Research Repository UCD

Title	The Senses in Literature, 1800 to 1920: Industry and Empire
Authors(s)	Daly, Nicholas
Publication date	2014-10-23
Publication information	Daly, Nicholas. "The Senses in Literature, 1800 to 1920: Industry and Empire." Bloomsbury, 2014.
Publisher	Bloomsbury
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/6477

Downloaded 2023-04-07T10:52:29Z

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd_oa)

© Some rights reserved. For more information

The Senses in Literature, 1800 to 1920: Industry and Empire

This chapter will look at the role of the senses in literature across a diverse period, spanning Romantic, Victorian and Modernist literary formations. There are, nonetheless, significant continuities across this period, since all three formations react to the alteration of sensory experience by modernization and an increasingly self-conscious imperialism. New conceptions of time and space, new sights, sounds, tastes and odours, and new tactile worlds, accompanied these developments, and were refracted, incorporated, and theorized in literary works. At the beginning of this period Romanticism is at least in part a reaction against the perceived destruction of an older experiential world by the age of steam, and an attempt to locate a basis for authentic poetic selfhood in sensory immersion in the natural world; in these years the poet's unique capacity for perception is thought to find its fullest realization away from modern life. Later nineteenth-century writers retain this perspective on modernity to a considerable extent, though a few attempt to come to terms with the new experiential world of the steam age. By the early twentieth century, while some Modernists continue to reject the sights and sounds of industry and mass urban life, others, notably the Futurists, seem to want to escape the messy stuff of humanity for the clean mechanical lines of the second industrial revolution. Empire recurs as a concern across this span, as the economic powers sought new markets and new sources of raw materials, and tightened their grip on existing territories. At times empire is a shadowy presence in the text, denoted by streams of revenue, foods, and fabrics; at times it is more insistent, a transformative or disruptive force for the sensory world of the characters, like the vision-producing opium of Dickens's *Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). Across all of this period reading itself as a practice was becoming more embedded in everyday life because of a number of factors: growing levels of literacy; cheaper books and newspapers; the text-saturation of increasingly urban environments; and the dissemination of new lighting technologies.

Romantic

The Romantic poet was deemed to be characterized by his (it was usually his) perceptive power, thought to resemble that of a child or a non-Western subject. He must, says Coleridge, have "the ear of a wild Arab listening in the silent Desert, the eye of a North American Indian tracing the footsteps of an enemy" (McSweeney 1998: 3). But he is also attuned to spiritual realities of which the natural world is thought to be the symbol, and experiences moments of total unity with that world, becoming, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, "a transparent eyeball ... nothing"; such intervals are William Wordsworth's "spots of time" Emily Dickinson's "Heavenly Moments" (McSweeney 1998: 29). These twin tenets of Romanticism – perceptual acuity, and affinity with the natural world -- suggest the gap between Romantic poetry and the fruits of the industrial revolution. Yet

there are poems that seek to bridge that chasm, and make industry more than a significant absence. Wordsworth's "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways" is such an attempt to reconcile poetic feeling with the ugly, noisy, smelly machines of the steam age. Ultimately the poem suggests that we must go beyond the ugly appearances of the new technologies to discover "what in soul [they] are", which turns out to be the power of nature harnessed by humankind. The new things may be unattractive to the senses, but they are the second-generation products of nature:

In spite of all that beauty may disown
In your harsh features, Nature doth embrace
Her lawful offspring in Man's art... (Wordsworth 1972: 47)

Wordsworth even bought railway stock (Warburg 1958: 27), but when steam power began to intrude into his beloved Lake District, he took a less benign view, and the late railway sonnets give voice to a fresh sense of the inimicality of the new transport technologies to a life and literature in tune with the tranquil beauty of nature. In "The Kendal and Windermere Railway", he seeks to open the eyes and ears of the mountains themselves to the unsightly, noisy and noisome threat that confronts them: "Hear Ye that whistle?", urging them to share his "just disdain" of the invaders.

Among less familiar work, Ebenezer Elliott's "Steam, A Poem", also known as "Steam, at Sheffield", which appeared first in 1833, is a rare attempt to capture the sounds, sights and rhythms of the steam-engine:

Oh, there is glorious harmony in this
Tempestuous music of the giant, Steam
Commingling growl and roar, and stamp and hiss
With flame and darkness.... (Elliott 1840: 91)

Nonetheless, for Elliott as for Wordsworth, steam power remains something monstrous, evoking both joy and terror. This remains the uneasy attitude for much of the nineteenth century: the new technologies were undoubtedly productive, but they grated upon the senses of the writer, and they remained a source of anxiety.

