STIMULATING TEXTS:
THE POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF AROUSAL IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

by

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Abstract

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Stimulating Texts: The Politics and Aesthetics of Arousal in Victorian Literature and Culture deals with representations of sexual affect in mid- and late-nineteenth century English literature and culture. In considering this particular aspect of Victorian society, I propose that it would be profitable to go beyond the existing scholarly considerations of desire. Such considerations, I argue, are too broad, failing to account for specific processes by which bodies respond to stimuli. Rather than understand desire as a uniformly useful rubric for approaching sexuality in Victorian texts, I focus on the particular, often peculiar build up to desire, especially the intensely bodily experience of sexual sensation.

Stimulating Texts carries out this investigation by reflecting on a number of formalist issues, also making use of psychoanalytic, queer, and reader-response theory. A study of how culture, both in its high and low, its written and visual iterations, becomes a vehicle for the transmission and the policing of sexual affect, this study looks at a number of well-known mid- and late-Victorian works: the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins and M.E. Braddon, Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. I show that the Victorian construction of sexual arousal is simultaneously a canny bit of marketing to attract readers and an attempt to control how citizens' bodies respond to stimulation. *Stimulating Texts* explores the processes by which

Victorian cultural productions stimulate readers and teach them how to properly channel that arousal.

The texts I explore here defy a totalizing picture. Where arousal is presented as a transportive force in the sensation novel, it is also an ambiguous affect, with undertones of sexual and economic violence. In *Salomé*, arousal is ecstatically transformative but fatal. Wilde's princess defies her society and its stultifying model of desire, but she does not defeat them; instead, she is killed at play's end, crushed by those whose authority her unique passion undermines. And *Dracula* deploys the tropes of erotica and pornographic materials, even as the novel expresses profound horror at the power of arousal to override social niceties and middle-class respectability. All, however, are intimately concerned with the sexual impulse.

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INTRODUCTION:
The Case for Arousal / The Case of Arousal

In a pivotal, early scene in *Great Expectations*, the novel's young protagonist Pip encounters the convict Magwitch in a graveyard. Terrified, Pip vows to return the next morning, as well as to bring food and a file for the leg iron Magwitch wears. As Pip makes his way back to the home of his guardian-sister, Mrs. Joe, he ponders his terrible dilemma, for, to honor his promise to Magwitch, he will be required to steal from his sister and to conceal the theft as well as its motivation. Consumed by fear, by confusion and dread, Pip hides the slice of bread-and-butter dealt out to him by the parsimonious Mrs. Joe at dinner, concealing it in his trousers. A "secret burden," Pip calls this hidden bread-and-butter, pronouncing conscience a "dreadful thing when it accuses man or boy; but when, in the case of a boy, that secret burden co-operates with another secret burden down the leg of his trousers, it is…a great punishment" (Dickens 32). The hidden food comes to represent Pip's sins, serving as a convergence point for the wrongs he perceives himself as having committed. In their most obvious iterations, these wrongs are his complicity with the escaped convict and the theft such complicity necessitates. Given Pip's naïveté, his experience of the tyrannical Mrs. Joe, whose notions of childrearing seem to consist of imbuing Pip with shame at having survived infancy, thus saddling his sister with his care, and his vividly rendered childish sense of the world around him, it seems possible, at first, to take Pip's confession literally.

But it is also possible to understand Pip's confession otherwise. In "Manual Conduct in *Great Expectations*," William A. Cohen suggests that Pip's "secret burden" is, actually, his sexual arousal, which he takes great pains to conceal. The secreted bread-and-butter functions as

an alibi, Cohen argues, a euphemism for the real nature of Pip's "wicked secret" (Dickens 41). Referring to the scene in which Pip undertakes the stirring of the Christmas pudding, all the while he is hiding the bread-and-butter intended for the convict, Cohen remarks that Pip's confession that he "found the tendency of exercise to bring the bread-and-butter out at [his] ankle, quite unmanageable" and that he thus "[h]appily…slipped away, and deposited that part of my conscience in my garret bedroom" (32) hints that "the load of which Pip relieves himself surreptitiously in his bedroom signals the irresistible culmination of…titillation" (Cohen 30). Thus, Pip's guilty conscience is the result not merely of the secret he is keeping vis-à-vis his contract with the convict, but first and foremost of his masturbatory habit, oh-so-innocently but unmistakably signaled by the "suspiciously buttery emission in Pip's bedroom" (Cohen 31).

Cohen's admittedly "lubricious reading strategy" helps us see what he terms the "deeply saturated perversity" at the "very heart of the Victorian literary canon," a perversity articulated in "a literary language that expresses eroticism even as it designates sexuality the supremely unmentionable subject" (31). Such a strategy is of course made possible by Michel Foucault's influential work on the history of sexuality. That history, Foucault demonstrated, was more complicated than had been assumed. Disputing the "repressive hypothesis," which held that the Victorians were "imperial prude[s]" (3), Foucault illuminated the ways in which the Victorians were in fact thoroughly invested in a thorough investigation of sexual behavior and expression, a "veritable discursive explosion" (17) that began in the seventeenth century and reached its apotheosis in the burgeoning and increasingly dominant medico-legal discourses of the Victorian period. By the end of the era, Havelock Ellis could confidently and convincingly identify "sex as

the central problem of life." Sex, Ellis proclaimed, "lies at the root of life, and we can never learn to reverence life until we how to understand sex" (*Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol. I).[1]

The "incitement to speak about [sex], and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail" (Foucault 18), was of course also made manifest in cultural productions, not least the novel. Indeed, the discourse about sex and sexuality became, arguably, *the* central subject of Victorian cultural output. While ostensibly focusing on the drive towards marriage and other trappings of bourgeoisie respectability, these works secretly surveyed the currents of various "carnal motivations" (Seidman 50).

Or so, anyway, post-Foucauldian critics of Victorian poems, plays, and novels would have it. In rejecting the repressive hypothesis, Foucault did more than astutely posit that, far from being a natural phenomenon, sexuality is a discursive formation, that our sexual identities are constituted within the nexus of power-knowledge. The recognition of the constructed nature (if the paradoxical formulation might be forgiven) of sexuality, of the ways in which it is understood, experienced, and lived, has also transformed the scholarly approach to Victorian culture. Even a cursory scan of the very extensive body of late-twentieth/early-twenty-first century criticism of the Victorian novel will suggest that the Victorian cultural imagination was consumed with sex. This purported obsession has, in the last thirty or so years, been explored, in a great deal of critical writing, under the heading of *desire*. As Richard Kaye observes in his

[1] The "problem of sex" replaced, in Ellis's estimation, "the problem of religion," which he saw as "practically…settled." "And now that…the problem of labor," he goes on, "has at least been placed on a practical foundation, the question of sex—with the racial questions that rest on it—stands before the coming generations as the chief problem for solution" (Ellis).

From hereon, I will abbreviate the title of Ellis's work as *Studies* when citing it parenthetically.

[2] I want to acknowledge here that my use of *arousal* is anachronistic. The word did not acquire a sexual connotation until well into the twentieth-century; the *OED* records the first usage of *arousal* as referring to "a phase of sexual

introduction to *The Flirt's Tragedy*, desire, "particularly as opposed to romantic love," has been increasingly treated as "a crucial locus of meaning" (2).

But, though the approaches to the erotic dimensions of texts have been varied, the end results have become curiously uniform. What was, initially, a transformative shift in emphasis, a surge of attention to an important, even vital, undercurrent of Victorian history and culture, has become a problematically monolithic methodology, as more and more studies take for granted that nineteenth-century texts deal with sexual desire. (We might call this the "desirous hypothesis.") Whether its depiction is found to subvert a stultifying social order or to standardize sexual expression, the critical consensus often coalesces around the need to investigate desire.

But such investigations tend to be too broad, failing to take into account the specific process by which bodies respond to sexual stimuli and aesthetic and political implications, complications, and ramifications of these responses. In what follows, then, I want to narrow the focus, to specifically consider sexual affect and its representation in several well-known mid- and late-Victorian texts, all of which have been extensively studied in terms of desire. In reflecting on issues of form and of content, I am hoping to reconsider some of the received notions about sexuality. In looking at representations of sexual affect, its physical, emotional, and psychological aspects, and its socio-cultural consequences, we may well be able to come by a more thorough understanding of the Victorian contribution to the making of sexual self and the emergence of sexual identity.

Indeed, the Victorians themselves may well have thought so: in the Preface to the first edition of the third volume of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, specifically dedicated to an "analysis of the sexual impulse," Havelock Ellis deems such an analysis "[one] of the most essential problems of sexual psychology" and contends that "[u]nless we comprehend the exact

process which is being worked out beneath the shifting and multifold phenomena presented to us we can never hope to grasp in their true relations any of the normal or abnormal manifestations of this instinct."

In what follows, I will show that the mid-to-late-Victorian cultural construction of and response to sexual arousal was simultaneously a bid for audience attention, a canny bit of marketing to attract readers and keep them coming back for more, and an attempt to control how citizens' bodies respond to stimulation. Part of an increasingly competitive and lucrative marketplace, even as they implicitly presented themselves as above or beyond it, cultural productions, high and low alike, came to depend on the audience's arousal, with affect becoming an important, if unacknowledged, selling point. At once vehicle for the transmission and the policing of sexual affect, these works offer suggestive and revealing commentaries on the theoretical and practical aspects of Victorian sexuality. By locating the stimulating, stimulated subtext of Victorian culture and considering its significance, we can incorporate it into our larger sense of desire as an animating force. As Petra Dierkes-Thrun notes, "Foucault outlines the larger cultural discursive moment toward and obsession with physical sensation" (52). And yet too often critics fail to pay attention to physical sensation, to representations of sexual affect, the physical and emotional experience of the build-up to the channeling of desire. This study aims to begin the project of filling in this piece of the larger picture of sexuality.

The Problem of Arousal: Defining the Sexual Impulse with Havelock Ellis

As William Cohen's "lubricious reading strategy" reveals in its application to *Great Expectations*, arousal conceals itself behind some of the most memorable moments in Victorian fiction. (Rather ironically, such evasions and displacements serve as a "stimulus" for literature [Cohen, "Indeterminate Wilde" 235].) As the title of his essay evocatively suggests, Cohen is

specifically (and, I might add, gleefully) interested in various instances of "manual conduct" in Dickens's novel, which is to say, he examines the masturbatory subplot of *Great Expectations*, and his reading of how masturbation functions and makes itself known can be productively applied to the study of arousal. "The placement of hand on genitals," Cohen writes, "remains a secret in the Victorian novel, but like all secrets it wants to be told" (33). Like masturbation, which, in *Great Expectations*, is coded through "the commonplace, benign, and unblushing representation of characters' hands," arousal is "quickly relegate[d]" (33) to the textual margins, subsumed by more innocuous imagery, hidden behind formal and stylistic flourishes.

Like Victorian sexologists, Victorian artists were profoundly interested in "the sexual impulse,"[2] "the internal messages which prompt the sexual act" and "the external stimuli which co-operate with the impulse to affect the nervous centers" (Ellis, *Studies*, Vol. III). In fact, as I note in the third chapter of this dissertation, the discipline of sexology is primarily the science of arousal, the attempt to catalog the various stimuli that sexually excite and the circumstances in which they do so.[3] Through the cornucopia of sexual types articulated and described by nineteenth century "experts"—the onanist, the sadist and the masochist, and the invert, to name but a scant few—the human subject came to be defined by the things he found arousing. We may well say, with minimal exaggeration, that, for the Victorians and their descendants, arousal became destiny.

Although my focus throughout this project will be on the ways in which mid- and late-Victorian art grappled with arousal, I want to briefly sketch the nineteenth-century medical

[2] I want to acknowledge here that my use of *arousal* is anachronistic. The word did not acquire a sexual connotation until well into the twentieth-century; the *OED* records the first usage of *arousal* as referring to "a phase of sexual activity characterized by sexual excitement" in 1948, with the publication of Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. The Victorians spoke in terms of the "sexual impulse," "the sexual instinct." In what follows, I will use the terms *arousal*, *sexual response*, *sexual affect*, and *sexual impulse* interchangeably, unless otherwise noted.

[3] In a foundational work of modern sexology, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Richard Krafft-Ebing identified four broad categories of "cerebral neuroses"—paradoxia, anaesthesia, hyperesthesia, and paraesthesia—all of which correspond to sexual excitement in perverse circumstances, that is those unconnected to reproduction.

discourse on the subject, taking Havelock Ellis's comprehensive, six-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* as a representative discussion.[4] *Studies* is well-suited to this task, for, in attempting "to analyze the *sexual impulse*," Ellis reflects on several prominent "scientific" theories of arousal. The first definition Ellis considers "is that which regards it as an impulse of evacuation" (*Studies*, Vol. III; italics in the original). Ellis admits that the evacuation theory "has most popular vogue" (*Studies*, Vol. III), but proceeds to dispel it by citing a number of experiments that demonstrated that castration and the removal of the ovaries in various animals did not necessarily affect the sexual appetite. Especially, if inadvertently, striking is Ellis's note, in disputing the evacuation theory, that "the trifling amount of fluid emitted in sexual intercourse is altogether out of proportion to the emotions aroused by the act" (*Studies*, Vol. III). Here, it seems to me, is an accidental theory of the cultural productions I tackle in this study: it is the build-up, the phase of arousal, that is of the profoundest interest; the climax is, as it were, anti-climactic by comparison.

Another popular approach to understanding the sexual instinct, Ellis recounts, is to see it as "a reproductive impulse, a desire for offspring," but this theory too is quickly discounted: "No one, indeed, would argue that it is a complete definition, although a few writers appear to have asserted that it is so sometimes as regards the sexual impulse in women" (*Studies*, Vol. III).[5] Instead, Ellis turns to the work of the German psychiatrist Albert Moll, who

[4] The third volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, on which I extensively rely here (as it explicitly concerns itself with the sexual impulse), did not appear until 1903, technically, if somewhat pedantically, making it post-Victorian. But in fact this vantage point makes it especially useful as an overview of nineteenth century theories on the subject.

[5] Of the potential connection between the sexual and the reproductive instincts in women, Ellis observes, "A woman may not want a lover, but may yet want a child. This merely means that her maternal instincts have been aroused, while her sexual instincts are still latent" (*Studies*, Vol. III).

Ellis further observes that the term "reproductive instinct" "is vaguely employed as a euphemism by those who wish to veil the facts of the sexual life; it is more precisely employed mainly by those who are unconsciously dominated by a superstitious repugnance to sex" (*Studies*, Vol. III).

> finds that [the sexual impulse] is made up of two separate components, each of which may be looked upon as an uncontrollable impulse. One of these is that by which the tension of the sexual organs is spasmodically relieved; this he calls the *impulse of detumescence*, and he regards it as primary, resembling the impulse to empty a full bladder. The other impulse is the "instinct to approach, touch, and kiss another person, usually of the opposite sex"; this he terms the *impulse of contrectation*, and he includes under this head not only the tendency to general physical contact, but also the psychic inclination to become generally interested in a person of the opposite sex. (*Studies*, Vol. III)

But Moll, Ellis writes, fails to establish a connection between the two components, and, moreover, he takes the impulse of contrectation to be secondary, and this finally renders his theory unconvincing. In fact, so significant is contrectation that Darwin "founded his famous theory of sexual selection" on his interpretation of the phenomena in animals (*Studies*, Vol. III).

Finally settling on the term "tumescence" to indicate "the fact that vascular congestion, more especially of the parts related to generation, is an essential preliminary to acute sexual desire," which is to say, sexual excitement, Ellis suggests that "nearly the whole of sexual psychology is rooted in it" (*Studies*, Vol. III). Achieved through the parallel influence of internal and external stimuli—"images, desires, and ideals grow up within the mind, while the organism generally is charged with energy and the sexual apparatus congested with blood" (*Studies*, Vol. III)—tumescence, Ellis concludes, is finally a state of heightened emotional and physical excitement. As far as the external stimuli necessary for tumescence, Ellis, in Volume IV, remarks that "[t]he chief stimuli which influence tumescence and thus direct sexual choice come chiefly—indeed, exclusively—through the four senses of touch, smell, hearing, and sight."[6]

[6] "Of the four senses—touch, smell, hearing, and sight—with which we are here concerned, touch is the most primitive, and it may be said to be the most important, though it is usually the last to make its appeal felt. Smell, which occupies the chief place among many animals, is of comparatively less importance, though of considerable interest, in man; it is only less intimate and final than touch. Sight occupies an intermediate position, and on this account, and also on account of the very great part played by vision in life generally as well as in art, it is the most important of all the senses from the human sexual point of view. Hearing, from the same point of view, is the most remote of all the senses in its appeal to the sexual impulse, and on that account it is, when it intervenes, among the first to make its influence felt" (Ellis, *Studies*, Vol. IV).

Pleasure and Danger, Art and Pornography

Ellis's overview of arousal is valuable in indicating the centrality of the sexual impulse in the medico-scientific thought of the nineteenth century, but *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* does not, cannot, register the role sexual affect played in the aesthetic and political lives of English citizens in the mid- and late-nineteenth century. That arousal prominently figured in daily life and the lived reality of Victorian men and women is suggested by Leigh Summers's analysis of the popularity of tightly laced corsetry during the period: the corseted woman, Summers speculates, appeared to be sexually aroused, her face flushed, her breasts rising and falling rapidly (140).[7]

The sexual instinct, refined and attached to "all those delicate, exalted and beautiful feelings of love" was thought to "constitute the store of the poet, and play so great a part in human happiness and in human sorrow" (Maudsley 133). Less refined but no less popular was another genre directly connected to arousal. The Victorians did not, of course, invent pornography, material with the explicit purpose of arousing its consumer, but they did popularize and commercialize it. (It bears noting that, though they did not originate the form, the Victorians did name it; the term *pornography* came into English usage sometime in the 1840s.[8]) Thus we might speculate that Victorian notions of arousal were half-moralizing, half-obscene, defined through "a drama of an omnipresent powerful sex drive propelled towards pleasure but

[7] These symptoms—and the popularity of the corset—are actually directly aligned, in Summers's argument, with tuberculosis. The symptoms of that illness were notoriously reproduced by healthy middle-class women, who emulated the appearance of tubercular patients, and the corset was instrumental in achieving the look. But, Summers notes, one of consumption's "more appealing symptoms" was the tendency of female patients to appear "to be in a state of acute sexual arousal" (140).

[8] The *OED* records the first instance of word usage in 1842:

1842 *Smith's Dict. Gr. & Rom. Antiq.* 694/1 Rhyparography, pornography, and all the lower classes of art.

A number of "histories of pornography," including Walter Kendrick's important *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, concur that the term began to make an impression in 1857, with the passage of the Obscene Publications Act.

susceptible to the dangers of excess and ruin" (Seidman 49). This tension between pleasure and danger,[9] between generative potential and destructive possibility, I contend, is an important aesthetic and political hallmark of Victorian depictions of arousal.

What we encounter, over and over again, in Victorian texts is an admitxture of concern and celebration, an attempt to configure and assimilate the sexual impulse as a powerful force. In an important way, sexual affect is intimately connected to cultural production, most notably the novel, the Victorian genre *par excellence*. The reader must be kept stimulated, in a perpetual state of arousal, of unending excitement. The context of Victorian publishing norms, with their emphasis on serialization, furthers this dynamic, given the explicit imperative to keep the reader excited but unfulfilled. At the same time, such works aim at instruction, imbued with a moralizing tendency that is, variously, genuine or a form of cynical defense. With its drive towards happy, heterosexual marriage, the novel finally works to sublimate arousal within a socially acceptable framework, but, in leaving marriage for its happy *ending*, the novel also

[9] The American dietary reformer Sylvester Graham, whose *A Lecture to Young Men, on Chastity*, the 1838 treatise that was widely available in England, identified the following "common evils…caused by sexual excesses":

> Languor, lassitude, muscular relaxation, general debility and heaviness, depression of spirits, loss of appetite, indigestion, faintness and sinking at the pit of the stomach, increased susceptibilities of the skin and lungs to all the atmospheric changes, feebleness of circulation, chilliness, headache, melancholy, hypochondria, hysteria, feebleness of all the sense, impaired vision, loss of sight, weakness of the lungs, nervous cough, pulmonary consumption, disorders of the liver and kidneys, urinary difficulties, disorders of the genital organs, weakness of the brain, loss of memory, epilepsy, insanity, apoplexy… (78-79)

That Graham's category of "sexual excess" comprehends arousal is signaled by his admonition that

> [t]he mind becomes exceedingly carnal, and inclined to dwell on sensual subjects, and cherish sensual images; and by degrees, becomes more and more averse to special application and continued effort. All systematic discipline and education become extremely irksome to it. Its energies and elasticity gradually decline; and by imperceptible degrees, it becomes weak and fickle. (119-120)

Furthermore,

> [t]hose LASCIVIOUS DAY-DREAMS, and amorous reveries, in which young people too generally,--and especially the idle, and the voluptuous, and the sedentary, and the nervous,--are exceedingly apt to indulge, are often the sources of general debility, effeminacy, disordered functions, and permanent disease, and even premature death, without the actual exercise of the genital organs! Indeed! this unchastity of thought--this adultery of the mind, is the beginning of immeasurable evil to the human family. (58-59)

implicitly suggests that the real interest is, after all, in the incitement, not the culmination, in the stimulation, not the climax.

The not coincidental rise of advertising, as well as the already noted increased availability of pornographic materials, during the Victorian period offered a potent model for stimulating audiences.[10] Advertising, of course, "creates and perpetually stimulates the craving for more commercial products" (Pikula 288); its imperative of creating a rapturous assembly of hungry consumers echoes the ethos of, notably, the sensation novel, which I discuss in Chapter Two. The "subtle veil[ing]" of "erotic energies" in popular ads, which, Tanya Pikula argues, "reflected the advertisers' growing interest in the commercial potential of sex and their willingness to subvert the Victorian ideal of passive, virtuous femininity in order to appeal to increasingly active female consumers" (287), is paralleled in many of the works I will discuss. Concurrently, as pornography became progressively more entrenched in the public imagination, pornographic strategies were adapted for the novel. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the focus of Chapter Four, for example, draws on the recognizable tropes of Victorian erotica in order to titillate knowing readers, able to pick up on the work's pornographic codes. By incorporating what may be called "pornographic strategies" into "legitimate" cultural expression, Victorian authors and artists increasingly made arousal an undeniable goal of their work.[11] All the same, the self-consciously aesthetic design of that work makes it necessary to consider it within a nexus of discourses, of which pornography is only one.

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[10] As Tanya Pikula has shown, the 1860s witnessed an increase in conspicuous female consumption, which Pikula associates with the establishment of the department store and the attendant targeting of women in advertising. This consumerism corresponded to the massive increase in porn publishing in England at the same time.

[11] Lisa Z. Sigel's *Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914* thoroughly demonstrates that pornography was not the provenance of the "other Victorians," as the title of Steven Marcus's pioneering but outdated account of pornography in mid-nineteenth-century England had it, but rather very much a part of daily life. Sigel notes that such technological developments as photography and film, social developments, particularly the expansion of literacy, and political and legal developments, such as the regulation of postal services, enabled the entrance of pornography into mainstream culture.

Notes on Arousal and the Victorian Novel

I have thus far focused on some of the discourses—sexology, pornography, advertising, aesthetics—useful for approaching Victorian representations of arousal. I would now like to ruminate on some of the metaphysical implications of arousal.

In *Disgust*, Winfried Menninghaus writes,

> Stated very abstractly, the defense mechanism of disgust consists in a spontaneous and especially energetic act of saying "no."[12] Yet disgust implies, not just an ability to say no, but even more a compulsion to say no, an inability *not* to say no. As this quasi-automatic ("instinctive") form of nay-saying, disgust stands on the boundary between conscious patterns of conduct and unconscious impulses. On the one hand, it comes to our attention in a particularly striking way and, accordingly, in no way escapes conscious perception. On the other hand, it attacks, it overcomes us, unannounced and uncontrollable, taking sudden possession of us. Viewed from this perspective, it does not stand under the sway of consciousness, but rather makes itself felt within consciousness as a voice arriving from somewhere else. In the volume of this voice from elsewhere, in this scandalous invasion of heterogeneity, disgust brings eminent affective powers to bear: it processes elementary civilizing taboos and social distinctions between what is foreign and one's own. (2)

I quote this definition so extensively because it speaks so aptly to my sense of how arousal is represented in the texts I take up here. Arousal, I contend, is the counterpart of Menninghaus's articulation of disgust. It is the spontaneous and especially energetic act of saying "yes," and, in many cases, an inability not to say "yes." Straddling the division of the conscious and unconscious, arousal, like disgust, takes "sudden possession" of the subject, a "voice arriving from somewhere else" and dominating those who hear it. Disgust, in Menninghaus's telling, is a defense against the foreign, an attempt to strictly delimit what is "one's own"; arousal, on the other hand, is the breaking down of the self's parameters, its established boundaries, a response to and an incorporation of the Other, the foreign.

But arousal is not simply disgust's flipside. Its complication—and the attendant difficulty of making sense of it—resides in the fact that, on occasion, it brings together attraction and

[12] Menninghaus credits Nietzsche as the source of this idea.

revulsion, its "yes" resounding not simply involuntarily but *in spite of* the conscious wish to scream "no!" Here, again, Menningahus's consideration of disgust is instructive: the French word *dégoût*, he notes, derives from *goût*, or "taste," with its connotation of aesthetic and moral judgment; the category of *disgust*, Menninghaus argues, comes into being as a means of denoting "a quality that wholly exceeds the conditions for the possibility of an aesthetic judgment" (5). Arousal, I want to suggest, has the potential to combine *goût* and *dégoût*, at once an aesthetic-moral affinity for and an extra-categorical rejection of a stimulant. In fact, it is often the moral dimension that brings about the ambiguity of arousal: compelled by social imperatives to deny undeniable attraction, the aroused subject experiences profound discomfort, rendered textually as a veneer of disgust.

This, anyway, is the case of *Dracula* (Chapter Four). But the sensation novels I discuss in the second chapter also generate ambivalence and anxiety around arousal. On the one hand, in works like Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, arousal speaks to a refined sensibility, a moral forthrightness. The tendency of Collins's protagonist, the drawing master Walter Hartright, to respond to stimuli with his whole body, as in his emblematic encounter with the titular woman, is implicitly linked, through his name, to a rightness of heart; contrasted to the unfeeling Sir Percival Glyde, Walter is made the hero of a story that sees his slow but certain climb up the social and economic ladder. In emphasizing his arousal, the narrative successfully convolutes the mercenary facet of his response to the women he encounters. At the same time, the sexual nature of Walter's response is subsumed by an emphasis on its sensory qualities. To borrow Diane Ackerman's coinage, Walter poses as a "sensuist," "someone who rejoices in sensory experience" (xviii), a fine disguise of his sensualism, his concern "with gratifying his sexual appetites" (Ackerman xviii). And, it is in positioning himself as a sensuist that Walter is

ultimately able to divert attention away from the economic interest inherent in the particulars of his sexual instinct and its expression. That conflation of arousal and gold digging is exposed through the other sensation novel I address in Chapter Two. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon makes explicit the connection between luxury goods and sensuality, repeatedly representing scenes of Lucy's intense arousal as she inventories her possessions. Unlike Walter, Lucy makes no effort to pretend to heights of feeling, and this proves her downfall. The exposing of her madness, a moral defect, is made virtually synonymous with her lack of "normal" sexual arousal.

In his philosophical consideration of sexual desire, Roger Scruton takes up the question of arousal. In the course of arousal, he argues, "the sexual organ becomes the self" (28). Although Scruton's account is problematic on many levels, clearly the result of his conservative politics, his emphasis on the ways in which arousal is constitutive of the self resonates in the texts I study here. In *Salomé*, the subject of my final chapter, the Princess of Judaea achieves subjectivity through her arousal. Unlike the mute dancer of earlier versions, Wilde's Salomé decisively establishes her individuality in her unflinching, unapologetic arousal. Though she is literally crushed by the consequences of her excitement, in the intensity of her arousal, she scales the heights of feeling, her passion made art.

I began this consideration of Victorian arousal by looking to late-nineteenth-century sexology, and here I return to it. For *Salomé*, I will argue, is, in its depiction of glorious, exultant arousal is a rebuke of sorts to that discipline. Wilde, who may have read Richard Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* shortly before commencing work on his "tragedy in one act," came to "reject the definitional power of a sexual science that he deemed vulgar and inaccurate" (Hanson 107). His Salomé *is* defined by her arousal, but not as an invert or a pervert or a nymphomaniac;

instead, she becomes fully and completely herself. An ecstatic rejoinder both to the society that would soon condemn Wilde for "gross indecency," *Salomé* is also a heralding of the coming of modernism and its endorsement of sensation, its regret over the failure of arousal.[13]

Sensation, Davide Panagia argues in *The Political Life of Sensation*, has the ability to alter and reconfigure accepted "regimes of perception." Such regimes, Panagia explains, "confer what counts as common sense" (7). The goal of this project is thus twofold: first and foremost, I want to consider here the ways in which a particular sensation—sexual arousal—unsettles the Victorian subject and the representation of that subject in various cultural productions; but I also want to suggest that, in momentarily diverting our attention from the now-dominant discourse of desire in order to note a somewhat different manifestation and experience, we might be able to see that discourse in an unexpected way.

A Brief Outline of the Project

In Chapter Two, "Arousing Ambiguities, Sensational Novels: Affect, Sensation, and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*," I focus on the sensation novel and its use of ambiguity in the construction and representation of arousal. This ambiguity, I argue, is part and parcel of the genre's main imperative: to appeal, to borrow Winifred Hughes's formulation "directly to the senses," to stimulate "such physiological reactions as creeping flesh, shocked nerves, teeth on edge, elevated pressure, and even sexual arousal" (260). "The novel with a secret," Kathleen Tillotson has called it (xvi), but this designation is only half true: the secret may underpin the sensation novel's plot, but it is finally incidental to its effect. Instead, the sensation novel traffics in feeling,

[13] Because this project focuses on Victorian literature and culture, a full-scale consideration of the role of arousal in modernism lies outside its scope. Let it suffice here to note that T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a representative text of high modernism, repeatedly and insistently conflates the desolation of the land with impotence, which is to say, the failure of arousal.

especially bodily feeling, modeled within the texts as the characters react to their many misfortunes, suffer reversals, and brace under the demands of the mystery the reader has long since solved. But their reactions, absolute on the surface, are riven and contradictory underneath.

Their ambiguity is manifold. In a paradigmatic image from *The Woman in White*, rivaled only by Walter Hartright's encounter with the eponymous woman, the new drawing master meets one of his pupils-to-be, Marian Halcombe. With her back to him, Marian presents a striking image of feminine beauty; when she turns, she reveals that her face is not only ugly but masculine. That face causes Walter to forcefully recoil, but the fact of Walter's earlier arousal as he admires Marian's uncorseted figure continues to haunt the novel, casting suspicion on all of Walter's subsequent sensations and his representation of them.

In fact, in *The Woman in White*, Walter uses his emotional sensitivity as a means of concealing his impulses towards sex and violence, and, in doing so, he permits the reader to simultaneously endorse his "h(e)art-rightness" and feel the anticipatory pleasure of aggression on the verge of being unleashed. In the scene of his first meeting with Anne Catherick, Walter's sensation is neither pure arousal nor pure aggression, but rather a continuity of the two. Walter couches his bodily response in the language of care, and his solicitude for the wellbeing of the woman in white becomes an alibi of sorts for the baser instincts that culminate in his marriage to the heiress Laura Fairlie. By the time Walter comes into possession of Limmeridge House, having spent so much of the lengthy narrative in the noble attempt to restore Laura's identity and fortune, the reader rejoices, having *felt* along with Walter. And yet, as Matthew Sweet reminds us, Walter's marriage to Laura allows him to enjoy "the benefits of her fortune as freely as Sir Percival might have done" (xxxi). What separates Walter, the hero, and Sir Percival, the villain,

is the claim of feeling, an avowal of arousal. Walter's repeated declarations of passion for Laura stand in stark contrast to Sir Percival's coldness, his apparent lack of sexual impulse.

A similar lack afflicts Lucy Audley, who assures her deceived husband that "the common temptations that assail and shipwreck some women" do not tempt her. "The mad folly that the world calls love has never had any part in my madness," she proclaims (Braddon 348). Though she inspires ardor in the men who encounter her, notably threatening, if only for a moment, to turn her husband's nephew into "the hero of a French novel" (Braddon 59), she herself feels nothing. Or, rather, she feels exceedingly, but only where luxurious goods are concerned. Perpetually stroking her many velvets and furs, hoarding fine drinking cups and delicate linens, Lady Audley appears to be sexually aroused by her possessions. It is the possessions and her uncontrollable appetite for them that motivate her crimes, for she cannot but say "yes" to them.

Lady Audley is contrasted to Robert Audley, the initially feckless protagonist, who, in answering the call of his feelings for Clara Talboys, throws off his idleness and single-mindedly tracks the clues of Lucy's villainy. But, like Walter's, Robert's arousal is ambiguous, "queered" by Clara's resemblance to her brother George, perhaps the real occasion of Robert's awakening. And like Walter, Robert mingles his finer feelings with the aggression of his pursuit of Lucy.

Both novels end with ambiguous domestic arrangements: Walter and Laura set up home with Marian, Robert and Clara with George, who is revealed, at novel's end, to have survived Lucy's attempt to kill him. The villains dispatched, the mystery long since resolved, the ambiguity of sensation persists.

In Chapter Three, "The Critic as Dancer: *Fin de Siècle* Sexology and the Meaning of Arousal in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*," I argue that the play serves as an exploration and, ultimately, celebration of arousal. Indeed, *Salomé* is a nuanced, ambivalent, ambiguous, and personal study

of sexual passion, of idiosyncratic attraction, and of sexual excitation. In the persona of Salomé, Wilde presents the audience with a searing, incisive portrait of the critic-artist, a fearless sexual rebel who, in daring to defy her society, becomes an ecstatic martyr.

The basic outlines of the Salomé story were of course well known long before Wilde made the Princess of Judaea his indelible heroine. But at least some of the interest of *Salomé* resides in Wilde's departures from earlier tellings of that story. His Salomé is neither the nameless dancer of the Gospels nor the *femme fatale* of the Decadents, neither the narrative-furthering marionette we find in Mark and Mathew nor Des Esseintes's Goddess of Hysteria. Wilde keeps the basic outline of the plot—Salomé dances for Herod and demands the head of John the Baptist as the price of her performance—and adds a few points—most notably, Herod gives the order to kill Salomé, who is crushed by the Tetrarch's soldiers as the play ends—but the details of the story are finally unimportant. Wilde's Salomé is an idea given form, an experience made palpable, a sensation embodied.

I begin by positing that, in *Salomé*, a crucial distinction exists between *desire* and *arousal*. *Desire* in Herod's court is essentially mimetic in character, reproduced for the purposes of reproduction. As René Girard suggests in "Scandal and the Dance," his reading of the Salomé story as presented in the Gospel of Mark using the theory of desire he had earlier articulated in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, "you desire something because someone else does" (312). Desire, Girard argues, is mimetic in character, and imitation is its essence (Girard 314). In *Salomé*, desire functions as a reiterated pattern, connected to the cultivation of power; it is socially accepted and, as it is internalized and replicated, it begets further replication. Signaled within the play through the gaze, *desire* connotes male privilege,[14] most often taking the form of powerful

[14] Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," is of course instructive in discussing the gaze and its connection to male privilege.

men looking at the woman, Salomé, they covet, not least because she is a symbol of power and legitimacy as the Princess of Judaea, born of royal blood, as her mother Herodias takes pains to note. A known quantity, desire suggests a contract—more specifically, marriage—and, in *Salomé*, it is repeatedly involved in negotiations, as when the princess offers to smile and throw a flower at Narraboth in exchange for seeing Jokanaan, and when she agrees to dance for Herod, who offers her anything she might ask for.

Although she shows herself capable of recognizing desire through the looks men like the Young Syrian and the Tetrarch repeatedly cast at her, and capable too of manipulating that desire for her own ends, Salomé sets herself apart from the model of desire she finds at court. Over and above this rejection, she is also capable of *arousal*, which, in the play, is distinguished from desire. *Arousal* is here figured as an idiosyncratic force, intimately and genuinely connected to the body. It transcends desire, goes beyond the look and extends to the touch, the kiss. In her encounter with Jokanaan, which begins not with sight but with sound, as Salomé is drawn to the prophet's voice, the aroused princess insists on feeling his body, on kissing his mouth. She offers no trades, spurns, in this keenly felt moment, the mercenary logic of desire and submits to her passion fully.

Arousal makes Salomé a threat, a danger to the established order. As I discuss in "The Critic as Dancer," the distinctly public nature of her arousal becomes scandalous. Ari Adut demonstrates, in his investigation of why Wilde was punished so swiftly following his 1895 trial, despite the fact that Victorian anti-sodomy laws were applied only sporadically and Wilde's sexual proclivities were an open secret, that transgression, when made public, becomes a scandal, and the publicity results in swift and decisive retribution against the perceived wrongs (214). Salomé's inflamed passion thus seals her fate.

Salomé's transgressions are several: beyond her ostentatious rejection of the prevalent mimetic model of desire, she assumes a subject position that hints at queer sexuality. As a woman unabashedly displaying her sexual feeling, Salomé is already perceived as pathological. But she goes further, feminizing Jokanaan through her use of the blazon in her celebration of his body, his eyes, his hair, and his mouth. In her passionate appeal to the prophet, she suggests the possibility of female homoeroticism. (In fact, as I make note of in the chapter, "lesbianism" as an identity within legal discourse was articulated through an indirect connection to the play, during the 1918 Maud Allan-Noel Pemberton-Billing libel trial, the result of Billing's accusations of "lesbianism" and "sadism" leveled against Allan, who was then starring in a production of *Salomé*. Notably, Billing cited the "'violence' of [Salomé's] sexual arousal" [Travis 153] as key evidence of "lesbianism.") When she demands Jokanaan's head and lavishes it with affection, culminating in her exultation, "Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth" (Wilde 575), she becomes, in the eyes of her society, "monstrous" (Wilde, *Salomé* 574). Herod, who as Tetrarch stands in for law and authority, indicts her for "a great crime" (574) and orders her execution.

