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Speer, Margaret Jane

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*Suffisaunce*: Women Alone and Together in the British Cultural Imaginary

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In English

by

Margaret Jane Speer

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Andrea Henderson, Chair  
Professor Irene Tucker  
Associate Professor Heather Lukes  
Associate Professor Rebeca Helfer  
Professor Martin Harries

2022



*In loving memory of Roger Earl Ruckman, 1935-2015*

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## VITA

Margaret Jane Speer

- |           |                                                                                     |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2015      | B.A. in English and Cultural and Intellectual History, University of Rochester      |
| 2019      | School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell University                                  |
| 2019      | Thayer Archival Research Fellowship, University of California, Los Angeles          |
| 2021      | Strauss Endowed Dissertation Fellowship, University of California, Irvine           |
| 2017-2021 | Queer Theory Reading Group Event Series Organizer, University of California, Irvine |
| 2022      | Ph.D. in English, University of California, Irvine                                  |

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

*Suffisaunce*: Women Alone and Together in the British Cultural Imaginary

by

Margaret Jane Speer

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2022

Professor Andrea Henderson, Chair

“*Suffisaunce*: Women Alone and Together in the British Cultural Imaginary,” illuminates an English literary-historical legacy of female self-sufficiency from the early modern to the modern period. Its focus is the Victorian era, pivotal as much for its reanimation of older paradigms of female relationality as for the changes it inaugurated. *Suffisaunce* is a meditation on sexual switching and women’s independence as much as a prehistory of lesbian identity. The medieval word refers to a source of perfect satisfaction, and to perfect satisfaction itself. That *suffisaunce* flashes forth in single women as well as between women marks its difference from earlier historical and queer theoretical conceptions of lesbian relationality. *Suffisaunce* brings the formal relations queer theory has prioritized together with historical categories of identity and bodies that inhabit them. Looking at women alone/together demands response to the recursions and repetitions. But beyond the non-normative temporalities theorized by scholars of queer time, *suffisaunce* evokes the frustration of denouement for which lesbianism specifically is famous: simultaneously the sexuality of under-development and non-arrival, lesbianism is unfinished and ongoing. My methodology and my argument are tied together; the figures I examine reject time.

Sufficient “without father, brother, or husband,” Elizabeth I created impossible possibilities of motherhood, eliciting panicked responses like Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*, where she appears as monstrously masculinized women. She set out a paradigm to which the Victorian period perpetually returned; in “The Lady of Shalott,” Tennyson degrades *suffisaunce* into “erotic similitude” by fixating on time-stopping, aesthetic auto-eroticism. While imagining women together in terms of similitude rendered female relations insignificant, inversion made the lesbian *visible*, taking hold conceptually from the literal inversion of the photographic negative, and aided by discourses of blackening in photographic writings to produce a novel national invert type. Examining photo-technical and sexological texts, Clementina Hawarden’s photography, and *The Woman in White*, I coin “photographic inversion” to demonstrate that in England, female inversion was first photographic and literary, before sexological. Elizabeth’s afterlife appears again in *Great Expectations*’ Miss Havisham, who stops all clocks, living forever in the moment of heterosexual marriage’s failure in “Satis House”—so named by Elizabeth I—which Dickens makes the seat of an *unsatisfied* virgin. Finally, Virginia Woolf’s four “Mary’s” are perpetually reborn as women writers. E. M. Forster and Woolf draw out the definition of *suffisaunce* as “enoughness;” without houses and rooms of their own, women’s poverty sustains compulsory heterosexuality.

## Introduction

I repurpose the medieval word “*suffisaunce*” from Chaucer to name an English literary-historical legacy of female self-sufficiency: a meditation on sexual switching and women’s independence, as much as a prehistory of lesbian identity. According to the Middle English Dictionary, “*suffisaunce*”—which appears variably as “*suffissaunce*, *suffisaunse*, *suffishaunce*, *sufficaunce*, *souffisaunce*, and *soffisaunce*”—stems from Old French and Anglo-French, where it is iterated as “*sofisaunce*, *soffisaunce*, *soufisaunce*, *souffissanche*,” and “*suffis(s)auunce*, *sufficaunce*,” respectively (MED). Its meanings were richer in Chaucer’s idiom (c. 1387-93) than our contemporary one, though they’re related. Today’s main usage of the word is akin to “adequacy,” which is certainly one sense *suffisaunce* has in Chaucer; for example, in the *Knight’s Tale*, the import of “Suffyceth heer ensamples oon or two” seems fairly straightforward (KT: 1953).

In the *Merchant’s Tale* and the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, *suffisaunce* is gendered feminine, and transformed into a metaphysical quality. Chaucer’s usage in the *Merchant’s Tale* narrates May’s plan to sleep with Damian; once she has assented, “Ther lakketh noight but only day and place,/ Wher that she mighte un-to his lust *suffyise*” (MchT: 1998-1999, emphasis mine). The nothing lacks save the mundane details of a time and place suggests that the transcendence of May’s feminine presence of spirit in her consent is that with which she will suffice his desire. But this satisfaction can only be accessed in accordance with her will. The *Wife of Bath’s Tale* confirms that *suffisaunce* cannot be taken by force. The rapist knight is sent away for a year to save his life by “An answer *suffisant* in [the] matere” of what women want most; the knight will die if he cannot answer (WBT: 910, emphasis mine). Because the question is posed as an unanswerable

one, the task a death sentence, the “sufficiency” of any imagined response becomes an unattainable, perhaps even unimaginable idea.

By merit of this frame—that women’s true desire only be opaquely imagined, if at all—*suffisaunce* moves from the realm of the concrete, something actually to be had, to the speculative. Despite the abundance and variety of answers the knight receives during his quest, none of which seems wrong, no single one suffices. Only the hag’s single answer, “*maistrie*,” can encompass all these lesser things that women want. The knight’s submission to the hag is the performance of the answer that reveals it. By correctly assimilating the import of the Lothly Lady’s lesson, the knight obtains *suffisaunce*: he surrenders to her will: ““as yow lyketh, it suffiseth me”” (WBT: 1235). The satisfactoriness of this relationship—a beautiful wife *and* trueness in love—is posited as a “possible impossibility” like having one’s cake and eating it, too. By yielding to femininity, or perhaps by yielding, femininely, the knight obtains *suffisaunce*. The lesson of womanhood can only be learned by the doing of womanhood itself. Means and end, method and outcome, are the same. In yet a further layer of feminine likeness between method and solution, the medieval snake of knowledge eating its own tail, *suffisaunce* is *itself* feminized, as we will see in a moment.

The *Clerk’s Tale* is also a story of winning by yielding. Patient Griselda, picked out of the peasantry to marry by Walter the Marquis, is tortured by her husband by what is simply the full usage of men’s power over their wives. Though he takes everything away from her, Griselda’s *suffisaunce* never diminishes because, I suggest, her source of satiety is herself. She breaks Walter’s will by never asserting her own—or at least, the will that she asserts is of a different kind than his. Hers is a passive strength that ultimately outdoes his own.

Intractable time presses upon Walter. His subjects, in turn, press him to marry.<sup>1</sup>

“Boweth youre nekke under that blisful yok  
Of soveraynetee, noght of servyse,  
Which that men clepe spousaille or wedlok;  
And thenketh, lord, among youre thoghtes wyse  
How thatoure dayes passe in sondry wyse,  
For thogh we slepe, or wake, or rome, or ryde,  
Ay fleeth the tyme; it nyl no man abyde.” CT 113-119<sup>2</sup>

From the outset of the story, Walter’s people raise the reversibility of sovereignty and “servyse.”

Walter, reluctant, insists that marriage will bind him “in servage:”

I me rejoysed of my liberte,  
That seelde tyme is founde in mariage;  
Ther I was free, I moot been in servage. 145-147

Though as husband, patriarch, and ruler, Walter will have all the authority in relation to a wife, by framing marriage as service (his own), Walter claims powerlessness from a place of total power—we will see this occur again and again in proximity to *suffisaunce*. He chooses Griselda from among the humblest of his people, and “Thus Walter lowly—nay, but royally—” marries (421). The immediate correction of “lowly” to “royally” again suggests the potential for reversals of power, or perhaps the unsuspected power of the seemingly powerless.

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<sup>1</sup> Because Walter has promised his people to marry, “*The Clerk’s Tale* may... be read in accordance with what Gayle Rubin termed ‘The Traffic in Women’, as Griselda is subsumed by a patriarchal kinship ritual. Whilst such a reading negates Griselda’s actions,” her “agency... may be found outside of the binary opposition constituted by victimhood and subversion” (Rossiter 181).

<sup>2</sup> Time abides no *man*, but it will abide Elizabeth I, in next chapter, where I argue that *suffisaunce* is a matter of lesbian time.

Perhaps because he assumes that marriage means his “servage,” Walter demands of his new wife complete obedience and submission to his will: “‘this wol I,’ quod he,/ ‘That ye to me assente as in this thyng./ Shewe now youre pacience in youre werkyng’” (493-497). Though Griselda is young, “Ther was enclosed rype and sad corage” (218-220). *Her* will is unsuspected, hidden (“enclosed”)—“corage” is related not only to heart (“[t]he heart as the seat of emotions, affection, attitudes, and volition; heart, spirit; disposition, temperament”), but to desire (“[i]nclination... sexual desire, lust”) (MED). The Clerk further describes Griselda’s enclosed “corage” as “sad.” Jill Mann’s discussion, in *Feminizing Chaucer*, of “Griselda’s ‘sadnesse’ [as answer to] Walter’s insatiability” feminizes *suffisaunce* as linked to her reading of Griselda’s patience (120). This reading hinges on the relationship between “sadnesse,” for which Mann draws on the “oldest English meaning (still active in Chaucer’s usage), ‘satisfied, sated, full,’” and the “English adverb ‘ynogh’, which means not only ‘sufficiently, moderately’, but also ‘extremely, ... fully, completely, entirely ... as much as well could be,’” and, finally, patience (120, 124).<sup>3</sup> The MED offers evidence for reading *suffisaunce* and “enough” as synonymous, with emphasis on “abundance, plenty, wealth.” Mann, notes the qualified feminization of patience, a virtue which may accrue to either sex, but is essentially rooted in womanhood:

patience is not, for Chaucer, a gender-specific virtue in the sense that it is a feminine ideal only; on the contrary, it is an ideal for both sexes alike. Activity is not reserved for men, passivity for women; the celebration of patience in the *Franklin’s Tale* shows each sex active and passive by turns. But the ideal that governs this alternation is derived from female experience. What makes patience

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<sup>3</sup> Mann asserts that “enough” “does not represent merely a limited satisfaction; it also represents complete fulfillment. It is not only a mean, a half-way house between the extremes of ‘too little’ and ‘too much’, but is also itself an extreme, finding its limit only in the completeness of perfection” (124).

a specifically female quality for Chaucer is not... the conventional expectations of his society about female behaviour. It is rather its intimate connection with female sexuality, and in particular with childbirth. In Latin, “patior” and “patientia” are technical terms for the female role in intercourse. 126

While we know better than to imagine that either sexual passivity or childbirth are inherently “female,” the Chaucerian essentialism Mann glosses is useful for thinking about the *suffisaunce* to which Mann’s extended gloss of “patience” accrues via the link of “enoughness.”

Walter proceeds to test Griselda’s obedience. One of the *Tale*’s more extreme trials is his removal of her newborn baby.

Ther fil, as it bifalleth tymes mo,  
Whan that this child had souked but a throwe,  
This markys in his herte longeth so  
To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe 449-452

The reason the Clerk cites for Walter’s “tempt[ation]” of his wife is a wish to “knowe” “hir sadnesse”—biblically, perhaps. If Walter’s desire for Griselda’s unhappiness suggests a scene of sadism, then, in light of the connection Mann makes between “sadnesse” and sated satisfaction, Griselda meets this scene with her own pleasurable suffering.

The issue of men’s understanding of women at issue in the *Clerk’s Tale* and the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* arises again and again in subsequent centuries, from male courtiers’ frustrations at Elizabeth’s impenetrability, to Virginia Woolf’s tragicomic image of Sir Chartres Biron (magistrate at *The Well of Loneliness*’ obscenity trial) crouching behind a curtain to find out what women say to one another when they are alone. I want to suggest that there is often a shadow of lesbian panic at the edge of this will to knowledge: thing men both want to and are

afraid to find out, is women's sexuality together. In Walter's case, that his cruelty to Griselda is framed as "tempting" her raises the specter of her (potentially deviant) sexuality. Further, Griselda meets Walter's temptations/ torture with a "wyl" that she links to her "corage."

"This wyl is in myn herte, and ay shal be;  
No lengthe of tyme or deeth may this deface,  
Ne change my corage to another place." 509-511

Her immovable "corage"—her inclination or desire—implies that this is a test of faithfulness to heterosexuality, her ability and her *willingness* to withstand whatever depths of suffering marriage to a man may entail under patriarchy. And the story will show just how deep that depth of suffering is. Nevertheless, Griselda affirms that neither time nor even death cannot change her will, or perhaps her sexuality *qua* "corage."

Walter is not just waiting for Griselda to cheat on him or to haul back and punch him; he is scrutinizing her down to the level of her feelings in response to his trials.

...to this markys now retourne we.  
For now gooth he ful faste ymaginyng  
If by his wyves cheere he myghte se,  
Or by hire word aperceyve, that she  
Were changed; but he nevere hire koude fynde  
But evere in oon ylike sad and kynde. 597-602

Walter demands Griselda's mild acceptance of his treatment by her "cheere" as much as by her "word." But no matter how he tries to provoke some change or difference in Griselda, she is always the same, "evere in oon ylike," and always "sad," which, as Mann points out, still



obscurely means, in the period, ““satisfied, sated, full”” (120). Describing Griselda’s unchanged affect and behavior after Walter’s so-called temptation, The Clerk narrates

As glad, as humble, as bisy in servyse,  
And eek in love, as she was wont to be,  
Was she to hym in every maner wyse;  
Ne of hir doghter noght a word spak she.  
Noon accident, for noon adversitee,  
Was seyn in hire 603-608

It is Griselda who is in “servage” to Walter, both affectively *and* structurally. We can only imagine that Walter was referring to being *emotionally* beholden to another in marriage, since his *structural* power is undiminished.

As response to Walter’s “tempt[ation],” Griselda’s perfectly maintained “servyse” is framed as her success against all odds, getting the better of him, even. Nevertheless, her awesome—awe-inspiring and awful—imperviousness is, at the same time, correct wifely behavior. Walter is merely pushing the expectations of marriage to an extreme. The tale thus raises the idea that heterosexuality is a *continuum* of suffering, from mild to terrible, to which women are expected to react with unchanged “cheere.” This passage specifically links Griselda’s composure to accident and adversity: “Noon accident, for noon adversitee,/ Was seyn in hire.” Chaucer refutes Cicero’s theory that “sovereignty” (prerequisite to male friendship in the classical *amicitia* tradition) is foreclosed to women because without “maistry,” never the master of their own fate, women are *inherently* vulnerable and beholden to “accident” or “adversity (Shannon 75-76).”<sup>4</sup> Griselda’s imperviousness to “accident” or “adversitee” is juxtaposed with—

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<sup>4</sup> In her work on Montaigne’s Renaissance revival of *amicitia*, Laurie Shannon explains the “emphasis... on the good man’s being one with himself” that same-sex friendship requires (75). The (male) “sovereign singularity, gathered,

met, in fact—by “servyse,” her subordination to man that is the very reason women are not supposed to be able to access sovereignty. This juxtaposition suggests a paradoxical kind of power-from-below, a power in bearing from beneath—bottoming, in contemporary terms—that is still under-theorized; *suffisaunce* describes this mode of femme power.<sup>5</sup> We might also understand “accident” as “error,” as I will suggest in the first chapter Spenser “taynt[s]” Elizabeth’s own sovereignty with “Errour.”<sup>6</sup>

Walter is awestruck by Griselda’s composure.

whan this markys say  
The constance of his wyf, he caste adoun  
His eyen two, and wondreth that she may  
In pacience suffre al this array;  
And forth he goth with dreery contenance,  
But to his herte it was ful greet plesance. 667-672

Walter pretends that it hurts him to hurt her, but her patient suffering—“pacience suffre,”—really causes him pleasure.<sup>7</sup> We have seen that “patience” can connote a passive or feminized sexual position; as I will discuss at more length in Chapter Four, “suffer” also suggests sexual bottomhood as “laying underneath” (OED). Though Walter is pleased by Griselda’s submission,

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perfected, master of accidents, and superior to need, proceeds to a nonobvious step: he finds another similarly situated and merges with him” (38).

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Tuttle Hansen’s reading of “Griselda’s paradoxical position as a woman” is “that she attains certain kinds of power by embracing powerlessness... she is strong, in other words, because she is so perfectly weak.... the unintelligibility of the perfectly good woman, or perhaps any woman—is the most threatening thing about her” (190-195).

<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, the literal sovereignty of the monarch forecloses *amicitia*, because the monarch can never have an equal with whom to merge (Shannon 142).

<sup>7</sup> Walter’s masking of his real reaction suggests one of the differences between “bottoming” as intentional sexual play with power, and patriarchal heterosexuality. The top who loves the bottom and beats her because she has asked her to may crow with pleasure at the bottom’s abjection as part of the scene, masking whatever heartache punishing the beloved entails; Walter’s response is the reverse.

the power she demonstrates—the power of patient suffering—Walter beyond all measure: “wedded men ne knowe no mesure,/ Whan that they fynde a pacient creature” (622-623). It gets worse before it gets better. Walter tells Griselda that she must return to her father’s house, naked, because he plans to take another wife. His intended is their daughter, whom Griselda does not recognize, grown up. She accepts (862-879).

Griselda also acquiesces to Walter’s request that she prepare his marital bed for this new union. He says to her,

“I have no wommen suffisaunt, certayn,  
The chambres for t’arraye in ordinaunce  
After my lust, and therfore wolde I fayn  
That thyn were al swich manere governaunce.  
Thou knowest eek of old al my plesaunce” 960-964

Walter taunts Griselda by saying she is best equipped to arrange the marital bed from which she herself is displaced, since knows his “lust” and “plesaunce;” in the same breath, Walter renders Griselda the woman of “*suffisaunce*.” In this context, that Griselda is the only woman “suffisaunt” indicates her boundless capacity to yield to Walter. But I want to suggest that where Griselda is sufficient—equal to Walter’s need, no matter how excessive—she is also quite simply enough, self-reflexively, for herself. This doubling back on the self implies, paradoxically, closure or impenetrability in the very moment of self-sacrificing generosity.<sup>8</sup>

The Clerk gestures to Griselda’s simultaneous selflessness and satedness by her “sadeness,” her steadfast ability to bear, sexually, which suggests both endurance *and* pleasure.

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<sup>8</sup> The difference, then, between *suffisaunce* and *amicitia* is that for former splits the single self and privileges the feminine; the latter is the merging of friends, and excludes women because woman can never be “master of accidents” (Shannon 38, emphasis mine).

The Clerk links “sadness” to Griselda’s endurance of “adversitee” again, and then also to *suffisaunce*.

I deeme that hire herte was ful wo.  
But she, ylike sad for everemo,  
Disposed was, this humble creature,  
The adversitee of Fortune al t’endure,  
Abidyng evere his lust and his plesance,  
To whom that she was yeven herte and al,  
As to hire verray worldly suffisance. 753-759

If the point of these trials is that Walter desires to “knowe” Griselda, we see, here, that he doesn’t know her heart, “ful wo.” Her feelings are inscrutable, impenetrable. The more he tries to break her in order to know her, the further from his knowledge she draws. The situation of “suffisance,” here, refers it to Griselda’s *own* satisfaction, in and from Walter, to whom she has been given. We cannot possibly imagine that Walter offers Griselda the main meaning of *suffisaunce*—plenty, abundance, wealth—since he takes everything away from her. We might imagine that the suffering Walter inflicts on Griselda is the condition for her own *suffisaunce* springing from within, as when Walter says she was the only one “suffisaunt.” She is the woman who “has it all;” “all” being the qualities others wants, in the sense of goods to plunder, and “having” meaning *being* for the taking. But, “having it all” also means *having it all for herself*.

The word *suffisaunce* itself supports my reading that Griselda’s boundlessly yielding generosity also implies an undiminishable self-satiety. The MED further defines “suffisaunce” as “[c]ontentment, satisfaction; ~ of, the satisfying of (a desire)... a source of satisfaction.”

*Suffisaunce* can refer to a state of satisfaction; the noun form of the act of satisfying; and a

source of satisfaction. The term invites confusion between active and passive parts of speech; *suffisaunce* means both satisfier and satisfied, as Griselda satisfies Walter; no matter how much he demands from her, she herself never seems unsatisfied. As *suffisaunce* encompasses both satisfaction and satisfier—having and being—Griselda, the subject of *suffisaunce*, I suggest, splits herself into both subject and object. Her sad patience to bear Walter’s treatment transcends passivity; *suffisaunce* as feminine self-relation refuses a separation between activity and passivity, even though the femininity of *suffisaunce* is predicated on essentialized female (sexual) passivity

If *suffisaunce* doubles Griselda, her passive strength of will also makes of herself and Walter one.

...of hem two

Ther nas but o wyl, for as Walter leste,

The same lust was hire plesance also.

And, God be thanked, al fil for the beste.

She shewed wel, for no worldly unreste

A wyf, as of hirself, nothing ne sholde

Wille in effect, but as hir housbonde wolde. 715-721

The Clerk explains the singularity of the couple’s will, desire, and pleasure. Womanhood and lesbianism have *both* often been understood, historically, as the facility of merging with another; my subsequent chapters will explore this, variously, as “erotic similitude,” “sympathy,” and “couverture.” But because *suffisaunce* implies the multiplication of woman as (self-) satisfier, *suffisaunce* exceeds woman’s capacity to become one with the beloved. My subsequent chapters

also explore the queer theoretical affordances of *suffisaunce* as a broader conception of interrupted individuality.

Griselda ends Walter's cruel temptations by submitting to them all. It is he who breaks, not she: "'This is ynogh, Grisilde myn,' quod he" (1051). The awkward moral of the story is "don't behave like Griselda."

O noble wyves, ful of heigh prudence,  
Lat noon humylitee youre tonge naille,  
Ne lat no clerk have cause or diligence  
To write of yow a storie of swich mervaille  
As of Grisildis pacient and kynde 1183-1194

If such an ending rings like a hollow and hastily appended about-face, this is because Griselda is exceptional only in the *perfection* of her performance. Neither her situation, nor her performance of responses to it are exceptional. In other words, the structural conditions of marriage allow for the violence Walter imposes on Griselda, and marital morality demands the submission with which Griselda meets it. The only reason to suspend our disbelief is that Griselda does such an unbelievably good job.<sup>9</sup>

Since Griselda's immovable "sadnesse" as she acts exactly as Walter has asked her to can be understood as her satisfaction in suffering, her masochism *itself* frustrates his sadistic desire. On the one hand, if Griselda is secretly pained and miserable in her heart, despite her outward "cheere," as the narrator suggests, then Walter's desire to "knowe her" is stymied. On the other,

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<sup>9</sup> William Rossiter misses this point, writing "[t]he figure of Patient Griselda inspires a revisionary hermeneutic by virtue of the fact that the ideal she ostensibly represents stands in complete opposition to contemporary sensibilities. Her 'radical alterity' provokes revision, perhaps even misprision. Yet misprision has always accompanied Griselda, and... this account... was no less defamiliarizing to its fourteenth-century audience than it is to its twenty-first-century equivalent" (166).

if Griselda truly enjoys her suffering, if she is satiated by her own sadness, then she refuses Walter's sadistic desire to witness unwelcome and unwanted pain and suffering.<sup>10</sup> Griselda's impeccably correct behavior *and* affect, in the context of the female role in marriage, and within her marriage specifically, are not only paradoxically perverse, but also pervert Walter's satisfaction—in spite of his total power over her.

I propose that Griselda's *suffisaunce*, her inward-facing and self-doubling self-satisfaction, offers a new way of thinking lesbianism as the pleasures of women (truly) alone. That *suffisaunce* can flash forth in a single woman, as well as between women, marks its difference from earlier historical and queer theoretical conceptions of lesbian relationality. A mode of eroticism—and subjectivity—where self and other become one, but also where the single female self becomes many to suffice herself, *suffisaunce* interrupts individuality, and implies the promise of a non-violent mode of inter-subjectivity, literalizing the injunction to treat the other as oneself. Queer theory either applauds utopian queer disruption, or, increasingly, uses historicism to refuse *any* counter-hegemonic potential in queerness. As a theory built from literary close-readings and historical reckoning with real moments of violence and failure, *suffisaunce* draws together the formal and temporal relations queer theory has prioritized with historical categories of identity and the bodies that inhabit them. *Suffisaunce* nuances, but refuses to refuse, sanguinity about queer subversion of heteropatriarchy. Griselda's own impenetrable imperviousness at the very moment of generosity embodies this contradiction.

In the last decades, scholars like Elizabeth Freeman, Heather Love, Karma Lochrie, and Annamarie Jagose have compellingly critiqued normative conceptions of time. *Time Binds* poses temporal drag as those elements that—particularly for queers—stick around long past

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<sup>10</sup> The true sadist and the true masochist don't actually correspond (Deleuze 39-43).

appropriate dates. *Feeling Backwards* examines the affective anachronism of men and women who felt out of time with the imminence of sexology's homosexual visibility. *Heterosynchrasies* redefines responsible historicism as sensitive response to the cultural logics of different time periods. We have long known that that to speak of gay people or even queers before the 19th century isn't quite right; what about how wayward sexuality in the medieval period was more about how much one ate than the gender of one's desires (Lochrie 34)? I am indebted to these queer theorists and historians alike for arguing that faithful attention to our objects of study sometimes surpasses the disciplinary demands of field-delineation.<sup>11</sup>

Even scholars of queer temporality have not, however, understood the implications of queer time for literary periodization. My project argues for, by experimenting with, a scope of centuries—the 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup>—utterly without claim to comprehensiveness. My methodology and my argument are tied together: looking at women alone/ together demands response to the recursions and repetitions of lesbian sexuality. Beyond even the non-normative temporalities theorized by scholars of queer time, *suffisaunce* evokes the frustration of denouement for which lesbianism *specifically* is famous. Simultaneously the sexuality of under-development and non-arrival, lesbianism is notoriously unfinished and ongoing.<sup>12</sup> Fundamentally based in female sexuality, *suffisaunce* has complex relations to sequence, fitting ill with linear time, and implying a historicist methodology of anachronism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Siobahn Somerville also writes, “[r]ather than asserting its own authenticity as a discrete field of study, at its best, queer studies has implicitly and explicitly challenged the seemingly ‘natural’ status of epistemological assumptions of established disciplines” (6)

<sup>12</sup> In *Inconsequence*, Annamarie Jagose crystallizes lesbianism's relationship to narrative sequence: the figure of female homosexuality reveals the function of sex *as* sequence, though the quality of backwardness or being behind is exclusively projected onto the lesbian.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher C. Nagle points out the use of literary-historicist queer theory, specifically: “[w]orking out of what seemed a longstanding impasse between alterity and continuism, this emerging body of supple theoretical work provides something more than new models for other readers to adopt and replicate. Even more stimulating, perhaps, is the anti-systematic character of this work, its explicit refusal to establish the kind of readily sedimentalizing edifice that new paradigms often introduce.... This particularly salutary effect of the new queer historiography



Tracking figures of *suffisaunce*, I suggest we think trans-historically—though not anachronistically—about the effects of women alone together, whether or not we call those effects “lesbian,” and whether or not the word “lesbian” or even “homosexual” would have made sense at the time. I begin with Queen Elizabeth I, who, through the power of her self-figurations, created impossible possibilities of self-doubling and immortal self-perpetuation. Such Elizabethan performances of self-sufficiency “took;” I next address the long afterlife of her claims to a personally and nationally insular (even autoerotic) feminine power that did *not* borrow from masculinity. Victorians were obsessed with Elizabeth, whether they insulted her, as does Wilkie Collins’ invert heroine, Marian, or paid her homage, like Charles Dickens’ Miss Havisham, who stops all clocks to live forever in the moment of failed marriage in a house the virgin queen named “Satis” after her own *suffisaunce*. The following chapters explore visions of women, doubled, produced by Alfred Tennyson, Clementina Hawarden, and Virginia Woolf, as well as the ways in which these all hearken, differently, to England’s past and ever-present question: whether women can be enough for themselves. Tennyson’s *Faerie Queene*-inspired Lady of Shalott lives alone with her mirror in a state of perfect aesthetic stillness. Hawarden’s photography toys with doppelgangers and inverts in a historically transitional moment from sameness to polar difference. *A Room of One’s Own* features four narratorial “Mary’s” perpetually reborn as women writers from the Renaissance ballad referring to Mary of Scots, Elizabeth’s would-be-wife. Differently than a *longue durée*, *suffisaunce* reveals contemporaneity and revival, but also stoppage and stuckness. I want to offer literary-historicist readings of

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promises a fresh proliferation of new means to reconceptualize what is queer about history, literature, and culture, by re-working the axes of temporality.... In this new work sexuality emerges as embodies not merely in acts or identities, but also *in time itself*. Neither simply universalizing, nor presentist, nor radically anticipatory—but also respecting rather than relinquishing the appeal that each of these perspectives might offer—new directions in queer historiography offer the potential of rethinking the relationship of temporality to sexuality, and in so doing, challenge us to think about the sex *of* time as well” (51-52).

English national concern about women and queerness appearing persistently—if under changed conditions in disparate historical moments—as queer theory. This concern appears as multiple forms of relationality that disrupt hetero-patriarchy; lesbian panic is often “really” about the havoc wreaked when men’s access to women is barred by female sufficiency, and these effects can be felt in the texts—literary and otherwise—I examine.

Chapter One takes up the specter of lesbianism haunting a (single) queen as a woman inhabiting male structural power. The strength of Elizabeth’s influence on the racial, gender, and sexual imaginary of England surely contributed to way in which The Renaissance would become “a mood” centuries later. Walter Pater wrote an entire book with that title about the atmosphere and attitude of the period, even as distinct from the historical time period itself, in a gesture familiar to the project at hand. Less well-known but no less interested in the sexuality of the Elizabethan period is Lytton Strachey’s *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History*. Strachey’s soap-operaesque page-turner notes the specificity of Englishness, as well as the intertwining of power, art, and medicine in the Renaissance, also like the current project. Essex’s “spirit, wayward, melancholy, and splendid, belonged to the Renaissance—the English Renaissance, in which the conflicting currents of ambition, learning, religion, and lasciviousness were so subtly interwoven” (126). Indicative of the long hold of *suffisaunce* I describe in my first chapter, Strachey describes Elizabeth I as full of “satisfaction” three times (38, 144, 263).

More immediately to Elizabeth’s literal reign, a bawdy account of her favorite’s attempts at heaven describes the afterlife of Leicester (Essex’s father, in line with the incestuousness of Elizabeth’s erotic economy I describe next) as a

future spent gazing into the vagina of a fiend.... ‘It was ordained that every smale  
t[o]wch of the cheane should drown the member of his virillitye in the

bottomless barell of her virginnitye, through which runeth a felde of  
unquenchable fier which at every gioneing to gether did so hisse his humanytye,  
that he was in continuall danger to lose the tope of his standard of stelle.’ (157)....  
The queen’s favorite is destined to wield his lance for all eternity in the service of  
fathomless and terrible virginity. Betts 153

Like the paradoxical way in which Griselda frustrates *by* acquiescing to Walter’s insatiable sadism, Leicester’s male, penetrative sexuality is imagined as inadequate Elizabeth’s bottomless desire. Though he may strive forever to satisfy this desire, the Queen’s virginity—her impenetrability—is miraculously preserved. The binding of Elizabeth’s female person’s impenetrability to the sexual integrity of the (white) nation had a long hold on the English cultural imaginary; for instance, “both the royalist and populist factions turned to images of Elizabeth to make a statement about the proposed marriage of Charles Stuart... two decades after her death” (Walker 252). In the figures of endogamy and enclosure Elizabeth invoked to claim virginal self-sufficiency, we see a relationship between her cult of sexuality and state violence like the expulsion of “blackamoors;” I will examine the (presumptively impossible) figure of the British lesbian through histories of colonial power and whiteness. The Elizabethan sexual imaginary is bound to English lesbianism for centuries after her demise. Queen Anne “adopted Elizabeth’s grammatically inflected feminine motto of chastity, *Semper Eadem* (always the same), and occasionally dressed in imitation of Elizabeth’s portraits” (Traub 156). *The Favorite* notwithstanding, Elizabeth I is England’s original lesbian queen.

Though my project begins in earnest with the early modern period, its focus is the Victorian period, which I argue saw older paradigms of female relationality—in particular, the assumption that absence of difference between women in love obviates any meaningful or

satisfying sexuality—reanimated towards new and transformed ends. Queer theory requires historical attention to strategic revivals of sexual morphologies. In Chapter Two, Tennyson represents artistic autonomy as female same-sex desire after tropes of female eroticism based in utter sameness from the Renaissance. He does so to *do away* with lesbianism as metaphor for aesthetic separation from the world. Tennyson’s choice of female homosexuality over the Hellenistic *male* homoeroticism available in his Oxbridge milieu was poetically motivated. Anticipating the negative association between aestheticism and male homosexuality that would mark the end of his century, Tennyson portrayed solipsistic artistic production as linked to a female homoeroticism verging on autoeroticism. In addition to revising Tennyson’s place in the received history of sexuality, Chapter Two argues that “The Lady of Shalott” helps us see what Tennyson does in and to the history of homosexuality in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, particularly in relation to differences between representations of male and female homosexuality. I articulate the poetic and political stakes of historical conceptions of male homosexuality constructed as social, productive, and active, versus (still-relevant) constructions of female homosexuality as sterile and morbid.

A waystation of sorts in the long arc of *suffisaunce*, Chapter Three is a deep-dive into English photography and the invention of the English lesbian. Concentratedly explaining the background of England’s insular and eccentric refusal—not unconnected to Elizabeth’s spectral lesbian threat—of a nationally domestic lesbian, I coin “photographic inversion” to name a mobile imaginary describing the relationship between the invention of the positive/ negative photographic method in England, and British female sexual inversion. The popularization of the positive-negative process in England at the midpoint of the 19<sup>th</sup> century offered a logic of inversion, the intelligibility of which did not emerge from sexology and filter into popular

knowledge, there, but was elaborated into the science of sex from cultural production. This chapter triangulates the photographic, literary, technological, and scientific to reveal an aesthetic origin of sexual-medical knowledge, and to revise English lesbianism's timeline. For reasons of ethnic purity, the advent of sexological inversion was much later in England than abroad. Nevertheless, a shift to female masculinity as the defining requirement of lesbianism occurred there earlier than we have understood, preceding sexologists' theorization of inversion. Photography made available a new means of abjecting sexuality between women: instead of affecting nonwhite women outside England, as of old, lesbianism could be newly conceived as affecting women who were not really women. This interdisciplinary section returns to issues of race and nation: a novel and nationally English definition of lesbianism as visible gender difference replaced racial/ national difference as the explanation for female same-sex sexuality—continuing, differently, a centuries-old project of white womanhood.

The *sine qua non* of Victorian female behavior, “suffer, and be still” (not to say “lie back and think of England”) returns us, in Chapter Four, to *suffisance* as the lesbian threat shadowing *too* perfect performances of femininity. Likewise, Elizabeth's queer afterlife reappears in *Great Expectations*' Miss Havisham and “Satis House”—so named by Queen Elizabeth—which Dickens makes the seat of an *unsatisfied* virgin. I suggest that Dickens both reveals and pushes to its limit the relationship between femininity and bottomhood during the moment of English marriage reform, when both sides of the political spectrum invoked historically lesbian forms of relationality to reimagine heterosexuality. At the same time, anxiety about the proximity between women “sympathy” allowed required a reimagining of female homoeroticism. Actor manager Seymour Hicks, who wrote middlebrow advice books vaunting “greater sexual sophistication and knowledge than average innocent Englishman,” said the lesbian is ““more dangerous than all

the men who attack your household put together” because the very correctness of her behavior is her inroad to your wife: “her caresses may have as an excuse “sympathetic femininity,” and you may hesitate to label her a Lesbian” (Medd *Scandal* 111-112). I argue that we must historicize the things that *feel* true to us now: here, the way in which “sympathy’s” (female) self-erasure and promise to undo individual identity smacks of lesbianism.

My final chapter moves to the modern period, where I take up Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* alongside Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, and E. M. Forster’s *Howards End*. Forster and Woolf both treat women’s sexuality as interchangeable with their financial independence. Rejecting inversion *à la Well*, they return to and elaborate a modern, economic version of *suffisance*: without houses and rooms of their own, women’s poverty sustains compulsory heterosexuality. Alice Fox has pointed out the (seemingly) uncanny similarities between Virginia Woolf and the Virgin Queen in the writing of fellow Bloomsbury member Lytton Strachey. Not only is the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century intellectual *avant garde* still obsessed with Elizabeth I; women are still collapsing together and redoubling in the minds of men. Woolf herself wrote copiously on Elizabeth I in the *Second Common Reader*, and in her review of Frank Mumby’s *The Girlhood of Queen Elizabeth*, but she refused to do so for an American journal (Fox 37-38). Her reticence may be similarly attributable to the long Elizabethan legacy of English (white female) impenetrability. Centuries later, Englishmen were still glad for and proud of the inviolate virginity of a queen married only to they themselves, the people of England. Elizabeth I, desirable into old age by virtue of this very virginity and chivalric rhetoric alike, was *all theirs*, to the point of endogamy and even autoeroticism. Simultaneously, (and still), unfathomability in a woman who neither needs a man, nor pretends to be one, is worrisome.

Woolf, by contrast, laughs at the men who worry about the secrets of women alone. She also reinscribes the white nationalism of Elizabeth's femme self-enclosure. Jane Garrity quotes the feminist English author Winifred Holtby on Woolf.

“When she wrote of women, she wrote of a generation in its exploration of experience as the Elizabethan men had been in their exploration of the globe. The women whom Mrs. Woolf knew were exploring the professional world, the political world, the world of business, discovering that they themselves had legs as well as wombs, brains as well as nerves, reason as well as sensibility; their Americas lay within themselves, and altered the map as profoundly as any added by Cabot or Columbus. Like Raleigh, they founded their new colonies; like Drake, they combined national service with privateering.” 15

The demurring of a white lesbian to publicize the topic of the Virgin Queen abroad represents the reverse side of the sexual project of English womanhood permanently tying Elizabeth I to female queerness that provoked Strachey and Spenser to draw forth and reveal the Queen's heart, and her other equally private parts. Though Woolf “contends that she is ‘not in the least patriotic,’ she concedes a love for English literature that exposes her investment in national kinship: ‘Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens. It's my only patriotism’”—and, I would add, her investment in the national lesbian legacy of *suffisaunce* these three authors all addressed (Garrity 247).

## *1. England's Single White Female: Lesbian Figures of Elizabeth I*

The appropriateness of Queen Elizabeth's gender (that she was a female monarch), as well as her gender performance (the way she inhabited womanhood *and* the throne; her sexuality and the terms in which she asserted prerogatives), were constantly at issue during her reign.<sup>14</sup> This can be felt in the fierce competition for control over Elizabeth's image. Edmund Spenser took up and transformed elements of the Armada Portrait, making Elizabeth into the monstrously phallic snake women of *The Faerie Queene*. In turn, Elizabeth and those who depicted her with her approval took these figures back in her portraiture at the turn of the century. This tug-of-war between an imaginary of female same-sex eroticism governed by sameness, versus one governed by extreme difference, underpins a centuries-long project of white English womanhood. I argue that white womanhood's dependence on the morphology of the lesbian crystalizes in the early modern period, when Elizabeth I is England *herself*.<sup>15</sup> A struggle over how to understand the Queen as a woman alone was staged across political, medical, and aesthetic realms of literature, painting, architecture, and theater. This anxiety is the palimpsest of a nationalistic obsession with the relationship between queerness and white womanhood, that to this day informs English sexual politics.<sup>16</sup> Illuminating the early-modern moment of England's legacy of female self-sufficiency I have called *suffisaunce* after Chaucer's Griselda, I demonstrate not only the

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<sup>14</sup> This issue has received a multitude of scholarly voices over the centuries. I draw especially on the work of Maureen Quilligan, Leah Marcus, Susan Doran, Philippa Berry, Susan Frye, Kimberly Anne Coles, and Theodora Jankowski.

<sup>15</sup> In *Pure Resistance*, Jankowski argues for the queerness of the adult virginal woman in the early modern period. Ultimately, she decides that Elizabeth did not fall under the rubric of queer virginity she elaborates because that would have rendered her monstrous.

<sup>16</sup> One prominent example is England's particularly virulent transmisogyny; many Britons absolutely cannot accept that a woman who has or has ever had a penis *can be a woman*.



intermingling of fields of thought in the production of a cultural imaginary, but the importance of transhistorical attention to sexuality and literature, alike.

During the early modern period, understanding of “desire among women... was fashioned primarily out of two rhetorics, both of which were revived from the ancient past: a medico-satiric discourse of the tribade, and a literary-philosophical discourse of idealized friendship” (Traub 8).<sup>17</sup> As elaborated in medical texts and travel writing, “[t]he tribade’s desires are interpreted... through a presumption of erotic difference—that which obtains between two women, only one of whom typically possesses (allegedly) an enlarged clitoris or dildo” (Traub 331).<sup>18</sup> Valerie Traub calls the second of these discourses, according to which “homoerotic desire enacts a similitude so extreme that all difference is banished from the circle of female intimacy,” “erotic similitude” (331). As a single, self-sufficient woman (sexually and politically), Elizabeth was shoehorned into both of these paradigms, though truly belonging to neither. Conversely, Elizabeth herself influenced the rhetorical conventions of both traditions. During her reign, erotic similitude was forcefully (with too much protest, perhaps) represented as impossible, unconsummable.<sup>19</sup> It was also in the middle of the sixteenth century that “more texts, and more kinds of texts, began to speak of the enlarged clitoris and the lusty tribade” (Traub 17). I want to suggest that at the tail end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *The Faerie Queene* is one such text, in which Elizabeth is imagined as the tribade, a perversely phallic woman with a snake’s tail, which introduces masculinity to an otherwise feminine economy of self. Elizabeth’s

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<sup>17</sup> Traub claims that there is “contamination” of the chaste female friend by the tribade; my project shows that this is a cyclical occurrence arguably in every century (though the terms for masculinity and femininity will shift) (20).

<sup>18</sup> Traub writes, “[a]ccording to the discourse of tribadism in early modern medicine and travel literature, such desire involves a difference so perverse that it can only be conceptualized as an imitation of masculinity” (331).

<sup>19</sup> A “variation within the tradition of female complaint, the homoerotic lament of the *amor impossibilis* functions as a governing convention until the mid-seventeenth century” (Traub 282). Sir Philip Sidney’s *New Arcadia* is an example in which the terms of “impossibility” appear “six times within nine sentences;” it’s not that women *shouldn’t* have sex, it’s that they literally *can’t*. Within this trope, the “impediment—to which the texts give the name of Nature—is... viewed as absolute” (Traub 286-288).

performance of a strong and self-sufficient will within “sexly weakness” (as she said in the Golden Speech of 1601), was enabled by her structural power (Rice 109). In other words, her position as monarch rendered Elizabethan *suffisaunce*—her self-sufficient, feminine strength through self-sacrifice—agential and materially consequential.<sup>20</sup> Such an arrangement necessitated, on the one hand, loud insistence on the silence and unmeaning of women alone together (erotic similitude), and on the other, casting women’s power as a usurpation of *male* power, laughable and grotesque, by turns (tribadism).<sup>21</sup> These two modes work in tandem to undermine Elizabeth’s *suffisaunce*.

The French Seigneur de Brantôme sums up sexuality between women *without* the phallic approximations of the tribade in *The Lives of the Gallant Ladies*: ““there is a great difference between actually pouring water into a pot and merely moistening it all around and about”” (Holstun 845). In the period, gynecological writings carried this episteme from France to England; “within the early modern logic of crime and punishment,” Traub writes, it was only “prosthetic supplementation of a woman’s body, when used to penetrate the body of another” that was considered a violation of chastity. Not only a violation of chastity: it was “unambiguous grounds for execution” (Traub 194). Sexuality between women, then, is either not sex at all, or is a transgression of male sexuality punishable by death. Representational attempts to transform Elizabeth’s *suffisaunce* into tribadism, or transgressive usurpation of male politico-sexual power, not only render female power disgusting and comical; it makes it imminently vulnerable to castration and even murder. Surprisingly enough, then, I want to suggest that the phallicized

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<sup>20</sup> In chapter four, I address the relationship between femininity and “bottomhood” understood as the power-from-below of the disenfranchised.

<sup>21</sup> James Holstun writes, “when early modern authorities took notice of lesbianism at all, they... had trouble describing its actual practice. It remained peccatum mutum, the silent sin” (843). He expertly reads the way in which Donne, Marvell, and Milton silence the lesbian, but rather than understanding their machinations, he attributes the silence of lesbianism in the early modern period to the actuality of lesbianism’s meaninglessness.

woman, though monstrous, is the most innocuous version of female same-sex eroticism: she is the easiest to do away with.

