

THE FEMALE BODY AS CONTAGION, COMMODITY, AND CURE:
EXAMINING DISCURSIVE AGENCY THROUGH PATRIARCHAL QUACKERY
IN ELIZABETH INCHBALD AND MARY ROBINSON

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to prod at the disciplinary rift between science and literature in an attempt to examine how the female body has been reinscribed, further codified, and controlled within the gendered linguistic structures of eighteenth century experimental electrical medicine. Analyzing Elizabeth Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* in conversation with Mary Robinson's *Walsingham; or, The Pupil of Nature*, I trace both authors' characterization of the electromagnetic quack doctor as a figure of patriarchal control. I argue that Robinson and Inchbald articulate a critique of the ways in which the rigidly gendered, heavily corporeal, and ambiguous linguistic structures of electricity collapse into a very literal oppression of the female body within patriarchal social structures. Appropriating the language of electricity, and the medical discourses of madness, sympathy, sensibility, and power which undergird it, Inchbald and Robinson examine how these quack figures translate this vocabulary into patriarchal terms to prey upon women. The inherently performative nature of experimental electrical therapy, and its gendered, often eroticized, scientific language which centers upon the female body, allows for a further interrogation of the way that the literal and metaphoric configurations of electrical science converge over the female body.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my friends, family, and professors who supported me and offered me guidance as I found a way to make my love of unusual science and eighteenth-century literature into a workable project. Thank you for your encouragement and everlasting patience.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1749, three years before the famous kite experiment, Benjamin Franklin concludes a letter to Peter Collinson with the promise of an extraordinary display of electricity at a dinner party seemingly dedicated to the novel phenomenon:

a turkey is to be killed for our dinner by the electrical shock, and roasted by the electrical jack, before a fire kindled by the electrified bottle; when the healths of all the famous electricians in England, Holland, France, and Germany, are to be drank in electrified bumpers, under the discharge of guns from the electrical battery.¹

Despite his grand plans, this electrical dinner ultimately ended in nothing more than a painful shock which circulated through Franklin rather than the turkey he intended to target.

Nevertheless, the display reveals a spectacular level of theatricality which became embedded within the culture of electrical experimentation as it emerged as a discipline. In the fictional works of Elizabeth Inchbald and Mary Robinson, this same theatricality becomes a weapon of patriarchal control in the hands of electromagnetic quack doctors who exploit the heavily gendered language of electricity. Oftentimes explained and even demonstrated using physical

¹ “From Benjamin Franklin to [John Franklin?], 25 December 1750,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0028>. [Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 4, *July 1, 1750, through June 30, 1753*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, pp. 82–83.] Paola Bertucci also mentions this party in “Sparks in the Dark: The Attraction of Electricity in the Eighteenth Century.”

displays of sexual difference and attraction, electrical experimentation, and its supposed therapeutic applications, enable these doctors in their efforts to control and confine women.

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, physicians researching nervous disorders often considered the female body to be a site of active contagion that could contaminate their nervous offspring and other women who reproduced or imitated their hysteric maladies. The physician to King Louis XV, Joseph Raulin, expressed this “illness” as “sometimes epidemic and contagious” as “women invent, exaggerate, and repeat all the different absurdities of which a disordered imagination is capable.”² Within these medical texts, physicians expressed concerns that women’s penetrable, weak bodies were particularly susceptible to the incitement of a nervous crisis. Such a crisis was incited by an excess of passion as could be provoked by activities like reading novels or attending theatric performances.³ In 1784, a report published by a French Royal Commission headed by Franklin employed similar logic in their argument that the electromagnetic therapist, Anton Mesmer, relied upon his female patients’ susceptibility to the contagion of hysteric theatricality as the impetus for their placebo cures.⁴ Their healing was considered to have been brought about by stimulating their disposed imagination through an act of unconscious and sympathetic imitation rather than any movement of a blocked fluid through the body. Mesmer often collectively treated large groups of women in very public displays as he waved his magnetized wand over their bodies, claiming to remove

² Veith, Ilza. *Hysteria: The History of a Disease*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965. P. 169 from *Traité des affections vaporeuses du sexe, avec l'exposition de leurs symptômes, de leurs différentes causes, et la méthode de les guérir* (1758) p. 20

³ “The existence of so many authors has produced a host of readers, and continued reading generates every nervous complaint; perhaps of all causes that have harmed women’s health, the principal one has been the infinite multiplication of novels in the last hundred years.” (Edmé-Pierre de Beauchêne) – *Madness and civilization* 219

⁴ Patricia Fara, "A Powerful Language: Images of Nature and the Nature of Science." p.195

fluids which had become rigid and stuck. This removal, he claimed, incited these “crises” which were highly sexualized and feminized by the public and treated by the commission as evidence of women’s susceptibility to the contagion of hysteric theatricality.⁵ While the commission sought to discredit Mesmer with this accusation, another electromagnetic therapist, Dr. James Graham, exploited this gendered, imaginative cure.⁶ In his practice, he created an ornate “Temple of Health and Hymen” in which he housed scantily clothed young girls who assisted him as he demonstrated an electric power to treat particularly sexual and gendered maladies. Throughout this electrical and medical discourse runs a particular emphasis upon the female body as a site of susceptibility, but also display and influence. The central point of examination in this study is the gendered application of this language of electric theatricality and its institutionalization as a construction of patriarchal control. Both Elizabeth Inchbald and Mary Robinson examine how women’s bodies are circumscribed by this highly gendered medical and scientific language. In their satirical depictions of electromagnetic therapists like Mesmer and Graham, Robinson and Inchbald create ineffectual quacks who exploit the gendered language of electricity to prey on women. They reveal a patriarchal system of control and oppression which collapses upon the pathologized and objectified female body. This gendered language marks the female body as particularly predisposed to the theatrics which appear to be almost inherent to therapeutic demonstrations of electrical power, causing women to become hysteric and moved by mere impassioned suggestion.

In Mary Robinson’s *Walsingham; or the Pupil of Nature*, the female body acts as a salve consumed for heartache, prescribed by Robinson’s satirical portrayal of the real-life

⁵ Patricia Fara, "A Powerful Language: Images of Nature and the Nature of Science." p.195

⁶ Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. P. 94

electromagnetic therapist, Dr. Graham. This “Dr. Pimpernel” prescribes the female body as a highly eroticized product for male consumption as he claims “the balsamic smile of a beautiful woman! More efficacious than all the drugs in Christendom; more skillful than all the bunglers of Warwick-lane. The breath of beauty would re-animate the heart of a dying anchoret”(Robinson 1:162). This text, which is the focus of chapter 2, exemplifies what Vieda Skultans has called the “age of quackery” as the eighteenth-century was an era when physicians were subjected to unprecedented levels of criticism and ridicule.⁷ It is within this tradition that this thesis begins. I intend to examine the ways in which two women writers critiqued the gendered constructions of the medical language of electricity through their satire of electromagnetic quack doctors’ discredited practices and thinly veiled experimental sex theaters. Through the figure of the quack doctor, Inchbald and Robinson reveal how the control of women’s bodies flows through the language of medicine and scientific experimentation in patriarchal terms. The language of sexual difference, contagion, and theatricality exemplify electricity’s ambiguous position at the end of the eighteenth century. In literary and scientific texts, the electrical language acts as a metaphorical vehicle through which to explain the movement of affect, attraction, and ideas, as well as one which described the literal, newly discovered phenomenon.

Inchbald and Robinson explore the implications of this ambiguous, highly gendered, and eroticized language as both the doctor in *Animal Magnetism* and Doctor Pimpernel profit from the feminized construction of electromagnetic persuasion and its commodifying abuses. It is this discursive framework which allows the doctor in *Animal Magnetism* to keep Lisette and Constance under lockdown in the hopes of performing an electromagnetic experiment to make

⁷ Vieda Skultans. *English Madness: Ideas on Insanity, 1580-1890*. P. 30

Constance fall in love with him. Although the doctor appears to wholly believe in the power of electromagnetism to move fluid throughout the body, he relies upon the stereotypical medical construction of women's particular susceptibility and weakness to carry out his plot.⁸ These constructions arise from the same gendered language Pimpernel touts in order to declare gendered treatments for love madness. Although Robinson's protagonist, Walsingham, adopts what Peter Logan calls a "nervous narrative" to describe his diseased mind and victimization, it is his ill-fated admirer, Amelia, who is treated as both a disease and a cure to be consumed.⁹ Rather than resulting in his imprisonment in Pimpernel's "mind mill" asylum, Walsingham's experience with the "electric shock" of emotion effeminizes but does not confine him. His body remains male and above the potential to be circulated through the gendered discourse which Pimpernel appropriates to peddle the commodified, displayed, and confined female body. Through this predatory figure of the electromagnetic quack doctor, Inchbald and Robinson examine how scientific language can be exploited to disproportionately suppress the female body within a patriarchal system which upholds rigidly gendered structures.

As both Inchbald and Robinson were accomplished actresses as well as authors, their formal choice to launch their satire as a play and a novel is central to their exploration of discursive agency and bodily control. As these two genres were considered to breed hysteria, the authors offer a meta-generic reflection on the very forms thought to produce madness, and the literary and medical languages which constructed them. This thesis, therefore, seeks to prod at

⁸ For more on gendered medical language see Mullan's "Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and Physicians," Logan's *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in 19th-Century British Prose*, and Small's *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*

⁹ Logan. "The Narrative of Nervous Bodies in 1800: Thomas Trotter's A View of the Nervous Temperament." P. 29

the disciplinary rift between science and literature that has become naturalized today as a result of the increasingly professionalization of science which began to develop in the nineteenth century. Both of these works emerge as forerunners during a time in which Amanda Goldstein claims that such disciplinary divisions “were not only unfinished but also brilliantly contested.”¹⁰ I examine the movement of electrical language in these works in an attempt to question what bodies and boundaries have been reinscribed, further codified, or bounded within the linguistic structures of this experimental medicine and its literary representations. I argue that Robinson and Inchbald articulate a critique of the ways in which the rigidly gendered, bodily, and ambiguous linguistic structures of electricity collapse into a very literal oppression of the female body within patriarchal social structures. Either through direct experience or the greater culture of quackery, these two authors are acutely aware of the particular ways in which the electromagnetic quack appropriates and abuses the language of electricity, nervousness, and experimentation to prey upon women. The inherent performative nature of experimental electrical therapy, and its gendered, often eroticized, scientific language, allows for a further interrogation of the way that the literal and metaphoric configurations of electrical science converge over the female body.

As the medical discipline introduced gendered language which effeminized madness and labeled the female body a site of active, theatric contagion, electric therapy employed an ambiguous conception of electricity. The fluid could serve as both a literary, figurative tool and literal, scientific phenomenon. The corporeality of this language, however, remains consistent as this ambiguity allowed electricity to serve in a literary capacity as an analogy to explain the physical sensation of emotion in the body, or in an experimental role as a real, yet not entirely

¹⁰ Amanda Goldstein. “Introduction: ‘Sweet Science’” p. 10

explained phenomenon which could be explored in amateur experiments on the body.¹¹

Electrical therapists like Mesmer and Graham thus entertained their own modes of theatricality as they made the body, particularly the female body, an instrument for demonstrating the existence of the universal fluid. As an “imponderable fluid,” an invisible force which moved throughout the world unseen and undetected unless specifically, demonstrably called forth, scholars have noted electricity’s ability to straddle the disciplinary rift between literal, scientific language and literary figuration. Mary Fairclough defines such “radical figurativeness” as one which allows electricity to be expressed using analogies while also allowing for electricity itself to become a metaphor for feelings of uncertainty about events such as the potentially revolutionary, and certainly political, implications of communicative power.¹² Potentially registering Raymond Williams’s “structure of feeling,” this electrical language, then, allows authors to express otherwise unintelligible lived experiences through electrical metaphor. Patricia Fara suggests that scientists studying electromagnetism, like literary authors, depend upon metaphor as an “essential cognitive tool” for describing a phenomenon for which there are no certain terms. She argues that metaphorical language allowed scientists to define ambiguous forces in relation to recognized human experiences.¹³ As contemporary theorists were hesitant to name one specific cause of electricity, this figurative explanation embeds scientific language within a literary framework, creating an interrelation between the “literariness” of science and

¹¹ In *Sparks in the Dark: The Attraction of Electricity in the Eighteenth Century*, Paola Bertucci argues that women were “essential protagonists of electrical soirées” as their bodies were crucial in at home experiments that played with sexual difference. (P. 90)

¹² Mary Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740–1840: 'Electrick Communication Every Where.'* p. 27

¹³ Patricia Fara. "A Powerful Language; Images of Nature and the Nature of Science." In *Sympathetic Attractions*, pp. 173-4

the metaphorical function of electrical diction in eighteenth-century literature.¹⁴ Electricity, then, represented a scientific world beyond the bounds of literal intelligibility. This intelligibility has proven to be a site of significant scholarly production and discussion as several literary, cultural and scientific history scholars have contributed to the critical fusing of an imagined rift between scientific and literary texts in the long eighteenth century. As the metaphor became a “cognitive tool” for explaining the effects and causes of electricity’s unseen operation, the figurative discourse of electrical science relied upon a framework coded in the language of sexual difference and attraction. The highly theatrical demonstrations of electricity’s movement physicalized this language as the body, most often the female body, became the central apparatus for exhibiting these reactions within quack experiments.

During the eighteenth century, this newly discovered, and rapidly developing, electrical science sparked fascination within philosophical, scientific, and public circles of society. While debates raged within Royal Societies and theories developed within lecture halls and scholarly publications, amateur experimenters or interested individuals could conjure electrical fires within their own salons or witness demonstrations in the public square.¹⁵ As evidenced by the work of Dr. Graham, although women were allowed to observe and participate in these electrical experiments, the practitioner’s abuse could potentially blur the line between spectator and spectacle. Aided by the gendered language of electricity and medicine itself, these demonstrations quickly devolved into an eroticized fixation on the female body. As showmen and

¹⁴ Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p 2 “Electrical science thus achieves a peculiar status during the eighteenth century. It is a highly visible and popular form of entertainment as well as experiment, but one that resists the attempts of natural philosophers of all kinds to assign it a recognizable cause and stable meaning.”

¹⁵ Paola Bertucci. *Sparks in the Dark: The Attraction of Electricity in the Eighteenth Century*. p. 87

demonstrators had spent decades grounding their work in sexual difference, electricity itself became a gendered phenomenon by the end of the eighteenth century. Graham's demonstrations often included several beautiful women whose conspicuous placement and Graham's not so subtle suggestions made their potential "sexual availability" a crucial aspect of his ritual.¹⁶ Graham, however, was not alone in his practice, his work was preceded by Anton Mesmer who similarly claimed that he could wave a magnetized wand over his patient, oftentimes a young woman, and restore circulation to a body whose fluids previously had become blocked. While there were several other prominent magnetists and animal magnetizers such as John de Maindauduc who was a trained surgeon and midwife,¹⁷ I focus here on Mesmer and Graham as these two men specifically were labeled and satirized as quacks during the 1780s and 1790s. Inchbald also specifically employs the language of Graham as she explains the "science" the doctor attempts to learn while Robinson personally attended Graham's lectures and was lampooned in satirical publications for her association. Georg Matthias Bose often made these very gendered electrical spectacles the subject of his poetry. In *Venus Electrificata* (1754), Bose muses on the electric kiss experiment which demonstrated the potential for a kiss to ignite an electric spark.

Once only, what temerity!

I kissed Venus standing on pitch.

It pained me to the quick. My lips trembled

My mouth quivered, my teeth almost broke¹⁸

¹⁶ Fulford. "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson."

¹⁷ Patricia Fara, "A Powerful Language: Images of Nature and the Nature of Science." p.197

¹⁸ Bertucci, *Therapeutic Attractions*, p. 272

In this experiment, men were coaxed from the audience up to the stage in an attempt to kiss a woman, delighting the audience as the kisser was shocked when they neared the woman's lips because she stood upon an electrified stool.¹⁹

Bose's poetry appears quite tame compared to some of the more sexualized electrical poems from the 1770s and 1780s which celebrated the erotic, electrified female body. *The Torpedo* by James Perry differentiates between male and female electric fire, thus exhibiting the movement of an electrical current from one sexed body to another as the "female flame" receives the "electric stroke."²⁰ It is within this tradition that Robinson and Inchbald write, I argue, in order to illuminate the ways in which this heavily sexualized language served to further ensnare the female body within patriarchal systems of economic independence, confinement, and weakness.

The centrality of the female body within these experiments, conducted almost exclusively by men outside of recognized institutional respectability, incited anxieties about potential sexual deviance and danger. The gendered, and highly eroticized, language of electricity sparked a growing fear that a female patient under an electrical treatment might be incapable of fully controlling their faculties, making them easy prey for a scheming quack doctor.²¹ In using electrical language, women writers conjure forth these social anxieties, gendered constructions of treatment, and the hypersexualized focus upon the female body central to these public electrical experiments.

It is this anxiety over sexual predation, codified in patriarchal notions of female passivity and receptivity, that I address first as I trace the gendered constructions of sexual difference and

¹⁹ Bertucci. *Sparks in the Dark: The Attraction of Electricity in the Eighteenth Century*. p. 92

²⁰ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740–1840*. p. 91

²¹ Smith, Andrew. "Gothic Science." P. 310

attraction which pervade the metaphorical language of electrical science in chapter 1. In this chapter, I analyze Elizabeth Inchbald's 1789 satire, *Animal Magnetism*, and the ways in which she employs the language of animal magnetism and its biggest professional critics in order to renegotiate a greater degree of power for the women in the play. As Inchbald satirizes the quackery of animal magnetism, she creates a study in language, mapping the ways in which the control of women's bodies is figured through magnetism's representation of patriarchal constructions of hierarchical bodily, familial, and domestic power relations which flow through and between bodies. I argue that Inchbald disrupts the patriarchal movement of power which typically moves from the active, male magnetist doctor into the receptive, female patient through a meta-theatrical display which consciously performs feminine sensibility to renegotiate power. Putting her play in conversation with modern affect theory which proposes an inter-corporeal movement of feeling between bodies bounded by their ability to reciprocate feeling rather than by any skin boundary, I interpret Inchbald's text as one which disrupts gendered boundaries of power, subjectivity, and knowledge. These far more fluid and reciprocal boundaries built upon processual development and performance, which reverberate through the works of Judith Butler, establish a kind of thinking that persists into the following chapter.

