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"The Body in Pain": George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife*

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"Why should a man's mind have been thrown into such close, sad, sensational, inexplicable relations with such a precarious object as his own body" (Hardy 227): Thomas Hardy's reflection as he gazed at his own image in a mirror poses the complex question of the coexistence of body and mind, recurrently addressed by thinkers at the end of the 19th century. In the wake of Darwin's, Spencer's, and Huxley's theories, but also of Schopenhauer's pessimism and "will-to-live",[1] writers reconsidered in their fiction the Christian version of this dualism and strove to establish new bases for a redefinition of identity. A disciple of Zola at the start of his career and also an admirer of Balzac, George Moore was one of them: his writings put the emphasis on the characters' bodies, both reading surfaces in Realist and Naturalist fashion and fathoming the depths of physical experience in an attempt to link thoughts and sensations. At the core of this vision there is a radical reversal of the hierarchy between matter and spirit, resulting from Darwin's theories, as Margot Norris puts it: "the inverted causality formulated by Darwin, that reason is the product, not the producer of Nature, and its perilous and ironic consequence, that reason is enthralled to the organic, the unconscious and the irrational, and that, for all the anthropocentric claims and prerogatives it has traditionally validated, it is deployed by the libido." (Norris 7)

A Mummer's Wife, written to emulate Zola and published in 1885, can read as another questioning on that relationship viewed by Norris as an "enthrallment": within the rigid framework of determinism, Moore's second novel narrates the fate of a modest dressmaker who, escaping from the narrow bounds of lower middle-class existence, follows a mummer, becomes an actress and dies a raving alcoholic… For all the attention paid to physical existence, which even turns into a dramatization of the body shaping textual representations and narrative modes, a process of deconstruction, actually akin to destruction, runs through this novel that unravels the heroine's spasmodic course through life. Though briefly replaced by the free play of desire and intense physical involvement both in adultery and on the stage in a theatre, Kate Ede's initial inertia seems to program her final prostration and ultimately

[1] For a thorough study of Moore's interest in Schopenhauer's philosophy, see Patrick Bridgwater, *George Moore and German Pessimism*.

her death. Moore locates fate in the body through images that articulate extremes and that turn it from a permanent straitjacket to a site of ephemeral pleasure then of dissolution and disintegration, an ambivalence that this paper analyzes. We shall first study the evocation of domestic space and the "twilight trances" that take place in it, before examining Moore's version of the unbearable lightness of being in which the body becomes both a burden and a spectacle. Finally, we shall see that the character's trajectory is a process involving metamorphosis and otherness, making and unmaking in language "the body in pain".

Domestic space and "twilight trances"

Body and space interact and this interaction is the first step in the dramatization of bodily experience, as Moore's fiction inscribes the character's moves and desires in an urban and industrialised landscape invaded by sulphur and mud. In pure Realist and Naturalist fashion, the relation between body and surroundings is central, as announced by the epigraph to *A Mummer's Wife* taken from Victor Duruy's *Introduction générale à l'Histoire de France*: "Change the surroundings in which man lives, and, in two or three generations, you will have changed his physical constitution, his habits of life, and a goodly number of his ideas." The implicit metaphor of uprooting and transplantation, evolution and adaptation to environment, echoes the dialectics of stability and instability contained in the very title (foregrounding marriage as the cornerstone of Victorian family and society, while "mummer" stands for a marginalized and wandering figure). A patchwork counterpane, torn lace curtains, a tattered carpet, a broken mug linked to shattered dreams "made in crockery" (74), crackers torn asunder to deliver mottoes decorated with a little Cupid with bow and arrow aiming at a heart: in the first chapters, elements of the domestic setting evoke fragmentation and decomposition at work at the very heart of a rigid puritan home, perhaps an indirect clue of the toll taken by the conflict between restraint and excess that the novel exposes. Like the clay moulded in the pottery works of Hanley, one of the Five Towns where the story begins, the heroine undergoes a process of making and unmaking.

