

SELF-POLLUTION



"[I]t is not possible to understand the social fabric properly until one has studied three or four of its component threads in detail."

– Hippolyte Taine



One can achieve greater control over others by achieving control over their sexual behavior (in the vernacular: "to grab them by their gonads") than in any other way. To be an act of duplicity which has the effect of enforcing authority, this control over the sexuality of others need not be consciously or deliberately malicious. To proscribe another's favored method of sexual release is the short route to complete mastery. To force a slave, for instance, to submit to one's sexual desires, was to humble and humiliate her or him permanently and totally (pending, of course, getting your throat slashed come some dark and stormy night). To criminalize homosexuality today is to render marginal, and vulnerable, and exploitable, an entire grouping of people. To problematize masturbation is similarly to enable oneself to intrude into every private corner of a child's life. One need not marvel that such strategies of control and manipulation of others are being endlessly pursued.

575 BCE

In Athens, coins were making their initial appearance.

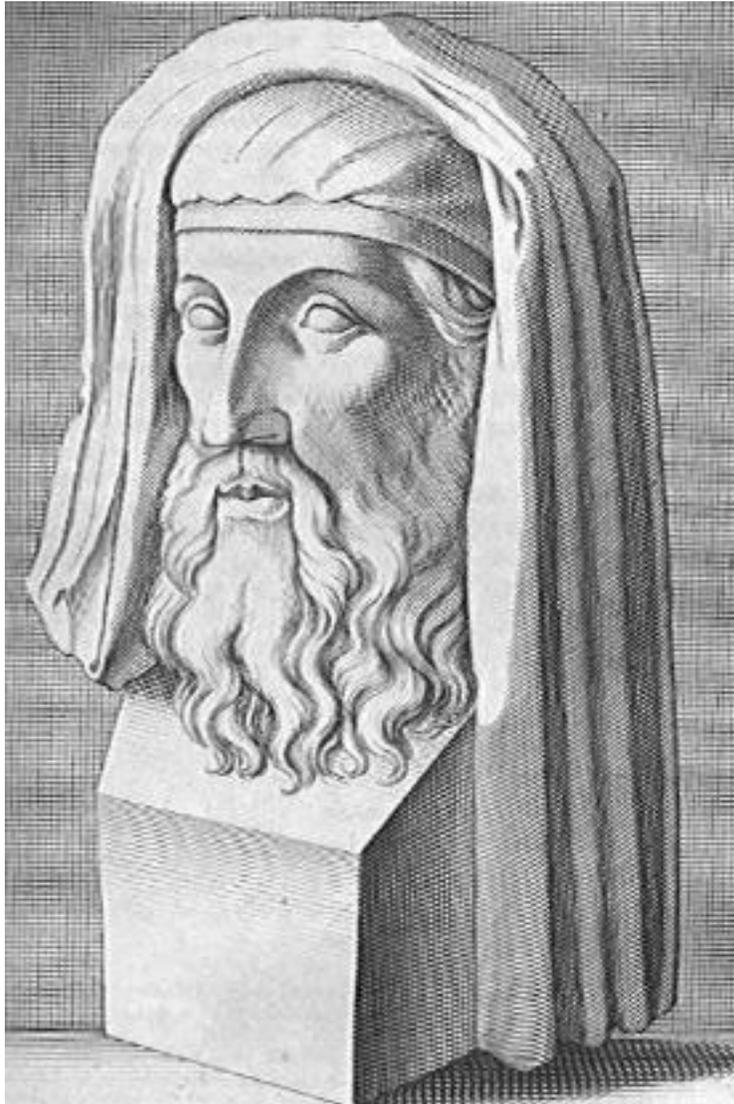
At about this point the Priestly or "P" source for *GENESIS-NUMBERS* was being written in Babylon. *GENESIS* 38 refers to Onan's seed falling upon the ground and to his execution. This passage is about the practice known as *coitus interruptus* and this man was put to death because he had refused to carry out the Judaic law, which obligated a brother to provide his deceased sibling with a blood-related descendant, by himself *ex post facto* impregnating his deceased sibling's widow whether or not this was desired by her. Just as the Bible makes no reference to female masturbation, it makes no mention of male masturbation, as the practice that was being condemned in that text had no points in common, no connection whatever, with solitary manual self-stimulation. Having no grasp of this Middle-Eastern historical circumstance and precious little grasp of English-language syntax, the US zoologist Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956) et al. would write in 1948 (page 476) that "Few other people in history have condemned masturbation as severely as the Jews have."

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350 BCE

Until about the age of 60 [Diogenes of Sinope](#) had worked with his father, minting coins for his colony, but then he was exiled for debasing the coinage, and went to Athens with his slave Manes. When Manes fled, Diogenes declined to attempt to track him down, mildly remarking that if Manes could live without him but not he without Manes, a difficulty would seem to arise as to who was really the free man and who the slave.



One can achieve greater control over others by achieving control over their sexual behavior (in the vernacular this wisdom has become known as “to grab them by their gonads”) than in any other manner. To be an act of duplicity which has the effect of enforcing authority, this control over the sexuality of others need not be consciously or deliberately malicious. To proscribe



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another’s favored method of sexual release is the short route to complete mastery. To force a slave, for instance, to submit to one’s sexual desires, was to humble and humiliate her or him permanently and totally – pending, of course, getting your throat slashed some dark and stormy night. To criminalize homosexuality today is to render marginal, and vulnerable, and exploitable, an entire grouping of people. To problematize masturbation is to enable oneself to intrude into every private corner of a child’s life. Etc. One need not marvel that such strategies of control and manipulation of others have been endlessly pursued. In the 4th Century BCE, Diogenes of Sinope masturbated εν τοις δηαγοροις *en tōi phanerōi*, which is to say, in the agora in public, not in order to offend, but as an emphatic way to point out that A.) if desire for food could be eased as readily as desire for sex, by the mere rubbing of one’s stomach, then there would be no need for war and for theft, and therefore that B.) since one’s sexual impulse could indeed be eased promptly by the mere rubbing of one’s genitals, there is **in fact** no reason whatever why we humans need to indulge in our habitual prostitution –and rape –and slavery.

A WEEK: Most men have no inclination, no rapids, no cascades, but marshes, and alligators, and miasma instead. We read that when in the expedition of Alexander, Onesicritus was sent forward to meet certain of the Indian sect of Gymnosophists, and he had told them of those new philosophers of the West, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Diogenes, and their doctrines, one of them named Dandamis answered, that “They appeared to him to have been men of genius, but to have lived with too passive a regard for the laws.” The philosophers of the West are liable to this rebuke still. “They say that Lieou-hia-hoei, and Chao-lien did not sustain to the end their resolutions, and that they dishonored their character. Their language was in harmony with reason and justice; while their acts were in harmony with the sentiments of men.”

PYTHAGORAS

SOCRATES

DIOGENES OF SINOPE



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1048 CE

At some point between 1048 CE and 1054 CE, Peter Damian (1007-1072) warned, in his *LIBER GOMORRHIANUS* (BOOK OF GOMORRAH), that not only sex between males, but also solitary [masturbation](#), was too much fun and therefore would bring the wrath of God, and eternal damnation. (The Christian Church in the 6th through 10th centuries had been developing a series of Penitential Books. These, among other things, explored the subject of sex in all its details. Every misdeed or sin was described and elaborated at length, and penalties penances or acts of amends for sins were prescribed for each. The church, combined with parental fears of infantile masturbation, attempted to maintain its system of repression by nurturing the willingness of parents to condemn this behavior. By this system a child learns before fully understanding, that self pleasure is bad and fear of pleasure becomes inscribed in his or her unconscious mind, to the point when it can become generalized to include fear of pleasure in all its forms. The Church therefore concentrated a great deal of attention on this matter, seeking Biblical justifications for its views.)

1646

One of the original settlers of Guilford, Connecticut, William Plaine, was accused of having committed sodomy in England, not once but twice, and also accused of corrupting “a great part of the youth of Guilford by [masturbations](#).” He was executed at New Haven.

[HOMOSEXUALITY](#)

1670

A [German](#) physician suggested that “[manstuprationem](#)” might be the cause of gonorrhea.

1674

April 2, Monday: According to the diary of Samuel Sewall,

Benjamin Gourd of Roxbury (being about 17 years of age) was executed for committing Bestiality with a Mare, which was first knocked in the head under the Gallows in his sight. N.B. He committed that filthines at noon day in an open yard. He after confessed that he had lived in that sin a year. The causes he alledged were, idlenes, not obeying parents, &c.



The Reverend Samuel Danforth (1626-November 19, 1674) of Roxbury, Massachusetts, inspired by this case of Benjamin Goad, preached a sermon against the sort of “Confusion” that would blur the boundary between man and “bruit Beast.” The young culprit had been born on September 7, 1656 in Roxbury, Massachusetts, 10th and youngest child of Richard Goad (1618-1683) and Phoebe Hawes Goad (1622-1678), and had been excommunicated from the Roxbury church at which the Reverend Danforth was Associate Pastor on March 15, 1674. The good Reverend would have his crowdpleasing sermon printed in Cambridge and distributed as THE CRY OF SODOM ENQUIRED INTO; UPON OCCASION OF THE ARRAIGNMENT AND CONDEMNATION OF BENJAMIN GOAD, FOR HIS PRODIGIOUS VILLANY.

This document describing the various practices associated with the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, including self-pollution ([masturbation](#)), whoredome (prostitution), adultery, fornication, incest, sodomy, buggery, and bestiality, has become perhaps the most available 17th-Century statement and discussion of “non-standard” sexuality. Benjamin had been born into the Reverend’s congregation and would have been well known to him. Since eight of his own children had died, the Reverend would have been aware of the anguish of Benjamin’s parents. We note that the execution of criminals is defended as edifying to the spectators, who share in man’s fallen and immoral nature: “The gross and flagitious practises of the worst of men, are but Comments upon our Nature. Who can say, I have made my heart clean? The holiest man hath as vile and filthy a Nature, as the Sodomites, or the men of Gibeah.” Such public spectacles remind spectators to beware the sins of pride, gluttony, drunkenness, sloth and idleness, disobedience to parents and masters, evil company, irreligion, and profaneness.

READ THE FULL TEXT

- “John Sherman (1618-1685)”: Pastor of the church in Watertown and a fellow of Harvard College.
- “Urian Oakes (*circa* 1631-1681)”: Minister of the church in Cambridge and a fellow of Harvard College.
- “Thomas Shepard (1635-1677)”: Assistant pastor of the church in Cambridge; son of Thomas Shepard (1605-1649).
- “Amnon, and Absalom, and Herod the Tetrarch”: Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (2 SAMUEL 13) and was killed by his half-brother Absalom. Herod took Herodias, his brother’s wife, and killed John the Baptist for deeming this unlawful (MATTHEW 14).
- “Theodosius and Arcadius”: Flavius Theodosius II (401 CE-450 CE), Roman Emperor of the East 408 CE-450 CE, in 438 CE promulgated a Codex Theodosianus. His father Flavius Arcadius (377 CE-408 CE) was emperor in the Eastern Roman Empire from 395 CE until his death.
- “childe of Belial,” “Sons of Eli,” “Hophni and Phinehas”: These are references to Eli’s sons, the priests Hophni and Phinehas, in 1 SAMUEL 2: “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord ... they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.” They also ate sacrifices offered by the people. In Hebrew, “Belial” is literally “without a yoke,” and the expression “sons of Belial” generally refers to non-Israelites.
- “Higgaion, Selah”: “Higgaion” indicates a sound of the harp to accompany meditation, “Selah” indicates a musical pause.
- “Gibeah”: In JUDGES 19/20 the inhabitants of this town rape and kill the concubine of a travelling Levite and are destroyed by the Israelites.
- “Comminations”: Threatenings of divine punishment or vengeance.
- “Epicures”: In this context, persons devoted to sensuous pleasure and luxurious living.



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“Nicolaitans”: Or Nicholaitans; they are condemned by name in REVELATIONS 2.14-15. They appear to have been a 1st-Century sect named after Nicholas, one of the first deacons, whom Hippolytus claimed “departed from correct doctrine, and was in the habit of inculcating indifference of food and life.” Irenaeus wrote in AGAINST HERESIES that they “lived lives of unrestrained indulgence.” Clement of Alexandria wrote in Book 3 of STROMATA that “They abandon themselves to pleasure like goats ... leading a life of self-indulgence.” Elisha Coles’s AN ENGLISH DICTIONARY (London, 1724) defined them as “Nicholaitans, Hereticks who had their Wives in common &c.” This may refer to the legend related by Clement that Nicholas was reproached by the Apostles for being jealous of his beautiful wife, and so brought her to an assembly and declared that any might “marry” her. According to John Marchant’s AN EXPOSITION ON THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (London, 1743), Clement wrote that this led his followers to “commit all Kind of Filthiness, without any Kind of Shame.” Laurence Echard’s A GENERAL ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY (London, 1729, 7th edition), had it that one of their branches, the Cainites, “had abominable Opinions, and held that the Way to be saved, was to make Tryal of all manner of Things, and satisfy their Lusts with all wicked Actions.”

“Menandrians”: Predecessors of the Gnostics, named for Menander, a disciple of Simon Magus, and a practitioner of magic arts. They seem to have been centered in Antioch, to have practiced a heretical form of baptism, and to have denied the corporal humanity of Jesus. Edward Ambrose Burgis, in THE ANNALS OF THE CHURCH FROM THE DEATH OF CHRIST (London, 1737-1738), wrote that they “agreed in running down virginity, and giving a loose to the pleasures of the flesh.”

“Abner ... Asabel”: In 2 SAMUEL 2, Abner tried to avoid killing Asabel in battle in order not to offend his brother Joab.

“Parthians”: The Parthians defeated several invading Roman armies. Their most effective tactic was launching arrows after having ridden past the enemy.

“Otia si tollas, periere cupidinis arcus”: (Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid), REMEDIA AMORIS, 139: “If you avoid idleness, you will be immune to Cupid’s bow.”

“Joseph ... his Mistresses”: Potiphar’s wife (GENESIS 39).

“timously,” “timous”: Obsolete variants of “timishly” meaning “in a timely fashion.”

“Samuel ... Agag”: In 1 SAMUEL 15; Agag was the king of the Amalekites captured by Saul.

1690

Jean Frédéric Osterwald explored, in THE NATURE OF UNCLEANNESS CONSIDERED (English edition 1708), the idea that if young people did not achieve self-discipline in regard to matters sexual, they were likely to become adult wastrels. Nowhere would Osterwald confess flat out, that his concern over uncleanness was a concern in regard to [masturbation](#). One’s initial and full and deliberate orgasm should, however, according to him, be postponed until when, well into maturity, one entered upon the condition of marriage.

How different this sort of advice was from all that had gone before in Western culture!



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1708

Hermann Boerhave cautioned that excessive loss of any bodily fluid, be it blood, semen, or even sweat, would produce ill health. Another doctor, an Englishman, would conjecture that the cause of impotence was [masturbation](#).



“For 2400 years patients have believed that doctors were doing them good; for 2300 years they were wrong.”



— David Wootton, *BAD MEDICINE: DOCTORS DOING HARM SINCE HIPPOCRATES*, Oxford, June 2006

1710

An anonymous booklet was published in London, entitled *ONANIA: OR, THE HEINOUS SIN OF SELF-POLLUTION, AND ALL ITS FRIGHTFUL CONSEQUENCES IN BOTH SEXES CONSIDER'D, WITH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ADVICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY INJUR'D THEMSELVES BY THIS ABOMINABLE PRACTICE. AND SEASONABLE ADMONITION TO THE YOUTH OF THE NATION, (OF BOTH SEXES) AND THOSE WHOSE TUITION THEY ARE UNDER, WHETHER PARENTS, GUARDIANS, MASTERS, OR MISTRESSES. WITH A LETTER FROM A LADY TO THE AUTHOR (VERY CURIOUS) AND HIS ANSWER TO IT, CONCERNING THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE MARRIAGE-BED; AND DIVERS OTHER LETTERS AND RELATIONS OF SOME SECRET MATTERS, NECESSARY TO BE KNOWN, AS WELL BY SINGLE AS MARRIED PEOPLE.* (No that's not the booklet, that's merely the title.) The credit for thus inventing [masturbation](#) as a grave medical hazard has been attributed by Haeberle in 1983 (page 199) to a person named “Dr. Bekkers” who operated out of Mr. Crouch's bookstall in London, who had been a clergyman before becoming a physician. Apparently convinced that many practiced self-pollution without recognizing its dangers, the author warned that it “destroys conjugal Affection, perverts natural Inclination, and tends to extinguish the hope of posterity.” Not only does “self-pollution” threaten the reproduction of the race, the author wrote, but these “onanists” who spill their seed upon the ground violate the Biblical prohibition against “sodomy” and suffer dire personal health effects as well. While [capital punishment](#) for sodomy effectively suppresses it, the absence of legal proscriptions against masturbation leads its practitioners to fancy that no harm will befall them. Onanists can expect to suffer blindness, insanity, stunted growth, and, unless they reform, death. The more you masturbate, the less able you are to have children, and if you do produce offspring they'll be runts or deformed, or even worse, they'll be born female. The publication's context suggests that the author was a quack: this 1st edition included advertisements for a “Strengthening Tincture”



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and “Prolifick Powder” which when combined with strict sexual abstinence had the power to cure the ills of onanism. Whether the author sold much of his powder or tincture is unknown, but he did sell a number of the pamphlets. At least one edition, in 1724, would be published in America. By 1750, the 19th edition would have made its appearance. The later revisions got longer, as they became padded with anonymous testimonials from people who claimed to have been helped by the book and defenses against critics. The author was vexed by one particular criticism: by talking about the vice of onanism, his critics argued, he was encouraging it. Innocents were being corrupted and taught a new vice that would, perhaps, have never occurred to them had they not read ONANIA’s explicit description of it! In his defense, the author claimed that his effort to “promote Virtue and Christian Purity” required a certain amount of plain speaking. If he thought a subject too salacious, he wrote in academic Latin, a language that a non-professional could not read.

1727

Here is a 1727 advertisement in full:

ONANIA: OR, THE HEINOUS SIN OF SELF-POLLUTION, AND ALL ITS FRIGHTFUL CONSEQUENCES IN BOTH SEXES CONSIDER’D, WITH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ADVICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY INJUR’D THEMSELVES BY THIS ABOMINABLE PRACTICE. AND SEASONABLE ADMONITION TO THE YOUTH OF THE NATION, (OF BOTH SEXES) AND THOSE WHOSE TUITION THEY ARE UNDER, WHETHER PARENTS, GUARDIANS, MASTERS, OR MISTRESSES. WITH A LETTER FROM A LADY TO THE AUTHOR (VERY CURIOUS) AND HIS ANSWER TO IT, CONCERNING THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE MARRIAGE-BED; AND DIVERS OTHER LETTERS AND RELATIONS OF SOME SECRET MATTERS, NECESSARY TO BE KNOWN, AS WELL BY SINGLE AS MARRIED PEOPLE. This Edition is correct; and the several Passages that have been changed with being obscure and ambiguous, in the former Impressions, are clear’d up and explain’d. A very grave and learned Divine and Physician having perused this Discourse, before it went to Press, returned it with his Opinion of it in these Words: “This little Book ought to be read by all Sorts of People of both Sexes, of what Age, Degree, Profession, or Condition soever, guilty or not guilty of the Sin declaimed against in it.”