In Chapter 2, I trace Mary Robinson's critique of the commodification, consumption, and confinement of women's bodies within the patriarchal construction of a market of women as it is articulated through her satirical depiction of Dr. James Graham in *Walsingham*. Here, I complicate Tim Fulford's portrayal of "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson" as I argue that Mary Robinson adopts the language and figures of electrical healing specifically in order to interrogate the ways that the metaphorical figuration of the language, and the physical treatments

themselves, delimit the female body as one intended for male consumption.²² Informed by Luce Irigaray's foundational description of "Women on the Market" in *This Sex which Is Not One*, I argue that beyond attempting to distance herself from the disgraced, late Graham and her earlier appearances at his temple with her famous lovers, Robinson satirizes the quack doctor in order to launch an ideological critique. Her critique is one which follows the Wollstonecraftian tradition as she examines the socio-economic constructions of the patriarchal system which allow men to prescribe and peddle women's bodies as objects on a market while women are subjected to threats of confinement and ruin because they are economically and socially dependent. This chapter also offers an examination of an oft overlooked section of Pimpernel's tale, one in which he is the principal proprietor of a mad-house where he confines the women for whom men no longer wish to be responsible. In this chapter, I argue that Robinson examines the patriarchal implications of medical discourse, using her own experiences with electromagnetic quackery as the basis for her satirical depictions and representative linguistic abuses. As quack doctors abuse the language of scientific experimentation and medicine, seemingly protected by their status and gender, Robinson argues that they not only practice, but instigate and perpetuate the commodification, confinement, and consumption of women's bodies as capital.

Although scholars have examined both the widespread adoption of electrical language within eighteenth-century literature, and women writer's contributions to scientific discourse, there has not yet been a focused study on how women writers addressed the public, experimental sciences of the period. This thesis offers a specific, focused study in language. One which

²² In *The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson*, Tim Fulford interprets this tradition of self-representation and the contemptuous satire of Graham as an unsuccessful attempt to distance herself from her past association with the sexual spectacles of the quack doctor and public perception which defined her by her commodified body.

focuses on the figure of the quack doctor as one both Robinson and Inchbald used to launch critiques of greater social and cultural strictures acerbated by an abuse of the gendered language of electrical science and medicine. The women writers discussed in this thesis, therefore, used the electrical language, theories, and experiments of the day to illuminate a division of scientific thought which had become highly gendered, highly licentious, and highly focused upon the woman's body.

Critics have developed a significant discussion surrounding eighteenth-century and Romantic women writer's work in scientific fields such as botany, geology, travel writing, geography, and, of course, the many scientific threads developed within Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. However, the fictional work of other women writers beyond these recognized sciences and canonical texts has not yet received the same amount of critical attention. In this thesis, my interest in women writers is first and foremost as an interest in how gender identity and expression operate within discussions of performance, power, bodily boundaries, and genre, as they are expressed through the language of electrical science. Rather than treating gender as a definitive, all-encompassing "answer" to a text or a strict prescriptive mode of interpretation, I intend to complicate these readings of gender expression and experience by examining the intersecting economic, political, and social constructions which exist within electrical science. In the eighteenth-century, these women writers register a collapse between the metaphorical language of electrical science and the performative experiments of the discipline which fell upon the female body. This thesis seeks to analyze how Inchbald and Robinson represent this collapse and the ways they adopt quack electrical science in their works as they examine systems of power and control which rely specifically on this gendered electrical diction.

CHAPTER ONE:
INCHBALD'S ELECTRICAL THEATRICALS: DISRUPTING GENDERED
CONSTRUCTIONS OF AFFECT AND PERFORMANCE

Affect arises in the midst of in- between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon.
-Gregory J. Seigworth, and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers"²³

In a 1783 medical text written on the influence of affections on nervous women, Edmé-Pierre de Beauchêne writes that the spectacle of theater “produces such a commotion in their nerves,” that the “momentous loss of their senses, the tears they shed at the performances of our modern tragedies are the least accidents that can result from them.”²⁴ Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Animal Magnetism* translates this fear of theatrically induced contagion onto the stage as she maps the ways through which the imagination, much like electromagnetic fluid, conducts feeling through, between, and amongst bodies. She invokes this eighteenth century medical discourse on the female contagion of the “disordered imagination” in her translation of Antoine Jean-Bourlin Dumaniant’s *Le Médecin Malgré tout le Monde*, which premiered at Covent Garden just four years after the 1784 Royal Commission’s report condemned animal magnetism as a theatrical pseudo-science.²⁵ As I mentioned in the introduction, this same medical language of an effeminized susceptibility to theatrical hysteria was specifically appropriated by the French Royal Commission as it sought to discredit the electrical therapies of Franz Anton Mesmer’s infamous practice of mesmerism, or animal magnetism.²⁶ The commission’s report compared the public enactment of the patients’ theatrical “crises” to a contagious theatric performance as the

²³ Seigworth, Gregory J. and Melissa Gregg. "An Inventory of Shimmers." In *The Affect Theory Reader*, p. 1

²⁴ *Civilization and Madness*, p.219 (Edmé-Pierre de Beauchêne, *De l'influence des affections de Pâme dans le maladies nerveuses des femmes*, 1783)

²⁵ Burwick, Frederick L. "Inchbald: Animal Magnetism and Medical Quackery" p. 165

²⁶ Nathaniel Leach, "Gendering Pseudo-Science: Inchbald's Animal Magnetism." p. 715

patient provoked their “audience” to further imaginative activity through these impassioned fits.²⁷ Any cure, therefore, was considered invalid, healing brought about by the imagination and participation in an act of unconscious and sympathetic imitation rather than any movement of a universal fluid through the body. Yet, both in the Royal Commission’s critiques of animal magnetism and in demonstrations of the practice, this affective power of the imagination and its potential material cures are filtered through theatrical language and disseminated down from the mesmerist to the patient in a gendered, dualistic construction of patriarchal authority. Although the electromagnetic fluid may move *throughout* bodies, within the figurative language of electrical science, these bodies remain fixed, gendered boundaries defined by sexual difference and attraction. Power moves from the active male body of the mesmerist into the receptive and passive body of the female patient in a linear, unequal construction. This movement of power catalyzed public concerns about women’s susceptibility to the deviant mesmerist given their compromising imaginative weakness, concerns which would later be published in a third report in 1800.²⁸ Inchbald employs the language of these gendered constructions of the affective imagination and passive susceptibility. She disrupts the rigid bodily delimitations which these constructions necessitated through the asymmetrical movement of power, affect, and magnetic healing.

Through a meta-theatrical performance which is at once aware of the fears of corruption and predation which embroiled animal magnetism in France, and the gendered constructions of affect and power from which they derive, Inchbald’s translation of the French farce articulates an “in-between-ness” that calls for a reconsideration of the ways that bodily

²⁷ Leach, "Gendering Pseudo-Science." pp. 715-716

²⁸ Stanbury. "Reflections of Mesmerism in Literature." pp. 10-11

boundaries are drawn when they act and are acted upon. I intend to show that Inchbald is interested in examining the potential of electric language and the restrictions effected through patriarchal constructions of power and sympathy. Inchbald does not openly satirize the practice of animal magnetism. Instead, she evokes the gendered language of theatricality, sympathetic communication, and contagion which had become so thoroughly engrossed within scientific and medical discourse as she examines a connection between the affective capabilities of theatrical performance and the theory of a universal electrical fluid. In doing so, Inchbald maps the ways through which imagination and sympathetic feeling, much like electromagnetic fluid, conducts feeling through, between, and amongst bodies. This chapter explores Inchbald's suggestions of a far more fluid, inter-corporeal, and reciprocal movement of affect which moves not from one rigidly bounded body to the next, as from powerful male mesmerist to simultaneously susceptible and contagious female patient, but traverses more permeable boundaries of power and the body. To this end, this chapter also serves more broadly to elucidate an articulation of the figurative framework operating in the language and practices of electrical science which is grounded in sexual difference and attraction. Undermining the patriarchal, linear movement of affect between bounded bodies, Inchbald suggests a model of affective flow that is built upon embodied knowledge, processual boundedness, sympathetic communication, and the ability to participate in reciprocal affective movement between conscious actors.

I argue that Inchbald thus disrupts the unequal movement of affect from knowing to unknowing, predatory to prey, and male to female evident within the language of animal magnetism and the more professionalized modes of electrical science by introducing an element of consciousness to imagination through which her female characters manipulate their perceived roles in order to negotiate more freedom. This consciousness is one which represents a non-

dualistic approach to power, a mode of thinking Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has defined as one which “confounds agency with passivity” in *Touching Feeling*.²⁹ A nonlinear affective moment allows us to understand Inchbald’s mimetic and processual theory of affect, one which presents actively passive female characters who only pretend to fall under the spell of the magnetist. Lisette and Constance perform the prescribed roles within a feminized conception of imaginative susceptibility but do so with a consciousness of the expected effect in order to negotiate their release into a more desirable, yet still submissive, role within the patriarchal structure. Inchbald’s meta-theatricality acts a disturbance of the linearity of the affective current within the language of electrical science as her characters embody this actively passive performance, operating also on a level of spatial power as she consciously places female bodies in crucial roles throughout the play, taking up space.

This chapter engages with critical discussions of affect theory and performance, considering the flow of feeling as a movement between permeable bodies, processually “becoming” in an act of performance. These bodies are defined not by a skin boundary but by a communicative or contagious potential to “reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect.”³⁰ Moving throughout this chapter, then, is a movement through a kind of Williams-like structure of feeling or level of consciousness which exhibits a “interrelating continuity,” between thought and feeling where feeling operates in a socializing, communicative position. I examine the ways in which Inchbald’s female characters’ performance of active passivity appropriates the medical language of hysteric contagion and sympathy to express an interdependent relation between bodies. The female characters’ performance of active passivity can then be considered to

²⁹ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling; Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. p. 2

³⁰ Seigworth, Gregory J. and Melissa Gregg. "An Inventory of Shimmers." In *The Affect Theory Reader*, p. 2

represent this “imitative urge” and the relation between the actors and audience. I will map the ways that Inchbald’s female characters perform a spatial disruption of electrical science’s dualistic flow of affect as they place their bodies at the center of this performance of a science built around the enactment of sexual difference and imaginative excess on their own terms in order to define a level of agency previously denied them. So too, does this chapter examine the ways in which Inchbald disrupts gendered orders within animal magnetism in an effort to further destabilize the patriarchal systems which pervade the scientific language and practice.

Reconfiguring the Medical Language of Sexual Difference

As Inchbald satirizes the practice of animal magnetism as a quack science, her mockery serves to further destabilize the discursive language of “natural” sexual difference which pervades patriarchal modes of power in electrical science. Employing the direct language of Anton Mesmer and the reports of his detractors throughout the play, Inchbald traces the ways through which the figurative language and demonstrations of electrical power inherently articulate a very bodily and sexed construction of the unseen fluid as it relies upon metaphors of sexual difference and attraction. As the language of electrical science surpassed “the bounds of ‘rational’ language,” it required theorists to turn to metaphor to compare and explain theories of electricity’s operation and origin.³¹ Inchbald adopts the figurative framework operable within the language of electrical science as La Fluer, disguised as “the Magnetizing Doctor,” attempts to explain to Lisette and Constance’s prisoner the “specimen” of his art of animal magnetism and the theory of imponderable fluids. La Fluer calls upon a simile, comparing the universal fluid to a river, as he explains how he commands the fluid by “merely gestures – or a simple touch,” and, like this river, it “begins again, softly and sweetly to flow” when all obstructions are removed

³¹ Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p 6

(I.i.12-13). The figurative use of language here is rather harmless, inviting a comparison between the known movement of rivers, and their potentially destructive capabilities to overrun “villages, hamlets, houses, trees, cows, and lambs” if they are obstructed. However, the threat of this destruction and Le Fluer’s further sexually suggestive language connote a gendered and affective element of electrical language based in sexual difference and sexual attraction.

The language of attraction, electrical fire, sparks, and the demonstrations of such a power, including the very theatrical work of animal magnetism, often turned to a gendered construction of attraction and difference in order to illustrate the ways that objects were attracted to one another, how they were manifested, and how they interacted. In her work on the discursive policing of these figurative boundaries, Patricia Fara collapses the metaphoric precedent Newton establishes in *Opticks* into the very language of magnetic attraction and science itself as “part of most people’s view of reality, it has itself become a basis for comparison.”³² Dependent upon articulating unknown phenomena with known sensations, Newton described how objects may be drawn together in a theory of magnetic attraction using the idea of human, male and female, attraction. Throughout the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, then, students of what Joseph Priestley in 1767 termed “the youngest daughter of science,” turned to these gendered constructions of attraction as an established basis of comparison to define electrical phenomena and attraction.³³ In the introduction to this thesis, I described one such experiment which exemplified this reliance upon sexual difference in Georg Mattias Bose’s “Electrifying Venus,” which situated a woman upon an electrified pedestal where men from the audience would

³² Fara. “A Powerful Language: Images of Nature and the Nature of Science.” p. 174

³³ Bertucci, Paola. *Sparks in the Dark: The Attraction of Electricity in the Eighteenth Century*. p.87

attempt to kiss her only to be shocked by an electrical current as they reached her lips.³⁴ Within this demonstration, not only does the female body play a central role wherein the woman is literally raised before the crowd on a stool or stage, the very idea of heterosexual sexual attraction becomes charged with electricity, eliciting a spark with its manifestation in the form of a kiss. Within his poetry on electricity, too, Bose classified a male and female electric fire distinguished by the intensity of their flames as “the male fire, emitted by metals and animal bodies, was unsurprisingly strong and powerful” and the “the female fire, instead, was a weak luminous emanation, the kind of light that characterized the aurora borealis.”³⁵ Inchbald employs this figurative language of electrical discourse, one dependent upon gendered constructions of magnetic attraction and physicalized through sexual difference, throughout the play.

Referring, then, to this “universal fluid which spreads throughout nature,” Inchbald mimics this metaphorical language as she illustrates the ways that this figuration often turns to the female body and the discourse of sex and sexual attraction within the very physical and gendered demonstrations of animal magnetism. Using sexually charged language and comical directional fumbles, Le Fluer describes how this fluid “ascends on high” (as he looks down), “descends on low” (as he looks up), and “penetrates all substances, from the hardest metal, to the softest bosom” (I.i.12). This predatory insinuation, although lost on the Doctor at this moment as he seeks out further clarification about the nature of the fluid, returns later as he wishes for La Fluer to confirm that it is true “what they report that he who is once in possession of your art can if he pleases, make every woman who comes near him, in love with him” (I.i.14). Using the same figurative language as even the most well-respected electrical scientists, Inchbald suggests what

³⁴ Bertucci. *Sparks in the Dark*. p 92

³⁵ Bertucci. *Sparks in the Dark*. P. 92-93

Nathaniel Leach has called “strong affinities” between the more legitimate and official modes of patriarchal power the doctor attempts to exercise over Constance as his ward and his desire for magnetizing power.³⁶ Yet even beyond the doctor’s individual desire for positions of patriarchal power, Inchbald enacts a clear discursive demonstration of the way that metaphors grounded in sexual difference and played out upon the female body rearticulate constructions of gendered hierarchies of power which mark the feminine as the passive recipient of the male magnetist’s “penetrating” affection. These constructions define bodies as fixed and bounded as affect moves linearly from one to another. Inchbald seeks to disrupt this linearity as she introduces female characters who are at once conscious of this element of the animal magnetist’s practice and manipulate their conceived role within it to renegotiate more freedom in their circumstances.

Deploying the Affective Imagination and Feminized Theatrical Contagion

It’s rather ironic that the doctor turns to animal magnetism in an attempt to legitimize himself within scientific practice after “scandalous reports” from the faculty threaten to ruin him, as animal magnetism itself was mired in accusations of illegitimacy and possible predation from the Royal Commission investigations. Inchbald capitalizes on these fears within her play, exploring the roles of theatricality and performance in the negotiation of power. Inchbald herself was familiar with the medical applications of electrical sciences, conducting guided research under Anthony le Texier for her plays and weighing the skeptical opinions of her physician and friend Dr. Brodie as she translated her work.³⁷ According to Frederick Burwick, she also witnessed firsthand in London the near impossibility of differentiating between the mesmerist or animal magnetist doctors who had earned their credentials and those who had faked them.³⁸ In

³⁶ Leach, "Gendering Pseudo-Science." P. 718

³⁷ Frederick L. Burwick. "Inchbald: Animal Magnetism and Medical Quackery." p. 165

³⁸ Burwick. "Inchbald: Animal Magnetism and Medical Quackery." p. 169-70

the figure of the doctor, then, it becomes clear that the boundaries that men of science attempted to draw between these accredited professionals and the quack healers blur into insignificance as the discursive policing only rearticulates modes of patriarchal power and gendered language which limit women's bodies.

This doctor who holds Constance captive as his ward within the confines of his Paris home is, even before experimenting with the practices of animal magnetism, a paternal figure who enforces asymmetrical power dynamics consistent within the discourses of electrical science. Unable to earn his diploma, the doctor is rejected by the faculty because his decision to practice by "the rules of reason and nature," rather than by learning what he terms the "insignificant words" of the profession leads to the death and injury of more of his patients than any recovery (I.i.4). Yet despite his failure as a professional, the doctor maintains the outer appearance of a faculty member. Donning the professional robes and locking his ward and her maid inside, he continues to perform house calls for opportunistic family members, "three nephews have sent for you to attend their uncles, very rich men—and five husbands have sent for you in great haste to attend their wives," as they look to benefit from the death of their sick relatives (I.i.10). His outer appearance is, therefore, indistinguishable from members of the faculty who have earned their diploma through rigorous schooling and ethical treatment just as it is inseparable from the robed figure of La Fluer, the valet to the Marquis de Laney, who paces the streets below the Paris apartment. As sole executioner of power within his own home, the doctor's overtures to La Fluer, disguised as this "Magnetizing Doctor," then, demonstrate a clear attempt to further consolidate authority as the practice promises to produce an effect "merely by the power of a magnet" which, he likens to the magic of a conjurer, as it "produces wonders in physic equally surprising" (I.i.10). The magnetist, as the center of the practice, assumes a central,

active role wherein all healing is concentrated within him and is then disseminated into the passive, receptive patient. It is, therefore, impossible to differentiate between a quack doctor and a legitimate doctor as both rearticulate figurative discursive modes of inscribing sexual difference and preying upon the female body. It is this asymmetrical mode of power that Inchbald establishes within the doctor in order to undermine throughout the play.

