

“WHEN YOU GO MAD... SOMEBODY ELSE COMES IN”

**“WHEN YOU GO MAD... SOMEBODY ELSE COMES IN”:
THE ARCHIVAL HYSTERIC IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE SET IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY ONTARIO**

By

KATRINE RAYMOND, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Katrine Raymond, M.A.

SUPERVISOR: Professor L. York

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ABSTRACT

This project reconsiders nineteenth-century hysteria and recovery in selected works of 1990s historiographical Canadian fiction. Using a material feminist perspective, I develop an understanding of the “archival hysteric”: a figure whose permeable mindbody reacts in eccentric ways to her environment. The material mindbody becomes a physiological archive of intersubjective interactions, social expectations, and past traumas. Expanding the concept of the archive to include the human subject, the family home, and the landscape, the fictions provide models for personal and social change.

Chapter One explores the eccentric nature of the female body as viewed in nineteenth-century documents and in Alice Munro’s “Meneseung.” This chapter focuses its analysis on the hysteric’s eccentric mindbody as the site of partial recovery. I propose that moving from hysteria to sanity involves a transformation to health of the mindbody that can occur through the ethical relationship and an acknowledgement of the permeable nature of intersubjective boundaries. The nineteenth-century concept of female flow is replaced by a model of viscous porosity.

Chapter Two explores how the archive functions as a metaphor for hysterical subjectivity. Following Kelly Oliver’s theory of witnessing, I show how the act of shared witnessing reveals the permeable boundaries between researcher and research subject. Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace* provides a case study of an archival hysteric that illustrates the ways in which shared witnessing can lead to both illness (reactivity) and health (responsibility).

Chapter Three explores *Away*, in which Jane Urquhart mobilizes the figure of the love-mad hysteric in postcolonial and environmental contexts. The archival hysteric here represents permeability not only between human subjects, but also between human and non-human subjects. The archival hysteric illustrates human subjects’ unfixed positions in the world: relying upon the binary of mental health and illness, diagnostic labels therefore misrepresent the complexity of states of being.

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Introduction

In her 2001 review of Peter Melville Logan's *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose*, Donelle Ruwe writes, "Always a sexy topic in literary criticism, the discussion of hysteria and nervous disorders has recently shifted from psychoanalytic discourse to cultural and historical approaches" (425).¹ Why is hysteria, a diagnosis that disappeared in the early years of the twentieth century (Hacking *MT* 61), considered a perennially "sexy topic" in literary criticism and contemporary literature? Studied by a range of scholars including historians, feminists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and ethnologists, hysteria is defined primarily by its protean and varied symptoms, which included headaches, dysmenorrhoea, alterations in mood, pain, non-organic paralysis, and general weakness that resembled symptoms of other, more fully understood, diseases. According to Canadian historian Wendy Mitchinson, hysterics also suffered from the nebulous symptoms of violent emotions and attention-seeking behaviour (285). All of these symptoms could be explained by hysteria's defining characteristic: a "lack of control over the emotions," which most doctors perceived as a predominantly female problem (Mitchinson 280). Many nineteenth-century hysterical

¹ The culturally and historically inclined critical texts to which Ruwe refers include Roy Porter's *Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (1987), Elaine Showalter's *Hystories* (1997), and Sally Shuttleworth's *Charlotte Bronte and Victorian Psychology* (2005).

sufferers and their families turned to the medical profession for help (Mitchinson 281).

Yet the causes of nineteenth-century hysteria were, and remain, difficult to delineate. Despite developments in psychiatric medicine, the causes of many mental illnesses including hysteria remain complex and contentious, and the cures elusive and often temporary; hysteria, one of the slipperiest illnesses of the mind, continues to invoke fear, curiosity, and the desire for interpretive mastery.² This thesis is particularly interested in the mutual exchange between literature and medicine. In both late twentieth-century literature and nineteenth-century medical discourses, minds and bodies interact in complex and non-hierarchical ways.

Despite its death as an official diagnostic category, the term hysteria is still used in medical literature. A search on the term “hysteria” in PubMed³ returns five hundred and three results from 2000 onwards. The American Psychiatric Association changed the diagnosis of “hysterical neurosis, conversion type” to “conversion disorder” in 1980. In the 1987 version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM III-R*, the American Psychiatric Association’s official catalogue of disorders, hysteria exists as an alternate term. The term no longer exists in the DSM-IV published in 1994. But the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the psychological assessment tool most commonly used by mental health practitioners, lists hysteria as one of its ten clinical

² Various disciplines continue to study the defunct condition of female hysteria, and a large group of diverse critics under the unofficial school of “new hysteria studies” have, over the last 35 years, pursued historical studies of the condition (Micale 5-6). Writers under the rubric of “new hysteria studies” include George Randolph Wesley, Etienne Trillat, Giuseppe Roccagiatia, Jan Godderis, Sander Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, George S. Rousseau, Elaine Showalters, among many more.

³ PubMed is the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health’s main bibliographic database covering the fields of medicine, preclinical science, dentistry, nursing, veterinary medicine, and the health care system (Accessed 5 May 2010).

scales that also include paranoia, schizophrenia, social introversion, and depression. The “hysteria” scale in this case indicates reactions to stressful situations; those who score highly tend to include female, well-educated participants, and those with higher socioeconomic status. While there is controversy about the accuracy and universality of such a test, it is widely used for legal and clinical purposes.⁴

While the diagnosis may be officially defunct, the language of hysteria is still used in popular, cultural, literary, and scientific discourses. Some articles suggest that aspects of nineteenth-century hysteria such as gender-typing are still perpetuated in contemporary psychiatric discourse and practice (Metzl; Kraan). According to Statistics Canada (2003), 341 126 Canadians were diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, a diagnosis frequently compared to hysteria. Edward Shorter shows how one of hysteria’s main symptoms, paralysis, which reached its peak in the late nineteenth century, has been replaced by the symptoms of pain and fatigue, now acceptable in the symptom pool of late twentieth and twenty-first century culture (297; 300; 323).

This dissertation examines why three best-selling late twentieth-century Canadian authors have turned to nineteenth-century hysteria, and why the figure of the archive is both materially and metaphorically important for their cultural work. These writers use the archive to both literally and figuratively structure their stories of hysteria. Throughout the thesis, I define an archive as a collection of artifacts, emotions, and memories, that may be housed in institutional, domestic, or natural spaces. These living archives may include natural spaces such as landscapes or even human bodies. To develop a context for

⁴ The MMPI-II, a restandardized version of the test based on a larger and more culturally and racially diverse normative comparison group, is currently in use and retains the scales of the original.

discussing these texts, this introduction will outline the aim and scope of the study and establish working definitions of hysteria and the archive. The complex relationship between the archival subject and the researcher brings the question of ethical response to the forefront of my discussion. How can one respond appropriately to a subject who is no longer alive and who exists only in traces? Just as historical hysterical subjects present their researchers with a set of challenging symptoms that provoke the desire for understanding and interpretive mastery, fictional hysterics similarly challenge readers. The site of the archive highlights the tension between the twin concerns of ethics and interpretation. Unethical relations may occur when a researcher imposes biases and (mis)interprets documents to suit a particular predetermined agenda. Readers, like doctors and archivists, rely on interpretation to interact with literary characters; in each case, responsible interpretation can lead to greater understanding of the other.

These fictions are part of the drive in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century to make the history of psychiatry in Ontario available for the public from the point of view of the sufferers – or at least those sympathetic to the plight of the mentally ill – as part of the emergence of a Canadian history of medicine written from below (Wright and Moran 7). My project explores the significance of forms of female subjectivity in Alice Munro's "Meneseteung" (1990), Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), and Jane Urquhart's *Away* (1993). Rethinking the concept of the archive to include homes, landscapes, and bodies – in addition to the more traditional spaces of institutional collections – and returning to historical materials help to uncover resonances

between discourses of hysteria in the nineteenth century between 1830 and 1900, and the last decade of the twentieth century.

These works by female Anglo-Canadian authors, written at a critical time in the history of mental illness, locate my study in a particular time and geography; the fictions by Munro, Atwood, and Urquhart are popular works that have reached large audiences. While the psychopharmacological revolution started in the 1950s, the emergence of Prozac in 1987 was in the process of changing the contemporary psychiatric landscape, with family doctors in addition to psychiatrists prescribing the pills.⁵ Wilson notes a change in the 1990s with a “transition from feminist politics under the influence of anti-psychiatry to feminist politics after Prozac” (2008 376).⁶ I see the stories by Atwood, Munro, and Urquhart in the light of this transition in their depictions of hysteria as a valid yet troubling condition that results from both social and familial trauma, and springs from the complexities of the mind-body connection. Furthermore, each of these authors sets her narrative in nineteenth-century Ontario, home to major developments in the history of mental health in Canada, with the country’s first asylum opening in Toronto in 1850.

Development occurred on a provincial basis rather than Canada-wide, and according to

⁵ In the 1990s, Prozac became a widely prescribed and financially successful drug that spurred a cultural phenomenon of books, articles, and memoirs. See, for instance, Geoffrey Cowley’s article in *Newsweek* entitled “The Culture of Prozac: how a treatment for depression became as familiar as Kleenex and as socially acceptable as spring water” (7 Feb. 1994) 37-40. Psychiatrist Peter Kramer’s 1993 bestseller *Listening to Prozac* supported the drug’s efficacy as it warned of the danger of quick-fixes in place of better coping skills. The drug contributed towards the perception of mental illness as a curable, or at least treatable, disease entity.

⁶ Wilson writes:

The changes brought about by Prozac... allowed for a new telling of the woman’s mental-illness narrative. Since the late nineteenth century, the genre had been marked by often-tortured relationships between women and the psychiatric establishment. [... However,] the women within these Prozac narratives would seem anything but stuck behind wallpaper or constrained by a civilization built by the fearful sons of psychoneurogenic mothers. Rather, they are engaged in the active creation of the terms of their illness and the active search for their own happiness. (174-176)

historians of mental health in Canada, “The institution-building period in Canada was accomplished with little communication among the provinces” (Sussman 2).⁷ The works of fiction are part of the slow, but ongoing, movement to legitimize mental distress of all kinds. Like much of the pre-Freudian thinking of the nineteenth century, the 1990s writers return to an exploration of the bodily element of hysteria.

By paying close attention to the formal, stylistic, and generic dimensions of these three narratives, I will consider how, in their active participation in discussions on archival subjectivity, recovering subjectivity, and settler-invader subjectivity, the fictions both reflect on and actively contribute to late twentieth-century thinking on female subjectivity and hysteria. How does a diagnosis of hysteria alter female subjectivity? This question is important to consider in the medicalized context of the 1990s, where a sufferer may see herself as acted upon by a medical condition: “The medications make it easier for someone who is afflicted by such a mental illness to think of it as something ‘other,’ a thing, almost an agent that acts upon one” (Hacking 113). In the nineteenth century, however, hysteria was seen less as an agent in itself but rather as a potential – and even “natural” – part of female subjectivity. As hysteria was a condition that could be treated by wide-ranging therapies including surgery, blistering, botanical remedies, marriage, talk therapy, cold douches, firm pressure applied to the ovaries, cliterodectomy, and rest (Mitchinson 286-88), the nineteenth-century conception of the condition rooted it in the

⁷ Historians have tended towards institutional or provincial histories due to Canada’s particular history as the colonial British North America and its later arrangement as a confederation which assigned health care to the provincial jurisdiction (Wright and Moran 6).

social, biological, and cultural life of the sufferer. In my readings of the novels and story, hysteria is neither naturally inherent in, nor externally imposed on, the female sufferer.

By juxtaposing analyses of nineteenth-century material with readings of contemporary texts, this dissertation shows how the texts return to the nineteenth-century archives of hysteria in order to uncover and rework destructive social scripts about femininity. The fictions show how long-held Western beliefs about woman such as her physical weakness, her primary role in the moral preservation *and* degeneration of the family, and her innate affinity with nature have opened women up to social disadvantage and abuse; yet such beliefs have also made the female body a provocative terrain upon which to explore the complexity of the mind-body connection. In this thesis, I will show how the fictional hysterics' minds and bodies react in eccentric ways to their environments, which include landscape and other people. Here, the communication between body and mind is non-hierarchical, existing in a continual feedback loop.

Not only do the works of fiction in this study reflect recent cultural obsessions, but they demonstrate the need to reconsider the questions that critics (and doctors) have been asking about hysteria. The novels do not focus on the issue of whether hysteria, in the nineteenth century or now, is real. They ask instead how hysteria may come about, how recovery can occur, and what the significances of personal and public memory are to female characters confronted with unrealizable gender roles. By exploring *how* (and not only *why*) hysteria develops, the texts present models of recovery. In this study, I do not

attempt to answer the intractable question of whether or not hysteria is a “real disease,” although such questions still vex contemporary medical discourse.⁸

While not strictly an illness or disease, hysteria is a breakdown of the mindbody system that may occur as a result of a person's open porosity with the environment. Factors such as trauma, breakdown of interpersonal relations, poor coping mechanisms, stressors, and personal or family crises may trigger an overpermeable relationship with one's environment. This leads to physical and mental breakdown which may manifest as symptoms of both physical and mental illness; hysteria is thus a condition that requires a process of recovery to resolve.

Literary hysteria and archives share several compelling characteristics. In both cases, a record of past experiences exists in traces that open up the hysterical subject and the archival subject to interpretation. Both literary hysterical subjects and archival subjects exist in a limited material sense; literary characters possess traits, descriptions and fictionalized bodies, while archival subjects exist in the recorded remnants of their lives. Both literary and archival subjects are interpreted and recontextualized by their readers and researchers.

The literary works in this study all address the ethical dilemmas involved in recontextualizing an archival subject. One of the dangers that may arise is the false belief that a full recovery of a dead subject can occur through interpretation of historical artifacts, and supplementation by the archivist's imagination. In the fiction, the process of

⁸ A *New York Times* article entitled “Is Hysteria Real? Brain Images Say Yes” shows how developments in neuroscience such as positron emission tomography erase the division between the “mind” and the physical brain and are making headway in discovering the neural pathways of hysterical paralysis (26 September 2006).

witnessing history is shared by characters, showing us some of the attendant dangers that may occur when an archival subject is recontextualized over time. Multiple witnesses may provide insight into a person after their death, but may overpower the voice of the original subject. Urquhart's novel suggests that all interpretation is misinterpretation, and instead insists upon the search for understanding rather than interpretation. For Munro, understanding takes the form of sensory responses of an empathetic mindbody, and not just the intellectual processes of an inquiring mind.

The works of fiction use the archive both conceptually and literally as source material; the archive is a means to understand female hysteria both through the authors' creative interpretations of nineteenth-century documents and through the archive's metaphorical representation of the complex process of recording, cataloguing, and interpreting human emotion and behaviour. In my readings of archival material, I consider the archive as a literary genre and examine archival works alongside literary texts. Pamela Banting casts the archive "as an avant-garde literary mode that deconstructs traditional ideas of the book and the author" (119). While I draw from archival sources, I do not comprehensively trace the history of hysteria in nineteenth-century Ontario through archival scholarship.⁹ I use archival material selectively, as it sheds light on the project's exploration of hysterical subjectivity.

My method of interpreting protagonists as archival subjects is based on the "recovery and deconstruction" model outlined by Marlene Kadar in *Working in Women's Archives* (2001). The "re/deconstructionist" approach is concerned with both recovering

⁹ The feminist historian Wendy Mitchinson provides an archival history of medicine in nineteenth-century Canada in *The Nature of their Bodies: Women and their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (1991).

previously anonymous female subjects from the archives and deconstructing “the traditional views of the female subject” (Buss and Kadar 2). The fiction in this study begins this work; real and fictional nineteenth-century women are reimagined out of historical details, and their subject positions are painted as multiple and sometimes conflicting. Kadar lists “six operations of the research that distinguishes this particular study of recovering women’s lives in archives” (116). These operations are:

1. The recovery of heretofore unknown materials, facts, knowledges;
2. The reclamation of women’s lives;
3. The reclamation of women’s ordinary, everyday, (or ‘trivial’) experiences as valuable, having their own integrity, both formal and substantive;
4. The reclamation of women’s writing, in a variety of life-writing genres—letters, diaries, memoirs, paintings, samplers, gravestones, cahiers, and other kinds of reminiscences;
5. The investigation, as a consequence of the above operations, of how women’s lives and works change how we think about reading; and
6. The ongoing project of rescuing women’s lives and cultures from the ‘anonymity of history’ (Davies), so that they are understood as part of our history and our present. (Kadar 116)

This thesis will focus on the final four operations.

Why does the female hysteric remain a compelling literary trope despite the death of hysteria as a diagnostic category? Further, what does literary hysteria tell us about the particular time and place in which it was created? In the context of 1990s Ontario, I account for the late twentieth-century literary recoveries of nineteenth-century hysteria in these texts in two major ways. First, hysteria provides a site for feminist conversation upon which to explore the complexities of the mind-body connection; as a defunct diagnosis, it is a condition that is familiar yet emotionally and temporally distant. Second, the recovery of hysteria demythologizes the hysterical figure – whether she is a symbol of

fear-provoking womanhood, or a romanticized victim of love-madness – and provides a model for healing.

Hysteria as a Feminist Site for Conversation

The subject of hysteria epitomizes the breakdown of disciplinary boundaries. Different definitions of hysteria exist between and within disciplines, although most concur in categorizing the hysteric as “other.” The hysteric’s symptoms and behaviours are categorized as being outside of, or an exaggeration of, normal standards.¹⁰ Critics including Elaine Showalter and Mark Micale argue that the history of hysteria is cyclical rather than linear. Earliest recorded information on hysteria dates to Egyptian sources around 1900 B.C. Hysteria, derived from the Greek word for the uterus (*hystera*), was associated with the wandering womb within the female body in the classical period.¹¹ Understanding of etiologies shifted from era to era in a protean fashion. Micale locates a major paradigm shift in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when uterine theories were reintroduced after two hundred years of abandonment, this time blaming the sufferer’s sexual overindulgence rather than deprivation. In the nineteenth century, a diversity of theories existed, “marked by a great multiplication of texts, theories, and therapies” (Micale 23).

¹⁰ Micale notes that throughout the twentieth century, American and European psychiatry has “deprivilege[d] the psychodynamic paradigm,” replacing hysteria with classifications such as “‘factitious illness disorder,’ ‘dissociative disorder—conversion type,’ ‘histrionic personality disorder,’ ‘psychogenic pain disorder,’ and ‘undifferentiated somatoform disorder’” (4).

¹¹ Micale argues that the derivation is even earlier, deriving from the Sanskrit word for stomach. He also cites Helen King’s work on the derivation of the disorder that argues that the term hysteria arrived much later than generally presumed; according to King, the term *hysterique* (as an adjective) arrived in French usage in 1568 and in English the term “hysterical” arrived in 1657; the terms “hysterick” and “hysteric” relating to a suffering person arrived in 1649 and 1657 (Micale 43). This new etymological information problematizes the notion of hysteria as a linear disease entity. We can infer that this mimetic condition changes according to time and place, defying a unified symptomology.

While comprehensive studies on male hysteria do exist, the figure of the hysteric has traditionally been feminized and I have chosen stories of female sufferers in order to explore how this widely disseminated trope, with all of its associated connotations, illuminates thinking on the potential of the mind and body. Social, cultural, and political factors predisposed nineteenth-century females to be more prone to hysterical malfunction of the mindbody system, though it is a condition that may affect all humans to varying degrees. David Wright's study of the Buckinghamshire County Pauper Lunatic Asylum in England (1853 – 1874) calls into question some of the assumptions that feminist writers such as Showalter and Chesler have held about hysteria's prevalence in the nineteenth century. He finds that both men and women were confined in equal proportions.¹² Furthermore, in his analysis of 1722 patients, only 4 of the 517 women (and none of the 487 men) were classified under the diagnoses of Hysterical Mania (161).¹³ If, as Wright's research convincingly suggests, hysteria was not a widespread official diagnosis, then there would seem to be little evidence for the nineteenth-century's purported general feminization of madness. Furthermore, in colonial systems such as Canada's, the county gaols and police expended more time and effort on the transgressive behaviour of males (Wright 151). Nonetheless, hysteria became popularized as the "female malady" and particularly captured the public imagination. For example,

¹² There were, however, gendered differences in the field of diagnoses. Wright finds that "'Mood' disorders were more widely described in female admissions to the asylum, leading to more common diagnoses of Mania with Depression, and Melancholia. By contrast, men were more often classified as suffering from Mania with General Paralysis (General Paralysis of the Insane) and Idiocy" (152-153).

¹³ Wright suggests that in the nineteenth century "classic examples of new 'gendered' diagnoses did not figure prominently at all. Mania, Melancholia, Dementia, and Idiocy – the standard psychiatric classifications in the mid-Victorian period – were applied to men and women using consistent criteria across the genders" (152). These gendered diagnoses include, of course, hysteria.

Charcot's staged photographs of female hysterics from La Salpetriere in the late nineteenth-century both reflected and generated the female face of madness to onlookers. This particular diagnosis has powerfully captured the imaginations of feminist writers and critics to illustrate and protest various aspects of the social construction of gender.

Published in *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpetriere* (1876-1880), Charcot's photographs found meaning in the visual symptoms of dramatic postures, stigmata, and hysterogenic zones (Micale 97).¹⁴ According to Charcot, a traumatic (and usually physical) event led to mental pain, from which the patient continued to suffer long after any physical pain had subsided. By the end of the nineteenth century, the work of Breuer and Freud continued to shift the etiology of hysteria from physical to mental causes. Nineteenth-century hysteria's many symptoms include: "a nervous temperament, violent and unstable emotions, depression, excitement, poor attention span, disturbed intellect, disturbed will, deficient judgement, dependency, immaturity, egocentricity, attention-seeking, deceitfulness, theatricality, simulation, jealousy, fearfulness, and irritability" (Small 18). While hysteria might begin as an exaggerated expression of female gendered behaviour, the condition held the potential to escalate into full-blown insanity. Hysteria also includes bodily conversion symptoms and "unusual altered states of consciousness" such as "obsessions, amnesias, abulias, fugue states, trances, and multiple personality" (Micale 26).

Since the nineteenth century, hysteria has come to symbolize archetypes of buried selves, unconscious conflict, a return to the presymbolic order, chemical imbalance,

¹⁴ As Micale notes, "Charcot's generation lacked a firm understanding of the causes of hysteria and instead lavished its attention on the descriptive neurosymptomatology of the disease" (97).

social deviance, loss of agency, female victimization, rebellious and reactive behaviour, emotional chaos caused by social conflict, or a mixture of any of these. The elusiveness of the diagnosis in its nineteenth-century context prefigures the way that the term is used today. The richly ambiguous designation of “hysteria” is useful in this project, as I aim to avoid diagnostic readings which designate the protagonists as suffering from twentieth-century maladies such as “dissociative disorder,” “premenstrual syndrome,” or “postpartum depression.”¹⁵

While Ruwe notes the general critical movement in hysteria studies from psychoanalytical approaches to cultural and historical treatments, psychoanalysis continues to provide some critics with compelling new approaches to hysteria. For instance, Elizabeth Bronfen’s *The Knotted Subject* (1998) explores the traumatic, rather than sexual, basis of hysteria, validating Freud’s early work on trauma, along with Lacanian ideas of hysteria as discourse and the ego as a set of fictions that protect an underlying wound or lack.¹⁶ Jonathan Metzl’s *Prozac on the Couch* (2003) further demonstrates how models of gender imbalance have been insidiously transmitted into the age of Prozac. Metzl shows how advertisements for supposedly gender-neutral

¹⁵ In a 2008 edition of *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, Harold Merkey suggests that while the collection of symptoms known in the nineteenth century as hysteria are no longer diagnosed as such, it is really the language that has primarily changed:

Physiological responses are now often mislabelled as ‘somatoform’, implying motivated.

Hysterical symptoms still occur, often briefly, with neurological conditions, mass complaints and subjective awareness of their physical improbability. (Merskey 465)

Merskey here points out that twentieth and twenty-first century bodies continue to enact physical responses that do not physically make sense: in other words, hysterical symptoms.

¹⁶ In *The Knotted Subject* Bronfen argues that the hysteric displaces traumatic knowledge of mortality and vulnerability into discourse. For Bronfen, the navel represents the traumatic moment in which the umbilical cord is cut and the maternal body is lost. The navel signifies the hysteric’s knowledge of vulnerability and mortality that is characteristic of the subjectivity of modern civilization (xiii). Bronfen’s work is particularly significant in its insistence on a traumatic, rather than sexual, basis in hysteria.

psychopharmaceuticals invoke oedipal relationships, unconscious conflicts, and sublimated sexual impulses in females. While feminist criticism often repudiates Freudian assumptions, Bronfen and Elizabeth A. Wilson draw on Freud's work in highly innovative ways. Psychoanalysis will not form the basis of my analysis, but its legacy to studies of "hystories" and the relations between self and other necessarily lie in the background.¹⁷ As Logan argues, "The predominant definition of hysteria used in literary criticism derives from psychoanalytic theory. Hysteria is associated with woman's exclusion from the sphere of representation, the symbolic that is necessarily gendered male" (9). The figure of the nineteenth-century female hysteric continues to provide writers and critics alternate ways of thinking about identity, power, perception, and reality.

Many critics explore hysteria using multidisciplinary approaches: an appropriate strategy for a shape-shifting condition. However, Micale has noted that feminism has provided some of the most challenging and wide-ranging thinking on hysteria (66). While historical diagnoses of hysteria were less widespread than popularly imagined, the figure of the nineteenth-century hysteric has been enthusiastically mobilized by feminist

¹⁷ A large body of criticism on madness's connection to language arises out of the psychoanalytical tradition. Shoshana Felman's *Writing and Madness* discusses "literature's constitutive relation to what culture has excluded under the label 'madness'" (2). In her influential work, she argues that modernity and postmodernity can be defined by their relation to the psychiatric age. Felman uses the work of Foucault to show how the mentally ill are deprived of subjectivity, and she queries how writers have responded to this. Examining literature of the psychiatric age, she uncovers the literary postures of the author as both psychiatrist and antipsychiatrist, and shows how "literature becomes the only recourse for the self-expression and the self-representation of the mad" (4). In her Preface to the 2003 edition of *Writing and Madness* she argues that while society has created mental institutions to keep the inside and the outside of a culture separated, literature "continues to communicate with madness—with what has been excluded, decreed abnormal, unacceptable, or senseless—by dramatizing a dynamically renewed, revitalized relation between sense and nonsense, between reason and unreason, between the readable and the unreadable" (5). While her conjoining of literature and madness has arguably become a clichéd position, her assessment of literature as a revitalizing force is valuable.

writers.¹⁸ Feminist historians and critics share “the view that hysteria may be read as a kind of metaphor both for women’s position in past patriarchal societies and for the image of the feminine in the history of scientific discourses” (Micale 8). Some of the most sustained analyses of the condition have occurred under the schools of essentialist, social constructivist, and more recently material feminist thinking. Essentialism suggests that hysteria is a psycho-socially induced exaggeration, rejection, and indictment of so-called “essential” or “natural” qualities of the female subject.¹⁹

Some feminist critics have interpreted female hysteria as a subversive performance of femininity.²⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1978) argues that female writers, restrained by nineteenth-century stereotypes about the literary imagination, projected their rage by creating monstrous doubles of the protagonists of their fiction. While her treatment of mental illness has been criticized for essentializing women, Elaine Showalter’s influential feminist history of madness entitled *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985) argues that women in Victorian England who defied traditional gender roles through higher education, divorce,

¹⁸ David Wright’s study of the Buckinghamshire County Pauper Lunatic Asylum in England (1853 – 1874) calls into question some of the assumptions that feminist writers such as Showalter and Chesler have held about hysteria’s prevalence in the nineteenth century. He finds that both men and women were confined in equal proportions.

¹⁹ The work of Catherine Clement, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray most notably represent this line of analysis.

²⁰ This madness-as-subversion position overlaps considerably with the anti-psychiatry position popularized by R.D. Laing, who writes in *The Politics of Experience* (1967), “True sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of...that false self completely adjusted to our alienated social reality.” Phyllis Chesler (1972) posits madness as a defiant escape of the female role (though she does acknowledge that the madwoman’s symbolic rejection of female powerlessness is, in the end, unsuccessful). Louis Sass’s definition of madness includes a heightening of conscious awareness, and an alienation from the emotions and instincts, rather than from reason.

or suffrage, for example, were often diagnosed as hysterics, their behaviour thus explained away as sickness. According to Showalter, this worked to control women by reinforcing the status quo; hysterics were thus enacting coded protests against patriarchy in their symbolic physical symptoms.²¹ Much of the early feminist work on hysteria has been since critiqued as essentialist, yet these writers laid important groundwork for later studies of hysteria, and for the understanding of hysteria as part of the process of subjectivity on which this study is based.²²

The social constructivist position suggests that hysterical occurrences, symptoms, and treatments are affected and influenced by the ways in which hysteria is perceived by the given culture; the dominant culture's values and fears, and its political, religious, social, and linguistic systems all shape how hysteria plays out in any given historical place and time. Foucault's influential social constructivist position in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965) describes the shift from an understanding of madness in the Renaissance based on spiritual forces to an Enlightenment understanding that necessitated confinement and punishment; the madwoman or man took the place of the leper within society. Social construction theory calls attention to the role of society in producing hysterical symptoms in the first place. While social constructivist accounts usefully examine the pathologies of a given culture, positioning hysteria (or its modern manifestations such as chronic fatigue, multiple personality, etc.) as socially constructed implicates hysterics as victims of their social

²¹ In fact, Showalter employs both essentialist and constructivist approaches to hysteria in her work.

²² Other feminist writers including Danielle Gourevitch and Eliot Slater discuss the ways in which hysteria reflects dysfunction in the doctor-patient relationship, mirroring social dysfunction in the male-female relationship. Smith-Rosenberg, along with Catherine Clement and Juliet Mitchell, portray hysteria as a simultaneous acceptance of and resistance to patriarchal capitalism (Micale 74-75).

worlds rather than as legitimate medical sufferers. Feminist theory emphasizes the importance of socially constructed gender roles in determining the female subject; to be a subject includes agency, but also subjection to multiple systems including sexual, linguistic, economic, psycho-social, and familial.

What Micale calls the “victimization model” of hysteria emerged in early feminist writing, arguing that hysteria has served to both stigmatize and protect women. This model of feminist thought tends to downplay medical discoveries of causes and cures, instead analyzing hysteria as a means to reinforce social and sexual stereotypes.²³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s “The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America”²⁴ argues that “The discontinuity between the roles of courted woman and pain-bearing, self-sacrificing wife and mother, [...] may all have made the petulant infantilism and narcissistic self-assertion of the hysteric a necessary alternative to women who felt unfairly deprived of their promised social role and who had few strengths with which to adapt to a more trying one” (Smith-Rosenberg 215). Spurred by Rosenberg’s nuanced assertion that hysteria was both a product of culture, and a passive resistance to it, a line of anti-psychiatric feminist argument continued to develop using the victimization model of female hysteria.²⁵

²³ Writers defining the male oppression model include Fischer-Homberger (1969), Ann Douglas Wood (1973), G.J. Barker-Benfield (1976), Deirdre English (1978), and Jeffery M. Masson (1986).

²⁴ Originally published in 1972 as “The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th-Century America”, reprinted in 1985 in *Disorder Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*

²⁵ Marta Carminero-Santangelo argues that madness removes the sufferer from a field of agency, and shows how madness’s ultimate “(dis)ability to produce meaning” marks a surrender to dominant discourses. She shows how literature depicts madness as an imaginary solution to the problem of powerlessness (11).

There is considerable overlap between approaches, although essentialist and constructivist accounts differ in their fundamental views of essential human or gendered natures. More recently, the material feminist account of human subjectivity has developed as an approach that productively employs both essentialist and constructivist approaches simultaneously.²⁶ Responding to feminism's retreat from the material, these authors suggest that "we need a way to talk about the materiality of the body as itself an active, sometimes recalcitrant force," suggesting an interconnected link between the material and discursive realms of analysis (Alaimo and Hekman 4). Material feminist writings reconceptualize nature, the body, subjectivity, and relations between human and non-human forces. This feminist drive is emerging from various strains of environmental feminism, corporeal feminism, and feminist studies of science.²⁷ Their work explores the material effects of wide-ranging cultural practices, including science, medicine, ethics, politics, and the environment. Material feminist thinking provides me with the necessary tools to examine hysteria as a constructed condition that also springs from the real, innate workings of all humans-in-relationship.

In keeping with the material feminist position, Ian Hacking provides a dynamic model of mental illnesses in general that can help us better understand the hysteric's subjectivity. In his book entitled *The Social Construction of What?* (1999) Hacking creates a space where the "real" and the "constructed" natures of madness can co-exist.²⁸

²⁶ These writers include Elizabeth Grosz, Susan Hekman, Karen Barad, Nancy Tuana, Vicki Kirby, Stacy Alaimo, and Elizabeth A. Wilson.

²⁷ The term "material feminism" also overlaps with the terms "new materialism" and "materialist feminism" which derive from Marxist feminism.

²⁸ Hacking adopts a balanced position that is similar Scheff's 1960 theory of labeling. In *Being Mentally Ill* (1966), Scheff advances the social constructionist position that society labels actions perceived

Hacking breaks down the binary between the “real” and the “socially constructed” visions of madness by providing two models: *biolooping* and *classificatory looping*. According to his theory of biolooping, at the level of the individual, mental states can affect physical states, potentially leading to changes in the structure of the brain.²⁹ Thus, a change in ideas can change physiological states. On the social level, *classificatory looping* refers to the looping effect of interactive kinds and indifferent kinds of classification; interactive kinds are those classifications (for instance, “the hysteric”) that “change the ways in which individuals experience themselves—and may even lead people to evolve their feelings and behavior in part because they are so classified” (Hacking *SCW* 104). Hacking suggests that the individual classified and the classification interact; in his example, “new knowledge about ‘the criminal’ or ‘the homosexual’ becomes known to the people classified, changes the way these individuals behave, and loops back to force changes in the classifications and knowledge about them” (*SCW* 105). On the other hand, indifferent kinds include those classifications, such as “the microbe,” that are unaware of knowledge about them and thus do not change their behaviour. He argues that a psychopathology is both an interactive kind and an indifferent kind. Hacking explains: “In the constructionist camp, these disorders are interactive kinds of illness. In the biological camp, they are thought of as indifferent kinds. Here is a very sharp instance of the fundamental tension between the ‘real’ and the ‘constructed’” (Hacking *SCW* 109). Hacking’s model of

to be deviant under the category of mental illness. Such labeling places expectations on those labeled, who thereby unconsciously change their behaviour to fulfill these expectations.

²⁹ Elizabeth Wilson also suggests this possibility in her work *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body* (2004).

classificatory looping helps us to read the hysterical behaviour of fictional protagonists as a dynamic process of self-creation in relation to cultural and medical theories of the self.

Informed by Hacking's theory of biolooping, which suggests that discourse and matter are not separate entities, this thesis takes up the work of rethinking the nature of materiality in the case of hysteria. When we consider matter to be flexible material – particularly, as the energy flow involved in sensory (and, more debatably, extra-sensory) perceptions – then it no longer remains discrete from discourse. The “constructed” and the “real” converge. Nancy Tuana's material feminist term “interactionism” expresses this dynamic as she argues that human bodies (as well as sexes) are “fluid and emergent” rather than “fixed or inert” (189). Rejecting the strict division between social constructivist and realist analyses in feminist writing, Tuana uses the term interactionism to dissolve the differences between nature and culture, citing a complex relationship in which the two mutually co-create one another. Tuana writes, “Interactionism acknowledges both the agency of materiality and the porosity of entities” (191). Material agency illuminates the subjectivity of the archival hysteric. While the hysteric has been predominantly coded as possessing a particularly feminine subjectivity, I would argue that hysteria elucidates those traits – possessed in varying degrees by any human being – that humans are particularly wary of: intersubjective permeability, contagion, eccentricity, mindbody, and the unclassifiable.

Material feminism and the mindbody

Set primarily in the nineteenth century, the fictions I examine use “hysteria,” a defunct diagnosis, as a site of conversation about mindbody interaction. Such retrospection allows the novels both to interrogate period definitions of health and illness and to scrutinize the cultural framework in which the diagnoses take place. As in Ian Hacking’s *Mad Travellers*, the fictions by Munro, Atwood, and Urquhart use a defunct mental illness to open the field of imaginative exploration and critique, for the texts do not hold themselves accountable to current “hysterical epidemics” such as chronic fatigue syndrome, alien abduction claims, satanic ritual abuse claims,³⁰ depression, mental breakdown, anxiety disorder, or the many other possible twentieth-century analogues to hysteria. While looking back at nineteenth-century hysteria uncovers misogyny, misdiagnoses, and contradictory thinking about the body, it also provokes us to reconsider the poorly understood organic component of hysteria. The works of fiction bring the bodies, as well as the minds, of female hysterics to the forefront. Wendy Mitchinson uncovers a biologized depiction of the female hysteric in her study of nineteenth-century Canadian medical documents: “Here, the female body was imaged as an exquisite set of structures and processes that with many sexual behaviours and at every stage of the life cycle—puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause—was prone to malfunction” (qtd. in Micale, *Approaching Hysteria* 69). In the fictions under study, the female body – with its many sexual behaviours and complex life cycle – is open to wondrous possibility when considered in conjunction with the mind.

³⁰

Outlined by Showalter in her controversial work, *Hystories*.

Hysteria is famously a disorder of conversion, whereby primarily mental distress is converted to primarily bodily dysfunction; the term mindbody becomes particularly provocative because it refuses to consider each component as a discretely functioning entity.³¹ As Elizabeth A. Wilson argues in her analysis of Freud, the soma and psyche are bound by mutual obligation “rather than unilateral control” (22). Neither body nor mind is the originary source: “It becomes meaningless to charge that psychic forces are governed by the soma if the soma itself is already psychic, cognitive, and affective” (23). Mutual obligation describes behaviour at the level of the microbiological, as well as consciously experienced emotion and reason. This understanding suggests biology’s richness, and the term mindbody includes both mutually obligated body and mind.