More threatening is eroticism based in utter sameness between (normatively feminine) women, because it's much harder to spot. But then again, since nothing can actually *happen* between such normatively feminine women, there's no need to even look, early modern poets reminded themselves again and again. *Suffisaunce* more closely resembles erotic similitude than tribadism; both concepts are organized around female self-sameness. But while the discourse of erotic similitude defined women's sexuality together as superficially non-penetrative, unfulfilling, and "inconsequential in its social effects," *suffisaunce* is women's complete self-satisfaction, their enoughness to themselves where nothing lacks (Traub 340). Further, the emphasis on *self*-satisfaction in *suffisaunce* distinguishes my theoretical concept from the more narrowly historical rhetoric of erotic similitude. In that poetic tradition, and in the male friendship tradition of *amicitia* from which it is partially culled, the singularity of two people is an extreme metaphor—"I am my lover" means "we two are one."<sup>22</sup> This is how lesbianism is historically (over and over again) contrived as mere masturbation.<sup>23</sup> In *suffisaunce*, "I am my lover" can also mean "I myself am many;" one woman becomes multiple to her own satisfaction, as Elizabeth makes much of in her rhetoric and her portraiture.<sup>24</sup> One of Elizabeth's oft-quoted snaps was "I will have here but one *mistress* and no *master*." Traub emphasizes the *feminine* self-doubling effect of this comment: Elizabeth is "a 'masterless' woman who 'mistressed'

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<sup>22</sup> Erotic similitude is, in part "[a]ppropriated from the discourses of classical *amicitia*" (Traub 329), which begins with a "sovereign singularity, gathered, perfected, master of accidents, and superior to need" which "proceeds' to a nonobvious step: he finds another similarly situated and merges with him.... The resulting sovereign amity, too, wears a crown" (Shannon 38). *Amicitia*, as described by Cicero and Montaigne, had its own renaissance in the Renaissance.

<sup>23</sup> This will be true for sexologists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>24</sup> When I asked Valerie Traub whether this splitting of one woman was implicit in her arguments about erotic similitude (which she partially recuperates by putting chastity in dialogue with female pleasure rather than asexuality), she said definitely not, and seemed surprised and intrigued (128).

herself” (153). Here, female autoeroticism takes on a lesbian aspect—perhaps even exceeding lesbianism’s own threat to heteropatriarchy—instead of serving as a dismissive metaphor for women’s sexuality together.

*“Sufficient” to Herself*

At the beginning of her reign, Parliament requested of Elizabeth that she marry. She responded, “in the end this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare, that a Queene, having raigned such a time, lived and dyed a virgin” (Coles 37).<sup>25</sup> Her assertion of self-sufficiency is bound up with her insistence on remaining single.<sup>26</sup> A similar moment is recorded in the Camden *Annales*: “I am already bound unto an Husband, which is the Kingdome of England, and that may suffice you” (Axton 38). Elizabeth’s usage of cognates like “sufficient” and “suffice” conflates her sufficiency to herself with her sufficiency for others, as does the term “*suffisaunce*” itself. Beyond marriage, Elizabeth’s *suffisaunce* threatened to exclude even male advisors, as Sir Francis Bacon nudged: “the wisest Princes, need not think it any diminution to their Greatness, or derogation to their Sufficiencie, to rely upon Counsell” (Shannon 51). Elizabeth did not always use the language of “sufficiency,” but the message was always the same (like her motto, *Semper Eadem*). At her coronation, she announced “No will in me can lack, neither, do I trust, shall there lack any power” (Rice 63). The Sieve Paintings of Elizabeth contain the motto “*Tutto vedo e molto manca;*” “I see everything, and much is lacking” (Pomeroy 52). That which is wanting is out there, not with her.

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<sup>25</sup> Coles finds this in MS Rawlinson D 723, fol. 31. The announcement that she would always remain single could have been “rhetorical,” if factual at all, and it could well be apocryphal (Doran *Monarchy* 38). But the statement’s importance to Elizabeth’s image (with which I am most concerned) makes its veracity immaterial.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Frye also notices that Elizabeth “...assert[s] herself through a powerful image, imagining her reign as a lifetime in which she would be ‘sufficient’ unto herself” (39).

Asserting self-sufficiency alone was how Elizabeth assumed authority without recourse to invocations of masculine power—and how she refused men’s access to that power. Within the structure of her castle, she often withdrew to “position [herself] as powerful because she was remote, self-sufficient, and desirable.... beyond the control of others” she becomes “inviolable” (Frye 107-108). Susan Frye argues that Elizabeth “related the autonomy of her physical body to the authority of her political self.... The very strategies that worked to preserve her power created a figure... remote in her material and discursive autonomy” (98). Elizabeth’s practices of seclusion and retreat cultivated an aura of feminine unattainability that both titillated and threatened the men she excluded. The courtier John Harington relished the ascension of a man in her place, saying “whensoever God shall call [Queen Elizabeth], I perceive we are not like to be governed by a lady shut up in a chamber from all her subjects and most of her servants, and seen seld but on holidays... but by a man of spirit and learning, of able body, of understanding mind” (Scott-Warren 234).

Of course, there were people who could get close to Elizabeth’s person in private, and they were women: “access to the queen’s body was in the hands of a small number of women; no approach to her privy chamber without passing by the female guard. These women are the only people we can be sure were intimate with the queen’s body” (Goldberg 47). Susan Doran documents the way in which people approached Elizabeth with suits and expensive gifts only through her “favorite female servants” (*Circle* 202-203). Her female body (and her withholding of it) were marshalled as part of her monarchical power. Only a “minority of courtiers... were allocated rooms in the palaces and invited to enter the privy chamber.... Contemporaries understood that regular and near access to the queen outside public spaces signified political intimacy” (Doran *Circle* 3). In Spenser’s *Shepherdess Calender*, the private female world of

Elizabeth's ladies is represented as the "Ladies of the lake" (Berry 79-81).<sup>27</sup> Spenser was engaged with Elizabeth's aquatic themes early on; in a moment, I will argue that he later troped her mermaid imagery in tribadic terms. For now, let us note that Elizabeth's physical movements seem to literalize the assertion of Montaigne, one of the originators of the *amicitia* tradition underpinning erotic similitude, that "'from the regular routine trechery of men nowadays there necessarily results what experience already shows us: to escape us, women turn in on themselves and have recourse to themselves or to other women'" (Traub 55). Elizabeth's self-sufficiency as a woman alone—her *suffisaunce*—sheds new light on the familiar collapsing of lesbianism with masturbation, or when women "turn in on themselves." She surrounds herself by women with whom, away from men's sight, she may have sex: a disturbing possibility, though entirely subsumable under the rubric of erotic similitude's meaninglessness.

Elizabeth was inherently doubled by her position as monarch. As applied to her, "the two-bodies theory of monarchy" meant that "Elizabeth's choice of 'marriage with my kingdom' united female monarch with feminine realm, and compelled consideration of the unsettling phenomenon of the feminine in relation to itself" (Berry 41).<sup>28</sup> But more, the Queen's self-figurations went beyond even the doctrine of "the king's two bodies" to multiply her into more than two, suggesting an alarming obverse of lesbianism *qua* autoeroticism. Because "*respublica*" and "*ecclesia*" are imagined as female, Elizabeth "as a female head of both church and state... performed a double symbolic marriage with both these feminine domains.... Elizabeth as queen

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<sup>27</sup> Philippa Berry writes that the *Shepherd's Calendar* "codified the image of Elizabeth as the self-absorbed inhabitant of a predominantly feminine world, in his description in the April eclogue... of 'Eliza' as a queen of shepherds who was paradoxically surrounded solely by her nymphs" (153). In the next chapter, we will see that Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* is a reference not only to Arthur's *Lady of Astolat*, but is also a *Lady of the Lake*.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Villeponteaux notes, "in her public discourse Elizabeth combats [her subjects' discourse about her private, feminine virtues] by reversing the expected gender of her two bodies. Rather than representing herself as a woman, but also a prince—thus identifying a female body natural and a male body politic—Elizabeth most often refers to herself as a single sex or as two bodies politic" (211).

had a triple rather than a dual aspect” (Berry 66-67). The specificity of Elizabeth’s female gender, then, produced an Elizabethan multiplicity of unions with selves, surpassing both the traditional two bodies of the king, on the one hand, and erotic similitude’s conventional merging of the female couple, on the other.

Elizabeth made much of the idea of the king’s two bodies as related to the myth of the phoenix, which Laurie Shannon notes became increasingly important during her reign.

The conundrum of the phoenix came to serve as a metaphor for monarchical “being” that gave a figural solution to the problem of political continuity and corporate perpetuity. There is always only one, there is never not one, and that one has the unique burden of representing at once the sole individual and the entire species. While classically derived friendship provided a structure of contemporaneous doubling (Cicero’s friend was an *alter idem*), the only possible plurality for the phoenix-monarch is a diachronic mirroring, a reiteration through time.... The monarch, in whom individual and species coincide, could only find parity with antecedents and successors—never in synchronic time. 137-8

Helen Hackett explains that the phoenix’s “connotations of virginity and singularity made it highly applicable to Elizabeth.... especially in conjunction with the motto she adopted, ‘Semper Eadem’” because “only one was alive at any time... it lived for several centuries, then mysteriously and asexually renewed itself from its own ashes (81). Figuring herself as reduplicative instead of reproductive, Elizabeth asserted a unique temporality far exceeding the imaginative powers of *amicitia*, male version of erotic similitude. *Suffisaunce*, like the phoenix who is singularly all phoenixes, illuminates the recursions and repetitions of lesbianism (which

both never truly happens, *and* never ends). Further, as the only one of its “entire species,” the phoenix already begins to indicate the way Elizabeth populated an entire family tree with herself.

The relationship of unending time to an eroticized familial community comprised of female selves can be understood within a theory of *suffisaunce* that retains an implicit lesbian eroticism that is only augmented, rather than undone, by lesbianism’s historical association with autoeroticism. Laurie Shannon takes Philippa Berry to task for sterilizing the Elizabethan “‘possibility of woman taking narcissistic, and possibly even homosexual, pleasure in the female body,’ suggested by ‘the recurrence of the figure of the goddess Diana’” because Berry interprets these “plural moments in terms of female narcissism, or in terms of Elizabeth’s female ‘community’ with her mother.... This sense of female community as a biological and religious genealogy emphasizes a female tradition at a distance in time rather than as a companionate present” (Shannon 80-81).<sup>29</sup> But I want to argue that Elizabethan *suffisaunce*, drawing female homoeroticism together with time-scrambling familial relations, while exceeding either of these alone, homo-eroticizes the family *itself*, and frames endogamy as an extension of masturbatory female self-sufficiency.

In *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth’s England*, Maureen Quilligan suggests that Elizabeth was outside what Gayle Rubin calls “the traffic in women” not only because she refused to marry, but also because she was touched with the suggestion of incest. This came about by her birth to a father who had divorced his first wife on the grounds that she had previously been married to his brother, only to marry a woman whose sister had been his mistress. On top of being the second Boleyn sister to occupy Henry’s bed, Elizabeth’s mother was herself

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<sup>29</sup> It’s true that Berry is extremely cagey about homoeroticism when she addresses the “mythological association of Diana with a close-knit community of women, and so with a feminine mode of self-consciousness which was not necessarily devoid of sexuality” (111-112)



subsequently accused of having sex with her brother (15, 33-35).<sup>30</sup> When the threat of Elizabeth's Catholic cousin, the problem of "Two Queens in One Isle" plagued England, the idea of their marriage was half-jestingly raised. Leah Marcus records that in 1559, Nicholas Throckmorton wished "[t]hat one of these two Queens of the Isle of Britain were transformed into the shape of a man, to make so happy a marriage as thereby there might be an unity of the whole isle;" even Mary of Scots "joked that if only she or Elizabeth were a man, they could have married" (97). Because Elizabeth and Mary were not only two women, but related, such an imagined union smacks of the sexuality of self defining both masturbation and endogamy: "l'inceste, entendu au sens le plus large, consiste à obtenir par soi-même, et pour soi-même, au lieu d'obtenir par autrui, et pour autrui" (Lévi-Strauss 561).

Though she sometimes "produc[ed] children... verbally, declaring (when it suited her) that either Mary Stuart or Catherine Grey was her child," Elizabeth needed neither eroticize, nor adopt female family members to establish a self-contained family (Axton 39).<sup>31</sup> We have seen that she claimed to be wife to the nation; she also claimed to be sister to members of Parliament,

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<sup>30</sup> Though Quilligan briefly suggests a theoretical equation between "choosing radical endogamy" and same-sex sexuality, for her, Elizabeth "became her own patriarch." Quilligan is one of many scholars who have written of Elizabeth's "figuratively male gender." Her argument that Elizabeth was an *ineffective* patriarch, as a woman ("she could exercise her right only to withhold herself from the traffic, not to trade herself out") is part of the pattern I claim, where transforming female power into borrowed masculinity makes of it a weaker imitation (17, 36, 75, 85). Carla Freccero, on the other hand, writes, "the figure of incest and the 'fantasized incestuous genealogies' generated... by Marguerite de Navarre provided the enabling terms of a form of female authority in the Renaissance, a form of authority that culminated in... Elizabeth I, who adopts Marguerite's metaphor of incest in her translation of Marguerite's *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*... Married to and mother of her people, Elizabeth, virgin queen and also prince, remetamorphorizes... incest... abstracting kinship into the terms of the body politic" (65-66).

<sup>31</sup> Coles quotes Philip Sidney's letter opposing the French marriage Elizabeth contemplated, where he wrote "if anything can stain so true a form it must be the bringing yourself not in your own likeness, but in new colours unto them" (42). Sidney's advice to the queen "amounts to self-replication: 'doing as you do, you shall be as you be: the example of princes... the most excellent fruit of all your progenitors, and the perfect mirror to your posterity'" (42). Sidney further "prescribes self-begetting. Elizabeth is to propagate by example. By remaining constant 'in [her] own likeness' she will project her image onto her successors—she will achieve immortality by a doubling effect" (43). This kind of doubling does not rely on metaphor to make of a friend another self who can never truly share one's identity, as in the masculine mode of amity, or even a female lover metaphorically collapsed with female self (Shannon 40). According to such figures, Elizabeth "can conceive herself in her own image: semper eadem" (Coles 44). Coles calls this a "counter-heterosexual construction[] of chastity" via "self-containment" (32) and "autonomy through self-absorption (54).

and her adoption of Marian imagery made her the (virgin) mother of the nation (Coles 39, Hackett 78). At the same time, she could be Mary's son, the "Christ-child," as in the decoration of "Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*," and in Nicholas Hilliard's 1570s "pair of nearly symmetrical portraits of the Queen, one showing her wearing a jewel in the shape of a pelican, the other, a phoenix" (Hackett 80). In old age, Elizabeth "portray[ed] herself as self-contained and self-perpetuating: she was husband and wife, mother and firstborn son, encompassing within her own nature the separate beings required for a genuine succession" (Marcus *Puzzling* 103). In addition to incestuously eroticized self-multiplication, here, we should note Elizabethan temporal scrambling.<sup>32</sup> A son and a mother cannot be the same person because they can never be the same age. Posing as an entire family to herself was similar to Elizabeth's posture of youthful virginity long past her child-bearing years.

Being all relations—mother, son, wife, sister—to herself rendered Elizabeth a site of anxiety about female autonomy so complete it could do without difference altogether, beyond even lesser concerns about female monarchical power or the royal succession. Female relations without difference (like erotic similitude) were supposed to be utterly insignificant, but the Queen cannot seem inconsequential. If erotic similitude reduced women in love to just one to eliminate their meaning, then Elizabeth, as a single woman, proliferated herself and became plentiful. As has long been understood, these gestures also made of the monarch's white, English, female, and virginal body, the island nation itself, as the Queen asserted, "I am the most English woman of the Kingdom. Was I not born in this realm? Were my parents born in

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<sup>32</sup> The implications were legible to Elizabeth's contemporaries: "gentlemen of Gray's Inn, impatient for a real child to be born of their Queen, pointed out the disastrous implications of her claim to be both spouse and mother of her realm by presenting the tragedy of the state consequent on the unnatural marriage of Jocasta.... In Gascoigne's *Jocasta* a marginal gloss to Oedipus' last speech in Act V labels the sightless king as a 'mirror for Magistrates'" (Axton 39-54).

any foreign country?’” (Rice 33). Of Elizabeth’s familial imaginary, Kimberly Anne Coles writes, “the series of analogous conjunctions... served deliberately to disrupt the outside alliances which threatened her hegemony.... by claiming an excess of kinship she could undermine the necessity to make exogamous kinship ties” (36-39). Less theorized is how Elizabeth’s *suffisaunce* permanently tied together issues of English national identity, white womanhood, and female queerness. The land became a white Englishwoman, and it has mattered ever since what kind of a lesbian she is.

Though they didn’t want her alone with herself in bed, a foreigner as the Queen’s bedfellow was an uncomfortable prospect for Englishmen, too. This catch-22 made for racializing animal metaphors about unnatural unions. John Stubbs *Gaping Gulf*, the title of which refers to England’s physical insularity and suggests racial and national integrity in need of protection, argued there was “threat to England’s interests implicit in the Aleçon match.” He called such an inter-religious marriage ““ugly before God and his angels [as if] an Hebrew should marry a Canaanite.”” Felix Pryor explains that Stubbs refers to St. Paul censuring the potential in the terms of ““contrary coupling together’ reminiscent of ‘the uneven yoking of the clean Oxe to the unclean Asse, a thing forbidden in the lawe.”” He also cited the “fleur-de-lis in Elizabeth’s coat of arms and the ‘old French coat of crawling toads’” to refuse a union of lion to frog (Content 234). Indeed, the Duke of Anjou was nicknamed “the Frog” by Elizabeth herself; his “Master of the wardrobe, Jean de Simier—‘the Ape’” (Pryor 73). Foreign marital prospects are not only un-English; they are inhuman. When Sir Philip Sidney and Edward de Vere (Earl of Oxford) fought about the French match, de Vere called Sidney ““puppy.”” Because Anjou could hear them, Sidney told him to say it again: Sir Fulke Greville, watching, records that de Vere, ““like an Echo, that still multiplies by reflexions’” did just that, and Sidney retorted, ““all the

world knows, Puppies are gotten by Dogs, and Children by men.””” Quilligan glosses this “bizarre zoological riposte” with reference to “the most extreme exogamy,” or bestiality (76-79). But she does not note that Greville’s reference to Echo reflects an opposite and equally strong anxiety about Elizabeth’s self-satisfaction: the possibility that in addition to not needing a foreign prince at her side, perhaps she needs no one else *at all*. The comment about multiplying by reflection gestures to the metaphor of Elizabeth herself as a mirror, and calls up Echo’s counterpart Narcissus, who fell in love with his own “reflexion.” In Greville’s further description of the seemingly multiple selves with which Elizabeth responded to Sidney’s interference, saying one thing and then another, the troublesome confluence of homoeroticism with autoeroticism in *suffisaunce* can be felt.<sup>33</sup>

Nods to Narcissus, whose desire is a thing of superficial beauty, but sexually unsatisfiable, are attempts to slot Elizabeth into the concept of erotic similitude, the morphology that defines lesbianism as frustrated by nature, impossible. Similarly, when poets call Elizabeth a mirror, they make of her the *mise-en-abyme* that symbolizes erotic similitude. Lyly called Elizabeth ““a Glasse for all Princes”” (Berry 113). If the Queen is a “Glasse,” then reflecting herself back to herself would be another mirror; she becomes two mirrors facing one another, emptily reflecting back and forth *ad infinitum*. Spenser also calls her a mirror, though as I will argue in a moment, he mostly intervenes on Elizabeth’s image in the mode of phallic tribadism (I.pr.4; VI.pr.6). Briefly, in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser combines both modes of neutralizing lesbianism’s threat to heteropatriarchy (the imputation that lesbianism is merely an imitation of heterosexual manhood, and the sexual impossibility of erotic similitude). Glauce, Britomart’s

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<sup>33</sup> Quilligan only goes so far as to note that Sidney “may owe this splitting of the ‘selfhood’ of his prince to the traditional notion of the two bodies of the King (Sovereign and Lady); but he may be indicating as well the problematic fact that one of Elizabeth’s bodies was female” (84).

nurse, reveals the true gender of the lady knight in disguise to Scudamour, who is jealous of Amoret's attention to him (who is really a "her"). She says to Scudamour and Artegall (Britomart's future husband), "Ne thenceforth feare the thing that hether-too/ Hath troubled both your mindes with idle thought,/ Fearing least she your loves away should woo,/ Feared in vaine, sith meanes ye see there wants theretoo" (IV.vi.267-270). Even though this avatar of Elizabeth is masculinized like the tribade or the Amazon (indeed, the Amazon Radigund is her double), Glauce asserts the impossibility of sex between Britomart and Amoret in the erotic similitude tradition. Because Britomart lacks a penis, she "wants" (in the sense of "lacks") any "meanes" to have sex with another woman, no matter how much she may "want[]" (in the sense of desire). Even if Britomart can be imagined to desire Amoret, Spenser's syntax makes a penis the thing Britomart "wants"—the only "meanes" to have sex with a woman—instead of the woman herself.

Britomart's "want[ed]" (absent and desired) penis illustrates the violent solution to lesbianism that rendering female queerness as pretension to manhood affords.<sup>34</sup> Mary Villeponteaux points out that "Britomart's... fight with Radigund... is also a battle with herself. Throughout the episode, the two warriors are paralleled through the typical Spenserian devices of repeated phrases and pronoun ambiguity, so that their similarity is repeatedly emphasized" (220). She argues that "an other-Britomart, Radigund is also an other-Elizabeth; one might argue that Britomart is Elizabeth as the poet wishes she were; Radigund is Elizabeth as she is" (220). It is an unsubtle warning to Elizabeth, then, when the two women "spared not/ Their dainty parts, which nature had created/ So faire and tender, without staine or spot,/ For other vses, then they

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<sup>34</sup> Villeponteaux also draws attention to the detail that Radigund's behavior—particularly fighting Britomart for Artegall—stems from her previous rebuff by a man (212). This is another "explanation" for seemingly man-hating behavior; really, the woman who rejects men loved men *too* well. I discuss Dickens' Miss Havisham as another spurned lover patterned on Elizabeth I in chapter four.

them translated,/ Which they now hackt and hewd, as if such vse they hated” (V.vii.29). When Britomart beheads her doppelganger, she symbolically castrates her usurped manhood, “cut[ing] off a masculine, public function, which we can connect with the *virtu* that makes the Amazon both heroic and monstrous, and may do the same in the case of the queen” (Villeponteaux 221).<sup>35</sup> The description of Radigund as the “queene her selfe, halfe like a man” reminds us of the Amazon’s queenliness (linking her to Elizabeth) in the same breath as her “halfe[ness],” like Spenser’s other half-women, half-monsters, Errour and Echidna—and like the mermaid (324).

### *Oceanography*

Inextricable from representations of Elizabeth’s imperviousness to men, control over temporality, and repetition of herself as an entire family, was her maritime theme. Pearls, or the gems from the sea, define the portraiture of Elizabeth by their presence, asserted the 18<sup>th</sup>-century art historian Horace Walpole: ““A pale Roman nose, a head of hair loaded with crowns and powdered with diamonds, a vast ruff, a vaster farthingale, and a bushel of pearls are the features by which everybody knows at once the portraits of Queen Elizabeth”” (MacNalty 221). The pearl is also a mark of femininity; as Louis Montrose notes in *The Subject of Elizabeth*, it is associated with chastity (147). We have already begun to see Elizabeth’s association with the Ladies of the Lake and with Diana, the virgin goddess of the moon that rules the waves.<sup>36</sup> The moon herself became increasingly important to Elizabeth’s imagery; as Helen Hackett writes, it signified “power over time” and “immutability, since it goes through a cycle of perpetual self-renewal....

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<sup>35</sup> A “common Renaissance analogy... equates the head’s ruling the body with the man’s ruling the family and the monarch’s ruling the nation” (Villeponteaux 221).

<sup>36</sup> She was also often associated with Cynthia; see Philippa Berry’s work on the plays of John Lyly.

accord[ing] with a trend in panegyric to celebrate the Queen's longevity, and even to profess belief in her immortality" (Hackett 176-177).

*Suffisaunce* is the power to make an unending lesbian temporality a reality rather than an exaggeration or a figure of speech. Hackett stresses courtiers' "hope and *even belief* that [Elizabeth] would live forever" (176-177, emphasis mine). Indeed, the virgin Queen's long grasp on the subsequent centuries my following chapters explore make it seem almost as though she *were* still alive. Starting around Elizabeth's 1575 progress to Kenilworth, it was

a convention... to assert that time stood still for the duration of a visit by the Queen.... the transition in the late 1570s and early 1580s towards certainty of the Queen's virginity as never-ending was naturally accompanied by increased interest in her longevity.... there was evidence that God had miraculously preserved the Queen from numerous mortal dangers, such as the threats to her safety during her sister's reign, the various Catholic plots, and the Armada.... plus the very fact of the Queen's advanced years. Hackett 176-177

*Suffisaunce* is fundamentally based in lesbian sexuality, and so differs from queer time in general. First dates lasting several days; immediate intimacy and deep knowledge of one another; blindingly fast willingness to commit; sex lasting so long it seems it should be physically impossible, or repeated (sometimes incessantly) with no refractory period; the difficulty, indeed, of saying when sex, unfettered by definitional parameters like penile penetration or a single orgasm, has truly begun or ended: these are some of the hallmarks of lesbian sexuality, apart, even, from other forms of queerness.<sup>37</sup> But beyond a simple elaboration of the theoretical affordances of a specific set of sexual practices, *suffisaunce* intervenes on historical and queer

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<sup>37</sup> Theorizing the specificity of lesbianism should not have to mean gatekeeping. Penile penetration and refractory periods do not preclude lesbian sex. Some of the best lesbians have penises.

theoretical accounts of lesbianism to assert, as Elizabeth makes perceptible, that such effects can hang about a woman alone.

Another element of Elizabeth's maritime imagery, Venus expressed Elizabeth's self-sufficient refusal of heterosexual reproduction in straight time, as well as her power to make things so that clearly were not, and couldn't be, like reproduction though self-replication, immortality, and eternal youth. Of the Queen's refusal to give her body, and chivalric insistence on a youth long-spent, Jonathan Goldberg bridges Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Elizabeth's portraiture.

Preservation takes the form of multiple denials and undoings, reversals that signify potency although their form is that of impotence. The queen does not marry, she has no children. The desire she generates she refuses herself. Hence, the imperialistic forms of marriage and generation are manipulated as lacks.... In book IV, powerful figures of desire convey these political meanings, most notably Venus, who, like Elizabeth, 'needeth other none' (x.41.9). A comparison to Venus is indeed a regular part of the vocabulary of Elizabeth's portraitists. For instance, in the *Raveningham Portrait*... the queen displays a jewel in which one can make out Venus, born from the sea, standing among men holding fish. 153

The power in the negative Goldberg identifies in Elizabeth's denial of desire, her disavowal of age, and her proliferation by absence, resonates with Griselda's paradoxical will that is not masterful or competitive, but rather an awesome strength to bear.<sup>38</sup> Again and again, Elizabeth's *suffisaunce* appears in images of the sea, the moon, Venus, and, most notably the mermaid.

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<sup>38</sup> It has often been noted that Elizabeth wielded power by saying no or refusing to act (Traub 128). Lytton Strachey is particularly misogynistic about it.



During the 1575 visit to Kenilworth, one of Elizabeth's entertainments similarly featured the Lady of the Lake, as well as a "swimming mermaid (that from top to tail was eighteen foot long)" (Berry 96, 98).<sup>39</sup> At Whitehall, the Queen had "an exotic bath into which the water poured from 'oyster shells and different kinds of rock'" as though she herself were a mermaid, and "[a]t Richmond Palace, Elizabeth might sleep in an elaborate boat-shaped bed with curtains of 'sea water green'" (Whitelock 85, 7). Originally part of the sanctioned constellation of aquatically-themed figures, the mermaid, I suggest, became a site of uniquely fraught competition for control over Elizabeth's image. Some time in the 1570's, the Darnley Portrait was painted. From Elizabeth's waist hangs a pendant like a jeweled medallion, decorated with mermaids.<sup>40</sup> In this painting, the Queen appears in a dress the colors of which match her hair and some shades in the fan of feathers she holds. The harmony—the singularity, even, of color tone in the image—makes an argument that Elizabeth is the singular ruler, that everything conforms to her. She stands against a dark background; the only thing that can be seen behind her is an elaborate crown, resting upon a piece of furniture only partially visible, but again, matching her dress and hair. The presence of the crown, too, gestures towards her power, but its understatement—it is in shadow, and, after all, part of the background to the Queen herself—suggests that it is in the *person* of Elizabeth, luminous subject of the painting, that power really resides.

The Darnley portrait's originator is uncertain, but we know that the painting was approved by Elizabeth, because it set the "master pattern" for the "officially sanctioned image" of Elizabeth's face that appeared on her portraits throughout the 80's and early 90's, often called

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<sup>39</sup> Originally in Gascoigne's *The Princely Pleasures* (8).

<sup>40</sup> Tara Pedersen also notes that "[i]n the Darnley portrait, Elizabeth wears a brooch decorated with sea nymphs" (18).

the “Darnley” face after this first portrait. Elizabeth Pomeroy calls the grouping of portraits originating with the “Darnley” face and copying the “facial type” (linked by Roy Strong), “a little family tree in itself” (38). Each branch of this family tree is Elizabeth again: rhetorically *and* visually, she multiplied herself to fill out a whole family of one. In a true family portrait, differently-aged faces resemble one another. Similarly to the temporal and biological impossibility of being virgin mother *and* Christ-child Elizabeth nevertheless claimed, the Darnley family portraits feature faces that are all hers and are all always the same youthful age. In *The Queen’s Bed*, Anna Whitelock links artists’ unaging renditions of her face to Elizabeth’s *actual* face, painted—in another sense—to keep her looking forever young by her ladies who did her makeup. Both can be linked to Elizabeth’s motto, “semper eadem;” Elizabeth ran a tight ideological ship (Whitelock 192-3).

The recurrent appearance of the mermaid in expressions of Elizabeth’s absolute power suggest that she is not an incidental motif. Scholars have overwhelmingly agreed that Elizabeth I left patriarchal order undisturbed, inhabiting power—and masculine power structures—only incidentally as a woman, and often masculinizing herself to do so.<sup>41</sup> I want to argue that Elizabeth’s oceanic iconography asserted a register of powerful femininity on its own terms, rather than masculine power usurped or simply inhabited by a woman. It seems to me that it was precisely when she claimed sovereignty *without* recourse to masculinity that Elizabeth was most

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<sup>41</sup> See Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins’s introduction to *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I*; Theodora Jankowski’s “Coda” on Elizabeth in *Pure Resistance*; Louis Montrose’ *The Subject of Elizabeth* (80-81); and Leah Marcus’ *Puzzling Shakespeare* (97-98). A notable exception is Philippa Berry, who writes, in *Of Chastity and Power*, “in spite of her position at the top of political and spiritual hierarchies which were androcentric, Elizabeth Tudor was not always necessarily represented as a passive emblem of patriarchal authority, a bearer of masculine power who just happened to be gendered female.... in order to understand her contradictory historical position *as a woman*, we have to consider the potentially subversive representation of Elizabeth as a Petrarchan or Neoplatonic beloved” (5). Susan Doran splits the difference, noting the use of “the language of courtly love” by “aristocratic men” who could thus “serve beneath a female monarch, accept her commands, and sue for her favor *without* impugning their masculinity or subverting gender norms,” even though the “lady... maintain[s] a disdainful distance” (*Circle* 6, emphasis mine).

threatening to the patriarchal order. In addition to not *wanting* a man, that the famously virgin Queen had no need to pretend to *be* one was most troubling to men in the period. In her study of the figure of the mermaid in Early Modern England, Tara Pederson writes,

In the majority of representations of the fishtailed mermaid, the comb and the mirror are her frequent accoutrement and... represent a penchant for narcissistic vanity.... however, the Greek word for comb *ketis* and the Latin *pecten* can be used not only to signify an item with which to smooth and fashion hair, but also female genitalia. 13

The mermaid, frequent vehicle for representations of Elizabeth's *suffisaunce*—her immortality, self-sufficiency, and self-proliferation—is resolutely woman-identified in the period. She holds the mirror of female self-satisfaction, and a metonymic vagina that could surely figure not just femininity, but female homoeroticism. Pedersen's emphasis on narcissism and vanity indicate that the figure Elizabeth chose to represent her power was oriented inward toward the feminine self; far from mimicking male power, the mermaid may even have suggested a frigid remove from masculinity.

Not only representations of lesbianism had a renaissance during England's Renaissance; the mermaid did, too. Pederson herself links this novel interest to the virgin queen. It is

no coincidence that the mermaid emerges with frequency and prominence during a period in which England was either ruled by a female monarch or influenced by the memory of that rule. Very much like the mermaid, Elizabeth, in her approach to leadership, was seen as a troublesome hybrid figure who maintained authority by playing various roles. Pedersen 17

Despite the womanly emphasis of the mirror and the “comb,” the mermaid could stand for many things; indeed, her ambiguities provided Edmund Spenser an opportunity for conceptual intervention.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the most noteworthy mermaid in Elizabethan imagery is that of the 1588 Armada Portrait. Elizabeth Pomeroy, in *Reading the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, makes it clear that the Armada Portrait was part of Elizabeth’s sanctioned imagery: “we may study it within three structures: the Queen’s attempts to control her portraiture; a historic event followed by its network of celebrations; and the Queen’s speeches to her people (which relate to the visual statement as a kind of self-fashioning)” (17). We don’t know for sure if Spenser did see the Armada portrait, but he could have while composing his epic poem; Willy Maley’s *A Spenser Chronology* shows that between October and December of 1589, Spenser received a visit from Raleigh in Kilcolman, Ireland, and then accompanied him to England, where the portrait had been produced a year before. During this time, he had private audiences with the Queen, and read to her from what he was writing of *The Faerie Queene*, which first appeared publicly in 1590 (Maley 52-53).<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the prominent mermaid icon in the lower right-hand corner, the Armada portrait again portrays Elizabeth decked in a “bushel of pearls.” The most striking of these is the sizeable drop-pearl under the bow over the Queen’s nether regions. The long-standing

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<sup>42</sup> Frye argues that Elizabeth performatively redefined chastity as self-sufficient womanly closure and that Spenser overwrote her in an attempt to undo this work. Spenser’s project as phallic poet was to violently interject and redefine chastity to neutralize the threat it took on in Elizabeth’s self-representation (114-124). I want to locate the queerness at issue in any Elizabethan redefinition of these terms, and, in turn, Spenser’s attempted regulation of that queerness, specifically. Seeking patronage, the poet “entertained” Elizabeth in the same manner Frye describes the “London elites of 1559 and, fifteen years later, Leicester and the Protestant faction” who “sought to ‘entertain’ Elizabeth through performed and printed representations that attempted to define her within their anxieties and concerns” (98). The steely double edge of Spenser’s literary homage to Elizabeth is situated in an anxious competition for Elizabeth’s image.

<sup>43</sup> For a reading of the relationship between the Armada’s crash on Irish shores (while Spenser was a deputy clerk) and book V of *The Faerie Queene*, see Thomas Herron’s “The Spanish Armada, Ireland, and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*.”

understanding of this bow is that it both calls attention to Elizabeth's female genitals, and signifies the importance of her chastity by its knot tightly tied. Julia M. Walker argues that the accompanying "large pearl revis[es] the iconic statement of her father's large codpiece" (Walker 259). Valerie Traub goes further, reading the pearl as a reference to Elizabeth's clitoris (126-129).<sup>44</sup> But the drop-pearl has never been linked to the Armada Portrait's lady with a fish-tail depicted in profile, arguably the most significant mermaid in Elizabeth's cadre of images.<sup>45</sup> For me, there is a productive ambiguity to the pearl: it could be the Queen's clitoris, or it could be a drop of moisture. But this very undecidability in combination with the "incoherence" of the mermaid—and I will argue that the pearl is linked to the mermaid herself—may be what enabled Spenser to transform the Elizabethan mermaid into the monstrously phallicized snake-women of *The Faerie Queene*.

In the early modern period, the mermaid could be interpreted as hyperfeminine (as I have suggested), *and* as phallic. Pedersen writes that the mermaid, as a "highly sexualized figure... comes into focus both because of her actions and her morphology but who, far from being a unified subject, also gains an early modern cultural identity through a profound incoherence" (8). This "incoherence" points to the suggestibility of the mermaid—she is sexually charged, but indeterminate. Pedersen herself understands the textual hybridity of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* as

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<sup>44</sup> Traub expands on the portraiture's pearl theme, "[a]s if in anticipation of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, who reclaims female pleasure from its post-Enlightenment diminishment—'woman has sex organs more or less everywhere'—this portrait of Elizabeth proclaims a profusion of pleasure points" (131). The "bushel" of pearls is almost invariably distributed all over Elizabeth's body, suggesting Irigaray's theory of a feminine, full-bodied sexuality; desire and pleasure are diffused everywhere, rather than concentrated in a single location (Traub 131).

<sup>45</sup> Roy Strong writes, "each item is intensely charged with significance, and yet as a whole they are linked neither by unity of time nor in a space defined as a geometric totality. Elizabeth rises between two windows, each of which has a view governed by separate laws of distance and space, showing the arrival and defeat of the Spanish Armada. What they depict together is an impossibility; nor do they in any way relate geometrically to the room in which the Queen presumably stands, oddly surrounded by two tables and a throne. Each of these is observed separately. The table with the diadem upon it is viewed straight on, the other upon which the globe rests is tipped up at an angle towards the viewer, while the throne to the right displays back and chair arm simultaneously. These images are attributes defining and expanding the central figure" (43).

a mermaid-like admixture of text and stage spectacle.<sup>46</sup> She draws on the work of Laura Levine to suggest that the crossdressing required by “transvestite theater” produced an anti-theater discourse that was also an unfavorable commentary on cross-dressing, and quotes the Puritan Philip Stubbes: “these women may not improperly be called *Hermaphroditi*, that is, monsters of both kinds” (87-88). The mermaid herself is one such. For all of Elizabeth’s intentional femininity as Venus, born of the water, Cynthia, mistress of the waves, and Diana, ruler of the moon, mermaids could be understood in the Renaissance as creatures of “both kinds.”

Not only the mermaid, but the drop-pearl-*cum*-clitoris was vulnerable to phallic refiguration. The mid-16<sup>th</sup>-century “rediscovery” of the clitoris in Europe “raised questions about the female body’s potential autonomy.” Its pleasures, “it was widely recognized, did not necessarily depend on the ministrations of men.... accompanying, influencing, haunting every anatomical discussion of the clitoris... was the monstrous figure of the tribade” (Traub 15-16). Though the clitoris was understood as a threat to hetero-patriarchy, it was ultimately (maybe for this very reason) framed as an inadequate penis:

Anatomists and medical writers... concerned about the misuse—or abuse, to use their terminology—of the clitoris, a misuse that was universally associated with women’s attempt to usurp male sexual prerogatives... regularly employed a penis-clitoris analogy as part of a system of representation that asserted the homologous yet hierarchical relation between male and female bodies. Traub 188-193

Discourse around the female “yard” was closely related to that of the dildo and strap-on. There was a significant uptick of anxious interest in such substitutes for male anatomy in the period.

But while men may have feared being cast off as unnecessary or not measuring up to the

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<sup>46</sup> This is especially true in Sir Guyon’s moment in the Bower of Bliss (Pedersen 95).

dependability of the prosthetic, the dildo functioned to legitimate the penis as the privileged site of sexual merit (Traub 98).<sup>47</sup> This seeming paradox becomes more coherent in light of my argument that the female pretender to phallic power, however transgressive, is the most palatable imaginary of the lesbian. Under such a regime of early modern gender-logic, viewers of the Armada portrait may not have seen the clitoral drop-pearl as “revising” Elizabeth’s father’s “large” codpiece, as much as *aspiring* to it.

*Tribades, Mermaids, and Snakes, Oh My!*

Parts of *The Faerie Queene* suggest that Spenser is responding to the Armada Portrait. If, for Traub, the Armada Portrait’s pearl stands for the clitoris, then perhaps the pearl also stood for the clitoris to Spenser—which is to say, historically, a smaller and less good penis. Spenser picks up on the “halfe[ness]” of the mermaid to refigure Elizabeth in some of his “in mirroures more than one” as other kinds of half women: *The Faerie Queene*’s Error and Echidna, grotesquely phallicized women (III.pr.41-44). Error is perhaps the most striking monster of *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>48</sup> Appearing in the first book and canto of the poem, Error is

A monster vile, whom God and man does hate.... ugly... Halfe like a serpent  
horribly displaide,/ But th’ other halfe did womans shape retaine,/ Most lothsom,  
filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.... Her huge long taile her den all  
overspred... Pointed with mortall sting. I.i.151-166

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<sup>47</sup> Traub reads the late-16<sup>th</sup>-century “bawdy verse narrative of amorous pursuit,” Thomas Nashe’s “The choise of valentines,” in which “the dildo functions as a fetish, not, as one might expect, of female desire, but of the male bodily ego. Enacting a logic of substitution—first the dildo replaces Tomalin’s inadequate penis, then his newly imagined ‘sufficient’ penis replaces the ‘new devise’” (96-98).

<sup>48</sup> According to David Lee Miller’s reading, the Error episode primarily regards the womb, which “suggest[s] that the subterranean terrors of male Elizabethans were if anything more intensely gynophobic than our own” (248). And that was when abortion was legal!

That Errour “retains” half a woman’s body—keeping or maintaining it—suggests that she is originally or “truly” a woman; her phallic snake tail is a perverse gender crime. Imitative of masculinity, she monstrosly ejaculates dead fleshy stuff in a parody of male potency: “she spewd out of her filthie maw/ A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,/ Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw” (207-210).<sup>49</sup> It has long been agreed that Errour’s spewing of filthy books is a dig at Catholicism. But based on the resemblance between Errour’s oral projection and a passage from “*Vers Funèbres* attributed to Cardinal du Perron” that calls Elizabeth ““this monster, conceived in adultery and incest, her fangs bared for murder, who befouls and despoils the sacred right of sceptres, and vomits her cholera and gall at heaven,”” I argue that the Protestant Queen is also implicated (Hackett 132). If we can understand Errour as simultaneously figuring Elizabeth I and the Catholic Mary Stuart, she links the two homoerotically endogamous queens on one isle, again.

In addition to her masculine ejaculative powers, Errour might “strangle” the Redcrosse knight as much as he might her: his lady cries to Redcrosse, “Strangle her, els she sure will strangle thee” (202). Such reciprocity gestures to the specter of a true contest between man and tribade, usurper of masculine parts and functions. However, the staging of Errour’s potential equality with the male knight is a paper tiger. While she seems like an ontological threat to manhood—her den “no place for living men” (153)—the imitative quality of usurpation *itself* implies inferiority, ensuring that even the most monstrous threat is an absurdity. Further, such a

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<sup>49</sup> Further, James Holstun documents the early modern poetic gesture to link Catholicism to lesbian transgression via “periodization.” In *Upon Appleton House*, Marvell “first gives [lesbianism] an institutional base in the religious houses of pre-Reformation England and then snatches that base away, leaving lesbianism utterly a creature of the papist past.... lesbianism emerges not as a dark subversive force that the poem must work hard to repress; instead, it depends utterly on a certain economic and institutional configuration. When that configuration changes, it can be absorbed without trauma into the Protestant household that replaces it... Lesbian desire simply does not exist in Marvell’s idealized Protestant aristocratic order” (851-852). Given that Errour, too, represents the old Church, Spenser seems implicated when Holstun writes “[i]t is difficult to say whether Marvell wishes to denigrate Roman Catholic England by associating it with lesbianism, or the other way around” (850).



monster is easily recognized, and just as easily castrated, and murdered. This is precisely Errour's end. Redcrosse is urged "Now, now, sir knight, shew what ye bee" (200). The episode "shew[s]" the difference between a real man and a female pretender to the phallus. With "more than manly force," Redcrosse beheads Errour; again, beheading symbolizes castration (249-251). In the knight's case, an excess of masculinity ("more than manly force) is a good thing. But for Elizabeth, of whom her secretary Robert Cecil famously said that "she was more than a man," the supplement of masculinity makes "A monster vile." We know that Elizabeth's political power was bound up with her sexuality.<sup>50</sup> By transforming Elizabeth's sexuality from the mermaid to the tribade, Spenser also reflects her political power as a usurpation grotesque and perverted.<sup>51</sup> Brilliantly reversing Cecil's formulation, Spenser invokes the tribade to represent Elizabeth as a *pretender* to phallic power, *less* than a man, insofar as the dildo, strap-on, or snake tail refer to the phallic monopoly on prowess and potency, and the female equivalent (the homologous clitoris) is a lower order imitation.

Transforming the mermaid's tail into a phallic snaketail, Spenser reads the related drop-pearl the same way Traub does. If for Traub, the drop-pearl is the clitoris (which need not be phallic), then for Spenser, the drop-pearl could be the clitoris, as understood in homologous and hierarchical relationship to the penis. After all, the comb—metonymic vagina the mermaid holds—does not double her own. Where a human woman's vagina is, the mermaid has a slippery

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<sup>50</sup> Berry writes, "debate articulated in the courtly pastimes, concerning the modes of courtiership appropriate to the servants of an unmarried Queen, reveals that the discourse of Elizabethan courtliness was the site of a contest for sexual as well as political authority." She argues that John Lyly changed the game in the 1580's when he encouraged "the male courtly lover... to imitate his queen, through a meditative withdrawal into the private, emotional, and feminine sphere of experience symbolized by the moon," in rhetoric nonetheless "marked by a distinct unease about the implications of this gynocentric definition of courtly service" (Berry 111-112).