As animal magnetism rearticulates these patriarchal modes of power, Lissette and Constance manipulate the effeminized and passive construction of the affective imagination which arises within the discourse as they assume their prescriptive roles in order to renegotiate space and power. Having overheard the doctor confirm with La Fluer the rumor that whoever holds the magnetist's *wand* has the power to make any woman fall in love with him, Constance and Lisette scheme to feign affection for the doctor in order to perform their way to freedom. In this mimetic performance, Lisette agrees to "take equal share" in Constance's acting as she explains, "I'll fall in love with the Doctor as well as you—if the Magnetism affects you—why not have the same power over me? and if it makes you *love* him, it shall make me *adore him*" (II.i.17). Appropriating the medical language of the feminine susceptibility and even predisposition to the material effects of the imagination, Inchbald nods not only to the accusations of theatricality launched by the Royal Commission, but to the gendered language of nervousness and madness which deemed the female body a site of contagion. This emphasis upon the affective imagination elucidates the gendered conceptions of nervousness, fancy, and the susceptibility to imaginative suggestion which a consumption of Gothic novels and the theater all suggested.³⁹ As I will further detail in chapter 2, this medical language arises particularly in texts examining the nature of nervous disorders, as physicians argued that the

³⁹ Fara. "A Powerful Language: Images of Nature and the Nature of Science." p. 715

female body was born with a particular predisposition to be more affected by passions. One of the most prominent physicians on nervous disorders in the mid eighteenth century, Robert Whytt considered the nervous system to be far more moveable within the female body, reporting that "It has frequently happened, in the Royal Infirmary here, that women have been seized with hysteric fits from seeing others attacked with them."⁴⁰ As the female body was considered to be more susceptible than the male body to these kinds of attacks, the female body was codified within this language of theatricality, contagion, and the "disordered imagination."⁴¹ While discrediting Mesmer, then, the Royal Commission report adopted the gendered language of nervousness and theatrical, imaginative contagion as it also established a theory which explored the potential for the imagination to produce a material, very bodily, effect.⁴² Acknowledging this medical convention, Lisette's avowal to take "equal share" in Constance's fabricated emotions is a play for power based within an extremely gendered and conventionally pathologized body. This corporal form of affect, spurred through the imaginative process assumes a more empowered, conscious level of communication within Inchbald's play as Constance and Lisette are aware of these assumptions and assume this theatricality willingly in order to manipulate the doctor.

Meta-Theatricality – Embodied Knowledge and Performing Feeling

Manipulating electrical science's gendered construction of one's vulnerability to the theatrical contagion of affect, Inchbald employs a mimetic form of communication grounded within the body. In her chapter "'After Affect:'" Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic

⁴⁰ Robert Whytt *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cures of those Disorders which have Commonly been Called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysteria* (1765). P. 105 from John Mullan's "Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and Physicians ." p. 153

⁴¹ Ilza Veith address the eighteenth-century conception of affect and imagination in Chapter VIII of *Hysteria: The History of a Disease*.

⁴² Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p 85

Communication,” Anna Gibbs frames mimetic communication within the language of contagion as she defines it as “corporeally based forms of imitation” which “involve the visceral level of affect contagion.”⁴³ Imitating facial expressions, movements, and intonations of another individual, people who perform this level of affect contagion “converge emotionally” with the person they are imitating, thus instituting bodily boundaries which are far more fluid and intercorporeal than the rigid, linear flow of affect constructed within traditional modes of patriarchally driven animal magnetism.⁴⁴ Lisette and Constance adopt this contagious theatricality in order to negotiate a space upon the stage where they can “plot and deceive” in a performance of animal magnetism within a play about animal magnetism (I.i. 4). Enacting this meta-theatrical display of conscious theatrical contagion, Inchbald places the female body, already central to the gendered constructions of electrical science grounded in sexual difference and attraction, in a position of knowing, of enactment, and power.

Inchbald displays a skilled exploitation of the theatrical connotations surrounding these demonstrations of animal magnetism as Lisette and Constance negotiate a space to perform their schemes. As previously demonstrated, these public proofs of electrical science were heavily focused upon the body as a means of physically manifesting the unseen workings of the mysterious fluid. Many of these experiments, grounded in sexual difference and physicalized through bodily attraction were performed in salons and town squares, drawing crowds like a theatrical performance.⁴⁵ Turning increasingly into what Laurie Johnson terms a “parlour game,” animal magnetism’s public nature meant that demonstrations could be conducted within the

⁴³ Anna Gibbs. "After Affect." *The Affect Theory Reader*, p. 186

⁴⁴ Gibbs. "After Affect." *The Affect Theory Reader*, p. 186

⁴⁵ Bertucci. *Sparks in the Dark*. p. 87

home, a sphere within which women wielded some power, even when under lock and key.⁴⁶ As La Fluer and the Marquis de Lancy bring the performance into the Paris apartment, they invite a greater degree of participation from the two women of the home as actors who can then feign a particular gendered susceptibility to the theatrical suggestion of the magnetist's charms. Raising the specter of imaginative theatrical suggestion conjured with the Royal Commission's reports, and its particularly effeminized configuration, Inchbald then creates a meta-theatrical space to fill with her female characters. Lisette and Constance use their theatrical and affective imagination to negotiate a presence upon this meta-theatrical stage, refusing to leave key scenes by faking love sickness even as the doctor asks, for "Doctor Mystery" to "use your authority with these females to leave use to ourselves." Le Fluer, feeling their pulses and playing along with their performance of magnetized affection, refuses, "no, the[y] can't go—no—the force of the attraction will not suffer them to go" (II.i.22). The female body here is not a receptive vessel of affect disseminated in an asymmetrical, downward movement from the magnetist. Instead, Inchbald presents a body processually developed through a constant state of movement, one acting as the women feign emotion and being acted upon by the young men in order negotiate freedom and space.

Unlike the firm boundaries which more "legitimate" electrical sciences attempted to draw between their work and the "quackery" of animal magnetism, the conscious affective flow which Inchbald institutes within her meta-theatrical performance produces permeable boundaries of embodiment and motion within and between her actors. Within the language of affect theory, the reciprocal movement of feeling and the mimetic communication which occurs between Lisette

⁴⁶ Laurie Johnson. "The Romantic and Modern Practice of Animal Magnetism: Friedrich Schlegel's Protocols of the Magnetic Treatment of Countess Lesniowska." p. 13

and Constance and La Fluer and the Marquis, reflects an inter-corporeal knowledge or embodiment that emphasizes a process, the “body’s perpetual *becoming*”⁴⁷ Inchbald first posits this processual stitching together of a body piece by piece quite literally before shifting to a demonstration of the way this *becoming* functions on a discursive level. In an attempt to negotiate the key to the garden gate, Lisette pretends to fawn over the doctor’s man and keeper of the keys, Jeffrey, who has recently undergone one of the doctor’s “cures.” This “cure,” having resulted in the loss of his left eye “in order to save the right,” has ultimately led to the installment of a glass eye in its place (I.i.6). In more playacting and flattery, Lisette coyly remarks to Jeffrey, who has always admired her, “and if the Doctor will remake you thus piece by piece, in time my dear Jeffrey, you may become a very pretty man—but you know Jeffrey, I love you even as you are” (I.ii.6-7). Here, Lisette proposes that Jeffrey’s body may be redefined piece by piece through a processual stitching together of separate parts. This literal re-composition, or transplantation suggests the possibility for an intersubjective event as Jeffrey’s subjective body is redefined with each new piece.⁴⁸ Inchbald suggests the creation of similar, intersubjective boundaries through aesthetic imitation and performance.

The Inter-corporality of Feeling - Passing Through, Between, and Amongst Bodies

In renegotiating an alternative to the life of imprisonment and surveillance to which Constance and Lisette are subjected under the roof of the doctor, Inchbald employs meta-theatricality and the language of affective power to define more permeable, intersubjective boundaries which disrupt the asymmetrical power dynamics evident in the language of electrical

⁴⁷ Blackman, Lisa. *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*. p. 1

⁴⁸ Blackman refers to “Frankenstein Syndrome” in cases where these translates come from another human body. Patients must live with another person’s dead body part and this fact raises questions of possessions and doubles in literature and scientific discourse in the twentieth century. Blackman *Immaterial Bodies*. p. 11

science. As Le Fluer, the Marquis de Lancy, Constance, and Lisette perform together, they build from each other's bodily and verbal cues, having been unable to communicate their plans before the two men entered the apartment. Relying upon an embodied form of knowledge, one dependent upon knowing one's roles within a societal performance of gendered constructions and expectations, Lisette anticipates the contents of the letter that the Marquis writes to Constance and replies for her before she has even received the correspondence. Lisette thus acts as she anticipates how her rescuers will act upon her and her lady:

Con.: "I wish I knew the contents of that letter he held out to me."

Lis. "That you are beloved—admired, I can tell every word in it—I know every sentence as well as if I had read it—and now, madam, it is my advice, you sit down and answer it directly."

Con. "Before I have read it?"

Lis. "Yes, yes, give your answer at the time you receive his letter—consider how convenient it will be to *give the one, while you take the other*" (I.i.4, emphasis mine).

Lisette writes out Constance's thoughts in the letter for her, preparing them for the exchange she predicts once the meta-performance of the animal magnetism practice begins and the fake doctors begin their own performance in an attempt to rescue the two women from their prison.

This processual enactment of an embodied form of theatrical consciousness is evident as Inchbald once again satirizes the Royal Commission's charges of theatrical contagion and gendered imaginative susceptibility to the mesmerist's charms. After the doctor's inquiries into the reports of animal magnetism's abilities to harness the power of affection, La Fluer, disguised as Doctor Mystery, promises that before the end the day, Lisette will prefer her confinement "to all the false pleasures of the gay world, for what are more false than the pleasures derived from balls masquerades and theatres" (I.i.14). La Fluer goes on to mockingly refer to the theater as "the most dangerous for a young woman to be present at" before launching into a summary of a

play he attended which almost exactly resembles the plot of the young men's scheme to emancipate Constance and Lisette.

The doctor, despite small interruptions to confirm the villainy of the young men in this imagined play, makes no connection between the performance before him and his own institution of constraint and patriarchal power. Lisette and Constance then successfully complete the anticipated letter exchange as Le Fluer explains to the doctor how the actors exchanged letters in the performance he watched, as he “seiz'd the moment when he embraced him as I now embrace you—to stretch out his hand, while it was behind him, and convey a letter to the Lady's waiting maid.” Reading the others' bodily cues and enacting the very performance Le Fluer narrates, “*La Fluer embraces the Doctor, and exchanges Letters with Lisette, Lisette gives the letter she receives to Constance, La Fluer puts the other into his pocket*” (I.i15). Here, the actors embody the action which La Fluer narrates as they perform their roles in front of the doctor, acknowledging a metatheatrical element of performance in which the actor embodies the social role of actor, the role as character, and acknowledges the audience's knowledge of their body's embodiment of both roles in the narration of this movement. Their bodies are, therefore, more open, co-participating in movement and feeling rather than acting as rigid subjects or objects which are simply giving or receiving power disseminated linearly from one body to the next. Lisa Blackman refers to this type of interaction as “haptic, affective” communication which “draws attention to what passes between bodies, which can be felt but perhaps not easily articulated.”⁴⁹ Passing between these actors here is power in this haptic form as it passes hands from Constance to La Fluer and La Fluer to Constance, each anticipating and reciprocating the other's movements which are processually developed through their performance. Sedgwick's

⁴⁹ Blackman, Lisa. *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*. p. 12

understanding of the preposition “beside” is crucial here too for understanding Inchbald’s meta-theatricality as a disturbance of the linear motion of affect within the language of electrical science as it is typically construed as a movement from active to passive. Her performance operates more on spatial thinking, who is on the stage, taking up space.⁵⁰ Much like the language of electricity which turns to metaphor, affect can be articulated through the metaphorical language of an electrical or magnetic flow through bodies. Here, the actors’ performances enact a flow of feeling which then defines their bodies not by their skin boundaries, but by their ability to participate in the feelings which flow through and between the other bodies beside them.⁵¹ In so disturbing the stability of patriarchal structures of asymmetrical modes of affect and power, *Animal Magnetism* presents an “in-between-ness” which posits a type of embodied performance which rejects these gendered forms of passivity and agency and presents bodies which act and are acted upon.

While Constance and Lisette develop a performative, reciprocal flow of affect which moves within and through themselves, and La Fluer and the Marquis de Lancy, they also manipulate the young men’s affections to negotiate their own freedoms outside of this performance. Constance and Lisette are conscious of their many roles within the multi-leveled performance of *Animal Magnetism*. Aware of their restrictions as women locked inside an apartment with two men, aware of class distinctions, aware of the gendered constructions of medicine, and aware of their roles as young, attractive damsels in distress in a theatrical production, the two women embody a performative consciousness which allows them to renegotiate terms of power as they continue to develop, process, and pretend. In choosing to act as if they are madly in love with whomever

⁵⁰ Sedgwick. *Touching Feeling*. p 9

⁵¹ Seigworth and Gregg. "An Inventory of Shimmers." p. 2

holds the magnetizing wand, they consciously embody these roles and submit to these patriarchal conceptions of feminine vulnerability in order to undermine the doctor's patriarchal modes of authority in their eventual escape.⁵² Beyond this destabilization, Inchbald further disrupts the asymmetrical, linear movement of power constructed within these patriarchal modes of authority as Constance and Lisette perform a conscious and embodied movement of inter-corporeal feeling which defines their bodies as permeable boundaries through which feeling flows freely within and between them.

Although the two women's performance of love and affection is most obvious when they are pretending that "some invincible power" has moved them to love, adoration, and even "a rage - a violence," they continue to manipulate the affections of their admirers to negotiate the most favorable position throughout the play (II.i.18). As a working-class woman, Lisette seems most aware of the roles and expectations of certain classes and stations throughout her performance. Using these class distinctions to guide her affections, Lisette aligns herself with Constance's lover's valet, Le Fluer, as her most likely ticket to freedom. Taking advantage of the Marquis de Lancy and his man's affections as the solution to their confinement, Lisette and Constance perform the role of damsels in distress in order to negotiate a more suitable marriage prospect. Realistic about her prospects, Lisette admits her lady's sentiments to Le Fluer: "a young woman, weary of confinement as she was, is easily in love with the first young man who solicits her affections." As Le Fluer questions her intentions, "And may I hope you love me?" she too expresses her eagerness to escape the jail in which she is held and subjected to the unwanted advances of the doctor's servant, "Aye, Sir, I am weary of confinement like my mistress" (III.i.26). Weary of their confinement, Lisette and Constance take advantage of the young men's

⁵² Leach, "Gendering Pseudo-Science." P. 719

advances and perform their roles as loving women, rescued from the clutches of their jailor. Again, as Lisette anticipates the exact words she would need to write in Constance's letter to elicit the continued adoration and participation of the Marquis de Lancy in their theatrical scheme, she displays an awareness and a fluidity of performance which allows her to take advantage of this more open processual movement of affect.

While Inchbald creates the theatrical occasion for such moments which disrupt the linear movement of affective power from an active subject to a passive object within the traditional patriarchal language of electrical science, so too does she entirely subvert these gendered constructions within her fluid, gender inverted version of the crises. As La Fluer explains how he intends to demonstrate the powers of magnetism, he presents an image of a performance in which the body moves through a progression of passions as the fluid moves within: "I will so direct the fluid, that it shall immediately give you the most exeruciating [sic] rheumatism which will last you a couple of hours — I will then change it to the gout—then to strong convulsions—and after into a raging fever" (I.i.13). While this is intended to convince the doctor to allow the demonstration to be conducted upon another body, it also presents a form of playacting that is shifting and processual, moving from one crisis to another like the affections of the women move from one subject to another. The patient chosen for this demonstration is noteworthy, too, as it is the Marquis de Lancy disguised as a dying *man* in need of electrical intervention. As he hyperbolically performs these fits, then, Inchbald presents a male body embodying the highly sexualized theatrical actions typically reserved for the female body within a demonstration of animal magnetism.⁵³ These fits remain highly performative; with each "change" of the passions, the Marquis embodies a new theatrical display. Ultimately, Lisette manipulates this fluid

⁵³ Bertucci. *Sparks in the Dark*. p. 90

language to convince the doctor that he fatally moved the malady into the patient's heart and is ruined once again (III.i.30). Yet, the fluidity of performance within Inchbald's play has limitations still very much coded within the patriarchal structure.

Negotiating Favorable Patriarchal Rule

As the Marquis de Lancy performs his theatrical passions for his audience, he moves through a series of crises which alter his language and personality, including a highly poetic entreaty reminiscent of the Renaissance "Carpe Diem" poems of Marvell and Herrick. In this fit he implores Constance, "you who listen to me partake my joy, come and dwell with me under the shady branches of the river side, come lovely shepherdess" (II.i.25). This thinly veiled appeal for Constance to leave the Doctor and join the Marquis de Lancy as his "lovely shepherdess," again employs all the sexual connotations evident in these seize the day poems and the language of the patriarchy. As such, it becomes evident that while Inchbald grants her female characters agency within her more fluid, inter-corporeal, and conscious construction of affective communication and embodied performance, this power is a movement within modes of patriarchal control, not beyond it. Leach refers to this shift as one from a "tyrannical patriarchy to a benevolent one," a move common within Inchbald's works.⁵⁴ While the Marquis de Lancy stresses that "the artifice I employed to obtain her" was employed "with her own consent," this can hardly be considered entirely consensual considering the women's confinement and the young men's entire lack of communication before entering the apartment to begin their performance (III.i.36). This re-inscription of patriarchal roles is one which Lisette and Constance

⁵⁴ Leach, "Gendering Pseudo-Science." P. 721

then masterfully deploy as a strategy of escape when it is already in progress, manipulating the affections of all the men involved on several meta-theatrical levels in order to negotiate the best possible scenario. However, it is undeniable that the roles they play, instructed by gendered terms of sexual attraction and difference within electrical science, only serve to negotiate them a more agreeable situation within greater patriarchal systems of power.

