

*The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities* by Patricia Pulham. Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020. ISBN 978-0748693429. 226 pp. + 18 illus. £75.00.

Some years ago, I witnessed a very special guided tour in the Musée Rodin in Paris: a blind man was taken round the museum and allowed to let his hands glide over Rodin's sculptures, exploring them through touch, indentation by indentation, protrusion by protrusion. As the blind man's seeing hands felt their way over Rodin's surfaces, sensing depth and three-dimensionality in ways akin to the sculptor's original creation of his works, I was watching discreetly from a distance, with a sense of voyeurism, envy, and a touch of shame: here was a man whose disability granted him the access to sculpture desired by us all, yet for the past centuries denied to most museum goers. "Please don't touch." The signs are familiar, and as parents we repeat the prohibition as we introduce sculpture to our children, whose instinctive first response to the art form is that of touch. Yet for the past centuries, vision has dominated in the appreciation of sculpture. Ever since Johann Gottfried Herder's treatise *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream* (1778), the desiring body's encounter with sculpture has been theorized in terms of the collusion between touch and sight. Herder's wonderful image of the way in which the eye that looks at sculpture becomes "a hand, the ray of light becomes a finger, and the imagination becomes a form of immediate touching" may convince us that we can reconstruct the experience of touch in our minds (and hence do not really need to trace that finger across the marble). A century later, reflecting the Victorian denigration of touch, Bernard Berenson's "tactile values" addressed our ability to reconstruct touch and three-dimensionality when looking at painting in the *Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896). On the basis of our early tactile approach to the world, we develop a sense of empathy that can recreate haptic experiences in the mind, hence keeping us at a safe distance from the artworks themselves.

Patricia Pulham's book on the sculptural body in Victorian literature largely covers the period framed by Herder and Berenson and embraces the sensuousness of touch associated with sculpture as a precondition for a perceptive understanding of the art form itself and its representation – and celebration – in literature. Pulham's own delight in the eroticism of the sculpted nude transpires throughout: this is a book by an author who fully understands the materiality of sculpture and the ways in which this materiality enabled the presence of sculptural works and metaphors in Victorian literature to serve as vehicles for a broad range of discourses on transgressive sexualities at a time when coded language was ubiquitous. For the Victorians,