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Résumé de l'article

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Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net

The Appeal of Panpsychism in Victorian Britain

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Abstract
This article argues that current trends in the humanities that embrace panpsychism, vibrant matter, object-oriented ontologies, and extended or dispersed conceptions of consciousness, could benefit from an examination of Victorian debates about panpsychism. The article does this by exploring panpsychism's relation to Victorian theories of evolution, late nineteenth-century idealism, and above all to conversations about desire, will, and consciousness. The article suggests further that understanding Victorian panpsychism can illuminate key aspects of Victorian aesthetics: detail, pattern, and dispersal. Authors discussed include philosophers W.K. Clifford, William James, and May Sinclair; the article then turns to Victorian translations of Lucretius, the poetry of Swinburne, the designs of William Morris, and the literary theory of Vernon Lee.

Biographical Note
Adela Pinch is Professor of English at the University of Michigan. She is the author of *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford University Press, 1996), and *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

I.

1. Why Victorian panpsychism? Panpsychism is the philosophical position that all forms of matter—down to the smallest atom—have consciousness, or if not consciousness, some form of mentality, or capacity for desire, for volition, or for experience. It connects you, not only to the sheep, and the protozoa, but also to the molecules of the dust on your shoe, through some shared property of mentality. Right now, panpsychism is experiencing, in spite of—or perhaps because of—its preposterous, non-empirical, counterfactual nature, a philosophical revival and a new sense of urgency. It has seemed an attractive way out of philosophy's current debate concerning the "hard problem" of explaining how consciousness emerges in a physical world (Chalmers xii). It has recently been embraced by the neuroscientist Christof Koch and the philosophers Thomas Nagel and Galen Strawson (Koch 131-34; Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* 62; Strawson 3-31; see also Goff *passim*). It has become newly relevant in the humanities and theoretical social sciences, as scholars have taken a turn towards the "nonhuman," advocating theories that view consciousness not as the exclusive property of individual humans, but rather as spread over networks of action spanning the human and non-human (Bennett; Bogost; Coole and Frost; Grusin; Harman; Latour; Shaviro). It has been linked to an anti-utilitarian radical politics (Graeber).

2. This is thus a great time to examine Victorian debates about panpsychism. It begs for a place at the Victorian studies table, given the prominence in general of theories of consciousness in our current picture of Victorian literature and culture, and recent interest, in particular, in the consciousnesses of the nonhuman and the small (Henchman, Coriale). "Modern panpsychism," as one philosopher has recently declared, "is an invention of the nineteenth century" (Meixner, 19). The word itself was coined in English by George Henry Lewes in 1879, though versions of panpsychism extend back to the ancient Greeks (Lewes I:19; Skrbina 23-58). Prominent Victorian-era sages, literary figures, and philosophers entertained or at least considered it. This most abstract and practically unthinkable metaphysical position had surprising, revealing links to both the theory of evolution, and philosophical idealism. Victorian thinkers were drawn to panpsychism for a diverse set of reasons, but almost always wrote about it with wistfulness and wishfulness. As the philosopher and novelist May Sinclair astutely observed: "Pan-Psychism has an irresistible appeal to the emotions" (vi). While panpsychism was certainly a minority position in Victorian approaches to consciousness, it was a curiously persistent and illuminating one. This essay therefore has several goals. First, it seeks to introduce Victorianist scholars to this

overlooked philosophical position, thus expanding our view of the period's theories of consciousness. Second, it seeks to remind contemporary fans of panpsychism of its Victorian moment, noting what lessons we might learn about its allure. And third, above all, I argue that putting panpsychism back into its place in Victorian intellectual life restores ontological questions to Victorian aesthetics, as we shall see in the last section of this essay.

II.

3. Twenty-first century philosophers have proposed panpsychism as an elegant alternative to the hard problems of determining what consciousness is, and where it comes from, once you grant that we live in a completely physical world**.** If, Nagel demonstrated, you believe that the world is composed of material substance, and you also believe that there is something about consciousness or mental experience that cannot be reduced to mere material, and you cannot explain how something like mental experience *emerges from* the material world, then you have to consider the possibility that something like consciousness or mentality may belong to the physical world itself (Nagel, "Panpsychism"). Panpsychism, argues Strawson, rescues consciousness not only from the inconsistencies of emergentism, but also from those of dualism and of "eliminativism," which holds that consciousness is an illusion, as well (Strawson 2006, 3-31).[1]