This processual enactment of performance, which produces bodies defined by their ability to co-participate in the communication of feeling rather than by any rigid boundary, disrupts the linear movement of power from active subject to passive object. Inchbald's disruption further destabilizes the gendered language of electrical science which inscribes these fixed, dualistic bodies as active, knowing male healers and passive, imaginative, and susceptible female patients. Inchbald's satire invites an interrogation of these dualistic modes of thinking and feeling, knowing and unknowing, and active and passive as she presents a meta-theatrical, embodied performance which places permeable bodies on stage as they both act and are acted upon. Her assertion of a conscious and material form of the affective imagination presents this "in-between-ness" of affect theory with remarkable cogency as it articulates a processual development of bodily boundaries which resonates in the work of Judith Butler.

Butler rejects a construction of matter which considers the body as a site upon which discourse is inscribed and instead posits a "process of materialization" which develops the boundaries of matter over time.⁵⁵ Inchbald's meta-theatricality performs this processual development, suggesting an inter-corporeal movement of theatrical contagion and affective communication which constantly shifts and changes as it outlines these bodily boundaries by the actors' performances and their ability to reciprocate or mimic feeling. Understanding Inchbald's

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex.'* p. 9

satire as disruption invites further critical analysis of the ways in which theories of affect, embodied performance, and gender performativity interrogate the construction of bodily, generic, gendered, disciplinary, and even cognitive boundaries. Inchbald posits the potential for a nonlinear, reciprocal movement of feeling between, amongst, and through bodies, an “in-between-ness” which may destabilize gendered codification and redefine far more fluid boundaries of actor and audience, playacting and reality, and thinking and feeling.

CHAPTER TWO:
DRAWN FROM LIFE: A PICTURE OF THE CONSUMPTION, CONFINEMENT, AND
PENETRATION OF WOMEN THROUGH THE CHARACTER OF DR. PIMPERNEL IN
WALSINGHAM; OR, THE PUPIL OF NATURE

I have held them up as beacons, to warn the unwary: I have portrayed them, as they are;
neither with a flattering nor a distorting pencil.
-*Walsingham* 2:321-322⁵⁶

In the months leading up to the publication of her fifth novel in December of 1797, Mary Robinson began the process of advertising her portrayal of the individuals *Walsingham* refers to as “the vicious reptiles” whom he leaves to “infamy” as he ends the narrative of his life of misery and misfortune as a “pupil of nature” (321-322). Filling the social columns of daily newspapers with puffs directed at an audience who knew well her familiarity with the social elite, Robinson promises that her next novel will include “all characters drawn from life,” “well known in the higher circles,” and “founded on facts.”⁵⁷ While Robinson had not gone to such lengths to advertise any of her previous works, the appearance of her name in print itself was not a novel concept. She had formed a certain cult of personality, with interested readers turning to “dailies” such as *The Morning Post* and *The Oracle* for health reports, social updates on her most recent appearances, and now, small teasers and excerpts of her upcoming publication of *Walsingham*.⁵⁸ Robinson’s advertisements of *Walsingham; or, The Pupil of Nature* seem to suggest an insider view into the character of certain real members of the upper echelons of society, one which, by the end of the novel, proves to be rather unflattering for some of these fictitious reptiles’ human counterparts. Robinson’s deliberate representation of her novel as one molded around

⁵⁶ All succeeding quotes from *Walsingham* quoted from *Walsingham; Or, the Pupil of Nature, a Domestic Story by Mary Robinson: Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Literature and Language. ESTCT181020.

⁵⁷ Leigh Bonds. "The Power of the Puff: Mary Robinson's Celebrity and the Success of "Walsingham" p. 46

⁵⁸ Bonds, "The Power of the Puff" p. 44

contemporary figures represents just one facet of the four-volume work which engages with an extensive array of contemporary topics of intrigue. In fact, Eleanor Ty explains that the reason many reviewers considered *Walsingham* disjointed and perplexing when it was released was because the novel “reflects the philosophical debates about female education; about nature vs art; reason and passion; male vs female power” while also serving as “a satire of aristocratic manners, an autobiographical statement, and a novel of sensibility.”⁵⁹ Choosing to highlight the more autobiographical elements of the novel in these puffs she purchased,⁶⁰ Robinson reveals much of the intentional and meticulous self-representation that has become the nexus of Mary Robinson criticism.

In this chapter, I examine one particular satirical representation of the pompous and gratingly unctuous Dr. Pimpnel who represents the real James Graham: a quack practitioner of electro-magnetic sex therapy, infamous for his commodifying display of women’s bodies and his appeal to noble clientele. Robinson raises the specter of the late Dr. James Graham as one of these “beacons, to warn the unwary” through the character of Dr. Pimpnel who profits off the voyeuristic consumption of women’s bodies. In his clear objectification of women and the abuse of his position as a physician, Dr. Pimpnel openly favors young, attractive, and women as he argues that “old women ought to die” and that the “sublime essence” of Amelia’s breath will cure the ailing Walsingham (1:262). Robinson visited Graham’s infamous “Temple of Health and Hymen” at the peak of its popularity from 1781-1783 with her lover, the Prince of Wales. She also later returned as the mistress of statesman Charles Fox.⁶¹ Her presence marked her as a

⁵⁹ Eleanor Ty. *Empowering the Feminine; the Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie* p. 43

⁶⁰ Bonds, "The Power of the Puff" p. 44

⁶¹ Tim Fulford, "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," p. 28

target of public ridicule which critics have argued she then attempts to turn towards Graham himself in her 1797 novel.⁶² The success of this vengeful divergence, another carefully constructed performance of her public self-representation, has remained a point of discussion within criticism concerned with the ways in which Robinson cultivated a fluid, theatrical persona which mediates her identity as celebrity and author.⁶³ While this characterization clearly exudes satirical disdain, Robinson creates a distinctly creative, literary representation of a more polemic figure of objectification and patriarchal oppression that exceeds the autobiographic limitations of Graham's character.

One of the novel's most prolific peddlers of women, Dr. Pimpernel's character inhabits the text as one who prescribes, facilitates, and profits from the commodification and exchange of women. The real Dr. Graham incurred significant debt, was imprisoned in Newgate, and had to be confined in his home several times due to insanity before his eventual death in 1794.⁶⁴ Yet, returning again and again in passages which have been largely overlooked within criticism, Dr. Pimpernel remains a prominent character within *Walsingham* who does not fall from the graces of his chosen aristocratic society. It is he who first attempts to help the Duke of Heartwing rape Amelia before Walsingham ruins her, it is he who then facilitates the marriage between the previously seduced and abandoned Julie de Beaumont and this same Duke in order to win a bet, and it is he who, rather than being locked up as a "lunatic," is instead the principal proprietor who locks Amelia up in his "mind-mill" (2:121). Robinson adopts the more "figurative" language of electricity in the novel to express the material, corporeal feelings of emotion and

⁶² Tim Fulford, "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," p.23

⁶³ The bedrock of this criticism is, of course, Pascoe's *Romantic Theatricality*, however, Fulford, Byrne, Ty, and Cross also participate in the critical conversation which imagines Robinson's fluid self-representation.

⁶⁴ Porter, Roy. *Graham, James (1745–1794)*, Quack Oxford University Press.

sympathy much like she had done in her earlier poetry. Her critique is not of the language or practice of electrical science, but rather how the gendered constructions of medical discourses can be exploited to control and commodify women's bodies. She uses the figure of the sex obsessed electromagnetic quack doctor as her strong, emblematic case here as her personal experience and the uniquely sexually charged literary and experimental culture of the phenomenon create a fruitful discursive study. Pimpernel only pretends to be a doctor and uses his position to sell sex. I argue that rather than simply attempting to rescue her own reputation from her past association with James Graham through the creation of an unsavory depiction of the quack doctor, Robinson uses his character to explore the ways in which an abuse of the languages of medicine, experimental science, and electrical therapy perpetuates the consumption, confinement, and penetration of women within a patriarchal market.

This interpretation participates in a critical feminist discourse which engages with theories of self-representation, performance, theatricality, and processually enacted bodies which I first introduced in my examination of Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism*. Several critics have noted the autobiographical performance Robinson enacts in her satirical portrayal of Dr. Graham, reading the ineffectual, objectifying, and generally unpleasant figure of Dr. Pimpernel in *Walsingham* as a vengeful attempt to distance herself from a historical connection with the real-life quack.⁶⁵ The central narrative of the cross-dressing Sidney Aubrey, only revealed to readers at the very end of the novel, is one which critics often read within the context of Butler's gender performativity and queer theories of homosociality and lesbian desire.⁶⁶ These intersecting

⁶⁵ Fulford's "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," Byrne's *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson*, Fairclough Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740–1840.

⁶⁶ Katherine Binhammer. "Female Homosociality and the Exchange of Men: Mary Robinson's *Walsingham*." P. 226

theories of gender, sexuality, and self-representation are viewed within the context of what Judith Pascoe calls Robinson's "Romantic Theatricality": the assumption of various performed authorial identities or personas which can be assumed and shed in order to liberate the poet from any one stance, style, or status as a commodified object.⁶⁷ As a poet, Robinson wrote for *The Oracle* and served as a writer and editor for the *Morning Post*, creating at least eight different pseudonyms under which to publish these works.⁶⁸ Fluidly moving through projected, overlapping identities, Robinson thus conveyed a creative Self derived from a confluence of artistic, personal, and social influences rather than one "poetic genius" Self developed over time like the Wordsworth of *The Prelude*.⁶⁹ While scholars disagree on its overall success, there is a general consensus that this multi-self approach to authorial presentation was an attempt at divorcing Robinson from her past as an actress and deserted mistress in order to assert a more professional identity as the "English Sappho," a celebrated novelist and poet.⁷⁰ In the case of *Walsingham*, Robinson advertised a narrative derived from experience, penned by a figure that the public had grown accustomed to consuming through multiple, performed identities. As such, she advertised a form of literary intimacy which she had perfected throughout her poetic career in direct addresses, apostrophes, calculated descriptions, and omissions.⁷¹ Her audience felt as if they knew her person having read her works and watched her body circulated on the stage, in scathing printed satirical cartoons, and even between notable men.

⁶⁷ Judith Pascoe. "Mary Robinson and the Literary Marketplace." P. 263

⁶⁸ Pascoe. "Mary Robinson and the Literary Marketplace." P. 260

⁶⁹ Pascoe. "Mary Robinson and the Literary Marketplace." P. 264

⁷⁰ Fulford's "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," Byrne's *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson*, Fairclough Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740–1840, Bonds' "The Power of the Puff"

⁷¹ Ashley Cross. *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism : Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784–1821*. P. 8

In this chapter, I intend to further engage with contemporary scholars' discussions of Robinson's methods of self-representation and gender performativity as I examine the ways in which the medical and literary languages of electricity, imagination, madness, and sensibility that Dr. Pimpernel manipulates collapse upon the commodified female body. This body is circulated through the patriarchal system which, as Luce Irigaray has argued in *This Sex Which is Not One*, is based upon the objectified exchange of women.⁷² Perhaps Robinson acts as what Julia Fawcett has termed more of a "not-not self" as she enters into the text through an autobiographical persona only to then become absent again once she takes on another self – one which then examines discursive agency and the limits of the language of sensibility, electrical experimentation, and erotic display.⁷³ The "demi-mondaine" public Robinson of the Graham era disappears into the text the more the satire of Graham becomes fictionalized, and a Robinson which Elizabeth Fay has called the more "vocally assertive" public face emerges.⁷⁴ She creates a literary representation of Graham which acts as a study of language, one which examines the systemic consumption, confinement, and destruction of women within a patriarchal system of voyeurism and excessive display. Through the character of Amelia, exchanged quite literally to death in the systems which Pimpernel perpetuates, Robinson explores the centrality of the female body within the language of experimental electrical sciences and medicine, revealing how the implications of the highly gendered language collapse upon women's bodies. Although Robinson presents some female characters who are able to hold power over Walsingham as he attempts to spy, infiltrate, and penetrate to gain financial, social, and ultimately patriarchal control over his

⁷² Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex which is Not One*, p. 171

⁷³ Julia H. Fawcett. "The Memoirs of Perdita and the Language of Loss: Mary Robinson's Alternative to Overexpression." P. 226

⁷⁴ Fay, Elizabeth. "Mary Robinson: On Trial in the Public Court" p. 405

family, this power is only possible through cross dressing and disguising one's sex. The women to whom Doctor Pimpernel has immediate access do not fare quite so well as Sidney Aubrey; they are pathologized as mad while simultaneously objectified as the cure to male maladies of love madness and poverty.

“Some quack-doctor, famous in his day”: Mary Robinson and Doctor James Graham

Dr. James Graham was not a fringe character in London whose cabinet of curiosities Mary Robinson had the misfortune to wander into one day. Rather, he was a well-known figure immortalized in many satirical sketches which mock the doctor and many of the social elite with whom he surrounded himself. He even occupies a line of Wordsworth's *Prelude* in chapter 7 where the poet notes that he is “some quack-doctor, famous in his day.”⁷⁵ His appeal stemmed from the theatrics of his practice and his focus on the imagination and fantasy, most specifically one's uninhibited sexual fantasies. Much like in the practice of Anton Mesmer and the reports of the Royal Commission which sought to discredit him, the imagination played a central role in the theatrical displays of electricity, sexual difference, and the spectacle of the female body in James Graham's electro-magnetic sex therapy. However, in Graham's work, the imagination and electricity are co-operators within a single cure as well as a potential effeminized cause of the blockage or illness.⁷⁶ As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, this emphasis upon imagination as both a potential illness and cure is central to Robinson's representation of madness, hysteria, and the confinement of the pathologized woman. For now, however, the imagination is central to Graham's creation of an exotic “cabinet of curiosity.” Like Lady Aubrey's cabinet which

⁷⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (VII, 183)

⁷⁶ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p 85

Walsingham constantly surveys and attempts to infiltrate, Graham's "Temple of Health and Hymen" was a cabinet of intrigue which appealed to the voyeuristic male gaze. Graham drew spectators with the allure of scantily clad young girls, "celestial music," exotic spices, and a leyden jar fashioned to look like a dragon.⁷⁷ He invited his visitors to peep and ogle as much, or perhaps more, than he invited patients to perform being cured.⁷⁸ Drawn into the public fascination with the exhibition of electrical experimentation and the excesses of exoticism, display, and sexual promiscuity which Graham peddled, Robinson attended the lectures and demonstrations held within this temple. According to Marjean Purinton, Graham claims to have performed electro-magnetic therapy on Robinson, Robert Southey, Katherine Macaulay, "and if Graham himself is to be believed, George III, the Queen of Portugal, and Catherine the Great."⁷⁹ Just like his living inspiration, Dr. Pimpnel is a sycophantic performer, capitalizing on his position as a doctor to gain entrance into aristocratic circles. When treating Walsingham's fever during their initial encounter, he forgets to offer an official diagnosis or treatment. As he rushes about the apartment, he splits his time between preying on the young Amelia Woodford, the homeowner's daughter, and bragging about his appointments: "Cannot stay – must be at Highgate by nine, on a consultation. Overwhelmed with practice; dine every day with the first men in the kingdom; - walk arm in arm with nothing but nobles" (1:263). Just as he peddles women's bodies, able to calculate their overall worth "from fourteen to five and thirty: all beyond that age should die," Pimpnel offers calculated, yet empty flattery as he repeats the same praises and flatteries to every Duke and Lord he meets (1:263, 2:201). Although he doesn't

⁷⁷ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. P. 89-90

⁷⁸ Marjean D. Purinton. "George Colman's "the Iron Chest" and "Blue-Beard" and the Pseudoscience of Curiosity Cabinets." P. 251

⁷⁹ Purinton. "George Colman's "the Iron Chest" and "Blue-Beard" and the Pseudoscience of Curiosity Cabinets." P. 251

perform his treatments in a large theater filled with opulent décor, he makes up for his lack of showmanship by never actually treating the ailing Walsingham when he first attends to him in the Woodford's home, making the connection between the useless practices of the pompous Pimpernel and the quack sex therapist strikingly clear.

