The Citizen's Body

Gilbert, Pamela K.

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Gilbert, Pamela K.
The Ohio State University Press, 2007.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/27982.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/27982

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1149990
In 1958 Hannah Arendt looked back over the troubled history of late modernity—the rise of democracy and of fascism, of the extension of citizenship and of semipermanent states of exception—and penned *The Human Condition*, her analysis of our political heritage and its possible futures. Early in the volume she devotes considerable space to the rise of the social, a historical fact she regards with resigned bitterness. According to Arendt, when late modernity, with its large populations organized into nation-states, enabled the realm of the household to invade the political arena, the social was born—and promptly, like the cuckoo in the nest, the social destroyed the legitimate existing domains of public and private upon which all truly political action could be based. What remains of the extinct demos is a mass of people without individuality who have lost the capacity to act and can now only “behave.”

In 1962 Jürgen Habermas would cover some of the same ground in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, at least somewhat more optimistically. During the same period when Arendt sees the political suffocating under the weight of the social, Habermas sees the birth of a vibrant public sphere. Despite the fact that this early work traces a rather dire debilitation of that public sphere in later years, Habermas’s oeuvre argues for a fairly optimistic vision of a new kind of political participation that emerges in this period, through the public sphere. Even if incompletely realized, he argues, this public of rational debate between putative equals allows for a new political relationship between an empowered public and sovereignty, which he sees as the ultimately worthwhile goal of the Enlightenment project. He, too, however, sees peril to this ideal from the intrusion of “private matters”—
identity issues, for example—in the public sphere. In this, at least, he agrees with Arendt’s sense of the dangers of the introduction of the private into matters of state.

However, the growth of the public sphere that Habermas celebrates and the emergence of the social that Arendt decries are not discrete events. It is, I will argue, the social as a mediating domain that enables the development, in this transitional period, of a notion of liberal government that can mediate between “matters of the household” and those of citizenship, both allowing for and policing a more inclusive model of political participation. Far from destroying the public and private, the social permits the development of a specifically modern understanding of public and private, in which the structurally necessary fantasy of a public-private divide can be sustained through the reformulation of older models of citizenship. In allowing “matters of the household”—of the body and the realm of necessity—into public discourse about the social body, the realm of the social provided a way to connect the management of individual bodies to citizenship, while still allowing “private matters” to remain outside the boundaries of politics per se. Although perhaps ultimately untenable, this double gesture—of making the private central to government while apparently excluding it from political representation—allows modern liberal government to develop and function in a complex and changing period.

This volume thus addresses a fundamental problem in Victorian notions of citizenship—a problem that remains thorny for liberal theorists today. What is the role of the social in creating and sustaining the ideals of national

1. A word is in order here about the use of the term “liberal,” which I use not in the specific sense of the Liberal Party (except when capitalized) or of a particular political theory. There were many kinds of liberals, of course, in mid-Victorian society, espousing theories from the economic liberalism of Smith to that of the later Mills, which emphasized social responsibility while retaining a largely Kantian notion of a core individual self. But I am referring here to the overarching philosophy of government in the period, stemming from Enlightenment ideals and largely shared by Tories and Whigs, and later by Conservatives, Liberals, and most Radicals alike. These ideals include the conviction that government should in some sense be representative, interest itself in building the good society (or in removing impediments to its development), be based when feasible on consent rather than force, and be founded on the inviolability of property and a relatively free circulation of labor, capital, and goods. It is at base a capitalist and possessive individualist vision. Although there were different interpretations of core terms, this was generally the ideal of government that most Victorians shared, and the one that comes under the broad term “liberal.” Thus, many people identified economic and social policies as “liberal,” especially in the beginning of the period, that we might see as conservative today because they were based on a fundamentalist view of economic liberalism. By the time the “Liberal” Party came along, the term had come to be associated with social policies favoring the extension of the franchise as later it would be connected to “social” measures such as universal education. But I am using the term here in its most catholic sense, and in that sense, Victorian Britain was marked by a steadily liberalizing vision of government.
community? How does the private self relate to the public one? And how can freedom of choice work to uphold a common ideal in a society in which cultural and personal values seem unmanageably diverse? As the idea of citizenship grew to be more inclusive, and liberalism posited a society of eventual universal citizenship, England confronted the problem of those whose behaviors did not seem to indicate fitness for the responsibilities associated with political power. In a liberal society, fit behaviors had to originate in individual choices rather than in coercion from above. In a market economy, rewards were held to accrue to those behaviors that were socially appropriate. Yet what of those who did not choose to behave appropriately? What of those who disregarded such rewards? Political economists and their early popularizers, such as Harriet Martineau, tended to assume that such misbehaviors (early marriages, bad saving habits, etc.) were the result of ignorance. Because establishing financial security, increasing social status, and nurturing a family were increasingly held to be natural human desires, those who failed to behave in ways designed to achieve those goals were assumed to be ill-informed. Once people understood the laws of economics, it was reasoned, they would certainly begin to behave appropriately, engaging in a kind of social citizenship that might (or might not) be the precursor of a suffrage-based citizenship.