Domestic space structures a complex interplay between excess and restraint along with oppositions between inside and outside, the intimate and the public. Yet architecture is first and foremost built on the motif of confinement reinforced by the impression that this universe is saturated with pungent smells, from the "sharp sickly odour of the aloes" (54), the "acrid odour of tea and the sickly smells of stale bread and rank butter", to the "fumes of the malt" (170). The female body's progression up a narrow and winding staircase "like a huge canister or burrow" (26), along small corridors, through poky and crowded rooms, is

thwarted, necessitates "a turn and a stoop" (27) or even "creeping" (9). This however does not prevent the heroine from crossing thresholds and entering forbidden territory (the room of the lodger, the actor with whom she is going to run away). The evocation of domestic space, with its limits and almost labyrinthian architecture, paradoxically favours promiscuity and makes transgression possible, while kinesthetic frustration kindles latent energies that are still dormant. The image of Kate, lingering on the threshold of the future lodger's bedroom before finally "step[ping] across the way" (12), with a novel in her hand (Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* in which the protagonist reads Byron and Shelley), suggests transgression through the combination of body and book, both vehicles for desire foreshadowing "the sudden delirium of the senses" (134) she later feels. The lodger's room gives her access to the world of the flesh through the objects displayed there, metonymies of bodily pleasure contrasting with the pious exhortations hung on the wall: *foie gras* suggesting "delicacy of living", a chemise "immorality" and a bottle of scent "refinement of taste" (83).

In the first paragraph, Moore seems to set his heroine's body in the "twilight", an idea borrowed from Anthony Winner's critical study, *Characters in the Twilight: Hardy, Zola, and Chekhov*, in which Winner uses the term "twilight" to define a form of in-betweenness (involving light and darkness, body and mind) emblematic of the construction of identity in the *fin de siècle*. In Moore, the representation of such in-betweenness revolves around the interplay of light and shadow, immobility and movement, life and death:

> In default of a screen, a gown and a red petticoat had been thrown over a clothes-horse, and these shaded the glare of the lamp from the eyes of the sick man. In the pale obscurity of the room, his bearded cheeks could be seen buried in a heap of tossed pillows. By his bedside sat a young woman. As she dozed, her face drooped until her features were hidden, and the lamp-light made the curious curves of a beautiful ear look like a piece of illuminated porcelain. Her hands lay upon her lap, her needlework slipped from them; and as it fell to the ground she awoke. (1)

Prefiguring the image of the heroine's petrified corpse in the last page, these first two paragraphs compose a *mise en scène* that puts in the foreground the female form: in its ether-induced sleep and hence motionlessness, it becomes an object to be gazed at in a somehow erotic–and even fetishistic–manner that first introduces underwear (and a red petticoat at that) instead of body, thereby playing with the reader's curiosity and starting with hints at naked flesh. The description also underlines "curious curves" steeped in the lamplight and focuses on skin, compared with porcelain. Kate stands for the Angel in the House yet she lets her sewing fall to the ground, a detail that may announce her future failing as perfect wife and nurse. Moore's creation here joins all these Victorian icons or, to quote Nina Auerbach, these "beautiful corpse-like women [...] who are transfigured in trance, sleep, lifelike death, or embalmed life" (Auerbach 41). It doesn't come as a surprise that the first

lines also present a literal awakening, however painful, as Kate rouses herself out of the vapours of ether later replaced by "leaden-coloured dreams which h[a]ng about her" (46). Interestingly enough, the beginning of the story coincides with the birth of sensation within the character, thus paving the way for the more metaphorical awakening of desire and awareness of self that are to take place. Yet, as a sign of the irreversible degradation that will be undergone by the protagonist, this moment also inaugurates a series of similar occasions when body and consciousness slowly emerge from a stupefied state caused by intoxication.

