Physiological Psychology and Dickens's *Bleak House*

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1

This paper focuses on how maternity is narrated and defined in Dickens's *Bleak House* and how its representation is related to the male-dominant society of mid-Victorian England. In the text, Dickens deals with the newly advanced theory of physiological psychology and illustrates the interplay between body and mind in the characters of nervously suffering mother, Lady Dedlock, and her illegitimate daughter, Esther Summerson. The novel challenges the conventional, dominant alliance of patriarchy and medicine, uncovering the secret maternity which is represented as "morbid" by the male and medical gaze. My project is twofold: to analyse the complex interaction between nineteenth-century medical theories and Dickens's narrative discourse, and to determine how his representations of health and illness functioned as imaginative creations of medical spheres, both challenging and reinforcing stereotypes of class and gender.

2

In the mid-nineteenth century, medical scientists had paid great attention to physiological psychology and the study in this field had developed remarkably: one of the distinguished accomplishments is Benjamin Collins Brodie's work, *Psychological Inquiries: In a Series of Essays Intended to Illustrate the Mutual Relations of the Physical Organisation and the Mental Faculties* (1854). Brodie (1783–1862) had, at this period, placed himself in the senior position as a surgeon. In 1854 he published, anonymously, *Psychological Inquiries*, the essays in dialogue form, intended to illustrate the mutual relations of the physical organisation and the mental faculties. He refers to Johannes Müller, who, as a physiologist and an experimental investigator, emphasised the need for philosophic speculation and for a logical co-ordination of the different scientific disciplines. His aphorism is a good example of this trend of thought: "No one can be

a psychologist without being a physiologist" (Mattler 99; Krumbhaar 684–85; Singer & Underwood 287–89). In the mid-nineteenth century medical scientists focused on the interplay between body and mind in terms of "mental physiology" and "physiological psychology." During the final quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, as the bodily basis of nervous breakdowns appeared a less fruitful subject of investigation, British psychiatrists and nerve specialists paid increased attention to the value of psychotherapeutic cases (Oppenheim 298).

In the mid-nineteenth century, mainstream physiological psychologists, such as Alexander Bain, William Carpenter, G. H. Lewes, and Herbert Spencer, wanted to develop a model of the mind that was materialistic as well as dynamic; they emphasised that mental processes were embodied in the physical workings of the mind as an evolving organism rather than being represented in abstract images (Taylor 68). In *The Principles of Psychology* (1855), Spencer has discussed that there is "a fundamental connection between nervous charges and psychical states" (129). Spencer has stressed the importance of synthesis, seeing consciousness in relation to unconscious processes and arguing that these take the form not of mental representations so much as latent adaptation to the environment; consciousness emerges in response to, and as a central part of, a process of continual development and differentiation. Spencer's writing indicates that mental physiology certainly could help shape and reinforce dominant contemporary progressivist ideas about individual and social development (Taylor 69).

This paper is about mental causes and physical symptoms. Put less bluntly, it examines the ways in which a long recognised interrelation of body and mind was put to work to explain the baffling functional disorders of women. Predominantly, it is concerned with the correspondences and contradictions between the portrayals of individual women in fiction and the definitive pathologies of "Woman." Female invalids feature largely in Victorian texts and my aim is to explore the extent to which, at a time when medical literature habitually referred women's illness to the peculiarities of the female nature, fiction writers were affirming or contesting the essentialising assumptions of medical classification and interpretation.

3

Dickens himself had a strong interest in the "female malady." In his previous novel, *David Copperfield*, he takes up the theme of fallen woman. Yet he is unable to depict the complicated nature of femininity in any single character. His characterisation of

femininity is divided into stereotypes; whilst he emphasises the praiseworthy angelic nature in Agnes, the other side of femininity as sexual whore is epitomised in the characterisation of Emily. In *Bleak House*, Dickens continues to explore better understanding of femininity, challenging the morbid representation of maternity by using newer, more advanced methods which he has learned from the scientific controversy expounded in *Household Words*.

Through his engagement with the contemporary periodicals such as *Household Words*, Dickens came into daily contact with cultures and traditions both inside and outside Victorian England. Whilst fascinated by the new worlds that science and medicine opened to him, he gained a vision of culture and social order and vigorously participated in the latest controversy explored in those periodicals. Having synchronised with *Household Words* at the mid-century, *Bleak House* is closely related with the periodical. Not merely being influenced by it, Dickens, through his publication of *Bleak House*, participated in the discussion surrounding mental science, especially with reference to the "female malady," as viewed in the light of physiology and psychology.

Household Words, a two-penny miscellany of "Instruction and Entertainment," was a family journal for the middle-class audience, intended, in part, to replace with wholesome fare the "villainous" periodical literature of crime and sensation that fulfilled the demands of the reading public. *Bleak House*, addressed to the middle-class family audience as well, contains the same intention and structure. Although the novel is filled with the gothic terror of a ghost story and the sensational elements of a fallen woman and her illegitimate daughter, the novel eventually ends with the happy expectation of a bright future following the repentance of the fallen woman.

Household Words carried informational articles on a wide variety of subjects which were designed to provide readers with instruction and entertainment. There were numerous articles on science for the layman - medicine, physiology, physics, astronomy, and geology. The medical treatment of insanity was one of the long-continued topics in the periodical.

During the 1850s, whilst *Bleak House* was published, there was an increasing interest in the human body from medical, physiological and neurological points of view. For example, in an article called "Man Magnified" (1851), Frederick Knight Hunt introduces Arthur Hill Hassell's *The Microscopic Anatomy of the Human Body* (1849). Hunt explores aspects of human body such as skin, hair, fat, teeth, and blood, by applying a microscope to them, and he concludes that a change in detailed particulars of the body shows the healthy/unhealthy conditions of the whole body. Edmund Saul Dixon wrote

three articles, about the marvel of microscopes, which were serialised in 1856. These articles introduce a challenge to decode and decipher human body physiologically.