As in the nineteenth century, the division between a complexly interrelated mind and body still define hysteria. Mitchinson defines hysteria in its contemporary terms, illustrating the popular perception of its lack of bodily causation:

Today hysteria is defined as ‘a form of psychoneurosis in which the individual converts anxiety created by emotional conflict into physical symptoms that have no organic basis.’[...] The term hysteria is also used to describe a state of tension or excitement in which there is a temporary loss of control over the emotions. (280)

The hysteric’s symptoms *do* have a powerful organic component, however. Hysterical reactions such as fainting, blurred vision, confusion, anxiety, and laudanum addiction do have organic roots, though they may develop out of a complex loop with emotional

³¹ Late twentieth-century writers from varied fields have written on the bodymind including Herbert Benson, an MD who famously pioneered work on the relaxation response; Shaun Gallagher (*How the Body Shapes the Mind* 2005); Babette Rothschild (*The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment* 2000); and medical anthropologists Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock.

causation.³² Grosz writes, “Our ideas and attitudes seep into the functioning of the body itself, making up the realm of its possibilities or impossibilities” (190). This seepage creates a feedback loop in which the body responds to emotional change and vice versa.

The intersection of the main terms of this thesis – the archive, hysteria, witnessing, and the mindbody – enables us to reconfigure forms of female subjectivity that allow for a flexible model of the body. The hysteric’s body is part of a broader dialogue; it is not simply a material presence but an agent of intellectual and sensory power. My working model of hysteria thus shares its language with cell biology. The human body possesses approximately 320 different types of eukaryotic cells. All of these varied cells are enclosed in membranes. The cell membrane is a semi-permeable structure that forms a barrier with the cell’s environment and regulates the flow of information, energy, and nutrients in and out of the cell. This membrane is a boundary that selectively regulates what is permitted into and out of the cell. While the cell membrane functions like the body’s skin, maintaining balance with its environment, it also functions like the body’s verbal communication system. Proteins within the cell membrane signal other cells, while protein receptors receive such signals. The cell has two ways of gaining nutrients: active and passive. The active method of *transport* requires energy, while the passive method of *absorption* does not. These two methods are highly suggestive when considering the functioning of the hysteric with her outside environment.

³² On the other end of the spectrum, in a paper given to the American Historical Association (1978) Edward Shorter goes so far as to argue that “hysteria was not a psychological response to women’s reality but a mistaken diagnosis of a physical ailment” (qtd. in Mitchinson 281).

Like the body's cells, most human subjects have semi-permeable membranes with others. The hysteric is characterized, however, by open porosity rather than the semi-permeable state of a "healthy" subject. Because of a complex combination of factors – both real and perceived – the female subject is more likely to have greater permeability in her boundaries with others. Her cultural and family background may socialize her to be more sensitive to emotions than men. While the hysteric is both trained and talented in responding to the emotions of others, she is unlikely to recognize that her connection to others is based on openly permeable dynamics. Through her porous membrane she absorbs social expectations and past traumas through both active transport and passive absorption, in a process of affective transfer. She is highly dependent on the feelings and reactions of others in constructing her own identity. Her physical disposition and environmental niche predispose her resulting emotions to manifest themselves in physical and mental symptoms of distress.

The metaphor of the archive helps us to understand how the dynamics of porosity dominate the hysteric's identity. Social expectations and past traumas become encoded in the hysteric's body. The material body acts as an archive of energy transfer, and the hysteric's body becomes a physiological archive of intersubjective interactions. Her condition grows worse as she does not acknowledge the porous nature of her relationships with others. Because of the mindbody's biolooping tendency, chemical balances, neural pathways, and physical responses such as sensation, inflammation, and pain are implicated in the process.

Stacy Alaimo's term "trans-corporeality" suggests that the human body is in constant interplay with her environment, thus leading to bodily unpredictability. Alaimo persuasively suggests that the boundaries between humans and nonhumans are inseparable, their boundaries selectively porous. Chemicals, including nutrients, as well as toxins, ideas, and emotions, can transmit between a person and her surroundings, which may (or may not) include other living humans. The movement across these boundaries is characterized most productively not by flow but by viscous porosity. Luce Irigaray has characterized flow as a defining part of female subjectivity.³³ According to Irigaray, who has explored a subjectivity particular to women, an alternate paradigm is necessary in order to understand women. She argues that the problem for woman becomes "how to distinguish the other from herself, how to be capable of remaining herself or returning to herself without flowing into the other(s). If man is too enclosed in his ego or 'I', woman is too open to the other, to the 'you'" (xiii). While I believe that subjectivity is more productively viewed as an individual process with variation within (as well as between) sexes, Irigaray here astutely points out the tendency of trans-corporeality to be viewed as a female gendered trait. While hysteria is a state that can and does occur in men, it was particularly encouraged in the nineteenth-century female subject by a patriarchal worldview that expected (and even encouraged) female bodies to engage in openly porous relationships in their roles as sympathetic nurturers.

³³ Irigaray has written that subjectivity is "neither neutral nor universal" and in her work proposes two different subjectivities: male and female (xii *Key Writings*). She argues that the male body and male subjectivity have dominated Western culture, which privileges the value of unity and the sense of sight. It is unethical to separate the body and mind, Irigaray argues, because it continues to support the modern Western division between man's association with mind and woman's association with body.

While flow evokes the image of passive acquiescence, viscosity suggests a materiality that includes resistance and bodily agency. For instance, in Tuana's example of breast milk contamination with PVC, "Plastic becomes flesh" quite literally (201). But while the body absorbs toxins, it also resists contamination through processes of detoxification. I build on Tuana's argument by seeing hysteria as an innovative case study of the relations between self and other that reveals both the destructive and transformative potential of viscous porosity. The viscous porosity of ideas, emotions, and mental states can both contribute to hysteria and enable its healing.

To undergo recovery, the hysteric must acknowledge the porosity of her boundaries, re-establish semi-permeable boundaries, and ensure a selective, bi-directional flow of affects. This is not accomplished through medication or willpower alone, but through a complex dynamic of recovery that involves changing thought processes, bodily healing, and storytelling, which occur through the formation of ethical relationships.

Defining the Archival Hysteric

In keeping with the historical emphasis on malleability, I define hysteria in these works of fiction as a fluid process that involves the loss of boundaries between the hysterical subjects and others. Hysteria thus exists in a liminal zone, in which binaries are deconstructed. For the hysteric, self and other dissolve to create an ambiguous state of being. The fluid process of moving from one subject position to another occurs as the literary protagonists oscillate between the subject positions of "hysteric" and "sane." In developing the term "archival hysteric," I turn to a metaphoric definition of the

nineteenth-century hysteric. Here, the archive acts as a metaphor primarily for the preserving and cataloguing process that the hysterical mind/body participates in; the characters' bodies record traces of the emotional transmission that occurs with their environments in their nerve fibres, muscle memories, and neural pathways. Micale writes, "Because the literalness of hysteria is so problematic, discussing the disorder virtually demands analogization" (181). I use the term "hysteric" to refer to a group of people, in addition to an individual sufferer, that the image of the "hysteric" may represent.

The hysterical patient has historically been positioned as an "other" within dominant society. Otherness relies upon difference, and a binary model of thinking.³⁴ Difference can be associated with positive or negative qualities, depending on the values of the dominant culture.³⁵ My model of self-hood relies upon the primacy of the other within the self. Emmanuel Levinas argues that self-hood, in fact, requires the other in order to exist; a subject needs the other in order to see oneself as self. He writes, "I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an 'I,' precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that make me an individual 'I'" (*Dialogues*, 62). If, in fact, the self needs the other to help understand itself, the self holds an ethical obligation to the other. However, tension can exist between self and other, particularly when the other is positioned on the "outside." In this situation, the other is often perceived as possessing the need to be recognized. The

³⁴ In post-colonial and feminist theory, otherness often relies upon distinct outward markers of difference. Models of otherness form a dynamics of disempowerment; processes of colonization, racism, sexism, among others, rely upon seeing oneself distinct from, and superior to, the other.

³⁵ The hysteric is generally positioned as a negative other in Western society, which values logic, reason, stability, and masculinity. However, the hysteric has also been lauded by sub-cultures such as literary studies and feminism, in which emotion, excess, and creativity and the imagination are valued.

process of conferring recognition, however, relies upon power imbalance.³⁶ The archival hysteric is a radical “other” who gains subjectivity through relationships that are based on the process of witnessing the irresolvable tensions in her life, replacing the unhealthy but more typical dynamic of seeking recognition from others.³⁷ In other words, the suffering and recovering hysteric is undergoing a paradigm shift in self-perception.

In her book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver develops a model for understanding the subjectivity of those who are positioned as objects within society. According to Oliver, the subjectivity of the “other” is gained through witnessing rather than the traditional Hegelian model of seeking recognition. Witnessing involves the double meanings of eyewitnessing and bearing witness. Oliver writes that “those othered by dominant culture are seeking not only, or even primarily, recognition but also bearing witness to something beyond recognition” (8). “Something beyond recognition” here refers to something that the listener cannot relate to his or her own frame of reference: an experience or emotion beyond the pale of familiarity or personal experience. According to this model, we can understand how the hysteric regains damaged subjectivity through witnessing experiences that are beyond recognition.³⁸

³⁶ Oliver notes that contemporary theory on otherness “is still dominated by conceptions of identity and subjectivity that inherit a Hegelian notion of recognition” (4). These depictions of subjectivity by writers such as Judith Butler, Charles Taylor, and Axel Honneth focus on the dialogic struggle that ensues as the self seeks – and requires – recognition in order to develop agency or sense of self. In this line of thinking the subject ultimately dominates, although he or she may depend on dialogue with “others” (Oliver 5).

³⁷ The hysteric is traditionally considered to be a performer, whose illness acts as a communication or performance. My understanding of hysteria does not necessarily view the act of witnessing as a performance, though it is an act that seeks out a listener. The term performance suggests deception and manipulation.

³⁸ Using the language of witnessing, Derrida writes: “the archive is not simply a mass of facts, of true facts, to be gathered and delivered and made available. They are interpreted facts, interpreted by the

The suffering archival hysteric may indeed seek recognition from doctors, lawyers, or family members, but this dynamic serves to perpetuate her status as an “othered” object; however, she also bears witness to things beyond the recognition of others. Archival materials act as eyewitness accounts, in their presentation of factual details. But they also act as testimony that bears witness, in their description of events, feelings, situations, and worldviews that, because of the passing of time, are beyond recognition.³⁹ The act of witnessing allows us to reconcile both discourse and materiality – stories and bodies – in the shaping of identity. Each of the works of fiction shares the act of witnessing among several characters, showing how the recovery of archival subjects through archival research and the recovery of hysterics through therapy both depend on the recovery of fractured memory traces.

The archive, like hysteria, is a conceptual term open to a wide range of shifting significations. Manoff has noted “the tremendous growth of attention to the concept of the archive and way the term itself is loosening and exploding” (Manoff 10). Carolyn Steedman has described the fractured nature of the archives as a “mad fragmentation” that results from the sometimes accidental nature of acquisitions (qtd in Tector 104). Viewing the archive as a hysterical site shows us that, like the hysteric, the archive sometimes

witnesses of course (testimony is not simply the unveiling of a truth; a testimony is an active interpretation of what happened)” (*Refiguring the Archive* 50).

³⁹ Felman shows how her influential work *Writing and Madness* prefigured her later work with Dori Laub on *Testimony*, writing that “the performance of an act of witnessing is one of literature’s most crucial functions, and that all literature in fact exists essentially or secondarily in the mode of testimony: testimony to reality. But what (I think back) is indeed the discourse of the madman, if not already testimony?” (5). The notion of testimony refers to both the work of the archive and the hysteric.

possess unacknowledged permeable boundaries with the world around it.⁴⁰ Critical fascination with metaphors of illness, both mental and physical, reflects the archival collection's unsettled nature.⁴¹ Amy Tector notes that "Critics and writers have used the archive as a metaphor for the human mind and the structuring of knowledge" (Tector 97). It is a mind, however, fraught with holes and memory lapses.⁴²

I am interested in examining how the literary protagonists function as archival hysterics: Atwood's protagonist Grace Marks is constituted through archival documents; Munro's fictional Almeda Roth is constructed by a narrator-researcher who goes about "rescuing one thing from the rubbish" (73); Urquhart's female genealogy traces through four generations of a woman whose stories are archived in her ancestral home and surrounding landscape. All are deemed hysterical by their families and friends. These suffering protagonists are representative of the complexities of the archival subject: the subject found within the traces of archival documents. In each story, the late twentieth-century feminist interpretation of a nineteenth-century female subject portrays an unresolvable and multiple subjectivity.

Partial recovery and the ethical relationship

⁴⁰ Semi-permeable membranes exist between the researcher and the traces of the archival subject. The material presence and organizational structures of archives including artifacts, catalogues, and finding aids suggest solid boundaries. However, the semi-permeable boundaries become evident through the existence of lost material, added material, and the physical disintegration of material. When the boundaries of the archive become openly porous, the researcher's subjectivity and the subjectivity of the research subject may blend. This is especially likely when no direct witnessing has survived, as in the case of Grace Marks.

⁴¹ Such writers include Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, Herman Rapaport's "Archive Trauma," Helen Freshwater's "The Allure of the Archive," and Carolyn Steedman's "The Space of Memory: In an Archive."

⁴² Archives have been characterized as "houses of what we recall and what we forget" (Ian Higgins qtd in Tector 104).

While the archive is a figure for hysterical subjectivity, it paradoxically also represents the therapeutic process. Therapeutic “recovery” in fact has two meanings: it suggests both the process of recovering the past through its traces, and the process of psychotherapeutic healing. In these works by Munro, Atwood, and Urquhart, the researcher figure—as an explicit literary character or an implicit presence—attempts to recover archival hysterics and reveals that the recovery process can only ever be a partial, and ongoing, process.

I use the term archival recovery in order to discuss the ways in which the archives work as a metaphor for partial healing through dialogue with the past. I argue that the process of recovery can only occur when the concreteness, objectivity, and wholeness of the archive are acknowledged to be myths. Helen Freshwater describes the archival “illusory pleasure of recovered memory” as insidious (737). Fully recovering history, like recovering memory, or recovering a stable identity, is an impossible project. Yet demythologizing this myth is part of the therapeutic nature of archives. Freshwater writes:

We are surely all vulnerable to this beguiling fantasy of self-effacement, which seems to promise the recovery of lost time, the possibility of being reunited with the lost past, and the fulfillment of our deepest desires for wholeness and completion. This, then, is the attraction of the archival object. It becomes a substitute for a lost object: a temporary satiation of the quest for full identity and narcissistic unity. (Freshwater 738)

The problem with the conception of the archival object as the lost object is that a relationship of violence ensues. This thinking threatens to subsume all past subjectivities in favour of current identity projects. The archival subject in this model provides only “temporary satiation.”

The potential exists in the archive for violence between a researcher and the archival subject found within the traces of the historical record. Traditional Hegelian models of subjectivity rely on aggression, as they are based on the “other’s” search for recognition from the dominant society. Viewing subjectivity as a result of aggressive relations places the archival subject, and the female hysteric, at the mercy of her observer. This model can lead to symbolic violence. Helen Freshwater notes:

As the archive cannot offer direct access to the past, any reading of its contents will necessarily be a reinterpretation. It is for this reason that the archival researcher must foreground his or her own role in the process of the production of the past; responsibility to the dead requires a recognition that the reanimation of ghostly traces – in the process of writing the history of the dead – is a potentially violent act. In order to guard against such violations, the researcher should foreground the agency of the interpreter and acknowledge that this is a recontextualization of the past rather than a reconstruction (738).

While the processes of recontextualization and reconstruction are intricately connected, the motivation differs. To reconstruct presumes that the past can be reanimated, or accurately recovered, based on careful attention to the details found in the archive; to recontextualize, however, recognizes that recovering the past is always a partial process that is influenced by the researcher’s own motivations, ethical responsibility, and interpretive strategies. The process of recontextualization recognizes that primary material is not neutral terrain. The ethical researcher asks, *what does this archive ask of me?* The ethical reader asks, *what does this novel ask of me?* Ethical interpretation and understanding of research subjects and literary characters can result from the pursuit of these questions.

The researcher/writer/genealogist looks at archival documents and sees the traces of a radical other; the “other” (in this case, a deceased and fragmented subject composed of its traces by way of an artifact collection) bears witness to that which is beyond recognition. The archival subject Grace Marks, for instance, bears witness to injustices suffered by Irish Canadians in the 1830s and to the emotional and economic hardships of being an unmarried female servant in the nineteenth century. Atwood’s use of manifold direct quotations from archival sources models a dialogue between archival traces and her imaginary counterfactual recontextualization.

The archival subject cannot literally participate in conversation with a researcher; how then does the dialogue between them take place? Subsequently discovered documents often reveal further information, changing the context of the initial documents; their ability to respond is not active, but based on the efforts of the researcher. As Kadar notes, “part of what makes the archive a complex text is that it is a fragmentary piece of knowledge, or an unfixed and changing piece of knowledge” (115). The meanings and contexts of the original documents shift in response to a researcher’s intervention and interpretation. The archive itself shifts, growing and changing in meaning, as the researcher engages with and interprets its contents. The power of the archival subject lies in calling up passions and directing research; in this way, recontextualizing the archival subject is a dialogic process.

The works by Atwood, Munro, and Urquhart all address the ethical dilemma involved in recontextualizing the archival subject. Their explorations of archives provide an entry point for understandings of truth, history, and knowledge production. Manoff

writes that “archival discourse provides a place to enter the debate about changes in knowledge-making practices” (Manoff 21). But human beings are more than knowledge sources, and the archives also offer insight into self-making practices of other subjects as they occur through and in time. Particularly as archival researchers never encounter the research subject’s physical presence, they must consider their responsibility. D.G. Myers writes:

Everyone is responsible to another whether he knows is or not. Being human is living in responsibility. [...] It is not that I *should* be responsible; I already am responsible. Every new encounter with another raises the question how I am going to respond to her. Either I can accept responsibility or I can default—there is no third alternative. (273-274)

The question of responsibility lies in the background of these works of literature; how does a researcher respond to an archival subject, and how does an interlocutor respond to a hysteric?

This process of partial recovery opens up the hysterical subject to new possibilities, just as the archival recovery process figuratively opens up the archival subject to new possibilities. For example, when Esther in *Away* begins to understand that the curse of the mines results not only from a family legacy, but from her society’s mistreatment of the environment, she is able to begin the process of healing. Her hysterical state develops as a result of her poor responses to circumstances, rather than a family curse. As she takes responsibility for her emotional state, she becomes able to respond to circumstances in a healthier manner.

By providing positive or open endings to a tragic nineteenth-century narrative and establishing a genealogical connection between the nineteenth-century protagonists and

their twentieth-century literal and figurative descendents, the fictional works I examine in this thesis present strategies for coping in a world that can be hostile to women who do not fit into available or acceptable female roles. While Munro's Almeda Roth dies an ambivalent death and Urquhart's generations of O'Malley women are unable to fully return from being "away," the narratives of non-linear healing betray the partial nature of recovery.

While archival artifacts are unable to seek recognition, they are able to bear witness. Manoff writes, "Certainly part of the attraction of the archive is this contact with objects that have survived to bear witness to the pastness of the past" (18). In keeping with Oliver's model of othered subjectivity, the stories all acknowledge that the contemporary subject can never fully recognize the "pastness of the past," which lies permanently outside of his or her life experience. Each of the stories portrays relationships of dominance and those based on an ethics of responsibility: what Oliver terms the "ethical relationship."

Oliver's formulation of the "ethical relationship" provides a provocative way in which to conceive of a responsible relationship between researcher and research subject, between reader and literary character, and between doctor and hysterical patient. According to Oliver, if, in an "ethical relationship,"

[...] we conceive of subjectivity as a process of witnessing that requires response-ability and address-ability in relation to other people, especially through difference, then we will also realize an ethical and social responsibility to those others who sustain us. (19)

Oliver's model of othered subjectivity urges us to rethink how we see the other. Oliver asserts that a new notion of vision is necessary for understanding othered subjectivity; she

proposes the concept of energies circulating between one another that supplement the physical sense of sight. The archival drive illustrates Oliver's point that "we are fundamentally connected to our environment and other people through the circulation of energies that sustain us" (15).⁴³ In her line of thinking, it is not only the traditionally privileged sense of sight that is important in the dialogic exchange.⁴⁴ Derrida acknowledges the spectral structure of the archive: "It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent 'in the flesh,' neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met" (84). Here, flesh and sensory perception exist in traces, rather than as material artifacts; a subject can exist in traces, betraying some of the process of subjectivity.

The process of archival recovery is not, as it might first appear to be, the attempt to repair the fractured subjectivity of the archival subject. As an archival subject may be dead, the researcher may sense an incompleteness that he or she hopes to make complete.⁴⁵ Yet this impossible dream of completion is not recovery, but continued hysteria. Archival recovery does not involve filling in the gaps, but rather acknowledging the porous boundaries between self and other. Healthy boundaries are then re-instated with the acknowledgement of semi-permeable relationships between individuals and of the inevitability of the fragmented nature of knowledge, whether of the past, another

⁴³ Hayes, Silvester, and Hartmann write that, in addition to bridging time, "when the photograph moves out of its stored archive space, it is as if energy is released" (*Refiguring the Archive* 104).

⁴⁴ The language of energy circulation that Oliver uses is familiar in archival discourse. For instance, Verne Harris writes: "While researchers release energies – and generate new energies – through usage, the record is already a space in which energies dance" (*Refiguring the Archive* 136).

⁴⁵ This notion of the archive's concreteness holds continuing appeal. Harriet Bradley writes that "even in an age of postmodern skepticism the archive continues to hold its alluring seductions and intoxications. There is promise (or illusion?) that all time lost can become time regained. In the archive, there lingers an assurance of concreteness, objectivity, recovery and wholeness" (qtd in Manoff 17).

person, or oneself. Partial recovery is a paradoxical process that occurs only when we recognize the permeability of both subjects: the archival subject and the researcher both alter as a result of their interaction. Particularly for dead subjects and for fictional characters, this is a partial and always ongoing process. To ethically engage with such subjects, one must remember that literal address and response does not occur; instead, the archivist and reader must prevent imposing a complete imagined history for the subject, and make a space for the gaps that remain. By accepting that only partial recovery of a dead or fictional subject can ever occur, this space of understanding is opened up. If, as Oliver states, the ability to address and to respond to others constitutes the subject, then the act of recontextualizing subjects from their traces in the archives represents a form of counterfactual posthumous subjectivity. Acknowledging the dynamic of address and response is important when working with archives; this dynamic illustrates Buss's point that archival documents should not be studied from above, as Hegelian dynamics of subjectivity based on aggression might occur (Buss 24). Indeed, we must be wary of archival documents being "studied from above" because of potential abuse of materials leading to "distortion of the subject position caused by the past silence of non-literary classes, the imposition of identity by the ruling classes, and 'the dissociation of those who collect the life stories and those who, eventually, will use them'" (Lejeune qtd in Buss 24). These fictions suggest that the female hysteric's path to stability in identity, and functionality of self-in-relationship, involves reaching back to foremothers.

Demythologizing Hysteria

The fictions demythologize Canadian foremothers and the colonial past by showing history's basis in contingency rather than necessity. They demythologize the nineteenth-century concept of degeneration, whereby mental distress within a family inevitably leads to destruction over successive generations. Their protagonists – Almeda Roth, Grace Marks, and the O'Malley women – defy the diagnostic impulse, as there is no specific twentieth-century illness from which these women suffer. The fictions demythologize contemporary forms of hysteria by casting the protagonists as hybrid nineteenth/twentieth-century sufferers.

These novels and story also participate in a movement to demythologize mental illness in late twentieth-century Ontario.⁴⁶ The *Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada* (2002), for example, is concerned with reducing the stigma of mental illnesses, as this stigma “presents a serious barrier not only to diagnosis and treatment but also to acceptance in the community” (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/miic-mmacc/sum-eng.php>).⁴⁷ This report responds to the recommendations of the 1999 Workshop on Mental Illnesses Surveillance to collate “existing data as the first step toward developing a surveillance system to monitor mental illnesses in Canada” (3). The report describes

⁴⁶ An archive designed to raise public awareness, the *Psychiatric Survivors Archives of Toronto* were created in 2001 to preserve the memories of those hospitalized for conditions such as depression, anxiety, and paranoia. Like programs such as *Check Up From the Neck Up*, the Archives hope to decrease the stigma of mental illness by portraying it as common rather than uncommon.

⁴⁷ The report finds that twenty percent of Canadians will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their lifetimes. The other eighty percent will be affected by a friend or relative's suffering. The report notes the higher incidences of mental illness in women compared to men. The report describes major mental illnesses, and “outlines their incidence and prevalence, causation, impact, stigma, and prevention and treatment” (3). According to the report, the rates are 1.5 times higher among women for mood disorders, twice as high among women for anxiety disorders, and nine times higher among women for eating disorders. Schizophrenia and personality disorders are approximately equally distributed between women and men.

major mental illnesses and “outlines their incidence and prevalence, causation, impact, stigma, and prevention and treatment” (3). It estimates that the cost of mental illness in Canada was \$7.331 billion in 1993 and states that “A complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors causes mental illnesses”

(<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/miic-mmacc/sum-eng.php>).

My reinvigoration of the materiality of hysteria is part of this demythologizing movement. The materiality of the body is becoming an accepted avenue for understanding mental health; however, in medical discourses, the body is primarily scrutinized according to the disease model of mental aberration.⁴⁸ A biological rather than a psychological understanding of twentieth and twenty-first century mental illnesses holds more weight in legal discourse, where issues of workers’ compensation and personal injury litigation may determine the sufferer’s long-term ability to recover. These novels and stories contest the late twentieth-century Canadian world-view that is still steeped in the conventional western biomedical model. The fictions under study depict mindbody models of hysteria that broaden our incomplete understanding of this condition. A close

⁴⁸ The 1990s and beyond has witnessed a proliferation of public education programs in Canada; for instance, the Toronto-based *Check up from the Neck Up* website created in 2005 does not officially diagnose mood disorders but offers a questionnaire to improve awareness. While the site supports the biopsychosocial approach, which considers the interactions of physiology with behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and social contexts, the biomedical model predominates. The site recommends a combination of therapies but treatment lists for each mental illness begin with pharmaceutical options, continue with psychotherapeutic options, and finish with alternative treatments such as exercise, relaxation, and herbal medications; this implicit hierarchy in treatments reflects the current Western hierarchy of models of mental illness. The list of recommended health care professionals similarly begins with Psychiatrists and ends with Social Workers, suggesting the implicit value in the type of care that each provides. Further, one of the “10 Things to Remember” for family and friends reads: “Remember that you are only human. You do not have the power to change the neurochemistry in your loved one’s brain. You can only do the best you can.” The site is financially supported by grants from the Lilly Neurosciences Wellness Fund, Astra Zeneca, Lundbeck, and GlaxoSmithKline, all pharmaceutical companies with a biased interest in mental health education. The disease model clearly holds ascendancy.

study of these novels and story shows how an emphasis on materiality need not be a stigmatizing move, nor a ploy to shift hysteria purely to the realm of the body, but can be a highly productive means of demythologizing hysteria.

Chapter One

“Deep deep into the river of her mind”: Recovering the Eccentric Female Body in Munro’s “Meneseteung”

What are the implications of seeing the archives and hysteria as mutually defining, as I suggested in the Introduction? Thinking about the two concepts in tandem provides a challenge to our general assumptions about boundaries, and grounds the metaphorical senses of hysteria and the archive in their powerful embodied, affective content. Both the hysteric and the archive traditionally house textual artifacts (even in the case of the hysteric’s body which is read as a kind of text) that may be interpreted, narrativized, and recovered. To view hysteria in terms of an archive is to highlight the condition’s common nature. To employ the archive as an analogy for hysteria is to understand the hysteric’s condition as simultaneously “socially constructed” and “real.” Exploring the archive and the hysteric together ultimately enables us to understand the hysteric’s mindbody as an archive of intersubjective interactions. Hysteria is both a self-preserving and a generative state. While the condition serves to alert the sufferer that her current state of being is untenable, it is also a coping mechanism that exercises the creativity of the mindbody.

In Alice Munro’s story “Meneseteung” (1991), both the archive and the hysteric’s eccentric mindbody are potential sites of partial recovery. Moving from hysteria to sanity involves a transformation to health of mind and body that can occur through the ethical relationship, which fosters an acknowledgement of the semi-permeability of intersubjective boundaries and the re-establishing of such boundaries in the process. Archival recovery, too, allows for identification and difference, as well as the revelation

that we idealize the archive as able to fulfill a concrete and objective recreation of the past. In Munro's story, the act of recontextualization works to preserve matrilineal heritage by uncovering traces of female subjects, allowing the fictional researcher to "recover" her sanity by "recovering" her foremothers.

This chapter explores a small sample of the diverse archives of nineteenth-century documents on hysteria to examine how women's bodily eccentricities have been depicted and to recontextualize these works as historical context for Alice Munro's twentieth-century story. In textbooks, women's health books, and patient files from the Toronto Asylum, bodily eccentricity is depicted as self-destructive and degenerative and women are essentialized as being at the mercy of their biology. The documents portray hysteria as an exaggeration of positive "female" characteristics. Quite differently, archival recovery consists of reinterpreting these documents as context for female-authored twentieth-century stories that feature nineteenth-century hysterical women—and twentieth-century researchers—as protagonists.

These explorations inform my discussion of the recovering hysterical subject as it is depicted in Munro's short story.¹ As I posited in the previous chapter, hysteria occurs when boundaries between bodies become openly permeable, and thus confused; what begins as excessive openness to the affects of others becomes stasis as the hysteric does not identify where her emotions and behaviours originated, and is thus unable to participate in dialogic expression. Almeda is an archival hysteric who experiences open

¹ Recall Charlotte Sturges's definition of subjectivity as "the way the self both shapes and is shaped through language, within the multiple discourses in which one participates" (13). I again invoke the model of the archive to explore the mode of becoming and the paradoxical disembodiment and embodiment of the hysterical subject.

porosity with the woman at her gate; however, her hysteria develops as she does not acknowledge her permeable state of being.

Recovery takes place when energy circulation is restored, dialogue is opened, and semi-permeable boundaries are identified and re-established. “Meneseung” contests the nineteenth-century view that hysteria is an essentializing exaggeration of positive “female” characteristics that restricts a suffering female’s potential for joy and connection. The story presents a nuanced account of hysteria and shows how the eccentric mindbody, itself an archive of past thoughts and feelings, mediates between nature and culture, and between public and private. In Munro’s vision, the seeds of recovery lie in the mindbody’s eccentricity. Almeda’s bodily eccentricity is a typical perceived characteristic of nineteenth-century hysterics. However, Munro’s story posits that recovery is always partial, in part because the movement that occurs in relationships is not really flow, but viscous porosity. This means that the restorative flow of energy is still fraught with stoppage, redirection, resistance, etc. Sometimes this supports healing, while sometimes it hinders it.

In “Meneseung,” a researcher narrator tells the story of a nineteenth-century spinster poetess living in an Ontario settler village. Jarvis Poulter, a recently arrived widower who owns the salt mines, courts Almeda. On nerve medicine and sedatives for insomnia, Almeda awakens one night to hear a man and woman violently fighting by her back fence. The next morning, she finds the bruised woman apparently dead at her gate and summons Jarvis. Jarvis nudges the woman, confirms she’s alive, and offers to walk Almeda to Church later that morning – a move that signals marital intentions within the

town's strict social codes. But Almeda begins to menstruate to the sound of her grape jelly straining in the kitchen and she leaves a note for Jarvis that she is not available. This marks the beginning of her descent into hysteria. In her later years, she dies from pneumonia after a walk in the bog, her mind clouded.

While nineteenth-century documents suggest that female bodies are eccentric, “Menese-teung” adopts and contests these nineteenth-century concepts to both normalize and individualize the eccentricity of the female mindbody; in Munro's work, the female body is eccentric, but in a highly individual and flexible manner. Recovery involves the acceptance of eccentricity. In Munro's story, biology, despite the existence of mapped anatomical systems, is wandering, as Wilson suggests (13). Despite being what Wilson calls a “seemingly antiquated formulation,” (98) the concept of wandering biology is useful to lead us to an understanding of the non-linear logic that underlies the mindbody's eccentricity.² Symptoms that express in one area of the mindbody may originate, and co-exist with other symptoms, in other systems of the mindbody. The notion that biology wanders suggests not that the womb literally moves through the body to cause hysteria, but rather that “the proclivity to conversion (diversion, perversion) is native to biochemical, physiological, and nervous systems” (Wilson 13). Such an understanding validates the breakdown of personal boundaries with others, both human and non-human; although this behaviour is generally deemed eccentric, it is part of the hysteric's process

² Referring to Charcot's hysterical patient and photography model Augustine who developed black and white vision during her photography session, Wilson asks: “What kind of biological material (retina, optic nerve, visual cortex) stops processing colour under the sway of photographic seduction? Why is the astonishment of Augustine's symptom attributed only to Charcot and not also to the remarkable, hysterical vicissitudes of Augustine's eyes and brains?” (*Psychosomatic* 6). Currently, Western medical science does not have a full picture of the brain. Yet here Wilson opens up the subject of the “remarkable” potential of Augustine's visual system.

of re-establishing healthy boundaries. Munro's validation of bodily eccentricity enables us to reconsider the politics of the hysterical subject by bringing a non-linear logic into our understanding of the body.

The nineteenth-century perception of the eccentric movement within women's bodies and throughout a woman's life was based on the concept of flow. Munro's story plays with the metaphor of flow to show that recovery, in fact, relies upon bridging stasis and flow with the movement of viscous porosity. Recovery involves recognizing the viscous potential of movement through the semi-permeable membrane. Just as the cell membrane selectively allows messages and chemicals to pass through, the semi-permeable membrane of the human mindbody can also exert resistance. This linguistic reformulation – from recovered to perpetually recovering – resists the return to a static state of being; viscous porosity is preferable for the recovering hysteric, as she is in a mode of transformation.

I follow the OED in defining recovery as the “Possibility or means of recovering, or of being restored to, a normal state; In general use, the act of regaining an original position, esp. after rhythmic movement; Reversion of a material, object, or property to a former condition following removal of an applied stress or other influence; Restoration or return to health from sickness” (OED Online Accessed 30 November 2007). Like *Alias Grace*, Munro's short story suggests that recovering mental health involves not simply the removal of symptoms, but the generation of new paradigms of selfhood which include a “pregnancy” or birthing of language, communication, and creativity. Generative sanity is produced as an empowering alternative to romanticized hysteria.

The researcher narrator in “Meneseung” recovers archival hysterics as part of the process of constructing her own subjectivity. Through a process of witnessing a past that is beyond recognition, the fictional twentieth-century researcher’s interaction with the archival hysteric allows her to acknowledge herself as an inherently fragmentary subject and to create her own subjectivity within the bounds of the story.

While the recovery that is modeled in the nineteenth-century documents seeks to achieve a destructive or reductive sanity based on fear of the myth of degeneracy, the recovery modeled in the twentieth-century fiction reworks the degeneracy model into a model of cultural inheritance through foremothers in order to produce a generative or productive model of sanity. The narrator’s ethical relationship with Almeda – distanced by time – provides a model for recovery that is based on witnessing and on its main vehicle, introduced in the Introduction: the ethical relationship.

The key relationship that occurs in “Meneseung” relies upon temporal distance. The researcher narrator acts as an archivist, co-creating the story of the fictional nineteenth-century poet, Almeda Roth, through her poetry, material artefacts, and newspaper clippings. In her imagining of Almeda, she engages in shared witnessing, for she voices the stories of other women, including Almeda and an unnamed woman at the focal centre of the story. Almeda’s deep connection to her family and to the natural world has been broken. Her parents and siblings have all died, and her burgeoning relationship with Jarvis Poulter disconnects her from nature: she is “sorry to have the countryside removed for her—filmed over, in a way, by his talk and preoccupations” (61). When Almeda fails to connect with others in her society, including her potential future mate,

Jarvis, she tries to engage in dialogue with the objects in her family home to re-create bonds with her dead siblings and parents. During the story's climax, she watches the activity of her surrounding furnishings, dishes, and decorations "Not to prevent their alteration so much as to catch them at it—to understand it, to be a part of it" (69). While it might be argued that Almeda's act of the imagination ultimately fails her, it does coincide with her moment of ultimate connection: the formation of her epic work "Meneseteung," which becomes the name of the researcher's story of Almeda's life.

The process of recovery involves making movement and sensation public through the ethical relationship and restoring energy circulation to a two-way dynamic. Munro imagines the ethical relationship as a generative process for both parties involved; further, the ethical relationship may exist between humans and the material world, evidenced particularly in the family home. It can also exist with the dead, as the imagination plays a role in bridging material gaps. The ethical relationship can exist through time, as evidenced in the archive. Munro shows that hysterical recovery and its main vehicle, the ethical relationship, depend upon imagination: imagining another vision of the self, a paradigm shift that involves imagining the unseen future. For example, a recovering subject cannot literally see the energy exchange that passes through intersubjective boundaries, but must make an imaginative leap to come to this understanding. To listen responsibly to an act of witnessing a story that is beyond recognition requires imagination to approach understanding. To simply use memory and personal identification in order to relate is not sufficient.

“Meneseteung” shows us that tentative relationships can exist between humans and non-human entities when we acknowledge the otherness of the non-human. The material is important in Munro’s fictional world; her characters express an appreciation of the matter around them, including a celebration of their use and material content. Acknowledging permeable boundaries with one’s material environment – which includes one’s possessions, one’s home, and one’s family heirlooms – has a reorganizing effect on how one views the world and one’s self. In Munro’s vision, no longer should material goods become easily disposable, or thoughtlessly accumulated.

The Body’s Eccentricity

In “Meneseteung,” Munro plays with the nineteenth-century conception of female eccentricity. Largely male authored, documents from the nineteenth century both essentialize the eccentric female body and portray these essential qualities of women as self-destructive and degenerative. These documents suggest that female bodies, different from the male “norm,” are therefore eccentric. In nineteenth-century thought, the perceptions of eccentricity in the female body were based on the movement of flow which was seen as a potentially destructive and degenerative force. Women’s bodies experienced hormonal variations—and resulting behavioural changes—according to monthly menstrual cycles and life cycles. Despite the vast dialogue devoted to its causes and cures, the phenomenon of hysteria was accompanied by the feminization of bodily eccentricity in nineteenth-century Upper Canada. This essentialized women’s bodies as uniformly prone to the eccentricity of being biologically female. In this way of thinking, recovery thus involved the removal of eccentricity through various external methods.