Another relevant feature of this passage–all the more relevant as it is recurrently found in Moore's work–is the narrative technique involving the fascinated gaze of an omniscient narrator who seems to make use of the character's passivity to compose a picture, play with light and darkness, and linger on chosen parts of the female form. For example, Kate's sewing becomes a focus for description and seems to provide another ideal moment for the emergence of body in text or at least of a range of sensations associated to the universe depicted here:

> Nothing was now heard but the methodical click of her needle as it struck the head of her thimble, and then the long swish of the thread as she drew it through the cloth. The lamp at her elbow burned steadily, and the glare glanced along her arm as she raised it with the large movement of her sewing.
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> Her hair was blue wherever the light touched it, and it encircled the white prominent temple like a piece of rich black velvet; a dark shadow defined the delicate nose, and hinted at a thin indecision of lips, whilst a broad touch of white marked the weak but not unbeautiful chin. (2)

This is an illustration of what Richard Allen Cave defined as the writer's "imaginative involvement with the physical nature of Kate Ede's existence" (Cave 36): Moore uses alliterations that turn text into texture, as an echo of the sounds that accompany Kate's activity, an interesting play on language as fabric. It nevertheless appears as a pretext leading to another play, this time on the heroine's face, to transform hair into velvet and skin into surface and volume, which are themselves defined by light and darkness. As he seems to juxtapose a poetic and pictorial rendering with the phrenological or physionomical study expected from a Realist or Naturalist portrait, the writer offers a reading of character that emphasises indecision and weakness while underlining sensuality.

Both burden and spectacle: the unbearable lightness of being

In keeping with the agenda of Naturalist writing, the frequent mentions of Kate's exhaustion "still [felt] in her bones" (24) make the body appear as a dead burden and show her

imprisonment in domestic space, itself invaded by scorching sun and heat. The “dead glare” creating an “oven-like atmosphere” (46), the pungent smells coming both from outside and inside the house (the fumes of industry, the odour of ether) increase the sense of discomfort itself made greater by the incessant coughing, wheezing and gasping of her asthmatic husband, a convulsive rhythm alternating asphyxiation and breathing, described as “a great upheaval, a great wrenching and rocking”, “a violent spasmodic wrench” that turn the sick man’s agony into a kind of spectacle exhibiting his “distented” veins, the “muscles of his chest labour[ing]” (6). Wrapped in the “luminous mist of sentiments” and clothed “in the pity of tragic things” (8), this moment parodies Christic passion, and Kate unwillingly becomes a spectator of “the same scene repeated a hundred times before” (5). Sensations of suffocation even provide a kind of frame as the image of Ralph’s body, “shaken until it seemed as if it were going to break to pieces like a bundle of sticks” (411), comes back at the end. The same pattern, representing the convulsive tearing apart of flesh, is repeated when Kate’s child dies: “soft roundnesses fell into distorsions; chubby knees were wrenched to and fro, muscles seemed to be torn.” (308)

The body is thus envisaged as a spectacle, as a site of dislocation but also as a burden and straitjacket in a Puritan universe where the work ethic prevails, desire is forbidden, and words are parsimoniously used, in an industrial city where the air is polluted and vital functions, such as breathing and sleep, are disturbed, where workers, forced to “dance up and down on one leg”, seem like machines, “the motive power and the feeders of the different lathes” (69). This insistence on the body’s reactions to overwhelming external conditions turns it into an element defined by its inclusion in outer space and, at the same time, into a locus of inscription of the outside world and a container of sensations and emotions. Even the colours and shapes of a theatrical poster which is on display on a wall in the street blend with Kate’s dream as she dozes on a sofa while having a dim perception of this picture which announces the arrival of actors in town and somehow plays a part in her future moves (she will follow them and desert her husband). Moore’s use of a hypallage, as he evokes the “dreamy warmth of the fire” (16) that triggers Kate’s sleep, is an illustration of the permeability between body and things which defines the character’s existence. Placed at the crossroads, the body, whose porosity is underlined, is thus a site of discomfort and confinement, feeling for example “the minutes slipp[ing] like the iron teeth of a saw over [its] sensibilities” or the cold atmosphere “pierc[ing] through” (12) its weariness, an image later echoed by the evocation of the steel needle of a sewing machine piercing a piece of glistening silk. It appears as a fragile receptacle sometimes unable to repress its emotions and energies,

no longer overwhelmed by outside forces but yielding to inner pressure, either a "sudden gush of feeling" or the "burden of pent-up emotions" (106).