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1741

The [Swiss](#) physician S.A.A.D. Tissot began to spread the news throughout Europe, that [masturbation](#) was wicked.



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1750

This entry under this date is to record the fact that, according to T.S. Szasz’s *THE MANUFACTURE OF MADNESS* (NY: Harper & Row, 1970, page 182) the term [masturbation](#) was not in use in the English language until “the middle of the 18th century.” According to Szasz, the etymology of the word is to be located in a corruption of the Latin word *manustupration* or “manual stupration,” meaning to defile by the touch of the hand. According to E.J. Haeberle’s *THE SEX ATLAS* (NY: Continuum Publishing Company, 1983, page 204), however, the genesis of the term is “manus; hand + either stuprare; to defile, or turbare, to disturb.”

1756

Dr. S.A.A.D. Tissot’s treatise on *ONANIA*, issued in Latin. Subsequently it would appear in English translation as *ONANISM: OR A TREATISE UPON THE DISORDERS PRODUCED BY MASTURBATION: OR THE DANGEROUS EFFECTS OF SECRET AND EXCESSIVE VENERY*. It is much better to do as Rousseau did, and naturally father child after child to be consigned to orphanages, than to risk unnaturally playing with oneself. [masturbation](#) is “more pernicious than excesses committed with women.”

1758

A Swiss medical doctor, Simon-Andre Tissot, spread the theory in his book ONANISM¹ that masturbation would raise the blood pressure inside your skull, which would do irreparable damage to your nervous system, resulting in insanity.²



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1760

P. du Tort de Mambrini’s treatise against masturbation, DE L’ONANISME: OU DISCOURS PHILOSOPHIQUE ET MORAL SUR LA LUXURE ARTIFICIELLE ET SUR TOUS LES CRIMES RELATIFS.

1766

The Oxford Dictionary recorded the word masturbation.

1776

The anonymous booklet ONANIA: OR, THE HEINOUS SIN OF SELF-POLLUTION had gone through 21 editions and its supplement was on its 12th edition. It was continually expanded, it would seem — swollen with the letters of grateful converts from masturbation, who wrote in to proclaim themselves “cured” and describe (often in graphic detail) what forms their “sins” had taken prior to their conversion.

1. To refer to masturbation as “Onanism” is historically and religiously inaccurate, since the sin attributed to the Biblical person Onan was a disinclination to get his brother’s widow pregnant as was emphatically required by Jewish law and custom.
2. Well, it makes a certain amount of sense after all, because people in insane asylums have no privacy and no sexual access and thus the attendants, and visitors, can watch them as they masturbate. They masturbate, they are insane: therefore their masturbation caused their insanity! (By the same curious logic of course masturbation can be seen as a cause of criminal incarceration.)



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1777

King Louis XVI confided in whispers to [Marie Antoinette](#)'s brother, Joseph II, that he had a sexual problem preventing normal intercourse. Within a couple of months, minor surgery corrected the problem, which was phimosis, a painful strangling of the head of the erect penis by an overtight ring of foreskin. Four years later, Marie-Antoinette would produce an heir to the throne of France.³

1810

 On the road to Stonewall,⁴



In America as in England, social conceptions of [sodomy](#) began to change in the late eighteenth century. Anti-sodomitical discourses gradually began the transference, similar to the English process, that moved sodomy from sin toward crime and onward into the realm of unspeakable acts and socially and medically aberrant behavior. This social anxiety and the homophobia it produced was already very much part of the history of proscriptive discourse as early as 1810,  when in a case prosecuting an assault for attempted sodomy the offense is described as “that most horrible and detestable crime (among Christians not to be named), called sodomy.” At a later appeal of the sentence, one of the judges observed that “the crime of sodomy is too well known to be misunderstood and too disgusting to be defined.” Mid-nineteenth-century American texts began to inscribe sodomitical acts within a sphere that allowed an association of emotional context with the act, making the anxious leap from notions about the individual sodomite to speculations about a species marked by effeminacy and mental instability. Just as dubious commentary about intense male-male friendships played a part in social and literary discussion in England, so in America in the first half of the nineteenth century understanding of just what erotic implications were inscribed within literary portrayals of passionate male-male friendship was very much in crisis. Such portrayals –in the novels of Herman Melville or the poetry of Walt Whitman– could be but were not necessarily read as a definitive site of homoeroticism. It is important therefore, as Robert K. Martin says, to establish just what was “normal” for writers and for society in the mid-nineteenth century. Male-male friendships had to exist against a background that included the homophobia evident in legal proscription of sodomitical acts –though the

3. The child she produced would die young, in a revolutionary prison. One of the charges against its mother, at her trial, would be that she had taught him how to “diddle,” that is, to [masturbate](#). Defiant to the end, the tutorial mother would inquire of her judges “Is such a crime **possible**?”

4. Refer to Bryne R.S. Fone's A ROAD TO STONEWALL: MALE HOMOSEXUALITY AND HOMOPHOBIA IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1750-1969. Bear in mind that the concept of **perversion** would not formally enter out medical terminology for some 32 years yet, when it would be defined in Dunglison's MEDICAL LEXICON in 1842 as one of the four modifications of function in disease, the other three modifications of function being **augmentation**, **diminution**, and **abolition**.



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death penalty was repealed in many states by mid-century— and against the often hysterical and certainly prohibitive discussion growing out of the moral purity movement that stressed especially the perceived evils of masturbation and its association with sexual perversion and “degeneracy” and increasingly and specifically with effeminacy and homosexuality. In an 1826  letter recovered by Martin Duberman, male-male intimacy is clouded by suspicion of perversion and also by what seems to be a curious dichotomy between the imperatives of intimacy and a somewhat uncertain though troubled sense of just what such intimacy might imply. In the letter Jeff (Thomas Jefferson Withers) writes to his friend Jim (James H. Hammond) —both men are in their twenties— wondering “whether you yet sleep in your Shirt-tail, and whether you yet have the extravagant delight of poking and punching a writhing Bedfellow with your long fleshen pole — the exquisite touches of which I have often had the honor of feeling.”

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1812

→ Thomas Rowlandson’s “Lonesome Pleasures” was drawn in this year:



In this year Dr. Benjamin Rush alleged in his [MEDICAL INQUIRIES AND OBSERVATIONS UPON THE DISEASES OF THE MIND](#) (Philadelphia; Published by Kimber & Richardson, No. 237, Market Street. Merritt, Printer, No. 9, Watkin’s Alley), the 1st psychiatric textbook printed in the US, that [masturbation](#) caused insanity:

Onanism produces seminal weakness, impotence, dysury, tabes dorsalis, pulmonary [consumption](#), dyspepsia, dimness of sight, vertigo, epilepsy, hypochondriasis, loss of memory, manalgia,

fatuity, and death.⁵



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1826

➡ On the road to Stonewall,⁶



In America as in England, social conceptions of sodomy began to change in the late eighteenth century. Anti-sodomitical discourses gradually began the transference, similar to the English process, that moved sodomy from sin toward crime and onward into the realm of unspeakable acts and socially and medically aberrant behavior. This social anxiety and the homophobia it produced was already very much part of the history of proscriptive discourse as early as 1810, ➡ when in a case prosecuting an assault for attempted sodomy the offense is described as “that most horrible and detestable crime (among Christians not to be named), called sodomy.” At a later appeal of the sentence, one of the judges observed that “the crime of sodomy is too well known to be misunderstood and too disgusting to be defined.” Mid-nineteenth-century American texts began to inscribe sodomitical acts within a sphere that allowed an association of emotional context with the act, making the anxious leap from notions about the individual sodomite to speculations about a species marked by effeminacy and mental instability. Just as dubious commentary about intense male-male friendships played a part in social and literary discussion in England, so in America in the first half of the nineteenth century understanding of just what erotic implications were inscribed within literary portrayals of passionate male-male friendship was very much in crisis. Such portrayals –in the novels of Herman Melville or the poetry of Walt Whitman– could be but were not necessarily read as a definitive site of homoeroticism. It is important therefore, as Robert K. Martin says, to establish just what was “normal” for writers and for society in the mid-nineteenth century. Male-male friendships had to exist against a background that included the homophobia

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evident in legal proscription of sodomitical acts –though the death penalty was repealed in many states by mid-century– and against the often hysterical and certainly prohibitive discussion growing out of the moral purity movement that stressed especially the perceived evils of [masturbation](#) and its association with sexual perversion and “degeneracy” and increasingly and specifically with effeminacy and [homosexuality](#). In an 1826  letter recovered by Martin Duberman, male-male intimacy is clouded by suspicion of perversion and also by what seems to be a curious dichotomy between the imperatives of intimacy and a somewhat uncertain though troubled sense of just what such intimacy might imply. In the letter Jeff (Thomas Jefferson Withers) writes to his friend Jim (James H. Hammond) –both men are in their twenties– wondering “whether you yet sleep in your Shirt-tail, and whether you yet have the extravagant delight of poking and punching a writhing Bedfellow with your long fleshen pole – the exquisite touches of which I have often had the honor of feeling.”

In the history of the politics of [homosexuality](#), this was an important year, for in this year in England, the law of the capital crime of [sodomy](#) (whatever it was — presumably it was, ordinarily, anal penetration of one male by another, but perhaps it might include, on occasion, anal penetration of a female) was tightened, despite the fact that the death penalty was being abolished for over a hundred other crimes, by removal of the need to prove emission of seed as well as penetration, and the death penalty re-enacted. According to Jeffrey Weeks’s *COMING OUT: HOMOSEXUAL POLITICS IN BRITAIN FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT* (revised edition, Quartet Books 1990): England:

Pages 11-12: Before 1885 the only legislation which directly affected homosexual acts was that referring to [sodomy](#) or [buggery](#).... The 1533 Act of Henry VIII, which first brought sodomy within the scope of statute law, superseding ecclesiastical law, adopted the same criterion as the Church: all acts of sodomy were equally condemned as being “against nature,” whether between man and woman, man and beast, or man and man. The penalty for the “Abominable Vice of Buggary” was death. The keynote Act, re-enacted in 1563, was the basis for all homosexual convictions up to 1885.

Page 13: As part of his consolidation of the English criminal law, Sir Robert Peel actually tightened up the law on sodomy in 1826. The need to prove emission of seed as well as penetration was removed, and the death penalty re-enacted. This was particularly striking at a period when the death penalty was abolished for over a hundred other crimes.... When Lord John Russell attempted to removed “unnatural offences” from the list of capital crimes in 1841, he was forced to withdraw through lack of parliamentary support.

Pages 13-15: The death penalty for buggery, tacitly abandoned after 1836, was finally abolished in England and Wales in 1861 (in Scotland in 1889) to be replaced by penal servitude of between ten years and life. It was to remain thus for homosexual activities until 1967. But this was a prelude not to a liberalization of the law but to a tightening of its grip. By section 11 (the “Labouchere Amendment”) of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, all male homosexual acts short of buggery, whether committed in public or private, were made illegal.... And thirteen years later, the Vagrancy Act of 1898 clamped down

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on homosexual “soliciting.” These two enactments represented a singular hardening of the legal situation and were a crucial factor in the determination of modern attitudes.

1828

 [James Henry Leigh Hunt](#)’s LORD BYRON AND SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES. It would seem that [George Gordon, Lord Byron](#), who had died of [tuberculosis](#) in 1824, had commented “I look pale.... I should like to die of [consumption](#).... The ladies would all say, ‘Look at that poor Byron, how interested he looks in dying!’”⁷



7. Later, a writer with the same general problem, Robert Louis Stevenson, would comment that he had written in bed, and written out of it, written in haemorrhages, written in sickness, written torn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness.

[TB](#) = *Mycobacterium tuberculosis humanis* = phthisis = consumption. Consumption was at that time still a disease of the aristocracy, so to be a victim of this disease was to be aristocratic. The image of the malady would change in subsequent decades as it became a disease of dark packed urban slums. Probably no single disease accounted for more deaths, in the American north prior to our civil war, than [TB](#). It was one of the three reasons why the countryside was less unhealthy than the crowded city, the other two reasons being [typhoid](#) and [cholera](#). Although Boston seems to have been the healthiest of large American cities, nevertheless the city Bostonian could expect to live a life five or six years shorter on average than a rural resident of Massachusetts. The small pox was the only infectious disease for which there was a preventive therapy. The only “behavioral avoidance” that as known was to stay clear of the city of New Orleans, in particular, and in general from the Southern seaports, to make it less likely that one would get what was known as the “yellow fever,” or the “black vomit.” [TB](#), by way of contrast, wasn’t even understood to be actually an infectious disease of the same order as [typhoid](#) and [cholera](#). It was supposed that it tended to run in families, and thus was mostly a sign of a hereditary weakness.

Another theory of the genesis of [tuberculosis](#) was, however, that its sufferers had brought it on themselves through “indulgence in a vice, in view of which angels ... weep, and creation sighs,” to wit, [masturbation](#), and that therefore they deserved no sympathy whatever, but only contempt. See Rosenberg, Charles and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, eds. THE SECRET VICE EXPOSED! SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST MASTURBATION, “A Brief and Intelligible View of the Nature, Origin and Cure of Tubercular Disease” (NY: Arno Press, 1974, page 136).

1830

→ The failed minister Sylvester Graham attempted to become a professional reformer on the lecture circuit. At first he lectured primarily against the evils of [alcohol](#). (He would, however, allow his wife to drink [wine](#) and [gin](#), for strength, when she was ill or when she was nursing.)



During the 1830s many people would be attending such lectures and taking a pledge to live healthy lives and eat right. Baker’s bread made from finely milled white flour was being recognized as injurious to health. One should have no need for stimulants such as [coffee](#) and [tea](#), [whiskey](#) and [tobacco](#), spices, which only cause a bothersome and excessive sexual appetite that distracted otherwise decent people from “civilized endeavors.” To avoid [masturbation](#), one should rise as soon as one awakes, and take a cold-water bath. One should exercise regularly. Married couples could have sex once a month, and should not violate this rule even on a honeymoon, because any energy given to sex would be energy taken away from the more serious things in life. Tight corsets were unnatural. Meat was to be eaten only sparingly, and thus there would arise vegetarian “Graham boardinghouses” at which no pepper, mustard, oil, vinegar or “other garbage” would be provided.



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Our sailor-boy [Richard Henry Dana, Jr.](#) would comment extensively on the vegetarian aspect of this regimen, and of course fail entirely to comment upon its sexual aspect, in [TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST](#):

... The work was as hard as it could well be. There was not a moment's cessation from Monday morning till Saturday night, when we were generally beaten out, and glad to have a full night's rest, a wash and shift of clothes, and a quiet Sunday. During all this times,— which would have startled Dr. Graham— we lived upon almost nothing but fresh beef; fried beefsteaks, three times a day,— morning, noon, and night. At morning and night we had a quart of tea to each man; and an allowance of about a pound of hard bread a day; but our chief article of food was the beef. A mess, consisting of six men, had a large wooden kid piled up with beefsteaks, cut thick, and fried in fat, with the grease poured over them. Round this we sat, attacking it with our jack-knives and teeth, and with the appetite of young lions, and sent back an empty kid to the galley. This was done three times a day. How many pounds each man ate in a day, I will not attempt to compute. A whole bullock (we ate liver and all) lasted us but four days. Such devouring of flesh, I will venture to say, was seldom known before. What one man ate in a day, over a hearty man's allowance, would make a Russian's heart leap into his mouth. Indeed, during all the time we were upon the coast, our principal food was fresh beef, and every man had perfect health; but this was a time of especial devouring; and what we should have done without meat, I cannot tell. Once or twice, when our bullocks failed and we were obliged to make a meal upon dry bread and water, it seemed like feeding upon shavings. Light and dry, feeling unsatisfied, and, at the same time, full, we were glad to see four quarters of a bullock, just killed, swinging from the fore-top. Whatever theories may be started by sedentary men, certainly no men could have gone through more hard work and exposure for sixteen months in more perfect health, and without ailings and failings, than our ship's crew, let them have lived upon Hygela's own baking and dressing.



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

1833



According to [Dr. William Alcott](#)'s THE YOUNG MAN'S GUIDE, the cause of [tuberculosis](#) was the solitary vice, self-abuse ([masturbation](#)).

‘HE THAT SINNETH AGAINST GOD, DESTROYETH HIS OWN SOUL.’

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*A hint to some professors of religion.**A dark catalogue*

chambers of drunkenness and debauchery; and, with the young man mentioned by Solomon, descended through them to those of death and hell.

It may be worth while for those sober minded and, otherwise, judicious Christians, who are in the habit of attending fashionable parties at late hours, and taking their 'refreshments,' to consider whether they may not be a means of keeping up, by their example, those more vulgar assemblies, with all their grossness, which I have been describing. Is it not obvious that what the *wine*, and the fruit, and the oysters, are to the more refined and Christian circles, what wine and fermented liquors may be to the more blunt sensibilities of body and mind, in youthful circles of another description? But if so, where rests the guilt? Or shall we bless the fountains, while we curse the stream they form?

SECTION III. *Diseases of Licentiousness.*

The importance of this and the foregoing section will be differently estimated by different individuals. They were not inserted, however, without consideration, nor without the approbation of persons who enjoy a large measure of public confidence. The young ought at least to know, briefly, to what a formidable host of maladies secret vice is exposed.

1. *Insanity.* The records of hospitals show that insanity, from solitary indulgence, is common. Tissot, Esquirol, Eberle, and others, give ample

testimony on this point. The latter, from a careful examination of the facts, assures us that in Paris the proportion of insane persons whose diseases may be traced to the source in question, is *one in from fifty-one to fifty-eight, in the lower classes.* In the higher classes it is *one in twenty-three.* In the insane Hospital of Massachusetts—I have it from authority which I cannot question,—the proportion is at least *one in three or four.* At present there are about twenty cases of the kind alluded to.

2. *Chorea Sancti Viti; or St. Vitus's dance.* This strange disease, in which the muscles of the body are not always at the command of the patient, and in which the head, the arms, the legs, and indeed every part which is made for muscular motion often jerks about in a very singular manner, is sometimes produced in the same way. Insanity and this disease are occasionally combined. I have known one young man in this terrible condition, and have read authentic accounts of others.