And yet, though *Salomé* is, as its subtitle indicates, a tragedy, Salomé is finally a triumphant martyr. In her arousal, Salomé becomes a poet of sorts, as when her passion leads her to describe Jokanaan through an escalation of similes. Most importantly, Salomé becomes a very fine critic in the sense of that vocation as described by Wilde in "The Critic as Artist." Staging the discourse of *fin de siècle* sexology, with its insistence on pathology—a pathology, I want to stress, defined through arousal, with sexual excitation as its main diagnosable symptom—as ecstatic self-expression. Salomé's life is brief, but, in her rejection of mimetic desire and her

pursuit of genuine, idiosyncratic arousal, she burns with a Paterian "hard, gemlike flame," achieving ecstasy for one glorious moment.

In Chapter Four, "The Blood Is the Stimulant: The Vampire and the Horrors of Sexual Arousal in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," I consider the implications of Stoker's depiction of the vampire. The vampire, I argue, is constructed to suggest sexual affect, functioning as a metaphor for arousal. Stoker repeatedly envisions the sexual response as intimately connected to the body, staging horrifying tableaus around the fact of an uncontrollable, unrestrainable arousal. So potent is the bodily response to sexual stimulation in *Dracula*, it defies logic, reason, law, and makes monsters of otherwise "good" men and women.

The "overpowering sexual desires" displayed by the novel's characters are finally a form of madness, Srjan Smajic argues in his examination of "Dracula and duty" (50). Smajic ultimately concludes that duty—that is, the vampire hunters' sense that they must defeat Dracula in order to protect English women, English identity, England itself—makes the expression of aggression and aggressive sexuality an ethical imperative (51). "[T]he dutiful subject," Smajic writes, "cannot choose but to submit, reward or no reward" (63). Like Smajic's "dutiful subject," the sexually aroused subject in *Dracula* is forced to obey the demands of his or her stimulated body, and, like the dutiful subject, the aroused subject is, finally, no subject at all, but an object, acted upon and manipulated. Over and over again, the dutiful men of Stoker's novel find their wills undone, their sense of themselves stripped away as they are faced with sexual temptation.

Jonathan Harker, the first member of what will become the band of vampire hunters, the so-called Crew of Light, to face Dracula's predation, struggles to maintain the scrupulous righteousness that has brought him the potential of professional success and solid middle-class security, as well as the promised hand of a thoroughly dependable woman, only to find his

veneer of bourgeoisie respectability crumbling as he comes face to face with the three vampire women at Castle Dracula. Assuming the role of a "damsel in distress," Jonathan simultaneously experiences attraction and revulsion as the women advance on him. Drawn to their voluptuousness even as he is revolted by their voluptuousness, the young solicitor is powerless to act on his own behalf, remaining prone as the blond vampire slowly lowers her face to his. Like some hapless maiden in a work of Victorian erotica, Jonathan is, in the words of Barry McCrea, "half-raped, half-seduced by ruby-lipped, blood-sucking women" (261). But Jonathan also identifies with the fair vampire, who, as Jeffrey L. Spear suggests, evokes the blond, blue-eyed Laura, the heroine of Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla*, who is similarly attracted to and repulsed by the vampire Carmilla (188).

Although LeFanu's vampiric narrative is more explicit in its depiction of same-sex desire, in *Dracula*, Stoker exploits the combination of desire and revulsion, of longing and fear, that characterizes Jonathan's response to the vampire women in two significant ways. Firstly, in the scene at Castle Dracula, Stoker's narrative simultaneously works to arouse the reader by invoking the most typical tropes of pornography, as Tanya Pikula so aptly demonstrates in "Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Late-Victorian Advertising Tactics," even as that arousal is accompanied by, or perhaps concealed behind, an insistent incitement of fear, especially as this fear pertains to the reversals arousal potentially engenders. As Pikula trenchantly observes of the passage describing Jonathan's "delightful [but dreadful] anticipation" as the vampiric women approach his prone, apparently immobile body, the narration "works to arouse and in turn generate anxiety about the destabilization of gender roles" (294). Secondly, the text simultaneously gestures at, exploits, and conceals Stoker's own anxieties about his own sexuality. As a fellow Irishman and the husband of the woman once courted by and proposed to

by Oscar Wilde, whose trial and conviction for "acts of gross indecency" with men shadowed *Dracula* and shaped its depiction of the Count according to a number of biographers and scholars, Stoker felt considerable apprehension at being identified with the disgraced playwright.

Regardless of whether Stoker was a closeted gay man, as Talia Schaffer argues in her examination of the intersection of Wilde's fate and *Dracula*, Stoker's novel manifests uneasiness, even trepidation, at the implications of same-sex attraction. In its elusive but highly resonant suggestiveness about the interaction between the Count and Jonathan Harker at Castle Dracula, as well as in its depiction of Lucy's staking by her suitors, and, finally, in the bedroom encounter between Mina and Dracula, *Dracula* tacitly manipulates scenes of homoeroticism as a means of evoking something dangerous and frightful. Homoeroticism as it is (re)presented in *Dracula* is unwilled, the sort of "wicked desire" (Stoker 61) Jonathan experiences as the vampire women advance upon him. Such desire "comes unbidden," Srjan Smajic observes (50); in the case of Jonathan Harker, it compels "the sedentary solicitor to perform acrobatic feats of strength" (Smajic 50), as when he escapes Castle Dracula by scaling its wall. Such feats, connoting quasi-supernatural abilities, liken and link Harker to the vampire: in the moment of arousal—connoted in the novel by the presence of vampires, who function as half-aphrodisiac, half-alarm—which comes upon the unsuspecting, unavailing subject, the boundaries of propriety break down, and "good" men and women lose their better selves. It is as if Lucy Westenra's (maybe) jokingly suggestive plea—"Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her…?" (Stoker 80)—becomes a distinct, and distinctly destructive, possibility in the moment of arousal. (Indeed, Lucy "marries" all three of her suitors, in addition to Dr. Van Helsing through the blood-transfusions she receives following her graveyard encounters with Dracula.)

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud speculated about the possibility that egotism serves in the manner of a safeguard against an excess of stimuli, positing that "a special envelope or membrane resistant to stimuli" functions as a "protective shield" in the face of an onslaught of excessive and harmful stimulation (30). *Dracula* explores the consequences of the safeguard's collapse, mining the horrifying implications of the ego's destruction when it can no longer protect itself from being stimulated. The sexual response undoes the very self, producing in its stead men and women who are motivated by urges far stronger than either their unified or idealized sense of self. Perhaps best represented by the image of the hypnotized or entranced subject, the aroused men and women of Stoker's novel are horrified to discover what they have shown themselves capable of when the spell is broken. It is not only Jonathan's "wicked desire" (Stoker 61) or his superhuman feat of strength that is meant to horrify us (and that he must forget if he ever hopes to recover his upwardly-mobile bourgeois social position, signified by his job promotion and his at-long-last-child-producing marriage to Mina), but also Arthur's unwitting attraction to the vampiric Lucy and his eventual dispatch of her, also Mina's eagerness to feast on Dracula's blood as it pours from his chest wound. "Unclean, unclean!" (285), Mina wails as she realizes what she has done and what she must now become. "Unclean, unclean!" the novel seems to scream, pointing a moralizing finger at each breach of duty by its aroused characters.

But *Dracula* finally has it both ways: even as it preaches against the evident evils of arousal, it tantalizes its readers, focusing again and again and yet again on scenes written in terms of what Pikula dubs "scripts of sexual arousal" (293). Stoker's novel relies on vociferous proclamations of traditional ideology, using these as a set-up to the tableaus of sexually provocative material it proffers to the reader's horror and for the reader's titillation. "[S]trok[ed

in] just the right places" (Pikula 298), the reader's terrified reaction is also an undeniable excitement.

CHAPTER TWO

Arousing Ambiguities, Sensational Novels: Affect, Sensation, and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

A Taxonomy of Sensational Affects

The rise, in England, of the so-called "sensation novel" was brief but spectacular. Attracting outsize attention from its rapt fans and outraged detractors alike, the genre chronicled bigamy, murder, and conspiracies concealed under a veneer of refinement and respectability. For about a decade, starting with the publication, in 1860, of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, which I will shortly consider, the sensation novel thrilled readers and appalled moralizers by positing that, beneath the trappings of wealth and breeding, lay terrible and shocking secrets.

Of course it would be patently ridiculous to argue that secrecy or bigamy or murder did not enter the novel until 1860: to cite the most obvious example, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847, stages the key plot point revelation (spoiler alert!) that Mr. Rochester's mad wife is very much alive during his wedding to Jane. No more is it true to say that these elements disappeared from the novel after 1870: works with titles like *The Surgeon's Secret* (1872), *Are You My Wife?* (1878), and *Mrs. Keith's Crime* (1885) attest to the continued preoccupation with scandal.[1]

What then makes the sensation novel different? What defines it, if not the deployment of shocking secrets festering beneath a layer of conventional domesticity? It is not, I propose, simply the fact of secrecy that distinguishes and particularizes the sensation novel but rather the way the secret is used. The OED is instructive to this end: the first definition it records of *sensation* is "an operation of any of the senses; a psychical affection or state of consciousness

[1] For this list of "evocative titles" (19), I am indebted to Andrew Maunder's "Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel."

consequent on and related to a particular condition of some portion of the bodily organism, or a particular impression received by one of the organs of sense"; the first recorded usage of the term in this way, according to the OED, dates to 1615. However, by the early 1800s, another sense of *sensation* comes into use: "An exciting experience; a strong emotion…aroused by some particular occurrence or situation." Circa 1860, the definition is further particularized to "the production of violent emotion as an aim in works of literature or art." Perhaps what is "sensational" about the sensation novel—to borrow the title, if not the substance, of Patrick Brantlinger's article—is not inherent to the text but resides in the work it performs.

The "sensation" of the sensation novel thus has a functional, rather than an ontological, definition; it is an experience, marked by "the desire to create a sensation in every sense of the word" (Hughes 260). With its "designs [set] on the reader's body," it "appeal[s] directly to the senses and stimulat[es]…such physiological reactions as creeping flesh, shocked nerves, teeth on edge, elevated pressure, and even sexual arousal" (Hughes 260). (The Victorian critic Thomas Arnold aligned sensation novels with what he dubbed the "convulsional school," emphasizing the genre's tendency to produce involuntary physical effects.) Acknowledging that "[i]nclusion within the category [of sensation novel] may…appear to materialize at random," Laurie Garrison suggests that the common element across sensation texts is "a penchant for inspiring physical excitement in the reader. Sensation novel reading depended on bodily responses, often at the expense of higher, more intellectual stimulation according to some reviewers" (1). This manipulation of affect, what Garrison terms "artificially produced excitement" (3), the possibility of producing in the reader a physical and emotional reaction, was the genre's chief asset, its main selling point.

But popularity had its perils.[2] In her examination of the political significance of Victorian affective constructions, Ann Cvetkovich remarks that "[t]he 'sensational' became an aesthetically, morally, and politically loaded term used to dismiss both particular kinds of representations and the affective responses they produce" (*Mixed Feelings* 13). The genre was held to be an especially virulent specimen of "low culture," and its purveyors accused of "successfully capitali[zing] on the degenerate taste of the uncultured public" (Elwin qtd. in Maunder 3).[3] Moreover, the sensation novel was frequently suspected of creating the very debauched appetite it then satisfied. Surveying "recent novel writing" in 1866, Thomas Arnold lamented that "the jaded palate of the habitual reader of fiction in our day requires more stimulating food" (qtd. in Maunder 1). And the anonymous author of "Our Female Sensation Novelists" observed that, though "all exciting fiction works upon the nerves," only "the true sensation novel feels the popular pulse with this view alone" (210), while H.L. Mansel, in his well-known attack on sensation novels, inveighed against the "great end at which they aim," which he saw as "excitement, and excitement alone…an end which must be accomplished at any cost" (482).

The sensational content of the novels, Cvetkovich suggests, was understood by critics like Mansel to be a mere vehicle for the efficient delivery of sensational affect. More specifically, though critical alarm tended to concern the harm wrought by sensation novels on the mind, the real danger of the genre lay in the "the prospect of a reader reduced to a body reacting instinctively to a text" (Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings* 20). Cvetkovich persuasively argues that the

[2] One measure of the popularity of *The Woman in White* is the merchandising industry that sprang up around the novel. As Matthew Sweet notes in his intro to the Penguin edition, "[l]oyal fans could spray themselves with *Woman in White* perfume, wrap up in *Woman in White* cloaks and bonnets, and dance to various *Woman in White* waltzes and quadrilles" (xv).

[3] At the height of its popularity, the sensation novel became the locus of debates about high vs. low culture, about the effects of reading on the public, especially women, and about the increasing commercialism in and commercialization of everyday life in the nineteenth century.

repeated critical reference to readers' attraction to sensation novels as "appetite" or "craving" situates the Victorian concern about the genre's effects in "base natural functions…According to this discourse, the sensation novel is deplorable because it reduces its readers to the condition of animals who are driven by instincts" (*Mixed Feelings* 20). Not least among these instincts is the sexual.[4]

One particularly curious aspect of the sensation novel is its refusal of pleasurable resolution: the intricacy of its plot is useful only in so far as it promotes the generation of suspense, in so far as it *arouses excitement*; the unraveling of the secret that has ostensibly fueled that plot is largely incidental, often murky or altogether implausible, disappointing, even anticlimactic.[5] The secret of *Lady Audley's Secret* is no secret at all: we know that Lucy is a bigamist almost as soon as the novel begins. Nor are the particulars of Sir Percival Glyde's plot against Laura or the reason behind it especially thrilling, and the fact that the narrative dispatches these details like so many trivialities suggests that they are beside the point. It is the build-up, not the resolution, that matters. Perhaps more so than any other genre, the sensation novel foregrounds the economic imperative of keeping the reader stimulated, ceaselessly excited.

[4] Cvetkovich confirms this impression: "Lurking behind the descriptions of the biological nature of the response to sensation fiction is the suggestion that this form of arousal is closely akin to sexual excitement" (*Mixed Feelings* 22). Given the already prevalent anxieties about the potential connection of solitary reading to masturbation (Laqueur 314), the belief that the sensation novel would arouse readers must have appeared especially threatening.

[5] An early reviewer of *The Woman in White* noted that, despite Collins's elaborate plotting, dates specifically cited by the text made the key plot point of the substitution of Walter's beloved Laura Fairlie for her identical half-sister Anne Catherick a technical impossibility. Collins corrected the error in subsequent editions of the work, but the fact "[t]hat [he] could make such an error suggests that the affect produced by his mystery is more important than the solution to it" (Cvetkovich, "Ghostlier Determinations," 27). The critic who first took notice of Collins's error took a strikingly similar view, reacting to the author's correction by conceding that such details, ostensibly pivotal to resolving the central mystery, are irrelevant to the reader's enjoyment of *The Woman in White*: "A plot that is worked out of impossibilities, like that of robbing the almanack of a fortnight, may be treated as a jest; but we vote three cheers for the author who is able to practice such a jest with impunity. He will not have a reader the less, and who read will be deceived and delighted" (qtd. in Cvetkovich, "Ghostlier Determinations," 27).

The fact that Victorian reviewers typically felt no compunction about revealing plot points, including the complications and resolutions of key developments, in their assessments of a work further contributes to the sense that uncovering the secret of the novel does not contribute much by way of sensation.

When the narrative has run its course—especially in its serialized form—no more excitement is necessary.

It is surely no accident that the rise of the sensation novel is concurrent with the rise of the department store and of advertising. The popularization of the department store in the mid-nineteenth century begat advertisements featuring provocative women hopelessly stimulated by consumer goods translated into novels that not only prominently featured similar goods (Richards 2)[6] but also deployed similar tactics in cultivating readers' attention. Increasingly, readers were equated with customers. As customers, they were courted through titillation, the incitement to buy/read more and more and more.

Like advertising, which cultivates the desire for the product it is selling, sensation novels modeled the very sensations they wished to produce in the reader. (Not accidentally, these sensations—shock, excitement, arousal—tended to occur at the close of each serialized installment, ensuring the reader would want more, would remain excited until the arrival of the next installment, which would, naturally, only further that excitement.) Refusing "emotional abstraction or re-collection in tranquility" (Masciarotte 95), sensation novels instead foregrounded and prioritized a never-ending heightening of emotional and physical affect.

That cultural anxieties arose around works that modeled extreme affects and encouraged their (mostly female) readers to internalize them and play them out through their own bodies can hardly be surprising. Critics like Margaret Oliphant bemoaned that

> [w]hat is held up to us as the story of the feminine soul as it really exists underneath its conventional coverings, is a very fleshly and unlovely record. Women driven wild with love…in fits of sensual passion…who give and receive burning kisses and frantic

[6] Thomas Richards notes that, "[i]n Dickens's novels furniture, textiles, watches, handkerchiefs seem to live and breathe" (2). Richards's interest lies in the process by which the commodity "literally came alive" (2), but his point also helps illustrate the growing connection between the concurrently developing genre of the novel and increasingly sophisticated advertising methods.

> embraces…She waits now for flesh and muscles, for strong arms that seize her, and warm breath that thrills her through, and a host of other physical attractions. (260-275)

Oliphant rejects the sensational version of "the feminine soul" as unnatural, misguided, opposed to what is properly and fittingly feminine. At the same time, she fears that such "fits of sensual passion" might become, through repetition and reiteration, naturalized. The readers of the sensation novel will be trained to condone aberrant affect and to reproduce it. Oliphant's concern furthermore proposes that the sensation novel puts the feminine capacity for feeling to wrongful use; rather than capitalize on the power of her *soul* to feel, the sensation novel exploits the possibilities of her *body*. The dangerously aroused reader was in danger of behaving badly, of acting on her awakened impulses, not unlike the shopper over stimulated by some especially effective advertisement.

In the context of its popularity, the critical assessment of the sensation novel represents an attempt to police and discipline dangerous sensations.[7] And because these sensations were so thoroughly grounded in the bodies of readers, the attempt to govern them necessarily translates into the an attempt to police and discipline the bodies of the masses who flocked to the genre. Cvetkovich considers the way "[t]he reader's body becomes a machine hooked into the circuit of production and consumption," and argues that

> [t]here is a slippage…between what is in the novels and what they produce; the content has the effect of "exciting" the reader, and what keeps moving is as much the reader's nerves as the novel's plot. Thus, a similar slippage is possible between bodily and economic activity, as indicated by how the term "sensation" was used to describe the content of the novels, the affects they produced, *and* the sales they achieved. (*Mixed Feelings*, 20-21)

But the multivalence of "sensation," coupled with sensation's role in the marketplace, is finally an element within the sensation novel itself, which repeatedly casts the capacity for

[7] Most contemporaneous assessments of the sensation novel located it within the sphere of "low" culture. That the genre proved so commercially successful became one more reason, perhaps the primary one, for coding it "bad" art, its mass appeal taken as one sure sing of minimal artistic value.

heightened feeling as virtuous, even redemptive, while lack of feeling is deeply suspect. But even as it presents arousal as the reflection of genuine goodness, of "heart-rightness," to invoke the name of Walter Hartright, the deeply feeling, humbly heroic protagonist of *The Woman in White* who is especially susceptible to sensation, the sensation novel tacitly couples it with the potential for aggression and violence and implies that, beneath feeling, lies an economic acquisitiveness, a grasping for social status and wealth.

In what follows, I will consider two representative sensation novels, Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, which cemented the genre's popularity and notoriety. My particular interest resides in their rendering of arousal as a conflation of emotional excitability and sexual impulse and the intersection of arousal with social status and economic wealth. More specifically, I am interested in the process by which arousal becomes, in these texts, an effective vehicle for social ascension.

Exciting Amorous Violence and the Ambiguity of Arousal

Wilkie Collins's 1860 novel *The Woman in White* begins with an inauspiciously treacly summary: "This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve" (9). The ensuing narrative painstakingly reconstructs, through ostensiblymeticulous, first-person accounts, a case involving illegitimacy, marital duplicity, mysterious and murderous Italian brotherhoods, switched identities, and, of course, enduring love. But though Walter Hartright, the art teacher who begins the narration, claims for the text an extra-legal authority, insisting "the Reader" shall hear the tale unfold "[a]s the Judge might once have heard it" (9), the faithful unraveling of a mystery is, finally, the least of the novel's concerns. Rather, the true interest of *The Woman in White* lies not in its plot, which is, after all, merely an unnecessarily complicated presentation of a simple story—poor boy meets rich girl

and marries her after proving himself worthy of her love in spirit and moral value, if not in wealth measurable in gold and property—but in its attentiveness to intense feeling.

Walter presents himself, throughout his own narration, as an exceedingly sensitive man, responsive to sensation to a fault. An artist, Walter is introspective, often lost in thought, perpetually in the process of identifying and delineating his feelings. But if this sensitivity at first appears in the manner of a joke, as a form of ridicule, implicating Walter as improperly masculine—that is, as too feminine—it also grants him, as a number of scholars have astutely noted, the ability to ascend the social ladder with impunity. Walter's apparent subjugation to his senses, his powerlessness to control his bodily reactions to the stimulations offered by his environment and, more importantly, by the women he encounters, finally exculpates him from responsibility, if not for his actions, then for the ends he achieves. His love for Laura Fairlie—the woman he has been engaged to instruct in art and his social and economic superior in every way—is conceived as being immediate and instantaneous, the sort of bodily reaction the reader has, by this point, learned to associate with Walter. But Walter's claims of "love at first sight" are contradicted by several key moments in the text, casting suspicion on his proclamations and, ultimately, his reactions themselves. Indeed, many of Walter's sensations in the text are marked, when examined closely, by ambiguity and multi-valence. These become a key aspect of the sensations, sexual arousal foremost among these, engendered within and by the sensation novel.

One of the most striking instances of ambiguity in the novel occurs in the moments before Walter's first encounter with Laura. Having arrived at the Cumberland mansion where his services as drawing instructor have been engaged, he is greeted by a vision of "a lady standing at [the window], with her back turned towards" him (Collins, *The Woman in White* 34). Walter is immediately struck by "the rare beauty of her form," her figure, which is "tall, yet not too tall;

comely and well-developed, yet not fat," his eye drawn to her waist—"perfection in the eyes of a man"—and he allows himself "the luxury of admiring her for a few moments" (34). That waist, notably, "occupie[s] its natural palce" (34), which is to say, the woman with whom Walter is so immediately taken does not wear a corset, in contradiction of mid-Victorian fashions but in alignment with Collins's own preferences; writing to his friend, the American photographer Napoleon Sarony, Collins confessed to thinking "the back view of a finely formed woman the loveliest view, and her hips the more precious part of that view. The line of beauty in those parts enchants me" (*The Letters of Wilkie Collins* II.534-535). Assuming Walter shares his creator's preferences, we might assume that he is "enchanted," that is aroused, by the woman's unfettered lower body.

By the time the lady turns and advances "from the far end of the room," Walter is "in a flutter of expectation," eager to see her face clearly. But, once he is given a clear glimpse of that face, he is forced into the realization, accompanied by "a sense of surprise which words fail [him] to express," that "[t]he lady is ugly!" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 35).

Walter's particular impression of this ugliness bears closer inspection:

> [N]ever was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head that crowned it. The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. Her expression…appeared to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest woman alive is beauty incomplete. (35)

This description of Marian Halcombe's visage is significant in two important ways. Firstly, as I will discuss shortly, Marian's feminine body and masculine face and their combined attraction-repulsion effect on Walter insinuate a "queerness" that suggestively permeates the novel and inflects its representation of sensation. This queerness also furthers the novel's aims of appealing

to the maximum number of readers. As Susan Sontag observes in "The Pornographic Imagination," "pornographic narratives function to multiply the possibilities of exchange. Ideally, it should be possible for everyone to have a sexual connection with everyone else" (66-67). In the multivalent joining of Marian's very feminine body and very masculine face, *The Woman in White* multiplies the possibilities of exchange. Something similar occurs when, a little later in the novel, Walter attempts to explain his love for Laura by imploring his ostensibly male readers to "[t]hink of her as you thought of the first woman who quickened the pulses within you that the rest of her sex had no art to stir" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 52): given the existence of a manly woman like Marian, the heterosexual female reader is left free to conceive of that woman as a man she loves.

Secondly, Walter's reaction to Marian's face necessitates a revision and reversal of his initial reaction to her. In fact, my primary interest of *The Woman in White* lies in the means by which Walter refashions his spontaneous reactions into what will best serve him, all the while claiming sincerity and spontaneity for his modified, self-interested response. The success of that claim, in turn, validates his eventual socio-economic elevation.

Commenting on this scene, D.A. Miller has observed that it develops "all the rhetorical suspense of a striptease, in which, as Barthes has written, 'the entire excitement takes refuge in the hope of seeing the sexual organ'" (176). But, in Miller's reading, the place of the genitals—what one might reasonably expect to be the focus of Walter's "flutter of expectation"—is "strangely occupied by Marian's head and face" (176). Walter is aroused by his first glimpse of Marian's majestic body, a feminine form seemingly offering itself to his vision and promising, with its lack of restraining garments, further revelation of its feminine charms. But once Marian's face comes into clear view, Walter's arousal is interrupted, the promise of furthering

and/or fulfillment broken. That is, if the initial moments of the meeting scene might be read as a kind of striptease, at least in its effect on Walter, the face offers an unexpected surprise, an intimation of proclivities Walter is at considerable pains to dispel. In fact, as will shortly become clear, his protestations following the discovery of Marian's face are considerably longer, filled with far more sensory details, than his descriptions of Laura's beauty.[8]

In fact, the scene of Walter's first encounter with Marian is made fully meaningful only in the context of an earlier scene—the as it were "primal scene"—in the novel, the foundational meeting between Walter and Anne Catherick, the eponymous "woman in white." It is the "woman in white" who persistently, insistently resonates throughout the narrative, no matter the narrator, and who comes to function as the novel's erotic charge, as its embodiment of sensation.[9]

Walter encounters Anne shortly after he is convinced to accept a job as a drawing master/art restorer at Limmeridge House in Cumberland, where he will be instructing two young women. An "inexplicable unwillingness" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 20) to take on the post afflicts Walter, but the encouragement of his friend Pesca, an Italian teacher who has procured the position for Walter, as well as his mother and his sister, finally persuades him to the task. Because he is himself strangely unable or unwilling to explain his reluctance in the face of what

[8] Walter himself explains his response to the encounter with Marian by invoking the imagery of dream visions, offering a proto-Freudian account involving distortion and discontinuity. That explanation is consistent with my own reading, which comprehends the scene in terms of arousal. Recent research has linked REM sleep—the phase of the sleep cycle coinciding with dreaming—to sexual arousal. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that REM sleep—and, by extension, dreaming—is accompanied, in men, by penile erections. Thus, Walter's evocation of dreams in his attempt to explain his experience of this initial encounter with Marian implicates arousal as part of the meeting, even as it makes possible arousal's denial—or at least disavows conscious intent of and responsibility for this arousal.

[9] That the titular designation the "woman in white" evokes a ghost-like figure is perhaps no accident. Anne Catherick might be said to haunt the text, and her tendency to appear suddenly, with the supernatural frisson of an apparition, is exploited to maximum effect (and—no surprise, given the genre Collins is initiating with *The Woman in White*—maximum affect).

At the same time, her white clothing, evoking virginity and sexual innocence, allows the text to simultaneously disguise or disavow any prurience and exploit the sensational possibilities of wounded, violated purity.

appears to be gainful employment, the reader is left to surmise Walter's motivations. One possible guess, based on hindsight knowledge of what transpires at Limmeridge and thereafter, might be that the young Hartright is disinclined to accept the job because he fears the potentially compromising situation of being a relatively poor and socially inferior young man among two relatively wealthy and socially superior young women. Pesca's parting advice to "[m]arry one of the two young Misses" (22) hints at and corroborates this anxiety, for, though his words are proven oddly prophetic, this particular bit of guidance, coupled with Walter's subsequent, fleeting fantasy of becoming "Honourable Hartright, M.P." (22), is, at this early point, risible.

Having thus grudgingly acceded to the position, having taken leave of his mother and his sister Sarah, Walter sets out to return to his London abode in order to prepare for his departure to Cumberland. "It was…a close and sultry night" (22), Walter notes by way of preparing the reader for the "sultry" encounter he is getting ready to describe. He notes too his "restless state of mind and body" and observes that "so far as [his] own sensations were concerned, [he] can hardly say that [he] thought at all" (23). Thus Walter presents himself, in the moments before the fateful meeting, as emotionally volatile, a conduit for sensations over which his conscious mind has little control or even comprehension. It is this state of restlessness perhaps that justifies to him his indulgence in a fantasy about "what the Cumberland young ladies would look like" (23). On the heels of Pesca's enthusiastically stated desire that Walter marry one of these ladies, a match he associates with the kind of social advancement that would produce the "Honourable Hartright, M.P.," this "idl[e] wondering" (23) can hardly appear innocent, combining as it does a quasi-sexual fancy (we might assume he supposes the young ladies attractive in his contemplations) and a socio-economic one.

The fantasy is interrupted by what happens next. Walter describes the occurrence as the "one moment" in which "every drop of blood in [his] body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on [his] shoulder from behind [him]" (23-24). This bit of description is highly suggestive, evoking as it does the physiological manifestation of an erection, perhaps the lingering legacy of his earlier Cumberland ladies-Honorouable Hartright ruminations. Walter's eventual plea for the reader's understanding and exculpation—"Remember that I was young; remember that the hand which touched me was a woman's" (27)—furnishes still more evidence that Walter is aroused.

But Walter is not aroused only in a sexual sense. Or rather, in the moment when he first feels the light touch and his blood is brought to a stop, Walter's sexual affect is shot through with aggression, an impulse toward violence: his immediate reaction is to turn "on the instant, with [his] fingers tightening round the handle of [his] stick" (24). The grasping of the stick, his hand clasping its handle, suggests a capacity for viciousness. Moreover, the hard-to-miss phallic overtones and the intimation of masturbatory sexuality in the image of "fingers tightening round the handle of [the] stick" also suggest that the violence of Walter's response is motivated by his suddenly, unexpectedly aroused sexual feelings. Thus, from nearly the inception of the story it intends to relate, *The Woman in White* exploits the continuity of arousal and aggression.

What Walter discovers when he turns is "the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments" (24).[10] In "'What Could I Do?' Nineteenth-Century Psychology and the Horrors of Masculinity in *The Woman in White*," Andrew Mangham suggests that, beyond its haunting quality, its suggestion of some supernatural being, the woman's "white costume could indicate her openness to violation" (121). Her white dress, symbolic of sexual

[10] The conspicuous capitalization of "Woman" here suggests, on Walter's part, a desire to establish that his reaction is grounded in some innate and natural attraction to femininity.

purity, comes to connote in Walter's mind her susceptibility to defilement, and thus an unconscious acknowledgement of the way violence inheres in the sexual instinct.

As Walter recalls the woman's request for his help in locating the way to London, her repeated inquiries as to whether he suspects her of "doing wrong" (25), and her complaints of having met with an accident, he appeals for the reader's understanding:

> The loneliness and helplessness of the woman touched me. The natural impulse to assist her and to spare her got the better of the judgment, the caution, the worldly tact, which an older, wiser, and colder man might have. (25-26)

This appeal simultaneously disguises Walter's sexually aggressive impulses towards the woman, couching them in the mode of masculine care for vulnerable femininity (even as such vulnerability makes it potentially open to violation), and presents him as a "warm" man, in an implicit contrast to some hypothetical "colder man." The intimation of "warmness" serves to affirm the very sexual, and, implicitly, violent affect Walter is otherwise at some pains to dispel. In this way, this foundational encounter establishes the pattern that will determine Walter's trajectory in the novel: his ambitions—whether economic or sexual or aggressive—will be consistently couched in terms of moral obligation, obligation that is at once suggestively amatory and quasi-paternal or -brotherly.

Mangham draws our attention to the fact that Walter, remembering the night of the fateful encounter with Anne Catherick, confesses that he trembles even now, trembles as he trembled when the woman in white first touched him. This, Mangham argues, "suggests that the reason for Hartright's trembling self-reproach is linked to an awakening sense of the dangerous possibilities of his own heterosexual desire" (121). More so than a legal document, a status he dubiously claims for his account, the narrative Walter prepares thus becomes a self-exculpation, an attempt to explain away, at times by covering up, what Mangham terms his "carnal urges,"

which are consistently "linked to the drawing master's latent fantasies of social advancement" (Mangham 122). The ambiguity of Walter's affect is an alibi, its emotional dimension serving as a cover for his aggression and acquisitiveness.

Walter's confusion in the face of the woman in white escalates, particularly as the encounter progresses and her behavior becomes increasingly opaque. The woman's evident distress when Walter presses her for details obliges him to assure her that, "if it troubles [her] to explain [her] strange situation to [him]" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 26), she need not do so. Thanking him, the woman mentions a friend waiting for her in London and requests Walter's assistance in procuring transportation, exacting from him a promise "not to interfere with [her], and to let [her] leave him, when and how [she] please[s]" (26). "What could I do?" Walter implores the reader. "Here was a stranger utterly and helplessly at my mercy—and that stranger a forlorn woman" (26).[11] Apparently becoming certain that what he ought to do is help the "stranger," a conviction he maintains even at the time of writing, Walter assists the woman, though he also violates his vow not to trouble her for the details she finds painful to relate. To his inquiries about the friend waiting to receive her in London, the woman responds only with another exhortation not to "interfere" with her when she chooses to leave him. The woman then proceeds to ask if Walter knows "many men of rank and title" (27) and expresses hope that a

[11] Andrew Mangham forcefully suggests that Walter's

> frenetic question "what could I do?...what could I do?" could be read not only as a justification of his helping a dubious woman, but as a consideration of what the situation could have enabled him to do *to* Anne. What could he have done, he seems to ask himself, when he had the opportunity? What were his capabilities? In coming face-to-face with a woman 'utterly and helplessly at [his] mercy,' he is struck by a sudden awareness that this was a meeting that could have resulted in his raping or violating his helpless companion. (121)

In Mangham's reading, Walter's insistence of gentlemanly care for a woman in distress is meant to cover up his anxiety in the face of the woman's ostensible sexual availability. I am more inclined to read Walter's care for Anne as a way of dealing with the discomfort provoked in him by his arousal. That is, it is not so much that he fears doing violence to her, that he suspects himself capable of raping this seemingly helpless woman. It is, rather, that he is struck by the intensity, the violence, of the sexual affect he experiences in the situation, and this obliges him to excessive deference to the woman's wishes.

particular baronet is not among his acquaintances, but she adamantly refuses to identify the man she has in mind, only expressing relief when Walter names the baronets he knows, and she does not find the dreaded name among the list. But when Walter reveals his occupation as drawing master and his plans to travel to Cumberland, the woman provides a solitary clue: "I was once happy in Cumberland," she says, repeating the name of the place "tenderly" (29). Asked if she had been born "in the beautiful Lake country," the woman replies, "No….but I once went to school for a little while in Cumberland. Lakes? I don't remember any lakes. It's Limmeridge village, and Limmeridge House, I should like to see again" (29). Very soon after this obscure hint, Walter helps the woman obtain a cab, and she disappears, gone nearly as spontaneously as the entrance she made into Walter's life.

The woman's disappearance is quickly followed by the appearance of a chaise bearing two men, one of whom, Walter overhears, anxiously inquires of a policeman about sightings of a woman dressed all in white, a woman who has recently escaped his asylum. Has he helped a madwoman escape, Walter wonders, and the question of the woman's identity, and, perhaps more importantly, of what that identity might expose, preoccupies him for much of his story's remainder. The woman's brief references to her connection to Cumberland and to Limmeridge House become his first clues, the first suggestion that her situation—whatever it ultimately proves to be—might have a bearing on his own life, his own position.[12] The mention of Cumberland inspires Walter to "tr[y] again to lift the veil that hung between this woman and [him]" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 29), and her impassioned remembrance of Limmeridge House "staggered [him] with astonishment," a reaction Walter links to "the excited state of [his] curiosity" (29).

[12] In using the word *position*, I wish to stress its socio-economic implications, which will be further explored in the course of my discussion of Walter and his changing *fortunes*—another word with significant socio-economic implications—in the course of *The Woman in White*.

As has already been noted, it is not only Walter's curiosity that has been excited by his interaction with the woman in white. Indeed, the *excited curiosity* is a screen for the *sexual excitement* he feels. Or, to put this another way, sexual arousal becomes a harbinger of mystery, a warning that a veil covers up something significant and that this veil must be lifted so that the mystery might be profitably solved. Walter thus channels his sexual affect into an excited curiosity, and the woman's arousing touch, her arousing vulnerability, becomes instead a series of confounding signs that Walter will strive to interpret and assemble into coherence. At the same time, the reader's curiosity is implicitly channeled into arousal through an identification with Walter, established through Walter's direct addressing of the reader, a strategy he deploys at particularly sensational moments.[13]

It cannot be insignificant that the mystery gains momentum, that Walter must relentlessly push forward in his quest to uncover the secret, after he meets another woman, who happens to be a virtual double for the woman in white. Laura Fairlie is, however, an heiress, and, as such, despite the mutuality of their love, she initially appears to be off-limits to the drawing master. Much of the narrative following the interlude of Walter's stay at Limmeridge House thus works to align the two lovers together, bridging the gap in their respective socio-economic statuses while ensuring that Walter's attraction to and love for Laura will be rendered without self-interest, despite the undeniable elevation their marriage would bring to his standing. Similar to the way Walter's solicitude for the welfare of the woman in white during their first encounter conceals his aggressive, potentially violent impulses towards her, and much in the way his "excited curiosity" acts as a screen for his sexual arousal, his oft-articulated insistence that he

[13] Gloria-Jean Masciarotte observes that "Sensationalism's feminine subject shocks or stuns the reader into further production" (98). Just as the woman in white excites Walter's curiosity, propelling him to work to solve the mystery she represents, so too is the reader enlisted in the project of making sense of her.

wishes only to be of service to Laura and to her half-sister, Marian serves to ameliorate the sense of the advantage he must gain in the realization of a union with Miss Fairlie.