Besides, *Household Words* had a long-continued interest in ghost stories which strongly attracted the reading public. Fiction writers introduced scientific and medical explanations of ghosts so that they tried to represent their unknown world as being knowable and interpretable. Many ghost stories characteristically linked ghosts haunting houses with women: for example, in "The Ghost That Appeared to Mrs. Wharton" (1850), Harriet Martineau depicts a respectable lady who is the only person who sees a ghost haunting her house, which, in fact, is finally found to be a human intruder, "very nearly a complete idiot" (143). Here women are depicted to have mysterious connections with ghosts, concealed secrets of the house. Women's testimonies of seeing ghosts are indecipherable and unapproachable from male, authoritative knowledge. In this sense, ghosts are a manifestation of women's mystery: women themselves are assimilated to ghosts.

The nature of women, especially of mothers, was usually represented as sensitive and nervous. In "Sensitive Mother" (1853), Eliza Lynn Linton depicts a story of a nineteen-year-old girl, who is positioned between her betrothed and her invalid but dominant mother and chooses to live with her mother without getting married. Linton, in "A Mother" (1857), pursues her interest in pathologically dominant mothers and depicts a mother's mental struggle with her contradictory desires both to dominate and to release her son. Mothers' mysterious existence is explained as an indication of their morbid attachment to their children. Wilful, dominant mothers are supposed to suffer from mental malady.

As time passed, *Household Words* gradually analysed those ghosts, and the persons who see them, with reference to a new, scientific point of view. In "Man as a Monster" (1854), Henry Morley criticises such ghost stories as a sort of superstitions, "the mere folly of belief in one relic of old ignorance" (409). Women, he has argued, – more particularly those belonging to the lower classes – are driven to madness by the influence of such "ignorance." In "New Discoveries in Ghosts," Morley elucidates the reasons for seeing and believing in ghosts by introducing Baron Reichenbach's experiments with magnetism. Reichenbach's theories have suggested that certain persons with disordered nervous systems and some healthy people with a peculiar nervous temperament are more sensitive to magnetism and therefore to the manifestation of "Odyle" which is generated in the decomposition of the human body. The experiences of seeing ghosts are regarded as a touchstone of nervous order/disorder. With the help of scientific confirmation,

women are defined to be more likely to fall into such nervous disorder.

Both the articles and fiction within *Household Words* are engaged with scientific controversies. John Robertson cannot finish his two ghost stories without an explanatory note on physiology; in "My Ghost" (1857), although he observes before beginning his story that "physiology may say what it pleases" (165), he refers to Jean Etienne Esquirol and Marie Jean Pierre Flourens on hallucinations, and also portrays a clergyman who has "picked up a few physiological notions" (167); in "My London Ghosts" (1857), Robertson mentions William Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood, however, in his conclusion Robertson refutes the physiological attempt to heal the diseased mind. Physiological notions are used and reinforced in these articles to define mental diseases. Ghost stories are the sites for physiological controversies to investigate and diagnose mental malady.

In 1850s *Household Words* became a forum for scientific controversy. Many articles focused on specialised fields of medicine and explored scientific methods to attempt to understand the human body. The fifteenth volume of *Household Words* published in 1857 pursued an especially strong interest in the relationship between body and mind, and the self and the world, all from a medical point of view. *Household Words* refutes one-sided opinions on the human body and suggests broadened perspectives along with a newly advanced study of medical science. Dickens, as its editor, seems to have orchestrated those articles on physiology and neurology, with the result that the periodical, on the whole, explores women's sensitiveness and peculiar nervousness.

On the one hand, many articles focused on physiology; for example, Edmund Saul Dixon investigated it in his two articles in 1857. In "The Art of Unfattening" he gives a detailed explanation of digestion and nutrition. In "The Circulation" he introduces M. Flourens's book, following the history of physiological discoveries, and also adds William Benjamin Carpenter's comment on Flourens's experiments. As for physiology, Wilkinson Speight explains the hemodynamic system by introducing the physiologist Draper in his article called "Why Is the Negro Black?" (1857). Louise Henson discusses Dickens's familiarity with the popular physiological explanation of the apparition (154-55).

On the other hand, there is an article on neurology, which suggests a different form of diagnosis of the human body. In "The Nerves" (1857), Christopher Wharton Mann anatomises the nervous system, focusing especially on the respiratory nerves which causes the outward manifestation of every emotion: "All passions of the mind exert an influence more or less powerful on the heart and on the breathing, and the muscles of the face, being supplied by a respiratory nerve, sympathise with their condition; and the

quivering lip and the spasmodic twitch of the throat reveal the agony which pride strives in vain to conceal" (524). He clarifies the relationship between mind and body, saying, "the heart and lungs suffer with the mind," and, "Nervous energy and life are identical" (524-25, 525). To the question of whether humans can master passion itself by controlling the outward sign of passion, he answers that it can be done but is "unequal and imperfect" (525). The nervous system is proved to have a strong influence upon the physiological condition; thus, the relationship between body and mind is explained from the newly established perspective of physiological psychology.

4

In *Bleak House*, which is closely related with the periodical, Dickens depicts the story of "fallen woman" and her illegitimate daughter from the perspective of the daughter, and investigates the female malady by engaging in the scientific discussion of physiology and neurology. *Bleak House* is a challenge to the prevalent assumptions of femininity and maternity. In the characterisation of Lady Dedlock, Dickens illustrates morbid maternity from the perspectives of physiological psychology and gradually deepens the understanding of it by using the perspective of her daughter, Esther. I attempt to discuss how he engages in the discussion of physiological psychology, which enlarges the understanding of the human nature.

