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**Behind the Veil: Gender and Apocalypse in George Eliot's  
*The Lifted Veil* (1859) and Wilkie Collins's *The Two Destinies* (1876)**

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**Behind the Veil**

“What is this, behind this veil,” the narrator of Sylvia Plath’s poem “A Birthday Present” asks: “is it ugly, is it beautiful?” (48) Throughout the poem the birthday present which may be ugly or beautiful, ugly *and* beautiful, is never revealed: it remains a secret; only ever a deferred promise of an unveiling ‘to come.’ In this sense, Plath’s poem can be said to be ‘apocalyptic.’ Etymologically, the word ‘apocalypse’ signifies an ‘unveiling’ or ‘disclosure’ and is synonymic with the term ‘revelation.’ And, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, in “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,” the apocalypse is always ‘to come.’ The opening question of Plath’s “A Birthday Present” can be seen as an epigraph to this essay in which I will examine George Eliot’s 1859 short story *The Lifted Veil* alongside Wilkie Collins’s 1876 novel *The Two Destinies*. The structure of veiling and unveiling in these two texts at once hides and reveals something which may be beautiful and/or ugly; but, like Plath’s poem, the ‘final’ revelation reveals *nothing*. I will be exploring the topical figure of the veil in terms of its relationship to female sexuality and the apocalypse; focusing specifically on modes of revelation and non-revelation.

Like the birthday present in Plath’s poem which is never unveiled and, therefore, absent from the text, we are always left waiting to be an eyewitness to the apocalypse. “The end approaches,” Derrida notes, “but the apocalypse is long-lived” (29). Furthermore, even if the impossible happened, and the apocalypse was finally unveiled it would only reveal itself: “[I]f the apocalypse reveals,” claims Derrida, “it is first of all the revelation of the apocalypse” (28). Derrida adds: “Here the catastrophe would perhaps be *of* the apocalypse itself [. . .] a closure without end, an end without end” (35, original emphasis). For Derrida, then, the revelatory apocalypse, signifies a non-revelation; an endless unveiling. But, as Derrida points out, the very failure to lift the last apocalyptic veil, to reach a final revelation, is what makes the apocalypse *apocalyptic*.

In his work, Derrida distinguishes between “the future” [*l’avenir*] and “the ‘to come’” [*l’à venir*] (Attridge 381). Derrida argues that, whereas the former is programmed and predictable, the latter is as wholly unpredictable and as radically

unknowable as the coming of the apocalypse. Indeed, as “the ‘to come’” cannot, by any means, be unveiled it is apocalyptic itself. As Derrida puts it: “the coming [of the apocalypse] is always to come” (25). Inextricably linked to Derrida’s apocalyptic notion of “the ‘to come’” is the repetition of the word ‘Come’ in the Book of Revelation. “Come,” Derrida explains, “is a call anterior to any other discourse and any other event, to any order, and any desire, an apocalypse that ends and unveils nothing” (131). Moreover, Derrida adds, “*Come* is apocalyptic” whilst being “in itself the apocalypse of apocalypse” (35, original emphasis).

Although the word ‘Come’ is notable by its absence in *The Lifted Veil*, it is present in Eliot’s 1860 novel *The Mill on the Floss*; a novel which she interrupted to write *The Lifted Veil*. The climatic flood in the penultimate chapter of *The Mill on the Floss*, entitled “The Last Conflict,” along with the repetition of the word “Come” in that chapter, provides an apocalyptic veil which enfolds *The Lifted Veil* (534-37). In this sense, “*The Mill on the Floss* and *The Lifted Veil*,” writes Nicholas Royle, “might seem, from before the beginning, to say ‘come!’ to one another” (193). The word “Come” also resounds throughout the penultimate chapter of *The Two Destinies*, itself entitled “The Two Destinies” (178-80). Echoing the repetition of the word ‘Come,’ “an apocalypse that ends and unveils nothing,” what is ‘revealed’ to George Germaine in this chapter is the rather open secret, (at least to the novel’s readers), that Mary Dermody is his long-lost childhood sweetheart. Significantly, within a year after writing *The Two Destinies*, Collins published two short stories, “Percy and the Prophet” and “The Captain’s Last Love,” that both end apocalyptically: the former in a Revolution, the latter with a volcanic earthquake.<sup>2</sup> Yet again, each apocalypse enfolds the other, calls the other to ‘come,’ without end.

