“My Letters Are All Talk”: Community in Nineteenth-Century Epistolary Narratives of Deafness and Disability

by

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For Andrew Fuller
My husband, my support and more than
my carrier and lifter

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Abstract

My dissertation expands on recent work in literary studies that has emphasized the significance of autobiographical narratives of disability for both identity construction and the establishment of narrative authority. My dissertation adds to this recent scholarship with the critical understanding that letters are often a significant part of the stories that persons with disabilities tell about themselves. To illustrate this, I concentrate on the letters of three Victorian writers—Harriet Martineau, John Kitto, and Helen Keller—whose deafness or hearing impairment have been subjects of much scholarship, but whose familiar letters have not been adequately recognized as vital resources for insight into their disability narratives. Within this context, I examine how the authors use the implied or imagined community inherent in the exchange of familiar letters to write their disability narrative and I explore the ways that conceptions of disabled embodiment are constructed, deconstructed, and re-written. More specifically, I explore ways in which Harriet Martineau uses letters to blur the lines between the private and the public and to publish an illness/disability narrative that allowed her to maintain both personal and public authority over her illness and disability. I examine Helen Keller's early letters and the ways in which writing about her body enabled her, through the support of a significant epistolary community, to explore her own existence and to develop a concern with philanthropic work. I consider John Kitto's familiar letters in comparison with his work *The Lost Senses*; I explore his self-construction in that work as a solitary "overcomer" and the manner in which these letters contradict this construction to provide a fuller picture of his life leading up to

the book's publication. I also discuss several of Kitto's poems as critical additions to his disability narrative. Building on the work of my previous chapters, I conclude this dissertation with an examination of the familiar letters and poetry of Amy Levy. My inclusion of Levy's letters and poetry builds on and complicates my work in the preceding chapters and makes a case for the recognition that disability narratives are multifaceted and are shaped by a range of interrelated concerns and by their authors' multiple identity positions.

Introduction: An Apologia for Our Bodies

"[I]t is critically important that we be open to many different kinds of stories about disability, especially those that are complex and open-ended, and especially those that people with disabilities tell themselves."
Julia Miele Rodas (New York Times)

This dissertation has its genesis almost twenty-two years ago. It stems from my need to have my narrative acknowledged and understood and, ultimately, reflects my awareness of the significance of personal narrative to experiences of shifting identity and disability. During this period of more than two decades, I have repeatedly been asked to account for my body; my "story" has been expected, demanded, and volunteered.

* * *

I had just arrived home after my first year of university when something started to go wrong with my vision. I could see, but I couldn't. There were times when I would suddenly and inexplicably lose all sight in my right eye and times when I would regain it just as suddenly and inexplicably. Sometimes, the colour would drain from my left eye and I would spend days watching what seemed like a unilateral black-and-white movie. Almost always present was an alternating nystagmus[1] that resulted in the spinning sensation of vertigo. I embarked on a campaign of months of appointments with multiple doctors and numerous visits to the emergency room with the hope of finding someone, anyone, who would listen to my story. I saw doctor after doctor until an optometrist finally listened to my

[1] I use these words only after many years of hearing them spoken about me by doctors/nurses/physiotherapists.

story (though only after he told me that he couldn't find anything wrong with my vision and I had made him uncomfortable by bursting into tears). After I had finished crying, he conducted one last and *very simple* test. The speed and simplicity of this test and the fact that a doctor, any doctor, could have performed it months before failed to anger me because I finally felt that the months of telling my story were not wasted. This optometrist seemed alarmed by the results of this test and immediately sent me to a pediatric neurologist because she was his friend and would see me an hour after his call. This pediatric neurologist listened to my story, conducted several tests and, in the end, called an adult neurologist who saw me as soon as I arrived at his office. I told my story once again and this neurologist conducted many of the same tests as the pediatric neurologist. After months of telling my story, I nervously sat in front of this neurologist trying to count the freckles on his hands as he explained that my tests indicated that I had multiple sclerosis (MS). I now know that months is a rather short period of time to get a final diagnosis of MS; some people go undiagnosed for years during which time they are made to feel as though they are losing their mind or just trying to get attention. I was then sent to a different part of the hospital where I would begin a course of IV steroids and where I would recount my story for a nurse. During this time, I was anxious to have any doctor listen to my narrative and although I told it over and over, watching doctors (when I could see) note the details in my chart comforted me.

However, less than ten months after my initial diagnosis I learned just how intimately my life would be wrapped up in narrative. After several exacerbations involving my lower body, I lost the ability to walk and I began to use a wheelchair

at home and in the community. Much to my surprise, complete strangers, adults mainly, began to approach me in grocery stores, department stories, and, often, on the street demanding to know "what happened to you," or "what's wrong with you" (children were usually more interested in the actual wheelchair and I even had a young boy approach me and only ask if I would share the cool cart I was driving). Although I will confess that I have wondered to myself why a person I saw on the street/in a grocery store/in a department store was using a wheelchair, it would not have crossed my mind then, and still wouldn't today, to approach him or her and ask what had "happened" to them. I soon realized, however, what most people who are wheelchair users realize: I would, from this point on, repeatedly be expected to explain myself. I learned the lesson that I would find many years later aptly expressed by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in "Staring Back" that in "social relations, disabled bodies prompt the question, 'What happened to you?' The disabled body demands a narrative, requires an apologia that accounts for its difference from unexceptional bodies. In this sense, disability identity is constituted by the story of why my body is different from your body" (334).

While I have often been frustrated by demands to disclose details of my life, I have also learned the benefits of narrative. After I had been struggling for two years with a difficult diagnosis, my neurologist admitted me into a physical rehabilitation hospital with the hope of improving my mobility. Part of the requirement of life in this hospital was that its denizens were to have their lunch and dinner in a common dining room. Although televisions were not permitted in rooms, there were lounges at either end of the hall on each floor if one wanted to

watch something on TV. This was, clearly, an attempt by hospital staff to encourage social interaction. It worked. We talked during meals and would commiserate about the physiotherapy and occupational therapy "classes" we had during the day. Several of my floor mates and I would meet in one of the TV lounges in the evening to watch trashy sit-coms or "made-for-TV" movies. We would talk about our lives, our families, our jobs; but, mostly, we talked about what our lives were like after disability had interrupted them. It struck me then—and continues to preoccupy me—that there were never demands of "what happened to you." Our narratives were volunteered. We were an interesting little community and our narratives came effortlessly. Although I was still required to tell my story to doctors/nurses/physiotherapists, this hospital stay gave me the opportunity to think more critically about the expectation to tell my "story" and would, in the end, shape my graduate work.

* * *

This dissertation is not an examination of the epistolary genre but an invitation to a conversation exploring the significance of familiar letters to the disability life-writing genre. The cumulative result of these chapters is, I hope, a persuasive case for the expansion of the disability narrative genre to include familiar letters. Further to this, I hope that it will lead to an understanding that disability life writing can and does take place in a variety of ways other than in published monographs and that this conversation will expand the genre to include

alternative modes of expression by persons with disabilities. I intend, as well, that the study of familiar letters will make a significant contribution to current scholarly work on the genre and prove helpful in shaping alternative approaches to understanding disability narratives. My dissertation examines the ways in which the writers in my study used their letters to give authority to their bodily experiences and the ways in which their letters bring the body to the forefront. My treatment of the letters' references to bodily complaints and vicissitudes of the body as disability narratives also introduces questions of audience, the borders between public and private spheres and authorial intent. By taking an approach that combines discussion of the findings of disability studies theorists with close formal analyses of texts, I hope to provide a sensitive focus on the diverse conditions of production, distribution, and consumption of familiar letters. Chapters One through Three focus on three well-known Victorian writers—Harriet Martineau, John Kitto, and Helen Keller—all of whom published autobiographical writing (both Keller and Martineau published multiple autobiographical works). Kitto and Keller were profoundly deaf and Martineau experienced hearing loss throughout most of her life. I hope to expand on existing scholarship on these authors' work by including their familiar letters in order to shape alternative approaches to understanding their narratives. My dissertation's last chapter builds on my work in the preceding chapters to include a writer, Amy Levy, who did not write an autobiography or a disability narrative but who wrote familiar letters, several of which reflect on her experiences with depression and with increasing deafness. Levy is important to my dissertation as it is through my discussion of her letters

and poetry that I emphasize the reality that disability life writing can be written in formats other than, and in the absence of, published disability narratives or autobiographies.

I began the process of contemplating my dissertation topic with three significant points of discovery in my research on disability in the nineteenth century. Although these early research discoveries focused on contemporary scholarship, I perceived its applicability to nineteenth-century studies. The first point of discovery in my research was my reading of an article on life writing by G. Thomas Couser. In his "Introduction: Disability and Life Writing" (2011), Couser comments on what has been termed the "nobody memoir." He writes "[w]hat distinguishes today's nobody memoir is that it tends to record worst-, not best-case scenarios, and it often issues from marginal sites and minority populations" (Couser "Introduction" 230). He further writes that "[o]ne novel aspect of the nobody memoir has not been widely acknowledged: it is often the memoir of some body. That is, the nobody memoir is far more likely than the somebody memoir to be concerned with what it's like to have, to inhabit—to be—a particular body" (230).

The thought of the "some body" narrative prompted me to conduct further research and I read Couser's book, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (1997), and, subsequently, Henry Kisor's work *What's That Pig Outdoors?: A Memoir of Deafness* (1990). Although Couser and Kisor write about contemporary works and present-day issues, their assertions that "[l]ittle [self-narrative] has been written by the deaf themselves" (Kisor 1) and that

autobiographies by the deaf are "unlikely and rare entities" (Couser 226) seemed to present fertile research opportunities. Both put forward the claim that although there have been autobiographies by deaf persons, there are often multiple factors in play that make these works uncommon occurrences, even in the disability-narrative rich twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This led me to contemplate and attempt to re-evaluate what it meant for a deaf person living in the nineteenth century to write her autobiography.

The final influential text that led me to my dissertation topic was David T. Mitchell's article, "Body Solitaire: The Singular Subject of Disability Autobiography" (2000). Mitchell stresses the importance of community to the lives of many disabled persons and urges that the same significance be attached to community in the life- narratives of persons with disabilities. Despite the fact that, Mitchell writes, "life with disability [is] an inherently social phenomenon," "disability life writing tends toward the gratification of a personal story bereft of community with other disabled people" (312). These statements from Mitchell's essay support my own experience that the public presentation of a solitary identity often found in disability narrative does not reflect the communal experience of disability or the daily processes of construction and reconstruction of identity demanded by chronic conditions. While I concur with Georgina Kleege, who questions if the disability narrative as a genre is, in fact, an unproblematic good and if "these texts [are] agents for social change or merely another form of freak show" (Kleege "Autobiography") and while I am equally cognizant of Donna M. McDonald's concern over the dangers of understanding "people's lives exclusively

through the lens of their particular disability" and of "trapping the autobiographical writers themselves into configuring their life stories within the enclosed box of their disability" (467), I attempt to undertake an essential re-evaluation of the disability narrative genre by examining familiar letters. In doing so, I find that letters, although frequently fragmentary and often containing only passing references to disability, offer opportunities for engaging with disability within the social context of authors' lives and, in the process, they illuminate more mediated published forms of autobiographical and canonical writing.

Chapter One, titled "'The Most Valuable Conversation': The Public and Private Letters of Harriet Martineau," uses Martineau's pairing of public and private writing to expand on the conventional structure of the illness/disability narrative. I have positioned my discussion of Martineau first in my dissertation in order to develop a foundation for my work. Focusing on Martineau's use of the epistolary genre for her published writing on health and ability, I explore ways in which Martineau used the letter genre to her advantage, publishing open or public letters on a variety of topics. Of Martineau's published letters, my dissertation examines her "Letter to the Deaf" (1834), her *Life in the Sick-Room* (1844), and her sixteen "Letters on Mesmerism" (1844). I focus on the community essential to this genre and the work this genre does to frame her illness/disability as a source of authority, to dissociate the story of her compromised body from the objectification inherent in medical writing of the period, and to make possible an epistolary illness/disability narrative that promotes the reclamation of authority over the body by the "sufferer."

Chapter Two, "'From Your Loving Little Friend, Helen Keller': The Epistolary Construction of the Young Helen Keller," addresses the ways in which an examination of familiar letters can modify traditional understandings of public figures. Mary Klages defines the conventional construction of Keller as the "embodiment of the idealism of Victorian girlhood" (185). I apply this construction of Keller to a reading of her juvenile letters and examine the ways in which Keller's letters both reinforce and contest these conceptions through her interaction with a large epistolary community. Although Keller's epistolary oeuvre is substantial, I concentrate on her early letters, 1887 to 1902, as they are central to an understanding of her formation of a coherent self through the first genre she mastered. Keller gravitated toward the epistolary genre early in her education; through her early letters, she gained a level of control over her public persona and defined herself as the writer she would become. A portion of my work with Keller takes me beyond the end of the Victorian era. Keller belongs in this dissertation, however, as a woman with disabilities who was educated predominantly in the Victorian period. I refer to two of her works that were published after 1901—*The World I Live In* (1909) and *Midstream: My Later Life* (1929)—but I concentrate most significantly on her *The Story of My Life* (1902), which details her early life.

Following from my examination of Martineau's published/private letters and Keller's early letters, which were explicitly intended to be shared and even published, Chapter Three, "'The Basis of Epistolary Intercourse': The Confidential Talk of the Letters of John Kitto," considers Kitto's familiar letters through a comparison of these missives to his most famous work, *The Lost Senses: Deafness*

and Blindness (1845), with a focus on his use of the “overcomer” trope in that work. Wendy L. Chrisman writes about the one-dimensional conceptions of stories of a person’s life with a disability in “A Recuperative Call for Emotion in Disability Studies.” She argues that:

> [in] Disability Studies, the inspirational narrative has become intrinsically bound to the narrative of overcoming: that is, the idea that one can take sole responsibility for conquering one’s disability and its attendant challenges. The belief that a person with a disability can and should pull oneself up by the bootstraps despite overwhelming odds is an impediment to understanding the sociocultural barriers that people with any given disability may face. (173)

Kitto’s use of the “overcomer” trope becomes significant when one reads *The Lost Senses* in conjunction with his familiar letters. These letters provide the reader with a greater sense of the realities of Kitto’s life story beyond the narrative he prepared and intended for public consumption, they provide clarity on the ways in which Kitto edited details of his story to support his self-construction as a solitary “overcomer,” and add nuance to what Kitto chose to discuss in *The Lost Senses*. Chapter Three includes a discussion of Kitto’s poetry and of familiar letters relating to his poetic work, identifying these bodies of work as vital parts of his disability narrative.

My conclusion, “Amy Levy’s Complex Disability Narrative,” takes up Couser’s assertion that multiple factors make autobiographies by the deaf “unlikely and rare entities” (*Recovering* 226) and explores the ways in which multiple factors in Levy’s life, including increasing deafness, affected her ability and even interest in writing an autobiography. This chapter examines Levy’s liminal state as a woman living with a compromised body and increasing deafness and the impact

that attention to her personal letters as a form of self-narrative can have on the scholarly conversation on her work. For the Levy scholar, these letters provide insight into her short life with an unreliable body and contribute a disability narrative that challenges accepted readings of her later poetic work. Just as Chapter Three argues for an examination of Kitto's poetry and his familiar letters relating to his poetic work as important parts of his disability narrative, my conclusion includes an examination of Levy's later poetry and of letters relating to that work.

The parameters of my dissertation dictate much of the language I use throughout the body of the text. Throughout the body of this dissertation, I use the terms "illness narrative" and "disability narrative." While I do not equate illness with disability and I include deafness in the category of disability, the meshing of illness causing or caused by disability, in many cases, can be difficult to untangle. My discussion of Martineau's illness, a cause of her long seclusion, for example, draws on sources that examine both Victorian illness and disability. It is currently common for many persons with deafness to reject the idea that they are disabled, preferring, instead, to consider themselves culturally Deaf and, as Lennard J. Davis valuably points out, a "linguistic minority" (*Enforcing* 3). Also, Jennifer Esmail, in a note to her article "'Perchance my hand may touch the lyre': Orality and Textuality in Nineteenth-Century Deaf Poetry," writes that currently it is "standard practice in Deaf Studies to use 'deaf' with a lowercase d when referring to the audiological condition of deafness and 'Deaf' with an uppercase D when referring to Deaf culture and to those deaf people who identify with a Deaf community and use a signed language" (528). I take her point that "there may be historical

problems with assigning nineteenth-century deaf people one of these designations" (528) under advisement and I use the word "deaf" "when referring to the audiological condition of deafness" when writing about Keller or Kitto and "hearing impaired," "hearing impairment," or "increasing deafness" when referring to Martineau's or Levy's disability experience.

Throughout this dissertation, I have used the word "suffer" and its many variations with more than a little anxiety. I have used this word in keeping with its use by the authors I study. Recently, Disability Studies scholars have expressed concerns over the use of words such as "suffer" and other devaluing terms and phrases to describe states of disability. As a person with a disability, I have experienced the sting of words that assume that my disability makes my life tragic and I appreciate the political motivation behind the pressure for us to examine the words we use to talk about and represent disability or, to quote Martha Stoddard Holmes, "bodily variation" (vii). However, I also recognize that the authors in my dissertation often referred to themselves as sufferers for political reasons that involved their personal reconfiguration of the state of suffering as a valuable social identity and as an opportunity for greater understanding and knowledge.

An important issue for the deaf community during the nineteenth century was the debate between manualists and oralists. Esmail writes that during Victoria's reign "'oralism,' a widespread movement to force deaf people to speak and lip-read instead of sign, burgeoned and became extremely influential in deaf life" (*Reading* 2). The time period on which I work was, indeed, a period before persons with deafness had solidified their group identity as a distinct culture and

during which there was debate between groups that supported the use of sign language for and by the deaf and groups that advocated teaching deaf persons to communicate orally and the eradication of the use of sign language as a means of communication for the deaf. I do not approach a discussion of this debate in my dissertation as none of the authors in my study used sign language, although Keller and Kitto did write, briefly, against it. Keller used finger spelling to communicate but was doubtful about sign-language, writing to William Wade on 5 June 1889: "Well, I must confess, I do not like the sign-language, and I do not think it would [*sic* be] of much use to the deaf-blind. [. . .] On the whole, if [the deaf/mute] cannot be taught articulation, the manual alphabet seems the best and most convenient means of communication. At any rate, I am sure the deaf-blind cannot learn to use signs with any degree of facility." Levy did not use sign language and neither did Kitto or Martineau, although Kitto wrote in *The Lost Senses* that "[a]ll my own household, and all those with whom I am in habit of personal intercourse, make use of their fingers" (84). He wrote of sign language: "I could gain or impart nothing useful by it, and [. . .] I have the strongest aversion to modes of intercourse which attract the attention and curiosity of others" (95).

The resistance to sign language but the adoption and the use of the manual alphabet by Keller and Kitto suggests the strength of skepticism about sign language during the nineteenth century. Douglas C. Baynton points out in *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* that oralists, thinking in terms of "evolutionary theory," associated sign language with "'inferior races' and 'lower animals'" (9) while "[m]annually coded English systems" were seen as "simplified representations of spoken English on the hands"

(156). However, despite active debate surrounding manualism and oralism, deaf individuals were able to prove their intelligence, social worth, and humanity and to use their writing to present a picture of the deaf community. Christopher Krentz argues in *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2007) that while the conviction that persons with deafness were a linguistic minority had yet to be established, the nineteenth century was a time of "coming out" (214) for persons with deafness, many of whom expressed their identity and experiences with deafness through writing.

In addition to the manualism/oralism debate, there were several prevalent stereotypes and a high degree of anxiety about the deaf and the place of deaf persons in society throughout the nineteenth century. Many stereotypes about the deaf were established and promoted by the scientific discourse of the day. For example, in 1817, Dr. Sébastien Guillié (1780– 1865), the director of the Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles wrote *Essai sur l'instruction des aveugles, ou, exposé analytique des procédés employés pour les instruire*[2]. While the work was devoted primarily to a description of the Institute's instruction of the blind, Guillié also included a description of what he felt were characteristics of persons with deafness. He writes that persons with deafness are "[s]trangers to all that passes around them" and that they "see everything, enjoy nothing" (qtd. in Kitto *Lost* 179). According to Guillié, it is because of their lack of ability to feel a natural sense of enjoyment, that an "insurmountable barrier separates [the deaf-mute] from the rest of men." He claims that "a serious cast, which resembles sadness [. . .] invades their countenance, and proves that with us they are in their state of real

[2] *Essay on the instruction of the blind, or showing analytical methods used to teach them.*

privation" (179-80). These statements, made by a doctor and educator, promoted and justified the isolation and marginalization of a segment of society and made the social exclusion of the deaf the natural consequence of their disability. This passage clearly employs an us/them dichotomy, describing deaf persons as being at a severe disadvantage based on their "unnaturalness," which results, in turn, in a condition of isolation within society.

Although Guillié was not the only early nineteenth-century expert to write on deafness, his work both influenced scientific discourse on sensory disability and promoted stereotypes that circulated about the deaf population in nineteenth-century popular culture. While opinions on the meaning of deafness fluctuated throughout the nineteenth century, commentators regularly reflected on the isolation of the deaf that Guillié's work describes. Baynton observes in "A Silent Exile on Earth" that "[u]ntil the 1860s, deafness was most often described as an affliction that isolated the individual from Christian community" and that "[a]fter the 1860s, deafness was redefined as a condition that isolated people from the national community" (33). Deborah Frantz describes the stereotypes that circulated about deaf people during the nineteenth century, isolating them from "normal" society: "[w]hen the absence of hearing was believed to impede mental development that depended on the acquisition of language, the deaf were frequently perceived as intellectually inferior. Those who became deaf were not subject to the same unjust preconceptions, but the social discomfort or impatience of the non-deaf often shamed the deaf into self-imposed exile" ("The Powers of Deafness" 53). However, despite these stereotypes, deaf people began to challenge these assumptions and became socially visible members of society, in some cases through publication.

According to Krentz, these publications form a "meeting ground of sorts between deaf and hearing people" (16). My dissertation expands on Krentz's *Writing Deafness*. While Krentz is writing specifically on the published work of deaf American authors, I extend treatment of this history to include deaf British writers while continuing to focus on the ways in which deaf people became socially visible, "negotiated deafness," and "collectively emerged into society" (2, 6) through their writing. Additionally, my work differs from Krentz's in terms of the genre of discussion. Krentz examines the poetry, fiction, and non-fiction of deaf writers; in contrast, while my work does examine the poetry of John Kitto and Amy Levy, I focus predominantly on letters by deaf or hearing-impaired authors.

While there is currently no scholarship specifically discussing the interplay between familiar letters and illness and disability narratives, there is ample scholarship on illness and disability during the nineteenth century on which to draw. I have identified the Victorian period as a particularly important time for an examination of illness and disability in familiar letters due to both the wealth of published collections of personal letters from the period and the abundance of contemporary scholarship on illness and disability during the period. Julia Miele Rodas observes in "Mainstreaming Disability Studies?" that "the presence of disability in Victorian fiction indicates more than a mere reflection of actual disabled persons in the culture" but that it "points also to an underlying anxiety and ambivalence regarding this presence, a grappling with identity, a desire to experiment with places and roles. In fact, the literature serves as a kind of barometer, making visible a keen social need to discover and work through the

meaning and possibilities inherent in the disabled figure" (372). Miriam Bailin, in *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (1994), and Martha Stoddard Holmes, in *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (2004), consider the prevalence of the depiction of ill or disabled characters in Victorian fiction and the importance and meaning of these representations. Athena Vrettos's *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (1995) and Maria Frawley's *Invalidism and Identity* (2004) both discuss what it meant to speak of illness and to define one's self as an ill person in the nineteenth century. Jennifer Esmail's *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature* (2013) is particularly useful for my work as it focuses on deafness in Victorian England and on particular subjects of use to me, such as poetry by deaf writers and prosthetic technology.

Much of my work in this dissertation also follows the work of Disabilities Studies scholars who concentrate on issues related to bodily difference. Theorists on bodily difference in literature such as David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (2001) and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (2009) have linked characterization in literature to a historic "prosthetic" dependence on the representation of disability. Additionally, there are several sources on modern illness/disability narrative that have influenced my dissertation. In his introduction to "'The Empire of the 'Normal,'" Couser writes that "autobiography offers an alternative to patronizing and marginalizing (mis)representation by others; it thus provides a medium for counter discourse that challenges stereotypes a misconceptions" (305).

He also writes in “Disability and Autobiography: Enabling Discourse” that

> writing disability is the (re)production of disability, a potent act of creation. Autobiography by a disabled person is an authentication of lived, performed experience [. . .]. In other words, writing, autobiography, the narration of an experience by a disabled person to a reader or an immediate listener, enables a marginalized voice to be heard [. . .] Disabled autobiography is a conscious act of becoming. (292)

He continues, noting that

> writing disability becomes an empowering act of control, a deconstructive critical strategy that attempts to break down oppressive and imprisoning cultural construction. By writing disability, the performance and general representation of disability is re-centered, re-focused on the disabled subject itself, which deflects and displaces the powerful gaze of the ‘norm.’ (292)

Works such as Arthur Kleinman’s *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (1988), Anne Hunsaker Hawkins’s *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography* (1993), Arthur W. Frank’s *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (1997) and Couser’s *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (1997), as well as his *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (2009), emphasize the significance of autobiographical narratives of illness and disability in identity construction and the establishment of narrative authority. While these texts are not about nineteenth-century illness/disability narratives, they are important to my work because of their scholarship on illness and disability narratives. These critics have elucidated the importance of illness and/or disability narratives and autobiographies to ill or disabled people and my dissertation benefits greatly from their work.

As my dissertation adds to contemporary scholarship on works examining disability and illness in the nineteenth century, it also addresses a critical oversight

in this body of work: its neglect of familiar letters. My inclusion of familiar letters as a productive and important subgenre of the disability narrative is encouraged by the widespread belief during the nineteenth century that letters are essential forms of life writing and are important components of biography and autobiography. During this period, the "Life and Letters" format of biography was, as Simon Goldhill writes in his book *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, "a particularly prevalent" genre (246). These biographies were usually written within a few years of the subject's death and were often hagiographic in nature. They reflected, according to Richard D. Altick, the belief that "an individual's life could be narrated most authentically through the reproduction of large portions of his or her correspondence and other personal papers" (193–195). Goldhill also points out that

> the republication of many letters within the biography both allowed a good portion of the book to be authored by the subject, as it were, and brought even the private life under the aegis of the semi-public exchange of letters, which had all too often been already with an eye to their broader reading, both by an extended audience with the family and by an imagined posterity. (246)

The genre was so popular during the nineteenth century that writers such as Harriet Martineau had serious, and well-founded, concerns that her letters might be published after her death. However, while the life and letters format was an important biographical genre in this period, several twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars such as Goldhill, Altick, and David Amigoni have suggested that there is a need "for radically redrawing the boundaries of the Victorian 'life and letters' format" (Amigoni 9) and that "[d]espite the continuing production and continuing circulation of formal biographies in the 'Life and Letters' format

through the nineteenth century, the range of narratives of the self was extraordinarily varied in Victorian life writing" (Goldhill 248). Building on the nineteenth-century conviction that letters are a significant form of biography/autobiography as well recent scholarly writing asserting the "need for a different critical language that enables more complex ways of exploring the relation between life writing and Victorian culture" (Amigoni 11), my dissertation explores the idea that letters are especially significant in the life writing of disabled persons.

My dissertation makes use of epistolary theory developed in four significant books on the subject. My chapters include examinations of Bruce Redford's *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (1986), Mary A. Favret's *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (1993), David Barton and Nigel Hall's *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (1999), and Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven's *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* (2000). To date, there has been no scholarship that specifically discusses the interplay between familiar letters and illness/disability narratives. My project is unique in that it unites the theories of illness and disability with theorizations of the epistolary form. As Mary A. Favret in *Romantic Correspondence* tells her reader, although letter writing is most often portrayed as a solitary activity, it is, by nature, characterized by a social exchange, with "specific practices that govern" the production of letters. Importantly for my project, Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven argue in *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* that "each letter, however private and personal it may seem, is a letter marked by and sent to the world" (1). In their introduction to

Letter Writing as a Social Practice, David Barton and Nigel Hall argue that letters are distinct in that they construct a specific reader or readers and that the existence of the letter itself has meaning in addition to its content. This additional meaning has much to do with the communities these letters document and bring into being. The importance of letters to an understanding of illness and disability narratives has yet to be addressed in a sustained, scholarly study and my intention is that my dissertation will expand the current parameters of the illness and disability narrative genre to make room for personal letters.

Richmond P. Bond in "Eighteenth Century Correspondence: A Survey" writes that "three major divisions [of the epistolary genre] are clear- (1) the intimate, informal message designed for one person; (2) the formal, public, 'open' letter written for any who will care to read it; and (3) the fictitious letter used as a literary device, telling a story or describing people and events" (572). Although I do not discuss the third type of letter, such as those that form the basis of epistolary novels, I do concur with Bond's comment that the "third type, the literary epistle, the artfully artless letter written to forward a fiction, bore its best fruit in the novels of Richardson and in *Humphrey Clinker*" (573). *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and that novel's epistolary focus on the body and bodily differences is significant to my dissertation and give support to my thesis concerning the importance of expression of illness and disability in letter form. Bond's second type of letter also lends support to my thesis. Although her letter is a mixture of illness/disability narrative and melodramatic fiction (Kaye 51), Frances Burney's (D'Arblay) 1811 letter is a link from the eighteenth-century epistolary narrative to

my work with Victorian familiar letters. Burney wrote a letter to her family and friends in England in 1812, describing the mastectomy of her right breast to remove a tumor her doctors suspected to be cancerous. This letter took nine months to complete and detailed her illness and her operation (Epstein 131). After the operation, Burney was plagued by severe pain that prevented the quick composition of this letter and yet she persevered in writing it (137). For months following the painful operation, Burney composed her illness narrative as a letter. She followed this letter with years of letters describing the lingering effects of her illness and operation. Although she later edited this letter when she was editing her correspondence for publication, the urge to render this event in her life in narrative form as a letter is noteworthy (140). Very much as Martineau did with her letters on mesmerism, Burney wrote this letter when she learned that some misinformed person had already written about her illness and her procedure (141). She intended to regain and maintain control over her body and illness with her illness narrative.

Mary A. Favret's *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* is an extremely important secondary source for the chapters that follow. Favret historicizes the letter in literature and argues that our understanding of the letter as feminine and personal has been encouraged by epistolary fiction such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1749). She disrupts this fiction of the letter by including in her study texts generally not considered part of the critical conversation on the epistolary canon but which emphasize the letter's disruptive potential together with its ability to encourage community and connection. Her chapters include work on texts and genres outside the epistolary

canon – “Letters or letters: Politics, Interception and Spy Fiction,” “Helen Maria Williams and the Letters of History,” “Mary Wollstonecraft and the Business of Letters,” “Jane Austen and the Look of Letters,” and “The Letters of Frankenstein.” Providing a materialist account of the political uses of the letter in revolution and in the crossing of class barriers, Favret gives a description of political aspects of the rise of the British postal service in her concluding chapter. Rather than seeing the letter as “the emblem of isolation and vulnerability” (1), Favret sees the letter as frequently occupying a powerful political position and as having potential for social influence that has been masked by its prior association with private and feminine voices. She writes that the face of the letter changed in the 1790s when it was seen as the agent of conspiracy and celebrated for its ability to transcend social barriers and argues that the letter was divorced from the private domain and brought into the public domain. This resulted in the institutionalization of the British postal system in the early nineteenth century.

Importantly for my work, Favret argues that the letter has been constructed as a literary vehicle divorced from the outside world and her position in *Romantic Correspondence* is that the letter can and should be considered a figure of the everyday. Her work is an attempt to bring the familiar letter into public critique. My dissertation benefits from Favret’s work in that I, too, treat the letter as a figure of the everyday. Like Favret, I pull the letter out of its fiction of isolation and interiority and place it in the realm of the everyday with a concentration on the letter’s emphasis on communities and its representation of the lived experience of illness and disability. Favret’s work is a prompt for me to understand the letter as

capable of having a variety of voices and to contest the dominant critical belief that the letter, historically, expressed only a feminine voice. Favret argues that, while the letters in the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century depicted the vulnerable female body, the "looseness" of the letter form meant that the actual letters of this time could be used as vehicles for revolution and that epistolary, as a mode of publication, "enabled a range of [. . .] voices other than the intimate" (24) to be heard. My work builds on the "looseness" of the letter form that Favret describes; it also builds on her attention to the circulation of "particularly deserving correspondence" (134) among friends and relatives. I examine the ways in which the letter becomes suspended between the public and the private as the authors in my study and their correspondents pass around letters pertaining to illness and disability and I focus on the way that Martineau, specifically, made use of the open-letter form in order to engage in public conversation about her deafness and illnesses.

Lastly, my dissertation relies on *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, a work edited by David Barton and Nigel Hall. Throughout its chapters, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* examines the writing and reading of letters as a social practice and explores the everyday writing of letters as a part of a social practice that solidifies communities. The essays in this book touch on various ways that letter writing functioned as a social practice in different communities throughout history. While the essays in *Letter Writing As a Social Practice* focus on communities as diverse as Cornish communities in the 1790s, nineteenth-century schools, modern Amish communities, Pacific Islander communities, and prison communities, my

dissertation is indebted to the book's introduction, in which David Barton and Nigel Hall argue that letters can be used to mediate a wide range of human interactions and that letter writing is a social practice embedded in a variety of social situations. My dissertation follows this line of argument and considers letters as part of the social practice of relating the vicissitudes of the body to "fellow sufferers." Barton and Hall view familiar letters as cultural objects. In my study, letters exemplify the cultural concern with the body in the Victorian era. The Victorians were deeply concerned with illness and disability and this cultural concern is reflected in their writing and, in particular, their correspondence. Useful to my conceptualization of communities based on the exchange of letters about experiences of disability and illness, Barton and Hall argue that the writing and reading of letters is not a solitary activity. Letters thought to be particularly good were passed around for others to read and advice on what should be written in a letter was often sought.

In addition to the introduction to *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, two chapters in the book are useful to my dissertation. In his chapter, "Letters and the Social Grounding of Differentiated Genres," Charles Bazerman writes that letters have played a role in the emergence of different genres. Bazerman's point that letters "provide a flexible medium out of which many functions, relationships might develop" (15) supports my claim that letters provide their writers the opportunity to articulate bodily concerns in the form of an illness/disability narrative that ascribes specific roles to writer and reader and allows for personal health-related content to be shared as part of an expected social interaction. Lucille M. Schultz, in "'What does the fellow mean by sending me his own spittle!': Letter Writing Instruction in

19th Century Schools in the United States," examines the profusion of letter writing instruction textbooks and manuals used in public schools during the nineteenth century. Schultz writes that educational reformers saw the common school as an important part of promoting morality and social order. She notes that the teaching of proper letter writing was an important part of this education and most textbooks for children had a chapter on letter writing. Letter writing was such an important part of the culture of the nineteenth century that instruction manuals for writing proper letters were a genre of their own. Most of these manuals were intended to instruct young people in the art of letter writing. Representative titles include: *The Classical Letter-Writer* (1833), *The Young Lady's Book of Classical Letters* (1836), *Classical English Letter-Writer* (1814), and *The Letter Writer's Own Book* (1848). My chapter on Keller touches briefly on Anne Sullivan's instruction of Keller in the art of letter writing and the difference that the acquisition of this skill made in Keller's life. Learning how to write a good letter meant that children were abiding by their culture's behavioural codes. I draw on Schultz's chapter in my dissertation because its material usefully informs my work on Helen Keller, who benefited from educational reform in America that mandated that deaf children be educated.

Like Favret's *Romantic Correspondence*, Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven's *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* is an important secondary source for my project. Gilroy and Verhoeven's work attends to the dialogic nature of the letter in ways that have influenced my thinking about communities of letter writers. The structure of *Epistolary Histories* echoes the pattern of receipt and return that characterizes epistolary communities. The book is

divided into three parts – “Epistolarity and Femininity,” “Cultures of Letters,” and “New Epistolary Directions” – and each part contains two to three separate essays devoted to an aspect of epistolary theory. Each essay is followed by a postscript by a fellow contributor to the book that comments on the essay and its gaps or its significance to epistolary theory. Gilroy and Verhoeven assert in their introduction to the book that there “are always (at least) two sides to any correspondence” (14) and that the structure of the book emphasizes this in an attempt to “resist the notion that any one critical position represents the last word on epistolary texts, and to demonstrate that correspondence promotes dissonance and difference as well as connection and community” (15). Themes of connection and community and the negotiation of borders between public and private spheres are a central concern in my dissertation. Gilroy and Verhoeven’s collection has influenced my discussion of the open letter and Martineau’s use of the public letter form in her narrative. I also use Garrett Stewart’s work *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Reader in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* in my discussion of Martineau’s open letters.

Many of the essays in Gilroy and Verhoeven’s book, while not specifically about the Victorian letter-writers in my study, do have some bearing on my work and engage with issues explored in my dissertation. Richard Hardack, in “Bodies in Pieces, Texts Entwined: Correspondence and Intertextuality in Melville and Hawthorne,” argues against the views of letters as secondary in importance to the author’s published work and Martha Nell Smith, in “Suppressing the Books of Susan and Emily Dickinson,” writes that an understanding of the epistolary context

in which Emily Dickinson circulated and "published" her work provides a greater appreciation of the importance of the epistolary genre in her life. Five essays in the book address the use of the public letter and are, consequently, of use in my work on Harriet Martineau: Anne L. Bower's essay, "Dear –: In Search of New (Old) Forms of Critical Address," focuses on the potential for a greater range of voices and improved sense of community with the public use of the epistolary genre. Donna Landry notes in her essay, "Love Me, Love My Turkey Book: Letters and Turkish Travelogues in Early Modern England," that the publication of letters could lead, for some writers, to wider audiences and greater public recognition. Gerald MacLean's essay, "Re-sitting The Subject," engages with ways in which historical letters employ ideas of the personal and the political. Finally, Linda S. Kauffman, in "Not a Love Story: Retrospective and Prospective Epistolary Directions," and Clare Brant, in "Love Stories? Epistolary Histories of Mary Queen of Scots," both consider the possession and circulation of the body through the exchange of letters. These essays, together with the introduction to the book, have informed my analysis of deafness and its relation to the epistolary mode. Gilroy and Verhoeven argue that earlier epistolary critics were concerned with questions of the body in letters and they assert that "[w]hile recent epistolary critics have turned to new areas of concern, such as technology, cybernetics, and violence [. . .] and while political and historical approaches to the letter are dominant, there remain significant absences within epistolary studies" (13). I concur with Gilroy and Verhoeven's assessment that there are significant gaps in epistolary studies; my dissertation adds to existing work on the body and letters with a focus on illness and disability narratives in Victorian letters. It considers the letter as both a

substitute and supplement for the body, which grants authority and social value to experiences of the body.

Although epistolary critics are turning to new areas of concern regarding the letter and while the study of illness and disability is extremely active in the humanities, neither scholars of epistolary culture nor disability studies scholars have come to grips with the significance of disability for familiar letters. Rather than the letter being a site of disembodiment, I argue that the letter serves as a site of radical embodiment. The authors in my study participate in a cultural preoccupation with disability and use bodily experience to claim authority. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan writes in "What Can Narrative Theory Learn from Illness Narratives?" that "Narratology gives insightful accounts of order but has no tools for—and no interest in—an analysis of randomness [. . .] Like time, the act of telling is considered a defining characteristic of narrative. Texts that struggle with its disturbance invite both a challenge and an expansion of the category of 'narration.' Such destabilization is not exclusive to illness narratives, but they add a dimension worth exploring" (245). Furthermore, Rimmon-Kenan's article, "The Story of 'I': Illness and Narrative Identity," aptly summarizes my intentions for this dissertation. She writes that the narrative

> process contains phases of disintegration and fragmentation [. . .] Fragmented narratives may become unintelligible and threatening, and hence risk remaining unheeded. Wittingly or unwittingly, they also subvert the cure-promising authority, thus provoking anxiety which sometimes leads to their being 'rewritten' by physicians and other care- givers. (22)

This dissertation endeavors to provide a map for the recognition of alternative disability narratives in the form of familiar letters, a form that simultaneously

reflects both the frequent randomness and “fragmentation” of narratives of chronic disability and the importance of community in the lives of disabled persons.

Chapter 1
"The Most Valuable Conversation": The Public Private Letters of Harriet Martineau

Referring to the tendency of many scholars of the illness/disability narrative genre to focus on contemporary works, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins notes in *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathographies* that "[i]t is striking that autobiographical descriptions of illness should belong almost exclusively to the second part of the twentieth century" (11). However, while the work of Hawkins and other scholars such as G. Thomas Couser, Arthur Frank, and Arthur Kleinman has done much to define the modern illness/disability narrative genre, I hope to demonstrate through my dissertation that this genre functioned in an equally profound way for ill and disabled persons of earlier periods. My work on the Victorian period benefits from the scholarly acknowledgement that Victorians were deeply concerned with the lived experience of illness and disability. While several Victorians authored autobiographies that include depictions of their illnesses and/or disabilities, few wrote book-length discussions of their illnesses/disabilities intended for publication. For many disabled Victorians, familiar letters and the community interaction resulting from the exchange of these letters were important parts of their experience of life with a compromised body. With this in mind, I begin my dissertation with an examination of a selection of published letters by Harriet Martineau (1802-1876). I focus predominantly on the letters that Martineau published during her lifetime but include several of her personal letters that were

published in collected form after her death. I position my discussion of Martineau's work first in my dissertation in order to elucidate the foundation and parameters of my work. My focus on Martineau and her published letters on her illness and disability allows me to introduce my contention that, while narratives of illness and disability can take many forms, letters are a valuable yet largely neglected form of engagement with these experiences.

During her life, Martineau was known for her struggles with poor health and disability. She had noticeable hearing loss from the age of twelve and used an ear trumpet as an adult and, as she wrote in her 1877 *Autobiography*, her health was quite poor until she was "nearer thirty than twenty years of age" (1 39). Her writing career spanned several genres, from children's literature to works of social commentary, but it was her writing on health and disability that was, as Maria Frawley writes, "not only the linchpin of her self-understanding, her guiding frame of reference, it was the lens through which she wanted her readers to see and understand her life and career" ("Prisoner" 11). Martineau published works devoted to her personal struggles with a compromised body and she gravitated toward the epistolary form and the sense of community inherent in the form when discussing her illness and hearing loss. This chapter uses the interplay between public and private writing found in Martineau's "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism" to broaden current critical understandings of her published letters and to expand on existing scholarly theories on the illness/disability narrative genre. Through her publication of letters that specifically address a community of fellow-sufferers, Martineau was able to disseminate health

information to a larger community than she could with her private familiar letters. Her choice of this genre allowed her to capitalize on the epistolary form and its potential to depict personal experiences of life with illness and disability in detailed and meaningful ways. Although Frawley and Trev Lynn Broughton have commented on the connection between Martineau's *Autobiography* and her health and ability[3] while Linda H. Peterson has observed that the *Autobiography* "engages the medical debates of her day and anticipates the modern disability memoir" (*Traditions* 15), I hope to show that Martineau's "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism," when read together, form an illness/disability narrative that follows changes in her health and ability through her adult years and addresses the social isolation of persons with compromised bodies. In what follows, I establish the significance of the epistolary form to narratives of illness and disability and provide the reader with a 'road-map,' so to speak, by which to navigate the subsequent chapters of this dissertation and to understand the approach that informs my consideration of the illness/disability narrative genre. I pair illness/disability narrative theory with epistolary theory to argue that Martineau's three published texts on health and ability reframe her bodily concerns as a source of authority, disassociate the story of her compromised body from the objectification inherent in medical writing of the period, promote the reclamation of authority over the body by the sufferer and, ultimately, form an illness/disability narrative defined by the existence of a vital and supportive community.

[3] Maria Frawley has argued that "[s]ickness is, in fact, the lens through which readers of Martineau's autobiography are asked to comprehend her life story" (Invalidism and Identity 434) and Trev Lynn Broughton writes that "Martineau's compulsion to speak of, and from, a moment of physical dis/integrationis a guiding principle of the Autobiography" (31).

Contemporary illness/disability life-writing scholars such as Ann Finger and David T. Mitchell have written of the dangers of the presumption of the social isolation of ill/disabled individuals. Finger, writing of community, argues that the notion that disabled people should be alone, isolated, not in a community with others—"whether disabled or nondisabled"—is "deeply entrenched" (611) and Mitchell, concerned that disabled individuals are being depicted as solitary strugglers in many disability narratives, writes in "Body Solitaire" that "disability life writing tends toward the gratification of a personal story bereft of community with other disabled people" and, thus, solidifies the "longstanding association of disability with social isolation" (312). Adding to this work on the genre of disability narrative, I begin with an examination of Martineau's demand that her correspondents either burn or return her personal letters, a demand expressive of her desire to maintain control over the story contained in these letters. I then move on to discussions of Martineau's "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism" and focus on the ways in which Martineau engages with the epistolary genre through these publications and creates an illness/disability narrative. I pay particular attention to Martineau's concentration on the authority found in personal experiences of illness and disability and I examine the ways she asserts this authority in the face of attempts by the medical community to confine her to the position of an object of scrutiny. While this dissertation focuses on epistolary disability narratives of deaf Victorians, I have included Martineau's letters on illness in this chapter in order to further exemplify the importance of the epistolary genre to narratives of life with a compromised body.

I. Freedom of (Epistolary) Speech and the Publication of Letters

In 1839, Martineau was diagnosed with uterine tumors and went into seclusion in Tynemouth until she was liberated in 1844 through, she asserted, the healing influence of mesmerism. By the time of her seclusion, she had already achieved fame for works such as *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-34), “Letter to the Deaf” (1834), *Society in America* (1837), *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838), *How to Observe: Morals and Manners* (1838), and *Deerbrook* (1839). After her diagnosis, she continued to work, writing and publishing *The Hour and the Man* (1841), *Life in the Sick-Room* (1844), and “Letters on Mesmerism” (1844). Martineau was, at this time, well known for her large number of correspondents; her frequent and lengthy letters to both intimates and casual acquaintances became even more significant to her during her seclusion. During her period of seclusion, much of Martineau’s social interaction was conducted through letters and the epistolary genre became such an important part of her life that she insisted on authoring letters even when she was extremely ill.

Because of her desire to have her letters respected as private, Martineau was very clear about her repugnance concerning their possible publication by her correspondents. She wrote to the politician and poet, Richard Monckton Milnes[4], in 1843:

> As for “where I draw the line,” (about publishing letters) why – at the intentions of the writer, to be sure. We revealers, – (poets and invalids) voluntarily commit our revelations to people at large: & if we leave M.S.S at our death, that must be supposed to be our

[4] Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1885) was the 1st Baron Houghton.

> intention, unless we signify to the contrary. But private letters are understood to be between four eyes. If you are willing to give up your right to privacy, & to let your letters be published after your death, well & good! – your Exrs will know what to do, & the world may profit. But you have no right to give up any one's right of privacy but your own. Thus I who reveal voluntarily, thro' the press, as much as most folk, & having no objection to any one knowing the contents of my letters, as far as they are on abstract matters, find myself obliged to defend the right of my privacy & others. Do you really see no difference between your choosing to publish a very sacred poem & your bosom friend publishing, without your leave, a sacred conversn in which you & he were tête-à-tête? – such a case shows "the line to be drawn," as I see it. (Martineau 2 215)

Martineau is clear in this letter to Milnes that she is willing to share information with the public– indeed, she was very open with the information she gave in several of her publications. She asserts the sanctity of the private letter and the private conversation contained therein. Although she writes to Milnes that it is his right to choose to allow others to publish his private letters after his death, she is insistent that he cannot give up the privacy of others. Her discussion of someone (in Milnes's case, a bosom friend) sharing "a sacred conversn in which you & he were tête-à-tête" neatly summarizes her frequently asserted conviction that letters are a personal conversation between friends and should be treated with as much discretion as face-to-face conversation. So intense was her desire to maintain the sanctity of the private conversation she saw contained in familiar letters and that she considered integral to personal letters that Martineau made the continuance of an epistolary relationship with her correspondents contingent on their compliance with this demand[5]. She wrote in a 11 February 1843 letter to her frequent

[5] Logan writes in her notes to Martineau's 1842 letter to her sister-in-law, Helen, that Martineau's brother, James, refused to comply to this demand and that his refusal, effectively, ended Martineau and James's relationship. Logan also points out that unbeknownst to Martineau, Helen preserved Martineau's letters and that while James did eventually destroy Martineau's letters, he did so only after he had made shorthand versions of them (132).

correspondent Henry Crabb Robinson[6]: "[m]y letters are all talk; & I cd not write them if they were not sacred to the friend to whom they are addressed" (Martineau 2 149). Martineau's emphasis on the spoken and the function of her letters as "private conversation" suggests the reality of her life with increasing hearing loss. Face-to-face private conversation became difficult for Martineau as her hearing impairment worsened and her companion was required to increase his or her volume of speaking or to speak into Martineau's ear trumpet. Her letters, therefore, often took the place of the spoken conversation and the privacy she expected in such conversations but could not always rely on in verbal exchanges. Martineau equated private letters with intimate conversation and wrote even her published letters as if she were having a private conversation with a friend. As her hearing worsened and she began to use an ear trumpet, the letter became, for Martineau, analogous to unmediated speech and, just as she would expect the person with whom she had a physical private conversation to keep their conversation confidential, she expected the same consideration to be granted to her written conversation. Reframing her letters as written talk allowed Martineau to request of others the same level of discretion expected in verbal conversation.