Diagnoses of hysteria describe those cases that defy understanding, but which the physician and society would like to understand and master. Diagnostics thus offers a framework within which to interpret—without accepting—the body’s eccentricity. Some nineteenth-century practitioners realized that the diagnosis of hysteria did little to ensure proper treatment and that the bodily pathways of hysteria were not sufficiently explained by uterine disease. However, many doctors and writers in nineteenth-century Upper Canada associated hysteria with female biology,³ a link seemingly borne out in fact when, for instance, three females died from hysteria in Ontario (*Census of Canada*, 1870-71). Whether or not these cases involved misdiagnoses of acute physical diseases, they suggest that hysteria was perceived as a disease with an organic, threatening component.

Munro’s story, concerned with the physical body as is so much of her writing, returns to the biology of the hysteric to validate eccentricity. The eccentricity of the hysteric’s body can be destructive but is also a productive force. The townspeople see Almeda as a “familiar eccentric or even, sadly, a figure of fun” (71), just as the bodies of hysterical sufferers are portrayed as eccentric in the nineteenth-century archive of their suffering. Yet for Almeda, eccentricity is, as defined by the OED, “Regulated by no central control. **a.** Of actions, movements, and things in general: Irregular, anomalous, proceeding by no known method, capricious.” Her behaviour is simply unknown in its methods.

³ Although the contemporary fiction suggests otherwise, in the nineteenth century, physicians were positioned as experts on the body: “As the medical profession gained in stature in the last decades of the [nineteenth] century, Canadians increasingly looked to doctors for information on the human body” (Mitchinson 8). Mitchinson notes the emergence of the field of gynaecology at the end of the century (9). According to Mitchinson, some nineteenth-century doctors blamed “progress” and others blamed physical problems for hysteria. In response, both environmental and biological causes were addressed in the treatment of hysteria.

Almeda is “eccentric” because her mindbody is in constant interplay with her environment, exhibiting a transcorporeality with the artifacts of her family home. While all mindbodies possess this potential, most do not enact it. The Pearl Street Swamp, located behind Almeda’s house, is a metaphor for her chaotic mindbody: “Bushes and luxuriant weeds grow there, there are piles of refuse and debris.[...] from her window she can see the swamp mist filling with light, the bulky nearest trees floating against that mist” (56). These floating trees are a precursor to Almeda’s final visions of floating objects during her descent into hysteria. The narrator notes that “no decent woman ever would” walk in the swamp, but Almeda later dies as a result of walking in that swamp (56). Here, body, mind, and environment are no longer separate entities, but share affects with one another.

Almeda’s role as a poetess makes her particularly susceptible to hysteria, according to nineteenth-century expectations. In nineteenth-century documents, bodily eccentricity is portrayed as arising from a “delicate organization” that females are particularly prone to, and is exacerbated by emotional overstimulation. Even in medical textbooks, the language that describes the hysteric’s body is often vague, referencing nervous organization, delicate constitutions, and the emotions. For example, Kenneth Fenwick described the causes of hysteria thus:

Causes.—It is most frequent in females of a delicate organization, and where the emotional system is highly developed; it is most common between the ages of 16 and 25; more common in the single than married; and all those influences are most apt to give rise to it which are connected with refinement and education, such as music, the reading of novels and poetry, the study of art, etc., which develop the emotional at the expense of the physical and intellectual. (Fenwick,

Kenneth. *Manual of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Pediatrics*. Kingston: J. Henderson, 1889. 189)⁴

Here, emotional, intellectual, and physical capacities are starkly contrasted. The masculine gendered traits of physical strength and intelligence are lacking in the hysterical sufferer.⁵ While Almeda is a single poetess known for being a “rather gloomy girl” who spends too much time in “reading and poetry” (59), Munro ultimately depicts her poetry as her point of connection with the twentieth-century researcher who partially recovers her.

While the only “historical evidence” of Almeda’s last years is the newspaper account that describes her as an eccentric, the researcher narrator imagines her increasing degeneration and social persecution. As demonstrated by the scrutiny of the hysteric’s body for signs of bodily dysfunction, female eccentricity was perceived in the nineteenth century as being self-destructive and degenerative. Often, hysteria might progress into “actual mental disease.” One textbook reports:

5. *Visceral*.—Vomiting is common. Disturbed digestion, flatulence, constipation, diarrhea may be found. Distension of the bowels may occur, forming phantom tumours. There may be retention of urine, dysuria or frequency or micturition; sometimes suppression of urine. Pains occur in the region of the kidneys, ovaries, uterus, coccyx, etc. Dysmenorrhoea is common.

⁴ In “Meneseteung,” the narrator comments that more married than single women receive treatment for nerve problems, perhaps conveying her attitude towards marriage.

⁵ In “A Wilderness Station” James Mullen reports to Reverend McBain that
His belief is that she is subject to a sort of delusion peculiar to females, for which the motive is a desire for self-importance, also a wish to escape the monotony of life or the drudgery they may have been born to. They may imagine themselves possessed by the forces of evil, to have committed various and hideous crimes, and so forth.... the doctor—lays the blame of the sort of reading that is available to these females, whether it is ghosts orf demons or of love escapades with Lords and Dukes and suchlike. (205)

Mullen’s words misogynistically suggest that Annie is “born to” a life of drudgery as a woman. She does desire importance of self and escape from her husband’s violence.

Sequelae.—It is important to remember that hysteria may pass into actual mental disease, *e.g.* mania, melancholy, dementia. (Diseases of Women: A Textbook for Students and Practitioners ECO, 140)

Hysteria is depicted as a transitional condition of the imagination that might eventually turn into a “real” illness. Yet the symptoms, as Munro shows, are so often physical. As in this passage, the gut is often referenced in hysterical cases, alluding to (though not exploring) its function as a second brain.⁶

In “Meneseung,” Almeda’s gastrointestinal system is the first bodily system to express symptoms. Munro transforms Almeda’s textbook nineteenth-century hysterical symptoms into meaningful eccentricity. After Jarvis nudges the drunk woman at Almeda’s gate and they watch her stagger home, Almeda feels symptoms of nausea and bile: “Her abdomen is bloated; she is hot and dizzy” (67). Almeda feels an intense pressure to relieve herself before the onset of her period, which coincides with her hysterical episode:

As soon as Jarvis Poulter has gone and she has heard her front gate close, Almeda rushes to the privy. Her relief is not complete, however, and she realizes that the pain and fullness in her lower body come from an accumulation of menstrual blood that has not yet started to flow. (68)

Almeda’s body and mind are intricately connected here. At this point in the story, Almeda cannot relate to the woman at her Pearl Street gate who is the object of her scorn, fear, and fascination. However, Almeda’s over-permeable boundaries permit her to absorb the woman’s anger, grief, sexual desire, and joy, although she does not acknowledge the source. The rowdy fight in the middle of the night ended in “a long, vibrating, choking

⁶ Elizabeth Wilson notes that “The gut is innervated by a number of events: neuroenteric, endocrinological, cerebral, affective, dsthymic, and transferential” (38).

sound of pain and self-abasement, self-abandonment, which could come from either or both of them” (64). The woman’s moans and howls (and Almeda’s silent concern) the next morning do not fully succeed in connection and meaning as she self-destructively thrusts her head against the wall. The meaning of the woman’s moans and howls from the night before remains ambivalent; it is unclear to Almeda whether they are sounds of satisfied pleasure, painful victimization, or a combination of both. What Almeda first interprets as pain from physical abuse changes when she listens to the woman, who “finds her voice and lets out an openmouthed yowl, full of strength and what sounds like an anguished pleasure” (66). Upon closer examination with Jarvis, Almeda reinterprets the woman’s “hair all matted with blood and vomit” as simply blood from a nosebleed (66). This ambivalence represents Almeda’s ambivalence about her own sexuality and about interpreting male behaviour as she evaluates Jarvis Poulter as a future mate. Her inability to form a relationship with Jarvis further triggers her “gut reaction”; while she realizes that some of the “pain and fullness” is also connected to her impending menstrual bleeding, relieving herself in the privy works to diffuse some of her abdominal distress. As Wilson writes, “Psychic defense is more muscular than cerebral” (Wilson 10). Here, Almeda’s response suggests a provocative relationship between biology and psychology, proposing that the body is itself cognitive.

Similarly, nineteenth-century doctors recognized that the gastrointestinal system was a key player in hysterical disruption. Fenwick’s writing reveals the observation that bodily systems other than the menstrual system are prone to disorder:

Most of these cases are anaemic, and show signs of a sluggish alimentary canal, especially constipations and impaired digestion. (Fenwick, Kenneth. *Manual of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Pediatrics*. Kingston: J. Henderson, 1889. 94)

These descriptions of “anemic,” “sluggish,” and “impaired” functions suggest a laziness of the body. Here, eccentricity is unproductive. Yet Almeda’s distress does not simply represent her emotional chaos, but literally embodies her dysfunction with the world around her, and the dysfunction of her world.

Almeda’s digestive symptoms represent her mindbody’s reaction to dysfunction. Elizabeth Wilson has shown how the digestive system is integrally related to the health of the brain.⁷ The enteric nervous system, a “complex network of nerves that encases and innervates the digestive tract from the esophagus to the anus” (34) can act independently of the central nervous system and has been termed “the brain of the gut” (Wilson 34). Wilson notes that humans do not sense parts of the gut regulated by the ENS, including the stomach and upper colon, until something goes wrong (37). She suggests that in addition to a neurology of the gut, a psychology of the gut exists.

Dysfunction in the digestive system reminds us of the mind-body’s permeability. Citing Gershon, Wilson writes, “In the case of the gut, this boundary allows the outside world to pass through us: ‘The space enclosed within the wall of the bowel, its *lumen*, is part of the outside world. The open tube that begins at the mouth ends at the anus. Paradoxical as it may seem, the gut is a tunnel that permits the exterior to run right through us. Whatever is in the lumen of the gut is actually outside of our bodies” (44).

⁷ Wilson shows how the gut works in the therapeutic process; because drugs such as antidepressants reach not only the brain but also “the synapses of the nerves in the peripheral nervous system, especially the gut,” we cannot assume that their only, or even primary work, is done in the biological site of the brain (381).

Wilson aptly notes that “to the extent that the gut is attuned to the outside world, it is a vital organ in the maintenance of relations to others” (45). Almeda’s “gut reaction” reflects distress in her relations with Jarvis Poulter and the woman at her gate. This rethinking of the gut shows us how the boundaries of our body are more permeable than we generally acknowledge. The body’s health relies on a selectively semi-permeable relationship with the contents of the lumen. At this point in the story, Almeda has been unable to “digest” the experience of unwillingly witnessing the ambivalence surrounding the woman’s suffering and/or sexual pleasure; she is unable to form an ethical relationship with this woman. She has also come to question Jarvis’s compatibility as a partner, as she questions his dehumanization of the drunk woman and his financially driven relationship with the earth in his enterprise of salt mining.⁸ If the gut is, in fact, involved in the process of “digesting” life experiences, then boundaries between the mindbody and its environment become less distinct than we presume, and breakdown is a temporary coping mechanism.

Munro portrays these symptoms of gut distress as valid – though not socially accepted or understood – representations of emotional and interpersonal distress. Historically, gastrointestinal complaints are frequently mentioned in nineteenth-century case studies, but the GI symptoms are generally explained away as imaginary symptoms, rather than as real bodily events. In a nineteenth-century reported case of “Hysterical Vomiting,” George Ross notes:

⁸ Almeda speculates, “Would she herself, knowing that there was salt in the earth, discover how to get it out and sell it? Not likely. She would be thinking about the ancient sea” (61).

From this day until exit (6th December) patient had no return of the attacks of vomiting nor of the fits, and she improved very much, the appetite returning, sleeping well, and the bowels regular. The treatment consisted in giving her a placebo—viz., peppermint water. (Ross, George. “Original Communications on some forms of Hysteria” *Canada Medical and Surgical Journal*. 1887. 16.1. 15).

While hysteria clearly manifests in physical changes, the use of a placebo to successfully treat these symptoms betrays the belief that the physical symptoms were, in fact, imaginary.⁹ This passage implies that bodily eccentricity arises from the mind, rather than from the body.

Munro’s depiction of Almeda’s mindbody, which operates according to non-linear logic, provides an alternative to this longstanding conundrum of hysterical causation. Munro’s validation of Almeda’s bodily eccentricities enables us to bring a non-linear logic into our understanding of the mindbody. As we saw, Almeda’s stomach distress is triggered by events originating outside of the gastrointestinal system. Body systems can relate to each other in ways that are not physiologically systematic or understood.¹⁰ Wilson writes, “As we know, hysterical symptoms do not follow the conventional logic of anatomy; an arm, for example, is paralyzed not according to biomedical maps of muscles and ligaments, but according to the logic of how an arm is usually dressed and used” (Wilson 7). An understanding of our mindbodies can only be tentative because of

⁹ In fact, peppermint likely exerts real bodily change as it is a traditional remedy for stomach and menstrual disorders that calms muscles and increases the flow of bile (“Peppermint.” <http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/peppermint-000269.htm> Accessed 9 February 2009).

¹⁰ Cojan et. al.’s 2009 research on psychosomatic conversion has found that “conversion symptoms do not act through cognitive inhibitory circuits, but involve selective activations in midline brain regions associated with self-related representations and emotion regulation” (Cojan 1026). Cojan et. al.’s findings “accord with the subjective report of patients suggesting that intentions are preserved, but execution ‘blocked’ by modulatory influences outside conscious will. Taken together, our results may thus help better understand the brain pathways by which self-awareness become distorted in these patients and how the mind may take control over the body during conversion” (1036). The pathway is thus not based on a linear connection between the brain’s desire to move and the body’s muscular movement.

their eccentric natures. An acceptance of such mindbody eccentricity brings with it an acceptance of non-linear logic.¹¹

If physiological eccentricity has a valid place in human subjectivity, as the narrator's archival work suggests, hysterical recovery need not involve the removal of eccentricity. Munro's stories play with the metaphor of flow to show that recovery, in fact, relies upon the paradigm shift that moves from conceiving of intrasubjective and intersubjective movement as flow to conceiving of it as viscous porosity.

While nineteenth-century writers depict female flow as a primarily liquid and dangerous force, Munro's story recasts the mindbody's flow as viscous, energetic, and generative.¹² The model of viscous porosity is more in keeping with my notion of the recovery of the intersubjective semi-permeable boundary. "Viscous porosity," as defined by Nancy Tuana, metaphorically signals "the rich interactions between beings through which subjects are constituted out of relationality" (188). In Munro's story, the term illustrates the porosity between humans and their environments. In scientific use, viscosity refers to "the tendency of a liquid or gas to resist by internal friction the relative motion of its molecules and hence any change of shape; the magnitude of this, as measured by the force per unit area resisting a flow in which parallel layers unit distance

¹¹ Although scientists are beginning to acknowledge the complex interactions of the mindbody, they are at still at a stage where the mapping of the brain and all of its interactions with the body are unknown. *Neuroimage's* 2009 September Special Issue on the slowly emerging field of Brain-Body medicine explores bi-directional brain-body pathways, and reflects a slow paradigm shift "in which psychiatric disorders are gradually coming to be understood in terms of pathophysiology rather than descriptive syndromes" (781).

¹² Flow describes the movement of fluids throughout the body, including urine, sweat, blood, and milk. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz suggests that "women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage" and asks "Can it be that in the West, in our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment" (203). The feminization of flow betrays the perception of women as openly permeable beings who lack self-containment and are therefore culturally groomed candidates for hysteria.

apart have unit speed relative to one another” (OED Accessed On-line 26 May, 2009). This term is preferable to the notion of fluidity in its emphasis on resistance.¹³ As Tuana notes, viscosity exerts a resistance to changing its form, unlike the notion of fluidity, “which is too likely to promote a notion of open possibilities and to overlook sites of resistance and opposition or attention to the complex ways in which material agency is often involved in interactions, including, but not limited to, human agency” (194).¹⁴ A liquid substance with high viscosity exists between the states of fluid and solid – a site for movement, but with resistance.

Viscous female fluids such as menses can be threatening because they reveal the body’s permeability. Grosz writes that “Body fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body’s inside and its outside” (Grosz 194). Like the lumen of the gastrointestinal system, connected as it is to the “outside,” body fluids “affront a subject’s aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity” (Grosz 194). Grosz suggests that “Perhaps it is not after all the flow in itself that a certain phallicized masculinity abhors but the idea that flow moves or can move in two-way or

¹³ Grosz suggests that female bodily flow contains a dangerous potential that threatens resistance:
The specific, particular developments surrounding women’s coming to maturity are thus linked with and may be represented in terms of various cycles of bodily flow: women’s genitals and breasts are the loci of (potential flows), red and white, blood and milk, flows that are difficult to appropriate while under constant threats of personal and legal appropriation, flows that signal both a self-contained autoerotic pleasure and a site of potential social danger insofar as they are resistant to various cultural overlays (being unamenable to coercion and pressure, though in a sense absolutely open to cultural inscription), and insofar as they insist on the irreducible specificity or women’s bodies, the bodies of all women, independent of class, race, and history. This irreducible specificity in no way universalizes the particular ways in which women experience their bodies and bodily flows. (Grosz 207)

¹⁴ This potential for resistance is captured in the “viscous porosity” of fluids.
A viscous substance is one that is “Imperfectly fluid; intermediate between solid and fluid; adhesively soft. Also used with abstract ns. (as *state*, etc.)” (OED Accessed on-line May 26 2009).

determinable directions that elicits horror, the possibility of being not only an active agent in the transmission of flow but also a passive receptacle” (Grosz 201). Two-way flow suggests that transmission can occur in both directions and places all subjects at risk of contamination, or in my model, hysteria. Perhaps this horror helps to explain the critical fascination with the hysterical woman: she is both an active agent and a passive receptacle; she is reviling and fascinating because her boundaries are so very permeable. Grosz suggests that the danger of bodily fluids is particularly threatening to a masculine model of the autonomous subject: “A body that is permeable, that transmits in a circuit, that opens itself up rather than seals itself off, that is prepared to respond as well as to initiate, that does not revile its masculinity...or virilize it...would involve a quite radical rethinking of male sexual morphology” (Grosz 201). When Almeda “looks deep, deep into the river of her mind” (70), the river is a metaphor for internalized flow and therefore stasis in Almeda’s intersubjective relationships with the outside world: the hysterical state. Almeda is unable to relate to the townspeople, her doctor, Jarvis Poulter, and the woman at her literal and metaphorical fence, and the flow of her dialogue thus collapses into an internal “river of her mind.”

A flow of words, energy, emotions, and sensory messages occur in all intersubjective exchanges. For an archival hysteric in an apparent state of stasis,¹⁵ this flow changes; movement, however, does not necessarily halt, but may be redirected. This redirection happens through the movement of viscous porosity. For example, Almeda attempts to redirect the flow of her sexual longing by the act of masturbation. As a

¹⁵ Here, I am using the definition of stasis as “a stagnation or stoppage of flow due usu. to obstruction, as of the blood or lymph, or of the intestinal contents” (OED).

transgressive behaviour in the nineteenth century, her masturbation is thus an act of resistance and self-discovery. Almeda is unable to express her sexual desire for Jarvis Poulter because she has absorbed the social codes of her small town, and she does not invite him in to her house because “a woman living alone could never do such a thing” (58). Almeda is unwilling to accept in herself what she sees in the woman at her gate; she is unable to acknowledge her sexual desire for Jarvis. Almeda’s fantasy of Jarvis “in his long underwear and his hat” (60) comprises her attempt to reconcile her experience of witnessing the woman’s sexuality and trying to accept her own sexual nature. While she wants to recognize a connection between her and the woman who both share carnal desire, she is unwilling to fully recognize the permeability between them.

As in nineteenth-century documents, Almeda’s masturbation scene is disembodied. Munro describes Almeda’s orgasm as “a buried gasp” (60). Stich writes that “As a marriageable father-substitute, Poulter ‘would be her husband’ (60), so she imagines while daydreaming and masturbating. The conjunction of her orgasm with her picture of him ‘in his long underwear and his hat’ (60) seems grotesquely humourous” (113). Yet why should Almeda’s orgasmic fantasy seem “grotesquely humourous?” Almeda’s image of Jarvis stripped down to his intimate clothing is a valid expression of sexual desire. Reflecting nineteenth-century reticence about the body, the story’s sex scene is also veiled in vague language, as it is filtered through Almeda’s point of view. Almeda hears a “long, vibrating, choking sound of pain and self-abasement, self-abandonment, which could come from either or both of them” (64). Almeda has internalized the strict and judgmental codes of her society. When Almeda associates the

woman at her gate with the sex act, she observes her in terms of an animal: “there is a bare breast let loose, brown nipple pulled long like a cow’s teat, and a bare haunch and leg....the unbruised skin is grayish, like a plucked, raw drumstick” (65). Almeda associates sexuality with pain, animals, and secrecy.

Despite knowledge in the Victorian period about women’s sexual anatomy, medical discussions of masturbation and hysteria served to disembodify women.

Mitchinson writes,

What is interesting about the medical acknowledgement of female sexuality was its accuracy. Victorian physicians knew where the center of sexual pleasure was located in women – the clitoris. This might not appear to have been so extraordinary except for the fact that this information was eventually superseded by the Freudian interpretation of mature female response being centred in the vagina. Not until the modern studies of Masters and Johnson was the clitoris restored to its central place in the physiology of female sexual experience. (115)

While Victorian doctors may have been familiar with the anatomy of female sexual pleasure, they depict self-pleasure as transgressive.

In their model, masturbation redirects flow inwards, without leading to production. Female masturbation is particularly threatening, as it can thus mark resistance through autonomous pleasure. Etiological confusion is evidenced in the writing on female masturbation and hysteria. Female masturbation is considered an eccentricity and, as with men, it is depicted as a cause of mental disturbance.¹⁶ Yet masturbation is listed as a causational agent as well as a symptom. Masturbation is said to cause: leucorrhoea; vaginitis, endocervicitis; diseases of the ovaries; hyperaemia of the ovaries; haematoma; oophoritis of the ovaries; vulvitis; urethritis; and irritable bladder (Garrett, J.W. 130; 178;

¹⁶ “There is no physiological ground for any indulgence in one case more than in the other” (*The Ladies book of useful information compiled from many sources*. 107)

225; 325; 325; 329; Webster 545; 603; “The Canadian Journal of Medical Science” 7.5 May 1882 160; Bell 3). Masturbation could both cause and result from hysteria: “Whilst it was admitted that in this sense [masturbation] was an *exciting cause* of insanity, the doctor contended that it was more frequently a symptom of that disease, and instanced several forms of mental unsoundness where it was clearly the outcome of disease or irritation in the nerve centres” (“The Canadian Practitioner.” 12.7. July 1887. 225). The perception of masturbation thus exists in a loop, both leading to and arising from hysteria.

Nineteenth-century writers remove the body from discussions of masturbation through the use of vague language and euphemism. For instance, Napheys writes to his intended female audience:

Secret Bad Habits

We now approach a part of our subject which we could gladly omit, did not constant experience admonish us of our duty to speak of it in no uncertain tone. We refer to the disastrous consequences on soul and body to which young girls expose themselves by exciting and indulging morbid passions. (Napheys, George Henry. *The Physical Life of Woman: Advice to the Maiden, Wife, and Mother*. Toronto: MacLear, 1871. 41)

Naphey continues to discuss masturbation for three pages, referring only to the “habit” and the “vice,” without referencing specific sexual acts or body parts. His instructions to mothers prohibit clear and open communication about sexuality: “But, it is exclaimed, is it not dangerous to tell them any thing about it? Such a course is unnecessary. Teach them that any handling of the parts, any indecent language, any impure thought, is degrading and hurtful” (Napheys 42). Avoidance of specific reference to genitals or sexual acts effaces the body. Alice Bunker Stockham’s *Tokology: A Book for Every Woman* (1893) compares withdrawal to masturbation but still effaces the body itself:

The act [withdrawal] is incomplete and unnatural, and is followed by results similar to and as disastrous as those consequent upon masturbation. In the male it may result in impotence, in the female in sterility. In both sexes many nervous symptoms are produced, such as headache, defective vision, dyspepsia, insomnia, loss of memory, etc. Very many cases of uterine diseases can be attributed solely to this practice. (Stockham, Alice Bunker. *Tokology: A Book for Every Woman*. Toronto: McClelland and Goodchild, 1893. 325)

Bunker ironically invokes specific breakdowns of the body to prevent discussing the body itself.

The language in textbooks intended for a male reading audience is more direct but still serves to disembodify the hysteric:

Nymphomania. When the sexual feeling in the female is excessive or perverted it is called nymphomania. There is a mental perversion, attended by an uncontrollable sexual passion, which, in its most severe form, is often associated with or dependent upon certain varieties of insanity with or without gross brain disease. Although observed in children and octogenarians, it occurs most frequently at the beginning and at the end of menstrual life. There is the greatest perversion of the sexual act, gratification being sought not only in masturbation, but also with others of the same sex [...] Nymphomania may also result from frequent masturbation as well as cause it. (Garrett, J.W. *Text book of medical and surgical gynaecology for the use of students and practitioners*. Kingston, ON: [s.n.], 1897. 128-29)

The attribution of masturbation to the beginning and end of menstrual life suggests a particular danger in times of the flow's change. For this doctor, sexual flow is perverted when it is inwardly directed.

For Almeda, the act of masturbation may be veiled, but it serves a productive purpose in her life. She fulfills her mindbody's sexual desire, and begins to better understand her feelings for Jarvis. Following her sexual release, Almeda pictures the reality of her future relationship with Jarvis: "He would be her husband" (60). But she realizes that he seems "to her deprived in some way, incurious" (60). Here, Almeda

realizes their incompatibility, and decides that she is unable to accept his use of the earth's raw material for profit in his job as a salt producer.

Jarvis's next show of courtship coincides with Almeda's period and her grape jelly making. The climactic grape jelly scene is another moment of stoppage and redirection. Here, Almeda redirects her static, inward energy flow into the household objects that surround her. As Almeda's energy flow metaphorically turns from juice to jelly, it becomes clear that she cannot continue to maintain over-permeable membranes with her neighbours and environment. While the juice flows, the jelly exerts resistance in its viscous state; Almeda herself straddles both states of movement. The stasis of the hysteric, then, does not involve a complete lack of movement, but rather flow that is perceived as being redirected "inappropriately." Almeda walks through the overflowing grape juice used to make grape jelly, and then "walks upstairs leaving purple footprints and smelling her escaping blood and the sweat of her body" (71). The viscous porosity of the grape jelly, forming from juice, and her menses represent Almeda's resistance to marriage – the "cure" recommended by her doctor, "in spite of the fact that most of his nerve medicine is prescribed for married women" (62). The cheesecloth bag that Almeda uses to strain her grape jelly represents the semi-permeable membrane (68). Yet Almeda abandons the jelly making, along with the semi-permeable membrane: "Plop, plup, into the basin beneath. She can't sit and look at such a thing" (68).

Her abandonment of the semi-permeable membrane marks the moment when Almeda's hysteria takes hold. Her descent into hysteria enacts the body's potential to collapse into the outside; yet Munro repositions this as an ability rather than a liability.

The movement that dominates Almeda's menstrual blood is not fluidity but viscosity. In fact, menses are not fully liquid, but a mixture of blood and uterus lining that thickens in preparation for potential pregnancy. K.P. Stich points out the verbal play on "mens" in Menstruation and Meneseteung from Latin's *mensis* meaning month (and thereby, female menses) and *mens* meaning consciousness, or the mind (115). The title thus evokes both meanings of mind and menses. Meneseteung also suggests "tongue," or language.¹⁷

Almeda's menstrual flow inspires her connection with her mother, who also suffered from hysteria and was bedridden. Stich notes that "Almeda's period, in conjunction with her evidently hypnagogic sensitivities and loss of ordinary consciousness, causes her to connect with her mother, seemingly trying to redeem her by unthreading the symbolic roses from the constraints of conventional artifice or social decorum" (Stich 120).¹⁸ The grape jelly, which is a precursor to Almeda's menses, draws our attention to the viscous nature of menses, as the grape jelly resists travelling through the membrane of the cheesecloth. No longer juice, or passive liquid, the jelly represents resistance to the patriarchal structures that brand Almeda a "spinstress" because of her unmarried state. The cheesecloth here is like the semi-permeability of the mindbody. Meda preserves her connection with her heritage in the genealogical poem "Meneseteung" that she creates in her imagination: "Soon this glowing and swelling begins to suggest words—not specific words but a flow of words somewhere, just about ready to make themselves known to her" (69). These words, too, take on an active role in Almeda's experience. It is no

¹⁷ Stich notes Medusa's presence in the story: "While Medusa's name reveals her symbolic representation of 'the principle of *medha*, the Indo-European root word for female wisdom,' her 'magic blood that could create and destroy life' evokes ancient beliefs in the magic powers of menstrual blood (Walker *Encyclopedia* 636, 637)" (119).

¹⁸ See Redekop for detailed discussion of mother-daughter relationships in Munro's stories.

coincidence that, because of its name, the short story “Meneseung,” is staged as a creation of the narrator, shaped out of the traces left by Almeda. This short story – a co-creation of Almeda’s inchoate poem and the narrator’s archival recovery – intervenes in Almeda’s story.

Almeda’s menstrual flow also leads her to drink tea with drops of “nerve medicine” (68). These drops of nerve medicine metaphorically echo the drops of grape jelly and drops of menstrual blood that “leak” through Almeda’s porous membranes. At the story’s end, Almeda takes laudanum, an opium-based painkiller that causes anxiety and hallucinations, in order to cope with her menstrual cramps and anxiety. Almeda envisions strange objects such as floating tombstones. Despite the apparent paradox, both uncontrolled flow and viscous porosity are at work in the intersubjective movement that occurs as she allows her surroundings to permeate her own boundaries, absorbing those emotions that they represent. In her “unresisting surrender to her surroundings,” Almeda takes in the emotions of grief, nostalgia, love, comfort, belonging, and fear (69).¹⁹ She also absorbs the coldness of “Jarvis Poulter’s boot” and the violence, fear, and sexuality of the unnamed woman’s “plucked-chicken haunch with its blue-black flower” (70). Finally, “The basin of grape juice has overflowed and is running over her kitchen floor, staining the boards of the floor, and the stain will never come out” (70). This overflow

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In Wright’s analysis of the overriding themes of the delusions suffered by patients in Buckinghamshire Lunatic Asylum, he discovers that female delusions tended to “be associated with kinship, family and household, and personal health, a function of the cultural importance of these aspects to the changing social circumstances in which women’s social role became increasingly associated with the domestic sphere. Male delusions, by contrast were most often associated with work, status and property. Thus the changing social and sexual role expectations of Victorian women and men had been reflected and distorted in the content of their own false beliefs” (153).

suggests that, like Grace Marks, Almeda's boundaries are openly permeable. Her hysteria occurs as she allows her family's sorrows to enter her. Almeda succumbs to "extraordinary languor, her perfect immobility, her unresisting surrender to her surrounderings. [...] It seems necessary" (69). The lack of human presence is replaced by her surroundings, which act as archival traces of those who have died or left her life. Here, Almeda experiences transcorporeality with her surroundings, as her mindbody no longer acts as a clear boundary. Ironically, Almeda's excessive absorption of emotions renders her "a long way now from human sympathies or fears or cozy household considerations" (70). Allowing too much in and out leads to a confusion of emotions, and Almeda's ability for basic human sympathy breaks down: a characteristic symptom of hysteria.

Almeda, making connection with her mother, gives birth to a poem that is her masterwork. Munro never reveals whether or not Almeda officially composed the poem or simply conceived of it in her imagination without ever writing it down. This creative birthing process occurs in parallel to her menstruation: the very biological process that represents a lack of pregnancy. In the nineteenth century, the cessation of flow was perceived as destructive for women, as illustrated by the language of degeneration:

...when the child-bearing period is over the sexual organs *shrivel up* and their function *no longer influences* the system at large. Towards the climacteric there is often developed a tendency to *morbid nutrition or degeneration*, and hence the frequency of cancer and fibroids at this time. But even when no tissue changes occur, at this period various *distressing phenomena* are met with which often become *pathological*. The sexual apparatus no longer dominating the system, the balance of healthy action and reaction *being lost*, the nervous force not finding its long accustomed use *wanders off* in other paths and often leads to *nervous disturbances* such as neuralgia, hysteria, syncope, vertigo, convulsions or even insanity. These are merely exaggerations of those 'hot flashes,' tingling,

numbness, burning feet, etc., so common to every woman at the change of life. [emphasis added] (Fenwick, Kenneth. *Manual of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Pediatrics*. Kingston: J. Henderson, 1889. 127)

The overwhelming use of negative and condescending language—“no longer influences...no longer dominating... balance being lost...wanders off”—serves to emphasize the loss of the woman’s childbearing potential. According to Fenwick, the “nervous force” usually directed toward sexual productivity “wanders off” in apparently unproductive directions, leading to various forms of mental and physical distress, including hysteria.

In the nineteenth century, menstrual problems were also censured for their lack of productivity:

Now hysteria causes a wretched train of symptoms, mimicking almost every disease that flesh is heir to. Menstruation in nearly all cases of hysteria is more or less at fault; it is either too profuse, or too deficient, or absent altogether; so that, in point of fact, hysteria and malmenstruation generally go hand-in-hand together. There is another peculiarity of hysteria; it generally attacks the delicate, those with poor appetites, those with languid circulations—with cold hands and cold feet, and those subject, in the wintertime, to chilblains” (Chavasse, Pye Henry. *Advice to a wife on the management of her own health and on the treatment of some of the complaints incidental to pregnancy, labour, and suckling, with an introductory chapter especially addressed to the young wife*. Toronto: Hunter, Rose. 1879. 103)

While the word “delicate” is vague enough to be apparently neutral,²⁰ the descriptions of the appetite and the circulatory system as respectively “poor” and “languid” invoke a production metaphor: with the flesh modeled as an “heir,” the body systems are lazy and impoverished workers who are not doing their share to ensure progress through the

²⁰ While delicate can mean “Having finely developed perception, feeling, appreciation, etc.; (of a person or instrument) sensitive” its earlier meaning also reflects the wasteful tendency ascribed to hysterical sufferers: “Characterized by sensuous delight; luxurious, voluptuous; (of a person) given to pleasure or luxury” (OED accessed 30 November 2007).

healthy preservation and advancement of the species. Languid circulation indicates that flow is not directed at production.

Yet in “Meneseung,” the viscosity of menses and grape jelly exert resistance, and participate in the process of recovery. Flow and viscosity exist together as two properties of the same substance. The viscous porosity of Almeda’s bodily eccentricity is self-preserving and generative, leading to the narrator’s recreation of the story. While Almeda does not marry and bear children, her legacy as a poet and hysteric is preserved by the researcher narrator. The vigilance that seeks to control female flow in nineteenth-century thought is replaced with a tentative acceptance of the eccentricities of such flow, including the viscous porosity of menses, grape jelly, and intersubjective boundaries.²¹

Almeda herself ultimately gives up her resistance, and denies the viscous porosity of her body, of her menses, and of her connection to others. Alternately closed and openly permeable, Almeda is unable to recognize her intersubjective potential in the cheesecloth bag, which she can’t stand looking at (68). For Almeda, the flow of the river of her mind overtakes the permeability of the jelly with its cheesecloth bag. Grosz invokes Irigaray’s explanation in *This Sex Which Is Not One* for the way that female flow invokes “the cultural unrepresentability of fluids within prevailing philosophical models of ontology, their implicit association with femininity, with maternity, with the corporeal,

²¹ The concept of vigilance structures thinking on female health in the nineteenth century. A female’s vigilance in self-control, desire, and daily habits could influence her biological flow. And any disturbance of the “natural” flow of female fluids can cause hysteria: “A large family of children, repeated miscarriages, and profuse menstruation, are three common causes of hysteria; indeed, anything and everything that produces debility will induce hysteria” (Chavasse, Pye Henry. *Advice to a wife on the management of her own health and on the treatment of some of the complaints incidental to pregnancy, labour, and suckling, with an introductory chapter especially addressed to the young wife*. Toronto: Hunter, Rose. 1879.102).

all elements subordinated to the privilege of the self-identical, the one, the unified, the solid” (195). Unable to recognize the jelly for the juice, Almeda succumbs to hysteria. When Almeda is in her acute hysterical state, she looks “deep, deep into the river of her mind and into the tablecloth, and she sees the crocheted roses floating” (70). Here, flow is internalized, as a figurative moving body of water within. The river is conceptualized as an absolutely fluid entity.²² The river is figured as Almeda’s master work and connection, as the name of the river “Meneseteung” becomes the title of her inchoate poem; her hysteria coincides with her great work of art. Yet this process is ambivalent, as the work is mediated by a third party: the archivist narrator. Ultimately, Munro leaves us with the suggestion that, according to the nineteenth-century model, female artistic fulfillment is tantamount to hysterical boundary erasures—a problematic position that limits the potential for female health and self-expression.

Partial Recovery

However, the narrator recognizes the resistance that Almeda exerts, by way of her remaining archival artifacts. Partial recovery occurs in this story through the figure of the narrator who researches Almeda’s life. By providing an open ending and establishing positive genealogical connection between the nineteenth-century protagonist and her twentieth-century symbolic descendent, “Meneseteung” over-writes the nineteenth-century myth of hysterical degeneracy and presents a strategy for coping in a world that

²² While traditionally figured as a completely fluid entity, a river may also be considered an entity that exerts viscous porosity. For example, a river’s natural flow may resist human imposed dams, cause soil erosion, the extinction of species, and when a dammed river floods, it often causes more damage.

can be hostile to women who do not fit into available or acceptable female roles. The nineteenth century's doctrine of degeneration extended the so-called destructive effects of female bodily eccentricity from the individual to society more broadly. Degeneration is a deterministic model based on necessity; according to this nineteenth-century doctrine, hysteria is part of a chain in which each generation necessarily becomes progressively sicker. Micale describes this model as one of "the great intellectual evils of Victorian psychological medicine, the deterministic doctrine of degeneration" (Micale *Approaching Hysteria* 76). Yet in "Meneseteung," transformation works through the mindbody to positive, as well as negative, effect.