"The instinctual and subcerebral are prominent elements in *A Mummer's Wife*" (Chaïkin 30) and the setting functions as a decor enabling Moore to introduce in his fiction anarchic forces that stand for the unconscious and for subterranean drives. Though these forces are first located in the outside world and presented as antagonistic to the self, they come to signify the presence of otherness within it. The industrial landscape–a "red brick oven" with a sweeping green line, "tantalizing hills" (60) in the distance, marking the limits of Kate's existence–thus represents a place of projection of anxieties and fears, of repressed desires, and its description, though inserted in narrative, is often filtered through the character's mind and body. As if things were viewed through a camera lens itself represented by the character's eyes but also by her bodily sensations, traces of that subjectivity can be found in descriptions that actually are visions the character may have at a specific moment, vehicles for the emotions and sensations stirred by what is seen. The frequent use of verbs such as "seemed", "appeared" and the phrases anchoring description in subjectivity ("seeming in Kate's fancy like", "it seemed to her that" [57]), or working as a frame that emphasises the act of contemplation ("she watched" [33], "Kate stood for a long while watching" [33], "she stood at gaze" [56], "they stood looking vacantly at" [60]) outline the contours of a sentient body whose perceptions give shape to thoughts, thereby illustrating the sensualist motto *sentio ergo sum*, later evolving into *patio ergo sum*. To account for it, Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasmus and interweaving–"chiasmes et entrelacs"–between body and mind (relying on the existence of a "body of the mind" and a "mind of the body") remains central: the mind, rooted in the body, is then considered as its "other side".[2]

The industrial landscape itself, with its fires, muddy spots, sharp angles, belching chimneys like pieces on a chessboard and "sulphur-hued atmosphere" (417), contrasting with rolling hills, generates a sense of disorientation and turns Kate's consciousness into a shifting ground, a quicksand: sensation and thought are juxtaposed, even form a conglomerate, and words such as "adrift", "float", "fade", describe how these fleeting moments of consciousness rise out of corporeal obscurity only to dissolve again. In this use of character as focal consciousness, the frontiers between the narrator's and the character's speech are somehow blurred, to the extent that sensations seem to infiltrate and pervade the narrator's discourse. As if he endeavoured to grasp the emergence of Kate Ede's consciousness out of the magma

[2] "Il y a un corps de l'esprit et un esprit du corps et un chiasme entre eux"; "l'autre côté du corps, [qui] déborde en lui, empiète sur lui" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 307).

of sensory experience, out of the "haze of dim sensuousness and emotive numbness" (16) enveloping her, his point of view imperceptibly gives way to the protagonist's perspective and sometimes even merges with it. Kate's body weighs on the narrative and gives it density and depth.

Moore's heroine belongs to this 19th-century category of women who, to quote Nina Auerbach, "abandon[ed] domestic confinement to unfurl their awesome capacity for self-creation" (Auerbach 9). However, as shown by Roger Kempf, the very emancipation of the female body entails constraint and its insertion in a network of contradictory forces and servitudes from which it emerges,[3] which finds an illustration in Kate Ede's fall from triumphant performance as an actress to alcoholism. If each experience is a means to make the body visible and to expose it in writing, the discovery of the theatre, first viewed in an impressionistic manner from the auditorium, then from behind the scenes, foregrounds it as an oppressive reality: "The odour of hair, cheap scent, necks, bosoms and arms [of the chorus girls in the wings] was overpowering and to Kate's sense of modesty there was something revolting in this loud display of flesh." (141) Such change of perspective entails a disturbing blurring of perception and loss of bearings, the empty auditorium appearing as a dark cellar or "a round blank overclouded in a deep twilight" while the wings reveal backstage activity and material organisation. As Kate impersonates a character and walks in red tights singing "'Look at me here! Look at me there! Criticize me everywhere!'" (228), thus participating in this loud display of flesh that she formerly found shocking, she derives a brief though intense satisfaction from it, feeling a "delicious but almost incomprehensible notion of contact–a sensation, more delicate than the touch of a lover's breath on your face" (227).