<sup>51</sup> Villeponteaux argues "that in Spenser's attempts to represent his queen, the private body usually supersedes the public one" and "that in Elizabethan England in general it was much easier to think of the queen in terms of her body natural" (210).

tail.<sup>52</sup> A mermaid's tail is very like a snake's tail, but the resonance is quite different.<sup>53</sup> For one thing, mermaids are wet, like the pearl as a (non-teleological) drop of pre- or post-pleasure wetness. Of the Armada portrait where mermaid and pearl both appear, Pomeroy writes

We are accustomed to looking into the depicted space of a painting to read it as disclosing some inner space—the consciousness of the chief figure or sitter (if a portrait), or some kind of metaphorical space. That does not seem to work here.... Because the interior of this picture is not visually plausible, it shuts us out, forcing us to seek contexts beyond. The painting makes its essential references: majesty, naval power, the feminine—then leaves the viewer to follow these networks of meaning wherever they will lead. 21

It seems to me that Spenser followed these “networks of meaning” to make of Elizabeth's “feminine” “majesty” a grotesque usurpation of male prerogatives, a suggestively phallic snake tail of the oceanic pearl and mermaid, in combination.<sup>54</sup>

Phallic contests were in the air surrounding the Armada battle. Being imputed to possess the biggest stick was not always an insult: it cannot be imagined that the Pope was on the side of the heretic Queen, but it is impossible to miss the respect in Sixtus V's comment that “the distaff of the Queen of England was worth more than the sword of the King of Spain” (Montrose 162).<sup>55</sup> Before and after the pissing contest of the Armada battle, (re)interpreting

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<sup>52</sup> Not all women have vaginas.

<sup>53</sup> The difference between snake and mermaid appears in *The Faerie Queene* when Sir Guyon passes the mermaids' bay, where they tempt him as strange and beautiful women.

<sup>54</sup> Roy Strong also draws a link between the paintings of Elizabeth and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*: “[a]lthough Spenser's characters are trapped in all the abstruse permutations of late Renaissance allegory, they are deployed within a narrative framework which can only be called neo-Gothic. There is no understanding or use of scale in relation to optical distance, or of the placing of characters and objects within a homogeneous geometric totality governed by the new laws of perspective. This also applies... to all Elizabethan works of art. There is no notion that a picture's surface should encapsulate a given viewpoint at a single moment in time” (43).

<sup>55</sup> Louis Montrose picks up on the sexuality of this remark, though I would argue with his semantics when he calls it “ambivalent wonder at the spectacle of this ‘woman on top’” (162).

Elizabeth's feminine power as the tribade's phallic supplement was a widespread gesture. Years earlier, the poet George Gascoigne anticipated Spenser's gesture, importuning the Queen as "a nymph of Diana" on the Earl of Leicester's part by making the "courtly lover" (victim of unrequited desire) into a "holly bush" that is "'furnished on every side with sharpe pricking leaves, to prove the restless prickes of his privie thoughts. Mary there are two kinds of Holly, that is to say, He-Holly, and She-Holly. Now some will say, that She-Holly hath no prickes, but thereof I intermeddle not'" (Berry 99). Philippa Berry interprets this speech as "effectively mock[ing] Elizabeth's assumption of a masculine authority along with her supposed freedom from sexual desire, in a lewd and punning speculation on the question of her prick-lessness" (99). In 1594, George Chapman published *The Shadow of the Night*, which Berry describes as "push[ing] to their logical conclusion" the "philosophical and religious implications" of Elizabeth's imagery.

The most disturbing metamorphosis of the Cynthia figure occurs... where she assumes the aspect of Hecate.... [whose] gigantic size 'of halfe a furlong' reveals the grotesque female body not as an object of satire, but as intensely threatening.... Her numerous serpentine attribute, which were associated in antiquity with the fearful Gorgon Medusa, but were often found in representations of the all-powerful mother goddesses of the pre-classical epoch, signify her possession of a phallic authority usually reserved for the male; they also challenge the stasis and uniformity of patriarchal definitions of both power and of sexuality.

139-142

Spenser's transformation of Elizabeth's oceanic female power into a giant snake woman is part of a larger project of gender and sexuality in the early modern period.

When Spenser professes hope that he will not “with his error taynt” the Queen’s “perfections” with his “pencil,” we should read a doubled statement of threatening purpose to “taynt” her “with his error;” “Errorr” (III.i.12-14). The intervention of the poet’s phallic “pencil” is likewise twofold: he takes control of her image by overwriting Elizabeth, and in doing so actually phallicizes her, undermining her feminine self-sufficiency, or “perfection.” Coles links “what Spenser cited as the goal of his project in Book III: to portray, or draw forth, Elizabeth” to Busirane’s rape of Amoret; in that episode, Busirane locks Amoret to a pillar and “cruelly... pen[s]” her (60). This penning makes of the woman who requires no man a usurper of manhood: quite a different beast, and, the poem demonstrates, a much more manageable one. Like Errorr, Echidna (mother of the Blatant Beast) is a creature of “halfe” kinds.

a Monster direfull dred... So hideous is her shape, so huge her hed, that even the  
hellish fiends affrighted bee.... Yet did her face and former parts professe/ A faire  
young Mayden, full of comely glee;/ But all her hinder parts did plaine expresse/  
A monstrous Dragon, full of fearfull uglinessse.... she enrold doth lie/ In hideous  
horror and obscurity VI.vi.10-15.<sup>56</sup>

Echidna’s description suggests that she is a woman on top, but a man on the bottom; her “hinder parts” are those of a hideous snake.

Spenser’s emphasis on the beauty of Echidna’s upper half suggests the possibility that one might be “fooled” into being attracted to her, only to discover the monstrosity of her phallic lower half. The loathing with which this is rendered indicates another variant of queer panic,

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<sup>56</sup> Britomart is described similarly to Echidna in the Castle Joyous episode: “For shee was full of amiable grace,/ And manly terrour mixed therewithall,/ That as the one stird up affections bace,/ So th’ other did mens rash desires apall,/ And hold them backe, that would in error fall;/ As hee that hath espide a vermeill rose,/ To which sharpe thornes and breres the way forstall,/ Dare not for dread his hardy hand expose,/ But wishing it far off, his ydle wish doth lose” (III.iii.451-459).

where a man is “falsely” attracted to a non-cisgender or non-heterosexual woman; one can just as easily imagine the seduced man’s delight at being surprised by the “hinder parts” of a beautiful woman... except that she is a dragon. Abjection piles upon itself in the *Errour* and *Echidna* passages, both phallicized snake women, both monsters. Inviting a fantasy of seduction becoming shocked disgust, Spenser inscribes revilement into queer desire itself.<sup>57</sup> Further, the effect of these monstrous representations is to introduce masculinity into Elizabeth’s threateningly feminine economy of power and personality. Supplementing the female body with a monstrous phallus replaces an invisible threat—Elizabeth’s unassailably correct withdrawal into chastity—with a *blatant* one, that it may be more easily recognized for castigation and castration.<sup>58</sup> But *Blatancy itself* is an ambiguous Beast: when female queerness is only legible as imitative masculinity, other forms of queerness are rendered even further hard to spot.

Spenser’s was not a singular voice imputing tribadic phallicism to the Queen. Rob Content’s “Fair is Fowle: Interpreting Anti-Elizabethan Composite Portraiture” pairs a discussion of monstrous early modern creaturely combinations with William Cecil’s 1563 Proclamation against unsanctioned representations of the Queen: “Hir majestie perceiveth that a great number of her loving subjects are much greved, and take great offence with the *errors* and *deformities* allready committed by sondry perons in this behalf” (229, emphasis mine). Of course, Spenser’s composite and hermaphroditic monster (in another medium) is actually named

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<sup>57</sup> This literary-historical violence is all too familiar, as present-day England wrestles with transmisogyny.

<sup>58</sup> The figure of the hermaphrodite has been noted by many scholars of the poem. I would challenge Lauren Silberman’s reading of hermaphroditic images in the text. For her, Spenser’s Ovidian citation of Narcissus misreading his body as feminized following its performance most masculine of functions (at the end of the 1590 text) means hermaphroditism cannot threaten us so long as we know how to properly read and inhabit our heterosexual bodies and functions (51). But the repulsiveness and threat to men posed by *Errour* and *Echidna*’s bodies suggests that Spenser marshals “hermaphroditism” as a violent and disgusting threat to heterosexuality from without.

“Errour;” the poet may even have taken this interdiction as inter-medium instruction. Even more strikingly, the same Proclamation explicitly juxtaposes *suffisaunce* with “error:”

all manner of painters have already and do daily attempt to make in short manner portraiture of her Majesty in... graving and painting, wherein is evidently seen that hitherto none hath *sufficiently* expressed the natural representations of her Majesty’s person, favour or grace, but that most have so far *erred* therein as thereof daily are heard complaints amongst her loving subjects. Whitelock 301, emphasis mine

The Proclamation’s term “deformitie” calls to mind Ben Johnson’s assertion that Elizabeth had a sexual deformity, ““a membrane on her which made her incapable of man through for delight she tried many”” (Whitelock 344). Sir Arthur Salusbury Macnalty records this conversation as having taken place with William Drummond of Hawthornden (225), but “[s]tories that Elizabeth was physically incapable of having sex had been commonplace for years” (Whitelock 344). There were always questions about whether ““the Queen was a woman;”” once “a carter remarked how he had seen her only partly dressed at her window and now ‘knew’” (Whitelock 24).

Poignantly, Elizabeth herself seems to have responded to such gossip, leaving “specific instructions that her body should not be disemboweled or examined” (Whitelock 344). But her council disobeyed upon her death. She was dissected by members of the Worshipful Company of Barber-Surgeons of London.... even if they treated her body with due care, the indignity and insult offered to the Virgin Queen in the mere fact that her aged body natural was exposed to the sight and touch of an exclusively male audience, is immense. Cregan 51-52

Kate Cregan is among many contemporary critics and historians, throughout the ages, who have taken these stories seriously, rather than understanding them as attempts to render Elizabethan as a tribade. In a rapid about-face, Cregan goes from acknowledging violation to sharing in the spectacle of Elizabeth's monstrous hermaphroditism, writing next, "it makes one wonder if Ben Johnson's salacious gossip... came from one of her dissectors" (51-52). Contemporary government members feared in earnest that Elizabeth "would be the victim of image magic," showing the power the figural was understood to have over the literal, then as now (Coles 31-32).<sup>59</sup> The parodic history *1066 and All That* says, "Although this memorable Queen was a man, she was constantly addressed by her courtiers by various affectionate female nicknames" (Connolly and Hopkins 1). This has, and always has had, more to do with the question of men's monopoly on political power than with the actual state of Elizabeth's body. Nevertheless, it worked.

In another period of English debate over female morphology—post-World War I renewal of interest in lesbian legibility, the nationalism of which, I contend, can be traced to Elizabeth's white female body *as* lesbian nation—Lytton Strachey renewed this theme. Like a good post-sexological subject, Strachey's biography of Elizabeth begins with an invitation to lift her skirts, examine her genitalia, and find out the lies.

The great Queen of... imagination, the lion-hearted heroine, who flung back the insolence of Spain and crushed the tyranny of Rome with splendid unhesitating gestures, no more resembles the Queen of fact than the clothed Elizabeth the naked one. But, after all, posterity is privileged. Let us draw nearer; we shall do no wrong now to that Majesty, if we look below the robes. 10-11

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<sup>59</sup> See also Carole Levin's "We shall never have a merry world while the Queene lyveth": Gender, Monarchy, and the Power of Seditious Words" (91).

Unsurprisingly, what he finds under the robes is secret manhood and perversion, “her temperament” a “mixture of the masculine and the feminine” (Strachey 12). Strachey repeats Ben Johnson’s “membrana” comment and says it’s silly, but then quickly asserts its possible “origin in a subtler, and yet no less vital, fact,” saying the Queen could not have had children, medically: “[a] deeply seated repugnance to the crucial act of intercourse may produce, when the possibility of it approaches, a condition of hysterical convulsion, accompanied, in certain cases, by intense pain” (24). Then again—or still—in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the frigid Queen is simultaneously imagined as a lusty tribade. During flirtations,

her whole being was suffused with a lasciviousness that could hardly be defined. She was a woman—ah, yes! a fascinating woman!—but then, was she not also a virgin, and old? But immediately another flood of feeling swept upwards and engulfed her; she towered; she was something more—she knew it; what was it? Was she a man? She gazed at the little beings around her, and smiled to think that, though she might be their Mistress in one sense, in another it could never be so—that the very reverse might almost be said to be the case. She had read of Hercules and Hylas, and she might have fancied herself, in some half-conscious day-dream, possessed of something of that pagan masculinity. Strachey 28-29

If imputations of her secret manhood “took,” so did Elizabeth’s promise to live forever, at least in the long English obsession with her sexuality. Strachey translates into contemporary terms “[t]hat iron structure” as “prey to nerves.... it so happened that, in Elizabeth’s case, there was a special cause for a neurotic condition: her sexual organization was seriously warped” (20).

I hope to show that the competition for control over the Queen’s image was based in anxiety about what lesbianism *means* that both crystallized and exceeded Elizabeth herself as a



woman alone. She bring int view, consistently, that the most harrowing and impossible to imagine version of lesbianism is a female economy of selfhood, sexuality, and power that does not borrow from manhood. Historians of sexuality have overwhelmingly understood the tribadic lesbian (the cross-dresser; the strapped-up woman; she who is clitorally excessive, whether though abuse or malformation; the dyke with a dildo) as the only lesbian who counts and must be dealt with. But I argue that the self-sufficient woman, as much as the feminine subject of erotic similitude, who is never supposed to count, counts most of all, and is often transformed into the figure of the tribade so that she may be recognized and dealt with. Spenser's covering over of Elizabeth's queer threat with grotesque butchness must be read symptomatically: the poem belies its contemporaries' claims that we also seem to have swallowed.

#### *Correction of Error*

Elizabeth retorted to Spenser's rhetorical figurations of her monstrous phallicism, and she won the day. Rob Content claims of the Hardwick Portrait (1599?, from the workshop of Nicholas Hilliard), that Elizabeth's dress, decorated as a bestiary of land, sea, and sky "prompt[s] us to recognize critical representations of the queen which the... visual program of pacific birds and monsters sought to neutralize" (247). Though Content does not make this connection, the snakes and sea monsters lurking in the folds of the dress are exactly such a "neutralizing" response to the "Error" with which Spenser had recently represented the Queen. The Hardwick portrait features a large pearl hanging at the pointed end of a long, inverted triangle formed by Elizabeth's dress and jewels. The effect is of an exaggerated view of the triangular vagina, seen straight on. These jewels and the pearl, which we should read as Elizabeth's taking back the clitoral imagery of the Armada Portrait, lie on her nether regions, atop of the part of her dress

decorated with the snakes and sea monsters. I suggest the arrangement asserts that her feminine rhetoric of the pearl (that she is a sea goddess; that her genitals are female) come out (literally) on top of Spenser's figures of monstrous women with animal parts. Spenser's imagistic argument is explicitly invoked by the bestiary patterning the lower half of Elizabeth's dress, like Error's and Echidna's lower animal parts. The largest (and toothiest) of the sea monsters appears under Elizabeth's wrist, indicating that she has Spenser in hand.

In 1601, Robert Chester wrote "an allegorization of court politics as an erotic narrative" called *Loves Martyr or Rosalins Complaint*, records Hannah Betts, in "'The Image of this Queene so quaynt': The Pornographic Blazon 1588-1603" (175). Tracking erotic addresses of Elizabeth to "the pornographic blazon" and back again, Betts argues

Chester returns the royal blazon to its panegyric context. However, even when restored to an encomiastic setting, the device bears the legacy of its recent past. Chester's catalog is arranged according to marginal titles that offer a guide to the inventory of the royal body. The pudendum [is] emphasized by its appearance in two stanzas rather than the single verse attributed to every other feature. 175

There was never any going back from the sexualization of Elizabethan representations to which Spenser was only one contributor. But what is most striking, for me, is that Chester explicitly addressed Spenser's figuration of Elizabeth as "Error." One section of his poem reads: "There is a place in louely paradize,/ From whence the golden *Gehon* ouerflowes,/ A fountain of such honorable prize,/ That none the sacred, sacred vertues knowes,/ Walled about, betok'ning sure defence, With trees of life, to keep bad errors thence'" (13-14, Betts 175). By 1601, "error" was recognizable as a negative figure for Elizabeth's genitals. Indeed, Chester's reference to the Garden of Eden ("trees of life") suggests a snaky threat. But the way the poet wields this figure

makes Elizabeth's vagina a chaste gatekeeper. Spenser's monstrous "error" is kept out; the Queen can neither be penetrated, nor her image "taynt[ed]."

Chester was not the only writer to notice and reframe "Error." Near end of the Queen's life, the Rainbow Portrait (painted 1600-1602 by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger), brought text and image together again. There, Elizabeth's sleeve is decorated with a huge, green, curling snake. She stares out of the portrait directly at the viewer, as if demonstrating her mastery not only of the rainbow she wields in her other hand, but the figure of the snake which has been used to insult her, and is now assimilated to her approved image. The snake is decorated with red stones, and, unsurprisingly, pearls. Unlike the Armada Portrait, this one features no "replacement codpiece" pearl. The snake is complimented by Elizabeth's signature pearls, dainty and multiple, offering no potential of twisting a clitoral statement into one of phallic "abuse." It is agreed that this snake symbolizes wisdom (Strong 50-51). But its sheer size and emphasis require more explanation; it is a response to Spenser's "Error." At the turn of the century, Sir John Davies wrote twenty-six acrostic poems about Elizabeth; Strong shows there is a connection between these verses and the Rainbow Portrait (46). Robert Cecil was Davies' "chief patron," and the portrait, belonging to Cecil's family, was

painted during those vital two or three years when Davies was employed by Cecil as court pageant poet. So close is it in content to his *Hymns to Astraea* [to which the acrostics are a preface] that one might reasonably conclude that the programme was actually drawn up for the artist by Davies. Strong 50

The acrostic Davies pairs with the Rainbow Portrait reads, "This is her clean true mirror,/ Her looking glass, wherein she spies/ All forms of Truth and *Error*" (52, emphasis mine). The painting explicitly invokes Error to take back control of the snaky figure, positioning Elizabeth

as she who sees and knows all, including what Spenser tried to do with her image. Pomeroy points out the reference to “Cynthia the moon goddess” in the portrait’s “crescent of pearls” atop Elizabeth’s head, a final touch returning Elizabeth to the feminine oceanic glory Spenser had defaced (71).

### *Suffisaunce or Girlboss?*

Elizabeth’s *suffisaunce*, enabled as it was by her structural power, was and remains a white nationalist imperial project that still resonates in English debates about gender and sexuality. The Queen’s feminine water imagery may have bound the integrity of the island nation to the integrity of her virginal white womanhood. But it also, by turns, augmented and diffused the problem of her perceived queerness. England *qua* Elizabeth’s inviolate white female body is bound up with the imaginary of lesbianism; John Lyly’s play celebrating the Armada victory depicted Philip II as Midas trying to enter England represented as Lesbos by force (Berry 131).<sup>60</sup> In the Tilbury speech, Elizabeth “deliberately employs the trope of land as feminine, when she describes the threat of Spanish invasion in terms of rape: ‘I... think foul scorn that Parma or Spain... should dare to invade the borders of my realm, to which rather than any dishonor shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms’ (Connolly and Hopkins 9). Montrose notes that in the speech and in the Armada portrait alike,

an alien threat that consolidates the collective interests of Englishmen also

enables an identification of the English body politic with the female body of its

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<sup>60</sup> Of John Lyly’s “initial use of the lunar system,” Berry writes, it “appears to have been intended to elide the problematic fact of a woman’s possession of ‘masculine’ political power. But her connection with this changeable planet (whose difference from the sun was further accentuated in the post-Copernican world view, where both moon and earth were distinguished from the sun as moving rather than fixed planetary bodies) also exaggerated the queen’s wandering or deviation from the passive role of the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic beloved, together with her femaleness” (135).

monarch. An emphasis upon the virginity of that royal body transforms the monarch's problematic gender into the paradoxical source of her potency and the foundation of her subjects' collective welfare. However, the dynamics of the early modern gender-system ensured that the power ascribed to virginity was always fragile, not only because of a cultural assumption that it was a prelude to marriage and motherhood but also because it tended to arouse a masculine will to mastery: A virgin's purity was inherently dangerous to herself because it presented an invitation to pollution. Thus, in his *Discovery of Guiana*, Sir Walter Raleigh reminded his Elizabethan readers that King Philip's father, the Emperor Charles V, had "had the maidenhead of Peru;" and when he concluded his tract with the declaration that "Guiana is a country that hath yet her maidenhead," he was exhorting them to emulate the Spanish example in a collective act of cultural defloration that would manifest the imperial ambition of heroic Englishmen. 150

Scholars have not noticed, however, the problems ensuing from transformations of Elizabeth's impenetrability—threatening to her own countrymen in the register of gender—into the amazon or the tribade definitionally not to be found at home among the Englishwomen of the island. This problem will dog England for centuries, like the bestial "puppy" proponents of the exogamous French marriage. Is Elizabeth the white hymen of England? Or is she, England herself, the tribade who was only supposed to exist overseas?

Elizabeth's project of self-sufficiency may have been a response to her very situation of vulnerability to projections of a definitionally foreign tribadic sexuality. But this project of self-sufficient Englishness did not preclude expansion outward. The "moon cult," one version of Elizabeth's oceanic iconography, was "private" to Raleigh in the 1580's, but "became public in

the nineties” (Strong 48). Raleigh’s 1588 self-portrait featuring a “crescent moon in the top left-hand corner... Elizabeth as Cynthia, the moon goddess, who commands the seas,” was motivated by his interests in an “imperialist policy of expansion overseas” (Doran *Circle* 169). Elizabeth nicknamed the explorer, (Walter) “Water.” Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, her favorite in later years (before his spectacular fall from grace and execution) also had ambitions in wanting Elizabeth to ““become mistresse of the sea, which is the greatness that the queen of an island should most aspire unto”” (Doran *Circle* 179). The Queen’s promotion of those who elaborated on her approved maritime imagery, the violence of her own nationalistically racial and gender conservatism, and the violent imperialism of the men who used the former to act on the latter, formed a circuitous system.

The Ditchley portrait (circa 1592), another with the “ageless” face of Elizabeth’s lesbian time, was especially important to the “official propaganda of empire.” It renders the “identification between the body of the Virgin Queen and her island nation... explicit... Elizabeth the inviolate virgin stands on a map of England, protecting it beneath the skirts of her dress; both she and the land she governs are impenetrable” (Connolly and Hopkins 9). Simultaneously, the Queen attempted, in 1596, to expel black people from England under the guise of poverty and urban vagrancy by an open letter to the mayor of London, and commissioned a merchant to deport them. She did so again in 1601 via a royal proclamation. Starting in the 1550s,

the time when Britain’s involvement with African trade and colonial travel was increasing, the pre-existing binarism of black and white became more visibly racialized, as references to skin colour, to Africa, and foreign wealth abounded... “blackness” and “whiteness” are recurring tropes in Renaissance literature....

these tropes are often gendered, as the ‘white’ and ‘fair’ woman becomes the symbolic repository for ‘white’ English culture. Dabydeen, Gilmore, Jones 260

The symmetry—inversion—I explore between black and white in photography as related to gender in the following chapters became a foundation for white English womanhood as well as lesbianism during this period. But we can also feel the precarity of white English female sexuality in the racial othering of the Irish. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Strachey imagines Essex asking,

Who or what were these people, with their mantles and their nakedness, their long locks of hair hanging over their faces, their wild battle-cries and gruesome wailings, their kerns and their gallowglass, their jesters and their bards? Who were their ancestors? Scythians? Or Spaniards? Or Gauls? What state of society was this, where chiefs jostled with gypsies, where ragged women lay all day long laughing in the hedgerows, where ragged men gambled away among each other their very rags, their very forelocks, the very... parts more precious still...? 204

These sexually available Irishwomen are certainly not the “inviolable” white women of England’s autonomously self-enclosed Queen as personification of the island.

Elizabeth’s endogamous and even autoerotic sexual-familial economy implied and cultivated the insularity of islandic England, imperialist ambitions notwithstanding. Elizabeth allowed nothing nationally or racially exogamous “in;” she also tried to racially purify a white England via expulsions of the “blackamoors,” ensuring a historical connection between female queerness and a specifically *white* English womanhood. If the virgin Queen’s rhetoric smacks, at times, of femme bottomhood—from the top or otherwise—we must also consider Elizabeth I as a femme top who fucks, but is not fucked. This is not just provocative language. English imperialist expansion outward understood other lands as virginal woman for the sexual taking,

while simultaneously figuring threats of Spanish invasion as rape. It is surely significant, in the history of English race and sexuality, that the monarch violently penetrating other female countries, and all the while refusing penetration for England *qua* herself, was a woman.

Elizabeth's female gender often allowed to her disavow mastery from a place of the structural power of the monarch, because women were not the legal or material equals of men in the period. When Lord Burghley was dying, Elizabeth brought his food to his very lips. He begged his son to

“let Her Majesty understand how her singular kindness doth overcome my power to acquit it, who, though she will not be a mother, yet sheweth herself, by feeding me with her own princely hand, as a careful nourice; and if I may be weaned to feed myself, I shall be more ready to serve her on earth.” Strachey 173-174

Burghley figures the Queen as a nursing mother, feeding him from her own breast. Elizabeth was often represented as the pelican, which “fed its young with blood from its own breast... an image of self-sacrifice... primarily associated with Christ” and, at the same time, “an image of self-denying maternal care... associated with the Virgin” (Hackett 80-81). Mother and wet nurse are both positions of female subservience and service; by serving Burghley, Elizabeth provokes his expression of hope to be able to serve *her*—except that he already does. Indeed, what makes Elizabeth's service so remarkable is the anomaly of the role, for her. This mode of garnering devotion via service *looks* like Griseldean power-from-below, but in this case, Elizabeth has all the power to begin with. She is, perhaps, “bottoming from the top.”

Elizabeth often rhetorically performed dizzying reversals of power relations. In 1592, she said to the students of Oxford,



your love for me... is of such kind as has never been known or heard of in the memory of man. Love of this nature is not possessed by parents; it happens not among friends, no, not even among lovers.... It is such a love as neither persuasion, nor threats, nor curses can destroy. Time has no power over it; time, which eats away iron and wears away the rocks, cannot sever this love of yours. It is of this that your services consist, and they are of such kind that I would think they would be eternal, if only I were to be eternal. The gratitude which I owe for such services I could not express if I had a thousand tongues instead of one. Rice  
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We can see several Elizabethan themes, here: she cites an excess of normal relations (love surpassing friends', parents', and lovers'). She also gestures toward eternal life and refusal of time, though here, she says that *she* is not immortal, in contrast to their love, humbling herself by admitting mortality in a rare moment. Though she humbles herself, she is only there, addressing them, because she is their queen. Further, Elizabeth secures these men's goodwill and loyalty by ascribing them extreme love for herself, which might seem to yield them power over her—except that she is telling them what they feel. Indeed, in the next moment, she ascribes the men “service” to herself, and then finally announces herself unequal to the repayment of it. In such a mode of affective engagement, the winner is she who loves and serves the other more... or sometimes, as in this case, she who asserts the abject failure of self *to* adequately serve, like Burghley's “power to acquit” Elizabeth's service “overcome.”

Lyly's *Euphues and his England*, as Berry glosses it, describes Elizabeth

as a virago who has disarmed her soldiers not in battle but by peace. The degree to which she has inverted a certain patriarchal order is indicated... by her

association with the images of sheath and Tower. In visual terms, these images have a phallic appearance; but their function in Lyly's passage is as receptacles—they serve as containers of the aggressivity normally deemed proper to a male monarch, imaged... by sword and armour. 113

This, I think, is a more nuanced description of Elizabeth's gender in relation to her position of power than Spenser's awkward (or aggressive) comment, "But virtuous women wisely understand/ That they were borne to base humilitie/ Unless the heavens they lift to lawfull soverainte" (V.v.224-226). Elizabeth is perhaps disarming by peace, like Griselda won the fight by refusing to fight with Walter, but for all that, Elizabeth has merely *inverted* patriarchal power. Elizabethan "bottoming from the top" was enabled by the combination of gendered disempowerment with the Queen's structural empowerment. Such an affective position is not uniquely historical to a female monarch in the early modern period; white womanhood is often a position of agency, even violence, that claims victimhood.

So perhaps Elizabethan *suffisaunce* is not *suffisaunce* after all. Dodging marriage in 1558, Elizabeth said, "that I may give you the best satisfaction I can, I have long since made choice of a husband, the kingdom of England.... I beseech you, gentlemen, charge me not with the want of children... every one of you, and every Englishman besides, are my children and relations" (Rice 117). The language of satisfaction I have linked to *suffisaunce* is important to this speech, which offers yet another instance of scrambled familial relations. Indeed, Elizabeth claims the subservient roles of wife and mother in one to give men of the nation satisfaction. But she refuses to marry, literally, *because she does not want to share her monarchal power*. Being a woman meant Elizabeth was vulnerable to male usurpations of her power—after all, poets were spending a lot of energy asserting that she had a deformity that made her not really a woman

after all, or was a tribadic snake-woman who'd stolen their male power in the first place. But when Elizabeth famously "boxed [Essex's] ears" during a council meeting, and he put his hand on his sword, it was totally and utterly forbidden (Strachey 172). Not because one couldn't get away with violence towards women—legally and in practice—as is still the case in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century's "woman question," where my examination of rhetorical and affective claims to femme bottomhood from positions of structural power resumes. Instead, it is Elizabeth's monarchal privilege that makes an enormous transgression of this slight gesture of physical retaliation. The bodies and identities inhabiting power structures matter as much as do the legal and material power structures governing our bodies and identities.

When Essex refused to humble himself before Elizabeth following the slap, friends urged him, "all you can do is too little to give satisfaction.... Let policy, duty, and religion enforce you to yield, and submit to your sovereign, between whom and you there can be no proportion of duty.... conquer yourself.... Her Majesty [will be] well satisfied" (Strachey 178-179). Using the language of submission, they say Elizabeth must be "satisfied," and even suggest, reversing the terms of *suffisaunce*, that Essex must double himself, or "conquer [him]self," just as Elizabeth "mistressed herself." Essex must "submit" because there is "no proportion" between them. Their structural positions have been reversed: "he, after all, was a man, with a man's power of insight and determination; he could lead if she would follow; but Fate had reversed the rôles, and the natural master was a servant" (Strachey 128). I contend that Elizabeth does not inhabit this reversed position of power either as a man, nor only incidentally as a woman, as scholars have mostly agreed. The historical effects of Elizabeth's gender performance can be felt in the imaginaries of English womanhood and lesbianism alike for centuries. I cite Strachey so heavily

not because he is a masterful historian, but to indicate Elizabeth's long grasp on the English cultural imaginary of race, gender, and queerness.

The Griseldean power-from-below I have been calling *suffisaunce*—doubling of self and imperviousness to suffering—does not describe Elizabeth's politically-gendered situation. When the “bottom” has structural power over the “top,” she is no longer bottoming. In the end, *suffisaunce* is not essentially gendered, as we will see again in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when men try to coopt “sympathy,” which, I argue, can itself be traced to early modern imaginations of lesbian relationality. First, though, I turn to Tennyson's citation of long English literary traditions including *amicitia*, erotic similitude, *The Faerie Queene*, and Elizabeth herself, where whiteness is still bound up with the lesbianism, and used anew to figure an aesthetic vision of the endogamous, virginal, self-enclosure Elizabeth performed as England herself.

## 2. *Queer for Art: Suffisaunce and Erotic Similitude in the Writing of Tennyson*

In the chapter that precedes this one, I suggested that we ought to understand Queen Elizabeth I through a concept I call *suffisaunce*: feminine self-sufficiency that may be erotic, but is always queer. In this chapter and the following ones, I examine 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary engagements with *suffisaunce* alongside competing representations of female queerness, recursive and emergent. Elizabeth's figurations of a singularly perpetual lineage enjoyed a fantastic afterlife. The virgin queen had laid claim to a genealogy of one through her own immortality with metaphors like that of the phoenix, the "conundrum" of which "gave a figural solution to the problem of political continuity and corporate perpetuity." The phoenix illuminates what I have called Elizabeth's *suffisaunce*, or her multiplicity as a single female subject: "plurality for the phoenix-monarch is a diachronic mirroring, a reiteration through time.... The monarch, in whom individual and species coincide, could only find parity with antecedents and successors—never in synchronic time" (Shannon 137-8).<sup>61</sup> The extraordinary queer temporality of Elizabeth's claims to perpetuity was twofold; she also rhetorically created possibilities of motherhood, in spite of the impossibility of such relations in terms of biological time. The reproductive capacity she imagined was reduplication without difference, rather than ordinary reproduction. In this chapter, I suggest that the temporal queerness of *suffisaunce* allowed Elizabeth's assertions of interminable historical presence some measure of truth. In the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Elizabethan *suffisaunce* remained relevant to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's queer poetic imaginary.

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<sup>61</sup> Laurie Shannon's own interest is in the Renaissance "*amicitia*" tradition of friendship and the personal sovereignty such friendship requires, from which the monarch is paradoxically barred by merit of sovereignty, and women are barred by their presumptive insufficiency.

The fascination Queen Elizabeth I held for the Victorians has often been noticed. Will Fisher argues that by no accident are “the ‘Renaissance’ and the ‘homosexual’... both nineteenth-century inventions,” because from its inception, the Renaissance was imagined as a highly queer time (41). The era of Elizabeth’s reign was invoked by 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers like John Ruskin, Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds and, at the turn of the century, Havelock Ellis, to castigate dissolute sexualities and to justify sexual freedom as coincident with artistic talent by turns (Fisher 41, 52). Contrasted with medieval restraint, “the Renaissance” was first imagined in Ruskin’s writing as a time of licentiousness that would eventually mirror the discourses of decadence and degeneration tied to homosexuality in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fisher 44). Fisher shows that Ruskin “compar[ed] the coming of the Renaissance to a debauched sexual act... personifying Venice as a woman” and evoking sodomy by referring to “‘Gomorrah’” and implicitly to Dante’s “seventh circle of hell (home to the sodomites)” (43). For writers like Symonds and Pater, the terms are the same—the falling away of (so imagined) medieval restraint and sexuality between men—but rendered in a positive light.<sup>62</sup> In their writing, “the historiographical production of a ‘queer Renaissance’ legitimated the newly emergent notion of the homosexual” by challenging theories like atavism and decadence: “[t]he unstated argument... was that if homosexuality flourished at one of the high points of western civilization, then it could not possibly be degenerate” (Fisher 42). These men were less “affirm[ing] their own

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<sup>62</sup> Fisher makes explicit the “queer implications” of the “‘*inverted*’” relationship between Pater’s and Ruskin’s writing on the Renaissance (47-48): “Pater describes how Winckelmann ‘rediscovered’ Greek art on a trip to Italy.... [and] describes how Winkelmann was ‘seduced’ by the sensuousness of these ancient art works” (50-51). John Addington Symonds, Havelock Ellis’ collaborator on *Sexual Inversion*, wrote a “fledgling essay on the subject” at Oxford in 1863 and later became “the first scholar in England to write a full-length history of the Renaissance. His seven-volume *The Renaissance in Italy* began to appear some twelve years after his initial student essay, and with the publication... Symonds became the foremost Renaissance historiographer in England. He is therefore often labeled ‘the English Burckhardt.’” Fisher shows that “a queer sexual politics underlies Symonds’ seemingly straightforward writing about the Renaissance.... Symonds was one of the first people in England to argue for the decriminalization of sodomy” (44).

identity by projecting it onto individuals from the Renaissance” than “trying to understand and formulate what it meant to be gay through their historical research and writing” (Fisher 57).

I want to argue that this recursive dialecticism between sexual propriety and profligacy also preemptively occurred in Tennyson’s own anticipation of the negative association between homosexuality and art for art’s sake that would come define the aestheticism—and the homosexuality—of artist figures like Oscar Wilde by the end of the century. As Jodie Medd notes, “Wilde’s aesthetic theories and practices became the substitutes for naming the unutterable sexual practices of which he was accused” (Medd *Scandal* 40).<sup>63</sup> If Pater and Symonds would eventually invoke aesthetic value to make of the Renaissance a homosexual apology, Tennyson had already invoked Renaissance categories of homosexuality to redeem poetry from a too-complete aesthetic self-sufficiency that would indeed come to characterize the turn-of-the-century discourses of decadent aestheticism bound up with homosexuality. In an ironic final turn, despite his look back at the Renaissance to ward off such a future for the homosexual artist figure, Tennyson himself appears in Ellis’ writing as an example of homosexuality’s typical coincidence with skillful aesthetic expression.

Like the conundrum of Elizabeth’s eternal but childless lineage, *suffisaunce* illuminates this dizzyingly circular temporal schema of projected sexualities and overlapping artistic values. Moreover, the “temporal slippages” in Pater’s late-19<sup>th</sup>-century writing on the early modern period “detach the period from its strictly temporal moorings,” as “he simultaneously stressed the

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<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, “Wilde’s art and desire were both constructed as expressly counterproductive within the bourgeois ideology that demands sexuality and labor productively benefit the state, supporting the health of the race and the wealth of the empire. Subsequently, the court and press repeatedly conflated aestheticism with national betrayal and displaced queer sexual anxieties onto aesthetic movements. He who perverts, plays with, and inverts language in ‘empty paradoxes,’ necessarily perverts, plays with, and inverts the status quo, precipitating paradoxes of social meaning and unnatural desire.... Referring to Wilde’s ‘cult’ of aestheticism as ‘the decadent theory of “Art for Immortality’s sake,”’ the *Westminster Gazette* grafts Wilde’s sexual transgression in an inextricable embrace of condemnatory meanings” (Medd *Scandal* 40).

connection between that period and his own” (Fisher 51-52).<sup>64</sup> It is in the temporally “incongruous” chapters of *The Renaissance* that Pater most strongly implies that anachronism itself is queer.<sup>65</sup> Like the Renaissance itself to queer Victorian admirers, converted “from a temporal period into a zeitgeist—or, in [Pater’s] words, a ‘spirit’—that could resurface at any historical moment” (Fisher 50), *suffisaunce* implies a “gat-toothed” historiography, to borrow a Chaucerism.

In this chapter, I show how the categories of queerness—Elizabethan *suffisaunce* and erotic similitude—Tennyson invokes to work through concerns of aesthetic selfhood are taken from the Renaissance. This may seem surprising, given that these are both categories of *female* queerness. We most often think of 19<sup>th</sup>-century male homosexuality as routed through the memory of Greek culture and upper-class young men’s classical education; the availability of an aestheticized homoeroticism through Hellenistic study to elite young men educated at Oxford and Cambridge, where Tennyson was educated, is a familiar narrative. Indeed, the tutelary relations reminiscent of pederasty and the intense male friendships occurring under the auspices of the classics had far-reaching cultural implications, the most significant of which was to sever the tether between male love and feminization.<sup>66</sup> But rather than to Greek history, Tennyson

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<sup>64</sup> Pater makes of the Renaissance a (queer) zeitgeist over a strictly historical period in part by imagining Winkelmann “‘finger[ing]’” Greek statues, the “‘supreme beauty’” of which “‘is male rather than female’ (123) ‘with no sense of shame or loss’ (143)” (Fisher 50-51).

<sup>65</sup> Fisher writes, “Pater mentions the friendship of Amis and Amile... alongside heterosexual couples.... discuss[ing] them alongside other famous lovers clearly implies a parallel. The second ‘anachronistic’ chapter... is even more overtly homoerotic” (50-51). The first anachronism is Pater’s “chapter on several individuals from twelfth- and thirteenth-century France at the beginning of his book. He sees this ‘medieval Renaissance’ as a harbinger of things to come” (Fisher 50). The chapter about Winkelmann, obviously, locates the Renaissance in the eighteenth century. For Ellis, too, the Renaissance becomes “more of a mentality... than a specific historical moment” (Fisher 55). Fisher notes, “Ellis did not simply use history and historical figures to support his theories; he was also involved in shaping the very history that he himself drew on. For example, he tried to promote a broader understanding of the Renaissance by editing the Mermaid series of books on ‘lesser’ early modern dramatists claiming that ‘although they may sometimes run counter to what is called modern taste, the free and splendid energy of Elizabethan art... will not suffer from the frankest representation’” (55).

<sup>66</sup> In *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, Linda Dowling writes “leading university reformers such as Benjamin Jowett were seeking to establish in Hellenism... a ground of transcendent valid alternative to Christian



turned to the Renaissance—preceding even Ruskin’s queering of that period—because politically and poetically, he preferred the *feminine* version of homoeroticism available in the early modern period to the masculine ones from antiquity upon which his Oxbridge contemporaries and successors drew.

Why did Tennyson draw upon a feminine paradigm to bring together aesthetic and erotic discourses in the very moment when male homosexuality could finally be imagined without effeminacy?<sup>67</sup> I will suggest that this gesture reflects two contradictory impulses. On the one hand, Tennyson dreamt of artistic self-sufficiency and separation from the public world, a fantasy served by Elizabethan *suffisaunce* as the splitting of a female creator creative figure into multiple selves in erotic relation. On the other hand, such transcendent aesthetic self-sufficiency seems to Tennyson idolatrous, and a betrayal of the masculine, public-facing world of the social. In his 1832 “The Lady of Shalott,” Tennyson imagines a feminized, self-absorbed, queer artist figure—precisely in order to eliminate such a figure.<sup>68</sup> This gesture in “The Lady of Shalott”

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theology.... once they had done so, Pater and Wilde and the Uranian poets could not be denied the means of developing out of this same Hellenism a homosexual counterdiscourse able to justify male love.... The Plato of Jowett and the Oxford reformers... was in most important respects the Plato of George Grote’s *History of Greece* and J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty*, the philosopher of a healthy and productive skepticism and fearless determination, in the phrase from *On Liberty* that was to prove so massively influential on two generations of Oxford men, ‘to follow one’s intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead.’ Yet this same Plato could then at the same moment and by an identical logic be taken as the tutelary spirit of a movement never foreseen” (xiii-xiv).

<sup>67</sup> Kathy Psomiades argues “British aestheticism, from its beginnings in isolated poems of Tennyson... organizes itself around a series of beautiful feminine visual objects whose femininity constitutes their meaning” (31).

<sup>68</sup> Psomiades “propose[s]... an account of British aestheticism that locates the foundations of Aestheticist ideology itself in the logic of... iconic images of femininity” (31). She, too, claims that “[i]mages of beautiful women... do not merely *figure* the poet’s introspection, or his separation from the public sphere, or the self-contemplative nature of art. Rather, the ability to represent these aspects of Aestheticism through images of femininity is what makes it possible for Aestheticist artists to think them and perform them at all. As the basis of an entire ideology of art that rests on the possibility of simultaneously knowing and not knowing that art serves no function and yet is bought and sold, holds a place for privacy and yet is implicated in public activity, feminine icons like the Lady of Shalott are both the content of Aestheticist art and its necessary support” (33). Womanhood facilitates “the simultaneity of ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ that art is for sale... necessary not only for the artist to continue producing, but for his products to continue to be consumed. If the ‘use’ of art lies in its ability to point to a world outside of the praxis of daily life, then what its consumers buy, its material presence, cannot for them be all there is, or in the very act of purchasing they would destroy what they came to buy. But if the idea of autonomy is to be sold, it must enter the marketplace as a material presence. Femininity, in its own doubleness and duplicity, figures art as double-natured, autonomous soul and beauty for sale, and thus allows Aestheticism to claim autonomy in the midst of

prefigures the competition later staged in *In Memoriam* between introverted feminine stasis and public-facing masculinity. There, the former is again rejected to make way for the poetic persona Tennyson chooses, despite his ambivalence: a poet who, if homosexual, is worldly and productive because male.

*"I am Not Thine, But Thee:"*<sup>69</sup> *The Literature of Erotic Similitude*

A story of a woman in a tower who weaves the world from the view in her magic mirror until Lancelot walks by her window and she abruptly stops weaving and dies, "The Lady of Shalott" is about a female artist figure's relations to herself and to her art, which are largely collapsed in the poem. But the obverse of this collapse is proliferation, and though there is only one woman in the tower, she is doubled by a magic mirror: "Before her hangs a mirror clear,/ Reflecting tower'd Camelot" (II.14). The phrase "Before her hangs a mirror" initially invites the reader to expect that it should reflect her, while instead it triangulates the Lady's gaze with the window, reflecting Camelot and its people as they pass. A woman looking into a mirror is a familiar emblem of female narcissism; I want to suggest it is through the mediation of her reflection that the world appears to the Lady. What might seem initially like optical indirection affords a metaphorical truth. The apparent worldliness of the mirror's sights belies the way in which it is not the Lady, but the world that disappears in her mirror. The hyperbaton in the line "Before her hangs a mirror" further prioritizes "her" by beginning with a prepositional phrase rather than the subject of the verb, raising the question of the order in which she sees things in the mirror. The

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commodification. In British Aestheticism... femininity is what permits the translation of economic into symbolic capital" (48).

<sup>69</sup> This line is from Katherine Philips' *To My Excellent Lucasia, on Our Friendship* (4).

repetition of her (non)name—"The Lady of Shalott"—which alone composes the final line of many stanzas, confirms that everything begins and ends with herself.

The all-encompassing importance of this woman alone (with herself) sounds initially much like *suffisaunce*; indeed, the mirror itself is an allusion to Elizabeth I and the *Faerie Queene*, where Britomart, Spenser's avatar for the queen, peers into a magic mirror that shows not her reflection, but the world and, ostensibly, the knight she will marry (who is actually herself). The trick of the Spenserian mirror is that Britomart's intended knight-in-the-glass is Britomart herself, the knight she wants to have and to be. Donning a knight's apparel and setting out to find him, Britomart actually fulfills the promise of the "mirror's magic sights" *herself*, becoming, in some sense, her own knight (II.29). This Spenserian intertextuality suggests that The Lady of Shalott likewise sees only herself, even when a love object appears in the mirror. Tennyson alludes directly to Queen Elizabeth, the Faerie Queene herself, when the reaper calls the Lady "the fairy" (I.26). She is "Full royally apparelled" in "A cloudwhite crown of pearl," (I.35, IV.10) the signature Elizabethan adornment.