If, as we have seen, Almeda is unable to "digest" her interpersonal relationships and succumbs to overly-permeable boundaries, the narrator restores semi-permeable membranes through the archival process. The narrator acknowledges that the intersubjective relationship between researcher and research subject relies upon semi-permeable boundaries and an energy flow that exerts viscous porosity.

Here, Munro challenges the nineteenth-century model of recovery, which involves a return to a destructive and degenerative sanity; here, sanity is achieved by removing eccentricity through various external methods.²³ Recovery programs tend to involve the removal of mental stimulation and addition of physical stimulation.²⁴ One writer notes:

²³ Wendy Mitchinson's *The Nature of their Bodies* (286) and Geoffrey Reaume's *Remembrance of Patients Past* discuss specific treatments including bleeding and blistering, opium, camphor, botanical remedies, and marriage.

²⁴ Preventative measures involve activities that prevent illness. Pye Henry Chavasse recommends horse-riding for girls to strengthen their bodies:

General measures, *e.g.* change of scene and occupation, freedom from over-work and worry, improved nutrition, etc., are of the greatest value in many instances. In cases where hysteria or neurasthenia may be marked, the Weir Mitchell treatment should be carried out. This consists in isolation of the patient under the care of skilful nurses for several weeks; regular massage of trunk and limbs; improvement of nutrition by highly nourishing and easily digestible food, *e.g.* milk, eggs, beef-tea, the chief factor being milk; and in some cases, faradic electricity applied to the muscles. (*Diseases of Women: A Textbook for Students and Practitioners* 145)

“Removal of the appendages” was deemed generally unsuccessful by the end of the nineteenth century. Removal of excess stimuli, however, was considered part of the cure. Yet it was not the removal of over-work and worry that strictly aided recovery, but the reduction of permeability.

In contrast to the nineteenth-century model, Munro’s vision of recovery recognizes that permeable flow, even redirected or resistant in its viscosity, can be potentially productive. The narrator of “Meneseteung” acknowledges that the movement of viscous flow is valuable; she attempts to validate it and seek a productive metaphor of partial recovery in her post-mortem reimagination of Almeda. The narrator is recovering her own sense of self and a female hysterical subjectivity. Just as the narrator works to recover Almeda’s life, she acknowledges that some elements of history (and hysteria?) resist discovery. For example, while the narrator discovers that “it is true” that Almeda was called by the nickname Meda, she may have gotten other details wrong (73). The

If girls were to ride more on horseback than they now do, we should hear less of crooked spines and of round shoulders, of chlorosis and of hysteria, and of other numerous diseases of that class, owing, generally, to debility and to mismanagement....Riding on horseback is both an exercise and an amusement, and is particularly suitable for the fair sex, more especially as their modes of exercise are somewhat limited. (Chavasse, Pye Henry. *Advice to a mother on the management of her children and on the treatment on the moment of some of their more pressing illnesses and accidents*. Toronto: Willing & Williamson, 1880. 269)

narrator's witnessing of the past requires her to use her imagination when true historical details are lost.

Munro's model of female inheritance provides an alternative to degeneration and the pregnancy and childbirth model: the production of storytelling. The researcher in "Meneseteung" rediscovers Almeda's obscure poetry and, through the vehicle of her story, recreates Almeda's master work: "Meneseteung."²⁵ As an archival hysteric, Almeda is both an archived subject, and an archivist of herself.

The Work of the Imagination

Munro's vision of partial recovery involves using the archives of others – human and non-human –in understanding one own's identity.²⁶ While a relationship based on sympathy is a distancing relationship, one based on empathetic imagination is a connecting one. While both types of relationships rely on imagining unknown elements of the other, there are ethical implications in inventing what cannot be known factually. Acknowledging the gaps in the record and the limits of the imagination are vital in the ethical relationship between researcher and research subject. The lack of closure in "Meneseteung" models this admission. In "Meneseteung's" final scene, the narrator shows us the inability to fully capture accurate conditions and feelings in other historical times and places, as she says, "I may have got it wrong. I don't know if she ever took laudanum. Many ladies did. I don't know if she ever made grape jelly" (73). These gaps

²⁵ Stich notes Almeda's "extraordinary pseudo-pregnancy with the poem she calls 'Meneseteung'" (120).

²⁶ The discovery, in the 1990s, of "mirror neurons" in primates, which fire both when animals perform an action and when they see someone else performing it, has led neuroscientists to postulate the same structure in human brains.

also exist intrapersonally, as Almeda herself has gaps in her identity. Her self-perception does not match with the expectations of the townspeople, who regularly report on the goings-on of the citizens. Just as Almeda tries to imaginatively engage with the woman at her gate to fill those in imaginatively, the researcher engages with Almeda's traces to fill in the gaps in herself.

It is the narrator who imposes a symbolic connection between Almeda, the woman at her gate, and the town eccentric. The morning after the ruckus, Almeda envisions a black crow on her windowsill talking about the events of the night before: "'Wake up and move the wheelbarrow!' It says to her, scolding, and she understands that it means something else by 'wheelbarrow—something foul and sorrowful'" (65). The wheelbarrow is also associated with the town drunk, Queen Aggie. The young hooligans "get her into a wheelbarrow and trundle her all over town, then dump her into a ditch to sober her up" (54). The wheelbarrow is a sort of vessel controlled by society into which these unruly women are poured. On this metaphorical common ground, Almeda may imaginatively connect with these women, but she can't actually speak for them: Munro writes, "Pearl Street, which her back windows overlook and her back gate opens onto, is another story" (55). Pearl Street is associated with poverty, depravity, and the feminine as opposed to the prosperous and masculine Dufferin Street at the front of Almeda's house (Stich 111).

Stich writes,

While Pearl Street thus mediates between the two geographical, social, and cultural extremes, it also both fastens and loosens the connections between a world of rational authority traditionally seen as male/masculine and a world of the imaginal, the unconscious and chaos often associated with fear of the female/feminine and no less often deemed accessible or bearable only with the help of alcohol, sex, and of course the arts. (111)

When the researcher looks at the artefacts of Almeda's life, she uses the gaps in Almeda to fill in the gaps of her own identity through co-creating Almeda's story.

This process illustrates the limits of the ethical relationship; one cannot completely fill in gaps in someone else's story. Ultimately, Munro shows us that the archivist can only ever truly be an archivist of herself, recreating her own subjectivity, in dialogue with her subject. This relationship grants the "other" a voice and the ability to respond, either literally or metaphorically. The narrator's research subject takes on, as it were, a life of her own. And yet a researcher, no matter how thorough, motivated, and ethically responsible, remains an archivist of herself in her work. Ultimately, an archival hysteric is both an archive and an archivist. Munro shows how this conception of the work of the archive is not, in fact, a selfish formulation, but a necessary component of intersubjectivity.

There are limitations to the relationship between the archivist and the archival subject. The state of recovery is necessarily partial and ongoing, even if healthy boundaries are reinstated and successful relations are re-established. The narrator states that others, too, are "driven to find things out [...] in the hopes of seeing this trickle in time" (73). The flow of information can sometimes dry up to a "trickle," or material may resist full understanding. Here we see both the limits and the transformative potential of the archive. The flow of information and affects that exists between the researcher and the research subject is subject to the movement of viscous porosity, as resistance may occur on both ends. If, as the figure of the archival hysteric shows us, the human body is like an

archive, we also see the limits of the human mindbody in addition to its transformative potential.

Not only is the imagination necessary to the ethical relationship between humans, but it is necessary for re-conceiving one's environment as an othered subject. As we have seen, material objects acts as conduits to people in Almeda's life; Almeda's relationship with her homestead demonstrates that permeable boundaries exist even with the nonhuman.

When Almeda is unable to establish relationships with others, she retreats into relationships with inanimate objects. At the end of the story, as Almeda absorbs herself completely into her surrounding, we see her merging with artifacts from her family and past. The narrator tells us, "A lot of things to watch. For every one of these patterns, decorations seems charged with life, ready to move and flow and alter. Almeda Roth's occupation throughout the day is to keep an eye on them. Not to prevent their alteration so much as to catch them at it—to understand it, to be a part of it" (69). Here, the decorations of the Roth homestead are imbued with a form of agency as they are "charged with life." Like archival artifacts, these mementoes of dead family members are ready to "move and flow and alter." Almeda's thoughts and emotions interact with the objects that surround her.²⁷ The narrator never reveals whether this interaction brings her comfort or launches her deeper into her hysteria; the story remains ambiguous here.

²⁷ While unable to form ethical relationships with those people around her, Almeda does show a consideration for her environment. While Jarvis Poulter runs the salt mines from a strictly capitalistic philosophy, Almeda wonders, "Would she herself, knowing that there was salt in the earth, discover how to get it out and sell it? Not likely. She would be thinking about the ancient sea" (61).

Munro shows that there are limitations ~~to~~ of this mode of relating. Almeda's researcher is unable to make a complete connection; some information is always unrecoverable. The researcher who attempts to uncover a research subject always possesses limitations. Like Almeda's inability to digest the experiences of the unnamed woman at her gate, a researcher may be unprepared to digest or accept what the archive is offering.

The researcher narrator acts as a figure for the imaginative element in the process of partial recovery. The recovery of Almeda as a historical figure relies upon the researcher's imaginative interventions. When Almeda mentally conceives of her great poem "Meneseteung,"

She has to think of so many things at once—Champlain and the naked Indians and the salt deep in the earth, but as well as the salt the money, the money-making intent brewing forever in heads like Jarvis Poulter's. Also the brutal storms of winter and the clumsy and benighted deeds on Pearl Street. The changes of climate are often violent, and if you think about it there is no peace even in the stars. All this can be borne only if it is channelled into a poem, and the word 'channelled' is appropriate because the name of the poem will be –it *is*—'The Meneseteung.'(70)

The poem is here equated to Almeda's hallucinatory hysterical state. The environmental turmoil that Almeda envisions, as well as Champlain and Jarvis Poulter's capitalistic drives, cannot be borne unless digested and creatively remade into another form. The change in tense from "will be" to "it is" suggests the narrator's movement between Almeda's history – and partial recovery – and her own present. Here, the process of "channelling" signals the flow of energy between Almeda and the narrator, as Munro assigns the short story the same name as Almeda's unwritten masterwork. The act of creation, the artistic product, and Almeda's environment converge as "The name of the

poem is the name of the river. No, in fact it is the river, the Meneseteung, that is the poem” (70).

By the end of the story, the snide local newspaper *The Vidette* (1903) reports that “the mind of this fine person had become somewhat clouded” (71). This suggests that Almeda’s internalized flow, which was a river during her hysteria, has changed state from liquid to gas. Here, the narrator reminds us that material states are in constant transformation. A change in energy occurs with this change of state, and the bonds between the liquid molecules become less strongly attached. Clouds, which appear to be more static than a river, are in fact simply a different form of flow, which again exerts a resistant viscosity.

The researcher’s work in “Meneseteung” shows how imagination is integral to the ethical relationship. While the nineteenth-century concerns about the hysteric focused on interpreting her symptoms, Munro places an even greater importance on understanding. The dialogue of relationship relies on the interpretation and understanding of another’s actions, speech, and silence. Interpretation, as Oliver states, “performs several transformative functions” (71). Oliver states that interpretation relies on imagination which “allows us access to our bodies and ourselves and other people” (Oliver 71). How else can we access unseen and unfelt parts of our bodies but through the imagination? The imagination, however, is particularly necessary in reimagining our relations with the material world.

As the capacity of seeing what is not visually observable, imagination is part of the reformulation of vision, and what it means to see. Employing Kristeva’s idea that

transformation requires the “psychic space” provided by the imagination, Oliver suggests in fact that “transformation is possible through imaginative interpretation” (Oliver 72). As the “space between the biological and the social,” this psychic space exists within the intersubjective semi-permeable membrane (72). The process of storying and retrieving memories in order to reconstruct subjectivity occurs on the path to therapeutic recovery. Munro’s narrator takes part in this process, which includes reframing the eccentric nature of the female body in terms of viscous porosity and accepting its eccentricity. Ben-Menahem writes that

One of the goals of the therapeutic process is to release us from the grip of perceptions and patterns of behaviour that force themselves on us, and as a result of which, we act, feel, or think in ways that hurt us, or do not help us, ways that differ from those in which we would act, feel, or think were it not for the coercive force of our obsessions. The psychodynamic approaches, all of which take their lead here from psychoanalysis, argue that the source of this self-coercion can be found in how we picture our pasts, and that therapy thus requires a reframing of the past to shake off these patterns of remembering and forgetting....However, fundamental questions remain: In what way is the new picture of the past superior to its predecessor? (Ben-Menahem 584)

Munro’s story argues that the new picture of the past re-embraces the mindbody’s contradictions.

If, in fact, the narrator’s history of Almeda Roth is made up, what model of intersubjectivity and ethics results? As recovery is always partial and ongoing, then so too is intersubjective understanding; we cannot presume to fully know or understand another human or nonhuman subject, but we must take responsibility for attempting this endeavour. This involves a responsibility to understand ourselves as human subjects to the best of our abilities. This paradox is at the heart of ethical relations. The narrator acknowledges the limits of permeability in her conclusion.

Reframing the past can help a sufferer to change her emotions and neurotic behaviours: “Awareness of the source of a particular neurosis in a specific event can, then, liberate one from the grip of the event and the neurosis that precipitated it” (Ben-Menahem 585). In hysteria, this source is openly permeable boundaries. This understanding of recovery challenges the notion of degeneracy – a model that requires powerful belief in necessity – and empowers successive generations to reconsider their personal histories as a result of contingency; that is to say, events did not have to unfold as they did, and the meaning attributed to any past event is only one of many possible interpretations: “We are now free to give [a past incident] a different meaning, and respond to it differently. In particular, because we are free to take responsibility for the meaning we choose to endow the incident with, and the manner in which we respond to it, our response need no longer be compulsive and automatic” (Ben-Menahem 586). The narrator has taken newspaper accounts of Almeda’s life, illness, and death, and has reimagined this particular past with an awareness that her version is one of many possible interpretations. The narrator visits Almeda’s overgrown tombstone and reveals in the final scene that she may have made everything up, unraveling the world she has created.

A relationship based not merely on recognition but on witnessing can help the hysteric to heal. Sanity, or a calmness of the mind, involves a re-membling of the past and is notably marked by an absence of the drama of hysteria. The process of recovery is, in fact, regenerative, rather than reductive. Fiction participates in the act of witnessing, acting as testimony. The politics of witnessing fosters a respect for differences, both

between humans, and between humans and their environments. It does so by enabling a transformation of both participants in the ethical relationship.

When encountering traces of the other that bear witness to that which is beyond recognition – the pastness of the past – the narrator, who is an ethical researcher, engages with Almeda's traces in a process of address and response. Oliver builds from Levinas's work on the ethics of the other, though she starts from the perspective of those othered: "Through the process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination, those othered can begin to repair damaged subjectivity by taking up position as speaking subjects" (7). Following Levinas, Oliver sees ethical responsibility for the other as a key part of subjecthood.

While Almeda's poetry is re-discovered, she herself is unable to take up a position as a fully speaking subject. Repair, or full recovery, of damaged subjectivity is an impossible project. Resistance symbolized by viscous porosity occurs in the relationship between the researcher and Almeda, as she is recovered from her artifacts and her poetry. The lack of closure in this story resists the twentieth-century rush to diagnose emotional instability and shows how the diagnostic impulse participates in the proliferation of objectifying and stereotypical narratives of female hysteria. Here we see an open-ended rather than fixed diagnosis.²⁸ As a minor genre, the short story enacts "a positive aversion to the entailment of 'power and law' that defines the 'major' literature" (Hunter 221). Munro does not impose another preferred reality or ideology in place of another, resisting

²⁸ Hunter argues that "Munro's use of the short story form, and particularly the development of an elliptical and interrogative narrational style, is fundamental to the account she gives of women in Canada's settler history" (219).

the production of simply “another ‘majority’ point of view, another structure of power and law” (Hunter 232-33). In the same way that hysterical archives challenge traditional narratives of history, Munro’s chosen genre, the short story, challenges the ability to have fixed or full knowledge of Almeda Roth’s life, times, and psychological state. John Orange comments that Munro’s stories “are designed so that their very form will reinforce the theme of the complexity, and, ultimately, the unfathomable depth, of any human experience. Our understanding, even of ourselves can only be tentative and tenuous, according to these stories” (89).

At the outer level of the frame, however, the narrator successfully establishes an ethical relationship with Almeda through her archival impulse. We find out by the end that “Meneseteung” is actually a story more about the narrator than the characters she writes about. Her story-making impulse comes out of what she admits is a human desire to find things out and to turn events into story. We see that recovery can be driven by the motivations of others, and recovery does involve outside relationship. The narrator’s acknowledgement here speaks to the feminist movement’s political mobilization of the hysteric as a symbol for resistance. Ajay Heble writes that “the narrator encodes her own subjectivity in telling of Almeda, so that the story set in the past is simultaneously ‘an autobiographical act in the present’” (qtd. in Hunter 233). The narrator is self-aware of her motivations – her curiosity and her desire to “rescue” a female subject from the anonymity of history. Yet the narrator does not treat her research subject as a victim. The end of the story shows that the narrator has engaged with Almeda’s life and told her story in accordance with the ethical relationship. She desires connection and she fashions

narrative as a self-exploratory act. When the researcher acknowledges her dependence upon other subjects and on her environment, and also sets up semi-permeable boundaries, she accepts her responsibility to listen.

The ending which unravels the story is, in fact, an act of the narrator's responsibility.²⁹ The narrator must use her imagination in establishing a bond with her research subject because they are temporally separated by over a century. She also reaches out to the general public, with whom she believes she shares a general human curiosity: "I thought that there wasn't anybody alive in the world but me who would know this, who would make the connection. But perhaps this isn't so. People are curious. They will be driven to find things out, even trivial things. They will put things together, just in the hope of [...] making a connection" (73). While she originally believes herself to be unique, she now describes the need for connection as a common human trait.³⁰

Although hysteria may be perceived as a female condition, it is *not* a female legacy. Recovery occurs through the act of female cultural inheritance that can occur through archival research. A careful reader of Almeda's poetry, who analyses her rhythm, meter, and thematic content, the researcher narrator reaches out against her own mortality to revive this fictional dead woman's life and works. Female inheritance can occur

²⁹ Redekop suggests that the story "does not lead to an easily defined political outrage, and yet there is tremendous implied anger that shakes 'Meneseteung' on its very foundations" (209). Almeda's surname suggests the meaning of the obsolete "wroth" meaning "deep anger or resentment; wrath, rage or fury; ire" (OED online, accessed 22 November 2007). The energy of this anger also comes from the narrator. While Meda turns her anger inward, the narrator directs her emotions outwards in an ethical relationship.

³⁰ Taking this dynamic one step further to involve the reader, Duncan invokes the feminist reading strategy of Patrocínio Schweickart (1986), where the reading experience is an "intersubjective encounter" (623 qtd in Duncan 100), "in which the audience must connect with the female writer and with a larger community of women" (101). In any case, "Connection," like other terms such as "shame," "friendship," "secrets," and "dirt" plays a large role in Munro's fictional vocabulary (York 135). Both genealogical connections and historical connections play a key structural role in both stories.

through archival work in a rebirthing process that is a powerful reimagining of motherhood.

Part of this rebirthing process involves throwing off the patriarchal myth that degeneracy is perpetuated by childbearing females. Rowland Smith suggests that

The plight of Almeda embodies the value-system underlying the reactions of subsequent generations of Munro female characters to their parochial world. That world may cease to be part of the wilderness, but as a settled Victorian colony or a shabby-genteel mid-twentieth century Dominion, or the liberated Trudeau-era ‘world-class’ province, its puritan roots, patriarchal and materialistic, inform the existential predicaments of Munro’s women. When the irrational and unpredictable erupt—with increasing frequency—into the lives of the protagonists in Munro’s later volumes, those flashes of quasi-insanity are almost without exception revealed in the context of the suffocating conventions of either nineteenth- or twentieth-century Ontario. (85)

Yet these “flashes of quasi-insanity” only appear to be eruptions because of those very suffocating conventions against which they are measured. Women’s bodies, under the threat of male violence and the difficulties of living in the wilderness, regularly act out in unusual ways. This is because, as Hunter writes, “Patriarchy and colonialism merge as types of authoritative discourses that fail women” (232). Women’s bodies act out because of biology’s inherent viscous potential.

A hysteric possesses the seeds of her own hysteria and recovery within her mindbody. Munro’s story helps us to understand the subjectivity of the recovering hysteric, as it both models and contests nineteenth-century concepts such as degeneration to normalize and individualize the eccentricity of the female body. Recovery involves the acceptance of eccentricity and the restoration of semi-permeability. The generative sanity modeled in Munro’s stories relies upon semi-permeability: health of mind and body is a productive, two-way flow of emotions creatively expressed. A recovering subject who

changes the framework in which he/she perceives him/herself and others is engaged in a political act. If she sees others as fully separate individuals and imagines herself untouched by their life experiences, sufferings, triumphs, and emotions, she may become confused in her relationships with others. Like Almeda, she may hold overly permeable boundaries, where everything gets in. Or, on the other hand, she may hold inflexible solid boundaries that keep her own feelings in and others' out. By reconceiving of the body and mind as the mindbody, we can understand why healing through one pathway will lead to healing in the other.³¹

Munro's story works to break down binaries between body and mind, instead of reinstating hierarchies or simply reversing them. "Meneseteung" does not suggest that the workings of one female's body can generalize a situation for all women; instead, Munro portrays the individual workings of the eccentric female body as a point of connection between females. According to Hunter, Munro's post-colonial stories "make a case that the feminist project may carry within its theory and practice the same totalizing ambition as colonial authority itself" (Hunter 220). Munro's open endings act as a non-authoritative play of possibilities, rather than simply reinstating another authoritative discourse. Her ending suggests that one woman cannot speak for all, but can speak for herself through tentative, self-aware use of reason and imagination and through attempts at connection with others.

³¹ Returning to Freud, Wilson cites the relationship between both realms as a transference logic (2008, 389). That is, disfunctions in the body such as "fatigue, poor appetite, guilt, and hopelessness are the result of losses—not of objects or organs themselves—but of relations to objects and organs. It follows, then, that dysthymic states can be most successfully ameliorated by restoring relationality in both emotional and organic registers" (Wilson 2008, 390).

Chapter Two

Envisioning the Archival Hysteric in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*

In Chapter One, we saw how an archival approach to Almeda Roth's character helped uncover some of her hysterical qualities and her partial recovery. In order to deepen our understanding of the archival hysteric, this chapter explores some of the hysterical elements of the archive, including the ways in which the archive's permeable boundaries between researcher and research subject and between past, present, and future encourage the act of shared witnessing to occur between researchers and archival subjects. The model of the archival hysteric ultimately shows us that boundaries between subjects are more dynamic and porous than is usually acknowledged.¹ The archival hysteric's subjectivity is based on the dynamics of shared witnessing, a term derived from Kelly Oliver's model of witnessing, outlined in the introduction. Shared witnessing can occur in two ways: multiple subjects may all give testimony about a single subject or event; alternately, one subject may serve as a witness to the lives and experiences of several others who, because of death or for other reasons, are unable to speak for themselves. *Alias Grace* shows us how the hysteric's mindbody is the basis for shared witnessing in both of these senses. For example, Atwood's use of newspaper articles about Marks shows how Grace's subjectivity was collectively shaped; Atwood also depicts Grace as a witness to the suffering of her mother, Mary Whitney, and Nancy Montgomery. Both types of shared witnessing can lead to fracture and hysteria. The

¹ While psychoanalytical concepts such as transference, countertransference, and projection include notions of affective transmission, "all reputable schools of psychological theory assume that the subject is energetically and affectively self-contained" (Brennan 2).

shared witnessing that occurs in the archives serves to portray Marks as a “bipolar” subject described in terms of irreconcilable opposites.² An examination of archival material about Grace Marks uncovers the nineteenth-century dynamics of the sympathetic relationship, as reporters shaped their views of Marks based on their sympathy (or lack of sympathy) for her.

In *Alias Grace*, Atwood contrasts the sympathetic relationship with the ethical relationship that leads to partial recovery. While shared witnessing can lead to hysteria, the shared witnessing within an ethical relationship can precipitate recovery. Because women were perceived in the nineteenth century as nurturers (Mitchinson 9), they would have been particularly subject to engaging in shared witnessing.

My reading of the figure of the archival hysteric in *Alias Grace* shows us how human connectivity might begin from sensory experience, allowing for a serious reconsideration of ways of knowing the other. If the physical senses and the transmission of affects between subjects potentially render all beings permeable to one another, then knowing no longer simply denotes a conceptual grasp of the world. Knowing instead involves a process of engaging the physical world through eyes, ears, nose, feet, hands and emotions. This process possesses the potential to bewilder and overwhelm a perceiver in the very act of instructing her or him. Historical reports portray Grace as a visual object to be observed; in *Alias Grace*, vision is both a distancing and a connecting sense, and the novel shows how other senses are important in ethical relationships. In witnessing, the

² Judith Knelman suggests that Marks may have suffered from bipolar disorder (681). While this post-mortem diagnosis is purely speculative, it does point out the gross dualities that populate Marks’s historical record. Reading strategies that seek to make a post-mortem diagnosis based on historical evidence hold the potential for re-victimization and objectification.

sense of sight is not necessarily dominant, but accompanied by other types of sensate communication.

Hysterics are subjects whose bodies and minds have become overwhelmed by both senses and feelings. This creates confusion in the communication process, as overwhelming emotional responses are deflected into bodily behaviours. The mindbody generates behaviours that are creative and self-preserving, as they alter the sufferer's mode of interaction with others. Overwhelmed as she is, her sensory experience of the world changes; disruption in her mindbody system gives way to an altered way of being in the world. The hysteric literally holds onto many of the sensational relationships with others, taking the affects of others within herself; the physiological changes may become long-term, although they are reversible through the recovery process. Hysteria, Brennan writes, "is biophysical in its effects. It really is in the flesh.[....] Misapprehensions about hysteria are themselves instances of the tendency to split biological or physical inquiry (real things) from psychosocial explanation (not real things). Because of this split, the mechanism of hysterical identification has not yet been specified" (3). This complex mechanism involves, in part, the transfer of affects between subjects: a process that holds both perils and potential.

Through its symptoms, the hysterical mindbody acts as a witness (and communicates to further witnesses) of the hysteric's past experiences, conveying her displaced suffering to others. For instance, Grace's fainting fit when she first meets Dr. Jordan betrays her fear of doctors but also tells of her earlier sufferings at the hands of her father, who throws her against the wall "shouting that I was a slut and a whore, and I

fainted” (129). Those who witness the hysteric’s tales of suffering may respond in a myriad of ways: they may ignore, deny, diagnose, attempt to cure, or responsibly listen to the story her mindbody tells.

The Historical Grace Marks, Sympathy, and the Visual

An Irish Catholic Upper Canadian servant, Grace Marks became well-known for the 1843 alleged murder of her master Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper Hannah Montgomery. The promotional copy for *Alias Grace* cites Grace Marks as a “notorious murderess” and refers frequently to the Kinnear case as a celebrated murder case in Canada’s history.³ Doubleday’s 1996 promotional poster for the novel reads in letters larger than the title or the author: “Was she evil, innocent, or insane?” Grace Marks’s notoriety hinges not only on her status as a murderess, but equally on her status as a victim. An ad for the Bloomsbury edition of *Alias Grace* features two faces from Rossetti’s “Head of a Girl in a Green Dress” (1850-65) facing each other, one shaded lightly and the other darkly, superimposed by the words “Is this the face of the innocent...or the guilty?” (*The Guardian Weekend* 28 September 1996). The Kinnear case was sensationalized in the nineteenth-century media based on this very kind of binary thinking. In nineteenth-century newspaper reports, Grace is alternately depicted as

³ In her unpublished biography of Marks for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Susan E. Houston writes: “A number of elements contributed to the special interest in the case. In a very practical way the crime revealed the severe limitations of law enforcement in the colony: it required the enthusiasm of railway promoter F. C. Capreol, a friend of Kinnear’s who impetuously pursued the chase to Lewiston, to overcome official confusion over the appropriate jurisdiction of city and county magistrates. More disconcerting was the uneasiness aroused by a murder committed by servants seemingly without provocation. Such a crime exposed the vulnerability of decent people to wickedness and violence. Local artist Hoppner Meyer, for example, was quick to appeal to such fears. Seeing the possibility of a popular market for portrait engravings he publicized the innovation in police detection effected by the mass circulation of portraits of wanted criminals” [MS COLL 335 Box 9].

a young, innocent woman or as a fiendish devil. As a foil to Marks, we can look at the portrait of unqualified victim Hannah Montgomery, also known as Nancy. She is consistently described in contemporary newspaper reports as a friendly, good-looking woman with a cheerful disposition (Berchem 166). Descriptions of the eighteen-year-old Grace Marks, however – a woman of comparative age and social standing – vary considerably. Reports of her physical beauty appear throughout the documents, as do assertions of both her sexual innocence and guilt. Throughout the Kinnear case, the media were particularly interested in Marks, focusing their attention on her youth and appearance. *The British Colonist* reported that “The female Prisoner is rather good-looking than otherwise, she appears totally uneducated, and her countenance is devoid of expression....” and further that “Grace Marks, the female, although wholly devoid of education, possesses good features, and in point of physical appearance, is much superior to her paramour.—” (Wednesday August 2, 1843).

In the archives, representations of Grace Marks operate within the dynamics of the sympathetic exchange. Not surprisingly, trial accounts that appeal to sympathy are largely based on Marks’s appearance, for sympathetic exchange relies on the sense of sight. In the eighteenth century, the sense of sight gained importance as the primary means of knowing, and by the nineteenth century became “the first of the senses, and to this day the only sense, to attain objective status” (Brennan *Transmission of Affect* 17). Theories of extramission, where the eye actively emitted light, were replaced by the understanding of a more passive eye that involved assimilating everything other than oneself into one’s frame of reference. This paradoxically “makes the subject the center of the world:

however passively it sees, it does so from its own standpoint, which also happens to be the world's center" (Brennan *Vision in Context* 224). The sense of sight connotes individualism, separation, and subject/object dichotomies.⁴ Cultural narratives of sympathy, Jaffe argues, do away with the body, and instead rely upon images or representations that "implicitly defin[e] identity as cultural image and fantasy" (13). Yet Grace is both embodied and disembodied in the archives; even while the archival depictions focus on her bodily parts, such as her hair and her wounded breast, and her bodily reactions, such as fainting, these are fragmented metaphorical representations which are several steps removed from Grace's actual body.

Newspaper articles, Prison Warden journals from the Kingston Penitentiary, Dr. Workman's reports from Marks's stay at the asylum, and letters exist that describe Marks's appearance, her demeanour, her style of dress, her attitude, and her presumed innocence or guilt. Yet these material traces in the archives obscure the "truth" about Grace Marks. Instead, they reveal a truth about how she was perceived, and how her mythology was created. Marks's portrayal was politically charged, as the reform papers

⁴ As a marginalized nineteenth-century female – an Irish Catholic, a servant, a criminal, and a hysteric – Marks provokes a fear of social and mental decline. An article from *The British Colonist* entitled "The Richmond Hill Tragedy" reports that "the murder of Mr. Kinnear was entirely of a domestic nature, perpetrated by his own servants who lived upon his substance, were sheltered under his roof, and who owed him fidelity at least, if not gratitude" (9 August 1843). The case is seen as particularly dangerous because it represents the potential of class uprising and betrayal. Audrey Jaffe notes that "The 'objects' of Victorian sympathy are inseparable from Victorian middle-class self-representation precisely because they embody, to a middle-class spectator, his or her own potential narrative of social decline: they capture the fragility of respectable identities psychically positioned between high and low, defined within the parameters of a narrative of rising and falling" (9).

tended to support her case, while the Tory papers advocated punishment.⁵ Knelman writes that

It is reasonable to assume that in the push for social reform that developed in Upper Canada in the 1830s and continued after the union of the two Canadas in 1840, reform journals would have been more sympathetic to servants than to their masters, while papers that supported the Tory establishment would press for swift arrest and extreme punishment of the offender. (Knelman 679)

Marks's "bipolar" mythology is formed out of two opposing politically motivated tendencies: to either garner sympathy for Grace or for her murdered master.

When appealing to public sympathy for Marks, reporters highlight and exaggerate typically feminine characteristics, including the previously noted physical attractiveness, physical weakness, fear, and emotional instability. In a scene of literary proportions, *The Times* depicts Marks as impaling herself in a fit of emotional distress:

The next day the female prisoner was also tried, convicted, and sentenced to be executed on the same day as McDermott. During the trial, this unfortunate and criminal girl was in tears, and when the verdict was brought in she swooned; in falling forward one of the spikes surrounding the dock inflicted a wound in her breast (*Times* 8 December, p.3 col. E).

Depicting Marks as "unfortunate," the writer here suggests that, although she is a criminal, she is a victim of fortune. The depiction of Marks wounding her breast in court is a highly visual appeal for sympathy.

In reports in her defense, Marks describes herself as lacking self-control. She claims to have fainted when informed by James McDermott that she must flee with him or die:

⁵ Knelman writes that "Newspaper articles are primary sources that do no more than record what people think is happening. They are not conduits to any hidden 'truth' or 'history' but simply blurry images of retreating reality captured from different perspectives" (684).

Question—Did you see Mr. Kinnear's body removed?

Answer—No. I saw him lying on the floor after he was shot, but when James (McDermot) fired at me, I fainted and fell on the ground. I think the body must have been removed then. I was "so scared" I was afraid to move. (This must have been after she came to herself.) ("The Late Murders" *The British Colonist* Saturday August 5, 1843)

Although the accuracy of this fainting scene is disputed, what is important is Marks's recourse to the female quality of faint-heartedness and lack of self-control when confronted with violence or fear.⁶ Similarly, reporters describe Grace's physical weakness in order to garner sympathy for her:

The remarks of Jamie Welch, the boy, (who gave his evidence in a most shrewd, intelligent manner,) had apparently overwhelmed her. "She has got on Nancy's frock; the tippot she has on is Nancy's, and so is the parasol in her hand" – these observations, made by the boy, completely overcame her, and she sat, or sank down in the chair, in a state of apathy and stupefaction. The crowd in the court was immense, and the heat very oppressive. (*The British Colonist* "The Late Murders" Saturday August 5, 1843)

According to these reports, Grace's willpower is weak and unable to sustain her through difficult times. The language is alliterative and the words sat, sank, apathy, and stupefaction paint a sympathetic portrait of the accused. The stressful environment, including crowds and heat, stimulates Marks's "feminine" weakness.

Further, reports aiming to generate sympathy for Grace often note her pliability, painting a portrait of a sensitive victim. A retrospective sympathetic treatment of Marks reflects earlier views that Marks was a malleable, sensitive woman who was unable to resist the orders of a stronger male criminal. In "Recollections of the Kinnear Tragedy,"

⁶ Fainting was a common characteristic of those sensibility-prone characters in sentimental novels, popularized in the eighteenth century. Sensibility, or particular responsiveness to various stimuli, including the emotions of others, was criticized as feminine and became politically linked to the excesses of the French Revolution. (Csengi 1). In this train of thought, over-stimulated nerves often led to hysteria. The historical response to the sentimental novel shows how intersubjective permeability was perceived as dangerous.

written on the sixty-fifth anniversary of the “now historic tragedy,” William Harrison suggests this:

[...] Grace Marks the last comer to the Kinnear home, McDermot's companion in crime but little known. She was only there a few months, a girl of about eighteen years of age, an immigrant from Ireland. She was engaged as house-work assistant to Nancy Montgomery. Grace was of a lively disposition and pleasant manners and may have been an object of jealousy to Nancy. Over Grace, McDermot seemed to have had a baneful influence from the first week of her arrival at the Kinnear homestead. There is plenty of room for the supposition that instead of her being the instigator and promotor [sic] of the terrible deeds committed, She was the unfortunate dupe in the whole dreadful business. There certainly did not appear to be anything in the girl's personality that would be likely to develop into an embodiment of concentrated iniquity that McDermot tried to make her out to have been, if he ever uttered one half of the statements attributed to him in his confession. His disregard for truth was well-known. [...] At the time of its occurrence there was no doubt of the murders having been planned and carried out by McDermot, he acting on Grace Marks' pliable nature to secure her as an assistance and an abettor in carrying out his diabolical intentions. (*Newmarket Era* 1908)

Marks's “pliability” lies in direct contrast to her otherwise noted ability to take command and give orders.⁷ These sympathetic accounts rely on visual “scenes” to incite compassion in their readers. They also demonstrate the problematic nature of the sympathetic exchange: while they assisted Grace in gaining public support, perhaps preventing her hanging, they also superimposed the fantasy of the weak love-mad woman upon her, entrenching stereotypical gendered characteristics.

Even when Grace is portrayed as an active force, she is still a candidate for sympathy. As a “life convict” in the penitentiary, Grace was the object of the warden's sympathy. In a 22 Sept 1863 entry, the Warden writes:

⁷ By other accounts, Marks remains in control of her voice, her body, and her carriage despite the stressors (heat, noise, and crowds) of the trial.

[...]Grace Marks leaving her seat during the Matrons [sic] absence contrary to the Matron's request and calling No. 26 (Mary Johnson) a wicked creature, Mary Johnson calling Grace Marks a black headed villain and pulling her hair and cap,

I did not punish either of the above mentioned parties as I looked upon Marks as the cause of the disturbance and could not punish one without the other and I feel very reluctant to punish a life convict (*Inspector's Minute Book, Feb 3, 1848-Oct. 1, 1864*)

While Marks is clearly the victimizer in this situation, the warden is particularly reluctant to punish her because of her life sentence. The dynamics of sympathy influence the warden's reaction.

