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# "Superbly Sterile:" Queer Reproduction in Victorian Literature and Culture

Mary Timothy Wilson

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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“SUPERBLY STERILE:” QUEER REPRODUCTION IN VICTORIAN  
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

The Department of English

by  
Mary Timothy Wilson  
B.S., Eastern Michigan University, 2003  
M.A., Eastern Michigan University, 2007  
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## ABSTRACT

Examining a broad range of texts, “‘Superbly Sterile:’ Queer Reproduction in Victorian Literature and Culture,” argues that Thomas Hardy’s final naturalist novels, popular nineteenth-century vampire narratives, and the fiction of Oscar Wilde queered the bildungsroman (or novel of development) through characters who failed or refused to progress along sexual and maturational timelines. Where these texts’ critics have tended to read them as cautionary tales about homosexuality or predatory female sexuality, this dissertation contends that they also presented alternate forms of kinship and reproduction.

They do so through the use of recursive, inverted, or otherwise backward relationships to time. Where Victorian sexology and psychology consistently pathologized temporal backwardness, “‘Superbly Sterile:’ Queer Reproduction in Victorian Literature and Culture” argues that these texts recuperate non-linear, recursive temporality in order to consider the ways in which it might sustain new modes of kinship and reproduction. These include the consanguineous-sexual bonds of vampire fiction; the historical kinship espoused in Hardy’s novels; and art’s status as a lasting product of homoerotic attraction in Wilde’s fiction. Along with queer theory, this project also places these narratives in the context of Victorian sexology, situating them within the work of Havelock Ellis, Carl Vogt, Otto Weininger, Max Nordau and other theorists who described both queer and female sexuality in terms of temporal recursiveness, arguing that both Hardy’s and Wilde’s fiction adapts the terms of this rhetoric in order to resist its often pathologizing and limiting effects. The chapter on Oscar Wilde’s fiction relies on the concept of *jouissance*, a shattering disruption of the dichotomies separating pleasure from pain, self from other, and life from death, constituting a transformative experience that defines queer, death-driven sexuality, in order to contend that in Wilde’s fiction privileges a death-driven male-homoerotic form of aesthetic reproduction over the more banal, bodily kinship

and procreative bonds offered by women. The third chapter focuses on maternal vampires, arguing that these characters espouse a form of single-gender kinship, one which blurs the lines between consanguineous and sexual relationships, and which offers eternal life through a perverse return to the pathologized female body.

# 1. INTRODUCTION: QUEER REPRODUCTION IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. He loved to stroll through the gaunt cold picture-gallery of his country-house and look at the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins. Here was Philip Herbert, described by Francis Osborne, in his “Memoires on the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James,” as one who was “caressed by the court for his handsome face, which kept him not long company.” Was it young Herbert’s life that he sometimes led? Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body til it had reached his own? Was it some dim sense of that ruined grace that had made him so suddenly, and utterly without cause, give utterance in Basil Hallward’s studio, to that mad prayer which had so changed his life? (*The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* 122)

This passage from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* contains, in brief, this novel’s philosophy of subjectivity, kinship, and reproduction. Dorian begins by pondering the falsity of models of selfhood construing identity as stable, unchanging, and singular, and goes on to suggest that identity is, instead, manifold. He cannot be limited to one life, one type of sensation, or even one physical form. This is partly an issue of inheritance, as this “multiform,” chameleonic quality is ascribed to “legacies of passion,” inherited dispositions or desires. It is at this moment, as these inherited passions are introduced, that the tone turns dark: The legacies are “strange,” Dorian’s flesh “tainted ... monstrous” and sick. He identifies the source of this polluting illness in ancestral portraits of relatives who are deceased, but whose blood flows in his own body, so that portraiture becomes the link through which consanguinity is established or confirmed. Consanguinity is not, however, the only presumable biological link between Dorian and his ancestor, as Dorian also considers their relationship one of pathological contagion, via a creeping “germ” which moves from “body to body.” Finally, he wonders if this germ is responsible for the “mad prayer” which helps create his mystical relationship to the portrait which Basil Hallward paints of him.

Though they seem to defy the laws of nature and psychology, Dorian's musings directly reflect and respond to the preoccupations, anxieties, and tenets of late-Victorian culture. As heir to a form of heredity-as-contagion which determines his desires, Dorian enacts the quandary of evolutionary devolution and its intellectual offshoot, degeneracy theory: Both these discourses centered on genetic heritage as pathology, with ancestors' past faults bodily haunting their progeny in the form of illnesses, telltale morphology, and a failure to desire or participate in heterosexuality. Kinship and heritage, then, were increasingly construed, not as a foundation for linear progress or development, but as a ceaseless pull back into the past.

“‘Superbly Sterile:’ Queer Reproduction in Victorian Literature and Culture” considers *The Picture of Dorian Gray* along with other narratives of failed or backward development, arguing that these texts allow their authors to rethink the nature of reproduction and kinship. This is accomplished, in part, by their intervention in medical and social discourses (including those surrounding hysteria, degeneration, and homosexuality) in order to imagine the possibilities of sexual and reproductive identities which are oriented toward the past, driven by or resulting in death. While many of these narratives seem to uncritically echo these discourses, pathologizing queer failure and nonreproductive sexuality, this dissertation argues that texts also generate possibilities of queer reproduction and kinship. In matrilineal vampire narratives, in Oscar Wilde's fiction, and in Thomas Hardy's last two novels, the dead or absent child and the correlative figure of the deadly or abject mother are deployed, not simply to mark the impossible or forbidden nature of queer or otherwise illicit sexuality, but also to generate the possibilities of queer reproduction, or of a sexuality that is constructive or productive not despite, but because of, its backward relationship to time.

This project examines narratives spanning the nineteenth century, including vampire narratives from Coleridge's 1800 “Christabel” through 1897's *The Blood of the Vampire*, the fin-

*de-siècle* fiction of Oscar Wilde, and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (published in 1892 and 1894, respectively). These texts are linked by key thematic concerns, including temporal displacement or anachronism, reverse colonialism, and forms of kinship and reproduction which are premised on child death or adult suicide rather than heterosexual reproductivity. Each of these thematic threads is instrumental to these narratives' evocation of reproductive identities which eschew the futuristic trajectory of narrative progress, whether those narratives are of sexual development or colonial development and imperial progress. This refusal of linear temporal progress is reflected in narratives which reverse or frustrate the *bildungsroman*'s developmental timeline, or which depict a reversal of the process by which a civilized England wrought progress upon purportedly primitive colonized cultures.

These narratives of temporal reversion and backwardness reflect, in order to critique, strains of medical discourse which portrayed both homosexuality and female sexuality as rooted in the past: Where degeneracy theorists including Max Nordau understood homosexuality and other nonreproductive forms of sexuality as instances of devolution, the discourse of hysteria was revived and popularized in the wake of the post-Darwinian belief that women marked the transition from animality to fully evolved humanity, as embodied by men (Hammack 886). This pathologizing of both homosexuality and female sexuality as undeveloped or temporally backward was compounded by a similar understanding of colonial or non-white sexuality: Native subjects were portrayed as both primitive and foreign, an anachronism in opposition to the full evolution of British males (Anolik 40-41).

Because the conjuncture of temporal backwardness and sexual queerness is a facet not only of Victorian literary and sexological writing, but also of recent queer theory, I have relied on the work of Lee Edelman, Jose Muñoz, Kathryn Bond Stockton, Elizabeth Freeman, and other theorists who have been exploring the connections between temporality and queerness. Despite

their various areas of focus, ranging from queer anti-futurity to queer futurity to the queer child, each of these theorists conceives of queer sexuality as bearing an alternative, nonlinear, or, as Bond refers to it, a “sideways,” relationship to time, whether the individual time of aging or the intergenerational time of reproduction. For purposes of this project, I have defined queerness according to this understanding of temporal and developmental nonlinearity.

Where critical consensus and my own analysis understand vampire texts as portraying same-sex desire, and the same is true of the narratives addressed by my chapter on Wilde, I have understood Hardy’s novels as queer texts because they depict sexual and reproductive identities which refuse the futuristic trajectory of heteronormative reproductivity. These novels espouse sexualities (including celibacies) which are oriented toward, and hampered by, ancestral pasts rather than progressing toward a reproductive future. At the same time, ironically, this failure to progress is depicted as futuristic: Little Father Time and Sue Bridehead are regarded as of-the-moment and as avatars of the future, by their respective narratives and by contemporary and recent critics. This anachronistic refusal of the developmental timelines governing sexual development places *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* in conversation with the more overtly queer narratives of Wilde, Le Fanu, Coleridge, and Marryat.

This dissertation’s understanding of queerness seeks to address temporality’s role in constructing and defining sexual and reproductive identity. This perspective has usually been overlooked in favor of definitions of literary queerness which emphasize depictions of same-sex desire or genital homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> As Jonathan Goldberg and Medhavi Menon have suggested, a broader and more useful understanding of queerness does “not necessarily refer to homosexuality at all,” but instead identifies a challenge to “the strictures of knowability itself, whether those consist of an insistence on teleological sequence or textual transparency” (1609).

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Kahan has also argued that queerness is too often defined on the basis of genital sexuality.

This desire for teleological sequence is frustrated by the temporal nonlinearity manifested at the narrative level in texts like *Jude the Obscure* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. These novels revise and thwart the forward trajectory of the *bildungsroman*, as well as the sexual and reproductive lives of characters whose erotic desires and choices propel them backward in time, or toward death, rejecting what Edelman refers to as reproductive futurism. At times, these characters and relationships are queer in the direct sense of same-sex desire, as in the vampire narratives “Christabel,” *Carmilla*, and *The Blood of the Vampire*, and in Wilde’s fiction. As applied to Wilde’s writing and to Hardy’s novels, this term refers to an orientation to time and to sexuality which refuses both heterosexual reproductivity and its futuristic arc. However, this is not always, or only, a refusal of reproductive futurism or progress. Viewed through the lens of Goldberg’s and Menon’s “homohistory,” it becomes apparent that queerness is also associated with narrative opacity, as these texts repeatedly refuse the narrative rewards promised by an approach to history as “the discourse of answers” (1609). If these texts’ characters defy teleological, linear models of sexual development, the texts themselves manifest that in their flouting of the *bildungsroman*’s plot structure, replacing its passage to adulthood and culmination in marriage with youthful death. This refusal of development and its rewards also emerges, in narratives like “Christabel,” in narrative lapses which occlude the homosexual encounters which are nevertheless widely understood to occur in both texts.

Building on the homohistorical approach advocated by Goldberg and Menon, this dissertation takes an expansive approach to queerness in order to more fully explore Victorian literary texts’ deployment of temporal recursion as a mode of resistance to reproductive futurism. This approach is “invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences while expanding the possibilities of the nonhetero, with all its connotations of ... anachronism” (1608). One aspect of this anachronism is the willingness to see the sameness in historical moments and

sexual identities, rather than constructing the past as alterity. In so doing, this approach avoids the tendency, identified by David Halperin, of “current work in the history of sexuality ... to be poised in its emphasis between the two poles of identity and difference” (105).

Halperin’s comments occur in the context of his influential *How to Do the History of Sexuality*, which attempts to address this tension between identity and difference by following “the disintegration of our own concepts as we trace them backward in time [as] the start of an inquiry into the alterity of the past” in the service of “a historical critique of the category of homosexuality” (107, 109). This disintegration and incoherence lead Halperin to proclaim that “there is no such thing as a history of male homosexuality,” or at least that homosexuality as it is now understood is an “effect of historical overlay and accretion” (109).<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this construction of the past as alterity, and compartmentalizing separation of “traditions of homosexual discourse ... from one another,” this dissertation’s scope and methodology deploy a broad understanding of queerness, recognizing these texts’ sameness and continuity through their deployment of anachronistic characters, narratives, and kinship (108). This means, for instance, reading the late-Romantic “Christabel” through the nationalist concerns which emerged with greater emphasis and clarity in mid-Victorian and *fin-de-siècle* vampire narratives. This approach understands queerness not simply as a sexual orientation, but as a temporal orientation, in order to unlock, and to draw connections between, literary texts which respond to, and reshape, their culture’s increasingly prevalent, interdisciplinary construction of sexuality as a temporal mode.

This inclusion of texts which have not ordinarily been construed as queer risks a potential slip into a variation on what Eve Sedgwick has classified as paranoid reading, a “hermeneutics of suspicion” which reduces reading to a search for clues of queerness, a possibility which

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<sup>2</sup> As Susan Lanser points out in *The Sexuality of History: Modernity and the Sapphic*, 1565-1830, Halperin seems to transition seamlessly from the concept of homosexuality to that of male homosexuality; the book’s title is *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, but the chapter from which this is quoted is titled “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality.” Though this is of course a question of scope and emphasis, it also reflects an overrepresentation of male homosexuality in queer studies.

Goldberg and Menon acknowledge in their caution against “false closure” (“Queering History” 1609, *Touching Feeling* 124). Both paranoid reading and the false closure in which it results are dependent on the strategy of close reading, a detail-oriented quest which adheres to a surface-depth model in which homosexual desire is both obscured and represented by symbols which must be decoded, and which unwittingly reproduces the dichotomous logic which it seeks to analyze.

These reading strategies are countered by Susan Lanser’s approach of “large reading,” which forgoes the decoding of texts for queer content or figures in favor of “read[ing] history through, and as contingent on sexuality rather than reading sexuality through, and as contingent on, history,” in recognition of sexuality’s shaping of history, and of a broad range of interests and concerns (20, 3). More specifically, Lanser suggests that the perceived “illogic” or “impossibility” of lesbian pairings in the Renaissance era allowed aesthetic portrayals of such relationships to offer a “distancing displacement” from issues “of statecraft and slavery, colonialism and class” (4).<sup>3</sup> Instead of reading vampire texts, Hardy’s novels, and Wilde’s writing as distinct in their various presentations of lesbian sexuality, male homosexuality, and anti-futuristic celibacy or suicidality, this dissertation places these texts in dialogue, tracing the ways in which they disrupt future-driven progress narratives underwriting sexual and national development through their respective evocations of temporally recursive modes of kinship and reproduction. This includes narratives in which suicide, infanticide, and child death are understood as viable, even preferable alternatives to the tyranny of heredity, which visits ancestral wrongs, vengeance, and desires on characters who end their own and others’ lives

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<sup>3</sup> Lanser is responding to David Halperin’s *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. Halperin focuses on male homosexuality, suggesting an historical approach which follows the concept of homosexuality backward through time, learning from its incoherence and disintegration (107). Lanser seeks to redress “a gender imbalance in queer studies,” and reverses Halperin’s stated approach, which reads sexuality through historical changes to that identity, by reading history through sexuality (4). Goldberg and Menon have criticized Halperin’s work for wrongfully assuming that homosexuality is a century-old identity which can, paradoxically, be followed backward beyond that point (1613).

rather than subject themselves or their future children to such circumstances. It also include narratives in which characters formed kinship or reproductive bonds which obviate consanguineous and legal bonds in favor of shared anachronism, a sense that these characters are either or both ahead of their time and new permutations of old identities. These narratives re-envision the relationships between past, present, and future; between the metropole and the colony; and between blood relations and strangers, complicating the simplistic dichotomies that underwrite each of these related concepts. In so doing, they intervene in, and write against the grain of, social, medical, and literary progress narratives.

In dialogue with Lanser's use of large reading to illuminate the sociopolitical valences of Renaissance lesbianism, this project reads lesbian attachments in Victorian texts as secondary to, and in the service of, these texts' engagement with colonial and postcolonial complications of racial and national identity, as well as their endeavours to reverse or frustrate the concepts of temporal progression which underwrote those identities. These texts incorporate medical discourse's portrayal of femininity as alterity, using their female vampire-antagonists to generate scenarios in which female-only consanguineous kinship excludes both male and British blood, or in which the mixed blood of slaves and their owners threatens to infiltrate England in a reversal of colonial infiltration.<sup>4</sup> This methodological strategy of reading sexuality as an index, allegory, or conduit for broader questions of identity and categorization also allows this project to read Hardy's novels in dialogue with vampire fiction's use of temporally recursive sexuality. Where vampire narratives portray a form of kinship which harks backward toward its own ancestry rather than forward, toward the formation of new heterosexual bonds, Hardy's novels track characters whose reproductive lives are similarly predetermined by their ancestry, who fail to form the marital or childbearing relationships which might wrench them into futurity, and who

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<sup>4</sup> My analysis of reverse colonization in vampire fiction relies on Stephen Arata's introduction of this concept in "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization."

instead enact or advocate an anti-futuristic approach to reproductivity. This dissertation similarly reads Wilde's fiction as advancing a form of anti-futuristic reproduction, obviating the sexual fertility associated in these texts with the female body in favor of an aesthetic mode of reproduction whose practitioners seek their kin among male homosexual forebears.

Repeatedly, the narratives considered in this project turn toward their protagonists' ancestry, biological or figurative, in determining their reproductive futures. This turn toward the past, forgoing a reproductive future in favor of a death-driven return to ancestry, is also portrayed as a return to the primitive and the geographically foreign, reversing the terms of the larger cultural narrative of colonial progress. Though the vampire narratives considered in this project find closure in the banishment of their vampires, my readings of Hardy and Wilde extend this temporal and developmental recursion to the level of narrative, with anti-*bildungsromans* detailing their protagonists' encumbrance by inherited, ancestral burdens before culminating in their youthful demise.<sup>5</sup> Narratives like these, according to Joshua Esty, do "not narrate the passage into adulthood," but instead seem "designed to avoid it" (3). As Esty explains,

in open and sustained violation of the developmental paradigm that seemed to govern nineteenth-century fictional and historical forms, such novels tend to present youthful protagonists who die young, remain suspended in time, eschew vocational and sexual closure, refuse social adjustment, or establish themselves as evergreen souls. (3)

These characters' lives, and the texts which narrate them, refuse the *bildungsroman's* developmental trajectory, its forward temporal thrust from childhood to adulthood, marked by the milestones of courtship, marriage, and the production of heirs. Esty posits this refusal of novelistic closure as a dramatization of the widening gap between narratives of colonial progress and the more complex reality of England's presence in its colonies (5-6). This dissertation intervenes in the conversation begun by Lanser and Esty by arguing that forms of sexuality and kinship which are temporally recursive, death-driven, and otherwise opposed to the

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<sup>5</sup> See Peter Arnds and Frank Giordano for readings of *Jude* as an anti-*bildungsroman*.

heteronormativity of reproductive futurism may serve to dramatize and to interrogate larger cultural narratives of linear temporal progress. These narratives of progress include imperialist discourse, which portrayed colonized nations and cultures as less evolved and more primitive than the British culture which was understood as facilitating their progress. They also include sexological discourse, which harnessed the concept of temporal progress toward the ends of sexual development, pathologizing nonreproductive sexuality as undeveloped, backward, or otherwise as a reversal of the evolutionary process. While Lanser's approach seeks to read history, and particularly the history of nationalism and colonialism, through representations of queer sexuality, and while Esty reads anti-developmental fiction, or variations on the *bildungsroman*, as the narrative effect or counterpart of the uneven temporality wrought by colonialism, this project considers the ways in which the anti-developmental narratives of Hardy, Wilde, and Victorian vampire fiction employ temporally recursive, nonreproductive forms of sexuality and kinship in order to interrogate and unsettle models of cultural and individual progress which centered on linear temporal progression.

### **Temporal Displacement and Reproductive Identity**

Temporal displacement is central to the literary texts considered in this project, responding to and revising the linear progress depicted in the *bildungsroman*. These literary texts incorporate nonlinear temporality at the level of narrative and plot, by skipping over events which occur during the narrative and which affect subsequent plot developments, as well as texts which vary from the temporal and developmental progression inherent to the *bildungsroman*. The narratological anachronisms reflect the status of characters who perceive themselves, or are described, as temporally displaced, characters whose bodies, minds, and desires make them representatives of the past, harbingers of the future, or both, and who manifest these conflicted positions by opting out of heterosexual reproduction.

These narratives sprang from a cultural context which held a firm belief in the past's determinate effect on the present and future. This influence was understood as predicated on sexual reproduction, the mechanism by which the genetic traits of past generations were transferred to the present. Multiple disciplines, including sexology, anthropology, and evolutionary theory, intersected in their focus on the influence of ancestral heritage on individual psychologies, sexualities, and bodies, as well as on the culture at large. As the century progressed, degeneracy theory increasingly framed inheritance as a form of pathological contagion which curbed, limited, and punished its heirs rather than enriching or otherwise strengthening them. This discourse built on the premises of evolutionary theory, including the belief that current life bore traces of past life, as well as an understanding that bodily and behavioral traits varied among nations. Meanwhile, post-Darwinian anthropologists studied what might be termed the evolution of culture, tracing the effects of pagan beliefs and rituals on late-Victorian society.

Each of these disciplines, from their various perspectives, advanced an overall concept of kinship, temporality, and development which understood inheritance and ancestral kinship as a persistent, often destructive, presence within the future. Rather than theorizing the present and future according to a linear progression, with the present building and improving on the past, these discourses understood the contemporary moment as reproducing, intensifying, or otherwise arcing backward toward the past. Inheritance, then, increasingly emerged as a form of tyranny, pathology, or burden, as the uncontrollable events of the past were believed to determine the present and future. This is reflected in the epigraph preceding this introduction, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and in a range of literary texts which thwarted their own narrative progression through their protagonists' failure to progress: If, as theorists like Esty have suggested, the *bildungsroman*'s narrative arc of progress illustrated and ran parallel to narratives of colonial and

cultural progress, these narratives frustrate and reverse that progress. This frustration, reversal and refusal become the grounds for new forms of kinship in these narratives, as characters formed reproductive and kinship bonds based on a recursion to the past, and on a refusal of the heteronormative imperative to perpetuate their ancestral lineage through marriage and childbearing.

The groundwork for this widespread fascination with the notion of the past running concurrently to, and within, the present, was laid by Darwin's theory of evolution. This theory troubled distinctions between the human and animal by placing both on a temporal continuum of progress, so that humans were the end of a developmental process which might reasonably be understood as having, over time, transformed animals into people.<sup>6</sup> Teleological progress, then, was construed as fundamental to human identity, its forward motion separating people from animals, but perpetually threatened by the possibility of devolution or degeneration, processes which, it followed, dehumanized and animalized their subjects.

Evolutionary theory's conflation of primitivity and national foreignness, later to be compounded by sexological theory, was apparent in Darwin's definition of reversion as a natural occurrence "in which a long-lost structure is called into existence," extending this possibility to the human race with his supposition that the Greeks may bear bodily evidence of this process, having caused it by "extreme sensuality" (160). This articulates a belief that evolution's counterpart was devolution, that it could be caused by behavior, and that it was also tied to nationality, as evidenced in his speculation that Greeks had, en masse, brought this process upon their nation through a shared tendency to licentiousness. Havelock Ellis complicated this premise in 1897's *Psychology of Sex*, which agreed that homosexuality was indeed prevalent and accepted in ancient Greece, while simultaneously sneering at each nation's "eager[ness] to

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<sup>6</sup> Also see Darwin's *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animal*, which details animals' manifestations of a broad range of emotions typically ascribed to humans.

associate sexual perversions with some other country than their own,” suggesting that social prohibitions against homosexuality (present in Victorian England and absent in ancient Greece) accounted for its comparative rarity in the former and ubiquity in the latter (4).

Each of these theorists set the stage for Max Nordau’s 1892 *Degeneration*, which gained massive influence with its assertion that sexual decadence, including homosexuality and other non-reproductive modes of erotic expression, were reversing evolutionary gains and leading to physical frailty and enervation, traits that were being passed from one generation to the next (Nordau). By the time of *Degeneration*’s release, a general belief in these premises was so well-established that, as Bram Dijkstra suggests, “Max Nordau merely expressed what was on everybody’s mind,” including that of Cesare Lombroso, the phrenologist who first articulated the ideas later elaborated upon by Nordau (*Idols of Perversity* 212).

The past’s incursion on the present were also a focus of *fin-de-siècle* anthropologists, who were fascinated with cultural atavisms and survivals, obsolete behaviors or cultural practices which persisted in the present. This interest was heightened by the 1890 publication of James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, a study tracing the influence of ancient mythology on contemporary religion. Led by Max Muller, the Covent Garden school of anthropology was also interested in the lingering influence of pagan and pre-modern cultures on present social beliefs and practices (Gallagher 424). This anthropological understanding of the present cultural moment as an accretion of anachronistic moments, with the past continuing to occur through its incorporation in the future, mirrored on a larger scale the scientific perspective introduced by evolutionary theory, but it also revised it: Where Darwinian theory contained the seed of degeneracy theory in its acknowledgment of devolution, both degeneracy theory and anthropological discourse emphasized the present’s recurrence to the past over the sense of teleological development contained in evolutionary theory. This project encompasses literary texts which reflect this

emphasis in their refusal of teleological progress, which, for the *bildungsroman*, consisted of passage to adulthood, marked by marriage and the production of heirs.

New Woman fiction may reasonably be considered an outgrowth of or response to this pressing awareness of temporality's intersection with sexuality and reproduction, though its interest is rather on the impact of social change, with its dismantling of old structures (particularly marriage and compulsory maternity) and call for new archetypes, values, and avocations to replace them. In consonance with the shared preoccupations of each of these discourses (sexological, anthropological, and literary) Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* combines the contemporary and futuristic concerns of the New Woman subgenre with scientific discourse's often-ominous recourse to the past's pernicious effects on the future, or the threat which it constitutes to the future or the new: Where sexologists warned of the pathological, destructive dangers of the past's presence in contemporary bodies, New Woman heroines illustrated the dangers of outmoded cultural practices being imposed on contemporary women. Consequently, as Gail Cunningham has argued, New Woman novels, including Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*, often follow a pattern in which an emancipated woman marries an unsuitable man for reasons which are unclear, then tries to escape before giving herself up to stifling marital domesticity and suffering a breakdown (Cunningham 43). Anti-New Woman discourse entered into this conversation with its own fears about the New Woman's physical unsuitability for, as well as their freedom to opt out of, childbearing (MacPike 372). These social commentators' fears bear the direct, evident influence of post-Darwinist scientific discourse in their shared certainty that sexual identity outside the heterosexual, procreative bonds of marriage was harmful, even fatal, to future generations.

*Jude* enters into this discourse with Sue's informal adoption of Little Father Time, based on Jude's assertion that it does not matter "whether a child is yours by blood or not," because

parenthood is a matter of diffuse, intergenerational responsibility, whereby “[a]ll the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of our time” (280). This construction replaces blood and marriage with temporality as a mode of kinship, suggesting that one’s relationship to time determines or reflects one’s reproductive identity. Hardy adopts this premise of sexological theory (and the cultural criticism which it influenced) in order to imagine, rather than simply stigmatizing or proscribing, a mode of kinship which is free from both consanguinity and marriage, and which is based on a recursive relationship to time. Little Father Time’s suicide and fratricides cement his kinship with Sue based on the shared anti-futurity which leads them both to believe the family’s children would be better off dead. In Hardy’s revision of post-Darwinian sexological, evolutionary, and anthropological discourse, the death-driven recursive temporality which these discourses so often pathologized was reimagined as a mode of resistance to the tyranny of heredity, and as grounds for a new form of kinship to replace the outmoded traditions of mating and family formation which stifle both Little Father Time and the New Woman Sue Bridehead.

The temporal displacement which characterizes both Sue and Little Father Time, and its employment in the evocation of new kinship forms, is also evident in the narratives examined in subsequent chapters on reverse colonialism in vampire narratives, and on aesthetic reproduction in the fiction of Oscar Wilde. In each these narratives, characters seek, and find, kinship in the past: Where Little Father Time is the concentrated product of his ancestors’ folly, revisiting past wrongs on the family’s newest generation, Wilde’s protagonists understand themselves as the newest iteration, the ideological heirs, of their ancient Greek male-homosexual forebears. This recursion to the past is complicated by these narratives’ consistent evocation of inheritance as a pathological disease, as this introduction’s epigraph demonstrates through *Dorian Gray*’s evocation of heredity as a germ passing from body to body. If healthy generation was understood

as a product of progressive development, these narratives portray reproduction and inheritance as a movement toward the future which is simultaneously undone by the past, as the germ of heredity draws the young, healthy, and new backward into an ancestral, primitive past.

### **Reverse Colonialism**

This incursion of the past on the present, with a pathologized primitivity reversing the process of individual and national development, is addressed by a range of fictional texts which used both queer and female sexuality to dramatize colonialist and reverse-colonialist anxieties. In these texts as in the rhetoric to which they respond, femininity, foreignness, and queerness are conflated: In doing so, these narratives incorporated medical, sexological, and social discourses in which female, foreign, and queer sexuality were equated with primitivity, developmental delay, and temporal recursion. All are understood as hostile to or in conflict with reproductive heterosexuality, with its futuristic orientation and parallel narrative of imperial progress. Rather, such characters undermine, reverse, or otherwise imperil such progress by refusing to reproduce, by killing their own or others' children, or by infiltrating (or threatening to infiltrate) British bloodlines with colonial blood. Rather than chronicling these characters' attainment of adulthood and marriage, in the manner of the *bildungsroman*, these narratives depict, and unsatisfactorily resolve, threats to that developmental process.

The nineteenth century saw a British literary revival of European vampire folklore, much of which relied on perverse maternity (including, but not limited to, infanticide), portraying women as more primitive, animalistic, and, by implication, more inherently degenerate and threatening to future generations, than men. Despite the proliferation of vampire narratives from the century's beginning to its end, and the resulting diversity of narrative approaches, including an increasingly self-conscious engagement with degeneration discourse toward the *fin-de-siècle*, these texts return again and again to a similar set of dynamics and concerns: Predatory mothers

(or matrilineal ancestors), often of non-British ancestry, rise from the dead to threaten their adolescent daughters with a potentially fatal consanguineous bond, just as those daughters are on the verge of marriage with an eligible suitor. These proffered bonds offer an exclusively female alternative to the patriarchal conscription of marriage and childbearing, and they also offer an alternative to the continuation of British bloodlines.

These narratives' portrayal of non-marital, lesbian-incestuous consanguinity is premised on medical discourse which portrayed female sexuality and reproductivity as foreign and primitive, traits which were also ascribed to queer and native sexuality. Brain specialist Harry Campbell, for example, wrote that "the mental traits of the child characterize the primitive man," while "women remain throughout life children," while William Stekel similarly described the violent primitivity of homosexuals (Anolik 159, 161). Where the vampire texts examined in this dissertation incorporate the tendency of medical discourse to conflate queer, female, and non-British sexuality as universally temporally inverted, they also rewrite it, building on the premise of pathology in order to construct a new form of reproductivity and family relationship, an alternative to the future of marriage and childbearing which immediately awaits these texts' heroines. This inclusion and reshaping of medical discourse is essential, not only to these narratives', but to Wilde's and Hardy's evocations of temporally recursive kinship: Each portrays heredity as an illness, but also as a seductive alternative to reproductive futurism. In Wilde's texts and in reverse-colonialist vampire narratives, this portrayal is significantly based on the pathologizing and abjection of maternity, a concept rooted in the medical diagnoses of hysteria and imaginationism.<sup>7</sup>

If hysteria was understood to be caused by wandering wombs, roaming the body rather than remaining in their rightful place, the foreign female vampires of these later texts may be

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<sup>7</sup> My analysis of Victorian vampire texts follows the understanding of maternal abjection articulated by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*.

considered extrapolations of this dynamic beyond the body and into the larger world. Whether portrayed through the discourse of hysteria or through colonial and reverse-colonial lenses, the maternal body emerges in these texts as an affront to dichotomous classification, and thus as a vehicle to comment on and to critique the increasingly complex relationships between imperial England and its foreign outposts. In Wilde's texts, this sense of animalistic, excessively physical feminine or maternal embodiment is instrumental to the protagonists' refusal and rejection of mother figures: His characters describe women as "the triumph of matter over mind," and, in *Teleny*, a homosexual character commits suicide in shame and disgust after being coerced into sex by his lover's mother (52). Rather than complicating and blurring national distinctions, then, maternity in Wilde's fiction is rejected in order to solidify queer male identity.<sup>8</sup> In both sets of narratives, however, the female reproductive body is understood as an incursion and threat, either to national identity or to homosocial bonds and homosexual desire.