While Romantic poetry forsook the world of steam for a version of pastoral, the Romantic or Gothic novel was probing different sensuous territory. In broad terms we can see that Gothic's preoccupation with sensation and with transgression – including the depiction of murder, rape, torture, and incest -- was also produced by modernization, insofar as Gothic provided a readerly outlet for acts and desires that were increasingly circumscribed by the modern state and civil life, and for heightened emotional states that were incompatible with ideas of rationality (Halttunen 1998: 78-83). Like the literature of sensibility (Henry Mackenzie's novel, *The Man of Feeling* [1771], is a famous instance), Gothic draws its energies from new attitudes to pain and the body. The spectacular violence of a novel like Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), in which the revered monk, Ambrosio, drugs, rapes and murders Antonia, who turns out to be his own sister, thus marks it as the grim twin of the more sentimental literature in which characters learn to feel the pain of others.

Sensory deprivation and overload in the form of burial alive, torture, and starvation are staples of Gothic. The readerly effects of these novels suggest a variety of the sublime perhaps not fully anticipated by Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).

The more geological shifts in behaviors and attitudes that accompanied the civilizing process of modernity are not the only forces acting on this Romantic literature, and the atrocities of the French Revolution and the 1798 rising in Ireland provide other contexts for understanding the focus on the body in pain and sensory extremes. Nor should we forget the global colonial context: Matthew Lewis, for example, owned and visited slave estates in the West Indies, where spectacular violence, rape and torture were recognized parts of a modern commerce that conflated people and goods; his *Journal of a West India Proprietor* was published posthumously in 1834. Slavery was not outlawed in British colonial possessions until 1833, and in French ones until 1848; in the United States it was 1865. In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the bestselling tales of 1848 retained the Gothic focus on violence and transgression (Williams 1986: 2). Across the Channel, Gothic lingered in the work of Théophile Gautier, among others, while on the other side of the Atlantic, it survived well into the nineteenth century in the work of Hawthorne and Melville. The literature of sensibility and Gothic would be combined to great effect in Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), one of the most widely-read books of the nineteenth century, in which the savage flogging of Uncle Tom provides a heart-wringing spectacle.

The early nineteenth century also saw a very different fictional representation of lived reality, a strain of the novel that foregrounded sense rather than sensibility, judgement rather than sensation, and manners rather than action. We do not usually think of Jane Austen's fiction as marked by any very vivid sensuousness. Her characters for the most part glide through well-regulated domestic environments that evoke little in the way of detailed description. But in *Mansfield Park* we get a clearer sense of what underwrites such a tranquil world. Fanny Price is raised apart from her family, and comes to think of the comfortable surroundings of the great house as her actual home. Its virtues are brought home to her abruptly when she returns to her parents's house in Portsmouth. There she finds herself "in the midst of closeness and noise [with] confinement, bad air, bad smells, substituted for liberty, freshness, fragrance, and verdure" (Austen 2003: 401). The deracinated Fanny has been placed in an invidious position, and has acquired the habitus of the gentry without its wealth. She does not seem to question the fact that freshness and verdure are the exclusive preserve of a wealthy elite. Nor does she seem greatly troubled that it is the sweetness of the sugar from Sir Thomas Bertram's West Indian estate that sustains the island of good taste that is Mansfield, and that domestic liberty is the obverse of a coin, the reverse of which is colonial chattel slavery.

While their contemporary settings and bon-ton milieu might persuade one otherwise, the silver-fork English novels of the 1820s and 1830s are closer to Gothic than to Austen, insofar as the anti-heroes of these novels are the lineal descendants of the Romantic rebel-hero of Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber* (1781). However, in such novels as Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826) and Edward

Bulwer's *Pelham; or The Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828), the protagonist is more likely to be an epicurean dandy in kid gloves than a bandit. The colorful reconstruction of the verbal and sartorial fashions of the beau monde, helped to make these novels of the moment the successful books of the day, as did their brisk pace, and their representation of "real people, real clubs, real shops, and real tradesmen" (Cronin 2004: 38). The narrative pacing was a self-conscious reaction to what was felt to be the relentless whirl of modern life: as Catherine Gore put it, "the velocity of steam inventions seems to demand a corresponding rapidity of narrative, dialogue, and discourse" (Cronin 2004: 41). But not only did Bulwer's *Pelham* capture the structure of feeling of a society in transition, it contributed to the desire for novelty: *Pelham* made fashionable the black coat (as opposed to blue), and thus, somewhat paradoxically, played a part in what J.C. Flugel would later term the great male renunciation of color. The avowed dandyism and dedication to the ephemeral performance of selfhood attracted invidious attention as well as plaudits; as Richard Cronin notes, Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4) is, inter alia, an attack on the silver-fork fetishization of appearance and dress. As we shall see, the epicene dandy-hero who lives for pleasure reappears in a new form at the end of the century as Wilde's Dorian Gray, a name calculated to recall Disraeli's Vivian Grey.