Walter's first glimpse of Laura merits a paean to her charms, though this description is largely notable for what it does *not* include. Unlike Walter's rapturous description of Marian's body and unlike his heightened, even maddened, sensations in the face of the woman in white, his first sense of Laura is nearly without explicit physical detail.[14] Aside from a brief mention of her "light, youthful figure" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 51), much of the rest of the description involves itself in quasi-poetic language, mystifying, even obfuscating, Laura's physical presence rather than celebrating it. Indeed, the most precise details here point to a faintness, a manner of vagueness characteristic to Laura's appearance: her hair, for example, "is of so faint and pale a brown…that it nearly melts, here and there, into the shadow of [her straw] hat" (51).[15] Walter maintains that Laura, despite his "poor portrait of her" (52), is "[t]he woman who first gives life, light, and form to our shadowy conceptions of beauty, fills a void in our spiritual nature that has remained unknown to us till she appeared" (52), but his suggestion that his description of Laura is "poor" precisely because his feelings are so strong is disingenuous, in no small part because his assertion that she is the first woman to quicken his pulse rings patently false on the heels of the preceding accounts of Walter's encounter with both the woman in white and Marian.

What is more, Walter admits that, lingering with and coloring his first impression of Miss Fairlie, there is "[a]mong the sensations that crowded on [him], when his eyes first looked upon her"—sensations he notably terms "familiar" (52), once again complicating his claim that Laura

[14] Masciarotte observes that Walter's attempts to portray Laura, to draw a verbal portrait of her, "never result in a description per se" (94).

[15] In "Sensational Sisters," her examination of the relationship between Marian Halcombe and Laura Fairlie, Leila Silvana May remarks that, in terms of textual description, Laura "is scarcely there." May suggests that, lacking physical description, it is Laura, rather than the woman in white, who becomes the true ghost haunting th[e] text" (90).

is the first woman to arouse them[16]—"there was one that troubled and perplexed [him]" (52), namely the suggestion of "something wanting" in Laura. "At one time," Walter somewhat cryptically explains,

> it seemed like something wanting in *her*; at another, like something wanting in myself, which hindered me from understanding her as I ought. The impression was always strongest, in the most contradictory manner, when she looked at me; or, in other words, when I was most conscious of the harmony and charm of her face, and yet, at the same time, most troubled by the sense of an incompleteness which it was impossible to discover. Something wanting, something wanting—and where it was, and what it was, I could not say. (53)

We soon learn that "[t]hat 'something wanting' was [Walter's] own recognition of the ominous likeness between the fugitive from the asylum [that is, the woman in white] and [his] pupil at Limmeridge House" (62).

It is Marian, to whom Walter relates the story of his encounter with the woman in white, who discovers not only the woman's name in her mother's letters but also the fact of the uncanny resemblance between Anne Catherick and Laura, and, once the likeness is revealed and confirmed, it seems remarkable that Walter, a man whose profession ought to make him a keen observer of the detail of physical appearances, and, moreover, a man who insists on the indelibility of the encounter with the woman in white and his love for Laura, fails to identify this likeness. This is especially striking when we take into account that, in essence, the "something wanting" that Walter senses in Laura is the incompleteness of the resemblance, and that the source of this incompleteness is Laura's relatively healthy appearance when compared to Anne.

Robert Lougy, who looks at Collins's novel through a Lacanian lens, notes that Lacan views desire as "the wish to reunite with the mother" (117-118). Arousal too is a form of

[16] Walter later observes that he "had trained [himself] to leave all the sympathies natural to [his] age in [his] employer's outer hall, as coolly as I left my umbrella there before [he] went up-stairs" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 65). The implication seems to be that he has conditioned himself to suppress all urges relating to the female pupils positioned above him in terms of socio-economic status. But such suppression—even if it involves a fair amount of repression—does not translate into a lack of experience with sexual arousal.

longing, the wish for a return to some primal state. Walter's ostensible feelings for Laura, a yearning he expresses in terms of its originality and which he suggests is made manifest to him as the first quickening of his pulse, as his first experience of arousal, reveals itself as a kind of recognition, an identification he *senses*, though does not consciously name, between Laura and Anne, the woman who had earlier quickened his pulse and aroused his desires. What stands in the way of immediate recognition, however, is Laura's relative robustness.

But why should Laura's comparative health be perceived as "something wanting"? Perhaps it is a lack of vulnerability, or, at the very least, a lessening of vulnerability, that Walter senses when he first sets sight on the woman he will eventually claim as his. Unlike Anne Catherick, Laura, in the early stages of her acquaintance with Walter, exhibits few signs of the weaknesses that bedevil the woman in white. That is, Laura is an heiress, beloved by her half-sister, whose life is overtly and explicitly dedicated to Laura's comfort, beautiful, young, with seemingly nothing to fear from nefarious forces. That she is, in fact, in danger, and from the very same sources as Anne Catherick, might partly inform Walter's eventual recognition of the likeness, a kind of presentiment; in this sense, then, arousal once again acts in the manner of hint or clue, a sign to be properly interpreted and integrated into the resolution of a mystery. Walter's relatively chaste description of Laura, which appears especially odd given that his presentation of the two women he claims no attraction to is far more physically detailed and passionate, seems to stem from the straightforwardness of the affect she inspires: unlike the woman in white, Laura is not on the run, claiming no need of masculine protection and therefore inviting no masculine violation, and, unlike Marian, Laura is not dependent on the financial beneficence of others, being in full possession of a sizable fortune.[17]

[17] Of course, all of these attributes also make Laura unavailable to Walter, though she might well love him. When Marian explains to Walter that Laura is engaged to be married, she explicitly notes that the engagement happily

It is only when she is stripped of these assets—health, beauty, wealth, her very identity—through the machinations of her husband Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco,[18] that is, when she becomes more fully Anne Catherick's double, that Walter's affect in connection to her becomes sexualized. Standing at the grave in which he believes Laura to be buried, Walter spots a veiled woman who approaches him and takes "possession of [him], body and soul" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 403). That woman, he realizes, as she lifts her veil is Laura, who is not, after all, dead. But of course that woman is also Anne Catherick, as Walter returns to the primal scene of that first encounter, that first pulse-quickening. "The outward changes wrought by the suffering and the terror of the past," Walter tells us, referring to Laura's travails at the hands of her husband and the Count, "had fearfully, almost hopelessly, strengthened the fatal resemblance between Anne Catherick and herself" (426). Now broken and broke, Laura comes to embody the very same sort of fantasy represented by the woman in white—vulnerable, unbalanced, poor—on the night of her first meeting with Walter.

As with that fateful encounter, Walter focuses his narration of the events subsequent to his reunion with Marian and the dispossessed Laura on the help he is able and willing to offer to the distressed woman. And, as with that fateful encounter, Walter couches his attentions to Laura in the tropes of masculine protection, casting himself in the role of White Knight to Laura's Damsel in Distress. There is nothing overtly sexual in Walter's treatment of Laura, as he consistently casts her as weakened not only in body but also in mind. Laura's memory, most significantly of the crucial days leading up to the execution of Sir Percival and the Count's plot

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makes it unnecessary to invoke the social and economic disparities that would, even were Laura free to marry, make a match between the drawing master and the heiress impossible.

[18] Fosco, with his corpulent body, his seemingly limitless appetite for sweets, and his apparently genuine attraction to Marian, which varies from moment to moment from the paternal to the romantic, offers a tremendous and nearly irresistible opportunity for a case study in affect, both sexual and otherwise, but such a discussion is outside the scope of this chapter.

against her, is understood to be irretrievable. In her confusion, her seemingly constant state of an anxiety that cannot be fully and clearly articulated, she comes to resemble Anne Catherick in diseased mind no less than in unhealthy body. It is this resemblance, now entirely unmistakable to Walter, that implicates his seemingly filial care for Laura in a somewhat different light.

As has already been sketched above in my consideration of Walter's original encounter with the woman in white, his sexual affect is bound up with aggression, expressing itself in narrative and textual terms as an eagerness to make himself available to vulnerable, seemingly defenseless women. But the ultimate success of his courtship of Laura—that is, the fact that his arousal in the case of Miss Fairlie leads to marriage and fatherhood, as well as his establishment as head of Limmeridge House—also revises and, most crucially, *normalizes* Walter's sexual response. In that first meeting between Walter and Anne Catherick, D.A. Miller argues in "'*La Cage aux Folles*': Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White*," we come to understand "nervousness" as contagious. In that pivotal encounter, Miller contends, a woman's nervous weakness is transmitted to a man, as Anne's touch cascades into intense sensations presented by Walter as a shock to the nerves. Miller further interprets this mode of "contagion" as akin to the notion of "a woman's soul trapped in a man's body," the definition of homosexuality posited in the 1860s. Thus, the centerpiece moment of the novel, the moment that underwrites and structures the narrative, might be understood as a quasi-portrait of male homosexuality, with "nervousness" as a kind of euphemistic shorthand for an attraction that cannot be named and acknowledged openly.

Miller further suggests that *The Woman in White* condenses together

> 1) a particular fantasy about male homosexuality; 2) a homophobic defense against that fantasy; and 3) the male oppression of women that, among other things, extends that defense. All three meanings bear pointedly on Collins's novel, which is profoundly about enclosing and secluding the woman in male "bodies," among them institutions like

> marriage and madhouses. And the sequestration of the woman takes for its object not just women, who need to be put away in safe places or asylums, but men as well, who must monitor and master what is fantasized as "woman inside" them. (112)

Read in this way, Walter's tremendous pains to couch the reactions of his body in the language of manly attentions to a woman in need of protection, care, and guidance imply an attempt to guard against the encroachment of feminized sensation. This "queering" of sensations, including sexual arousal, imbues them with an ambiguity, which in turn permits Walter to disavow those dimensions of his feelings he deems unacceptable and position himself as a successful man in the context of heteronormative relations. That original meeting with Marian Holcombe is again relevant here: confronted with the masculine face of the woman he has just been aroused by, Walter immediately sets himself to dispelling any suspicion of impropriety through the swift rejection of Marian's masculine visage. Notably, that rejection keeps Walter aligned with his fantasy of social advancement: given Marian's relative poverty, she cannot be the Cumberland lady to make Walter the "Honourable Hartright."

But, beyond shielding him from the potential ambiguity latent in the bodily response to stimuli, Walter's insistence that his attentions to women, particularly to Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie, both sufferers of a distinctly feminine "nervousness," which he has shown himself liable to "catch," are always honorable and pure finally serves to fulfill Pesca's wishful prophecy. So successful is his campaign to present himself in the guise of manly guardian of womanly virtue that by the novel's conclusion, which sees the restoration of Laura Fairlie to her rightful status and (at least some of) her wealth, the reader is given no option but to rejoice in Walter's good fortunes. Now the patriarch of Limmeridge House, Walter Hartright, former drawing master to the estate's heiress, appears its only rightful owner, and his young son, its only rightful heir.

Walter's legitimacy is established and ratified through his passion for Laura. That passion, set against Sir Percival's coldness, his profound lack of arousal in relation to his wife as a woman, validates his movement up the socio-economic scale. In fact, his marriage to Laura is no different in its effects on his monetary situation than is Sir Percival's. The difference resides then in Walter's effectively affective motives, in the quickening of his pulse at the sight of Laura. Walter's arousal subsumes and obviates all other profitable motives. In *The Woman in White*, this auspicious beginning foreshadows the happy ending.

Still, the novel retains some measure of ambiguity. In the final family arrangements, we see Marian Holcombe remain an integral part of the Hartright household. "[T]he good angel of our lives" (Collins, *The Woman in White* 617), Walter terms her as he takes leave of the patient reader. But Marian is also a reminder that neat conclusions and decisively settled questions are an illusion. Retaining something of the status of the conventional woman (the domestic angel, the saintly nurturer of sister and nephew) and of the conventional man (the eminently rational appraiser, the brave defender of her sister's name and honor), Marian Holcombe, she of the beautiful body and the ugly face, stands in for the contradictions that remain hidden within Walter, for the ambiguity of sensation itself.

The MADWOMAN's Sensational Secret

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, "the most sensationally successful of all sensational novels" (Sutherland 360), appeared in 1862.The tale of a "bigamous heroine [who] deserts her child, pushes husband number one down a well, thinks about poisoning husband number two and sets fire to a hotel in which her other male acquaintances are residing" (Showalter 134), the novel relates the story of how Lucy Graham, a poor, orphaned governess employed by the surgeon Mr. Dawson, becomes Lady Audley, the wife of the much older and

wealthier Sir Michael Audley, in order to unmask this childlike woman, with her "soft and melting blue eyes" and a "wealth of showering flaxen curls" (Braddon 12), as a bigamist, murderer, and arsonist, a coldly-calculating *femme fatale*, whose vanity and immoderate acquisitiveness drive her to deceive and kill. Lucy Graham is merely a pretense, a false identity assumed by Helen Talboys *née* Maldon when she willfully disregards the inconvenient fact of her husband George Talboys, making a fortune for his "darling" in Australia, abandons her child, and strikes out to advance herself in the world.

And yet *Lady Audley's Secret* is blithely unconcerned with keeping its villainess's secret actually *secret* in any prolonged or suspenseful way. Indeed, the very title is a dead giveaway: we know, even before we encounter her, that Lady Audley has a secret. And we become aware that Lucy is not who she appears to be from the very first chapter when she is shown, following Sir Michael's proposal, exclaiming, "No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations…every trace of the old life melted away—every clue to identity buried and forgotten" (17). Her next words—"except these, except these" (17)—accompanied by the dramatic removal of a black ribbon from her throat and the revelation of the object hanging from the ribbon—"a ring wrapped in an oblong piece of paper" (17)—almost certainly establish that Lucy's "old life" included a marriage. That her description neatly dovetails with the description, in the very next chapter, George Talboys offers of his wife, as he makes his way back to her aboard the *Argus*, offers further confirmation of Lucy's past, and the discovery, in the third chapter, helpfully entitled "Hidden Relics," of a "baby's little worsted shoe rolled up in a piece of paper, and tiny lock of pale and silky yellow hair, evidently taken from a baby's head" (34) suggests that Lucy, despite her youth,[19] is a mother. (That her lady's maid, Phoebe Marks, greets

[19] On the subject of Lucy's age, we learn that "nobody exactly knew [it], but she looked little more than twenty" (Braddon 13).

her discovery of the shoe and lock of hair with the proclamation that she would "rather have this than the diamond bracelet" [34] further corroborates the significance of this particular bit of evidence.) And, when George Talboys unexpectedly disappears, having apparently impetuously returned to Australia with no word of warning to his closest friend Robert Audley, the reader, like Robert, immediately suspects foul play, in which Lady Audley is necessary implicated.[20] (The revelation that George is in fact very much alive despite Lucy's belief that she has murdered her inconveniently returned husband is the novel's only real twist.)

As in *The Woman in White*, the interest of *Lady Audley's Secret* vis-à-vis sensation lies in its construction of arousal, both affective and sexual. Lucy marries for money; indeed, she does so more than once. So too, I have suggested, does Walter Hartright. But Lucy's failure to feel appropriately for her wealthy spouse, and her sexualized response to luxury goods make her a villain where Walter is "honourable." This difference is of course bound up with gender disparity, and Lady Audley's situation has been and should be read as an implicit criticism of a society that leaves women like Helen Talboys with few viable choices. Furthermore, the Victorian ideology of female passionlessness (Cott) effectively prohibited Lucy from displaying, if not experiencing, arousal. Nonetheless, that she does demonstrate arousal in relation to commodities highlights her lack of a properly affective response as a moral failing and indicts her as a criminal.

From the start, Lucy's affect is improper, out of proportion, even queer. When Sir Michael proposes marriage to her (despite the great disparity in age and status between them), Lucy falls "on her knees at his feet." Sir Michael protests, but, a "strange passion…agitat[ing]

[20] An unsigned review of the novel's theatrical adaptation by George Roberts in *The London Review* noted that, "after the middle of the first volume," the secret of the novel "is no secret at all" (245).
The novel's one twist is the sudden late-in-the-game revelation that George Talboys is in fact very much alive, despite Lucy's belief that she has murdered her inconveniently returned first husband.

her [and] making her voice sound shrill and piercing—not loud, but preternaturally distinct," the young governess asks him to "[r]emember what my life has been…Poverty, poverty, trials, vexations, humiliations, deprivations!" (Braddon 16). As Sir Michael witnesses his intended's "agitation and her passionate vehemence, there was an undefined something in her manner which filled the baronet with a vague alarm" (16). When Lucy finally does accept his hand, Sir Michael finds, returning to Audley Court, "some strong emotion at work in his heart—neither joy, nor triumph, but something almost akin to disappointment; some stifled and unsatisfied longing which lay heavy and dull at his heart, as if her had carried a corpse in his bosom" (17). Sir Michael's misgiving is figured as a premonition, a foreshadowing of what Lucy's odd agitation signifies, and this intuition attaches itself to and is the result of Lucy's distorted affect, her deviated arousal pattern, which will manifest itself throughout the novel and serve as a signpost of Lucy's deviancy.

In the proposal scene, Lucy reacts with a strange mixture of passion and calm, of excitement and detachment, and this strangeness persistently attaches itself to her throughout the course of the novel.[21] And yet, even as Lucy's affect is presented as odd, as deviating from some affective standard, that standard itself is never explicitly articulated. If anything, the standard is implied and constructed through Lucy's deviation itself, her "queer" affect positioned as the counterpart that throws "normal" affect into relief. Thus, Sir Michael's desire for the poor young governess—"this fever, this longing, this restless, uncertain, miserable hesitation" (12)—becomes an earnest, even admirable, expression, when juxtaposed with Lucy's reaction upon being informed by the surgeon's wife of Sir Michael's interest—"Once or twice, while she sat

[21] The novel consistently codes Lucy's reactions as suspect, inadequate to the occasion, as excessive or underwhelming or, paradoxically, both at once. In the context of Lucy's confession of her mother's madness and her proclamation of her own insanity, her strange affect may perhaps be read as a clue, an early signal to the reader of Lady Audley's "secret."

silently thinking, she removed one from before her face, and fidgeted nervously with the ribbon [around her throat], clutching at it with a half-angry gesture, and twisting it backwards and forwards between her fingers" (14). The ribbon holds Lucy's wedding ring, and, once revealed, this fact quickly casts her anxiety, at first an apparent complement to Sir Michael's "love," as a mode of disassembling, an outright lie.

Indeed, it is Lucy's performative tendency that "queers" her and typifies her affect. Perhaps even more so than other sensation novels, *Lady Audley's Secret* repeatedly suggests that identities are a matter of performance, that its characters are all engaged in role-playing, even if they themselves are unaware of the role, and that sexual arousal, specifically, and sensation, more generally, furnish the only possibility of authenticity. Sir Michael, for instance, has for many years prior to the novel's beginning embodied the respectable widower, a man who has, after the death of his wife, devoted himself to his daughter, Alicia. And Sir Michael's nephew Robert Audley, a man remarkable for his apathetic temperament, his lack of interest in anything aside from his meerschaum pipe and his French novels, is early on a man whose distinctive qualities might be summed up as lethargy and a disposition against work and marriage, the latter being a seemingly inevitable union with Alicia Audley. Yet both men find themselves acting otherwise in and through moments of arousal. Sir Michael notably realizes, as Lucy's "tender fascination" (12) begins to exercise its effects on him, that "[h]e had never loved before. What had been his marriage with Alicia's mother but a dull, jog-trot bargain, made to keep some estate in the family…? What had been his love for his first wife but a poor, pitiful, smouldering spark, too dull to be extinguished, too feeble to burn?" (12) In a moment of intense sensation, he comes to realize the barrenness of his first marriage, a pre-scripted drama of real estate and other property.

Similarly, Robert's first meeting with Clara Talboys, the look-alike sister of his missing friend, causes him to cast off his earlier indifference as a mere posture and commit himself to ascertaining George Talboys's fate on Clara's behalf. The encounter with Clara "le[aves] him half-bewildered by the passionate energy of her manner and the noble beauty of her face," and as Robert Audley watches her walk away, he vehemently resolves, "Heaven help those who stand between me and the secret" (203) of George's abrupt disappearance. His arousal mobilizes Robert to abandon his indolence, to rise to the requirements of his circumstances.

Lucy, by contrast, maintains that the "mad folly that the world calls love has never had any part in [her] madness" (348). Yet she serves as a stimulant of sorts, fascinating the men who encounter her. Both George Talboys and Sir Michael are consumed by her, the spell broken only by the revelation of her duplicity, her capacity for bigamy and murder, and Robert Audley fears succumbing to his "aunt's" obvious charms.[22] But it would be inaccurate to view Lady Audley as without a sexual impulse, for she is unmistakably aroused by luxury goods.

Over and over, Lady Audley is represented and described through her possessions: her chambers become analogous to her self, and these chambers are insistently described and catalogued. Lady Audley's "great drawing-room [is] rich in satin and ormolu, buhl and inlaid cabinets, bronzes, cameos, statuettes, and trinkets, that glistened in the dusky light"; her "morning-room [is] hung with proof engravings of valuable pictures" (32). In the ante-chamber hang "Claudes and Poussins, Wouvermans and Cuyps," all worth, according to Lady Audley's maid Phoebe Marks, "a fortune" (33). Lady Audley's boudoir is "fairy-like," strewn with "a heap

[22] In this way, Lucy is analogous to the sensation novel itself: a work of deliberately crafted, fictional(ized) plot points designed to attract the reader's attention, to cultivate and maintain that attention, and produce reactions grounded in the reader's body and mind.

Ann Cvetkovich suggests that the combination of her beauty and her criminality is instrumental to the production of sensation: the "sensation of repulsion produced by Lady Audley's criminality is indistinguishable from the fascination produced by her beauty; sensationalism consists in the indistinguishability of the two feelings" (Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings* 50).

of dresses" (33), and her dressing-table is "full as it can be of diamonds, rubies, pearls, and emeralds" (33). These possessions, or rather the excitement they inspire, define Lady Audley, who covets them above all. Consistent with the "lust fueled by the emerging consumerism of [the] mid- [nineteenth] century that witnessed the advent of London department stores along with the middle-class woman as a significant force in the marketplace" (Bernstein 214), Lady Audley's appetite for fine things appears boundless.

Lady Audley is a woman who abandons her young child, who deceives and manipulates the respectable man who loves her, who believes she has killed the husband who might expose her duplicity, and who deliberately commits arson in order to eliminate the threat of exposure; these acts, the novel suggests, are motivated largely by her greed, her immense need to transcend her poverty, and her sense that "if [she] was indeed prettier than [her] schoolfellows, [she] ought to marry better than any of them" (Braddon 345). These render her, by her own admission, "heartless" (345), and it is thus possible to understand "Lady Audley's crime [as a lack of] the affect appropriate to her sex" (Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings* 47).

So complete is Lady Audley's obsession with luxury goods that, when her sundry crimes are exposed and her husband no longer serves as her protector, she is determined that "[t]hey were not going to rob her of her possessions" (Braddon 375). In her attraction to these things—"her favourite Russian sables…fragile teacups and covered vases of Sèvres and Dresden among the folds of her silken dinner dresses…jewelled and golden drinking-cups amongst her delicate linens" (376)—there is a kind of erotic thrill, as if the items were part of a much-desired and desirable body. The tactile nature of the things Lady Audley collects—soft furs, fragile china, delicate silks and linens—metaphorically evokes other kinds of sensuous pleasures.

The novel insinuates that this is the only kind of thrill Lady Audley is capable of experiencing and implicitly condemns her as one who invests libido in objects rather than persons. Her materialism is implicated as a form of sexual irregularity, which is, in turn, understood "as motivating [her] crimes" (Nemesvari 515). But Lady Audley is not the only one to experiences arousal in relation to luxurious goods.

For one thing, in the narrative's insistent cataloging of the objects that excite Lady Audley, there is a covert assumption being made: the reader, the narrative insinuates, is also interested in these things, also enjoys the carefully, deliberately delineated list of Lucy's things. Moreover, Lady Audley, with her *golden* hair, is herself a luxury object, and the effect she has on men like George Talboys and Sir Michael is, finally, not unlike the effect *golden* objects have on her. "Golden hair," Galia Ofek writes, "marks a woman as the ultimate commodity" (106). The very first description of Lucy's hair represents it as a "*wealth* of showering flaxen curls" (12; emphasis mine), and the image of "wealth" is no coincidence. Although she is actually poor, Lucy's appearance signals riches, and this quality is inseparable from the effect she has on others. Ofek suggests that Lady Audley's hair, like the hair of her literary predecessor, the forgerer, blackmailer, and murderer Florence Armytage in George Augustus Sala's *The Seven Sons of Mammon*, "is the physical embodiment of a world ruled by mammon worship" (106). Lucy is well aware that her golden hair and her lovely face are arousing commodities and that she might trade them for commodities that arouse her.

As she fears exposure as a bigamist, Lady Audley recalls

> the early time in which she had first looked in the glass and discovered that she was beautiful: that fatal early time in which she had first begun to look upon her loveliness as a right divine, a boundless possession which was to be a set-off against all girlish short-comings, a counter-balance of every youthful sin. (Braddon 293)

The language here is one of trade, even of commerce. As a girl, Helen Maldon recognizes her beauty as "a boundless possession, one she comes to understand might be her ticket to success "in the world's great lottery." She learns too that her "ultimate fate in life depended upon [her] marriage" and concludes that if she "was indeed prettier than [her] schoolfellows, [she] ought to marry better than any of them" (Braddon 345). From an early age, then, Helen understands the possibility of commodifying herself as liberating, potentially setting her free from a lifetime of poverty, which is to say, a lifetime without commodities.

The narrator encourages the reader to consider whether Lady Audley's beauty and her awareness of it are not the at the root of her crimes:

> Did she remember the day in which the fairy dower of beauty had first taught her to be selfish and cruel, indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others, cold-hearted and capricious, greedy of admiration, exacting and tyrannical, with that petty woman's tyranny which is the worst of despotisms? Did she trace every sin of her life back to its true source? and did she discover that poisoned fountain in her own exaggerated estimate of the value of a pretty face? (293-4)

And yet Lucy does not put an exaggerated estimate on her own value, for she is twice able to transform her beauty into advantageous marriages. But the price of marrying well is the need to transform herself into a valuable, desirable object, like the teacups she hoards and the furs she wraps around herself. Like the teacups and the furs, Lady Audley is a commodity, meaningful largely within the context of the (marriage) market where her value is determined through trade. As Ofek observes, "she is determined to 'sell'…to the highest bidder, and uses her symbolic gold [her hair] to seduce and defeat men" (114). The men who marry Lucy essentially "buy" her, but, in wrapping the purchase in the language of affection, they establish themselves as selfless (where she is selfish) and solicitous (where she is "indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others").

It bears noting that the lovely image of Lady Audley is literally transformed into a commodity in the course of the novel. One of the first signs of her duplicity is presented in the portrait of Lucy commissioned by her husband and located in her ladyship's ante-chamber. The portrait, hung among "the best pictures in the house" (Braddon 69), is, first and most obviously, a sign of Lady Audley's ascent from poor, orphan governess to the wife of a baronet; it is thus a literal mark of Lady Audley's success at commodification. But where Lady Audley herself seems to be a remarkably attractive commodity, her portrait, as an emblem of that attractiveness, is more ambiguous.[23]

The painting depicts Lady Audley standing in her own room, its background a faithful reproduction of the chambers. The artist, the narrator is "afraid" to inform the reader, "belonged to the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, for he had spent a most unconscionable time upon the accessories of this picture—upon my lady's crispy ringlets and the heavy folds of her crimson velvet dress" (71).[24] Though Lady Audley is lovely as ever, she has in the portrait "something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend" (72), an early sign that the lady is neither innocent nor childlike. Like the picture of Dorian Gray some thirty years later, the picture of Lady Audley subtly suggests her secret nature, a hidden self at odds with the beautiful surface.

[23] Ironically, Lady Audley is a tarnished object masquerading as a luxurious good. This is true most obviously in her commission of bigamy, for, far from being a passive, innocent, virginal angel, she is a devious schemer, with a living husband and child. That is, if "[t]hat very childishness had a charm which few could resist," if "[t]he innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes," if "[t]he rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness" (Braddon 55), the discovery of her actions—bigamy, yes, but also murder and arson—suggests that such symbols cannot be read and interpreted unambiguously.

[24] Lady Audley's affinity for softly (or otherwise pleasantly) textured fabrics, velvet and fur most obvious among these, as well as the frequent depiction of her stroking these materials, has suggested to critics like Natalie Schroeder a tendency to masturbation (92). The velvet of her dress in the portrait is perhaps especially suggestive, given the Victorian use of the euphemism "tipping the velvet" for cunnilingus. Thus, if the portrait is meant to reveal some profound truth about Lady Audley's real nature, it might be understood, at least in part, as a commentary on the actual direction of the lady's sexual inclinations. That is, the portrait suggests that, if Lady Audley is left cold by men, it is because she is sexually drawn to women. (Schroeder locates "undercurrents of homoeroticism" in Lucy's relationship with her look-alike maid Phoebe [92].)

The somewhat curious insistence on the pre-Raphaelite provenance of Lady Audley's portrait speaks to the ambiguity of arousal both within and without the novel.[25] Katherine Montwieler "recognize[s] the portrait's debt to the Pre-Raphaelites as a mark of Lucy's erotic power" (50), and there is undeniably something sexual in the fact of two men who have surreptitiously made their way into the lady's private chamber in order to, unbeknownst to her, examine her personal effects, including her unfinished portrait.[26]

"The young men," the narrator tells us, "looked at the paintings on the walls first, leaving this unfinished portrait for a *bonne bouche*" (Braddon 71). The notion of a treat deliberately postponed hints at the slow build-up of excitement, the cultivation of an appetite for a delectable delight. With only a single candle between them, the men take turns examining the postponed pleasure, with Robert Audley rhapsodizing to George Talboys about his step-aunt's charms and directing his friend's gaze to the portrait. As this scene intimates, and as Lynette Felber cannily suggests in "The Literary Portrait as Centerfold," Braddon might have had other precedents beyond the Pre-Raphaelites in her description of Lady Audley's portrait, namely the emergence of "visual pornography facilitated by photography" (475). (Felber cites Henry James's sense that Braddon "knows much that ladies are not accustomed to know…the talk natural to a crowd of fast men at supper, when there are no ladies present but Miss Braddon" as evidence that she was

[25] The painters associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were interested, as the name suggests, in a return to a style of representation dating from before what they viewed as the corrupting influence of Raphael and other Classical painters. In practical terms, this goal translated into paintings honing in on aspects of reality that had been overlooked or suppressed by other artists, with the result of "initiat[ing] new modes of perception, a new realism which extended aesthetic, class, and gender boundaries" (Andres 561). One method of accomplishing this "new realism" was the "distinctness and sharpness of each object" in Pre-Raphaelite paintings, with the attendant "correspondence between the…sharp and minute representation of objects and the intensity of the emotions their subjects…experience" extending to those looking at the work (Andres 562).

[26] Like Walter Hartright's insistence that his original interaction with Anne Catherick is guided by his concern for her, a kindness that conceals his arousal and aggression and the continuity of the two, the men's desire to see the portrait serves as a disguise for the sexual and aggressive dimensions of the steps they must take in order to see it. Furthermore, the portrait, with its intimation of Lucy's fiendishness, becomes a kind of catalyst for Robert's relentless pursuit of Lady Audley, which rouses him from his indolence, though he credits his detection to his sudden passion for Clara. The ostensible sincerity of his feelings for George Talboys's sister serves as a veneer for his aggression against Lucy.

likely to be well aware of the existence of visual pornography, though it was largely produced by and for men [476].) Lady Audley's portrait functions then as a kind of proto-centerfold, "a typical visual and sexual fetish, which incites (or excites) but may or may not deliver specifically what it promises" (Felber 476). Furthermore, the portrait's inclusion of Lady Audley's possessions, its insistence on situating her remarkably detailed likeness in the context of commodities, links this sexualized image to advertisement (Felber 479), the joining of sex and product designed to artificially and systematically arouse desire. The men's sexual response to the portrait thus implicates them in the same attraction to commodity that defines Lucy, yet *their* arousal is redeemed through its disguise as an appreciation for "the best pictures in the house."

The story of *Lady Audley's Secret*, like the story of *The Woman in White*, is about the redemptive potential of arousal, of sensation, and of passion. These, the novels imply, are essential to the stable social formations of marriage and family. *Lady Audley's Secret* concludes with an idyll in which the married Clara and Robert and their "toddling baby" (Braddon 435) share house and home with George Talboys and the son abandoned by Lucy. The happy domicile is blessed by frequent visits from Sir Michael Audley and his now happily-married daughter Alicia. On the subject of Lucy, there is only silence. Lady Audley, it seems, has become the secret of the novel, a villainess "buried alive" in an asylum. With no finer feeling to redeem her, the former Lady Audley's impulses—her enormous appetite for consumer goods, her anger with George who has, in effect, abandoned her, the terrible, vengeful wrath that leads her to attempt murder and arson—are simply what they are. And yet she has served as catalyst, a generator of the "finer" sensations of others. Even as she fails to react "appropriately," Lady Audley becomes the locus of feeling both within the novel and for its readers.

CHAPTER THREE

The Critic as Dancer:
Fin de Siècle Sexology and the Meaning of Arousal in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*

Driving the Dancer Wild(e)

A veritable thicket of criticism has sprung up around Oscar Wilde. Wilde's work, filled as it is with enigmatic pronouncements and paradoxical insistences, and his life, with its splash of tragedy, have conspired to produce a cottage industry of scholarly writing, ranging from the biographical to the poststructuralist. There is, it seems, something suitably Wilde for every critical taste. Is Wilde a martyr, publicly humiliated and denounced, dethroned as the reigning wit of his day and stripped of beloved possessions, for daring to partake of the "love that dare not speak its name"?[1] Or is he rather a radical thinker, a man who provocatively and fearlessly lived

[1] The euphemism, made famous by Wilde during his first criminal trial for gross indecency, appears in Lord Alfred Douglas's poem, "Two Loves," which was published in the December 1894 edition of *The Chameleon*. The poem was brought up during Wilde's cross-examination by C.F. Gill, who demanded Wilde define the term after reciting the poem's conclusion:

> Sweet youth,
> Tell me why, sad and sighing, dost thou rove
> These pleasant realms? I pray thee tell me sooth,
> What is thy name? He said, "My name is Love,"
> Then straight the first did turn himself to me,
> And cried, "He lieth, for his name is Shame.
> But I am Love, and I was wont to be
> Alone in this fair garden, till he came
> Unasked by night; I am true Love, I fill
> The hearts of boy and girl with mutual flame."
> Then sighing said the other, "Have thy will,
> I am the Love that dare not speak its name."

Wilde responded that

> "[th]e Love that dare not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'Love that dare not speak its name,' and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing

his own theories? Do his experiences indict an era's repressive practices, or do they defy our assumptions about Victorian sexual expression?

Wilde-as-tragic-hero casts a long shadow over late-twentieth, early-twenty-first century readings of his work. In particular, *Salomé*, a play simultaneously at odds with the rest of the Wildean canon and representative of the author's aesthetic and political concerns, has been read through the lens of the playwright's life. The temptation to do so is easy to understand; indeed, it is hard not to see the play as a mysteriously prescient gloss on the fate that would befall Wilde himself.[2] *Salomé*—the story of the eponymous princess's hopeless, unrequited love for the prophet Jokanaan, who spurns her, her subsequent performance of the Dance of the Seven Veils for her mother's husband, the Tetrarch of Judea, who has offered to grant her any wish should she consent to dance, her request for Jokanaan's head, on the mouth of which she bestows an anguished, desperate kiss, and Herod's conclusive order to "[k]ill that woman" (Wilde, *Salomé* 575)—is, after all, concerned with sexual transgression, with the harsh punishment meted out by a ruthless court to a sexual outlaw, to one who has challenged stricture and prohibition alike in order to act faithfully to personal need, to otherwise unacceptable passion. Thus, it is no surprise that quite so many of the scholarly treatments of the play return again and again to the topic of desire. Though there is some disagreement among critics as to the precise nature of that desire, it is increasingly a commonplace that *Salomé* is a work about dangerous desires, about their expression and their consequences.

> unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.

The court transcript records that Wilde's explanation was greeted by "loud applause, mingled with some hisses."

[2] Wilde's conviction for act of gross indecency resulted in a two-year prison sentence with hard labor. It bears noting, however, that, prior to 1861—that is, a mere thirty years before *Salomé*'s composition—sodomy was subject to capital punishment (Adut 215).

I do not dispute the centrality of desire to the play. But I do believe that the critical picture offered thus far has been reductive, simplified, incomplete. In *Salomé*, we find an exploration of the sexual affect, a study of the bodily and psycho-sexual manifestations of arousal. A work that insists on delineating the parameters of its interpretation, *Salomé* potentially tells its readers/audience more about late-nineteenth-century sexology than the work of such seminal figures in that field as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis; indeed, a key premise of this chapter is that Wilde deploys his titular heroine as a critic—in the sense of that terms as it is articulated in his own "The Critic as Artist," a dialogue published, perhaps not coincidentally, in the year of *Salomé*'s composition—of the discourse presented by the then-proliferating discipline of sexology. In differentiating among *desire* and *arousal*, as I will argue the play does, positioning the former as a concealable, essentially private but socially determined experience, and the latter as an irrepressible, publicly visible but idiosyncratic one, necessitating swift and brutal policing, this *Tragedy in One Act*, as its subtitle terms it, offers a nuanced, if ambiguous, view of sexuality and its manifold expressions. At the same time, *Salomé* is a profoundly and significantly personal portrait of the artist as a sexual being, both inspired and troubled by sexual arousal and attempting desperately to find a successful balance between inspiration and trouble. The failure to establish this middle ground, while acknowledging the truth of both sides, is simultaneously the play's tragedy and its triumph. It also results in an ambiguous work, rife with conflict, convoluted by ambivalence, coursing with a nervous energy. Despite this—or quite possibly because of it—what Wilde, aided by the illustrations supplied for the 1894 edition by Aubrey Beardsley, achieves in *Salomé* is a remarkable picture of sexual affect, in, both, theory and practice.

