



## Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, and London's "Bridge of Sighs"

L. J. Nicoletti

<1> Victorian Londoners were inundated with images of drowned women regardless of the fact that contemporary suicidologists, such as Daniel Hack Tuke and Emile Durkheim, claimed men were statistically three or four times more likely to kill themselves. Representations of male suicides were conspicuously absent. Women's suicidal leaps were captured in illustrated newspapers, sold in one shilling books, presented in theaters, displayed at the Royal Academy of Art, and narrated in literature. Early in the era, the iconography became well-established and ahistoric: a composition framed by an arch; a moonlit setting; a beautiful, unscathed corpse; and a fall from Blackfriars or Waterloo Bridge, allowing St. Paul's Cathedral to be moralistically included in the background.

<2> In her study of precinematic spectators, Anne Friedberg has observed, "It was precisely while . . . changes in the observer were occurring in the nineteenth century that women were changing their social role and were allowed a new and more public access to mobility through urban space" (35). The proliferation of images of suicidal women concurred with women's increasing involvement in the city. To limit the suggestion of autonomy and guard the societal reliance upon domesticized women, images of female suicide imputed that women were not able to handle the enticing spectacles afforded by the industrialized metropolis, that the cacophony of sensory experience would fray their nerves and disorder their minds. The picture of female suicide became hegemonic.

### The River Thames

*Looked at in any light, the magnitude and growth of London are marvellous; it is unsurpassed by any other place in the world for health, commerce, and wealth; she stands by her river, her railways, her public buildings, her grand embankment, and her magnificent bridges, the Queen City of the world.*

-- John Diprose<sup>[1]</sup>

*[T]he record of a woman's life-wanderings from the cradle to the Embankment must be at once pathetic and terrible.*

-- Robert Blatchford<sup>[2]</sup>

<3> Victorian representations of female suicide converged at the Thames, then pictured as the lifeblood of metropolis and empire. The river demonstrated the country's success in commerce, reinforced its status as a naval power, and highlighted its architectural marvels (Fig.1). Antonio Canova claimed that Waterloo Bridge alone was worth the trip from Rome, being "the finest bridge in Europe" (Knight 3: 165). The river was also strictly coded as a male space, through its allegorical figure Father Thames<sup>[3]</sup> (Fig.2) and myriad representations of physical labor on its currents and along its banks.<sup>[4]</sup> What better location, then, to emphasize a woman's fatal wandering from her allotted sphere?

<4> Even as the Thames was being portrayed as a status symbol, it was disparaged as London's polluted netherworld. The Reverend Noel proclaimed, "Shut out from the princely dwellings of the noble and the great, there is a second city; so ragged, so dirty, so degraded, so ferocious, and so vast, that it might seem to the eye of a stranger to have gathered, as in a common sewer, the wretchedness and villainy of the whole world" (14-15). Like its sanitary counterparts, this cultural sewer drained into the Thames. An engraving by Ebenezer Landells (1808-60), designed by Henry George Hine (1811-95), illustrates the perceptual break in the "monster city," evenly dividing the lofty spires and domes of London's churches and monuments from its underside -- the desolate river below (Fig.3).<sup>[5]</sup> A print called *Monster Soup, Commonly Called Thames Water* from 1828 (Fig.4) presented a satirical "Microcosm dedicated to the London Water Companies" who had been slow to provide pure water to their customers.<sup>[6]</sup> It shows an upper-class woman dropping her teacup after looking through a microscope at "a correct representation of that precious stuff doted out to us." Pertinent to this study, the print additionally conflated female propriety with repulsion for the Thames. The wretched state of the river was well known to all. Around 1840 George Smeeton claimed,

[W]hoever swallows it, quaffs what is impregnated with all the filth of London and Westminster, and charged with the contents of the great common-sewers, which disembogue a pretty particular dud considerable quantity of filth into the Thames; the drainings from dunghills and laystalls, the refuse of hospitals, slaughter-houses, colour, lead, and soap works, drug-mills, gas-works, the minerals and poisons used in mechanics and manufacture, enriched with the purifying carcasses of dogs, cats, rats, and men; and mixed with the scourings of all the wash tubs and kennels within the bills of mortality. And this is the agreeable potation extolled by the Londoners, as the finest water in the world! (110-11)

The Thames smelled so foul near Westminster Bridge that the House of Commons was forced to adjourn in 1858 (Porter 263).<sup>[7]</sup> Henry Mayhew's investigative report *London Labour and the London Poor* starkly illustrated the pestilence and depravity of Thames culture through its mud-larks (2: 155), sewer-hunters (2: 394), and rat-catchers (2: 431). Finally, Doré and Jerrold's *London: A Pilgrimage* presented it as the only home of the city's outcasts and profligates ( Fig.5).<sup>[8]</sup>

