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Freakish Masculinity in the Eighteenth Century: Andrew Miller's *Ingenious Pain* and Hilary Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien*

La masculinité grotesque au dix-huitième siècle : *Ingenious Pain* d'Andrew Miller et *The Giant, O'Brien* d'Hilary Mantel

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Article abstract

This paper considers masculinity in two twentieth-century historical novels set in the eighteenth century: Andrew Miller's *Ingenious Pain* (1997) and Hilary Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998). It argues that both novels create protagonists who embody masculine-coded attributes, including resistance to pain and bodily size and strength, and that, in both novels, earning potential is concomitant with such attributes. Complicating matters, however, the very exaggeration of stereotypical masculine characteristics in these texts causes each man to seem something other and less than a man—ranging for both, at different times, from monstrous to pathetically weak (and childlike, or even womanish) victim. Qualities associated with manhood, therefore, paradoxically deny the men more agency than they allow in these stories set in the eighteenth century, inhibiting them from enjoying ideal manhood and making them the property of other men.

Freakish Masculinity in the Eighteenth Century: Andrew Miller's *Ingenious Pain* and Hilary Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien*

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In the late nineteen-nineties, two novels set in the eighteenth century appeared by then promising, now renowned authors of historical fiction, Andrew Miller and Hilary Mantel. Miller's *Ingenious Pain* (1997) and Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998) both introduce protagonists who display masculine coded attributes including, in the first case, resistance to pain and, in the second case, bodily size and strength. In both novels, earning potential is concomitant with these masculine attributes. The exaggeration of stereotypical masculine characteristics, however, causes each man to seem something other and less than a man. Qualities associated with manhood, therefore, paradoxically deny the men more agency than they allow, inhibiting them from enjoying ideal manhood, and making them the property of other men.

Andrew Miller's picaresque first novel *Ingenious Pain* recounts the life of James Dyer, born without the capacity to feel either physical pain or emotions like sadness and happiness. Because of his singularity, James becomes a spectacle as a boy, his body a source of profit for others. After most of his family has died, the child is taken in and shown off at country fairs by a huckster named Marley Gummer. In a ruse, James pretends to feel pain by screaming when a needle is stuck through his hand, then to be unaware when the needle is reapplied following a dose of the elixir Gummer is peddling. In other words, James play-acts being a regular boy. He performs vulnerability while being largely invulnerable to pain—that part of life which, Gummer

explains in his pitch to sell the tonic, comes "from the devil."[1] As the story continues, James is stolen away from Gummer by a wealthy collector, Mr. Canning, in whose mansion of freaks he spends over a year. This time James is displayed exclusively to other privileged curiosity-seekers. Later, James is kidnapped yet again (by Gummer, who is then robbed of his prize by a naval press gang). The boy goes on to serve as assistant to a naval surgeon. Throughout his youth, those who encounter young James see him as "a most delightful, cold-blooded monster of a boy"[2]—words uttered by the conman whose delight arises from the money James can garner for him. It is also a comment about sadistic pleasure as Gummer is one of many who carry out violence against James because they are jealous of and/or disbelieving in his invulnerability to pain.

In time, James becomes a successful surgeon, skilled and wealthy. He even travels across Russia in a race to inoculate Empress Catherine the Great against smallpox. However, while in Russia and at the pinnacle of his career James undergoes a mystical baptism into the world of pain. Great suffering envelops his life, including months in Bedlam where he is vomited and blistered, beaten, abused, cold, diseased, and where he falls in love for the first and last time, only to have his beloved, who is also chained up in a cell, die tragically. Once freed, James is taken in by the kindly Reverend Lestrade and lives some quiet months in a rural parsonage. He has become a loving, compassionate man when he dies shortly afterwards at the age of thirty-two.

Hilary Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien* tells the tale of an Irishman who arrives in London in 1782 to exhibit himself for money. O'Brien is based on the real Irish giant, Charles Byrne (1761–83).[3] Along with an agent and a small entourage of men, O'Brien is "fleeing cyclical deprivation, linguistic oppression, and cultural decline, conditions in which it is hard for a great man like the Giant to flourish."[4] Not only is the giant in need of more food than other men at a time of acute hunger, but he is also a living spectacle that the hungry cannot afford to pay to see. Further, "linguistic oppression, and cultural decline"

1. Andrew Miller, *Ingenious Pain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 97.
2. Miller, *Ingenious Pain*, 108.
3. Charles Byrne was exhibited in London in the early 1780s. Some accounts state he was over 8 feet tall, although skeletal evidence places him at just over 7 ft 7 in.
4. Hilary Mantel, *The Giant, O'Brien* (London: Picador, 1998), author's note.

impede him from earning a living because O'Brien is a storyteller (another luxury commodity). His combined sources of greatness are therefore devalued in Ireland.

