

**“She grew more English every day; and that was a good thing”:
Gender, Nation, and Posthumanism in Du Maurier’s *Trilby***

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2 + 2 = 4, also 2 x 2 = 4: that peculiarity was no reason why 4 should be conceited; for what was 4 but a result, either way? Well, [Little Billee] was like 4—just an inevitable result of circumstances over which he had no control—a mere product or sum; and though he meant to make himself as big a 4 as he could (to cultivate his peculiar *fourness*), he could no longer feel the old conceit and self-complacency; and they had been a joy, and it was hard to do without them. (146)

<1>In George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), Little Billee obsesses over his “fourness.” He and other characters struggle to escape the deterministic logic, here presented as two mathematical equations, that drives their destinies. This deterministic logic works through Darwinism on their bodies; just over a century later, Darwinist theories of biological advancement undergird posthumanist theories explaining our contemporary cultural obsession with body modifications. A telling definition says posthumanism is “the belief in artificially enhanced evolution” (Terranova “Posthuman” 234). Posthumanism and postbody theory, which include thinking about the human body in relation to both animal bodies and cyborgs, provide one way to explore nineteenth-century, Darwinian stylizations of the body. Here, I draw on scholars like Jill Galvan, William A. Cohen, Tamara Ketabgian, and others, who have explored posthumanism’s relevance for the later nineteenth century, and I explain the relationship between *Trilby* and posthumanism particularly. I argue that posthumanism should not forget its roots in the intellectual history of the nineteenth century, and that while parts of posthumanism acknowledge human embodiment as the condition of consciousness, posthumanism needs to do so universally. Also, scholars of later nineteenth-century British literature need to account for the troubling ways *Trilby* shows characters’ material embodiments driving their consciousnesses. These fields, by engaging each other more fully, can better understand the long arc of British culture’s obsession with consciousness and the body. In *Trilby*, competing national codes style the gendered body, and these codes determine success in evolutionary logic.

<2>Some recent critics of nineteenth-century literature have engaged Darwinism, embodiment, or posthumanism to explicate *Trilby*, but no one has yet accounted for how Darwinist posthumanism can provide a unique insight into *Trilby*’s obsession with English, nationalist codes in embodying consciousness. Helpfully, Laura Vorachek’s and Christine Ferguson’s recent, excellent articles on *Trilby* put the novel in the context of social Darwinism; I do not think *Trilby*’s Darwinism is necessarily social Darwinism, but the novel’s use of Darwinism has social Darwinist or eugenicist resonances. Vorachek analyses Little Billee reading Darwin’s work and considers the procreative success of minor characters. Ferguson focuses on the foot in evolution, and the role *Trilby*’s foot (and artistic representations of it) plays in the novel. My discussion builds on their insights to clarify how evolution shapes characters’

bodies, and how this shaping drives their thoughts and consciousnesses. Other nineteenth-century scholars have developed the era's connection with posthumanism. Ketabgian shows how Victorians imagined their machines' inner lives or thoughts, but she ends her analysis a few decades before *Trilby's* seemingly mechanized consciousness. Cohen argues for the embodied nature of the mind and the importance of the senses as material or physical indications of the connection between mind and body. *Trilby's* focus on the materiality of the body suggests a shift in thinking about subjectivity in relationship to Darwinism at the end of the nineteenth-century. I follow Cohen, who says "Victorian writers [...] posed the body against or athwart the self, decentering the humanist subject by focusing on its materiality," for *Trilby* and others lose control of their thoughts based on their changing bodies (xiii). Embodiment is a popular topic for recent critics, and Galvan in her book *The Sympathetic Medium* has connected the female operator of transmission systems to mediumship; she links *Trilby* to the phonograph (3). Elsewhere, Galvan argues that the séance and "spirit-seekers" anticipated the posthuman, in a discussion of the cyborg and Darwinism (80). My own claim is that posthumanism, sometimes unknowingly, draws on evolution rather than that *Trilby* and evolution anticipate postbody theory, as others imply. I explore the novel's attempted overlay of an English identity over bodies unfit for Englishness due to their mixed heritages and insist that biological determinism is used in *Trilby* to negate possibilities for characters of mixed heritage. Following these several critics, I expand on the fraught subjects of materiality and consciousness in this era, and I insist that national and gender codes underwrite embodied consciousness in *Trilby*.

<3>My argument begins with a brief explication of how, for Du Maurier, Britishness is Englishness in this era. That posthumanism will draw on nationally-coded theories of biological materiality simply suggests that posthumanism carries the seeds of evolutionary theories of materiality in it, and few today will assert that evolution is not indelibly marked by nationalistic, racial theories. Posthumanism cannot escape nineteenth-century constructions of nation so easily. Then I explore the direct invocations of Darwinian and Lamarckian evolution and degeneration, in *Trilby*, to probe the consequences of evolutionary logic. This linkage exposes the shared intellectual history of posthumanism and evolution. When using *Trilby* as a popular culture exemplar of these theories, we see how the novel objects to any severing of consciousness from embodiment and how specific, malleable, material embodiment produces different thoughts and possibilities for its characters. The novel incorporates some character history into its depiction of materially-determined consciousness. My analysis of *Trilby* draws on later nineteenth-century theories of embodiment and cognition from anatomists to show the era's obsession with national differences in the gendered human body. I end by briefly exploring how *Trilby's* deterministic logic ranges beyond embodiment to other explanations for a character's fate.