Atwood's initial interest in Marks's story also privileges sympathetic visual representation rather than the complexities of the historical record. As the Atwood collection at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (University of Toronto) shows, the early scripts on Marks took the form of dramatic spectacles. Atwood's various version of Marks's story include: *Grace Marks: A Television Play* (1974) written for the CBC; *The Servant Girl* (1974); the unpublished stage play *Grace: A Play in Two Acts* (1978-79); the novel *Alias Grace* (1996); and Atwood's scholarly response *In Search of Alias Grace* (1997). The premium Atwood placed on the spectacle emerges in her proposed set design and stage directions for "Grace: A Play in Two Acts." Her sketches for set design include an elaborate four-story cross-section of Kinnaird's (sic) house. Atwood aims to represent the classes, characteristics, and states of mind of the characters based on the visual design of their rooms. The stage set includes a root cellar full of "barrels, stored bottles, junk"; Kinnaird's bedroom is "overfurnished"; the front parlour is "done in English taste of the period, with a parlour piano and furniture too big for the room, so that the room feels

stuffed. Kinnaird's pretensions exceed the space" [n.p.].⁸ Here, the visual representation of the scene represents Kinnaird's overbearing and greedy character. As discussed in the previous chapter, vision is traditionally seen as a dividing sense that relies upon distance from the perceived object, unlike other sensory experiences such as taste, touch, or smell. Oliver writes, "Vision grasps objects at a distance and therefore is seen as either the privileged sense for knowledge or the sense that creates an illusion of mastery over the world" (171). Accordingly, Atwood notes that visual description is reserved primarily for the marginalized members of the lower classes. Hannah (called Nancy in *Alias Grace*) fails at her representation of an upper class lady: she has "no more luck with her embroidery than she did with her piano playing," she easily exhibits frustration and she frequently "reverts to a lower class accent" (s.d. "Grace: A Play in Two Acts" 27; 37), "squalling like a fishwife" (s.d. 37).

In these early scripts, Atwood mobilizes hysteria politically to assert the ideal of feminist identity and power through sisterhood. Grace's hysteria is visually and aurally evidenced as unequivocal, though periodic, as she retreats from words into postures and sounds. In the final scene, she "Sinks to her knees, her hands to her throat, head back, in the attitude of HANNAH while she was being strangled. [...] her expression should be one of demoniac, demented glee" (s.d. "Grace: A Play in Two Acts" 59). Atwood depicts Grace "in a trance of cold rage" ("Grace: A Play in Two Acts" 15) and after urging MacDermott towards murder, Grace's "laughter has an element of hysteria" ("Grace: A

⁸ Similarly, McDermott is depicted in the cellar with his head in a noose in his highly dramatic, visual scenes.

Play in Two Parts” 37).⁹ While Grace’s hysteria is unequivocal, the reasons for it in these early works range from obsession to “pangs of remorse” (“Grace Marks: A Television Play” 3) to the double personality that later emerges in *Alias Grace*: “Hannah and I are the same person...I live in her death, she dies daily through my wretched life....” (“Grace Marks: A Television Play” 56). While Grace is definitively a killer with a guilty conscience, she is ultimately a victim of patriarchal oppression. Grace is victim to an abusive father and remains unable to better her life. She claims, “Because of all the things I ever wanted in my life...and I wanted many things...her death was the only thing I ever got” (“Grace Marks: A Television Play” 56). She realizes, “I shouldn’t have killed Hannah. She was the same as me. Hannah isn’t the one I should have killed” (“Grace: A Play in Two Acts” 63). In a strong feminist statement, Grace here acknowledges that she has misidentified the enemy and mistakenly killed a “sister.” Grace has tried to gain power for herself by punishing other women, rather than rising against patriarchal violence.

In these early versions, Atwood uses visual representation to build sympathy for Grace and to approximate “truth,” understood simply as accuracy of historical detail. Atwood writes that “That was the first version of the story I came across, and, being young, and still believing that ‘non-fiction’ meant ‘true,’ I did not question it” (“In

⁹ Grace’s final words to Moodie are rational as she explains that “the reason I don’t talk is that there no longer seems to be much worth saying” (“Grace: A Play in Two Acts” 62). This rationale invokes the patriarchal oppression model of hysteria.

Search” 1513).¹⁰ Atwood’s scripts represent the nineteenth century as a distant period, emphasizing difference through visual details and period songs, costume, and decoration.

***Alias Grace* and the archival hysteric**

The Atwood papers show us how the author’s attention to the hysterical nature of the archive changed the portrayal of her heroine as she began to transform the story into novel form. While moving the story away from the theatre, she also moved away from an emphasis on the visual in the relationships between her characters.¹¹ Atwood’s later acknowledgment of the complexity of Marks’s subjectivity and the permeability of boundaries between subjects allows for a metaphorical, post-mortem partial recovery of her heroine. The Grace Marks that appears in Atwood’s 1996 novel *Alias Grace* is another example of the archival hysteric: a hysteric whose mindbody undergoes a preserving and cataloguing process, and who is open to the perils and potential of the transfer of affect.

Atwood’s 1996 narrative retelling of Marks’s story is interspersed with excerpts from archival documents such as Dr. Joseph Workman’s letters and newspaper reports of the Kinnear and Montgomery murder. In the novel, Grace Marks is in the Kingston

¹⁰ As Atwood becomes aware of the gaps within Marks’s story, her portrait becomes increasingly complex.

¹¹ Even by the time she wrote *Alias Grace*, Atwood was concerned with sight as a dividing sense. In a note dated 30 January 1996 that includes a list of revisions to her editors, Atwood writes,

NB. Kinnear is seen mostly through his objects – and his position – like Simon’s father – so doesn’t get a big descry. (it’s what’s remarkable in the doc’s too: nobody ever describes him. The higher your class, the less likely you are to be subject to the impertinence of description!) (It’s the beginning of surrealism, which substitutes objects for people.) [Folder 4 (335:9)]
Kinnear’s higher class standing affords him less visual scrutiny.

Penitentiary,¹² where the fictional Dr. Simon Jordan is hired by a group campaigning to pardon Marks. His course of therapy is thus designed to diagnose and cure Marks. Dr. Jordan's talk therapy ends with a scene of hypnosis led by Jeremiah, an old friend of Grace's, who disguises himself as Dr. Jerome DuPont. In this climactic scene, Grace reveals that her alter-ego, Mary Whitney, actually committed the crimes. This alternate personality is Grace's deceased friend and former fellow servant at a house in Toronto. Through a series of flashbacks, the reader learns that Mary Whitney became pregnant by her employer's son while working as a servant with Grace; once he ended the relationship and paid her to keep silent, Mary had an abortion. Grace witnessed Mary's death from blood loss.

Moving beyond Atwood's earlier sympathetic portraits of Grace, *Alias Grace* provides anecdotal biological data about the potential of the female mindbody. Atwood's unused draft of the opening of *Alias Grace*, handwritten on Hotel zum Storchen paper, show the origins of her interest in the body:

I was born into this body – or the body I had, back then, in Liverpool. They would have told you I was Irish, but that was only true in part. [...] I want you to love me, he said. That is how he put it, but I could tell he didn't mean love, he only meant the body, that was all. The body is nothing, I wanted to say to him. It is nothing at all, it is ashes. I could have spit in his face. But then I thought, if the body's nothing, what does it matter? (Box 136 Folder 13)

Here, Grace considers the body's significance, a concern that pervades the novel. In the novel, Dr. Jordan only equivocally solves the mystery of Grace's involvement in the murders by revealing her violent and sexual second personality, Mary Whitney, but the

¹² Marks's stay in the Penitentiary lasted from 19 November 1843 to 7 August 1872.

novel leaves the reader to interpret the more pressing issue of *how* Grace's mind/body developed the second personality.¹³

As Atwood began working with archival documents, her narrative strategy for the story of Grace Marks became modeled on shared witnessing, a process that occurs in archives. For instance, to some extent, Grace Marks's archive has become subsumed under the name of Margaret Atwood. The copies of diverse historical documents about Grace Marks exist in Atwood's collection at the Fisher Rare Book Library.¹⁴ Marks exists both in her own, albeit already fractured, right but can also be accessed by researchers as "Atwood's Grace Marks." Such permeable boundaries between author and character and researcher and historical figure can lead to shared witnessing. For example, Atwood notes in her 1996 McClelland and Stewart press kit,

I once tried to sew a quilt myself, but, like my opera about Grace Marks, it was almost too much for me. In fact the novel itself was almost too much for me; I found myself wrestling with details such as prison dress for women in the 1850s, the origin of the Memorial Quilt, and where the parsnips would have been stored. But I finally made it through to the end; and perhaps now Grace Marks may stop wandering around in my head, and will wander around in the reader's for a while. (Coll 335 12:3)

¹³ In discussing conversion hysteria, whereby the patient exhibits bodily symptoms in response to emotional distress, Elizabeth Wilson states, "It has been almost universally agreed among feminist commentators that what is most interesting politically and what is most important theoretically in hysteria is the complex condensation and displacement of ideational content that motivates hysterical attacks. The ways these contorted ideational structures are then converted into bodily symptoms has attracted less attention than one might expect. Oddly enough, it is the very mechanism of conversion (of psyche into soma) that has been the least explored aspect of conversion hysteria" (5).

¹⁴ Atwood's many historical and theoretical sources include Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) and Ian Hacking's *Rewriting the Soul – Multiple Personality and the Science of Memory* (1995). Juxtaposed with nineteenth-century newspaper columns are articles from contemporary headlines, including dream research and the mind of Karla Homolka. These articles include *Kingston Whig-Standard's* "Mind Games: A Kingston Psychiatrist Takes a Glimpse Inside the Mind of Karla Homolka" and Shawn Thompson's "Fallen Angel or Devil in Disguise" (December 16, 1995).

Here, Atwood explains how the subjectivities of reader, author, and archival figure collide and co-create the historical subject of Grace Marks.

The process of archival research makes visible the unstable nature of subjectivity. The identities of the researcher and her subject may become flexible and dependent upon one another as the researcher calls up her research subject from textual records. Pamela Banting writes:

The yellowing documents glide into the researcher's unconscious like Oriental screens and assume a new ambience there. Her own unconscious is bracketed while she dreams the unconscious of another. All the energy expended by the author to integrate the psychic halves of herself through her writing is called into question as she is again split. Both author and researcher are 'schizophrenized' in the archive. (Banting 121)

Here, material documents become conduits to other selves, as the researcher's own memories, associations, and emotions merge with and sometimes alter those of another. In *Alias Grace*, "Dr. Jordan believed that even common and unregarded objects can have a meaning, or else recall to memory a thing forgotten" (428). Just as Grace observes that a button can both open up or close things, archival artifacts can work to paradoxically both close and open dialogue. They may close dialogue by fixing a dead subject's thoughts and memories into a static form.

But they also may open dialogue, and the boundaries between a researcher and her research subject often become permeable in the archives during the research process. As in hysteria, a fluid process occurs that entails a temporary loss of boundaries between subjects before reconsolidation. According to Rapaport, "*mal d'archive* concerns a forgetting or obliteration of the trauma that the trauma itself instantiates in its being repeated as discourse [...] for all its visibility, the trauma doesn't want to know about

itself, cannot confront itself, won't speak itself, and refuses to declare itself" (76). This is like the hysteric's "conversion," in which trauma does not speak itself but is displaced into physical symptoms. A looping between mind and body occurs, rather than a one-way conversion of symptoms. Physical and mental distress instigate and aggravate one another in a complex interaction. Overwhelmed by the sensate, the body's overload may lead to mental dysfunction. Overwhelmed by the emotional confusion of permeability, the body's biochemistry may alter. Indeed, Grace Marks's body forms the basis for shared witnessing in the Atwood archives.

On the surface, both hysteria and the archive foster an illusory divide between body and mind. Accounts of hysteria posit a malfunction in the communication between body and mind as mental traumas are unconsciously converted into bodily dysfunctions. The archival subject is often perceived as a disembodied figure in the same way that the hysteric has become disembodied in feminist theory.¹⁵ The archival subject may be fractured, multiple, and not locatable on a grid, but she is not pure text, as Banting's poststructuralist approach to the archive suggests. Like the hysterical subject, the archival subject cannot be separated from the traces of her physical body. Through her traces, the archival subject can do work: she can address and respond, call up passions, direct research, and interrupt typical patterns of thought.

Alias Grace provides a model for the uncanny ways in which the body and mind communicate in response to the environment and others. The novel proposes a wider capacity for the female mindbody through its representation of Grace's hysteria, rather

¹⁵ Elizabeth Wilson argues this point convincingly in *Psychosomatic* (2004).

than a reduced capacity through illness. In Atwood's delineation of Grace's hysteria, the body and mind communicate in non-hierarchical ways that transcend our current Western scientific understanding of anatomy.¹⁶ In order to refocus discussions of hysteria from the mind to the ever-looping mindbody, it is necessary to relinquish the notion of discrete forces such as body/mind, subject/object, life/death, remembering/forgetting, and instead highlight the fluidity between such concepts. As an archival hysteric, Grace Marks provides a model for how the social and environmental become physical.¹⁷

Bodily systems including the digestive system, the nervous system, and not least of all the brain all respond to outside influence, and themselves influence human behaviour.¹⁸ Wilson suggests that "biology is more naturally eccentric, more intrinsically preternatural than we usually allow" (12). As we saw in "Meneseung," an understanding of the archival hysteric validates the mindbody's eccentricity, which also serves to prevent reinscribing the female hysteric with so-called "natural" feminine qualities. *Alias Grace* is concerned with the preternatural nature of female physiology, and the ways that social expectation and past traumas are encoded in the body, creating physiological change that may work to promote sickness or health. To set out this model of the female mindbody, I will invoke Oliver's model of witnessing and Brennan's

¹⁶ More specifically, Grace exhibits a form of hysteria called double personality, or in the nineteenth century, "double consciousness."

¹⁷ Feminist accounts of hysteria have focused on why, rather than how, bodily conversion takes place. Elizabeth Wilson writes, "Following Breuer and Freud, feminists have tended to retreat from the biology of hysteria and theorize hysteria as primarily ideational" (Wilson 5). Wilson is referring to writers such as Showalter and David-Menard. An ideational approach has historically made sense, as hysteria has been effectively mobilized by feminist writers for political goals. Yet an understanding of hysteria based primarily on its social, cultural, literary, linguistic, and historical factors leaves out a key dynamic: the body's complex and unseen interactions with the mind and society.

¹⁸ Wilson argues that "sustained interest in biological detail will have a reorganizing effect on feminist theories of the body—that exploring the entanglement of biochemistry, affectivity, and the physiology of the internal organs will provide us with new avenues into the body" (14).

conception of the transmission of affect in order to examine the material body as an archive of energy transfer.

In *Alias Grace*, Atwood represents the hysteric's body as a physiological archive of intersubjective interactions. Through the historical documents, we see that Grace Marks's identity – as a daughter, servant, friend, criminal, and hysteric – is formed through shared witnessing.¹⁹ As Atwood writes, “the witnesses—even the eye-witnesses, even at the trial itself—could often not agree; but then, how is this different from most trials?” (Atwood *ISOAG* 33). In the novel, Grace describes the shared witnessing involved in constructing her identity:

I think of all the things that have been written about me – that I am an inhuman female demon, that I am an innocent victim of a blackguard forced against my will and in danger of my own life, that I was too ignorant to know how to act and that to hang me would be judicial murder, that I am fond of animals, that I am very handsome.... that I am of a sullen disposition with a quarrelsome temper, that I have the appearance of a person rather above my humble station, that I am a good girl with a pliable nature and no harm is told of me, that I am cunning and devious, that I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot. And I wonder, how can I be all of these different things at once? (23).

Grace's acknowledgement of her many identities calls into question any definitive, or singular, account of subject formation. Through her own process of witnessing, Grace Marks moves from an “othered” object to a subject in her own right. But just how does this multitude of subject positions initially become encoded upon Grace's body?

¹⁹ In fact, the historical process of certification of the insane, according to Wright, was a community procedure that was based on a process that relied on shared witnessing: “Under the 1853 Lunatics Amendment, the medical practitioner was required to validate his comments with testimony from other individuals and state from whom this corroboration was given. The certification of the insane in Victorian England was, therefore, a process performed largely in the ‘community’ and from which those most experienced in observing the behaviour of the insane – medical officers of asylums – were barred from participating” (155).

Historically, we saw that Marks's release from prison directly depended on public sympathy. A group of sympathetic clergymen and other well-respected citizens worked on her behalf, arranging petitions for her release.²⁰ However, Atwood's representation of the economy of sympathy in *Alias Grace* departs from and critiques history insofar as it shows how hysteria can in fact be aggravated by the intersubjective dynamics of sympathy; in the sympathetic exchange, the usually marginalized object looks to the subject for recognition. Her identity is formed through seeking – and subsequently gaining or not gaining – recognition. Unlike a Victorian text that “models sympathy for readers positioned as witnesses,” Atwood's text adopts strategies from the Victorian era in order to show how sympathy may fall short (Jaffe 30). Positioned as a spectator, the Victorian subject was engaged in “a continual drama of rising and falling fortunes” (3), in which his or her own projected identity was reflected in the act of sympathetic exchange.²¹ As Audrey Jaffe writes

The distinction between sympathy for fictional characters and sympathy for actual people dissolves into—or rather, may be reformulated as—the difference between the pleasurable sympathetic feelings fiction invites and the potential threat of an encounter with an actual person. Pleasure, here, coincides with an absence of reciprocity: a fictional character cannot look back. But in both accounts sympathy is fictional, in the sense that it is fundamentally involved with representation; in both, sympathetic representation takes place within and constitutes a cultural narrative about the identities of sympathetic object and subject. (7)

While fictional characters indeed cannot “look back,” they still act upon observers.

Fictional and archival subjects may operate at a distance from the material body, but they

²⁰ Her good behaviour and such petitions worked to secure her release in 1872.

²¹ Jaffe uses Adam Smith's model of the “sympathetic exchange” in order to describe how both subject and object imagine themselves as they imagine the other to see them. Thus, “the scene of sympathy in effect effaces both its participants, substituting for them images, or fantasies, of social and cultural identity” (Jaffe 4).

also carry traces of that body. Jaffe's key point here is that sympathy is a transaction based on representational fictions whether for living human subjects, archival subjects, or fictional subjects. Dr. Jordan's changing perceptions of Grace are based on fictions. His paternal and then increasingly sexual feelings towards Grace demonstrate how sympathetic representation occurs in the mind – and body – and reveals nineteenth century cultural expectations of doctor and patient (and man and woman). Sympathy can open one up to another, but may also fix another in a position based on fantasy.

Yet the novel moves beyond the sympathetic exchange and shows how Grace Marks's overdeveloped sense of response-ability leads to a reactive transmission of affect that becomes a liability to her mental health. According to Teresa Brennan, the transmission of affect is a social process that occurs between subjects, causing biological and physical effects. Brennan defines an affect as "the physiological shift accompanying a judgement" and feelings as "sensations that have found the right match in words" (5). Through the transfer process, a person's affects or emotions (as well as the "enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail") enter another person through sensory pathways (Brennan 3). Grace Marks illustrates the process of shared witnessing that has gone too far as she absorbs affects from the lives of those women around her, including her mother, Mary Whitney, and Nancy Montgomery. Brennan suggests that in the nineteenth century, "those who are most susceptible to transmitted affects are those who are least socially desirable" (Brennan 18) based on the social structure of dominant culture. Marks, as a lower class Irish Catholic servant, and a woman, is a prime nineteenth-century candidate for such "susceptibility." Response-ability is a trait commonly linked to the

female sphere; as Atwood notes, “Women help each other; caring for the afflicted is their sphere” (“In Search of...” 143). While “caring for the afflicted” is indeed an ability, it becomes a liability when it becomes reactive rather than responsive. The title of the novel hints at these perils of shared witnessing. If Grace Marks takes on the alias of Mary Whitney, why is the novel named “Alias Grace” rather than “Alias Mary”? The title does not make sense on a literal level; figuratively, however, Grace is an alias for a split subject involved in shared witnessing: a historical subject, an archival subject, and a hysterical subject, who possesses fragments of all of the female characters with whom she comes into contact. Her self breaks down such that she becomes alias Grace – a no-body who takes on an alias. In the novel, Grace’s identity becomes almost completely constructed by others – those women to whose traumas she must repeatedly bear witness and those men who write about her.

Grace develops her hysteria, and her alias, Mary Whitney, through a strange communication between body, mind, and environment. Brennan argues that that “the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject” (1). Sometimes the alteration is brief and at other times, long lasting.²² For the hysteric, this alteration becomes long lasting. As Brennan explains, “the ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual” (1). Critics and book reviewers tend to focus on the debate about whether Marks is indeed the victim of double personality disorder, or whether she is fooling her doctors, lawyers, and spectators. This critical

²² Brennan explains that this concept of transmission was historically common knowledge, but faded into obscurity after the seventeenth century as the notion of the “biologically determined individual” was popularized (2; 17). Brennan shows how the notion of the transmission of affect became feminized in the eighteenth century, as women popularly suffered from vapours (17).

response picks up on the novel's use of the dynamics of sympathy, represented by Dr. Jordan and the campaigners for Grace's freedom. However, Atwood's book asks a more difficult question: what is the nature of Grace's body that makes her mind create an alternate personality, whether fictional or "real"? Darroch argues that "Atwood's novel expresses an ambivalent desire to redeem Grace, not by putting forward evidence for the innocence that she claimed, but by providing her with a legitimate psychiatric complaint in the form of post-traumatic stress, recast as nineteenth-century hysteria" (106). It is important to note Darroch's use of the term "legitimate." Much of the controversy surrounding traumatic amnesia and double personality hinges on the legitimacy of the psychiatric condition; Atwood's creation of Dr. Simon Jordan (modeled on Dr. Joseph Workman of the Queen Street Asylum in Toronto) represents the desire to verify Grace's mental illness. But ultimately Atwood pulls back from satisfying this desire, shifting the text's focus to the complex mechanisms of Grace's hysteria rather than its veracity.

Historically, we know that Grace Marks used the name Mary Whitney as her alias when she crossed the Niagara River and stayed at the Lewiston Hotel with James McDermott.²³ In the novel, the two girls share their life stories with one another: "She asked all about me, and I told her about the journey in the ship, and about my mother dying, and sinking down into the sea among the icebergs. [...] And then I told her about my father" (149). They become close friends, and Grace's relationship with Mary Whitney begins to model an extreme dialogic relationship that eventually crosses

²³ The media were fascinated by the presumed sexual relationship between Marks and McDermott, paying careful notice of the accuseds' sleeping arrangements: "They were in separate rooms when they were made prisoners by the High Bailiff..." (*British Colonist*, Wednesday August 2, 1843).

boundaries in a way that becomes unhealthy. Grace's sense of her subjectivity is formed by including otherness into her boundaries such that they actually get under her skin. While an underdeveloped sense of response-ability can have negative social and political consequences, an overdeveloped sense of response-ability is a personal liability; it negates the ethical relationship it seeks to initially support, as it paradoxically closes off the possibility for communication.

The metaphor of a trapped spirit is used to describe the way in which boundaries between Mary's and Grace's bodies merge. Before her abortion, Mary writes an impromptu will: "If I die, my things are to go to Grace Marks" (175). But more than a transfer of material artifacts takes place. During the abortion, Mary gives a false name and the doctor takes "a knife to her, and cut[s] something inside" (176). Grace later absorbs Mary's fear of doctors, as she faints at their approach and fears their knives, even if they do not have any. When Mary returns home from the abortion, Grace notices "there was indeed a smell in the room; it was the smell of wet straw, from the mattress, and also the salty smell of blood; you can smell something very similar in a butcher's shop" (177). After Mary's death, Grace claims, "I heard her voice, as clear as anything, right in my ear, saying *Let me in*. I was quite startled, and looked hard at Mary, who by that time was lying on the floor as we were making up the bed. But she gave no sign of having said anything" (179). Grace becomes cold and dizzy, a reasonable physiological reaction from the shock of the event, and faints. When she wakes, she keeps asking "where Grace had gone" before finally recovering her sense of self (180). Dr. Jordan later describes this incident as an "auditory hallucination" (189); more likely, Grace, in her state of grief and

shock, is using her imagination to try to continue the dialogue with her beloved friend. Grace's boundaries are overly porous with those to whom she is close. She observes, "*Gone mad* is what they say, and sometimes *Run mad*, as if mad is a direction, like west; as if mad is a different house you could step into, or a separate country entirely. But when you go mad, you don't go any other place, you stay where you are. And somebody else comes in" (33). Here, Grace explains that hysteria occurs when boundaries are so permeable that the affects of others actually "come in." When stasis sets in – in Grace's case, affects flow inward, but do not flow out – hysteria occurs.

While Grace is hysterical, she summons the figure of her dead friend, Mary Whitney, to act as her inner witness. Oliver borrows Dori Laub's concept of the "inner witness" to explain how, in times of trauma, "psychic survival depends on an addressable other," even if this inner witness is internal (Oliver 17). When Grace is compelled to tell her stories, she does so to and through the dead Mary Whitney, who acts as an auditor and as an inner voice. However, the inner witness is meant to be a temporary solution to help subjects retain their subjectivity through difficult periods of trauma. As a result of her inability to acknowledge the permeability of her boundaries, Grace instead retains this inner witness.

Marks absorbs Mary Whitney's anger and is unable to contain it when she sees Nancy Montgomery in a similar situation. Grace decides to accept the position of Kinnear's servant, observing that Nancy Montgomery, "resembled Mary Whitney, or so I then thought; and I'd been in depressed spirits ever since Mary's death. And so I decided to go" (200). Like Mary, Nancy is a servant who is taken advantage of and impregnated

by her master. Although Grace initially likes Nancy, she enacts Mary Whitney's anger against her. In her letter to Dr. Jordan, Grace notes, "I had a rage in my heart for many years, against Mary Whitney, and especially against Nancy Montgomery; against the two of them both, for letting themselves be done to death in the way that they did, and for leaving me behind with the full weight of it. For a long time I could not find it in me here to pardon them" (458). Grace has taken on too great a responsibility, as she has absorbed the anger of these two women who are both victims of male violence; she attempts to force Mary's conversation to remain open.

Grace's hysteria thus develops primarily out of the looping effect between body and mind resulting from intersubjective experiences with her Mother, Father, and Mary Whitney, showing that social expectation and past traumas become encoded in the body. We see that the subject is not emotionally self-contained, or even necessarily the generator of her own emotions. Affects, according to Brennan, possess an energetic quality. She writes, "they enhance when they are projected outward, when one is relieved of them[...] affects deplete when they are introjected, when one carries the affective burden of another, either by a straightforward transfer or because the other's anger becomes your depression" (6). Hysteria, then, involves the process of a subject's depletion by environmental stresses and/or by other people.

By way of contrast, "healthy" girls in *Alias Grace*, including the Governor's daughter Lydia, archive their intersubjective relations in a controlled manner, aware of boundaries. They record their emotions and exchanges between friends in Keepsake Albums, and acquire items such as the scarf of a drowned friend in a very personal sort of

archive (25). Grace claims not to understand these girls' desire to memorialize themselves to one another, saying, "I don't know why they are all so eager to be remembered. What good will it do them?" (26). And yet Grace herself has the same tendency to archive emotional exchanges with her friends and relatives. Less aware of boundaries, Grace does not separate such emotions from herself and record them in an album; instead, she records them onto her very body. For instance, Grace's past experiences with doctors become sketched on her body as she associatively records physiological responses of anxiety and fear of violence. When a new doctor approaches Grace at the penitentiary, she sees "his hand, a hand like a glove, a glove stuffed with raw meat, his hand plunging into the open mouth of his leather bag. It comes out glinting" (29). She responds based on past experiences that have become encoded physiologically: "my heart clenches and kicks out inside me, and then I begin to scream" (29). In the beginning of the next chapter, the reader discovers that this doctor is harmless, intending only to measure her head (30). However, Grace's past experiences have imprinted so strongly upon her as to influence her present behaviour. The physical body of the hysteric becomes an archive of social and environmental interactions.

Grace's bodily archive challenges Dr. Jordan, who struggles to interpret and recover her. The relationship between Grace and Dr. Jordan initially replicates the subject-object hierarchy of the Hegelian model of subject formation based on recognition. According to models of subject formation based on confrontation, subjectivity is formed

through the process of recognition: a dynamic based on the sense of sight.²⁴ Jordan first looks at Grace to confirm what he already knows. When he first sees Grace he sees

an image almost mediaeval in its plain lines, its angular clarity: a nun in a cloister, a maiden in a towered dungeon, awaiting the next day's burning at the stake, or else the last-minute champion to rescue her. The cornered woman; the penitential dress falling straight down, concealing feet that were surely bare; the straw mattress on the floor; the timorous hunch of the shoulders; the arms hugged close to the thin body, the long wisps of auburn hair escaping from what appeared at first glance to be a chaplet of white flowers...all was as it should be. He'd seen many hysterics at the Salpetriere in Paris who'd looked very much like this. (59)

He seeks to confer recognition on Grace based on what he already believes to recognize in her situation. His observations are based on literary and cultural knowledge rather than sensate experience. But when Grace steps closer to him, his initial assessment is incorrect, as "the woman he'd seen the instant before was suddenly no longer there" (59). While Grace is resistant to doctors, she too initially seeks recognition from Jordan, observing: "He is a collector. He thinks all he has to do is give me an apple, and then he can collect me.... They come in and they stare, and when they look at you, you feel as small as an ant, and they pick you up between finger and thumb and turn you around. And then they set you down and go away" (41). She does not want Dr. Jordan to figuratively set her down and go away; she realizes that if she gains recognition from Dr. Jordan, she may be released from prison. She will benefit from gaining his sympathy. Dr. Jordan notices that "It was as if she were contemplating the subject of some unexplained experiment; as if it were he, and not she, who was under scrutiny" (60). Grace, too, holds an unlikely power

²⁴ Oliver shows how sight need not be an alienating sense. In her ethical conception of sight, she suggests that there is no separation of mind (via "Vision") from world (via "vision"). In her thinking, "The idea that my body does not belong to me, and that sensation does not belong to consciousness, but that both belong to the world, begins to liberate us from a phenomenology premised on ownership" (174).

over the doctor as she judges him based on what she recognizes from her past experience with corrupt doctors.²⁵

While Grace Marks does initially seek recognition and visibility from Dr. Jordan, she eventually struggles to bear witness to her experiences that are beyond Dr. Jordan's recognition. She counters the voices of newspaper reporters, doctors, judges, and lawyers when she takes up her position as a speaking subject while in therapy with him. Marks's struggle for subjectivity is not only a struggle for recognition but an attempt at witnessing which, according to Oliver, is "the basis for all subjectivity" (7).²⁶

Grace, a woman who has been othered by the discourses of mental health and dysfunction in dominant society, gains her subjectivity outside of the sympathetic exchange with Dr. Jordan, based as it is on the dynamics of recognition. As we have seen, witnessing involves the double meanings of both eyewitnessing and bearing witness. In *Alias Grace*, Atwood shows how the hysterical subject must regain balance in her response-ability in order to begin the healing process.

Identity is constructed through dialogic relations. Oliver notes, "we cannot conceive of subjectivity as both fundamentally antagonistic and fundamentally dialogic in the rich sense of dialogue as response-ability that I propose, using the notion of witnessing" (5). Oliver proposes that "through the process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination, those othered can begin to repair damaged subjectivity by

²⁵ Dr. Jordan experiences the negative side to sympathy – the dread fantasy of occupying another's social position – as he begins a relationship with his landlady. Jaffe writes, "The text teaches not only the need to project the self into the consciousness of others but also the potential unpleasantness of doing so: the desire *not* to be in the other's place" (Jaffe 41). Both identification and disidentification are part of the process of sympathy.

²⁶ Subjectivity need not be gained through antagonistic relations, though it has tended to be positioned as such by thinkers including Hegel, Derrida, and Butler.

taking up a position as speaking subjects” (7). Grace Marks becomes a subject with both “address-ability and response-ability,” those qualities that Oliver associates with the process of gaining subjectivity through witnessing.

As the relationship between Dr. Jordan and Grace progresses, it strains to move beyond the dynamics of sympathy, and begins to approach an ethical relationship based on bearing witness in addition to eyewitnessing. When Dr. Jordan tells Grace that she can be completely honest with him, she responds: “I have no reason not to be frank with you, Sir...A lady might conceal things, as she has her reputation to lose; but I am beyond that” (90). While she does continue to withhold information from Dr. Jordan, Grace begins to testify to things which are beyond his understanding. She bears witness to the eccentric nature of the female mindbody.²⁷ Such eccentricities include the imagination’s ability to simulate vision even in the dark: “if you stare into the darkness with your eyes open you are sure to see something after a time. I hope it will not be flowers” (297). In a dream-like state in Chapter Thirty-three, spoken as she moves between sleep and waking, Grace’s tone of voice changes while considering what she will tell Dr. Jordan. Short, terse sentences become uncertain and full of questions and are interspersed with dream-like, image-laden language. The repetition of the phrase “I think I sleep” (297; 298) highlights her liminal state of consciousness, and reveals that Grace’s thoughts may be part of a lucid dream rather than direct recollections from her past.

²⁷ Dr. Jordan dismisses eccentricities of the body as “illness” according to his diagnostic approach: “[...]an episode of fainting, and then by hysterics, mixed with what would appear to have been somnambulism; after which there was a deep and prolonged sleep, and subsequent amnesia” (189).

Grace's hysterical symptoms also testify to her fear of the replaceable nature of the female body. From an early age, she learns that the female body is deemed replaceable by patriarchal society. She is witness to her mother's death at sea, to her father's alcoholic violence, and to Mary Whitney's abortion and death. Just as she did with Mary Whitney, Grace also confuses her boundaries with her mother. When her mother dies at sea, Grace "felt as if it was me and not my mother that had died; and I sat as if paralyzed, and did not know what to do next" (120). While she observes her mother wrapped in a sheet, Grace imagines that the corpse is someone other than her mother.²⁸ Such replacement tactics recur in more literal forms as her father immediately (though unsuccessfully) attempts to attain a substitute wife in the widow Mrs. Burt, and Grace herself "replaces" her mother in the family, gaining responsibility over her younger siblings and suffering her father's violence. Grace says, "Already my arms were black and blue, and then one night he threw me against the wall, as he'd sometimes done with my mother" (129). Here, Grace slips into her mother's role as caregiver and recipient of male domination and violence. Her later hysteria serves to reject this model of replaceability. The hysteric's bodily eccentricity is a testament to the unique eccentric potential of the human body, rather than the uniformity of the female form.

While Grace's boundaries are initially overly porous, she begins to consider her boundaries and learns how to keep them distinct from others' during the imposed

²⁸ Grace later dreams of her mother's death at sea, noting that "this was not my mother at all, but some other woman, and she was not dead inside the sheet at all, but still alive" (167). This fear of the replaceable female body affects Grace's own body, as she dreams of her mother's death and wakes up covered in sweat with an increased heart rate. At the end of novel, Grace is pardoned from the Penitentiary and, remembering her mother and how "she had already changed inside the sheet, and was a different woman" feels as though the same thing is happening to her (443).

narrative therapy, where she must choose which life events she will share with Dr. Jordan and decide how she will shape these events. While Dr. Jordan's diagnosis of "dedoublement" or "double consciousness" (406) does not provide a complete understanding of Grace's complex mental state, his course of talk therapy is useful in her healing for reasons other than he intends.²⁹ After relating to the reader a suggestive dream about a peddler, Grace decides not to share this dream with Jordan. She begins to acknowledge that "I have little enough of my own, no belongings, no possessions, no privacy to speak of, and I need to keep something for myself" (101). Here, Grace is setting up distinct boundaries between herself and others.

Though Dr. Jordan's relationship with Grace approaches an ethical one, it never fully becomes one. Jordan is torn between two models: on one hand, he seeks to assert his own subject position and reinforce Grace's position as object of study by attempting to confer recognition on Grace through eliciting her "voice" through talk therapy. On the other hand, however, he tries to understand Grace by moving beyond recognition and seeking out those experiences that he cannot recognize. Dr. Jordan cannot personally recognize what Grace tells him; in order to more fully understand Grace's testimony, he begins to enact many of Grace's experiences. Identifying with Grace's overbearing father, he recognizes one of his nightmares as "Grace's story, with its Atlantic crossing, its burial at sea, its catalogue of household objects; and an overbearing father, of course. One father leads to another" (140). Subjectivities merge in the dream state.

²⁹ Jordan decides that Grace suffered from "a form of *auto-hypnotic somnambulism*" as a fear response, and therefore suffered amnesia on the days of the murders (433).

Yet Dr. Jordan fails in the ethical relationship because he is not able to negotiate the tension between eyewitnessing and bearing witness. This tension occurs between the senses and the extra-sensory. Oliver writes that

The productive tension at the foundation of the notion of witnessing is the paradox of the eyewitness. The possibility of getting beyond a mere repetition of either history or trauma is the result of the tension between history and testifying to what one already knows from firsthand experience, on the one hand, and psychoanalysis and bearing witness to what is beyond knowledge or recognition, on the other. (Oliver 18)

While this tension is a productive force, Dr. Jordan relies too heavily on visual evidence and recognizable firsthand experience. Dr. Jordan must literally *see* for himself that Grace has multiple personalities in the climactic hypnosis scene with Dr. Jerome DuPont. Yet what Jordan sees is not “truth”; DuPont is, in fact, the peddler Jeremiah, an old friend of Grace’s. Dr Jordan’s historical inspiration, Joseph Workman, invokes a metaphor of vision in order to explain his lack of knowledge about the mind:

Dear Henry

1866

It is of the greatest regret that we do not have the knowledge whereby we might cure these unfortunate afflicted. A surgeon can cut open an abdomen and display the spleen. Muscles can be cut out and shown to young students. The human psyche cannot be dissected nor can the brain’s workings be put out on the table to display.

When a child, I have played games with a blindfold obscuring my vision. Now I am like that child. Blindfolded, groping my way, not knowing where I am going, or if I am in the proper direction. Someday, someone will remove that blindfold.

Believe in me.

Your true friend

Jos. Workman. (*Alias Grace* 45)

Workman is here concerned with “display” and things that can be “shown.” Jordan similarly states that “he has been traveling blindly” (293) as he treats Grace. Atwood’s

recourse to a visual metaphor directly links knowledge acquisition with the sense of sight. Female patients are meant to be observed. However, as we have seen, hysteria goes far beyond the sense of vision to include other sensory pathways. For Workman, the removal of the blindfold suggests a revelation, or ability to see something that is *beyond* the sense of sight. “Witnessing” is a new way to position the sense of sight that removes it from its confrontational and separating nature.