Victorian

The industrial novels of the 1840 and 1850s were an attempt to introduce readers to a new political landscape, and to provide symbolic resolution to structural political problems. But they were also an introduction to the urban landscapes and new ways of life that had mushroomed alongside the new factories. To this extent they expand the descriptive range of the novel, showing at least some of the sensory world within which lived the new class of industrial workers, its sights, smells, sounds and textures. For the most part, though, the narratives focus less on the factory floor, and more on the domestic lives of their protagonists, employers and workers alike. Mrs Gaskell, for example, shows us the neat home of the working-class Bartons in the first chapters of *Mary Barton* (1848). But as the narrative develops it leaves this respectable if fragile domestic world to describe the conditions of the worst-off of Manchester's poor. In a particularly powerful passage in chapter 6, our narrator adopts a more intimate second-person voice to bring us, with John Barton and his friend, Wilson, to the cellar-home of the Davenports:

You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes were many of them broken and stuffed with rags ... the smell was so fetid as almost to knock the two men down ... they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children, rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up (Gaskell 1998: 66-7).

The overpowering stench, the darkness, and the filth underfoot – such evoked experiences retain some of the shock-value that they must have possessed for their first readers, who expected such horrors to be confined within the Gothic novel. The chapter adds further point to this description by taking us

immediately afterwards to first the brightly-lit streets, and then the luxurious home of the Carsons, the mill-owners whose more comfortable lives become intertwined with those of the Bartons and Wilsons. In a famous passage, it is the glittering shop-windows that make John Barton muse upon the contrasting lives of the haves and have-nots:

It is a pretty sight to walk through a street with lighted shops; the gas is so brilliant, the display of goods so much more vividly shown than by day, and of all shops a druggist's looks the most like the tales of our childhood, from Aladdin's garden of enchanted fruits to the charming Rosamond with her purple jar. No such associations had Barton; yet he felt the contrast between the well-filled, well-lighted shops and the dim gloomy cellar (70).

John Barton grows angry with the seemingly happy pedestrians of these pleasant streets, but Gaskell's point is in part that "you cannot read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street" (70). Real urban life is marked by its opacity, and does not offer the panoramas and cross-class tourism that the novel makes possible. The commodity fetishism of Victorian shop-window displays offered the urban pedestrian no clue to the visual, olfactory and tactile horrors that were just around the corner.

It was Friedrich Engels who first explored this particular form of fetishism in the industrial city. The urban labyrinths of Manchester feature in his *Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in German in 1845, though not to appear in English translation in the U.S. until 1886, and in England itself in 1892. Engels, who had been guided around Manchester by his Irish working-class partner, Mary Burns, takes us on a tour of main thoroughfares that "conceal from the eyes of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement to their wealth" (Engels 1987: 86). Engels' account veers between a belief that such invisibility is part of a deliberate plan, and a contrary assumption that these deceptive appearances are the unplanned product of economic forces. While he is scathing regarding the economic causes of urban squalor, he does not scruple to paint a picture that is rather more graphic than that of Gaskell as regards the degradation of humanity that has resulted: this is not a vision of working-class resistance, or even agency. He notes the presence of pig-sties alongside human dwellings, producing air "corrupted by putrefying animal and vegetable substances" (92); and the "foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement" (88). He draws on the reports of Dr James Kay, inter alia, to conjure up other tactile horrors, a moral filth to accompany the physical: "it often happens that a whole Irish family is crowded into one bed" (101); some of the poor take in lodgers, and "lodgers of both sexes by no means rarely sleep in the same bed with the married couple" (102); other lodging houses are a "focus of crime, the scene of deeds against which human nature revolts" (102). Only a "physically degenerate race ... reduced morally and physically to bestiality" (100) can be comfortable in such surroundings. As we shall see, it is not so very different from Charles Dickens's argument that crime breeds in the neglected and invisible corners of the city: if we could only see clearly, such horrors might disperse.

Similar issues of visibility and social opacity trouble much of the literature and drama of the first half of the nineteenth century, and linger long

after. At times it seems that what is sought is a form of visual mastery that would render the city and the urban crowd transparent, while keeping the viewer distant from any too immediate exposure to the olfactory and tactile nature of the streets. This is in keeping with the privileged position of sight in this period, and with the collapse of social distance that the other senses threatened (Classen et al. 1994: 3-5, 166; Flint 2000). Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) shows the origins of the scopic power of the detective story in the wish to disaggregate the urban crowd, to make the mass intelligible by sheer dint of staring hard at it. The extraordinary success of the many "Mysteries" novels that emulated Eugène Sue's bestselling *Mystères de Paris* (1842-3) can also be seen as a symptom of the desire to render the darkness of the city visible, and there is more than a little cross-class voyeurism evident. Sue's formula spread virally across Europe, the United States and Australia inspiring such works as Paul Thiel's *Die Geheimnisse von Berlin* (1844), G.W.M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London* (1846) "Ned Buntline"'s [E.Z.C. Judson] *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1847-8), and Donald Cameron's *The Mysteries of Melbourne Life* (1873) (Knight 2012).