<4>My focus on national identity shaping the deterministic logic in *Trilby* requires some explication of how the British nation is an unstable construction at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Linda Colley's *Britons*, English, Welsh, and Scottish national identities fused to form a fourth identity, one of Britishness, that overlaid without replacing the earlier, independent national identities. This argument directly contradicts previous arguments that suggest Britishness is solely Englishness imposed upon Welsh and Scottish national identities through colonialist practices. *Trilby's* recurring phrase *trois Angliches* indicating the Scotch, Welsh, and English (and even possibly Irish) Laird, Taffy, and Little Billee shows that Englishness stands in for Britishness, and the effects of internal colonialism have produced Scotch subjects as English in the francophone eyes of the narrator. Essentially, it would seem that the varieties of Britishness do not really matter since they are all basically English, anyway. This allows for the novel's slippage between English and British. The British felt the necessity of reviving a specific national identity at this historical juncture partly because of threats to the integrity of the empire. Krishan Kumar thoroughly explicates how Englishness was imposed as Britishness throughout the UK

and argues the English faced a lively reassertion of Scottish, Irish, and Welsh nationalist movements (200):

[f]altering confidence in empire; the decline of religion, and the identities it sustained; changing perceptions of the national enemy; the rise of cultural and ethnic nationalism; all these worked to undermine the primacy of the British identity [...] there was room, and a felt need, for some expression of English national identity. (Kumar 202)

This development necessitated the assertion of a new “British” national identity, but since few period tracts celebrated “Englishness” as a distinctive national character, we must look for obscure assertions of Englishness *as* British national identity (Kumar 175-196). *Trilby* bears these obscure assertions underneath an ostensibly hybrid Britishness. Kumar traces out assertions of Anglo-Saxon-ness saying, “[a] strong strain of anti-Celtic rhetoric marked late nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism” (202-208; 207). Furthermore “the future of English might seem to lie in a returning to itself, to its true Saxon nature, and in getting rid of [its] Celtic elements” (207). In other words, the English wanted to create a national identity that had the façade of inclusion yet the goal of exclusion. In *Trilby*, “Britishness” seems required for procreative abilities, but as we shall see this Britishness bears a distinctly English character. Kumar tells us “the original word [Britain] evidently referred to the Celtic practice of painting the body” (5). This practice compellingly conflates nationalism and a stylization of the body.

***Trilby* and Posthumanism, Darwinism, and Degeneration**

<5>*Trilby* tells the story of Trilby O’Ferrall, a young woman of English (and Irish) blood living in France. Set in the 1850s and 1860s, Du Maurier represents the artistic world of the Parisian Left Bank as a hodgepodge of nationalities—French, English, German, and the racially-written Jew. Trilby has little national identity initially, but as the story progresses, her contact with three young men develops her English national identity. However, a mesmeric Jewish villain named Svengali turns Trilby into an unknowing automaton: a singer capable of the greatest vocalic feats but only as an unconscious performer. This use of Trilby’s body emphasizes embodied consciousness for readers, and it also raises the issue of human consciousness as having a biological basis that evolutionary thinking now needed to explain. The language of evolution so saturates *Trilby* that it turns up in unusual places, such as the discussion of artistic movements; the narrator describes “a time of evolution, revolution, change, and development—of the founding of new schools and the crumbling away of old ones—a keen struggle for existence—a surviving of the fit—a preparation, let us hope, for the ultimate survival of the fittest” (151). By using these terms to describe artistic movements rather than human reproduction the novel naturalizes the terms and suggests the laws of evolution apply to all human conditions.

<6>In narrating Little Billee’s reading of Darwin, the novel suggests a rejection of Darwinian evolution and flirts with an alternative method of imagining biological or material reality. Darwin’s theory of natural selection argues that variation in animals allowed some to survive and reproduce better than others in the species; a contradictory (and earlier) theory of evolution, by Lamarck, suggested that individual animals could adapt and pass on their adaptations. Gillian Beer provides an excellent summary of these competing theories saying “Lamarck’s account of evolutionary process is *still* the popular one [...] the source of creativity is in the world of species. But intention or will remained the *instrument* of change, in that creatures learn physically to adapt and can in Lamarck’s view pass on their acquired physical adaptations to their inheritors” (20). The novel engages both evolutionary accounts, showing a Lamarckian change of physiognomy in the titular Trilby and the Darwinian extinction of her line; since she and Little Billee feel as though they have lost their will, or their intentionality, these

developed traits no longer seem to matter. As Beer says, “[i]n Lamarck's theory conscious endeavour, as well as reflexive habit, are agents of evolutionary change” (19). The novel tries to incorporate personal history and embodied change into its logic of determinism, as we will see, but since many of the main characters lack progeny, the novel does not fully endorse either theory of evolution.

