of Hippocrates downwards’, declared one nineteenth-century doctor, ‘dietetics, and the efficacy of abstinence, have been the constant theme of physicians and moralists’. However, whilst the chronicle of slimming is expansive – in both a cultural and chronological sense – the nineteenth century was undoubtedly central to clinical developments in, and theoretical solidifications of, ‘fat pathology’.

Beginning with a precursory examination of the Romantic ‘celebrity’ and his aversions to fat, this chapter will turn to survey the girth and breadth of nineteenth-century fat discourse. Broadly speaking, it will move from a discussion surrounding the anorectic behaviour of Lord Byron and the ascetic cult of Romanticism through to the widespread Victorian dieting craze induced by William Banting. However, diverging from the linear singularity that this structure seems to imply, the ideological transitions located between Byron and Banting are by no means uncomplicated. As the intricate nuances and paradoxes explored throughout the chapter will suggest, during the nineteenth century, fatty matter was multifarious and contradictory. Fat was simultaneously essential and superfluous; protective and parasitic; a sign of material wealth and moral weakness. As a result of these oxymora, any single and linear trajectory of fat history threatens to oversimplify its complexities and streamline its densities. Multiple trends in coexisting attitudes towards fat – influenced by class, fashion, medicine, as well as competing ideals of masculinity – were integral to the formation of psychosomatic pathologies throughout the era in question. Without addressing the nuances surrounding fatty matter, we risk undermining just how pervasive Romantic, Victorian, and later Edwardian strains of fat-phobia would become. One of the principal aims

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of this chapter, then, is to reveal that, throughout the long nineteenth century, ‘fat’ functioned as a floating signifier which could erratically disrupt and dislodge a mélange of equally volatile social categories. It will explore how, within the extended body of nineteenth-century culture, ‘fatty matter’ engendered acute social perplexity: an increasing visible presence which, in turn, spawned cultural (and clinical) schisms which periodically diversified throughout the epoch as a whole. It was this very instability and ideological volatility, I will argue, which permitted the era’s fat-phobic symptomologies to thrive.

As proponents of the first industrial, consumer-driven society, the inhabitants of the long nineteenth century had to deal with their materiality in new, frightening and complex ways. Men and women had to learn how to grapple with their material desires in a manner that would simultaneously distance them from the materiality of their consumer bodies. The inclination to consume in a commercial sense would, ideally, be kept separate from alimentary consumption. It was during this period that ‘consumption’, to borrow the words of Fred Inglis, acquired ‘derogatory’ – even pathological – ‘inflexion[s]’. For the (wealthy) inhabitants of the latter half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, to consume meant being ‘impelled by a passion for going to market not to subsist, but to buy for the joy of it, to consume more than their dinner (and more dinner than they needed)’. It was, as William Wadd suggested in 1810, ‘the increase of wealth and the refinement of modern times’ which had ultimately begun to render ‘fat’ (as well as fears of it) a ‘disease’. In its newfound status as ‘illness’, fat, and the corpulent bodies it infected, triggered distended cultural dis-ease beyond the bounds of its individual sufferers. Medics and misers contemplated and contested fatty matter with persistence. The discrepancies between gluttonous surfeit and poverty-stricken malnourishment struck a note of discord in all social circles. Fat was a substance that afflicted the nation: it tainted its moral character, and depleted Britain of its ‘greatness’.

Of course, such frames of thinking were not a nineteenth-century innovation. Although temporally remote and fundamentally different societies, many inhabitants of the eighteenth century were likewise preoccupied with consumer materiality and its related disturbances. For the eighteenth-century physician, George Cheyne, for instance – a man who, at his heaviest, was thirty-two stone – the weighty ills brought about by modernity were in themselves a troublingly ‘English’ phenomenon. Voicing concerns that would later become central to both Romantic and Victorian modes of living, Cheyne stated:

46 Wadd, Cursory Remarks on Corpulence, p.17. Of course, whilst fatness was categorised as a disease, medical theories on anorexia nervosa – an illness primarily characterised by irrational fears of gaining weight – would also soon be clinically developed.
the Richness and Heaviness of our Food, the Wealth and Abundance of the Inhabitants, the Inactivity and Sedentary Occupations of the better Sort (among whom this Evil mostly rages) [...] have brought forth a Class and Set of Distempers, with atrocious and frightful Symptoms, Scarce known to our Ancestors, and never rising to such fatal Heights, nor afflicting such Numbers in any other known Nation. 47

‘The whole Controversy among us’, Cheyne went on, ‘seems to lie in out-doing one another in such Kinds of Profusion’. This sense of ‘out-doing’, of competitive markets, of spirited emulation, coincided not only with the cultural rise of capitalism, but also with the social construction of notions of celebrity status.

According to Jason Goldsmith, it was the infamous Lord Byron who ‘inaugurated the new technics of mass-media celebrity’. 48 Whilst this claim is not necessarily accurate, 49 Byron was certainly renowned for his celebrity status. With Byron, the boundaries which distinguished public and private were distorted, and visual appearance, in particular, became increasingly pivotal to the fashioning of his public, literary self and image. Aware of the aesthetic values embodied by slenderness, the ‘bashfully’ corpulent, clubfooted Byron dieted drastically: he ‘physicked his intellect with wretched opium pills and acrid vinegar’ so as to ‘vie with the slim Beau’s [sic] of modern times’. 50 Without doubt, Byron’s dieting feats incurred an enthralling hold over an impressionable and receptive youth. While few of Byron’s contemporaries would dispute his bearing, or even his significance, the nature of his cultural power was widely contested by the contemporary press. 51 In 1821, for instance, John Scott, then editor of the London Magazine, denounced Byron’s antics ‘not merely as offensive spectacles, but as dangerous causes of the deformity of others by operating on susceptible dispositions with their diseased and monstrous influence’. 52 Byron’s ‘diseased’ and ‘monstrous influence’ reflects the impact created by nineteenth-century’s fat-phobia as a whole. Diets and dieters were, for much of the century, troublingly pervasive and influential. 53

49 Claire Brock, among others, has demonstrated that the rise of celebrity cultures long pre-date Byron, as well as traversing traditional boundaries of gender. See, Claire Brock, The Feminization of Fame, 1750-1830 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
50 Edward Trelawny, Recollections of the last days of Shelley and Byron (Boston: Ticknor and fields, 1858), pp.50-51; Lord Byron to Elizabeth Pigot, 13 July 1807, in Byron’s Letters and Journals, ed. by Leslie Marchand, 12 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973), i, pp.126-127.
51 Goldsmith, ‘Celebrity and the Spectacle of Nation’, p.28.
In a culture that could often reach no cultural or clinical consensus regarding the pros and cons of fat, men were increasingly unsure of how to ‘properly’ respond to their surplus adiposity. This responsive uncertainty made individuals fear fat, and consequently want to eradicate it from their bodies. As we shall discover, because culturally accepted modes of embodiment were so conceptually unstable, the body that, in one moment, fell within the parameters which defined acceptable adiposity was, in the next, at risk of spreading beyond those limits. To facilitate interaction with these constantly changing norms on a personal, public and political level, Victorian men had to intuitively respond to the epoch’s dietetic innovations, so as to meet the criterion of the period’s ever-shifting ideals.

The wide-ranging publication dates of the disparate texts featured in this chapter provide testimony to the fact that the era’s fat philosophy drastically varied: one decade often contradicting the next. They also reveal that there was no decisive chronological shift from pro-fat to anti-fat; rather, like the weight of the ardent dieter himself, ideals and paradigms of weightiness and weightlessness constantly fluctuated. In the following 1888 news article, we begin to see how contemporary critics were, themselves, aware of the theoretical intricacies which surrounded fat thinking:

If we ask these two practical questions: (1) Is there any harm in getting fat? and (2) When may a man be said to be getting too fat? we shall encounter[...]some divergence of opinion. A reader of medical journals might have observed, in one of the most influential of these papers, an alarming summary of all the evils which obesity brings in its train; a few weeks later he might have read, in another equally influential journal, a statement that there really was no reason whatever why a man should object to weigh from fifteen to twenty stone!  

Whilst some of today’s critics have readily acknowledged that nineteenth-century attitudes towards ‘fat’ cannot be defined by any ‘single monologic voice’, many still neglect to fully recognise the inherent chronological complexities and competing narrative strands which – when taken as a whole – comprise a more complete version of the Victorian gentleman’s ‘Fat History’. In Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West (2002), for instance, Peter Stearns suggests that ‘between the 1860s and the 1880s rotundity gained ground for men as

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well as women’. It was, according to Stearns, not until the 1890s that widespread ‘concerns about fat began to emerge’. However, with references to conditions such as sitophobia and anorexia – illnesses that, as we have seen, are characterised by irrational fears of food, fat and gaining weight – being made from the early 1860s, Stearns’ claim seems untimely and ill-founded. Medical men would surely have needed to collate a substantial amount of case studies before the medicalization of excessive dieting and irrational fears of growing fat could occur.

As much of the pre-1890s material presented in this chapter will confirm, although there was no clear-cut chronological divide marking a linear shift from pro-fat to anti-fat, the period 1860-1880 was, in fact, emphatically central to fat-phobic attitudes taking cultural precedence. These mid-Victorian decades were what I shall refer to as the ‘post-Banting’ years: the decades in which weight-watching and aversions to corporeal materiality became acute and prolific. In response to these intensifying fears of fat, diet regimes which aimed to drastically reduce the bulk of one’s body became more pressing and public. No longer something pursued by a select cult of Romantic individuals and their small throng of admirers, excessive – even obsessive – diet behaviour was assimilated into the mainstream.

According to Hillel Schwartz such widespread diet fads ‘seem to appear out of nowhere, in no time at all, like barbarians or wandering saints’. They also ‘seem to disappear as easily and as swiftly as they come’. As a result of these impulsive sequences of appearance and disappearance, the ‘typical chronicle of slimming’, claims Schwartz, will only ever be ‘a discrete set of flashing points: enlightenment to dark age to enlightenment, discontinuous and disappointing’. Whilst there is much truth in what Schwartz claims – fears of fat and trends in diet do shift in sporadic cycles, which peak and wane – I want to suggest that the fat-phobic discourses which drove the nineteenth-century’s diet industry were far more (omni)present than these ‘discontinuous and disappointing’ ‘flashes’ seem to suggest. In spite of all its enigmatic paradoxes and complexities, fat became a ubiquitous source of stigma and shame to various sectors of the nineteenth-century public. Although for every spurt of fat-phobic intensification came a reactionary pro-fat outbreak, fears of fat ultimately tipped the balance in the scales. If anything, the vehemence and ineffectualness of anti-dieting authorities merely attests to just how culturally ingrained fat-phobic notions were. Furthermore, such sporadic refutations were, most probably, further pivotal to the construction and proliferation of the era’s anti-fat phenomena. Without them, and the cultural controversy and speculation roused

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by them, fat-phobia would probably have been nothing more than a fleeting fancy. Yet, as the temporal diversity of the material used in this chapter—spanning from the early 1800s well into the first decade of the 1900s—demonstrates, fears of fat were far from fleeting, or fanciful: a more appropriate label would be ‘fatal’.

(i.) Romantic Self-Restraint: Establishing an Anorectic Aesthetic
Throughout the ‘Romantic’ years of the nineteenth century, slenderness and the ‘healthy bodily functions’ it signified were often thought to bring about ‘stability’—to both the body and the body politic. ‘A bloated state’, (of either kind) suggests Louise Foxcroft, ‘was a disaster’. Although the proponents of Romanticism were not all necessarily fat-phobes, many did show an aesthetic and intellectual preference for the ethereal and ineffectual over the substantial and weighty. Ascetic modes of living (and the slender body configurations which derived from such temperance) represented ‘a return to “nature”’: a ‘contemporary reaction to pollution, artificiality and corruption that has resonance today’. In an anonymously written poem that was first printed in the mid-eighteenth century, ‘Foul luxury’ was denounced as being ‘the cause of all your pain:/ Nature and reason bid you then abstain’. ‘Fast, and fear not; you’ll need no drop or pill’, this wise bard concluded, ‘Hunger may starve, excess is sure to kill’. The distinguished naval surgeon, Thomas Trotter, was another who cautioned against the dangers of such ‘luxurious living’. ‘I would sooner encounter the prejudices of any sick man’, Trotter confessed in 1807, ‘rather than those of a glutton’. In his view, the ‘excess and debauch’ brought about by ‘vicious indulgence’ led to a ‘vortex of dissipation’. The Corpulent’, claimed Trotter, were ‘nervous and bilious’; their minds constantly clouded by thoughts of ‘rich food’. It was potentially for this reason that the French Romanticist, Théophile Gautier, archly declared that he could not have ‘accepted’ as a successful ‘lyric poet anyone weighing more than ninety-nine pounds’. Bearing such potentially weighty burdens in mind, many of the writers who belonged to the Romantic movement were careful to not let

59 Ibid. p.51.
62 Ibid. p.44.
63 Ibid. p.68.
their bodies expand beyond these designated limits. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for instance, ‘monitored much that he allowed to pass down his oesophagus’.65 Percy Bysshe Shelley was equally steadfast in his ‘Mother Hubbard’ abstemiousness: much of his poetic success was, according to Matthew Arnold, dependent upon his cultural presence as a ‘beautiful and ineffectual angel’.66 It may very well be for this reason that Lord Byron also ‘clapped a muzzle on [his] jaws, and [...] consumed [his] own fat’ in order to ‘attenuate and keep up [his] ethereal part’.67 This last notion – ‘consuming’ one’s own body fat – was undeniably central to the Romantic ethos.

Whilst the likes of Percy Shelley were internally consumed by the ravages of pulmonary consumption, many others manifested a very concentrated external craving for a consumptively slender disposition. But just why were such excessively slender contours so appealing? As many critics have suggested, throughout and beyond the Romantic period, the extremely slight victim of tuberculosis was thought to have been blessed with ‘heightened awareness, creativity, and intensified intellectual power’. Consumption was, in short, configured as ‘the writer’s disease’, an emblem of artistic ‘stoicism’ and ‘talent’.68 As an 1828 author writing for the Atlas pointed out, the ‘greatest writers’ of all time often inhabited a (consumptively) ‘slender’ silhouette. They were ‘all little, attenuated men; stomachless, meagre, lean and lath-like beings who half-spiritualized themselves by keeping matter in due subordination to mind’.69 This author’s declaration simultaneously connects and disconnects such writers to, and from, the authentic consumptive. Whilst the adjectives in this statement all point to the physical side-effects of consumption, the verbs imply a sense of self-willed agency, and, of course, the true victim of tubercular illness was not usually an agent in the making of their own disease.70 This is where the thought-patterns which inform the notion of

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67 Entry for 10 April 1814 in Byron’s Letters and Journals, iii, p.257.
69 ‘Intellectual Influence of Diet: Good Living the Cause of Bad Writing’, The Atlas, 1:9 (15 November 1828), p.65. This notion of ‘mind over matter’ was one which reverberated throughout the later Victorian era. The Atlas article itself was reprinted in several other publications, including: New Monthly Magazine; Athenaeum; and Extractor.
70 Whilst the sufferer of tuberculosis could not ‘will’ the disease upon themselves, there were sanitarians who held that the poor living conditions of the working classes were largely accountable for the illness. As J. N. Hays suggests, ‘poverty and tuberculosis [coexisted] in a symbiotic relationship [with] individual failure’. If consumption was caused through dirt and bad living habits, then the slovenly poor only had themselves to blame for their contraction of the disease. ‘Who, after all’, Hays questions, ‘produced the dusty and dirty environments [that TB tended to circulate in]?’ René and Jean Dubos
‘consumptive genius’ merge with those of a pre-emptory anorectic logic. As has already been suggested, ‘authentic’ cases of consumption are not premeditated by ‘will’; rather, the victim of tubercular illness becomes a passive receptor who generally contracts the disease without intention. Anorexia nervosa, however, is an illness motivated by the self-willed urge to be excessively slender; it is this steely self-determination which pervades the ‘anorexic’ spirit that suffuses many strands of Romantic (and later, Victorian) patterns of thought.

Lord Byron is one very obvious ‘anorectic’ case in point. Acutely mindful of the affiliations coexisting between tubercular infection and exalted genius, Byron expressed a fervent wish that he “should like to die of consumption”. Although Byron’s wish failed to materialise, he did successfully ‘self-consume’ much of his own body fat. In addition to ‘physick[ing] his intellect with wretched opium pills and acrid vinegar’, so as to feign the willowy pallor contracted through tubercular disease, Byron undertook a pernicious scheme of fasting and ‘vigorous exercise’ which allowed him to eradicate his fleshly ‘superfluities’ at an alarmingly rapid rate. After only a few weeks of adhering to his ‘system’ – which incorporated ‘no Suppers, or Breakfast, only one meal a Day’ – Byron was able to proudly declare: ‘my Ribs display Skin of no great thickness, & my Clothes have been taken in nearly half a yard’. Formerly a man of 14st. 6lb., Byron’s unremitting feats of dieting soon reduced him to a man who, at just 9st. 10lb., was, ‘at least 14 LB below the Fashion’. As he further spiralled into the ravages of a consumptive-driven eating disorder, Byron appears to have become physically and mentally addicted to the pleasure derived from losing weight: the unheeded words, ‘I will stop there’, permeate his diaries like some form of lyrical refrain.

Byron’s inability to impede his self-consuming antics is paradoxical, but of paramount importance. His ‘anorexia’ – an illness theoretically pervaded by autonomous control –

likewise describe tuberculosis as a ‘social disease’ that is ‘the consequence of gross defects in social organization, and of errors in individual behaviour’. In this sense, the working-class sufferer of TB could, potentially, be described as being an agent in the making of their own disease. Nevertheless, this agency still remains separate from ideas of desire or conscious action. See, J. N. Hays, The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Western History (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009), pp.155-169; and René and Jean Dubos, The White Plague: Tuberculosis, Man and Society (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1987), p.xxxviii.

71 Byron seems to have been aware of this internal process of self-consumption. In his journal entry for 22 March 1814, Byron wrote: ‘I must set about some employment soon; my heart begins to eat itself again’. See, Letters and Journals, iii, p.226.


73 Lord Byron to John Hanson, 2 April 1807, in Letters and Journals, i, pp.113-114.

74 Lord Byron to Elizabeth Bridget Pigot, 13 July 1807, in Letters and Journals, i, pp.126-127.

75 To take examples which appeared in close succession of one another, two of Byron’s letters, dated 16 April and 14 May 1807 alluded to this notion of ceasing attempts at continuous weight reduction: ‘I shall still proceed till I arrive at 12st. and then stop’. ‘I shall reduce myself to 11. & there stop’. See, Letters and Journals, i, p.115, pp.118-119.
becomes incontrollable; it gradually creeps beyond the parameters of self-willed containment and consequently acquires the more impulsive disposition inherent in cases of consumption. Significant for our purposes, throughout the subsequent Victorian period, and following the development of the scientific etymologies of the illness, it was not uncommon for anorexia to be misdiagnosed, possibly because of its relatively novel status as a clinical condition, as incidences of tubercular disease. For instance, in 1880, Dr Samuel Fenwick admitted:

I have twice known nervous anorexia diagnosed as tubercular meningitis, and in one of these instances the mistake was committed by a well-known hospital physician, who had devoted special attention to diseases of the nervous system.\(^\text{76}\)

Like the anorexic, the consumptive’s appetite was notoriously capricious; the patient often resolutely refused food. Both illnesses were also characterised by an angelic otherworldliness. In 1842, Dr Rowland East had confirmed that consumption, like anorexia, “‘thr[ew] an ethereal character over the human form’”.\(^\text{77}\) Given this mismatch of symptoms, it is easy to see how the two illnesses might have long been confused or conflated. Yet, very much unlike tuberculosis, a purely physical malady, anorexia nervosa was, and still is, psychosomatic: an illness affecting both body and mind. Through this term, ‘psycho-somatic’, the effects produced on the patient’s mind take precedence over the effects produced on their body. As a disease lacking in organic origins, anorexia was, from its initial coining, attributed to ‘mental perversity’;\(^\text{78}\) or, as we saw in the introduction to this thesis, a condition that ‘certainly belong[ed] to the borderland of insanity’.\(^\text{79}\) It is this ‘mental perversity’, ‘insanity’ or ‘nervousness’ which firmly re-configures Byron within an anorexic paradigm.

Prolonged bouts of starvation left Byron helplessly swooning in what he himself referred to as ‘hysterical merriment’.\(^\text{80}\) ‘I am growing nervous’, he confessed to Francis Hodgson in 1811, ‘(how you will laugh!) – but it is true, – really, wretchedly, ridiculously, fine-ladically nervous’.\(^\text{81}\) Ironically, it was through these times of stark alimentary neglect and ‘hysterical merriment’ that Byron was most intellectually and creatively productive. As Edward John Trelawny suggested, ‘by starring his body Byron kept his brains clear’.\(^\text{82}\) A writer in the \textit{Atlas} likewise maintained that ‘Lord Byron never wrote so well as when he was macerating

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\(^{76}\) Fenwick, M.D, \textit{On Atrophy of the Stomach}, p.117.  
\(^{77}\) Dr Rowland East, \textit{The Two Most Dangerous Diseases of England} (London: John Lee, 1842), p.30. Whilst anorexic behaviour was thought to represent angelic spirituality, it is important to note the clinically branded anorexic was treated more contemptuously.  
\(^{80}\) Lord Byron to John Cam Hobhouse, 10 August 1811, in \textit{Letters and Journals}, ii, p.70.  
\(^{81}\) Lord Byron to Francis Hodgson, 13 October 1811, in \textit{Letters and Journals}, ii, p.111 [emphasis original].  
\(^{82}\) Trelawny, \textit{Recollections}, p.53.
himself by rigid abstinence’. In fact, for this particular writer (and for early nineteenth-century culture in general), a ‘corpulent intellectualist’ was deemed ‘a contradiction in terms, a palpable catachresis. One might as well talk of a leaden kite, a sedentary will-o-the-wisp, a pot-bellied spirit, or lazy lightening’. According to this mode of thinking, ‘Obesity’ was seen as ‘a deadly foe to genius’. The most intellectually superior of writers were those ‘whose minds had merged [with] their bodies till they became almost as ethereal as the ardent spirit they enshrined’.  

Drawing further attention to the Romantics’ crusade against fat, the Atlas writer went on to suggest (in a tone which was both hyperbolic and satirical) that literary authorities should ‘let no man attempt to write who has a protuberant stomach;’ they should ‘let no man reckon upon immortality who cannot distinctly feel and reckon his own ribs; for the thinnest bow shoots the farthest, and the leanest horse generally wins the race’. ‘If I were a publisher’, he concluded,

I should invariably fight shy of the “fair-round belly with good capon lined,”
and immediately offer a handsome price to the Living Skeleton for his memoirs. They would [...] be doubly acceptable to a public which has lately been overwhelmed with such a mass of flesh, fat, and flummery. Nothing fat ever yet enlightened the world; for even in a tallow candle the illumination springs from the thin wick.

When read through the lens of early nineteenth-century Romanticism, flesh was expected to melt into imagination. The (corpulent) body was rendered a corporeal shackle, a bulky encumbrance which detained one’s mind and spirit from embarking upon weightless flights of ‘illuminated’ fancy. As Richard Klein eloquently puts it, the Romantic soul aimed to soar to the sublime heights of ‘rugged mountain tops, where bodies, like spirits, appear almost transparent – like clouds reflected in an Alpine lake’. The Romantic soul then, as we have seen, had to inhabit a transparently slender body; a body whose shape bespoke a ‘disinterested, ascetic relation to food and to the material world in general’. This material

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83 ‘Intellectual Influence of Diet: Good Living the Cause of Bad Writing,’ p.65. Throughout the later Victorian period, established medical authorities were also quick to make connections between mental aptitude and bodily starvation. Several specialist physicians attributed a profound link between intellectual fervour and clinical cases of anorexia nervosa. W. S. Playfair announced that he had ‘rarely seen a case [of anorexia] which has not been preceded by some such condition as over-work or [mental] strain’. See, Playfair, ‘Note on the So-Called Anorexia Nervosa’, Lancet, 131:3374 (28 April 1888), pp.817-818, (p.818). Other doctors, such as Stephen Mackenzie, noted that the anorexic’s ‘intelligence was good’; see, Mackenzie, ‘On a Case of Anorexia Nervosa Vel Hysterica’, Lancet, 131:3370 (31 March 1888), pp.613-614. Meanwhile, Charles Lasègue went so far as to suggest that ‘the whole disease is summed up in [...] intellectual perversion’. See, Lasègue, ‘On Hysterical Anorexia’, Medical Times and Gazette (27 September 1873), pp.367-369, (p.368).

84 ‘Intellectual Influence of Diet: Good Living the Cause of Bad Writing,’ p.65.

85 Klein, Eat Fat, p.142.
distancing crystallises ‘the idea of some edifying elevation beyond the flesh’, and it is through such ‘ascetic relation[s]’ that the Romantic anorectically freed himself from the inertia and impenetrability of an earthly existence.

Closely meshed to this notion of insufferable ‘earthliness’, was the idea of conflated commercial and alimentary surfeit. As the Atlas author had suggested, the nineteenth-century ‘public’ was one ‘which ha[d] lately been overwhelmed [by] a mass of flesh, fat, and flummery’. But, what exactly did this mean? Contextualised alongside a discussion surrounding the publication of otherworldly, ‘skeletal’ memoirs, the author’s references to ‘flesh, fat and flummery’ were maybe a sardonic allusion to the literary and commercial circulation of overly dense and excessively wordy texts. In light of this, one could argue that even the literary medium through which the Romantics chose to express their ideas was characteristically ‘anorectic’. As Caterina Eppolito explains, ‘poetry is the thinnest form of writing’: it is light, sparse and lacks lexical density. Moreover, like anorexia nervosa, poetry – on account of its regimented metres and rhythms – is often governed by restrictive rules; it aims to eliminate surplus, and typically demands exacting, authorial control. The Romantic poet, then, appears to have projected a diluted form of anorexic thinking onto his own textual and intellectual property. He aimed to trim any excess words in the same way he might trim his excess fat: an excess which would otherwise detain, encumber and distract.

By the mid-Victorian period, this fear of ‘excess’, literary and literal, had become indivisible from a distasteful fear of the (surplus) alimentary. One particularly forthright author, writing in All the Year Round, suggested that ‘modern writers of comic literature [were] gorg[ing] the English public to nausea with incessant eating and drinking in print’. ‘Now-a-days’, he explained, ‘when a man has nothing whatever to say, he seems to write, in a glutinous despair, about his dinner’. As a self-professed ‘literary gentleman’ who was ‘really and truly suffering so acutely from the mental dyspepsia consequent on [his] own inability to digest other people’s meals’, this writer claimed that ‘the bare idea of ever writing about breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, or supper[...] ha[d] become absolutely revolting’. Proceeding to take a vow of abstinence, he concluded: ‘if I live a hundred years, and write a thousand volumes, no English reader – I solemnly declare it – shall ever know what I have had for dinner, in any part of the world, or under any stress of gastronomic circumstances’. Sickened by the era’s prevalent excess of food (and food writing in general) this author’s annoyance with the ways in which the ‘genre’ was beginning to dominate literary output is consistent with

87 ‘New View of Society’, All the Year Round, 17 (20 August 1859), pp.396-399, (p.397).
anorectic patterns of thought. The vehemence of his ‘solemn declar[ation]’ seems to imply that food consumption should be connected to feelings of secrecy and shame. The textual eradication of anything alimentary here suggests that fatty ‘matter’, once again, was rendered subordinate to the cerebral processes of the mind.\footnote{The strand of Romantic thought which idolised ‘mind over matter’ reverberated throughout the Victorian period. The Penny Satirist announced in 1839 that, ‘food for reflection is more nutritious than food for deglutition. It is better to be strong in mind than powerful in body’. See, ‘Food for Reflection’, Penny Satirist, 3:114 (22 June 1839), p.1. Lewis Carroll also frequently comments upon the importance of feeding the mind, as opposed to the body. See, Carroll, Feeding the Mind [1884] (London: Chatto and Windus, 1907).}

As early as 1839, Victorian culture’s unease surrounding alimentary ‘matter’ appeared to have reached a critical peak. In a scathing article printed in Cleave’s Gazette of Variety, for instance, it was prophetically suggested that all men should ‘be aware of the quantity of food which [they] hurry into the stomach’: ‘Let your diet be sparing’, this particular writer commanded, ‘though the temptation to do otherwise will be strong’.\footnote{‘Regulations of Diet’, Cleave’s Gazette of Variety, 2:31 (11 May 1839), p.3.} The allusion to ‘temptation’ here pre-empted the All the Year Round author’s inclination towards ascetic solemnity. It illustrates that eating was conflated with notions of ‘sin’, and also implies that ‘vowing’ to abstain was becoming increasingly paramount. The stigma surrounding man’s appetite was, at times, so patent in the early years of Victoria’s reign that readers of the popular press were often encouraged to endorse unhealthy, anorexic-like conduct: ‘When by any means you have [...] overstepped the proper limits as to eating’, one writer declared – sadly without any indication of just how restrictive these ‘proper limits’ might have been – ‘the most perfect way to recover is to abstain entirely from food’.\footnote{Ibid. p 3.} Here, the word ‘recover’ poignantly (and not without some irony) embroils a hearty appetite within the semantics of illness and disease.\footnote{Dr A. J. H. Crespi discusses the ambiguity which underlies the concept of ‘heartiness’. In an 1891 article printed in Tinsley’s Magazine he notes how ‘stout’ men ‘only reluctantly confess that they are hearty’. He goes on, ‘What volumes that word “hearty” may convey – seven huge meals a day, two gallons of malt liquor, no exercise, early to bed and late to rise – still it never means more than heartiness, perhaps hardly that’. See, Crespi, ‘Food for the Fat’, Tinsley’s Magazine, 21 (February 1891), pp.266-271, (p.268).} Because of the widely held perception that eating ‘normal’ amounts of food was devilishly sinful, a criminally inflected moral ‘illness’ that one needed to ‘recover’ from, the beginnings of an ascetically-motivated, authentic disease were in the making. By the late 1870s and early 80s, reports of anorexia nervosa were no longer an anomalous rarity in medical reports.\footnote{To give some idea of the rapid increase in isolated cases of anorexia nervosa after 1873, between March and May of the year 1888, 11 patient cases, according to my own calculations, were reported by different doctors writing for the Lancet (volume 131, issues 3368-3377). Prior to Gull’s coinage of the}
Aware of the dangers such rigid feats of abstinence could pose, even prior to the clinical establishment of anorexia, opponents of self-governed malnourishment (who were generally, though not exclusively, medics) repeatedly attempted to encourage a more positivist outlook on fatty matter. Standing in contrast to the widespread negative appraisals of fat were reactionary visions of fat ‘the protector’: a soft, motherly substance which, ultimately, spared the body from harm. According to this mode of thought, fat was a nurturing substance, one that would ‘pad’ the body and shield it from illness. In his 1850 treatise on *Corpulence*, for instance, Thomas King Chambers stated: ‘As a constituent of the bodily frame, fat has important duties to perform. It fills up [...] angular spaces [...] and acts as a pad on which the eye may revolve with fluency’.\(^93\) This vision of fat as a form of exterior ‘padding’ was one that recurrently filtered into the period’s fat discourse. Whilst Chambers employs the ‘pad’ motif to highlight the aesthetic benefits of possessing ample body-fat, a more popular use was obliquely linked to the cultural wastelands of bodily disease. In an era where the blights of poverty and pulmonary consumption could ravage all – though, most often, the poorest – strata of the social body it is easy to see how fat might have been construed as a sign of health, wealth and status.\(^94\)

In contrast to the artistic visions of consumptive health propounded by the Romantics, later realist novelists, such as George Eliot, were alert to the protective aura which surrounded body-fat in the face of illness. For instance, Mr Vincy – the ‘fat’ and ‘florid’ Mayor of *Middlemarch* (1872),\(^95\) a man whose bodily amplitude, according to Eliot’s narrator, makes him the perfect prototype ‘for a study of the flesh’\(^96\) – refuses to adopt a more ‘ascetic’ mode of living on the precept that “‘Life wants padding!’”\(^97\) As many medical and social authorities realised, it could be “‘an uncommonly dangerous thing to be left without any padding against disease, to have 11 cases per year reported in all the medical journals of the era collectively would have seemed an oddity.”\(^98\)

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\(^94\) Despite all the attention (clinical and cultural) lavished on it, consumption presented a complex picture to nineteenth-century welfare and medical thinkers, who could neither agree upon its causes, nor its most vulnerable victims. Whilst late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century culture held that pulmonary tuberculosis was a disease which afflicted the upper and middle reaches of society – making it a fashionable ailment – in later decades, the condition’s associations with misery and poverty became more widely acknowledged. See Hays, *The Burdens of Disease*, p.157.

\(^95\) Although published in 1872, Eliot’s narrative is temporally situated much earlier, specifically, between 1830 and 1832. As a consequence, Eliot’s ‘positive’ attitudes towards fat appear to be, in narrative terms, staged in reaction to the fasting behavioural tropes of early Romantics. When considering such attitudes outside of her fictional framework, that is the contemporary 1872 locale, we begin to notice Eliot’s nostalgic yearning for a return to former, plumper times.


\(^97\) Ibid. p.119.
the shafts of disease”.\footnote{Ibid. p.86. For more on Eliot’s attitudes towards fat see, Tess Stockslager, “Life Wants Padding”: Food, Eating and Bodies in George Eliot’s Novels (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Liberty University, 2009).} An anonymous writer in the *Cornhill* saw fatty matter in these terms. ‘Fat’, he suggested, ‘is one of the most useful tissues’: it is ‘deposited as a kind of sheath’ and ‘acts as a kind of cushion [to] the more important organs’, particularly through spells of ‘coldness’, and during times of ‘disease’.\footnote{‘Corpulence’, *Cornhill Magazine*, 7:40 (April 1863), pp.457-468, (pp.458-9).} Thus, in those unfortunate ‘states of disease where wasting of the tissues occur[ed]’, such as pulmonary consumption, ‘one of the best possible remedies’ was, according to Dr Lankester, to counteract the patient’s atrophy by increasing their intake of ‘fat and its analogues, butter, suet and oil’.*100*

Food, then, was itself central to the way in which fat could function as a protective mechanism. As the aforementioned *Cornhill* journalist suggested, one only had to consider the popularity of the domestic ‘meat market’ to gauge ‘the pre-eminent value of oily substances [...] and fatty foods’.\footnote{Edwin Lankester, M.D., ‘Good Food’, *Popular Science Review*, 4 (1865), pp.14-27, (p.18).} Dr Thomas Beddoes was another advocate of such domestic ‘meat markets’. As early as 1802 he had suggested that ‘physic and metaphysic all depend upon the inspiration of roast beef. If you would do well’, it was suggested, ‘you must eat and digest like a ploughman’.\footnote{‘Corpulence’, *Cornhill*, p.460.} Another anonymous author, writing in a much later 1850 edition of the *Critic*, also maintained that fatty ‘food does a man good; it clings to him; it fructifies upon him; he swells nobly out, and fills a generous space in life’.*103* From this short citation we begin to see more clearly how fat could be perceived as both protective and nurturing. The word ‘clings’ immediately evokes a sense of infantile grasping and thereby creates a maternal image of affectionate bonding and security. Moreover, ‘fructify’, ‘swells’ and ‘fills’ are all words which recall the intimate process of reproduction, and, as a consequence, intertwine fat with birth and regeneration, as opposed to death and decay.

Frequently depicted as lifelessly ‘lank’ and skeletally ‘cadaverous’, the Romantic and Victorian era’s self-fashioned ‘thin men’ – some of whom would have been meat-averse vegetarians – were frequently recognised as ‘Death’ incarnate: a ‘lank tribe’ of ‘mummies preserved in saffron’, ‘all skeleton and bile’.*104* To move from the general to the particular, Shelley was one such undernourished vegetarian whose want of body-fat made him both physically vulnerable and ‘deathly’. In the words of his biographer, Thomas Jefferson Hogg:
Shelley was fugitive[...]he evaporated like ether[...]. He was [always] fading, vanishing speedily from our sight[...]. [H]e could not support himself; he must be tied up fast to something of a firmer texture, to [something] of a less flexible formation: he always required a prop.\textsuperscript{105}

Hogg’s description of Shelley as ‘fugitive’ underscores his inability to thrive as a permanent, or even semi-permanent, earthly fixture. His ‘ethereal’ qualities make him eerily ghostly and provide him with a persona which seems to transcend the grave. Although Hogg refrains from explicitly linking Shelley’s fleeting ‘translucence’ to a dangerous lack of fatty matter, his allusion to him being in want ‘of something of a firmer texture’ arguably points us in that direction. To say that fat is ‘firm’ and ‘inflexible’ would be a contradiction in terms. As we have seen, fat is characteristically soft and fundamentally supple: it cushions; it spills; it flows; it fills. Nonetheless, in comparison to gaseous ether, fat would have seemed inordinately firm and ‘supportive’. Yet, as Edward John Trelawney intimates, Shelley’s stubborn irregularities in eating were only ever going to fortify his ghostly aura. With an unrelenting propensity to ‘peck’ at food ‘like the birds’, and with kitchen ‘cupboards like Mother Hubbard’s, bare’,\textsuperscript{106} Shelley’s disintegrating body was apparently doomed to fade, vanish, and finally expire.

Another early critic to associate a stark lack of dietary fat (particularly in the form of meat) with the processes of disintegration and decay was Dr William Wadd. However, for Wadd, this process was not exclusively a physical one located in the body, but also a metaphorical one which might initiate the decomposition of a male’s inherent ‘manliness’. In his \textit{Comments on Corpulency} (1829), Wadd mocks the weight-conscious gentlemen and his foolish ‘muttonic aversions’ with explicit derision. He scoffs at the way in which a ‘man six feet high should faint away at the sight of a shoulder of mutton’, further condemning the said gentleman for ‘minc[ing] his meat, and put[ting] aside all fat, gristle, and skin, with the fastidiousness of a puny school-girl’.\textsuperscript{107} As Wadd’s statement suggests, the man who was ‘fastidious’ in all matters ‘fatty’ was not only making himself prone to accusations of ‘school-girl’ effeminancy – a mode of being which was, in itself, a form of ‘moral’ disease – but was also endorsing a ‘puny’, undersized body configuration which was notoriously susceptible to

\textsuperscript{106} Trelawny, \textit{Recollections}, p.65.
\textsuperscript{107} Wadd, \textit{Comments on Corpulency}, pp.14-15. Byron exhibited a similar self-consciousness regarding the ‘effeminate’ nature of his dietary behaviour. Writing to Thomas Moore in 1816, Byron stated that his prolonged bouts of starvation had left him ‘subject to casual giddiness and faintness, which is so like a fine lady, that [he was] rather ashamed of the disorder’. See, Lord Byron to Thomas Moore, 6 November 1816, in \textit{Letters and Journals}, v, p.124.
‘fatality’. This ill-fated species of man, referred to by Wadd as the “Herculean delicate”, also makes an appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1865 novel, *Wives and Daughters*.108

Although it might seem anomalous to conflate Wadd’s “Herculean delicate” of 1829 with the central character of a novel published in the mid-1860s, Gaskell’s narrative, like Eliot’s, is temporally situated much earlier: in this case, between the years 1827 and 1830. *Wives and Daughters*, therefore, becomes a work of literature which is all the more contextually noteworthy to this study. It bridges the chronological and ideological expanses between two apparently distinct, pro-fat/anti-fat philosophies: philosophies that would constantly merge in and between the Romantic and Victorian eras. Taken as a whole, Gaskell’s novel is suffused with conflicting representations of body-conscious material. In addition to offering literary insight into the physical dangers surrounding excessive slenderness, it also draws attention to the various social stigmas attached to the corpulent body of the nineteenth-century male. Whether Gaskell’s commentary is intended to ridicule such fat-centred body-consciousness is unclear,109 but, either way, the physiques of all her male characters are frequently thrust into the spotlight.

Gaskell’s highly esteemed physician, Mr Gibson, for instance, is not immediately identified by his good nature, or his inherent professionalism, but by his ‘very genteel figure’, a figure which had ‘not an ounce of superfluous flesh on [it]’. This admirable, ‘non-superfluous’ body configuration, the narrator proceeds to inform us, was a pleasant rarity ‘in those days, before muscular Christianity had come into vogue’.110 The body of Mr Preston, a middle-class land agent, is also conspicuously present. He ‘was very handsome’, the narrator states; ‘[he] had a figure rendered easy and supple by the athletic exercises in which his excellence was famous, and which had procured him admission into much higher society than he was otherwise entitled to enter’.111 As each of these descriptions infer, corporeal slenderness was perceived as a stepping-stone to ‘gentility’. If a male were corpulent, he not only risked sacrificing his grasp on any superior social (and, by extension, moral) standing, but also putting an end to his career.112 As this, in turn, suggests, fatty matter was entangled with class-consciousness in a complex and paradoxical way. Whilst the man of means was economically

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108 Wadd is also condemnatory of gluttony and corpulence. He notes that ‘Some men have appeared with the digestive powers of a double stomach, to which the grinding properties of a gizzard seemed superadded’. *Comments*, p.16.
109 Gaskell’s narrative treatment of Osborne, which will be discussed in due course, seems to imply that she was concerned about the dangers posed by fat-phobia and other such faddy trivialities.
111 Ibid. p.158. The ‘sporting’ or athletic male body will be discussed at length in the third chapter of this thesis.
112 Note that each of these men are ‘professional’ and aspiring: they cannot afford to be fat.
capable of consuming prolifically, and consequently at risk of becoming fat, his moral superiority and predilection for self-control ensured that his body remained appropriately slender. Despite his prolific wealth, the middle-class man of means was expected to know how to navigate his consumer urges at the table.

The middle-class male’s concerns with the correlations between body size and social standing were, consequently, not governed by a desire to distinguish himself from the classes beneath him – whose often scanty subsistence and extreme feats of manual labour, of course, ensured that getting fat was nigh on impossible – but, instead, were driven by a compulsion to diminish the gap between himself and his upper-class superiors. The middle-class, professional male wanted to appear ‘genteeel’, and a finer lifestyle, full of finer things, also meant – in its most literal sense – a finer body configuration.113 The middle-class man plagued with a tendency to stoutness therefore sabotaged his ability to move through the class hierarchy. Squire Hamley, Osborne’s father, suffers on this account. “Here am I”, he declares, “of as good and as old a descent as any man in England, and I doubt if a stranger to look at me, would take me for a gentleman, with my red face, great hands and feet, and thick figure, fourteen stone, and never less than twelve even when I was a young man”.114 Interestingly, the Squire’s magnitude here is far less gross than the earlier manuscript version of the novel would suggest. Originally 16 and 14 stones respectively, Gaskell trimmed the Squire of his weighty MS proportions (perhaps in reaction to the intensified 1860s pressure to be slender) before the text reached serial publication.115

With the first serialized instalment of the novel appearing less than a year after William Banting’s Letter on Corpulence (1863) – which, as I shall explain later, became a landmark text in fat-phobic developments – Gaskell was supplied with both a ‘post-Banting’ cognizance and a readership that would have been intuitively responsive to the dictates of mid-Victorian fat-phobia.116 By choosing to set her ‘everyday’ narrative in the late 1820s, however, Gaskell creates a forty-year chasm for her 1860s reader to bridge mentally. Nonetheless, it is in creating this temporal gap that Gaskell is able not only to merge the old

114 Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p.74.
116 In her short story, ‘The Cage at Cranford’, published in November 1863, Gaskell makes more explicit references to her post-Banting cognizance. Through the character of Mr Hoggins – whose name necessarily links him to a ‘pig’, or hog – Gaskell creates a Bantingesque figure. Mr Hoggins is presented as an ‘encumbrance of a man’ who is always ‘in the way’ and is perpetually ‘eating hunk[s] of bread-and-cheese’. Gaskell, ‘The Cage at Cranford’, All the Year Round, 10:240 (23 November 1863), pp.332-336, (p.335).
and the new, particularly in relation to competing body ideals and aspirations, but also to demonstrate a certain level of continuity concerning attitudes towards diet and fat. As Angus Easson states, part of the narrative’s ‘fascination is how far and yet how near it is’ – both to the Romantic era, the mid-1860s post-Banting reader, and today’s more pronounced world of weight-watchers. Gaskell’s text, and its body-focussed content, reiterates the fact that Schwartz’s ‘discontinuous and disappointing’ ‘flashes’ of diet history were far more persistent than his terminology implies. The temporal continuity crafted by Gaskell demonstrates how the era’s intensifying patterns of fat-phobic thought were simultaneously cohesive and sporadic. Her descriptions reveal just how integral (in theory, and practice) notions of food, diet and fat were to embodiments of masculinity throughout various eras and generations.

From the very outset of Gaskell’s novel, Osborne Hamley, a ‘beautiful’ but ‘languid looking’ male, fails to satiate the ‘hearty’ appetite allotted to his gender. In describing Hamley, the narrator states: ‘the ideal was agile, yet powerful, with Greek features and an eagle eye, [...] the real was almost effeminate, [...] he was dainty in eating, and had anything but a Homeric appetite’.117 This plummeting from the ‘ideal’ to the ‘real’ immediately inscribes a failure of societal expectations onto Osborne’s figure. As the narrator indicates, an ‘ideal’ body configuration was one that might permit powerful ‘agility’ – a quality which is both lexically related to and metaphorically opposed to ‘fat’, in that it simultaneously evokes ‘suppleness’ (fat, remember, is flexibly soft) and ‘nimbleness’ (an attribute patently discordant with a substance that is so weighty and dense). Osborne, however, is categorically devoid of any such ‘agility’, his body does not dexterously respond to the era’s fluctuating ideals, but remains rigidly ‘frail’, ‘infirm’, and disappointingly ‘weak’.

In many ways, the ‘Byronesque’ Osborne could be read as a precursory literary trope for the male anorexic.118 His penchant for academic excellence and an apparently neurotic aversion to food are symptomatic of anorexia nervosa.119 Allowing us to further affiliate his character to the male anorexic, as Osborne becomes increasingly ‘ill’, his peers struggle to uncover any organic roots underlying his malaise. Therefore, bereft of any physiological symptoms other than his perceptible lack of appetite, Osborne’s friend Molly begins to doubt

117 Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p.173.
118 Osborne Hamley is an uncannily ‘Romantic’ character. He is inherently Byronic in temperament: a ‘genius’ poet whose ‘poetical mind’ is enshrined in ‘sentiment and imagination’. Wives and Daughters, p.82, p.81.
119 Osborne, the narrator informs us, ‘did well at school, carrying away many prizes; and was, in a word, the pride and delight of both father and mother’. His ‘dainty appetite’ is particularly apparent during a tête-à-tête with Molly: ‘I suppose I may help myself to a biscuit and a glass of wine? No, don’t ring for more. I could not eat it if it was here. But I just want a mouthful; this is quite enough, thank you”. Wives and Daughters, p.42, p.518.
the somatic nature of his condition. After observing his movements closely, the narrator tells us, ‘Molly had persuaded herself that Osborne’s evident illness was partly “nervous,” by which she meant imaginary’. Although anorexia is far from ‘imaginary’, it is ‘partly nervous’, thus, projecting the clinical category of anorexia nervosa onto Osborne’s figure is, perhaps, critically apt. Whilst it is not my intention to deliberate on the intricacies of Osborne’s (clinical, or merely speculative) anorexia – I simply wish to use his malnourished figure as an example of how men devoid of fleshly ‘padding’ were thought to be at high risk during times of physiological hardship – the last scene in which we see Osborne is, suggestively, one of food refusal. Having ‘gone since morning without food’, Molly Gibson is persuaded by Robinson, the old butler, to encourage Osborne to ‘touch a drop o’ [soup]’. Yet, after putting ‘a spoonful to his lips, and touch[ing] them with the savoury food’, Osborne, in a ‘passionate gesture’, ‘almost overturn[s] the basin’. ‘“He will never eat again – never”’, the butler laments as Osborne takes his last breath. Of course, as the only delicate, frail male within the text, it seems inevitable that it is Osborne who has illness thrust upon him. With his body, heart, and mind all too ‘weak’ to cope with the strains of disease, the only realistic narrative outcome for his character is death.

Socially cementing this Darwinian amalgamation of fitness/fatness with physical prowess, towards the close of the nineteenth century, the Strand Magazine began to (satirically?) ponder the social advent of ‘Fat Men’s Clubs’, places where ‘corpulent brethren’ could celebrate their bounteous abundance and, apparently, set about ‘weed[ing] out the leaner kine on the well-known biological principal of “the survival of the fattest”’. However, as one might expect, in an increasingly prevalent fat-phobic climate, this makeshift biological doctrine was not supported by all. Dr Nathaniel Edward Yorke-Davies, one of the period’s most renowned dietetic authorities, refuted: ‘if there’s any condition that shortens existence, […] it is that of being overburdened with an unnatural amount of adipose tissue’. For Davies, ‘excessive fatness’ was, ironically, a disease. Thus, challenging the fairly diffuse cultural perception that fat formed a kind of globular padding which would potentially protect a man

120 Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p.530.
121 Ibid. pp.582-583.
122 G. Megan and D. Brill, ‘A Fat Men’s Club’, Strand Magazine, 15:89 (May 1898), pp.524-528, (pp.526-27). The re-surfacing of more positive attitudes towards fat during the fin-de-siècle years most probably occurred in reaction to fears of degeneration – an idea which will be further explored in chapters 3 and 4.
through spouts of illness, Davies, along with many other sceptical medical authorities, pathologized fat: it was ‘to be looked upon as a disease and treated as a disease’. 124

Given that fatty matter could unpredictably transmogrify from ‘pad’ to ‘parasite’, many later strands of nineteenth-century society were, understandably, fat-wary. According to Hillel Schwartz, it was during this process of clinical pathologization that fat became ‘ghostly: a slow menacing poltergeist, obnoxious, sometimes deadly’. 125 Although Schwartz’s rendering of body fat as ‘ghostly’ – an image that implies transparent frailty and airy serenity – is, I would argue, highly unconvincing, there is no denying his precision in identifying fat as ‘menacing’ and ‘obnoxious’. Yorke-Davies certainly perceived fat in these terms: it was a substance which ‘crept on insidiously and slowly’, ‘entangling’ its ‘victim’ in ‘toils’ of pain. 126 Mr Broadbottom, a fictional, yet generic, prototype of middle-class stoutness, also venerated the ‘obnoxious’ qualities of fatty matter. Fat was, for him, a ‘curse’. Swamped in ‘ghostly’ paradox and entangled in the toils of fleshly ‘malevolence’, by the mid- to late-Victorian period, fat-phobic malaise was culturally, and clinically, on the rise.