3. *Epilepsy.* Epileptic or *falling sickness fits,* as they are sometimes denominated, are another very common scourge of secret vice. How much they are to be dreaded almost every one can judge; for there are few who have not seen those who are afflicted with them. They usually weaken the mind, and sometimes entirely destroy it. I knew one epileptic individual who used to dread them more than death; and would gladly have preferred the latter.

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Idiocy.	Palsy.	Apoplexy.	Blindness.	Hypochondria.
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4. *Idiotism.* Epilepsy, as I have already intimated, often runs on to idiotism; but sometimes the miserable young man becomes an idiot, without the intervention of any other obvious disease.

5. *Paralysis or Palsy,* is no uncommon punishment of this transgression. There are, however, several forms of this disease. Sometimes, a slight numbness of a single toe or finger is the first symptom of its approach; but at others a whole hand, arm, or leg is affected. In the present case, the first attacks are not very violent, as if to give the offender opportunity to return to the path of rectitude. Few, however, take the hint and return, till the chains of their slavery are riveted, and their health destroyed by this or some other form of disease. I have seen dissipated young men who complained of the numbness of a finger or two and the corresponding portion of the hand and wrist, who probably did not themselves suspect the cause; but I never knew the disorder permanently removed, except by a removal of the cause which produced it.

6. *Apoplexy.* This has occasionally happened; though more rarely.

7. *Blindness,* in some of its forms, especially of that form usually called *gutta serena,* should also be added to our dark catalogue. Indeed a weakness of sight is among the first symptoms that supervene on these occasions.

8. *Hypochondria.* This is as much a disease by



Consumption.	Peculiar form of this disease.
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itself as the small pox, though many regard it otherwise. The mind is diseased, and the individual has many imaginary sufferings, it is true; but the imagination would not be thus unnaturally awake, if there were no accompanying disturbance in the bodily functions. Hypochondria, in its more aggravated forms, is a very common result of secret vice.

9. *Phthisis*, or consumption, is still more frequently produced by the cause we are considering, than any other disease I have mentioned. And we know well the history of this disease; that, though slow in its progress, the event is certain. In this climate, it is one of the most destructive scourges of our race. If the ordinary diseases slay their thousands, consumption slays its tens of thousands. Its approach is gradual, and often unsuspected; and the decline to the grave sometimes unattended by any considerable suffering. Is it not madness to expose ourselves to its attacks for the shortlived gratifications of a moment?

There is indeed a peculiar form of this disease which, in the case in question, is more commonly produced than any other. It is called, in the language of physicians, *tubes dorsalis*, or *dorsal* consumption; because it is supposed to arise from the *dorsal* portion of the spinal marrow. This disease sometimes, it is true, attacks young married people, especially where they go *beyond* the bounds which the Author of nature intended; and it is

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its symptoms.	The sufferer's only hope of relief.
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occasionally produced by other causes entirely different; causes, too, which it would be difficult, if not impossible to prevent. Generally, however, it is produced by *solitary vice*.

The most striking symptom of this disease is described as being a ‘sensation of ants, crawling from the head down along the spine;’ but this sensation is not always felt, for sometimes in its stead there is, rather, a very great weakness of the small part of the back, attended with pain. This is accompanied with emaciation, and occasionally, though not always, with an irregular appetite. Indeed, persons affected with this disease generally have a good appetite. There is usually little fever, or at most only a slight heat and thirst towards evening, with occasional flushings of the face; and still more rarely, profuse perspirations in the latter part of the night. But the latter symptom belongs more properly to common consumption. The sight, as I have already mentioned, grows dim; they have pains in the head and sometimes ringing in the ears, and a loss of memory. Finally, the legs become weak, the kidneys and stomach suffer, and many other difficulties arise which I cannot mention in this work, followed often by an acute fever; and unless the abominable practice which produced all the mischief is abandoned, death follows. But when many of the symptoms which I have mentioned, are really fastened upon an individual, he has sustained an injury which

can never be wholly repaired. All he can hope is to prolong his days, and lengthen out his life—often a distressing one. A few well authenticated examples of persons who debased themselves by secret vice, will, I hope, satisfy those who doubt the evils of this practice.

One young man thus expressed his sufferings to his physician. ‘My very great debility renders the performance of every motion difficult. That of my legs is often so great, that I can scarcely stand erect; and I fear to leave my chamber. Digestion is so imperfect that the food passes unchanged, three or four hours after it has been taken into the stomach. I am oppressed with phlegm, the presence of which causes pain; and the expectoration, exhaustion. This is a brief history of my miseries. Each day brings with it an increase of all my woes. Nor do I believe that any human creature ever suffered more. Without a special interposition of Divine Providence, I cannot support so painful an existence.’

Another thus writes; ‘Were I not restrained by *sentiments of religion*,* I should ere this have put

* What inadequate ideas are sometimes entertained by young professors of religion, and even by those more advanced, in regard to the purity of character which is indispensable to the enjoyment of a world of bliss—a world whose very source, sum, end and essence, are *Infinite Purity* itself!

Since the first edition of this work was published, I

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More examples of disease.

Looking to the grave for relief.

an end to my existence; which is the more insupportable as it is caused by myself.’

‘I cannot walk two hundred paces,’ says another ‘without resting myself; my feebleness is extreme; I have constant pains in every part of the body, but particularly in the shoulders and chest. My appetite is good, but this is a misfortune, since what I eat causes pains in my stomach, and is vomited up. If I read a page or two, my eyes are filled with tears and become painful:— I often sigh involuntarily.’

A fourth says; ‘I rest badly at night, and am much troubled with dreams. The lower part of my back is weak, my eyes are often painful, and my eyelids swelled and red., I have an almost constant cold; and an oppression at the stomach. In short, I had rather be laid in the silent tomb, and encounter that dreadful uncertainty, *hereafter*,

have received several letters of thanks for having ventured upon this long neglected, but important subject. Teachers, especially, have acknowledged their obligations, both in person and by correspondence. One teacher, in particular, a man of considerable experience, writes as follows:—

‘The last chapter of the book, is by no means, in my view, the least important. I regret to say that many *religious* young men, through ignorance, are attached to the last mentioned vice. I could wish that what you have written could be carefully read by every *young* man, at least, in our land. Alas, dear sir, how little do mortals know, when they do not understand their physical structure!’

than remain in my present unhappy and degraded situation.’

The reader should remember that the persons whose miseries are here described, were generally sufferers from *hypochondria*. They had not advanced to the still more horrid stages of palsy, apoplexy, epilepsy, idiotism, St. Vitus's dance, blindness, or insanity. But they had gone so far, that another step in the same path, might have rendered a return impossible.

The reader will spare me the pain of presenting, in detail, any more of these horrid cases. I write for YOUNG MEN, the strength—the bone, muscle, sinew, and nerve—of our beloved country. I write for those who,—though some of them may have erred—are glad to be advised, and if they deem the advice good, are anxious to follow it. I write, too, in vain, if it be not for young men who will resolve on reformation, when they believe that their present and future happiness is at stake. And, lastly, I have not read correctly the pages in the book of human nature if I do not write for those who can, with God's help, keep every good resolution.

There are a few publications to which those who are awake to the importance of this subject, might safely be directed. One or two will be mentioned presently. It is true that their authors have, in some instances, given us the details of such cases of disease as occur but rarely. Still, what has happened,

Where the path of error may end.

One more warning.

in this respect, may happen again. And as no moderate drinker of fermented or spirituous liquors can ever know, with certainty, that if he continues his habit, he may not finally arrive at confirmed drunkenness, and the worst diseases which attend it, so no person who departs but once from rectitude in the matter before us, has any assurance that he shall not sooner or later suffer all the evils which they so faithfully describe.

When a young man, who is pursuing an unhappy course of solitary vice, threatened as we have seen by the severest penalties earth or heaven can impose, — begins to perceive a loss or irregularity of his appetite; acute pains in his stomach, especially during digestion, and constant vomitings; — when to this is added a weakness of the lungs, often attended by a dry cough, hoarse weak voice, and hurried or difficult breathing after using considerable exertion, with a general relaxation of the nervous system; — when these appearances, or symptoms, as physicians call them, take place — let him *beware!* for punishment of a severer kind cannot be distant.

I hope I shall have no reader to whom these remarks apply; but should it be otherwise, happy will it be for him if he takes the alarm, and walks not another step in the downward road to certain and terrible retribution. Happiest, however, is he who has never erred from the first; and who reads these pages as he reads of those awful scenes in

Several works, on this subject.

An extract.

nature, — the devastations of the lightning, the deluge, the tornado, the earthquake, and the volcano; as things to be lamented, and their horrors if possible mitigated or averted, but with which he has little personal concern.

Sympathizing, however, with his fellow beings — for though *fallen*, they still belong to the same family — should any reader who sees this work, wish to examine the subject still more intimately, I recommend to him a Lecture to Young Men, lately published in Providence. I would also refer him, to Rees' Cyclopaedia, art. *Physical Education*.

The article last referred to is so excellent, that I have decided on introducing, in this place, the closing paragraph. The writer had been treating the subject, much in the manner I have done, only at greater length, and had enumerated the diseases to which it leads, at the same time insisting on the importance of informing the young, in a proper manner, of their danger, wherever the urgency of the case required it. After quoting numerous passages of Scripture, which, in speaking of impurity, evidently include this practice, and denouncing it in severe terms, he closes with the following striking remarks,

‘There can be no doubt that God has forbidden it by the usual course of providence. Its moral effects, in destroying the purity of the mind, in swallowing up its best affections, and perverting its sensibilities into this depraved channel, are

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Extract continued. Contains judicious advice.

among its most injurious consequences; and are what render it so peculiarly difficult to eradicate the evil. In proportion as the habit strengthens the difficulty of breaking it, of course, increases; and while the tendency of the feelings to this point increases, the vigor of the mind to effect the conquest of the habit gradually lessens.

‘We would tell him (the misguided young man, that whatever might be said in newspapers respecting the power of medicine in such cases, nothing could be done without absolute self-control; and that no medicine whatever could retrieve the mischiefs which the want of it had caused: and that the longer the practice was continued, the greater would be the bodily and mental evils it would inevitably occasion.

‘We would then advise him to avoid all situations in which he found his propensities excited; and especially, as far as possible, all in which they had been gratified; to check the thoughts and images which excited them; to shun those associates, or at least that conversation, and those books, which have the same effect; to avoid all stimulating food and liquor; to sleep cool on a hard bed; to rise early, and at once; and to go to bed when likely to fall asleep at once; to let his mind be constantly occupied, though not exerted to excess; and to let his bodily powers be actively employed, every day, to a degree which will make a hard bed the place of sound repose.

Other forms of licentiousness do not escape punishment.

'Above all, we would urge him to impress his mind (at times when the mere thought of it would not do him harm) with a feeling of horror at the practice; to dwell upon its sinfulness and most injurious effects; and to cultivate, by every possible means, an habitual sense of the constant presence of a holy and heart-searching God, and a lively conviction of the awful effects of his displeasure.'

I should be sorry to leave an impression on any mind that other forms of licentiousness are innocent, or that they entail no evils on the constitution. I have endeavored to strike most forcibly, it is true, at solitary vice; but it was for this plain reason, that few of the young seem to regard it as any crime at all. Some even consider it indispensable to health. This belief I have endeavored to shake; with how much success, eternity only can determine.

Of the guilt of those forms of irregularity, in which *more* than one individual and sex are *necessarily* concerned, many of the young are already apprized. At least they are generally acquainted with the more prominent evils which result from what they call excess. Still if followed in what they deem moderation, and with certain precautions which could be named, not a few are ready to believe, at least in the moment of temptation, that there is no great harm in following their inclinations.

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Excess.	Guilt far short of this.	A great mistake made.
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Now in regard to what constitutes excess, every one who is not moved by Christian principle, will of necessity, have his own standard, just as it is in regard to solitary vice, or the use of ardent spirits. And herein consists a part of the guilt. And it is not till this conviction of our constant tendency to establish an incorrect standard for ourselves, and to go, in the end, to the greatest lengths and depths and heights of guilt, can be well established in our minds, that we shall ever be induced to avoid the first steps in that road which may end in destruction; and to take as the only place of safety, the high ground of total abstinence.

But although the young are not wholly destitute of a sense of the evils of what they call excess, and of the shame of what is well known to be its frequent and formidable results, — so far as themselves are concerned, — yet they seem wholly ignorant of any considerable danger short of this. For so far are they from admitting that the force of conscience is weakened by every repeated known and wilful transgression, many think, (as I have already stated) promiscuous intercourse, where no matrimonial rights are invaded, if it be so managed as to exempt the parties immediately concerned from all immediate suffering both moral and physical, can scarcely be called a transgression, at all.

I wish it were practicable to extend these remarks far enough to show, as plain as noon-day light can make it, that every criminal act of this

Painful condition of a parent. Prevention better than cure.

kind — I mean every instance of irregularity — not only produces evil to society generally, in the present generation, but also inflicts evil on those that follow. For to say nothing of those horrid cases where the infants of licentious parents not only inherit vicious dispositions, but ruined bodies — even to a degree, that in some instances excludes a possibility of the child's surviving many days; — there are other forms of disease often entailed on the young which as certainly consign the sufferer to an early grave, though the passage thither may be more tedious and lingering.

How must it wring the heart of a feeling young parent to see his first born child, which for any thing he knows, might have been possessed of a sound and vigorous body, like other children, enter the world with incipient scrotula, diseased joints or bones, and eruptive diseases, in some of their worst forms? Must not the sight sink him to the very dust? And would he not give worlds — had he worlds to give — to reverse those irreversible but inscrutable decrees of Heaven, which visit the sins of parents upon their descendants — ‘unto the third and fourth generation?’

But how easy is it, by timely reflection, and fixed moral principle, to prevent much of that disease which ‘worlds’ cannot wholly cure, when it is once inflicted!

I hazard nothing in saying, then — and I might appeal to the whole medical profession to sustain

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Recovery never complete. Fearful details. A desirable change.

me in my assertion — that no person whose system ever suffers, once, from those forms of disease which approach nearest to the character of special judgments of Heaven on sin or shame, can be sure of ever wholly recovering from their effects on his own person; and what is still worse, can ever be sure of being the parent of a child whose constitution shall be wholly untainted with disease, of one kind or another.

This matter is not often understood by the community generally; especially by the young. I might tell them of the diseased eyesight; the ulcerated — perhaps deformed — nose and ears, and neck; the discoloration, decay, and loss of teeth; the destruction of the palate, and the fearful inroads of disease on many other soft parts of the body; besides the softening and ulceration and decay and eventual destruction of the bones; and to crown all, the awfully offensive breath and perspiration; and I might entreat them to abstain, in the fear of God, from those abuses of the constitution which not unfrequently bring down upon them such severe forms of punishment.

A thorough knowledge of the human system and the laws to which all organized bodies are subjected, would, in this respect, do much in behalf of mankind; for such would be the change of public sentiment, that the sensual could not hold up their heads so boldly, as they now do, in the face of it. Happy for mankind when the vicious shall be

Study of Physiology. A caution. The best youthful guides
obliged, universally, to pass in review before this enlightened tribunal!

Young men ought to study physiology. It is indeed to be regretted that there are so few books on this subject adapted to popular use. But in addition to those recommended at page 316, there are portions of several works which may be read with advantage by the young. Such are some of the more intelligible parts of Richerand's *Physiology*, as at page 38 of the edition with Dr. Chapman's notes; and of the 'Outlines of Physiology,' and the 'Anatomical Class Book,' two works recently issued in Boston. It must, however, be confessed, that none of these works are sufficiently divested of technicalities, to be well adapted, as a whole, to the general reader. Physiology is one of those fountains at which it is somewhat dangerous to 'taste,' unless we 'drink deep;' on account of the tendency of superficial knowledge to empiricism. Still, I am fully of the opinion that even superficial knowledge, on this long neglected topic, is less dangerous both to the individual and to the community, than entire ignorance.

And after all, the best guides would be PARENTS. When will Heaven confer such favors upon us? When will parents become parents indeed? When will one father or mother in a hundred, exercise the true parental prerogative, and point out to those whom God has given them, as circumstances may from time to time demand, the most dangerous

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Appeal to the young.Physical education neglected.

rocks and whirlpools to which, in the voyage of life, they are exposed? When will every thing else be done for the young rather than that which ought never to be left undone?

Say not, young reader, that I am wandering. You may be a father. God grant that if you are, you may also act the parent. Let me beg you to resolve, and if necessary re-resolve. And not only resolve, but act. If you are ready to pronounce me enthusiastic on this subject, let me beg you to suspend your judgment till the responsibilities and the duties and the anxieties of a parent thicken round you.

It is painful to see — every where — the most unquestionable evidence that this department of education is unheeded. Do you ask how the evidence is obtained? I answer by asking you how the physician can discover, — as undoubtedly he can, — the progress of the drinker of spirituous liquors, by his eye, his features, his breath, nay his very perspiration. And do you think that the sons or daughters of sensuality, in any of its forms, and at any of its stages, can escape his observation?

But of what use is his knowledge, if he may not communicate it? What person would endure disclosures of this kind respecting himself or his nearest, perhaps his dearest and most valued friends? No! the physician's lips must be sealed, and his tongue dumb; and the young must go down to their graves, rather than permit him to make any effort to save them, lest offence should be given!

The subject is, however, gaining a hold on the community, for which none of us can be too thankful. I am acquainted with more than one parent, who is a parent indeed ; for there is no more reserve on these subjects, than any other. The sons do not hesitate to ask parental counsel and seek parental aid, in every known path of temptation. Heaven grant that such instances may be speedily multiplied. A greater work of reform can scarcely be desired or anticipated.

But I must draw to a close. Oh that the young were wise,² and that they would ‘consider!’ ‘There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death.’

There is, then, but one course for the young. Let them do that which they know to be right, and avoid not only that which they are sure is wrong, but that also of which they have *doubts*. Let them do this, moreover, in the fear and love of God. In the language of a great statesman of the United States to his nephew, a little before his death, let me exhort you, to ‘Give up property, *give up every thing — give up even life itself, rather than presume to do an immoral act.*’ Let me remind you too, of the declaration of that Wisdom which is Infinite;—
 •HE THAT SINNETH AGAINST GOD, DESTROYETH HIS OWN SOUL.’

END.

READ THE FULL TEXT



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

 September 23, Monday: Maria II was once again proclaimed Queen of Portugal under the regency of her father, Dom Pedro.

The Daily Sun of New-York, 1st of the American “penny papers.”

With the assistance of Christ Jesus, [Henry C. Wright](#) revealed in his private journal, he had won his victory over the vice of self-onanism (what we know under the rubric “[masturbation](#)”). What was the result of “THE UNNATURAL AND MONSTROUS EXPENDITURE OF THE SEXUAL ELEMENT, FOR MERE SENSUAL GRATIFICATION?”