Esther Summerson, the novel's heroine and one of its two narrators, self-effacingly tells and attempts to reconstruct the story of her own life. Her story culminates in her discovery of her parentage, and in her marriage to a hardworking man of reforming persuasion. In the process she discovers her illegitimate origin; her mother is Lady Dedlock, an influential aristocratic Sir Leicester Dedlock's wife, who has given birth to Esther by Captain Hawdon (now known as his pseudonym, Nemo) and has been made to believe, by her late, discordant sister, that her baby was dead soon after her birth.

At the centre of the novel is the expansive and complicated Chancery case of "Jarndyce and Jarndyce." John Jarndyce, who refuses to involve himself in the legal proceedings, brings together at his home, Bleak House, Richard Carstone and Ada Clare — the two orphaned wards in Jarndyce — and Esther Summerson, supposedly an orphan, who has been brought up to feel guilty about her very existence. Esther, who acts as a sort of companion to Ada and housekeeper for them all, watches Richard and Ada fall in love, and observes the process by which the Chancery suit and Richard's "expectations" of what he might obtain from its resolution combine to erode Richard's

power to commit himself to work and cause his destruction.

The law courts that consume so many lives are the centre of a corrupted world drowned in one protean cloud: London fogs, the deadly miasma of the slums of "Tom-all-Alone's," and the humid mists of Lincolnshire where Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock live. Lady Dedlock's splendour and the wretchedness of "Tom-all-Alone's" are part of a single totality that Dickens welds artificially together as his plot meanders on.

Like the articles in *Household Words*, *Bleak House* explores the mystery of human body and mind. The death of Krook, a marine-store dealer and an eccentric devotee of Chancery, is described as "Spontaneous Combustion" (519; ch. 32). The description of his death, "inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself" (519; ch. 32), illuminates the increasing interests of physiological psychology in the interrelation of body and mind. His death causes a sensation in London: "[o]ut of the court, and a long way out of it, there is considerable excitement too; for men of science and philosophy come to look, and carriages set down doctors at the corner who arrive with the same intent, and there is more learned talk about inflammable gases and phosphuretted hydrogen than the court has ever imagined" (532; ch. 33). Dickens draws attention in his 1853 Preface to "the possibility of what is called Spontaneous Combustion" and his own researches into the subject. Challenged by his friend, G. H. Lewes, he avers that "the recorded opinions and experiences of distinguished medical professors, French, English, and Scotch" support his belief in this phenomenon. Chapter 32 of the novel records the "nauseous" traces of Krook's death, and Chapter 33 the inquest, preceded by citation of many learned works by "men of science and philosophy" on the subject. Not only does Krook's grisly end give a narrative and symbolic parallel to the theme of self-destruction also played out by Jarndyce and Jarndyce in Chancery, but it is equally surrounded by enticing mystery of mental science.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens challenges to depict secret lives of his characters from the perspective of psychological interpretation. Richard, being called "smouldering combustion" (631; ch. 39), is one of a long line of Dickens's studies of the malign effects in young men of the middle and upper classes of the psychology of expectations. As we can see examples in Steerforth in *David Copperfield*, Henry Gowan in *Little Dorrit*, Pip in *Great Expectations*, and Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens studies the socio-psychology of expectations in young middle-class men, whose lives are (mis-) shaped by their expectations of future wealth and social position and by the expectations of others about them. Same as this study of psychological problems in male characters, Dickens explores mental malady in female characters from psychological perspectives.

As some articles in *Household Words* investigate human being from the perspectives of physiology and neurology, *Bleak House* repeatedly focuses on "nervous" illness of Miss Flite. Moreover, Dickens explores nervousness in female characters, especially taking up the theme of impure woman in the characterisation of a lady who belongs to, and embodies herself, the upper class.

The impure woman is part of a critique of society. In order to illuminate the narrative of the impure woman in a complex way, Dickens develops a double and split narrative in *Bleak House*. In his attempt to represent a whole society as an interconnected web Dickens makes use of two narrators: the impersonal third-person narrator, narrating in the present tense, and a first-person narrator, the self-effacing, saintly, and often coy and evasive, Esther Summerson. Esther narrates her story retrospectively, and, it would seem, reluctantly, and also in the manner which questions her own narrative authority:

> I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that, I can remember, when I was a very little girl indeed I used to say to my doll, when we were alone together, "Now Dolly, I am not clever, you know very well, and you must be patient with me, like a dear!" (27; ch. 3)

Esther's narrative and its place in the double narrative has been one of the main interests of much recent writing on *Bleak House*. On the one hand, the innocence of the angelic creatures such as Esther gives rise to the reawakened discovery of the sin of the impure woman; yet, on the other hand, the novel is now more likely to be read as a comment on the nineteenth-century construction of a feminine gendered self rather than merely a reproduction of it. It is, then, less likely to be read as a "weak and twaddling" representation of the angel in the house, than as a psychologically acute representation of a young woman damaged and self-alienated by a loveless childhood and by the sense of personal and social guilt inculcated by her "godmother" (actually her aunt), who brings her up to regard herself as a double disgrace: "Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you are hers" (30; ch. 3). Esther's coyness may, on occasions, make her an unreliable or evading narrator, but it is also an integral part of self-consciously constructed narrative of self-fashioning, in which the female narrator constructs the story of her life as a good girl's story. This is a narrative which seeks to "repair the fault I have been born with (of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent)" (27; ch. 3). It is a narrative of industriousness, contentedness, and kind-heartedness, aimed at winning

some love for herself.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens explores the device of the double narrative mediated by such different narrators. It requires readers constantly to shift their perspectives and to view the same events and situations through different value systems. This is a process which, as Virginia Blain has suggested, "sets up a submerged dialectic" between masculine and feminine viewpoints (31). The third-person narrator adopts the pose of an authoritative social commentator, who indicts Chancery and the system. He is rather like the shadowy, transcendent reporter persona whom Dickens self-consciously sought to develop in his other novels. Esther, on the other hand, is a limited narrator, both in the technical sense that her knowledge of the action is restricted to those aspects of it which she actually experiences or learns about in the conventions of realism, and in her own conscious level, as she repeatedly insists on describing herself as "not clever." The limitations of Esther's knowledge and understanding are in large part the limitations of the way in which middle-class femininity was constructed in the nineteenth century.