(ii.) “If fat is not an insidious creeping enemy, I do not know what is”: Getting to the Crux of Victorian Fat-Phobia

The next section to this chapter will examine more thoroughly how the Victorians came to grapple with fat and bloated consumerism in a more integral way than their Romantic predecessors. It will assess the ways in which many middle (and upper) class men neurotically concerned themselves with their size. The fact that anorexia nervosa made its debut appearance as a clinical category in the late 1860s – in spite of the fact that anorectic behaviour had attracted popular and medical attention before – is not insignificant. The 1860s (a decade fully immersed in post-Great Exhibition, consumer furor) saw an acute intensification of fat-phobic ideas. These fears of fat, along with the diet fads that emerged in reaction to them, allowed for dieting to become – as Gull’s medicalization of sustained cases of abstinence suggest – obsessive and conducive to ill-health. Although early case histories of anorexia are overwhelmingly populated by women, this next section aims to show how the symptoms which characterised the illness could also (meta)physically affect men. Whilst, as stated from the outset, it will not be my intention to retrospectively diagnose figures from the past as anorexic, I will examine how the era’s generic fears of fat induced obsessive and

126 Yorke-Davies, *Foods For the Fat*, pp.v-vi.
collective dieting behaviour which does, in many cases, parallel that exhibited in individual cases of anorexia nervosa.

According to Foxcroft, ‘EVERYONE was getting in on the diet act during the nineteenth century’. Although this claim is both dubious and hyperbolic, the era’s burgeoning diet industry was becoming an expansively big business. In Britain, Europe, and across the Atlantic, the dis-ease surrounding fatty matter was intensifying. Extraordinarily varied theories, medical and non-medical, on what could and ought to be done about (excess) fat were becoming increasingly, perhaps even madly, popular during the mid-Victorian period. In his 1848 novel, Vanity Fair, William Thackeray, for one, had begun to integrate the epoch’s distending fat fears into the Victorian literary canon. Yet, throughout his novel, all the ‘anxious thought and alarm’ incited by the bulk of Thackeray’s notorious ‘gourmand’ is surreptitiously muted in favour of derisive humour and ridicule. Within the vernacular literature of this mid-century period, however, fat was, for the most part, increasingly fiendish.

In an 1857 edition of Household Words, it was declared that ‘the origin of evil, nay, evil itself is fat’. A writer in Bentley’s Miscellany similarly denounced the fat man as being the

127 Not everyone was concerned with dietetics. Some were disinterested in the matter, whilst, for others, minimal subsistence meant that concerns about being or becoming overweight was rarely a problem. The poorer, working classes, for instance, were generally excluded from the diet scene on two counts: most obviously, they did not need to lose weight. Although the calorific intake of the labouring classes (whose diet chiefly consisted of carbohydrate and fat) could often look enormous (though still deficient in protein and vitamins) in comparison to today’s recommended amounts, these men needed the endless quantities of bread and potatoes they consumed in order to be able to work manually. According to an 1863 report conducted by Dr Edward Smith on behalf of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, the average quantities of food in the rural labourer’s family budget produced 2760 kilocalories per person, per day. An urban labourer’s allowance was slightly lower at 2190 kilocalories. Yet, with demanding, physical and laborious jobs, the bodies of both rural and urban workers were generally a lot less susceptible to the flabbiness brought about by wealthy indolence. For more on this 1863 report, and the diets of the labouring classes in general, see, John Burnett, Plenty and Want (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.139-144, p.173.

Although not all working-class individuals were slender, those who were fat or overweight would not necessarily have had the financial means to buy into the era’s diet industry anyway. Books, quack remedies, and patent foods were expensive, and therefore generally marketed to the middle and upper classes.

128 Foxcroft, Calories and Corsets, p.63, p.81.

129 Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins were two other canonical writers of the time who likewise began to interrogate the implications of fat and morality in relation to class and gender. Gail Turley Houston has explored Dickens’s treatment of the subject at length in Consuming Fictions (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

130 William Thackeray, Vanity Fair [1848] (London: Methuen & Co Limited, 1963), p.29. Thackeray was one of many who chose to read fatness through the lens of ridicule or humour. Constantly competing against depictions of the fat man as a malevolent source of evil were visions of him as being who was ‘ridiculous’, the ‘laughing-stock of everybody’. See, for instance, Dr. Wilhelm Ebstein, Corpulence and its Treatment on Physiological Principles, 6th edn. (London: H. Grevel, 1884), p.10. Another canonical conception of fatness was the Dickensian idea of ‘corpulent benevolence’. See, ‘The Cult of Slimness’, Saturday Review, pp.70-71.

period’s worst ‘nightmare’ – his globular deformity made him unnervingly ‘fishy’. As peculiar as this last image might seem, it is one which accentuates the idea that fat was a profoundly ‘slippery’ stigma. The symbolic fluidity or, sinuous ‘fishiness’ of fat made it an uncontainable substance: one that could spill over, shape-shift, adapt. Indeed, as this author went on, the fat man was not merely the period’s worst nightmare, but also its ‘incubus – the demon – the sprite – the goblin – the Friar Puck – the mystery – the unknown’. The fluidity of this tirade reveals that the fat man stoically resisted any stable, monolithic categorisation: he was continually dissipating boundaries, splitting definitive seams. The latter two labels, in particular, imply that the ever expanding contours of his burgeoning body had the potential to completely defy the limits of the definable. And, in an era renowned for its proclivity to define, classify and categorise like never before, it is not surprising that his unruly body caused much angst.

Following the lead of the era’s candid vernacular writers, Sensation novelist, Wilkie Collins seized upon the era’s fears of fat in order to create the most enigmatic and disconcerting of villains. In The Woman in White (1860), Collins utilises the ‘odious’ contours of the ‘immensely fat’ rogue, Count Fosco, in order to ‘single him out from the rank and file of humanity’. With countless fat-phobic periodical articles in circulation by this time, readers would almost certainly have been able to interpret what Fosco’s fat signified. Depicted as an unfathomable ‘monstrosity’ with an indefinable body the fat man had, apparently, exhausted his claim to being called ‘human’. However, as one writer assured, ‘twenty stone need be no solid ground for despair. Mortals grown to the proportions of a Stilton cheese have yet returned to the aspect of humanity’. With disciplinary maxims looming large, the (fat) male body became ‘reformable’, a body that one might, to recall the words of John Ruskin, ‘chisel into shape’. One way to ‘attain the result’ was ‘by a surgical operation’; a hazardous procedure, which added a perturbing imminency to the allegorical practice of ‘chiselling’. This ‘consisted in cutting a hole in the patient and taking out his troublesome lump of fat, very much in the way in which the avaricious farmer opened his goose that laid golden eggs’. In his earlier 1850 treatise on corpulence, dietician and medical adviser, Dr Thomas King Chambers, likewise alluded to such amateur forms of early lipo-surgery. Although he confesses to be ‘in favour of medicines in preference to the knife’, he does acknowledge that the

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132 The Little Fat Man in Gray’, Bentley’s Miscellany, 21 (January 1847), pp.492-498, (p.494).
133 For a more in depth literary discussion on the Victorian era’s obsessive desire to define and categorise, see Nikole June King, Men’s Physique (Riverside: University of California Press, 2009).
136 Ibid. p.330.
‘removal [of fat] by surgical operation’\(^{137}\) was, in fact, a mid-century occurrence. As a consequence, Sander Gilman’s claim that ‘reduction operations [began] in 1886 with Howard Kelley’s removal of fat and skin from the abdomen and thighs’, perhaps needs re-examining.\(^{138}\) Either way, as one might expect, such precursory forms of liposuction were invariably reserved for only the most extreme cases of corpulence. A less precarious (and therefore more prevalent) means of ‘chiselling’ at the fat man’s gargantuan body was by subjecting him to one of the era’s many fads, fasts and diet regimes.

One particularly famous regime was the ‘Banting Diet’, and, without doubt, any critical text which aims to chart the cultural and clinical ascendency of Victorian fat-phobia would never be complete without reference to its creator: ‘Mr. William Banting, late of No. 27 St. James’s street, Piccadilly’.\(^{139}\) In short, William Banting’s dietetic ‘system’ was one which required ‘low living’. It incorporated ‘no medicine, beyond a morning cordial as a corrective’, and persistent ‘moderation [in] light food’.\(^{140}\) The list of ‘heavy’ food items to be excluded from the ‘banter’s’ bill of fare was not exhaustive, but certainly meticulous. Mirroring anorectic patterns of thought, the banter designated certain ‘articles’ as ‘forbidden’.\(^{141}\) ‘Bread, butter, milk, sugar, beer, and potatoes’\(^{142}\) were the prime fat-inducing culprits to be excluded; but ‘parsnips, beetroots, turnips, carrots’ and ‘champagne’ also made an appearance on the list of the prohibited. In a later edition of Banting’s pamphlet, ‘veal, owing to its indigestible quality, as well as pork for its fattening character; also herrings and eels (owing to their oily nature)’, were omitted too. Yet, as long as the banter successfully ‘abstained’ from this rapidly proliferating list, they were sure to see ‘gradual beneficial results’.\(^{143}\) These said ‘results’ were, primarily, an overwhelming sense of having ‘defeated’ their ‘insidious creeping enemy’, an enemy otherwise known as ‘fat’.

As all this suggests, Banting’s *Letter on Corpulence* (1863) was central in representing Victorian fatness as a ‘stigmatised mode of being’.\(^{145}\) ‘Of all the parasites that affect humanity’, Banting’s pamphlet begins, ‘I do not know of, nor can I imagine, any more distressing than that of obesity’. For Banting, corpulence was a ‘lamentable disease’, a ‘crying evil’, and from

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\(^{137}\) Chambers, *Corpulence*, p.134.


\(^{141}\) Ibid. p.35.

\(^{142}\) Ibid. p.17.

\(^{143}\) Ibid. p.34.

\(^{144}\) Ibid. p.43.

childhood he had experienced ‘an inexpressible dread of such a calamity’. Although he was not, by any means, the first male to develop ‘an inexpressible dread’ of growing fat – the infamous Lord Byron’s ‘terror’, for instance, was, as we have seen, ‘so great that he reduced his diet to the point of absolute starvation’ – Banting’s dieting pamphlet does appear to act as a major catalytic agent in igniting profuse, fat-phobic turmoil. As the illustrated literary journal Once-a-Week explained in an article published less than a year after Banting’s treatise appeared: ‘thousands of people [had begun] to worry themselves out of their lives in consequence of this famous pamphlet’, and, as a result, Banting soon acquired an enthralled throng of ‘fellow fatties’ who, apparently, followed the ‘directives’ of his ‘marvellous production’ to ‘the very letter of the law prescribed’. This last writer’s designation of Banting’s pamphlet as a ‘production’ adds a perturbing sense of civic performativity to the role of dieting men. When viewed in this light, Banting becomes the public’s ‘director’; his followers correspondingly ‘act’ according to his dieting prompts.

Extending this notion of Banting as a ‘directive’ authority further, Joyce Huff reads Banting’s treatise through the lens of Althusserian theory. She argues that Banting’s text ‘constructs its reader’, ‘hailing’ or ‘interpellating’ them to participate in his directive ‘system’. Through this process, Huff claims that Banting ‘projects onto his corpulent reader a high degree of corporeal dissatisfaction, manifested as a fear of corpulence and a desire to eliminate it’. Yet, as persuasive as Huff’s argument is, it is not without its complicating flaws. For instance, the ‘corporeal dissatisfaction’ which Huff sees as emerging solely through the process of reading Banting’s treatise is, I would argue, already manifest (in varying degrees of severity) prior to his pamphlet. As we have already seen, the popular literature circulating before Banting’s publication was already saturated with fearful, fatty matter. Therefore, many of the people who turned to Banting’s tract were most probably already pronounced fat-phobes: corpulent subjects, alarmed by their bulk, in search of a curtailing remedy. In a pithy verse printed in Fun we begin to see how Banting could be entirely detached from the cultural ‘construction’ of the fat-fearing male:

Some time ago, wher’er I strayed,
I heard these observations made,
To which I close attention paid:
“How very stout you’re getting.”

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146 Banting, Letter on Corpulence, p.22.
147 Trelawny, Recollections, pp.50-51.
Said one, “Dear me, you waddle quite,
You bid fair to become a fright.”

Another said, “You’re such a sight –
You’re like a bladder blown out tight;”

... At these remarks I took affright,
And so resolved that very night,
I’d put myself at once on diet,
And try the wondrous BANTING!151

In this particular source, the ‘interpellatory’ powers sucking the fat man into the era’s dieting systematics are external to Banting and his pamphlet. The fat subject’s ‘corporeal dissatisfaction’ emerges through the taunts and jeers of a fat-phobic public, not through the reading of Banting’s tract. Likewise, the fat man’s final integration into the ‘banting’ system does not rely upon any textual awareness of Banting’s ‘directives’; rather, assimilation is dependent upon the fat subject’s own autonomous and independent exertions.

Throughout the diet pamphlet itself, Banting also takes care to accentuate the independent subjectivity of his audience. Although he does invite his readers to share the burdens of a fat identity – ‘I could not [...] attend to the little offices humanity requires without considerable pain and difficulty, which only the corpulent can understand’ – at no point does he attempt to force his system onto them. Through the clause, ‘which only the corpulent can understand’, Banting gives his reader the choice to be recognised as a fat subject. Therefore, if there is any strain of systematised ‘interpellation’, it is initiated through empathetic relations and comprehension, not intrusive structures of power. Further examination of Banting’s treatise also reveals that he did not see himself as a high and mighty interpellator. Rather, Banting beheld himself as ‘an insignificant individual [who] would[n’t] be noticed without some special introduction’ – an ironic claim, given his weight. Far from being interpellatory, Bantingism was a system which required reasoning, not imposition: ‘I do not recommend every corpulent man to rush headlong into such a change of diet, (certainly not), but to act advisedly and after full consultation with a physician’. Likewise, it was, upon Banting’s own confession, not a necessarily suitable, or infallible, method of weight reduction: ‘I am fully persuaded that hundreds, if not thousands, of our fellow men might profit by [Bantingism]; but, constitutions not being all alike, a different course of treatment may be advisable for the

152 Banting, Letter on Corpulence, p.14, [emphasis mine].
153 Ibid. p.9.
154 Ibid. p.20, [emphasis original].
removal of so tormenting an affliction’.\textsuperscript{155} Thus, contra hailing power, in a culture with a suddenly acute weight problem (and a scientific establishment not yet well enough informed to respond to its complexities\textsuperscript{156}) Banting often played the part, one might argue, of benevolent, public saviour.

The following ‘Ode to Banting’, printed in an 1864 edition of \textit{John Bull} is typical in its deferential, praiseworthy tone:

\begin{quote}
Banting thou’rt the best physician,  
Friendly counsellor, magician,  
Whom the laden and opprest  
Have with heart-felt praises blest.  

\ldots  

Three times three and one cheer more  
For the man we all adore,  
Let us our thanksgiving shout,  
We, who once were much too stout.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

Although this author’s initial designation of Banting as ‘physician’ does infuse a certain degree of authoritative power into his being – as well as a conspicuous lack of faith in the actual medical profession – any sense of this power being hierarchically superior is retracted through the next appellation, ‘friendly counsellor’. As the term ‘friendly’ suggests, there must have been some form of reciprocal, emotive understanding between Banting and his ‘fellow fatties’. Sufficiently filling the shoes of ‘counsellor’ would also have required some intuitive bonding and the sharing of sympathy. Yet, in defining Banting as an interpellatory ‘power’ with the officious authority to ‘hail’, Huff emphatically distances him from such realms of reciprocity. She ultimately denies him the capacity to perform successfully in the role of ‘fellow sufferer’.

As the following extract reveals, however, fellowship was most definitely central to the Banting circle:

neither Mr Banting nor his disciples are happy in the discovery of their reservoirs of fatty oil; they do not look upon it as a thing to be desired, but as a parasite to be scrubbed off and got rid of at any price. They argue, and perhaps rightly, from their own point of view, that it is not well to be transformed into so much candle material.\textsuperscript{158}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{155} Ibid. p.24.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{156} Many scientific and medical authorities were themselves aware that fat (and the treatment of it) was a matter which was highly contested throughout the period. See, for instance, ‘What we Ought to Eat’, \textit{Bow Bells}, 3:76 (10 January 1866), p.593.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{157} ‘Ode to Banting’, \textit{John Bull}, 2269 (4 June 1864), p.364.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{158} ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.696.}
The neither/nor construction which opens this quotation immediately establishes mutual footings between Banting and his ‘disciples’: they are corpulent counterparts; equal ‘fellows’ of fat hatred. The repetition of third person pronouns ‘they’ and ‘their’ further accentuates this sense of convivial affinity. Yet, in spite of all this kinship and mutual understanding, Banting was not without his opponents.

In the wake of ‘Banting bedlam’, one particular cause for concern was an intensified obsession with being the ‘correct weight’. Although John Joseph Merlin had invented the mechanical apparatus required to weigh the human body in the mid-eighteenth century, the cultural angst surrounding the proliferation of human weighing-machines in public outlets appears to have been a largely post-Banting phenomenon. With Banting’s marginally neurotic weight recordings padding out the pages of his own (highly popular) pamphlet, it is perhaps not surprising that scales came to assume an integral part in forming the somatic identity of the dieting male. As the author of the aforementioned review in *Once-a-Week* remarked, following the publication of Banting’s tract, one was ‘suddenly struck with the number of persons who were weighing themselves’. This particular critic observed how something as mundane as a ‘visit to a hair-cutter’s shop’ could result in a man discovering that he was the ‘incorrect’ body mass. The author went on to note how, in one particular London hair-dressing ‘establishment’, customers were greeted by ‘a young lady in attendance’ who, standing beside a mechanical weighing-machine, held in her hand ‘a card showing Dr Hutchinson’s scale of the weight proper to individuals according to their altitude’. Having claimed a ‘certainly not over-fat individual’ as her first victim, the attendant asks: “What’s your height, sir?” “Five feet three,” replies the offender. “Five feet three, sir? then you ought to be 133lbs”. This unfortunate individual – who chanced to weigh ‘forty pounds over his complement’ – ‘sneaked out of the shop’ (presumably before the barber could use his scissors to ‘snip away’ at any superfluous flesh) ‘convicted of [his] heinous and excisable offence’.

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159 Banting himself also makes use of the third person in his treatise, so as to crystallise this essence of ‘fat belonging’.
160 Pat Rogers discusses the rise of public scales and weighing machines in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The most renowned places a man could go to weigh himself were Merlin’s museum and the tailors’ shops in the district of St. James’s in London. Particularly important to this study, Rogers notes that the majority of early self-weighers were men, not women. However, the cases Rogers looks into appear to appraise weight-gain rather than fear it. See, Rogers, ‘Fat is a Fictional Issue: The Novel and the Rise of Weight-Watching’, in *Historicizing Fat in Anglo-American Culture*, ed. by Elena Levy-Navarro (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), pp.19-39, (p.25).
161 ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.697.
162 One such height/weight chart is printed in the appendix to Banting’s tract.
163 ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.697. Given that this article appeared in an illustrated ‘literary’ journal, it is possible that this anecdote is fictional (although, nowhere is it stated that this is the case). Nonetheless, with so much attention paid to William Banting within the piece, it is hard to deny that the narrative (if it is in fact fiction) must have at least been inspired by real-life events.
Of course, when placed in a consumer environment – one that is, moreover, intended to promote the commercial adornment and amelioration of an increasingly visual and perfectible body – weighing-machine rituals became further integral to the paradoxes implicit in consumerism itself. To ‘consume’ (in a commercial sense), to buy into industries of body cognisance and commodification, was permitted, even encouraged, but other forms of consumption, namely alimentary, would merely intensify man’s increasingly acute weight problem. Consumption and consumerism, then, were concepts which required careful administration. In 1857, A. W. Moore alluded to these conflicting associations. ‘The best machines’, Moore states, ‘are certainly those found’, ironically, ‘at any place where they are used for commercial purposes’. The very public positioning of a commercial weighing machine ensured that the weight configured by ‘the heavy ones’ would become an outspoken ‘source of amusement’. While ‘the lean ones’, who admire ‘the beauty of their lankiness, smile with a kind of self-complacency’, the ‘heavy ones’ are made ‘the butt of their jokes’.164 The underlying implication here is that the ‘heavy’ men who become ‘the butt’ of the ‘lankier’ self-weighers’ jokes might be implored to reform and better manage their consumer urges – because, as the author of the *Once a Week* article suggested, the inability to exact consumer self-mastery and control was a ‘heinous and excisable offence’.165 The (omni)presence of weighing apparatus in commercial and consumer spaces served as a panoptic tool which prompted self-monitoring reform.

As has been implicit thus far, like the criminal that he superficially was,166 the fat man’s body was submerged into an unprecedented state of societal monitoring and regulation: it was to be quantified and modified with numerical precision; or, to borrow Michel Foucault’s term, rendered ‘calculable’.167 According to Scotsman, David Macrae, the importance placed on notions of calculability were, in America, effectual from birth: ‘one of the first things to be done with a baby when it is born’, Macrae states in his 1870 travel diary, ‘seems to be to hurry it into a pair of scales. [...] It continues to be weighed at short intervals all through its childhood, and on to the time when the question becomes one of personal interest and it is old enough to weigh itself’.168 As Macrae’s statement indicates, through schemes of routine weighing which are, initially, external and peripheral, the (fat) subject is trained to internalise a compulsive ‘interest’ in his body mass. The need to know one’s weight in precise, measureable

165 ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.697.
terms is presented as being both a social and personal prerequisite. Although the context in which Macrae is writing suggests that these schemes of weighing were a specifically American peculiarity, the same longing to record an individual’s weight from birth was also patent in Britain; and, what is more, was dealt with in far more rational terms.

In an 1865 article entitled, ‘The Weight of People’, for instance, the London Journal commented extensively upon the clinical weighing practices of Adolphe Quetelet: an eminent sociologist and mathematician from Brussels who, in 1835, ‘got hold of everybody he could, everywhere, and weighed them’. Summarising Quetelet’s findings, the London Journal revealed that the statistician’s ‘average returns [have] show[n] that a citizen of the world on the first day of his appearance in public, weighs about six pounds and a half’. Yet, according to Quetelet’s data, there were, at times, ‘some very […] pretentious youngsters [who] boast[ed] of ten and eleven pounds’. As the label ‘pretentious’ – used in association with over-weight infants – implies, even from birth, being the ‘correct’ weight, and falling in line with averages and norms, was essential to the formation of one’s moral character. Although ‘pretentiousness’ is a quality at odds with new born infancy, if a baby weighed more than an archetypal ‘citizen of the world’ should do, his surplus bodyweight would immediately taint his character, regardless of age, innocence or naivety. As the infant grew older, however, accusations of ‘pretension’ would be the least of his over-weight worries.

Writing in 1883, Donald Shaw, a former fat convict, who, during a short spate in prison, produced a spin-off of Banting’s treatise, went so far as to argue that adulthood ‘obesity’ ought to be made ‘penal’. Shaw called upon social authorities for special legislation, whereby the police would be justified in arresting oleaginous pedestrians, clapping them into the scales at the nearest police-station, and if they exceeded a certain number of feet in circumference, or weight, at once procure their summary imprisonment, without the option of a fine. The streets would thus be cleared of these fleshy obstructions.

Shaw’s use of the term ‘oleaginous’ here supplements earlier visions of the fat man’s ‘fishiness’, as well as heightening fears surrounding contagion and uncontrollable spread. His berating of these ‘oleaginous’ ‘obstructions’ confirms that Victorian culture had become progressively less tolerant of the fat man’s ‘fleshy’ superfluities. The fat man was a burden to society (and himself) and the remedy lay in making him aware of his gross misconduct in calculable terms.

By 1873, the same year that William Gull officially coined the term anorexia nervosa, *Punch* had begun to mock satirically the extent to which the period’s numerical fortification of ‘fat’ had cultivated an inveterate obsession with ‘weight’. An unfortunate ‘MAN OF SUBSTANCE’ complained:

> Weight! Yes, that’s the word which is ever ringing in my ears, and never absent from my thoughts. “Try your weight, Sir!” is the mandate I hear everywhere addressed to me[..]. “Try your weight, Sir, only a penny!” Ha! hal hal only fancy one’s weighing only a pennyweight! “Try your weight, Sir! Tell yer ‘xact weight!” Haunted by the cry, I am continually yielding to the cheap temptation, and squandering my pennies in attempts to ascertain whether my progress towards pinguitude be really so alarming as my bosom friends assert.  

Again, the irony of this piece is rooted in the fact that the practice of weighing oneself is itself presented as an integral part of consumer conduct. By juxtaposing commercial terms such as ‘penny’, ‘cheap’, ‘yield’, with the dieting man’s pitfall, namely, ‘temptation’, the article further accentuates the conflation of commercial and alimentary notions of consumption. Through his perpetual indulgence in the ‘try your weight’ industry, the fat man – whose oversized body is, in itself, symbolic of consumer excess – is further embroiled in the raptures of consumer gluttony. As a consequence, he only has himself to blame for his distress and mental torture. It is the fat man’s own inability to defy ‘temptation’ and control his consumer urges, both at table and in the public sphere, which leads to his ‘weighthy’ predicament. In other words, excess fat, and, by extension, excess weight, represented a man’s overindulgence in desire: his bodily (and behavioural) excess was seen as a slur on his moral integrity.

The disintegration of the fat man’s moral integrity was further accentuated through his inability to contain himself physically. As both Shaw’s remarks and the following article suggests, the fat man came to be discomfortingly invasive. Not only did his plethora of flesh permeate the boundary which separated self from ‘other’, but it also clouded the dividing line between private and public spheres:

> By some mysterious law of Nature [...] the persons who use omnibuses at a time of day when they are likely to be crowded are always stout. What is the result? The result naturally is that an annexation of space rightfully belonging to us thin passengers follows; these elephantine individuals either ‘push us from our seats,’ or deposit themselves and their adipose tissue on our laps.  

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The mingling of words such as ‘Nature’, ‘naturally’ and ‘elephantine’ with ‘omnibuses’, ‘passengers’ and ‘seats’, emphasises the fat man’s potential to dislodge the boundaries which distinguished two seemingly separate worlds. In effect, fat had begun to function as a form of symbolic pollution, and, in an era patently obsessed with contagion and sanitation, elimination was essential. According to this particular author, one way to ‘remedy’ the psychosomatic discomfort spread by such ‘elephantine individuals’ was, once again, ‘for Omnibus Companies to erect a neat and compact weighing-machine at the entrance to their vehicles’. The moment ‘a passenger put his foot on the step’, this writer continued, ‘his correct weight would be registered on the dial’. If the fat man happened to scale over a ‘certain number of stones, it would be the duty of the Conductor to inform him that the conveyance was already “full inside,” or that it had a case of measles in it’ – note the ironic use of contagion to fight contagion here – ‘or that its journey ended at the next street – or whatever other excuse for non-admission his ingenuity and mendacity might suggest’. ‘There might be special roomy omnibuses constructed to meet these painful cases of corpulence’, the author concludes, ‘but for the convenience of the public, I would really suggest that the motto for ordinary busses should be, “Abandon fat, all ye who enter here!”’

As all of this suggests, the fat man, was to be segregated from his thinner comrades. His bestial, ‘elephantine’ proportions were repeatedly, albeit satirically, subjected to the numerical rigours of the scale. Despite this newfound penchant for weighing machine calculability, the apparatus used was, at least according to the following self-weigher, not always numerically precise. The formerly quoted ‘Man of Substance’ suggested that:

> The scales which are provided for the public, though certainly convenient, are sadly incorrect. This scrap of scientific knowledge has been drawing on my mind many a month past, and a day or two ago it burst into full light. Coming from the Crystal Palace, where I had spent no less than fourpence in the terrible amusement of going to the scale, I managed in my journey homeward to lay out ninepence more in the like attractive torture. Sir, my patience and my weight were tried precisely thirteen times that afternoon, and I find by the tickets, which I carefully preserved, that I varied nearly two pounds seven ounces in my weight. Such incorrectness in the scales may be of direful consequence to corpulent and nervous people like myself, who are

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174 *The Fat of the Land*, p.147.

175 Ibid. p.147.
mentally tormented by visions of obesity, and go to scale continually to relieve their anxious fears.  

As this extract derisively reaffirms, the financial cost, the quantitative frequency, and the numerically precise (or imprecise) outcomes of these ‘try your weight’ machines were all driven by a deeply ingrained (and problematic) commercial and statistical alertness. The fact that this obsessive-compulsive weighing was capable of making a man ‘nervous’ also reveals that the era’s fat-consciousness was capable of engendering psychosomatic distress.

It was possibly on account of these psychosomatic sufferings that William Aytoun, one of William Banting’s harshest critics, vehemently contested society’s rudimentary weighing tics: ‘Men are not pigs, to be estimated entirely by the standard of weight’, he declared. Although Aytoun did not ‘hold forth’ the freakishly heavy ‘Daniel Lambert’ as a ‘suitable example for imitation’, he could not condone man’s new weight-focussed ‘dislike to be twitted on the score of paunchiness’. Aytoun continued:

Because cabmen and street-boys make impertinent remarks about stature—
because querulous people in the pit of the theatre object to having a human screen interposed between them and the spectacle—because an elderly gentleman cannot contrive to squeeze himself with comfort into an opera stall, or the narrow box of a chophouse—is it the duty of a physician to recommend such stringent measures as will make [a man] a walking skeleton?

As this very last rendition suggests, another cause for concern regarding dietetic ‘systems’, like the one belonging to Mr Banting, was that reducing ‘directives’ could be taken to compulsive extremes. Banting himself admits to the obsessive-compulsive tendencies which meshed closely to the practice of weight reduction: ‘Many of my friends’, he confesses, ‘have said, “Oh! you have done so well...but take care you don’t go too far”’. The following declarations of a journalist writing for the New Monthly Magazine ran along similar lines:

Mr Banting’s motives being undeniably good, there is nothing to say against them; but there are objections to the system [...] being carried too far. Like every man who rides a hobby, having mounted his Pegasus, he would rise till he scorches himself, or sink till he cannot recover. We shall endeavour to rein in this ill-regulated steed.

178 Ibid. p.609.
All attempts to ‘rein in’ the ‘ill-regulated steed’ of dieting, however, were futile. Just a month later it was suggested that if one were ‘to hear the conversation that goes on at every dinner-table, it might be imagined that [...] it lay within any man’s power to blow himself out and suck himself in as he would a bladder’.

Dr Chambers likewise noted that, ‘during the prevalence of the attention excited by Mr. Banting, reports of persons having injured themselves by adopting with over-strictness the system by which that famous man [had] regained the sight of his toes [were rife].’

Even several years after its initial publication, the hysteria regarding the extremist dangers of Banting’s system was still very much in circulation. For instance, in an 1866 edition of the satirical penny-weekly, Fun, the following passage appeared:

Bill Portly purchased Banting’s book, whose treatment, as I glean, procures for those inclined to fat a learning to be lean.[...] His sides fell in, his limbs grew lank, his skin hung on his bones. To see how he had lost his size, it would have cost you groans. But still he persevered and vowed he must, he would get thin – “one might cut off one’s flesh by will, as one cuts off one’s kin”.  

As ‘must’ implies, slenderness was now seen, by many, as a cultural imperative. Faced with this new necessity, the more protective of social authorities had to upstage their anti-Banting views: ‘the crowd of young and middle-aged men who are now shaping their courses by Mr Banting’s sailing chart’, declared one particularly vexed critic, ‘are simply behaving like simpletons’.

In his delineation of the dieting man as a ‘simpleton’, this writer was, in effect, linking the fat-phobic to the clinically branded anorexic. As Dr Samuel Fenwick observed of numerous case studies of anorexia, the anorectic patient’s lack of sustenance made him ‘stupid’:

Master C – aged seventeen, had been gradually but steadily losing flesh for eighteen months. When I saw him he was greatly emaciated, seemed unable to undertake the slightest mental or bodily exertion, had a stupid, almost idiotic, look, and although he answered all questions put to him, it was impossible to engage him in conversation. He could scarcely be prevailed upon to touch any food, and that only in the smallest quantities.

When viewed in this light, Bill Portly’s humorous determination to get thin acquires more sinister undertones. Portly’s ‘perseverance’, his ‘relentless pursuit of excessive thinness’,

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181 ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.697.
182 Thomas King Chambers, The Indigestions or Diseases of the Digestive Organs Functionally Treated (London: John Churchill & sons, 1867), pp.63-64.
183 Bill Portly’, Fun (March 24, 1866), p.17.
184 ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.698.
185 Fenwick, On Atrophy of the Stomach, pp.100-102.
becomes unnervingly anorectic. With fasts, fads and stringent diet regimes being promoted by the press, mid-Victorian culture itself, like its Romantic predecessor, was becoming a proponent of the era’s paradigmatic ‘anorexic logic’.

Such anorectic frames of thinking were further reinforced by the specific age-related, mid-life stigmas which had also progressively attached themselves to the fat male and female body. In clinical cases of anorexia, the fear of growing fat is, as the next chapter shall explore more fully, closely knit to the process of growing older, and, by necessity, larger in body. Reflecting the era’s concerns about age-related weight-gain, Mr Broadbottom – a fictional icon sick to the stomach of being hailed “‘the monster of magnitude’”, or the “‘whale among wigglers’” – claimed that the most distressing ‘inconvenience [of] being fat’ was the ‘disagreeable and vexatious notice it cause[d] [him] to receive from the young[...] and the lean’. 186 ‘I used to be as spry as a cat’, Broadbottom declares, ‘but now I am as clumsy as a man of fourscore, and but little on the wrong side of thirty’. As this statement infers, the distress which pervades Broadbottom is not brought about by general fears of growing old, but by the very specific mid-life piling on of pounds, which is a characteristic part of being on the fatter side of thirty. As this in itself implies, the nineteenth-century forerunner to today’s “Fat and Forty Syndrome” was quite feasibly the Victorian male. Throughout the long nineteenth century, the existential narrative of male ‘ageing’ was, like fatty matter, repeatedly depicted as one of unremitting horror. Ruddy-faced and rotund, grey-haired and gargantuan, the Victorian male was often dupe to a pound-and-inch-frenzied, ‘mid-riff’ crisis.

As Yorke-Davies proclaimed in 1889, ‘Of all the evils to which humanity is subject as middle-age creeps on, there is not one more common than excess of fat’. 187 Reiterating his fears a few years later, Davies went on to explain that, ‘after the age of forty [...] excess of fat becomes almost the rule’. 188 Davies was not the only social authority to draw attention to these increasingly prevalent ‘Fat and Forty’ associations. As early as 1835, Quetelet had suggested: ‘Man reaches his maximum of weight about the age of 40 and begins to waste in a sensible manner about the age of 60’. 189 As these statistical ponderings suggest, the protracted span of time which characterised middle age was generally associated with weight gain. It was only when the fat man had surpassed his mid-life existence – if, of course, he even lived to the age of sixty – that he could reclaim his ‘senses’ and begin to lose weight.

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188 Ibid. p.10.
The angst that appears to have surrounded middle age was largely accountable, I would argue, to the lack of quantitative clarity which characterised the life-span as a whole. To enter ‘mid-life’ was, in short, to enter a liminal space between the clear-cut poles of ‘youth’ and ‘age’. As Florence Bell explained in 1900, ‘[middle age] is a time that stands half-way between youth and age; [...] a time which is a strange and inconsistent medley of warring possibilities and impossibilities’. An author in an 1881 edition of London Society likewise marked middle age as being a ‘dubious period of human life’ which cannot be ‘too strictly define[d]’. Like the fat man, whose porous body permeated a variety of literal and symbolic boundaries, the man of ‘mid-life’ existed in a space which defied precise and recognisable categorisation. Because of this resistance to definability, the era’s conflated age and fat stigmas worked in tandem. The desire to reduce one’s body mass was frequently coupled with a longing to recapture lost youth.

In the next chapter, I will use Lewis Carroll and J. M. Barrie – both renowned for the (imaginary) perpetuation of their childhood years – to explore how calorific intake (or, rather, the lack of it) could become a manipulative tool in which a man might craft his body to remain eternally lightweight and little. Like the anorexic, who is sometimes thought to refuse food as a means of boycotting the responsibilities brought about by adulthood, so, too, did Carroll and Barrie. The anorectic tropes established in what follows will then linger throughout the remainder of this thesis. They will appear and reappear in different pretexts, but will, ultimately, remain linked to the fat-phobic rhetoric manifest here. As this chapter has shown, the entire practice of weight reduction (for men of all ages) could become dangerously addictive. Burdened with a body that threatened to defy numerical limits, the process of dieting could itself become one with no perceivable end. Through perpetuated cycles of definition and redefinition, conformity and non-conformity, creeping weight-gain and sudden weight-loss, the nineteenth-century male’s body insecurities came to thrive. In a culture which could reach no definite consensus regarding ideal weight and shape, the nineteenth-century male would have at least been challenged by the epoch’s competing dietetic philosophies.

Despite the intermittent emergence of reactionary pro-fat refutations – ‘it is childish to preach that men should live on rabbits’ food’, one turn-of-the-century writer petulantly...

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concluded – a pronounced segment of Romantic, Victorian (and later Edwardian) society appeared to be symbolically attracted to extreme weight-loss-inducing fads, and similar feats of self-denial. Increasingly suffused by anorectic thinking, the greater part of Victorian culture progressively came to identify the fat man as a being unable to squeeze into the tangible limits which defined nineteenth-century ‘normality’. Privileging mind over matter, the thin over the fat, and the weightless over the weighty, nineteenth-century culture played a formative part in the production of its own psychosomatic sufferings. The well-padded ‘oil-cake school[s] of obesity’, the vast ‘profiles of pronounced convexity’, and the ‘majestic swagger of corpulence’\(^{193}\) were, as the subsequent chapters to this study will make clear, to become all but remote relics of the past. Terrified of becoming a ‘ruminatively replete’, marginalized misfit who defied the willowy contours of the epoch’s burgeoning anorectic ideal, Victorian men, in increasingly large numbers, steadfastly took to the scales. Man’s corporeal feats of weight-and-measure centred dieting risked becoming representative of an anorectically-driven, age-defying act: a weighty unburdening stimulated and sustained through an ever progressive, fat-phobic dis-ease.

\(^{193}\) ‘The Cult of Slimness’, p.70.
Chapter 2 – Lightweight and Little: The Anorectic Plights of Two Eternally Boyish Men

‘We teach people how to remember, we never teach them how to grow’.

– Oscar Wilde, The Critic as Artist (1891)

In Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body, Anna Krugovoy Silver argues that the self-conscious domain of ‘children’s literature is a particularly good place to look for evidence of the beginnings of a culture of anorexia’.

Often didactic in nature, children’s literature presents its juvenile readers with a sugar-coated version of hegemonic cultural values. The production of children’s books is governed by what adult authors want children to be, and do. It likewise offers them an opportunity to induce children to share their ‘adult goals’.

This chapter will, in its later sections, analyse the speculatively anorectic ‘goals’ of two eternally boyish men. Read alongside a medley of sources which urged restrictive eating protocol throughout boyhood years, it will begin by exploring how these ‘eternally boyish’ life narratives were externally refracted in the nineteenth-century cultural domain.

Surveying the weighty gravitas which often filtered into the era’s clinical and didactic discourses on boyhood greed, this chapter’s first section will expose how the era’s fat-phobic logic was psychosomatically indoctrinated from an early age. From an exploration of the primitive de-formations of Greedy Gus and George to a discussion of Oliver’s ascetically driven spiritual ‘solidification’ in Charles Dickens’s Oliver Twist (1837), it will expose the ways in which anti-fat thinking suffused a variety of social discourses. Moving from the primitive to the pious, it will uncover the moral scope surrounding abstemious eating among children. Further analysing the valiant heroics which filtered into the era’s minimalistic dietetics, this chapter’s primary section will conclude with a discussion of the romantic youth: a child figure who weightlessly trailed in the fat boy’s path. Following a brief glossing of John Ruskin’s Shelleyan sensitivity, this romantic prototype will lead us to the concept of eternal boyishness itself.

Using Lewis Carroll and James Matthew Barrie as case studies, I will then move on to reveal the speculatively anorexic strains of their conditions. Taking each ‘eternally boyish’ man in turn, I will examine how their life and works often manifest a (un)conscious desire to school their male (and female) readers in the ways of remaining eternally ‘little’. From Carroll’s ‘calorific’ regulation of childhood years, to Barrie’s disciplinary indoctrination of make-believe meals, I shall reveal how hunger haunted each of these men and their works. In exploring their

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194 Silver, Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body, p.51.
personal histories, I will ask whether these men intended to promote and proliferate the anorexic logic characteristic in both themselves and the era at large, or whether their anorexic symptoms are merely inhibited ramifications of their own internally traumatic and destabilising lives. Although an answer to this question is inevitably tentative, the anorectic symptomologies they present in their works are symbolically ominous and hard to ignore. Yet, before turning our critical gaze to Carroll’s food-conscious Wonderland and Barrie’s time-absconding realm of ‘Never’, we must first analyse the child-centred dietetics which might have motivated these men to remain eternally lightweight and little.

(i.) Boyhood out of Bounds: Making the Victorian Fat Boy Slim

According to Silver, the ‘culture of anorexia’ which is so palpably apparent in children’s literature is one which especially targets young girls. ‘In story after story’, Silver argues, it is girls’ eating habits which are associated with traits of ‘greed, lust and aggression’. Victorian children’s literature was frequently staged as a pedestal for teaching young females that ‘they must control their appetites and, by implication, their desires and bodies, in order to be “good”’.\(^{196}\) Whilst there is much evidence to suggest that what Silver argues is true,\(^{197}\) by focussing on the Victorian girl, she unnecessarily exempts the nineteenth-century boy from the period’s admonitory didactics. Although Silver does admit that ‘children’s stories and poems frequently have a laugh at the expense of the boy who steals a plum tart, or who eats like a glutton’,\(^{198}\) by focussing exclusively on the laughable ‘Limby Lumps’\(^{199}\) inherent to the male-centred strands of the genre, she essentially undermines the more weighty gravitas which often filtered into the era’s stories of boyhood greed.

A brief glance in the direction of works by medical writers, such as Thomas King Chambers, provide us with enough evidence to dismiss Silver’s claim that ‘male fatness’ was primarily perceived as a ‘cause for laughter’.\(^{200}\) In his Manual of Diet (1876), Chambers states that ‘youth is the time when gluttonous habits are acquired. The commencement of them is easily detected, and they should unsparingly be made as disgraceful as they really are’.

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196 Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, pp.54-55.
197 Using Silver’s work as inspiration, I, among many other critics, have written about the complexities surrounding girlhood appetites within the era of concern. See, Lisa Coar, ‘Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice: The Victorian Woman’s All-Consuming Predicament’, *Victorian Network*, 4:1 (Summer 2012), pp.48-72.
198 Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, p.56.
199 The anonymously written tale of ‘Limby Lumpy’ (c.1840) appears to have been a popular children’s story which was reprinted in various collected volumes. It revels in the humorous blunderings of its fat protagonist, and Silver apparently uses the story’s comic tone to cast triviality onto the era’s conception of boyhood greed at large. For a printed version of the narrative, see: *Old Fashioned Tales*, ed. by Edward Verrall Lucas (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton, 1905), pp.122-129.
‘Ridicule’, continues Chambers, ‘is not always a wise engine to employ in education – it is too powerful’; yet, when directed against boyhood ‘gluttony’, he concedes, ‘it may fairly be used’. However, unlike the ‘ridicule’ which Silver sees as inane and non-serious, the ‘ridicule’ glossed by Chambers is crafted as a didactic tool in which to urge reform. In order to avoid conflating purposeful ridicule with trivial and humorous effect, Chambers concludes: ‘Let it not be supposed that excess in gratifying the palate is at all a laughing matter. It is a vice just as truly as sexual excess is a vice; and there is [no] excuse for its becoming habitual’. As Chambers’ statement indicates sex and food were often conjoined in nineteenth-century discourses. Simmering beneath the body’s lusting ‘desire’ for food was not only a gustatory appetite, but an implicitly sexual one. An awareness of this reciprocity between sex and food ensured that the reformation of boyhood appetite became all the more imperative.

It was not just nineteenth-century medical writers who promoted the seriousness of reforming boyhood greed. In John Churchill Brenan’s short story, ‘Greedy George’ (1873), for instance, any superficial humour found in the gluttonous protagonist’s excessive love for sugared-pastries is undercut by his unnerving transmogrification into a grotesque ‘hog’. Aware of the tendency for boyhood greed to be dismissed as humorous and trivial, the author concludes in scorn: ‘Don’t laugh at him, boys; but let his punishment be a warning. [...]If you want to be a pig, go and live in a sty; but if you want to become a man, [...] never eat more than is sufficient to keep you in health’. Without doubt, this greedy protagonist’s metamorphosis is devoid of narrative joviality. Likewise, the author’s stress on male ‘humanity’, or, becoming ‘a man’—as opposed to degenerating into an atavistic hog—evokes notions of degeneration and devolution: matters which are, in themselves, weighted with contextual seriousness. As Kelly Hurley observes, the social and scientific discourses emerging from Darwinism ‘opened up a space wherein hitherto unthinkable morphic structures could

201 Thomas King Chambers, A Manual of Diet in Health and Disease (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1876), p.154. That anorexic eating patterns were indoctrinated from an early age is particularly evident in the following hospital records. On 10 August 1905, for instance, Arthur Lenton (11 years, 6 months old) was admitted to Great Ormond Street on account of bodily ‘wasting’ and ‘neurasthenia’. Yet, perhaps more unnerving was the admission of both Arthur Backlake (1 year, 11 months) and Henry Gray (3 years, 6 months) on 8 February 1909 and 13 October 1892 respectively. Each of these boys were admitted to hospital (as recorded on the admission registers) for ‘Bulimia’ and ‘Anorexia’. Although these categorisations might merely have been medical shorthand for ‘being sick after meals’ and ‘inability to eat’, the fact that the records have subsequently been labelled under the appropriate ICD10 codes for anorexia and bulimia suggests that this was potentially not the case. See, Historic Hospital Admission Records Project (HHARP), <http://hharp.org/admissions/a54045f6/65926> [accessed 29 November 2011].

202 Fears about male adolescence, adulthood and masturbation were intense in the nineteenth century. As we know, the ideal man was trained to control his urges – particularly for sex. See Gosse, The Image of Man, p.27, pp.60-3.

203 John Churchill Brenan, ‘Greedy George’, Our Young Folks, 154 (6 December 1873), pp.619-620, [emphasis original].

emerge’. As a result of Darwin’s theories of evolutionary descent, the nineteenth century became anxious about a ‘too intimate continuity between humans and the “lower” species’. If men derived from mammals then they might still be abhuman entities, neither fully evolved nor fully human. Maybe worse, the evolutionary process might be reversible. By retaining or developing bestial, barbaric, appetitive and impulsive characteristics the human race could, as Hurley puts it, ‘ultimately retrogress into a sordid animalism rather than progress towards a telos of intellectual and moral perfection’. Read in another way, Brennan’s allusion to ‘becom[ing]a man’ creates a text which meshes closely to the era’s coming of age chronicles. It is the literary depiction and assimilation of such repressions of boyhood appetite and ageing, I would argue, which helped to prefigure assumptions about the ideal, adult masculine role.

In his recent study of *Masculinity in the Modern West*, Christopher Forth suggests that the middle-class men of the nineteenth century ‘were keenly aware of the tightrope they walked between the social demand for self-control and the temptations periodically to relax that control’. The boy who was to eventually fit the prototype of the ‘proper gentleman’ had to learn ‘how to navigate those competing demands’. Of course, the concept of ‘gentlemanhood’ is something quite distinct from manhood: most obviously, it pertains to middle and upper-class consciousness. But if middle and upper-class males were expected to curtail their consumption, were the poorer classes to be excluded from the era’s restrictive decrees? Possibly the most iconic literary manifestation of boyhood appetite in Victorian culture comes from Charles Dickens’s poverty-stricken orphan, Oliver Twist. The very articulation of Oliver’s frightened cry for ‘more’ indicates that even the poorest of boys could be nervous about voicing their desires. As Gail Houston remarks, when faced with the board of workhouse executives, the vulnerable ‘Oliver is like a hungry pig midst […] fatted porkers. [T]he board’s answer to Oliver’s desire for “more” is death. They apprentice him to the

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205 Ibid. p.10. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin states: ‘As a struggle may sometimes be seen going on between the various instincts of the lower animals, it is not surprising that there should be a struggle in man between his social instincts, with their derived virtues, and his lower, though momentarily stronger impulses or desires’. Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp.149-150.

206 Ibid. p.56.


208 Interestingly, Oliver inhabits a betwixt-and-between class status. Dickens tells us in the very first chapter of the novel that Oliver ‘might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society’. Dickens, *Oliver Twist* [1837] (London: Penguin, 2003), p.3. Oliver’s indefinable social status perhaps indicates that the angst surrounding childhood appetites surpassed class boundaries: both the poorest and richest of boys were expected to restrain their appetites, confining within the ‘proper’ limits.
unsavourily named Sowerberry, the local mortician’. If publicly vocalising a desire for food when excessively slender earned a boy his death sentence, then the fat boy’s alimentary desires were inevitably a lot more fatal.