In what follows, I wish to examine *Salomé* in terms of its departures from and its debts to the story of the dancing princess of Judea; in terms of its idiosyncrasies and its conformities as it fits into Wilde's larger body of work; and, most importantly, in terms of what the play reveals about the experience of arousal as distinct from the experience of desire. In doing so, I hope to show that many of the work's ambiguities and peculiarities are rooted in its exploration of arousal as a discrete, distinctive phenomenon; that the play's queer vision of sexuality—both in the sense of strangeness and non-heteronormativity—is connected to the manifestation of arousal; and, that, finally, through its depiction of the effects of the sexual affect, *Salomé* takes up issues of identity, of the private and public, and of authenticity and performance.

I do not mean to suggest that Wilde deliberately set out to write a play explicitly addressing such issues, even as I acknowledge the temptation to ascribe an uncanny prescience to the tragedy. The extra-textual history of *Salomé*, namely the collaboration between Wilde, his lover Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas, who served as the work's translator from the original French, and Aubrey Beardsley, who provided the illustrations,[3] that ushered the English edition of the play into being, itself in part the result of the Lord Chamberlain's refusal to grant theatrical license to the play, is seemingly impossible to ignore. Thus, even as I do not wish to ascribe intent, to argue that the matters I am discussing were of explicit, conscious concern to Wilde in precisely the ways I am articulating, I want to note that some biographical speculation is, almost by default, given Wilde's well-known history, inevitable here. However, as I proceed, I want to reiterate that the distinction I am positing here between *desire*, as the socially sanctioned, primarily imitative basis for heterosexual union, and *arousal*, as the transgressive, idiosyncratic,

[3] There has been considerable debate about the extent of Bosie's contributions as translator. In all likelihood, Wilde was forced to rework Bosie's subpar translation, perhaps lending to the play's stilted quality in English, while allowing Bosie to claim credit for the translation. And while Wilde famously inscribed the edition of the play he presented to Beardsley "[f]or the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is and can see that invisible dance," he had earlier rejected the artist's attempt to translate the play from the French.

bodily, queer rejection of such unions, is a contrast useful for approaching the play's ambiguities, its relative strangeness. At the same time, I want to stress that this distinction is neither absolute nor universal. That is, in this chapter, I am specifically interested in how *Salomé* differentiates between the two rather than in contending that the distinction exists in a more general sense. Instead, what I am proposing here is that *Salomé* is structured by the contrast and that Salomé's fate is best understood as a consequence of the contrast. The project of locating and tracing the difference elsewhere lies beyond the scope of my intentions in this chapter.

Debt and Departure: Biblical Desire, Decadent Dancing

As has been discussed at much length in the scholarly apparatus surrounding *Salomé*, Wilde significantly re-envisioned the core story of the princess who dances for her stepfather, the Tetrarch of Judea and, as the price of her dance, obtains the head of John the Baptist. Making use of the biblical gospels of Mark and Matthew and Symbolist and decadent forbearers, Wilde nonetheless made the story his own, most notably and significantly in its conclusion, which he recast entirely. It is this last change that particularly concerns me here, but a brief overview of Wilde's appropriations and innovations will, I think, prove instructive, both in and of itself and in so far as it sets up the significance of that final, crucial revision.

Wilde's adaptation of well-known material is part-and-parcel of his (unfortunately short-lived) triumph as a playwright. In *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s*, Kerry Powell argues that Wilde's genius lay in his deployment of dramatic conventions in fresh, unexpected ways. His audience could be counted on to easily recognize the conventions, to pick up on the references, often to immediately identifiable material, all the while perceiving that the playwright was invoking these signposts in service of a new philosophy.[4] Wilde's reliance on recognizable

[4] To be fair, many of Wilde's contemporaries were not as generous in their assessments. Reviewers often took Wilde to task for his unabashed cribbing from his predecessors and fellow writers, and this was certainly the case in many

source material is perhaps most notable for the way it highlights his ability to reshape, in striking, occasionally counterintuitive, and potentially blasphemous ways, well-known material, making it serve his own sometimes paradoxical purposes. In his transformation of his influences, Wilde serves as a critic, emphasizing particular modes of thinking and drawing attention to animating forces, and creator both; that is, he fulfills his own vision of what a critic ought to do and be as it is outlined in "The Critic as Artist." In that dialogue-as-philosophical-investigation, Wilde asserts that "the critic is he who exhibits to us a work of art in a form different from that of the work itself, and the employment of a new material is a critical as well as a creative element" (1034). This conception of "critic-as-artist" is instrumental, even essential, to a more complete vision of *Salomé* and of the changes Wilde made in his representation of the princess. His Salomé evolves from an unknowing co-conspirator or the reckless temptress of her earlier incarnations to an astute critic-as-artist, both within the play and without. Taking as her materials the life of Herod's court and the dominant discourses of *fin de siècle* sexology, Salomé "puts them into a form that is at once new and delightful" (Wilde, "The Critic as Artist" 1027).

This Salomé is, for all intents and purposes, a virtually unrecognizable version of her scriptural predecessor. She first appears, nameless and peripheral, in the Gospel of Mark, then reappears in the Gospel of Matthew. Both Mark and Matthew relate that Herod's stepdaughter, the daughter of the Tetrarch's wife Herodias, demanded John the Baptist's head on a platter as the spoils of her birthday dance for Herod, compelled to the terrible deed by her mother, who maintained a vengeful hatred for John because he had condemned her incestuous marriage.[5]

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assessments of *Salomé*. In an anonymous review of the first English edition of the play in the February 27, 1893 edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, to cite just one example, the play was derided as "a mosaic," a hodgepodge of Théophile Gautier, Maurice Maeterlink, Anatole France, and Marcel Schwob. *Salomé*, the review further asserted, was dominated by the voice of Gustave Flaubert, asserting "If Flaubert had not written *Salammbo*, if Flaubert had not written *La Tentation de Sainte Antoine*—above all, if Flaubert had not written *Herodias*, *Salomé* might boast an originality to which she cannot now lay claim" (qtd. in Beckson 135-7).

[5] Mark 6: 17-28 reads:

Merely a pawn in her mother's vendetta against the prophet, the biblical princess dances on command, just as she makes demands on command. Having all the volition of a wind-up toy, she is a plot contrivance, a way of moving the story along to its next, necessary phase. Known only as "the daughter of Herodias," referred to simply as a "damsel," she has no agency, no

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> Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Hero'di-as' sake, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her.
> For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.
> Therefore Hero'di-as had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not:
> for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.
> And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief *estates* of Galilee;
> and when the daughter of the said Hero'di-as came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give *it* thee.
> And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give *it* thee, unto the half of my kingdom.
> And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.
> And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.
> And the king was exceeding sorry; *yet* for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.
> And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,
> and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel; and the damsel gave it to her mother.

From the slightly later Gospel of Matthew (14:3-11), we learn that

> …Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put *him* in prison for Hero'di-as' sake, his brother Philip's wife.
> For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.
> And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.
> But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Hero'di-as danced before them, and pleased Herod.
> Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.
> And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.
> And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded *it* to be given *her*.
> And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.
> And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought *it* to her mother.

(All biblical passages are quoted from the King James Bible.)

subjectivity. But she is also ultimately blameless, an innocent, merely a performer, acting out a part based on her mother's direction.

She gains a name, this dancing princess, in Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*, the circa-93 A.D. twenty-volume history of the ancient Jews, where she is mentioned in the fourth section of Book XVIII, Chapter 5:

> Herodias…[who] was married to Herod [Philip]…had a daughter, Salomé; after whose birth Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our country, and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive, and was married to Herod [Antipas], her husband's brother by the father's side...

Josephus's Salomé has no part in the death of John the Baptist: it was actually Herod Antipas who, fearing John's influence, had him executed.[6] Moreover, according to Josephus, Salomé went on to twice marry and bear several children.[7]

The Salomé of antiquity, then, is either an inadvertent temptress, her mother's puppet, as in the Gospels, or a mere footnote in the larger history of the Jews, as in Josephus. Still, her scriptural anonymity and historical insignificance are instructive when contrasted to her prominence in Wilde's play.[8] Indeed, this contrast is vital for understanding another contrast, one

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[6] Josephus writes that

> Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do any thing he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. (XVIII.v.2)

[7] "Salomé was married to Philip, the son of Herod, and tetrarch of Trachonitis; and as he died childless, Aristobulus, the son of Herod, the brother of Agrippa, married her; they had three sons, Herod, Agrippa, and Aristobulus" (Josephus XVIII.v.4).

[8] Richard Ellmann writes, in his biography of the author, that

> Wilde complained of the docility of the Biblical Salomé, who simply obeys Herodias, and, once she receives the head, conveys it to her mother. The inadequacy of this account, Wilde said, "has made it necessary for the centuries to heap up dreams and visions at her feet so as to convert her into the cardinal flower of the perverse garden." (344)

that structures *Salomé* and gives it meaning, which is to say the contrast between desire and arousal.

In "Scandal and the Dance," his reading of John's beheading as related in the Gospel of Mark, René Girard notes the importance of resemblance. Mark's telling of story, Girard contends, is structured by what he terms "mimetic desire": "you desire something because someone else does. That person's desire, in turn, is reinforced by your own desire" (312). Girard's argument thus reinforces the sense that, in the gospels, Salomé has no desire of her own, being either too young, too naïve, or too innocent to know what she wants. Girard holds that she must be instructed, as all of us must be, in what she will desire. Once Herodias has schooled her in this regard, Salomé internalizes her mother's desire, revealing that "imitation is the essence of desire," that desire is the result of "contagion" (Girard 314). This notion of desire ultimately serves to protect the dancer, for her "dance is a mimed drama that turns…spectators into a single whole" (319), allowing "the already mimetic desire of Herodias transmit[ted] mimetically to her daughter, [to be] mimetically too, retransmit[ted] it to her admirers" (320). The crowd who watches Salomé's dance must collectively bear the guilt for John's execution, for the prophet's beheading. When the head is brought in on its platter, it is offered to the crowd no less than to the princess.[9] The nameless biblical daughter of Herodias has no responsibility for her desire, which is after all a malleable quality, built on the model provided by her mother and shared by others. But she also lacks subjectivity and agency, mechanically executing her dance and apparently having neither involvement nor investment in the political life of the court. Indeed, Girard's argument implies that the acquisition of *desire* is the foundation of the social and political self, a necessary prelude to entering into the social and political worlds. The mastery and internalization

[9] In this sense, as in others, John's death portends and evokes the crucifixion of Christ, suggesting that, like desire, death might also be mimetic.

of the imitative model of desire is a crucial step in the formation of a subject who will comfortably, easily fit into the crowd. (It is John, then, who remains apart, insistent on his own, separate allegiances, refusing to absorb the court's model of desire; in this sense then, the Gospels anticipate a key insight of *Salomé*: the price of individuality is martyrdom.)

Wilde's Salomé, on the other hand, responds to and interacts with her world individually, even idiosyncratically. She rejects the model she finds in the court, refuses to make it her own. Instead, Salomé responds with her body, positing the possibility of a sincere, untutored self and positioning herself as wholly separate from others at court. *Salomé* faithfully observes and documents the genuine expression of Salomé's genuine self, opposing her extravagant, anarchic *arousal* to the limited, rule-bound *desire* otherwise prevalent in Herod's court. As she finds herself becoming increasingly enraptured by Jokanaan, Salomé discards all that is proper to court life, insisting on a subjectivity that is wholly her own and attaining mythical status, the right to have her name written into art, to claim fame (or infamy, as the case may be) apart from her relationships. Unlike the ancient accounts, which position Salomé as Herodias's daughter, in *Salomé*, she is the referential center of the play's universe. Her triumphant articulation of sexual agency is short-lived. For Salomé, the difference between *desire* and *arousal* amounts to her life. Oh, but what a life! In *Salomé*, she is no more the marginal biblical figure or historical afterthought, but a brilliant flame demanding our attention.[10]

[10] A not dissimilar distinction between arousal and desire animates the Sybil Vane portion of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. When Dorian first sees Sybil, she is performing as Juliet, so wonderfully miming desire that she becomes "the loveliest thing [Dorian] had ever seen" (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 51). Dorian responds to Sybil's performance by miming that desire in return, and the couple becomes engaged. Now, Sybil feels and shows genuine *arousal*—"Mother, mother, I am so happy!" she thrills, as "[a] rose shook in her blood, and shadowed her cheeks. Quick breath parted the petals of her lips. They trembled. Some southern wind of passion swept over her, and stirred the dainty folds of her dress" (57). Most notably, her arousal is represented in the novel through the failure of her stage performance: suddenly, "the staginess of her acting was unbearable, and grew worse…Her gestures became absurdly artificial….She spoke the words as though they conveyed no meaning to her….She was a complete failure" (72-73). Angry, disappointed, Dorian pronounces her "commonplace, mediocre" (73), even as Basil Hallward tries

A more recognizable Wild(e) Salomé emerges toward the end of the nineteenth century, now a Symbolist and decadent icon.[11] *Salomé*'s debt to the princess's decadent precedents has also been amply considered, but here too a brief consideration of Wilde's borrowings and innovations will prove illuminating. This sketch of influence and resistance will, I hope, elucidate the lineage of male writers and artists consumed by the image of the dancing princess and thus shine light on the connections between collaboration, intertextuality, and homoeroticism—what Megan Becker-Leckrone has called the "secret-effect" (242) of the Salomé narrative—which will prove vital in looking at the collaborative and intertextual nature of Wilde's play, and throw into relief the articulation and development of the category of *arousal*—its manifestations, its vitality, its vicissitudes—in *Salomé*.

The Symbolists made the princess into an essential character in the story of John's beheading, gave her a sense of standing apart from other members of Herod's court, though her individuality is an artificial one, as well as an incomplete one. In Stéphane Mallarmé's great dramatic poem *Hérodiade*,[12] to invoke a particularly pertinent example, the eponymous heroine[13]

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to reassure him that "Love is a more wonderful thing than Art"; to this, Lord Henry notably remarks, "They are both simply forms of imitation" (73).

When Dorian confronts her backstage, Sybil "seemed not to listen to him, She was transfigured with joy. And ecstasy of happiness dominated her" (74). Before she met him, Sybil says, theatre was the one reality of her life, but Dorian has taught her "what reality really is" (74). She will never again, she says, "act well" (74). Dorian can only respond that she has "killed" his love (75). Sybil's successful mimesis drew Dorian to her; her genuine feeling repels him. He abandons her, and Sybil commits suicide.

In distinguishing between arousal and desire in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde pursues Dorian's perspective, showing how Sybil's genuine arousal threatens him. In *Salomé*, however, he takes the perspective of the princess, following along with her experience of arousal.

[11] Although she is the subject of several well-known medieval paintings, in which she is often presented, according to Udo Kultermann's account, "as a strange acrobatic dancer" (188), and poses with the prophet's head in Baroque renditions, Salomé largely faded from view through the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries.

[12] Mallarmé originally conceived his poem as a tragic drama, and, in fact, correspondence between Mallarmé and Théodore de Banville in March of 1865 suggests that a production of the work was being given some consideration. Banville, for example, noted that the décor of the Théatre-Français would be especially suitable for staging *Hérodiade*. These plans never came to fruition, however, as Mallarmé came to see the work as "no longer a tragedy, but a poem…" (qtd. in Lenson 573). (Banville wrote his own poems about the princess: "Hérodiade" [1874] and "La danseuse" [1875].)

[13] "Mallarme seems to have collapsed Herodias and her daughter Salomé into one figure: he gives Hérodiade a father but no mother" (Weinfield 169).

is conceived as "a postreligious, rebellious, and split self in search of wholeness" (Dierkes-Thrun 17), a sort of proto-existentialist heroine. She "exists in isolated splendor and self-sufficiency, pure and perfect, highly stylized and artificial, virginal and sterile" (Dierkes-Thrun 18). Mallarmé's princess is "a creature self-purified of humanity" (Rose 174), in love with the "horror of [her] virginity" (Lenson 586), "[u]tterly solitary…[and] delight[ed] in the autoerotic touch of her pure hair on a virginal and gloriously 'useless' flesh" (Dierkes-Thrun 19). Though the poem stresses her virginity, she has already transformed into a dangerously sexual threat, an identification and a burden she will bear through the *fin de siècle*. As Bram Djikstra suggests in his influential study of *fin de siècle* fantasies of feminine evil, "virginity [was] the worst form of feminine whoredom, because in her virginity woman maintains her self-sufficiency, and hence her power to 'decapitate' the male by making him wait in impotent longing for her compliance to his wishes. Then, when he loses patience, she, in effect, perversely 'forces' him to rape her, to 'slay' her in order to regain his masculinity" (385). In this way, *Hérodiade* presents its central figure as an a priori *femme fatale*, a temptress and a horror, whose subjectivity extends only to an awareness of herself as, to use Djikstra's term, "an idol of perversity." But though Mallarmé's Hérodiade lacks the tragically triumphant self-expression of Wilde's Salomé, *Hérodiade* provides an important template for *Salomé*:

> I have finally begun my *Hérodiade*[, Mallarmé wrote of the poem that would occupy him for the rest of his life]. With terror because I am inventing a language which must necessarily arise from a very new poetics, which I could define in these two words: *To paint not the thing, but the effect that it produces*. Therefore the verse must, in this case, be composed not of words, but of intentions, and all must be erased in the face of feelings. (qtd. in Lenson 573)

As Mallermé's letter begins to suggest, the interest of the Salomé story for the aesthetes and decadents of the *fin de siècle* lay not so much in "the thing" but in the effect Salomé could command. Wilde would extend this notion, this sense that the mystery of the story mattered most

not in and for its content but its effects. Crucially, he would transform these effects into affects, or, more specifically, into sexual affect: *Salomé* is thus an exploration of sexual affect, a rendering of an old, well-worn story into a study of sexual stimulations, its effects, its consequences. That Wilde produced this study as a *play*—though one that was denied theatrical license during his lifetime—made it more subversive than Mallarmé's *poem*, for, in bringing Salomé's arousal before an audience, in enacting it, Wilde was potentially going as far as inquiring about the effects of watching the build-up to arousal, transforming a biblical drama into a contemporary investigation of actual sexual feeling.

The pre-Wilde Salomé also remains her mother's daughter. In "Hérodias," Gustave Flaubert's attempt at a reconstruction of the story, Salomé is Herodias's doppelgänger and decoy.[14] Here, Herodias is a Machiavellian tactician who perceives the court in terms of enemies who would impede her dominance, and of expedients who might prove convenient to her reign. Her daughter serves her as a pliable, impressively flexible means to her end: Salomé dances at her mother's behest, and she demands the prophet's head on her mother's orders. So little connected is the dancing princess to the desire for the head that she stumbles in articulating her request for it: invited to claim her prize for dancing, she announces "'I ask my lord to give me, placed upon a charger, the head of –' She hesitated, as if not certain of the name; then said: 'The head of Iokanaan!'" (Flaubert). Like the dancing princess of the Gospels, she relies on her mother to furnish for her a model of *desire*, too naïve to herself know what she wants, what she ought to want.

[14] Salomé is a near double for her parent: as she performs her dance for the Tetrarch, she "remove[s] her veil…[and] seem[s] to be Herodias herself, as she had appeared in the days of her blooming youth" (Flaubert).

Still, Salomé is indispensable: her dance is essential to the story's action, and Flaubert details it extravagantly.[15] That dance, "progress[ing] from a mood of youthful expectations, to funeral despondency, to languid surrender, to brutal quest of satisfaction, and finally to a frenzy which mimes the female lascivious ecstasy" (Brombert 248), is predicated on a series of escalations, on steps building on each other, the energy harnessed at each turn transformed into still another phase of the performance, involving movements that very nearly defy physical plausibility. By the end of her dance, we see the searing gaze of the male crowd honed in on the figure of the dancer, who remains stolid and uninvolved in what she has unleashed. Flaubert's Salomé utters no sound, making of her a clear contrast to the vociferously argued politics of Herod's court. While the hall around her is filled with the sounds of angry disputes, she is impassive, and where her dance leaves the crowd stunned, she appears unaffected. Others are drawn to her, but she has no need to commune with them. Indeed, the dancer's allure is tied to

[15] Salomé, we learn, has been "instructed in dancing, and other arts of pleasing" for many months. The results of this instruction is described thusly:

> Her slender feet took dainty steps to the rhythm of a flute and a pair of Indian bells. Her round white arms seemed ever beckoning and striving to entice to her side some youth who was fleeing from her allurements. She appeared to pursue him, with movements light as a butterfly…
>
> Her bosom heaved with sighs, and her whole being expressed profound languor, although it was not clear whether she sighed for an absent swain or was expiring of love in his embrace. With half-closed eyes and quivering form, she caused mysterious undulations to flow downward over her whole body, like rippling waves, while her face remained impassive and her twinkling feet still moved in their intricate steps…
>
> And now the graceful dancer appeared transported with the very delirium of love and passion….She whirled about like a flower blown by the tempest….Her arms, her feet, her clothing even, seemed to emit streams of magnetism, that set the spectators' blood on fire.
>
> …All eyes were fixed on Salomé, who…placed her feet apart, and without bending the knees, suddenly swayed her lithe body downward, so that her chin touched the floor; and her whole audience…gazed upon her with dilated nostrils.
>
> Next she began to whirl frantically around the table where [Herod] was seated….
>
> The nape of her neck formed a right angle with her vertebrae. The full silken skirts of pale hues that enveloped her limbs when she stood erect, now fell to her shoulders and surrounded her face like a rainbow. Her lips were tinted a deep crimson, her arched eyebrows were black as jet, her glowing eyes had an almost terrible radiance; and the tiny drops of perspiration on her forehead looked like dew upon white marble.
>
> She made no sound; and the burning gaze of that multitude of men was concentrated upon her. (Flaubert)

This description of the dance "reflects many of the later performances of the stage" (Kultermann 191).

her ambiguous mystery: she might be pursuing her lover, but she also might be avoiding his embrace. She evokes Walter Pater's description of *La Gioconda* in *The Renaissance*: "She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave"; like Pater's vision of Leonardo's mysterious Mona Lisa, Salomé is mysterious, tinged with an evil, but little aware of her own power.[16] She uses her sexuality while maintaining a distance from that sexuality.

From Flaubert, Wilde borrowed imagery fusing sexual lust and the desire for divine, for transcendence, an eroticism wrapped up in metaphysical and spiritual longing (Dierkes-Thrun 25). Flaubert also furnished Wilde with "a model for rendering the sensual sublime" (Dierkes-Thrun 32). But, as I have already suggested, Flaubert's Salomé manifests desire, serving as an exemplar of Girard's model of "mimetic desire." It is in Joris-Karl Huysmans's notorious novel *À rebours* (*Against Nature*), in the long ekphrastic description given by the decadent aristocrat Des Esseintes of two works by Gustave Moreau—*Salomé Dancing Before Herod*, an oil painting, and *L'Apparition*, a water-color drawing, both dating from 1876[17]—that we begin to sense Salomé's *arousal*, a response grounded in the body. In *Salomé Dancing Before Herod*, Des Esseintes sees her

> in the overheated atmosphere of [the] church,…her left arm extended in an imperious gesture of command and her right arm bent…
>
> A pensive, solemn, almost august expression on her face, she begins the lubricious dance which is to awaken the slumbering senses of the ageing Herod; her breasts rise and fall, their nipples hardening under the friction of her whirling necklaces; the diamonds adhering to her moist skin glitter…

[16] Although I take issue with Christopher S. Nassaar's assertion that Salomé, as portrayed by Wilde, is "completely evil," I am indebted to the link he posits between the Princess of Judaea and Pater's description of the Mona Lisa.

[17] Des Esseintes has "acquired Moreau's two masterpieces, and spent night after night pondering over one of these" (Huysmans 44). (Both works are included at the conclusion of this chapter, as Figure 1 [*Salomé Dancing Before Herod*] and Figure 2 [*L'Apparition*].)

Ellmann observes that Wilde was "only…satisfied" by Moreau's Salomé, and that "he liked to quote Huysmans's description of the Moreau paintings" (323).

> Totally absorbed, with the staring eyes of a sleep-walker, she sees neither the trembling Tetrarch nor her mother, the implacable Herodias, who watches her, nor the hermaphrodite or eunuch…(Huysmans 45)

Des Esseintes explicitly differentiates this Salomé from the dancer of the Gospels, rhapsodizing that she is "superhuman, strange" (Huysmans 46), no longer a mere performer. The dance becomes her own, unconnected to her mother's wishes. As she receives John's head in *L'Apparition*, she "wards off the ghastly vision…her eyes widen, her hand clutches convulsively at her throat" (Huysmans 48). She is now "almost naked," for "in the heat of the dance, the veils have come undone" (Huysmans 48). The "dreadful head" exists for her alone (Huysmans 48).

Salomé's hardened nipples, her moist skin, the results of a dance termed "lubricious," are strongly suggestive of arousal, of bodily excitation, a physical response to stimulation. So are her dilated eyes, her convulsive movements. "[A]lmost naked," she excites Herod, who "pants with desire, driven wild by this woman's nakedness" (Huysmans 48), but this she hardly notices, for she herself is excited. "[L]ike the old king," Des Esseintes is also "overwhelmed, stunned, unhinged by this dancer," seeing in "the unfeeling, ruthless figure, in the naïve yet dangerous idol, the *sexual excitement* and the terror of the human being were apparent" (Huysmans 48; the emphasis is mine).

But Des Esseintes deems Salomé "truly a whore, obedient to her temperament of a cruel and passionate woman; she lived again, more polished and more barbaric, more hateful and more exquisite; arousing the languorous senses of man more vigorously, she bewitched and subjugated his will more surely, with her charms as of some great venereal flower…" (Huysmans 48-49). She is, finally, an emblem of going "against nature," a

> Symbolic deity of indestructible Lechery, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the accursed Beauty singled out from among all others by the cataleptic paroxysm that stiffens her flesh and hardens her muscles; the monstrous, indiscriminate, irresponsible, unfeeling

> Beast who, like the Helen of Antiquity, poisons everything that comes near her, everything that sees her, everything that she touches. (Huysmans 46)

Even as Des Esseintes observes what he understands and responds to as Salomé's sexual excitation, *À rebours* strenuously denies her agency. This Salomé is "an artistic and literary *mysterium tremens et fascinosum*, a mystical puzzle that inspires both horror and fascination" (Dierkes-Thrun 42), but she is not a feeling individual, not a subject whose sexual feeling is personally significant to herself. In this sense, then, the arousal so evident in Moreau's Salomé via Des Esseintes is a performance, or, to use the terms underpinning my argument, her *arousal* is not opposed to *desire* but is rather *desire* made perverse, stripped of its social utility as a building block, a teleological end. It is only in Wilde's play that we see Salomé acquire a genuine self, that we see her *arousal* made profoundly meaningful.

"Getting It Real": Simulation and Stimulation

In his study of the decorations included in Wilde's published works, Nicholas Frankel suggests that Wilde essentially "simulates" thought (84). Focusing on the essays collected in *Intentions*, Frankel argues that these stage the process of thinking with the goal of providing pleasure, as opposed to meaning, for the reader. This performance of thought is fundamentally, necessarily imitative. The implication of Frankel's argument is that Wilde's criticism finally asserts nothing; it is not in itself thoughtful but rather a mere approximation—though a very skillful one—of thinking. Frankel's observation is meant to dispel charges of Wilde's shameless borrowings, suggesting that, because "Wilde's language *masquerades* as the language of ideas, it becomes impossible to hold Wilde to notions of plagiarism and influence since his language makes no truth-claims as such and only *acts* as it does" (86). Frankel's insight is useful for thinking through Wilde's use of language; it is also helpful for addressing derision of *Salomé* as a "pastiche," a series of images taken from the work of, among others, notable French writers of

his day, and strung together (Eells 86). Frankel's notion is furthermore useful for considering *how* Wilde deploys all-too-recognizable motifs in *Salomé*, for in the play, through the character of Salomé, Wilde *simulates* in order to emphasize the difference between *desire* and *arousal*. As I have begun sketching out, *desire* is a *simulation*, an imitative repetition of codes and patterns, socially transmitted and internalized; *arousal*, as will be shown in what follows, is, by contrast, idiosyncratic, a defiance of social norms, a bodily acting out, a genuine response to *stimulation*. In *Salomé*, then, Wilde *stimulates* no less than he *simulates*: Salomé removes herself from the mimetic chain of desire when she rejects the desires prevalent in Herod's court and instead responds to an unlikely but apparently potent stimulus. Set apart from those around her, Salomé is, for a moment, vividly, passionately alive. Unlike the other characters in the play, who conceal their true needs, Jeffrey Wallen argues, "Salomé does name her desire" (128), but perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Salomé puts her arousal front and center. Thus awakened, she "cannot be appeased or diverted" (Wallen 129), nor can she return to or survive as part of the status quo.

Salomé, which Wilde began composing during a Parisian sojourn in the fall of 1891, was an important play for Wilde; it was also an "anomalous" one (Donohue, "Salomé and the Wildean Art of Symbolist Theatre" 85). At the time, Wilde was largely known as a relentless self-promoter, a self-serious wit, a delightful conversationalist, a mildly successful poet, a critic prone to epigram, aphorism, and occasionally opaque pronouncement, and a controversial novelist, the author of the semi-scandalous *Picture of Dorian Gray*, a novel viewed as a barely coded representation of sexual relations between men.[18] He was also, by and large, a failed dramatist, his previous plays *Vera; or, the Nihilists*, a melodrama set in Russia, and *The Duchess*

[18] Late twentieth century criticism would identify a similar subtext in *Salomé*. Notably, Heather Marcovitch claims that "Wilde saw Salomé as the representation of all the unspoken impulses and desires in *Dorian Gray*" (88).

of Padua, another melodrama, this one set in Padua and written in blank verse, having proved to be commercial and critical disappointments.[19] Perhaps some of the trouble could be linked to Wilde's complaint, in a letter to the theater manager George Alexander in February 1891, that he could not "get my people real" (qtd. in Bennett viii). Michael Y. Bennett comprehends the lament in the context of Ibsen's dramatic success, speculating that Wilde was tentatively contemplating realism as a key to having a theatrical hit. In this regard, Bennett notes, *Salomé* failed: set "explicitly out of the world of Wilde's audience" (viii) and using archaic, even strange, language provocatively unlike that spoken by that audience, the play was, moreover, banned from being performed on the English stage for its violation of the prohibition on depicting biblical characters.[20] And yet *Salomé* is "explicitly out of the world" of real people and real experiences only on its stylized surface. Beneath that aestheticized veil lurks a realist and realistic exploration of the process of sexual excitation.

Arousing Salomé

We first encounter Wilde's Salomé as she is fleeing Herod's banquet, questioning "why…the Tetrarch look[s] at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids." Although she initially claims, "I know not what it means," she recognizes that "[i]t is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that," and almost immediately concedes, "In truth, yes I know it" (555). Matthew Lewsadder terms this sequence "an epistemic shift emblematized by the caesura between epistemological positions" (521), as Salomé comes into a new awareness of and relation to her world. In this first phase of the play, she articulates her disgust at what she

[19] The two plays remain a low point in the Wilde *oeuvre*, revived only rarely and little studied.
[20] The banning of the play from the English stage made it, to use Elaine Showalter's term, a "closet drama…in the sense of a play existing primarily as a text" (*Sexual Anarchy*150). Showalter's description is doubly apt, for the notion of a "closet drama" also carries with it "the contemporary sense of a heterosexual play by a homosexual writer that has a gay sexual subtext" (Showalter 150). Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations, Showalter notes, bring out "the secret or unspeakable subtext of the play, especially its homoerotic and blasphemous elements" (Showalter 152).

perceives and understands as the Tetrarch's lust for her and rejects his insistent glances. Refusing to remain a moment longer in Herod's loathsome presence, Salomé rejoices in the "sweet…air" (555) on the terrace of the Tetrarch's palace, exclaiming, "I can breathe here!" (555). It is as if Herod's attention, his licentious stare, the quivering eyes connoting his terrible need for her has oppressed her, has threatened to suffocate her.

So great is Salomé's disgust at and with Herod, some critics have suggested that the lady doth protest too much. In "The Sadism in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*," Isador H. Coriat posits that "Salomé's sexual feeling is evidently aroused by Herod" (257), although he offers little evidence in support of the claim. I propose that, in fact, Salomé conveys her recognition of Herod's *desire* for her, made evident through and represented by the looks he directs at her. "The play," Jeffrey Wallen notes, "aligns the field of vision with the body and with sexual desire" (124), and, here, both the audience and Salomé are given to understand that the looks Herod repeatedly casts at his stepdaughter are a manifestation of his desire for her. Indeed, looking becomes shorthand for *desiring* in the play, a metonymy that effectively highlights the imitative nature of desire. Herod's authority establishes his desires as authoritative, furnishing a model that dominates the court; thus, we find that others associated with the Tetrarch's rule, like the Young Syrian captain, Narraboth, also desire Salomé, and that this desire is also signaled by looking. Moreover, Herod's desire is itself implicitly imitative, for he has married his brother's wife and now lusts after her look-alike daughter.[21] It is also thus linked to power, as Herod's marriage establishes his rule, for as Herodias makes sure to note, she and her daughter "come of a royal race," while Herod's father "was a camel driver…a robber!" (Wilde, *Salomé* 562). Finally, this model of

[21] Herod has had Herodias's first husband, "his elder brother…imprisoned…for twelve years….At the end of the twelve years he [was] strangled" (Wilde, *Salomé* 554).

desire is, implicitly, heteronormative, founded on male covetousness of beautiful women and designed to replicate the status and power such women confer.

Salomé sets herself apart from the rest of the court by refusing to participate in the model of desire she identifies in Herod's looks. Linking Herod's desire with the vulgarity of the banquet she has just escaped, Salomé condemns both: "Within there are…barbarians who drink and drink," she announces, "and spill their wine on the pavement,…and Romans brutal and coarse, with their uncouth jargon. Ah! How I loathe the Romans! They are rough and common, and they give themselves the airs of noble lords" (Wilde, *Salomé* 555). The disorder of Herod's reign, at least partly the product of his murderous rise to power and his incestuous marriage to the queen, is mirrored in and symbolized by the excesses of his table, themselves a symbol of desire, as hospitality is traded for power and alliance. Looking to curry favor with Caesar, Herod welcomes his guests with an overloaded feast, meant to signify bounty but connoting, to Salomé, only the lechery and iniquity, the ineffectual nature, of the Tetrarch's reign. She, then, wants no part of and in it.

Instead, Salomé looks to the moon, which she extolls for its "virgin's beauty" (Wilde, *Salomé* 555). The moon, Salomé muses, "has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men," and she describes it as "cold and chaste" (555). This "preference for coldness, chastity, inhumanity, and precious metals or materials"[22] (Dierkes-Thrun 19) suggests Salomé's idealization of self-containment, of removal from the sordidness of court life, dominated by imitative grasping after power, by corrupt and corrupting desires. But the moon, which functions, as Petra Dierkes-Thrun posits, as a mirror (23), offers only an ambiguous, even ambivalent, refuge. "The symbolist imagination," Margaret Stoljar notes, "consistently employs the mirror as an icon for the ambivalence of existence, because of its mysterious betrayal of uncertainty in

[22] Salomé likens the moon to "a little piece of money…a little silver flower" (Wilde, *Salomé* 555).

what is perceived and the strangeness of its shadowed world. A sense of ontological anxiety underlies many uses of the motif" (364). Such ontological uncertainty undergirds the moon in *Salomé*, as it transforms in meaning throughout the play. To the Page of Herodias, for example, the moon is "like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman" (Wilde, *Salomé* 552); later, in Herod's estimation, the moon is "like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked, too….She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman," and he is certain that "she is looking for lovers" (561). In effect, then, the moon becomes an emblem of desire, as it takes on the appearance of what those looking at it want to see, as it seemingly emulates and mirrors the needs of the viewer.[23] (Aubrey Beardsley's *The Woman in the Moon*, one of the illustrations the artist supplied for Wilde's play, famously used Wilde's own visage to illustrate the titular entity [See Figure 3 at the end of this chapter]; the drawing thus cleverly intimates that the moon functions in the manner of a playwright's stylistic device, a symbolic function that is taken up too by the play's characters.)

Discussing the mirror imagery in Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, Dierkes-Thrun suggests that "[t]he mirror interposes itself like a hymen between Hérodiade's inside and outside…Referring

[23] Perhaps only Herodias's assertion that "the moon is like the moon, that is all" (561) treats the moon as something other than portent or symbol. But, given the context of Herodias's remark—a response to Herod's seeming anxieties about his hold on power--it is certainly plausible that Herodias too sees what she wants to see: a moon that does not augur certain disaster.

