Exhausted Men:

Making Fatigue Visible in *The Metamorphosis* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*

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Abstract

Though not always immediately recognizable, fatigue and tiredness play a central role in modernist literature. As society placed increasing value on productive, strong, energetic bodies, the growing presence of bodies tired from the effects of overwork, rapid social progress, illness and post-war malaise posed a threat both to society and ideas of the able-bodied self. Recumbent bodies challenge expectations of productivity; they remind us of our own bodily fallibility and blur the line between life and death as a visual representation of our own mortality. Further, the fatigued body at rest is predominantly associated with the feminine, as has been reflected in much prior academic engagement with neurasthenic women in modernist literature. What then are the implications for fatigued men? This thesis traces the previously overlooked depictions and uses of fatigue in two texts that have been the subject of significant analysis: *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka and *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien. Though neither of these texts are inherently medical in nature, I show how fatigue nonetheless plays a central role in each, albeit in quite different ways. By unpacking these contrasting engagements with fatigue and the simultaneous lack of critical interest in fatigue in these texts, I uncover stigmatizing social perceptions of fatigue as deviant, burdensome, and indicative of emasculating weakness. Further, such depictions seem to go unquestioned, suggesting that these beliefs are largely naturalized within Western society. In the current time of pandemic, as society is again increasingly confronted with very visible exhaustion in the form of Long Covid amongst other fatiguing conditions, modernist fiction from the early-twentieth century offers valuable insights into how we engage with fatigue.

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

To experience tiredness is to be human. Despite our attempts to overcome the demands of exhaustion, from the coca-infused tonics of the early twentieth century to the burgeoning coffee culture of today, tiredness remains a fundamental aspect of being human. Pushed from our beds to the workplace, we sympathize with each other on Monday mornings, grumble at the offensive energy of morning larks. We know tiredness.

What then, when tiredness becomes so severe that we are unable to pull ourselves from bed, to sympathise, perhaps even to manage a grumble? Many of us will know others who have experienced this, if we haven't ourselves – you may remember, for example, having the flu or Covid-19. What, though, of when this extremity of fatigue occurs beyond the acute phase of illness, or when there was no acute illness to begin with?

Writing in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2022 and 2023, it is impossible to avoid the pervasive atmosphere of exhaustion. Though we are still clearly within the thralls of a global pandemic, the ongoing threat of illness has nonetheless become increasingly normalized: following extensive time in nationwide lockdowns and the oppressive fear of contracting Covid-19, public sentiment seems to have shifted toward desire to return to business as usual. Yet, simultaneously, another more literal form of fatigue is also becoming more prominent: fatigue from Long Covid, or long-haul Covid, a post-viral illness for which there is still no cure, most often characterized by extreme fatigue and post-exertional malaise.

For many, the experience of Covid-19 is, while unpleasant, sharp and acute, characterized by several days of symptoms and then shaken off into the past, much like our expectations of lockdowns. However, this is not the experience of everyone: just as

our societal expectations of short, sharp lockdowns were proven incorrect, for some, Covid-19 transcends the expectation of a short bout of illness and instead becomes the lingering array of symptoms that are now loosely defined as Long Covid. As personal experiences and news reports of Long Covid increasingly circulate, so too does recognition of fatigue as a potentially debilitating symptom. However, long before the advent of Covid-19, fatigue had already become a central characteristic of modern life, associated both with work-related burnout and with a range of fatiguing illnesses, such as ME/CFS. And yet, despite its prevalence, we struggle to see and engage with fatigue, which, as an invisible, unprovable symptom is also easily delegitimized and disbelieved. Further, fatigue is dangerous and potentially destabilizing to neoliberal capitalist hegemony which requires ever-growing productivity from working individuals.

However, with the perceived threat of workers 'faking' an illness with no current means of clear, objective testing and the hangover of medical stigma surrounding fatiguing illnesses such as ME/CFS, it is also of little surprise that diagnoses of and treatment for Long Covid have proven difficult for many patients, resulting in further stigmatization. As is posited by Long Covid researcher Anna Brooks, this is further complicated by difficulties communicating what are often 'confusing and difficult to describe symptoms'.[1] Following the advent of Covid-19 and, in turn, the increase in patients experiencing severe fatigue, how is it that we still have such difficulty in communicating and acknowledging experiences of fatigue? As Western society continues to grapple with the growing challenge of fatigue, it seems an important moment to interrogate many of the entrenched social narratives that have surrounded

[1] Katie Kenny, 'The narrative of Omicron as a 'milder' variant is dangerous, given what we know about long Covid, experts warn', *Stuff*, 16 January 2022 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/127493464/the-narrative-of-omicron-as-a- milder-variant-is-dangerous-given-what-we-know-about-long-covid-experts-warn> [accessed 22 April 2022].

this symptom and to examine what Michel Foucault describes as subjugated knowledges. These knowledges consist of 'the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functional coherence or formal systemisation' and 'low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges (such as that of the psychiatric patient, of the ill person, of the nurse, of the doctor – parallel and marginal'.[2]

While there has been previous research on fatigue as a medical symptom and its historical role in Western society from the likes of Anson Rabinbach and Tim Armstrong, as well as useful work by Jonathon Crary examining the function of sleep within rampant capitalist societies that demand constant consumption and productivity, there is a peculiar tendency within academia to overlook representations of tiredness within literature. There are of course, exceptions, such as work on sleep and the recumbent body from researchers such as Michael Greaney and Louise Hornby. Yet, more frequently, when fatigue is engaged with, scholars veer away from the literal and into the metaphorical, such that tiredness becomes symptomatic of broader societal issues, or of the exhaustion of creative possibility, rather than seen as an embodied symptom.[3] This is perhaps unsurprising considering Susan Sontag's exploration of tuberculosis, cancer, and AIDS as prominent metaphors of the last century. Indeed, the uncertainty surrounding fatigue may further enable its use as metaphor: 'it is diseases thought to be multi-determined (that is, mysterious) that have the widest possibilities as metaphors for what is felt to be socially or morally wrong'.[4] However, I further argue that our failure to notice fatigue is symptomatic of a broader societal tendency to overlook and underestimate tiredness altogether.

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[2] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, trans. by Colin Gordon and others (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 81-82.

[3] See, for example: Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', trans. by Anthony Uhlmann, *SubStance*, 24.3 (1995), 3-28 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3685005>; John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', *The Atlantic Monthly*, (1967), 29-34 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1967/08/the-literature-of-exhaustion/659344/> [accessed December 12 2022].

[4] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor & Aids and its Metaphors* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), p. 62.

My own ability to locate and analyse fatigue in these texts is impacted by my own personal experiences: I have been surrounded by fatigue for much of my life. This thesis begins and ends with my mother, who has suffered from ME/CFS for over a decade; as such my research more truly commenced in childhood than in the summer of 2022. This thesis is steeped in the strange chronicity of fatigue, an overlap of time and memory, past and present, a shifting of perspective.[5] This thesis is further rooted in the body, as my observations and inscriptions are bound to dips in my mother's health and my own. It is also tied not only to the exhaustion experienced by so many of us within academia, but also by our current global context of the Covid-19 pandemic and post-viral illness, the effects of which have touched many of us and for some have yet to let go.

Where past critics have engaged with sleep, fatigue, or insomnia in modernist literature, this tends to occur with a relatively small number of texts – especially the works of Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, and Samuel Beckett – of which an even smaller subset engage with literal rather than metaphorical or structural fatigue.[6] By failing to deconstruct representations of embodied exhaustion, we risk overlooking the lived realities of sufferers of fatiguing conditions and contributing to the naturalisation of often narrow, problematic representations of fatigue. Further, we continue to position fatigue as unimportant, and undeserving of research. Yet, much of our literature indicates to a great preoccupation with sleep and fatigue. This is especially so for sleep 'done wrong', a phrase that I use to refer to non-normative and socially unacceptable forms of sleep and

[5] Alex Henry, 'Chronicity: Future in the Past (Part 1)', *The Polyphony* (2022) <https://thepolyphony.org/2022/07/28/chronicity-future-in-the-past-part-i/> [accessed 29 July 2022].

[6] See, for example: Louise Hornby, 'Downwrong: The Pose of Tiredness', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 65.1 (2019), 207-227 <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2019.0009>; Michael Greaney, *Sleep and the Novel: Fictions of Somnolence from Jane Austen to the Present* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), SpringerLink <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75253-2>; Herschel Farbman, *The Other Night: Dreaming, Writing, and Restlessness in Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

rest – for example, 'excessive' time spent in bed, insomnia, sleep apnoea, and sleepwalking. It is with these concerns in mind that I analyse two texts that have already been the subject of considerable criticism over the last century – Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* – and make visible the representations and uses of fatigue that have repeatedly been overlooked.

Franz Kafka was born in Prague in 1883, amidst a time of rapid social change within Europe, and died of tuberculosis in 1924 at forty-one after years of health struggles.[7] As Benjamin Balint evocatively words it, Kafka belonged 'to a Jewish minority within a German-speaking minority within a Czech minority within a heterogeneous Austro-Hungarian Empire being pulled apart by the centrifugal force of rival nationalisms', and as such had experienced multiple moments of anti-Semitism.[8] Until his retirement due to illness in 1922, Kafka worked as a civil servant at the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute in Prague, and completed his writing at night. Kafka was intensely dissatisfied with this job as it left him so exhausted that he was often too tired to write and prevented him from writing fulltime, which he perceived as indicative of his failure as a writer.[9] Indeed, Kafka refers to trouble sleeping, overwhelming exhaustion, and neurasthenia throughout his diaries.[10] At various stages of his life, Kafka underwent multiple sanatoria rest cures.[11] Kafka wrote *The Metamorphosis* early in his literary career in 1912, amidst the disruption of a business trip, and subsequently considered it with '[g]reat antipathy' as '[i]mperfect to its very

[7] Shadi Neimneh, 'Kafka's *Letters to Milena* and the Question of the Body', *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6.3 (2015), 37-46 <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.6n.3p.37> (p. 37).
[8] Benjamin Balint, *Kafka's Last Trial: The Case of a Literary Legacy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), pp. 60-61.
[9] David Constantine, 'Kafka's writing and our reading', *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. by Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 9-24 (p. 11); (p. 18).
[10] Julian Preece, 'Introduction: Kafka's Europe', *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. by Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-8 (p. 1); Franz Kafka, *The diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910-23*, ed. by Max Brod, trans. by Joseph Kresh & Martin Greenberg (Middlesex: Peregrine Books, 1964), p. 221.
[11] Preece, p. xix.

marrow'.[12] Despite Kafka's disappointment in *The Metamorphosis,* it has since been recognized as a significant piece of modernist fiction and subject to immense critical interest.

Flann O'Brien, one of several pseudonyms used by Brian O'Nolan, was born in 1911, the year before Kafka wrote *The Metamorphosis,* in the town of Strabane in Northern Ireland. Born shortly before the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, O'Nolan also grew up during a time of extreme social change as Ireland grappled with its identity as a young nation. As with Kafka, he too spent much of his life working as a civil servant – work which he simultaneously satirized in his newspaper column, *Cruiskeen Lawn,* under the name of Myles na gCopaleen.[13] As with *The Metamorphosis, At Swim-Two-Birds* was also written early in O'Brien's literary career, yet the novel initially met with limited commercial success.[14] Prior to his death in 1966 at age fifty-four, O'Nolan published numerous novels, short stories, plays, and newspaper columns. Though the works of Flann O'Brien (and those of O'Nolan's numerous other pseudonyms) have long been held in esteem within Ireland, it is only more recently that they have gained international recognition.

Though *The Metamorphosis* has been increasingly read in varied medical contexts, it is not usually considered a text that is specifically medical in nature (in contrast to texts such as William Maxwell's *They Came Like Swallows* or Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider,* which overtly engaged with the Spanish Flu). Considerations of the medical within *At Swim-Two-Birds* are even rarer. Instead, as I will show, scholars tend to look through the fatigue present in these texts, tying the exhaustion and arrested development of young male protagonists to concepts such as the failed bildungsroman

[12] Kafka, *The diaries of Franz Kafka,* p. 253.
[13] Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), p. 126.
[14] Taaffe, p. 7.

and 'the contradictions inherent in mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire'.[15] Yet, as I find, literal depictions of sleep and fatigued bodies play substantial roles within both of these texts. In Chapter 3, I begin with an analysis of *The Metamorphosis* in which I find a near claustrophobic investment in Gregor's transformed, fatigued body. Importantly, this new body is not only imbued with symptoms of fatigue but is presented as literal vermin. Despite the grotesque qualities of Gregor's form, his suffering is nonetheless depicted as deserving of empathy. I then turn to *At Swim-Two-Birds* in Chapter 4, a text which was published over twenty years after *The Metamorphosis*. In contrast to *The Metamorphosis*, *At Swim-Two-Birds* depicts fatigued bodies that are not literal vermin but are grotesquely verminous; bodies that are the site of humour and the butt of O'Brien's jokes, rather than bodies deserving of empathy. *At Swim-Two-Birds* is a text less invested in the embodied experience of the exhausted body so much as in the way such a body is read within society. Though published decades apart and substantially different, both works nonetheless indicate similar stigmatizing societal engagements with the fatigued body. Further, both texts have been frequently analysed in a similar manner – in relation to metaphor, in the case of *The Metamorphosis*, and in relation to structure, for *At Swim- Two-Birds* – both focuses which overshadow the embodied fatigue presented on the page.

The sheer amount of analysis on *The Metamorphosis* is intimidating, highlighting its potency and slipperiness. In fact, so substantial and contradictory is analysis of this text that the critical reception of *The Metamorphosis* has itself garnered interest, as in Stanley Corngold's *The Commentator's Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's Metamorphosis*. That this text lends itself to so many different interpretations is perhaps unsurprising, given its powerful potential as metaphor. Scholars such as Sander

[15] Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 3.

L. Gilman and Simon Ryan, for example, read Gregor's metamorphosis in relation to anti-Semitic beliefs that projected fears of infection, and sexual deviancy onto the Jewish body, and associated Jewish men with femininity and homosexuality.[16]

However, against the prevalence of such readings is Kafka's statement that '[m]etaphors are one of the things that makes me despair of literature'.[17] Rather, as stated by Deleuze and Guattari, 'Metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor'.[18] Critics such as Günther Anders have considered how Kafka takes metaphors at their word – 'Die metaphorischen Worte nimmt er beim Wort'[19] (he takes metaphor literally, by the word) – transforming Gregor from 'a familiar metaphor into a fictional being literally existing as this metaphor'.[20] This reading has influenced a number of later critics, such as Walter H. Sokel, who builds on Anders' reading to propose that Gregor's metamorphosis as the result of Gregor's many appeasements of others and failure to acknowledge his real desires.[21] Central to such readings is the manner in which, in *The Metamorphosis*, the rejection of metaphor comes across through Kafka's 'subversion, through literalisation, of the metaphor of 'vermin' (Ungeziefer) applied to the human subject' which 'prevents the process of translation that would neutralize any singular and uncanny transfiguration into an already existing meaning'.[22]

Yet, the challenge of reading *The Metamorphosis* without drawing on metaphor is

[16] See, for example: Sander L. Gilman, *Franz Kafka, the Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Simon Ryan, 'Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*: Transformation, Metaphor, and the Perils of Assimilation', *Seminar: a Journal of Germanic Studies*, 43.1 (2007), 1-19 <https://doi.org/10.1353/smr.2007.0020> (pp. 9-10).

[17] Kafka, *The diaries of Franz Kafka*, p. 398.

[18] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 22.

[19] Günther Anders, *Kafka, pro & contra: die Prozess-Unterlagen* (München: C.H.Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1951), p. 40.

[20] Stanley Corngold, '"Die Verwandlung": Metamorphosis of the Metaphor', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 3.4 (1970), 91-106 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24776235> [accessed 30 September 2022] (p. 93).

[21] Walter H. Sokel, 'Kafka's "Metamorphosis": Rebellion and Punishment', *Monatshefte*, 48.4 (1956), 203-214 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30166165> [accessed 15 March 2023] (p. 212).

[22] Vivian Liska, 'The Beetle and the Butterfly: Nabokov's Lecture on Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis'', in *Vladimir Nabokov's Lectures on Literature: Portraits of the Artist as Reader and Teacher*, ed. by Ben Dhooge & Jürgen Pieters (Leiden: BRILL, 2018), pp. 60-74 (p. 65).

substantial, even for critics who have discussed Kafka's dislike of metaphor. Nabokov, for example, criticizes 'the neutralizing effect of symbolic interpretations' that 'undercut the story's unsettling power', yet seems to have himself struggled to avoid symbolic interpretation.[23] In his lecture on *The Metamorphosis*, Nabokov drew attention to the 'fragility – and desirability – of normality itself', but also undermined his own criticism of symbolic interpretations with his later suggestions that the text is a metaphor for, amongst other things, 'mediocrity surrounding genius'.[24] I further acknowledge that this is a challenge for my own reading. Though centred in the embodied and the literal fatigue presented on the page, there are nonetheless moments at which I draw comparisons between Gregor's transformation and the experiences of real- world patients, and others at which I view aspects of, for example, Gregor's bedroom, a room closely associated with sleep, as metonymic of rest. Steering fully clear of metaphor is a significant challenge, even when this is consciously attempted – and this appears to be especially the case when engaging with slippery symptoms such as fatigue, that often refuse clear, literal communication.

Where much criticism of *The Metamorphosis* has privileged the role of metaphor, a substantial number of analyses of *At Swim-Two-Birds* have emphasized the complex and at times exhausting structure of the novel. For example, *At Swim-Two- Birds* has previously been considered as a text exemplifying aspects of Barth's literature of exhaustion.[25] Its explicit metafictional engagement with exhausted literary possibility makes this hardly surprising. As argued by the novel's student-narrator:

> a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham […]. The entire corpus of

[23] Liska, p. 65.
[24] Liska, p. 66; Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 260.
[25] R. M. Berry, 'Metafiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, & Brian McHale (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 128-140, Taylor & Francis Group [accessed 22 February 2023].

> existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating characters only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet. The modern novel should be largely a work of reference. Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before – usually said much better.[26]

While Barth's essay focuses predominantly on the works of Jorge Borges, much of his argument could just as easily be transplanted into an analysis of *At Swim-Two-Birds* given the text's proclivity for mimicry, metafictional commentary on writing itself, and inclusion of multiple authors, especially the fictional student-narrator author who 'imitates the role of the [real] Author'.[27] R. M. Berry specifically considers *At Swim-Two-Birds*, along with the works of Barth and Borges, as metafictional texts employing conventions discussed in 'The Literature of Exhaustion'.[28] Other works of O'Brien have also been considered in relation to the literature of exhaustion: Lloyd (Meadhbh) Houston's analysis of *The Hard Life* explores the 'aesthetically and ideologically fatigued character of the later fiction' with relation to the exhausted topic of sexual health in Ireland.[29]

Analysing the works of O'Brien in relation to the 'Literature of Exhaustion' is not new. I could read the fatiguing structure of *At Swim-Two-Birds* as performing exhaustion purely to interrogate what a novel may be or mean when faced with 'the used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities'.[30] Literary exhaustion, in this instance, is equated to artistic death, a creative fatigue, an absence of possibility in the face of a supposed oversaturation of novels where every original story

[26] Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 33.
[27] Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', p. 33.
[28] Berry, pp. 131-132.
[29] Lloyd (Meadhbh) Houston, 'Veni, V.D. Vici: Flann O'Brien, sexual health and the literature of exhaustion', in *Flann O'Brien: Gallows Humour*, ed. by Ruben Borg & Paul Fagan (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), pp. 146-162, (p. 149).
[30] Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', p. 29.

has already been told. That O'Brien's central characters are authors who spend the majority of their time in bed explicitly discussing literary exhaustion, within a novel that is itself exhausting to read, seems to me the kind of multi-textured dark humour typical of his work. But, in order for the joke to function, it depends on readers holding a number of harmful ideas about fatigue and fatiguing bodies, which are themselves its punchline at all levels.

Considering these two texts in tandem helps to shed light not only on pernicious social constructions of fatigue and fatigued bodies, but specifically on the constructions of fatigued men, a demographic that has that received comparatively less attention than fatigued women. Providing a thorough analysis of the depictions and uses of male fatigue in these two texts draws attention to gendered points of differences in these depictions, as well as their ensuing analyses, and contributes to our broader understanding of the way Western society constructs fatigue.

Sleep and tiredness permeate and shape our lives in ways we often fail to recognize, as do the entrenched beliefs we hold about such states. In order to support my analysis of *The Metamorphosis* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*, it is beneficial to consider first the societal beliefs surrounding sleep and fatigue that contributed to the environment within which these texts were written and analysed. We can locate the underpinnings of Western ideas about sleep and fatigue by considering the stories we tell about these experiences, from the overt messaging in children's stories to the complex academic engagements of prominent thinkers. To this end, in the following two subsections of this introduction, I consider some of the influential constructions of sleep and tiredness found both in fairy tales and in several key philosophical engagements from the last century. Having established some of the moral and philosophical constructions of sleep and fatigue, I then examine how these beliefs translated into embodied experiences. In Chapter 2, I introduce the field of disability studies, which I draw on in much of my later

analysis, before turning to consider the shifting medical engagement with fatigue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Building on the historical medical context of modernist fatigue and a disability studies framework, I provide a brief overview of modernist literary representations of female fatigue in anticipation of my more intensive engagement with male fatigue in *The Metamorphosis*, in Chapter 3, and *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in Chapter 4, before closing with a few thoughts on the importance of analysing literary fatigue in our current day.

1.1 Tired Fairy Tales: 'no sooner did she touch the spindle than she pricked herself and fell down into a deep sleep.'[31]

From the time we are born we are surrounded by tiredness, not only in our literal experiences of the world, but also through the stories we are told. For many of us, these are fairy stories: for example, 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', 'Jack and the Beanstalk', and 'Snow White'. Fairy tales have long been recognized as deeply influential to our cultural and moral education: as stated by Jack Zipes, 'Literary fairy tales are socially symbolical acts and narrative strategies formed to take part in civilised discourses about morality and behaviour in particular societies and cultures'.[32] The power of fairy tales in influencing ideas around sex, gender, and work has been explored in depth by the likes of scholars such as Zipes, yet, again, analysis of the constructions of sleep and tired bodies have been largely absent from published work. This is especially surprising considering that many of the attitudes about and narrative uses of sleep and tiredness still present in fairy tales today appear to be unchanged from

[31] Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Briar Rose', ed. and trans. by Jack Zipes, *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 163.

[32] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), p. 19.

those we can find in even older stories.

Sleep has preoccupied our narratives for as long as we can see: in *Beowulf*, combinations of feasting, sleeping, and treachery occur numerous times, giving sleep a perilous tinge, a combination also found in *The Odyssey*.[33] The trope of sleep and deception recurs many times – think, for example, of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' or 'Hop-o'-My-Thumb', where different uses of sleep enable the besting of oppressive captors. In Greek and Roman mythology, we may think of the tale of Psyche and Cupid/Eros, and the many functions of sleep within it. We see sleep as a weakness, an opportunity for treachery, as Cupid falling asleep enables Psyche to learn the true identity of her secret husband.[34] This treachery is, of course, punished: Psyche accidentally pricks herself with his arrow and so falls in love with him – something which could be understood as a sexual awakening – before being punished for her disobedience as he flees from her. Within the same tale, sleep becomes a punishment again for curiosity and vanity: in the course of Psyche's later trials, imposed by Venus, she opens the box said to contain beauty and is instead sent into a deep sleep, only to be rescued when awakened by a forgiving Cupid. Aspects of this story have travelled across time into European fairy tales: we can see the uncovering of the identities of night-time lovers in many animal bridegroom tales, so popular as to have their own type in the Aarne-Thompson categorisation system.[35] Furthermore, the use of sleep as a punishment for curiosity or disobedience is seen many times: think, for example, of what happens after the pricking of the finger in 'Sleeping Beauty', or after Snow White takes the apple against the advice of the dwarves.

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[33] Paul Battles, 'Dying for a Drink: "Sleeping after the Feast" Scenes in *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and the Old English Poetic Tradition', *Modern Philology*, 112.3 (2015), 435-457 <https://doi.org/10.1086/678694> (p. 435-436).

[34] Apuleius, *The Metamorphosis: or, Golden Ass, of Apuleius*, trans. by Thomas Taylor (London: Robert Triphook and Thomas Rudd, 1822), pp. 66-99.

[35] Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folk-Tale: A Classification and Bibliography*, trans. by Stith Thompson (New York: Burt Franklin, 1928), p. 68.

Sleep is marked as a state of transformation: while we expect to wake after a usual period of time feeling refreshed, the punishing sleep of stories often becomes a state of lengthy suspension, as in 'Snow White', or produces sinister change, as when Hansel and Gretel awake to find themselves abandoned in the forest. Alternatively, when deserving, protagonists may wake to find themselves rewarded, all of their problems resolved, as in 'The Elves and the Shoemaker'. As in 'Sleeping Beauty', the sleeping body of a beauty may be awakened decades after falling asleep and find themselves preserved, having escaped atrophy and age. This fascination with sleep is one often tied also to death, which, in its still recumbence, the sleeping body so resembles – a likeness made explicit in the oblivious entombment of the dormant Snow White. As with death, sleep is an inescapable marker of humanity that cannot be overcome, even by the likes of the heroic Gilgamesh.[36]

In the tale of the beautiful youth Endymion, we find a battle waged against the ravages of age with sleep as the primary weapon: in one telling, he is granted eternal sleep by Zeus so as to retain his youth and beauty in perpetuity. In alternative versions of the tale, however, Endymion is instead induced into sleep by Zeus as punishment for an attempted affair with Hera, in yet another case of sleep as sentence.[37] We may also consider Hypnos and the Oneroi, with perhaps the most famous of stories recounting how Hypnos, at the behest of Hera, puts Zeus to sleep so as to avenge the ransacking of Troy and enable the Greeks to win the Trojan War.[38] Sleep has the ability to make even Gods fallible, and to produce opportunities for treachery and mischief, to topple the powerful and enable underdogs to rewrite the course of their stories. The legacy of the

[36] *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. by Maureen Gallery Kovacs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. xx.
[37] 'Endymion', in *Britannica: Academic*, ed. by The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica (2007), <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/levels/collegiate/article/Endymion/32626> [accessed 1 April 2023].
[38] 'Hypnos, in *Britannica: Academic*, ed. by The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica (2008), <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/levels/collegiate/article/Hypnos/41813> [accessed 1 April 2023].

Oneroi is of course ongoing, with the popularisation of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* series and, most recently, the Netflix television adaptation, which shows numerous tactical uses of sleep.