<7>The context of evolution also produced the idea of degeneration.⁽¹⁾ Using Lamarckian terms, Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth explain “concerns about the hereditary transmission of physical and mental traits and fears of the long-term decline of families and civilizations” through degeneration (287). Degeneration required reproduction of less sophisticated creatures; in Edwin Lankester's popular *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880), he argued that “[d]egeneration may be defined as a gradual change of the structure in which the organism becomes adapted to *less* varied and *less* complex conditions of life [...] there is *suppression* of form, corresponding to the cessation of work” (32). Lankester's observation of non-advanced life forms (like moss) existing alongside complex ones required explanation; in Darwinism's progressive narrative, these life forms should have advanced (29). “Balance,” without advancement or degeneration, is a possibility, but not a compelling account for the Earth's multitude of non-advanced life forms, according to Lankester (29). Neither *Trilby* nor *Little Billee* produce degenerate or weak offspring. The divergent and contradictory theories of Lamarck and Darwin cannot always be held in opposition, for as Beer says, “[i]t is extraordinarily difficult to eradicate the language of intention from accounts of evolutionary development. Darwin himself never entirely succeeded. But for him there was a constant awareness that he must try to expunge from language the suggestion that will is a force for change” (19-20). The novel imagines a deeply conflicted view of embodiment affecting cognition and the will, and embodiment in *Trilby* comes in nationalized terms.

<8>Scientific belief, written as belief in Darwin, spoils Little Billee's one shot at an English middle-class life by causing him to doubt his not-nearly masculine-nor-English-enough body while he also experiences a crisis of religious belief. Little Billee's attempted romance of Alice, the “pure woman,” reveals the novel's obsession with a distinctly English, not British, character (179). He feels that Alice's father, a clergyman, will reject him; he wonders, “[w]hat allowances will *he* make for a poor little weak-kneed, well-meaning waif of a painter-fellow like me, whose only choice lay between Mr Darwin and the Pope of Rome, and who has chosen once and for ever—and that long ago—before he'd ever even heard of Mr Darwin's name” (181). This confluence of his weak body and his inability to believe in religion—represented here in a very un-English way—indicates the unshakeable connection between materiality and consciousness in *Trilby*. Little Billee can only imagine an English suitor for Alice; he thinks “Alice is not for the like of *me*! She's for some splendid young Devon squire, six foot high, and a-cred and whiskered within an inch of his life!” (176). Importantly, he imagines one way to get Alice, even though he's not six foot high nor whiskered so masculinely. He thinks he “can do more good by lying than by telling the truth, [...] and this lie of mine is on so stupendous a scale that it will have to last me for life. It's my only one, but its name is *Lion*! and I'll never tell another” (186). The lie, the “*Lion*” that is Englishness, is one Little Billee finally cannot tell. He consciously grapples with, and submits to, Darwinist logic that erases his body's procreative abilities. He confronts Alice's father with his refutation of Biblical truth and ends his chance at the lie of an English, Lion-like life.

<9>Little Billee's romantic and procreative failure emphasizes how, in *Trilby*, material immortality matters. The painters seek artistic success to ensure a continuation of their ideas, and *Trilby* feels the loss of her biological contribution to humanity as keenly as Little Billee. As Little Billee rereads Darwin and confronts the clergyman with his doubts about Anglican truth, the novel introduces the human body as a medical, historical, and even discursive text; this discursivity, alongside *Trilby*'s artistic depictions of the body, demonstrates its fascination with textual embodiment. Some of posthumanism, as a branch of

postmodernity, thinks of the body as a discursively-produced phenomenon; leading scholar N. Katherine Hayles wryly comments that a “contemporary belief likely to stupefy future generations is the postmodern orthodoxy that the body is primarily, if not entirely, a linguistic and discursive construction [also ...] the body’s materiality is secondary to the logical or semiotic structures it encodes” (*How* 192). This is a riposte to Judith Butler, who famously argued that gendered bodies are discursive in *Gender Trouble*. In subsequent books, Hayles defines materiality as “an emergent property created through dynamic interactions between physical characteristics and signifying strategies” (*Mother* 3). Defining materiality as a “property” that comes from the interaction between something solid like “physical characteristics” and signifying (or discursive) strategies provides a palpable corrective to postmodernity. However, it posits an inaccessible blank that only comes into human knowledge through signification. The *trois Angliches* admire Little Billee's quick painting of Trilby's foot during their reunion in Paris; this picture “was Trilby herself,” an embodiment of her identity that suggests how absolutely tied their knowledge of her is to representations of her materiality (202). Here, Little Billee has immortalized himself and Trilby even if the *trois Angliches* are the only ones who recognize this immortality. The painted-on-the-wall material representation of Trilby reinforces her physicality. Discursivity and materiality are inextricable here.