Graham's bragging that he treated Mary Robinson demonstrates that her name had garnered a great deal of public interest by the time she entered the theater and even more by the 1790s when her notoriety had made her the center of several satirical attacks. Although Robinson first began her career as a poet in order to earn money while in debtor's prison with her husband, her notoriety upon the stage and her prominent amorous entanglements brought her into the public eye as the demi-mondaine, the actress, and then the writer. Her celebrity was founded, in large part, upon her infamous and conspicuous dalliance with the Prince of Wales. This affair was kindled when Robinson first enamored the Prince with her performance as Perdita in David Garrick's adaptation of *Winter's Tale* in 1779, after which he sent a love note backstage from "Florizel" to "Perdita."⁸⁰ It was with the Prince of Wales that Robinson first went to Graham's performance. Undoubtedly the center of his practice, Dr. Graham's "Celestial Bed" was said to be the only one of its kind in the world and the very reason he was able to attract such illustrious guests.⁸¹ The electrified bed itself was decorated in the same exoticized style as the rest of his temple - draped with a "mirrored canopy," surrounded by spices, and music, all designed to feature the circular ring of magnets which would "attract" a couple and encourage conception.⁸²

⁸⁰Fawcett. "The Memoirs of Perdita and the Language of Loss: Mary Robinson's Alternative to Overexpression." P. 174

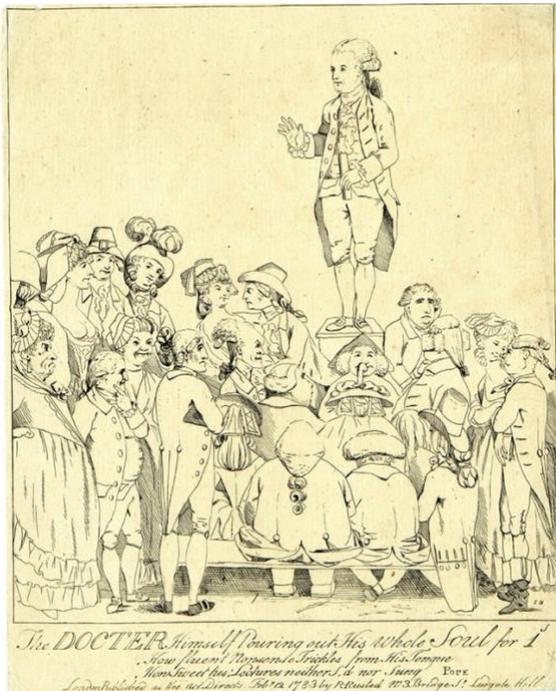
⁸¹ Fulford, "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," p. 25

⁸²Fulford, "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," p. 25

In 1791, the satirical author of the pamphlet, *The Celestial Beds* insinuated that Robinson brought the Prince of Wales to Graham so that she could make use of this electrical contraption:

And shall she not, his joy and pride,
Be for a pledge electrify'd?
Yes, Graham shall exert his art,
And give a bantling to her heart!
The Muses' darling it shall be,
The flow'r of royal progeny.⁸³

Robinson was later seen attending one of Graham's lectures after the Prince of Wales had left her and she had taken on a new lover, Charles Fox. The two are pictured below in a satirical cartoon from 1781 by John Boyne entitled "The doctor himself pouring out his whole soul for 1s."



Copyright: British Museum, 1781 "The doctor himself pouring out his whole soul for 1s." by John Boyne

⁸³ Fulford, "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," p. 26

In all of Graham's lectures, experiments, and therapies, like those of Mesmer, highly sexualized and gendered language placed a heavy emphasis on the female body. Surrounded by young and attractive women who served as his assistants and patients, the lines between sexual desire, availability, and empirical scientific or medicinal treatments blurred into theatrical experiments and therapies. Robinson registers the heavily sexualized language of these practices, and the surrounding cultural hyper-sexualization, through Dr. Pimpernel's rant about his book on Barley water: "the fountain 'cannot flow clear while the source is muddy.'... Virtue will electrify – it will awaken the torpedo – it will take its proper sphere – it will mount like phlogisticated air – it will prove the inevitable and tremendous *placularis* of the great catalogue of disasters which have too long disgraced the wide theater of the universe!" (1:321). Here, the doctor quickly passes through all the key features of electrical quackery as he emphasizes a sexually charged clearing of the blockages in the body through treatments, which "awaken the torpedo" and "mount" the nitrogen dense air. His bombastic language all the while reaffirms the inherent theatricality of the process. By the late 1770s, right before Graham's Temple was opened, the recently discovered electric eel and torpedo fish became the subject of several poems as poets drew a connection between their ability to discharge electricity and an electric connection between male and female genitalia.⁸⁴ A stanza from the 1777 poem "The Torpedo" below exemplifies the hyper-sexualization of the electrific language which Pimpernel employs as it was metaphorically analogized to sexual attraction in both literary and scientific texts:

Full well I know his polish'd crest

⁸⁴ In *Sparks in the Dark*, Paola Bertucci argues that the discovery of animal electricity, such as the torpedo, provided new inspiration for sexually charged literature. Some authors suggested the electric eel could be used for sexual torture, or impotency treatments, while others suspected that the leyden jar couldn't work on castrated men. P. 92

His tempting form, his speckled vest,
Can female flames provoke:
When warm'd by their creative hands,
Sudden his length erected stands,
And gives the electric stroke.⁸⁵

Distinguishing between a female flame and this electric stroke “he” gives, James Perry and other poets and authors from the 1770’s-1790’s adopted the language of electricity in order to depict scenes with an erotic charge based upon sexual difference and a magnetic sexual attraction.⁸⁶ The poem, *The Semi-Globes*, written in 1777 further exemplifies this sexual electric genre as it “celebrates the electric attraction of women’s breasts.”⁸⁷ It is this tradition that Pimpernel seems to articulate here as he sarcastically proclaims that “virtue will electrify” as he then alludes to the most heavily sexualized words in both the medical and literary languages of electricity.

The metaphorical connections between theatricality, electricity, and sexual desire thus make both Graham and his fictionalized form targets of attack. Graham was criticized both by the public and the increasingly professionalized and “respectable” practitioners who sought to legitimize their profession much like those of the Royal Commission.⁸⁸ As a celebrity already well known for her theatrical career and sexual liaisons herself, Robinson’s association with a quack electrical practice which dealt in sex, particularly the theatrical, promiscuous display of the female body, certainly drew her into the fire as well. Linked to these demonstrations centered around sex, virility, and the commodification of women’s body’s, it seems likely that one of Robinson’s motives in creating the figure of Dr. Pimpernel is to distance herself from a

⁸⁵ James Perry. *The Torpedo: A Poem to the Electrical Eel, Addressed to Mr. John Hunter, Surgeon, and Dedicated to the Right Honourable Lord Cholmondely*. London: 1777.p. 11

⁸⁶ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p. 18

⁸⁷ Fulford, "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," p. 91

⁸⁸ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p. 86

phenomenon which so clearly appears to define her persona as the highly sexualized mistress and actress rather than the serious author. Beyond this, however, Robinson's depiction demonstrates a careful consideration of the sexually, socially, and politically charged connotations the language of electricity and electrical medicine had begun to carry by the 1790s. In the figure of Dr. Pimpernel, she explores the way the gendered language of electricity and both its metaphorical and experimental focus on sex and sexual difference had significant implications for the women commodified and exchanged within the market of women.

Prescribing the Female Body as a Cure for Male Maladies

Although it is unclear if Dr. Pimpernel actually helps to cure anyone over the course of four volumes, it is abundantly evident that his prescriptions of the female body to assuage the sufferings of his male patients significantly contribute to the destruction and even death of women in *Walsingham*. Offering the consumption of the female body as a cure for his love sickness, Dr. Pimpernel's language literalizes the commodification of women through their use as objects of exchange between men. Tim Fulford, Mary Fairclough, and other scholars who have studied Robinson's satirical depiction of Graham have focused their study on his introductory scene as it is here that many examples of the connections between the objectifying Graham and his fictitious "reptile" are most salient. Here, Mrs. Woodford brings Pimpernel into her home to treat Walsingham, her lodger, after he has suffered from the feverish "agonies of reflection" which had him speaking "the wildest language of a confirmed maniac" (1:260). Diagnosing the patient as "mad! Mad, by G-d!" after staring at him with "oppressive inquisitiveness," Pimpernel prescribes sexual gratification, begging the young and attractive Miss Woodford to offer her body as a cure (1:260). Previous scholarship has correctly read this scene as one which casts Pimpernel in an incredibly distasteful light. He is distracted, continues

to prey on Amelia throughout the visit, constantly expresses his wish that old women would die, forgets to write a prescription, and even misremembers Walsingham's symptoms. Yet, beyond the sexual obsession and ineptitude which comprises his biographical caricature and allows Robinson to distance herself from Graham, Pimpernel also thoroughly engages with the medical language of madness and Graham's sexual therapy.

Robinson uses Pimpernel to illuminate the ways in which the gendered constructions of madness commodifies the female body and relegates it to the status of a consumable cure for male love madness which can be exchanged as an object between doctor and patient in a patriarchal market. Before exploring Doctor Pimpernel's corporeal prescriptions, his "mind-mill," or his role in hymeneal exchanges, it is first necessary to establish the ways in which Robinson engages with the medical and literary conventions of sensibility and madness throughout *Walsingham* in order to determine the nature of her social critique. Doctor Pimpernel and Walsingham adopt the ambivalent and gendered discourse of sensibility, madness, and its electromagnetic applications in order to abuse Amelia. Pimpernel diagnoses Walsingham mad in order to prescribe the female body as a gratifying cure for his nervous maladies, a prescription Walsingham takes by force because Amelia is presented as an exchangeable object rather than a subjective human being.

James Graham studied medicine at Edinburgh University under some of the most notable medical writers on nervous disorders such as hysteria, hypochondria, and the general melancholy. Although he claims differently, he never took a degree.⁸⁹ While he never graduated, Graham did learn under two physicians, Robert Whytt and William Cullen, whom critics

⁸⁹ Peter Otto *The Regeneration of the Body: Sex, Religion and the Sublime in James Graham's Temple of Health and Hymen* footnote 9

consider to be “two founding figures in British neurology.” They conceptualized these “hysterical maladies” as a “sensibility and delicacy” of the nervous connections in the body rather than the “imbalance of the bodily humors.”⁹⁰ The nervous affliction, while no longer necessarily focused on the idea of a physical “wandering womb” which caused hysteria in women, still largely effeminized the malady as it emphasized women’s particular proclivity to sensibility or an excess of passion. Whytt writes in his studies that a woman’s “nervous system is generally more moveable than in men,” causing an excess of sensibility to result in hysteric fits which can manifest themselves in any number of ways including fainting, convulsing, and general frailty.⁹¹ Cullen too specifically cites the ovaries as being particularly affected by hysteria and suggests the disorder may be caused by the “turgescence of blood in the genital system.”⁹² Largely consistent within this medical literature, too, is the contagion of female madness and hysteria as discussed in chapter 1. Recall that Whytt specifically refers to this phenomenon when he recounts that “It has frequently happened, in the Royal Infirmary here, that women have been seized with hysteric fits from seeing others attacked with them.”⁹³ Educated within this tradition, Doctor Graham, and his literary representation, adopt this effeminized language of hysteria as one highly gendered and specifically associated with female reproduction. This language, too, arises in the language of sensibility within literature as this

⁹⁰ Logan, Peter Melville. *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in 19th-Century British Prose*. P. 17-18

⁹¹ John Mullan. "Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and the Physicians." P. 153

⁹² Veith, Ilza. *Hysteria: The History of a Disease*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965. P. 173

⁹³ Mullan, "Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and the Physicians." P. 153, Robert Whytt, *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cures of those Disorders which have been commonly called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysteria* (Edinburgh, 1765) p. 215

prognosis of excessive passion and an indulgence in one's feelings becomes visible in the eighteenth-century novels of sensibility.

Robinson introduces several characters of feeling into her novel, offering both male and female victims of sensibility who she then uses to examine the ways in which the patriarchal systems of commodifying exchange and the harmful, objectifying language of Doctor Pimpernel converge upon the female body. Rather than narrating this novel from the perspective of one of these victimized women, Robinson's protagonist in *Walsingham*, is a man of feeling, a "hero from nature" whom the Duchess of Riversford looks upon as she explains that she would rather encounter "a Werter or a St. Preux" than "a Lord Wou'd-be-good or a Count Never-Wrong" in her literature (2:81-82). Associated with Rousseau's Julie and her tutor and tragic lover, St. Preux, Walsingham is characterized as a suffering victim of sensibility, caught in a depraved and unjust world in which he is "the child of sorrow, the victim of deception" (1:4). Throughout his correspondence, Walsingham consistently turns to a narration of his nervous body and madness which he attributes to his surrounding misfortune: "Perpetual warfare between the passions of the soul and the energies of reason has debilitated the latter, while the former grow into vigour, and riot over the subservient senses with unabating power" (1:3). Embedding the medical and literary language of madness and sensibility into the narrative, Robinson creates a study through which to explicate the vastly different ways her man of feeling protagonist and her female victims of sensibility experience the societal repercussions of the condition with which Doctor Pimpernel diagnoses them.

Robinson introduces female victims of sensibility, like Amelia Woodford, into the novel to further elucidate the gendered oppressions women face as the central bodies within the languages of medicine, madness, and their electromagnetic applications. In narrating their ruin

through Walsingham, Robinson embeds the pervasive systems of voyeurism, suffering, and male complicity, which maintain the systemic commodified exchange of women's bodies, within the very language of sensibility itself. Robinson surrounds the sentimental Walsingham with women by whom he feels assailed and threatened as he constantly feels compelled to enter into their private boudoirs, cabinets, conversations, and even bodies in order to seek out the truth and assert his power. In *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*, Helen Small examines the shared linguistic convention between the medical and literary languages of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which expressed an overly conventional tale of a woman driven mad by her lover's desertion or death. She argues the figure of the young, beautiful, either incorruptibly pure or hypersexualized woman deserted by her lover comes into fashion in the late seventeenth century.⁹⁴ Before this moment, however, love-madness was a masculine affliction most sufficiently satisfied through sexual gratification.⁹⁵ In many ways, Walsingham is established as this love-mad victim of sensibility; he constantly draws the attention of his correspondent, Rosanna, and therefore, the reader, to his suffering and madness as a pupil of nature and victim of society.⁹⁶ It is his desire for sympathy which compels him to begin the narrative in the first place, relaying to Rosanna that he will answer her question of "why I court the gloom which feeds my sorrow, and cherish in my breath the anguish that will destroy me" (1:9-10). Walsingham constantly alludes to his own love-madness, born out of his affection for Isabella, his childhood love whom he feels he has been raised to wed. His affections are rejected out of what he assumes to be amorous affection for his cousin, Sidney Aubrey, rather

⁹⁴ Helen Small. *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*. P. 5-6

⁹⁵ Small. *Love's Madness*. P. 5-6 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas C. Faulkner et al., with intro. by J. B. Bamborough (Oxford, 1989-94), iii 197-9

⁹⁶ Logan, Peter Melville. *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in 19th-Century British Prose*. P. 29

than a platonic friendship and devotion. At this point, and for almost the entirety of the novel, Walsingham is unaware that Sidney is actually a woman disguised as a man so that she can escape the primogenital laws of her father's will. His fever at Mrs. Woodford's, and his subsequent mad actions, are all what he claims to be derived from his madness which is urged on by Amelia as she condemns him for being a maniac (2:166). This particular depiction of love madness fits all the characteristics of the "love melancholy" which would have been a popular literary trope before the late seventeenth century when, according to Small, the medical and literary language of love-madness became more likely to be depicted as a female malady.⁹⁷ Choosing to depict an older form of love madness with a now effeminized male victim of sensibility as the protagonist, Robinson creates a patient who acts as an agent of exchange rather than an object. He consumes Amelia, the cure, rather than becoming a cure himself. So, too, does this sentimental male protagonist demonstrate the ambivalence of the trope of sensibility as Walsingham adopts it here, and the effeminized discursive constructions with which it has come to be associated, in order to assert his own victimization.⁹⁸

As Pimpernel begins to examine Walsingham, he becomes increasingly distracted, forgetting that his patient complains of a fever entirely because he is too busy preying on the young, concerned Amelia Woodford. After quickly pronouncing him mad, Pimpernel asks for paper to write a prescription because he has "no time for anything but gazing on you, beautiful Amelia," before inquiring about her "noble cousin, Lord Kencarth," making it quite clear that his priorities are peeping at women and getting in with their noble relatives. (1:261). After several

⁹⁷Small. *Love's Madness*. P. 5

⁹⁸ "Because of the ambivalent status of sensibility, both privilege and ailment, refinement and excess, this trembling body appropriated by eighteenth century novelists, male and female, as the sign of the sentimental extravagance which may be either stubbornly virtuous or manifestly debilitating" Mullan 158-9

entreaties from both Mrs. Woodford and her daughter, Pimpernel finally offers his diagnosis of male love madness, combining the older ailment with a physiognomic approach in which he reads the love upon Walsingham's face "on the tip of his nose – in his right eye – on his forehead; - damme, on the very point of his chin" (1:261-262). The historic cure for this kind of madness, as described in early seventeenth century texts, was sexual gratification.⁹⁹ Pimpernel remains true to the doctrines of this nervous disorder as he begs Amelia to offer her body to cure him: "Well you must cure him, Amelia; the sublime essence of your odiferous breath will do the business. Nothing like the balsamic smile of a beautiful woman" (1:262). In Irigaray's chapter on "Women on the Market," in *This Sex Which is Not One*, she argues that men are not objects of exchange between women like women are objects of exchange between men specifically because women's bodies, "through their use, consumption, and circulation – provide for the condition making social life and culture possible."¹⁰⁰ As the "infrastructure" of social life, these bodies, like that of Amelia above, are peddled as a means of bringing a man back into the world of business so that he may conduct homosocial interactions with other men. Robinson illustrates that for Pimpernel as a figure of patriarchal control and commodification, woman is only valued in so much as she can "warm the blood and animate the nervous system." Given this system of use value, Pimpernel has no use for the old women he claims are "hysteric," "only fit to see physicians, and to propagate false politics" (1:261). If Robinson had not yet made it clear that women are prescriptions within the language of medicine, madness, and experimental science, her Graham figure boasts that he keeps "a list ready to fill up my prescriptions, all colours, all sizes, black, white, red, and yellow; French, English, Irish, and Italian, red drugs" (1:262). In her

⁹⁹ Small. *Love's Madness*. P. 5

¹⁰⁰ Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex which is Not One*, p. 171

Letter to the Women of England which remained anonymous at the time of its publication two years after *Walsingham*, Robinson makes clear her attack on this commodification and consumption of women's bodies through a patriarchal market of exchange. She argues that "The laws are made by man; and self-preservation is, *by them*, deemed the primary law of nature. Hence, woman is destined to be the passive creature; she is to yield obedience" (78). More than just rescuing her own reputation from its association with the late Graham, Robinson calls attention to the ways in which the oppression of women is not only tolerated, but embedded within the language and practices of medicine and literature. Although Graham is a quack, she does not attack the science of electricity itself, only the way his character uses his position to prey upon women and exchange them as prescriptions for male maladies in a market of commodities packaged for men.