It is worth noting that Martineau shared in her *Autobiography* reservations about the efforts some notable figures made to control their letters. She cites Samuel Johnson[7], who limited what he wrote in his letters to inconsequential detail; Fanny Burney[8], who revised all of the letters she had written or received for publication on

[6] Henry Crabb Robinson (1776-1867) was a lawyer and member of the South Place Ethical Society with Martineau. His Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence was published in 1869.

[7] Samuel Johnson (1709-1785) was an English poet, literary critic, editor, and compiler of the *Dictionary of the English Language*.

[8] Frances Burney (1752-1840) was an English novelist and playwright.

her death-bed; and Robert Southey[9] and Philip Doddridge[10], both of whom made copies of every letter they wrote for the purpose of future publication (*Autobiography* I 3-4). Although this level of manipulation frustrated her, Martineau did recognize the need for control over letters. She advocated the burning of letters and wrote to her sister-in-law, Helen Martineau, in 1843 about the methods she felt would preserve her "freedom of epistolary speech," writing that "Wordsworth[11] & Brougham[12] have, – like that other person[13] & I, been burning & causing to be burnt, all their private letters, except on mere business [. . .] caring little what was in the letters but protesting agst the perverting of private letters into biographical material" (Martineau *Collected Letters* 2 149). She, in a later letter, asserted that "[n]othing but mutual burning can bring letters to the talking point of confidence, even between uncelebrated persons" (2 216). She further wrote to Robinson:

> Let me just say that I do hope you don't keep my letters. I preserve few or none but business-letters: & my correspondents generally, knowing my feelings about letters, – that they are talk, & shd be treated as such, – are kind enough to give me perfect freedom in writing by destroying my letters. I shd be grateful to know that you do this too. I have no fear of the posthumous publication of my letters, for I have guarded against it, in my testamentary disposition of my affairs [. . .] Some of my friends have declared themselves almost indignant at the thought that they wd allow any line of my letters to be published: while others have protested against the idea that they wd not publish them: while others, again, are for my leaving the whole to the discretion of my private Exr. (2 149)

[9] Robert Southey (1771-1843) was an English Romantic poet and England's Poet Laureate from 1813 until his death in 1843.

[10] Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) was an English Nonconformist leader and hymn writer.

[11] William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was an English Romantic poet and the Poet Laureate of England from 1843 until his death in 1850.

[12] Henry Brougham was the first Baron of Brougham and Vaux and Lord Chancellor of Great Britain. He was a lawyer, education reformer, activist against the slave trade, and helped to found the Edinburgh Review.

[13] The text is not clear about the identity of "that other person."

In contradiction of the confidence expressed in the above-quoted passage that her correspondents would comply with the agreement to return or destroy her letters, less than two months later Martineau was forced to make use of her "testamentary disposition." She again wrote to Robinson to tell him that because this agreement has not been maintained by all of her correspondents, she had sought legal advice in the matter: "I discovered that my most private letters were kept labelled & prepared for publication after my death: & also that those who were corresponding with me on an agreement that letters shd not be kept had not kept the agreement on their side" (2 155). Linda H. Peterson asserts in her introduction to Martineau's *Autobiography* that "[b]y interdicting the publication of her letters and asking friends to burn private correspondence, Martineau in effect prevented others from shaping her life story, and thus she maintained the power to write it her own way" (8). Indeed, this prohibition was so important to Martineau she used the greater part of the introduction to her *Autobiography* to discuss this choice. She was writing this autobiography in the belief that she was terminally ill and was cognizant of the importance of explaining her reasons for so significant a decision to her general reader. She tells her reader that because of the diagnosis of a terminal condition, "I rather hope that I may be able to finish my story with my own hands. If not, it will be done by another, from materials of more or less value. But one part which ought to be done by myself is the statement of my reasons for so serious a step as forbidding the publication of my private correspondence" (1 35).

While Peterson is undoubtedly correct that Martineau was anxious to have

control over her own story and that her prohibition of the publication of her letters certainly facilitated this control, I contend that this prohibition had as much to do with her conviction that private letters were akin to intimate conversation as it did with control over her story. This anxiety regarding the publication of her letters and her objection to the commodification of her intimate epistolary conversations, as well as those of her correspondents, is given clearer expression in her 21 January 1843 letter to William Johnson Fox. She wrote to Fox about what she considered a great secret and it is clear that she expects Fox to respect the sanctity of her letter:

> Will you think it very strange if I tell you a secret, — really & truly a secret, — even from my own family, who otherwise have all my confidence? I tell it you because I know it will interest you, & I am pretty sure it will give you satisfaction. My secret is that I expect to leave behind me perhaps the amplest account of a life ever written. I have taken measures to prevent my private letters being ever printed: but I shall leave otherwise the fullest possible revelation of myself. I can do it, I find, without much implicating my family; but still, I wish to keep my mind clear from all family influences & have therefore not even told James; — nor shall. It makes me ill, — the effort, but I feel it to be a clear duty. (Martineau *Collected Letters* 2 146)

Martineau wrote in her autobiography that "[f]rom my youth upwards I have felt that it was one of the duties of my life to write my autobiography" (1 1) and, reflecting the interest of many nineteenth-century readers in autobiography, "I have always enjoyed, and derived profit from, reading [autobiographies] of other persons, from the most meager to the fullest" (1 1). She wrote, also, of her personal conviction that "[w]hen my life became evidently a somewhat remarkable one, the obligation presented itself more strongly to my conscience" (1 1). That Martineau used the epistolary form to tell Fox what she referred to as "really & truly a secret," one she had not revealed even to her family, indicates the level of respect she had

for the inviolable nature of letters and the confidence she had that her correspondents would respect her view of letters as, as she wrote in her *Autobiography*, "written speech" (1 3) that warranted a similar treatment as private. This letter to Fox provides the reader with a fuller understanding of Martineau's anxiety that her familiar letters not be published. Although she wrote to Fox that she intended to write the "fullest possible revelation" of her life and that she considered doing so to be "a clear duty," she was troubled by the sale of private letters and stated many times that she would never agree to print her familiar letters for the public or allow them to be printed after her death. She persisted in her beliefs regarding the sanctity of letters and reaffirmed her repugnance toward their publication in her *Autobiography*: "Epistolary conversation is written speech; and the onus rests with those who publish it to show why the laws of honor, which are uncontested in regard to conversation, may be violated when the conversation is written instead of spoken" (3).

II. Letters in Martineau's work

My discussion of Martineau's "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism" follows the work of three influential life-writing scholars: Sidonie Smith, Linda H. Peterson, and Arthur W. Frank. Smith and Peterson have connected innovations in autobiographical writing with gender politics. Specifically, Smith writes in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987) that women have historically had to use genres in creative ways to express their experiences (45) and writing about women's autobiographical efforts in "Women

Writers and Self-Writing" (2001), Peterson asserts that some women writers used diaries, journals, memoirs, and personal letters in ingenious ways to put their lives into writing. Responding to Smith and Peterson, I argue that Martineau pushed "beyond the limits of domesticity " (Peterson *Traditions* 27) inherent in the epistolary genre to publish important open letters, both as isolated letters in popular magazines and as parts of larger texts, in order to express, explore, and share her experiences with illness and disability. Additionally, I follow the work of Frank, who argues that illness/disability narratives begin when those with compromised bodies "recognize that more is involved in their experiences than the medical story can tell" (6).

I also focus on Martineau's use of an interconnectivity between the public and the private through her use of the open letter genre, a form which the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines as "a letter addressed to a particular person or persons but intended for a more public readership." During the nineteenth century, several writers used the open letter form to express their social/political concerns through "deliberate publication in a newspaper or journal" (*OED*). For example, Émile Zola protested the incarceration of Alfred Dreyfus through "J'accuse!" (1898), an open letter published in the French socialist newspaper *L'Aurore* and directed to the president of France, Félix Faure. Richard Oastler, labour reformer and abolitionist, protested the continued use of children in the textile industry in an open letter to the editor of the *Leeds Mercury* entitled "Yorkshire Slavery" (1830). Like these authors and many other contemporaries, Martineau used the open letter form to argue against what she considered evils in society. In a series of open

letters to the *Daily News* in 1869, she protested the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, 1869), acts that declared that any woman suspected of prostitution could be detained by police without a warrant and be subject to invasive medical examination (Martineau "Contagious" 124). However, while her open letters to the *Daily News* followed the format of distanced condemnation of a contentious issue in society directed to a particular person or persons, her "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism" diverged from this norm in that they were directed to a rather undefined community of fellow-sufferers and were deeply personal in nature. These letters are important examples of her use of the open letter genre as she drew on the personal topics of her illness and disability to benefit others and, as Shelagh Hunter asserts, transform "personal loss into public service in a particularly intimate way" (192). My discussion of "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism" draws on Garrett Stewart's insights on the open letter during the nineteenth century in *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Reader in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. This work provides my discussion of Martineau's open letters with a useful structure. Stewart's discussion of the "addressed or otherwise rendered nineteenth-century reader" applies to Martineau's letters in several significant ways that I will address with each letter or series of letters.

a. "Letter to the Deaf" (1834)

"Letter to the Deaf" first appeared in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, a popular monthly periodical. It reflects Martineau's determined desire to educate and instruct her readers. Noteworthy for its didacticism, the letter is interspersed with

biographical information about her hearing loss and the ways in which she has been able to overcome many of the limitations of her deafness. It is, as such, an integral part of her larger illness/disability narrative. In my discussion of "Letter to the Deaf," I combine epistolary theory with prosthesis theory. Prosthesis theory informs my examination of the importance of the epistolary genre to Martineau's identity as a disabled woman and includes a discussion of Martineau's well-known use of an ear trumpet. A device that acted as an extension of her body, allowing her to better participate in conversations, her ear trumpet was a visible sign of her identity as a deaf person and had a significant role in her instruction to the hearing impaired readers of "Letter to the Deaf." I extend this discussion of Martineau's use of an ear trumpet as prosthesis to her life-long connection with the epistolary genre and I use Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven's theory in *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* that the letter is "both a substitute and supplement for the body" (2). I add to recent work on Martineau's letters with my hypothesis that the epistolary form was, like the ear trumpet, a prosthetic extension of her body that allowed her to participate in conversations and convey personal details of her life with a compromised body.

Epistolary scholars have written extensively on the politics of the letter. Mary A. Favret has commented in *Romantic Correspondence* on the letter form as both private and public, observing that "critical discourse has written a fiction of letters that gives the letter [. . .] a private voice divorced from the outside world" (19) and Gilroy and Verhoeven point out that the categories of public and private work become an interlocking cultural system with the epistolary form (9). Martineau unquestionably recognized this interconnectivity between the public

and the private in "Letter to the Deaf" and in her other published letters on illness and disability. Although she published "Letter to the Deaf" in *Tait's*, she wanted to maintain the sense of personal community implied by the familiar letter and writes several times in the letter that she intended it to be like a personal conversation with a friend. Suggestive of Stewart's theory of the "addressed or otherwise rendered" (3) reader, Martineau directly addresses her imagined reader(s) and writes "I am writing with the freedom which I should use in a private letter to each of you" (Martineau "Letter" 231).

Because she considered personal letters to be equivalent to conversation, it is not surprising that Martineau gravitated toward the epistolary form when discussing the personal topics of illness and disability in a public space. Her narrative intent with her use of the open letter was to encourage a sense of community with the understanding that she is a part of the community that she is writing both *to* and *about*:

> The deafness under which I have now for some years past suffered, has become, from being an almost intolerable grievance, so much less of one, to myself and my friends, than such a deprivation usually is, that I have often of late longed to communicate with my fellow-sufferers, in the hope of benefiting, by my experience, some to whom the discipline, is newer than to myself. (231)

In this, her opening paragraph, Martineau establishes three points she considers essential to the success of her letter: her membership in the deaf community as a fellow "sufferer," the authority derived from her membership in this community, and her altruistic intention with the letter. She begins with a self-referential description that outlines her membership in the deaf community. She asserts that she understands the "intolerable grievance" of deafness with an acknowledgment

that she has "suffered" with deafness for a number of years. The audience for the letter is a double audience, the deaf and their hearing companions, and her experience with deafness gives her authority in the eyes of both. She suggests that as a member of the deaf community, she can commiserate with its members and that the knowledge she has gained from being a long-time member of this community together with the fact that she has been able to transform her "deprivation" into less of a grievance grants her the authority to address the community and share her experience. Rather than risking the letter being mistaken for her attempt to increase her public image, Martineau quickly identifies it as stemming from a selfless desire to "to communicate with [her] fellow-sufferers" in the hope that her experience would be of some benefit to members of this community.

Martineau distances herself from the stereotype that all deaf or hearing impaired individuals are miserable by asserting that the "intolerable grievance" of deafness is no longer one for her at the same time as she reinforces it through her claim that deafness is a grievance to most hearing impaired individuals, particularly to those who are newly deaf. She suggests that she has been able to rise above this misery and now desires to share how she has been able to overcome it with her "fellow-sufferers." Martineau's use of the word "discipline" in this passage sheds additional light on her intention with the letter. The various definitions for the word "discipline" provided by the *OED* all relate to instruction: "Instruction imparted to disciples or scholars; teaching; learning; education, schooling," a "particular course of instruction to disciples," and "[i]nstruction

having for its aim to form the pupil to proper conduct and action." Martineau's use of the term "discipline" also evokes the now obsolete use of "[t]reatment for some special purpose, e.g. medical regimen." As an experienced member of the deaf community, she hopes to provide instruction or discipline that will benefit those in the community who are new to the discipline of deafness.

Instead of writing a narrative in which she depicts herself as overcoming obstacles relating to her hearing loss as a solitary sufferer, Martineau uses the open letter form to evoke a sense of community in several ways. Although it refers to letters from one character to another contained within Victorian fiction and made open to the reader, Stewart's work is relevant to a discussion of Martineau's "Letter to the Deaf." Stewart asserts that: "[t]he mentioned reader [. . .] marks the site of an implicated response, however minimal [. . .] And so the mentioned reader becomes an optionally explicit place holder for that subjectivity constructed by, because requisite for, the execution of narrative not only as mass product but as supposedly private pleasure" (27). Martineau apostrophizes her readers as "Dear Companions" and "fellow-sufferers" in the letter's opening address and, as she continues the letter, she incorporates the reader further by consistently using phrases such as "our principle," "we sufferers," and "[w]hatever may be our fate." These addresses to the reader perform important work for Martineau. They require the attention of, or a response by, her readers within the deaf community of at least minimal recognition of their personal participation in the behaviours and stereotypes she describes in the letter. The "mentioned reader" also becomes a surrogate for Martineau. She constructs her subjectivity and performs an autobiographical narrative focused on

her struggles and achievements with deafness in a general publication designed to reach a large market but which has the appearance of possessing the "private pleasure" of a familiar letter.

As Martineau began to use the genre of open letters as a way to inform and instruct her readers, the private pleasure of familiar letters became for her the public work of fulfilling a duty:

> I have for some time done what I could in private conversation; but it never occurred to me to print what I had to say, till it was lately not only suggested to me but urged upon me as a duty. I adopt this method as the only means of reaching you all. ("Letter to the Deaf" 231)

While the above passage implies, perhaps not entirely sincerely, that she desired to relay her knowledge of life with a hearing impairment in the personal method of private conversation, most of her readers would have recognized that her intent to relay this information to the extent that she felt useful would certainly have been logistically difficult and that part of that difficulty would have resulted from her use of an ear trumpet and the hearing impairments of some of her imagined readers. She deflects her own responsibility for the publication of "Letter to the Deaf" to interested parties who convinced her of the duty she had to her "companions" in deafness to communicate what she had learned. This passage begins with Martineau writing that she had "for some time done what [she] could in private conversation" and I suggest that, considering her belief that letters are "written conversation," her attempt to communicate in private conversation might indicate that she had attempted to convey her information in individual, private letters. As a person with increasing hearing loss, the "written conversation" she saw as inherent in the letter form gave her a practical way of conveying

information to a community of both deaf and hearing readers in an ostensibly personal and intimate way; she considered the open letter as the "only means of reaching" both segments of her audience. Additionally, Martineau's suspension of the letter between the private and public enacts what critics Gilroy and Verhoeven refer to as the "range of voices other than the intimate" (10) of the epistolary form.

Martineau references the medical profession several times in "Letter to the Deaf." Specifically, she alludes to the case narrative, the medical genre that many modern critics have analyzed as a source of medical authority and power during the nineteenth century. Michel Foucault writes in *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* that the case narrative proliferated in the nineteenth century and gave "the clinical field a new structure in which the individual in question was not so much a sick person as the endlessly reproducible pathological fact to be found in all patients suffering in a similar way" (97). Leonard Cassuto also defines the medical case study as "one of the most powerful tools of the Western medical profession. According to Cassuto, as a genre with tendentiously objective connotations, it became the vehicle by which rationally based medical science turned the disabled person into a medical narrative" (119). He further asserts that the medical case narrative "made the medical doctor into an authority" through "its impersonal character, which effaces the I" (119). Additionally, Nichole Desiree Buscemi, in her 2009 doctoral dissertation, *Diagnosing Narratives: Illness, the Case History, and Victorian Fiction*, uses the example of Dickens and his work to discuss the reaction of some Victorian writers

to the medical case report, writing that Dickens frequently reworked "the generic conventions of the case history in order to highlight the importance of *personal* experience—as opposed to the *observed* experience that characterizes the typical medical case narrative" (26). Like Dickens, Martineau reworked these conventions and although she uses the language of the case study several times in "Letter to the Deaf" and in her subsequent writing on health and ability, she connects with her reader/subject in a personal way through the familiar letter and her use of the first-person narrative. She uses the epistolary genre to convey her personal experience of disability and illness and to reshape case report conventions:

> It does not matter what may be thought of anything I now say, or of my saying it in this manner, by those who do not belong to our fraternity. I write merely for those who are deeply concerned in the subject of my letter. The time may come when I shall tell the public some of our secrets, for other purposes than those which are now before me. At present I address only you; and as there is no need for us to tell our secrets to one another, they may be little interest to any but ourselves. (231)

This passage references the conventions of the medical case report and suggests the ways in which her letter works both with and against them. The "manner" of her writing on deafness, the personal letter form, is a form contrary to the detached, scientific case narrative form. The nineteenth century was a time in history when the medical system was attempting to increase its power and authority and when physicians formed a closed group of experts, or "fraternity," that isolated itself from the general public and had "secrets," the possession of which turned the doctor into *the* authority on illness and disability. Illness and disability were largely shaped by the enormous amount of medical discourse circulating during the Victorian era, discourse which, as Athena Vrettos writes, included "lectures,

textbooks, journals, essays, advice manuals, case studies, photographic comparisons and analyses" (5). As Vrettos explains, this medical discourse entered the social field and took on "personal and cultural meaning" (10). Much of Martineau's language in this passage implies that she is not only referencing the conventions of the case narrative genre but is actively using them to the benefit of her personal narrative. She suggests that some readers might be shocked at what she advocates in the letter. Specifically, she is referencing the medical system's attempt to create a hierarchy in which the public saw the doctor as an authority figure in sole possession of the expertise to manage and control medical cases. However, Martineau advocates the patient assuming control over her own case throughout the letter. She writes "I am afraid some of you may be rather surprised at the mention of plans, and methods, and management" and laments that patients are "too apt to shrink from regularly taking in hand our own case" (231). Although she is promoting the development of plans for methods of the management of disability, a role that physicians generally assumed for patients, she advances the view that responsibility for this management fall to the patient herself.

Later in the letter, Martineau goes further in her questioning of the monopoly of medical doctors and advocates placing some of the power and authority of the medical profession into the hands of the sufferer with statements such as "[a]dvice must go for nothing with us in a case where nobody is qualified to advise. We must cross-question our physician, and hold him to it till he has told us all" (233). This passage also references a fraternity, referring to the nature of the medical system and the case narrative. Some of the power of the doctor/patient

relationship resides in the secrecy or mystery doctors were able to develop around their profession. Much of this mystery came from the medical language used in case narratives published in medical journals. Martineau writes "Letter to the Deaf" in a style very different from the controlled case narrative, which was, as Cassuto writes, "frequently couched in technical language" (120). As she references this fraternity of physicians, Martineau is explicitly using the "Letter to the Deaf" to establish a community of persons with hearing loss and deafness that is based on the personal connections of "those who are deeply concerned in the subject of [her] letter." Although her letter had been published in a periodical for a general readership, she, referencing the closed community of medical doctors, factitiously uses the term "fraternity" to refer to the community she envisions reading her letter and writes that the "time may come when I shall tell the public some of our secrets."

Martineau's use of the epistolary form can be read as a prosthetic expansion of her body that parallels her use of an ear trumpet as a prosthetic technology. Although Susan F. Bohrer writes that "Martineau, as a deaf woman, carries along with her a visible sign that contributes to her already precarious status as an intellectual and vigorous woman" and proposes that Martineau was "[s]tigmatized by her disability" (25), I hope to show that the "visible sign" of Martineau's ear trumpet actually increased her influence as a disabled woman, added authority to her writing on heath and ability, and contributed significantly to what she considered her duty and life's work. While Erin O'Connor's focus in her book *Raw Material* is the Victorian discourse of dismemberment and masculine identity, her observations that "the discourse of prosthesis consistently links bodily condition to

social position" and that "bodily recovery [. . .] became synonymous with social recuperation" (126, 124) lend themselves to an examination of Martineau's ear trumpet as an auditory prosthesis that contributed to the establishment of her position in society as a knowledgeable social commentator on health and ability and that added authority to her recommendation to her hearing impaired readers to adopt the technology. Mitchell and Snyder write that "[i]n order to dissociate one's disability from stigmatizing associations, disabled people are encouraged to 'pass' by disguising their disabilities" and that "[p]rosthetic devices, mainstreaming, and overcompensation techniques, all provide means for people with disabilities to 'fit in' or to 'de-emphasize' their differences" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 3). However, I concur with Esmail who writes that Martineau described "her ear trumpet as an instrument that provided her remarkable power in her role as a writer and recorder of the practices and thought of other people" (*Reading* 171). I would add that rather than disguising or de-emphasizing her disability with a prosthesis, Martineau used both her ear trumpet and the letter form to emphasize her disability in order to grant her writing on health and ability greater authority.

The ear trumpet performs very important social work for Martineau. Her trumpet enabled her to engage socially while causing as little anxiety to others as possible. O'Connor asserts that "[p]rothetics allay anxieties" (123) and, while she is referring to the use of artificial limbs, this comment can easily apply to Martineau's use of an ear trumpet to "allay anxieties" of those in social situations, both hearing and deaf. Martineau asks readers of "Letter to the Deaf": "[h]ave we not seen — it sickens me to think of it — restless, inquisitive, deaf people, who will have every insignificant thing repeated to them, to their own incessant

disappointment, and the suffering of every body about them" (235). Additionally, just as artificial limbs were intended to restore "anatomical integrity and seamlessly become a working part of the wearer's body, allowing him to engage in physical work and regain his "social position" (O'Connor 123, 126), Martineau intended that the ear trumpet be seen as an integral part of the user's body. In the "Memorials" section of her *Autobiography*, Martineau reproduces an excerpt from the 1854 notebook of the American novelist and short story writer Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 –1864) in which he wrote about meeting Martineau and about her use of the familiar ear trumpet. Hawthorne's memory of their meeting suggests that Martineau's use of the trumpet did seem to lessen social anxieties about her hearing loss. Hawthorne makes a curious physical merging between Martineau and her ear trumpet in which Martineau seems to become the host for the sentient trumpet. He writes that "[a]ll the while she talks, she moves the bowel of her ear-trumpet from one auditor to another, so that it becomes quite an organ of intelligence and sympathy between her and yourself. The ear-trumpet seems a sensible part of her, like the antennae of some insects" (II 388). For Hawthorne, the trumpet is an animate extension of Martineau's body and an "organ of intelligence." As her ear trumpet became "a sensible part of her," it encouraged private conversation between her and her companions and assuaged social anxieties about her hearing loss.

Martineau then moves from a discussion of the use of the ear trumpet to one on the place of the deaf in society. While opinions on deafness in the nineteenth century fluctuated through the period, they generally shared an assumption of social isolation. Douglas Baynton, in his chapter, "A Silent Exile on Earth," writes that

"[u]ntil the 1860s, deafness was most often described as an affliction that isolated the individual from Christian community" but that "deafness was redefined as a condition that isolated people from the national community" (33). Without a doubt, the stereotypes about the deaf circulating in the general public, particularly those concerning social isolation, were largely established and promoted by scientific discourse. Although published after Martineau's "Letter to the Deaf," John Kitto's[14] book, *The Lost Senses: Deafness and Blindness* (1845), is useful for a discussion of the scientific understanding of deafness in circulation during the nineteenth century. Kitto quotes from Dr. Sébastien Guillié's (1780–1865) *Essai sur l'instruction des aveugles, ou expose analytique des procedes employes pour les instruire*, first published in 1817. In it, Guillié argues that the deaf are "[s]trangers to all that passes around them" and that "[a]n insurmountable barrier separates them from the rest of men; they are alone in the midst of us" (qtd. in Kitto *Lost* 179). Guillié's assertions typify early nineteenth-century scientific views on the isolation of the deaf in society. Twenty-eight years later, Kitto echoes Guillié's opinions and adds his views on how he feels deaf persons should approach their lives of seclusion: "[i]f one who is deaf has any respect for himself, and for his own feelings, as well as for the real comfort of others, he will not be solicitous to bring himself into that unequal condition which his presence, say at a dinner party, imposes" (117). Although Kitto was deaf, having become so as a result of a fall when he was twelve, and despite the fact that he actually had a rich social life, he argues for the appropriateness of the self-exclusion of the deaf.

[14] John Kitto (1804-1854) became completely deaf at the age of twelve as a result of a construction accident. He was largely self-educated. He eventually became a Doctor of Divinity and published many of his travel journals as well as many books of Christian scholarship.

Throughout "Letter to the Deaf," Martineau acknowledges the stereotypes of life with deafness circulating in society and emphasized by Kitto's work. However, she either describes them and provides a way to avoid them, thus avoiding distressing hearing friends, or she writes of them as a surprising compensation for the privation of deafness. Like Kitto, Martineau focuses on the isolation of the deaf. Both connect this isolation with an obligation or duty on the part of the deaf, but while Kitto asserts that it is a duty of deaf persons to isolate themselves from society, Martineau stresses that it is the duty of deaf persons to press beyond total isolation and attempt to participate in society. She gives advice to her deaf readers on how to navigate this isolation. While her advice is, mainly, not to give up social communication she, in many ways, recommends behaviour that replicates the conditions of isolation. She feels that a deaf person must make an effort to attend and participate in social engagements, partly for his or her own sake, but mainly for the sake of friends. She tells her readers that "we must submit to be usually insignificant, and sometimes ridiculous [. . .] Those who have strength of mind to seek society under such humiliation, and to keep their temper through it, cannot remain insignificant there. They must rise to their proper place, if they abstain from pressing beyond it" (Martineau "Letter" 234). She does not define what she considers this "proper place" to be, but the bulk of the letter seems to suggest that it is, at least for the average person with hearing loss, to be a silent fixture and recipient of charity. It is through this submission, which has a religious suggestion of being content with one's lot in life, that one comes to his or her proper place in society and will be the recipient of social kindness.

In order to become a recipient of this kindness, Martineau tells her readers that they must "bring an open temper and an open countenance [to social situations]" (234). Although she acknowledges that most do not want to have to think of his or her countenance all the time, she asserts that it is of vital importance for the deaf if they want to avoid complete social isolation. She describes her own experience in gatherings as instruction to her readers:

> I was kindly told, a few years ago, that many people wished to converse with me, but that I looked as if I had rather not be spoken to. Well I might; for I then discovered that in trying to check one bad habit, I had fallen into another. I had a trick of sighing, to cover which I used to twist my fingers out of joint, (and so do you, I dare say) and the pain of this process very naturally made me frown. (234)

Using the epistolary form as a way to speak directly to a community, Martineau draws in her readers with an assertion that they share a common bond through their disability, assuring them that she understands the coping mechanisms they employ in social situations by explaining what she has done in order to cope and telling readers "and so do you, I dare say." Martineau's solution to this difficulty is to reflect on how she has submitted to an acceptance of her fate as a deaf person and to urge her readers to do the same. Her solution, again, has more than a hint of religious acceptance and she tells her reader that, "instead of twisting my fingers, I recalled my vow of patience, and this made me smile; and the world has been a different place to me since. Some such little rule as turning every sigh into a smile will help you over a multitude of difficulties, and save you, at length, the trouble of thinking about either smiling or sighing" (234-35). Again, while Martineau appears to be counseling her deaf readers on how best to avoid social isolation, her advice is focused on how these readers can better submit to their fate and avoid

causing their hearing friends anxiety.

Martineau counsels her deaf and hearing impaired readers that they must "give up also all undertakings and occupations in which we cannot mark and check our own failures;—teaching anything which requires ear, preaching, and lecturing, and music" (235-236). Again, this is a matter of lessening the anxiety of hearing friends. She provides her reader with biographical information in order to enforce the importance of this point: "I gave up music, in opposition to much entreaty, some reproach, and strong secret inclination; because I knew that my friends would rather put up with a wrong bass in my playing, and false tune in my singing, than deprive me of a resource" (236). Later in the letter, Martineau attempts to convince her readers of the compensation they have for what they have lost because of their deafness:

> The ear was not made that men should be happier without it. To attempt to persuade you so, would above all be folly [. . .] We have some accomplishment which we may gratefully acknowledge, while the means by which we gain them must prevent our being proud of them. We are good physiognomists—good perceivers in every way, and have (if we are not idle) rather the advantage over others in the power of abstract reasoning. The union of two kinds of power, which in common cases are often cultivated at the expense of each other, puts a considerable amount of accurate knowledge within easier reach of us than of most other people. We must never forget what a vast quantity we must forego, but neither must we lose sight of whatever is peculiarly within our power. We have more time; too, than anybody else: more than the laziest lordling, who does nothing but let his ears be filled with nonsense from morning till night. The very busiest in our fraternity has, I should think, time every day for as much thought as is good for him, between the hours of rising and of rest. (238-39)

After she has spent most of the "Letter to the Deaf" detailing what one loses with deafness and what one must relinquish, the closing paragraph of the letter suggests

that despite the resignation Martineau is urging her readers to practice, she believes that there are some benefits to the state of deafness. One benefit to deafness she describes is a skill at physiognomy. However, early scientific discourse on deafness frames physiognomy as a detriment rather than a benefit. Returning to Guillié's discussion of the characteristics of the deaf, the reader finds a definite difference in the way Martineau and Guillié discuss physiognomy. Whereas Martineau considers the skill the deaf have with the art of physiognomy a compensation for life with deafness, Guillié considers it a detriment to the deaf person and writes that the "custom which they have of reading the physiognomy is very often a subject of ever additional anxiety to them; they do not always divine aright; doubt and uncertainty increase their anxiety and suspicions" (Kitto *Lost* 179). Martineau attempts to frame this "custom" of physiognomy in a way that is contrary to existing scientific discourse on deafness and to give the deaf an advantage over hearing people. Returning to the opinion she expressed earlier in the letter that only those who are legitimately qualified through personal experience are competent to advise, she further emphasizes her own qualification to advise by asserting to her reader that "[t]o attempt to persuade you so, would above all be folly" and using the exclusive form of the pronoun "we" throughout the passage. While she emphasizes that the ability of the deaf at physiognomy is a skill based solely on their deafness, she, implying that deafness is, in fact, the hardship she once asserted it is not, quickly warns her deaf readers that they cannot and should not be proud of their skill because they have gained it through their deafness. She tells her deaf readers that, because of their deafness, they also have an "advantage over others in the power of abstract

reasoning" and that the combination of these two powers is "in common cases" rare. Again, although she tells her readers that the combination of these powers "puts a considerable amount of accurate knowledge within easier reach of us than of most other people," she is quick to remind them that, because of their deafness there is "a vast quantity we must forego." Even while she was in seclusion in her sickroom, Martineau was extremely active in writing and publishing and, yet, she uses the exclusive "we" and tells her reader that "[w]e have more time; too, than anybody else" to cultivate these powers. Implying that it is because of their deafness that she and her readers have time to develop these skills seems disingenuous in light of the fact that details of Martineau and her life and career would have been extremely well known by her readers and it would have been known that, despite her hearing impairment, Martineau did not have "more time" than others to quietly contemplate these skills.

Martineau spends significant time attempting to encourage her readers to go beyond the assumptions that a life with deafness is necessarily tragic. However, as Martha Stoddard Holmes writes, Martineau repeats the "familiar idea that deaf people are miserable in society" (152). Susan F. Bohrer adds to this discussion of Martineau's relationship to stereotypes of life with deafness by pointing out that Martineau "manipulates the tropes of deafness to set herself apart from stereotypical disqualifications and revises them to emphasize her own independence and intellectual prowess" (27). Indeed, Martineau encourages her deaf readers throughout "Letter to the Deaf" to cheerfully accept their position in society, telling them "[w]e must make up our minds for a time to hold the place that we may

chance to be put into" and "[w]e must submit to be usually insignificant, and sometimes ridiculous" (234). In spite of these recommendations for her deaf readers and rather than cheerfully accepting this position in society herself, Martineau seems to disregard her own principles and works to exceed the fate of the deaf in society that her letter describes, publishing widely and travelling to areas of the world such as America and the Middle East.

Martineau wrote "Letter to the Deaf" with the same sense of the work's social significance and the need for it in society as she later felt with *Life in the Sick-Room* and "Letters on Mesmerism" and the many letters she received about it convinced her of its importance. Approximately one month after the publication of "Letter to the Deaf," Martineau wrote to her publisher, William Tait, about the significance she saw in the letter and the personal correspondence she had received from readers: "I am heartily glad I wrote that letter to the Deaf. It was a great effort: but people with all infirmities are reading my sermon.[15] As a lady said to me 'We all have our deafnesses.' I have had some very interesting letters about it" (Martineau *Collected* 1 243-44). While "Letter to the Deaf" was not on the scale of her 1877 *Autobiography* in terms of length and coverage of her life, its significance lies in its position as the first stage in her illness/disability narrative and as a record of her understanding of the shared experience of hearing impairment and the significant part letters played in the formation of disability communities. She went on to write *Life in the Sick-Room* and "Letters on Mesmerism" with this same sense of the

[15] Deborah Anna Logan, editor of *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau*, writes that the word "sermon" suggests that Martineau saw her literary mission as being sacred as her brother James' clerical mission.

importance of community in a life with a compromised body and with an awareness of the social significance of works arguing for this importance.

b. *Life in the Sick-Room* (1844)

Internal medicine physician, literary critic, and professor of narrative medicine Rita Charon has suggested that "many within medicine and within literary studies have recognized the critical importance that writing—autobiography, memoir, pathography[16], fiction, personal essay—has developed within health care" (262). She and many of her colleagues have recognized the therapeutic potential of narrative in medicine. Additionally, extending Charon's argument into a discussion of narrative and health care in the nineteenth century, Maria Frawley writes in "'A Prisoner to the Couch': Harriet Martineau, Invalidism, and Self-Representation" that the nineteenth-century sick "seemed inexorably to write about their encounters with health" (174). In *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Frawley further examines the features of the nineteenth century that influenced the development of a culture of invalidism and the authorship and reception of the numerous texts devoted to the depiction of the personal experience of illness and disability during the period. As part of this examination, Frawley lists several memoirs including *The Solace of an Invalid* (1832), *An Invalid's Day* (1877), *Literary Gleanings by an Invalid* (1848), *The Idle Hours of an Invalid* (1878), and *The Invalid's Own Book* (1853) (11-12). Like many Victorians, Martineau was preoccupied with health and ability and recognized the personal and collective benefit of narrative to ill and disabled persons. While Martineau's memoir *Life in the Sick-Room* can be included in

[16] A term used to describe autobiographical narratives of illness and disability. The term was coined by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins in her work *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography*.

Frawley's list, Martineau's use of the epistolary genre and its engagement with implied community throughout the work's entirety gives it distinctive status in the illness/disability genre of the period.

Life in the Sick-Room was, as Alison Winter writes, "widely hailed as [Martineau's] most important and influential work" ("Reform of the Invalid" 597). A reading of it adds to my examination of Martineau's use of the letter form as an expression of the experience of life with a compromised body. The book's ten chapters are extensions of its opening letter and both are written as intimately as her familiar letters. Placing *Life in the Sick-Room* within the tradition of illness/disability narratives and acknowledging the critical concerns of many illness/disability scholars, Frawley writes in "'A Prisoner to the Couch'" that "Martineau's work highlights many issues [. . .] crucial to disability studies today" (175). One such issue addressed by *Life in the Sick-Room* is the presumed isolation of ill and/or disabled persons as highlighted by Mitchell and Couser. In *Life in the Sick-Room*, as elsewhere in her oeuvre, Martineau counters isolation through her use of the open letter and engages with the sense of community fostered by the translation of the personal experience of illness and disability into public discourse. She writes the opening letter of *Life in the Sick-Room* and the following chapters as if she were writing a personal letter to a friend and suggests to her imagined reader/fellow-sufferer that the letter and the entire book is very personal because "one may speak far more freely with a friend"(39).

Documenting the widespread Victorian preoccupation with health and soundness of body, Martineau addresses this letter to an unspecified addressee, a "you" that can sympathize with her ill health as she, too, has experienced

vicissitudes of the body. While Martineau addresses "Letter to the Deaf" to her "Dear Companions," the opening letter of *Life in the Sick-Room* is addressed "To ____." This can, of course, be seen as an attempt to suggest one is reading a private letter made public. While the book was officially dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett [Browning], a fellow 'invalid' living in seclusion, I read this opening letter as being addressed to no one yet everyone and, therefore, encompassing a community connected by ill health and, perhaps, seclusion in a sickroom. The unspecified addressee of *Life in the Sick-Room* gives a sense of Martineau's intention for the universal significance of the work and is an instance of Garrett Stewart's "addressed or otherwise rendered" (3) reader. Martineau writes:

> As I write this, I cannot but wonder when and how you will read it, and whether it will cause a single throb at the idea that it may be meant for you. You have been in my mind during the passage of almost all the thoughts that will be found in this book. But for your sympathy — confidently reckoned on, though never asked — I do not know that I should have had the courage to mark their procession, and record their order. I have felt that if I spoke of these things at all, it must be to some fellow-sufferer — to some one who had attained these experiences before me or with me; and, having you for my companion throughout, (however unconsciously to yourself). (39)

This first paragraph of this opening letter details many of the concerns that can be found throughout *Life in the Sick-Room* and, indeed, much of Martineau's published writing on illness and disability. This passage is directed to an individual whose name has been censored, but it allows the reader to either insert herself into the letter as addressee or to feel that she is reading a private letter between intimates. Martineau had suggested in her private correspondence that she

considered letters to have an important role in the creation of community and she is here using this aspect of letters to speak to a grouping of ill individuals, but in the very personal and *individual* style of the familiar letter. This paragraph evokes Martineau's earlier "Letter to the Deaf" (1834), her own deafness, and her renown as a logical and experienced commentator on issues of disability and illness and, like "Letter to the Deaf," it uses self-referential address as it refers to her desired sympathy from her reader(s) and, later in the letter, her own illness and seclusion. Martineau further reinforces this idea of community through bodily concerns by telling her reader(s) that "You have been in my mind during the passage of almost all the thoughts that will be found in this book." The paragraph continues with the final lines: "I have uttered many things that I could hardly otherwise have spoken: for one may speak far more freely with a friend, though in the hearing of others, than when singly addressing a number. Most frequently, however, I have forgotten that others could hear, and have conversed with you alone" (39). These lines express Martineau's opinions on personal conversation, on letters as written speech, and on her own experience of increasing deafness. They reference Martineau's decreased hearing and her use of an ear trumpet, both of which made it easier for her to speak more freely and intimately with a single friend, to have a "tete-a-tete in comfort" ("Letter to the Deaf" 238), than with a number of individuals in a group. Of course, these tête-à-têtes could be overheard by others in the room though she conversed with one friend alone. The implication here is, as in "Letter to the Deaf," that the publication of a letter, which is, for Martineau, written speech, is less complicated than attempting to verbally relay her message

to a group.

In all of her work on her illness and deafness, Martineau uses the intimacy suggested by the epistolary form to reframe illness from an individual tragedy into something more easily endured with fellowship:

> It matters little, in this view, that we have never met — that each of us does not know, except by the eye of the mind, with what outward face the other has encountered the unusual lot appointed to both. While I was as busy as any one on the sunny plain of life, I heard of you laid aside in the shadowy recess where our sunshine of hope and joy could never penetrate to you; and it was with reverence, and not pity, that I inquired of those who could tell, whether you had separate lights of heaven, such as there are for retreats like yours. When I was myself withdrawn into such a recess, if I learned to pity more than before, it was with a still enhanced reverence for your older experience. As the evils of protracted unhealthiness came upon me, one after another, I knew that they had all visited you long ago; and I felt as if they brought me a greeting from you. For me, at least, you have not suffered in vain. Would there might be anything in this volume which might enable you to say the same to me! (39-40)

This passage is significant for what it reveals about Martineau's intentions with *Life in the Sick-Room* and her position on the importance of community to ill or disabled persons. It evokes two communities, one made up of those in good health and one made up of those in compromised health. The members of each community exist on disparate plains and it is only with an "outward face" that "the other has encountered the unusual lot appointed to both." Martineau, however, straddles both of these communities. The passage begins with her memory of her life while in the community of those in good health when she "was as busy as any one on the sunny plain of life" and, as she did in "Letter to the Deaf," she grammatically includes herself in a community, using the possessive adjective

“our” in “I heard of you laid aside in the shadowy recess where our sunshine of hope and joy could never penetrate to you.” This is reminiscent of Frawley’s point in her introduction to Martineau’s *Life in the Sick-Room* that Martineau’s “association of writing with ill-health was particularly her own” (11) and it is, in fact, not until she becomes ill herself that she feels a duty to write her treatise on illness and the sickroom. This passage is later echoed by Martineau in her *Autobiography*: “while I was in health, there was always so much to do that was immediately wanted, that, as usually happens, that which was not immediately necessary was deferred” (I 34). It is through her writing on her health and ability, produced when she is ill and in seclusion, that Martineau fulfills what she conceives of as a duty. Also, while Martineau was, as Winter writes, “one of the most celebrated ‘sickly’ intellectuals of her day” (“Reform of the Invalid” 599), Martineau acknowledges her past membership, however brief, on “the sunny plain of life” and remembers that while on this plain her knowledge of those in “the shadowy recess” of the other plain was limited to second-hand information and the imagination of “the eye of the mind.” She considers a true understanding of the community of others on different plains of existence limited but hopes that *Life in the Sick-Room* will connect these communities. She acknowledges that her imagined reader has “not suffered in vain” and hopes that “there might be anything in this volume which might enable [her] to say the same to me!” This epistolary volume upon which she has pinned these hopes of connection through community suggests that Martineau feels these bonds can be formed through the far-reaching lines of a letter.

Realizing that many in her reading public would be interested to know

why she chose to continue working despite an illness that she and most others considered terminal, Martineau details her reasons for beginning new work despite the urging of friends and loved-ones to rest and be still in illness and she proposes a justification founded on work performed while in health. Rather than abstaining from work because of illness, illness becomes the motivation for work. She tells her reader:

> You know, doubtless, as well as I, the emptiness of the consolation when our pitying friends, in all love and sincerity, remind us of what we did by our efforts when we were well and active, and what we are doing still for the world, by preserving a decent quietness in the midst of our troubles. You know, as well as I, how withering would be the sense of our own nothingness, if we tried to take comfort from our own dignity and usefulness. You know, as well as I, how very far we can see from our place on the verge of life, over its expanse, and how ridiculous, if it were not shocking, would be any complacency on the ground of our having followed the instincts of our nature to work, while work was possible, — the issues of such divinely-appointed instrumentality being wholly brought out and directed by Him who framed and actuated us. You know, as I do, how useful it is to human beings to have before their eyes spectacles of all experiences; and we are alike willing, having worked while we could, now to suffer as we may, to help our kind in another mode. We feel it some little service to be appointed, — having become accustomed to our footing on the shaking plank over the deep dark river, — to lead on and uphold with a steady hand some who may be appointed to follow, and perhaps to pass us upon it. (40-41)

As is demonstrated in the previously quoted passage and, indeed, as she does throughout much of her writing on health and ability, Martineau here creates a connection with the reader/fellow-sufferer. She repeats references to “we” and “our” and uses the phrase “you know, as well as I” frequently through this initial letter to establish a community that is, ultimately, solidified by the familiar letter. Martineau frames work performed during her illness with a sense of religious

requirement that comes from her understanding of her position, and the position of others in similar circumstances, as a blessed "place on the verge of life" that allows a sanctified ability to see the workings of the world with "divinely-appointed instrumentality." Her writing becomes work that has been divinely intended by God and, it follows, that to go along with the urgings of friends and family to rest would be to go against her duty. Rather than the successes of her life while in health justifying her respite when in sickness, it is her sickness and her familiarity with life "on the shaking plank over the deep dark river" and her intent to assist others in a similar position that justify her continued writing. Martineau ends the opening letter by reasserting her altruistic intent to act, through *Life in the Sickroom*, as nurse to her fellow-sufferers, writing to her reader(s): "If [my words] should have the virtue to summon thoughts which may, for a single hour, soften your couch, shame and banish your foes of depression and pain, and set your chamber in holy order and something of cheerful adornment, I may have the honor of being your nurse, though I am myself laid low" (42). Most important for my work with the book as a whole is Martineau's assertion at the end of this introductory letter that "the whole book is truly a conversation with you" (42).

Also of interest to her friends and family, as well as her reading public, was Martineau's decision to leave the home of her sister and, thus, the immediate care of her physician brother-in-law, in her illness. She had very clear motivation for her move and took the opportunity of the illness/disability narrative found in *Life in the Sick-Room* to discuss this motivation. She writes in the chapter, "Sympathy to the Invalid," that

> I cannot but wish that more consideration was given to the comfort of being alone in illness. This is so far from being understood, that, though the cases are numerous of sufferers who prefer, and earnestly endeavour to procure solitude, they are, if not resisted, wondered at, and humoured for a supposed peculiarity, rather than seen to be reasonable; whereas, if they are listened to as the best judges of their own comforts, it may be found that they have reason on their side. (59)

This argument is, of course, reminiscent of the claim that she developed in "Letter to the Deaf" that it is the disabled person who has the knowledge and experience to have authority over her own condition. She constructs herself rather than the well-meaning friends or even physicians as the best judge over her treatment options and suggests that it is the patient who is most qualified to make these life decisions, telling her readers, "it does appear to me, and is felt by me through experience, to be incomparably the happiest plan for the sick one to live alone" and that the "experience of years qualifies me to speak about this" (60). She continues this assertion of the authority of the sufferer over her condition and body in her later "Letters on Mesmerism" and *Autobiography*. Although her promotion of living alone for ill persons seems to be at odds with the assertions of Finger and Mitchell of the importance of community to ill/disabled persons and the dangers of social isolation, Martineau connects helpful and supportive community with familiar letters rather than with shared living spaces.

Although she writes in the above-quoted passage of the "comfort of being alone in illness," she is clear in the book's subsequent chapters that this comfort in aloneness is achieved in part through letters. As she does in "Letter to the Deaf," Martineau connects writing about illness and disability to the personal writing of the epistolary genre and suggests that the writing most applicable to the treasured

state of seclusion of the sickroom is the equal state of privacy implied by the letter. Just as she controls her sickroom and the frequency of her visitors, she is equally anxious to control the content of her letters for the benefit of others: “It becomes a habit, from the recurrence of this feeling [of pain], to write letters in one’s best hours; to present one’s most cheerful aspect abroad, and keep one’s miseries close at home, under lock and key” (60). Given her published discussion of her diminishing sense of hearing, her propensity for lengthy familiar letters that discuss illness and disability, and, indeed, this book itself, this passage seems inconsistent with Martineau’s frequently-stated literary intentions. However, this discussion of private writing and pain/illness is significant to my argument. Because of her insistence on the privacy and seclusion of the sickroom, it is significant that she gravitates to the letter form and the private talk she considers to be “under lock and key” in this genre. Conversely, Martineau considers letters to be a significant part of community life. She writes: “Post time is looked to for its sure freight of love and pity and good wishes from a few — or not a few — whose affections keep them even more on the watch than ourselves for one’s [birthday]. *Letters are one’s best company on that day, — and best if they are one’s only company*” (emphasis added; 64). For Martineau, the letter seems to be more beneficial than the bodily presence of its author and rather than overcoming isolation, the letter, seemingly, preserves it. The letter, however, can both challenge assumptions about the social isolation of ill persons and give the sufferer power. While the letter, which brings a “freight of love and pity and good wishes from a few — or not a few” on the sufferer’s birthday and, thus, overcomes the presumed isolation of the invalid through a bulk of correspondence that carries company with it, it also grants her the power to

control her surroundings and maintain privacy in her illness. Later, in Chapter Six, "Temper," Martineau writes of the importance of correspondence to the invalid: "Through the post, we hold the best kind of correspondence with the society from which we are withdrawn; we have the opinions of the wise, and the impressions of the active, transmitted to us, stripped of much of the passion and prejudice in which they would have been presented in conversation" (117). Although Martineau seems to hold personal, private conversation in high regard, her frequent defense of written conversation in which she writes of the benefits of epistolary interaction privileges letters over actual people and written conversation over spoken conversation. Her preference for the written conversation contained in letters certainly had to do with her desire to live alone during her illness, but it seems that it had as much, if not more, to do with her increasing hearing loss.