5

Problems of knowledge are crucial for this text and for many twentieth-century readings of it. For J. Hillis Miller it is a document about the interpretation of documents, a novel whose characters and readers alike are faced with problems of interpretation, of making connections, and of solving mysteries: "The reader of *Bleak House* is confronted with a document which he must piece together, scrutinise, interrogate, at every turn — in short, interpret — in order to understand" (182). *Bleak House* makes detectives of most of its characters and all of its readers. Just as Esther's narrative is a quest for her own identity and for her parentage; so, too, the third-person narrative is a series of interconnected quests for identity, as others seek out the identity of Esther and her connection to Lady Dedlock (Guppy); the identity of Nemo and his connection to Lady Dedlock (Tulkinghorn); the identity of Tulkinghorn's killer and the disguised Lady Dedlock (Bucket); the identity of Jo and his connection to Mr Snagsby (Mrs Snagsby); and the identity of Mr George and his connection to Mrs Rouncewell (Mrs Bagnet).

From the very beginning of his career as a writer Dickens was fascinated by the law and crime. In the 1850s he was increasingly interested in the police, and especially the new detective police force, which was established just ten years before the appearance of *Bleak House*. Starting with "A Detective Police Party" (27 July and 10 August 1850),

he wrote several admiring sketches of and interviews with members of the detective force for *Household Words*. Several recent critics (taking their lead from D. A. Miller) have suggested that *Bleak House* is not just a response to the rise of the new Detective Force, but that it is concerned with more subtle and pervasive forms of policing — with the processes of (self-) surveillance, (self-) control and (self-) management that are characteristic of modern bourgeois society, which produce the modern bourgeois subject.

D. A. Miller's essay "Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family and *Bleak House*" is most in debt to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, both of which focus on the disciplinary technologies that use the prison and the police as their nineteenth-century symbols. The prison, especially the Panopticon in its ideal form, was used as a device for constant monitoring of prisoners, whilst the first London police came on the streets in 1829. Discipline is produced through, for example, the calibrating different forms of sexuality, linking them to character-types, so that sexual behaviour became in the nineteenth century the marker of a personality, of a subject to be individualised and singled out. In *The Novel and the Police* Miller argues that Foucault's use of the word "discipline" implies a number of meanings that bear upon Dickens's novel:

> (1) an ideal of unseen but all-seeing surveillance, which, though partly realised in several, often interconnected institutions, is identified with none; (2) a regime of the norm, in which normalising perceptions, prescriptions and sanctions are diffused in discourses and practices throughout the social fabric; and (3) various technologies of the self and its sexuality, which administer the subject's own contribution to the intensive and continuous "pastoral" care that liberal society proposed to take of each and every one of its charges (viii).

According to Miller's Foucauldian reading of *Bleak House*, the aristocratic law, which is represented by Tulkinghorn, gives way to the middle-class power of the detective police, Inspector Bucket, whose deceptiveness in his way of discovering the truth is apparent from his first appearance in chapter 22, tricking both Mr Snagsby and Jo. Dickens shows a shift of power at work. Bucket is aided unconsciously by other middle-class figures, such as Guppy, Weevle/Jobling and the Smallweeds, in tracking down and trapping Lady Dedlock. *Bleak House* becomes a detective novel after Tulkinghorn is shot, virtually the first in English. Bucket symbolises a new type of surveillance working in society, and the detective form links with the drive for a "will to truth," for a single, monopolistic

wish to find out people's secrets and expose them, drive them out, or normalise them.

The detective story paradigm may also be regarded as realist fiction. Though *Bleak House* seems confusing in its proliferation of characters and settings, it all works towards one end, and everyone turns out to be related, connected to everyone else, crossing class and gender lines. Details are picked up and used by the agents of surveillance: for example, the handwriting that Lady Dedlock sees in chapter 2. The novelist himself plays a role of policeman, not only because he knows the secrets of everyone, but also because it is also implied that everyone is aware of Lady Dedlock hiding a secret:

> She supposes herself to be an inscrutable being, quite out of the reach and ken of ordinary mortals .... Yet, every dim little star revolving about her, from her maid to the manager of the Italian Opera, knows her weakness, prejudices, follies, haughtinesses and caprices; and lives upon as accurate a calculation and as nice a measure of her moral nature, as her dressmaker takes of her physical proportions. (24; ch. 2)

The novel seems to offer a resistance to the power of the police. Or, Dickens seems to be fascinated by the police force, writing as a policeman, siding with the forces of bourgeois hegemony, that would replace an inchoate, fog-bound, filthy, wasteful society with one organised, inspected and known, down to everyone's intimate secrets. In this way, a Foucauldian analysis offers a sense of how Dickens's text is caught up in history and social change.

In order to make clear the power politic embedded in the novel, the significance of the double narrative should be posed again, because the two narrators represent the text's own conflicted politic and its lack of a synthesis. This brings us back to divisions in the text, which we need to consider psychoanalytically. Esther's secrecy, her attitude to her mother, her share in tracking her down, and her excessive care of duty as a form of repression should be read from the perspective of physiological psychology.

6

Concerning surveillance and interpretation in the power politic, we notice that the novel obsessively emphasises vision: the reader is to see seemingly invisible connections between physical and social pathology. *Bleak House* is a text diversified with medical discourse. Two of its leading characters are medical men (Woodcourt and Skimpole), and a third, Richard, trains briefly to be one. Its plot revolves around an infectious

disease that serves to unite many of its apparently unrelated characters. Moreover, the physical disease in the novel stands for the general malaise of the body politic of England at the mid-century. The novel makes palpable to the sight the inseparable physical and moral pestilence. The plot dramatises the inexorable spread of infection: for at overcrowded urban graveyard to which he takes Lady Dedlock, Jo inhales effluvia given off by the rotting corpse of Nemo, contracts from it smallpox, and then passes the disease to Esther, who is soon to be disfigured. The disease of modern urban society, moral and physical, strikes all in the end.