This sense of the maternal body as an unwanted incursion and threat to identity is harnessed, in *The Blood of the Vampire*, toward a reverse-colonialist narrative. *The Blood of the Vampire* chronicles the life and early death of Harriet Brandt, its title referring to her matrilineal heritage of black (Jamaican) blood as well as both vampiric and animal genetic traits, derived from the bite of a vampire bat. Harriet is conceived through rape, as her European slave-owning father assaults her mother. Able to pass as white, Harriet comes to England as a marriageable young woman, forming multiple romantic alliances which create the possibility of her mixed blood, the product of imperial exploitation, to infiltrate England, the source of that exploitation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This argument diverges from that of Richard Ellman, who has argued that Wilde portrays male homosexuality as a failure to differentiate from one's mother (45). Michael du Plessis has derided this assessment as "a readymade fiction on heterosexism" (146).

<sup>9</sup> This argument coincides with that of Marjorie Zieger, who cites Stephen Arata in her argument for reading *The Blood of the Vampire* as a narrative of reverse colonization, suggesting that vampirism allegorizes the "implosion of the military and commercial British imperial projects" (198). Giselle Anatol suggests that the power dynamic between Harriet's European and Jamaican ancestors is a "vampiric violation" which is reversed by the vampiric Harriet's return to England (286).

Harriet's blood is not, however, mixed only in the racial sense, as her British physician, Dr. Phillips, states that it also contains animal traits.

This apparently fantastic proclamation is in fact rooted in Victorian medical science: As Marie-Helene Huet has argued, the concept of imaginationism (the belief that pregnant women could transfer desires and experiences to their children) originated in a belief that, because women and particularly female sexuality were animalistic, mothers were understood as uniquely capable of "mixing and confounding species" (22). It is evident, then, that the concepts of imaginationism and racial hybridity shared the premise of female, and especially maternal, animality, and of the potential for both to contaminate others.

Harriet's belief in this theory prompts her suicide, intended to prevent further harm to others, including transmission of vampirism to her potential offspring. While many critics, including Florence Hammack, have regarded Dr. Phillips as surrogate for the author's own beliefs and opinions, my own analysis concurs with that of Ardel Thomas, who contends that *The Blood of the Vampire* does not necessarily echo, but rather undermines, Phillips' claim to Western medical authority, as his diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of Harriet are based on Jamaican folklore (Thomas 151). This insight opens up the possibility of a more sympathetic and complex reading of Harriet, and of the text's position toward her. Harriet's suicide, undertaken in response to her diagnosis and an effort to prevent harming others, may be understood as caused by the doctor's charlatanry, or by his reliance on Jamaican folklore rather than Western medical knowledge in treating her. Like the creole Harriet, who passes for white, Dr. Phillips's expertise (at least in her case) is derived from Jamaica, but gains acceptance through a European veneer. Harriet's death, then, may serve as an indictment of either her own multivalent creole status, combining human and animal traits as well as black and white blood, or of the doctor's similarly blended professional persona. In either case, whether the immediate cause is Harriet or Phillips,

death results from the blending of racial and cultural traits, and the nationality (and, consequently, the validity) of medical authority is called into question.

The progress of *The Blood of the Vampire*'s plot, from Harriet's young womanhood through flirtation and, finally, marriage, is marred by her own death, and by her belief that she's inadvertently caused the death of a friend's child through her own vampirism. Harriet's choice of death over the continuation of her marriage, in part to spare her own future offspring, makes it clear that this novel's status as a reverse-colonial narrative is a function of its oppositional relationship to the *bildungsroman*. This becomes evident when viewing the text from the perspective laid out by Esty, who links the novelistic form to nationalist and imperialist narratives. As Esty suggests, "... the classic or nineteenth-century bildungsroman in Europe aligned nationhood and adulthood in order to create a manageable narrative about modernization," so that "adulthood and nationhood served as mutually reinforcing versions of stable identity" (39). This reinforcement was needed, Esty argued, in the face of colonialism's "chaotic and unending (or unnarrateable) set of personal and social transformations" (39).

This perspective regards the *bildungsroman* as as a teleological progress narrative which echoed and supported narratives of colonial progress. In contrast, the anti-*bildungsroman* emerges as an intentionally frustrating recursion of that process, toward the past, towards failure, and towards the blending and dissolution of sexual and national identities. Reverse-colonialist narratives incorporated and reshaped sexology's pathologizing of female, queer, and native sexuality as temporally backward, reflecting this in plots of reproductive recursion and the abdication of heterosexual childbearing. Wilde's narratives reframe homosexuality's perceived temporal backwardness through characters who simply refuse to grow up: Instead, they die young or remain frozen in portraits. In Wilde as in sexological theory, these youthful deaths and

the queer desire which precedes and inspires them are understood as nationally foreign in origin, but nevertheless as present within British bodies.

### **Reverse Temporality and Queer Reproductivity**

As the preceding sections have suggested, the literary texts considered by this dissertation present a range of reproductive and sexual identities which turn backward, toward the past and toward death, in a variation on the linear temporal and sexual development which are the province of the *bildungsroman*. Temporal recursion is consistently associated with a refusal of heterosexual reproductivity, in a manner consistent with sexology's often pathologizing description of homosexuality as a form of devolution or degeneration. Repeatedly, in vampire fiction as well as Hardy's novels and Wilde's fiction, this temporal approach to the pathologizing of non-procreative sexuality is reshaped in such a way as to facilitate reproductive and sexual identities which are portrayed, even privileged, as appropriate to and viable in other places and times.

This reshaping is accomplished, in part, by the perceived centrality of both time and place to the viability and appropriateness of sexual orientations and behaviors. If Hardy's novels suggest their characters' heterodox sexual choices are harbingers of the future, wrongly stifled by outmoded social mores, reverse-colonial vampire narratives build on medical concepts of primitive female sexuality in order to imagine such sexuality as a threat to imperial England. Wilde's fiction enters into this textual conversation by addressing a potentially homophobic niche within the discourse of queer temporal backwardness which informed these texts: specifically, the belief, articulated in Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion*, that, though queerness was an undeveloped, uncivilized form of sexuality, an inverted relationship to gender with a correspondingly backward relationship to time, it was, for this very reason, acceptable in some remote contexts. However, where Ellis advances his argument in order to declare homosexuality

incompatible with British national identity and with the contemporary historical moment, these literary texts deploy the tropes of queer temporal backwardness in order to trouble that distinction. According to *Sexual Inversion*, homosexuality was, in ancient Greece, “perfectly normal,” “respectable,” and consequently there “was no reason whatever” to avoid it (*Sexual Inversion* 59).

This passage marks a potentially homophilic moment in Ellis’s otherwise condemnatory view of queerness, a willingness to acknowledge homosexuality as appropriate or acceptable in other, distant times and places (most specifically ancient Greece). This cultural and temporal relativism provides a useful lens through which to consider the control and flexibility with which Wilde’s queer male characters relate to time: They are able to call upon an ancient Greek tradition of homosexual acceptance, drawing strength from their relationship to the past in a way which illuminates an ambivalence within inversion discourse, with its otherwise pathologizing insistence on queer temporal backwardness. Viewed from the perspective of Wilde’s relationship to this aspect of Ellis’s thought, a similar pattern emerges in vampire narratives and in Hardy’s novels: These narratives are linked by their portrayal of non-procreative sexuality as predicated on a past moment, culture, or way of being. They both affirm the pathologizing implications of this sexological tenet and think beyond them in order to imagine creative and productive bonds which are rooted in or defined by an ancestral or national past.

This passage also demonstrates the extent to which *fin-de-siècle* thought understood sexuality, temporality, and nationality to be mutually constitutive. If the sexuality of colonized peoples was understood as primitive, homosexuality was similarly understood as both temporally and geographically distant.<sup>10</sup> For Ellis, this distance seems to have inspired hypothetical tolerance. This limited tolerance is, however, mitigated by *Sexual Inversion*’s description of

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<sup>10</sup> As extensively documented in Linda Dowling’s *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, ancient Greek culture was of profound interest as the century progressed, with the neoclassical revival of Hellenism ensuring popular awareness of homosexuality’s acceptance, even importance, in ancient Greek culture (Dowling).

infanticide as a common practice in ancient Greece, and by Ellis' application of the same logic by which he ambivalently condones ancient Greek homosexuality: Either practice may have been normal and acceptable in that alien context, but both were construed as equally obvious in their pathology when engaged in by contemporary Britons (*Sexual Inversion* 59). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that infanticide, maternal suicide, child murder, and violent, youthful death occur so frequently in the narratives of queer reproductive temporality which this project considers: Characters as diverse as Little Father Time, Dorian Gray, Teleny, Harriet Brandt, Tess D'Urberville, and the maternal vampires of "Christabel" and *Carmilla* are depicted as infanticidal, or as maternally or youthfully suicidal. These murders and suicides (or, in Tess's case, simply her rumored, stated wish that both she and her baby were dead) are prompted, not by malice, but by a desire to avoid the tyranny of heredity. Conducted by characters who are emphatically described as anachronistic, foreign to their temporal moment and often to the British nation, these suicides and murders are portrayed as understandable choices appropriate to their circumstances, and as fundamental to these characters' and narratives' backward temporal orientation.

In order to more fully illuminate these texts' repeated portrayal of queerness as both temporally backward and death-oriented, this dissertation considers the relationship of *fin-de-siècle* constructions of homosexuality to recent developments in queer theory, particularly in light of numerous theorists' interest in queer temporality. Over the last decade, critics including Edelman, Stockton, and Muñoz have focused on queerness' relationship to time, sharing a premise which was also central to mid- and late-Victorian sexologists: the previously-mentioned conviction that sexual identity is defined by time and place. These theorists seek to explore the ways in which new relationships to time and space might enable a variety of queer and reproductive identities.

Consequently, this dissertation relies on Edelman's 2004 *No Future* as well as Stockton's 2008 *The Queer Child* in order to clarify these texts' understanding of homosexuality as a state of temporal backwardness, revealing the extent to which one's relationships to time and to sexuality are mutually constituted. Expanding on the concept of *jouissance*, a state of joyful, often fatal obliteration of selfhood, which Edelman uses to open up the political valences of death-oriented homosexuality, I consider the murders and suicides which are repeatedly associated with, and result from, nonreproductive sexuality, not simply as indicators of such sexuality as a pathological alternative to healthy heterosexuality, as an illness or an instance of failed evolution. Rather, these violent deaths, juxtaposed to refusals of heterosexual courtship and mating, illustrate the failure of the present to contain, define, or direct the development of queer sexuality.

Accordingly, this project also places the trope of youthful death in the context of Stockton's compelling writing on the queer child, as an instance of "backwards birth," or an inverse relation to time and to one's own development. For Stockton, as for Edelman, queer temporal inversion or backwardness results in a morbidity which is not politically, creatively, or aesthetically empty, but which is instead productive through its refusal of a heterocentric future to be reached through the generation of physical offspring.

This approach to time does not simply subvert popular sexology's construction of homosexuality as an obsolete or degenerate form of sexuality: Rather, these narratives manifest an ambivalence toward queerness in their paradoxical use of time, as they are both homophilic and illustrative of homosexuality's potential dire outcomes. *Teleny*, for instance, makes a strong argument for ancient Greek homosexual precedent, and thus for homosexuality as a longstanding tradition, one that is also rooted at a biological level, in the blood. As de Grioux elaborates: "Had I committed a crime against nature when my own nature found peace and happiness thereby? If I

was thus, surely it was the fault of my blood, not myself” (119). This rhetorical question is complicated by *Teleny*’s (as well as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*’s) association of homosexuality with violence. Amongst the rumors that proliferate about Dorian, he is said to have been seen “brawling with sailors,” a hint of the violence he later displays in stabbing Basil Hallward and himself to death (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 112). *Teleny* ends similarly, with its protagonist stabbing himself to death in remorseful self-loathing for having betrayed de Grioux with a woman (and worse, de Grioux’s mother).

These violent incidents illuminate de Grioux’s prescient reference to the question of homosexuality as a crime, his failure or refusal to verbally distinguish the homosexual from the criminal by answering his own rhetorical question in the negative, and his blaming of this possible crime on his blood. De Grioux’s words and the violent events which follow them affirm the belief, espoused by theorists including Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Wilhelm Stekel, that homosexuality was an atavism passed on genetically, present in the blood, and often paired with or expressed through homicide. For Stekel, male-on-male homicide, particularly by stabbing, was considered a sexual act, with blood substituting for semen. This belief recurs to the premise of death as the outcome of physical homosexuality. Wilde’s fiction is consistent, then, in its presentation of death-driven homosexuality as liberatory. The murders and suicides which proliferate in these texts seem to form the crux (or a crux) of this conflict, which becomes fully apparent when considering these texts’ cultural and sexological context.

## **Chapter Two: Time, Reproduction, and Kinship in Hardy**

Placing *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in the context of these violent deaths, this chapter argues that Hardy deploys the figure of the dead child in order to critique, interrogate, and revise temporally linear models of sexual development, I note and disagree with a critical tendency to read these novels as illustrations of sexual pathology. In order to see past

the negative emotions evoked by these novels' disastrous endings, and the sense of punishment which attaches to their characters' violent deaths (both of which would tend to support such readings), I place these narratives in the context of queer theory on failure and nonlinear temporality. Relying on Stockton's writing on the queer child and backwards birth, Freeman's work on failure as a form of political resistance, and Edelman's work on the queer death drive in opposition to reproductive futurism, I argue that child death in these texts serves the critical function of critiquing reproductive futurism, and of allowing an escape from the specter of heredity.

This chapter reads *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* retrospectively, through the lens of *Jude the Obscure*, a perspective which reveals the extent to which the earlier *Tess* begins *Jude's* more pronounced process of rethinking kinship bonds by problematizing the relationship between reproduction and time, marking that vexed relationship with the figure of the dead child. Where Sorrow's death may be read as *Tess's* narrative crux, registering the conflict between *Tess's* pagan sexuality and the mid-Victorian cultural proscriptions which doom her and her progeny, Little Father Time's and his siblings' deaths stem from a similarly anachronistic sense of heritage. As a physician explains to Jude after Little Father Time's death, he is a new type of boy, espousing a death-driven kinship based on a refusal of the future. However, as the narrative also details, he emblemizes a model of kinship in which his backward gaze over an ocean of time unites him with all of historical humanity.

Finally, in order to more fully understand these novels' participation in the nonlinear temporality which they depict, I consider critical debates over Hardy's influence by both Shakespearean and Greek tragedy, contending that these texts combine tragic elements with the conventions of the New Woman novel in order to address issues of hereditary determinism which were very much at stake in late-Victorian culture, in the concerns of degeneration discourse, and

in related medical and legal debates over incest and the resulting propagation of atavistic traits. Because these discourses also thoroughly informed the texts considered in subsequent chapters, and because my application of queer theory to reproduction and child death in these novels prepares the reader for the related arguments which follow in my chapters on vampire narratives and on Oscar Wilde's fiction, I placed this chapter previous to them.

### **Chapter Three: Perverse Maternity in Victorian Vampire Narratives**

This chapter argues that these texts present an exclusively feminine mode of kinship which is at once consanguineous and erotic, and which predicates eternal life on a fatal return to the maternal body. The vampiric process of birth-through-death places this novel in dialogue with *Jude*, whose Little Father Time cements his affinity with Sue, and his recursive kinship with historical humankind, through a similar process (and, later, with Wilde's texts, through their own brand of death-driven, anti-futuristic queer reproduction).

Situating these texts in the context of Victorian medical and sexological discourse portraying female sexuality as atavistic, animalistic, and as a vector through which unwanted bodily, moral, and national traits might taint future generations, this chapter argues that they expand on these discourses, exaggerating the conflict between such rhetoric and venerated images of the pure and quintessentially British wife and mother in such a way as to undermine the validity of both. Using the supernatural to address concrete, increasingly prevalent concerns regarding incest and female reproductive pathology, these narratives recast those concerns into images of female reproductive sexuality which is at once atavistic and the potential key to an unlimited future. These narratives both wrestle with and offer potential escape from the tyranny of heredity, flirting with and occasionally outright embracing a preference for death over reproductive futurism. This death-driven recursion to the past becomes instrumental to these texts' illustration of reverse colonialism, as maternity becomes a conduit by which imperial

wrongs are revisited upon their source. While Hardy's novels seemingly endorse their characters' queer kinship forms, the vampire narratives examined in this dissertation take far more ambivalent positions toward their maternal vampires.

#### **Chapter Four: Queer Reproduction in the Fiction of Oscar Wilde**

If heredity is an often unbearable burden in the literary texts which inform this project's first two chapters, Oscar Wilde's characters see themselves as heirs to an ancient Greek precedent for intergenerational male homosexuality, one which bolsters the validity of their own *fin-de-siècle* queer identities. Relying on aesthetic objects to encapsulate their same-sex attachments and to represent them into futurity, these characters are not simply throwbacks to Greek antiquity, but also the avatars of a form of queer reproduction which transcends time by suspending or reversing its forward motion: Whether through the death-driven *jouissance* which defies the future-oriented trajectory of heterosexual reproduction in *Teleny*, the time-freezing portrait so famously portrayed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or the poetic and visual works which sustain the queering of Shakespeare in "The Picture of Mr. W.H.," this chapter argues that these narratives substitute aesthetic for sexual reproduction, privileging the former over the latter by portraying the human body as comparatively banal and fleeting, while art is understood as superior in its permanence.

The dichotomy between aesthetic and sexual, bodily reproduction is strictly gendered in these texts. Art objects do not merely substitute for the human body, aesthetic creation for sexual procreation: The privileged aesthetic realm is regarded as masculine, while women are scorned, in *Dorian Gray* and elsewhere, as "the triumph of matter over mind" (87). Time itself is also gendered in these narratives. Male artists (and artistic subjects) use art to suspend time and to preserve their ardor for future centuries. They are also able to call on past precedent via the ancient Greeks, while women are cemented in their own contemporary moment, as Dorian learns

when he is disillusioned by Sybil's theatrical performance. This chapter argues that these texts advance male homoerotic aestheticism as a form of reproduction and kinship which refuses both the temporal inflexibility and the heterosexual procreativity which are continually identified with female sexuality, both in Wilde's texts and, as has been established, in much of the century's medical discourse. If these narratives adhere to sexological tenets in their abjection of women, they make far more creative use of them in portraying a mode of male-homoerotic reproduction which thrives, even briefly, on its embrace of nonlinear temporality.

## 2. QUEER TEMPORALITY AND CHILD DEATH IN THE NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY

‘It is best, perhaps, that they should be gone. -- Yes --- I see it is! Better that they should be plucked fresh than stay to wither away miserably!’

‘Yes,’ replied Jude. ‘Some say that the elders should rejoice when their children die in infancy.’ (*Jude the Obscure* 347)

‘She’s fond of that there child, though she mid pretend to hate en, and say she wishes the baby and her too were in the churchyard.’ (*Tess of the D’Urbervilles* 109)

Thomas Hardy’s last two novels, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, build on *fin-de-siècle* medical and social theory, with its interest in inherited personality traits as well as cultural survivals or atavisms, to create anachronistic characters -- characters who incarnate and are punished for their forebears’ faults and wrongdoings, but who are also accorded narrative sympathy for being ahead of their time and thus incurring social censure. Rather than following the developmental path of the *bildungsroman*, ascending from childhood through courtship, marriage, and the production of heirs, characters like Tess D’Urberville, Sue Bridehead, and Little Father Time variously refuse this timeline. Their abdication or reordering of its milestones results in the youthful deaths which end both texts, including Tess’s voluntary surrender to capture and execution as well as Little Father Time’s suicide and murder of his half-siblings.

These novels’ departures from the *bildungsroman*, as well as their direct influence, acknowledged by Hardy, by contemporary anthropology, place them within the naturalistic canon, so that Hardy’s work is often mentioned along with Emile Zola’s among the founding texts of this literary movement, with both authors tracking the shaping influence of biological inheritance on human life, and therefore of the past on the future.<sup>11</sup> Despite Hardy’s status as an

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<sup>11</sup> Numerous critics have commented on Hardy’s relationship to anthropology. Andrew Radford’s *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* extensively documents Hardy’s familiarity with contemporary anthropology, explaining that Hardy was reading *The Golden Bough* during the year of *Tess*’s composition, and tracing the novel’s references to that book (Radford 68). Also see Michael A. Zeitler’s *Representations of Culture: Thomas Hardy’s Wessex and Victorian Anthropology*, which argues that Hardy takes an ethnographic approach to rural culture (14). Catherine Gallagher’s “*Tess of the D’Urbervilles: Hardy’s Anthropology of the Novel*” takes a narratological approach, suggesting that *Tess* performs an anthropology of the novel, illuminating the genre’s connections to Biblical and

early adopter of literary naturalism, critics including Ted R. Spivey and Frederick R. Gwynn have also responded to the anachronism that pervades the author's work by regarding him as a tragedian, citing the fatalistic, determinative effect of the past on the lives of his characters, along with the recurring trope of intrafamilial murder.

These tragic readings of Hardy are based on a valid observation of these texts' fatalism and their characters' tendency to repeat and atone for previous generations' errors. However, to see Hardy in this way risks overlooking these novels' deep context in Victorian culture's cross-disciplinary, often fearful fascination with the past's encroachment on the future. This fascination stemmed from acute public awareness of Darwin's theory of evolution, a principle applied to social science by the Covent Garden school of anthropology, with its focus on cultural atavisms or survivals, including fertility rituals and human sacrifice. Culminating in Max Nordau's publication of the 1897 classic *Degeneration*, medical and social theorists provided numerous variations on the idea that the past was ominously present. For many of these thinkers, the figure of the dead or absent child marked the boundaries of illicit sexuality, as sexual heterodoxy was understood to cause physical harm to future generations through the process of reproduction.

Beset by this sense of the past's threat, many *fin-de-siècle* Victorians were equally appalled at the spectre of the New Woman, an emancipated woman who reserved the right to remain single, to become educated, and often to work, and who, if she did decide to bear children, was feared to pass on her enervated traits to them. This fear suggested that new or modern social ills might negatively impact the coming generation, rather than the obsolete traits more commonly associated with behavior's impact on reproductive genetics. This same figure became the subject of the New Woman literary subgenre, which sympathetically chronicled the lives and struggles of fictional feminists. In addition to his familiarity with the Covent Garden school, Hardy was well-versed in the discourse of the New Woman, directly acknowledging his pagan narratives and rituals.

intention to present Sue Bridehead as a New Woman.<sup>12</sup> In both *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and, to a greater extent, in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy adapts the scientific discourse of temporally inverted sexuality to the New Woman novel, seizing on the figure of the dead child, used by such discourse as a marker of and punishment for unsanctioned sexuality, in order to explore the possibilities of non-reproductive kinship modes.

Because of these novels' temporality, in which the past does not necessarily precede the present and future, but rather pervades, interrupts and determines them, and because of the resulting proliferation of child deaths caused by non-normative parental (and ancestral) sexuality, I have placed both *Tess* and *Jude* in the context of contemporary queer theoretical treatments of sexuality's relationship to temporality and to narratives of progress, including Stockton's work on the figure of the queer child and its backward relationship to time and to development, Freeman's work on the political valences of failure, and Edelman's theorizing of queerness and the death drive. These queer theorists help us see that Hardy uses child death to critique, resist, and interrogate cultural expectations surrounding mating and reproduction. In so doing, they allow us to see past the tendency, present from these novels' contemporary reviews, to read their disastrous endings as punishments, warnings, or illustrations of sexual pathology.

Instead, both *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* participate in the larger cultural project of rethinking sexuality and kinship. Little Father Time's and Sue's nihilistic approach to reproduction, as illustrated by her affirmative answer to his query "I ought not to be born, ought I?" and his siblings' resulting deaths, is grounded in a critique of the expectations surrounding Victorian sexuality and kinship (341). *Tess* precedes this, and in some way prepares or sensitizes readers to the centrality of child death to this critique. Rather than being simply destructive, the suffering that ends these novels serves a critical function by problematizing the timing of sexuality.

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<sup>12</sup> Hardy stated this in a letter to George Egerton (*Collected Letters* 2: 102).

## **Time and Kinship in *Jude* and *Tess***

*Jude*, for instance, posits a form of kinship which builds on a sense of intergenerational responsibility, the belief that “All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care,” which brings Little Father Time into Jude’s and Sue’s household (280). The quasi-familial bond between Sue and Little Father Time is then cemented by affinity, as the child’s precocious grasp of Sue’s ambivalence toward motherhood leads him to murder her children in perceived compliance with her perceived wishes. Their kinship, and their family’s structure, are determined by Little Father Time’s and Sue’s shared aversion to what Edelman calls reproductive futurism -- the heteronormative drive toward to the future, as exemplified in the figure of the living child.

*Jude*’s vision of unrequited love (Jude’s for Sue) culminating in a family of dead children, precipitated by the bond between a paradoxically ancient child and his reproductively-averse mother, intensifies or accelerates a set of dynamics present in *Tess*. Preceding *Jude* by two years, *Tess* chronicles a teenage girl’s transformation from hopeful ingenue to abandoned mother, reputed by a dairy co-worker to wish for her own and her child’s death despite her evident love for the child. (Tess’s infant’s name, Sorrow, further exemplifies the continuity between these two texts’ treatment of child death, its heavy-handed symbolism later re-emerging with Little Father Time.) Tess’s initial placid naivete, Sorrow’s natural death from an untreated illness, and Tess’s decease and final bequeathing of her beloved husband to her sister, are all intensified in *Jude*; this later novel replaces Tess with a child who is younger than her, yet somehow old, already disabused of the resilient drive to live and to feel pleasure which sustains Tess through so many travails.

Reading *Tess* backward through *Jude*, we perceive the centrality of Sorrow’s death and the text’s brief reference to Tess’s previous, rumored wish for an end to both their lives emerges.

This allows us to perceive the centrality of child death in this novel, an element which might otherwise be obscured by the relatively short narrative space granted to Sorrow's death and its aftermath. As Aaron Matz has noted, the comparatively gruesome description of *Jude's* suicidal-fratricidal ending "can trick us into thinking it's exceptional, even for Hardy's graphic imagination," a misapprehension which Matz counters by suggesting this scene is "a foreseeable event," based on Hardy's "long-standing interest in procreation as a moral quandary, one that evokes ... antinatalism" ("Hardy and the Vanity of Procreation" 7).

*Jude the Obscure* brings child death to the forefront, as Sorrow's children-only funeral midway through *Tess's* narrative has its exaggerated counterpart in the grotesque child massacre which is *Jude's* narrative culmination. *Tess's* death can be read as a willing sacrifice to rescue her sister Liza Lu, and, by extension, her other siblings, from poverty and her mother's poor management, providing them with a future. The deaths which end *Jude* serve no such optimistic purpose: Rather, they are based on Little Father Time's and Sue's shared belief that no future (or, rather, death) is preferable to the future of social ostracism and material deprivation that awaits them. In both novels, child death marks the boundaries where cultural proscriptions delimit or exclude existing forms of sexuality, and is used by the narrative to critique those proscriptions and to imagine other ways for families to be formed and to exist. However, *Jude* works on a grimmer, accelerated timeline, foregoing the elements of hopeful futurism that, to the last, maintain some spark of hope in *Tess*.

The novels are united, though, in their concern with the fates of anachronistic characters, whether the obsolete, and therefore fatal, pagan throwback status ascribed to Tess D'Urberville, or the equally deadly *avant-garde* sensibilities which knit together Sue Bridehead and her lover's child, Little Father Time, in an alternate form of kinship. Each of these texts ponders what it means to be new, whether the latest incarnation of a declining stock, like Tess, an archetypal

New Woman in the mode of Sue Bridehead, or the “new type of boy” represented by Little Father Time’s precocious fragility. For each of these characters, newness is hampered or determined by the past: Both Tess’s and Sue’s lives are arguably ruined by these women’s mating with their cousins, and thus incurring the family curses that haunt both the D’Urberville and Fawley clans, while Little Father Time is widely understood “to symbolize the significance of the mistakes Jude has made in the past” (Edwards 33). To be new in these texts, then, is to be anachronistic, a fresh iteration of the past, while to be anachronistic is to be unsuited for survival. This premise is reinforced by the infant, child, and adolescent deaths which plague these narratives, including those of Tess and Little Father Time.

Tess and Little Father Time are both children of “advanced” (i.e. of impending or actual reproductive age) who choose death over adulthood as their environments offer it to them, defined by heterosexual courtship, marriage, and childbearing and -rearing. The nature of this choice, and the ways in which Tess and Little Father Time arrive at it, vary between the two novels: *Tess*, the first of these two narratives, introduces its title character as a specimen of hopeful adolescence, condensing the stages of her childhood’s development in a revolving panoply of features. As the narrator describes Tess, “Phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still ... for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would fit over the curves of her mouth now and then” (39).

This moment of introduction, couched as it is in her father’s discovery of the family’s former nobility, and preceding the novel’s increasingly emphatic portrayal of Tess as defined and doomed by her lineage, cements her status as an individual, possessed of her own personal history. The fatal encroachment of her family’s past on her future is momentarily paused, allowing her to emerge as a character in her own right rather than simply as an accretion of her

family's history. Little Father Time is denied this benefit: Published two years after *Tess*, *Jude* intensifies the former novel's pessimism by accelerating the collapse of past into present, foreclosing the possibility of Little Father Time developing his own history and personality beyond the family history which dooms him. Despite this distinction, Tess and Little Father Time are united in their recursive temporality, and in their related (in Tess's case, reluctant and conflicted) preference of death over the future as it is offered to them.

Their death-driven anachronism allows these characters and narratives to be read as instances of temporally-oriented resistance to the imperatives of a predominantly heteronormative and child-focused *fin-de-siècle* culture. This becomes particularly clear when reading *Jude* through the lens of recent queer theory by Judith Halberstam, as well as Freeman and Stockton, each of whom is concerned with the ways in which failure both characterizes queerness and makes it a rich site for resistance and critique. The introduction of Halberstam's 2011 *The Queer Art of Failure*, for instance, points out that "... failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure ... disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children" (3). In this way, failure and refusal can operate as "shadow feminisms ... tak[ing] the form not of becoming, being, and doing, but of shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming, and violating" (4).

Through their spectacular failures to move in a disciplined fashion from unruly childhood to predictable adulthood, Hardy's characters, including Jude Fawley, Little Father Time and Sue Bridehead, as well as Tess D'Urberville, offer modes of resistance which are both self-destructive and, in some sense, culturally constructive. Through their tragic demises, each of these characters demonstrates the failures and limitations of scientific views which stressed

linear, future-driven temporality as essential to the development of a healthy (yet restrained) adult sexual self.

*Jude*'s narrative, for example, is itself a series of failures, populated by characters who strive for educational attainment, for love, and for a modicum of social acceptance, who fail and are harshly punished for defying the norms by which unruly children become predictable adults.<sup>13</sup> Jude's efforts to develop from a lovelorn student to a common-law husband and father fail spectacularly, leaving him in a permanent rut, rather than an arc of achievement ascending as he ages. His son, conversely, is a paradoxically aged child, seemingly born with the pessimism which was only drummed into his father by a gradually intensifying series of thwarted milestones.

For Hardy's contemporary critics, these circumstances confirmed *Jude*'s status as a fiction of reproductive pathology, a topic with which the public had become increasingly conversant through works of popular sexology.<sup>14</sup> Robert Yellerton Tyrell's 1896 review, for example, derides *Jude* as a half-baked medical text, lamenting that Hardy "has determined to try the public and see whether they will accept in lieu of a novel a treatise on sexual pathology, in which the data are drawn from the imagination and are, therefore, scientifically invalid" (Cox 295). Havelock Ellis, writing that same year, concurs with Tyrell's assessment of the novel as a cautionary and condemnatory account of sexual waywardness, though Ellis' review ends by affirming the novel's value, suggesting that it is "immoral and indecent," fit only to serve as "an example or warning" (*Savoy* 6). Both reviewers link the novel's self-conscious engagement with

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of *Jude* as a failed novel, based on its hostile reviews and Hardy's subsequent retirement from fiction, see Galia Benziman's "Thrust Beneath the Carpet: Hardy and the Failure of Writing," which argues that Hardy's previous novels had embedded anxieties about the failure of readers to respond adequately to writing, and about the limitations of writing as a communicative mode (199).