Martineau firmly believed in the importance of *Life in the Sick-Room*. In a 25 December 1843 letter to Jane Welsh Carlyle she explained the significance she saw in the book: "[w]ithin a week, there was a change in sick rooms – more simplicity – more truth spoken, – more faith put in the sufferer [. . .] Not a moments wavering had I about this book, – in the weakest or darkest hour of day or night. Nothing can ever shake or alter my mind about it" (Martineau 2 210). Later, in a 8 February 1844 letter to her close friend Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton she wrote of the personal and professional significance the writing and publication of *Life in the Sickroom* had for her: "It is strange, if true, that there was no such book about the Sick-room before [. . .] it suddenly occurred to me what a relief it wd be to ease my mind of the convictions that have grown up out of my condition [. .] the very mischief itself [her illness], – the spoiler of my life, – has become the agent of my

usefulness, – has brought the suffering directly under my helping hand" (2 238). However, from a distance of more than ten years, Martineau would write in her *Autobiography* that she regretted much about what she wrote in *Life in the Sick-Room* (I 432). She particularly regretted the vanity and pride with which she felt she viewed her illness and the fact that she once saw illness and pain as a "distinction" and "special pupilage by God" (I 433). Her concerns about the book centered on a sense of shame, not that she wrote the book, but that her position was so excessive, morbid, and narcissistic. Despite her serious concerns about much of *Life in the Sick-Room*, she also gives herself and her state of mind while writing the book some acknowledgment and tells her reader in her *Autobiography* that "[g]reat allowance is to be made, no doubt, for the effect of a depressing malady, and of the anxieties which caused it, and for an exile of years from fresh air, exercise, and change of scene" (II 450-51). She adds that "[a]ll the facts in the book, and some of the practical doctrine of the sick-room, I could still swear to" (II 450). Despite Martineau's later concerns about *Life in the Sick-Room*, I maintain that the book plays an integral part in her epistolary illness/disability narrative as I see the construction and reconstruction of her illness found in her letters, the book, and her later writing on the book as inherent aspects of her life with a compromised body.

c. "Letters on Mesmerism" (1844)

During the Victorian era, the conventional medical system was anxious to discredit any theories that could be seen as alternative and thus rival techniques to traditional medical treatments. Charges of "quackery" were consistently leveled against these rival theories and their practitioners. One such theory was

mesmerism, the term used by Victorians for the eighteenth-century concept of animal magnetism[18]. Although many traditional physicians considered mesmerism to be quack medicine practiced by charlatans, some lay-practitioners, radical physicians, and patients saw the power of the therapy to harness the strength of the mind and believed that the trance state could have therapeutic benefit. Harriet Martineau was among these proponents. After a course in mesmerism that, she asserted, cured her of her uterine tumours and "liberated" her from her sickroom, Martineau published a series of letters entitled "Letters on Mesmerism" in 1844 in the *Athenæum*, which she republished in book form in 1845. As with "Letter to the Deaf" and *Life in the Sick-Room*, Martineau used the epistolary form in "Letters on Mesmerism" to educate her readers and fellow sufferers in a way that employed the sense of community central to the epistolary genre. The result is a narrative of recovery written in a more personal way than is found in conventional case narratives. Martineau's narrative asserts control over her medical story, and, as Anka Ryall productively points out, "raises questions about issues of medical and epistemic authority" and argues that scientific medicine fails to "acknowledge the personal meaning of illness" (35). While Martineau's "Letters on Mesmerism" is an important part of her epistolary illness/ disability narrative, the epistolary responses the letters received after their publication in the *Athenæum* are also striking illustrations both of conflict between patients and physicians for authority over the ill or disabled body during the

[17]Animal magnetism was a term coined by Franz-Antoine Mesmer, a young doctor practicing in late eighteenth-century Vienna. Mesmer believed that individuals who possessed natural healing powers could control a fluid permeating the entire universe and could, through fixing their gaze on a subject or making passes over them, cure any illness, even those thought incurable by medical science.

Victorian period and of Martineau's role in this debate. In this section of this chapter, I diverge slightly from my treatment of Martineau's "Letter to the Deaf" and *Life in the Sick-Room* with my discussion of "Letters on Mesmerism" in that I include letters to the *Athenæum* written in response to Martineau's letters and Greenhow's "Medical Report on the Case of Miss H—M—" as part of her epistolary illness/disability narrative, as they play an extremely important part in the narrative of her role in this medical dispute.

In 1839, Martineau informed her friends and family that her brother-in-law/physician, Thomas Greenhow, and Sir Charles Mansfield Clarke had diagnosed her with uterine tumours and that they had deemed this condition incurable. Responding to this news, she established herself in a sickroom, a move she discusses at length in *Life in the Sick-Room*. Out of grave concern, several members of her epistolary circle such as Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote to her and suggested mesmerism as a possible way to alleviate her suffering. Martineau responded to Bulwer-Lytton's suggestion in an 22 August 1842 letter by writing that although she was not completely opposed to mesmerism, she was satisfied that she was "in the best position that can be commanded" and was "content to await the result of time and patience" (Martineau *Collected* 2 127). According to Alison Winter in *Mesmerized*, Martineau's relationship with her physician, Greenhow, was a major factor in both this initial dismissal and her later acceptance of mesmerism. Winter writes that Greenhow, who had initially been against mesmerism and had warned Martineau against the therapy, became more amenable

to the procedure after witnessing Spencer Hall[18] mesmerize subjects in 1842 or 1843 (221). Following Greenhow's reconsideration of the procedure, Martineau agreed to make an attempt at being mesmerized.

Similar to "Letter to the Deaf" and *Life in the Sick-Room*, Martineau's "Letters on Mesmerism" are not wholly autobiographical. I concentrate here on the first letter in the series—12 November 1844—and its depiction of her personal experience of the mesmeric process. The significance of this letter is that it builds on the well-known fact of her illness and hearing loss as well as the recognized candor of her previous writing on health and ability, advancing the construction of her as a reliable observer. Martineau knew that mesmerism was a polarizing issue with many in society being adamantly against the procedure. She also knew that there were many patients and radical physicians proclaiming its benefits:

> It is important to society to know whether Mesmerism is true. The revival of its pretensions from age to age makes the negative of this question appear so improbable, and the affirmative involves anticipations so vast, that no testimony of a conscientious witness can be unworthy of attention. I am now capable of affording testimony; and all personal considerations must give way before the social duty of imparting the facts of which I am in possession. (Martineau "Letters on Mesmerism" 11/23/1844 1070)

Martineau begins "Letters on Mesmerism" with the suggestion that she is in a position to inform and educate her readers with vital information obtained through a life of poor health and suffering. She relies on what she seems to consider her important place in society as a trusted commentator on matters of health and ability and identifies herself as being in possession of personal experience with

[18] Spencer Hall (1812-1885) was an English writer, phrenologist, and mesmerist. He also became a homeopathic doctor and in 1843 he founded the journal *The Phreno-Magnet, or, Mirror of Nature*.

mesmerism that she has a social obligation to impart to her readers. This early passage relies heavily on the reputation she had developed as a logical and "conscientious" thinker and writer as a result of her earlier writing on health and ability in publications such as "Letter to the Deaf" and *Life in the Sick-Room*. Further building on her reputation as a selfless writer, the final line of this passage—"all personal considerations must give way before the social duty of imparting the facts of which I am in possession"—indicates that although she is cognizant of the degree of animosity the topic of mesmerism elicits she knows, also, that the community to whom she is writing has come to expect a level of candor in her writing and she disregards the potential the letters have to diminish her position in society. Although "Letters on Mesmerism" is part of Martineau's larger autobiographic narrative of illness and disability, she, knowing that the story of her illness had become well known in society, chooses to concentrate for the most part on her recovery. She also recognizes that because the topic of mesmerism was so divisive in society and so, for the sake of her case in favour of the phenomena, some autobiographical detail on her struggle with illness was needed. Rather than giving exhaustive detail of her illness in the letters and running the risk of them becoming what Kathryn Montgomery Hunter refers to as "the narrative" of a malady (135), Martineau writes in the first letter that "[t]his is not the place in which to give any details of disease. It will be sufficient to explain briefly, in order to render my story intelligible, that the internal disease, under which I have suffered, appears to have been coming on for many years" (11/23/1844 1070) and that this illness had confined her "to a condition of almost entire stillness, — to a life passed between my bed and my sofa" (11/23/1844 1071). What would have

been an obvious reference to Greenhow to her readers, she explains that her "kind and vigilant medical friend, — the most sanguine man I know, and the most bent upon keeping his patients hopeful, — avowed to me last Christmas, and twice afterwards, that he found himself compelled to give up all hope of affecting the disease [. . .] As to all the essential points of the disease, I was never lower than immediately before I made trial of Mesmerism" (1071).

Martineau hoped that her reputation would change the belief of some that "mesmeric patients were of the weaker class as to nerves & mind" and that her candid description of the process of mesmerism and her experiments would be of benefit to other sufferers and, ultimately, change the face of medicine. She put forth arguments in favor of the remarkable potential she saw in the procedure and was convinced of the significance of her decision:

> so, not only on account of my previous knowledge of facts, and of my hopelessness from any other resource, but on grounds which other sufferers may share with me;— on the ground that though the science of medicine may be exhausted in any particular case, it does not follow that curative means are exhausted. (11/23/1844 1072).

She argued that she made herself the subject of an experiment, suggesting that she did this both for her own benefit but also for the benefit of others who, like her, had exhausted all other avenues of care. She suggests that much of the professional resistance to mesmerism stems from professional ignorance of the nervous system and the resulting inability to reason that the "application of human energy" is a viable treatment option. Martineau, according to Ryall, "saw her recovery as irrefutable experimental proof not only of the healing powers of mesmerism but of the inadequacy of conventional medicine" (36). This passage also refutes the claim

of many doctors that if all attempts at a cure have been exhausted by medical science a cure is impossible and opens the door to the possibility of achieving cures through alternative treatments. Martineau was writing at a point in medical history when the existing medical system was trying to professionalize itself and increase its authority. Traditional doctors perceived that patients such as Martineau were suggesting that treatment could, and often should, be taken outside of the prescribed medical system and that some of the medical authority found in the system-wide prevalence of the case narrative be redistributed to the patient.

My discussion of Martineau's "Letters on Mesmerism" as an integral part of her epistolary illness/disability narrative has focused on the autobiographic portions of the letters that centre on her own illness and recovery experience. Martineau, however, predicted the insults she would receive from many in society as a result of the revelations found in "Letters on Mesmerism" and it is important to consider some of the aggressively unfavorable letters in response to her letters as part of her narrative of recovery. While many read Martineau's "Letters on Mesmerism" enthusiastically as proof of the power of mesmerism, the letters received hostile and disparaging criticism from others. Although not a letter, Thomas Greenhow's "Medical Report on the Case of Miss H—M—" was written in response to Martineau's claims in her "Letters on Mesmerism" that she was cured of her long illness through the agency of mesmerism. Greenhow's pamphlet was, essentially, a denunciation of her recovery narrative in "Letters on Mesmerism" and was additionally a refutation of much of what she wrote in *Life in the Sick-Room* about the terminal nature of the diagnosis that caused her to seclude herself in her sickroom. Because of his denial of her cure through mesmerism and

his assertion that he was aware that Martineau's illness would, at least in part, resolve itself on its own, Greenhow's report is a major part of a larger hybrid narrative, of which Martineau's epistolary narrative of recovery is one part, that is produced by the coexistence of multiple narratives with conflicting views.

Martineau wrote in her familiar letters that Greenhow brought Hall to her home for her initial trial of mesmerism but does not specify what changed Greenhow's mind about the therapy; these letters imply that it was his decision to go forward with the trial. In her "Letters on Mesmerism," however, Martineau gives a slightly different description of how she began the process of a trial of mesmerism. She explains in the letters that she felt an obligation, a duty, to try any means necessary to improve her health. It was not until Greenhow informed her that he could do nothing more for her as her case was hopeless (a claim Greenhow would refute in his later report on her case) that she became adamant that she wanted to attempt mesmerism:

> After my medical friend's avowal of his hopelessness, however, I felt myself not only at liberty, but duty bound, to try, if possible, the only remaining resource for alleviation. I felt then, and I feel now, that through all mortification of old prejudices, and all springing up of new, nobody in the world would undertake to say I was wrong in seeking even recovery by any harmless means, when other hope was given up by all: and it was not recovery that was in my thoughts, but only solace. It never presented itself to me as possible that disease so long and deeply fixed could be removed; and I was perfectly sincere in saying, that the utmost I looked for was release from my miserable dependence on opiates. Deep as are my obligations to my faithful and skilful medical friend, for a long course of humane effort on his part, no one kindness of his has touched me so sensibly as the grace with which he met my desire to try a means of which he had no knowledge or opinion, and himself brought over the Mesmerist under whom the first trial of my susceptibility was made. (11/23/1844 1071)

This explanation of Martineau's introduction into mesmerism seems to distance Greenhow from any real responsibility for introducing her to the process. From this description, the reader is led to believe that it was Martineau, feeling a sense of duty, who initiated the trial and that Greenhow had little to do with the decision other than connecting Martineau with a mesmerist at her request. Appreciating that such a revelation of her attempt at mesmerism could result in dire consequences for his career, Martineau seems to be making every attempt to divorce Greenhow's name from responsibility for her trial. Martineau's description of the circumstances leading up to the "first trial of [her] susceptibility" counters Winter's assertions that Greenhow was initially against mesmerism and gives the impression that Martineau's only obligation to him is that he located a practitioner at her request. When Hall was prevented from treating her again, Martineau suggested that her maid, Jane Arrowsmith[19], who had seen Hall perform the mesmeric passes, attempt to mesmerize her. Martineau wrote in a letter to Milnes that after this second session she experienced "the first feeling of entire comfort for above 5 years" (Martineau *Collected* 2 324) and, in a letter that seems to place excessive significance on her case and her trial of mesmerism, she wrote to Edward Moxon on 28 September 1844 that "[a] clearer, or more sharply defined case of benefit from mesmerism has not occurred; and I shall do every thing in my power to make my testimony available" (Martineau 2 333). Just as she would write later in the introduction to her *Autobiography* that "I rather hope that I may finish my story with my own

[19] Jane Arrowsmith was Martineau's maid during the time she was in seclusion. Jane is the subject of Martineau's second letter in "Letters on Mesmerism," which is part of Martineau's defence of her after she came under much criticism for allegedly predicting a shipwreck while in a trance. This shipwreck, it was discovered, had already occurred and had been reported on in newspapers.

hands" (35), Martineau set out to tell the story of her mesmerism and recovery with her own hands.

In the same period that the *Athenæum* was publishing letters in response to Martineau's "Letters on Mesmerism," Greenhow published his "Medical Report on the Case of H—M—." Although Martineau had praised Greenhow in "Letters on Mesmerism" for his medical skill and kindness, his response to her "Letters on Mesmerism" was among the most aggressive and demeaning. Greenhow's pamphlet was designed to damage the credibility of Martineau's epistolary testimony of her recovery through mesmerism, a document whose production, ultimately, challenged the professional privilege of the physician to recount a patient's case. The pamphlet was a response to Martineau's letters to the *Athenæum* as well as a reaction to the mounting medical attacks published in the magazine; he became concerned that Martineau's letters on mesmerism were putting his medical career in jeopardy (Winter "Harriet Martineau" 228). He had legitimate concerns that his reputation was at risk with Martineau's publication. In addition to his fear of reprisal from the medical community, Greenhow saw himself losing control over his patient and scrambled to reassert his jurisdiction as a physician with his pamphlet. Winter explains that while Greenhow had initially "considered that *he* was performing an experiment upon Martineau and that he would evaluate it" and that he "expected to be the judge of the success of the trial, and whether further trials, and eventual publications should be ventured" (*Mesmerized* 222), Martineau believed that "the authority on the experience of somatic diseases, and even, potentially, on the nature of the disease itself, was the invalid" (221). Rather than

considering her assertion that mesmerism was "a means of which [Greenhow] had no knowledge or opinion," stemming from a concern for his professional reputation, he considered it an appropriation of his power and a questioning of his skill. The first letter in the series essentially removes Greenhow from having a role in her recovery as Martineau writes "[f]rom the early summer of 1839, I was, till this autumn, a prisoner from illness. My recovery now, by means of mesmeric treatment *alone*, has given me the most thorough knowledge possible that Mesmerism is true" (emphasis added; Martineau "Letters on Mesmerism" 11/23/18441070). In response to this public slight that called into question his professional abilities and in an effort to preserve his reputation in the medical world, Greenhow refuted Martineau's claims through his pamphlet.

Nicole Desiree Buscemi writes that the case report[20] was the dominant form of medical writing during the nineteenth century and that "due to their publication, they reached an even broader audience of medical professionals" (6). The nineteenth century saw an increase in the number of "professional periodicals" and many, such as *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*, regularly published these reports. Leonard Cassuto also writes that "[a]s a genre with tendentiously objective connotations, [the case report] became the vehicle by which rationally based medical science turned the disabled [and ill] person into a medical narrative. The case study also helped turn the doctor into an authority on such narratives" (119). Greenhow's report relied heavily on the authority cultivated through the publication of case reports and he begins "Medical Report on the Case of H—M—" with a listing of his medical credentials. He identifies as a "Fellow of

[20] Buscemi writes that several writers such as Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Arthur Conan Doyle of fiction adapted the genre and mimicked it, producing short stories disguised as case studies.

the Royal College of Surgeons of England; Senior Surgeon to the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Infirmary and Eye Infirmary" (Martineau *Life in the Sick-Room* 187). These credentials give authority to his medical opinions as they turn Martineau's experiences into a medical narrative and divest her "Letters on Mesmerism" of their personal authority to narrate her own medical case.

Detailing the essential differences between the case report and the illness narrative, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins writes that illness narratives, or, as she terms them, pathographies, can be seen "as the logical counterpart to the medical history written by the physician" and that the "subject of the case report is a particular biomedical condition, the individual reduced to a body and the body reduced to its biophysical components ('the disease in the body in the bed'), while the true subject of pathography is illness and treatment experienced and understood by the ill person who is its author" (12). Despite the fact that Greenhow's "Medical Report on the Case of H—M—" was a medical report and would normally have been published in a medical journal, Greenhow chose to publish it as a shilling pamphlet detailing information about Martineau's health, including information on her menstrual irregularities, vaginal discharge, problems with constipation, chronic back-aches, and depression, and arguing that Martineau's recovery was not the result of mesmerism but was the natural course of her illness. In the preface to this report, Greenhow writes that his intention is to place a "concise history of [Martineau's medical case] before the *profession*" (emphasis added; Martineau *Life in the Sick-Room* 187). However, as Martineau explains in a passage written many years later in her *Autobiography*, one of her major difficulties with Greenhow's publication was not the publication of her case itself,

but that it was published as a pamphlet and was consequently available to the general public and was not, as Greenhow suggests in his preface, aimed solely at the medical profession.

Greenhow goes on in this preface to challenge Martineau's authority to determine the validity and success of mesmerism by writing that "[t]he numerous and striking claims in favour of mesmerism, emanating from so many sources, have, at length, rendered it a subject of serious and philosophical inquiry, which can no longer be resisted by the medical profession. *It is by them only* that its pretensions can be properly weighted" (emphasis added; 188). Rather than relating Martineau's medical case and eventual recovery, he goes on to make his doubts about mesmerism, and, therefore, about Martineau's narrative, exceedingly clear: "[i]t is in this spirit of calm and dispassionate inquiry, that I have myself entered on the investigation, though I must admit that my efforts have not yet been attended with any results confirmatory of the powers of mesmerism; but I shall proceed circumspectly in my experiments, till repeated failures shall either confirm my doubts, or positive practical results remove them" (188). While Greenhow published several reports and letters on cholera, small pox, and various surgical procedures, reports of his investigations into mesmerism were not published after this pamphlet, making his vow to proceed in his inquiries into mesmerism beyond what he claimed were unsuccessful efforts seem insincere and revealing his entire report on Martineau's case and her trial of mesmerism as anything but "calm and dispassionate." He adds to his account of Martineau's case that he, as a medical professional, "always believed that a time would arrive when [his] patient would

be relieved from most of her distressing symptoms, and released from her long continued confinement.” Paraphrasing John 5:8 and suggesting that the wisdom and authority of the medical professional surpasses that of lay-persons, he writes that more than once he had “made use of the somewhat strong expression, that some day, probably before long, Miss M *would take up her bed and walk*” (195). He argues that Martineau’s recovery cannot be attributed to mesmerism and that she had begun to improve prior to the time at which she began her course in mesmerism: “On the 2nd of April, 1844 I was first enabled to detect a slight change in the condition of the uterus” and the “unwonted symptoms of indisposition had subsided, when, on June 22nd, the Mesmeric treatment commenced” (192). While he gives details of examinations he performed post-mesmerism that suggest that the condition that had incapacitated Martineau in the past was still present, he indicates that he was not surprised by her improvements and suggests that mesmerism had nothing to do with them: “[d]uring the last year or two, in common with many friend of Miss M., I had frequent opportunities of observing the increased ease and freedom with which she moved about her sitting-room; and my conviction became confirmed, that the time was approaching when she would resume her habits of exercise in the open air” (195).

Greenhow ends his report by writing that “[i]n the history of the case it is probable that the advocates of mesmerism will find reasons and arguments in support of their opinions. But the experienced practitioner, carefully distinguishing the *post hoc* from the *propter hoc*, will have little difficulty in bringing the whole into harmony with the well-established laws of human physiology” (195). He goes

on to suggest that it was Martineau's excitable mind that resulted in her improvement after her course in mesmerism:

> [a]s regards the pathology of the case, [the experienced practitioner] will conclude that the condition of the uterus in December is but the natural sequel of progressive improvement begun in, or antecedent to, the month of April; and as regards the relief from the distressing nervous symptoms connected therewith, that the time had arrived when a new and powerful stimulus only was required, to enable the enthusiastic mind of my patient to shake them off. (195)

Greenhow, for the sake of his professional reputation, creates a distance between himself and Martineau. Utilizing the appearance of authority the medical profession sought to establish during the Victorian period, he characterizes himself as an "experienced practitioner" who has the level of medical expertise and is well-versed enough in the "laws of human physiology" to understand the order of events that led to Martineau's recovery and to determine that it was not the result of mesmerism. His thinly veiled attempt to obscure Martineau's name and use it at the same time with the ridiculously obvious "H—M—" in the title of his report, both identifies the subject of the report and reduces Martineau to the position of "the patient." Although Greenhow may well have been right about Martineau's illness and its remission, his pamphlet was, ultimately, his attempt to reduce Martineau's authority over her story of illness and recovery and replace it with his medical voice, dispensing with many of the conventions of the case report to make it accessible to lay-people. In addition to publishing the report as a shilling pamphlet rather than in a professional periodical, he published it in English rather than Latin, making information on her gynecological history accessible to the general public rather than just the medical profession.

Also offensive to Martineau were the letters of response written and published by the editor of the *Athenæum*, Charles Dilke, questioning her ability to evaluate messmerism's effect on her health and calling the validity of her narrative into question. Just as Greenhow wrote and published his "Medical Report on the Case of Miss H—M" in an attempt to contain Martineau's body and narrative within medical discourse, Dilke, too, repeatedly assigns any right and ability to evaluate mesmerism's efficacy to medical science and questions Martineau's narrative of recovery. Although Dilke purportedly told Martineau that he would allow her "Letters on Mesmerism" to speak for themselves when she contacted him about publishing her letters on the controversial topic, he began publishing his own disparaging comments on the letters in the 28 December 1844 issue of his magazine:

> [t]he reader will see, at a glance, that, if true, this would be a phenomenon strictly within the province of medical science; and that Miss Martineau, therefore, would be an incompetent witness. What are the conditions required, in a person who offers evidence with regard to complicated phenomena involving the functions both of body and mind? The first (honesty, sincerity, and such moral qualities being assumed) is intellectual competency. This competency is not a general competency, but *special*, with reference to the particular subject [. . .] It is obvious, therefore, that, with reference to the question under consideration, we are not wanting in respect to Miss Martineau when we object to her as an insufficient witness. (*Athenæum* 1198)

Rather than letting Martineau's letters speak for themselves, Dilke, with this statement, condemns her letters in a way that calls the significance of her narrative into question and takes the ability to comprehend the workings of mesmerism out of her hands. He reinforces the primacy of physicians to tell the story of an individual's illness/disability/recovery and questions the patient's ability to

articulate their own story to other sufferers, implying that the legitimacy of mesmerism can only be determined by medical science and doctors, the keepers of that knowledge. Dilke's characterization of Martineau disregards her personal experience of illness and degrades her illness/disability narrrative to an unreliable document fueled by emotion and characterized by misunderstanding. He states that Martineau does not meet the intellectual conditions required to determine the efficacy of the phenomenon and implies that any beneficial results reported by someone with her lack of scientific credentials can only be called, as we would say today, a placebo effect. Seeming not to recognize or at least acknowledge Martineau's intention with her past publications on health and ability and, indeed, with "Letters on Mesmerism," to use her writing to make medical issues accessible to lay-readers, Dilke argues that any documentation of the phenomenon of mesmerism is within the province of the "*special*" competency of physicians only, rather than a "general competency," and implies, therefore, that the only writing capable of accurately conveying details about mesmerism is the case report. Dilke finally attempts to excuse his behaviour by asserting that he *is not lacking in respect for Martineau* but has shown, and assumes his readers will concur, that she is, in fact, an "insufficient witness." Defending herself against Dilke's criticism, Martineau responded in her familiar letters, writing to Fox on 4 January 1845 that "the Athenm 'Comment' serves the cause as well as advocacy could do, – it is so very weak a presentment of the old commonplace opposition, & so deeply unfair" (Martineau 2 341).

Dilke continues with his assault on Martineau rather than her work when,

in the 4 January 4 1845 edition of the *Athenæum*, he reluctantly publishes Martineau's letter of response to his 28 December comments. It is, however, comments by Dilke that frame Martineau's letter that interest me most. Dilke's comments are both sarcastic and hostile and, as they bookend Martineau's letter, attempt to reduce her letter to a rant in the middle of his "rational" comments and, in doing so, diminish her credibility. Dilke writes that

> [t]he following letter from Miss Martineau it was, at first, our intention to decline publishing—because of the temper in which it is written [. . .] The tone of the letter itself, however is such an additional proof of the strong prejudice under which Miss M. is labouring, and throws such useful light upon her argument and ours, that, on further consideration, we will take leave of the subject, so far as the *Athenæum* is concerned, by letting Miss M. speak finally for herself. (*Athenæum* 14)

Martineau's letter is not long but rather than letting Martineau truly "speak finally for herself," Dilke adds additional comments after Martineau's letter. He ends the dispute, in his opinion, by writing "[s]o much for the letter. As to the argument which it maintains, that speaks for itself in such a manner as to render our further comment unnecessary" (14). Again, Martineau defends herself in her familiar letters and writes to Edward Moxon that

> Mr Dilke's finial grace is charming! For weakness, temper, & unfairness, he excels himself of last week. Think of him omitting to say that my notice of another channel was in case of his not publishing my letter this week. Every one thinks here, & who has mentioned the 'Comment' to me, – not only that it is too weak to spend labour upon, but there is no end of arguing, & no safety in it, with one who twists & omits so unfairly. (Martineau 2 343)

Dilke's comment that he "take[s] leave of the subject [of mesmerism], so far as the *Athenæum* is concerned" certainly suggests that the magazine was loath to publish

additional remarks on the subject. The journal, however, continued for the next six numbers to publish various letters and reports on mesmerism and Martineau's "Letters on Mesmerism," all of which, in the opinion of Dilke, further damaged the credibility of her testimony.

Martineau had always professed that her intent with her writing was to help the sick and disabled. However, in addition to letters from the sick requesting details on her mesmerism, her letters prompted numerous requests from physicians for details of her recovery. Before Greenhow had published his infamous report, he and Martineau had discussed how she might manage these requests. In January 1845, some time after Greenhow's publication of "Medical Report on the Case of Miss H—M—," Martineau wrote to Edward Moxon about the circumstances surrounding Greenhow's publication. She wrote to Moxon that Greenhow "told me that he had letters daily from physicians, enquiring the nature of my illness. I told him, so had I, – & it wd be a relief both to the doctors & me when they cd go to a medical journal for the facts, instead of asking me" (Martineau *Collected* 3 1). She had hoped that Greenhow's publication of her case in a *medical journal* "where medical men could learn what they wanted better than from [her]" (3 1) would better manage some of the burden of responding to the request for details on her case. Martineau's intention with "Letters on Mesmerism" was to reach a general community, a different portion of the public than the "medical men" she intended to reach via Greenhow's publication in a medical journal. However, while the result of Greenhow's publication of her case as a pamphlet available to the public did not reduce the number of requests she received, Martineau began to

appreciate the increase in her epistolary community as a welcome expansion.

Approximately one month after she published her "Letters on Mesmerism" in the *Athenæum*, Martineau published the letters as a monograph with Edward Moxon in London. In the preface to the second edition, Martineau writes of a growing epistolary community devoted to mesmerism that resulted from her initial publication:

> There is a remarkable uniformity in the letters I have received from medical gentlemen, from various parts of the country, each believing himself almost the only one who has ventured upon the practice of Mesmerism, either from scientific curiosity, or from the failure in particular instances of all other means, — each having two or three valuable cases to report, — and each suffering under the experience or apprehension of ill-will from his professional brethren, from the hour of his avowing any belief in Mesmerism [. . .] Now, if these medical gentlemen knew how far they are from being alone, — if they could be brought into mutual communication, they might not only aid and support each other in their study and use of this great curative agency, but they might furnish, in concert, such an array of facts as must command the attention of the profession. (Martineau "Letters on Mesmerism" vii-ix)

This idea of mutual communication is crucial for Martineau. Her ultimate desire was that patients be in communication with patients and doctors with doctors. She continued to stand by her publication of "Letters on Mesmerism" even in the face of appalling treatment by the media and by some in the medical profession. She used the preface of the second edition of *Letters on Mesmerism* to inform her readers, many of whom would have likely been physicians, that mesmerism was a force that reached beyond a few "quack" practitioners and desperate patients. While Martineau generally stressed that she wrote to benefit her fellow-sufferers, this passage from her preface specifically reprimands the medical profession for its suppression of a portion of its "brethren" who want to assist their patients in any

way possible but fear retaliation for their interest in mesmerism. She writes that the number of physicians interested in mesmerism and, indeed, of those turning to the practice to help their patients, is growing and that their "study and use of this great curative agency" will result in great benefit to the profession. She suggests that once these doctors understand that they are not alone in their belief in mesmerism, a movement of acceptance of the power of mesmerism will change the medical profession. Even twenty years after her experience with mesmerism, she was still being questioned about it and she remained convinced of its benefits and continued to use the epistolary genre to champion the phenomenon. In a 17 April 1866 letter to Mary Carpenter Martineau wrote: "If Cuvier and other eminent naturalists insisted that no group of facts in natural history is better established than those of Mesmerism, it is not possible for any reasonable person who knows the facts to have a variable opinion on the case" (Martineau *Collected* 5 137). She later wrote to her cousin, Henry Reeve, in a 15 December 1867 letter, that the "curative effects" of mesmerism "are now past question among duly informed people" (5 203).

Martineau had shown with her previous writing on health and ability that she considered the sufferer to be the best judge of treatment and viewed the patient as most qualified to make decisions about her case and, indeed, to narrate her experiences. Throughout these earlier publications, Martineau advocated taking control over one's case and even assuming some of the power and authority of the medical profession so it was, therefore, not surprising that she considered it her right to evaluate the success of her trial of mesmerism and to

convey the narrative of her cure to the general public. While she did appreciate the importance of the publication of case reports in professional journals, she recognized the value of personal narratives to ill and disabled people and, as she wrote in *Life in the Sick-Room*, considered herself appropriately qualified to write these narratives because of her “experience of years” (60). However, the debate surrounding Martineau’s open letters on her cure through mesmerism and the medical profession’s attempt to discredit her continued even after her death. In his sustained effort to destroy Martineau’s reputation as a logical thinker and writer on health and ability, Greenhow, in an article entitled “Termination of the Case of Miss Harriet Martineau” published in 1877 in the *British Medical Journal*, implied that her identity *was* her disease. He argued that Martineau’s “interesting case [. . .] may serve in some degree to explain some of the peculiarities of character which were apparent during her remarkable career” (Greenhow 450). The debate continued in the *British Medical Journal* for more than a year and a half after her death with the publication of a lecture by T. Spencer Wells and letters to the journal by medical men such as Greenhow, W. O. Markham, and W. H. Day. “Letters on Mesmerism” can be included with her “Letter to the Deaf” and *Life in the Sick-Room* as part of her illness/disability narrative in which she used the epistolary genre to suggest the community interaction she felt was paramount to life with a compromised body. Martineau spent most of her career fulfilling what she saw as her duty to educate the public and was very clear in her first installment of “Letters on Mesmerism” that this work was a fulfillment of this duty. Her choice to put the details of her cure

through mesmerism into the public arena and, ultimately, endure condemnation for doing so, was part of what she felt was her larger obligation to society.

III. Conclusion: Reforming Medicine

Referring to the large number of invalid narratives published during the nineteenth century, Frawley writes that "[t]he proliferation of invalid narratives [. . .] suggests that the sick and suffering may have looked to popular culture for avenues through which to tell medical stories and health histories no longer perceived as necessary to modernizing medicine—or perhaps to tell their medical stories in a different way than that cultivated in the case-taking scenario" (52). Harriet Martineau participated in this culture of telling medical stories. However, her use of the epistolary genre in her production of three published texts on health and ability resulted in works that differed from other published invalid narratives of the period. Letters were an important part of the depiction of the lived experience of illness and disability during the nineteenth century. Bruce Haley observes in *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* that "[t]heir correspondence indicates that many prominent Victorians were, or thought they were, constantly afflicted" (12). Martineau's use of the epistolary genre, while not rare, was unusual because of the way in which it was produced and published. These three works were written and published in different periods of Martineau's life with illness and disability and, therefore, pointedly depict the reality of the processes of construction and reconstruction of identity demanded by chronic conditions. While Athena Vrettos includes in her introduction to *Somatic Fictions* works such as medical case histories and advice manuals as texts that can be considered

narratives of compromised bodies, my work with the writing of Martineau focuses on the epistolary form and the ways in which she used the genre to blur the lines between the private and the public in order to reframe public conceptions of illness and disability and to publish an illness/disability narrative that evoked the private and intimate conversation so integral to her familiar letters.

Martineau was a tireless letter-writer who strove to use the genre to her own and others' advantage. She used the letter genre in a variety of ways and recognized the genre as a particularly effective way to communicate meaningfully about illness and disability. "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism" did more than merely describe Martineau's life with illness and disability; she intended them to have significant social impact. In fact, Winter has made a case that Martineau worked to "reform" the "invalid's identity" and "extend the principles of the free market to the realm of illness and medical care" ("Harriet Martineau" 1, 2). Martineau's published letters counter the professional and detached clinical writing found in the medical writing of the period and solidify her identity as both an ill and disabled woman and an expert in heath and ability. All three of the texts discussed above advocate in their own way for placing some of the power and authority of the medical profession into the hands of the sufferer and use the conventional understanding of the epistolary form as private to reach out to a community of sufferers in a very personal and intimate way. She attempted to extricate her compromised body from "domination by others' authority and discourse" (Couser 291), to assert control over her body outside of the doctor/patient narrative, and to encourage fellow sufferers to do the

same. Martineau used the epistolary form and the intimacy created by the letter genre to reshape the experience of illness and disability and to counter the presumed isolation of life with a compromised body.

While Martineau's *Autobiography* addresses, in part, her experiences of life with a compromised body, my work with her published letters on health and ability has engaged with several issues of interest in Martineau scholarship. It adds a discussion of the ways in which her published letters contributed to her creation of the social identity of a sufferer and to the solidifying of her authority on matters of health and ability through "[t]he personal issue of telling stories" and giving "voice to the body" (Frank 2). Moreover, my work with the published letters of Martineau contributes to the study of her writing from the point of view of health and disability and adds to both the study of Martineau's oeuvre and the larger study of illness/disability narratives. Martineau participated in this culture of suffering and much of her writing relied on an invalid identity. Her use of the epistolary genre with "Letter to the Deaf," *Life in the Sick-Room*, and "Letters on Mesmerism" resulted in work that used the epistolary genre and the actual community essential to this genre in order to reframe her illness/disability as a source of authority and to dissociate the story of her compromised body from the objectification inherent in medical writing of the period. She authored instead an epistolary illness/disability narrative that promotes the reclamation of authority over the body by the sufferer and, ultimately, emphasizes the importance of community in the lives of ill and disabled persons.

Chapter 2
"From Your Loving Little Friend, Helen Keller": The Epistolary Construction of the Young Helen Keller

This second chapter focuses on the early letters of Helen Keller (1880-1968) and demonstrates how an examination of familiar letters can modify or add to the conventional understanding of a public figure. While works such as *Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy* (1980) and *Helen Keller: A Life* (1998) include several of Keller's early letters and Keller's own *The Story of My Life* reproduces the majority of her letters from 1887 to 1901, surprisingly little attention has been given to Keller's childhood letters and their function as Keller's first disability narrative. This chapter aims to fill this critical gap with a discussion of Keller's letters and of a selection of her autobiographical writing. I begin with a brief examination of the atmosphere of educational reform in the mid-nineteenth century with a focus on the education of Laura Bridgman (1829-1889), a young deafblind girl who began her education at the Perkins School for the Blind[21] approximately fifty years before Keller attended the school. I then move on to my larger discussion of Keller and her relationship to and reliance on texts of the body—text written about her body and words written on her body and the bodies of others through fingerspelling, a practice frequently used in, but distinct from, signed languages such as American Sign Language (ASL). I then reflect on the importance of letters to Keller and her creation of a disability

[21] The Perkins School for the Blind has also been known as the Perkins Institution for the Blind. In 2012 the name was shortened to Perkins. I will use Perkins to refer to the school throughout the remainder of this chapter.

narrative that allowed her both to participate in personally fulfilling philanthropic work and to explore how she wanted to present herself to the world.

Today, Keller's story is so ubiquitous that most people know some details of the story of her life; indeed, her autobiographical *The Story of My Life* (1903), both in the original English and in translation, has become a staple of public school libraries. James Berger, editor of the restored edition of *The Story of My Life*, writes that "Helen Keller is simultaneously one of the best known and least known figures in American cultural history" (Keller vii). Although Keller, as Dorothy Herrman writes in *Helen Keller: A Life*, was regarded by some of her relatives as "a 'monster'" and a "'mental' defective' who would be far better off in an institution" after she had become deaf and blind (12), she mastered both reading and writing and was able to write her life story. She focused on her life with disabilities and her navigation through the world with a compromised body in multiple forms of autobiographical work. She published several autobiographies and autobiographical essays during her life. They include: *The Story of My Life* (1902), "My Key of Life: Optimism. An Essay" (1903), *The World I Live In* (1908), *Light in My Darkness* (1927), and *Midstream: My Later Life* (1929).

Part of the conventional social construction of Keller was, as Mary Klages writes in *Woeful Afflictions*, the "embodiment of the idealism of Victorian girlhood" (185). This chapter recognizes that, in addition to her published autobiographical work, Keller was an active and prolific participant in epistolary communication. In it, I read her juvenile letters to show the ways in which these letters both initiate and contest what would become the conventional construction of Keller. Through her

early letters, Keller established an extensive and supportive community through which she shaped an articulate public self, culminating in her first foray into published autobiography with *The Story of My Life*. Although Keller's epistolary oeuvre is substantial, I concentrate on her early letters, 1887 to 1902, as they demonstrate Keller's formation of a coherent self through the first genre she was able to use effectively.

II. Laura Bridgman: The First Helen Keller

The title of this section of my chapter on Keller is modeled after the title of a section of the "Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution" (1888) by the school's principal, Michael Anagnos. The title of this section of Anagnos's report—"Helen Keller: A Second Laura Bridgman"—closely links the two girls in the minds of readers. In this chapter, I hope to illustrate that although the lives of Bridgman and Keller do have significant similarities and, as John Albert Macy asserts, the "names of Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller will always be linked together" (Keller *Story* 214), there are some substantial differences in their lives and education. Importantly for my argument, Keller, in her 1929 monograph *Mainstream: My Later Life*, remembers her brief encounter with the famous Bridgman and reflects on Bridgman's life compared to her own. She writes in the chapter "Muted Strings" that:

> My experience and Laura's were so closely parallel in their outward aspects that we have often been compared. We were about the same age when we lost our sight and hearing. We were alike in that although our parents and friends were exceedingly kind to us we both grew restless, willful, and destructive because we had no adequate means of expressing our desires. [. . .] Here the

> resemblance ends. We were educated in a different manner [. . .] From what I have read of Laura I am sure that she was bright and eager, and I believe that if she had had my teacher she would have outshone me. (Keller Mainstream 247)

Both girls attracted the attention of educators and the public and challenged assumptions about the intellectual capacity of deafblind persons and both attained celebrity through professional and popular publications about them. Although Bridgman visited her family in Hanover during summer vacations, she predominantly lived in and was educated at Perkins from 1837 until her death in 1889. Keller, however, attained most of her education at home or university and only attended Perkins from 1888 to 1892. While the names of Bridgman and Keller are linked through their respective role in American experiments in educating deafblind children, I argue that the differences between the two girls extended beyond the ways in which they were educated and that their stories diverge considerably in their relationship to their disabilities, autobiography, and community. Both girls were constructed as pure and angelic wonders, but Keller was able to use and even participate in this construction through philanthropic work in the disability community while Bridgman was, ultimately, either unwilling or unable to comply with this image throughout her life.

While the nineteenth century witnessed several significant developments in the lives of deaf and blind Americans—the Hartford Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb[22] was established in 1817 and Perkins was established in 1829—the

[22] The first school for the deaf in the United States, the Hartford Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, now called the American School for the Deaf, was established in Hartford, Connecticut. It was established by Thomas H. Gallaudet (1787-1851) who was inspired to teach the deaf by his nine-year-old deaf neighbour. He travelled to Paris and studied methods for teaching the deaf at Institut National de Jeunes Sourds de Paris. The first university for the deaf was established by his son in 1864 and became Gallaudet University in 1886.

education of the deafblind, a group considered by many to be unreachable, remained largely unattempted by educators. However, within the atmosphere of educational reform, some educators postulated that the instruction of the deafblind could prove to be an important opportunity to study the development of the human intellect. Several European deafblind children were studied and educated with varying degrees of success during the nineteenth century and, as John Kitto wrote in his book *The Lost Senses*, it was through the highly publicized education of deafblind children in the early part of the century that "it has been shown that something more can be done for such unfortunates than merely providing for their subsistence" (190). It was during this time that Samuel Gridley Howe[23], after being named director of Perkins, began to search for a new way to increase general awareness of the institute. With the encouragement of supporters such as Harriet Martineau, Howe set out to conduct an "experiment" to prove the efficacy of the American system of asylums by working with the seven-year-old deafblind girl, Laura Bridgman. Howe began the education of Bridgman, an education that held considerable significance for educational reform. Indeed, Mary Klages, a leading expert in Disability Studies, writes in *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America*, that Bridgman "came to represent the entire catalog of cultural attitudes toward disability. In Howe's descriptions, as in those of numerous other observers and commentators, Bridgman served as a source of scientific information for a professional community" (118). Roughly seven years after Bridgman had become deaf and blind due to scarlet fever, Howe began to educate her at Perkins. Initially he was

[23] Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876) established the New England Asylum for the Blind, the first school for the blind in the United States. The name was changed to the name of one of its biggest benefactors, Thomas Handasyd Perkins, in 1832. It was originally established in Boston, Massachusetts but moved to its present location in Watertown, Massachusetts in 1912.

apprehensive about taking on a deafblind child as a student; however, as Douglas C. Baynton explains in "Laura Bridgman and the History of Disability," he was encouraged by figures such as Harriet Martineau to consider that "[w]hat a deaf-blind child learned and experienced might be monitored by an experimenter, making it possible to determine which aspects of moral, spiritual, and intellectual knowledge were innate to human nature and which came from experience" (Baynton 228).

Throughout her time at Perkins, Bridgman was written *about* in ways that spiritualized her but that effaced her actual life story. Howe was anxious to prove the validity of his theories on education and, as Elizabeth Gitter writes in her influential study of Bridgman, *The Imprisoned Guest*, he "made [Bridgman] into a popular heroine through a series of widely circulated reports to the trustees of the Perkins Institution" (5). She became the figure that exemplified American progress and achievement in educational reform and "[c]ouched in the language of religious conversion, her story, as he shaped it, demonstrated that even the most hopelessly imprisoned soul could be brought into the warmth of human community and into the light of moral knowledge" (5). Howe not only wrote his reports and disseminated them to the trustees of the Institute but also circulated them to the general public, who were anxious to read all they could about the "afflicted" child. His reports became popular public reading and they were frequently excerpted in newspapers, magazines, and scientific journals. As Karen Bourrier notes, Bridgman was reported on through "[a]rticles in newspapers, magazines, and tourist guides [that] marked her as a site—and sight—not to be missed" (38). While Howe's intention when he brought Bridgman to Perkins in 1837 was to monitor her acquisition of knowledge, language, and human values in a controlled environment, his

public promotion of his work and of Bridgman became a source of revenue for the Institute and the basis of his own public acclaim.

Writers as prominent as Thomas Carlyle responded to the narrative of Bridgman as created by Howe. After reading Howe's 1842 *Ninth Annual Report*, Carlyle wrote him an 23 October 1842 letter expressing a fascination with the girl:

> Few things that I ever read have interested me more than this of your dear little Laura Bridgman;—probably one of the beautifullest phenomena at present visible under our Sun. The good little girl: one loves her to the very heart [. . .] A true angel-soul and breath of Heaven, imprisoned as none such ever was before. A child of *genius*, for such I can perceive she is; without eyes, ears, voice, taste or smell; isolated, as within fivefold iron gates, from all men and all things! (*CLO*)

By the time Carlyle, who never met Bridgman, had written this letter to Howe, Bridgman was thirteen years old and although still a child was not quite the "little Laura Bridgman" of Carlyle's imagination. Carlyle's adoration of Bridgman as the "good little girl" and "angel-soul and breath of Heaven" suggests the persistence and the pervasiveness of a popular conception of Bridgman as an innocent, unaffected, and otherworldly child. Through Howe's writing of her, Carlyle and other readers came to the conclusion that Bridgman was both a wonder and a genius. For many Victorians, Bridgman's allure and beauty came from her position as the silent and imprisoned child. This letter both reiterated Howe's construction of Bridgman and perpetuated the vision of the girl locked away in a silent prison that other Bridgman admirers, such as Dickens, would echo.

In "Deaf and Mute Heroines," Gitter argues that during the Victorian period deafness was "almost exclusively personified by a number of popular deaf-mute women" and that writers frequently spiritualized the figure of silent woman in their

work (185-86). The spiritualization of Bridgman depended on her silence, a literal silence which Howe insisted on but which Bridgman did not always enact. In his *Ninth Annual Report*, Howe attempted to exploit this fascination with the figure of the silent woman in Victorian society and assuage public fears or concerns about noises made by deaf persons being "animalistic" by assuring his readers that Bridgman is always happy in her solitude and tries to keep the sounds of "her weeping private" (Howe *Ninth Report* 27, 39, qtd in Gitter "Little Nell" 77-78). Bridgman frequently vocalized and was berated or punished by her teachers for her noise. When she seemed unable or unwilling to stop vocalizing, Howe offered the compromise of shutting "herself in a closet [to] 'indulge' in making noise" (116). Also coinciding with the spiritualization of the silent woman was Howe's conviction that blind students should be instructed in vocational skills that would enable them to become productive members of society. The girls at Perkins were taught to knit, do needlework, embroidery, and household chores (Freeberg *Education* 13). Quoting from Howe's *Fifth Annual Report,* Freeberg writes that Howe believed that the girls in his school, Bridgman included, "'should be able to wash, iron, set tables, and to keep furniture in order.'" Of Bridgman, Howe notes ""[w]hen left alone, she seems very happy if she has her knitting or sewing, and will busy herself for hours'" (qtd. in Freeberg 71).

For many people, Bridgman dramatized the connection between silence and female industry and virtue. As early as his 1836 *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle had fetishized the silent woman at work:

> Lieschen[24] was [Teufelsdrockh's] right-arm, and spoon, and necessary of life, and would not be flatly gainsayed. We can still remember the ancient woman: so silent that some thought her dumb; deaf also you would often have supposed her; for Teufelsdrockh, and Teufelsdrockh only, would she serve or give heed to; and with him she seemed to communicate chiefly by signs; if it were not rather by some secret divination that she guessed all his wants, and supplied them. Assiduous old dame! she scoured, and sorted, and swept, in her kitchen, with the least possible violence to the ear; yet all was tight and right there; hot and black came the coffee ever at the due moment; and the speechless Lieschen herself looked out on you, from under her clean white coif with its lappets, through her clean withered face and wrinkles, with a look of helpful intelligence, almost of benevolence. (19)

Lieschen is prized by Teufelsdrockh as much, if not more, for her silence as for the work she does. Her speechlessness imbues her with a benevolence for the philosopher whose life is devoted to higher order thinking which he can only conduct in silence. Lieschen is so attuned to Teufelsdrockh that she is able to discern his desires while communicating, silently, with him. Bridgman seemed to be the embodiment of the working, silent woman that literary figures such as Lieschen represented. Although Bridgman did not enter Perkins until 1837, Carlyle's adoration of her can be related to a pre-existing fixation with the silent working woman personified by Lieschen.

