



Watching Hannah: Sex, Horror and Bodily De- Formation in Victorian England (Reaktion Books - Picturing History)

Barry Reay

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Arthur Munby (1828–1910) was a Victorian gentleman from a respected family of Yorkshire lawyers. He left behind diaries that record his life-long obsession with working-class Victorian women, whom he interviewed, photographed and wrote about. This obsession led to his relationship with, and eventual secret marriage to, his maidservant Hannah Cullwick.

Working women fascinated Munby because they disrupted his Victorian ideal of femininity: their bodies were altered by physical exertion and dirt, and they were also often deformed by disease. Drawing not only on the diaries but also on a vast, untapped archive of documents, photographs, poems and sketches, *Watching Hannah* is far more than an account of a compulsive observer of working women and a fetishist of hard-working female hands, however. The author analyzes Munby's obsessions in relation to changing definitions of gender, sexual identity and class to reveal wider male preoccupations with femininity, the body, deformity, masculinity and – most of all – sexuality, at a pivotal point in European history.

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