Acting results in dispersal, the birth of myriad sensations that jeopardise identity, so that the quest for self leads to loss of self, prefigured in a previous sequence when Kate, then a mere spectator, goes through the play as through "a sensual dream", with "a mingled sense of nearness and remoteness, an extraordinary concentration, and an absence of her own proper individuality". The intoxication (music "rushed to her head like wine" [125], "foamed in her head like champagne" [128], which results in a "whirling sense of intoxication" [128]), the "giddiness" (125), the "maze of colours" (125) and "mist sw[imming] before her eyes" (128) are harbingers of the delirium provoked by drink whose effects later enable the novelist to

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[3] "Toute émancipation suppose un asservissement–réel ou imaginaire, et, en tout cas, le sentiment d'une contrainte. 'Inerte et flexible' à la fois, tiraillé par des appels contraires (le désir, les convenances), le corps féminin émerge d'un réseau de servitudes." (Kempf 125)

theatralise the body as a physiological inferno. “She was overborne and over-tempted; all her blood seemed to be in her head and heart, and from time to time she was shaken with quick shudderings” (130): this unbearable lightness of being generated by theatrical experience is followed by “sad languor” and “sad ecstasy” (130), oxymorons expressing the ambivalence proper to Kate’s equivocal state. Central to Moore’s vision, the image of a body erased in the very act that carries it beyond itself, as the ascending movement of ecstasy inevitably leads to vertigo (itself prefiguring a final fall), stems from what Michel Foucault has termed a “process of hysterization” of the female body. According to Foucault, the female body is both defined and dismissed as saturated with sexuality: it is organically linked with the social body because of its reproductive functions and fecundity, connected with the family as an essential component, then with the life of the children that it breeds (gives birth to and educates).[4]

Making and unmaking the body in pain

In *A Mummer’s Wife*, even the ecstasy found in motherhood is of short duration and evolves from “twilight trances” (300) to “apathy” (302). The child, a “tiny whining mass of flesh” [296] and “puling pulp” [300], dies. Alcoholism, fueling jealousy and passion, is evoked in relation to fire, acid, together with love “like a dagger whose steel was being slowly reddened in the flames of brandy” (330) and sorrow “like a corrosive acid [penetrating] into the marrow of her bones” (393), while pain turns to “particles”: “in this subtilization of the brain the remotest particles of pain detached themselves, until life seemed to her nothing but a burning and unbearable frenzy” (330). Expressed in terms of industrial processes, emotions are imprinted in the flesh, become substances, and Kate’s aspirations are reduced to bodily tensions, which may be interpreted as a Naturalist version of Flaubertian Bovarysm. In *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry explains how the pain felt by another person often has “the remote character of some deep subterranean fact,

[4] “*Hystérisation du corps de la femme*, triple processus par lequel le corps de la femme a été analysé – qualifié et disqualifié – comme corps intégralement saturé de sexualité ; par lequel le corps a été intégré, sous l’effet d’une pathologie qui lui serait intrinsèque, au champ des pratiques médicales ; par lequel enfin il a été mis en communication organique avec le corps social (dont il doit assurer la fécondité réglée), l’espace familial (dont il doit être un élément substantiel et fonctionnel) et la vie des enfants (qu’il produit et qu’il doit garantir, par une responsabilité biologico-morale qui dure tout au long de l’éducation) : la Mère, avec son image en négatif qui est la ‘femme nerveuse’, constitue la forme la plus visible de cette hystérisation.” (Foucault 137)

belonging to an invisible geography" (Scarry 3), yet it seems that Moore's venture is an attempt to articulate this pain felt by an imaginary other or, to use the words of Scarry, "to lift the interior facts of bodily sentience out of the inarticulate pre-language of 'cries and whispers' into the realm of shared objectification" (Scarry 11).