In "The Lady of Shalott," I want to suggest, female self-sameness is (still) bound up with the Elizabethan imaginary. Tennyson invokes Elizabeth and *The Faerie Queene* in this poem not only to hearken to a fantasy of old England, but also to marshal the fantasy of *suffisaunce* for his poet's dream of isolation and separation from the workaday world. The poem is affectively ambivalent; the Lady weaver's privileged place high above the rest of the world is idealized and attractive, the Lady herself and her aesthetic solitude compelling. But Tennyson renders this towered immurement impossible to maintain, and the poem punishes the Lady with a meaningless death. He does so by degrading *suffisaunce* into *insufficiency*: the largely poetic early modern trope of female sexuality Valerie Traub calls "erotic similitude." Where

*suffisaunce* is transcendentally satisfying, erotic similitude is morbidly sterile. Though Tennyson revels in the fantasy of artistic closure afforded by female self-same sexuality, he ultimately rejects such a poetic vision of the artist, making the Lady and her mirror a meaningless void of self-reflexivity.

Erotic similitude is a narrower historical category than is *suffisaunce*, one that offers “the female body as a mirror, with homoerotic desire fundamentally a captivating play of reflective surfaces.... In loving the other, the lover loves herself; in touching herself, the lover touches the other” (Traub 338-339). Paradoxically, *suffisaunce* is diminished by its representation in the more explicitly erotic mode of similitude. Both *suffisaunce* and erotic similitude evoke female self-sameness, but with the crucial difference that erotic similitude is entirely knowable and ultimately understood as unproductive and meaningless. Erotic similitude poses the female self as unsatisfying in comparison to heterosexual difference. In more or less chronological order, some prominent examples: Edmund Spenser’s late 16<sup>th</sup>-century *The Faerie Queene* invites Elizabeth I to see herself reflected in “mirrours more than one,” while his chaste reflection of Elizabeth I, Britomart, experiences affection and attraction to other women as unconsummable identification (III.pr.5., III.i.54).<sup>70</sup> Lady Mary Wroth’s early 17<sup>th</sup> century *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* creates female characters and communities by a “‘sad Eccho’ for [Urania] herself, one which provides ‘like friend of mine owne choice’, a ‘doubly resound[ing]’ ‘monefull voice’” (Donahue 32).<sup>71</sup> At the midpoint of the century, Edmund Waller’s poetry presents

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<sup>70</sup> Arthur Hallam quotes *The Faerie Queene* in a letter to Tennyson; of a mutual friend, he writes that the outlook is “‘Like as a gloomy cloud, the which doth bear/ A hideous storm, is by the Northern blast/ Quite overblown, yet doth not pass so clear/ But that it all the sky doth overcast/ With darkness dread & threatens all the world to waste’” (Kolb 562). Jack Kolb refers these lines to Spenser’s book IV, 1.45 lines 5-9 (564). Tennyson also sometimes read Spenser aloud to his mother (Hallam Tennyson 77).

<sup>71</sup> See Susan Donahue’s “‘My Desires... Lie... Wrapt up Now in Folds of Losse’: Lady Mary Wroth’s Baroque Visions of Female Community in the Enchantment Episodes of *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* (1621)” for a discussion of how “The ‘Enchantment of the Theatre’... offers a ‘mise-en-abyme in representation [of an inner scene of personal history and the outer world of events]’.... Via the episode of the ‘Enchantment of the Theatre’ and the

women “so ‘choicely matcht’” who “mirror one another in their beauty” (Traub “Friendship” 23).<sup>72</sup> Katherine Philips’ oeuvre heavily features the fusion of the woman speaker with the female beloved she addresses, as in “*L’Amitié: To Mrs. Mary Aubrey:*”<sup>73</sup>

How happy are we now, whose Souls are grown,  
By an incomparable mixture, one:  
Whose well-acquainted Minds are now so near  
As Love, or Vows, or Friendship can endear?  
I have no thought, but what’s to thee reveal’d,  
Nor thou desire that is from me conceal’d.  
Thy Heart locks up my Secrets richly set,  
And my Breast is thy private Cabinet,  
Thou shed’st no tear but what my moisture lent,  
And if I sigh, it is thy breath is spent.  
United thus, what Horrour can appear...? 3-14

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many stories and poems it inspires and draws into its processes, Wroth’s distinctive practice of inserting a ‘mirror’, or what Luce Irigaray might call a ‘speculum’, into her text at precisely these points where the female subject is about to emerge can be observed most entirely.” As the “central enchantment episode, the ‘Enchantment of the Theatre’ reveals Wroth’s text to be one which is thoroughly captured by abysmal representations.” Further, “all of *Urania*’s female characters, each mirror[s] an aspect, or aspects, of one, all, or any of the others, yet each [is] furnished with her own infinite singularity” (I.1-2, Donahue 32-45).

<sup>72</sup> Volume III of Tennyson’s letters show he was a reader of Waller’s poetry. He wrote to Edmund William Gosse, “I could scarcely have said that ‘graces eyed’ was Waller’s original reading.... ‘Grace espied’ is very happy” (327). Lang and Shannon note that “[i]n *From Shakespeare to Pope* (p. 71) Gosse had appended the following footnote to Waller song, ‘Go, Lovely Rose’, 1.7—‘And shuns to have her graces spy’d’: ‘The syllables ‘graces spy’d’ drag painfully on the tongue, and I remember to have heard the greatest living authority on melodious numbers suggest that Waller must have written ‘graces eyed.’ The first edition of 1645, however, has, by obvious misprint, ‘grace spy’d,’ and I believe that what Waller wrote was ‘grace espy’d’” (327).

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Wahl suggests we ought not think of Philips “in relation to a discourse of female homosexuality that became prevalent *after* she had created her own poetic representations of female intimacy” but rather in “relation to those discursive models of female-female desire already available in English culture. In contrast to the dynamics of the marketplace that increasingly governed literary production after the Restoration, Philips wrote in a milieu that remained far closer to Renaissance culture in both its sensibilities and its practices.... Such a milieu could have recognized the transgressive figure of the female transvestite, hermaphrodite, and sodomite, but was far more likely to have encountered a less threatening [because “feminine”] form of female-female desire in Renaissance romance narratives” (144, 140).

John Donne's "Sappho to Philaenis" regrets that while "My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two" only "as thine from one another do," and that "Likeness begets such strange self-flattery,/ That touching myself all seems done to thee," kissing herself in the mirror only results in "tears" that "dim" Sappho's "eyes and glass" (45-56). Margaret Cavendish's work is full of "narcissistic females who reflect the glory of each other"<sup>74</sup>: the female lovers of *The Blazing World* are both figures of the Duchess of Newcastle, Cavendish herself (D'Monté 93).<sup>75</sup> Eve of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* initially prefers the beauty of her own reflection to Adam, and has to be called away from it to him (IV.449-471).<sup>76</sup>

In the literature of erotic similitude, female homoeroticism is based in "homogeneity, and mimetic identification." Under this regime, desire *between* women is often thematized by the symmetry of a single female body, with its two eyes, lips, hands, and so on. The similarity of shared womanhood is imagined to overcome any dissimilarities like age, rank, visual aspect, or native tongue. Finally, "the distance between 'I' and 'thee' is transited so easily that difference is erased: [as in Katherine Philips' phrase,] 'I am not thine, but Thee.'" While some writers (often women) used tropes of erotic similitude to register practical and ideological impossibility of women's partnership, imagining utopias of women's "erotic innocence, purity, gentleness, and pleasure... in explicit opposition to the difference, friction, and reproductive after-effects of

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<sup>74</sup> See Rebecca D'Monté's "Mirroring Female Power: Separatist Spaces in the Plays of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle" on how "conventional seventeenth-century motifs, such as the masque, the pastoral and the mirror, are turned into images of narcissistic pleasure and erotic desire" in "separatist spaces to empower women" (104-105).

<sup>75</sup> D'Monté notes "the two women act like lovers. On meeting the Duchess, the Empress 'embraced and saluted her with a spiritual kiss', they become 'platonic lovers, although they were both females', and the Duchess becomes the Empress's 'favorite', a word that had homosexual implications" (183, D'Monté 102).

<sup>76</sup> As a youth in 1821, Tennyson showed off his knowledge of Milton to his aunt in a letter (Lang and Shannon v. I 3). Arthur Hallam sometimes referred to Milton in letters to Tennyson (Kolb 413, 662). After the stillbirth of his son, Tennyson took to Italy with him Shakespeare and Milton, according to Hallam Tennyson's memoir (341), and often read Milton in the evenings (391). The third volume of Tennyson's letters records that Tennyson quoted Milton during illness (Lang and Shannon 392).

heteroeroticism,” such depictions of love between women tend towards meaninglessness (Traub 338-339). Male poets like Donne, Marvell, and Milton employ modes like tautology, prelapsarianism, and elegy to represent female homoeroticism as love out of time (Holstun 841, 857, 846-847). Rather than “bodily orifices and interiors,” this sexuality is one of “surface pleasures [...] compound[ing] the image of the female body as a mirror.”<sup>77</sup> Ultimately, “the combination of similitude and unity renders female-female desire solipsistic and self-absorbed” (Traub 338-339). The qualities that make erotic similitude a romantic ideal have also served, historically, to evacuate it of meaning.

Tennyson’s letters and biographies make it clear that he was a reader of Spenser, Milton, and Waller. But his main Renaissance influence was undoubtedly Shakespeare.<sup>78</sup> While the male homoeroticism of the sonnets is likely the first form of Shakespearean queer desire that comes to mind—and Tennyson’s favorite sonnets were those of Shakespeare and of Milton—Shakespeare’s plays rehearse erotic similitude between female characters (Lang and Shannon v. III 415).<sup>79</sup> The two major plays that invoke this theme are *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, authored with John Fletcher, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.<sup>80</sup> In addition to the sonnets, “Tennyson was thoroughly versed in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama; as an undergraduate he joined

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<sup>77</sup> Women’s romantic friendships were not a threat to heterosexual marriage in the 17th and 18th centuries because “anything two women might do together was *faute de mieux* or insignificant [...] without penetration with a penis nothing ‘sexual’ could take place” (Faderman *Surpassing* 4).

<sup>78</sup> As Linda Peterson notes, Tennyson’s 1830 *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* and 1832 *Poems* contain “more than a dozen lyrics now designated ‘lady poems’—taking his titles from the heroines of Shakespeare and Spenser” (“Ladies” 25-26); “Mariana”’s epigraph comes from *Measure for Measure*. Arthur Hallam refers to this influence on Tennyson in a letter to the poet’s sister: “From the single image of you, standing there among the flowers, and listening to the ‘clear carol’ and the ‘solemn cawing,’ the whole scene has shaped itself out, with a wonderful propriety and grace, just as Alfred’s Mariana grew up, by assimilative force, out of the plaintive hint left two centuries ago by Shakespeare for the few who might have ears to hear, and a heart to meditate” (Kolb 433). Hallam Tennyson records that his father “would dramatically give parts of Shakespeare” (184).

<sup>79</sup> Lang and Shannon include William Angus Knight’s “A Reminiscence of Tennyson,” originally published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1897: “We talked much of the Sonnet. He thought the best in the language were Milton’s, Shakespeare’s, and Wordsworth’s” (415). To contemporaries like Benjamin Jowett, Tennyson’s affinity for Shakespeare’s sonnets was legible as disconcertingly homosexual in a male vein (Nunokawa 432).

<sup>80</sup> These two plays are themselves echoes of one other; both treat of Theseus and Hippolyta.

enthusiastically in the Apostles' performances of Shakespeare's plays" (Peterson "Ladies" 27). As Linda Peterson points out, Tennyson's "rhyming pair ('Adeline' is 'Madeline' minus a letter)" from his early poems "work by contrast: the dark and the light, 'black brows' (Madeline,' II.34, 46) and 'flaxen hair' ('Adeline,' I.6)" (32); this pairing rhymes with *Midsummer's* Helena and Hermia's consonant names and opposite appearances. The vast divergence in their looks, where Hermia is dark and short of stature and Helena fair and tall, is superseded by the unity their shared gender affords, as established in Helena's amatory lament for their bygone closeness:

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,  
Have with our needles created both one flower,  
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,  
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,  
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,  
Had been incorporate. So we grow together,  
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,  
But yet an union in partition;  
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;  
So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart;  
Two of the first, like coats in heraldry,  
Due but to one and crowned with one crest.  
And will you rent our ancient love asunder...? III.ii.203-216



Tennyson knew the play well; Hallam Tennyson records that on his brother Lionel's birthday, they "acted a little Play or Charade: the first scene, to represent the word 'lion,' was the interlude of Pyramus and Thisbe from *Midsummer Nights Dream*" (512).

Even more striking is the poet's regard for *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Tennyson wrote to Frederick James Furnivall on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1874: "Fletcher . . . I was acquainted with early... I rejoice that men have come round to my views of... the Two Noble Kinsmen—views which have been mine verily I think for upwards of 40 years" (Lang and Shannon v. 3 76-77). Here, too, eroticism between women is presented as a bygone anachronism, and one would be hard pressed to find a stronger example of erotic similitude. Emilia, sister of the Amazon queen Hippolyta, reminisces of her friend Flavina,

The flower that I would pluck  
And put between my breasts—O, then but beginning  
To swell about the blossom—She would long  
Till she had such another, and commit it  
To the like innocent cradle, where phoenix-like  
They died in perfume; on my head no toy  
But was her pattern; her affections—pretty,  
Though happily her careless wear—I followed  
For my most serious decking I.iii.66-74

Laurie Shannon explains that Emilia "provides a fully developed articulation of an Amazonian position, situating herself exclusively among women affectively and socially. She not only connects chastity with a preference for female society; her idea of her reputation and her identity is drawn from and maintained within the company of women" (114-115). In this speech,

Emilia's "narrative does not suggest that likeness was the *source* of the friendship. Instead, sameness seems to have been... its *goal*" (Shannon 115-116). Following this discourse, Hippolyta remarks that her sister is "'out of breath'"—suggesting that recounting her old friendship has sexually excited her—and finally, as Shannon notes, that she "'shal never... love any that's called man'" (I.iii.83-85, 116). Nonetheless, "This rehearsal [...] has this end,/ That the true love 'tween maid and maid may be/ More than in sex dividual" (I.iii.78-82).<sup>81</sup> Emilia's love was only a "rehearsal"—one with which Tennyson was familiar.

In "The Lady of Shalott," Tennyson echoes Renaissance poets by troping the Lady's desire as a mirror, rendering it both beautiful and ultimately meaningless. He portrays the Lady's erotic economy as populated entirely by mirror images of herself, even refiguring Lancelot as a feminized love-object, another reflection of the Lady, despite the fact that the Arthurian Lancelot whom Tennyson in part rewrites is one of the most famously heterosexual figures in the English literary tradition.<sup>82</sup> On the face of it, reading a poem mostly featuring a woman alone with an interlude in which she desires a male love object as a rumination on lesbian relationality would seem patently counterintuitive. But Tennyson strategically revives historical forms of queerness *to* reduce lesbianism to mere narcissistic solipsism. Reading "The Lady of Shalott" in this way lends coherence to the poem's deep affective ambivalence, makes sense of the poem's contradictory investments. The Lady weaver's privileged place high above

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<sup>81</sup> In the present of the play, Emilia and her "Woman" repeat flower-based erotic similitude in their dressing chamber (Shannon 118-120); see pages 95-122 for Shannon's entire reading of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

<sup>82</sup> The Arthurian narrative from which "The Lady of Shalott" is culled is the section of Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* concerned with the "Lady of Astolat." In Malory's version, Lancelot stays with a baron and borrows his son's shield: "this old baron had a daughter that was called that time the Fair Maiden of Astolat, and ever she beheld Sir Lancelot wonderfully. (And as the book saith, she cast such a love unto Lancelot that she could never withdraw her love, wherefore she died. And her name was Elaine le Blanke)" (131). The "blankness" of Elaine's name carries through to Tennyson's version, as does her Elizabethan adornment in pearls. Lancelot wears her favor, "'a red sleeve... of scarlet, well embroidered with great pearls'" to disguise himself, though he has never worn any woman's before (Malory 132).

the rest of the world is idealized and attractive, the Lady herself captivating. But this towered immurement is impossible to maintain, and the poem punishes the Lady with a meaningless death that asserts the sterility of aesthetic self-sufficiency. Invoking this specific sexual arrangement to explore artistic autonomy allows Tennyson to displace the negative charge of homosexuality as aesthetic solipsism onto women rather than men. Tennyson uses a cross-gender homosexual identification to do the work of imagining a desire about which he is ambivalent in multiple registers.

*The Ladies of Shalott in the Magic Mirror*

The artist's cloistered space—including the suggestion of celibacy implied by the term—is initially presented in positive terms. Though “She hath no loyal knight and true.... in her web she still delights/ To weave the mirror's magic sights,/ For often thro' the silent nights/ A funeral, with plumes and lights/ And music, came from Camelot” (II.26-32). Her pleasures are all aesthetic; she “delights” in her own artistic production and enjoys funereal music. While we could imagine that music mourning a death should prompt another kind of affect, it is transformed by her aesthetic cloister into joy. She is carefree in this protected world, where art fulfills the place held by divinity in a more traditional cloister. Beyond her art, she has “no other care.” In these lines, Tennyson poses a causal logic with the preposition “for:” the passing of the funeral is the reason for the Lady's “delight” in her separation. The Lady is frozen in time; here, her stasis is a felicitous refusal of death and decay. This quality of innocent stasis links the Lady to the prelapsarianism of lesbian love in early modern discourse, as in “Upon Appleton House,”

where sex between women is without sin and its wages—death.<sup>83</sup> Early modern logic assumed that between women, sex never really *happens*, and so erotic similitude cannot be sinful. This is obviously an ambiguous blessing. Tennyson explicitly juxtaposes death, the “consummation devoutly to be wished” with sexual consummation, and places them both in the world of passing time outside the Lady’s tower.

In this depiction of an unfallen state outside death and sexuality—which, by the lights of the Renaissance, means no real sexuality at all—we can start to see the ambivalence of the Lady’s privileged artist position. With her double mediation (she sees the world through her own reflection in the mirror, and then creates art from this vision), the Lady creates in her own image by weaving what she sees in the mirror. But rather than making much of the unsurpassed self-sufficiency, the *suffisaunce* suggested by such a godlike position, Tennyson turns instead to the historical implication that erotic similitude’s doubling of women results in an erotic arrangement that is unreal, unsatisfying, and impossibly out of time, refiguring *suffisaunce* as erotic similitude. The way in which Tennyson’s poem hearkens back to an earlier England may be part of a larger return among his contemporaries to interest in Anglo-Saxon diction and English nostalgia, but it also recalls the way that early modern writers would *themselves* post-date relations between women to the distant past.<sup>84</sup> Tennyson’s use of Arthurian and Spenserian

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<sup>83</sup> Holstun explains the unfallen sexuality of Marvell’s nuns seducing the novice Thwaites, who “must have a ‘fresh and virgin bride’ every night, but [...] somehow remain[s] chaste, like the fruit which is continually plucked but continually preserved” (848).

<sup>84</sup> In 1882, Tennyson wrote a note on influence in response to Samuel Edward Dawson’s comments on *The Princess*. The poet wrote “I do not object to your finding parallelisms. They must always occur. A man (a Chinese scholar) some time ago wrote to me saying that in an unknown, untranslated Chinese poem there were two whole lines of mine, almost word for word. Why not? are all human eyes all over the world looking at the same objects, and must there not consequently be coincidences of thought and impressions and expressions. It is scarcely possible for anyone to say or write anything in this late time of the world to which, in the rest of the literature of the world, a parallel could not somewhere be found.... I could multiply instances, but I will not bore you, and far indeed am I from asserting that books, as well as nature, are not, and ought not to be, suggestive to the poet. I am sure that I myself, and many others, find a peculiar charm in those passages of such great masters as Virgil or Milton where they adopt the creation of a bye-gone poet, and re-clothe it, more or less, according to their own fancy. But there is, I fear, a prosaic set growing up among us, editors of booklets, book-worms, index-hunters, or men of great memories

elements echoes Marvell's remembrance of Catholic England and Donne's Sapphic antiquity to represent erotic similitude as late or never arriving. While James Holstun explains this 17<sup>th</sup>-century English poetic tradition representing love between women as available only in history, he fails to note the rhetorical intentionality of such representations, taking at face value "how hard it is for early modern writers to describe lesbian sex" (848). By contrast, Annamarie Jagose argues, "the mechanisms of sexual hierarchisation produce the lesbian as the figure most comprehensively worked over by sequence, secondary and inconsequential in all senses." She explains "the retrospective narration of relations between present and past that presents the lesbian as anachronistic and belated" (ix, xi). Tennyson's presentation of the Lady's stasis in an anachronistic tone participates in this rhetorical tradition.

Tennyson further uses temporality to underscore the logic of sameness by which the Lady's immured space is ruled. While her weaving evokes that of the Fates, signaling that time is important in the poem, the Lady's production of a tapestry suggests her stasis rather than the passing of time. Stasis in time means sameness across time, whereas movement means change, and difference across time. Hers is a "silent" island in the midst of a "stream that runneth ever;" the lady is an isolated, still heart at the center of perpetual movement (I.17, I.12). The poem's nouns are often delayed; the Lady of Shalott herself seems especially late in coming in the early stanzas. Enjambments where noun and verb are split across lines, like "the squally east-wind keenly/ Blew" (IV.15-16) cultivate anticipation, even anxiety, a mood of baited breath threatening to tip into frustration. Tennyson gives us a formal version of lesbian non-

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and no imagination, who *impute themselves* to the poet, and so believe that *he*, too, has no imagination, but is for ever poking his nose between the pages of some old volume in order to see what he can appropriate. They will not allow one to say, 'Ring the bells' without finding that we have taken it from Sir P. Sydney — or even to use such a simple expression as the ocean 'roars' without finding out the precise verse in Homer or Horace from which we have plagiarised it. (fact!)" (Lang and Shannon v. III 239-240).

consummation: as the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Seigneur de Brantôme wrote, explaining that sex between women is not cuckolding, ““there is a great difference between actually pouring water into a pot and merely moistening it all around and about”” (Holstun 845).

Feminine rhymes (“chilly,” “quiver”) (I.8-11) make up teasing lines that show female self-sameness as lack of fulfillment. These poetic effects resonate with the Renaissance definition of lesbianism as too late coming to be a historically viable arrangement *or* to produce sexual satisfaction, and speaks to theoretical accounts of lesbianism as arrested development. “The Lady of Shalott” offers historicizing force to bridge these, and, insofar as her erotic similitude approaches extremely to masturbation, sheds necessary light on why lesbian sexuality is *still* sometimes represented as something akin to autoeroticism. Like masturbation, lesbian sexuality is “inconsequential” in the sense of “insignificant,” as well as “temporally inappropriate;” these meanings converge in the way both sexualities have been historically understood as underdeveloped.

Outside the Lady’s cloistered space of stasis, the people who pass by her are defined by their gender difference: “She sees the surly village churls,/ And the red cloaks of market girls/ Pass onward from Shalott” (II.16-18). Like the river all around her island, these boys and girls are active in movement. This world is characterized by relations of difference and change, things *happening*. Isolated and apart from them, the Lady experiences “little joy or fear” (II.10). She is safe from the vicissitudes of real life, but also barred from feeling in the outside world, where a wedding is a consummation: seeing “two young lovers lately wed,” the Lady speaks, ““I am half sick of shadows”” (I.ii.34-35). Hers is the unmeaning world of the mirror, while out her window are girls’ and boys’ *true* experiences and erotic connections. The Lady’s exclamation makes clear that the other world is preferable; she is “sick of shadows” ...but only by half. Self-division

is synecdochical for the Lady throughout the poem; speaking aloud alone, she necessarily addresses only herself. Such multiplication of the self ought to signal *suffisaunce*, but instead of regarding herself as her own lover, the Lady's (self-)relations are only meaningless shades.

Lancelot arrives in the poem under the regime of difference outside. Introduced in the first lines of Part III, his coming marks a transition: "A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,/ He rode between the barley-sheaves (I.iii.1-2). The measure of Lancelot's distance from the Lady's still tower—a "bow-shot"—calls up a hunting or warlike phallic projectile, suggesting Lancelot's masculinity. He also conveys heat; his "helmet" and "helmet-feather/ Burn'd like one burning flame together" (I.iii.21-22). It seems he will interrupt the Lady's still frigidity. Like the bearded barley outside (where, by the poem's logic, real life and erotic connection are located), Lancelot, travels "As [...] Some bearded meteor" (I.iii.24-26). This simile of a comet's trail repeats and intensifies the earlier connotation of the outside natural world's hirsute male aspect. Lancelot is part of this world; his masculine heterosexuality ought to interrupt the Lady's unmeaning self-relation and bring her to the world of change and difference.

But the Lady fails to join Lancelot. She cannot emerge from the narcissistic and masturbatory world of the mirror that Tennyson, Renaissance poets—and psychoanalytic theory, for that matter—would have us imagine is developmentally prior to heterosexuality. Under the Lady's gaze in the mirror, Lancelot's masculinity does not endure: "He flash'd into the crystal mirror" (I.iii.34). Between his projectile-like entrance into the poem and his appearance in her mirror, Lancelot is feminized by his affinity with art and blazoned description. Tennyson's use of "for ever" in the *Faerie Queene* reference "A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd/ To a lady in his shield" aligns Lancelot with the Lady's frozen quality (I.iii.6-7). Its resonance with Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" codes Lancelot's war wares as yet another aesthetic object. As decorative art,

too, the shield recalls the tapestry the Lady weaves from the mirror: that mirror mediates Lancelot into a feminized aesthetic object, a further reflection of herself.

Two stanzas describe Lancelot's ornamentation and body in pieces. His "flow[ing] [...] curls" themselves augment the feminization of the medieval blazon tradition, typically reserved for women (I.iii.30-31). Even the phallic suggestion of his "mighty silver bugle hung" is complicated by the decorative quality of its "blazon'd baldric" (I.iii.15-16). This knight is glittering, musical, aestheticized: "The gemmy bridle glitter'd free [...] / The bridle bells rang merrily" (I.iii.10-13). The rhyme scheme lends itself to the jingle-jangle quality of Lancelot's description, echoed in his song, "'Tirra lirra, tirra lirra'" (I.iii.35).<sup>85</sup> His ringing armor shines as though it were itself a mirror; the Lady is taken with him because he is another mirror of herself. Her look at him in his mirror-like armor through her mirror suggests the *mise-en-abyme* structure of her desire, the appropriateness of which to the scene is augmented by the *mise-en-abyme*'s own heraldic origins, where images of knights' shields within shields repeat ad infinitum. (The *mise-en-abyme* is emblematic of erotic similitude in texts like Lady Mary Wroth's 1621 *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*.) Lancelot, who ought to be the Lady's hero of (hetero) difference, reflects her own femininity back at her, in, and more importantly *as* her mirror, continuing the Lady's self-reflexivity as (self-)love object.<sup>86</sup>

Tennyson's Spenserian intertextuality—the "red-cross knight" of Lancelot's shield, and the knight-in-the-mirror himself—confirms that Tennyson's Lancelot is the Lady's own

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<sup>85</sup> My reading diverges from Psomiades', who only concedes "although the singer of an inane song ('Tirra Lirra'), [Lancelot] is a representative of a masculine world of action and result" (34).

<sup>86</sup> In Malory's *Lady of Astolat*, Elaine transgresses gender roles by asking Lancelot to marry her: "'Sir, I would have you to my husband,' said Elaine. 'Fair damsel, I thank you heartily,' said Sir Lancelot, 'but truly,' said he, 'I cast me never to be wedded man.' 'Then, fair knight,' said she, 'will ye be my paramour?'" (150). Lancelot provokes devotion in men that is explicitly compared to that which he provokes in Elaine. Her brother says to their father, "'I dare make good she is a clean maiden as for my lord Sir Lancelot; but she doth as I do, for sithen I saw first my lord Sir Lancelot I could never depart from him, nother nought I will, an I may follow him'" (Malory 151).



reflection, just as Britomart's knight was actually Britomart herself. Absorbing Lancelot into her solipsism, making him another of the magic mirror's reflections, Tennyson subverts the utopian potential of *suffisaunce*, where the difference between lovers is undone such that Lancelot becomes not the Lady's lover, but the Lady. Instead, the poet takes up the dissatisfaction in erotic similitude's superficial sexuality, where "[t]he appeal of exploring bodily orifices and interiors gives way to surface pleasures [...] compound[ing] the image of the female body as a mirror, with homoerotic desire fundamentally a captivating play of reflective surfaces," or a *mise-en-ebyme* (Traub 338-339).

Reckoning with historical imaginaries of desire by attention to Tennyson's *own* reckonings with them generates a genealogical understanding of female sexuality. The paradox of erotic similitude is that we need not understand Lancelot as a second woman in the poem for a historically lesbian reading; indeed, he is as much aestheticized as he is feminized. While to our ears the Lady's self-reflexivity and the way in which the poem as a whole seems governed by female solipsism might sound more masturbatory than lesbian, this is itself a historical effect of erotic similitude. The Renaissance imaginary contrived to render female homoeroticism as mere masturbation. Autoeroticism and erotic similitude were linked by their (non)productivity; "[t]he productivity of lesbian love is limited to the production of love itself or to its aesthetic memorialization" (Traub 338-339). Indeed, nothing is produced by feminine desire in Tennyson's poem *except* aesthetic objects: the Lady's tapestry, Lancelot's blazoned aspect, the Lady's cryptic note, and the poem itself.

Even more than unsatisfactory, the similitude between Lancelot and the Lady is represented as calamitously impossible. Her distracted attention breaks her mirror, but Lancelot is not a viable alternative to her artist's world. She can neither move intact into the world of

heterosexuality, nor keep as she is: the tapestry falls out the window and her mirror cracks (I.iii.42-43). Looking directly at Camelot for the first time should mark the end of her relation to the world as mediated by her self-absorption. Instead, it prompts her death sequence. Though we are not invited to think about the Lady's guilt, her curse causes this. Implying the Lady's absorption in her mirror reflection (that from which she weaves), initially it is not clear whether her curse is always to weave, or if her weaving stays the curse. We are first told, "She knows not what the curse may be;/ Therefore she weaveth steadily,/ Therefore no other care hath she" (I.ii.6-8). Two "therefore's" offer a tautology, operating like a mirror in which the original is not clear; this is paradigmatic of the Lady herself. That the Lady dies when she stops weaving, crying "The curse is come upon me" (I.iii.44) suggests an answer—her weaving protected her from the curse—but her final note explains "The charm is broken utterly" (I.iv.61). Freed from the broken curse, which at last seems to mean her perpetual weaving, the Lady dies. If her curse was always to weave lest she die, but weaving itself is also a curse, then the curse is her self-referentiality, and her death when it is interrupted. It is her exclusion from the real world of difference, change, consummation—and that which makes it impossible for her to enter that world.

Tennyson invokes *suffisaunce* through Elizabethan and Spenserian images, as well as the possibility of transcendent plenitude suggested by the Lady's creation from her own image in the mirror. But the poem ultimately impoverishes (feminine) erotic and aesthetic solipsism, making of female solitude not *suffisaunce*, but erotic similitude. The poet makes much of the way in which erotic similitude is only ever productive of aesthetic objects by writing a poem: "[t]he productivity of lesbian love is limited to [...] its aesthetic memorialization in [...] the *lyric poem*" (Traub 338-339, emphasis mine). With no tapestry or mirror, the Lady dies, as though her

artistry justified the self-absorption of erotic similitude. This is a referendum on aesthetic isolation *and* erotic similitude insofar as her punishment comes when Lancelot becomes not hers, but her: “the distance between ‘I’ and ‘thee’ is transited so easily that difference is erased [...] ‘I am not thine, but Thee.’” Tennyson makes erotic similitude and aesthetic production mutually exclusive, rather than mutually sustaining.

Once the events of her death are in motion, the Lady’s self-reflexivity becomes even more pronounced. The anaphora of her pronouns—four “She’s”—feels static and tense (III.37-41). In her shallow boat, “Below the carven stern she wrote,/ *The Lady of Shalott*” (IV.8-9) and a note to the “wellfed wits” (IV.59) at Camelot, “this is I,/ *The Lady of Shalott*” (IV.62-63). The lady duplicates and multiplies herself on her boat, in her deathsong, and in her note, but the effect is only self-referentiality, as she endlessly announces “this is I.” As when one half spoke to her other half of being “sick of shadows,” this expression figures her multiplicative self-relation. She is surrounded by figures of herself; Lancelot was only one. While reproduction is replication with a difference, a copy has no difference, no matter how many are produced. This sounds like Elizabeth’s fantastic self-replication (in lieu of reproduction) like the self-perpetuating and eternally living phoenix. But instead, Tennyson aligns this situation with death. In death, the Lady is not so changed from what she was in life, “A pale, pale corpse... Deadcold” (IV.48-49). As the confusions of her curse make clear, the Lady was always damned either way. Her solipsistic script, “Draw near and fear not” may reassure the world of heterosexual difference that there is nothing to fear, but the poem makes it clear that there never was. There is no place in the real world for this female artist figure, who dies before she reaches even the first house of Camelot (IV.42-43). Her note to the “wellfed wits of Camelot” is more cipher than solace, as devoid of meaning as her inward-facing sexuality, since both only reduplicate her own “I.” Even

the aesthetic object she produces is too self-referential to make sense; a poem is being written, but not by the Lady, who finds no comprehending audience except herself.<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, Tennyson's violence may be preservative as well as punitive. Perhaps Tennyson is not (only) representing female self-sameness as inconsequential. In a period of increasing industrialization, Tennyson may reflect with both relief and dismay on the increasing separation between the world of "useful" work and that of aesthetic production. Perhaps he uses queer femininity to create an autonomous space for the artistry that the Lady is, as poetic creation, and represents, as character in a poem. The formal qualities I have read as queer may *also* demonstrate the poet's difficulty with the fact that language works only ever in relation. Tennyson's delay of the Lady until the end of each line and stanza, after places and objects, is *also* an attempt to produce solitude on behalf of the art that the Lady embodies. But relationality inheres even at the level of the artist's (non)name: "of" must mean "belonging to," as does "Lady" (of the island). The social is encoded at the level of the language describing artistic solitude. The poem's prepositional layers of isolated containment—"in," "near"—are relational. This way, Tennyson's use of the figures I describe is ambiguous. Like and as his own art, Tennyson may not want the Lady to be defiled by the real world; for all that she is vacuous, she is conserved. Tennyson's allegory of art for the artist's sake uses a metaphor of unproductive female sexuality to convey the nonproductivity of the cloistered artistry he yearns towards, but sees as selfish, incomprehensible.

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<sup>87</sup> Malory's Elaine refuses to eat or drink, and requires her father to send her, richly appareled, in a barge manned by a single man, with a note clasped in her dead hand. Arthur and Guinevere find Elaine's body with the mute man and the note. The king says, "Now I am sure this letter will tell us what she was, and why she is come hither." It reads, "Most noble knight, my lord Sir Lancelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love. And I was your lover, that men called the Fair Maiden of Astolat. Therefore unto all ladies I make my moan, yet for my soul ye pray and bury me at the least and offer ye my mass-penny: this is my last request. And a clean maiden I died, I take God to witness. And pray for my soul, Sir Lancelot, as thou art peerless" (Malory 152-154). The Lady's total incomprehensibility is Tennyson's invention.

Because *suffisaunce* is fulfilment and erotic similitude frustration, by denigrating the cloistered artist figure as a figure of erotic similitude, Tennyson champions extroversion, hetero- or alloeroticism over inward-facing sameness. The Lady's femininity distances the artist figure from Tennyson as male artist, one who *can* enter the world, tempted though he may be by the artistic seclusion that he genders feminine. Tennyson produces the death of an unproductive mode of poetry so that another may live. Or, Tennyson rejects a mode of queerness by abusing a subject of erotic similitude as artist figure. My attention shifts, now, from textual to biographical criticism of Tennysonian aestheticism as mode of queer selfhood. My slanting approach crossing formal analysis and historicism obviates the question of whether Tennysonian attraction to lesbian eroticism led to a particular account of autonomous art, or vice versa. The more interesting point is that the metaphor cuts both ways. Whatever motivates Tennyson's adoption of this figure, the result is that what he says about artistic desire, he must say about female queerness.

### *The Personal is the Poetical*

Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was remarked that Tennyson cut a figure of the homosexual artist. Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, England's two most important sexologists, both refer to him in their writing.<sup>88</sup> In 1908, in *The Intermediate Sex*, Carpenter wrote of the subject of sexual inversion, "[w]hen we turn to the poetic and literary utterances... two names stand conspicuously forth—those of Tennyson, whose 'In Memoriam' is perhaps his

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<sup>88</sup> Laura Doan notes that the name "sexologist" was "reserved for professionals in the field of sexology with training or expertise in science or medicine;" Carpenter was "a homosexual, a socialist, and an ardent supporter of feminism" ("Outcast" 165).

finest work, and of Walt Whitman” (41-44).<sup>89</sup> In the third edition of *Sexual Inversion, Volume II* of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Ellis wrote

Various modern poets of high ability have given expression to emotions of exalted or passionate friendship toward individuals of the same sex, whether or not such friendships can properly be termed homosexual. It is scarcely necessary to refer to *In Memoriam*, in which Tennyson enshrined his affection for his early friend, Arthur Hallam, and developed a picture of the universe on the basis of that affection. 339

Carpenter and Ellis both evoke the möbius loop that augmented aesthetic ability and homosexuality made up by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>90</sup> Tennyson’s homosexuality is pointed to as evidence of homosexuality’s entwining with artistic talent; the content of Tennyson’s art is pointed to as evidence of his homosexuality. I take this outdated and arguably ridiculous historical commonplace seriously, but aslant, to think through the way in which tropes of homosexuality are useful for expressing the 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet’s concerns, and vice versa.

More transparently the speaker of his elegy for Arthur Hallam, the man he loved, Tennyson employs a familiar pattern *In Memoriam*, producing a feminized speaker resembling the Lady of Shalott to sacrifice; the male poet survives. I am not simplistically claiming that we ought to read the Lady as a figure for the author.<sup>91</sup> I am suggesting, however, that demonstrably

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<sup>89</sup> Noteworthy in these lines, too, is the characteristic racism of sexology: “of the more civilised nations.”

<sup>90</sup> Brenda S. Helt explains, “[w]hile sexual science was laying claim to aesthetic concepts of androgyny, some early twentieth-century aesthetes were appropriating sexual science. Primary among these... was a shift in reasoning, popularized by Edward Carpenter, that challenged sexologists’ treatment of homosexuality as degenerate. Many in aesthetic and Bohemian circles embraced what Carpenter argued... inverts’ gendered double nature made them adept mediators between the sexes, a skill particularly necessary to the artist. By proliferating such arguments, many in the avant-garde associated the figure of the invert with that of the artist and the genius. By the early 1920s.... So common was this stance at Cambridge that young men like Leslie Runciman felt the need to apologize for their attraction to women” (136).

<sup>91</sup> Tennyson’s poetry seems to invite such readings: Sarah Rose Cole notes that the critic “S. E. Dawson[’s]... conflation of Tennyson with the Prince drew forth from the poet a letter of disagreement” (165).

Tennysonian concerns converge in the female homosexuality and the artist figure in “The Lady of Shalott.” In *In Memoriam*, erotic similitude again allows Tennyson to express his desire to be one with Arthur Hallam while simultaneously addressing his troubling aesthetic hermeticism. But here again, Tennyson ultimately purges erotic similitude because it is feminine—or perhaps genders it feminine in order to purge it. We might reconcile Tennyson’s attraction to and rejection of extreme enclosure and stillness in both poems either artistically or biographically, but this is a matter of attitude more than methodology; both understandings depend on an amalgam of literary production and personal history.

Tennyson’s writing conveys impulses toward the total separation of his art from the world. Paradoxically, the incomprehensibility of the Lady of Shalott’s deathnote is a Tennysonian gesture to save your darlings *by* killing them.<sup>92</sup> D. B. Ruderman has argued that Tennyson “articulates a desire for a poetry that does not circulate” (154). In Tennyson’s announcement of his dead-on-arrival child to a few friends, “neither character nor action [...] determines the beauty of the stillborn child, but rather his arrested and unrealized potential.” Tennyson found in his son a compelling figure for his wishes as a begetter of poetry: “with a stillbirth, some qualities [...] remain preserved in the child, locked up forever within, protected” (151-154). But this is best expressed in “The Lady of Shalott,” with the “parchment on her breast,/ That puzzled more than all the rest” (l.iv.58). The Lady’s script “allow[s] for qualities and potentials to be... preserved. Because the poem, like the child, has not breathed, it can circulate without the fear of being snuffed out or asphyxiated by criticism or misreading” (Ruderman 154). In the description “wellfed wits,” the poet’s sympathy is with the script, not its useless audience.

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<sup>92</sup> Of the second version of “The Lady of Shalott,” Marion Shaw writes “death has saved [her] from the pollution of living” as that poem “ends at the point of reduction to an image of purified stasis” (133-134).

Tennyson ambivalently uses erotic similitude to elaborate the Lady's beautiful, idealized space, aesthetic production, self. He produces her world not simply to sacrifice it, but to enjoy a fantasy to which he is deeply attached. The Tennysonian neologism "immoor," from a fragment finally published in 1969 suggests Tennyson's "doubled desire, to have his poems be in the world and out of it" suggesting "Tennyson's self-image as a solitary creator, his anxiety concerning the social realm [...] and the affective force with which he felt the threat of usurpation, or intrusion." Again, "The Lady of Shalott" best demonstrates this term's proximity to "'immortal,' in the distinct sense of moral impasse [...] Tennyson cannot simply and morally seal himself off from his readers [...] even if 'immoor' also suggests 'immure,' to wall in or secure" (155, 157). Such morally ambiguous privacy is gendered in *In Memoriam*'s lines "These mortal lullabies of pain/ May bind a book, may line a box,/ May serve to curl a maiden's locks" (I.LXXVI.5-7). Tennyson is feminized insofar as his "songs are lullabies, and their future is domestic and marginalized... the expressive but private and unauthorized [female] world [...] is permitted a temporary superiority over the values of a public life: '...more than fame'" (Shaw 81). But this exceeds cross-gender ventriloquism. The poet's love and poetry are nothing more than feminized aesthetic remembrances, as "[t]he productivity of lesbian love is limited to the production of love itself or to its aesthetic memorialization in bracelets of hair or the lyric poem."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Leslie Brisman notes "'Tennyson turned to Keats as a woman writer turns to a woman writer'" (23, 26). Joseph Bristow argues that, as wife to female nation, "[f]or Tennyson to be able to rationalize the war as a poet... he would have had to have been a woman. But as a man, he was duty-bound by the national symbolic force of woman to act out a feminine role. An implicitly feminine role involved accepting his duty, *responding* to commands, and, above all, *feeling* that what he was doing was both correct and appreciated. There is curiously, something very wifely about the passive duty expected of a soldier, here, especially one mesmerized by a female icon that is also an embodiment of nationhood" ("Nation" 142-143). John Hughes, in 2007, suggests that Tennyson should be understood as "a case... of what we are learning to call the transgendered" (97). Beyond the appropriative and Johnny-come-lately distastefulness of his argument, Hughes fails to recognize the female *homoeroticism* of Tennyson's putatively transgender voice, dismissing homosexuality—too "either/or"—as a critical lens for thinking about Tennyson. Further, Hughes fails to acknowledge the inextricability of transgender narrative from the invention of



We can name “erotic similitude” that which D. B. Ruderman recognizes in describing the collapse of identities haunting Tennyson’s writing: “the children of the poet’s thoughts are his thoughts, the product is the producer [...] an attack on the poem is an attack on the thought... an attack on the self [...] coequal with the poet’s name” (157). Though he never mentions “The Lady Shalott,” there, the Lady *is* her own literary production, the parchment that says “this is I,” the last in her proliferation of selves. In Tennyson’s reduction of the artist to her aesthetic production—or perhaps his reduction of the art object to its artist—the Lady’s poem is her own name. The poet and the Lady are both one with their own artistic production, (re)producing not offspring, but art with which they are over-identified.

The artist’s total immersion in and reduction to the realm of aesthetic production and pleasure may be an attractive prospect and even an accurate description of poetic production, but it also feels heretical. If Tennyson understands the cloistered artist figure as “immoored” apart from the workaday world, this figure is also immorally immured. We might think of “The Palace of Art,” in which the speaker’s soul desires nothing except art, but upon achieving aesthetic solitude, suffers, repents, and ultimately turns back to God. Like the Lady of Shalott, the aesthete’s soul in “The Palace of Art” is gendered female (11). Tennyson, even—perhaps especially—when meditating on himself, aesthetic self-indulgence is feminine or feminizing. It might be that the turn inward of the isolated poet hoarding his poems to himself resembles the private domesticity of women more than the public-facing posture men.<sup>94</sup> But it is also true that love for the aesthetic approaching to a sin seems a quintessentially feminine form of guilt.<sup>95</sup> In

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homosexuality itself as the category of “inversion.” See Jay Prosser’s “‘Some Primitive Thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition’: The Transsexual Emerging from *The Well*.”

<sup>94</sup> The subtitle of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, appearing in 1886 in Germany as one of the very earliest sexological texts, was “With Special Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study.” “Antipathic” suggests anti-social, as well as pathological.