<10>Trilby’s material body changes like a discursive construction in the novel; at one point, it even seems as though her bodily changes are so drastic that her intentional will has escaped. Posthumanism worries the very question of empty bodies. Hayles summarizes one of Hans Moravec’s posthumanist positions that “humans [may] find ways to upload their consciousness into computers and leave their bodies behind” (*My Mother* 1). But Hayles questions the ethics of computerizing human consciousness, because what will happen to leftover human bodies? Trilby’s emptied, consciousness-lacking body appears when she performs after her capture by Svengali. Her triumph on the stage, while mesmerized, greatly dismays her three English friends. They notice Trilby’s “lips and cheeks were rouged” and her significantly different dress (209). Her unnatural appearance—painted, robed, and decorated like a queen—causes the Laird to disbelieve she’s Trilby. The essence of Trilby, that Little Billee captured in his painting of her foot, has vanished. The narrator says the Laird “had narrowly scanned her face [...] Her face was narrower and longer, her eyes larger, and their expression not the same, then she seemed taller and stouter, and her shoulders broader and more dropping, and so forth” (222). Trilby’s body has changed as her consciousness has changed or vanished. Her body is a shell that has been re-shaped into another form: “[h]er face was thin, and had a rather haggard expression, in spite of its artificial freshness” (209). The contradiction between “the original” that the narrator (and the three Englishmen) can see wasting away and the imposed/unnatural freshness suggests unfair tampering and “artificial” mechanization. Her eyes also appear empty as they see her “rouged and pearl-powdered, and her eyes were blackened beneath, and thus made to look twice their size” (234). The enlarged, darkened, empty eyes emphasize absent interiority. Lacking consciousness further points to the possibility of a material determinism, much like Little Billee's “product” realization. Her disturbing actions include “a cold stare of disdain, and [she] cut him dead [...] with a little high-pitched flippant snigger worthy of a London barmaid” (234-35). Trilby’s behavior contradicts her previous, nearly ladylike self. The three Englishmen had worked hard at Anglicizing Trilby, trying to make her a respectable woman, and this utter reversal shocks them. As Jeff Wallace says, “[p]opular narratives of Darwinian evolutionism [...] show how the moment of the emergence of mind out of matter could be construed as one of an amiable awakening or enlightenment” (14). Contrarily, *Trilby*’s popular narrative of evolution is deeply troubled by the severing of consciousness from organic materiality.

<11>Posthumanist theories of materiality and consciousness also appear in *Trilby* through the metaphor of prosthesis. Katherine Hayles argues that posthumanism considers cognition an evolutionary accident

and not ordained, and she discusses how the metaphor of prosthesis explains human manipulations of (sometimes their own) organic materiality (*How* 2-3). The *trois Angliches* first realize how Trilby became a great singer in horror as “Little Billee remembered there was such a person as Svengali in the world, and recalled his little flexible flageolet!” (214). The “little flexible flageolet” links Trilby with a manipulable object or prosthesis. The parallel between a beautifully singing “La Svengali,” once a woman with great physiological potential but no talent, and the phallus-like instrument, which gives Svengali great pleasure, becomes painfully obvious. Svengali played with his flageolet throughout the text. Early on, he “pulled out of his pocket a kind of little flexible flageolet (of his own invention, it seems)” (23). Svengali keeps this instrument in his pocket and “[h]e poured” all his energy “into his little flexible flageolet” for fulfillment, musical or otherwise (42). While Trilby’s extensive manipulation and success as a singer implies a more complex relationship than a one-to-one comparison with a flageolet, the basic comparison provides insight for the English characters and reveals the novel’s concern with questions of embodiment that posthumanism continues to wrestle today. Trilby as a prosthetic extension of Svengali very nearly resembles her “Englishing” at the hands of the three Englishmen, but it has vastly different narrative effects (see below). She is either a prosthesis for Svengali, garnering him fame, or an “English” machine produced by the *trois Angliches*.

<12>Trilby, as a manipulable prosthetic or machine in others’ hands, might be understood as the science fictional hybridization of pre-hypnosis organic matter and hypnotized, mechanized consciousness. Some utopian posthumanism considers the conjunction of the human and the inorganic machine the cyborg; per Donna Haraway, the cyborg is, “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction [...] the cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience [...] the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (2269). Humans cannot distinguish between machine and human in a successful cyborg; thus the human becomes more like an automaton and the machine becomes more human. R. L. Rutsky argues that “the birth or coming to life of the machine is not simply the product of a rational, scientific design [...] such a machine is necessarily infused with a living spirit, with a soul” (24). This “coming to life” of the machine does not exist in a vacuum, either. Ketabgian, drawing on Hayles, argues against “the persistent dismissal of machinery from the real of modern psychology [...] Victorian machines were not simply soulless, lifeless, predictable, and unidimensional; not simply opposed to organic feeling and vitality; and not simply reductive material objects” (2). The living spirit infusing characters, automatons, or biological substrates in *Trilby* is a reasserted national identity. The infusion of nationalism into materiality shows how thoroughly posthumanity has blurred the human/machine boundary. And in the 1890s, evolutionary posthumanism asserts difference along nationalist lines.