<5> The Thames' polluted state served as a metaphor for the urban depravity caused by London's weakening morals. Not surprisingly, Hope Constable's narrator in *London After Dark; or, Rambles by Night* uses water imagery in his condemnation of prostitution:

I liken this aspect of human sin to a foetid pool of enormous dimensions, sending innumerable streamlets into every grade of society. Now, into this hellish reservoir, men of thought and action are continually pouring transforming chemicals, and somewhere in the golden future this black ocean and all its tributaries shall be cleansed--shall, in fact, be changed into sparkling water, wherewith the nation shall be purified and strengthened. (20)

Until the "black ocean" of prostitution was purified through hygiene and regulation, the nation symbolically cleansed itself of polluted and polluting urban women through their visualized -- and ironically beatific -- drownings.

<6> Drowning women were omnipresent in Victorian London's visual culture.<sup>[9]</sup> Hablot Knight Browne, or "Phiz" (1851-82), showed the unchaste Martha contemplating

suicide in his 1850 illustration to *Livia Coppertina* called "The River" (Fig.6). The heroine of W. L. Moncrieff's 1843 play *The Scamps of London* drowned herself nightly. So, too, tried Mrs. R. Honner as the seduced and abandoned "Louise" of Edward Stirling's *The Bohemians; or, The Rogues of Paris*, but after missing the mattress on a fifteen-foot leap from a bridge during its December 1843 opening, the *Pictorial Times* reported she "was so seriously injured, as to render it uncertain when she may be able to appear again" (qtd. in Meisel 138-39n52).<sup>[10]</sup> Charles Selby's melodrama *London by Night*, performed at the Strand Theatre in January 1844, also included a woman's plummet into the Thames, and ran on and off for forty years, as did Moncrieff's *The Scamps* (Anderson 198). This image advertised the play, as shown by the title page of its 1886 republication. George Cruikshank's *The Drunkard's Children*, which opened at the Surrey Theatre in July 1848, similarly concluded with Emma's fall from the parapet. Her fateful story--assembled in a folio of eight plates--could be bought by playgoers for one shilling.

<7> Aside from the use of female suicide to entertain Victorian book-lovers and theater-goers, the tourist trade additionally appropriated its morbid topography to advertise London's spectacular and unpredictable side. In 1872, travel writing like John Diprose's *Book about London and London Life* illustrated a typical sight one would supposedly encounter in London at 3:00 a.m.: a woman apprehended by the police after a drowning attempt.<sup>[11]</sup> Diprose related her familiar wayward path: she left her country home with a seducer who abandoned her in London, and her father died of a broken heart. Impoverished and "Maddened, in the depths of her despair, she leaves her cruel lodging and rushes to the river," but is saved by a passerby and reformed "to return to her simple village home" (80-81).

<8> Bridge construction, widespread in nineteenth-century London, was viewed as a panacea (Fig.7).<sup>[12]</sup> Antiquarian and cultural historian Charles Knight reveals that in addition to their utility, bridges symbolized urban and spiritual renewal:

[B]y the latter part of the eighteenth [century] . . . one of the recommendations of the new [Blackfriars] bridge . . . [was] the certainty of its working a purification of the district, and redeeming it from the state of poverty and degradation into which it had fallen. (3: 120)

It is not surprising that the fictional suicides of London's deviant women would so often be staged from its bridges given their cultural import.

<9> Emblematically, bridges had also long indicated the edge of decrepitude, with spiritual fulfillment awaiting on the other side. Passing from one bank to the other frequently involved a hardship (city bridges often required a toll to cross).<sup>[13]</sup> In Victorian representations of female suicide, the despairing, solitary woman was often physically separated from St. Paul's dome by the gloomy, menacing presence of Waterloo or Blackfriars Bridges, urban symbols of circulation and access that allowed vistas of the cathedral (Fig.8). Her fatal leap into the dirty Thames nonetheless purified her sinful habits. As Foucault has noted, "when civilization, life in society, the imaginary desires aroused by novel reading and theatergoing [sic] provoke nervous ailments, the return to water's limpidity assumes the meaning of a ritual of purification; in that transparent coolness, one is reborn to one's first innocence" (167).

<10> The clear geographic location and the dead female body presented suicide by drowning as an observable, locatable phenomena. Olive Anderson has shown, however, that suicides were more common in London's canals and parks (130, 132, 356). The Thames setting, therefore, originated more from imagination than from fact, pictorially sustaining the narrative of Victorian women's inescapable downward mobility when they ventured from their respectable homes into the city.