<sup>14</sup> Irving Yevish's "The Attack on Jude the Obscure" argues that critics responded harshly to *Jude* because of the novel's depiction of the socioeconomic constraints that keep him from the university at Christminster, which contends represents Oxford University. Yevish contends that critics' objections to *Jude*'s sexual content were in fact motivated by and substituted for their alarm at Hardy's depiction of the impact of class on education (239).

sexological discourse to their certainty that the behavior and dispositions the novel depicts can or should be avoided. From this perspective, one might reasonably regard *Jude* not as an aesthetic object or literary text, but, as Tyrell suggests, as a medical text on sexual pathology, meant to define, prohibit, and aid in its avoidance.

Reading both *Jude* and *Tess* in the context of Halberstam's concept of failure, as well as Stockton's treatise *The Queer Child*, allows us to see beyond these potentially reductive readings, illuminating ways in which these novels use asynchronicity and child death to call for, and to imagine, a culture and a future in which these doomed characters might thrive: In other words, the extent to which these texts may be read, not as cautionary tales or evocations of sexual pathology, but as indictments of the pathologizing discourse in which critics like Ellis and Tyrell perceive them as participating.

This intervention is largely based on the tendency of Hardy's characters toward what Stockton calls "asynchronous self-relation," a tendency to perceive themselves as inhabiting a moment whose historical significance is overdetermined by its links to the past and future, both of which impinge violently on the present. According to Stockton, such asynchronicity is fundamental to queer childhood, as the queer child identifies herself only retrospectively, via the symbolic death of the straight child which heteronormative culture assumed her to be: A death which, for Stockton, constitutes a backwards birth (6).

Queer identity, per this formulation, is predicated on the death of the child, and of the future possibilities which the child symbolizes, possibilities which cannot coexist with queerness, or with an approach to sexuality or reproduction which does not progress neatly from childhood to adulthood through the markers of matrimony and childbearing. Given queer theory's and sexuality studies' roots in sexological theory, Stockton's linkage of non-normative sexuality to an anachronistic or inverted temporality, and to child death, may be read as part of a

wide-ranging discourse on time and sexuality which portrayed queerness as a pathologically reversed relationship to time, including sexologist Havelock Ellis, whose *Sexual Inversion* regarded same-sex eroticism as a relic of antiquity, appropriate for ancient Greeks but undesirable and out of place in contemporary Britain. Where popular sexology used the signifiers of temporal reversal and the dead child to pathologize queerness, Stockton uses them to expose the disjuncture between the expectations and realities surrounding childhood, “to outline, in shadowy form, the pain, closets, emotional labors, sexual motives, and sideways movements that attend all children, however we deny it” (3). Stockton’s backwards-born queer child, contingent on the death of the straight child’s future promise, serves not to pathologize queerness, but rather to suggest that “every child is queer,” that no developmental process adheres to the purely linear ascent of a one-directional timeline (3).

Even assuming Stockton’s belief in the universal queerness of childhood, Little Father Time still emerges as uniquely, even iconically, queer in his morbid anachronism, a preternatural knowledge of the world which leads him to commit suicide and murder in perceived obedience to Sue’s reluctance to enlarge their family through her pregnancy. Where Tess’s initial description captures her dancing among girls of her age, and is based on her embodiment of her own past developmental phases, Little Father Time is contrasted to a train car full of adult strangers, the only child and the only passenger not laughing at the antics of a playful kitten: Rather, he, “without animation, would try to smile, and fail” (282). The narrator explains this failure by suggesting that:

He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through the crevices. A ground swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then to lift the child in this his morning-life, when his face took a back view over some black Atlantic of Time, and appeared not to care about what it saw. (282)

Rather than embodying, like Tess, his own and his family's history, Little Father Time is burdened by humanity's history; where Tess's first appearance is one of youthful optimism, later tarnished to suicidal despair by harsh experience, Little Father Time seems to have been born profoundly weighted by the past. Where Tess's short life collapses its milestones, rapidly transforming her from a virgin to a rape victim, mother, wife, and murderess before terminating in early death, Little Father Time is described in terms of milestones' reversal: As the narrator explains, "Children begin with detail, and learn up to the general; they begin with the contiguous, and gradually comprehend the universal. The boy seemed to have begun with the generals of life, and never to have concerned himself with the particular" (284). This detached perspective allows him to regard "his companions as if he saw their whole rounded lives rather than their immediate figures" (282).

Little Father Time's inverted relationship to time, his skipping over the initial childhood interest in minute personal detail in favor of a precocious knowledge of universal truths, and the consequent reversal illustrated by his sober demeanor amid adults' hilarity, shortly results in his apprehension of his parents' reproductive predicament, and in his and his siblings' deaths. His grasp of this situation is predicated on his ability to see adults' "whole rounded lives," their full trajectory and overall shape, without being burdened by the details which appeal to and distract other children of his age. His ability to gauge his family's future, seeing ahead to the increased strain which will be caused by another child, is predicated on his inversion of adult-child roles, and prompts him to take pre-emptive action to forestall the family's increase.

These temporal paradoxes, and the fatal actions to which they lead Little Father Time, allow us to read him as a Stocktonian queer child, illuminating the gap between reality and the reproductive proscriptions which deny social acceptance to, and thus make life untenable for, the children whom he kills. His motive is not one of hate or anger. Rather, his succinct suicide note

stating “Done because we are too menny,” indicates that he is moved by compassion and despair, as well as a correct understanding of the cultural disapproval that impinges on their existence (312). Despite its stark, drastic, and devastating outcome, then, his violent outburst both inflicts and expresses suffering with a purpose, fulfilling Little Father Time’s wish to help his family even as it illuminates and indicts the social conditions which led to it. At least at the narrative level, these murders are a political act. As Freeman writes in 2004’s *Time Binds*:

... loss ... has emerged as one of ... queer theory’s key terms ... I would like to suggest, however, that this powerful turn toward loss – toward failure, shame, negativity, grief, and other structures of feeling historical – may also be a premature turn away from a seemingly obsolete politics of pleasure ... melancholic queer theory, may acquiesce to the idea that pain ... is the proper ticket into historical consciousness. (160)

As *Jude the Obscure* demonstrates, failure and loss need not be simply personal and individual, but may creatively address the absences and failures of moral and sexological discourses which do not include, or include only to isolate, a broader variety of sexual and reproductive identities. However, the “failure, shame, negativity” which necessarily attend such efforts demand a renunciation of pleasure in the form of the narrative rewards (courtship culminating in matrimony) which await the protagonists of the familiar *bildungsroman*. The price of acquiescing to such a bargain is, as Freeman notes, the experience of loss and suffering. Situated with Freeman’s economy of historical loss, Little Father Time’s premature turning away from pleasure, as illustrated by the foregoing passage as well as by his sorrowful demeanor and finally by his suicide, emerge as painful-yet-constructive conduits to historical consciousness, or the temporal ocean which Little Father Time is described as holding in his backward glance. In this economy, suffering is not pathologized, but validated as “proper,” and valued as a conduit to a broader consciousness which is superior to, precedes and subsumes, one’s own life.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Recent Hardy criticism has been strongly oriented toward the novel’s relationship to evolutionary and post-Darwinist theory. Caroline Sumpter situates *Jude* in contemporary post-Darwinist debates, arguing that this novel advocates for a more evolved form of empathy and sympathy which Hardy portrays as morally superior to the social judgment and exclusion faced by his characters (Sumpter 665). Also see Jed Mayer’s “Germinating Memory: Hardy

*Time Binds* succeeds Edelman's 2004 *No Future* in its advocacy of loss and failure as modes of critique, with the distinction that Edelman's work is more firmly centered on nonreproductive sexuality as driven by and toward death, and marked by the death or absence of the child (19). Edelman defines queerness as an "unnameable remainder," extraneous to culturally sanctioned and acknowledged forms of sexuality, and, as such, as an instance of Lacanian "jouissance, sometimes translated as 'enjoyment': a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity" (25). Laying a partial groundwork for Freeman's, Stockton's and other queer theorists' valorization of what Sianne Ngai calls "ugly feelings," sensations of suffering which destabilize the boundaries of selfhood, *No Future* effuses over the potential of queer *jouissance* to "evoke the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle," positing the absent or dead child as its avatar, in opposition to what Edelman terms the reproductive futurism of child-centered discourse (25, 2). Rather than focusing, as does Stockton, on the figure of the queerly morbid child in its variants and critical possibilities, Edelman identifies the child in general as embodying "the telos of the social order ... the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust," thus abdicating the range of rich textual meanings which, as Stockton demonstrates, the queer child allows (11).

Despite this arguable fault, Edelman's use of *jouissance* to unpack the critically constructive potential of death-driven, anti-futuristic sexuality does provide a useful framework through which to read Hardy's morbid eroticism, and its problematizing of cultural proscriptions' stifling influence on the sexual desires which escape their purview. This is evident in Hardy's

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and Evolutionary Biology," which argues that Hardy employed evolutionary biology in order to imagine alternative models of inheritance. Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* reads Tess D'Urberville as illustrating the conflict between female individuality and reproductivity (199). See also Ronald Morrison's "Humanity Towards Man, Woman, and the Lower Animals: Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and the Victorian Humane Movement."

description of the mass sexual desire with which Tess and her female coworkers regard Angel Clare:

The air of the sleeping-chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law – an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired ... the flame ... was burning the inside of their hearts out, and the torture was almost more than they could endure. The differences which extinguished them as individuals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex ... The full recognition of the futility of their infatuation, from a social point of view; its purposeless beginning; its self-bounded outlook; its lack of everything to justify its existence in the eye of civilization (while lacking nothing in the eye of Nature); the one fact that it did exist, ecstasizing them to a killing joy. (170)

This passage emphasizes the potential of unrequited, and thus futile or failed, sexual passion to obliterate the boundaries between individuals, blurring identities as well as the distinction between pleasure and pain in a transcendent joy which revels in the loss or unavailability of the desired object.<sup>16</sup> The “burning” and “torture” transforms the girls’ perspective from a narrow, micro-level self-interest to a broader, abstract consciousness based on their shared, if thwarted, female sexuality. That sexuality is described as valid and justified by nature, but turned inward and rendered painful by “civilization” or the “social,” a thwarting that prompts one dairy maid’s suicide attempt, as well as another other girl’s similarly morbid condition of “dead” drunkenness.

These chaotic and injurious results are credited, in both *Tess* and *Jude*, to the conflict between civilization and sexual human nature. Tess’s and her counterparts’ desire is described above as wholly natural, crushed and stifled only by their culture. In *Jude*, Little Father Time’s suicide and murder of his siblings are also attributed to nature, but with a crucial difference: The

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<sup>16</sup> J. Hillis Miller’s *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* argues that in Hardy’s novels, unrequited love represents a futile attempt to replace God with a distant or otherwise unavailable love object, and that these failed attempts illustrate a pessimistic belief in predetermination. Merryn Williams’ calls this argument “depressingly familiar,” suggesting that Hardy’s pessimism and the related prominence of unrequited love in his fiction have been generally overemphasized in Hardy criticism, and that Miller’s analysis “does his best to explain ... away” the happier endings and successful courtships of Hardy’s lighter fiction (Williams 370). James F. Scott has similarly characterized Miller’s reading of Hardy’s pessimism as containing “some very familiar generalizations” (Scott 332).

attending doctor remarks that it was “in his nature to do it,” rather than stemming from a conflict between healthy, natural desires frustrated by a repressive culture. In this way, then, these two sequential novels move from a portrayal of lusty, healthy nature, as embodied by Tess, to an evocation of a new, modern nature in which the death drive is endemic, not solely caused by cultural conflict, and sex drives are weak or absent (as with Sue Bridehead).

I have already noted a similar progression or intensification of pessimism between these two novels, as evidenced by Tess’s initial childlike innocence, her accompaniment by her peers, and by her having been freshly “abstracted,” or distracted from individual to universal concerns: In *Jude the Obscure*, published just two years later, Little Father Time is born, or at least first introduced, with a perspective that privileges human generalities, historical consciousness, and the broad contours of a life over its particular features. His access to this perspective is automatic and innate, not wrought by frustrated sexual desire. Rather, the apparently asexual Little Father Time sees past sexual desire to its procreative outcome, and to the social forces which render this outcome, as Tess names her baby, a sorrow.

As I have already argued, *Tess* benefits from being read retrospectively through *Jude*. Little Father Time’s broad, abstracted view of life, and its resulting effect of ennui, are also hinted at in this earlier text, in a conversation that mirrors Little Father Time’s conversation with Sue as well as his detached perspective. As Tess and her younger brother, Abraham, are driving their horse and carriage one night, gazing at the stars, they exchange the following remarks:<sup>17</sup>

‘Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?’  
‘Yes.’

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<sup>17</sup> For further discussions of Hardy’s fiction and astronomy, see Anna Henchman’s “Hardy’s Stargazers and the Astronomy of Other Minds.” Henchman reads stargazing in Hardy’s novels as a metaphor for interpersonal knowledge, regarding these scenes as momentary traversings of what is usually an insurmountable distance (37). Anne DeWitt’s “The Actual Sky is a Horror: Thomas Hardy and the Arnoldian Conception of Science” centers on Hardy’s *Two on a Tower*, arguing that this narrative uses stargazing to advocate a humanistic perspective over a scientific view (479). Pamela Gossin’s *Thomas Hardy’s Novel Universe: Astronomy, Cosmology, and Gender in the Post-Darwinian World* suggests that Hardy’s novels present cosmology as a way of knowing the future which is simultaneously rooted in the past, connecting ancient and Victorian cultures (229).

‘All like ours?’  
‘I don’t know, but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our  
stubbar-tree. Most of them seem splendid and sound – a few blighted.’  
‘Which do we live on – a splendid one or a blighted one?’  
‘A blighted one.’ (63)

Where Little Father Time’s suicide is prompted by a sense that he and his siblings are “too  
menny,” both excessive and insignificant, Tess’s conversation with Abraham reflects a similarly  
dismayed sense of tininess, of being inconsequential to almost all but oneself in the broader  
scope of the universe – and, more particularly, of history. Tess’s and Abraham’s talk ends when  
he falls asleep and she falls into a reverie:

As the occasional heave of the wind became the sigh of some immense sad soul,  
coterminous with the universe in space, and with history in time. Then, examining  
the mesh of events in her own life, she seemed to see the vanity of her father’s  
pride ... and her shrouded knightly ancestry. Everything grew more and more  
extravagant, and she no longer knew how time passed. (64)

This passage’s immediate earthly focus interweaves Tess’s family and their dilemma with  
the broader, dwarfing history of the planet, as that history seems to come unmoored from its  
sequence and occur all at once, rendering both Tess’s life and the world’s history  
“coterminous” in a way that defies the passage of time, as no temporal moment seems more  
distant than another. Tess’s dismay, then, does not simply stem from a sense of being dwarfed by  
this scale, but also from the new awareness that her own obscure existence and her ancestors’  
grander, more dramatic lives and deaths are relatively equal in their significance (or lack  
thereof).

The ambivalence with which both Tess D’Urberville and Sue Bridehead regard  
motherhood plays on late-Victorian concerns regarding the impact of changing gender roles on  
maternity, and on heterosexuality itself. As critics including Lorelee MacPike and Martha  
Vicinus have noted, women’s increasing freedom to abstain from marriage, embracing celibacy  
or lesbianism, caused concern that too few women would bear children (MacPike 369). Thus,

the threat of the new, and particularly of the New Woman, complemented the threat of the old, as articulated by post-Darwinian fears of inherited degenerate traits. In both discourses, sexuality not bound by the reproductive expectations of matrimony was regarded as a threat to the health, even to the existence, of current and future infants. Hardy's use of child death in these two novels plays on these fears in order to call for the acceptance of new sexual and reproductive identities, whether of the single or celibate New Woman, the new type of boy exemplified by Little Father Time's wish to spare other children the future, or in *Tess*, the unwed mother.

The deaths that end *Jude the Obscure*, and the logic behind them, are contextualized by the bleak conversation Little Father Time has with Sue Bridehead immediately before the killings, and Sue's subsequent miscarriage. Like Tess, Sue is portrayed very much "in the light of a murderess." While Tess's discussion with Abraham and the subsequent accident catalyze a chain of events leading to Tess's own death and that of her child and its father, Sue's similar response to Little Father Time's queries similarly both prefaces and indirectly causes her own miscarriage, the deaths of her biological and adopted children, and arguably Jude's demise as well. As Robert Heilman suggests, "Sue actually provides the psychological occasion, if not the cause, of the double murder and suicide" ("Hardy's Sue Bridehead" 313). Both she and Tess, then, are heavily (albeit indirectly) implicated in the child deaths which plague these two narratives.

In Sue's case, the germ of destruction seems to be centered in her status as a New Woman, of which Hardy was quite consciously aware, writing to fellow novelist George Egerton that "it is extraordinary that a type of woman, comparatively common and getting commoner, should have escaped fiction for so long" (*Collected Letters* 2: 102). As Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy* explains, the New Woman was often figured as asexual (and, as a predictable result, childless) as a reaction against the men's perceived primitive sexuality: "The dominant

discourse among New Women ... reproduced and intensified stereotypes of female sexlessness and purity ... appl[ying] the terminology of Darwinian science to the study of male sexuality and discover[ing] biological sins that could lead to general retrogression” (45).<sup>18</sup> This Darwinian analyses complemented the popular belief, espoused by physician William Acton’s 1867 *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, that “the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled by sexual feelings of any kind” (Acton 144). Influenced by both, as Showalter observes, Victorian feminists or New Women often embraced celibacy as a sort of public service, refusing to set back civilization by propagating primitive, sexually aggressive male genes (45).

Despite the high-mindedness of this intent, the New Woman’s stereotypical childlessness was often attributed to their own biological unfitness to procreate. As socialite and cultural commentator Lady Mary Jeune opined in a contemporary essay:

The life of excitement they [New Women] lead is worse than any dram-drinking, and its effects more injurious, not to themselves alone but to their children. We are already beginning to see in a small way the effect it is going to have on future generations, in the number of delicate and weakly children that are born ... Nervous, rickety, and bloodless, they are the natural offspring of the overstrung, sensitive mother. (“The Women of Today” 558)

This description recalls Hardy’s evocation of Little Father Time as morbidly emblematic of his cultural moment: He and his adopted siblings bear the physical effects of their forebears’ behaviors and feelings. This conflation of psychological or spiritual conditions with physical traits, which become more marked in descending generations, constitutes a twist on genetic inheritance, by which the sins and weaknesses of parents are bodily visited on their children: If Sue constitutes an exaggeration or caricature of New Womanish traits, it is unsurprising, given

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<sup>18</sup> Kate Millet counters this reading of Sue as a New Woman, questioning Sue’s coherence as a character if she is indeed both a New Woman and frigid, which Millet sees as incompatible. Kathleen Blake has disagreed with Millet’s assessment, contending that this incompatibility or conflict reproduces the tensions which bore on Victorian women (Millet 130-131, Blake 704).

the popular image described above, that the informally adopted offspring for whom she cares, and in whom she confides, is in poor psychological health and doomed to perish. This emphatically new trend in heritability is paralleled by Little Father Time's status as a degenerate figure, literally embodying the sins of his forebears, who include not only Jude, his biological kin, but the vast history of humankind implied by the "black Atlantic" of history which he holds in his retrospective gaze, bound to them by the intergenerational kinship which accounts for Sue's first accepting him into her home.

For Hardy, then, as well as for cultural commentators including Lady Jeune, inheritance and kinship were not simply matters of biology, but of moral or spiritual affinity as well. Accordingly, Jude considers Sue to be Little Father Time's parent, despite their lack of consanguinity, remarking, as I have already quoted, that "All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time" (324). The disastrous effects of Sue's parenting, however, seem to suggest that these confluences of physical and psychological affinity, via both adoption or "collective" parenting and degeneration, are ultimately destructive. William Davis, for example, has suggested that "Sue follows a roundabout path, as opposed to an instinctual one, to motherhood. Sue is willing enough to be an adoptive mother to Little Father Time ... but biological motherhood is another thing altogether" (57). Hardy himself described Sue's failure as "consist[ing] in disproportion rather than in inversion ... her sexual instinct being healthy as far as it goes, but unusually weak and fastidious" (*Collected Letters* 2:99). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jeune also saw the New Woman as lacking in sexual and maternal instinct – as Davis has noted, "Sue's belief that the deaths of her children represent a punishment for her lifestyle is merely Lady Jeune's thesis carried to its logical extreme" (63).

These arguments over Sue's sexual and maternal fitness run the risk of overlooking the true nature of her kinship with Little Father Time: Though she initially accepts him as her

adopted son based on a belief in intergenerational responsibility (a decision based on ethics rather than on a blood or marriage-based bond) Little Father Time cements this affinity through murder and suicide, which he commits at her inadvertent behest, in consonance with his and Sue's shared rejection of reproductive futurism.<sup>19</sup>

The pattern of truncated childhood and adolescence is, of course, far from unique among the plots of nineteenth-century novels: *The Mill on the Floss* and *Great Expectations* both spring to mind as long narrative treatments of children's mostly failed attempts to master the standards of adulthood as they understand them. Hardy is, however, arguably unique among popular late-Victorian novelists for the melodramatically lurid -- one might even argue, the gratuitously excessive -- manner in which he thwarts his characters' development into adulthood, as well as those characters' ultimate ambivalence toward, and ultimately wilful refusal of, their own futures.

This queering of the *bildungsroman*, tracking increasingly desperate failures over the course of a lifetime, followed by the death of its youthful protagonist, rather than as series of often painful trials leading to the protagonist's successful maturation and marriage, inevitably calls into question the value of the heterosexual pairing and production of heirs which so often and predictably await the heroes and heroines of nineteenth-century novels.<sup>20</sup> In so doing, Hardy's relentless and intensely dramatic thwarting of his characters' romantic aspirations also challenges the cultural expectations and proscriptions that rendered the fulfillment of such aspirations an accepted measure of one's personal, psychological, and physical development.

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<sup>19</sup> Lyn Pykett's "Ruinous Bodies" argues that Hardy's later fiction increasingly portrayed the body, and especially women's bodies, as a source of destruction, pointing to Sue Bridehead's sexuality as an instance of this (Pykett 158).

<sup>20</sup> Much of recent Hardy criticism considers *Jude* as an anti-*bildungsroman*. Peter Arnd's "The Boy With the Old Face" suggests that this genre is an effect of mechanization's increasing encroachment on the natural world (222). Deborah Collins has also argued for *Jude* as an anti-*bildungsroman*, focusing on the novel's hostility to the redeeming narrative of religion (139). Hillel Dileski centers his reading of *Jude* as anti-*bildungsroman* on the novel's theme of unrequited love (184). Frank Giordano argues that the *bildungsroman* was an outgrowth of Romantic optimism, and that by mimicking the *bildungsroman*, then thwarting its protagonist's advancement, *Jude* reflects pessimistic attitudes which doubted the forward, improving thrust of evolution (587).

The impulse to rewrite the timelines of sexual development and identity is evident within *Jude*'s narratology, as it both corresponds to and reverses the conventions of the *bildungsroman*. *Jude*, of course, reverses these conventions by telling a story of individual social decline culminating in child death. Alex Moffett argues that this revised, even darkly parodic, narrative structure indicts the social and class strata which are uncritically mastered by the hero of a classic *bildungsroman*. We can, then, "conceptualize *Jude the Obscure* as a *bildungsroman* either by conceiving the genre as encompassing all possible developmental vectors, not necessarily just onward and upward, or by problematizing the actual existence of such social trajectories in the first place" (86).

In other words, *Jude*'s fractured or split relation to time, its entrenchment in both past and future, is inherently linked to its characters' frustratingly horizontal and, finally, sharply downward mobility. By queering the narrative frame of the *bildungsroman*, Hardy offers both a critique and alternative, dire though they may be, to the social and sexual strictures which precipitate Little Father Time's demise. Little Father Time's asynchronous ability to comprehend sexual and social issues beyond his childish ability to bear is portrayed as fundamental to a generation of children precociously aware of, and inclined to reject, their own present and future.

*Jude*'s revision of the *bildungsroman*'s temporal and narrative structures, and Little Father Time's position as a boy "of a sort unknown in the last generation," are also inextricably linked to the novel's publication at the close of the nineteenth century. As Franco Moretti contends in *The Way of the World*, his survey of the European *bildungsroman*, Goethe's 1796 *Wilhelm Meister* was the genre's inaugural text, ushering in a century in which the emergent identities of the novel and the *bildungsroman* became increasingly entwined. At the same time (again, according to Moretti) youth became an essential aspect of literary heroism. Previously, childhood had been regarded and portrayed as a blank, "invisible" period, predating the

inscription of an adulthood whose patterns and progressions had already been lived by one's parents and grandparents, as "[e]ach individual's youth faithfully repeats that of his forebears, introducing him to a role that lives on unchanged." Subsequently, changing historical and cultural conditions made "youth itself problematic -- an uncertain exploration of social space" (3-4).

Hardy's novels may certainly be read as gross exaggerations of this problematizing of childhood, which, over the course of the nineteenth century, was increasingly belabored and revealed, in great detail, as a fraught and helpless period. Both *Little Father Time's* and *Tess D'Urberville's* experiences constitute emphatically radical departures from childhood as the blank slate against which, per Moretti, the nineteenth-century novel defined itself. Instead, these narratives collapse the process so that *Tess*, *Little Father Time*, and their siblings (as well as *Tess's* baby, *Sorrow*) are born already marked and defined by the experiences and actions of their predecessors. These characters' childhoods are not dull periods of indeterminate identity awaiting inscription upon maturity; their identities are thrust upon them before they are prepared to accept or even comprehend them.

As I have already noted, Hardy's children are thrust anachronistically into adulthood. This circumstance becomes grotesquely apparent in *Tess's* opening chapters, which detail the ludicrously and pathetically reversed roles of parent and child in the *D'Urberville* family, as *Tess* replaces her intoxicated father in making the ill-fated market delivery which leads to the family's downfall, and which then prompts her to "claim kin" with the rapacious *Alec* in order to provide for her parents and siblings. *Sorrow*, the offspring of *Tess* and *Alec*, is similarly doomed by her immediate inscription into family identity, as *Tess's* father forbids the infant from receiving medical attention lest the family be shamed, leading directly to *Sorrow's* death. This point is further driven home, with an equally glaring lack of subtlety, by *Sorrow's* burial: Having been

refused a Christian burial, Tess administers the funeral herself, with only her siblings present. Sorrow's funeral is for, by, and attended exclusively by children, as the adults in their lives have so thoroughly failed them that they are forced to fend for themselves or perish.

If Tess, her siblings and her child inherit an historically determined lot, and Tess in particular is doomed to re-enact the dreaded D'Urberville curse (involving a man who abducts a woman and subsequently suffers a violent death), Little Father Time is more evenly torn between past and future: He is not simply a figure who, like Tess, juxtaposes a miserably adult past onto an ironically youthful subject. Instead, *Jude the Obscure* deepens and expands on *Tess's* problematization of youth, evoking a childish figure who is not only born to adult imperatives whose contours predate his own existence, but is also claimed as an emissary of the future, one member of an imminent class whose motives and desires are heretofore unknown, so alien as to constitute a rejection of life itself.

It is tempting, then, to consider both *Tess* and *Jude* in the context of what Franco Moretti, citing Jurij Lotman, describes as a dichotomous relationship between transformational, as opposed to classification-oriented, narratives. As Moretti explains, in classification-oriented narratives, youth terminates in a just, fixed ending which solidifies the protagonist's adult identity. In transformational narratives, however, endings are left open and maturation may be seen as a betrayal of youth, rendering youth meaningless rather than meaningful as a prelude to adulthood (4).

Both these novels, however, trouble Lotman's dichotomy: From birth, Little Father Time and Tess are firmly classified as representatives of their respective family lines, and their deaths certainly constitute unambiguous, fixed endings, though the justice of those endings is far from clear. In this sense, both novels may be considered classification narratives. However, these narratives may also be considered transformational: Little Father Time's attainment of "an

intelligent age,” and Tess’s own status as an adolescent, herald the violent destruction, or betrayal, of youth by age. Similarly, though these characters are born classified and fixed in the path of their family lineage, this status arguably renders youth meaningless: As the emphatic obscurity of *Jude*’s title suggests, these characters are defeated and ineffective within the narratives they inhabit, though the narratives themselves may be read as advocating for a transformation of the traditions and restrictions whose crushing effects they describe, and for the proliferation of open, as-yet-undefined endings to replace them.

In other words, the aesthetic and political meaning of these texts depends upon their presentation of characters who are stiflingly classified, and whose fixed endings are the predictable culmination of that stifling. In exaggerating the traits of classification narratives, these novels become their own type of transformation narrative, advocating for a loosening of the cultural strictures which doom their characters, and for the imagining of roles and identities that might have allowed them happier, more flexible fates. Both Tess and Little Father Time, then, are caught between the two halves of the classification/transformation dichotomy, as they are bound by the past in a way which invites a radical re-envisioning of the future, a temporal paradox which is inextricable from their similarly ambivalent status as preternaturally adult children.

*Jude*’s contemporary reviews, in their insistence on this text as a document of sexual pathology, would seem to support the false dichotomy that *Jude the Obscure* must properly be considered either, favorably, as a deterrent portrait of sexual vice and its tragic aftermath, or unfavorably, as an unjustifiably obscene depiction of adultery and extramarital sex. This dichotomy precludes an understanding of the ways in which the narrative might function neither as an affirmation or condemnation of nonstandard sexual practices and identities, but as a challenge to re-envision the social and medical definitions and boundaries which offer only the

language of pathology and morbidity with which to define them. Declaring the novel a literary failure on account of its alleged status as a medical text also ignores the novel's deliberate revision of the narrative conventions of the *bildungsroman* and, by extension, its effort to forge a language and a canon with which to delineate sexual identities beyond the purview of procreative marital sexuality. As Jude explains:

It was in his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us – boys of a sort unknown in the last generation – the outcome of new views on life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live. He's an advanced man, the doctor, but he can give no consolation. (400)

The doctor's, and Jude's, understanding of Little Father Time as an emissary from a nihilistic future seems, in some ways, to be a reversal of degeneracy theory, suggesting that illness and death may stem from incursions of the future, rather than the past, on the present. The underlying principle, however – a sense that one's placement in time was uncertain, unstable, and vulnerable, anything but fixed – underlies the quasi-apocalyptic concerns of both the degeneracy theorists and *Jude*. In re-interpreting the concerns of degeneration theory by projecting them into the future, or onto characters which the narrative specifically and plainly regards as futuristic, Hardy opens a crucial perspective within degeneration discourse, asking what potential futures might exist for a new type of child who manifests the compulsions and sins of his forebears while forging a new identity for, and with, the future.

Rather than simply portraying Jude as a sexual profligate, and Little Father Time as an agent of moral recompense – either to obscene or transcendent aesthetic effect – *Jude*, I want to suggest, posits the social and ethical potential of a sexuality which deviates from a linear progression from past to future, or from the individual ascent marked by the *bildungsroman*. Little Jude, then, is not simply a recurrence of the past or fulfillment of a family curse, but also a “new type of boy” who represents both a return to the past and an unsustainable link to the

future. In writing Little Father Time's death this way, and in ending this perverse *bildungsroman* with a spectacularly morbid instance of child death, then, Hardy is arguably approaching pathology from a sidewise perspective. This perspective demonstrates the extent to which misery, loss, and the failure or refusal to secure a mate or reproduce, may function as one option, among many, for defining one's sexual identity and future.

*Jude's* reversal of the *bildungsroman's* temporal and social trajectories, and its fatal results, are predicated on its characters' compulsory repetition of the past, whether they are conscious or unconscious of it. This is true of Little Father Time's fulfillment of the Fawley family curse, but also evident in Sue's subsequent intellectual and ethical regression, and her return to Phillotson. (Similarly, the elder Jude succumbs to alcoholic and sexual temptation, returning to and remarrying Arabella after Sue leaves him.) Little Jude's emergence as a simultaneously youthful and aged offspring, a childish revisiting of ancient wrongs, is typical of Victorians' increasing sense that individual entrenchment of the past, whether in the form of degeneration, or in a failure to make timely progress along a timeline of appropriate sexual development, was profoundly unhealthy. Such concerns were partly a response to the accelerating pace of technological and scientific developments: As Stephen Kern has noted, phonographic cylinders, moving pictures, and the popularization of preservation societies and personal photographs all constituted "silent arguments for the persistence of the past and its impact on the present" (40).