Beyond Vision: Energy Transfer

When Dr. Jordan first views Grace, his sense of vision is affected by layers of cultural images of hysteria, largely influenced by Charcot’s photography. Yet his vision alters when Grace steps closer; in this pivotal moment, vision moves from a separating sense to a connecting sense. As Oliver explains, “Vision is the result of the circulation of various forms of energy, including social energy[...] If vision is the result of the circulation of various forms of energy through the mediums of air, light, and other elements, including language, then it is not an alienating but a connecting sense” (Oliver 14). Dr. Jordan does not realize it, but vision need not be a sense that separates. Instead, vision can connect subjects to each other and to their environments. Marks’s hysteria suggests an alternative to the separating model of visual recognition (Oliver 12).³⁰ The notion of emotional transmission, rather than self-containment, threatens nineteenth-century notions of sympathy, as described by Jaffe. While sympathy depends on the fantasy of self-containment, emotional transmission disrupts this fantasy.

³⁰ Oliver explores the ways in which vision depends on perception of energy in the environment, including chemical, electrical, thermal, mechanical, photic, and magnetic.

Participants in an ethical relationship acknowledge that humans exchange energy, including chemical, social, electric, and thermal, in all of their relationships. Energy exchange between subjects does not always flow smoothly, but can become blocked or stuck.³¹ Energy exchange occurs between people, causing changes in matter. As a form of communication, energy exchange can exist outside of language, although language provides access to our description of it, and mediates our interpretation of it. Oliver observes that “Some people, usually women, are ‘trained’ to be more attuned to changes in affective energy or mood” (Oliver 14). This affective transfer, particularly valued and thereby often heightened in women, might in part explain the higher prevalence of women suffering disorders such as hysteria, major depression, and chronic fatigue syndrome. All types of perception, including vision, depend upon the circulation of energies: “Indeed, we are conduits for energy of various sorts” (Oliver 14). As we saw in the case of Almeda in “Meneseung,” the hysteric’s movement of energy becomes blocked, or internally channeled, instead of interchanging with her environment; she holds on to the energy of others instead of releasing it back into her environment. Perception is altered as physical pathways are blocked. Citing the work of psychologists and neuroscientists, Oliver shows that the “senses are intermodel and the motor system is central to perception” (12). As a hysteric, Grace is prone to suffer from the process of energy transfer; even Dr. Jordan is not immune to the energy transfer that occurs in social relationships. Atwood employs the language of energy exchange to explain how Jordan himself slowly becomes mentally unstable: “It’s as if she’s drawing his energy out of him

³¹ An effective model for understanding the movement of energy in hysteria is Nancy Tuana’s concept of “viscous porosity,” which I explore more fully in chapter 2.

– using his own mental forces to materialize the figures in her story, as the mediums are said to do during their trances” (291).

Like Grace, Jordan becomes unable to separate his dreams from waking life as he is seduced by his landlady while in a dream-like state (352). *Alias Grace* focuses not only on visual representations, but on other sensate experience, including a sixth sense, which can be termed intuition, or that sense accessed through hypnosis. The “witnessing” of that which is beyond recognition moves past the sense of vision to include the movement of energy through the olfactory, tactile, and auditory senses. The mindbody here is a conduit to the process of bearing witness. Boundaries between subjects break down under the influence of the other senses.

The sense of smell crosses bodily boundaries. Grace notes that “*Murderess* is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell to it, that word – musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase” (23). Here, the sense of scent is at work in meaning creation. While there is debate in scientific circles as to the pathways and range of pheromones,³² chemical communication occurs between animals, including humans. Wyatt notes that “The idea that odours might affect our emotions or subconscious, and is not entirely under our control, is scary to modern sensibilities” (274). In *Alias Grace*, various characters feel themselves altered by the scent of others. Dr. Jordan, for example, feels “enveloped” by a lily of the valley scent when he flirts with the governor’s daughter, and he also succumbs to Grace’s scent:

³² A semiochemical used for communication within a species, a pheromone is a “chemical signal (such as an odour) that is emitted by one animal and affects the behaviour of others. Pheromones are used by many animal species to attract mates” (*Hutchinson Pocket Dictionary of Biology* 2005 225)

Simon can smell her as well as look at her. He tries to pay no attention, but her scent is a distracting undercurrent. She smells like smoke; smoke, and laundry soap, and the salt from her skin; and she smells of the skin itself, with its undertone of dampness, fullness, ripeness – what? Ferns and mushrooms; fruits crushed and fermenting [...] He is in the presence of a female animal; something fox-like and alert. He senses an answering alertness along his own skin, a sensation as of bristles lifting. (90)

The smell of Grace's skin is connected with plant and animal life – particularly the liminal moment where fruit sugars transform to alcohol through fermentation. Jordan responds in an animal fashion by absorbing her alert energy through his sense of smell and by responding physically. Grace, on the other hand, finds Dr. Jordan's scent of English shaving soap and ears to be "a reassuring smell" to which she begins to look forward. His scent suggests comfort, cleanliness, and regularity to Grace. Earlier, in her first meeting with Mary Whitney, Grace observes that Mary "smelled like nutmegs or carnations" (149). However, once Mary becomes involved with their employer's son, "her smell had changed, from nutmegs to salt fish" (172). Through smell, Grace senses a change in Mary's affect and also begins to absorb the change, as she herself becomes more sober. The sensory thus connotes the body's response to other humans, as environmental odours can function as mood changers and as an eccentric form of communication.

Jordan begins to acknowledge his participation in a sensory exchange with those around him; yet his ultimate reliance on vision is evidenced in his fact-checking expedition to the Kinnear homestead and the Adelaide Street Methodist Church where Mary Whitney is buried: "He wants to visit the grave of Mary Whitney. He wants to make sure she really exists" (387). Although the facts seem to corroborate Grace's story,

finding a small stone engraved with the name “Mary Whitney” does little to satisfy Jordan. He asks “What are such physical tokens worth?[...] She could be just a name, a name on a stone, seen here by Grace and used by her in the spinning of her story. She could have been an old woman, a wife, a small infant, anyone at all. Nothing has been proved. But nothing has been disproved either” (388).³³ Jordan only values incontrovertible visible proof. While the researcher in “Meneseteung” accepts the gaps and disparities in the historical record, Dr. Jordan insists that only complete evidence is meaningful; he even disregards the material evidence of the gravestone he *does* find. He can only repeat history because he ultimately rejects that which is beyond recognition. Finally unable to deal with the tension between the two types of witnessing, Dr. Jordan gives in to false witnessing.³⁴ False witnessing involves responses that “attempt to close off response from others, otherness, or difference. And there are various ways to engage in false witnessing, many of them encouraged within cultures of dominance and subordination” (Oliver 19).

Dr. Jordan becomes frightened when confronted with the responsibilities that come along with the ethical relationship, as well as the power of such a relationship to change one’s affirmative conception of oneself and to call into question presumed male authority and the discipline of psychiatry. *Alias Grace* critiques the Western psychiatric system as being traditionally based on a model of false witnessing. When Jordan contemplates escaping to the United States with his lover and landlady Rachel and killing

³³ These multiple potential subject roles highlights the issue of Grace’s multiple subject positions.

³⁴ False witnessing also occurs in psychiatry by Dr. Bannerling. He diagnoses Grace as “a sham,” closing off any possibility of her response by calling her “an accomplished actress and a most practiced liar” (71). Bannerling further uses powerful cultural references – Ophelia and the Greek sirens – as touchpoints for Grace’s condition, as he is unable to move beyond what he cannot recognize.

her husband, in a parallel to Grace's story, he is unable to bear the psychological strain and hastily leaves Canada. Having himself "gone to the threshold of the unconscious" (412), Dr. Jordan is exhausted and unable to continue his course of therapy with Grace; he loses his ability to respond (or *response-ability*). "Will she think he's deserted her?" he wonders (413). In an ironic reenactment of Grace's continuing story, Jordan receives a head wound while fighting in the Union army and loses part of his memory (including the time he spent in Kingston). As a result, he refers to his fiancé Faith Cartwright as "Grace" and his mother acts as a therapist, showing him "various little homely objects once dear to him" in order to help increase his memory (431).

Ultimately, Dr. Jordan's relationship with Grace resembles more strongly the dynamics of the nineteenth-century sympathetic exchange – and its counterpart in twentieth-century wound culture – than the ethical relationship. Described in Mark Seltzer's article "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere" the term wound culture describes North America's late twentieth-century fascination with open and torn bodies *and* minds. Seltzer describes wound culture as "the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (3); this may take the form of traffic accidents, interest in serial killers, and television programs such as *The Jerry Springer Show* (1991-2009), *Dr. Phil* (2002-present) and *Intervention* (2005-present). This public interest in the wound breaks down the distinction between private and public spheres. In his writing on wound culture in contemporary Western society, Mark Seltzer writes: "One discovers again and again the excitations in the opening of private and bodily and psychic interiors: the

exhibition and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display, of wounded bodies and wounded minds in public” (3). Atwood depicts this fascination with damage as one that traces back to earlier societies. Dr. Jordan initially comes to Grace seeking a wound in the form of a lesion of the nervous system (80).³⁵ Jordan uses the public’s fascination with bodily and psychic wounds to explain their fascination with his work:

It was knowledge they craved; yet they could not admit to craving it, because it was forbidden knowledge – knowledge with a lurid glare to it; knowledge gained through a descent into the pit. He has been where they could never go, seen what they could never see; he has opened up women’s bodies, and peered inside. In his hand, which has just raised their own hands towards his lips, he may once have held a beating heart. (82)

The dynamics of wound culture are complex; spectators get involved by looking in, but there is also a fascination with being the wound. According to Seltzer, the very concept of the wound in trauma has “come to function not merely as a sort of switch point between bodily and psychic orders; it has, beyond that, come to function as a switch point between individual and collective, private and public orders of things” (5).³⁶ Part of the fascination with hysteria is the act of making external the internal secrets and eccentricities of the mindbody.

Yet Jordan’s dream of dissection aptly represents the limitations of wound culture:

he must make a dissection. [...] It’s a woman under the sheet; he can tell by the contours [...] He must lift off the sheet, then lift off her skin, whoever she is, or was, layer by layer. Strip back her rubbery flesh, peel her open, gut her like a haddock. He’s shaking with terror. She will be cold, inflexible [...] But under the sheet there’s another sheet, and under that another one. It looks like a white muslin curtain. Then there’s a black veil, and then – can it be? – a petticoat. The woman must be down there somewhere; frantically he rummages. But no; the

³⁵ See also p. 60 and p. 298 for a discussion of Jordan’s interest in the Material School of Psychiatry which seeks organic causes for mental illness.

³⁶ Seltzer further notes that the use of childhood trauma to account for public violence is “part of a more general movement of *privatization*,” whereby public matters are reduced to private matters (8).

last sheet is a bedsheet, and there's nothing under it but a bed. That, and the form of someone who's been lying here. It's still warm. He is failing desperately... (351-2)

Jordan's dream reveals that wound culture ultimately fosters an empty form of relationship. In wound culture, Seltzer sees "a model of sociality bound to pathology" whereby "the opening towards others is drawn to the collective spectacle of torn and open bodies and persons" (9). This collective spectacle occurs as the public gathers to watch the climactic hypnosis scene in *Alias Grace*. Dr. Jordan himself models the public's interest in the repetition of trauma, as he reenacts Grace's suffering in his own life. It becomes difficult to move beyond the negative expression of sympathy when engaged in the dynamics of wound culture.

Just as Dr. Jordan ultimately bases his relationship with Grace on false witnessing, Jamie Walsh does too in his marital relationship with her. Instead of opening dialogue, Walsh closes response from Grace, encouraging her to endlessly repeat stories of her trauma for his sexual pleasure:

I tell him he did not cause me any sufferings [...] but he likes to think it was him that was the author of all, and I believe he would claim the death of my poor mother too, if he could think of a way to do it [...] He likes to picture the sufferings as well, and nothing will do but that I have to tell him some story or other about being in the Penitentiary, or else the Lunatic Asylum [...] he begs me to tell him yet more. If I put in the chilblains and the shivering at night under the thin blanket, and the whipping if you complained, he is in raptures; and if I add the improper behaviour of Dr. Bannerling towards me [...] he is almost in ecstasies. (456-7)

Walsh gains pleasure from the repetition of Grace's trauma, as it bolsters his sense of power as both her punisher and protector. Grace draws a connection between his response and Dr. Jordan's, writing to Jordan: "you were as eager as Mr. Walsh is to hear about my

sufferings and my hardships in life; and not only that, but you would write them down as well” (457). *Alias Grace* shows how Oliver’s ideal ethical relationship is difficult to enact in a society in which hierarchies are built into the very structure of daily living.

The ethical relationship is, however, possible between men and women. Grace and Jeremiah the peddler model the ethical relationship in which both parties fulfill their obligation to respond in a manner that opens up the possibility of response by others (Oliver 18). Jeremiah’s hypnosis of Grace is an act that productively employs the tension between eyewitnessing and bearing witness.³⁷ While hypnosis has a stereotypical reputation as an act of imposed will, or an alteration of consciousness that one person enacts upon another, the process is, at its heart, a deep state of relaxation. While it is a process that possesses potential for misuse and abuse of power, the novel shows the ability of hypnosis to foster semi-permeability and freeing up of emotions when practiced responsibly.³⁸ In fact, an external hypnotizer is not a necessary component of the process; self-hypnosis is an effective method of achieving a state of auto-relaxation.

In the climactic scene in the novel, Jeremiah the peddler, disguised as Dr. Jerome DuPont, practices the Braidian system of hypnosis.³⁹ The apparent doctor is, in fact, a friend of Grace’s, and Grace is an equal and active participant in the process. Her healing

³⁷ While there is disagreement about how the process works, the APA defines hypnosis as “a procedure during which a health professional or researcher suggests that a client, patient, or subject experience changes in sensations, perceptions, thoughts, or behavior” (1985)(qtd in Yapko 17). The procedure produces psychophysiological responses in the patient.

³⁸ Scientists are now suggesting that the brain’s state during hypnosis is a state that may happen during full concentration in everyday activities; “hypnosis alters neural activity by rerouting some of the usual connections between brain regions” (Gaidos 26). Like hysteria, the actual physical pathways for hypnosis are still unknown to the medical community.

³⁹ In 1843, Braid was one of the first to use the term hypnosis, derived from the Greek “hypnos” meaning sleep; he devised a physiological theory of mesmerism and advocated the importance of the imagination and the client’s belief system in hypnosis (Sapp 11-12).

occurs as those stagnant energies within her – including anger and violence – are released and she becomes open to the circulation of affective energies. Her stagnant energies are enlivened through hypnosis, a relaxed bodily state in which muscles relax, the respiration rate slows, and blood pressure drops (Sapp 27). Jeremiah, tied to the symbol of the buttons he gave to Grace, opens up communication through the circulation of energy with Grace. During hypnosis, the inner witness is “let out.” Jeremiah explains: “It involves the deliberate relaxation and realignment of the nerves so that a neuro-hypnotic sleep is induced” (396). Energy transfer occurs during the process. Before Grace undergoes hypnosis, Jordan can sense her fear: “She’s so highstrung Simon can almost feel her vibrating, like a stretched rope” (396). Ethical hypnotism allows for an understanding of boundaries as semi-permeable, but it does not grant power to anyone other than the person undergoing hypnosis.

Significantly, the sense of vision is restrained when Jeremiah places an “ordinary woman’s veil, light grey” (397) over her head. Grace cannot see her observers, and her observers can see “only a head, with the merest contour of a face behind it” (397). The hypnosis scene paradoxically models both wound culture (at the social level) and the ethical relationship (at the personal level between Grace and Jeremiah). A crowd gathers to view the exposed wound in Grace Marks: a sexually assertive alter-ego, the vengeful spirit of Mary Whitney. But Mary’s voice delivers mixed messages. Mary sounds vengeful in discussing the Kinnear murder – “And this time the gentleman dies as well, for once” (401) – but she also asserts that “Nancy isn’t angry any more, she doesn’t mind, Nancy is my friend. She understands now, she wants to share things” (402). This alter-

ego is not simply the result of suggestion by Jeremiah. Kirsch and Lynn argue that hypnotic experiences are “the by-products of social experiences and cognitive-behavioral strategies used by clients” and are thus not simply evidence of compliance to external suggestion (qtd. in Sapp 27). In this scene, Grace’s earlier strategy of reactive shared witnessing is exposed as problematic. Mary Whitney’s voice claims that she “only borrowed her [Grace’s] clothing for a time” (402). This resonates with the way that Grace borrowed Nancy’s clothing following the murder. By exposing the problems with overpermeability, the act of hypnosis assists Grace’s process of recovery.

In addition to demonstrating the public dynamics of wound culture, the hypnosis scene models the ethical relationship based on witnessing. By bringing Grace’s maladaptive coping mechanism to the surface, the hypnotic trance serves to assist in her healing. When brought out of her hypnotic trance, Grace states that she doesn’t remember what happened, but she knows that she dreamt of her mother, peacefully floating at sea (403); her fear of the replaceable nature of the female body is transformed into feelings of comfort and connectedness. After her trance, Grace has “a calm smile, no longer tense and fearful” (403); further, Grace “walks lightly enough now, and seems almost happy” (404). Jeremiah duplicitously tells the other doctors and men, “The results were most unexpected. As a rule, the subject remains under the control of the operator” (405). However, control is not necessary in Jeremiah’s and Grace’s ethical relationship. Grace says, “I know my secrets are safe with Jeremiah, as his are safe with me” (456). The relationship between Grace and Jeremiah enacts Oliver’s model of witnessing through the

ethical relationship that can restore the mindbody to a healed state. Healing occurs when the movement of energy is restored.

To help a hysteric heal, then, investigations of public violence, private traumas and the ethical relationship are necessary. We have seen how *Alias Grace* prepares readers to perceive and engage with the disruptive and unfamiliar hysterical subject. An understanding of shared witnessing and the ethical relationship involved in witnessing can deepen our understanding of the mindbody connection in hysteria. Defying the nineteenth (and twentieth) century's tendency to romanticize hysteria, *Alias Grace* in fact presents a model of partial recovery rather than madness. Grace realizes that she is seen as "a romantic figure" and accordingly adjusts her behaviour, noting that "romantic people are not supposed to laugh" (25). Grace experiences recovery when she recognizes that the transmission of affects has occurred and she re-establishes boundaries between herself and others; she gains this self-awareness through retelling the story of her life with herself as the main character. When released from the Penitentiary, Grace opens up her old box of keepsakes:

There was the dress I'd made at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's, with the bone buttons from Jeremiah, but nothing could be saved of it except the buttons. I found the piece of Mary's hair, tied with a thread and wrapped up in a handkerchief as I'd left it, but the moths had been into that too. (445)

Grace's inability to wear Nancy's rotting dresses symbolically represents her newfound ability to maintain boundaries with others, while acknowledging the permeability of those boundaries. It is significant that the buttons – metaphorically, the ability to open and close dialogue – remain. In this passage, remnants of the body – hair and bone – last, while

remnants of culture – threads, handkerchief, dress – do not. A button made of bone signifies the mindbody's position at the crux of meaning making.

Atwood's poem at the beginning of the novel states "I've dresses enough for three" (13), indicating the exchange of garments between Grace, Nancy, and Mary. At the end of the novel, Grace uses cloth from the dresses of each woman in her "Tree of Paradise" quilt that she sews after her release from prison, saying "I will embroider around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern. And so we will all be together" (460). It is significant that each dress is surrounded by a boundary of red stitches, symbolically indicating Grace's acknowledgement of the paradoxical nature of communication between humans: working collectively yet with an awareness of distinct experience and boundaries. This poignant act of Grace's ends the novel by suggesting a healing movement as boundaries are demarcated with love towards and understanding of the other.

The hysteric is, in fact, a figure of great potential. The novel ends with a hint of pregnancy, as although Grace thinks she is "well past the time of childbearing," she is "now three months gone." She further comments that "It is hard to believe, but there has been one miracle in my life already, so why should I be surprised if there is another one?" (439). While Grace speculates that the feeling of heaviness might be a tumour rather than a fetus, the novel ends with the promise of the mindbody's capabilities. In 1854, suspicion was raised about the historical Grace Marks's pregnancy. The *Inspector's Minute Book* states that

As a report has been made by the Matron that she has strong suspicions that convict Grace Marks who has recently been returned from the Lunatic Asylum is

in the family way, It is therefore desirable that Dr. Sampson, Surgeon of the Penitentiary, make an examination of her person, and see if there is any cause for such suspicions (*Inspector's Minute Book, Feb 3, 1848-Oct. 1, 1864*, 245).

This interest in the female body illustrates a sexual responsibility unique to women; while men bear no visible mark of illicit sexual activity, women's bodies bear witness to their "indiscretion." Dr. James Sampson's response, dated 28 March, 1854 reads, "In obedience to your instruction I have to report that I examined the convict Grace Marks on the 23d instant and could discover no sign of recent parturition" (*Inspector's Minute Book, Feb 3, 1848-Oct. 1, 1864*, 245). Marks was not actually pregnant; however, this rumour bears evidence of the intense public scrutiny of her sexuality.⁴⁰ The possibility of pregnancy at the end of novel does not necessarily indicate childbirth, but points to the body's metaphorical potential for, and literal involvement in, the rebirth of the healthy subject.

Grace's hysteria thus represents a challenge to the notion of impermeable boundaries between subjects. Both Grace Marks's hysteria and her healing are productive processes that reposition fear of being "overtaken" by the other to openness to the adventure in otherness. Teresa Brennan suggests that concern with boundaries has been proliferating in the 1990s in Western society (15). She suggests this may be because "self-definition by projection is less available than it was during the last few sexist and colonial centuries—there are now too few willing receptacles—or because of an

⁴⁰ In a review of *Alias Grace* from *The Roanoke Times & World News* (16 March 1997), Margaret Grayson speculates, "The reader's last glimpse of Grace is of a woman, still young, still remarkably beautiful, who feels a 'heaviness inside' – a baby? a tumor? A heaviness, then, bearing either life or death. Again the question, again the mystery – symbolic of the whole novel." While hysteria is often defined based on its creative potential, the "pregnant" ending of *Alias Grace* suggests the fullness and creativity of sanity.

accumulation of environmental-inflected affects” (15). She suggests there is an increase of affects with no place to go:

The reality of the increase makes the Western individual especially more concerned with securing a private fortress, personal boundaries, against the unsolicited emotional intrusions of the other. The fear of being ‘taken over’ is certainly in the air, although the transmission of negative affect generally is not recognized for what it is. Boundaries, paradoxically, are an issue in a period where the transmission of affect is denied. (15)

Alias Grace teaches us that hysteria remains relevant, and even revolutionary, as it brings together discourse and matter in a way that challenges our thinking on material agency. The archival hysteric positions the body as living history (cf. Karen Barad 127); the mindbody becomes an active and sometimes unpredictable mobilization of inherited genes, neurochemical reactions, memories, impressions, and feelings. Both sense perception and interpretation – physical reaction and discourse – go hand-in-hand.

To foster the ethical relationship, boundaries must be acknowledged to be more porous than is commonly assumed in Western philosophy and psychology. If we consider those things outside the self as a threat to identity, then “relations will be hostile” (Oliver 3). The understanding of boundaries is, in fact, a highly political concept; understanding and correcting oppression and domination rely on categories of identity. Thus, as long as the self is considered to be a self-contained unit, the hysterical symptoms of the sick “other” will remain aberrant and threatening. A hysterical subject (like an archival subject) shows how the sovereign nature of the subject is, in fact, a myth that has fostered the dehumanization that often accompanies relationships of domination.

Chapter Three

Being *Away*: Hysteria and the Female Settler-Invader Subject

In *Away* (1993), Jane Urquhart presents an ambivalent portrait of the archival hysteric: she is both a romantic figure and a model for acknowledging and coping with permeable intersubjective boundaries. The novel's main characters Mary, Eileen, and Esther all possess characteristics of a nineteenth-century sub-type of hysteric, the love-mad woman. In the nineteenth century, social understandings of female frailty were assigned to this figure, for it was understood that she went mad from her romantic partner's withdrawal of love. In Urquhart's narrative, however, the new-world love mad women present a broader understanding of love, as their disappointments in love of landscape and of home, as well as romantic love, weaken them but also inspire their recoveries. In the novel, passion between humans, and passion between humans and their landscapes, become interchangeable.

Away deploys the love-mad woman, and models her recovery, in order to reposition love as a means of understanding the other. The novel presents alterity as a site for learning, rather than a site of fear and contamination. The love-mad archival hysteric, in the state of partial recovery, moves from experiencing the fixed "love" of traditional romantic, patriarchal models to experiencing the unfixed, continuously viscous love that negotiates difference. Oliver, convinced of a love that exists outside of domination, insists that such love does not fix another person (or landscape, culture, etc.) as an object: "Love is the ethical agency that motivates a move towards others, across difference" (218).

Borrowing from Irigaray's conception of love as "dynamic movement," this process is both a connecting and separating process, as it involves vigilance in "interpretation, elaboration, and analysis" of an other (Oliver 218). In other words, an ethics of love helps us to continually challenge ourselves to see beyond "blind spots," and to allow a space for the other to respond, even if that other is dead or a fictional character. The loving subject accepts that the response may sometimes be silence. For the O'Malley women, learning to move from being love-mad hysterics, to women who love, is an act of self-recovery. Out of this love springs the ethical relationship, in which these women express their own personal pain, and become more responsible to the environments around them. Following Stacy Alaimo, I understand those environments to be located "not in some distant place, but within homes, schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods" as well as in the traditional locations of landscapes and seascapes (9).

Fiercely ambivalent, the text both romanticizes and resists mythologies of female settler-invader subjectivity and hysteric subjectivity. On one hand, Mary is romanticized; the townspeople sexually desire her in her hysterical state, and she is depicted in close association with the natural world, particularly the shores of Rathlin Island and the forests of Ontario. On the other hand, the text uses the love-mad woman as a symbol of division and alienation, who shows us that human subjects hold unfixed positions in the world: relying upon the binary of mental health and illness, diagnostic labels clearly misrepresent the complexity of states of being. *Away* both mythologizes and demythologizes Canadian history, ultimately exposing the danger of romanticizing hysteria, alienation, and colonial history.

The love-mad woman in Urquhart's novel intervenes in two distinct moments of Canadian nationhood: colonial settlement and the present ecological crisis. Urquhart's novel traces the emotion of guilt through these key historical moments. It positions Mary as a hysterical settler-invader subject. In her inability to settle and invade, the love-mad woman complicates the position of the female settler-invader subject. Nineteenth-century medical discourse cites women's mental health as necessary for motherhood and the concomitant responsibilities of the reproduction of race and teaching of imperial culture. Because she neglects her familial duties, the love-mad woman complicates the colonial project of reproduction through motherhood.¹ While the women in *Away* do mother, they pose challenges to the sort of mothering idealized by colonial ideology.

While all of the female characters in *Away* can be understood as love-mad hysterics, the novel ultimately conveys an interest in resilience rather than hysteria or continued psychic pain. *Away* stages a tentative strategy for the partial recovery and reconciliation of postcolonial settler-invader guilt as it manifests itself in the late twentieth-century environmental crisis. While treading a fine line between romanticism and social criticism, *Away* mobilizes a vision of subject formation that attempts to address postcolonial guilt through witnessing and love. The novel addresses the cultural work of recovery in both a personal and a postcolonial context. Through providing strategies for personal change, the text challenges twentieth-century public assumptions of national

¹ All of the women in the novel, except for Esther reproduce. However, they do not nurture in any traditional sense. Mary's son becomes a landlord who benefits from European mistreatment of First Nations people.

postcolonial and environmental guilt, advocating responsibility – social responsibility and response-ability – through the ethical relationship.²

The archival hysteric's journey through partial recovery shows us how subjects form out of their relations with other subjects and with their environments; her healing journey also shows us that a subject-in-relationship holds an ethical responsibility to others. Partial recovery involves the realization of "our own dependency on environment and others for our self-hood" (Bettina 209). No full recovery occurs in *Away*, nor reparation of postcolonial guilt, but a small movement is made from a model of oppression to one of interdependence.

Urquhart's novel proposes that being "away" is a problematic state; the solution is not to be "home," but rather to "be where you are" (12). Here, Urquhart advocates being in concert with one's environment rather than possessing it (or being possessed by it). Yet while there is a mutual obligation between the human and non-human worlds, we cannot forge a complete reconciliation between nature and culture. In her article, "The Garden and the World: Jamaica Kincaid and the Cultural Borders of Ecocriticism" Susie O'Brien suggests that eco-criticism's goal to return to "pure nature" is fraught with contradictions.³ Viscosity exists between human and non-human entities and healthy relationships do involve resistance and separateness, rather than uncontrolled porosity. Human and natural economies cannot be, as O'Brien argues, integrated "into a seamless whole" (174). Indeed, human identity loses shape when it merges too completely with the

² Again, "response-ability" is the subject's responsibility to make a space in which the other has an ability to respond.

³ Rather than fostering a fantasy of a return to a "pure" or unmediated nature, ecocriticism should instead explore ways in which the world is culturally mediated.

natural world. According to O'Brien, heterogeneity exists both between and within nature and cultures (178). The ecological vision in *Away* does stereotype an aboriginal vision of oneness with nature in its depiction of Exodus Crow, but ultimately proposes that uncontrolled connection and identification with nature can, in fact, lead to human passivity on environmental matters. To be "away" is to be overly connected with nature to the point where one paradoxically loses one's connection with the well-being of oneself, one's immediate environment, and others.

The love-mad woman and the scene of sympathy

Away traces four generations of Irish-Canadian women, beginning with Mary who finds a sailor washed up on shore and instantly becomes possessed, or "away," according to local legend. The villagers believe that the sailor is her demon lover, and Mary remains haunted by this love. The village Priest, Father Quinn, arranges her marriage to the local teacher, Brian O'Malley, as a cure. This is temporarily successful and Mary emigrates to Canada with her new family during the potato famine (1845). But as a hysteric who cannot integrate in a settler-invader society, she leaves her small settler home for the forests. Her daughter, Eileen, later becomes obsessed by a young Canadian Irishman named Aidan, whom she believes is a Fenian rebel. Transplanting patriotic stories of Ireland onto Aidan, she joins him in Montreal and Ottawa and ends up partly responsible for the 1868 assassination of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, the Irish Canadian Minister for Agriculture and Immigration and Father of Confederation. Aidan is actually a spy and supporter of McGee and is disgusted by what he sees as Eileen's dreamworld existence,

rejecting her after her accidental role in McGee's death. The hysteria skips a generation and these family tales are told in the novel's frame story by Esther, the last O'Malley woman who is dying in her bed in Loughbreeze Beach in the 1980s-1990s while the family curse of the mines plays out around her. The urban sprawl and destruction of Ontario farmland that Esther mourns bespeak the looming environmental crisis.

All of the hysterical O'Malley women function as love-mad women. In her book *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*, Helen Small explains that, stereotypically, a woman goes mad in the wake of experiencing unrequited love or abandonment by her male lover.⁴ Small notes that melancholy and hysteria were the two most frequent diagnoses for love-mad women.⁵ In addition, as Urquhart shows, the feelings of the so-called love-mad woman include not only love, but also guilt, resentment, inferiority, instability, and unfulfilled desire resulting from abandonment.

For these "love-mad" women, love of a man and love of landscape are entangled: "It was in them to seek forever the beaches they were born near and to walk in landscapes where something liquid glistened through the trees" (5-6). Mary's ecological vision of connectedness follows from her experience of passion for the sailor who washes up on

⁴ While love-madness hysteria was not an official classification in the nineteenth century, love trouble was a predisposing factor in some cases. In his study of Buckinghamshire, Wright suggests that "the gender incidence of the specific diagnoses – like melancholia or mania with depression – did not reflect a gendering of *diagnosis*, but may have possibly reflected either a gendering of the confinement process or a 'real' gender difference in the presentation of symptoms leading to social identification" (169). The image of the woman gone mad from ill-fated love was popularized by nineteenth century literary figures such as Crazy Jane, the Lady of Shalott, and the reconstructed Ophelia.

⁵ The epitaph of a love-mad woman Sarah Fletcher who died in 1799 in Clifton reads: "When / Nerves were too delicately spun to / bear the rude Shakes and Jostlings / which we meet in this transitory / World, Nature gave way; she sunk / and died a Martyr to Excessive / Sensibility" (Small 1). Small argues that Fletcher's epitaph wouldn't have been written as such by 1865 for, "when the Medico-Psychological Association took its name, medicine had laid its claim, albeit with profound internal and external conflicts, to a specialized knowledge of diseases of the mind" (21).

shore. Even Esther, whose love of place precludes her love of a man, has a lover who is “drawn to her shore by the threat of a storm” (353). For these hysterics, the relationships with their environments are more interconnected than those with other people, as the landscape seems to possess its own agency, functioning as a major character in the novel. In fact, the landscape is personified in the character of the male lover – manifesting as Mary’s daemon lover, Eileen’s Aidan Lanighan, and Esther’s sailor. The landscape here functions as a mysterious and attractive “other.” While openly permeable boundaries structure the hysteric’s relationship with others in this novel, the effects become pronounced in the heterosexual romantic relationship and in relations with the environment.

In the nineteenth century, the love-mad woman elicited responses of sympathy. Her identity was thus formed and shaped in encounters that Jaffe argues are based on imaginary processes, whereby both participants are replaced by fantasies (4). Just as Dr. Jordan initially perceived Grace according to social and cultural images of the hysteric, nineteenth-century doctors often sympathetically superimposed images and fantasies onto their primarily female hysterical patients, assigning them inherently weak physiologies. No matter which diagnostic label the physician chose, he relied upon the medical tradition “of viewing the physiology of women as cripplingly vulnerable to their emotional state” (Small 15). While sympathy might positively foster a space in which a medical relationship of caring and protection may develop, there is also a “close relationship between identification and violent appropriation” (Jaffe 5). The act of sympathy may involve “killing off the other in fantasy in order to usurp the other’s place, the place

where the subject desires to be” (Jaffe 5). Killing off can occur in two ways in the exchange: by looking or by refusing to look. Sympathy also comes with a fear of falling; for women, it is a sexual fall and for men, an economic fall.

Nineteenth-century authors constructed the love-mad woman as an ambivalent sympathetic figure who has undergone such a sexual fall. Yet she also holds a certain power over those who strive to make sense of her condition.⁶ An example from the Ontario Archives Collection (RG 10-270) illustrates this tendency. A patient of the Toronto Asylum, Ellen Pitterson (admitted September 13, 1847 and discharged March 25, 1848) was a nineteen year-old well-educated English woman who lived in Toronto; her habits in early life were “temperate & industrious & good.” However, by the age of eighteen, her behaviour changed, as she became “afflicted with bowel complaint” and was “quite wild & excited to a very great degree.” Question twelve on her admission form asks “Has any material change taken place in the pecuniary circumstances of the patient; or has he been exposed to any particular reverse or disappointment of any other kind, or to any remarkable success?” In response, the examining physician has written: “nothing special – but says she has been disappointed by a young man who seduced her under promise of marriage.” Pitterson’s experience is here downgraded as an unremarkable disappointment in love. Her subjective experience of loss and rejection is classified as “nothing special,” invalidating a female’s emotional response to unfulfilled love. However, the unfulfilled promise of marriage for nineteenth-century women was particularly destructive, as their virtue was often tied to sexual purity. Some of Pitterson’s

⁶ Mary holds sway over all the men of her village, fascinating them just as she herself has been imaginatively enslaved by her sailor.

symptoms marking her as mad are justifiable behaviours of anger and guilt: “she has frequently called upon the young man by name, & accuses him of destroying her & fancies that he is near her &c.” This reading of Pitterson’s symptoms removes responsibility from her lover, though he is the one who apparently did not keep his promise. On the other hand, the doctor’s full analysis is contradictory; the supposed cause of the attack of mental disorder is listed as “disappointment & seduction.” Pitterson’s experience in love is interpreted both as nothing special and as an exacerbating cause of mental illness.⁷ Nineteenth-century doctors thus both dismissed and pathologized a woman’s subjective feelings about romantic love.

Urquhart explores this paradox in her novel. The female characters in *Away* function as hysterical love-mad women characterized by overwhelming despair. Mary’s hysterical response to the dead sailor is dismissed as a work of magic by the villagers, who tell tales of the “Sidhe [...], Fetch, Pookah, Banshee, and Love-Talker” to explain her behaviour (17).⁸ Her suffering due to love is dismissed, while the learned men of the community, particularly the Priest and schoolteacher, use it as the basis for analyzing her condition. Mary loses her voice, which she uses only to speak to her lover.

Mary and her husband, Brian O’Malley, model the nineteenth-century dynamic of the sympathetic exchange. While Brian believes that his love returns Mary to sanity (58), he actually feels sympathy – including pity, tenderness, and erotic desire – but not love

⁷ In response to question 25, “Is the patient prone to acts of destruction, or to violence of any kind; or has he made any dangerous attacks upon the life of any person?” the physician notes “yes, she tears her clothes.” This response draws an association between sexuality and impropriety. While her acting out may be part of a process of anger and mourning, it is pathologized by doctors (Q1 Ellen Pitterson 545).

⁸ Urquhart researched the mythical connotations of being “Away” from Lady Gregory’s book *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*.

for Mary (52). His love for her is couched in negativity. When he first falls in love with Mary, he believes “He was a ruined man” (55). This relationship, based on recognition, relies upon dominance and violence, and Brian is unable to move towards otherness. After Mary’s death, Exodus Crow tells Brian, “she told me that you knew that she had been, as they say on the island you came from, ‘away.’ But because you did not believe this, you could not see when she went away again” (182). Unable to imaginatively transcend his own experiential knowledge of states of being and conceptions of selfhood, Brian does not fully believe that she is “away.” When Brian says to Exodus, ““Had she chosen to come back [...] I loved her,”” Exodus responds by saying, “There is this fierce love in all of us for that which we cannot fully own” (182-83). Brian enacts the very problem with the Victorian scene of sympathy: “With its ostensible effacement of differences and asserted dissolution of individuals into a common humanity, sympathy thus formulated seeks to efface the social and political problems for which it is offered as a resolution” (Jaffe 15). Brian’s love for Mary does not address her state of otherness, and so effaces her hysterical experience.