Given the long history of storytelling involving sleep and the morals attached to it, it seems that we have always been afraid of and intrigued by sleep, tiredness, and the often-uncontrollable effects these have on our bodies. Many of the stories we have created to help understand sleep and tiredness, as well as the moral judgements they propagated, have remained unchanged – something which becomes increasingly concerning when we later begin to examine how these narratives have shaped, and continue to permeate, our modern understandings of these complex yet central features of the human experience.

1.2 Uncanniness and Philosophies of Sleep: 'uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness'[39]

There is something deeply uncanny about sleep and the sleeping body, something at times bordering on the abject – especially when these bodies engage in non-normative sleep 'done wrong'. While visibly non-normative bodies have often been used in literature to portray either exceptional or monstrous difference, with externally visible differences often appearing as grotesque, the disturbance caused by bodies showing sleep 'done wrong' differs, in that these bodies may appear externally normative. Yet, as I will discuss further in the coming chapters, the body in bed seems to generate similar discomfort, becoming the receptacle of various societal ideas about difference, rest, and the bedroom.

The idea of normal sleep, where one lays in bed, falls asleep for approximately

[39] Nicholas Doyle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 2.

eight hours, and awakes rested, does not typically arouse in us the same disgust we would feel when considering, say, vomiting. Indeed, this seems at first an odd comparison to make. However, there is something similarly uncanny about sleep: it is a crossing between states, an activity that, even if you are physically in the presence of others, you can only truly experience alone. As we die alone, we also dream alone. While many a romance may describe the joy of watching a lover sleep, this is rather subjective, as observing the sleeping body or being observed in this state can be deeply unsettling. Indeed, the idea of being watched while asleep by someone you do not know is horrifying and, likewise, watching a stranger sleep would be an uncomfortable experience; an intrusion, a breaching of the expected barrier of privacy. Further, the sleeping body becomes a socially unacceptable body, prone to uncontrollable bodily functions. Worse, bodies may walk, talk, and even in rare cases murder, entirely on their own; when in the presence of a sleeping body it can be difficult to predict what it may do. And, on becoming the sleeping body yourself, there is no true guarantee of where and in what circumstances you may find yourself when reawakening.

The sleeping, recumbent body sits in an uneasy position between animated form and cadaver: *dead to the world*. I personally recall the times I have paused to check the breath, the pulse even, of a sleeping family member or pet, so eerily still they were in sleep. Absent of consciousness, the sleeping form is evocative of the corpse, which Blanchot, as I will return to, suggests 'offers a resemblance no longer grounded in an existent thing',[40] 'similarity par excellence', yet like nothing but 'its own image', a profound resemblance that is nonetheless profoundly Other.[41] As the corpse resembles the individual who has died yet lacks the 'existent thing', the individual themselves, instead taking on 'its own

[40] Simon Morgan Wotham, '*L'Arrêt de mort*, Insomnia, Dreaming, Sleep: Derrida, Blanchot, Levinas', *Derrida Today*, 5.1 (2012), 111-139 <https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2012.0031> (p. 128).
[41] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 257.

image', so too does the sleeping body.[42] This unconscious form itself becomes the absence of the original – the waking, conscious Self – yet, in its resemblance of the corpse, simultaneously provides what we may recognize as an uncanny picture of rest which is not rest, a restlessness born of absence. We may also be reminded of the doppelgänger, or the Jungian machine without a ghost; the image of similarity and simultaneously incontrovertible Otherness. Indeed, we may view the sleeping body as exemplifying Descartes' consideration of

> man's body as being a machine, so built and composed of bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin, that although it had no mind in it, it would still move in all the same ways that it does at the present, when it does not move by the direction of its will, or, consequently, with the help of the mind, but only by the disposition of its organs.[43]

Though Descartes was in this instance discussing the fallibility of the sick body, this image of the body as an independent machine, devoid of consciousness yet still functioning, is just as applicable to the sleeping body. The body at rest, reduced in function to those automatic nervous functions – breathing, heart rate, digestion, and so on – is uncannily still, many of these functions invisible externally. This is a body that appears suspended, temporarily paused with the expectation that it will return to its usual activities, to its usual Self, upon awakening. Descartes' uneasy image of a mindlessly functioning figure 'renders the body as the ultimate site of the Unheimlich',[44] and the sleeping body, then, uncanny in the extreme.

The uncanniness of sleep and sleeping bodies – especially with regard to

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[42] Blanchot, p. 257.

[43] René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method and The Meditations*, trans. by F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 163.

[44] Yaeli Greenblatt, ''the tattered cloak of his perished skin': The body as costume in 'Two and One', *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and *The Third Policeman*', in *Flann O'Brien: Gallows Humour*, ed. by Ruben Borg & Paul Fagan (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), pp. 131-145 (p. 143).

instances of sleep 'done wrong' – has long been a topic of interest for writers and readers alike. I think here of, for example, E. T. A. Hoffman's 1816 collection, *Nachstücke,* or *Night Pieces,* with his short story 'The Sandman', which would later catch the attention of Freud in 'The Uncanny'. More recently, the rise of 'sleep disorders and sleep medicine in the twenty-first century', has led to greater interest in the uses of sleep 'done wrong' in horror films.[45] As discussed by Dawn Keetley, 'horror films [such as *Paranormal Activity*] dramatize how the uncanniness of sleep negates human reason and agency in order to posit two alternatives: the agency of the demonic and the agency of the body (bereft of mind)' to the effect that in 'horror films about sleep and its disorders […], the spectre of the evil agent and of no ruling agents at all' become so intertwined 'that the latter becomes associated with the former. The corporeal and the neurological, the sleeping body, *is* demonic'.[46] However, though there has been some consideration of uncanny sleep in stories from the early eighteenth century, this has not been the topic of significant research in relation to modernist literature.[47] This is especially fascinating considering that Freud's influential work, 'The Uncanny', with his discussion of 'The Sand-man', was published in 1919.

What, then, should we make of the actual experience of sleep, of the loss of bodily control and the uncertainty of the dreamscapes one may find themselves in? The sleeping realm is one in which stable ground falls away; in which identity is inherently threatened and the Self, as we would usually recognize it, is made porous and unstable. As in *The Metamorphosis*, when falling asleep, you may 'reawaken' to find yourself in a strange body, or in a strange world, with strange people, all of which, exempting those

[45] Dawn Keetley, 'Sleep and the Reign of the Uncanny in Postrecession Horror Film', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 52.5 (2019), 1017-1035 <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1111/jpcu.12842> (p. 1020).
[46] Keetley, p. 1019.
[47] Matthew J. Rigilano, 'Waking the Living Dead-Man: The Biopolitics of Early Modern Sleep', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 17.4 (2017), 75-112 <https://doi.org/10.1353/jem.2017.0027>.

who can successfully engage in lucid dreaming with any regularity, you have no control over. Even when awakening with a mind seemingly restored, you may find yourself in a state of sleep paralysis, trapped within a frozen body in a familiar space made uncanny and threatening. Worse, as worried Descartes, 'there are no conclusive signs by means of which one can distinguish clearly between being awake and being asleep'.[48]

And what of the even more slippery space at the borders of sleep and waking, the state of exhaustion? We consider the waking world one in which we hold an element of control: if not of our situation and the things that are done to us, then at least of how we respond to these things. But does this hold in the state that is not quite awake yet not quite asleep? That state where one is in the process of waking or of drifting off to sleep; a state caught in mid-transformation? Is this a liminal Self, or a 'contaminated' Self? What happens when an individual is trapped in this transitional state by a fatigue never cured by sleep? The Self begins to act in ways that are unpredictable, less controlled – prone to falling asleep, forgetting tasks, making unusual errors. This is not usually the version of the Self we refer to when describing ourselves, but more often something we view as a temporary state, one we may apologize for – think of the phrases *I'm out-of-sorts* or *I'm not myself today*. This is a Self which draws into question its own identity. Experiencing this type of in-between, hybrid state can be distressing for anyone, but, though we may experience this at numerous points even on a daily basis, it usually is a passing state. The implications for those experiencing long-term fatigue are far greater, as this may demand an adjustment of personal and social identity – one beset with not only the individual challenges this entails, but also by the barriers erected by a society in which excessively tired bodies, sleep 'done wrong', and the new identities these may demand are stigmatized.

[48] Descartes, p. 97.

The tired or sleeping body can become a threatening marker of the infallibility of both our bodies and our identities; of our mortality, our frailty, and the instability of our taken-for-granted realities: in short, they represent a state of abjection which we all must enter on a daily basis, and which we may unexpectedly find ourselves unable to escape. The level of scientific uncertainty surrounding the functions and workings of sleep and dreams only further amplifies our inability to know ourselves and our bodies. It is perhaps a combination of these many real-world uncertainties that has caused the absence of scholarship on literary engagements with sleep. There is, however, a long history of philosophical interest in sleep and the body at rest that lends itself to my discussion of the uneasy engagements with sleep and fatigue in *The Metamorphosis* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*.

Descartes was far from the only philosopher to approach the problem of sleep: the role of sleep in understanding the Self, consciousness, and Being in the world has long been of interest to philosophical thinkers. Aristotle considered sleep as the opposite of waking, 'both necessary and beneficial for everything that moves by nature'.[49] For Aristotle, the temporary immobilization of the body and soul's separate abilities of perception was a necessity in order to enable recuperation, so that the individual could adequately perceive the world on waking. However, the connection between sleep and ideas of Self continues to intrigue philosophers in modern times. To this end, it is beneficial to briefly consider the works of two prominent twentieth century philosophers: Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot.

Derrida is perhaps most known for his concept of deconstruction, which suggests that the meaning of a word or concept is not self-sufficient or self-contained, but is determined through reference to its opposite, through the context surrounding the word,

[49] David Gallop, *Aristotle: On Sleep and Dreams* (United Kingdom: Aris & Phillips Classical Texts, 1996), p. 71.

and through the absences, or traces, which it entails. This inclusion of the opposite, this constant redirection to that which is absent, this différance, is valuable when considering the body at rest – again, the body void of consciousness, which so uncannily resembles the image of the corpse. Derrida makes several points beneficial to my work in his consideration of Blanchot's novel *L'arrêt de mort*, the translation of which is complicated by wordplay that means it could be understood either as 'death sentence' or as 'suspension of death'.[50] Within Blanchot's text, the tension between these two meanings continues: the unwell character, J., is deemed terminally ill and given (sentenced to) a month to live, yet instead lives on for a decade, 'more alive than ever', having successfully 'suspended her sentence'.[51] Ultimately, however, J. demands the narrator kill her, sentencing herself to death in an act that paradoxically functions as 'a triumph of life *and* of death', and is again characterised by her pulse's series of stops and restarts.[52] In his analysis, Derrida considers the way in which such a sentence is defined by suspension, as it 'arrests death by suspending it, interrupting it, deferring with a 'start' [sursaut] the startling starting over, and starting on, of living on'.[53] Life is asserted through the decision to end it, 'the suspensive arrêt' (death temporarily suspended, thus undecided) arresting 'the decisive arrêt' (death decided by sentence, yet also undecided as it is 'the undecidable itself').[54] Death, which seemed such a clear category, such a decisive line to cross, is characterised by both stops and starts; the sentence by both decision and indecision.

In this same way, sleep 'done right', a 'highly determined and constructed phenomenon, produced and managed in a very specific way to serve the interests of the

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[50] Geoffrey H. Hartman, quoted in Jacques Derrida, 'Living On', in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. by Harold Bloom and others (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 109.
[51] Derrida, p. 112.
[52] Derrida, p. 112.
[53] Derrida, p. 114.
[54] Derrida, p. 115.

‘day’’, acts as a suspension of waking life that simultaneously creates the possibility for the conscious life of the day.[55] Sleep is a suspension always on the precipice of resumption, characterised by inanimation in relation to animation, by repeated starts and stops. As ‘the borderline of a whole series of suspensive states’, which one will experience again and again so that ‘you’ll never have done with that suspension itself’, ‘sleep emerges, perhaps, as the (unavowed) condition of living on’.[56]

Even as we so often construct sleep as a domestic task, an action undertaken so as to guarantee our ability to dedicate ourselves to the controlled daytime activities of the conscious self, Blanchot draws our attention to the fact that it is we who ‘surrender to sleep’, not the other way around.[57] Indeed, it is only in this surrender to deep, ‘correct’, sleep, that we can ‘escape what there is in the deep of sleep’ – a lack of control and the horror of facing an empty absence of self.[58] Faced with sleep ‘done wrong’ – excessive sleep, sleep at inappropriate times, insomnia, and, as Blanchot discusses, the figure of the somnambulist who sleepwalks or sleeps with their eyes open – we are confronted with an otherness that troubles our own ideas of Self and self- mastery, a troubling of the familiar identity that is grounded in the world of the day: ‘[t]o sleep badly is precisely to be unable to find one’s position’ in the daylight realm.[59] In discussing those displaying sleep ‘done wrong’, Blanchot states that ‘[p]eople who sleep badly always appear more or less guilty. […] They make night present.’[60] This sentiment – one that recurs in fairy tales, medical texts, and literature – precisely locates one cause of societal unease about fatigue and ‘unusual’ sleep. Restful slumber, or sleep ‘done right’, ‘remakes the very possibility of reawakening to the world and to oneself in the world […], allowing the self

[55] Derrida, p. 118.
[56] Wotham, p. 119.
[57] Blanchot, p. 264.
[58] Blanchot, p. 264.
[59] Blanchot, p. 265.
[60] Blanchot, p. 265.

to remake itself in the world and remake the world for itself ('to find one's position')'.[61] However, sleep that fails to leave us refreshed, which does not support the daytime Self, challenges the supremacy of the conscious Self of the day as well as our ability to find our position within the world – a daytime world now affronted with the threat of a lingering night. To this end, the overly vigilant or insomniac Self, which in its stubborn awareness of the Self orientated to the day and daytime expectation causes itself to fail to achieve the adequate rest that it requires, becomes something of an autoimmune Self, a Self which attacks itself and its own needs. The fatigued body and the body spending 'excessive' time in bed may function as reminders of the instability and fallibility of the Self, and as such may be perceived as threatening to the borders erected between productive day and dangerous night.

Sleep and ideas of Self appear to be closely intertwined, not only for philosophers, but even for the everyday person faced with the body at rest or the body fatigued from a failure of sleep – and, as I return to in my analysis of *The Metamorphosis* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*, these associations are reflected in our literature. Whether characterised by threat or by potentiality, sleep is recognized as a state fraught with challenges, the (un)settling ground of identity. In turn, the body at rest – especially when or where rest is deemed inappropriate – becomes uncanny and troubling, as does the fatigued body which points not only to sleep, but to an uneasy sleep 'done wrong'. By reading *The Metamorphosis* and *At Swim-Two-Birds* against the backdrop of these philosophical engagements, we are able to unravel some of the complexities underpinning of Kafka and O'Brien's depictions of sleep and fatigued bodies. To this end, it is also important to draw on a disability studies framework: already the cause of discomfort, the body suffering from chronic, disabling fatigue is faced with further

[61] Wotham, p. 125.

difficulties.

Chapter 2 : Constructing Medical Fatigue in the Collective Consciousness

2.1 Fatigue and Disability Studies: 'a crutch upon which literary narratives lean'[1]

The growth of disability studies as a field has seen a wealth of interdisciplinary analyses of the societal constructions of disability and the ways in which persons with disabilities are perceived and depicted, with the aim of critiquing oppressive ableism, 'the widespread belief that having an able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being'.[2] Though fatiguing conditions have a contentious history within the medical field and, in turn, with receiving recognition for their potentially disabling effects, they have become increasingly embraced by disability studies researchers, some of whom themselves have experienced fatigue of this nature. Within this field, there are several key terms and theories that it is beneficial to be familiar with. When describing different aspects of disability, for example, Ronald J. Berger writes that 'impairment refers to a biological or physiological condition that entails the loss of physical, sensory, or cognitive function, and disability refers to an inability to perform a personal or societally necessary task because of that impairment or the societal reaction to it'.[3] The distinction between the impairment itself and the societal barriers created as a result proves particularly helpful.

Still an often-contested area, there have been several models or theories of disability. Two central approaches from which theories stem include social constructionist and medical essentialist views of disability. Constructionist approaches to

[1] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000), p. 49.
[2] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), pp. 3-4.
[3] Ronald J. Berger, *Introducing Disability Studies* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), p. 6.

disability understand 'disability as constructed by or residing in the social environment', focusing on the societal barriers surrounding the disabled body which require intervention through social justice action.[4] [65] In contrast, the medical essentialist model 'defines disability as an individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being'.[5] At their most extreme, these models exclude one another – the medical essentialist model strictly focusing on embodiment while the social constructionist model fails to acknowledge embodied aspects of disability – however, there have been significant pushes for more nuanced approaches to disability. Within this thesis, I draw on a more blended theory of complex embodiment, which critiques social barriers that contribute to disabling while acknowledging the genuine bodily experiences, both positive and negative, linked to physical impairment.[6] Posited by Tobin Siebers, 'the theory of complex embodiment raises awareness of the effects of disabling environments on people's lived experience of the body, but it emphasizes as well that some factors of disability […] derive from the body' and 'need to be considered in tandem with social forces affecting disability'.[7] Such a model works to include the experiences of unhealthy disabled people, 'whose bodies are highly medicalized because of their suffering, their deteriorating health, or the threat of death' as well as experiences of 'physical or psychological burdens that no amount of social justice can eliminate'.[8] Given that fatigue as a symptom has a profound effect on patients due to a combination of social stigma and barriers as well as the embodied challenges it entails, when considering fatigue, complex embodiment is the most helpful theory to draw upon. My research is further influenced by crip theory,

[4] Berger, p. 9
[5] Siebers, p. 3.
[6] Berger, p. 28
[7] Siebers, p. 25.
[8] Susan Wendell, 'Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities', in *The Disability Studies Reader,* ed. by Lennard J. Davis (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013), pp. 161-173 (p. 162).

formulated by Robert McRuer, which draws connections between the societal constructions of able-bodiedness and heteronormativity, both largely viewed as invisible, or 'unmarked', states of being due to their societal positioning as the 'norm', in order to 'question the order of things, considering how and why it is constructed and naturalized; how it is embedded in complex economic, social, and cultural relations; and how it might be changed'.[9] Such an approach is especially beneficial to my exploration of fatigued literary men, who, as I will further explore in the coming chapters, are 'marked' as transgressive Others – a 'marking' which has, nonetheless, repeatedly been overlooked by critics, suggesting that such depictions have been naturalized.

The inclusion of unhealthy disabled people and chronically ill people in this field is nonetheless relatively new and still at times contested. Although this is changing, fatigue and fatiguing conditions, often medically unexplained, undiagnosable, and invisible, are still frequently overlooked. However, these bodies are nonetheless 'marked' and stigmatized, albeit usually in different ways. As discussed by Susan Wendell, chronic illness, especially where it is invisible, is surrounded by 'suspicion about how ill/disabled we really are, how or why we became ill, whether we are doing everything possible to get well, and how managing our lives, minds, or souls may be contributing to our continuing illness'; suspicion that 'comes from medical professionals, friends, relatives, coworkers, and, understandably, from other people with disabilities'.[10] That many chronic illnesses are characterized by fluctuations in severity and, in turn, in ability, is often cause for further suspicion.[11] And, often, when chronic illness and/or other invisible conditions flair, this results in additional time resting or in

[9] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 2, ProQuest Ebook Central <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=865717> [accessed 31 December 2022].
[10] Wendell, 'Unhealthy Disabled', p. 169.
[11] Wendell, 'Unhealthy Disabled', p. 170.

bed – rest that is necessary, but which, by nature of our already-present societal unease about the body in bed and sleep 'done wrong', may be viewed as additionally suspicious. To this end that I argue that the body in bed, performing sleep 'done wrong', is indeed a body 'marked' as non-normative, even if the actual symptom of fatigue is itself invisible. By examining the ways in which the fatigued body is depicted as 'marked' within literature, we can locate further evidence of a range of societal beliefs about these bodies. As such, it is also valuable to draw on David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis, which stems from David Wills' consideration of prosthesis in the human body as well as in literature and criticism, 'in order to demonstrate to what extent a supposed natural creation relies on artificial devices of various kinds'.[12] Narrative prosthesis develops from examination of the narrative drive to artificially 'compensate for an unknown or unnatural deviance that begs an explanation' and to correct 'deviance marked as improper to social context'.[13] Further, Mitchell and Snyder offer strategies to theorize literature's appropriation of and discursive dependency on disability through consideration of literature as commentary on the positioning of disability across a range of disciplines.[14] Frequently, this analysis points toward the way 'disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device'.[15]

Early in the process of writing this thesis, I described fatigue as slippery, located in the margins rather than explicitly discussed. However, the more that I examined these texts, the more that I realized I was wrong. Fatigue in literature is everywhere, but it holds a peculiar position: it is invisible until specifically looked for, at which point it reveals itself to be pervasive. Fatigue is regularly both alluded to and clearly written

[12] David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 10.
[13] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 53.
[14] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 1.
[15] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 47.

upon the page – we simply don't notice it unless actively looking, or unless we observe from the marginalized outskirts of the 'ideology of ability' from which its structure appears more clearly.[16] Just as even experienced scholars have previously struggled to recognize and interrogate pervasive representations of disability, critics still regularly fail to recognize the prevalent depictions and uses of fatigue, sleep, and fatigued bodies.[17] Why might this be? In trying to answer the same question with regard to disability in general, Mitchell and Snyder state that, contrary to charges that disability is avoided and ignored, 'disabled peoples' social invisibility has occurred in the wake of their perpetual circulation throughout print history'.[18] Despite the explicit, prominent use of disability as a tool for characterization or as a narrative crutch, such representations and uses themselves failed to be the focus of critical analysis until the formation of disability studies. As with fatigue, it wasn't that the disabled body was being avoided, as would be expected of a society seeking to escape the threatening reality of fatigued bodies – on the contrary, it was frequently and prominently featured in literature – rather, the depictions and possibilities offered to the fatigued body on the page were widely accepted without critique.

I turn to the modernist texts in this thesis with the aim of examining the explicit uses of fatigue and sleep that have previously been overlooked in analyses, suggesting that such representations have been naturalized within our society. As with the disabled body, the sleeping or fatigued body recurs throughout literature performing a similar role of narrative prosthesis, an artificial tool of characterization, metaphor, and plot that largely goes without notice by nature of the normalized status of such uses and depictions. Fatigued bodies and sleep 'done wrong' are the deviant forms against which

[16] Siebers, p. 9; p. 14.
[17] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 51.
[18] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 52.

'normal', energetic bodies are constructed; bodies which become metonymic of broader societal concerns, and which are therefore in need of correction. By shining light on these depictions and uses of the fatigued bodies of men in literature, I simultaneously draw attention to the broader societal narratives surrounding fatigue within the real world.

2.2 Medicalized Fatigue: 'thoughtless sinners against the laws of labor and of rest'[19]

Rest, our need for it, and any deviation from its expected pattern – be it through inability to sleep or sleeping too much – has long been of societal concern. Prior to its medicalization in the late nineteenth century, fatigue was viewed predominantly as a form of immoral idleness, bound to criminality and fears of social degeneration.[20] While the medicalization of fatigue added legitimacy to those experiencing it (where there was clear cause), it nonetheless remained tarnished with stigma; characterised as misuse of energy and a problem of willpower.[21] Even as fatigue was repositioned as a medical and social issue, it remained intertwined with anxieties surrounding increased expectations of productivity and shifting gender roles. For example, while male neurasthenic fatigue due to 'overwork' may have been viewed with greater sympathy following medicalization, even considered admirable as it pointed toward masculine ambition and 'fine organization', it was nonetheless indicative of insufficient nervous energy to manage said

[19] Silas Weir Mitchell, *Wear and Tear; or, Hints for the Overworked* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1891; Philadelphia: J.B. Lipincott & Co., 1871), para. 1, Project Gutenberg <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/13197/pg13197-images.html> [accessed 31 March 2023].
[20] Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 6, pp. 28-31.
[21] Andrew Wilson, *Brain and Body: The Nervous System in Social Life* (London: James Bowden, 1900), p. 112.

work.[22] Further, the rapid increase in diagnoses of neurasthenia following American physician George Beard's popularisation of the term in 1869 was so great that it became viewed as a fashionable disease.[23] The significant rise in such diagnoses further contributed to fears of a weakening nation, of an insufficiency of 'the nerve force necessary for the maintenance and advancement of civilisation'.[24] And, as has been observed by Elaine Showalter, '[i]n periods of cultural insecurity, when there are fears of regression and degeneration, the longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class, and nationality, becomes especially intense'.[25]

Though neurasthenia began as a condition associated with upper-class White men, especially those with intellectually demanding jobs, as time progressed it became increasingly diagnosed in middle and upper-class White women. I note that the narrowness of this demographic is reflective of cultural beliefs surrounding class and ethnicity: as stated by George Beard, nervous exhaustion was associated with temperaments that are 'civilized, refined, and educated, rather than of the barbarous and low-born and untrained – of women more than of men'.[26] Beard's sentiment about the inherent feminine disposition for neurasthenia was reiterated by A. Ross Diefendorf some thirty-four years later in the statement that '[w]omen because of their weaker powers of resistance and their greater emotional irritability, [were] more susceptible than

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[22] A. Ross Diefendorf, *Clinical Psychiatry: A Textbook for Students and Physicians, Abstracted and Adapted from the Seventh German edition of Kraepelin's 'Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie'* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915), p. 147; George Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences, a Supplement to Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881), p. 26; David G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), p. 88.

[23] See, for example: Augustus Hoppin, *A Fashionable Sufferer; or, Chapters from Life's Comedy* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883); Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Exhaustion and the Pathologization of Modernity', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 37 (2016), 327-341 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-014-9299-z> (p. 332).

[24] Warwick Anderson, 'The Trespass Speaks: White Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown', *The American Historical Review*, 102.5 (1997), 1343-1370 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2171066> [accessed 31 March 2023] (p. 1348).

[25] Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), p. 4.