Like Zola who wanted to show this fire burning and roaring in the flesh as an image of unruly desires,[5] Moore recycles the clichéd metaphor of passion as fire in the context of industrialization. He turns it into an entropic process, a transformation of heat into energy, which, in *Zola, feux et signaux de brume*, Michel Serres associates with the steam engine and thermodynamics. Difference, mixing, and irreversibility are foregrounded in theories on entropy, hence the tragic notion of degradation around which it revolves.[6] "It devours me like a fire" (408), Kate says: the body as a still, or "corps-alambic", Serres's image, consumes itself, burns too quickly, a boiling pot of blood, fire, and alcohol, driven by "a yearning [...] for the tingling sensation that brandy would bring" (315), needing the spirit that "diffuse[s] a graceful warmth through her" (308) "blaz[ing] into flame", "all things serv[ing] as fuel" (319), "leap[ing], crackl[ing], and burn[ing] with the fierceness of a house in the throes of conflagration" (374). Words such as "yearning" and "spirit" now refer to a degraded version of former ideals and aspirations, which corresponds to a fall into the body's material reality and to corporeal obsessions, with the result that her mind "bec[omes] denser", while it "foamed" and "fizzed" during her ecstatic experience on the stage.

Moore's involvement in the sensual stuff his protagonist's life is made of has to be regarded in the context of his own intentions and aims as a "ricochet" (Frazier 95) of Zola in Britain. Taking religious or sensual passion as a foundation for narrative and scientific observation, Moore advocated an art similar to clinical study in *Literature at Nurse or Circulating Morals*, in order to emphasise the centrality of both body and mind in fiction: "To analyze, you must have a subject; a religious or sensual passion is as necessary to the Realist novelist as a disease is to the physician." (Moore 21) Passion entails pathology, suffering and deviance: the doctor carefully deciphering bodily signs as indexes of Kate's addiction to

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[5] "tout ce qui brûle et rugit dans la chair, nos colères, nos désirs, nos passions déréglées, les charniers où nous courons, les joies défendues, dont crient nos membres" (Zola 218).

[6] "La théorie de la chaleur, des moteurs et des réservoirs, pose la différence, le mélange et l'irréversibilité. On invente, du même coup, l'histoire et l'entropie. Voici le nouveau temps, l'idée tragique d'une dégradation, et l'espoir pathétique d'une coulée de vie qui va en sens inverse." (Serres 72-73)

alcohol, going beyond her painted face with his "merciless eyes which s[ee] through all the secrets of her life" (397), may be regarded as a *mise-en-abyme* of the narrator's stance, though what purports to be a scientific reading of symptoms actually transforms the body into a spectacle. As it recounts an entropic process of degradation and fragmentation involving an increasing disorder, an explosion of energy and a final inertia, Moore's novel seems to call on and even rewrite the myth of the Fall.

From images of languor provoked by domestic heat and boredom in the first pages to the conflagration triggered by excessive drinking, the novel is run through with references to shivering, to sensations of stifling heat alternating with cold. One may think here of Starobinski's study of the scale of temperatures ("échelle des températures") and bodily self-reference ("auto-référence charnelle") in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (Starobinski 48).[7] The critic explores the transformation of sensations (due to outside influences and to the interaction between body and space) into inner forces that eventually have their origins in Emma's body. Discontinuity and explosion characterize the description that is made of this burning and consumed self oscillating between excessive energy and utter prostration, dispersal and dissolution. This "poor aching body, throbbing with the anguish of nerves" (330)[8] seems to be engaged in a process that transforms it and that is recorded in the narrative with such care and precision that the professed scientific dimension of this account is clearly underlain by fascination for this abject self. This paradoxical combination of Naturalist agenda and fascination accounts for the writing being saturated with references to the body, an accumulation that verges on excess and explains why, upon its publication, the novel was judged as coarse, disagreeable, or even repulsive. Yet it also testifies to Moore's attempt to articulate bodily experience and to make it felt through his writing, becoming what Scarry calls "the realm of shared objectification" (Scarry 11).