They never discuss her experience of being away. While their relationship is based on history, mythologies, language, and academic learning, no exchange through personal storytelling occurs between them. Even when she speaks to her husband and her children, she buries her eloquence and poetry. She is described as having a fever of the mind and sometimes swims naked, transgressing her society’s standards of acceptable behaviour (32-33). Mary leaves her home at dawn to bathe in the ocean, “Her mind already awash with love” (37). She is initially presented as a woman who has internalized

her society's views of a woman's destiny to be loved: "She felt contented, knowing her life's destiny to be fulfilled, her heart to be given or taken away. In the manner of her old eloquence, which she vowed she would never make use of again except to address him, she began to make words for him and to sing these words to him in a clear, quiet voice" (17). Yet her destiny is not as a wife, but as a lover of the environment, which manifests itself first through her encounter with the sailor.

The sympathy from other characters only serves to reinforce Mary's hysterical condition. For example, she engages in sympathetic encounters with the Irish landowner Osbert Grenville. Mary meets Osbert as he is pursuing his work of collecting small creatures from a coastal tidepool. While Mary is collecting seaweed to help nourish the soil, she stops, "sensing his scrutiny" (86). Mary is aware that she is being looked at according to a dynamics of sympathy that is expected of relations between landlords and poor tenants. Instead of responding to her observation that the crops aren't growing properly, Osbert "assume[s] a sympathetic expression" (87). He delivers a "platitude," "Ah well, things can only get better" (87) to which Mary does not reply. As this scene suggests, the sympathetic encounter relies upon the dynamics of recognition, because the self is figured as an image that is visible to others. While sympathy can be a corrective social force that encourages charitable feelings and behaviours--both the observer and the observed imagine him or herself as the other must be seeing him (Jaffe 4)⁹--the

⁹ Jaffe writes that "the purpose of the visual here is to produce secondary experience in a spectator, an image or copy of pain whose significance—better, interest (for there is no small degree of scientific detachment here)—lies not in its effect on the sufferer but rather in its representational potential: in the power of its ripple effect, its capacity to reverberate in the spectator's mind and body, literally moving the latter" (11). The body may actually undergo change in the sympathetic encounter.

sympathetic encounter can also be based on the dynamics of dominance. Such is the case when the hysteric gets positioned as the recipient of the look.¹⁰

While Mary's state is romanticized by the villagers in Ireland, Eileen's state of being in love is pathologized, as if it is a medical "condition." As a child born in the new world, without the Irish traditions of magic and the supernatural that explained Mary's condition, her love-mad state becomes more overtly pathologized. She loses weight and interest in regular activities: "Eileen had wandered vaguely from a scarcely touched supper, the three men discussed her condition" (261).¹¹ Eileen and Aidan experience sexual desire and exchange but do not communicate: "While he caressed her she told herself the brief, brutal story of his life, composed partly of the things the captains had said to her and partly of the songs she had sung, innocently, as a child" (259). Just as Aidan is looking for the familiar in Eileen, she is looking for the familiar in him, and she fits Aidan into a preconceived mold inherited from her father: "In his arms she was assaulted, stolen, by a learned mythology" (259). When he leaves her, "She had given her real voice to Aidan Lanighan" (260). This is a model of ownership rather than love. In their conversations, Aidan speaks little and Eileen tends to speak for him. For example, she asks him:

'Did you dance for McGee?'
'I tried.'
'But he never understood it?'
'No, he never understood it.' (290)

¹⁰ In Victorian fiction, Jaffe notes, the middle class subject is traditionally figured as a spectator (8). This dynamic places marginalized figures such as criminals, beggars, and hysterics in the role of the observed object.

¹¹ Eileen believes that Aidan's withdrawal of his love causes her to go away. She composes a letter to Aidan in her mind: "It is your thick curling hair that has filled me with melancholy, And it's parting with you that has left forever this pain in my side" (295).

Aidan only parrots back to Eileen those feelings that she provides for him, and tells her, “you cannot even begin to understand. [...] You couldn’t be a part of it even if I wanted you to” (322). After Aidan reveals that he was a spy, working “against people like you,” he leaves Eileen (342). Their relationship is entirely based on interpretation (and particularly *misinterpretation*), rather than understanding.

When Liam moves his house across the lake, Eileen becomes “a captive, now, of heaving architecture, afloat on a Great Lake” (266). While Eileen literally does spend more time within her brother’s white house, her captivity arises out of her unfulfilled fantasy of Aidan that she mistakes for love. Her feeling of captivity in the house is symbolic of female submission rather than love: “She would speak little – become silent, a person who waits. She would hold Aidan Lanighan in her mind. And he would recover her” (267). It is ironic that she dreams of her “recovery” by Aidan while this belief is, in fact, part of her continued hysteria. Eileen has already pathologized love relationships through cultural mythology: “She recalled her father’s songs... melodies suggesting the paralysis of great love” (271). She enacts the mythology in the sphere of politics, as her love-madness leads to her indirect role in the assassination of D’Arcy McGee.

The love-mad woman in a post-colonial context

Urquhart rewrites and mobilizes the figure of the love-mad woman, showing us how the trope of love-madness works in a colonial setting.¹² In *Away*, female hysteria

¹² With the figure of the love-mad woman, *Away* troubles the genre of the archival romance (Suzanne Keen), a genre that makes “more recent attempts to come to terms with the loss of empire and to provide a way to explore and make sense of Britain’s colonial legacy....the archive anchors explorations of national identity and provides the evidence of establishing the meaning of the past” (Manoff 16).

throws nineteenth-century colonial reproduction of culture off balance and distances nineteenth-century women from their role as complicit colonizers. However, while hysteria exerts resistance to colonial values, it is not a viable alternative to the model of settler domination. The novel also enacts a neo-colonial desire to story the past and establish national, and particularly Celtic-inspired, Canadian mythologies. The novel, featured on the *Globe and Mail's* National Bestseller list for 132 weeks, was praised for its poetic style and vivid re-imagining of Canadian postcolonial experience (Colville; Ross; Smart; Wyile).¹³ However, in “Haunted by (a Lack of) Postcolonial Ghosts: Settler Nationalism in Jane Urquhart’s *Away*,” Cynthia Sugars reacts skeptically to the novel’s positive critical reception as a postcolonial reimagining of Canada’s settler history, and considers the novel to be both colonizing and postcolonial:

Away postulates a movement from diasporic absence – the experience of having no ghosts – to diasporic presencing – the act of transplanting foreign ghosts into a new world – only to suggest the vanity of this act of cultural colonization, while at the same time shamelessly reveling in a mix of colonial nostalgia and postcolonial melancholy. If the women in the novel are haunted by a series of only too tangible ghosts, they are also destroyed by their obsession, which might suggest that they are, finally, haunted by a lack of postcolonial ghosts. Meanwhile, the reader of the novel, like the author, risks being seduced by its evocation of (post)colonial desire. (25)

The contradictions that Sugars notes are indeed present throughout the text; Urquhart’s evocative, poetic language and New World landscape filled with imported ghosts and mythologies evoke a seduction that contrasts with the act of love. Esther’s family curse of the mines, for instance, simultaneously represents a romantic narrative of family destiny and a more material destruction of landscape. This type of double vision exists throughout

¹³ *Away* won the 1994 Trillium Award (1994) and shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (1996).

Urquhart's story. For instance, Sugars aptly notes that the condition of being "away" represents "diasporic displacement"(4) in addition to a hysterical condition explained by Irish myths of demonic possession.¹⁴ If we consider being away as both a diasporic and a hysterical state, it nuances our reading of the novel and allows us to examine the hysterical subject in a colonial context.¹⁵ The novel raises the issue of identity boundaries in a colonial context, where the porosity of such boundaries is particularly significant. Jennifer Henderson explains that we can understand Canada's colonial development as a liberal project of rule involving the "precarious and contested realization of a scheme to extend the government of 'freely' self-governing individuals [...] across a new space and into an indefinite future" (5). Although the frontier was celebrated as a porous and endless site, as it could be more readily claimed that way, open porosity between settlers and natives was threatening to the settlers' sense of conquest and, ultimately, self.

Colonial settlement relies upon perceiving boundaries between subjects and objects as solid. This very vigilance about human boundaries, however, betrays a fear of their permeability. As Teresa Brennan writes,

The taken-for-grantedness of the emotionally contained subject is a residual bastion of Eurocentrism in critical thinking, the last outpost of the subject's belief in the superiority of its own worldview over that of other cultures.[...] Notions of the transmission of affect are suspect as non-white and colonial cultures are usually suspect. (Brennan 2)

¹⁴ Urquhart explicitly draws the connection between immigration and Mary's mental condition as the "word she thought was hers alone was flung across the landscape. 'Away, boys, away'" (112). In addition to her so-called demon lover, Mary is in love with the freedom of traveling. Here love-madness is conflated with colonial travel. When Mary pictures her lover, she pictures "distant harbours, far shores, rivers penetrating foreign continents, a glimpse of a strange dome or monument...He would open his hands under the water and there would be steeples, towers, forests, a crowded wharf" (37).

¹⁵ Alan Lawson urges us "to attend more comprehensively to the different ways in which imperialism interpellated the full range of its subjects so that we can explore the particular investitures of power, both material and discursive, that postcolonial readings unmask and unravel" (22).

The new liberal order that British settlers tested on Canadian soil involved the regulation of social conduct among citizens. If the settler colony was, as Henderson argues, a place for testing out issues surrounding the day-to-day life and the social structure of a population, then this project relied upon the ways of seeing the self and other and attendant concerns about such boundaries (7).¹⁶ While Henderson is primarily concerned with the Anglo-Protestant female settler, whose “capacity to govern herself was still in question,” (13) the question is also pertinent to the already marginalized Irish-Catholic female settler. This questionable status of female self-governance heightened the issue of boundaries. The perceived lack of self-government that accompanied hysteria was threatening to the liberal project’s strategy of “harness[ing] individual modes of self-government to wider campaigns to govern others” (Henderson 19).¹⁷ In fact, as Urquhart shows, hysteria throws the government of self and other into question, with its assertion of an ungovernable bodymind.

The female settler-invader subject in nineteenth-century Ontario is an ambivalent subject who forges her identity through seeking recognition.¹⁸ She looks to the patriarchal structures of her home country – generally England, though in this case Ireland – in order to forge her identity. Eileen, for instance, shapes her beliefs and life purpose by reading

¹⁶ Henderson suggests that nineteenth-century Canada was “a privileged testing ground for the liberal democratization of political rule, characteristically coupled with the institution of diffuse new mechanisms of coercion and constraint” (7). If the settlers figured Canada as a testing ground rather than as a new home, as Henderson suggests, questions of identity played out on a complex site that involved identification, mimicry, sympathy, re-education, and many other processes of interpreting self and other.

¹⁷ The concept of self-government laid the basis for Responsible Government, a system in which British-appointed governors were responsible to the Upper Canadian and Lower Canadian elected assemblies. This system was part of Canada’s progress to independence from British rule.

¹⁸ Lawson describes the ambivalent state of the settler-invader subject: “The settler subject represents, but also mimics, the authentic imperial culture from which he – and more problematically, she – is separated” (Lawson 23)

stories of male uprisings and absorbing the political opinions of her father. She seeks the approval of Aidan and his Fenian brothers for validation. Eileen looks for stability of self in tribal identity: “The idea of the oneness of the tribe, the imagined collective voice, calmed her. There were no uncertainties” (330). The development of one’s identity through a process of othering here relies on seeking recognition. As we have seen, basing identity on recognition employs a model of vision, whereby one must be seen in order to become a subject.

While tribal identity confers the fantasy of sameness, a subject also defines herself against perceived difference. While a female settler-invader looks to her country of origin for recognition, she also looks to the aboriginals in her new land to form her subjecthood against them. For example, Frances Stewart, an Irish emigrant who settled in Duoro Township with her husband, demonstrates in her letter of 15 July 1822 the primacy of the sense of sight in the dynamics of recognition of others:

We saw some Indian huts, or wigwams, near us, and went to them. The Indians looked at us inquisitively, but seemed to wish to keep a distance. The men were employed in keeping brooms, the women, or squaws, in making baskets. They use little hammocks for their infants. (8)

Here, Stewart emphasizes sight as a separating sense as both parties “saw” and “looked” at one another across a “distance,” or divide. First contact is necessarily initiated through the sense of sight, on the presupposition of sight as a distancing and alienating sense. Under this assumption, the female settler-invader subject is in the ambivalent position of forging her identity based on both being othered and on othering. Relying upon recognition, the colonial relationship, is based on a model of domination. .

Urquhart mobilizes the figure of the nineteenth-century hysteric in order to explore the affective anxiety surrounding the condition of the settler-invader in the act of colonial relationship. If, as Lawson comments, “the colonial ‘moment’ (as in physics) is a transaction of forces, a relationship – unequal, certainly, but a relationship nonetheless” (21), the condition of hysteria throws typical settler-invader desires into disarray: “settling” cannot obscure “invading” because the hysteric does neither. She does not clear land, does not make a new home, and looks to the wilderness for comfort. In a settler-invader society, Mary is neither a settler nor an invader. According to Lawson, there are three dreams of the settler situation: 1) the effacement of Indigenous authority; 2) the appropriation of Indigenous authenticity; and 3) the desire to inherit the Natives’ spiritual ‘rites’ to the land (24). Mary does not possess or enact any of these desires.

As Henderson insists, the settler woman is not exterior to the machinations of imperial power. She is also not inherently associated with nature or indigeneity. Both Mary's Irish heritage and her inability to perceive boundaries between self and others set her in uneasy tension with the colonial project. Mary explicitly tells Exodus about “the time of the stolen lands of her island, and of the disease, and of the lost language and the empty villages and how the people who once sang were now silent, how the people who once danced were now still” (184). Mary’s abandonment of the family homestead betrays her resistance to clearing and settling Canada. Her flight to Moira Lake resists caretaking behaviour; Liam recognizes that “until she reached the lake she would have still been his mother” (186). While Mary bears children, she does not stay to rear them and morally educate them, resisting her role in the colonial race-making project. She puts her own

needs before those of her children and the settler colony. The love-mad hysteric is not a “well-governed white woman” idealized by the settler colonies (Henderson 39), but rather one perceived to be in need of governance.

Mary’s hysterical behaviour reveals both the positive and negative aspects of hysteria as an alternative to settler domination. While she is able to form an ethical relationship with the Ojibway Exodus Crow, she is unable to maintain bonds or communicate with her family. Henderson shows that settler-invader females were assigned moral, physical, and emotional responsibility for others, including Aboriginal others. Urquhart reshapes the nineteenth-century notion of “responsibility” to include response-ability: the ability to make a space for the other to respond. Yet while Mary takes on responsibility in her relationship with Exodus, she rejects it in her relationship with her husband and children until her death; hysteria is thus a problematic act of resistance.

Ghosts versus archival hysterics

While I define Mary as an archival hysteric, Sugars proposes that we interpret Mary as a postcolonial ghost.¹⁹ Sugars outlines postcolonial haunting as a means of constructing originary and mythological histories that obscure aboriginal history:

¹⁹ Sugars gives the example of Atwood’s refiguring of Susanna Moodie (*The Journals of Susanna Moodie*) as a ghost that haunts the landscape and serves as a “postcolonial reinscription of local culture”: “the paradox here is that the unsettling and uncanny experience of being haunted is what produces a feeling of familiarity and home” (7). Mary transplants her ghosts from Ireland in order to bring familiarity with her; ironically, though, she does not feel at home either in Ireland or in Canada due to her state of awayness. What is familiar to her, as an immigrant Irish woman, is a state of being “away.” Her experience in Ireland actually forecasted this settler paradox, as Mary’s dead sailor is bound for Halifax and brings with him desires to travel.

Given that multiply constituted settler-invader societies such as Canada are internally conflicted, and that the field of postcolonialism itself has always been haunted by contending appeals to authenticity and hybridity, the construction of any definitive postcolonial ghosts to fill our perceived cultural lack-gap is highly problematic. (Sugars 3)

Competing drives towards authenticity and hybridity make definitive identity and origin-seeking an impossible project. If this is the case, as Sugars deftly shows it is, then any re-telling of Canadian history is inherently problematic. Sugars's description of Mary as a ghost is therefore suggestive. Sugars even notes the psychological suffering of a ghost:

By definition, a ghost is an unsettled neurotic, which also makes it an inherently problematic metaphor of cultural/national authenticity. On the one hand, it represents a figure that is ill at ease, displaced, trapped in a place where it does not want to be; on the other hand, this entrapment is what lends that place a history. Hence, the ghost may provide the only authentic postcolonial mythology possible. (Sugars 9)

Yet Sugars here participates in a slippage between the symbolic figure of a ghost and a suffering historical subject, herself seeking "an authentic postcolonial mythology." She does point out that "it may be that every instance of ghosting in a settler context is compromised" (25). This rightly implies that there is no possibility of an authentic postcolonial Canadian ghost.

The ghost is a contested concept in the novel, and thus not fully adequate for understanding its hysterical women. When Exodus Crow first meets Mary, he asks, "What was a white woman doing in the forest with the first coat of snow on the ground? Was she, he wondered, a ghost? Then he remembered that white ghosts stayed in the houses they had built and never in the woods which, it was said, they feared" (178). Exodus Crow here makes a distinction between white ghosts, who remain in their homes, and aboriginal ghosts, who presumably exist everywhere. According to his terms, Mary is

not a ghost. Exodus Crow's belief in the Manitou provides an explanation of another form of ghostly being that epitomizes the state of becoming: "That is the spirit that is everywhere and that we, the Nishwabe, believe in" (176). While Urquhart here presents a reductionist view of Native spirituality, Exodus Crow introduces the term "spirit," which perhaps is a more apt term than ghost, returning us to the concept of energy flow.²⁰ Mary does not transcend her physical body but requires shelter, warmth, food, and even human company when she flees to the woods. We can thus seek to understand her as an archival hysteric, embodied and suffering, rather than as a ghost.

We acknowledge the affective and material qualities of the female figures in *Away* by understanding them as archival hysterics rather than as ghosts. While the postcolonial ghost, according to Sugars, is herself haunted and compromised by her very lack of substance, the archival hysteric is a material being as well as a metaphorical figure. Mary, who leaves her family and seeks out aboriginal company, is one such archival hysteric who is unable to fully function in Upper Canadian settler society. Mary's identity as a hysteric is formed through her Irish neighbours, the priest Father Quinn, the schoolteacher O'Malley, and the landlords Osbert and Grenville Sedgewick. After her "possession," Mary no longer speaks, but only sings quietly (22). Mary is described as being "touched" and "taken" (13). These terms suggest how the hysterical women in this text absorb the suffering of their people, thereby becoming hysteric. Others' emotions of guilt, sorrow, suffering, mourning, and desire transfer to these women in a one-directional absorption. They absorb but do not have an outlet. While Brian writes bad poetry on topical subjects

²⁰ In his book *Ojibway Heritage*, Basil Johnston describes the Manitou as the one "Who gave to us / The gifts we do not own / But borrow and pass on" (12).

(31), Mary is a poet without an outlet. Brian notes that “It was the one scholar with the gift [of poetry] that I was waiting for, who never came, to my very great sorrow” (73). Because of her gender, Brian is unable to recognize his wife as that very gifted scholar. While Mary knows that “it was in her also to twist a sentence into a song if she chose to sing at all,” her talent remains hidden until uncovered by her female descendents (75). Similarly, while Aidan dances for D’arcy McGee, Eileen does not express her creativity (21; 247). This creativity resurfaces in a later generation when Esther engages in storytelling; her story is what is to be “looked” at, rather than her body or her hysterical condition.

Permeable Boundaries, Postcolonial Guilt, and the Environmental Crisis

Sugars points to the guilty pleasure derived from enjoying Urquhart’s romanticization and effacement of colonial violence. The emotion that Sugars describes is post-colonial guilt: “*Away*’s haunting (and postcolonizing) of Canadian space is far from easy, for it dramatizes a conflict within the field of settler-invader postcolonialism itself: a conflict between an assertion of a postcolonial cultural-national identity and an awareness of the colonizing implications of such nationalist assertion” (Sugars 4). The anxiety of the settler-invader subject later manifests itself as postcolonial guilt in Mary’s twentieth-century descendent Esther. Esther experiences guilt in the form of ecological concern, acknowledging that there are ways to relate to the land outside of ownership and domination.

As *Away* participates in the paradox that accompanies and unsettles all retellings of nationhood, Sugars suggests that the novel is insufficiently self-critical and melancholic in its complicity. While *Away* can indeed be accused of providing “an insufficiently critical postcolonialism” (Sugars 6), the novel’s lack of self-awareness and melancholic tone are symptomatic of its protagonists’ condition. The frame story, which casts the novel as a warning to others, resists this complicity and provides an alternative to unproductive guilt. The novel straddles the fine line between fulfilling the desire for celebrating origins and addressing the guilt in the attendant violence.

Sugars notes that the novel's frame story takes the form of a warning of an ancestral curse. On her deathbed, Esther remembers the story of the curse of the mines that her grandmother, Eileen, told her when she was twelve. Sugars suggests that this curse is “the allure of the past” (9).²¹ Sugars aptly notes that this curse is both perpetuated and deflected through the process of narrative. This curse of the mines is also a curse of the “mind,” and inherited colonial guilt: “The story of ghostly possession serves as a metaphor for Eileen’s mother’s longing for home, for her inability to adjust to life in a new world.[...] Colonial dissonance is projected backward and envisioned as a curse handed down through the generations” (Sugars 19).²² Although her family perceives her as unable to adjust to her life in the new world, Mary does adjust well to life on the shores of Moira Lake, taking only what she needs for survival and forging a bond with Exodus,

²¹ The curse of the mines comes upon the family after Liam sells the family property to Osbert Sedgewick. Eileen finds gold in a stream on the property, leading towards the Black River, and the property inspires a small gold rush in Madoc Township.

²² The curse is also explicitly yoked with colonial oppression. As a child, Eileen sings about “wild colonial boys, the curse of Cromwell, cruel landlords, the impossibility of requited love, and the robbery of landscape while she built snow castles under the brilliant slanting sun” (199). Here, the curse of Cromwell refers to the oppression of the Irish.

who also cares for place. Where Urquhart does draw a similarity between the Irish and Ojibway experiences of colonialism under the British – a comparison that Sugars justifiably criticizes – it is framed as a warning about the future destruction of land: “‘She told me a frightening thing,’ said Exodus after several moments of quietness. ‘She told me that on the big island there were once forests as thick as those here in this land but that the old kings and lords of England had cut down each tree until only bare hills were left behind’” (184).

Away yokes post-colonial guilt with the fear of looming environmental crisis.

Caterina Ricciardi interprets Esther’s frame story as a tale of ecological colonization:

the reason for the frame story told by Esther, seeming to serve the literary device of a monologue-narration, is in fact to be found in its being a kind of dark chronicle of Esther’s last night at Loughbreeze. That chronicle actually follows another story: the story of the quarry nearby, i.e. of the destruction of the landscape, being brought to an *extreme* in 1982. The one hundred years of Canadian history end up there, in the complete and irreversible colonization of space. (66)

The novel shows us how we may be possessed by time and place, instead of possessing them. The hysterical figures seem to know this best, and perhaps too well. Their too-open boundaries allow them to be possessed more easily than others who guard their autonomous identity. While the novel seems to support a model of simplistic anti-industrialism, human progress and settlement possesses some positive characteristics and nature sometimes proves destructive. The archival hysteric, a material subject, is also a subject of time; Eileen thinks “of the long seasons that her mother had been away and how all that time was preserved, exposed, placid and frozen on her face” (337). The landscape, too, serves as an archive, collecting and storing memories for later recovery.

Esther's archive of her surroundings involves a systematization of landscape by familiar points of reference. These two European systems – creating a map of land and creating an archive of documents – are similar processes of knowledge creation, organization, and ownership of a collection that is meaningful to the creators. For Esther, the lake has swallowed up the evidence of human settlement. Yet traces still remain in nature. Esther “knows that were she to step into a boat and glide near the spot on a clear, calm day, she would be able to look over the gunwales and see the old pilings, waterlogged and green, wavering beneath the surface like an unconscious memory” (9). In this natural (and personal) archive lie Esther's memories of “a man, a few beloved horses, the possibility of children” (9). Affects become a part of the landscape, though the evidence may slowly disappear. Perhaps the subjective experience of a “haunted” landscape is a result of more material, energetic processes of absorption, with the disintegrating jetty preserving memories of love and love lost (9).²³

Esther further experiences her home as part of her natural archive; she experiences it is as permeable with the landscape, and active in a process of recording events, emotions, and the movements of weather:

Her house is solid but it as always responded to stimuli. Made of slender pine boards, lined with cedar, insulated with sawdust, it is alive with a forest life never experienced by walls of stone or brick or cement. When the vehement storms that mark the end of summer come tumbling in over the lake, each gust of wind, each eruption of thunder, is felt in the house's timbers, until, late at night, in the confusion of sleep, the women of this family have been known to believe that the house has *become* the storm; that some ancient quarrel is going on between that which is built and that which is untouched, and that the house

²³ The resort hotel that becomes buried by sand due to its low elevation reappears in *A Map of Glass*, showing Urquhart's fascination with disappearing traces of historical architecture.

might fling itself in a moment of anguish into the arms of its monstrous liquid neighbour. (5)

In this passage, the boundaries between emotional states and acts of nature, and between houses and bodies, become blurred and permeable.

The house, a symbol of human production, is not an enemy to the land, but instead works on a continuum with it: the ideal philosophy is to reposition human endeavour with nature, rather than against it. A house – a product of living nature turned into materials to ensure human comfort – attests to the connection between the human and natural world that is often overlooked; we learn from these women that a house deserves respect and consideration beyond the understanding of its use value as a building. The wood of these women's homes connects them to the forest and trees from which the planks were harvested. For the O'Malley women, home shelters the body, but is also an agent of relationship with the surrounding landscape. Every aspect of humankind's material life reveals our deep obligation to and reliance on nature.

We often assume that affective boundaries between humans and the non-human world are impermeable in nature, but Sugars suggests that postcolonial ghosts work to undo what we historically and psychically take most for granted (6). So do nineteenth-century archival hysterics. These boundary dissolutions can be devastating, as a complete breakdown of boundaries can lead to a loss of self; however, such dissolutions can also be generative, particularly as they instigate a selective rebuilding of healthy boundaries with a new awareness that such permeability exists. Like Almeda Roth and Grace Marks, the hysterics in Urquhart's novel possess permeable boundaries with others and the landscape. When Mary bathes in the sea while "away," she experiences the porous

boundaries of erotic love: “Her arms were full of him, he entered her and passed right through her. He enveloped her like her own skin and she a stone sinking under his weight [...] he was the exact spot where the sea touches land, the precise moment of the final reach of surf” (25). The experience of erotic love – a sort of madness that literally changes brain chemistry – serves to highlight the permeable nature of boundaries between humans (and nonhumans). Similarly, Eileen cannot distinguish between herself and Liam in their relationship of lust: “just before they began to make love, just before the frantic part when she didn’t know whether it was his breath or her own that she was hearing” (341). For Eileen, this boundary dissolution becomes devastating because it is based on false assumptions and fantasies about her lover, rather than truthful observance and understanding of him. When fantasy or misinterpretation overrule a relationship, boundary dissolutions can become harmful to the self.

Mary becomes hysterical, in part, because of boundaries that are too permeable. Bodies and landscapes also become inextricably and problematically intertwined. As Mary becomes hysterical, she merges with the landscape: “‘Landscape,’ Old Eileen had said to Esther, ‘shrank to a circle that could be measured by Mary’s arms, and in that circle the only familiarity was her own brown skirt swaying in a sea that had transformed itself into an undulating carpet of precious metal and wrinkled leaves’” (7). Landscape becomes embodied, as it is transformed into Mary’s armspan and clothing. While the landscape has been shrunk to the size of an armspan, this symbolically allows it to come within the realm of human understanding. Yet the hysteric’s overly permeable membrane here illustrates an extreme position that is not sustainable: nature is quite literally

embodied. Landscape and body bleed into each other, but this merging is reductive and restricts Mary's freedom. Similarly, while Brian reads to Mary, the world "absorbed her in exaggerated ways. Its vastness – continents, seas, and solar systems – described in the book seemed to break through the bounds of her body while she was reading" (62). This exaggerated absorption is destructive to Mary's sense of self, as her subjectivity has been formed too strongly by place. She becomes hysterical, or "away," because she is openly porous but does not acknowledge the permeability of her boundaries. Even in her death, Mary merges with the natural world around her:

By the time [Liam] had thumped the last nail onto the shallow, slim box, his mother was a silhouette standing on the shore of a shining expanse of water; one of several trees rooted in an alien landscape. (186)

While Liam tries to contain her in a coffin, Mary symbolically becomes part of the landscape, just as her physical body decomposes. However, the implications go beyond the symbolic: nature is granted agency. The land plays a role in human subjectivity, as much as human subjects act on the land.

Urquhart's hysterics particularly experience permeability between bodies and landscapes shaped around images of water, modeling the fluidity of intersubjective boundaries. Mary experiences a passionate sexual encounter with the sea/her sailor lover that enacts this kind of open permeability:

In her arms he was as cool and as smooth as beach stones, and behind him the water trembled and shone. When he entered her she was filled with aching sorrow. His cool flesh passed through her body and became the skin she would wear inside her skin. She heard the rocks of lakes and oceans rattle in the cavity of his skull and then in the cavity of her own skull. (84)

Here, body, mind, and sea merge in an undistinguishable triad. The sailor becomes a metaphor for the loss of her ancestral landscape, but also for the merging of human and nonhuman forms. The problem of open porosity is represented in Urquhart's passage that suggests the romanticized need for completion by the other; without her sailor lover, and his penetration, Mary is unable to hear the "rocks of lakes and oceans."

While the merging of body and landscape can have harmful effects on the self, this merging can also be positive. While Osbert is alienated from the land that he owns, oversees, and derives his living from, Mary's subjectivity, and her cells, are composed of matter derived from her environment. When Mary and Osbert are at the tidepool, he notes that "Everything about him had been manufactured somewhere else, in another country; everything, including his bones and the cellular construction of his flesh. She however, had been built out of the materials of this country" (91). His observation works both metaphorically and figuratively, as regenerating body cells are composed of the transformation of food, water, and air absorbed from the environment. (In other words, raw materials plus energy.)²⁴ Mary's mind and body have been constructed from – and their growth and development are influenced by – local environmental conditions, scents, memories, and ideologies. Similarly, when Mary walks through Grey Man's Path, "This coarse beauty – the ragged island offshore and the dark tumble of difficult coastal landscape – was implanted in her bones" (82). This understanding of both beauty and difficulty allows Mary to respect her surroundings in a way that Osbert does not. This merging of the human and nonhuman is suggested by other forms of energy, such as the

²⁴ Citing Birke, Alaimo notes that "Cells 'constantly renew themselves,' bone 'is always remodeling,' and 'bodily interiors' 'constantly react to change inside or out, and act upon the world'" (241).

senses, light, heat, and electricity. Before anyone recognizes the smell of the potato blight, Mary associates it with loss: “Mary recognized something in the air that made her think, for a moment, of cool white skin stretched over the muscle on an arm. The air smelled of loss – of beautiful absence.” (77). To Mary, the smell of the potato famine evokes the loss of her sailor. If subjectivity is not only rooted in place, but developed by place, then the philosophical divide between humans and their environments becomes erased. Transcorporeality, defined by Stacy Alaimo, as a “time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’” (238) is at work in Mary’s world. For Alaimo, transcorporeality can reconfigure human relationships with their environments, as “It makes it difficult to pose nature as a mere background for the exploits of the human, since nature is always as close as one’s own skin” (238). For Urquhart, the landscape is not only “always as close as one’s own skin” (Alaimo 238) but is also part of one’s skin.²⁵

In Urquhart’s depiction of Canada, its various cultural groups both bring with them traces of past geographies, and merge with the landscapes that become their new homes. Nature here is not static; its role in the development of human subjectivity is dynamic. As the divide is erased, we are encouraged to become response-able to our environments. If we are not response-able to our environments, then we are not response-

²⁵ In their study on strontium isotopes in bone and teeth, Beard and Johnson discovered that the isotope composition can be used “to infer the geographic region that an animal or human inhabited” because of the different compositions of strontium isotopes in different geographical regions (2000). Through their results, they were able to trace both the geographic origin and mobility of the animal or human. Beard, B.L. and C.M. Johnson. “Strontium Isotope Composition Skeletal Material Can Determine the Birthplace and Geographic Mobility of Humans and Animals.”

able to ourselves. *Away* shows us that, as much as we also rely on our bodies, we also rely on our landscapes for our psychic health.

The dynamics of viscosity support this response-ability between a subject and her environment. As we have seen, Nancy Tuana describes the mutually transformative interactions between bodies and the environment as “viscous porosity” (193). Her compelling metaphor speaks to the interactions between bodies and the environments that they inhabit, as well as influential environments that may be geographically distant.²⁶ Tuana explains, “There is a viscous porosity of flesh—my flesh and the flesh of the world. This porosity is a hinge through which we are of and in the world. I refer to it as viscous, for there are membranes that effect the interactions. These membranes are of various types—skin and flesh, prejudgements and symbolic imaginaries, habits and embodiments. They serve as the mediators of interaction” (200). All human and extra-human interactions, in one sense, are determined by varying levels of participation in and resistance to flow. What is key, here, is the term’s focus on *resistance* to flow. This viscous porosity acts, according to Tuana, as a mediator; for the archival hysteric, mediation occurs between body and mind, nature and culture, and past and present. The term, then, aptly describes the hysteric’s interactions with others as she begins to recover.

The bond between human and nature relies on mutual obligation, but the need for separateness exists as well as the experience of continuity. For instance, O’Brien uses the term “calibration” to suggest the way that nature and culture can be brought into balance; a balanced relationship between human and non-human worlds is necessary to

²⁶ In reference to Hurricane Katrina (2005), Tuana shows how political decisions, human generated toxins, and natural forces played a role in shaping the bodies and lives of citizens of New Orleans.

acknowledge the true agency of both. Mary cannot possess a personal identity if she is completely unified with nature. Through the simultaneous connection and separation of body and landscape, both the female body and the landscape can be granted agency. No longer simply resources, they are active forces that have power to transform; they may help or harm, and may behave in an orderly or disruptive manner.

According to the novel, the dissolution of boundaries between humans and landscape can be destructive, but is ultimately instructional. Exodus tells Mary “that her hair contained the light of the rising and the setting sun and by that she was blessed” (180). He senses the positive effects of such connection between the human and natural world. Understanding subjectivity this way – as a human and non-human process that relies on interaction between human bodies and environments – has the potential to bring about change in the social world: hysteria is no longer a deviant position, but a state of becoming that has much to teach us about our relations with the material world. Understood within a material feminist account of subjectivity, the archival hysteric is a figure that teaches us how to relate ethically to ourselves, others, and the landscape.

Recovery, Witnessing, Responsibility, Sympathy, and Love

Like Atwood’s *Alias Grace*, *Away* presents an alternate model of identity formation that goes beyond the framework of recognition to a model that relies on witnessing and response-ability. When engaging in ethical relationship, one is responsive rather than reactive, and makes a space to foster the ability of the other to respond. Living in responsibility to one’s environment can foster the process of recovery.

Against expectations, Urquhart does not contrast being away with coming home. Returning home is not necessarily the means to achieving recovery.²⁷ Instead, Eileen tells Esther “For God’s sake...stay where you are, be where you are” (12). The dichotomy in *Away* is not between away and home, but between being away and being where you are. “Be where you are” is an invocation to be in your body and to be in the landscape rather than to own it: to respond to the landscape, and to acknowledge the landscape’s response to you. Esther recalls her grandmother Eileen conveying a warning: “By the time I finish this story you will have decided to hug the land – the real earth – the trees in the orchard, the timbers of this house. You will have decided never to go away” (9). While Esther herself flirted with “awayness” in the love-madness resulting from a relationship with a sailor, she does not remain away but partially recovers. Eileen tells Esther: “He was the energy of the real moment while I was always turning the moment into something else altogether. You have this gift in you, the ability to be where you are, but I am in you as well and there will be times when you want to drift away. No more of this drifting” (355). By privileging the “real earth” and the “real moment,” Eileen invokes the material as a place of recovery for hysterical women. Being where you are suggests an alternative to ownership. This understanding of place relies upon belonging in whatever place one currently is existing within; one does not own land, but is shaped and determined by the land one is existing in relationship with. Despite learning this, Eileen does not recover. Although Eileen returns to the safety of her home, she says, “I’ve given up on outer

²⁷ In fact, a hysteric may simultaneously be home and away. Eileen does not find recovery in her return home: “So this is what it is to be away, her mother’s voice told her. You are never present where you stand. You see the polished dishes in your kitchen cupboard throwing back the hearth light, but they know neither you nor the meals you have taken from their surfaces” (345).

worlds [...] I live on an otherworld island. I'm going to lie down in my large room where I can see the lake" (346). Eileen remains in a state of hysteria, saying as an old woman to Esther: "I hold still in my otherworld and let your world rock and tilt and veer" (348). It is ironic that, despite living by turbulent waters, Eileen remains largely unmoved by a flow of energy that may help her heal.

The "love-mad" hysterics in the text who undergo partial recovery do so through witnessing and love. The partial recoveries of the love-mad women illustrate the difference between relationships based on sympathy and recognition and those based on witnessing. While the archival hysteric's initial identity is based on recognition by others, her recovery occurs by way of an ethical relationship. Eileen tells Esther, "Try to understand, but try not to interpret. [...] Any interpretation is a misinterpretation" (12). While this provides a challenge to any academic interpreter, Oliver recommends a process of interpretation that is, in fact, compatible with Eileen's vision: "Only through this process of continual reinterpretation and reassessment can we be vigilant in an attempt to think through our blind spots and transform ourselves and our culture" (218). Oliver's introduction of continual repetition brings a flexibility and openness to the concept of interpretation; while interpretation fixes, continual reinterpretation works towards understanding. With her emphasis on understanding, which moves beyond sympathy, Eileen underscores the novel's emphasis on the affective content of being "away" in all of its senses. Esther's reaction to her grandmother's story models responsibility. When listening to the story, "She was being shocked and moved and shamed by skin and ribs and collarbones, just as, later in the story, she would be tossed and shaken

by the gestures of a young dancer” (15). She responds viscerally, as the story of the sailor’s “skin and ribs and collarbones” literally moves her body to replicate traces of the emotions of the initial actors within the story. Esther’s response here models response-ability, as she both emotionally and physically responds to her Grandmother’s act of witnessing.