<sup>95</sup> See Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mary Ann Doane’s *The Desire to Desire*, Naomi Schor’s *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*.

Tennyson's case specifically, casting this as a womanly transgression allows him both to indulge in fantasies more appropriate or accessible to women, *and*, like Lady Macbeth, to cast off the woman in him. This at last explains the poet's slanting choice of Renaissance, female homoeroticism over the Hellenistic, masculinist homoeroticism available in his milieu.

“*Namby-Pamby Tennysonian Poetry*”

I want to further suggest that the feminization these fraught desires produced in the poet was *itself* is an ambivalent desire of Tennyson's, and in so doing hew a more or less arbitrary distinction between artistic motivations and the poet's biography. The poet's—or perhaps his poetic—femininity was remarked upon by his contemporaries. In 1847, a critic accused Tennyson of feminizing literature: “[t]he manliness of our light literature is curdling into licentiousness on the one hand and imbecility on the other; witness... the namby-pamby Tennysonian poetry we have of late had so much of” (Magnet 176).<sup>96</sup> Tennyson's cross-gender identification was conflated with the literary forms he explored; readers of *The Princess* understood the speaker as “belonging to a border-state [...] half masculine and half feminine.” Also of concern was “the effeminacy of the poem's language.” *The Princess* made a “‘strange diagonal’ between lyric and epic” that the critic D. M. Moir called “‘a *crambe recocta* of all heterogeneous elements” comparable to the “‘mermaid, ‘a lovely lady with a fish's tail’” (Ruderman 165). During the early modern period—from which Tennyson drew his model of queerness—the mermaid was often compared to the new androgynous clothing suggestive of

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<sup>96</sup> Magnet attributes this to a G.W. Peck, cited in Higgins and Parker (138). He also writes that in *In Memoriam*, the poet “suggests alternatives to the developmental teleology from youthful same-sex friendship to grown-up heterosexual marriage, as in his Marlovian proposal, ‘O Sorrow, wilt thou live with me/No casual mistress, but a wife./My bosom-friend and half of life’ (59.1–3). Earlier he seems to endorse the telos of heterosexual marriage, but his endorsement in fact conveys, as much as anything, his ambivalence and smoldering anger about the whole institution” (190).

“Hermaphroditic; that is, Monsters of bothe kindes, halfe women, halfe men” (Pedersen 87-88).

How to differentiate Tennyson’s gendered literary crossing from gender crossing for its own sake?

Cross-gender identification, though apparent in much of Tennyson’s oeuvre, occurs most personally and overtly in *In Memoriam*. This makes a certain amount of sense; scholars and indeed sexologists have made much of the analogies of bereft girl and widow Tennyson employs in his elegy for the man he loved. On the correspondence of literary talent with same-sex affection, Ellis writes that Shakespeare’s sonnets “may fairly be compared to the *In Memoriam* of Tennyson, whom it is impossible to describe as inverted, though in his youth he cherished an ardent friendship for another youth, such as was also felt in youth by Montaigne” (*Studies* 44). However ironically, I agree with Ellis that Tennyson was *not* inverted—even though the correlation of cross-gender identification with same-sex desire (a female soul in a male body, as in *The Palace of Art*) is the very definition of inversion. Tennyson’s cross-gender identification is not the basis of a homosexual identity *qua* simple gender inversion, but rather a means of imagining a specific mode of homosexuality that is historically feminized. This diagonal identification—Tennyson imagining himself as a woman-loving-woman—is a fine, but crucial, distinction.<sup>97</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s transformation of the university, Hellenistic study offered “homosexual code.” One effect this culture had to excise degrading suggestions of feminization from love between men. The centuries-old grasp of effeminacy associated with male love was loosened in the crucial discovery that *paiderastia* or Greek love was itself martial in origin”

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<sup>97</sup> Jeff Nunokawa also wishes to historicize homosexuality precisely. He asks not “is the poem gay?” but rather *as what kind of homosexuality In Memoriam would have registered in its context* (427). Nunokawa, however, uses Hellenism euphemistically for a homosexual reading of *In Memoriam* (427); I want to illustrate the ways in which the Renaissance informed Tennysonian homosexual poetics.

(Dowling xiii-xv.)<sup>98</sup> At Cambridge, Tennyson was a member of the Apostles, or the “Conversazione Society.” Their “self-appointed mission to reform Britain through humanistic education” credited intimate relationality between men the knowledge that could bring about societal reform (Cole 47-48, 58). Arthur Hallam wrote an essay at Cambridge about Cicero in which he “condemn[ed] the Roman orator’s merely practical concept of male friendship and prefers Plato’s ‘sublime principle of love,’ while regretting that modern readers have been ‘repelled’ from Plato by the accusation of male-male sexual contact” (Cole 56). By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lytton Strachey could mock what he called the “higher sodomy,” or the fashion of young Oxbridge men’s sexual choice of men under the assumption that they were more intelligent than women, and so more sexually exciting (Helt 136). Why did Tennyson not draw on this culture of intellectualism combined with love between men?

That he did not do so speaks to the special significance of *suffisaunce*. Rather than understanding femininity as masculinity’s equal and opposite corollary, we must see forms of male and female relations in their historical specificity. Traditions of female and male homosexuality have not always been symmetrical. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sexology insisted on the binary logic of heterosexuality, with “inversion” positing that the male lover of men was a woman inside, and vice versa. But the reversibility of this model is a historical construct post-dating Tennyson’s cross-gender identification. While poetically posing as Hallam’s widow may sound like inversion to our post-sexological ears, we must understand

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<sup>98</sup> See Dowling’s chapter “Victorian Manhood and the Warrior Ideal” from *Hellenism and Homosexuality* for her account of the connection between a “buried level of martial consciousness [that] stirred so powerfully in... Tennyson during the war and invasion-scare years of the 1850s” (48) and “a classical republican discourse that... had exercised a powerful hold over the English cultural imagination for over two hundred years, a body of political theory always identifying the health of the polity as a whole with the *virtus* or virility of an ancient warrior ideal.” (xiii-xv). Dowling also understands *Maud* as hearkening not to “medieval campaigns or chivalric crusades but to a mode of combat in defense of the *patria* arising out of the Renaissance” (52).

Tennyson's feminization in different terms than these.<sup>99</sup> The poet invokes version of female homoeroticism because the historically specific mode of erotic similitude collapses the distance between (female) lovers and removes them from the public sphere—at the price of their intelligibility to the public. In choosing the Renaissance over Hellenism, Tennyson marshals an unpropitious erotic and artistic vision to cast it off.

Attention to the feminized homosexuality Tennyson ventriloquizes in “The Lady of Shalott” helps us historicize the speaker's posture as wife and widow in *In Memoriam*. My reading of “The Lady of Shalott” also clarifies the literary and cultural stakes of the specificity of Tennyson's queer rhetoric. Cross-gender homoeroticism in *In Memoriam* is not only attributable to the impossibility of loving a man for Tennyson, though that may well be true. It seems also, in light of my analysis, that the way Tennyson loves a man seems to him idolatrous or productive of heretical guilt, like his related desire for artistic autonomy, self-indulgent beyond the pale. Tennyson desired precisely the kind of merging between lovers that erotic similitude offers—but only to women, and at the price of meaning in public. In *In Memoriam*, the poet produces beautiful moments of what we can see as a “Lady of Shalott”-variety of merged stasis between himself and Hallam. This longed-for state comes, however, hand-in-hand with a guilt that transforms the transcendental autonomy, satisfaction, power, and longevity of Elizabethan *suffisaunce* into mere erotic similitude, which historically asserted that mirrored love between women always and only goes hand in hand with sterile aesthetic production.

Though the erotic similitude of *In Memoriam* is more restrained than that of “The Lady of Shalott,” the ease with which Tennyson's speaker switches places with Hallam points to erotic

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<sup>99</sup> See Sedgwick's introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet* “Axiomatic” for a breakdown of the falseness of even our present-day sense of symmetry between homo- and heterosexuality, and between male and female homosexuality.

similitude's equality and sameness to the point of interchangeability. As has been most thoroughly remarked by scholars, Tennyson is at first the "perpetual maid[]" whose male love has died. Later, however, he becomes the "happy lover who has come/ To look on her that loves him well.... and learns her gone and far from home;/ He saddens.... And all the place is dark/ So find I every pleasant spot" (VIII.1-9). Tennyson makes Hallam the woman to his male lover; he is sometimes "the widower" (I.xiii.1), elsewhere "widow'd" (I.xvii.20). He describes their youthful relationship as the marriage of like with like: "*Thought* leapt out to wed with *Thought*/ Ere *Thought* could wed itself with *Speech*" (XIII.15-16, emphasis mine). Marriage between two of the same (thought with thought) precedes wedded difference (thought with speech). In narrating that they two were so close as not to need words for communication, the speaker also invokes the erotic similitude relation that is always developmentally prior to ("Ere") the teleological endpoint of heterosexual difference.<sup>100</sup> Just as the Lady was doubled by her halving, the speaker of *In Memoriam* is made two of the same with Hallam by cleaving: "with *equal* feet we fared.... Nor could I weary, heart of limb,/ When mighty Love would cleave in twain/ The leading of a single pain,/ And part it, giving half to him." (XXV.2-12, emphasis mine.) In describing himself and Hallam as living half measures of the same experiences, Tennyson suggests that they transcended mere equality to become truly one.

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<sup>100</sup> Many critics have tracked the developmental model *In Memoriam* poses. While, as Nunokawa notes, it was "a staple of Victorian and post-Victorian ideology" that male homoeroticism served as "an early phase that enables and defines the heterosexual," erotic similitude poses sexuality between women—presumed to be perpetually virginal—as a prelude to true (hetero-)sexuality (429, 428). But the moment Nunokawa cites, without distinguishing between genders, is a reference to one of Shakespeare's most explicit narratives of girlhood "ancient love" rent "asunder" by adult heterosexuality (*Midsummer* III.ii.203-216). In the same scene where Helena and Hermia trade insults based in their difference of height, calling one another "puppet" (III.ii.296), "dwarfish" (III.ii.303), and "maypole" (III.ii.304), Helena regrets that they were once one, now that Hermia sides with men against her. Nunokawa emphasizes Tennyson's treatment of his and Hallam's height difference; "If thou cast thine eyes below,/ How dimly character'd and slight,/ How dwarf'd a growth of cold and night,/ How blanch'd with darkness must I grow!/ Yet turn thee to the doubtful shore,/ Where thy first form was made a man;/ I loved thee, Spirit, and love, nor can/ The soul of Shakespeare love thee more" (*IM* 60.1-61.12). This meditation on growth suggesting progression away from youthful homosexuality occurs in the same place as Tennyson's invocation of Shakespeare.

Tennyson's penchant for queering relationship structures has been most thoroughly remarked with regard to *In Memoriam*. Alec Magnet details Tennyson's "fascination with alternative forms of relatedness: with recognition, identification, and incorporation, with same-sex attachment and erotics, and with literary echo and inheritance" (Magnet 177). It seems to me, however, that "The Lady of Shalott" most boldly figures forth same-sex eroticism as identification to the point of incorporation, using the literary inheritance of erotic similitude to do so, while *In Memoriam* is ultimately much more conservative.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, Sarah Rose Cole draws our attention to Tennyson's phrase "perpetual maidenhood" as metonymic for the poem's extended juxtaposition of "images of feminine stasis" with "images of masculine development." Though "the poet initially chooses to identify himself with the former" in the end, Tennyson prefers a public-facing masculinity capable of development (Cole 51). This allowed him to assert an aestheticism free of the charge of solipsism, the kind that made the Lady see the world only through herself in her mirror.

Gender blending *and* conservatism (like Tennyson's punishment of femininity) are staples of criticism. Tennyson interpellates or ideologically appeals to the dominant, heterosexual audience without entirely banishing the possibility of homoerotic desire."<sup>102</sup> Shaw has noticed that Tennyson employed "a line of effeminate protagonists who culminate in Arthur, the 'eunuch-hearted king' of *Idylls of the King*" (72). She explains this Tennysonian impulse

Emotional excess, heightened sensibility and expressive language, the stuff of poetry in the romantic tradition to which Tennyson belonged, are incompatible

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<sup>101</sup> Magnet suggests Tennyson treats "the literary as a performative space in which to discover and create such relatedness, a space open to the potential desire of a queer reader" (177).

<sup>102</sup> Both are short-handed in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry: In Memoriam* is "a 'triumphant reaffirmation' of hegemonic values.... 'the confusion of gender categories in the poem... more difficult... for bourgeois hegemony to handle'" (Morgan 223).

with manliness in its mid-nineteenth-century definitions.... During a period when the separate spheres and sexual categories were being rigidly defined... a poet of Tennyson's allegiances found himself confronted not only by... moral questions concerning manliness... but by a poetic dilemma also. Shaw 73-74

Shaw's work is exceptional because she goes beyond noting Tennyson's penchant for gendered extremes in his female protagonists and the generalized queerness of his work to remark upon the *poetic* uses of male femininity for Tennyson.

Tennyson increasingly distances himself from his female characters... the attitudes and neuroses embodied in the female figures in his earlier work become more consistently located the young male protagonists of his later poems, who are as weak, emotional, dependent and at times hysterical as any of Tennyson's female characters.... The benefit to poetry... of the use of an effeminate or feminized protagonist is that it liberates the voice of feeling.... Tennyson makes use of a womanly hero, or a womanly voice, to play a[n]... expressive role within the dynamics of his poetry. Shaw 76-77

*In Memoriam* revisits and revises the Lady of Shalott's extremes of "identification, and incorporation:" her failure to leave behind the world of erotic similitude for the "real" world. In the later poem, "The baby new to earth and sky.... Has never thought that 'this is I:/' But as he grows he gathers much,/ And learns the use of 'I,' and 'me,/' And finds 'I am not what I see,/ And other than the things I touch;'/ So rounds he to a separate mind" (XLIV.1-9). Here, the subjectivity of the *male* child capable of understanding its differentiation from the world, or the way in which the world is *not* simply a mirror-reflection of the self, *emerges* with the phrase "this is I," rather than dying with it, as did the Lady, who wrote "this is I" in her deathnote. Mary



Jean Corbett has noted *In Memoriam*'s suggestions that Tennyson and Hallam will be the parents of the children begotten on Tennyson's erased sister, Hallam's intended in life (306-308.) This diagonal fatherhood—reproduction aslant—resembles Tennyson's poetic gestures to render female sexuality sterile for the sake of an aesthetically productive male homosexuality. The development of the child, here, frees *In Memoriam*'s (male) aestheticism from the Lady of Shalott's (female) solipsism.

Crucially, Hallam himself is also feminized in *In Memoriam*. He is “manhood fused with female grace” (CVIII.17), and after death becomes “diffusive” in “flower[s]” (CXXIX.6-7). Very few scholars notice that Hallam is also occasionally feminized; Shaw writes “[o]ne [sic] rarely, as in sections VIII, XIII and XL, is the relationship reversed, with the dead Hallam likened to a female role, and these occasions are lost in a general impression of the poet as the weaker partner” (79). Cole goes so far as to suggest that

“If Sleep and Death be truly one” (43.1), then perhaps Hallam is immersed... in feminine stasis, awaiting Tennyson like a Sleeping Beauty. Lying “unconscious of the sliding hour” amidst the “still garden of the souls” (43.5, 10), the “folded bloom” of Hallam's spirit might remain unchanged after all: “And love will last as pure and whole/ As when he loved me here in Time” (43.2, 13-14). This layered analogy—between death and sleep, and then between a sleeping soul and a flower bud—represents the extreme limit of both feminization and stasis. Not only does the flower analogy transform male souls into impenetrable yet eroticized female bodies, but it also puts off the reunion of friends until Judgment Day, the moment of the “spiritual prime” when the “dawning soul” will at last “reawaken” to knowledge of the virginally preserved love (43.15-16).... this

scenario offers the comfort of an unchanged relationship... by transferring the  
“perpetual maidenhood” of the bereaved girl into an indefinite afterlife. 54-55<sup>103</sup>

No critic has yet registered that Tennyson’s *and* Hallam’s momentary figural feminization results in a kind of coupling that requires its own attention as something other than men’s affection for one other as such, or even as pseudo male-female affection between men.

“In Memoriam,”—a poem with much less authorial distance than “The Lady of Shalott”—also evokes the kind of female pairing I have identified in “The Lady of Shalott,” but without a strong “allegory of art” slant. The “pure” chastity of Hallam’s “folded bloom” is the same perpetual virginity of the erotic similitude lover, where the absence of (masculine) difference results in a superficial sexuality over a penetrative one, recalling the surface play of the Lady’s reflective mirrored surfaces. When Tennyson writes “My paths are in the fields I know,/ And thine in undiscover’d lands” (XXXIX.31-32), he returns Hallam to a prelapsarian state in contradistinction to his own: without Hallam, Tennyson must toil in and eat of the field. Hallam’s stepping out of time, implied by Tennyson’s bereavement alone in time, suggests erotic similitude’s “mov[ement] out of masculine society and history into a timeless and sinless lesbian idyll” (Holstun 848). Hallam as prelapsarian virginal bud beautifully restages the Lady’s timelessness, away from sexuality and death, as funeral and marriage pass her by, though paradoxically, Hallam has achieved this state *through* death.

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<sup>103</sup> Unlike Ruderman, Cole mentions that “The Lady of Shalott,” and “Mariana” meditate on the “female entrapment” by which Tennyson was “fascinated” (51). Cole’s larger argument is that “*In Memoriam* uses images of feminine stasis to construct an opposing concept of developmental male friendship. In the narrative of *In Memoriam*, one of the main threads is the process by which the poet first loses and then begins to recover a belief in the possibility of development itself—a belief that depends on his position as a male subject involved in an educational friendship with another man. The poem’s first section signals the poet’s loss of this belief, in terms that implicitly refer to the Bildungsroman genre, the primary nineteenth-century form of developmental narrative” (51).

It would seem simple to contest this reading by the most obvious, indeed the motivating, fact of *In Memoriam*—Hallam’s death.<sup>104</sup> However, spiritual union, such as that to which lovers beyond the grave are reduced, is itself part of the erotic similitude tradition of female homoeroticism. The clearest early modern example of lesbian spiritual union is Margaret Cavendish’s tongue-in-cheek “Platonik” lovers in *The Blazing World*. The most extensive work on this tradition is Terry Castle’s *The Apparitional Lesbian* and Carla Freccero’s *Queer / Early / Modern*. Though less historical than her argument might be, Castle nonetheless demonstrates the literary tendency to turn the lesbian into a ghost or a fading wraith when faced with the problem of the lesbian’s en fleshed sexuality because the lesbian’s sexual body is so baffling (28-65). How do two “normally feminine” (i.e., “erotic similitude”) women have sex with one another? Where on the body does lesbianism occur? The answer is that it does not, really, or that it is meaningless when it does, leaving no comprehensible trace of itself, like the Lady of Shalott’s note.<sup>105</sup>

Even before his bereavement, a masculine gender position would not do for Tennyson’s sense of the separation between the public, working world and the artist, as “The Lady of Shalott” demonstrates. If *In Memoriam*’s cross-gendered grief of the “widowed yet virginal girl, whose life is over before it has begun... captures a state of absolute stasis” because women rarely remarried after losing a husband while considered natural only for widowers to “temper... widowhood with professional activities” (Cole 50), neither of these facts justify the artist’s cross-gender identification in “The Lady of Shalott.” There, Tennyson’s interest in stasis was already

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<sup>104</sup> For Shaw, *In Memoriam* utilizes “feminized utterance in writing” because it “is most appropriate, in elegy, the poetry of love and absence” (49).

<sup>105</sup> See also Jagose: “the prohibition against lesbianism—seldom explicitly realized in legislative terms but no less authoritative for all of that—frequently takes the form of a foundational uncertainty or disbelief that is hard put to imagine the existence of the category at all, but nevertheless exercises its epistemological ignorance as a curiosity that cannot be assuaged: ‘What *do* lesbians so in bed?’” (4).

resolutely feminized, though that poem narrowly preceded Hallam's death in 1833.<sup>106</sup> As James Kissane argues, Tennyson's elegiac longing for love and desire's past tense predate Hallam's loss: "[t]he death of Hallam... transform[ed], as it were, a poetic attitude into a biographical fact" (85-87). I wish to bring into view that the *feminization* of this poetic attitude also preceded Tennyson's widowing.

### *The Uses of Cross-Gender Fantasy*

That female homosexuality in the vein of erotic similitude should be a strong thread of *In Memoriam's* erotic imaginary—as opposed to an adoptive heterosexuality requiring the feminization of one man as counterpart to a normatively gendered man—is not so shocking when we examine other examples of homoerotic self-elaboration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women sometimes drew on traditions of male homosexuality to signal their interest to other women and to explain, even to celebrate, themselves to themselves. A touch earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than Tennyson, Anne Lister referred to literature and histories of homosexuality, female and male, to provoke recognition and legible reciprocity in women she desired: by women's reactions to her veiled references, she could find out whether they were in the know.<sup>107</sup> Will Fisher also remarks that Lister's Juvenal "contains descriptions of both male and female homoeroticism" (57). Lister once made "reference to Tiresias having 'tried both sexes' and ask[ed] her friend if 'she remembered the story?'" (Fisher 57).<sup>108</sup> Terry Castle implicitly notes the cultural mediation of

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<sup>106</sup> "The Lady of Shalott" was published at the end of 1832, though the book of poems in which it appeared bore the date 1833.

<sup>107</sup> In Lister's case, it has been argued, cross-gender identification served a complicated gender identity for a woman who sometimes felt herself to be a man; other examples of Lister's citational practices make such a case more clearly than the ones I mention here. See Stephen Colclough's "'Do you not know the quotation?': Reading Anne Lister, Anne Lister Reading."

<sup>108</sup> A few scholars have puzzled over the "Achilles" moment. Fisher suggests that when, in 1824, "Anne received a note from a woman named Miss Mackenzie that asked 'Êtes-vous Achilles?' This question... probably meant to imply a comparison between Lister and the cross-dressed Achilles in the court of Lycomedes, but Mackenzie may

sexuality: “her sexual career was richly mediated by cultural influences. Classical literature, particularly the satires of the Roman writers Juvenal and Martial... supplied her with a useful knowledge of ancient homosexual acts and a historic precedent for her own behavior” (Castle 102). Such understanding underlies my own argument for the value of transhistorical attention to palimpsestic sexualities and cyclical cultural imaginaries of gender.

Much later in the century, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, aunt and niece, the pair of women poets who made up the literary signature “Michael Field,” were “fascinat[ed] with the tropes of male homosexuality” (Vicinus “Boy” 103). Martha Vicinus notes that Cooper was “short-haired and boyish... attract[ed] to both homosexual men and women” (“Boy” 103). Even between the two women, “the fifteen-year difference between her and her aunt... cast her in the role of the young initiate. In recording her delirious fantasies when she was sick with scarlet fever, Edith compared herself to Antinous, the beautiful boy beloved by the late Roman emperor Hadrian” (103). Michael Field even produced a “self-portrait of their persona” as a homosexual male: ““He is a plan, a work of some strange passion/ Life has conceived apart from Time’s harsh drill”” (Vicinus “Boy” 95). Their cross-gendering and emphasis on the timelessness of the artist figure renders these lines an inverted mirror image of Tennyson’s cross-gender artist’s portrait in “The Lady of Shalott.” The poet(s) “celebrat[ed]” in their work “Italian paintings of fauns, Saint Sebastian, and a shepherd boy—all well-known homosexual icons” (Vicinus “Boy” 103). Despite the queer masculinity of Field’s imaginary, Vicinus also notes that the Renaissance was a popular source for creating a 19<sup>th</sup>-century “lesbian imagination” (“Boy” 101).<sup>109</sup>

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also be alluding to the homoerotic passion that Achilles had for Patroclus.... These ‘allusions’ are particularly fascinating for their references to both male and female historical figures.... knowledge about male homoeroticism could provide a means of negotiating relationships between women as well as knowledge about female homoeroticism” (58). The homosexuality Lister would have found in Rousseau’s *Confessions*, from which Terry Castle notes Lister drew often and heavily, would have been masculine (101).

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Bristow, too, notes the utility and eroticism of boy-drag for 19<sup>th</sup>-century female same-sex sexuality (among other sexual arrangements), specifying the Renaissance as a powerful source for this partially lesbian

Field's identification with cultural and historical tropes of male homosexuality was more explicit than Tennyson's with female, and had specificity and subtlety of purpose. Nonetheless, Field helps illuminate the associations I have suggested between antiquity and male homoeroticism on the one hand, and the early modern period and female homoeroticism on the other. In the "bilingualism" of their volume *Long Ago*, as Yopie Prins notes, "Bradley and Cooper make a claim to classical scholarship.... [which] places Michael Field within an elite circle of poets who turn to Greek literature to redefine the language of English poetry" (76). Surprisingly, by writing in Sappho's voice, Bradley and Cooper also "enter[] into a domain often coded as masculine, and, by the end of the nineteenth century, increasingly homosexual.... Sappho was invoked as model for the Greek genius, defined by *male pederasty*" (Prins 77). Prins and Peterson both note that paradoxically enough, writing through Sappho could be understood as a way of *masculinizing* poetry, since so many "male poets... used Sappho's poetry as an initiatory vehicle or an object of exchange" ("Sappho" 123). Joan deJean has explained the "triangulation of desire" by which "young male poets compete for recognition and priority by translating Sappho's lyrics and thus taking possession of her voice" (Peterson "Sappho" 123).<sup>110</sup>

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imaginary. In "There You Will See Your Page": Olive Custance, Alfred Douglas, and Lyrics of Sapphic Boyhood," he writes that the figure of the Renaissance page was a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century locus for "women's sexual adventures," and that had, in part, as "an alluring type of transmasculine embodiment.... an enduring appeal because of the freedoms it afforded, especially in the figure of Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (ca. 1599).... At the very end of Victoria's reign... the iconic girl in page's garb had also taken a decisively Sapphic turn, in ways that created intimate links between... [Natalie Clifford Barney;] Renée Vivien; Olive Custance; and Alfred Douglas. Each of these writers expresses a strong interest in the seductive and sexually subordinate properties of the beautiful boy, although the erotic valences attached to this figure vary among them, especially the degree to which the boy's attractions lie in his male homoerotic, his lesbian, or his transmasculine qualities. Moreover, the boy can also, for the purposes of Barney and Vivien, be modeled upon a female body" (265-266). While we should never assume same-sex eroticism where we see cross-gender identification, they often correspond in the cases Bristow discusses. Moreover, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, same-sex attraction and gender deviance were increasingly *understood* to imply one another.

<sup>110</sup> Peterson writes that with "Eleänore," "Tennyson did turn a sapphic triangle of desire into a heterosexual triangle and he did finally use Sappho's second ode as a means of expressing male (poetic) desire" ("Sappho" 127).

Where Tennyson engaged with Sappho, then, Sappho herself represented something of a masculine poetic imaginary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>111</sup> Arthur Hallam wrote in 1831 that Greek “art... imag[es] a mood of the human heart in a group of circumstances, each of which reciprocally affects and is affected by the unity of that mood, resembles much Alfred’s manner of delineation” (sic). He highlighted especially “the fragments of Sappho” and included ““Southern Mariana’... copied at length” (*Memoir* 500-501); both “Mariana” and “Mariana in the South” are animated by Sapphic fragments. Nevertheless, as Peterson argues, “Tennyson’s exploration of the Sapphic strain represents the most devastating attempt to subsume the female voice in English literary history.” He “took over the strain that... [women poets] meant to claim.... what female poets might have achieved for themselves” (“Sappho” 131-134). So, while “Tennyson... had a lifelong obsession with the technicalities of Greek poetry, including Sapphics,” counterintuitively enough, he aligned the female poet from antiquity with a male model of homoeroticism, while drawing from Shakespeare, a male early modern writer, to represent female erotic similitude (Peterson “Sappho” 122).<sup>112</sup>

Tennyson’s case is the opposite impulse of women like Field’s toward cross-gender identification with androgynous youths: what compels him in female figures is constraint, even confinement. For women, “[i]dentifying oneself as a boy was not simply a matter of taking over male status and freedom. Rather, the boy’s liminal sexual position and appearance give him the necessary combination of familiarity, ambiguity, and distance” (Vicus “Boy” 100). Similarly, though, gender-crossing produces distance. If Tennyson’s desires—queer and artistic—felt to

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<sup>111</sup> Prins shows women “manipulate[d] the conventions of authorship in ways that cross-couple gender and genre... through Greek... What Greek learning signifies, in this context [of Victorian Hellenism], is more than just linguistic: it marks a distinct though unspoken set of assumptions about sexuality as well as class and gender (76-77).

<sup>112</sup> Vicinus also that the Renaissance was popular, alongside Greek life, for creating a 19<sup>th</sup>-century “lesbian imagination” (“Boy” 101).

him like self-indulgent narcissism, then he naturalized his punishment of them at a feminized distance; self-indulgent narcissism is almost always gendered feminine.<sup>113</sup>

*Inversion, Amicitia, and Female Insufficiency*

I have explained why a feminized position might be attractive to Tennyson, poetically or professionally, and personally—though as the personal is itself always governed by structures like domesticity, and, in fact the professional. Now, I turn to the other side of Tennyson’s deep ambivalence about feminization, and his ultimate rejection of it. In the turn of *In Memoriam* where the speaker shuns feminized stasis in favor of masculine movement, “Tennyson discards the comforting analogy of sleep and death” and, in the afterlife poems, “accepts that his friend is moving forward.... Although this assumption often leads to anxieties about separation and inequality, with the poet hopelessly following his friend ‘evermore a life behind,’” the poet ultimately chooses male maturity (Cole 54-55). Cole does not hazard a motivation for this “pivot,” and similarly, we have yet to fully account for the seeming denigration of the cloistered, static female artist figure in “The Lady of Shalott.” What if we did not assume that change is transparently better than stillness? Or, to put it another way, what are the implications for the gendered sexualities that accrue to stasis and development of the presumed superiority of the latter? We should recall that erotic similitude—always a *female* category of homosexuality—has the dubious privilege of being the sexuality of atemporality and underdevelopment.<sup>114</sup> In using

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<sup>113</sup> Narcissus himself is the obvious counterexample, though he is arguably feminized by his self-love. Enduring strains of such an interpretation can be found in modern pop culture like the *Harry Potter* character Narcissa Malfoy, and lesbian-artist Christine and the Queens’ “Narcissus is Back.”

<sup>114</sup> Women’s sexuality together appears “as playful and ultimately boring or frustrating. Their function is usually to educate or warm up the participants for heterosex, or to add fresh titillation to a conventional heterosexual plot” (Donoghue 197).



erotic similitude as a metaphor for the artist figure, “The Lady of Shalott” requires us more urgently than Tennyson’s other poems to see his rhetorical gestures cutting both ways.

Tennyson problematizes his speaker’s feminine stance by pairing it with idolatry. In *In Memoriam*, Alec Magnet notes the same phenomenon I do in “The Palace of Art.” Twenty years after the first appearance of *In Memoriam*, Tennyson modulated the lines “all at once it seem’d at last/ His living soul was flash’d on mine,/ And mine in his was wound” to read instead “all at once it seem’d at last/ The living soul was flash’d on mine,/ And mine in this was wound” (XCV.35-37). Of the change, Tennyson said “‘my conscience was troubled by ‘his.’” Magnet explains that the revision addresses not only the queerness of the earlier pronoun, but the “overtones of idolatry. The less specific determiners ‘this’ and ‘the’ suggest an intertwining with the divine in everything, whereas ‘his’ intimates a potentially inappropriate valuation of one individual soul” (184). We should also mark that the revised version conflicts with the poet’s “earlier rejection of the belief ‘That each, who seems a separate whole,/ ... should fall/ Remerging in the general Soul’ as a ‘faith as vague as all unsweet’ inasmuch as it contradicts the hope ‘I shall know him when we meet’” (XLVII.1–8). Magnet suggests “Tennyson requires the survival of individual identities for the interpenetration of soul with soul—Hallam’s entering his and his winding itself in Hallam’s—to remain meaningful” (184). The problem of individual versus blended identities is inextricably bound up with the issue of too-extreme veneration. As we recall, the foremost quality of erotic similitude is the collapsing of difference between women. Here, Tennyson distances himself from this initial impulse, privileging the true connection of discrete over corporate identities like the difference between the “churls and girls” outside the Lady’s tower.

I have argued that the nature of the relationship for which *In Memoriam* irresolutely expresses grief and desire is feminized stasis and the merging of two selves. While the radical unity of lovers is best available to women in the erotic similitude tradition, there is also a historically masculine mode of this relationality. Like erotic similitude, the male tradition of “amicitia” promises to unite two friends with “one soul” between their two bodies (Shannon 32-46). “Amicitia,” largely drawn from Montaigne and Cicero, had its own renaissance in the early modern period, when the robust erotic similitude tradition was being conventionalized.<sup>115</sup> It is telling that Tennyson did not take up *this* tradition, but rather its feminine version.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, there is a brief moment in “The Lady of Shalott” when it seems as though the pairing of men might have been possible: outside her tower, “sometimes thro’ the mirror blue/ The knights come riding two and two” (II.24-25). But Tennyson does not choose to represent male queerness. This is especially surprising given that to Havelock Ellis, Tennyson seemed eminently comparable to Montaigne himself.

Hirschfeld... included in his great work *Die Homosexualität* (1913, pp. 650-674) two lists, ancient and modern, of alleged inverts among the distinguished persons of history.... we find in the list 43 English names; of these at least half a dozen were noblemen who were concerned in homosexual prosecutions, but were of no

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<sup>115</sup> Shannon addresses erotic similitude as pluralized chastity when women’s primary bonds are with other women. For her, the women’s form is derivative. Notably, the first text from which Lillian Faderman includes selections in *Chloe Plus Olivia* is Montaigne’s *On Friendship*. I prefer the category of erotic similitude because Traub’s form is less derivative, though she cites Alan Bray’s and Jeffrey Masten’s work on male bonds.

<sup>116</sup> In Cole’s reading, Tennyson represents a masculine form of “lost communion,” and his “language evokes the complete equality and ‘merging of individual identities’ that the historian David Halperin has identified as the central ideal of elite male friendship since the classical era (*How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, p. 119). In the mutual exchange between ‘each’ and ‘each,’ ‘Fancy’ and ‘Fancy,’ ‘Thought’ and ‘Thought,’ it is impossible to assign separate roles to the poet and his friend. But, in the first phase of *In Memoriam*, this masculine union is confined to a passing moment of memory and fantasy, which is abruptly terminated by a return to scenes of present-day domestic mourning.... in the poem’s next phase, Tennyson reintroduces the possibility of developmental male friendship... by moving beyond both the family home and the university, into an imagined afterlife” (53).

intellectual distinction. Others, again, are of undoubted eminence, but there is no good reason to regard them as homosexual... Tennyson, whose youthful sentimental friendship for Arthur Hallam is exactly comparable to that of Montaigne for Etienne de la Boëtie, yet Montaigne is not included in the list.

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Though he says elsewhere that Tennyson is *not* inverted, Ellis remarks that his appearance on Hirschfeld's list of famous English inverts should qualify Montaigne for the list, given the exact resemblance of their affections. In fact, as we have seen, this is the second time Ellis compares Tennyson's regard for Hallam to Montaigne's for Etienne de la Boëtie. Given his apposite availability to the masculine *amicitia* tradition with which the name of Montaigne was synonymous, why does Tennyson choose to feminize Hallam as well as himself, as though they are women in love?<sup>117</sup> Why does he write a female artist figure of erotic similitude who dies a meaningless death when her mirror of art mediates a male love object into a feminized reflection of herself?

There are two crucial distinctions between the masculine and feminine modes of *amicitia* and similitude, and I would offer that they help us understand Tennyson's motives. First, *amicitia* between men constantly and anxiously holds homosexuality at bay, while erotic

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<sup>117</sup> Sarah Rose Cole's interpretation is that *In Memoriam* "chart[s] the loss and recovery of male-male love." She argues that in the poem's later "marital analogy, the woman does not appear static, so much as predictable; she is capable of development, but only along lines that are already marked out for her by social and biological laws. In her progress toward 'other realms of love' (40.12), the bride moves between two bounded domestic spaces, her parents' house and her husband's; and her destiny takes her simply from daughterhood to motherhood, 'as is meet and fit' (40.14). This narrative of limited female development presents nineteenth-century 'separate spheres' ideology at its most extreme. As an ardent admirer of Jane Austen's novels, and as the author of *The Princess*, Tennyson would have been keenly aware of alternative narratives that present the progress from daughterhood to marriage as anything but simple and predictable. However, *In Memoriam* never grants this kind of complexity to female development. Instead, as section 40 reveals with particular self-reflexive clarity, Tennyson deliberately indulges in fantasies of unchanging femininity, in order to underline the unpredictable potentialities of male development" (55-56). Shaw, too, suggests that in *In Memoriam*, femininity is "invaded and appropriated as a means.... The transvestite facility of Tennyson's early years emerges again here to become the vehicle for grief, a conduit of a sort but one which becomes and assimilates, at least temporarily, its proponent." (78)

similitude is avowedly homoerotic. Second, the erotic similitude tradition contains within itself its own dismissal. For as much as it represents love between women as non-violent (because non-penetrative) and even utopian in its prelapsarian evasion of time and hierarchical difference, it also renders love between women superficial and unproductive, unreal and unconsumated, out of time. In the feminine mode, unity of self with lover is shadowed by an insignificance that is absent from the masculine mode—and the Lady is half sick of shadows. I have suggested that the feminine mode is apposite for Tennysonian desires, artistic and personal, *and* productive of distance between Tennyson and those desires. This distance allows the poet to double down on the impoverishment of this mode from within, denigrating precisely what made it apposite. It is *because* it is already a diminished category that Tennyson uses the cross-gender version of the relationality he so vacillatingly desires. Turning to the female tradition of erotic similitude allows Tennyson to refuse the whole enterprise of same-sex erotic merging on the artist's behalf, and on behalf of the artistic impulse itself.

Like male writers in the early modern period, Tennyson represents female life where sameness is all, and aesthetic production replaces reproduction, as insufficient. “The Lady of Shalott” marshals a largely literary tradition of erotic similitude alongside Spenserian and Arthurian elements to speak to the literary-historical inheritance of *suffisaunce*. The threat of women alone, exclusively feminine spaces, never goes away; though the Redcrosse Knight could draw on a reserve of masculinity to defeat Errour, he is reduced to a mere decoration for a shield in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Tennyson's Lancelot fails to heterosexually intervene on the Lady's solipsism. Tennyson casts commentary backwards to Elizabeth herself, and like Spenser, retools female self-sameness so that it becomes not *suffisaunce*, but the resoundingly *unsatisfactory* formation of erotic similitude. Understanding the specificity of male and female homosexuality

imaginaries in history helps us read “The Lady of Shalott” and *In Memoriam*; both poems, in turn, illuminate the 19<sup>th</sup>-century afterlife of a Renaissance imaginary of female sexuality still haunting our conception of lesbianism. This double movement crosses close reading with historicizing attention to constructions of gender and sexuality, much as Tennyson’s own writing slanted across centuries and gender.

### 3. Photographic Inversion and the First English Female Homosexual Type



Figure 1. Clementina Hawarden, *Clementina and Isabella Grace Maude, 5 Princes Gardens, Photograph, ca. 1863-1864*, (Victoria and Albert Museum), <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93658/clementina-and-isabella-grace-maude-photograph-hawarden-clementina-viscountess/>

Viscountess Clementina Hawarden’s mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century photographs of her daughters look like lesbianism to us now for good reasons.<sup>118</sup> In this photograph, (fig. 1) circa 1863, eroticism between women is signaled by their role-play as boy and girl. The most visually striking element of this image is the striped garment with which the “boy” is draped. Whatever the cultural or generic significance of this vaguely oriental garment, its crucial referent is the photographic

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<sup>118</sup> Hawarden followed the “aristocratic and learned amateurs of the 1840s” and preceded the “professional art photographers of the 1860s.” Virginia Dodier notes that whereas “[m]any of the first generation, active in the 1840s and early 1850s, were upper-class and well-to-do, steeped in learning and culture, and driven by an enthusiasm to advance science.... Hawarden... was more interested in the art than the science of the medium” (21).

process by which the image itself has come to be. Just as the photograph indexes an actual presence, preserving a chemical trace of light, eroticism between women is made visible, here, by the presence of female masculinity.<sup>119</sup> At the end of the century, English sexology would define “inversion” as imitative heterosexuality between women premised on exactly such visions of female masculinity. Though this image predates sexological inversion in England by a quarter of a century, the garment’s black and white stripes allude to what I call “photographic inversion:” the photographic positive and negative side by side, one the tonal and directional inverse of the other. Photographic inversion names a mobile imaginary that, I will argue, made possible a specifically English female invert type discernable in photography and literature before it appeared in English sexological discourse.<sup>120</sup>

Visible consciousness of inversion extends to other elements of this image in the stark contrast between shawl and skirt, and the slanted patch of sunlight with its angular shadow tracking the striped garment’s pattern. The imaginary of inversion extends even beyond what the photographic process strictly entails: the “boy”’s forward-facing posture, as the girl is viewed from behind, extends the lateral inversion of the photographic image. Inversion, here, exceeds the visual realm altogether, and becomes a matter of affect; reversing traditional 19<sup>th</sup>-century gender roles, the girl apparently importunes, while the “boy” rebuffs her. The correspondence of form with what we might call “theme”—this reversal of gendered affect—suggests the capacious

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<sup>119</sup> Visible difference of female masculinity as “proof” of sexual abnormality was related to scientific racism conjoining racial difference with abnormal sexuality. According to Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, “the European construction of sexuality coincides with the epoch of imperialism.... The personage of the savage was developed as the Other of civilisation and one of the first ‘proofs’ of this otherness was the nakedness of the savage, *the visibility of its sex*” (106).

<sup>120</sup> Sexological inversion became available in England in the 1890s, beginning with *The Evolution of Sex* in 1889 by Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, which appeared as the first of Havelock Ellis’s Science Series: “small volumes presenting contemporary scientific developments for the average intelligent reader.... a cheap volume of popular science, *The Evolution of Sex* doubtless circulated far more widely than Ellis’s own subsequent massive, hard to obtain project, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1899-1910, 1928)” (Porter and Hall 155).

mobility of inversion as concept. The black and white striped garment—which we will see repeated in Hawarden’s work—signals the photographic inversion that Hawarden makes metonymic for the gender distinction between the two women. The images in what I call her “inversion series” invoke a mimicry of heterosexuality that is precisely how sexology would register female same-sex desire at the end of the century. Hawarden’s images smack of lesbianism to us now because they display a homosexuality *qua* inversion to which we are accustomed—which her photography helped to normalize.

The popularization of the positive-negative photographic process at the midpoint of the 19<sup>th</sup> century offered a logic of inversion, the intelligibility of which did not emerge from sexology and filter into popular knowledge in England, but was elaborated into the science of sex from cultural production. This article triangulates mediums and disciplines—photographic, literary, technological, and scientific—to reveal an aesthetic origin of sexual-medical knowledge.<sup>121</sup> That our modern understanding of lesbianism depended on an intertwining of photography, literary realism, and scientific knowledge, has until now been a lacuna in the history of photography and 19<sup>th</sup>-century identity formation alike.<sup>122</sup> Further, the mid-century photographic imaginary of binary oppositions I explore revises English lesbianism’s timeline. For reasons of ethnic purity, the advent of sexological inversion was much later in England than abroad. Nevertheless, a shift to female masculinity as the defining requirement of lesbianism occurred in England earlier than we have understood, actually preceding sexologists’ theorization of inversion. Photography helped make available a new means of abjecting sexuality

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<sup>121</sup> Most work on the scientific uses of early photography has been done in the American context. See Dana Seitler’s *Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity*.

<sup>122</sup> Only Richard Dyer’s *White* treats the racializing and gendering of photographic technology itself. My argument historicizes claims that light and dark code heterosexuality when figure lighting helps to “construct the characteristic glow of white women” in opposition to “dark masculine desire” which can be “felt as racially other” (87-88).



between women: instead of affecting women who were not white in England, as of old, lesbianism could be newly conceived as affecting women who were not really women. Photographic inversion explains not only when, but how, and why visible difference in the form of female masculinity became requisite for an English lesbian type. A novel definition of lesbianism as visible gender difference replaced racial or national difference as the explanation for female same-sex sexuality, continuing—differently—a centuries-old project of white womanhood in England.

Turn-of-the-century English sexology defined “inversion” as the correspondence of women’s same-sex desire with cross-sex identification.<sup>123</sup> Havelock Ellis, England’s father of sexology, wrote in 1901

The commonest characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity.... Even when [masculinity] is not obvious, there are all sorts of instinctive gestures and habits which may suggest... the remark that such a person “ought to have been a man.” The brusque, energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness and sense of honor, and especially the attitude toward men, free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity, will often suggest the underlying psychic abnormality. 244-250

By the time it took hold in England, belatedly in the 1890s, inversion was above all governed by the polarized gender opposition implied by the very term. But prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, English nationalist denial of female homosexuality was singularly remarkable. The sapphic woman, the

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<sup>123</sup> Jay Prosser shows how “[c]ross-gender was structured into the very definition of inversion in its origins,” reading trans narratives at the heart of sexology to argue that “rather than inversion being a symptom or construction of homosexuality... homosexuality was on the contrary one symptom of transgender” (130-133).