Once in London, O'Brien's size and eloquence keep his group of men afloat for a few months. Yet the giant's novelty wears off, whereupon his agent Joe Vance tells him, "The public's fickle, and in my opinion it's had its fill."[5] Vance absconds with O'Brien's savings. The latter's gigantism renders him weak and wracked with pain until he dies, uncared for in a cellar and surrounded by miserable freaks such as the "pinheads" who swallow pins for a living. The irony of O'Brien's death in the "deep and dirty" cellar is that his body will not be buried in the earth once he dies—a prospect which fills the big, soft-hearted man with dread as he cannot expect resurrection on judgement day: "I can go nowhere. Nothing is to go. Dead is dead, for me."[6] Instead, the Scottish anatomist and surgeon, John Hunter, who has been eagerly and openly awaiting the giant's death, acquires the corpse for medical experimentation, boiling the flesh off the bones.[7]

Allan Hepburn notes that "history reconceived in confabulations about eighteenth-century freaks and monsters (as in Hilary Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien* or Andrew Miller's *Ingenious Pain*) … is history injected with wonder."[8] Hepburn's point is that such historical fiction offers "reenchantment … as an analogue for what is lacking in contemporary representation: wonder as the source for stories."[9] Miller's and Mantel's novels are not fantastical. Still, they offer wonders even as they explore how wonder and curiosity themselves create "freaks and monsters" by creating the appetite for them. At the same time, these works of twentieth-century historical fiction comment on eighteenth-

5. Ibid., 138.

6. Ibid., 187.

7. In reality, after boiling flesh from bone, Hunter stored [Charles] Byrne's skeleton for four years before it went on display. Byrne's remains have had an important role in medical research, including linking pituitary tumors to gigantism, something discovered by surgeon Harvey Cushing while studying Byrne in 1909 … The centuries-long exhibition of Byrne's skeleton raises broader questions about consent in medical museums, and how to respectfully treat historic specimens. Alison C. Meyer, "Will an Irish Giant Finally Get a Burial at Sea?," JSTOR Daily, July 7, 2018, https://daily.jstor.org/will-an-18th-century-giant-finally-get-a-burial-at-sea/.

8. Allan Hepburn, "'Enough of a wonder': Landscape and tourism in Thomas Wharton's Icefields," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 73 (Spring 2001), 77.

9. Ibid., 76.

century constructions of masculinity and explore dimensions of the gendered body, gendered spectacle, and gendered exploitation, with wonder as a part of that. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that "through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space."[10] In Miller's and Mantel's novels, the "permanent liminality" includes the border between manhood and non-manhood that the semi-fantastical protagonists inhabit.

Different as they are, James Dyer and Charles O'Brien loosely share attributes associated particularly with manhood. Resistance to pain and largeness of body have long been valued as masculine traits, particularly with respect to strength and endurance, and their exaggeration in these novels is a source of strength for Dyer and O'Brien. However, the very hyper-masculinity in relation to these traits proves also to be a source of intense vulnerability—vulnerability both to pain and to loss of agency and even ownership of the self—and is ultimately a cause of their deaths. Whatever else James Dyer and the Giant, O'Brien are, they are men who exist outside normative manhood.

In *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, Alexandra Shepherd puts normative manhood itself in perspective by contextualizing both the ideal it represented in the period and how limited the percentage of males who could fully participate in the media of respected, healthy manhood in this era was:

> Besides being a qualitative set of attributes, manhood was approached in advice literature as a distinct stage in the life cycle … Parenting manuals, father-son advice, sermons, and tracts on ageing approached manhood as an ideal to which young men should aspire and from which old men would decay. Manhood was thereby portrayed as the golden mean of existence, although it was also deemed a fleeting phase. Theoretically limited to a mere ten or twenty years of the life cycle it was, as a consequence, restricted to a minority of men at any one time.[11]

Regarding the eighteenth century in particular, Gerrit Verhoeven adds, "masculinities are highly hierarchical: the upper-crust archetype

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10. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 17.

11. Alexandra Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

tends to push all other interpretations into the margins."[12] In other words, not many men actually enjoyed manhood or qualified as appropriately masculine for the "golden mean of existence" that Shepherd identifies. Miller's and Mantel's novels further trouble the ideal of manhood because, at one time or another, James Dyer and Charles O'Brien's distinct and lucrative masculine attributes make them prey to and indeed the property of unscrupulous men. The limited time each character experiences productive, relatively self-reliant manhood is fleeting indeed.

Size and Strength

While others cannot tell from looking at James Dyer that he is a prodigy, Charles O'Brien's prodigious size cannot be missed. Prior to his English adventures, O'Brien "had lived by obliging a farmer who wished a rooted tree lurched up, or a town man who wanted his house pushed down so he could build a better. Strength had been a little of it, height had been more, and many hearths had welcomed him as a prodigy, a conversationalist, an illustration from nature's book."[13] In London, however, this "illustration from nature's book"[14] usually travels in the street with a bag to hide his head and is mainly confined indoors so that no one will be able to get a free look at him. No longer "a pleasant visitor" at fireside gatherings, but rather a spectacle only, O'Brien's size now robs him of agency, and being a sight for others robs him of his own sight.

Unlike the original Charles Byrne, who was, Mantel notes, probably mentally deficient, the novelist makes O'Brien intelligent, a valued storyteller, and sophisticated in his way despite his poverty, with his initial showing in London enriched by his mental and verbal prowess. Whereas in Ireland he told folk and fairy tales, the stories O'Brien tells in London are about himself. The giant, who has never left Ireland, claims to be arriving in England from a tour of the continent where, he observes, "Among the French églises there are some pretty little

12. Gerrit Verhoeven, "Malleable Masculinity: Fashioning Male Identity in Teding van Berkhout's Travel Letters (1739–1741)," *Journal of Family History* 45, no. 1 (January 2020): 4. https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199019881644.