This alterity which affects the body is accompanied by madness. When Kate goes on the stage to interrupt a rehearsal, literally and figuratively making a scene, she substitutes for the play

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[7] "le corps s'appréhende, se perçoit, se rapporte à soi-même dans une sorte d'auto-référence charnelle" (Starobinski 48).

[8] It seems relevant to draw a parallel between this vision and Parnet and Deleuze's analysis of Thomas Hardy's characters as bundles of nerves and sensations ("bloc de sensations variables", "paquet de sensation à vif") who run along lines of luck or misfortune–mostly misfortune in the final works *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895)–leading them to death and returning them to an obscurity (more particularly Jude) they have never really left (Deleuze, and Parnet 51).

another show, an exhibition of madness reminiscent of *Jane Eyre*: "We ought to put up Jane Eyre [...] we'd be sure to draw full houses" (364), says one of the actors now relegated backstage and turned into spectators. Moore takes up the scene when Brontë's madwoman–commonly regarded as the projection of Jane's rebellion, anger and desire since the publication of Gilbert and Gubar's groundbreaking work on *The Madwoman in the Attic*–attacks Rochester who is himself intent on displaying in a theatrical fashion her animality to a bemused audience (chapter 26). It is clear that, in his representation of the mad body, Moore plays with the intertextual reference to Bertha: "The long black hair hung in disordered masses; her brown eyes were shot with golden lights; the green tints in her face became, in her excessive pallor, dirty and abominable in colour, and she seemed more like a demon than a woman as her screams echoed through the empty theatre." (364)

Dissolving flesh, erasing individuality and suggesting the return to chaos and primeval mud with visions of a decaying social organism that regresses to an amorphous state ("a huge, rollicking population, fetid with the fermenting sweat of the factories" [281], "a mud-bespattered crowd roll[ing] in and out of the darkness" [410]), the narrative relates the metamorphosis of the Victorian middle-class angel into a figure between prostitute and alcoholic workwoman, "a heedless nondescript–a something in a black shawl and a quasi-respectable bonnet, a slippery stepping-stone" (406). This is of course a common theme in Victorian literature and art, one of the most famous examples in painting being Augustus Leopold Egg's triptych *Past and Present* (1858). As he takes up the Victorian "rhetoric of fallenness" and its exploration of "predicaments of agency, and uncertainties about the nature of selfhood, character, and society" (Anderson 1), Moore inscribes it in *fin de siècle* concerns by staging the discovery of otherness within the self and dramatizing the body's function as a site of difference and violence. If it contains the crises of violence it stages, the narrative is also to a certain extent contaminated by them, all the more so as the abject body becomes a fascinating object: the flows of mud that run through the streets in the last part are not just emblematic of a typical Naturalist theme (of what Moore, after distancing himself from Zola, called "the putrid mud of naturalism") but of regression, decay, loss of form and identity, a state mirroring the flashing furnaces and "unfathomable grey" (148) of the industrial landscape.

As summed up by Walter James Miller in a foreword to *A Mummer's Wife*, "life emerges 'in its entirety', a conglomerate of sweet singing and sour vomiting, walking by the sea and phlegmy coughing, a glass of ale and a whiff of ether." (vii) Before reaching this formless state, violence, decentering the self, reconfigures the body into sharp angles and breaks its harmonious and supple curves, leading to an expressionist rendering of its distorsions and

contorsions, to quote Jankélévitch,[9] before final petrification. This process of unmaking that underlies the heroine's fate is first and foremost manifested through evocations of transformations that climax in a dislocation of her body: the last pages show her final convulsions, "withered arms [...] wav[ing] to and fro" and "the large, dimly-seen folds of the bedclothes [...] tossed to and fro" (430).