The awareness of the past's persistent impact was shared not only by amateur historians, but by medical researchers, who increasingly suspected that the body was a repository of past experience. In 1867, Henry Maudsley's *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* introduced the concept of organic memory, claiming that memories are stored in "the nervous cells which lie scattered in the heart and in the intestinal walls" (182). In 1870, the popular German

psychologist Ewald Herring revised his theory to suggest that each cell contains the memories, not only of the organism's parents, but of all preceding related generations (Kern 40). Similarly, Henri Bergson's 1896 *Matter and Memory* sought to define the present as the duration of the past, positing that "Either you must suppose that this universe dies and is born again miraculously at each moment of duration, or you make of its past a reality which endures and is prolonged into the present" (142).

Clearly, many of the above sources were published subsequent to *Jude*, and therefore cannot be said to have influenced Hardy in writing it; however, I want to suggest that this novel, as well as the above-described biological and psychological theories, demonstrate and respond to a pervasive cultural sense that the past was increasingly present. These texts constitute threads in a discourse that defines the human condition as one of partial engulfment by the past. This engulfment was not always understood as benign: If the diseased mind and body were understood to be haunted by prior trauma or degeneracy (respectively), the culture at large was also repeatedly and widely represented, by social and scientific theorists as well as by texts like *Jude*, as similarly fraught and imperiled by the perceived increasing overlap between past and future.

The perils of individual entrenchment in the past were also, of course, explored and widely publicized by Freud, whose writings on trauma and melancholia portray the recurrence or persistence of the past as a potentially disabling affliction. However, it is also worth noting that psychoanalysis itself is predicated on a return to, and reconstruction of, childhood and, if applicable, of one's traumatic past. This movement backward in time is not only salutary; it illuminates the extent to which each individual life story encapsulates or allegorizes the history and development of mankind. As Freud explains in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, "The prehistory into which the dream-work leads us back is of two kinds – on the one hand, into

the individual's prehistory, his childhood, on the other, in so far as each individual somehow recapitulates in abbreviated form, the entire development of the human race" (246). In other words, psychoanalysis is a narrative project which necessitates a return to the past, and to one's childhood self. By traveling backward in time in a controlled manner and environment, the psychoanalytic subject is able to fend off the past's unwanted incursions and ill effects. If the recurrence of the past signals disease, a conscious and controlled return to the past constitutes an essential component of the Freudian cure.

If both physiological theories of organic memory and psychoanalytic trauma theory presuppose the past's often stifling recurrence in the present, so too did an increasing concern over the frequency and effects of incest. As Mary Jean Corbett has noted, this concern was heightened by the fact that late Victorians were only beginning to distinguish between affinity (relation by marriage) and consanguinity (relation by blood) -- a distinction that was not codified until legislation passed in 1907 and 1908 (4). In addition to their consanguinity, Jude and Sue are heir to a family curse which prevents any of their lineage from marrying happily, the disastrous results of which are presumably multiplied by the presence of two Fawley family members in the same union. This danger was consonant with a particular public concern with the offspring of cousins. As Corbett as remarks, "... the biological wisdom of cousin-marriage ... was increasingly debated after 1860 regarding its effects on the offspring of such unions," who were thought to suffer from a doubling-up of "bad blood" (13-14). Incest was thought to be particularly threatening and prevalent among the lower classes and allegedly primitive peoples, in part because, as Darwin himself suggested, there is no innate revulsion against incest. This argument was reinforced by Freud, who suggested that the incest taboo was a primary requirement of civilization, imposed by one's culture rather than innate.

The 1880s saw a spate of studies on the urban poor, as well as the 1884 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, which solicited testimony on the effects of overcrowding on sexual behavior, including both precocious sexual activity and incest. Twenty years prior, in a speech to Parliament, Lord Shaftesbury attested that “There were not only adults of both sexes living in the same room, but adult sons sleeping with their mothers, and brothers and sisters very commonly sleeping in the same bed ...incestuous crime was frightfully common – common to the greatest possible extent” (Hollingshead 223).

*Jude*'s portrayal of incest as a recursion to the past was in consonance with popular writing on the subject, in which incest was considered a refusal of advancement or development, while exogamous marriages were regarded as the bedrock and end goal of civilization. As John Ferguson McLennan wrote in *Primitive Marriage* (1865), “The city might be made to furnish illustrations of the progress of the family in every phase, from the lowest incestuous combinations of kindred to the highest group based on non-monogamous marriages” (15). McLennan's fear echoes Lord Shaftesbury's testimony in its fearful reference to excessive proximity between family members of different generations. This proximity was understood to chip away at the separation of consanguineous and sexual relationships, and is associated by both McLennan and Shaftesbury with lower class status, thus suggesting, at least in McLennan's formulation, that the upper classes engaged in a more evolved form of sexuality, one which was exogamous if not monogamous.

It is evident, then, that incestuous behavior was popularly perceived to be closely linked to poverty and overcrowding, and was partly the result of undue physical proximity, or a lack of spatial boundaries, between the generations. Thus, young children, often siblings, were likely to witness sexual scenes between their elders. It was believed they might mimic such scenes with other child-relatives, producing offspring which, as earlier explained, would bear redoubled,

rather than diluted, remnants of their ancestors' flaws and vices. Such fears are plainly addressed in *Jude*'s extremely unhappy ending, right down to Little Father Time's enigmatic suicide note, which reads "Done because we are too menny" (312). If the reader presumes "menny" is a misspelling of "many," the note reads clearly as a reference to the family's immediate circumstances: Unable to provide for their children and ostracized for their unwed status, Jude and Sue have just been told they will have to leave their current lodging. The size of the Fawley family was the last topic of discussion between the younger Jude and Sue. Having told him she is expecting another child, and unable to answer Little Father Time's question about why she would add to their already oppressively large brood, Sue is posed another question: Would it be better if none of the family had been born?

Given the novel's context in contemporary debates on incest, "too menny" may also be read as a plaintive acknowledgment of the younger Fawleys' status as the offspring of cousins: "too menny" in the sense that they are haunted by, reflective of, and otherwise crowded out by the prior generations, whose flaws and failures spell their own doom. Rather than progressing in linear fashion, developing a personality, identity, and desires of his own, Little Father Time is born, in Stockton's parlance, backward: For all his futurity, as diagnosed in the doctor's speech considered earlier in this essay, Little Father Time is doomed to revisit his ancestors' failings, taking to its logical extreme the "Fawley curse" which dooms the marriages of all family members. The timeless and repetitive nature of this curse is underscored by Jude's quotation of the Greek tragic hero Agamemnon in explanation of it: "Things are as they are, and will be brought to the destined issue" (328). Agamemnon is a member of the house of Atreus, a family which occurs in the plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus, and whose members are doomed, generation after generation, to fulfil the gods' decrees that they murder their relatives. The

imminent parallels with the Fawley family are clear, as Little Father Time, the “issue” of Jude’s and Sue’s incestuous liaison, soon fulfills his own familial destiny by murdering his siblings.

Critics have expounded on Hardy’s influence by Greek myth, with Felicia Bonaparte elaborating on the links between, for example, Tess and the Persephone myth (Bonaparte 415).<sup>21</sup> Each of these readings, to some extent, regards Hardy as disjointed from his historical moment and, consequently, from the novelistic genre, contextualizing him among the authors of previous centuries due to the pessimism (or, more specifically, the belief in historical predetermination as a force encroaching on the present) which pervades his works, and, as I have already suggested, intensifies over the brief years intervening between *Tess* and *Jude*. It is, however, my contention that Hardy makes transformative use of the tragic elements which he employs in these texts, using them to comment on issues of historical and ancestral predetermination which were very much at stake in his own culture, and in the novel as a genre.

Hardy uses the generic conventions of tragedy in order to pose the larger question which animates both *Tess* and *Jude*: Can temporal reversion provide or sustain the future, and is the future worth it? *Tess* contains a more individualized, micro-level perspective, regarding its heroine Tess as a person before embroiling her in intergenerational fatalism. This is exemplified in Hardy’s initial description of her appearance displaying previous moments of her development in an alternating, anachronistic fashion, and by the novel’s expanded focus on what it means to be a D’Urberville. In *Jude*, Little Father Time, Sue, and Jude espouse a more generalized form of kinship, based on shared humanity as well as the older generation’s responsibility to care for the younger. Despite the fatalism which pervades both these texts, each employs anachronism to

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<sup>21</sup> For other readings of *Tess* as a reworking of Greek mythology, see Shirley Stave’s *The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture, and Women in Thomas Hardy’s Fiction*, which reads Hardy’s heroines as Greek mythic figures, representing a conflict between male-identified civilization and female-identified Pagan values (8). Lynn Parker’s “‘Pure Woman’ and Tragic Heroine? Conflicting Myths in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*” argues that mythic allusions in *Tess*’s rape scene point to the eternal nature of patriarchal domination (276). G. Glenn Wickens’s “Hardy and the Aesthetic Mythographers: The Myth of Demeter and Persephone in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*” reads *Tess* as a retelling of the Persephone myth.

generate, and to advocate for the acceptance of, forms of kinship which thrive on temporal dislocation, and for which the figure of the dead child is not a figure of pure hopelessness, but productive in its indication of the need for cultural change.

### 3. MATRILINEAL VAMPIRISM IN VICTORIAN FICTION AND POETRY

The following chapter argues that in a range of nineteenth-century vampire narratives, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1800 "Christabel," Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 *Carmilla*, and Florence Marryat's 1897 *The Blood of the Vampire*, the female reproductive body is used to negotiate the increasingly fraught and complex relationship between British and foreign nationality. Influenced by Susan Lanser's exhortation in *The Sexuality of History* to read historical and political meaning through representations of the sapphic, I demonstrate that the lesbian desires and attachments which emerge in each of these texts dramatize an increasingly anxious awareness that England's imperialist presence in foreign territories problematized dichotomous distinctions between the British and the foreign. Where British imperialism was premised on England's distinction from, and superiority to, the nations it colonized, this separation was undermined by the physical proximity, mutual cultural influence, and interracial sexuality which are inevitable aspects of colonial infiltration.<sup>22</sup> This dynamic of international interdependence and sameness, which belies an expected separation or distinction, is reflected in depictions of same-sex desire, including incestuous maternal advances, which blur the boundaries of both national and individual identity.

This chapter follows Julia Kristeva's understanding of the maternal body as the prototypical site of abjection, an object of both horror and fascination to be rejected in establishing independent identity -- a dynamic which, for Kristeva and in these texts as I read them, is then replicated in establishing national identity. I show that in "Christabel," *Carmilla*, and *The Blood of the Vampire*, colonialism's blurring of national identity was emblemized by

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<sup>22</sup> For further discussion of the role of place and nationality in identity formation, including imperialism as a challenge to British identity, see Ian Baucom's *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*. Simon Gikandi's *Maps of Englishness* also examines the impact of imperialism on the novel.

the female reproductive body.<sup>23</sup> Medical discourse on hysteria, from Hippocrates' evocation of hysteria through Victorian writing on this same concept, regarded female sexuality and reproductivity as animalistic, primitive, and otherwise as alterity. As Kristeva argues, such discourse constructed the feminine as an inescapable "other" haunting and undermining any attempt to establish an identity based on its rejection.

Building on Stephen Arata's reading of the vampire as infiltrating the British empire in a reversal of the colonial process, as well as medical discourse which portrayed inheritance as an infliction of past wrongs on the present, this chapter begins with "Christabel," reading this earliest text, and later Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, through the lens of subsequent Victorian vampire narratives' increasing engagement with nationalist anxieties. Placing Geraldine and Carmilla in the context of the Greek lamia myth, the tale of an androgynous, child-devouring, serpentine woman which was revived in popular Victorian culture, allows us to more accurately perceive these texts' use of the female reproductive body as an index of reverse-colonialist anxiety: Because the lamia was understood to appeal to others' sympathy on the basis of being a stranger in an unfamiliar place, this figure became a symbol of female sexuality as an abrogation of both species and national identity. In *The Blood of the Vampire*, female sexuality and maternity also serve as conduits for the reverse-colonialist anxieties which infuse this text: The protagonist, Harriet's, conception during the rape of her Jamaican-slave mother by her European slave-owner father is the narrative's initial act of kinship-as-contagion. This rape creates the looming threat that Harriet, now in England and infected with her mother's vampirism, will avenge this wrong on its geographic source. That Harriet's unwitting ability to enact such vengeance is based on her presumed status as a marriageable young woman in England makes it clear that, in this text as in

<sup>23</sup> For further criticism on vampirism and female abjection, see Angelica Michelis' "Dirty Mamma: Horror, Vampires, and the Maternal in Late Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fiction." Michelis accounts for the abundance of psychoanalytic readings of vampire texts by suggesting that both psycholanalytic criticism and late-Victorian gothic literature were "fascinated and haunted" by anxiety embedded in cultural constructions of maternity (6). Joan Copjec's "Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety" contends that breast-feeding in *Dracula* is a symbol of the anxiety created by a maternal figure who is both undefined and inescapable (27).

earlier vampire narratives, female reproductive sexuality serves as an index of nationalist concerns, and as a vehicle for reverse-colonial infiltration.

### **Vampirism and the Foreign in “Christabel”**

My reading of “Christabel” is retrospective, viewing this text through the dynamics and concerns of the vampire texts which proliferated in its wake, including not only *Carmilla* and *The Blood of the Vampire*, but also Keats’ “Lamia” and Stoker’s *Dracula*. These later texts become increasingly concerned with British nationality and the threat posed to it by foreign, and especially colonial, female vampires. Arguing that female sexuality, particularly as figured through maternity and lesbianism, is used to address colonialist anxieties with increasing emphasis and specificity over the course of the century, I contend that reading “Christabel” through these later texts foregrounds its representation of maternal domination as a form of foreign usurpation -- a theme running through each of the texts explored in this chapter.<sup>24</sup>

*Carmilla*, for instance, employs the foreign setting of Styria for its narrative of a deceased, foreign mother returned to life to tempt her British daughter with a vampiric mode of consanguineous kinship which eschews both men and, implicitly, England. We can see Christabel being offered a similar form of national and family belonging by Geraldine, a mysterious stranger, far from her unknown home, who speaks to Christabel’s dead mother and states she is taking her place. Reading “Christabel” in this way allows us to understand the poem, not simply as a narrative of female hysteria or lesbian desire, but as employing these tropes of sexual sameness to encapsulate imperialism’s impossible drive to hold British culture and identity distinct from the colonized peoples who were depicted as feminine and primitive.

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<sup>24</sup> As suggested in this dissertation’s introduction, this reading of “Christabel” through the lens of mid- and late-Victorian vampire texts follows Goldberg and Menon’s homohistorical approach of collapsing temporal distance in order to read queer characters and texts as similar and continuous.

This trope of horrific sameness undermining national, gendered, and temporal distinctions is partly achieved through the figure of the Greek mythological lamia. Perhaps best known from Keats's 1820 poem "Lamia," this figure is an adulterous woman turned to an androgynous human-snake hybrid and condemned to wander the earth devouring others' children. The lamia facilitated the association of primitive, animalistic alterity with female sexuality, and with that of foreign, and particularly colonized, peoples: As Octavia Davis has noted, late-Victorian imperialism "construct[ed] 'native' bodies as ... feminine, the anachronistic opposite of the 'highly evolved' white British male" (Anolik 40-41). In its combination of androgyny, human-animal hybridity, and geographic foreignness, the ambiguous lamia illustrates this conflation of femininity with both animality and national foreignness. In the vampire texts considered in this chapter, these conflated traits are set against, and threaten to infiltrate and contaminate, British characters and locations. The nationalist nature of this threat remains subtextual in the late-Romantic "Christabel" and becomes overt but is effectively banished in mid-century *Carmilla*. By the *fin-de-siècle* *The Blood of the Vampire*, however, the lamia's conjunction of female sexuality, species and national hybridity represents a clear threat to England, causing this narrative's heroine to banish herself through suicide rather than pass these traits to her future children.

The aptness with which female sexuality and maternity were used in these texts as a metaphor for nationalist anxieties is significantly due to the tendency of medical and psychological discourse to regard women as less developed than men, and thus as temporally stunted, animalistic, prone to the interpersonal transmission of hysterical symptoms, and, for those reasons, as threatening to the boundaries which underwrite and sustain identity, whether human, individual, or national. Consequently, I have read these texts through the conceptual lens of reverse colonization. As Arata notes, the late nineteenth century was marked by colonial

unrest as well as growing British unease over imperialism's morality, which "combined to erode Victorian confidence in the inevitability of British progress and hegemony" (622). This unease was "transformed into narrative[s]" of reverse colonization, "the period's most important and pervasive narrative of decline" (623). The texts considered in this chapter deploy the figure of the maternal vampire as an agent of reverse colonization, as these figures' recursion to the past undoes the teleological progress of both sexual and national development.

I will begin with "Christabel," not simply because of its predating the other texts discussed in this chapter, but because of this poem's evocation of a consuming, maternal vampire who both mirrors and seduces the protagonist while threatening to destroy and displace both her and her mother. "Christabel" is a meditation on monstrous maternity as a threat to individual identity. This threat underlies the ambiguity and anxiety driving the poem's plot and the characterization of its antagonist, Geraldine, who both silences and speaks through other characters. Geraldine's ability to silence others is duplicated at the narrative level by the poem's refusal to disclose precisely what takes place in Christabel's bed during the night she shares it with Geraldine. Christabel herself is also unable to describe these events, as Geraldine's "bosom" places a spell on Christabel which acts as "lord of [her] utterance," enabling her to tell her father, Sir Leoline, only that she found Geraldine alone and helpless in the woods in the aftermath of a kidnapping by several men (lines 267-268).

It is apparent that Christabel's power to deceive is based in part on her ability to manipulate the eyes -- and, by extension, the subjective perspectives -- of others, causing them to see things which are not literally present, or to be blinded to those that are. Just prior to this description of Leoline's deceived eyes, his envoy, Bracy, complains of a dream that "would not pass away ... [it] seems to live upon my eye." This obsessive vision is a clear analog for Geraldine's diabolical power over Christabel, as Bracy dreamt of a dove attacked by a snake, the

snake “coiled around its wings and neck ... Close by the dove’s its head it crouched / And with the dove’s it heaves and stirs / Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!” (lines 543-561). The confusion created by the pronouns “its” and “hers” is echoed in, and reflective of, the tangled bodies of the dove and snake, as the snake’s swollen neck hints that it may be devouring the dove, even as it coils around its neck, crushing the air and life from the bird. Bracy’s obsessive, hallucinatory vision complements Sir Leoline’s blindness, as Leoline “half-listens” to Bracy’s description before turning to Geraldine and judging her divine -- thus tempting Christabel to warn him. Each man is responding to his own vision of Geraldine, Leoline to the material beauty who stands before them, and Bracy to a spectral, unreal image which nonetheless captures a more fundamental and urgent truth than that perceived by Leoline. Geraldine’s loveliness may be physically present, but it is not real in the manner of Bracy’s imagined tableau, which captures the truth hidden beneath her beautiful surface, and which is obscured by her silencing of Christabel.

Geraldine’s serpentine nature is affirmed by the description of her eyes as “each shrunk up to a serpent’s eye,” clearly identifying her as the snake in Bracy’s vision. This causes Christabel, “in dizzy trance,” to “hiss aloud,” preventing her from warning her father against Geraldine (lines 585-597). In speaking through Christabel, Geraldine compels her to make serpentine sounds rather than speaking her native tongue, English. Viewed from the perspective of *Carmilla*, in which the heroine’s family home stands as a bulwark of the English language in foreign-tongued Styria, this silencing emerges as a form of linguistic domination: Christabel’s inarticulate hiss may be understood as a foreign tongue, and as an indirect statement of Geraldine’s nationally foreign origin, with its full associative baggage of uncontrolled sexual desire, infanticidal tendencies, and primitivity.<sup>25</sup> Geraldine’s foreignness, which infects

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<sup>25</sup> Gayatri Spivak has argued for the difficulty, if not impossibility, of imperial voices seeking to speak for native perspectives; see “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

Christabel through their narratively-obscured encounter, is inseparable from her vampiric entrenchment in a primitive past; each haunts the progress narrative of imperial British identity.

**“Christabel,” Geraldine, and the Lamia.** Bracy’s hallucinatory vision interprets the real sight which Leoline fails to properly understand, as though he is looking through Leoline’s eyes and seeing what Leoline cannot. Geraldine also looks through Christabel’s eyes, her (Geraldine’s) “shrunk serpent eyes” instilling her serpentine nature in Christabel and supplanting her ability to warn her father about this feminine interloper. Where Geraldine originally appears under the guise of a beautiful young woman, then, the image of the snake -- both perceived by Bracy’s eye and displayed in Christabel’s -- seems to be a more accurate portrayal of her lustful, deceitful, ancient and predatory character.

The centrality of Geraldine’s serpentine alter ego to “Christabel,” and the increasing resonance of the mythological snake-woman in Victorian literature, is evidenced in James Routh’s 1910 review of “Parallels in Coleridge, Keats, and Rossetti.” As Routh notes, a much-delayed second installment of “Christabel” was published in 1816, only a few years before Keat’s “Lamia,” a poem which revived the Greek myth of an adulterous woman whose lover’s wife retaliates by killing her children and cursing her to roam the earth devouring others’ children. In both texts, a serpent-woman is found in the forest, presents herself as a stranger from from home, and is rescued from “great grief” before vanishing (line 34). Both Keats and Coleridge describe their serpent-women as undulating and changeable; where Geraldine’s serpentine self is described as undulating, expanding, contracting, and changing shape with each breath, Keats’ lamia is described in chameleonic terms, her scaly flesh shot through with changing colors (line 34).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For further discussion of Keats’s and Coleridge’s mutual influence, see Rosemarie Maier’s “The Bitch and the Bloodhound: Generic Similarity in ‘Christabel’ and ‘The Eve of St. Agnes.’”

The parallels between Geraldine and the lamia figure, in its various literary incarnations, are further developed by Coleman Parson's work on the lamia's evolution.<sup>27</sup> As Parsons explains, British children were introduced to the lamia through an illustrated text called *A Description of 300 Animals*. In print from 1730 to 1826, this volume represented the lamia as "having human countenance and breasts, male sex organs, and scaly body -- until the 1790's, when the scales and sex organs were both "censored out." The illustration (though not the text) was omitted in 1808, and "the hermaphroditic lamia became *monstra non grata*" in the revised editions of 1812 and 1826 (183). Both Coleridge and his readers, then, were likely familiar with the the image of the lamia combining male and female bodily traits, while simultaneously incorporating both bestial and human features. The horror of this image seems to lie in its blurring of these identity-sustaining dichotomies, as both the sexual and animalic features were edited out before the image was removed entirely. These editorial decisions made and carried out between 1790 and 1826, spanning the interval in which the initial "Christabel" poem emerged and was followed, sixteen years later, by its long-delayed conclusion. At the precise moment when the lamia's visual image (though not her verbal description) was first partially obscured, then entirely removed, Coleridge's Geraldine emerged, answering to the image of a creature who is both human and serpentine, and whose body is hidden -- visually in the *Description of 300 Animals*, and verbally through "Christabel's" narrative silence.

The emphatic blurring of gendered and species boundaries, the feminine embodiment of that blurring, and the insistence on obscuring that embodiment, suggest not only that Geraldine is an extension of the Greek figure, as well as an influence on Keats' subsequent "Lamia," but that this figure's horrific power stems from its fusing of opposites, which constitutes an affront to human, individual, gendered, and even national identity (as the lamia invariably appeals for help

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<sup>27</sup> For further readings of Geraldine as a lamia figure, see Arthur Nethercot's *The Road to Tryermaine* (59-106); Elizabeth Schneider's "Notes on 'Christabel'" (197-206); and Sharon Weltman's chapter on the lamia in *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion and Victorian Culture* (73-99).

as a stranger in an unfamiliar land). This power is inseparable from the lamia's (and other mythological figures') utility in interrogating and seeing beyond binary constructs of gender identity. As Sharon Weltman has argued in her work on Victorians' use of mythopoesis, myth "provid[es] the tools ... for redefining gender itself in ways beyond traditional, empirical, rigidly bipolar logic" (*Ruskin's Mythic Queen* 352).

The critical impulse, both Victorian and more recent, to read "Christabel" as a narrative which both portrays and creates hysteria, is grounded in the same anxieties which I have described as being essential to the figure of the lamia: Where the lamia generates horror from its disregard for the dichotomous boundaries which underwrite identity, from being at once male and female, human and animal, the lamia-like Geraldine breaches these same boundaries while causing hysterical symptoms in those around her, including Christabel's aphasia (loss of speech), inarticulate utterings, and Bracy's hallucinations. She also appropriates the identities of both Christabel's mother and Christabel herself: In appealing to Christabel as an innocent maiden, wandering unprotected, Geraldine elicits sympathy by mirroring her. The poem itself is similarly credited, by critics like Karen Swann as well as contemporary reviewers including William Hazlitt and Thomas Moore, with inducing hysteria and identity disturbance in its readers.

The disorienting sameness which haunts "Christabel," and which continues to influence readings of this poem, also perplexed contemporary reviewers, leading them to diagnose its author with hysterical identity loss similar to that of his heroines. The poem garnered negative notices from Moore and Hazlitt, as well as anonymous criticism which has since been attributed to Charles Lamb (Erdman 53). Reviewers castigated Coleridge as "unmanly ... [an] enchanted witch ... old nurse," "pann[ing] its author as like a woman, as effeminate and hysterical, like his hysterical heroine who 'cannot tell' what ails her" (Swann 398).<sup>28</sup> This last phrase is particularly

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<sup>28</sup> For further discussion of "Christabel's" reviews, see Elizabeth Schneider's "The Unknown Reviewer of Christabel: Jeffrey, Hazlitt, Tom Moore."

telling: The author's effeminacy and hysteria reveal themselves in the inability to "tell" which plagues both the narrative itself and its character, Christabel -- and, according to reviewers, extends to the author as well. Hysteria, defined by its free-floating, contagious character, infects the poem at every level: a perceived circumstance which identifies the poem as a female body, exhibiting and possibly transmitting symptoms. Such an image is inseparable from Geraldine's body, which is the poem's initial locus of hysteria, causing hallucinations and identity disturbances in those who behold it.

Swann extends this analysis to include reviewers in the growing circle of hysterical contagion, suggesting that "men of letters reacted hysterically to "Christabel" because they saw the fantastic exchanges of Geraldine and Christabel as dramatizing a range of problematically invested literary relations, including those between writers and other writers, and among authors, readers, and books" (543). For contemporary reviewers as well as recent critics, "Christabel" is understood to function -- or dysfunction -- as a hysterical female body and, as such, as a repository for concerns about generic impurity (including the effeminate character of Romantic poetry). Swann's analysis further suggests that, in problematizing the relationship between writers and their work, blurring the distinctions between the two as if they constituted one boundless, amorphous female body, both "Christabel" and its contemporary reviewers foregrounded an increasingly anxious sense of the reproductively viable female body as a potentially encompassing threat to both physical and psychological wholeness, as well as the boundaries that define them.

The animality of the lamia, and of Geraldine, are inseparable from the discourse of hysteria in which "Christabel" is so clearly embedded. As King's *Hippocrates' Woman* argues, the figure of the hysterical woman evolved into the animalistic, degenerate woman which came to unnerve Victorian thinkers (3). Sabine Arnaud's *On Hysteria* similarly contends that the

wandering uterus was alienated or separate from the female body in such a way that it is “made foreign” from that body, a microcosm of women’s perceived alterity, which is heightened by the frequent “use of the animal metaphor” in describing the hysteric malady (66). Between Geraldine’s serpentine transformation and the hysterical symptoms seemingly affecting the poem’s characters as well as its readers, “Christabel” marks the centrality of female bestial traits to hysteria discourse. Consequently, it is useful to read this poem retrospectively through vampire narratives published after Darwin’s 1859 *The Origin of Species*, which further complicated the distinction between humans and animals, inspiring degeneracy discourse’s understanding of women as both primitive and animalistic, and which also feminized and infantilized foreign peoples.

**“Christabel,” Androgyny and Predatory Lesbianism.** We can see, then, that the power of “Christabel” to engage -- to titillate and horrify -- is based on Geraldine’s apparently supernatural, chameleonic power to usurp, mirror, or otherwise adopt others’ identities. As Jonas Spatz influentially argues, Geraldine’s power over Christabel is based on her status as a projection of Christabel’s “sexuality, with its desire, fear, shame, and pleasure. The ‘witchcraft’ that makes her beautiful or ugly, inviting or menacing, depends on Christabel’s changing attitude toward herself. In Christabel’s dreams, Geraldine is the woman she at once yearns and fears to become” (111).

Spatz’ interpretation is strengthened by the context in which we meet Christabel at the poem’s opening: Bereft of a mother, as emphasized by the “toothless mastiff bitch” who acts as a dubious guard to Christabel’s home, and who moans, “some say,” at the sight of her deceased mistress, Christabel is also disturbed by the absence of her “betrothed knight,” of whom she dreamed all the previous evening (lines 6, 11, 24). In other words, Christabel is plagued by an unspecified anxiety (or anxieties) related to the absence, and possibly also to the impending

presence, of her soon-to-be husband. This absence and anxiety are introduced immediately following the first stanza's emphatic establishment of Christabel's home, and thus Christabel herself, as motherless.

Having walked into the woods near her home to pray her fiancé's welfare, and, arguably, for a resolution to the anxious dreams which disturbed her sleep the previous night, Christabel receives an immediate answer in the form of Geraldine, the mysterious woman who arises, at first moaning incoherently, from the other side of the oak tree where Christabel pauses to pray. Geraldine, then, seems not only to incarnate the mature sexuality that will soon be demanded of the apparently fearful Christabel, but also to embody or stand in for both Christabel's absent mother and her (also absent) "betrothed knight."

The extent to which Geraldine presents a sexually forward answer to the virginal Christabel's prayers is not only evidenced by the immediacy with which she emerges in response to them, but by the swift surety with which she seduces Christabel, first verbally and then physically. Geraldine first wins Christabel's trust by identifying herself as the victim of an abduction and, by implication, of rape, after which she was deposited, "a weary woman, scarce alive" beneath the oak, where she has lain "entranced" and unknowing "how long it is" since she was left for dead (lines 91-98). This narrative of kidnapping and coercion, with Geraldine as the victim, is then neatly reversed, as her woeful tale wins her an invitation into Christabel's home and, shortly thereafter, her bed. At this point, Geraldine re-enacts in reverse the story she has told Christabel: Where Geraldine was allegedly abducted and transported to a strange place, she uses this tale to gain entrance, and accompaniment by Christabel, into Christabel's family home. Just as Geraldine claims these men took advantage of her, "a maid alone," she preys on the solitary and abandoned Christabel, repeating her own experience with the variation of herself in the role of sexual aggressor (line 95).

Certainly, the poem up to this point has established a claim for the homoerotic nature of Geraldine's attempt to befriend Christabel. As Auerbach remarks, "*Christabel*, like *Carmilla*, strips its story of occult trappings that distract from the erotic interchange of identities between vampire and prey. Intimacy arouses these vampires, not blood or the moon" (*Our Vampires, Ourselves* 48). In other words, the relationship between Geraldine and Christabel is so evidently lesbian as to make this text remarkable for its late-Romantic context. This is, however, an aberrance for which Auerbach accounts in her chapter on *Carmilla* and "Christabel," "the female vampire is licensed to realize the erotic, interpenetrative friendship male vampires aroused and denied" in nineteenth-century prose and poetry (39). Accordingly, "[o]nly among women, those specialists in romantic friendship, is vampirism embodied in a physical, psychic union" (51). From this perspective, both vampirism and homosexuality are regarded as fundamentally alien in a way that is inextricable from the female body: For Auerbach, these texts "isolate vampirism as an extract of alien femaleness" (50).