### Waterloo, the "Bridge of Sighs"

*I have all but done a poem on 'the Bridge of Sighs' -- ie Waterloo, and its Suicides.* -- Thomas Hood<sup>[14]</sup>

<11> Thomas Hood's 1844 poem "The Bridge of Sighs" lent itself well to visualization. Martin Meisel calls it the "*locus classicus*" of Victorian scenes of female suicide (138n52). Commenced just two weeks after the heavily publicized suicide attempt of seamstress Mary Furley, nothing of Furley's story, however, remains in the poem.<sup>[15]</sup> Furley, a forty-year-old single mother whose only money had been lost or stolen, attempted to drown her children and herself in the Regent's Canal to avoid returning to the harsh treatment of the Bethnal Green workhouse (Anderson 202n32). She was condemned to death for the murder of one child, but public sympathy, anti-poor law lobbyists, and the demonstrations of reformers led to a reduced sentence of transportation for seven years (Clubbe 173). Hood initially retained aspects of Furley's history, seen in the following posthumously published verses: "The moon in the river shone / And the stars some six or seven -- / Poor child of sin, to throw it therein / Seemed sending it to Heaven" (qtd. in Clubbe 174). In the final version, however, he metamorphosed Furley into a seduced, abandoned, and love-mad woman who redeemed herself through a suicidal leap off Waterloo Bridge, so that "All that remains of her / Now is pure womanly" (lines 19-20).

<12> Hood restaged the suicide at Waterloo Bridge instead of a more secluded canal, locating it near London's scopic, commercial, and religious center. Anderson reports, "In 1840 around 30 suicides a year (or some 15 per cent of London's registered suicides) were committed from this bridge" (201). She suggests that its penny toll may have attracted the suicidal, ensuring privacy and, therefore, a greater chance at success.<sup>[16]</sup> But in reality, only a small proportion of the city's suicides occurred at Waterloo Bridge, and its reputation as the "Bridge of Sighs" or "The Arch of Suicide" (Anderson 201) stems more from London's visual and literary cultures than actual practice.

<13> As a case in point, Charles Knight's huge compilation *London* (1841-1844) promoted Waterloo Bridge as a popular Victorian suicide locale. The credible, narrative voice of Knight's topographical and cultural guide is a gentleman-scholar, not a sensationalist. Knight's introduction claimed that each subject discussed

must necessarily be of no abstract nature . . . but something which *can be seen*, and thus copied for the reader's eye, or made more intelligible by the graphic art. OUR LONDON WILL BE PICTORIAL. The several artists of eminence who will be engaged upon this undertaking will labour upon a well-defined principle -- *that of uniting to the imaginative power the strictest fidelity in every detail of Architecture and Costume* . In the same spirit will the writers work. (1: ii)

One of Knight's hopes for the series was that "by diminishing ignorance, we may diminish crime; and, by cultivating innocent pleasures, do something to drive out unlawful excitements" (1: iii). Knight's professedly objective portrayal of Waterloo Bridge explained it was "built in the centre of the commercial world, [and] will exist to tell the most remote generations, "This was a rich, industrious, and powerful city" (3: 169). Yet before leaving the topic, Knight

remember[s] with pain how many unfortunates have stood shivering in those very recesses, taking *their* last farewell of the world in which they had experienced so much misery. We have no idea, nor do we wish to have, of the entire extent of this dreadful evil, which has of late years given a new and most unhappy kind of celebrity to Waterloo Bridge, but the cases of accomplished and attempted suicide here must have been fearfully numerous. (3: 169)

Notably, Knight's account does not portray Waterloo as a magnet for female suicides, nor does he prescribe leaps from it as a cure for immorality, as would artists and writers in the wake of Hood's poem, such as Walter Thornbury, who claimed in his 1865 book *Haunted London* that the bridge was "a spot frequently selected by unfortunate women who meditate suicide, on account of its solitude and privacy" (480).

<14> "The Bridge of Sighs" was frequently republished, often in illustrated editions including prints by John Everett Millais, Lord Gerald Fitzgerald, Gustave Doré, J. Moyr Smith, and H. Granville Fell. The success of the poem stemmed largely from the narrator's remaking of a female suicide and its plasticity to become a sign supporting Victorian ideals. The narrator first orders the "Dissolute man" (line 77) who has found the drowned woman to "Take her up tenderly, / Lift her with care" (5-6). Next the man is told to observe the body: "Look at her garments, / Clinging like cerements" (9-10). He is then instructed by the narrator on how to refashion her: "Wipe those poor lips of hers / Oozing so clammy" and "Loop up her tresses / Escaped from the comb" (29-32). Finally he erases the woman's last imprint of self-expression and recomposes her body himself, hastened by the narrator:

Ere her limbs frigidly  
Stiffen too rigidly,  
Decently,--kindly,--  
Smooth. and compose them:

... and close them,  
And her eyes, close them,  
Staring so blindly!  
.....  
Cross her hands humbly,  
As if praying dumbly,  
Over her breast! (85-102)

The necrophilic excitement at the opportunity the dead female body presents reminds us of the sexuality which caused her fall. The narrator claims "Death has left on her / Only the beautiful" (25-26). Her attractiveness in death stresses her purification through drowning. Even though she was "Mad from life's history" (121) due to unbridled sexuality, her "Burning insanity" (98) did not prevent her from "Owning her weakness, / Her evil behavior, / And leaving, with meekness, / Her sins to her Saviour!" (103-06). The narrator's reclaiming of her body and her story replicates Victorian medico-judicial discourse, which sustained a suicide's image for all to see through the coroner's inquest, and posthumously projected mental disorder onto the escaped patient. Her body is turned into an instructive sign marking the way out for "One of Eve's family" (28).

<15> Hood's narrator expressed the need for a single, authoritative account of female suicide, one already surfacing in Victorian visual culture through the uniformity of popular representations. The fatherly speaker teaches the observer how to recreate the image of the drowned woman, and the man he addresses doubles for the reader of the poem. This intervention limited the body's signs and prevented a woman from sowing discord between men; her deviant act instead united them. Society is told to "Picture it--think of it, / . . . / Lave in it, drink of it, Then, if you can!" (76-79). The reconstituted female body, passive to interpretation and completely immobile in the city, instructed readers to learn the poem's lesson through observation, to experience it through their senses, to bathe themselves in the revised version and utterly consume it.

<16> Artists interpreting Hood's poem reveal the cultural unanimity in representing female suicide that made the drowned Victorian woman a cliché before mid-century. For six decades, Hood's hapless heroine was consistently depicted in three ways: at the river, falling from the bridge, and dead below the bridge. No editions illustrated the respectable home she came from or her disreputable life in London, although Hood alluded to them. Each illustrator also coded her suicide as redemptive, through emblematic details and an aesthetically pleasing corpse, and inevitable, by surrounding her with passive observers, not rescuers -- a feature of Hood's poem in conflict with actual river-practice.

<17> Regardless of the frequent presence of witnesses to these fictional suicides, none shows a resuscitation attempt, although it would have been standard practice in the Victorian era. This fact attests to the implicit determinism of the motif, that "the prevalent tendency towards self-destruction among isolated and alienated young women in London . . . was beyond social intervention and institutional reform" (Maidment 142). Since 1774, the Royal Humane Society had been diligently setting up receiving stations around London's bodies of waters, training attendants on the principles of expiration and inspiration, and instructing the public never to assume a drowned body was irrevocably dead. They advertised rewards "to all who manifest an ardent zeal for the preservation of human life" (Gregory 38).<sup>[17]</sup> By 1788, surgeon Charles Kite was marketing a twenty-piece "Pocket Case of Instruments, for the Recovery of the Apparently Dead," which included pipes and attachments to convey air to the lungs, medicines to the stomach and intestines, and tobacco smoke to the rectum. He noted that "reanimation" was not dependent upon a strong constitution, and one could never predict who would recover from drowning (61), stressing that even "the livid, black, and cadaverous countenance" or "the rigid and inflexible state of the body, jaws, or extremities" were not proof of absolute death" (92). None of the drowned women in Victorian visual culture is so far gone. Kite also recounted several cases from medical history in which drowning victims were reanimated hours after being underwater, including "a man who continued under water seven weeks, notwithstanding which, he not only recovered, but enjoyed a good state of health for a great many years after" (61)! In 1795, Anthony Fothergill of the Royal College of Physicians prescribed the standard: at least "three hours diligent perseverance in the treatment recommended" on those with "no pulsation of the heart -- no contraction of the pupil of the eye -- nor any visible mark of restoration" before they be assumed dead (91).

<18> In 1821, the *Gentleman's Magazine* carried illustrations of water rescues and successful resuscitation.<sup>[18]</sup> By 1836, one could stop into the Society's offices at 2 Chatham Place, Blackfriars, for a free copy of "Methods of Treatment" for drowned persons (Melvill 4). Resuscitation grew in popularity throughout the nineteenth century and became increasingly visible. Wooden platforms were added to the Society's boats on the Serpentine in 1861, allowing resuscitation to begin immediately after a body was recovered (Silvester 26). Water rescue training was provided by the Royal Humane Society in public schools and on ships by 1882 (Mundell 20). Even a Sunday School Union book for children by Frank Mundell, entitled *Stories of the Royal Humane Society* (1895) included instructive diagrams of Dr. Silvester's "Method of Inducing Respiration" (153). B. E. Maidment's assessment that "the middle class spectator was positioned as an appalled but helpless observer," not a rescuer (142) of female suicides is supported by the lack of good samaritans in these recreations.