Dickens never names the particular fever in the novel but he indicates quite clearly that it is smallpox. As F. S. Schwarzbach has discussed, smallpox is suited to the plot, for it is the only disease that could be caused by atmospheric poisons and transmitted by personal contact; so it can originate in the graveyard but then be given by Jo to Esther. Moreover, its incubation period, unlike that of cholera, was believed to be quite long and variable; and, most importantly, it leaves permanent scars, marking Esther even though she survives it ("The Fever of *Bleak House*" 21-27). Schwarzbach also argues Dickens's indebtedness to contemporary medicine, suggesting the point that he uses some studies of infectious disease that stressed above all else the antiseptic value of light and air. The role of the cognitive model and related discourse borrowed from medicine in this novel is to reveal the pathology of a diseased urban society and in so doing to effect the first step towards cure; the novel brings light, literally and figuratively, to play upon the secret urban plague spots, which generate the infectious moral and physical pestilence that threatens to destroy the nation ("*Bleak House*: The Social Pathology of Urban Life" 98-99).

As borrowed from Foucault the concept of discourse, the implicit social program of reform is to turn lower-class urban dwellers into objects to be manipulated and regulated. The intention of medical discourse, then, is social control, and by adopting it in *Bleak House* Dickens implicates himself in these power and class relations.

A Foucauldian analysis would see the doctor as an emergent figure of normalisation and discipline in the nineteenth century. In crucial scenes in *Bleak House*, Dr Allan Woodcourt directs onto many characters the interpretative gaze of medical science. He speaks with unshakeable authority, calmly confident of his professional ability to reveal the hidden meanings of their inner states. Every outer sign becomes an active invitation to his interpretative penetration: male science here unveils female nature, piercing through her outer layers to reveal her hidden secret.

The medical model and its language play a predominantly conceptual role in the

discourse of the social reform movement, a movement that has treated the social, political, physical, and moral problems of urban England as symptoms of disease. The body is pathologised as a contaminated city, where mania and crime lurk in hidden slums. Dickens's description draws attention to the same rhetorical field of Victorian social and psychological analysis: the same metaphors were used in each sphere, whether the threats were of working-class power, disease, or female sexuality. The newly established theories of physiological psychology demonstrated that the same laws of circulation animated the individual organism and psyche as operated in the wider social economy. The physiological premises explained that social psychological ills could be traced back to the workings of the individual body. Both medical science and literature represented the individual as a microcosm of the social realm.

Dickens's fiction is preoccupied with the relationship between the visible and the invisible. Surveillance and interpretative penetration are not represented as innocent activities. Suspicion of interpretative authority is embedded in the narrative form of Dickens's works. In *Bleak House* Dickens eschews relying on only one omniscient third person, and he adopts the first-person narrative of Esther not as a form of her innocent confession but as her interrogation of social evils which exceeds and resists the authoritative surveillance of the third-person narrative.

By synchronising two narrative perspectives, Dickens explores the gender and class politics which underpin the activities of surveillance. Women and men stand in a very different relationship to the mastery of the gaze. To understand these differences one must look to the conflicting ideologies of self-control and female sexuality which permeated Victorian social and psychological discourse.

7

The discourse of disease in the Victorian era drew directly on notions of polluted internal space. Cholera, which seemed to pass mysteriously and invisibly across all known barriers, was associated with syphilis which could lurk invisibly within the female body. Suggested cures for cholera ranged from political, medical inspection to industry and self-control. In the late 1840s public attention turned specifically to syphilis and the role of prostitutes in transmitting the disease. In an article of *Westminster Review* in 1850, W. R. Greg, calculating the number of prostitutes in England at 50,000, warned that "spreading infection on every side of them, quarantines against the plague, and costly precautions against the cholera, seem very like straining at gnats and swallowing camels"

(477). Greg's warning suggested that ten per cent of the male population of England acquired syphilis by this means. Prostitution seemed to reveal the interconnected, distributive networks of the social organism. Female sexuality appeared to lie at the heart of the corruption of the industrial social body. These associative connections are given fictional embodiment in *Bleak House*, where capitalism and female sexual passion are the interlocking devices for the spread of the mouldering diseases. Esther Summerson learns of her origins in sexual sin and is immediately struck down by a disease bred in the horrifying recesses of Tom-all-Alone's, "a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water" (256; ch. 16). Lack of due regulation has created both this stagnant human cesspit, which threatens to pollute the entire social organism, and the self-destructive consequences of Lady Dedlock's sexuality. The two finally come together with her death amidst the miasma of the graveyard.

To understand Victorian attitudes to female sexuality we need to see dichotomous divisions of the representations of womanhood. Dickens's fiction, like *David Copperfield*, exemplifies the diverse models of femininity in angelic innocence and sexual guilt and reveals contradictory formulations of womanhood. We are familiar with the Victorian trope of the angel in the house: the male returns from his contaminating material labours in the outer world to be spiritually refreshed by his angel within the inner sanctum of the home. Victorian medical textbooks demonstrated not only woman's biological fitness and adaptation to the sacred role of housemaker, but also her terrifying subjection to the forces of the body. Whilst man is deemed to occupy the central defining position of rationality and control, woman is assigned to the two contrary poles of spirituality and bodily subjection. At once angel and demon, woman came to represent both the spiritual virtue and the uncontrolled economy of maternity.