4. Meanwhile, scholars in the humanities may locate panpsychic resonances in some of the contemporary political and ecological theories that go under the names, variously, "new materialism," "speculative realism," and "object-oriented-ontology," and which often cite as theoretical influences Deleuze, Bruno Latour, and sometimes look back to Spinoza or Leibnitz. Jane Bennett, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost see a "new materialism" as overcoming an opposition between old materialism (in which matter is just matter) and vitalism (in which there is some kind of living-like spirit that flows through everything), in order to see matter itself as "enchanted," "resilient," "productive," or "exhibiting agency" (Bennet xii; Coole and Frost 7). "One can discern in such material productivity a posthumanist sense of material agency and a limitation of humans' agentive efficacy," the editors of *New Materialisms* say (Coole and Frost 14). "Concerning consciousness or cognition," they write, "while it does not follow that cognitive capacities for symbolism or reflexivity are no longer valued, the new materialism does prompt a way of reconsidering them as diffuse, chance products of a self-generative nature from which they never entirely emerge" (Coole and Frost 20). It is no criticism of the political, ethical, and

environmental goals of the "new materialisms" to note that its visions of an enchanted materiality can seem patently willed and wished for, rather than rigorously argued for. Furthermore, it is worth remarking that for many of these thinkers, as well as for contemporary philosophers sympathetic to panpsychism, the starting point is a vision of the world as fundamentally physical or material: the challenge is explaining or conferring mind and feeling. In contrast, as we shall see, some of the Victorian panpsychists arrived at their position from the starting point of idealism: it was a way of explaining the omnipresence of consciousness or spirit.[2] Restoring to view some of the idealism in Victorian panpsychism might be a way to pinpoint, acknowledge, and from thence, embrace or reject what seems most wishful in some postmodern materialisms and new ontologies.

5. One of the striking things about Victorian panpsychists is the diversity of positions from which they arrived at it. Some got to panpsychism from what seemed to them an insuperable problem in the theory of evolution: the problem of determining when and how consciousness evolved out of something that was not-consciousness. For example, the mathematician and philosopher William Kingdon Clifford started with humans and worked his way down. When we contemplate those beings, such as animals, "next below us in the scale of organization," "we cannot help ascribing to them a consciousness which is analogous to our own" (2:60). His example is a cat. We can go a little lower down, and the forms of consciousness may seem simpler, but no one can say for certain where exactly on the line of descent the introduction of what he calls "a fact"—consciousness—"entirely different and absolutely separate from the physical fact"—appears. Clifford goes straight from cats to amoebas. "The only thing we can come to," he concedes,

> If we accept the doctrine of evolution at all, is that even in the very lowest organisms, even in the amoeba which swims about in our own blood, there is something or other….which is of the same nature as our own consciousness….that is to say (for we cannot stop at organic matter, knowing as we do that it must have arisen by continuous physical processes out of inorganic matter), we are obliged to assume, in order to save continuity in our belief, that along with every motion of matter, whether organic or inorganic, there is some fact which corresponds to the mental fact in ourselves. (2:61)

"We cannot stop," Clifford concluded: there is consciousness, or something like it, all the way down. While Clifford expressed this conclusion with some reluctance and dismay, others more optimistically found in panpsychism a solution to some of the theory of evolution's woes. The idealist philosopher James Ward cheerfully claimed "one need not fear the theory of evolution;

this does not degrade either consciousness or human life, but leads to a spiritualized view of matter" (246). Indeed, while some critics of evolution, he noted, worried about the "leveling down" of evolution, bringing humans down to apes, he saw a kind of "leveling up": "now it would seem that the atom. . . may be linked with man." Ward did despair, however, that we can never know what molecules are thinking: "such lowly individuals are wholly beyond our reach" (246).

6. Indeed, the question of whether such lowly individuals can be said to be thinking at all, raised for Victorian thinkers the problem of whether panpsychism was truly about consciousness, or perhaps rather about the existence of something more like the capacity to for desire or volition. At very least, contemplating panpsychism ought to expand our sense of the diversity of ways in which consciousness was defined by Victorian writers. While some writers such as Herbert Spenser and William B. Carpenter generally defined consciousness as awareness or thinking, some others, such as G.H.Lewes and Alexander Bain, expanded the definition of consciousness to include feeling and sensation. In almost all cases, however, consciousness tended to be conceived of as in opposition to volition and desire.[3] Panpsychism put additional pressure on these already complex terms. For example, the novelist Samuel Butler arrived at panpsychism through his own eccentric version of evolution, which rejected Darwinian natural selection in favor of a more Lamarckian approach that emphasized inherited habit. For Butler, the existence of habits in humans indicated that we are born with the memories of our progenitors. Every step forward was passed on to succeeding generations through inherited habit, down the evolutionary chain. If evolution proceeds through generations unconsciously remembering what came before, then, it followed, that unconscious memory, and therefore some form of mentality, stretched all the way back. He concluded: "I would recommend the reader to see every atom in the universe as living and able to feel and remember, but in a humble way" (Butler, *Unconscious Memory* 273). The "humbleness" or "low"-ness of the mentality inhering in atoms was something Butler like James Ward stressed ("a low kind of livingness," Butler called it, 276); and it has been an issue for perennial debate in panpsychism: do the particles that make up larger things all have little bits of consciousness, or are the larger things of this world just "very large collections of very stupid minds," as another philosopher put it (Broad 169)? Whether such beings were very stupid or merely small, what was most important to Butler was the conjunction of consciousness and will. "No objection," he claimed, "can lie in our supposing potential or elementary volition and consciousness to exist in atoms, on the score that their action would be less regular or uniform

if they had free will than if they had not. By giving them free will we do no more than those who make them obey fixed laws" (Butler, *Note-books* 72). That is, given the eccentricity of the universe, it seemed to make more sense to imagine atoms having free will than obeying laws. Nevertheless, for Butler, the term "consciousness" was fundamental: "if there is no consciousness, there is *no thing*, or nothing (Butler, *Note-books* 73; italics in original).