Mary begins the O’Malley family’s journey to recovery, as she attempts to purge herself of guilt by leaving civilization and rejecting her role in the imperial power structure. Is Mary, however, like Atwood’s narrator in *Surfacing*, reenacting “one of the classic gestures of colonial appropriation in order to escape her own identity, claiming the purity and authenticity of a Native subjectivity” (Fiamengo 150)? Her act of “indigenisation” is clearly problematic, as she does seek to appropriate Indigenous authenticity, but she in fact does not achieve healing through her experience. While Mary’s behaviour might be interpreted as a native spirit quest, she has shown herself to possesses a conflicted subjectivity throughout the novel; this is yet another example of her conflict. As the novel shows, neither the land nor the hysteric can rid itself of woundedness. There is an ultimate realization at the end of the novel that the land cannot be restored to its wholeness or original state before invasion. However, people can learn to live on the land in less destructive ways.

Mary begins to recover when her identity is based on witnessing rather than recognition. Mary begins to restore her intersubjective boundaries in her relationship with Exodus as she distances herself from Brian, yet retains the mythology of her Irish background, identifying herself with Deirdre for whom “the branch of one tree could

gladden her heart” (184).²⁸ She feels she must live by the spirit of Moira Lake, who “shares [her] name” (181). By this point, Mary is no longer solely inhabited by the environment and by thoughts of a lover, but also by her own needs and by a drive to co-exist with, and love and be loved by, nature. Mary learns to respond to stories that Exodus tells her, embracing him without absorbing his pain and suffering. She sends her story for her children to hear, and returns to them in death; Exodus returns both her body and her story to her family. Exodus tells them, “before she died, she told me to go to her children and tell them her story” (175). Although Liam is initially resistant both to Exodus and to his mother’s story, through the act of storytelling, the energy flow between bodies is restored. Exodus tells Mary’s children that “Her story will move through me as easily as a wind through the pines of the forest” (175). Invoking the spirit quest of Nishnawbe tradition, Exodus tells Liam, “If you hear your mother’s story it will be the same as seven long days and nights in the forest alone, you will be cold and afraid, but when you have heard her story it will be as if you had reached out and touched your own adulthood” (176). Liam learns about himself through this story; during Exodus’s visit, Liam tries to assist the cow, Moon, in calving (192). Exodus must step in to resuscitate the calf: “he placed his mouth over one of the cow’s nostrils and exhaled slowly” (193). While Liam is scared by this birth event, he participates in an act of shared mothering. He vomits afterward, but this scene represents a change in Liam’s acceptance of both his mother and Exodus, as he makes a search for Exodus each spring, realizing that “No longer a beast

²⁸ She identifies her love of nature with the story of Dierdre, who “had lived happily in the forest with three warrior brothers, one of whom she loved, until a bad king had killed them, and how she had died of sorrow” (184).

who had swallowed his mother whole, the forest became, if not a lover, almost a friend” (197).

While, at times through the novel, “Indianness” gets represented “as merely a phase that the white narrator must pass through on her route to self-realization” (Fiamengo 150), this usurping identity project does not ultimately work, as Mary is ultimately unsuccessful in her healing. She does not establish a full ethical relationship with Exodus, though she tries to. Mary seeks to connect with Exodus, telling him, “The same trouble stayed in the hearts of both our peoples” (185). Here, Mary does not acknowledge her own family’s (and nation’s) participation in the settler-invader project. As Sugars puts it, “To link Irish oppression prior to their arrival in Canada with the near genocide of Canadian aboriginal peoples is to mix contexts in such a way that Native oppression *within* Canada becomes obliterated” (111). While Mary attempts to act as a witness to the suffering of Exodus Crow and his people, she does not engage in both kinds of eyewitnessing: she relates their oppression to her own experience, but she does not “see” that which is beyond her own experience.

Yet Mary’s partial recovery occurs during her attempt to develop an ethical relationship with Exodus Crow and with her environment. When she begins her partial recovery, Mary takes moral, physical, and emotional responsibility for herself as a priority. It is not only Mary’s hysteria that enacts resistance, in fact, but also her responsibility developed during her recovery. On the shores of Moira Lake, Exodus is the only one who perceives her as responsible in her relationship to the land rather than lacking in

self-control. While Liam remains bitter about his mother's abandonment,²⁹ Exodus displays understanding. The relationship is based on ethical practices rather than ethical principles; that is, her behaviours arise from material realities and have material consequences. For instance, Exodus Crow expresses his relationship with Mary by bringing her firewood to help keep her warm (183).³⁰ Conversely, Mary learns to cope in the wilderness and shares stories with Exodus, telling him about the myth of Deirdre, and the history of Ireland (184). The stories that Mary shares are based on the material realities of the eroding forests, and political privation in Ireland.

When Mary tells Exodus that she loves and is loved by the spirit of Moira Lake, she asks "Do you believe me?" (181). Exodus does believe her and understands the sailor as her spirit-guide. Exodus Crow signals the connection between the O'Malley women and their changing relationships with the land. Exodus reveals that he was named after the bible, but "The book called Exodus [...] was not worthy of its name because it was filled with battles for land and the making of laws" (175). Exodus Crow is representative of this tension between ownership and freedom. When Osbert arrives in the New World, Eileen asks the crow, "'Is this landlord the one you said would come?'" [...] he told her that there were no landlords, there were no lords of the land" (222). It is not a coincidence that years later, while listening to McGee's speech in the legislature about an ideal Canada, Eileen remembers the crow. Hearing about "A sweeping territory, free of wounds, belonging to all, owned by no one" (338) provokes Eileen's previously shaky memory to

²⁹ Liam represents the colonial drive to clear and settle, which he enacts as he grows up.

³⁰ Critics such as Sugars and Omhovere have noted Urquhart's depiction of Exodus Crow as an exoticized figure. Like Mary, he inhabits a romanticized world of sensation and affinity with nature rather than a world of reason. Sugars suggests that *Away* "enacts a conflict between an oppositional postcolonial revisionism and a form of nostalgic neo-colonial revival" (102).

recall Exodus Crow: “the privacy within the curtains of a willow, a dialogue with a blue-black bird. This, and a kind of music breaking into meaning. The words in the room had become like that, a significant message carried on cadence. [...] There was a man [...] called Exodus Crow. He knew things. He told me once – a long time ago – he told me there were no lords of the land” (338). *Away* here enacts a problematic portrayal of idealized native spirituality. Troublingly, the novel portrays native characters as non-human: being native is either a non-human state, as in Exodus Crow’s existence as a bird, (194) or a superhuman state, as in Molly’s excess strength and fertility. Just as Urquhart portrays identity in relation to others as moving from recognition and dominance to responsibility, she similarly depicts a changing identity in relation to the land; her stereotypical portrayal of native spirituality is problematic in its accuracy and reliance on a simplified model of aboriginal relationship to the land. However, it does illustrate Urquhart’s interest in the interrelationship between the human and non-human world.³¹

Upon her return in death, Mary does bring together two cultures. When Brian and Exodus bury Mary, there is a sharing of cultures, with “Exodus chanting words in his native tongue, Brian saying the rosary in Latin” (187). We learn here that genuine reciprocity may involve difference; Brian learns to respect what he views as the other, without attempting to participate in or claim his rites.

Love similarly fosters understanding between humans and their environments. Osbert Sedgewick, the Irish landlord, expresses the novel’s alternative vision of love outside of domination. While the initial interaction between Mary and Osbert represents a

³¹ Liam sees his mother as becoming birch trees, and part of the forest, after her death.

typical nineteenth-century scene of sympathy, with Osbert categorizing her as one of “these people,” their conversation about their shared landscape does change their dynamic (88). When Mary asks Osbert why he is collecting specimens, he is forced to question his own work, attitudes, and relationship to the land: “Not one of his tenants had ever questioned him like this” (89). Osbert is initially “annoyed,” but he begins to engage with her curiosity, telling her “There are many different kinds [...] and they can be very difficult, sometimes, to see” (89). Osbert here reveals that recognition of otherness, based on the sense of sight, cannot always account for the variability within human and nonhuman existence. Just as we must make room for other senses in human relationships, so must our relationships with landscape involve a wider range of sensory experiences.

Osbert learns from Mary in an ethical relationship where each one sees the other beyond their fixed subject positions. Osbert ultimately learns from her to see tidepools as interconnected networks of life that should not be destroyed. When he mistakes Eileen for Mary in the Canadian bush, he tells her, “I left everything alone, you know, didn’t alter anything” (216). Osbert further tells Liam that his mother

changed something in me. I wasn’t in love with her but she changed something in me. Granville, my brother, could never comprehend it – though he wanted her story, you understand. We collected folklore. He thought he loved the legends – but you can’t love something you don’t believe in and he never believed a word of it. (219)

Granville’s notion of an archive includes ownership and domination over the other, be it human, nature, or narrative. In contrast, Osbert learns from Mary to reconfigure his encounters with land, history, and others as dynamic relationships based in love. By

pointing out that he was not “in love” with Mary in the traditional romantic love relationship, he alludes to a fuller connotation of love here.

While Mary strives to engage in ethical relationships with Exodus, Osbert, and the land around her, Esther partially heals as she tries to understand her own role in the further subjection of people and land. As Sugars writes, “The curse of ‘awayness’ that is passed down through the women of the family is therefore the curse of nostalgia or a gaze that looks elsewhere (hence a book that is itself being nostalgic critiques the ‘awaying’ allure of nostalgia).” (107). Esther’s partial recovery helps her to come to understand that she cannot gain absolution for the violence that her family and cultural descendants inflicted on First Nations Peoples and the Canadian landscape, because she is necessarily implicated in it. Even the great white house in which Esther dies is a symbol of her role in a system of land ownership.

The process of partial recovery suggests a model of subject formation that reframes self and other as selectively porous, and helps to address issues of colonial guilt. The healing women are no longer objects, but are not fully autonomous subjects either. These healing women do not see themselves as self-sovereign, but as part of a complex interdependency with others and their environment. Moving beyond colonial guilt involves moving beyond labels and beyond a theory of subject formation that relies upon difference and recognition. The novel reveals the power of identity labels such as settler, hysteric, Irish, and Ojibway. As Mary learns to read and write, “finally she was able to write the word ‘away’ on her slate without looking up and around to determine whether

its awful power had caused the calm solidity of the evening to disintegrate and waves to wash over the cabin” (61). A label falsely solidifies what is a viscously porous condition.

The novel finally teaches that the porosity between bodies must be acknowledged in order for healing to occur.³² Esther recognizes that “by giving her this story all those years ago her grandmother Eileen had caused one circle of experience to edge into the territory of another. The child that Esther had been had drawn circles like this with her compass when she was in school, had shaded with her pencil the place where the two circles intersected” (133). Esther’s explanation of two intersecting circles of experience demonstrates her understanding of individual selves that bleed into one another – shared yet distinct.

While the love-mad woman of the nineteenth century relied upon her lost lover’s recognition for identity, *Away* repositions love as a bridge to otherness. Love goes beyond the sense of sight:

The loving eye is critical in that it demands to see what cannot be seen; it vigilantly looks for signs of the invisible process that gives rise to vision, reflection, and recognition. The loving eye is a critical eye in that it insists on going beyond recognition towards otherness. (Oliver 219)

Love is part of an energy flow and is in a constant state of flux: “When love or the beloved becomes fixed, stable, recognizable, part of an economy of exchange, then love cannot be maintained” (Oliver 220). The love-mad hysteric reflects women fixed in an economy of production. The return of the viscous flow of emotions helps the women in

³²

In an interview with Laura Ferri, Urquhart speaks to literature’s ability to foster empathy: “Literature is what helps us understand the experience of the other; it can take us, perhaps, into the minds and hearts of people who are so injured by what has happened – the kind of North American take-over of the universe – that they are driven to desperate acts, and, also, can take us into the minds and hearts of people who quite innocently are going about their lives developing an economic system in which they believe” (Ferri 24).

Away in their self-recovery (see Oliver 219) and provides an alternate way for addressing postcolonial guilt rather than despair. Being “love-mad” in fact means that the woman fixes love in a static, and often fantasy-based, state. Eileen’s love for Aidan is part of a drama of her own creation, with Aidan playing a fantastical role (293). In her hysteria, Eileen cannot recognize the love between Liam and his wife Molly: “She had lost the ability to recognize contentment” (300).

The four generations of the O’Malley women work against the nineteenth-century degeneracy myth and provide a model of female foremothers, as in Munro’s story, even though hysteria clearly runs through the family. Sugars suggestively notes that it is Liam’s family line, not Eileen’s that goes on to populate Canada. However, Mary, Eileen and Esther model the work of preservation through offspring, but also through love for foremothers. By replacing the degeneracy model with one of learning from foremothers (biological and otherwise), a difficult yet also sensual identification with the body is passed down from woman to woman.

Esther learns from her foremothers that nothing actually offers an escape from the inherited “curse” of white settler guilt. Just as Janice Fiamengo notes about Atwood’s *Surfacing*, “in a postcolonial context, the theft of aboriginal territory is the repressed memory that haunts the text” (149). In addition, the text is haunted by the hysterical archive of female displacement. Signs of conquest continue to exist into Esther’s present. For instance, the artifacts invested with her emotions in the white house include “thin glass under which rests a lock of black hair, braided together with a red-golden tress and fashioned into a circle...a bone hairpin around which is twined a single long thread of the

same red-golden hair, a shard of turquoise china, and one black feather, old, torn, seemingly neglected” (20). Hair, bone, china, and feather come together to evoke memory but the aboriginal artifact is “seemingly neglected.” *Away* is here perceptive in its demonstration of a conflicted postcolonial consciousness in the emerging ecological crisis of 1990s Canada.

While the characters undergo private processes of recovery, their transformations do not translate to the public stage of national crises. While she is able to achieve partial personal healing, reparation for colonial violence is not achieved on a broader scale. Similarly, Esther’s hysteria finally represents her eco-critical passivity. Her feelings remain stuck in suffering while the landscape around her is slowly destroyed. Instead of experiencing the movement of love, Esther is mired in the stagnancy of despair. Esther’s sense of guilt lies partly in her inability to do anything about the cement company around her: “In Esther’s lifetime she has seen architecture die violently. It has been demolished, burned, ripped apart, or buried. Nothing reclaims it. Just as the earth at the quarry is wounded beyond all recognition and no one remembers the fields that flourished there” (135). Recognition and dominance lie at the heart of the destructive relationship with the earth. The novel ends on a negative note, as the “scream of the machinery intensifies” (356). The activities of the cement company employees who work on the land are foreboding:

The midnight men begin their tasks, these summer nights, under a thick carpet of stars they rarely notice, their machines being so powerfully exposed by other forms of light that everything beyond the glare is a black wall...the noise they make is strong and relentless, and, because the wind and lake are often calm on summer nights, all pervasive. They are out of step with the rhythms of the rest of

the world.[...] They represent the most dangerous kind of shape changers: those who cannot see, because of darkness, beyond the gesture of the moment. (237)

Esther witnesses these men who are detached from the long-term results of their actions and lack a sense of wonder in the natural world.

The female hysterics all move, with varying degrees of success, from positions of psychological hysteria to acknowledging their responsibility to others. The novel highlights the problems of being away, in multiple senses, and the lack of responsibility that comes with the condition. There is no triumphant recovery, but a tentative repositioning of self and other. Esther only partially recovers as she realizes that the land and the house do not belong to her. Instead, they are the landscape upon which she acknowledges her familial complicity in colonial violence. Even as *Away* ends, as Ricciardi notes, uncannily with a scream (77), it resists an easy reconciliation of guilt, as it incites discomfort in its readers in the final paragraph. A complete understanding of the violence imposed by imperial culture – to land, to women, to aboriginal people and culture – may not be possible. As Oliver writes, “Love is not something we choose once and for all. Rather, it is a decision that must be constantly reaffirmed through the vigilance of ‘self-reflection’” (221). Recovery does not then mean wholeness; recovery instead involves a transformation towards greater awareness, the recognition of boundaries, and empathy through a life lived in ethical relationship with others and with the land.

The novel is ultimately ambivalent in its solution to postcolonial guilt. The ethical relationship is an idealized social interaction; the novel portrays an imagined relationship that can *only* take place in the imagination. Urquhart suggests that while Canadians

cannot retroactively return to the nineteenth century and rewrite the colonial relationship as one of learning, cultural exchange, and love, moments of affective and cultural exchange do hold imaginative potential to recover relations. By modeling the ethical relationship, *Away* promotes responsible behaviour for the future, and encourages twentieth and twenty-first century readers to rethink their relationship to their environment, other cultures, and First Nations history that may have become obscured through time and colonial effacement. Esther's story is staged as a call to rethink how we conceive of our own subjecthood, and the processes that we undergo to achieve subjectivity. Urquhart has said in interview with Laura Ferri that "The imagination will be very important, I think, in upcoming times, simply because... the only way that we really come to grips with other cultures, and other spiritual points of view, is by allowing our imaginations to enter the experiences of the 'other'" (Ferri 25). The imagination is pivotal in carrying out the work of partial recovery.

Afterward

In the preceding chapters, I have shown how that the archival hysteric is an embodied subject in addition to a metaphorical figure. Yet we are still left with a seeming lack of material bodies in texts. Texts, after all, are material objects rich with symbolic force, but lacking in literal animating features. How might we figure this apparent contradiction? By viewing the body in terms of its energy circulation, we are able to examine the bodily traces that exist in the textual world of books and archives. Bodies are not absent here, just as materiality cannot be separated from an examination of hysteria. The intersection of the main terms of this thesis – the archive, hysteria, sympathy, and the mindbody – enables us to reconfigure forms of female subjectivity that allows for a flexible notion of the body. An archival hysteric becomes hysterical through dysfunction in bodily systems and through storying processes, by which her physical and emotional behaviours become perceived as part of a pathological condition. Because both pathways work in concert, according to Hacking's biolooping model, either may be the precipitating factor for dis-ease. And so it follows with the process of recovery. This helps to explain why treatment for mild depression, one of the many contemporary analogues to hysteria, may involve a complex combination of medication and psychotherapy, as well as lifestyle and social modifications (Wilson 2008).

The act of witnessing allows us to reconcile both stories and bodies in the shaping of identity; models of social constructionism and embodied subjectivity can work together, as in Hacking's looping model. Witnessing relies upon the use of the body and

mind together; yet the absence of one is not enough to obscure the machinations of its counterpart. For instance, the absence of a physical body in a letter written in Upper Canada in 1865 does not obscure the machinations of the mind behind the letter; the mind's presence brings traces of the body into the future. As Thomas Osborne writes, "archives have beginnings but not origins [...] they are both controlled by gatekeepers and worked upon, are never innocent but yet still oriented towards a space of public contestation, towards a never-ceasing politics; oriented—one is tempted to say dialogically—towards some or other kind of recipient, the future" (56). The novels give us a nuanced way of rereading hysteria, and the partial recovery of hysterics, as a model for future ethical relationships. The body is part of a broader dialogue; it is not simply a material presence but an agent of intellectual and sensory power – thus a mindbody. While distressed by her lover's abandonment, Eileen burns a mark in the wooden floor by dropping an iron. This mark that Eileen leaves in the floorboards "was evidence of her own emotion; the moment of contact with the dream" (Urquhart 287). This mark, in effect, acts as a future witness to Eileen's suffering. Oliver's model of othered subjectivity in fact relies upon the storytelling that is key to the novels around which I have focused my discussion of hysteria. Fiction participates in the act of witnessing, acting as testimony.

The researcher's complex relationship to the archival subject betrays a fear of human mortality; objects, letters, maps, photographs, and artifacts retain something of the person who owned, wrote, or created them. When encountering traces of the other that bear witness to that which is beyond recognition – the pastness of the past – the ethical

researcher encounters her own fear of loss of body and loss of mind. While the fictional researcher figure recovers archival hysterics in the process of constructing her own subjectivity, she also models empathy and the ethical relationship. Playing against the nineteenth-century model of sympathy that Jaffe elegantly outlines, the fictions I have studied make a step towards organic empathy: an emphasis on understanding rather than interpretation that is rooted in the mindbody. Eileen realizes that Patrick “was the energy of the real moment while I was always turning the moment into something else altogether. Inventing it. Interpreting it” (355). Interpretation is prone to errors and power struggles, while understanding is part of the adventure in otherness. Yet the act of continual reinterpretation that occurs within the ethical relationship allows us to reconcile the related processes of interpreting and understanding. The exercise of organic empathy can be an act that prevents future madness.

A recovering subject who changes the framework in which he/she perceives him/herself and others is engaged in a political act. If she sees others as fully separate individuals and imagines herself untouched by their life experiences, sufferings, triumphs, and emotions, she may become confused in her relationships with others. Like Grace Marks, she may hold overly permeable boundaries, where everything gets in. Or, on the other hand, she may hold inflexible solid boundaries that keep her own feelings in and others’ out. If she directs this confusion inward, she may become angry, sad, fatigued, or inexplicably unwell (“hysterical”) and may be unable to acknowledge how these exterior, and seemingly random emotions have arisen. If, on the other hand, she directs confusion outward, she may feel threatened and become hostile, cold, or display verbal or physical

abuse towards her perceived opponents. However, if she acknowledges her dependence upon other subjects and on her environment, and also sets up semi-permeable boundaries, she more fully accepts her responsibility to listen. A similar process occurs with her environments. If she perceives herself as keeping strict boundaries with her neighbourhood – the chemicals released in the laying of her asphalt, the small ecosystem in the treed cemetery across the street, the spray on the lawn, and the farms a short distance away – she is both negating her interactions with and her responsibility to the land in which she lives, works, and plays. The novels encourage a thoughtful engagement rather than a fully separate existence.

Creating and reading (co-creating) fiction is part of the process of response in the ethics of responsibility. We tell our own stories, and as responsible listeners, we also respond “to the others and for the others” (Bergo 206). The archival researcher ideally balances personal drives with such a response. Oliver’s model of subjectivity illuminates the discussions of female hysteria that Munro, Urquhart, and Atwood engage in, as Oliver’s philosophical project is similarly engaged in the processes of becoming a subject. The archival project, too, is a process of recovery, or “re-becoming.” The moment of recognition, or the scene of sympathy, relies upon a limited understanding of vision which, in light of research in neuropsychology, is simply no longer tenable. Like Oliver, the fictions critique what Bettina Bergo calls “the monolithic logic at work in theories of subjection, which explain the genesis of a subject in terms of subordination and the need for acknowledgment” (205). Oliver’s model of subject formation is so compelling because it is concerned with face-to-face relationships and the workings of

socio-political equity. Her model is thus relevant to understanding the recovery of the othered subject, be it in a colonial, environmental, or hysterical context. Our notion of subjectivity must change in order to produce changes in a model based on human relations that involve domination and violence. As Oliver puts it, “How we conceive of ourselves determines how we act and how we conceive of, and treat, other peoples. If we conceive of subjectivity as a process of witnessing that requires response-ability and address-ability in relation to other people, especially through difference, then we will also realize an ethical and social responsibility to those others who sustain us” (Oliver 19). We will realize a responsibility not only to those others, but to our environments as well. Technological and political solutions are being pursued as solutions to the environmental crisis; these goals are both valuable and necessary, but to be effectively mobilized, a change in the way that humans view themselves must accompany these advancements. Altering our views of subjectivity and the body can change the problem of unethical relations.

Oliver’s writing, like many feminist projects more generally, is inclined towards utopian thinking (Bergo). She desires a transformation of relations between self and other. Oliver’s model provides us with an ethical approach to reading texts, as well as bringing together the human and non-human world, that enables readers to “practice” response-ability. The politics of witnessing fosters a respect for differences, both between humans, and between humans and their environments. It does so by enabling a transformation of both participants in the ethical relationship. Nature is an active force: “Nature can no longer be imagined as a pliable resource for industrial production or social construction.

Nature is agentic—it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman world” (Alaimo and Hekman 5).

As we saw in *Away*, Esther's feelings of anger, despair, and nostalgia (or solastalgia) result from the earth's woundedness. Glenn Albrecht's article published in *Australasian Psychiatry* (2007) defines the term solastalgia to describe “environmentally induced distress” which he uses in connection with the loss of environmental features and characteristics due to global warming. This condition “is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment” (S95). Albrecht's work studies drought and coal mining in New South Wales, Australia. Albrecht discovered that “In both cases, people exposed to environmental change experienced negative affect that is exacerbated by a sense of powerlessness or lack of control over the unfolding change process” (S95). Classed as a type of “Psychoterratic illness,” this new term explores human psychic distress resulting from environmental loss, while at the same time illustrating the current desire to diagnose all distressing mental states. Alternative forms of recovery, outside of traditional psychiatric models, may provide productive ways of healing contemporary hysteria-like ailments. For instance, the field of ecopsychology “seeks to heal the more fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment” (Roszak 320). Ecopsychology, in fact, shares many similar aims with material feminism, including breaking down dualist thinking in the field of psychology, and bridging the space between the human and natural worlds.

The novels promote a way of relating to one another where understanding and organic empathy replace sympathy. *Away's* epigraph is a paradoxical Irish triad: “The three most short-lived traces: the trace of a bird on a branch, the trace of a fish on a pool, and the trace of a man on a woman” (n.p.). This paradox reveals how such traces are simultaneously short-lived and held long-term, as in an archive. Wounds inflicted on nature and on people remain. The three traces that define the novel – a bird on a branch, a fish on a pool, and a man on a woman – underscore the porosity of an individual with her human and natural environment.

Sanity and recovery are often culturally perceived as the admirable but artistically boring cousins to madness. *Alias Grace* deliberately confounds expectations in its portrayal of the nineteenth-century female hysteric by moving beyond sympathy and bringing the senses to bear on her condition. While moving beyond sympathy, “Meneseung” and *Away* return to a somewhat more stereotypical, romanticized portrayal of the archival hysteric. Like the O'Malley women, Almeda is a hysteric and a sensitive poet who leaves a legacy of her art behind through the work of fiction. Yet they accomplish something fundamentally similar: an underlying interest in an ethics of sanity realized through the recovery process. In these novels, there is tension between the theatre of hysteria and the quotidian of recovery. In *Away*, Eileen is attracted to the drama of hysteria: she “believed that she was one of them, that Aidan Lanighan’s touch had guaranteed her a role in the theatre, the performances, that made up their lives” (293). When Osbert thinks about the O'Malley family’s new freedom in Canada, he “did not know that there was an inner theatre where a girl could build a prison. He did not see

Eileen translating from myth to life the songs her father had taught her” (296).¹ Hysteria, taking place within the theatre of the mindbody, lends itself to dramatic storytelling for the author. While hysteria offers narrative complexity, recovery lends narrative structure. The recovery process in these works is not afforded the drama of a Freudian working through; in fact, recovery here involves the day-to-day hard work of revisiting memories, behavioural adaptation, and re-education. In *Alias Grace*, the recovery scene plays the role of a false climax; here, mesmerism, revelation, and recovery turn out to be fraudulent. Unlike the strange, unpredictable, sexual, and sometimes gender-bending antics of the hysterical subject, the subject in recovery is involved in a rethinking of selfhood, restructuring of boundaries, and the resulting change in behaviour.

Urquhart, Munro, and Atwood show us in these fictions that the process of recovery hinges on the witnessing involved in storytelling. As Wilson shows us, “The choice between Freud and Prozac, between talking and ingesting, is turning out to be less ideologically and medically definitive than we have been led to believe in the postwar, post-Freudian, pro-pharmaceutical years of the twentieth-century” (Wilson 2008, 387). The realms of the biochemical and the psychological are “ontologically connate” (Wilson 2008, 386). By reconceiving of the body and mind as the mindbody, we can understand why healing through one pathway will lead to healing in the other.²

¹ Jennifer Henderson suggests that Anna Jameson perceived Upper Canada in the terms of heterotopic space with which she was most familiar – the English theater: “an exceptional space that permits women to practice a transformative work on the self, unconstrained by the dictates of social custom” (8). Henderson uses Foucault’s definition of a heterotopic space as an enacted utopia that, like a mirror, reflects back upon the observer (7).

² Returning to Freud, Wilson cites the relationship between both realms as a transference logic (2008, 389). That is, dysfunctions in the body such as “fatigue, poor appetite, guilt, and hopelessness are the result of losses—not of objects or organs themselves—but of relations to objects and organs. It follows,

Making a space for the material body within hysterical discourses is important in revisiting hysteria. The fictions illustrate Elizabeth Wilson's argument that "The biological disintegration of mood is a breakdown, not of the brain per se, or the liver or the gut, but of the relations amongst organs" (2008 385). Hysteria is a systemic breakdown of the mindbody. Wilson suggests that the "pharmaceutical treatment of depression has to be the management of—not of a place or center or even a neurological pathway—but of an organic capacity to connect" (2008 385). She terms this capacity for bodily systems and organs to connect "organic empathy." Not only can the mindbody develop its capacity to connect within, but also with other people and its environments. The materiality of the body is an active force. Our environment is not only the wilderness of the Canadian Bush, but our homes, our city streets, our archives, and our bodies. A reconceptualization of the body is counterpart to a reconceptualization of nature that makes room for the material nature of both. In his description of the self-regulating systems model, Richard B. Miles notes the work of physiologist Claude Bernard in understanding disease as "an indication of dysfunction in a connected, self-regulating, and self-healing life system." (8). While this model is gaining more acceptance in Canadian society, the older "warrior model" of disease, based on difference, dominance, and mastery, still maintains a hold on some medical thought and on the public imagination.³ An empathic understanding between bodily systems is not only a metaphor for human interaction but a biological reality.

then, that dysthymic states can be most successfully ameliorated by restoring relationality in both emotional and organic registers" (Wilson 2008, 390).

³ Miles cites language such as the "war on cancer" and the "fight against aids" as telling military analogies that bolster this view (8).

My approach addresses the loss of the material in much feminist thinking, and considers how the material can become political. As Wilson writes, “The capacity for transformation—the sine qua non of politics as it is usually understood—is already native to biological substrata” (Wilson 2008, 378). For instance, Wilson ultimately finds that SSRIs do not act on the brain but in fact “reanimate affinities between organs,” promoting what she terms organic empathy. To revisit the work of Ian Hacking, discourse and matter are not separate entities. It has become clear throughout this thesis that this work involves rethinking the nature of materiality itself. When we begin to think of matter as flexible material – particularly, as a form of energy circulation involved in sensory (and, more debatably, extra-sensory perceptions) – then it no longer remains discrete from discourse. The “constructed” and the “real” converge.

A feminist focus on the female body is not new. Invoking the work of Laura Chrisman, Jennifer Henderson writes that “an imperialist discourse already imbued with the logic of political economy in the first half of the nineteenth century came to refocus itself on an economy that was centred on the *physical* body; the foregrounding of feminine ‘life-force’ and ‘womb-power’ that this investment in the body entailed did not replace the earlier rhetoric of political economy but rather folded it within a new construction of society as a biological organism” (17). The physical female body has been used to the ends of various political projects.⁴ The fictions allow us to see that some

⁴ For instance, the Durham Report was shaped around “campaign of internal purification” in the colony (Henderson 22); also see p. 27. While this ideological campaign involved many fronts, it also involved the bodies of the settler-invader subjects.

paradoxical elements of nineteenth century feminism persist.⁵ For example, the body betrays the most evident marks of race; the nineteenth-century's maternal feminism relied upon race-making as the "dominion's primary industry" (16).⁶

In spite of the mixed genetic inheritance of the Dominion of Canada, this argument went, a pure nation could be produced through the Anglo-Protestant woman's concerted efforts to create morally improving social and cultural environments. This crucial rhetorical manoeuvre generated a specialized, gendered form of social labour for certain kinds of women, on the very basis of the dominion's heterogeneous population. It also articulated feminism with a vision of 'race-culture' that was distinct from the more restrictive one associated with the masculinist Canada First movement. The distinction between these visions rested on the feminist's more 'tolerant' openness to the other, an openness that served only to argue for women's greater effectiveness in accessing moral and racial 'inferiors,' the better to correct and improve them. (Henderson 16)

Henderson here suggests that, historically, the perception of female permeability was used to assign the female a role of moral arbiter. This dynamic often creates an internal tension. For example, Almeda both does and does not want to stop the "morally loose" drunken woman at her gate; she feels conflicted in her position. Hysteria is a means of turning away from situations or projects that seem emotionally, psychological, or physically impossible or irresolvable. But through the process of recovery, these fictions model a return to those very problems, and suggest that these problems are, in fact, resolvable through the ethical relationship.

The fear of the replaceable female body in patriarchy is heightened in a colonial context due to women's role as cultural and physical perpetuators. That is, their bodies are vessel-like and their lives are susceptible to more hardships such as the rugged

⁵ Henderson shows how the liberal and patriarchal norms of nineteenth century Canadian society influenced the feminist movement.

⁶ Grace Marks is Irish, Annie is Scottish, and Mary is Irish.

wilderness, climate, and poor emigration conditions. Bodies are tools of the Empire's power. In Urquhart's novel, the notion of the replaceable female body is romanticized, yet it is also fraught with fear. Marriage and pregnancy are posited as short-term but ultimately ineffective solutions to hysteria. Mary's longing for beaches decreases as "the presence of the child in her body tied her to the earth, the cottage, the fire" (58). A birthing process occurs at the end of the novel, as Esther dies childless, but telling a story amidst the destruction that is going on around her. The mindbody here functions as an archive. As Wilson writes, "The analysis of biological matter is important [...] because biology itself is 'as actively literature, numerate, and inventive as anything we might want to include within Culture' (Kirby 2003, 438)" (Wilson 2008, 378)

I have proposed that hysteria is a fluid process that involves the temporary loss of boundaries between subjects before reconsolidation. This reconsolidation, we have discovered, involves an understanding of the viscous potential of fluidity, and not solidity as the word suggests. This liminal zone is inhabited by many othered subjects, including archival subjects. Bodily transformation occurs on a cellular level. In *Away*, when Eileen arrives to Montreal to be with Aidan: "She re-enacted in her mind the journey in lurching coaches and swaying boats, except that now the passing landscape was so altered by pleasure that her own transformation was deep and cellular" (311). Eileen's cellular transformation represents the mindbody's ability to process communication between emotional and physical realms. Whether in literature or in the popular press, the very notion of energy flow challenges a binary system of language and thinking. Notions of

the mindbody are making their way into the popular press, as phenomena such as the placebo effect and therapies such as acupuncture are gaining scientific credibility.⁷

These fictions particularly capture the sense of adventure in the ethical relationship. “Love,” as Oliver writes, “is an ethics of difference that thrives on the adventure of otherness”(20). A feminist theory of similarity within difference need not reduce all women – or all races – to a common element (or a common set of attributes). A quest for understanding, rather than interpretation, drives all of these fictions. Understanding the similarities between one another exists as a different quest that occurs in the archives rather than the romantic quest for truth and origin that exists in the archival romance. Oliver writes, “The interpretation or elaboration necessary for the process of what hooks calls self-recovery, and what Kristeva identifies with the process of working-through in psychoanalysis, depends on constantly renegotiating self and other to expose the connections between them” (Oliver 219).

This thesis aims to reclaim hysteria as a catalyst of transformation rather than as a female heritage. It is a state of disconnection to which anyone living in a challenging environment may be susceptible. This is why even the most healthy among us may have hysterical episodes. To be hysterical is to be in a state of apparent fixity, but with the promise of returned flow. In a contemporary context, the diagnosis of hysteria has disappeared, yet alternate diagnoses for similar conditions remain. Philosophers and scientists are still asking whether some diagnoses are “real.” The question of hysteria’s

⁷ Dr. Herbert Benson’s work in mind-body medicine and the relaxation response has led to greater acceptance in the Western medical community of philosophies which acknowledge the complex and non-hierarchical relationship between the mind and body (“Exploring the Effectiveness of a Comprehensive Mind-body Intervention for Medical Symptom Relief”).

reality is undoubtedly a red herring; if a sufferer perceives mental and/or physical distress, then despite its reality in the DSM, it still exists as an experienced reality. Lived distress *is* real distress, whether the diagnostic label is “correct” or not. The question of why a condition develops involves a complex and constantly changing barrage of environmental, social, physical, chemical, emotional, and historical causes. By asking *how* a condition develops, we are more able to conceive of healing.

Like all researchers, I have approached this topic with a personal bias – as a woman diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder. Upon reflection, that particular diagnosis was meaningless in itself. However, it has led me towards a fuller understanding of the complexity of my bodily systems and the intricate balance necessary for health. I have witnessed ways that addiction and depression have been passed down genetically and behaviorally in my family. But I have also witnessed the inheritance of ineffective coping mechanisms. The model of degeneration has imaginatively preoccupied my own siblings who have perceived a certain sense of doom in their own lives, but transformation can come with a different understanding of the self.

Hysteria, in some ways, became a common experience in a family that displayed common characteristics of addiction and co-dependency: aches, pains, depression, and anxiety manifested in each of my family members, often with no clear medically diagnosable reason. It is no coincidence that current therapeutic approaches to families of addiction include setting boundaries, detachment, self-care, and open communication. I have shared with the fiction an interest in sanity. This interest need not be a morally based judgement that values normative behaviour and chastises other behaviours as the result of

“diseased” or “hysterical” subjectivity. Sanity, instead, relies upon a model of empathy and an openness to the adventure of otherness. The very elusiveness of the term hysteria, I have realized, has made it an effective term as there is no precise contemporary equivalent. In popular use, the term “hysteria” is still currently clouded with judgement, evoking a too-rich imagination, gendered behaviour, attention-seeking antics, irrationality, or uncontrollable laughter.

Wright and Moran have noted that “Public stereotypes and private myths about mental disorders run deep in Canadian society” (3). In Canada, the *Check Up From the Neck Up* website has been part of the drive to make mental illness more socially accepted and publicly accessible. While a useful tool, the site does feature a biomedical bias in its understanding and recommended treatments for various forms of mental distress. This site reminds family members: “Remember that you are only human. You do not have the power to change the neurochemistry in your loved one’s brain.”

However, *Alias Grace*, Munro’s short story, and *Away* show us that we are not *only* human. As full subjects, we are, in fact, more than human. While we are recovering our state of subjectivity, and becoming fully human, we engage with the nonhuman world and acknowledge that the world around us literally gets under our skin. As healthy engaged citizens, friends, mothers, fathers, sisters, daughters, and more, we do hold a certain power to change the neurochemistry in one another’s brains – though perhaps not curatively, and perhaps not in a linear way. To deny that affects do not lead to change in ourselves and others is to deny our full capacity as sensory and responsible beings.

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