13. Mantel, *The Giant*, 6–7.

14. Ibid., 103.

chapels, one they call Notre Dame in Paris I remember. Amsterdam is most picturesque, with rivulets running between the houses."[15] The imagery is that of a fairy tale due to his exaggerated perspective. Looking down on the wonders that other travellers look up to thus transfers the wonder of what O'Brien has seen onto himself, combining his listeners' curiosity for travel and the unknown with the impression the giant makes as a curiosity. His dual role as tourist and attraction in this short scene is important, marking a high point for him in the story. Nathan Gorelick explains, "the gaze possesses a power symbolically to locate, surveil, control; it represents the power of seeing rather than the passivity of being seen; it means being above and beyond the reality it surveys; it belongs to the One who makes the Law rather than the one who obeys."[16] In addition to indicating that he, like the young men of rank of England, has been on the Grand Tour,[17] Charles O'Brien suggests that his listeners see through his eyes while encouraging the men who are looking at him to reflect on the very height of those eyes belonging to the "I" of the teller.

Insensibility

Early modern parents were urged to strengthen and toughen up their boys to be men, although, as Elizabeth Foyster notes, "Few probably went as far as John Locke suggested in 1693 and made holes in their sons' shoes to let in water, and gave their sons hard beds to sleep upon."[18] Obviously, Charles O'Brien—born into a class where the holes in shoes and hardness of beds were *de rigeur*—is inherently physically tough. Leaving a London pub in which bandits eye his moneybag, he is unconcerned: "Later they were waiting for him, in strength, but he casually placed an elbow in the eye socket of one, tripped another

15. Ibid., 72.

16. Nathan Gorelick, "The Fetish, the Phallus, the Fantasy: Orientalism, Symbolic Castration, and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination" in *Castration, Impotence, and Emasculation in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Anne Greenfield (London: Routledge, 2021), 81.

17. See Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), 54–63.

18. Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (Longman: 1999), 30. For Locke's advice see *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), eds. J.W. and J.S. Yolton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 86 and 98.

bloody-nose squash on the cobbles, and nudged a third into the wall head first."[19] However, O'Brien is also attacked from within, and he cannot remain unconcerned about this. The gigantism, which has been in abeyance, starts up again. He feels "in his bones and his gut the truth of what anecdote and observation had taught him: a giant who begins to grow again does not live long."[20] The singularity of his size—already an excess—has a boundary beyond which he cannot survive. O'Brien is weakening and in pain when winter arrives, and we hear, "The mornings were icy now, and for the first time in his life the Giant began to feel the cold."[21] "Aching and snuffling,"[22] the twenty-two-year-old is unable to maintain his indifference to discomfort, seeming both an old man and a helpless little boy. Larger than a man, he seems not to be one. He has already passed his prime.

Whereas O'Brien is never allowed to forget about his body, bumping into tables, ducking under doorways, and straining or breaking chairs, for years, James Dyer is almost unaware of his body because he feels no pain. John D. Loeser explains, "The inability to feel pain of any type is known medically as 'uniform congenital indifference to pain.' It is a very rare congenital abnormality."[23] While O'Brien is soft-hearted, James appears heartless. The boy abandons his blind sister, who loves him, after they lose both their parents and two other siblings.[24] Nevertheless, like O'Brien, indifference to discomfort helps James earn his living—first because he does not feel the needle shoved into his hand by the men who show him off, then because his lack of scruples and conscience contribute to his development as a surgeon. He is not distracted by his patients' pain, only interested in solving problems and earning money. The combination of indifference to suffering and remarkable skill in alleviating it comes early; when he is still a boy in the home of the wealthy connoisseur Mr. Canning, James sews a wounded dog's torn ear: "It was his first patient, and when the dog failed to pick up more wounds, James administered them himself,

19. Mantel, *The Giant*, 111.
20. Ibid., 89.
21. Ibid., 146.
22. Ibid.
23. John D. Loeser, "The Tragedy of Painless Needs," *Pain Research Management* 5, no. 3 (2000), 23.
24. Miller, *Ingenious Pain*, 108.

with knife or stick, such that the dog that runs past him now towards the topiary in the Italian gardens bears a dozen scars, some livid, some pale, but each more cunningly tailored than the last."[25] James has no difficulty disregarding pain because he alone is an observer of it, disinterested without being uninterested: "It was everywhere, this thing called suffering. And such an infinite variety! People skulked in horror of it, prayed to their god to be spared it, and yet it seemed that nobody was; no one, that is, apart from himself."[26] In a sense, James, when in his prime, fits the definition Samuel Johnson provides for the adjective "manly" in the *Dictionary*: "Manlike; becoming a man; firm; brave; stout; undaunted; undismayed" ("stout" being "Strong; lusty; valiant," and lusty being "able of body").[27] However, we have seen that it is not valour or bravery that leaves James Dyer "undismayed" since he *cannot* feel: he does not choose to be insensible to others' suffering for most of his life; he truly is insensible. Thus set apart, James Dyer is considered manly and brave by some, but many others, including his patients, see him as inhuman and, as such, unsettling.