[26] Beard, p. 26.

men' to developing neurasthenia.[27] Such beliefs about the aetiology and treatment of neurasthenia, presented as scientific fact, worked to uphold the traditional gender roles under threat from the growing women's rights movements. For example, where 'women were described as overloaded by emotional and social pressures, men were described as being overloaded through intellectual work'.[28] Further, minor neurasthenic symptoms in upper-class White women could be viewed as socially acceptable, but only so long as they manifested as 'an exaggeration of stereotypically feminine traits' such as 'delicacy and dreaminess, sexual passivity, and a charmingly labile and capricious emotionality' that tied such symptoms to 'normal' femininity.[29] Indeed, as fatigue was most visible in middle to upper class White women, managing the appearance of tiredness became a talking point in popular beauty guides, which warned that '[a]fter unusual fatigue, the face of even a young woman has a drawn and tired look which ages it palpably'.[30] As growing numbers of women sought to work outside of the house, beliefs about the inherent weakness of female nerves were used in attempts to uphold traditional gender roles. While suggesting that sufficient sleep is the best remedy for the appearance of fatigue, Mrs. Humphry's *How to be Pretty though Plain* further utilized the threat of fatigue-induced ugliness to warn women both against engaging in employment as 'brain-worker[s]', which would leave them so 'dead-beat' from overwork that they could succumb to 'indolence', and against indulging in a 'pure laziness […] bad for the health as well as antagonistic to beauty', which was best remedied by '[a] little housework'.[31]

[27] Diefendorf, p. 147.
[28] Olaug S. Lian and Hilde Bondevik, 'Medical constructions of long-term exhaustion, past and present', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 37.6 (2015), 920-935 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12249> (p. 930).
[29] Susan R. Bordo, 'The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault', in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, ed. by Alison M. Jaggar & Susan R. Bordo (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 15-16.
[30] Mrs. Humphry, *How to be Pretty though Plain* (London: The British Library, 2014; London: J. Bowden, 1899), p. 37.
[31] Humphry, p. 34; p. 100.

When women were diagnosed with neurasthenia, they were often treated with Silas Weir Mitchell's infamous rest cure, which involved enforced rest, overfeeding, massage, and in some cases electrocution.[32] This treatment, though intended to cure, simultaneously acted as a deeply invasive and infantilizing form of discipline – perhaps especially so for women deemed to indulgently 'mimic fatigue […] who have no symptoms so truly honest that we need care to regard them'.[33] These women, Mitchell suggested, physicians ought 'to control with a firm and steady will'.[34] Whereas cures for neurasthenic women required rest and complete submission to male physicians, treatments for neurasthenic men often entailed rest cures with greater emphasis on personal freedoms, as they were 'encouraged to resume a life of energetic masculine activity' in order to 'restore masculine self-esteem'.[35] For men deemed overly effeminate, physicians even recommended outdoor retreats to reinvigorate their masculinity.[36]

Not only was fatigue a medical and social concern, it was also an economic one. The burgeoning need for greater productivity led to an increased interest in fatigue, a significant and potentially manageable threat to efficiency. Bound to work and productivity, and in turn imbued with a clearer economic value, the ability to identify, prevent, and minimize bodily fatigue was of interest not only to those experiencing the symptom, but to those profiting from their material outputs who wished to minimize 'the great unnecessary waste in accumulated fatigue', leading to increasing research into

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[32] Silas Weir Mitchell, 'Rest', in *Fat and Blood: An Essay on the Treatment of Certain Forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*, ed. by John K. Mitchell (London: J.B. Lipincott Company, 1911; Philadelphia: J.B. Lipincott & Co., 1877), para. 1, Project Gutenberg <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/16230/pg16230-images.html#CHAPTER_V> [accessed 8 November 2022].

[33] Mitchell, *Fat and Blood*, para. 4.

[34] Mitchell, *Fat and Blood*, para. 5.

[35] Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 181.

[36] Jung Yeonsik, '"Our one great national malady": Neurasthenia and American Imperial and Masculine Anxiety at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *Korean Journal of Medical History*, 30.2 (2021), 393-432 <https://doi.org/10.13081/kjmh.2021.30.393> (p. 407).

exhaustion.[37] In studies from the likes of Hugo Kronecker (1871), Angelo Mosso (1891), and Emil Kraepelin (1902), researchers also sought to find ways of accurately identifying fatigue – an aim which gave rise to '[v]arious social and political processes [that] were to make 'fatigue' a visible, and therefore a measurable, problem that could be rendered through graphical means into lines and curves'.[38] This emphasis on quantifying fatigue not only indicates social anxieties about the management and minimization of fatigue, but also the suspicion cast upon those who claimed to be experiencing it. The publication of Frederick Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* proved especially influential for businesses seeking to maximize labour while minimizing fatigue.[39] Ultimately, even scientific research specifically focused on the symptom of fatigue became metonymically connected to a broader fear of national 'waste of life' and 'the economic prosperity of [the] country'.[40]

Fatigue research was of significant interest throughout the United States, Great Britain, and Western Europe, with large congresses held to rapidly translate and distribute findings in Paris (1900), Brussels (1903), Berlin (1907), and Washington (1912).[41] The focus on understanding, measuring, and managing the problem of fatigue generated a range of fatigue studies and the establishment of several research groups, including Britain's Industrial Fatigue Research Board (1919), later renamed the Industrial Health Research Board (1927), and America's Harvard Fatigue Laboratory (1927).[42] Fatigue research was also enthusiastically accepted within the Habsburg

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[37] Frank B. Gilbraith and Lilian M. Gilbraith, *Fatigue Study: The Elimination of Humanity's Greatest Unnecessary Waste, a First Step in Motion Study* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1916), p. 6, The Project Gutenberg <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/67908/67908-h/67908-h> [accessed 29 June 2022].
[38] Mark Paterson, *How We Became Sensorimotor: Movement, Measurement, Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), p. 204.
[39] Rudolf Kucera, *Rationed Life: Science, Everyday Life, and Working-class Politics in the Bohemian Lands, 1914-1918* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), p. 64.
[40] Gilbraith and Gilbraith, p. 6.
[41] Kucera, p. 67.
[42] Paterson, p. 209; p. 233.

Empire, including Bohemian Prague, leading to new theories of work organisation, changes in expected working hours, and the rise of worker accident and medical insurance[43]– the very field that Kafka worked in for the majority of his life. This work led to substantial improvements in working conditions as such groups sought not only to increase worker productivity for the benefit of employers, but also to investigate the effects of working conditions on fatigue levels so as to preserve workers' health.[44] For example, following the publication of multiple reports, the British Industrial Health Research Board ultimately succeeded in passing the 1937 Factories Act, 'which ruled on acceptable working hours, ambient conditions, and rest breaks'.[45] I note here that I am unable to refer to specific fatigue-related actions within Ireland, where *At Swim- Two-Birds* were written, as I was unable to locate information about fatigue research or acts within this region. Nonetheless, interest in and distribution of fatigue research during the period these texts were written in certainly was extensive. Given the proximity between Great Britain and Ireland, and the circulation of ideas, I believe it is fair to suggest that fatigue was a subject of interest in Ireland as well.

With such high stakes, the causes of and cures for fatigue became of vital importance. As *The Family Doctor* told readers in 1890, the cause of fatigue was 'the effect of failure of nervous energy, or of deficiency of organized materials fitted to support the requirements of the body', with differences in available nervous energy in different bodies.[46] As well as through the demands of work and the strains of increased social demands, nervous energy could be expended by 'intemperate indulgence in the pleasures of sensuality, as well as in the enjoyments of intellect, or the toils of daily

[43] Kucera, p. 68.
[44] Paterson, pp. 208-209.
[45] Paterson, p. 209.
[46] A Dispensary Surgeon, *The Family Doctor: A Dictionary of Domestic Medicine and Surgery*, (London: George Routledge, 1890), p. 16.

life'.[47] Following on from this logic, patients displaying fatigue – especially those not deemed to have clear cause – could be considered to blame for a combination of overindulgence and insufficient resolve, exemplifying an inability to make 'the body the willing and obedient servant of the brain'.[48]

Underlying many of these explanations are several value judgements about correct and incorrect bedroom behaviours, underpinned by the belief that inappropriate bedroom behaviour will beget fatigue, and, in turn, further inappropriate bedroom behaviour via the need for 'excessive' rest. In a time of significant worry about production, these concerns were also tied to worries about reproduction: in short, worries about who was reproducing with whom and to what effect, as well as concerns about who was failing to do so.[49] Feeding into these anxieties were prevalent eugenicist fears about the increasingly 'poor' stock of respective nations, and that the 'right' type of people were not the ones reproducing.[50] The increasing availability of contraception was a significant concern, heightening fears that the purportedly delicate nature of the 'right' type of women was preventing them from wishing to give birth. Such fears led to the creation of procedures such as Twilight Sleep, an early twentieth century approach to giving birth whereby women were heavily drugged so as to avoid the pain of birth, and perhaps forget the experience altogether.[51] Steeped in positive eugenics, this form of childbirth was only accessible to upper class, 'civilized women of the most highly developed nervous or intellectual type' who were deemed more delicate than 'lower

[47] *The Family Doctor*, p. 16.
[48] Wilson, p. 112.
[49] Francis Galton, 'Presidential Address, Section H, Anthropology', *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 55 (1885), 1206-1214 <https://galton.org/bib/JournalItem.aspx_action=view_id=140> [accessed 31 March 2023].
[50] Clare Hanson, 'Save the Mothers? Representations of Pregnancy in the 1930s', *Literature & History*, 12.2 (2003), 51-61 <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.7227/LH.12.2.4> (p. 54).
[51] Lauren MacIvor Thompson, 'The Politics of Female Pain: Women's Citizenship, Twilight Sleep and the Early Birth Control Movement', *Medical Humanities*, 45 (2019), 67-74 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2017-011419> (p. 69).

class ‘robust’ women’ and ‘the women of primitive and barbaric tribes’.[52] Contraception also meant that non-productive, and therefore not morally sanctioned, sexual activities were an increasing threat – hence, again, warnings of ‘intemperate indulgence in the pleasures of sensuality’.[53] These concerns were added to previous ones already present surrounding another incorrect, unproductive, bedroom activity: masturbation.[54]

The practice of onanism, or masturbation, ‘one of the ultimate lapses of manly willpower that characterized males’ neurasthenia’, was a feared result of time spent in bed by men, as I will return to in my discussion of *At Swim-Two-Birds*.[55] As described in *The Secret Companion* (1845), those engaging in masturbation were deemed to ‘bring their own punishment’ in the form of a broad range of symptoms, from hypochondria and hysteria to paralysis, blindness, and death.[56] Medical books of the nineteenth century also described patients suffering from onanistic complaints as reporting fatigue: ‘my sleep at night is disturbed and uneasy, and does not recruit my spirits. […] I am pale’; ‘I cannot walk two hundred paces without resting; I am extremely weak’; ‘all that appears before me is like a dream; I have more difficulty to conceive, and less presence of mind; in a word, I find myself perishing, though I can still sleep’.[57] Despite the forty-five years of difference between the publication of *The Secret Companion* (1845) and *The Family Doctor* (1890), onanism was still described in the latter as leading to ‘unaccountable symptoms of debility, particularly about the lower limbs, with listlessness and love of solitude’.[58] Onanism was, in fact, mentioned as a likely cause for debility in youths, with

[52] Henry Smith Williams, *Twilight Sleep: A Simple Account of New Discoveries in Painless Childbirth* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1914), p. 39; see also: Dale M. Bauer, ‘*Twilight Sleep*: Edith Wharton’s Brave New Politics’, *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 45.1 (1989), 49-71 <https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.1989.0002>.
[53] *The Family Doctor,* p. 16.
[54] Sabine Frühstück, ‘Male Anxieties: Nerve Force, Nation, and the Power of Sexual Knowledge’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Societies*, 15.1 (2005), 71-88 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186304004717> (p. 80).
[55] Schuster, p. 89.
[56] R. J. Brodie and Co., *The Secret Companion*, (London: R. J. Brodie & Co., 1845), p. 11.
[57] R. J. Brodie and Co., p. 23.
[58] *The Family Doctor,* p. 550.

the only listed cure being abstinence and a course of tonic treatment to reinvigorate the patient and strengthen the 'impaired constitution'.[59] Indeed, as late as 1927, the three main causes of neurasthenia for those living in the tropics are suggested by gynaecologist V. B. Green-Armytage to be '(a) masturbation, (b) coitus interruptus, and (c) sexual starvation'.[60] Tracing the close ties of onanism to nerve troubles and, in turn, fatigue, highlights the stigma surrounding exhaustion: fatigue was again tied to sin and perceived as an indication of depravity as well as poor mental fortitude.

The role of sleep in relation to fatigue has also been the subject of debate. Nineteenth and early-twentieth century doctors such as Andrew Wilson supported the need for sufficient rest and sleep, recognizing impaired rest as a cause for fatigue and other nervous conditions:

> there can be no doubt that in the nerve troubles which affect our modern existence, rest must be deemed one of the chief, if not the principal, conditions for cure. The age we live in may be described as essentially a rest-less one, and the want of sufficient repose may undoubtedly lie at the root of a vast deal of the irritability which prevails.[61]

This was supported by popular novelist and journalist Mrs. Humphry, who recommended that '[o]ne should sleep not merely six or eight hours a night, but until one wakes refreshed' as '[s]leep restores the nervous power more than any other part of the system, and those who make the greatest drain on their nervous forces need the most sleep'.[62] Others put less value on sleep, with George Lincoln Walton stating that

> The nervous breakdown which precludes sleep is oftener due to worry than to

[59] *The Family Doctor*, p. 550.
[60] Hugh W. Acton, 'Neurasthenia in the Tropics', *The Indian Medical Gazette*, January 1927, p. 7, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/789f/b8243551cf8bc73b84e320d0c31a9c9336c5.pdf> [accessed 31 March 2023].
[61] Wilson, p. 138.
[62] Humphry, p. 103.

> work. Nor should the sufferer jump too quickly to the conclusion that it is the loss of sleep rather than the worry that makes him wretched. It is astonishing how much sleep can be lost without harm, provided its loss is forgotten, and how much work can be carried on without fatigue, provided it be undertaken with confidence and pursued without impatience.[63]

Regardless of just how much rest was viewed as necessary, what was more widely accepted was that the world was shifting rapidly, and that people were experiencing increasing demands on their productivity. When discussing fatigue more broadly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the increasing busyness of life was routinely mentioned as a causative factor, with Wilson opining that 'we are certainly as a race more subject to nervous ills than were our parents, and the life of to- day has nothing at all in common with the slow, peaceful existence led by our grandparents'.[64] With this awareness of overwork and stress as factors in creating fatigue, it is unsurprising that recommended cures include rest and eliminating excess worry. Similarly, in the preface to *Why Worry?* (1908), Walton feels the need to explicitly state that it 'is not the aim of the writer to transform the busy man into a philosopher of the indolent and contemplative type, but rather to enable him to do his work more effectively by eliminating undue solicitude. This elimination is consistent even with the 'strenuous life'.[65] Such concern about the legitimacy of fatigue again arises in Walton's discussion of neurasthenia, a condition that he dismisses as diverting 'attention from the real condition oftenest to be treated, namely, the faulty mental tendency, and direct[ing] attention to an assumed debility which may or may not exist'.[66]

The categorization, diagnosis, and treatment of fatigue and fatiguing conditions

[63] George L. Walton, *Why Worry?* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1916; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908), pp. 148-149.
[64] Wilson, p. 11.
[65] Walton, p. 12.
[66] Walton, p. 133.

have long been the cause of debate, largely because of the immeasurability of exhaustion and the seeming inability to separate fatigue from moral ideas about laziness and deviancy. Even in 1998, when discussing the contested chronic Epstein-Barr syndrome (often linked with ME/CFS), the condition was described as 'a manifestation of the current narcissistic and hedonistic society in that there is an ever-increasing tendency for people to blame something or someone else rather than look at themselves'.[67] Over the last century, the terminology used to discuss fatigue has changed as new fatiguing conditions appeared. However, despite a century of scientific advancement, we seem to repeatedly approach fatigue in the same ways. Even with the prevalence of today's experiences of fatigue due to Covid-19 infection and Long Covid, patients whose fatiguing symptoms extend beyond the initial acute phase of illness still frequently report facing disbelief, lack of support, and self-blame.[68] More than 140 years on from Beard's popularisation of the term 'neurasthenia', we are still stigmatizing fatigue in many of the same ways. Having considered several ways of thinking about fatigue in fairy tales, philosophy, disability studies, and medicine, in the following section I turn to the construction of female fatigue in literature.

2.3 Literature and Female Fatigue: 'the dream rose into a climax of meaninglessness, fatigue and powerlessness'[69]

Many fatiguing conditions such as ME/CFS and Long Covid are more frequently

[67] R. Holland, 'Is It Nobler in the Yuppie Mind to Suffer the Slings of EBV', *Medical Post*, 1 November 1998, p. 12.

[68] See, for example: Larry Au and others, 'Long covid and medical gaslighting: Dismissal, delayed diagnosis, and deferred treatment', *Qualitative Research in Health*, 2 (2022), 1-11 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2022.100167>; Anna K. Taylor and others, ''Reluctant pioneer': A qualitative study of doctors' experiences as patients with long COVID', *Health Expectations*, 24.5 (2021), 833-842 <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13223>; Ed Yong, 'Long-Haulers are Redefining COVID-19', *The Atlantic*, 19 August 2020 <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/08/long-haulers-covid-19-recognition-support- groups-symptoms/615382/> [accessed 31 March 2023].

[69] Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Books, 2019; London: Constable, 1934), p. 137.

diagnosed in women within our current real-world context and female fatigue is more frequently the subject of literary criticism.[70] This is despite the fact that, while hysteria was indeed believed to be a purely female condition, neurasthenia was, at least initially, most frequently diagnosed in White middle to upper-class men.[71] In addition to – and perhaps in part because of – this association between fatigue and the feminine, conditions such as hysteria and neurasthenia are now often viewed as predominantly female maladies.[72]

The association between women and fatigue has also been supported by the many depictions of fatigued women in literature. Further, the most well-known texts depicting neurasthenic women were written by women who themselves suffered from neurasthenia and had experienced treatment for the condition – most infamously, in the form of the rest cure, which was explicitly critiqued by the likes of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Virginia Woolf. Discussed to a lesser extent, Edith Wharton, who herself suffered from neurasthenia for over a decade and also witnessed her husband suffer from the condition, also includes multiple depictions of fatigued women in her writing, at times propagating stigmatizing depictions of female exhaustion while at others posing subtle resistance to these views. While Gilman, Woolf, and Wharton provide works engaging with the experiences of upper-class White women, Wharton, along with Jean Rhys, also consider the experiences of lower-class fatigued women and girls. These varied engagements indicate that these authors had an explicit awareness of the stigmatizing social constructions of fatigue in women, as well as a desire to critique these constructions – even if at times they still perpetuated aspects of these beliefs themselves. The intent behind these author's engagement with exhaustion influences the depiction of the

[70] Ashley R. Valdez and others, 'Estimating Prevalence, Demographics, and Costs of ME/CFS Using Large Scale Medical Claims Data and Machine Learning', *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, 6.412 (2019), 1-14 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fped.2018.00412>; Roy H. Perlis and others, 'Prevalence and Correlates of Long COVID Symptoms Among US Adults', *JAMA Network Open*, 5.10 (2022), 1-11 <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.38804>.

[71] See, for example: Yeonsik, p. 410; Lian and Bondevik, p. 924.

[72] Showalter, *The Female Malady*.

fatigued women in their texts, as well as ensuing critical engagement with their literary works. The work of Olaug S. Lian, Catherine Robson, and Hilde Bondevik in particular draws on 'The Yellow Wallpaper' in tracing shifting 'culturally and historically contingent norms and values related to long-term exhaustion' in women from the mid-nineteenth century through to the twenty-first century.[73] This work highlights the manner in which women have consistently been stigmatized and blamed for their own exhaustion: in the nineteenth century, this was believed to be due to the innate, natural fragility of women, whereas in the modern day, exhausted women are blamed for displaying insufficient coping skills and failing to preserve their health as individuals.[74]

Edith Wharton is known for her social critique of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century society, especially of the upper classes, as well as for 'creating incisive portraits of characters deeply affected by their social and physical environments'.[75] One well-known example of Wharton's fatigued women is found in *Ethan Frome*, the story of a farmer who is stuck in poverty and an unhappy marriage. Zeena, the wife of Ethan Frome, is portrayed as a hypochondriac in constant search for cures to a mysterious illness and who functions as narrative device preventing her husband from pursuing his own dreams. Zeena is described as 'sickly', yet as soon as this description is given, it is laced with suspicion by the addendum: 'if she were as ailing as she believed'.[76] The nature of Zeena's illness is uncertain, and on the page it is most frequently shown through her fatigue: she is regularly depicted as sleeping, or otherwise in bed. She is also routinely described as unpleasant and demanding: she speaks in a 'flat whine' and is, at

[73] Olaug S. Lian, Catherine Robson and Hilde Bondevik, 'Women with long-term exhaustion in fictional literature: A comparative approach', in *Reading the Psychosomatic in Medical and Popular Culture: Something. Nothing. Everything.*, ed. by Carol-Ann Farkas (London: Routledge, 2017), Taylor & Francis Group <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.4324/9781315515694> (p. 114).
[74] Lian, Robson, and Bondevik, p. 125.
[75] Carol J. Singley, *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 3.
[76] Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 15.

worst, ‘an oppressive reality’; at best ‘an insubstantial shade’.[77] When first described physically, it is again in grotesque terms, as Ethan imagines her ‘lying in their bedroom asleep, her mouth slightly open, her false teeth in a tumbler by the bed’.[78] When it conspires that she is, in fact, still awake on account of feeling ‘so mean [she] couldn’t sleep’, she is further described as ‘tall and angular’ with a ‘flat breast’, a ‘puckered throat’, and a ‘high-boned’ face with deep ‘hollows and prominences’.[79]

Zeena is depicted, in short, as Mitchell’s ‘domestic demon which has produced untold discomfort in many a household […] the woman who wears and destroys generations of nursing relatives […] like a vampire, sucking slowly the blood of every healthy, helpful creature within reach of her demands’.[80] The seemingly intended implication, then, is that Ethan’s unfaithfulness is permissible due to the unlikeable and unattractive nature of his wife – especially since she is depicted as either a sickly burden or a hypochondriac manufacturing her symptoms. It is, of course, Ethan who describes Zeena in such negative terms, but the narrator at no point questions or critiques this portrayal, further delegitimizing her claims to illness.[81] Such an unreliable narrative framework, though explicitly perpetuating such harmful beliefs, nonetheless draws attention the potential flaws in such perspectives.

Wharton’s depiction makes clear the stigma that women had to contend with. Women began writing back against such stereotypes, both those of the lazy woman and of the weak woman. Take, for example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who was treated for neurasthenia by Mitchell and famously sent him a copy of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ with

[77] Wharton, *Ethan Frome*, p. 15; p. 16.
[78] Wharton, *Ethan Frome*, p. 21.
[79] Wharton, *Ethan Frome*, p. 22.
[80] Mitchell, *Wear and Tear*, para. 33.
[81] Mary D. Lagerway, Mary D. Lagerway-Voorman and Gerald E. Markle, ‘Edith Wharton’s Sick Role’, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 35.1 (1994), 121-134 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4121247> [accessed 1 March 2023] (p. 130).

the aim of altering the treatment 'to save people from being driven crazy'.[82] The Yellow Wallpaper', a text analysed by feminist scholars since the 1970s 'as paradigmatic of the patriarchal silencing of women',[83] tells the story of a new mother who is treated to a rest cure at the hands of her physician husband and begins to suffer from increasing psychological disturbance. The story takes place almost exclusively in the bedroom, the narrator's place of confinement and one that she becomes ever more obsessed with as she is instructed to take more and more rest. As the text progresses, there is a shift as sleep gains increasing dominance and the narrator herself begins to sleep during the day so as to stay awake through the night, watching the woman she perceives to be in her wallpaper. This uncanny movement into sleep 'done wrong' indicates the narrator's mental descent following her husband's dismissal of her health concerns, as 'he does not believe [she] is sick'.[84] As Gilman herself was actively critiquing the rest cure as a treatment, linking her own 'ailments to male patriarchy and domestic life', the inclusion of this text as a staple of feminist canon is unsurprising.[85] 'The Yellow Wallpaper' also provides an excellent example of our uneasy relationship with sleep, rest, and its potential threat toward us – yet the connection shown between sleep 'done wrong', danger and mental illness is taken for granted.

Virginia Woolf takes criticism of stereotypes surrounding female exhaustion further when she represents rest as something productive, but in terms of self-knowledge and quiet contentment rather than capitalist productivity. In her essay, 'On Being Ill', Woolf considers the peculiar fact that 'illness has not taken its place

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[82] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ''Why I wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*?'', *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 17.4 (2011), 265 <https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.17.4.265> (p. 265).

[83] Jane F. Thrailkill, 'Doctoring "The Yellow Wallpaper"', *ELH*, 69.2 (2002), 525-566 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30032030> [accessed 2 March 2023] (p. 526).

[84] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2017; Boston: New England Magazine Corporation, 1892), p. 5, Proquest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=5443984> [accessed 3 March 2023].

[85] Lian, Robson, and Bondevik, p. 123.

with love, battle, and jealousy among the prime themes of literature', and indeed, that even the English language itself lacks appropriate vocabulary to describe pain.[86] The view from bed she describes is one in which the pretences of health fade away, as the ill 'cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; [they] become deserters […] irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round' and observe the world differently.[87] Illness and the bed are repositioned as holding creative opportunities, new perspectives and allowances despite the stigma surrounding them.

Take, for example, Clarissa Dalloway. Within the first few pages of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa is described as 'very white since her illness', with 'her heart affected, they said, by influenza'.[88] The effects of illness linger in her need to minimize potential overexertion, to rest at midday, and especially, at the behest of Richard Dalloway, to 'sleep undisturbed'.[89] In contrast to the constrictive rest depicted by Gilman, through her mandatory rest Clarissa is able to reflect on her own aging, drift through memories, and recognize and reframe an earlier relationship with Sally Seton not as platonic, but as one of queer love. The bedroom becomes a space not only of sleep or restriction, but of discovery, the position of rest one in which new perspectives can be explored. Through these newfound insights, Clarissa is finally able to triumph, not in spite of her post-viral condition, but because of it. After private reflections on age and mortality, finally, she emerges 'having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank'.[90]

Against this peaceful productivity we can set Wharton's *Twilight Sleep*, in which

[86] Virginia Woolf, 'On Being Ill', *The New Criterion*, 4.1 (1926), 32-45 <https://thenewcriterion1926.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/criterion-eliot-woolf-jan-1926.pdf> [accessed 16 November 2022] (p. 32).
[87] Woolf, 'On Being Ill', p. 37.
[88] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Vintage, 2004; London: The Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 2.
[89] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 26.
[90] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 164.

rest is constantly pursued but also desperately avoided. In *Twilight Sleep*, I find a different engagement with fatigued women as the members of the elite Manford family respond to expectations of relentless energy in the increasingly fast-paced capitalist world. While the Manford family have considerable wealth and privilege, they nonetheless must contend with societal expectations of how they should present themselves both through body and action. Most importantly, the characters are burdened with the need for conspicuous consumption, and, as this takes the place of more fulfilling forms of interaction, they seek constant stimulation in order to avoid, rather than face, problems. In short, the characters live in a metaphorical twilight sleep, actively working to avoid and forget pain, as is suggested by the title of the text, *Twilight Sleep*, which takes its name from the medical procedure of the same name, discussed in 2.2. Sleep here is given decidedly negative connotations: of avoidance, of alienation from nature and the body through a gendered relinquishing of control, and of decadence, a freedom from pain available for purchase.