It is not only to *Walsingham* that *Pimpernel* prescribes the commodified body of a woman as a cure. In the case of nobility, he even helps to procure their sexual gratification. After accompanying Amelia to a masquerade and abandoning her in the search for Isabella, *Walsingham* soon discovers that Amelia has left the ball and her chairman has been knocked down by the pole of a chariot, causing her to faint. Having been whisked away unconscious in a carriage, *Walsingham* soon finds Amelia in a mansion "in the most extreme agitation, attended by his Grace of Heartwing and Doctor *Pimpernel*" (1: 332). Rather than helping her to recover, however, Amelia tells *Walsingham* how grossly she had been insulted by *Pimpernel* and the Duke who, we can assume, intended to take advantage of her unconscious state. Although Mrs. Woodford claims she "never would have believed, that a man so idolized by the women as the doctor, would enter into a plot for the destruction of innocence," *Pimpernel*'s intention is clear (1:332). He aimed to procure and administer the body of Amelia to the Duke in order to gain

noble favor, keeping the promises made in his earlier boast of maintaining a list of women ready to gratify his patients. Within this specific instance, Walsingham appears to be the hero who saves Amelia from ruin as he whisks her away from the plotting doctor and love-mad Duke in need of gratification, however, it is he who ends up taking the doctor's prescription of Amelia's body.

Walsingham and Dr. Pimpnel Perform the Exchange of Women

Although Walsingham and Dr. Pimpnel are by no means friends throughout the novel, Robinson aligns them as collaborators in the exchange of women on the patriarchal market as Walsingham ultimately takes the doctor's suggested treatment when he rapes Amelia. On the violated, abandoned, confined, and ultimately dead body of Amelia, Robinson heaps the consequences of the gendered medical language of electricity as Dr. Pimpnel and Walsingham participate in the exchange and consumption of women's bodies as objects. Dr. Graham catered to his male clients' voyeurism by creating an erotic spectacle and employing assistants as young as the fifteen-year-old Emma Lyon to dress as Vestina, the Goddess of Health, as she handed out pamphlets about his lectures and assisted in his performances.¹⁰¹ So, too, does the fictionalized Pimpnel commodify and peddle the young bodies of the women he encounters. Although he advises Walsingham that he needs to hurry and marry Amelia because at eighteen she is "three years too old," (making Emma Lyon's age ideal), he also warns against marriage, "Never while you live, think of that enemy to universal liberty – that d-d despot Hymen!" (1:269, 2:25). His contradictory advice all centers around the expiration of the value of the commodified female body – in marriage one becomes trapped to what Pimpnel views as an object which loses all

¹⁰¹ Purinton. "George Colman's "the Iron Chest" and "Blue-Beard" and the Pseudoscience of Curiosity Cabinets." P. 251

value after the age of thirty-five. Pimpernel's prescription to Walsingham and his entreaties to Amelia for a bodily cure, then, can be assumed to lay outside the marriage bed, a practice Graham endorsed by treating Robinson and her lovers as well as various other unmarried clients and young women.

In his narration of oppression, Walsingham traces his madness and misery back to his rivalry with his assumed male cousin, Sidney Aubrey, whom he thinks has seduced his beloved Isabella. In an effort to achieve "retaliation for the capricious Isabella's conduct, and Sir Sidney's barbarous exultations," he rapes Amelia, having mistaken her for Isabella at another masquerade (2:18). Although Amelia clearly had affections for Walsingham, Walsingham notes that his feelings for Amelia simply arose from her resemblance to Isabella: "I could have passed all my hours in contemplating the one, merely because she resembled the other" (1:323). In "Female Homosociality and the Exchange of Men: Mary Robinson's Walsingham," Katherine Binhammer examines women's homosocial bonds within the novel. Her observations about male homosocial relations within the market, however, are particularly pertinent within the context of the rape. She argues that the "desire for women is mediated through desire for men since, while women, themselves, are interchangeable, their relation to a male subject of exchange is not."¹⁰² Walsingham's feelings for Isabella, then, are simply a displacement of those he feels towards Sidney and those he feels towards Amelia are simply a displacement of those he feels towards Isabella and therefore, Sidney. The rape, then, is a homosocial interaction within the patriarchal market.

¹⁰²Katherine Binhammer. "Female Homosociality and the Exchange of Men: Mary Robinson's Walsingham." P. 232

In fulfilling men's physical needs, women act as interchangeable objects where one can stand in for the other due to their status as commodities rather than people. The reason why Walsingham becomes so upset by the rape could partially stem from his concern for the reputation of the virtuous Amelia. Yet as Walsingham admits that the rape was an act of violence against his enemy at a time when Isabella was assumed to be his lover, I argue that the commodified object (Amelia) did not have the required relation to the man with whom Walsingham wished to engage in the market. The consumption of the object, therefore, did not have the desired effect and Walsingham regrets his actions because he is unable to connect to Sidney through the enacted exchange. In ultimately taking Dr. Pimperl's advice to use the body of Amelia to cure his love madness, Walsingham's actions further support Robinson's assertion that the consumption and commodification of women's bodies is accepted and perpetuated within the manipulated language of electrical medicine. Using rape as a tool of oppression within the patriarchal market, Walsingham forcefully participates in the exchange of women supported by Pimperl. He consumes Amelia's body as an object to cure his madness and as a way of socializing with the male Sidney Aubrey. As such, Robinson illustrates the ways in which the gendered constructions of electricity, particularly that which allowed Graham to assert an essential connection between electromagnetic healing, sexual difference, and sex itself, converge in the language of madness to circulate women's bodies as commodified and hypersexualized capital.

Dr. Pimperl's manipulation of his position as a physician allows him and other men he engages with in the market to use the language of science and medicine to commodify and exchange women's bodies, with the act of commodification further embedding a hypocritical double standard for reputation, ruin, and blame. Considering the female body a cure to be

consumed, Pimpernel's language rearticulates the language of virginity and chastity into an almost vampiric exchange in which the woman's body is drained of all value once "prescribed" to a man. Within Irigaray's conception of women on the market, the virgin is "pure exchange value" because she presents nothing but the possibility of relations between men - a "simple envelope" which hides the homosocial exchange.¹⁰³ Having lost her value within this exchange without taking the commodified role of wife and mother, Amelia has been removed from the market without having the protection of a man. As a woman, however, she cannot defend her own reputation; one which Walsingham equally blames her for acquiring. Calling Amelia a "voluntary sacrifice" and arguing that they were "equally culpable" in her ruin, Walsingham maintains that Amelia's "curiosity" and "susceptibility" were a crime for which rape was a worthy punishment (2:19-26). In *A Letter to the Women of England*, Robinson focuses much of her criticism on the fact "that woman is denied the first privilege of nature, the power of self-defense" (73). Calling woman the "defenseless sex," she explains that she "is exposed by her personal attractions, to more perils, and yet she is not permitted to bear that shield, which man assumes; she is not allowed the exercise of *courage* to repulse the enemies of her fame and happiness; though, if she is wounded, -- she is *lost for ever!*" (6-7). The crime with which Walsingham charges Amelia is one which he has committed innumerable times throughout the novel, yet he is allowed to defend himself, escape, and return to his narrative unscathed.

As Amelia is raped to cure Walsingham's prescribed love madness, and then blamed for her role in her ruin through espionage, Robinson further articulates a language of hypocrisy which is embedded into the scientific, medical, and ultimately systemic consumption of women's bodies. Dressing "in a black gauze robe spangled with silver" like that she knew Isabella would

¹⁰³ Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex which is Not One*, p. 186

be wearing to the masquerade, Amelia attempts to disguise herself as the woman Walsingham loves in order to learn of his true intentions and desires (2:16). In this act of secrecy and spying, Amelia resembles Walsingham as he spends much of the novel peeping into women's cabinets, listening to conversations, bursting into locked rooms, and forcefully penetrating spaces of intimacy in which he has not been invited. Bearing the name of Queen Elizabeth's spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham, this spying is a crucial part of the tortured protagonist's characterization.¹⁰⁴ Yet as an active, penetrating role, it is one which is considered the role of a man and for her spying, Amelia is punished. Robinson illuminates the blatant double standard in the language of the market through Amelia's body, first offered as a cure for love madness, and now drained of its market value as punishment for her attempts to step beyond the boundaries of her sex's sensibility.

Amelia does not allow herself to accept Walsingham's attempt to shirk responsibility and abandon her, nor does she wholly take on the characterization of a fallen woman. Yet, even in her attempts to maintain her dignity, Amelia's body remains commodified, consumed, and confined within the literary and medical language of electrical science, medicine, and madness which Pimpernel upholds. She is a victim of commodification as she is pathologized under his care, locked within his asylum, and ultimately killed by the gendered language of medicine which seeks to exchange her body within a patriarchal market and drain her of her value as she is passed between men.

The Confinement of the Commodified, Love-mad Woman

¹⁰⁴ Cross. *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism : Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784–1821*. P. 112

The scene of Doctor Pimpernel's initial interview with Walsingham is most often cited as the quintessence of Robinson's satirical representation of Dr. Graham, as it so vividly depicts the language of a culture obsessed with the commodification of women's bodies. However, Robinson makes a significant revision in Graham's biography as she invites an interrogation of the ways the language of consumption and erotic display disproportionately pathologize, confine, and oppress female bodies within the conventions of medicine and literature. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the real Dr. Graham suffered from nervous disorders which necessitated that he be confined within his home.¹⁰⁵ Incurring debts and financial distress through the operation of his temple, Graham was forced to move the theater to Pall Mall (where Walsingham lives at one point in the novel) until his property was seized, then he presented lectures and demonstrations in his room, and in public before his confinement and death.¹⁰⁶ While Graham was potentially mad in reality, Robinson chooses instead to install the fictional Pimpernel as the "principal proprietor" of a "private mad-house" (2:121). As Small argues, novels of sensibility, particularly Makenzie's *The Man of Feeling* which paved the way for the man of sensibility protagonist, "transformed the asylum from a grotesque Augustan theatre of irrationality into an arena for sentimentalism."¹⁰⁷ This arena is one which Robinson adopts as she launches into an ideological critique of the ways in which sentimentalism and medicine treated women's bodies as objects to be peddled and confined for the convenience of men. This deliberate inversion of Graham's history demands examination as Pimpernel remains a lingering character in the novel, notorious for his consumption, commodification, and now confinement of women's bodies.

¹⁰⁵ Byrne. *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson*. P. 227

¹⁰⁶ Porter, Roy. *Graham, James (1745–1794)*, Quack Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁷ Small. *Love's Madness*. P. 9

Although Walsingham rapes her and damns her to ruin, Amelia initially rejects to wholly allow herself to submit to the social strictures which mark her as fallen. Despite his remonstrations that they were both equally culpable in the act and his pleas for her to return to her mother, Amelia seeks to remain by Walsingham's side as she refuses to become an abandoned, love-mad woman depicted within the conventions of medical and literary language. She unknowingly offers to enact the same plan currently being undertaken by Sidney Aubrey when she declares that she will "bear the fatigues of a soldier's wandering life: I can even disguise my sex, to be the partaker of your peril" (2:29). When such a plan is rejected by the miserable Walsingham, she becomes defiant, refusing to "sue for consolation," she demands "respects, esteem, and gratitude, as the wife of Colonel Aubrey!" (2:30). Ashley Cross notes the particularly Wollstonecraftian resonance in this insistence upon respect and esteem rather than the "childish, empty adoration" Walsingham offers Amelia as he declines to marry her and instead presents her as his invalid sister at his lodgings (2:30).¹⁰⁸ Amelia's resolution to appeal to Colonel Aubrey's generosity and marry him despite her ruin prevents her from wholly succumbing to the patriarchal constructions of a fallen woman. However, it does reinstitute her market value and return her to commodification where her body is quite literally conveyed by the several men to market.

After Amelia's ruin and rejection by Walsingham, Robinson adopts the medical and literary language of madness and sensibility to describe her body as it is conveyed and confined by various men throughout the novel. As I have demonstrated, the language of hysteria and the contagious female bodies underpins many of the gendered constructions of imagined theatric

¹⁰⁸ Cross. *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism : Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784–1821*. P. 121

healing within electromagnetic practices. Here, Robinson adopts the language of madness and the figure of an electromagnetic quack as she defines Pimpernel's commercial confinement as one which profits off the commodification of the weak, mad, and abused female body, much like Dr. Graham and other electromagnetic doctors. Of course, the first to confine Amelia is Walsingham, Pimpernel's complicit male agent who participates in his exchanges of flesh. After seeing "her pale countenance, her languid eyes, and her dejected looks," he presents her as his invalid sister because "her dejected looks fully authorized the description" (2:21). There he confines her in his residence until he is able to abandon her. It is later Walsingham again who penetrates her space as he peeps into her bed at the inn as Amelia is on her way to be married to Colonel Aubrey. Extremely ill and bedridden, her body is conveyed to the marriage market by her cousin, Lord Kencarth. Confined once again, "pale and entirely senseless" as she is exchanged between men, Amelia's body is one of disease; weakened and manipulated she is carried into the final confinement of a magnanimous marriage which will save her reputation (2:115). It is at Walsingham's discovery of Amelia's wretched state that the full extent of her abuse is revealed when Lord Kencarth relays her experiences in Pimpernel's "mind mill." Here, after having suffered from delirium upon briefly returning to Mrs. Woodford's home, her mother followed the doctor's advice and removed her to his private mad-house.

Profiting off men's desires to confine inconvenient women, Pimpernel commodifies sexual desire and the hypocritical, patriarchal codes of ruin and reputation which mark women as "value-less" once they lose their potential as envelopes for the procreation of future heirs and future male homosocial relations.¹⁰⁹ Pimpernel's "mind-mill" operates off the "experimental knowledge" he developed throughout his travels as he tried his hand at all professions,

¹⁰⁹ Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex which is Not One*, p. 175

concluding that “two-thirds of the breathing race were mad” (2:121). This conclusion echoes a popular mid-eighteenth-century sentiment within the medical literature on nervous disorders. George Cheyne, physician to Samuel Richardson and Alexander Pope, argues in his popular text *The English Malady* that two-thirds of English aristocrats suffered from hysteria, melancholia, or other nervous maladies.¹¹⁰ Armed with this conclusion, Pimpernel ensures that he can “possess” the patient’s mind within his mind-mill “where he ground the shattered particles of intellect to his own purpose; and when the produce of his labour promised either reputation or profit, he never failed to promote the one, or to embrace the other” (2:121). In this act of possession, Pimpernel controls both the mind and the body of his patient, much like Dr. Graham whose electromagnetic cures he suggested might be entirely affected by stimulating the patient’s imagination rather than moving any spirits or blockages in the body.¹¹¹ Within his opulent Temple, Graham insisted upon a symbiotic relation between the imagination, excited by the immense theatricality and erotic corporeality of his demonstrations, and the “electric and aethereal principles” which charged his celestial bed, magnetized wands, and other therapeutic instruments.¹¹² Curing the body through an exercise of the fantastic elements of the mind, Graham promotes what Marjean Purinton calls a “circular” dynamic - the very curiosity which draws his clients into the Temple is one which breeds madness in a society which promotes the primacy of reason over the unbridled passions.¹¹³ In exercising the imagination to cure this madness, Graham thus embraces the very charge which the Royal Commission summoned to

¹¹⁰ Logan, Peter Melville. *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in 19th-Century British Prose* p. 18

¹¹¹ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p. 94

¹¹² Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p. 90-95

¹¹³ Purinton. "George Colman's "the Iron Chest" and "Blue-Beard" and the Pseudoscience of Curiosity Cabinets." P. 254

discredit Mesmer, making it both the cause and the cure of his madness. Grinding the intellect to his own purposes, Pimpernel enacts what appears to be a more sinister version of Graham's cures within his mad-house, one which grants him whole possession of his female charges.

Pimpernel's commercial asylum confines women and further commodifies their bodies by profiting off men's desires to hide away unwanted objects of exchange that have lost their market value as he markets his mad-house solely to men with women to discard. In describing the business, Walsingham relates only the potential benefits to men of storing women in Pimpernel's mind-mill:

A husband who wanted to have a troublesome wife taken care of – a libertine who wished to provide for a mistress, when the edge of passion became blunted by satiety - or a man of refined taste, who sought to secure unguarded innocence, found infinite advantages in the subduing atmosphere of the all-potent mind-mill (2:121).

It is clear that Pimpernel is only interested in confining and commodifying the mad female body. Using his position as physician to diagnose his male patients as love-mad, Pimpernel creates a Grahamian circular system in which he prescribes sexual gratification as a cure for his nervous patients and then provides a convenient location for the disposal of the female victims who serve as the now ruined and devalued corporeal medication. In order to profit off their confinement, Pimpernel pathologizes the ruined and abandoned woman, diagnosing her as mad in order to possess and manipulate her mind into submission within his mind-mill. Amelia, and the other abandoned mistresses, troublesome wives, or unguarded innocents, are transformed into these victims of sensibility, the frail, delirious, "sorrow-stricken" women commodified and confined through Pimpernel's abuse of his title and position. Adopting both the medical language of nervous disorders and the literary language of love-madness and sensibility as applied within the

practices of electrical science, Robinson reveals how the gendered constructions of these disciplines disproportionately affect the female body as it is rigidly regulated within social and sexual codes of conduct.