Failure in business, without any apparent cause; imbecility and folly in plans and purposes, and indecision in execution, where strength, wisdom and promptitude were expected; dyspepsia, rheumatism, gout, apoplexy, paralysis, [consumption](#) and disease ... and a premature and agonizing death, where a healthy, vigorous youth gave promise of a long life...; a morose and selfish temper, where, in youth, a loving and manly spirit reigned; domestic circles converted into scenes of discontent, strife, cruelty and blood...; women, whose girlhoods were seasons of health, beauty and joyous life and activity, become prematurely nervous, fretful, sickly, helpless and deformed; ... children ... dead under five years of age...; the many premature births; the sufferings and deaths in child-birth; the inconceivable amount and variety of disease and suffering peculiar to the female organism; idiots, born of intellectual parents; insane, born of the sane; diseased and deformed, born of the healthy and beautiful; hating, revengeful and bloody spirits, born of the loving, the forgiving, and the gentle; – these and many other facts connected with human life, are ever before us, and ever marvellous.

On the contrary, the retention of the semen, “except for offspring,” was “deep, vitalizing, ennobling, and intensely joyous and elevating.”⁸

 September 28, Saturday: On this day and the following one [Henry C. Wright](#) was deciding to leave behind him not only [masturbation](#) but also, shudder, fiction. Having perused [Sir Walter Scott](#)’s SCOTTISH CHIEFS he was concluding that such tale-spinning was “pernicious” (he would later visit Abbotsford and Scott’s gravesite there, and his summation would be that despite the manner in which other tourists treated this as if it were some sort of shrine, the reputation which this tale-spinner Scott had left behind was an entirely insignificant one):

I believe [Shakespear (*sic*) & Scott] have ruined many souls.
WOuld God they had never seen the light of day & that I had more

8. There’s this beach-front property in Arizona....

“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

strength to resist temptation.

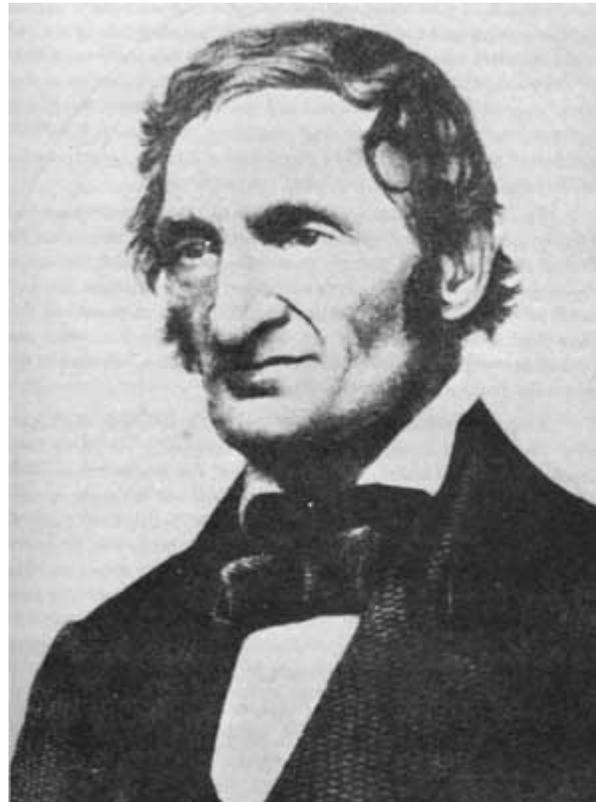
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford

1835

→ [Dr. William Andrus Alcott](#)'s “On Cleanliness,” in The Moral Reformer and Teacher on the Human Constitution admonished readers “that he who neglects his person and dress will be found lower in the scale of morals, other things being equal, than he who pays a due regard to cleanliness.”



Mr. Clean



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

The 4th edition, in Boston, of his ever-popular THE YOUNG MAN'S GUIDE:
THE

YOUNG MAN'S GUIDE.

BY

WILLIAM A. ALCOTT,

FOURTH EDITION.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY SAMUEL COLMAN,
SUCCESSOR TO LILLY, WAIT, & Co.
1835

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE rapid sale of a large edition of this work, and the general tribute of public praise which has been awarded to its merits, instead of closing the eyes of the Publishers or the Author against existing defects, have, on the contrary, only deepened their sense of obligation to render the present edition as perfect as possible; and no pains have been spared to accomplish this end. Several new sections have been added to the work, and some of the former have been abridged or extended.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE THIRD EDITION.

AN increasing demand for the Young Man's Guide, evinced by the sale of more than five thousand copies of the work in a few months, have induced the publishers to give a third edition, with some amendments and additions by the author; who has also derived important suggestions from gentlemen of high literary and moral standing, to whom the work had been submitted for examination.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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Among the diseases caused by sexual licentiousness are the [tuberculosis](#) that was the scourge of the Thoreau family of Concord. This phthisis condition was caused by [masturbation](#), onanism, self-abuse, which is a crime against God and against one's own body. The punishment prescribed by God for this is [consumption](#). Implicitly, nobody needs to feel sorry for the victim of such a malady, who personally had caused all this harm to himself or herself, caused it through a lack of proper private self-restraint and through a lack of respect for God and His law:

LICENTIOUSNESS (pages 340-354): *Phthisis*, or consumption, is still more frequently produced by the cause we are considering, than any other disease I have mentioned. And we know well the history of this disease; that, though slow in its progress, the event is certain. In this climate, it is one of the most destructive scourges of our race. If the ordinary diseases slay their thousands, consumption slays its tens of thousands. Its approach is gradual, and often unsuspected; and the decline to the grave sometimes unattended by any considerable suffering. Is it not madness to expose oneself to its attacks for the shortlived gratifications of a moment?

There is indeed a peculiar form of this disease which, in the case in question, is more commonly produced than any other. It is called, in the language of physicians, *tabes dorsalis*, or dorsal consumption; because it is supposed to arise from the dorsal portion of the spinal marrow. This disease sometimes, it is true, attacks young married people, especially when they go beyond the bounds which the Author of nature intended; and it is occasionally produced by other causes entirely different; causes, too, which it would be difficult, if not impossible to prevent. Generally, however, it is produced by *solitary vice*. ...A few well authenticated examples of persons who debased themselves by secret vice, will, I hope, satisfy those who doubt the evil of this practice....

When a young man, who is pursuing an unhappy course of solitary vice, threatened as we have seen by the severest penalties earth or heaven can impose, — begins to perceive a loss or irregularity of his appetite; acute pains in his stomach, especially during digestion, and constant vomitings; —

when to this is added a weakness of the lungs, often attended by a dry cough, hoarse weak voice, and hurried or difficult breathing after using considerable exertion, with a general relaxation of the nervous system; – when these appearances, or symptoms, as physicians call them, take place – let him *beware!* for punishment of a severer kind cannot be distant....

There is, then, but one course for the young. Let them do that which they know to be right, and avoid not only that which they are sure is wrong, but that also of which they have *doubts*. Let them do this, moreover, in the fear and love of God. In the language of a great statesman of the United States to his nephew, a little before his death, let me exhort you, to ‘Give up property, give up every thing – give up even life itself, rather than presume to do an immoral act.’ Let me remind you too, of the declaration of that Wisdom which is Infinite; – **‘HE THAT SINNETH AGAINST GOD, DESTROYETH HIS OWN SOUL.’**

1836



The famous American actor [Edwin Forrest](#) was reported to have been hissing from a balcony seat in a theater in England, during a performance of his British competitor William Macready. Witnessing Macready’s effete, reserved, delicate, aristocratic, in a word **effeminate**, style of acting had simply been too much, and the visiting American actor had been unable to moderate his American contempt for woman-like weakness.⁹ Attempts to excuse this behavior as some sort of cultural misunderstanding would not be generally appreciated in the British press.



9. Bear in mind that during this period the weakness of the female element and the sexual depletion of the male element were linked in the popular mind, so that an “effeminate” man, seeming to be lacking in proper masculine vigor, would be assumed to be a victim of the “spermatorrhea” associated with the secret vice of [masturbation](#). He had wasted his ammo and his gun was empty. Just as an obese person might be sneered at by pleasure-denying Puritans, as self-indulgent and lacking in self-control in regard to a personal indulgence in regard to eating, so the unmasculine male might be sneered at as self-indulgent and as lacking in self-control in regard to an assumed private manipulation of private parts. (In women, however, the diddling of the passions was believed to so increase sexual energy as to create not an unsuitable weakness but instead an unsuitable strength, to wit, a “furious, noisy and filthy” monster.)



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

1837

 [Professor François Pierre Guillaume Guizot](#) and Pauline de Meulan Guizot’s only son died of [tuberculosis](#). The father resigned as French Minister of Education.

Sylvester Graham was scheduled to speak in [Boston](#) at Armory Hall (Amory Hall?), but the owners feared the place would be burned down by the butchers and bakers, who were indignant at his teachings. Graham’s TREATISE ON BREAD AND BREAD-MAKING was advocating what today would be referred to as a diet high in fiber. The lecture had to be delivered on the 3rd floor of the Marlborough Hotel, which was the first temperance hotel in America, with the building’s 1st floor barricaded. Proponents were seen to dump powdered lime from the windows onto protesters in the street outside.

Graham was a phenomenon. There was no hypothesis so inflammatory that he would forbear to advance it in his lectures. (Of course, by now it is clear that he was merely advancing his career as a lecturer by espousing whatever doctrine would attract the most scandalized attention. People like him are a dime a dozen.) For instance, he was proclaiming there to be a hidden link between [tuberculosis](#) and [masturbation](#) — people who contracted TB did so because in private they were contemptible people who were abusing their private parts, abusing themselves to the point of innervation and exhaustion:

Armstrong, James. “Thoreau, Chastity, and the Reformers,” in THOREAU’S PSYCHOLOGY. Gozzi, Raymond D., ed. Lanham MD: UP of America, 1983

“A Review From Professor Ross’s Seminar”

James Armstrong looks at [Henry David Thoreau](#)’s attitude toward purity and chastity and its development in his late teens and early twenties. He links Thoreau’s dietary attitudes (*i.e.* vegetarianism) and his sexual attitudes to reformers of the 1830s, especially [William Alcott](#) ([Amos Bronson Alcott](#)’s cousin) and Sylvester Graham (father of the graham cracker). The most basic motive for Thoreau’s dietary and sexual asceticism, according to Armstrong, was “his desire to reduce the threats to his uncertain health.” Armstrong cites Alcott’s YOUNG MAN’S GUIDE and its influence on [WALDEN](#); Thoreau had obviously read it and used many of its themes, techniques and phrasing. YOUNG MAN’S GUIDE includes a 40-page section on licentiousness, including “solitary vice,” *i.e.* [masturbation](#). Graham’s theories on purity include strict dietary measures, and his books and lectures include vivid, erroneous descriptions of the kinds of diseases one can catch by being sexual active or masturbating. His theories also linked sex with [tuberculosis](#). Thoreau was probably aware of Graham’s teachings, since Bronson Alcott was a follower of Graham’s and Graham was a popular feature of the Atlantic coast lecture circuit. Armstrong argues that Thoreau’s asceticism was set while young as a protection against the tuberculosis that was a danger to him and was reinforced in later years in his reading of eastern mystics, etc.

(J.J.B. 5-4-89)

There is no direct evidence that [[Henry David Thoreau](#)] ever read or heard Sylvester Graham’s “Lecture to Young Men,” although he



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MASTURBATION

could hardly fail to be aware of Graham's teachings. Not only was his friend [Bronson Alcott](#) a practicing Grahamite, but so was Horace Greeley, editor of the New-York [Tribune](#), who voluntarily acted as Thoreau's literary agent... Likewise, numerous acquaintances at Brook Farm and Fruitlands followed the Graham regimen ... it is inconceivable that Thoreau could have remained ignorant of Graham's doctrines. But whether or not he was impressed by the ugly specters raised by Graham or other sexual reformers, he must have been affected by one factor they all mention: the link between sex and [tuberculosis](#). Graham, in his "Lecture to Young Men" suggests not only that ALL sexual activity is conducive to [consumption](#), but that [consumptives](#) or suspected [consumptives](#) should refrain from sex altogether:

Those who are troubled with weakness of lungs or in any way predisposed to pulmonary complaints should be exceedingly careful to avoid sexual indulgence: and in some cases total abstinence is necessary. Pulmonary [consumption](#) is always more speedily developed and terminated in death, by venereal pleasures.

The calamities resulting from "venereal excess," according to Graham, could be avoided by a "pure and well regulated vegetable diet," which "serves to take away or prevent all morbid or preternatural sexual lust, and to bring and keep the instinct more in a truly natural state, and in strict accordance with the final cause of man's sexual organization, and thus enable him to be chaste in body and in spirit." Such a diet, in fact, seemed to be more important in regulating chastity than any other factor.

Graham warns that "venereal excesses occasion the most loathsome, and horrible, and calamitous diseases that human nature is capable of suffering." [He said:] "Remember my friends, the end of your organization! ... remember that the higher capabilities of man qualify him for more exalted and exalting pleasures than lie within the precincts of sensual enjoyment."

Even Sylvester Graham had developed symptoms of [consumption](#) when he was 16, and in 1837 Graham was to all appearances an active and healthy man at the age of 43. He died, in fact, at 57.



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

 West, Michael. “Scatology and Eschatology: The Heroic Dimensions of Thoreau’s Wordplay.” *PMLA* 89 (1977): 1043-64

“A Review From Professor Ross’s Seminar”

West delves into the importance of Thoreau’s “dirty jokes” in [WALDEN](#) and sees an understanding of them to be essential in the understanding of the book. In his using puns, [Henry David Thoreau](#) is following an American tradition that stretches from his own period to Puritans like the Reverends [Jonathan Edwards](#) and [Cotton Mather](#).

Thoreau’s puns often center around bodily functions, and West argues convincingly that this reveals Thoreau’s deep ambivalence about the body and its functions. He recognizes the body’s need to cleanse itself but is frightened because it will never totally do so. This ambivalence expands to situations in nature and society that resemble the purging of the body as in [WALDEN](#) when he notes the mud flowing from the railroad cut and when he looks at people’s home as places of contamination.

West acknowledges that other critics have attributed Thoreau’s obsession with the excremental to his misogyny or latent homosexuality, but he presents another reason. Thoreau, with good cause since his family had a history of [tuberculosis](#), feared [consumption](#), the disease that does eventually kill him, and the popular medicine of the time linked the bowels and proper excrementary functioning to the health of the lungs. Thoreau’s jokes about scatological subjects are serious business. He is laughing bravely at death.



“A Review From Professor Ross’s Seminar”

West traces Thoreau’s interest in etymology and language to a deep interest in the subject in America in the early 1800s. He finds Thoreau’s attitude toward the body and toward excrement ambivalent: [Henry David Thoreau](#) found all excremental functions necessary and good in purifying the body but at the same time found the excrement and functions highly unclean. West says, Thoreau “was naturally bothered, like the Hindu, by the problem of contamination. How to preserve an immanent divinity from pollution is a recurring preoccupation in [WALDEN](#) and the journals.”

West continues by analyzing Thoreau’s attitude toward sexuality. Not surprisingly he finds Thoreau’s near asexuality to be influenced by a feeling that all sexuality is dirty. “Largely because of some oddly sentimental verses to Ellen Devereux Sewall’s brother, Thoreau’s misogyny has often been interpreted as latent [homosexuality](#). But it may stem more simply from the feeling that whereas all sexuality is dirty, female biology renders woman intrinsically more unclean than man, and apparently sicklier and less independent to boot.” In that statement lie as many clues about the author of this article as about Henry Thoreau. Here, West assumes Thoreau was misogynous, dismisses his fascination with Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr., and make female biology dirtier than male. Such are the dangers of psychological analysis.

West’s most valuable analysis is of Thoreau’s scatological wordplay. He relates Thoreau’s fascination with cleanliness to his fear of [consumption](#) and his asceticism to his attempt to ward off the illness that would eventually kill him.

Thoreau enthusiastically supported the 19th-Century campaign for an American native style and national literature. The mid-19th Century was a time of much philosophic speculation about language, one result being a renewed interest in this country in the gentlemanly English cult of the pun as it had been revitalized by the English Romantics. This interest in puns and other types of wordplay “was also stimulated by the thriving native tradition of vernacular humor, with its stylistic habit of isolating and intensifying individual words.” Wordplay, at least for Thoreau, was also a way to free American language from its English roots. Thoreau indulges freely in his love of wordplay in [WALDEN](#) to the point that he questions if there isn’t something wrong with so much “playing with words, – getting the laugh.” At the same time, he feels that “most words in the English language do not mean for me what they do for my neighbors,” so that even as he uses humor to open up his text, to attract a popular audience, he also uses it to close his text, to create what at times amounts almost to a private language. West spends most of the article analyzing the scatological wordplay and dirty jokes in [WALDEN](#), most of which reflect Thoreau’s powerful ambivalence toward the human body. West brings to the surface the underlying images of excrement, pollution, contamination, uncleanliness, and disease that lace Thoreau’s text. West argues that “Thoreau’s excremental wordplay is neither primarily evasive nor primarily subversive. It is in the radical sense **elusive.**”

(Lane Stiles, Winter 1992)

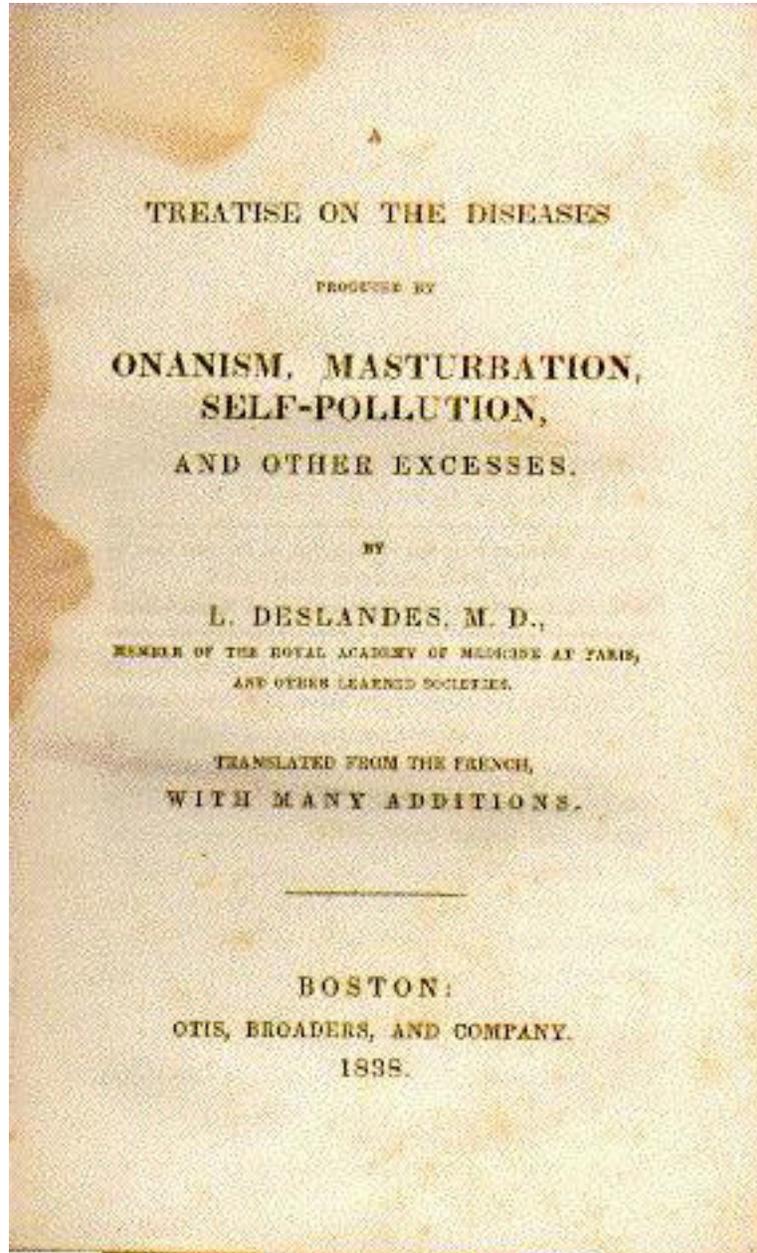


“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

1838

Leopold Deslandes's A TREATISE ON THE DISEASES PRODUCED BY ONANISM, MASTURBATION, SELF-POLLUTION, AND OTHER EXCESSES:



MASTURBATION



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

1843

At the same time Americans began to discover the evils of onanism, they also began to replace the older, biblical term with a new word: [masturbation](#). That, at least, is a reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the fact that “masturbation” appears for the first time in Webster’s 2nd edition, published in this period, whereas it had not in the 1828 edition (while the eruption in anti-onanist rhetoric in the United States had come in the early 1830s).