As Greedy George’s transmogrification confirms, gorging oneself into gluttony annihilated a boy’s humanity: his existence as a worthy ‘human’ became extinct. It is for this reason that the fulfilment of Oliver’s alimentary, and sexual, appetites are negated; satiation and gratification are displaced onto his villainous counterparts. The novel’s anti-hero, Fagin, for instance, is depicted as a ‘hideous old man’, whose life of gratified avariciousness has transformed him, not unlike Greedy George, into a (pre)Darwinian, primordial creature. As he ‘glide[s] stealthily’ along the intestinal path of inner-city London, perpetually ‘in search of some rich offal for a meal’, Fagin, the narrator informs us, ‘seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved’. In contrast to this degenerate sketch of immoral villainy, Oliver is presented to readers as the paradigm of moral virtue: ‘Nature or inheritance’ had ‘implanted a good, sturdy spirit in Oliver’s breast’. In compliance with the flesh/spirit dichotomies intrinsic to patterns of anorexic thought, Oliver’s spiritual ‘goodness’ is solidified by his abstinence. The ‘sturdy spirit’ which Oliver is to grow into, the narrator suggests, is ultimately attributed to ‘the spare diet’ which forms his childhood years. The constant denial of Oliver’s fleshly needs means that his spirit (as opposed to his stomach) ‘had had plenty of room to expand’. In short, it is Oliver’s minimalistic fare – consisting of ‘the smallest possible portion[s] of the weakest possible food’ – which spiritually elevates him above the corporeal baseness which defines his criminal acquaintances.

It is only when Oliver ravenously partakes of food that his moral integrity slides. When thrown ‘scraps’ of cold meat that Sowerberry’s dog has ‘neglected’, Oliver begins to show signs of a burgeoning alertness to his sexually ripe masculinity. He ‘trembl[es] with eagerness’ at

209 Houston, *Consuming Fictions*, p.19. Houston discusses the paradoxes inherent in Oliver’s appetite at great length. She argues that ‘Dickens represents Oliver’s hunger as both innocent and guilty’. In the 1841 preface, Dickens explains that ‘his purpose in creating the Oliver character was to show “the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance”’, but, Houston remarks, ‘the narrative also recognizes that adolescent “boys have generally excellent appetites” as it ponders the “fearful auguries of [Oliver’s] future appetite”’. These ‘auguries’ of appetite, claims Houston, ‘suggest the accession of sexual appetite, for the ravenous Oliver is also a prepubescent Oliver’. *Consuming Fictions*, p.31. Houston’s claims further bolster Silver’s dismissal of boyhood ‘anorectics’ on account of sexual appetites being exclusive to female-targeted audiences.

210 Oliver is described as being ‘somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference’. *Oliver Twist*, p.5.


212 Ibid. p.5.

213 Ibid. p.4.

214 Ibid. p.31.
the thought of consuming the meat, and, following its consumption, his person becomes passionately aroused and heated. He is ‘crimson with fury’, and becomes literally ‘erect’:

[Oliver] started up. [H]is spirit was roused at last; [...] his blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed; [...] he was] defined by an energy he had never known before.\(^{215}\)

Unnerved by this frenzied state of ‘madness’, Mrs Sowerberry sends an errand boy in search of Oliver’s former workhouse master, Mr Bumble. Following his arrival at the scene, Bumble declares: “It’s not Madness, ma’am[…]it’s Meat”. “Meat, ma’am, meat”, he bellows. “You’ve overfed him, ma’am. You’ve raised an artificial soul and spirit in him, ma’am. [...] If you had kept the boy on gruel, ma’am, this would never have happened”.\(^{216}\) In order to rectify this mistake, and to prevent him from growing into a degenerate cast of manhood not dissimilar to old Fagin’s, Oliver’s ‘future appetites’ are, as we have seen, to be projected onto the novel’s criminal underbelly. In order to render Oliver an appropriate ‘hero’ for his text, Dickens has to deny Oliver any further satiation. As Houston confirms, ‘Dickens embraces, chafes against, grapples with, and finally consciously rejects [...] his protagonist’s pulsing appetites’.\(^{217}\) Thus, it is only through Dickens’s external, narrative autonomy that Oliver is salvaged from the archetypal greedy boy’s fate: moral collapse, and human(e) extinction.

Such ‘extinction’ or collapsing of ‘human(e)’ nature resurfaces in several other narratives which scorn the dangers of boyhood greed. In fact, fatness as an indicator of moral and evolutionary deterioration appears to have been an extensively popular literary trope, even prior to the publication of Darwinian theory. In Catherine Sinclair’s collection of children’s stories, the Holiday House (1839), for instance, Peter Grey – an emphatically greedy boy, ‘who spent all his own pocketmoney, and borrowed a great deal of other people’s, to squander at the pastry-cook’s’\(^{218}\) – is depicted as ‘the father of mischief’ who, according to the text’s narrator, ‘ought to be put into the monkey’s cage at the Geological gardens!’\(^{219}\) In depicting Peter as ‘father’, Sinclair creates an overbearing figure who possesses the untimely adult capacity to procreate. As a result of this reproductive power, Peter becomes a character who threatens to perpetuate his flaws through the (re)production of progeny who would doubtless be equally greedy and morally debased. However, by ‘caging’ the ‘animal’ within him, Peter’s

\(^{215}\) Ibid. p.44.
\(^{216}\) Ibid. p.51.
\(^{217}\) Houston, Consuming Fictions, p.33.
\(^{218}\) Sinclair, Holiday House, p.13.
\(^{219}\) Ibid. p.147.
potency (along with his gluttonous habits) is symbolically prohibited, and, by extension, the succession of gluttony among future generations is also presumably suspended.

An austerely enforced ‘suspension’ of boyhood greed was, according to scientific theorists of the time, a prerequisite of good parenting. It was the father (or, more frequently, the mother) figure’s duty to stifle the ‘beast’ within their unruly child. In 1895, Victorian psychologist, James Sully, proclaimed that ‘the most distant acquaintance with the first years of human life tells us that young children have much in common with the lower animals. Their characteristic passions and impulses are centred in self and the satisfaction of its wants’.

According to Sully, ‘the boundless greed of the child’ was suggestive of the fact that, ‘for some time after birth’, the child was ‘little more than an incarnation of appetite which knows no restraint’.²²⁰ It was the parent’s duty, then, to instil this absent ‘knowledge’ into their animalistic offspring. The over-doting guardian who neglected their duty to define the precincts which designated acceptable patterns of restraint was, in actual fact, failing to provide their child with a ‘happy and healthy’ future.

In Ascott Hope’s story, ‘Greedy Gus’ (1888), the eponymous protagonist’s ‘fond mother’ offers a prime fictional example of such parental failing. Naively encouraging her son ‘to eat more than would have kept a strong man, on the plea that her dear boy “needed nourishment”’,²²¹ Gus’s mother ‘indulged [him] with almost everything he took a fancy for’. If it had been possible, the narrator explains, she would have ‘give[n] him the moon when he cried for that on hearing it was made of red currant jelly’. Yet, as Gus becomes increasingly ill with over-repletion, and his mother comes to realise the errors of her ways, the damage induced by gluttony is already done. Fed to bursting point on ‘the richest and spiciest dishes’, Gus’s countenance is soon tarnished with the ‘mottled’ stains of greed: red and rashy in hue, Gus had begun to ‘look like one of the many sausages or slices of brawn he had devoured’.²²² This last detail suggests that certain foods imparted certain qualities to the eater; that is, you were (or you became) what you ate. These consumer/consumed interrelations were, in actual fact, well-established concepts prior to the publication of Hope’s text.

In his eminently popular *The Physiology of Taste* (1825), for instance, Jean Brillat-Savarin had authoritatively declared in the opening pages to his book: ‘Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are’.²²³ In claiming that he could identify someone by the food which they consumed, Brillat-Savarin was, in effect, linking the axiom ‘you are what you eat’ to

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²²² ibid. p.440.
national discourses of corporeality. It is potentially on account of this consumer/consumed axiom that pig meat, be it sausage, roasted, or otherwise, was viewed with both narrative and medical trepidation. Dr Pye Henry Chavasse was one particularly noteworthy medical authority who scorned the eating of pork. In his authoritarian book of questions and answers about child-rearing, which went through fourteen editions between 1839 and 1885, Chavasse – when asked, ‘Have you any objection to pork?’ – insisted:

I have the greatest objection to it. It is a rich, gross, and therefore unwholesome food for the delicate stomachs of children. [...] It being a gross meat, if a child be fed upon it, it will likely produce eruptions of the skin. In fine, the child's blood will pit on the same character as the food it is fed with. 224

Here, Chavasse provides clinical validation that the ‘you are what you eat’ adage was far more than a mere literary trope. Chavasse’s repetition of the word ‘gross’, in combination with the dynamic image of ‘erupting’, seems to suggest that a race of hybrid pig-boys – who literally ‘erupted’ from the seams of their skin, and thereby penetrated the symbolic boundary which separated human from animal – was not as fantastical a prospect as it sounds. In stating that ‘the child’s blood will pit on the same character as the food it is fed with’, Chavasse implies that the ingestion of pig meat could potentially induce internal mutations which would result in an external diminution of the child’s human subjectivity. Thus, the fictional symptomologies of both Greedy Gus, whose skin evokes the mottled tints of fatty sausage, and also Greedy George, who, we might recall, had entirely metamorphosed into a pig, had (at least in the eyes of Chavasse) weighty, clinical groundings.

On account of such clinical concerns, Hope has Gus’s mother turn to the local medical authorities in search of a ‘cure’ for her son’s overindulgence. Calling in a physician, Gus’s mother insists that her ‘darling was consumptive’; ‘and so he was’, the narrator snidely remarks, ‘in one sense’. Anticipating the prescription of ‘tonics’ to cure her son’s ailing, Gus’s mother is outraged to hear the physician’s diagnosis: “[There is] nothing the matter with him except over-eating”. “Tonics?” he scolds: “The only tonic he needs are a black draught and a little spell of starvation”. “Delicate?” he bemuses, “Not a bit”. 225 However, with gluttonous habits entrenched from birth, Gus is apparently devoid of the mental strength and fortitude required to purge himself of his greedy faults. Instead, the narrator informs us, he ‘guzzled idly at home all the rest of his youth’. ‘Naturally’, the narrator continues, Gus ‘never fitted himself to do anything in the world but consume what others ha[d] toiled to produce – a most

224 Dr Pye Henry Chavasse, Advice to Mothers on the Management of their Offspring (London: Green & Longmans, 1839), p.76.
contemptible occupation, if one considers it’. ‘Glutton by trade’, Gus’s ‘whole mind seems to be taken up by eating and drinking; all day long he [thought] about his dinner, which, when it [came], [...] set him growling and snarling at this or that dish’. On reaching his adult years, Gus (long-term victim of his foolish mother’s pandering) had ‘so thoroughly ruined his digestion’ that he had become ‘an invalid in real earnest’: a man rendered completely immobile by his corpulent bulk. Leading his ‘miserable life [with] alternate dosing and cramming’, Gus had, in short, become ‘a fat, bloated, pallid, useless lump of flesh’. A man ‘nobody [would] much miss from the earth’ when he had finally succeeded in ‘digging his grave with his teeth’.226

In concluding his stern tale, Hope asks his readers to ‘bear with [him] if [he] run[s] into a sermon at the end of a story’. He confesses to ‘speak so seriously on this subject because, though all of us may not be so shamelessly greedy as poor Gus, it seems [...] that, as a nation, we are apt to be too complacent towards his weakness’. The ‘habit of self-indulgence’, he states, too frequently appears ‘in young people’, and ‘commonly begins with an unrestrained love of eating, treated, perhaps, lightly as matter of jest’. However, this jesting and harmless ‘love’ is, according to Hope, allowed to ‘pass too often into that congenial vice, whose hideousness is clear even to its besotted victims’. ‘I hope’, he continues, ‘some of my readers may take a hint from this boy and recognise how pitiful a thing it is to be the slave of one’s stomach’. ‘We cannot begin too soon’, Hope concludes,

in trampling down our baser desires. [...] I would have all brave boys look to it betimes that they thankfully use, and not abuse, the blessings which turn to a curse when, instead of eating to live, we fall into the vileness of living to eat, like that Greedy Gus.227

Taking for granted the fact that all boys must internalise a desire to be perceived as ‘brave’, Hope, like Dickens, uses the rhetoric of valiant heroics in order to endorse restrained appetite as a stepping stone to moral virtue. Using language which implies literal, moral and metaphorical ‘descent’ – ‘trampling down’, ‘baser desires’, ‘fall into’– Hope promotes the idea that nineteenth-century boys needed to rise ‘above’ their ‘degenerative’ inclinations. By indulging his ‘natural appetites’, Hope suggests, a boy scuppered his chances of crafting himself as a ‘true hero’.228

This non-heroic delineation of hunger and eating in both canonical and vernacular children’s literature mimics, to varying degrees, the moral ‘heroics’ associated with the real-life restrictions enforced upon the Victorian child. Like the literary greedy boys of the period, who

226 Ibid. p.442.
227 Ibid. p.443.
228 Ibid. p.443.
are repeatedly criticised for their sugared tastes, non-fictional boys were equally admonished for ‘gorging themselves with sweet-stuff at the confectioner’s’. In a culture that was becoming, as we know, increasingly fat-phobic, the regulatory curtailing and controlling of the ingestion of foodstuffs was, as we have seen, a means of exemplifying ‘moral certitude’. Abstaining from food whenever possible was, in the words of Joan Jacobs Brumberg, ‘a means of advancing in the moral hierarchy’. As the following Bow Bells article on ‘Children’s diet’ implies, children, or, rather, their parents, were urged to encourage the partaking of a bland, unstimulating diet; one essentially devoid of harmful sugar and spices:

There is nothing in the life of children that needs more careful study than diet [...]. [Children] should under no circumstances be allowed cake or much confectionery. [...] [H]ighly-seasoned and spiced food is unfit for children to grow on. [...] Fresh vegetables of all sorts are good for children, but should be fresh, and carefully prepared. [...] Brought up by these laws they will be healthy, happy, good-natured, clear-headed and kind-hearted.

Here, even the epoch’s ‘safer’ vegetable foodstuffs are urged to be consumed with caution – maybe suggesting, in extremist terms, that avoiding most foods, whenever possible, would be the most advisable option. Adding further scientific weight to Chavasse’s denunciation of pork, as well as enhancing Dickens’s portrayal of the damning effects of meat, this particular writer goes on to state that ‘the least possible meat for children is best. It is a fully-established fact that the free use of meat makes them irritable and vicious, and some of the most advanced hygienists are cutting off meat diet from all children under ten years of age’.

It was on account of such ‘irritable’ ‘viciousness that various strands of the era’s meat-eating boy ‘species’ were often, in the eyes of many nineteenth-century authorities, perceived as being a dire ‘curse’. In an 1863 article entitled ‘Against Boys’, for instance, a writer in Chamber’s Journal suggested that:

The boy is a dreadful animal, under whatever aspects we regard him, and in whatever social rank, from the aristocratic youth at his private tutor’s down to the *gamin* at the corner of the streets. [...] No nation, however civilised, can hope to forget what were its own primeval wicked habits, so long as it possesses Boys. In them we see continually reproduced a picture of savage humanity, [and] if all the grown-up people in the world should suddenly fail, what a frightful thing would Society become, reconstructed by Boys! If

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Adam had begun life as a lad, the world would have been a deal worse than it is, [...] he would not have required an Eve to tempt him to steal apples.  

In this extract, we get both a critical solidification of the degenerative and devolutionary modes of fat-thinking, as well as an equally pronounced biblical insight into the era’s dietetic censure. This article’s final allusion to the Adam and Eve components of the Genesis narrative explicitly links boyhood appetite to puritan discourses. According to Jacqueline Labbe, it was under the rubric which construed these said ‘discourses’ that ‘eating too much – or sometimes wanting to eat at all –’ came to be a primary ‘marker of the child’s inherent viciousness, the residue of Original sin’. From Dr Chambers’ allusions to boyhood greed being a mor(t)al ‘vice’, to Ascott Hope’s more explicit claims that ‘greediness is a besetting sin of too many boys’, the predominant mode of nineteenth-century thought castigated the appetitive ‘sinfulness’ of young boys.

It is presumably because of this sinful boy-scoorning that the writer of the ‘Against Boys’ article revels in his adult status. The initial ‘transition from the boorishness of boyhood to the refinement and grace of adolescence’, he claims, was ‘very remarkable’. The ‘metamorphosis’ was particularly ‘astounding’ to his ‘younger brother, who [was] still amid the jam-pots’. But even ‘that young gentleman’, he continues, soon ‘slough[ed] his old school-skin’. ‘I was not a very bad boy myself’, the author goes on to assert, ‘but the comparison of my Now with my Then is certainly not odious’:

I [no longer] distend my pockets with filberts purloined from my host’s dinner table; I do not smoke bits of cane until I am sick [...] I am no longer irresistibly attracted to any barrow full of strange delicacies [...] and] when I find any foreign substance, whether of a sticky nature or otherwise, upon my fingers, nature does not impel me, on the instant, to put them in my mouth[...]. Upon the whole, in short, I flatter myself that my relations with society are improved since I was that dreadful being – a Boy.

This author’s egocentric ‘flattering’ suggests that the quenching of his boyhood tastes and appetites is a source of self-assured gratification. His boyhood memories might still be in close proximity, but he is by no means tormented by this fact.

235 Hope, ‘Greedy Gus’, pp.3-5.
236 An image which arguably reconfigures the ‘pig-skin’ metaphor employed by Chavasse, albeit in a more favourable light.
237 ‘Against Boys’, p.145.
In Charlotte Brontë’s 1853 novel, Villette, however, male protagonist, Graham Bretton, is discomforted by the prevailing imminence of his boyhood years. Unlike the ‘Against Boys’ author above, who takes pride in the reformation of (and consequent detachment from) his gluttonous boyhood habits, the adult Graham finds them a persistent source of embarrassment. Publicly provoked by his mother – who declares, “‘Have you forgotten how you would come to my elbow and touch my sleeve with the whisper, ‘Please ma’am, something good for Graham – a little marmalade, or honey, or jam?’’” – Graham (uncomfortably ‘reddening’) responds: “it surely was not so; I could not have cared for these things”. Yet, in an earlier narrative depiction of his portly contours, one might assume that the adult Graham is, in actual fact, still indulgent in, and pervaded by, the honeyed tastes of his past. Having condemned his mother for her slothful afternoon sleep, mother and son engage in the following tête-à-tête:

“My slumbers, Graham! What are you talking about? You know I never do sleep by day: it was the slightest doze possible.”

“Exactly! A seraph’s gentle lapse – a fairy’s dream. Mama, under such circumstances, you always remind me of Titania.”

“That is because you, yourself, are so like Bottom.”

“Miss Snowe – did you ever hear anything like mama’s wit? She is a most sprightly woman of her size and age.”

“Keep your compliments to yourself, sir, and do not neglect your own size: which seems to me a good deal on the increase. Lucy, has he not rather the air of an incipient John Bull? He used to be slender as an eel, and now I fancy in him a sort of heavy-dragoon bent – a beef-eater tendency. Graham, take notice! If you grow fat I disown you”. 238

The dialogue here is infiltrated with sarcasm and irony. Graham’s blunt references to his mother’s ‘size and age’, in combination with the depiction of her indulgent sedentariness, indicate that she is overweight. His allusions to ‘seraphs’, ‘sprightliness’, and Shakespeare’s fairy queen, Titania, are therefore humorously ironic. Nonetheless, receiving a large dose of his own sarcastic medicine, Graham’s insults are swiftly deflected by his mother, whose retaliatory mentioning of ‘Bottom’ embodies Graham’s own implicit bulk. Through her vengeful reference to Bottom, Graham’s mother not only creates a further intertextual allusion to Shakespeare’s ‘ass’, but also draws attention to his visibly perceptible corporeality – ‘bottoms’ being, of course, sufficiently flesh-filled and ‘padded’. Much like Hope’s Greedy Gus, then, who carries

his boyhood gluttony through to his adult years, Graham is to be persistently reminded of the adult perpetuation of his boyhood tastes.

If the tastes and habits of boyhood years were, as Graham’s discomfort suggests, so incompatible with accepted modes of physical (and moral) embodiment, one might question why the men I shall proceed to use as case studies for the remainder of this chapter wanted to remain eternally ‘boyish’? Whilst boyhood was, as the ‘Against Boys’ article implies, widely perceived as a period of repulsive digress, there were, in fact, more promising (though less pervasive) literary and cultural appraisals of boyhood. In the words of the ‘Against Boys’ writer himself, ‘it is often the paradoxical fashion of these days to praise boys’. Although, as we have seen, many nineteenth-century narratives focussed on the sinful temperament inherent in appetitive boyhood, a more favourable boy figure often trailed in the fat boy’s path. Shadowing the paradigm of the voracious, sinful child was the Romantic ideal of the innocent, pure and uncorrupted representative of boyhood: a child figure who was nostalgically recreated throughout the duration of the nineteenth century. According to Jacqueline Labbe, this Romantic youth became an iconic literary character, an imaginative figment of ‘one’s happier uncomplicated past’. Towards the close of the century, and during the fin-de-siècle, writers and critics of all kinds consciously (or, unconsciously) returned to this ‘Romantic ideal’. In his *Studies of Childhood*, Sully noted how Romantic initiators, such as Wordsworth, had sparked an entire epoch’s worth of literary ‘child-lovers’. He writes:

> For us of to-day, who have learned to go to the pure springs of nature for much of our spiritual refreshment, the child has acquired a high place among the things of beauty. Indeed, the grace of childhood may almost be said to have been discovered by the modern poet. Wordsworth stooped over his cradle intent on catching, ere they passed, the 'visionary gleams' of 'the glories he hath known'. [And, as a result,] the page of modern literature is a monument of our childlove and our child-admiration.\(^240\)

This ‘childlove’ and admiration helped to form one component of the anorectic symptoms characteristic of ‘eternally boyish’ men. However, the meek and ‘childish’ temperament manifest in the Romantic poets themselves appears to have been equally influential. In his autobiographical work, *Praeterita* (1885-9), for instance, John Ruskin takes pride in the Romantic essence pervading his adolescent person. Significant for our purposes, Ruskin essentially saw no difference between his adolescent and adult subjectivities:

> I had in my little clay pitcher, vialfuls, as it were, of Wordsworth’s reverence [and] Shelley’s sensitiveness all in one. [...] [Even] now, looking back from

\(^{239}\) Labbe, ‘To Eat and be Eaten’, p.94.

\(^{240}\) Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, p.2.
1886 to that brook shore of 1837, whence I could see the whole of my youth, I find myself in nothing whatsoever changed. Some of me is dead, more of me stronger. I have learned few things, forgotten many; in the total of me, I am but the same youth. 241

Through his closing remark, (“in the total of me, I am but the same youth”) Ruskin suggests that his boyish person has persisted into old age; or, in other words, the core of his identity had eternally crystallised prior to his crossing of the ‘brook shore’ which designated manhood. Adding further weight to this subliminally infinite ‘boyishness’, Ruskin’s allusions to both ‘dead’ and ‘stronger’ selves evoke an internal battle wrought against time and age: a battle which essentially underlies the concept of eternal boyishness itself. The ‘some of me’ which is ‘dead’ represents the physical and spiritual parts of his whole which have withered in their attempts to erase or suspend time, and ‘the more of me’ which is ‘stronger’ symbolises his persistent psychic determination to further suspend the inevitable process of bodily ageing.

Of course, one of the predominant driving forces of anorexia nervosa mimics this fervent desire to suspend or eradicate time. The anorexic obstinately avoids ingesting the nourishment which will initiate and sustain their growth. As eating disorder psychiatrist, Hilde Bruch confirms, ‘the whole illness’ can be characterised as ‘an effort to make time stand still, not to grow but to go back to childhood size and functioning’. 242 Ruskin’s manifestation of this desire to take a regressive step back into childhood is further evident in a letter he wrote to his father at the age of forty-six:

It is curious that I feel older and sadder, very much, in now looking at these young children – it is especially the young ones between whom & me I now feel so infinite a distance, – and they are so beautiful and so good, and I am not good, […] by any means. The weary longing to begin life over again, and the sense of fate forever forbidding it – here or hereafter – is terrible. [But] I daresay I shall get over it in a day or two. 243

Once again, through his ‘weary’ comments, we can identify that Ruskin was consciously alert to the fact that his internal battle against time and age was one shrouded with the prospect of inevitable loss. The intensity of his wistful longing to ‘begin life over again’ is sabotaged by the conscious reality that ‘fate’ is working against him to ‘forever forbid’ such an eventuality. Nonetheless, there are certain phrases in this extract which unveil the continuation of a childlike consciousness. The emotions which Ruskin expresses within this passage are simplistic.

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to a childlike degree. They are not complex or psychologically multifaceted, but simple, exterior emotions, easily felt by the most juvenile and emotionally undeveloped of individuals. Ruskin feels ‘sadder’ – as opposed to, say, melancholic, despondent, or wistful. Likewise, the construction of the largely monosyllabic phrase, ‘they are so beautiful and so good, and I am not good’ is equally childish in tone. If children tend to think in binary terms when it comes to the early projection of their emotional capacities – happy/sad, good/bad, beautiful/ugly – then Ruskin renders himself adept in the rhetoric of infantile sensitivity. Why Ruskin no longer perceives his adult self as ‘good’ is unclear, but it is maybe not unfeasible to suggest that the children’s ‘goodness’ lies in their innocent and slender delicacy: delicate contours which presumably contrast with Ruskin’s much larger, adult self.

However, the fleeting dismissal which closes Ruskin’s ponderings, (‘I daresay I shall get over it in a day or two’) suggests that his childlike demeanour is external and performative, as opposed to being internal and neurotic. Ruskin endorses the concept of eternal boyishness in an ephemeral manner; there is no evidence to suggest that his desire to return to youth is psychologically rooted, or anorectically motivated. Although a consciousness of male body image obviously plagued Ruskin (even if it was only to a mild extent) this consciousness was not apparently intertwined with his relationships to food. Yet, with Lewis Carroll, the first of our ‘eternally boyish’ case studies, and also J. M. Barrie, our second exemplar, this was evidently not so.

(ii.) Weight-Watching in Wonderland: Lewis Carroll’s Dietary Regulations

In her recent study, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*, Catherine Robson convincingly argues that Ruskin’s desire to regress back into childhood might have derived from an unconscious desire to recapture the lost ‘female years’ which prefigured his male sexed identity. Extending her argument further, Robson’s study likewise suggests that this might also have been true of Lewis Carroll, author of the timeless literary classic, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Offering illuminating insight into the psychological depths which motivate the concept of interminable childishness, Carroll’s life and writings simultaneously display a longing to return to childhood years and functioning, but also, as Robson suggests, ‘a violent rejection of all children who happen to be male’. To be sure,
when Carroll declared that ‘as a little boy, I was simply detestable’; he was merely adding to
the tirade of boy abuse that was to become a regular feature in both his published works and
his private correspondence alike. In a letter written to Edith Blakemore in 1890, for instance,
Carroll stated:

Sometimes [children] are a real terror to me – especially boys: little girls I
can now and then get on with […] but with little boys I’m out of my element
altogether. I sent *Sylvie and Bruno* to an Oxford friend, and, in writing his
thanks, he added, “I think I must bring my little boy to see you.” So I wrote
to say “don’t,” or words to that effect: and he wrote again that he could
hardly believe his eyes when he got my note. He thought I doted on all
children. But I’m not omnivorous! – like a pig. I pick and choose.246

Carroll’s last exasperated reference to an ‘omnivorous’ or ‘pig-like’ appetite is possibly a subtle
allusion to boy-nature itself. If we recall the ‘Against Boys’ ramblings discussed previously,
Carroll’s rejection of boy-nature seems to be interlaced with an aversion to the gluttonous
carnality which was thought to be instinctive in the male sex. In a letter written to Margaret
Cunynghame in January 1868, Carroll reveals this connection himself. Appending a postscript
to his letter, Carroll writes: ‘p.s. My best love to yourself – to your Mother my kindest regards
– to your small, fat, impertinent, ignorant brother my hatred. I think that is all’. In light of
this fat-boy scorning, it comes as no surprise to learn that the creation of his titular protagonist
Bruno was, as Carroll’s nephew confirms, ‘the only act of homage Lewis Carroll ever paid to
boy-nature, for which, as a rule, he professed an aversion almost amounting to terror’.248

Given this terror of little (or, perhaps not so little) boys, it seems somewhat illogical to suggest
that Carroll manifested a desire to be eternally ‘boyish’. Thus, in Carroll’s case, the concept
needs revising a little.

Rather than projecting a desire to be ‘eternally boyish’, Carroll, I would argue, appears
to crave a return to the ‘petticoat stage’ of his infancy; a time of life in which his childhood
attire essentially rendered him asexual, and partially exempt from the atrocities which were
characteristic of boyhood years. Yet this, in itself, strengthens the plausibility, and visibility, of
Carroll’s speculative strain of anorexia. As various authorities have long suspected, the clinical
anorexic—he tends to be, though not exclusively, female – appears to express a desire to
erase themselves of a definitive and monolithic sex identity. Instead of assimilating into binary

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245 *A Selection from the Letters of Lewis Carroll to His Child-Friends*, ed. by Evelyn M. Hatch (London:
Macmillan, 1933), p.177.
247 To Margaret Cunynghame, 30 January 1868, in *Letters*, ed. by Cohen, ii, p.113.
male/female gender patterns, the patient suffering from anorexia nervosa generally wishes to flout definitive gender categories and craft an androgynous anatomy instead. This desire to nullify or erase one’s definitive sex is particularly apparent in nineteenth-century contexts, which, as a rule, endorsed separate spheres ideology.

According to nineteenth-century conduct writer Marion Harland, it was on account of this restrictive sphere philosophy that it had become, throughout the Victorian epoch, ‘an uncommon event to meet a woman, who, if put into the confessional of conscience, would not own that at some period of her life, she had wished she had been born a boy’.249 This idea of wanting to be ‘born a boy’ is where the female anorexic’s ruthless demolition and destruction of biological apparatus comes into play. Using anorexic eating patterns as an exploitative tool, a woman could embark upon a rebellious flight from maturity and motherhood. One instance of this anorectically-driven departure from a house-bound life of ceaseless fecundity is evident in the medical notes of Jean-Martin Charcot. In his clinical study on hysteria, Charcot notes that in the case of one particular disorderly eating patient, the self-willed avoidance of acquiring all that a matronly figure implied resulted in the girl’s stubborn insistence that she ‘prefer dying of hunger to becoming big as [her] mamma’.250 As Charcot’s notes suggest, through a politically-motivated restriction of food, the anorexic girl could deter the onset of menstruation by reaching critically low levels of body fat. She could likewise stifle the ‘distasteful’ budding of breasts, minimise the widening of her hips, and consequently prevent her body from being fit for womanly reproduction. Finding the male ‘public sphere’ of the outdoor world more invigorating and mentally stimulating than the prospect of domestic imprisonment, a pre-pubescent girl might, in short, purposefully uptake anorectic eating-patterns so that she could live like a little boy.

In a complex role reversal of sexed subjects, this is, to some extent, what Carroll appears to do. However, instead of using ill-nourishment in order to deflate feminine curves and appear more masculine, Carroll promotes abstemious living in order to retain a slender cast of delicate effeminacy.251 In the following reminiscences of his niece, Carroll’s inclination to perform female gender roles becomes clear. Recalling a summer visit to Carroll’s lodgings, his niece states that ‘from the moment he met [her] at the station’, Carroll had proved himself ‘to be the Perfect Uncle’. He took Violet and her siblings ‘under his wing, and ran around after

251 As Phyllis Greenacre observes, Carroll’s femininity was possibly enhanced by his wearing his hair rather long. Carroll’s effeminate cast did not go unnoticed by some of his less sympathetic Oxford students, who once wrote a parody of his works and signed it “Louisa Caroline”. See, Phyllis Greenacre, Swift and Carroll: A Study of Two Lives (New York: International Universities Press, 1977), p.166.
[them] like a hen fussing over her chicks’. Despite this interpretation of him as being ‘the Perfect Uncle’, Carroll appears to be fully absorbed in a pseudo-feminine role here. He assimilates himself into the realm of the maternal – ‘like a hen fussing over her chicks’ – and is therefore figuratively attributed both male and female identities. The fact that Carroll appears to be drawn to, and pedantically preoccupied by, infantile states of existence is also of critical interest.

Spending the majority of his spare time with ‘child-friends’ as opposed to being in adult company, Carroll immersed himself in juvenility. In such a vision, Carroll’s immersion is best diagnosed as an attempt to recapture his own childhood years. As Catherine Robson puts it, ‘it is no great stretch to hypothesize that this child-chasing don was on an impossible quest to catch the child he himself had once been’. In an account prefixed to a volume of Carroll’s diaries, Mrs E. G. Shawyer similarly recounted the following: ‘the truth of the matter is that he had the heart of a child himself, so when he spoke to a child [they] understood – even about the deeper things of life – because he spoke [their] own language.’ Shayer’s statement here posits an exclusive adult/child divide; and, on account of his intimate ‘physical’ and linguistic connection to children, Carroll essentially fits into the non-adult, or child, division.

In March 1853, however, Carroll, then aged 21, was already feeling the ebb of his diminishing childhood littleness. In a poem entitled ‘Solitude’, which was to be included in a volume of poetry published nearly forty years later, Carroll produced the following youth-yearning stanzas:

Ye golden hours of Life’s young spring,
Of innocence, of love and truth!
Bright, beyond all imagining,
Thou fairy-dream of youth!

I’d give all the wealth that years have piled
The slow result of Life’s decay
To be once more a little child
For one bright summer day.

An incongruent sense of old-aged despondency pervades these stanzas. Carroll’s untimely allusions to ‘Life’s decay’ do not sound like the words of a twenty-one year old male who

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253 Robson, *Men In Wonderland*, p.139.
254 Mrs Shawywer, ‘Introduction’ to *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll*, ed. by Green, i, p.xxv.
revels in his cusp-of-manhood status. Sympathetic to Carroll’s post-adolescent anguish, S. D. Collingwood, Carroll’s nephew and biographer, wrote the following:

we all have to pass through that painful era of self-consciousness which
prefaces manhood[...]. The natural freedom of childhood is dead within us;
the conventional freedom of riper years is struggling to birth, and its effects
are sometimes ludicrous to an unsympathetic observer. 256

Various contemporary accounts (made by both unsympathetic – as well as more sympathetic – onlookers) reveal that Carroll retained such ‘ludicrous’ and ‘self-conscious’ behaviour throughout the entirety of his adult life. For instance, Violet Doddson, Carroll’s doting niece, noted that her ‘uncle had undoubtedly his foibles’. ‘It is undeniable’, she states, ‘that there were many who found him difficult, exacting, and uncompromising’. Though ‘invariably welcoming and courteous to guests’, she continues, ‘he had a disconcerting way (on becoming aware that the informal tea which he was settling down to enjoy was a real party (with people invited to meet him) of rising and departing with polite but abrupt excuses, leaving an embarrassed hostess and a niece murmuring second apologies’. 257 Violet’s comments immediately alert us to Carroll’s socially localised self-consciousness. Yet, whilst his unrest could easily stem from the formal bent of such ‘conventional’ sociality, the fact that his self-consciousness materialises during a tea party – one which is, moreover, presumably a ‘high tea’ party – is largely symptomatic, I would argue, of his unease and self-consciousness surrounding food.

To say that Carroll was possessed of bizarre eating rituals would be a flagrant understatement. His interminable abstemiousness borders on the disorderly. Although there is no clinical evidence to suggest that Carroll suffered from anorexia nervosa, or even that he was underweight, 258 many of his letters and diary entries, and even sections of his poetry and prose, provide evidence of a deeply rooted connection to the era’s ‘anorectic’ malaise. Carroll was possessed of many of the character traits which form a distinctive component of the archetypal anorexic. For instance, his persistent longing to suspend ‘time’, as well as his ardent desire to eradicate the psychosomatic effects wrought by ‘time’, are, as has already been suggested, intricately knit with the logic of the disease. According to Phyllis Greenacre, Carroll ‘seemed always to be in some kind of battle with time, attempting to avoid being caught by

256 Collingwood, Life and Letters, pp.45-6.
258 Although not underweight, the 6ft. tall Carroll – who, in 1882, weighed 10st. 3½lbs. – would have, in modernist terms, ebbed towards the lower side of the ‘OK’ or ‘normal’ weight categories in Body Mass Index calculations.
time or trying to entrap time himself’. In light of Greenacre’s statement, the White Rabbit of Wonderland – who is incessantly gazing at his watch, hopelessly chasing a pre-appointed time which ceaselessly evades him – appears to be a pseudo projection of Carroll. Just as the rabbit is incessantly preoccupied with the fact that he ‘shall be too late!’ so, too, was his creator. In fact, Carroll would often refuse invitations (to luncheon, tea-parties, or other social events) if they allocated a specific time for arrival. Quite often he would announce his intention to attend, but at a later, unspecified time.

Another manifestation of Carroll’s temporal neurosis appears in his much later (and unjustly understudied novel) *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889). However, in this case, the concepts of time suspension and reversal are explicitly interlaced with the ingestion of food – or, more precisely, the absence of it. In a chapter entitled, ‘An Outlandish Watch’, Carroll, in the guise of an unnamed narrator, ventures into the fictional realm of Outland: a magical province which equips its inhabitants with the temporal tools required to suspend, or eradicate time. The ‘Outlandish Watch’ of this chapter’s title is, as its appellation implies, no ordinary watch, but a ‘Magic Watch’; one which bestows its wearer with the power to undo, or reverse temporal proceedings. Intrigued by the reported efficaciousness of this timepiece, the narrator determines to cast a time-reversing spell over a neighbouring dinner table. Under this spell, the food which has previously been ingested can theoretically be retrieved (or, temporally regurgitated) before it is fully assimilated into the body’s system.

Upon his ominous arrival at the dining-room scene, the narrator notes that ‘the table had only dirty plates and empty dishes on it. However the party […] seated themselves at it very contentedly.’ The bloated ‘contentment’ of these diners (in combination with their dirty, empty plates) appears to denote the satisfaction that comes with satiety. Consequently unsure of, and befuddled by, the effectiveness of his watch, the narrator continues to overlook the scene. He recounts, in minute detail, what follows:

You have seen people eating cherry-tart, and every now and then cautiously conveying a cherry-stone from their lips to their plates? Well, something like that went on all through this ghastly – or shall we say “ghostly?” – banquet.

An empty fork is raised to the lips: there it receives a neatly cut piece of mutton, and swiftly conveys it to the plate, where it instantly attaches itself to the mutton already there. Soon one of the plates, furnished with a complete slice of mutton and two potatoes, was handed up to the presiding

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263 Ibid. p.353.
gentleman, who quietly replaced the slice on the joint and the potatoes in the dish.\textsuperscript{264}

As these happenings confirm, Carroll, fictionally endowed with the temporal omnipotence he so desperately craved in reality, succeeds in transforming a ‘ghastly’ banquet of material abundance into a ‘ghostly’ one pervaded by anorectic emptiness. The term ‘ghostliness’ immediately evokes sensations of earthly absence and ethereality; states of existence which, as we saw in the first chapter, mesh closely with the immateriality of anorexia nervosa. Although such ‘ghostliness’, visualised through empty forks and dishes, is held in constant tension with the ‘ghastly’ abundance one might expect to find at a Victorian dinner party, the (suspiciously Carrollian) ‘gentleman’ who presides over the table ensures that non-consumption prevails. This extract, as a whole, then, becomes psychologically revealing on numerous levels. It not only draws attention to Carroll’s obsession with food (and the preferred absence of it), but also fictionally accentuates his real-life desire to manipulate and control time.

One final time-centred preoccupation which repeatedly filters into Carroll’s work, and is, therefore, conspicuous enough to be clinically noteworthy, is, as Greenacre prompts, his ostensible fetish for cats.\textsuperscript{265} From Alice’s humdrum house-cat, Dinah, to the more fantastical Cheshire Cat of Wonderland, Carroll appears to have been drawn to the feline species. But, why is this temporally significant? Cats, at least according to mythic tradition, have nine lives. This nine-life existence consequently allows them to flout temporal boundaries. Rather than pursuing an untraceable, linear life-course – one which is separated by the binary poles, youth and old age – the nine-lived cat can continually retrace and relive its infancy; a desire which, as we know, pervaded the eternally ‘boyish’ Carroll himself.\textsuperscript{266}

As well as repeatedly appearing in his fiction, Carroll appears to have written extensively about cats and kittens to his child-friends. In these letters, which tend to incorporate a great deal of fantasy, there is a constant and unnerving oscillation between

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid. p.354.
\textsuperscript{265} Greenacre, M. D. examines Carroll’s work exclusively from a clinical psychoanalytic perspective. She was drawn to Carroll through her earlier clinical work on fetishism. See, \textit{Swift and Carroll}, p.171.
\textsuperscript{266} Animals pervade Carroll’s literary works. There are various reasons why he might have been psychically drawn to the animal kingdom. Firstly, animals are often adored by children, and potentially provided Carroll with a further bond between him and his child friends. Secondly, he was a keen antivivisectionist. What is more, some of his allusions to the animal kingdom link his work to the evolutionary/devolutionary model of greedy boy dietetics. In \textit{Sylvie and Bruno}, for instance, Darwin is explicitly mentioned in regard to fluctuating body size. Following a discussion of the latest scientific developments, the conversation turns to Darwin: ‘A development worthy of Darwin!’ a lady exclaimed enthusiastically. ‘Only you reverse his theory’, she continues. ‘Instead of developing a mouse into an elephant, you would develop an elephant into a mouse!’ (pp.64-5). Here, we witness an interesting shrinkage of size along the evolutionary path of survival – one which mimics the conflated fat/devolutionary modes of thought which resonated throughout the era at large.
aggressive feline envy, and affectionate playfulness. At times, Carroll appears to have treated the cats that crossed his path with demonstrable cruelty. For instance, in a letter to Agnes Hughes, Carroll claimed that, on the previous day, ‘three visitors came knocking at my door [...]. When I opened the door’, he wrote, ‘who do you think they were? You will never guess. Why they were three cats! They all looked so cross and disagreeable’, continued Carroll, ‘that I took up the first thing I could lay my hands on, which happened to be the rolling pin, and knocked them all down as flat as pancakes: “If you come knocking at my door,” I said, “I shall come knocking at your heads”’. By flattening the cats into ‘pancakes’, Carroll renders them inappropriately edible. Bearing in mind the ‘you are what you eat’ adage discussed previously, the ‘who eats whom’ question which underlies this comestible cat episode is, as Jacqueline Labbe and Carolyn Daniel demonstrate, one which evidently preoccupied Carroll.

Bodies and boundaries, predators and prey, bat-eating cats and cat-eating bats, are constantly melting into one another in Carroll’s vision of Wonderland. This perpetual uncertainty and ambiguity, particularly regarding predator/prey delineations, augments the anxiety which surrounds food and its ingestion. It is presumably for this reason that, in Carroll’s works, food consumption is often closely interlaced with corporeal punishment. The black kitten which features in the opening section of *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), for instance, is – having greedily guzzled down a saucer of milk without leaving any for the white kitten – threatened by Alice with the prospect of cat prison. Alice’s punitive thought patterns lead her to consider her own misbehaviour and its consequences: ‘suppose each [of my] punishments were to be going without dinner’, she muses. ‘Well, I shouldn’t mind that much! I’d far rather go without them than eat them!’ As Alice’s statement suggests, an absence of food, in Carrollian terms, could become a source of self-gratified pleasure as opposed to punishment. Bearing in mind the epoch’s avocation of a ‘Don’t be Greedy’ outlook, along with its conflating of restrained childhood consumption and ‘goodness’, Alice’s declaration renders her a worthy heroine.

From an early age Carroll was himself intensely aware of the mandates which indicated good behaviour, and the punishments which might await him if they lapsed. Much like the clinical anorexic – who, in the words of eating disorder therapist, Hilde Bruch, is ‘driven to be good, to live by the rules, to avoid arousing criticism or discontent in their parents or...

267 To Agnes Hughes, n.d., *Letters of Lewis Carroll to His Child Friends*, pp.64-68.
teachers\textsuperscript{271} – Carroll appears to have excelled in pleasing adult authorities from an early age. In his first ever school-report, Mr Tate of Richmond wrote the following about the twelve-year old Dodgson: ‘I do not hesitate to express my opinion that [Charles] possesses, along with other excellent natural endowments, a very uncommon share of genius’. However, in what proceeded, Tate made subtle hints that a burgeoning awareness of this superiority might lead Dodgson to fall victim to a superlative, perfectionist fatality – perfectionism being, of course, another profoundly anorectic trait:

You must not entrust your son with a full-knowledge of his superiority over other boys. [...] The love of excellence is far beyond the love of excelling; and if he should once be bewitched into a mere ambition to surpass others I need not urge that the very quality of his [person] would be materially injuréd, and that his character would receive a stain of a more serious description still.\textsuperscript{272}

Despite Tate’s early warnings, Carroll does appear to have acquired various ‘stains’ of character whilst pursuing his superiorly ‘bewitching’ path to manhood. As Phyllis Greenacre observes, Carroll ‘is generally reported to have become increasingly vain, secretive, and even a little suspicious’.\textsuperscript{273} He was also ‘fussily pedantic’ and ‘compulsive’: his life was, in short, ‘one of sad and desperate immaculateness’.\textsuperscript{274} Without doubt, each of these qualities created a man who exuded a toxic concoction of perfectionist ‘flaws’. There are also further indications here of a fetishistic or obsessive-compulsive tendency. From his time-worn fetish for cats, little girls, and photography\textsuperscript{275} to his fixation with food (and, of course, abstaining from it) Carroll was generally ‘obsessive’ to a neurotic degree.

According to Greenacre, psychologically internalised obsessions, fetishism, and other perversions of emotional development, tend to ‘occur in people who [are] constitutionally active and strong, but subject at certain critical periods in early life to external stresses of a nature which upset the integrity of their self-perception and the assimilation of the sensations of their own bodies’. As a result of this integral ‘upsetting’, suggests Greenacre, ‘the body image becomes impaired’. One way in which ‘this impairment of a ‘secure self-awareness of the body’ continually manifests itself, she continues, is ‘in disturbed subjective sensations of

\begin{thebibliography}
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\item \textsuperscript{271} Bruch, \textit{The Golden Cage}, p.46.
\item \textsuperscript{272} Quoted in Collingwood, \textit{Life and Letters}, p.25.
\item \textsuperscript{273} Phyllis Greenacre, ‘The Character of Dodgson as Revealed in the Writings of Carroll’, in Lewis Carroll, \textit{Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland}, ed. by Harold Bloom, p.108.
\item \textsuperscript{274} Greenacre, \textit{Swift and Carroll}, p.10, p.147.
\item \textsuperscript{275} Carroll’s obsession with photography – an art form which crystallises its subjects in momentary eternity – obviously correlates to his desire to suspend time and the size-centred effects it produces on the human body.
\end{thebibliography}
changing size of the total body, or of certain body parts’. Greenacre’s comments here are particularly applicable to Carroll, a man who embellished his most notorious literary work with a protagonist whose body continually mutates.

The ‘external stress’ which is most likely to have initiated such an ‘impaired’ self-awareness in Carroll was the premature death of his mother in 1851. Subsequently, the grief-stricken youth, who had very recently commenced his undergraduate education at Oxford, threw himself into a ‘dogged application’ of his studies. During this period, Carroll would be up past midnight, and often skipped meals, suggesting that a grief-induced ‘mind over matter’ philosophy was quickly taking precedence. The profound effect Carroll’s mother’s death appears to have had upon him is, according to Greenacre, testimony to the ‘intensity of the unresolved oedipal love’ he bestowed upon her. Although Greenacre’s oedipal-rooted theories are dubiously presented (on account of there being no clinical evidence to support her case), the fact that, following his mother’s decease, Carroll never expressed love for another woman, and, instead, chose to live as a child, still in the ‘magic garden’ of his youth, ‘devoted only to little girls not yet across the mystic bar of puberty’, suggests that he was, to some extent, little-girl obsessed and oedipally stunted.

Of course, the name of one particular ‘little girl’ and Lewis Carroll has become symbiotic in cultural terms; there is a certain interchangeability which links Lewis Carroll with the prepubescent Alice Liddell. In her fictional guise as the protagonist of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Miss Liddell is forced to undergo the erratic fluctuations in body size of which Carroll was himself so terrified. These fluctuations fill Alice with an alarm that is, presumably, not that dissimilar to Carroll’s own. The loss of control which stems from these fluctuations ensures that eating becomes a laborious form of trepidation for Alice. We see her ‘anxiously set[ting] to work’ on the currant-laden cake that Carroll displays under the instructive label, ‘EAT ME’, all the while worrying what effect it will produce on her body’s unstable constitution. That Carroll was self-consciously aware of his own mutable contours is best evidenced in his diaries. In an entry for 5 August, 1882, for instance, Carroll appears to disclose himself as another male afflicted by the era’s weight-watching mania. The full entry for this date reads: ‘Was weighed on pier – am 10 stone 3 ½ lbs.’ The passive tone here – ‘was weighed’, and not ‘I weighed myself’ – indicates a certain reluctance on Carroll’s part. Yet, one

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277 This anorectic mode of thinking and behaviour, in which the mind is nourished and the body is starved, seems to have stuck with Carroll for the remainder of his life. In 1884, Carroll delivered a lecture entitled ‘Feeding the mind’, which was then published in 1907.
279 Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures*, p.15.
280 5 August 1882, *Diaries of Lewis Carroll*, ed. by Green, ii, p.408.
cannot help but wonder why this is the only information provided in Carroll’s diary on this particular date. Is it significant that he chose to note only his weight down? Given his usual tendency toward an anorectic strain of hyperactivity,\(^\text{281}\) it seems slightly odd that this would be the only event worth jotting down during a full day of events on his summer vacation: maybe Carroll’s heaviness was weighing on his mind.

In light of the behavioural similarities between Carroll and his protagonist, it comes as no surprise to learn that the food which most captures the attention of Alice in Wonderland is the mushroom: a magical provision which remarkably allows her to regulate her body’s fluctuations in size. The conjectural brilliance of this magic fungus lies in its powers of theoretically preventing Alice’s body becoming any bigger. Nonetheless, as she succumbs to the temptations of Wonderland’s unsubtle advertising ploys – ‘EAT ME!’ ‘DRINK ME’ – it is often the case that Carroll’s pretty little heroine’s body does swell out of control, becoming preposterously massive and grotesque. It is for this reason, I would argue, that, throughout the Wonderland texts, Carroll appears to adopt the role of ‘dietary doctor’; his aim being to cure Alice of her greedy girl tendencies.