The comparatively non-homoerotic content of early-to-mid-Victorian male-vampire texts like Byron's *Gaiour* and the serialized *Varney the Vampire*, if not the late-Victorian *Dracula*, supports this observation. Halberstam, however, identifies a possible weakness of such readings in her aforementioned book review, writing that

... more than one critic has suggested that romantic friendship is an ahistorical idealization of what were actually much more sexually animated bonds between women. The female vampire, in fact, might more accurately have played upon nineteenth-century fears about masculine, predatory women who seduced more obviously feminine women and rehearsed elaborate sexual scripts under the cover of female friendship. (60)

From this perspective, readings predicated on the romantic-friendship model may obscure the extent to which lesbian bonds did, and were known to, exist. Auerbach's insistence, for example, on the fundamentally alien quality of both lesbianism and femininity to Romantic readers of

“Christabel,” might reasonably be understood to erase the awareness and existence of lesbian relationships at that time

I would suggest, however, that this is not necessarily the case: Auerbach’s reading of “Christabel” does not at all preclude an understanding of Geraldine as a predatory lesbian, or the possibility of the poem’s contemporary readers identifying her as such. In fact, I would suggest that the poem invites readers to imagine Geraldine as a masculine figure at the poem’s critical moment, when Geraldine bares her breast and torso (her “side”) and the narrative conspicuously withholds a visual description.<sup>29</sup> Assuming Geraldine’s bosom and torso to be human, or at least humanoid, in appearance, the possibilities are various yet relatively limited: The shape of her breasts, ribcage, and waist might be feminine, masculine, or somewhere in between; they may or may not be disfigured or bear distinguishing marks. In addition to imagining the various ways in which Geraldine’s bosom may be read or marked, the imaginative reader is also invited to consider her body’s conformity to, or deviation from, her feminine identity. Despite her initial appeals to Christabel on the basis of shared femininity, then, Coleridge’s description of Geraldine, and this crucial narrative ellipsis, leave her open to be read as the “masculine, predatory” lesbian which Halberstam fears may be silenced by the discourse of romantic friendship.

This moment does not, however, only invite us to read Geraldine as a figure of gender ambiguity: In baring her breast, Geraldine usurps Christabel’s mother, overpowering Christabel by filling this primal gap. Geraldine’s baring of her breast has an understandably striking effect on Christabel, whose mother died in childbirth, thus ensuring that the maternal bosom is a sight

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<sup>29</sup> James B. Twichell has suggested that this scene “is better understood if we treat Christabel as a masculine figure” an argument which differs from my own reading of Geraldine as an androgynous figure, but which supports my, and others’, understanding of female androgyny as central to this moment (42). See also Cyndy Hendershot’s “Vampire and Replicant: The One Sex Body in a Two Sex World,” which builds on Thomas Laquer’s observation that, prior to the eighteenth century, a “one sex model” of anatomy prevailed, by suggesting that the vampire is an androgynous “ghost” of this model, haunting a two sex model which enshrines gender differentiation and masculine superiority (374).

wholly unknown, and inevitably unavailable, to her -- like Geraldine's, a vision "to dream of." (It is worth noting that Count Bracy recalls his own blaringly symbolic dream of a snake choking a dove as occurring at midnight, the same moment Christabel was beginning the walk that led her to Geraldine, and when the "toothless bitch" guarding her home howled at the chiming of the church bells to which Christabel's mother referred on her deathbed -- the bed in which she fatally bore, and presumably conceived Christabel, as well as predicting her marriage) (line 7).

Unsurprisingly, Geraldine is subsequently described as holding Christabel "in her arms ... As a mother with her child." More eerily, her seduction of Christabel is prefaced by a verbal warding off of Christabel's deceased mother, as during this same bedroom scene, Geraldine suddenly, and bizarrely, exclaims "Off, wandering mother ... I have power to bid thee flee" (lines 210-213).

Geraldine is not necessarily, however, limited to the female body: In the ending which Coleridge's physician later claimed the poet confided in him, she appears in the bodily form of Christabel's fiancé, returned to marry her (McElderry 437). This suggests that her duplicity is intended to gain sexual access to Christabel. As Nina Auerbach argues, Geraldine's ability to so thoroughly insinuate herself into Christabel's home, bed, and family is partly predicated on her exploitation of the social codes surrounding female romantic friendship. In *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Auerbach contends that "[t]he vampire in its female form ... embodies forbidden intimacy by presenting a gothicized version of the female ideal of romantic friendship." Such friendships are often initiated by psychic -- not necessarily blood-sucking -- vampires, "figures of womanly dependence" who "refuse blood but grow fat on friendship" (107-109). Rather than literally drinking their victims' blood, such women thrive on personally and psychologically diminishing them -- an expectation fulfilled by Geraldine's proclamation, upon undressing and

entering Christabel's bed, that her body contains a "spell" which will become "lord of" Christabel's speech.

This Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around;  
Then drawing in her breath aloud,  
Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
The cincture from beneath her breast:  
Her silken robe, and inner vest,  
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,  
Behold! her bosom and half her side --  
A sight to dream of, not to tell!  
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel! (lines 247-254)

These last few lines form a sharp narrative pivot which veers away from the overtures toward romantic friendship made up to this point: Though earlier details like the dying of fire in Geraldine's presence have suggested that she is not what she seems, it is at this moment that one realizes Geraldine is dangerous -- a quality which is specifically rooted in her physical body, and even more particularly in her breast. It is difficult, then, to read "Christabel" along the chronological continuum by which Auerbach contends (as pithily summarized in a 1996 review by Judith Halberstam) that "...early-nineteenth-century vampires are homoerotic friends; later in the century, they become female predators, and by the turn of the century, vampires have crystallized into one master vampire, Dracula ... the patriarch, the seducer, and finally the queer" (606). Instead, these lines, and Geraldine's subsequent status as "lord of [Christabel's] utterance, suggest that Geraldine occupies each of these three statures: The masculine "lord," as well as the authority implied by Geraldine's usurpation of Christabel's speech, are consistent with paternal authority; her disrobing in Christabel's bedroom certainly suggests seduction, and such an encounter between these two women qualifies as queer in the term's strictest sense.

Geraldine's assumption of these statures is predicated on her silencing of both Christabel and her phantom mother, particularly when they are about to warn one another, or Leoline, against her. She does not simply silence these women, however: She commandeers their bodies,

assuming corporeal form despite evidence of her own demise, emerging from her interment under an oak to lay in Christabel's bed, the undead embodiment of her absent, "wandering" mother. Geraldine's propensity to inhabit and control others' bodies is not, however, limited to these two women. As previously described, she also transfixes the vision of Count Bracy, whose obsessive vision of the snake-endangered dove stands in for Leoline's concomitant blindness. In a poem so concerned with wandering mothers, it seems that wandering does not simply mean physically leaving one's child or one's living body through death. Instead, like the wandering wombs first thought by Hippocrates to cause hysteria, and which then returned to haunt nineteenth-century physicians and their patients, Christabel's dead mother and her proxy Geraldine, do not simply wander away, but wander within and among bodies, causing a contagion which silences Christabel and causes Bracy to hallucinate.

Geraldine's spell also seems to bewitch the narrator, as the poem elides the events immediately following it, much as Christabel is forced to do. As Geraldine tells her, the otherwise mysterious "mark of shame, this seal of my sorrow" which marks her bosom, will prevent Christabel from telling anyone what will shortly transpire, rendering her able to relate only that she found Geraldine in distress in the forest and brought her home to "shield her." These are precisely the words used by the narrator to plead with "Jesu Maria," another deceased mother, to protect Christabel (lines 260-270). The narrator's wish is also apparently silenced, as Christabel is not shielded from, but prey to, Geraldine's manipulations. After a caesura which excludes the women's subsequent encounter (or whatever follows Geraldine's disrobing and proclamation), the narrative abruptly resuming on the following morning. The poem, then, suggests a potentially physical homosexual encounter, crystallizing that possibility in a visual display (in this case, Geraldine's chest) while deferring and silencing that encounter through the same symbol.

Geraldine is not, however, content simply to silence Christabel's speech. This silencing is a means to the end of displacing Christabel and her mother from their respective maternal and daughterly statuses. When Christabel's deceased mother, who, the poem suggests, acts as a guardian angel to her half-orphaned daughter, attempts to warn Christabel against Geraldine's advances, Geraldine perceives her presence (line 210). Christabel is similarly prevented from warning her father against Geraldine's sinister nature. Distracted by Geraldine's beauty and her alleged status as the daughter of an estranged friend of his youth, Sir Leoline perceives only these qualities and becomes irate with Christabel's sudden fit of apparent illness, as "He, who saw this Geraldine / Deemed her sure a thing divine," his "eyes made up of wonder and love" (lines 476-477). Geraldine's deceptive appearance, and her linguistic domination of Christabel, allow her to switch their roles, so that Christabel speaks a foreign, serpentine tongue while Geraldine takes the guise of youthful innocence. In so doing, Geraldine reverses their respective statuses as domestic maiden and foreign monster, so that this text contains traces of the reverse-colonial narrative arc which would emerge with greater clarity and intensity over the course of the century.

**"Unsettled and Unsettling:" Complicating Lesbianism in "Christabel".** It is clear, then, that Geraldine's silencing, her deceptive appearance, and the hallucinations she causes function as a threat to interpersonal boundaries and identity: Both her beauty and the visions she causes are false displays which seem real, and result in Christabel behaving uncharacteristically while Geraldine usurps her role. The critical impulse to read this poem in terms of surface and depth, seeing beyond the former to uncover the latter as if the text were a two-dimensional puzzle, makes it tempting to read this as the poem's ultimate meaning, as if the task of reading "Christabel" was to uncover Geraldine's true identity, or to expose her as a predatory lesbian. This impulse is complicated if we read, as Benjamin Kahan suggests in *Celibacies*, in a way that

does not insist on uncovering a “real” meaning below the textual veneer, or in reading silence as monolithic, to be decoded and spoken in a similar dichotomy. Rather, as Kahan asks us to remember from Foucault, “There is not one but many silences.” Cautioning us against “a paranoid hermeneutic that ‘reads through’ censorship to recover sexual expression -- in order to make sure that one’s sexual identities, desires, and pleasures never fall victim to suppression,” Kahan notes that such readings reduce texts to single, flattened meanings (5). In opposition to such symptomatic reading, Kahan advocates leaving “the knottedness of coding and difficulty intact, reading the blockage not as an impediment but as an elegant formation in and of itself” (5).

What would it mean to apply such a reading to “Christabel?” It would mean refusing to conceptualize Geraldine’s bosom -- first covered by her clothing, then briefly revealed without description, and finally plunged into a narrative silence -- as an object to be uncovered, a symbol sure to have a secret meaning behind it, recognizing that such approaches work from the premise of the queer as as the secret, deep obverse of heterosexual appearances, creating a one-to-one relationship or a dichotomy where a proliferation of meanings or identities might otherwise emerge.<sup>30</sup> Such a reading would arguably meet Geraldine on her own terms by embracing the variety of depthless, mutable surfaces with which she presents the reader, including the public appearance which stuns Christabel’s father and Count Bracy and the private sight she yields to Christabel. Rather than insisting on uncovering Geraldine’s true identity, collapsing the mysterious confusion that animates the text and gives life to her character, one might usefully regard her as hostile to the boundaries which underwrite individual selfhood. Claire B. May suggests such a reading when she suggests that “‘Christabel’ resists all attempts to give it determinate meaning. It remains unsettled and unsettling” (699). Similarly, Kathleen M. Wheeler, who regards Geraldine as “a force neither of evil nor desire, but of disruption ... the

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of narrative gaps and silences in “Christabel,” see Mark M. Hennelly, Jr.

meaninglessness at the heart of all language and meaning” (Wheeler 86). These critics’ surface-oriented reading of the poem counters the tendency of many critics to read these narratives as tales of repressed sexuality.<sup>31</sup> Read from May’s and Wheeler’s perspective, however, it becomes clear that rather than being a poem “about” hidden lesbianism, “Christabel” does the far more complex work of problematizing identity.

It is possible, then, to resist reading “Christabel” as a narrative of latent homosexuality, to be uncovered by the queer-savvy reader, while simultaneously recognizing that this poem does invite the reader to consider Geraldine as a lesbian (if only amongst her many identities). This approach reflects what Lanser refers to, in *The Sexuality of History*, as “large reading,” a strategy which moderates between close reading and historicism, reading “history through, and as contingent on, sexuality rather than reading sexuality through, and as contingent on, history” (20). According to Lanser, “in contrast to the project of queer reading, whereby scholars expose embedded homoerotic content in ‘closeted’ texts,” critics should seek “the breadth of concerns and interests that may be embedded in more obviously erotic surfaces” (20, 3). For Lanser, lesbianism, in its “(il)logic of woman + woman became a testing ground for modernity’s limit points,” dramatizing and displacing the perceived incoherence caused by the “more pressing material challenges of statecraft and slavery, colonialism and class” (2-4).

Reading “Christabel” from this perspective allows us to understand the ways in which these narratives deploy homoeroticism in order to address cultural conflicts, including the increasingly problematized relationship between readers and writers, between humans and animals, and between the British nation and its colonized subjects. Each of these conflicts creates anxiety by presenting sameness, continuity, or lack of differentiation where a dichotomy is

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<sup>31</sup> For readings of “Christabel” as a narrative of psychosexual repression, see Edward Proffitt, Douglas B. Wilson, and William A. Ulmer.

expected, such that, as Lanser suggests, the lesbian (il)logic of feminine sameness becomes a conduit for these issues.

Building on this sense of the poem as addressing larger dichotomies of identity, critics like Robbie B.H. Goh have read “Christabel” as an instance of the gothic genre’s “neurotic sensualization of of the affairs of state,” positioning the poem as “a sentimental response to the evils and sufferings ... caused by opportunistic commerce in the form of (among other things) Britain’s trade in African slaves” (272). As this chapter suggests, these sufferings inflicted by England on foreign bodies are then revisited by foreign female vampires upon British female victims. In *Carmilla* and in “Christabel,” the boundary-dissolving illogic of lesbian desire is compounded by the more profound and disturbing sameness of incestuous sexuality (since Geraldine takes the place of Christabel’s mother). Goh argues that this dissolution of boundaries mirrored the reverse-colonial crisis to which this text was an early literary response, so that “Coleridge’s poetic persona becomes split, other even to himself; on the one hand, a social prophet and ascetic ... on the other hand a visionary whose dreams re-position social conflicts as sexual tensions” (272). For Goh, Coleridge’s transferring of political concerns to the trope of the maternal body signalled a fragmentation of authorial identity. This perspective reveals the extent to which both hysteria discourse and the perceived illogical sameness of lesbian desire informed these texts’ deployment of female sexuality as an allegory for colonized peoples and cultures: Both are feminized, primitive, animalistic, and neither can be fully rejected, because they have infiltrated the British national body through sexual reproduction.

Paradoxically, Geraldine wins Christabel’s sympathy by mirroring her status as a solitary, endangered female, but also by portraying herself as an outsider, inexplicably abandoned in an unfamiliar place: She ingratiate herself with Christabel by being both like and unlike her, an initial paradox which is then expanded by Geraldine’s promiscuous adoption and violation of

others' identities and subjectivities. By first introducing Geraldine as a lamia figure, lost, away from home, and pleading for assistance, and then later as a bestial would-be devourer of another woman's child, "Christabel" deploys female sexuality as a symbol of both geographic foreignness and animality, and as a conduit by which the past infiltrates the present and future. Reading this poem retrospectively through texts like *Carmilla* and *The Blood of the Vampire*, the apparently small role played by Geraldine's foreignness emerges, instead, as a crucial, germinal manifestation of the nationalist and colonialist concerns which dominate these later texts. Her silencing of Christabel emerges as an act of linguistic domination, with the foreign Geraldine forcing Christabel to emit the inarticulate hissing sounds associated with reptiles. Christabel's hisses represent a human regression to the animal, an abrogation of both species and national identity which is premised on a similarly ambiguous, or anachronistic, relationship to time.

### **Female Sexuality and Nationality in *Carmilla***

Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, published serially in 1871, marked a milestone in the burgeoning late-Victorian revival and revision of Eastern European vampire folklore.<sup>32</sup> Much like Stoker's novel, *Carmilla*'s horror derives from the pervasive ambiguity of its titular monster: She is both young and ancient, dead and alive, lovely and innocent in appearance, yet deadly and seductive in practice, her vagueness and changeability exemplified by the varying names she adopts in each incarnation. The original Countess Karnstein is born and reborn as Carmilla, Mircalla, and Millarca, though each of these women bears an identical resemblance to the original Countess' portrait.

*Carmilla*, however, is crucially distinct from *Dracula* in its portrayal of a female vampire with exclusively female victims, though, in both texts, vampiric relationships are strikingly homoerotic. Bram Djikstra's notes that "*Carmilla* marks one of the first appearances, center

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<sup>32</sup> For discussions of *Carmilla*'s relationship to *Dracula*, see O'Connor Lysaght and Margot Gayle Backus.

stage, of a female vampire in modern fiction. Previous vampire narratives ... had all still featured male predators” (341). John Polidori’s 1819 *The Vampyre*, as well as James Malcolm Rymer’s *Varney the Vampire*, serialized in 1845-1847, were both popular and influential vampire narratives which primed their early- and mid-Victorian readers with images of the male vampire, an archetype which was then resoundingly confirmed by Stoker’s 1897 *Dracula*. (It is important to note, despite the arguable accuracy of Dijkstra’s claim, that Coleridge’s 1800 fragmentary poem “Christabel” is widely regarded as the earliest Victorian vampire text.)

*Carmilla* and *Dracula* also bear marked similarities of plot, most noticeably in the centrality of modern medicine in banishing their respective monsters. *Carmilla* is presented as a medical case study, presided over by a Dr. Hesselius and prefaced by his assistant. (When the novella was later published in an anthology along with several of Le Fanu’s short stories, each story was similarly presented as a case study and prefaced by a note explaining its scientific significance). An acolyte of the spiritualist thinker and author Emmanuel Swedenborg, Dr. Hesselius notes in *Carmilla*’s prefatory note that her case involves “some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence, and its intermediates” (243). This remark is rooted in Swedenborg’s writings on “the world of spirits ... [which is] a place intermediate between heaven and hell and ... also the intermediate state of man after death” (Tracy 345). In this way, the preface frames its subsequent case study as an exercise in rendering the indeterminate definite, as relatives of *Carmilla*’s victims band together to cause her unambiguous, final death, thus consigning her to a single, extinguished identity, devoid of the power to haunt or horrify.

The explicit prominence of medicine in *Carmilla* constitutes a change from “Christabel,” which makes no mention of doctors or medicine. As I have already shown, however, the accusations and diagnoses of hysteria which have surrounded “Christabel” are particularly telling: The poem’s contemporary reviews show readers making a connection between this

supernatural text and the realistic reproductive, psychological, and sexual concerns which it addressed, and employing medical discourse in order to negotiate this apparent paradox. Again, reflecting on this text from the perspective of the vampire narratives which followed throughout the nineteenth century reveals the extent to which apparently minor aspects or moments of “Christabel” later emerge far more emphatically in these narratives. Where medical discourse has been a persistent presence in criticism of “Christabel,” despite the absence of doctors or diagnoses in that text, subsequent Victorian vampire narratives, such as *Carmilla*, were framed as medical case studies, while others, including *The Blood of the Vampire* and *Dracula*, prominently featured (and largely endorsed) medical doctors and their efforts to force vampires to one side of dichotomies which they consistently unsettle.

The unsettling indeterminacy on which *Carmilla*'s narrative depends, and which defines Carmilla herself, answers directly to the concept of the uncanny as introduced in Freud's 1919 essay: Lack of place, a muddying of nationality or origin, is essential to the Freudian uncanny, while being buried alive, rather in the manner of a resting vampire, is declared by Freud to be “most uncanny of all,” as it exemplifies the terror of uterine envelopment. Indeed, if this is the case -- if the fear of being buried alive is rooted in a subconscious fear of a forced, oppressive return to pre-nativity -- vampires are profoundly uncanny in their juxtaposition of living burial and perpetual life (*The Uncanny* 138). Not only are vampires enclosed in coffins, or buried in dirt, each day of their immortal lives, signaling a perpetual return to and entrapment by the maternal body, but Carmilla and her ilk are also “intermediates,” per Swedenborg, across the boundaries of life and death, as well as of time, which fails to fix them within a single generation, to halt their lives or put an expiration date on their sexual and reproductive lives.

Like *Dracula* after it, and true to Freud, *Carmilla* is also set at a multinational crossroads, involving both British and Eastern European characters. As Laura remarks, she has grown up in

Styria, with a governess who speaks “French and German ... and broken English, to which my father and I added English, which, partly to prevent its becoming a lost language among us, and partly from patriotic motives, we spoke every day. The consequence was a Babel” (245).

Carmilla literally rises from this emphatically foreign soil to threaten the sexual and national purity of Laura’s body, dramatizing the extent to which these two types of purity -- sexual and national -- were perceived as entwined, and as most crucially important for young women of reproductive age, whose bodies were seen as a conduit to England’s future. Much like *Dracula*’s, *Carmilla*’s horror derives from the threat posed to a British virgin by a foreign vampire: a trope which unsubtly echoes prevalent beliefs in the heritability of character, and in the superiority of British national character over others. Accordingly, numerous critics, including Howard Malchow in *Gothic Images of Race*, have convincingly argued that, for Victorian readers, both the creole and the vampire (and, as we will see in Marryat’s *Blood of the Vampire*, creole vampires) were totems for cultural anxieties regarding blood pollution (Malchow 167).

The image of the parasitic, exploitative, and contaminating creole is, however, also a precise reversal, and arguably a projection, of England’s expanding colonial presence. Both the creole and the vampire are the results of a blending of blood, a melding that does not represent an equal and reciprocal exchange, but an involuntary, hegemonic transformation. From this perspective, it becomes clear that not only are the figures of the creole and the vampire knit together by Victorian racial and national anxieties, but that these figures are multivalent, conveying not only a fear that British blood would be contaminated, but a correlated awareness of British encroachment on the cultures, economies, and bodies of their empire’s native inhabitants. These fears of contamination and encroachment, as well as the figure of the creole which symbolized them, were both gendered female: As Octavia Davis remarks, colonized

peoples were regarded as “living histories of Europe’s primeval past, thus constructing ‘native’ bodies are perpetually immature, bestial, and feminine” (Anolik 40).

Carmilla’s fluid evasion of geographic, temporal, and sexual boundaries, and the certainty with which such fluidity must be arrested, is manifested in the case-history structure of *Carmilla*’s narrative, culminating in her “cure,” which is administered by doctors. In the novella’s closing pages, “formal proceedings” take place, in which Countess Karnstein / Carmilla’s grave is discovered and opened, and her body destroyed. Laura takes care to explain that both the belief in vampires and the creatures themselves are crude holdovers from preceding generations, most common in Eastern Europe, and ideally to be rendered obsolete by recent medical knowledge, administered by British men. This is evident in her narration of Carmilla’s final moments:

You have heard, no doubt, of the appalling superstition that prevails in upper and lower Styria, in Moravia, Silesia, and Turkish Servia, in Poland, even in Russia; the superstition, so we must call it, of the Vampire ... For my part, I have heard no theory by which to explain what I myself have witnessed and experienced, other than that supplied by the ancient and well-attested belief of the country ... The features, though a hundred and fifty years had passed since her funeral, were tinted with the warmth of life. Her eyes were open; no cadaverous smell exhaled from the coffin. The two medical men, one officially present, the other on the part of the promoter of the inquiry, attested the marvelous fact, that there was a faint but appreciable respiration, and a corresponding action of the heart ... Here, then, were all the admitted signs and proofs of vampirism. The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. (315-316)

Laura regards the superstition itself as appalling, an opinion expressed in conjunction with the superstition’s location in Eastern Europe. Though she herself “never saw England,” Laura has repeatedly and emphatically described herself and her father as British patriots, including their previously-noted “patriotic” insistence on speaking English at home, as well as her father’s similarly motivated insistence on tea being served along with coffee in their home (245-246).

Despite their residing in Styria, then, Laura's and her father's home constitutes a bulwark of British nationality and culture within this foreign territory.

Both vampire folklore and Carmilla herself are regarded as unwonted, unnatural, and uncanny survivals, to be rendered blessedly obsolete by the investigations and ministrations of late-Victorian medicine. The superiority and advancement of nineteenth-century medicine over the primitive traditions of Styria are, however, undercut by the implicit continuity of the two approaches: Having located the Countess Karnstein's secret resting place and prying her from it, Laura's father and Baron Vordenburg, whose female ancestor was involved in an ambiguously erotic relationship with the predatory countess in her original, human form, perform the anticlimactically mundane medical tasks of ascertaining her blood pressure and respiration, noting her symptoms, the bodily "signs and proofs" of vampirism. The medical examination of Carmilla's animated corpse and cataloging of her symptoms then seamlessly transition to the ancient "cure" for vampirism, as her body is staked, decapitated, and burned to ashes, which are then poured into a river, with the result that this long-plagued territory "has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire" (315-316). It is crucial to note that the vampire's vanquishing is accomplished by a blending of ancient Styrian customs with medical practices (checking breathing and blood pressure) which would have been, to *Carmilla's* contemporary readers, identified with their own time, place, and experience: The use of current, mainstream medicine, administered by Laura's British-patriot father, in order to kill Carmilla (and, by extension, to save Laura) may seem to indicate that *Carmilla* is a narrative in which British medicine is distinct from, and has or gains mastery over, primitive, foreign customs. The participation of Vordenburg, as well as the tandem operation of contemporary medical and primitive traditional practices in expelling Carmilla, support a more complex relationship between British and foreign

cultures in this text -- one in which medicine may be seen as compatible with, even influenced by, ancient and foreign cultural traditions.

The entirety of this scene, and of the novella that precedes it, places the vampire's body at temporal, geographic, and erotic boundaries, tentatively diagnosing these liminal statuses as the symptoms of a disease which can and must be corrected by the intervention of British medicine in concert with Styrian tradition. The great care with which Le Fanu establishes vampirism as, not only a bodily disease, but a correspondingly disordered relationship to time, as well as to sex, suggests that temporality is essential to the definition of both national and sexual identities within this text, and, further, that temporality, nationality, and sexuality are inextricably interdependent.<sup>33</sup> This is evident in the foregoing passage, as well as in the narrative preceding it: In *Carmilla*, both vampires and the legends that surround them are repulsively obsolete, steeped in local culture, and in need of rectification by modern medicine, as practiced by Dr. Hesselius, and by the medical men who dispose of Carmilla. However, this goal cannot be accomplished without resort to Styrian custom. Similarly, the physical affection and declarations of love with which Carmilla showers Laura are inseparable from Carmilla's diseased condition, or from the violent intentions she ultimately bears toward each of her many female consorts. If the vampire is both a sexually charged and a characteristically regional figure, unique to and representative of Eastern Europe in this text, both the vampire and the regional culture from which it springs are ultimately portrayed as pathologically mired in the past.

Carmilla is, of course, an embodiment of the ancient Countess Karnstein, but she / the Countess are also capable of metamorphosing into "a sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat," and which is spotted emerging late at night from the bedrooms of her female victims (304). This animal incarnation is credibly read by Djikstra as evidence of the text's

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<sup>33</sup> As indicated in the introduction, this understanding of the intersectional nature of temporality, sexuality, and nationality follows that articulated by Jared Esty in *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*.

misogynist portrayal of women as undeveloped, backward and evil as compared to men. For Djikstra, “the ostensible resolution of the story [is] in the ritual exorcism of the bestial creature, for the evil in this narrative is the never-ending evil of all women -- their blood link with the animal past ... The vampire Carmilla, then, is the eternal animal in woman” (342). As I have argued above, both female homoeroticism and the Styrian setting of *Carmilla* are derided in this text as seductively, yet repulsively, rooted in an obsolete past whose outcroppings are regarded as pathological symptoms, and which must be, and is, vanquished by the informed efforts of British men. Furthermore, and also as noted earlier, Carmilla’s pathological entrenchment in the past is inseparable from her desire to bind herself to Laura, and to re-create her as a vampire whose living entombment, per Freud, constitutes a horrific return to the maternal body. As we will also see, the maternal body is essential to the matrilineal transmission of vampirism in this text, and which is also strongly correlated with the occurrence of incest.

The nature of Carmilla’s interest in and affection for her is so plainly erotic that even the virginal Laura wonders “... was there here a disguise and a romance? ... What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought the prosecute his suit in masquerade?”, before assuring herself that “Except in these brief periods of excitement her ways were girlish; and there was always a langour about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health” (265). Though Carmilla’s caresses and declarations of love mimic the behavior of a male suitor, they are, upon Laura’s closer consideration, the acts of a sickly woman rather than the healthy heterosexual overtures of a man. Upon even closer inquiry, Carmilla’s overtures are revealed to be not only homoerotic, but incestuous, since Laura herself is a descendant of the Karnsteins.

Fittingly, then, Laura’s most explicit description of Carmilla’s affectionate frenzies is couched in the context of her fruitless inquiries into Carmilla’s personal and family history.

Carmilla's refusals are immediately followed by outbursts of apologetic affection. As Laura recalls,

No matter what my tactics, utter failure was the inevitable result ... But I must add this, that her evasion was conducted with so pretty a melancholy and deprecation, with so many, and even passionate declarations of her liking for me ... She used to place her pretty arms about my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine, murmur with her lips near my ear, 'Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness .. I live in your warm life, and you shall die -- die, sweetly die -- into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which is yet love; so, for awhile, seek to no more of me and mine, but trust me. (263)

Though Laura does not realize it, Carmilla is not entirely evading her question: Carmilla's blood affiliation is with other vampires and her own victims, in obeisance to the irresistible law which compels her to "share life" in a spreading web of consanguinity. This consanguinity is erotic, rather than forbidding sexual contact between those who share in it. This is evident in the double meaning of "die," which is and was a well known informal Victorian term for orgasm. Carmilla's wishful prediction that Laura will "die sweetly" into her own (Carmilla's) life thus suggests that the bodily death which initiates the creation of a vampire is also an erotic and life-giving act, a rapturously cruel-yet-loving sexual initiation into an ever-growing sorority. Indeed, Carmilla seems to have no male relatives or associates: At her first contact with Laura, as well as with her prior victim Bertha Spielsdorf, Carmilla is accompanied by a female attendant or relative, who foists her lovely charge off on both Bertha's and Laura's families. As we will shortly see, the catalog of victims attributed to her is also exclusively female.

Carmilla, then, is espousing a form of kinship which obviates the presence of men, and by which women may form bonds of consanguinity -- bonds which are certainly also reproductive -- with other women of their choice. These bonds are both filial, in the sense that one vampire creates or gives birth to the new immortal life of the other, and erotic (as evidenced in the double meaning of "die" in the passage above, as well as by the Laura's confused reverie

regarding Carmilla's gender and perceived amatory intentions). This already complex relationship is further complicated when Laura later learns that she herself is descended from the Karnsteins -- a fact she intuits just after Carmilla's above quoted effusions, when she (Laura) asks, "Are we related? .. what can you mean by all this? I remind you perhaps of someone you love; but you must not, I hate it; I don't know you -- I don't know myself when you look and talk so." Laura's stumbling over "I don't know you -- I don't know myself," as if she cannot distinguish between herself and Carmilla -- especially when the latter gives her strangely impassioned answer to inquiries about her family origins -- further stresses her own recognition of herself in Carmilla (265).

Laura further specifies that her Karnstein ancestry is on the maternal side, as she reluctantly admits "I am descended from the Karnsteins ... that is, Mamma was" (267). She shares this maternal ancestry with Carmilla's other victim, Bertha Spielsdorf, whose mother, like Laura's, is a deceased Karnstein. It seems, then, that vampirism is matrilineal amongst the Karnsteins -- and it also follows that Carmilla is Laura's distant great-grandmother. The triad of Laura, Carmilla, and Bertha is emphasized in far greater detail than is given to Carmilla's other suspected victims, "the pretty young girl ... who fancied she saw a ghost a fortnight ago, and has been dying ever since," as well as "the swineherd's young wife ... [who] died only a week ago, and she thought something seized her by the throat at night as she lay in her bed, and nearly strangled her" (267). Each of these other two victims' stories are told in the space of a single page, while Bertha's demise merits the enclosure of a longer letter by her father, and Laura's own experience comprises the whole of the narrative. Carmilla, then, emerges as more than a vampire: She is a monstrous mother, both murdering and attempting to seduce her young. As Nina Auerbach remarks, "murderer and murdered, mother and lover, are one; women in *Carmilla* merge into a union the men who watch them never see" (*Our Vampires, Ourselves* 43).