According to Sally Shuttleworth's essay, "Female Circulation: Medical Discourse and Popular Advertising in the Mid-Victorian Era," medical writers defined the problems of maternity from the professional perspectives at the mid-century. The contemporary physician, J. G. Milligen, gave scientific authority to notions of female pathology in regard to uterine system and spinal irritation. Woman, with her constant predisposition to hysteria, was defined to be a figure of radical instability. The internal mysteries of the female body drew unprecedented medical attention in the early nineteenth century: the physiological processes of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation all became the focus of intense medical research and analysis. Medical theories of the role of menstruation in the female economy were used in fairly overt ways to police the boundaries of gender identity. By the 1850s menstrual flow still remained inexplicable, regarded as "an

outward sign of the threatening sexual and reproductive excess of the female body" (Shuttleworth 60). Pregnancy, as well as puberty and menopause, was considered to be a "dangerous period of the female lifecycle" in the nineteenth century when medical authorities defined "female malady" (Showalter 55–56). Parturition and lactation were regarded as the dangerous periods in which secretions were discharged from the maternal body. Motherhood, on the whole, signified the consequence of physical disorder in the female body.

8

Bleak House demonstrates the Victorian assumptions of dangerous, morbid maternity in the characterisation of Lady Dedlock. Keeping pace with many articles in *Household Words*, Dickens depicts her as a mysterious woman who is trapped in the intersected bonds of family secrets and ghost stories. The symptom of her mental morbidity is narrated in her custom of walking in the Ghost's Walk as if she is the very picture of the ghost.

Lady Dedlock's chief quality is informed to be pride, but, because her presence is quite mysterious, hidden from the narrative perspective, we do not entirely grasp her character until we recognise that she also represents the extraordinary ability to control anger: when Tulkinghorn blackmails her concerning her secret of her illegitimate daughter, he notices, "The power of this woman is astonishing. She has been acting a part the whole time" (743; ch. 48). Her excessive sedation, as a distorted version of female will, suggests her mental morbidity.

Lady Dedlock "becomes" a mother figure, since she finds her daughter who she has thought to be dead is actually alive and appears before her as Esther Summerson. Although Lady Dedlock has been depicted as an embodiment of indifference and languidness so far, her nervous, restless behaviour now becomes prominent. Her strange gaze transfers her emotional surprise to Esther: "Shall I ever forget the rapid beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met, as I stood up! Shall I ever forget the manner in which those handsome proud eyes seemed to spring out of their languor, and to hold mine!" (290; ch. 18). The innocence of Esther gives rise to a sort of inner conversion, which comes out in frantic fits of humility and crying, and imploring postures. The revelation of transcendence breaks down defences, bringing about confessions of impotence, a sense of sin, and remorse. The proud and haughty Lady Dedlock is provoked into an outburst of humility and self-accusation by Esther's innocence.

Lady Dedlock's ordeals come from her recognition of her identity as a mother. Her secret is linked to her motherhood and is equivalent to her secretion. As during her pregnancy her maternal body fosters her baby by stopping its regular menstruation and keeping blood (one of secretions) undischarged, she now becomes a mother by discovering her daughter alive and figuratively completing the childbirth. Her passionate love and regret as a mother begin overflowing like her discharged secretions. Because she cannot express her maternal love for Esther openly, she is forced to find in her maid, Rosa, a substitute daughter to satisfy her maternal demand by "soothing her (Rosa's) dark hair with that motherly tough, and watching her with eyes so full of musing interest" (456; ch. 28).

Finally, Lady Dedlock faces Esther and confesses her identity to her: "O my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! O try to forgive me!" (579; ch. 36). It is significant that Esther recognises Lady Dedlock's confession is "in the only natural moments of her life" (580; ch. 36). The novel, through the daughter's perspective, emphasises that the maternal love is to be "natural." This implication is based on Victorian assumptions on maternity: as the professional authorities of medical science demonstrated, the maternal nature was defined to be subject to the physical laws of lifecycle. Lady Dedlock becomes even more dangerous when she, with her own will, decides to hide her maternity which is supposed to be "natural":

> "If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered; think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable!" (582; ch. 36).

Here Lady Dedlock pronounces to keep concealing her secret of maternity by wearing the mask. She appears a dangerous, morbid mother again: as she has been made to believe that she murdered her baby at the birth before, she now intentionally becomes a murderess of her daughter after the figurative birth. Her act of renouncing her maternal nature, by keeping her natural secretion (lactation) undischarged "within her breast," is also marked to be her rejection of the medical definition of maternity and her announcement of finding a new definition of her identity, freely from the contemporary physiological notions.

Lady Dedlock chooses her position as the wife of Sir Leicester Dedlock by rejecting the maternal duty towards Esther. She repeats emphasising the necessity of keeping the

honour of the Dedlock household, saying "I have a husband, wretched and dishonouring creature that I am!" (580; ch. 36). This is a challenge towards the contemporary medical discourse which admitted that women were torn in the conflict between maternal and wifely roles in the Victorian ideology. Sara Ellis, in *The Mothers of England, Their Influence and Responsibility* (1843), instructed that maternal emotion should be subjected to the wifely responsibilities: "We must not forget that while wholly given up to this feeling, so sacred in itself, there is such a thing as neglecting, for the sake of the luxury it affords, the duty of a wife" (43). This pressure of the enforcement of both different roles on women assisted to accelerate the morbid conditions of mothers. In *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock seems to reject to be a sacrifice of male, patriarchal, and medical ideologies that all drive women into their prevalent definitions of mental malady.

Short-lived repentance does not lead to salvation or change the course of events. Lady Dedlock as a sinner is associated with psychological and physical shadows. "I must travel my dark road alone," says Lady Dedlock to her daughter (579; ch. 36). Shadows assert themselves in her fate of the solitary flight from her past splendid life of aristocracy to the dark, invisible slum of Tom-all-Alone's until she assimilates herself with Jane, the bullied wife of a brickmaker.