While connections exist between Carlyle's creation of Lieschen and his later admiration of Bridgman, public fascination with Bridgman was simultaneously shaped by other literary works during the nineteenth century that depicted an isolated working woman. One particularly pertinent work is Lord Alfred Tennyson's (1809–1892) "The Lady of Shalott." Tennyson published two versions

[24] Lieschen is the fictional German philosopher Diogenes Teufelsdrockh's domestic help in *Sartor Resartus*. She frequently restores order to his apartment and to the book.

of "The Lady of Shalott," one in 1832 and one, after revisions, in 1842. Although the details of the Lady of Shalott's life in her tower, her flight from the tower, and her death do not differ significantly between the versions of the poem, I have chosen to focus on the 1832 version of the poem because of the inclusion of the detail of a parchment that is not present in the poem's later 1842 version but which is an important connection between the Lady and Bridgman. I have used W. J. Rolfe's inclusion of the original stanzas from the poem's 1832 found in his notes to *The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson* as my source. In this section, I argue that like the Lady in "The Lady of Shalott," who exists behind "[f]our gray walls, and four gray towers" (I. 15), Bridgman was in many ways isolated from the outside world and that it is this isolation that reflects what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson asserts in "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory" are the "[m]any parallels [that] exist between the social meanings attributed to female bodies and those assigned to disabled bodies" (19). "The Lady of Shalott" anticipates and is evocative of elements of Bridgman's life and productively elucidates the fascination of the nineteenth-century public with Bridgman's story through its depiction of an isolated woman at domestic work. There are several parallels between Bridgman's life at Perkins and the existence of the Lady that are worth exploring.

"The Lady of Shalott" has garnered much critical attention since its initial publication in 1832. Critic Edgar F. Shannon Jr. writes that "the rare beauty of 'The Lady of Shalott' prompts universal admiration" (207) and Flavia M. Alaya remarks that the poem is "universally thought of as one of Tennyson's masterpieces" (273). Shannon further writes that the canonical approach to the poem has been to read it

as Tennyson's questioning of the relation between art and life and the poet's ability to be a part of reality (207). Carl Plasa writes that this question is, in the minds of many critics, resolved by the Lady's destruction when she attempts to leave her enclosure and participate in the world (247). However, Plasa also argues that this view fails to recognize that the two worlds are not mutually exclusive and "that art and life, the aesthetic and the political, are fully interwoven" (248). Kathy Alexis Psomiades writes in "'The Lady of Shalott' and the Critical Fortunes of Victorian Poetry," that Victorian poetry, particularly "The Lady of Shalott," not only "represents but also helps construct the social" (29) and Joseph Chadwick has shown in "A Blessing and a Curse" that "The Lady of Shalott" itself constitutes an "art-work produced and indeed enabled-albeit obliquely-through an active engagement with its own contemporary moment" (25). It is this "contemporary moment" with which I am concerned here. Chadwick asserts that "despite the feudal setting of the poem, the problems of privacy and autonomy it confronts are not specifically medieval ones" and that it is Tennyson's own social order from which he drew the details of the condition of the life of the Lady (17). I read "The Lady of Shalott" as containing images of imprisonment, images of and conventions surrounding the desirability of a passive femininity, and issues of mediation that address the contemporary condition of a Victorian woman's life and link together the values of Victorian society, productively elucidating the fascination of the nineteenth-century public with Bridgman's story through its portrayal of an isolated woman.

According to Psomiades, "The Lady of Shalott" engages with what

modernist critics such as Virginia Woolf have condemned as an "oppressive model [. . .] of femininity"(25). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar address this "oppressive model" and point out in their influential work *The Madwoman in the Attic* that the "ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel" (20). Using the phrase that Coventry Patmore would popularize with his 1854 narrative poem *Angel in the House*, Gilbert and Gubar write that female purity was epitomized by the figure of "angel in the house" during the nineteenth century (20). Just as writers such as Thomas Carlyle idealized Bridgman, writing of her as he did in his 23 October 1842 to Howe, as a "true angel-soul and breath of Heaven" (*CLO*), the Lady of Shalott is idealized by the poem's reaper who "Hears her ever chanting cheerly / Like an angel, singing clearly" (21-22). This image of the angel includes her symbolic imprisonment within the home. As the Lady of Shalott attends to her domestic duty of weaving, her tower and "the silent isle imbowers" her (Tennyson I 17). The Lady's imprisonment, however, is real as she knows that

> A charmed web she weaves alway.
> A curse is on her, if she stay
> Her weaving, either night or day,
> To look down to Camelot.
> She knows not what the curse may be;
> Therefore she weaveth steadily. (II 38-
> 43)

Her reward for her unquestioning domestic work is a "pearl garland" around her head, "a velvet bed," and embellished garments (II 33, 34, 35); her punishment for forsaking her domestic duties and desiring to leave her imprisonment is death.

According to Chadwick, "the Lady's isolation and gender define Shalott as a private, domestic domain (the domain which was becoming increasingly

important to the social structure of nineteenth-century England)" and "[t]he social place of the Lady of Shalott [. . .] shares the privacy of the domestic household" (Chadwick 15, 19). Bridgman's social place is similarly tied to the privacy, albeit contrived, of a domestic household. Howe strove to create a domestic environment with his cottage system, in which small groups of students would live together. He instituted workshops for the residents at Perkins, where "girls performed domestic chores and worked on knitting and sewing" (Freeberg *Education* 71). Just as the Lady of Shalott's femininity is defined by her situation of confinement within the walls and towers of her island of Shalott and her divorce from the activity surrounding her (Chadwick 17), Bridgman, too, was depicted as confined and imprisoned in much of the writing about her; her perceived confinement and inactivity resulted in her idealization by many in society. Howe frequently used the discourse of imprisonment and rescue in his relation to Bridgman by equating her, as Gitter argues, with a damsel in need of rescue and himself with a chivalrous knight.

Gitter writes that "[b]efore Howe found [Bridgman], she was, he said, like a maiden locked up in a tower in some chivalric tale" and "[b]y bringing her to Perkins and teaching her language, he saved her from a numbing, terrifying isolation" (*Imprisoned* 7, 8). Writers such as Carlyle replicated the discourse of Bridgman's confinement advanced by Howe. Carlyle wrote, in his 23 October 1842 letter to Howe, of a fascination with the girl who seems to him "imprisoned as none such ever was before [. . .] isolated, as within fivefold iron gates, from all men and all things!" (*CLO*).

This connection between Bridgman and the Lady of Shalott extends to images of and conventions surrounding the desirability of a passive femininity. According to Gilbert and Gubar, during the nineteenth century "woman symbolized pure contemplation, in contrast to masculine action" (21). The Lady of Shalott exists in a state of passivity. The first two stanzas of the poem depict the life of the embowered Lady and her separation from the outside world and parallel, in many ways, Bridgman's existence at Perkins:

> And thro' the field the road runs by
> To many-tower'd Camelot;
> And up and down the people go,
> Gazing where the lilies blow
> Round an island there below,
> The island of Shalott. (Tennyson I 4-9)

The people of Camelot move "up and down" unlike the confined Lady. Her life is characterized by silence and inactivity and as she sees the locals of Camelot going about their daily business through her mirror "[n]o time hath she to sport and play" (II 37).

Although Howe had instituted a regime of light exercise for the students at Perkins, Bridgman, by virtue of her gender, lives a more passive life than the male students of the Institution. After the students had breakfast, the boys went outside for exercise while the girls performed housework (Freeberg *Education* 68). Bridgman did participate in the school's program of physical activity; however, her perceived inordinate physical aggression resulted in her physical activity being limited to more feminine walks with her teachers. As Bridgman aged, Howe became concerned that she was not outgrowing her childish exuberance or accepting the requirement of the passive femininity expected of her as a woman. She eventually

settled into the work of knitting, sewing, and crocheting. However, as Garland-Thomson writes, the lives of women often parallel the lives of many disabled persons and Bridgman's domestic work never resulted in her being able to provide for herself. She remained dependent on others throughout her life at Perkins.

Chadwick's comment that the Lady exists in a position of "self-containment, objectified otherness, removal from the flux of life" (15) is relevant to a discussion of Bridgman's life at Perkins. Howe attempted to isolate Bridgman morally and intellectually and to protect her from "corrupting outside influences" (Gitter 190). He structured her education according to his pedagogical philosophies and took her moral and religious instruction upon himself. Guided by socially valued expectations for women, Howe fostered the belief that Bridgman was unaware of the presence of others and unaffected by influences of the world and in his 1850 report to the trustees of Perkins, Howe named Bridgman "a curious and an interesting spectacle" but assured his readers that although "thousands have been watching her with eager eyes" she has remained "all unconscious of their gaze" (qtd. in Gitter 139). Once Bridgman entered Perkins, she was under almost constant surveillance by Howe and her teachers and she "understood that her daily lessons and some of her comments were recorded in her teachers' journals" (Freeberg *Education* 105). Howe and her teachers frequently read the letters Bridgman wrote and even monitored her journal entries. This level of mediation and control can also be seen as parallel to the mediation of the Lady of Shalott's activity. Although the Lady "weaves by night and day / A magic web with colours gay" (II. 37- 38), a tapestry that depicts human life, the Lady is divorced from this

activity of life in that she can only experience it vicariously as images in an enchanted mirror. While Bridgman's disabilities did not necessarily exclude her from contact with the world, her life in the isolation of Perkins and Howe's control over her contact with the public meant, until she was an adult and spending more time with her family in Hanover, that information about the world outside the walls of Perkins was necessarily conveyed to Bridgman by others, primarily Howe himself.

While the parallels between the life of Bridgman and the life of the Lady in the poem "The Lady of Shalott" are coincidental, they reveal values that undergird the fascination many in nineteenth-century society had with Bridgman. The fate of the Lady in "The Lady of Shalott" forms interesting parallels to Bridgman's life story and the relationship of each woman to writing. In Part IV of the poem, the Lady has left her tower, causing the mysterious curse to descend upon her. She finds a boat that "[b]eneath a willow lay afloat" (IV 797). It is at this point that the Lady attempts to write herself into existence: "[b]elow the carven prow she wrote, / The Lady of Shalott" (797). As she travels down the river in this boat, the Lady dies. The residents of Camelot discover her body and find that "[t]here lay a parchment on her breast." This parchment reads: "'The web was woven curiously, / The charm is broken utterly, / Draw near and fear not,—this is I, / The Lady of Shalott'" (IV. 797). Both acts of writing feature the Lady's name and can be read as an attempt by the Lady to claim her personhood through writing. However, as Anna Jane Barton explains, "[a]s the boat travels down the river into the city, the Lady is reduced to the empty corpse of her name" (138). The Lady is not granted any

meaningful social contact in the poem and she is identified, and identifies herself, only by the name others have given her. Like the Lady in "The Lady of Shalott," Bridgman attempted to write herself into existence. Throughout her time at Perkins, Bridgman wrote about herself through letters to her family and friends and also in three unpublished autobiographies she wrote at the request of friends. Just as the Lady of Shalott left her isolated home in the tower, as an adult, Bridgman made the choice to leave her perceived social isolation at Perkins and return to her home in Hanover. While the Lady of Shalott dies on her way to Camelot, Bridgman came very close to death at Hanover. Gitter explains that Bridgman became depressed while in Hanover because she was separated from Howe and began to starve herself (234). She returned to Perkins where she had lived since she was a girl. As she grew older, she did spend at least two months a year with her family in Hanover, but she spent the rest of the year at Perkins, knitting and embroidering (255). The isolation which eventually causes the Lady of Shalott to leave her tower despite her knowledge that her curse will be enacted, can be seen as a very real fear for Bridgman, perhaps because of her disabilities. When Bridgman was seen as acting against the conventions of acceptable femininity by lying or behaving in a obstinate manner, she would be threatened with social isolation and even be physically isolated from Howe and her other teachers and friends; the threat of this terrifying social isolation when she was a student at Perkins would often result in Bridgman conforming to gender expectations. However, her return to Perkins after her initial attempt to divorce herself from its confines was the very result of the isolation she feared while at Perkins. Howe and the teachers at Perkins had introduced Bridgman to structured language and provided her with a community with whom she could

converse and interact. While home in Hanover, Bridgman realized that many could not understand her fingerspelling and that she was socially isolated away from the confines of her school.

The same year that Carlyle wrote to congratulate Howe and to glorify Bridgman, Dickens[25], one of Bridgman's most famous admirers, wrote of his visit to and observation of Bridgman in his *American Notes*. Here I draw upon Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's article "Staring at the Other" from the *Disability Studies Quarterly* and Michel Foucault's concept of "seeing without being seen" (198) and of the panopticon[26] from his *Discipline and Punish* to analyze the attraction of many of Bridgman's visitors, Dickens in particular. Although Garland-Thomson's interest is in modern medical imaging techniques, her list of how this kind of "mediation changes the lived staring encounter" can be applied to Bridgman and her interaction with the visitors who flocked to Perkins to watch her perform activities such as writing or embroidering. Garland-Thomson writes that the mediation of modern medical imaging "absolves the starer of responsibility to the object of the stare," "eliminates the possibility of engagement between the two people in the staring relationship," "grants all agency to the looker and withdraws any agency from the looked upon," and "renders the confrontation static" (Garland-Thomson "Staring").

Foucault has made influential arguments regarding the exclusion and

[25] Dickens' *American Notes* eventually resulted in Helen Keller connecting with Anne Sullivan and Perkins after her mother read the publication.

[26] The panopticon is a type of institutional building designed by the eighteenth-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). The design of the building allowed inmates to be observed without their being able to tell when or if they were being observed. Although this type of building was never actually constructed, the concept of the panopticon has served as a metaphor for modern power structures by philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault (1928-1984).

segregation that was "operated regularly by disciplinary power from the beginning of the nineteenth century in the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school and, to some extent, the hospital" (199). This was the "division between the normal and the abnormal" and there was "the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal" (199). The nineteenth century saw the establishment of institutions focused on the education of disabled children and the increased segregation of disabled people. The blindness of the children at Perkins made them useful panoptic subjects. They could be observed and studied in ways that they were not always entirely aware of. Bridgman was, as were the other Perkins students, an object of information. She was, in fact, often envisioned by her observers as the panoptic subject extraordinaire.

Dickens's description of his visit to Perkins and his time observing Bridgman in his 1842 *American Notes* details the assumption of her visitors of her obliviousness to their presence. When he sits down to observe Bridgman, she seems, to Dickens, to be unaware of the fact that she is being scrutinized:

> The thought occurred to me as I sat down in another room, before a girl, blind, deaf, and dumb; destitute of smell; and nearly so of taste: before a fair young creature with every human faculty, and hope, and power of goodness and affection, inclosed within her delicate frame, and but one outward sense - the sense of touch. There she was, before me; built up, as it were, in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light, or particle of sound; with her poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall, beckoning to some good man for help, that an Immortal soul might be awakened. (Dickens)

His time with Bridgman is spent observing the girl unobserved by her. Just as Carlyle professed his love of and devotion to Bridgman without having seen her

face-to-face, Dickens writes of her in a way that is as equally divorced from her as Carlyle's. Dickens, in fact, spends more of the space in *American Notes* devoted to Bridgman and the Perkins Institute quoting Howe's 1842 report for his reader than he does on description of any kind of direct interaction with her. Any writing about Bridgman only replicates what Howe has written about her and does not detail or suggest meaningful interaction with the girl. She becomes an idealized image of what her observers imagine or want her to be. From her cell, she cannot observe her observers and she randomly beckons not for anyone specific, but for "some good man," any man, to save her. Bridgman is, for Dickens, in a prison in which she is being surveyed and scrutinized but within which she cannot observe her examiners and can only reach one "poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall."

While Bridgman was being idealized as angelic by poets and writers, she was also being written about as a scientific wonder. Years after Howe's "experiment" began, Charles Darwin referenced Bridgman in his 1872 work, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. In this work, Darwin uses Bridgman as an example of unaffected emotion in humans. He writes that "Laura Bridgman, from her blindness and deafness, could not have acquired any expression through imitation, yet when a letter from a beloved friend was communicated to her by 'gesture-language,'" she "laughed and clapped her hands, and the colour mounted to her cheeks" (197). On other occasions "she has been seen to stamp for joy" (198). Even at fifty years of age, Bridgman continued to be examined and written about. In 1879 psychologist G. Stanley Hall published a

lengthy description of Bridgman and the various physical tests conducted on her over her life at Perkins ("Laura Bridgman" 156-58). There is no evidence that Hall actually conversed with Bridgman. Although he, very briefly, references some elements from one of Bridgman's early unpublished autobiographical sketches, he relies mostly on the reports of different specialists (Clarence J. Blake, H. P. Bowditch, O. F. Wadsworth, Dr. W. Ogle, Dr. Lieber, Burdach) for his information about Bridgman (158). In the year of Bridgman's death, the *British Medical Journal* confirmed her importance to the science of the day. The writer of this short article tells the reader of Bridgman's value to science:

> The student of mind has but a very limited power of artificially varying the conditions of the phenomena which he investigates. He must therefore seize with avidity the results of those psychological experiments which he finds ready made for him by nature. From this point of view it is of surpassing interest and importance to observe those cases in which an individual experience has grown up without the co-operation of one or more of those senses which play an important part in mental development under normal conditions. Among these cases that of Laura Bridgman possesses a value almost unique. We have in it an example of a highly-organized experience almost entirely built up out of material derived from tactile and muscular sensation. (1412)

The writer ends the article by reaffirming her importance: "[w]hatever importance we may be disposed to attach to this consideration, the case of Laura Bridgman remains a most impressive example of an extensive and complete experience, developed through the high elaboration of extremely meagre sense-given materials" (1412). After her death, Bridgman's brain was autopsied by at least seven scientists, in particular Henry H. Donaldson[27], all seeking physical evidence of her disabilities in her brain ("Anatomical " 148-194).

[27] Henry H. Donaldson (1857-1938) was an American neurologist who made a detailed study of Laura Bridgman's brain.

Although Keller asserted in *Midstream* that she and Bridgman had only surface similarities, they both saw the advantage of writing about themselves and were, thus, avid letter writers. Foucault's concept of the panopticon, however, can be extended to the letter-writing of both girls. This activity was often adversely affected by their disabilities. Although Keller did, as discussed below, receive letters written in Braille, neither Bridgman nor Keller could read the majority of the letters they received. In her 1844 journal, Bridgman's teacher, Mary Swift Lamson, wrote that she had informed Bridgman of the faults of a letter she had written. She wrote that the faults in the letter were "many–for she does not seem to think it at all important to her to be able to express herself in writing" if she could not read it herself. Despite this inability, Bridgman understood and felt very strongly that these letters were her private property and that this should be respected. As Gitter points out, Lamson also recorded details in her journal that suggest Bridgman objected to Howe's opening her letters. She protested to Lamson: "Doctor was wrong to open little girl's letters," "Little girls open theirself" (qtd. in Gitter *Imprisoned Guest* 113). Once Bridgman had learned to write, she "continued to write each day, maintaining a wide correspondence, keeping a regular journal, and even preparing several brief 'autobiographies,' based on recollections of her childhood in New Hampshire" (Freeberg *Education* 210). G. Stanley Hall writes in *Mind* that

> For years Laura was encouraged to write down every day her experiences, acquisitions and reflections, and her teachers were also in the habit of keeping a diary of her progress. She had also at different periods of her life written three "autobiographies," two of which were mainly devoted to the recollections of child-life at home. She has had quite an extensive correspondence and many of her letters have been collected and preserved by friends. (Hall 151-152)

The urge to write about herself and her life experiences extended to the epistolary genre. While Keller published extensively, Bridgman's writing remained limited to and focused on letters, diaries, and short biographical works that were written at the request of friends. Although Bridgman did not write with the goal of being published, Howe did publish several of her letters in his annual reports to the trustees of Perkins. As Jennifer Esmail notes in *Reading Victorian Deafness*, two poems written by Bridgman were reproduced by Mary Swift Lamson in her 1890 study of Bridgman, *Life and Education of Laura Dewey Bridgman: The Deaf, Dumb and Blind Girl*, and by Maud Howe Elliot and Florence Howe Hall in their 1908 book, *Laura Bridgman: Dr. Howe's Famous Pupil and What He Taught Her* (53). Although Keller was able to distance herself from the Institute and its principal, Michael Anagnos, through extensive self-narration in several autobiographical works and through her early letters, Bridgman remained, as Klages writes, "the written about, serving as a symbol to be described and interpreted by others" (*Woeful Afflictions* 144). While Keller's letters allowed her to connect with a large epistolary community, to claim full selfhood at an early age, and to develop what would become an adult public self, Bridgman, for most of her life, relied on the other residents of Perkins and Howe for much of her social interaction and her epistolary community consisted mainly of her family and their few friends. Because of her constrained life, Bridgman was prevented from accessing many of the experiences needed to develop and broadcast a public self that accorded her with her own ambitions, values, and inclinations.

II. "I did not know that I am": Helen Keller's Textual Body

In her 1909 publication, *The World I Live In*, Keller wrote that "[b]efore my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am" (113). This statement connects Keller to a long line of Western philosophers who have explored the meaning of subjectivity. Historically, in his dialogues, Plato reported that Socrates employed the principle that the goal in life should be to know oneself and many Western philosophers have followed after Socrates, considering what might constitute this knowing. René Descartes (1596- 1650) is best known for his philosophical statement "I think, therefore I am" and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) asserted that "[t]o become subjective should be the highest task assigned to every human being" (Kierkegaard 163). Keller also wrote in *The World I Live In* that "self-knowledge is the condition and the limit of our consciousness" (149). Philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) determined that it is through language that being is formed. He wrote in "Letter on Humanism" (1947) that "[l]anguage is the house of Being" (217). It is in the process of using language that we take up positions as speaking and thinking subjects. So, the question regarding Keller becomes 'what about her work with her teacher resulted in her awareness of her being?' Even before she wrote her philosophical *The World I Live In*, Keller wrote in *The Story of My Life* that when she first understood language and abstract ideas she "felt that there were invisible lines stretched between my spirit and the spirits of others" (26). It was through language that Keller attained awareness of her existence in a community.

At issue here is the centrality of the body to identity. Before moving on to

my discussion of Keller's epistolary disability narrative, I first focus on Keller's attainment of subjectivity through language and the ways in which she was able to develop ownership of her body through tactile fingerspelling[28]. In what follows, I utilize the work of several scholars, namely Disability Studies scholars David T. Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson. I use Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyglossia in a general sense in my discussion of the importance of community to Keller's epistolary relationships and I draw broadly on the theories of two influential feminist scholars— Luce Irigaray and Hélène

[28] Although Keller and Bridgman could write, their primary means of face-to-face communication was tactile fingerspelling. There is no evidence that either girl used Print-on-Palm (POP), a common method of communication for deafblind individuals. The POP process is very structured. The index finger is used to write individual letters of the alphabet on the palm of the person receiving the message in a recommended direction, number of strokes, and sequence of strokes for each letter. In a June 12, 2014 email to the author, Jan Seymour-Ford, Research Librarian for Perkins School for the Blind, indicated that in her many years of research on the life and education of Laura Bridgman, she has not encountered any evidence that Bridgman used POP and that all the references in resources on Bridgman and her methods of communication indicate that she used one-handed fingerspelling. Indeed, Mary Swift Lamson's Life and Education of Laura Dewey Bridgman and Florence Howe Hall and Maud Howe Elliot's Laura Bridgman: Dr. Howe's Famous Pupil and What He Taught Her, the earliest monographs on Bridgman and her education, consistently reference Bridgman's use of fingerspelling and the finger alphabet. Lamson, Bridgman's teacher for three years at Perkins, reflects on her methods of educating Bridgman, giving evidence of the consistent use of tactile fingerspelling with Bridgman. Lamson writes in a 6 March 1842 journal entry that Bridgman had "never been taught anything but the finger alphabet" (239). Florence Howe Hall and Maud Howe Elliot also indicate that Bridgman communicated through fingerspelling throughout their book. They reproduce Howe's 1838 annual report in which he writes to the Perkins Trustees that "[d]uring the year [Bridgman] has attained great dexterity in the use of the manual alphabet of the deaf mutes; and she spells out the words and sentences which she knows, so fast and so deftly that only those accustomed to this language can follow, with the eye, the rapid motions of her fingers" (61). There is also significant evidence that Keller relied on tactile fingerspelling rather than POP. In a 5 April 1887, Sullivan wrote to Sophia C. Hopkins, her former teacher at Perkins, about the methods she used to teach Keller. This extract from this letter indicates that Sullivan used tactile finger spelling and the manual to communicate with Keller: "I must write you a line this morning because something very important has happened. Helen has taken the second great step in her education. She has learned that everything has a name, and that the manual alphabet is the key to everything she wants to know" (emphasis in text; Keller Story 230). John Albert Macy, in his supplement to Keller's The Story of My Life, also provides evidence for Keller's use of tactile fingerspelling over POP. He writes that the "manual alphabet is that in use among all educated deaf people [. . .] The deaf person with sight looks at the fingers of his companion, but it is also possible to feel them. Miss Keller puts her fingers lightly over the hand of one who is talking to her and gets the words as rapidly as they can be spelled. As she explains, she is not conscious of the single letters or of separate words" (207).

Cixous. My focus on the theories of feminist scholars in my discussion of Keller is encouraged by Garland-Thomson's observation of important connections between disability theory and feminist theory in her chapter "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory" in *Gendering Disability*. She points out that, like Disability Studies theories, Feminist Studies investigates how particular bodies are invested with meaning and the consequences of those meanings.

Like Bridgman before her, Keller relied on tactile fingerspelling, a method of communication that centers on the hand. Keller described the process in *The Story of My Life*: "One who reads or talks to me spells with his hand, using the single-hand manual alphabet generally employed by the deaf. I place my hand on the hand of the speaker so lightly as not to impede its movements" (49). Keller wrote of the importance of hands to her life in the chapter "The Seeing Hand" in her book *The World I Live In*. She writes that "[m]y hand is to me what your hearing and sight together are to you. In large measure we travel the same highways, read the same books, speak the same language, yet our experiences are different. All my comings and goings turn on the hand as on a pivot. It is the hand that binds me to the world of men and women. The hand is my feeler with which I reach through isolation and darkness and seize every pleasure" (5). This tactile exchange allowed Keller to gain subjectivity through the skin of her hands and to perceive both the connections and the limits between her self and the Other. She asserts that her life is, in many ways, typical and that she has much in common with her readers, including the language they speak and the books they read. However, it is the means by which she speaks language and reads books and by which she has gained life experiences and, indeed, many of those experiences themselves that differ and

result in her very particular understanding of her being. Her subjectivity is intimately linked to the body of the Other.

In the chapter "The Hands of Others" from *The World I Live In*, Keller describes the significance of the hand that conveys the world to her and connects the letter to the hand: "The warmth and protectiveness of the hand are most homefelt to me who have always looked to it for aid and joy [. . .] I am told that the glance of a beloved eye thrills one from a distance; but there is no distance in the touch of a beloved hand. Even the letters I receive are kind letters that betray the heart's deep history, in which we feel the presence of a hand" (19-20). I extend my discussion of Keller's attainment of subjectivity through letters that bring with them the warmth of the touch of the hand to the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. I take his theories from *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1975) and use his concepts of dialogism and polyglossia in my discussion of Keller's reading of letters. I extend the work of prior theorists who use the theories of Bakhtin in ways that add nuance to my examination of Keller's relationship with letters. Critics such as Nancy M. P. King and Ann Folwell Stanford have used Bakhtin's theories in their discussions of the dangers of illness/disability narratives when the narrative of an individual with illness or disability is told by "proxy," that is, by a physician or with the use of assisted communication. My focus is on heteroglossic narratives by doctors, scientists, poets, politicians, and general lay people that fashioned a version of Keller's story and circulated the story of her disabilities. While Keller was intensely objectified in this writing, she responded to this objectification by writing letters.

Bakhtin's concept of polyphony fits well with an understanding of the epistolary genre for Keller. Bakhtin first used the term "polyglossia" in his *The Dialogic Imagination*, which examines the novel genre and the hybrid nature of language. In the essay, "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin examines the concept of heteroglossia and the conflict between different types of speech that exist therein. His concept of polyglossia, or the hybrid nature of language, offers insight into the process of receiving and reading letters for Keller. For Bakhtin

> [p]ublic and rhetorical forms expressing the unity of the human image had begun to ossify, had become official and conventional; heroization and glorification (as well as self-glorification) were felt to be stereotyped and stilted. Moreover, the available public and rhetorical genres could not by their very nature provide for the expression of life that was private, a life of activity that was increasingly expanding in width and depth and retreating more and more into itself. Under such conditions the forms of *drawing-room rhetoric* acquired increasing importance, and the most significant form was the *familiar letter*. In this intimate and familiar atmosphere (one that was, of course, semiconventionalized) a new private sense of self, suited to the drawing room, began to emerge. A whole series of categories involving self-consciousness and the shaping of life into a biography—success, happiness, merit—began to lose their public and state significance and passed over into the private and personal plane. (emphasis in text; 143)

Bakhtin's assertion that the familiar letter was a significant form in an atmosphere of "self-consciousness and the shaping of life into a biography" is, certainly, applicable to my dissertation as a whole and is of great importance to my discussion of Keller's early letters. Sullivan had taught Keller how to read and write Braille very early in Keller's education and Keller wrote to Alexander Graham Bell in a 9 March 1900 letter that a "letter always seems more truly my own when I can run my fingers over it, and quickly enter into the thoughts and feelings of my friends without an interpreter" (Keller). But as Gitter points out,

Sullivan insisted Keller write to sighted persons in pencil (*Imprisoned* 281). Because Keller sent and received Braille letters on a much more limited basis than hand-written letters in pencil, letters, for Keller, did not always pass into the "private and personal plane" theorized by Bakhtin, but were the product of at least two voices: the voice of the correspondent and the voice of the person or persons who read the letter through tactile fingerspelling[29] into her hand. Keller's participation in the epistolary genre often required a community. Just as the process of face-to-face communication for Keller meant that she had to use tactile communication, her receipt of letters frequently meant that Sullivan, or someone else who could use the manual alphabet, had to read her each letter by fingerspelling it for her.

Keller's use of tactile communication leads me to a discussion of theories of intersubjectivity and possession of the body. Theories of the body by Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, two twentieth-century feminist scholars, contribute significantly to my discussion of what Keller suggests in *The Story of My Life* was her profoundly transformative entry into language and subjectivity and her sense of intersubjectivity through her reliance on tactile fingerspelling. I focus my critical attention on the ways in which an emphasis on disability productively adds to the theories of Irigaray and Cixous.

Although their theories of subjectivity do not adequately recognize the dual nature of subjectivity for some individuals with disabilities or those with alternative methods of interaction or communication with the world, their concepts

[28] Although Keller's primary method of personal communication was tactile fingerspelling she writes in *The Story of My Life* that there were many people she came into contact with who did not know how to fingerspell. In these cases she had to read their lips by placing her fingers on the person's mouth to feel their movement and on their throats to feel the vibrations.

are useful for a discussion of Keller and her subjectivity.

Sidonie Smith writes in “Self, Subject, and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice” that in the nineteenth century “the notion of the ‘individual’ achieved its fullest, most finely-tuned shape” and that the core of the self was “understood to be unitary, irreducible, atomic; its boundaries separating inner from outer, well-defined, stable, impermeable; its relationship to the world, unencumbered by alternative, absorbing roles” (11). Smith argues that although several twentieth-century feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray have attempted to break free of the “essentialized phallic selfhood [of the nineteenth century]” they have only succeeded in replicating this selfhood with “another kind of troubling essentialism” that does not recognize differences between women (14). Smith also recognizes that the “body itself is marked by a variety of physical phenomena that affect our movement through the web: the fact of our female (or male) sexed body, the physical markers of racial and ethnic identity, the brain’s altering biochemistry, inherited or acquired physical disabilities” (16). To be sure, Irigaray’s work focuses on sexual difference between women and men without consideration of particular differences between women (or men). However, two of Irigaray’s major works are particularly pertinent to my discussion of Keller and the nature of her subjectivity and can consequently open the door to a discussion of bodily differences and alternative methods of communication. Although sexual difference is at the heart of Irigaray’s project, it is her recognition of intersubjectivity, the essential interaction between two people, that is the starting point of my exploration.

In her introduction to part one of her self-edited work *Key Writings*, "Philosophy: From a Love of Wisdom to a Wisdom of Love," Irigaray theorizes a "double and even triple dialectic, one in the masculine, one in the feminine, and one between the two" (3). She writes of "the duality of subjectivities, and a space between them, which belongs neither to one nor to the other and which allows them to meet together" (3). Although I retain Irigaray's focus on intersubjectivity, I depart from her dialectic of feminine and masculine subjectivities. I argue that Irigaray's theory of "the duality of subjectivities" is a valuable concept for understanding Keller's reliance on an intimacy with the Other that is more literal than the one theorized by Irigaray, but which requires a (figurative) between space which allows the Other to be recognized as Other. For Keller to communicate, she had to maintain a closeness in which her separateness and that of the Other were preserved. Keller's method of communication required that both bodies come together in a way that requires physical contact. The space that, for Irigaray, defends against "any possession, appropriation or fusion," while important, could not occur for Keller but had to be replaced by her reliance on the closeness of bodies intertwined at the hands and the intimacy fostered by this. Keller did not have access to a literal version of this negative space because of the requirements of the process of communication for her. Speech was a sensuous act for Keller that resulted in greater intersubjectivity than Irigaray theorizes. For Irigaray, the negative space maintains the duality of subjectivity and preserves the "transcendence of the other" (3). The 'I' and the 'You' remain, for Irigaray, separate, distinct entities. In order to achieve separateness and preserve the "transcendence of the other" and enter into productive interaction with the Other,

Keller had to possess the Other's language through tactile fingerspelling but do so through a caress in which she placed her hand "on the hand of the speaker so lightly as not to impede its movements" (Keller *Story* 49). The addition of a discussion of marginalized means of attaining subjectivity through language to Irigaray's theories of subjectivity is productive for an understanding of the relation between the self and the Other and the reality of interdependence but separateness in the context of literal dependence.

Irigaray's "The Wedding Between the Body and Language" from *Key Writings*, although related to sexual touching and the caress, a caress that leads to an understanding of intersubjectivity, does allow for a discussion of the importance of touch to Keller's subjectivity. Irigaray writes that "we lack a culture which is both subjective and inter-subjective. Such a culture would require being faithful to the reciprocity in touching-being touched, itself a matter of perceiving or a speaking" (18). Knowledge for Keller was profoundly embodied and, as Marta L. Werner writes, her "access to her world was channeled almost entirely through the sensuous and intimate medium of touch" (4). Keller's experience of the world was an experience that reflects Irigaray's "reciprocity in touching-being touched" (18). Irigaray writes about communication not only through the voice but through touch. Although Keller herself had been an object of study, rather than studying the Other, she incorporated him/her into herself when she spoke/wrote/read using tactile fingerspelling. Keller's experience of embodiment meant that she had to maintain a state of intersubjectivity and it was through this intersubjectivity that she had access to her "mother-tongue," her first language.

Until Sullivan's death in 1936, Keller and Sullivan conceived of and presented themselves "as a symbiotic being" (Werner 25). Indeed, their intersubjectivity was well represented by events such as one that took place on June of 1888 when Keller read a poem during the commencement exercises at Perkins. In this performance, "Keller read a poem in raised print with the fingers of one hand and spelled it into the air with the other while Sullivan interpreted the movements and translated them aloud to the audience" (Werner 22).

Cixous's theories on women and the possession of the body are useful to a discussion of Keller and her reclamation of her body through literacy. For Cixous[29], as for Keller, writing is the key to the articulation of and possession of the body. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous writes of the act of writing in a way that seems extremely significant for an examination of Keller and her writing. Cixous connects the act of writing with the ownership of the body and tells her reader that "[w]riting is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it" (876). Cixous does not consider disability in "The Laugh of the Medusa," but uses it only on a metaphorical level to signify weakness and inability, writing that a "woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter" (Cixous 880). Keller took ownership of her body through writing/speaking of herself. While she went on to write several autobiographies and autobiographical essays, Keller's earliest writing of her self took place in her early familiar letters that, as Kleege asserts in "The Helen Keller Who Still Matters," "provided her with a record of her own experience that promoted a sense of her self as a consciousness

[29] Cixous does write about her severe myopia and her operation to correct it in "Savior." "Savior" is part of her shared text with Jacques Derirda, Voiles (1998).

with memories, ideas, and intentions" (102). Indeed, Keller did become a "good fighter" early in her education and the epistolary genre was integral in her development as a writer through her writing of her self.

In his introduction to the restored edition of Keller's *The Story of My Life*, James Berger draws attention to Keller's need for collaboration in her life: "[i]n a broad sense, all of our lives are collaborations [. . .] But in Keller's case, the collaborative nature of perception and consciousness is especially vivid" (viii). The "collaborative nature" of Keller's life is made particularly evident by her reliance on tactile communication. However, it was through collaboration that Keller was able to become independent. In a 20 December 1900 letter to her teacher Charles T. Copeland, Keller wrote of her resolve to be independent within her dependence. She wrote to Copeland:

> When I came to your class last October, I was trying with all my might to be like everybody else, to forget as entirely as possible my limitations and peculiar environment. Now, however, I see the folly of attempting to hitch one's wagon to a star with harness that does not belong to it. I have always accepted other people's experiences and observations as a matter of course. It never occurred to me that it might be worth while to make my own observations and describe the experiences peculiarly my own. (Keller *Story* 191).

Although Keller was reliant on others and their "experiences and observations" as communicated to her through tactile communication, it was through this communication that she was able to become independent in thought. In her description of the education of Keller in *The Story of My Life* Sullivan explained the ways Keller was able to communicate through her body: "She had become very proficient in the use of the manual alphabet, which was her only means of communication with the outside world; through it she had acquired a vocabulary

which enabled her to converse freely, read intelligently, and write with comparative ease and correctness" (Keller *Story* 289). However, although Keller was educated through tactile fingerspelling, the words spelled into her hand were ephemeral, only existing for the time the hand is in motion and held in her hand. It was through epistolary communication that Keller came to an understanding of herself. While many of her letters had to be read to her through tactile fingerspelling, it was through the concreteness of the letter that she was able to understand herself as a part of a community, assert her subjectivity, and describe experiences particular to herself.

III. "I am glad to write you a letter": Keller's Epistolary Disability Narrative

Historically, persons with disabilities have been tied to their compromised bodies in biographical writing. Mitchell and Snyder argue in *The Body and Physical Difference* that there is a "continual circulation of professionally sponsored stories about disabled persons" (1). Like Bridgman before her, Keller and her disabled body were circulated throughout society through professional publications. Referring to these "professionally sponsored stories," Keller writes in her 1929 memoir *Midstream: My Later Life* of the periods in her life when she was an object of study: "I wonder if any other individual has been so minutely investigated as I have been by physicians, psychologists, physiologists, and neurologists. I can think of only two kinds of tests I have not undergone. So far I have not been vivisected or psychoanalyzed. To scientists I am something to be examined like an aerolite or a sunspot or an atom!" (257). This intense scientific

investigation resulted in a large number of publications about Keller. Because she challenged social assumptions about deafblind individuals, Keller, like Bridgman, stimulated the public's imagination and the interest of the scientific community to attempt to understand and quantify her through professional publications. Just as Samuel Gridley Howe wrote the story of Bridgman in his annual reports at Perkins, Michael Anagnos published reports about Keller during his tenure as principal of Perkins. In the "Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Trustees of Perkins and the Massachusetts School for the Blind," published in 1888, Anagnos introduced Keller to the institution's trustees and the public. This report connected Keller to Bridgman and relied on the knowledge of the trustees and the general public of the circumstances surrounding Howe's successes (and failures) with Bridgman to remind them that it was, in fact, possible to rescue "persons afflicted with [. . .] the dread dungeon of deathlike darkness and stillness [of deafblindness]" (71). This report reminded the trustees that the experiment with Bridgman was conducted at Perkins and that his work with Keller presented the possibility of replicating Howe's success at the institution. He relates a brief history of Bridgman and Howe and goes on to write of Keller that:

> It is no hyperbole to say that she is a phenomenon. History presents no case like hers. In many respects, such as intellectual alertness, keenness of observation, eagerness for information, and in brightness and vivacity of temperament she is unquestionably equal to Laura Bridgman; while in quickness of perception, grasp of ideas, breadth of comprehension, insatiate thirst for solid knowledge, self-reliance and sweetness of disposition she certainly excels her prototype. (78-79)

Although the title of his report was "Helen Keller, — A Second Laura Bridgman,"

Anagnos was anxious to establish that "[h]istory presents no case like [Keller's]" (78). Keller is, Anagnos goes on to indicate, indeed a second Bridgman in that her education as a deafblind person succeeds that of Bridgman but that she surpasses Bridgman in ways that will affect her education and, ultimately, her reception by the public (and, of course, patrons). For Anagnos, Keller is a phenomenon who refutes assumptions regarding the intellect and cognitive ability of deafblind persons. She is a scientific wonder worthy of study and investigation. Additionally, further encouraging interest in and writing about Keller, Anagnos acknowledges that Keller exceeds Bridgman in sweetness as Bridgman was often judged obstinate and antisocial by Howe and her teachers.

After Anagnos's initial report on Keller to the trustees at Perkins, several reports and articles on her in magazines such as *Mind*, *Science*, and *American Anthropologist* were published in the course of the late nineteenth century. Also, in addition to professional writing, Keller's story was circulated in more personal ways. The year after his first report about Keller, Anagnos wrote her an 1 October 1889 letter from Vienna. This letter is a telling example of the extent to which Keller was idealized and the manner in which her story was circulated:

> I can hardly tell you how dearly I love you and how often I think of you. During the last two or three weeks I have met with a number of cultivated persons who seemed to be very much interested in your work and who wished to know all about you, and as a consequence your name has been constantly on my tongue. When I feel lonesome among strangers or when the memories of the past fill my heart with grief and sorrow, my thoughts turn toward you, and in the recollection of your dear self alone I seek comfort and brightness. (Anagnos)

This extract from a letter from the middle-aged Anagnos to the nine-year-old

Keller gives the impression of a love letter. The language seems inappropriate to the modern reader and suggests Anagnos's desire to psychically possess Keller. His declarations of love and longing to be with Keller—"I can hardly tell you how dearly I love you and how often I think of you" and "[w]hen I feel lonesome among strangers or when the memories of the past fill my heart with grief and sorrow, my thoughts turn toward you, and in the recollection of your dear self alone I seek comfort and brightness"—suggest a desire to consume/subsume/appropriate Keller. Anagnos's declarations of devotion to Keller in his letter implies that her agreeableness is an important part of his devotion to her and his work with potential patrons. This extract also brings to mind Mitchell and Snyder's comment in *The Body and Physical Difference* that "disability infuses every aspect of [a disabled person's] social being" (3). Keller is not present in body at these social gatherings in Vienna, yet her disabilities make her very present in the sense that her name is "constantly on [Anagnos's] tongue." Anagnos relies on Keller and her reputation in his social interactions and the metaphorical social presence of Keller and her disabilities at these gatherings are a part of his work. Although he references Keller's "work" in this letter, the social gatherings during which he discusses Keller with "cultivated persons" are clearly part of his work of disseminating her story verbally, as well as through published writing, in order to increase support for his efforts at Perkins and add to the recognition of him for his connection to Keller.

As noted above, Cixous connects the act of writing with the ownership of the body in "Laugh of the Medusa" by urging her readers that "[w]riting is for

you" (876). Keller did take ownership of her body through her own writing. In addition to her published autobiographical works, Keller was an active and prolific participant in epistolary communication. While Kleege demonstrates that letters "helped the young Keller master the new vocabulary she was rapidly acquiring" and "[m]ore significantly for her future as a writer, they provided her with a record of her own experience that promoted a sense of her self as a consciousness with memories, ideas, and intentions" ("Matters" 102), I would add that Keller's early letters provided her with a space in which to explore how she wanted to present herself to the world and in which she was able to write an autobiography that restructured her disabilities from the catastrophe of affliction into a life in which disability functioned as an avenue to fulfillment. Although they did play a significant role in forming the kind of writer Keller would become, her early letters are also significant because they form the initial disability narrative in which she worked through her understanding of the ways in which her disabilities informed her public life. These letters also document Keller's formation of self in conjunction with and beyond scientific and philosophical writing *about* her and record the development of her early public persona through philanthropic efforts for the disability community. Keller wrote in her chapter "Muted Strings" from *Midstream*: "I know that a great many people pity me because I can show so little visible proof of living. They are often supercilious and sometimes contemptuous of the 'poor thing' who is so shut out from everything they know" (243). For the young Keller, these early letters connected her with community and the world in a very profound way.

My discussion of Keller and her early letters as disability narrative expands on the framework of Arthur Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller*. Although Frank focuses on the stories ill persons tell about their bodily experience, much of what he argues can be applied to the letters of Keller and to her disabilities. Frank argues that these stories come from those who have been the "objects of others' reports" and that these stories "come out of bodies" (xii, 2). In the chapter "When Bodies Need Voices," Frank discusses the modern experience of illness: "[f]olk now go to paid professionals who reinterpret their pains as symptoms, using a specialized language that is unfamiliar and overwhelming. As patients, these folk accumulate entries on medical charts which in most instances they are neither able nor allowed to read; the chart becomes the official story of the illness" (6). I extend Frank's discussion of illness narratives to disability and I argue that Keller was an "object of others' reports" and that it was her early letters that gave her a voice that was separate from these reports and formed a disability narrative. I also expand on Kleege's examination of the disability narrative genre in America. Kleege, in her essay "Helen Keller and 'The Empire of the Normal,'" focuses on Keller's *The Story of My Life* but points out that "during her long career [Keller] attempted every genre of life-writing: linear narratives, personal essays, a treatise on her religious belief, and a published journal recording her daily life during a five-month period" (322). I add Keller's early letters to Kleege's list of life-writing genres attempted by Keller and put forward that Keller's early letters are her first attempt at the genre and are an attempt to attain control over her story and the story of her disabilities.

Lucille M. Schultz writes in "'What does the fellow mean by sending me his

own spittle!': Letter Writing Instruction in 19th Century Schools in the United States" that educational reformers saw the common school as an important part of promoting morality and social order. Schultz notes that the teaching of proper letter writing was an important part of this education and most textbooks for children had a chapter on the skill (110). Although Sullivan modified the practices of the common school education in the way she taught Keller, she eventually included instruction in letter writing in Keller's education. Skill in letter writing indicated good manners and virtue and, for the young Keller, who was frequently combative and unruly, the rules of polite correspondence provided codes for functioning in a society where, as Barton and Hall notes, "writing a good letter was learning to be a well-mannered person" (118). Keller showed an early interest in letters and Sullivan wrote to Sophia Hopkins, a former matron at Perkins when Sullivan was a student, in a 2 June 1887 letter, "what was my astonishment when I found that the little witch was writing letters! I had no idea she knew what a letter was. She has often gone with me to the post-office to mail letters, and I suppose I have repeated to her things I wrote to you. She knew, too, that I sometimes write 'letters to blind girls' on the slate; but I didn't suppose that she had any clear idea what a letter was" (Keller *Story* 237). As Sullivan encouraged Keller's interest in writing letters, Keller's devotion to the form grew and she developed epistolary relationships with many people, including famous writers and politicians. Written conversation was in many ways easier for Keller than face-to-face communication and she gravitated toward letter writing in her drive to have an active role in society. Her early letters give a picture of a girl and young woman attempting both to communicate with the world in meaningful ways and to establish her existence and place in the world through her

textual self-construction. The epistolary genre gave Keller not an escape from her disabled body, but the opportunity to exert control over her own construction, the power to reconstruct the meaning of her life with disabilities, and the ability to better understand her part in the world and the significance of her disabilities in this role. One of the more significant characteristics of her letters is the sheer volume of them. During her childhood, with Sullivan as her teacher, Keller experimented with different forms of writing and self-expression but the epistolary genre connected her immediately to a community.

After only three months of working with Sullivan, the seven-year-old Keller wrote her first letter on 17 June 1887. It was to her cousin, Anna Turner: "helen will write anna george will give helen apple simpson will shoot bird jack will give helen stick of candy doctor will give mildred medicine mother will make mildred new dress" (Keller 117). This first letter, and several following letters, show evidence of an author new to the rules of language and writing and one who seems younger than her chronological age. It is written in the simple future, written entirely in lower-case letters, contains no articles, contains no punctuation, and has no signature. Three months later, in a September 1888 letter to Mary C. Moore, Keller wrote that her "uncle James is going to buy Helen a very gentle pony and a pretty cart" and that "father is going to buy Helen a beautiful little brother some day" (125). While the content of these letters is seemingly commonplace, they contain important indicators of Keller's growing understanding of the significance of letters. Keller's use of illeism in her early letters is, certainly, a signal that she is a new language user and not yet

comfortable with the first-person construction. However, her use of self-referential constructions also suggests that she saw letters as an important means to convey and even assert her own existence. Although her style matures, these early letters depict more than the mundane details of her everyday life and the wishes and desires of an “ordinary child of eight” (Keller 125). In *The Story of My Life*, Keller writes that after she had recovered from her illness she “felt the need of some communication with others and began to make crude signs. A shake of the head meant ‘No’ and a nod, ‘Yes,’ a pull meant ‘Come’ and a push, ‘Go.’ Was it bread that I wanted? Then I would imitate the acts of cutting the slices and buttering them. If I wanted my mother to make ice-cream for dinner I made the sign for working the freezer and shivered, indicating cold” (8). Letters now provided Keller with a more concrete way to express her desires than her “crude signs.” Although these letters were short, they contained a great deal of information about Keller’s concerns and interests and were the beginning of her focus on the epistolary genre, a focus that would span the rest of her life. Her early letters are her first attempt to write herself into the life of a community through the depiction of her relationships with others, her childlike desires—candy, apples, ponies, and baby brothers—and, most importantly, her knowledge of herself as an independent, desiring being. These childhood letters show Keller, a young girl who had just entered into written language, using letters to communicate with the world in a more permanent way than was possible through her use of the manual alphabet.