By the mid-century it had become evident that this had been a utopian belief. Behaviors were based not on the intellectual awareness of enlightened self-interest but on the desire for the good things that those behaviors could bring. And too many people displayed desires that were antithetical to the notion of fitness championed by liberal thinkers. Thus, social outreach became a matter not simply of giving information but of a more comprehensive education leading to the management of desire, which in turn required an active role in the very formation of subjectivity. Since these desires were supposed to be natural, they were rooted in the private sphere—in the body and the family, believed to be the natural, universal substrata of the individual and social units. Preparation for citizenship came to be seen less as a matter of acquiring a public and political identity than of shaping the familial, moral, and physical environment required to foster a natural and healthy body and mind; in short, with liberal universalism, fitness for citizenship ceased to be simply a political issue and became instead explicitly a social matter rooted in the private and domestic spheres. The management of the social body through public medicine and discourses of health became the principal discourse with which to negotiate these new questions of citizenship and the Condition of England, of the fit individual and the problematic masses. The development of this discourse identified the healthy body and healthy desires as the basis of political fitness. Over the course of this period, the citizen became not only
a moral product of education but also a physical product of good domestic hygiene.

A flurry of recent books on Victorian liberalism focus on anxieties surrounding the figure of the citizen. Richard Dellamora’s *Friendship’s Bonds* traces the ideal of male homosocial bonds within a “just society . . . governed by friends” (1) and its shadow, anxieties about male homosexual exploitation—the fear that the city on a hill would become the cities of the plains. Amanda Anderson’s *The Powers of Distance* also examines problematic figures of liberal anticitizenship (and antimodernity). The celebrated powers of reason and cosmopolitan detachment valued by liberalism led to fears that such detachment taken to extremes undoes liberalism itself—taking the citizen toward rootlessness, dandyism, dilettantism, and amoral sensation-seeking. Anderson traces the anxiety around detachment specifically through aesthetic debates of the period. David Wayne Thomas’s *Cultivating Victorians* also examines the ideal of liberal agency in relation to aesthetic value; his concern centers more on questions of authenticity and the staging of the self through various cultural debates. Finally, Lauren Goodlad’s splendid *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* is most closely related to the concerns of this book, as it focuses on the oscillation between the desire for a managerial state and one fostering autonomy, a model of state as pastor. All of these studies focus on the anxieties of liberalism—in an inclusive state, what are the limits of inclusion? When does the nation itself lose its identity, and on what is that identity based? They also all identify nodes of anxiety around questions of individual agency and autonomy.

This book intersects with these recent works in a variety of ways. Anderson and Thomas attempt a revalorization of liberal values and frequently make compelling arguments to support their positions—among them, critiques of the tendency of recent scholarship to reject such values wholesale. Although sympathetic to many of the core values of liberalism that these authors advance, I attempt in this volume to provide a balanced critique of the problems and contradictions within those values, as well as the opportunities those contradictions have historically created. In the works above, also, whether citizenship is articulated through aesthetic practices, practices of consumption, sexual practices, or anxieties about identity, these debates tend to be articulated through ideals of normalcy—the normal individual’s tastes
and practices in relationship to the “healthy” ideal self or the deviant other. Rather than focusing primarily on those tastes and practices, however, this book focuses also on the ground of those tastes: the body. This book traces the construction of citizenship through the figure of the healthy body, in parliamentary debates on the franchise, in sanitary and housing publications, and in novels. Throughout the mid-century, evolving discussions of the healthy body and its tastes would undergird debates about individuality, the social body, and fitness for citizenship.