### **Gender and Apocalypse**

Despite their seeming disparity, the gendered and apocalyptic connotations of the figure of the veil have been woven into its fabric from the start. For example, in *Apocalypse Now and Then* Catherine Keller explains that “[p]rebiblically the term [apocalypse] connotes the marital stripping of the veiled virgin” (1). Here we find the veil the subject of male penetration; as a figure for the ruptured, virginal hymen which, as Derrida informs us in “The Double Session,” is itself “a sort of textile” – another veil (224).<sup>3</sup> What Derrida calls “the fine invisible veil” of the hymen “stands *between* desire and fulfilment”: “With all the undecidability of its meaning, the hymen only

takes place when it doesn't take place, when nothing *really* happens [ . . . ] when the veil is, *without being*, torn for example" (223, original emphasis). The tearing of the hymeneal veil, like the lifting of the apocalyptic one, takes place because it *does not* take place. Like an apocalypse that only reveals itself, the hymen exceeds the play of veiling and unveiling.

The Book of Revelation, as revealed to St. John of Patmos, also links female sexuality to the apocalypse. Crucially, for this essay, "[i]n the biblical text of John's Apocalypse," as Keller points out, "[t]he revealing gaze is male" (1, 25). The apocalypse, then, is again linked to male penetrative power, as St. John's revelatory visions pierce the apocalyptic veils. But "John's Apocalypse" is forever in the process of 'coming' without ever arriving, without ever reaching fulfilment. As mentioned above, for Derrida, "the coming [of the Apocalypse] is always to come" (25). In this sense, the Book of Revelation itself takes on the undecidability of the hymen. In other words, the veil concealing the apocalypse, which is to be eventually lifted, is itself hymeneal: it "stands *between* desire and fulfilment."

In *Apocalyptic Bodies*, Tina Pippin observes that "[i]n the [Biblical] Apocalypse desire is linked with horror" (86). For Pippin, this simultaneous horror and fascination of the apocalypse is centred upon its representations of women. "Women's bodies," Pippin claims, "are particularly abused in this text; [but] women's bodies are also desired" (119). As Pippin indicates, in the Book of Revelation's problematic depiction of female figures, such as the 'Whore of Babylon' and 'Jezebel,' the Biblical apocalypse depicts 'aberrant' female sexuality rather than the 'unveiling' of a virgin bride. Akin to a hymeneal veil itself, it seems that the term 'apocalypse' is situated in between the familiar 'virgin'/'whore' dichotomy; as well as being placed between fascination and repulsion and between desire and fulfilment.

Like Jacques Lacan's formulation of the "Law of the Phallus" which, as David Coad notes, "attributes absence and lack as the essential functions of the veil," the fear and desire which Pippin identifies in the Book of Revelation can be linked to male fear of castration (Coad 62). For example, Luce Irigaray writes that, for Freud and Lacan, a "[woman's] sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*" (26, original emphasis). In other words, the fear manifest in the Book of Revelation may be based upon the fact that, even if the veil is lifted, nothing will be revealed other than the (male) seer's blindness. Behind the veil there may be something beautiful or there maybe something ugly, but it seems that in "John's Apocalypse" it is preferable to live

in the uncertainty of a final unveiling 'to come' than to live in the certainty that, in place of the apocalypse, there will only be an abyss (Pippin 64-77). An "apocalypse *without* apocalypse," to use Derrida's phrase, is by far the most frightening of any apocalyptic vision (34, original emphasis).

### **Lifting the Veil**

When Latimer, the narrator of Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*, is mysteriously endowed with the "gift" of foresight and the ability to read other characters' minds he finds nothing worth seeing (11). Instead of a beautiful revelation, a sublime unveiling of the other's soul, Latimer finds only a nullifying absence. Writing on what he calls his "abnormal power of penetration," Latimer tells us how, by no effort of his own will, "the vagrant, frivolous ideas and emotions of some uninteresting acquaintance [. . .] would force themselves on my consciousness, like an importunate, ill-played musical instrument" (33). For Latimer, it seems that possessing the capability of seeing and knowing everything means that, in effect, he sees and knows nothing. His penetrating vision is also a blinding one.