Amazon, or the tribade could only be found somewhere over there: in France, or to the East.<sup>124</sup> It was England's invention of the positive-negative photographic process in the 1830s and subsequent mid-century fascination with the positive and negative's inverted opposition that primed England's acceptance—and indeed extraordinary enthusiasm—for a domestic female invert. The imaginary affordance of a native technological innovation, photographic inversion became unmoored from a strictly technological, formal relationship, and even from the visual regime. Before becoming a medical category in England, polarized gender opposition between women in photography's black and white terms was not only a visual trope, but a mode of literary characterization—a way of making identities—as we will see in Wilkie Collins' 1859 *The Woman in White*.<sup>125</sup> Hawarden's inversion series and Collins' novel both show that photographic inversion accrued associations of gender and race that preempted the first “real” English female homosexual identity.

When we need images of 19<sup>th</sup>-century lesbianism, we often reach for Clementina Hawarden's photographs of her daughters. Her work has graced the covers of many sapphically-themed books: Lillian Faderman's 1981 *Surpassing the Love of Men*; Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* in 2009 (originally published in 1936); and in 1999, both Eve Sedgwick's *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, and indeed Wilkie Collins' 1859 *The Woman in White*. Hawarden's oeuvre and Collins' novel both represent residual and emergent models of female homoeroticism across the bodies of sisters. Hawarden sometimes staged her daughters as

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<sup>124</sup> The term “tribade,” or a “woman who rubs.... often described as having a ‘female member’... which allowed her to have penetrative intercourse with other women” was “adopted into both French and English [from Greek origin] by the sixteenth century” (Donoghue 4). Scholars agree this myth “operated as a discursive figure that reified and projected fears about female homosexuality onto a monstrous feminine Other—the racially marked Asian or African woman whose hypertrophied clitoris hung outside her body like a penis” (Wahl 12).

<sup>125</sup> Collins' novel started in serial form between 1859 and 1860, appearing in England's *All the Year Round*, and America's *Harper's Weekly*. 1860 saw the publication of eight different editions, and finally in 1861, the final triple decker version appeared (Tucker 88).

twins, sometimes as photographic opposites. Collins' literary vision of symmetrical racial and gendered oppositions within an erotically charged sororal relationship demonstrates the mobility of photographic inversion, even apart from Hawarden's self-consciously meta-photographic medium.

First: England's paradoxical lesbian imaginary before the Victorian period. Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, female same-sex sexuality was understood as an impossibility, based on the assumption that love between women meant eroticism without difference: two women, mirror-images of one another, solipsistically kissing as a single woman might kiss herself in a glass.<sup>126</sup> As we have seen, Tennyson made use of this representational tradition in the first third of the century. I suggest that the daguerreotype—the earliest French photographic method—evoked in England the manner in which female homoeroticism had historically been understood: as love of the same. Popular in England in the 1840s, the daguerreotype produced a single image, reversed by the camera, and was conceptualized as a “mirror with a memory.” Like a mirror, the results were “shiny and inverted” (Pultz 13). A mid-point between exact sameness and oppositional difference, the daguerreotype sparked novel attention to the reversal which, though previously unremarked, always accompanied the mirror as emblem of narcissistic love.

In the second section, I explain the positive-negative process that superseded the daguerreotype midcentury, invented by England's own Henry Fox Talbot.<sup>127</sup> Photography's inversions became even more striking with the technology's development from a logic of mirror-

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<sup>126</sup> Proliferating representations of love between women in England's early modern period stressed the *impossibility* of sexual consummation between women based on this imaginary of extreme sameness. Exceptional depictions conjoining female love to female masculinity like John Lyly's *Gallathea* prove the rule: union is impossible as two of the same—either girls *or* boys—only becoming a possibility when Venus turns one into a “real” boy.

<sup>127</sup> For a longer history of the way in which “[p]hotography... grew out of two strands of historical development: an optical one (the history of the camera obscura) and a photochemical one (the history of experiments concerning the light-sensitivity of silver salts)” and a discussion of whether photography can be considered an invention at all, or had not better be called a discovery (27), see Geimer's *Inadvertent Images*.

image sameness (the daguerreotype) to a logic of oppositional difference in similitude (paired positive and negative images). Negatives were not simply a byproduct, as we might imagine, but were “significant in their own right,” and viewed side by side when exhibited, for instance in the photographic displays featured at the Great Exhibition of Arts and Industry at the Crystal Palace in 1851 (Seiberling 2, Henderson 109). As Hawarden’s photographs of women in the 1860s make evident, photographic inversion became an object of meta-photographic play. Because early English photography resonated formally and thematically with female homoeroticism, the imaginary of female homoeroticism shifted alongside the photographic technology over the second half of the century.

Next, I argue that the polar oppositions of Hawarden’s inversion series also appear alongside England’s disappearing vision of mirrored similitude in Collins’ sensation novel *The Woman in White*. The residual paradigm can be perceived in Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick: women so like one another that they seem to be one person. The plot of stolen property and general male villainy hinges on the fact that it is impossible to tell them apart. Over the course of the novel, this insalubrious pairing of doppelgangers literally dies off. Stronger than ever emerges the new model: Marian Halcombe, Laura’s masculine and suggestively non-white half-sister, and her feminine, white counterpart represent the ascendancy of inversion. My choice of these two examples to illustrate photographic inversion is not incidental: Hawarden and Collins’ cross-medium resonances have only been only partially understood. Photographic inversion illuminates the relationship of their intertextuality to realism. Finally, I will briefly revisit *The Pencil of Nature*, and rehearse arguments by Carol Armstrong, Nancy Armstrong, and Andrea Henderson to suggest that the interchange of photography and literature that produced 19<sup>th</sup> century realism also produced the visible identity of the female invert. The translation of

photographic inversion's oppositional poles into racialized, gendered identity across media and genre demands a new history of the emergence of modern lesbianism: in England, female inversion was photographic and literary before finally sexological.

*"A Mirror With a Memory: The Impossibility of Sameness*

Beyond the absence of legal statutes on "female sodomy," what had historically "set England apart from the Continent in its discourse of homosexuality—juridical and medical, literary and libertine—was the intensity of focus on male-male relationships... almost to the occlusion of similar relations between women." Elizabeth Whal attributes this denial to the

dogged capacity of the English to project the sources of their own fantasies of desire onto the corrupt ideology of an Other such as "popery," or to refract fears of homosexuality or of deficiency in virility onto racial or national types (e.g., referring to the French or the Italians as "nations of sodomites"). 23-25<sup>128</sup>

This section's title refers to the "impossible possibility" as which England's early modern period understood love between women. For the most part, the 17<sup>th</sup> century leaned on the trope of the "lesbian lament:" that women cannot have sex with each other, no matter how much they may love.<sup>129</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> century largely laughed at the idea of sex between women.<sup>130</sup> With no man on the scene, how could anything happen? Even in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's life writing shows, female cross dressing was commonly regarded as nothing more than an amusing

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<sup>128</sup> *Travels into Turkey's* "female husband" story, which appeared in English in 1722, "reinforc[ed] the links the British made between sexual perversion and Mediterranean and Moslem countries." As *The Midwives Book*—which reached four editions by 1725—put it, "'in the Indies and Egypt they are frequent, but I have heard of but one in this country'" (Donoghue 35).

<sup>129</sup> See Traub's "'Friendship so curst': *amor impossibilis*, the homoerotic lament, and the nature of *lesbian* desire."

<sup>130</sup> *Satan's Harvest Home* (1749) refers to sex between women as "the comic 'game of flats;'" *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749) portrays women's sexuality together "as the deficient prelude to 'more solid food;'" *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) "includes a ridiculing portrait of the predatory Miss Barnevelt, a masculine woman... in open pursuit of a wife" (Lanser 176).

prank (Marcus *Between* 38). While same-sex desire and cross-sex identification both existed prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were rarely conflated before inversion's dominance made one the necessity of the other.<sup>131</sup> Before that point, lesbianism in England was understood as a matter of masturbatory insignificance or non-occurrence, by turns comic, frustrating, or tragic.

As late as the 1811 Woods and Pirie trial, where a mixed-race schoolgirl accused her schoolmistresses of having sex, neither Scottish nor British law could accommodate the idea of eroticism between women.<sup>132</sup> Of the proceedings, Emma Donoghue notes, "Lord Meadowbark insisted over and over again that no woman 'in this country' (Scotland, or the United Kingdom) would have a big enough clitoris to commit the kind of penetrative tribadism he had heard was so common in India" (37). Meadowbark also claimed that "'the imputed vice has been hitherto unknown in Britain'" (Moore 36-37). Lisa Moore explains,

most of the judges were to use this argument—that race determines sexuality more importantly than does gender, at least in the case of deviance—to acquit the

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<sup>131</sup> A notable exception—complicated by her real-life personage—was the representation of Mary Hamilton's arrest for cross-dressing and female marriage in the Newgate Calendar and Fielding's mid-18<sup>th</sup> century pamphlet "The Female Husband." Such cases were (imagined as) so atypical that Havelock Ellis referred to the legacy of *non-coincidence* between same-sex attraction and cross-sex identification, even as he defines the female invert in these terms: "She may not be, and frequently is not, what would be called a 'mannish' woman, for the latter may imitate men on grounds of taste and habit unconnected with sexual perversion, while in the inverted woman the masculine traits are part of an organic instinct which she by no means always wishes to accentuate" (227). See Majorie Garber's "Transvestite Logics" in *Vested Interests* on the differences and occasional overlap between same-sex desire and cross-dressing in early modern England, especially with regard to sumptuary laws under Elizabeth I.

<sup>132</sup> Chris Roulston calls the charge of which the Scottish schoolteachers stood accused a "non-event" (128), since "non-representation within the law was the logical reflection of its non-existence" (129). See "'A Thing Perhaps Impossible': The 1811 Woods/ Pirie Trial and Its Legacies" in *Developments in the Histories of Sexualities*: "[w]hen Lord Meadowbark makes his initial summation of the trial in 1811, he argues that the act would be possible either by 'women of a particular conformation, from an elongation of the *clitoris*' or conversely that, 'by means of tools, women may artificially accomplish the venereal gratification.'.... By making 'lesbian' sexuality articulable only through the figure of the phallus, Lord Meadowbark can also ensure its invisibility by taking the phallus away: no phallus, no transgression. The crime, which is not a crime, could not have taken place" (130). Further, of the student who made the accusation, "Jane [Cumming's] testimony literally and symbolically disrupts the coherence of Scottish womanhood, her hybridity—both in terms of her assumed precocious sexual knowledge, and her mixed-race background—paradoxically also secures the trope of visibility; for the pursuers, Jane becomes the only object the judges can see, thereby ensuring that the schoolteachers' sexuality and race can remain invisible" (134). This relationship between whiteness, invisible sexuality, and the visibility of racial difference primed British culture for photography's intervention very soon after these events.

two Scottish teachers.... Pirie and Woods were never examined to determine whether they bore the ‘peculiar conformation’ that would make it possible for them to have sex together... rather, their ‘normality’ was assumed on the basis of race. The possibility that British female bodies or British female erotic imaginations were capable of sexual congress with each other was thus diverted in the trial through recourse to a racist myth of a deviant, sexualized Eastern woman’s body. 36-37

Such is the crux: it couldn’t happen here, because in the absence of male anatomy, sexuality is impossible... and our women are normal. British as defined against India, and English as defined against France, England could assimilate Scottish women to their provincial denial of lesbianism (thanks to British whiteness), while coolly accepting that in France, white women who were not British, certainly not English, had sex all the time. Sharon Marcus’ *Between Women* begins with her puzzlement at how the English never talked about lesbianism, while the French would not shut up about it: “British reviews of French literature... prove[] that Victorians were capable of deciphering even very coded allusions to sex between women. At the same time, however, they dismissed sapphic characters as morbid, diseased, perverse, exotic, and abnormal” (Marcus *Between* 15). The English impulse to ferret out lesbianism with an eagle-eye, while simultaneously turning a blind eye on home soil, were different sides of the same sword. The accused schoolteachers’ lawyer reveals this sword to be the troubling proximity between normal behavior—“pure virtu[e]”—and a “black[ness]” that conflates race and sexuality:

“They little thought, that that warm and interesting mutual regard, which springs from the finest and purest feelings of the human heart, and can only exist in pure and virtuous breasts, should be to them the source of the foulest condemnation, or

be converted into the means of fixing upon them an imputation of the blackest and most disgusting atrocity.” Moore 34

Though “the finest and purest feelings of the human heart” and “the blackest and most disgusting atrocity” are set up as diametrically opposed, the fact that the former can be so easily mistaken for the latter illuminates the necessity of a clearly legible mark of deviance. Paranoia about lesbianism would require its visibility—its marking by gender difference—before it could be assimilated to a nationalist imaginary.

Only when it became possible to conceive of her without damaging white English womanhood did an English lesbian type finally appear. Something occurred to allow a shift from the logic that “the kind of women who have sex with other women aren’t *Englishwomen*” to “the English women who have sex with other women aren’t really *Englishwomen*.” Consistent with centuries-old nationalist denial, the English medical establishment refused the import of continental sexology and arrived instead, late and parochially, at a domesticated model of female inversion. While the science of sex appeared in Germany in the 1860s, English refusal of female homosexuality on home soil remained insular until the last moment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Porter and Hall’s history of British sexual medicine, Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* immediately earned a “scabrous British reputation as little more than a work of scientific pornography.” Skepticism was especially strong “among the medical profession” (163-164). Even in 1908, *The Lancet* used the phrase “turbid continental outpourings”—because that simply didn’t happen in England (“Library Table” 1373). German sexology “appeared to many yet another dubious continental import” (Porter and Hall 158-163).



By the time Havelock Ellis began theorizing homosexuality in England, he “had almost a clear field” (Porter and Hall 166).<sup>133</sup> In 1900, he addressed the way in which Englishmen had held out against theorizing homosexuality, noting that when they finally did, they sometimes had to leave the country to do so: “[i]n England the first attempts to deal seriously, from the modern point of view, with the problem of homosexuality came late, and were either published privately or abroad” (72). Ellis and Edward Carpenter both especially emphasized the novelty of inversion in the English context:

I know medical men of many years’ general experience who have never... come across a single case. We may remember, indeed, that some fifteen years ago the total number of cases recorded in scientific literature scarcely equaled those of British race which I have obtained, and that before my first cases were published not a single British case, unconnected with the asylum or the prison, had ever been recorded. *Studies v*

In *The Intermediate Sex*, (1908) Carpenter notes that inversion is “a thing which only a few years ago was very little understood” and “in England... still comparatively unknown” (9, 20). The homosexuality that finally did emerge in England at the last gasp of the 19<sup>th</sup> century relied on inversion more heavily than did the German tradition, and even more so in women than in men.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Besides Ellis, “there were a few writers—such as Arthur Cooper—writing approved textbooks on the clinical manifestations of sexual disorders which might appear in the consulting room” (Porter & Hall 166). Edward Carpenter’s intermediate sex theories were at first excluded from his 1894 pamphlets, but finally appeared in 1906 *Love’s Coming of Age* (Porter & Hall 158-159).

<sup>134</sup> Despite the alleged novelty of English inversion, sexologists cast inversion itself backwards to lend it authority. Ellis writes, “the ancient medicophilosophic conception of organic bisexuality put forth by the Greeks as the key to the explanation of sexual inversion, after sinking out of sight for two thousand years, was revived early in the nineteenth century... it enables us in some degree to understand what for many is a mysterious riddle, and it furnishes a useful basis for the classification not only of homosexuality, but of the other mixed or intermediate sexual anomalies in the same group” (314-315). Carpenter, too, writes, “[s]uch an idea [of the intermediate type]... must have been familiar in pre-Christian times and among the early civilizations, and if not consciously analysed or

Late-coming though she was, the English female homosexual could even be said to be the first female invert, with Ellis writing of “the prevalence among inverts of a tendency to... feminism in men and masculinism in women.” Though “denied by Hirschfeld,” Ellis claims that such reversal of gender “is often well indicated among the subjects whose histories I have been able to present, and is indeed suggested by Hirschfeld’s own elaborate results; so that it can scarcely be passed over” (*Studies* 291-292). Of other national traditions Ellis also notices, “[t]he chief monographs devoted but little space to women,” complaining repeatedly that Krafft-Ebing “gave little special attention to inversion in women” (*Studies* 203).<sup>135</sup> Edward Carpenter similarly describes the physicality of the “extreme type of the homogenic female” as

a rather markedly aggressive person, of strong passions, masculine manners and movements, practical in the conduct of life, sensuous rather than sentimental in love, often untidy, and *outré* in her attire; her figure muscular, her voice rather low in pitch; her dwelling-room decorated with sporting-scenes, pistols, etc., and not without a suspicion of the fragrant weed in the atmosphere. *Intermediate* 30

Ellis’ explanation for the “retardation in the investigation of sexual inversion in women” as the fact that “we are accustomed to a much greater familiarity and intimacy between women than between men,” and so homosexuality is “less easy to detect” (*Studies* 203-204). In England, the female body was sexology’s privileged object of inquiry; legible signs of inversion were all the more rigorously hunted down because a national tradition of lesbian denial had rendered female homosexuality quite invisible.<sup>136</sup>

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generalised in philosophical form, it none the less underran the working customs and life of many, if not most primitive tribes” (*Intermediate* 10).

<sup>135</sup> Ellis also wrote, “until recently, comparatively little has been known of sexual inversion in women. Even so lately as 1901 (after the publication of the first edition of the present Study), Krafft-Ebing wrote that scarcely fifty cases had been recorded” (203).

<sup>136</sup> Siobahn Somerville shows how Ellis spent more time with the inverted female body than with the male (26).

Everyone has a slightly different account of when a shift toward the linkage of cross-sex identification with same-sex desire occurred, and what it entailed. But in sharp contrast to the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, concern about the predation of “normal” women by mannish lesbians was an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century commonplace in England. Though she threatened “normal” women, the invert did not threaten normal womanhood itself, because *she* was not a “normal” woman. Inversion solved the impasse of the English insistence on difference between normal Englishwomen and women who have sex with other women. Lesbianism conceived as women imitating male heterosexuality rendered sexuality between women not only finally possible, but a real and imminent threat. And what first intervened between the lesbian as impossibility, versus menacing masculine presence, in England, was not sexology, as we have long imagined.

As we have seen, Englishwomen’s sexuality together necessitated borrowed maleness, a “big enough clitoris to commit... penetrative tribadism” in order to transform away from a *mise-en-abyme* of absence: women facing one another as would two mirrors. If lesbianism was impossible in England before the second half of the Victorian period because there was simply nothing *there*, early photographic technology offered a novel presence, a physical trace. This presence had a racialized precedent: as should be clear by now, the English were all too happy to project female masculinity onto racial others and foreign nationalities. Perverts and women with outsized clitorises had dark skin, or maybe lived in France.<sup>137</sup> What made English sexual inversion qualitatively different than such earlier moments of racially or geographically othered female masculinity was English obsession with the *polarity* of gender; oppositional difference made a domestically palatable lesbian fathomable *qua* invert.<sup>138</sup> “Inversion” as polar-reversal

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<sup>137</sup> The latter was especially true in Restoration England (Wahl 120).

<sup>138</sup> Andrea Henderson traces the history of this interest: “polarity... was not in itself new. Scientists working under the influence of German *Naturphilosophie* conceived of all physical phenomena as the dynamic product of the antagonism of polar forces.” Before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, however, “[a]lthough these opposites exist... for each

was most pronounced where Victorians struggled to imagine women together, though the actual origin of “inversion” as medical label has been opaque: “the *OED Supplement* defines sexual inversion tautologically as ‘the inversion of the sex instincts’ and provides two perfunctory citations” (Craft 113). England’s homegrown obsession with polarity—which, I explain in the next section, was popularized by the positive-negative photographic process in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century—helped mobilize a gender-imaginary of inversion.

As opposed to earlier racist economies of female masculinity, the novelty of inversion’s photographic imaginary was polar symmetry. This is a fine, but crucial, distinction, as sexologists often employed similar means of searching out female masculinity as had pre-sexological traditions linking female sexual activity with non-whiteness in England *and* abroad. Sexological conflation of the non-white body and the inverted body is well documented, but mostly in the American context.<sup>139</sup> English sexology was a racial science as much as a sexual one, too: Havelock Ellis wrote on eugenics for the British National Council for Public Morals, and participated in the Eugenics Education Society in England (Somerville 31). Race and imperialism were inextricable from early photographic discourses in England, where papers were “blackened with Indian ink” (Hunt *Researches* 53). Such cultural, political, and economic forms as British white nationalism and colonial exchange formed interanimating circuits with the material, technological bases of photography as aesthetic form and scientific tool.<sup>140</sup> That

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other, they retain an intrinsic, essential nature, one that is proper to themselves” (101-102). Later, by contrast, “polar opposition could be simply summed up in the words ‘positive’ and ‘negative.’ As various physical phenomena were reconceived according to the model of magnetic polarity they came to seem defined, not by an essential nature, but by the structuring tension of opposition itself” (102). Henderson’s account of formal binary oppositions’ privileging over essential or discrete definitions in this historical moment complicates the Foucauldian account of identities overtaking acts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>139</sup> See also Jennifer Terry’s *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*.

<sup>140</sup> Photography was a tool for the study of race in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: T.H. Huxley, president in 1869 of the Ethnological Society, served the colonial office by drawing up a program for photographing the subjects of the empire (Pultz 24-25). Amos Morris-Reich describes how “[p]retty much immediately after its invention in the mid-nineteenth century, photography was incorporated into anthropology, and just as anthropology was deeply bound up

photographic inversion and paradigms of racially abjected female masculinity both depended on blackness, albeit in different ontological registers, helped mobilize photographic technology's formal relations into conceptions of gender from which race has never been absent.

Nevertheless, associations of photography with female homoeroticism were not merely the product the negative print's blackness and racist morphologies of female masculinity. An even earlier form of photography already suggested England's historical hall-of-mirrors imaginary of female homoeroticism. Mirrors were central to the devices that preceded those to finally fix photographs in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the "Claude glass" was a "small, slightly convex mirror" from which drawing images was a leisure activity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Nickel 4). Sir David Brewster, inventor of the lenticular stereoscope and the kaleidoscope, in his 1843 essay, "Photogenic Drawing, or Drawing by the Agency of Light," called photography "self-delineating." Steve Edwards translates this description as indexing "autogenesis," or a "utopia of detail, one in which things are doubled, or mirrored, by the machine" (52-55).<sup>141</sup> This

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with race, so too was anthropological photography" (27). He identifies *Races of Men* by Carl Victor and Friedrich Wilhelm Dammann, available in England in 1876, as "the most influential racial photographic book of the nineteenth century." It was "conceived as a photographic atlas of the different races of man.... each page comprises high-quality black-and-white photographic reproductions, which appear accompanied by titles and coupled with brief textual descriptions of central physical and mental traits of the respective type that appear in small print under the photographs" (35). Efram Sera-Shiar writes, "[p]hotography was envisaged as an essential tool for acquiring visual representations of different races around the world.... Proponents of the technology argued that its mechanical precision afforded the possibility of capturing realism.... researchers and photographers could make objective claims about their images because the technology that produced them did not have social, religious or political orientations" (158). Even before Francis Galton's racial photography, David Roberts' photographed Egypt and Nubia from 1846-9, and Dr. John Murray, Captain Linnaeus Tripe, and Samuel Bourne all photographed India in the 1850s and 60s.<sup>141</sup> The stereoscope marked a jointure of erotic spectacles of women with the question of how two literally become one. Jonathan Crary explains, "[i]t is no coincidence that the stereoscope became increasingly synonymous with erotic and pornographic imagery in the course of the nineteenth century" (127). "The stereoscope as a means of representation was inherently *obscene*, in the most literal sense. It shattered the *scenic* relationship between viewer and object that was intrinsic to the fundamentally theatrical setup of the camera obscura. The very functioning of the stereoscope depended... on the visual priority of the object closest to the viewer and on the absence of any mediation between eye and image" (127). Furthermore, though parallax, or "[b]inocular disparity, the self-evident fact that each eye sees a slightly different image, had been a familiar phenomenon since antiquity," it was not until the 1830's that it became "crucial for scientists to define the seeing body as essentially binocular, to quantify precisely the angular differential of the optical axis of each eye.... The question that preoccupied researchers was this: given that an observer perceives with each eye a different image, *how* are they experienced as single or unitary? Before 1800, even when the question was asked it was more as a curiosity, never a central problem" (119). By 1833, it was

should put us in mind of the Lady of Shalott's self-replication that, without difference, could not attain to reproduction. The first photographic process was in some sense *itself* a mirror, as daguerreotypes were "shiny and inverted," like a reflection in a mirrored surface, Lancelot's shiny, mirror-like armor. Until the 1850s and 60s, "[n]ot only do mirrors figure prominently in photographs... the mirror image is frequently treated as a metaphor for photography itself," Henderson notes (11). The mirror has historically been symbolic where homosexuality is understood as love for one's own same; Baudelaire called French society "Narcissus to a man" in the new craze for photography. But in England, photography was a much more charged site for thinking about *womanly* narcissism (Baudelaire 230). Photography complicated the mirror as timeless trope for sameness: though the daguerreotype suggested a woman kissing herself in the mirror, it also revealed the way in which erotic similitude had *always* glossed over the detail that mirrors *reverse*, or *invert* one's image. It took photographic technology, Daguerre's "mirror with a memory" to emphasize this fact, and people to start thinking explicitly about mirror inversion.

Though it was a direct-positive process, the daguerreotype represented an early moment for thinking about inversion, as "that which is the right in nature being to the left in the photograph." In his poem "The New School of Portrait-painting," Samuel Laman Blanchard wrote "Your image reversed will minutely appear." The inverted nature of the daguerreotype image sometimes prompted recourse to more mirrors to "correct" it (Henderson 110). This material technology of a mirror facing a mirror-image produced the *mise-en-abyme* as which the impossibility of sexuality between women had always been imagined: erotic similitude offered woman-*cum*-mirror facing woman-*cum*-mirror, reflecting back and forth in an infinite, meaningless, abyss of unconsummable desire. Prompting attention to mirror inversion and

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understood that the "binocular body" could "synthesize retinal display into a single unitary image," and the stereoscope made use of this knowledge (119).

recourse to more mirrors to “correct” inversion, the daguerreotype represented a middling point between the mirrored imaginary of erotic similitude and what would follow.

Moreover, mid-century photography was preoccupied with the erotic twinning of women. A daguerreotype representing a popular pornographic trope, “Reclining Nudes,” (circa 1850, photographer unknown), exhibits two women who look almost exactly the same lying together naked on a sofa (fig. 2).



Figure 2. Unknown Maker (French), *Two Women Embracing*, Daguerreotype, hand-colored, ca. 1848, (J. Paul Getty Museum), <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/58401/unknown-maker-french-two-women-embracing-french-about-1848/>

These women are erotically posed; one cups the other’s breast, and it can be faintly made out in the mirror behind them that the other cups her buttocks in return. Not only are the women

practically duplicates, they are reduplicated in the mirror behind them. Images like these were pleasurable because the underlying assumption of erotic similitude is that nothing *happens* between women—there is no threat, to men, of displacement or irrelevance. Nudes such as these would have been directed at male audiences, and should be understood as a pornographic version of lesbianism defined by male desire. This construction is merely a different form of the masculine supplement we will see inversion contributing to the scene of female same-sex desire. Here, the masculinity on the scene belongs not to the women themselves, but to the male gaze upon them. 19<sup>th</sup>-century iterations of similitude such as this reveal the categorical difference between erotic similitude and suffisance: insofar as *suffisance* refuses *any* male intrusion on the scene of women’s self-sufficiency, it could be only very awkwardly appropriated for a pornographic male gaze.<sup>142</sup>

Even if eroticized pairings of feminine women could be a pleasurable spectacle for men, female solipsism—women without men—sometimes presented a problem that, paradoxically, photography itself would help solve. Photographs that were *formally* all feminine with no interruption, like visual versions of “The Lady of Shalott,” were worrisome, as Henry Peach Robinson stressed the “danger with making pictures exclusively out of female forms. Excessive breadth of effect... led to ‘effeminacy.’ Pictures that displayed too much ‘sweetness’ became ‘sickly’” (Edwards *Allegories* 236). In debates about the artistic status of photography in the 1860s, it was sometimes seen as a “parrot,” which “mimic[s] without understanding, or cop[ies] without thought” (Edwards *Allegories* 154). Shawn Michelle Smith notes that the ultimate

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<sup>142</sup> Arguably, Algernon Charles Swinburne is an example of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century male writer who relishes women’s sexual self-sufficiency to exclusion of men. On the other hand, he also sometimes seems to take pleasure in lesbian cruelty, implying that *he* is the recipient—the subject—of a Sapphic beat[ing]. See John Vincents “Flogging is Fundamental: Applications of the Birch in Swinburne’s *Lesbia Brandon*” in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. This collection, edited by Eve Sedgwick, also features a Hawarden photograph as the cover image.



preference for “straight” over “soft” photography “has been undeniably gendered” (45); the latter style is epitomized in the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, which George Wharton Simpson, who edited *The Photographic News*, called an “infection” which he “hoped [] would not spread” (Edwards *Allegories* 229-230).

Reciprocally entangled with female desire, photography was not just a new medium for representing women’s eroticism in the way it was already understood, though it did that, too. As a medium, photography itself also transformed the way female homoeroticism was culturally understood.<sup>143</sup> In broad theoretical strokes, associations of photography with queer femininity have often been made. Barbara Creed asserts that “[p]hotographic technology, with its powers of duplication, reinforces a fear that, like the image itself, the lesbian couple-as-double will reduplicate and multiply.” She bases this claim on the way in which “[f]ashion photography... displays the look-alike bodies of female models, often in an embrace, draw[ing] on the notion of the narcissistic female double to sell clothes... with suggestions of auto-erotic, anorexic lesbian desire” (Creed 100, 86). Carol Mavor argues, “photographs themselves, printed in multiple copies, ensure the abyss of endless reproduction, without origin, without end: the *mise-en-abyme* of the mirror within a mirror within a mirror. Photography undoes the subject/ object (heterosexualized) couple at the root of most origin stories and uses its own narcissism for queer (re)production” (107). Peggy Phelan writes,

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<sup>143</sup> Nancy Armstrong notes photography’s power to intervene on *the way things are seen*: “[t]hroughout the nineteenth century... optical science and aesthetics came to think of the eye as increasingly embedded in a highly individuated physical body subject to mood swings, flagging attentiveness, hallucinations, and a variety of outside pressures.... In comparison with the eyes, the modern optical apparatus seemed relatively neutral and impervious to such influences, as only a machine could be. What is more, the modern camera substituted an image for the object represented, as if to say that an observer could learn more and better from the former than the latter.... At the same time, that image determined *how* one saw things, since it reproduced not only the image of some person, place, or thing, but also a way of seeing subject matter of various kinds” (77).

Like the photograph whose development and visibility depend on filling in and embodying the negative, the woman is made visible through her embodiment of the not-male. It is the energy needed to fill in the negative other/wise that sutures both the photograph and the woman to the ontology of the copy. Always already linked to a reproductive body, the ontologies of women and photographs are profoundly matched. Neither will admit the singular. 70

The cultural logics that make connections like these *seem true* must be historicized, their material bases uncovered.<sup>144</sup>

*Black and White, Boy and Girl: The Positive-Negative Process in Hawarden's Inversion Series*

Published between 1844 and 1846, Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* claimed the invention of photography for its English author; Talbot introduces the negative in the same breath as he expresses his competition with the French daguerreotype. After failures to produce Camera Lucida sketches at Lake Como in 1833, Talbot experimented with chemical processes that ultimately allow him to fix images and discover that multiple images could be produced by a reversible positive-negative process. But between his artistic disappointments and the publication of *The Pencil of Nature*, Talbot narrates that Daguerre's announcement of his photographic process "frustrated the hope with which I had pursued, during nearly five years, this long and complicated... series of experiments... namely, of being the first to announce to the world the

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<sup>144</sup> Crary's approach to historical transformation more closely resembles mine: though his interest lies in the status of the observer, he makes a crucial point about the cultural embeddedness of non-neutral developments in pre-existing technologies. "It has been known for at least two thousand years that when light passes through a small hole into a dark, enclosed interior, an inverted image will appear on the wall opposite the hole.... It is important, however, to make a distinction between the enduring empirical fact that an image can be produced this way and the camera obscura as a historically constructed artifact. For the camera obscura was not simply an inert and neutral piece of equipment or a set of technical premises to be tinkered with and improved over the years; rather, it was embedded in a much larger and denser organization of knowledge and of the observing subject" (27).

existence of the New Art” (Talbot 10-11). Though Talbot’s resentment suggests otherwise, the positive-negative process was a decisive change in the technological history of photography.

Talbot elaborates the importance of black and white polarity to his process

The ordinary effect of light upon white sensitive paper is to *blacken* it. If therefore any object... be laid upon the paper, this, by intercepting the action of the light, preserves the whiteness of the paper beneath it, and accordingly when it is removed there appears the form or shadow of the leaf marked out in white upon the blackened paper; and since shadows are usually dark, and this is the reverse, it is called in the language of photography a *negative* image. 55-56

Positive and negative images were also laterally reversed. Oppositional differences introduced by the negative interrupted the daguerreotype’s relations of sameness such that an invert appeared—literally, became visible. Over the course of the 1840s and 50s, positive-negative processes like the talbotype and its evolutions rendered the photographic relationship of inversion an even more explicit object of thought than had the direct-positive daguerreotype method. On the one hand, photography remained a doubling medium: the positive and negative, as two of the same, continued to call up erotic similitude. But their symmetrical opposition became an object of new attention: blacks and whites’ “oppositional logic was brought to bear on the left/right reversal that was an unavoidable part of capturing a photographic image.” Crucially, “lateral inversion seemed to bear some necessary relationship to negation. Was the reversed image the ‘complement’ of the original? Was it the opposite? Did the two... cancel each other out?” (Henderson 110). Impossible possibility, erotic similitude’s too much absence, also received a heterosexual solution in photography’s symmetrical opposites.

Mid-century photography was markedly conscious of itself as technology; this is nowhere more clear than in Lady Clementina Hawarden's body of work.<sup>145</sup> What crucially distinguishes Hawarden's race- and gender-laden imagery from other 19<sup>th</sup> century painting and photography is the explicitness of her meta-photographic representational play. In the late 1850s and early 60s, Hawarden repeatedly staged her daughters—especially her own namesake—as figuring the relationship between the photographic positive and negative in scenes that have often been understood as laden with homoerotic desire, in and out of their actual context. Her images sometimes rely on gender and racial inversion to figure this relationship; they come to seem homoerotic in part *because* they are governed by meta-photographic attention to inversion. Explorations of dark and light, masculine and feminine in what I call her inversion series anticipate the sexological model of female homosexuality that comes in retrospect to seem so well illustrated by her images.

More, Hawarden puts the 19<sup>th</sup> century *transformation* of lesbianism in plain sight, offering the residual and the emergent side by side. Intentionally metonymic for photography writ large, her oeuvre invokes *both* erotic similitude and gender inversion, demonstrating some awareness of the technology's role in bridging a residual and an emergent imaginary of women together. Hawarden's images seem aware of the technical details of photography I have discussed: the way in which the daguerreotype, the "mirror with a memory," and even the positive-negative process evoke mirroring and the *mise-en-abyme* quality of erotic similitude, but also the way in which photographic inversion troubles erotic similitude. They bring to the fore

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<sup>145</sup> Hawarden made exclusively albumen prints with negatives of wet plate collodion (Dodier 12). She started out with a stereoscopic camera, in which two lenses are separated by a septum, and produce nearly twinned images, and she "composed each photograph by viewing the image on the ground glass of the camera, where it appeared upside down, inverted by the lens" (Dodier 13, 23). Around the mid-point of the 1850's, decent negative images could be produced with either the collodion or calotype process, but collodion started to dominate the field, and by the late 1850's had taken over, in part because it was the used for stereoscopic images, which were more and more prevalent in the second half of the decade (Seiberling 24, 33).

the way in which a material technology straddled erotic similitude and inversion, as the mother writes with light both arrangements across the bodies of her daughters.

Hawarden's images of twinned girls in white have been most thoroughly read as modelling erotic similitude. Virginia Dodier notes Hawarden's use of a "lady-and-looking-glass motif" (48). Carol Mavor takes her work as a provocation to actually enact collapse between women, using formulations like "I/we" (Mavor 16). In a familiar gesture, Mavor's 1999 *Becoming* makes extensive conceptual use of erotic similitude without acknowledging the historicity of the category:

Whereas the word *duplicate* is used in various ways—as an adjective to describe something as “being the same as another,” as a noun that defines “either of two things that exactly resemble each other,” as a verb that emphasizes the process “to make double or twofold”—the definition of the verb *reduplicate* is “to make or perform again”.... Hawarden's photographs use her daughters to reperform Hawarden's desire again and again: through the repetition of her daughters, who are themselves repetitions of her (especially Clementina).... through the reflected images of her daughters in the mirror that Hawarden often used as a prop; and through the endless repetition of the photograph itself, as is beautifully registered in the image of Clementina and Isabella sharing a photograph of Florence. 41

I will not rehearse the twinning that certainly prevails in many of Hawarden's photographs. But her oeuvre cannot be only—let alone best—understood through erotic similitude; I want to focus on the model of sexuality governing Hawarden's inversion series.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Mavor's writing is full of unselfconscious racial language: “too much light, too much white” (58). Race and gender converge again when Mavor associates becoming white with erotic similitude: “Clementina and Clementina, alone in the darkroom, *la chambre noire*, the glass plate negatives of blackened girls turning inside out, shedding their black chrysalis skin to sprout the white wings of their mothers eyes, *la chambre claire*. The washing of the

Hawarden often stages female homoeroticism *qua* photographic inversion by visually pairing light and dark. This is especially true where the black and white garment worn by the “boy” in the first image we saw is present. Photography is this garment’s key referent, and remains even when neither sister is sartorially masculinized, as below.



Figure 3. Clementina Hawarden, *5 Princes Gardens, Florence Elizabeth, Clemantina* (sic.), Photograph, 1863-1864, (Victoria and Albert Museum), <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O234701/5-princes-gardens-florence-elizabeth-photograph-clementina-lady-hawarden/>

Figure 4. Clementina Hawarden, *Untitled*, Photograph, 1862-1863, (Victoria and Albert Museum), <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1047979/photograph-clementina-lady-hawarden/>

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prints becomes domestic, like rinsing porcelain plates in the kitchen sink” (Postscript). Their domestic femininity and their sameness hinge on emerging like a butterfly out of blackness into whiteness.

These photographs, it seems to me, are some of the most sensual images in Hawarden's body of work. Women are eroticized by intimate positions, rather than identities in relation to one another, as is the case in images that stage "boy"/girl pairs. In each, two sisters embrace. In fig. 3, the sister wearing the striped garment covers the breast of her sister all in white, who in turn covers her sister's hand with her own. She does not sit quite on her lap, but their legs bend towards one another, and their knees overlap. The first sister's face turns toward the viewer with undemonstrative happiness. In fig. 2, the sister clad in stripes buries her face against her sister's breast, while being clasped by the hand over her other breast. The woman all in white cradles her sister against herself.

As opposed to the *mise-en-abyme* of erotic similitude—where women twin one another as would mirror images—photographs in the inversion series offer a *mise-en-abyme* of *inversion*. In the images above, the overwhelming effect of the sister in stripes is one of darkness, compared to her sister in white, though the former's dress alternates black and white in both images. This pattern adorning the darker sister is echoed and magnified by the sisters themselves, as their side-by-side positions tonally contrast. Placed one next to the other, as above, the two images' four subjects form yet another larger pattern of black and white stripes like those of the photographic garment. Andrea Henderson notices that Hawarden "produced pairs of photographs that function like mirror images of each other" (117); here, we can see that Hawarden also created compositional near-copy images that, when placed side-by-side, extend the visual metaphor of the positive and negative within individual images. Mirroring plays only a supporting role in these images, which privilege binary difference over sameness. These photographs suggest that the positive-negative process evoked mirroring and the *mise-en-abyme*, but also the way in which photographic inversion offered a new way of imagining women together. Writing with

light both old and new arrangements of women together across the bodies of her daughters, Hawarden shows that midcentury photographic technology straddled the cultural imaginary of erotic similitude and inversion.

As in the image with which this chapter begins, some of Hawarden's inversion series place the black and white garment alongside a "boy"/girl pair. While the postures in the following photographs suggest romantic pairs, they are less intimate than those just examined, where two women dressed in women's clothes embrace.



Figure 5. Clementina Hawarden, *Clementina and Isabella Grace Maude, 5 Princes Gardens*, Photograph, ca. 1863-1864, (Victoria and Albert Museum),

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93658/clementina-and-isabella-grace-maude-photograph-hawarden-clementina-viscountess/>

Figure 6. Clementina Hawarden, *Untitled*, Photograph, 1863-1864, (Victoria and Albert Museum), <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1047971/photograph/>



The poses of these photographs' figures reflect one another with the lateral reversal of a mirror image. By adding masculinity to these inverted images, Hawarden draws out photography's revelation of the inversion that was always present to the mirror of erotic similitude, from early modern poems about Sappho kissing herself in the mirror, to the Lady of Shalott's magic glass. Henderson, too, notices Hawarden's penchant for meta-photographic "experimentation with mirrors and inversion," arguing that "the details of the mirror-image pairs... make clear that the mirror is more than just a useful prop for Hawarden; it is an opportunity to think about the significance of inversion." She notes that "[t]hese mirror-image pairings are teasingly similar and yet not exactly the same: here the face is lit, there it is dark" (118). Though these tiny differences—a lit versus a dark face—resonates with the racial difference that had previously been used to assert the non-Englishness of female masculinity, here, the symmetrical halving of faces by shadow and light invokes photographic technology's polar relationship of blacks and whites more so than the English sense of essentialized, racially non-white identity.

Without overtly erotic touch like cradling and touching of breasts, these women's narratively suggestive poses and one of the pair's masculine habit of dress conspire to mark them as lovers. Less pornographic still than the tableau of twinned nudity in the previous section, this image's eroticism is suggested structurally by heterosexual themes costume and posture produce: a yearning "boy" reaches up toward a melancholy or cruelly indifferent girl. Here, the "boy" need not even wear the striped garment; "he" sits on it (fig. 5), or it hangs off to the side (fig. 6). Its presence signals the self-consciously photographic scene, and, in this case, eroticism between women based on gender inversion. This is how English sexology will understand female homosexuality at the end of the century. Under the regime of inversion, female homoeroticism

requires visible gender difference in women behaving like men in relation to other (“normal”) women. The impression of homosexuality *qua* gender inversion is inextricable, here, from the self-consciously photographic medium: Hawarden produces these two images as inverts one of the other, nodding to the inversion of the positive and negative prints that produced them. In the inversion series, the presence of photographic inversion—black and white patterning, and the inversion of images themselves—is conflated with the heteroeroticism of “boy”/girl couples. Even where both women remain feminine, the force of the meta-photographic striped garment is to emphasize the polarized *difference* between the two women, rather than their sameness. Making much of photographic inversion per se, Hawarden’s images of her daughters have been understood as lover-like across decades *because* of the visual oppositions she generates. Using her daughters, erotically posed, to embody the positive and negative, Hawarden draws the formal relations of photographic technology’s polar oppositions together with bodies in space, and the identities invented to understand them.

The main—and most enduring—cultural contribution of sexual inversion has been to make visible what women’s desire for other women can be supposed to *look like*. It was so important, in England, to assert the impossibility of sex between normatively feminine white women in part because erotic similitude depended on the interchangeable *sameness* of women. If any woman unmarked by (corresponding) female masculinity and national or racial otherness could have sex with another, then any woman might do so... even one’s wife. In bringing inversion to light—literally—photography provided a visual metaphor for women who incline towards women. Where English lesbianism *qua* erotic similitude had for so long been invisible, a vacuum of feminine absence, now, a visible, material presence intruded: photography’s light trace, and femininity’s inverse: masculinity. While we have long understood photography’s

usefulness to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century question of what it would mean to make sex visible on the body's surface, it has never been noted that the visible difference for which sexology searched depended on the photographic process *itself*.<sup>147</sup>

*“Washed With a Dirty Brush:” Photographic Technique and English Sexological Racism*

Photography's evidentiary indexicality helped supply a visible, tangible realness from which lesbianism had previously been excluded, adjacent to the better-documented role photography played in late-19<sup>th</sup>-century scientific racism.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, it has almost never been noted that the technical language of early photography anticipated the racial projects to which photography would be put to use, like the comments of Thomas Sutton (editor of *Photographic Notes* from 1856 to 1867) on ““very clean whites”” (Seiberling 31). In *A Popular Treatise on the Art of Photography* (1841), Robert Hunt, notes the “injurious consequence of a cloud obscuring the sun during the last darkening process, is the formation of a surface which has the appearance of being washed with a dirty brush” (Hunt *Treatise* 38). He records that it was (mistakenly) thought “necessary, to procure any impression of human features on the daguerreotype plate, to paint the face white, or dust it over with a white powder” (*Treatise* 64). Talbot explains that “[s]tatues, busts, and other specimens of sculpture, are generally well represented by the Photographic Art...

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<sup>147</sup> Daphne Brooks indicates that photography itself became a 19<sup>th</sup>-century metaphor for deviant sexuality, though in a masculine context. She notes that Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr. Hyde is racialized by an ugliness that appears in the proto-photographic terms of phantasmagoria. Utterson sees Hyde in a nightmare ““scroll of lighted pictures”” (Brooks 54). Hyde “Manifest[s] the submerged fears and desires of the spectator... the monstrous invention of those who look upon him and those who are determined to (un)cover him. Like the racial stereotype which is ‘at best a nominal construct and a phantasmatic space,’ [Bret Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*] the protean figure of Hyde ‘fixes sexual and racial difference within a body which combines horrific effect with Semitic and Negroid features’ (Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 82). For this reason, the novel's characters are both alarmingly aware of and yet refuse to see Hyde for what he is—a reflection of themselves. A body that materially necessitates the community's fear and desire for order and purity in the narrative, Hyde exists so as to be spotted, exposed, and sacrificially executed in order to reinforce communal boundaries” (Brooks 55).