9

Bleak House demonstrates the interconnections between family and nation and warns the risk of spreading the personal, sexual morbidity in the national level. As the chapter titled "National and Domestic" makes clear, the ruling caste of the Doodles, the Coodles and the Dedlocks has no sense of any separation between public and private domains. For them affairs of state are affairs of family. The nation is perceived only as the domestic space on which their lives are staged: "Boodle and Buffy, their followers and families, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns are the first-born actors, managers, and leaders, and no others can appear upon the scene for ever and ever" (191; ch. 12). Since their small, enclosed world is perceived as the nation, all of their private and personal interests can only be understood by them as national interests. The effect of this self-absorption, the text insists, is to seal them off away from the realities of the larger world.

Bleak House recognises the order of nobility and chivalry as a nostalgic myth. Sir Leicester Dedlock is certainly the most affectionate representation of an upper-class

character in Dickens's fiction. The keynote underlying the entire representation of Sir Leicester is chivalry: the most frequently repeated words are honour, truth, integrity, gallantry, and courtesy. Sir Leicester's chivalry is most powerfully dramatised in his concern to protect his wife from dishonour when she has been cast down from the top of the fashionable world. The feudal ideal can only survive by constructing a flattering belief in the poor as "very picturesque and faithful" (189; ch. 12). The necessity of maintaining this view untouched by the pestilence, obscenity and degradation of urban poverty ensures that the dangerous condition of the poor cannot even become a case of "telescopic philanthropy" (49; ch. 4). Its existence cannot even be spoken of in the circle of fashionable life.

Sir Leicester emphasises a certain boundary between classes in order to maintain his superior position:

> From the village school of Chesney Wold, intact as it is this minute, to the whole framework of society; from the whole framework of society, to the aforesaid framework receiving tremendous cracks in consequence of people (ironmasters, lead-mistresses, and what not) not minding their catechism, and getting out of the station unto which they are called — necessarily and for ever, according to Sir Leicester's rapid logic, the first station in which they happen to find themselves; and from that, to their educating other people out of *their* stations, and so obliterating the landmarks, and opening the floodgates, and all the rest of it; this is the swift progress of the Dedlock mind. (455; ch. 28)

Whilst Sir Leicester clings to the old framework of society, however, the middle classes invade his sanctuary and violate his exclusive rights. Boythorn, the vigorous ex-soldier, vies with Sir Leicester to get possession of a green pathway in Chesney Wold. Boythorn exceeds Dedlock in vital power: "Talking, laughing, or snoring, they make beams of the house shake" (140; ch. 9). Mr Rouncewell, the ironmaster who beats Sir Leicester in the election, decisively secures the victory of the middle classes. Tulkinghorn (solicitor), Bucket (detective officer), and Woodcourt (surgeon) all meddle in the domestic matters of the Dedlock. They gain power by probing into Lady Dedlock's secret and interpreting her body.

Women, in *Bleak House*, play strikingly oppositional roles to the established power. Tulkinghorn, the embodiment of a ruthless, specialised machinery of knowledge and coercion, is shot by Hortense, who, as Virginia Blain has observed, functions as the Lady

Dedlock's double (143-44). Sir Leicester Dedlock, the representative of the hereditary power of aristocratic caste, is destroyed by revelations of his wife's illegitimate love and sexual sin. Significantly, the stability of the nation is based upon the ideological control of female will and sexuality: without effective control, uninhibited female power may undermine the male dominant authorities.

The exposure of Lady Dedlock's secret spurs on the shift of control from the upper classes to the middle classes. Smallweed and Chadband, after discovering the secret, breaks into the Dedlock's house to blackmail Sir Leicester. It is Mrs Rouncewell, a middle-class mother, who, for the purpose of proving the innocence of her son, George, eventually makes Lady Dedlock decide to leave home. The idealistic, affectionate mother of the middle class thus excludes the disqualified mother of the upper class. Mothers' positions and functions illustrate the downfall of the upper classes and the following prosperity of the middle classes.

10

The novel seems to suggest the beginning of a different social order in its final movement away from the dying feudal world of the agricultural provinces and from the metropolitan centre. The future of the story moves to Yorkshire and the new Bleak House of Esther and Allan Woodcourt. The new form of knowledge which implies ideals of social relationship is constructed by Esther's narrative. Harold Skimpole's description of Esther as "the very touchstone of responsibility ... intent upon the perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre" seems to emphasise her character as a bourgeois regime of prudence, management, and diligence (603; ch. 37). Esther's moral rectitude underwrites the authority of her regulatory influence upon other lives. Her illegitimacy, constantly referred to, cannot be unimportant in the text that situates power in inheritance and law. Her mother's death at the entrance into the pauper graveyard confirms Esther's inherited affiliation with the illegitimate body of the poor.

Just after her interview with Lady Dedlock and her discovery of her illegitimate origin, Esther feels sympathy towards her mother, repeating Lady Dedlock's terms, "unhappy mother." Esther identifies herself with Lady Dedlock by walking near the Dedlock mansion and imagining to walk in the Ghost's Walk as her mother used to: "my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the

stately house; and that my warning feet were haunting it even then" (586; ch. 36). Here Lady Dedlock's morbidity seems to transfer to Esther as her inheritance. Yet Esther recovers from her morbid identification with her mother: soon after reading her mother's letter, she receives two letters from Mr Jarndyce and Ada, the witnesses of Esther's identity as the housekeeper of Bleak House.

Whilst Lady Dedlock is merely a passive victim of others' surveillance, Esther enters with zest into the project of interpretative penetration. Yet her narrative perspective becomes twofold afterwards: as a narrator, and as a victim. Jasmine Yong Hall discusses Esther's capitulation to the patriarchal discourse in relation to Lady Dedlock; in her disciplinary gaze, Esther's narrative objectifies her mother as the source of sexuality and attempts to separate herself from the stigma of her mother's sin (177). In her pursuit of her mother, she takes up Bucket's detective discourse, emphasising her passivity. This is her revenge on her mother who has "murdered" her twice.