1844

In *AMATIVENESS: OR EVILS AND REMEDIES OF EXCESSIVE AND PERVERTED SEXUALITY INCLUDING WARNING AND ADVICE TO THE MARRIED AND SINGLE*, Orson Fowles lumped [masturbation](#) and sexual play between males into the same category, as similarly nonreproductive.

HOMOEROTICISM

1847

Fall: The 30-year-old [Henry Thoreau](#) worked on “KTAADN,” on relationship to government, and, abstractly, on relationship to others. He firmly rejected, however, the advances of 45-year-old Sophia Foord, who had been living in the barn at the [Waldo Emersons](#) while tutoring the Emerson and Alcott children until she had become ill in October 1846 and had left Concord in March 1847.¹⁰

"By the way have you heard what a strange story there was about Miss Ford, and Henry, Mrs. Brooks said at the convention, a lady came to her and inquired, if it was true, that Miss F. had committed, or was going to commit suicide on account of H_____ Thoreau, what a ridiculous story this is. When it was told to H_____ he made no remark at all, and we cannot find out from him any thing about it, for a while, they corresponded, and Sophia said that she recollected one day on the reception of a letter she heard H_____ say, he shouldn't answer it, or he must put a stop to this, some such thing she couldn't exactly tell what."

10. Nevertheless, Ms. Sophia Foord or Ford, formerly associated with the [Association of Industry and Education](#) in [Northampton](#), would love Henry all her life from a distance, and would remain in contact with his friend and neighbor Louisa May Alcott to be kept up to date about this man she loved. The fact that she loved Thoreau all his life shows the Edward Dahlberg rendition –that Thoreau’s refusal of Miss Foord’s advances must have been “orgiastic and savage”– to be a superficial reading perhaps motivated more by Mr. Dahlberg’s personal situation in the world than by a familiarity with the historical materials. We may note that Mr. Dahlberg was also troubled that Professor Kant had been guilty of [masturbation](#), or perhaps troubled at Professor Kant’s having acknowledged that he masturbated.

Immanuel Kant embraced godhead, the universe, the abstract Man, and, as he himself confessed, [masturbated](#)!



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

– per an undated, unprovenanced letter by Maria Thoreau

AUNT MARIA THOREAU

SOPHIA FOORD

MARY MERRICK BROOKS

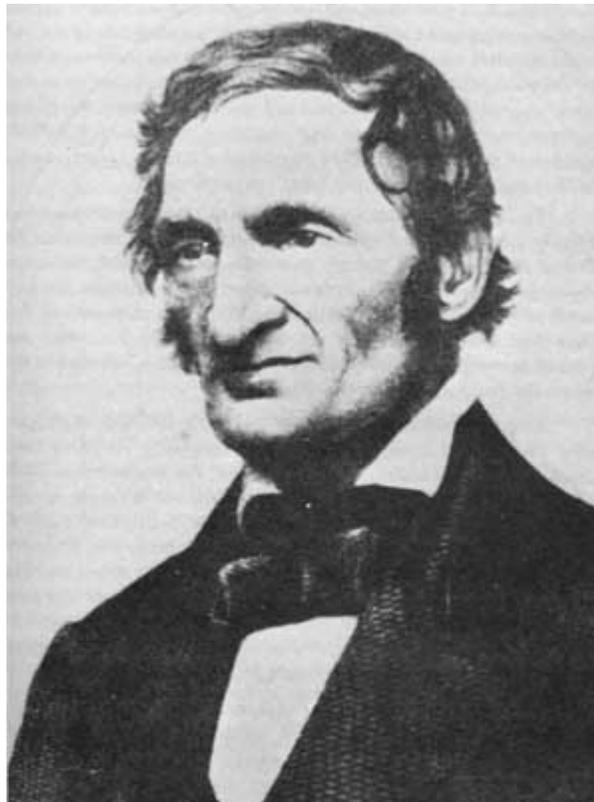
SOPHIA E. THOREAU

1849

[William Henry Harvey](#)'s A MANUAL OF THE BRITISH MARINE ALGAE... (London: John van Voorst). Also, his *PHYCOLOGIA BRITANNICA* (Plates 217-294). (London: Reeve & Banham). Also, his THE SEA-SIDE BOOK: BEING AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH COASTS (London: John Van Voorst, Paternoster Row; this would pass through a series of editions).

THE SEA-SIDE BOOK

[Dr. William Andrus Alcott](#)'s FAMILIAR LETTERS TO YOUNG MEN ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS. DESIGNED AS A COMPANION TO THE YOUNG MAN'S GUIDE, first published in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), added to his familiar preoccupations, such as that the cause of a man's ails (such as the [tuberculosis](#) that was then endemic among the Irish workers in New England factories) must be that in defiance of God's law and to the damage of his own health, he had not in private kept his hands off himself, the added details that just as spicy food was to be avoided because it stimulated the lusts, so also spicy reading (was he referring to one-handed magazines, or to WALDEN?), for the same reasons, was to be avoided.



Mr. The Spicy Life Is Not Worth Living

MASTURBATION

There is even a graver class of books than those to which I have here alluded, that are far too exciting for the healthy mental palate. This class is to be found in our bookstores. I scarcely know a man who would hesitate to keep and sell them, even though

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MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKEN.

on the watch for prey. Its name, Petrel, is given, Mr. Yarrell tells us, from its “habit of paddling along the surface, from the Apostle Peter, who walked on the sea.”



STORM PETREL.

The last little bird of which we have spoken ends the list of our marine birds, and naturally suggests to us a storm, as a storm does a shipwreck ; and from a shipwreck to floating pieces of timber, or drift-wood, the passage is easy and natural. We shall now inquire whether such floating spars are worth examining. They often come ashore covered externally with Barnacles, and pierced through and through by the *Teredo* and *Limnoria*. All these animals have something interesting in their history. The Common Barnacle



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he were a professed disciple of the Saviour.

This may seem a very grave charge, but is it not founded on the strictest truth? It is not asserted, or even intimated, that these men who sell the machinery of Satan, even consider well what they are doing. They are trained to it – they act as mere machines, or almost so. If you say they have no right thus to act – they are bound to reflect – my reply is, *that is your own assertion, and not mine.* To their own master they stand or fall, who deal out to the community, in any way or shape, what operates like a fire-brand every where, whether it acts upon the body, the mind, or the heart. Nor does it mend their condition very much to be able to say in the great day of account, that they did it in sport, or even to obtain a livelihood.

Should you be so fortunate as to escape the deteriorating influences of the whole paraphernalia of physical, intellectual, and moral excitement; and should the temptation present itself of spreading before the public, as a means of gaining a subsistence for yourself and family, such things as I have referred to, remember that you are not now in the condition of those whose minds have never been at all enlightened on this subject. Weigh well the consequences of your conduct, before you act. Remember your accountability to God, and to future generations.

...How can a person be expected to deny himself and take up his cross, in the larger, less frequently occurring affairs of life, who has not first learned to deny himself in small matters?

The same remarks and the same admonitions may apply to the case of those before whom exciting intellectual and moral food is continually presented. If they govern the appetite – which incessantly cries, Give, give – in these smaller occurrences, may they not hope to pave the way for self-government in larger matters, whenever the time of trial shall come? ... For until each generation shall be as an improved edition of that which precedes it, the work of God, delegated to man on earth, will never be accomplished.

1851

May 20, Tuesday: At the “little Red House” in Lenox, Massachusetts, [Rose Hawthorne](#) was born to [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) and [Sophia Peabody Hawthorne](#).

At least subsequent to this period, it seems likely that Nathaniel and Sophia no longer had sexual intercourse, as Nathaniel has been characterized by one of his contemporaries as deficient “in the power or the will to show his love. He is the most undemonstrative person I ever knew, without any exception. It is quite impossible for me to imagine his bestowing the slightest caress upon Mrs. Hawthorne.” Sophia once commented about her husband that he “hates to be touched more than anyone I ever knew.” Presumably the Hawthornes gave up sexual intercourse for purposes of contraception, or perhaps because they found solitary or mutual [masturbation](#) to be more congenial, or perhaps, in Nathaniel’s case, because he preferred to have sex with prostitutes, a social practice of the times which Hawthorne referred to as “his illegitimate embraces,” rather than go to the trouble of arranging “blissful interviews” with his wife.¹¹ Hawthorne was bothered by the presence of children, and after the birth of Rose would speak bitterly of the parent’s “duty to sacrifice all the green margin of our lives to these children” towards which he never felt the slightest “natural partiality”:

[T]hey have to prove their claim to all the affection they get; and I believe I could love other people’s children better than mine, if I felt they deserved it more.



May 20, Tuesday: There is no doubt a perfect analogy between the life of the human being and that of the vegetable –both of the body & the mind.

The botanist, Gray, says–

“The organs of plants are of two sorts: –1. those of *Vegetation*, which are concerned in growth, –by which the plant takes in the aerial and earthy matters on which it lives, and elaborates them into the materials of its own organized substance; 2. those of *Fructification or Reproduction*, which are concerned in the propagation of the species.”

So is it with the human being– I am concerned first to come to my *Growth* intellectually & morally; (and physically, of course, as a means to this, for the body is the symbol of the soul) and, then to bear my *Fruit* –do my *Work* –*Propagate* my kind, not only physically but *morally* –not only in body but in mind.

“The organs of vegetation are the *Root, Stem, & Leaves*. The *Stem* is the axis and original basis of the plant.”

“The first point of the stem preexists in the embryo (i.e. in the rudimentary plantlet contained within the seed): it is here called the radicle.” Such is the rudiment of mind –already partially developed –more than a bud but pale –having never been exposed to the light –& slumbering coiled up –packed away in the seed –unfolded (consider the still pale –rudimentary infantine radicle-like thoughts of some students, which who knows what they might expand to if they should ever come to the light & air. –if they do not become rancid & perish in the seed. It is not every seed that will survive a thousand years.– Other thoughts further developed –but yet pale & languid –like shoots grown in a cellar.)

“The plant – – develops from the first in two opposite directions, viz. upwards [to expand in the light & air] to produce & continue the stem (or *ascending axis*), and downwards [avoiding the light] to form the root, (or *descending axis*. The former is ordinarily or in great part aerial, the latter subterranean.”

So the mind develops from the first in two opposite directions –upwards to expand in the light & air; & downwards avoiding the light to form the root. One half is aerial the other subterranean. The mind is not well balanced & firmly planted like the oak which has not as much root as branch –whose roots like those of the white pine are slight and near the surface. One half of the minds development must still be root –in the embryonic state –in the womb of nature –more unborn than at first. For each successive new idea or bud –a new rootlet in the earth. The growing man penetrates yet deeper by his roots into the womb of things. The infant is

11. I doubt that we will ever know which of our male literary subjects of this period followed the exceedingly prevalent custom, of paying regular visits to houses of prostitution for what was commonly considered to be a needed and healthy “physical relief.” It would be a great error to suppose that these males of the pre-Victorian era were sexually “repressed” simply because they lived in a world which was divided into totally separate cultural, high-class, and carnal, low-class realms, a world in which the range of recorded discourse was entirely confined within the realm of culture and in which the range of “earthy” or “street” dialog was entirely excluded from that recorded realm.



“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION

comparatively near the surface. just covered from the light– But the man sends down a tap root to the centre of things.

The mere logician the mere reasoner who weaves his arguments as a tree its branches in the sky –not being equally developed in the roots, is overthrown by the first wind.

As with the roots of the Plant so with the roots of the Mind– The branches & branchlets of the root “are mere repetitions for the purpose of multiplying the absorbing points, which are chiefly the growing or newly formed extremities, sometimes termed *spongelets*. It bears no other organs.”

So this organ of the minds development the *Root*, bears no organs but spongelets or absorbing points

Annuals which perish root & all the first season –especially have slender & thread-like fibrous roots. But biennials are particularly characterised by distended fleshy roots containing starch –a stock for future growth – to be consumed during their second or flowering season –as carrots radishes –turnips.

Perennials frequently have many thickened roots clustered together –tuberous or palmate roots –fasciculated or clustered as in the Dahlia, Paeony &c

Roots may spring from any part of the stem under favorable circumstances “that is to say in darkness & moisture, as when covered by the soil or resting on its surface.”

I.E. the most clear & ethereal ideas (Antaeus like) readily ally themselves to the earth –to the primal womb of things– They put forth roots as soon as branches they are eager to be *soiled* No thought soars so high that it sunders these apron strings of its mother. The thought that comes to light –that pierces the Empyrean on the other side is wombed & rooted in darkness –a moist & fertile darkness –its roots in Hades like the tree of life. No idea is so soaring but it will readily put forth roots –wherever there is an air & light seeking bud about to expand it may become in the earth a darkness seeking root. even swallows & birds of paradise *can* walk on the ground.

To quote the sentence from Gray –entire

“Roots not only spring from the root-end of the primary stem in germination, but also from any subsequent part of the stem under favorable circumstances, that is to say, in darkness & moisture, as when covered by the soil or resting on its surface.”

No thought but is connected as strictly as a flower, with the earth– The mind flashes not so far on one side – but its rootlets its spongelets find their way instantly on the other side into a moist darkness. uterine –a low bottom in the heavens even miasma-exhaling to such immigrants as are not acclimated. A cloud is uplifted to sustain its roots. Imbossomed in clouds as in a chariot the mind drives through the boundless fields of space.–

Even there is the dwelling of Indra.

I might have quote the following with the last –of roots

“They may even strike in the open air and light, as is seen in the copious aerial rootlets by which the Ivy, the Poison Ivy, and the Trumpet Creeper climb and adhere to the trunks of trees or other bodies; and also in Epiphytes or Air-plants, of most warm regions, which have no connection whatever with the soil, but germinate & grow high in air on the trunks or branches of trees, &. as well as in some terrestrial plants, such as the Banián and Mangrove, that send off aerial roots from their trunks or branches, which finally reach the ground”

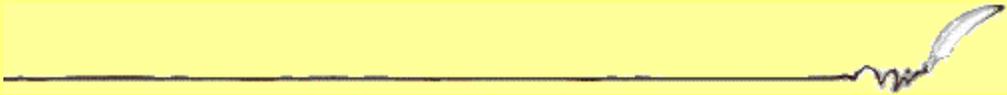
So if our light & air seeking tendencies extend too widely for our original root or stem we must send downward new roots to ally us to the earth.

Also there are parasitic plants which have their roots in the branches or roots of other trees as the mistletoe –the Beech drops &c There are minds which so have their roots in other minds as in the womb of nature– If indeed most are not such?!

1852

August 18, Wednesday: On about this date, having apparently learned that the sculptor Horatio Greenough, who had had the temerity to attack him, had been institutionalized and was dying of some sort of brain problem in Somerville, Massachusetts (site of McLean’s Asylum), [Waldo Emerson](#) confided to his JOURNAL with evident satisfaction that:

Greenough called my contemplations, &c. "the masturbation of the brain."



(Well, Waldo, he who laughs last, laughs best, right?)

MASTURBATION

“ONANISM”

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1858

The book *BOYHOOD’S PERILS & MANHOOD’S CURSE* included an illustration of the facial expression of a persistent masturbator. The tongue is protruding from the mouth and there is a copious dripping of saliva. The eyes are vacant and hooded.

At about this point a prominent London surgeon, Dr. Isaac Baker Brown, was advocating clitoridectomy to cure girls and women of the vice of masturbation. He feared that female masturbation was the cause of “vexing mental disorders.” In America, removal of the ovaries, and infibulation, were sometimes added to this



clitoridectomy. Protecting people from themselves became a virtual obsession of American and British doctors. It was thought that certain food products could help quell the urge to masturbate. J.H. Kellogg produced corn flakes for that reason. Sylvester Graham created the Graham cracker with a similar purpose in mind. Both these men became popular sexual advisers. Graham prescribed that males eat grains and wheat rather than meat. Further, he advised sleeping on hard wooden beds and taking strenuous exercise to ward off the dire results of masturbation.



“For 2400 years patients have believed that doctors were doing them good; for 2300 years they were wrong.”



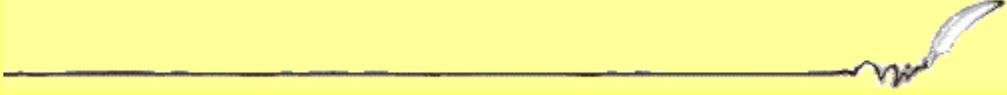
“ONANISM”

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– David Wootton, BAD MEDICINE: DOCTORS DOING HARM SINCE HIPPOCRATES, Oxford, June 2006

May/June: [Waldo Emerson](#) to his JOURNAL:

*We are all better in attack than in defense. It is very easy to make acute objections to any style of life, but the objector is quite as vulnerable. Greenough wittily called my speculations **masturbation**; but the artist life seems to me intolerably thin & superficial. I feel the reasonableness of what the lawyer or merchant or laborer has to allege against readers & thinkers, until I look at each of their wretched industries, and find them without end or aim.*



MASTURBATION

1860

The process of placing photographs upon a piece of blackened iron, known as “tintype,” began to be popular because of its low cost. Even though these were one-of-a-kind positives, one could obtain multiple images upon the plate with a multilens camera, and then cut these images apart with tinsnips. The smallest size, 1⁵/₈" x 2¹/₈", a sixteenth of a plate, would be referred to as a “gem picture,” and there would even be miniature photo albums especially for these gems of technology.