Pauline Manford, the aging mother figure, displays the drive to constantly perform an overflow of energy and to avoid or forget pain at all costs. Far from performing sleep 'done wrong', Pauline is in perpetual motion, relentlessly pursuing social activities and commercialized treatments intended to increase her energy levels and hide signs of aging. In fact, even Pauline's bedroom is treated as a place not of rest, but of work, deemed 'the office'.[91] With low energy levels associated with weakness, tiredness, and illness, it is of little surprise that Pauline would, having the means to do so, aggressively pursue vitality. While vigour and action, coded as masculine traits, were certainly expected of men, they were also demanded of women, whose bodies during the modernist period were being 're-energized, re-formed, [made] subject to new modes of

[91] Edith Wharton, *Twilight Sleep* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997; New York: The Pictorial Review Company, 1927), p. 9.

production, representation, and commodification'.[92] Confined to the domestic sphere, Pauline channels her energy into the detailed planning of events and advocating for a range of conflicting beliefs, highlighting that this is done not so much out of conviction, but out of a need to be busy and to be seen being busy. This visual, performative aspect of Pauline's advocacy also ties in with her greatest task: to control and reshape her body into the slender, efficient, lineless, youthful shape desired not only in technology but in women. Rather cynically, however, as Pauline becomes increasingly distressed, resulting in her making several errors, she determines that she is in need of a rest cure treatment at her country lodge, Cedarledge. However, this is also shown to be performative, as she simply relocates her relentless activity to a new location. Pauline's nerve trouble is positioned as the result of her own engagement in excessive activity and refusal to acknowledge the painful aspects of her life. Such a representation further supports stigmatizing descriptions of neurasthenic symptoms of fatigue and nerve troubles as a trendy disease of the upper classes.

Whereas *Twilight Sleep* presents the frenetic energy of avoidance and consumption, a different form of restlessness arises in texts such as Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. These novels follow impoverished female narrators who live on the fringes of society due to their status as ethnic and/or class outsiders. For these women, tiredness and fatigue are an endless, repetitive cycle with no escape but a moment's relent through violence, a slight pause before 'starting all over again, all over again'.[93] For Anna, the young protagonist of *Voyage in the Dark*, her bouts of illness and exhaustion occur alongside a movement into prostitution and an increasingly surreal narrative style, her entrapment within a cycle of poverty in the British underbelly characterised by the language of dreamlike exhaustion. This is again

[92] Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 2.
[93] Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 155.

found in *Good Morning, Midnight*, which follows the aging Sasha, who struggles to sleep, resorting to the use of laudanum to find peace amidst the relentless demands of the world around her. Sasha is unrooted, her aimless walking moving her not only through space but also through memories as time collapses. As she traverses 'a repeating loop of moments in which she is seen, and moments in which she wishes to disappear',[94] it becomes increasingly difficult to extract which fragments belong to the present narrative and which belong to the past: following a clear linear narrative becomes difficult, and perhaps unnecessary. The world of the text is presented as a continuous cycling of rooms and faces, each nearly interchangeable with the next, as the past and present, real and imaginary, blend together, and events are presented in disjointed chunks of text. Sasha herself is in a constant state of restless insomnia, exhaustion and drunkenness, her literal experience of tiredness simultaneously reflected in the exhaustion of the text's language and narrative structure. Through the exhaustion of Sasha and Anna, we find critique of the fast-paced, unforgiving nature of modern society, and its cruel treatment of lower-class women in particular, who, if they 'trip' will 'fall into blackness' where 'there is no past, no future, […] but always the same'.[95]

Expectations of relentless productivity within a rapidly changing capitalist society – a productivity that goes hand in hand with the ideology of ability – permeate different social groups within society, albeit in different ways. Indeed, so pervasive are beliefs connecting productivity and ability that they even intrude into Woolf's depictions of transcendental rest in *Mrs Dalloway*. By suggesting that fatigue can generate greater creative potential, Woolf implies that this is possible for all fatigued bodies, in turn positioning failure to achieve such results as a fault not of fatigue, but of the individual.

[94] Erica L. Johnson, '*Hontologie*: The Chronotype of Shame in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*', *KronoScope*, 13.2 (2013), 28-46 <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685241-12341257> (p. 34).
[95] Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* ([n.p.]: Penguin Books, 2016; London: Constable & Company, 1939), p. 143.

Further, exactly which unwell or tired bodies are admirable and contain visionary potential is also policed by Clarissa herself. From the very beginning, Clarissa is on an excursion to buy flowers for Evelyn Whitbread, 'that indescribably dried-up little woman' in a nursing home who is 'ill again'.[96] As the opening of the text, this immediately sets up a contrast between Clarissa, the active woman who overcomes the effects of her condition, triumphing because of them, and Evelyn, the passive, isolated invalid who never takes 'the risks necessary to gain a visionary body'.[97] By framing the text in this way, Clarissa can 'begin to develop her emerging visible persona defined in opposition to that of Evelyn's', creating an uncomfortable situation in which Woolf presents both 'good' and 'bad' ways of being chronically ill or disabled.[98] Though Clarissa displays kindness towards Evelyn, placing herself in the role of 'sympathetic caregiver', this is not entirely altruistic nor does it negate her negative attitude towards the way in which Evelyn experiences her condition.[99] Whereas it is permissible, even beneficial, for Clarissa to require rest, where Evelyn is severely affected and must stay 'in her nursing home', this is positioned as burdensome and unacceptable.[100]

Woolf does, however, complicate Clarissa's differentiation between herself and Evelyn: even as Clarissa finds benefits in her fatigued and aging body, this is not a perspective held by many others in the text. Where Evelyn is positioned as inferior to Clarissa by nature of her poorer health, Clarissa herself, with her need for rest, becomes inferior in relation to the robust health of Lady Bruton. From the able-bodied position of Lady Bruton and the husbands at her lunch, Clarissa's careful distinction between her own fatigue and Evelyn's is collapsed into one category: 'women who often got in their

[96] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p.7; p. 3.
[97] Jane Elizabeth Fisher, *Envisioning Disease, Gender, and War: Women's Narratives of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 85.
[98] Fisher, p. 86.
[99] Fisher, p. 85.
[100] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 7.

husbands' way, prevented them from accepting posts abroad, and had to be taken to the seaside in the middle of the session to recover from influenza'.[101] The perception of those suffering from illness, especially fatiguing, chronic, or recurring illness, is gendered as feminine and stigmatized as weak and burdensome. Further, the implication is that their needs are frivolous and, were those suffering stronger and more inclined to overcome their conditions, they would do so. While Woolf provides the potentially positive representation of the recumbent body as one of creativity and insight, this positioning is nonetheless contingent on the productivity of said body.

In these texts, fatigued women are shown to have limited and often contradictory options. Some women are burdens and malingerers, whose fatigue and need for rest is viewed with suspicion, while others fight back against the isolating, infantilising rest imposed upon them. Women such as Clarissa see in rest the opportunity for productive creativity and self-realization, whereas others recognize rest as a commodity yet are nonetheless afraid to pause their relentlessly busy lives. Marginalized women, however, find themselves in an inescapable cycle where rest is not an option.

Though the complexities of rest have often been associated with women, I emphasize that fatiguing conditions affect men as well, despite the feminine coding of such conditions. However, the feminine associations ascribed to fatigue, and the judgements that stem from these, still affect perceptions of the fatigued male body. When turning to *The Metamorphosis*, for example, prior criticism including that of Elizabeth Boa and Edith H. Krause, draws attention to the perceived feminization of Gregor through his transformation.[102] Alternatively, in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the bed is

[101] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 93.

[102] Elizabeth Boa, 'Creepy-crawlies: Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"', *Paragraph*, 13.1 (1990) 19-29 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43151703> [accessed 29 September 2022] (pp. 25-26); Edith H. Krause, 'Aspects of Abjection in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 30.4 (2019), 303-322 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10436928.2019.1673022> (pp. 314-315).

itself described as feminine, 'yielding without stint the parturition of her cosy womb', and the men spending excess time in bed subsequently framed as engaging in deviancy.[103] For women, the horizontal position 'attains the status of scandal by drawing the body to the ground, a debasement that insists on the body's materiality and sexual availability'.[104] For men, however, this position suggests emasculation, a failure to uphold 'expectations of masculine uprightness, subjectivity, and strength', and, rather than sexual availability, an engagement in un-masculine masturbation.[105] As a largely immeasurable symptom with strong gendered associations, exploring fatigue in literature offers insights into cultural beliefs about gender as well as 'the socially contingent factors that govern the social construction of medical knowledge'.[106] Having now introduced a range of different conceptual engagements with fatigue and briefly explored how these have influenced depictions of female fatigue in literature, I turn to focus more narrowly on portrayals of male fatigue, first in *The Metamorphosis*, then *At Swim-Two-Birds.*

[103] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 138.
[104] Hornby, p. 7.
[105] Hornby, p. 8; Schuster, p. 89.
[106] Lian and Bondevik, p. 931.

Chapter 3 : Becoming Vermin: Fatigue in *The Metamorphosis*

When I first read *The Metamorphosis*, I was on a bus from Hamilton to Whakatāne. It was the middle of the summer following my first year of undergraduate study, and between the heat from the sun and the breath of my fellow passengers the atmosphere was claustrophobic. Given the massive influence of *The Metamorphosis*, I came to the text with a general understanding of the plot and a range of prior expectations: that there would be questions of humanity, metaphorical resonance with the plight of cultural Others, and an overall sense of existential dread. And I did, indeed, find all of these things. Yet, after only a page or two, I had to close the book from nausea – not simply from travel sickness, though this surely factored in, but from a disturbing sense of recognition.

I was travelling to Whakatāne to assist my parents with packing their freshly sold home, a task which was made more difficult than normal due to my mother's worsening health. She had recently been given a suspected diagnosis of ME/CFS, and, so as not to exacerbate her condition, was effectively banned from assisting us with the physical work of the move. We were moving to Germany with the express hopes of finding effective medical care for my mother following nearly ten years of substandard and, at times, distinctly cruel treatment. And, as I read those first few pages of *The Metamorphosis*, I saw not only my mother but myself depicted in stark detail: as we would later learn in Germany, in addition to my mother's ME/CFS, she also had Ehler's Danlos Syndrome, a genetic degenerative connective tissue disease, the symptoms of which have increasingly appeared in my own body over the last ten years.

Gregor's experience and his fears, even in those early pages, mirrored the fears that I held deepest, both for my mother and for myself, to an uncomfortable extent.

Though I could not, of course, relate to waking up as an insect, even with my own condition, comparatively minor to my mother's, I certainly could relate to waking up to sudden and irreversible bodily change; to losing the ability to participate in previously cherished activities that had been central to my identity; to unexpectedly find it difficult and painful both to go to sleep and to get out of bed. And, through my mother, I had witnessed the potential for cruelty in those we are promised will care for us and had begun to realize that it was unlikely that either of us would regain the bodies we had thought were our own. During the hour-and-a-half stopover in Rotorua I finished *The Metamorphosis* in the bus terminal and cried.

When I began to read criticism of this text, I was astonished that, despite the wealth of research considering *The Metamorphosis* in relation to diseases and other conditions, there was a distinct lack of analysis considering the role played by fatigue, which to myself had been obvious. After reflecting over the course of the last year, I can see that this is not perhaps as obvious to everyone as it is to myself: it is not just prior expectations that I come to this text with, but the lived, embodied experiences I have accumulated over what is now the last sixteen years. It is not that I notice fatigue in *The Metamorphosis* because I am looking for it, so much as because I cannot avoid seeing it. We are rightfully told to beware of our internal biases, but, in this case, my biases situate me in a unique position to add a new perspective to the century-long conversation that has surrounded *The Metamorphosis*.

Recently, *The Metamorphosis* has become an increasingly prominent text within the growing field of the medical humanities. Within such analyses, Kafka's novella has proven a fruitful medium through which to examine attitudes toward HIV and other diseases, aging, and a range of mental illnesses, and as a tool to improve empathy in

caregiving for patients of all kinds.[1] The text has also resounded with many queer readers and researchers, leading to readings of the text in relation to queer and transgender experiences of dysphoria and shame.[2] Gregor's body has been read several times as abject and grotesque: 'the metamorphosis in the Samsa household of a man into a vermin is unsettling not only because a vermin is unsettling, and not only because the vivid representation of a "human louse" is unsettling, but because the indeterminate, fluid crossing […] is in itself unsettling'.[3] Yet other readings have considered *The Metamorphosis* more specifically in relation to Kafka's personal life, especially as an exploration of a negative father-son dynamic (as stated by Kafka, conflict with the father is a 'primeval theme' of literature) and of sexual dysfunction or deviancy.[4] While one 2018 study seeks to diagnose Kafka with chronic insomnia through reference to his diaries, even this study, one focused on sleep 'done wrong', has failed to consider the representations and uses of fatigue within Kafka's fiction.[5] In short, *The Metamorphosis* has been analysed to what one would expect to be a point of over-exhaustion – something that I was surprised to find was not the case, as none of these readings have

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[1] Courtenay Sprague, 'What Matters Most? The Power of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* to Advance Understandings of HIV Stigma and Inform Empathy in Medical Health Education', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, (2022) 1-24 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-022-09729-2>; Ciaran O'Connor, 'A Consideration of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* As A Metaphor For Existential Anxiety About Ageing', *Existential Analysis*, 23.1 (2012), 56-66 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A288874173/LitRC?u=anon~25bd0a8f&sid=googleScholar&xid=f2e257df> [accessed October 9 2022]; James T. Antony, 'Metamorphosis: A Reason Why Many Schizophrenics Get Abandoned by Their Dear Ones', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 59.1 (2017), 10-13 <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.204446>; Michael Rowe, '*Metamorphosis*: Defending the Human', *Literature and Medicine*, 21.2 (2022), 264-280 <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/20311/pdf> [accessed 16 June 2022].

[2] See, for example: Randy Kaufman, 'Introduction to Transgender Identity and Health', in *Fenway Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health*, ed. by Harvey J. Makadon and others (Philadelphia: American College of Physicians, 2008); Britta Kallin, 'From the Body in Pain to the Body Transformed: Feminist and Trans Readings of Franz Kafka', *Journal of Austrian Studies*, 53.4 (2020), 51-73 <https://doi.org/10.1353/oas.2020.0062>; Simona Giordano, 'Understanding the Emotion of Shame in Transgender Individuals – Some Insight from Kafka', *Life Sciences, Society and Policy*, 14.23 (2018), 1-22 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40504-018-0085-y>.

[3] See, for example: Krause; Corngold, '"Die Verwandlung", (p. 98).

[4] Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. by Goronwy Rees (London: Quartet Books, 1985), p. 68; Saul Friedländer, *Franz Kafka: The Poet of Shame and Guilt* (London: Yale University Press, 2013); especially 'Love, Sex, and Fantasies', 66-94.

[5] A. Iranzo and others, 'The Insomnia of Franz Kafka', *Sleep Medicine*, 50 (2018), 24-28 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleep.2018.05.024>.

shown much interest in the literal tiredness on the page. Indeed, the only such engagement with *The Metamorphosis* comes from Michael Greaney's 2017 work on literary exhaustion, where it only merits a few brief sentences considering the text as 'a painfully simple account of not being able to summon up the wherewithal to get out of bed and go to work in the morning'.[6]

I argue that the lack of analysis of exhaustion in the text is symptomatic of a broader inability of critics to see literal fatigue in literature. This is especially peculiar given the prominence of tiredness, the bed, and the bedroom both in the text itself and in Kafka's diary entries during the time of its writing. It is clear when reading Kafka's diaries that while writing *The Metamorphosis* and in the time leading up to this, he was experiencing fatigue, insomnia, and bodily pains: 'I lie here kicked out of the world, on the lookout for the sleep that refuses to come and will only graze me when it does, my joints ache with fatigue, my dried-up body trembles towards its own destruction'.[7] Critics have been quick to refer to Kafka's diaries when reading the text as allegorical of his real-world socio-political context, his sexuality, or his own relationship with his father. Yet, even when Kafka explicitly lists neurasthenia as one of the health complaints he was suffering from, this fails to garner interest. While the lived experiences of neurasthenia in female authors have repeatedly influenced readings of their works, this has not been the case for *The Metamorphosis*. To begin addressing this oversight, I centre my analysis of *The Metamorphosis* on the fatigued body of Gregor and permit the literal exhaustion which has hitherto been overlooked to guide my reading.

As an invisible symptom that often cannot be objectively measured, real-world

[6] Michael Greaney, 'Literary Exhaustion', in *Burnout, Fatigue, Exhaustion: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on a Modern Affliction*, ed. by Sighard Neckel, Anna Katharina Schaffner & Greta Wagner ([n.p.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 241, Springer Link <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3- 319-52887-8> [accessed 27 March 2022].

[7] Kafka, *The diaries of Franz Kafka*, p. 124.

patients of fatigue often struggle to convey the severity of their symptom and receive adequate support and understanding. The normality of tiredness, its day-to-dayness, can further lead to it being perceived as a benign, surmountable obstacle, such that when real-world patients fail to overcome fatigue, they are liable to be labelled lazy and burdensome.[8] However, I find in Gregor's metamorphosis the image of debilitating fatigue, a symptom usually characterised by its invisibility, made both visible and outwardly horrifying: fatigue is not verminous or 'disease-like, meaning […] disgusting and ugly', but literal vermin, metaphor projected upon the body.[9] Nonetheless, a cruel irony of Gregor's predicament is that his condition, though completely visible and therefore undeniable, is nonetheless treated as impossibly monstrous, such that he is still denied support and reviled by those he loves. Where illnesses such as tuberculosis have previously been romanticized despite their horrific reality, in *The Metamorphosis* Kafka, who himself struggled with his health throughout his life and eventually died of tuberculosis in 1924, designs a condition that seemingly resists romanticization by nature of its representation as vermin.[10] To this end, I begin with consideration of Gregor's body, the fatigued body made visible as literal vermin, then examine the role of caregiving within the text. I next consider the construction of Gregor as burdensome and the potentially problematic nature of his representation before unpacking the role of the bedroom as setting. Finally, I turn to the legacy of *The Metamorphosis* and interrogate further the difficulties of romanticising Gregor's condition.

3.1 The Fatigued Body as Vermin: 'How repulsive the sight of him still

[8] See, for example: Charlotte Blease, Havi Carel, and Keith Geraghty, 'Epistemic Injustice in Healthcare Encounters: Evidence From Chronic Fatigue Syndrome', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 43 (2017), 549- 557 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2016-103691>; Alexandra Stenhoff and others, 'Understanding Medical Students' Views of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: A Qualitative Study', *Journal of Health Psychology*, 20.2 (2015), 198-209 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105313501534>; Rosalind Raine and others, 'General Practitioners' Perceptions of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Beliefs About its Management, Compared with Irritable Bowel Syndrome: Qualitative Study', *BMJ*, 358.7452 (2004), 1354-1357 <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.38078.503819.EE>.

[9] Sontag, p. 60.

[10] Sontag, pp. 18-19.

was to her'[11]

From the first line of *The Metamorphosis*, readers are immediately dropped into Gregor's predicament, both surreal, yet simultaneously and strangely banal: 'As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect'.[12] The absurdity of Gregor's transformation into an insect aside, awakening from strange dreams to find the body altered is mundane – it is, after all the purpose of sleep to turn a tired body to a rejuvenated one. Gregor, however, is transformed not only into a strange, monstrous bodily form, but also one which is still profoundly exhausted, a body which causes him to sleep through his alarms well before he is fully aware of the extent of its altered state.

Many of us have personally experienced awakening to find ourselves ill with the flu or Covid-19; disoriented by a strange sense of altered time, the fevered ache of weighted muscles, lungs, heart, the pressure of a head cold disturbing our base perception of light and sound. We may wake to the unexpected pains that come with aging, disability or impairment: to acid reflux, to arthritis, to heart palpitations, to dizziness, or even to acute injury. Perhaps more banal, we may simply wake to find we feel unrested, our exhaustion outwardly betrayed by darkness beneath our eyes and tired, sallow skin. We may even awaken to find that, in our exhausted state, we slept through our alarms and are late for work. As discussed in 1.2, such experiences, even at their most everyday, are still deeply unnerving: they draw into question, not only for ourselves but for those who rely on and care for us, understandings of who we are and what we are and are not capable of. Having contracted Covid-19 myself in the midst of writing this chapter, I recall that my greatest concern, even more so than my experience

[11] Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. by Willa Muir & Edwin Muir (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 35.
[12] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 9.

of unpleasant physical symptoms, was the question of how long it would be until my fatigue dissipated so that I could return to working on my thesis, and, more alarmingly, whether or not I would return to 'normal' at all. Gregor's unexpected metamorphosis can be read quite literally as the story of sudden and disabling bodily change, wherein Gregor struggles to leave the bedroom due not only to his physical transformation, but also due to the social barriers constructed by a society that views him as monstrous. We can think about this text in a number of ways, but, at its heart, this is the story of a young man, the sole provider for his family, who awakens to find himself overcome with fatigue, his body having betrayed him such that he can't get out of bed and fulfil his role as a productive member of the workforce.

It is, in fact, his overwhelming exhaustion, not his external bodily changes, that most troubles Gregor when he first awakens. Indeed, he initially dismisses his physical transformation as an imagined product of his tiredness, 'this getting up early', and is far more concerned with the fatigue which he perceives as causing his 'purely imaginary' change and preventing him from getting out of bed.[13] Where tiredness is the one aspect of *The Metamorphosis* that so many critics are unable to see, at first, tiredness is the only thing that Gregor can see. It may seem a point of absurdity that Gregor's initial sense of horror is not at his absurd bodily transformation, but at his inability to get out of bed and the negative reaction he knows he will receive from his boss, yet this is a concern recognizable to many who have experienced severe fatigue. As he struggles to get out of bed, he fears that he will be deemed 'a perfectly healthy malingerer'.[14] He blames himself – 'what's the use of lying idle in bed?'.[15] Gregor finally determines that it is 'impossible to stay in bed, and that the most sensible course was to risk everything

[13] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories,* p. 10; p. 12.
[14] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories,* p. 11.
[15] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 13.

for the smallest hope of getting away from it'.[16] In desperation, Gregor attempts to push through and overcome his body's limitations so as to disprove allegations that he is merely 'neglecting [his] business duties in an incredible fashion'.[17] However, in the process of getting out of bed Gregor injures himself. Rising from bed, previously such a simple task, becomes incredibly painful. Determined to push through his suffering, Gregor nonetheless decides to 'pay no more attention to the pains […], however they smarted'.[18]

As is unfortunately familiar for many real-world patients with impairments or chronic conditions such as Long Covid or ME/CFS, Gregor's efforts in persevering through his suffering only leads to further injury. However, at this early stage, Gregor does not yet fully understand the significance of his predicament or the abilities of his new body, as is evidenced by his continued attempts to speak despite the changed quality of his voice. On hearing his altered voice through the door, his family finally send for a doctor, providing Gregor with the false hope that 'people now believed that something was wrong with him, and were ready to help him'.[19] He continues to turn the key to unlock the door, 'undoubtedly damaging' his mouth further.[20] Finally emerging, he declares his commitment to returning to work 'with all the more industry and concentration'.[21] However, once his family and boss see his condition, his fears are proven justified as support and compassion are still distinctly lacking: his boss, the Prokurist, flees in horror, the call for the doctor, from whom Gregor had 'hoped for great and remarkable results', is cancelled.[22] Instead, Gregor is chased violently back into the confines of his room, bruised and bleeding, the door slammed firmly behind him.

[16] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 13.
[17] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 17.
[18] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 19.
[19] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 19.
[20] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 20.
[21] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 22.
[22] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 19.

The pivotal moment when Gregor emerges from the bedroom is deeply theatrical – it is a dramatic, suspenseful event which all those present are shown to anticipate with bated breath. Gregor himself is 'eager to find out what the others, after all their insistence, would say at the sight of him',[23] deciding to allow their reactions to govern his own response to his transformation, and carefully prepares his entrance accordingly. However, despite all of Gregor's painful efforts at ensuring a successful reception, his attempts at achieving recognition and acceptance are immediately denied. The narration immediately turns away from description of Gregor's appearance to instead focus on his family and the Prokurist's reactions to seeing him; Gregor himself becomes unrepresentable, characterized by external responses to his appearance of 'not seeing, not wanting to see, retreating from and even repelling the (non)appearance'.[24] This is a rejection of representation and, as Gregor's boss the Prokurist, says, of 'an immediate and precise explanation'.[25] There is no clear meaning, no clear explanation, for Gregor's bodily changes or the fatigue they make visible. Gregor is horrifying to his waiting audience, not only due to his unexpectedly transformed appearance, but for what this appearance signifies to them: a deviation from his expected social role as employee and provider; a failure of control over his body tantamount to betrayal, 'one way of evading social responsibilities'.[26] As a result, Gregor and his symptoms are denied; he instead becomes defined by the gaze of a society in which there is no space for him.

Gregor's failed appearance, the moment he is made visible to a family that wishes not to perceive him, marks the moment at which we see 'the intersubjectivity of stigma as a social process' begin to construct the experience of his new body, for Gregor

[23] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 18.
[24] Katrin Trüstedt, 'The Fruit Fly, the Vermin, and the Prokurist: Operations of Appearing in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*', in *Cultural Techniques: Assembling Spaces, Texts & Collectives*, ed. by Jörg Dünne and others (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter GmbH, 2020), p. 303.
[25] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 17.
[26] Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 431.

and his family alike.[27] The horrified reaction toward Gregor's body displayed by his family and the Prokurist strongly influences his 'internalization of stigma, where stigma informs his sense of self',[28] and indeed, it is after this interaction that Gregor's mental state begins to deteriorate, and he begins to describe himself increasingly as a burden and object of disgust. The moment of trauma is not when Gregor awakens and discovers his transformation, but when he is denied recognition.

From the first chapter, *The Metamorphosis* is firmly grounded in bodily experience – more specifically, in the experience of the body transformed by fatigue – and the resonances between Gregor's fictional scenario and lived experiences of patients with fatiguing conditions are strong. In a world where disability is already stigmatized and treated as a barrier, fatigue, a potentially incapacitating yet invisible and therefore contestable symptom, can be especially stigmatized. So altered and dehumanized is Gregor's new fatigued form that his family eventually draws into question whether the 'creature' could really be their son/brother, charging that if it were Gregor, 'he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away of his own accord'.[29] Where invisible fatigue is readily overlooked and stigmatized, even when it comes with visible, physical form, the fatigued body is still positioned as grotesque and overly burdensome.