7. A chief difficulty, moreover, that the lowness or stupidness of atomic mentality seemed to raise was what William James identified as panpsychism's "combination problem": that is, if every little atom or particle has some bit of mentality to it, how does one explain what happens when some of those bits come together to form a being, such as a person, who has presumably a more complex form of mentality as well as, in most cases, a unified one? Do the little bits fit together like pieces of a puzzle, or do they do a kind of mind meld? What are the conditions in which combinations of mentality happen? Is it desire, or perhaps simply proximity that causes multiple mentalities to meld into one? In the latter case, how come the minds of all the people in a packed room don't glom together into one big mind? Making an association between small units of consciousness and words, James illustrated the combination problem this way: "Take a sentence of a dozen words, and take twelve men and tell to each one word. Then stand the men in a row or jam them in a bunch, and let each think of his word as intensely as he will, nowhere will there be a consciousness of the whole sentence" (James 1:160). We shall return to this connection between words and small units of consciousness at the end of this article. James was, however, deeply intrigued by panpsychism, revisiting it throughout his writing. At the end of his career he affirmed a commitment to what he called a "pluralistic panpsychism": a belief that "material objects are 'for themselves' also" (qtd. in Ford 163).

8. It was above all the idea that everything, down to the littlest atom, has free will, that prompted the remarks on panpsychism by the novelist, poet, and philosopher, May Sinclair, she who noted ruefully that "pan-psychism has an irresistible appeal to the emotions." Sinclair was a philosophical idealist who was both drawn to and troubled by panpsychism: although not for the reasons we might be. It is worth keeping in mind, as context, that at the end of the nineteenth century the dominant position in British philosophy was absolute idealism: a belief in reality as a single unified consciousness or conscious experience. One recent history of panpsychism has suggested that all idealists are in a way panpsychists "by default," insofar as they posit consciousness absolutely everywhere (Goff, Seager and Allen-Hermanson; see also Strawson,

"Mind and Being"). It is not always true that all panpsychists are idealists, but certainly a number of late Victorian idealists were explicitly panpsychists. This was, for example, true of the Cambridge philosopher James Ward, who held that the difference between idealists and panpsychists "is not fundamental: their common persuasion is that life and mind are at the bottom of all" (246). It is worth noting the difference between this orientation and that of the revival of panpsychism in our time. For most current philosophers of mind sympathetic to panpsychism—as well as for fans of vibrant matter—the starting point is a vision of the world as fundamentally and incontrovertibly physical or material; the challenge is attributing or conferring mind and feeling where it would seem not to be. In contrast, from the starting point of idealism, panpsychism simply explains the omnipresence of consciousness or spirit. In many ways, this is an easier sell. Panpsychism's affinity with idealism is something its current advocates—who, along with partisans of the "liveliness" of matter, face an uphill battle against the physicalism that is our era's version of common sense—might wish to keep in mind.

9. While May Sinclair is best known now for the novels she wrote after the turn of the century—and as the first writer to use the phrase "stream of consciousness" specifically in relation to narrative technique—she began writing philosophical essays in the 1890s, and even after the turn of the century she continued to write in a very late nineteenth century idealist tradition, after that tradition had begun to be challenged by George Moore, Bertrand Russell, and others (Raitt 41-50). While she was very alive to the emotional appeal of panpsychism, what troubled her was, first of all, the idea of a universe of innumerable little consciousnessess or bits of consciousness instead of an absolute, unifying, universal consciousness; and, second of all, the vision of a world of innumerable individualized, self-organizing, volitional, desiring, remembering tiny beings, especially as described by Samuel Butler. After acknowledging panpsychism's appeal to the emotions, she illustrates the allure of Butler's wishing, willing, remembering "low forms of livingness" like this:

> I like to think that my friend's baby made its charming eyelashes, that my neighbor's hen designed her white frock of feathers, and my cat his fine black coat of fur, themselves; because they wanted to; instead of having to buy them, as it were, at some remote ontological bazaar. (vi)

The contrast Sinclair is trying to make here is between the auto-generative, volitional nature of Butler's panpsychism—in which presumably some atoms come together, make a baby or a hen, who then desire eyelashes or feathers, and make them—and an idealist ontology in which

properties flow from a thing's essence, which itself hails from a remoter concept of being. In Butler's version of panpsychism, she says, "desire binds you to the wheel of life. Desire shapes your destiny for you within the wheel" (332). It may be appealing to our sense of individuality and free will, perhaps, to imagine a world in which everything makes itself from the inside out—babies their eyelashes, cats their fur, hens their feathers—but it is not so. It is of course as whimsical to imagine babies, hens, and cats buying their properties at an ontological bazaar as it is to imagine them making them: it sounds like a twisted, cosmic version of a story by Sinclair's contemporary, Beatrix Potter.