But mystery was not the only direction taken by the optical imaginary in these years. In Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846-8), which traces the impact of the railways on England, the narrator cries out for some magical force to allow us to visually penetrate the opacity of the city, and show us how the neglected parts of the city breed the crime and vice that will ultimately overtake all:

Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off, with a more potent and benignant hand than the lame demon in the tale, and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying angel as he moves forth among them! For only one night's view of the pale phantoms rising from the scenes of our too-long neglect. (Dickens 1997: 623).

The "lame demon" is generally identified with Asmodeus, the supernatural agent who appears in Alain-René Lesage's satirical urban novel of 1707, *Le Diable boiteux*. But in *Dombey and Son*, it is the railway that seems to promise just such a magical visual power, as it cuts its way through the slums of London, shining its modernizing light into the dark corners of the city. The odiferous clutter of "dunghills, and dustheaps, and ditches" (65) that he identifies with the working-class neighbourhood inhabited by the Toodles in chapter 6 of the novel has by chapter 15 been swept away by the rough vigor of the railways:

The miserable waste ground, where the refuse matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frowsy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise ... the new streets ... formed towns within themselves, originating wholesome comforts and conveniences belonging to themselves (213).

Time itself is now upon railway principles: "There was even railway time observed in clocks, as if the sun himself had given in" (214). This clean,

prosperous, punctual urban space is Dickens's fantasy of a successful industrial city.

It would be a mistake, of course, to take Dickens vision of the modernized city for the reality. In many ways the sensory experience of the Victorian urban pedestrian was not so very different from that of the previous century, or indeed of a much earlier period. Animals still thronged the streets, their noises and excreta adding to the auditory, olfactory and tactile dimension of city life, as their presence also made city life possible in an age of short supply-chains. Except for the occasional cameo appearances of horses as transport, such street animals are something of an absent presence in literature, denoted only by crossing-sweepers such as Jo in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3), until humanitarian narratives like Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) placed them centre-stage. Other aspects of a pre-industrial world lingered too: traditional street-sellers continued to cry their wares long after the advertising industry pushed selling into a more visual register. Francis Wheatley captured these cries – "Milk below", "Sweet China oranges, sweet China", "Strawberrys, Scarlet Strawberrys" in a series of paintings in the 1790s, much reproduced throughout the nineteenth century. But perhaps their most striking memorial is Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), which turns the street cries into the sinister calls of the goblins (Norcia 2012):

"Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpeck'd cherries,
Melons and raspberries" (Rossetti 1993: 71)

Such acoustic contexts for nineteenth-century literature have been relatively neglected, though John Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes* has helped to restore them to view, or rather to audibility. Picker makes clear that the literature of the nineteenth century was written against a soundtrack of urban noise, as well as against the backdrop of campaigns to control street noise backed by Dickens, Tennyson, Wilkie Collins and others (Picker 2003: 61). While street criers, church bells, urban animals, and many other sources contributed to the urban cacophony, the ire of Dickens and his fellow writers was mostly focused on immigrant itinerant musicians, rival cultural-producers, after a fashion, who troubled the walls of the home as a place of intellectual labor. It is a useful reminder that the writers who provide our window onto the sensory landscape of the past were also engaged in struggles for place that recall what Jacques Rancière terms the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004).

Dickens and others continued to worry at the city as a problematic social space, but by and large the novel in English changes focus after the early 1850s, and the next few decades see the dominance of a different kind of domestic fiction. On the one hand there is the sensation novel, in which the darker side of family life is explored; on the other there is the provincial novel. In such novels, vivid accounts of the burgeoning cities are replaced by a detailed attention to more "knowable" provincial communities in Raymond Williams' terms. And yet these novels also record in their textures the processes of modernity. In Eliot's

novels, for example, the language of scientific observation – optical and acoustic – weaves through the narrative providing striking metaphors for the necessary limits of individual knowledge. As John Picker notes, Eliot's famous evocation in *Middlemarch* (1870) of "that roar that lies on the other side of silence" (Eliot 2000: 124) is only one of the passages in which her fiction invokes contemporary discoveries in sound, from the emergent amplifying technology of the microphone, to Hermann von Helmholtz's account of sympathetic vibration (Picker 2003: 82-100).