In 1887 and 1888 Keller began to write longer, more complex letters. Her

use of the past is still found in her letters but is interspersed with more involved constructions. In the months following her September letter to Mary C. Moore, Keller begins to use conversational phrases such as "I am glad to write you a letter," "I am happy to write you a letter this morning," and "I am happy to write you a letter" (120, 121). She also begins to provide her correspondents with more biographical information about of her life such as information about her travels; details on her family, friends, and toys; and particulars on the reading, math, and writing skills she is acquiring. By 1887, Keller began to use epistolary conventions. She began her early letters with nothing and ended them with either nothing or a simple "good-bye." In an October letter to the blind girls at Perkins, she addresses them with the conventional "Dear" and finishes the letter with her name. By March 1888, Keller has moved on from ending her letters with only her name to ending them with phrases that indicated that she was growing more familiar with the social conventions of the epistolary genre. She ends her 1 March 1888 letter to Morrison Heady—whom she, like many children of the time, referred to as "uncle Morrie"—with the phrase "With much love and a kiss," a leave-taking she would repeat with many of her correspondents. She also begins to refer to herself in the first person in these letters.

Mary A. Favret writes in *Romantic Correspondence* that "critical discourse has written a fiction of letters that gives the letter [. . .] a private voice divorced from the outside world" (19). For Keller, most of the letters she wrote and received were, in a sense, communal and exceeded this "fiction" that letters are merely a private voice. Her letters were frequently shared by their recipients

and she very often intended them to be circulated widely with the intention of furthering her philanthropic endeavors. Like her earlier letters, Keller's first letter to the girls at Perkins demonstrated her growing abilities and suggested the potential of a group that, as mentioned above, was considered by many to be unreachable. In a September, 1887 letter, Keller wrote to the girls at Perkins:

> Helen will write little blind girls a letter Helen and teacher will come to see little blind girls Helen and teacher will go in steam car to boston Helen and blind girls will have fun blind girls can talk on fingers Helen will see Mr anagnos Mr anagnos will love and kiss Helen Helen will go to school with blind girls Helen can read and count and spell and write like blind girls [. . .] Helen is blind Helen will put letter in envelope for blind girls. (Keller *Story* 118)

The significance of this letter is that it was meant to be shared, like many of her later letters to the girls at the institute, with students and teachers; just as most of the letters Keller received had to be read, in a sense, collectively, the letters that Keller sent were also very often read collectively, reflecting the communal experience of her own disability. Keller was aware of the collective reading of her letters and, as she grew, she used her letters as a venue to circulate aspects of her autobiography. This early letter tells the girls (and later the public through its publication) of aspects of her biography Keller would have considered significant for her readers to know, such as her ability to read, count, write, and spell. It also indicates Keller's ability to make plans for her future. This letter, like many of Keller's letters, was shared with the public through Anagnos's reports to the trustees at Perkins and through re-publication in magazines, journals, and newspapers. Another example of the sharing of Keller's letters comes from Anagnos's 5 February 1890 letter in which he wrote to Keller that Mademoiselle

S[30] had passed Keller's letter to Albert[31] on to him (Anagnos), who then allowed several of his friends to listen as he read it aloud. The communal reading of Keller's letter to which Anagnos refers certainly reflects contemporary epistolary habits, but it is necessary to remember that nearly every letter Keller received had to be read to her by an interpreter through the process of tactile fingerspelling and was, essentially, communal.

Anagnos was, until their relationship soured after the "Frost King" incident[32], a great supporter of Keller and had a valuable role in connecting her to a number of people who would become vital members of the epistolary community that assisted in her endeavors to assist others in the disability community. In his 30 September 1891 report to the trustees, Anagnos presents a picture of Keller which he seems anxious to promote and which Keller herself encourages through personal and public letters to her community of correspondents. Anagnos writes in his report that Keller "is a manifestation of loveliness, the personification of generosity, the essence of amiableness [. . .] Helen's life is as perfect as a poem, as pure and sweet as a strain of music. She appears in the firmament of humanity like a new star, shining with its own light

30 This name is unintelligible.

31 I was unable to locate the exact reference for this name.

32 Keller was accused of plagiarizing the details of "The Frost King," which was meant for Anagnos on his birthday. Anagnos was not supportive of Keller and she and Sullivan severed ties with him and Perkins thereafter. Keller wrote of this episode as "the one cloud in my childhood's bright sky" (51) in The Story of My Life and explains the details of the events surrounding the tale in Chapter XIV of the book. Anne Sullivan's comments on the "Frost King" incident and her defense of Keller as well as a reproduction of the tale itself are contained in The Story of My Life. Additionally, both Joseph P. Lash and Dorothy Herrmann in Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy and Helen Keller: A Life respectively, describe the events surrounding Keller's writing of the tale, its publication, and Keller subsequent trial for plagiarism, with Herrmann reproducing several of Keller's familiar letters concerning the incident.

and differing from all others in glory, and seemingly independent of the rest of the host of heaven" (58). He reproduced several of Keller's letters in this report that support this characterization of Keller. In addition to other letters, Anagnos reproduced this 7 November 1889 letter from Keller to himself as a particularly telling example of Keller's delightful personality and her intellectual progress:

> Mon cher Monsieur Anagnos: — Today is your birthday, and how I wish I could put my two arms around your neck and give you many sweet kisses; but I cannot do that, because you are far away, so I will write you a nice long letter, and when you come home I will give you the kisses [. . .] I enjoy being at the Institution very, very much. I learn a great many new and interesting things every day [. . .] My pigeons, puppies, kitties and my dear little birds are all very well. The white pigeon has three tiny babies to take care of, and she is very busy finding food for her hungry family and teaching the timid pets to fly alone. Teacher says she thinks you would like to know what I do every day. At eight I study arithmetic, and I enjoy it greatly. I can do some very difficult examples. At nine I go to the gymnasium with the little girls, and we play pretty games. I wish you could be here to see what splendid times we do have. At ten I study geography. Yesterday I found Athens on the map, and I thought about you. At eleven I have lessons in form, and at twelve I have zoology. The other day I recited in exhibition about the kangaroo. At two I usually sew, and at three I take a walk. At four and five I read, write and talk. (62-63)

Keller was aware that Anagnos frequently published her letters in his reports on her and her progress as he made a habit of sending his completed reports to Sullivan who then read them to Keller. She was also aware that Anagnos often promoted his work by circulating his reports to influential members of society. Keller was, therefore, highly cognizant of the public presentation of her behaviour and life. Consistent with Anagnos's description of her personality, this letter shows the young Keller as thoughtful and loving. In addition to presenting Keller as the epitome of charming American girlhood with an appropriate love of nature and

small animals, this letter also supports the claims of Anagnos and the trustees that the children in the institute are gaining much from their time there. With its smattering of French, its list of classes she professes to get pleasure from, and its statement that "I enjoy being at the Institution very, very much. I learn a great many new and interesting things every day," it, coupled with Anagnos's reports, constructs Keller as a perfect and grateful child.

Barton and Hall write that some people see themselves as letter writers (7) and it is clear that Keller considered herself a letter writer. Starting in November of 1887, Keller began writing to famous and influential people with whom she would correspond until their deaths. Much of Keller's writing seemed to become the "property" of the general public in a variety of ways. As Howe did with Bridgman's letters, Anagnos used the 30 September 1887 Perkins Report to print Keller's first letter to her mother, her first and second letter to the girls at the institute, and her November 1887 letter to him, in which Keller wrote things she had been taught by Sullivan and in which she informed Anagnos "you do love me. I do love you" (Keller *Story* 119). This report was responsible for the beginning of Keller's fame and the beginning of her epistolary relationships with the famous in society. It was also the beginning of her use of the epistolary genre to promote her philanthropic work. As a result of these letters, Dr. Edward Everett Halewrote to Anagnos and requested to be permitted to reprint Keller's letter in his magazine, *Lend a Hand* (1870-75). Sullivan told Keller of Hale's letter and this resulted in an epistolary relationship between the two. Importantly, as a result of this report, Dr. Alexander Graham Bell wrote to Captain Keller to inquire about Keller, who chose to write back to Bell herself in November of 1887. Bell and Keller had met briefly

when Captain and Mrs. Keller had taken her to be examined by Bell when she was a little girl. In her first letter to Bell, Keller gave him details of her everyday life, told him of the skills she has acquired, and reminisced about this meeting:

> I am glad to write you a letter. Father will send you picture. I and Father and aunt did go to see you in Washington. I did play with your watch. I do love you. I saw doctor in Washington. He looked at my eyes. I can read stories in my book. I can write and spell and count. good girl. My sister can walk and run. We do have fun with Jumbo. Prince is not good dog. He can not get birds. Rat did kill baby pigeons. I am sorry. Rat does not know wrong. I and mother and teacher will go to Boston in June. I will see little blind girls. (Keller *Story*120)

Keller's simple childish phrases "I did play with your watch. I do love you" and "I can read stories in my book. I can write and spell and count. good girl" led Bell, Joseph P. Lash writes in his book *Helen and Teacher*, to exclaim: "I feel that in this child I have seen more of the Divine than has been manifest in anyone I ever met before" (172).

These expressions of a child's affection and pride in her accomplishments encouraged the image of Keller as the perfect and thankful child throughout society, an image she would go on to employ in many of her letters, particularly those that were integral to her philanthropic work. Bell added to Keller's renown when he allowed a New York newspaper to reprint both a picture of Keller and this letter to him; Joseph Jastrow (1863- 1944), the well-known American experimental psychologist and inventor, also published this letter and picture in *Science Monthly* (Lash 84, 89). While to the modern reader this exchange of Keller's personal letter and picture might be considered an inappropriate dissemination of the private writing of a child, as discussed above, Keller's letters were frequent objects of

exchange and just as Nancy K. Miller asserts in her essay "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir" that autobiography is an entanglement of self and other, Keller's letters became her early autobiography and embodied this entanglement.

Over time, autobiographical letters became for Keller what Linda H. Peterson refers to as a "polemical and political act" with "public intentions, not just private confessions" (*Traditions* 16). Because of the public interest in Keller and her education, her letters exist on the border between public and private. Like Harriet Martineau, Keller used her letters to interact with the larger world and, as she grew older and became more proficient with writing, she frequently published open letters to the public in newspapers. Epistolary scholars Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven write in their introduction to *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* that the "categories of public and private work are an interlocking cultural system" (9). This is true of Keller's letters. Keller was quite aware of, and encouraged the sharing of her letters; she used this propensity of her correspondents to complicate the line between the public and the private and further her political goal of improving the lives of blind, deaf, and deafblind individuals. Keller worked for persons with disabilities from an early age and she used her familiar letters in this work. Among the philanthropic friends that Keller made was William Wade. Wade, like Keller, was directly invested in assisting persons with disabilities. Wade, Dorothy Herrmann writes in *Helen Keller: A Life*, was "a benefactor to many deaf-blind individuals, furnishing them individually with books, bicycles, vacations, and other luxuries to alleviate their loneliness"

(94). Wade was fascinated by deafblindness and published his book *The Deaf-Blind* in 1901, "which was the first attempt to compile a roster of deaf-blind individuals in the United States, detailing their education and accomplishments" (94). Although Keller's first letter to Wade was a letter of thanks for the mastiff puppy he had sent to her, because of their mutual concern for the deafblind community, Keller and Wade became friends and frequent correspondents. In a 19 February 1899 letter Keller wrote to Wade of the progress she saw resulting from their efforts: "[i]t gives me great pleasure to hear how much is being done for the deaf-blind [. . .] Why, only a little while ago people thought it quite impossible to teach the deaf-blind anything; but no sooner was it proved possible than hundreds of kind, sympathetic hearts were fired with the desire to help them" (Keller). Keller capitalized on this interest in the deafblind community with her letter campaigns. Wade was a generous contributor to Keller's charitable drives and was instrumental in her campaign to help a deafblind five- year-old boy named Tommy Stringer.

Keller was made aware of the need for money to hire a tutor for Tommy through the correspondence of J. G. Brown (147) and her subsequent campaign to raise funds for Tommy's education was the first time she used her renown and her extensive epistolary community to assist other disabled people. Reiterating David T. Mitchell's assertions in "Body Solitaire," I contend that Keller seemed to understand not only that "people with disabilities find their lives so inextricably tethered to the lives of others" (Mitchell 314) but that "community with other disabled people" (312) is of the utmost importance. While Laura Bridgman, Gitter writes, "went on at length in her letters about her physical and emotional ailments:

her scratchy throats, headaches, toothaches, lassitude, loneliness, poor appetite, 'violent' colds, weakness, liver congestion, nervousness" (*Imprisoned Guest* 262), Keller used her disabilities as a key component in her activism on the part of the disabled. Her acknowledgment of the importance of community in the lives of persons with disabilities would extend throughout her life. She was able to take control of her voice through letters devoted to philanthropic causes and to both use and subvert her construction by others.

Because Keller was profoundly aware of what education had given her, she became committed to raising the money needed for Tommy's education and began to solicit donations from friends and correspondents. Keller understood that her contact with donors and the frequent exchange of her letters would result in greater future contributions to her fundraising campaigns. As part of her campaign for Tommy, Keller turned to some of her well-connected correspondents and made use of their propensity for sharing her letters. One such correspondent was British author and expert on dogs, George R. Krehl. Krehl had planned to send Keller a dog (Keller's dog, Lioness, from William Wade had been killed) but she decided that she would sacrifice the gift in order to raise money for Tommy. She wrote to Krehl in an 20 March 1891 letter:

> I have just heard, through [William] Wade, of your kind offer to buy me a gentle dog, and I want to thank you for the kind thought. It makes me very happy indeed to know that I have such dear friends in other lands. It makes me think that all people are good and loving [. . .] [Wade] has another dog for me, and he thinks she will be as brave and faithful as my beautiful Lioness. And now I want to tell you what the dog lovers in America are going to do. They are going to send me some money for a poor little deaf and dumb and blind child. His name is Tommy, and he is five years old. His parents are too poor to pay to have the little fellow sent to school; so, instead of giving me a dog, the gentlemen are going to help make Tommy's

> life as bright and joyous as mine. Is it not a beautiful plan? Education will bring light and music into Tommy's soul, and then he cannot help being happy. From your loving little friend, Helen A. Keller. (*Story* 244-45)

Keller is suitably grateful for Krehl's proposed gift of the dog, but without specifically telling him what she would prefer, she leads him to understand that money for her campaign for Tommy would be appreciated more. Keller's reference to "the dog lovers in America" indicates the extent of her epistolary community and the frequency of the exchange of her personal letters throughout this community. This letter is among the many in which Keller acknowledges the benefits she has had in life due to the community of friends who helped to bring education into her life and how she sought to repay this support through her own activities of charity in the disability community. Although there is no evidence that Tommy became part of her epistolary community, Keller's efforts to assist him, just as her frequent letters to the blind girls at Perkins and her epistolary efforts to find funding for a kindergarten for bind children, indicate her understanding of the importance of community in the lives of disabled people.

Keller had, according to Lash, a "great passion for poetry" (111) and she particularly enjoyed the work of Oliver Wendell Holmes. Holmes became an important part of her epistolary community after she wrote to him expressing her adoration of his work. In April of 1891 Keller wrote to Holmes about his poetry and how she felt connected with nature by his words. As part of her campaign to assist Tommy she wrote to Holmes about how education has allowed her to experience his work and how Tommy could also be given this gift of nature through education:

> Your beautiful words about spring have been making music in my heart, these bright April days. I love every word of “Spring” and “Spring Has Come.” I think you will be glad to hear that these poems have taught me to enjoy and love the beautiful springtime, even though I can not see the fair, frail blossoms which proclaim its approach, or hear the joyous warbling of the home-coming birds. But when I read “Spring Has Come,” lo! I am not blind any longer, for I see with your eyes and hear with your ears. Sweet Mother Nature can have no secrets from me when my poet is near. I have chosen this paper because I want the spray of violets in the corner to tell you of my grateful love. I want you to see baby Tom, the little blind and deaf and dumb child who has just come to our pretty garden. He is poor and helpless and lonely now, but before another April education will have brought light and gladness into Tommy’s life. If you do come, you will want to ask the kind people of Boston to help brighten Tommy’s whole life. (Keller *Story* 149)

In this first letter to Holmes regarding Tommy, Keller promotes a faith in the transcendental power of poetry to allow the blind to see and the deaf to hear. She writes that it is because of his poetry that that she has access to the secrets of “Sweet Mother Nature.” Holmes was originally from the Boston area and Keller, in this letter, is cognizant of this connection and uses her own relationship with Holmes to further the success of her campaign. Holmes, like many of Keller’s correspondents, read her letters to groups of friends and, just as many of Keller’s correspondents published her letters in newspapers and magazines, Holmes published the first of Keller’s letters to him in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May of 1891 (140-141) and later in *The American Annals of the Deaf*. Keller later wrote to Holmes on 27 May 1891 thanking him for his contribution to her campaign for Tommy and informing him of a reception at Perkins at which she would be speaking:

> Dear, Gentle Poet:–I fear that you will think Helen a very troublesome little girl if she writes to you too often; but how is she to help sending you loving and grateful messages, when you do so much to make her glad? I cannot begin to tell you how delighted I was when Mr. Anagnos told me that you had sent him some money

> to help educate "Baby Tom." Then I knew that you had not forgotten the dear little child, for the gift brought with it the thought of tender sympathy. I am very sorry to say that Tommy has not learned any words yet. He is the same restless little creature he was when you saw him. But it is pleasant to think that he is happy and playful in his bright new home, and by and by that strange, wonderful thing teacher calls *mind*, will begin to spread its beautiful wings and fly away in search of knowledge-land. Words are the mind's wings, are they not? (Keller *Story*141)

Keller is clearly very proficient with the epistolary genre and has acquired advanced writing skills. Showing evidence of her growing writing ability, Keller makes the rhetorical move of using first-person construction and referring to herself as "I" in much of the letter, but uses third person construction when she is thanking Holmes for his contribution to her campaign for Tommy. She writes of herself using diminutive terms: "[Holmes will think] Helen a very troublesome little girl" for writing to him so frequently and "how is she to help sending you loving and grateful messages, when you do so much to make her glad" (141). She uses this construction when she expresses her gratitude for his contribution in order to, certainly, thank Holmes, but also to remind him that just as many like him have helped her, "Baby Tom" is also a child in need. While Tommy has not made the kind of progress she was hoping for, Keller expresses in this letter to Holmes, a well-known medical reformer and proponent of educational reform, the Victorian belief that theirs was a progressive period in history and that education could, and would, eventually open Tommy's mind to knowledge.

Keller's friend Rev. Phillips Brooks, who had been very active in Keller's campaign to assist Tommy, requested that Keller compose an appeal for support addressed to little boys and girls for use in his efforts on her behalf. She willing wrote

this letter:

> Dear Little Boys and Girls: — You will be surprised to receive a letter from a little girl whom you have never seen, but I think she will not seem quite such a stranger when you know that she loves you and would be delighted to give each of you a loving kiss; and my heart tells me we should be very happy together, for do we not love the same things: playful young kittens, great dogs, gentle horses, roguish donkeys, pretty singing birds, the beautiful springtime, and everything good and lovely that dear Mother Nature has given us to enjoy? and, with so many pleasant things to talk about, how could we help being happy? But now I am going to tell you about a dear little boy who does not know how to be joyful, because he cannot hear or speak or see, and he has no kind lady to teach him. His name is Tommy, and he is only five years old. His home is near Pittsburgh, Penn. The light went out of the poor little boy's eyes and the sound went out of his ears when he was a very small infant, because he was very sick indeed and suffered greatly. And is it not sad to think that Tommy has no gentle mother to love and kiss her little child? He has a good papa, but he is too poor to do much to make his little son's life happier. Can you imagine how sad and lonely and still little Tommy's days are ? I do not think you can, because the light has never gone out of your bright eyes, nor the pleasant sounds out of those pretty ears like pink- white shells. But I know you would like to help make your new friend happy and I will tell you how you can do it. You can save the pennies which your papas give you to buy candy and other nice things, and send them to Mr. Anagnos, so that he can bring Tommy to the kindergarten and get a kind lady to teach him. Then he will not be sad any more, for he will have other children to play with him and talk to him, and when you come to visit the institution you will see him and dear little Willie playing together as happy and frolicsome as two kittens; and then you will be happy too, for you will be glad that you helped make Tommy's life so bright. Now, dear little friends, good-bye. Do not forget that you can do something beautiful, for it is beautiful to make others happy. Lovingly, your friend, Helen Keller. (201-02)

Much like Martineau, Keller uses both the open letter genre and the private letter in her public work and recognizes that through the epistolary form, the categories of public and private work become, as Gilroy and Verhoeven point out, an interlocking cultural system (9). As Martineau intended her published open letters to be like a personal conversation with a friend, Keller directly addresses her child-

readers as “Little Boys and Girls,” evokes a sense of community and connects with them on their level in several ways. She refers to herself as a “little girl” and, in the beginning of the letter, refers to herself in the third person. She connects with her child-readers by using the collective “we” and telling them “my heart tells me we should be very happy together, for do we not love the same things”; she lists all of the things she feels children enjoy: “playful young kittens, great dogs, gentle horses, roguish donkeys, pretty singing birds, the beautiful springtime, and everything good and lovely that dear Mother Nature has given us to enjoy.” She writes to her readers that she would like to talk to them about these pleasant things in life, but quickly goes on to tell them about Tommy who does not know of these wonderful things because he is deaf and blind and has no one to teach him. By this time, Keller was a household name and her child-readers would have known that she, like Tommy, was deaf and blind but that she had the ability to know of the wonderful things that typical children like them enjoy because she has had a “kind lady” to teach her. The message to readers is that if they help Keller raise money for Tommy he will be able to enjoy the same things they enjoy. This letter appeals to a child’s fear at the thought of being without a “gentle mother” and their imagined desire to make others happy. It also appeals to a child’s desire for agency and implies that even a child can do “something beautiful” by choosing to sacrifice a small amount of money to contribute to Tommy’s fund. This letter was extremely effective and many children contributed to Keller’s fund for Tommy.

Keller seemed to understand the importance of maintaining connections in order to facilitate success in her charity work. Her friends had advised her that

contact with the media could result in further contributions. A copy of this letter to children was published in the *Daily Witness* of Montreal by George O. Goodhue, a fellow dog-lover in Canada with whom William Wade had connected Keller. Anagnos writes in his book *Helen Keller* that Mr. Amos I. Root of Medina, Ohio, editor of the *Gleanings in Bee Culture*, also published an appeal for Tommy in his journal and that Goodhue included a letter from himself as well as two photogravures of Keller with Root's appeal (Anagnos *Helen* 202). While these images of the renown Keller were surely effective in raising funds for Tommy, it is unclear if the creation and publication of these images was completed with either the permission of Keller or of the eleven-year-old Keller's father. This dissemination of Keller's image is reminiscent of Bell's circulation of Keller's letters and photographs in 1887, further indicating the appeal Keller had in society. The inclusion of Keller's image in the campaign for Tommy rather than an actual image of Tommy himself is useful for an understanding of the advantage of Keller's fame and how her name increased the chances of a cause's fundraising success. The success of her campaign is indicated in a letter Keller wrote to J. G. Brown on 26 May 1891 telling him that a teacher had been secured for Tommy. Like many of her letters about Tommy's progress, Keller implies to Brown that Tommy has yet to show an acquisition of the abilities she and his friends had hoped for. However, Keller has faith that language will open his mind and enrich his spirit. She tells Brown that she and Tommy's patrons "are all waiting eagerly for the happy day when language will make a *little human being* of him. Oh, what a joyful day it will be! Then his mind will open like a beautiful flower, and his heart will be filled with gratitude and love for the kind friends who have helped bring light and music into

his soul" (emphasis added; Anagnos *Helen* 202). In this letter, Keller links Tommy's anticipated achievement of humanity to the assumed quintessential human trait of language use and, thus, implies that those who are unable to use language are mere "dumb" animals.

Although the number of contributions to her campaign for Tommy was significant, Keller responded to each contribution through a personal letter of thanks and also published public acknowledgment in newspapers. She took it upon herself to write individual letters to the editors of the various Boston newspapers to ask them to publish lists of contributors to her campaign. On 13 May 1891, Keller wrote to John H. Holmes, editor of the *Boston Herald*; Edward H. Clement, editor of the *Boston Transcript*; Colonel William Warland Clapp, editor of the *Boston Journal*; and Colonel Charles H. Taylor, editor of the *Boston Globe*. Anagnos writes that "no two [letters] were alike either in matter or form" (*Helen* 207). However, while each personal letter differed according to the level of familiarity between Keller and the recipient, these letters as well as her individual letters to the editors of the Boston newspapers did, in fact, contain some very clear similarities that had much to do with her continued success in philanthropic undertakings. In each personal letter, as in her open letters to newspapers, Keller wrote of the success of her campaign to raise funds for Tommy's education and, of course, thanked the recipient(s) for their contribution. Although I do not question the genuineness of her regard for her correspondents, Keller, even at her young age, was politically savvy and the language she used in her early letters supported her in her assumption of a very distinct role—that of innocent, grateful child—even as she aged. The language she

used to refer to herself conformed to this construction. This role was particularly useful to her, as she desired to maintain an extensive epistolary network from which she hoped for "little" and "poor little ones." Even her plans to help them are "little plans." As she would do in her letters to Holmes, for example, during her campaign for Tommy, Keller coyly confesses that she knows that Spaulding will find her "very troublesome" and asks for his forgiveness for "troubling" him. As she did during her drive for Tommy, Keller reached out to the media for assistance in this later campaign. She wrote Mr. Arlo Bates, editor of the *Boston Courier*, on 18 May 1892 about her planned tea, telling him: "I am trying to raise money to help build a pleasant, cheerful home for poor little sightless children, where they will be tenderly and wisely cared for [. . .] I want the kind people of Boston, who have already done so much to brighten the lives of these helpless little ones, to come to my tea, and buy light – the precious light of love and knowledge for those who are still in darkness" (Keller letter to AB). She was also very anxious to compliment her connections for their part in her events. She wrote to Alfred Waite, editor of the *Boston Herald*, on 18 May 1892 to thank him for publishing a notice of her tea in his newspaper appealing to his vanity when she writes:

> I am delighted to hear that you will give notice of my tea in the Herald. Surely there are many, many readers of that great paper, who must feel a deep and tender sympathy for the little ones who cannot see this beautiful world, and sympathy always makes us helpers of one another. Therefore, I shall look forward to seeing many friends at my tea, who will say, "Helen, I read about your tea in the Herald, and I have come to help make the lives of afflicted little children more bright" (Keller)

Gitter writes that "[i]n private, Keller occasionally confessed to [. . .] feelings [of frustration and anger], but her public face always smiled" (*Imprisoned Guest* 292).

Keller's public face of agreeableness was integral to Anagnos's construction of her for the public and the Perkins' trustees, but it was also important for Keller as she grew and became invested in philanthropic work. Most people know that Keller was friends with many famous individuals from all over the world, and her familiar letters are a record of these friendships. However, few recognize the significance of her early epistolary communication with these individuals to her early formulation of her life's work as a fundraiser and activist for the rights of disabled persons. Even as a young girl in her early letters, Keller very quickly established the way in which she wished to be seen. Berger writes that Keller

> assumed the role of paragon—beautiful, spiritual, intellectual, and pure— whose reassuring image could be opposed to other, more threatening embodiments of the disabled (or, as they were still called by Keller and others, the 'defective'): the blind, deaf, crippled, deformed, insane, and retarded, especially those from the lower classes who could not receive adequate care. In her apparent perfection, Helen Keller buffered 'able' society from contact with those hideous others. (Keller *Story* xxiv)

Keller did, in fact, "buffer" able-bodied society from the "undesirable" disabled community through her language choices in her correspondence. She was the wholesome, cheerful, and grateful little girl who epitomized idealized Victorian girlhood and whose early ambitions were concentrated on helping others. Her image also supported assertions by American educators and philosophers of the success and excellence of the American education system as well as the value of reforms in the education of persons with disabilities. Keller further buffered able-bodied society from the "undesirable" disabled community by assuring her correspondents that education and language had the potential to make human beings of their disabled Others.

Years after her efforts on behalf of Tommy, Keller wrote to William Wade on 9 December 1900 of a chance meeting with Tommy: "A few days ago I met Tommy Stringer in the railroad station at Wrentham [. . .] He goes to the public school, I hear, and his progress is astonishing, they say; but it doesn't as yet show in his conversation, which is limited to 'Yes' and 'No'" (190). Keller's addition of a vague "they say" to the claim that Tommy's "progress is astonishing" suggests that she is reluctant to believe that his progress praiseworthy. She seems disappointed that he does not seem to have achieved the kind of advancements she had been confident education would produce. Her campaign on behalf of Tommy, while not entirely triumphant in terms of the actualization of the extraordinary intellectual benefits and "light and gladness" (Keller *Story* 149) she believed education would bring to Tommy's life, was certainly successful in terms of Keller's growing awareness of her life's passion. This early venture into charitable work—Keller was only eleven years old when she began her campaign for Tommy's education—was the first time Keller used her name and her community of epistolary connections to promote a significant cause. These early letters give evidence of the development of her early public persona through philanthropic efforts for the disability community, provide an epistolary disability narrative in which she demonstrates the ways in which her disabilities informed her public life and served as a path to fulfillment, and, most importantly, give "visible proof of living" (Keller *Midstream* 243) beyond the framework of medical/scientific writing about her.

IV. Conclusion: "Awakened by Her Loving Touch"

Referring to community and persons with disabilities, David T. Mitchell, as

quoted above, writes in "Body Solitaire" that many twentieth- and twenty-first-century works of disability life writing tend "toward the gratification of a personal story bereft of community with other disabled people" (312) even though "people with disabilities find their lives so inextricably tethered to the lives of others" (314). Keller, however, recognized the collaborative nature of her life. As James Berger points out in his introduction to *The Story of My Life*, she "felt her own case was simply an intensified version of the norm—that all people are mutually dependent collaborators in one another's lives" (xxix). Keller recognized that she and Sullivan, in particular, were connected in extremely profound ways. She wrote of their connection in *The Story of My Life*: "My teacher is so near to me that I scarcely think of myself apart from her [. . .] I feel that her being is inseparable from my own, and that the footsteps of my life are in hers. All the best of me belongs to her–there is not a talent, or an aspiration or a joy in me that has not been awakened by her loving touch" (22). Further indicating how much she relied on and valued her connection with Sullivan, Keller wrote an 7 August 1889 letter to Sullivan in which she lamented the latter's three and a half month absence, telling her: "I do want you to come back to me soon. I miss you so very, very much. I cannot know about many things, when my dear teacher is not here" (135). Keller relied on Sullivan and a community of supporters and collaborators in her writing. Berger further expands on the collaborative character of Keller's life and writes that her *The Story of My Life* was a "many-voiced chronicle" (xxxi). Although this statement refers to Keller's *The Story of My Life*, it is certainly applicable to her later published writing and is helpful for an understanding of the collaborative nature of her letters and an appreciation of these letters as an early disability narrative.

According to Helen Selsdon, Archivist and Curator of the Helen Keller Collection for the American Foundation for the Blind, Keller changed the face of disability. Keller did, certainly, change the face of disability in many ways through her early letters. While Keller did write of the relationships she has with others in her multiple autobiographic works, her letters provide a more detailed account of the significance of her epistolary community in her life. Through her letters, Keller was able to discuss what she saw as the most important aspects of her life, aspects that contributed to her influence on the lives of persons in the disability community. Ultimately, Keller's early letters were essential to her formation of self and to her development of the autobiography that she wanted to present to the world. The epistolary genre allowed Keller to explore her own existence and her conviction that persons with disabilities could, and should, be active participants in their community.

Chapter 3
"The Basis of Epistolary Intercourse": The Confidential Talk of the Letters of John Kitto

This chapter examines the letters and poetry of the British missionary and biblical scholar John Kitto (1804–1854) in order to further explore the role of familiar letters and community in disability narratives. Kitto became completely deaf at the age of twelve after he fell from a roof while working with his father. He was subsequently sent to a workhouse in Plymouth to learn a trade but expressed his desire for a career in writing while there. He began his literary career in 1823 with the publication of three of his essays in the *Plymouth Weekly Journal* and he went on to publish the book *Essays and Letters*, which included these essays, in 1825. He traveled as a missionary to cities such as Malta, Constantinople, Petersburg, and Moscow and he wrote a series of articles on his travels entitled "The Deaf Traveller" for *The Penny Magazine* in 1833. He also wrote "The Pictorial Bible[33]" in monthly parts in 1838 and "The Pictorial History of Palestine" in 1839–40 for *The Penny Magazine*. In addition to these articles, Kitto wrote several books about his journeys: *Uncle Oliver's Travels in Persia* (1838), *The Gallery of Scripture Engravings* (1843), and *The History of Palestine from the Patriarchal Age to the Present Time* (1843). He was granted an honorary Doctor

[33] *The Pictorial Bible* was published in a two volume set in 1855 and as a four volume set after Kitto's death in 1866 with the longer title The Pictorial Bible, being the Old and New Testaments according to authorized versions. Illustrated with Steel Engravings and Woodcuts representing landscape scenes, and subjects of natural history, costume and antiquities with Original Notes by John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.

of Divinity in 1844 and went on to publish *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature* (1845), *Ancient Jerusalem* (1846), *Modern Jerusalem* (1847), *The Olive, Vine, and Palm* (1848), *The Court and People of Persia* (1848), *The Tabernacle and its Furniture* (1849), *The Bible History of the Holy Land* (1850), and *Domestic Arrangements of the Orientals* (1853). It was *The Lost Senses: Deafness and Blindness* (1845) for which Kitto became particularly well known. Philosophers and literary critics praised *The Lost Senses* and Harriet Martineau declared the work to be of "rare & inestimable value" (Martineau *Collected* 3 22). As Jennifer Esmail writes in her chapter "'I Listened with My Eyes'" in *Reading Victorian Deafness*, it influenced popular fiction as both Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins used details from *The Lost Senses* in their depiction of deafness in their respective works "Dr. Marigold" (1865) and *Hide and Seek* (1854, 1861).

There have been two major biographies written about Kitto, both published after his death in 1854. John Edwards Ryland (1798-1866) published *Memoirs of John Kitto, DD, FSA* in 1856 and John Eadie (1810-1876) published *Life of John Kitto, DD, FSA* in 1886. More recently, several critics, including Jennifer Esmail, Eitan Bar-Yosef, and Martha Stoddard Holmes, have published articles or chapters on Kitto. These authors have focused on Kitto's *The Lost Senses* and the influence of his work on Victorian understandings of and attitudes towards deafness. Attention has also been paid to his part in a community of deaf poets during the period. In this chapter, I draw on work by Esmail, Bar-Yosef, and Holmes and I make use of Kitto's biographies as well as both *The Lost Senses* and several of his poems for specific biographical information. However, I focus predominantly on Kitto's familiar letters and the community of supporters addressed in these letters

and I treat *The Lost Senses* as a work that makes evident what David T. Mitchell in "Body Solitaire: The Singular Subject of Disability Autobiography" argues are the dangers of disability life writing's tendency to reinforce "the longstanding association of disability with social isolation" (312). Kitto constructs his life story in much of *The Lost Senses* in a way that, ultimately, upholds a public image of solitary triumph over adversity. However, the lack of community represented in the book is complicated if not contradicted when one reads the work in conjunction with his familiar letters. My goal in this chapter is to show that Kitto's letters provide the reader with a greater sense of the realities of Kitto's life story than is provided in *The Lost Senses*. I also hope to reveal the existence of a supportive epistolary community, nuancing our understanding of Kitto's writing and its relationship to both self-construction and physical impairment. Kitto's letters played a significant part in his representation of his own identity because, unlike other hearing-impaired authors such as Harriet Martineau, for example, who had a well-established literary identity outside of her familiar letters, Kitto's familiar letters contain evidence of the development of his literary abilities over time and provide evidence of his self-construction as an "overcomer."

Just as Harriet Martineau's middle-class identity provided her with a sense of authority to challenge medical opinions on her illness and disability in several published letters and autobiographical works and just as Helen Keller's position as a cherished member of an affluent and influential family granted her the financial means to have a private tutor, attend a prominent school, befriend powerful individuals through her letter-writing, and publish several autobiographical works, Kitto's membership in the working class had a profound

influence on his self-conception and self-representation. Several studies of autobiography of the Victorian period provide comparisons of working-class autobiography and middle-class autobiography that offer insight into Kitto's autobiographical work. Regenia Gagnier in *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain* (1992) contrasts British working-class autobiography with "traditional autobiography as the literary community has defined it" (138). She argues that for many working-class autobiographers,

> being a significant agent worthy of the regard of others, a human subject, as well as an individuated 'ego' for onself— was not a given. In conditions of long work hours, crowded housing, and inadequate light, it was difficult enough for them to contemplate themselves, but they also had to justify themselves as writers worthy of the attention of others. (141)

Gagnier adds that these material conditions of working-class life prohibited a working-class individual from writing what she refers to as the "classic realist autobiography" (43). Adding to Gagnier's discussion of working-class life and autobiography, Janice Carlisle writes in her introduction to *Factory Lives: Four Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiographies* (2007) that while "evidence offered by a single individual was gaining new respect and significance" (13), "writing was a medium of self-representation unavailable to most workers" and "the material conditions of working-class lives did not easily accommodate the ideal of success and stability that determine the form and ending of so many middle-class autobiographies" (27-28). Additionally, Martin A. Danahay in *A Community of One: Masculine Autobiography and Autonomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1993) writes that an insistence on social conditions informs the autobiographical work of women and working-class writers, while writers of "higher status tend to represent themselves as 'detached' or autonomous from social exigencies" (4).

Indeed, the material conditions Kitto faced in the workhouse had the potential to limit his autobiographical endeavors. Although Martha Stoddard Holmes positions Kitto within her subsection of "Middle-Class People with Disabilities," I consider his situation in life as a workhouse boy and member of the working class, a situation he emphasizes many times in his personal letters and *The Lost Senses*, to be of the utmost importance to my examination of his letters as his early disability narrative. Holmes devotes space to what she considers to be Kitto's delineation of his disqualifications that are the "result of a combination of hearing impairment, socioeconomic status, and public prejudice" (160). Kitto, at the beginning of his introduction to *The Lost Senses*, connects his deafness very clearly to his class, telling his reader that the "commencement of this condition is too clearly connected with my circumstances in life to allow me to abstain from troubling the reader with some particulars which I should have been otherwise willing to withhold" (10). He relates his disability to his class and prospects in life with his explanation that his father belonged "to that class of men whom prosperity ruins" (11) and that the precariousness of his father's employment at that time of his accident meant that Kitto was required to supply his father with assistance:

> This early demand upon my services, joined to much previous inability or reluctance to stand the cost of my schooling [. . .] made my education very backward. I could read well, but was an indifferent writer, and worse cypherer, when the day arrived which was to alter so materially my condition and hopes in life. (11)

Kitto's ambitions in life are, ultimately, shaped by and related to disability but also to class and class mobility. These circumstances direct the ways in which Kitto chose to present himself in writing and how, to paraphrase Gagnier, he chose to situate himself in the world. His disability and class informed his familiar letters and, later on, his choice of

the type of autobiography he wrote. Holmes productively points out that throughout *The Lost Senses*, Kitto engages "with his deafness as a key spur within his coming of age as a writer, and a means of self-authorization" (158). I add class to Holmes's discussion of Kitto's deafness and consider that Kitto, as the child of working-class parents and as a poor workhouse boy, distinguished himself by his deafness and writing skills through his early letters to persons of middle-class status in order to gain opportunities his class could not provide him.

As a member of the working class and a resident of a workhouse, Kitto's sense of masculinity was associated with a strong, able body. The self-doubt that characterizes much of his correspondence is a result of his perceived inability to fulfill these gender expectations, an inability he attributed to his disability. The kinds of self-doubt he lived with are suggested by familiar letters in which he responded to hypothetical detractors who he imagines accusing him an overinflated sense of his abilities and his internalized convictions of his inferiority. Largely self-educated before he entered the workhouse, Kitto's sense of superiority and separateness from the other boys in the workhouse was mixed with a self-doubt regarding his lack of education, which could in turn be attributed to his class. Throughout his letters, he asserts to his teachers and mentors that he is not equipped for the life of manual labour expected of members of his class. In his desire for the kind of social mobility that missionary work presented, he reveals his belief in a kind of superiority concerning his abilities. The individuality Kitto established through his deafness and his connection to members of the middle class resulted in his social mobility and the publication of an autobiographical work, *The Lost Senses*, that resembles the middle-class autobiography, a form that Carlisle describes as being "often conceived as a

success story, charting the ways in which an individual grows to maturity to find his rightful place in the world" (27) and that exhibits the "detached individualism" theorized by Gagnier (42).

Kitto begins *The Lost Senses* with his deafness as a justification for his work, writing that "[a]ny one who has spent a considerable portion of time under peculiar, or at least undescribed, circumstances, must have been very unobservant if he has nothing to relate in which the public would be interested [. . .] It is under this impression that I now write" (*Lost* 9)[38]. Although John Eadie writes in reference to *The Lost Senses* that Kitto claimed in an 1845 letter to Robert Lampen that the work was an "experiment of writing some personal notices in his little autobiographical work" (6), Kitto attempts to dissociate the work from the idea of autobiography and self-advancement. He indicates that although he feels that he has no right to do so, he does, in fact, include autobiographical material in the work, this because he is compelled to do so:

> I know not, however, that I have any right to obtrude the events or studies of my life upon the public notice; and it is not my intention to refer to them further than may be necessary to bring out the points and peculiarities of the deaf condition. From the multifarious matters arising from the activities of a life which once seemed doomed to inertion, I shall select those only which arise from, which illustrate, or which are in any remarkable way connected with my deafness. It is needful to explain this, lest, in sketching the natural history of my deafness, I should be supposed to offer a biography of myself. (10)

Kitto's justification of *The Lost Senses* with the reasoning that it covers a subject

[34] This justification for The Lost Senses is very similar to the first essay of Kitto's "The Deaf Traveller." Kitto writes in this first essay: "Unless, therefore, I were a person of more than ordinary dullness and want of observing powers, I ought to have something to relate of the things I have seen and experienced, in which the readers of "The Penny Magazine" would be interested. Yet there are circumstances in my condition which would exonerate me from censure had I nothing at all to say, or less than I really have. But I do not intend to shelter myself under this excuse, though I shall presently state what are the circumstances to which I refer" (309).

that would be of interest to the public is not merely an expression of his personal conviction of the value of his personal story but a statement of his understanding that this project catered to the Victorian penchant for reading material pertaining to bodily differences. By framing the work as a public service, Kitto justifies the work's existence and refutes any suggestion that he wrote the work as a means to self-advancement.

I. Kitto's Letters: "Documents Relating to the Steps at First Taken on My Behalf"

While he mentions the epistolary genre only very briefly in *The Lost Senses*, letters were very important in Kitto's life. His life story outside of the narrative of his life intended for public consumption is documented by his familiar letters. These letters complicate Kitto's self-construction as a solitary "overcomer" and provide evidence of the support he found in an epistolary community that encouraged him in his literary endeavors. Although there is ample evidence that Kitto did participate extensively in letter writing, he seems to have been of two minds about the practice. In *The Lost Senses*, he constructs letters as a medium that limits and even prohibits the participation of deaf persons in the world of business. He writes that the lives of deaf persons are intimately tied to epistolary communication but characterizes the world of business as completely counter to the productive exchange of letters. He places deaf men and men of business into two different worlds in which there seems to be no place for the other. He writes in *The Lost Senses* that

> every point which goes to form that character [of men of business],

> is so much a point of repulsion to the deaf; and every point which goes to make up the personal position of a deaf man, is so much a point of repulsion to them, that feelings of cordiality, the foundation of which lies chiefly in personal intercourse, can seldom exist between them. Men of business have also a feeling that affairs can be transacted much better by personal interviews than in writing; and I have no doubt that this is the fact. But even a personal interview with one who is deaf involves the necessity of writing, or of some equally slow process of intercommunication. (82)

Because, he argues, men of business prefer spoken communication over written communication and deaf men use letters as “written talk,” neither group can effectively communicate with the other (82). He further diminishes the importance of written communication in the world of business in a 22 February 1847 letter to his benefactor W. M. Tracy. He writes to Tracey that “in the process of my editorial labors, small notes, of no consequence, became so numerous, that I was obliged, in self-defence, to keep a basket under my table for the reception of the *trifling notes* that reached me in the course of *business*” (emphasis added; Ryland II 227-28). Rather than allow “trifling notes” of personal communication to interrupt him in his valuable “course of business,” Kitto relegates this communication to a place of insignificance at his feet.

However, despite this relegation of his personal communication to an inconsequential location, Kitto’s use of the epistolary genre went beyond letters of business and he recognized the importance of the familiar letter to his daily life. Like many Victorians, Kitto was concerned about his letters and how they were circulated by his correspondents. He expresses concerns about his correspondence to Robert Lampen, the minister of St. Andrew’s parish in Plymouth, in a 1 June 1826 letter:

> Soon after I commenced letter-writing, I became aware that the letters I wrote were very extensively circulated, even among those who were personally strangers to me. Now, it does not generally happen, I believe, that we like to hear proclaimed aloud those words which it cost us an effort even to whisper in the ear of one, whom we know to cherish kind and affectionate feelings toward us. Most certain it is that I did not, however it may be with others [. . .] my vanity, indeed, was flattered, but nevertheless the mind was wounded and confidence destroyed. Confidence should, I think, be the basis of epistolary intercourse. But when I knew that my unbosomings were made known to other persons than those for whom they were intended, I could, on paper, confide no longer; and then what other resource remained to me than that of writing on general subjects? Essays essentially — letters only in externals, only from the form and manner in which they were folded and addressed, and from the usual respectful or familiar additions. (Ryland I 167-68)

Just as Harriet Martineau considered her letters to be "all talk" (Martineau *Collected* 2 149), akin to private conversation, Kitto equated personal letters with spoken words so confidential that they were comparable to words whispered into the ear of the confidant. He regarded what he wrote to his correspondents to be his private "unbosomings" and was incensed to learn that his letters were being circulated to strangers. Although he did not go so far as Martineau, who demanded that her correspondents either destroy or return her letters in order to preserve her "freedom of epistolary speech" (Martineau *Collected* 2 149), Kitto did contemplate limiting what he wrote in his letters to inconsequential detail and writing "letters only in externals." However, he quickly reconsidered this strategy and informed Lampen that although this mode of letter-writing could provide him with more room in which to display his skill at writing, he intended to trust in the judgment of his correspondents: "I am now satisfied that I might safely leave it to my friends to judge whether or not that which I might write to them would be fit to communicate to others; and at least, if there were any thing in a letter which I would like known

only to the person, addressed, I might express my wishes on that point in the letter itself" (Ryland I 167-68). Kitto did relent and decided not to resort to extreme measures to control the circulation of the information in his letters. He appreciated the significance of familiar letters for the autobiographical representation of self and, like authors such as Martineau, used the epistolary genre as a means of claiming authority over his body and, as I will discuss further below, recognized that the biographical information contained in his familiar letters augmented his self-constructed identity as an "overcomer[35]" and could potentially increased public interest in his published autobiographical work.

Much of Kitto's correspondence suggests his interest in control over the biographical material contained in his letters. In 1826, George Harvey approached Kitto with a request for personal information with the goal of publishing a work that he intended would introduce Kitto to society. On 17 October 1826, in response to Harvey's request, Kitto wrote:

> To return to the desire you express, that I should furnish you with the materials for a Memoir of myself, I feel it a matter of considerable difficulty to bring my mind to any decision on the subject. There are many reasons which would induce me most decidedly to oppose myself to such a publication, but I must confess, there are others which would lead me to promote it by any communication which would be necessary to its completion. [. . .] in any future publication by myself, or concerning myself, it is my desire to appear fully as I am, and that it should be fully recognized through out "*whose* I am, and whom I serve." I do not wish, or expect, all men to think and feel exactly as I do, but surely I have a right to hold and express my own thoughts and feelings. I am fully aware that I hold some opinions which some will disapprove, and which will procure for me the stigma of being fanatical and

[35] I use this term following Eitan Bar-Yosef's useful discussion of Kitto's self-characterization in the article "The 'Deaf Traveller,' the 'Blind Traveller,' and Constructions of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing."