An equally important, invisible element of Gregor's metamorphosis and subsequent dehumanization is his abrupt loss of spoken language after the first chapter. Even prior to seeing him, Gregor's family draw into question his humanity due to his disturbing, altered voice – 'Did you hear how he was speaking?' 'That was no human voice'.[30] Following his family's violent rejection of him, whether due to loss of physical

[27] Sprague, p. 13.
[28] Sprague, p. 12.
[29] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 57.
[30] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 19.

ability or the trauma of this interaction, never again does Gregor speak. Gregor's loss of voice and spoken language with which to communicate further dehumanizes him in the eyes of his family, who bemoan what they wrongly perceive as his equal inability to understand them. This is not for lack of effort on Gregor's part: though he does not speak, he structures his daily routine around accommodating the preferences of his caretakers and responding to the discomforts they themselves communicate even where this causes him difficulty. Nonetheless, with Gregor's loss of language, his 'kinship is no longer recognized': 'unable to speak and act as a normal human being', he is increasingly viewed as inhuman; as a vermin that can and should be treated as such.[31] As stated by Ruyu Hung, at the centre of such logic is this unnerving message: 'one who is not (taken as) a human being deserves no humanly treatment'.[32]

The difficulties surrounding communication of fatigue deserve further consideration at this point. Accurately describing experiences of illness has been the topic of discussion by the likes of Woolf, who laments that '[t]he merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare, Donne, Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry'.[33] The same holds true for those trying to convey symptoms of fatigue. In some ways, conveying the extent to which fatigue can debilitate may prove even more difficult, given the universal understanding of everyday tiredness. As tiredness is something that everyone is familiar with, this may lead to a false sense of recognition, whereby non- sufferers incorrectly assume they understand the fatigue being described while in fact underestimating a symptom that can be profoundly debilitating.[34] Further, fatigue itself has a literal

[31] Ruyu Hung, 'Caring About Strangers: A Lingisian reading of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 45.4 (2013), 436-447 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2012.718102> (p. 439).
[32] Hung, p. 439.
[33] Woolf, 'On Being Ill', p. 34.
[34] Stenhoff and others, p. 202.

negative impact on the ability to 'speak and act as a normal human being',[35] as anyone who has tried to communicate clearly while experiencing even the effects of more mundane tiredness will recognize. Of course, when fatigue becomes more severe, so too do its effects on patients' communication skills, compounding the difficulties already present for patients who may face stigma for being housebound or bedbound for no easily recognizable reason.

3.2 Fatigue and Care: 'how simple it would be if he could get help'[36]

For myself, the most disturbing aspect of *The Metamorphosis* is the aforementioned disgust toward and increasingly dehumanizing treatment of Gregor by his family. Gregor is repeatedly subjected to violence from his father and, as the story progresses, the initial caregiving efforts made by his sister, Grete, fade away. Though minimal from the start – Grete brings him food and cleans his room, though she flees at the sight of him – over time she '[grows] tired of looking after Gregor as she did formerly'.[37] Where initially Grete spent the effort to find what foods he liked, she begins to 'hurriedly [push] into his room with her foot any food that was available', with the result that Gregor often goes without eating.[38] The room Gregor is locked within becomes increasingly dirty: 'streaks of dust stretched along the walls, here and there lay balls of dust and filth'.[39] Eventually, '[a]nything that was not needed for the moment was simply flung into Gregor's room', with the result that Gregor is unable to move within his room and instead, 'being sad and weary to death, he would lie motionless for hours'.[40] Gregor himself becomes increasingly more filthy as 'his indifference to everything was much too great for him to

[35] Hung, p. 439.
[36] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 14.
[37] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 49.
[38] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 48.
[39] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 48.
[40] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 50.

turn on his back and scrape himself clean'.[41] Following the climactic declaration from Grete that '[h]e must go […] that's the only solution' and his father's agreement, Gregor retreats to his room determined that 'he must disappear', and dies.[42] His corpse, when found, is described as 'completely flat and dry', because '[i]t's such a long time since [he'd] eaten anything'.[43] Gregor is repeatedly positioned both by his family members and himself as a monstrous burden; his need for care as overly demanding and thus eliciting his family's exhaustion and justifying their treatment of him.

Long-term chronic illness disrupts stable categories of well/unwell and expected protocols of recovery, leading to challenges in the perceptions of chronically ill individuals who may be seen to be abusing the privileges given to those in the sick role, which is intended to be temporary.[44] Whereas there are an abundance of clear formulas for restitution narratives, in which the unwell individual makes a recovery, and tragic narratives, in which death provides narrative closure, there is a distinct absence of narrative both for patients who become chronically ill and for their caregivers. We can see the difficulty this presents in *The Metamorphosis* when, despite the initial care provided for Gregor by his family, especially Grete, Gregor fails to adhere to either of the expected outcomes of illness: getting better or dying within a set period of time. With Gregor's care constructed as a horrifying burden, after several months the Samsas determine that they have 'tried to look after it and to put up with it as far as is humanly possible' and, as Grete states, they 'don't think anyone could reproach [them] in the slightest' if they 'try to get rid of it' because 'things can't go on like this'.[45] Gregor, by not recovering, dying, or otherwise having 'gone away of his own accord', is increasingly viewed as an antagonistic figure by his family, one who prevents them from

[41] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, pp. 52-53.
[42] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 56; p. 58.
[43] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, pp. 59-60.
[44] Parsons, pp. 436-438.
[45] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 56.

being ‘able to go on living […] and would have [them] all sleep in the gutter’.[46] Unable to access support, whether due to the Samsa’s determination to hide their ‘shameful’ family member, financial inability, the absence of social support, or all of the above, the family is indeed in a challenging position – and, in their fear and inability to understand Gregor’s seeming refusal to follow the accepted rules of sickness, Gregor is positioned as intentionally difficult, even deliberately cruel.

As with Gregor, many patients suffering from severe fatigue are made dependent on support from family and friends: yet as time passes their condition may lead to changes in their appearance, physical and mental abilities, and even in their ability to communicate, such that ‘one finds oneself a stranger’.[47] And, as has been seen time and again, those deemed strange Others are far easier to dehumanize and are far less likely to be deemed rational in their concerns or deserving of care. It is exactly this alienation that occurs in *The Metamorphosis*: following Gregor’s climactic discovery by the three lodgers, Grete abruptly shifts in her pronominal designation of him: ‘We must get rid of it’.[48] Grete continues to slip between using he/it pronouns for Gregor as she seemingly struggles to convince both her parents and herself that ‘if this were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that human beings can’t live with such a creature’.[49] Unable to reconcile her previous understandings of her brother with his altered, needy form, Grete seeks to further deny his humanity in order to justify her negative feelings toward him.

Yet another form of fatigue appears in depictions of Gregor’s ‘overworked and tired-out family’ who must take on a range of jobs and who fall into a state of ‘complete hopelessness’ as they ‘fulfilled to the uttermost all that the world demands of poor people’.[50] The language of exhaustion increasingly permeates descriptions of Gregor’s

[46] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 57.
[47] Hung, p. 441.
[48] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 56.
[49] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 57.
[50] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 46; p. 47.

family members: his father routinely falls asleep 'fully dressed where he [sits]'; Grete is 'exhausted by her daily work'; his mother's eyes are described as 'almost closing for sheer weariness'.[51] While Gregor notes that a touchiness seemed 'to have infected the whole family', it can be equally argued that the Samsas have all been infected with fatigue.[52] There are unfortunate real-world parallels to the Samsas feelings of exhaustion and disgust toward Gregor: not only is caregiving work demanding, but empathy fatigue and feelings of disgust toward patients are not infrequently experienced by caregivers.[53] Indeed, *The Metamorphosis* has been used as an educational text for caregivers with the aim of improving care and '[defending] individuals' humanity […] when long-term critical or chronic illness seems to have changed them utterly'.[54]

The difficulties of caregiving notwithstanding, the negative views the Samsas hold toward Gregor, and his subsequent poor treatment, are not only morally reprehensible but also impact on Gregor's very real potential for greater self-sufficiency and contribution to his family. Gregor is hidden away in his bedroom, out of his family's sight: even as his family is forced to restructure itself around his changed body, the actual presence of Gregor himself is unwelcome and in turn he is repeatedly denied any agency he may have been able to exert were he accepted in his new form. Though fatigue presents a very real obstacle that is not strictly social in nature, Gregor himself notes during his initial struggle to leave his bed that with assistance even such a challenging task would be simple.[55] Of course, help is not forthcoming, nor is social acceptance of his altered body: Gregor is denied access back into society not only by his new form, but by his unaccommodating, violent family. Confined out of sight, Gregor

[51] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 45; p. 49; p. 57.
[52] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 48.
[53] Michael Rowe, '*Metamorphosis*: Defending the Human', *Literature and Medicine*, 21.2 (2022), 264-280 <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/20311/pdf> [accessed 16 June 2022] (p. 264).
[54] Rowe, p. 264.
[55] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 14.

feels the increasing burden of needing to 'help the family to bear the inconvenience he was bound to cause them in his present condition', even as they refuse to seek help out of shame of their son.[56]

Previous analyses comment on Gregor losing both his hope and his sense of Self in relation to Heidegger's concept of Da-sein (there being), and to consider existentialism in modernism more broadly.[57] Gregor does indeed suffer immensely and increasingly loses hope as the text progresses – however, this mostly occurs following the violent conflict in chapter two, when he is brutally injured by his father after trying to stop his mother and sister from removing his belongings. It is important to note that prior to this assault, he is 'portrayed as growing accustomed to his new form with remarkable ease and speed' and at points 'seems to relish the process of discovering the capabilities of his new form, something he is alone in appreciating'.[58] Quick to learn his new abilities and hindrances despite the traumatic initial morning, Gregor still perceives himself as capable and worthy – 'not quite so well as I thought', but 'alright, really'.[59] Though this is said in his early state of desperation, in the hopes of retaining his job, Gregor consistently fights to retain his sense of Self and purpose, and to better his plight, but is denied – often not by his body, but by those around him. Throughout the entirety of the text, even after his father's attack – arguably even while dying – Gregor never stops trying to find ways to help his family. While some critics have referred to Gregor's constant pursuit of supporting his family as indicative of his own absence of Da-sein,

[56] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 28.
[57] Lewis Livesay, 'Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*: Gregor's Da-sein Paralyzed by Debt', in *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, (Hanover: Springer, 2007), pp. 367-394; Pavlos E. Michaelides, 'Modernity and the Existential Metaphysics of Life and Death in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*', *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, 9.4 (2017), 101-118 <http://ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/modernity-existential-metaphysics-life-death/docview/1899786154/se-2> [accessed October 2 2022].
[58] O'Connor, p. 59.
[59] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 18.

referring to him as 'one who does not belong to himself',[60] this is nonetheless Gregor's earnest desire and is one of the few aspects of his life that he has some control over following his metamorphosis. Even small actions such as Gregor's sad hiding of himself beneath a blanket to spare Grete from the sight of him require significant effort and are, especially within the narrow, abusive context he lives in, expressions of Self and agency. Gregor quickly adapts to his new body, and repeatedly tries to show his potential to those around him but is instead locked into a place of rest and denied entry into the world of the waking. Though able to enjoy moments of repose, Gregor is nonetheless limited by socially erected barriers in the activities he can partake in, and is sadly left to crawl aimlessly within the confines of the bedroom until he becomes too tired to continue.

3.3 Productivity & Burden: 'O God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on!'[61]

Gregor's sudden and dramatic transformation leads him to become 'factically limited by both the physical changes to [his] body and by [his] abjection by society'.[62] He is not only a transgressor of the boundary between human and animal, but also of the boundary between the upright, waking body, associated with energy, productivity and masculinity, and the recumbent body associated with laziness, femininity and death.[63] Gregor's new body is one that, even in waking, is naturally horizontal: he has permanently ceased to be a soldier 'in the army of the upright'.[64] The associations of Gregor's recumbent body are such that it becomes not only stigmatized, but a visible threat to the normative,

[60] Livesay, p. 367.
[61] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 9.
[62] Shaun May, 'Abject Metamorphosis and Mirthless Laughter: On human-to-animal transitions and 'the disease of being finite'', *Performance Research,* 19.1 (2014), 72-80 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2014.908086> (p. 76).
[63] Hornby, p. 8.
[64] Woolf, 'On Being Ill', p. 37.

upright bodies around him and to the broader production- oriented society. After all, if Gregor, the previously able-bodied sole provider for his family could suffer such a sudden, inexplicable and incurable metamorphosis, then so too could others. His altered, fatigued body acts as a visible, uncomfortable reminder of our own frailty, and 'can be read as analogous to the bodily failure that we all experience, to a greater or lesser extent, at some point in our lives'.[65]

This is, of course, yet another way for us to understand *The Metamorphosis*: as a story of exhaustion induced by overwork and the draining effects of capitalism on the lower classes. We have long made monsters of our greatest social anxieties. The transformation of Gregor is no exception, however, determining what is truly monstrous about the text is not so simple. In the rather controversial analysis by Theodor Adorno, whose Marxist reading, 'Notes on Kafka', considered 'the culture of disintegrating commodities under monopolistic capital',[66] Adorno argues that 'Kafka unmasks monopolism by focusing on the waste-products of the liberal era that it liquidates'.[67] Within the capitalist framework, Adorno argues, 'the slightest 'deviation' becomes a threat to [its] basic principal', leading to a 'disintegration of individuality' even as such excluded aspects 'define it all the more precisely in its negative'.[68] Such negatives, rather than merely acting as a foil against which the system can define its superiority, also become symptomatic of its own monstrosity. The sudden disabling of the productive body within a demanding capitalist society creates not only anxiety in the individual worker, whose impairment translates into financial penalty, but also within the rapidly changing modernist society itself. The inexhaustibility and relentlessness of some earlier monsters such as Dracula highlights their 'absolute otherness', in turn

[65] May, p. 75.
[66] Stephen Corngold, *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 142.
[67] Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel Weber & Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 257.
[68] Adorno, p. 256; p. 260; p. 256.

casting exhaustion in a positive light through its association with humanity.[69] However, we could view Gregor's transformation as having the opposite message: that it is the fatigued, exhausted body, a body we're all close to having, which is the site of horror. In *Dracula*, the increasing fatigue of Lucy, and later Mina, has clear justification – they are victims whose energy is drained by Dracula to fuel his own monstrous relentlessness. In contrast, while the cause of Gregor's transformation into the monstrous, fatigued figure of the oversized vermin has been the source of speculation, Kafka offers no clear cause or meaning within the text. With no clear reason for his transformation and unable to provide for his family, who are then forced to work themselves, Gregor is increasingly perceived and perceives himself as an unpleasant and meaningless burden to his family. By the end of the text, Gregor's fatigued body quite literally becomes a product of waste, his life having been altered absurdly and without meaning.

However, to myself, it is Gregor's family and the society he lives in that becomes the greatest cause of horror, rather than his physical transformation. The violence and rejection the Samsas direct toward Gregor throughout the text prevent any joy at the ending which sees the family happy and improving in circumstances following the death of his fatigued body which allows Grete's energetic, desirable one to take his place. The effect of Gregor's family rejoicing at his death is instead disturbing: within a capitalist framework, is rejection and death the only acceptable ending for non-normative, fatigued bodies that fail to produce? Is the rejection and ending of such lives the only hope for family members to lead fulfilling lives themselves? By choosing to situate Gregor as the protagonist up until the final pages of the text and permitting his family a 'happy' ending, Kafka seems to challenge such a belief while simultaneously acknowledging that this same harsh reality is a common, almost normalized reality for

[69] Greaney, 'Literary Exhaustion', p. 247.

many.

That usually invisible fatigue is given a physical, monstrous form is nonetheless cause for pause. Despite Kafka having forbidden his publisher from including illustrations of Gregor[70] – which has been repeatedly ignored, as images of Gregor plaster the covers of many a copy of *The Metamorphosis* – through the descriptions of Gregor in prose, readers still have access to a (albeit vague) mental image of him. And this is an image that is, aesthetic preferences aside, intentionally made grotesque; a form with snapping jaws, 'armour-plated' and 'segmented', that crawls on 'numerous legs', trailing 'fluff and hair and remnants of food'.[71] Whether intentionally or not, the fatigued body is made visibly repulsive, a decision that can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, we can consider Gregor's monstrous form as a representation of the internal experience of both the physical suffering and the mental/emotional trauma that come with chronic fatigue. So often overlooked and underestimated due to its invisibility, there is a certain power in giving fatigue such a vivid, disturbing bodily form. Such an unpleasant form further heightens the intensity of disgust displayed by Gregor's family, thereby enabling us to see explicitly the effects of the external gaze. The stigma and judgement directed toward Gregor are shown to have a clear impact both on his own sense of self-worth and on his literal, physical experience, as his seemingly inhuman form is used as justification for the cruel, inhumane treatment displayed toward him by his family.

However, we can also understand this choice as one that is inherently problematic, as the fatigued, disabled body is literally depicted as a monstrous burden, the removal of which seems to be a net positive for the Samsa's wellbeing and socio-economic standing. As such, this depiction feeds into unfortunate, negative stereotypes

[70] Stanley Corngold, *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 67.
[71] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 9; pp. 52-53.

of individuals with disabilities and/or fatiguing conditions and can, in the worst case, strengthen these damaging beliefs. When not interrogated further, this interpretation leads to cynical readings, whereby the text appears to manoeuvre 'readers into adopting an attitude that they first would have rejected as inhuman and callous': that Gregor 'who gains our sympathy but not our affection, is actually superfluous and may have been so from the start'.[72] *The Metamorphosis* has been read in this manner several times: in one notable instance shortly after its publication, Karl Müller, a young author deeply ill with tuberculosis and himself unable to leave his apartment, attempted to give Gregor an alternate ending in 'The ReMetamorphosis of Gregor Samsa' whereby he was rehabilitated back into society.[73] Though Müller's distaste toward the ending is understandable, I disagree with such readings of *The Metamorphosis*. Rather, I feel the text is driven by a profound sense of empathy for Gregor and acts as an inditement of the callous attitudes displayed toward him and, in turn, toward similar treatment of individuals in the real world. Though perhaps a gentler ending, or conclusion rehabilitating Gregor could have prevented such negative interpretations of the text, this would also risk diminishing the overall emotional effect and undermining the real trauma experienced by many who have struggled with severe fatigue and subsequent stigmatization.

There is, finally, the risk that Gregor could be viewed as an example of Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis, exemplifying 'the materiality of metaphor' as for some readers and critics his disabled body 'serves as a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse'.[74] On the contrary, though his body has indeed been altered in a fantastical way, I find that Kafka's descriptions of the bodily sensations Gregor feels and

[72] Reiner Stach, *Kafka: The Decisive Years*, trans. by Shelley Frisch, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 204.
[73] Stach, p. 204.
[74] David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, 'Narrative Prosthesis', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 222-235, (p. 222).

the treatment that he endures are eerily realistic representations of chronic fatigue. Further, my understanding of *The Metamorphosis* as a clear criticism of the disabling treatment of Gregor by his family and broader society leads me to view the text as something far more radical: a text that reverses such expectations, and instead, through the literalization of a metaphor that seeks to dehumanize, critiques such metaphors for the cruelty they encourage. Though the fatigued body is indeed characterized as a grotesque, burdensome Other, the overall depiction of Gregor is more nuanced: he is shown to adapt rapidly to his shifting abilities, to care doggedly, if ill-advisedly, for his family, and to be in constant search for opportunities to contribute to his household's wellbeing. As with the theory of complex embodiment, Gregor is shown to be affected by a blend of both his changes in physical ability and by his disabling environment. However, the text indicates that Gregor is restricted more so by the barriers erected to keep him hidden, and by lack of acceptance and accommodation, than by the changes he has undergone in and of themselves – and these barriers, these violences done to him, are far more monstrous than a body transformed into a form made outwardly grotesque.

3.4 Spaces of rest, spaces of sin: 'through the crack in the door'[75]

In a recent conversation with my mother, she described her experience of life since becoming largely bedbound as largely consisting of a series of ceilings, of narrow slivered views through windows, dislocated from any sense of place beyond the home, each of which she memorised over time. As our family underwent a series of moves and my mother's condition worsened, she lost her previously strong sense of direction and the world as she knew it shrank from a country, to a city, to a street, to her bedroom and the top story of the house across the road as viewed through the window. While

[75] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 27.

explaining this experience, my mother recalled with great detail the window views she associated with the last three homes she had lived in: the retirement home across the street in Hamburg, the concrete fence seen from a ground-level room, the white frame of the window across the street from her own. Though she could vaguely place where she lived within Hamburg, still having had the ability to leave the home occasionally, the next two homes, she said, could have been anywhere in the world if not for the fact that she knew the name of her city. As she shared this with me, I was immediately reminded of Gregor's own description of his own, important window view:

> Often he just lay there the long nights through without sleeping at all, scrabbling for hours on the leather. Or he nerved himself to the great effort of pushing an arm-chair to the window, then crawled up over the window-sill and, braced against the chair, leaned against the window-panes, obviously in some recollection of the sense of freedom that looking out of a window always used to give him. For in reality, day by day, things that were even a little way off were growing dimmer to his sight; the hospital across the street, which he used to execrate for being all too often before his eyes, was now quite beyond his range of vision, and if he had not known that he lived in Charlotte Street, a quiet street but still a city street, he might have believed that his window gave on a desert waste where grey sky and grey land blended indistinguishably into each other.[76]

As with my mother, the bedroom becomes for Gregor a place not only of rest, privacy, and safety, but a space closely bound with the shifting realities of body and identity. The bedroom, usually considered a space of the personal, is perhaps especially so for the chronically ill individual who may struggle to leave the room. Unfortunately, this can become a space not only of privacy, but one of entrapment, the physical representation

[76] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories,* p. 34.

of the new limitations of an altered body. I stress that this is not to paint the experience of impairment or illness, one which the majority of us will live through ourselves at least once, as destined to be purely negative and restrictive – I firmly believe this to be untrue – but to acknowledge the definite challenges that come with accepting and adapting to changes in mental and physical abilities. Of course, in the case of Gregor, the rejection of his new body and the ensuing barriers this creates for him cause his bedroom, quite literally, to become a place of imprisonment. Not only does Gregor's ability to see the outside world from his bedroom literally fade along with his eyesight; his increasing alienation from his family and his previous sense of Self can also be tracked through his descriptions of the room itself. In this way, the space and configuration of the bedroom plays a critical role both in Gregor's perspectivisation of his bodily state, and in his perception of his own shifting identity.

Gregor's story begins and ends in the bedroom, with its middle consisting of a series of surreal, nightmarish events. It is important to consider the fact that *The Metamorphosis* takes place predominantly in the bedroom, which, as the space where sleep occurs, is metonymically tied to rest and other bedroom activities. The bed itself in *The Metamorphosis* becomes a site not of positive transformation – of creativity, or the restoration provided by sleep – but of uncanny change. It becomes a site not of safety, where one can relax in private, but of unexpected, unwanted bodily alteration: a failure of rest resulting from sleep 'done wrong'. As the confining, private space of the room is increasingly intruded into, the room becomes a space for additional exposure and stigmatization.

Gregor's bedroom merits careful description in the second paragraph of *The Metamorphosis* – an even longer description than is given to his new body – and it is through the description of his room that we as readers are told who Gregor is and what his life was like prior to his transformation. The room is described as 'a regular human

bedroom, only rather too small, [laying] quiet between the four familiar walls'.[77] This is a depiction that offers much information about Gregor himself: prior to his metamorphosis he was by the given accounts a regular human, rather restricted as an individual by the claustrophobic expectations of work and family, but 'a quiet, dependable person', uncomfortably accustomed to the safe familiarity of his discontent.[78] As with Pauline's office-bedroom in *Twilight Sleep*, expectations of productivity are shown to have intruded into the realm of his personal life: Gregor's professional life as a 'commercial traveller', a job he wishes to quit, messily invades the private space of his bedroom as his table is covered with 'a collection of cloth samples […] unpacked and spread out'.[79] The one item indicating to Gregor's own preferences and personality is 'the picture which he has recently cut out of an illustrated magazine' of 'a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole'.[80] Description of this photograph, carefully framed and elevated above his work materials, takes up nearly half of the paragraph and has been the subject of considerable analysis, as I will return to. For the moment, however, let us simply acknowledge the photo as Gregor's one attempt at personalizing his otherwise inconspicuous room, and therefore as an item strongly tied to his sense of identity.

Gregor's initial attempt to leave his bed, then bedroom, so as to return to work is, by nature of this association, also an attempt to escape himself and his newly fatigued body. Again, though this reading does make a metaphorical leap, Gregor himself directly complains of his exhaustion while attempting to leave the bedroom, further solidifying this connection: he initially considers 'sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense' and blames his predicament on having 'an exhausting job', and of 'getting up early' which 'makes one quite stupid' as 'a man needs his sleep'.[81] Continuing to blame himself for his

[77] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 34.
[78] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 17.
[79] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 9.
[80] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 9.
[81] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, pp. 9-10.

condition, Gregor determines that 'he [feels] quite well, apart from a drowsiness that was utterly superfluous after such a long sleep' – yet four pages later, he still finds himself 'actually incapable of leaving his bed'.[82] When he finally escapes the bed, a feat that requires all of his strength, he falls back to the floor. Once standing again to open the door, Gregor is so exhausted he needs to '[catch] hold of the door for support […] and [rest] against it for a moment after his efforts'.[83] Leaving the bedroom, a task that is, to the able-bodied, so simple as to be overlooked as a task at all, for Gregor becomes incredibly challenging and takes over thirty minutes to accomplish.

Of course, no sooner does Gregor exit his bedroom than he is violently returned to it by his father, and falls back into 'a deep sleep, more like a swoon than a sleep'.[84] The room, within which he is now locked, is depicted rather differently: awakening on the floor following his father's attack, Gregor finds he has been removed from the sheen of the outside lights – 'down below, where he lay, it was dark' – and has been left physically isolated, only able to see 'through the crack of the door'.[85] Further, the 'lofty, empty room in which he had to lie flat on the floor' increasingly fills 'him with an apprehension he could not account for, since it had been his very own room for the past five years'.[86] The bedroom becomes an unsettling place by nature of his altered body, and its uncanniness interferes with Gregor's ability to consider 'how he was to arrange his life afresh'.[87] Again, Gregor proves adaptive: he scuttles 'under the sofa, where he felt comfortable at once' – yet acknowledging the new needs of his body and allowing himself these new accommodations causes him to experience 'a slight feeling of shame'.[88] Having responding to his altered needs, however, Gregor wakes to find that '[h]is wounds must have healed

[82] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 11; p. 15.
[83] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 20.
[84] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 26.
[85] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, pp. 26-27.
[86] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 28.
[87] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 28.
[88] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 28.

completely, moreover, for he felt no disability'.[89] Though his changed view of his room initially causes Gregor understandable unease, he is able to quickly recognize how he could fit into this space.