The sensation novel for its part is rarely noteworthy for the sensuous detail of the world that it depicts. In such novels as Wilkie's Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60), and *The Moonstone* (1868), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), the focus tends to be more on action and mystery, rather than richly evoked settings or sensory experience. However, these domestic mystery novels mark a new epoch in the sustained deployment of a particular kind of physical effect on the reader: suspense. In this respect they follow in the tracks of the Gothic novel, which also worked on the reader's body as much as her mind. The sensation novel is close kin to the contemporary sensation play, in which all of the audience's interest is focused on particular "sensation scenes": episodes of spectacular action, often last-minute rescues, against vividly-realized backdrops. Among the most successful of these plays were Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), with its much-celebrated water-rescue, and his *After Dark* (1868), which borrowed its last-minute railway rescue from Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867), and its vision of the city as a criminals' paradise from Adolphe Philippe Dennery and Eugène Grangé's *Les Bohémiens de Paris* (1843). The railway rescue becomes one of the most imitated spectacles of the history of popular entertainment, and lingers well into the film era: the villain(s) leave someone unconscious, or bound, on the railway tracks; the train hurtles towards the helpless victim, but the hero or heroine arrives just in time to roll with the victim to safety as the train flashes past. As a symbolic scene, it suggests that true humanity is somehow at odds with technology, and perhaps with modernity itself. At the same time, such scenes deployed a stagecraft that turned the levels of focused attention required by an industrial age into a pleasurable entertainment – audiences were undergoing a species of industrial training of the senses (Daly 2004).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the sights, sounds, smells and textures of the city return as topics of urgent interest in the slum novels of Arthur Morrison, George Gissing, and Clarence Rook in Britain, as well as in continental and American Naturalism. By the end of the century too, a generation of criminologists and scientists had convinced many that criminality was actually written on the body, something to be observed in the size and shape of skulls and ears, and the angle of foreheads. The work of Cesare Lombroso, author of *L'uomo delinquente* (1876), persuaded many of the reality of this visual fantasy (Pick 1993: 109-52). On this reading the city became less the principal site of modernity, and more a place where the past lingered in a dangerous population of atavistic survivals, low-browed primitive types that only modern forensic science could keep under control, through an emerging visual and haptic biometrics of cranial measurement, forensic photography, and fingerprinting. Such nightmares run through the popular and literary fiction of the fin de siècle, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907)

(Pick 1993: 155-75). The literary experiments of the Symbolists, Decadents, and Naturalists, which included attempts to utilize the “lower” senses, were seen by Max Nordau to be the high-cultural equivalent of the such degenerate criminality, proof of the diseased nature of modern culture (Classen 1998: 118-20).

The social conflicts of the 1840s, and the will to “see” the social totality, make an unexpected return in another form in E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910). Gone are the industrial workers, and in their place is the growing army of clerical workers, in Forster’s tripartite vision of intellectuals (the Schlegel family), capitalists (the Wilcoxes), and workers (Leonard Bast). The longing to peer through the opacities of the industrial city takes a new form as a will to connect, to understand the relations not just of the life of the mind and the world of work, but the offstage world of Empire, from which the Wilcoxes (and later the Schlegels) draw their money. “It is impossible to see modern life steadily and see it whole” (Forster 1985: 127), we are told in chapter 18 of a novel that privileges the point of view of Margaret Schlegel, who sees things whole. That ability to totalize is linked by Forster to the rural seclusion of the house, *Howards End*, an idyllic pastoral survival that has been temporarily the possession of the Wilcoxes, but at the novel’s end is to belong to a boy whose mother is a Schlegel and whose father was a Bast. Unless we enjoy our rootedness in the past and in the slow rhythms of the land, we cannot understand the present, would appear to be one message of this ending. The imperial Wilcoxes are excluded from any such apprehension; they quite literally cannot smell the roses, as they all suffer from hayfever, and delight in driving their noisy and smelly cars too quickly down country lanes. The disjunction between Forster’s philosophical vision and the world of the motor-car is evident in a passage in which Margaret is driven at queasy speed through the English countryside: “She looked at the scenery. It heaved and merged like porridge. Presently it congealed. They had arrived” (156). But Forster is also aware of the limitations of Little-England pastoralism, and this is no *Mansfield Park*: we are encouraged to recognize, as Margaret does, that her good taste and social vision, like *Howards End* itself, depend on money that flows from colonial exploitation, this time not based on the sweetness of sugar, but the elastic and waterproof properties of the rubber required by the second industrial revolution.

The counter-industrial thread that I have been tracing is only one in the dense literary fabric of the nineteenth century. For example, across the English Channel, or La Manche, a very different engagement with modern life was emerging in the work of Charles Baudelaire, who took the city streets as his material, like his painter of modern life, Constantin Guys. Baudelaire argues that the modern artist must immerse himself in modern life, which he identifies with the sensory world of the street, and the crowd. The crowd is not something to be mastered, as detective fiction suggests, or a figure of alienation, as it is in stage melodrama, but a vast reservoir of energy from which the artist can draw. For Walter Benjamin, Baudelaire’s most striking innovations include his attempt to absorb the modern experience of shock into poetry (Benjamin 1968). In *Une passante* (1861), Baudelaire captures the (literally) fleeting beauty of modernity in the form of a woman in mourning who passes him by while the noise of the city’s traffic roars in his ears (“La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait” [Baudelaire 1968: 181]). He is reborn by his momentary glimpse of her funereal

“fugitive beauté”, drinks from her sky-blue eyes, in which hurricanes grow. Here the anonymity of the city is not something against which the writer rails and struggles: the visual world of the city is full of promise, it allows for endless fantasies of other lives, other loves, glimpsed in the eyes of a thousand strangers; this is no pastoral vision, but nature, with its skies and storms, has been condensed into the body of an unknown woman. Baudelaire’s sensual embrace of the life of the street, as well as his ideas of sensory correspondences, would reappear later in the century in the work of the French Symbolists – Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud – as well as in the poems of the Rhymers’ Club (Classen 1998: 111-12).