In *The Lifted Veil* the relationship between blindness and insight is juxtaposed with the ugly and the beautiful and the play of veiling and unveiling. For example, disgruntled with his overly scientific education Latimer states: "I was glad of the running water [. . .] I did not want to know *why* it ran; I had perfect confidence that there were good reasons for what was so very beautiful" (7, original emphasis). In Latimer's opinion, unveiling the mystery of nature robs the beautiful of beauty. It is small wonder, then, that he soon finds himself under the bewitching spell of Bertha Grant, the one person whose mind he cannot read, whose thoughts are a "closed secret" to him (15).

Latimer's attraction to Bertha is founded on the very fact that he cannot penetrate the veil surrounding her thoughts. Describing the effect Bertha has on him, Latimer writes: "She was my oasis of mystery in the desert of knowledge [. . .] no matter how empty the adytum, so that the veil be thick enough" (18-29). Like his views on the beauty of nature, it is what Latimer describes as the "enigma" of Bertha that draws him to her (29). If the veil were lifted, Bertha could be 'lacking' like all of the others, but it is precisely the uncertainty regarding this fact that makes her desirable. "The fluctuations of hope and fear," which Latimer says Bertha incites in him, stem from the fact that, like the apocalypse, her unveiling is still 'to come' (17).

Latimer's "gift" of insight, though, is a poisoned one. Here, Eliot appears to be playing on the fact that in German the term 'Gift' signifies the noun 'poison.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, before Bertha literally tries to poison Latimer near the end of the story she is described, on more than one occasion, as "intoxicating" (17). What is more, the German word 'Gift' is a neuter in German grammar making it neither a masculine nor a feminine noun. Latimer, then, who has "a sort of half-womanish, half-ghostly beauty," is also endowed with a castrating (poisonous) 'gift' (14).

Throughout *The Lifted Veil* Bertha is associated with all that is mysterious, aggressive, and potent – in a word, *castrating* – about female sexuality. Her "cruel eyes" are reflected in "Giorgione's picture of the cruel-eyed woman, said to be a likeness of Lucrezia Borgia," that Latimer had been "looking at" on a visit to an art gallery in Prague (18-19). Like Bertha, the painting of Borgia, who supposedly used mysterious and deadly poisons to devastating effect herself, appears to mesmerize and intoxicate him. Latimer states: "I had stood long alone before it [the picture] [. . .] till I felt a strange poisoned sensation, as if I had long been inhaling a fatal odour" (19).

The connection between Bertha and Lucrezia Borgia is made explicit a little later in the chapter when Latimer leaves the gallery after "refus[ing] to come within sight of another picture that day" (19). As he is walking, Latimer feels Bertha's "arm slipped within [his]" (19). "In the same instant," Latimer explains, "a strange intoxicating numbness passed over me, like the continuance or climax of the sensation I was still feeling from the gaze of Lucrezia Borgia" (19). The eroticism of this scene captured in the words "climax" and "sensation" is offset by the "cruel eyes" of Borgia's portrait which return Latimer's gaze with a castrating, Medusa-esque intensity. Indeed, the figure of Medusa is an apt one as the portrait painter's name, "G(i)org(i)on(e)," at once hides and reveals the name 'Gorgon': "When the veils are lifted," Elizabeth Grosz writes, "there is only the Medusa – woman's castrated genitals, lacking, incomplete, horrifying (for men)" (121). It is at this juncture in the story that the veil surrounding Bertha is first lifted for Latimer.

When the veil is lifted from Bertha, in a prophetic vision, Latimer does not see the "beautiful sylph" that has enchanted him in the past (25-26). Instead, in the vision, Latimer sees a much older Bertha wearing "a studded serpent" brooch "with diamond eyes" (19). Noticing the "white marble medallion of the dying Cleopatra," as Bertha approaches him, Latimer telepathically reads Bertha's thoughts at the very moment she wonders, with more than a little disgust, why he has not killed himself before now (19).

After the veil is lifted from Bertha, Latimer *sees nothing* – only what he calls, with a “chill shudder of repulsion,” “a blank prosaic wall” (32). “It was a moment of hell,” he says, “I saw into her pitiless soul – saw its barren worldliness, its scorching hate” (19). Now Bertha is fully revealed to him, Latimer is left only with what he describes as “the horror of that certitude!” (21) In Eliot’s story, the lifting of the veil shrouding Bertha from Latimer, with its poisonous, serpentine imagery, is directly linked to ‘deadly’ and ‘transgressive’ female sexuality: in all its ‘horror’ and ‘ugliness.’