Esther's early life produces a sense of self as outcast. The account of her childhood shows her as groping for knowledge in order to understand the mystery of her origin. As Pam Morris has argued, Esther's relationships with others are represented by means of physical touching, often by kissing and touching the person's face with her hands (693). Such affectionate intimacy is a feature of the representation of the supportive female network of Caddy, Miss Flite, Ada, and Esther.

Woodcourt's way of knowing is also represented as involving physical closeness to the subject of his concern. He walks observantly through the slum area. At the death of the law-writer, Nemo (Hawdon), Woodcourt's "professional interest in death, noticeable as being quite apart from his remarks on the deceased as an individual" is differed from that of Tulkinghorn (168; ch. 11). His interaction with characters from the diseased world of poverty is based on bodily contact and compassionate knowledge.

Esther's radical capacity for knowing, deriving from an alienated sense of self and the experience of bodily contact, is recontained at the close of the novel within the traditional domestic sphere. In her marriage to Woodcourt, she now takes up his medical discourse: her surveillance and interpretative penetration is outstanding, correcting the definitions of female weakness which have been enforced by the male, medical authorities.

With Esther, both as the heroine and the narrator, Dickens reconstructs the idea of motherhood which has been rejected and defiled by Lady Dedlock and by other mothers such as Mrs Jellyby. In the characterisation of Mrs Jellyby, Dickens constructs an ideological nexus of gender and empire. Her "telescopic philanthropy" destroys the

barrier between forms of distant savagery and the British domestic sphere: neglecting her household duties by spending all of her time on the project designed to "cultivate" Africans, she ironically transforms her home into a wilderness, her family into savages.

Dickens uses Esther to illustrate the efficacy of his approved model of female reform in which domestic order expands from a well-managed domestic sphere. Emphasising her role as an effective manager of the household economy at Bleak House, he shows her order from that site gradually and naturally. Esther first proves her ability to reverse the professional woman's disastrous effect in the Jellyby household, in which the distinction between British home and untamed wilderness remain precarious. Her influence on the Jellyby children is more significant than her limited assault on the household. She fulfils the role of mother that Mrs Jellyby has rejected, and begins a reform project at home. The middle-class women's proper civilising mission consists of performing and imparting the duties which sustain the middle-class British domestic sphere and preserve clear distinctions between home and Borrioboola-Gha.

Esther's mission in the novel is to eradicate the bad examples of the eroded motherhood and the dark memories of the morbid mother and to reconstruct the proper, healthy model of maternity. Differentiated from the male gaze of the third-person narrator and of the patriarchal authorities, the narrative and characterisation of Esther suggest new models of the female self and of the family order.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens focuses on maternity, which is defined as morbid and contaminated. He attempts to enlarge Victorian assumptions of femininity and maternity through the new perspectives he gained by participating in the scientific controversies as exemplified in *Household Words*. The novel is Dickens's challenge to the newly established theories of physiological psychology for the purpose of illuminating the human nature.

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Synopsis

Physiological Psychology and Dickens's *Bleak House*

Sakiko Nonomura

This paper focuses on how maternity is narrated and defined in Dickens's *Bleak House* and how its representation is related to the male-dominant society of mid-Victorian England. In the text, Dickens deals with the newly advanced theory of physiological psychology and illustrates the interplay between body and mind in the character of nervously suffering mother, Lady Dedlock, and her illegitimate daughter, Esther Summerson. The novel challenges the conventional, dominant alliance of patriarchy and medicine, uncovering the secret maternity which is represented as "morbid" by the male and medical gaze. My project is twofold: to analyse the complex interaction between nineteenth-century medical theory and Dickens's narrative discourse, and to determine how his representations of health and illness functioned as imaginative creations of medical spheres, both challenging and reinforcing stereotypes of class and gender.

Before discussing the relationship between the novel and the scientific arguments, I take up Dickens's edited periodical *Household Words* and explore how articles in it respectively deal with scientific and medical controversies and how the periodical, on the whole, represents the new concept of physiological psychology.

Diversified with medical discourses, *Bleak House* is a challenge to the prevalent assumptions of femininity and maternity. The concept of disease in the Victorian era drew directly on notions of polluted internal space. The theme of fallen woman, then, is directly connected with the contaminated female body. Furthermore, from the perspective of physiological psychology, maternity itself is defined to be a phenomenon of physical disorder. In the characterisation of Lady Dedlock, Dickens illustrates morbid maternity from the perspectives of physiological psychology and gradually deepens the understanding of it by using the perspective of her daughter, Esther.

Esther Summerson, the novel's heroine and one of its two narrators, attempts to reconstruct the story of her own life. Her story culminates in her discovery of her parentage, and in her marriage to a hardworking man of reforming persuasion. In the process she discovers her illegitimate origin; her mother is Lady Dedlock, an influential aristocratic Sir Leicester Dedlock's wife, who has given birth to Esther by Captain Hawdon (now known as his pseudonym, Nemo). Whilst Lady Dedlock is a merely passive victim of others' surveillance, Esther enters with zest into the project of interpretative penetration. In the characterisation of Esther, the text explores a new perspective on femininity and maternity.

The novel demonstrates the interconnections between family and nation and warns the

risk of spreading the personal, sexual morbidity in the national level. Through the Foucauldian analysis of surveillance and interpretation, I explore how the power system based on knowledge is embedded in the detective paradigm. In this paradigm, the middle classes gain power by following the downfall of the upper classes. After all, women play strikingly oppositional roles to the established power. The exposure of Lady Dedlock's secret spurs on the shift of control from the upper classes to the middle classes.

Esther's mission is to illustrate the efficacy of the approved model of female reform in which domestic order expands from a well-managed domestic sphere. She eradicates the bad examples of the eroded motherhood and suggests new models of the female self and of the family order which are differentiated from the male and medical gaze.