Fig 1: illustration from *Ginger and Pickles*

10. But Sinclair's great insight was that panpsychism has had a troubling—or exhilarating, depending on your point of view—connection with desire. As her remarks suggest, it has often seemed a short step from imagining atoms having mentality to imagining atoms desiring: desiring to form themselves, or to come together to form other things, or just coming together. Nowhere was this more true than in the home-grown brand of Victorian panpsychism of eccentric physician and

radical thinker James Hinton, a surprisingly influential figure whose devotees ranged from Victorian radicals from sex radicals such as Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, to the "social purity" reformers and the Fabian socialists (Clark; Koven 14-18; Pinch 54-57). What Hinton's followers drew from his life and voluminous writing was his emphasis on altruism and on the breaking of taboos separating rich and poor, and men and women; what these followers sometimes neglected was that for Hinton himself, this vision of social and sexual relations was really the extension of a version of panpsychism he called "Actualism." Actualism begins with a conception of the continuity of mental with physical force; if force is constantly passing between mental, organic, and inorganic entities, then, for Hinton, it follows that consciousness can be said to have its home in inorganic entities as well as in humans: "all existence is truly active or spiritual, as opposed to inert or dead" (xiii). In this vision of the cosmos, everything is linked by bonds of love: "The stars that roll thro space, the minutest particles of which millions constitute an atom, are our brethren" (84). Claiming love and fellowship with everyone from multiple particles of the universe to multiple sex partners, Hinton and his followers were the Victorian exemplars of one trend visible throughout the long history of panpsychism, in which an interest in the life of atoms "was often seen as democratic," and "the foppish, casual dance of atoms" (that's Lucy Hutchinson, seventeenth-century translator of Lucretius) was linked to sexuality (qtd. in Greenblatt 260). This undercurrent formed part of the emotional appeal of a universe of, as Oscar Wilde put it, "atom calling to atom in secret love or strange affinity" (Wilde 91).

11. The next section of this essay will consider some ways we might think about Victorian panpsychism and Victorian aesthetics. As we have seen, for Victorian writers writing about consciousness, as for contemporary philosophers, panpsychism was in part a response to problems in their era's theories of body and mind. It emerged in relation to, and put pressure on, a variety of specific currents in Victorian intellectual life, from evolutionism and other developments in science, to the flourishing of metaphysics, and in particular absolute idealism, in late nineteenth century England. Panpsychism had its true believers, but for many—as for contemporary philosophers—it emerged as an unintended consequence of certain set of facts and ideas. Arriving at panpsychism could seem alluring, consoling, or could be attended by attitudes and emotions ranging from reluctance, to surprise, to disbelief. Indeed, the ways in which Victorian discussions of panpsychism so insistently give place to psychological questions, about the relation of reason and emotion, of desire and belief—both the desire to believe and the belief

in desire—make it an especially valuable tool for illuminating the psychological dimensions of contemporary panpsychism-talk as well.

III.

12. Though it was always a minority position, panpsychism makes an important contribution to recent "consciousness" debates in scholarship on Victorian literature. As many recent scholars of the relations among Victorian science, literature, and psychology have demonstrated, the era's larger debates about the relationship of body and mind, and between materialist and idealist approaches to consciousness, were deeply and widely public topics.[4] Not sequestered in the work of specialists, discussions of consciousness traveled on a broad highway well-worn by both literary and philosophical writers (Matus 24-32). What follows are speculations about three brief case studies where it is productive to think about Victorian panpsychism, poetics, and aesthetics together.[5] My goal is to suggest that approaching late-Victorian aesthetics from the point of view of panpsychism is a way to heighten our apprehension of certain of its key stylistic features: patterns, grids, and particles.