Pretended Prowess

Firm, brave, and undaunted as Charles O'Brien is at the start of Mantel's novel, we have seen that he also performs aspects of "full manhood" that are not part of his reality. Along with pretending to have travelled the world, O'Brien also claims in his grandiose speech to the men of the London press that his "organ is proportionate" to the rest of him.[28] "A Tower of Ivory," he boasts,

> at the base of which [women] fall, stunned … And then, gentlemen, their rhapsodical sighs and moans—but I see by your faces that you already know those sounds, albeit only in your imaginations. First they try to scale the tower—the ambition is natural to them—with their slick

25. Ibid., 143. The anecdote bespeaks one of the central problems of both Miller's and Mantel's novels: scientific progress made by disregarding others' suffering, which itself has a gendered history—think of the girl looking away in Joseph Wright's "Experiment with an Airpump." See Susan L. Siegfried, "Engaging the Audience: Sexual Economies of Vision in Joseph Wright," *Representations* 68 (1999): 34–58.

26. Miller, *Ingenious Pain*, 108.

27. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1755), s.v. "manly, adj." https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/1755/manly_adj.

28. Mantel, *The Giant*, 73.

> little tongues like the tongues of kittens. When I am satisfied in that way, I put out my little finger and flip two or three of them on their backs. When I say "two or three," when I say "them," I speak advisedly—for I have about me every night an eager set of the female sex. They fear … they fear indeed—but oh, it is their fear that delights them![29]

Again in the *Dictionary*, Johnson defines "masculine" as "2. resembling man; virile; not soft; not effeminate"—a gloss perhaps befitting a tower of ivory.[30] So boasting of his romantic conquests, O'Brien characterizes himself as both worthy and capable of pleasing many women. Then he goes further, insulting his listeners by assuming them to be inadequate and unpleasant sexual partners:

> And when you, at some stale hour, are rolling from your mattresses, and roaring for your piss-pots, and grinding the yellow pills from your eyes—and when, I say, your foetid molls are trolling forth, booted from your couches, unwashed, fishy, chafed between the thighs, slowly dripping your lukewarm seed—my douce delights are receiving their bouquets, with pearls of pretty laughter. Each one carries within her a giant baby. How can she not conceive?[31]

Prior to this meeting with the press, O'Brien is hidden, crouched behind a curtain. When he clears his throat, his voice is so loud and deep that the room pays attention: "'By God's balls!' one man exclaimed; all sat up straighter."[32] The reference to divine gonads seems fitting given the size of the man the pressmen encounter, combined with the phallic boast and belittlement to which he then subjects them.[33]

Whereas his imagination matches his body in size, the gap between reality and tall tales mirrors the young giant's profound loneliness. In fact, O'Brien soon confesses to his youngest follower, "I am a perfect

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29. Ibid., 73–74.
30. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*.
31. Mantel, *The Giant*, 74.
32. Ibid., 70.
33. Paul Semonin has traced how "monsters in the marketplace of early modern England [such as dwarfs, conjoined twins, and giants] embodied elements of an ancient comic tradition," which was later obscured by Protestant prodigy literature. Paul Semonin, "Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 80. O'Brien's discourse makes him part of that tradition at the outset of his showing in London, even while granting him agency to laugh at others while they gawp at him.

stranger to the rites of Venus."[34] The giant talks as big as he is, yet the full experience of his sexual organs, a fundamental part of early modern manhood, is denied to him. As far as sexuality and regeneration go, O'Brien's claims are ironic. Joanne Bailey notes that early modern paternity "was one of the badges of mature manhood, a sign of fertility and a conveyer of authority so powerful that childless men acted as surrogate fathers to children or assumed symbolic versions of fatherhood as philanthropists and godfathers."[35] There are no "giant bab[ies]" carrying on O'Brien's name or his genetic material. At the same time, O'Brien's virginity is itself a testimony to his decency, especially given that his most violent follower, Claffey, observes, "I was told that there are gents who will pay five guineas to force a nine-year-old"[36] girl. By contrast, the giant whose phallus would in any attempt at sex cause pain, would never "force" (and so grievously injure) anyone. His own virginity also aligns the giant man with those nine-year-old girls as victims of human trafficking—especially as he deteriorates and is preyed upon. Anne Lake Prescott points out the tendency, particularly of early European writers, to align giants and pygmies as "ambiguously monstrous," and, if "setting the gigantic against the minuscule encourages thoughts about perspective and outlook, rhetorically coupling a giant and a pygmy can create a monster even more apt to amuse, horrify, instruct."[37] Hilary Mantel's associating of O'Brien with the small girls is unamusing, while the regular-sized man, Claffey, whose impulse is to use all of them, embodies the monstrous.

Indeed, excessive "manliness" for Charles O'Brien and James Dyer is, to some extent, effeminizing. The varieties of imprisonment that both characters experience at different points in their lives also align them with women of a better class who might hope for marriage. As Clarissa Harlowe's friend, Anna Howe, complains in Richardson's novel, such women's lives amounted to being "cajoled, wire-drawn, and ensnared, like silly birds, into a state of bondage or vile subordina-

34. Mantel, *The Giant*, 76.

35. Bailey, "Family Relationships" in *A Cultural History of Childhood and the Family in the Age of Enlightenment*, eds. Elizabeth Foyster and James Marten (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 25.