However, the stigma and fear felt by the Samsas is such that even well- intentioned attempts at supporting him are done without any consultation of Gregor himself. When Grete and Mrs. Samsa determine to remove Gregor's belongings from his bedroom so as to make the space more accessible for him, he is initially grateful – yet, this becomes an overstep, once Gregor realizes that they are 'taking away everything he [loves].'[90] Though Grete and Mrs. Samsa's removal of Gregor's belongings would provide Gregor with more space to crawl, this also becomes an intrusion into his most private of spaces, and the removal of his prized belongings a removal of pieces of himself. This implies that, as his mother expresses concern over, they have 'given up hope of his ever getting better'.[91] Though the removal of his furniture had indeed been something Gregor 'had quite earnestly looked forward to', following his mother's statements, Gregor is roused into a state of crisis whereby he determines that 'nothing should be taken out of his room; everything must stay as it was; he could not dispense with the good influence of the furniture on his state of mind'.[92] The objects which populated his room, which had become so closely tied in with his identity and his ability to cling to his previous body and lifestyle, are suddenly made precious; in need of 'rescue'.[93] Were Gregor included in such decisions – as Grete knew was possible, given her earlier experiments to determine what he could eat– he could have retained a sense of agency and inclusion, and accommodations could have been made in a beneficial manner. Instead, the bedroom – the one space of relative safety and privacy Gregor is permitted – is intruded upon and altered without his consent,

[89] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 29.
[90] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 40.
[91] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 38.
[92] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 38.
[93] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 40.

and his defence of this space leads to further violence toward him.

In his desperation to prevent the removal of his belongings, Gregor leaves his hiding space and crawls up the wall to cover his beloved picture of the woman in furs so that he hides it completely. As I have mentioned, Gregor's investment in this photo has been the cause of considerable academic analyses – analyses that I would now like to consider in light of my own. Whereas I read *The Metamorphosis* as a text that is inescapably invested in the fatigued body, far more common are analyses invested in Gregor's sexuality and potential deviancy. Such analyses regularly draw on Gregor's preoccupation with this photo and, I posit, may be influenced by the predominant setting of the bedroom, a space associated not only with sleep, but with privacy and sexuality, as I will return to in the following chapter. To further unpack such analyses, it is beneficial to consider the full description of this photo, one which

> he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished.[94]

As noted by Mark M. Anderson, both the photo of the woman in furs and aspects of the plot for *The Metamorphosis* seem to be borrowed from Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's 1880 erotic work, *Venus in Furs*, within which the protagonist is metaphorically transformed into an animal as part of a punishment fantasy.[95] Yet, even as Anderson acknowledges the erotic associations of this image, he also draws attention to the way in which these are subverted; the 'movement toward 'animality' and masochistic desire' failing to result 'in sin and guilt but in a cleansing of these 'human' remnants from Gregor's past'.[96] Given the similarities with *Venus in Furs*, consideration of sexuality in

[94] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 9.
[95] Mark M. Anderson, 'Sliding Down the Evolutionary Ladder? Aesthetic Autonomy in *The Metamorphosis*' in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Metamorphosis - New Edition*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), p. 86.
[96] Anderson, 'Sliding Down the Evolutionary Ladder?', p. 87.

The Metamorphosis seems a fruitful focus of analysis. Yet, the focus on sexuality, especially sexual deviancy, not only appears to have masked the literal fatigue in *The Metamorphosis*, but also privileges the bedroom as a space of sexuality over one of rest, reasserting the connection between the fatigued body and sexual deviancy (a connection I find again in *At Swim-Two-Birds*).

Deleuze and Guattari analyse the dynamic of the Samsa family through their reframing of the Oedipus complex, one in which the family organization acts to control and repress the desires of its members, contributing to desire production, and, in turn, social production.[97] This reading has influenced numerous analyses, focusing criticism on the sexual, and, by extension, the socio-political. Feminist literary scholar Nina Pelikan Straus offers a different perspective, albeit one still invested in gender and sexuality. Straus considers the photo of the woman in furs as indicating both Gregor's 'male erotic response to women, the desire to stick a phallic 'forearm' into a fur muff, and Gregor's identification with a lady encased in fur the way he is encased in armour', as well as to the photo's potentiality as a 'metaphor for a male-female compound'.[98] Work from Boa considers the photograph as a means of expressing 'animalesque desire for the animalesque female', and for its role in conveying Gregor's 'loss of manhood […] the loss of humanity'.[99] With Gregor's loss of income, social standing, and subsequently of the ability to control whether his door is locked, he loses further elements of his own freedom. As mentioned in 2.3, this leads scholars such as Boa to describe Gregor as becoming increasingly feminized, as is indicated by his room which, following his metamorphosis, 'is open to endless penetrations'.[100]

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[97] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p. 67. For more exploration of Deleuze and Guattari's theories of schizophrenia and the anti-Oedipus complex, see: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem & Helen R. Lane (New York: The Viking Press, 1977).

[98] Nina Pelikan Straus, 'Transforming Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis"', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14.3 (1989), 651-667 <https://doi.org/10.1086/494528> (p. 661).

[99] Boa, p. 25; pp. 25-26.

[100] Boa, p. 21.

Scholars show a repeated tendency to analyse *The Metamorphosis* in relation to sexuality and emasculation, and frequently utilize this to discuss broader social dynamics. There is indeed much of value to be explored here. However, in the search for broader social meaning, critics have also repeatedly overlooked, and at times recreated, stigmatizing views of the fatigued body and the bedroom as sites of sexual deviancy.

3.5 A Legacy of Unease: 'Furo Wariboko awoke this morning to find that dreams can lose their way and turn up on the wrong side of sleep'[101]

In the introduction to this chapter, I stated that Kafka's depiction of the fatigued body as vermin seemingly refused romanticisation. Though this is largely true – Gregor's transformation into vermin and subsequent suffering is by no means considered desirable – this has not prevented attempts to romanticise *The Metamorphosis*. I think first of the considerable social power of the text both within and outside of academia: not only does the enormous scholarly edifice surrounding *The Metamorphosis* indicate an academic infatuation with the text, so well-known is the novella that even many of those who haven't read it are familiar with its premise due to its prominence in popular culture. Memes referencing *The Metamorphosis* were popularized by Rage Comic and Cheezburger edits as early as 2008 and have seen a resurgence of popularity since March 2020, perhaps unsurprisingly coinciding with the rise of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns.[102] I also think of the many creative adaptations of *The Metamorphosis*: following Karl Müller's 'The ReMetamorphosis of Gregor Samsa', there have been numerous literary, film, stage, comic, radio, and even video game adaptations of *The Metamorphosis*.[103] Some of these texts make use of the premise of awakening

[101] A. Igoni Barrett, *Blackass* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p. 3.

[102] KnowYourMeme, 'The Metamorphosis', *KnowYourMeme* (2021) <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/the-metamorphosis> [accessed 22 March 2023].

[103] See, for example: Marc Estrin, *Insect Dreams: The Half Life of Gregor Samsa* (New York: Penguin

transformed, as in Igoni A. Barrett's novel, *Blackass*, or, following in Müller's shoes, offer Gregor an alternative, less tragic, ending, as in Marc Estrin's *Insect Life: The Half Life of Gregor Samsa*. The recurring drive to soften *The Metamorphosis*, rewriting the ending to allow Gregor to escape, as in the *Metamorphosis* video game, or having him transform into a more appealing body, as in *The Meowmorphosis*, suggests a tension between the audience's desire to romanticise a text that adamantly refutes romanticisation.

As I have mentioned in relation to Müller's adaptation, it is understandable that some may be distressed by Gregor's tragic mistreatment and death – yet attempts to soften Kafka's blow are not without their own problematic elements. These rewrites, in their attempts to metonymically change the world by changing the text, gloss over what is for some real-world patients a harsh reality in need of attention. Further, these adaptations repeatedly overlook the fatigue that permeates *The Metamorphosis*, creating instead a narrative of correction wherein Gregor's abilities are often drastically enhanced. Such attempts to re-energize the text create impossible expectations for real fatigued bodies: while audiences are permitted to escape from the discomfort, it can be impossible for those with genuine fatigue to escape or overcome their bodies in such a way, and indeed harmful to attempt to do so, as Gregor himself experienced while first attempting to leave his bedroom. This suggests an uncomfortable refusal to engage with conditions that aren't viewed as compatible with happy endings – a denial that not only attempts to reposition fatigue as invisible, but that simultaneously refuses fatigued bodies the possibility of kind treatment and happy endings. The only adaptation of the story that could improve Gregor's circumstances without minimizing his condition is sadly the one that is not being told: one where he receives better care and is accepted as

Publishing Group, 2002); *Metamorphosis* (Warsaw: Ovid Works, 2020) [PC]; Franz Kafka and Coleridge Cook, *The Meowmorphosis* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2011).

he is with his transformed body.

While the trope of awakening to find one's body changed is consistently retained in adaptations of *The Metamorphosis* and acknowledged within literary criticism, interest in fatigue and sleep 'done wrong' seems to end there for academics and lay audiences alike. This is not an isolated instance: I again find this oversight when turning to *At Swim-Two-Birds*, a text that is quite different from *The Metamorphosis*, yet nonetheless relies heavily on depictions of fatigue that are regularly overlooked. However, where *The Metamorphosis* offers a deeply embodied, tragic, and empathetic perspective on the fatigued male body, and one which literally makes fatigue visible as vermin, in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* I find a quite different engagement with the bodies of men, in which fatigue makes them verminous.

Chapter 4 : Becoming Verminous: Fatigue in *At Swim-Two-Birds*

As is reflected in the structure of this thesis, I came to *At Swim-Two-Birds* after *The Metamorphosis*, with little awareness of its premise beyond the fact that it featured a character who had been bedbound for twenty years. In fact, I first opened the novel while at my parent's house, following a discussion with my mother about the limited view she had from her bedroom window. I began reading while in the living room – a room that my mother was denied access to, given that it was downstairs – and found myself increasingly uneasy. Whereas Kafka approaches Gregor's fatigued body with empathy, offering nuanced critique of the ideology that led to his cruel treatment, Flann O'Brien explicitly draws upon and replicates stigmatizing constructions of the fatigued body to facilitate his story, positioning these bodies as the butt of his joke. In *The Metamorphosis* I found a space held for myself, my mother, and others kept outside the structures of ability, but this was not the case with *At Swim-Two-Birds*, where the fatigued body is offered the most limited of possibilities.

Flann O'Brien is considered one of the most significant authors of Irish modernist fiction, and, increasingly, in the modernist canon as a whole. His writing is known for its complex plots, dark, satirical humour, and engagement with both metaphysics and metafiction. His novels, with *The Third Policeman* an exemplary example, illustrate a deep interest in the boundary between Self and Other, and a concern about just how (un)stable these boundaries may be, as according to the Atomic Theory presented in that novel even the very atoms at the core of our being are only tenuously our own. These anxieties frequently appear through the unpredictable, grotesque, and abject bodies of O'Brien's predominantly male characters, who often seem incapable of adhering to the bodily borders of social expectation.

Describing the modernist relationship with body and mind, Ástráður Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska state that '[m]odernism has often been seen as an art of interiority and subjectivity. […] When taking a closer look, we may begin to suspect that rather than mediating the inner motions of the mind, modernism is attending to the invisible and slippery border between the inner and the outer self.'[1] As discussed in 1.2, the uncanny, mysterious nature of sleep and sleeping or fatigued bodies has perplexed philosophers throughout the twentieth century, in part because of the very same negotiation between inner and outer Self. Yet, research on sleep and fatigue in modernist literature has been remarkably limited, often netting no more than a passing mention. This is especially peculiar when considering the works of O'Brien, where the erasure of Self and bodily integrity, leading to an ontological confusion between inside and outside, is a recurring theme.[2] While this troubling of borders has been most frequently located in more explicit examples, as in *The Third Policeman* where, in accordance with Atomic Theory, frequent cyclists 'get their personalities mixed up with the personalities of the bicycles' and become 'half people and half bicycles',[3] O'Brien's many uses of similarly, if less explicitly, disruptive sleep have not received any significant analysis. There is instead a curious, resounding silence around O'Brien's many depictions of sleep and exhaustion, despite their prominence within his work. Indeed, these have only ever been analysed in terms of their structural and metaphorical implications – a focus that, as I have already discussed, eliminates the literal bodies of fatigue from critical discourse and in so doing positions experiences of embodied fatigue as a means to a discursive, non-fatigue-related end rather than a topic worthy of significant analysis in its own right.

[1] *Modernism,* ed. by Ástráður Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), p. 319.
[2] Dirk Van Hulle, ''widening out the mind': Flann O'Brien's 'wide mind' between Joyce's 'mental life' and Beckett's 'deep within'', in *Flann O'Brien: problems with authority*, ed. by John McCourt, Paul Fagan & Ruben Borg (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017), p. 115.
[3] Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967), p. 85.

In this chapter, I turn my attention to O'Brien's portrayals of sleep and men in bed to draw attention to this overlooked yet pervasive aspect of his work. To this end, I focus on O'Brien's first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, a text in which discourses of sleep and bodies in bed – especially grotesque male bodies displaying sleep 'done wrong' – play a central narrative role. Indeed, the two central characters, the unnamed college student (from here on referred to as 'the student-narrator') and Dermot Trellis, are both authors who spend the majority of their time in their beds, where they complete their creative work. Following an abbreviated overview of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, a text which is infamously complex, I turn to an in-depth consideration of O'Brien's depictions of men in bed, with a special focus on Trellis and the student-narrator. Then, I move to examine the role of the bedroom and bedroom activities within the narrative, looking in particular at the way in which O'Brien both acknowledges and draws upon the social stigma surrounding men in bed. Following this, I consider the uses of fatigue and sleep as tools of punishment. Finally, I reflect on previous analyses of *At Swim-Two- Birds* in light of my own reading, and consider the structural exhaustion performed by the text itself.

At Swim-Two-Birds has an extremely complex plot and structure, which I will discuss in greater detail in the final section of this chapter. However, in the most simple of terms, the novel tells the story of two authors who write stories from bed: the student-narrator, who, in his final year of university, writes the story of Dermot Trellis, whose own work on a moral novel of improvement – a literary response to the appalling 'spate of sexual and other crimes recorded in recent times' that is simultaneously filled with sin to ensure it is read – is interrupted as the sentient fictional characters of his novel turn against him.[4] In one of the many intricacies of O'Brien's storytelling, much of *At Swim-*

[4] Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 47.

Two-Birds follows Trellis's many fictional characters as they scheme against Trellis, travel, debate, and tell their own tales in the lead-up to enacting their revenge. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the rich complexity of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and the many structural and allegorical readings it permits. In pursuing such readings, the analyses of this text have overlooked the base image from which the novel grows: that of the man in bed. To begin, I recentre this image.

4.1 Grotesque Bodies: 'I discovered that my person was verminous'[5]

Much of the stigmatizing discourse surrounding fatigue and fatigued bodies centres on the ability or inability of the mind to adequately govern the body. As discussed in 1.2, many anxieties about sleep and the fatigued body are driven by concerns about identity and control. Sleep and fatigue, which exert influence on the body that the mind is unable to regulate, disrupt the borders between the purportedly controlled mind and uncontrollable body. When discussing destabilized borders, it is helpful to draw on Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, that which 'disturbs identity, system, order [and] does not respect borders, traditions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'[6] Common examples of the abject include bodily excretions and birth which, due to their crossing of the internal/external borders of the body, both draw attention to these borders and to their fallibility. Yet another, perhaps subtler, example given by Kristeva is that of 'crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law'.[7] We see in *At Swim-Two-Birds* clear examples of the visibly abject – I think, for example, of Mr. Corcoran, a friend of the student-narrator's uncle, who sneezes, 'spattering his clothing with a mucous discharge

[5] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 60.
[6] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.
[7] Kristeva, p. 4.

from his nostrils', in turn causing the student-narrator to feel his 'gorge was about to rise'.[8] But what if we consider more broadly that which draws attention to fragility, which fails to adhere to recognized borders or rules, which disturbs identity? Examples abound in *At Swim-Two-Birds,* as in the character of Orlick, Trellis's half-real, half-fictional son born of rape, and in the frequent border crossings that occur between the different, and supposedly distinct, storylines of the text. I also argue that we can find aspects of abjection in, or associated with, the many instances of sleep 'done wrong' and its connected bedroom habits. While abjection is displayed through many of the character's actions, from their excretions to their criminality, and their 'excess' time spent in bed, the bodies of characters shown to spend irregular time in bed are also made grotesque. It is no mistake that many abject processes in the text, such as vomiting, are carried out in bedrooms, or that many of the grotesque attributes of characters such as Trellis are then directly attributed to laziness or sleep 'done wrong'.

Though grotesque bodies permeate the works of O'Brien – much of his humour centres on the disgusting bodies of his characters and the disgusting things that they do with them – the grotesque bodies in *At Swim-Two-Birds* are shown to be grotesque specifically because of their sleeping and bedroom habits. Depictions of both Trellis and the student-narrator indicate a desire to make fatigue not only visible but grotesque, as descriptions of these characters highlight not only physical indicators of their significant time spent in bed, such as paleness and frailty, but also of poor hygiene, such as vermin-ridden bedclothes. Simultaneously, the possibility that any genuine fatigue could be present is denied – Trellis being bedridden is described as a choice and the student-narrator's exhaustion as performative. The effect of these descriptions is that claims of fatigue and the need for additional rest are presented as merely excuses for poor behaviour,

[8] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 133.

and therefore are indications of immorality. I first consider the characterisation of Trellis and the ways in which the student-narrator goes to great efforts to 'mark' his body with visible effects of his 'voluntarily bed-ridden' state.[9]

When Trellis is first introduced, his bedbound status is utilized to accentuate his unpleasantness: he is described as 'flabby and unattractive, partly a result of his having remained in bed for a period of twenty years […] voluntarily bedridden' as he has 'suffered from no organic or other illness'.[10] This initial description is, as with much of the Trellis story, given as a succinct overview, within which Trellis's bedbound state becomes synonymous with laziness, ugliness, and general unpleasantness of character. It is, of course, possible that Trellis genuinely suffered from no illness. However, this is never treated as an option: the potential for any legitimate physical suffering to have contributed to his twenty years in bed is immediately denied – something regularly experienced by those who have unexplained fatigue or have been bedridden for extended periods of time. Instead, a later note mentioning his alcohol consumption states that he is a 'widowed husband and a childless father', perhaps attempting to provide a psychological reason for his decision to take to his bed.[11] However, such an explanation is still, unjustly, stigmatizing: within the real world, patients of fatiguing illnesses such as ME/CFS and Long Covid regularly cite their symptoms being dismissed by doctors as purely psychosomatic or a sign of mental illness[12] – diagnoses unfortunately surrounded with further stigma – leading to beliefs that 'the ill person is faking and unwilling to get appropriate treatment'.[13] Regardless of the cause behind Trellis's decision to remain in

[9] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 34.
[10] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 34.
[11] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 41.
[12] See, for example: Eleanor Alexandra Byrne, 'Understanding Long Covid: Nosology, Social Attitudes and Stigma', *Brain, Behaviour, and Immunity*, 99 (2022), 17-24 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2021.09.012>; Valerie R. Anderson and others, 'A Review and Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Studies on Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome', *Patient Education and Counseling*, 86.2 (2012), 147-155 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2011.04.016>.
[13] Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 12; pp. 100-103.

bed, rather than eliciting him sympathy, his bedbound state is instead used to characterize him as tyrannical and demanding: he only leaves his bed for brief periods to 'interview the slavey in the kitchen on the subject of his food or bedclothes' and is later stated to be 'subject to extreme irritability and 'tantrums''.[14] Trellis's hypocrisy in presenting himself as 'a philosopher and a moralist' and 'writing a book on sin and the wages attaching thereto', while simultaneously engaging in several of the sins he protests, is presented as a source of amusement.[15] Simultaneously, Trellis's hypocrisy makes his later crimes made more believable as his very immorality is marked upon his body by an ugliness from the first tied to his bedridden state.

Additionally depicted as regularly 'idling' in bed, for which he is berated by his uncle within the first few pages of the novel, the student-narrator's excessive time in the bedroom is made also visible through grotesque attributes and actions. He explains that he 'rarely undressed', only cleaning his suit with 'a brisk application with a coarse brush before going out', with the result that he is unable to dispel 'the curious bedroom smell which clung to [his] person and which was frequently the subject of humorous or other comment'.[16] Following a night of excessive drinking, the student-narrator vomits beneath his mattress so as to avoid leaving bed and leaves the mess so that, during a later visit, his friend Brinsley remarks 'that there [is] a queer smell in the room'.[17] Eventually, he makes 'the discovery of lice in large numbers' in his bedclothes, which finally prompts him to resolve 'to make an end of [his] dissolute habits'.[18] Beds become sites of a filth that spills over to encompass the characters that frequent them. However, these examples of the grotesque bodily effects ascribed to sleep 'done wrong' are only one way in which O'Brien makes the effects of tiredness visible: exhaustion is also depicted as something enacted

[14] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 34; p. 293.
[15] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 47.
[16] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 11.
[17] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 30.
[18] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 61.

with ulterior motive, and therefore worthy of suspicion.

Though the student-narrator presents himself as weak and unwell, staying in bed out of necessity, this is consistently framed as performative. Following his bout of excessive drinking, the student-narrator describes himself as remaining in bed 'for three days on the *pretence* of a chill' (emphasis mine).[19] When visited by his friend Brinsley, he states that he 'fell back again *as if* exhausted by [his] effort'[20] (emphasis mine), 'raising [his] shoulders feebly from the bed', and giving 'a low moan of exhaustion'.[21] While we as readers know the true cause of the student-narrator's desire to stay in bed – he is hungover and doesn't want his uncle to find out – by framing his exhaustion as consciously performative early on in the text, all complaints of exhaustion that he has throughout the rest of the novel are also marked as disingenuous. Further, just as the student-narrator uses exhaustion as an excuse to mask his alcohol intake, a few pages later, when writing about Trellis, he positions sleeplessness as an excuse for excess alcohol consumption. In the given extract, Trellis is accused of having regularly 'indulged to excess in the use of wine', for which he gives the justification that he 'should not be able to sleep if [he] did not use wine as an opiate'.[22] This is disconcerting for two reasons: firstly, the positioning of Trellis's use of 'an opiate' in order to sleep is immediately positioned as both unnecessary and as a 'failing of so great a man'.[23] Such attitudes are regularly experienced by those experiencing chronic pain – a proportion of whom are bedbound due to invisible conditions – leading to increased suspicion regarding their need for medication and, at

[19] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 30.
[20] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 31.
[21] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 35.
[22] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 41.
[23] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 41.

worst, the harmful labelling of these individuals as drug-seekers.[24] Secondly, even if we are to disregard the first possible reading, the main function of this passage is, again, to position the need for sleep as an excuse for negative behaviour, in turn undermining any genuine need for sleep or 'excessive' time in bed. That both of the central characters who spend 'excessive' time in their beds are shown to do so for reasons deemed illegitimate draws into question the legitimacy of all individuals seen to spend 'excessive' time in their beds, as well as any fatigue they may report having.

Indeed, the legitimate need for anyone without clear, visible impairment to remain in bed for extended periods of time is repeatedly and explicitly questioned – especially by the student-narrator's uncle, who states that 'excessive' time in bed is 'a very bad sign in a young lad' – especially one who 'is healthy as far as [he] can see'.[25] Though, as his uncle specifies, 'you would understand an old person or an invalid', the student-narrator 'looks as fit as a fiddle' and therefore simply needs to make the effort to 'rise and use [his] God-given strength to the best of [his] ability'.[26] Those who fail to do so, he continues, exhibit the sin of sloth: 'the lazy man is a burden to his friends, to himself, and to every man woman or child he'll meet or mix with'.[27] As the subject of these accusations, it may be predicted that the student-narrator would empathize with others who spend significant time in bed: yet this is not the case. Instead, as seen in the negative bodily depictions of Trellis, the student-narrator perpetuates the stigmatizing, moralistic narratives that his uncle attaches to bodies in bed – even as he himself generates these stories 'from the bed'.[28] Just

[24] See, for example: Roger Collier, '"Complainers, Malingerers and Drug-seekers" – the Stigma of Living with Chronic Pain', *CMAJ*, 190.7 (2018), 204-205 <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-5553> (p. 205); Matthew D. Moore and others, 'Stigma, Opioids, and Public Health Messaging: The Need to Disentangle Behavior From Identity', *American Journal of Public Health*, 110.6 (2020), 807-810 <https://doi.org/10.2105%2FAJPH.2020.305628>; Cyndi Gilmer and Kristy Buccieri, 'Homeless Patients Associate Clinician Bias With Suboptimal Care for Mental Illness, Addictions, and Chronic Pain', *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health*, 11 (2020), 1-7 <https://doi.org/10.1177/2150132720910289>.

[25] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 233.

[26] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 233.

[27] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 234.

[28] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 35.

as the uncle derides the student-narrator for engaging in sloth – and, through association, lust, as I will return to in the following section – qualities which he links to the bedroom and any excess time spent there, the student-narrator likewise uses Trellis's bedbound state to code for these same qualities. The stigma the student-narrator attaches to Trellis is indicative of his own ablest beliefs – even as the student-narrator argues that he is being unjustly mischaracterised, he still replicates these same attitudes, upholding the societal narratives that led to negative assessments of his own character. Tiredness is reduced to a narrative tool, and the tired body is made an object subject to moral judgement. That Trellis is often understood by critics as a parody of the student-narrator's uncle provides yet another layer – in exacting his literary revenge, the student-narrator likens his uncle to a hypocritical tyrant who demonstrates the very sins he disparages most. And, to quickly characterise Trellis as immoral, the student-narrator gives him the most offensive form he seems able to muster: the bedbound body, a body then vilified for the sake of comedic narrative revenge. I again must highlight the very real-world effects and resonations of this kind of depiction: patients of fatiguing and invisible conditions, such as Long Covid and ME/CFS, are regularly stigmatized as faking symptoms, being overly demanding or aggressive burdens, and exhibiting poor moral qualities such as laziness;[29] and representations of this type contribute to these pervasive societal assumptions.