Much scholarship on the Victorian period in the past several years, following the insights of Foucault, has addressed the social body, a key term for the same period, and its relationship to the state. The rise of liberal government and new knowledge directed at measuring and controlling the economic and physical behaviors of the populace have a strong relationship to Victorian ideas about fitness and citizenship. Yet little work has explicitly connected these two areas of scholarship. In Victorian Britain the discussion of the franchise developed in the context of industrial capitalism and a slow enlargement of the polis, which allowed for a protracted and richly complex debate on the formation of the fit citizen and citizenship’s relationship to class and gender identity. In this period the legislative and cultural basis developed, not only for a modern liberal notion of citizenship as defined by political rights but also for its social corollaries. The emergence of the social as a key domain is fundamental to the definition of public and private that materializes over the long and troubled period marked by the First and Second Reform Bills (1832 and 1867). Yet this social sphere, of which much has been said, has actually been ill-defined in scholarly discussion. Theorists such as Mary Poovey, Jacques Donzelot, and Patrick Joyce have each placed its origination in historical periods more than one hundred years apart, a discrepancy that has not been adequately addressed. Finally, the operations of the social in relation to articulations of public and private have not been fully explained.

As a metaphorical description of a population in corporeal terms, the “social body” had a long history in the early modern period and took on renewed importance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as discussions of the social body coincided with new views of the state’s role as a manager of physical health and facilitator of social cohesion. The social body should not be confused with earlier and very different concepts, such as the monarch’s two bodies, or the public, or the state. The “body of the people” is probably the closest concept. But only in the late eighteenth century did

2. A notable exception is Patricia McKee’s fine analysis of the gendered knowledge systems operating through the public-private divide in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
a concept emerge of a body of the nation that was neither identical with the politically active portion of the population nor simply the economic one. This new understanding of the body of the people positioned it as one to be managed in terms of its health, reproduction, and morality. This body was constitutive of the state but still disconnected from direct political influence. In the early nineteenth century, as political representation became conceptually linked to the social body for the first time (with the threat and promise of an ever-expanding suffrage), the social body began also to be medicalized. As Foucault’s work emphasizes, with the advent of new statistical practices to analyze the population, the figure of the social body as understood in this period divided society into masses of standardized or deviant individual bodies. Vice came to be seen less as the result of fallen nature than as the perversion of nature through adverse circumstances, such as living in urban poverty. Moral health was understood as coterminous with physical health; political normalcy was dependent on this healthy state. The advent of epidemic disease in urban areas lent both focus and urgency to this understanding of the social body. It also provided it with a vocabulary founded on the notion of physically healthy bodies as the basis of the modern state. Healthy subjects—structurally equivalent and behaviorally similar—would behave rationally and appropriately; hence, statistical science would not only measure but also predict behavior, contributing to the transparency of a thoroughly modern society. As the century wore on, this model was inflected with a number of other ways of reading the healthy body, including ethnicity (especially as compared to the Irish in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s) and emerging modern notions of race (mostly from the mid-1850s on). But these ways of reading “deviance” largely participated in and built on the sanitary rhetoric established earlier, as Irish or Indian bodies were read as “naturally” dirty or prolific.

3. Some readers may be surprised to find Foucauldian and Habermasian scholars side by side in this volume. Poovey’s analysis of the making of the social body is fundamental for me, and I see my work here in part as extending her analysis. Habermas and Nancy Armstrong have also provided me with key insights for understanding the period. Although I have fundamental differences with Habermasian liberalism, his work as a historian is foundational. Some historians have critiqued Structural Transformation as overgeneralizing and idealizing a never-never coffee house culture that did not live up to its own notion of itself. But Habermas is here a historian of an ideal; that is, he gives us a clear history of what people hoped for and believed in, if not of actual practices. That ideal is, of course, still very much with us. Foucault gives us a somewhat more cynical history of the epistemologies associated with those developments. In this sense, the two projects are complementary.

