



palgrave▶pivot

# Human Tissue in the Realist Novel, 1850–1895

Ben Moore

palgrave  
macmillan

# Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine

## Series Editors

Sharon Ruston  
Department of English and Creative Writing  
Lancaster University  
Lancaster, UK

Alice Jenkins  
School of Critical Studies  
University of Glasgow  
Glasgow, UK

Jessica Howell  
Department of English  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, TX, USA

Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine is an exciting series that focuses on one of the most vibrant and interdisciplinary areas in literary studies: the intersection of literature, science and medicine. Comprised of academic monographs, essay collections, and Palgrave Pivot books, the series will emphasize a historical approach to its subjects, in conjunction with a range of other theoretical approaches. The series will cover all aspects of this rich and varied field and is open to new and emerging topics as well as established ones.

**Editorial board:**

Andrew M. Beresford, Professor in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University, UK

Steven Connor, Professor of English, University of Cambridge, UK

Lisa Diedrich, Associate Professor in Women's and Gender Studies, Stony Brook University, USA

Kate Hayles, Professor of English, Duke University, USA

Peter Middleton, Professor of English, University of Southampton, UK

Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, Professor of English and Theatre Studies, University of Oxford, UK

Sally Shuttleworth, Professorial Fellow in English, St Anne's College, University of Oxford, UK

Susan Squier, Professor of Women's Studies and English, Pennsylvania State University, USA

Martin Willis, Professor of English, University of Westminster, UK

Karen A. Winstead, Professor of English, The Ohio State University, USA

Ben Moore

Human Tissue in the  
Realist Novel,  
1850–1895

palgrave  
macmillan

Ben Moore  
University of Amsterdam  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ISSN 2634-6435 ISSN 2634-6443 (electronic)  
Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine  
ISBN 978-3-031-26639-3 ISBN 978-3-031-26640-9 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26640-9>

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023  
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover pattern © John Rawsterne/patternhead.com

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although most of this book was written quite recently, parts of it have been in gestation for a long time. The earliest elements of the material on *Le Ventre de Paris* that appears in Chap. 4 derive from a 2013 paper at the conference *'In the jungle of cities': Mobs, Murders, Crowds, Riots and Crises in the Modern City*, at Chetham's Library, Manchester. I remain very grateful to the organisers and attendees of this event. Chapter 2 originated in a paper at the *Becoming Animal with the Victorians* conference, at the University of Paris VII in 2016. An earlier version was published as 'Becoming-evolutionary?: Animal Transformations in Kingsley's *Alton Locke*' in *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 85 (2017). My sincere thanks go to Fabienne Moine for helping to shape the article during the editorial process. It is reproduced here by kind permission of the journal. Chapter 3 began life as a conference paper at *NEMLA 50* in Washington DC in 2019. I am especially indebted to the organisers and fellow speakers of the 'George Eliot at 200' panels, whose comments and suggestions have in several places influenced the resulting chapter. Chapter 3 also benefitted enormously from the attentive and insightful reading of my colleague, Nicholas Carr. Thanks are also due to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam for an award of sabbatical hours in 2022 that enabled me to complete this manuscript. I am grateful as well to the anonymous manuscript reviewer, whose advice was instrumental in my final revisions, and to the editors of *Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine*, to which this book is honoured to belong. Finally, I thank my family and above all Ellie, without whose support this book would not have happened. It is dedicated, with unstinting love, to Stanley and Arthur.

# CONTENTS

1	Introduction: Human Tissue	1
2	Becoming-evolutionary?: Animal Transformations in <i>Alton Locke</i>	17
3	Allegorical Realism and the Figure of the Human in <i>The Mill on the Floss</i> and <i>Middlemarch</i>	39
4	Zola, Moore, Lee and the Vivisectional Novel	67
5	Conclusion: The Primitive Tissue of Realism	91
	Index	95

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ben Moore** is Assistant Professor in English Literature at the University of Amsterdam, having previously studied at the University of Manchester and taught at Cardiff University. He works mainly on nineteenth-century novels, with interests in architecture, cities, money, childhood and modernity, as well as biology and science. He is the author of the forthcoming book *Invisible Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Rethinking Urban Modernity* (Edinburgh University Press), along with various journal articles and book chapters. He is Co-Editor of the *Gaskell Journal*.





## Introduction: Human Tissue

**Abstract** This chapter introduces the concept of ‘human tissue’ as a way of approaching the realist novel in the nineteenth century. Engaging with theoretical discussions of the human from Amitav Ghosh, Sylvia Wynter, Georg Lukács, Michel Foucault and others, as well as discourses of material ecocriticism and the Anthropocene, this introductory chapter argues that the novels to be discussed in this book simultaneously construct or stabilise the figure of the human and break down or destabilise it. The chapter also engages with Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1834) in order to argue that ‘human tissue’ is a particularly appropriate concept for reading literature from the Victorian period.

**Keywords** Human tissue • Man • Material ecocriticism • Anthropocene • Victorian literature • Realism • Thomas Carlyle

Society stands before us like that wonderful piece of life, the human body, with all its various parts depending on one another, and with a terrible liability to get wrong because of that delicate dependence.

George Eliot, ‘Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt’, in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 627 (Jan 1868), 1–11 (p. 4).

In a world that is being dramatically reshaped by anthropogenic climate change, often in devastating ways, it makes sense to regard the realist novel with suspicion. If individualism and anthropocentrism have a literary year zero, the realist novel that came to fruition in nineteenth-century Europe and America would seem to be it. Literary scholars from Ian Watt to Nancy Armstrong have read the development of the modern novel as bound up with the development of the individualised human subject, even if by the second half of the nineteenth century we can identify ‘a radical reformulation of the individual as a subject layered by successive displacements’.<sup>1</sup> The realist novel, we tend to assume, puts the human at the centre, even or especially when these humans are layered, complex characters who demand our sympathy and understanding.

If the realist novel’s interest in human individuality is the aesthetic face of a political, social and environmental problem, an expression of a narcissistic concern with a narrowly conceived (Eurocentric, white, usually male, usually middle-class) sense of humanity as the master of the world and the hero of its own stories, then different forms of reading would seem to be in order. This is the route taken by many eco-minded critics in recent years, such as Jesse Oak Taylor’s ‘atmospheric reading’, which ‘revises the common notion that the novel is a genre predicated on (and formative of) the human individual as the key locus of agency, ethics and subjectivity’, or Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s work on allegorical ways of thinking the Anthropocene, in which she explores texts that challenge ‘the telos of individuation so favored by the social realist novel’.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Emily Steinlight’s reading of ‘mass life’ rather than the individual as the subject of the nineteenth-century novel ‘recharacterizes the genre’s essential human material and its narrative project’.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the best known of these challenges is Amitav Ghosh’s contention that the realist novel is fundamentally incapable of representing climate crisis. For Ghosh, the dominant form of the novel has been built on

<sup>1</sup>Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 8. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Jesse Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 14. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>Emily Steinlight, *Populating the Novel: Literary Form and the Politics of Surplus Life* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2018), p. 15.