<19> The second glaringly unnaturalistic element recurrent in these scenes is the beatific composure of the corpse. Consider, for example, an 1848 *London Journal* story which featured a seduced woman's drowned body

of exquisite proportions. The face was very lovely, and wore, even in death, a placid smile, as if the owner had parted with the world in a forgiving mood. Perhaps a sweet prayer quivered on her lips as she left her spirit on the face of the waters. Her eyes were of that dark brown colour which render them so winning and expressive in a woman, and her hair quite black, and very luxuriant in quantity. ("All Her Own Fault" 380)

Victorian audiences were not ignorant as to the appearance of drowned corpses, yet their visual representations of female suicide never comply. This is not because there was no market for gore, as Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors was in full swing, and, a decade later, the *Illustrated Police News* would be routinely filled with graphic scenes of death and dismemberment. Such a suicide from Waterloo Bridge as Hood imagines, however, would have incurred a fifty-four foot drop (Knight 3: 176). Although her placement in the heart of the city under the slimy arch of a bridge attested to the aberrant sexuality responsible for her end, Victorian writers and artists transformed their subject's corrupt life and violent death into a peaceful martyrdom. They left the woman's body unscathed because Victorian art and literature constructed suicide as a redemptive act for unchaste women -- "Such violence promised the rebirth of a baptism" (Foucault 172).<sup>[19]</sup> After Hood, female suicide in London was inextricably connected to spiritual deliverance.

<20> When artists and writers did not wish to depict redemptive drownings, they produced scenes like Dickens did for one of Boz's sketches discussing a male "body . . . washed ashore, some miles down the river, a swollen disfigured mass,"<sup>[20]</sup> or consulted Shakespeare for Falstaff's response to being thrown in the Thames: "a death that I abhor; for the water swells a man; and what a thing should I have been when I had been swell'd! I should have been a mountain of mummy" (*Merry Wives of Windsor* III.v.15-18).<sup>[21]</sup>

<21> Just a decade after her creation, Hood's heroine was resuscitated to help memorialize the poet's death. Hood had become so noted for his "Bridge of Sighs" that Matthew Noble's monument to him in Kensal Green Cemetery, erected through public subscription, carried a bas-relief of the drowned woman (Fig.9).<sup>[22]</sup> The uniform iconography of Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs" historicized his character's suicidal leap, providing a referent in Victorian visual culture for a body that was not there.

<22> Knight's *London* and George Augustus Sala's *Twice Round the Clock* are useful barometers for gauging the spread of Victorian suicide myths. Knight's description recognized Waterloo Bridge as a suicide locale two years before Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs," but didn't gender the deaths occurring there (3: 169). After Hood's poem, Waterloo Bridge was recreated as the immoral woman's last stop, demonstrated in Sala's sensational travelogue of 1859. At 2:00 a.m., Sala's narrator reaches the "'Bridge of Sighs.' Which never sleeps! Morning, and noon, and night, the sharp, clicking turnstile revolves; the ever-wakeful tollman is there. . . . I call this man Charon, and the river which his standing ferry bridges over might well be the Styx" (373). Suddenly, a "phantom in crinoline" touches the narrator's arm and asks for a halfpenny to cross. She then "hastens through the turnstile--'Anywhere, anywhere, / Out of the world,' perhaps. But I may not linger on the mysteries of the Bridge of Sighs" (373). Sala's story, borrowing lines from Hood, is accompanied with a wood engraving by William McConnell (d. 1867) entitled "Two O'Clock A. M.: The Turnstile of Waterloo Bridge" (Fig.10).<sup>[23]</sup> At first glance, it looks like a benign topographical print taken from a banal vantage point, but its focus on the entrance to the bridge does more to characterize it for Sala's audience than a portrayal of Waterloo's facade. It presents an uninterested tollman passed by an immodestly-dressed woman, who pays her

fare to a speedy forgetfulness.

<23> Behind these hegemonic images of drowned women was a struggle to control society's signs to maintain social order. Judith Walkowitz's study of Jack the Ripper narratives shows how Victorian medical authorities, in the face of unrelenting popular accounts, tried "to restrict knowledge of the mutilations . . . enact[ing] a well-established strategy designed to maintain a monopoly of expert knowledge over the body" (211). Victorian visual culture limited what the drowned female body could say. It couldn't complain that patriarchal society was more torturous than death, or that England was victimizing and hystericalizing its women instead of protecting and empowering them. It couldn't recreate female suicide as a rational escape from a hopeless situation. It couldn't demand political autonomy. It couldn't appear wholly innocent of its fate, and risk inciting the sympathy of philanthropists, suffragists, and feminists. Mary Poovey claims, "As the arena for negotiating values, meanings, and identities, representation authorizes ethics and social practices; it stages the workings through of the dominant ideology" (138). From fiction to morgue, Victorians prevented suicidal women from speaking for themselves.