HOW TO TELL THEM APART:

Daguerreotype	direct positive, reversed image	mirrorlike surface shifts from positive to negative as you tilt it	August 19, 1839-circa 1860
Ambrotype	direct positive, reversed image	pry the sheets apart and shine a light through from the back to verify that the image is negative	1855-circa 1865
Carte de Visite	non-reversed image	wedding band is on the proper hand, you can read the titles of books, and clothing is buttoned properly for each gender	1854-circa 1925
“Tintype” (Ferrottype)	direct positive, reversed image	The metal is attracted to a magnet and there is no mirror appearance	1856-circa 1945



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For the less expensive photographic processes such as the tintype and the albumen photograph, about the best price available was \$1.⁰⁰ for a sheet of 25 albumen images — referred to as *cartes de visite* and dispensed more or less as calling cards had been and more or less as we now dispense business cards. It would become very common to take such an image just before sending one’s son off to war.

Photography was still dependent upon abundant natural light, but at about this point Adolphe Braun was able to take a photo from some yards inside an ice cave in the Grindelwald Glacier of Switzerland, by pointing the camera out toward the open entrance to the cave and making a time exposure which picked up light reflections from the glistening walls.

A series of photographs were made, of criminal types, by Samuel G. Szabó, which included a “Pick Pocket,” a “Lifter” (shoplifter), and a Mrs. Hudson characterized as “Abortionist.”

Nadar (Gaspard Félix Tournachon), with the assistance of Dr. Jules-Germain Maisonneuve, photographed the genitals of a hermaphrodite, a person who had both a penis and a vagina. This series of photographs would be the only one he would ever copyright. The photo in question is now at the Musée D’Orsay in Paris.

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A [prostitute](#) in France was photographed [masturbating](#) with a turnip. She is staring straight at the camera and has applied the tip of her index finger to the tip of her nose. (Was that a gesture of the period, meaning perhaps “You do this also” or “I’m looking out for Number One”?)

During the decade of the 1860s, the Great Lakes area would be becoming the center of the US lumber industry. But the two-man crosscut saws with raker teeth that you have seen in old photographs of lumberjacks in the American woods –saws that could accommodate themselves to the sappiness of the wood of a tree near its stump and not gum up during extended use– would not be appearing until the 1880s.

Using a camera mounted under a balloon, [Boston](#) was photographed from 1,200 feet away:





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1863

The topics of mail-order pornographic photographs in this year included “Indian Maidens,” “Wood Nymph’s Frolic,” and “Circassian Slavegirls.” The Civil War troops attired in blue and attired in gray could order them, as visualization aids in [masturbation](#), at \$0.¹² each or \$1.²⁰ the dozen.¹²

During this war former Lieutenant [George Douglas Brewerton](#), rather than himself re-enlisting to serve his nation, would be vending a set of visualization aids for recruits which he denominated the “The Automaton Regiment,” “The Automaton Company,” and “The Automaton Battery.” –Evidently these were decorated pieces of cardboard or particleboard that were to be manipulated by an instructor during basic lectures on military tactics.¹³

At some point former Lieutenant Brewerton had his portrait made by Matthew Brady — and we can perceive how very serious he was about civil war as opportunity.

1866

The Reverend [Horatio Alger, Jr.](#) came to be suspected of being engaged in “questionable relations” with a choirboy or two and was ousted from the [Unitarian](#) church of Brewster on Cape Cod, at which he had been the pastor. He agreed never again to accept a position as a minister, and returned to the home of his father and mother. He then relocated to the New-York metropolis, where, over the following three decades, he would “adopt,” live with, and nurture a series of teen-age boys.

His cousin, the Reverend [William Rouseville Alger](#), who on August 1, 1854  had been the first to purchase a copy of [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#) –hot off the press eight days before its official publication date– during this year prepared a treatise THE SOLITUDES OF NATURE AND OF MAN; OR, THE LONELINESS OF HUMAN LIFE which immediately went through a number of printings, a treatise in which in no uncertain terms he denounced [Henry Thoreau](#).

TIMELINE OF WALDEN

On page vii of the Introduction we learn that the objective of this treatise is to learn “how at the same time to win the benefits and shun the evils of being alone.” ... “The subject –the conditions and influences of solitude in its various forms– is so largely concerned with disturbed feelings that it is difficult, in treating it, to keep free from everything unhealthy, excessive, or eccentric.” On page viii we learn that: “The warm effusion of Christianity is better adapted to human nature than the dry chill of Stoicism.”

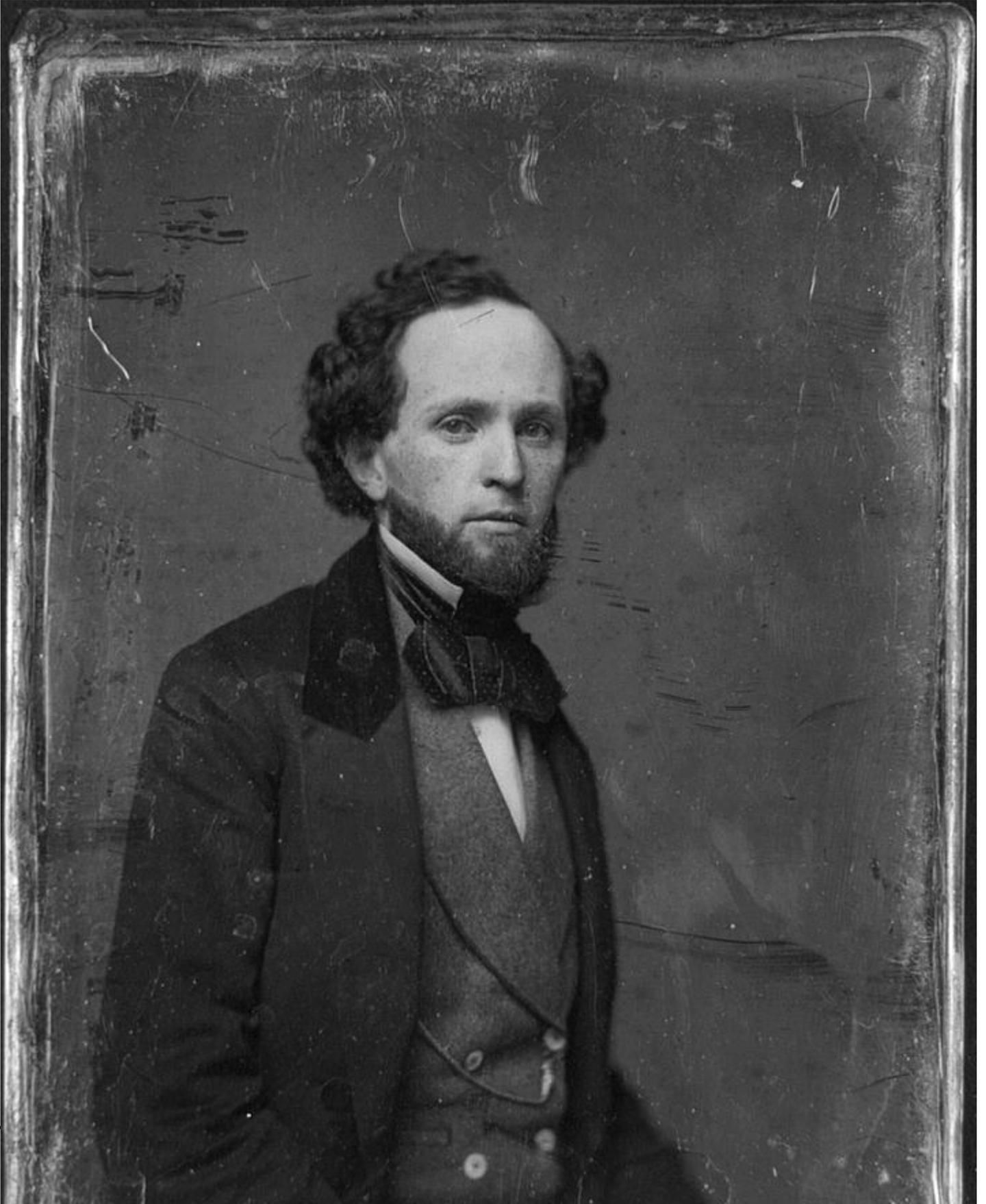
It was obviously a very low blow, hitting below the belt, to describe Thoreau as he did (see below), in terms that suggested that this author had been not only a solitary but also had been “feeling himself,” had been

12. Unfortunately, we lack illustrations of these aids.

13. Unfortunately, we lack illustrations of these aids.

“ONANISM”

MASTURBATION





“ONANISM”

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“fondling himself,” which is to suggest, going one better on the previously published derogations of James Russell Lowell, that Henry had been a [masturbator](#). Nowadays, however, it requires some special explanation of the context for us to grasp just what an utterly low blow it was, because nowadays we have a more accurate theory, an infection theory, of the origins of the [tuberculosis](#) from which Thoreau died. This was, however, the period before, during which the contagious nature of the ailment was not yet generally understood. One of the pervasive theories of “phthisis” of that era was that it was a debility brought about through excessive and unrestrained [masturbation](#). The reverend was therefore in effect suggesting to his appreciative audience that the [Concord](#) author had, **through his lack of self-restraint** as persistently exhibited in the text of his manual for life, been **responsible for his own early death!**



The second half of the volume bears this title page:

**SKETCHES OF LONELY CHARACTERS:
or,
PERSONAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE GOOD AND EVIL OF SOLITUDE.**

In this second half the reverend author deals serially, in sub-chapters, with Gautama Buddha, Confucius, Demosthenes, Tacitus, Lucretius, Cicero, Boethius, Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Bruno, Vico, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibnitz, Milton, Pascal, Rousseau, Zimmermann, Beethoven, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Blanco White, Leopardi, Foster, Channing, Robertson, Chopin, Thoreau (pages 329-338), Maurice de Guérin, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Eugénie de Guérin, Comte, and then with Jesus.

Pages 329-338: If any American deserves to stand as a representative of the experience of reclusiveness, Thoreau is the man. His fellow-feelings and alliances with men were few and feeble; his disgusts and aversions many, as well as strongly pronounced. All his life he was distinguished for his aloofness, austere self-communion, long and lonely walks. He was separated from ordinary persons in grain and habits, by the poetic sincerity of his passion for natural objects and phenomena. As a student and lover of the material world he is a genuine apostle of solitude, despite the taints of affectation, inconsistency, and morbidity which his writings betray. At twenty-eight, on the shore of a lonely pond, he built a hut in which he lived entirely by himself for over two years. And, after he returned to his father's house in the village, he was for the chief part of the time nearly as much alone as he had been in his hermitage by Walden water. The closeness of his cleaving to the landscape cannot be questioned: “I dream of looking abroad, summer and winter, with free gaze, from some mountain side, nature looking into nature, with such easy sympathy as the blue-eyed grass in the meadow looks in the face of the sky.” When he describes natural scenes, his heart lends a sweet charm to the pages he pens: “Paddling up the river to Fair-Haven Pond, as the sun went down, I saw a solitary boatman disporting on the smooth lake.



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The falling dews seemed to strain and purify the air, and I was soothed with an infinite stillness. I got the world, as it were, by the name of the neck, and held it under, in the tide of its own events, till it was drowned; and then I let it go down stream like a dead dog. Vast, hollow chambers of silence stretched away on every side; and my being expanded in proportion, and filled them."

In his little forest-house, Thoreau had three chairs, "one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." "My nearest neighbor is a mile distant. It is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as much Asia or Africa as New England. I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars; and a little world all to myself." "At night, there was never a traveler passed my door, more than if I were the first or last man." "We are wont to imagine rare and delectable places in some remote and more celestial corner of the system, — behind the constellation of Cassiopea's Chair, far from noise and disturbance. I discovered that my house actually had its site in such a withdrawn, but forever new and unprofaned, part of the universe." "I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so compatible as solitude." In this last sentence we catch a tone from the diseased or disproportioned side of the writer. He was unhealthy and unjust in all his thoughts on society; underrating the value, overrating the dangers, of intercourse with men. But his thoughts on retirement, the still study and love of nature, though frequently exaggerated, are uniformly sound. He has a most catholic toleration, a wholesome and triumphant enjoyment, of every natural object, from star to skunk-cabbage. He says, with tonic eloquence, "Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness: while I enjoy the friendship of the seasons, I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me." But the moment he turns to contemplate his fellow-men, all his geniality leaves him, — he grows bigoted, contemptuous, almost inhuman: "The names of men are of course as cheap and meaningless as Bose and Tray, the names of dogs. I will not allow mere names to make distinctions for me, but still see men in herds." The cynicism and the sophistry are equal. His scorn constantly exhales: "The Irishman erects his sty, and gets drunk, and jabbars more and more under my eaves; and I am responsible for all that filth and folly. I find it very unprofitable to have much to do with men. Emerson says that his life is so unprofitable and shabby for the most part, that he is driven to all sorts of resources, and, among the rest, to men. I have seen more men than usual, lately; and, well as I was acquainted with one, I am surprised to find what vulgar fellows they are. They do a little business each day, to pay their board; then they congregate in sitting-rooms, and feebly fabulate and paddle in the social slush; and, when I think they have sufficiently relaxed, and am prepared to see them steal away to their shrines, they go unashamed to their beds, and take on a new layer of sloth." Once in a while he gives a saner voice out of a fonder mood: "It is not that we love to be alone, but that we love to soar, the company grows thinner and thinner, till there is none at all." But the conceited and misanthropic fit quickly comes back: "Would I not rather be a cedar post, which



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lasts twenty-five years, than the farmer that set it; or he that preaches to that farmer?" "The whole enterprise of this nation is totally devoid of interest to me. There is nothing in it which one should lay down his life for, – nor even his gloves. What aims more lofty have they than the prairie-dogs?"

This poisonous sleet of scorn, blowing manward, is partly an exaggerated rhetoric; partly, the revenge he takes on men for not being what he wants them to be; partly, an expression of his unappreciated soul reacting in defensive contempt, to keep him from sinking below his own estimation of his deserts. It is curious to note the contradictions his inner uneasiness begets. Now he says, "In what concerns you much, do not think you have companions; know that you are alone in the world." Then he writes to one of his correspondents, "I wish I could have the benefit of your criticism; it would be a rare help to me." The following sentence has a cheerful surface, but a sad bottom: "I have lately got back to that glorious society, called solitude, where we meet our friends continually, and can imagine the outside world also to be peopled." At one moment, he says, "I have never felt lonesome, or the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once; and then I was conscious of a slight insanity in my mood." At another moment he says, "Ah! what foreign countries there are, stretching away on every side from every human being with whom you have no sympathy! Their humanity affects one as simply monstrous. When I sit in the parlors and kitchens of some with whom my business brings me – I was going to say – in contact, I feel a sort of awe, and am as forlorn as if I were cast away on a desolate shore. I think of Riley's narrative, and his sufferings." That his alienation from society was more bitter than sweet, less the result of constitutional superiority than of dissatisfied experience, is significantly indicated, when we find him saying, at twenty-five, "I seem to have dodged all my days with one or two persons, and lived upon expectation"; at thirty-five, "I thank you again and again for attending to me"; and at forty-five, "I was particularly gratified when one of my friends said, 'I wish you would write another book, – write it for me.' He is actually more familiar with what I have written than I am myself."

The truth is, his self-estimate and ambition were inordinate; his willingness to pay the price of their outward gratification, a negative quantity. Their exorbitant demands absorbed him; but he had not those powerful charms and signs which would draw from others a correspondent valuation of him and attention to him. Accordingly, he shut his real self in a cell of secrecy, and retreated from men whose discordant returns repelled, to natural objects whose accordant repose seemed acceptingly to confirm and return, the required estimate imposed on them. The key of his life is the fact that it was devoted to the art of an interior aggrandizement of himself. The three chief tricks in this art are, first, a direct self-enhancement, by a boundless pampering of egotism; secondly, an indirect self-enhancement, by a scornful deprecation of others; thirdly, an imaginative magnifying of every trifle related to self, by associating with it a colossal idea of the self. It is difficult to open many pages in the written record of Thoreau without being confronted



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with examples of these three tricks. He is constantly, with all his boastful stoicism, feeling himself, reflecting himself, fondling himself, reverberating himself, exalting himself, incapable of escaping or forgetting himself. He is never contented with things until they are wound through, and made to echo himself; and this is the very mark of spiritual disturbance. “When I detect,” he says, “a beauty in any of the recesses of nature, I am reminded, by the serene and retired spirit in which it requires to be contemplated, of the inexpressible privacy of a life.” In the holiest and silentest nook his fancy conjures the spectre of himself, and an ideal din from society for contrast. He says of his own pursuits, “The unchallenged bravery which these studies imply is far more impressive than the trumpeted valor of the warrior.” When he sees a mountain he sings: —

Wachuset, who, like me,
Standest alone without society,
Upholding heaven, holding down earth, —
Thy pastime from thy birth, —
Not steadied by the one, nor leaning on the other,
May I approve myself thy worthy brother!

This self-exaggeration peers out even through the disguise of humor and of satire: “I am not afraid of praise, for I have practised it on myself. The stars and I belong to a mutual-admiration society.” “I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost.” “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” But he, — he is victorious, sufficing, royal. At all events he will be unlike other people. “I am a mere arena for thoughts and feelings, a slight film, or dash of vapor, so faint an entity, and make so slight an impression, that nobody can find the traces of me.” “I am something to him that made me, undoubtedly, but not much to any other that he has made.” “Many are concerned to know who built the monuments of the East and West. For my part, I should like to know who, in those days, did not build them, — who were above such trifling.” “For my part, I could easily do without the post-office. I am sure that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper.” This refrain of opposition between the general thoughts and feelings of mankind and his own, recurs until it becomes comical, and we look for it. He refused invitations to dine out, saying, “They make their pride in making their dinner cost much; I make my pride in making my dinner cost little.” One is irresistibly reminded of Plato’s retort, when Diogenes said, “See how I tread on the pride of Plato.” — “Yes, with greater pride.” But he more than asserts his difference; he explicitly proclaims his superiority: “Sometimes when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they.” “When I realize the greatness of the part I am unconsciously acting, it seems as if there were none in history to match it.” Speaking of the scarlet oaks, he adds with Italics, “These are *my china-asters, my late garden-flowers*; it costs *me* nothing for a gardener.” The unlikeness of genius to mediocrity is a fact, but not a fact of that relative momentousness entitling it to monopolize attention. He makes a great ado about his absorbing



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occupation; his sacred engagements with himself; his consequent inability to do anything for others, or to meet those who wished to see him. In the light of this obtrusive trait the egotistic character of many passages like the following become emphatic: "Only think, for a moment, of a man about his affairs! How we should respect him! How glorious he would appear! A man about *his business* would be the cynosure of all eyes." He evidently had the jaundice of desiring men to think as well of him as he thought of himself; and, when they would not, he ran into the woods. But he could not escape thus, since he carried them still in his mind.