4. The impact of empire on visions of citizenship and the body cannot be underestimated, and clearly, the Irish famine, the Jamaica uprisings, and the Indian Rebellion of 1857 all weighed heavily on British visions of the nation and the body, although it is beyond the scope of this study to treat these topics with the care they deserve. For a discussion of the impact of empire on British understandings of public health at home, see Gilbert, Mapping the Victorian Social Body.
In the reform debates that took place between 1832 and 1867, the concept of citizenship was elaborated in relation to the franchise, which made elite perception of the working classes the site of contention about what constituted a right to or fitness for participation in government. The sense of fitness that developed, although formally tied to economic requirements, was increasingly defined in social terms. The first reform shifted qualification from property ownership to levels of consumption. Additionally, by the 1860s the criterion of “fitness” as a qualification to exercise the vote came to predominate; key to fitness was “individuality.” At the same time, in both political and sanitary rhetoric, the “masses” were seen as the antithesis of individuality and citizenship. The “fit” working man was by the 1860s defined as he who was able to act as an individual, defined in part by his modes of consumption, rather than as a part of a mass; the unfit noncitizen—the pauper, for example—was part of an aggregate who lacked individual interests and the ability to reason. This fear of the realm of necessity—of the body—reflects what J. G. A. Pocock calls an Aristotelian strand in Victorian theories of liberal citizenship: those caught within the realms of necessity, too engaged with bodily needs, were seen as requiring socialization before emerging into the public sphere, which was carefully separated from the domestic. This division perpetuated an illusion of politics as separable from materiality and economics, and of a bourgeois individual self that preceded the “mass” of humanity and was separate from it.

The social body, then, includes and depends upon a definition of the (ideal) body of the individual citizen. “Citizenship” is constructed as dependent on the internalization of certain kinds of desire and their enactment as consumption of goods and services (especially housing) and information. Thus, to make the pauper into a good citizen, it is necessary to teach him or her to desire appropriately—usually framed as desire for marriage, financial security, and upward mobility for one’s family. Citizenship, although defined as public and male, is therefore dependent on the domestic sphere—that is, on private and female modes of production and reproduction. Not surprisingly then, anxiety about the control of the working classes is centered on (feminine or feminized) inappropriate desires and on the inappropriate desires of middle-class women.

“Citizenship” is connected to the rise of the national narrative and positions itself explicitly as a category of identity overriding class identification; it is constructed to operate as a counter to class politics by incorporating all classes within a shared civic culture of appropriate consumption. Every citizen is a citizen of something. If not members of a class or other identity group,
individuals could not simply be monads, floating free of all communal sentiment. The imagined community that legitimated citizenship was the nation. National identity, as a widely shared identity value, comes into sharp focus in this period precisely as public authority is contested and as other identities, such as class, begin to appear threatening as loci of power. As Habermas’s analysis suggests, it required the presence of a public sphere, within which narratives of national identity might be played out in relationship to the concept of individual, private (bourgeois) identity being formulated in the novel. Western liberal notions of citizenship rely on this divide to safeguard both individual freedom and a state that is putatively free of identity politics. This division has, of course, been extensively critiqued as an ultimately untenable, if strategically necessary, fiction. Though national identity is fundamentally a public identity, it is one of the peculiar markers of this period and its rhetoric that individuals internalized their sense of this public self as a fundamental, physical (and later, racial) essence, which nonetheless never fully lost the public character bound up in the concept of citizenship.

As sanitarians struggled to extend their legal influence, the discourse of moral environmentalism contributed to the conception of healthful environment as a prerequisite of citizenship; health, like literacy, was something to which the potential citizen must have access. Health was defined as a set of hygienic practices that created a bodily habitus appropriate to the development of middle-class tastes, thus eradicating class boundaries. It was necessary to the nation that workers be both healthy and fit citizens, rather than physically degenerate and politically disaffected—either apolitical or, worse, identifying primarily with class interests. Paradoxically, then, the desire to separate the political man—self-as-citizen—from the realm of the body and necessity demanded an increasingly anxious emphasis on the body itself. The notion of the social body became a way to talk about the connection between the public sphere of nation and the private sphere of individuals, while citizenship—both as a way of defining the person as a member of the national social body and as the institutional link between nation and state—became the measure and the goal of its health.

Thus, national identity, as it operated in the mid-nineteenth century, was beginning to be defined in the public sphere as a link between the individual and the population as a whole—in short, as a mode of interpellation of the citizen, the public identity of the private man. The complete match between the nation and the social body could only be achieved if all members could be brought within that narrative and made into good, healthy citizens who identified with the nation as an overarching category more fundamental than other identities, especially class. Many institutions contribute to this process,
but perhaps none so fundamentally as that state-supported but private ideological apparatus, the family. Liberal inclusiveness demanded the careful and untiring construction of a subject perfectly free to act in accordance with his or her desires, provided those desires were “natural”—that is, constructed within increasingly narrow definitions of the normal and appropriate. Most of these desires had to do with domestic, “private” life and the reproduction of the family in a bourgeois mode.