### **Veiled Secrets**

Like *The Lifted Veil*, the narrative of Wilkie Collin’s novel, *The Two Destinies*, is driven by a series of visionary, telepathic communications between its two central characters: the childhood sweethearts George Germaine and Mary Dermody.<sup>5</sup> Following George and Mary’s enforced separation, instigated by George’s domineering father, George visits the Shetland Isles. After a riding accident whilst pony-trekking in Shetland, George is taken to the house of Mr Dunross so that he can recover from his injuries. Along with Mr Dunross, the house is also inhabited by his daughter, who is known only as “Miss Dunross” throughout the text. According to Collins, the character of Miss Dunross was “modelled” on:

an unhappy lady suffering from some disease of the blood which produced a terrible deformity in the face. She was invariably veiled – and she uniformly refused to say why [. . .] The name of the disease, and the nature of the deformity, my informant refused to reveal (Baker and Clarke 555).

The non-revelation of the ‘unhappy lady’s’ deformity is strangely echoed in *The Two Destinies* by the character of Miss Dunross, who also wears “a very large and thick veil on [her] head” (98). The “nature” of Miss Dunross’s “deformity,” like her Christian name, is a secret in-and-of the text which elides the possibility of a full disclosure. Whilst in Shetland, George tries desperately to penetrate the secret behind Miss Dunross’s veil, but it effectively blinds him in that he sees nothing. Akin to Latimer in *The Lifted Veil*, the very fact that George cannot see Miss Dunross makes her all the more fascinating to him. “I own it. I feel deeply interested in her,” George says at one point (132).

On one of the occasions that George attempts to see past Miss Dunross’s veil, to penetrate its mystery, he is spotted by Miss Dunross’s “quickness of perception” (99). “You have been trying to see me,” Miss Dunross tells him, before adding:

Don't associate any romantic ideas of invisible beauty with *me* [ . . . ] I had but one beauty to boast of before I fell ill - my complexion - and that has gone forever. There is nothing to see in me now, but the ruin of what was once a woman [ . . . ] the darkness [is] a perpetual obstacle, so far as your eyes are concerned, between you and me (99, original emphasis).

What is immediately striking about this passage is Miss Dunross's use of the adjective "invisible" in order to describe her 'lack' of beauty. It is possible that Collins uses the word "invisible" in the sense of something hidden from view, but this would not fully explain why Miss Dunross's veiled beauty or ugliness is frequently placed outside the realm of the 'normal' sense of visibility. For example, after her death the doctor says of George that, "[w]hen he thinks of her now, let him think of the beauty which no bodily affliction can profane – the beauty of the freed Spirit, eternally happy in its union with the angels of God" (150).

As it stands, Miss Dunross's phrase seems to posit a notion of beauty which exists in an apocalyptic, hymeneal space between and beyond 'ordinary' concepts of beauty and ugliness; visibility and invisibility; and presence and absence. It is an apocalyptic, hymeneal space because the revelation of her "invisible" beauty would reveal, in her own words, "nothing to see." In this respect, what lies behind Miss Dunross's veil resembles Derrida's formulation of 'the secret': "*There is something secret*. But it does not conceal itself. Heterogeneous to the hidden, to the obscure, to the nocturnal, to the invisible [ . . . ] it cannot be unveiled" (21, original emphasis). In essence, even if Miss Dunross's veil was torn it would reveal *nothing*; it would be as if it had never taken place. Like Plath's "The Birthday Present," the question as to whether Miss Dunross's veil is covering something ugly or something beautiful continually escapes the text.

The visible/invisible nature of Miss Dunross's beauty or ugliness is further emphasised when she is writing a letter for George, under his dictation, to his mother. After George starts to dictate the letter he hears Miss Dunross "shudder": "Something has come between me and the letter I am writing for you," she tells George (112). The "something" which is between Miss Dunross and the letter, like a veil one could say, is the "ghostly Presence" of his childhood sweetheart, Mary Dermody; conveyed telepathically when she is dreaming (114). Although it is not presented in the text until later, it is during the telepathic vision of Mary that Miss Dunross's veil is first lifted. When George visits Mary, on his return from Shetland, she tells him:

While I lay in the trance I saw everything [. . .] I saw what the veil hid. Don't let me speak of it! You must have shuddered at that frightful sight in the reality, as I shuddered at it in the dream (136).