36. Mantel, *The Giant*, 107.

37. Anne Lake Prescott, "The Odd Couple: Gargantua and Tom Thumb," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 75.

tion: to be courted as princesses for a few weeks, in order to be treated as slaves for the rest of our lives."[38] Anna prefaces this complaint with the assertion that she "heartily despise[s]" the male sex. O'Brien and Dyer do not seem quite to belong to that male sex, given the cajoling *they* meet with from handlers and agents whose goal is to seduce and ensnare them into doing those men's bidding, thus treating them as enslaved.

In contrast to O'Brien, James Dyer does lose his virginity at the age of thirteen, with conjoined teenage twins Anne and Anna, who are collected as he is by the wealthy Mr. Canning (himself uncanny and a hermaphrodite). Dyer's first sexual experience demonstrates the boy's apparent ability to gratify two females and the unnaturalness of his initiation into sexuality and other human relations. Presumably, he feels some kind of sexual pleasure, but it is never described. Later, James so pleases the wife of his partner in surgery, Mr. Munro, that the man's wife becomes besotted by him, although he is baffled by the love she professes, not knowing what love feels like himself. Her infidelity leads to a duel in which Dyer shoots off Munro's nose. Dyer feels no remorse about these events, even when Munro commits suicide. Such absence of sentiment might, strictly speaking, seem "masculine" in that James is "not soft."[39] Yet he loses the respect of the community in which he has lived and grown his practice as a result of not merely his immoral conduct but his heartless disloyalty and lack of humanity.

So, each protagonist is deficient in full manhood in some crucial way. In O'Brien's case, this is a sexual experience, such that he dies not only virginal but also unloved, even though he is big-hearted and loveable; in James Dyer's case, he can perform the physical act of love (or sex) expected of a man, but he has no heart for it. He is a shell. And, like O'Brien, James dies without having fathered a child.

Arguably, both Charles O'Brien and James Dyer remain childless due, directly or indirectly, to rare disabilities. As Anna K. Sagal points out, citing one of Samuel Johnson's definitions of "disable (v)" being "to deprive of usefulness or efficacy," "eighteenth-century codifications suggest disability removes that which makes a man 'worth

38. Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1985), 133.

39. Johnson, *Dictionary*, s.v. "masculine, adj."

something' in a social context."[40] Ginette Carpenter points to the body in all of Mantel's novels being depicted as "troublesome, disobedient and largely unbiddable," drawing attention especially to *The Giant, O'Brien*.[41] While Carpenter links this bodily recalcitrance to Mantel's own body, O'Brien's maleness and how he meets, exceeds, and suffers because of expectations of manhood are significant. The weakened giant becomes "worth something" outside of a social context due to his worsening disability and the fact he no longer has control of what his body earns. His worth is only to others, not himself, and it is entirely pecuniary. Moreover, unlike the "illustration from nature's book" that O'Brien first sees himself as, the excessive and still growing parts of O'Brien's body "illustrate Edmund Burke's classification of 'deformity' as absence of 'the complete common form.'"[42] David M. Turner points out that in the eighteenth century, "in a broader sense, 'deformity' stood in opposition to the values of a well-ordered, free, and civilised society, demarcating all that was idolatrous, distorted, ill-principled, or morally odious."[43] Whereas it is the men around O'Brien who are morally odious, they can behave this way because of his gigantism, because it weakens him.

Agents, Handlers, Owners

Another shared aspect of Miller's and Mantel's protagonists that emphasizes their non-normativity and aligns them with the feminine is their object-position as gazed upon: "as numerous scholars have articulated, the eighteenth century constructed a system whereby men were positioned as observing, empirical subjects … while women and non-normative men were positioned as objects, figures to be observed

40. Anna K. Sagal, "Disability, Trauma, and Language," in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Chris Mounsey (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 107. Sagal is here discussing Tristram Shandy's Uncle Toby's wound to the groin, of which so much is made (circumlocutively) by Laurence Sterne. I am grateful to both anonymous *Lumen* readers for suggestions on incorporating more disability studies in this paper.

41. Ginette Carpenter, "Walking the Dead: Unruly (RE)Animation in A Place of Greater Safety," in *Hilary Mantel: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, eds. Eileen Pollard and Ginette Carpenter (London: Routledge, 2018), 111.

42. David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 27.

43. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 27.

and regulated."[44] Observation and regulation are indeed interwoven in *Ingenious Pain*. When Marley Gummer first comes across James Dyer, a boy who has broken his ankle falling from a tree and who shows no signs of pain, Gummer's predatory nature stirs. He mutters to himself, "There would have to be the right man in charge."[45] The enterprise of profiting from this boy requires the right *man*, as it is not only James' lack of sensation but also his youth that make him vulnerable to exploitation. Gummer sees the boy as "'an aberration of nature. A true *rara avis*. A …'—lowering his voice—'… a commodity'."[46] Loeser notes the adults around the young James have "reason to believe his inability to feel pain pushes him out of the class of humankind altogether."[47] Later, kidnapping the boy back from the wealthy Mr. Canning, Gummer growls, "you were my property, boy, and the bastard stole you."[48] Although we do not get the sense that James is especially bothered by any of these changes, he takes what actions he can to gain freedom, moving from one type of agent to another with no sentiment or loyalty.