Much like Inchbald's oppressive patriarchal figure of the inept doctor in *Animal Magnetism*, Pimpernel's practice of misogynistic quackery commodifies and confines his patients into the grave. Unable to enter into the church as he originally intended, Pimpernel instead "confined the specimens of his art to the sadly solemn precincts of the church-yard, where innumerable monuments will remain to the end of time, of his industry, skill, popularity, and experience" (2:122). Although Amelia escapes the asylum, she is discovered by Mr. Optic wandering around the fields and brought under the protection of Lord Kencarth to be conveyed to Colonel Aubrey for a speedy marriage. After leaving the inn, Kencarth successfully exchanges Amelia through marriage to the Colonel, removing her from the market and confining her in the more secure institution of marriage as a wife rather than the false sister of Walsingham, or a madwoman in an asylum, or an invalid under the protection of her cousin. Yet, here she remains for only fourteen days before Walsingham again becomes complicit in her ultimate confinement. Attending a wedding with his friend and benefactor, Mr. Randolph, Walsingham sees Amelia, "the pale specter of a departed angel," who then perceives him and immediately drops upon the marble steps before the altar in the church (2:221). Never again conscious, this "departed angel" whom Walsingham has "murdered" becomes the ultimate victim of Pimpernel's initial prescription for this man of feeling (2:223). Love-mad over his loss of Isabella to his assumed rival, Pimpernel begs Amelia to cure him, suggesting she provide gratification for his nervous disorder by giving him her body. As Walsingham ultimately takes this cure by force, Pimpernel, too, is complicit in Amelia's ruin and death as the language of medicine and sensibility collapse

upon her body. Upon the tragic body of Amelia, Robinson places many of the consequences of Doctor Pimpernel's abuses. Openly promoting the commodification, consumption, and confinement of women's bodies in order to turn a profit, the irredeemable reptilian figure of Doctor Pimpernel paints a ghastly picture of the true conditions of Graham's Temple. Beyond this characterization, however, Robinson's literary liberties demonstrate a greater reflection upon the linguistic systems that enabled Graham and Pimpernel to profit off the patriarchal constructions which reduce women's bodies to marketable objects to be exchanged upon this market. Robinson does not wholly adopt the conventions of sensibility in order to conduct this reflection, however. Through her character which carries the Roussevean namesake of Julie, Robinson explores another potentially biographical moment as she depicts one way women may gain financial independence as victims of this market model.

Electric Implications of Hymeneal Exchange and The Female Victims of Sensibility

In the hypocritical, sycophantic, yet self-important character of Dr. Pimpernel, Robinson creates a figure who remains visible throughout much of the story, peddling female victims of sensibility and commodification on the market as they are exchanged between men until they are either confined within matrimony or the grave. While the story of Julie de Beaumont, the lovesick woman to whom Dr. Pimpernel prescribes a hasty marriage, does not end as tragically as that of Amelia or even perhaps Judith Blagden, she still remains financially dependent upon men as the socio-economic strictures of the patriarchal system prevent her from achieving total independence. Robinson's Julie is a female sentimental character commodified and exchanged into marriage in order for the doctor's noble friend to win a bet. Within the parameters of this wager, Lord Kencarth and the Duke of Heartwing have ten days to get married; the winner receiving four thousand pounds after the proof of their nuptials (2:220). Doctor Pimpernel, as

one experienced in the conveyance, confinement, and consumption of women's bodies, inserts himself into the bet to offer "another thousand," "that his Grace wins your money" (2:201). This venture equates women with gambling earnings, the marriage market with a homosocial exchange between men as money changes hands once the deal is brokered, and women become the means to the ends of a better fortune. The exchange of women upon the market in order to pay off debts and secure financial stability is not foreign to the novel nor the institution itself as Isabella is later married to the bumbling, yet inoffensive, Kencarth after he is unable to pay his debts (2:310). Eleanor Ty characterizes both Julie de Beaumont and Judith Blagden as "Rousseauvean Julies who have given in to their desires" as "victims of sensibility."¹¹⁴ I focus here on the figure of Julie de Beaumont as she becomes a victim of Dr. Pimpernel. The doctor's involvement further explicates his exclusive dealings in the bodies of women rather than any legitimate medical practice, further solidifying Robinson's satirical portrayal of Dr. Graham as one notorious for exploiting female participants and intimating the "sexual availability" of his female performers.¹¹⁵ Robinson's examination of discursive agency and her critique of the market of women which condemns them as the weak and defenseless sex is further manifested within Julie's tale as her youth and beauty mark her as prey for the commodifying Pimpernel. Her body is converted into literal capital as Pimpernel exchanges her in order to negotiate status and stability for himself and his powerful associates. Once again exposing the quack doctor's exploitation of his position and the language of medicine, electrical experimentation, and conventions of sensibility, Robinson interrogates how the gendered constructions of these linguistic systems collapse upon the female body in a system which controls them.

¹¹⁴ Ty, Eleanor. *Empowering the Feminine; the Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie* p. 54

¹¹⁵ Fulford, "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson," p. 27

It is the doctor's manipulation of his position and his self-representation as both the prescriber and procurer of the female body as a cure to his aristocratic patients' bodily and social ills which drives many of the "exchanges" within the novel and leads to Julie's confinement and removal from the market. Although Pimpernel vocally protests against the "despot hymen," it is he who first introduces Julie to the Duke, most likely because he is aware of her desperate circumstances and fall from aristocratic graces. Pimpernel boasts of having "had the pleasure of presenting his Grace to the angelic mortal! And never since the union of Venus and Adonis, did so illustrious a pair offer up their vows at the hymeneal altar" (2:215). This hyperbolic assurance of marital bliss ends in a phrase which sounds remarkably similar to the bliss Graham would have assured his patients within his Temple of Hymen, one which smacks of the insincerity and empty flattery which Pimpernel has peddled throughout the novel. While at dinner with several notable literary and social figures for example, Pimpernel bestows gushing praise on the reviewer and author, Mr. Gnat. He says of his new work "It is the very quintessence of pure metaphysical writing," "The fire of Junius, the fancy of Shakespeare, the reasoning of Locke; every page contains a mine of knowledge!" before he turns to Mr. Doleful to ask "what is the title? For I never read it?" (1:277). It is, then, no surprise that given the incredibly limited window of opportunity for capitalizing on this bet, Pimpernel seeks to prey upon one of these such "Rousseauvean Julies" whose ruin prevents them from seeking marriage under more normal circumstances and also avoids any familial inquiries or entanglements. He is not one to work tirelessly to achieve his status, but rather he is one who seeks to remain in noble graces through flattery and convenience. Thus settling on the once "beautiful, the innocent Julie! The *élevé* of Lady Emily Delvin," Pimpernel selects the fallen protégé whom Walsingham had encountered when they were children in Nice, France (1:245). Her story reenters the narrative when she is

introduced as a fellow prisoner confined in the watchhouse beside the unfortunate Walsingham. As a “daughter of affliction,” Julie is characterized as a sentimental victim of the oppressive societal hypocrisies regarding ruin and defense which Robinson decried in her *Letter*. Julie immediately displays her sensibility as she “sighed and burst into an agony of tears” when Walsingham first approaches her (1:239). As she later recounts “the development of her misfortunes” like any victim of sensibility must, Walsingham explains how Lord Linbourne had seduced and abandoned her “in a country to whose language she was then a stranger, and amongst a race of women whose greatest stigma is that want of pity for their sex’s failings” (1:245). As a woman seduced and ruined, Julie is no longer a virgin and not yet a mother within the market of women; she has been removed from the exchange of men without having been “entrapped” within the private property and protection of a man.¹¹⁶ Given Julie’s abandoned and distraught characterization, she is once again, the perfect love-mad woman upon whom Pimpernel can prey. Following Cullen’s specific association between menstruation and hysteria, it follows that the most at risk for hysteric maladies would be young, unmarried women. As such, John Mullan notes that the most popular remedy for hysteria, a particularly feminized malady, was, of course, marriage.¹¹⁷ Therefore, gratification would provide the cessation of menstruation through the production of heirs. Pimpernel takes a fallen woman removed from the market through ruin, re-circulates her, only to then remove her again through marriage and confinement as a prescription for her potential madness and his friend’s diminishing coffers.

Rather than blame men for her ruin, however, Julie voices a sentiment similar to those expressed by Robinson herself as she blames women for ultimately keeping her in poverty and

¹¹⁶Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex which is Not One*, p. 186

¹¹⁷ Mullan. "Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and the Physicians." P. 161

ruin. In her story, Julie professes to Walsingham “that cruel torturer of her own frail sex, whose vaunted and fastidious purity has made more hardened profligates than all the arts and machinations of the destroyer, man” (1:242). Julie echoes a sentiment expressed in Robinson’s memoir and acknowledged in Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as one of the reasons why men believe that women are unable to create homosocial friendships. In her memoirs, Robinson complains, “I have almost uniformly found my own sex my most inveterate enemies; I have experienced little kindness from them; though my bosom has often ached with the pang inflicted by their envy, slander, and malevolence.”¹¹⁸ Wollstonecraft understands men to be the crucial property holding resources to which the commodified woman must attach in order to survive and argues in *Vindication* that female competition is natural. She argues that women “are all running the same race, and would rise above the virtue of mortals if they did not view each other with a suspicious and even envious eye.”¹¹⁹ Robinson’s Julie, as the commodified object, attacks her competition as she maintains affection for her seducer because it is upon him and other men that she relies for economic security. The economic and social dependence of the patriarchal market turns women against women as they are both oppressed within this race which necessitates a relation to a man who is able to participate in the market as a subject rather than an object. Within this patriarchal market, women are interchangeable commodities, cures, and patients whose value is determined by the male agent and as such, the commodified female bodies are put into competition with one another. While Doctor Pimpernel and the members of this marriage brokerage are complicit in Julie’s exchange, they are shielded from consequence by their agency within the market as human beings while women are relegated

¹¹⁸ Katherine Binhammer. "Female Homosociality and the Exchange of Men: Mary Robinson's Walsingham." P. 22. *Memoirs of Mary Robinson* by Mary Darby Robinson p. 82

¹¹⁹ *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* p. 108

to the status of commodified, exchangeable objects which must fight for stability. This system of blame echoes that which Franklin and the Royal Commission launched at Mesmer and his imaginative patients as the hierarchal power structure which undergirds these patriarchal systems paints the hysteric female body as the site of contagion and blame. In echoing this language, Robinson reveals the gendered, commodifying language of the market, of electrical science, and medical diction which can be manipulated to further circumscribe the female body. Julie blames other women because other women are forced into competition with her through the commodified language of these patriarchal systems. Within Irigaray's framework, Julie's marriage marks her successful exchange and legitimizes her "deflowered" status, relegating her to her commodified use value as a mother and producer of heirs. "She is removed from exchange among men," yet she is protected as a wife with a legitimate social relation to a man.¹²⁰ This is a transactional marriage of sheer convenience in which Julie's body is quite literally exchanged into the Duke's hands by Pimpnel for money, and it does not last.

In the midst of all the spectacular resolutions which appear in the last two epistles of the novel, including the revelation of Sidney's sex and her future marriage to Walsingham, is a short aside to Rosanna that her letters are being filtered through the newly separated Duchess of Heartwing. Having been abandoned by her lord, Julie "retires on a separate maintenance of six hundred pounds *per annum* to her native country, after passing a few weeks at Spa for the benefit of the waters" (2:321). Like Robinson who lived separately from her husband, Julie gains a bit of financial independence in her escape from commodification. While separation was difficult to obtain and the process itself often disenfranchising and humiliating,¹²¹ Robinson's inclusion of

¹²⁰ Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex which is Not One*, p. 186

¹²¹ Fay, Elizabeth. "Mary Robinson: On Trial in the Public Court, p. 416

this limited option available for women in unhappy marriages offers a happier ending for this character of sensibility than that of the lifeless bodies of Amelia and Judith. As Julie is ultimately able to escape her ruin and the typical strictures of the love mad, sentimental convention, her association with Pimpernel is one which is a bit unique.

While Julie gains a degree of independence by the end of the novel, she is still a woman thoroughly abused and abandoned by the patriarchal market of women and financially reliant upon her estranged husband to provide for her welfare. Associated with the Frenchified and eroticized Julie d'Etange of Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise*, Julie is forced to abandon her passionate love of Lord Linbourne in order to become the secure wife of another as she prevents her further detriment. Narrated through Walsingham, Julie's tale is also filtered through the male gaze, male surveillance, and male agency as Walsingham is another of the agents who acts in her exchange. Yet because this miserable man of feeling is not a direct agent who seeks to possess her, she fares quite well. As Walsingham narrates his marginalization and victimization, Robinson presents him as a highly effeminized character of sensibility which several critics have cited as crucial to the protagonist's queer panic and espionage.¹²² As such, when Walsingham seeks to gain control through surveillance and sexual violence with the help of Doctor Pimpernel, Amelia suffers a far more miserable fate. In a professional capacity, then, Dr. Pimpernel does not perform any legitimate medicine, instead he hastily declares his patients insane, dying, love-sick, and desperately in need of nothing more than the female body to cure their maladies. The female body is similarly deemed maddened in order to conceal the doctor's

¹²² In her book, *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism: Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784–1821*, Ashley Cross argues that Walsingham performs his victimhood in order to “disguise his anxiety about controlling women, an anxiety that appears variously as phobic panic and pornographic curiosity.” 113

commodifying practices of sexual consumption and confinement. While Robinson clearly critiques the corrupt abuses of the gendered language of medicine and quack electrical treatments, she too adopts the scientific and literary language of electricity to metaphorize and communicate sensations for which there are no other words.

Robinson's Use of the Languages of Electricity

Robinson is intentional in her representation of the scientific and literary languages of electricity, adopting electrical discourse in order to discredit the quackery of Graham and Pimpernel as abusers of the gendered constructions within the vocabulary, while legitimizing its ability to express the centrality of the body in experiencing the passions. Before the publication of *Walsingham*, Robinson adopted the language of electricity in her poetry. Specifically, according to Fairclough, Robinson appears to extract the elements of Graham's language which focused upon centralizing the body within his electrical demonstrations and therapies.¹²³ In *Ainsi Va Le Monde* (1790), written to Robert Merry, Robinson appropriates the language of electricity as she refers to the "Promethean fire" and "electric incense" within the Temple to the Goddess of Freedom who speaks and makes tyrants fall.¹²⁴ So, too, does she celebrate "Health's vivifying breeze" as she participates in the radical tradition of using electrical language to describe the vital communication which produces such galvanizing societal responses as the French Revolution.¹²⁵ Seven years later, Robinson again adopts electrical language within her novel, but here the language is one which focuses more upon the bodily response to affect rather than an explicitly political celebration of the French Revolution. Electricity in *Walsingham* describes the communication of sympathy, appropriating the tradition evident in the medical language of

¹²³ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. P. 105

¹²⁴ Mary Robinson. "Ainsi Va Le Monde, a Poem." p 197

¹²⁵ Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. P. 111

contagion, understanding, and affect which I discussed in chapter 1. In characterizing Walsingham as a Mackenzian “man of feeling,” Robinson employs electrical language as her protagonist recounts that “the idea electrified my heart, and roused all its sensibilities” and “admiration of his conduct struck with electric force to the centre of my heart” (1: 42, 141). Robinson even connects this electric sympathy to the theater as it is during a performance of *King Lear* that Walsingham becomes so moved that he explains how “The shock was electric; my swelling breast could not sustain its conflicts; I sprung from my seat, and cried aloud, ‘Give him my guinea, and send him to Glenowen’” (1: 47). In using the language of electricity to mark the appearance of sympathy, Robinson creates a distinction between the perverse language of Pimpernel and Graham which genders electrical experimentation through a focus on sexual difference and attraction, and that which focuses on the body to promote a greater sense of sympathy between individuals.

This distinction is further established through the magnanimous figure of Mr. Optic who genuinely seeks to improve the lot of those around him while Doctor Pimpernel exploits the language of medicine and therapeutic cures in order to commodify women’s bodies. As the very opposite of such a quack figure, Mr. Optic magnanimously seeks to help a mother whose son has been blinded by a “German quack doctor.” (1:266). These displays of insincerity and allegiance to social standing rather than honesty allow Pimpernel to become the agent through which the men of Robinson’s novel conduct exchanges in the market of women.

Conclusion - Masculine Women and the Market

The only woman who escapes the commodification of the patriarchal market of women in *Walsingham* is the woman who disguises her sex and pretends to be a man. And it is only while she is disguised that Sidney Aubrey is able to circumvent commodification, once it is

absolutely necessary that her sex is revealed, this protection dissolves. Robinson once again asserts the centrality of the female body to the commodifying, confining, and penetrating systems of gendered electrical language which Doctor Pimperl and other men abuse throughout the novel.

As Lady Aubrey pretended to have given birth to a son, Sidney Aubrey spends most of her life able fulfill the stringent requirements of primogeniture and her father's will which generously provided for her mother's maintenance, her education, and the inheritance of the estate once the heir was of age. In an ending which seems to reaffirm patriarchal, heterosexual marriage like that of *Animal Magnetism*, Sidney Aubrey's sex is revealed, Walsingham finds that he idolizes her virtues and they are soon to be married (2:320-322). Cross reads this reaffirmation as a celebration of the masculine woman, one in which the man of feeling protagonist must challenge his queer panic in order to "rediscover" the masculine woman as his soul mate.¹²⁶ This rediscovery also colors the ways Sidney engages with the market of women as she is inevitably exchanged and confined into marriage with the rest of the women, yet her masculine education and performance prevents her life-long abuse. Educated and raised as a gentleman, Sidney "sung, danced, he played the mandolin, and spoke the Italian and French languages with the fluency of a native," she also "fenced like a professor of the science; painted with the correctness of the artist; was expert of all manly exercises; a delightful poet; and a fascinating companion" (1:125-126). Educated in these masculine arts, Walsingham celebrates the rapidity with which Sidney learns the art of feminine charms, while also praising her preservation of the intellect she achieved through this masculine education. He writes to

¹²⁶ Cross. *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism : Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784–1821*. P. 114

Rosanna, “Indeed, so completely is she changed, so purely gentle, so feminine in manners; while her mind still retains the energy of that richly-treasured dignity of feeling which are the effects of a masculine education” (2:320). In the figure of Sidney Aubrey, it becomes clear that Robinson subscribes to the feminist conception of an unsexed mind, yet her emphasis upon the feminine manners and the revelation of Sidney’s sex reasserts that within this radical tradition which also included Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, the unsexed mind was still attached to a sexed body.¹²⁷ In her *Letter to the Women of England*, Robinson essentializes these differences to assert the nobility of women and the supremacy of their reason, “The fact is simply this: the passions of men originate in sensuality; those of women, in sentiment: man loves corporeally, woman mentally: which is the nobler creature?”¹²⁸ Within this letter, Robinson promotes an education like Sidney’s, one which includes being “liberally, classically, philosophically, and usefully educated” as they “speak and write their opinions freely” and “read and think like rational creatures.”¹²⁹ Yet, it is also one which cultivates the graces and the mind, making women “highly, eminently polished;” as they learn to dance, paint, sing, and do needlework while “She should likewise, if strong and active, be indulged in minor sports; such as swimming, the use of the ball, and foot racing.”¹³⁰ This education, which cultivates a wholly unsexed mind devoted to reason, also caters to a woman’s particular graces while allowing for the acquisition of strength and agility, the very kinds of knowledge and skills Sidney would have acquired as the perfect masculine woman. In this kind of education, although the body is one which is indeed sexed, it one which is not defined and educated by this distinction, but rather it is one educated

¹²⁷ Cross. *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism : Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784–1821*. P. 117

¹²⁸ *Letter to the Women of England* p. 10

¹²⁹ *Letter to the Women of England* p. 94

¹³⁰ *Letter to the Women of England* p. 87-88

and judged by the intellectual and one's physical capabilities. The masculine woman is celebrated here as a figure capable of resisting the control which Pimpernel, as a model of men's abuses, attempts to exert by manipulating the patriarchal systems which deny women "that intuitive privilege" as if "she were the least enlightened of rational and thinking beings."¹³¹

As Sidney is assumed to be a man for the vast majority of the novel, both Walsingham and the reader believe that her relationship with Isabella is one of romance, one which ruins Isabella's reputation and incites much of Walsingham's misery. Unlike Julie who blames women for her fall into prostitution, Isabella and Sidney form a homosocial bond in which they reject men and the potential labels of ruin which may result from their friendship disguised as a romance. Katherine Binhammer notes that these female relationships only succeed in the culture of the market when the bond is read as a relationship between a man and a woman.¹³² Such a bond would remove Isabella from exchange. However, once Sidney reveals her sex, Walsingham no longer begrudges this bond as one which removes Isabella as an object in a homosocial relationship between himself and Sidney. Sidney's own relation to the market drastically changes and despite her masculine education and noble birth, she must allow herself to circulate within the market in order to achieve financial stability. Although Robinson celebrates her education, it is not enough to remove her from the economic structures of dependence which demand she enter the marriage market.