George cannot disguise his shock at Mary's disclosure, and she immediately realises the truth: "Good heavens!" she cried. "You have *not* seen her!" (136, original emphasis) But then neither has Mary. Like her own spectral appearance, what is hidden under Miss Dunross's veil is simultaneously there *and* not there; between and beyond visibility and invisibility. For although Mary claims to have seen the horrible deformity hidden under Miss Dunross's veil it was the "ghostly Presence" of Mary, a 'presence' here signifying an *absence*, and not Mary 'herself.' As George puts it, shortly after leaving Mary: "I ought surely not to accept the conviction of [Miss Dunross's] deformity on no better evidence than [. . .] a dream?" (136) The unveiling of Miss Dunross's deformity, it seems, is a revelation that reveals nothing; a fact underscored in the text as Mary never describes the nature of Miss Dunross's deformity that, we are told, is hidden under her veil.

Whilst still in Shetland, an agitated George mixes a sleeping draught after the appearance of Mary's apparition. The sleeping draught, however, only partially works and George lies "in [a] semi-sleeping, semi-wakeful state" (120). In this hypnagogic condition, and with what he calls "fast closed eyes," George hears the sound of "soft breathing" above his head (120). "The next moment," George relates:

I felt a touch on my forehead – light, soft, tremulous, like the touch of lips that had kissed me. There was a momentary pause. Then, a low sigh trembled through the silence [. . .] Had living lips really touched me? (120-121)

The following morning, George inspects his room for clues. Underneath the key inside his bedroom door he notices "a torn morsel of black lace" (121). George conjectures that Miss Dunross's "long veil might easily have been caught, and torn by the projecting key, as she passed rapidly through the door" (121). The tearing of the veil can be seen to be symbolic of the rupturing of the virginal hymen, with Miss Dunross's lips signifying the vulva. In this sense, the scene could be read as another example of 'castrated' female 'lack.' We have only to think what is behind Miss Dunross's veiled 'lips,' her teeth and mouth, to be thrust back once again to "the *vagina dentata*, the agent of castration" (Pippin 71). But, the tearing of Miss Dunross's veil is also resonant of Derrida's logic of the hymen in that it simultaneously does and does not take place. Realising Miss Dunross was not aware that he was partially awake when she kissed

him, George vows to keep “her secret” (121). The fact that George keeps his knowledge of the kiss secret means that, in a sense, Miss Dunross’s kiss does *and* does not take place; it is as if the kiss never happened. In addition, the only reason that George believes Miss Dunross has kissed him is because of the torn fragment of veil: he *sees nothing* of the actual kiss. Again, we have an unveiling which only reveals another veil; as the veil covering Miss Dunross’s face is torn, George’s eyelids form another type of veil.

Shortly after Miss Dunross’s kiss, George leaves the Shetland Isles. As George departs Mr Dunross asks him, for the sake of his daughter, never to return. However, George finds it difficult to forget Miss Dunross and on hearing that she is severely ill sends her a secret gift via her doctor. George’s gift is a locket containing his portrait; allowing Miss Dunross another opportunity to look at him, even if George is forbidden to see her. Before the doctor hands Miss Dunross the locket he is unsure whether the gift will bring her “pleasure or pain” (148). The doctor’s apprehension is well-founded as, immediately after having been given the locket, Miss Dunross dies. Like Latimer’s gift of foresight in *The Lifted Veil*, it seems that George’s gift is a poisoned one. But, akin to the French term *jouissance*, George’s (poisonous) gift (of death) is at once pleasurable *and* painful to Miss Dunross.<sup>6</sup> For example, on handing Miss Dunross “the locket in secret,” the doctor states:

she lifted up her veil; and [...] looked at the portrait. A long low cry – not of sorrow or pain; a cry of rapture and delight – burst from her. I heard her kiss the portrait [. . .] The moment of her supreme happiness, and the moment of her death were one (148-50).

Despite fully exposing her face to the doctor in this quasi-orgasmic scene of her death, what lies behind Miss Dunross’s veil still remains a secret. Answering George’s other enquiries concerning Miss Dunross’s death, the doctor steadfastly refuses to confirm or deny Miss Dunross’s disfigurement. Instead, the doctor informs George that he and another doctor are the only two people to have seen Miss Dunross’s face and that they have both sworn never to reveal the “terrible secret” that “our eyes alone have seen” (150). This admission by the doctor is as close George and, consequently, the reader of the text gets to finding out the truth about Miss Dunross’s deformity. Collins’s unwillingness to share Miss Dunross’s secret with the readers of *The Two Destinies* means that each page of the novel acts as another veil concealing the secret. Just as the two doctors vow to take Miss Dunross’s secret “with us to our graves,” Collins buries

the secret within his text (150). Even in death it appears that Miss Dunross's unveiling is still 'to come.'