That being the case, it is evident that his early experience as someone else's property has a lasting impact on him. As a grown man and a physician, James takes pride in not only his skill but his status as his own master. One instance demonstrating his sense of self is his refusal to tend to a post boy who has been shot in a robbery because James is not to be paid for his medical services. A wealthy salesman of automata named Mr. About, also on the Russian expedition when this incident occurs, tries to prick the doctor's conscience and insult his pride by choosing his words carefully: "'What is your price, Doctor, to attend to this'—he gestures—'unfortunate creature?' 'You refer, monsieur, to my fee?' 'Indeed. The word eluded me.'"[49] Whereas About insinuates that James can be bought, James is pointing out with the word "fee" that precisely the opposite is true. He is no longer a commodity. The insistence with which James employs terminology aligned to service

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44. Mary Beth Harris, "Masculinity, Performance Anxiety, and Literary Impotence in Charlotte's Charke's *The History of Henry Dumont*," in *Castration, Impotence, and Emasculation*, ed. Anne Greenfield (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), 174.
45. Miller, *Ingenious Pain*, 84.
46. Ibid.
47. Loeser, "The Tragedy of Painless Needs," 230.
48. Miller, *Ingenious Pain*, 144.
49. Ibid., 228.

rather than ownership is an insistence on his agency. The doctor is his own man.

Similarly, object-freighted vocabulary is used to discuss the giant—not surprising in a narrative where he and his attendants live close to the bone. In his own characteristically flourish-filled language, O'Brien calls Joe Vance "the agent and prince of us all,"[50] an exaggeration but also an acknowledgement of Vance's authority. If Vance is a "prince" here, O'Brien is "an aristocrat of height,"[51] both hyperboles bespeaking monetary advantages that end up being all too temporary.[52] In London, for one short "summer the Giant grew rich. He washed in Castile soap, and made the purchase of some decanters. His followers ate green peas and strawberries."[53] As noted above, O'Brien's earning power lessens as the fickle public tires of him and his growing pains increase. Unlike James Dyer, whom we observe rise in stature and wealth for a time, enjoying agency and refuting words like "price," O'Brien goes quickly downhill. The landlord who has rented property to Joe Vance commodifies O'Brien absolutely in his suggestion to the agent:

> "You ought to sell him," Kane said. "What's the good now? All novelty's worn off. You could hire him out as a whole gang of labourers."
> "He'll not do manual work," Joe said. "Not that he is too proud, but he says his muscles are tearing off the bone."
> "Have you ever considered you could swap him?"
> "I'd certainly swap him for a sapient pig, if one could be got."[54]

This "sapient pig," named Toby, is another rumoured freak in the London entertainment market and one of the giant's competitors. At this point in the novel, although Vance would "swap him," what O'Brien "says" still matters, so there is a sharing of agency; however, the balance is tipping as O'Brien is increasingly disabled by that which sets him apart from the majority of men.

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50. Mantel, *The Giant*, 160.
51. Ibid., 71.
52. Deborah Needleman Armintor makes the argument that the eighteenth century witnessed a plethora of depictions of "little men" once court dwarfs' portraiture had waned, "for contrarily *anti*aristocratic ends." [emphasis added]. See *The Little Everyman: Stature and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 5.
53. Mantel, *The Giant*, 82.
54. Ibid., 153.

Vance's observation of how O'Brien feels about (and in) his muscles and bones reflects the way that pain forces the giant to be aware of his body as pieces and of how pain influences the human brain to think about one's body in this way—as a collection of pains:

> "My head is lengthening and stretching. I feel the pain deep in my bones, as if the close knitting of my skull were beginning to ease itself, beneath my scalp, and unstitch. I feel a pain in my jaw, as if the swing of it were to be tested, as if the swivel cannot support the greater weight that is to come. My feet are bursting from my boots, Joe. See here—I've had to slit them. My knee-joints and ankle-bones are oppressed."[55]

As Rainer Emig notes, "bodily integrity, masculinity studies generally agree, is a major test of masculinity, and its only legitimate violation is bloodshed in situations of attack or defense."[56] Charles O'Brien is fragmented, almost enumerating awareness of his bodily parts and pains, indicating that the large man's body is under attack from within and without because the awareness of such mutability is part of the pain. When Vance steals the giant's money and flees London, he takes most of O'Brien's agency with him. The murderous Irishman, Claffey—he who had relished the five guineas a man might pay "to force a nine-year-old"—now menaces the giant who previously could have crushed him: "Claffey gloated. He stared down. 'You're my creature, Charlie O'Brien, and I'm your only agent now'."[57] At this point, talk of O'Brien's "fee" is completely replaced by the "price" that his corpse might fetch: "Negotiations are in progress. The Giant's price is driving up and up. Heads are whispering together at the Crown on Wych Street. Two hundred, three. John-o [Hunter] near-apoplectic."[58] John Hunter has tried to strike a deal with O'Brien himself, telling him pragmatically, "you want money, I want your bones."[59] But the giant refuses, believing it tantamount to damning his own soul. At the same time, the pain of being abandoned by his agent exacerbates the pain in O'Brien's objectified and commodified body. The giant had been saving up to rebuild

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55. Ibid., 98.

56. Rainer Emig, "Sentimental Masculinity: Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771)" in *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. Stefan Horlacher (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 134.