Competing National Ideologies and the Gendered Body

<13>An English national identity serves as one central trope of *Trilby*. Sarah Gracombe’s sharp argument about English national identity focuses on the cultural aspect of identity but disregards embodiment (76). By linking her argument with an account of materiality, we can see the parallel nationalizing of Trilby by the *trois anglisches* and by Svengali (81). The Englishing of Trilby has an anatomical effect on her, and her bodily changes, instigated by the three English men, happen early in the novel. Trilby initially lacks a strong, singular national identity, but her development happens according to pattern: English housewife, Jewish performer, or French prostitute. In this process, a rejection of hybridity occurs. During her Englishing, the narrator observes that “the bones of her cheeks and jaws began to show themselves [...] the improvement was astonishing, almost inexplicable” (90). The Englishmen notice the physiological change as “[s]he was no longer slangy in French” and “her mouth, always too large, took on a firmer and sweeter outline, and her big British teeth were so white and regular that

even Frenchmen forgave them their British bigness” (88, 90). Trilby has bent under the influence of English books, English language, English manners, English food, and, of course, the company of English men (60-68). Indeed, “[s]he grew more English every day; and that was a good thing” (62). It is readily apparent that the racial quality of her blood has been enhanced by the culturally English *trois Angliches* so that she has become the perfect woman—in body, mind, and English cultural taste. As Cohen argues, “Victorian fiction frequently recurs to the body’s materiality in representing interior being” (11). This woman, now Anglicized into a lady, is primed for producing perfect Protestant progeny. And each of the *trois Angliches* want to marry her.

<14>The English language is an important factor in *Trilby’s* nationalist imagination. According to Christine Ferguson, evolutionary theorists agreed that “the role of language [was] the apparent *sine qua non* of human identity” (*Language* 21). Language provided an important identity for humans; it distinguished them in a world revolutionized by the claim that humans descended from “lower orders” of animals. Some period scientists went further by claiming that language could also mark the orders of an ascending taxonomic system internal to the human race. Thus evolution gave the higher races, ostensibly the English or Europeans, more abstract language. Henry Maudsley, a premier mental scientist of the late nineteenth century, writes of a much lesser race, the “native Australian, [...] one of the lowest existing savages, has no words in his language to express such exalted ideas as justice, love, virtue, mercy [...] he has no such ideas in his mind, and cannot comprehend them” (56). Because of their developed vocabulary, Britons could display their “higher mental faculties [which] are formed by evolution from the more simple and elementary, just as the more special and complex structure proceeds from the more simple and general [...] follow the order of development” (5). Maudsley’s evolutionary teleology posits higher and higher orders. Trilby’s improved French and English, as opposed to her later subhuman snigger, reflect her evolved mental state. The next evolutionary step for the highly developed Trilby could be successful reproduction. Early in the novel, language was part of Little Billee’s attempt to convert Trilby from a young person first appearing in “the grey overcoat of a French infantry soldier” speaking in “English, with an accent half Scotch and certain French intonations” into the proper English, middle-class woman (12, 13). Trilby’s ability to speak proper English, with some training, further reflects her white, English materiality. This ability is specifically racial, in addition to cultural, because her body has changed. Maudsley writes against “materialism” and “spiritualism” and advocates exploring the physical or physiological causes for divergent mental states, just as Trilby’s physical body indicates her changed mental state (vi; vi-vii). Her Englishness can develop her brain and its anatomy according to nineteenth-century anatomists.

<15>Descriptive anatomist Jean-Martin Charcot, a widely-influential French neurologist, describes distributed cognition in the human body; posthumanists discuss distributed cognition extensively, noting that it is a key feature of the posthuman. Charcot says, “the principles of cerebral localization rest upon the following proposition: The encephalon does not represent an homogeneous organ, a unit, but rather an association, or a confederation, composed of a certain number of diverse organs. To each of these organs belong distinct physiological properties, functions, and faculties” (*Localization* 3). Here, cognition is distributed throughout the brain. On the brain’s anatomy Maudsley asserted there was a “physical meaning of the progress of human intelligence from generation to generation. What structural differences in the brain are implied by it? [...] this progress has been accompanied by a progressive development of the cerebral hemispheres, the convolutions of which have increased in size, number, and complexity” (53-54). In this formulation, the brain develops physically; as the primary seat of the mind, the brain is bound to have increasing ability. Maudsley does not assert that the brain is the *sole* seat of the mind but argues that the mind or consciousness is distributed throughout the human body. At one point, he extends a reference to instincts becoming embodied in nerve fibers that are not part of

the brain. Hayles discusses the developments in similar “models of neural functioning” in the second half of the twentieth century in her description of the emergent posthuman (*Mother* 7-11). These models draw directly on the earlier work of scientists like Maudsley, who says:

[the increased] superiority of the human over the animal mind seems to be essentially connected with the greater variety of muscular action of which man is capable: were he deprived of the infinitely varied movements of hands, tongue, larynx, lips, and face, in which he is so far ahead of the animals, it is probable that he would be no better than an idiot, notwithstanding he might have a normal development of brain. (30)