From the outset of his book, Carroll presents Alice as a child who, unfortunately, ‘always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking’.\(^\text{282}\) It is on account of such eating attentiveness that Krugovoy Silver diagnoses Alice with an ‘enormous appetite’, which, she suggests, ‘clearly and hilariously subverts the conventional Victorian heroine’s lack of hunger’. Silver goes on to claim that Alice’s fervent appetite sets ‘Carroll apart [...] from most Victorian writers of children’s literature’.\(^\text{283}\) However, as I have argued elsewhere, Carroll’s text is not, as Silver suggests, ‘set apart’ from iconic children’s literature at all.\(^\text{284}\) Like the boy-focussed authors discussed at the outset of this chapter, Carroll is seen to be constantly schooling his protagonist in the ways of dietary denial, and, furthermore, seems to punish her when her calorie counting lapses.

Rather than using Alice’s hunger as a counter-narrative to the iconic literary trope of the non-hungry hero/heroine, Alice becomes, I believe, a malnourished marionette, driven by Carroll’s alimentary instructions.\(^\text{285}\) As Carroll’s White Queen (whose majestically pallid complexion symbolises the inherent purity of the lily-like anorectic) proclaims, in Wonderland, ‘“the rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam to-day”’.\(^\text{286}\) Alice might be

\(^{281}\) Carroll’s hyperactivity will be discussed at greater length later on in the chapter.

\(^{282}\) Carroll, Alice’s Adventures, p.65.

\(^{283}\) Silver, Victorian Literature, p.71.

\(^{284}\) Coar, “Sugar and Spice”, pp.48-72.

\(^{285}\) Ibid. pp.48-72.

\(^{286}\) Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p.171, [emphasis original].
compulsively concerned with ‘questions of eating and drinking’, but, her ‘enormous appetite’ is never granted satiation. Under Carroll’s weight-watching eye, Alice’s food fantasies (‘I wish they’d hand round the refreshments!’) seem more on par with the anorexic’s obsessive, but nevertheless unfulfilled, desire for food, than the greedy girl’s overindulgent potential. Even when she does demonstrate voracious hunger – for instance, the narrator informs us that Alice had once ‘really frightened her nurse by shouting suddenly in her ear, “Do let’s pretend that I’m a hungry hyena, and you’re a bone!”’ – the foodstuff she imagines is insubstantial. A bone is, as Carol Mavor suggests, for ‘chewing and gnawing, picking and licking. It’s really not much to eat’.

Although in Carroll’s work minimal calorific intake prevails, there are times, like the hyena anecdote above, where Alice’s greedy propensities seep through her angelic crust. When this happens, it is as if Alice has been anorectically burdened with two selves: a bloated, bingeing self and dietary-denying self. Confirming this binge/starvation dialectic the narrator remarks how ‘this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people’. Interestingly, Carroll, who, as we know, was usually abstemious to an anorectic degree, appears to have intermittently transformed, in similar schizoid fashion, into a bloated binger himself. In a letter written to Edith Blakemore in 1882, for instance, Carroll confessed (if we are to believe his fantasy-laden anecdotes) that he was planning to secretly consume an entire plum-pudding. ‘And what do you think I am going to have for my birthday treat?’ he toys. ‘A whole plum-pudding!’ comes the response. ‘It is to be about the size for four people to eat: and I shall eat it in my own room, all by myself! The doctor says he is “afraid I shall be ill”: but I simply say, “Nonsense!”’ Although this account could, in itself, be fabricated ‘nonsense’, it nonetheless draws our attention to Carroll’s enduring obsessions with food.

Carroll’s allusions to ‘the doctor’ here should equally not go unnoticed. As we saw in the opening section to this chapter, medical men were keen to intervene in the regulation of the era’s childhood dietetics. Playing the part of dietary doctor, Carroll takes it upon himself to assume this authoritative role. Like the Victorian physicians of reality, Carroll (using calorific intake as a manipulative tool) experiments with Alice’s body: he moulds her into what he pleases, shrinks her back down to inferior size. Peppered with ‘potions, ointments, and

287 Carroll, Alice’s Adventures, p.65.
288 Ibid. p.95.
289 Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p.124.
references to medicines of all kinds – from cooling ‘camomile’ to energy-sustaining ‘treacle’ – Wonderland, as Laurence Talairach-Vielmas confirms, appears to be ‘a male laboratory’, a sterile sphere in which Alice is ‘to be cured of her uncurbed desire’, and educated in the precepts of the era’s restrictive eating ideology. In addition to this fictional ‘laboratory’ existence, Carroll was also interested in medicine outside of Wonderland. He was compelled by a love of human anatomy, and the inner workings of the ‘human system’ thoroughly captivated his attention.

How much Carroll thought in (inner) bodily terms is apparent from another entry in his diary for 24 November, 1857. Having finished reading a ‘perfectly delightful’ volume of Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions* – an autobiographical work inundated with distorted body-consciousness – Carroll records how he wanted ‘to organize some regular means by which all valuable reading may be made available afterwards’. This had to be done, he suggests, ‘by various “indices,” which, like the absorbent ducts in the human system, shall each mechanically take up and secrete what belongs to its department.’ Augmenting this medically-orientated fascination with interior bodily functions, Carroll proceeds to record that, just a few weeks later, he had attended an operation at St. Bartholemew’s Hospital with his friend and photographing companion, Southey. In his entry for 19 December, Carroll notes how he had observed (for no apparent reason) the cutting into, and surgical amputation of, a patient’s lower leg. The haphazard desire to be present in this surgical environment highlights Carroll’s fascination with a desire to probe, cut and trim the human bodies around him.

As we shall discover, Carroll’s surgical inclination is not dissimilar to John Ruskin’s desires to ‘chisel’ the human – particularly male human – body ‘into shape’. Carroll’s fascination with knives and cutting, in both his letters and works of fiction, also recalls (albeit symbolically) the era’s fat-phobic penchant for amateur forms of lipo-surgery. In a scene which

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294 Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures*, p.78.
295 Ibid. p.65.
296 Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body*, p.56.
297 Interestingly, Thomas De Quincey provides us with another ‘eternally boyish’ case study. As Judith Plotz has convincingly argued, De Quincey assumed ‘as much as possible the demeanour, the appearance and – through self-starvation – the size of a child’. Endorsing anorexic eating patterns, De Quincey appears to have been another body-conscious male who embarked upon a self-mutilating project in which he aimed to ‘scrape down through the dura mater, however cruelly, to reach the palimpsest child self’. See, Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p.180.
298 *Diaries of Lewis Carroll*, i, pp.130-131.
299 Ibid. i, p.133.
epitomises Carroll’s experimental tendencies, Miss E. M. Manners recalls a dinner party at which Carroll offered to carve (or, rather, dissect) the animal corpse they were intending to eat. What is interesting about all this is that Carroll is, albeit incompetently, aping the behaviour of the children he despises: ‘beastly’ little boys who continually torment and torture. ‘Asked to stay to dinner’, Miss Manners begins, ‘[Carroll] assured us that he never took anything in the middle of the day but a glass of wine and a biscuit’. Nonetheless, she continues, ‘he would be happy to sit down with us, which he accordingly did, and kindly offered to carve’. Gladly accepting his offer, the following occurrences ensued:

[T]he appearance of a rather diminutive piece of neck of mutton was somewhat of a puzzle to [Carroll.] He had evidently never seen such a joint in his life before, and had frankly to confess that he did not know how to set about carving it. Directions only made things worse, and he bravely cut it to pieces in entirely the wrong fashion [...]. The task [now] finished, our visitor gazed on the mangled remains, and remarked quaintly: “I think it is just as well I don’t want anything, for I don’t know where I should find it”. 300

Much like the earlier, time-centred obliteration of food seen in Sylvie and Bruno, Carroll casts a similar type of abstention over this dinner table. Through his butchering of the already ‘diminutive’ joint of meat, Carroll transforms the edible into the invisible.

Another instance of such prohibiting occurs in Carroll’s later Wonderland text, Through the Looking Glass. The unnerving impulse to haphazardly cut and trim is suffused with a confusion regarding human/animal, animate/inanimate, edible/non-edible boundaries. At a dinner party frequented by the Red and White Queens of Wonderland, the ‘who eats whom’ quandary glossed previously becomes interlaced with body-probing malpractice. In the scene that follows, the whole monstrous business of surgical carvery appears to dissolve the subject/object, consumer/consumed margins which designate appropriate table etiquette. As Alice sets about carving the joint of mutton before her, she appears to be a little anxious, much as Carroll was. The Red Queen attempts to appease Alice’s discomfort: “You look a little shy”, she begins, “let me introduce you to that leg of mutton: Alice – Mutton: Mutton – Alice”. Yet, when Alice takes up the carving knife, the Red Queen instantly reprimands her, claiming that “it isn’t etiquette to cut anyone you’ve been introduced to”. 301 Having been introduced to the leg of mutton – a social intervention which involves an exchange of names – the formerly edible ‘object’ is awarded subject status, and, as a consequence, cannot, of

300 Miss. M. E. Manners, quoted in Collingwood, Life and Letters, pp.400-401.
301 Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p.229.
course, be consumed. In Carroll’s earlier Wonderland text, the inclination to inappropriately cut and probe is further transposed onto various other bodies with (human) subject status. For instance, arriving as guest at the Mad Hatter’s tea party, Alice’s body is immediately subject to the clinical gaze of her host. ‘For some time’, we are told, the Mad Hatter stared at Alice ‘with great curiosity’. Under the glare of his scopophilic gaze, the Hatter proceeds to rudely, and somewhat suggestively, remark: ‘your hair wants cutting.’ The Hatter’s statement here conceals, in archetypal, Rape-of-the-Lock fashion, body-probing resonances. Moreover, this is not the only allusion Carroll made in his lifetime to threatening young girls, and young boys, with phallic potency. For instance, Carina Garland has noted that Carroll once sent a small knife to Kathleen Tidy, a child friend, as a birthday present. A critical pillage through Carroll’s letters suggests that this knife was, like his own precarious carving equipment, intended to curb the cravings of its voraciously consuming recipient. In his letter to Kathleen, Carroll instructed her to use the knife to cut her dinner, as ‘this way’, he asserts, ‘you will be safe from eating too much[...].If you find that when the others have finished you have only had one mouthful’, he continues, ‘do not be vexed about it’. Although Carroll does not use the knife to literally penetrate Kathleen’s flesh, the fact that he urges her to use it in order to impede the over-consumption of food – which would theoretically induce corporeal expansion – ensures that her body is kept within the confines of appropriate littleness. These contour-curbing desires were equally applicable to the male sex; the same piercing gift was bestowed upon Hallam Tennyson, son of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, less than a year later. ‘Thank you for your nice little note’, writes Carroll. ‘I am glad you liked the knife, [but] I think it a pity you should not be allowed to use it “till you are older”’. The ‘pity’ of not being able to use this knife until he is ‘older’ is, I would argue, emblematic of Carroll’s intuitive older/wider conundrum. When Hallam is ‘older’ it will presumably be ‘too late’ to sustain the diminutive proportions which would have preserved his boyhood littleness.

An internal refraction of this conflated body-contour/age-consciousness is exposed in a letter that Carroll wrote to Mary MacDonald in 1869. In this letter, the despair that comes with the initial process of growing ‘older’ (and, by extension, ‘wider’) is juxtaposed with, and

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302 Carroll, Alice’s Adventures, p.60.
304 To Kathleen Tidy, 30 March 1861, in Letters, ed. by Cohen, i, p.49.
305 To Hallam Tennyson, 23 January 1862, in Letters, ed. by Cohen, i, p.53. A little unnervingly, many of Carroll’s letters expose a partiality for using knives to cut and probe little boys. In a letter dated 20 February 1861, for instance, Carroll advised one acquaintance to use the knife he had given her ‘whenever [she] wish[ed] to punish [her] brothers’. By ‘running the knife into their hands and fares (particularly the end of their nose)’, this method of punishment was, according to Carroll, a ‘very convenient’ one: one that ‘gives a good deal of pain if you run it in hard enough’. (Letters, i, p.49).
counteracted by, the pleasure derived from the bodily withering that comes with extreme old age. Apparently having had to wait an inordinate amount of time for Mary’s response, Carroll writes:

Well, the days rolled on – and the nights too [...] and no answer came. And the weeks rolled on, and the months too, and I got older, and thinner, and sadder, and still NO ANSWER came. And then my friends said – how white my hair was getting, and that I was all skin and bone, and other pleasant remarks – and – but – I won’t go on.\(^{306}\)

Although the tone of this letter is clearly in jest, the association of losing weight with sensations of ‘pleasure’ may be of some import. The self-mollified gratification Carroll obtains from becoming ‘all skin and bone’ is obviously contingent upon his abstemious diet.

That Carroll was steadfast in his miniscule dietary measures is clear in many of his letters and diary extracts. In a letter written to Mrs Mayhew in 1878, for instance, Carroll asks to be ‘kindly excuse[d]’ for declining her invitation to lunch. ‘Many thanks [for your invite,] but [...] I always decline luncheons. I have no appetite for a meal at that time, and you will perhaps sympathise with my dislike for sitting to watch others eat and drink’.\(^{307}\) It would appear that ‘dinner’, and even ‘tea’, were also meals which Carroll ‘had no appetite for’. Writing to George Bell, Carroll states: ‘Dinner parties have too many courses for me. Even our daily High Table is much more than I care for’.\(^{308}\) The conceited stress placed on the pronoun ‘I’ here, indicates the ‘superior’ self-consciousness that Carroll’s first school master had pre-empted. It sets up a self/other partition in which the ‘self’ component becomes elite. All the same, Carroll was elated at the prospect of finding a companion who was equally abstemious as himself. Writing to the self-denying Elisabeth Bury in 1896, Carroll exclaimed: ‘It is a gratifying fact to fall back on, in an age of so much greediness and overeating, that there is at least one young lady in Oxford, who not only never takes luncheon, but has never even heard of such a meal’.\(^{309}\) As each of these anecdotes suggest, Carroll felt unease regarding food and appetite. What is more, he appears to have been particularly disgusted by the ravenous appetites of his child acquaintances. As Stuart Dodgson Collingwood confirms, ‘the healthy appetites of his young friends filled him with wonder, and even alarm’.\(^{310}\) This appetitive ‘alarm’ is apparent in a letter he wrote to his sister in 1854.

\(^{306}\) To Mary MacDonald, 13 March 1869, in Letters, ed. by Cohen, i, p. 126.
\(^{307}\) To Mrs A. L. Mayhew, 19 December 1878, in Letters, ed. by Cohen, i, p.319.
\(^{308}\) To George Charles Bell, 13 November 1882, in Letters, ed. by Cohen, i, p.469, [emphasis original].
\(^{309}\) To Elisabeth Bury, 8 March 1896, in Letters, ed. by Cohen, ii, p.1085, [emphasis original].
\(^{310}\) Collingwood, Life and Letters, p.134.
Recalling the endless procession of dishes which were produced during an annual school feast, Carroll is positively outraged by the fact that the ‘large baskets of currant-bread’ which were presented at the tea table quantitatively outweighed the number of ‘absurdly small jugs of tea’. As ‘fast as the supply of [currant-bread] came round’, Carroll remarks, ‘the boys stuffed it into their pockets and waited for the next basket. Some means ought to have been taken to stop this’, he continues, ‘though I can’t say I could have suggested any’.\textsuperscript{311} In contrast to the unruliness of this particular tea-time event – one which outrageously skimps out on its eponymous ingredient – Carroll’s most iconic scene of fiction (namely, the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party in Wonderland) makes this liquid substance its central focus. What makes the fictional enrichment of tea momentous in anorectic terms is that it is a drink free of calories. Being caffeine-suffused, tea is ascetic: it ‘masks’ hunger, and feeds without food.\textsuperscript{312}

Contrary to what one might expect from the classic, mid-century ‘High-Tea’ – be it the basic staples of currant-bread and butter, or the more extravagant fare of cream-filled cakes and jam – Carroll’s spread in Wonderland consists of not so much as a crumb. His guests (if the text’s accompanying illustrations are anything to go by) are to subsist on nothing but hot air.

Illustrations and other forms of visual material are, in themselves, key to further unravelling the complexities intrinsic to Carroll’s body politics. Not only did he converse with his illustrators at great length regarding the bodily proportions and dimensions of his protagonists, but his own body-bound illustrations tended to make people either abnormally fat or thin. As an adolescent, Carroll had begun to write and illustrate home magazines for his siblings. These illustrative works were eventually collected in journals, such as the Rectory Umbrella (c.1850-53, published 1932), and consisted largely of short stories, poems, parodies and caricatures. Although much of Carroll’s writing is, as we have seen, psychologically revealing (on numerous levels), his drawings, on account of their visual prominence, are even more so. As Phyllis Greenacre observes, ‘it seems obvious that an artist reveals, in one way or another, his own unconscious stresses and strivings’. No ‘creatively driven man’, she continues, ‘can ever get totally outside the web of his inner life’.\textsuperscript{313} Keeping Greenacre’s comments in mind, it comes as no surprise to learn that Carroll’s illustrations tend to present individuals who are subject to conspicuous bodily distortions. They frequently embody a repulsive, ‘ballooning obesity’, or a ghastly – even ‘ghostly?’ – thinness.\textsuperscript{314} In a short picture-story entitled ‘The Scanty Meal’, for instance, Carroll depicts a dinner scene in which the foods (and consumers) present are infinitesimally small. Taking food in homeopathic doses,

\textsuperscript{311} To his sister Mary, 23 August 1854, in Letters, ed. by Cohen, i, p.27.
\textsuperscript{312} Mavor, ‘For-getting to Eat’, p.103.
\textsuperscript{313} Greenacre, Swift and Carroll, p.11.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid. p.129.
comprised of only billionths, trillionths and nonillionths, these atomic (non)diners have the semi-transparent appearance of those suffering from anorexia nervosa.

Figure 1: Lewis Carroll, ‘The Scanty Meal’, (c.1849) from The Rectory Umbrella.

Accentuating this proclivity for such ‘ghostly’ translucence, Carroll appears to have taken great care to ensure that the artists commissioned to illustrate his later works of poetry and prose did not make his protagonists ‘too fat’. Conversing with his illustrator, A. B. Frost regarding one ‘delicious little sketch’ entitled ‘First meeting of old gentleman and ghost’, a disgruntled Carroll suggested that Frost’s illustration of ‘the “stoutish city man”’ would, ultimately, ‘vulgarise the poem’ it was intended to accompany’. ‘I don’t like his stoutness (when so displayed)’, declared Carroll. ‘Nor his tailcoat – nor his coarse features – nor his bald head. I want him to be a thorough gentleman’, he proposed. ‘My idea of his face is a rather long face, grave, benevolent, a little weak […] please make him a gentleman’. 315 Carroll’s stress on the term ‘gentle’ here implies a man of refined, effeminate delicacy. His desire for the man to appear ‘weak’ likewise indicates a delicacy which borders on emaciation. These visions of such ‘grave’ gauntness dovetail with Carroll’s anorectic penchant for the ‘ghostly’ and immaterial. In contrast to the scorn he vocalised regarding this ‘stoutish gentleman’, Carroll was inclined to praise Frost’s rendering of the ‘ghosts’ which featured in the sketch. With their ‘big head[s] and thin legs’ these foetal-like spectres were, according to Carroll, ‘very charming’.

315 To A. B. Frost, 9 December 1880, Letters, ed. by Cohen, i, p.398, [emphasis original].
The only criticism Carroll appears to have had is that they were not quite sufficiently immaterial: ‘I suppose you will make them partly transparent?’ Carroll prompts.

Carroll’s approval of such foetal ghostliness highlights his (un)conscious absorption in all things airy and weightless. Complementing such a vision, Carroll appears to have wanted his one male protagonist, Bruno, to emulate this ‘airy fairy’ body configuration. Writing to Harry Furniss, the illustrator of *Sylvie and Bruno*, Carroll proclaims: ‘No, No! Please don’t give us the (to my mind) very ugly, quite modern costume, which shows with such cruel distinctiveness a podgy, pot-bellied (excuse the vulgarism) boy, who couldn’t run a mile to save his life. I want Bruno to be *strong*, Carroll continues, ‘but at the same time light and active – with the figure of one of the little acrobats one sees at the circus – not “Master Tommy,” who habitually gorges himself with pudding’. To be simultaneously ‘strong’ and ‘light’ is, in physical terms, not only improbable, but nonsensical. Muscle weighs more than fat, and it is muscle, not fat, which makes us ‘strong’. Yet, if Carroll’s desire for Bruno to be ‘strong’ is applicable to his character in mental terms – as in strong-minded, strong-willed – then Bruno’s body configuration becomes eerily anorectic. Of course, the clinical anorexic’s mental fortitude and dogged determination to become ‘light’ and thin is unparalleled. Further projecting Bruno’s body onto an anorectic prototype, his ‘acrobatic’ capacity denotes a little boy who is so ‘light’ and airy that his weightlessness potentially propels him through the air.

According to the reminiscences of Greville MacDonald, one of Dodgson’s many surrogate ‘nephews’, Carroll was unequivocally compelled towards, and even mesmerised by, the real acrobatic gymnasts who could fulfil such weightless flight. Greville notes how ‘Uncle Dodgson’ used to take him and some friends to the ‘polytechnic’ to see ‘the mechanical athlete *Leotard*’. Although there is no further identification attributed to this ‘mechanical athlete’ – a label which directly indicates the ‘steely’ willed fortitude required to condition his body for flight – it is possible that the man being referred to was Jules Leotard (1842-70), a French acrobat who popularized the one-piece gymwear that now bears his name. According to popular imagination, Leotard was endowed with the power to fly. In an eminently popular folk song, originally published in 1867 under the title ‘The Flying Trapeze’, it was suggested in the refrain that Leotard ‘[would] fly through the air with the greatest of ease, that daring

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317 To Mr Furniss, 1 September 1887, in Collingwood, *Life and Letters*, p.261, [emphasis original].

318 *Diaries*, ed. by Green, i, p.155.
young man on the flying trapeze. Such energetic flight fantasies materialise in Carroll’s own visions of Wonderland.

Consider, for instance, the eventful race in which the Red Queen and Alice run breathlessly, toes ‘hardly touching the ground’, across a life-sized chess board. They ran ‘so fast’, the narrator explains, that ‘they seemed to skim through the air’. The fact that Carroll fuses cardiovascular exercise and airiness here is highly significant. Adhering to a regimented scheme of exercise himself, Carroll was a compulsive power walker – often calculating his average speed as he strode. In June 1897 Carroll bought a “Whiteley Exerciser” and fixed it up in his rooms. ‘One would have thought’, notes Collingwood, ‘that he would have found his long walks sufficient exercise (an eighteen-mile round [circuit] was no unusual thing for him to undertake), but apparently it was not so’. Carroll was reportedly ‘so pleased with the “Exerciser” that he bought several more of them, and made presents of them to his friends. Carroll’s penchant for excessive exercise correlates to the clinical anorexic’s unrestrained hyperactivity. Inflicted with what Dr Duncan refers to as a ‘degree of festinatio’ – the Latin for speed, or haste – the clinical anorexic would march relentlessly without ‘get[ting] tired, or want[ing] [...] rest’. In the words of T. Clifford Allbutt, the patient suffering from anorexia nervosa was ‘fiercely active’, and doctors were often astounded by ‘so much physical strength in such an ill-nourished body’.

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319 Acrobatics and gymnastic fantasies of flight will be discussed at greater length during the third chapter. George Leybourne, ‘The Flying Trapeze’, (London: C. Sheard, c.1870).
320 Other scenes of flight include the brook-jumping train, an episode in which ‘Alice felt the carriage rise straight up into the air’, (p.148); the rocking-horse flies, which get themselves about by ‘swinging from branch to branch’, (p.149); the bread-and-butter flies, which ‘are so fond of flying into candles’, (p.151); and, finally, the Looking Glass trial, in which ‘the candles all grew up to the ceiling, looking something like a bed or rushes with fireworks at the top. As to the bottles, they each took a pair of plates, which they hastily fitted onto as wings, and [...] went fluttering about in all directions: and “very like birds they look”’, (p.232).
321 Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p.142.
322 In a diary entry for January 1880, Carroll notes: ‘Took my favourite 18-mile round, by Besilsleigh, and Abingdon. Left Tom at 12.35 and got back at 5.23, making exactly an average pace of 3 ¾ miles in the hour’. This obviously stresses Carroll’s obsessive compulsive accuracy. See, Diaries, ed. Green, ii, p.458.
323 Collingwood, Life and Letters, p.338. The ‘Whiteley Exerciser’ Collingwood refers to is most probably the ‘Sandow-Whiteley Exerciser’ which was gaining commercial prominence towards the close of the century. These ‘exercisers’, which, according to a writer in the Ludgate, were ‘fixed at intervals all round the walls [of gymnasiums]’, consisted of ‘two stout pieces of elastic fixed to the woodwork with two hooks’. The exercisers were designed to ‘bring every muscle of the body into play’. See, George Bellingham, ‘A School of Physical Culture’, The Ludgate, 5 (February 1898), pp.361-366.
324 Collingwood, Life and Letters, pp.338-339.
Fictionally enhancing this picture of post-exercise ‘ill-nourishment’, after the completion of Alice’s chess-board marathon (which had left her terribly ‘breathless and giddy’), the only restorative sustenance she craves is liquid (one which is, moreover, presumably calorie free): ‘I’m quite content to stay here – only I am so hot and thirsty!’ she wails. When offered a post-race biscuit in response to her complaint, Alice, ‘though it wasn’t at all what she wanted’, compels herself to force down one, out of politeness, (in case it might ‘not be civil to say “No”’) but emphatically refuses a second helping: “No, thank you […] one’s quite enough!”328 As this instance suggests, by the time we reach the latter of Carroll’s Wonderland texts, the once ‘greedy’ Alice has come to the end of her alimentary apprenticeship. His anorectics have wholly penetrated her psyche, and his weight-watching endeavours have sufficiently curbed her carnality.

Further conflating Carroll’s own behaviour with that of Alice, Dodgson appears to have had a curious preoccupation with the ingestion of fresh air, as well as a neurotic consciousness of his own breathing and breathlessness.329 As Greenacre observes, ‘Dodgson considered whether air was healthy or morbid with nearly the same intensity of concern which he gave to food and drink’. Of course, the processes of ingesting food and drink are not that psychologically different from those involved in ‘ingesting’ air. In some ways, the latter appears almost to be a ‘ghostly spirit’ of the former.330 Gertrude Chataway, another of Carroll’s child friends, described the extensity of his fresh air fetish as follows:

Next door there was an old gentleman who interested me immensely. He would come onto his balcony which joined ours, sniffing the air with his head thrown back and would walk right down the steps on to the beach with his chin in the air, drinking in the fresh breezes as if he could never have enough.331

This image of an ‘old man’ greedily ‘drinking’ in the fresh sea-side air contains a discrete elaboration of the idea that our bodies, and hence our identities, are determined by what we consume. If Carroll existed on a diet which involved the drinking of fresh air, would he, himself, become sufficiently airy?

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328 Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p.143.
329 It is perhaps on account of a bizarre fixation, as well as the era’s fairly commonplace instances of diseases of the lungs, that Carroll often visited his doctor regarding breathing/breathlessness matters. In 1884, for instance, Carroll noted that ‘Mr Beddard’ had given his ‘lungs a thorough examination and pronounced [him] a “thoroughly healthy man”’. Carroll’s concerns with breathing are possibly also suggestive of the fact that he might have believed in miasma theories. See, 24 September 1884, Diaries, ed. by Green, ii, p.429.
330 Greenacre, Swift and Carroll, p.175.
331 Qtd in. Collingwood, Life and Letters, p.379.
The combination of Carroll’s obsessions with airy weightlessness, his active evasions of time, his abstentions from food and the enforced starvation of others, all create the picture of a man who was potentially anorexic. That these anorectic yearnings, as a collected whole, affected Carroll on an individual level is clear; however, the notion of surviving on ‘air’, in particular, was manifest in various other works of nineteenth-century literature. In Catherine Sinclair’s the Holiday House, for instance, the children who pervade her narrative are residents of ‘Famine Castle’; another uncannily anorectic abode in which its inhabitants ‘must learn to live upon air [...] and mouthfuls of moonshine’.\(^\text{332}\) Her male protagonist, Harry, shares Carroll’s weightless fantasies of flight: ‘when [Harry’s] kite was flying up to the clouds’, the narrator notes, ‘[he] often wished that he could be tied to the tail himself, so as to fly also through the air like a bird’\(^\text{333}\).

One of the era’s most illustrious hybrid bird-boys is J. M. Barrie’s eternally boyish, Peter Pan: ‘I’m youth, I’m joy, I’m a little bird that has broken out of the egg’,\(^\text{334}\) he declares in the second act of Barrie’s 1904 stage play. In a kite-flying scene (which is not all that dissimilar to Sinclair’s) Barrie readily delves, like Carroll before him, into the fantastical depths which motivate a neurotic preoccupation with airy weightlessness. Caught stranded on a sea-rock by Mermaid Lagoon, Peter and Wendy resort to using a makeshift kite as a means of escape. As the tail of the kite touches Wendy’s hand ‘as lightly as a kiss’, Peter ‘grips the tail and pulls’. Wendy asks if the kite will carry both of them, and Peter replies, ‘It can’t lift two. Michael and Curly tried’. In the stage directions which follow this dialogue, Barrie notes that Wendy ‘[knew] very well that if [the kite] [could] lift her it [could] lift him also, for she ha[d] been told by the [Lost] Boys as a deadly secret that one of the queer things about [Peter Pan] [was] that he is no weight at all’. Barrie’s secretive references to ‘weight’ here recall Lewis Carroll’s earlier reluctance towards his own quantitative weight cognisance. Peter’s weight – or, rather, the lack of it – is, in the words of Barrie, ‘a forbidden subject’.\(^\text{335}\) Moving on from Carroll, and ignoring Barrie’s ‘forbidding’ injunction, it is to an intimate discussion of Peter Pan’s weightless character, as well as his potentially anorectic creator, that we now turn.

\(^{332}\) Sinclair, Holiday House, p.30.
\(^{333}\) Ibid. p.15.
\(^{335}\) Ibid. p.544.
(iii.) The Peter Pan Syndrome: J. M. Barrie, or the Little Boy Who Never Grew

In accordance with the aims of this thesis, and because of a notable lack in detailed information on his medical history, it would be imprudent to ‘diagnose’ James Matthew Barrie – celebrated author of the children’s literary classic, *Peter Pan* (1904) – as anorexic. However, as an illness which has, in recent decades, been hailed ‘The Peter Pan Syndrome’,\(^{336}\) it is worth exploring the potential links Barrie and his protagonist share with the disease. Peter Pan, with his urgent desire to “‘always be a little boy’”,\(^{337}\) is conceivably the most dedicated apostle of abstinence. Although Peter ‘could eat’, Barrie’s narrator informs us, ‘really eat, if it was part of a game’, he ‘could not stodge just to feel stodgy’.\(^{338}\) Anorectically driven to be eternally small, food is, as we shall discover, only permitted to pass Peter’s lips if it is associated with child’s play. Aliment with any weighty substance to it is rendered dangerous; its measurable tangibility poses a threat to his virtually non-tangible body. In 1904, the year that saw *Peter Pan* take to the stage, J. M. Barrie was himself but ‘a wisp of a man’,\(^{339}\) an individual who, according to Carol Mavor, ‘dreamed of delicious, childish flight, of being with the stars’.\(^{340}\) Like Carroll and Sinclair before him, Barrie idolised an airy, weightless image of man.

Peter, alias ‘The Little White Bird’,\(^{341}\) fits the prototype of this ideal perfectly: his excessively light, no-weight-at-all body allows him to float high above the realms of reality and adult responsibility. Michael Balint argues that such ‘flying dreams’ are unconscious ‘repetitions’ of either ‘the very early mother-child relationship’ or, perhaps ‘the still earlier intra-uterine existence during which we were really floating [...] with practically no weight to carry at all’.\(^{342}\) If this is true, then Barrie’s flight fantasy – along with its affiliations to weightlessness and infantile escapism – further links him to the dynamics which drive anorexia nervosa. If anorexia is, as we have seen, a desperate longing to perpetuate, or fly back to, childhood, an urgent desire to crystalize one’s youthful body into weightless eternity, then it

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338 Ibid. p.69.
341 *The Little White Bird* appeared in 1902 as a simplified version of what would later become *Peter Pan*.
becomes hard to deny that J. M. Barrie, and his alter ego Peter Pan, prove to be feasible sufferers.\(^{343}\)

From his nostalgic yearning for his home town, Thrums – which, in the words of Mavor, ‘evokes Tom Thumb, Thumbelina, and all places small’ – to his manic obsession with cricket – a sport which (albeit dubiously) ‘hails the miniature through the musical winged insect with which it shares its name’\(^{344}\) – everything about Barrie remained childishly minuscule for much of his life.\(^{345}\) At little over five foot in height, and always, according to Janet Dunbar, ‘very thin’,\(^{346}\) it is almost as if the adult Barrie, like the anorexic, had willed himself not to grow.\(^{347}\) This idea of willing one’s body to not grow, or, in other words, wanting it to remain eternally childish, is, as we saw in the case of Carroll, often psychologically rooted within the subject’s own traumatic past. In his recent book on male anorexia, Morgan argues that ‘a significant minority of men with eating disorders [...] may have experienced severe traumas either in their childhood or early adulthood’.\(^{348}\) Barrie, whose childhood was pervaded by instability and loss, arguably makes up one part of this ‘significant minority’.

At the age of six, Barrie was faced with the tragic news that his elder brother David had been involved in an ice-skating accident. After falling heavily and hitting his head on the ice, this was, unfortunately, an accident from which the thirteen-year old David would never recover. Understandably, David’s death hit the Barrie family hard. Having long been deemed the favourite child and the centre of his family’s ambitions, all were emotionally traumatised by his sudden death. In the words of Lisa Chaney, the Barrie family, and, in particular, their mother, were ‘driven to an all-consuming emotional crisis’.\(^{349}\) In the midst of this crisis, Barrie had to watch his mother, who refused to both eat and sleep, sink ever deeper into the murky depths of despair. Given that ‘rising’ is the antithesis of ‘sinking’, Barrie’s infantile understanding of his mother’s emotional plummeting could quite easily be from where his later flight fancies sprung. If the six-year-old Barrie could find in himself the psychic power to weightlessly lift his family from the depths of despair, he might also be able to fly back to a

\(^{343}\) For an interesting case which argues that J. M. Barrie suffered from anorexia, see Risto Fried and Walter Vandereycken, ‘The Peter Pan Syndrome: Was James M. Barrie Anorexic?’ International Journal of Eating Disorders, 8:3 (May 1989), pp.369-376.

\(^{344}\) Mavor, Reading Boyishly, p.206, p.231.


\(^{346}\) Dunbar, J. M. Barrie, p.169.

\(^{347}\) John F. Morgan, in The Invisible Man: A Self-Help Guide for Men With Eating Disorders, Compulsive Exercising and Bigorexia (London: Routledge, 2008), argues that ‘particularly where the anorexia nervosa has begun before or during puberty, there may be evidence of delayed growth in terms of height or even the genitals’, p.20.

\(^{348}\) Ibid. p.62.

happier existence, and, most importantly, re-establish the long-lost intra-maternal link with his increasingly estranged mother.

Incapable of finding the intense psychic discipline required, Barrie’s mother turned hopelessly inward, refusing to even acknowledge the existence of her flight-fancying son. Perplexed by his inability to grasp her attention, Barrie was, in his own words ‘taken by an intense desire [...] to become so like David that even my mother would not see the difference’. 350 This unnerving, self-effacing prayer was one that would haunt Barrie for the remainder of his life. As a six-year old attempting to fill the shoes of a thirteen-year old adolescent, Barrie could permit his body to grow for a few more years. However, on reaching the cusp of his own adolescence, he would have to find some means of arresting his growth. Of course, with an increasingly frail mother who still petulantly refused to eat and sleep, Barrie was in close proximity of an anorectic role model. Whether his mother’s abstemious behaviour did influence Barrie or not is unclear; what is clear, though, is that Barrie did partially succeed in perpetuating the existence of his adolescent sibling. As Sydney Blow explains, ‘all his life [Barrie] had the good fortune to keep a firm grip on youth and be eternally young’; even ‘his shadow[...] was one that knew no age – it had an impish look and was much given to laughing at its own secret jokes’. 351 What Barrie’s ‘secret jokes’ might have been will possibly always remain a mystery, but, I would argue, they were quite plausibly anorectic in bent.

Much like Lewis Carroll’s life and works of fiction, Barrie’s letters, diaries, novels and plays are infiltrated with a self-consciousness surrounding an eternally boyish body image and the abstention from food. Having grown-up (despite his fervent desire not to grow) in the midst of Victorian ‘fat-phobia’, Barrie was, if the following diary extract is anything to go by, a man who had cultural access and a psychological motive to experiment with the epoch’s newfound food fads:

> With so much water inside me I must be a sort of barometer for the sea...here I pause to drink some more water....Last night I couldn’t sleep [...] for no worthier reason than because in my mind’s eye I conceived oat-cake with butter on it and marmalade on the butter. [But] one ought to have these little fasts often so as to revel in the good things when they come instead of partaking mechanically. 352

From this extract we can surmise that, when writing his letter in 1925, Barrie was following some form of water-fast. Twenty-one years previously, a similar fast had made its way into the pages of his most famous work, *Peter Pan*. However, for ‘Poor Slightly’, the Lost Boy

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351 Blow, ‘Foreword’ to *When Wendy Grew Up*.
undertaking this particular slimming scheme, there were complications. Having become ‘madly addicted to the drinking of water’...[Slightly] had swelled in consequence to his present girth, and instead of reducing himself to fit his tree he had, unknown to the others, whittled his tree to make it fit him’.\footnote{353}

As the above anecdote suggests, in Barrie’s Neverland ‘tree-fitting’ and ‘clothes-fitting’ are akin. Living by the era’s recurrently materialising Ruskinian maxim which dictated that one must ‘chisel a boy into shape’, Peter’s cautionary words of wisdom to the Lost Boys are: ‘you simply must fit’.\footnote{354} In \emph{Peter and Wendy} (1911) (the novel version of his stage-play \emph{Peter Pan}), Peter adopts the absurd role of ‘tree-tailor’, and, because, as many periodical writers observed, ‘tailors look[ed] to leanness as their best friend’,\footnote{355} he simultaneously assumes the guise of admonitory dietician. One boy explains, ‘Peter measures you for your tree as carefully as for a suit of clothes: the only difference being that the clothes are made to fit you, while you have to be made to fit the tree’. This declaration, in addition to the fact that (the no longer ‘slight’) Slightly keeps his futile ‘whittling’ secret, indicates that altering the internal dimensions of a tree to fit its inhabitant reeked of foul-play. Instead, Peter relies on the boys’ abilities to control their appetites, and, as an extension of this, their capacities to keep the male body sufficiently slim.

Yet, as Slightly’s failed attempt at autonomous dieting implies, the Lost Boys were incapable of resisting the temptation to ‘stodge’: after all, ‘stodging’, as we know, was what ‘most children like better than anything else’. As a consequence, Peter has to commandeer the Lost Boys’ diets and, when their bodies begin to show signs of expanding beyond the proper limits, he denies them access to food, enforcing a prolonged fast. One boy complains, ‘you never exactly knew whether there would be a real meal or just a make-believe, it all depended upon Peter’s whim’. If, however, ‘you could prove to him you were getting loose for your tree’, Peter would, with caution, retract the fast and ‘let you stodge’.\footnote{356} If the Lost Boys did somehow manage to over ‘stodge’ during this retraction, they would soon be physically subject, like Carroll’s Alice, to a course of disciplinary body-probing. As Barrie notes in the stage-play version to his tale, ‘Sometimes [making a boy fit his tree] [could] be done by adding or removing garments, but if [he were] bumpy, or the tree an odd shape, he ha[d] things done to [him] with a roller, and after that [he would] fit’.\footnote{357} Faced with the choice of this furtive body crafting or a short spell of starvation, Barrie’s lost boys quickly learn to swallow down their

\footnote{353} Barrie, \emph{Peter and Wendy}, p.109.  
\footnote{354} Ibid. p.67.  
\footnote{355} ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.696.  
\footnote{356} Barrie, \emph{Peter and Wendy}, pp.67-69.  
\footnote{357} Barrie, ‘Peter Pan’, Act III, p.538.
make-believe meals without a fuss. Of course, the narrator explains, making do with ‘make-believe’ meals ‘was trying’, but, ‘you simply had to follow [Peter’s] lead’.  

In Neverland, Peter’s Pan’s dinner-table presence is virtually unheard of. Absenting himself from meals whenever possible, it is Wendy – playing the role of motherly, moral adjudicator – who is often left to monitor the Lost Boys’ ingestion of food: ‘All the boys except Peter are here,’ states Barrie in his mealtime stage directions, ‘and Wendy has the head of the table, [...] doing her best to see that [the boys] keep the rules about hands-off-the-table, no-two-to-speak-at-once, and so on’. In order to further aid Wendy in her monitory endeavours, Barrie (much like Carroll) ensures that a ubiquitous non-consumption prevails. In the same way that Carroll’s intervening schemes prevent Alice from eating freely in Wonderland, Barrie has the Lost Boys intermittently ‘pause’ whilst ingesting their (ironically already make-believe) meals. ‘The table at which the lost ones are sitting’, writes Barrie, ‘is a board on top of a live tree trunk, which has been cut flat but has such growing pains that the board rises as they eat, and they have to pause in their meals to cut a bit more off the trunk’. Here Barrie puts a twist on the subject/object, chiseller/chiselled relations which surround the era’s phallic body probing. The boys are subjectively urged to cut (or chisel) the tree that they are sitting at in order to appease the ‘pains’ caused by ‘growing’, yet, at the same time, their own bodies are metaphorically, and objectively, ‘chiselled’ too. In downing their forks full of (albeit imaginary) food and up taking their chisel-apt knives, Barrie theoretically prevents the Lost Boys from undergoing the painful expansion in size that is experienced by the living tree which grows before them.

Given the prominence of these growth-inhibiting dietetics, it is not surprising that the majority of Neverland’s inhabitants, are, in the words of Barrie, ‘not quite so round’ as when they first came. To be sure, ‘roundness’, in Barrie’s work, is closely linked to moral baseness. From the not so ‘slight’ Slightly’s water-induced convexity to the villainous Captain Hook’s exclamatory interjections about ‘Obesity and bunions’ – bunions, of course, being repulsively globular – Barrie evidently associated rounded contours with mischief. Even the hair-pulling, fairy-screaming mischievousness of Tinker Bell (who, we are told, had a ‘slight inclin[ation] to embonpoint’) is possibly enhanced by her fleshy physique. Similarly, Slightly’s

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360 Ibid. Act IV, p.546.
greedy guzzling differentiates him from the rest of his pack: he is, in short, ‘more conceited’364 than the others. Following this descriptive pointer from Barrie, Slightly haughtily boasts that, unlike ‘the other boys’, who had to be nominally christened by Peter, his ‘mother had wrote [his] name on the pinafore [he] was lost in’. “Slightly Soiled”, he vaunts, “‘that’s my name’.365 Although, on a literal level, the term ‘soiled’ points to the physical grubbiness of this little boy’s pinafore, there is also the possibility that, on account of his inability to sustain alimentary restraint, Slightly’s mother felt that her son was ‘slightly soiled’ in moral terms too. If we recall the difficult relationship the less-than-perfect Barrie had with his own mother, Slightly’s misinterpreted maternal intimacy seems to echo Barrie’s life story.

A persistent absence of maternal figures abounds in Barrie’s fiction. Moreover, this absence is often interrelated with an ignorance surrounding the dangers of ingesting certain foods. In an exchange between Captain Hook and his fellow pirate Smee, for instance, the two men plot to poison Neverland’s motherless Lost Boys with a noxiously tempting cake. Hook declares that he intends ‘to cook a large rich cake of jolly thickness with sugar on it, green sugar’. ‘They will find the cake’, he proceeds, ‘and gobble it up, because, having no mother, they don’t know how dangerous ‘tis to eat rich damp cake!’366 With the intervening arrival of Wendy in Neverland, however, Hook’s plan inevitably fails:

SMEE. What’s up, Captain?
HOOK. (who has found the large rich damp cake untouched). The game is up. Those boys have found a mother!367

In her newfound role as motherly adjudicator, Wendy succeeds in preventing the lost boys from ingesting Hook’s poisoned goods. ‘Wendy snatched it from the hands of her children’, the narrator of Peter and Wendy explains, ‘so that in time it lost its succulence, and became as hard as stone, and was used as a missile, and Hook fell over it in the dark’.368 Impressed by Wendy’s protective diligence, Smee, ‘(not usually a man of ideas)’ asks his Captain, ‘could we not kidnap these boys’ mother and make her our mother?’ ‘Obesity and bunions!’ Hook instantaneously replies, “tis a princely scheme!”369 Hook’s profane outbreak here – ‘Obesity and bunions’ – alerts us to the fact he is defined by the bodily and behavioural globularity which a mother would be expected to inhibit. Although Wendy is, at first, ‘rather startled to find, on arriving, that Peter knew of no other kind [of meal than pretend ones]’, she eventually, as we saw in the tree-table scene earlier, accedes to the fact that ‘the pretend

368 Barrie, Peter and Wendy, p.72.
meals [are] partaken of with gusto’, and ensures that Peter’s ‘band’ of boys do ‘their best to obey [alimentary] orders’.370

Interestingly, this sense of regimental ordering manifests itself in relation to hierarchical spectrums of size. Although one might expect the largest cohabitants of Neverland to be situated at the apex of this hierarchical structure, the opposite is in fact true. In Barrie’s anorectically-driven world, the smallest – and therefore most boyish – individuals thrive. Thus, despite the lost boys being ‘in height and still more in breadth all larger than their captain’,371 it is the ‘no weight at all’ Peter who maintains authoritative control. Even when faced with inordinately oversized ‘adult’ opponents, Peter uses his size-centred chiselling to keep his unruly adversaries in check. When telling John and Michael about Captain Hook, for instance, physically ‘cutting’ or probing becomes explicitly linked to hierarchical relations: ‘“What is he like? Is he big?” asks John. “He is not so big as he was”, replies Peter, “I cut off a bit of him”. “You!” exclaims John, evidently surprised that someone so little could chisel a pirate so big. “Yes, me,” said Peter sharply.372 Barrie’s description of Peter’s words being ‘sharp’ here serves as a reminder that Peter’s cutting propensities are constantly poised for action.

Peter’s ‘chiselling’ is, as we have already seen, not only applicable to body size, but portion size as well. When Wendy temporarily retracts Neverland’s make-believe meals in favour of ‘the other kind’, Peter ensures that the foods which are commissioned instead are still insubstantial. These ‘other meals’, which consist ‘chiefly of bread-fruit, tappa rolls, yams, mammee apples and banana splash, washed down with calabashes of poepoe’, have an insistently fantastic quality which makes them sound suspiciously unreal. The foodstuffs glossed here are plush with exotic flamboyance, and would have almost certainly been unknown to nineteenth-century child audiences. As a consequence, these ‘other meals’ become ‘Other’, or, in anorexic terms, unsuitable for safe consumption. More often than not then, there is, in Neverland, ‘nothing whatever on the table, not a mug, nor a crust, nor a spoon.’373

Hunger haunts and appetite teases each and every one of Neverland’s inhabitants. As in Wonderland, even the most ravenous and reptilian of appetites is never satiated. One particularly noteworthy manifestation of this can be seen through the ticking crocodile that plagues Captain Hook. Hook explains to Smee that ever since ‘Pan flung my arm to a crocodile that happened to be passing by[...] the brute has followed me, from sea to sea, and from land to land, licking his lips for the rest of me’. Continuing his story, Hook states that the ‘crocodile

370 Ibid. Act IV, p.547.
371 Barrie, Peter and Wendy, p.51.
372 Ibid. p.43.
would have had me before now, but by a lucky chance he swallowed a clock, and it goes tick, tick, tick, tick inside him; and so before he can reach me I hear the tick and bolt’. Daring to interrupt Hook’s story, Smee somberly proposes that ‘someday the clock will run down, and then he’ll get you’. Hook, by this time ‘a broken man’, anxiously agrees: ‘Ay, that is the fear that haunts me’.  

This episode is meaningful on numerous counts. The ticking of the clock which resounds from inside this crocodile’s stomach symbolises the mechanical regularity by which our bodies remind us that we require regular injections of food. However, in a land prefixed by the term ‘Never’, the fulfilment of this dietetic ‘regularity’ is counteracted by a sense of eternal timelessness. It is only when the clock has finally ‘run down’ that this former timelessness will become ‘timely’ and mechanical regulation can prevail.

That Barrie was averse to the ‘mechanical’ ingestion of food is best evidenced in the diary extract quoted earlier: ‘one ought to have these little fasts often’, claimed Barrie, ‘so as to revel in the good things when they come instead of partaking mechanically’. The fact that the Crocodile has somehow ingested a ‘mechanical’ piece of equipment is therefore worth elaborating upon. Ingesting mechanical apparatus as opposed to food indicates that alimentary objects should, according to Barrie, be made externally industrious as opposed to internally industrious. In the fantastical world of Neverland, it is not uncommon to find food sources being made useful in exterior, as opposed to interior, terms. In Barrie’s world, food has more use outside of the body than it does inside of it. As a consequence, Neverland boasts a landscape of edibles which are transformed into non-consumable goods. Hook’s poisonous cake, for instance, is (with the aid of protracted time) transformed into ‘stone’ and becomes a form of retaliatory ammunition. Furthermore, pumpkins become stools, and, in contrast to the magical mushrooms in Carroll’s Wonderland – which, we might recall, were internally ingested in order to regulate Alice’s exterior fluctuations in size – Neverland’s fungi externally adorn the roofs of houses. Although this might at first seem trivial and unimportant, in conflated body/industry terms, chimney stacks, like various internal organs of our bodies, work to digest and emit waste products from an enclosed, interior space. The rejection of food/product/waste from the body – or, in this case, excessive heat and smoke from the house – is, in anorectic terms, an essential part of regulating the body and/or house as well as keeping it slim and/or smoke and pollutant-free.