Moreover, as Jokanaan's condemnations of Herodias imply, the queen has all too enthusiastically partaken of the model of desire as it exists in the court. "Where is she who, having seen the images of men painted on the walls, the images of the Chaldeans limned in colours, gave herself up unto the lust of her eyes, and sent ambassadors into Chaldea?" Jokanaan demands, a description Salomé immediately identifies as pertaining to her mother (Wilde, *Salomé* 557). The prophet's continued condemnation of Herodias reiterates her willingness to participate in the mimetic chain of desire:

> "Where is she who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria…? Where is she who hath given herself to the young men of Egypt…whose bodies are mighty? Bid her rise from the bed of her incestuosness, that she may hear the words of him who prepareth the way of the Lord, that she may repent her of her iniquities. Though she will never repent, but will stick fast in her abominations." (558)

In invoking "the lust of her *eyes*," as well as the link he establishes between (Herodias's) sexuality and the acquisition of power, Jokanaan gestures at the model of desire Salomé identifies when she admits she understands the meaning of Herod's looks.

both to the vaginal membrane, the physical equivalent of a virgin's bridal veil, and the marriage ceremony, traditionally associated with defloration, the term *hymen* marks a liminal moment in which original unity and intactness [are] forever destroyed" (21-22). In *Salomé*, the moon-as-mirror, to which the princess looks as an alternative to the model of desire she identifies in and through Herod, fails as a means of escape, perhaps because the idealized image of a virginal, inviolate, self-sufficient goddess she projects onto it proves, for her, an impossibility. In fact, the moon foreshadows the destruction of Salomé's "unity and intactness." As it changes from white, its initial color and the phase of its "virginity," to red, anticipating the blood that will be spilled in the course of the play, and, finally, to black, portending death, so too does Salomé move from the "whiteness" of her innocence to the "redness" of her *aroused* feelings for the prophet Jokanaan, which will, in turn, lead her to her demise.[24]

Salomé is initially drawn to Jokanaan's voice, the sound of which she describes as "strange" (556), though "strange" seems more apt as a description to attach to the feeling he inspires in her, for she finds the sound of the prophet's speech enigmatic and fascinating. "I would speak with him," she notes, a tentative preference that evolves into "I desire to speak with him," and finally grows into the insistence, "I will speak with him" (556). Here, Salomé further sets herself apart from the model of desire dominant in Herod's court, which is, as has been previously discussed, largely signaled in visual terms, through the metaphor of the look; unlike

[24] Dierkes-Thrun notes that, throughout the play,

> Salomé's and the moon's symbolic intertwinement functions as a structural device that foretells impending turns of events via three phases—white, red, and black—by slowly moving the plot toward its inevitable fatal conclusion, the escalation into violence and murder. As the moon changes from white (bright moon) to red (the phase of Salomé's passion and of the first blood, when the Syrian kills himself) and ultimately to black (a cloud passes over the moon and the stars and extinguishes their light; Herod orders the slaves to put out the torches), so Salomé goes from innocence and purity (white), to feeling passion and love for Jokanaan and inspiring Narraboth's suicide (red), to the dark intrigue of the dance leading to Jokanaan's murder, the necrophilic encounter with the severed head, and ultimately her own death (black). (24)

I am borrowing Dierkes-Thrun's astute notion of the phases structuring the play, though I would like to suggest that the phases are, for Salomé, (1) innocence; (2) *arousal*; and (3) death.

others in court, Salomé responds to an aural stimulus, shifting the organ of sexuality from eye to ear.[25]

Yet, curiously, at this early stage of her attraction to Jokanaan's voice, Salomé is able to mount a performance of the desire prevalent at court, or, to be more exact, she is, for a brief moment, capable of manipulating the desire she inspires in others. Turning to the Young Syrian captain, when her request to see the prophet is denied by the soldiers who guard him, Salomé sweetly asks, "You will do thing for me, will you not Narraboth?" (556). She is certain that he will indeed: "You will do this thing for me" (556). Apparently comprehending the looks Narraboth has cast at her, Salomé manipulates Narraboth's desire for her:

> You will do this thing for me, Narraboth. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter beneath the gateway of the idol-sellers I will let fall for you a little flower…You know that you will do this thing for me. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter…I will look at you through the muslin veils, I will look at you, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at you. (557)

Following up her promise with the demand that the Young Syrian "Look at [her]" (557), Salomé is able to definitively conclude, "you know that you will do what I ask of you. You know it well….I know that you will do this thing" (557). Narraboth does indeed capitulate, commanding that "the prophet come forth" (557), as though, in accepting Salomé's offer of a glance and flower, he signs a contract with her. That this exchange foreshadows Salomé's similar, if higher staked, negotiation with Herod, as she holds out the promise of her dance in exchange for Herod's offer of spectacular prizes, comes to suggest something significant about the model of desire in the court and in the play. Beyond the fact of its manifestation between powerful men

[25] Sharon Marcus's observation that "Salomé and the audience first experience Iokanaan as an offstage voice, whose disembodied aural presence stimulates the wish to see him in person" (1008) interestingly suggests that, like Salomé, the audience is also aroused.

and the woman they covet,[26] desire in *Salomé* reveals its heteronormative valence through its approximation of the marriage contract. Herod makes this notion nearly explicit when, imploring Salomé to dance for him, he offers her "[e]ven…half of [his] kingdom" and assures Salomé she would "be passing fair as a queen" (568), hinting at his willingness to trade in his wife Herodias, the present queen, for Salomé.[27] That such "contracts" prove disastrous—fatal for Narraboth, who commits suicide shortly after witnessing Salomé's encounter with the prophet he has caused to be brought to her from his cistern-prison; damaging for Herod, who must keep his promise despite his fearful reluctance to execute Jokanaan—posits desire as, at once, foundational to the social order and destructive of it. In desiring the beautiful princess, these powerful men act foolishly, rashly, risking order and social cohesion.[28]

And yet desire is entrenched, tacitly accepted. Even as warnings are sounded about the dangers of looking, the symbolic shorthand for desire in *Salomé*, the expression of desire is ultimately quiet, for looks are of course silent, disguising their potentially disruptive nature. In fact, desire is deceptively cast as a private conflict, for, having been internalized, it becomes naturalized, as though human relations have always been structured in such a way, as though they always will be. Even Herodias's admonishments that Herod ought not look at Salomé make sense within a dominant, accepted model of desire: she fears the danger of Herod's looks at Salomé for *herself alone*, well aware of the look's meanings in so far as they connote a danger, to her, of being replaced. So too with the pleas of the Page of Herodias, who implores Narraboth

[26] Given his status as the Tetrarch of Judaea, Herod's power is obvious enough. But Narraboth, as the captain of the guard, also commands a fair amount of authority. Both men, in the course of the play, leverage their relative power into a "contract," an agreed upon trade, for the chance to realize their desire for Salomé.
[27] This willingness further confirms the essentially mimetic nature of desire in the play, as Herod prepares to substitute Herodias for her daughter, a substitution that itself mimics the earlier replacement of Herodias's first husband by Herod.
[28] In this, it seems, *Salomé* is not unlike Wilde's great comedies, which, though they lower the stakes significantly, often seem to question the institution of marriage by casting it as foolish, whimsical, even altogether ridiculous.

to foreswear looking at the princess: his fear is a private one, an accurate intimation of something befalling the Young Syrian, whom the Page loves.

Arousal, on the other hand, as will be shown shortly, has a problematically public, and therefore more publicly transgressive, quality in *Salomé*. The resonance here with Wilde's life is eerily prophetic but undeniable. In "A Theory of Scandal," Ari Adut investigates why and how Wilde's "acts of gross indecency" faced such intense prosecution and were punished so harshly despite the fact that laws against sodomy were so rarely enforced and that gossip about Wilde's sexual preferences and activities was so widespread. Adut's convincing answer is that the publicity of Wilde's lawsuit against the Marquess of Queensberry, Bosie's loathed father, made it impossible for the Victorians to continue ignoring Wilde's "transgressions." Scandal, then, Adut posits, is "the disruptive publicity of transgression," and it is this publicity that "can explain significant and otherwise inexplicable variations in norm enforcement" (214). Thus, Salomé's vociferously articulated arousal is, unlike quietly conveyed desire, impossible to ignore and punishable by death. That Salomé's arousal moreover alludes to and implicates homoeroticism—and, again, does so publicly—makes it still more scandalous and thus subject to swift retribution.

Having been hopelessly intrigued by the sound of the prophet's voice, Salomé devotes herself to the enumeration and exultation of Jokanaan's physical charms almost as soon as he is brought out of the cistern so that she might see him. Engaging in a long bout of ardent description, Salomé details the appeal of Jokanaan's parts, beginning with his "eyes [that] are above all…terrible." Jokanaan's eyes, Salomé rhapsodizes, "are like black holes burned by torches in a Tyrian tapestry.[29] They are like black caverns where dragons dwell" (Wilde, *Salomé*

[29] The allusion to Tyre evokes Dido, the Carthaginian queen whose tragic love for Aeneas is depicted in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Dido, having escaped the murderous tyranny of her brother Pygmalion's rule in Tyre, establishes the city of Carthage. Sworn to chastity after the death of her husband, Dido oversees the construction of a magnificent city, but her ability to keep her vow and lead her city is compromised when she is made to feel inordinate passion for Aeneas.

558). Although her desire to "look at him closer" (558) and her initial attention to his eyes appear to for the existent and accepted model of desire, Salomé's insistence on *speaking* to, on *touching*, and, finally, on *kissing* Jokanaan belies the similarities. So too does the fact that her growing excitement is placed center stage, unconcealed and undisguised; and so too the perverseness of Salomé's arousal—in the sense of it having no clear teleological purpose, unlike desire, which has power as its end. From the moment of their encounter, Isador Coriat observes, the princess's "sexual interest in John is worked up with terrible intensity" (258).[30] In the implacability of Salomé's spontaneous passion for Jokanaan, she has definitively moved away from the mimetic and self-interested desire recognized and sanctioned by her society to the anarchic, uncontrollable disorder of the un-meditated sexual response.

Salomé almost immediately throws herself headlong into paeans to Jokanaan's charms, admitting she is "amorous of [his] body!" which she describes, at some length, as

> white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains, like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea…There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. (Wilde, *Salomé* 558-9)

Salomé's excited litany of Jokanaan's allures next assesses his hair, which is

> like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine-trees of Edom…Thy hair is like the cedars of Lebanon, like the great cedars of Lebanon that give

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(The sudden onset of that passion, the result of meddling by Venus and Cupid, is suggestive of the sudden onset of arousal.) Under the influence of that passion, Dido abandons Carthage, and the city quickly falls into disrepair and decrepitude. When Aeneas ultimately rejects and leaves her, Dido commits suicide. Salomé's invocation of "a Tyrian tapestry" foreshadows her own imminent demise.

[30] Coriat uses the reflection as a piece of evidence for his argument that Salomé is a sadist, but that particular diagnosis misses the point. If anything, the princess is more akin to a masochist, as she becomes increasingly aroused by a man who is not only "filthy and disgusting" (Donohue, "Distance, Death and Desire in *Salomé*" 126) in the eyes of others but who spurns her emphatically and cruelly.

Salomé's particular turn on, if a bit of biographical speculation might be forgiven, may have been Wilde's own, given his apparent sexual preference for "rough-trade," young men who might well fit the general description of "filthy" if not disgusting.

> their shade to the lions and to the robbers who would hide themselves by day. The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black. There is nothing in the world so black as thy hair…(559)

Her descriptions culminate in her exaltation of the prophet's mouth:

> It is thy mouth that I desire, Jokanaan [she declares]. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate-flowers that blossom in the garden of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets, that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy are not so red. Thy mouth is redder that the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of the doves who haunt the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings…! It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth….(559)

Each of Salomé's accounts concludes with the imploration that she be permitted to "touch [Jokanaan's] body," "touch [his] hair," "kiss [his] mouth." Each of her requests is spurned by Jokanaan, who refers to her as "Daughter of Babylon" and "Daughter of Sodom," apparently repulsed by her display of unbridled passion.[31] Whereas, as has already been suggested, Salomé's display of arousal represents a rejection of and a threat to the mimetic model of desire prevalent in Herod's court, it is rebuffed by Jokanaan for its unabashed embrace of and expression through the body. Perhaps sensing this, Salomé responds to Jokanaan's denials and denunciations, by retracting her earlier tributes:

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[31] In "Salomé!! Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde, and the Drama of Celebrity," Sharon Marcus explores the play in terms of its connection to the then-emerging category of celebrity. (Wilde was certainly a celebrity, and one by design.) The approach, she explains, makes sense, given that, in *Salomé*, "almost every character is both a fan and idol" (999). Marcus is especially interested in what she describes as celebrity's "theatrical structure," by which she means that celebrity is "organized around nonreciprocal exhibition and attention, around the asymmetrical interdependence that obtains between actors and audiences" (999). Celebrity is essentially theatrical "because it combines proximity and distance and links celebrities to their devotees in structurally uneven ways" (1000).

I propose that, in *Salomé*, arousal has a similarly theatrical structure. For Salomé, Jokanaan's rejection of her advances serves to further heighten her excitement. His remove from her, his insistence on distance from her, his refusal to allow her to touch him echo the necessity, for celebrities, of maintaining distance from their fans. Access, Marcus suggests, destroys the sense of celebrity. To look at arousal in this way is to see its satisfaction as always-already-destructive.

> Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things. It is horrible, thy body is horrible. (559)

Of his hair, Salomé retorts,

> Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust. It is like a crown of thorns which they have placed on thy forehead. It is like a knot of black serpents writhing round thy neck. I love not thy hair….(559).

When Jokanaan refuses her a kiss, Salomé swears that she will kiss his mouth, an oath she repeats thrice.

I quote Salomé's speeches at such great length for they are revealing and emblematic of her arousal.[32] For one thing, the momentum of the speech, its rushing pattern, its insistence on building up images, evokes the quickened pulse and the heightened sensation of the state of arousal. It is as if Salomé's monologue reproduces the build-up of sexual excitation, evoking the sudden onrush of feeling, which becomes unstoppable, even uncontrollable. Salomé's speech is propelled by association, exaggeration, hyperbole, and insistent repetition,[33] as if each description begets more descriptions, as if each response to the stimulus serves as a step in a

[32] Aubrey Beardsley's *John and Salomé*, a depiction of the first encounter between Salomé and Jokanaan, effectively illustrates the dynamics of the scene. [Please see Figure 4 at the end of this chapter.] In the drawing, a rosebush grows behind Salomé; it "seems like a live thing extending its tendrils behind Salomé's body to entwine John. It is full of blossoms, while all of its thorns have become giant protuberances wound in Salomé's hair like a *vagina dentata*" (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 154). The rose, in the religious and Pre-Raphaelite art that served as Beardsley's key influences, is typically associated, Showalter notes, with the female body (153-4); here, it appears to echo and reiterate Salomé's own body. Thus, in *John and Salomé*, we see Salomé's body bloom and blossom, signifying her arousal, which threatens to envelop John, even as it envelops the princess herself, notably crowning *her* head with a wreath of thorns, perhaps as a hint of her tragic fate. In fact, Salomé is associated with roses, especially overripe and falling ones, throughout Beardsley's illustrations. Roses become a visual shorthand for arousal, as when in *The Toilette of Salomé*, the powder puff used by a masked servant scatters what appear to be flower blossoms over Salomé's dress and rose-like puffs of material bloom from her bosom. (Please see Figure 5.] The original *Toilette of Salomé* was censored, presumably because several of the characters included in the drawing appear to be masturbating. Beardsley, Linda Zatlin suggests in her biography of the artist, viewed masturbation as a means of "validating one's sexuality without exploiting another individual" (73); in such terms, masturbation, like arousal, stands in opposing terms to *desire*, which, with its power dynamics and self-interest, makes exploitation an inevitability. (Wilde's sentiments on the subject of masturbation ran to the sense that it is "cleaner, more efficient, and you meet a better class of person" [qtd. in Scruton 17].)

[33] That eerie, chant-like repetition may also be linked, as it often has been in both contemporaneous and more recent assessments of Wilde's play, to the work of Maurice Maeterlinck, whom Wilde greatly admired. Indeed, Wilde's debt to Maeterlinck, especially in *Salomé*, is undeniable. But the acknowledgement of that debt need not, of course, negate the significance of the borrowed device for the play.

progressing escalation. The impressions Salomé conveys are bound by the logic of arousal; they work as a series of "erotic reiteration[s]" (Coriat 258), each echo incrementally increasing the feeling suggested by its predecessor, represented, to cite as an example Salomé's description of the mouth she vows to kiss, by the progression from "a band of scarlet" to "redder than…" and culminating in Salomé's assertion that "[t]here is nothing in the world so red."

Particularly notable is Salomé's use of simile, which becomes in the course of the play a signpost of arousal, poetic trope as formal sign of mounting excitement.[34] To engage in comparison within the play is to suggest not merely the affinity of things but an undeniable attraction. To be sure, this tendency to render attraction as poetry is seemingly evident in other characters in the play, as when the Young Syrian opens the play by likening Salomé to "a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. You would fancy she was dancing" (Wilde, *Salomé* 552). But the comparison is misleading; rather, a subtle contrast is established. Though he appears to deploy poetic imagery, Narraboth's imagination does not proceed very far. Ultimately, he compares the princess to a princess, which is to say he represents her as what she is, in the mimetic terms of desire, not the esoterically poetic terms of arousal. It is specifically in Salomé's speech that we find a real attempt at poetry. As a manifestation of her rapidly mounting excitement, Salomé's language does not merely signal that Jokanaan's mouth reminds her of pomegranates or of roses, of wine or of coral, but rather that his mouth fills her with the urge to rhapsodize about its wonders.[35] Moreover, as Chad Bennett asserts, "Salomé's catalogues of similes…enact a sort of

[34] Another bit of biographical supposition: According to Bosie's *Oscar Wilde, A Summing Up*, his late-life confessional, Wilde "took a violent fancy—it is no exaggeration to describe it as an infatuation—to [Bosie] at sight" (120). Wilde apparently conveyed his "violent fancy" in a letter describing Bosie in a variety of complimentary ways, which he handed over at dinner.

[35] In considering the "ornamental" dimensions of Wilde's language in *Salomé*, Chad Bennett notes that, in addition to his "excessive use of simile," Wilde also employs "extravagant images, and a rhythmic syntax propelled by anaphora (the repetition of 'Thy body is white like'), assonance (the insistent long *I* of 'Thy,' 'white,' and 'like'; and

reverse striptease—a series of body parts, called forth one by one and clothed in ornamental language that…demands [to] be stripped away" (305), thereby potentially implicating the audience in Salomé's yearning, followed by the attempt, to strip Jokanaan and to touch his body.

Salomé's rhapsodies correspond to a specific poetic tradition: the blazon.[36] The poetic technique, involving the singling out of (typically female) body parts for rapturous celebration by the (typically male) speaker, through a series of extended metaphors, has long been associated by critics with arousal. Commenting on the medieval notion that "women are meant to be looked at by men to provoke arousal," Michelle M. Sauer suggests that the blazon's fragments are "offered up as…object[s] of excitement and lust" (131).[37] Thus, in performing her blazon of Jokanaan's body, with most of her attention given over to his skin, eyes, hair, and mouth, Salomé reveals her own excitement and potentially looks to excite others.

As Nancy Vickers remarks of the blazon, it makes central "a trajectory from the visual to the tactile" (19); that is, in the terms I've established here, the blazon specifically reveals *arousal* as an experience that exceeds *desire*: looking, synonymous in *Salomé* with the mimetic model of desire, is no longer sufficient; only the touch, the kiss, the body-on-body connection will do.[38]

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the *o* of 'mowed,' 'snows,' and 'roses,' migrating from figure to figure), alliteration ('like' and 'lilies,' "mower' and 'mowed'), and rhyme (the sonic linking that moves us from the mountains of 'Judaea' to a garden in 'Arabia')" (303).

[36] Gail Finney, in her study of "women in modern drama," links Salomé's speeches to the blazon, identifying in them the "scattering" of parts performed by Petrarch in his sonnets about Laura (64ff). Of course it is striking that in *Salomé*, unlike the traditional blazons, the "scattering" of parts is made literal, as Jokanaan is beheaded, his hair, eyes, and mouth separated and isolated from his body.

[37] Although an extended consideration of medieval literary forms is beyond the scope of this chapter, it bears noting that, while the blazon is associated with male speaker-poets detailing the attractions of their mistresses part by part, thereby making the mistress and her parts objects of male arousal, the mystic text, a genre typically linked to medieval women, might be understood as a kind of rejoinder, a rendering of specifically *female* arousal (Sauer 131). One possibility then is to potentially view Salomé as a mystic, a female counterforce to Jokanaan's authoritative male vision of proper religious feeling.

[38] Vickers writes that "[a]natomical blazons return repeatedly to the temptation to touch conceived as a frustrated desire" (19), though I would like to reformulate this insight to suggest that the blazon exposes the limitations of *desire*. As Amanda Fernbach comments, "Salomé does not merely mimic the fetishizing and scopophilic desires of the Syrian captain and Herod, who are always looking at her. Salomé is not content to stare; she also wants to touch Jokanaan's body and to kiss his mouth" (214).

Furthermore, the blazon becomes an erotic game, especially in conjunction with the counter-blazon, which Salomé deploys after Jokanaan repels her tributes to his body, eyes, and hair (Chad Bennett 306). Vickers identifies "a discontinuity, a gap" between the blazon and the counter-blazon, noting that "in the blazon, we read ripeness…in the counterblazon, we read depletion" (17). To put this another way, the "ripeness" of the blazon signifies arousal, the "depletion" of the counter-blazon, an attempt at managing, even dampening, the excitation. But, as the play insists, Salomé's arousal cannot be managed: the counterblazon inexorably begets a new blazon, leads to a new investment in simile.

That the blazon functions, as Sharon Marcus explains in her investigation of *Salomé* and celebrity, as a sort of spotlight, a "verbal equivalent[…] of [a]…close-up[…]" (1007) makes it clear that there is a public dimension to Salomé's arousal, that it deliberately courts and attracts attention to itself and its stimulating object. This has several significant implications. Firstly, as has already been noted, Salomé's arousal, made publicly visible, necessitates, as the work of Michel Foucault has repeatedly shown, investigation, supervision, and discipline by the medico-legal establishment. And, as Ari Adut suggests, in being made public, Salomé's transgressive behavior must be swiftly punished, lest it contaminate (Adut 220-221) and provoke (221-222) others.

Secondly, Salomé's use of the blazon gestures at the precise nature of her transgression. Given that, throughout the nineteenth century, "conventional belief dictated that real women were essentially passionless" (Fernbach 212), the very fact of Salomé's sexual feeling, her insistent sexual arousal, is radical. Matthew Lewsadder persuasively argues that *Salomé* was not granted a theatrical license by the Lord Chamberlain not only due to its depiction of biblical personages, but more so because of its depiction of female sexuality, "parallel to male-male sex

in its transgressiveness" (523). Indeed, as Amanda Fernbach argues, Salomé's passion "would have indicated that she was, in the terms of *fin de siècle* sexology, a 'sexual invert'" (212).[39] A number of critics have pursued this line of reasoning, asserting that Salomé's lust for Jokanaan is homoerotic. Readings of this sort tend to assume that Salomé is an alter-ego for Wilde, allowing for the conclusion that her attraction to the prophet is therefore a coded representation of male homosexuality. And Salomé's assumption, in her blazons, of the male poet-speaker's prerogative of looking at and describing his lover's body part by part appears to further substantiate this view, for Salomé speaks, with undeniably sexual overtones, of a man from a male perspective. Adut notes that "[t]he publicity of homosexuality was…thought to corrupt or tempt young and female audiences," for "young women…were seen as more susceptible than men" (223). It is for this reason, Adut observes, that lesbianism was never criminalized in England; when a provision against female homosexuality was proposed in 1921, Lord Desart successfully countered it by incredulously protesting, "You are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamt of it. I think this is a very great mischief" (qtd. in Adut 223-224). Salomé thus threatens to spread her peculiar passion and taint others through her display.[40]

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[39] Fernbach cites two of the most prominent late-nineteenth century sexologists, Richard Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, on the subject of women's sexual feelings. Krafft-Ebing, she notes, remarks that "woman…if physically and mentally normal, and properly educated, has but little sensual desire" (qtd. in Fernbach 212), while Ellis observes that "[b]y many, sexual anesthesia is considered natural in women, some even declaring that any other opinion would be degrading to women" (qtd. in Fernbach 212). Although Ellis ultimately disputed that commonly held opinion, he nonetheless associated "the sexual impulse in women," Fernbach notes, with passivity and "need of stimulation" (212).

[40] In a remarkable correspondence, "lesbianism" as a category within legal discourse actually came into being in connection to *Salomé*. As Jennifer Travis details in her cleverly entitled "Clits in Court: *Salomé*, Sodomy, and the Lesbian Sadist," the term was first used as part of the 1918 libel trial brought by Maud Allan against Noel Pemberton-Billing. Billing had accused Allan, then performing in a production of *Salomé* in which she famously performed a dance known as "The Vision of Salomé," of "lesbianism" and "sadism" in an article—"The Cult of the Clitoris"—published in the *Vigilante*, a paper he owned.

Billing based his case against Allan on the premise that her willingness to perform a scandalous part in a scandalous play by a scandalous writer "revealed and played out her essential sexuality" (Travis 149). (Travis astutely notes that Wilde's trials were based on the "performance" of sexuality, observing that Queensbury's charge

This danger crystallizes even more when we reconsider the particular implications of Salomé's blazoning of Jokanaan. In addressing herself to his parts, Salomé repeatedly feminizes the prophet, not only in generally making him the object of her speeches, but in the specific terms she uses to do so. Helen Davies notes that, in comparing Jokanaan's mouth to a pomegranate, Salomé uses imagery "associated with feminine vulnerability," as well as with "fecundity and female sexuality" (63). Amanda Fernbach further suggests that "Salomé…feminizes Jokanaan by inverting the traditional male celebration of female anatomy….Because the subject of the gaze (Salomé) is, at least nominally, a woman, and the object of the gaze is feminized by a succession of blazons reminiscent of the Song of Songs, lesbian desire is…evoked" (209).[41] (Contemporaneous reviews notably identified the subtext of *Salomé* as specifically lesbian. Using Sharon Marcus's analysis of the rhetorical strategies used by the British reviewers of French sapphic novels between 1830 and 1900, Matthew Lewsadder finds the same censorious adjectives deployed in appraisals of Wilde's play: *unnatural*, *morbid*, *obscene*, *immoral*, *perverse*, *impure*, and *diseased* [526]. As Marcus has shown, such adjectives "so consistently replaced references to sex between women" that they "finally stood for the signs they were meant to supersede" [qtd. in Lewsadder 526].)

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against Wilde was phrased as "I do not say that you are [a sodomite], but you look it, and you pose at it, which is just as bad" [149].) More damning still was her recognition and comprehension of his accusations against her. That is, Billing argued in court that Allan's "professed knowledge of a discourse that women were supposed to be ignorant of was…a sure sign of her sadism, and subsequently, lesbianism" (Travis 151). Allan's understanding of terms like "clitoris" was, to Billing, a sure sign of her lesbianism. Billing's conclusion was that Allan was a "lewd, unchaste, and immoral woman" whose private performances of *Salomé* were specifically intended to "foster and encourage obscene and unnatural practices among women" (Travis 151).

Because the libel trial and Billing's defense of his article were instrumental in articulating the "lesbian" as a category of sexual identity, the particular qualities associated with lesbianism by Billing are instructive. Most notably, he argued that "[w]hat constituted Salomé's (and, in turn, Allan's) 'lesbianism'…was the 'violence' of her sexual arousal" (Travis 153). More specifically, Billing intimated that the violent sexual arousal, induced within the play by sadistic acts, could only signify lesbian practices.

Billing's case proved persuasive: he was acquitted of libel.

[41] Richard Ellmann makes a similar connection between Salomé's descriptions of Jokanaan and the Song of Songs in his biography of Wilde (325).

Salomé's blazons, a symptom of her arousal, position her as a distinctly queer figure, a sort of sexual outlaw, but it is what happens next that cements her identity as one. In the play's culminating sequence, Herod, Herodias, and the remaining members of their court enter the terrace, Herod in search of Salomé, whom he repeatedly solicits to join him. His requests are repeatedly denied, and he grows despondent. Eventually, Herod announces that he is "sad to-night" and beseeches Salomé to dance, promising her that, should she do so, she "may ask of me what you will, and I will give it you, even unto the half of my kingdom" (Wilde, *Salomé* 568). To this Salomé responds with interest: "Will you indeed give me whatsoever I shall ask, Tetrarch?" she demands, while the stage directions parenthetically indicate that she here rises (568). Coming on the heels of her forceful rejection of Herod's desire for her, of, as I have argued, her rejection of the entire model of desire replicated in Herod's court, Salomé's consent to perform for Herod's gaze appears, at first glance, curious. But, as suggested by her forceful rising, evocative of an *arousal* to action, in agreeing to dance, Salomé acts not in service of Herod's desire, but her own passion.

That this is so is attested by the play's treatment of Salomé's dance, which is merely described in tersely parenthetical stage directions: *Salomé dances the dance of the seven veils* (Wilde, *Salomé* 570). The "enigmatic[…] concise[ness]" (Garland 125) of the description—"perhaps one of the most notorious narrative ellipses of the late-nineteenth century" (Maier 221)—may perhaps be ascribed to Wilde's anticipation, as he wrote the play, that it would be staged.[42] Still, it seems telling that he does not take the time to envision the dance, to sketch it

[42] Ellmann suggests that Wilde "did not start with the idea of writing a play" when he first became obsessed with Salomé's story: "He first wrote some pages in prose, then broke off and decided to write a poem. Only gradually did he realize that a play was in order" (324). But even once the story was envisioned as a play, Wilde did not, according to Robert Ross, necessarily "imagine its being put on the stage" (Ellmann 324). Gradually, however, Wilde began to cast the performance in his mind—he saw Sarah Bernhardt as Salomé—and to design the production. Envisioning a Salomé clad in "green, like a curious, poisonous lizard," or else a naked Salomé, roped in exotic jewels (Ellmann 351), Wilde also planned a black floor, contrasting a backdrop of violet sky. He also

even briefly. Even Herod's reaction to the dance he has repeatedly requested is an afterthought: "Ah! Wonderful! Wonderful!" is all he says (Wilde, *Salomé* 570). Perhaps the dance does not interest Wilde as such; in *Salomé* he is more taken with exploring build-up than culmination. To that end, it is notable that the title so deliberately emphasizes that the tragedy has but a single act: foregoing the more typical multi-act structure that characterizes his other plays, Wilde here focuses exclusively on the mounting action, with the expected climactic points amounting to no more than mere asides.

Anyway, his priority, as his title suggests, is Salomé herself. Done dancing, she demands her prize: "[t]he head of Jokanaan" (570). Seizing the head off a silver shield on which it is brought to her by the executioner, Salomé again falls into great raptures, insisting, "I will kiss [your mouth] now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes, I will kiss thy moth, Jokanaan. I said it. Did I not say it? I said it. Ah! I will kiss it now…" (573). She accuses him of treating her "as a harlot, as a wanton" (574), an idea that appalls her, but she cannot forget that he was "the only man that [she has] loved" (574). All other men, she says, in a reiteration of her earlier rejection of mimetic desire, were hateful to her, all alike, unlike Jokanaan, who was unique, alone worthy of her passion.[43] He had aroused her:

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considered replacing the orchestra with "braziers of perfume" (Ellmann 351). Although these plans went unrealized, Charles Ricketts, the set designer with whom Wilde discussed the potential production, would be instrumental to the 1906 performance of *Salomé* at the King's Hall in Covent Garden, where the play was performed as the second half of a double bill with *A Florentine Tragedy* (Tydeman and Price 44).

It may also be instructive to consider Beardsley's representation of the dance, which he dubbed *The Stomach Dance*. [Please see Figure 6.] Salomé's movement is suggested by a flurry of roses around her body, her exposed breasts tipped with roses. The dancing flowers near her torso bend towards the phallic swoop of one of the princess's veils, a swoosh that unmistakably suggests an erect—that is, aroused—penis. Taken together, the roses and the penis imply that Salomé is aroused during her dance. We might speculate that she anticipates, as she dances for Herod, having Jokanaan's head in her possession.

[43] The memory of Jokanaan's body again inspires Salomé's blazons:

> Thy body was a column of ivory set on a silver socket. It was a garden full of doves and of silver lilies. It was a tower of silver decked with shields of ivory. There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy

> I saw thee, Jokanaan, and I loved thee. Oh, how I loved thee! I loved thee yet, Jokanaan, I love thee only….I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my desire.[44] What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion….I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire. (574)

She prepares to kiss the mouth Jokanaan had earlier denied her, while Herod, addressing Herodias, accuses Salomé of being "monstrous…altogether monstrous. In truth, what she has done is a great crime" (574). Though he is ostensibly referring to "a crime against an unknown God" (574), it seems that he is in fact condemning the crime of Salomé's arousal, now made perverse as she lavishes the prophet's head with poetry and kisses his lips. Heading back inside his palace, a metonymy for his authority and power, Herod commands his soldiers to "Kill that woman!" (575).[45]

Herod's order has been and should be understood as a manifestation of an oppressive society crushing the possibility of a challenge to its ideologies. Having so vividly and publicly cast aside the acceptable model of mimetic desire and embraced her own idiosyncratic arousal, Salomé represents, as has already been shown, a threat to the social order. In her kiss of the prophet's head, she again reveals the transgressive nature of her arousal. The head on the platter, vividly and aptly described as "a tangle of hair and a bleeding orifice" (209) by Amanda Fernbach, suggests the head of the Medusa. It evokes, Fernbach further remarks, "the female genitals," and in her stated intention to kiss it, Salomé intimates she "may be about to engage in lesbian cunnilingus" (Fernbach 209). But even leaving such coded implications aside, the

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> mouth. Thy voice was a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music. (574)

[44] Although Salomé uses the word *desire* here, her meaning—given her invocation of the body, in the reference to "hunger" and "thirst, of "passion," of the "fire" in her "veins"—is more consistent with what I have, throughout this chapter, termed *arousal*.

[45] Here, again, Wilde shows himself uninterested in the details of conventionall exciting action; the play ends only with terse stage directions indicating that "*[t]he soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields SALOMÉ, daughter of HERODIAS, Princess of Judaea* (575).

princess is, in her final moments, apparently aroused by a decapitated head she holds in her hands, suggesting at least some degree of pathology.

Is she a *femme fatale* after all, a dangerous predator? Is Wilde's Salomé no less the "Goddess of Hysteria" than Des Esseintes's vision? I submit that it is here that Wilde's Salomé actually realizes her full significance in the role of the artist-critic, as she interprets and transforms *fin de siècle* sexology in and through her arousal. As Lord Alfred Douglas's testimony during the Maud Allan-Noel Pemberton-Billing libel trial, during which he served as a witness for the defense, indicates, Wilde read Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* shortly before beginning work on *Salomé*.[46] Krafft-Ebing, Stephen Garton writes, had "produced a portfolio of 'strange cases'—men and women who could only be sexually excited by particular types of clothes or hair, being whipped or humiliated, or humiliating others, or by seeing animals slaughtered" (175). Krafft-Ebing's interest in these cases, Garton suggests, was "forensic," and he invented a range of new terms…to describe the various classes of 'perversion' he found" (175). It is certainly notable that these "perversions" are constituted and defined, for Krafft-Ebing though arousal, the "strange cases" taking note of what men and women find, in Garton's words, "sexually excit[ing]." Sexology thus depends on (physical) arousal as the key symptom for diagnosing sexual pathologies;[47] it is the study of and the attempt to identify, monitor, and treat those instances of sexual excitation that stand at odds with the socially-sanctioned model of desire, which underpins the nineteenth-century heterosexual marriage contract.

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[46] Philip Hoare's *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand* focuses on the Allan-Billing libel trial and includes a useful discussion of Douglas's testimony. After noting that he wished he had never met Wilde, Douglas went on to describe Wilde as "the agent of the devil in every possible way. He was a man whose whole object in life was to attack and to sneer at virtue, and to undermine it in every way by every possible means, sexually and otherwise." Douglas also maintained that while he was composing *Salomé*, Wilde, who read German, had showed him *Psychopathia Sexualis*, "a study by a doctor of sexual perversions of all kinds." Asked whether the study was scientific, Douglas replied, "It is pornographic" (152).

[47] In fact, contemporary sexology literally relies on the monitoring of physical manifestations of arousal through the use of devices like the photoplethysmograph, which measures blood flow, and the electromyography, which records muscle activity.

Wilde would repeatedly, Ellis Hanson argues, parody sexology's language of perversion, its categories of problematic arousal, as when, while serving his sentence, he wrote a letter to the Home Secretary requesting books and citing his "erotomania" as the reason he should receive them. (The books were supposed to rescue him from his obscene fancies.) His seeming self-abnegation, Ellis contends, was really a sneer at sexology and the Victorian acceptance of its verdicts; these paled in comparison to his artistic genius and had no claim on him. After Wilde's release, "he seemed especially eager to reject the definitional power of a sexual science that he deemed vulgar and inaccurate" (Hanson 107). It might be fair to say that the rejection actually begins in *Salomé*. The play envisions a court repressed by a model of desire that dictates preference and thus makes such preference personally meaningless. The people of this world talk past each other, failing to entertain, let alone sustain, any genuine idea or belief. Salomé refuses to take her place along the chain of desire in Herod's court. Instead, she follows her own bliss, commits to her own passion.[48] For this, she is destroyed, martyred. Writing the play, Wilde could not of course know that less than four years later, he too would be destroyed. Instead, *Salomé* stands as a kind of monument to a princess whose arousal is deemed transgressive by those with power over her, but who, in a brief, exquisite moment, triumphs over them by the sheer force of her feelings.

"Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love," Walter Pater writes in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*. Such heights of sensation "yield…[the] fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness" (Pater, "Conclusion"). Pater explicitly associates the feeling, or at least its most potent realization, with art, but, as contemporaneous reactions to the "Conclusion" imply, he is also insinuating a connection

[48] It is of course ironic that, in this, she is not at all unlike Jokanaan, who also rejects the life of Herod's court and commits to his message of the coming of Christ.

between such feelings and sexual fervor.[49] "To burn always with [a] hard, gemlike flame, to maintain…ecstasy, is success in life," Pater rhapsodizes towards the end of the "Conclusion." He continues,

> In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. (Pater, "Conclusion")

In her genuine excitement, her senses stirred by looking into the face (and at the body) of the man she finds compelling above all, because he is unlike all, Salomé makes a "desperate effort to see and touch." The effort costs her her life but what does that matter when she has truly lived?