The closest thing to this shift in the representation of the senses in the Anglophone world is that combination of movements that we generally place under the label “Aestheticism”. While the most exotic flowerings of this tendency do not appear until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the beginnings of Aestheticism are visible much earlier in, for example, the ideas and practices of the Pre-Raphaelites, the essays of Walter Pater, and the work of James Abbott McNeill Whistler. By the time Oscar Wilde arrived on the London scene in the 1880s, much of the groundwork had been laid for his popularization of the ‘cult of beauty’. The hostility to this cult of those who felt that art and literature should be concerned with morality more than the senses was also evident at an early date. Robert Buchanan, under the pseudonym Thomas Maitland, attacked Dante Gabriel’s *Poems* (1870) as well as the work of Algernon Swinburne, William Morris, and others, in his essay “The Fleshly School of Poetry”, charging them with a ‘sub-Tennysonian’ addiction to the senses. Their mission, he fulminated, was:

to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense; and that the poet, properly to develop his poetic faculty, must be an intellectual hermaphrodite, to whom the very facts of day and night are lost in a whirl of aesthetic terminology (Maitland 1871: 336).

Rossetti is singled out for opprobrium: he is accused of “nastiness” in his celebration of sexuality; his work is seen to display sensuality for its own sake, without any leaven of the spiritual and the intellectual. To an extent, the model for Buchanan’s critique is a pictorial one: Rossetti’s paintings, he considers, are those of a skilled colorist, lacking the control of line and perspective of a more intellectual artist, and the poetry is much the same. But Rossetti is also accused of being too “painfully self-conscious”, and too mannered in his diction and forced rhymes. Similarly contradictory charges would be leveled at Wilde’s Dorian Gray in the 1890s, and ultimately at Wilde himself in 1895.

While aestheticism had complex origins, Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) can be seen as the veritable Bible of the movement. Pater’s Renaissance is not an art-historical period, but a series of artifacts and historical figures from the 12th to the 18th century that display a particular sensibility, part of which is an appreciation of male beauty, and a delight in artistic form. Turning his back firmly on the moral criticism of Ruskin, and the assumed critical neutrality of Matthew Arnold, Pater assures the reader

that the question to ask of a text, a picture, or indeed any other experience, is what is this to me, how does it affect me. In a world of flux, our goal should not be to seek for wisdom, but to relish experience for its own sake: “not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end” (Pater 1986: 151). Pater’s remarkable “Conclusion” to the *Renaissance* inspired a generation not only to a new conception of the relations of art and life, but to a new attitude to life itself. Indeed, it still stirs, with its combination of *carpe diem*, and a radical call to open our minds and senses to the world:

A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? ... To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. (152)

Pater’s claim that “all melts under our feet” expresses his belief in both the time-bound aspect of reality, and the fact that the observing subject is herself in flux, though it is difficult not to make the connection to Marx and Engels’s “all that is solid melts into air”, which historicizes instability in terms of the dynamic destructiveness of the capitalist economy. At any rate, we can trace Pater’s radical impressionism, and his cult of sensuous experience throughout the literary output of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and indeed into the twentieth: it is still there, for example, in Joyce’s evocation of the young artist, Stephen Dedalus.

There is a substantial body of late-Victorian poetry that embodies aspects of Pater’s vision. Ernest Dowson’s “Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae” provides a familiar example of the flavor of this work:

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion. (Dowson 1962: 58)

The speaker seeks to lose himself in the riotous empire of the senses – red mouths, madder music, stronger wine -- but is haunted by an older love, whose “lost lilies” suggest death more than erotic love. It has Paterian shades, but it also has the darker coloring that we associate with Decadence; the celebration of intensity is there, but also a morbidity that is little evident in Pater’s

Renaissance. This drive to evoke complex states of mind, and to hint at the inexpressible reminds us that literature in English did not exist in a vacuum in this period. Dowson may be drawing on Pater, but he is also calling upon the earlier work of Baudelaire, and contemporary French Symbolism.

We see a more direct adaptation of Pater's "Conclusion" in Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Wilde's Dorian is remembered for the devil's bargain that transfers the human ageing process to his portrait, but Dorian gets full value from this arrangement only by living life to the full, by savoring his own sensations as a lover, collector of beautiful things, opium fiend, and murderer. He even relishes his own remorse, before ultimately destroying the portrait, and thus himself. As with Pater, the *Picture* complexly endows men who love other men with a particular sensitivity towards the world of things. Among the novel's most remarkable passages are those in Chapter 11, partly based on Wilde's reading of arcane collector's lore in the British Library. Here, for example, having already devoted himself to the study of perfumes and exotic musical instruments, Dorian becomes a connoisseur of precious stones:

He would often spend a whole day settling and resettling in their cases the various stones that he had collected, such as the olive-green chrysoberyl that turns red by lamplight, the cymophane with its wirelike line of silver, the pistachio-coloured peridot, rose-pink and wine-yellow topazes, carbuncles of fiery scarlet with tremulous, four-rayed stars, flame-red cinnamon-stones, orange and violet spinels, and amethysts with their alternate layers of ruby and sapphire. He loved the red gold of the sunstone, and the moonstone's pearly whiteness, and the broken rainbow of the milky opal. (Wilde 1998: 144)

Of course this is a passage that works at various levels. It shows us the increasing refinement of Dorian's tastes, and his attempt to extend the limits of subjectivity through the objects with which he surrounds himself and imbues with his collector's love. But for the reader it offers the experiential pleasures of a sensuous prose poem: verbal novelty, rich and strange words to be rolled around in the mind, or on the tongue. And if this static chapter is in one sense "practically unreadable", as Jeff Nunokawa puts it, it also evokes a desiring gaze, and a series of objects of that gaze that escape easily from the heteronormativity of Victorian fiction (Nunokawa 2003: 147).

Wilde was not drawing on Pater alone for his inspiration. The most obvious other source is Joris-Karl Huysmans's extraordinary *A Rebours* (1884), sometimes assumed to be the "yellow book" that Dorian takes as his guide. The protagonist of Huysmans's novel, Des Esseintes, wearies of a life of urban debauchery, and acquires a house in Fontenay, outside Paris, where he becomes a recluse. Thereafter he devotes himself to a programme of refined intellectual and sensuous experiment, immersing himself in his favorite artists and authors, who include Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé. He grows poisonous plants (like Nathaniel Hawthorne's Rappaccini), dabbles in perfumery, and even creates a series of highly stylized dinners, one all in white, one in black. In his study of perfumes, he decides that the history of scent follows the general contours of cultural history:

Its history followed that of the French language step by step. The Louis XIII style in perfumery, composed of the elements dear to that period – orris-powder, musk, civet, and myrtle water, already known by the name of angel-water – was scarcely adequate to express the cavalierish graces, the rather crude colors of the time which certain sonnets by Saint-Amand have preserved for us ... And then, after the indifference and incuriosity of the First Empire ... perfumery followed Victor Hugo and Gautier and went for inspiration to the lands of the sun ... It had continued to develop joining in the cult of things Chinese and Japanese ... imitating the flower posies of Takeoka, mingling lavender and clove to produce the perfume of the Rondeletia.... (Huysmans 1987: 120-1)

There is a humorous touch here that is sometimes wanting in the more gothic *Dorian Gray*, but otherwise one can easily see how much Wilde has borrowed. Huysmans also anticipates Wilde in moving from a catalogue of sensory immersion, and a celebration of artifice and culture over nature, to a wider conception of the nature of sexuality. While *A Rebours* does not feature the all-male love-triangle of Wilde's novel, in other ways it is more explicit about the protagonist's sexuality, and the pleasures of the flesh. In chapter 9, Des Esseintes recalls his brief relationship with a Miss Urania, an American circus performer (presumably based on Adah Menken), whose masculinity in performance attracts him: "he was seized with a definite desire to possess the woman, yearning for her just as a chlorotic girl will hanker after a clumsy brute whose embrace could squeeze the life out of her" (111). Alas, she proves to be disappointingly feminine in private life. He finds greater satisfaction in the company of a youth whom he meets on the street one day. He strikes up a "mistrustful friendship" (116) with this youth, who has lips like a cherry: "never had he submitted to more delightful or more stringent exploitation, never had he run such risks, yet never had he known such satisfaction mingled with distress (116). No passage this explicit would appear in *Dorian*, though critics nonetheless felt that it was a novel of "unhealthy" tendency. That Huysmans's book becomes a bible to *Dorian Gray* might also remind us that one of the most striking aspects of late-Victorian aestheticism was a new interest in the book as a sensuous object in its own right. These years see a particularly happy marriage of design and publishing that issued in such eye-catching magazines as *The Yellow Book* (1894-7), *The Evergreen* (1895), and *The Acorn* (1905), and books designed by Talwin Morris, Charles Ricketts and Will H. Bradley.

If the 1880s and 1890s see the dominance of neo-Romanticism, and a celebration of a lush poetry of the senses, a reaction developed in the early twentieth century in the work of writers inspired by a whole series of new "isms" that overlapped and competed with each other, such as Futurism, Vorticism, and Imagism, manifesto-driven movements for cultural renewal, that at times called for new hierarchies of the senses (Classen 1998: 126-31). Where Futurism celebrates the exhilaration of speed and the beauty of the machine, Imagism seems to represent a species of neo-classicism, a rejection of the rhetorical flourishes of the Rhymers Club generation in favour of a sparer and less subjective approach. The American poet Hilda Doolittle's "Oread" (1914), which first appeared without title in the Vorticist journal *Blast* as Pound's model poem, is a good example of the new direction. In its six short imperative lines it conveys its message with a peculiar intensity:

Whirl up, sea—
 Whirl your pointed pines,
 Splash your great pines
 On our rocks,
 Hurl your green over us,
 Cover us with your pools of fir. (Doolittle 2010)

The lilies and roses of 1890s verse are gone, but this is not to say that this is poetry without sensuous appeal: it's "whirls" an "hurls" and "firs" appeal to the ear as much as its wish to erase the line between sea and land, self and other, appeal to the mind, and suggest a quasi-sexual sense of oceanic envelopment. But the brevity and condensation of meaning, and the rejection of the inherited lexis of poetry, suggest a very definite desire to make it new. Antecedents include classical models, and also, perhaps, the work of W.E. Henley, whose long poem, "In Hospital" (1889), shows a similar way with powerful images, synaesthetic effects, and developing impatience with conventional poetic rhetoric. Indeed Henley's poem, which is usually taken to be autobiographical, by making the hospital experience its centre, seems to look forward to a good deal of the bleaker side of twentieth-century verse, not least that of T.S. Eliot: the subject without dignity, prodded and poked at, surviving unhappily in a devitalized, algogenic environment, becomes a typical rather than exceptional figure.

Imagism was never very likely to be a powerful force in the novel, whose generic tendency is towards capaciousness rather than compression. Ernest Hemingway, directly influenced by Pound and his adjective-cutting scissors, may be an exception here, but for the most part the modernist novel remained an inclusive form. This is particularly true, of course, of the work of Marcel Proust, whose seven-volume *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27) is a window onto the sensory world of belle-epoque Paris, but also of James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* (1922) is a veritable encyclopedia of everyday experience in Dublin in June, 1904.

Proust's magnum opus is, among other things an exploration of the embodiment of consciousness, a theme famously announced by the narrator's tasting of a "petite madeleine" that sets his involuntary memory to work: "after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered ... the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, to remind us ... and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection" (Proust 1934: 36). But even before the madeleine episode, we are encouraged to think about the relationship of memory and the senses. The "gusts of memory" that our narrator experiences give him a feeling of temporal dislocation that he does not analyse, "any more than, when we watch a horse running, we isolate the successive positions of its body as they appear upon a bioscope" (6). As Sara Danius has noted (Danius 2002), the reference shows the extent to which Proust's ideas of perception are shaped by contemporary technologies of vision, his example evoking not so much the bioscope as the photographic experiments of Etienne-Jules Marey. But rather than linking the workings of memory to Marey's analytical camera, Proust seems

to suggest that memory is most powerful when the analytical impulse is kept at bay.

In Joyce's *Ulysses* the present is also shot through with the traces of the past, but it is the city more than memory that is Joyce's theme in *Ulysses*. His earlier work, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), had already staged the encounter of art and the street. In a semi-comic late chapter, Stephen and his friend Lynch walk a circuitous route from their college to the National Library, during which Stephen attempts to explain his neo-Thomist ideas about beauty. But as they stroll, his earnest discourse is interrupted by the noise of the street, "a long dray laden with old iron ... covering the end of [his] speech with the harsh roar of jangled and rattling metal" [Joyce 1986: 476]. Joyce rather than Stephen realizes the weakness of even the most elaborate theories of art before the pressure of urban experience in an age of distraction. In his subsequent tour de force, *Ulysses*, Bloom, the epic hero reborn as a peripatetic Dublin advertising agent, is also a version of Baudelaire's artist, a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness who interiorizes the streets. He rather than Stephen is the novel's central presence, and through his mind all of Dublin flows, its vistas, noises, smells, tastes, and textures. In Joyce's original schema for the novel each section is supposed to have its own characteristic organ of the body – the ear in the Sirens episode, for example (Ellmann 1983: 436), but the novel goes beyond such a rigid approach, and the sensuous orientation also follows the characters: where Stephen dwells on the ineluctable modality of the visible, and attempts to view the world through the cold eyes of the artist, Bloom's negotiation of the world is more immediate and corporeal. As if to reaffirm this commitment to the embodiment of consciousness, in the novel's final section the perspective shifts, and we are given access to the thoughts of Bloom's wife, Molly, who even more than her husband appreciates the empire of the senses (a suggestion that women are more "body" than mind that should remind us that the literary avant garde was not immune to the gender ideologies of the time).

In Joyce we see a form of experimental modernism that attempts, inter alia, to do the senses justice, to show the embodiment of consciousness, and to undermine the privilege of the eye. In these efforts, of course, he was seen to exceed the boundaries of decency, and to overstep the limits of the literary. *Ulysses* was a book too close to the senses for some, something that Judge John M. Woolsey acknowledged in his decision in 1933 that *Ulysses* could be sold in the United States. He felt that while its effect was "somewhat emetic, nowhere does it tend to be aphrodisiac" (Ellmann 1983: 667). By then, though, there had been a wholesale reconception of the nature of literature, and of the relationship between literature and the senses. But that story belongs to the next volume in this series.