This useful industriousness and controlled expending of energy is, I would argue, intricately linked to Peter’s and, by extension, Barrie’s anorectic penchant for physical activity. As the narrator of Peter and Wendy puts it, Peter ‘hates lethargy’ and ensures that ‘the whole

374 Ibid. Act II, p.528.
island [is] seething with life’. It is only during Peter’s absence from Neverland that ‘things are usually quiet on the island’. When Peter is away, ‘the fairies take an hour longer in the morning’, which potentially explains why Tinker Bell has a ‘tendency to embonpoint’, and ‘the redskins feed heavily’. Yet, ‘with the [home]coming of Peter’, explains the narrator, they are all hyperactively ‘underway again’.\textsuperscript{376} That Barrie was (like Carroll) himself inclined to physical hyperactivity is evident in the following observances of Lancelot Strong. Interviewing the illustrious playwright for \textit{The Woman at Home} magazine, Strong notes that Barrie was, ‘after only a few moments of interested listening, [up] on his feet, and pacing to and fro the length of the room with quick, nervous footsteps’.\textsuperscript{377} Apparently impressed by, and further enhancing, this picture of physical restlessness, Strong contends: ‘I should never be afraid of this Mr. Barrie coming to my school. I am sure that instead of inquiring into the arithmetical information possessed by the fourth standard, he would be out in the playground, playing at “tig” with the boys or getting up a cricket match in Wester Lunny’s pasture field’.\textsuperscript{378} When Strong ventured to ‘speak to Mr. Barrie shyly of books’, he ‘instantly turned the talk to sport’ and boasted that, ‘in his time’, he was ‘a mighty player of football’. \textit{“What do you think, Mr. Barrie”}, questioned the interviewee, \textit{“of the present tendencies of English literature?” “What do you think”}, came Barrie’s reply, (‘with his head turned a little elvishly to one side’) \textit{“of the prospects of the Everton team for the English Championship?”}\textsuperscript{379} As this digressive conversation seems to imply, Barrie’s mind was either determined not to discuss literature, or irrationally focussed on the physical. In the same way that Barrie appears to have been incapable of enduring protracted episodes of rest, to ‘see Peter doing nothing on a stool’, remarks the narrator of \textit{Peter and Wendy}, ‘was a great sight’. He ‘could not help looking solemn at such times’, and ‘to sit still seemed to him such a coming thing to do’. Instead, Peter preferred to ‘boast that he had gone a walk for the good of his health’.\textsuperscript{380} As this last statement confirms, ‘good health’ was, in Barrie’s eyes, contingent upon functional physicality.

In a relatively unheard of stage piece which immediately preceded \textit{Peter Pan}, Barrie artistically combined this physical activeness with his iconic abstemiousness in order to create a play whose central character was (somewhat absurdly) ‘the stomach’. \textit{Little Mary} (1903) – a play which, despite its apparent fall into literary and critical oblivion, appears to have been

\textsuperscript{376} Barrie, \textit{Peter and Wendy}, p.47.
\textsuperscript{378} Ibid. p.27.
\textsuperscript{379} Ibid. p.27.
\textsuperscript{380} Barrie, \textit{Peter and Wendy}, p.71.
highly appealing to contemporary audiences[^381] — makes its titular protagonist, ‘Little Mary’ (otherwise known as ‘the stomach’) a mysterious ‘medium’ who possesses the power to cure British society of its overindulgent ills. ‘You see, there is a spring in you all that is not working’, declares the pre-pubescent Moira, guardian of Little Mary, in the play’s opening act, ‘— and Grandpa is going to touch the spring and set you all going again’.[^382] Through this image of a faulty ‘spring’, Barrie returns us to the idea of bodily mechanics. It is on account of the regular and ‘mechanical’ ingestion of food — as well as an insufficient expending of the energy which this alimentary input supplies — that the play’s overindulgent characters are pronounced ‘ill’. It is only with the approved interventional handling of their own ‘mediums’ that correct corporeal functioning is restored.

As we saw in Peter Pan, Barrie’s conception of functional corporeality is intricately related to weight management. The lost boys who are incapable of managing their own bodily functions are subject to the interventional wrath of their ‘Captain’. From the protracted indoctrination of make believe foods, to a short spell of phallic body bashing, Peter ensures that the lost boys remain ‘stodge-free’, lithe and active. Anticipating the fairy-tale quality which pervades Neverland, Moira, with the aid of her apothecary grandfather, proceeds to cast a similar anorectic spell over the house of nobility she intends to ‘cure’.[^383] Using ‘Little Mary’ as her invisible medium, as well as her grandfather’s book of secret wonders, the inhabitants of this sedentary house are transformed from proponents of greedy indolence to fasting hyperactivity. Throughout the duration of this transformation, all the protagonists involved (including Moira herself) are subject to a dramatic shedding of (bodily and metaphorical) ‘weight’. In Little Mary, weight has double significance. Not only does it impede its victims in a physical sense, but also burdens them spiritually and psychologically. Take, for instance, Lady Millicent, Moira’s primary patient, who, not unlike Barrie’s own mother, sinks into a grief-induced depression following the death of a loved one. Encouraged by the

[^381]: Because of its continued absence from editions of Barrie’s dramatic works, Little Mary appears to be (from a literary perspective) one of Barrie’s least successful plays. However, following its stage premiere at London’s Wyndham Theatre on 24 September 1903, the play went on to run for 208 performances, and received a great deal of appraisal from reviewers all over the world. For instance, the New York Times noted that the play was ‘excellently received’: ‘an elixir of wit [and] all art properly called fine’. ‘Little Mary’, New York Times, 25 September 1903, p.7.


[^383]: In one of the first reviews of Little Mary, the play’s magical quality was criticised. ‘We are disposed’, wrote the Athenaeum on 3 October 1903, ‘to view with a feeling akin to dismay the extent to which on the stage the fantastic is supplanting the dramatic’. ‘The entire action passes in a species of prosaic fairyland’, this article went on. ‘Who can conceive an English earl wandering into […] the shop of a casual chemist, there to wait a while a prescription is made up?’ See, ‘Drama,’ The Athenaeum, 3962 (3 Oct 1903), p.459. Ironically, Barrie himself recognised that there was truth in this matter: after all, it was he who was trying to satirically reveal just how lazy and indolent the upper classes were.
incompetent Dr Topping and Sir Jennings to perpetually eat and rest – ‘Dr. Food and Dr. Sleep!’ declares Sir Jennings; ‘when Lady Millicent is not sleeping she should be eating, when not eating she should be sleeping’ – the emotional weight which has come to burden Millicent is considerably worsened by the additional bodily weight she gains through adhering to their indolent prescriptions. The toxic combination of these conflated weights ‘de-presses’ Millicent so much that she completely loses her ability to walk. Stepping in to rescue her patient from this depleting burden, Moira extols self-starvation as a way of life. She encourages Millicent to eat less, and to endorse an anorectic strain of hyperactivity. Thus, in the same way that Barrie’s infantile flight fantasies were potentially driven by the anorectic idea that weightlessness could ‘lift’ his family from the depths of despair, the prevailing message of Little Mary is that life can be ‘light’ and ‘uplifting’ without food.

From the very beginning of the play, the ingesting of food is disapproved of. When Lord Carlton first enters Moira’s grandpa’s chemists, she is most displeased to see him fling Billy, one of her surrogate ‘sons’, a chocolate: ‘You will be sick tomorrow, Billy’, she scolds. ‘It was only one!’ Lord Carlton reprimands. Lord Carlton, much like Captain Hook, is defined by food-centred corporeality. Even his rhetoric is shrouded with references to food: ‘all seems to me to be in apple-pie order’, he observes, eyeing up the boxes which fill the room. Carlton’s utterance here adds weight to her grandpa’s ‘profound conviction’ that ‘the dear, darling English people suffer from eating too much’. Without doubt, food fills every nook and cranny of Lord Carlton’s food-obsessed psyche. Yet, in a hefty book which has required years of labour, Moira’s grandfather manages to conjure up a cure for such ‘gout swathed’ individuals. As his life rapidly draws to a close, Moira is urged to master her grandpa’s theories and to put them into effect. Before he dies, Moira’s grandfather tells her that she must carry the three-volumed book ‘about with [her] everywhere’. In the same way that the anorexic undergoes an extreme form of self-sacrifice, Moira’s grandfather urges that her ‘self must be sacrificed and all aspirations turned to the path of duty’. The ‘path of duty’ being referred to here is one which involves putting into practice the spells which form his anorectic ‘cure’.

The second act of Barrie’s play takes us to the centre of this spell-conjuring action. Under the appellation of ‘Stormy Petrel’ Moira travels to the play’s domestic hub of pretentious nobility and sets about her rejuvenating ways. The fourteen-year-old ‘Lord

Plumleigh’, who, on our first sighting, is ‘munching’ the remainders of his eleven o’clock breakfast, is the first to be transformed from a ‘lazy little beast’, ‘the idlest boy in the whole school’, to an abstemious individual who ‘moves briskly, like one who knows the value of time’. Of course, this last reference to ‘the value of time’ immediately recalls the temporal dimensions which define eternal boyishness. Unlike Peter, who, as an inhabitant of Never-land, manages to countermand temporality, Lord Plumleigh takes it upon himself to make the most of his fleeting youth. Flitting hyperactively between time’s unstable dimensions, Plumleigh turns to time-regulated industriousness in order to keep himself lithe, active and young. Immersing himself in the practices of late nineteenth-century ‘Physical Culture’, Plumleigh becomes an ardent user of the ‘Sandow exerciser’. When Lord Carlton (Plumleigh’s Uncle) re-enters the scene, he is astounded to see his once indolent nephew setting ‘vigorously to work at exercises’. ‘Are you always as busy as this, Plum?’ he enquires. ‘Eight—nine—ten’ Plumleigh strains, counting his repetitions so as to not lose track of time, ‘here’s my time-table’:

6.30—leap out of bed; 7 run a mile, walk a mile; 7.30—breakfast; 8—Botany; 8.45—Herodotus; 11—run a mile, walk a mile; 12—Latin verse; 2—dinner. Dinner? –

As this precise timetabling demonstrates, Plumleigh, unlike the fantastical Peter, tracks temporality because (with his feet firmly grounded in reality) he knows that time cannot be frozen. Nonetheless, as his busy schedule confirms, whilst he might be incapable of fantastically flouting the ravages of time, he is by no means immune from Peter’s affinity for hyperactivity. Much like the anorexic, Plumleigh is governed by routine, structure, and obsessive-compulsive stringency. The ingestion of food is given a markedly smaller amount of time within his daily routine: his prolonged eleven o’clock breakfasts make no further appearance, and, what is more, he proudly declares ‘we have no late dinner. Ever so much better. But we dress for tea at six’. The ‘tea’ which this household now dresses for most probably involves the ingestion of light foods. However, if we recall Lewis Carroll’s ‘High Tea’ quandaries—whereby the focus of the feast is on tea, as opposed to its edible accompaniments – there is a possibility that, given Barrie’s taste for make-believe meals, Plumleigh’s ‘tea’ is also intended to evoke a similarly calorie-free affair. By the end of the play,

393 The ‘Sandow Exerciser’ was invention of Eugen Sandow (1867-1925) a pioneering bodybuilder who came to be known as the father of both ‘Physical Culture’ and modern bodybuilding. Sandow and the era’s Physical Culturists will be explored in more detail in chapter three.
all of the household’s inhabitants eat much smaller and less frequent meals. Yet, when asked by Lord Carlton when and how ‘this ambition’ had seized them, the unanimous reply is: ‘I don’t know. It’s just as if I had suddenly wakened up’. The mystery and ambiguity surrounding this episode is applicable to Little Mary’s anorectic ‘cure’ as a whole.

Just as Barrie’s eternally boyish body configuration is, in the words of Sydney Blow, dependent upon his own ‘secret jokes’, and, in the same way that Peter’s ‘no weight at all’ body configuration is a ‘forbidden subject’, Moira is initiated into her grandfather’s mysteries and ‘sworn to secrecy’ regarding the old man’s remedy: ‘You must carry me [in the form of the book] about with you everywhere—but no eyes but yours must see me. Not even those you are curing must know the nature of the cure. It would startle them too much’. Putting her body and soul into the secret dispersion of her grandfather’s theories, the book itself becomes a weighty burden to Moira. Having psychosomatically indoctrinated its contents to the rest of the house, however, the ‘weight’ which oppresses her begins to subside. In the dramatic climax to the play, Lady Millicent, who has, under Moira’s guidance, secretly fasted and regained the use of her legs, reveals her no-longer-invalid, ‘uplifted’ self to the rest of the house. Astounded and intrigued by this miraculous recovery, the others press for an explanation. Seeing this as an opportunity for her to reclaim ‘the self’ she had formerly sacrificed, Moira ignores her grandfather’s injunction and reveals the secret of his rejuvenating method. However, just as he had foreseen, this revelation does indeed ‘startle them too much’.

As Moira explains the old man’s theory that it is the idle ingesting of ‘three solid meals a day’ which leads to their bodily ills – not to mention their having to go annually ‘to Homburg and such like places to be washed out and scraped down’ (note the similarity to Slightly’s tree-tailored body ‘chiselling’) – her crowd of listeners, who begin to detect the internal nature of this ‘cure’, become agitated:

Grandpa knew it would never do to tell you what was really the matter with you, you are so delicately minded. He said to me, “Either you must invent some milder name for their—their medium, or they will all fly from the cure.” And SO, after thinking about it for a long time, I invented the name of “Little Mary”.

Unnerved by the semi-revelation of this ‘medium’, Lady Georgy cries, ‘what is this thing?’ ‘I hate the name as much as you do’, returns Moira, ‘but I must say it once – it’s the only way, oh

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dear – stomach’. Outraged by her mentioning of the organ which ‘dare not speak its name’, Moira’s listeners retreat in horror. ‘Disgusting! Preposterous!’ cries Lady Millicent. ‘Please’, Moira pleads, ‘we need never mention it again. Let us call it the organ’, she contends, ‘Oh, let us all look our organ firmly in the face, and dear England will once again be invincible as in the great Shakespearean days’. Although this episode is obviously interlaced with satire, one cannot help but wonder whether these repressed ‘organ’ musings are emblematic of the inner thoughts of Barrie himself.

That Barrie appears to have compelled his own house guests (whether consciously or not) to refrain from ingesting large amounts of food is evident in the following autobiographical account of Neville Cardus. Having accepted an invitation to stay with Barrie in June, 1926, Cardus notes that Barrie ensured that meal times were generally suffused with a sense of ‘discomfort’. At ‘breakfast’, he writes, Thurston (the butler) ‘came into my bedroom with tea’ – note the ascetic choice of drink. ‘[He] then directed me to the breakfast-room’, states Cardus, ‘where he attended to me in complete silence, only once speaking to inform me that Sir James was staying in bed for a while’. In addition to the discomfort caused by the ‘silence’ which pervades this scene, Barrie’s absence is highly intriguing. Although one could argue that Barrie’s ‘staying in bed’ imparts a laziness which contradicts the anorexic’s penchant for hyperactivity, if his absence is accountable to a desire to avoid the ingestion of food, then Barrie – who, in the words of Cardus, was a ‘frail man in pyjamas, like a pygmy with one of those big pantomime heads’ – is firmly re-cast within an anorexic paradigm. In the same way that Peter absents himself from meal times in Neverland, Barrie appears to have rarely graced Cardus with a dinner-table presence throughout the entirety of his stay. ‘Next morning’, writes Cardus, ‘Thurston again served tea in my bedroom, and watched me carefully at breakfast. He told me that Sir James had gone away until Monday; [and asked] would I be in for dinner?’ With Barrie absent, Thurston appears to assume the role of omnipresent ‘weight-watcher’ in his master’s place. The voyeuristic care Thurston takes in ‘watching’ Cardus eat evokes a monitory sense of weight-centred panopticism. Further enhancing Thurston’s ‘anorectic’ quality, we are informed by Cardus that he ‘had a ghostly face’, and, what is more, his absence from the house at night leads him to wonder if ‘perhaps [Thurston] merely dematerialised’. Of course, the immateriality which pervades Thurston’s person accentuates the anorexic aura which, in turn, pervades Barrie’s house.

400 ibid. Act III, p.484.
Chapter 2: Lightweight and Little

On the rare occasions in which Barrie does appear to have presented himself during Cardus’s stay, Cardus is quick to assert that Barrie ‘offered me no refreshment’ which, as it happens ‘would have been fortifying to me, I am sure; for already the spell of the flat high amongst the roofs of Adelphi was gripping me’. This last reference to the ‘spell’ which infiltrates Barrie’s abode recalls the mystical quality which shrouds the house in Little Mary. That Cardus feels ‘gripped’ by Barrie’s ‘spell’ confirms the mesmeric sway the playwright impishly provoked. In the opening section to his account, Cardus specifically alludes to the ‘fantastic’ quality which characterises his visit as a whole:

this week-end at Barrie's flat will make so strange a story that I must assure the reader that in telling it I have made no exaggeration and have carefully overhauled my memory. Maybe I suffered from delusions; I do not deny the possibility; the point is that if delusions did seize me they were so potent as to become inextricable from fact.

This idea of blurring the boundary which separates fact from fiction, as we have seen, perpetually appeared in Barrie’s visions of Neverland.

In the same way that Neverland’s ‘other’ meals are often dubiously illusionary, Cardus’s description of the one meal Barrie does consume with him evokes a similar sense of ambiguous substantiality: ‘Barrie was waiting for me next evening alone’; writes Cardus. ‘We dined together and under the glow of a perfect Burgundy we thawed somewhat’. The evocation of luminescent ‘glowing’ immediately perpetuates the former sense of magical spell-casting. Moreover, the concept of bodily ‘thawing’ creates an image of subsiding solidity. Further illuminating this picture of immaterial dining, Cardus notes, ‘I can remember nothing of the dinner-party save the occasional low chuckle’. The fact that Cardus cannot ‘remember’ ingesting food endows the occasion with a Neverlandish essence of make-believe: did he eat? Did he not eat? Or, in the words of Wendy, ‘Did they really feel hungry, or were they merely pretending?’ Cardus’s description of ‘low chuckling’ also revives the image of Barrie laughing at his ‘own secret jokes’. That these ‘secret jokes’ unnerved Cardus is clear. On his departure from Barrie’s flat, Cardus declared that he would ‘never [again] stay the night. I prefer my Barrie plays on the stage in front of me’, he concludes, ‘where I can see what [the players] are doing; I don’t like them taking place behind my back in the night’.

The suspicion that consumes Cardus is not dissimilar to that felt by the characters of Little Mary. It is certainly this ‘behind-the-scenes’ impishness which unnerves Lady Millicent. The indefinable locus of Moira/Barrie’s psychosomatic influence ultimately causes her distress.

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402 Cardus, Autobiography.
403 Barrie, Peter and Wendy, p.37.
404 Cardus, Autobiography.
When she demands to be enlightened on what has been ‘done’ with her ‘stomach’, Moira reveals that, although she was aware from the beginning that ‘what made [Millicent] ill was the death of him [she] loved’, it was only as soon as she had compelled her to abandon the ‘mechanical’ ingestion of food that this depressing ‘weight [could be] taken off [her] organ’. Following this alimentary weight-reduction, the ability to ‘think healthily again’ and ‘the desire to be up and doing’ took sway. Here, the symbiotic relationship between the body weight brought about by eating and the symbolic weight one shoulders in an emotional sense is reaffirmed. Yet, whilst Millicent manages to shed both forms of burden, Moira is left to bear the hefty load of a new encumbrance: a weighty ‘loneliness’ which is, essentially, brought about by the three-volume book conjoined to her person. ‘Don't go’, pleads Moira, as the party rapidly flees from her,

Don’t go. Be patriots. […] I want you to form a league with “one day one dinner” for its motto. Grandpa calls it Home Rule for England. He foresees the time coming when all the best people will greet each other with the words “Good morning! How is Little Mary?”

As Moira’s patriotic ‘Home Rule for England’ declarations imply, Barrie, like many other body-conscious writers, aimed to assimilate anorectic patterns of thought into national discourses of corporeality. Nevertheless, still repulsed by the avocation of this stomach-centred starvation, the others (with the exception of Lord Carlton) depart. ‘Grandpa was right’, Moira despondently admits. ‘He warned me against telling. Oh, must I begin again, all alone, all alone!’

The loneliness Moira is subject to is interrelated to a yearning for reciprocal love. Just as Barrie craved love from his internally and emotionally consumed mother, Moira craves an affiliation that will lift her of the dead weight of despair. Fortunately for Moira, Lord Carlton – who, we might recall, initially appears to be defined by food-centred corporeality – has also fallen under the spell of Barrie’s ‘cure’. Seeing Moira (surrogate mother to Little Mary) in a favourable light, he envisions a life shared with her being one of industrious improvement. Endowing her with the power to diffuse further anorectic magic, Moira, in Carlton’s eyes, possesses the power to restore his youth. If she agrees to marry him, she can transform him from a forty-five-year-old man to a ‘boysish’ youth of ‘five and twenty’: an individual whose own weighty loneliness would be lifted, and, as a consequence, would ensure that he is ‘never idle again!’

With someone to share the weight of his loneliness, Carlton vows that there would be ‘No suppers in restaurants, or breakfasts in bed’; only ‘Work, noble work, for every moment of the day!’ As Carlton’s vows suggest, emotional fulfilment leads to fervent body conditioning. The reciprocity between body and mind relations ensures that ‘psycho’ uplifting leads to ‘somatic’ uplifting as well. This is, in some respects, an extension of the ‘you are what you eat’ adage which has reappeared at various points throughout this chapter as a whole. In the closing scene of the play, Barrie explicitly returns us to these food/identity mechanics: ‘Grandpa discovered the amazing truth that what we are depends chiefly on what we eat’, declares Moira. Those who consume light and airy meals will, in turn, become light and airy themselves. Thus, Little Mary, like Peter Pan, can potentially be read as an idealisation and oblique confession of Barrie’s own tendency towards anorexia. Given the anorectic nature of his works, it is maybe not unfeasible to suggest that a subliminally anorectic stance was Barrie’s own personal ‘secret’ too.

Although Barrie (1860-1937) and Carroll (1832-1898) might seem worlds apart in a chronological sense, the anorectic ideologies which inform their disparate life spans are uncannily close. From their pathological obsessions with the abstention of time, to their fixations with food (or, rather, the absence of it) both ‘eternally boyish’ men are psychosomatically disposed to keeping their bodies lightweight and little. Yet, whilst their own bodily and behavioural feats appear to mimic the clinical anorexic’s growth, weight and age defiance, do the anorectic strains manifest in the bodies of their fictional works suggest that Carroll and Barrie wanted to put their own anorexic behaviour into cultural production? Of course, there is no definitive answer to this question; however, I would argue that they did. Like many of the other child-centred literary works which scorned the greedy ingestion of food, Barrie and Carroll praise abstemious eating behaviour and renounce gluttonous carnality. Although it would not be feasible to speculatively ‘diagnose’ every children’s writer who renounces gluttony as anorexic, we must not forget that Carroll and Barrie are, of course, plagued by their own psychologically-rooted, post-traumatic motives. Through their promotions of physical activity and sparse diet regimes these ‘eternally boyish’ men invite a nation of growing children to share their own desires to be eternally small.

408 Ibid. Act III, p.486.
409 Ibid. Act III, p.484.
Chapter 3 – Sporting Slenderness: Jockeys, Gymnasts and Physical Excess

‘While exercise [...] tends to development and health, excessive exertion produces debility and decay’.

— George Henry Lewes, ‘Training In Relation To Health’, (1864)

Following John Morgan’s claim that ‘many men with anorexia nervosa will be utilising excessive exercise as a means of weight manipulation’, this chapter will discuss the Victorian male’s anorectic taste for physical excess. Through an examination of the period’s male-targeted conduct-books and periodical works – some of which claimed that ‘an athlete should not have four ounces of fat on his whole body’ — I will begin to consider the extent to which fat-phobic boys and men became, in the words of Frederick Broome, ‘possessed by a perfect mania for every species of athletic contest’. From a specular glimpse at the period’s weightless acrobats and aerial gymnasts to a retelling of the ‘Tinman’ to ‘Thinman’ narratives surrounding horse-racing superstar, Fred Archer, this chapter will reflect upon the disorderliness inherent in the epoch’s slender sportsmanship.

Having begun with the anorectic proclivities of the era’s sporting ‘lightweights’, I will conclude with an equally important discussion surrounding the ‘muscular’ glamorisation of the period’s fat-free strong men. Whilst the strong man essentially revoked the image of the ‘ethereal’ anorectic, his persistent aversion to fat, in addition to the visual focus placed upon his nude physique, merely intensified fears of aesthetic (ab)normality. As an extended part of these physical fixations, a relative hierarchy emerged in which men relentlessly compared their own bodily dimensions with those of their peers. This sense of competitive comparison is, of course, iconic anorexic behaviour itself. The man who could not sufficiently measure up, or adequately slim down, had to find some means of intensifying his body-crafting game.

Throughout the nineteenth century, exercise was widely prefigured as ‘the panacea which will destroy many of the terrible ills “which flesh is heir to”’. However, as an author writing in an 1879 edition of a popular journal the Friendly Companion observed: ‘there should be a reasonable limit to all our exercise, whether physical or mental. A proper amount of grinding will put a good edge to a tool; but too much grinding will grind it all away’.

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414 Friendly Companion, 52 (1 April 1879), p.90.
reference to ‘grinding’ provides us with a connection to the epoch’s long-lived ‘chisel’ rhetoric. The art of physically ‘sculpting’ the body could, as we shall discover, be taken too far.

George Henry Lewes was one critic who was aware of the dangers resulting from energetic excess: ‘exercise, though freely prescribed, requires great discrimination in its prescription’, he stated. ‘No one thinks of recommending more beef than digestion can control; but most people recommend exercise as if it were in itself so excellent a thing that you could not go wrong in its indulgence’. That many men did ‘go wrong’ in their personal indulgence of exercise is clear. By the end of the century, the dangers implicit in excessive strains of physical activity had become both culturally pervasive and attacked satirically.

The turn-of-the-century satirical press – which only a few years earlier had proclaimed in pithy verse, ‘in exercise, assert the wise,/ There often lies a cure for ills’ – was suddenly renouncing athletic indulgence on account of its relations to ill-health:

All those who cycle, those who walk, or climb the mountains tall,
And those who wander round the links in search of the golf ball,
Come listen to the teaching of the very newest cult
Which says these habits should be curbed, less injury result.
You really mustn’t take a walk if you can go by train,
Or use the various golf clubs with all your might and main;
You mustn’t run, you mustn’t ride – in fact, you must keep still
If you would keep your body free from every kind of ill.

* * *

For “Truth” – which cannot lie – has said in words which are delicious,
That exercise is bad for one, if not, indeed, pernicious.

A former ‘cure’ of all ‘the ills that flesh was air to’, (excessive) exercise was increasingly linked to physical and mental malaise. Of course, there was, and still is, some truth in this newfound conception. As Morgan explains, ‘for many men with body image disorders, exercise is intrinsically tethered to their underlying illness’.

The potentially anorexic Lord Byron’s correspondence is scattered with references to his undertaking of ‘violent’ exercise. Likewise, Banting rowed; Lewis Carroll power-walked;

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418 Morgan, *The Invisible Man*, p.86.
419 ‘I am here boxing in a Turkish pelise to prevent obesity’, (to John Hobhouse, 30 August 1811, *Letters and Journals*, ed. Marchand, ii, p.84). ‘I fence & box & swim & run a good deal to keep me in exercise & get me to sleep[...]. You ask after my health, I am in tolerable leanness, which I promote by exercise & abstinence’, (to Augusta Leigh, 9 September 1811, in *Letters and Journals*, ed. Marchand, ii, p.94).
and Barrie, in the words of one recent biographer, ‘would often exercise himself until he collapsed’. Early advocates of the era’s muscular Christianity movement, according to Bruce Hayley, found ‘constant, strenuous exercise so exhilarating that [they] soon felt in danger of succumbing wholly to it, of indulging in it as strong drink’. Whilst this last reference to the dangers of indulgence is akin to the religious zeal implicit in muscular Christianity itself, it nevertheless imparts a proclivity on the part of the muscular Christian to take bodily discipline too far. As Lewes confirmed, ‘all over-stimulation which is continuous must sooner or later be fatal: [a] man may “train” himself into fever and exhaustion, as he may stimulate his brain into madness or apathy.’ Ironically, it was only after years of encouraging regular (if not ‘continuous’) exercise that these later fears regarding energetic excess emerged.

Like contemporary restrictive eating tenets, exercise was encouraged among the period’s children from a very young age. In 1891, for instance, Morrell Mackenzie exclaimed: ‘How are children to be made “good animals”? By the fullest development of their bodily powers. How is this development to be compassed ... By exercise, by exercise, and yet again by exercise’. According to Mackenzie, even the new-born infant’s ‘physiological craving for movement show[ed] itself with the unrestrained freedom of the natural animal’. If a ‘healthy baby’ were allowed to have ‘free play of its limbs’, he stated, ‘it will go through a series of improvised acrobatic performances, twisting and turning [its body] into knots that might excite the envy of a professional “contortionist”’. It was, Mackenzie concluded, ‘an excellent plan to give an infant perfect muscular freedom for some time every day’; the child should, in short, ‘be allowed to kick and throw itself about to its heart’s content’. The 1891 publication date of this text suggests that Mackenzie’s views on exercise for children were most probably linked to the wider emergence of physical culture movements in the late 1880s and early 90s. Mackenzie’s specific focus upon the child figure is possibly representative of a more general preoccupation with children’s health at the end of the century. As Janet Golden, Richard Chaney, *Hide and Seek*, p.32.

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420 Chaney, *Hide and Seek*, p.32.
422 Lewes, ‘Training In Relation To Health’, p.223.
424 Ibid. p.450.
425 A large part of the physical culture movement involved ‘improving’ British individuals from a very young age. Boy Scout Associations and Military cadet colleges, for instance, were set up in reaction to fears that the urban populace of Victorian culture were deteriorating in physical health. See, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.4.
Meckel and Heather Prescott suggest, child-centred dietary cures, coupled with physical health regimens, found a concrete ‘niche’ in late-century medical marketplaces. The scientific developments in nutrition, as well as the addition of physical education to a child’s schooling career, were regarded by health reformers as means of alleviating the debilitating effects of urban living. By centring movements for national efficiency on the physical well-being of the era’s youth, social authorities could potentially secure the physical proficiency of Britain’s future.

J. M. Watson, author of an 1883 Public Health Report, similarly endorsed the progressive introduction of physical activity among small children: ‘From two to seven years of age is the children’s germ-time of health, the parents’ golden opportunity’, he claimed. ‘My brief admonition to them’, Watson went on, ‘is [...to] set apart a suitable place in the house, the barn, an out-building, or out of doors under a spreading tree, for childish games and physical training, both with and without apparatus’. There should likewise be ‘no attempt to suppress the animal energy and untamed enjoyment of the vigorous child’. Rather, ‘in advancing youth and throughout the schooling period, physical sports and games [...] should receive encouragement and support’. Once again, then, the debilitating effects produced upon the child’s body through urban living are shunned in favour of (often excessive) outdoor physicality. The cramped confines of overcrowded urban spaces are rejected in favour of free movement through spacious ‘outbuildings’, ‘barns’ and ‘spreading trees’. Despite this conceptual shift from urban overcrowding to rural (and physical) freedom, the physicality embodied through Watson’s doctrines is still bound to mechanical urbanity. ‘The primary office of school calisthenics’, Watson concluded, was ‘to beautify the body by pleasurable exercises, which [would] develop, regulate, and perfect its parts’. This last reference to the perfection of ‘parts’ creates a mechanical image of anorectic ‘discorporation’: it arbitrarily breaks corporeal focus down into more appropriately sized proportions. The body ‘parts’ to be industrially ‘perfected’ through exercise would, presumably, be those which were malnourished and devoid of requisite strength, or, in the bodies of the more wealthy classes, those which were impeded by an unhealthy tendency to store surplus fat.

In a book on British Sports and Pastimes (1868), edited by Anthony Trollope, this vision of corporeal ‘mechanics’ was similarly applied to the collective body of the period’s Oxford and Cambridge rowing teams:

428 Ibid. p.135-6.
429 Ibid. p.132.
the captain of a University [rowing] crew is a man who has to put together a
compound Frankenstein an amount of time and attention which would
almost entitle him to preside over an episcopal synod.\footnote{British Sports and Pastimes, ed. by Anthony Trollope (London: Virtue & Co., 1868), p.241.}

By referring to this rowing ‘machine’ as a ‘compound Frankenstein’, the author implies that a
ferocious monstrosity propels the conglomerate ‘creature’ to succeed in its sporting feats. Of
course, following such persistent ferocity, partial malfunctioning or ‘getting out of order’ was
very likely to ensue.

As this writer went on, ‘one great cause’ of the rowing ‘injuries’ sometimes resulting
from University boat races was ‘the absurd theory of training’. The training doctrine adopted,
this writer imagined, was not dissimilar ‘from that current amongst prize-fighters’. For a prize-
fighter it ‘was a great thing to cut off his liquor, to sweat down his superfluous fat, and to put
him on a simple diet’. However, ‘when University lads were trained on the same principles, it
was something like training a two-year-old in the same fashion as an aged horse’. University
crews had formerly ‘been accustomed to a varied diet, and were suddenly reduced to great
masses of raw beef steak, of which it was a point of honour to swallow as much as possible,
with the natural consequences of boils, indigestions, and various other inconveniences’.
Furthermore, ‘it was held that they must be sweated till they had lost perhaps a stone in
weight, and a man was proud of the number of pounds of which he could get rid’. There was ‘a
theory about “internal fat“, which was supposed somehow or other to fill up a man’s inside,
and impede the action of his other organs’. It was thought, the author concluded,

\begin{quote}
that this fat might be melted down whilst the muscles were strengthened by
steady exercise. I am no physiologist, but I imagine that the human frame
has a more delicate and complex organisation than this mechanical theory
implies, and that you can’t safely melt bits of it out, any more than you can
cut bits out, without danger of deranging the other organs.\footnote{Ibid. pp.254-55.}
\end{quote}

This article is critically revealing on various counts. Through its allusions to ‘sweating’, and,
more importantly, ‘simple diet’, it exemplifies that physical regimes were often adopted in
order to aid diet-centred programs of weight loss. As one 1864 writer aptly put it, ‘fat is
nothing more than fuel food and it is consumed in proportion to the strain we put upon the
lungs’.\(^{432}\) This ‘proportionate’ input/output equation confirms that the mathematically inclined conversion of food/fuel to energy was also linked to the energetic expenditure of excess. Moreover, the article’s reference to ‘cutting out’ man’s internal adiposity returns us to the formerly discussed concepts of chisel-based lipo-surgery.

In the Lewes article quoted earlier, such surgical body-sculpting was mentioned in reference to one particular prize-fighter who went by the name of Heenan. Citing ‘some remarks copied from the *Lancet* on the condition of Heenan’, Lewes addressed the fact that the boxer’s body was ‘as little encumbered with fat as if [it] had been cleaned by the scalpel’. The fact that Heenan’s body has been ‘cleaned’ in such a way potentially implies how unnatural, polluting and contaminating a boxer’s body fat was alleged to be. Alternatively, such instrumental cleansing could denote just how rudimentary, regimental and nonsensical the excessive strains of training regimes had become. With all “this splendid development”, claimed the *Lancet*,

> “it was evident that Heenan had received a shock from which his system was only slowly recovering. [...] It seems to us highly probable that his training had been too prolonged and too severe. [...] While exercise, properly so called, tends to development and health, excessive exertion produces debility and decay”.\(^ {433}\)

This exercise-induced vision of ‘debility and decay’ replicates the physical failing of the university rowers who, ‘reduced in weight till they [were] in the lowest tone of health, [...] broke down immediately afterwards’.\(^ {434}\) The concept of ‘breaking down’ – be it mechanically, physically, or metaphorically – correlates to anorectic notions of fatty ‘degeneration’. The corporeal decomposing (or the ‘breaking down’ of fatty tissue) which ensues from energetic excess is, in itself, linked to the specifically anorectic desire to dematerialise.

One sport which particularly well encapsulates this dematerialisation is aerial gymnastics. The acrobat who supernaturally ‘flies’ through the air theoretically transcends the physical limits which define his corporeality. In the next part of this chapter, I will begin to examine how such physical transcendence can be related to anorectic discourses, and weightless fantasies of flight.

(i.) High Flying: The Trapeze Artist’s Weightless Fantasies of Flight

‘Jules Leotard’, the most celebrated gymnast of the era’s popular aerialists, ‘was a spending specimen of manly beauty’, wrote an author in *Chambers’ Journal* in 1891. He had ‘a perfect

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\(^{432}\) ‘Our Once-Fat Friend’, p.698.

\(^{433}\) Lewes, ‘Training In Relation To Health’, pp.222-23.

\(^{434}\) *British Sports and Pastimes*, pp.254-55.
figure united to a strikingly handsome face’, and his 1861 sporting début ‘was a veritable triumph’. Following Leotard’s cultural inauguration the ‘flying trapeze became the rage, and a whole host of flying trapezists appeared at music halls’.\textsuperscript{435} As we saw in the previous chapter, this ‘mechanical athlete’, was a man who, much to Lewis Carroll’s delight, effectively encompassed the idea of incorporeal ‘mechanics’. Whilst Leotard possessed the psychic ‘steel’ to condition his body for flight, the act of ‘flying’, in itself, presumably required the decomposition of bulky materiality. A reviewer of Leotard’s New York performance of 1868 was quick to spotlight the contrasts imbedded within such contradictory mechanisms. In an article printed in the \textit{New York Clipper}, it was noted that Leotard’s implicitly heavy ‘iron frame’ contrasted with the effortless motion which permitted him to ‘sway through the air backwards and forwards [...] as lightly as a bird’.\textsuperscript{436} This bird-like buoyancy was also noted by various other critics. The Alhambra theatre in London, for instance, described Leotard as resembling ‘a tropical bird leaping from branch to branch, leaving in the dazzled eyes of the spectators a brilliant but confused impression of its bright plumage’.\textsuperscript{437} This author’s reference to the ‘confused impression’ created by Leotard stresses the element of ‘fantasy’ embodied in the act of flying: the success of the aerialist’s specular feats was dependent upon the audience’s suspension of disbelief.

That fantasies of flight had long gripped cultural imaginations is made clear in the following extract taken from an 1852 edition of the \textit{New Monthly Magazine}:

> History has handed down to us a variety of facts which prove that, from the earliest ages, a desire has been entertained to mount into the skies. Man, by nature restless, [...] could not regard without envy the birds who possessed alone the empire of the air.\textsuperscript{438}

Of course nineteenth-century culture was suffused with its own empire of bird enviers. The era’s fascination with aerial gymnasts, such as Leotard, confirmed the mesmeric sway visions of weightlessness held. Although flight fantasies were not devoid of caution – if ‘[Leotard] were all feathers and wirework’, stated one critic, ‘it would be impossible for this man to throw himself about with more apparent recklessness’\textsuperscript{439} – it was, in fact, the daring ‘recklessness’ implicit in the act of flying which helped to secure the aerialist’s magnetic pull.

Aerial gymnastics were made all the more appealing by the fact that they hovered tantalisingly above the borders which fused the real and the imaginary. As the Alhambra

\textsuperscript{436} \textit{New York Clipper} (7 November 1868). Qt’d. in Helen Stoddart, \textit{Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.169, [emphasis mine].
\textsuperscript{437} Qt’d. in George Speaight, \textit{A History of the Circus} (London, Tantivy Press, 1980), p.73.
theatre reviewer had noted, Leotard simultaneously ‘dazzled’ and ‘confused’: terms which accentuate the fusion of awe with dubious credibility. Whilst the trapeze artist or the aerial gymnast did not really ‘fly’, the specular effects produced on his body did gratify such visions of weightless floating: ‘He’d fly through the air with the greatest of ease’, began the refrain to George Leybourne’s famous musical hall number, ‘That daring young man on the flying trapeze’.  

In the words of Ernest Low, the acrobatic craze which took Victorian popular culture by storm was further reiterated:

*we never seem to get tired of watching the evolutions of acrobats; there is a magnetic influence in feats demanding nerve and agility which is well-nigh perennial; it appeals to those of all classes and all ages, to the horny-handed son of toil as well as the man about town; alike to the middle-aged paterfamilias and his boisterous boys and girls home for the holidays.*  

Of course, the above mentioned ‘evolutions’ map the feats of the aerial gymnast onto scientific discourses concerning the progression of humanity. Although, as Peta Tait suggests, ‘mid-air aerial bodies [were] frequently described […] as leaving an impression of insubstantiality’, – in both a figurative and literal sense – the real ‘substance’ of aerial performance came from ‘intense physical training’; an ‘intensity’ which (during a time when ‘athletic prowess’ was acquiring increasing importance for manly ideals) ensured that the body of the male gymnast was understood to be demonstrating Darwinian prowess and surviving as ‘the fittest’. As Low’s statement implies, the interest in acrobats and aerialists not only bridged the gap between imaginative fantasy and scientific reality, but also spanned class divisions and barriers of age and gender. Throughout Low’s statement, acrobatics are seen as appealing largely to boys and men. When the interest of the female sex is glossed, it is only in the form of young ‘girls’, who have presumably yet to develop any traces of femininity and are, in fact, ‘boisterous’. Why gymnastics and acrobatics might have been so appealing to males of all classes and ages is a question with no conclusive answer. However, the daring, courage, muscular and mental fortitude required to condition the body of the acrobat were certainly ideals cherished among the panorama of Victorian manly attributes.

Nineteenth-century commentary on acrobatics also repeatedly focussed upon the appealingly ‘youthful’ quality implicit in aerial athleticism. Throughout the period of concern, the slender body of the male sportsman became an aesthetic ideal for a variety of individuals,

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441 Ernest W. Low, ‘Acrobats And How They Are Trained’, *Strand Magazine*, 10 (July 1895), pp.728-735, (p.728).
including ‘the horny-handed son of toil’, as well as the middle-class ‘man about town’. Its resemblance to the youthful body was no coincidence since sports were most often pursued by boys (of all classes), university athletes and young men. Although a middle-aged man, ‘weighing but a trifle above fourteen stone’, was, in the words of William Aytoun, ‘not qualified to exhibit himself as a dancer on the tight rope, or to [...] enter himself as a competitor for the long race at a Highland meeting’, he was, suggested Aytoun, equally not to ‘be expected to rival Leotard, or to pit [himself] in athletic contests against hairy-houghed Donald of the Isles’. Nonetheless, whilst ageing town men were not ‘expected’ to rival the feats of svelte athletes, such as Leotard, there was an equally appealing air surrounding the notion that, “the corpulence of the middle-aged can be reduced by throwing a somersault”.

The mid-air twisting and tumbling of a gymnast was, in other words, one potential means of recapturing the slight outlines of youth – not literally, of course, but on a level intimately close to fantasy.

Thus, whilst, as Dave Day has suggested, athleticism was never to be ranked among the ‘serious pursuits’ that more mature individuals might engage in, there was persistent cultural resistance to the idea that older men should be excluded from physically focussed pastimes. Of course, escapist flight – both fictional and gymnastic – could, as we saw in the case of Barrie, keep a man’s youth unconsciously afloat. In fact, sport, in general, often became a way of recapturing the slender contours of one’s lost youth. As Trollope’s book on *British Sports* suggested, ‘it is undoubtedly a fact that [sports] have a most serious influence on the lives of a vast proportion of Englishmen of the upper and middle classes. It is almost rare to find a man under forty who is not a votary of one of them; – and among most men over forty

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443 One might recall Lewis Carroll’s desire for his one male protagonist to be ‘light and active – with the figure of one of the little acrobats one sees at the circus’. See, to Mr Furniss, 1 September 1887, in Collingwood, *Life and Letters*, p.261.

444 For more on sport and class see, Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport* (London: St Martin’s Press, 2004). Huggins argues that Victorian Sports were generally ‘cross-class’: few, if any, were confined to one segment of society. Sporting participation and spectating ‘intersected with class in complex ways’, (p.19). ‘Few Sports’, claims Huggins, ‘were purely amateur, purely middle class or purely working class in active membership’, (p.20). Workers were encouraged to participate in sporting activity on the ‘muscular Christian’ basis that ‘a healthier workforce with a higher morale and sporting identity would be more productive and efficient’ – avoiding the temptations of drink and gambling. (p.36). Meanwhile, ‘working class urban children played football through winter and summer in streets and yards, making goals from lampposts and coats’, (p.48).


Chapter 3: Sporting Slenderness

the passion for them does not easily die out.’ Contrary to Aytoun’s assertions, then, ageing men were encouraged to involve themselves in a variety of sporting activities: ‘No matter though your vision’s dim,/ Your face both seamed and rutty’, began one poet,

Your nose as red as Bardolph’s was,
Your figure fat as putty,
Come, pull yourself together, man,
Be plucky! Look alive!
And play at Cricket with the boys,
Though you are Forty-five.

Much like cricket – a sport which, in the words of Carol Mavor, metaphorically ‘hails the miniature through the musical winged insect with which it shares its name’– aerial gymnastics also lent themselves to the minute and the miniscule. As an All the Year Round spectator of one particular trapeze act observed:

On the stage, as we enter[ed] [the music hall], Tiny Topsy-turvydom [was] in full swing. A Lilliputian trapeze occupie[d] the centre, and from it a five-year old morsel of humanity [was] hanging by its heels, wafting graceful kisses to an enraptured audience; whilst a yet smaller morsel – just turned three–lean[t] with folded arms against the proscenium, eagerly calculating the number of tricks his elder brother ha[d] yet to go through before he [was] privileged, in his turn, to risk his tiny neck.

The repetitive stress placed on the word ‘tiny’ here underscores the gymnasts’ diminutive statures. These particular boys are ‘morsels’ of humanity, ready to be devoured by the gargantuan audience who sit before them. The fact that these children are extremely young enhances the impossibility of flight. Likewise, the extract’s child-centred reference to the show’s ‘Lilliputian’ equipment also emphasises the fluidity which merged flight and fantasy. Aerialists seemed to relentlessly invite a submission to one’s imaginative impulses.

Yet, in spite of all this imaginative escapism, the tangibility of the gymnast’s weightiness was a preoccupation which firmly grounded him in reality. The trapeze artist’s weighty solidity could become detrimental to his success. In an 1865 story entitled ‘Muscular Society’, Blanc-Bec provided his readers with further insight into the vigour of the gymnast’s

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448 British Sports and Pastimes, pp.4-5. Also, see Huggins, Victorians and Sport, pp.21-32. Elitist sports – yachting, shooting, hunting – helped foster upper-class identity and unity. Likewise, university field sports generally retained an exclusive following among upper-class undergraduates.
450 Mavor, Reading Boyishly, p.231. Although Mavor’s comparison seems outlandish, if one considers the spectator side of cricket, an individual viewing a team of cricketers on the green from a distance, might find the insect-like comparison more convincing.
training grounds. In the opening scene to the narrative, Freddy, Bec’s weight-conscious protagonist, leads the story’s narrator into a room in which there ‘hung ladders, trapezes, and incomprehensible ropes of all sizes and lengths’. At the ‘further end’ of this room, notes the narrator, there ‘were single and parallel bars, many-handed machines for pulling at, and all the [other] dreadful machinery of gymnastics’. The scene in the centre of the room ‘was equally striking, not to say alarming. Six couples of fencers, masked and padded, were struggling in frantic desperation, advancing, retreating, lunging, stamping and shouting as though possessed’.452 The ‘frantic desperation’ of these gymnasts, in combination with their appearing ‘possessed’, suggests that gymnastic training could induce psychic turmoil. Their constant movement – ‘advancing, retreating, lunging, stamping’ – indicates an equally neurotic strain of physical excess. Further illuminating this picture of body-centred disorder, the first thing Freddy does as he enters the training grounds is ‘to seat himself in one scale of a weighing-machine, and gravely to pile up weights on the other’. The result of ‘this operation’, the narrator remarks, ‘seemed to afford [Freddy] much concern, for his countenance fell considerably’.

“This is serious,” said he.

“What is?” I asked; for the scale only showed 10st. 4.lbs. I noticed, too, that he was as lean as a greyhound, and the idea of his being a victim to some frightful form of atrophy crossed my mind.

“I’ve gained two pounds and a half since last Wednesday,” said he. “I see I must give up dining out”.

As this anecdote suggests, the gymnast’s concern with weight gain was a constant source of stress. However, that his fears of gaining weight were both redundant and irrational is implicit in the narrator’s observations that Freddy was already ‘as lean as a greyhound’, recalling the slight contours of one who has suffered from ‘some frightful form of atrophy’. Nonetheless, for Freddy, exercise alone is no longer a sufficient means of keeping his air-bound body in check; the imperative clause, ‘I must give up dining’ parallels the anorectic’s autonomous dictates to self-starve. Of course, Freddy’s ‘dining’ could be read in two ways: dining, as in eating dinner, or dining, as in ‘dining out’ (and all the unnecessary extravaganza that comes with it). Either way, the success of Freddy’s gymnastic training is dependent upon the combination of a diminution in the consumption of food, as well as corporeal exertion. Rather than ingesting food, the objective motive of the gymnast was, apparently, to internally consume one’s own superfluous fat instead.

453 Ibid. p.323.
Following the shock resulting from his increase in weight, Freddy begins to ‘cook’ himself thin. Increasing the level of intensity involved in his various training exercises, Freddy is, by the end of his regime, ‘what is precisely termed “bathed in perspiration,”’ and presented the appearance of having been parboiled’. He himself ‘admitted that he was “a little baked”’, notes the narrator, ‘and left me to take a cold douche bath (the thermometer being at 34°) as being the most pleasant finish to the afternoon’. This intermingling of culinary terminology – ‘parboiled’, ‘a little baked’ – metaphorically accentuates the concept of an anorectically inclined consumption of self. The heat-induced ‘cooking’ of one’s own flesh to the point of melting, dissolving, evaporating (or any other state of physical reduction) reciprocates the era’s more general desire to melt the fat man’s ‘too, too solid flesh’.