[49] In a note appended to the 1893 edition of *The Renaissance*, Pater writes, "This brief 'Conclusion' was omitted in the second edition of this book, as I conceived it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall." Although he reinstates the "Conclusion," "with some slight changes" (Pater, "Conclusion"), the note tacitly acknowledges the controversy caused by the frequent interpretation of the "Conclusion" as endorsing same-sex relations.

Figure 1: Gustave Moreau, *Salomé Dancing Before Herod*
[Source: Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, France]

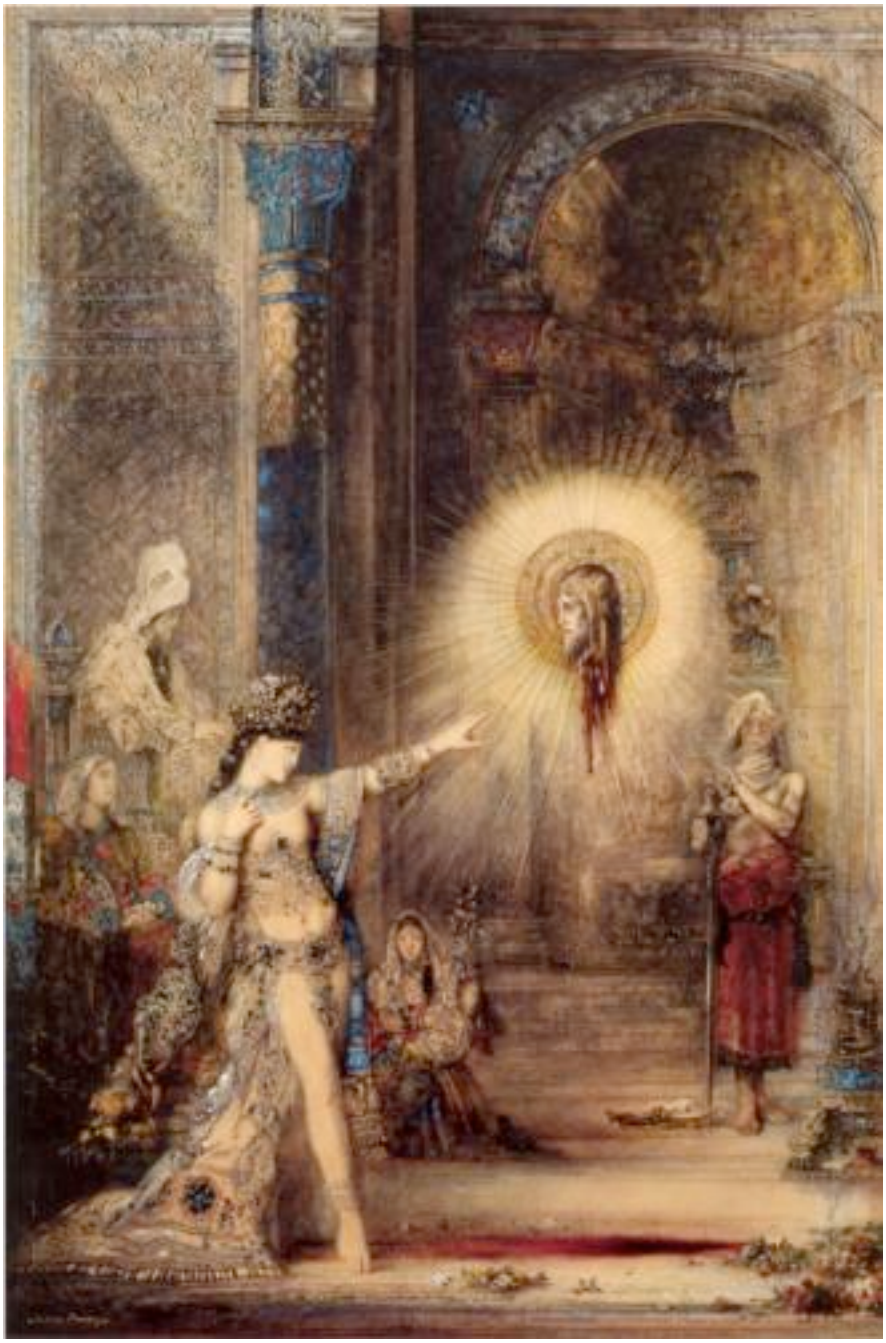

Figure 2: Gustave Moreau, *L'Apparition*
[Source: Musée du Louvre, Paris, France]

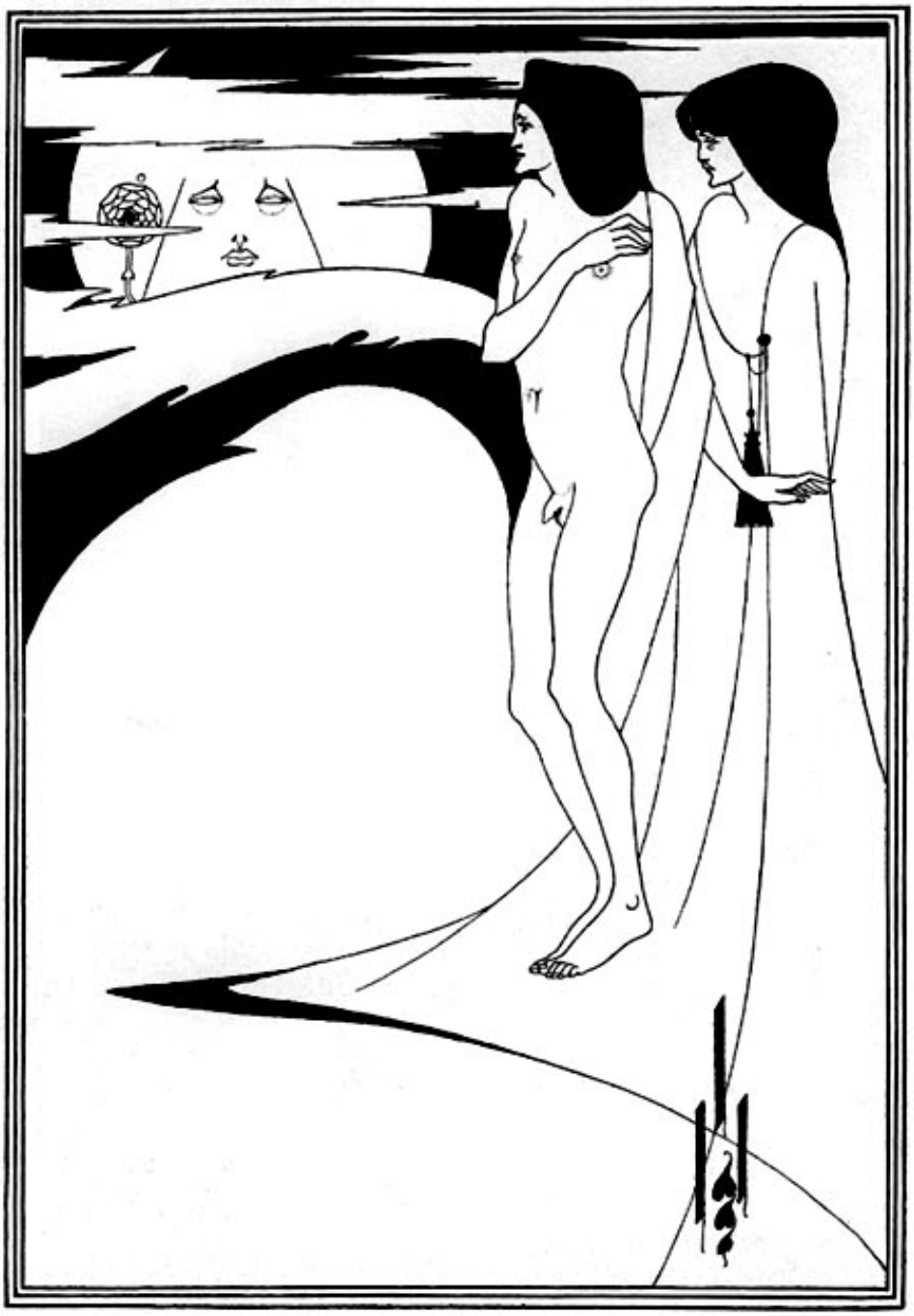

Figure 3: Aubrey Beardsley, *The Woman in the Moon*
[Source: *The Collected Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley*]

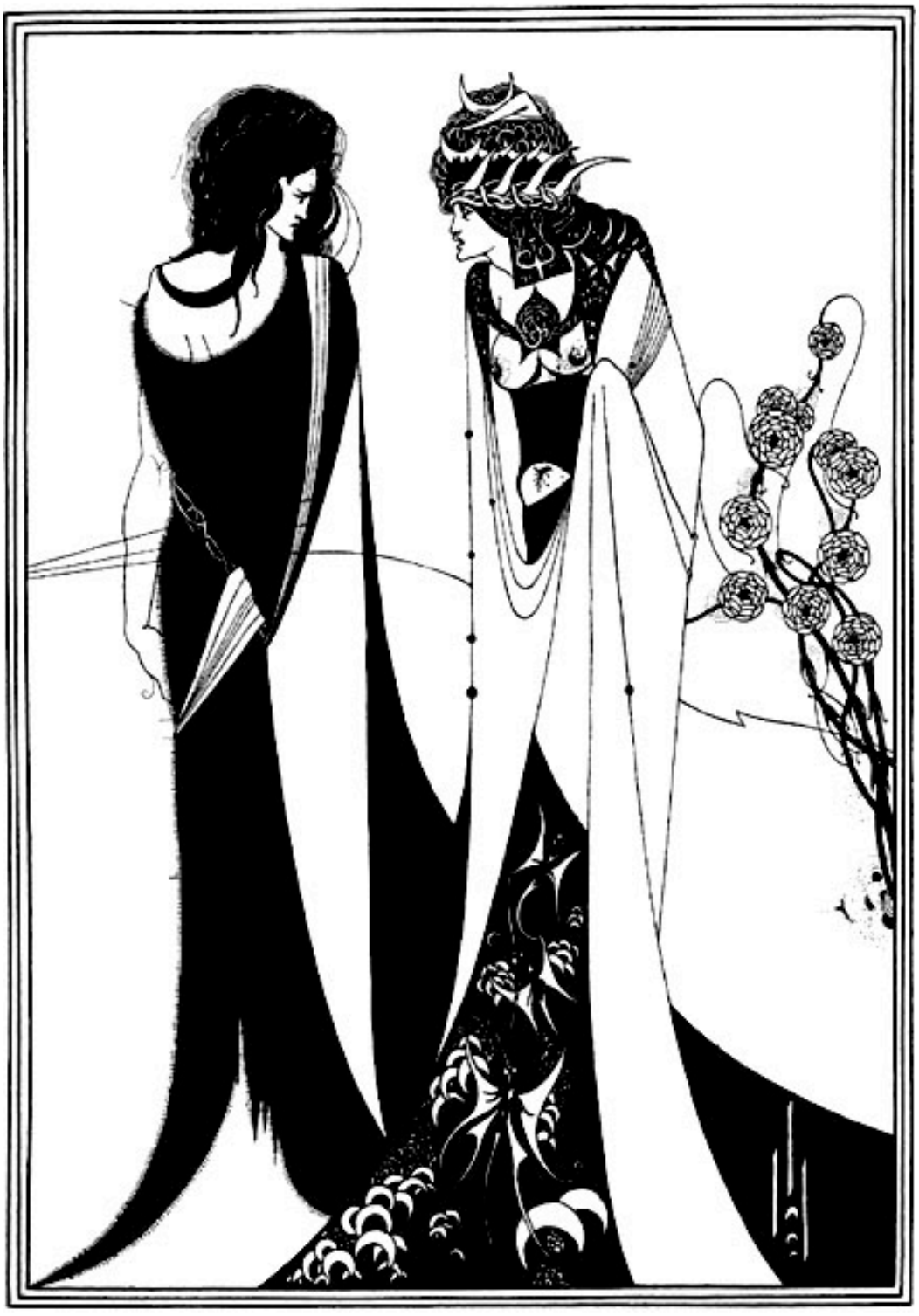

Figure 4: Aubrey Beardsley, *John and Salomé*
[Source: *The Collected Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley*]

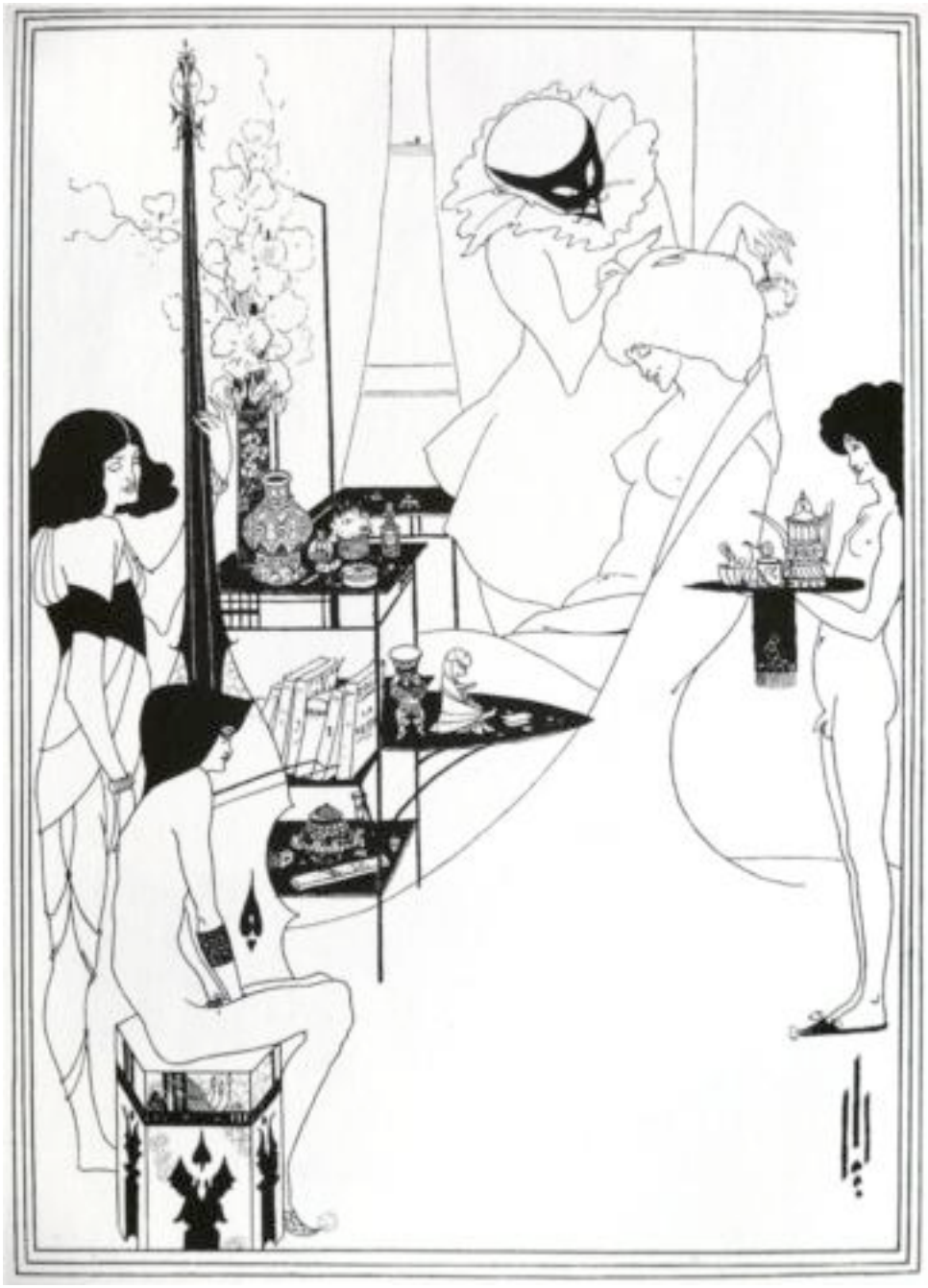

Figure 5: Aubrey Beardsley, *The Toilette of Salomé*
[Source: *The Collected Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley*]

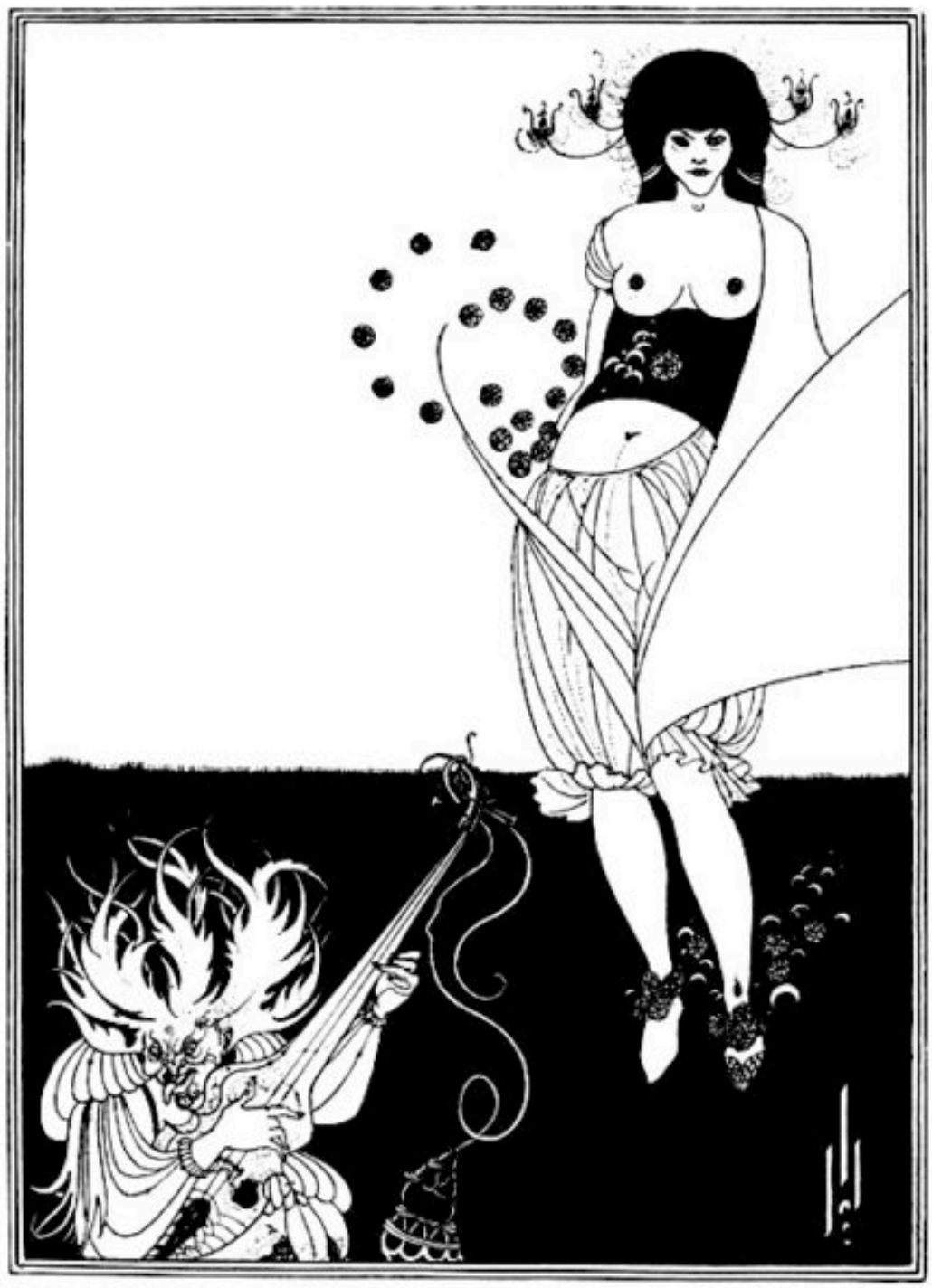

Figure 6: Aubrey Beardsley, *The Stomach Dance*
[Source: *The Collected Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley*]

CHAPTER FOUR

The Blood Is the Stimulant: The Vampire and the Horrors of Sexual Arousal in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Desiring Monsters, Monstrous Desires

The (late-) Victorian fascination with monstrosity—whether represented by vampire, ghost, demon, or still some other supernatural, ill-intentioned fiend—has been extensively observed and much commented on by twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics, who have variously read it in terms of theories of evolution and degeneration and of fears surrounding perceptions of uncontrollable sexuality and non-normative desire. "The monsters of the 19th century," Judith Halberstam writes in her introduction to *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, "metaphorized modern subjectivity as a balancing act between inside/outside, female/male, body/mind, native/foreign, proletarian/aristocrat" (1).[1] As the boundaries between what were once neatly contained oppositions became increasingly slippery, more difficult to police, and progressively more difficult to maintain, the wild (and Wilde[2])

[1] Somewhat similarly, Ruth Bienstock Anolik suggests that, in general, the Gothic genre—to which the Victorian monster narrative loosely belongs—is defined and structured by binaries and the attempt to uphold these definitive, structural oppositions against the threat of their dissolution (1).

[2] Oscar Wilde's trial for acts of "gross indecency" took place in 1895; that is, the court proceedings unfolded very late in the Victorian era. However, as the culmination of a long process through which the homosexual emerged as an identity, the trial presents an important (and, for the purposes of the discussion to come, highly relevant) lens for considering the (late-) Victorian representation of monstrosity. More specifically, the scandal surrounding Wilde, his eventual conviction and prison sentence, and the collapse of his career and reputation, is especially revelatory in the context of arousal and its connection to the monster narrative. Wilde's was perhaps the most high-profile in a series of sexual scandals—which included prostitution and the spread of syphilis—that rocked the second half of the nineteenth century, and his fame and the publicity his "crimes" attracted made of Wilde a convenient shorthand representation of the dangers the Victorians linked with what Jonathan Dollimore has termed "sexual dissidence."

It bears noting, especially in the context of this chapter's attention to same-sex desire among men, that Stoker famously married a woman—Florence Balcombe—who had earlier been courted by Wilde, sparking, as Talia Schaffer recounts in "'A Wilde Desire Took Me': The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*," an intense competition between the two men, but also an identification, the inevitable flip-side of rivalry. Though he remained conspicuously silent during Wilde's trials—despite requests from mutual acquaintances to offer his sympathies for Wilde's plight—Wilde and Wilde's "crime," as well as Stoker's sexual identification with Wilde through their attraction to the same woman, are, Schaffer argues, prominently featured in *Dracula*.
For more on Wilde, please see Chapter Three.

slippage of margins and the attendant sensitivity to imbalance created an atmosphere of dread and trepidation, "embodied within a specifically deviant form—the monster—that announces itself (de-monstrates) as the place of corruption" (Halberstam 2). The monster makes visible the anxieties of the age, anxieties that, for the Victorians, were often sexual in nature.

Indeed, the monster, Halberstam proclaims, "mark[s] difference within and upon bodies" (8), a difference that, in its connection to the body, might effectively be read as intimate, as almost unavoidably sexual. Halberstam goes so far as to assert that "the monster is the product of and the symbol for the transformation of identity into sexual identity through the mechanism of failed repression" (Halberstam 9). That is, she argues that those taboo desires that become too potent to remain repressed are coded as monstrous; simultaneously, in breaking through the socially mandated mechanisms of repression, such monstrousness becomes the basis of identity itself.[3]

Let me here take a moment to be clear about my own purposes: I do not mean here, nor throughout what follows, to suggest that any intrinsic link exists between any aspect of sexuality and any aspect of monstrosity. In fact, I do not mean to establish either "sexuality" or "monstrosity" as categories that exist independently of discourse. My interest in this chapter is rather in tracing the ways in which depictions of monsters, and, more specifically vampires, in late-Victorian narratives intersect with the late-Victorian understanding of the sexual response in order to consider what the Victorian association of danger, repulsion, and fear with sexuality, and, more specifically sexual arousal, might reveal about both the political and the aesthetic

[3] Again, the case of Wilde is instructive: his conviction for "gross indecency" transformed him, in the public sphere of Victorian assessment, from playwright, bon vivant, and wit-about-town into a homosexual. One may, indeed, argue that Wilde is often treated, even in the ostensibly more progressive estimation of twentieth and twenty-first century criticism, in terms of, first and foremost, his sexuality. In fact, I must concede that my own argument about Wilde in "The Critic as Dancer" occasionally succumbs to the temptation to read his work through the lens of what might be gleaned about the artist's sexual experiences and preferences.

choices made in the Victorian representation of monsters. To reiterate then: as this chapter unfolds, any claims made in regard to sexuality, whether in and of itself or in its relation to monstrosity, are, unless otherwise specified, meant to be understood as constructed discursive formations. That is, I posit no given, inherent, or natural notions of sexuality, approaching the subject as socially, culturally, and historically determined.

"Suddenly Sexual"[4] Monsters

The Victorian monster was determined, at least in some very great part, by the rapidly changing perception of and assumptions about human sexuality, a shift the medical, legal, and artistic discourses of the mid-to-late nineteenth century struggled to comprehend and accommodate. As Elaine Showalter has amply illustrated in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, many of the primary fears, suspicions, and nightmares of the *fin de siècle* were driven by what the novelist George Gissing termed "sexual anarchy," a terrifying free-for-all of identity, behavior, and possibility that was derided as threatening to the very foundations of the social order. That is to say that the tenor of the public discourse on matters of sexuality tended strongly toward the alarmed, and Victorian thinking, especially in its concern with the possibility of degeneration, often aligned overt displays of (transgressive) sexuality with the monstrous. The Victorian iteration of the Gothic sounded a warning about the dangers of unbridled, uncontrolled sexuality, tending to side with the forces that might eradicate this threat, valiantly (and, often, violently) triumphing over the potential contamination of upstanding British citizens.

It is not so much that the threat of earlier monsters or earlier Gothic fictions was somehow, in and of itself, less immediately sexual, but rather that a confluence of several

[4] This subsection's title of course alludes to Phyllis A. Roth's well-known study of "Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*."

nineteenth century developments, in terms of, both, specific cultural phenomena and key discursive formations, made the sexual connotations of the threat more explicit. In particular, the earlier-mentioned shifts in medico-legal frameworks, as well as technological progress, changes in the status and role of women, and the anxieties that accompanied these changes, brought heretofore concealed strands of the Gothic more prominently to the surface. If, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes in "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel," "the veil [imagery] that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as a metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified" (256) in several of the most prominent exemplars of the late eighteenth century Gothic,[5] we might say that, in the Victorian iteration of the Gothic, the veil becomes more transparent, in large part because what it covers becomes a more pressing concern, a subject of medical and legal investigation and intervention. To put this another way, the veil becomes less metaphor, more pointing arrow. Moreover, sexuality and sexual identity became, for the Victorians, a grand narrative, an increasingly revelatory lens for approaching and understanding human experience. This foregrounding of a set of assumptions about sexual desires and practices makes it unavoidably tempting to read Victorian cultural productions in terms of what they might reveal about these assumptions, as they functioned both within Victorian society and as modes of representation.

Monstrous Effects and Sexual Affect

Having briefly sketched out some of the historical context behind the Victorian interest in and repeated return to the trope of the monster—a context I will shortly take up again and in more detail—I want to clarify the specific concerns of this chapter. As I hope to show here, the

[5] Sedgwick focuses her argument on Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) and M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796).

monster is particularly and expressly constructed to evoke sexual arousal, staging the sexual response as intimately connected to the body, as uncontrollable and unrestrained by the demands of the mind and of the law, and, most importantly, as productive of gender and, consequently, in the Victorian imagination, of sexual-preference confusions and reversals.

My intention is to consider one specific manifestation of the monster: the vampire. The vampire is an especially apt figure for this investigation in several key respects.[6] Perhaps most obviously, the vampiric tendency to swell and engorge with blood speaks rather literally to the physiology of sexual arousal; the vampire might thus be understood as a stand-in for the sexually aroused, sexually affected body. Furthermore, the vampire, more so than other monsters, interestingly negotiates the boundary between the Self and the Other, simultaneously recognizable and foreign, a peculiarly human sort of monster; this negotiation is especially significant because Victorian concerns about sexual arousal were so much bound up with the line between subject and object, the confines of the individual self and its connection to and separation from others. The tension between Self and Other, as symbolized by the vampire, is evident in at least two ways: firstly, because the vampire was once human, a living being, even an admirable or upstanding one; and, secondly, because the vampire's condition is one grounded in the need to consume in order to survive. (Though the vampire's appetite for blood might, at first glance, separate it from the more conventionally human appetites, the fact remains that, in the vampire, we are confronted with the image of our own needs, those overriding demands that cannot be denied if one is to endure.) That is to say, the vampire has no mirror image, as one especially well-known aspect of vampiric lore would have it, because the vampire *is* a mirror

[6] In relying on a single type of monster, I am following in the tradition of critics like Terry Castle, who, in works like *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Sexuality and Modern Culture*, concerns herself with the correspondence between ghosts and representations of same-sex desire between women.

image, reflecting back at the Victorians those parts of themselves they experienced as undeniable and that they were at most pains to deny.

Here, I once again want to particularize my concern: in this chapter, I will focus on the vampire as represented in Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*, with a relatively brief digression to Sheridan LeFanu's 1872 novella *Carmilla*, a major influence on Stoker's text and one that is especially revelatory in examining the vampire's connection to sexual affect. It is my contention that *Dracula* situates its horror in the startling tendency of all bodies towards arousal. Even as it sounds alarms about female autonomy, about same-sex desires, about the possibility of upending long-standing social and cultural conventions, and about how these are made manifest in the capacity for and experience of arousal, Stoker's vampire narrative tacitly acknowledges that, in the impossibility of fully controlling the body's sexual response, men and women *demonstrate* their otherwise repressed monstrosity.

Citing Ann Radcliffe's well-known explanation of the distinction between "terror" and "horror,"[7] Ruth Bienstock Anolik suggests that "[t]he nature of Gothic representation explains why the response (of both subject and reader) to the sexual Other, shunted by Enlightenment categorization to the other side of the epistemological divide, is best described as 'horror,' and not as 'terror,' horror's tamer relative" (6). Where "terror is wrapped up in suspense and dread," suggesting a "fear that has not yet been realized, [a] fear generated by the danger that has not yet been encountered," horror is "the fear that has been realized; the danger having been encountered, nothing remains for the imagination. The *frisson* of suspense is drained from this emotion as the subject's fully explicit encounter with dangerous evil lacks all 'uncertainty' or

[7] In "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826), Radcliffe writes "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them…and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?" (qtd. in Anolik 6).

'obscurity'" (Anolik 6). In *Dracula*, sexual arousal is representative of the moment when terror turns to horror. "A close analysis will show that the only emotions which in the long run harm are those arising from sex impulses, and when we have realized this we have put a finger on the actual point of danger," Stoker opined in his 1908 essay, "The Censorship of Fiction" (qtd. in Spear 179), but it is his most famous work of fiction that really makes this point, locating in the moment(s) of arousal a danger. What is more, *Dracula* suggests that even one's best efforts at censorship—and Stoker appears to go to great lengths to censor "arising sex impulses" in the text, concealing them behind duty and violence, costuming them in an insistence on clear distinctions—fail in the face of the sexual response. What is finally horrifying in *Dracula* is the inevitability of arousal, the impossibility of suppressing it fully,[8] and the resulting sense that "good" men and women—that is, those who exercise full control and mastery over themselves and their bodies—simply do not exist. Indeed, not only do ostensibly "good" people repeatedly collapse in the face of their own sexual affect, so too do the very distinctions that enabled the Victorians to distinguish the bad from the good, the men from the women. In so far, then, as *Dracula* is an exemplary (late-) Victorian monster narrative, sexual affect is constitutive of its monstrosity, and it is this linkage that I propose to investigate in this chapter.

Dracula's Sexual Affect

On its surface, *Dracula* is the story of the valiant resistance offered by a group of vampire hunters—typically dubbed the "Crew of Light," following Christopher Craft's coinage in "'Kiss Me With Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*"[9]—against

[8] In this way, *Dracula* not only looks back to the Gothic but also anticipates the work and thought of the psychosexual provocateur Georges Bataille, for whom horror and ecstasy are intimately linked as "experiences of emotional excess and loss of control," both establishing "a similarly complete reign of affect over reason" (Dierkes-Thrun 49).

[9] Craft's term is apt not only in its suggestion of the fight between the forces of good (the vampire hunters) and evil (Dracula and his minions), but also in its evocation of Lucy Westenra, the beautiful girl beloved by several of the hunters who becomes Dracula's first English victims and whose first name, derived from the Latin, means "light."

Count Dracula's schemes. The fight, documented in a series of diary entries, transcribed phonograph recordings, letters, and newspaper clippings, is at face value one between good and evil, and its culmination in Dracula's defeat, its triumphant assertion of the healing consolations offered by the traditional refuge of the heterosexual family. The destruction represented by Dracula and his threatened creation of a vampiric army is defused by the fearless gang of men (and one woman), who selflessly submit themself to their duty to rid London and the world of monsters, and who, for all their troubles, get the Victorian version of the "Happily ever after" fairy-tale ending.

But beneath such conventional trappings lies "a kind of incestuous, necrophilous, oral-anal-sadistic all-in wrestling match" set in "a sort of homicidal lunatic's brothel in a crypt" (Richardson 427). Though Stoker maintained, in a letter to his friend William Gladstone, that, despite his work's inclusion of "horrors and terrors," "I trust that these are calculated to 'cleanse the mind by pity and terror.' At any rate there is nothing base in the book" (qtd. in Miller 274), *Dracula* is "a veritable sexual lexicon of Victorian taboos," "seduction, rape, gang rape, group sex, necrophilia, pedophilia, incest, adultery, oral sex, menstruation, venereal disease, and voyeurism" (Belford 9). Dracula himself, Maurice Richardson announces in "The Psychoanalysis of Ghost Stories," his oft cited, infinitely quotable consideration of the novel, holds out the promise of "a vast polymorph perverse bisexual oral-anal-genital sadomasochistic timeless orgy" (429). This promise, Dracula's siren song, does not go unnoticed or unheeded by the Crew of Light,[10] who, at various points in the novel, succumb to it with some combination of reluctance and willing (and pleasurable!) submission.

[10] Late-twentieth century critics have similarly found themselves susceptible to Dracula's sexual charms. A number of the most influential studies of the sexual symbolism and its significance in the novel will be cited in what follows, but let it here suffice to note that few, if any, critics in the last sixty years have treated *Dracula* as simply a story about the conflict of good versus evil.

Critics have thoroughly excavated the novel's recesses for hints of eroticism, have tirelessly catalogued its perversions and depravities, its investment in slyly-coded but unmistakable—at least to late-twentieth/early-twenty-first century readers—depictions of sexual pleasures and dangers. But I would like to suggest that, above and beyond and beside its investment in general sexual matters, *Dracula* is specifically a case study in arousal. (I use the term "case study" deliberately in order to emphasize the sense that, in *Dracula*, arousal is pathologized, a matter for observation and careful deliberation, a "problem" to be addressed and, ideally, neutralized, even cured. That so much of the narrative relies on diaries and recorded testimonies—a form of free association, in the inclusion of seemingly irrelevant details, like Jonathan Harker's early offhand note-to-self to procure a chicken recipe for his fiancée—and the close, even systematic observation of characters by other characters, including two doctors, suggests a pre-Freudian attempt to mine unconscious urges and to get a handle on these.)

The vampire, John Paul Riquelme notes in "Doubling and Repetition/Realism and Closure in *Dracula*," "is a creature who appears to have no choice in its need for blood as nourishment" (561); he must have blood, whether he consciously wills it or not. This hunger follows its own logic, obeys only itself; what is more, its satisfaction is always only temporary, for it returns, unbidden, again and again, an uncontrollable affect.[11] Such "monstrosity" is reflected too in the exigencies of sexual arousal; as it is coded in *Dracula*, the sexual response bypasses personal choice, ignores affective ties and responsibilities, pays no heed to legal and social boundaries. There can be little doubt, Anna Krugovoy Silver demonstrates, that hunger for nourishment stands in for sexual need, for the vampire's sexuality is expressed almost entirely

[11] We might thus think of the vampire not simply as perpetrator but also as victim, powerless to resist the demands of his desire for blood. Indeed, Riquelme's deconstruction of *Dracula* reveals that, far from being an agent of evil, the Count has been stripped of choice and subjected to a loss of power, metonymically suggested by his family's doomed resistance to foreign powers who wish to conquer and control them.

through appetite, and the novel repeatedly conflates sexual arousal with the desire to eat or to be eaten (119). *Dracula*, then, abundantly illustrates the continuity of arousal and other bodily affects, all the while insisting that such bodily demands are not simply inclinations but inescapable exigencies, controllable only through violence (and, ultimately, even the violence is an illusory panacea). Vampires, with their relentless appetite for blood, which leaves them powerlessly obedient to the urge, come to represent the vagaries, the vicissitudes, the pleasures and pressures of sexual excitation, to embody a sublimely overpowering threat to the social order, and its attendant conceptions of civilized humanity, which must be countered, repressed, and "turned off." "Reading Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is a bit like watching a perverse puppet show…," Srjan Smajic concludes, "because the principal actors behave like sentient marionettes [who are t]ugged this way and that by urges, impulses, and drives they are powerless to resist" (49).[12]

In focusing more narrowly than has previously been done on "urges, impulses, and drives" the characters in *Dracula* are "powerless to resist," especially as these "urges, impulses, and drives" converge around sexual excitation, we might begin to more clearly understand late-Victorian anxieties about sexual experience and sexual identity. The notion that the Victorians saw sexuality as always already dangerous has been, in recent scholarship, repeatedly dispelled as a reductive observation, a limited and limiting conception. As Steven Seidman remarks in "The Power of Desire and the Danger of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered," the Victorians recognized and acknowledged the importance of sexual pleasure and of sexual

[12] In fact, Smajic, as the title of his essay on *Dracula*, "Dracula and Duty," indicates is not primarily interested in the "perverse puppet show" that preoccupies other scholars of the novel (myself included). He is rather more concerned with "*Dracula*'s ethical discourse, centered around the idea of duty" (50) and the ways in which this discourse legitimates otherwise forbidden actions on the part of the vampire hunters. That said, Smajic's argument, particularly in his astute assessment of the intersection of duty and desire in the novel, will nonetheless be useful to my own.

expression. In the context of marriage, sex was understood to be necessary, the basis of conjugal harmony and the production of offspring. While "unconventional" desire—whether same-sex or extra-marital, to name just two obvious examples—could be and often was perceived as problematic, a violation of social decorum, the Victorians also believed, perhaps more so than their predecessors, in the powers of the medico-legal establishment to curtail untoward expressions. In holding "unacceptable" desires unacceptable, Victorian society could maintain its boundaries, its sense of itself. Stoker—a closeted gay man, according to Talia Schaffer's reading of *Dracula* and Stoker's other writings, including his letters to the American poet Walt Whitman, (in)famous for his frank depictions of homosexual desire—certainly appears to have embraced such a possibility: secrecy, discretion, self-control and self-discipline, repression, even self-loathing, these could theoretically be used to maintain (the appearance of) propriety. But whereas behaviors and appearances might be controllable, *Dracula* posits the bodily response to sexual stimulation as beyond the power of the will, beyond self-mastery. That the predominant motif of the novel is blood is instructive in this regard: "the blood told as blood will" (89), Anne Sexton writes in "Cinderella," her poetic adaptation of the fairy tale, referring to the moment in the Grimm Brothers' version of the story when one of Cinderella's step-sisters cuts off the heel of her foot in order to fit into the glass slipper. Borrowing Sexton's pronouncement, we might say that, in *Dracula*, the hunger for blood—a metaphor, as has already been suggested and will be shown further, for other forms of appetite—always "tells."