Thus Britishness equals Englishness equals, by the end of the period, the healthy (clean, isolated), white, masculine, middle-class body. Women became the privileged site of production of this body through their ability to construct an appropriately domestic environment. As Foucault has argued, the move toward modern liberal government is marked by “governmentalities”—the development of bodies of knowledge that are also practices, particularly in regard to biopolitics (the management of populations) through public health, the census, and the like, which enabled governments to know about both the movements and living habits of their subjects. This information was also used to mobilize consent among those subjects to governmental aims, rather than relying on brute power. The discourses and practices that emerged in Britain in regard to these developments authorized themselves with the rhetoric of national identity, interest, and improvement; those we will engage include some of those associated with the development of the sanitary and housing movements and their relation to the emerging concept of the social body, especially in combination with citizenship and the franchise, domesticity, and pauperism.

What would come to be understood over the course of the period as public health—especially in relation to epidemic disease and sanitary issues—has a privileged role in the discourses of the social body. The public health debate did much to foreground the body and its environment as the basis of national health and morality; as the body took center stage in these discourses, citizenship itself came to be perceived as having a physical basis. The body itself is a key signifier. Basic representative of a materiality that is malleable yet limited, the body became in this period both the index and the metaphor of the nation. Individual bodies and their ills, as representatives of classes and populations, became indices of the condition of that less tangible entity, the social body; early on, the social itself, in both its physical and its moral manifestations, came to be understood as a medicalized physical entity that could be fixed, observed, and dissected both through the individual bodies of its subjects and in toto (or en masse) in the form of statistics. The social, like
a body (and like the economy), was supposed to work according to “natural
laws,” laws that, nevertheless, had to be carefully learned. Because of this
formulation, the social was not considered amenable to legislative or politi-
cal solutions, but it was to pedagogical ones, especially those situated in the
home.

This volume traces the discourse on the citizen and the social body in three
forms of discourse in the public sphere. Section I of this book focuses on mid-
nineteenth-century political views of citizenship. The first two chapters of this
section provide a detailed analysis of parliamentary debates on the franchise
and an exposition of competing notions of political fitness. Within these
debates we can also trace the impact of sanitary visions of the body—con-
ected to English political discourse partly through the aleatory conjunction
of a major cholera epidemic arriving concurrently with reform agitation—on
notions of political fitness for citizenship. Social issues coalesced around san-
tary questions, just as political enfranchisement was insistently connected
to the health of the social body. By the mid-century, as we see in chapter 3,
progressive politics came to be allied with sanitary intervention. Victorians
thus set the stage for a time when health, like education, would be a right of
the nascent citizen; however, Victorian liberalism’s mystification of the inter-
dependence of the political, social, domestic, and economic would also retard
the recognition of those rights and contribute to their erosion in the latter
years of the twentieth century.

Section II focuses on the social. In these three chapters, we shall examine
how interventions in the domain of the social—specifically in the housing
movement—clarify the relationship between the political, economic, domes-
tic, and sanitary projects of the mid-Victorian period. First, chapter 4 offers
a careful theorization of the divisions between public, private, and the social
that clarifies the stakes of the succeeding readings. The well-wrought indi-
vidual was thought to emerge from a physical environment that would foster
not only health but also suitable values. It was in the domestic sphere that
these values were formed. For this reason, following earlier successes at san-
tizing the city, social outreach turned to the domestic environment. Yet the
social need to house the poor well conflicted with the economic doctrine that
charity pauperized by undermining independence. Chapter 5 explores the
mid-century emphasis on inculcating bourgeois norms of privacy and separa-
tion in multiroom dwellings and how it conflicted with the reality of high
urban rents and the habits of city-dwelling laborers. These and other problems
encouraged social reformers to look not only at the built environment but
also at the behaviors and the desires of the poor. The poor, it was concluded, were problematic because of structural and economic problems and because their desires, shaped by their unusual home lives, were warped. Social workers, then, needed to address not only the physical environment but also the unhealthy desire that it produced and reflected.