When not overtly used to reflect poor moral quality, confinement to bed – even where deemed morally permissible – is still casually stigmatized in passing comments as a state that inherently allows only for suffering. The most explicit of such instances occurs during a social gathering of Trellis's fictional characters who, over the course of the

[29] See, for example: Marija Pantelic and others, 'Long Covid Stigma: Estimating Burden and Validating Scale in a UK-based Sample', *PLoS ONE*, 17.11 (2022), 1-14 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0277317>; Zachary A. Siegel and others, 'A Content Analysis of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis in the News from 1987 to 2013', *Chronic Illness*, 14.1 (2018), 3-13 <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/journals-permissions>; Charlotte Blease and Keith J. Geraghty, 'Are ME/CFS Patient Organisations "Militant"? Patient Protest in a Medical Controversy', *Bioethical Inquiry*, 15 (2018), 393-401 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-018-9866-5>.

conversation, begin discussing various injuries and ways of dying. Following appraisals of death via fire and drowning, Mrs. Furriskey states that she hopes 'they will all die in [their] beds'.[30] This is quickly dismissed by Shanahan, who instead suggests that death by gun would be preferable, as '[t]here's no nonsense about the gun […] It's quick, it's merciful, and it's clean'[31] – the implication being that a death in bed is none of these things. Shanahan later elaborates on this, when he describes the impairment and eventual death of Bartley Madigan, who was 'paralysed from the knee up' and subsequently lived for 'twenty years on the flat of his back in bed'.[32] Madigan's experience is described as decidedly unpleasant, and characterised by poor care: he is stated to have been 'carried out by his brother and put in a bath' each Christmas, and as a result of this substandard care to have suffered from 'plenty of bedsores', so that '[t]he sight of his legs would turn your stomach'.[33] His twenty bedridden years are in fact described as so awful that 'He was better dead […] He was better in his grave than in that bed'.[34] Importantly, Shanahan is unperturbed by the poor quality of care that Madigan receives – this is accepted as normal, even good, care – rather, he locates the cause of Madigan's suffering in his disabled body and the fact that he is bedbound.

Several points can be taken from this exchange: firstly, that disabling of this nature intrinsically entails such poor quality of life as to be a state worse than death; that becoming bedbound brings with it only further suffering and humiliation, be it from bedsores or degrading reliance on others. Secondly, and likely at the heart of the first point, that becoming bedbound inherently reduces one to an unpleasant burden whose poor treatment and lack of support is, if not encouraged, at least to be expected. While the effects of such an impairment and ensuing shift in individual ability would indeed call for

[30] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 222.
[31] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 222.
[32] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 228.
[33] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 228.
[34] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 228.

significant readjustment of subjectivity, the belief that bedridden individuals would be better off dead carries with it deeply eugenicist overtones and is embedded in ablest narratives, ideologies which deny that individuals with non-normative bodies could possibly find satisfaction when living in accordance with their own unique abilities and limitations. This brief discussion between the characters highlights the dangers of any such single story of disability: as I have already discussed in relation to *The Metamorphosis*, such poor quality of care for homebound and bedbound individuals does unfortunately occur in the real world and, by presenting it as normal, this poor treatment is made both expected and permissible. Further, when comparing the experiences of Madigan and Trellis, both of whom are said to have spent twenty years in bed – the former out of necessity and the latter out of choice – there is no in-between. The bedbound body is characterised either as one which, having a genuine disability, experiences only great suffering and indignity or which, as a body bedbound by choice, is immoral and deserving of suspicion.

4.2 Spaces of Sin: 'Aren't you very fond of your bedroom'[35]

Depiction of Trellis and the student-narrator as lazy malingerers relies upon and perpetuates a particularly insidious ablest narrative about fatigue and the body in bed; one which regularly causes harm to real-world people with fatiguing conditions. As I have discussed in 2.2, some of the stigma attached to fatigue is inherently bound with expectations of productivity. When these expectations are not met, this can lead to the attribution of negative moral judgements upon these 'unproductive' bodies – bodies which, when viewed strictly within the confines of a neoliberal capitalist framework, become burdensome and devoid of value. However, Trellis and the student-narrator are

[35] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 11.

offered a possible redemption in that, for both characters, their beds, as spaces of literary creation, are sites of production as well as rest: since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns, we may be inclined to think of them as working from home. Yet, as with individuals who work from home, the manner in which Trellis and the student-narrator complete their work is still viewed with suspicion: in the case of the text, a suspicion shown to be warranted. The most blatant cause of suspicion pertains to the potential laziness of bedroom workers and the amount of work actually being done, as is repeatedly voiced by the student-narrator's uncle. From this initial cause for concern, two more arise: the potential for other, also stigmatised, bedroom activities to be occurring instead of productive work, and, in the case of Trellis, the potential for an overly demanding and lazy employer – again, coded for by the fact that he is bedbound, as is visibly marked upon his body – to place unfair labour burdens on workers.

From the first few pages of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the student-narrator is repeatedly faced with allegations of laziness from his uncle, even as we, the readers, are privy to the literary work he is undertaking. While the uncle's accusations of laziness could be taken purely at face-value, this is not the only complaint being levelled at the student-narrator. When the student-narrator argues that his bedroom is his space of work, the uncle's response – 'I know the studying you do in your bedroom. […] Damn the studying you do in your bedroom.'[36] – echoes medical narratives warning of the potential dangers and symptoms of masturbation, as discussed in 2.2. Just as I've found in descriptions of onanism, idleness – which was regularly listed as a symptom of onanism – is described by the uncle as something for which '[y]oung people especially would have to be on their guard', the best defence against which is to 'keep on the move, and you'll move towards God.'[37] When discussing the student-narrator's indulgence in 'the sin of sloth',

[36] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 12.
[37] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 309.

it is never simply his slothfulness that is being discussed, but by extension his lustfulness.[38] Any redemptive quality the bedroom may stand to gain from its repositioning as a space of work is tainted by its potential as a space of perversion.

The connection between the body in bed – even when productive – and masturbation is one O'Brien toys with throughout *At Swim-Two-Birds* and is indeed at the heart of the text's central joke about aestho-autogamy, or successfully reproductive mental masturbation. More specifically, aestho-autogamy is the creation of a literary character but evokes the idea of the 'real' creation of a 'living' character by claiming that this mode of creation does not involve gestation in a female womb, but can spring complete from the author's pen – with 'pen' understood as a contraction of 'penis'.[39] Much of this joke hinges on connecting the private act of literary production with the private act of masturbation, both 'self-administered in private', and, following Trellis's breakthrough research, both of which crucially can be achieved without the female.[40] Though this 'happy event' is framed as a laudable achievement in the media extract the novel provides, with Trellis's 'zeal and perseverance' described as bringing 'a century of ceaseless experiment and endeavour to a triumphant conclusion', this is generally read as a comical explanation of his extensive, albeit eventually productive, masturbatory indulgence.[41] As each form of production is imbued with the qualities of the other, creative reproduction and productive masturbation become increasingly intertwined, with both located firmly in the space of the bedroom. In turn, excessive time spent in the bedroom becomes a code not only for laziness, but for self-indulgence in masturbation and sexual activity.

This is further complicated as aestho-autogamy further allows for the creation of

[38] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 13.
[39] Maebh Long, *Assembling Flann O'Brien* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), Bloomsbury Collections <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472543400.ch-001> [accessed 16 November 2022] (p. 33).
[40] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 32.
[41] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, pp. 54-55.

fully grown adults, 'born already matured, teethed, reared, educated, and ready' to enter the workforce.[42] As described in the celebratory media announcement, earlier research into aestho-autogamy sought to ensure 'married couples could be assured that their legitimate diversion would straightaway result in finished bread-winners or marriageable daughters'.[43] With this in mind, aestho-autogamy itself becomes a form of production bound with the drive to generate further productivity: reproduction becomes solely about the creation of immediately productive bodies. Of course, Trellis manages to take this even further, producing the character Furriskey without the need of a woman at all and showing the potential for a means of production that requires fewer bodies.

Indeed, inclusion of the female body in this process is presented as a cause of great concern: while 'the male author's creative masturbation is portrayed as a laudable literary act, […] heterosexual sex, with its lamentable involvement of the female, is the result of common, base desire condemned for its lack of literary purity'.[44] Further, within the text, the only instance of such involvement is also an instance of incestuous rape: Trellis creates the character of Sheila Lamont, intended to be 'a woman of unprecedented virtue', and, 'about an hour after she [is] born', assaults her so brutally that she dies 'indirectly from the effects of her assault some time later'.[45] Before Sheila's death from this incredibly violent act, she first gives birth to a son, Orlick, who, by the nature of his conception is part real and part textual; a product quite literally of both body and mind, his own person yet inextricably also a part of Trellis, his author- father. Not only do the rape of Sheila and the unintentional creation of Orlick present a literary complication for Trellis's story, but it is Orlick himself who later spearheads the revenge plot against his author-father, resulting in his torture.

[42] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 56.
[43] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 56.
[44] Long, *Assembling Flann O'Brien,* p. 36.
[45] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 48; p. 298.

How, you may wonder, does fatigue play into this? The entire revenge storyline, born, so to speak, of Trellis's aestho-autogamy, relies firmly upon tiredness and sleep, which enable the plot to occur. We can most immediately see this arise in the problem of Orlick's creation: as the student-narrator's friends are quick to state, by the misogynistic logic of the story, Trellis could have prevented the birth had he immediately required 'the expectant mother to make a violent end of herself'.[46] What prevents Trellis from doing so is that 'the author was paying less and less attention to his literary work and was spending entire days and nights in the unremitting practice of sleep':[47] Trellis is the true benefactor of his own ruin. As mentioned in 1.1, the trope of the powerful succumbing to a sleep that enables their overthrow or undermining is old, recurring time and again in myths and fairy tales alike. Yet, this aspect of the text has garnered no comment, with Trellis's downfall instead regularly tied to his involvement of the female body in the creative process and the negative literary impact this has. While this misogynistic element of the text is certainly one key factor in Trellis's ruin, treating this as the sole reason for his downfall has hidden the role played by sleep and the body fatigued from its productive effort. The focus on complex issues of misogyny, sex, and masturbation in *At Swim-Two-Birds,* while legitimate and valuable, has overwhelmed the critical narrative surrounding the text to the extent that scholars do not see the literal, explicit positioning of fatigue as the central factor in Trellis's defeat.

The danger of uncontrollable fatigue leading to inopportune sleep 'done wrong' is again seen following Trellis's creation of Furriskey. This seemingly immaculate conception, in which no woman was involved, still contributes to Trellis's later torture, because, yet again, Trellis falls asleep immediately after his creation, in this case failing to alleviate Furriskey's 'doubts as to his own identity'.[48] This instance is often

[46] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 206.
[47] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 207.
[48] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 57.

recognized as another masturbation joke, with Trellis's unexpected sleep ascribed to post-climactic exhaustion: yet, this is a distraction from the uncontrollable tiredness that literally interferes with his ability to adequately complete his work. Left to suffer 'considerable mental anguish' due to the existential uncertainty surrounding his 'identity and duties', Furriskey becomes one of Trellis's later tormenters in a literal attack of mind upon the body.[49] The body in bed, even when technically productive, is still shown to be inadequate due to an exhaustion that is further bound with perversion by nature of its ongoing connection to masturbation.

O'Brien again draws on this particular connection in his depictions of the student-narrator. Though a slightly different approach is taken – the student-narrator is shown to eventually graduate with high marks – even the positive creative potential he finds in his resting is still imbued with a decidedly masturbatory quality. From the start of the novel, when coming up with ideas for his story, the student-narrator retreats to the privacy of his room and lays on 'the tender trestle of [his bed], arranging [his] back upon it in an indolent horizontal attitude', closing his eyes.[50] In this horizontal position, he retires 'into the kingdom of [his] mind', to 'complete darkness and an absence of movement on the part of the cerebral mechanism' and 'after an interval Finn Mac Cool, a hero of old Ireland' comes 'out before [him] from his shadow'.[51] With the additional context of Trellis's creative processes and the ongoing joke surrounding aestho-autogamy, hinging on the role of the pen/penis in the creative production of characters, as well as the frequent complaints of his uncle, what could be read as restful daydreaming, perhaps reminiscent of Clarissa Dalloway, is instead coded as sexually deviant.

Past analyses of *At Swim-Two-Birds* have taken for granted the connection

[49] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 59.
[50] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 15.
[51] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 15.

between the body in bed and the qualities of laziness and deviance without questioning their association. Gregory Dobbins notes that '[a]s a form of unproductive, self- involved enjoyment, idleness overlaps with such sins as masturbation', both activities which, within the minds of those such as the student-narrator's uncle, were particularly dangerous to postcolonial Ireland in the 1930s, as they 'not only [prevented] the work necessary for the nation to come into being but also [suggested] a deeply flawed and unproductive moral character'.[52] Dobbins' analysis reiterates several common narratives surrounding the fatigued body: most importantly, the body at rest is accepted without question to be an idle body. Further, the idle body (which could instead be a body of genuine fatigue) then becomes a body associated with immorality. I do not mean to say that Trellis and the student-narrator are not shown to display idleness or deviance within the text, but that the narratives of laziness and deviance surrounding the body in bed are so pervasive as to be taken for granted by authors and critics alike. Finally, the idle-appearing body is made metaphorical; bound with national failure and poor moral character. Dobbins goes on to argue that idleness 'attains a utopian quality in *At Swim-Two-Birds*', as the novel rebels through its structure and narrative style against the imperial-capitalist 'process by which even relaxation and free time take on structural forms derived from alienated labor'.[53] However, while this allocates a more positive symbolic quality to the body in bed, this metaphorical use still reduces fatigued bodies to symbols: the body at rest is a static image for cultural interpretation, one with a limited range of meanings and possibilities afforded to it in contrast to the multitude granted to the body of the norm.

4.3 The Troubles of Dualism: 'But the soul, the ego, the *animus*,

[52] Gregory Dobbins, 'Constitutional Laziness and the Novel: Idleness, Irish Modernism, and Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*', *Novel*, 42.1 (2009) 86-108 <https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-2008-005> (p. 101).
[53] Dobbins, p. 106.

continued Orlick, is very different from the body'[54]

O'Brien's works often 'push the Cartesian body–mind split to extremes', undermining beliefs in a clear split such that the 'broadening of the mind is immediately confronted with the imperfections of the body'.[55] The effect of this confrontation is such that the body in O'Brien is repeatedly made a site of the unheimlich; 'the uncanny, inorganic or automated body is not only a Freudian symbol for dysfunctional investments of desire, but is also an expression of the strain of modernity to confront echoes of Cartesian dualism'.[56] The mind is alienated and fractured from the unpredictable, disturbing body, the Self existing uneasily, under constant threat of the actions of its mindless and machine-like bodily casing. Yet O'Brien's engagement with dualism in *At Swim-Two-Birds* is most often located in the character of Orlick, who is half-real and half-textual, a disturbing, literal embodiment of mind-body unification. However, we can also locate such interest in O'Brien's depiction of Trellis, whose moral deviancy is made visible on his body. In this section, I will consider several of the ways O'Brien depicts and undermines the possibility of a clear mind-body distinction in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, with emphasis on the problems that arise when he depicts the body performing sleep 'done wrong'.

What might it be about the body in bed performing sleep 'done wrong' that seems to make it such a potent image and productive metaphor? To answer this question, it is helpful to return to the work of disability studies theorists. In relation to disability more broadly, Mitchell and Snyder state that the 'inherent vulnerability and variability of bodies serves as a metonym for that which refuses to conform to the mind's desire for order and rationality. Within this schema, disability acts as a metaphor and fleshly

[54] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 242.
[55] Van Hulle, p. 114.
[56] Greenblatt, p. 133.

example of the body's unruly resistance to the cultural desire to 'enforce normalcy''.[57] The uncontrollable body disrupts many of our most core beliefs: for example, beliefs about who we are as individuals and our abilities of self-control. And these ideas further inform many of our broader societal beliefs, seeping even into policy: for example, in positioning the ill or non-normative body as deviant, due to failures of morality or insufficient effort, it becomes more acceptable for disability to be treated as purely the responsibility of the individual. Widespread acceptance of a belief such as this, which projects onto the non-normative body such strong judgement, furthers the metaphorical potential of the disabled body.

While the body in bed – especially when performing sleep 'done wrong' – may not display external physical difference, it retains its metaphoric potential due to its power as an image: of comfort and rest, at best, and of laziness and deviancy at worst. Again, we like to think of sleep as something that we can control through willpower, something that we allow to occur during set times and in set locations. According to this line of thinking, the image of the body performing sleep 'done wrong' can only be indicative of two things: either an uncontrollable body or an uncontrollable mind. Where there is no clear outward cause to justify a body being uncontrollable, as in acute illness or impairment, the uncontrollable mind would then seem to be responsible instead. As such, the image of the body that is fatigued without clear cause becomes conventionally recognized as an image of insufficient willpower and poor strength of character; a mind run rampant. As I have shown, in the depiction of Trellis, the uncontrollably fatigued body is used to signify laziness, deviance, and criminality.

Though sleep is alternatively positioned as admirable and sinful throughout *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in the closing sections of the text O'Brien decidedly frames the body

[57] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 48.

performing sleep 'done wrong' negatively, as emblematic of an uncontrollable mind. Firstly, the student-narrator's views seemingly shift to reflect his uncle's belief that '[i]dleness darkens the understanding; idleness weakens the will; idleness leaves you a very good mark for the sinful schemes of the gentleman down below' and is 'a thing that grows on you […] To be avoided like the plague'.[58] Seemingly as a result of the student-narrator's shifting opinion of his uncle, he then alters the ending of the Trellis story so that Trellis is saved from execution. Interestingly, in doing so, the student- narrator also repositions Trellis not as a problem for the legal system, but for the medical one. On waking from the sleep that had enabled his literary torture, Trellis comments that he has 'done too much thinking and writing, too much work' with the result that his 'nerves are troubling [him]', he has been having 'bad nightmares and queer dreams', has been sleep-walking, and is 'very tired'.[59] Trellis's observations on their own appear reasonable and not particularly contentious – however, these are then immediately reframed in the concluding extract, which occurs immediately after this scene. This extract, written in the third person with a new tone of scientific objectivity, questions how we ought to view Trellis, querying whether he was 'mad', and 'a victim of hard-to-explain hallucinations'.[60] Though it is stated that '[n]obody knows. Even experts do not agree on these vital points',[61] no alternative suggestions are offered, with the result that by questioning whether Trellis's symptoms were caused by madness, it is insinuated that they were. The student-narrator finally refers to

> 'Du Fernier […] Professor of Mental Sciences and Sanitation at the Sorbonne, [who] deduces from a want of hygiene in the author's bed-habits a progressive weakening of the head. It is of importance the most inestimable, he writes, that

[58] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 309.
[59] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 313.
[60] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 313.
[61] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 313.

> for mental health there should be walking and not overmuch of the bedchamber.'[62]

Trellis becomes the subject of medical interest, his performance of sleep 'done wrong' deemed the cause of a madness that can then be presented as the fault of his own personal moral failure.

Even as O'Brien mocks and troubles the idea of a clear mind-body split, he simultaneously reiterates and draws on several ideas rooted in these beliefs – ideas that work to further stigmatize the body in bed. Upholding the mind-body split may suggest that the mind holds complete power over the body (thus locating blame for any bodily abnormalities or troubles on the individual's lack of willpower) and that the body cannot affect the mind (minimizing then the genuine impact of bodily experience on subjectivity).[63] Conversely, where body and mind are bound together, bodies 'marked' as non-normative are coded as displaying moral defects. As described by Mitchell and Snyder, this noticeably occurs in literature where disability is regularly relied upon as a narrative prosthesis and the moralistic conflation of mind and body is used to situate 'the internal [mind] and external body within a strict mirroring relationship to one another'.[64] O'Brien toys with ideas of a clear mind-body split throughout the text, though often in order to poke fun at them (as in Lamont's portrayal of a pompous philosopher).[65] However, as we have seen in the student-narrator's depiction of Trellis, wherein his bedbound body acts as a physical manifestation of his laziness and depravity, O'Brien still makes use of the idea of a mind-body connection. The aforementioned examples from the Trellis storyline indicate a discomfort about these uncontrollable, unpredictable bodies, and, to a greater extent, about their seemingly unruly drive both to influence the

[62] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 315.
[63] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 58.
[64] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 58.
[65] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, pp. 273-274.

mind and to betray its purported privacy via visible, external manifestations of character. These are moments which trouble the mind-body split as 'the mind is immediately confronted with the imperfections of the body' and the body simultaneously reflects the moral quality of the mind: ''deviant' subjectivity violently erupts on the surface of its bodily container', drawing into question our own tremulous capabilities of self-control.[66]

4.4 Sleep, Fatigue, and Punishment: 'Do you think it would be safe to go to bed'[67]

As I have discussed in 1.1, going to sleep in stories has always been perilous business. In fairy tales, sleep can become a form of punishment, as in 'Snow White' and 'Sleeping Beauty'. Alternatively, sleep can be used to overthrow those more powerful than us, as in 'Jack and the Beanstalk'. Within the real world, even where sleep and bed rest are intended to act as a cure, they have simultaneously functioned as a form of disciplinary action, intricately bound with problematic societal gender roles (as seen in Mitchell's description of his rest cure, seen in 2.2). Sleep – especially sleep 'done wrong' – also challenges our conceptions of Self and Other and, as explored in 1.2, functions as an ongoing state of suspension, similar to Derrida's 'living on' as theorized in relation to *L'Arrêt de mort* (translated either as 'death sentence' or 'suspension of death').[68] As with the suspension Derrida considers intrinsic to Blanchot's 'arrêt de mort',[69] there is also a suspension inherent in the space between sleep and waking, as sleep both structures and destabilizes the possibility of waking. The body performing sleep 'done wrong', as in experiences of severe fatigue or insomnia, also sits then in this state of suspension, a state

[66] Van Hulle, p. 114; Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 58.
[67] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 300.
[68] Derrida, p. 112.
[69] Derrida, p. 12.

of radical uncertainty. While in theory, medicalization separated the fatigued body from the idle, immoral, body, understandings of fatigue as a sign of immorality continued to linger, as we can see represented in literature. All of these constructions of sleep and fatigue, though seemingly disparate, are nonetheless central to *At Swim-Two-Birds* – and, more specifically, to punishment of Trellis storyline, and his movement from exploitative employer to tortured victim.

Though the extent of Trellis's own work productivity is unclear, his depiction as an oppressive and negligent employer is. Crucial to this depiction is the image of the bedridden body, its 'bulging exuberance' and 'white worthless legs',[70] signs of Trellis's excessive time in bed that are contrasted with the 'muscular and well- developed' masculine bodies of his character-employees.[71] The bedridden body is treated as symbolic of degeneracy and tyranny, a 'corporeal metaphor [offering] narrative the one thing it cannot possess—an anchor in materiality'.[72] The bedroom, as the site of Trellis's literary work, further functions as something of a boss's office, reminiscent of Pauline's 'office' in *Twilight Sleep*.[73] It is from the bedroom that Trellis directs his characters on how to act – not only as actors performing literary roles, but as hired and/or created employees with their own private lives and expectations of decent working conditions and wages.

Indeed, the central conflict between Trellis and his characters stems from his poor treatment of them, denying them sufficient rights, wages, working conditions, and time with which to indulge in personal freedoms: the climactic trial of Trellis is at heart one of employment dispute. Throughout his trial, Trellis is accused of, amongst a range of crimes, compelling characters 'to sleep in an unsanitary attic', 'allow[ing] little or no

[70] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 42.
[71] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 54.
[72] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourse*, p. 63.
[73] Wharton, *Twilight Sleep*, p. 9.

liberty', and, when 'presented a petition […] praying relief from certain disabilities and seeking improved pay and conditions of service', 'violently refus[ing] to make any of the concessions sought and threaten[ing] members of the deputation who waited on him with certain physical afflictions, most of which were degrading and involved social stigma'.[74] On the surface, such employment abuses may seem unrelated to fatigue. However, as seen in 2.2, it was concerns about work-related fatigue that largely gave rise to new fatigue research committees and occupational health boards, and, in turn, to labour laws that protected workers from poor treatment. Given that *At Swim-Two-Birds* was published a mere two years after the passing of the 1937 Factories Act in the neighbouring United Kingdom, I argue that through the concerns raised about poor working conditions we can locate yet another instance of fatigue anxiety.

This is complicated by the fact that this fatigue is displaced from the character-employees – the stand-ins for the working-class, in this reading – and onto Trellis. However, it is important to note that while Trellis is described as bedbound by choice, his uncontrollable sleeping – his fatigue – comes about as the result of, firstly, his own work outputs, and secondly, the revenge of his characters, who drug him so as to obtain their own rights as workers. While Trellis has complete control over his characters while he is awake, he loses control when he is asleep. In this fantasy of workers' revenge, sleep and fatigue are a condition of bad employment as well as a weapon and a means to freedom from bad employers. Fatigue enables employees to retaliate against unfair employers, forcing employers to experience the exhaustion, and ensuing degradation, they had inflicted upon employees. I will return to this in more detail shortly, but, for example, as Trellis initially became more prone to sleep – a state from which he could not control his characters – he would make all of them go to bed before locking up and

[74] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 285; p. 252; p. 293.

going to sleep himself.[75] In order to retain their free time and begin plotting revenge, his characters instead began to drug Trellis, effectively locking him into bed as he had done to them.

Lastly, and of most interest to me, is the inability to remove fatigue from moralistic judgement. The ingrained, negative perception of fatigued bodies means that where fatigue is made visible, it must be shown on a villainous body; that of the tyrannical employer who profits from his worker's labour from the bed. The spurned character-workers, despite experiencing the exploitative working conditions feared as inducing fatigue, are instead strong and energetic: fatigue can only be made visible on the body coded as immoral, even where this seems counter-intuitive in the context of the real-world concerns of the time. Even when engaging with prominent discourses of labour rights and fatigue, the negative social perception of the fatigued body proves more powerful than the scientific and political efforts of the time which aimed to shift fatigue from the realm of morality to that of the scientific and medical.[76] Despite the many moments within *At Swim-Two-Birds* that appear to celebrate sleep and the body at rest, sleep 'done wrong' is still repeatedly coded as a moral failing – one which, as I will now explore further, is shown as deserving of punishment.