Interestingly, this heat-induced method of weight reduction was, as we shall discover, also employed by many of the era’s finest jockeys. Of course, the horseman and the gymnast have a lot in common: both sports have roots in circus performance, and both incorporate a desire to weightlessly fly – be it across the race track or through the air. In fact, according to the Anthony Trollope volume on British Sports, ‘the motion [of horse racing], as easy as it was swift, seemed more like flying through the air than riding on the earth’. The aerial dimensions of equestrian sports were made further apparent in an 1872 article printed in All the Year Round. Quoting an anonymous Parisian Critic, the article stated:

“Animated, light, and graceful, the English horseman seduces and enchants us by his elegant agility. He absolutely sports with the rules of statics, and gravity has no central point for him. Sometimes like an aerial being you would suppose him ready to take an easy flight. Sometimes stooping over the arena he remains suspended in space, a prodigy of equilibrium.”

Much like the gymnast then, the horse racer appeals to the individual’s imaginative impulses. He ‘seduces and enchants’, instantaneously creating the illusion that he has the power to defy the laws of ‘gravity’ and ‘take an easy flight’. On account of this ability to ‘suspend’ himself in ‘space’, the horseman, like the gymnast, appears to transcend physicality: he is a ‘prodigy’, a sensational star capable of creating cultural furore.

454 Ibid. p.326.
455 A similar culinary rhetoric was glossed by Harry Andrews. Designating a man’s ‘watch, his weighing-machine, and his looking-glass’ as three essential monitory tools to a man’s fitness, Andrews noted that ‘If the glass showed any dullness or a dead-codfish look, it is certain he is out of condition, stale, or overdone’. Training for Athletics and General Health [1903] (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p.55.
456 The citation of Hamlet’s fleshly burdens in relation to fears of fat was common in nineteenth-century periodical culture. Two instances include, ‘The Art of Unfattening’, p.329; and ‘Too Solid Flesh,’ Bow Bells, 30:379 (5 April 1895), p.347.
457 Equestrian ‘tricks,’ shows and races were common in early nineteenth-century circus settings.
458 British Sports and Pastimes, p.27.
459 ‘Andrew Ducrow’, All the Year Round, 7:166 (3 Feb 1872), pp 224-229, (p.223).
Andrew Ducrow, the era’s “Colossus of equestrians”, and eventual proprietor of Astley’s Amphitheatre in London, was one particular artist whose speed and stamina on horseback accentuated this image of corporeal transcendence. Much like Leotard, Ducrow was admired on account of both his athletic and aesthetic superiority. According to one writer in the *Mirror*, ‘he looked nothing less than a descended god – Phaeton in his wind-borne chariot, or Phoebus on his throne of light!’ Although Ducrow is here presented as a being of ‘colossal’, ‘godly’ magnitude, his physicality is associated with weightless evanescence. His corporeality is made intangible through its associations with images of wind and light. The *New Monthly Magazine* similarly commented upon Ducrow’s elusive airiness. Ducrow’s act, in itself, could ‘send one’s spirits careering among the stars’. At ‘a wave of his own wand’, this reviewer went on,

this seeming Harlequin, moving round in his endless path, like the wind round the “earth globose” transform[ed] himself into a symbol of that wind itself, and flo[w] before us like a winged Zephyr pursuing, with the speed of light, the invisible Flora of whom he [was] enamoured.

Here, the physical intangibility glossed through images of ‘wind’ and ‘light’ is made further explicit: as an abstract ‘symbol of the wind’, Ducrow is further removed from concrete corporeality. Allusions to magic ‘wands’, ‘seeming’ and ‘invisibility’ all accentuate the formerly discussed aesthetic fusions of the real and the imaginary. As the awestruck *Mirror* critic observed:

The mingled grace and gusto of [Ducrow’s] movements as he flew after the flying object of his fairy love – the lightning speed to which he urged the motion of his steed – the miraculous skill with which he took advantage of the centrifugal and centripetal forces that were counteracting each other, to give his course the semblance of flight – his whole frame literally hanging pendent in the supporting air; all this must have been duly admired and wondered at; and even then it was one of those cases [...] in which “seeing is not believing”.

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460 Astley’s Amphitheatre was established by Philip Astley, an ex-cavalry man who initially set up a London-based Riding School in 1768, teaching in the morning, and performing equestrian tricks in the afternoon. After a fire which burned his ‘riding school’ to the ground, Astley opened his ‘Royal Amphitheatre’ in 1795 – which also burned down a few years later. In 1804, the theatre was rebuilt, and in 1824, the management was taken over by Andrew Ducrow who made equestrian dramas and trick riding extremely popular. See Henry Benjamin Wheatley and Peter Cunningham, *London Past and Present: Its History Associations, and Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.76; and Sarah Hudston, *Victorian Theatricals: From Menageries to Melodrama* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p.82.


Here, Ducrow’s ‘semblance of flight’ is constantly inflected with phrases which oscillate between certainty and uncertainty, reality and unreality. The technical specificity of terms such as ‘lightning speed’, ‘centrifugal and centripetal’ create the impression of scientific certainty; an impression which is undoubtedly bolstered by the author’s description of Ducrow ‘literally hanging pendent in the supporting air’. However, the extract’s references to ‘fairy love’, ‘miracles’ and visual ‘semblance’ appear to undermine the concrete tangibility of the act. The writer of this particular article finished by suggesting that the ‘lightning speed’ of Ducrow’s ‘mad flight’ could not ‘give you time to satisfy yourself that [he was] a thing of mere mortal mould’.463 His sporting prowess, then, if this author’s observations are anything to go by, appeared to surpass the physical limits which defined human mortality.

The ‘superhuman’ aura which fused physical excess with corporeal incredibility also filtered into clinical discourses of anorexia nervosa. As William Gull suggested, the combination of a desire to be excessively physical despite the rapid diminishing of fleshly substance was ‘curiously’ remarkable. ‘It is curious to note’, writes Gull, ‘the persistent wish to be on the move, though the emaciation [is] so great and the nutritive functions at an extreme ebb’.464 Samuel Fenwick found the paradox all the more beguiling: ‘There is no symptom that seems so inexplicable’, he proclaimed, ‘as the constant activity the [anorexic patient] exhibit[s]’.465

One particularly notorious sportsman whose neuroses with physical excess and body weight parallel these clinical findings was Frederick James Archer, the Victorian era’s most renowned jockey. Just like the patients discussed by Fenwick and Gull, ‘there was an incessant call on [Fred’s] nervous energy’, and he ‘persisted in lowering himself to weights almost incredible, considering his height and strength’.466 Once again, the rhetoric of incredulity and incredibility is held in tension with extreme feats of sporting strength and stamina. The following section of this chapter will further examine how Archer ruthlessly pushed himself to corporeal limits (and beyond). It will explore how his anorexic drive and steely determination to win enabled him to take outdoor horseracing to non-human heights. However, as shall soon become clear, despite such superhuman feats, Archer was ultimately racing against the one thing that he could never beat: himself. As a victim of the epoch’s competitive fatalism, Archer physically embodied the destructive side-effects which developed through the highly competitive environment of weight-conscious sport. Training to achieve ‘vigour and moderate

463 ‘The Late Andrew Ducrow’, p.365.
skill’ was, according to one writer in the Lancet, perfectly ‘safe’; but training to achieve records was, as Archer discovered, both dangerous and even fatal to health.

(ii.) From ‘Tinman’ to Thinman: Fred Archer’s Equestrian Anoretics

Fred Archer was a sportsman who, like Leotard, created extensive cultural euphoria. His eminence was ‘felt far beyond the narrow confines of racing’ and his ‘name was gradually noised abroad until it became a household word’. With a ‘mania for winning [which] was simply insatiable’ and having ‘imbibed a love of racing with his mother’s milk’, Archer’s flighty pre-eminence helped accentuate the ‘superhuman energy’ which oozed from his being. From ‘quite a baby’, a writer in Bell’s Life remarked, this enthusiastic ‘feather-weight’ had ‘learned to go like a bird across country’. Devoid of the weightlessness his ‘wings’ provided him with, Archer might not have been able to soar to such extravagant heights of jockey stardom. Proving testimony to Archer’s ‘flighty’ fame, the Saturday Review announced in 1886 that, ‘the public followed his star with a kind of superstitious attachment’. There was, indeed, ‘something childish about the craze’. Whether Archer’s enthralled fans admired him for his confounding weightlessness (or merely for his miraculous aptitude to win) is unclear, but either way, like Leotard and the period’s other aerial gymnasts, he seemed to have a mesmeric hold over them. Writing in Time, Alfred Allison went on to note how Archer’s admirers had soon christened him ‘the “Tinman,” the “Wonder”’, thereby perpetuating the boyish myth which surrounded his ‘superhuman’ persona.

As the appellation ‘Tin-man’ – with its cold, metallic, materialistic associations – suggests, Archer was another nineteenth-century male whose person meshed closely with the idea of (in)corporeal mechanics. Archer’s love of money – ‘tin’ – created the picture of a man defined by material fortune and mercenary living. However, Archer was also a malnourished man, starving amidst plenty. Significant for the purposes of this thesis, eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, often emerge from wealthy communities. When surrounded by plenty, food refusal becomes a choice: the autonomous decision to ingest food (or not) becomes one means of remoulding the body. In light of this, the label ‘Tinman’, in symbolic terms, situates

467 Lancet (11 April 1903).
468 Michael Tanner & Gerry Cranham, Great Jockeys of the Flat (Enfield: Guinness, 1992), p.78.
470 Ibid. p.646.
471 Ibid. p.642.
Archer’s body alongside the (implicitly malleable/metallic) body of Ruskinian philosophy: you must ‘chisel a boy into shape, as you would [...] a piece of bronze’. Yet, unlike the era’s greedy youths, or the stodge-prone boys of J. M. Barrie – who were in need of such ‘chiselling’ – Archer, with his ‘lithe and beautifully proportioned figure’, ‘fitted faultlessly’, not to his tailored tree, but to his ‘irreproachable breeches’.

Nevertheless, in Archer’s world, ‘fitting’ to the correct ‘shape’ was far less important than figuring the correct ‘weight’ on the scales. In the words of Country Life’s burly jockey-trainer, Mr Burnish: “I’ll have you the right weight, my lad, if I have to drag out every tooth in your head, stopping an’ all”.

Unlike this article’s ‘ravenous-looking Fat-Head’ who, according to Burnish, “must a bin breakfastin’”, Archer, led by jockey-school-proprietor Mat Dawson’s macerating rule, had learnt ‘from childhood’ to keep ‘his eyes [...] open and his mouth shut’. Again, not dissimilar from Barrie’s Peter Pan, Dawson, Archer’s own pseudo-dietician, ‘had a little army of [...] boys completely under control’. Yet, whilst Peter would occasionally permit his boys to ‘stodge’, Dawson’s regime was unrelenting.

Under Dawson’s weight-watching eye, Archer was brought up on a diet consisting of very little but ‘fresh air’. In Archer’s case, the concern was not so much that he was taking physical training too far, but that he was letting the competitiveness of the sporting world infect his person to fatalistic extremes. Rather than pushing his body to the limits aerobically, he pushed it to the limits in a psychic sense, draining both his corporeal and mental stability through anorexic behaviour. In the words of the elusive ‘E.S.’: ‘No Christian martyr ever exercised more self-denial than [...] he who was popularly known as “The Tinman.” I knew him somewhat intimately, and seldom saw him eat anything’. Apparently, ‘a cup of tea’ (which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is, as a drink free of calories, in itself is ascetic) the occasional ‘bunch of grapes’, (notably fat-free) or ‘a single piece of dry toast’, (providing virtually no calorific value whatsoever) ‘would suffice him as [...] nutriment for the day’.

As one might expect, in light of such shocking nutritional privations, Archer was, throughout his youth, ‘frail, nervous, and delicate’. However, as he matured in years and his body’s urges became both more prominent and demanding – particularly when it came to refusing Mrs Dawson’s homemade jams and cakes – maintaining such frail delicacy was difficult. As ‘E.S.’

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477 Ruskin, Sesame and Lilies, p.166.
478 Bosvile, ‘Frederick Archer’, p.42.
480 ‘Celebrities at Home’, p.10, [emphasis mine].
482 Allison, ‘Fred Archer’, p.647.
pointed out: ‘It is when the “twenties” are reached that the critical question has [to be] asked, “Can I do 7st. 7lb, or not?”’ In ‘many instances’, ‘E.S.’ concluded, ‘this question has to be answered in the negative’. But for Fred Archer, the steely-willed ‘Tinman’ whose forte was victory, answering ‘no’ to the self-imposed question, “Can I do 7st. 7lb?” was not an option.

With anorectic determination, Archer embarked upon a ‘relentless pursuit of excessive thinness’; waging ‘war against [his] flesh.’ However, despite his ‘superhuman’ bent, Archer, in the words of Alfred Alison, proved to be no match for the ‘great Dame’ in such ‘a bitter struggle with nature’. Although his feats of ‘self-denial [were] marvellous, for when he must have been simply ravenous with hunger’, he would always ‘resist the temptation to eat, adjourn to his library, test his weight on his trusty scales, shake his head at the last obstinate pound which refused to “come off,” and then retire to bed[...] [away from] the savoury smell [of] the kitchen’, Archer found it almost impossible to stay permanently below the ‘ten-stone’ figure which nature had destined him to become.

Unlike many other jockeys who often relied heavily upon physical activity as a means of reducing their weight, Archer suffered from congenital weakness in his feet, and therefore had to opt out of all foot-bound forms of weight-controlling exercise. In the words of Nathaniel Gubbins, “Walk, walk, walk,” appear[ed] to be the method employed by the three W’s’, (the ‘three W’s’ being Fred’s chief racing competitors: Fred Webb, John Watts and Charles Wood) but Archer, ‘his feet being always more or less tender’, could ‘not walk any distance – probably he put in his longest work afoot whilst journeying to and from the paddock at Epsom – and, therefore, had to employ artificial means, such as physic and Turkish baths’. Like many other non-sporting men who wanted to be deemed victor in their fatal combat against ‘fat’, Archer resorted to taking a concoction of toxic potions and pills which, he believed, would melt away his superfluous bulk.

In an 1865 edition of the New Sporting Magazine, one author stressed the impact that the jockey’s notorious sweating and physicking had on the non-sporting sectors of weight-conscious society. The overgrown narrator of this particular article observed:

[At dinner], my obesity was discussed by my companions with as much seriousness as if I had been a jockey going into training for the Derby. [...]
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Tom suggested three great coats and a twenty miles ride every morning, and eight or ten blankets at night. Algernon recommended a toast-and-water diet, and a fifteen miles walk daily in a hilly country. Fitzpatrick thought that a course of hydropathy would meet the exigencies of the case, and strongly advised me to pay a month’s visit to a celebrated water-doctor’s establishment in the neighbourhood. Though each differed as to the modus operandi, all agreed that something must be done, and my unfortunate fatness gave birth to a very strong argument, and sent me to bed feeling convinced that by getting stout I had really committed a very heinous offence against society.493

The offensiveness of this ‘heinous’ crime committed against society, as we have already seen, appears to have shown little abatement in forthcoming years. For instance, in 1905, Dr Yorke-Davies declared: ‘the cure of obesity (Heaven save the mark!) has been the happy hunting-ground of the quack for many years past. During my long professional career, I have known [...] thousands of people whose health has been permanently ruined by [...] charlatans who sell medicines for what they call the “permanent cure” [of corpulence].’494

Archer’s own medicinal ‘mixture’ became the catalytic agent which spurred his death. In the words of Godfrey Bosvile, guzzling insupportable quantities of quick-fix ‘quack physic’ played ‘sad havoc’ with Archer’s ‘constitution’. Although elated at having managed to successfully waste himself to the scale of a ‘Living Skeleton’, Archer had become a skeleton whose vibrancy was short-lived. In a drastic attempt to waste himself to 8st. 5lb – which, according to modern standards, would have given him a Body Mass Index of 17.28 (a figure that would make him categorically underweight)495 – Archer’s physical deterioration got the better of him. Gradually sinking further into the murky depths of despair, ‘Archer’s life’, claims Boswell, ‘was a misery to him’,496 and on 8 November, 1886, ‘the man’s mind gave way, and in the throes of delirium he put an end to his life with a bullet’.497 Interestingly, Archer shot himself through the mouth, and, in doing so, brutally obliterated the orifice which had troubled his fat-phobic-self for much of his racing life.

495 To meet healthy weight criteria today, one needs a BMI of between 18.5 and 25. Whilst Victorian culture was a fundamentally different society with different body types and attitudes towards them, there was an increasing tendency for clinical and social authorities to determine ideal body weight in relation to height. Between 1830 and 50, Belgian Mathematician, Adolphe Quetelet began devising the prototype of today’s Body Mass Indexing system, then referred to as the Quetelet Index.
496 Bosvile, ‘Frederick Archer’, p.45.
Accentuating the disorderly strains of the sporting world, and further adopting an unhealthy, anorectic philosophy – in which the chief goal (namely excessive slenderness) is pursued until ‘the death’ – the following extract taken from the Trollope edition on *British Sports* likewise suggested that the competitive racer should, and would, disregard ‘survival’ as being contingent upon success. ‘A man about to start in a severe race’, the author stated, ‘should have the hearty confident smile which, being translated, means “death or victory”’.498 Such ‘deathly’ exhilaration, which pushed the human body beyond its mortal limits, was not confined to Archer, nor the competitive environment of horseracing. After running ‘four miles on land’, for instance, a man’s heart would, by that time, become totally irreconcilable with his other internal arrangements; it [would] seem to be jumping into his mouth, knocking at his ribs, and swelling as though, like a young cuckoo, it considered all neighbouring organs as intruders to be crowded out.

Aerobic and cardiovascular exercise, according to this source, made a man ‘totally irreconcilable’ with his corporeal functionality. Adopting an anorectic mind set in which body parts were seen as superfluities in need of ‘breaking down’, or functionally impeding, the runner, at least in this case, saw ‘all neighbouring organs as intruders’ to be eliminated. In the same way that the clinical anorexic inhabits the borderland separating life from death, ‘running’ was, apparently, ‘pre-eminent as a means for giving a man a sensation suggestive of sudden death’. Nonetheless, conflicting with such images of extinction and fleshly expiration, the runner revived the formerly discussed visions of Darwinian prowess. He more frequently boasted ‘sheer superiority of lungs or legs’499 than the man who abstained from cardiovascular activity altogether.

In a series of contemporary caricatures of Archer, Fred’s spindly legs and malnourished contours underscored the terminal dangers that non-athletic means of ‘training’ – such as ‘sweating’ and ‘physicking’ – could induce.

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499 Ibid. p.237.
Chapter 3: Sporting Slenderness

Figure 2: Otto Brower, ‘Frederick Archer’, 1878, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Figure 3: Spy, ‘Fred Archer: The Favourite Jockey’, *Vanity Fair* (1881).
Although, as Amanda Murray has suggested, ‘the caricature[s] were not meant to be taken seriously or personally’,\(^{500}\) they pinpointed the fatalism bound to Archer’s character at its most extreme. The message that the oppressive weight-limits of horseracing could be harmful was clear. The first image presents us with a man visually crippled by his slender frame. The curvature of his upper spine on horseback imparts a muscular deficiency so pertinent that it prevents him from carrying upright his own (insubstantial) weight. His posture in the second image reveals the same skeletal ‘stoop’. Archer’s body is one doubled over in pain, an idea enhanced by his disturbing facial expression, an expression which suggests he might have been gasping for his last few breaths of air.

The severity of Archer’s tragic story rekindled the era’s long-subdued fears surrounding the dangers of (as Mr Blackwood had put it in 1864) ‘maceration, as a rule of life’.\(^{501}\) A few weeks after Archer’s death, the *Sporting Times* announced: ‘Let us all hope that by his acts of martyrdom [such] cursed system[s] of wasting may be dispensed with, and if this is so Fred Archer will not have died in vain.’\(^{502}\) However, Archer had merely immortalised the era’s fascination with ascetic excess. In an attempt to keep the embers of his skeletal stardom glowing in the ash, ‘Mr Macleod’, the *Birmingham Owl* announced, had succeeded in resurrecting this once ‘Living Skeleton’ from the nadir of his grave. ‘Macleod’, the paper asserted,

> has added to his already large and varied collection of waxworks, a life size
> model of the late Fred Archer. This figure which, for exactitude and life-like
> grace, is quite a work of art, was on exhibition for the first time last Saturday
> evening, and quite a crowd of admirers of the late jockey thronged around,
> expressing in audible tones their warm approval.\(^{503}\)

Unnervingly, Archer’s malnourished frame is rendered visually compelling, appealing even: a sight worthy of ‘warm approval’. Such ‘exhibiting’ of Archer, in addition to the public branding of him as ‘a freak of nature’,\(^{504}\) readily integrates him into the era’s nascent discourse of ‘freakery’. However, unlike the ‘Living Skeletons’ who were displayed at county fairs and in exhibition halls,\(^{505}\) Archer’s ‘freakishness’ is endearing, enviable perhaps. This admiration for Archer’s emaciated physique marks a shift in both tone and attitude towards the skeletal, freak-show phenomenon at large. For instance, discussing the excessively thin curiosity Claude

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\(^{501}\) ‘Banting on Corpulence’, p.607.

\(^{502}\) Charles Head, ‘Correspondence’, *Sporting Times*, 1210 (27 November 1886), p.3.

\(^{503}\) *Owl*, 412 (Birmingham: 17 December 1886), p.10.

\(^{504}\) Bosvile, ‘Frederick Archer’, p.45.

\(^{505}\) See, Craton, *The Victorian Freak-Show*. 
Ambrose Seurat, a man who, weighing only 77lbs., was regularly ‘exhibited in Pall Mall under the appellation “Anatomie Vivante”’, All the Year Round had previously remarked:

We speak, truth to tell, somewhat contemptuously of [very thin people.] We call such a man Lanky Laurence, or Pill Garlic, or Thread-paper, or Skin-and-Grief, or Bodkin, or Lath. Scarcely any man, except the Living Skeleton, ever exhibited himself on account of his thinness. What a poor object that same Claude Ambrose Seurat was! Anatomists and medical men were greatly interested in him; other spectators were shocked.507

No longer a figure spoken of ‘contemptuously’, or a physique which might incite ‘shock’, Archer’s emaciated body is one which, in this particular instance, conveys ‘grace’. Moreover, the curiosity such ‘skeletons’ could rouse had shifted its locus from the realm of science, that is, anatomy and medicine, to the sphere of high-culture, namely ‘art’.

Branching out into all forms of ‘art’, Allison noted that, after Archer’s demise, ‘enthusiastic musicians wrote waltzes, mazurkas, gallops, and quadrilles in honour of his name’. Furthermore, ‘amateur poets’ had ‘invoked the muse to give him praise in swinging rhyme’.508 Carrying this affiliation between poetic grace and Fred Archer further, Bosvile stated: ‘though education and different pursuits make the poet […] differ from the wearer of silk on a flat racecourse’, there was ‘a certain affinity between this ideal jockey and the satirical Byron, both delighting to dazzle the world, and ride roughshod over its feelings’. Although Byron was a man of a very different time and place to Archer, one cannot help but wonder whether it is noteworthy that Bosvile draws the parallel. Both men were disorderly eaters, and both were apparently preoccupied with (and made popular by) their public image. Like Archer – who was ‘so spick-and-span that he narrowly escaped being a dandy509 – the notoriously dandified, and potentially anorexic, Lord Byron, as we have seen, had steadfastly ‘clapped a muzzle on [his] jaws, and consumed [his] own fat’ so he could ‘vie with the slim Beau’s [sic] of modern times’.510 Continuing this art of fashionable assimilation, ‘boys and young men’, (particularly those ‘of “horsey” proclivities’), were striving to ‘copy’ Archer’s ‘style of dress’; furthermore, ‘hatters and hosiers’ were ‘pander[ing] to the demand by proclaiming Archer hats, or Archer ties, and even Archer socks’. A variety of Victorian males, then, wanted to be

511 Trelawny, Recollections, pp.50-1; Lord Byron to Elizabeth Pigot, 13 July 1807’, in Letters, i, pp.126-127.
visually analogous to the legendary Archer, even if it meant being ‘terribly’ thin and ‘painfully pinched in the waist’.\footnote{Allison, ‘Fred Archer’, p.644, p.646.}

If the following statement made by Archer in an 1884 interview printed in the \textit{Sporting Times} is anything to go by, one can see that the ‘painfully pinched waist’ was, in his eyes, a contentious site of the male sporting body. ‘Whom do you consider the best all round man on the English Turf at the present moment?’ questions the interviewer. ‘Honourable Rupert Carington’, Archer replies. ‘Why?’ the questioner proceeds. ‘Because he measures fifty-nine inches round the waist’.\footnote{‘Fred Archer Interviewed’, \textit{Sporting Times}, 1110 (27 December 1884), p.1.} That Archer’s response is pervaded with biting satire and irony is clear. The ‘Honourable Rupert Carington’ is ‘the best all round man’ on account of his gargantuan waist measurements and nothing more. The sartorial and cultural dissemination of the Victorian male’s ‘painfully pinched waist’ will be discussed at length in the next chapter, but before moving on, it is worth discussing the more general notion of sporting ‘spectacle’ – a concept inevitably linked to Archer’s visual, fashionable and sporting identities.

Since horseracing was reported widely (by both sports newspapers and the periodical press) Archer, along with his racing contemporaries, was always on show. Being constantly in the public eye made sure that part of the discipline that went into Fred’s work was contingent upon his appearance as showman. He had to have ‘an acute sense of the dramatic’. As Amanda Murray has observed, Archer’s colours and racing silks were always immaculate. Archer ‘loved the spectacle and atmosphere which surrounded a race meeting and probably derived much of his inspiration, as well as motivation, from it’.\footnote{Murray, \textit{Race to the Finish}, p.94.} With his body in a state of constant exhibition, both on and off the course, it is perhaps not surprising that Archer was so self-conscious in both body and dress. ‘His racing cap and jacket’, declared Bosvile, ‘were most carefully arranged, and his irreproachable breeches and neat top-boots fitted faultlessly’.\footnote{Bosvile, ‘Frederick Archer’, p.42.}

Interestingly, this perfecting of a fashionable racing figure extended beyond sartorial dynamics: ‘Probably no horseman ever got into the saddle who had more perfectly shaped legs for riding; they were long, thin, and straightly put on, but not in the least bowed; he was tall and slight’. That Bosvile sees past Archer’s clothing and determines the perfectibility of the body beneath is of much consequence. Whilst clothing can make a man look like an apt sportsman on the surface, it is what is beneath his attire that counts. This on the body/beneath the body divide is pertinent in many other sporting contexts.\footnote{Sports commentary frequently criss-crossed between different sporting terrains. Bosvile, for instance, was writing about Archer in \textit{Badminton Magazine} – a periodical which addressed myriad...} The spectacle
surrounding Archer’s body (clothed and unclothed) is equally apparent, for instance, through the ‘strong man’s’ penchant for an aestheticized, slim-line silhouette.

In the same way that horseracing became, for Archer, a means of accentuating the specular presence of the male sporting body, the domain of physical body building ensured that a man’s muscular – but simultaneously fat-free – physique was thrust into the epoch’s weight-watching spotlight. As the next section to this chapter will demonstrate, specular aesthetics meshed closely with the panoptic intensity which generally filtered into the world of competitive weight athletics. The body of the strong man was not only built to be ‘perfect’, but also built to be seen.

(iii.) Fat Free: the Disorderly Magnitude of the Muscular Male

In George Du Maurier’s highly popular society novel, *Trilby* (1894), this fusion of the aesthetic and athletic takes centre court. The locus of the narrative’s central action doubles up as both an artist’s studio and gymnasium. As Du Maurier’s narrator states in the opening pages of the book, ‘the big studio […] was beginning to look ship shape at last. The big piano, a semi-grand, […] lay, freshly tuned, alongside the eastern wall [and] on the wall opposite was a panoply of foils, masks, and boxing gloves’. The language here is saturated with subtle allusions to the conflation of malleable bodies and artistic commodities, aestheticism and sport. The fact that the room being described is a ‘studio’ immediately alerts the reader to its artistic dynamic. Moreover, the sporting artefacts on display are presented as being a ‘panoply’ – a term which accentuates the specular and exhibitive dimensions Du Maurier intended to create. The repetition of the word ‘big’, in addition to the mentioning of both the ‘semi-grand’ and ‘ship shape’, also act as further pointers toward the novel’s fascination with the ‘art’ of musculature and bodily perfection. ‘A trapeze, a knotted rope, and two parallel cords’, the narrator continues,

[were suspended] from a huge beam in the ceiling. The walls were of the usual dull red, relieved by plaster casts of arms and legs and hands and feet; and Dante’s mask, and Michael Angelo’s alto-rilievo of Leda and the swan. […] There were also studies in oil from the nude, copies of Titan, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Rubens, Tintoret, [and] Leonardo da Vinci.517

As this last narrative contribution confirms, the specular world of artistic aestheticism and the sporting world of bodily perfection were not too far apart, in both spatial and symbolic terms.

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Immediately following the establishment of this aesthetic-athletic continuum, Du Maurier introduces us to Taffy: ‘a towering figure of righteous Herculean wrath’,\textsuperscript{518} a man whose ‘muscles were strong as iron bands’.\textsuperscript{519} In the same way that Grecian and Roman models had long provided artistic inspiration, Taffy’s body is described as being ‘a perpetual feast to the quick, prehensile, aesthetic eye’.\textsuperscript{520} His ‘powerful, impressive aspect, his great stature, his gladiator-like poise [...]’, and [all the] bold and highly finished athletic shapes of him, [created] an easy grace of strength that made all his movements a pleasure to watch, and any garment look well when he wore it.\textsuperscript{521} That the interest in these specular dynamics extended beyond artistic circles is made evident through the following reference to the era’s most widely acclaimed and popularly admired body-builder: ‘people came and went [from the studio], and boxed and fenced and did gymnastic feats, and felt Taffy’s biceps, which by this time equalled Mr Sandow’s!’\textsuperscript{522} Through his reference to ‘Mr Sandow’, Du Maurier illuminates the amalgamation of physical and popular cultures. Eugen Sandow was the most famous advocate for the Physical Culture movement, and the first globally famous strongman.

Sandow, of Prussian origin, ran away from home as a youth in order to join a travelling circus, and the gymnastics and acrobatics he learned there came to be the prime means of strengthening his body. Following the insolvency of this circus troupe, Sandow became apprentice to a professional bodybuilder, touring French music halls as a strongman and living statue. In 1889 Sandow took the London sporting world by storm, out-lifting the heavy-weight routines of two distinguished professionals, and, in short, staked his claim to fame.\textsuperscript{523} ‘So great and wide-reaching was the interest taken in him’, suggested George Adam, ‘that, throughout the British islands, the worship of muscle became a cult, and every phase of athleticism [...] was minutely and unweariedly discussed’.\textsuperscript{524} As Adam’s statement reveals, the grandeur of Sandow’s muscular body obviously stood in contrast to the malnourished frame of Archer. Although the interest taken in both men was ‘wide-reaching’, there is a sharp – almost oxymoronic – contrast between the emaciated grace of Fred Archer, and Sandow’s muscular bigness.\textsuperscript{525} However, what links these disparate body configurations is the super-humanity

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid. p.48.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid. p.4
\textsuperscript{520} Ibid. p.236.
\textsuperscript{521} Ibid. p.236. The sartorial body of the nineteenth-century male will be discussed at length in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid. p.93.
\textsuperscript{524} \textit{Sandow on Physical Training}, ed. by G. Mercer Adam (New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1894), p.44.
\textsuperscript{525} There was a similar contrast between two Ancient Greek bodily ideals which were heavily aspired to by nineteenth-century culture at large. Competing as the dominant male body prototype was the
which enshrouds them. In the same way that Archer was seen to surpass the limits which defined ‘normal’ human corporeality, Sandow was also widely perceived as super-human: a figure of superlative, mortal extremism.

As each of the above images reveal, Sandow’s body was statuesque: it bore a classically sculpted, herculean silhouette of god-like proportions. In contrast to Archer’s wizened ‘stoop’, Sandow’s body is presented as an erect, solid expanse. However, echoing the mechanical strains which surrounded the ‘Tinman’, Sandow was also pervaded by a sense of non-human mechanicity. ‘Sandow’s arms’, Adam recounts, ‘were a rare spectacle’. They ‘resembled iron rather than human flesh, and it [was] just the same all over his body. Nothing but solid adamantine muscle [was] to be felt, and not one ounce of superfluous flesh [was] apparent’.  

Further accentuating Sandow’s non-human tenacity, Adam went on to remark that when [Sandow] came to [New York], it might have been supposed – and the hyperbole in the present case is pardonable – that the advance-guard of a new order of physical beings had descended on our planet. Not only the slender, lithe and lightweight Apollo on the one hand, and the muscular, hefty Hercules on the other. See, Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Managing the Body, p.4.  

ibid. p.57, p136.
ubiquitous reporter, but native strong men, and even experienced and widely-read physiologists, waxed eloquent in descanting on his points.\textsuperscript{527} Sandow’s ‘descent’ from another planet instils his person with omnipotence. Yet, as Adam went on to conclude, ‘Eugene [sic] Sandow […] neither fell romantically from the clouds nor came among us without record of his past doings or passport to public appreciation and favour’.

Whilst, for the most part, the non-human scale of Sandow’s body did, indeed, inspire ‘public appreciation and favour’, there was, as in Archer’s case, an extremely fine line which separated him from the period’s emerging discourses of freakery. ‘The nearest approach to a deformity’, stated one member of the New York Athletics Club, ‘if a natural muscular development may be termed a deformity, is in the abdominal muscles. The like of these I have never seen before in a human being’.\textsuperscript{528} The \textit{Sunday Times} likewise commented upon Sandow’s ‘abnormal’ physique. However, according to this reporter, Sandow’s body ebbed more on the side of ‘boyishness’ than abnormality:

\begin{quote}
The abnormal muscular development which makes him unique among living men is hidden in his street attire, and in his face, or in what is visible of his figure, there is nothing to speak of his extraordinary strength. The face and figure both look a little boyish.\textsuperscript{529}
\end{quote}

This last author’s allusion to Sandow’s figure looking ‘a little boyish’ undermines earlier visions of him as a gargantuan, god-like, and omnipotent being. Moreover, despite the widespread comment upon his massive, muscular physique, this \textit{Times} reporter was not the only critic to note the paradoxical ‘littleness’ of the world’s greatest strong man. “The first thing that struck me when I saw Sandow stripped”, stated Dr. Sargent, a surgeon at Harvard University, “was the extraordinary size of the muscles as compared with that of the bones. His skeleton is not large, as is easily seen in the girth of his wrist and ankles, but the bones are exceedingly fine”.\textsuperscript{530} As Sargent’s observations imply, Sandow’s muscles are a covering for his ‘exceedingly fine’ skeletal frame. In addition to this, Sargent noted that, whilst Sandow ‘bulges out about the chest and back’, this ‘marvellous muscular power’ stands ‘in curious contrast to the waist, which is as small as a woman’.\textsuperscript{531} Both the earlier reference to Sandow’s ‘boyishness’ and this last allusion to his ‘womanly’ waist infuse vulnerability into his being. In the words of Adam,
Sandow was, essentially, ‘a fine model of compactness and symmetry’\textsuperscript{532} – the term ‘fine’ creating a subtle but double meaning.\textsuperscript{533}

In the image printed below, both the womanliness and the vulnerability of Sandow’s physique are enhanced. Featured in a resting position with his white-marble hand outstretched – an image suggestive of a needy desire to touch, grasp, hold and be comforted – Sandow appears defeated in his (hyper)masculine strength. Moreover, Sandow’s stance accentuates the indent of his waist. The ‘V’ shape created through his posture is not dissimilar to the feminine hourglass profile created through the practice of corsetry.

![Figure 6: Eugen Sandow, by Benjamin J. Falk (New York, c.1894), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalogue.](image)

Heightening the specular fascination with Sandow’s (almost feminine) corporeality, many secured Sandow as a model. ‘Interest in Sandow as a physiological study has always been intense’, claimed Adam. ‘The finely-formed limbs, the great thews [and] the Titanic strength [...] of the famous athlete, have been the admiration of countless medical men and artists in the nude’. A ‘hardly less notable feature in the great athlete’, Adam went on, ‘is his suppleness of limb and the shapeliness and symmetry of his person. Herein we see the secret of Greek art, as modelled in its famous sculpture’.\textsuperscript{534}

This ‘famous sculpture’ and the Greco-Roman hygienic ideals they tended to enshrine were favoured by more than just a small sect of physical culture enthusiasts. As Ina Zweiniger-

\textsuperscript{532} Ibid. p.75.
\textsuperscript{533} This last allusion to the compact ‘symmetry’ of Sandow’s body also re-assimilates the strongman into the realm of the artistic.
\textsuperscript{534} Ibid. pp.119-120.
Bargielowska suggests in her recent study *Managing the Body*, ‘Mens sana in corpore sano’ – the ancient concept of sculpting a healthy mind in a healthy (and beautiful) body – inspired the masses.\(^{535}\) From public health campaigners and policy makers to working-class loafers and the moneyed middle and upper classes, ancient Greek ideals created a nation of men prepared (and encouraged) to train themselves into a race of modern Hercules.

Whilst the deteriorating health concerns integral to urban living were a large part of physical culture motivations, the movement was, as has already been intimated, also largely inspired by the celebration of a ‘male body beautiful’. Combining classical aesthetics and modern weight-lifting technology, physical culturists concocted a blend of heroic masculinity which ‘struck a chord with men coming to terms with modern urban lifestyles’.\(^{536}\) The disciplined, well-managed body of the physical culturist soon became identified with normative or ‘hegemonic’ masculinity. This was, in the words of Zweiniger-Bargielowska, defined ‘in contrast to countetypes such as the emaciated, deformed urban poor, who were unfit for military service, the effeminate homosexual, and the flabby middle-aged businessman whose bodies denoted degeneration’.\(^{537}\) As this emphasis on Grecian beauty, along with Adam’s remarks about the ‘shapeliness and symmetry’ of Sandow’s ‘artistic’ body, suggest, late nineteenth-century culture began to harbour a body-consciousness centred on perfect *shape* as opposed to one solely focussed on reductive weight. According to the emerging cultural and visual ethos, the muscular male body should fall within the parameters of normative weight categories, but also adhere to the proper prototype in terms of visual form.

Unlike the era’s cult of non-athletic fat-phobes, the strong man often commemorated an increase in weight. When Sandow was asked by Dr Sargent to ‘step on the scales and be weighed’ as part of his observatory medical examination, for instance, the 180lb weight that figured – which, we are promptly told, ‘is slightly less than usual’ – becomes a source of angst for Sandow. This ‘falling off’ of weight is immediately dismissed, and attributed to the ‘recent hot spell’.\(^{538}\) Although there is no contemporary clinical category to support a psychological reading of Sandow’s unease regarding this ‘falling’ of weight, his concern with weight-reduction and becoming smaller does partially resemble the symptomologies of modern body-image conditions, such as ‘bigorexia’, or muscle dysmorphia. Unlike anorexia nervosa, a clinical category which, as we know, was clinically defined in the late 1860s, the modern phenomena muscle dysmorphia, or, ‘reverse anorexia’, is a condition which, despite no clinical recognition in the nineteenth century, could have been in the making.

\(^{536}\) Ibid. pp.1-2, p.38.  
\(^{537}\) Ibid. pp.11-12.  
\(^{538}\) Ibid. p123.
Individuals with muscle dysmorphia often (mis)perceive their body as being much smaller than it actually is. Furthermore, they frequently compare their own bodies with those of the ‘more perfect’ peers who surround them. In the case of Sandow, frequently designated as The Strongman of the century, one cannot help but wonder with whom he could be inferiorly competing. The most explicable answer lies in the Greek ideals taken from the Classical past. Yet, whilst Sandow aspired to rebuild the bodies of the Herculean gods and Grecian ideals, a more localised cult of comparison emerged between contemporary men. In 1911, Arnold Bennett drew attention to the development of such competitive body comparison: ‘we compare our arms to the arms of the gentleman illustrated in the advertisement’, states Bennett, ‘and we murmur to ourselves the classic phrase: “This will never do”’.\(^{539}\) This concern with being the ‘correct’ size and suitably ‘big enough’ (in the right places) also filtered into the era’s periodical fiction. In Blanc Bec’s ‘Muscular Society’, for instance, Freddy, in addition to being acutely weight-conscious, becomes obsessed with numerically recording the effects of physical training produced upon his body:

To show the effects of a regular practice of gymnastics, Freddy produced the club weight-book, from which it appeared that in six months his arm had increased in circumference nearly an inch (it then stood at fourteen inches!), and that in the same time he had gained two inches round the chest and (which seemed to please him even more) lost one round the waist.\(^{540}\)

Once again, the small waist, a body part which will be discussed at length in the final chapter, becomes tantamount to the shapely perfection of the muscular male (as well as female) physique. Unlike the era’s aerial gymnasts and jockeys – whose body-consciousness, as we have seen, was ultimately bound to the reductive mechanisms which incorporated weight management – the strongman was far more preoccupied with perfecting his malleable shape.

This distinction between weight and shape is humorously glossed by H. G. Wells in his short story, *The Truth About Pyecraft* (1903). Just as Archer had guzzled quick-fix ‘quack physicks’ in order to reduce his weight, the eponymous protagonist of Wells’ narrative imbibes a mysterious weight-reducing potion. However, Pyecraft’s reduction in weight is presented by Wells on an explicitly literal level. Following his drinking of the tonic, the repellently fat Pyecraft – a ‘great, uneasy jelly o substance! The fattest clubman in London’\(^{541}\) – becomes entirely weightless: he floats up to the ceiling, completely defiant of gravity. Yet, despite his weightlessness, Pyecraft is still repulsively fat; a great, shapeless ‘rolling front of chins and

\(^{539}\) Arnold Bennett, *Mental Efficiency and other Hints to Men and Women* (n.p, 1911).


abdomina’. As this last remark makes clear, Pyecraft was possessed of a body devoid of any form of aesthetically-pleasing shape. That H.G. Wells was acutely aware of his own shape is evident in his autobiography. In Sandowesque fashion, Wells remarks, ‘I would survey my naked body, so far as my bedroom looking-glass permitted, with extreme distaste, and compare it with the Apollos and Mercuries in the Art Museum’. There were ‘hollows under the clavicles’, he continued, ‘the ribs showed, and the muscles of the arms and legs were contemptible. [...] I thought it was an inferior body’, Wells concluded, ‘perhaps past hope of mending’. As Wells’ confession implies, the specular dynamics involved in muscularity were not always externally sourced. The act of spectatorship was often driven by oneself, and, what is more, the self-spectator was generally unhealthily hyper-vigilant in their observations.

‘It is most desirable’, suggested Eugen Sandow in 1897, ‘to exercise before a looking-glass’. ‘You can thus follow the movements of the various muscles’, he continued, ‘and see the muscles at work, and mark their steady development, [which] is itself a help and pleasure’. A few years later, Harry Andrews reiterated the importance of self-monitoring observation among athletes in muscular training. ‘There are three tests to a man’s fitness’, Andrews states: ‘his watch, his weighing-machine and his looking-glass’. However, as shall become apparent in the next chapter, the constant, public refraction of this self-speculation permitted, as we saw in the Bennett extract quoted earlier, a cult of comparative body-haters. Little Billee, another of Trilby’s main characters, provides us with a fictional example of the toxic side-effects that the act of self-spectatorship could incite. ‘Catching sight of his own face and form in a mirror’, the narrator observes,

[Little Billee] would curse himself for a puny, misbegotten shrimp, an imp – an abortion – no bigger, by the side of the Herculean Taffy or the burly Laird of Cockpen, than sixpennorth o’ halfpence: a wretched little overrated follower of a poor trivial craft – a mere light amuser.

Like Bennett and his associates who ‘compare [their] arms to the arms of [other] gentleman’, murmuring to themselves ‘the classic phrase, “this will never do”’, Little Billee is plagued by a sense of bodily deviance and failure. The competitive environment of body shaping makes him feel redundant, ‘an abortion’ not worthy of his place in the world. This last notion of being eligible for his earthly existence relates to the wider nineteenth-century contextual
frameworks related to degeneration and eugenics. As many critics, including Zweiniger-Bargielowska, have observed, fears that the bodies of nineteenth-century males had long been physically ‘degenerating’ – a term which recalls the physical wasting of the body’s muscular tissues in clinical cases of anorexia – were widespread.

Before the cultural dissemination of the training regimes of strongmen such as Sandow, both Muscular Christianity and the era’s cult of New Athleticism had been touted as the solution for what was seen as the ‘degenerate’ state of Great Britain’s inefficiently strong and unhealthy male bodies. As George Henry Lewes stated in an 1864 article on the era’s new penchant for athleticism, ‘the weak – and most of us are weak – desire to get strong; the strong desire to get stronger’. \[549\] With the subsequent popularity of physical culture, the national desire to create a race of perfectly formed muscular men was instilled with a new sense of urgency. In light of this, Little Billee’s malnourished frame robs him of his manly virtues: he is ‘puny’, ‘misbegotten’, not even worthy of human subject status. Sandow himself was a great proponent of rebuilding a supposedly ‘degenerate’ nation through the establishment of his own commercial enterprise. Through the publication of his own magazine, he used modern advertising techniques in order to campaign for bigger, stronger, hungrier men with muscles fit to fight for the nation.

As we have seen, Sandow’s brand of masculinity was the antithesis of the degenerate, hot-house and effeminate dandy so often associated with late nineteenth-century culture. He was disciplined, finely formed and fit for purposive reproduction. His muscular, gargantuan and taught (yet fat-free) physique denoted a type of physical perfection which resembled the statuesque greatness of the classical past. Possibly because of his fervent interest in the eugenic amelioration of the human race, or merely on account of the phonetic link between his name and the term itself, many thought, as David Waller has suggested, that eugenicism derived from Eugen Sandow himself. \[550\] According to the Chicago Daily Tribune, Sandow promoted eugenicist thought within his immediate family circle: his children ‘lived on vegetables, never took medicines and trained their muscles – all so that they could grow up to share in their father’s physical perfection’. \[551\] This idea of being ‘perfect’ correlates to the characteristic behavioural tropes of both the anorexic and the ‘bigorexic’. A superlative sense of being ‘the best’ spans both ends of the disorderly spectrum which simultaneously separates and conjoins the two conditions.

\[549\] Lewes, ‘Training In Relation To Health’, p.219.
\[550\] Waller, The Perfect Man, p.25.
\[551\] Chicago Daily Tribune (1 September 1907), quoted by Waller, The Perfect Man, p.211.
The superlative and competitive nature of muscular athletics was exploited by Sandow on a commercial basis. ‘In order to encourage those who intend to adopt my system of training’, he states in his treatise of Physical Strength (1897),

I offer for every town two sets of first, second and third prizes, in the form of cups and medals, to the pupils who can show in the one case the best development, and in the other the greatest strength. [...] Pupils who wish to compete for these prizes should send me, without delay, their present measurements, duly witnessed by two persons, (one medical man preferred), together with their age, weight, height, and portrait (stripped to the waist).  

By introducing ‘prizes’ to the world of body sculpting, the unhealthy dynamics of bodily comparison are obviously accentuated. The fact that Sandow requires his participants to be ‘stripped to the waist’ so as to be eligible for the competition confirms the intensity of the visual pull involved in the practice of anti-degenerate body monitoring.

With the nude male body, or one which was at least partially nude, gaining increasing visual prominence in the world of athleticism, those who were not part of this world, or incapable of thriving in it, were eager to hide their muscularly deficient bodies, and camouflage their flabby faults. Of course, as Adam proclaims, ‘it is easy to see that Sandow, even when dressed, possesses marvellous muscular power’. However, ‘clothing, as a rule, effectually conceals a man’s physical development, which is in most cases a fortunate circumstance from an artistic point of view’. This is where a shift from the sporting body to the sartorial body can be observed. But what happens when the sartorial body is disrobed and placed before a mirror?

Elaborating upon the visual presence of mirrors in the world of physical culture, it will be the aim of the next chapter to explore how a narcissistic fetish with the sartorial body recalled the disorderly strains manifested in the body-builder’s desire to be ‘perfect’. Ideas of what constituted the ‘perfect’ or ‘ideal’ body were as conceptually unstable as attitudes towards fat – which, as we saw in the first chapter, was a profoundly slippery stigma. However, in regards to the sporting male body, there is no need to contest the fact that fat had no place. ‘With flabby muscles’, stated Adam, ‘there can hardly ever be vigorous frames or sound
health.\footnote{Ibid. p202.} George Beard likewise suggested that, ‘in athletic training the object is to reduce the fat and [increase] the power of endurance’.\footnote{George M. Beard, M.D., Eating and Drinking (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1871), p.135.}

An obsessive desire to rid oneself of ‘flabbiness’ was, as the present chapter has demonstrated, often equally as dangerous and disruptive to maintaining ‘sound health’ as abstaining from physical training altogether. As Lewes noted in 1864:

In the case of training, where, as we said, the object is to work up the muscular system to its highest pitch, the man may be magnificent to look upon, and formidable to contend against, but he [...] is doomed to wither early. The training system is a forcing system: were it continued long it would kill; even for a brief space it is injurious.\footnote{Lewes, ‘Training In Relation To Health’, p.222.}

Each of the sporting case studies addressed in this chapter all came to a weary (and often early) end. Jules Leotard died at the young age of twenty eight from an infectious disease; which, had his body not been exhausted from a youth dedicated to vigorous training, might have better resisted the ravages of the malady. Fred Archer, as we have seen, prematurely ended his own life following a severe bout of depression brought about by the dead weight of despair (both literal and metaphorical) which impeded any further success in his lightweight career. Finally, whilst Eugen Sandow lived well into his fifties, it was observed by George Bernard Shaw that not even the world’s greatest strongman could ‘offer immunity to disease and ageing’. Following Sandow’s ‘sudden, youthful death’ in 1925, Shaw stated: ‘I remain a weakling, but I am alive and Eugen is dead. Let not my example be lost on you. The pen is mightier than the dumb-bell’.