### Literature and the Secret

J. Hillis Miller writes that "[t]he literary work [. . .] is governed by what Derrida calls 'the exemplary secret of literature.' This secret makes it possible for the work to be the endlessly deferred promise of a definitive revelation that never occurs" (Miller 132). Like the Apocalypse, then, the unveiling of "the exemplary secret of literature" is always 'to come.' Miller's reading of Derrida could certainly apply to *The Two Destinies* and, in particular, the veiled form of Miss Dunross who can be seen as figuring as "the exemplary secret of literature" in the text. Never unveiled to the readers of the novel, *The Two Destinies* can be said to keep its own secret in terms of the character of Miss Dunross. In *The Lifted Veil*, the apocalyptic secret of literature is most clearly signalled by the fact that at the end of the story we return to its beginning: the description of Latimer's death. For instance, Latimer writes:

It is the 20th September 1850. I know these figures I have just written, as if they were the long familiar inscription. I have seen them on this page in my desk unnumbered times, when the scene of my dying struggle has opened upon me. . . . (43)

The narrative of *The Lifted Veil* ends with this ellipsis signifying Latimer's death. Derrida notes in *Aporias* that "death is always the name of a secret" but, as Latimer's death testifies, it is a secret that cannot be shared (74, original emphasis). Unable to be represented in the text, the 'final' veil to be lifted for Latimer remains a secret to the story's readers. By beginning *The Lifted Veil* with its ending and ending it with its beginning, Eliot appears to suggest that Latimer's 'final' revelation is *The Lifted Veil* itself. In other words, like the secret hidden behind Miss Dunross's veil, the secret of *The Lifted Veil* is "the exemplary secret of literature."

Like a hymen, or a veil which is forever and never lifted, the secret of literature stands between desire and fulfilment. If it is the desire to lift the veil that draws us to literature, it is a desire that can never be fulfilled. To re-contextualise the words of Latimer near the end of *The Lifted Veil*, literature can be seen as the ultimate "Unknown Presence revealed and yet hidden" that he speaks about (42). It is precisely this veiled and unveiled secret of literature, the promise of a revelation 'to come,' which makes it necessarily impossible to find an answer to the question: "What is this,

behind this veil, is it ugly, is it beautiful?"

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank all those who attended the MIVSS postgraduate conference, in October 2006, where this essay was first delivered as a paper; especially Louise Lee, Kara Tennant and Amelia Yeates. In addition, I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Fiona Robertson for her helpful and perceptive comments.

<sup>2</sup> “The Captain’s Last Love” was published in *The Spirit of the Times* on 23 December 1876 and “Percy and the Prophet” was published in *All the Year Round* in the summer of 1877. *The Two Destinies* was originally serialized in *Temple Bar* from January to September 1876. Incidentally, in Collins’s 1880 novel *Jezebel’s Daughter*, we are told that the character of Mr Keller has to be prepared “for the revelation that was to come” (87).

<sup>3</sup> For Derrida: “The hymen is thus a sort of textile. Its threads should be interwoven with all the veils, gauzes, canvases, fabrics, moires, wings, feathers [...] curtains, and fans” (224).

<sup>4</sup> Presumably, Eliot, who translated Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* from German into English, would be aware of this nuance in the German language. Moreover, in *The Lifted Veil* Latimer says his “mind is full of German lyrics,” and describes “German lyrics” as his “pet literature” (12, 15).

<sup>5</sup> In his essay “Telepathy,” Derrida makes an explicit connection between telepathy and the apocalypse. For Derrida, like the apocalypse, “[t]elepathy comes upon us” without ever fully arriving (38). I am using the term ‘telepathy’ anachronistically in this essay as it was not coined, as such, until 1882; see Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> According to Carmela Levy-Stokes, “*jouissance* is an enjoyment that always has a deadly reference, a paradoxical pleasure, reaching an almost intolerable level of excitation” (101). Pertinent to this essay, Levy-Stokes adds: “From 1957 the sexual reference of *jouissance* as orgasm emerges into the foreground. This is the more popular use of the term *jouissance*, with *jouir* meaning ‘to come’” (103).

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