The conundrum presented by Carmilla's physical advances toward her own distant relative, and by her conflation of consanguinity and sexuality, is rendered somewhat more relevant to its Victorian readership when one considers the legal confusion surrounding the distinction between affinity, or relation by marriage, and consanguinity. As Mary Jean Corbett helpfully explains in the introduction to her 2008 study of incest in Victorian fiction, *Family Likeness*, the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 did not make any provisions against incest, an omission only corrected by the 1908's Punishment of Incest Act, and further complicated by the fact that it was only with the passage of the latter legislation that affinity, or relationship by marriage, was legally distinguished from consanguinity (4). In other words, Carmilla's ideal vision of a union with Laura which is both erotic and based upon shared blood was, at the time of the novella's 1871 serialization, directly germane to a genuine cultural anxiety based on a legal system which failed to adequately define the boundaries of affinal and consanguineous, or consanguineous and sexual, relationships. Both Carmilla and Coleridge's Geraldine press this lack of definition: If affinal and consanguineous bonds were unclearly distinguished, these seductive mother figures further interrogate the distinction between incestuous and homosexual relationships. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, the incest taboo is meant to enforce exogamous heterosexual reproduction; taboos against incest and homosexuality are both in the service of heteronormative reproductivity (93). These taboos are both violated by these texts' maternal vampires, who advocate a form of reproduction which excludes both men and those outside the family.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This argument is consistent with that made by Elizabeth Signorotti's "Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in 'Carmilla,'" which reads *Carmilla* as "the original tale to which Stoker's *Dracula* served as a response." While *Carmilla* envisions a form of incestuous-lesbian kinship which excludes participation in the patriarchal exchange of women, Signorotti suggests that *Dracula* reinstates this control (607). Both Signorotti's analysis and my own are premised on Gayle Rubin's understanding of exogamous kinship's support of patriarchal authority, as articulated in "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex."

Much as *Carmilla* does, the mid- and late-Victorian discourse surrounding incest projected the practice onto non-white or “savage” races: a tendency which itself conflates nationality with temporality, spatial location with developmental advancement or regression. As John McLennan’s 1865 *Primitive Marriage* characteristically opines, “savages are unrestrained by any sense of delicacy from a copartnery in sexual enjoyments ... A survey of the primitive facts of life exclude[s] the notion that the law originated in any innate or primary feeling against marriage with kinsfolk” (287). To the extent that Victorians were, as Corbett contends, uniquely aware of the dangers and prevalence of incest, even as they were denied a clear legal framework for defining it, the vehemence and repetition with which *Carmilla* associates Eastern Europe with an incestuous sexuality that is pathologically rooted in the past becomes somewhat more intelligible.

The female gender of this narrative’s vanquished monster, as well as that of her intrigued-yet-repelled victims, compounded by the matrilineal contagion of vampirism in this text, are also apparent when viewed in the context of late-Victorian medical rhetoric, which cast both women and non-whites as less fully developed, and thus more rooted in the past, than males and whites. In other words, femininity and non-British nationality are both regarded as regressive in *Carmilla*, and Carmilla’s body, at once maternal and foreign, threatens to engulf Laura, prompting the vampire’s destruction by Laura’s father, along with Count Vordenburg. Le Fanu’s emphatic portrayal of vampiric incest as endemic to Eastern Europe and foreign to British nationals can be read as a narrative forerunner to the eventual destruction of Carmilla’s body: Both are defensive measures intended to correlate homosexuality with incest, consigning these sexual practices to a past which is both temporally and spatially distanced.

These tropes are, of course, familiar from “Christabel.” In *Carmilla* as well as in Coleridge’s proposed ending for “Christabel,” we see a mother figure masquerading as a

daughter's male suitor before ultimately being vanquished. Though the role of medical discourse differs widely between the two narratives, it can be seen at the margins of "Christabel," in its criticism, being used to negotiate the poem's themes of female identity disturbance, before reappearing fully integrated into *Carmilla*'s case-study narrative form. In "Christabel" and *Carmilla*, both animality and national foreignness emerge as pronounced features of a female abjection which is met with and managed by medicine.

### **Reverse Colonialism in *The Blood of the Vampire***

If nationality is a germinal concern in "Christabel," then blooms more fully at mid-century in *Carmilla*, it becomes truly and unmistakably central to *fin-de-siècle* *The Blood of the Vampire*. Where these earlier texts use homoeroticism to evoke the sense of profound alterity which defines their vampires, focusing on ageless mother figures and virginal ingenues, *The Blood of the Vampire* alters this dynamic with the character of Harriet Brandt. The fear which she creates is primarily based on her status as a prospective, and then an actual, fiancé to a British man, and on the resulting potential for the mixed-race, Caribbean Harriet to infiltrate the national bloodline (and England's future children) with foreign blood. This feared infiltration does not merely reflect an imperialist belief in the inferiority of colonized nations and peoples, but rather undermines that belief: My own reading argues that Harriet's and her mother's vampiric condition, and the threat it poses to British nationals, is a return of the exploitative violence which characterized England's relationship to Jamaica, enacted in microcosm by Harriet's European, slave-owning father's rape of her mother.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, I argue that the exaggerated foreignness or alterity with which this novel associates its non-white female characters is not an uncritical reflection of British medical discourse's frequent ethnocentricity. Rather, this vampire

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<sup>35</sup> This argument coincides with those of Marjorie Zieger and Giselle Anatol. Zieger cites Arata in her argument for reading *The Blood of the Vampire* as a narrative of reverse colonization, suggesting that vampirism allegorizes the "implosion of the military and commercial British imperial projects" (198). Anatol suggests that the power dynamic between Harriet's European and Jamaican ancestors is a "vampiric violation" which is reversed by the vampiric Harriet's return to England (286).

narratives' presiding physician -- Dr. Phillips, who diagnoses Harriet's vampirism, leading to her suicide -- is portrayed as a charlatan, pretending to a Western education though his knowledge of Harriet's condition is based on West Indian folklore. As Ardel Thomas suggests, the lack of medical expertise which Dr. Phillips brings to bear on Harriet's case, as well as her subsequent suicide, create sympathy for Harriet, so that her character is less a figure of horror than a critique of colonial domination and the medical discourse that often supported it.

The othering effect which is produced by queer sexuality in "Christabel" and *Carmilla* texts is, then, largely transferred to blood-based national and ethnic identity: shifting, indeterminate, categories which are negotiated, in each of these narratives, through the bodies of young, would-be wives and mothers. Much like *Dracula*, *The Blood of the Vampire* generates a horrifying mode of monstrous maternity in which the female reproductive body becomes a conduit for reverse colonization. However, where Stoker's novel ends in the birth of a quintessentially British child, signalling the final victory over Dracula, Marryat's ends with Harriet's suicide, undertaken to avoid passing her condition on to her husband or future offspring. This act ends a narrative which repeatedly endorses infanticide as a compassionate maternal act, and as a reasonable preventative against the travails of heredity. *The Blood of the Vampire* is, then, unique among these narratives, as a horror story of reverse colonization which ends, not with the reassuring birth of a child who signals a continued and worthwhile future, but with the narratively-endorsed death of a new wife and prospective mother, the final event in a novel which continually advocates child death as superior to survival. This privileging of child death over the perpetuation of British blood, and the novel's refusal to provide its readers with an infantine emblem of futurity at its end, has dismal implications for the narrative's estimation of the value and viability of England's genetic future, suggesting that the suffering wrought by imperial exploitation is likely to return to, and destroy, its origin.

Born in Jamaica to an unmarried couple, with a mixed-race Obeah practitioner for a mother and a sadistic German scientist for a father, Harriet Brandt is infected with vampirism in utero, as her mother was before her.<sup>36</sup> As Dr. Phillips, who is called in to treat a dying baby whom Harriet has unwittingly sickened, and who is coincidentally familiar with Harriet's family history, explains:

They declared that when her slave mother [Harriet's grandmother] was pregnant with her [Harriet's mother] she was bitten by a Vampire bat, which are formidable creatures in the West Indies, and are said to fan their victims to sleep, with their enormous wings, whilst they suck their blood. Anyway the slave woman did not survive her delivery, and her fellows prophesied that the child would grow up to be a murderess. Which doubtless she was in heart, if not in deed! (83)

Harriet's blood, then, places her in multiple categories which complicate her humanity: She is a descendant of slaves and murderers, and her blood is not only reflective of this heritage, but of animality, as the vampire bat's infection is understood to have passed matrilineally through subsequent generations. This species of vampiric bat is described as particular to the West Indies, suggesting that the symptoms it engenders are also specific to, and arguably emblematic of, this foreign (i.e. non-British) location. Finally, Phillips' version of events declares that Harriet's mother was designated a murderer from birth as a result of her own mother's demise -- a condition which she ostensibly inherited from her mother and passed through blood to her daughter, Harriet.

Because Harriet is the offspring of a European slave-owner and an African-Caribbean slave, the spectre of blood contamination with which she threatens England has been recently understood as an instance of reverse colonialism. Critics like Anatol, for instance, have argued that while the vampiric bat bite is "overtly identified" as the origin of trauma in this novel, it may be understood to stand in for the subtextual trauma that may have constituted Harriet's

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<sup>36</sup> Tatiana Kontou's reading, in *Women and the Victorian Occult*, regards Harriet as "akin to the tragic mulatto figure in nineteenth-century American fiction" (186). See also Aspasia Stephanou's *Reading Vampire Gothic Through Blood: Bloodlines*, which reads Harriet as a figure of racial and species hybridity (109).

conception: Anatol suggests that this probable rape constitutes a “vampiric assault,” “draining” Harriet’s mother of her labor and freedom, and that this experience, not necessarily the bat bite, imprints Harriet with vampiric traits (146). Zieger has similarly argued that Harriet’s vampirism stems from her “family’s history of sadistic violence against their slaves” (199-200). The threat of consanguineous contamination which Harriet represents is not, then, simply an invasion of a national or ethnic other, but an instance of British colonial exploitation returning to, and against, itself.<sup>37</sup>

Harriet’s status as a figure of horror, the return of Britain’s colonial wrongdoings upon itself, is compounded by her own status as a prospective wife and mother, and her potential ability to both pollute British genes and to deplete British bodies. This potential is consistent with the tendency of late-Victorian medical writing to describe reproductively viable women in animalistic, predatory terms. George Gould and Walter Pyle’s 1896 *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*, for example, refers to an allegedly extensive history of human succubi, remarking in the same passage on the “perverted appetites and peculiar longings of pregnant women” (80). The early-nineteenth-century eugenicist William J. Robinson, as quoted by Bram Dijkstra, warned more explicitly that many enthusiastically sexual women were vampires “in its literal sense. Just as a vampire sucks the blood of its victims in their sleep while they are alive, so does the woman vampire suck the life and exhaust the vitality of her male partner -- or victim” (qtd. in Dijkstra 334).

Marryat’s images of the female sexual body enter into this discourse with their paradoxical images of gluttony and depletion. Rather than simply passing blood, nutrients, and nurturance to their babies, the mothers in Harriet’s family bequeath and inherit death through

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<sup>37</sup> For a similar reading, see Octavia Davis’s “Morbid Mothers: Gothic Heredity in Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire*,” which argues that Harriet’s symbolizes fears that the colonized body might emerge in the guise of a British woman (Davis 42).

consanguinity. In Harriet's case, this process applies to everyone she encounters: Much as Robinson describes, she depletes the energy of, and in some case indirectly kills, everyone to whom she becomes close. If this problem becomes most apparent and severe with Harriet's engagement, and her fiancé's subsequent illness, it is presaged in her relationship to Margaret Pullen, which follows a similar pattern of intense attraction, ardent companionship, and subsequent illness on the part of Harriet's companion. The potentially erotic overtones of this attraction, at least on Harriet's part, are explicitly acknowledged within the text:

Margaret was struck by the look with which Harriet Brandt was regarding her -- it was so full of yearning affection -- almost of longing to approach her nearer, to hear her speak, to touch her hand! It amused her to observe it! She had heard of cases, in which young unsophisticated girls had taken unaccountable affections for members of their own sex. (27)

This passage precedes a close friendship between the two women, leading Harriet to spend time with Margaret's baby, and to the baby's subsequent illness and death. Given the medical precedent to perceive sexual women as physically and emotionally draining the objects of their desire, as well as the text's direct implication that Harriet's attraction to Margaret may be sexual, critics have compared the two to Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Laura. Thomas, for instance, has suggested that "we are left to wonder at the same-sex attraction felt by the 'victim' ... [who] *recognizes* Harriet's queer gaze ... participates in the flirtation and homoerotic dance," and is punished when her daughter "languishes and dies from Harriet's affection" (Smith 151).

Building on Thomas's valid point, it seems apparent that Marryat's text uses the lesbian desire between Harriet and Margaret (or at least the desire of Harriet for Margaret) as a metaphor for or index of this novel's reverse-colonial dynamics: To the extent that female sexual desire, and certainly female homosexual desire, was understood as physically and emotionally draining, it mirrored the exploitative impact of British imperialism on its colonial subjects and, by extension, the potential for a vengeful reversal. This reading of *The Blood of the Vampire* is

buttressed by similar interpretations of *Dracula*, including Arata's, which argues that reverse-colonization narratives express "both fear and guilt," as well as an apprehension the colonizer will be treated like the colonized. As a result, even if these narratives seem to abide by colonialist beliefs, they contain potential critiques, including the possibility of imaginary atonement (623). In this way, they deploy degeneration theory's premise of kinship as a form of contagion by constructing it as a means by which pathologized native sexuality might gain mastery over, or at least justifiably avenge itself upon, the British empire.

*Dracula*'s immediate and widespread popularity overshadowed Marryat's novel, which became 1897's "other" vampire novel. Like Stoker's, Marryat's narrative concerns a vampire whose foreign nature is belabored throughout, and who threatens to infect or contaminate a host of comparatively pure, emphatically British characters. Also like *Dracula*, *The Blood of the Vampire* features a medical doctor who correctly diagnoses this character's vampirism -- though in this case, the doctor's efforts fail. Perhaps most crucially, however, these texts converge in their repeated interweaving of maternity and vampirism, particularly in the transmission of vampirism: Where *Dracula*'s Lucy Westenra kidnaps children and feeds on them in a murderous mimicry of maternal affection, and a grotesque reversal of breast feeding, *Dracula* forces Mina Harker to drink from his breast, with the maternal implications heightened by comparison of Mina to a kitten lapping milk. Marryat's protagonist, Harriet Brandt, inherits vampirism directly from her mother, in utero, then commits suicide rather than pass along this trait.

*The Blood of the Vampire* is distinctive in its emphatic, repeated assertions, stated by characters and born out by the circumstances that befall them, that suicide and infanticide are viable, even desirable solutions to the inheritance of unfavorable traits, as well as the correlative implication that to be a mother is to be a latent murderer in defense of one's child. This tendency extends to the passive, even glad, acceptance of child death as an alternative to life's unpleasant

realities. Harriet's forebears are not the only maternal murderers in this text: Even Margaret Pullen, who is regarded by Harriet (and seemingly by the narrative itself) as the best woman she has ever met, is considered capable of murder in vengeance of her daughter Edith's death. Accordingly, Dr. Phillips recommends that Margaret not be told of Harriet's suspected role in the child's demise, lest she kill Harriet. Madame Gobelli, the worst woman to Margaret's best, and reviled by the characters as well as by the narrator's scathing descriptions, presents yet another killer-mother figure within this text, as she berates and manhandles her son Bobby throughout the novel, and finally on his deathbed.

Despite her cruel treatment of Bobby, Madame Gobelli then threatens to avenge herself on Harriet for causing his death, exclaiming "when I look at my dead son, I could kill 'er, because she 'as killed him" (188). Her willingness to commit violence on Bobby's behalf is complicated by her prior tendency to beat and humiliate him, and her smothering refusal to allow him to leave her abusive company and attend school. She even goes so far as to advocate infanticide for him as well as for Edith Pullen -- who will, of course, die before the novel progresses much further. Spotting Margaret attempting to shield the napping Edith from noise, Gobelli loudly asks "why didn't you put it in the tub as soon as it was born? It would have saved you a heap of trouble! I often wish I had done so by that devil Bobby!" (8). (This conversation is overheard by Bobby). Later, when Edith has died, Madame Gobelli seems to maintain this position, as she says she is "sorry to hear she [Margaret] 'ad lost her baby, for she was quite wrapt up in it! But I daresay she'll soon have another" (157).

It would be interesting, and horrifying, enough if this willing acceptance of infant death were confined to Madame Gobelli, or to the plainly monstrous mothers who recur in this text, but it is not: Throughout the text, the idea that death may be an ideal outcome for many infants is advocated by the apparently levelheaded and sensitive Dr. Phillips, as well as by others who seek

to console Margaret over Edith's death. As Dr. Phillips explains to Margaret's husband, Colonel Pullen,

My dear fellow, though it is useless to preach the doctrine to a bereaved mother, the loss of an innocent baby is perhaps the least trying in the category of human ills. To rear the child, as thousands do, to be unloving, or unsympathetic, or ungrateful, is a thousand times worse. But it is too soon for your dear wife to acknowledge it! (207)

It would seem that, in addition to engendering murderous impulses, motherhood in this text also creates an inability to appreciate that death is far from the worst outcome that may befall a person, even (or especially) a child. The novel's characters illustrate this in a range of ways. Bobby's death, for instance, is regarded as a much-needed separation from his overbearing mother. Miss Wynward, the servant who has raised him from the age of five and credibly claims to love him as her own son, though she is childless, adopts reasoning similar to Dr. Phillips' when she tells Harriet that "I am glad he is dead! I am glad he has escaped it all, for this is a wicked house" (189).

It is Harriet's suicide, however, which most fully affirms this nihilistic premise, and which seems to indicate its ambiguous endorsement at the narrative level. In choosing to end her life, Harriet escapes from the tyranny of heredity, and from the vampiric condition which eventually kills everyone close to her. Her death is foreshadowed not only in the scene of maternal mortality which heralds her birth, but by Dr. Phillips' gloomy prognostications that, given her ancestry, she can come to no good end. The veracity of his predictions is suggested by the fate of Anthony Pennell, Harriet's lover and, later, her husband, who boldly declares "Dr. Phillips be damned! ... He is an old fool, a dotard, a senseless ass, and I shall tell him so! Vampire be hanged! And if it were the truth, I for one could not wish for a sweeter death ... try your venom upon me! I am quite ready to run the

risk!” (201). Pennell dies not long after, his marital bed having literally become his deathbed in fulfillment of Phillips’ assessment.

The certainty with which Dr. Phillips diagnoses Harriet’s condition and foresees its outcome reflects the tenets of Victorian medical and reproductive discourse, particularly that surrounding issues of racial and species hybridity (which were regarded as nearly interchangeable) and “imaginationism,” or the transmission of maternal impressions or desires to a developing fetus. Both imaginationism and the scientific discourse of hybridity were premised on the animalistic nature of the female, and particularly the maternal, body. As Marie-Helene Huet notes in *Monstrous Imagination*, a survey of Romantic teratology, imaginationism expanded on such beliefs, positing the maternal body as “mixing and confounding species” in a way that “Nature [would] not allow” (22). Throughout the nineteenth century, then, women, and especially mothers, were understood to be fundamentally animalistic in a way that men were not -- a condition inseparable, in the century of Darwin, from evolutionary inferiority.

Numerous critics have remarked on the congruence of Dr. Phillips’ beliefs, as well as *The Blood of the Vampire*’s plot, with Victorian medical discourse. Florence Hammack argues that the novel suffers from “pronounced reliance on the rhetoric of Victorian sociomedical theories ... [and] reads like a medical case study,” further suggesting that Dr. Phillips is a stand-in or conduit for Marryat’s own voice within the text -- a contention supported by the consistency with which the doctor’s pronouncements are shown to be correct, to the extent that his medical advice repeatedly foreshadows the plot’s development (Hammack 886). Robert T. Eldridge has similarly lamented that *The Blood of the Vampire*, like “most commercial fiction .. too much embodies or replicates the scientific conventions of its day rather than critiquing or at least illuminating them (qtd. in Marryat 893).

These readings are complicated by Thomas's trenchant observation that Dr. Phillips -- the ostensible voice of medical discourse within this novel and, according to Hammack, a surrogate for the author -- bases his assessments on "Jamaican folklore and *not* on a Western medical education," despite his pretensions to such an education (151). Thomas further argues that it is this false claim to knowledge of Harriet's condition, and not necessarily the condition itself, which drives Harriet to suicide, suggesting that this circumstance "gives us room for sympathy and room to wonder about the author's ultimate intent" (151). Hammack and Eldridge make valid points about this novel's inclusion, via Phillips, of contemporary medical beliefs which posited the inferiority, primitivity, and animality of female, non-white, and non-British people. However, in castigating *The Blood of the Vampire* for adhering to such discourse, these critics miss a larger point being made, and a more complex reading being offered, by Thomas's suggestion we read Harriet, not as a monster, but as a sympathetic figure, and by this novel's approach to the medical theory which so strongly informs it, not as one of submission or duplication, but of critique. This critique extends beyond medical discourse to the imperialist goals and beliefs which it undergirded.

## **Conclusion**

"Christabel," *Carmilla*, and *The Blood of the Vampire* are horror stories about maternal relationships and forms of female sexuality which lead to death. These tropes are used to illustrate anxieties about imperialism's complication of national identity: Marginalized sexuality (female, lesbian, incestuous) dramatizes non-sexual cultural anxieties and changes, particularly anxieties related to colonialism's complicating of the domestic/foreign dichotomy. Nationalism emerges subtly in "Christabel," and has been overshadowed by critics' tendency to read it as a narrative of female hysteria and lesbian desire. Placing this text in the context of both the Greek lamia myth and Victorian female-vampiric incarnations of that myth makes it clear that, in this

text as in *Carmilla* and *The Blood of the Vampire*, female sexuality and maternity function are used to illustrate and address reverse-colonialist anxieties, including the concern that England's exploitation of its colonies and their native peoples might be revisited on British soil.

As in Hardy, we see maternity portrayed in these narratives as naturally and even acceptably infanticidal and anti-futuristic, a congruence which suggests an underlying cultural belief in universal female sexual morbidity and pathology. This is also consistent with maternal abjection in Wilde's fiction. But *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," and *Teleny* do not dwell on abject maternity's reproductive possibilities, as the texts in this chapter do, by envisioning vampiric kinship's promise of an eternal life-giving consanguinity which excludes men. Instead, maternal abjection becomes the departure point for a death-driven, anti-futuristic form of exclusively male aesthetic reproduction.

#### 4. “SUPERBLY STERILE:” REPRODUCTION IN OSCAR WILDE

To modern scholars of late-Victorian culture, it is a familiar narrative that medical discourse increasingly sought to codify and discipline sexuality through the articulation of prescriptive timelines of sexual development, which distinguished the sexually and psychologically healthy from their inverted and degenerate counterparts. Theorists from Sigmund Freud to Havelock Ellis expounded on the need for linear growth, casting individual sexual development as a microcosm of historical progress and insisting on heterosexual pairing and reproduction as the pinnacle and goal of sexual maturity, in opposition to the immature, developmentally stunted, or throwback status ascribed to homosexual or bisexual subjects -- and which, as we have seen in previous chapters, was also attributed to female sexuality. Healthy sexual development was generally understood by Victorian sexologists to be necessarily forward-looking, a perpetual plunge into the future that culminated in childbearing and -rearing, while same-sex eroticism was generally regarded as rooted in immaturity or degeneracy, an atavism best left in the past, yet stubbornly wont to crop up in the Victorian present. These elements of reproductive futurism, maintained in opposition to pathologized queer and female sexualities, are reflected and challenged by Hardy's final novels, and to various extents by the vampire narratives examined in the previous chapter. They also emerge in the fiction of Oscar Wilde, which resists and revises reproductive futurism by detailing modes of homoerotic reproduction which thrive on temporal recursiveness.

Read in the context of late-Victorian discourse on the timing of sexuality, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.,” as well as *Teleny*, a collaboratively-authored novel which is generally believed to be authored in part by Wilde, along with various men of his acquaintance, can be read as exemplars of the ways in which degeneracy discourse, with its focus on homosexuality as temporally backward, an arrest of heterosexual development,

may be rewritten or re-thought in a way that explores the creative and erotic potential of an aesthetic which valorizes (or at least explores the possibilities of) queer, or queered, temporality, in which time does not move inevitably and predictably from past to future, but is capable of arrest as well as regression and futurity. This temporal flexibility is strongly rooted in acts of aesthetic creation and appreciation, acts which transcend time and bond men over centuries and generations, replacing the heterosexual fecundity which links generations in a more material and biological fashion (and which is linked, in these texts, to a derided femininity). Sexual reproduction is not, however, simply replaced by aesthetic bonds and experiences in these texts: Rather, repeatedly, aestheticized homosexual bonds terminate in suicide, as if to stress the superior longevity of art as compared to human life, as well as the privileging of the art which issues from, and cements, these relationships over the comparatively prosaic and vulgar results of heterosexual union.

Such an aesthetic is most plainly crystallized in Wilde's most famous work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which, of course, the titular picture ages in place of its subject, whose often vaguely-described sexual sins create wrinkles and blemishes in the portrait, while Dorian himself remains ageless and flawless, until he destroys his portrait and, thereby, himself. Dorian's death by his own hand is hardly the novel's only suicide: His reputation has been marred by the marked deterioration of his male friends after he has introduced them to various dimly-described vices, culminating in the suicide of at least one of these young men. Dorian is also instrumental in the events prompting the suicide of Sybil, the Shakespearean actress with whom he is briefly in love, and whom he then coldly rejects when she reciprocates his ardor.

Throughout the novel, suicide luridly forestalls the momentum of heterosexual courtship, marriage, and childbirth, elements which so consistently provide the structure of Victorian fiction, even as they mirror the prescriptive developmental timelines of *fin-de-siècle* medical and

psychological thought. Such forestalling is accomplished not only by the replacement of marriage and childbearing by suicide, but by Dorian's refusal to move forward in time -- or, alternately, his ability to suspend or transcend it. Frozen at the pinnacle of reproductive viability, he remains ageless, a perpetual adolescent refusing the developmental markers of marriage and parenthood.

The paradox of youthful age, or aged youth, results from sexual profligacy, and it culminates in Dorian's refusal of heterosexual reproduction, a refusal which is associated, throughout Wilde's fiction, with premature and unnatural death. In other words, these texts portray a causative chain in which non-reproductive sex leads to a paradoxical conjuncture of youth and age, and then to violent death. Accordingly, Dorian's entanglement with Sybil Vane ends, not in marriage and children, but with her suicide. Similarly, the homoerotically fraught relationship between Dorian and Basil Hallward puts a morbid spin on the traditional novelistic closure of marriage and children: Rather than a male-female union resulting in sexual reproduction, Dorian and Basil are bound by a homoerotically fraught relationship which results in aesthetic reproduction, murder and suicide.

The following chapter will focus on the tendency, throughout Wilde's fiction, to substitute aesthetic for sexual reproduction, a privileging of an aesthetic homoeroticism over fecund heterosexuality which ultimately culminates in suicide (those of Sybil Vane, Alan Campbell and, arguably, Dorian) as well as Dorian's murder of Basil (whose desire for Dorian inspires him to create the fatal portrait in the novel's opening chapter, and whose death marks the novel's end). Dorian is able to sidestep chronological aging, compartmentalizing or splitting them between himself and the portrait so that they run parallel. He also refuses the milestones of heterosexual courtship, marriage, and the production of heirs: His aborted courtship of Sybil

Vane contributes to her suicide, and is also specifically credited with contributing “lines of cruelty” to the portrait’s face (139).

I read *Dorian*’s substitution of aesthetic for sexual reproduction as a response to the temporal discipline of sexuality and reproduction, and an exploration of the ways in which such discipline might be queered.<sup>38</sup> In illustrating and elaborating these preoccupations, *Dorian* intervenes in Victorian degeneracy discourse, which was intently focused on the morbid and fatal potential of sexuality which did not proceed in a linear chronological line, both at the macro level of evolution and at the micro level of the individual milestones of puberty, adolescence, marriage and childbearing. Havelock Ellis’ 1897 *Sexual Inversion*, for example, evinces brief sympathy for the invert, explaining that male homosexuality is in many cases “inborn,” before explaining that Victorian culture was so fundamentally and thoroughly opposed to same-sex eroticism as to almost thoroughly snuff it out as a viable approved identity. Ellis carefully establishes a position of tentative sympathy in the book’s introduction, establishing the “congenital” and apparently “natural and normal” condition of same-sex desire, and its compatibility with honorable character:

I found in time that several persons for whom I felt respect and admiration were the congenital subjects of this abnormality [inversion]. At the same time I realized that in England, more than in any other country, the law and public opinion combine to place a heavy penal burden and a severe social stigma on those manifestations of an instinct which to those who possess it frequently appears natural and normal. (v)

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<sup>38</sup> Ed Cohen argues that *Dorian*’s portrait “displaces the erotic onto the aesthetic,” coinciding with my own argument in this chapter, which suggests this novel privileges the aesthetic over the physical while transferring reproduction from the physical to the aesthetic plane (Cohen 806). Shalom Kahn has critiqued Cohen, writing that this understanding of *Dorian*’s portrait as a symbol of representation “might have puzzled Wilde himself, who probably thought he was basically writing an allegory of ‘good and evil’” (815). Similarly to Kahn, Dominic Manganiello reads this novel as “an attack on dualism,” including that between soul and body, and that aestheticism in this text seeks to unite this duality even while drawing attention to the impossibility of that task (Manganiello 25). Elisa Glick’s dualist reading of *Dorian*’s portrait attempts to trace “how the queer came to be defined as “a contradiction between the seen and the unseen” (129). Christopher Lane has read *Dorian*’s portrait as supplementing the narrative’s failure or inability to directly represent homosexual desire, “retaining what is . . . unrepresentable by the text” (*The Ruling Passion* 85).

Having established the persistence of this instinct even in England, a nation in which, he suggests, heterosexuality is uniquely bound up in statehood and citizenship, Ellis goes on to stress the acceptance of homosexuality in other nations and other centuries, implying, arguably, that such desires may be in, but are not of, England or the present time. Again and again, Ellis defines and expounds upon homosexuality as both foreign and rooted in the past, traits which he goes on to link with lower class status:

It must be remembered that, in dealing with a northern country like England, homosexual phenomena do not present themselves in the same way as they do in southern Italy today, or in ancient Greece. In Greece the homosexual impulse was recognized and idealized; a man could be an open homosexual lover, and yet . . . be a great and honored citizen of his country. There was no reason whatever why a man, who in mental and physical constitution was perfectly normal, should not adopt a custom that was regarded as respectable, and sometimes as even specially honorable. But it is quite otherwise today in a country like England. (59)

In these excerpts, we can see Ellis prescribing a national erotics of time, an orientation toward the present and future that sets England apart from its queerer, old-fashioned southern neighbors. In so doing, he also makes a crucially important acknowledgment that sexual identity is defined to a great extent by one's time and culture, and that there may be varied and valid perspectives on the viability of homosexual practices and identities. At the same moment, however, Ellis straightforwardly states that Victorian England is neither the time nor the place for the homosexual -- "quite otherwise." His rejection does not extend, however, to the ostensibly honorable male homosexuals who flourished in Greece: In fact, Ellis goes nearly so far as to endorse their sexual practices, stating there was "no reason" to abstain from them and that such a subject might reasonably be considered mentally and physically normal.