57. Mantel, *The Giant*, 166.

58. Ibid., 185.

59. Ibid., 174.

a decrepit tavern back in Ireland.[60] In other words, he was saving his earnings to invest in community and fellowship.

Belonging

As I have noted, James Dyer and Charles O'Brien enhance the impression of epitomizing masculinity with performance. Dyer acts like a boy who feels pain but is rendered impermeable by the elixir Marley Gummer peddles, and later, when it suits him, he imitates being a man in love. Charles O'Brien does not need to "perform" his gigantism but chooses to play it up and comes across as a debonair, travelled aristocrat of height. He also mythologizes his own conception, inventing an origin story that distances him further from ordinary men: "I was conceived on the slopes of a green hill, known as a sacred place by the men and women of my nation. My mother was a green girl entirely, and my father came out of Scotland, possessed of a raw and tartan heart."[61] As such, O'Brien characterizes himself as real and unreal—a real man in that he has all the bodily parts of a man, but at the same time as more and other than a man.

Neither Dyer nor O'Brien can control their narratives or how others perceive them. Considering the failure of language to convey so many human experiences related to the performance of gender, it is interesting to look at how, different as they are, Miller's and Mantel's protagonists perform and exaggerate aspects of manhood they do have (and have in uncommon proportions)—such as indifference to pain and largeness of body—while such performance fails when it comes to the golden mean of full, agentive, manhood. James Dyer and Charles O'Brien are, in the words of Judith Butler, "fundamentally unintelligible," a state in which each "find[s] oneself speaking only and always as if one were human, but with the sense that one is not. It is to find that one's language is hollow, and that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in one's favor."[62] A man who can feel no pain and another who towers above everyone else seem as though they should have more agency than most men; however, they are commodified for these very traits,

60. Ibid., 110.
61. Ibid., 71.
62. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 218.

and the language of ownership is used in relation to them not only because one is (at first) a child, and the other is poor (and Irish). Both men are part of the majority encompassed in the sobering observation by Thomas A. King, who notes that early modern "children, servants, apprentices, students, some adult men, slaves, and women were all property of some other men."[63] Miller and Mantel make this state of affairs clear, the latter writing a minor character called Bitch Mary into O'Brien's story. Mary, pregnant near the end of the novel, hopes for twenty children, the commercial advantage of which is not framed with reference to fees for service but to prices: "Then I can sell my boys to chimney-sweeps and my girls to Drury Lane snatch-purveyors."[64] The heartlessness of the anti-maternal statement speaks to the reality of the poverty depicted in *The Giant, O'Brien*, and the lived reality of the masses in the eighteenth century as Mantel paints it. O'Brien is a kind and gentle man who feels for others, but he is alone in this goodness in the bleak world Mantel creates.

Given the period in which Miller and Mantel set their novels, both texts invite reconsideration of the discourse of sensibility that arose in the second half of the eighteenth century—sentiments about sentiment propounded in works like Henry Mackenzie's popular novel *The Man of Feeling* (1771). Other texts that heralded the cult of sensibility and also focussed on what makes a good man were Samuel Richardson's *History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1757) and Lawrence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).[65] Hilary Mantel's story denies any such cultural movement, at least among the poor, while Andrew Miller's novel more fully and optimistically takes up the conversation that placed sentiment front and centre with respect to qualities that made one not only a good person but a good man. When James Dyer really feels—

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63. Thomas A. King, *The Gendering of Men, 1600–1750*, vol. 1 of *The English Phallus* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 29.

64. Mantel, *The Giant*, 178.

65. For more on this topic, see Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Apropos the necessity of feeling in the *man's* body, see Ann Jessie van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. Chapter 6, 98 ff. See also Alex Wetmore, "Sympathy Machines: Men of Feeling and the Automaton," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no 1, (2009): 37–54. See too Emig's discussion of encompassing the masculine along with the feminine in discussions of sensibility in this period in "Sentimental Masculinity."

both pain and love—they paradoxically unman him, even though in discovering pain, "He is like the others now."[66] Through suffering, James becomes compassionate. He seems to join the human race. At the same time, Miller's text pushes against putting too much stock in late eighteenth-century sensibility. The only eighteenth-century text mentioned by name in *Ingenious Pain* is Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)—a text that both preceded the cult of sensibility and undercuts it with its misanthropic satire.

Even as the reader is directed to feel sympathy for Miller's and Mantel's protagonists, these characters' narratives rely on what scholars like Simon Dickie identify as normative in eighteenth-century jestbooks, which prove "remarkable to modern readers" for

> their sheer callousness, their frank delight in human suffering. They suggest an unquestioned pleasure at the sight of deformity or misery—an automatic and apparently unreflective urge to laugh at weakness simply because it is weak. The miserable old father, the hunchback, the disabled street vendors, the battered wife, the rape plaintiff: the victims of these jokes are as helpless and vulnerable as it is possible to be. Those who mock them are simply delighting in their immense superiority and good fortune.[67]

Neither James Dyer nor Charles O'Brien is at first "as helpless and vulnerable as it is possible to be," and, indeed, it is their apparent states of being the opposite that make them remarkable. As such, their entertainment value lies at an intersection of unsympathetic freakishness and sensibility; in other words, their chief appeal to audiences in the world they inhabit as characters and their appeal to modern readers converge somewhat in their sources of singularity (one kind of "deformity" or other), but also diverge—as freaks, they are interesting to their eighteenth-century audiences, as suffering men, they are interesting to twentieth and twenty-first-century readers. We, the latter, can "delight in [our own] immense superiority and good fortune," as sensitive, feeling, modern readers who would never attend such freak shows.