This is not to suggest that the Victorians unequivocally condemned sexual affect. In fact, they "held that the sex instinct is a powerful force that needs to be channeled in the proper way to be beneficial to humanity," Steven Seidman argues. Properly directed, the sexual instinct could be a benevolent power; however, its ubiquitous potential for excess also positioned it as "a

principal source of misfortune and evil" (Seidman 50). Seidman notes that "the Victorians believed that arousing sexual feelings easily elicits sensuality…[and] imagined a drama of an omnipresent powerful sex drive…susceptible to the dangers of excess and ruin" (49). The sex instinct, Seidman further observes, was potentially dangerous, for, once stimulated, it could "become insatiable." In this "domino theory of sex," "carnal motivations," when pursued, could "come to monopolize the unconscious and conscious life of the individual" (50). Thus "[c]ontrolled by sensual urges, the individual loses self-control and social purpose. This inevitably leads to self-destruction and to social chaos and decline" (Seidman 52). Viewed in this light, the sex instinct, represented by sexual arousal, might be interpreted as perpetually imperiling and undermining the quest for spiritual perfection, for personal and social continence, threatening to replace piety and goodness with crude animality.[13] In its potential to conflate man and beast, arousal thus held out the threat to reveal the monster lurking beneath the façade of culture. To invoke and paraphrase Sexton's maxim one more time: "arousal told as arousal will."

One more general observation vis-à-vis the functioning of sexual arousal in the novel before considering particular moments: it is not only the animal (or the monster) concealed by the veneer of civilization that is uncovered in and through arousal. As it is depicted in *Dracula*, the sexual response repeatedly suggests that, in the moment of the body's unwilled, uncontrolled response to sexual stimuli, there exists the potential for a horrifying gender reversal. Sexually stimulated men are rendered passive by their arousal; sexually stimulated women become

[13] The perceived dangers of the turn from the spiritual to the carnal were many and manifold. In *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, his 1838 treatise (first published in the United States but widely available in England), Sylvester Graham identified the following as "among the common evils which are caused by sexual excesses":

> Languor, lassitude, muscular relaxation, general debility and heaviness, depression of spirits, loss of appetite, indigestion, faintness and sinking at the pit of the stomach, increased susceptibilities of the skin and lungs to all the atmospheric changes, feebleness of circulation, chilliness, headache, melancholy, hypochondria, hysteria, feebleness of all the sense, impaired vision, loss of sight, weakness of the lungs, nervous cough, pulmonary consumption, disorders of the liver and kidneys, urinary difficulties, disorders of the genital organs, weakness of the brain, loss of memory, epilepsy, insanity, apoplexy (78-9).

uncharacteristically, in the Victorian conception of femininity, active, even aggressive. Moreover, such reversals hint at the homoeroticism implicit in desire, playing out a drama of same-sex attraction that must be violently defused.

To begin an examination of arousal as it is represented in *Dracula*, I propose to reexamine three pivotal scenes, which have typically been the focal points of consideration for critics interested in examining the novel's presentation of sexuality. In (re)considering these episodes, I intend to show that *Dracula* hones in on the uncontrollable nature of arousal, which is experienced as horrifying, and stages a drama of fear around the realization that even "good" men and women are always potentially monstrous, *because* they, by virtue of their bodies, are always potentially arousable. The three scenes in question are (1) Jonathan Harker's encounter with the three vampire women in Dracula's Transylvania castle; (2) the staking of the vampiric Lucy by her fiancé Arthur Holmwood, who is spurred on and encouraged in the action by Dr. Van Helsing and Lucy's other suitors, Dr. John Seward and Quincey Morris; and, (3) Dracula's attack on Mina Harker, in which, having served as the vampire's "wine press," she is made to drink from a wound in the Count's chest while her husband lies helplessly beside her.[14] Following Christopher Bentley's lead, the first scene has generally been viewed in light of the symbolic linkage of blood and semen; the second is seen as a means of bringing Lucy to orgasm through the use of a symbolic phallus;[15] the third is taken as "a symbolic act of enforced fellatio" (Bentley 29). These moments in the text are thus generally read as manifestations of sexual transgression, eruptions of dangerous pleasures with the potential to challenge social

[14] These three scenes were first identified by Christopher Bentley in his influential 1972 article "The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," which, as the title implies, takes up the hidden-in-plain-sight subversively sexual imagery in the novel.

[15] A number of feminist critics have suggested a more sinister reading of the staking of Lucy. Elaine Showalter argues that the scene evokes nothing so much as a gang rape, an act that becomes "embarrassingly clear," as Holmwood drives the "impressive phallic instrument" (*Sexual Anarchy* 181) through Lucy's shuddering body, urged on by Van Helsing, Seward, and Morris.

conventions, normative morality, and good middle-class breeding. These interpretations have certainly been productive, as well as remarkably versatile, in positioning the novel as, variously, recognizing and celebrating the liberating possibilities of desire, castigating decadent sexual depravity, or staking out some middle ground between these polarities.

But it is possible and moreover instructive to see these plot points as specifically concerned with sexual arousal, rather than as more general(ized) expressions of sexuality and desire. In documenting the horrors of sexual excitement, which, in the novel, threatens to dissolve the boundaries of the self as it succumbs to sexual stimulation, *Dracula* posits that the seemingly well-organized world of middle-class morality is always under threat, always on the verge of collapse. Moreover, in paralleling vampires and arousal and using the supernatural symbol vampiric hunger for blood as a stand-in for an all-too-natural sexual response, Stoker's novel suggests that arousal, though it may at first seem powerful or liberating, strips one of choice, deprives one of agency and self-control, and makes (illusory) eradication necessary and inevitable.

A final note before proceeding: if the above appears to conflate all permutations of the sexual response, to blithely ignore the distinctions between male and female experience and behavior, this is precisely because what gives the threat of arousal its potency in *Dracula* is its collapsing of conveniently comforting distinctions—between human and monster, between male and female, between hetero- and homosexual. Like mesmerism—implicitly linked with arousal, both as a source of great interest and potential fear for the Victorians and as a kind of controlling mechanism—sexual excitement makes its object impressionable, highly suggestible, easily led towards dissolution and away from the recognition of and respect for social and cultural boundaries. This, then, is the monstrousness of sexual arousal as rendered in Stoker's novel: it

reverses and blurs, refuses the boundaries so central to the Victorian conception of the social order and its maintenance, of the very self. As such, even as I will, for the sake of closer examination, on occasion distinguish between vampires and their human victims, will consider various iterations of sexual affect and differentiate among male and female arousal, I want to be clear that, in *Dracula*, these distinctions are significant only in so far as they are liable to break down.

The Vampire as Aphrodisiac: (1) Jonathan Harker and the Vampire Women

Perhaps the earliest manifestation of arousal in all its horror, all its terrifying implications, can be seen in Jonathan Harker's reaction to the three vampire women[16] who surround him as he slumbers in a strange room in Dracula's Transylvanian castle. "In the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner," Jonathan recounts in the journal he keeps during his travels, a document that becomes instrumental in allowing the Crew of Light to understand the vampire and his habits. "I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, for, though the moonlight was behind them, they threw no shadow on the floor" (Stoker 61). His sudden awareness that he is no longer alone in the room where he must have fallen asleep immediately alarms Jonathan, though his impressions are as yet indistinct, hazy, and his response to the situation, in these early stages, is perhaps necessarily one of ambiguity. Indeed, so difficult is the situation for him to appraise fully, he initially thinks himself dreaming, for what appears before him seems without logic, lacking the clarity of reality and, thus, demanding no real action. As the journal account soon reveals, Jonathan continues to recline, remaining supine; his posture and position throughout the ensuing scene remain little

[16] Although he three women are often dubbed "the Brides of Dracula," there is no explicit indication of their relationship to either the Count or to each other offered by the text. Rather, this identification serves to highlight the sexualized reading of the novel and the critical tendency to read all relationships portrayed in *Dracula* as having a sexual component. The designation as "brides"—rather than "wives"—is particularly notable in the context of arousal, for it suggests desire on the verge of consummation, a longing that is present and that has yet to be gratified.

changed. But Jonathan's lack of *arousal*—in the sense of arising or stirring, of entering into activity—is finally a mask for his *arousal*—in the sense of sexual excitement—as his description of the unexpected nighttime visitation begins to illustrate. (To this end, Jonathan's claim that he believes he is simply "dreaming" is in itself quite revealing: recent research has shown that REM sleep—the phase of the sleep cycle associated with dreaming—is accompanied by genital arousal and prolonged erections in men.)

Jonathan's observation of the three women yields the following account of their appearance: "Two were dark, and had high aquiline noses…and great dark, piercing eyes, that seemed to be almost red…The other was fair, as fair can be, with great, wavy masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires" (Stoker 61). The fair vampire in particular causes Jonathan to experiences a sensation he finds uncanny, as he confesses a strange familiarity with the fair woman: "I seemed somehow to know her face," he records in his journal, "and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where" (Stoker 61). Though Jonathan insists that he is unaware of the specific associations he makes with the fair vampire, it is not very difficult to connect his description of her to Lucy, Mina's best friend.[17] There is, of course, no textual indication that Jonathan is acquainted with Lucy—in fact, an acquaintance is more unlikely than not—but the salience of the point is hardly lost here, for regardless of whether the blond vampire is explicitly evocative of Lucy, she is the physical opposite of Mina, the slender, dark-haired, efficient wife-to-be, one who serves in many a capacity, yet who seems to hold remarkably little sexual interest for Jonathan. That this face—a face so unlike his fiancée's—is associated in Jonathan's mind with "some dreamy fear" suggests that the arousal he is at pains to disavow is all the more troubling for its evocation of arousal felt

[17] Phyllis Roth connects the description of the blond vampire, "this golden girl," (119) to the later descriptions of Lucy Westenra. Elaine Showalter also notes that the blond vampire "clearly resembles "Mina's best friend, Lucy" (*Sexual Anarchy* 180).

previously. The sexual affect he is able to conceal—perhaps even from himself—in civilized London haunts him in monstrous Transylvania,[18] asserting itself relentlessly and mercilessly. The removal from the limitations and controls of Victorian (near) domesticity opens for Jonathan a space of arousal, which reveals itself as "truth," a reality that he begins to accept and acknowledge as pressing and undeniable, as, perhaps most significantly, full of pleasurable possibility.

Moreover, Jonathan's encounter with the three female vampires in Castle Dracula and his confession of recognition in regard to the fair vampire suggests "an intertextual memory" (Spear 188). As Jeffrey L. Spear astutely observes, "[t]he appearance of the golden vampire is almost exactly the same" as that of the golden-haired, blue-eyed Laura, the narrator of Sheridan LeFanu's 1872 novella *Carmilla*.[19] Laura's first encounter with the seductive vampire Carmilla—who, with her "her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair…exquisitely fine and soft, and in colour a rich, very dark brown, with something of gold" (Le Fanu 224) perhaps not coincidentally anticipates the two darker vampire women in Castle Dracula—occurs when she is a mere child, and she long believes that the meeting was a dream,[20] but she remains haunted by

[18] The very name "Transylvania" is evocative of potentially fearsome change, of ***trans***formation and ***trans***ition. In acknowledging heretofore hidden urges, Jonathan risks becoming someone else, moving from the position of respectable, bourgeois solicitor to the condition of monstrous vampire. Indeed, the potential for this transformation is hinted from the very start of Jonathan's journey to Transylvania, which is marked by an intense interest in food and drink. One of his earliest observations, for example, concerns a particularly tasty chicken dish (Stoker 27). Given the links *Dracula* establishes between hunger and sexual appetite, this fascination with Transylvanian cuisine aptly presages Jonathan's experience at Castle Dracula.

[19] Daniel Farson asserts that Stoker was "absorbed in the vampirism in 'Carmilla'" (23). The influence of Le Fanu's text is evident in the deleted first chapter of *Dracula*, indicated by a sepulcher Harker comes across in an abandoned, overgrown graveyard as he seeks Castle Dracula. The tombstone belongs to "Countess Dolingen of Gratz, In Styria, Sought and Found Death" and there is "seemingly driven through the solid marble…a great iron spike or stake" (qtd. in Farson 142-3). This episode also features in "Dracula's Guest," a short story likely adapted from *Dracula*'s original opening chapter and included in the posthumously published *Dracula's Guest and Other Weird Stories*.

[20] In the "dream," Laura is visited by a young lady with "a solemn but very pretty face" (Le Fanu 210). The young lady, "kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet" of Laura's bed, comforts the whimpering Laura, who perceives herself abandoned and neglected.

> She caressed me with her hands, [Laura recounts], and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a

the memory until, thirteen years later, she again comes face-to-face with the young woman she recollects from her "dream." This meeting, which takes place on a moonlit night,[21] when the carriage conveying Carmilla and her "mother" breaks down near the remote and isolated *schloss* shared by Laura and her father in the Styrian countryside, echoes a seduction, as Carmilla wonders whether Laura "feel[s] as strangely drawn towards" her as she does to Laura (Le Fanu 222). These intimations of intimacy produce a strange effect on Laura, who confesses, "I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger. I did feel…'drawn towards her,' but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed….she was so beautiful and so indescribably engaging" (Le Fanu 222).

Laura's "ambiguous feeling" is echoed in Jonathan's "uneas[e], some longing and at the same time deadly fear" (Stoker 61) as he observes the fair vampire. One effect of this echo is the suggestion that not only is Jonathan Harker attracted to and aroused by this woman but that he also identifies with her, as his own reaction in the face of her approach mirrors the reaction of the woman whom the blond vampire so much resembles. Here then is one early instance when sexual arousal threatens to dissolve the boundaries of the gendered self, to complicate gendered (self-) identification. Furthermore, the "intertextual memory," with its evocation of the same-sex desire so prevalent in *Carmilla*, helps make sense of what is potentially arousing in the initial

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> sensation as if two needles ran into my breast, just below my throat, very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed (Le Fanu 210).

As has already been noted of Jonathan's initial assumption that he is "dreaming" when he first notices the three vampire women at Castle Dracula, Laura's belief that her first encounter with Carmilla took place in a dream is suggestive of the sexual arousal the vampire has inspired, as well as of the effort to deny such an interpretation or at least disavow responsibility for her body's reaction.

It bears noting too that Jonathan's apparently instinctual recourse to "dreaming" as an explanation for his experience is perhaps another instance of "an intertextual memory" inspired by *Carmilla*.

[21] That Carmilla arrives on a moonlit night is striking, given the moon's well-established connection to menstruation—the words "menstruation" and "moon" are etymologically related—and menstruation's linkage to sexual excitation in women. The timing of Carmilla's reappearance in Laura's life thus further underlines the underlying nature of Laura's response to her visitor.

configuration of the encounter between Jonathan and the three women. Spear notes that the vampire women's easy, "even 'coquettish'" (188), interaction with each other ought to be read as "the displacement of two [common] male fantasies," namely "the fantasies of 'the omni-available woman' and of lesbian sex" (184).[22] But the notion of an "omni-available woman," defined as "a woman who is always aroused, always ready, always easy to please; a woman …who is essentially interchangeable with other women, and who may be treated with 'condescension, contempt, or even sadism'" (Spear 185), is also suggestive in its reminder that such a fantasy that "effectively obliterates sexual distinction by projecting a male form of sexuality onto women" (Spear 185). That is, the "omni-available woman" mirrors, in her desires, the desires of the man who fantasizes about her (Spear 185), blurring the distinction between male and female sexuality, at least in so far as sexuality is the provenance of fantasy. What the encounter between Jonathan Harker and the vampire women reveals then is the ever-lurking possibility of collapsing rigid categories. The moment of Jonathan's vague recognition of the fair vampire thus presages much of what will follow in the ensuing scene.

Continuing his description of the women, Jonathan notes that "[a]ll three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips" (Stoker 61). This focus on the women's mouths is notable, at once an amusingly unconscious pre-recognition/fantasy on Jonathan's part of what these women intend to do to him and a portentous

[22] The women share an easy intimacy: "They whispered together, and they all three laughed—such a silvery, musical laugh, but as hard as though the sound never could have come through the softness of human lips. It was like the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand" (61). The women's laughter overwhelms Jonathan's senses, beckoning and simultaneously warning, like the deadly, irresistible call of the Sirens. This corroborates Spear's observation, based on the work of the psychiatrist Ethel Person, that the "omni-available woman" "represent[s] both male desires and fear" (184). Moreover, the emphasis on sound is significant here, for the laughter's ability to penetrate the ear and Jonathan's simultaneous inability to resist its unwelcome qualities anticipate and metaphorize the subsequent depiction of Jonathan's arousal, with its combination of pleasure, passivity, and horror. And, in reversing expected roles, casting the women('s laughter) as penetrating and Jonathan('s ear) as penetrated, the description of the women's interaction with each other suggests, once again, that, in its effects, such interaction potentially disassembles gendered categories and unsettles patterns of expected sexual behavior.

symbol of sexual affect. So potent is the draw of the women's lips, Jonathan must confess to "a wicked desire that [the women] would kiss me with those red lips" (61). The physical intensity of the "wicked desire," made up of "longing" and of "deadly fear," Jonathan realizes in a moment of exquisite and exquisitely painful lucidity, overwhelms the restraints of decorum, of what is due to his fiancé; he acknowledges that articulating and recording this desire might prove painful to Mina, should she ever come across the confession, which, of course, she does. Anyway, even aside from Jonathan's confession, the sexual implications of the lips, perhaps the novel's best-known image, are hard to miss, and much critical ink has been devoted to deciphering the sexual imagery of the vampiric mouth. Viktor Sage's notion that "ruby lips" always evoke the vagina and that "crimson suggests anatomical arousal and the flow of blood to the organs" (31) is perhaps especially relevant here. So too is Christopher Craft's observation regarding the vampire's mouth, with its "promise of red softness" and its delivery, instead, of "a piercing bone." Craft further notes too that, in this, "the vampire mouth fuses and confuses" (218), another reminder of the ways in which the vampire complicates Victorian assumptions about gender and sexual expression; conflating vaginal and penile imagery, the vampiric women's mouths are, simultaneously, yielding and threatening, seemingly available for penetration and yet, we will, along with Jonathan, soon learn, capable of penetrating.

The description of the women's lips as "voluptuous" also bears further consideration. (The descriptor "voluptuous" will recur several times in the course of the novel, consistently applied to female vampires; indeed, a designation of "voluptuousness" is a kind of shorthand for "female vampire" in *Dracula*.) The OED rather innocuously defines "voluptuous" as "of or pertaining to, derived from, resting in, characterized by, gratification of the senses, especially in a refined or luxurious manner; marked by indulgence in sensual pleasures; luxuriously

sensuous." But, "[w]hile the term could perfectly apply to the decadence of *fin-de-siècle* consumerism and pursuit of leisure, 'voluptuous' is also the quintessential word by which… Victorian texts could be identified as pornographic" (Pikula 292). The word "voluptuous," Tanya Pikula observes in "Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Late-Victorian Advertising Tactics: Earnest Men, Virtuous Ladies, and Porn," appeared as part of the titles of nineteenth-century pornographic texts with striking regularity (292); as such, a description of "voluptuous," particularly when applied to an organ like the mouth and connected to a "wicked desire," "clearly gestures towards scripts of sexual arousal" (Pikula 293).

Pikula further connects Jonathan's perception of and interaction with the three vampire women to pornography, positing that the women's "active…sexuality" as they collaborate in their "seduction" of Jonathan and make their advance on his prone body "itself connotes pornography" (293). The scene unfolds with a kind of pornographic logic, as Jonathan articulates an "agony of delightful anticipation," which he believes will find relief with the approach of the "fair girl[, who] advance[s] and ben[ds] over [him] till [he] could feel the movement of her breath upon [him]" (Stoker 61). That breath—"sweet...in one sense, honey-sweet...but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness" (61)—recalls "the intolerable, tingling sweetness" of the earlier laughter and anticipates the girl's "deliberate voluptuousness which [is] both thrilling and repulsive" (61). The women's voluptuousness—a marker of their sexual availability—draws Jonathan to them, even as their laughter and the fair vampire's breath evocatively warn of the consequences of succumbing to the attraction: like the laughter, which permeates Jonathan's ears, and like the breath, which suffuses his nostrils, their teeth will bore into his throat, will infiltrate the boundaries of his body and initiate a monstrous transformation. All three—laughter, breath, voluptuousness—thus anticipate a change intolerable to the self,

even as the body unwittingly, and perhaps unwillingly, accommodates and admits. Christopher Craft explains "the competing imperatives of 'wicked desire' and 'deadly fear'" by noting that, for Jonathan, the erotic fulfillment he awaits

> entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes, which constrained the mobility of sexual desires and varieties of genital behavior by according to the more active male the right and responsibility of vigorous appetite, while requiring the more passive female to "suffer and be still." (217)

Although the clear-cut gender distinctions Craft relies on to make his argument have since been called into question by scholars who argue that the Victorians were more flexible in practice, if not in theory, *Dracula* is nonetheless notable for its repeated insistence on the voracious appetites, sexual and otherwise, of women, who threaten to transform the more socially-acceptable male desire into a destructive force, which will consume the men themselves and fundamentally realign the social order. Or, to put this as Pikula does, Jonathan's account of the fair vampire's approach and his resulting anxious but "delightful anticipation," "works to arouse and in turn generate anxiety about the destabilization of gender roles" (294). That is, in the scene of the planned attack on Jonathan, by the three vampire women, in Castle Dracula, Stoker's novel has it both ways: even as it works to arouse by invoking language[23] and imagery associated with pornography, it expresses ambivalence, even outright alarm, at the implications and consequences of becoming aroused.

The ambivalence is the product, at least in part, of the ways in which the narrative simultaneously faithfully observes the pornographic script and subverts the reader's expectations

[23] Pikula makes particular note of *Dracula*'s use of "words that end in 'y' or feature sibilants, such as 'dreamy,' 'intoxicated,' 'trance,' 'ecstatic,' 'insensibility,' 'languorous,' and 'ecstasy.'" Such words, she argues, "caress with their sounds and suggest increasing sensual abandon," while "crisper ones such as 'quick and panting' and 'beating heart' add a pulsating dimension to the descriptions" (294).

for it. Pikula quotes from *The Lustful Turk, or Lascivious Scenes from a Harem*,[24] singling out a scene in which "an inexperienced and initially resistant maiden is paralyzed by passion" (Pikula 293):

> "Never, oh never shall I forget the delicious transports that followed the stiff insertion; and then, ha me!, by what thrilling degrees did he, by his luxurious movements, fiery kisses, and strange touches of his hand to the most crimson parts of my body, reduce, reduce me to a voluptuous state of insensibility…until the nature of the pleasure and ravishment became so overpowering, that unable longer to support the excitement I so luxuriously felt, I fainted in his arms with pleasure." (qtd. in Pikula 293)

Similarly, in *Fanny Greeley*; *or, Confessions of a Free-Love Sister Written by Herself*,[25] the innocent heroine presents her seduction by an older lover by noting that she "had no power to move, a dreamy, intoxicated feeling came over me; my breath came quick and panting through my parted lips: I was as though in a trance" (qtd. in Pikula 293). Consider these descriptions in relation to Jonathan's account of his dream-like state as he awaits the approach of the fair vampire's mouth to his throat in a state of "languorous ecstasy" (Stoker 62). As she descends to Jonathan's throat, and he remains prone and immobile, her teeth come ever nearer his flesh, making penetration seem unavoidable, inevitable.

The divulging of details in the course of the scene proceeds "in a manner that belies an intention to arouse" (Pikula 295), both in the seeming suggestion of fellatio and in Jonathan's uncertainty and apprehension about will take place, enabling, even encouraging, the reader to imagine a much more arousing scene than the one that actually takes place. It may thus be argued that, rather than withhold details out of a sense of reticence, of Victorian propriety, Stoker

[24] Although it first appeared in 1828, anonymously published by John Benjamin Brookes, *The Lustful Turk* was not widely circulated until 1893; that is, the erotic novel's popularity coincides with the composition of Stoker's novel. *Dracula*, in fact, echoes *The Lustful Turk* in ways beyond the pornographic: for one thing, *Turk* is a work of epistolary fiction, presented as a series of letters between Emily Barlow, a young English woman kidnapped by pirates and conscripted into a harem, and her friend Sylvia Carey, who is herself later abducted and also brought into the harem; for another, *Turk* concerns the seduction of English women by a charismatic foreign man.

[25] *Fanny Greeley* first appeared sometime in the 1850s, written by George Thompson and published by Henry S.G. Smith & Co. Subsequently lost, excerpts from the novel appeared in Henry Spencer Ashbee's *Catena Librorum Tacendorum* (1885).

exploits the tropes of Victorian pornography and enlists the reader's imagination in the project of titillation. At the same time, Stoker implicitly indicts the reader for recognizing the "erotic clichés of *Dracula*" (Pikula 298), deploying horror at the very moment when Jonathan (and presumably the reader) is seemingly at the height of arousal.

If, until this point, the narrative has merely gestured at the reversal of roles between Jonathan and the vampire women who mesmerize him and make him seemingly powerless to resist their advances, even as he recognizes—at least in his journal, after the fact—the unseemliness of his "wicked desire," what happens next forcefully clarifies the full stakes of the situation. At the very moment the consummation of Jonathan's "wicked desire" to be kissed by the "red lips" appears to be a foregone conclusion, "another sensation swe[eps] through" (Stoker 62) him, as he becomes aware of the presence of the Count, who furiously intervenes, demanding that the women leave their prey. In the ensuing violence, as Dracula throws the fair woman across the room and orders the departure of all three, Jonathan is overcome entirely, swooning and losing consciousness. Though he claims that the faint stems from fright, its circumstances suggest something more intricate, more nuanced. The sudden appearance of a male figure explicitly signals the dangers Jonathan faces as a direct result of his arousal and the gender-role reversal that arousal has so far suggested.[26] Thrust into the position of the innocent but about-to-be-fallen maiden, Jonathan is exposed to seemingly inevitable penetration, first by the fair vampire's teeth—a stand in for the erect penis—and then by the Count himself—whose unexpected but undeniable sudden presence makes the symbol of the teeth all too literal.

[26] "Dracula's intercession here has two obvious effects: by interrupting the scene of penetration, it suspends and disperses throughout the text the desire maximized at the brink of penetration, and it [poses] the threat of a more direct libidinous embrace between Dracula and Harker" (Craft 219). As Craft's first observation begins to suggest, arousal—"desire maximized at the brink of penetration"—is one of the novel's key concerns.

Seemingly incapable of moving, of resisting or even voicing an attempt to resist, Jonathan finds himself vulnerable to the sexual advances of another man.[27]

These advances have been hinted at earlier, when the Count approaches Jonathan as the latter is shaving and lays his hand on Jonathan's shoulder. Dracula's unexpected advent and his proximity, which increasingly causes Jonathan uneasiness, result in Jonathan cutting himself slightly with his shaving razor: "[T]he cut had bled a little, and the blood was trickling over my chin….When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat" (Stoker 50).[28] The crucifix Jonathan has around his neck ensures Dracula's immediate withdrawal, thereby averting what just a moment prior seemed to portend Jonathan's inescapable doom after having whetted Dracula's appetite with his blood. Jonathan escapes the close call, but he realizes, as a result of the incident, that he is Dracula's "prisoner" (51), rather than his guest. This nightmarish imprisonment evokes the fate of Oscar Wilde and so insinuates homoeroticism, or even full-blown homosexual desire.

"Desire is 'wicked' in *Dracula*…because to desire something or, more often, someone is to be caught off guard and forced into the role of a passive recipient of pleasurable sensations," Srjan Smajic argues (49). To give in to that desire, to become the "passive recipient," is to lose subjectivity, to lose the ability to control oneself: Smajic likens this giving in to exposing "the marionette strings" he identifies with "urges, impulses, and drives" in the novel (49). In becoming aroused, Jonathan risks becoming an object to be acted upon. In other words, he becomes less a man capable of choosing his own goals, of executing his proper and fitting duties, and more the unwitting victim of circumstance. It will take Jonathan the rest of the novel to

[27] Interestingly, Pikula sees Jonathan's "limited capacity to express himself" as belying his "focus on the sensory overload of his excited body" (296).
[28] Marjorie Howes identifies "the suddenness and intensity of the [shaving] incident" with "a spontaneous eruption of desire" (108).

recover, to restore his wounded manhood and reenter the bourgeois Victorian social order, and much of the success of this restoration relies on a cultivated forgetting of his half-rape, half-seduction (McCrea 261) at Castle Dracula. But the scene, which remains indelible for the reader, is also significant in setting up the narrative's attempt to manage arousal, particularly its horrifying capacity for enacting gender reversals.

The Vampire as Aphrodisiac: (2) Lucy and Her Suitors

The next scene I want to take up in this consideration of *Dracula*'s representation of sexual affect appears to reverse the dynamics discussed above: it depicts the nascent gang of vampire hunters—the mentor-leader Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, Lucy's fiancé Arthur Holmwood, and his friends, and former romantic rivals, Dr. John Seward and Quincey Morris—encountering the Un-Dead Lucy Westenra in a graveyard. Like the women Jonathan Harker comes across at Castle Dracula, Lucy is a vampiric seductress, a notably "voluptuous" predator who appeals to men even as she endangers their lives and their souls. However, unlike the three Brides of Dracula, Lucy is outnumbered by the men, whose ability to work together further gives them an advantage over her. Nonetheless, the intensity and brutality of the violence the men must unleash in order to neutralize Lucy's threat—a threat, as will shortly be shown, connected to arousal, to the sexual response Lucy demands, and might receive, from them—suggest the vampire's potency, as well as the men's implicit perception of what is at stake in their interaction with Lucy.

The scene illustrates, forcefully and graphically, what *Dracula* apparently envisions as the only effective means for managing and controlling sexual affect. Having established beyond doubt that Lucy is now a vampire, Van Helsing and Seward enlist the other two men in their quest to reclaim and salvage Lucy's soul. The gang's ensuing confrontation with Lucy reveals

her as changed almost beyond recognition, her "sweetness…turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and [her] purity to voluptuous wantonness" (218). The much-altered Lucy[29] immediately evokes the female inhabitants of Castle Dracula, who are described in strikingly similar language, suggesting that the threat she now poses is not unlike the danger the vampire women had earlier posed for Jonathan Harker.[30] More significantly, it is the *change* in Lucy's appearance that ultimately crystallizes the precise nature of that threat: the once pure, pristine Lucy is now swollen with blood so visibly as to be rendered voluptuous, her former whiteness turned to the exaggerated, obscene crimson of her blood-stained mouth. This femme fatale in the graveyard recalls nothing so much as an engorged, aroused phallus, as if she were taunting the men with their disbelief at her appearance by embodying the effect she intends to have on them. Referring to Le Fanu's predatory vampire Carmilla, William Veeder describes her as "phallically swelling" (205) as she prepares to attack an unwitting victim. Carmilla appears to prey exclusively on young women, and Veeder's description perhaps speaks to this aspect of Le Fanu's novella, as women assume conventionally male sexual roles in relation to other women. Nonetheless, the phallicism of the female vampire is certainly notable and instructive in the context of *Dracula*, a narrative highly invested in presenting all erotically-tinged interactions as

[29] Craft traces the origins of Lucy's change to Dracula's initial "authorizing kiss [which] triggers the release of the latent power and *excites* in [her] a sexuality so mobile, so aggressive, that it thoroughly disrupts…compartmental conception[s] of gender. Kissed into a sudden sexuality, Lucy grows 'voluptuous' (a word used to describe her only during the vampiric process), her lips redden, and she kisses with a new interest." (228; emphasis mine).

[30] As has already been noted, Lucy specifically resembles the blond vampire who is the focal point of Jonathan Harker's attentions during his encounter with the vampire women at Castle Dracula. Though the vampire-hunting men of the graveyard scene have no way of knowing and recognizing this curious resemblance, it is notable in establishing a continuity of sorts between the vampiric women, as well as serving as a textual echo, a thread binding the narrative—composed as it is of so many varied parts—together. Because both women are key to the generation of arousal, it may perhaps be said that arousal itself—as it finds expression in the vampiric monster—connects the several elements of the text.

Moreover—as has also already been discussed—Lucy, like the fair vampire, resembles Le Fanu's Laura, further connecting *Dracula* to *Carmilla* and confirming Laura James's sense that, in *Dracula*, "sexuality and textuality become intrinsically conjoined" (93). Like Laura, Lucy stands in for an idealized and imperiled mode of Victorian femininity, and, like Laura, she increasingly assumes vampiric qualities.

heterosexual. The "phallicization" of the female vampires, in the emphasis repeatedly given their voluptuous swollenness, casts this insistence on heterosexuality into doubt.[31]

Further highlighting Lucy's phallic resemblance and its capacity to reverse gendered and sexual conventions is the child she holds to her breast; when the men first glimpse her, she is preparing to penetrate the child's throat in a perverse reversal of maternal nourishment. Denied satisfaction by the appearance of the four men—all of whom she has, in the rules earlier established by Van Helsing, "married" through the blood-transfusions they have provided to her in an attempt to revive her after Dracula's repeated feedings—Lucy turns her attention to the vampire hunters, particularly singling out her fiancé: "Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!" Lucy intones as she advances towards the men, addressing her betrothed "with a languorous, voluptuous grace" (219). To cite Pikula once again, the reiteration of "voluptuous" here in regard to Lucy's address speaks to *Dracula*'s reliance on "scripts of sexual arousal" (Pikula 293) and makes explicit Lucy's goal of sexually stimulating the men. So too does her quasi-hypnotic repetition of "come to me": in his seminal "Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England," *The Other Victorians*, Steven Marcus observes that Victorian pornography made frequent use of "formulaic gesturings" (279). Lucy's stock turns of seductive phrase here thus serve as a mean of titillation both within and without the text, a coded means of alerting the in-the-know reader to the nature of Lucy's invitation.

Moreover, Dr. Seward reports that

[31] In "Heterosexual Horror: *Dracula,* the Closet, and the Marriage Plot," Barry McCrea asserts that "*Dracula*…is a novel about heterosexuality as it is viewed from inside the gay closet" (253). Drawing on scholarship posting that Stoker was a closeted gay man, McCrea sees *Dracula* as a kind of "fantasy", one that "contemplates the excitement and dangers of the heterosexual world, in which the difference between inner desire and social procedure, so clear in the closet, is 'collapsed'" (268).

> [t]here was something diabolically sweet in [Lucy's] tones—something of the tingling of glass when struck—which rang through the brains even of us who heard the words addressed to another. As for Arthur, he seemed under a spell; moving his hands from his face, he opened wide his arms. (219)

The comparison of Lucy's speech to the "tingling of glass" further solidifies Lucy's connection to the female vampires of Castle Dracula and their "silvery, musical laugh" with its impression of "the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand" (61). In this way, Lucy's effect on the gang of vampire hunters is connected to the effect the vampire women have on Jonathan; that is, like the vampire women, Lucy arouses Arthur and his companions. That Jonathan and Seward use such strikingly similar language to describe the impression left by the vampire women with whom they interact also corroborates the impression that *Dracula* relies on "scripts of sexual arousal," as the character differences between the men are effaced by their reliance on the sort of "interchangeable" language Steven Marcus connects to Victorian pornography (279).[32] In discarding the imperatives of character differentiation and development—that is, in disregarding the needs of the novel—in favor of erotic clichés, *Dracula* thus suggests arousal's potential to undermine the basis of the recognizably individual self, as the men's attention to and focus on the strikingly uniform sexual responses of their bodies destabilizes their ability to express their individual minds. Just as Jonathan Harker is paralyzed and stupefied by the sensuous appeal of the fair vampire, so too is the aroused Arthur made immobile, seemingly spell-bound as Lucy approaches. It is only Van Helsing's intervention—the determined brandishing of a crucifix[33]—that halts Lucy's progress; at the sight of the cross, she

[32] Van Helsing too will reference "those so sweet tingling tones that Jonathan said were of the intolerable sweetness of the water glasses" (Stoker 359) in relation to the three vampire women when he pursues them at Castle Dracula. Although his invocation of the description explicitly makes use of Jonathan's terms—gleaned by Van Helsing from Jonathan's diary—this third use of the phrase once again reinforces the titillation associated with the vampire women.