As in many a myth and fairy tale, Trellis's need for sleep provides his characters with the only means of ensuring their freedom and defeating their powerful oppressor. Just as the conscious Self loses control during sleep, Trellis only loses control over his characters' actions while asleep. With this knowledge, his characters keep him 'almost perpetually in a coma as a result of the drugs secretly administered', so as to live as they wish.[77] However, with the ever-present threat of Trellis becoming 'immune to the drugs' and punishing them, his characters determine that the literary Orlick should 'utilize his

[75] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 48.
[76] Rabinbach, p. 6.
[77] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, pp. 214-215.

gift to turn the tables (as it were) and [compose] a story on the subject of Trellis, a fitting punishment indeed for the usage he [had] given others'.[78] Trellis's need for sleep, first coded as purely indulgent and then as the result of his own depravity, ultimately leads to an extended sequence of punishment in the form of the violent torture and trial of the fatigued body: a sequence that begins and ends in the bed.

This punishment sequence, characterised by its many starts, restarts, and repetitions, also brings to mind Derrida's 'living on', 'the state of suspension in which it's over – *and* over again'.[79] Trellis is repeatedly awakened into a 'stasis of the natural order'[80] characterised by timelessness, a mutating bedroom, and disorientating repetition: a waking nightmare, an invasion of the night into the realm of the day that prevents Trellis from regaining control of his daytime Self. Further, Trellis is given multiple 'death sentences', as again and again he is tortured past the point a human body could withstand, but each time survives. Each death, then, is interrupted by a restarting, a living on governed by radical uncertainty as each near execution is narrowly and unexpectedly averted. In this punishment sequence, Trellis, suspended in a state of sleep throughout the majority of the text, only awakens to enter yet another state of suspension – one which is quite literally 'over – *and* over again'.[81]

The initial torture sequence, which takes place as Orlick writes out his father's torture, involves disturbing Trellis from bed three times. Each time he is wrested from a liminal state in which he 'neither slept nor woke but lay there in his bed, a twilight in his eyes […] at peace'.[82] The bedroom, supposed to be a space of privacy and safety, is intruded upon and made dangerous, as first a cleric, then a saint (who remains outside), and finally the devil Pooka interrupt his rest. When informed by the Pooka of the torture

[78] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 236.
[79] Derrida, p. 77.
[80] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 252.
[81] Derrida, p. 77.
[82] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 237.

he is to undergo, Trellis refuses to 'arise and [dress] against the hour of [his] torment'[83] – in consequence, he is set upon while still in bed. Trellis's torture begins when he, the 'man in the bed', is 'beleaguered with the sharpness of razors as to nipples, knee-rear and belly roll', and 'the corrugations of boils and piteous tumuli […] appeared upon the large of his back'.[84] The bed, metonymic of Trellis's rest, is then further soiled, as 'a general re-arrangement of his interior' has the result that 'a meat repast in the process of digestion [is] ejected on the bed'.[85] The bed is made not only uncomfortable, but disgusting – and, in turn, so are Trellis's sleeping habits. Yet this degradation is not enough, as even the bedroom itself is turned against Trellis, as 'the walls parted, diminished and came back again with loud noises and with clouds of choking lime-dust' and the 'gift of light was frequently withdrawn without warning and there was a continuous loud vomit-noise offensive to persons of delicate perceptions'.[86] The space of the bedroom is transformed from a site of comfort to one of revulsion and suffering, with the result that Trellis, 'wind-quick, eye-mad' jumps from his window and is left 'reclined on the mud-puddled cobbles'.[87] After Trellis is violently ejected from his room, the Pooka then returns him only to make the ceiling collapse on him. In this way, 'the security of [his] bedroom' is actively weaponized, morphed into yet another tool of torment and turned against the resting body it is intended to shelter.[88]

Though this could be understood as a purely vengeful act, there are also several uncomfortable resonances here. Firstly, I think of how the bed became weaponized through the attempts of Mitchell to cure bedridden women, either by forcing them to exert themselves or to partake in rest that 'is not at all their notion of rest', such that

[83] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 252.
[84] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 253.
[85] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 253.
[86] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 253.
[87] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 254.
[88] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 257.

'repose becomes […] a rather bitter medicine, and they are glad enough to accept the order to rise and go about'.[89] Just as there is discomfort surrounding the ability of the disabled body to experience pleasure, the body in bed performing sleep 'done wrong' becomes especially offensive when it seems to receive any enjoyment.[90] While it may be logical that Trellis's torture occurs in the bedroom given that he spends most of his time in bed, the connection between torture and the bedroom is nonetheless significant. These particular acts not only appear geared toward punishing Trellis's bedridden body, but toward shocking him out of his offensive enjoyment of the bed through pain and humiliation. Indeed, throughout this violent sequence and Trellis's later trial, the torture of 'the cripple'[91] is positioned as a source of amusement and celebration, justified by his own moral failings.

Further, when ejected from his bed Trellis is still clothed in 'his sweat-wet night-shirt and day-drawers'.[92] Indeed, though moved from the bedroom to the courtroom following his torture, Trellis remains in his bedclothes throughout the punishment sequence: his pyjamas act to further mark him with the exterior signs of his fatigue. That he is tortured and eventually cast from his bedroom while still in his pyjamas, by that point 'disarranged and torn and piteously stained with blood and other fluids discharged probably from his many wounds'[93] also adds to Trellis's punishment: it is a humiliation, a degradation of the powerful in the vein of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' as he is shown to be fallible and grotesque. Cast from bed, Trellis's space of both power and weakness, his vulnerability is paraded; his invisible fatigue externalized and literally brought before court. Already weakened, exhausted and in pain, that Trellis is forced to defend himself in his bedclothes in a final act of humiliation; one that centres on making

[89] Mitchell, *Fat and Blood* ch. 5, para. 5.
[90] Wendell, *The Rejected Body,* pp. 102-104.
[91] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 281.
[92] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 254.
[93] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 280.

his sleep 'done wrong', so offensive to the energetic, able-bodied world, equally offensive and embarrassing to Trellis himself.

This punishment continues to operate in several ways following the sequence of active physical torture. Forced to leave his home and travel to court, Trellis is denied not only appropriate clothing, but food, shelter, and a bed. Sleep continues to be weaponized, as Trellis, increasingly weakened by lack of food, is further denied access to appropriate sleep: while the Pooka dresses in silk pyjamas and sleeps in an elaborate bed in a tent, Trellis is instead forced to rest in 'tufts of piercing thorns and tangles of bitter spiky brambles'.[94] When Trellis does drift into sleep, this is immediately punished:

> the cripple in the tree was abandoned without warning by each of his wits with this unfortunate result, that he fell senseless through the cruel arms of the branches, and came to the ground with a thud that placed him deeper in the darkness of his sleep. The thorns which were embedded in his person could be ascertained on counting to be no less than 944 in number.[95]

The result of such deprivations is that, when they finally reach his trial, 'the prisoner was stretched on the ground in an unconscious state'.[96] On seeing him, Shanahan (performing the role of philosopher-constable) determines that '[h]e looks a very criminal type'.[97] The appearance of the outwardly fatigued body is explicitly deemed morally suspicious in contrast with Shanahan, 'a reservoir of strength', on whom the 'glory of manhood in its prime was stamped on every line of his perfectly proportioned figure and the rhythm of glorious youth was exemplified in every movement of his fine athletic stride'.[98] As the novel repeatedly insists, vigorous and energetic masculinity is

[94] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 265.
[95] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 267.
[96] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 279.
[97] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 279.
[98] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 269.

aligned with good character and exemplary manhood, whereas the exhausted fatigued body, still clad in dirtied bedclothes, is immediately determined to be criminal without need to 'bother about the charges at all'.[99]

Trellis's trial continues in this same manner, with the verdict already determined before the trial ever commences: indeed, it is only held so as to give an additional form of punishment and humiliation. Trellis is given lawyers who cannot speak English and so must defend himself in a trial that is by design unwinnable as his vengeful characters act as both judge and jury, appearing as kings while Trellis remains in soiled pyjamas. O'Brien provides detailed comment on Trellis's suffering: when attempting to stand and defend himself, Trellis 'pressed out words from his mouth with the extremity of his will-power' before falling 'back on his chair in a swoon of exhaustion', in which state he passes much of the trial.[100] Ultimately, Trellis is of course deemed an 'unsavoury example of the depraved and diseased mind', and when making a final attempt to save his life, is 'unable to rise or, for that matter, to raise his voice above the level of a whisper', such that 'nobody in the court was aware he had spoken at all'.[101] Just as Gregor in *The Metamorphosis* loses his ability to speak and be heard after his unsuccessful attempt at explaining himself, so too does Trellis. Fatigue, in these texts, cannot speak. Trellis's struggles throughout the trial are by design, written by Orlick so as to incorporate psychological as well as physical torment into his punishment, with the increasing pain and fatigue that impedes Trellis's ability to govern his body at the centre. The fatigued body is shown to be grotesque, criminal, and deserving of punishment; penalized with additional fatigue as is his poetic due.

4.5 Exhaustion and Structure: 'a satisfactory novel should be a self-

[99] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 279.
[100] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, pp. 286-287.
[101] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 296; pp. 298-299.

evident sham'[102]

As an intensely self-aware text rich in both form and meta-commentary about not only itself and novel-writing, but also of the socio-political content it was written in, *At Swim-Two-Birds* has – unsurprisingly – been the subject of significant and increasing academic analysis. Past criticism has especially focused on its unusual storytelling and structure, as well as its importance as an Irish text in active conversation with its context of modernization and Ireland's shifting identity as a newly independent postcolonial nation-state. While critics have engaged with laziness, deviancy, and the novel's complex narrative structure, my thesis presents the first analysis of O'Brien's depictions and uses of the fatigued male body and sleep 'done wrong'.

Several critics, including Maebh Long and Yaeli Greenblatt, consider O'Brien's depictions of grotesque and abject bodies – yet none have extended their analysis to the O'Brien's engagement with bodies in bed. Though Long examines Orlick as an autoimmune Self, the 'abject body turning on itself: a self that is transgressive, porous and hybrid, a subject at war with itself', and Greenblatt explores how O'Brien 'conceive[s] the physical body as the site of a materialized uncanny', neither have engaged sufficiently with literal sleep.[103] As I have posited, the fatigued body, existing in a liminal state that challenges preconceived beliefs of identity, can also be considered an abject, autoimmune body; its uncontrollable and inopportune calls to sleep functioning as an attack upon itself. Further, the sleeping or fatigued body is also a site of the uncanny, a Self with reduced function that sits in the uneasy position of the corpse. O'Brien's work has also been read through a disability studies lens in analysis from Yael Levin, who examines the role of the disabled protagonist in *The Third Policeman* in relation to

[102] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds,* p. 33.
[103] Maebh Long, 'Abject Bodies: Brian O'Nolan and immunology', in *Flann O'Brien: Gallows Humour,* ed. by Ruben Borg & Paul Fagan (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), p. 177; Greenblatt, p. 135.

Lennard J. Davis's disabled dismodernist subject and the effects and uses of his prosthesis, both literal and metaphorical.[104] Though all these analyses consider the male bodies of O'Brien's work in such a closely adjacent manner, fatigue has remained invisible.

This remains consistent even when reviewing analyses discussing O'Brien's depictions of idle or lazy characters in the context of postcolonial Ireland. What I read as a literal engagement with fatigue has, as mentioned, been elsewhere analysed by Dobbins through a more metaphorical lens. Dobbins draws attention to the text's focus on idleness and temporality, suggesting that the novel both demonstrates and operates as ''Irish time', an understanding of temporality recalcitrant in the face of modernization identified with the state' which was exemplified by the imposed colonial Greenwich time.[105] Dobbins' analysis positions O'Brien's engagement with idleness as a rebellion not only against the capitalist demands of productivity, but also of resistance against the colonialism that introduced these demands and positioned Ireland as a step out of time with modernity. Where outward indications of fatigue are located in the male body, they are tied either to deviancy or to rebellion against colonial capitalist expectations of productivity. Despite the utopian quality Dobbins ascribes to idleness in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, this is also only attributed to the male body, and only when the idle body is deemed to be engaged in the metaphorical action of rebellion. The woman in bed in *At Swim-Two-Birds* remains 'hidden and not easy to discern, a black evil wrinkle in the black sackcloth quilts, a shadow', with little to say and no greater meaning attributed to her body.[106] Whereas the body of the woman in bed in this particular text is largely ignored, the bodies of men in bed take on considerable meaning in published

[104] *The Disability Studies Reader,* ed. by Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 313; Yael Levin, 'Who Hobbles after the Subject: Parables of Writing in *The Third Policeman* and *Molloy*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 40.4 (2017), 105-121 <https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.40.4.08>.
[105] Dobbins, p. 87.
[106] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 146.

scholarship– yet only in the abstract, such that the actual, literal bodies in bed remain invisible.

In earlier work, Joshua D. Esty's brief engagement with the body performing sleep 'done wrong' also accepts without question the connection between such bodies and laziness. And, again, the body in bed is considered purely as a metaphorical tool: Esty considers the ways in which 'O'Brien uses the stock character of the lazy, learned Irishman' to present a 'satire of the Irish artist'.[107] Simultaneously, he argues, O'Brien resists the 'imagined opposition between the 'civilized' mind of the English and the comic body of the Irish' as well as 'the rationalized work ethic of the modern metropolis and the 'erudite irresponsibility' of the backward Irish'.[108] These analyses of Esty and Dobbins are valuable for their engagement with the postcoloniality of the text, yet they simultaneously accept without question the negative representations of the body in bed. In failing to interrogate the ways in which sleep 'done wrong' is presented, such analysis takes for granted, for example, that when the student-narrator is 'reclining safe from ill and infection in the envelope of [his] bed', citing concerns of the dangers of cold 'to persons of inferior vitality', that this is yet another example of his laziness.[109] Authorial intent here is not so much of interest to me as the fact that critics have at no point questioned what beliefs such comments may be representing. This is particularly fascinating when engaging with the text from our current context of Covid-19, when the image of a student staying at home to avoid infection is especially familiar, as are the unfortunate suspicions surrounding the student-narrator's ability to be productive from home and the truth of his vulnerability, which result in the ensuing charges of laziness.

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[107] Joshua D. Esty, 'Flann O'Brien's "At Swim-Two-Birds" and the Post-Post Debate', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 26.4 (1995), 23-46 <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/34426/28462> [accessed 22 February 2023] (p. 31).

[108] Esty, 'Flann O'Brien's "At Swim-Two-Birds" and the Post-Post Debate', p. 31.

[109] O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, p. 83.

Yet more analysis has centred on the structure of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. This is unsurprising, given its complexity: *At Swim-Two-Birds* is a novel that defies clear, coherent structure, instead consisting predominantly of digressions, in which its tangle of storylines are not only in constant conversation, but in a state of overlap and underlap, both proceeding and preceding one. What is often recognized as the clearest of the storylines follows the student-narrator through his final year of studies. However, many key events one would expect from such a story – actual attendance of classes or the challenge of final exams, for example – are treated as irrelevant and occur off the page, with the novel instead focusing on the significant time he spends in bed or drinking and philosophizing with his friends. The second storyline traces the student- narrator's fictional tale of Trellis, but we begin this story after it has already begun, and seemingly important plot points are ignored in favour of digressions and are only shared with us through lists after the fact. Trellis's own writing, a green book of sin, appears to be central to his storyline but we never see any of its content, and only learn of the book through second-hand reference to it. As Trellis's characters seek revenge against their employer-creator, what could be a straightforward revenge narrative instead consists predominantly of more seemingly irrelevant digression as characters tell and retell stories of their own. In addition, the text is also linguistically demanding, as characters shift between multiple genres and registers, at times speaking in dialects they should not logically have access too. The many storylines of the novel contaminate one another as characters traverse across the narrative boundaries, moving from one storyline to another, and events occurring at one level of the narrative bleed into others. As argued by Long, the complicated effect of these crossings is such that the 'differing narrative spaces become complicit as characters exist on multiple planes, and reality and fiction become

entangled'.[110]

At Swim-Two-Birds is a challenging text that requires patience and tiring labour from its readers merely in order to be read, and even more so to be understood: in short, it is a text that enacts exhaustion through its very structure. While many critics have engaged with the structural complexities of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the exhaustion the text itself performs has also failed to garner interest. This is especially odd, given that the novel appears to have been deliberately made more challenging than it originally was. As found by Samuel Anderson, earlier versions of the manuscript were far less complex: it appears 'that O'Brien wrote the *second* level of *AS2B* – that is, the Narrator's novel – before he wrote the first level describing the Narrator himself'.[111] The student-narrator's plotline was woven in later on, as if in a deliberate attempt to further fragment and complicate what was already an intricate story. This weaving is also actively disruptive, calling attention to its own fragmentation to jarring effect as characters are repeatedly introduced and reintroduced, and ideas are reiterated multiple times in different storylines. The result is a story that is often disorientating, in which the frequent repetitions and summaries of off-page events that occur throughout the text not only destabilize any sense of clear linear narrative, but also mimic a state of exhaustion, where it becomes near-impossible to remember what has already been said and to whom.

Previous scholarship by Long begins to connect these structural aspects of *At Swim-Two-Birds* to ideas of sleep and tiredness, describing a particularly surreal and linguistically experimental segment of the fictional characters' journey as a 'dream-like sequence', wherein the expected limitations of '[r]ealistic knowledge, spatiality or

[110] Maebh Long, 'Stepping Away: Radical Digressivity and *At Swim-Two-Birds*', in *Textual Wanderings*, ed. by Rhian Atkin (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 83, Taylor & Francis Group <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.4324/9781351192996> [accessed 7 September 2022].

[111] Samuel Anderson, 'Pink paper and the composition of Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds', *LSU Master's Theses* (master's thesis, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2002), in *English Language and Literature Commons* <https://doi.org/10.31390/gradschool_theses.3989> p. 6.

vegetation' are made 'irrelevant before lyricism and the narrator's desire to exhibit erudition'.[112] Indeed, these increasingly disruptive aspects of the text further contribute to the text's sense of temporal dislocation, its semi-remove from linearity and common time. I would, however, expand this to a characteristic of the text as a whole rather than this one exceptionally dreamlike passage. The novel in its published entirety reads like an incursion into the realm of dreams, which also jump through time and space with no seeming logic, digressing and refocusing unexpectedly on strange events or objects that may seem irrelevant to the drive of the previously established 'plot', such that all attempts at excising a clear narrative, at least, a narrative of the kind we are familiar with in the waking world, becomes impossible. *At Swim-Two-Birds* exhausts the reader with its complex structure and, having done so, becomes increasingly delirious such that the text becomes akin to a waking dream, or a story read through the fog of fatigue, which, though perplexing when held to the standards of the waking world is perfectly acceptable in the sleeping one.

In short, *At Swim-Two-Birds* was purposefully made into a challenging, fatiguing read – and subsequently not read as such by any of its critics. Nor have the numerous depictions and uses of sleep or fatigue drawn critical attention. Why might this be? We could consider the effects here of genre – as a text generally considered comedic, *At Swim-Two-Birds* encourages us to laugh at the grotesque nature of its lounging characters and their strange bedroom activities, so removing us from the potential of their genuine suffering. Indeed, none of the suffering felt by the central characters in *At Swim-Two-Birds* appears to be permanent (the tragic Sheila Lamont is only ever treated as an embarrassing footnote in need of erasing): the student-narrator gains his uncle's respect and, seemingly as a result of this, also writes Trellis out of his torture and death

[112] Long, *Assembling Flann O'Brien*, p. 26.

sentence. Yet as I have discussed, the fatigue in *The Metamorphosis*, a text profoundly tragic despite its moments of absurdism and deeply invested in portraying the suffering of its protagonist, has also failed to garner significant attention. It seems that, in striving to find deep underlying meanings in literature – metaphors and allegories offering secret insights into what it is to be human, existing in different times and places, with different beliefs and sociopolitical contexts – we may have overlooked some of the insights literature has to offer into seemingly more banal, yet equally important, aspects of the human condition: our experiences as bodies in the world, subject to, and often governed, by the pleasures and demands alike arising from our own physicality and that of those we share the world with.

Chapter 5 : Conclusion

As I write this conclusion in the final weeks of my thesis, I find myself reflecting more and more on what it means to research fatigue in literature. Over the course of the last year, I have had the privilege of discussing my work with a range of audiences, from friends to fellow students and academics at conferences. Whenever I introduce the topic of my thesis, I am inevitably met with initial uncertainty: why fatigue? However, despite the differences in backgrounds, I have found that, following the initial hesitation, there are several threads that consistently arise in conversation: surprise not to have previously considered fatigue in literature in this way, frequently followed by several examples of texts in which individuals can now recall fatigue playing a prominent role, and, inevitably, references to either personal or witnessed experiences of fatigue, often characterized by descriptions of struggle and stigma. These repeated stories highlight the importance of researching literary engagements with fatigue, making an often overlooked, invisible symptom visible and, in turn, making space for these conversations to happen. Many of us have experienced fatigue and its associated stigma over the last several years, yet suffering from fatigue often occurs in the privacy of the bedroom and so remains profoundly isolating. In another sentiment that audience members have frequently expressed to me, open discussion of fatigue and its negative associations can help sufferers feel not only 'validated', but 'seen'.

We have a long history of utilizing constructions of fatigue and sleep 'done wrong' as narrative tools, often perpetuating negative societal stereotypes of the fatigued body. Further, these are stories and tropes that audiences keep returning to – I think again of the many ongoing modern engagements with *The Metamorphosis* and the increasing recognition and academic analyses of *At Swim-Two-Birds.* Indeed, these texts seem to be experiencing something of a renaissance of interest. Simultaneously, the increasing encroachment of the public realm into the private space of the bedroom

through social media, Zoom, and working from home, may be functioning to make the bedroom, and, in turn, sleeping habits, more outwardly visible, while also increasing demands for the appearance of appropriate bedroom behaviour. I think of yet another comment from an audience member who described the strain of working in their bedroom during a Covid-19 lockdown and being too afraid to turn their camera on during a Zoom meeting because colleagues may notice that they were attending while in bed and think poorly of their working habits.

While the context giving rise to these comments is of course steeped in the modern day, as I have shown, the anxieties that surround fatigue and sleep 'done wrong' are far from new. In our current time of 2023, we are again faced with many of the same societal challenges that contributed to the cultural construction of fatigue in the nineteenth century. As contributed to the growing cultural insecurity of the late-nineteenth century, in our current time we face heightened anxieties surrounding not only gender, sexuality, race, class, and nationality, but also climate, working conditions, and pandemic. All of this occurs against the backdrop of a rapid increase in expectations of constant productivity and consumption, the push to be busy 24/7 'amid the dissolving of most of the borders between private and professional time, between work and consumption'.[1] The growing demands for constant activity and displays of excess, both of which are supported by the encroachment of social media into daily life, resemble in many ways the demands placed upon 'fin-de-siècle Londoners' who sought to maintain 'imaginary states of well-being' so as to lead the 'more animated life apparently required by a rapidly industrializing society that seemed to demand more energy than urban-dwellers' constitutions were able to supply'.[2] Just as turn-of-the-century Londoners led

[1] Jonathon Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 15.
[2] Takahiro Ueyama, *Health in the Marketplace: Professionalism, Therapeutic Desires, and Medical Commodification in late-Victorian London* (Palo Alto: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 2010), p. 62; p. 77.

increasingly busy lives, twenty-first century Americans are progressively entering a state of sleeplessness, 'in which producing, consuming, and discarding occur without pause, hastening the exhaustion of life and the depletion of resources'.[3] This has also been reported in Aotearoa New Zealand: in a 2005 study with 4,000 participants, on average, one quarter reported chronic sleep problems, with Māori reporting sleeping difficulties at even higher rates.[4] Apprehension about rest – both desired and reviled as unnecessary waste – continues to underlie so much of our lives. Indeed, sleep and tiredness pervade our lives even at a linguistic level and are again used as metaphors for broader concerns, the push to 'be woke' of the 2010s giving way to the 'war on wokeness' of the 2020s, while calls from conspiracy theorists urge the public to 'wake up' to the threat of Covid-19 government measures.[5]

When we consider past narratives of fatigue in relation to modern experiences, I find cause for concern. Even as fatigue was legitimized through medicalization in the late-nineteenth century, demands for relentless vitality and productivity, especially of men, still meant that the fatigued or neurasthenic body was stigmatized. I have found this tension reflected in *The Metamorphosis* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*, where fatigued male bodies are surrounded by contradiction: fatigue may be the result of overwork, yet the fatigued body is repeatedly coded as lazy. Fatigue as an invisible symptom is thus presented as contestable, liable to be faked for personal benefit, yet the effects of fatigue are shown to be grotesque, explicitly inscribed upon the body in such a way as to make

[3] Crary, p. 17.

[4] Sarah-Jane Paine and others, 'Prevalence and Consequences of Insomnia in New Zealand: Disparities Between Maori and non-Maori', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 29.1 (2005), 22-28 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-842x.2005.tb00743.x> (p. 24).

[5] Jocelyn Gecker, 'A College in Upheaval: War on 'Woke' Sparks Fears in Florida', *AP News*, 1 March 2023 <https://apnews.com/article/ron-desantis-florida-state-government-race-and-ethnicity-b1d847ddc5e1f136b17f254f71fd15dc> [accessed 1 March 2023]; Byron William Rangiwai, '"Wake up, Sheeple!" Conspiracy Theories and Māori During the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Mai Journal*, 10.1 (2021), 46-49 <https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2021.10.1.6>; Sara Rushing, 'On Bodies, Anti-bodies, and the Body Politic in Viral Times', *Theory & Event*, 23.4 (2020), 53-60 <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/775402> [accessed 1 April 2023].

fatigued individuals repulsive and immediately suspect. The fatigued patient struggles to leave the bed yet can be fearsomely criminal and threatening.

When *The Metamorphosis* and *At Swim-Two-Birds* were written, fatigue was also largely associated with femininity. This did not, of course, preclude the writing of fatigued men in these texts, but anxieties about the 'feminine' symptom of fatigue developing in the male body does seem to have influenced not only the portrayals of fatigue and sleep 'done wrong' in these stories, but also how we have read them ever since. There is a widespread failure to recognize and report on fatigue in literature regardless of the demographic it is shown in. However, fatigue appears to be even more invisible when it is depicted in male characters, as scholars seem to have recognized female fatigue in texts such as 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and *Mrs Dalloway* with comparative ease. Worse, all of the fatigued literary characters that I have discussed, regardless of gender, have been stigmatized because of their exhaustion – often in the same ways that patients of fatiguing conditions still report being stigmatized today.

It is important that we recognize fatigue across society, wherever it appears, as a legitimate symptom rather than a sign of individual failure, and one which is experienced by a broad spectrum of individuals beyond the demographic it has been culturally associated with. To fail to do so not only raises barriers to recognition and assistance, it also contributes to the perpetuation of stigma surrounding fatigue. Within our current context of pandemic and increasing demands of productivity, it is vital that we deconstruct stigmatizing, entrenched depictions of fatigue and are vigilant in our observation of how these old stereotypes continue to arise at the detriment of those experiencing fatigue today.

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