## Endnotes

[1] Diprose 15. [↗]

[2] Blatchford 63. [↗]

[3] The figure of "Father Thames" appeared at least as early as 1784, when James Barry, R. A., completed his murals for the Adelphi. In his *Triumph of the Thames (Commerce)*, Father Thames sits in majesty on a floating throne propelled by Nereids and British heroes such as Sir Walter Raleigh and James Cook; see Eitner 2: 39 for a reproduction. In 1810, sculptor Richard Westmacott, R. A., included Father Thames on the tomb of Cuthbert, Lord Collingwood in St. Paul's Cathedral. Doré's title page to *London: A Pilgrimage* (Fig.2) also used this popular personification of London, in addition to the English lion. Since 1870, both figures have appeared on Victoria Embankment lamp posts, designed by G. Vulliamy. [↗]

[4] See, for example, Antonio Canaletto, *London Seen through an Arch of Westminster Bridge* (1746-47; Duke of Northumberland); Samuel Scott, *The Arch of Westminster Bridge* (c. 1750; Tate Gallery); William Daniell, *George Dance's Design for London Bridge* (c. 1825; Guildhall Art Gallery); George Scharf, *New London Bridge and the Demolition of London Bridge* (1831; Guildhall Library); William Parrott, *London from the Thames* (London: H. Brooks, 1840-41); and David Roberts, *Thames at Hungerford Bridge* (c. 1861; private collection). [↗]

[5] Robert Jones, "The Monster City," *Illuminated Magazine* 3 (1844) 286. [↗]

[6] Courtesy of the Wellcome Library. [↗]

[7] A collection of letters from the Department of Public Works at the Public Record Office, Kew, details the condition of the Thames in 1858; PRO WORK 6/156/9. [↗]

[8] "Under the Arches" (185). See also Doré's illustrations on pages 165, 177, and 179. [↗]

[9] For a thorough examination of this visual trope, see my dissertation "Resuscitating Ophelia: Images of Suicide and Suicidal Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England," U of Wisconsin-Madison, 1999. [↗]

[10] Mrs. R. Honner was likely Maria Honner (née Maria Macarthy; 1812-70), the wife of actor and stage manager Robert William Honner (1809-1852); see George B. Bryan, *Stage Deaths: A Biographical Guide to International Theatrical Obituaries, 1850-1990*, Biographies and Indexes in the Performing Arts 9, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1991) vol. 1. [↗]

[11] Illustrated in Anderson 288. [↗]

[12] Figure 7 from Charles Knight, ed., *Knight's Cyclopaedia of London* (London: Knight, 1851), 505. The following London bridges underwent construction in the nineteenth century, drastically changing the face of the metropolis: Vauxhall (1811-16); Waterloo (1811-17); Southwark (1814-19); New London Bridge (1824-1831); Hammersmith Suspension Bridge (opened 1827); Hungerford (opened 1845); the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway Station Bridge (opened 1863); and Blackfriars New Bridge (1865-69). [↗]

[13] According to Porter, tolls were required on all London bridges except London, Westminster, Blackfriars until at least 1855 (227, 263). [↗]

[14] Thomas Hood, "To Frederick Oldfield Ward," 10 April 1844 (Hood, *Letters* 600). [↗]

[15] See also Nead 169, Nochlin 65, and Gates 136 for a discussion of this poem. Hood's son allegedly told Walter Thornbury "that the poem was not suggested by any special incident, but that a great many suicides had been reported in the papers about that time" (Thornbury 480). [↗]

[16] According to Sala's *Twice Round the Clock*, the toll in 1859 was a halfpenny (373). The "Grand Panorama of London," an engraving given to subscribers of the *Pictorial Times* in 1844, shows few people using Waterloo Bridge, while Westminster, Blackfriars, and London Bridges are congested (London: Charles Evans, 1844). Knight reported,

Standing on the seat of this recess, one has perhaps the finest view of London that can be obtained, and which is enhanced by the quiet and comparative solitude of the place--a strange advantage, by the way, for such a bridge, and one that, however much we may individually appreciate, we should be glad to see lost by the removal of its cause--the toll. (3: 168)

[↗]

[17] Christopher Bethell reported that by 1825, rewards had been paid to around 21,000 people (18). [↗]

[18] "Royal Humane Society," *Gentleman's Magazine* (April 1821) 305-08, plate 2. See the Wellcome Library at <http://medphoto.wellcome.ac.uk>, Quick Search: Objects of the Royal Humane Society. [↗]