13. **Case Study A.** Panpsychism played a key role in the vigorous Victorian influence of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. Focusing on the Victorian Lucretius forces us to be mindful of the confusions that took place in how the Victorians understood the differences among panpsychism, and atomism (the universe is made up of tiny indivisible particles of matter) more generally, and materialism even more generally. As I have stressed, panpsychism is concerned with the nature of what the universe is made of, but while some panpsychists saw themselves as "materialists," others were idealists; accounts of Lucretius in Victorian Britain were a key site for these confusions. Some of these confusions stemmed from interpretive uncertainties in the poem itself. Lucretius' dictum that nothing can come from nothing ("de nilo quoniam fieri nil posse videmus"), seemed to point to panpsychism: if nothing can come from nothing, emergence is not possible, and therefore mind must be present, at least in some form, from the beginning. However, while it was possible to claim Lucretius as a forerunner, and while he was certainly an atomist and a materialist, in the ancient understanding of those terms, Lucretius was certainly not panpsychist with respect to consciousness, but perhaps could be considered so with respect to the will: the poem links the swerving of atoms in the void with the existence of free will.[6]

14. Victorian translators and interpreters of Lucretius tacked back and forth on the inferences about atomic consciousness to be drawn from the association of atomic motion and free will. Thomas Charles Baring's translation affirms how the swerve of atoms in space must "somehow break fate's dreary compact." If atoms could not swerve, if they always fall along an "interchained" path, the poem asks, how can there be "freedom of the will"?

> Moreover if all movement is for ever interchained,
> The new arising from the old in order ascertained;
> If first-beginnings never swerve to make commencement new
> Of movement, which may somehow break fate's dreary compact through,—
> Whence comes throughout the earst this power of freedom of the Will
> In living things, this power, I say, extorted from the Fates,
> Whereby we men go forward, each where'er his choice dictates [?] (ll.251-260)

Arguing backwards from here, it was possible for Victorian commentators to see Lucretius as conferring free will onto atoms themselves; arguing forwards, Victorian commentators could use this association as a tool with which to bash away at Victorian panpsychism.[7] In a treatise called *The Atomic Theory of Lucretius contrasted with Modern Doctrines of Atoms and Evolution*, Scottish classicist John Masson linked Lucretius' atoms, Lucretius' account of free will, and Clifford's panpsychism, all in order to criticize the latter. His reasoning goes this way: "Lucretius," he says, "is a most ardent believer in individual Free-Will" and "can only explain it by assigning Free-will to the atoms" (136). Similarly, Clifford does not believe that consciousness can emerge from insensate matter:

> His only escape from the difficulty is this:—the atoms are not 'utterly dead,' but contain in a faint and weak form the faculties of consciousness and mind which are found in . . . man. Thus Professor Clifford, in order to explain the evolution of Mind from atoms, asserts that every atom of matter corresponds to an atom of Mind-Stuff, that is, of something analogous to mind. (135-36)

"The reasoning of both [Lucretius and Clifford] is," Masson concludes, "substantially the same, and the two theories of 'Mind-Stuff' and of Atomic Declination deserved to be placed side by side. Both are based upon the same principle [here he quotes Lucretius, "de nilo quoniam fieri nil posse videmus"], and apply it with equal boldness. Both moreover show to us Materialism confessing its own weakness to account, unaided, for the origin of mind" (136). Thus were ancient philosophical materialism and Victorian scientific naturalism conflated; and an ancient poem used to both exemplify and refute panpsychism.

15. Meanwhile, the poetry of Lucretius got mashed up with misunderstandings of his philosophy, appreciated or depreciated as such, circulated in translations and adaptations, and assimilated to the writing of other poets.