[33] The use of the crucifix—a distinctly Catholic symbol—in an ostensibly Protestant context has raised a number of questions. It is not my purpose here to investigate the specific implications of the crucifix in Stoker's novel. I do however want to note my sense that the cross serves, at this particular juncture, as a means of interjecting a social

desists in her advance and instead turns upon the men a face reminiscent of Medusa: "the eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell-fire, the brows were wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa's snakes" (219). The seductive, arousing woman is thus revealed as a monster.[34] This monster, the men are now firmly convinced, must be defeated, both for her own good and theirs.

Having temporarily retreated following their first encounter with Lucy's vampiric incarnation, the men return on the subsequent evening. Lifting the lid off the coffin containing Lucy's (un-)dead body, the men again observe "the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth…the whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a mockery of Lucy's sweet purity" (221). Lucy's carnality, the undeniable facts of her body—its contours swollen, its fleshiness paradoxically exaggerated—causes the men significant discomfort. This discomfort likely derives from the association the Victorians tended to make between female corpulence and female sexuality. As Anna Krugovoy Silver has noted in her study of anorexia within the context of Victorian culture, "a woman's light weight suggest[ed] her spiritual, rather than carnal, nature" (44). Indeed, "Lucy's fatness [as she appears to be recovering from her illness following the Van Helsing-administered blood transfusions] indicates her exaggerated, carnivorous

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institution, one linked to normative sexuality and repression, between the bodies of the citizens and the stimuli that would arouse them.

[34] In "Medusa's Head," Freud argues that the sight of Medusa's decapitated head fills the male observer with dread, a horror that is intimately connected to the parallel the unconscious mind immediately draws between beheading and castration. The spectator, arrested by the gaze of Medusa, turns to stone, a stiffening Freud immediately likens to male sexual excitation. But the rigid man—in essence, an erection—has an apotropaic effect, according to Freud's reading, signaling male power over the woman. In effect, the power wielded by Medusa's head is undermined by its ability to generate, or, perhaps more exactly, to recreate arousal, for in arousing her male victim, she begins to reveal her own lack, her own always already-castrated body. Though the snakes that replace Medusa's hair suggest the penis, they ultimately amount to a female attempt to possess the phallus, to guard against the lack she inevitably experiences, particularly in the face of the actual phallus. Freud's interpretation of the Medusa story is notable in the context of the men's battle against Lucy and other female vampires—and, more pertinently, the female vampires' engorged voluptuousness, their tumescent manifestation—for it suggests that the only defense the male vampire hunters have in the face of arousal—an arousal that is coterminous with the overwhelming fear of castration—is to, in turn, threaten the monstrous woman with castration, to remind her that she is, despite her most awful efforts, finally lacking where they are equipped.

sexuality" (Silver 123), and the men—that is, Van Helsing and Seward—who treat her as she vacillates between decline and health, "are not at all pleased with Lucy's 'abnormal' recovery, as one would expect: instead, they grow more and more suspicious of her increasingly uncontrolled appetite" (Domínguez-Rué 303).

The Un-Dead Lucy is thus the worst-case realization of the men's worst-case fears about women's capacious appetites. Female hunger becomes not only "a sign of transgressive desire" (Silver 118), but also of a suggestion that women are not, finally the pure property of men but rather, as Bram Dijkstra memorably puts it, "polyandrous predator[s], indiscriminately lusting after man's seminal essence" (334). Lucy, faced with three proposals of marriage, notoriously wonders "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her…?" (Stoker 80), offering a prophetic glimpse of the "polyandrous predator" she will soon become. That all three of her suitors, plus Van Helsing, give her their blood in a quasi-marital consummation serves as another bit of foreshadowing, as Lucy's "indiscriminate lust[…] after man's…essence" grows ever more potent. This literal bloodlust is of course a sign and symptom of Lucy's apparently inevitable transformation into a vampire, but it also hints at a key fear animating *Dracula*: if "the perfect woman is the one who submits her physical appetites…to her will" (Silver 27), then Stoker's novel seems to be arguing that no "perfect," or even good, woman exists. The terrible, horrifying irony with which the men of *Dracula* are forced to come face-to-face is that the women whose virtues and souls they are so determined to protect are potentially insatiable monsters, just one "authorizing kiss" from Dracula (Craft 228) away from the assumption of their predatory state.

The men's concern for Lucy's soul, and the need to deliver that soul to eternal rest, to rid Lucy's body of the evil now inhabiting it, officially animates the Crew of Light's actions. But the

efficient brutality of what follows suggests that it is not only Lucy's salvation that matters. The treatment of Lucy's body, particularly the insistence that it must be not only staked but also beheaded, cannot help but evoke (at least in Freudian terms) castration. The scene of the staking, with its celebration of male camaraderie and its attendant aggression against the female body, seen as "saturated with sexuality" (Foucault 104), effectively demonstrates the imperative, in *Dracula*, on restoring conventional gender relations and upholding heteronormative formations through violent intervention.[35]

Their first sighting of the sexually aggressive, vampiric Lucy has well-prepared the men for their return engagement: their next arrival at Lucy's grave is triumphantly marked by the presence of a "round wooden stake, some two and a half or three inches thick and about three feet long. One end of it was hardened by charring in the fire, and was sharpened to a fine point. With this stake came a heavy hammer" (Stoker 221). The vampire hunters find the appearance of the stake immediately and undeniably reassuring. Dr. Seward, whose diary documents the incident, maintains that he finds the preparations for the stake's imminent use "*stimulating* and bracing" (221; emphasis mine), while Arthur and Quincey remain courageous and silent throughout. (Van Helsing goes through the proceedings with his typical "methodicalness.") Armed with an almost comically exaggerated symbol of masculine potency, the men seem to find within themselves the necessary will and volition to rouse them to battle: "once [Arthur's] mind was set on action his hands never trembled nor even quivered" (223). While the remaining men recite the prayer for the dead, Arthur places the point of the stake over Lucy's heart,

[35] In *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle: Popular British Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914*, Nicholas Daly maintains that "it is only when the female body has been infected by vampirism that it can constitute a proper object of expert treatment: where there is no crisis, there can be no intervention" (51). This of course echoes Foucault's by now well-known insights about the 19th Century hysterization of women's bodies and the subsequent medical intervention and interrogation the identification of such pathology required. It is certainly not insignificant in this context that two of the vampire hunters—Van Helsing and Seward, who in fact direct the staking of Lucy's body—are doctors. Lucy's staking thus dramatizes a historical reality in terms of the 19th Century view and treatment of women's bodies and the policing of their behaviors.

repeatedly striking with all his might. Though the "Thing in the coffin" (223) resists, writhing and gnashing its pointed teeth, such resistance is futile, for Arthur does not waver, driven by the prayers of the men who surround him, and who are in turn heartened by the sight of Arthur's determination.[36]

This male bonding enables the defeat of the vampiric woman, whose body finally lies still, her teeth "ceas[ing] to champ" (223). Returned to her form as the unquestionably feminine "Lucy we had seen her in her life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity" (224), the woman who now lies before the vampire hunters is no longer the monster who threatens to seduce and penetrate her male victims, no more the voluptuous wanton predator; instead, she is once again the virtuous, virginal Victorian woman posing no threat to male potency. As Christopher Craft observes, "Dracula's daughters"—Craft's preferred term for the women Jonathan encounters at Castle Dracula, but one presumably applicable to all women vamped by the Count—offer "a feminine form but a masculine penetration" (219). In staking Lucy, the vampire hunters violently restore her properly feminine form by severing it from any penetrative abilities. In the process, they also reestablish their own masculinity, having "saved" the

[36] It is of course also possible to view the staking of Lucy as an oblique depiction of intercourse. Such a reading would suggest that the men are able to overcome their arousal through a symbolic orgasm. In "The Mechanism of Detumescence," Havelock Ellis's describes the connection of detumescence and tumescence:

> Detumescence is normally linked to tumescence. Tumescence is the piling on of the fuel; detumescence is the leaping out of the devouring flame whence is lighted the torch of life to be handed on from generation to generation. The whole process is double yet single; it is exactly analogous to that by which a pile is driven into the earth by the raising and the letting go of a heavy weight which falls on the head of the pile. In tumescence the organism is slowly wound up and force accumulated; in the act of detumescence the accumulated force is let go and by its liberation the sperm-bearing instrument is driven home.

The tumescent phallus is thus envisioned as an accumulation of force, which can only be unleashed in the form of sperm.

Consistent with the terms of Ellis's explication, "in the act of detumescence the accumulated force is let go and by its liberation the sperm-bearing instrument is driven home."

Also perhaps significant here is Ellis's insistence that "the hymen is…an anatomical expression of that admiration of force which marks the female in her choice of a mate." That Arthur, Lucy's intended, is explicitly chosen to forcefully penetrate the barriers of Lucy's body, and that he is successful in the endeavor, as well as celebrated in that success, accords with this interpretation.

victimized damsel through the masculine imperatives of community, medico-science and sexual dominance, now conjoined in a spectacularly graphic manner.

But even at this moment of ostensible triumph, Van Helsing and Seward are determined to leave nothing to chance. The two doctors leave the point of the stake in the body of the now really-Dead Lucy, cutting off her head and filling the mouth with garlic. The beheading, which may at first seem unnecessarily excessive, again conjures castration, suggesting that the no-longer-voluptuous Lucy ceases to pose a phallic threat, as she has done earlier. The addition of garlic, which, in folklore serves to ward off and protect against the vampire, is also significant, serving in the manner of an amulet against arousal, for the garlic may "possibly…disguise the sexual odors [Lucy's]…excited body exudes" (Signorotti 623). Citing Alain Corbin's work in *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, Elizabeth Signorotti maintains that cloaking the odor of the body is "a way of denying the sexual role of the sense of smell" (623). In masking Lucy's scent, Van Helsing is determined to purify her body of its horrifying capacity to arouse.[37]

In the meantime,

> [t]he hammer fell from Arthur's hand. He reeled and would have fallen had [the other men] not caught him. The great drops of sweat sprang out on his forehead, and his breath came in broken gasps. It had indeed been an awful strain on him; and had he not been forced to his task by more than human considerations he could never have gone through with it. (Stoker 223)

It is only once his attention is drawn to Lucy's coffin, where she now peacefully lies, that Arthur is able to rise, "for he had been seated on the ground," and look, "and then a glad, strange light broke over his face and dispelled altogether the gloom of horror that lay upon it" (223). Exhausted, nearly undone by the struggle, Arthur is reassured by the sight of the unmonstered

[37] Also drawing on Alain Corbin's work, Leila S. May observes that "there is an unmistakable resemblance between the description of prostitutes in…Corbin's article, 'Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France," and the account of vampires in Stoker's novel: primarily, a common olfactory denominator" (17).

woman. Domínguez-Rué points out that "[l]ooking at Lucy's coffin, the vampire-hunters complacently reflect that she makes a 'very beautiful corpse'" (304). Lucy is finally made "good" by death, her own over-stimulated appetites now safely arrested by the finality of her demise, her capacity to stimulate the appetites of the men safely contained by the defacement of her body. If, as Dijkstra argues, the threat of female sexuality, metaphorically rendered as insatiable hunger, triggers male anxieties about the indiscriminate nature of women's desires, then the vampire hunters have, in their staking and beheading of Lucy, diffused not only her own haphazard "lusting after man's seminal essence" (Dijkstra 334), but also their own potential to become indiscriminate in the face of sexual excitement. That is, these men, who have all lent their blood—a fluid viewed in *Dracula* as the symbolic equivalent of semen—to Lucy are able to definitively renounce an attachment to her and replace it with a recommitment to their masculine affiliations, an affirmation of their status as men in a community of fellow men.[38]

The Vampire as Aphrodisiac: (3) Mina and Dracula

If the previous two scenes ostensibly focus on the male experience of anxiety pertaining to sexual arousal, the final scene I want to consider appears to take up the implications of female arousal. In Mina's curious interaction with the Count, we see several crosscurrents come together in what is arguably the novel's most sensational incident: as described by Seward, the men find Mina Harker kneeling near the edge of the marital bed, her husband Jonathan, "his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor" (Stoker 283), lying nearby. The lack of initial descriptive details in Seward's narration, Tanya Pikula astutely observes, and particularly the

[38] Jason Sellers argues, in "Dracula's Band of the Hand: Suppressed Male Onanism," that the vampire hunters who stake Lucy, along with Jonathan Harker, may be viewed in terms of their "urgent male need for autosexual satisfaction," terming the men the "Band of the Hand" (149). *Dracula,* Sellers speculates,

> embodies the (male) guilt of Victorian female sexual repression. Female sexuality is at once ignited and extinguished, and what better way to observe the effect than through an exclusively male entity that is as dangerous as the monster it creates? Solely autosexual experience—covert, anxious, and (especially) even incomplete—may be the price the members [of the Band] pay for a century of sexist tyranny. (158)

initial absence "of references to blood and biting" might be understood as a coded signal to "the reader that Jonathan was aroused by watching Mina perform oral sex on Dracula" (295). Eventually, however, Seward records that Dracula holds Mina's hands while gripping her by the back of the neck and forcing her face to his chest, and that Mina's "white nightdress [is] smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickle[s] down the [Count's] bare breast" (Stoker 283). Seward's early reticence thus implicates the reader in the novel's representation of arousal, while working to exculpate the men from responsibility for their voyeuristic excitement as they come to Mina's rescue. Brandishing their crucifixes, the vampire hunters cause the Count to retreat, breaking his spell on Mina, who immediately begins to scream, producing a sound "so wild, so ear-piercing, so despairing" (Stoker 283).[39]

This scream is in marked contrast to Mina's concession that, though she "would have screamed out, only...[she] was paralysed…too bewildered to do or say anything"; much to Mina's later dismay, she does not "want to hinder" Dracula as he feeds on her.[40] Mina ascribes this to "a part of the horrible curse…when his touch is on his victim" (287), implicitly gesturing

[39] Although Mina's scream is unlike the "tingling" laughter of the female vampires, both sounds, scream and laughter alike, are presented as "intolerable," and both are linked to scenes in which arousal is simultaneously inevitable and unwelcome. The piercing quality of the sounds, in particular, conveys their potent mixture of unavoidability and revulsion.

[40] In his study of sexual desire, Roger Scruton repeatedly insists that true arousal is predicated on a desire for a particular person. Should the lover learn himself deceived about who has been arousing him, Scruton contends, "[h]is pleasure…instantly turns to disgust: it suffers, indeed, the same kind of reversal as is suffered by an emotion, when the belief upon which it is founded is shown to be false" (21). Thus, "the discovery that these fingers, while they are the fingers of my lover, are not alertly engaged in soliciting my attention—for he is asleep, say, unconscious, or dead—will extinguish my pleasure, even if it does not change the character of my sensations" (Scruton 21). Although I depart from Scruton's sense of arousal as always and necessarily intentionally directed—indeed, my reading of *Dracula* suggests that arousal is involuntary and inconvenient, standing contrary to conscious desires and aims—I find the correspondences between his assertions about the disgust that follows the recognition that one has been mistaken about the source of arousal and the bedroom scene too striking to ignore.

Moreover, Scruton suggests that "truly arousing conduct is that in which the awakening of the woman seduced is made to seem like a mutual self-discovery, so that *she* seems, in her eyes, to be responsible for what he feels" (25; emphasis in the original). This formulation is helpful in comprehending Mina's sense of responsibility, despite her avowals of being hypnotized by Dracula's touch, as well as the mutuality of the interaction between Mina and the Count. Helpful too is Scruton's assertion that "[i]n effect, the consciousness of observation destroys the intentionality of the act" (31). Thus, the presence of the vampire hunters forces Mina's disavowal of the arousal she has just felt.

at the sexual excitation she feels at Dracula's touch, his "authorizing kiss" (Craft 228). To adapt Christopher Craft's reading of Dracula's unseen visits to Lucy, Mina's contact with the Count "*excites* in [her] a sexuality so mobile, so aggressive, that it thoroughly disrupts…compartmental conception[s] of gender" (228; the emphasis is mine) and breaks the standards of Victorian propriety. More generally, the representation of Mina's arousal as a daze or trance, produced through Dracula's mesmeric talents, evokes the hypnotic state, often conflated in the medical discourse of the late nineteenth century with anesthesia. In *Man and Woman*, a study contemporaneous with *Dracula*—it first appeared in an English translation in 1894—Havelock Ellis explicitly links hypnosis and anesthesia, seeing both as belonging to that group of "psychic phenomena which are characterized by a decreased control of the higher nervous centres, and increased activity of the lower centres" (299). Ellis further notes that "chloroform, ether, nitrous oxide, cocaine, and possibly other anaesthetics, possess the property of exciting the sexual emotions. Women are especially liable to these erotic hallucinations during anaesthesia" (313).[41]

Notably, Laura, the vampire-stricken heroine of LeFanu's *Carmilla*, also experiences the eroticized attacks by the vampire Carmilla as a kind of trance: though she wishes to "extricate" herself from Carmilla's embraces, she finds that her "energies seemed to fail" her. Carmilla's "murmured words sounded like a lullaby in [Laura's] ear," soothing Laura's "resistance into a trance, from which [she] only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms" (LeFanu 225). Recalling her relationship with Carmilla some ten years after in a letter to Dr. Heselius, an expert in psychopathology with an abiding interest in the supernatural and occult, Laura confesses that she did not much care for her companion when "these mysterious moods" struck her: "I experienced," Laura remembers, "a strange tumultuous *excitement* that was pleasurable

[41] In her study of 19th Century gynecology in England, Ornella Moscucci notes that anesthesia was associated with sexual fantasies and was thought to produce displays of sexual excitation (127).

but was ever and anon mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust." She further notes that she "had no distinct thoughts about" Carmilla during such moments but soon become aware "of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence." Acknowledging the paradox, Laura nonetheless maintains that she "can make no other attempt to explain the feeling" (225; emphasis mine). Like Mina, Laura is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by her vampiric paramour, and she can only understand her self-contradictory feelings through the metaphor of the trance, a state that conceals her arousal all the while undeniably hinting at it. Like Mina, she feels "the narcotic of an unsuspected influence…acting upon [her,] and [her] perceptions…benumbed" (LeFanu 241).

The "horrible curse" Mina identifies with Dracula, which she explicitly links to "his touch," is evocative of his ability to sexually stimulate her. And her excitement, in turn, stimulates the men who are sworn to protect her. Of the men, Jason Sellers observes that their sexuality is essentially autoerotic, driven by the substitution of autosexual gratification for heterosexual consummation in the face of Dracula's threat to possess "[y]our girls that you all love" (Stoker 304). (Indeed, the bedroom interaction between Mina and Dracula, haplessly observed by her impotent husband, offers ready proof that the girls beloved by the vampire hunters "are [Dracula's] already.") There are, Sellers observes, five men—Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, Jonathan, Quincy Morris, and Arthur Holmswood—who form the Crew of Light, redubbed for the critic's purposes the "Band of the Hand"; these five men represent the five digits of the masturbating hand (157). Mina—both part and not part of the Band—is necessary for the successful realization of the fantasy that enables satisfaction by the hand:

> Self-stimulation with the hand where the thumb and index finger touch involves the forming of an approximated vagina, a self-made orifice where sexual intercourse is acted out. The men at least need to see their efforts as natural and successful coitus, and so require the presence of a woman as they join to form the pleasure Hand. (Sellers 157)

The encounter between Mina and Dracula reveals, then, not only the Count's potential to "authorize" female sexuality but also its capacity to stimulate, if in a roundabout manner, the "good" men whose fight against him becomes a battle against their own urges and impulses, their own sexual tendencies and turn-ons.

But though the scene of the bedroom encounter continues to mine anxieties accrued around same-sex male desire, it also homes in on the horrifying possibilities implicit in female arousal and contemplates the likelihood that, just as *Dracula*'s men are implicated in the cross-currents of desire for other men, so too are *Dracula*'s women drawn to other women. In Christopher Craft's reading of the encounter between Mina and the Count, the open wound on Dracula's chest from which Mina drinks stands in for "a bleeding vagina" (234). Judith Halberstam meanwhile argues that Dracula's body is "noticeably feminized, wildly fertile, and seductively perverse" (89), noting too that the image of Mina drinking blood from his chest "feminizes Dracula in relation to his sexuality" (101). (That Mina appears to suckle on Dracula's chest also potentially gestures, as a number of critics have observed, at an image of perverse maternity, with Dracula as a mother figure, engaged in the act of breastfeeding.) Because the interaction between Mina and the Count marks the single moment in the text when Mina's levelheadedness, rationality, and practicality give way to a reckless passion, the moment suggests that Mina's staid and reliable "goodness" is a mere front, a cover for subversive desires unleashed by Dracula. Mina's purity, her apparent lack of sexual feeling, is shown to be the result of a disinterest in men, itself the result of a latent attraction to women. When she is sheltered by and within a community of men, with no female companionship that might tempt her as she is helplessly tempted by Dracula's wounded chest, Mina is devoted to the cause of the Crew of Light; when she is exposed to the tantalizing stimulus of Dracula's quasi-vaginal

wound, his feminized body, she ceases to be "good," becoming instead a sexually frenzied liability to the very mission of the vampire hunters.[42]

At once penetrated and penetrating— she is both fed on by the Count and feeds on him— the "suddenly sexual" (to adapt Phyllis Roth's formulation) Mina's acquiescence to Dracula, is not only in marked contrast to her stalwart behavior and her concern with being useful throughout the rest of Stoker's narrative, it also promises Mina the possibility of heretofore unimaginable power, presaged by Mina's feeding on Dracula, the only incident of such an exchange in the course of the novel. Though in this instance, it is the Count who uses his own fingernail to create a bleeding gash on his chest, from which Mina then drinks, the exchange inevitably conjures the eventuality of Mina's penetration of men with her own vampiric teeth, itself a symbolic rendition of Mina's potential power over the fate of the very men who presently control her. Mina's uprightness and steadiness, what Van Helsing terms her "man's brain— a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and a woman's heart" (240), afford her a privileged position in the world of *Dracula*, implicitly contrasting her to the vampire women Jonathan encounters at Castle Dracula and to Lucy, whose flighty flirtations make her more obviously attractive but also more susceptible to Dracula's temptation, and explicitly positioning her as *the* "good woman" of the novel. In her submission to Dracula, Mina hints at her capacity to be stimulated and, if the consequences of this capitulation are taken into account, her capacity

[42] Pikula observes that "active female sexuality…connotes pornography" (293), potentially linking the bedroom scene to the scene that unfolds at Castle Dracula as Jonathan is set upon by the three vampire women, whose active (blood) lust for the young solicitor evokes pornographic tropes. Moreover, as has been observed earlier, the vampire women appear to share a "coquettish" (Spear 188) intimacy with each other, suggesting still another link to the bedroom scene, as an active female sexuality evokes same-sex desire among women. Indeed, as Jennifer Travis demonstrates in "Clits in Court: *Salome*, Sodomy, and the Lesbian 'Sadist,'" the Victorians subscribed to the notion that any awareness of sexual matters, as well as the ability to pick up on sexual connotations, as Mina ostensibly does in pronouncing herself "Unclean, unclean!" (Stoker 285) following her encounter with the Count, was evidence of lesbianism (Travis 151). (In the May 1918 criminal libel trial of Noel Pemberton-Billing, who had deemed Maud Allan a perverse, sadistic lesbian for her willingness to play the titular role in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, Billing suggested that Allan's understanding of the accusations he leveled against her were ample proof of both her sadism and her lesbianism. The Billing trial, as well as Travis's reading and contextualization of it, is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.)

to be less than good. To put this another way, Mina's interaction with Dracula suggests that her "man's brain…and woman's heart" are at the mercy of her sexual instincts, a mere stimulant away from collapsing and leaving in their stead an overwhelming sexual excitement.[43]

The bedroom scene is also notable for just how much blood is visibly spilled. Though vampiric feeding—and therefore narratives about vampires—involves blood by definition, this particular encounter between vampire and human is unusual within the novel for its graphic depiction of blood, depictions absent elsewhere, when the exchange of blood is thwarted at the last minute, as in Jonathan's encounter with the vampire women and with the Count himself, or else when the exchange is transformed into a medical procedure, as when Lucy's suitors donate their blood to her. Even Dracula's attacks on Lucy are represented chastely: Mina finds only "two little red points like pin-pricks" (Stoker 112) on her friend's throat after Lucy has been sleepwalking and concludes that they must be the result of nothing more insidious than a shawl-pinning accident. Contrast such tame descriptions with the "ghastly…pallor" of Mina's face, "accentuated by the blood which smeared her lips and cheeks and chin; from her throat trickled a thin stream of blood" (283). Dracula's "foul, awful, sneering mouth" is described, upon coming away from Mina's throat, as "drip[ping] with fresh blood" (288). Dracula opens a vein in his

[43] A recent study has found that "sexual engagement temporarily reduces the disgust-eliciting properties of particular stimuli or that sexual engagement might weaken the hesitation to actually approach these stimuli" (Borg and DeJong). The study's authors have noted that, though "[s]aliva, sweat, semen and body odours are among the strongest disgust elicitors," such fluids and smells are not repulsive during sexual stimulation. The study involved ninety healthy women who were

> randomly allocated to one of three groups: the sexual arousal, the non-sexual positive arousal, or the neutral control group. Film clips were used to elicit the relevant mood state. Participants engaged in 16 behavioural tasks, involving sex related (e.g., lubricate the vibrator) and non-sex related (e.g., take a sip of juice with a large insect in the cup) stimuli, to measure the impact of sexual arousal on feelings of disgust and actual avoidance behaviour.

The results showed that "[t]he sexual arousal group rated the sex-related stimuli as less disgusting compared to the other groups," a finding the authors take to signify that the relationship between sexual arousal and disgust in women "goes beyond subjective report by affecting the actual approach to disgusting stimuli."

breast, from which "the blood began to spurt" (288), and Mina drinks from the open wound, lest she suffocate in the refusal to swallow.

This remarkable attention to blood suggestively evokes female arousal, deploying a link between menstruation and sexual excitability about which many Victorians were deeply apprehensive.[44] Nineteenth-century science saw the menstruating woman as dangerously oversexed, akin to an animal "in heat."[45] Thus, the image of a woman covered in blood as a result of an erotically charged encounter is likely to implicate her as dangerously aroused and even pathologically desirous. Indeed, Mina's situation bears remarkable similarities to a case recorded by the sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his 1886 study of human sexual behavior *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Special Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*. Krafft-Ebing makes note of

> [a] married man [who] presented himself with numerous scars of cuts on his arms. He told their origin as follows: When he wished to approach his wife, who was young and somewhat "nervous," he first had to make a cut in his arm. The she would suck the wound, and during that act become violently excited sexually (87).

Krafft-Ebing explicitly connects the case to Balkan vampire legends, but his primary interest in the case touches on the rare and disconcerting display of "sadism" in a woman; he remarks that "in the first place, sadism, in which the need of subjugation of the opposite sex forms a constituent element, in accordance with its nature, represents a pathological intensification of the

[44] In "Clitoredectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain," Ornella Moscucci notes that menstruation was frequently linked to sexual excitation in women, and that both—menstruation and arousal—were in turn connected to "a wide variety of mental disorders" (74). Indeed, Marie Mulvey-Roberts has argued that "Stoker's attention to the relationship between women and blood is a surrogate for menstrual taboo, which is also eroticized haemofetishism. At the same time, it is a reinforcement of the Victorian conservative medical view that menstruation should be morbidified" (78). Although Mulvey-Roberts's sense that *Dracula*'s vampires are finally a metaphor for menstruation is perhaps too reductive, her exploration of the novel in terms of its participation in the Victorian discourse about the problem presented by menstruation is nonetheless useful.

[45] Elaine and English Showalter quote the Victorian progressive George Drysdale, who campaigned for birth control among other social reforms, on the subject of menstruation: "Menstruation in woman corresponds exactly with the period of heat in female animals, and differs only in the unessential particular, that in woman there is an external sanguineous discharge" (qtd. in Showalter and Showalter 84).

masculine sexual character" (87). Thus, *Dracula*'s vision of female arousal, as it is rendered through Mina in the bedroom scene, is multi-valent, even queer, at once strictly "feminine" in its connection to the essentially female experience of menstruation, and strictly "masculine" in its invocation of sexual sadism. Where male arousal threatens to turn otherwise strong and virtuous men passive and less-than-properly-manly, female arousal menaces with its potential to transform otherwise "good" women into ambiguously-sexed monsters, bloodthirsty, sadistic, simultaneously yielding and aggressing.

In this, *Dracula* dramatizes the emphatic warnings issued by the Victorian medico-sexual discourse about the dangers of "overexcitation," the insistence that female arousal might collapse into outright insanity: nymphomania was construed as a form of madness brought on by excessive sexual excitement. A woman in the throes of overexcitation was further understood to be prone to criminal behavior. In the work of the Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, whose studies helped shape fin-de-siècle anxieties about degeneration and criminality, the aroused woman emerges as an unmatched social menace:

> …if morbid excitation of the psychic centers happens to awaken her bad qualities, leading her to seek relief in wrongdoing, if pity and maternal feeling are lacking, and if one adds to that impulses deriving from intense eroticism, fairly well developed muscular strengths and a superior intelligence for planning and executing harmful acts, it is obvious that the inoffensive semi-criminaloid woman can be transformed into a born criminal woman more fearful than any criminal male (Lombroso qtd. in Cryle and Downing 4).

The very bloodiness of the encounter in the bedroom may be read as hinting at a crime scene, insisting on Mina's criminal proclivities. Here, the aroused woman is again made doubly suspect: she is a sexual predator, capable of villainy, of evil, of spreading mayhem and destruction and infecting the social order.

Our Vampires, Ourselves[46]

Mina is of course "saved" from her darker impulses, and Dracula and his vampire women are defeated. The novel's conclusion finds the Crew of Light settled into domesticity: Arthur and Seward are both married, and Mina and Jonathan have a son, whose "bundle of names links all [their] little band of men together" (Stoker 368). Having accomplished their task, the vampire hunters now glory in their lives of heteronormative propriety. And yet, Jonathan Harker informs the reader in a concluding NOTE, they are compelled to return to Transylvania, to revisit the site of their final battle with the Count (and, for Jonathan, the site of his first encounter with Dracula). That "old ground[,] which was, and is…so full of vivid and terrible memories" (368) nonetheless draws the Crew back, beckons like a Siren's call. Still, seven years after the events recounted by the compiled narrative, Jonathan assures us, "[i]t was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths. Every trace of all that had been was blotted out" (368). Jonathan's comforting suggestion that the terrible history of the men's pursuit of the monster culminates in a kind of clean slate echoes the implicit reassurance that so too is the history of horrifying arousal rewritten by marriage and childbearing. But, as John Paul Riquelme astutely points out in his deconstruction of *Dracula*, that history is not so easily undone: Dracula's blood runs through Mina's veins and perhaps the veins of her child, and the sexual response, with its uncontrollable urgency, its demanding insistence, its mesmeric powers, remains a haunting motif subtly playing alongside the happy concluding music.

Anyone may become a vampire. The possibility animates *Dracula*, gives it its frisson of fear. The same is true of arousal, which preys on even the most worthy of men and women and makes monsters of them. The sexual response is insidious precisely because it is instinctive, and

[46] This subsection's title borrows from Nina Auerbach's book of the same name.

it threatens to expose the underpinnings of Victorian assumptions—the very assumptions that are constitutive of Victorian morality, its official discourse about the self and about sexuality—as constructed, as unnatural, and, finally, as ineffectual against the tide of desires that may well unmake or at least undermine an established social order. It is hardly accidental that the development of sexology as a discipline, the increasing move to locate the foundations of the identity in sexuality, coincides with a concerted move to police sexuality—and its attendant expression in the self. *Dracula* suggests that the sexual response is, ultimately, outside of and beyond control, both personal and social. Like the vampire, whose appetite may well undo the monster and the victim, sexual arousal is construed as unraveling and implicating, for good men and their good women are only a stimulant away from the complete collapse of their goodness, their obedience, their very selves.

EPILOGUE:
The Case for Stimulating Texts

The goal of this project has been a modest one: it does not seek to reinvent the proverbial wheel, so much as to better examine one of its spokes. In concluding this dissertation, I want to very briefly clarify my intentions, as well as outline some possible implications and applications of the possibilities I have sketched here.

To briefly summarize, I have argued throughout that, rather than focus on the totalizing conception of desire, a single, monolithic formation, it would be profitable to home in on desire's component parts, the process of which it is constituted. In particular, I have here considered representations of arousal in several well-known works of mid- and late-Victorian fiction. These works have been chosen, in part, because they are often read in terms of desire; as such, they provide useful case studies for how our vision of canonical works might be enriched through a consideration of arousal.

In "Love at First Sight: The Velocity of Victorian Heterosexuality," Christopher Matthews argues that male heterosexuality is constructed, in the mid-nineteenth century, through the positing of the phenomenon of "love at first sight." Matthews understands the trope of "love at first sight" "as a performance of simultaneously instinctual and moral passion" (426). The male experience of "spontaneous love,"[1] and, more specifically, the Victorian discourse about that experience, "provide one provocative perspective on heterosexuality as a nuanced and evolving phenomenon: a multidimensional positioning, a collection of feelings, gestures, duties, and transgressions that produces narratives and subjectivities" (Matthews 427). Furthermore,

[1] Matthews notes that, though in the late-twentieth, early-twenty-first centuries the phenomenon of love at first sight "as romantic trope, Hollywood staple, biochemical wonder" is distinctly part and parcel of what might be termed "feminine epistemology" (425). However, in tracing the genealogy of that phenomenon, Matthews finds that, in its Victorian incarnation, "love at first sight…emerged as a question of *masculine* epistemology and sexuality" (Matthews 425), figured "as a specifically male experience of desire for women" (425-426).

love at first sight transforms, Matthews suggests, "public space into libidinal space" (427), and the discourse that surrounds it "represents a delicious opportunity for male fantasy and apostrophe, for erotic bartering and submission" (Matthews 434). Arousal, I have argued, works in a similar way: figured as bodily affect, an involuntary response, it is the just barely concealed subject of Victorian discourse. Entering the cultural stream, it is venerated and valorized as the mark of "heart-rightness," as in the case of the resonantly named hero of *The Woman in White*, even as it is the subject of hand-wringing anxiety at the close of the century, the realist monster at the heart of a narrative about fantastical monsters.

"A feeling is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled," Eric Shouse explains. Shouse understands "feeling" as "personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling their feelings," but I submit that, in so far as the Victorian discourse on the subject of sexuality is concerned, sensations—in this case, of sexual arousal—are actually labeled by culture. An integral aspect of this project then has been tracing that labeling.

Culture is not, in this reading, uniform. This explains the variety of depictions and valences we encounter: the tacit endorsement of arousal in the sensation novel; the martyred glory of genuine excitation in *Salomé*; the anxiety surrounding the body's response to sexual stimulation in *Dracula*. Of course some of that difference is attributable to the fairly lengthy period of time separating the sensation novel, the subject of the second chapter, and Wilde's play and Stoker's novel, the subjects of the third and fourth chapters respectively. One possible way of continuing the work begun here is to take stock of some of the cultural productions in the intervening years.

The works I have focused on here do share significant connections, moments of striking intertextuality, which is, as it happens, a reccurring motif in my argument about the representation of arousal. To name just a few ties, both trivial and meaningful: Oscar Wilde's nickname as an Oxford undergraduate was Fosco, the villain of Collins's *The Woman in White* (Sweet xvi); Stoker was an admirer of Collins's novel, and many contemporaneous reviewers of *Dracula* noted similarities between the two texts, which notably share the device of a narrative compiled from eyewitness accounts (Bollen and Ingelbien 403), and *Dracula* has long been understood as shaped by Wilde's trials; and Wilde's Salomé has been interpreted as a *femme fatale* in the mode of Lady Audley (though I ultimately dispute this characterization of both women). All of the works discussed here were, in their own way, scandalous, which is to say, they all deal with scandal, with disruptions in expected social formations. These scandalous disruptions are, I have argued, linked to arousal, though, as I have already noted, the valence of that arousal differs across the texts. All are invested in ambiguity, multivalence, queerness, though these qualities are largely subtextual. I have tried to excavate them here in order to examine them and contextualize them as part of the discourse of sexuality during the mid- and late-Victorian period.

This project ends with *Dracula*, published in 1897. That novel's anxiety about sexual arousal is, in some ways, an essentially modernist one, an anticipation of an era marked by the sense that man is buffeted by forces—war, history, modernity itself—beyond his control. (These forces, it turns out, compromise the experience of sexual arousal: that iconic modernist artifact, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as I have noted elsewhere in this dissertation, is, in part, a poem about the failure of arousal.) The work of sexology at the close of the nineteenth century would,

at the start of the twentieth, be taken up by Sigmund Freud, whose exploration of arousal might also make for a productive continuation of this project.

This dissertation is entitled "Stimulating Texts," and I want to conclude by briefly commenting on that title. The "stimulating" is of course an adjective modifying "texts," a description pointing to my specific concern in exploring these works. *Stimulating Texts* is interested in the aesthetic and political implications of how sexual stimulation and the subsequent response to that stimulation are represented within Victorian texts; it also considers how these texts potentially stimulate their readers. But "stimulating" ought also be understood in the manner of a verb, an action performed in reference to the texts themselves. That is, this project has aimed to "stimulate" the reading of these well-trod texts. Looking at Victorian cultural productions through the lens of a shifted emphasis has the potential to invigorate our response to them, to—if a final pun might be pardoned—arouse us from a complacent reading into reading and responding anew.

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