<sup>148</sup> See Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography: Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876-1980*, and Efram Sera-Shiar, “Anthropometric Portraiture and Victorian Anthropology: Situating Francis Galton's Photographic Work in the Late 1870s.”

in consequence of their whiteness,” including two different images (out of 24 plates) of “a bust of Patroclus” in *The Pencil of Nature* (23, 47). White marble neoclassical statuary, the Oxford Companion to Black British History explains, “signaled... the ideological preference for an abstracted whiteness which held a symbolic power intertwined with contemporary racialized ideals of beauty” (Dabydeen, Gilmore, Jones 504).

Early technical-theoretical writings on the positive-negative process further register an ethos of heterosexuality inextricable from racial projects.<sup>149</sup> Referring to papers, salts, and solutions, Hunt uses variations on the phrase “impregnated with” on pages 45, 85, 112, 188, and twice on 147 of his *Popular Treatise*. One of the founders of the Liverpool Photographic Society, Frances Frith, wrote a piece for *The Art Journal* in 1859 worth quoting at length.

To Mr. Fox Talbot is due... the production of the first matrix, or “negative,” by means of the camera, which... gave a “positive” result—that is, a picture with objects in their correct relative positions, and with the proper relations of light and shade. Now, it is obvious that, in order to accomplish these objects, the matrix, or “negative,” must be produced in the camera *with all these conditions reversed*. The right hand of the picture must be brought to the left; blacks must be white, and whites black; shadows must be clear, and high lights opaque.... all [these] required conditions—by a sort of providential arrangement so remarkable that it

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<sup>149</sup> Steve Edwards elaborates the gender politics of early photography; Talbot’s drawing failures in *The Pencil of Nature* become a more generalized discussion of the superiority of mechanic representation (photography) over artistic skill in a moment when skilled labor was understood as an “individual possession” (35) important for workers to assert independence and authority: “any attack on skill involved an assault on male workers’ traditions, culture, livelihood, and authority in the family. Intended or not, Talbot’s tirade against skill cannot but take its place in this field of struggle. By stripping away skill, he implied not only a capitalist assault on the worker but also a demasculinization of the artisan.... The struggle to define who controlled technology was no less than a struggle to decide who would be called a man. In the history of the victors, men came to be viewed not as those who possessed a property in skill, but as those persons who owned and controlled a different kind of property—the kind that Talbot owned” (29-36).

looks exceedingly like a *special* one, rather than by any complicated devices of Mr. Fox Talbots—hasten to crowd themselves upon this wonderful “negative” picture. The lens, of its own accord, reverses the relative position of the objects,—throws right to the left, and left to the right,—the chemical action of the light *blackening* (instead of *whitening*) the prepared surface in the most inconceivably delicate proportion to its intensity. We have, altogether, such an indivisible, unalterable, and appropriate combination of natural laws, bearing upon the subject with such perfect *benevolence* towards the desired result, that it has frequently struck us that a photographic picture is not so much a contrivance of man as a design of nature, with which we have become happily acquainted, and which to neglect in cultivation would approach nearly to a sin. 72

Frith suggests that the positive-negative process surpassed the daguerreotype because the former allows for reproduction. In the same metaphoric vein, he calls the negative “matrix”—womb—likening the positive-negative process to heterosexual reproduction and female fertility, as opposed to the sterility of the daguerreotype’s “mirror with a memory.” Most of all, it is the oppositional logic of the positive-negative process that seems to him natural and decent, even morally imperative.<sup>150</sup>

Frith’s startling language of morality indicates how important was the naturalization of oppositional poles. Metaphors of reproduction accruing to these poles suggest that the way the positive and negative were conceptualized was reciprocally related to a Victorian gender imaginary fixated on equal and opposite symmetry. In the way that 19<sup>th</sup>-century photographers

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<sup>150</sup>. Henderson comments on this passage, “[t]he daguerreotype was a direct-positive process that did not invert darks and lights; that Frith should ignore this virtue and consider the indirect double-inversion process of the calotype and its successors as fundamentally ‘natural’ speaks to the extent to which oppositional relationships had themselves come to seem part of the ‘design of nature’” (97).

wrote about their practice, a colonialism obsessed with gender—and likewise a gender imaginary obsessed with race and empire—is inescapable.<sup>151</sup> Like Frith’s moralizing of the negative itself, “[f]or amateur photographers, chemical processes and the practices of the darkroom became enmeshed with the moral qualities of both self-restraint and self-discipline” (Edwards *Camera* 106). As always, “self-restraint and self-discipline” are necessarily raced and gendered configurations. As the *British Journal of Photography* protests (too much) in 1863: it is “not at all un-ladylike to pursue the black art. We know many ladies who do so, and who excel in it... With a little care there is no need to black your fingers—much!” (Dodier 35). That the “black art” could undo white English femininity obviated the English need to studiously look away from home when thinking about female sexual non-normativity. In a *Punch* cartoon from 1853, a young woman lifts a veil under which she has been hiding black smudges from practicing photography. she is not “sufficiently careful” with her chemicals, and has blackened her face.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Photography was often personified as art’s racially non-white handmaiden, following orientalist painting’s troping of female-female eroticism. Edwards notes that in “debates” over photography’s status as art, “the metaphor of slavery routinely crops up” (*Allegories* 14). In the early 1860s, George Wharton Simpson, editor of *The Photographic News*, complained that “‘photography is to be a servant of servants; it may hew wood and draw water, or do other mechanical labour; but it must not presume to act as having attained its freedom in the guild of art.’” This phrase is “massively overdetermined.... ever since the authorized version of the Bible of 1611 appeared, this formulation... has been employed to designate... those condemned to perform unfree labor... slaves and indentured servants; all too frequently, they were black or Irish” (Edwards *Allegories* 230-231). Frank Howard, of the Liverpool Photographic Society, suggested that were photography to “overstep[] its ‘legitimate aims,’... we would witness ‘a realization of Swift’s fable of the Houyhnhnms [*sic*], in Gulliver’s Travels, in which the horses are the masters, and the human beings, as Yahoos, are degraded to slaves of the brutes” (Edwards *Allegories* 159). In the same period, R. A. Seymour wrote for the *British Journal of Photography* that among the practitioners of photography are the “Miniature and portrait painter” who had lost their profession as did “Othello” (Edwards *Allegories* 111).

<sup>152</sup> Hannah Cullwick often dressed as a man for photographs and erotic play, and, as in the *Punch* cartoon above, the “dirt” with which Cullwick and Arthur Munby were erotically fascinated sometimes translated into blackface. See Anne McClintock’s “Imperial Leather: Race, Cross-Dressing and the Cult of Domesticity.” Cullwick’s “talent for costume, disguise and improvisation was no simple theatrical masquerade; rather, it was a profound engagement with the social edicts that brutally circumscribed her life.... [She] performed transformations of race and class as well as gender” (175-176). Portrait photography was a key part of her exercises in pleasure and labor; indeed, Munby regularly photographed Cullwick as she “cross-dressed as an upper-class mistress, a rural farm worker and a male valet. She costumed herself as a male slave, a chimney sweet, an angel and a fieldhand” (173). McClintock’s reading makes much of the economic power and historical transformations of the different social roles Cullwick inhabited, but reproduces without attending to its photographic record. Given the importance of producing photographs to Munby and Cullwick, I hazard that the photographic logic of opposition and inversion I have been suggesting structured new ideas of gender and sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century inspired Cullwick and Munby’s lifework and oeuvre.

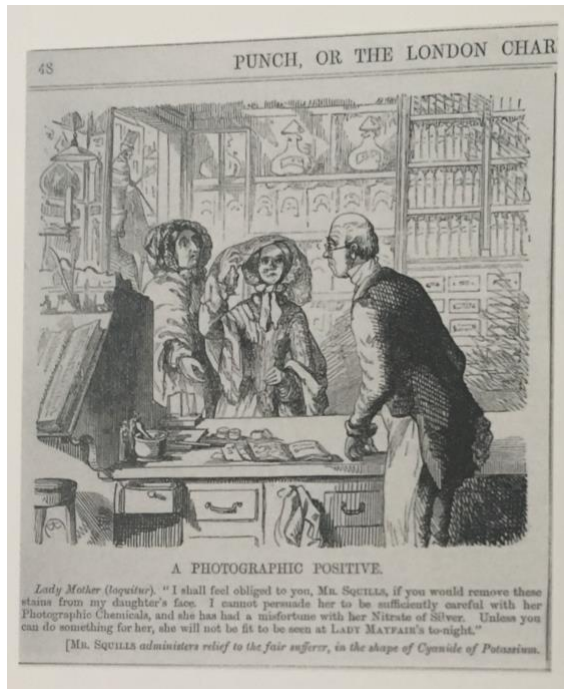


Figure 7. Cuthbert Bede, “A Photographic Positive.” *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 30 July 1853, p. 48.

Photographic blackness damages white middle class femininity, as “she will not be fit to be seen at Lady Mayfair’s to-night” (fig. 7). The *idea* of white womanhood undermined by the “black art” persisted, despite an actual paucity of female practitioners of photography. (In 1865, the *Photographic News* speculated “[u]ndoubtedly the difficulty of keeping their dainty fingers stainless is the great reason why we have comparatively so few lady amateurs” (Dodier 35).)

Paradoxically, this imaginary was productive—reassuring, even—for a national tradition that above all could not countenance the invisibility of female same-sex desire. *Punch* slyly refers to the possibilities of exposure afforded by photography: lift the veil, and shameful female secrets will appear. In the first few pages of *Researches on Light*, Robert Hunt suggests that photography might expose nature by “lifting up” the “veil” through which “natural truths” had been seen “in the youth of mankind.” A tool for scientific investigation, photography is also

rhetorically posed as an instrument for mapping feminized nature.<sup>153</sup> Hunt's suggestion of exposure resonates with sexology's project to ferret out the signs of inversion on the female body by more than just metonymic slippage between the lifted veil and lifted skirt. The implicit maleness of Hunt's viewing subject ("youth of mankind") brings the inverted female object into photographic relation with masculinity; similarly, in 1839, Michael Faraday said, "what man may hereafter do, now that Dame Nature has been his drawing mistress, it is impossible to predict" (Edwards *Allegories* 307). But if photography allowed the "unveiling" of female secrets, the secret in question was the inversion photography itself posited.<sup>154</sup> Photography doubled down on imperialist notions of the visibility of sexual deviance by *itself* lending a mark of visible difference, and then documenting that difference in the photographic record. A scientific operation more than an artistic one up until the 1860s, photography offered one more "device that could increase the power of vision," of a piece with "the hold of the microscope and the telescope."<sup>155</sup> Until now, the way in which "medical metaphors" informed the "cultural

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<sup>153</sup> In the *Three Essays*, Freud draws together this metaphor of the veil with that of penetration: "in the woman, it [sexual life] is veiled in impenetrable darkness, partly in consequence of cultural stunting and partly on account of the conventional reticence and dishonesty of women" (16). Photography's use as a scientific tool to penetrate the secrets of a feminized nature reveals something about the sexological project that photography preceded and aided. "To penetrate" is as much to insert masculine difference as it is "to know." Sexology's aim was to locate and document the secret masculinity of the woman who loved other women—her gender inversion. Both projects made female sexuality knowable by adding a man to the scene of women alone.

<sup>154</sup> In *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula suggests that the photographer feels his own gaze returned through the camera-like eye opening of the veiled woman, and in response stages an unveiling in his studio (14-15). He writes, "[i]t matters little if Orientalistic painting begins to run out of wind or falls into mediocrity. Photography steps in to take up the slack and reactivates the phantasm at its lowest level. The postcard does it one better; it becomes the poor man's phantasm: for a few pennies, display racks full of dreams. The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space, immediately available to the tourist, the soldier, the colonist. It is at once their poetry and their glory captured for the ages; it is also their pseudo knowledge of the colony. It produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano. It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision" (4). The photographer's gesture of unveiling in this orientalist mode doubles down on the tone of sexual revelation implicit in Robert Hunt's usage. In the colonial context from which he writes, Alloula's formulation suggests that when the veil is lifted and the female body is photographically, scientifically exposed and examined, what is (sexually) revealed is exoticized racial difference.

<sup>155</sup> Historians of photography have often oversold the artistry of the photographer before the 1860s (Edwards *Allegories* 62).



identity of portrait photography” up until the second half of the century has almost exclusively been documented across the Atlantic (2).<sup>156</sup>

Nevertheless, it was within this discursive milieu in England that Hawarden self-consciously transferred the positive and negative’s formal polarity into theme, differentiating photography’s polarized schema from earlier racist imaginaries of gender. Pre-nineteenth century traditions conjoining female masculinity to non-Englishness surely aided and abetted the conjoining of gender to photographic discourses of blackening; to imagine that female masculinity and non-whiteness went hand in hand, photography and sexology alike could draw on centuries-old English traditions. But what finally allowed a domestically English female invert to appear in medicine was photographic inversion’s polarized imaginary. While the former associations are well established, the latter has never previously been noted by scholars of sexuality or photography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the final section, I argue that inversion was literary, as well as photographic in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century before only finally sexological at its end. When sexology was already entrenched, Virginia Woolf would draw these disciplines and media together, issuing a literary sendup of British sexology in her 1928 novel *Orlando*. Tongue planted in cheek, the narrator explains “[l]ove... has two faces; one white, the other black; two bodies; one smooth, the other hairy. It has two hands, two feet, two, indeed, of every member and each one is the exact opposite of the other” (Woolf *Orlando* 117). Woolf’s mocking description of the polarized heterosexuality of England’s sexological inversion confirms—by making ridiculous—the equal

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<sup>156</sup> Tanya Sheehan shows that in the moment just before sexuality became a science and a medicine, in America, “commercial portrait photographers began constructing medical metaphors to describe the space of the urban photographic studio, the materials central to studio practices, and the physical and social effects of photographic operations. This practice became so pervasive in early photographic literature, in fact, that one rarely finds an issue of a trade journal without references to the photographer as ‘doctor,’ his apparatus as ‘surgical,’ or his chemicals as ‘diseased’ patients” (2).

and opposite symmetry on which it depended for women. Madelyn Detloff notes that this passage “mimics sexological rhetoric... in the pseudoscientific tone with which the narrator describes Orlando’s predicament, both before and after s/he mysteriously changes sex.... This bifurcation of love’s qualities ad infinitum not only parodies the taxonomical impulse of sexology but also highlights the hetero-inevitability of theories of inversion” (Detloff 7). In a novel about Englishness, and specifically the (hilariously literalized) English requirement of cross-gender identification for same-sex desire, Woolf suggests that the “exact opposite[s]” on which English inversion depended were underpinned by the black and white imaginary of the photographic positive and negative, where all is perfectly the same, but reversed, blacks and whites inverted. In the novel to which I now turn to show that inversion circulated in literature at midcentury, Wilkie Collins similarly marshals the masculine Marian Halcombe’s darkness in a manner resonant with photography’s schematic, symmetrical opposites more than racial non-whiteness’ categorical difference in the Victorian imaginary.

### *Photographic Inversion in The Woman in White*

Between 1999 and 2006, Penguin Classics ran an edition of *The Woman in White* featuring a cover by Clementina Hawarden: a girl all in white, standing before a mirror. In turn, Julie Lawson’s 1997 book on Hawarden’s photography, *Women in White*, adopts Collins’ title. The ekphrastic relationship of these texts is suggestive: like Hawarden, Collins represents residual and emergent models of female homoeroticism. *The Woman in White*’s main (female) characters, Anne, Laura, and Marian, are arranged in two different types of pairs: one of twinned women in white (who are white women), and one pair in a relationship of inversion. The midcentury novel suggests that erotic similitude, the relationship between Laura, a “normal” (feminine white)

woman, and her doppelganger, Anne, is insalubrious and unsustainable. Inversion, expressed as partnership between the same “normal” woman and her racialized and gendered female opposite, Marian Halcombe—Wilkie Collins’ pre-sexological invert heroine—is the way of the future, as Marian’s character precipitates what sexology says of the female invert a quarter of a century later.

We should pause for a moment to address the fact that Collins inscribes two different versions of female eroticism across sisterly bodies: both Marian and Anne are half-sisters to Laura. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century imaginary of female (homo)eroticism is populated by sisters perhaps because in the context of sympathy, the sororal relationship is a privileged one for collapsing difference between women.<sup>157</sup> Eve Sedgwick places this pattern within a tradition of masturbatory aesthetic production, but as we have seen, masturbation and erotic similitude are deeply intertwined histories. She explores the literary history of autoeroticism to argue that *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel about love between sisters tending towards the erotic, and masturbatory solipsism, simultaneously (*Tendencies* 114).

[T]he Aesthetic in Kant is both substantively indistinguishable from, and at the same time definitionally opposed against, autoerotic pleasure. Sensibility, too—even more tellingly for the example of Austen—named the locus of a similarly dangerous overlap. As John Mullan points out in *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, the empathetic alloidentifications that were supposed to guarantee the sociable nature of sensibility could not finally

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<sup>157</sup> More generally, sisters are good for representing erotic similitude because sisterhood augments one of its defining effects. The attitude that nothing can “really happen” between two women becomes even more intense when those two women are related. Denis Diderot offers a perfect example: sisterhood did not stop him being jealous of Sophie Volland’s sororal intimacy. Having heard from their mother that she “‘likes pretty women,’” he wrote to her, “‘I put my lips to yours and kiss them, even if your sister’s kisses are still there. But no, there’s nothing there; hers are so light and airy’” (Wahl 1, 4). Though he is threatened by the eroticism between them, he represents it as insubstantial, absent.

be distinguished from an epistemological solipsism, a somatics of trembling self-absorption, and ultimately—in the durable medical code for autoeroticism and its supposed sequelae—“neurasthenia.” Similarly unstable dichotomies between art and masturbation have persisted, culminating in those recurrent indictments of self-reflexive art and critical theory themselves as forms of mental masturbation *Tendencies* 110-111.

Like masturbation—literal or mental, in Sedgwick’s idiom—erotic similitude is a sexuality of one, though there are literally two. Sororal eroticism is the closest alloerotic approximation of autoeroticism.<sup>158</sup>

*The Woman in White*’s insistently “true” events depend on female similitude.<sup>159</sup> Anne Catherick, the mysterious title character, is an asylum escapee haunting the novel with a secret more like a cipher, dressed all in white to match her fair complexion. She is the spitting image—and, as we discover, the half-sister—of Laura Fairlie, whose very name suggests her whiteness of skin. Laura is an heiress whose only protectors are her useless uncle and contrastingly capable

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<sup>158</sup> The notorious 19<sup>th</sup>-century medical treatment of Dr. Zambaco’s little girl patients X and Y, sisters who taught each other to masturbate, forms a lengthy portion of Sedgwick’s essay; we ought to remember that the daughters and photographic models of Viscountess Clementina Hawarden are yet another set of sisters.

<sup>159</sup> For Irene Tucker, “the likeness at the heart of Collins’ novel tells the story of the newly dominant anatomical medicine paradigm, a framework in which the likeness of bodies and their capacity to cause and control their own operations imply one another” (78). She also sees *The Woman in White* as marking a moment of historical change, albeit from another angle: “the impulse to make likenesses perceptible that is modern, skin-based race was not simply born of a generalized empiricism, but emerged as a solution to a particular Enlightenment problem: to make likeness visible instantaneously, so as to circumvent the incapacity of certain models of Enlightenment thought to register lawful change. In this regard, *The Woman in White*, which turns the novel form’s generic power to treat indiscernible likeness as if it is visible into the stuff of its own pointedly diachronic plot, can be seen both to illustrate the process by which realist description and racial knowing are brought into being and to engineer the undoing of that racial and novelistic knowing. For Collins... the genre of the novel is especially well suited to the task of thinking through the relations of materially present likeness and a sameness that is elsewhere, dedicated as the form is to representing particular characters who can’t actually be seen and whose legibility rests on readers’ capacity to imagine them to be like people those readers have seen. In Collins’s hands, this ordinary practice at the heart of nineteenth-century realism becomes an instrument for coming to understand why it matters that we recognize subjects *as subjects* because they occupy the same body over time, as well as what exactly it is we are thinking and seeing when we look at ‘individuals’” (Tucker 76-77).

(other) half-sister, Marian Halcombe. Dark and hirsute, Marian is like a man in a woman's body. The narrator, Walter Hartwright, meets Laura and Marian when he is employed as a drawing teacher at Limmeridge, Laura's house, following his first encounter with the as-yet-anonymous Anne. Walter falls in love with Laura, who herself falls victim to a villainous adventurer's plot to marry her and take her property. Sir Percival Glyde and his cleverer and more menacing sidekick, Count Fosco, take advantage of the resemblance between Laura and Anne to imprison the former in Anne's old asylum, where Laura temporarily loses her wits. She is rescued by Walter and Marian, and ultimately united with Walter, following Sir Percival's disgraceful death.

The novel triangulates Anne and Laura—feminine, white doubles—and Laura and Marian—polar opposites in every regard. In the tradition of erotic similitude, where sexuality between (white) women is considered impossible because there's simply *nothing there*, the Laura/ Anne coupling seems to lack something. Upon their first meeting, Laura produces in Walter an “impression, which, in a shadowy way, suggested to me the idea of something wanting.... Something wanting, something wanting—and where it was, and what it was, I could not say” (111-112).<sup>160</sup> Like the non-existent sexuality of the subject of erotic similitude, “where it was, and what it was” cannot be said. What Walter cannot pinpoint—that which Laura lacks—is her twinned resemblance to her half-sister: their sameness itself is the absence. Such a multiple form of female subjectivity approaches *suffisaunce*, but is rendered devastatingly *insufficient* in this transitional moment for female sexuality. For Rachel Ablow, Laura's meaning (even as Laura), is all projected onto her by Walter; for me, the reason she is a meaningless cipher is her

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<sup>160</sup> Leila Silvana May comments on Laura Fairlie thus: “there is never a trace of masculine in Laura... the first time we hear of her, Marian tells us, ‘My sister is in her own room, nursing that essentially feminine malady, a slight headache’ (59). Walter describes Laura.... ‘Her hair is of so *faint* and *pale* a brown—not flaxen, and yet *almost* as light; not golden, and yet *almost* as glossy—that it *nearly* melts, here and there, into the *shadow* of the hat’; ‘the eyes are of that soft, limpid, turquoise blue, so often sung by the poets, *so seldom seen in real life*’ (75, emphasis added). Laura, in short, is scarcely there” (132).

identity with Anne (96). Ablow attributes loss of meaning to sensation within the genre of sensationalism, but the history of erotic similitude reveals the way in which meaning requires difference between discrete subjects.

Paradoxically, that there are two of the same woman becomes their very insufficiency in Collins' description, as Walter finally realizes what was missing: "There stood Miss Fairlie, a white figure... in her complexion, in the shape of her face, the living image... of the woman in white.... That 'something wanting' was my own recognition of the ominous likeness between the fugitive from the asylum and my pupil" (133). Laura and Anne, though they are two, are vacuous deficiency like the *mise-en-abyme* of absence characterizing erotic similitude. As racial project, erotic similitude asserts sex is impossible between white Englishwomen; that which is "wanting" is expressed in the same breath as Laura and Anne's whiteness, the "colourless... face" of a racial category that claims itself as *unmarked* by race (43).

Anne's all-encompassing whiteness leads to the impression that she is Laura's ghost. She is described by a child as "'Arl in white—as a ghaist should be'" (193). Not only is Anne mistaken for a qualified version (a ghostly one) of Laura, ghostliness itself recalls the unindividuated corporeality of erotic similitude. Disembodiment appears in English early modern texts as a tactic for obviating lesbian sexuality, for instance in the "spiritual" union of Margaret Cavendish's "Platonik" lovers in *The Blazing World*, where both female lovers are figures of the Duchess of Newcastle, Cavendish herself. Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian* discusses the literary tendency to turn the lesbian into a ghost or a fading wraith when faced with the problem of enfleshed sexuality, as a way of simply doing away with the body (Castle 28-65). Inextricable from the English tradition of erotic similitude, disappearing the flesh serves a construct of white womanhood as evacuated of sexuality and embodiment itself. As Laura's

ghost, Anne would be a qualified version of Laura, actually *becoming* Laura, fulfilling erotic similitude's promise to undo "the distance between 'I' and 'thee'... 'I am not thine, but Thee'" (Traub 338).

With its ghost motif, *The Woman in White* augments even the "somatics of trembling... absorption" of *Sense and Sensibility*'s masturbatory/ sisterly eroticism (Sedgwick 110-111). Trembling, edge-of-seat sensations occur with the highest intensity at moments when the identity of the woman in white is in question: the sensational climax of *The Woman in White* is a scene over the grave of Laura Fairlie. Though the gravestone reads "'Sacred to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde—' Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription" (968). The frisson of this scene is too many women in white: Laura is in the grave; she is on the gravestone; she is standing over the grave. The generic requirements of the novel make this arrangement of women together moribund; sensational scenes featuring ghosts and graves characterize the morbidity of Laura and Anne's twinning. Marian's concern for Walter's wellbeing in this moment would be bafflingly excessive, but for this referent. Like the too-absorbing and viscerally affecting 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel generally, moments like this carry an obscurely onanistic threat. However, unlike the singularity of the reader/ masturbator, alone with her intensely somatic feelings, the cause for anxiety here is the multiplicity of one same.

In "Sensation and Gender in *The Woman in White*," D.A. Miller points out that what Laura is "missing" to become a perfect replica of is Anne is her sorrow and suffering (124). If we think back to suffering Griselda, we recall that sorrow and suffering are key elements of *suffisaunce*. But whereas the remarkable result of Griselda's ordeal is her unchanged self-sufficiency in the face of unimaginable loss—in other words, her endurance as the same—Laura is markedly diminished by loss; arguably, she loses herself as she is mistaken for Anne. If Anne

in some sense *is* Laura when mistaken for her ghost, then conversely, Laura might be said to become Anne when the only difference between them disappears. Of Anne, “the poor little thing’s intellect is not as developed as it ought to be” (128). She is “[q]ueer... always queer, with her whims and her ways” (211) with “a touch of something wrong in the head” (782). Falsely imprisoned in the asylum, being told that she is Anne makes Laura mad for a time, erasing their only distinction: Laura’s previously strong mind. The “weakened, shaken faculties” (1020) that descend on Laura after being locked up as Anne render her as “queer” as the true Anne.<sup>161</sup>

Loss of her faculties is not the only occasion for Laura’s infantilization. She is first introduced as a “visionary nursling of... fancy” (110), and at the end of the novel, she is positioned as Marian and Walter’s child in their tripartite relation. This characterization resonates with representations of erotic similitude as masturbation, and both as sexual underdevelopment.<sup>162</sup> Strikingly, at the point in the novel when the woman in white could legitimately be either Laura or Anne, their indifference is the site of madness, or, as Sedgwick reminds us, “the durable medical code for autoeroticism and its supposed sequelae—

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<sup>161</sup> For the most part, sexologists understood “nonprocreative sexual behaviors” to be “signs of mental disorder”; for instance, “Kraft-Ebbing’s interest in homosexuality stemmed from his experience in asylum-based psychiatry” (Terry 45). In “nonprocreative sexual behaviors,” we hear an echo of Traub’s un(re)productive play of surface pleasures between mirror-like women. Georges Didi-Huberman has written extensively on the relationship between female mental insanity and photography: “a certain session of the medico-psychological society in Paris, on April 27, 1867, was organized around the theme of ‘the application of photography to the study of mental illness.’ Participating in this session were, notably, Moreau de Tours, Baillarger, and Morel. Considering a method did not so much mean questioning photography’s epistemic interest—for this appeared to everyone as evident, all too evident—but rather establishing the basic protocol for the transmission of these images. The problem of the reproducibility and literary treatment of images was on the agenda” (44). Before the first page of text in *The Invention of Hysteria* is an untitled and uncommented-upon image of a woman in bed with her hand between her legs (2). Jean-Martin Charcot came to the Salpêtrière in 1862 (Didi-Huberman 13). One of the 38 “physical causes” of death of the 254 women who died at the Salpêtrière in 1862 was “masturbation” (Didi-Huberman 15). One of Charcot’s causes of hysteria is masturbation; for Paul Briquet, it was a cure (Didi-Huberman 72, 176). One way or another, masturbation was always on the scene in the asylum. Didi-Huberman imagines the experiments with asylum patients as “what is called a *branle*, the dance that a leader or the master of ceremonies must know how to lead.” The translator notes that “the very form *branler* is also slang for masturbation” (223). The sensation novel provides a good vehicle for doubling down on the meaninglessness of erotic similitude with madness because it could bridge the supernaturalism of spiritualist doubling and inter penetration with science and realism.

<sup>162</sup> Annamarie Jagose argues that even in modern understandings, lesbian sexuality never develops past masturbation into true alloeroticism.



‘neurasthenia’” (110-111). This feebleness remains for a time once she is delivered of the asylum; as she recovers under Walter and Marian’s care, she spends her time making “poor little dim faint sketch[es]” (1050), the aesthetic production of the weak-minded masturbator. When Walter encourages her with “a little box of colours, and a sketch-book” her “poor weary pining eyes looked... with a new interest, with a faltering thoughtfulness in them”; Laura’s “faltering touch” and the “feeble hand” which “patiently practise it by herself, with some faint reflection of the innocent pleasure” (1021) suggestively refer us to the aesthetic objects of which alone erotic similitude qua masturbation is productive.

Sedgwick gracefully connects sympathy, masturbation, and neurasthenic madness to female homoeroticism with her turn of phrase, a “love that keeps forgetting its name” (*Tendencies* 129).<sup>163</sup> But *The Woman in White* shows that the “self-forgetfulness” Sedgwick identifies as a symptom of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century lesbian masturbator is actually the normal condition of right womanhood in the period: “[t]hat sublime self-forgetfulness of women” (1281). “Forgetting” oneself was the stuff of conduct books for white, middle- and upper-class women. But self-forgetfulness in the sense that Laura can’t quite remember who she is anymore when told she is Anne approaches dangerously to queerness, where homoeroticism is imagined as erotic similitude. Feminine self-effacement, as much as Sedgwickian sympathy, threatens to tip into mutual masturbation, or a 19<sup>th</sup>-century version of “the lesbian urge to merge.” Collins’ novel reveals the conceptual flaw in erotic similitude as a project to eliminate female same-sex

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<sup>163</sup> Feminine narcissism was also at issue between the asylum and the photograph: “too much attention to dress and appearance was a sign of madness.... James Crichton Browne, medical director of the West Riding Asylum at Wakefield, photographed a woman patient who suffered from ‘Intense Vanity’” (Showalter 84-85). Elaine Showalter recounts Charcot’s patient Augustine, an adolescent who was raped by her mother’s lover, a man for whom she also worked. She went into the Salpêtrière in 1875, and was photographed repeatedly, until she “began to see everything in black and white.” Showalter notes that Charcot referred to her speech, generically, about “fire, blood, rape, hatred of men, revolution, and escape” as “‘much ado about nothing’” (152-154). Historically, female repudiation of masculinity is understood as nonsense. Didi-Huberman himself recreates the interchangeability of madwomen in the separatist logic of erotic similitude: “Augustine looks more or less like anyone” (85).

sexuality. Laura's easy loss of selfhood, as when the confusion of her identity confuses *her*, is the correct condition of white womanhood. Beyond even her extreme resemblance to Anne, Laura is *generally* without identity. Walter suggests that Laura is interchangeable with whatever woman the reader first loved by way of introducing her. Instead of actually describing her, "[t]hink of her as you thought of the first woman who quickened the pulses within you that the rest of her sex had no art to stir" (110). In a heterosexual context, it is correct for the woman's identity to disappear. The villain says of his wife and himself, "we have but one opinion between us, and that opinion is mine" (562).<sup>164</sup> In the scheme to switch the doppelgangers, Laura for Anne, Fosco's line "presto! pass!" (546) means the women pass as one another because no one can tell them apart, but also suggests the "passing" femme, or the woman no one can tell is a lesbian because she presents visually as normatively feminine.<sup>165</sup>

Tellingly, Laura's outline becomes more firm once she is married. On her return, her sister describes her, "[t]here is more colour and more decision and roundness of outline in her face than there used to be, and her figure seems more firmly set" (487). Heterosexuality pulls Laura away from erotic similitude, where no boundary separates women. The color in her face, too, suggests her removal her from the whiteness of this imaginary.<sup>166</sup> Laura and Anne's

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<sup>164</sup> This assertion occurs as part of a question about whether Fosco and his wife can both sign a document as witnesses. The next chapter addresses the way in which husband and wife were one under *couverture*.

<sup>165</sup> Femmes are not merely "straight-looking;" their femininity is stylized and intentional, legible to butches and to other femmes.

<sup>166</sup> Nancy Armstrong suggests "[p]hotographically speaking, gender might well depend on the degree of opacity an object acquired or failed to acquire in becoming an image. In linking nineteenth-century photography to the culture's fascination with spiritualism, [Tom] Gunning has called attention to the fact that communion with the dead automatically feminized the medium: 'The medium was passive, but passive in a particularly dynamic way. She was receptive, sensitive, a vehicle, a medium by which manifestation spread. All mediums, men or women, had to be, in Spiritualist parlance, feminine, or negative (borrowing again from electricity and magnetism a technical term which also has implications for photography) in order to let the spirit world manifest itself.' Gunning's remarks cast an interesting light on the nineteenth-century view of the 'medium' of photography itself, which can certainly be considered 'passive in a particularly dynamic way.' He also offers a suggestive analogy by which we might understand what photography accomplishes in semiotic terms when it selects certain objects for the kind of transparency that indicates there is nothing of substance behind the image. Whether male or female, rich or poor, people are rendered feminine in opposition to figures that other images endow with the opacity of material things"

characterizations go a long way to explaining why erotic similitude is so troubling, why inversion—once it became conceptually available with photography—seemed preferable as a way to think of women together. The value of inversion is the visual mark of different: the invert cannot “pass.”

Laura’s half-sister Marian Halcombe embodies oppositional, inverted difference from “normal” white femininity. Marian’s darkness and masculinity are established in the first description of her, which is a comic blazon through Walter’s eyes. Upon meeting her, Walter is “set... in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly” by “[t]he easy elegance of every movement of her limbs and body as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room.” In this state of anticipation, Walter breathlessly narrates, “I said to myself, The lady is dark. She moved forward a few steps—and I said to myself, The lady is young. She approached nearer—and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express), The lady is ugly!” (68). Walter goes on to depict her physiognomy, making clear that Marian’s unsightliness *is* the dusky masculinity of her visage.

The lady’s complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. Her expression—bright, frank, and intelligent—appeared, while she was silent, to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest woman alive is beauty incomplete. 68-69

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(94-95). “Spirit photography,” which most often presented ghostly women as its subject matter, offered images of women half disappeared, difficult to pin down, with no firm outline, like Laura before her marriage. These oppositions were gendered along the lines of light and dark, solidity and transparency.

Like *Orlando*'s male half under the regime of inversion, Marian is dark and hirsute' the phrase "dark face" is repeated on the next page (69). Walter stresses that the last two terms—cleverness and boldness—obviate beauty in a woman, and so defines feminine beauty as "gentleness and pliability:" the very qualities that get Laura into trouble.

Not only Marian's outward appearance, but her speech and manner betray her masculinity in terms perfectly prefiguring sexological descriptions of female inversion. Marian issues Walter

odd words of welcome... spoken in a clear, ringing, pleasant voice. The offered hand—rather large, but beautifully formed—was given to me with... easy, unaffected self-reliance.... Her light flow of talk, and her lively familiarity of manner with a total stranger, were accompanied by an unaffected naturalness and an easy inborn confidence in herself and her position, which would have secured her the respect of the most audacious man breathing. While it was impossible to be formal and reserved in her company, it was more than impossible to take the faintest vestige of a liberty with her, even in thought. I felt this instinctively, even while I caught the infection of her own bright gaiety of spirits. 70-72

Compare this passage with Ellis' notes with which this essay begins: "energetic movements... direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness and sense of honor, and especially the attitude toward men, free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity... suggest the underlying psychic abnormality" (*Studies* 244-250). Neither "shy" nor "audacious," Marian is "straightforward" with Walter, who finds that if it is impossible to be formal with her, it is *more* than impossible to "take the faintest vestige of a liberty with her, even in thought."

Marian cannot even be thought of in a sexual way by a man; her directness and ease with Walter do not in any way make her available to him, but rather indicate inversion.

We should notice that Marian's unattractiveness consists *only* in her darkness and manishness, inextricable in these passages. We can imagine how appealing and compelling is Marian's female masculinity if we disregard Walter's heterosexual male gaze, the filter through which we receive her. Nevertheless, in the terms that the novel offers, with her beautiful (womanly) body and ugly (masculine) face, Marian embodies the same internal contradiction as the striped garment of Hawarden's inversion series. Her incongruousness is violently represented by Walter; "such a face as this set on such shoulders that a sculptor would have longed to model—to be charmed by the modest graces of action through which the symmetrical limbs betrayed their beauty when they moved, and then to be almost repelled by the masculine form and masculine look of the features in which the perfectly shaped figure ended" (69). This internal contradiction resonates with the invert's "intermediate or mixed temperament," a way in which English sexologists made their own the German idea of a male body in a female soul (Carpenter *Intermediate* 9). A creature of "both kinds," like the Renaissance hermaphrodite mermaid, or the Faerie Queene's Echidna and Errour (half woman, repellent male parts), Marian is a creature of visible opposites—inversions—like Hawarden's symbol for photography itself, the black and white garment with which she adorns her daughter, simultaneously boy and girl.

Just like Hawarden's "boy," the darkly shadowed girl draped in the striped garment, Marian's overall effect is one of contrast with her sister, though she is internally made up of contradictions. Marian describes Laura "as unlike" herself as possible: "I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty" (73). Here again, race, gender, and beauty are ambiguously conflated. Though Marian encompasses both masculinity and femininity with her fine figure and man's

face, lightness of movement and bold manner, she ultimately plays the man's role vis-à-vis the feminine woman. Both Ellis and Carpenter would stress the "tendency for the invert to be attracted toward persons unlike himself, so that in... sexual relationships there is a certain semblance of sexual opposition" (*Studies* 283-284). The inverted woman's "inner nature is to a great extent masculine.... Her love goes out to younger and more feminine natures than own" (Carpenter *Intermediate* 35). In other words, under inversion's regime, same-sex attraction mimics heterosexuality's oppositional logic.

Sharon Marcus has thoroughly explored the relationship of female same-sex bonds to opposite sex unions in the Victorian marriage plot. She demonstrates both the reality of female marriages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the role of the intimate female friend in the novel, contending that critics have very wrongly

cast all relationships between women as troubling disruptions or utopian alternatives to the genre's smooth reproduction of femininity, marriage, and heterosexuality. The insistence that relationships between women must heroically oppose the marriage plot has led scholars to define any novel that ends in marriage as hostile to female friendship, rather than attend to the remarkably overlooked fact that almost every Victorian novel that ends in marriage has first supplied its heroine with an intimate female friend. 76

Marcus examines *Shirley* to demonstrate the difference between the intimate female friend and the female suitor. The former is the much more common figure, and is not an alternative to, but rather facilitates the Victorian marriage plot (Marcus *Between* 101). The latter is distinct from this type; in *Shirley*, Mrs. Pryor criticizes the man Caroline will eventually marry, and offers Caroline a proposal of her own. Nevertheless, the female spouse is *still* not an alternative to

heterosexual marriage, argues Marcus: “[i]n the 1860s and 1870s, a period when few knew of the sexological idea of inversion and many still associated sodomy with sexual acts absolutely opposed to nature and virtue, the female couple was accepted as a variation on legal marriage, not treated as a separate species” (*Between* 203).

I want to suggest that *The Woman in White*’s depiction of Marian and Laura’s relationship is the exception that proves Sharon Marcus’ rule in a manner revealing the salience of inversion much earlier in England than we have imagined. While Marcus is undoubtedly correct that just pasty midcentury, the female suitor or spouse was seen as a “variation on” marriage, such views surely depended on the gender normativity of both members of the female couple. What resolves Mrs. Pryor’s offer to Caroline of a life together is her white English femininity perhaps even more so than the fact that she is secretly Caroline’s mother (though Caroline doesn’t know of their familial relationship when she receives her proposal). The female wife was often an aunt or a cousin—in the case of Collins’ novel, a half-sister. Marcus asserts the lived legibility of such marriages *as* marriages to the women involved and to their social peers. It is not that such marriages weren’t marriages; it’s simply that they didn’t threaten or rival heterosexual marriage. This does not hold true in *The Woman in White*, however, and the difference is inversion.

I was obliged to tell her that no man tolerates a rival—not even a woman rival—in his wife’s affections, when he first marries.... Drop by drop I poured the profaning bitterness of this world’s wisdom into that pure heart and that innocent mind, while every higher and better feeling in me recoiled from that miserable task. It is over now. She has learnt her hard, her inevitable lesson. The simple

illusions of her girlhood are gone, and my hand has stripped them off. Better mine than his—that is all my consolation—better mine than his. 429-430

In images of stripping to nakedness and dripping liquid, Marian initiates Laura with her “hand.”<sup>167</sup> Inversion made sex a real possibility between women for the first time in the English imaginary; accordingly, Marian and Laura’s relationship is eroticized in a way that Laura and Anne’s—governed by erotic similitude—is not.<sup>168</sup>

The novel takes Marian seriously as a “rival” to Laura’s first heterosexual marriage, anticipating the perceived threat that mannish lesbians’ seduction of “normal” women would come to seem after sexological inversion. Both are a far cry from the laughter or lament with which the (impossible) idea of sex between women was met under the regime of erotic similitude. The novel difference (literally) is the presence of white femininity’s polar opposite, Marian’s “dusky” masculinity. Though the imaginary of inversion solved the problem of homosexuality’s invisibility in women, it posed a different problem with which we are more familiar: the specter of the husband’s replacement by a woman. Part of the conflict worked out over the course of the novel is the implicit rivalry between Marian’s partnership, and any husband of Laura’s. The inverted female companion is the exception to Marcus’ argument that neither the female friend nor the female suitor is a rival to heterosexual marriage. This mistake

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<sup>167</sup> May also notes that “Laura and Marian express their love physically and fervently.... Laura kisses Marian’s hand (285); Marian crushed Laura into her arms (284); Laura kisses Marian: ‘She put her lips to mine and kissed me. “My own love,” she said softly.... She reached both hands up to my cheeks, and drew my face down to hers till our lips met’ (186, 188); Marian kisses Laura: ‘I caught her by the hand as she passed me on her way to the table, and kissed her as if that night was to part us forever’ (310). Before Laura’s wedding, she climbs into Marian’s bed: “I shall lose you so soon, Marian,” she said; “I must make the most of you while I can”” (209)” (134).

<sup>168</sup> Lauren Hoffer and Sarah Kersh argue that *The Woman in White* and its adaptation, *Fingersmith*, “challenge both nineteenth- and twenty-first century conceptions of the Victorian family in their representations of sisterhood as an alternative to a traditional, heteronormative nuclear family unit” (196). They also note how significantly queer time figures in *Fingersmith*, where the latent lesbianism of *The Woman in White* is made explicit. *Suffisaunce* describes specifically such a legacy of lesbian time scrambles (206).



comes about from the incorrect assumption that inversion filtered from sexology into novels, and not the other way around.

Inversion, or the novel presence of female masculinity, renders the lesbian a rival to men, but the fact that the invert is a “*woman rival*”—her masculinity borrowed in the sexological imaginary—ensures that she will lose the girl. Marian grieves, “she will be *his* Laura instead of mine!” (428). As we saw in the role-play posture of Hawarden’s daughters in drag, the invert’s masculinity is not that of a “real” man. Really—or, another way, politically—Marian remains a woman. She laments her female inadequacy to the position of protector signified by the phrase “father or brother.” “Husband” is the implicit third term in such a list of male roles barred to her. This list of male relations is strikingly repeated in the novel: on the night before Laura’s wedding, Marian grieves over her sister, “[n]o father, no brother—no living creature but the helpless, useless woman who writes these sad lines, and watches by you for the morning” (449-450). This phrase repeats, but meaningfully deviates, from Queen Elizabeth’s assertions of self-sufficiency without father, brother, or husband. By contrast, when Laura is at her most diminished, Walter can celebrate the fact that she is “[m]ine to love and honour as father and brother both. Mine to vindicate through all risks and all sacrifices—through the hopeless struggle against Rank and Power, through the long fight with armed deceit and fortified Success” (974). Walter’s highlighting of all his inadequacies—rank, power, success—draws attention to what he *does* possess, unlike Marian, despite her masculinity: manhood in the social and political sphere. His self-narration likewise poses “husband” as the apposite male protector-position implied by father and brother, despite his disavowal: “I never said to myself, ‘If I do succeed, it shall be one result of my success that I put it out of her husband's power to take her from me again.... The sad

sight of the change in her from her former self, made the one interest of my love an interest of tenderness and compassion which her father or her brother might have felt” (1068-1069).