The idea that physical exercise would create a race of perfect, abominable, fool-hardy specimen, then, was an illusion: a smoke and mirror screen effect which merely masked another strain of physical myth and inefficiency. Writing in 1896, Henry Beyer had remarked upon the reciprocal relationship established between exercise and its contradictory outcomes: ‘the effects produced by exercise on the human body’, he claimed, ‘may be divided into immediate and remote, subjective and objective, ponderable and imponderable, permanent and temporary, real and imaginary’.\footnote{J. M. Watson had similarly proclaimed a few years earlier that ‘the whole history of physical training is a most extraordinary exhibition of man’s fickleness and pitiable vacillations’. At ‘one period’, he stated, it is ‘made fierce, savage, and aggressive by exclusive and overdone bodily discipline’, and, ‘at another’, he went on, it}

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‘lapse[s] into decadence’. As both Watson’s observations and this chapter make clear, there was an exceedingly fine line which separated exercise as a bodily discipline from exercise as a means of indulging one’s own body-centred neuroticism(s).

Sporting slenderness not only created a pathological obsession with culturally unattainable ideals, but also an obsession with the cult of self: one whose manifesto indoctrinated physical excess as the prime means of being fat-free. Thus, from the cultural dissemination of the notion that exercise could be a means of attaining slenderness (and communal strength) among the social body to the internalisation of this concept on an individual level, physical activity was taken to disruptive extremes. The craving for bodily perfection, however, was rarely gratified. Man’s pursuit of the perfect body was, once again, one with no perceivable end.

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Chapter 4 – Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Male Sartorialism and Body Dysmorphic Disorder

‘I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness — a real thoroughgoing illness’.
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground (1864)

According to Brent Shannon, the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a ‘sartorial mirror phase’: a new fashion-driven fixation with the visual presence of man. Contrary to the widely held (mis)conception that Victorian men existed only as a kind of ‘absent present’, donning a distinctly sombre style of dress in order to avert attention from themselves and their bodies, this chapter will explore the ways in which overt self-awareness and conscious self-display became an integral part of the Victorian male’s (sartorial) life and being.

Dismissing the erroneous picture of ‘the grim-faced Victorian patriarch clad in dark frock coat’, who, according to the dictates of The English Gentleman (1849), should, at all costs, ‘avoid leaning into every mirror that [he] may cross’, this chapter will expose the ways in which Victorian men, whether intentionally, or not, became susceptible to multifaceted forms of mirrored consciousness.

I will begin this chapter by exploring how man’s sartorial self-awareness was interlaced with sex and science. Uncovering the ways in which a man’s clothing functioned as a form of secondary sexual characteristic – a medium which might enable a man to (or, indeed, disable him from) securing victory in amatory conquests – this first section will reveal the discomforting centrality of visual appearances in fictional, and non-fictional, plots of courtship.

Having examined the evolutionary motives which helped fortify man’s appearance concerns, I will then turn to investigate the clinical concerns which emerged from man’s impairing fixation with his mirrored self. Unravelling the complexities which surrounded the era’s grievous strain of ‘puny peacockism’, the second part of the chapter will peer ‘through the looking glass’, as it were, and examine how Victorian culture’s increasing reliance upon mirrored surfaces made the act of self-spectatorship both clinical and disorderly. To do this, I will be utilising the work of the Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli, who, in 1886, made a preliminary reference to a

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563 Shannon argues that there did not exist a ‘great masculine renunciation’ in fashion throughout the nineteenth century. The separate spheres dichotomy which made men producers and women consumers was not accurate.
564 The English Gentleman (London: George Bell, 1849), p.103.
condition that he would later go on to call ‘Dysmorphophobia’. This illness, which, Morselli explained, ‘consists of the sudden appearance and fixation in the consciousness of the idea of one’s own deformity’, transformed male (and female) body-consciousness into a clinically recognisable dis-ease.

Using Morselli’s theoretical framework to add weight to the readings presented in my work, this chapter will examine a variety of mirror-fiends and phobes; men whose relationship with their own (often mis)perceived reflections appear to be neurotically tainted. Whilst it would not be feasible to project the clinical category of dysmorphophobia directly onto the various literary and non-literary individuals discussed as part of this work, it is possible, I will argue, to uncover traces of the condition within these individuals, as well as in the culture they inhabit. Rather than diagnosing the persons discussed here as ‘body dysmorphophobic’, I will be exploring the ways in which Victorian culture itself suffered from a metaphysical form of dysmorphophobia: one which frequently shaped man’s discomforting notions of both the sartorial and specular self.

(i.) Sexing Self-Spectatorship: Seeing Through Science and the Victorian Man’s Clothes
The sartorial self and the concept of self-spectatorship are, in this chapter, contingent upon reflective surfaces and mirrors. As shall become apparent throughout this chapter, the mirror is omnipresent in Victorian culture. It tenders, to borrow the words of Isobel Armstrong, ‘an unprecedented scopic potency’; its visual and literary predominance discloses an ‘acute awareness of a reflective world’. In addition to this ‘acute awareness’, there existed a pertinent reciprocity between sartorial fashioning and reflective spaces. As an author writing

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566 Dysmorphophobia was coined by Morselli in 1891, and is now widely recognised as Body Dysmorphic Disorder.


568 Primarily because many of the texts examined here pre-date Morselli’s findings.

569 There is much evidence to suggest that body-dysmorphic anxieties existed prior to the late nineteenth century, even though the vocabulary for identifying them did not. Thus, although many (if not all) of the literary (and non-literary) figures discussed in this chapter can describe their feelings of physical inadequacy in visual terms, it would, in most of the cases presented here, take another few decades before psychiatrists such as Morselli could label their condition as ‘dysmorphophobia’. See Andrew Mangham, ‘How Do I Look? Dysmorphophobia and Obsession at the Fin de Siecle’, in Neurology and Literature, 1860-1920 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.77-96, (p.80).

in an 1864 edition of the periodical *London Society* confirmed, it was often in sartorial establishments that an awakening of man’s self-perceptive faculty was stimulated:

> Every one of our readers, be he ever so little studious of his personal appearance, must at least once or twice in the course of his existence have had his eyes directed to his own outward configuration, as reflected in the variously-disposed mirrors of a tailor’s shop.

On looking into these ‘variously-disposed mirrors’, the writer continued, the male shopper ‘will become acquainted for the first time with numerous aspects of his person which he had never dreamed of investigating’.

The author’s use of the term ‘investigating’ here immediately attributes scientific weight to the male gaze. When stood before the tailor’s glass, the subject is ascribed a visual proficiency that rivals the scrutiny required of clinical officials. Through conducting such bodily ‘investigations’, a man would ‘become acquainted with defects of symmetry or awkwardness of gesture wholly unknown to [him] before’.

This last allusion to the visual ‘defects’ encountered by the observer sheds light on the tenuous relations which came to exist between body (dis)satisfaction and a disorderly mirrored consciousness. It is on account of such rude awakenings of visual disenchantment that the *English Gentleman* urged its male readers to ‘steal as few conscious glances towards [mirrors] as you can’.

The *English Gentleman*’s aversion to the tailor’s reflective apparatus is analogous to the ideology which underpinned what Brent Shannon refers to as the era’s ‘Great Masculine Renunciation’. The Victorian notion of a “‘Great Masculine Renunciation’”, in which, Shannon explains, ‘middle-class males abandoned ornamentation and sartorial display’, idealised a disinterested brand of manhood that was entirely ‘immune to vanity and unconcerned with outward appearance’.

Whilst this disinterest in male sartorial display is, to some extent, culturally valid, male patterns of renunciation were neither uniform nor static. For every writer who embraced the period’s renunciatory ethic – ‘there is no man more truly wretched than he whose mind is only a mirror of his body, whose soul can fly no higher than a neck-tie, [or] who suffocates glory in a boot’ – there would be at least one other who renounced its utilitarian sobriety – ‘the costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing. Sin is the only real colour-element left in modern life’.

As these conflicting vantage points suggest, there existed a curious paradox at the centre of the era’s conduct literature. Despite frequent acknowledgments that fashion was, in

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572 Ibid. p.405.
573 *The English Gentleman*, p.103.
575 *The Habits of Good Society*, p.140.
the words of Shannon, ‘a vain, silly, and even wicked pursuit’, nineteenth-century commentators nevertheless insisted that ‘it was an essential social convention to which meticulous attention had to be paid’. In 1859, for instance, the author of *Habits of good society* stated:

the man who rebels against fashion is even more open to imputation than he who obeys it, because he makes himself conspicuous, and practically announces that he is wiser than his kind. [...] It is left to the man of sense and modesty to follow fashion so far as not to make himself peculiar by opposing it.

As this allusion to the ‘peculiar’ denotes, to be ‘out’ of the fashion came, in short, to be an indicator of non-normativity; and, as Oscar Wilde suggests in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891): ‘it is better not to be different from one’s fellows’.

This process of simulation and assimilation is central to ideas of dysmorphophobia. According to Sander Gilman, the thing most valued by the dysmorphophobic individual is the prospect of invisibility. The dysmorphophobic, claims Gilman, desires to be ‘a member of a cohort or collective which is so visible that its visibility becomes defined as “normal”’. In 1864, the writers of *Routledge’s Manual of Etiquette* addressed the enigmatic nature of such visible invisibility:

a gentleman should always be so well dressed that his dress shall never be observed at all. Does this sound like an enigma? It is not meant for one. [...] If any friend should say to you, “What a handsome waistcoat you have on!” you may depend that a less handsome waistcoat would be in better taste. If you hear it said that Mr. So-and-So wears superb jewellery, you may conclude beforehand that he wears too much. Display, in short, is ever to be avoided, especially in matters of dress.

According to this particular source, a gentleman should dress ‘well’, and even fashionably, but not, by any means, to impress. His clothing should be averse to showy, affected (and class-aspiring) ‘display’.

William Cobbett’s much earlier *Advice to Young Men* (1829) had similarly criticised male spectacle. According to Cobbett, the desire to ‘decorate’ one’s body through fashionable dress ‘arises solely from vanity, and from vanity of the most contemptible sort’. ‘It arises’,

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578 The Habits of Good Society*, p.139.
Cobbett continues, ‘from the notion that all the people in the street [...] will be looking at you as soon as you walk out; and that they will, in a greater or less degree, think the better of you on account of your fine dress’.\(^{582}\) Here, the notion that dressing fashionably might be a means of assimilation, of averting visual attention, is turned on its head. Cobbett suggests that the man who dresses in the fashion welcomes the gaze of his peers: the thought that ‘all the people in the street [...] will be looking at [him]’ becomes a source of sartorial motivation. Continuing his rally against the fashionably dressed male, Cobbett was emphatic in his assertions that ‘never was a notion more false’. Adhering to the period’s renunciatory ethos, Cobbett upbraids the fashionably dressed man for his estrangement from ideals of productive utility: ‘Men are estimated by other men according to their capacity and willingness to be in some way or other useful’.\(^{583}\) The emphasis Cobbett places on the male to male gaze here ensures that his counsel reflects the epoch’s conventional dichotomy of separate spheres. Men, in the eyes of other men, are not expected to be preoccupied with finery and fashion: this was the domain of women. A bit later on in his crusade, Cobbett suggests that this gendered distinction was also venerated by the era’s females. Detracting further attention from man’s outer façade, and urging him to cultivate his inner and moral qualities instead, Cobbett explains:

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\text{though, with the foolish and vain part of women, fine clothes frequently do something, the greater part of the sex are much too penetrating to draw their conclusions solely from the outside show of man: they look deeper, and find other criterions whereby to judge. [...] Female eyes are very sharp; they can discover beauty though half hidden by beard, and even by dirt, and surrounded by rags. [...] Never, no, not for one moment, believe that any human being, with sense in skull, will love or respect you on account of fine or costly clothes.}^{584}\]

Subtly weaving threads of amatory interest into his critique, Cobbett encourages men to believe that physical attraction, the desire to be looked at and admired by the opposite sex, is unfounded. That many men failed to heed such admonitions is clear. In 1881, *Punch* produced the following cartoon:

\[^{582}\] William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men* (London: B. Bensley, 1829), pp.13-14, [emphasis original].
\[^{583}\] Ibid. pp.13-14, [emphasis original].
\[^{584}\] Ibid. pp.13-14, [emphasis original].
As the illustration’s title—‘Masculine Inconsistency’—suggests, the paradoxes and enigmas that masked any clear-cut ideas regarding fashionable dress were wreaking havoc with masculine conduct. Soliloquising before his looking-glass, Mr Lovelace de la Poer Spinks attempts to convince himself that Cobbett’s amatory theorising is true: ‘It’s not a man’s personal appearance women care for. It’s his character, it’s his intellect, it’s—’

Proceeding, as usual, to squeeze his neck into a collar which prevents him from turning his head, his feet into tight boots which prevent him from walking, and his waist into a belt which prevents him from drawing his breath.

However, abandoning his soliloquy part of the way through, Spinks errantly turns his attention to sartorial display. Proceeding to ‘squeeze his neck into a collar’, his ‘feet into tight boots’ and ‘his waist into a belt’, Spinks very quickly becomes ensnared by the appealing lures of fashionable dress. With a small glass placed in each of his hands, Mr Lovelace is both literally and figuratively
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preoccupied by his reflection: he is actively disabled by the hold mirrors have upon him. The
exhausted leaning posture in which the protagonist is positioned heightens this sense of
dependency; meanwhile, the mirrors he clutches onto appear to be propping him up. The
stern look which infects the man’s countenance, as well as the tightly clenched fists which hold
the circles of glass, imply a staunch sense of (very masculine) resilience: resilience, perhaps, to
the all-consuming power of both sartorial and somatic consciousness. Yet, in a space which is
very clearly defined by display and specularity – indicated, of course, not only by the three
mirrors, but also through the entourage of portraits which adorn the dressing room’s walls –
Spinks has to admit defeat.

The repetition of the term ‘usual’ in the notes that accompany the illustration
indicates that this predicament is part of the man’s habitual routine. Looking into his mirror(s)
and deciding whether to adhere to the prescriptions of flashy display, or not, becomes a daily
battle, one in which the invisible ‘character’ and ‘intellect’ give way to the power of the eye. As
he begins to ‘squeeze’ his body into the cramping garments which denote visual acceptance,
Lovelace becomes further disabled by sartorial-consciousness. His collar ‘prevents’ him from
‘turning his head’, his boots stop him ‘from walking’, and his ‘belt’ – the masculine euphemism
for corset – impedes him from ‘drawing his breath’.\footnote{\textit{Masculine Inconsistency}, \textit{Punch} (2 April 1881), p.156.} As this last inhibition hyperbolically
suggests, the fixation with man’s sartorial appearance had the potential to become fatal.\footnote{Of course, corsets – whose use had been tenuously discussed for years, most notably in the infamous ‘corset controversies’ of the 1860s – were renowned for taking its wearer’s life prematurely. See, Valerie Steele, \textit{Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.59.} In
a much earlier 1853 cartoon, [pictured below] the terminal prospects which lurked beneath
the inhibitive garments of male ‘taste’ were also satirically addressed:
In this illustration, the skull, which teeters on top of the ‘deuced neat style of pin’ worn by Charley, becomes a visual symbol of impending doom. These men of ‘taste’, whose eyes are mesmerically drawn to the skull, are psychosomatically fixated with sartorial frivolities. Whilst, in this particular cartoon, the mirror is conspicuously absent, the symmetrical, reflexive positioning of the two men visually emulates the typical man before the mirror scenario. Because of their close proximity to one another, each man is capable of meticulously scrutinising the other. A few months after this image was printed, another cartoon appeared. However, this time, there was a mirror present:
Chapter 4: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Whilst, on the surface, this sketch appears to be nothing more than another trivial poking of fun at the man of ‘fashion’, there is, I think, a more discerning, dysmorphophic reading of the image to be made. The first thing to note is the very apparent discomforts surrounding discrepancies in size. As the first cock sparrow – whose diminutive tie droops dismally from his neck – gazes on at the second cock sparrow’s large, starched, stiff and erect neck edifice, the comparative behaviour distinctive in dysmorphophobia is mimicked. The mirror that lurks at the back of the scene also serves to emphasise that the spectating practices which swamped the Victorian male and his sartorial body were multi-dimensional: perceptive vision could be refracted in a variety of ways, creating a scopic potency which was hard to elide or escape. When the second cock sparrow is asked, ‘how the doose do you manage it?’ his response – ‘I give the whole of my mind to it!’ – is dysmorphophobically disposed. In the same way that the

587 The comparative behaviour of the dysmorphophobic will be discussed in more detail during the second half of this chapter.
dysmorphophobic is fully absorbed in his body’s appearance, the second cock sparrow reveals that his own fixations are monomaniacal; they pervade aspects of his psyche.

The fact that the men are presented here as cock sparrows is also significant. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin paid particular attention to the sexually selective conduct of the bird species. 588 ‘When we behold a male bird elaborately displaying his graceful plumes or splendid colours before the female’, Darwin states, ‘it is impossible to doubt that she admires the beauty of her male partner’. ‘If’, he goes on, ‘female birds had been incapable of appreciating the beautiful colours [and]the ornaments [...]of their male partners, all the labour and anxiety exhibited by the latter in displaying their charms before the females would have been thrown away.’ 589 Of course, by drawing attention to the male birds that put on the most elaborate rituals of display, Darwin depicted sexual selection as driven by both the eyes of the female and the visual presence of the male. Indeed, throughout the entirety of the animal kingdom, ‘the female’, Darwin states, ‘accepts one male in preference to others’. She accepts ‘the male which is the most attractive to her, [and] the one which is the least distasteful’. 590 If these capacities of aesthetic choice were translated into human terms, Darwin’s theories would become highly problematic; they would disrupt bourgeois views of gender and sexual propriety in several important ways. For a start, the notion that Victorian (wo)men should be disinterested in surface (and sartorial) appearances would be radically undermined. 591 As a consequence, Darwin conveniently modified his theories when it came to discussing humans. In humans, he claimed, ‘the males are the selecters, instead of having been the selected’. The theory behind this convolution was that ‘women are everywhere conscious of the value of their own beauty [...] , they take more delight in decorating themselves with all sorts of ornaments than do men’. 592

Although Victorian culture was very publicly aware of a woman’s inclination to ‘decorate’ herself with all manner of ornaments, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the same inclination also infected men. As an 1899 edition of the *Ludgate* observed: ‘It is quite an open secret that the sterner sex, though in theory considered above such trivialities as fashions, is, in reality, as much at the mercy of the tailor’s latest dictum as the average woman

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588 See, Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). ‘While Darwin surveys sexual selection throughout the animal kingdom, he gives by far the most attention to birds, where male “antics” and display are much more important than violent combat’, p.114.
590 Ibid. p.257.
591 What is more, if the process of human sexual selection were driven by female desire, the era’s cherished ‘angel in the house’ would no longer be asexual: instead, male display (in which, of course, both sexes were apparently disinterested) would become an exciting source of sensual stimulation.
is a slave to “la Mode”.

That man’s slavish adherence to ‘the tailor’s latest dictum’ was intricately knit to his desire to attract the opposite sex, in spite of Darwin’s claims, also a focal point of literary discussion. In Thomas Hardy’s, The Woodlanders (1887), for instance, Giles Winterborne ponders over the following:

> It had sometimes dimly occurred to him, in his ruminating silences at Little Hintock, that external phenomena such as the lowness or height or colour of a hat, the fold of a coat, the make of a boot, or the chance attitude or occupation of a limb at the instant of view – may have a great influence upon feminine opinion of a man’s worth, so frequently founded on non-essentials.

Hardy’s emphasis on minor details – the lowness or highness of a hat, a fold in the fabric of a coat – all serve to emphasise that (from a man’s point of view) the female gaze was unscrupulously meticulous. What should be deemed ‘non-essential’ to the female in her capacity as ‘selector’ was, in actual fact, a prerequisite of sexual selection. In George Meredith’s The Egoist (1879), Sir Willoughby Patterne, alert to these discriminating mandates, appropriates Darwinian principles of self-display for his own self-aggrandising purposes. Described by Meredith’s narrator as ‘a deeper student of Science than his rivals’, Willoughby is endowed with the ‘scientific’ knowledge that sexual success is ‘awarded to the bettermost’. ‘You spread a handsomer tail than your fellows’, the narrator insists, ‘you dress a finer top-knot’, you have ‘a longer stride’ and a woman will ‘select you. The superlative is magnetic to her.’

This notion of ‘the superlative’, of being ‘the bettermost’, fuelled sartorial interest and competition between men. Male display and sartorial self-fashioning were a means of advancing up social and sexual hierarchies. In H. G. Wells’s novel, Kipps (1905), Wells’s titular protagonist, Arthur, exhibits a sartorial interest in cultivating his physical appearance which both rivals and surpasses that of his social seniors. In a scene that makes explicit the young man’s growing awareness of his physical and sartorial selves, Wells describes his hero’s indoctrination into competitive life as an object of display. Realising that his social and sexual identities are largely defined in relation to other men, Kipps immediately seeks to transform himself through fashionable dress so as to secure his place in ‘the eyes of the girl-apprentices’:

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593 Helen C. Gordon, ‘English Historical Costumes for Ten Centuries; Or, Fashion’s Mirror for Men’, Ludgate, 8 (October 1899), pp. 528-535, (p.528).
[Kipp’s costume] began to interest him more; he began to realise himself as a visible object, to find an interest in the costume-room mirrors and the eyes of the girl-apprentices.

In this he was helped by counsel and example. Pearce, his immediate senior, was by way of being what was called a Masher, and preached his cult. During slack times grave discussions about collars, ties, the cut of trouser-legs, and the proper shape of a boot-tow, were held in the Manchester department. In due course Kipps went to a tailor, and his short jacket was replaced by a morning coat with tails. Stirred by this, he purchased at his own expense three stand-up collars to replace his former turn-down ones. They were nearly three inches high, higher than those Pearce wore, and they made his neck quite sore and left a red mark under his ears. [...] So equipped, he found he had now succeeded Minton [the head apprentice] in his seniority.  

As this passage indicates, cut-throat feats of visual supremacy ensured that sartorial display preceded physical comfort. Men were willing to endure extreme physical discomfort if it meant being superlatively attractive. Furthermore, the fact that these men are trivially preoccupied with the ‘cut’ of their trousers and the ‘shape’ of their boots is by no means immaterial. Both terms reconfigure the long nineteenth century’s ever-present ‘chisel’ rhetoric.

As the Victorian male began to attract the attentions of the opposite sex through modes of dress that helped to accentuate his physical contours, the malleability of his body – his ability to cut and shape it – became crucial. Following the lead of the well-famed Regency dandies, who proclaimed (albeit satirically): ‘A skeleton’s the taste/ Scarce five inches round the waist’; Victorian men, in increasingly large numbers, were taking to the corset and other body-shaping undergarments as a means of ‘cutting’ a physically attractive (and noticeably slight) figure. I allude to the process of cutting here on purpose. The corset, capable of ‘painfully pinching’, was hailed yet another disciplinary tool designed to help ‘chisel a boy into shape’. In 1889, a writer in the Family Doctor stated that: boys are very ‘liable to injury from unbridled license’; therefore, ‘a period of discipline is extremely valuable’.  

597 The Dandy’s Songster (Newcastle: I. Marshall, c.1820), pp.7-8.  
which forced its wearer ‘to exercise great self-control at meal times’, thereby preventing ‘over-indulgence in both eating and drinking’, the ‘compulsory wearing’ of a corset ‘at once suggested’ itself as [...] beneficial’. Of course, the corset had to be ‘strongly-boned, stiff-busked, [and] firm’ – note the aggressive, almost phallic, potency such disciplinary systems incited. The ‘absurd flimsy things one only too often notices’ would simply not be strong enough to withstand and ‘conquer’ the boy’s taste for ‘excess’.

Further accentuating this almost soldierly resilience to the excess-prone, fat body, the most aggressive and ruthless of ‘stay-lace’ ‘regime[s]’ would soon invade the era’s military and cadet colleges. For example, describing a young Russian cadet in 1894, the Family Doctor observed

a remarkably handsome youth [...] especially on account of his waist, which by a very severe system of lacing never exceeded in size that of the reigning star in the theatrical world. He was made to go through long and very arduous gymnastic classes, with his figure always as strictly confined as when buttoned up on a parade [...] [T]he military authorities refused to allow him to loosen his waist, and even made him lace tighter to counteract his growing weight.

Although this points us to the implacably penal nature of tight-lacing, it simultaneously renders the practice appealing: wearing a corset could make one ‘remarkably handsome’. Moreover, propagating the era’s obsession with airy serenity, it could help a boy float amidst the ‘reigning stars’ of an almost weightless ‘theatrical world’.

As a commodity which literally encased and speculatively exhibited its wearer for visual consumption, it is not surprising that the midriff of the male tight-lacer aquired as much attention as the ‘reigning stars’ of contemporary theatrics. Although some of this attention was negative – in 1864, for instance, Fyodor Dostoevsky declared ‘I hate men in corsets’, and, in 1903, the writers of Fashion sardonically queried whether this ‘corseted popinjay with the twenty-six inch waist’ was to be ‘the New Man’ – many of the boys and men who had been exposed to such disciplinary schemes became ‘submissive subject[s]’, even advocates

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600 [Finished Figure], ‘Corset Discipline’, FD (31 August 1889), pp.9-10.
604 [Finished Figure], ‘Corset Discipline’, pp.9-10.
608 [Finished Figure], ‘Corset Discipline’, pp.9-10.
of the system, boasting ‘a decided and unqualified approval of corsets’.\textsuperscript{609} As A. Williams noted in 1894, realising that their ‘slender waists’ could compel ‘a large share of admiration’, it was not uncommon for youths to be afflicted with a positive ‘rage for tight-lacing’.\textsuperscript{610} This ‘rage’ for corsetry is precisely how the female ‘mania’ was described. As Dr Staines noted in Charles Reade’s 1873 novel \textit{The Simpleton}: ‘all [tight-lacing] ladies are monomaniacs’.\textsuperscript{611} Of course, the term ‘monomaniacs’ implies that the practice of corsetry could have extensive psychological dimensions; the ‘curious custom’ could become addictive. This characterisation of tight-lacing as a ‘mania, a disease and an addiction’\textsuperscript{612} was equally discernible in the male sex. Describing the practices of another male military school in Moscow, Williams recalled the following:

\begin{quote}
we went out into society a great deal during our holidays, and finding the admiration of the ladies a novel and attractive delight, and, further finding that our slender waists came in for a large share of admiration, a rage for tight-lacing set in among us. The ladies at that time followed this fashion, and, as each cadet had some special divinity at whose shrine he worshipped, a rivalry regarding waists arose between many ladies and their attendant cadets. Many of the cadets laced to such an extent that it seriously impeded their studies. They would, with each other’s assistance, or as was more often the case, by the assistance of certain corset makers, draw themselves in to incredibly small dimensions. The ladies, jealous at this, would playfully insist that the prerogative of slenderness rested with them, and further rivalries would ensue. The cadets would resolutely resist any attempt to outdo them, and in these endeavours their waists were still further reduced. Corsets were not taken off at night, but were still further tightened, and as time went on and the cadets joined the army the habit of lacing became firmly rooted in them.\textsuperscript{613}
\end{quote}

As Williams’s reminiscences reveal, the competitive elements to sartorial fashioning had the ability to entirely traverse boundaries of gender. Not only were men fashionably competing with other men, but also with the opposite sex.

In his turn-of-the-century conduct manual, \textit{Clothes and the Man}, Edward Spencer, writing under the pseudonym ‘The Major of Today’, similarly noted (and subsequently dismissed) women’s fears that men might outshine them in their sartorial intrigues. Rather than discussing man’s new (and arguably selective) taste for corsetry, Spencer writes about the

\textsuperscript{611} Charles Reade, \textit{A Simpleton} [1873] (London: Chatto and Windus, c.1873), p.134.
\textsuperscript{612} Steele, \textit{The Corset}, p.87.
\textsuperscript{613} Williams, ‘Military Tight-Lacing’, p.410.
illusory slimming effects produced by ‘double-breasted waistcoats’. Some ‘double-breasted waistcoats’, he states,

are made with the two rows of buttons set wide apart across the chest and gradually getting closer, till they nearly meet at the bottom of the waistcoat. There are advantages to be derived from wearing such a waistcoat. They tend to make your chest appear larger than it really is, and the two rows of buttons meeting at the bottom of the waistcoat make your waist appear a trifle smaller than it really is. If your wife tells you that a man has no business to think about having a waist, you can retort that primitive man had a waist considerably smaller than the waist of primitive woman. She won’t like that.\(^\text{614}\)

In addition to the cross-gendered elements of competition, this article is significant in terms of its blurring of the boundaries between illusion and reality. As shall be revealed in the second part of this chapter, visual discrepancies between the real and the imaginary, between what is ‘really’ there and what is there only in the form of illusion – an illusion that is both self-conjured and perceptive – was a definitive feature of dysmorphophobia. According to an article taken from an 1890 edition of the \textit{Tailor’s Review}, man’s novel taste for such close-fit styles of clothing (which might, or might not, reveal his body as it ‘really’ is) were, ironically, shunned by many women because of their apparent exposure of the ‘real’ male body lurking beneath. If a man’s figure-hugging garments exposed his body too freely, there would be nothing left for the female imagination to uncover:

Women are beginning to object to and discuss the garments of men. They say it is time there was a reform in men’s wearing apparel; […] If men are shocked by the sight of a lady in tights, or \textit{au naturel}, is it not to be conjectured that women regard with loathing the current habit of mankind of clothing the legs in an envelope that reveals only too acutely outlines that might be left to the imagination? If it is improper for women to apparel themselves so as to afford a correct idea of the proportions and contours of their nether extremities, is it not in equally bad taste for masculines to indulge in that exposure?\(^\text{615}\)

As this article implies, the specular concern with man’s visual appearance stretched beyond the seams of his clothing. Man’s ‘nether extremities’,\(^\text{616}\) his bodily curves and contours, his physical form and physique were also subject to visual critique.

\(^{614}\)Edward Spencer [The Major of Today], \textit{Clothes and the Man} (New York, M.F. Mansfield, 1900), p.64.
\(^{615}\)\textit{Tailor’s Review} (June 1890), p.108. quoted by Shannon, pp.82-3.
\(^{616}\)According to Ralph Keyes, a variety of ‘mealy-mouthed’ euphemisms for trousers developed throughout the nineteenth century in order to avert visual attention from a man’s ‘nether regions’.

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For J. M. Barrie, whose tree-tailored chiselling in *Peter Pan* emphasises this synthesis of sartorial and/or bodily form and fit, the diminutive stature of his legs became a painful hindrance in life, particularly in areas of amatory interest. Although the above article suggests that women desired to avert sartorial attention from the curves and contours of male legs, Barrie’s understanding of the issue implies that if his ‘legs had been longer’, and, presumably, more conspicuous, he might have better succeeded in romantic conquests. Reflecting upon his adolescence at Dumfries Academy, Barrie writes:

...six feet three inches – if I had really grown to this it would have made a great difference in my life. [...] My one aim would have been to become a favourite of the ladies which between you and me has always been my sorrowful ambition. The things I could have said to them if my legs had been longer.617

This extract confirms that becoming ‘a favourite with the ladies’ was, in the eyes of Barrie (as well as many other males), dependent upon the perfect shape of a man’s body and its extremities, not just the fit of his clothes. Barrie’s internalisation of a preconceived ideal – which opined that being ‘six feet three inches’ was attractive – ensures that his failure to meet these set standards results in emotional dejection and body dissatisfaction.

As the approximation of the increasingly miniscule waist and the cultural focus placed on the length, breadth and shapeliness of male legs implies, man’s body (clothed and unclothed) was self-consciously ‘measurable’ in a variety of ways. The notion that the male body had to meet certain criterion is, of course, reinforced by the fact that the era’s fashion industry had begun to mass produce clothing which was cut to standardised fits. Just like Barrie’s lost boys – who, instead of having their trees tailored to fit them, ensure (under Peter’s admonitory guidance) that they are made to fit their tree – the rise of ready-made clothing exemplified that the individual body did not serve as a static ‘reference point’, as the ‘immobile absolute to which the environment must be adapted’.618 Rather, the male body had to adapt and conform to a circumscribed set of preconceived standards. In his history of men’s fashion, Colin McDowell claims that ‘ready-made clothes were available even in the late

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Among the most popularly employed of these were: ‘irrepressibles, indescribables, ineffables, unnutterables, nether garments, continuations, don’t name ‘ems and mustn’t mention ‘ems’. In *Sketches by Boz* (1836), Dickens wrote that one character wore ‘light inexplicables without a spot’. In the *Pickwick Papers* (1837), the servant Trotter gives ‘four distinct slaps on the pocket of his mulberry indescribable’. See, Ralph Keyes, *Unmentionables: From Family Jewels to Friendly Fire, What we Say Instead of What we Mean* (London: John Murray, 2010).


eighteenth century, but they were inexpensive and badly made – cheap clothes for the poorer classes’. By the later decades of the nineteenth century, however, ready-made clothing was acquiring more credibility. The stigmas attached to ready-made garments had begun to subside. Describing the industry’s novel predominance in Leeds, for instance, the author of an 1883 article printed in Good Words stated:

Leeds is contributing an interesting chapter to our industrial history in its manufacture of “ready-made” clothes. [...] The “ready-mades” are almost exclusively clothes for boys and men, and a single factory will turn out in the course of a year close upon a million garments, counting coats, jackets, waistcoats, and trousers separately. These factories are among the finest buildings in Leeds. You might indeed call them industrial palaces. [...] One sees all sorts [of fabrics], from the cheapest to the dearest; and it is worth mentioning that the demand for the better qualities steadily increases – a proof, perhaps, that “ready-mades” are working their way through “the masses” to “the classes”.

Whilst the description here seems to confirm the idea that ready-made clothing was produced on a grand scale for the (presumably poorer) ‘masses’, the author ensures that the industry is presented as ‘exclusive’ in more than merely gendered terms. Manufactured ‘among the finest buildings in Leeds’, these garments were produced ‘from the cheapest to the dearest [of fabrics]’. Yet, in spite of this shift from poor ‘masses’ to wealthy ‘classes’, the disparate bodies of the ‘boys and men’ that these items were being ‘exclusively’ produced for nevertheless had to conform to standardised patterns and fits. ‘Something should be said as to how the unseen customers are measured for their clothes’, the author admits. ‘In the early days of the trade’, he begins, ‘the customer had only a few sizes to choose from, and if he had a long body and short legs, or measured more round the waist than he ought to have done, it was unlikely he would get ready-mades to fit him’. However, as ‘the growth of the trade’ (and the number of ‘closely graded’ sizes) increased, ‘unless a man [was] quite abnormal in his proportions he should have [had] no difficulty in finding what he want[ed]’. The ‘average man’, the author concluded,

has, if one remembers exactly, a “thirty-two leg” and a “thirty-one waist.”
But as some men are average in the leg and not in the waist a series of trousers is sent into the market in which the waist increases by half-inches

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almost to what one may call aldermanic girth, while the leg remains at thirty-two.  

Although, as this confirms, ready-made clothing industries would interact with fluctuating sizes if necessity arose, the fact that sartorially pandering to an ‘aldermanic girth’ made a man ‘abnormal’ would have encouraged him to adhere to the era’s standardised “thirty-two leg”, “thirty-one waist” prescriptions.

Of course, the idea of the male body being standardised is central not only to the clinical and contextual frameworks underpinning the advancement of dysmorphophobia, but also to the thesis as a whole. In the next section to this chapter I will explore how such preoccupations made man’s sartorial consciousness emphatically body-bound. After examining the cultural refraction of mirrored spaces in a variety of literary (con)texts, this second section will return us full-circle to the centrality of fat-phobia to nineteenth-century patterns of thought. With reference to a number of literary and non-literary materials, I will explore how descriptions of male body-consciousness helped appropriate visual pointers and a specific vocabulary that would eventually transform man’s painful desperation for normalisation into clinical and pathological states.

(ii.) Through the Looking Glass: Refracting Man’s Mirrored Consciousness

The dysmorphophobic, according to Morselli’s diagnostics, is acutely aware of his own visual presence: he ‘constantly peers in the mirror, feels [...] measures [...] and examines the tiniest defects in his skin, or the proportions of his trunk and the straightness of his limbs’. This idea of ‘measuring’ the ‘proportions’ of the male body is, as I have suggested, particularly important to my argument that dysmorphophobia was externally sourced and culturally produced. In addition to the fact that ‘measuring’ is an (inter)relational activity – that is, an action which aims to make an object proportional to, or commensurate with, something/someone else – the ‘state of pain and anguish’ the dysmorphophobic finds himself in is seemingly generated by the importance Victorian culture placed on the static ‘calculability’ of the male body. Of course, Morselli’s use of the word ‘measure’ here introduces the idea of corporeal quantification, and, as we saw in the first chapter, Victorian males were trained to be constantly aware of their bodies in statistically cognisant, or ‘measurable’ way. Through a visual ‘measuring’ of his (and his peers’) bodily proportions, the

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621 Ibid. p.528.
dysmorphophobic is, as Morselli suggests, mentally calculating whether his body falls within
the acceptable parameters which momentarily define corporeal normativity.

In the following poem printed in an 1865 edition of *London Society*, the speaker’s
inability to sustain this sense of static calculability induces a dysmorphophobic proclivity to
repeatedly look into his mirror; he visually records (and laments) the changes wrought upon
his increasingly ‘deformed’ physique.

Now my weight is twenty stone,
Daily I increase a pound,
Looking in the glass I groan,
Seeing I grow still more round.

The ‘now’ which opens this stanza locates us in the present moment, but the subsequent
line’s, ‘Daily I increase’ and the final line’s, ‘still more’ suggest that the speaker is rapidly
moving away from any sense of stability. His body’s state of constant *flux* instigates, in
Morselli’s terms, an equally constant (and paradoxical) ‘fixation in the consciousness of the
idea of one’s own deformity’. As the speaker admits, his measuring rituals occur on a ‘daily’
basis, and, in the same way that Morselli’s dysmorphophobic patient becomes ‘a veritably
unhappy individual, who in the midst of his daily affairs [...] is suddenly overcome by the fear
of some deformity that might have developed in his body without his noticing it’, the
speaker is plagued by a need to repeatedly self-spectate, in spite of the emotional discomfort
it induces.

In another 1865 article, this time printed in the *New Sporting Magazine*, we are
presented with a similarly troubled mirror scene. Masterton, the article’s weighty male
subject, is ridiculed by a surgeon and a second lieutenant in his company on account of his
reputed increase in weight. Following their jibes, Masterton initially attempts to dismiss their
derogatory observations, but is then plagued by an uneasiness which compels him to examine
his body before a mirror:

“My jove, Masterton, how stout you’re getting!”
“Fat, you mean,” laughed the second lieutenant.
“He will be a porpoise, soon,” sniggered the surgeon.
“Prime bait for a shark,” whispered one middy to another.
“Nonsense,” I exclaimed, “it is only the sea-air: it always makes me stout.” I
said this cheerfully, but a feeling of uneasiness made me shortly after study

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623 Remember, fat was perceived as being a kind of ‘deformity’ by the Victorians. Fat men were often
exhibited at freak shows, etc.
626 Ibid. p.108.
As a surgeon and a second lieutenant, the men who sneer at Masterton are authoritative bodies and representatives of disciplinary state apparatus. Their taunts therefore become an artful means of instigating self-regulatory behaviour; they force Masterton to internalise their panoptic, disciplinary gaze. The contrast between Masterton’s initially dismissive “‘Nonsense’”, and his subsequent sense of ‘conviction’ are pivoted around the centrality of the mirror as a tool for reflecting the truth.

In numerous nineteenth-century texts, the mirror is presented as a judicatory authority which only ever reveals a veritable reflection. The image presented in the mirror is generally representative of reality, and is not fabricated ‘nonsense’. In an 1838 article ‘On Reflecting Mirrors’, for instance, the following observations were made:

The feeling which prompts us to view ourselves in a looking-glass is so widespread in its operation that we may perhaps call it a pardonable vanity. But whether it be or be not deemed pardonable, the world will, we presume, continue to seek this sort of silent reflection – not of their conduct – but of their faces; for this glassy monitor is viewed with that respect which we all agree to award to one who uniformly speaks the truth.

From this extract we can deduce that the ‘silent reflection[s]’ presented to us in ‘this glassy monitor’ – the word ‘monitor’ imparting an air of regulatory authority – were affirmative: reliable sources of visual authenticity. However, one cannot help but wonder whether Masterton’s post-mirror convictions are actually a fabrication of his socially stimulated paranoia. Does he really see that he is ‘making flesh rapidly’? – a phrase which suggests that his body is supernaturally expanding before his very eyes. Or is this altered sense of perception brought about by the voices which taunt him? If Masterton’s altered bodily state is, in fact, ‘nonsense’, a result of his externally-sourced angst, then his condition becomes further related to the body dysmorphophobic, whose ‘deformities’ are often imagined, or exaggerated through their fraught sensory perceptions.

The notion of being visually ‘fraught’, or a victim of sensory distress, is one which augmented the epoch’s mirror craze. The imagined defects in one’s appearance needed to be habitually affirmed or dismissed, and these results were largely dependent upon the social presence of mirrored surfaces. That mirrors were becoming increasingly integral to nineteenth-century culture is evident in the following observations of Chambers’ Journal:

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Chapter 4: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Mirrors have been in use since the days when Eve made her toilet by the streams of Paradise; and all her daughters – ay, and her sons too, if truth must be told – have resorted to them, whether in the form of the clear fountain, or the polished steel, or the modern looking-glass. [...] We take them as we find them – a necessity of life. What house does not possess a mirror? – from the large cheval mirror, with its gorgeous gilding, [...] down to the little cracked disk, bound with red painted wood [...] they[all] bear a deservedly fair character for singleness and truth, so as to render their testimony worthy of credit. 629

As this author suggests, the mirror had become ‘a necessity of life’. Through its pervasive domestic presence, the mirror not only traversed boundaries of gender, 630 but also minimized disjunctures in class. The cracked and tarnished glasses of the working-class home were as ‘worthy of credit’ as the opulent gold gildings of the rich. The ideas of reflective ‘truth’ and ‘testimony’ are also reiterated here, adding further moral weight to the mirror’s judicial functioning.

Of course, through its officious, monitory (omni)presence, the mirror often appeared to transcend its objective status. In a short-story entitled, ‘Reflections of a Bath Mirror’, for instance, the ‘Bath Mirror’ of the story’s title is configured as subject, and turns the typical ‘man before the mirror’ scenario on its head:

I am an old mirror. I have an old history. I have seen strange things that would shock Nineteenth Century Propriety and make Dame Grundy’s hair stand on end. [...]That my frame is a little bent from trying to hear the inward speech of a de-generation born with a silver spoon in its mouth, I must admit. [...][Upon my arrival] everyone – that is, everyone worth knowing in Bath – came to see me. Oh, the beautiful ladies with hair rolled back, and pear powder and patches who looked into my bright face, and went away better pleased with their own. The gentlemen, too, with their periwigs and great white neckcloths, their claret-coloured coats and

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629 ‘The Truth of the Mirror’, Chambers’ Journal, 2:26 (1 July 1854), pp.11-12, p.11, [emphasis mine].
630 In accordance with Darwin’s convoluted theories, the writer of this article seems to imply that women were the primary occupiers of reflective spaces. It is Eve’s daughters who frame the extract, her ‘sons’ merely being a reflective afterthought, ‘if truth must be told’. A similar attitude towards gendered mirror patterning is perceptible in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Wives and Daughters, where Squire Hamley, who is disgruntled by his son’s prolonged toilet-making, states: ‘when I was a young man I should have been ashamed to have spent as much time at my looking glass as if I’d been a girl’, (p.263). The Squire’s pinpointing of his and his son’s generational differences, perhaps suggests that man’s fascination with his mirror image was a novel phenomenon, and therefore, to begin with, one which incited suspicion.
embroidered waistcoasts, and such calves! Ah me! They never dress now
but in funeral suits, and legs have dwindled to broomsticks. 631

Here, the central observer of the extract is not the man standing before the mirror, but is, in fact, the mirror itself. As a result of this switch in scopophilic positions, the mirror becomes a panoptical mechanism – one which perceives and reveals man’s visual (and moral flaws) from both subjective and objective positions. The monitory gaze, then, could be simultaneously internal (coming from the man stood before the mirror) and external (refracted through the mirror itself): subject/object, seer/seen relations are presented as being interchangeable. This interchangeability serves to spotlight the fact that, throughout the nineteenth century, people were subject to a constant state of surveillance. Whether that surveillance was self-directed or not, the mirror was central to the dynamics of visual scrutiny. Another point of significance to note in this passage is the author’s sardonic reference to ‘de-generation’.

As we saw in the previous chapter, concerns that the British race was physically ‘degenerating’ were rife during the closing years of the nineteenth century. The physical manifestations of such degeneration often pivoted around scenes involving a man who would observe his inferior bodily form in a mirror. From Little Billee’s cursing himself as a ‘puny misbegotten shrimp’ to the reflective rituals of the ‘scandalously skinny’ H. G. Wells – who, ‘like Alice through the Looking Glass’, worried that ‘there [were] Mock Turtles and White Queens and Mad Hatters about’ who discouragingly marked one’s ‘changing [...] shape and stature’ 632 – the nineteenth-century male’s visual ‘dwindling’ was an acute cause for concern. In the case of the ‘Bath Mirror’, the castigatory gaze is focussed upon male ‘calves’: calves which have recently ‘dwindled to broomsticks’. That the author of this article should be concerned with the (un)shapeliness of male legs is important in the contexts of both physical and sexual attraction, as well as dysmorphophobia. In terms of the former, a man’s legs were, according to Colin McDowell, regarded as ‘the chief male erogenous zone for nineteenth-century women’. 633 Subsequently, many men, as we saw earlier, often paid particular attention to (and were particularly conscious of) the development and showcasing of their lower limbs.

Spotlighting the conflation between form and fit, and in contrast to the opinions of the women mentioned in the Tailor’s Review – who, we might recall, found men’s close-fitting trousers offensive – Mrs Mountstuart, of Meredith’s The Egoist, firmly asserts that Sir Willoughby’s leg was ‘exquisite’, particularly when dressed in ‘a cavalier court-suit’. It ‘was a

631 C. J. Langston, ‘Reflections of a Bath Mirror’, The Argosy, 60 (December 1895), pp.748-758, (pp.748-9). This mirror as perceptive subject scenario is also played out in the following short-story in Bow Bells: ‘The Story of the Mirror Told’, Bow Bells, 12:291 (23 February 1870), p.111.
632 Wells, Experiment in Autobiography, ii, p.607.
633 McDowell, The Man of Fashion, p.76.
leg to be seen because it was a burning leg’. ‘There it is’, she meditates, ‘and it will shine through’. It ‘twinkles’, Mountstuart goes on, ‘to a tender midway between imperiousness and seductiveness, audacity and discretion; between “you shall worship me” and “I am devoted to you”’. Such a leg, she concludes, ‘will walk straight into the hearts of women’. It might have been on account of this female fixation with the purported beauty of the male leg that Morselli’s clinical findings revealed that, one of the ways in which the dysmorphophobic patient’s suffering often became manifest was through an irrational fear of having ‘deformed’ or ‘crooked legs’. This fragmentary fixation with certain body parts also finds fictional parity (and disparity) in Charles Dickens’s 1840-41 novel, *Barnaby Rudge*.

In this novel, Simon Tappertit, an apprentice locksmith to Gabriel Varden, becomes neurotically obsessed with the mirrored appearance of his legs. Sim – whose surname, in aural terms (‘Tap-at-it’), appears to align him with the cult of body chisellers who have appeared throughout the thesis as a whole – is obsessed with ‘beautifying’, or augmenting the visual appearance of his body. In the following scene, we begin to see the extent to which a fixation with his visual appearance pervades Tappertit’s psyche:

> Quite unconscious that his master was looking on from the dark corner by the parlour door, Sim threw off the paper cap, sprang from his seat, and in two extraordinary steps, something between skating and minuet dancing, bounded to a washing place at the other end of the shop, and there removed from his face and hands all traces of his previous work – practising the same step all the time with the utmost gravity. This done, he drew from some concealed place a little scrap of looking-glass, and with its assistance arranged his hair, and ascertained the exact state of a little carbuncle on his nose. Having now completed his toilet, he placed the fragment of mirror on a low bench, and looked over his shoulder at so much of his legs as could be reflected in that small compass, with the greatest possible complacency and satisfaction.

The first thing to note about Sim Tappertit’s behaviour in this passage is his clandestine secrecy. He is completely self-absorbed: ‘quite unconscious that his master was looking on [at him]’, and remains engrossed in his self-contained surroundings. The haste with which Sim conducts his movements also seems to evoke a sense of guilt, almost as if he wishes their very brevity to erase his body from view. What is more, the ‘little scrap of looking-glass’ that Sim looks into is drawn from ‘some concealed place’.

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634 Meredith, *The Egoist*, p.72.
635 Some of Morselli’s patients were conscious of ‘developing a compressed, flattened forehead’, others ‘a ridiculous nose’. See, ‘Dysmorphophobia and Taphephobia’, p.108.
In her book, *The Broken Mirror*, Katherine Phillips, a leading expert on Body Dysmorphic Disorder, discusses the aspects of secrecy and shame which are often integral to a modern diagnosis of the condition. Because of a sufferer’s worry of being considered superficial or vain, their symptoms are frequently concealed.\(^{637}\) When Sim proceeds to ‘ascertain the exact state of a little carbuncle on his nose’, his dysmorphophobic tendencies are made all the more apparent. Like the clinical dysmorphophobic, who, according to Morselli, ‘measures the length of his nose, [and] examines the tiniest defects in his skin’,\(^ {638}\) Sim appears to be preoccupied by an apparently minor defect in his complexion: ‘a *little* carbuncle on his nose’. However, adding to the notion that first appearances can be deceptive, these fears are soon dismissed, and his attentions are turned to his legs: legs which incite the ‘*greatest possible complacency and satisfaction*’.\(^ {639}\) Here Sim’s self-absorption in his mirror image differs dramatically from the dysmorphophobic’s. Rather than being pervaded with sentiments of ‘fear, distress, anxiety and anguish’,\(^ {640}\) Sim’s emotional response is one of contentment. In the passage immediately following this scene, Dickens draws further attention to Sim’s body fulfilment:

> Sim […] was an old-fashioned, thin-faced, sleek-haired, sharp-nosed, small-eyed little fellow, very little more than five feet high, and thoroughly convinced in his own mind that he was above middle size; rather tall, in fact, than otherwise. Of his figure, which was well enough formed, though somewhat of the leanest, he entertained the highest admiration; and with his legs, which, in knee-breeches, were perfect curiosities of littleness, he was enraptured to a degree amounting to enthusiasm. He also had some majestic, shadowy ideas concerning the power of his eye. […] [B]ut it must be added, that this faculty […n]ever furnished evidence which could be deemed quite satisfactory and conclusive.\(^ {641}\)

As the narrator makes clear, Sim ‘entertains the highest admiration’ for his own bodily appearance, in particular toward his legs – of which ‘he was enraptured to a degree amounting to enthusiasm’. Whilst this body-confidence distances Sim from dysmorphophobic symptomologies, the fact that his confidence seems to derive from a distorted perception of self, reconnects him to the condition. What Sim sees when he looks in the mirror seems at odds with what the narrator sees. Rather than envisaging legs which induce ‘enrapture’ and

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\(^{639}\) Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, p.42.
\(^{641}\) Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, p.42.
‘enthusiasm’, the narrator sees, instead, ‘perfect curiosities of littleness’. The term ‘curiosities’, in this context, is by no means complimentary. Therefore Sim’s perception of himself becomes radically different from the reality of the image presented by the mirror. Likewise, the veritable ‘littleness’ of his legs adds to this discrepancy; their smallness denotes an insignificance which parallels his own. Although this incongruence of perceptive vision could be due to the insubstantiality of Sim’s reflective apparatus (his mirror is only ‘a little scrap of glass’), the implication – evoked through the ‘majestic, shadowy ideas […] concerning the power of his eye’ – is that Sim’s perception of himself is a figment of his imagination, a case of misguided narcissism.