> enthusiastic. These you would, and I would not, wish to conceal. In short, I should wish most decidedly that it should be a publication, *so far as I am concerned*, of a decidedly religious character, and not only so, but *of my own religion*. You will write and reason like a philosopher — you will, of course, say exactly what you think of me. I have nothing to say against this— I would not interfere. I only contend that my principles and general character should be exhibited, in all their length and breadth, as they really are, and that wherein you differ from me, instead of omitting my views, or softening them down, I would rather wish that you should exhibit your own opposite impression, or state that your views and my own, on the particular subject, do not coincide. This being understood, my feelings are rather favorable than otherwise to the publication. Now, I would wish to mention a few other conditions, to which I should think my self authorized to request that you will be pleased to assent: — That, wherever I may be at the time, the work may be sent to me as finally arranged for the press, that I may be enabled to correct any quotations which may be in it from myself; and those passages which may give statements of my own opinions. If I am in Malta, it can be sent and returned in two months. That the whole responsibility of the work be your own, excepting in the instance of verbal quotations from myself; and that I be not recognised as furnishing materials for the express purpose of publication. I do not recollect anything else at the moment. I really must beg to be excused in being so very particular, but I am sure I should be blamed for it, if it were known how much I have suffered on account of the book already published. (Ryland I 225-227)

This quotation provides a description of the lengths to which Kitto would go to in order to have control over his story. Although he writes to Harvey that he has several reasons "to promote [the memoir] by any communication which would be necessary to its completion," this letter is focused on his concerns about the publication. Suggesting that his "apprehensions" about the publication of his life story had nothing to do with details of his life being made available to the public—indeed, Kitto had published his *Essays and Letters* the previous year and he writes in this letter to Harvey that he had, in the past, contemplated writing such a memoir in the future—Kitto initially objected to this publication as he seems to have

considered it a loss of his own control over his life-story. Just as he was displeased that his letters were being circulated by his correspondents, Kitto seems concerned that he would not have control over his story unless he were the author. It was his understanding of letters as an important source of biographical information that led to his desire for control over them and the protection of this information had much to do with his desire for control over his story for future publication. Eadie writes that Kitto "always purposed to write out his own life, and unfold its great lessons" (5). Kitto's subsequent 13 November 1826 letter to Harvey clarifies his intentions regarding his biographical material:

> I supposed, indeed, that your smaller work, if it were little more than a sketch, would increase the desire in some instances, and induce it in others, of something more minute in detail from myself, and having the authority of your well known name, might be the means of introducing me where I may not be known already. And this introduction, if it should be the means of opening to me a greater measure of future usefulness, would not be an undesirable circumstance. Again, as many minor publications may possibly, if I am spared, precede the publication of the memoir, I thought it possible that your little work might pave the way for a more favorable reception, and a more extended circulation of my own Essays than I might otherwise expect [. . .] *I contemplate my own memoir as such a standing object for some years to come* [. . .] I intend, in the first instance, to draw up the substance of the work without any reference to letters, or quotations from them. When this is done, I will send to England for all the letters to be collected of those I have written. Then I will transcribe what I had previously written, introducing, as I go on, such letters, or extracts from them, as may explain my views and feelings at particular times, and on certain occasions, and my sentiments on subjects which I may have had to mention in the memoir itself. After this I will submit it to the judgment and examination of such friends as it may be in my power to consult, and then, with my own final and mature corrections and emendations, I will copy it fairly off for the press. (231-233)

This letter demonstrates Kitto's interest in writing a memoir or autobiography and suggests the amount of recognition he hoped to gain from the support of his

community. He repeats several times throughout the above excerpt that Harvey's work would be "a small publication," a "smaller work," and "little more than a sketch," which would not preclude the publication of his larger memoir. Kitto was savvy enough to recognize that a small publication that highlighted him and his story had the potential to introduce him to a larger group of people and, thus, generate interest in his later, larger work. This letter usefully points out what he knew to be the significance of letters to the publication he was contemplating, and, therefore, the importance of controlling his story in them. This letter also suggests the level of personal control he desired to maintain over letters, which he planned to collect, transcribe, and comment on himself. His control over his letters and the way in which they might be used is crucial, as I show below, to his self-construction as a solitary "overcomer," a construction that will inform his eventual *The Lost Senses*.

In an effort to highlight the most significant parts of his life story and to construct himself as an "overcomer," Kitto keeps his deafness at the forefront of *The Lost Senses*, this to remind the reader of the misfortune he has overcome. Martha Stoddard Holmes points out that *The Lost Senses* contains several inconsistencies and contradictions between the way Kitto represents life with deafness and the realities of his everyday life. She argues that "incongruities" found in the work are, in fact, "purposeful"(160) and that "[t]he pessimistic remarks on deafness in general [. . .] are in service to the story of [his] affliction" (163). Indeed, the chapter "Disqualifications" contains several "purposeful" inconsistencies and contradictions between the way Kitto represents life with deafness and the realities of his life. He begins this chapter with a description of how the deaf are regarded in society:

> It will require no great weight of argument or force of illustration to demonstrate that one who is deaf labors under a highly disqualified condition. In much of that in which lieth the great strength of man, he is impotent; for the great race of life he is maimed; and his daily walk is beset with petty humiliations, which bear down his spirit by the consciousness, which he is never allowed to forget, that he is, in one most essential respect,
>
> "Inferior to the vilest now become.[40]" (64)

Because Kitto, as Eadie writes in his preface to *Life of John Kitto*, "told his story so often and to so many persons" (7), the reader of *The Lost Senses* is led to believe that Kitto, who was once destined to live a life of inferiority because of his hearing impairment, been able to triumph over this negatively and forcefully imagined fate of the deaf man. In *The Lost Senses*, Kitto outlines the difficulties he had in overcoming societal assumptions of his uselessness because of his deafness and even his own fears of living a pointless life. The reader of the book finds no information about the role of community in his accomplishments. However, his familiar letters expose these inconsistencies and provide the reader with a greater understanding of how community functioned in his life and how it provided him with opportunities that *The Lost Senses* does not explore.

In 1821, after the death of his beloved grandmother, Kitto's parents could not provide for him and he was sent to the Plymouth Workhouse. In *The Lost Senses*, he depicts this period of his life as one plagued by isolation and solitude:

> it does somewhat move me to look back upon that poor and deaf boy, in his utter loneliness, devoting himself to objects in which none around him could sympathize, and to pursuits which none could even understand. The eagerness with which he sought books, and the devoted attention with which he read them, was simply an unaccountable fancy in their view; and the hours which he strove to gain for writing that which was destined for no other eyes than his

36 This quotation comes from John Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

> own, was no more than an innocent folly, good for keeping him quiet and out of harm's way, but of no possible use on earth. This want of the encouragement which sympathy and appreciation give, and which cultivated friends are so anxious to bestow on the studious application of their young people, I now count among the sorest trials of that day: and it serves me now as a measure for the intensity of my devotement to such objects, that I felt so much encouragement within, as not to need or care much for the sympathies and encouragements which are, in ordinary circumstances, held of so much importance [. . .] the shyness and reserve which the deaf usually exhibit, gave increased effect to the physical disqualification; and precluded me from seeking, and kept me from incidentally finding, beyond the narrow sphere in which I moved, the sympathies which were not found in it. (Kitto *Lost* 68-69)

Referring to working-class autobiographers, Gagnier writes that many of these authors sought to "distinguish themselves from other workers, and establish themselves as individual agents" (144). Kitto relies on both his deafness and his literary interests to distinguish himself from the crowd of boys in the workhouse. It is a distinction he consistently uses throughout *The Lost Senses* and his familiar letters. According to Kitto, the boys he lived with in the workhouse could not relate to or even understand his devotion to books and study and he, most assuredly, would have felt the loneliness that a child unable to relate to his peers on multiple levels might feel. He structures this picture of his early life as one during which his literary interests received no sympathy or encouragement that young people "in ordinary circumstances," not "plagued" by deafness would have received. He suggests that it is the many disqualifications specific to the deaf that have resulted in the lack of encouragement of his literary interests by those around him. It is because of his hearing impairment, he implies, that his interest in reading and writing was considered a mere "fancy" and one that was only tolerated because it was "good for keeping him quiet and out of harm's way"; his interest is assumed to

have no value other than as a way to keep him out of trouble. He also suggests that it was the "shyness and reserve which the deaf usually exhibit" that prevented him from finding the support he craved from sources outside of the workhouse. His reader is made to understand that his only source of encouragement to continue in his commitment to study came from his own internal dedication and that the pain of this period of his life now serves as "a measure for the intensity of [his] devotement to such objects." Here and in similar passages, Kitto constructs himself as a solitary "overcomer" and reinforces the claim that he was able to overcome the disqualifications of his deafness on his own and find "encouragement within" himself rather than relying on support from outside sources.

In their introduction to *Letter Writing as Social Practice*, David Barton and Nigel Hall argue that the letter is versatile and can be used to mediate a variety of social interactions (1). Although Kitto claims in *The Lost Senses* that he found no understanding or assistance (70), it is clear from his familiar letters and journal entries that he was able to find the assistance he required to mediate his difficult social situation in the workhouse. Kitto's early years in the workhouse were difficult. The other boys in the workhouse frequently bullied him and his journal during his early time there describes boys frequently "making faces" at him during assemblies, "attempting to pull [his] nose," giving him "unprovoked blow[s] on the back," and attacking him in groups of "ten or twelve" (Eadie 40-41). However, the sympathies that he claims he sought but did not find from sources outside of himself were available to him in the workhouse via the exchange of letters with a supportive community of teachers. Kitto made use of the letter form to address these difficulties and to convince the workhouse administrators to intervene on his behalf and

improve his social situation. The aggressive treatment by the boys continued until Kitto lost all patience and wrote a letter of complaint to Robert Burnard, the workhouse administrator. Eadie writes that this "'frisky letter,' as one of the accused styled it, was at once acknowledged, and his tormentors were severely cautioned as to their misconduct, and prohibited from indulging any longer in such wanton cruelty and sport" (Eadie 60). Kitto described the assistance he received from the administrators at the workhouse after he had written this letter of complaint in a 30 August 1821 journal entry:

> Last night, as soon as I went up, I was surprised that none of the boys began their accustomed teasings, and that some of them made signs to me about a letter. At last I learned that Mr. Burnard had read my letter (complaining of P, etc.) to all the children and lads after evening prayers, with comments, I suppose. I also understood that [John] Nugent (the schoolmaster of the Red and Blue Coat Schools) interested himself in my cause, and reproved P and the rest, and threatened them, if they molested me again, with chastisement. (Ryland I 54)

While this letter of complaint did much to alter Kitto's circumstances, it also established a community within the workhouse that would become part of a support system for Kitto's literary endeavors. Burnard came to his defence and Nugent vowed to protect him from the other boys and had Kitto sit beside him in assembly, writing him a short letter in which he vowed that if Kitto "conduct himself prudently, [he] shall always find in me, to the utmost of my power, a friend and protector" (Ryland I 54). Kitto continued this 30 August journal entry with the resolution: "Henceforth I must add the name of Mr. Nugent to the list of my benefactors" (54). Burnard, too, did much to protect Kitto, to improve his social circumstances, and to further his literary development. He became a friend and benefactor of Kitto, working to find him employment outside of the

workhouse, reading and critiquing his writing, encouraging him to develop his religious interests, and lending him books. Burnard, who Kitto counted among his five best friends, was one of the first persons Kitto wrote during his world travels.

Barton and Hall also contend that letter writing crosses formal and informal contexts and is embedded in particular social situations (1). As a result of his formal letter of complaint, Kitto received several short, encouraging letters from Burnard and Nugent. These letters suggest the unequal relationship between writer and reader as Burnard and Nugent were administrators in the workhouse and Kitto was, as he wrote, a “workhouse boy” (Ryland I 62). The letters from Nugent and Burnard to Kitto reflect the fact that they were sent from Kitto’s superiors, but they also indicated that Nugent and Burnard were very much aware that, because of his social position, Kitto required assistance. Kitto does not mention either of these men or their assistance in *The Lost Senses* but writes instead that his mind had become accustomed to “seeking for itself elsewhere, the nourishment and solace, which it was no longer capable of receiving in the ordinary commerce of life” (70-71) and that he had very little encouragement in his choice to pursue a literary career, suggesting that it was only through his own perseverance that he achieved his goals. However, the letters to Kitto from Nugent and Burnard counter these assertions and indicate that there was, indeed, a community very much invested in his plans to write.

Both Nugent and Burnard made great efforts to assist Kitto in both his religious training and writing. Both men became supporters of Kitto and appreciated his skill in writing and love of books, sending him frequent short

letters with instructions for writing practice and offers to loan him books, thereby helping him in the early development of his writing skills and literary knowledge. In his 15 September and 18 September 1821 journal entries Kitto reproduces two such brief but significant letters:

> September 15. — I was sent for to the office this afternoon. When there Mr. Burnard gave me the following questions to answer, in the hand- writing of Mr. Nugent : "What is Sin?" "What is Holiness?" "What is the difference between the sincere man and the polite man?" (Underneath, in the hand-writing of Mr. B.) "Mr. Nugent has written the above questions for you. Have you read Sturm's Reflection.. If not, I can lend it to you." (Ryland I 57)

Three days later, Kitto received more encouragement from Nugent:

> September 18. — I summoned sufficient courage, about one o'clock to- day, to go into the office to ask Mr. Burnard for the book he had promised to lend me. He gave me the book, and a paper, as follows: "John Kitto—"I wish you to take a little more time to answer the questions — What is Sin? What is Holiness?" Take it from Scripture (chiefly), and refer to proofs, chapter and verse. "Where is Scripture proof that sin is a falling off from grace? Where is Scripture proof that holiness or righteousness is the gift of God? Define Repentance and its effects, with references to Scripture. Likewise define Truth and its fruits, with like references. (Ryland I 57- 58)

Nugent and Burnard were clearly attempting to develop Kitto's religious understanding through questions that required both contemplation and reference to religious works. In fact, Burnard appreciated Kitto's writing skill so much that in his 21 October 1821, journal entry, Kitto reproduces a letter from Burnard that read

> Your paper did not fail to deserve my attention, but I let Mr. Nugent have it, and he has not returned it. I have another set of books ready for you. Will you undertake to write a set of Lectures, to be read to the boys in this house, respecting their duty in it, their future

[37] Kitto is referring to Reflections on the Works of God in Nature by the German preacher Christoph Christian Sturm (1740–1786).

> conduct, etc.? If so, I shall have them read, if approved of by me and some of the guardians. I hope you will let me see what you have written. I will do all I can for your improvement. (6)

Kitto continues this entry by writing directly to his journal, referring to it as "my friend" and using conversational phrases such as "[b]y the by." He also authors a conversation he had with an imaginary reader about Burnard's suggestion, a habit he also indulges in with his familiar letters: "You can scarcely imagine, my friend[38], how this letter elated me, and set me a walking up and down the court with uncommon quickness, eagerly talking to myself. Take a bit of my soliloquy : — 'What! I, John Kitto, to write lectures, to be read to the boys! Mr. Burnard seems to think me competent to it, too!' (rubbing my hands with great glee)." However, Kitto also constructs himself as locked out from happiness because of both his poverty and deafness: "I can not be happy. Far from it! Am I not deaf? Am I not a workhouse boy?" (Ryland I 62). Contrary to the feelings of inadequacy he expresses in this journal entry, Kitto wrote to Nugent a 1 January 1823 letter in which he seems confident enough in his own literary opinion that he can become playful and joke with Nugent that Fontenelle's work on the Plurality of Worlds, which Nugent had lent him, "will probably be useful to me in a visit which I have some idea of paying shortly to my Lady Luna" (80). Although Burnard and Nugent were the administrators in the workhouse and in positions of authority over Kitto and their letters to Kitto were often brief and concerned with Kitto's improvement and education, they played a significant part in the formation of the community in the workhouse that connected Kitto to opportunities and benefactors outside of that

37 Ryland notes in Memoirs that in "several passages of the Journal Kitto expresses himself as if addressing a friend, but not always the same" (59). In several entries Kitto constructs an imaginary reader of the journal, using the name "Hal" or "Harry."

institution and helped him to overcome the limitations of his deafness. For Kitto, these letters served as a crucial nexus between himself and the life and recognition he craved, facilitating the creation of a community of supporters with similar interests to him.

1823 was a year in which Kitto's community of supporters increased. This was largely a result of his familiar letters. One of Kitto's greatest supporters was George Harvey, a prominent mathematician in Plymouth. Kitto and Harvey met in 1823 in a bookstore. The owner of the bookstore explained to Harvey that Kitto was a deaf workhouse boy who possessed great literary talent and was anxious to further his knowledge. After this meeting, Kitto wrote to Harvey a 1 June 1823 letter in which he expressed his disappointment with his life:

> [nature] has now closed one of the principal avenues by which knowledge gains admittance to the human mind. She has denied me the advantages of education, nor has she given me the only means of improvement which are now, as deaf, accessible to me; and she moreover has placed me in a very contracted sphere of life, where the soarings of an ardent spirit must be checked, and where I must ever continue to grope in mental darkness and degradation! (Ryland I 94)

Kitto combines his description of his life with deafness with blindness imagery as a means to illustrate the difficulties of his life to Harvey. He revisits the dread the thought of the literal combination of these two disabilities can illicit in *The Lost Senses* when he writes: "what must be the extent of the calamity when [conditions of blindness and of deafness] are united in the same person! The mind instinctively shrinks with pain" (Kitto *Lost* 189). Harvey was so moved by this letter that he made Kitto's story known to several of his friends and convinced them to contribute toward Kitto's wellbeing, a decision that began a series of events that had far-reaching implications for Kitto's literary career. Harvey's friend, Edward Nettleton,

one of the proprietors of the *Plymouth Weekly Journal*[38], had come across several of Kitto's essays. Indicating Kitto's understanding of the importance of the epistolary form to his career as a writer, these essays were written in the form of letters to Harvey[39]. Nettleton inserted these letters/essays, "Happiness," "Home," and "Contemplation," in the journal with the intention that their publication would afford Kitto the "opportunity of making his case known" (Ryland I 82). Kitto was able to attract significant attention through this early publication of his letters/essays, and his identity as a poor, deaf, workhouse boy became solidified in the minds of his audience. This also added to the recognition of Kitto as an "overcomer," an aspect of his character he would promote in his future publications. They gained the notice of several gentlemen—John Hawker, Henry Woollcombe, William Eastlake, Thomas Stewart, John Tingcombe, and Robert Lampen—in Plymouth. His story and obvious literary skill induced these gentlemen to draft a circular on 28 June 1823 in an attempt to remove Kitto from the workhouse and install him as a sub-librarian in the Plymouth Public Library:

38 Kitto, in Essays and Letters, and Ryland, in Memoirs of John Kitto, and Eadie, in Life of John Kitto, cite the Plymouth Weekly Journal as the journal in which Edward Nettleton published Kitto's essays. Every publication by and about Kitto refers to Nettleton's Plymouth Weekly Journal as the journal in which Kitto's essays were published. However, The History of Plymouth and The Newspaper Press Directory both cite the Plymouth Weekly Journal as beginning publication in 1718 and ceasing publication in 1723. The titles of two publications closer to the time in which Kitto's essays were published are the Plymouth Journal and the Plymouth Herald. Both of these papers began publication in 1820 (Newspaper Press 226). The Newspaper Press Directory lists the publisher of the Plymouth Journal as I. Latimer and a proprietor of the Plymouth Herald as Edward Nettleton (226), making the Plymouth Herald the most likely paper to have published Kitto's essays. The cost of the Plymouth Herald was 4 ½ d or pennies.

39 While I could not find these essays in their letter form to Harvey, Kitto's August 1, 1823 to Harvey in which he wrote "My future letters will, I hope, be less personal; for my letters shall be a sort of epistolary essays, which will answer the double purpose of corresponding with you, sir, and at the same time writing that which will appear more advantageously than personal letters before the public" (Ryland I112), clearly indicates that Kitto's essays for his publication Essays and Letters came from these letters to Harvey.

> The attention of the public has lately been drawn, by some Essays published in the Plymouth Weekly Journal, to the very extraordinary talents of John Kitto, who is now a pauper in the Plymouth workhouse. He is about eighteen years of age, and has been nearly four years in the workhouse, to which he was reduced by the inability of his parents to maintain him, after his having lost his hearing by a fall from a house in Batter-street, where he was employed as an attendant on the masons. This loss of hearing has been accompanied with other bodily infirmities; but he has been thus so entirely thrown on the resources of his own mind, that he has cultivated his intellectual faculties with singular success, and gives promise of making very considerable attainments. An inquiry into his conduct and general character has proved most satisfactory to the undersigned, who are thus led to believe that he must greatly interest those who feel for the difficulties under which virtue and talents labor when they have to struggle with poverty and misfortune. He has of late been employed as a shoemaker, in the workhouse, and in that capacity he has given proofs of great skill and industry; but it seems desirable that he should be placed in a situation more consistent with his feelings and abilities, and to which his deafness might not render him incompetent. It has been suggested that, as a temporary measure, application should be made to the Committee of the Plymouth Public Library to employ him as a Sub-Librarian; and that a sum might be raised, by small subscriptions, to enable him to obtain board and lodging in some decent family, until something permanently advantageous should be suggested. In the mean time, although he could not be in the receipt of a salary, he would have opportunities of improving himself, and would be enabled to direct the powers of his mind to those pursuits in which he is so well qualified to excel, and in which, perhaps, the world may find his usefulness, and he himself a merciful and abundant compensation for all his deprivations. Great reliance may be placed on his industrious habits, and it is confidently believed that small contributions from several individuals would enable him to get over the chief impediments to success in a way for which he seems so peculiarly well qualified. The undersigned, who have carefully examined into his character and acquirements, are anxious to give the strongest testimony in his behalf, and will receive with great pleasure any contributions, pledging themselves to use the utmost discretion in their power in the application of any money that may be thus entrusted to their management. (Ryland I 83-84)

I have included this circular in its entirety for the evidence it contains of the part that a community of influential Plymouth gentlemen played in assisting Kitto in his literary career. These men clearly supported Kitto in his opinion that because of his

deafness he had been “entirely thrown on the resources of his own mind.” And like Kitto, they felt that his “intellectual faculties” made him unsuited for the work he was doing in the workhouse. Also like Kitto, who felt, and wrote to several of these men, that a literary career would render him the most useful to society, these gentlemen agree that “it seems desirable that he should be placed in a situation more consistent with his feelings and abilities, and to which his deafness might not render him incompetent.” Through the benevolence of these gentlemen, Kitto was removed from the workhouse and given employment in the Plymouth Public Library. Additionally, several of these gentlemen in Kitto’s large community of supporters rallied around him to raise money for his first publication, *Essays and Letters*, in 1825. However, Kitto does not mention the efforts of these men in his widely circulated *The Lost Senses*. Radically altering his prospects in life, this circular provides ample evidence of the role that community played in his life and success.

Just as Kitto constructed imaginary conversations with imaginary friends and detractors in which he responded to their encouragement or criticism, he wrote letters to himself from an imaginary correspondent named “Cecil” which, Ryland writes, Kitto “made use of in order to give himself (as he said) that advice which no other person could give him, and to exercise himself in familiar letter-writing” (I 118). While “Cecil” seems to act as Kitto’s alter ego, or trusted friend, he also acts as Kitto’s superego, giving Kitto advice according to moral and behavioral standards and acting as a check to any presumptions of grandeur in Kitto. “Cecil” provides Kitto with advice on how to take care of his body and spirit in light of the

fortuitous alteration in his material circumstances, urging him to avoid excessive study, to take care of his health through exercise, and to spend time reflecting in nature. Kitto would send these letters to William Harvey to make him aware of his feelings and to receive Harvey's criticism and suggestions about his epistolary skill. In his August 1823 letter, Kitto writes to himself as "Cecil" who has taken "[pains] in developing [Kitto's] intellectual and moral faculties and inclinations" (119), and who now advises him on his relationships with his supporters:

> You can never be sufficiently thankful to the Great Being who has thus raised you from the dust and placed you in a state where, by a proper attention to your duties, and a sedulous endeavor to confirm the impression which your friends entertain in your favor, you will be in the way of obtaining eventual emolument and honor, and what is still better, of acquiring that knowledge which you have hitherto sought, and continue to seek. Always remember the obligations you are under to those philanthropic and disinterested individuals who have thus provided for you, and do not imagine that you will retain their friendship longer than you continue to deserve it. Let not your present prosperity too highly elate you. Ever recollect your humble origin, and do not forget that some unexpected circumstance may again consign you to that poverty and wretchedness from which you have emerged [. . .] Enjoy the comforts which your present situation affords, and for your future welfare rely on the exertions of your friends, who have the power, and, doubtless, the inclination to provide further for you, when your circumstances shall require it. (121)

Kitto reminds himself to always remember that it is God who has raised him out of a position of destitution and through God he has been granted friends and supporters devoted to seeing him succeed despite the disqualifications that attend his hearing impairment. Although "Cecil" encourages Kitto to relish the benefits these supports have provided him, he, in a moment of doubt, writes that he cannot expect loyalty from them if he fails to continue to be deserving of their support. Kitto expresses his sense in many of his letters that his circumstances in life are

subject to sudden and catastrophic alteration, a logical outcome of his sudden accident and deafening. In a December 1823 letter, "Cecil" again reflects on the importance of Kitto's group of supporters and acknowledges that while Kitto's life is such that he has to rely on others, he cannot truly succeed without relying on himself:

> You are, in a great degree, abstracted from the world, and from the genial charities of social life. Your comforts depend on others, and so does your external happiness; but much, very much depends upon yourself. Within yourself you must seek those resources which others derive from extraneous circumstances, and your improvement in knowledge and under standing must necessarily proceed from your own unassisted exertions. (123-124).

His deafness means that he is excluded from the typical amusements of society and is obliged to rely on others for these comforts. However, "Cecil" tells Kitto that he is not without agency and that through his own exertions he can add to the improvement of his circumstances. This "Cecil" letter exemplifies Kitto's frequent episodes of self-doubt and of feelings of inadequacy that he tried to assuage through self-reminders of his personal successes. Rather than construct this imaginary friendship with "Cecil" through journal entries, Kitto chooses to use epistolary communication. While these "Cecil" letters were intended for Harvey, because Kitto was aware that his letters were frequently exchanged by his correspondents, it seems plausible that he intended these letters to have a wider readership. Kitto's creation of an imaginary authorial identity allowed him a distance from which to write of his awareness of his indebtedness to Harvey and other gentlemen invested in his success, this to allow his readers an understanding of his fears and also his conviction regarding his personal responsibility for his

success in life.

Kitto’s *Essays and Letters* had not been published by the end of December and he was becoming frustrated. Although the publication of this book by subscription gave Kitto some control over the book, the pace of its publication was of great concern to him. He expressed his frustration in a 23 December 1824 letter to Burnard: “I expected, when I left our “gude auld town,” to see my book in circulation in about a fortnight, but by a letter I received from Colonel Hawker a day or two ago, I find that another tantalizing delay has been occasioned by the storm [. . .] my poor book has been laid on the shelf” (Ryland I 199). Kitto’s *Essays and Letters* was published in early 1825 and received generally positive reviews. However, in a note pertaining to the publication, Ryland writes that the “list of subscribers contains between three and four hundred names, but the work does not appear to have been a source of much emolument to the author, though it increased the public interest on his behalf” (Ryland I 81). Ryland further writes that “[d]uring the interval between its composition and publication, [Kitto's] mind had not been stationary; he had been brought under fresh influences, and on some important points his views had changed. His literary ardour had suffered some abatement, and his energies were partially directed into another channel” (Ryland I 201). Kitto wrote a letter to Harvey after the book’s publication in which he commented on disappointment he was sure he caused his supporters and expressed his own dissatisfaction with his literary endeavor:

> It appears very plain to me that you expected me to prove something very different from what you ultimately found me; nor does it appear less evident that the expectations of others were similar to your own. To have disappointed these expectations, as it afterwards

> appeared to me that I had, was a very mortifying reflection, but perhaps it was nothing more than my pride that was mortified, exclusive of a feeling of regret which I doubtless experienced at knowing my self a cause of disappointment to those who had so exerted themselves on my account. (202)

However, Harvey's reply to Kitto's letter suggests that Kitto's friends were familiar with Kitto's periods of hopelessness and indicates, to some extent, the level of support he had from friends: "I confess I felt somewhat grieved at the tone of despondency which ran through your last letter [. . .] The publication of your book has revived many interesting inquiries about you. Everybody is pleased with it, and the best proof I can give you of its excellence, is the doubt entertained by some, of your being the unassisted author" (203). Harvey attempts to alleviate Kitto's feelings of inadequacy with the news that some readers are convinced that Kitto, a deaf man, could not have written the book without assistance. Harvey considers this proof of the work's excellence.

Despite the support and encouragement Kitto received, just as he was disappointed with that publication, he was also disappointed with the trajectory of his life. At this time, Kitto was apprenticed with Anthony Groves, formally a dentist turned missionary living in Plymouth. He had been approached by Groves to work as a printer with the Church Missionary Society and it was decided that he would live at the Missionary College at Islington under the instruction of William Mavor Watts, the Society's printer. Kitto's new employment was focused on the mechanics of printing, employment that he felt was far outside his interests and abilities. Letters to his benefactors written during his time at the College describe his lack of interest in the mechanics of the printing process as well as his renewed sense of his Christianity and desire for missionary work. In December of 1826,

Kitto wrote to the Rev. J. N. Pearson, principal of the College, to express his distaste for his employment as a printer and his desire for different work with the Society. He writes to Pearson that because of his literary attachments and fondness for the retirement of contemplation in his room, he is unable to commit his "whole mind, thought, and spirit" to the "business habits" of a printer and that his heart is in nothing else but his "books and pens":

> It is now nearly ten years since I became deaf. From that time, I was thrown for many years on the resources of my own mind and the minds of others, for information, amusement, and instruction, and indeed for occupation also. I read much — all I could get to read; wrote a little; and thought more than I either wrote or read. Thus a habit was created, and thus a character was given to my mind, which no subsequent circumstance or situation has been able to obliterate. I have been encouraged in these habits. I have been taught to thank God for them, as for blessings bestowed upon me, and as talents intrusted to my care. I have been instructed to look upon them as means of the most important usefulness, which a person in my situation could have [. . .] I should have been, perhaps much gratified if my immediate duty to the Society could have been more identified with those habits and pursuits, or rather, that they be brought to bear more immediately upon that duty than it appears they can, in the line of employment now chalked out for me. (241-242)

Kitto cites his ten years of deafness and implies that his deafness has fostered in him a need to interact with others and to use his God-given literary talents. He suggests that these talents have been bestowed upon him as compensation for his deafness and that it is his duty to use them, something the Church Missionary Society should be cognizant of in their decisions regarding his employment. He suggests to Pearson in this letter that his skills might be of more use in missionary service in Malta. Pearson, however, wrote back to Kitto, telling him that he had committed himself to work for the Society in the printing office and that he was expected to honour that commitment. Much to the disappointment of his friends,

Kitto then took his leave of the Society. Kitto wrote a letter to his friends at the Missionary College about his choice to leave. He repeated many of the arguments he had made in his letter to the Rev. Pearson and very clearly connected his desire for alternate employment with the Society with his deafness, writing "my pen, however humble its pretensions and its powers, did, *in connection with my peculiar circumstances*, afford me prospects of greater usefulness to the cause of Christ in general" (246). Ryland writes in a note in his *Memoirs of John Kitto* that "Kitto, in writing to his friends, and in other communications, frequently remonstrates against the injustice of being judged by 'general rules,' and claims that his should be treated as 'a peculiar case[40]'" (247). He also reached out to his friends outside of the Society. Henry Woollcombe, an attorney in Plymouth, was also a supporter and friend of Kitto. Kitto frequently used his epistolary communication with influential men like Woollcombe to lament his situation in life. In a 13 February 1827 letter to Woollcombe Kitto repeats his frustration with his work in the printing office of the Church Missionary Society and, again, stresses his "peculiar circumstances":

> I think I have observed in this, and other matters, that people judge me, and my views and feelings, too much by *general* rules. Now, mine is a *peculiar* case — sufficiently peculiar, from the temporal circumstances in which I have been placed, and still more, from the deprivation under which I have labored. I should, therefore, be judged by peculiar rules, suited to my case, since no, or very few, general rules can be brought immediately to bear upon it. So now, for instance, after I have been talking of my literary habits and feelings, and my hopes of greatest usefulness in a literary way —

[40] Ryland also writes that "to a certain extent, there is force in his representations; but had not his great calamity shut him out from free intercourse with his fellow-men, it, would not have needed half his sagacity to perceive that peculiar cases are not likely to obtain the attention they deserve, and still less that which they think they deserve, from committees and societies. They require a minuteness of investigation, and a delicacy of sympathy, which in the ordinary course of things can only be expected from an individual here and there, and for which to many the time, and to others the benevolence, are wanting. Moreover, it often happens, as in Kitto's case, that the disqualification is much more prominent and palpable than the counterbalancing abilities or acquirements" (I 248).

> those who hear me, if they judge me by general rules, will cry out, "Oh Kitto you take yourself for a great man, a man of great talent, a genius. It is clear that you want to be an author, and to shine." I reply,
>
> "Sir, you judge me by general rules. Only consider my circumstances. Ten years totally deaf — accustomed, during the greater part of that time, to find everything in my books and pens — comfort, society, consolation, instruction, power, and always in the habit of looking to them, as affording my ultimate and proper means of usefulness and employment. These circumstances form a peculiar case, for which none of your general rules will do." (Ryland I 247-49)

Just as Kitto constructed imaginary letters from "Cecil," he constructed imagined conversations with detractors in which he responds to their criticism. This imaginary conversation with his detractors, the focus of his letter to Woollcombe, is clearly constructed out of the frustration he feels with the fact that the special circumstances of his case are not being considered fully and he is being judged by "general rules." While he clearly believes that the rules that apply to the assistants in the printing office are "general" rules that should not apply to him, Kitto is not clear in this letter about what the rules for his *peculiar* case should be. Noting that "books and pens" have been his means of "comfort, society, consolation, instruction, power," he asserts that he has a right to special treatment based on his circumstance of prolonged deafness and the isolation from society that this deafness has caused. He argues that his deafness has made literary pursuits the only avenue through which he will find useful employment. In the end, although Groves was saddened by Kitto's decision to break ties with the Society, he and Kitto's other supporters worked to have him reinstated with the Society and to have committee members consider his special circumstances when making decisions about his employment.

The committee at the Society agreed to receive Kitto back into its service and to send him out on missionary duty from 1827 to 1833. Kitto repeats the argument rehearsed in his letter writing on this issue in his introduction to *The Lost Senses* in which he justifies his work through the peculiar circumstance of his deafness. By 1832, Kitto had become disenchanted with his missionary work and made plans to return to England. He arrived in England in June of 1833 and, as Ryland writes, he came "back from foreign lands laden with rich stores of observation, which served as the foundation of his future life-work" (II 161). Kitto's friends worked to assist him in his literary endeavors and Lampen and Woollcombe exerted their influence to bring him into contact with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge upon his return. He wrote to Harvey on 19 August 1833: "I have obtained an engagement to write in the Penny Magazine, on very liberal terms, only that I am limited in the space I occupy to two or three columns weekly. Two papers of mine appeared in the Number for the 10th of August, namely, Arabic Proverbs, and the first of a series of papers I am to write about my travels" (169-170). Writing to Woollcombe in a 28 September 1833, Kitto tells him that Charles Knight had suggested that "I had better take some one subject, and bring my collected information to bear upon it, rather than carry the readers on from stage to stage, as in a book of travels. 'I do not say, don't write a book,' Mr. Knight remarked, 'for that is a different matter, but don't write a book for the Penny Magazine.' I am now preparing the papers on this principle" (171-72).

During his time abroad, Kitto remained interested in writing an autobiographical work. Suggesting that he was confident that his letters were

accurate and useful records of his life, he wrote to Burnard on 20 January 1832 that "the circumstances of my intercourse with yourself have been brought before my mind with great force, and I have been deeply interested in laying my hand on a narrative of my early feelings and struggles, written at the time of their existence" (II 85). This narrative was available in Kitto's epistolary communication. These letters frequently contained intimate details of his life as a young, deaf boy struggling in a workhouse and were of great importance to Kitto's planned memoir. Much of the epistolary communication detailing his early life was exchanged with a community of benefactors including Burnard, Woollcombe, Harvey, and Lampen. On 21 July 1832 Kitto wrote Woollcombe a letter from Baghdad in which he thanked him for his correspondence and support:

> I hope, from my recollection, I do feel grateful that you, less than any of my friends, have despaired of me; and have waited so patiently and long, corresponding much with me meanwhile, to see whether the wild and rude plant you assisted to transplant and water, would at last become fruitful [. . .] I must ever feel that my correspondence with you has been, for many years past, the chief, and often the only encouragement I could find to perseverance. If the letters I had written you from the beginning had been preserved, they would have afforded a very curious display of my progress, if any has been made, from that time when you sent me an entire sheet of grammatical and orthographical corrections to a letter I wrote you, to this time, when you do me the honor of saying, that my now unstudied epistles have the power to please and interest you. (II 109).

Kitto's conditional sentence in this passage—"If the letters I had written you from the beginning had been preserved, they would have afforded a very curious display of my progress"—suggests both his awareness of the significance of his letters and his early intentions to produce an autobiography. Although Kitto had, in a 1 June 1826 letter to Robert Lampen, expressed his concern that his letters were being

shared and, by implication, preserved, he, at in this letter, acknowledges that the mapping of his scholarly development found in his letters would be a valuable part of his biography. Despite his coy reflection that "if" his letters had been preserved, his following requests to Burnard, Woollcombe, Harvey, and Lampen for the return of his letters for the purpose of his autobiography indicate that he was, indeed, very much aware that his letters were being preserved and that the progress he felt these letters displayed would be intriguing to readers. Based on epistolary evidence that he made every effort to have his letters read and critiqued and his propensity for producing letters for practice such as the "Cecil" letters, Kitto's reference to his "unstudied epistles" is inauthentic at best.

Reflecting his desire to write of his life and further reiterating how he received encouragement from his close epistolary community, Kitto wrote to Woollombe on 4 March 1834 that "I concur so fully in the sentiments you express concerning Biography and Memoirs, that, since receiving your letter, I have written several little Memoirs for the Penny Magazine" (II 179). This same letter further narrates the way in which the assistance of his influential friends played an essential part in his literary successes:

> I am also, on the same terms, to prepare a book, to be called "The Lost Senses," consisting of remarkable narratives of the acquirements and compensations of the Blind, Deaf, Dumb, etc. Mr. Knight [from the *Penny Magazine*] proposed this, saying, "You are the most proper person to do it." If any cases of this kind occur to your recollection, perhaps you will be so kind as to communicate them to me, or indicate the sources of information, if you have met with such cases in books. I am delighted at all this. I have been singing in my heart all day. I do, indeed, feel very much indebted to your kindness, for opening to me the door to all these satisfactions. (II 180)

Although *The Lost Senses* does focus on blindness and deafness, it does not expand on the importance of the community or on those who opened "the door to all these satisfactions" for Kitto through epistolary communication. It is only when one reads his familiar letters that one understands the full extent this community played in his successes. Several powerful men with whom Kitto developed epistolary relationships were central to his success. Despite his assertions that the world is inhospitable to the deaf and that the deaf cannot interact meaningfully with the hearing, Kitto had a hearing wife and interacted primarily with hearing people.

By 1845, the year in which he published *The Lost Senses*, Kitto was respected in literary circles and his skills as a writer and biblical scholar were readily apparent. Indeed, his religious works are still read and respected today. While Kitto laments the limitations his deafness has imposed upon him in *The Lost Senses*, he also celebrates the successes related to his deafness. Granted, his poverty and deafness must have seemed insurmountable to the young Kitto, but the man who reflected on his early life from a distance in *The Lost Senses* seems reluctant to expand on the place of those who aided him in his attempts to be perceived as one who was able to overcome obstacles society assumed faced him. However, as late as 1847 Kitto was planning an autobiographical work that was intimately tied to the community he had formed through the epistolary genre. In a letter to Tracy, dated 6 January 1847, Kitto expresses gratitude for Tracy's positive influence: "In writing one part of the book [the 'Lost Senses'] I had often a vivid recollection of that sympathetic and good-natured face, which was the first that met my eyes when I once more awoke (for a brief interval, I think) to the consciousness of

existence, and which, for that reason, doubtless, has always been very strongly impressed on my mind" (I 84). Later that year, Kitto wrote to Tracy, telling him "I have received a large bundle of my letters from the executors of the late Mr. Woollcombe — a most curious collection it is, *with documents relating to the steps at first taken on my behalf*, and with numerous letters bearing the dates of Malta, Petersburg, Moscow, Teflis, Teheran, Baghdad, Trebizond, Constantinople, etc., which are now of much value to me, and afford good encouragement to my projected Biography" (emphasis added; 21 May 1847 I iii). Both of these letters indicate Kitto's awareness of the debt he owed to his epistolary connections for their part in his successes and the second letter definitely confirms that Kitto had continued to write an autobiographical work after *The Lost Senses*. He wrote to his Edinburgh publisher in a 21 September 1851 letter that "the reception of 'The Lost Senses,' and the desire for further information which it has awakened, have confirmed me in a purpose I previously entertained, of hereafter preparing or leaving materials for a full account of my early experience, my travels and sojournings, and my literary labours since my return. I have reason to hope there is yet much for me to do, which may render this memorial of an eventful and laborious life, no unbecoming intrusion on the public notice" (Eadie 6-7). However, Kitto's health began to fail early in 1854 and in August of that year he and his family left for Germany with the hope that a change of air and "taking of the waters" would alleviate his seizures, acute pain, and numbness. These efforts were unsuccessful and Kitto died on 25 November 1854 without having written his planned autobiography.

II. Kitto and Poetry: "For a Deaf Man to be a Poet"

In what follows, I examine Kitto's poems "The Garden," "Home," and "Mary" and I read them as integral elements of his disability narrative. My discussion of these poems as components of Kitto's disability narrative emphasizes the importance of his epistolary community to their composition. Although I recognize the risks of reading a poem autobiographically, I am justified in considering these poems as autobiographical as Kitto, in his preamble to his poetry in *The Lost Senses*, explicitly invites his reader to consider his life story when reading his poems. He tells his reader that "the morbid state of feeling" (144) found in his poems had specific causes. I argue that these causes are his hearing impairment and related feelings of desolation and isolation. Kitto expressed early interest in poetry in a 1 June 1823 letter to George Harvey. He wrote to Harvey that his answer to the frequently-asked question about what type of literature he had studied or would wish to study has generally been "history, ethics, biography, and *poetry*" (emphasis added; I 92). However, by the time Kitto wrote to Mr. Ramsay[41] on 29 July 1838, his interest in the study of poetry seemed to have lessened. Although Kitto ostensibly wrote this letter to Ramsay to thank him for information on the poetry of James Nack[42], the letter articulates views on poetry by deaf persons that Kitto will go on to express in *The Lost Senses* seven years later:

> I am much obliged to you for directing my attention to the notice of

[41] The text is unclear about to whom "Mr. Ramsay" refers. Because "Mr. Ramsay" is designated as questioning Kitto about the composition of The History of Palestine (211), this could be the classical scholar, William Ramsay (1806-1865).

[42] James Nack (1809-1879) was an American poet who had lost his hearing at the age of nine.

> James Nack, which I had not previously seen. His history so far as stated, seems, in some respects, to have a singular coincidence with my own; it therefore interests me greatly, and there are, perhaps, not many who can understand and feel its details so distinctly as I do. The matter that interests me most is, that he should have acquired distinction as a poet, as this solves a point which once occasioned me much thought and some disturbance. I was at all times unwilling to think that a deaf man, as such, was necessarily excluded from any path in which other men may walk [. . .] But poetry was a stumbling block in the way of my general principle. It seemed to me that it was as little possible for a deaf man to be a poet, as for a blind man to be a painter. Not, indeed, that he might not, in all essential truth, be a poet, but that he could not attain the art of expressing the poetry within him — the art of versification, with all its requirements of accent, quantity, and rhythm and rhyme; and all because he could not have any assured confidence that he assigned the right powers to the words he employed; in short, because, in the most literal sense possible, he *has no ear* for poetry or music. But besides the principle stated above, which made this unpleasant, there was another connected with it, or resulting from it, which made it more so; this was, that there was no difficulty in the world which the perseverance of a deaf man might not overcome. Therefore, but with far less confidence than in any other case, I turned to try this door also, and persisted till I saw it open before me, or at least thought so, which was the same thing for me. Indeed, I was surprised at the little difficulty I found, or seemed to find, in this. But, then, I turned back from this also, because I was less assured that what I wrote was poetry than that it was verse; and it was verse, you will observe, not poetry, which had been in question. And even if I had the fullest conviction that my compositions were not only verse but poetry, I should still, on a principle, have withheld my feet from the walk. Inducement, indeed, was not wanting, nor temptation either [. . .] The short of it is, however, that though I should not care much to see another added to the list of uneducated poets, yet one, in the peculiar circumstances of being deaf, is just the phenomenon I wanted, and which, indeed, I am delighted to find. (Ryland II 202-03)

During the fifteen year gap between his 1823 letter to Harvey and his 1838 letter to Ramsay, Kitto claims to have been trying to work through the "stumbling block" of poetry in his conviction that all paths are open to deaf persons. Although he had been of the belief that "it was as little possible for a deaf man to be a poet, as for a blind man to be a painter," seven years before he published *The Lost Senses*, he

wrote to Ramsay that he was delighted to find a successful, deaf poet: "The short of it is, however, that though I should not care much to see another added to the list of uneducated poets, yet one, in the peculiar circumstances of being deaf, is just the phenomenon I wanted, and which, indeed, I am delighted to find." While this letter suggests that the work of Nack altered his opinion on the impossibility of a deaf poet, by the time Kitto published *The Lost Senses* in 1845, several of the concerns found in this letter are repeated, in very similar language, in the chapter "Miscellaneous" in *The Lost Senses*:

> In the first place [the deaf man] wants words; and then he has in a painfully literal sense, no ear for numbers. For want of oral guidance in hearing others speak, it is next to impossible that he should have that knowledge of quantity and rhyme which is essential to harmonious verse. He would also be unsafe in his rhymes: for rhyme lies in assonances which can often only be determined by the ear; and verse will require words which one who became deaf in early life will never have heard. (Kitto *Lost* 141)

Like Kitto, Nack became deaf in early childhood and Kitto's statement in *The Lost Senses* about those who have become deaf in early childhood like himself—"I am utterly ignorant of any verse — for I will not venture to call my own such — written by any persons under such circumstances" (141)—seems disingenuous in light of the fact that he was familiar with Nack's poetry when he wrote *The Lost Senses*. Kitto's statements disparaging poetry by deaf authors reflect, as Esmail usefully points out in *Reading Victorian Deafness*, "the complicated cultural climate that [Kitto], and other deaf poets, strove to navigate during the nineteenth century" (22). Kitto's seemingly incompatible set of assertions made between the time of his letter about Nack to Ramsay and his publication of *The Lost Senses* also reflects Kitto's very conscious development of himself as an overcomer.

Expanding on his comment—"it was as little possible for a deaf man to be a poet, as for a blind man to be a painter"—from his 1838 letter to Ramsay, Kitto spends much of *The Lost Senses* comparing the state of deafness to that of blindness. He argues that

> The question, Whether the blind or the deaf are in the most afflicted condition? arises almost spontaneously to any one who gives the least attention to the subject. To this question almost every one will feel himself inclined to answer, without hesitation, that the blind are under far more unhappy circumstances than the deaf, and suffer a far greater amount of positive privation. The more a person reflects, however, the more this first impression is weakened, and every line of consideration he may take, will eventually lead him to the conclusion that the blind are not so badly off as the deaf. (178)

This comparison of the respective condition of blind persons and deaf persons leads Kitto to discuss poetry and the ability of the blind to write poetry as compared to the ability of the deaf to write poetry, with the blind being in the more advantageous position. He writes:

> There is one point of difference between the deaf and the blind which does not appear to have received all the attention it deserves, although it seems better calculated than any other single circumstance which could be produced to illustrate the disparity of their intellectual condition. This is the prominence of poetical tendencies in the blind, and the utter absence of such tendencies in the deaf. The cause of this remarkable difference is not very recondite. The blind have a perfect mastery of words, and their sole reliance upon the ear, as the vehicle of pleasurable sensations, renders them exquisitely alive to harmonious sounds and numbers. Add to this, that in the absence of the resources in reading, etc., which hearing allows, it must be a most interesting occupation and solace to the blind, to be able to occupy themselves in poetical compositions, in marshalling their ideas, and in constructing and polishing their verse. (140-41)

This comparison between life with blindness and life with deafness includes Kitto's assertion that there is a disparity between the intellectual condition of each group

and that poetry, specifically the reputation for "poetical tendencies in the blind, and the utter absence of such tendencies in the deaf," best exemplifies this disparity. The features of blindness—the complete reliance on sound and the lack of reliance on reading printed text—fosters in the blind superior poetic tendencies; because his lack of "all the peculiar resources of the blind man," the deaf man is distinctly unqualified as a poet. However, despite his list of reasons why it is "next to impossible" for the deaf man to write good quality poetry, Kitto goes on to reproduce seven of his own poems. The inclusion of his own poetry following his discussion of the inability of the deaf to write poetry seems, at first, difficult to reconcile. However, it is useful when discussing Kitto's treatment of poetry in the book to be cognizant of Holmes' observation that when one considers *The Lost Senses* to be "an autobiography of Kitto's disability, and not the general account it claims to be" these "incongruities seem purposeful rather than absurd" (160). Throughout *The Lost Senses*, Kitto is anxious that deafness be seen as a truly catastrophic condition but also as one that he has been able to overcome. He establishes the impossibility of a deaf person writing quality poetry only to go on to demonstrate to his reader that through his own effort he has been able to prevail against the limitations of deafness and produce commendable poetry.