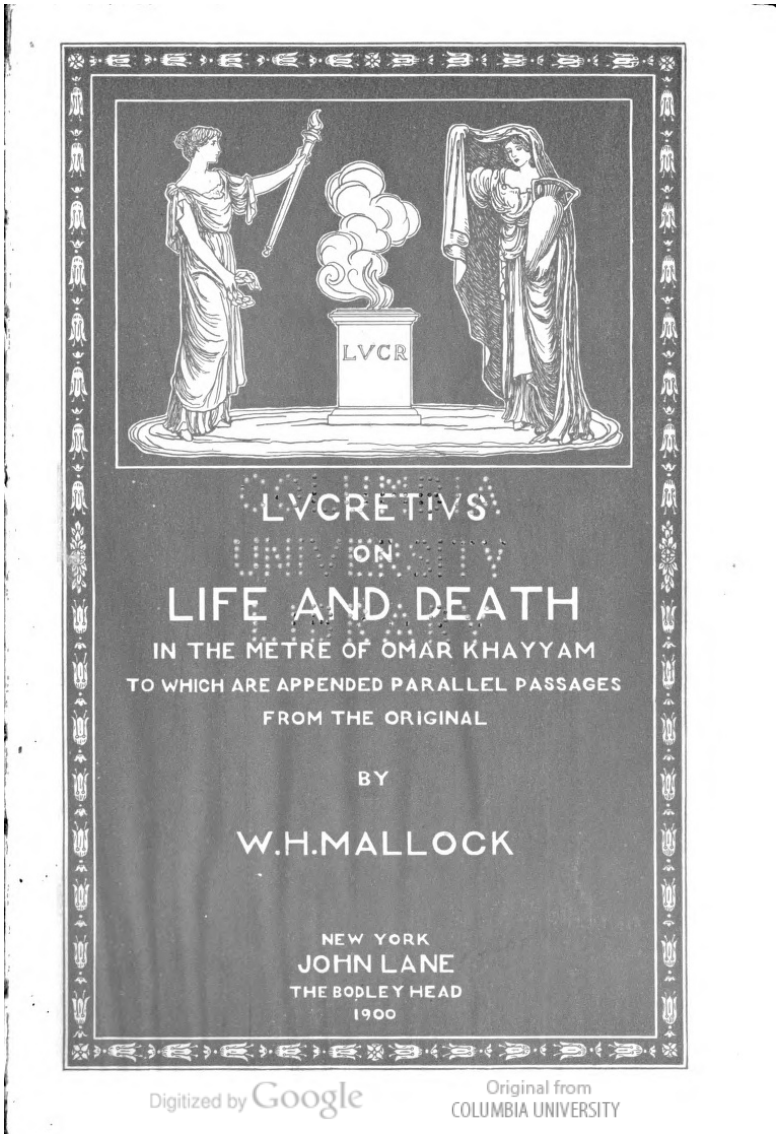

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Fig. 2: title page of 1899 mash-up of Lucretius and Omar Khayyam.

The Victorian poet most associated with Lucretius was Swinburne. Both William Clifford—who loved Swinburne—and the critic and psychical researcher Frederick H.W. Myers not only linked Swinburne to Lucretius, but also nominated him as the poet most in touch with a new

understanding of the cosmos. Myers pegged Swinburne as the poet most attuned to the idea that "we must somehow achieve a profound readjustment of our general views of the meaning of life and of the structure of the universe." "With this great upheaval of thought," Myers writes, "Swinburne (. . .) finds himself largely concerned. It is not that his main interest is in philosophical speculation; his main interest is in literature and poetry. But he has the intelligence to catch, the voice to utter, whatever speculation is in the air around him" (97). But Myers' appreciation of Swinburne went hand in hand with his ambivalence about Swinburne's unearthly indifference to the human. "I know not," he exclaimed, "what in the easy brilliancy of [Swinburne's] lines gives the impression that they are an imaginative description of the inhabitants of some other planet, or at least that he is as much concerned for his seaweed as for anything else" (100). In Swinburne's poetry, in Myers' view, there is no-one home, no ordinary human being at home, no point of view even from which things are described. The poems are like thoughts without a thinker; a view from no-where; or emanations of what Graham Harman has called "the zero-person": neither first, nor second, nor third person ("Zero-person," 258).

16. But the flip side of the sense in which no-one is home in Swinburne's poetry may be a glimmering that everybody is home: that every piece of the poem-world is suspended in a knowing, feeling environment which is the poem itself. In her recent study of Swinburne, Sara Lyons also notes not only Myers' and Clifford's canny accounts of the poet's cosmic view, but also his affinity with panpsychism, as he evokes (in *Tristram of Lyonesse)* a world in which "all matter participates in a kind of cosmic *joie de vivre*" (127). We might also turn to Swinburne's style. In these stanzas from "Hertha," for example, we see Swinburne's characteristic commitment to an un-hierarchized yet uniformly animate universe:

> Beside or above me
> Nought is there to go:
> Love or unlove me,
> Unknow me or know,
> I am that which unloves me and loves; I am stricken, and I am the blow.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I the grain and the furrow,
> The plough-cloven clod

And the ploughshare drawn thorough,
The germ and the sod,
The deed and the doer, the seed and the sower, the dust which is God.
(ll. 16-20, 36-40, *Songs Before Sunrise* 83, 84)

The "I" is everywhere and everything, from God to dust; the "I" is a mentality that pushes out to the very walls of the stanzas, spreading out and pooling in the long final line. The point is not to claim Swinburne for panpsychism, but rather to note this Victorian fascination with the idea of a universe of atomized mentalities that provides an analogy to features of his art. A characteristic form of Swinburne's poetry is the poetic line consisting of equally weighted almost entirely monosyllabic words. For example: "Stars and moon and sun may wax and wane, subside and rise, / Age on age as flake on flake of showering snows be shed" ("Grace Darling" ll. 101-02, *Astrophel and Other Poems* 79). Edmund Wilson called these Swinburne's "generalizing visageless monosyllables" (qtd. in Rosenberg 132; see also McGann, 294; Levin 55-72; Walsh 29-54). To call these units of language "visageless," paradoxically, has the curious effect of projecting an interior or consciousness into them. They are buzzing flakes, flecks (two of Swinburne's favorite words) and particles of language.

17. **Case Study B.** Victorian panpsychism can provoke a restoration of key ontological questions to some aspects of late Victorian aesthetics, such as detail and pattern, to supplement the perceptual, epistemological, and representational questions more commonly emphasized.[8] When we look at a William Morris design, who is at home there?