Ellis coins the terms "sexo-esthetic inversion, or Eonism," in which one adopts the aesthetic affectations and subjectivity -- in other words, the identity -- of the opposite sex (2). According to *Sexual Inversion*, Eonism is much the same as the Platonic Urnings of 19th-century German sexology, a "kind of inversion which usually remains, so far as the sexual impulse is

concerned, heterosexual, that is to say, normal” (2). Ellis’ evocation of the sexo-esthetic invert is, then, demonstrably based on an implicit belief that gendered and personal identity are potentially as mutable as the clothing, accoutrements, and affects associated with the “opposite” sex. In other words, for Ellis, this special sub-category of inverts were not homosexual, despite their attraction to men, because they themselves were not men, having effectively transformed themselves by desiring men and dressing as women. Gender, then, is understood by Ellis as consisting of subjective, surface, and aesthetic components which may override biological sex. If, however, Ellis seems sympathetic or accepting, however ambivalently, toward the inverts and homosexuals whom *Sexual Inversion* seeks to categorize, it is essential to note that his nationalistic derision of homophile cultures extends to a linkage between homosexuality and infanticide, both of which Ellis regards through a somewhat softening lens of cultural relativity, as long as these practices are understood as necessarily non-British. As he explains of infanticide and “the exposition of children ... both were practised in some of the early Greek States by parents who were completely healthy and normal; in England a married woman who destroys her child is in nearly every case demonstrably diseased or abnormal” (59). For Ellis circa *Sexual Inversion*, normality does not attach itself to timeless, static qualities or behaviors. Rather, homosexual acts or identities were normal, even admirable, in ancient Greek culture, while these same acts and identities are unequivocally abnormal, prompted though they may be by “instinct,” just as were their Greek forerunners. Where, as I shall shortly discuss, Oscar Wilde claimed historical Greek precedent as a defense for the love of Basil for Dorian, and the anonymous, collaborative authors of *Teleny* evoked similar support for that novel’s doomed male lovers, Ellis used this same historical record to argue that Victorian male homosexuality was not heir to a

timeless tradition, but, instead, that sexual identity was so inextricable from its cultural and historical context as to be meaningless outside of it.<sup>39</sup>

Ellis short-circuits this potentially inclusive feint toward cultural relativism with a horrifying image intended to illustrate the perils of tolerance gone too far, going on to explain that the same Greek states which valorized male homosexual bonds also countenanced infanticide -- and that neither of these practices were, per Ellis, abnormal given the time and place in which they occurred. The compelling inference is that strong social constraints on sexual behavior, particularly on male homosexual behavior, are an essential constraint against child murder, and that in Victorian England, homosexual and extramarital relationships must and should be rendered unthinkable and unsayable, if not impracticable. (It is certainly also worth noting that, for Ellis, any *married* woman would have to be abnormal to commit infanticide, again begging a rather striking inference: that an unwed mother's murder of her child might not be an abnormal or diseased act). In contrasting Victorian England to ancient Greece, Ellis privileges the British tendency to look toward the future rather than to historical precedent, and to populate that future with heterosexual unions, as opposed to the homophile, child-killing Greeks, whose actions he considered at least somewhat excusable for their consistency with a time which is decidedly not that of Victorian England. In Ellis' rendering, the figure of the dead child marks the boundaries of proper temporal and sexual orientation.

The understanding of sexuality as deeply imbued with and defined by time, which gained great currency at the Victorian *fin-de-siècle*, also deeply informs recent queer theory: Over the past decade, texts like Edelman's *No Future* and Stockton's *The Queer Child* have attempted to resist or rewrite the forward thrust of reproductive sexuality, by which "the Child has come to

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<sup>39</sup> Also see Joseph Bristow's "'A complex multi-form creature: Wilde's Sexual Identities,'" which cautions critics to focus on the question of how homosexuality came into being as a category, rather than on decoding Wilde's texts for clues to queerness (196).

embody for us the telos of the social order ... our political institutions compel the reproduction of the child” (Edelman 11). For the Victorians as for modern readers, the child was not only a politicized figure, but a deeply temporal figure, and those two statuses are in each case interdependent: Where Ellis casts homosexuality as properly relegated to the past, and typical of cultures which condone infanticide, twenty-first-century thinkers, including both Edelman and the proponents of futurity whom he derides, also interpret children as inherently political subjects, largely by virtue of their understood interest in (or ownership of) the future.

For Stockton as for Edelman, the cult of the child privileges futurity, disciplining those who subscribe to it into a heteronormative, child-friendly politics which excludes queer sexuality -- in other words, using the figure of the future child in a manner which is more conservative than progressive. In response, Edelman calls for the exploration and liberation of what he calls the queer death drive, while Stockton, whose book is subtitled *Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, examines queer modes of growth and progress which operate through delay, suspension, or, most importantly for my own work, what she terms the “backwards birth” of the queer child. In Stockton’s own words:

This is something that childhood studies *and* queer studies have yet to address: what I call the gay child’s ‘backwards birth,’ which also has piercingly postmortem features. Here is what I mean. Such a child, with no established forms to hold itself in the public, legal field, has been a child remarkably, intensely unavailable to itself in the present tense. The protogay child has only appeared through an act of retrospection ... The effect for the child who already feels queer ... is an asynchronous self-relation. (6)

In other words, Stockton’s protogay child queers the linear, forward movement of heterosexual, reproductive time, as shown in this dissertation’s previous reading of Hardy’s *Little Father Time*. Haunting the margins of the presumed-straight child, the queer child has typically only been available from the perspective of the now-grown queer adult, creating a backwards birth which reverses the straight (both sexually and temporally) timeline of heterosexual reproduction: The

gay adult gives backwards birth to him- or herself by retrospectively acknowledging a sexuality that was formerly invisible, a process which hinges on delay (for the unrecognized queer child) and temporal reversal (for the queer adult looking back on their own early youth).

Jose Muñoz' 2009 *Cruising Utopia* takes a rather opposite approach to those of Stockton and Edelman, both of whom seek to explore and exploit the potential of queer temporal reversal. If Edelman abdicates futuristic optimism as "kid stuff," Muñoz advocates for queer utopianism as an escape from "*straight time*. Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only future promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through ... subsidized acts of reproduction" (22). If the state (both the *fin-de-siècle* Victorian state and, for Muñoz, the millennial United States) promotes a straight erotics of the present and future, an erotics which alienates and denies the temporal and physical presence of the queer, this is best countered, for Muñoz, with a queer erotics of the future, "an economy of desire and desiring ... always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" if not actual presence (26). Where Edelman crafts "No Future" as a queer slogan, a response to the child-centric heteronormativity of everyday life, *Cruising Utopia* rightly notes that the homophobic discourse and behaviors which still pervade much of twenty-first-century cultures are already proclaiming that there is no future in being gay. In response to that paucity, Muñoz imagines a queer future beyond the barren confines of the present.

Wilde's fiction addresses itself to these intra- and intergenerational debates on the politics and erotics of time, self-consciously entering into late-Victorian degeneration discourse even as it anticipates the turn-of-the-twentieth-century queer theories of Muñoz, Stockton, and Edelman. Spanning the century-long gap separating degeneracy theory's horror at the threat posed to civilization by queer temporality from queer theory's fascination with the converse -- the ways in

which chronologically non-linear or anachronistic sexuality may yield rich modes of political resistance -- Wilde's narratives emerge as key voices in these intergenerational debates on the temporality of sex.

They do this, in large part, by imagining sexualities which simultaneously defy both heteronormative expectations and the sequence of events recognized as appropriate courtship, arguably offering an instance of what critic Freeman refers to as "counterpolitics of encounter in which bodies ... meet one another by chance, forging ... history differently." Like Ellis' *Sexual Inversion*, Freeman's call for a temporal-erotic counterpolitics is premised, in part, on an understanding of sexual identity as not only temporally, but also nationally defined, as she "argue[s] that even non-nationalist cultural belonging is a matter of affects that inhere, in many ways, in shared timings" (*Time Binds* xi). It is evident, then, that the notion of sexual orientation or identity, emergent in the late 1800s and still evolving, has continuously been understood as a matter, not only of sexuality, but of nationality and temporality. The ways in which these temporal, sexual, and national statuses mutually inflect each other is imagined differently by Ellis, by Wilde, and by a panoply of recent queer theorists, but for each of these thinkers, their enmeshment is foundational.

### ***Dorian, Teleny, and The Erotics of Time***

Wilde's canny manipulation of the public discourse surrounding history and sex is instrumental to the apparently paradoxical way in which, despite the author's protestations of the amorality of art, *Dorian* and *Teleny* seem to work as both apologias for and melodramatic illustrations of male homosexuality's dire outcomes. This paradox is centered on each text's reliance on the history of homosexuality. 1893's *Teleny*, collaboratively and anonymously authored (and widely attributed in part to Wilde), offers a defense of male homoeroticism which is identical to that Wilde offered at his 1895 trial: that of ancient historical precedent. *Teleny*

elaborates on this, claiming not only world-historical precedent, but personal historical precedent, or the presence of homosexual inclinations in childhood. Perturbed and confused by his love for Teleny, de Grioux diligently “read all I could about the love of one man for another, that loathsome crime against nature, taught to us not only by the very gods themselves, but by the greatest men of olden times” (112). Pondering suicide by drowning as a way to end the conflict between his desires and the cultural proscriptions against them, de Grioux elaborates:

Had I committed a crime against nature when my own nature found peace and happiness thereby? If I was thus, surely it was the fault of my blood, not myself. Who had planted nettles in my garden? Not I. They had grown there unawares from my very childhood. I began to feel their carnal sting long before I could understand what conclusion they imported . . . Fate, Iago-like, had clearly shewed me that if I would damn myself, I could do so in a more delicate way than drowning. I yielded to my destiny and encompassed my joy. (119)

This passage attributes de Grioux’s homoerotic desire to nature, locating it in his blood and comparing it to nettles growing in a garden, present from childhood, prior to his conscious awareness and therefore uncontrollable. Rather than fully opposing homosexual desire to suicide, however, de Grioux refers to them as alternate modes of self-damnation: Rather than surrendering his body to the water rushing beneath the bridge, de Grioux yields to the “joy” which, in the preceding sentences, he has compared both to suicide and to the sting of nettles. Both suicide and eroticism between men are regarded as fatal, encompassing experiences which overwhelm both the subject and his ability to articulate them.

Further, and as will later become relevant, de Grioux’s opening query remains unresolved: He discredits the notion of homoerotic desire or behavior as a crime by attributing it to his blood and to historical precedent, both of which are understood as prior to his consciousness and thus beyond his control.<sup>40</sup> However, this ends in the curious distinction de Grioux makes between his blood and himself, suggesting that any criminal tendency is the fault

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<sup>40</sup> Simon Joyce has argued that Wilde’s writing helped to articulate an aesthetic of crime, which became an increasingly relevant concept over the course of the nineteenth century (501).

of the former rather than the latter. In addition to affirming degeneracy theory's understanding of crime as rooted both in the past and in the blood (as, for instance, asserted by Lamarck) this locution also positions homosexuality as a fracturing of the self.

Both *Dorian Gray* and *Teleny*, then, portray a male homoeroticism which is criminally violent and destructive, a tendency which accords with the theories of *fin-de-siècle* psychologists: Lacassagne's medical dictionary referred to homosexuality as a "school for crime," while Havelock Ellis saw sadism as an essentially effeminate quality, writing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* that "It [sadism] is not, as we might infer, both from the definition usually given and from its probably biological heredity from primitive times, a perversion due to excessive masculinity ... the more extreme and elaborate forms of sadism ... are more apt to be allied with a somewhat feminine organization" (Lombroso 386, 318). This passage goes on to elaborate the physically feminine traits of two male murderers (of male victims), and suggests their crimes, stabbings, were attempts to compensate for phallic lack. Similarly, Wilhelm Stekel, along with Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, regarded sadism as a primitive element lying dormant in the sexualities of evolved males, but springing up unabated in criminals, whose reversion to an atavistic state found ultimate expression in the act of murder. In *Sadism and Masochism*, Stekel, writing on "lust-murder" between men, argued that "the act of murder became the symbol of possession. It is also sexual union; the revolver or the dagger represents the phallus, the blood the semen. Murder therefore is the sexual act of the impotent man" (McLaren 177).<sup>41</sup> For late-Victorian theorists and their readers, then, male homosexuality was often presumed a reversion or atavism, death-oriented rather than productive of life. This intellectual habit certainly surfaced in the fiction of Oscar Wilde. The notion of a death-oriented queer sexuality, devoted to the

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<sup>41</sup> Though Stekel does not explicitly state the related substitution of death for conception, it is nevertheless implied by his analogy between blood and semen.

dissolution rather than the formation of identity, is not unique to the late-Victorian moment: As we have seen, these same ideas animate much of recent queer theory.

For instance, de Grioux's understanding of homosexuality as an ecstatic blotting out of the self is easily understood from the perspective of Edelman's evocation of queer political resistance in *No Future*, the introduction to which bluntly proclaims that "queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (17). According to Edelman, this is because homo- and heterosexuality are oppositionally defined, such that homosexuality constitutes the vacant, negatively-defined, or unthinkable counterpart to heterosexuality, its eminently thinkable counterpart: Because "queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of figuration; for the gap, the noncoincidence ... queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects" (24). For Edelman, this undoing, and the resultant blotting out of the self, is a source of political resistance, a way of undermining the "structural logic of opposition" which renders homosexuality the dark, under-defined counterpart of the straight. This obliteration of the divisions which underwrite selfhood is "a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law" (25).

Read from this perspective, the apparent conflict which I've identified in both *Dorian* and *Teleny* -- their status as both apologias for and cautionary tales regarding male queerness -- is resolved: The suicides and murders which proliferate in these texts, originating from the homoerotic desires that propel them, are incidents of jouissance, the "joy" de Grioux refers to in the dissolution of identity caused by both death and desire.<sup>42</sup> Such dissolution operates in resistance to what Edelman characterizes as "reproductive futurism," the previously-mentioned

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<sup>42</sup> Christopher Craft's "Come See About Me" posits Dorian's portrait as representing the impossibility of a unified identity, and as a symbol and agent of dissolution (111).

process by which political goals and individual behavior are harnessed in the service of an imagined future child, who “remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the phantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (3). In contrast, the consummate achievement, in both Edelman’s politics and Wilde’s aesthetics, is a movement beyond one’s own identity, and the impulses to avoid pain and seek pleasure which sustain its continued existence. For both, then, death is a politically potent mode of resistance, replacing procreation as the natural outcome of sexual coupling in a way that illuminates the limitations of reproductive heterosexuality, rather than moralistically and univocally stressing death as a sure or just outcome of queer sexuality.

As previously stated, the substitution of aesthetic for sexual reproduction is linked, in *Dorian* and in *Teleny*, to the replacement of childbearing by death. Each text begins with a homoerotic infatuation which is either inspired or expressed by art: De Grieux becomes fascinated with Teleny while attending a concert at which Teleny plays the piano with great artistry, while *Dorian* opens with the inspiration and creation of Hallward’s portrait of Dorian.<sup>43</sup> Each text also ends in suicide: So many of Dorian’s male associates destroy themselves that even the besotted Basil wonders “Why is your friendship so fatal to young men?” (183).<sup>44</sup>

The aestheticization of sexuality, then, results (in these texts, at least) in the loss or unattainability of the love object, in the avoidance of marriage and childbearing, and in violent and unnatural death. This affirms Wilde’s observation, in a letter to Bernard Clegg, that art “is

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<sup>43</sup> Much of the criticism on *Dorian* is centered on the relationship between artist and model. Houston Baker has argued that Basil corrupts Dorian through the process of painting his portrait (353). Robert Keefe has disagreed with Baker, writing that this analysis, in identifying Basil as the source of corruption, overlooks Wilde’s belief that art is inherently criminal (63). Sheldon Liebman has suggested that Baker’s understanding of Basil relationship to Dorian is overly defined by the dichotomy of good versus evil, and oversimplifies the complexity of these characters and their interaction (297).

<sup>44</sup> Dorian’s effect on women is also detrimental, though its elliptical description remains open to the interpretation that their wild pursuits of him may have been rebuffed, as the narrator imparts that “Women who had wildly adored him, and for his sake had braved all social censure and set convention at defiance, were soon seen to grow pallid with shame or horror if Dorian Gray entered the room” (174).

superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is sterility” (*The Letters of Oscar Wilde* 478).

Elsewhere, in “The Artist as Critic,” Wilde similarly praises “the exquisite sterile emotions that it is the function of Art to awaken” (380). The primary meaning of sterility in both contexts seems to be a failure to produce, inspire, or influence action. As Wilde elaborates in his letter to Clegg: “If the contemplation of a work of art is followed by activity of any kind, the work is either of a very second-rate order, or the spectator has failed to realise the complete artistic impression” (478).

I want to suggest, however, that Wilde’s use of “sterile” allows him to paraleptically evoke male homoeroticism: While the word signals both an asexual lack of reproductive potential and art’s failure to influence action, “sterile” may also be understood to describe non-reproductive sexuality, including homosexuality. Art that is “supremely sterile,” then, may exemplify, express, or stand in place of the homoerotic desires or actions which it both displays and defers, much as Basil’s portrait signifies his desire for Dorian. In this way, aesthetic reproduction and, more particularly, eroticized portraits of male subjects, replace heterosexual reproduction (i.e. the siring and bearing of children). Wilde’s succinct description of art as “supremely sterile” pithily summarizes the privileging of male-male creative endeavors over marriage and procreation.

Such endeavors are not, however, merely sterile in the sense of childlessness: They also result, again and again in Wilde’s fiction, in the suicide of young male erotic (and aesthetic) objects, and in the consuming subjection of their admirers, who also tend to meet fatal ends. In *Dorian*’s first chapter, Basil Hallward describes his ultimately deadly infatuation in a passage worth quoting at length:

What the invention of oil-painting was to Venetians, the face of Antinous was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me. It is not merely that I paint from him, draw from him, sketch from him ... I won’t tell you that I am dissatisfied with what I have done of him, or that his beauty is such

that Art cannot express it. There is nothing that Art cannot express, and I know that the work I have done since I met Dorian Gray ... is the best work of my life. But in some curious way -- I wonder will you understand me? -- his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style ... I can now re-create life in a way that way hidden from me before. (51)

Basil's speech suggests that his painting fully captures and represents Dorian, that there is no ineffable surplus, no aspect of Dorian's character beyond Basil's ability to aesthetically reproduce it. In creating Dorian as an aesthetic object, Basil takes on a paternal role toward the younger man, discovering a way to "recreate life" in a way that was unavailable to him before his fascination with Dorian. Art, then (specifically, Basil's ideal type of art, which fully expresses, is identical to and commensurate with its subject) is a mode of reproduction which replaces and is privileged over heterosexual marriage, childbearing and -rearing, both by *Dorian's* characters and, at the narrative level, by the text itself. Such privileging is evident in Hallward's reference to Antinous, the beautiful male youth, beloved by the Roman emperor Hadrian, who drowned, leaving Hadrian to erect numerous monuments in his memory -- monuments which have far outlived hundreds of generations, and which Basil's speech re-introduces Wilde's late-Victorian readers (51).<sup>45</sup> In this way, art in *Dorian*, as in *Teleny* and (as I will show) "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," forms intergenerational bonds between both living and dead men, assuring Wilde's homoerotically-inclined aesthetes that they stood at the end of a long historical lineage, inheritors of an artistically and intellectually rich precedent. Far from simply sterile, then, art for Wilde is "superbly sterile" -- able to reproduce and represent itself over centuries without resort to the prosaic bodily realities which are, throughout these texts, ascribed to women.

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<sup>45</sup> Sarah Waters explains that Antinous was the "attendant to the Roman emperor Hadrian," and frequently appears in late-Victorian "homosexual literature" (195). Waters argues that Antinous is a "versatile" figure whose portrayal varies between authors and texts (196).

Sterility is not, however, simply a way for Wilde to signal the possibilities of non-reproductive eroticism, and their enmeshment with (and representation by) art: Sterility is also, as we have already seen, an essential node of degeneracy discourse on homosexuality. Medical thinkers including Lacassagne, Stekel, and Krafft-Ebing all affirmed that violence and death were the natural fruits of an atavistic sexuality which, as Stekel so strikingly analogized, replaced semen with blood.

What all of this has so far left out, of course, is women, who remain afterthoughts and play secondary roles in both *Teleny* and *Dorian*. Dismissed by Wotton as “the triumph of matter over mind,” women appear in *Dorian* only to be discarded, from the nameless women who pursue, then seemingly fear him, to Sybil Vane, in whom he abruptly loses interest (52). As Richard Dellamora notes in *Masculine Desire*, this phallogentric celebration of male-male eroticism was not unique to *Dorian*, but a characteristic component of the late-Victorian cultural moment. In 1894, Edward Carpenter gave a much-discussed lecture on homogenic love at Manchester, and he and John Addington Symonds had been campaigning for the decriminalization of male homosexual behavior (Dellamora 209). Both Dellamora and Brian Reade agree on 1894 as the “high-water mark of publications that valorized male homosexual feeling within the general ambit of ‘culture,’ whether of contemporary painting, poetry, or of high Anglican religious sentiment” (Dellamora 209). As many critics have noted, this valorization came at the expense of women, who were denigrated and alienated by the an insidious misogyny which underwrote much of *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism: As Sedgwick influentially argued in both *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*, late-Victorian aesthetic culture was significantly premised on “the immanence of men’s same-sex bonds, and their prohibitive structuration, to male-female bonds” (*Epistemology of the Closet* 15).

What Wilde termed the “exquisite sterility” of ideal art, then, was understood to gain this crucial quality through what Sedgwick has termed the male homosocial continuum, along which both overtly sexual and apparently chaste male bonds might be located, thus de-emphasizing or averting the question of which relations might properly be understood as homosexual (*Between Men*). In coining the word “homosocial,” in *Between Men*, Sedgwick rethinks Adrienne Rich’s influential concept of the lesbian continuum, with the similar effect of de-emphasizing genital sexuality and therefore broadening the range of people, experiences, and practices which might qualify as homoerotic. Responding to Sedgwick, Richard Dellamora’s *Masculine Desire* reads *Dorian Gray*’s characters along a homoerotic continuum in which erotic investment finds aesthetic, rather than explicitly sexual, expression. Cohen similarly remarks of *Dorian*, “... it portrays a world of art and leisure in which male friendships assume primary emotional importance and traditional male values (industry, earnestness, morality) are abjured in favor of the aesthetic” (“Writing Gone Wilde” 805). In other words, as I have been arguing, *Dorian* (to some extent) replaces physical sexuality with aesthetic interest, creation, and desire in a way that sidesteps the erotic nature of Basil’s fascination with Dorian, by cloaking and conflating male homosexuality with the “exquisitely sterile” art which both symbolizes and forestalls it. Women act as a vulgar, bodily foil for this narratively-privileged abstraction.

Sybil Vane, of course, presents the strongest example of this within *Dorian*: Dorian feels that she and Henry Wotton represent opposing courses, and he finally comes to reject Sybil, breaking off their engagement and leading to her suicide. Wotton warns him against romantic involvement with women, telling him that “Women represent the triumph of matter over mind, just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals” (87). This axiom neatly places men in an immoral (or amoral) alliance against women, who are characterized by the physical, bodily “matter” that Wotton’s aesthetic, homosocial milieu seeks to avoid. That Dorian perceives

himself forced to choose between Wotton and Sybil is made clear in his anguished response that “Your voice and the voice of Sybil Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don’t know who to follow” (90).

Indeed, Dorian’s brief enthrallment with Sybil stems from her own transcendence of body and identity through her apparent ability to travel to the past: As he tells Wotton, “I have seen her in every age and in every costume. Ordinary women never appeal to one’s imagination. They are limited to their century” (90). The linkage between Sybil’s ability to transcend both time and gender is made even plainer in the following chapter, when Dorian effuses to Basil that “When she came on in her boy’s clothes she was perfectly wonderful” (113). It is Sybil’s cross-dressed performance of centuries-old plays that convinces Dorian that, unlike the “ordinary women” he has decried to Wotton, Sybil is the perfect mate for him: “I have been right, Basil, haven’t I, to take my love out of poetry, and to find my wife in Shakespeare’s play?” (113).<sup>46</sup> Dorian’s love is marred, however, when Sybil no longer accords with her aesthetic surroundings, a change which she attributes to her knowledge of Dorian’s love, and to realistic love’s superiority to its aesthetic representation, telling Dorian “before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theater that I lived ... You freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is ... You are more to me than art can ever be.” Dorian’s far more terse response: “You have killed my love” (123).

This passage clearly demonstrates that Dorian’s love for Sybil is destroyed by the union of her real self with the theatrical character she is enacting, a collapse which reverses his own relationship to aesthetics and identity: Dorian is sustained and enabled to enjoy pleasure without consequence because he and his portrait are compartmentalized; rather than identifying himself

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<sup>46</sup> Numerous critics have written on *Dorian*’s relationship to Shakespeare, including Maho Hidaka, who has argued that the novel traces the “development and downfall” of Dorian’s theatricality (97). For criticism on Wilde’s relationship to Shakespeare, see Kate Chedgzoy’s *Shakespeare’s Queer Children: Sexual Politics and Contemporary Culture*.

(or being identified by others) with the wrinkles and age spots which mottle the portrait, Dorian remains aloof from it. Sybil's lack of aesthetic distance is, predictably, attributed by Wotton to her gender: "They [women] are charmingly artificial, but they have no sense of art" (136). In fact, Dorian's status as muse or model threatens to feminize him, in a culture (and aesthetic subculture) which both derided femininity and associated it with those statuses. As Rita Felski remarks:

The narcissistic dimension of the feminized male is epitomized most clearly in Dorian Gray... his yearning to retain the flawless and ageless qualities of his own portrait ... also accentuates his feminized status, since it is, above all, images of women that circulate in commodity culture as objects of identification and desire. ("The Counterdiscourse of the Feminine" 1096)

Felski's analysis of *Dorian Gray* applies to *Teleny* (and, as I will later claim) "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." with equal aptitude: Like Dorian Gray and Cyril Graham, Teleny is the subject of portrait which becomes crucial to his own narrative, as de Grioux recalls "what a shock of pleasure, not unmingled with jealousy I felt when for the first time I saw his [Teleny's] likeness in a window amongst those of other celebrities. I went in and bought it at once" (35). Teleny's portrait, widely distributed in order to advertise his musical performances, precisely answers to Felski's analysis of the portrait's subject as a feminized commodity to be circulated among men.<sup>47</sup> De Grioux's jealousy and immediate purchase of the portrait, affirms this dynamic as well: If Teleny is a feminized aesthetic object, available to be purchased and owned as property (at least in this disembodied form), de Grioux's purchase of his portrait might easily be read as a marriage in microcosm, as de Grioux's jealousy of those who might gaze on or take ownership of this object prompts him to take it for his own. Such ownership, however, is shown to be impossible by Teleny's suicide, which forever destroys the portrait's referent, demonstrating the ultimate incongruence of the two. Where *Dorian's* Basil and "W.H."s Graham insist that truly inspired

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<sup>47</sup> Dennis Denisoff has also argued that Dorian's portrait is a form of commodification, noting that for Victorians, portraiture was a site of class anxiety, as the portrait became a symbol of wealth without requiring upper-class status or lineage (85).

portraiture can be fully commensurate with its subject, capturing every aspect, Teleny's death (along with Dorian's and Graham's) is prompted by the folly of this notion: Dorian's portrait dies with him, while W.H.'s lives on, but neither lives in eternal consonance with its subject.

De Grioux also mirrors Basil in his subjection to the influence of his younger lover: Just as Basil finds himself entranced with Dorian to an extent which threatens and, finally, extinguishes, his selfhood, Camille de Grioux becomes transfixed by Teleny. The two are almost literally inseparable, "being almost of the same build, of the same age, as well as of identical tastes -- the people, who saw us always arm in arm, ended by not being able to think of the one apart from the other" (113). In addition to constant companionship and physical similarities, Teleny and de Grioux share a supernatural psychic bond, somewhat akin to that which allows Charlotte Brontë's Rochester to summon Jane Eyre, but even more intense, as de Grioux is able to inhabit Teleny's subjectivity, rather than simply "hearing" his thoughts.. This incident begins when, jealous of the many admirers who throng Teleny after his performances, de Grioux spies on him with a young woman:

In the cab that night, my mind was so intently fixed upon Teleny that my inward self seemed to disintegrate itself from my body and to follow like his own shadow the man I loved. I unconsciously threw myself into a kind of trance and I had a most vivid hallucination, which, strange as it might appear, coincided with all that my friend did and felt. (36)

In so doing, de Grioux realizes the converse of Wotton's summation of women as the triumph of matter over mind: The aesthetic, homoerotic charge between de Grioux and Teleny is such that, though a woman may be in physical proximity to Teleny, de Grioux's mind is briefly unleashed from his body and united with him, thus achieving a far superior communion with the object of his desire. This spiritual or psychological union is premised on the disintegration of de Grioux's identity, which becomes dislocated from his physical body, a mere "shadow" of Teleny. Rather

than the comparatively paltry possibility of a physically sexual, potentially childbearing bond, as crystallized in Teleny's unnamed female companion, *Teleny's* narration strongly prefers a dissolution and destruction of the self that is inextricable, here as elsewhere in Wilde's oeuvre, from male homoeroticism.

If, as Felski suggests, Wilde's men supplant women's status as visual sex objects "of identification and desire," coveted by men, it is the failure of this identification -- the incommensurability or disjuncture between the aesthetic-sexual object and those who long and vie for it -- that leads to the murders and suicides which mark both *Dorian's* and *Teleny's* final chapters. Women also commit suicide in both these texts, in ways which affirm their secondary and instrumental relation to the male suicides which take pride of place in the *denouements*: Catherine, for example, is merely a footnote in de Grioux's narration of his desire for Teleny. Attempting to discharge his apparently futile desire for Teleny, he begins to seduce her, but relents when she protests "if you ruin me, I shall kill myself." Catherine is subsequently raped by another suitor and, as de Grioux relates, is "true to her word," leaping from a window (52-53).

Women are absent throughout much of *Teleny*, an absence which is fittingly epitomized as the novel's final high point -- an orgy attended by both Teleny and Camille, who are assured by another guest that "women are never admitted to our revels" (98). If the relationship between homoerotic aesthetic and sexual practices remains encoded in *Dorian*, it emerges explicitly here, in de Grioux's description of the decor, viewed from a balcony:

The frame was well worth the picture, for, as I was saying before, the studio was a museum of lewd art worthy of Sodom or Babylon. Paintings, statues, bronzes, plaster casts -- either masterpieces of Paphian art or of Priapean designs, emerged amidst deep-tinted silks of velvety softness, amidst sparkling crystals, gemlike enamel, golden china or opaline majolica, varied with yataghans and Turkish sabres, with hilts and scabbards of gold and silver filigree work, all studded with coral and turquoise, or other more sparkling precious stones ... just then it seemed to me as if I were in some rank jungle, where everything that is beautiful brings about instant death; where gorgeous, venomous snakes cluster together and look

like bunches of variegated flowers, where sweet blossoms are ever dropping with wells of fiery poison. (98-99)

De Grioux's reference to the frame created by his balcony view implies the revelers as aesthetic objects, works of art similar to the objects whose descriptions then predominate. These "Priapean" designs, visual odes to phallicism, are themselves imitations or representations of bodies. The intricately filigreed scabbards recall Stekel's insistence on the knife as phallic substitute in male-male murders, presaging Teleny's own shortly subsequent demise from a self-inflicted stab wound. De Grioux is consciously aware that the sexuality on display is deadly, and seems to locate this deadliness in the disjuncture between artistic representation and the aesthetic object. This disjuncture is, throughout both *Dorian* and *Teleny*, analogous to unrequited homoerotic desire. Accordingly, de Grioux complains that these decorative objects are not what they seem, that they promise beauty only to impart death. This charge also applies to Teleny, who is shortly revealed to be conducting a sexual affair with de Grioux's mother, and who then fatally stabs himself in the heart, bleeding to death in the novel's final sentences.

### **Suicidal Aestheticism in "The Portrait of Mr. W.H."**

"The Portrait of Mr. W.H." similarly links male homoeroticism to both aesthetic representation -- as in *Dorian*, through both portraiture and acting -- and to suicide. Centered on the theory that the "fair youth" to whom many of Shakespeare's love sonnets are addressed was, in fact, a male actor named Willie Hughes, who took female roles in the author's plays, the plot of "W.H." centers on an artistic forgery intended to prove this point, commissioned by the aesthete Cyril Graham to convince his doubting friend, Erskine. When Erskine discovers the portrait of Willie Hughes, posing with his hand on a book of Shakespeare's sonnets featuring a legible dedication to him, is a fake, Cyril Graham shoots and kills himself in a dramatic (if illogical) demonstration of his conviction that Hughes was the sonnets' subject. Erskine tells this

series of anecdotes to “W.H.”’s narrator, who then becomes convinced of the theory’s truth, even briefly obsessed with it, and sets out to prove it through research. Having presented Erskine with his findings, the narrator then inexplicably loses interest and faith in the theory, only to see Erskine become zealously convinced, and subsequently die of long-dormant consumption, which reemerges following Erskine’s conversion to Graham’s theory.