Kitto writes in *The Lost Senses* that as a young man his literary interests often drew him to the composition of poems, but that he realized that he was unable to judge the true merits of his work and ceased writing poetry. Although he goes on to include examples of his own poetry in *The Lost Senses*, he does so with the qualification that he has introduced them with the purpose of proving his point

about the inability of the deaf to write noteworthy poetry and encourages his reader to find fault with his work:

> as there is no other way of setting the question which has here been mooted, I will venture to introduce a few specimens. If the reader can discover the formal errors— the bad rhymes— the halting, hopping, stumping feet — which I am unable to detect, then my proposition is demonstrated; but if he can make no such discoveries, it must then be admitted with some qualification. (144)

I concur with Holmes and her observation that Kitto's "pessimistic remarks on deafness in general [. . .] are in service to the story of [his] affliction" (163). His display of false modesty regarding his poetry serves the same purpose as his generally negative remarks about deafness. As he will do in his poetry, Kitto uses allusions to physical disability— "halting, hopping, stumping feet"—to emphasize his triumph over the adversity of disability. Kitto's preamble to his poetry in *The Lost Senses* responds to and even advances the assumption circulating in the nineteenth century that a deaf person did not have the ability to write poetry. At the same time as he asserts that someone in his circumstances cannot be expected to be able to write poetry, he justifies his own poetry through the assertion that, if someone like himself is "subjected to exciting and impressive circumstances, the chances are ten to one that the feelings thus produced will strive to vent themselves in verse" (Kitto *Lost* 142). I find a significant connection between Kitto's deafness and his gravitation toward poetry. The poems examined below—"The Garden," "Home," and "Mary"—suggest Kitto's life-long desire for a stable, happy home and, like his familiar letters, these poems reflect on the consequences of acquired deafness.

As mentioned above, Kitto had a propensity for periods of depression and

he explicitly connected these episodes with his deafness in several of his familiar letters. He wrote to his friend Robert Lampen on 26 July 1827, telling him that the "feeling of desolateness is one to which those that are deaf are particularly liable" (Ryland I 264). He continues this association of feelings of bleakness with deafness in *The Lost Senses* and further connects his composition of poetry to emotional periods in his life:

> There is a time of life when the emotional character is more strongly developed than at any other; and if one is then subjected to *exciting and impressive circumstances*, the chances are ten to one that the feelings thus produced will strive to vent themselves in verse; the ordinary vehicles of human thought seeming then too poor and level for the due expression of intense emotions. *It was at such a time that my attempts were made*. (emphasis added; Kitto *Lost* 142)

Distinguishing between poetry and verse, constructing verse as the unsophisticated venting of emotions as a result of "exciting and impressive circumstances," this in opposition to poetry's finely crafted and complex use of language, Kitto supports his claim that deaf persons cannot write poetry and disparages his own efforts by linking them with the circumstances in which verse is written. Eadie's comment that Kitto "told his story so often and to so many persons" (7) suggests that Kitto could have safely expected his reader to be aware of the biographical aspects of his life and the "exciting and impressive circumstances" that would have facilitated his reliance on literary expressions of emotion. He seems to intend that his reader understand that it was at crucial points in his life that he gravitated toward the emotional outlet of verse and, more specifically, that these crucial points in his life can be closely linked to his deafness. While Kitto goes on to claim to be at a more settled or mature point in his life, the poems he has submitted for consideration in

The Lost Senses are, he writes, the products of these earlier circumstances. Although he rejects any speculation that the "morbid state of feeling" exhibited in these poems is significant for a judgment of his current state of emotions, he maintains that "there were causes" and that many of the poems' sentiments were "suited to the time of life at which they were written" (Kitto *Lost* 144). I illustrate below that the "the time of life" during which many of his poems were written were points at which his deafness became a significant issue for or impediment to complete happiness in his life.

Despite his assertion in the preamble to his poetry that for "want of hearing others speak, it is next to impossible that [a deaf person] should have that knowledge of quantity and rhyme which is essential to harmonious verse" (141), Kitto goes on to rely heavily on sound and rhyme in his Petrarchan sonnet, "The Garden." Although she does not discuss Kitto's "The Garden" specifically, Esmail points out in *Reading Victorian Deafness* that Kitto believed that his "authority as a poet depended on his use of the formal poetic features traditionally tied to sound" (27). To be sure, Kitto's skillful use of the strict structure of the Petrarchan sonnet grants him poetic authority, but his use of the form also provides him with the opportunity to examine the conflicting emotional states of life with a disability in this respected poetic form. Indicating that he is well-versed in poetic forms, Kitto's "The Garden" suggests the work of the Romantic poets that laments the loss of childhood. However, while "The Garden" is a poem of loss, it is not a lamentation for the loss of childhood but a highly personal expression of grief over the hardships of a life that seem to allow for no consolation:

> My hope's enclosed garden, — where there grew
> The trees that I had planted, and sweet flow'rs
> Enwreathed in shady arbors and fair bow'rs
> Of every form and fragrance — every hue
> That the untroubled spirit loves to view; —
> Where I have spent all my serenest hours,
> Mocking the scowl of pride, and the fierce lowers,
> Which the ungentle world upon me threw; —
> Is now a cheerless desert — broken — wild —
> Whereon no eye reposeth with delight —
> Of all its garniture and sweetness spoiled
> By the keen winds and the untimely blight,
> Which have not left my lilies undefiled,
> Or spared my roses, beautiful and bright. (1-14)

The octave begins with a description of a metaphorical garden that the speaker considers his protection against the hardships "[w]hich the ungentle world upon me threw" (8). The initial "lowers" to which the octave refers can be identified as Kitto's accident and his subsequent deafness. The "enclosed garden" (1) is not the speaker's compensation for these hardships but his place of sanctuary despite his hardships, a space that allows him to remain at a distance from the world's adversities. It is a refuge of his own creation—he has chosen and planted the trees and flower—catering to what one who desires to be "untroubled" by the world would need. However, rather than spending his "serenest hours" reveling in the beauty of his garden, the speaker, in his belief that his seclusion will protect him from the "ungentle world," spends these hours mocking the world and its "scowl of pride." The final two lines of the octave—"Mocking the scowl of pride, and the fierce lowers, / Which the ungentle world upon me threw" (7-8)—hint that the *speaker's* pride in and belief that the fortification of his creation can completely protect him will be thwarted by the vagaries of life he hoped to keep out of his garden. While the Romantics associated the child with nature and lamented the loss of an innate connection between the child and nature with the coming of adulthood, Kitto's "The Garden" mourns the loss of

the protection and refuge of what he metaphorically refers to as his "garden" from the hardships that life has thrown at him thus far. I contend that the poem's sestet is not bemoaning the assault of adulthood, but the "untimely blight" (12) of Kitto's literal relocation from his home of protection to the workhouse.

This relocation is the blight that has laid waste to the "enclosed garden" he had created to protect himself after his accident. The sestet refers specifically to Kitto's return to his home after his relocation. He finds that his little room in his home on Nut Street, "[w]hereon no eye reposeth with delight — / Of all its garniture and sweetness spoiled" (10-11), has been laid to waste. Supporting this line of reasoning is Kitto's 14 April 1826 letter to his friend Henry Woollcombe in which he reflects on his visit to his old home. Kitto writes to Woollcombe that he was reminded of his garret on Nut Street when he "happened to look to the window" in his room at the Missionary College and saw the "beautifully blossomed fruit trees in a neighboring garden" as he wrote (Ryland I 218). The garden he gazes upon triggers memories of his garret in his childhood home, the only place of solace he was able to find after his accident. He contrasts this with his more recent memories of the state of disrepair in which he found the garret when he visited it after years of living in the workhouse:

> I observed with much regret that this little place, so endeared to me as the scene of the highest pleasures and enjoyments which the thorny path I walked on allowed me to have, had sadly gone to ruin since it ceased to be under my care and appropriated to my use. The holes of the window, which gave such free admission to the healthful breezes of heaven, were not half so nicely managed as when I had the management of it. The window was a small immoveable lattice tolerably round, and beside it there was a glassless hole in the lath and plaster about two feet long and one broad. Now, in fine weather, this was a very comfortable thing, and I used to be delighted when I could leave the orifice open on a fine

> evening; and as I sat down at the foot of my bed with the little crazy round table before me, could feel the refreshing breeze playing quietly about my little cell, and breathing on my face [. . .] The engravings I had collected, the poor drawings I had painted, the tables I had compiled, all are taken down from the walls they decorated, or are defaced and torn [. . .] But now things are different. (218-219)

Kitto writes to Woollcombe that his garret was the "little place, so endeared to me as the scene of the highest pleasures and enjoyments which the thorny path I walked on allowed me to have" (Ryland I 218). The sestet of "The Garden" reflects the spoiling of the paradise of his garret by his removal to the workhouse. Kitto's inability to "tend" his garret has meant that it "had sadly gone to ruin since it ceased to be under [his] care and appropriated to [his] use." His story of the desolation of his garret of solitude in his home on Nut Street echoes the garden and its devastation in his poem. The storm that he had worked to exclude from his garret is now no longer barred. Just as the garden in the poem has been so battered by storm and "all its garniture and sweetness spoiled / By the keen winds and the untimely blight" (*Lost* "The Garden" 11-14), Kitto laments to Woollcombe that without his careful management of the garret, the "tempest is not excluded as before" and the "engravings I had collected, the poor drawings I had painted, the tables I had compiled, all are taken down from the walls they decorated, or are defaced and torn" (Ryland I 219).

Kitto frequently wrote to those in his epistolary community that he did not expect to live very long. He wrote to George Harvey in a 7 August 1823 about his period of employment at the public library that "My views extend yet further, for I hope that when the above period shall have elapsed (if I spend it in the manner

proposed, and if I live till then, which last is rather doubtful), an opportunity will occur of visiting, in company with some person who would not think me an incumbrance, the Continent and most interesting parts of the Island" (102). The next year, he writes to Lampen in a 4 December 1824 letter on the occasion of his birthday: "'Where am I likely to be on my next birthday?' is a question, which, on such an occasion, seldom fails to occur to the mind [. . .] To the question of whether I may live or die, I never felt more indifferent than at this moment" (Ryland 198-199). Also, in a 9 May 1831 letter to his mother from Baghdad Kitto declared "So far as I consider myself a dying man [. . .] As to me, it seems of little consequence to any whether I die or live" (53). However, even during these melancholy periods, he attempted to put his faith in God's plan that he would find his peace in his home in Heaven. As part of his disability narrative, Kitto's poem "Home" explores the grief of his life and his seemingly futile search for a home, but also the faith in God that assuages his sorrow. This poem illustrates how heavily invested he was in the belief that what he terms his "misery" would be rewarded in Heaven:

> If earth be not my home why then should I
> The blessedness and joy of home seek there
> There make my rest, and build me dwellings fair
> Which I may not inhabit? Why, oh! Why
> On most vain things and vainer hopes rely?
> Why still again the pleasing structures rear
> Which have so oft dissolved into thin air,
> And left me shelterless to misery?
> Oh, for home indeed!— a place to hide
> Till the fierce biting winds are all blown by;
> And not alone to flee to— but abide,
> Free from these cares, this agony, this toil.
> Or where hope still may check the rising sigh,
> And comfort me in pain and wearisome turmoil. (Kitto *Lost* 1-14)

"Home" explores the concept of home in both the literal sense of a physical

structure and in the sense of a place of belonging; it clearly reflects on the metaphysical concept that the true "home" for humanity is not on the earthly plane but in heaven. The first eight lines of this sonnet feature the speaker questioning the soundness of placing emphasis on the home that one makes on earth. In reality, the speaker asserts, earth is not our home and any structure/home on earth is, by nature, ephemeral. Because "home" is supposed to be a place of "blessedness and joy," it seems, to the speaker, counterintuitive to fixate on constructing buildings that are transient and dissolve "into thin air," leaving one "shelterless to misery." The poem's sestet answers the octave's questions of why humanity fixates on creating home on earth when such a home is necessarily temporary. For the speaker, home, for all its fleetingness, is a place of sanctuary and security, "a place to hide / Till the fierce biting winds are all blown by; / And not alone to flee to" (9- 11).

"Home" is a part of Kitto's disability narrative in that it is expressive of the unhappiness Kitto had experienced in his life. Kitto was a sickly infant and not expected to live. Because he was sickly in infancy, he was unable to walk and had to be carried until well after the time when other children begin to walk. Ryland writes that as a result of his poor health, Kitto was drawn to sedentary activities and he expressed a greater fondness for home than others his age; he preferred to stay at home rather than to participate in the outdoor amusements of other children (I 7). Kitto's deafness and his subsequent relocation to a workhouse exacerbated his desire for a secure home. Kitto focuses on the benefits he felt were inherent in a home in the essay "Home" in his 1825 *Essays and Letters*. He asserts in this essay that "[t]o home we are attached by the ties of kindred, sociality, and love; and

these ties are generally so strong that when we have quitted our home, it becomes the point, the attractive magnet, on which centre our hopes, our fears, and our wishes" (79). Throughout his life, Kitto's familiar letters focus on the idea of "home," either an earthly home or a home in heaven. When he travelled overseas as a missionary, Kitto had a great interest in how people of other cultures viewed home. In an 1829 journal entry, written while he was travelling in Russia, Kitto wrote: "I never saw such structures, unless so far as they resemble the pig-sties attached to English cottages. Yet men can live in those places, and find in them the comforts attached to their own idea of home" (Ryland I 377). His travels abroad, also, raised thoughts on what home meant to him and where he might make one. In a 3 August 1827 letter to Robert Lampen from Malta, Kitto asserts that Malta is now his home:

> I desire to be very thankful to God that He has cast my lot in a place where the little missionary body is thus banded together by the bonds of love and Christian friendship, and where so little of European coldness is known among those who call themselves by the same name, and are engaged in the same service. This is my *home* now; I wish to feel it so; I wish to make it so, as far as a missionary may be allowed to look on any place on this side the other world, as his home. (Ryland I 267)

Kitto states that Malta is his home but adds that he *wishes* "to feel it so" and "make it so," thus implying that he has not completely accepted Malta as his home. He wants to call Malta home but qualifies this wish by suggesting that it is difficult for a missionary, someone who, by virtue of his or her job, has relocated to a country that is not his own. He wonders if a missionary can be "allowed," or permitted, to call any place on the other "side the other world" that he has visited in the course of his work, his home. Although he feels a spiritual connection to the missionaries who

work beside him, Kitto seems to be resigned to the temporary nature of home that he has experienced throughout his life. Several months later, still in Malta, he expresses the following news about Malta as a home to Henry Woollcombe in a 1 November 1827 letter. Concerned about his loss of home and community, he writes:

> To think, to feel, that the island was before me, for which I had left my own better land; in whose bosom my bones would probably have their final earthly rest; in which I had no friend to give me the welcome of affection and regard; in which I knew not whether I should find living men and women, with living hearts in their bosoms, or with that mere negative kindness, that civility and politeness which is as equally removed from love on the one hand, as it is from positive hate on the other; or, again, to feel the home of my future life lay before me, the chosen scene of my future labours. (272)

But his feelings on where he calls home have again changed by 11 February 1828, as expressed in a letter to Woollcombe:

> As a man and an Englishman, I should say — "Nothing like home after all." But as a missionary and a Christian, I feel that the place in which I am is the best place for me, for I am now really aware of no other, in which I could hope to be equally useful. I therefore love Malta, but I have not felt that any feeling of this kind renders it necessary that I should love my own country less than I have ever done, and, I hope, ever shall do. (288)

Although he is reluctant to declare his affection for any country other than England, he is clearly resigned to life in Malta. Much of this resignation comes from his sense of duty of fulfilling a responsibility that, ultimately, relates to his desire for a home and, indeed, a final home with God. His acceptance of his life in Malta is also related to a desire to be useful in his life. Malta is the place where he sees himself fulfilling his desire to be useful. Importantly for my discussion of Kitto's poetry as part of his disability narrative, Kitto's fascination with the concept of home extended to the institution of marriage, an institution he viewed as a refuge and a

haven. He writes in his essay "Home" that

> Marriage is in general the principal component part of a happy home. There are, notwithstanding, beings who have such a home, although they prefer to live in "single blessedness": yet I believe, that generally speaking, the happiness of a well married man is much superior to that of a bachelor, even if the latter has parents, sisters, friends, and other social ties which may in some degree be supposed to compensate for the want of a wife and children. (*Essays and Letters* 85)

At the age of twenty-one, when he published *Essays and Letters*, Kitto held beliefs about marriage that would last his entire life. He additionally related the importance of marriage to his deafness. Ryland writes in *Memoirs of John Kitto* that Kitto regarded his deafness "as peculiarly requiring such a union. The solitude in which his deafness placed him, fostered, if it did not originate, a morbid melancholy, which he believed the social converse of wedded life, was best fitted to alleviate and dispel" (I 228). Although Kitto does not discuss marriage in *The Lost Senses*, a reference to his own anticipated marriage appears in a 17 October 1826 letter to George Harvey. He wrote to Harvey that "[w]hen this delay [in his departure to Malta] was communicated to me, it was mentioned that, in consequence, all preparation must be suspended for the present, excepting that my banns were to continue to be published, although the marriage itself was not to take place till the time of my embarkation was ascertained" (Ryland I 225). Kitto's reference to his marriage in this letter is the first mention of marriage plans in any of his surviving correspondence. Ryland attempts to make sense of the lack of details about Kitto's engagement in his letters by informing the reader that the

> reference in the preceding letter to Kitto's intended marriage, requires a few words of explanation. In his letters for some months previous, allusions to the subject occur, which *would not have been*

> *left out had the affair terminated happily*. To pass it over altogether would not be consistent with biographical fidelity; to enter into details might inflict pain on the blameless living, and would only serve to gratify a prurient curiosity. (emphasis added; 227-28)

Although Ryland claims to be concerned with "biographical fidelity," he makes it clear that he has edited Kitto's letters and has made the decision to omit details of Kitto's failed engagement because it did not end well for Kitto. Ryland's paternalistic decision to omit these details based on what he seems to consider his duty to protect the feelings of "the blameless living" and to avoid satisfying "prurient curiosity" suggests an attitude of superiority based on his role as Kitto's biographer, and, perhaps, even on his role as the editor of *Life and Correspondence of John Foster* (1846), on his work on Kitto's *A Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*, and on his contributions on Kitto, Andrew Fuller, and Robert Robinson, three prominent biblical scholars, to *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Ryland's exclusion of significant material for Kitto's biography is also reminiscent of Kitto's self-editing for *The Lost Senses*. Kitto did not mention his failed attempt at marriage and it seems as though Ryland is anxious to avoid the topic as well, possibly in an attempt to protect the Church Missionary Society which, as Eadie writes, had worked to separate Kitto from his intended bride by keeping his letters to her from her (151).

Despite his apparent reluctance to discuss Kitto's failed plans for marriage, Ryland does include several letters from Kitto after he has found out about what he perceived as his fiancée's infidelity. Soon after his arrival in Malta, Kitto received the news that his intended fiancée had married another man, news which put Kitto in a protracted period of depression. He did not discuss this period in his life in his published autobiographical work and, as a result, his familiar letters and poetry are

useful for understanding his frame of mind at that point. Kitto's familiar letters from that time suggest that the news of his fiancée's marriage to another man and the solitude of his deafness had resulted in extreme melancholy; he seems convinced that his deafness meant that he would, thereafter, be excluded from happiness. In a 7 March 1828 letter he wrote of the news to his mother:

> I write this letter to you in very great sorrow of heart. I received news yesterday from the Society, which has given me a blow that it will be very long before I shall recover. It was this — that — — is married to some person in England! Oh, my mother, you cannot imagine what this has made me suffer! I had expected that she would soon come to me, and hoped that we should be very comfortable and happy together in this place — when all my hopes and happiness in this life were at once destroyed by this intelligence. (I 294)

He expresses to his mother a longing for what he considers to be his true home in Heaven: "I do not care to live at all. I have had nothing to make me love life. My life has been quite full of disappointment and sorrow, and I shall be very, very glad, when my labours are ended, and I am permitted to go to my home in Heaven" (I 294). Being deprived of the community he imagined creating with a wife, he turned to his epistolary community and wrote several letters about his misery. A particularly pertinent letter for my dissertation is a melancholy and lengthy letter he wrote to Lampen on 10 June 1828:

> My feelings, though still painful, are more sober and quiet than they formerly were. I need not tell you that I am low-spirited and sad, sometimes even to an extent calculated to make me dread the permanent recurrence of that morbid feeling, of which I have so much cause to be afraid from former experience. I feel that I have cause for enduring regrets. I feel that I have not now that within me and about me, which, whatever it was, was most pleasant to me whilst I had it. I feel that I am become careless and indifferent about many things which were once important, and which once interested me greatly, and I often find myself engaged in the

> repetition of two lines, which I must have picked up somewhere at a former period —
>
> > "No more, no more, oh, never more on me The freshness of the heart shall fall like dew."
>
> This expresses in part what I feel for the present, and fear for the future. (I 300)

Kitto turned to his epistolary community to express his grief over his failed marriage plans as well as his fears for the rest of his life. This letter to Lampen also indicates that he, and presumably several of Kitto's other correspondents, were aware of Kitto's propensity for "morbid feelings" and that Kitto relied on this community during these periods of melancholy. Just as he wrote in his preamble to his poetry in *The Lost Senses* that "exciting and impressive circumstances" (142) in life often initiate a reliance on poetic expressions of emotion, Kitto uses a quotation from Lord Byron's *Don Juan* to end this letter to Lampen in order to express his sorrow. In his preamble to his section on poetry in *The Lost Senses*, Kitto connects the poem "Mary" to emotional circumstances. He writes that "Mary" is "perhaps [because of its morbid state of feeling] liable to some objection; but it is introduced because it is the only piece in which I can discover allusions to my deafness, which render it suitable to the object of the present volume" (Kitto *Lost* 144). Although Esmail writes in *Reading Victorian Deafness* that the poem "Mary" describes "the communicative capabilities of his wife's eyes [that] compensate for his deafness" (27), I maintain that the "Mary" in the poem is, in fact, not Kitto's wife, Annabella Kitto née Fenwick, but the woman, Hannah

A.[43], who had disappointed his plans for marriage[44] in 1828. Kitto's use of poetry to express his grief over his marriage expressed in his letter to Lampen connects the poem "Mary" to his biography and in the discussion of the poem that follows, I suggest that Kitto's passionate beliefs about the benefits of marriage, his faith in the ability of marriage to lessen the solitude of deafness, and the failure of his planned marriage are connected to both the elation and the melancholy expressed in the poem.

The poem begins by establishing the fact that Kitto prizes glances from Mary's eyes beyond the riches of the world because with them, she does not need the spoken word to communicate with him. Suggesting the idea of compensation for disability, Kitto spends much of the poem praising the "deep eloquence" (Kitto *Lost* 151) of Mary's eyes that surpasses the spoken word in clarity and connects the two in ways that are more spiritual than physical. While in the larger text of *The Lost Senses* Kitto seemed to have agreed with Sébastien Guillié who wrote in *Essai sur l'instruction des aveugles, ou, exposé analytique des procédés employés pour les instruire* that "the art of physiognomy is a detriment to the deaf person" (qtd. Kitto

[43] Evidence that Kitto changed the name of the woman in the poem "Mary" comes from a note in Ryland's Memoirs. Ryland writes that "[t]he verses in 'The Lost Senses,' entitled 'Mary' (P. 176), were addressed to [the woman he had intended to marry in 1828], though that name was substituted to avoid the pain of repeating the real one" (I 230). While Ryland does not give the name of Kitto's first love, he does provide a description of the last hours of Kitto's life in Memoirs through the words of Kitto's wife. While her name is not explicitly used, she wrote of Kitto's attack of paralysis in her own words and gives some indication of her first name: "on attempting to rise, he exclaimed, "Oh Bell, I am numb all down my side'" (282) and Eadie clarifies the name "Bell" in his Life of John Kitto by referencing the "marriage of John Kitto and Annabella Fenwick" (289).

[44] Eadie writes that in their 20 March 1827 minutes, the Church Missionary Society "gave a conditional sanction to [Kitto's] marriage, 'on the understanding, that, at a future period, should he conduct himself to Mr Jowett's satisfaction, H. A., to whom he is under matrimonial engagements, may join him at that place, with a view to their marriage'" (Eadie 146) and that in Kitto's Islington Journal we find the record "'Went to Hannah before coming to the Institution'" (Eadie 150). I could not, however, locate the last name of Kitto's first love.

179), Esmail points out in “The Power of Deaf Poetry” that deaf poets such as Kitto considered the ability to read faces as “a form of compensation” and accepted that “deaf people are better physiognomists than hearing people” (357). Esmail adds in *Reading Victorian Deafness* that the poem “Mary” describes “how both [Kitto's] visual acumen and the communicative capabilities of his wife’s [*sic*] eyes compensate for his deafness” (27). Kitto uses cultural assumptions about the ability of the deaf to read faces and relies on this belief to convincingly celebrate his ability to read Mary’s face in the poem. He further relies on societal assumptions of the misery inherent in the deaf condition to celebrate the communicativeness of Mary’s eyes and the happiness in his life: “a clear glowing light hath shin'd / Into the caverns of my mind, / To kindle thoughts which lay there cold. / And quicken hopes which died of old” (4-7). Without the light of Mary’s eyes, his mind was a cold, dark cavern into which the light of knowledge could not reach. He characterizes the thoughts and hopes he had before he saw her as cold and dead but needing only the spark, “sparkle,” of knowledge brought to him through Mary’s eyes to awaken them. He uses the contemporary scientific association between deafness and lack of knowledge and understanding (Kitto *Lost* 179, 184) to describe how his deafness left him unable to access thoughts and knowledge which had turned cold and inert. While these lines celebrate the clarity of meaning Kitto finds in Mary’s glances, they also lament the experience of isolation Kitto found in deafness. He also uses the idea of compensation for disability with a metaphor in this stanza in which he describes a fortunate blindness, a blindness in which his soul is blind to all visions other than that of Mary: “My soul to other vision blind” (8). Kitto revisits this concept of a

double disability in the last stanza of the poem to depict a twofold deprivation with his loss of Mary.

Esmail, in the chapter "'Perchance My *Hand* May Touch the Lyre'" from *Reading Victorian Deafness*, coins the term "sounds-unheard poetry" (43). She defines this term as poetry written by many nineteenth-century deaf poets in which a poem's speaker "describes all the sounds that he or she can no longer hear or has never heard" (38). Esmail discusses Kitto's use of "voice" in "Mary" and writes that "Kitto subsumes the various sounds of nature and music in his poem 'Mary,' including the ubiquitous nightingale, into the fraught concept of voice [in poetry]." Esmail asserts that Kitto "uses writing to describe sounds he can no longer hear and then to name these sounds as 'voice'" (42). The poem's third stanza discusses the sounds he is unable to hear in his chosen profession as minister:

> Deaf to the melody of song.
> And all music to me mute, —
> From the organ's rolling peal
> To the gay burst or mournful wail
> Of harp, and psaltery, and lute (33–37).

Coupled with the stanza's earlier assertion that "[i]n silence I have walked full long / Adown life's narrow thorny vale" (Kitto *Lost* 31-32), this stanza on the sounds he cannot hear fosters in the reader the impression that Kitto's life is full of grief because of his lack of ability to hear these sounds. However, Kitto's reference to the sounds essential to his chosen vocation also recalls a different consideration of his lack of ability to hear these sounds. In a 25 September 1823 letter to Henry Woollcombe, Kitto implies that he is able to find some compensation for his

"deprivation." He writes to Woollcombe: "[y]ou are right in supposing that I should feel pain in being unable to hear what is said at the [Athenaeum] lectures; yet the pain is counterbalanced by the pleasure. I felt this pain at church, yet I continue to go there at the time I have appointed" (Ryland I 129). Although he is deaf to "the melody of song" (Kitto *Lost* 34) and is unable to hear the voices at the lectures at the Athenaeum or the sermons at church, the "pain" of this loss is "counterbalanced" for him by pleasure. Kitto does not describe what he means when he refers to "pleasure" in this letter, but much of this pleasure could have come from his memories of the sound of music or voices through the contemplation of God.

Kitto frequently took refuge from his everyday life in the natural world and wrote in his journal on 5 December 1820 of the comfort and pleasure he found there: "with a book in my hand, I have sat for hours under a tree or hedge reading: sometimes, too, sheltered from observation by a rock, I have sat in contemplation by the river side. At such times I have felt such a melancholy pleasure as I have not known since I have been in the hospital" (Ryland I 44). The fourth stanza of "Mary" suggests that Kitto found God in nature and could mentally conjure the voices he once heard through this connection. He reflects on the sounds he once heard in nature in these stanzas and grants nature the characteristics of "the human voice divine" he is now unable to hear:

> Heaven's dread answer I have heard In
> thunder to old ocean's roar,
> As while the elements conferr'd,
> Their voices shook the rock-bound shore: —
> I've listened to the murmuring streams,
> Which lulled my spirit into dreams (39-44).

He continues to write of the sounds-unheard in nature in the poem's fifth

stanza:

> And so beneath o'ershadowing trees,
> I've heard leaves rustle in the breeze.
> Which brought me the melodious tale
> Of the all vocal nightingale.
> Or else, the cushat's coo of pride
> Over his own new mated bride" (49-54).

However, his disability narrative continues as the comfort he feels from his contemplation of the divine in nature is crushed by his recognition of the reality of his life. He writes of this realization in the final lines of the fourth and fifth stanzas. Even as his spirit is lulled into dreams by the myriad voices of nature, this pleasure is broken by the realization that the voices are merely "[b]right hopes, and fair imaginings, / But false as all that fancy flings / Upon a page where pain and strife / Make up the history of life" (45-48). He pleads with nature to speak to him again: "Yes: I have heard thee — Nature, thee, / In all thy thousand voices speak, / Which *now* are silent all to me: — / Ah, when shall this long silence break, — / And all thy tides of gladness roll / In their full torrent on my soul?" (49-60). With Mary in his life, however, the unhappiness of his life with deafness is lessened: "So Mary, gilded by thine eye / Griefs melt away, and fall in streams / Of hope into the land of dreams. / And life's inanities pass by / Unheeded, without tear or sigh" (66-70). He ends the first section of the poem with his assertion that Mary's glances are compensation for his deafness and that her eyes can convey more than spoken language. For him, they communicate "[v]olumes of meaning to my soul / How long — how vainly all — might words / Express what one quick glance affords" (92-94). There is a sense that Mary has changed the tenor of his narrative.

The final two stanzas of "Mary" are separated from the larger body of the poem by a series of asterisks. A shift in the tone of the poem can be seen in these final two stanzas, signifying to the reader a development in the poem's narrative. These last two stanzas also present the autobiographical elements to which Kitto alludes in his preamble to his poems and add to his disability narrative. Although Kitto writes of his deafness and his sorrow over what he has lost because of it, he finds joy in the presence of Mary in his life. He writes several times throughout the poem in the simple present tense to Mary directly, telling her "Mary, one sparkle of thine eye / I'd not exchange for all the gems / That shines in kingly diadems" (99-101) and explaining that this sparkle is sufficient compensation for his losses. In the poem's last two stanzas, Kitto writes in the present perfect continuous tense. The poem's penultimate stanza reads:

> I *am* a beggar; — poor indeed!
> That eye whose glance was ample meed For
> all the blood-strife that I knew.
> The toil, the sorrow I went through,
> No love, no strength, no skill could save
> From the obstructions of the grave.
> Was not that glance of heaven? Oh, why
> Should things so little earthly die?
> Why for the bridal of the tomb
> Clothe them in loveliness and bloom? (108-117)

In this stanza, the speaker now metaphorically refers to himself as a beggar, suggesting that the sparkle from Mary's eye is no longer a part of his life. This sparkle was once worth more to him then all the riches of the world, and without it, and her, he declares: "I *am* a beggar; — poor indeed!" Throughout the poem, Kitto has referred to the "sparkle" of Mary's eye as being ample compensation for the isolation and loneliness he has experienced because of his deafness. However, he

now laments that the “eye whose glance *was* ample meed” (emphasis added; 109) is no longer reward “For all the blood- strife that I knew. / The toil, the sorrow I went through” (110-111). At the same time as they refer to his deafness and the difficulties he has experienced because of his disability, these lines indicate that an event has occurred in association with Mary that has drastically altered the sense of contentedness that the speaker once felt in his love for her. Signaling a death, he goes on to refer to “the obstructions of the grave” (113) and to question the logic of the death, asking “[w]as not that *glance* of heaven?” (emphasis added; 114) and why “[s]hould things so little earthly die?” (115). Although the death in this stanza with its emphasis on the “eye” and “glance” of “Mary” could be read as referring, synecdochically, to Mary herself and her physical death, it is the glance that has been sent from heaven and which has been clothed “in loveliness and bloom” (117). However, while this stanza seems to be about Mary’s death, I suggest that it can also be read, in light of the line “the bridal of the tomb” (116), as mourning for the metaphorical death of the hopes he once had that the institution of marriage would alleviate the solitude in which his deafness had placed him.

The poem’s last stanza further expands on my view that “Mary” is autobiographical, focusing on his feelings of isolation due to his deafness:

> Who can these hard things answer? Thou
> To whom perforce I turn me now?
> Oh! I'm not only deaf but blind
> — Blind, blind of heart. Oh!
> seek me, find Thy lost one — he
> so prone to stray From that
> sequestered and cool way, Where
> thine walk, guided by thine eye
> And cheer'd; — and Thou dost never die. (Kitto *Lost*
> 118-125)

The stanza is an apostrophe in which Kitto speaks to God, saying that although God had granted him an earthly guide who was a panacea for the sorrows of his life, God is his true guide in life. In this stanza, Kitto, much as he did in the poem's first stanza, uses disability as a metaphor. Although he used blindness to indicate his devotion to Mary— "My soul to other vision blind" (8)—in the poem's first stanza, in this last stanza Kitto is using a figurative blindness and his actual deafness as short hand for extreme suffering. Klages writes in *Woeful Affliction* that "[d]eafness and blindness[45] were the two most recognizable forms of disability [in Victorian culture]" (7). Suggesting both his own disability experience and his awareness of the propensity of the literary culture of the nineteenth century to use disability to convey misery, Kitto uses the connection between deafness and blindness and the recognizable 'wretchedness' of these disabilities during the period to convey the privation of his life. This pairing of the disabilities of deafness and blindness is reminiscent of his 1 June 1823 letter to Harvey in which Kitto, in an effort to convey to Harvey the difficulties of his life, wrote that because of his deafness he "must ever continue to grope in mental darkness and degradation!" (Ryland I 94). This stanza also echoes his comments in *The Lost Senses* about the social perception of deafblindness: "If the conditions of blindness and of deafness are separately so afflictive, what must be the extent of the calamity when both afflictions are united in the same person!" (189).

Just as his letters described points in his life during which he was profoundly depressed and points during which he was optimistic about his future, "Mary" illustrates

[45] Although Kitto asserts that deafness is the more pathetic disability between deafness and blindness, Klages writes, blindness "was considered the more 'pathetic' form of disability" (7).

that his perception of existence fluctuated between one of “cheerful destinies” to one in which he was “not only deaf but blind” (24, 120). Although Kitto’s early hopes in marriage ended with the betrayal of his fiancée, his 1833 journal of his return voyage to England shows a man, although slightly jaded after his failed engagement in 1828, with hopes of eventually marrying. He wrote an 12 August 1833 letter to Lady M’Neill Teheran in which he told her that he could never truly accept the “single blessedness” of bachelorhood and wrote: “I remember the time when I had firmly made up my mind to die an old bachelor; but now, if I can find any one who will have me, I know nothing further from my intention” (Ryland II 168). By 25 October 1833, Kitto wrote to Robert Lampen to tell him: “I am married at last, thank God. Thank God! I have now a fireside of my own to sit down by, and on the other side is my wife darning stockings. I have a home, which I am reluctant to leave, and to which I am happy to return” (174-75).

IV. Conclusion: “How Miserable I Once Was”[46]

Just as Harriet Martineau felt a responsibility to her “fellow-invalids” to write her “Letter to the Deaf,” *Life in the Sick-Room*, and “Letters on Mesmerism,” Kitto writes of a similar obligation in his introduction to *The Lost Senses*: “It may be, indeed, that [a person who has lived under peculiar circumstances] lies under the same obligation to the public of describing his own condition, as a traveller is under to render his report respecting the unexplored countries which he has traversed in his pilgrimage” (9). He connects this

[46] Taken from an October 16, 1823 letter from Kitto to Mr. Wilde of the Plymouth Public Library (Memoirs of John Kitto I 132).

obligation to his justification for writing *The Lost Senses* and implies, although not convincingly, that his book is no more for his self-advancement than the documentation of his missionary work in foreign countries that he undertook in "The Deaf Traveller."

Although *The Lost Senses* describes aspects of Kitto's life with deafness, it ultimately reinforces the "longstanding association of disability with social isolation" (312) described by David T. Mitchell in "Body Solitaire: The Singular Subject of Disability Autobiography." Mitchell regrets, too, that "disability life writing tends toward the gratification of a personal story bereft of community with other disabled people" (312). Kitto does not describe his interaction with other disabled people in *The Lost Senses* and only one 1823 letter to William Harvey found in John Edwards Ryland's biography of Kitto includes a reference to "a deaf and dumb boy [in the workhouse], to whom it was usual and necessary for other boys to express themselves by signs" (Ryland I 103). However, Kitto does write in *The Lost Senses* that his deafness made him subject to ridicule and oppression and, most significantly, to social isolation. The isolation Kitto describes in *The Lost Senses* goes beyond segregation from other disabled persons to include a social isolation in which his literary leanings were not understood or encouraged by anyone in his life. His intent with this claim was, I argue, to further his self-construction as a solitary "overcomer" during a time in which his disability was considered to be a disqualification for a life that could be considered "normal" or successful. My goal with the chapter has been to attend to the concerns of contemporary critics of the disability narrative genre and expand on Kitto's

narrative through the inclusion of his familiar letters. While I am not suggesting that Kitto did not work extremely diligently to reach his goals, I am proposing that a more accurate account of his life story than can be found in *The Lost Senses* can be best found in his personal letters documenting his life beyond his self-construction as a solitary "overcomer" and providing evidence of the support he found through an epistolary community that encouraged him in his literary endeavors.

Conclusion: Amy Levy's Complex Disability Narrative

I conclude this dissertation with an examination of the work of Amy Levy (1861- 1889). My inclusion of Levy builds on and complicates the work of the preceding chapters and makes a case for the recognition that disability narratives are multifaceted and that their analysis cannot always be restricted to a single concern. Even as I examine in what follows Levy's life as a woman living with increasing hearing loss, I recognize that her hearing loss was only one part of her identity and was often overshadowed by other concerns. While critical work on Levy's writing has paid attention to her multiple minority positions, it has generally overlooked the productive possibilities that attention to her life as a woman living with increasing deafness could have for the scholarly conversation on her work. I build on existing scholarship on her life and work and hope that attention to her hearing loss will expand this scholarship and broaden the current parameters of the disability narrative genre.

After her death by suicide, Oscar Wilde wrote of Amy Levy in the 1890 edition of his magazine, *Woman's World*, that the "loss is the world's, but perhaps not hers. She was never robust; not often actually ill, but seldom well enough to feel life a joy instead of a burden; and her work was not poured out lightly, but drawn drop by drop from the very depth" (52). Levy, a poet, novelist, essayist, and literary critic, was a contributor to *Woman's World*, having published the short stories "Cohen of Trinity" (1889) and "Wise in Their Generation" (1890) during Wilde's tenure as editor from 1887-1890. Although her life was short, Levy was a

prolific writer. Her literary career began when she was fourteen years old when she published the poem, “Ida Grey: A Story of Woman's Sacrifice,” in the journal *Pelican*. She published her first book of poetry, *Xantippe and Other Verse*, in 1881 and her second book of poetry, *A Minor Poet and Other Verse*, in 1884. In 1886, she wrote a series of essays on Jewish life and culture for the *Jewish Chronicle*; in 1888, she published two novels, *Romance of a Shop* and *Reuben Sachs*; in 1889, she published her third novel, *Miss Meredith*. Her final book of poetry, *A London Plane Tree and Other Verse*, was published after her death in 1889. While it reflects on her literary career, Wilde’s obituary also references Levy’s poor physical and emotional health and the difficulties that her pursuit of a literary career presented. Although Levy’s compromised body rarely brought about physical seclusion or, what Michel Foucault, in *Birth of the Clinic*, terms “socio-spatial isolation” (17), it had a significant influence on her writing and literary career.

Martha Stoddard Holmes describes in her book *Fictions of Affliction* the range of writing on disability produced during the Victorian period. Holmes writes that this diverse body of writing includes “published debates on heredity, health, education, work, and welfare” (5); works of popular literature by authors such as Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Dinah Craik, and H. G. Wells; and “Melodramas of the Self,” namely biographies or autobiographies about or by disabled Victorians. While, as explored elsewhere in this dissertation, authors such as Harriet Martineau, Helen Keller, and John Kitto did publish melodramas of the self, much as in our own time, many Victorians with disabilities did not, or could not, write their

autobiographies. David Amigoni points out in *Life-Writing and Victorian Culture* that life-writing in the Victorian era was characterized by a hybridity of form (Amigoni 2). While authors such as Amy Levy did not leave a published disability narrative, Levy's familiar letters and later poetry can be read as a narrative she wrote about her life with a hearing impairment and about the importance of this experience for her social and creative life.

With the exception of her second novel, *Reuben Sachs: A Sketch* (1888), which received negative reviews by the Jewish press for its perceived attack on Jewish life, most of Levy's work attracted positive critical attention during her life. However, despite positive reviews of her work and tributes such as the above-quoted Wilde obituary, which included his assertion that Levy was "a girl with a touch of genius in her work" (52), her work fell from critical attention after 1890 and remained so until the late twentieth century. Her work is currently experiencing a renaissance as demonstrated by studies such as Christine Pullen's *The Woman Who Dared: A Biography of Amy Levy* (2010), Linda Hunt Beckman's *Amy Levy: Her Life & Letters* (2000) and articles and chapters in books by scholars Cynthia Scheinberg, Joseph Bristow, Iveta Jusová, Alex Goody, and Karen Weisman. In her conclusion to *The Woman Who Dared*, Pullen writes that the "scholarly researchers and literary analysis in recent years have tended to categorize her as a marginal, marginalized individual, who played a minor role in the literary life of her time" (203). While Pullen offers ample evidence that Levy did not, in fact, play "a minor role in the literary life of her time," scholars have, indeed, focused on Levy's "otherness" and multiple minority positions, using such labels, Pullen writes, as

"Jew, lesbian[47], depressive[48]" (203). Like Scheinberg, I consider Levy's multiple minority positions to have had weighty implications for her creative life. The state of, as Scheinberg writes, "compulsory heterosexuality" and "compulsory Christianity" endemic to Levy's society (193) certainly had profound effects on Levy's understanding of herself and, therefore, on her work as a writer. Also, like Scheinberg, I acknowledge that Levy was an author who explored the concept of "minority" through her work (191). However, of Levy's marginal subject positions, her deafness has not been adequately examined as a position that impacted her work. Although I am not concerned with Levy's sexuality, my work does take as inspiration Alison Kafer's "Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-bodiness" to discuss Levy's hearing impairment and its influence on her exploration of minority positions. Like Kafer, I am exploring the "compulsory nature of able-bodiness" (79), something to which Levy was not able to conform.

I. Levy's Letters: "Many Woes of the Spirit & Flesh"

John Kitto introduces *The Lost Senses* with a statement that seems to encourage other deaf persons to write their autobiographies. He tells his readers that "[a]ny one who has spent a considerable portion of time under peculiar, or at least undescribed, circumstances, must have been very unobservant if he has nothing to relate in which the public would be interested" (9). While Kitto

47 While critics have suggested that Levy was a lesbian and in love with, among others, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), Pullen hypothesises that Levy might have been in love with Karl [Carl] Pearson, a fellow member of the progressive A Men and Women's Club (91).

48 Pullen argues that Levy "suffered" from "some degree of bipolar disorder" (91), a contention Beckman objects to in her essay "A Scholarly Dialogue: In Response to Christine Pullen" in the online journal The Latchkey Journal of New Woman Studies.

attempted with *The Lost Senses* to write, as he termed it, "a biography of myself" (10), several aspects of Levy's life and her hearing loss made writing her autobiography in the way that Kitto encourages complicated. Unlike Kitto's abrupt loss of hearing after a fall from a ladder, Levy's hearing loss was gradual, taking place over the course of several years and requiring her to frequently reassess her condition and its impact on her identity. This reassessment was complicated for Levy who had, because of her multiple minority positions, what Iveta Jusová terms a "difficult sense of identity" (132). These minority positions made writing a typical autobiography problematic for Levy. The first and most obvious minority position was her gender and the cultural criticism of autobiography by women. Although women writers such as Harriet Martineau, Helen Keller, and Margaret Oliphant wrote autobiographies, a brief survey of existing scholarship on Levy illustrates that she was hindered by minority conditions in addition to her gender. As Jusová writes in *The New Woman and the Empire*, London was increasingly anti-Semitic during the 1880s (131). Levy was, in fact, a part of what many Christian Victorians considered a "highly suspect race" (132) and it is unlikely that the predominantly Christian public or even the traditional Jewish population would have readily accepted an autobiography by a Jewish woman. Like Jusová, Cynthia Scheinberg, in her book *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture*, concentrates on Levy's minority status as a Jew. However, she valuably points out that Levy "created a literary identity deeply linked to the concept of minority" and wrote against "hegemonic assumptions of the normative that structure almost any kind of cultural discourse" (191, 192). Like

Alex Goody, Scheinberg considers Levy's identification as a lesbian and the manner in which several of her poems such as "The Dream," "Borderland," and "In the Night" "challenge some of the basic Christian and heterosexual assumptions that have structured much English poetry" (217). Lastly, Levy's recurrent episodes of depression made the possibility of writing a narrative of her experience with increasing deafness problematic for her. Levy did not publish an autobiography during her short life but her personal letters are an important form of self-narrative. Epistolary scholars Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven's suggest in the introduction to *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* that the letter can be both a "substitute and supplement" (6) for the body. This is a claim with applicability to Levy's use of the letter form. Her letters united her with an epistolary community and developed into a "substitute and supplement" for her body as her deafness increased, acting as a remedy for her social seclusion.

Unfortunately, my work with Levy's letters is limited by familial editing. Although, as epistolary scholar William Merrill Decker notes, it was common in the nineteenth century to preserve letters "in view of returning them eventually to their authors or to their authors' heirs" (51), this practice seems not to have been common with the Levy family. Christine Pullen, in the preface to *The Woman Who Dared*, proposes a pattern of interference with Levy's familiar letters. Pullen writes that the bulk of Levy's surviving letters from Newnham College "contains large chronological gaps, and exhibits evidence of having been edited—one letter has had a section snipped out with scissors, and in other instances entire pages are missing" (11). She also notes the fact that Levy's "remaining family correspondence has been interfered with suggests to me that the documents that

were destroyed contained material that the family wished to suppress" (11). Although it is safe to assume that much of the excised material from Levy's letters had more to do with her depressive episodes or even her sexual attraction to other women than her increasing hearing loss, some material pertaining to her deafness may have been lost in this editing. The potential loss of Levy's ruminations on her decreased hearing limits my work on her letters as a disability narrative and similarly limits future work focusing on Levy's letters.

Providing me with evidence that Levy appreciated the literary potential of the letter, Levy wrote an epistolary short story in 1883 entitled "Between Two Stools." Using the conventional epistolary narrative form, "Between Two Stools" takes the form of letters from Nora Wycherley, who has left Newnham College and returned to London, to her friend Agnes Crewe, who remains at the college. Like Levy, who attended Newnham College in 1879 and 1880, Nora, by virtue of her education, is an outsider in London society. Nora embodies the New Woman with her reading of Plato and Swinburne, her apparent disregard of female propriety in dress as indicated by her "absence of stays and crinolette," and her dislike of conventional feminine fashion that she finds, as she tells Agnes, "unwholesome, artificial" and in violation of "all laws of beauty" (Levy *Complete Novels* 409). Gail Cunningham writes in "'Between Two Stools': Exclusion and Unfitness in Amy Levy's Short Stories" that, as an educated woman, Nora is "granted agency" but that this "newfound ability to make choices results ironically in self-exclusion from two contrasting worlds and leaves her unable to exist in either of the elements available to her" (80). For Cunningham, "Between Two Stools" "approached the question of woman's struggle in the marriage market" (83). However, it is Levy's use of the epistolary genre and its function as a form of talk that makes this story useful for

my dissertation. Nora's pleasure in the epistolary form calls to mind Martineau and Kitto's explicit connection between spoken and written conversation. Nora writes to Agnes, "[w]hat a relief, to be quiet and alone in one's room; to lock the door; to take up one's pen and have a little peaceful *talk* with one's best friend!" (emphasis added; Levy *Complete Novels* 409).