His quotations are not often beautiful or valuable, but appear to be made as bids for curiosity or admiration, or to produce some other sharp effect; as they are almost invariably strange, bizarre, or absurd: culled from obscure corners, Damodara, Iamblichus, the Vishnu Purana, or some such out-of-the-way source. He seems to take oddity for originality, extravagant singularity for depth and force. His pages are profusely peppered with pungent paradoxes and exaggerations, – a straining for sensation, not in keeping with his pretence of sufficing repose and greatness: "Why should I feel lonely? is not our planet in the Milky Way?" "All that men have said or are, is a very faint rumor; and it is not worth their while to remember or refer to that." He exemplifies, to an extent truly astonishing, the great vice of the spiritual hermit; the belittling, because he dislikes them, of things ordinarily considered important; and the aggrandizing, because he likes them, of things usually regarded as insignificant. His eccentricities are uncorrected by collision with the eccentricities of others, and his petted idiosyncrasies spurn at the average standards of sanity and usage. Grandeur, dissociated from him, dwindles into pettiness; pettiness, linked with his immense ego, dilates into grandeur. In his conceited separation he mistakes a crochet for a consecration. If a worm crosses his path, and he stops to watch its crawl, it is greater than an interview with the Duke of Wellington.

It is the wise observation of Lavater, that whoever makes too much or too little of himself has a false measure for everything. Few persons have cherished a more preposterous idea of self than Thoreau, or been more persistently ridden by the enormity. This false standard of valuation vitiates every moral measurement he makes. He describes a battle of red and black ants before his wood-pile at Walden, as if it were more important than Marathon or Gettysburg. His faculties were vast, and his time inexpressibly precious: this struggle of the pismires occupied his faculties and time; therefore this struggle of the pismires must be an inexpressibly great matter. A trifle, plus his ego, was immense; an immensity, minus his ego, was a trifle. Is it a haughty conceit or a noble loftiness that makes him say, "When you knock at the Celestial City, ask to see God, – none of the servants"? He says, "Mine is a sugar to sweeten sugar with: if you will listen to me, I will sweeten your whole life." Again, "I would put forth sublime thoughts daily, as the plant puts forth leaves." And yet again, "I shall be a benefactor if I conquer some realms from the night, – if I add to the domains



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of poetry.” After such manifestos, we expect much. We do not find so much as we naturally expect.

He was rather an independent and obstinate thinker than a powerful or rich one. His works, taken in their whole range, instead of being fertile in ideas, are marked by speculative sterility. “He was one of those men,” a friendly but honest critic says, “who, from conceit or disappointment, inflict upon themselves a seclusion which reduces them at last, after nibbling everything within reach of their tether, to simple rumination and incessant returns of the same cud to the tongue.” This unsympathetic temper is betrayed in a multitude of such sentences as this: “O ye that would have the cocoanut wrong side outwards! when next I weep I will let you know.” Thoreau is not the true type of a great man, a genuine master of life, because he does not reflect greatness and joy over men and life, but upholds his idea of his own greatness and mastership by making the characters and lives of others mean and little. Those who, like Wordsworth and Channing, reverse this process, are the true masters and models. A feeling of superiority to others, with love and honor for them, is the ground of complacency and a condition of chronic happiness. A feeling of superiority to others, with alienation from them and hate for them, is the sure condition of perturbations and unhappiness.

Many a humble and loving author who has nestled amongst his fellow-men and not boasted, has contributed far more to brace and enrich the characters and sweeten the lives of his readers than the ill-balanced and unsatisfied hermit of Concord, part cynic, part stoic, who strove to compensate himself with nature and solitude for what he could not wring from men and society. The extravagant estimate he put on solitude may serve as a corrective of the extravagant estimate put on society by our hives of citizens. His monstrous preference of savagedom to civilization may usefully influence us to appreciate natural unsophisticatedness more highly, and conventionality more lowly. As a teacher, this is nearly the extent of his narrow mission. Lowell [James Russell Lowell], in a careful article, written after reading all the published works of Thoreau, says of him: “He seems to us to have been a man with so high a conceit of himself, that he accepted without questioning, and insisted on our accepting, his defects and weaknesses of character, as virtues and powers peculiar to himself. Was he indolent, — he finds none of the activities which attract or employ the rest of mankind worthy of him. Was he wanting in the qualities that make success, — it is success that is contemptible, and not himself that lacks persistency and purpose. Was he poor, — money was an unmixed evil. Did his life seem a selfish one, — he condemns doing good, as one of the weakest of superstitions.” In relation to the intellectual and moral influence of solitude, the example of Thoreau, with all the alleviating wisdom, courage, and tenderness confessedly in it, is chiefly valuable as an illustration of the evils of a want of sympathy with the community. Yet there is often a deep justice, a grandly tonic breath of self-reliance, in his exhortations. How sound and admirable the following passage: “If you seek the warmth of affection from a similar motive to that from which cats and dogs



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and slothful persons hug the fire, because your temperature is low through sloth, you are on the downward road. Better the cold affection of the sun, reflected from fields of ice and snow, or his warmth in some still wintry dell. Warm your body by healthful exercise, not by cowering over a stove. Warm your spirit by performing independently noble deeds, not by ignobly seeking the sympathy of your fellows who are no better than yourself.”

Though convinced of the justice of this sketch, the writer feels rebuked, as if it were not kind enough, when he remembers the pleasure he has had in many of the pages of Thoreau, and the affecting scene of his funeral on that beautiful summer day in the dreamy town of Concord. There was uncommon love in him, but it felt itself repulsed, and too proud to beg or moan, it put on stoicism and wore it until the mask became the face. His opinionative stiffness and contempt were his hurt self-respect protecting itself against the conventionalities and scorns of those who despised what he revered and revered what he despised. His interior life, with the relations of thoughts and things, was intensely tender and true, however sorely ajar he may have been with persons and with the ideas of persons. If he was sour, it was on a store of sweetness; if sad, on a fund of gladness. While we walked in procession up to the church, though the bell tolled the forty-four years he had numbered, we could not deem that he was dead whose ideas and sentiments were so vivid in our souls. As the fading image of pathetic clay lay before us, strewn with wild flowers and forest sprigs, thoughts of its former occupant seemed blent with all the local landscapes. We still recall with emotion the tributary words so fitly spoken by friendly and illustrious lips. The hands of friends reverently lowered the body of the lonely poet into the bosom of the earth, on the pleasant hillside of his native village, whose prospects will long wait to unfurl themselves to another observer so competent to discriminate their features and so attuned to their moods. And now that it is too late for any further boon amidst his darling haunts below,

There will yet his mother yield
A pillow in her greenest field,
Nor the June flowers scorn to cover
The clay of their departed lover.

1870

February 9, Wednesday: According to <http://www.cirp.org/library/history/gollaher>:

An omnibus procedure, supposedly effective against dozens of disorders which were widely feared yet poorly understood, [circumcision](#) lent itself naturally to sexual diagnoses, which in turn helped complete the transition to routine care for male infants. Late Victorian America was of course notoriously ill at ease with human sexuality. The infamous Comstock Act of 1873 captured an attitude toward sex, awkward and censorious, which was widespread within the middle and upper classes. For a



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culture nervous about sex, manifestations of infant and child sexuality seemed especially disturbing, contradictions of children's pristine purity. In ages past, the most common expression of sexuality in children –[masturbation](#)– seldom had caused much comment or concern. Amidst a general transformation of sexual attitudes in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, however, the popular view of masturbation darkened. Since the Enlightenment, doctors in Western Europe and America had identified masturbation as a cause of illnesses. In the course of the nineteenth century it was linked to madness, idiocy, epilepsy, and from these to a multitude of other psychological, behavioral, and pathological conditions. “The most serious forms of disorder attributable to this cause are spinal paralysis, locomotor-ataxia, and convulsions,” declared a physician at Virginia's South-Western Asylum. “Besides these, masturbation, does occasionally, induce an intractable form of insanity.” This was so-called “masturbatory insanity,” a label many American and British physicians used for psychotic illnesses they could not otherwise classify. For ages the Catholic Church had taught that masturbation, because it existed apart from marriage and procreation, was a mortal sin. But the medical theory that masturbation caused disease presented a more immediate threat. Fittingly in the age of Darwin, biology joined God as the punisher of transgression.

The evidence for this view, which was surprisingly well accepted, was derived in part from physicians' experience with mentally ill patients. It was unnerving, one doctor wrote, to see that among the feeble minded their “hands seem instinctively drawn to those parts.” So logic seemed to indicate that masturbation somehow led to feeble-mindedness. As Remondino said, “it may be a question as to whether the feeble-mindedness be not a reflex condition from this excessive morbid irritability of the sexual organs.” Other commentators, pediatricians prominently among them, warned parents that the habit of masturbation was often learned in infancy, and that the foreskin was chiefly to blame. “The fact that children under two years of age can and frequently do contract the habit of masturbation is a revelation to many physicians,” declared J. P. Wester in a paper he read to the Ohio Pediatric Society. He went on to profile a typical masturbator: a three-year-old boy who was “small, had a scowl on his face, looked wearied and bloated; he was nervous and fretful, a poor eater and a very poor sleeper.” The sickly child had developed his habit before he was a year old, according to Webster, evidently “due in the first place to the condition of the prepuce.”

One physician who described a successful circumcision of an infant to cure urinary tract lithuria also remembered having detected similar “oxalic acid deposits in the urine of masturbators, and offspring-shunning husbands, who practice onanism.” This observation not only reconfirmed the theory that masturbation was connected with neurasthenic disease but, more important, implied that masturbation was itself less a moral failing than a response to a basic physiologic aberration. In the view of many practitioners, [masturbation](#) became an intermediate link in a chain of cause-and-effect that originated



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in the foreskin. Writing in support of this theory in the prestigious Philadelphia Medical Bulletin, a physician who specialized in treating neurasthenia claimed that in a sample group of 192 men with nervous disease, “including neurasthenia in all its varieties, epilepsy, etc., there were 60 cases of phimosis or redundant foreskin.”

When in 1896 a popular book, *All about the Baby*, advised mothers that circumcision of baby boys was “advisable in most cases,” it recommended the operation mainly for preventing “the vile habit of masturbation.” L. Emmett Holt, professor at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and a distinguished expert on pediatric medicine, told his fellow physicians that “adherent prepuce... is so constantly present that it can hardly be called a malformation. It is, however, a condition needing attention in every male infant.” The perils of neglect, he said, included “priapism, masturbation, insomnia, night terrors, etc.,” and for that matter, “most of the functional nervous disease of childhood.” Remondino, for his part, was certain that “circumcised boys may, in individual cases ... be found to practice onanism, but in general the practice can be asserted as being very rare among the children of circumcised races ... neither in infancy are they as liable to priapism during sleep as those that are uncircumcised.”

Strange as it may seem in light of their using circumcision to suppress masturbation, Remondino, along with many other physicians, also endorsed circumcision as prophylaxis for impotence. Recently some scholars have argued that middle- and upper-class men in late Victorian America suffered a sexual crisis typified by fears of impotence and lost manhood. [57] Whether or not impotence and anxiety about impotence became more widespread, and can be correlated with broad social changes in the 1890s, remains a point of debate. But it is clear that impotence, a condition commonly devoid of any specific pathophysiological cause, fit neatly into the medical framework that supported circumcision. After all, phimosis and paraphimosis (the latter being a condition in which, according to one surgical textbook, “the prepuce gets behind the corona glandis, threatening the strangulation of the organ”) were thought to predispose boys to impotence and sterility. “Sexual relations are much more to man or woman than is generally acknowledged,” Remondino declared. And he maintained that freeing the male organ from “a constricting, unnatural band” would surely enhance sexual performance and pleasure.

1871

By this point merely 1% of the US male population was circumcised (that statistic would presumably represent the male Jewish and Moslem population). The following remark, however, appeared in NY Medical Journal, in an article about the value of the practice as a hygienic and therapeutic measure:

I refer to masturbation as one of the effects of a long prepuce; not that this vice is entirely absent in those who have undergone



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circumcision, though I never saw an instance in a Jewish child of very tender years, except as the result of association with children whose covered glans have naturally impelled them to the habit.

The fascination many Americans now have with protecting children from sexual pleasure isn't anything new. At this point male [circumcision](#) was being sponsored as a way to intercept what was seen at the time as self-abuse by boys. Self-stimulation was considered to be as damaging as sexual abuse by an adult. Among the most visible American physicians who opposed [masturbation](#) in the 1870s were Drs. Abraham Jacobi (1830-1919) and M.J. Moses. Jacobi was the president and founder of the American Pediatric Society, the first Chairman of the Section on Diseases of Children of the American Medical Association, President of the New York State Medical Society, President of the New York Academy of Medicine, and President of the Association of American Physicians. Jacobi and Moses, themselves Jews, claimed that circumcision made Jews immune to the health problems of masturbation, and for decades to come the opinion would be being repeated endlessly, by both Jewish and non-Jewish medical writers, that uncircumcised Gentiles were likely to become compulsive masturbators and fall victim to horrible diseases. Dr. Jacobi was able to demonstrate to his own satisfaction that if the foreskin were not removed, the result would be epilepsy, paralysis, malnutrition, hysteria, and other nervous disorders. In this year Dr. Moses published an article that would be being cited for decades in the medical literature, alleging that:

As an Israelite, I desire to ventilate the subject, and, as a physician, have chosen the medium of a medical journal, that I may not be trammelled in my expressions, as I necessarily would be were I confined to the pages of an ordinary paper.... I refer to [masturbation](#) as one of the effects of a long prepuce; not that this vice is entirely absent in those who have undergone circumcision, though I never saw an instance in a Jewish child of very tender years, except as the result of association with children whose covered glans have naturally impelled them to the habit.

The germ theory of disease not yet being prevalent, the term “sanitary” was at that time being deployed by circumcisers to denote not an absence of germs and dirt, but the presence of moral purity. When Dr. Moses used the word “Hygienic” in his title, therefore, it is clear that his intention was to indicate a moral rather than personal hygiene. The situation would get worse and worse. By about 1880, according to B. Berkeley in *CIRCUMCISION: THE PAINFUL DILEMMA*, masturbation-prevention appliances were being strapped onto boys at night:

By about 1880 the individual ... might wish [to] ... tie, chain, or infibulate sexually active children ... to adorn them with grotesque appliances, encase them in plaster, leather, or rubber, to frighten or even castrate them ... [masturbation](#) insanity was now real enough – it was affecting the medical profession.

In 1885, Dr. E.J. Spratling would prescribe the method of circumcision as it is practiced in hospitals today:

To obtain the best results one must cut away enough skin and mucous membrane to rather put it on the stretch when erections come later. There must be no play in the skin after the wound has thoroughly healed, but it must fit tightly over the penis, for should there be any play the patient will be found to readily resume his practice not begrudging the time and extra energy required to produce the orgasm.... We may not be sure that we have done away with the possibility of [masturbation](#), but we may feel confident that we have limited it to within the danger

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lines.

In 1903, Dr. Mary R. Melendy would weigh in with the following about “self abuse”:

It lays the foundation for consumption, paralysis and heart disease. It weakens the memory, makes a boy careless, negligent and listless. It even makes many lose their minds; others, when grown, commit suicide.... Don't think it does no harm to your boy because he does not suffer now, for the effects of this vice [masturbation] come on so slowly that the victim is often very near death before you realize that he has done himself harm. It is worthy of note that many eminent physicians now advocate the custom of circumcision....



“For 2400 years patients have believed that doctors were doing them good; for 2300 years they were wrong.”



– David Wootton, BAD MEDICINE: DOCTORS DOING HARM SINCE HIPPOCRATES, Oxford, June 2006

1880

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1895

Dr. E.J. Spratling was offering the method of [circumcision](#) practiced in hospitals today: “To obtain the best results one must cut away enough skin and mucous membrane to rather put it on the stretch when erections come later. There must be no play in the skin after the wound has thoroughly healed, but it must fit tightly over the penis, for should there be any play the patient will be found to readily resume his practice not begrudging the time and extra energy required to produce the orgasm.... We may not be sure that we have done away with the possibility of [masturbation](#), but we may feel confident that we have limited it to within the danger lines.”

1900

In the course of the previous 250 years, the use of [sugar](#) had spread until it was at this point a regular part of the diet of working families. Despite the abolition of slavery, sugar was supplying approximately 20% of the calories consumed by the civilized!

SWEETS
WITHOUT
SLAVERY

By this point perhaps 25% of the US male population was [circumcised](#). The editor of the journal [Medical News](#), copping an attitude that there’s no reason whatever, why sexual intercourse needs to be so very pleasant an activity, registered a plea on behalf of the further expansion of this surgical intervention:

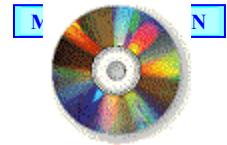
Finally, circumcision probably tends to increase the power of sexual control. The only physiological advantages which the prepuce can be supposed to confer is that of maintaining the penis in a condition susceptible to more acute sensation than would otherwise exist. It may increase the pleasure of coition and the impulse to it: but these are advantages which in the present state of society can well be spared. If in their loss, increase in sexual control should result, one should be thankful.

1903

Dr. Mary R. Melendy issued a stern warning on the perils of “self abuse”: “It lays the foundation for consumption, paralysis and heart disease. It weakens the memory, makes a boy careless, negligent and listless. It even makes many lose their minds; others, when grown, commit suicide.... Don’t think it does no harm to your boy because he does not suffer now, for the effects of this vice come on so slowly that the victim is often very near death before you realize that he has done himself harm. It is worthy of note that many eminent physicians now advocate the custom of [circumcision](#)....”



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1912

The GooGoo Cluster, a chocolate, caramel, & peanut candy, was created in Nashville, Tennessee.

PLANTS

Frederick Hopkins showed that there were chemical substances (additional to fats, carbohydrates, and minerals) obtained from food that are essential to human growth and maintenance, and Casimir Funk coined a term for such substances: “vitamines.”