The story is framed by the narrator as a meditation on artistic forgeries and the disjuncture between reality and aesthetic representation which they highlight. In the opening paragraph, the narrator gives the context of his discussion with Erskine prior to the latter’s imparting the story of Cyril Graham and the falsified portrait: The narrator had just

insisted that ... so-called forgeries were merely the result of an artistic desire for perfect representation ... that all Art being to a certain degree a mode of acting, an attempt to realize one’s own personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammeling accidents and limitations of real life ... [so that] to censure an artist for forgery was to confuse an ethical with an aesthetical problem. (48)

For the narrator of “W.H.,” and throughout Wilde’s fiction, art is understood as both superior to and divorced from reality. This distinction is breached at great peril, as a flawed or misguided perception of aesthetics, one which dictates that art directly and literally imitates life, is portrayed as destructive and deadly. Just as Sybil Vane’s suicide is set in motion when her first experience of genuine romantic love causes her to fall flat in her portrayal of Shakespeare’s Juliet, Cyril Graham’s suicide is prompted by his insistence on, and forgery of, a direct and literal aesthetic reproduction of Willie Hughes which literally and specifically labels him, in writing, as the subject of Shakespeare’s sonnets. In both cases, art which is too firmly based on or representative of reality is implicated in the deaths of those who behold or create it: Sylvia’s love for Dorian causes an overly realistic acting style which falls flat, while first Graham’s, and then, less directly, Erskine’s, deaths are precipitated by their fixation on the portrait as the literal and truthful representation of the sonnet’s subject.

This insistence on truth is also derided by the narrative structure of “W.H.” As Lawrence Danson has observed, “the obvious answer [to the question of what “W.H.” is “about”] ... is radically undercut by the very narration that proposes it ... a daisy chain of converts and skeptics ... [whose] resulting self-subverting narrative enlists a tale of scholarly detection in the service of the indeterminate” (980). In other words, the structure of “W.H.” mirrors the indeterminacy of its real or factual subject matter, the relationship between Shakespeare and Willie Hughes. However, both the relationship and the text are left emphatically indeterminate, a lack of clarity which jars this apparently neat congruence between art and life.<sup>48</sup>

As Reiko Oya notes, Danson’s reading is complicated by the narrative’s attribution of Erskine’s death to consumption: Foreseeing his imminent demise, Erskine stages a pseudo-suicide, adding another layer to this text’s repeated conjuncture of artistic fraud and suicide (29). Erskine’s suicide, then, constitutes another elaborate fraud, enacted to make a point about the relationship between authenticity and aesthetic value. This faked suicide expresses Erskine’s belief that the forged document bears witness to a truth which supersedes a literal correspondence to factual reality, and, therefore, as an affirmation of both this text’s, and that of the Shakespearean sonnet on which it is based, privileging of aestheticized falsity over prosaic accuracy. Alternately, one might reasonably read Erskine’s faked suicide as a mockery of this notion, and of the credulity with which such literary hoaxes are greeted, as well as the need to perceive art as biographical, or commensurate with life, such that suicide might be a plausible response to a literary-historical disagreement. Either way, the ambiguity surrounding Erskine’s demise exemplifies the extent to which this text, typically of Wilde’s fiction, valorizes both masculine aestheticism and ambiguity, often masking the former with the latter.

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<sup>48</sup> William Cohen has written on the relationship between Wilde’s life to his work, suggesting that his refusals to state, at trial, that *Dorian* depicted homosexuality, have been unnecessarily dismissed as “mere defensiveness.” For Cohen, this insistence on reading *Dorian* as a queer text eclipses the ways in which the novel “reimagined the status of literature in ways analogous to that of homosexuality” (192). Paul Saint-Amour’s *The Copywrights* has expanded on Wilde’s role in literature’s awareness of its self-conscious status as intellectual property.

As I have previously argued regarding the aesthetics of *Dorian Gray*, Wilde's refusal to perceive or to create a symmetrical relationship between life and art also functioned to deflect others' attempts to classify authors, readers, or characters as homosexual. This became evident at Wilde's 1895 trial, during which he was asked about "W.H." by Edward Carson, counsel for the Marquess of Queensberry, "I believe you have written an article to show that Shakespeare's sonnets were suggestive of unnatural vice?" Wilde evasively replied, "On the contrary, I have written an article to show that they were not. I objected to such a perversion being put upon Shakespeare" (Hyde 130). This denial is rendered plausible by the portrait's status as a fake, suggesting that such falseness also inheres to the contention of a homoerotic attachment between Shakespeare and his male muse.

While plausible, however, Wilde's claim reads as false to twenty-first-century readers as it does in the *fin-de-siècle* context of his story. Accordingly, though both Erskine and Graham knows the portrait itself is a forgery, both perceive it as being faithful to the deeper essential truth of Shakespeare's love for, and inspiration by, Willie Hughes. This relationship is paralleled by Graham's transmission of his theory to the skeptical-yet-fascinated Erskine, and later by Erskine's passing the same theory on to the narrator, who then convinces Erskine, awakening from a long-dormant disease which, just like the theory, had lain inert within Erskine for decades before finally consuming him. The aesthetic influence and intense interpersonal fascination which bind these men together, two at a time, over the centuries, are thus linked to a medical-legal discourse which perceives and portrays them as pathological, but which is also inextricably linked to a homophile discourse: Indeed, as Stefano Evangelista remarks in an article on Platonic aestheticism at the Victorian *fin-de-siècle*, "From the 1860s sexuality starts to be used as a critical category in the study of literature and the arts in a way that anticipates the concerns and methods of 'queer' criticism today," with both Victorian critics and queer theorists interpreting

aesthetic works, in part, on the basis of the artist's sexual identity and proclivities, acting on the shared assumption that art acts as a transgenerational link between queer individuals (231).

Erskine's description of the portrait as "the only legacy I ever received in my life," emphasizing, on the story's first page, that the portrait both depicts and catalyzes intense male homosocial bonds as it, and the theories, circumstances, and relationships surrounding it are relayed from one man to another over the generations (50). Erskine interweaves the story of his own relationship to Graham with his explanation of the portrait's background, evoking an obvious, if implicit, analogy between himself and Graham, Shakespeare and Hughes. Unsurprisingly, then, Erskine recalls Graham as "fascinating," sketching it in terms that ambiguously evoke a schoolboy friendship based on vaguely-evoked activities which tangentially and occasionally involve academics: As Erskine tells the unnamed narrator,

He and I were in the same house at Eton ... we were immense friends, and did all our work and all our play together. There was, of course, a good deal more play than work, but I cannot say that I am sorry for that. It is always an advantage not to have received a sound commercial education, and what I learned in the playing fields at Eton has been quite as useful as anything I was taught at Cambridge. (50-51)

This description rather evasively, negatively defines Erskine's and Graham's strong friendship as markedly *not* based on the academic surroundings which have brought them together, but on unspecified forms of "play" which constitute a preferred alternative form of education, as evidenced by Erskine parallelism in favorably comparing what he "learned" on Eton's playing fields to what he "was taught" at university. These vaguely evocative references to play and playing fields are rendered more mysterious by Erskine's continued description of Graham as "effeminate, I suppose, in some things ... very languid in his manner, and not a little vain of his good looks, and had a strong objection to football. The two things that really gave him pleasure were poetry and acting" (52). Here as throughout the text, Graham's beauty is portrayed as essential to the personal magnetism which attracts his many ardent admirers, including Erskine,

who recalls his younger self as “absurdly devoted” to Graham, who “fascinated everybody who was worth fascinating, and a good many who were not” despite (or, more likely, because of) his fundamental insincerity (52-53).

In fact, it is Graham’s insincerity which ensures his success as a Shakespearean actor, in counterpoint to *Dorian*’s Sybil. As Erskine recalls of Graham’s appearance in *As You Like It*, “... of course Cyril was always cast for the girls’ parts ... it was a marvellous performance. In fact, Cyril Graham was the only perfect Rosalind I have ever seen. It would be impossible to describe to you the beauty, the delicacy, the refinement of the whole thing” (53). Erskine “of course” harks back to his initial description of Graham as “effeminate, languid in his manner, not a little vain of his good looks, and ha[ving] a strong objection to football:” all traits stereotypically ascribed to Victorian women (52). The crucial difference, though, is that rather than being feminine, Cyril is instead effeminate: His performance of femininity, though false in literal and physical fact, is lauded where Sybil’s is panned precisely because of this disjuncture between truth and representation. Juxtaposed with the forged portrait which drives the story, Cyril’s similarly falsified femininity is perceived, at least by the admiring Erskine, as somehow truer than the truth, free from the cloying, obvious excess of a femininity rooted in and portrayed by a woman’s body (*The Artist As Critic* 192). Graham’s personal and theatrical effeminacy have their historical counterpart in Willie Hughes -- where Erskine effuses the part of Rosalind “might have been written for him [Graham],” Graham theorizes that the subject of Shakespeare’s sonnets was “surely none other than the boy-actor for whom he created Viola and Imogen, Juliet and Rosalind, Portia and Desdemona, and Cleopatra herself” (53, 56-57).

In this way, both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” use portraiture to demonstrate art’s ability, per Wilde, to exceed and emphasize rather than simply imitating that which it portrays. This aesthetic ability to transcend prosaic details in favor of a

greater truth emerges, in both texts, as an exclusively male province, as demonstrated, in part, by the respective failure and success of Sybil and Cyril as Shakespearean actors.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 20, the text under discussion by these characters in "W.H.," describes just such a dynamic, praising an ambiguously gendered love interest whose feminine appearance is contrasted with an authenticity implicitly regarded as male. As Shakespeare addresses this mysterious youth, he might just as easily be speaking for the older aesthetes whose unrequited passions animate both "W.H." and *Dorian*:

A woman's face with nature's own hand painted  
Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;  
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted  
With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;  
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,  
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;  
A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,  
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth  
And for a woman wert thou first created;  
Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,  
And by addition me of thee defeated,  
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.  
But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,  
Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure. (lines 1-12)

Like Cyril's and Dorian's, the face of Shakespeare's love object blends nature and art along with masculine and feminine traits, paradoxically transcending these apparent conflicts: Though the face is a woman's, it is painted, or falsified, by nature, suggesting that these feminine traits may lie only on the surface, belying a deeper and more fundamental masculinity that renders Shakespeare's muse superior to the false dichotomy which seeks to distinguish him or her as either male or female. In refusing such classification, the poet's "master mistress" lays claim to both a "woman's gentle heart" and an authenticity which the poem implies is fundamentally masculine, in contrast to feminine falsity. These masculine qualities of surface beauty and inner authenticity are regarded as both truer and more beautiful than their inferior feminine counterparts, not only brighter, but "less false."

The eyes of Shakespeare's love object are not only beautiful to gaze on and reflective of a truth beneath that aesthetic surface: They are an art object capable of gazing back, and of projecting their own beauty onto other objects, "gilding" them. This ability to gaze back, and to transform the beheld object with one's gaze, is, like the just-lauded traits of beauty and authenticity, immediately coded as masculine: The next line celebrates Shakespeare's love as a "man in hue" (a visual object) with "all hues in his controlling." This last phrase ambiguously designates this mysterious "man" as both a critic and an artist -- his gaze, has already been given agency in gilding, or creating, art, a status which is then emphasized by this dual status as both "in hue" and in control of all hues. This duality allows him to "steal men's eyes," another ambiguous phrase, suggesting both his ability to arrest the gaze with his beauty and, potentially, to control or appropriate it by influencing the viewer's aesthetic values, much as Dorian Gray does to Basil Hallward, or Cyril Gray does to Erskine.

Having first established the feminine qualities of the poem's muse, then elaborated on the extent to which these qualities are intermixed with a fundamental masculinity, the poem then returns to an evocation of feminine traits, proclaiming that this androgynous creature was initially created "for a woman," a phrasing that momentarily leaves open to interpretation whether this means as a woman, or for women's benefit. This confusing gendered interplay is only heightened by the following lines, which specify that nature "prick'd thee out for women's pleasure," potentially suggesting that the addition of male genitalia to this compelling creature was a last-minute gift to womankind. This apparently clear statement is, predictably, then befuddled by the poem's cryptic and elliptical closing lines, which divides "thy love" and "thy love's use" between the (presumably male) narrator and the women just gifted with nature's capricious pricking out for their use: Though the narrator's love object may be arbitrarily designated by nature for their use, his love belongs to the narrator. This circumstance closes the

poem by again privileging masculine depth over feminine surface, though it is this feminine appearance which the poem initially praises.

In this poem, as in the fiction of Oscar Wilde, including “The Portrait of Mr. W.H., *Teleny*, and, of course, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, an abundance of visual depictions supplements the verbal silence surrounding male homoeroticism. Even in the latter novel, queer liaisons are spoken of in hushed tones and related as scandals. In Antonio Sanna’s reading of *Dorian*, silence is the mechanism that empowers Dorian’s portrait and drives the narrative; as Sanna emphasizes, Wilde makes numerous references to the silent conditions in which Basil paints, and also portrays Basil’s murder as both a figurative and literal silencing (Sanna 28). Dorian stabs Basil to death after the Basil imparts that Dorian has been the subject of rumors, thus rendering Basil unable either to spread gossip or to cry for help, as Dorian slashes his throat, causing him to choke on his own blood.

This fit of violence culminates in Dorian’s destruction of the portrait, which leads directly and immediately to his own death. Critics in the post-AIDS era, including Sanna, have interpreted this as a literal, if anachronistic, demonstration that silence equals death -- in other words, that both Dorian and Basil are ultimately killed by the code of silence that proscribes the desire between them (Sanna 31). Others, like Rita Felski, have rightly emphasized the extent to which Dorian’s existence as an object of aesthetic and sexual desire renders him effeminate, and the extent to which femininity is derided, in both *Dorian* and *Teleny*, as unduly concerned with or composed or matter, as foolishly literal and fleshly in contrast to men’s intellectual and aesthetic homosocial (and homoerotic) continuum.

I am most interested, however, in the ways in which these narratives’ valorization of a death-oriented male homosexuality, one in which aesthetic objects speak visually for a verbally silenced sexuality (or, rather, for a range of male homosexualities) is enmeshed in these

characters' simultaneous refusal to hew to an expected personal or developmental chronology, or, put more plainly, to marry and reproduce. Instead, in refusing to age, Dorian is able to perpetually forestall these options, remaining at the beginning of an extended bachelorhood. Teleny similarly dies young, in a narrative in which women's reproductive capacity is portrayed as a monstrosity, his suicide resulting directly from his ludicrous sexual congress with de Grioux's mother.<sup>49</sup> For all their disastrous results, then, both Teleny and Dorian refuse adulthood in a way that constitutes an act of sexual-political resistance, anachronistically recalling Freeman's contention that "even non-nationalist cultural belonging is a matter of affects that inhere, in many ways, in shared timings, and I stake my claim for a counterpolitics of encounter in which bodies ... meet one another by chance, forging ... history differently" (xi). It is this willingness to do personal history differently that enables the radical possibilities within Wilde's fiction.

Wilde's characters' death-driven homoerotic refusal of the sexual trajectory formed by marriage and procreation has its counterpart in the vampire texts examined earlier in this dissertation, texts in which a morbid female sexuality emerges from the past, offering a form of reproductive kinship which recurs to that past, as well as to the maternal body. In Hardy's novels, his characters' reproductive trajectories are arrested by an anti-futuristic anti-natality which also arcs toward the past. Each of these narratives variously generates new forms of kinship based on recursion to the past, adapting the discourses of sexological, psychological, and cultural criticism in order to do so.

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Du Plessis's work on "mother's boys" in Wilde's fiction argues against psychoanalytic readings which understand male homosexuality as a failed disidentification with a mother figure, arguing that the trope of the mother-emulating male homosexual may be understood, in Wilde and other texts, as "set to new ends" (146). Patrick Horan's *The Importance of Being Paradoxical: Maternal Presence in the Works of Oscar Wilde* traces the influence of Wilde's mother on his work, claiming that Wilde's own personality and the female characters in his plays were strongly influenced by his mother (124).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that Victorian literary texts devised alternate kinship forms in response to cultural debates on family structure and the nature of biological inheritance. Noting the influence of contemporary medical, psychological, and legal discourses on these texts, I have argued that they adapt and respond to such discourses, using the temporal backwardness popularly associated with non-normative (and especially non-procreative) sexuality as a springboard for new reproductive and sexual identities.

### **From Vampires to Hardy: A Short Developmental History of This Dissertation**

This project began, though I did not yet know it, several years ago, in a seminar on representations of the Irish in Victorian literature. Reading *Dracula* and its criticism, I was fascinated by this novel's evocation of horrifying reproduction. As I examined this text more closely, I realized that, for all the male homoeroticism which so clearly infuses it, and which has so enhanced its status as a queer text, *Dracula* is replete with images of perverse maternity, including its titular character's forced breast-feeding of Mina Harker. Placing both *Dracula* and Lucy Westenra, the virginal bride turned child-devouring vampire, on a spectrum of perverse maternity, I then approached my continued studies in Victorian literature with an eye out for queer and/or monstrous reproduction.

Looking for characters who forged kinship and reproductive bonds outside the parameters of heterosexual procreation, I soon realized that *Dracula* was not unique. If this narrative was refreshingly queer in its departure from those parameters, it was also only one voice in a century-spanning conversation which revised them. Even more specifically, and despite its iconic tendency to overshadow its peers, *Dracula* was one of many Victorian vampire narratives, ending a century which began with Coleridge's "Christabel," and continued with *Carmilla* and *The Blood of the Vampire*. Due to *Dracula*'s tendency to overshadow these other texts (in my

own mind and in the criticism), I deliberately shut it out in order to focus on the others. What emerged was a series of representations of perverse, often queerly incestuous, maternity. In these narratives, vampirism is matrilineal, and offers eternal life via a return to an ancient maternal body, a type of morbid birth promising futurity through temporal reversion. Each of these texts described a mode of reproduction -- the birth-through-death and potentially eternal life of the vampire -- which obviated heterosexuality and, more specifically, the need for men in establishing consanguineous bonds.

In these vampire texts as well as in the fiction of Hardy and Wilde, it seemed that a fatal return to the past was the price or condition of queer futurity. Linking this pattern to the tendency of Victorian sexology to portray non-normative sexuality in terms of devolution and degeneration, I was at first inclined to read these literary texts as direct reflections of scientific discourse. This tendency abated as I read more deeply in Victorian sexology, noting the ambivalence and complexity within the work of Havelock Ellis, whose writing on homosexuality is so nuanced and conditional in its simultaneous acceptance of this identity as appropriate (for ancient Greeks) and pathological (for Victorians).

Equally interesting were the homophilic writings of John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter, particularly Carpenter's 1894 *Homogenic Love*, which explains that both "comradeship" and "romantic male friendship" are enshrined in "the annals of all nations" (5-6). Rather than pathologizing such attachments as degenerate, Carpenter takes an intriguingly distinct position of placing such relationships, and the cultures which venerate them, atop an international-genealogical hierarchy, theorizing that Pacific Islanders, among whom "romantic male friendships are ... in vogue," have "probably inherit[ed] the traditions of a higher culture than they now possess" (5-6). This assertion reverses the tendency of degeneration discourse -- for example, the work of Max Nordau -- to read non-procreative sexualities as devolutionary, and

as pollutants degrading British blood (though it does also unfortunately duplicate the assumption of a nationalist hierarchy in which the lower ranks were occupied by non-white and non-British peoples). Carpenter's work also accorded homosexuals a role in the creative endeavor of spawning new generations, deeming it "the most natural thing in the world" that, like heterosexuality, "the other love should have its special function in social and heroic work, in the generation -- not of bodily children -- but of those children of the mind ... philosophical conceptions and ideals" (42-43). I realized, then, that Victorian sexological theory was not monolithic in its pathologizing of what Carpenter called "the other love," but rather that the nationalist and evolutionary tropes that recurred throughout this period's sexology could be, and were, deployed to describe and generate queer reproductive identities.

As I deepened this area of my research, I was also drawn to the work of Oscar Wilde, increasingly perceiving the relevance of homoerotic aesthetic reproduction in his work to the issues and narratives animating this developing project. While I had previously placed a range of Victorian vampire texts on a spectrum of perverse maternity, noting that each supplanted heterosexual procreation through a reversion to a past which was at once life-giving and deadly, I now expanded my focus to include narratives which performed a similar maneuver from a male-homoerotic perspective.

Instead of matrilineal vampirism, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," and *Teleny* use aestheticism -- which they clearly delimit as a male province -- to diverge from linear temporality, hearkening back to an ancient Greek precedent for male homosexuality in a way that suspends time for its youthful protagonist. Like the vampire texts which I was still discovering, these narratives defined the female reproductive body as a site of abjection, and femininity in general as a state of profound physicality. Where vampire texts developed this premise as the basis for an alternative form of life-giving kinship, I saw female reproductive

abjection in Wilde's narratives acting as a foil for a privileged, masculine, aesthetic mode of reproduction. In both groups of texts, however, I noted queer reproduction operating on a non-linear timeline, whether in a vampiric reversion to the maternal body, or in an aesthetic ability to suspend or otherwise transcend time's progress. These temporal reversions and suspensions provided the framework for narratives which, in their depictions of failure and refusal, rewrote the structure of the *bildungsroman*.

Having observed these patterns' persistence, with variation, among relatively diverse fictional texts, as well as the corresponding tendency of sexological and psychological discourse to portray non-reproductive sexuality as temporally backward, I then realized the relevance of queer theory to these narratives, and to this overall project. I immersed myself in the discourse of queer temporality and failure as articulated by thinkers like Edelman, Stockton, Heather Love, and Judith Halberstam. Each of these theorists considers the political valences of temporal inversion, often including a failure to develop along prescribed sexual and reproductive timelines. This reading deepened my prior realization that Victorian texts were not merely reflective of sexology's often pathologizing conflation of sexual and temporal inversion. Instead, they were rewriting, or writing back to, a heteronormative discourse of reproductive futurism which was sustained in opposition to images of the temporally backward queer.

As I read these texts and made these connections between Victorian literature, psychology, sexology, and queer theory, I realized that the dynamics at play in these texts and in this dissertation were not limited to depictions of same-sex attraction or sexual intimacy. As I noted the significance of the dead, degenerate, or absent child as a marker of sexual boundaries in Victorian literature and culture, and realized this figure's effectiveness as a symbol of a failed, rejected, or thwarted reproductive future, I came to see Thomas Hardy's final novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, as participating in the same conversation in which I had

found both vampire narratives and Wilde's fiction, a dialogue informed but not determined by the scientific discourse surrounding non-normative sexuality.

Both these novels' plots, to varying extents, resist the *bildungsroman*'s progression from a protagonist's childhood through young adulthood, successful courtship, marriage, and the production of heirs. While *Tess* re-sequences and foreshortens this process, chronicling the birth and death of Tess's child, her broken marriage, her murder of her child's father, and her own death, *Jude* culminates in a paradoxically aged child's suicide and murder of his siblings. This resistance to linear progress also emerges in these characters' approach to time, which is recursive, oriented toward a single family's ancestral past (in *Tess*) or, in *Jude*, toward a more generalized, encompassing kinship based on membership in the broad historical arc of humankind. As I gradually distinguished these novels' participation in the rhetoric of temporally reversed and failed sexual reproduction, I realized that they were using those tropes to explore questions of kinship. While *Tess* ponders what it means to be a new and obsolete outgrowth of England's pagan past, *Jude* imagines a more universal form of kinship, based on Little Father Time's backward-facing perspective over an oceanic, all-encompassing human past, as well as on his and Sue Bridehead's shared dread of sexually reproductive futurism.

## **Final Overview**

Over the course of this project, I realized that Victorian literature abounds with narratives exploring non-procreative (and often non-heterosexual) forms of kinship and reproduction. These texts spanned the century, but seemed to proliferate most intensely in its final decade. They transcended form and genre, including poetry, novels, short fiction, an anonymously collaborative novella, and both supernatural and naturalist fiction. Far from being isolated to a particular time period, literary genre, or school, these texts may be read as conversant with one

another, and should certainly be read in dialogue with contemporary sexological, psychological, medical, legal, anthropological, and social discourse.

Though the recurrence of the abject maternal body in these texts is often, and reasonably, read as evidence of misogyny, I have also noted this trope's centrality to the creation of new reproductive and kinship forms. The most obvious, and certainly a valid, interpretation of this recurrence might read it as a symptom of a culturally-rooted misogyny which particularly suffused medical discourse, and which these texts absorbed along with the sexological theory to which they so clearly respond. This notion would be compatible with a reasonable claim that both fecundity and abjection were so strongly associated with the female sexual body that this body, whether rejected or embraced, continually emerged as the basis for even queer reproductive forms: While vampire texts examined in this dissertation employ images of perverse maternity in order to generate a mode of consanguineous kinship which excludes men, and which seeks eternal life through a deadly return to the womb, Wilde's fiction uses abject female reproductivity as a foil for a form of male-homoerotic reproduction which replaces the body with its aesthetic representation, and which transcends time through the death drive. Though the characters in Hardy's final novels similarly transcend time through sexual and reproductive identities which are both death-driven and temporally inverted, these novels lack the tendency, present in Wilde and vampire fiction, to portray the maternal body as grotesque.

If Hardy's texts seem to participate least in the abjection of the maternal body, his novels still support this sense of widespread internalized misogyny, as Hardy, of all authors considered in this project, is the most prone to inserting openly misogynistic observations at the narrative level. It is clear, then, that, despite the stunningly creative ways in which these texts have variously adapted, written back to or against the grain of, a range of Victorian sexological and psychological influences, they are unable to fully escape or separate from them.

Rather than simply reflecting or incorporating these discourses, however, the narratives considered in this dissertation reshaped them. This is particularly apparent in their adaptation of the discourse surrounding sexual and reproductive temporality. Where temporal reversion was popularly regarded as pathologically opposed to heterosexuality (an opposition marked by the dead child), I have argued that these texts redeploy such tropes to counter and critique the pathologizing of non-normative sexual identities. Consequently, I have used queer theory in order to examine these narratives' queered temporalities, and the ways in which they problematize the received relationship between linear temporality and sexual reproductivity. This has allowed me to conceptualize, and to explain, the ways in which these texts use recursive temporality to generate new and creatively fertile modes of sexual and reproductive being.

### **Further Applications**

In framing the dialogue between these texts and the cultural discourses to which they respond, I have necessarily chosen to emphasize some of its aspects at the expense of others. Celibacy, for instance, seems to be an essential aspect of the kinship between Sue Bridehead and Little Father Time, and may also provide some insight into the ambiguously lesbian encounter at the center of "Christabel." As Kahan has noted, and as this dissertation has only begun to consider, celibacy is a sexual identity which may usefully be considered queer. It refuses legibility under rubrics which insist on genital sexuality as a litmus test, characterizing subjects as either queer or straight. In other words, celibacy is queer in its stymieing of the homo/hetero binary.

As such, celibacy enables a critical departure from paranoid reading, an approach which emphasizes the un-closeting or decoding of latent homosexual content, placing "its faith in exposure," as though the goal or ultimate potential of literary studies were to find what one was already looking for, and then to call others' attention to it (*Touching Feeling* 138-139). In its

disengagement from interpersonal sexual contact, celibacy challenges the insistence on uncloseting which has so influenced work on Victorian homosexuality and romantic friendship, encouraging a focus on sexualities and relationships that do not fit our understandings of either queerness or heterosexuality. The arguments, approaches and interventions encompassed in the preceding pages might productively be applied to New Woman novels and other narratives centering on subjects whose lives fall aslant of heteronormative (and procreative) pressures to marry, including romantic friendships as well as single women, or spinsters.

Nationality is another conceptual thread which runs through this project, but which might be more fully scrutinized in future projects on Victorian sexual temporality. In vampire narratives as well as in Wilde's texts, ancient, foreign forms of sexuality are the precursors of queer Victorian reproduction. These texts are not unique in their use of foreign settings and characters to illustrate and often advocate forms of sexual identity and expression which deviated from British social norms. Texts such as H. Rider Haggard's 1887 *She*, Olive Schreiner's 1883 *Story of an African Farm*, and Charlotte Bronte's 1847 *Jane Eyre* variously contribute to this pattern, depicting traditional or inherited sexual behaviors and identities in ways which may be illuminated by placing these narratives in the context of the discourses described and arguments advanced throughout this dissertation.

*She*, for instance, uses its African setting to explore a fictionalized culture which remains primitive, unchanged by modernity or civilization, and which is subjugated to the whims of an ageless goddess referred to as She Who Must Be Obeyed, more simply as She, or, in her current incarnation, Ayesha. Believing a European explorer to be the reincarnation of her former lover, Ayesha attempts to bathe with him in a pillar of fire, thus allowing him to join her in eternal life. This novel stands out among those I've considered, due to its vampire's failed attempt at her task of morbid birth: Ayesha perishes in the fire, reverting to her true age -- a sight so shocking it kills

another of the white-male explorers who witness it. Given what I now know about the interest of late-Victorian anthropology in cultural survivals, as well as the pattern of infanticidal vampiric mothers and the suicide of Harriet Brandt (from *Blood of the Vampire*), I can now suggest that *She* might usefully be read as a narrative of extinguished, or dwindling, cultural survivals, lured to their demise by curious Britons. Considered in the context of suicidal and infanticidal maternity established by Hardy's novels as well as Victorian vampire texts, I would place Ayesha's death on a spectrum along with Harriet's, Little Father Time's, and Tess's, suggesting that her demise was a predictable effect of her walking into the fire. Ayesha's death may be read as her (and the narrative's) spiteful comment on her companion's ignorant faith that their exotic setting and her beauty might somehow suspend fire's danger. Certainly, she seems to have deliberately lured him nearly to a miserable death. Both Ayesha's death and her ambiguous attempt to embroil another in it may be read as acts of political protest at the cultural death knell sounded by the arrival of British explorers.

As this aborted backwards birth suggests, perverse maternity features in every chapter in this dissertation. My chapters on vampire narratives and on Hardy's novels hint at the complex ways in which abject maternity and infanticide may be used as tropes in feminist or queer narratives, interrogating and revising normative concepts of female sexuality. My analysis of Wilde adds to this by demonstrating that maternal abjection can also be co-opted in support of a masculinist aesthetic ideal. These are only two instances of maternal abjection and infanticide in Victorian literature, a topic which would surely benefit from a sustained analysis from both queer-theoretical and sexological perspectives, in order to more fully tease out the numerous political and social valences of both the dead child and the abject or murderous mother. *The Blood of the Vampire*, for instance, advocates a maternal willingness to commit violence upon or in protection of one's child, a willingness which spans social class and moral character, and

which seems to make little distinction between harming and protecting one's child. The implication of rejecting this distinction -- that a compassionate mother may see death as the ideal outcome for her healthy child, and therefore that death in general may be superior to life and to the future -- also emerges in Hardy's novels, with the deaths of Sorrow, Little Father Time, and his siblings. These sympathetic portraits of murderous and infanticidal mothers, forming an inescapable pattern in my research on the separate, if related, topic of queer reproduction, suggest a rich vein of cultural ambivalence, not only toward female sexuality and maternity, but toward to the more universal concepts of reproduction and futurity.

These conceptual nodes of celibacy, nationality, and perverse maternity radiate from this dissertation's central axis: its focus on Victorian literary texts' reshaping of the scientific rhetoric of sexual temporality in order to present alternate forms of kinship and reproduction. Linking Thomas Hardy's late fiction to Victorian narratives of matrilineal vampirism, and placing both in dialogue with Oscar Wilde's writing on homoerotic aestheticism, I have demonstrated that these texts predicate queer kinship and reproduction on temporal reversion, enacting a backwards birth which seeks futurity through a return to the past. In so doing, I have set this dissertation at a promising interdisciplinary crossroads, placing Victorian literature and sexology in dialogue with queer theory in a way that has numerous applications for future projects.

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## **VITA**

Mary Timothy Wilson has received bachelor's and master's degrees in English literature from Eastern Michigan University. She has taught English at the high school, community college, and university levels, in addition to teaching English as a second language.