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66. Miller, *Ingenious Pain*, 260.

67. Simon Dickie, "Hilarity and Pitilessness in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: English Jestbook Humor," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 2. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25098027. See too Dickie's *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

This is how historical fiction works, for alongside accuracy of detail comes telescoping of the historical period, its interests, attitudes, and obsessions. G. S. Rousseau interprets the awarding of the £100,000 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award to Miller for *Ingenious Pain* as being an indication of "what is at stake in the survival of the eighteenth century in our contemporary postmodern world."[68] Writing this in 2001, Rousseau identified a "new awareness of the importance of artistic narrative in the recounting of all history."[69] In 2022, it is worth revisiting both novels set in the eighteenth century to consider what is at stake for our contemporary postmodern world as we also think about the history of gender.

Sans the *via media*

A moderate life is impossible in the bodies in which James Dyer and Charles O'Brien find themselves; as such, so is normative masculinity. Shepherd observes that eighteenth-century texts about the golden mean of masculinity "sought to define manhood in broadly patriarchal terms of discretion, reason, moderation, self-sufficiency, strength, self-control, and honest respectability."[70] James Dyer enjoys some of these qualities for a brief part of his adult life, but neither he nor Charles O'Brien experiences much moderation. Rather, the source of each man's strength comes unravelled and leads to early death. For James, a lifetime of pain not previously felt rushes in all at once, and his sensibility to both physical and emotional pain eventually brings about his death—albeit death as a transformed, grateful, and content man. Andrew Miller called his creation, James Dyer, "an outsider in his ability to understand the great engine of human physical distress" and, as such, a "monster … automaton … demi-god."[71] This characterization reinforces the humanity Dyer gains once he experiences love, pain, and, through these, compassion. *Ingenious Pain* ends where it began,

68. G. S. Rousseau, "*Ingenious Pain*: Fiction, History, Biography and the Miraculous Eighteenth-Century," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25, no. 2 (2001): 47.

69. Ibid., 47–48.

70. Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood*, 9.

71. Andrew Miller, "The Ceryneian Hind: Some Notes on the Writing of *Ingenious Pain*" (PhD diss., University of Lancaster, 1996), 397 and 392, qtd. in Rousseau, "*Ingenious Pain: Fiction, History, Biography and the Miraculous Eighteenth-Century*," 52.

having told the story of the man whose corpse at the start is robbed of its heart by anatomists attempting to discover what made James Dyer so unusual. These natural philosophers themselves have hearts untouched by the process of removing his. There is, nevertheless, a sense of peace at the close of Dyer's life. Shortly before his death, he saves a man by performing open-heart surgery, proving that the skills of the profession he abandoned when he discovered feeling could co-exist with sensibility.

In contrast to Dyer's death in a peaceful meadow, O'Brien's death is terrible. Once abandoned by his agent, he spends most of his time in bed. O'Brien is not murdered, but neglect intensifies the suffering of his natural demise because he believes that his cut-up, dispersed, and unburied body will not find resurrection. His last weeks spent lonely, drunk, and penniless are worsened by terror. Unlike Miller's physician, Mantel's giant seems less human, less of a man as he nears death, and less capable even of the thought required for compassion as his pain becomes unendurable. An undescribed freak, housed in the cellar with the giant, makes the last noise O'Brien hears: "he dies to the sound of What Is It, dragging its chain in the next room."[72] We assume that "What Is It" is a suffering human, so distorted before (and) or after birth to be undefinable, a what rather than a who.

James Dyer's heart and Charles O'Brien's bones are taken from their dead bodies and used for scientific experiments, reinforcing their status as property of other men, but also, ironically, because they were in some ways more "manly" than other men: both were indifferent to discomfort and pain, were strong, and were gifted in some way, with O'Brien being large-bodied. Because of these traits, their earthly remains undergo a fate usually reserved for criminals in the eighteenth century. In his last days, the giant, dreading the fate that awaits his body, tries to convey that awfulness to his followers:

> "It's a new and original wickedness. To come to a man, to say 'I'll buy you,' to say 'I'll buy you while you're still breathing, I'll buy you now against the hour of your death.'"
> "Not so," said narrow Slig.
> "How not so?"

72. Mantel, *The Giant*, 189.

> "Not so because it's ain't," drawled Con Claffey. "Not new, not original. Not wicked, even."[73]

When they explain that "anatomies" commonly approach felons about to be hanged with the same offer, O'Brien must settle into the banality of his situation: "'So it's regular?' said the Giant. He wanted to think the approach of the little Scotsman was some stealthy, snuffling seduction, peculiar to him. Their faces showed him the truth: it's regular."[74] Charles O'Brien and James Dyer have broken no laws, but, irregular as they both are, they have spilled over the boundaries of common manhood, been denied the golden mean, and are less valued as men because of it.

73. Ibid., 175.
74. Ibid., 176.