This complex interplay of bodily development through evolution and increasing intelligence suggests that if a more perfect body develops then a higher form of consciousness is possible. According to Cohen, “[e]volutionary biology and affiliated nineteenth-century sciences promoted the notion that consciousness developed out of the body rather than being implanted in it” and then discusses how with Maudsley’s work “[s]uch biological determinism was offensive to many different kinds of thinkers” (2; 3). Also, Maudsley thinks non-brain anatomy plays a deterministic role in consciousness for humanity. Charcot argued against behavior producing anatomical change; he says an underlying biology causes disease not “prolonged functional disturbance” (4). In his schema, biology produces behavioral and anatomical change. *Trilby* more resembles Maudsley’s notion of changed materiality changing consciousness, and in Lamarckian terms, these changes could benefit evolution.

<16>Trilby’s anatomy is possibly already highly evolved, as her vocal organs suggest, even though her poor control of this anatomy would not benefit evolution. Svengali points out, “[t]he entrance to [Trilby’s] throat is like the middle porch of St Sulpice when the doors are open for the faithful on All Saints’ Day” (50-51). The erotic suggestion—that the faithful can enter her orally—indicates the multiple uses her body has for Svengali beyond that of singing machine. Suggesting non-reproductive sex adds to Trilby’s discomfort. Svengali’s later anatomizing leads him to predict that after dying she will be displayed like an exoticized museum specimen, that she “shall have a nice little mahogany glass case all to yourself in the museum [...] and Svengali shall come in his new fur-lined coat, smoking his big cigar of the Havana, and [...] look through the holes of your eyes [...] and up the nostrils of your high, bony sounding-board of a nose” (92). Death does not stop his interest in her anatomy. Trilby’s particular anatomy predisposes her to musical greatness—and signals evolutionary hyper-development—but Svengali must manipulate her tone-deaf body to make great music. Trilby’s British-now-Anglicized racial heritage has produced the machinery for Svengali to manipulate; racially-other Svengali cannot sing like she can because of her British-blood anatomy. That the three Englishmen find his anatomizing of her distasteful reifies the racial boundaries explicit in the novel.

<17>Svengali is reading Trilby like an encoded, informational system: her raced body looks like that of a good singer to him. Richard Menke, one of the recent critics who connects the later Victorian era with emerging electronic means of communication, argues that the concept of information developed alongside the new “transmission systems” of writing, such as the telegraph. He says that “[n]ineteenth-century information was not automatically imagined as separate from the reality of embodied subjects and material objects. In Victorian fictions, any such separation usually seems perilous and temporary: the conversion of life to information is often represented as estranging and violent, and information often returns to haunt the world of matter and bodies” (23). Trilby objects to Svengali’s violent and estranging reading of her body; her will later evaporates under his powers in his nearly permanent severance of her consciousness from her body. Throughout *Trilby* anatomical descriptions trigger particularized emotional reactions. The body is a text the characters try to change, and characters hope

these anatomical adjustments will reshape their consciousnesses. For instance, Maudsley's thinking about embodied cognition parallels Little Billee's connection of his emotions with his materiality. During an anguished re-reading of Darwin, Little Billee says, "[f]or that's what's the matter with me—a pimple—just a little clot of blood at the root of a nerve, and no bigger than a pin's point!" (179). He thinks of his emotional self as a problematic and possibly abnormal development, saying "he felt rather bitterly how happy he could be if the little spot, or knot, or blot, or clot which paralysed that convolution of his brain where he kept his affections could but be conjured away!" (174). He cannot quite reshape his body which, according to Maudsley's schema, will change his emotions and cognition.

<18>National terms reshape the bodies of women and men in *Trilby*. Little Billee, as the chosen suitor of the three Englishmen, must become appropriately English for his potential marriage. Initially, the narrator praises Little Billee's "faint suggestion of some possible very remote Jewish ancestor" who gave him an "infinitesimal dose of the good old Oriental blood, [which ...] made him stick to his last through thick and thin" (6). However, the narrator condemns Oriental/Eastern influence more frequently and vehemently, and compares people of more than one racial background to mixed breed dogs (157, 7). The ephemeral privileging of hybridity (much like in the substitution of Englishness for Britishness) dissipates when the novel considers his reproductive potential. Little Billee's weakness appears not in "impure" language (such as Trilby's) or racialized facial features. Rather, feminized features indicate weakness—"Little Billee was small and slender [...] very graceful and well built, with very small hands and feet [...] young and tender [...] almost girlish purity of mind" and his artistic ability (Du Maurier 6, 8, 9). He is weak when losing Trilby: "[h]e grew more and more uncontrollable, became almost unintelligible, he stammered so—a pitiable sight and pitiable to hear" with an "epileptic seizure. It ended in brain fever and other complications" (135). This emotion-turned-embodied-disease more frequently defines the woman's representation in the nineteenth-century novel. And Little Billee, as a puny, less-than-masculine character, cannot procreate. Later, Little Billee wonders, "[c]ould [Alice] possibly care for a shrimp like himself?" (176). If only Little Billee could gain weight—thereby becoming anatomically English and male—he might succeed. Little Billee is a failed Englishman: his failure to procreate and lack of malleable materiality keeps him from evolutionary success; his mixed blood cannot adapt as well as Trilby's, and he is the novel's most thorough-going example of evolutionary determinism.