The novel's representations of this metamorphosis are structured on a double perspective focalising in turn on Kate's consciousness and on an external observer's gaze, either her husband's or the omniscient narrator's. Constructions of inner perception underline disconnection, dissociation, fragmentation ("splitting" head, about to "roll off her shoulders" [358]) and indistinction, confusion ("sensations of numbness, in which all distinctions were blurred" [304], "nebulae, enough to soften the lines of a too hard reality to a long sensation of tickling" [318]). The character's body is reduced to lead, glue, and pulp: "[...] then the great throbbing pain that lay like a lump of lead just above her forehead. Her mouth was clammy as if filled with glue, her limbs weak as if they had been beaten to pulp by violent blows. She was all pain [...]" (357). These phenomena have been analyzed by Paul Schilder in a work on the body as a construct in the mind, *L'image du corps*,[10] and explained in terms of mass, unity and fragment, heaviness and lightness, an image that gets altered in neuroses and pathologies and is modified in hallucinations.

Seen by an observer, the mad and anarchic body of the alcoholic is mentioned in terms of chaos, endless repetition ("the incessant repetition of the same words and gestures turned in the brain with the mechanical movement of a wheel" [325]) and animal imagery: "her tigerish walk" (326), "like a bird of prey, all her fingers distented" (351), "like a panther that has tasted blood" (375), while her husband, receiving her blows, is "beaten, scratched, torn to pieces" (385). In its organisation of this downward trajectory, the text works as a machine grinding the individual, actuated by what Leo Bersani calls the "fear of desire", typical of 19th-century Realist writing. He explains that, as a subversive agency, desire is a threat to the narrative form: obsessed with the very possibility of subversion that it stages, the Realist novel also furthers its brutal repression, creating "heroes of desire" who go through

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[9] "[la violence] tord les courbes gracieuses et flexibles, fait grimacer la souple arabesque du corps féminin et ricaner, au lieu du sourire, le rictus anguleux." (Jankélévitch 165)

[10] In cases of neuroses, Schilder mentions alterations linked with images of heaviness, of floating (bubbles), of emptiness, of inner dissolution (Schilder 118).

"ceremonies of expulsion" necessary for the annihilation or at least the mastery of the anarchic tendencies that have just been displayed.[11]

In *A Mummer's Wife*, Moore's venture rests on ambivalence as it both creates and uncreates the heroine, making and unmaking "the body in pain". Through an intense commitment to Kate's corporeal existence, he constructs her as a space where perceptions emerge only to overwhelm any stable sense of self. The sense of physical immediacy conveyed by Moore's writing is mediated through tropes, comparisons and metaphors that create effects of accumulation and saturation in the writing and a sense of determinism. The idea that fate is located in the body therefore also comes from these tropes, comparisons and metaphors that can be envisaged as an annexation of bodily otherness. Exploring the equation of feminine and inanimate, feminine and object, together with the complex representational potential of pain, Moore exhibits the female body in *A Mummer's Wife*, making and unmaking it. Images of the body in this novel are part and parcel of a representational system pertaining to Western culture, as shown by Elisabeth Bronfen in *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Bronfen uses Teresa de Lauretis's argument that violence is "en-gendered" by discourses in which the feminine, equated with the inanimate, cannot become a hero/subject and that this equation is "the locus of a 'rhetoric of violence'" (qtd. in Bronfen 50), a formula that could define the early production of George Moore, a Victorian writer trying to emulate Zola.

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[11] "Le désir est une menace pour la forme du récit réaliste. Le désir subvertit l'ordre social ; il fait aussi éclater l'ordre romanesque. Le roman du XIX[e] siècle est hanté par la possibilité de ces moments subversifs, et il les réprime avec une brutalité qui est à la fois choquante et logique au plus haut point. [...] Le roman réaliste admet les héros du désir pour pouvoir les soumettre à des cérémonies d'expulsion. Cette forme littéraire exige, pour que soit possible son existence même, l'annihilation ou, pour le moins, la maîtrise paralysante des tendances anarchiques." (Bersani 65-66)

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