Fig. 3: William Morris,"Tulip"

Fig. 4: William Morris,"Corn Cockle"

What are all the little pieces of the pattern doing, pushing and pulling against each other?[9] One feature common to many forms of panpsychism, both Victorian and contemporary, is a syndrome one philosopher has called "smallism" (Coleman, 40-44). Smallism is the tendency to assume that truth resides in the smallest particulars of reality. The tiny units or bits of miniature or "low"

mentality may clump together to form the larger consciousnesses of the world, in ways that are unaccountable even to the most committed panpsychist. But he or she holds that the ontological truth is to be found with the small, or with all the "smalls" in all their innumerable multiplicity. At that level, all the "smalls" are equally small, and mentality inheres in all: "consciousness," in the phrasing of the panpsychist contemporary science fiction writer, Rudy Rucker, "is a universally distributed property" (qtd. in Shaviro 86).

18. The idea of consciousness—or the capacity for experience, or mentality—universally distributed among the small, is at home with certain features of late Victorian aesthetics and new approaches to late Victorian aesthetics. I'd like to stay with William Morris's designs, which have been opened up in fascinating ways in Caroline Arscott's book on Morris and Burne-Jones. Although Arscott notes that in the work of these two artists, "bodily experience" seems to "take over from ratiocination," she goes on to note that, "we should not assume that the. . . artworks (…) preclude *agency* (…), since the scientific thinking if the period made it possible to characterize animate, corporeal substance as a diffuse location of mind" (25) In Arscott's approach, Morris' designs are not representations of a world viewed; they present us with no point outside from which to view; we cannot tell what is over, or under, us; rather, we experience their substance as it were from within. They take us inside an experiencing grid (51, 96-97, 173). Arscott comes to this reading of Morris by convincingly linking his patterns not only to gruesome narrative art by Burne-Jones and others; but also to embodied actions and processes, including boxing and fishing, tracing the influence in the designs of everyone from Morris' boxing master, Archibald McClaren—himself an enthusiastic fan of the life of atoms—to Ruskin. Morris adopted and adapted Ruskin's microscopic view of the natural world so that "we. . . expect the plants to be shown as subject to physical and psychic experiences comparable to those of conscious human beings" (43). The result is "an aesthetic experience that takes the subject . . . into the substance of living matter which is knitted together, self with self, and, potentially, self, with homologous elements and extensive systems" in which "mental activity is conceived of not as images (literal or symbolic) or fantasized events, but as energy and appetite" (102). The focus of this interpretation of Morris is not on the plant forms in the designs, but on the swirls and weaves themselves, on the dyes that seep into the fabric, so that it is truly about what is, not just about the "as if" of representation.

Fig. 5: William Morris, "Acanthus."

Arscott's account of Morris's designs as an experience of being inside a swirl of microscopic mentalities, is fascinating to the student of Victorian panpsychism, attuned to the idea of consciousness as a "universally distributed property."

19. **Case Study C.** There is an intriguing role for panpsychism in late Victorian theories of reading. As Nicholas Dames has shown in *The Physiology of the Novel*, Victorian literary critics were keen on embracing new approaches to consciousness in a new science of reading. One question they sought to address was: where are the sites of consciousness, feeling, or mentality, in the act of reading? In the brain, the nerves, the body, of the reader? Or of the author? What does one make of one's sense that there is consciousness somehow *in* the book, the sentences, the letters? Dames cites a passage from Vernon Lee's 1894 essay, "The Craft of Words," which imagines "units of consciousness" bouncing, in a curiously random way, between writer and reader:

> The impressions, the ideas and emotions stored up in the mind of the Reader, and which it is the business of the Writer to awaken in such combinations and successions as answer to his own thoughts and moods—these, which you must allow me to call, in psychologist's jargon, *Units of Consciousness* (emphasis original) have been deposited where they are by the random hand of circumstance, by the accident of temperament and vicissitudes, and in heaps or layers, which represent merely the caprice or necessity of individual experience. From the Writer's point of view, they are a chaos; and, what is worse for him who wishes to rearrange them to suit his mood, they are the *chaos of living moving things* (my emphasis)….The Writer must select, for the formation of his

> particular pattern of thought or fact or mood, such as he requires among these *living molecules of memory* (my emphasis). (Lee 575; qtd. in Dames, 176)

These "units of consciousness," these "living molecules of memory," seem to reside in the reader, but they also seem to belong to the writer, who can select and arrange them; they seem moreover not only to be moving between writer and reader, but to have a kind of Brownian motion to them; they seem scattered randomly, a "chaos," and it is the writer's job to try to corral them into a pattern. In these formulations it is possible to hear not only Lucretian atoms swerving, but also, especially in Lee's phrase "living molecules of memory," echoes of Samuel Butler's panpsychism, which emerged, as noted earlier, out of his commitment to seeing memory in all things.