Several of Levy's letters indicate that Levy participated in a not uncommon search for health during the Victorian period. Christine Kenyon Jones writes that Victorian culture had a "preoccupation with total health or wholeness of mind and body" (Jones 28). As a result, there was an enormous amount of medical discourse circulating about disability during the Victorian era. Although deafness was particularly difficult to cure or even treat during the Victorian period, many traditional doctors attempted a variety of procedures they hoped would have some effect on hearing impairment. Describing the ineffective efforts of doctors to make any change in his hearing, Kitto wrote in *The Lost Senses* that doctors "poured into my tortured ears various infusions, hot and cold; they bled me, they blistered me, leeched me, physicked me" but, when nothing came of these efforts "they gave it up as a bad case, and left me to my fate" (15). While traditional physicians worked to develop more effective treatments for illness and disability, a number of "alternative" treatments were also developed. Harriet Martineau drew on several of these treatments and published remarks on their efficacy. As analyzed at length in Chapter One of this dissertation, Martineau's 1834 "Letter to the Deaf" is an attempt to instruct readers on deafness which includes a description of her efforts to improve or restore her hearing. In the letter, Martineau discusses her experience with galvanism, an alternative procedure that

improved her hearing for only a few weeks and which, in the end, she could not recommend. While there is no evidence that Levy underwent any of the treatments described by either Martineau or Kitto, there is some epistolary indication that she did participate in the widespread Victorian effort to achieve soundness of body. In a fragment of an 1880 letter to her mother from Italy, Levy wrote that she expected "to be well long before 3 months & to be in full work for the summer term" (Beckman 232). It is unclear if Levy went to Italy merely for 'a change of air' or to visit spas because of her poor health and hearing impairment but, as a feature of Victorian culture was travel in pursuit of health or, as Maria Frawley writes, "medical climatotherapy" (119), and because Levy expected "to be well long before 3 months," it is likely that this trip was prompted by a search for health and improved hearing. While it is not clear if Levy returned to the college for the summer term of 1880 or 1881 or even if she was well enough to resume work after the three months, it is known that she made a trip in 1881 to Germany with a friend from college. Adding to this is a 2 October 1888 letter from Vernon Lee to her mother about Levy's health. Lee wrote: "Poor Miss Levy is ordered abroad for her health" (quoted in Pullen 139), confirmation that medical tourism was an activity in which Levy took part.

Levy frequently wrote about pain and poor health during her early twenties and she wrote to her mother on 10 November 1881 from Germany that she did not "like being twenty at all [. . .] I think my arrival in the world was rather an unfortunate occurrence for everyone concerned" (Beckman 233). In 1884 Levy wrote to her sister Katie from Baden, Germany that she was consoling herself "with the abnormal wholesomeness of [her] body" but that amidst the

wholesomeness the "devils [were] awful bad in the intervals of basking" (Beckman 245-46). Baden was a well-known spa town in the nineteenth century but Levy, although seeming to have gained some benefit to her physical health from the site, does not seem to have gained psychological benefit and pessimistically waits for her poor health to return. Beckman's suggestion that the reason for Levy's "departure from Cambridge [after only two years of study] was that she had a sense of social inferiority as a Jew or at least the conviction that she would never gain acceptance there" (74) is possible; however, evidence to support a theory that Levy experienced a health crisis during the early 1880s can be found in her personal letters during that time. Her continental European travel does not seem to have had the therapeutic effects she had hoped for and her fear of aging can be related to her bodily concerns and the ways in which she saw her body breaking down even at a young age. Connecting her melancholy to her hearing impairment, Levy wrote to her sister Katie in a teasing manner in an 1884 letter: "Fr. my point of view you are such a lucky beggar! Fixed income, good ears" (250).

As her deafness became more pronounced, Levy became more socially limited. In 1882, Levy joined A Men and Women's Club, a progressive club where both women and men assembled to (ostensibly) candidly discuss social, political, and metaphysical issues facing the sexes. However, in 1884 Levy's acquaintance and fellow club member Karl Pearson ended his ties with the group and formed *The* Men and Women's Club for which the membership was handpicked by Elizabeth Cobb, Maria Sharpe, and himself. Although Cobb and Sharpe were responsible for

choosing the women who would be invited to join the club, Pearson consistently gave them his "advice" on prospective female members. Pearson wrote to Sharpe about Kate Mills[49] and her potential membership in the club and, at the same time, commented on Levy and her suitability for The Men and Women's Club: "[w]hat a misfortune with regard to [Mills'] deafness! It is the very reason which has withheld my mentioning the matter to a Miss Levy, who it seems would otherwise have made a useful member" (quoted in Pullen 96). Basing her statement on the evidence that Clementina Black went on record after Levy's death to say that Levy's deafness was only slight, Pullen notes that since Mill's "handicap" was greater than Levy's but, although never a formal member of the club, still maintained close contact with the club organizers, Pearson must have "deliberately exaggerated the extent of [Levy's] deafness" in order to mask the truth of his falling-out with her (96). Like Linda Hunt Beckman, I feel that Pullen has made assumptions about Levy's relationship with Pearson based on slight evidence. Beckman writes in "A Scholarly Dialogue: In Response to Christine Pullen" that the "question of evidence is important: Pullen, it seems to me, has *none* for her contention that Levy was in love with Karl Pearson, that she was deeply hurt by not being invited to join the second Men and Women's Club, and that she committed suicide four years later when she learned he was engaged to marry Maria Sharpe." Beckman further writes: "Pullen cites Pearson as saying to Maria Sharpe that the only reason that he did not invite 'Miss Levy' was her hearing loss, but there were many reasons why she does not

[49] Pullen notes that Kate Mills, whose dates are unknown, was "a social worker who had made a detailed study of the relations of the sexes on many sides" (220). Pullen also notes that she accessed this information on Kate Mills in Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality*.

seem a likely member." Indeed, Beckman is correct that there were likely many reasons why Levy was not considered for membership in the club that had little or nothing to do with her hearing impairment. However, it is the fact that her deafness was being used as a reason for Levy's social exclusion that interests me here.

Levy's relationship with Pearson aside, the fact remains that Levy's deafness was a topic of discussion among her peers, and regardless of Pearson's true reasons for excluding Levy, he appears to be opportunistically using Levy's hearing impairment and cultural assumptions about deaf persons and their place in society as reasons for Sharpe to exclude Levy from membership in the club. Closer to Levy's death, Vernon Lee[50] connects Levy's hearing impairment with loneliness in an 2 October 1888 letter to her (Lee's) mother. Lee writes that Levy "is very forlorn, poor little body, for her deafness has not diminished" (Pullen 139), suggesting the social isolation that many in society at the time assumed was inherent to a life with deafness.

Although there is a surprising lack of explicit reference to her hearing loss in her surviving correspondence, both references to her increasing deafness and her letters on her general poor health and depression, together with the letters of her close friends about her hearing loss and its impact on her social life, provide the Levy scholar with a sense of the complex nature of her identity as a disabled person. If attention to her minority position as a person with increasing hearing impairment offers insight into her life as a woman who has occupied multiple minority positions, it also provides the Levy scholar with greater understanding of

[50] Vernon Lee was the pseudonym for Violet Paget (1856-1935), a British writer of supernatural fiction.

the ways in which Levy explored the presence and absence of sound in several of her later poems.

II. Levy's Poetry: "The Boon of the Gods that I Crave"

Scholars have concentrated on Amy Levy's minority statuses as woman, lesbian, and Jew in their readings of her work, particularly her poetry. Critics such as Alex Goody (*Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, "Murder in Mile End"), Cynthia Scheinberg, and Susan David Bernstein (*Amy Levy: Critical Essays*) have rightly examined Levy's poetry with attention to her Anglo-Jewish identity while Linda Hunt Beckman, Emma Francis (*Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian*), and Kate Flint ("The 'hour of pink twilight'") examine Levy's work with a focus on her possible identity as a lesbian. I hope to add to these discussions of Levy's minority statuses with an examination of the expression in poetry of Levy's experience with hearing impairment. Levy, as mentioned above, had a writing career that encompassed several genres. However, the climate of the nineteenth century meant that her work as a poet with hearing loss had the potential to be treated with disdain by hearing audiences. Indeed, Jennifer Esmail writes that American poet Laura Redden Searing (1840-1923), who lost her hearing at the age of eleven, had concerns about the public's perception of her ability to participate in her chosen profession in the "cultural climate" of her day ("Perchance" 509). Esmail points out that "Searing suspected that readers maligned her poetry once they discovered she was deaf" ("Perchance" 511). The effects of this cultural climate were epitomized and perhaps even promoted by John Kitto. Although

Kitto's *The Lost Senses* was published in 1845, sixteen years before the birth of Levy, many deaf poets and aspiring poets with hearing loss were still internalizing his statements about the impossibility of deaf poets at later points of the nineteenth century. Levy was in a particularly precarious position regarding her hearing impairment and her poetry. Her hearing impairment began in her youth and worsened throughout her adulthood and she was not immune to anxieties concerning her creative ability due to her increasing hearing loss. She regularly explored sound and absence of sound in her later poetry.

Beckman writes in *Amy Levy: Her Life & Letters* that by the age of twenty Levy was depressed over her propensity for "abscesses, eye infections, neuralgia, and increasing deafness" (92). As she points out in "A Scholarly Dialogue," Levy experienced periods of depression, but she was not constantly depressed. She adds that "[b]y the end of her life, she felt bad about her (serious) hearing loss." While it is difficult to determine precisely how significantly the gradual loss of the ability to hear and the general conviction of society that the deaf could not write poetry impacted her work, my discussion of Levy's later poetry expands on Alex Goody's attention to her "fluctuating or nonfixed" identity (159). It is Goody's discussion of Levy's "fluctuating or nonfixed" identity that suggests to me the importance of Levy's increasing deafness and the ways it complicated an already complex identity. Levy, although she does not treat her increasing deafness directly in her poetry, wrote several poems that do suggest a sense of alienation from and longing for sound. I discuss below several poems from Levy's later books of poetry with particular attention to how her compromised sense of hearing allows for a greater

understanding of the way in which she engaged with her hearing loss in her creative life.

Poems such as “A June-Tide Echo” from *A Minor Poet and Other Verses* provide valuable reflections on her life with hearing loss and add to her disability narrative. My examination of “A June-Tide Echo” expands on the work of Linda Hunt Beckman in *Amy Levy: Her Life & Letters.* Although Beckman does not discuss the poem extensively, several of her points about the poem and, indeed, about Levy’s life generally provide useful background for my argument connecting Levy hearing loss and the poem. “A June-Tide Echo” is a first-person lyric account of the thoughts and feelings of an unknown speaker on a June night after a Richter concert. While the poem’s speaker is not clearly identified, there are several features of the poem that suggest that Levy is echoing her own frustration over her decreased hearing in the speaker’s disappointment over her inability to find joy in the long-awaited June. The poem considers one of the more painful aspects of decreased hearing loss for Levy: a diminished ability to hear music. The first three stanzas of the poem depict the despondency of the poem’s speaker.

However, the source of her sorrow and inability to find joy is not made clear until the poem’s fourth stanza. The first stanza of the poem quickly establishes the sorrowful mood of the speaker. She begins with her memory of a recent period of depression, suggestive of Levy’s own episodes of depression. She connects this period of depression with winter and evokes the conventional characterization of the season in her description of this period as “the long, sad time, when the sky was grey, / And the keen blast blew through the city drear, / When delight had fled from

the night and the day" (1-3). In the midst of this "long, sad time," the speaker implies that her dreariness will be relieved with the final line of the stanza and the whisper of her "chill heart" that "'June will be here!" (4). This promise continues into the second stanza with the expectation that June, "'with its roses a-sway in the sun, / Its glory of green on mead and tree'" (5-6), will bring the longed-for joy with its beauty. The final two lines of the stanza bring the reader to the present and the promised return of June. Although the anticipated June has returned, the anticipated return of pleasure does not materialize for the speaker. She finds no pleasure in the month and laments that "now the sweet June-tide is nearly done, / June-tide, and never a joy for me!" (7-8). The speaker criticizes the gods in the poem's third stanza and asks her reader a direct question that implies that the gods are unreasonable to deny her request: "[i]s it so much of the gods that I pray?" (9). She makes her case that "[s]ure craved man never so slight a boon!" (10). To her, the blessing she seeks, "[t]o be glad and glad in my heart one day— / One perfect day of the perfect June" (11-12), is a very simple request and she implies that it is unfair that she is denied such a minor desire. Her assertion of the simplicity of her wish is, however, an understatement. As the poem continues, the gravity of her need becomes clear and the poem's title becomes more important to the reader's understanding of the speaker's longing.

As the poem continues into the fourth stanza, the reader gets a better sense of why the speaker can find no joy in this particular month. According to Beckman, Levy had a well-known love of music and her hearing loss "cut her off from the music that was so important to her and affected her social life" (Beckman 92). The title of the poem, "A June-Tide Echo," combined with its subtitle, "After a Richter

Concert[51]," becomes significant as several points in the poem suggest that Levy, through the poem's unidentified speaker's "rage about the unfairness of [her] lot" (Beckman 106), is exploring her own anguish over her loss of hearing and the impact this loss has on her appreciation of music. The poem's titular motif of the echo is especially significant to a discussion of Levy's hearing loss. The *OED* defines "echo" in its figurative sense as "A repetition or close imitation, chiefly of things that can be compared to speech, voice, or sound" and, importantly for my argument, "an enfeebled reproduction." The "June-Tide Echo" is the speaker's remembrance of past Junes when she could appreciate the music. Her memories of the music and the joy it brought her are merely echoes. She is reduced to trying to find joy in memories, but realizes that true pleasure cannot be found in the echoes, weak copies of past concerts. Levy, like the poem's speaker, is compelled to search for joy in these echoes but cannot find it.

The fourth stanza is the speaker's recent memory of the end-of-June-concert[52]. The music and the night seem, to her, perfect, yet she cannot be glad: "Sweet sounds to- night rose up, wave upon wave; / Sweet dreams were afloat in the balmy air. / This is the boon of the gods that I crave— / To be glad, as the music and night were fair" (13-16). The "Sweet sounds" are likened to "Sweet

[51] Hans Richter (1843-1916) was an Austrian conductor who became a staple of British musical festivals during the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. According to Lewis Foreman and Susan Foreman in London: A Musical Gazetteer, Richter made his debut as a conductor in England in 1877. Thereafter, he held an annual series of concerts called The Orchestral Festival Concerts at St. James's Hall in London from 1879 to 1897 (280). Levy's subtitle to "June-Tide Echo," "(After a Richter Concert)," places the poem's date of composition after 1879 as Richter's concerts became so popular that they became known as the "Richter Concerts." These concerts were generally given five times in the month of May and five times in the month of June of a year.

[52] The first Richter concert was held in 1879 and Levy passed away in 1889. *A Minor Poet and Other Verses* was published in 1884, leaving only a five-year window for Levy to have attended one of the concerts. Most of the end-of-June Richter concerts seem to have been give around the mid-June mark.

dreams," the dreams in which the music is living music rather than the echo of the music of a past concert. The boon the speaker asks for is more than the echo of happiness on a beautiful June day; it is one hour during which to experience music in its purity. The speaker's inability to find joy in the music and perfect night can be connected to Levy's diminished sense of hearing and her decreased experience of music. In the fifth stanza, the speaker expresses the ephemeral nature of music for her and her desire to perceive it and the happiness it produces: "For once, for one fleeting hour, to hold / The fair shape the music that rose and fell / Revealed and concealed like a veiling fold; / To catch for an instant the sweet June spell" (17-20). She repeats this entreaty, for one hour to experience the joy of June, a joy she associates with the music of June, in the poem's sixth stanza. In this stanza, June's "sweet secret," its music, has taken on a wounding quality: "The sweet June secret that mocks my heart; / Now lurking calm, like a thing asleep, / Now hither and thither with start and dart" (22-24). The happiness she once found in the music of the June concerts now eludes her; the echo of the music mocks her with its inferior and transitory existence. The poem ends with her promise to the gods that if she were granted this boon, she would deem this gift compensation for "the sick, slow grief of the weary years, / The slow, sick grief and the sudden pain; / The long days of labour, the nights of tears" (25-28) and, rather than judging her life futile or ineffective, she would consider it a "thing of worth" (29).

Alex Goody writes in "Passing in the City" that in the first section of *A London Plane Tree and Other Verse*, "Levy clearly is celebrating the city and the ability to move through and be immersed in it" (164). Goody cites Beckman who asserts that "the city became central to [Levy's] poetic development" (219).

However, while the city certainly functioned as an essential poetic space for Levy, it, importantly, provided her with a space with which to explore her loss of stable identity through the element of sound. Several poems in *A London Plane Tree and Other Verse* highlight Levy's fluctuating identity during a period when her hearing impairment was becoming more pronounced. Two poems from the first sequence of *A London Plane Tree* explore sound and diminished sound and a preference for the vitality of the clamor in the urban space; the potent cacophony of sound of the urban space provided her with a point of fixity of self. "Straw in the Street" is the sixth poem in the first sequence. Goody asserts that the poem's speaker "passes by and through the uncertain zone between life and death" (167). I contend that while the speaker does pass through "the uncertain zone between life and death," she also passes between uncertain regions of sound and soundlessness in her experience of life and death. It is the forceful zone of the sound of the city that signals life to the speaker and life to Levy. With her sense of hearing diminished, it is the noise of the city that provided Levy with fixity of self. In the poem's first stanza, Levy uses the convention of laying straw to deaden noise on the street on which a person in failing health lives to represent the indeterminate existence she sees as part of her deteriorating hearing: "Straw in the street where I pass to-day / Dulls the sound of the wheels and feet. / 'Tis for a failing life they lay / Straw in the street" (1-4). The literal act of laying of straw in the street for a dying person stands in for and replicates figuratively the failing of sound/hearing in opposition to the noise of "the pulses of London beat" where citizens "[p]ause and jostle and pass and greet" (5, 9) and give proof of life.

Levy's appreciation and desire for the living sounds of the city continues in

"The Village Garden." "The Village Garden," the last poem in the same sequence, positions the speaker as outside the conventions of English poetry. Beckman writes that in fact the speaker "instead of seeing solace in a realm that has no actual existence on earth, voices the untraditional idea that the city is the best place for a troubled person" (193). I contend that Levy saw the silence and tranquility of rural surroundings that had long been prescribed for persons with illnesses and disabilities as potentially stifling and as unbearable for persons with compromised hearing. The first stanza of "The Village Garden" depicts a pastoral world of delightful smells of "lavender and lilies" and "gentle seasons passing one by one" (3, 12). However, the garden is a soundless world where the air is unmoved by noise and where the speaker is in a silent, lingering dream state. The poem depicts neither the sounds of birds nor the buzzing of insects; any potential sound is carpeted and hushed by turf and the air merely "breathes of peace and sunshine in the present" and, in the hushed voice of history, "tells of bygone peace and bygone sun" (9- 10). The years and the seasons pass soundlessly and the recorders of time are the silent trees and the only indication of the passing of seasons is the silent growth of the plants. Despite the beauty of the garden, the speaker is fenced in and stifled by a soundlessness that can tell no more of life than blossoms and cloves.

Goody notes that in "The Village Garden," "Levy clearly is celebrating the city and the ability to move through it and be immersed in it" (164). It is the "call," however, that is significant for me here. The speaker would linger in the soundless dream of the garden and its beauty but it is the unrelenting call of the city that draws her. Although the call is "clear and low" (14), it is also a "ceaseless voice" (14), enough to make the speaker "arise

and go" (16); she rejects what at first seems like soundless peace and is drawn toward the clear, definite sound of the city. It is the "roar and hurry of the town" (18), the city's noise, that the speaker prefers. The bustle and noise of the city allows for an escape from the "burden / Of individual life that weighs [her] down" (19-20). This "individual life" suggests the isolation her hearing impairment introduces into her life and her desire to "pass" through the clamor of the city and reject "silent sweets" (22). For the "happier comers," the garden's silence is "anodyne," harmless and benign, a cure for the ills of city life; the silence is, for these "happier comers," a treat, a form of remedy. For her, however, the opportunity to forget the bustle and pain of life that others might find in the garden's silence does not ease her pain, but instead causes her distress.

In several poems in the last two sequences of *A London Plane Tree and Other Verse* continues, Levy seems to begin to relish silence. It is a silence, however, that she links with depression and death. Writing specifically about "The Old House," Linda Hunt Beckman observes that the poem seems as though it were written in Levy's last year as the speaker "often expresses an intense yearning not just for calm but for diminished feeling" (193). While "Straw in the Street" and "The Village Garden" in the first sequence of the book explore stifling silence and soundlessness, expressing a preference for the clamor of the city, several poems in the "Love, Dreams, and Death" and "Moods and Thoughts" sequences explore the blissful silence of sleep and death. These last two sequences leave behind the allure of the city to explore the attraction of the death-like silence of the dream state. The "uncertain, the transitory, and the in-between are obvious facets" (Goody 171) of the book's second sequence, "Love, Dreams, & Death."

"The Dream" describes the dream-life of a speaker and the lingering effects of what she considers a perfect dream, a dream that, even after she has gone from dream to dream, is perfection. From the poem's first stanza, the reader deduces that there has been a past difficulty between the speaker and the beloved but that she, the speaker, believes this dream to be a resolution to this difficulty. This resolution comes not through conversation, but through what is a telling silence. She seems to find the crowd that flies into the chamber of her dream agitating in their boisterousness: "A fair dream to my chamber flew: / Such a crowd of folk that stirred, / Jested, fluttered" (1-3). Although "stirred" and "fluttered" are verbs that indicate motion, they can also, like "jested," be suggestive of sound. It is these indistinct, yet present, sounds that bother the speaker during the dream. Rather than being unsettled by the silence of the loved one, the speaker finds comfort and tells her:

> You alone of all that band,
> Calm and silent, spake no word.
> Only once you neared my place,
> And your hand one moment's space
> Sought the fingers of my hand;
> Your eyes flashed to mine; I knew
> All was well between us two. (4-10)

The loved one is unlike the frenetic crowd that chatters away and jokes meaninglessly. The speaker finds security through mutual silence with her lover and intimacy in silent gestures and poignant looks rather than noise and banter. The speaker considers the dream perfect because of the lover's silence and Levy shifts from sound to olfactory imagery. The speaker tells the loved one that

> The fair dream hovered round me, clung
> To my thought like faint perfume:—

> Like sweet odours, such as cling
> To the void flask, which erst encloses
> Attar of rose; or the pale string
> Of amber which has lain with roses. (18-23)

The speaker shows an obvious preference for the imagery of sight, smell, and touch over sound. This prioritization of olfactory perception over auditory perception suggests that she now relies on her sense of smell, the sense that elicits emotions and memories, in place of her compromised sense of hearing.

The silent dream state is preferred over wakefulness in many of the poems in this sequence, perhaps because of its closeness to the state of death and its estrangement from sorrows in the real world. Indeed, the first stanza of the short poem, "The Promise of Sleep," highlights the turbulent nature of day and wakefulness. The strife of the speaker's daily life does not allow her to work or even rest but tosses her "to and fro, / Like a leaf on the storm's breast" (3-4). However, rather than her sleep being disrupted by the turmoil of her day, causing her to toss and turn, it is during the day that she tosses "to and fro" and during the night that she finds peace in silence: "Night came and saw my sorrow cease; / Sleep in the chamber stole; / Peace crept about my limbs, and peace / Fell on my stormy soul" (5-8). It is the transition between her restful, silent sleep and the time of wakefulness that she dreads now and she thinks only of the "gentle sleep—who promises / That death is gentle too" (11-12). Similarly, the speaker in "In the Nower" lies "Deep in the grass outstretched [. . .] / Motionless on the hill" (1-2) as if asleep. She contemplates that "[t]here is no breath, no sound, no stir / The drowsy peace to break" (5-6). It is soporific lack of sound that most attracts the speaker and, like the speaker in "The Promise of Sleep," she connects this soundless peace with

the peace of death ("So simple not to wake").

"The Promise of Sleep" and "In the Nower," with their speakers' desire for a silence close to death, are much like the first poem in the last sequence of *A London Plane Tree*, "The Old House." Angela Leighton identifies it as a poem about "self- encounter." While many examples of this kind of poem depicts a grown woman meeting herself as a young girl, Beckman notes that in "The Old House" the "speaker does not welcome the opportunity to re-establish a connection with her youthful self" (193). Instead, the speaker feels shame at how altered her life is and quickly wants to leave the dream state. The poem begins with the speaker/dreamer entering the old house. She travels "up the silent stair" (1) and is at peace with the silence of the dream world as "[l]ittle is changed" and she "know[s] so well the ways" (2). She appears at ease at the beginning of the poem and connects that ease with death, remarking that in the old house "the dead came to meet me" and that this dream of the dead meeting her is a dream that "was dreamed in unforgotten days" (4-5). She has had the same dream in the past and seems comforted by the memory of it. However, the appearance of a "flitting shade" (6), a specter, confuses her. The specter turns and the speaker proclaims "I saw her face,—O God, it wore / The face I used to wear when I was young!" (7-8). She sees the face of her younger self and the peaceful death-like silence of the dream is disrupted by the realization of the remembrance of her real world. As with other poems in the last two sequences of the book, the noise of the city is not preferred over silence in this lyric; it is the silence of the dream state, with its closeness to death, that the speaker values. While Levy wrote of a preference for

the vital, living cacophony of the city that, in some ways, staved off her realization of an increasing silence in her life in such poems as “The Village Garden,” the speaker in “The Old House” is resigned to, and even thankful for, an increasing silence that has deadened her anguish: “I thought my spirit and my heart were tamed / To deadness; dead the pangs that agonise” (9-10). Lines like these suggest that Levy has become accustomed to the pains of her life and to her increasing deafness, and had tamed her “spirit and [. . .] heart” to her agony. Also, the word “deadness” is close both in orthography and phonetics to the word “deafness.” This parallel implies the proximity Levy saw between the states of deafness and death. Levy’s younger self, with her dreams and expectations for life, now confronts the speaker who is shamed by her resignation to her growing deafness. She now expresses comfort with the silence, rather than anger, and turns away from her younger self so she may not see what her life has become. She “hasten[s] down the stairway” (19) out of the silence that holds no comfort for her now, leaving her younger self “dreaming in the silent land” (20). Levy makes a clear connection in this poem between silence and death. Her biographers, Pullen and Beckman, both write about Levy’s known propensity for depressive episodes and Levy herself referred to periods of having the “blues” and her belief that it would have been better for her family if she were not alive. There is a clear connection between several of the poems in *A London Plane Tree* and Levy’s lived experience. *A London Plane Tree* was Levy’s final book of poetry and was, as already noted, published after her death in 1889. Poems such as “The Old House” seem to reflect a growing preference for the silence of death over the

experience of the increasing silence of her life.

III. Conclusion: "The Sick, Slow Grief of the Weary Years"

Theorist Kristin Lindgren suggests that disability may create a discontinuity in self-perception and writes that "living with a radically unpredictable body, or a body that has lost functions or parts, calls into question the stability and the continuity of identity" (148). Amy Levy's increasing deafness called "into question the stability and the continuity" of her already minoritized sense of identity. Although Levy did not publish a disability narrative, she did touch on her hearing impairment and her frequent bouts of depression in several of her letters to members of her small epistolary community. Levy's hearing impairment was a chronic condition that worsened over time and letters were an important way for her to record the construction and reconstruction of her identity and, as Arthur W. Frank writes, give "voice to the body" (2). Levy's understanding of her own identity was, of course, influenced by her multiple minority positions, but my work with her letters and poetry contributes to the study of her writing by adding her experience of disability to the scholarly conversation. Levy did not write a traditional published autobiography, as did a number of Victorians with disabilities. However, the collection of her letters, although not complete, provides the Levy scholar with an idea of the significance her deafness had for both her personal life and her professional life. Read together, several of Levy's letters fashion a brief disability narrative that is expanded upon in several later poems.

My reader might question the importance of the short life of Levy, who did not publish an autobiography on hearing loss, to my dissertation. She, in fact, is

very important for my work. The absence of a published disability narrative makes her valuable to my work because she provides me with support for my argument regarding the necessity of expanding the current parameters of the disability narrative genre. Through the addition of Levy's hearing impairment to the list of her marginal subject positions, I have attempted to elucidate the productive possibilities that attention to her liminal state as a woman living with increasing hearing loss could have for the scholarly conversation on her work. Although Levy does not write any where near as much as, for example, Martineau, Kitto, or Keller, on her hearing loss, attention to this issue and awareness of even very brief epistolary exchanges concerning her hearing loss allow for new readings of her published poetry.

I hope that I have made a persuasive case for the expansion of the illness/disability narrative genre to include familiar letters with this chapter and the chapters that precede it. In them, I suggest that while narratives of disability can take many forms, letters are a central yet neglected form of engagement with the experience of disability. My work on the correspondence of four Victorian authors and letter-writers and their epistolary communities demonstrates the use of letters as disability narrative and emphasizes the need to expand the current parameters of a genre that, according to G. Thomas Couser and David T. Mitchell, tends to depict a solitary identity often divorced from a communal experience of disability. Although my dissertation focuses on deaf and hearing impaired Victorian writers, I hope that the addition of letters to the disability narrative genre will result in the recognition and examination of previously overlooked stories of life with compromised bodies

from many historical periods, that it will make a significant contribution to current scholarly work on the genre, and that it will prove helpful in shaping alternative approaches to understanding disability narratives.

I return to the quotation from Julia Miele Rodas with which I began this dissertation. Rodas's belief that "it is critically important that we be open to many different kinds of stories about disability, especially those that are complex and open-ended, and especially those that people with disabilities tell themselves," has shaped and guided my work in this dissertation. I have attempted to open the groundwork for an exploration of the diverse ways in which persons with disabilities tell their stories about their bodies. I have asserted that it is through "different kinds of stories" that we are granted access to personal narratives of life with corporeal difference. In order for a person with a disability to navigate her disability experience, traditional assumptions about ways of telling our stories must shift. Practices of traditional autobiography do not always allow a person with a disability to assert herself and the very structure of the stories we tell about disability must change. David T. Mitchell has expressed serious concerns about the singular subjectivity of the traditional autobiography and its effect on autobiographies of disability. He writes: "I would argue that the singular pose of the autobiographer of disability derives from literary conventions that need to be queried more vigorously" (312). This dissertation has attempted to query this position by examining familiar letters and the communal nature of the exchange of letters as a way to nuance if not counter the prevalence of this "singular pose" (312). While I concentrated on stories of deafness and hearing impairment in this dissertation with the intention of expanding the illness/disability narrative genre to more fully include and encompass

familiar letters, I hope that the result of this work is a convincing argument to broaden the genre of disability/illness autobiography to include diverse personal stories of disability/illness experience told in ways as varied as the lives and bodies they portray.

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MARY

One sparkle from my Mary’s eye
  Would I exchange for gems of Hind,
Or spices of rich Araby?
  No : — a clear glowing light hath shin'd
  Into the caverns of my mind,
To kindle thoughts which lay there cold.
And quicken hopes which died of old.
  My soul to other vision blind,
  And casting all its griefs behind.
Does count the diamonds and the gold
Which Eastern kings have left untold
  But as a beggar's price to buy
  One sparkle of my Mary's eye.

As the Chaldean, from his plain,
  Upon him saw ten thousand eyes
  Look down from the unclouded skies;
And deemed them, while he looked again,
The arbiters of joy and pain.
And from their thrilling glances drew
Conclusions most sublime — if true, —
So I resume my younger lore,
And turn astrologer once more;
And happy horoscopes I raise.
Replete with cheerful destinies,
From the kindly beams that shine,
Dear Mary, in these orbs of thine.

In silence I have walked full long
  Adown life's narrow thorny vale,
Deaf to the melody of song,
And all music to me mute, —
  From the organ's rolling peal
  To the gay burst or mournful wail
Of harp, and psaltery, and lute.

Heaven's dread answer I have heard
  In thunder to old ocean's roar,
As while the elements conferr'd,
  Their voices shook the rock-bound shore : —
I've listened to the murmuring streams,

Which lulled my spirit into dreams.
Bright hopes, and fair imaginings,
But false as all that fancy flings
Upon a page where pain and strife
Make up the history of life.

And so beneath o'ershadowing trees,
I've heard leaves rustle in the breeze.
Which brought me the melodious tale
Of the all vocal nightingale.
Or else, the cushat's coo of pride
Over his own new mated bride ; —
Yes : I have heard thee — Nature, thee,
   In all thy thousand voices speak,
Which now are silent all to me : —
   Ah, when shall this long silence break, —
And all thy tides of gladness roll
In their full torrent on my soul?

But as the snows which long have lain
   On the cold tops of Lebanon,
   Melt in the glances of the sun,
And, with wild rush, into the plain
Haste down, with blessings in their train : —
So Mary, gilded by thine eye
   Griefs melt away, and fall in streams
   Of hope into the land of dreams.
And life's inanities pass by
Unheeded, without tear or sigh.

True, that the human voice divine
Falls not on this cold sense of mine ;
And that brisk commercing of thought
Which brings home rich returns, all fraught
With ripe ideas — points of view
Varied, and beautiful, and new,
Is lost, is dead, in this lone state
Where feelings sicken, thoughts stagnate,
And good and evil knowledge grows
Unguided and unpruned, and throws —
Too often a dull sickening shade,
Like that by trees of Java made,
O'er hopes and o'er desires which might
Have lived in glory and delight.
Blessed and blessing others, till
The gaspings of this life were still.

But Mary, when I look on thee
All things beside neglected lie.
There is deep eloquence to me
In the bright sparkle of thine eye.
How sweetly can their beamings roll
Volumes of meaning to my soul,
How long — how vainly all — might words
Express what one quick glance affords.
So spirits talk perhaps when they
Their feelings and their thoughts convey,
Till heart to heart, and soul to soul
Is in one moment opened all.

Mary, one sparkle of thine eye
I'd not exchange for all the gems
That shines in kingly diadems.
Or spices of rich Araby.
My heart would count th' refined gold
Which Eastern kings have left untold
But as a beggar's price to buy
One sparkle of my Mary's eye.

* * * * *

I *am* a beggar ; — poor indeed !
That eye whose glance was ample meed
For all the blood-strife that I knew,
The toil, the sorrow I went through,
No love, no strength, no skill could save
From the obstructions of the grave.
Was not that glance of heaven? Oh, why
Should things so little earthly die?
Why for the bridal of the tomb Clothe
them in loveliness and bloom?

Who can these hard things answer ? Thou
To whom perforce I turn me now.
Oh ! I'm not only deaf but blind —
Blind, blind of heart. Oh ! seek me, find
Thy lost one — he so prone to stray
From that sequestered and cool way,
Where thine walk, guided by thine eye
And cheer'd ; — and Thou dost never die.

the nervous structures in correspondence with the affected parts. The case I mentioned in my last lecture would be readily explained on this supposition. The sensitiveness of the vaso-motor nerves, as well as the sympathetic, would lead us to expect that we should find woman more liable to the phenomena which follow both contraction (irritation) and dilatation (relaxation) of the vessels; and this is borne out by every-day experience. The majority of the cases where errors occur in these functions never come on the *post mortem* table, and probably, if they did so, we should find nothing, the action being vital, leaving no sign.

There is one other phenomenon which it might be well to consider a moment. I mean the *growth of the heart* which takes place during pregnancy. This now established fact is doubtless the result of sympathetic excitement communicated from the uterus, and enables it to meet the new requirements. It is a purely healthy process; but it would be interesting to know how far this growth may occur in the presence of large tumours in either sex; and again, how far the opposite, viz., amputation of limbs, would be attended by shrinking of the heart.

One cannot pass this subject without alluding to the changes which occur in the state of the *blood* during pregnancy. There can be now no doubt that this fluid is in a decidedly different condition from that of the non-pregnant state. The blood of non-pregnant women differs somewhat from that of healthy man, being more watery; but when men are of the leucophlegmatic type, their blood is but little different from that of women. But as soon as woman becomes pregnant, the change slowly commences and gradually increases till she arrives at full term. So far as investigations have ascertained, the changes are as follows. It is more watery, its serum deficient in albumen, the coloured corpuscles less, in the proportion of 111.8 against 127.2 in the non-gravid state. The fibrin, on the contrary, is increased, and that undefined "extractive" also. Hence is explained the liability to thrombosis, which is so well known.

There is also a substance passed out from the kidney during pregnancy, which has been called "gravidine", or "kiestine" when altered by keeping. Probably, this previously exists in the blood. There are probably other changes with which we are little acquainted.

It is this state of the blood which renders the woman so liable to contract the formidable blood-changes well known in the puerperal state; it is this which intensifies all the zymotic diseases, when they invade the lying-in woman.

Is it a change found only in the pregnant and puerperal person? Are there no phenómena similar in the male? It may be so; for, at any rate, kiestine has been noticed in the non-pregnant woman by myself; and by others in men. One has a parallel in the susceptibilities to blood-changes in some men who, apparently in excellent health, succumb to pyæmic and septicæmic conditions in a few days.

The process of pregnancy is simply physiological, and is doubtless carried on according to the same principles as the other processes of the body. But it is so enormous a change, and takes place so rapidly, that we are apt to think we find in it new and unique phenomena. In this exaggerated action and its errors, may we not find a magnified view of less but similar conditions in the non-pregnant woman and the male; a more distinct and clear exposition of what is in them ambiguous, both in physiology and pathology.

While on the subject of the blood, I must mention the well-known diseases *rheumatism* and *gout*. Rheumatism, taken generally, attacks, as I have already said, the two sexes nearly equally, rather more males than females; but gout more decidedly selects males for its victims, at least in its articular forms. Dr. Garrod (Reynolds's *System of Medicine*) considers that the occurrence of the menses during so long a period of the woman's life is doubtless a great safeguard against the disease, and, as a rule, whenever it appears in the female it is after the cessation of this function. But Darwin (*Descent of Man*, part 2, chap. 8) also suggests a further explanation; for, in speaking of "hereditary transmission", he says: "That characters which appear late in life in one sex are transmitted exclusively to the same sex. Gout generally falls under this rule, for it is generally caused by intemperance after early youth, and is transmitted from the father to his sons in a much more marked manner than to his daughters." But, doubtless, the more intemperate habits of men and their grosser living, tend very much to the development of this complaint, in addition to the above reasons.

Diabetes mellitus, not unfrequently associated with gout and rheumatism, is much more frequent in males than in females. The origin of diabetes is still undetermined; but the opinion that it is dependent on disturbance of the cerebro-spinal system will receive some support, rom the fact that disorders of that system are more frequent in males.

[*To be concluded.*]

TERMINATION OF THE CASE OF MISS HARRIET MARTINEAU.

By THOMAS M. GREENHOW, M.D., Chapel Allerton, Leeds.

SINCE the publication of the autobiography of Miss Harriet Martineau, it has become incumbent on me to say a few words to the profession on the termination of her case, which, thirty-two years before her death, excited so much interest and attention.

First of all I may observe, what will be obvious to all readers, that section III, vol. ii, page 191, contains *little fact* and *much imagination*; and that, as was shown by the *post mortem* examination, instead of her being cured by mesmerism or any other agency, although the distressing symptoms were greatly relieved by the palliative treatment exclusive of mesmerism pursued while she was at Tynemouth, no *cure* was effected, but temporary suspension of suffering took place from natural causes connected with local disease. But, before giving a report of the proofs ascertained after death of what she had suffered so much discomfort from during life, I may refer to her constantly expressed conviction that her disease was of a fatal malignant nature, and could only terminate in early death, and to the fact that, in 1855, eleven years after I had seen her, she consulted two eminent physicians in London, Dr. Latham and Sir Thos. Watson, by whom she was assured that she was free from heart-disease; she nevertheless maintained and asserted her conviction that she would soon die from that cause. In proof of this circumstance, I need only refer to the letter from Sir Thomas Watson,* which appeared in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL for July 8th, 1876, and in many newspapers.

With these preliminary remarks, I shall now relate the substance of the report of the *post mortem* examination made by Mr. King, by whom Miss Harriet Martineau was attended during the later years of her life, and furnished to me by my friend Mr. Higginson of Liverpool. She died on June 27th, 1876, at the age of seventy-four, twenty-one years after Dr. Latham and Sir Thomas Watson had declared her free from disease of the heart. Of the history of her health since she ceased to be under my observation, thirty-two years before her death, I know nothing except from occasional imperfect reports.

POST MORTEM EXAMINATION.—Forty-two hours after death a *post mortem* examination was made by Mr. King. He says: "On opening the abdomen, the muscular tissue I cut through showed decided signs of fatty degeneration, and a vast tumour became apparent at once. I could pass my hand round it and turn it completely out of the cavity, where it hung by one pedicle, which was found to be attached to the broad ligament close to the cornu uteri. The broad ligament and the Fallopian tube were spread over the surface of the tumour, to which they were adherent, and the tube admitted a wire to be passed through to the extent of three inches or more till it reached the pedicle. The tumour was pear-shaped, with the narrow end within the pelvis. In the longer diameter, from the upper to the lower extremity, it measured twelve; in the lateral direction, ten inches. On cutting into the tumour, about half a pint of brown fluid escaped; the remainder of the contents consisted entirely of a mass of greyish-brown soft stuff. I can only compare it to bread soaked in tea, dotted here and there with white hardish pieces, exactly like half of apple-pips, generally two halves being together. I have had the sac preserved in spirits. On sewing up the incision, Mr. Higginson found that it would contain 110 ounces—10½ imperial pints. The larger circumferences measured 30 inches, the smaller 28 inches. The pedicle had the appearance of having been cut pretty close to the uterus. The interior was still lined with abundant flakes of white and rather glistening substance, which did not grease the paper nor melt under heat, but gave off a slightly grizzled smell. Under the microscope, crystals of cholesterine were sparingly found, and granular matter. The disease was in the left ovary. The uterus was small and unaffected. The right ovary was normal. The liver was elevated into the chest by pressure from below, but otherwise appeared normal. The kidneys showed nothing remarkable. The intestines nearly entirely occupied the upper cavity of the abdomen, the stomach being much pushed up, and to the right overlapping the liver a good deal. The diaphragm was much arched, by which the cavity of the chest was much diminished. There must of necessity have been considerable interference with the action both of the lungs and heart from pres-

* Sir Thomas Watson says: "I have been in the habit of illustrating my caution by likening the heart so affected to a china jar slightly cracked, which, if carefully handled, may remain long unbroken, but which heedlessness or accident might ruin much more easily than if it were sound: but in Miss Martineau's case there was no such obvious rift, and I therefore affirmed to her that her life was in no immediate danger."

sure." Mr. King says that circumstances did not admit of his examining the chest, but "I conclude that the heart sympathised in the general fatty degeneration of muscular tissue, and during life I was convinced that fatty degeneration existed". "As to the mode of death, this was unquestionably due to failure of the heart's action, which had for some time (about eighteen months) been gradually weakening; and, during the last few weeks of Miss Martineau's life, that organ had failed very markedly."

I have carefully examined, with my friend Mr. Higginson, this very large cyst, which undoubtedly had its origin in the left ovarium. The surface was traversed by blood-vessels, and to it was adherent the broad ligament of the uterus with its fimbriated extremity, and the Fallopian tube, this remained pervious, and admitted a wire to be passed through to the extent of three inches, when it came into contact with the pedicle, which was attached to the fundus, or perhaps more properly to the left cornu uteri.

From these data I shall endeavour to deduce a pathological history of the case, which will reconcile the symptoms experienced by the patient with the progress of organic disease.

The first question that presents itself for solution is, How did the displaced ovarium arrive at its situation near the uterine extremity of the Fallopian tube just before it entered the cornu uteri?

In answer, may it not be inferred that it had passed through the tube itself, which remains pervious? and, we know, as in cases of extra-uterine pregnancy or the formation of tuberculous matter, the Fallopian tube will admit of almost any degree of dilatation, it might easily enough admit the passage of the compressed ovarium, and in process of time regain its original calibre.*

If this inference be correct, the passage of the ovarium through the Fallopian tube must have been a slow process, and attended with much suffering, experienced in the early stages of disease. In this respect, it would bear some analogy to the passing of gall-stones or of calculi through the male urethra.

The dislocated ovarium in the first stage of its morbid growth, by its weight and connection with the fundus uteri, dragged the uterus down into the lower part of the pelvis, and so produced the retroversion observed when Miss Martineau was at Tynemouth, and by its fixed position between the rectum and the bladder occasioned the distressing symptoms then experienced. But as the displaced ovarium gained greater dimensions, it would gradually raise the uterus from its imprisonment in the lower part of the pelvis, and in this way the patient was relieved for a considerable time from the pain and discomfort it had caused. It was this temporary relief which led to the conclusion, not unnaturally, that she was cured. At this time, it is probable, that the growth of the ovarian tumour was not rapid; but, as time went on, its size became so great as to reproduce symptoms of oppression, the history of which is imperfectly known to me, and death has at length revealed the pathological condition which has been described.

In 1841, when Sir Charles Clarke saw Miss Harriet Martineau, careful examination led us to conclude that the retroverted uterus was itself enlarged, and that it would eventually gain such dimensions as to raise it from its fixed position and so afford relief to the patient. But we were convinced that no malignant disease existed in the uterus. The displaced ovarium was at that time behind the fundus uteri, and probably gave the impression of abnormal enlargement of the uterus itself. Or, it is possible, that such enlargement actually existed, and that in the subsequent progress of disease the ovarium might gain nourishment at the expense of the uterus, thus inducing the small size of that organ at the time of death. It is not easy to define the changes produced during the lapse of thirty-two years. Whether some years ago, while the constitution retained some vigour, and the tumour had not yet attained its great size, it might have been successfully removed by operation, so as to effect a *real cure* of the disease, I had no opportunity of judging.

Such is a brief sketch of the conclusions at which I have arrived after careful reflection on this interesting case: interesting, not only in reference to the eminent lady who was the subject of it, but, perhaps, as affording a contribution of some value to the class of diseases of which it is a remarkable example. Perhaps, too, it may serve in some degree to explain some of the peculiarities of character which were apparent during her remarkable career.

* My friend Mr. Higginson does not quite perceive the probability of the passage of the displaced ovarium through the Fallopian tube; but pathology discloses many unlooked-for facts; and the situation of the pedicle, which appears to have grown from the Fallopian tube just before its terminations in the cornu uteri—the tube being pervious to that point and no further—and the division of the pedicle having taken place at the same point, so as to leave the uterus on the one side and the tumour with the remainder of the Fallopian tube and broad ligament on the other, seems to render it highly probable that the ovarium of its normal size forced its way through the Fallopian tube to its ultimate position. I can find no record of a similar process, but it may have happened in other cases without observation. But whether correct or mistaken in this conjecture, the general history of the case remains untouched in its three stages: first, of suffering; secondly, of temporary relief (supposed cure); thirdly, of renewed illness, associated with collateral symptoms and so ending in death.

THE ADVANTAGES OF EARLY OPERATION FOR THE CURE OF HARE-LIP.

By HENRY G. RAWDON, M.D., M.R.C.S.,
Surgeon to the Liverpool Infirmary for Children.

In the following remarks, I propose advocating the practicability and desirability of operating for the cure of hare-lip very soon; I mean within a few hours after birth. It is no doubt true that this has been occasionally done; but the practice has, as yet, neither received the sanction of our surgical authorities nor has it been fairly tested by experience. As a matter of fact, most surgeons prefer postponing the operation till after the third month. This means that infants suffering from hare-lip are most frequently so feeble and imperfectly nourished, from the first ten days or so after birth till they are over three months old, that an operation cannot be undertaken without unjustifiably hazarding life.

It is perhaps not so well known as it might be, that the mortality attending the rearing of these unhappy little ones is very considerable, more particularly in large towns, where the attempts to hand-feed are too often very injudicious. If the fatality in these cases be so great as I am inclined to believe, at least among the poorer classes in towns, it is obvious that the cause is the absence of the natural nutriment: breast-milk. Consequently, we may safely conclude that if such infants, by early operation, can be placed in a position to obtain their natural nourishment, the cause of fatality will be removed. The practice of early operation, however, can only be recommended when there is a reasonable hope of the infant being afterwards able to take the breast; therefore, where there is no prospect of this end being attained, as in cases complicated with extensive cleft palate, the operation cannot be urged.

An argument in favour of the practice I propose, is the fact that infants, born with this class of deformity, are for the most part strong and in really good condition at birth, and continue so for a week or two, until the attempt to bring them up by hand, even when judiciously managed, begins to tell, and they more or less rapidly fall away, and often have a great struggle for life in the earlier weeks.

Does it not, therefore, appear a prudent thing to take advantage of the inherent vitality of the new-born infant, and operate within twenty-four or thirty-six hours after birth?

It is scarcely necessary to state that there is seldom difficulty in preventing the milk from leaving the mother, during the few days the lip will require to form a sufficiently firm union for the infant to begin to take the breast.

I have lately had two cases under my care, which tend to support the practice I recommend. In the first, which occurred in private practice, I operated, November 2nd, 1876, about twenty-three hours after birth. In this case, both hard and soft palates were completely cleft, therefore, I did not recommend operation, as sucking would necessarily be impossible; however, as it was the wish of the medical attendant, and the parents were extremely anxious it should be attempted, I operated. The fissure was on the left side, and into the nasal cavity. The intermaxillary bone projected very considerably, and required to be cut across on the right side and bent into position. The lip had also to be well freed from its bony attachments on each side. The bleeding was not excessive, and was well controlled by small pads of rolled lint pressed upon the cut surfaces for a few minutes. I used three silver sutures and one entomological pin (the hare-lip pin recommended by Mr. Stokes of Dublin). This latter I removed the following day, when I found union perfect, and in two or three days afterwards I removed the silver sutures. The child bore the operation remarkably well, and the result was extremely gratifying. I have lately been informed it is thriving as fairly well as can be expected, considering it is brought up by hand.

The second case was a feeble and imperfectly nourished infant, five weeks old, which came under my care at the Infirmary for Children, October 18th, 1876. The fissure was on the left side, exposing the nasal cavity, and the anterior half of the palate was cleft to a considerable extent. To my surprise, I found that the mother still retained her milk, and that with assistance by pressure the child was able to obtain a certain, but obviously insufficient, amount of nourishment. The cleft in the palate was very wide, and the intermaxillary bone extremely