By this point perhaps 35% of the US male population was being [circumcised](#). The practice was on its way to becoming routine. In a text on the philosophy, application, and technique of “orificial surgery,” the beneficial effect of the emerging standard was duly noted:

The little sufferer lay in his mother's lap. The dropsy ... had taken the form of hydrocephalus ... I then circumcised the child ... The head [of the child's penis] diminished in size and in two weeks the condition of hydrocephalus had disappeared and the child was once more dismissed as cured.

In a text dating to this year, on sex hygiene for the male, we find:

Circumcision promotes cleanliness, prevents disease, and by reducing oversensitiveness of the parts tends to relieve sexual irritability, thus correcting any tendency which may exist to improper manipulations of the genital organs and the consequent acquirement of evil sexual habits, such as [masturbation](#).



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1920

June 5, Saturday: By this point approximately half the male babies in the United States of America were being [circumcised](#). Taking a “we do know what little boys are like” attitude, the British Medical Journal was definitely in favor of such surgical interventions:

Circumcision is an excellent thing to do; it helps to prevent hernia due to straining, and later it helps in preventing [masturbation](#). The ordinary schoolboy is not taught to keep himself clean, and if he is taught he thinks too much about the matter.

1935

The 1st night [baseball](#) game was played.

SPORTS

This of course has nothing to do with that, but by this point perhaps 55% of male infants in the US male were undergoing [circumcision](#). The surgical intervention was praised in an article in the British Medical Journal, for the decidedly beneficial effects it would have on men’s adolescent and adult sex lives:

I suggest that all male children should be circumcised. This is “against nature”, but that is exactly the reason why it should be done. Nature intends that the adolescent male shall copulate as often and as promiscuously as possible, and to that end covers the sensitive glans so that it shall be ever ready to receive stimuli. Civilization, on the contrary, requires chastity, and the glans of the circumcised rapidly assumes a leathery texture less sensitive than skin. Thus the adolescent has his attention drawn to his penis much less often. I am convinced that [masturbation](#) is much less common in the [circumcised](#). With these considerations in view it does not seem apt to argue that “God knows best how to make little boys”.

1976

 Moller, Mary Elkins. “Thoreau, Womankind, and Sexuality.” ESQ 22 (1976): 123-48

HOMOSEXUALITY



“A Review From Professor Ross’s Seminar”

FIRST REVIEW: In this article Moller analyzes Henry Thoreau’s attitudes toward women and his own sexuality. She identifies two popular opinions regarding this subject: that Thoreau was “a woman-hater, and that his feeling about sex was consistently negative.” Moller, however, recognizes a “functional distinction” between Thoreau’s view of women in general and his view of sexuality and proceeds to prove the “striking contradictions” – the “frequent ambivalence” – existing between them.

Thoreau’s relationships with the members of his own family, reveal that “there is little in what is known ... which would have disposed him to serious or chronic misogyny.” He had a good relationship with his active mother [[Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#)], a close relationship with his older sister [Helen Louisa Thoreau](#), and after Helen’s death, an increasingly strong relationship with his other sister [Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau](#). And although the death of his brother [John Thoreau, Jr.](#) made the family “quite lopsidedly female,” Thoreau’s “escapes” into the countryside are balanced by his desired returns to the [Concord](#) home.

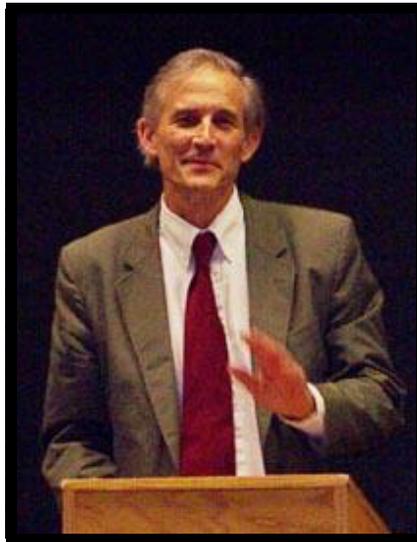
During the years 1837-1842, his “impressionable years,” several women evoked Thoreau’s response. Among these is Margaret Fuller, the intelligent, strong-willed editor of [THE DIAL](#), with whom he maintained a constant though never intimate friendship. In contrast to his admiration of Margaret, Thoreau revealed his impatience with the lecturer Mrs. Elizabeth Oakes Smith, whose “flirtatiousness or frivolity” annoyed him. Thoreau included several “exasperated outbursts” in his JOURNAL as he reacted against the stereotypical “ideal woman”: the woman whose priority was “to be as pretty and charming as possible, and as pliant, and helpless as necessary, in order to attract the admiration of men.” While he condemned women’s “slavery” to fashion and to the idea of marriage, he praised [Waldo Emerson](#)’s aunt, [Mary Moody Emerson](#), for her wisdom and clear thinking. Thoreau also maintained positive relationships with other women in the Concord community, women such as Emerson’s daughters [[Ellen Emerson](#) and [Edith Emerson](#)], [Sophia Peabody Hawthorne](#), Mrs. Mary Peabody Mann, etc.

However, there were four women to whom Thoreau was attracted romantically during 1837-1845. The first was [Mrs. Lucy Jackson Brown](#), Mrs. [Lidian Emerson](#)’s elder sister. Although she was twenty years older than he, Thoreau revealed a “half younger-brotherly and half lover-like” affection for her. It was Ellen Devereux Sewall, however, to whom Thoreau eventually proposed. During a visit with her grandmother then living with the Thoreaus, Ellen sparked the interest of both John and Henry. Later, after John had proposed to Ellen, been initially accepted then rejected, Henry asked for her hand in marriage but was also refused. This was Thoreau’s “closest brush with matrimony.” His third romantic encounter was with Mary Ellen Russell, a young friend of the Emersons who sometimes acted as the children’s governess. While both she and Thoreau were living in the Emerson home, they developed a strong mutual attraction.

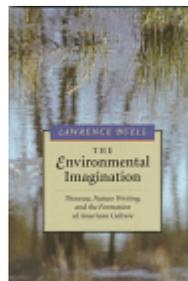
But it was Mrs. [Lidian Emerson](#) for whom Thoreau probably maintained the longest sustained admiration and attraction. Getting to know Lydia during his residences in the Emerson home, Thoreau wrote letters to her that were often intimate in tone, although there is no evidence “that any physical intimacy ever took place.” Thoreau realized Lidian was “ultimately inaccessible” and eventually

1995

Harvard University professor Lawrence Buell, Powell M. Cabot Professor of American Literature, on page



152 his *THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION: THOREAU, NATURE WRITING, AND THE FORMATION OF AMERICAN CULTURE* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1995), accused former Harvard College student [Henry Thoreau](#) of retreating into “mid-Victorian continence philosophy.” He condemned Thoreau’s attempt, in the chapter “Higher Laws” in *WALDEN*, to resolve the conflict between spiritual needs and bodily requirements, as “almost schizophrenic.”¹⁴ His take on Thoreau’s remark that “Nature is hard to be overcome, but she must be overcome” is that, if Thoreau is indeed here being serious, if, indeed, he is here “disown[ing] the balance of *WALDEN*,” then he is “abandoning nature” in order to find a cheap “safe refuge” in the inanity of “mid-Victorian continence philosophy.”



HIGHER LAW

“Higher Laws,” a brief but unequivocally triumphant section in the 1849 manuscript, [is] a tortuous and schizophrenic one by 1853. Returning home at night after fishing with John Field, the

14. One wonders whether this Harvard University commentator was intending such a remark A.) in the conventional mode according to which schizophrenia is equated with the phenomenon of “split personality,” or whether he was intending it B.) in the clinical mode according to which schizophrenia is utilized as a pot category, a diagnosis of last resort, meaning roughly “psychotic, but not otherwise classifiable,” or whether, perhaps, he C.) was intending that no weight at all be placed upon his choice of derogatory term here, so that we might categorize his remark as “pure derogation without content” — as if he had merely termed Thoreau “a son of a bitch” without intending to imply thereby anything at all about Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau.



“A Review From Professor Ross’s Seminar”

decided he would never marry. This decision did not seem to be based solely on the fact that he could not marry the woman he loved or on some critics’ assumption that he was not capable of propagation. Indeed, Thoreau appeared to be “an extraordinarily sensuous man” who had “by no means lost all interest in sexual love.”

His view of love and marriage, however, seemed to be ambivalent. While taking offense at Channing’s vulgar allusions to sex, Henry Thoreau often maintained a seemingly “puritanical” attitude: he expressed “diffidence and shame” regarding his thoughts in the piece “Chastity and Sensuality” and in a journal entry expressed “disgust” toward his own body with its sexual desires. Nevertheless, Thoreau at times wrote idealistically of the “passionate love between men and women,” revealing “his own yearning for a mate.” And in many different passages Thoreau used “erotically suggestive imagery” or “sex-related figures of speech.” Clearly Thoreau was not “hostile” to the idea of sexual love but “acknowledged his own sexuality, and that of every other man and woman, as a valued part of his and their emotional nature and thus at the core of a sympathetic relatedness to all other human beings.”

[Janet B. Ergino (Sommers), May 1989]

SECOND REVIEW: A long article the sole purpose of which seems to be to prove that Thoreau was heterosexual, had sexual attractions to several women (we know which ones), and perhaps was actually sexually active.

Moller makes a distinction between Thoreau’s general attitude toward women and his feelings for specific women. She points out his idealization of women and contrasts it with the way he felt about young, non-intellectual women. “What Thoreau reacted against was a traditional stereotype of ideal womanhood: the assumption that the first business of any girl or woman is to be as pretty and charming as possible” to attract a mate and that intellect and independence are dangerous. She then cites several journal passages which are critical of women’s frivolity and explores Thoreau’s feelings toward older, intellectual women, such as [Mary Moody Emerson](#) and Mrs. [Lidian Emerson](#).

Moller discounts [homosexual](#) tendencies that Thoreau might have had with a cursory look at his poem “Sympathy” (the “gentle boy” poem). She calls his attraction to Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr. “a fleeting emotional complication.” She does not however mention any journal passages from that time which are also homoerotic and celebrate masculinity. She cites four passages that illustrate Thoreau’s feelings for Ellen Devereux Sewall at that time, though she admits that by the time he proposed to her he probably wasn’t seriously interested.

She, of course, spends a lot of time on the relationship with Lidian Emerson and points out the passionate letters. She contrasts the letters from Staten Island to later letters which treat Lidian as a sister.

Finally Moller discusses “Love” and “Chastity and Sensuality.” Her conclusion is that Thoreau meant “control” when he said “chastity” and not “celibacy.” She asserts that sexual love was not necessarily taboo for Thoreau unless it was outside of a truly affectionate and highly intellectual relationship. She suggests that Thoreau may have been sexually active himself, though he probably was limited to wet dreams and [masturbation](#).

The point of all this sex talk, of course, is to find out what Thoreau’s sexuality had to do with his writing and his views of women, ideas of purity, etc. Moller doesn’t discuss Thoreau’s asceticism at all and largely ignores his feelings toward men and the sexuality that may have been behind it. The article seems to be a justification of Thoreau as a lover of women and not a misogynist.

[James J. Berg, May 8, 1989]



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narrator catches sight of a woodchuck and is “strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for the wildness which he represented.” “I found in myself, and still find,” he adds, “an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good.” The claim has roots in Thoreau’s long-standing attraction to both “a mystic spiritual life” and “a primitive savage life,” tendencies he managed to persuade himself were not only congruent but coimplicatory. “How near to good is what is wild,” he wrote in September 1849, in words he would later include in “Walking.” In the early “Baker Farm” he could thus exhort himself to “grow wild according to [his] nature,” confident that in doing so he was following the hints of his “Good Genius.” “Higher Laws” revives the distinction between the wild and the good, but after praising the impulses as equally worthy, it proceeds to identify the wild with appetites of the body at war with the aspirations of the soul. When Thoreau depicts himself “ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound, with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison [he] might devour,” he is describing a mood of compulsion that resembles nothing so much as unbridled lust. So far as the wild in man signifies psychic drives arising from his kinship with “the lower orders of creation,” growing wild according to one’s nature represents a naïve and morally perilous advice. By the end of the chapter Thoreau has worked round to what is probably the most startling sentence in [WALDEN](#): “Nature is hard to be overcome, but she must be overcome.” ... Whitman’s poetry was “exhilarating,” [sic] but it had to be received with caution. So, in “Higher Laws,” did nature.... Thoreau’s revulsion with sensualism of the palate is so extreme that taste seems a surrogate for appetites he is reluctant to name. In a journal entry of September 1851 he links diet with chastity as “disciplines” he finds himself “relax[ing]” with age, though he knows “we should be fastidious to the extreme of Sanity.” Chastity seems the veiled subject of another entry of the period in which, borrowing [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)’s conceit from “Egotism; or, The Bosom-Serpent,” he speaks (figuratively) of swallowing a snake when he “drank at stagnant waters once.” “I caught him by the throat & drew him out & had a well day after all,” he writes, but the image returns in “Higher Laws” in his allusion to “an animal in us,” a “reptile and sensual” nature that “perhaps cannot be wholly expelled” and may even “enjoy a certain health of its own,” so that “we may be well, yet not pure.” He continues: “The generative energy, which, when we are loose, dissipates and makes us unclean, when we are continent invigorates and inspires us. Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it.” In the initial wording from draft D “divine liquors” euphemistically substituted for “generative energy” even as a redundancy of charged language (“profligate,” “defile,” “bestial”) betrayed the force of Thoreau’s (self-)disgust.



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Well, but what is this “mid-Victorian continence philosophy” of which Thoreau stands accused by Professor Lawrence Buell? According to Robert Milder’s REIMAGINING THOREAU, pages 132, 133, 135, 143 *passim*, this was, basically, that males who [masturbated](#) were debilitating their energies, and would be better off healthwise if they could just control themselves and “sit on it”:¹⁵

A draft E addition, later excised, is still more openly confessional: “I do not know how it is with other men, but I find it very difficult to be chaste. <Methinks I can be chaste in my relation to persons, and yet I do not find myself clean.> I have [‘frequent’ interlined in pencil] cause to be ashamed of myself. I am well, but I am not pure.” In passages like these, muted or generalized in the published text, if not expunged, Thoreau’s “idealized versions’ of the “‘pure’ and ‘chaste,’” as Richard Bridgman says, run up against the fact of “nocturnal emissions or [masturbation](#).” Philip Young describes the protagonist of [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)’s “Egotism” as a “solitary man in the grip of a solitary vice,” [Robert Milder’s footnote here points the reader toward, and seems to endorse, Frederick Crews’s THE SINS OF THE FATHERS (NY: Oxford UP, 1965, page 85), Hyatt H. Waggoner’s THE PRESENCE OF HAWTHORNE (Baton Rouge LA: Louisiana State UP, 1979, page 108), and Philip Young’s HAWTHORNE’S SECRET: AN UN-TOLD TALE (Boston MA: Godine, 1984, page 66).] and it seems likely that Thoreau conceived his own snake in a similar way, though **involuntary** sexuality seems to have troubled him fully as much as conscious lust. **Thoughts** about sex he could control, or take responsibility for if he couldn’t; emissions were beyond his power but seemed as though they should not be. As early as 1839, before he read the Orientals on the subject, Thoreau was asking whether “by a strong effort” a man might not “command even his brute body in unconscious moments” and thereby realize “the life his imagination paints.” For Thoreau this was a life chaste in the strictest sense of continence as well as abstinence. He wished for an innocence (humanity’s as well as his own) so complete that men and women might read poems like Whitman’s “without harm, that is, without understanding them.” Barring that, his characteristic approach to sexual matters was to rarefy them to virtual incorporeality. He condemned Ellery Channing in 1852 for “coarse jesting of facts which should always be treated with delicacy & reverence”; it is hard to imagine, however, what “reverence” might entail, as newlywed Harrison Blake must have wondered on receiving Thoreau’s letter on “Chastity & Sensuality,” which leaves it unclear whether married people should copulate at all. Fastidiousness, inhibition, modesty, and a native asceticism contributed to a queasiness about sex quite different from Victorian prudery in being as uncomfortable about conjugal lovemaking as about fornication. “If [copulation] cannot be spoken of for shame,” Thoreau told H.G.O. Blake, “how can it be acted upon?” Beyond an exaggerated heterosexual embarrassment, sex of any sort and in any circumstance was a “dissipating” act for Thoreau within what became by 1852 a vigilant spiritual economy of sublimation. “Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open,” he wrote in “Higher Laws,” drawing upon a line of thought

15.  Robert Milder. REIMAGINING THOREAU. NY: Cambridge UP, 1995



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prominent in the contemporary journals. “What is called genius is the abundance of life or health,” he remarked in July 1852, “so that whatever addresses the senses ... intoxicates with a healthy intoxication. The shrunken stream of life overflows its banks, makes and fertilizes broad intervals, from which generations derive their sustenances. This is the true overflowing of the Nile.... If we have not dissipated the vital, the divine fluids, there is, then, a circulation of vitality beyond our bodies.”

In the continent man, that is, the waters of life flow upward from the loins to irrigate the reaches of perception and creation rather than deplete themselves in voluntary or involuntary emissions. Ideally, Thoreau wanted to believe with the Orientals that “the spirit can for the time pervade and control every member and function of the body.” His dilemma was that if chastity were a matter of discipline and will, he stood accused by his acknowledged lapses, whereas if, on the other hand, it were not, he was helpless before the necessities of his body. Although shame at first seemed preferable to passivity, the sequence of his phrasing from one draft of WALDEN to another argues a gradual movement toward acquiescence. In draft E, for example, he claims to “have **experienced**” the spirit’s control of the body [Robert Milder’s emphasis], a testimony he withdrew at a later stage. Similarly, while drafts D and E evoke a Manichaeian war between body and spirit that spirit seems capable of winning, the final text retains the idea of struggle but not the prospect of victory. “Perhaps there is none but has cause for shame on account of the inferior and brutish nature to which he is allied, **though his superior divine nature be not subjected to it,**” the earlier drafts had read; the published WALDEN omits [the words Milder has here emphasized]. ... As “Higher Laws” tested and drastically qualified Thoreau’s belief in purity, so “The Pond in Winter” tests his analogist’s faith that one might pass, by study, from natural fact to moral fact.



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“What difference does it make under what rule a man lives who is soon to die, provided only that those who rule him do not compel him to what is impious and wicked?”



– [St. Augustine](#)

GOD IN CONCORD by Jane Langton © 1992

Viking Penguin

Penguin Books USA Inc.

51

*Our whole life is startlingly moral.
Walden, “Higher Laws”*

“**F**or you,” muttered Mary, reaching the telephone across the bed. It was six o’clock in the morning.

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“It’s all now you see. Yesterday won’t be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago.”

– Remark by character “Garin Stevens”
in William Faulkner’s INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: July 14, 2013

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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone’s request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot “Laura” (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

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