20. Furthermore, Dames points, as Lee's source, to the German "psychophysicist" Gustav Fechner, who, "laid out a careful argument for the existence of basic 'bits' of consciousness" and had, as Dames correctly notes, a significant influence on British psychology (127). However, what Dames does not discuss is that Fechner was also a panpsychist. He theorized the existence of consciousness going all the way down to plants at least, and up to the earth as a whole, in a kind of nested hierarchy in which each individual consciousness is a unit of a larger one, up to the whole universe. Bouncing around in Vernon Lee's psychology of reading and writing, along with the units of consciousness and the molecules of memory, in other words, may be a distinctly panpsychist account of the type of consciousness involved in reading and writing: an account of consciousnesses everywhere, nested among readers and writers. And, above all, in words and letters. Lee's "Craft of Words" draws on analogies between words, letters, consciousness, and the living particles of the world, a chain of analogies that is one of panpsychism's recurring rhetorical patterns.[10] Victorian panpsychism might be thought of as a response to, among other things, a psychology of reading, to the sense that words buzz and hum with a mentality that seems to belong neither wholly to the writer, nor to the reader. The feeling that words have "minds of their own" is the psychological component of many enduring features of modern literary criticism (the belief that meaning exceeds authorial intention, for example), enduring elaborations of a psychology of reading that holds that, as Coleridge put it, "if words are not THINGS, they are LIVING POWERS" (xlviii).

Conclusion

21. Panpsychism is so strange that it is almost impossible to think about. It is hard to imagine: it is hard to imagine that the world around us, that looks the way it does, and feels the way it does, is made up of billions of bits of consciousness. In positing experience or the capacity for experience in every molecule of the world, it seems to upend our own ordinary experience. It might best be thought of as one those ideas or fictions that emerges at particular times and places, to fill in the corners of other almost unimaginable ideas; and Victorian Britain was one of those times and places where panpsychism functioned, for some people, in this way, to explain the "hard problems" of life and literature. Panpsychism has an emotional as well as logical appeal, and its status as a theory that seems to fufill intense desire for a beautiful solution links it to the aesthetic.[11] Conversely, Victorian aesthetics from the point of view of panpsychism renews our sense of the ways in which its emphases on pattern and smallness pull us in by shimmering with implicit philosophical stances. My goal in this essay has been to evoke the diversity of areas of Victorian culture—aesthetic, scientific, philosophical—in which panpsychism plays or could play a role, in hopes of prompting more scholars to take up this topic. Our picture of Victorian consciousness-talk is incomplete without it.

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[1] Both Strawson and Nagel, however, are emphatic that committing to panpsychism does not entail believing that chairs, or lakes, or other objects of our senses have consciousness: such a belief, they argue, is animism, not panpsychism (see Strawson, 26). Without wishing to split definitional hairs: for the purposes of this article, the definition of panpsychism sticks close to Nagel's and Strawson's, and does not include Leibnitzian monadism, Spinoza, and other Romantic conceptions of body and mind.

[2] For contemporary cases for an idealist panpsychism, see Meixner, and, to some extent, Goff.

[3] The literature on consciousness is vast: but see G.H.Lewes: "It is absolutely necessary that we (...) settle the meaning we assign to the term Consciousness. (…) Usage (…) points to a general and a special sense of the term. The general usage identifies it with Sensibility, in its subjective aspect as Sentience, including

all psychical states, both those classed under Sensation, and those under Thought. (…) In the special usage it is distinguished from all other psychical states by a peculiar reflected feeling of Attention, whereby we not only *have* a sensation, but *feel* we have it; we not only think, but are conscious we are thinking" (Lewes 356-7). For a guide to this literature see Rylance.

[4] The scholarship on Victorian discussions of consciousness includes, for example, Shuttleworth, Taylor, Matus, and Vrettos.

[5] To date, one of the few recent scholars who notes affinities between distinctive features of Victorian aesthetics and panpsychism is Benjamin Morgan. In *The Outward Mind*, Morgan mentions ways in which the poet Constance Naden steps up to the edge of the view that "it is that matter itself bears qualities of mind," a position he identifies as prefiguring contemporary panpsychism (147-8, 305 n.64).

[6] On the history of uses of Lucretius, see Goldberg, 31-62; on panpsychist reclamations of Lucretius, see Skrbina 51-53; on seventeenth-century English translations and interpretations of Lucretius, see Kramnick 14-15, 61-98.

[7] Turner points out that Lucretius was often the winner in this comparison: Lucretius seen has having blamelessly turned to atomism as part of his struggle against paganism, against which he valiantly strove without the benefit of Christianity, whereas the modern panpsychists ought to have known better.

[8] Influential accounts of the perceptual emphasis of late Victorian literature include Christ, Shires.

[9] On pattern, pushing, pulling, and agency, see Gell 66-81.

[10] The literature on the history of associations among small units of writing and small units of life includes Serres and Hallyn.

[11] See Hartley for an account of the extent to which interest and desire were folded into late nineteenth-century aesthetic theory. A compelling case for the deep emotional and aesthetic appeal of panpsychism for literary writers can be found in Jonathan Kramnick's "Two Kinds of Panpsychism: Margaret Cavendish and Marilynne Robinson," in *Paper Minds* 138-159, esp. 159.