Although such a conclusion reaffirms many of the realities of the patriarchal market of women, it is one which is consistent with my argument that one of Robinson's many aims with this novel is to offer an examination of the social, economic, and sexual strictures which regulate

¹³¹ *Letter to the Women of England* p. 55

¹³² Katherine Binhammer. "Female Homosexuality and the Exchange of Men: Mary Robinson's Walsingham." P. 236-7

the female body in the late eighteenth century. Within her social critique, Robinson uses a satirical portrait of Dr. James Graham to examine the specific ways in which an abuse of the gendered language of medicine and electrical experimentation commodified, consumed, and confined the female body within these cultural regulations.

In both Amelia and Julie's commodification, Pimpernel emerges as one of the principal agents of exchange. First suggesting the use of Amelia's body as a cure, then later confining her and grinding the "shattered particles" of her mind into acquiescence, he uses the gendered language of madness to pathologize, objectify, circulate, and confine the young, attractive, yet ultimately "mad" woman. So, too, does Robinson explore discursive agency and the exploitation of the gendered constructions of medical and electrical language in Pimpernel's circulation of Julie de Beaumont. Although Pimpernel's proscription of her body does not lead to her destruction as it does Amelia, Pimpernel views Julie as another one of his cures as he procures her to assuage the Duke's financial afflictions. Through Julie's commodified body, turned into capital and circulated on the marriage market, Robinson explores the systemic control of women's bodies as women are forced to rely upon relations to men for financial security. While Julie's body does bring the Duke financial gain, it is her marriage and legitimate relation to him which brings her out of ruin and allows her to once again live a stable life. The reptilian figure of Doctor Pimpernel is irredeemable as he peddles the bodies of women as cures for aristocratic men, only to then pathologize and confine these very same women in loveless marriages, asylums, and eventual graves. While Robinson celebrates the masculine woman whose intellect helps her to escape many of these abuses, it is clear that all women must go to market as commodified bodies to be circulated, consumed, and confined by men at their will.

CONCLUSION:
DISCURSIVE AGENCY, THEATRICAL SPECTACLES, AND SOCIALIZING SYMPAHY

In 1769, Mary Robinson's tutor at Drury Lane, David Garrick, wrote of the actress "La Clairon" that her "heart has none of those instantaneous feelings, like that life-blood, that keen sensibility, that bursts at once from genius like electrical fire, shoots through the veins, marrow, bones and all of every spectator."¹³³ Here, Garrick distinguishes theatrical genius from the deliberate movements of a good actor by employing electrical diction. The difference is a matter of consciousness. Genius is an unknown movement which springs itself upon both the actor and the audience, allowing the actor to be "transported beyond himself" as they embody the feeling of their character and present it to their audience. Near the end of the eighteenth century, there were many such descriptions which linked what Fairclough calls the "affective power of performance" and the power of such electrical fire.¹³⁴ Within this theatrical movement of feeling, genius is awarded through one's ability to provoke a sympathetic sensation of electric affect, much like that which the young Walsingham experiences when he feels an electric shock of emotion upon seeing *King Lear* (1:47). A similar conception of a theatrical movement of feeling appears, too, in Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism*, one which invites an examination of the communication of feeling as a deliberate sympathetic spectacle used to negotiate power. As Constance and Lisette perform their sympathetic crises of affection, they adhere to the gendered constructions of feminine susceptibility, theatrical, imaginative contagion, and domesticity in

¹³³ Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p 87, *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick* p. 359

¹³⁴ Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics*. p 87

order to escape confinement. In doing so, they take up space both literally on stage and as critical facilitators of their escape by asserting their female bodies defined not by bodily boundaries, but by their ability to co-participate and communicate feeling. Fara has argued that the decline in popularity in “civic humanist models” gave rise to authors adopting magnetic imagery as a representation of asymmetrical power dynamics and relations between people rather than unifying moral sympathy.¹³⁵ Perhaps reading Inchbald’s work as one which participates in the affective, processually developed and reciprocal building of sympathetic bodies and Robinson’s as one informed by this co-participatory potential for social reform and critique allows for the examination of both power dynamic and a moral sympathy. In these works, the gendered language of electromagnetic experimentation is one which draws from these constructions of madness, sympathy, contagion, and sexual difference to examine how language specifically, and disproportionately, collapses upon the female body in a patriarchal system. Inchbald and Robinson deploy the gendered constructions of this sympathy, and the medical and electrical discursive systems which have significantly contributed to this gendering, to interrogate the ways that affect and capital respectively impact the female body.

I have argued that Inchbald presents a meta-theatrical display of women’s bodies as they perform their expected roles of a particularly effeminized susceptibility to the charlatantry of animal magnetism, one which cures the body through a stimulation of the overactive, perhaps even nervous or maddened imagination. In this play, itself a form thought to stimulate madness,¹³⁶ Inchbald’s women appropriate electricity’s gendered constructions in order to

¹³⁵ Patricia Fara, "A Powerful Language: Images of Nature and the Nature of Science." p.190

¹³⁶ In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault argues that “the disorder of the senses continues in the theaters, where illusions are cultivated, where vain passions and the most fatal movements of the soul are aroused by artifice; women especially enjoy these spectacles.” P. 218

renegotiate power. They thereby assert their sexed bodies in a way that is at once a spectacle, and a reciprocal, co-participatory movement of feeling which disrupts the typically gendered and commodifying discourse of this electromagnetic practice. This appropriation of theatrical affect is one which informs a discursive reading of Mary Robinson's *Walsingham; or the Pupil of Nature*. Robinson satirizes the figure of the electromagnetic therapist who capitalizes on these gendered constructions of an electric movement of power like Garrick narrates above. Inchbald expresses her concerns over discursive agency principally in relation to the language of the electromagnetic cure itself: one which is based upon a feminized conception of affective and imaginative excess and biological predisposition to theatrical contagion. While her female characters appear to be wholly conscious of the ways in which their bodies mark them as particularly susceptible victims for their quack jailor's mesmeric aspirations, Robinson's women are mostly disgusted by Pimpernel, but unable to escape his predation due to his favorable relation to the patriarchal market compared to their own. This shift in discursive agency is one which demonstrates that Robinson is more concerned with the implications of the gendered constructions of madness, sensibility, respectability, and medical discourse which all collapse upon the female body to oppress and confine her. She uses her personal experience with Dr. Graham and electromagnetic therapy as the representative case here, specifically highlighting the centrality of female body within the practice and the emphasis on sex and sexual difference which pervaded literary and cultural discourses of electricity itself.

Concluding her *Letter to the Women of England*, Mary Robinson includes a list of British women poets, playwrights, novelists, and translators whom she believes do "not fail to excite emulation" and she calls for her audience of women to "claim an equal portion of power in the

Tribunal of British Literature” (96-97).¹³⁷ In the final lines of this letter, she again reiterates that her audience are the women whose minds she hopes to influence into performing the intellectual labor necessary to rise to a state of mental equality with men. To this end, Robinson claims that while men may think little of literature written by women, she corrects these “male disciples of modern philosophy” as she asserts the influence of the British woman writers; “no works of the present day are so universally read as theirs” (95). According to Robinson, women have produced the best novels since the works of Smollet, Richardson, and Fielding, they have produced “the purest translations,” and “poetry has unquestionably risen high in British literature from the productions of female pens” (95-96). On this list, Elizabeth Inchbald’s name is listed, not once, but twice as both one of the authors to whom posterity will be indebted for her translations, as well as one of Britain’s famed original dramatists. As such, Inchbald is one of Robinson’s famed women, one of those illustrious writers she has crowned as a “natural genius” capable of inspiring her fellow countrywomen.

This letter, published two years after *Walsingham* and eleven years after *Animal Magnetism*, is one which asserts that women’s mental subordination has inhibited their ability to participate in the mental and bodily power men enjoy as privileged members of the patriarchy. This focus on both the mental and corporeal equality of women is crucial to the works studied within this thesis as it is the gendered language of electrical science and medicine and its discursive abusers who focus on the sexualized, commodified, and confined female body that Inchbald and Robinson examine in their satirical representations. The figure of the quack doctor, here, is the central thread within this reading of both Inchbald and Robinson. Both women

¹³⁷ Robinson, Mary. "A Letter to the Women of England." https://romantic-circles.org/editions/robinson/mrletterfrst.htm#rational_creatures

examine the limits of discursive agency through this male figure who appropriates the gendered language of electrical medicine, abusing his position as a physician and a privileged member of a patriarchal society in order to prey upon women. Although Inchbald's Constance and Lisette perform their prescribed roles within the gendered language of animal magnetism and madness in order to escape, they are only able to negotiate their release from the locked house prison of the doctor by promising to enter into the confinement of marriage. So, too, is Robinson's Amelia able to resist many of the traditional social barriers which should befall her as a ruined woman, yet she ultimately succumbs to Doctor Pimpernel's objectification and confinement as well as Walsingham's consumption of her body as a cure for his own love madness. Despite their ability to subvert some of the gendered conceptions of the rigidly dualistic and patriarchal constructions of power, madness, and theatrical, imaginative contagion, Inchbald and Robinson's women cannot fully escape the discursive confinement and suppression embedded within these gendered constructions.

This failure is central to their discursive project and my argument. It is one which reveals the ways in which the figurative, highly gendered language of electrical science persists within a patriarchal society. Quite specifically, I argue that their failure elucidates the ways in which the theatrical performances of quack doctors who prey upon women and commodify sex under the guise of electrical healing are able to profit off a gendered language which perpetuates the economic, political, and social confinement, commodification, and silencing of women. What I have proposed throughout this project, then, is a study in language, one which examines how Mary Robinson and Elizabeth Inchbald appropriate, redefine, and subvert the ambivalent and figurative language of electricity in order to elucidate the ways in which the gendered language of this experimental science and medicine can be abused to further objectify, confine, and silence

women. Both of these works draw directly from a culture of quackery which raged in the later decades of the eighteenth century as they examine the centrality of the female body within these specific types of electromagnetic experiments and therapies. It is this language, and its real, predatory medical application that becomes the focus of Inchbald and Robinson's critique as the female body, the protagonist and spectacle in these experiments, poems, and the very language of electricity itself, becomes objectified and confined. Men like Anton Mesmer with his magnetized "wand" and James Graham and his opulent temple and electrified celestial bed capitalized upon the culture these authors depict within their works as many of the public demonstrations, lectures, and literary representations of electricity were based around sexual difference, attraction, and the erotic body. Although they represent their study in language differently, Robinson and Inchbald are both concerned with how these men use their power to abuse the gendered language of electrical experimentation, medicine, and literature to prey upon women. The figure of the quack doctor becomes the physician capable of pronouncing the female body mad and contagious, he becomes her jailor, and ultimately for Robinson, her executioner.

The meta-theatricality of Inchbald's play criticism and the intentional "Romantic theatricality" which has characterized Robinson's fluid, multi-self-representation further suggests these authors shared awareness of electricity's use as a metaphorical vehicle for expressing the physical sensations of affect and the ways in which communication of these feelings presented the female body as a spectacle. While the discursive reading which associates these two authors is strong enough to suggest critical examination as they contemplate the theatrics of animal magnetism, the affective imagination, and gendered contagion, there is also a biographical link which further strengthens the coupling of Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* and

Robinson's *Walsingham*. As both authors were members of Godwin's Jacobin circle, Inchbald and Robinson were associated with intellectual abolitionist, feminist, and polemic writers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays.¹³⁸ These radical writers detailed the socio-economic constructions which continued to intellectually oppress women in order to maintain control over them within their prominent novels such as *The Wrongs of Women* and *The Victim of Prejudice*, as well as, of course, Wollstonecraft's famous *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. So, too, were both authors actresses, performing on the London stage as Shakespearean heroines. Inchbald made her debut in 1772 as Cordelia while her new husband, Joseph Inchbald, played Lear.¹³⁹ Robinson made her debut two years later in 1772 as Juliet.¹⁴⁰ That these two authors with experience in performance register the inherent theatricality of the language and performances of animal magnetism, then, is not surprising, especially in light of the explicit theatrical language evident in the Royal Commission report I discussed in chapter 1. Comparing Mesmer's electromagnetic treatment to a "theatrical representation" in front of an audience, his susceptible female patients were considered to have fallen victim to a hysteric imitation of the other patients' crises as their imagination allowed them to feel as though they experienced a physical magnetic sensation.¹⁴¹ Thus discrediting animal magnetism through gendered language which defines the female body by its susceptibility to hysteric fits, excess imagination and emotion, and a contagious theatricality, the commission marks the spectacle of sympathy as one which is placebic and dangerous.

¹³⁸ Byrne. *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson*. P. 342

¹³⁹ Scott, Elma. "Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821)." P. 1

¹⁴⁰ Fawcett. "The Memoirs of Perdita and the Language of Loss: Mary Robinson's Alternative to Overexpression." P. 177

¹⁴¹ Leach, "Gendering Pseudo-Science." P. 715

This slippage between the language of electrical experimentation, literature, and madness is one which hinges upon a gendering of language and asymmetrical displacement of power. While both Inchbald and Robinson appear to center their examination of the potential abuses of this language on the figure of the quack doctor, the pervasive gendering of the scientific disciplines and its effect on discursive agency is a far wider project. The proliferation of scientific literature intended specifically for women, the feminization of natural history, and the centrality of women's bodies in other types of public experiments and sciences all offer potential discursive inroads for future topics of study. According to Patricia Phillips in *The Scientific Lady: A Social History of Women's Scientific Interests, 1520-1918*, an eighteenth-century overall growth in the dissemination of scientific "media," promoted a development in women's scientific literacy as more and more publications were produced specifically for a readership of women.¹⁴² From fundamental textbooks designed for women and children, scientific diaries with contact lists for their subscribers, and targeted ads for scientific instruments, scientific publications designed for women focused upon the educational and social value of scientific development for the female brain. Women could even imbibe the language of electrical science through their own popular publications such as "The Ladies Magazine or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex" which printed poems, etiquette pieces, and essays which adopted electrical language to describe an electric fire, or the motion of one's frame, or the flow of reason.¹⁴³ As evidenced by previous scholars, the pervasive nature of this electrical diction and its ambiguous, figurative allure created an ideal framework from which to analyze

¹⁴² Phillips. *The Scientific Lady* p. 77

¹⁴³ "The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to their use and Amusement." v. 25. 1794. P. 48

the electrifying turbulence of contemporary political and social life.¹⁴⁴ The extremely public aspect of this science, I argue, evident within the highly performative, extra-institutional displays of amateur experimentation, illuminates a deeply corporeal element of this electrical language. Focusing on the body, and most often the female body, these demonstrations ultimately gendered electrical scientific terms. These women, rather than serving a peripheral role within electrical discussions, were central agents within the public electrical displays, serving as spectators, assistants to the performance, and patients themselves. Although perhaps more accessible to laymen and women in its public form, public electrical science nevertheless recreates the same language of its institutional counterpart - the same gendered, hypersexualized, pathologized language focused upon the female body. I use the term “popular science” here within its modern context in the field of scientific history. This term, although not one which is contemporaneous to the eighteenth century, delineates the particular practices conducted for a more general audience, typically in a public, demonstrative capacity. These popular scientific discussions, circulating in women’s magazines, textbooks for women and children, and gentlemen’s journals, created a public discourse from which specifically acknowledged women as participants and patients, although not without gendered qualifications. I propose that in examining the ways in which women writers approached these subjects in their fiction, essays, non-fiction books, textbooks, and manuals, one can examine unique ways these writers renegotiate gendered terms of self-representation, bodily boundaries, scientific experimentation, the imagination, education, and madness. This study in language and discursive agency can, therefore, be expanded to include the works of women poets who addressed topics concerned with natural history, such as

¹⁴⁴ Mary Fairclough. *Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740–1840: 'Electrick Communication Every Where'* and Fulford, Tim. "The Electrifying Mrs. Robinson."

botany, zoology, and geology, as well as instructional textbooks for women and children, travel guides, and popular texts such as magazines. In studying how women writers participate in scientific conversations – and the ways these scientific disciplines, too, have been gendered – one can examine how these writers attempt to define, subvert, permeate, and reconstruct disciplinary, bodily, and aesthetic boundaries.

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