Because it dealt with this feminized domain of the home and the body, social intervention offered special opportunities for middle-class women. Yet as the social became central to the national project, it called increasingly for a professionalized class of social workers. Such professionalization threatened the status of the social as an autonomous domain emerging from the private by bringing it under state control. In chapter 6 Octavia Hill provides a transitional example: as the last representative of the mid-Victorian concept of liberal social action, she espoused a vision that tended inevitably toward the more professionalized activism of the 1880s and 1890s while highlighting, by her resolute refusal to acknowledge that trend, the particular issues of the mid-Victorian vision of the social. Her work is revelatory of the roots of difficulties still with us today (especially in the United States), in terms of both wedding social activism to liberal democracy and reclaiming a tradition of female activism rooted in the separation of the social from political action. This history is particularly problematic for feminism, as the separation of the social is in part based on the discourse of the social as a body and the cultural associations of the body with a feminized system of care and a discourse of “nature” that is separate from culture and politics.

Section III turns to the novel and, with it, to the representation of the individual. Hannah Arendt called the novel of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “the only entirely social art form” (39). The novel is the privileged forum for the exploration and celebration of middle-class Victorian subjectivity and domesticity, as well as one of the most important arenas for social commentary in this period. In chapter 7 the mid-century “social problem” novel enables us to examine narratives of the development of the social, sanitary reform, and their relation to the political in works by Benjamin Disraeli and Margaret Oliphant. After the initial flurry of Condition of England novels and the failure of the Charter, social fitness came to be defined less explicitly in terms of the franchise and more in terms of individual development. The fit body was defined in terms of continence and incontinence, and the fit subject was marked by a painfully achieved moral and physical self-containment, as we will see elaborated in Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens in chapter 8. Finally, George Eliot’s *Felix Holt* rereads mid-century social problem novels in consideration of this attention to moral hygiene. Chapter 9 demonstrates how Eliot recovers and revises an earlier tradition in both political writing and sensation novels in using addiction as a thematic correlative for politically
unfit behaviors. The closed, disciplined bourgeois body requires careful development and policing and is always under the threat of invasion and dissolution through mismanagement of its own desires. Intemperance and addiction become dominant themes for thinking through the threats to civic “fitness” in these novels, just as the beneficent influence of the feminized social is expressed through plotlines that emphasize sanitary reform and social work.

Thus, the book examines the epistemology of cultural divisions into public, private, and social domains and links the development of these concepts to the problems of class, gender, and citizenship that are particularly volatile in the mid-Victorian period. The striking centrality of medical discourse to politics and government in the context of parliamentary reform, women’s social activism, and conceptions of English identity testify to the importance of the body and ideas of health to citizenship. In each of the three sections of the book, a different kind of discourse is examined. At the state level, parliamentary debates lay out an explicitly political agenda for citizenship. These debates concern not only ideological questions but also structural ones—how will the newly enfranchised affect the existing system? Sanitary writings also deal with questions of the moral and physical health of the public and are written to encourage political change—that is, changes in legislation and policy. In the second section, social experts in the field of housing are largely writing to each other and to the general public. This shift not only reflects the reification of social intervention, in that it constitutes particular and specialized fields such as housing, which are public issues without being state issues per se, but also its general importance throughout the culture, as charity is systematized and organized under social theories. Such documents, generally intended to be persuasive to a general public, appeal to broadly understood notions of social appropriateness and desirable behavior in the service of specific arguments. The final section examines the incorporation of such narratives into novels, emphasizing the centrality of public health and its formulations of the social in the liberal domestic novel of the mid-century. These novels, like the texts explored in earlier sections, seek to communicate with the general public on political or social questions. But with their focus on private life and the elaboration of private subjectivities, they also offer detailed explorations of the relation between narratives of public and private life unavailable in the other discursive arenas studied here. In this section we can trace the increasing centrality of constructions of bodily desire and continence to these narratives over the course of the mid-century.

Each group of writings addresses fitness for citizenship in a different way, with different audiences and emphasis. Yet all, finally, concern the body, its environment, and its desires. The notion of the medicalized social body emerges as the most significant way to mediate competing discourses of
citizenship and nationhood, of the individual and the larger community. The development of the discourses explored here foregrounded the healthy body as the very basis of political fitness and defined the condition of England in terms of individual healthy bodies and the management of desire to produce the ideal bodily habitus. From the first reform seen as a potential cause of national ills to a second reform positioned as an inadequate cure for national incontinence, we can trace the establishment of a self-contained English body as a *sine qua non* of citizenship and the definition and disciplining of the social as its nurturing medium.