[19] The redemptive potential of drownings was ironically stressed with the establishment of the Royal Humane Society. John Griffin remarks, "In the reports of the Society for 1781-82 it is recorded that a Bible, a book of Common Prayer and a 'religious booke' were to be given to everyone restored from apparent drowning by the Medical assistants" (522). [↗]

[20] Charles Dickens, *Sketches by 'Boz,' Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People*, "Tales," chapter 12. It was illustrated by Frederick Barnard (1846-96), engraved by the Dalziel Brothers (fl. 1840-1905), and reproduced in Fred Barnard, et al., *Scenes and Characters from the Works of Charles Dickens, Being 866 Pictures Printed from the Original Wood Blocks Engraved for 'The Household Edition'* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1908) 24. [↗]

[21] Thomas Hood quotes this passage in discussing water's swelling properties in "Reflections on Water," *Hood's Own: Or, Laughter from Year to Year. Being Former Runnings of His Comic Vein, with an Infusion of New Blood for General Circulation* (London: A. H. Baily, 1839) 182. [↗]

[22] This Dalziel illustration is from Thomas Hood, *Memorials of Thomas Hood* (London: Moxon, 1860) 276. See also the frontispiece. The monument was placed over Hood's grave on 18 July 1854. [↗]

## Works Cited

- "All Her Own Fault." *The London Journal*; and *Weekly Record of Literature, Science, and Art* 7 (19 Aug. 1848): 380-81.
- Anderson, Olive. *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987.
- Bethell, Christopher. *A Sermon, Preached at the Anniversary of the Royal Humane Society, at the Parish Church of St. George, Bloomsbury, on Sunday Morning, 17 April, 1825*. London: J. Nichols, 1825.
- Blatchford, Robert. *Dismal England*. London: Walter Scott, 1899.
- Clubbe, John. *Victorian Forerunner: The Later Career of Thomas Hood*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1968.
- Constable, Hope. *London After Dark; or, Rambles by Night*. London: H. Clements, 1894.
- Diprose, [John]. *Diprose's Book About London and London Life*. London: Diprose and Bateman, [1872].
- Doré, Gustave, and Blanchard Jerrold. *London: A Pilgrimage*. 1872. New York: Harper, 1890.
- Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide*. 1897. Trans. John Spaulding and George Simpson. Ed. George Simpson. New York: Free, 1951.
- Eitner, Lorenz. *An Outline of Nineteenth Century European Painting from David through Cézanne*. 2 vols. New York: Icon-Harper, 1987.
- Fothergill, A[nt]hony. *A New Inquiry into the Suspension of Vital Action, in Cases of Drowning and Suffocation, being an Attempt to Concentrate into a More Luminous Point of View, the Scattered Rays of Science, Respecting that Interesting though Mysterious Subject. To Elucidate the Proximate Cause, to Appropriate [sic] the Present Remedies, and to Point out the Best Method of Restoring Animation*. 2nd ed. Bath: S. Hazard, 1795.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Vintage-Random, 1988.
- Friedberg, Anne. *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Gates, Barbara T. *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988.
- Gregory, G[eorge]. *A Sermon on Suicide, Preached at St. Botolph's Bishopsgate, at the Anniversary of the Royal Humane Society, on Sunday the 26th Day of March, 1797*. London: J. Nichols, 1797.
- Griffin, John P. "A Tale of Two Paintings and the London Medical Scene of the Late Eighteenth Century." *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 83 (Aug. 1990): 520-23.
- Hood, Thomas. *The Letters of Thomas Hood*. Ed. Peter F. Morgan. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973.
- . *Selected Poems of Thomas Hood*. Ed. John Clubbe. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970.
- Kite, Charles. *An Essay on the Recovery of the Apparently Dead*. London: C. Dilly, 1788.
- Knight, Charles, ed. *London*. 6 vols. London: Knight, 1841-44.
- Maidment, B. E. *Reading Popular Prints, 1790-1870*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996.
- Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor. A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Those that Cannot Work and Those that Will Not Work*. 4 vols. 1861-62. London: Frank Cass, 1967.
- Meisel, Martin. *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in 19th-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.
- Melville, Henry. *A Sermon Preached at the Sixty-Second Anniversary of the Royal Humane Society, at St. Luke's Church, Chelsea, on Sunday Morning, May 1, 1836*. London: Compton and Ritchie, 1836.
- Mundell, Frank. *Stories of the Royal Humane Society*. London: Sunday School Union, [1895].
- Nead, Lynda. *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
- Nochlin, Linda. "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman." *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*. New York: Harper, 1988. 57-85.
- Noel, Rev. Baptist Wriothlesley. *The Spiritual Claims of the Metropolis. A Sermon, on Luke XIX.41. Preached at St. John's Chapel, Bedford Row, Sunday, May 29, 1836; In Aid of the Design of the Lord Bishop of London to Build Fifty Additional Metropolitan Churches*. 2nd ed. London: Sampson Low, [1836].
- Poovey, Mary. "'Scenes of an Indelicate Character': The Medical 'Treatment' of Victorian Women." *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987. 137-68.
- Porter, Roy. *London: A Social History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994.
- Sala, George Augustus. *Twice Round the Clock; or the Hours of the Day and Night in London*. London: Houlston and Wright, [1859].
- Shakespeare, William. *The Plays of Shakespeare. Illustrated During the Several Preceding Years and Arranged 1835 and Following Years*. Comp. Thomas Turner. [Gloucester]: n.d. 45 vols. Comp. of *The Dramatic Works of Shakespeare*. Ed. George Steevens. 9 vols. London: W. Bulmer, 1802.
- [Smeeton, George.] *Doings in London, or Day and Night Scenes of the Frauds, Frolics, Manners, and Depravities of the Metropolis*. 7th ed. London: O. Hodgson, [1840?].
- Thornbury, Walter. *Haunted London*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1865.
- Tuke, D[aniel] Hack, ed. *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine, Giving the Definition, Etymology and Synonyms of the Terms used in Medical Psychology with the Symptoms, Treatments and Pathology of Insanity and the Law of Lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, 1892.

Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, and London's "Bridge of Sighs". L. J. Nicoletti. <1> Victorian Londoners were inundated with images of drowned women regardless of the fact that contemporary suicidologists, such as Daniel Hack Tuke and Emile Durkheim, claimed men were statistically three or four times more likely to kill themselves. Representations of male suicides were conspicuously absent. Women's suicidal leaps were captured in illustrated newspapers, sold in one shilling books, presented in theaters, displayed at the Royal Academy of Art, and narrated Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies In The Representation Of London, Volume 2 Number 1 (March 2004) . Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, And London's "Bridge Of Sighs" Feb 2th, 2019. Fig Trees – Veggie Gardening Tips. Fig Trees Lend An Exotic Presence And The Flavor Of Tree-ripened Fruits To The Home Garden. With Extra Care To Provide Winter Protection You Can Succeed In Growing A Fig Tree Even In Northern Climates. Growing Fig Trees.

**To Cite This Article:**

L.J. Nicoletti, 'Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, and London's "Bridge of Sighs"'. *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, Volume 2 Number 1 (March 2004). Online at <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/march2004/nicoletti.html>. Accessed on 8/2/2019.

---

[Journal Home](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Back Issues](#) | [Submissions](#) | [Editorial Board](#) | [Contact](#)

This page is at <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/march2004/nicoletti.html> | ISSN: 1744-0807 | Last updated 21 August 2014

All material published in *The Literary London Journal* (material within the directory [www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/](http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/)) is copyright © the identified author. If no author is identified in relation to content, that content is copyright © **The Literary London Society**, 2003-2014.

---

Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, and London's "Bridge of Sighs". L. J. Nicoletti. <1> Victorian Londoners were inundated with images of drowned women regardless of the fact that contemporary suicidologists, such as Daniel Hack Tuke and Emile Durkheim, claimed men were statistically three or four times more likely to kill themselves. Representations of male suicides were conspicuously absent. Women's suicidal leaps were captured in illustrated newspapers, sold in one shilling books, presented in theaters, displayed at the Royal Academy of Art, and narrated Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies In The Representation Of London, Volume 2 Number 1 (March 2004) . Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, And London's "Bridge Of Sighs" Feb 2th, 2019. Fig Trees – Veggie Gardening Tips. Fig Trees Lend An Exotic Presence And The Flavor Of Tree-ripened Fruits To The Home Garden. With Extra Care To Provide Winter Protection You Can Succeed In Growing A Fig Tree Even In Northern Climates. Growing Fig Trees.

"The Bridge of Sighs" is a famous poem of 1844 by Thomas Hood concerning the suicide of a homeless young woman who threw herself from Waterloo Bridge in London. Although Thomas Hood (1799–1845) is usually regarded as a humorous poet, towards the end of his life, when he was on his sick bed, he wrote a number of poems commenting on contemporary poverty. These included "The Song of the Shirt", "The Bridge of Sighs" and "The Song of the Labourer". "The Bridge of Sighs" is particularly well-known because 51 L.J. Nicoletti, "Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, and London's "Bridge of Sighs," Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London, 2.1 (2004), [accessed 21 January 2016] 52 Anderson, Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England, p. 198. 53 Brown, Art of Suicide, p. 2001. 21. became evident in police investigations at the time. When the motivations of the female suicide victim were unclear, questions about love-interests soon arose, for example in the case of Margaret Moyes. Struggling to explain Moyes's rash act, investigators soon turned to her love-lif