<19>The frequent passages concerning Little Billee's androgyny, and the overwhelming sex drive of Svengali, prompt Neil Davison to read Svengali as the "gendering" factor in *Trilby*. He suggests that Svengali, as Jew figure, gender-binarizes the initially androgynous Trilby and Billee. However, the overtly masculine older Englishmen exert just as much power. Taffy appears "[b]are-armed, and in his shirt and trousers [...] he was perspiring freely and looked fierce. He was a very big young man, fair, [...] the muscles of his brawny arm were strong as iron bands;" plus he escaped injury in the disastrous Crimean War (4, 5). This body is more properly fit for evolution or successful reproduction. Maudsley's injunction that the more sophisticated, perfect body is of higher evolutionary standing with a more attuned mind applies to Taffy not Little Billee. Indeed, Taffy's embodied masculinity contrasts greatly with Billee's miscegenated androgyny. Taffy and the Laird try to masculinize Little Billee, but they fail frequently and finally. No amount of Englishing can prepare Little Billee's recalcitrant Eastern blood for evolution and reproduction. After the reappearance of Trilby as La Svengali, Little Billee must wonder "what an unmanly duffer!" about himself (225). And, unlike the more reserved Englishman he should be, the "Little Greek that he was, he worshipped the athlete, and opined that all women without exception—all English women especially—must see with the same eyes as himself" (177). It is not a coincidence that Little Billee's mixed blood accounts for his overly homosocial, potentially subversive tendencies, and in "Tit for tat," the illustration Davison analyzes, the men with any amount of Jewish blood are penetrated,

ultimately, by the hyper-masculine Englishman. Certainly they will feel the prick of English nationalist ideology's "red-hot needle" that Trilby is numb to while under hypnosis (298). Sadly, Trilby's penetration by Svengali makes her completely unfit for life as an Englishwoman and she dies. Little Billee, the excellent artist but failed Englishman, must die as well. Of the main characters, only Taffy, who with the perfected masculine physique is fit for progress, marries and reproduces. Interestingly, Taffy's body does not need shaping during plot of the novel; as a war hero, he is already proven fit.

<20>Being a proper English matron is not possible for Trilby not because of androgyny, part of the basis for Little Billee's exclusion, but because of her time under Svengali's spell. This is another place where the novel incorporates a character's personal history into its logic of biological determinism; if Trilby had married one of the three Englishmen after her Englishing, the story might have ended differently. Instead, Svengali has Trilby "for his wife, slave, and pupil" for years (245). This period—when Trilby is partially under Svengali's mesmeric powers and partially not—suggests something quite frightening to Mrs. Bagot, *Trilby's* primary arbiter of respectability. After Trilby's "recovery" by the three Englishmen, Mrs. Bagot "caught her in her arms, and kissed and caressed her, and burst into a flood of tears, and forced her back into her chair, hugging her as if she were a long-lost child" (269). The occasion for such a passionate outburst comes because of her redemption from Svengali. The narrator says Mrs. Bagot "was just a shrewd little conventional British county matron of the good upper middle-class type, bristling all over with provincial proprieties and respectabilities" (271). The novel makes it clear that Mrs. Bagot's outburst is *not* predicated on Trilby's potentially sexually exploited subalternity to a man (or, much of conventional marriage); rather, it's that Trilby served in this binary outside the justificatory scheme of a proper English marriage. Mrs. Bagot's first question for the Laird and Taffy when discussing Trilby's identity is *not* "is she a lady," but is "[i]s she English?" (123). Mrs. Bagot's transformation into Trilby's admirer, and thus the metaphorical transformation of the English polity, though, is tempered by her "quite forgetting (or affecting to forget) on what very questionable soil the lily had been reared" (271). The impossibility of Trilby reproducing in her sickened state and a selective censoring of her history enables the novel to show Mrs. Bagot's forgiveness and protects the English national line and memory at the same time.

<21>Of course, the novel does not allow Little Billee to train his mixed body nor does he procreate. In posthuman terms, we see the body as prosthesis in Svengali's training of Trilby. Gecko, Svengali's friend and accomplice, reveals that "Svengali with his little flexible flageolet, I with my violin—that is how we taught her to make the sounds—and then how to use them" (297). This process takes a period of several years and resembles more the writing of computer code than fine-tuning an instrument. (2) Trilby is the instrument or device used by Svengali as a singer just as she is the device used by the Englishmen for the nation's ends; it is not that Trilby is learning or has learned to control her own body in either case. *Trilby's* attempt to nationalize Little Billee also makes him resemble an instrument at times, but were his speedy course of gendered nationalizing successful, he would have benefited immensely.