In her clinical study on body dysmorphic disorder, Phillips draws further attention to the bonds forged between perceptual distortion and how someone really looks. ‘People with BDD’, Phillips states, ‘have a problem with body image – with how they view their physical appearance – not with how they actually look’. ‘Research on body image more generally’, she continues ‘shows that the view from “inside” (our body image) usually doesn’t match that from the “outside” (other people’s view of how we look.) Many homely people think they look fine, and many attractive people think they’re unattractive. In BDD, this mismatch is greatly magnified’. This sense of dysmorphophobic ‘magnification’ is made figuratively apparent in Sim. As we saw earlier, when stood before the mirror, he sees himself telescopically. Although ‘very little more than five feet high’, Sim is ‘thoroughly convinced in his own mind that he was above middle size; rather tall, in fact, than otherwise’. Such perceptive mismatching was by no means confined to fictional figures. In the Chambers’ article discussed earlier, the authors (after stating that ‘the morality of a mirror consists in its truth’) went on to add the following disclaimer: ‘we will not deny that there are individuals […] to be met with[…] wh[o] have a quite wonderful propensity for elongation and extension of the visage, or of some one of its particular members’. This article’s reference to a collective body of ‘individuals’ implies that there might have existed a cult of mirror addicts who, like Sim, had a proclivity to visually ‘dysmorph’.

The conceptual incompatibility between Sim’s view of his body and the reality of his appearance is made all the more evident in a later scene with Mr Stagg, who, we should note, is blind. Looking once more into his glass, Sim is interrupted in his self-spectating by the blind man, who ‘dropped on one knee, and gently smoothed the calves of [Sim’s] legs, with an air of humble admiration’:

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642 Phillips, Understanding Body Dysmorphic Disorder, p.18.
643 Dickens, Barnaby Rudge, p.42.
644 ‘The Truth of the Mirror’, p.11.
“That I had but eyes!” he cried, “to behold my captain’s symmetrical proportions! That I had but eyes, to look upon these twin invaders of domestic peace!”

“Get out!” said Mr Tappertit, glancing downward at his favourite limbs. “Go along, will you, Stagg!”

“When I touch my own afterwards,” cried the host, smiting them reproachfully, “I hate ‘em. Comparatively speaking, they’ve got no more shape than wooden legs, beside these models of my noble captain’s."

“Yours!” exclaimed Mr Tappertit. “No I should think not. Don’t talk about those precious old toothpicks in the same breath with mine; that’s rather too much. Here. Take the glass”. 645

The fact that Stagg is a blind man means that, once again, the perfectionist impressions of Sim’s legs are conjured up by his own ‘majestical power of eye’: the clichéd phrase that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ takes another egotistical twist. Contrary to the assertions made by Sim in this scene, his legs are, if the narrator’s external observations are anything to go by, just as spindly as the ‘precious old toothpicks’ of Stagg. 646 Although ‘in personal dignity and self-esteem, [Sim] had swelled into a giant’ – note, again, the figurative notions of telescopic magnification – his legs are nevertheless ‘stupendously little’. 647 Yet, despite the narrator’s contentions, Sim protests (after ‘[taking] down his piece of looking-glass, twist[ing] his head round, and look[ing] closely at his legs’) “If they’re a dream, [...] let sculptures have such wisons, and chisel ‘em out when they wake. This is reality. Sleep has no such limbs as them””. 648 The allusions Sim makes to dreams and reality here accentuates the fact that he appears to dysmorphophobically distort his image. His sensory impressions are false, suggesting that perception and visual perspectives are fluid and fallible as opposed to being stable and fixed. The shifting interchange between Stag and Sim in this extract, as well as Stagg’s ‘comparative’ mode of speaking, also recalls the idea of bodily competition discussed above in relation to Punch’s cock sparrows, and in the previous chapter.

The constant specular awareness of one’s ‘self’ forced a man to consciously compare (often unfavourably) his own body to that of his peers. According to Phillips, ‘comparing is the most common BDD behaviour of all. [...] More than 90% of people with BDD do this’. 649

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645 Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, p.72.
646 Sim’s comparative associations are intriguing. In her self-help guide on BDD, one of Phillips’s patients worries that his legs “were becoming too thin like toothpicks and disappearing”. See, Philips, *Understanding Body Dysmorphic Disorder*, p.56.
647 Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, p.304.
648 Ibid. p.252.
649 Philips, *Understanding Body Dysmorphic Disorder*, p.73.
self to other, and other to self. Like the individual suffering from body dysmorphic disorder who, according to Phillips, often ‘appear[s] to overfocus on details and minor aspects of appearance’, which eventually ‘take over and dominate their view of themselves’, Sim is completely absorbed in the appearance of his legs. However, unlike the dysmorphophobic, whose neurotic focus on a specific body part is generally negative, Sim’s fixation is emphatically positive. In this respect, Sim appears to be suffering from a kind of antithetical Dysmorphophobia. As we have seen, he also distorts (or accentuates) their perfection through perceptual magnification, much like a concave mirror magnifies and distorts what it is reflecting as a whole.

The distorting properties and illusory optics of concave mirrors were discussed at length in an 1862 article printed in the *London Journal*. The fallibility of the mirror image therein presented, its instability, its visual alterations, and its refracting of differential perspectives, made this type of mirror (and, by extension, mirrored surfaces in general) unnerving:

> Among the curiosities exhibited in the last Paris Exposition, and promised for ours, was a huge concave mirror, the instrument of a startling species of optical magic: – On standing close to the mirror, and looking into it, it presents nothing but a magnificently monstrous dissection of your own physiognomy. On retiring a little, say a couple of feet, it gives your own face and figure in true proportion, but reversed, the head downwards. Most of the spectators, ignorant of anything else, observe these two effects, and pass on. But retire still further; standing at the distance of five or six feet from the mirror, and behold, you see yourself, not a reflection – it does not strike you as a reflection – but your veritable self, standing in the middle part between you and the mirror. The effect is almost appalling from the idea it suggests of something supernatural; so startling, in fact, that men of the strongest nerves will shrink involuntarily at the first view.

As the phrases ‘startling species’, ‘magnificently monstrous’ and ‘something supernatural’ suggest, mirrored surfaces were capable of transcending the mundanely domestic. Here, the reflective apparatus is not a household ‘necessity’ but, instead, is an attraction of horror. The concave mirror is publically ‘exhibited’, commercially paraded, and designed to galvanise perceptual fascination and fear. The way in which the mirror can simultaneously ‘dissect’ one’s physiognomy, distorting it beyond recognition, but also animatedly reflect one’s ‘veritable self’ ensures that the real and the imaginary sit uncomfortably close to one another. What is

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650 Ibid. p.18.
interesting to note about this juxtaposition is that the reflection of one’s ‘veritable self’ appears to be far more ‘supernatural[ly]’ disconcerting than the mirror’s ‘magnificently monstrous dissection of physiognomy’. Presumably aware that the concave mirror’s capacity to distort is, very clearly, an optical illusion, one which bears no relation to the subject’s actual appearance, when this distortion is retracted, and reality is restored in its place, the reflection presented becomes ‘startling’. Seeing oneself veritably – flaws and all – makes ‘men of the strongest nerves’ ‘shrink involuntarily’. The man in the mirror is left face to face with a visage that he might not necessarily like, and, knowing that his reflection is authentic, a veritable reflection of his true self, he is forced into a hyper-awareness of his visual flaws.

In 1864 Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote Notes from Underground, a novella which, like many other Russian novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, reveals just how morbid man’s hyperawareness could become. In the opening lines of the text, the anonymous narrator confesses: ‘I am a sick man . . . I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man’. The immediate establishment of such insecurity, of such specular self-defeatism, alerts the reader to the speaker’s self-consciousness in dysmorphophobic terms. The exasperated narrator perceives himself as ‘unattractive’ and this makes him ‘sick’. ‘I swear, gentlemen’, the narrator continues, ‘to be too conscious is an illness — a real thoroughgoing illness. [...] I am firmly persuaded that a great deal of consciousness, every sort of consciousness in fact, is a disease’. As the narrator progresses further into the story, his dysmorphophobic proclivities become all the more apparent. His extreme self-consciousness forces him to retreat further underground, and interaction on a social level becomes impossible:

> My life was gloomy, ill-regulated, and as solitary as that of a savage. I made friends with no one and positively buried myself more and more in my hole.
> At work in the office I never looked at anyone, and I was perfectly well aware that my companions looked upon me, not only as a queer fellow, but even looked upon me — I always fancied this — with a sort of loathing.

What is interesting about this passage is the fabricated intensity surrounding the act of looking. Whilst the speaker is ‘perfectly well aware that [his] companions looked upon [him]’, there is nonetheless an indication that this constant looking is a delusional falsehood, a sustained ‘fancy’. That this fancy derives from the speaker’s own insecure perception of self is obvious: ‘It is clear to me now’, he confesses,

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652 Dostoevsky, Notes From Underground, p.viii.
653 Ibid. p.5.
654 Phillips also states that some people with BDD ‘avoid eye contact or keep their head down or turned away from other people’. Understanding, p.69.
that, owing to my unbounded vanity and to the high standard I set for myself, I often looked at myself with furious discontent, which verged on loathing, and so I inwardly attributed the same feeling to everyone. I hated my face: I thought it disgusting, and even suspected that there was something base in my expression.655

As the terms ‘inwardly attributed’, ‘thought’ and ‘suspected’ indicate, the speaker’s fears are not founded on perceptive certainty. His self-perceived deformity is not given any kind of specificity. We are told that he thinks his face is ‘disgusting’ and ‘base’, but, again, these terms are subjective, any further visual clarity is dependent upon individual vantage points of looking. Dostoyevsky’s reluctance to pin down his protagonist’s deformity in tangible terms potentially heightens his air of grotesqueness. Of course, a visual defect which is indefinable, or one which fluctuates in severity according to the immediate perceiver, is far more unnerving than one which can be defined in exact or universal terms.

The specular enigmas surrounding the indefinable body are also explored by Robert Louis Stevenson in his The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886) – another novella which makes mirror consciousness one of its central foci. In the words of one of the story’s main protagonists, Richard Enfield:

“There is something wrong with [Edward Hyde’s] appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point. He’s an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I can really name nothing out of the way. No, sir, I can make no hand of it; I can’t describe him. And it’s not want of memory, for I declare I can see him this moment”.656

Just like the fat man, whose ever-expanding contours threaten to defy the limits of the definable, Hyde’s appearance resists visual verification. Although there is ‘something wrong’ with his appearance, that ‘something’ is impossible to define. However, the ‘feeling of deformity’ which plagues Hyde’s person is very different to the ‘deformity’ of the fat man. When Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde observes his doubled self in the mirror, a distinctive ‘slightness’ of body differentiates him from the fat ‘monsters’ discussed at the outset of this thesis. In his own account of transformative events, Dr Jekyll/ Mr Hyde recounts the following:

I determined to venture in my new shape as far as to my bedroom. [...] I stole through the corridors, a stranger in my own house; and coming to my

655 Dostoevsky, Notes From Underground, p.33, [emphasis mine].
room, I saw for the first time the appearance of Edward Hyde. [...] And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil [...] had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. [...] I lingered but a moment at the mirror. 657

Jekyll/Hyde’s reaction to his visual appearance here is inflected with schizoid complexities. Stevenson’s protagonist becomes both supremely obsessed with his mirrored reflection – its smallness, slightness and youthfulness – but also unconsciously repulsed by it. Although Jekyll/Hyde claims to be ‘conscious of no repugnance’ when stood before the mirror, the fleeting transience of the scene suggests otherwise. His lingering ‘but a moment’ becomes oxymoronic: to ‘linger’ implies endured looking, whilst ‘but a moment’ suggests the onset of dysmorphophobic avoidance. Upon his recognition that ‘this, too, was myself’, Hyde suddenly wishes to desert the ‘ugly idol’ in the glass. The ephemerality of this mirror scene also contributes to Jekyll/Hyde’s indefinability. Such comparative flitting between double identities deprives each character of any sense of unified whole. Jekyll/Hyde’s identity is fragmented; their reflection is subject to a constant state of kaleidoscopic change: from good to evil, from self to other, and from small to big.

In a later scene of the novel, we are told that Hyde has ‘never been photographed’. The fact that he manages to escape having his photograph taken further contributes to the unstable sense of indefinability which pervades his person. As a medium designed to crystallise its subject in black and white eternity, the permanency of a photograph is possibly the dysmorphophobic’s worst nightmare. According to Phillips, many sufferers of BDD ‘avoid having their picture taken. Or they cut their face out of photos or destroy all photos [of themselves]’. 658 In addition to making a man’s visual ‘flaws’ overtly apparent, the static intransience of a photograph makes its subject unchangeable. It captures man’s reflection in a moment, and makes that moment definitive and memorable – no matter how pleasing, or displeasing, the image therein presented might be. Through never having his photograph taken, Jekyll/Hyde is able to resist this sense of unflattering permanency. Whilst never being photographed means that ‘the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity’ which plagues him is

657 Ibid. p.58.
658 Phillips, Understanding, p.69.
perpetuated, Hyde never has to confront his deformed self for more than a fleeting moment. Eternal ‘deformity and decay’ remain remotely distanced threats.

In Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula*, a similarly elusive resistance to visual permanency takes place. The visual remoteness of the ‘magnificently monstrous’ is, once again, favoured over photographic longevity. However, in Stoker’s text, visual aloofness is taken a step further. Not only are there no photographs of the count, but his face is also devoid of a reflection when looking in the mirror. This gothic trope serves to heighten the reader’s sense of fear. In a culture which placed so much emphasis on the disciplinary, panoptic gaze, not being able to see someone – particularly in glass spaces which were intended to reveal multifarious reflections and refractions – would have been horrifying; the Count’s invisibility makes him pathological. This strain of non-visible invisibility obviously stands in contrast to the earlier strains of ‘visible invisibility’ endorsed by sartorial culture. Whilst it is acceptable to use clothing to make oneself ‘invisible’ through assimilation, when transcribed onto the body, such invisibility becomes a threat. Being devoid of a reflection accentuates the count’s status as ‘Other’. In one of Stoker’s earliest manuscript notes for the novel, Dracula’s character was fleshed out as follows:

- Painters cannot paint him. His likeness always like someone else could not Codak [sic][photograph] him - comes out black or like skeleton corpse
- No looking glasses in Count’s house - never can see his reflection in one - no shadow
- never eats nor drinks.

In the earliest stages of drafting then, Stoker’s vampire appeared to embody a perverted form of the era’s visual hyper-consciousness. Just like Jekyll/Hyde, whose interchangeable halves vacillate from one to the other, the count cannot be photographed, or painted, because ‘his likeness’ is in constant flux. What is more, the notes about the absence of mirrors and food, when read in relation to one another, create a potent concoction of dysmorphophobic intricacies. As many clinical authorities have pointed out, BDD and eating disorders are cognitively similar. There is ‘a diagnostic gray zone’ between the conditions. Both illnesses involve ‘appearance-related ritualistic or repetitive behaviors’ which make it difficult to distinguish or differentiate between the two.660

659 This vision of the count comes from Bram Stoker’s earliest manuscript drafts, written on Lyceum Theatre notepaper, when Dracula was still called ‘Count Wampyr’. See, Christopher Frayling, ‘Preface’ to *Dracula* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.viii.
As we saw in the case of the fat man who looks into his glass and ‘groans’, seeing he grows ‘still more round’, when amalgamated with anxieties about body shape and weight, the era’s mirrored consciousness noticeably intensified. Not without irony, the period’s burgeoning consumer culture used these anxieties to boost its profit margins. As one particularly astute critic noted of William Banting, rather than awarding him ‘every credit for [...] his crusade against fat’, of perceiving him as a powerful and inspirational figure, Banting was, instead, ‘only an unconscious agent in the hands of the tailors’. By adhering to the cultural prescriptions which urged a man to rid his body of fat, Banting was, according to this writer, also ridding himself of consumer agency:

> Tailors [...] look to leanness as their best friend [...] A fat man would order a coat one day that would be, under a course of Bantingism a misfit the next month. There would be no element of fixedness in his figure, and, consequently, he would require a sliding-scale of garments. The artistic tailor may well feel in a constant flurry at such fluctuations.\(^{661}\)

As the above confirms, through his prolonged system of weight-loss, Banting’s ability to choose when to buy new items of clothing is stripped in favour of necessity; he ‘require[s] a sliding-scale of garments’, and becomes dupe to an endless process, or ‘constant flurry’, of consuming. According to Phillips, compulsive shopping is often an archetypal feature of dysmorphophobia. ‘Clothes shopping’, she explains, ‘can be expensive and time consuming’ for the person suffering with BDD. ‘While some people avoid shopping because they get so anxious looking in mirrors and trying on clothes, others shop excessively, trying to find something that will improve their looks, distract others from their flaws, or provide the perfect cover’.\(^{662}\) As we saw in the first section to this chapter, the notion that a man should use his clothing to help him blend in, to assimilate and avert attention, is discomfortingly similar to the dysmorphophobic’s desire to ‘distract’ and ‘cover’. Extending this idea further, Phillips goes on to discuss the deceptive quality of modern cosmetics industries, which fuel our economy and (falsely) promise us ‘sex appeal, youth, and eternal beauty’. ‘Many of us’, Phillips claims, ‘feel we couldn’t possibly survive without makeup, hair gel, and conditioners. Purchasing such products has become commonplace in our lives’. Yet, for some people with BDD, ‘this behaviour is carried to an extreme. They spend lots of time and money buying products for grooming and camouflaging’.\(^{663}\) Such ‘conspicuous consumption’\(^{664}\) is, as Thorstein Veblen’s

\(^{661}\) ‘Our Once Fat Friend’, p.696.

\(^{662}\) Phillips, Understanding Body Dysmorphic Disorder, p.84.

\(^{663}\) Ibid. p.83.

infamous labelling suggests, not confined to current-day modernity. Man’s ‘dysmorphophobic’ proclivity to ‘conspicuously consume’ was, in fact, rooted in the late-nineteenth century.

In a Williams’s Shaving Soap advertisement, printed in 1895, Punch drew further attention to the ways in which large, commercial enterprises had begun to manipulatively feed upon man’s visual hyperawareness of his appetitive self. In a culture that was becoming increasingly saturated with products that might improve (and even perfect) one’s visual appearance, Punch satirised the ways in which astute entrepreneurs exploited men’s all-consuming fears for their own commercial gain.

Upon a first viewing, the advertisement [pictured right] seems to address typically dysmorphophobic concerns: skin, complexion and the minutiae of ‘pores’. However, through vocabulary pertaining to food and hunger, the appetitive nature of man becomes ever more important. As the man anxiously peers into his dressing mirror, he exclaims: “Pores—! Do you realize what they are—how numerous, how very hungry and thirsty? Little mouths of the skin—constantly drinking—drinking—eating—eating—everything within reach”.

As the advertisement wryly suggests, for a (notably slender) man obsessed with his body image, every fibre of his being could become a source of either fascination, or fear. In this particular case, the apparently ever-hungry skin is rendered horrifying. As the man holds the magnifying glass to his cheek, his pores transmogrify into gaping monsters, making the implied aversion to his body’s appetites alarming and inescapable.

In an attempt to either satiate or eradicate these constantly eating and drinking ‘little mouths’, the man manages to courageously ‘force’ feed them Williams’s miraculous soap, and can (presumably) breathe a sigh of relief.

A similar fusion of mirror discomfort and appetitive consciousness is also apparent in Oscar Wilde’s body-centred novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890-1). Like the man in the soap advertisement,

665 Think of the home exercise equipment designed by Sandow, or the fat-reducing pills and potions which were promoted to the public through the deceptive ploys of the quack physician.

666 ‘Williams’ Shaving Soaps advertisement’, Punch (February 23, 1895).
who, as we have seen, is unnerved by the visual amplitude of his body’s hungers, Wilde’s
eponymous character would, ‘taking up from the table an oval glass frame in ivory Cupids’,
nervously ‘wince’ at the prospect of ‘glanc[ing] into its polished depths’. 667 Though it is highly
unlikely that, when writing his text, Wilde would have been familiar with Morselli’s recent
clinical diagnostics, 668 the compulsive emphasis he places on self and self-appearance creates
another literary microcosm surfeit with dysmorphophobic, as well as anorectic,
symptomologies.

As an aesthete and self-fashioned artist, there is no doubting that Wilde was highly
preoccupied with visual appearances: ‘beauty is the wonder of wonders’, he states in the early
chapters of Dorian Gray, ‘it is only shallow people who do not judge by appearan-
ces’. 669 That much (often negative) attention was paid to Wilde’s own visual presence surely aggravated, if
not stimulated, a self-conscious discomfort surrounding his ungainly self. Wilde was of
noticeably large build and frequently attracted many damaging observations and appearance-
targeted insults. In 1883, Laura Troubridge noted that Wilde had ‘grown enormously fat’ and
‘vulgar’. 670 A few years later Adrian Hope scalded Wilde for being ‘as fat and greasy as ever and
looking particularly revolting in huge white kid gloves’. 671 Wilde was described by George
Bernard Shaw as ‘a giant in the pathological sense’, 672 ‘an overgrown man, with something not
quite normal about his bigness’. Meanwhile Lady Colin Campbell referred to him as the ‘great
white caterpillar’. 673

A few years prior to the publication of Dorian Gray an interview with Wilde was
printed in the Sporting Times. Bill Nye, Wilde’s impudent questioner, made the following
observations:

 [...] Mr Wilde is very tall, with a face like a broad axe. [...] He wears a kind of a
Byron collar and a necktie the colour of a diseased liver. [...] His face, when
buried in a piece of pie must be a ghastly sight. [...] Mr Wilde wore a silk
handkerchief the colour of the illustrations found in public documents
describing the cattle plague. He spoke of various topics with a seductive

667 Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p.78.
668 Although Morselli’s theories began circulating from 1886, the term ‘dysmorphophobia’ was not
introduced into English until 1910. See Gilman, Creating Beauty to Cure the Soul, p.61.
669 Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p.22.
670 Laura Troubridge, quoted in Neil McKenna, The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde (London: Basic Books,
671 Letters of Engagement, 1884-1888: the Love Letters of Adrian Hope and Laura Troubridge, ed. by
672 Wilde might possibly have based the ‘Selfish Giant’ of his short story baring that title on Shaw’s
descriptions of him.
673 George Bernard Shaw, ‘My Memories of Oscar Wilde’, in Oscar Wilde, His Life and Confessions, ed. by
drawl, wriggling his limber angle worm legs as he spoke, and posing like a
giraffe with the colic, for the benefit of the ladies who stood near.⁶⁷⁴
What is interesting about the depiction of Wilde here is the prominence of devolutionary, or
non-human epithets: his legs are likened to worms (an image which reifies Lady Campbell’s
vision of a ‘great white caterpillar’), and he poses like a giraffe. These animalistic portrayals
blur the boundaries between aesthetic observation and scientific scrutiny, and, as we saw in
the preliminary section to this chapter, one integral part to the development of the epoch’s
dysmorphophobic consciousness was a Darwinian appreciation of, and reliance on, surface
appearances. Visual markers of scientific, evolutionary and/or sexual deviance⁶⁷⁵ – pock-scars,
syphilitic stains, taints of foreign, or racial, descent – could hamper a man’s social and
(re)productive standing, as well as heighten his self-conscious awareness.⁶⁷⁶ The interviewer’s
allusions to the colour of Wilde’s clothing in terms of illness – ‘diseased liver’, ‘cattle plague’,
‘colic’ – also indicate a risk of infectious contamination: he appears anxious that Wilde’s
distasteful manner of dress will catch on. The fusion of sartorial appendages (collars, neckties,
handkerchiefs) with unclothed body parts (face and legs) implies that the threat of
‘contamination’ extends beyond external fixtures. Wilde’s visual (and inferred sexual? moral?)
defects are not necessarily peripheral or self-contained.⁶⁷⁷ The interviewer’s observations,
then, are particularly extreme. He is absolutely repulsed by Wilde.

In an article published in the August 1890 edition of All the Year Round, just a couple of
months after the Lippincott had printed the first instalment of Dorian Gray, these associations

⁶⁷⁵ Wilde’s identification as a homosexual male may have created an impacting effect on his appearance
concerns. As much clinical and non-clinical research has almost conclusively shown, gay and effeminate
men tend to be considerably more dissatisfied with their bodies. According to Maurice J. Levesque, ‘gay
men are at particular risk for body image dissatisfaction’. See: Maurice J. Levesque and David R
Vichesky, ‘Raising the Bar on the Body Beautiful: An Analysis of the Body Image Concerns of Homosexual
Men’, Body Image, 3 (2006), pp.45-55. Also, Christine Yelland, Marika Tiggemann, ‘Muscularity and the
Gay Ideal: Body Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating in Homosexual Men,’ Eating Behaviours, 4 (2003),
⁶⁷⁶ Sander Gilman and Andrew Mangham explore the clinical development of dysmorphophobia
alongside discourses of Darwinian and racial difference.
⁶⁷⁷ Whilst body dissatisfaction and dysmorphophobia are, in themselves, not contagious, the physical
defects which frequently induce such discontent (imagined or not) potentially could be. People with
BDD are often preoccupied by concerns with their complexion. A change in one’s complexion – be it
sudden paleness, flushing, the development of a rash, pox or spots – is often an early indication of
physical illness. Believed to have contracted syphilis as an undergraduate at Oxford, Wilde might well
have suffered various degrees of physical deterioration following the condition’s progression. And, as
Sander Gilman notes in his history of aesthetic surgery, prior to the clinical emergence of
dysmorphophobia, ‘syphilophobia’ (a cultural phenomenon which described an obsession with the
visual markers of sexual ‘sin’) was often a cause of aesthetic sensitivity and social castigation. The
physical marks wrought by syphilis – rashy ulcerations of the skin, wart-like lesions, and even bulbous
protrusions on the face or nose – made it a ‘highly stigmatising disease’. As a result, the camouflaging
and, more importantly, eradication of its visible effects became an integral part of cosmetic culture and
early aesthetic surgery. See Sander Gilman, Making the body Beautiful, p.16.
between contagion and appearance were addressed in a manner that condemned Wilde’s fictional veneration of beauty. Unlike Wilde’s protagonist(s), who hold visual appearances in high esteem, this author sees beauty itself as a grave affliction:

For my part, I should, I think, regard it as a calamity to be very handsome. The temptation to be contented with that endowment at the hands of Nature would be so strong, that I should certainly pay less attention to my various mental faculties than, under stress of necessity, I pay at present. I have little doubt that I should view the world merely as a garden of entertainment, designed for such folk as myself, and the sun as an ingenious method of increasing the effects of beauty. The stock of baby defects which I should, of course, take with me at the outset of my career, would very soon bloom into a bevy of bouncing vices. And the best fate that my best friend could wish for me would be either a bottle of vitriol in the face, or a comparatively early grave.

In the old days, before good Dr. Jenner came into the world, the small-pox must have been a very potent saver of souls. Its methods were rough enough; but how radical! Virtually pre-empting the ‘bevy of bouncing vices’ committed by Wilde’s protagonist, this writer equates (and conflates) an awareness of one’s own beauty with moral collapse. Furthermore, this immoral malaise is perceived to be far more harmful than extremely infectious, and often fatal, outbreaks or organic illness. According to this writer, if Dr Jenner had not initiated his famous (and highly controversial) smallpox vaccine, the terrifying defects in physical appearance which were brought about by the disease might have, ironically, been ‘a very potent saver of souls’.

Contrary to this vision of smallpox as a ‘potent saver of souls’, the illness was, in fact, generally seen as a ‘devouring monster’ which posed a serious danger to the vulnerable ‘souls’ of the national community. As Gareth Williams observes in his fascinating history of the disease: ‘Smallpox did more than just kill’. It made a ‘savage mockery’ of the notion, “‘beauty is just skin deep’”. In 1865, John Shortt, general superintendent of smallpox vaccinations for Madras, suggested that the patient ‘attacked with this fell disease becomes a mass of living corruption’. If the afflicted did manage to ‘escape’ with his or her life, they would be ‘so

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678  ‘The Profit of Ugliness’, All the Year Round, 4:86 (23 August 1890), pp.175-178, (p.176).
frightfully disfigured as scarcely to be recognised’. 681 In 1891, R. H. Blakewell similarly claimed that the ‘horror and disgust’ inspired by the smallpox patient, ‘the hideous loathsome aspect of the face, the horrid smell, the frightful pits and scars’, could be fully appreciated only by those who attended an epidemic.682 Without doubt, the descriptive pointers used by officials – ‘horror’, ‘disgust’, ‘hideous’, ‘loathsome’, ‘frightful’ – are akin to those central in cases of dysmorphophobia.

One pronounced example of how smallpox could feed dysmorphophobic fears about acquiring a defective or deformed visage can be seen in Charles Dickens’s Bleak House (1853). Following a severe bout of smallpox, Esther Summerson, the novel’s protagonist, is prohibited from any access to mirrors, and her looking-glass is removed from sight. Following her recovery, Esther never asks for her glass to be restored to her, but this unwillingness to be reunited with her reflection becomes, in her own words ‘a weakness which must be overcome’.683 Finally mustering the courage to confront her mirrored self, Esther goes up to ‘the veiled glass upon the dressing-table’. Standing before the mirror, Esther ‘looked at the reflection: encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at [her].’684 Gazing on, she states:

I was very much changed – O very, very much. At first my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back, but [...] very soon it became more familiar, and then I knew the extent of the alteration in it better than I had done at first. [...] I had never been a beauty, and have never thought myself one, but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears, and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully.685

Esther’s reaction to her flawed visage is morally spotless. Apart from one initial outburst – ‘O very, very much’ – Esther ensures that her negative consciousness remains self-contained. Whilst the awkward syntactic construction of the word ‘not’ in the phrase, ‘I could let it go with a few not bitter tears’ seems to imply that Ether’s struggle with acceptance of her disfigurement is strained, her moral position and righteousness ensures that her altered appearance does not interfere with her ‘thankfulness’ for having survived.

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684 Ibid. p.572. Note, again, the mirror’s capacity to observe the subject, as well as the subject’s capacity to observe herself.
685 Ibid. p.572.
Esther’s reaction, like that of the Jenner adversary, offers insight into Dickens’s own condemnatory ideas surrounding the (ever progressive) importance Victorian culture seemed to place on visual appearances. Of course, the interesting thing about Sim Tapperit was that his preoccupations with mirror image were fed through a misguided, narcissistic vanity. Although what Sim sees when he looks in his glass is perceptively false, his distorted mirror image nevertheless fills him with gratification. It is possibly because of this narcissistic, egotistical vanity that Dickens narratively punishes Sim. During the Gordon riots at the centre of the novel, Sim’s highly-prized legs are crushed, their imagined beauty destroyed. By penalising Sim for his hyper self-awareness, Dickens is suggesting, like the All the Year Round writer, that people can become too preoccupied with their appearance; that the societal emphasis placed on the ‘specular self’ had become reckless. In Bleak House, Dickens effectively removes mirrors from Esther’s reach to ensure that her post-smallpox appearance does not become a means of inducing the self-consciousness which so painfully plagued many individuals who had – and even those who had not – been afflicted. Read in this context, the Williams’ soap advertisement becomes all the more significant.

Within the advertisement, the amplification of the man’s distended pores creates the impression that he has, or has recently had smallpox; which – particularly in the 1890s, when vaccination controversies preoccupied society – terrified the masses.\(^{686}\) The fact that such explicit mirror consciousness appears in an advertisement for soap, an agent designed to purify and cleanse, reifies the cultural angst surrounding contagion and sanitation. It is also no coincidence that the advert hyperbolically stresses that the product has been manufactured with a ‘scrupulous regard for every detail’, ensuring that ‘NOT ONE OUNCE of impure fats or other objectionable – dangerous matter – was ever contained’. The fact that the soap has never been contaminated by ‘impure fats’ strengthens the bonds forged between fat-phobia and a ‘scrupulous’ dysmorphophobic consciousness. This idea of decontaminating or ridding oneself of an undesirable defect is, of course, linked to the pollutant rhetoric which forms a central part of fat-phobic diet discourse. As we saw in the opening chapter to this thesis, throughout the nineteenth century fat came to function as a form of symbolic ‘pollution’: its dissolution was indispensable.

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Given the extensive appearance insults Wilde had to face from both his peers and the popular media, it may be no accident that his most iconic fictional protagonist retains an enchanting and sinister beauty which stood in contrast to his own gargantuan form. Beautifully adorned in a lustrous ‘cape with satin-lined wings’ 687 Dorian becomes yet another flight-fancying anorectic determined to retain the slender contours of his youth. In a desperate plight to arrest time – which, if left unimpeded would leave ‘the grace of his figure broken and deformed’, ‘dreadful, hideous and uncouth’ 688 – Dorian barters away his soul in exchange for eternal youth. As these qualms about the ‘grace’ of his figure becoming ‘deformed’ suggest, in Dorian’s mind, like the fragile mind of the anorexic, the fear of growing older meshed closely with the fear of growing ‘fat’. This emphasis on deformity also links Dorian’s fears to the dysmorphophobic’s. The angst surrounding the deformation of Dorian’s ‘exquisite’ bodily form is therefore analogous to both pathologies.

In his introduction to the Cultural History of Eating (2010), Norbert Lennartz notes that ‘the urban jungle of the late nineteenth-century novel is [...] inhabited by dandies who are averse to the traditional ways of eating’. With the exception of ‘a few cucumber sandwiches’, Lennartz notes, ‘the dandies tend to see eating as a reminder of their odious corporeality’. 689 Like the ‘dandies’ of Lennartz’s description, Dorian Gray ‘eats clean’, as it were. We rarely see him partake of food, and any food items which are permitted to pass his lips tend to be calorifically ‘safe’. Although during the most noticeable scene of abstinence in the novel Dorian’s lack of appetite seems to stem from the sense of guilt which weighs upon his conscience 690 – ‘at dinner’, we are told, ‘he could not eat anything. Plate after plate went away untasted’ 691 – there are many other behavioural tropes which, when collectively extracted, transform Dorian’s abstinence from a subsidiary side-effect into an independent affliction.

The rampant consumption of those who surround Dorian, for instance, instils him with terror. During his debut outing to the theatre, Dorian is overwhelmed by ‘the terrible consumption of nuts going on.’ 692 On the rare occasions that we do see Dorian eat, he is, more often than not, staged ‘listlessly’ ‘toying’ with fat-free wares such as ‘fruit’ 693 ‘salad’ 694 and

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688 Ibid. p.25.
690 This occurs at Lady Narborough’s dinner party, shortly after Dorian has murdered Basil Hallward.
691 Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p.149.
692 Ibid. p.44.
693 Ibid. p.68.
694 Ibid. p.67.
‘jade-green vegetables’. Like all individuals who deprive themselves of nutritional sustenance, Wilde’s ‘puny’ protagonist is constantly haunted by ‘mad hungers’ (which are both literal, and metaphoric). Yet, unlike the man featured in the Williams’ Soap advertisement, Dorian’s famished body is not subdued by the force feeding of some quixotic (diet) potion; instead, the fibres of his body would merely ‘grow more ravenous as he fed them’. In a forlorn attempt to alleviate the ‘hideous hunger’ which plagues him, Dorian resorts to one particularly lethal ‘potion’; an addictive ‘green paste’, otherwise known as opium. ‘Opium dens’, the narrator informs us, were the perfect place ‘to buy oblivion’ from ‘the senses’, and, in light of this, one can presume that, following the ingestion of the drug, the sensation of ‘hunger’ would momentarily pass into ‘oblivion’ too.

Dorian’s use of opium to escape a fervid consciousness could also be read in dysmorphophobic terms. Early on in Wilde’s narrative the following declaration is made: ‘the moment one sits down to think on he comes all nose, or all forehead’. Here, cognitive absorption – ‘to think’ – is explicitly linked (whether intentionally or not) to dysmorphophobic concerns – becoming ‘all nose, or all forehead’. By using opium to temporarily paralyse his cognitive capacity, Dorian is also able to temporarily forget his bodily angst. However, Wilde’s protagonist desires much more than a momentary alleviation from his body’s senses, and, as we know, Dorian trades his soul in order to avert the ravages of temporality. Having laid his claim to Basil’s portrait, or, ‘the most magical of mirrors’, Wilde has us believe that Dorian is supernaturally capable of avoiding ‘that somewhat grotesque dread of mirrors, and polished metal surfaces, and still water’ which often comes to plague men through their advancing years.

In the following passage, such fusions of anorectic and dysmorphophobic traits become all the more apparent:

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695 Ibid. p.77.  
696 Ibid. p.109.  
697 Ibid. p.156.  
698 Ibid. p.154.  
699 Ibid. p.155.  
700 Ibid. p.6.  
701 Morselli’s findings showed that Dysmorphophobic patient’s often feared ‘having or developing a compressed, flattened forehead, a ridiculous nose’. And, consequently, ‘he constantly peers in the mirror, feels his forehead, measures the length of his nose.’ Morselli, ‘Dysmorphophobia and Taphephobia’, p.108.  
702 According to Phillips, ‘many BDD sufferers have problematic alcohol or drug use.[…] They may abuse alcohol or drugs as a way to try to decrease their appearance preoccupations, dull emotional pain, and lessen anxiety and self-consciousness’. Understanding, p.105.  
703 Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p.91.  
704 Ibid. p.108.
[Dorian would] creep upstairs to the locked room, open the door with the key that never left him now, and stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and aging face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. He would place his white hands beside the coarse bloated hands of the picture, and smile. He mocked the misshapen body and the failing limbs.  

‘The very sharpness of the contrast’ at the centre of this scene is suffused with symbolic importance. Prior to Dorian’s mortal bargaining, Wilde’s narrator informs us that the realisation that ‘there would come a day when […] the grace of his figure [would be] broken and deformed’, causes a ‘pang of pain’ which ‘str[ikes] through [Dorian] like a knife’. The knife simile here, in combination with the ‘sharpness of contrast’ above (which distinguishes the real from the imaginary, the mirror from the painting, and the fat from the thin) potentially implies that his perceived faults are coupled with a desire for restorative surgery, be it lipo, or cosmetic. As the sensations of ‘pleasure’ and ‘delight’ indicate, these transformative prospects instil Dorian with a new lease of life.

With increasing confidence in the untouchable ‘white purity’ of his boyhood physique, Dorian – like many other juvenile ‘street urchins’, who, as we saw at the beginning of this thesis, cruelly ‘saluted’ the fat man as a ‘“whale among wiggles”’, or ‘the hippopotamus out for a walk’, – dares to mock the ‘misshapen body’ and ‘failing limbs’ of the aging man on canvas. Sitting smugly in front of the portrait, Dorian, we are told, would ‘smile with secret pleasure’ at the ‘misshapen shadow’ of the man who had to ‘bear’ the weighty ‘burden that should have been his own’. As the passage indicates, Dorian thrives on being able to distinguish himself from his ugly counterpart. Like both the anorectic and the dysmorphophobic, he examines, ‘with minute care’, the ‘hideous lines that seared […] the
heavy sensual mouth’ of his corpulent reflection and foe. Further stressing the fact that this is not a typical self-spectating scene – in that the selves being ‘reflected’ are both different and duplicitous – Dorian, with ‘a monstrous and terrible delight’, repeatedly places his own ‘delicate white hands’ beside the ‘coarse bloated hands of the picture’, permitting the ‘very sharpness of the contrast [...] to quicken his sense of pleasure’. However, no matter how much pleasure Dorian derives from watching Basil’s portrait become ‘bloated’ and fat, his own body, of which he was very ‘self-conscious’, still proves to cause him much angst.

Despite all apparent attempts to perfect his youthful visage through sartorial flamboyance and strict dieting, Dorian’s ‘beauty’ is still not ‘perfect’ enough. Receiving a large dose of his own mocking medicine, when Dorian looks into the ‘polished shield’ of his looking-glass, he is pervaded by the psychotic sensation that ‘the white-limed Cupids’ which embellish the mirror’s rim are, in fact, scoffing at his body whilst they ‘laughed round as of old’. Thus, with ‘wild tear-dimmed eyes’ Dorian begins to ‘loathe his own beauty’, and, in a petulant rage, ‘crush[es]’ the glass, and his own body, ‘into silver splinters beneath his heel’. Upon the discovery of his corpse, Dorian is found ‘lying on the floor [...] with a knife in his heart’. Once again, the presence of the knife here is key. If Dorian’s ideas regarding what the ‘sharpness’ of a ‘knife’ can potentially accomplish echo those entertained by the aesthetic surgeon, is it possible to read Dorian’s death as a sordid type of self-guided aesthetic surgery? As Andrew Mangham observes, in cosmetic surgery, ‘the scalpel is often viewed as having the ability to “kill a monstrous soul-life” and restore the mind to “peace”’. In this respect, Dorian’s suicidal end is itself representative of the fatality which often supersedes the clinical dysmorphic’s recovery. Although Dorian’s death could be (and often is) interpreted as a means of thwarting his reprehensible immorality, the fact that his suicide provides restorative closure in what Mangham refers to as ‘the century’s most sustained literary analysis of the idea of human beauty’ makes it hard to ignore the possibility that Dorian’s end is driven by image-based pathologies.

As we have seen, such pathologies circulated in and between a variety of social, sexual and scientific spheres throughout the nineteenth century as a whole. The fictional case studies explored here – Arthur Kipps, Sir Willoughby Patterne, Sim Tappertit, Jeckyll/Hyde, Count Dracula, Dorian Gray – all provide varied examples of how writers had begun to perceive man’s
relationship with his mirrored consciousness as obsessive, or, in the case of Fyodor Dostoevsky, a form of outright ‘disease’. The idea of being obsessed with one’s visual appearance was appropriated and modified not only through narratives of fiction and fashion, but also through the era’s emerging scientific discourses of evolution. The sexual models of consciousness propounded by Darwin formed, as we saw earlier, a complex and protean part of the clinical development of dysmorphophobic patterns of thought. Following the publication of Darwin’s theories in the 1870s, ideas pertaining to courtship and sexual selection – formerly extant through the marriage plots in canonical fiction – were prescribed a scientific vocabulary which heightened the importance placed on the physical and physiological wellbeing of man. Man’s intensified awareness of his visual appearance, his burgeoning obsessions with his own attractiveness, emerged partly in reaction to his new objectified position in the gendered hierarchies of sexual selection.

As the wealth of both literary and non-literary material used here confirms then, there is much evidence to suggest that body-dysmorphic anxieties existed prior to Morselli’s clinical prognosis, even though the vocabulary for identifying them (in a medical sense) did not. The examples used here are by no means exhaustive. They represent only a small cross-section of material which glosses mirrored consciousness, as opposed to a unified vision or whole. Although not interrelated, the symptoms provided in each case offer a catalogue of traits which, when collectively extracted, pre-empt the clinical birth of Body Dysmorphophobic Disorder. They reveal man’s mirrored consciousness – a consciousness he finds it hard to elide or escape – to be the side effect of a culture fixated on normativity, assimilation, and an existence streamlined for modernity, driven by the compulsive consumer. From its secret (and not so secret) encouraging of self-monitory observation and its fascination with the way it (and its inhabitants) looked to its compulsive fears of becoming non-normatively fat, the collective body of Victorian society unconsciously promoted many of the pre-occupations integral to dysmorphophobic dis-ease.

717 Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, p 5.
Conclusion

‘Dis-ease’ with the male body is a concept that, as we have seen throughout all four chapters of this thesis, infected many sectors of nineteenth-century culture, on both individual and national scales. Ostensibly diverse contexts – be it social, medical, sporting, or sartorial – shared mutual anxieties about the body of the ideal (or not so ideal) male. In some cases, the pressures placed on men to fit to these ideal forms led to an acute strain of body-consciousness: one that increasingly bordered the realm of pathology. In an epoch driven by continuous advances in the visual sciences and Social Darwinism, panoptical discipline and the arts of fashion and photography, it was difficult to escape the new emphases placed on visibility – in both the human body and ideal constructions of it. More than any other visual defect it was fat, of course, that had no place within these constructions. All individuals plagued with surplus deposits of fatty matter were made instantly more vulnerable to critique. The fat man was attacked from all angles. Medics warned of the dangers adipose tissue posed to his health, aesthetes and athletes chided his ungainly proportions, economists scorned his greed and his inability to appropriately navigate consumer urges.

Fat represented chaos for many nineteenth-century thinkers. More than anything, its supple resistance to control and curtailment, to definability and delimitation sabotaged prescriptive desires for order and restraint, cultural and bodily. Because being able to control, discipline and order the bodies that comprised its nation formed an integral part in sustaining Britain’s greatness, collective desires to ‘abandon fat’ – and the unruly chaos it signified – became ideologically imperative. As we have seen, the steadfast feats of self-discipline required to meet such ‘abandonments’ persistently threatened to exceed the bounds of ordered rationality. This process, whereby intentions to exact order became themselves a form of disorder, supplied the nineteenth century with an ideal of masculinity which mirrored the behavioural patterns of the anorexic. Though clinical diagnoses of male anorexia were few and far between, it has been the aim of this thesis to reveal that increasing numbers of nineteenth-century men did, in fact, share many of the condition’s symptoms, without necessarily realising that, by (dis)ordering their bodies, they were prescribing to emergent clinical categories.

Of course, the anorexic logic which pervaded many nineteenth-century discourses is still prevalent today. Our modern aversions to fat are so widespread that diets and (dis)orderly eating behaviour have become norms. Today, bodily dis-ease is so embedded within our cultural and ideological discourse that its affiliation with notions of ‘disorder’ is generally disregarded, or conveniently ignored. Because of both its predominance and timely relevance,
understanding where, why and how bodily dis-ease became clinically and culturally significant helps solidify our modern understandings of today’s sustained, (dis)orderly fixations. As this thesis has shown, our preoccupations with body shape and size are multiform and complex: they are often inseparable from personal morals and national politics, physical health and evolutionary science. Perhaps most importantly, the material explored throughout this study provides us with a deeper understanding of how bodily dis-ease – and the (dis)order which emerges from it – transcends traditional binaries of gender. Fat is not, by any means, a feminist issue. Men are, and always have been, subjected to, and compelled by, anti-fat philosophies.

Uniting various fields of critical study, it has been the aim of this thesis to close the gap between archetypal gender divides. Building upon the works of John Tosh, George Mosse, Andrew Dowling and James Eli Adams, this thesis offers an original stance on issues surrounding the male body and self-control in relation to nineteenth-century masculinity studies. Whilst there is an increasing body of criticism that explores the ways in which nineteenth-century masculinity became intertwined with concepts of self-mastery and negation, regulatory discipline and control, this study is unique in its examination of the nineteenth-century male’s psychosomatic vulnerabilities, as well as its simultaneous validation of a male-centred anorexic logic. Through its exploration of various cultural sects, my work reveals the full extent to which ideals of nineteenth-century masculinity created anxious conjunctions between self-discipline and display.

As we have seen, men of all ages were exposed to ideals that could potentially shatter their self-esteem and distort their perceptions of self. Of course, inhabiting a culture largely underpinned by panopticity, nineteenth-century men were constantly encouraged to look at themselves (and other men) as malleable objects, capable of reform. While bodily ‘reform’, on individual and national scales, has long attracted scholarly interest, I have departed from the usual ports of investigation. Instead of pursuing the Smilesean discourses of self-help, school boy athleticism, or exploring the religious zeal implicit in Muscular Christianity, I use less commonplace case-studies and examples. From analyses of the body-fixated lives and works of underexplored authors – such as Carroll and Barrie – to an examination of lesser known instances of weight-controlling sport, my work sheds new light upon the nineteenth-century male’s psychosomatic complexities.

I have called for a broader cultural-historical understanding of the relations forged between ideals of masculinity and body (dis)ordering throughout this study as a whole. In recent years, man’s bodily (dis)ordering has undoubtedly acquired more scholarly concern. Sander Gilman, in *Fat Boys*, and John Morgan, in *The Invisible Man*, for instance, have both
traced the modern man’s susceptibility to neurotic body fixations in contemporary culture. However, as my study reveals, many of the disorderly characteristics which now attract popular and scholarly attention can be linked directly to the ideals posited in the nineteenth century. The period between 1860 and 1910, in particular, gave rise to an increased acknowledgment and cultivation of male beauty, and an awareness of man’s body as sexual and sartorial commodity. As new consumer bodies, expected to limit what they consumed, it is perhaps not surprising that it was during this crucial period of commercial, clinical and scientific expansion that the behavioural tropes underpinning anorexia were to become the paradigm of an age. Though the clinical anorexic’s aversion to fat is excessive, even obsessive, the era’s collective mistrust of fatty matter should nevertheless be placed on a long continuum: one that intrinsically links wide-spread concerns about fat with pathology, and (dis)orderly extremes.
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