Conclusion

<22>Using posthumanism to interpret *Trilby* makes the role of embodiment in consciousness obvious. Here, the body is gendered and nationalized before procreation; unsuccessful reproduction demonstrates failed bodies, or evolutionary determinism gone awry. In the revised notion of posthumanism that I'm proposing here, human intelligence does depend on the body; the body is central to anything human and the posthuman cannot get away from the organic, biological body without becoming purely machine. Importantly, the nineteenth-century's high valuation of evolutionary logic has not disappeared. Gillian Beer tells us that Darwinism remains culturally relevant because of

“the accumulating realisation over the past decade of how significant the discovery of DNA is for all our lives and futures” (xxiii). Contemporary culture obsesses over humanly-enhanced evolution. When today’s cultural critics use “evolution” to define posthumanism, we should consider how culture today might replicate some evils of evolutionary theory. Posthumanism, as a branch of critical theory alive today, should consider its own intellectual history.

<23>My analysis suggests that to better account for gendered nationalism, posthumanism needs to question its links with evolutionary theory thoroughly. Posthumanism that privileges the biological material foundation of consciousness must account for how literature imagines the controlling factors of nationalism and gender that might shape one’s consciousness. As the epigraph to this article shows, Little Billee feels like “just an inevitable circumstance over which he had no control,” a sentiment which Trilby herself articulates later in the text (146). Whether Trilby can escape the gendered nationalism rampant in Du Maurier’s novel is not entirely clear. At the novel’s close, she is “quite an imbecile, no doubt from grief and anxiety. But she never left her husband’s bedside for a moment, and had the obedience and devotion of a dog” until Svengali dies (246). To those with English eyes, Trilby’s participation with Svengali in a sexual union must look like a marriage; nothing else is intelligible from within this national symbolic. As such, they can see the unnaturalness of her sex and the construction of her desire for Svengali. Her farewell song to his picture also reeks of unwilling obedience to an unjust practice. Yet, she remembers her resistance to Svengali quite well; she says “[h]e used to say he’d come and look at me there [the Morgue], and the idea made me so sick” (256). These conflicting moments reveal her coerced participation in the system of power that benefits Svengali. And questioning the Englishmen’s positioning of her comes only after extensive analysis; it’s not as though the narrative strongly encourages readers to see Svengali and the Englishmen having a similar effect on Trilby. Paradoxically, the religious determinism she expresses before her death contradicts the religious system of power represented by English nationalist Mrs. Bagot and the *trois Angliches*. Of her father, Trilby says, “[h]e told me that *he* was responsible for me—he often said so—and that mamma was too, and his parents for *him*, and his grandfathers and grandmothers for *them*” (279). In her view, she has no control over her destiny; it’s all in her ancestors’ hands. Just as Little Billee is a four, Trilby is also a product. Interestingly, Trilby cannot participate in this sort of determinism. Since she does not leave any descendants, and her one dependent brother has died, the possibility of her responsibility for another is unrealized. Trilby’s faith in religious determinism releases her from the bonds of English nationalism, the bonds that competed with Svengali’s mesmeric stripping of her English national identity. At least from the evolutionary perspective that posthumanism occasionally endorses, her actions may have aided this escape; her agency, exerted in body-shaping ways, has had some effect. Posthumanism better theorizes the complex interplay of determinism and action in shaping her destiny even if the novel ends with release through faith alone. This release comes on her deathbed. Throughout determinism has focused in and on the body; the escape in death is an escape into religious determinism and away from the body.

Endnotes

(1) Degeneration and the decadent movement are well trod critical territory. The sympathetic portrayal of so many artists might make *Trilby* seem like an aesthetic or decadent novel, and therefore like Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, critical of the notion that embodied degeneration can wholly affect one generation instead of happening over several (Constable et al 20). However, the question of decadence in *Trilby* is much debated. Dennis Denisoff argues that Du Maurier celebrates a degree of artistic/sexual dissidence only to reject it fully in his next novel, *The Martian*. Furthermore, Jonathan H. Grossman traces the lampooning of Wilde by Du Maurier in *Punch* to a critique of aestheticism also evident in

Trilby. Michèle Mendelssohn discusses degeneration and Maudsley and Nordau extensively, arguing that Jews (and Little Billee is an honorary Jew due to this mixed racial heritage) in *Trilby* are representative degenerates. (▲)

(2) I would venture to suggest that a metaphor like “coding” explains *Trilby*'s automation best, but I don't have space for that argument here. Computer code depends on exact inputs to produce an exact response, and resembles the note-by-note rote learning that turns the woman *Trilby* into a singing machine. While the computer had not yet debuted in Western consciousness, the “calculator”—as an adding machine with some pre-programming—existed decades before the publication of *Trilby*. See Simon Schaffer for an account of Babbage's Analytical Engine, or what might be described as the first computer in Western culture. The ability to generate sensitive responses from a pre-programmed device more clearly resembles the function of a machine today, and this helps bridge the connection between the possibly disparate meanings or uses of the metaphor. (▲)

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