*The Woman in White* reiterates, with a difference, the scrambled multiplicity of familial relations asserted by Elizabeth I. Posing, by turns, as the mother and the virgin bride of England allowed Elizabeth to be all things at once to her nation and to herself. The Victorian version is still wrestling with the radical female autonomy of *suffisaunce*, and ultimately makes of female solitude utter inadequacy. Leila Silvana May notes the scrambling of fraternal, paternal, and marital relations in the novel:

sororal love forms bonds that protect against the vicissitudes of lust, greed, fraud, insensitivity, madness, class conflict, and the callousness of English domestic and property law, while at the same time being mediated by and transforming those very forces.... the intensity of this sibling bond threatens to establish an autonomous and subversive domain of sororal justice.... On the one hand, the reversal of identities between the deranged working class sister and the ideal gentrified sister threatens to obliterate the very class distinctions on which society is based. Moreover a secret illegitimate ménage à trois, set up by two sisters and a “brother” creates a make-believe family in the urban slums.... [where] there is a dissolution of the very boundaries required for the maintenance and disciplining of the Victorian family as social cornerstone.... in its triumph, this sibling love tames itself, and the make-believe family becomes a real one, where brother becomes husband and father, one sister becomes wife and mother, and the other becomes maiden aunt and nurse. 125

Though Marian loses the rivalry with men for partnership with Laura, their romantic attachment works in both directions, suggesting the novel reality of the invert *as* rival to men. In the same breath as she expresses affection for her, Laura emphasizes Marian's dark masculinity. On her return from her wedding trip, Laura is elated to see again her sister's "horrid heavy man's umbrella, that you always would walk out with when it rained! And first and foremost of all, your own dear, dark, clever, gipsy-face...!" (490). The racializing "gipsy" description appears alongside her masculine habits, and their conjunction makes a man (of sorts) of Marian. One can only imagine what Sedgwick would make of the fact that, all this time, Laura is "nervously buckling and unbuckling the ribbon round [Marian's] waist" (489). Marian then narrates a proposal, fittingly in the negative, from her more feminine sister: "promise you will never marry and leave me! It is selfish to say so, but you are so much better off as a single woman—unless—unless you are very fond of your husband—but you won't be very fond of anybody but me, will you?" She... crossed my hands on my lap, and laid her face on them (490)" Marian and Laura's sororal sexuality resembles that of the women in erotic postures populating Hawarden's photographs beyond just their sisterhood. Collins' heroines translate to the page the visual pattern I earlier called the *mise-en-abyme* of inversion in the inversion series: Marian contains internal contradictions that disappear into the overwhelmingly masculine impression she makes next to her feminine sister. This should remind us of photographs where the pattern of alternating black and white within the striped garment worn by one figure repeats at a larger scale *across* the two figures.

As literary text, Collins' novel lends narrative to the visual schema of inversion we saw in Hawarden's work. While she is devoted to her half-sister, Marian is a breezy sort of misogynist—like a man, she is contemptuous of women. She offers a passing insult to the virgin

queen when noting that much of the novel's action takes place in a house "of the time of that highly-overrated woman, Queen Elizabeth" (179).<sup>169</sup> Fitting that this dismissal of woman "sufficient" to herself without father, brother, or husband comes from a character representing the new invert type. Inversion offered a new solution to the problem of women without men by making the woman who loves other women an (*insufficient*) kind of man, *herself*. But in Marian's characteristically contradictory way, her resentment towards men is much more serious than her flippant misogyny. Though prompted by the villainy of her sister's husband, her complaint spares none, and anticipates the New Woman feminism that would come to euphemize literary lesbianism at the turn of the century: "No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace—they drag us away from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship—they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return?" (418-419).<sup>170</sup> Marian heralds a later type half-parodied in Henry James' Olive Chancellor of *The Bostonians*, whose outrage against male treatment of a younger woman only thinly veils her romantic desire for that woman, as the title's "Boston marriage" joke implies. The literary genealogy of such a photographically inflected character as Marian suggests how these two modes—the literary and the photographic—conspired in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to visualize a novel identity for the female invert.

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<sup>169</sup> Marian's comment felicitously suggests that Elizabeth I has her own time.

<sup>170</sup> Edward Carpenter links "the New Woman" with a "*rapprochement* between the sexes," resulting in the increased masculinity of women (*Intermediate* 16). Jennifer Terry sums up Ellis' attitude: he "emphasized their mannishness and their tendencies toward predation, while criticizing their feminist beliefs as pathological" (51).

*Identity, Evidentiary Proof, and Literary Realism*

Talbot himself hypothetically conjoins photography to the novel—to the mystery novel, specifically—at the end of a long technical explanation in his foundational text. He describes how the

existence [of *invisible rays* beyond the light spectrum] is only revealed to us by th[e] action which they exert.... [If these were separated] from the rest, by suffering them to pass into an adjoining apartment through an aperture in a wall or screen of partition.... the apartment would thus become filled (we must not call it *illuminated*) with invisible rays, which might be scattered in all directions by a convex lens placed behind the aperture. If there were a number of persons in the room, no one would see the other: and yet nevertheless if a *camera* were so placed as to point in the direction in which any one were standing, it would take his portrait, and reveal his actions.... Alas! that this speculation is somewhat too refined to be introduced with effect into a modern novel or romance; for what a *dénouement* we should have, if we could suppose the secrets of the darkened chamber to be revealed by the testimony of the imprinted paper. 30

Photography drew together the aesthetic and the scientific; the trans-disciplinary and trans-medium nature of photographic inversion is embedded in early photography's own technical archive.<sup>171</sup> Though involving no plot of photographic proof revealed—only a character scheme

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<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Crary notes, “[f]rom 1820 into the 1840s physiology was very unlike the specialized science it later became; it had then no formal institutional identity and came into being as the accumulated work of disconnected individuals from diverse branches of learning. In common was the excitement and wonderment about the body, which now appeared like a new continent to be explored, mapped, and mastered.... But the real importance of physiology had less to do with any empirical discoveries than that it became the arena for new types of epistemological reflection that depended on knowledge about the eye and processes of vision; it signals how the body was becoming the site of both power and truth” (79). As a technology of light, the photograph illuminated the obscurity of the female sexual deviant. Richard Dyer also notes that sight is the privileged epistemological sense—seeing is knowing—and that photography has always been bound up with the problem of knowing what cannot be

strongly resembling photography's polar relations—Collins' sensation novel certainly does feature a highly confusing and ultimately unprovable *dénouement* of purportedly evidentiary proof.<sup>172</sup>

The cooperation of and even resemblance between literary text and photographic image in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has often been noticed. In *Scenes in a Library*, titled for Talbot's photographic plate of that name depicting a shelf of books in *The Pencil of Nature*, Carol Armstrong asserts

the book was not only the principle frame for the photograph, historically speaking, but also that it had something to do with the very being of the medium.... because paper photographs are produced and received serially, because they must be representational... because their materiality is... of the textual kind of the page, rather than anything resembling a wall, a panel, or a canvas—they are really closer to written imagery than they are to paintings.... Historically... the invention of photography derived more immediately from another paper art, itself deeply connected to the book, namely that of the print.... We remain more accustomed to holding photographs in our hands as pages, rather than standing before them as windows, mirrors. 3-4

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seen (103-4). Photography helped inspire confidence in a visual epistemology of racial and sexual difference, but even more importantly *itself* offered up a (largely visual) mode of difference: inversion.

<sup>172</sup> Carol Armstrong argues that Henry Fox Talbot treats the photograph like a literary text. Of the first plate in *The Pencil of Nature*, depicting Queen's College, "Talbot has us read from left to right. He asks that we look first at the surface of the façade on the left, where we are to notice 'on its surface the most evident marks of the injuries of time and weather, in the abraded state of the stone.' This is primarily what the photograph is a picture of; namely, a surface marked with the indexical traces of time and weather. This is, of course, also what a photograph is. So Talbot's instructions ask us to read the photograph self-reflexively, as an image of photography, defined as a surface full of imaged detail, deriving from the action of Nature and serving as a temporal index of the history of the material it records.... Increasingly we move from what is visible in the photograph to what is either invisible or not a matter of visibility at all, to the history of the place, which must be given in words. Thus Talbot directs us to a point of conjunction between image and text, where each is grafted onto the other to make an indivisible whole, such that the traces of 'time and weather' in and on the photograph have added to them spatial and temporal indications that describe the photograph's parameters, and text provided historical information that comes to seem as if given by the photograph itself, by the indexical marks on its surface" (132-133).

Armstrong also notes that Talbot calls his work “a matter of the book,” explaining “[r]ather than announce the calotype as the first photograph per se, Talbot defined it as the first photograph publishable in book form” (*Scenes* 112). She glosses his introductory remarks that the photograph is “Nature’s paper art, Nature’s method of producing book illustrations,” and suggests that the main advantage of Talbot’s “reproducible paper photograph” over the daguerreotype is that it can be “incorporated into the book” and published (*Scenes* 113).<sup>173</sup>

Photographic inversion elaborates a specifically British relationship between photography and literature: “[n]ot only was it on the English side of the Channel that the photograph was first made ready for the book, it was in an English book that the paper photograph was first described and published as a new kind of bookready image (and as such, contrasted to the concurrent French invention)” (Armstrong *Scenes* 17-18). But more specifically than the book form in general, the genre of realism was defined, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by opposition-based identities like the ones that populating Hawarden’s inversion series. Modernity’s “new visual order” of character, operating under a regime of differentiation rather than identification, was accomplished by “realism and photography as partners in the same cultural project.” Nancy Armstrong’s *Fiction in the Age of Photography* posits that if consciousness begins as a “mix of categorical possibilities” that is “neither male nor female, black nor white, of high social status or of low,” then one of each set of these binary terms must be disavowed and continually excluded to maintain “integrity of... self-image.” Crucially, these binaries were themselves produced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the confluence of photography with literary realism: “[a]s Victorian photography established the categories of identity—race, class, gender, nation, and so

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<sup>173</sup> Carol Armstrong also notes that Frances Frith “marketed himself as a specialist in the combination of photograph and verbal description” He also illustrated Longfellow’s *Hyperion*; both these texts, she argues, “show[] the equally evidentiary structure of fiction illustration: the ways in which fictional protagonists and narrative trajectories could be verified by the travelling reader by means of the photographic trace” (Armstrong *Scenes* 20-21).

forth—in terms of which virtually all other peoples of the world could be classified, literary realism showed readers how to play the game of modern identity from the position of observers” (Armstrong *Fiction* 25-26).

Further, the category of literary realism was a near-empty one in the period, best defined by offshoots like the sensation novel—of which Collins’ is, of course, an apposite example (*Fiction* 7). While photography was literalizing “seeing is believing” midcentury, literature was simultaneously “promising to put readers in touch with the world itself by supplying them with certain kinds of visual information.... fiction equated seeing with knowing and made visual information the basis for the intelligibility of a verbal narrative” (*Fiction* 7). Given “positivist assumptions” that the body could be read like a novel, it is little wonder that the characters of *The Woman in White* in 1859 so strongly resemble the positive-negative photographic schema (*Fiction* 17).<sup>174</sup> The Victorian mode of “negative self-definition” was modeled by the oppositional difference of the positive-negative process’ material technology *itself*.

The relationship of the photographic schema to 19<sup>th</sup>-century realism is described in what Andrea Henderson calls Clementina Hawarden’s “formalist realism:” realism based on “belief in the defining power of structural relationships” (98). It was precisely because it “worked according to a logic that was not just formal but contrastive—light vs. dark” that photography was imagined to be “capable... of capturing the fundamental characteristics of the physical world.” Henderson emphasizes that “the inversions and transpositions required to make a positive print from a negative original, which might have been regarded as attenuations of the real, could instead be taken to indicate photography’s special relationship to it;” Hawarden’s

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<sup>174</sup> See Carol Armstrong’s argument that “positivism’s narrative-tabular ‘natural method,’ with its emphasis on ‘observation, experiment, and comparison,’ may be seen to structure the collaboration and collision between text and photograph that constitutes the photographically illustrated book of the time” in the introduction to *Scenes in a Library*.



photography perfectly epitomizes this (Henderson 96-98). Nevertheless, the intense female homoeroticism of Hawarden's images remains underexplored. Likewise missing in Armstrong's account is any mention of sexual difference in the very moment at which it was invented *as an identity*. While Nancy Armstrong draws our attention to the oppositional logic of photography, realism, and 19<sup>th</sup>-century identity, but to not positive-negative photographic technology, Henderson draws our attention to photography, realism, and positive-negative photographic technology, but bypasses identity. The sheer number of lesbian-themed book-covers graced by Hawarden's photography suggests that imagining female homoeroticism was a privileged project of the opposition-based realism to which Henderson and Armstrong both refer. Photographic inversion supplies a crucial, but missing, term for accounts of 19<sup>th</sup>-century identity, the oppositional logic of positive-negative photographic technology, and literary realism.

The intertwining of photographic technology with cultural imaginaries of sexual subjectivity and gender morphology is suggested by the place of photography itself between art and science. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary notes that "concepts of subjective vision, of the productivity of the observer, pervaded not only art and literature but were present in philosophical, scientific, and technological discourses. Rather than stressing the separation between art and science in the nineteenth century, it is important to see how they were both part of a single interlocking field of knowledge and practice" (9). Despite the fact that the main promulgators of sexual inversion asserted its novelty—in England—at the turn of the century, the transformation of female homoeroticism is perceptible in literature significantly preceding the most notable English sexological texts. But in fact, British sexologists were diagnosing British cultural production in the same way that their psychoanalyst successors would. It has

often been remarked that Freud's theories were based on literature; Clementina Hawarden may be to Havelock Ellis' inversion as Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was to Freud's sado-masochism.

As photographic and literary culture intermingled, English literary and sexological culture were often entwined. Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century novelist Rebecca West said that Havelock Ellis wrote in “‘delicate, grave, rectory English’” and gave “‘in the most difficult circumstances’ the ‘inveterate appearance... of being a character out of *Cranford*’” (Porter and Hall 166). Lisa Duggan has pointed out the reciprocity between Ellis' published works and newspaper treatments of female love murders; more generally, “[t]he sexologists served up a strong brew of materials gathered from fiction, fantasy, clinical experience, newspapers, and autobiographical reports” (174-177). The literary realm has always been privileged in the creation of female homoeroticism's morphologies, in England: erotic similitude was established by Renaissance poetic tropes, and inversion is grounded in an intermingled literary and visual realism. English sexology developed a “scientific” discourse to negate lesbianism at the turn of the century different from, but as robust, as the older poetic tradition. Sexological inversion ensured that women would never threaten men's claims on women by asserting that inverted women were like men—only *like* men; not real men. Ellis famously avowed that the “normal” women—the femmes—loved by inverts, are the women that “normal” men would “pass by” (*Studies* 222).

As paradoxical as Marian's own gender is the fact that Marian and Laura are *The Woman in White*'s felicitous pairing, over against the sameness between Laura and Anne. Like the negative cancelled the positive in the early photographic imaginary, same-sex relations with a difference canceled the problem of female self-sameness (Henderson 110). The sexological invert was pathological, and worse, the lady was ugly, but at least she was (inadequately) heterosexual. Because the female invert occupies the place of insufficient man, she continues the

English project of safeguarding white womanhood from sexual deviance. Laura and Anne, too—women without men or masculinity—are represented as insufficiency itself because *suffisaunce* threatens, in plot terms, masturbatory neurasthenia; in aesthetic terms, egotistical self-stroking; and in political terms, women’s independence. Without boundary or stable self, Anne dies off and is forgotten, survived by Marian, with her “dark face” opposite Laura’s “white figure:” a photographically inverted pair. And Walter interposes between them as Laura’s second husband.

Vis-à-vis the literally heterosexual pair of the novel’s end, Marian is ostensibly a third wheel. Though simultaneously inadequate and superfluous to the end, the invert is necessary the reproduction of white patriarchal land inheritance. She avows, ““there can be no parting... till the last parting of all.... Wait a little till there are children’s voices at your fireside.... the first lesson they say to their father and mother shall be—We can’t spare our aunt!”” (1462).<sup>175</sup> The tripartite arrangement of Walter and Laura’s marriage leaves Marian in an ambiguous position between secondary mother/ wife and secondary father/ husband, though properly none of these. Nevertheless, she cannot be “spared” (neither dispensed with, *nor* saved from violence) by the offspring of Walter and Laura’s heterosexual union. This offspring, “*the Heir of Limmeridge*,” is named for the father, and it is Marian who announces baby Walter as ““the landed gentry of England.”” Marian’s service to heteropatriarchal lineage is suggested by the very last lines of the novel: “[t]he long, happy labour of many months is over. Marian was the good angel of our lives—let Marian end our Story” (1471). The invert, here, is the dual-sexed angel who facilitates the “labour” of reproducing exclusively white male claims to landed property. These words are

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<sup>175</sup> That Walter and Laura’s child has two godfathers with Marian as his godmother (1471) emphasizes the way in which Marian adds to, rather than balances a surplus of masculinity; one (deficiently feminine) mother does not equal to two fathers.

spoken in Walter's voice; though he pretends to "let Marian end our Story," it is he who narrates her.

The end of *The Woman in White* sets out the terms of the following chapters where we will see, in Virginia Woolf's writing and the obscenity trial over *The Well of Loneliness*, how sexological inversion conflated the medical and the legal to allow men to speak over women in the persistent relationship of white Englishness to conceptions of female homoeroticism. For Woolf and even more so for E. M. Forster, in *Howards End*, The Englishness of England is partially rooted in her land—"property itself"—from which women are excluded, as both writers attempt to write, but not define, an uninverted female homosociality after (or perhaps before) inversion. But first, we turn to *suffisaunce* and property inheritance during the period of debates about changes to the legal status of women and marriage reforms, in *Great Expectations*.

#### 4. “Suffer, and Be Still:” *Femme Bottomhood in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

What would it mean to read Sarah Stickney Ellis’ declaration, in 1842, that woman’s “highest duty is so often to suffer, and be still” as a theory of femme bottomhood? What, indeed, is the relationship of “woman” to femme bottomhood? “Suffer” bears an etymological link to womanhood *and* to bottomhood. The verb comes from the Latin “*sufferire*,” which combines “*suf*,” or “sub”—“prepositional relation to the noun... in the second element, with the sense ‘situated, existing, or occurring under, below, or at the bottom of’”—with “*ferre*”—“to bear” (OED). The position of sexual bottom is well described—affectively and physically—by a constellation that amounts to enduring and bearing from underneath. As we recall, suffering Griselda’s “sadness,” or “patience” (“[i]n Latin, *patior* and *patientia* are technical terms for the female role in intercourse”) bears an “intimate connection with female sexuality, and in particular with childbirth,” according to Jill Mann (126). Similarly, in the transitive, “suffer” means “[t]o submit patiently to,” linking the concept—contingently, at least—to women (OED). On the one hand, childbirth is certainly a historically crucial category for thinking about women. On the other hand, “the female role in intercourse” should surely be revised as “the bottom’s role.” The conflation of bottomhood with womanhood is a historical problem: it is a problematic equation, but also a historical reality, as women have been materially and structurally disempowered. Simultaneously, as Sarah Stickney Ellis shows, women are often powerful from below, from a position of bearing underneath resonant with bottomhood.

In this chapter, I examine *suffisaunce* in its 19<sup>th</sup> century forms: suffering, and sympathy, that other watchword of Ellis’ advice to women. Ellis subtly theorizes the powers of bottomhood (such as suffering Griselda’s), and reveals the potential perversity of sympathy. An affective

technology of intersubjective porosity with a privileged relationship to womanhood in the Victorian period, “sympathy” was simultaneously the *non plus ultra* of correct femininity, as Ellis’ conduct books assert, *and* increasingly understood as a lesbian menace as the century progressed.<sup>176</sup> Beyond the obvious level of proximity in the name of sympathetic affection allowed women sharing beds, caresses, and kisses—as sexologists would anxiously note, later in the century—sympathy was the Victorian evolution of the interpenetrating selves that had historically characterized both erotic similitude and *suffisaunce*: the true collapse of self and other between women in love.<sup>177</sup>

Because “sympathy” closely resembled cultural-historically lesbian relationality (erotic similitude), it threatened to render normal feminine behavior indistinguishable from lesbianism. Sexologists like Havelock Ellis became notoriously vague upon the affections of the seemingly “normal” (femme) woman who loves the invert back. These twined issues, lesbianism’s troubling invisibility, and the radical unity of selves that sympathy offered as 19<sup>th</sup>-century *suffisaunce*, would both be solved by the deployment of inversion, first as cultural logic, then as medico-sexological category, in the last third of the century.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, Ellis’ most definitive

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<sup>176</sup> In 2018, Natalie Prizel asserted that “sympathy” can help us recover a lesbian literary history because it resonates with our contemporary conceptions of lesbian relationships: “[t]he kind of radical empathy that was idealized in the Victorian period—and taken to its perversely logical extreme by Swinburne—serves at once as an ideal and a disturbance. The disturbance lies in the convergence of identification and desire in such a way that renders clear subject-object divisions moot” (280). My project started out similarly, but in 2018, I was training in a historicist department. I asked myself what kind of history might make this *feel* true to us now. I came to the conclusion that sympathy was understood as a distinct affective aptitude of female-female relations *in the Victorian period*, with the traceable consequence of lesbianism’s reformulation from similitude into polarized gender difference.

<sup>177</sup> Erotic similitude, we recall, is another historically specific iteration of response to the theoretical concept I call *suffisaunce*; in the Renaissance, erotic similitude—the threatening and alluring collapse of women’s subjectivities—is neutralized by assertions of the utter meaninglessness of women in love.

<sup>178</sup> Prizel says that as contemporary lesbian readers, we can spot lesbian relationships between men and women, say, in the poetry of Swinburne: “Dickens and Swinburne participate in a version of literary history... based on ideas of perverse sympathy and intersubjectivity as foundational to a newly imagined world. In contrast to the antisociality endorsed by Edelman and others, the kind of empathy that unites these works might be considered hypersocial—social to the point that self and other become messily conflated. The joke about lesbian couples’ ‘urge to merge’ is well worn, but whereas that urge is usually presented as a sign of complacency, or relational frumpiness, I argue that that urge is not only profoundly imbricated in Victorian culture but also profoundly radical for imagining a lesbian literary history that might fortify us for the future” (271). Prizel reads Swinburne’s “The Leper” to suggest “[e]ven

statement on the femme is that she must be feminine where the invert is masculine, because inverts are above all interested in reproducing heterosexual difference. We have already seen that it became increasingly important at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to define female pairings along inversion's heterosexual difference. In this chapter, I want to suggest that in the same period, conceptions of male-female romantic relationality were also coopting what had historically been the provenance of female-female relations: affection based in likeness, equality, and sympathy. As marriage reforms and "the woman question" became more and more pressing, the qualities of similitude that had so long served to render female relations meaningless came to be valuable to heterosexual marriage. While woman's glaring inequality in marriage to men seemed like a real problem, women's friendships were simultaneously coming under increased suspicion. It was expedient, therefore, to transfer notions of friendship, similitude, and radical equality from women together, to men and women's unions—and to insist, at the same time, that women together were a mere imitation of heterosexuality. Sharon Marcus has shown that heterosexual marriage appropriated the language of female friendship to help establish companionate marriage, but it has never been noticed that the gendered locations of sameness versus polar opposition *reversed* in this period. Between the 1860s and the turn of the century, the British cultural logics of heterosexuality and female homosexuality switched places.<sup>179</sup>

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without lesbians per se, the poem leaves us with a lesbian structural paradigm characterized by a mutual subsumption of one subjectivity into another's in which both subjects share in abjection and power, in shame and glory" (275). I explore the history behind these kinds of theoretical connections: what makes subjective mutual subsumption lesbian?

<sup>179</sup> In contemporary theoretical terms, Eve Sedgwick cites Radicalesbnians and Adrienne Rich's "stunningly efficacious coup of feminist redefinition to transform lesbianism, in a predominant view, from a matter of female virilization to one of woman-identification" (84). I historicize both threads: "the persistence of the inversion trope has been yoked... to that of its contradictory counterpart, the trope of gender separatism. Under this latter view, far from its being of the essence of desire to cross boundaries of gender, it is instead the most natural thing in the world that people of the same gender, people grouped together under the single most determinative diacritical mark of social organization, people whose economic, institutional, emotional, physical needs and knowledges have so much in common, should bond together also on the axis of sexual desire" (87).

The means of appropriating tropes of erotic similitude in service of rendering heterosexual marriage an arrangement between equals—imaginatively and affectively, only—that this chapter explores is male self-feminization and -abasement *vis-à-vis* women: in other words, male femme bottoming. If Sarah Stickney Ellis set out a program of suffering for women that surprisingly resulted in a kind of femme power-from-below, as I will argue, then men in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were perhaps interested in coopting *this* kind of power, too. This chapter reads *Great Expectations* not only to argue that Dickens recorded, in 1861, the situation of femme bottoming by men as an affective strategy of lesbian co-optation, but also to draw conclusions about the historical conflation of abasement and feminization with which we began.<sup>180</sup> Pip certainly enjoys his suffering; *Great Expectations*' protagonist is a male figure who feminizes himself, in part, via the affects of bottomhood to get money and a girl. He perpetually asserts his incapacity to do otherwise than to miserably love Estella. He claims to be without agency, immobilized by his feelings, like Ellis' daughters of England who must "suffer, and be still." Marcus has convincingly argued that Pip feminizes himself aesthetically and sartorially in an attempt to participate in Estella and Miss Havisham's erotic female dyad. Categorically excluded, but desiring both to have Estella, and to be her—favored by Miss Havisham—Pip reaches for girlhood by way of fashion and ornamentation, rejecting masculinity as ugly and dirty. So runs Marcus' argument. I argue that Pip's victimization by love is a crucial part of his bid for feminization. His (affective) disempowerment at Estella's indifferent hands produces an (emotional) power dynamic that reverses historical gender structures—but strictly in terms of

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<sup>180</sup> Prizel notes that "lesbian erotics in Victorian literature are often written 'primarily within the male literary tradition' in which 'lesbian fantasies allow male writers to indulge... the "wish to be a woman"' (Dellamora 1900: 85, 75)" (269).



feelings. If, as Marcus claims, Pip tries to penetrate Estella and Miss Havisham's female-female relationship, he does so in part by becoming a bottom.

Further, I want to argue that *Great Expectations* offers *suffisaunce* as a name for what was suddenly so compelling to men about a historically feminine mode of relationality, and illuminates the attractions of suffering femme bottomhood. Miss Havisham's property, where time has stopped as a result of heterosexual disappointment, is named "Satis House" after an actual place (Restoration House) where Queen Elizabeth stayed, close to where Dickens resided, and often walked (Forster *Life* 221-223). Apocryphally, perhaps, when asked how she liked the spot, Elizabeth I said, simply, "satis." In the novel's context, Estella explains that the property's name means "enough." The long Victorian obsession with Queen Elizabeth makes good her promise of fantastic longevity, keeping her alive in meditations on women's power and (self-)relations. Dickens' novel also calls up the lesbian temporality of *suffisaunce*, where history becomes recursive, or stops altogether, as in Miss Havisham's frozen abode. The centrality of Miss Havisham's property prepares us to think about one of the most basic meanings of *suffisaunce*: the material conditions where women have enough. The next chapter's topic is *suffisaunce* as "enough" for a room or a house of women's own.

Property ownership was a crucial aspect of "the woman question" during the period in which I argue men started to think about how to use historically feminine affects to their own ends. The Married Women's Property Act—the first time women's property did not automatically transfer to her husband—was passed in 1870. We have seen how *The Woman in White*'s "Sir" Percival Glyde used female similitude in tandem with marital property rights against women. *Great Expectations* demonstrates a different self-serving male relationship to similitude, portraying a man who tries to inhabit the equality and intersubjective penetration that

sympathy and *suffisaunce* promise to women. But the novel also reveals the limits on men's access to sympathy and femme bottomhood: feminizing himself produces neither perfect equality between Pip and Estella, nor changes the structures of heterosexual marriage that result in her abusive union with Drummle, who shares Pip's gender. *Suffisaunce* brings into view the privileged relationship of 19<sup>th</sup>-century sympathy to female positionality, if not identity, and the impossibility of similitude's cooptation by companionate marriage, illuminating the relationship between femininity and bottomhood.

### *Self-Sacrifice, Self-Service*

We remember Sarah Stickney Ellis best for her (in)famous “suffer, and be still.” But in fact, she writes

It is a remarkable feature in connexion with the constitution of woman, that she is capable of enduring, with patience and fortitude, for beyond the stronger sex, almost every degree of bodily suffering. It is true, that she is more accustomed to such suffering than man.... Still there is a strength and beauty in her character, when labouring under bodily affliction, of which the heroism of fiction affords but a feeble imitation. *Daughters* 107-108

When elaborating on the female capacity for suffering for which she is famed, Ellis' description of victimization, pain, travail become—paradoxically—strength, endurance, ability.<sup>181</sup> Further, her reversal immediately renders this form of patient strength—which is perhaps not quite strength as we typically conceive it—superior to presumptively male “heroism,” which suddenly becomes a “feeble imitation” of *women's* power. My addition of “patient” to “strength” is not a

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<sup>181</sup> This quality of being two opposite things simultaneously resonates with the switchiness of *suffisaunce* as both giving, and having, perfect satisfaction.

haphazard qualification of a typically masculine provenance to gloss the strength Ellis describes. Women do not inhabit this mode of power by actively competing with, or overmastering men. But more importantly, “patience” means the sexual position of the bottom, as well as endurance of pain in childbirth, to which Ellis herself gestures when she uses the phrase “labouring under,” suggesting both delivery, and a “lying underneath” sexual posture.

In her encouragement to women to give without end, as Griselda does, Ellis renders explicit my argument about Griseldian *suffisaunce*: “expenditure never exhausts.... the indulgence of gratitude, and the bestowment of affection, instead of impoverishing, render more rich the fountain whence both are derived” (*Daughters* 145). This is the very paradox of *suffisaunce* as Griselda demonstrates and Ellis theorizes: endless giving becomes endless having: transcendent, endless plentitude. As lesbianism is the practice where feminism is the theory, Sarah Stickney Ellis’ championing of female self-sacrifice and sympathy might be read as the 19<sup>th</sup>-century theory of Griselda’s suffering *suffisaunce*.

Consider Sarah Stickney Ellis’ language of desire and pleasure based in sympathy between women:

And is this, then, too much to expect from the daughters of England—that women should be true to women? In the circle of her private friends, as well as from her own heart, she learns what constitutes the happiness and the misery of woman.... She learns to comprehend the deep mystery of that electric chain of feeling which ever vibrates through the heart of woman, and which man, with all his philosophy, can never understand. She learns that every touch of that chain is like the thrilling of a nerve; and she thus acquires a power peculiar to herself, of distinguishing exactly between the links which thrill with pleasure, and those which only thrill with pain. Thus, while her

sympathy and her tenderness for a chosen few is strengthened by the bond of friendship into which she has entered, though her confidence is still confined to them, a measure of the same sympathy and tenderness is extended to the whole sisterhood of her sex, until, in reality, she becomes what woman ever must be—in her noblest, purest, holiest character—the friend of woman. 156

The thrills of pleasure and pain—which it is women “peculiar power” to know (and, one suspects, to wield)—are achieved through sympathy. Rachel Ablow shows that in the period, “sympathy” could mean “‘affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another... or attract or tend towards each other’” but also “‘agreement in qualities, likeness, conformity, correspondence,’” and finally “[t]he quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others” (7-8). Even discretely, these three 19<sup>th</sup>-century usages combine attraction with identification with interpenetration; taken together, they demonstrate sympathy’s multiplicative capacity and eros of sameness. We have mostly explored *suffisaunce* as *self*-sufficiency, in the case of Griselda, who is her own satisfaction throughout her suffering, and in this manner is doubled, and that of Queen Elizabeth, who doubled and even multiplied herself to her own satisfaction. Because *suffisaunce* comprehends both the multiplication of single women, and the collapsing of multiple women into one—as in the sympathy Ellis deploys—*suffisaunce* is distinct from sympathy and indeed from erotic similitude.

Reading Ellis’ language as erotic is not an ahistorical projection of sexual desire onto the intensity of normative female relations. The paradoxical approach of good female behavior to homoerotic pleasure between women has been thoroughly established. Sharon Marcus writes,

“[p]recisely because Victorians saw lesbian sex almost nowhere, they could embrace erotic desire between women almost everywhere. Female homoeroticism did not subvert dominant codes of femininity, because female homoeroticism was one of those codes” (113). Martha Vicinus writes, “[i]f active sexuality was defined in wholly heterosexual terms, a woman could be sexually involved with another woman and still remain a virgin. If fidelity was defined as heterosexual monogamy, then a woman might flirt with another woman without losing her respectability” (*Friends* xix). These writers help historicize contemporary notions of lesbianism both theoretical, and pop-cultural. Patricia White argues that the “femme film” scrubbed of overt lesbianism (as in the case of Lilian Hellman’s play *The Children’s Hour*, which became *These Three* under the Hays code), paradoxically preserves and even produces the possibility that all the women depicted are femmes—that is to say, lesbians (28). The play on which the sanitized film is based is itself based on an early-19<sup>th</sup>-century trial in Scotland, where the authorities themselves registered White’s point exactly: “Was it possible to attribute ‘unnatural lewdness’ if one woman asked another into her bed on a cold Scottish night so that they might discuss the day’s events in reasonable comfort?” Martha Vicinus records that Lord Gillies, “rhetorically asked: “Are we to say that every woman who has formed an early intimacy, and has slept in the same bed with another, is guilty? Where is the innocent woman in Scotland?”” (*Friends* 66). This oscillation between panic (“it’s everywhere”), and disbelief (“it’s nowhere”), is the same as the relationship between *suffisance* and erotic similitude or sympathy, which are historically particular responses to worry about what women do when they are alone together. Contemporary culture of the everyday still registers this epistemology; queer memes circulate where one woman says to another, “please sit on my face” and the other thinks, “I bet she is just being friendly.”

Beyond the proximity of sexuality between women to sympathetic female friendship, I want to further argue that self-sacrifice—closely related to sympathy and affection, and possibly even more crucial to fundamental to Victorian womanhood—similarly allows for perversity in good behavior. The selflessness Ellis encourages when she writes that “woman must be lifted out of self” refuses women’s individuality (*Daughters* 76-77). The firm boundary of the individual subject, that which separates and distinguishes you from me, falls away when she urges women to avoid “love of distinction” and “singularity” (*Daughters* 170-171). Not only is this kind of boundless subjectivity based in self-erasure normative and even aspirational for women, it is also specific *to* women. For men, writes Ellis, “the love of distinction” is “ambition;” in women, by contrast, “it is a selfish desire to stand apart from the many; to be something of, and by, herself” (*Daughters* 132). Only in the feminine mode, then, does repudiation of “distinction” become a refusal of subjective “singularity.” In men, it’s merely the opposite of ambition—incompetence, perhaps. In differentiating the meaning of the exact same impulses sheerly along the line of gender, Ellis creates an ontological state unique to women. This state is one of negation, but also one that allows for plentitude in network: woman “has nothing, and is nothing, of herself;” her “experience, if unparticipated, is a total blank; yet... [her] world of interest is as wide as the realm of humanity, boundless as the ocean of life, and enduring as eternity!” Woman, “in her inexhaustible sympathies, can live only in the existence of another... her very smiles and tears are not exclusively her own” (*Daughters* 73). The language of “boundlessness” and “inexhaustibility,” here, refers us again to woman’s perpetual capacity to give, that which also sustains her own endless having.

Ellis’ networked circuit of giving and having between women raises the question of what difference there is between self-sacrifice and self-service. Sharon Marcus notes that from our

contemporary perspective, it is “difficult to believe in social relations that equate self-interest with self-sacrifice, cooperation, and identification” (92). She, too, notes the register of the infinite raised by the “commitment to an intersubjectivity based on mutual identification rather than on zero-sum competitions that leave one contestant depleted” in “nineteenth-century idealization of female friendship” (92).<sup>182</sup> In her study of 19<sup>th</sup>-century female fashion, this paradox is found in fashion plates, where “girls... embody a desire to look at and touch a woman, a desire figured as both self-abasing and self-important” (Marcus *Between* 135). She shows how the same conundrum we saw in Griseldian *suffisaunce*—becoming great through abasement, winning by not fighting, obtaining power in submission—was inherently eroticized between women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The masturbatory resonance of self-service, selfishness, and even self-importance, is not lost in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century context. Marcus examines a plate from 1888 showing

a seated woman, one hand buried deep in a small bag that rests on her thigh just below and alongside her crotch, the other hand resting on a table but also tangled in the fur trim of the dress of the woman standing in the center.... While furtively handling her social peer’s dress, the seated woman gazes at the well-dressed servant who, eyes slightly averted, hands her tea and also has a hand buried in her pocket. The servant’s decorum creates a masturbatory allusion that links the maid and her mistress’s guest. *Between* 131

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<sup>182</sup> Ellis’ own assertion of women’s immortality echoes the implicitly white English nationalism underpinning Elizabeth’s: “As Christians.... you are not alone; you are one of a family—of a social circle—of a community—of a nation. You are a being whose existence will never terminate, who *must* live forever.” To achieve this immortality, Ellis exhorts girls to make the choice of “living for others, rather than for themselves—of living for eternity, rather than for time” (x).

Not only does this scene suggest a *mise-en-abyme* of self-satisfaction, where women touch themselves while watching other women touch themselves, it also recapitulates the “Pudica” tradition, where Elizabeth touched herself all the time in paintings.<sup>183</sup>

As we have seen giving become having, and self-sacrifice becomes self-service, Ellis’ treatment of bonds between women is also a site of a reversal where weakness becomes power. Though stressing the “inferiority” of woman, in the same breath, Ellis contravenes

No party... can be weak, which has truth for its element, and love for its bond of union. Women are only weak in their vanity, their selfishness, their falsehood to each other. In their integrity, their faithfulness, their devoted affection, they rise to an almost superhuman eminence; because they are strong in the elements of immaterial being, and powerful in the nature which is capable, when regenerated, of being shared with the angels. *Daughters* 156

The loyalty and affection between women Ellis claims raises them “to an almost superhuman eminence” is also important between women and men. But the crucial difference is that while loyalty between women makes of woman “the noblest, purest, holiest character—the friend of woman,” loyalty to men often just means female suffering (*Daughters* 156). In a description of

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<sup>183</sup> Elizabethan allusion extends beyond the formal “Pudica” postures in these images. Another midcentury plate “takes up a motif popular in nineteenth-century pornography, the game of blindman’s bluff, played here by three women with a statue of Diana behind them. A blindfolded woman touches a woman who looks at her, while a third woman peeks at them both from behind the statue. As is frequently the case in fashion images, the woman who looks is shown with a hand at crotch level, where she gathers up her skirt so that, barely touching the blindfolded woman’s skirt, we see a miniscule foot whose scale and form make it resemble a displaced clitoris” (Marcus *Between* 131). We have seen how Elizabeth I replaced the phallic codpiece with a clitoral drop pearl. She was also often represented as Diana and her virginal circle of women. Interested primarily in fashion, Marcus quotes Walter Benjamin: “To be *contemporaine de tout le monde*—that is the keenest and most secret satisfaction that fashion can offer a woman.” “*Tout le monde*” most literally means “the whole world,” but also simply means “everyone.” Benjamin suggests that woman is best “satisfied” when she is the contemporary of everyone geographically, but also historically, across time, like Elizabeth’s persistent longevity. Further, Marcus identifies the switchiness of *suffisance* in this pronouncement: “[b]y equating fashion with female ‘satisfaction,’ Benjamin captures the debate between those who view fashion as a technology of women’s subordination and those who see it as a venue for women’s pleasure, invention, and power” (*Between* 116).



woman's lot that sounds like a plot summary of the Clerk's Tale, Ellis writes of a wife's position, "[w]hile her faithfulness remains unshaken, it is true she may, and probably will suffer; but let her portion in this life be what it may, she will walk through the world with a firm and upright step; for even when solitary, she is not degraded." Rather than producing network, as loyalty among women does, loyalty to men produces solitude for women. Nevertheless, Ellis asserts this "consolation... under... suffering," asking "who would not rather be the one to bear injury, than to inflict it; and the very act of bearing it meekly and reverently, as from the hand of God, has a purifying and solemnizing effect upon the soul" (*Daughters* 179). In a now familiar reversal, woman obtains the better part through the "bear[ing]" of injury, evoking again the terms of bottomhood as being underneath.

### *Structures and Feelings*

The reason for the difference between women together, and women with men—where loyalty in produces sisterhood in the first case, and solitude, in the other—is, in Ellis' idiom, that women are "inferior." By this, she means that men have the upper hand in both brains and brawn, Women must be "content to be inferior to men—inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength.... the great attribute of power... wanting... it becomes more immediately her business to inquire how this want may be supplied" (Ellis *Daughters* 6). Though she renders these differences as essential rather than structural, we can recognize the underdevelopment of woman's faculties as a material condition, her "inferiority" as produced by the legal structures of patriarchy. If Ellis' advice to married women recalls, chillingly, Griselda's dignified abjection at Walter's all-powerful hands, this is perhaps because "[t]he doctrine of coverture dictated that a wife's income and property unprotected by equity belonged absolutely

to the husband alone, as did the couple's children." In fact, "until 1891 a husband was legally allowed to hold his wife in custody against her will" (Marcus *Between* 206). This certainly recalls the medieval situation of *The Clerk's Tale*. Ellis is concerned with the female affects of sympathy and gracious suffering, but *couverture*, as the corresponding discourse, reveals the *legal* combination of husband and wife, to the wife's detriment. *Couverture* was "consistently discussed in relation to questions about the conditions, nature, consequences, and limitations of sympathy" (Ablow 10). Sympathy—as a relative of *suffisaunce*—and *couverture* offer two different modes of becoming one: one affective, the other structural. But we have seen Ellis say that among women, sympathy produces an eroticized community of women, and between men and women, marital suffering for the wife. Sympathy's historical relationship to erotic similitude illuminates this difference. The collapse of female subjects that erotic similitude was imagined to afford elided any differences between women because of their shared gender, necessitating *and* creating equality between women. In a structurally symmetrical, but totally opposite manner, *couverture* is both based on, and generative of, disenfranchisement for women. Between equals, becoming one means intersubjectivity. Between unequals, becoming one means simply that the woman disappears.

The very word "*couverture*" means covering, as in "*femme couvert*," or "a woman covered:" a woman underneath; bearing from below; bottoming. We have two different versions, then, of *femme* bottomhood, related, but ultimately distinct. Ellis' affective version encourages women to become powerful by "bearing" their suffering, but this is necessarily a response to *couverture*, where woman is structurally, legally underneath. We have already seen her assert that to suffer—in both senses, presumably—is better than to inflict suffering, but she will state even more strongly in the language of "satisfaction" that *suffisaunce* results from affective

bottomhood, from the kind of acceptance with which Griselda meets Walter's treatment. Ellis writes, "[t]he part of a true-hearted woman, is to be satisfied with her lover, such as he is, and to consider him, with all his faults, as sufficiently exalted, and sufficiently perfect for her. No after-development of character can shake the faith of such a woman, no ridicule or exposure can weaken her tenderness for a single moment" (*Daughters* 186). This is a devastating assessment of the situation of heterosexuality. Ellis implicitly assumes the regular disappointment and inadequacy of husbands, of men. In femme fashion, she kills such men with kindness and damns them with the faintest of praise: "such as he is," he is quite good enough by the grace of women's affective machinations, her own feelings. The enoughness of men, that of which Ellis encourages women to be convinced, is unrelated to women's own satisfaction and sufficiency, words she uses three times in quick succession in this brief, swift blow to men. Just as when Griselda called Walter her *suffisaunce*, female sufficiency and satisfaction, here, comes from within woman herself.

The paradoxical power and happiness of the powerless, but self-sufficient woman, as Ellis theorizes her, registered as a tension in the Victorian period, though, Ellis says this position is obtained by giving: "[h]ow happy... is that woman, who, by the habitual exercise of her ingenuity, is able so to make the most of the means within her power, as to supply, without its having to be solicited, the very thing which is most needed" (x). Amanda Anderson refers to Ellis' writing specifically when she writes,

Accounts that claim extraordinary responsibilities and duties for 'the women of England' recurrently struggle against portraying feminine influence as a form of power that women wield too deliberately or instrumentally. The idea of action

that is both selfless and overly reflective risks aggrandizing an agent who is supposed to be self-effacing. *Daughters* 42

It was necessary that women's "influence" not resemble men's power too closely, as the two were never supposed to compete. I suggest that it is only because we lack vocabulary for the kind of strength yielded by sympathy and self-sacrifice—when women themselves yielded—that this seemed like a problem. Male and female power were based in totally different structural *and* affective positions. *Suffisaunce* can supply this absent language.

*Suffisaunce* links and names a wide-ranging set of historical tropes, from woman as mirror, the doubled and self-sufficient self, to women in love collapsed in erotic similitude, to panicked responses instering masculinity into such female economies. Thus, the unnamed writer of *Why Women Cannot Be Turned Into Men* (1872) insists that "female influence" is only a female "habit of absorbing herself in the man, losing her identity in him, and living a kind of reflected life." Rachel Ablow notes, though without connecting "self-loss" to the historical tropes of lesbianism that *suffisaunce* brings into view, "[i]n this account, 'female influence' comes very close to a form of female erasure, and sympathy comes to seem like a kind of self-loss" (14). We have often seen woman figured as a mirror, but usually in a *mise-en-abyme* where another woman becomes herself. The next section asks whether woman can truly be a mirror for man, as the anonymous writer asserts; in other words, whether men and women can reflect one another with the perfect equality that governs tropes of lesbian sexuality. The "turning of women into men" is the subject of the previous and the following chapters. Inversion is already working, in 1872, to define lesbianism as women's "feeble imitation" of male sexuality; sexology will ironically reverse Ellis' statement that male heroism is but a "feeble imitation" of the female

strength to bear suffering. Let us turn now to the way in which the tropes defining female and male-female pairings reversed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Which is the “Feeble Imitation”?*

I have argued that as early as the 1860s in England, photographic inversion was helping shift the lesbian imaginary from a logic of sameness to a logic of polar opposition. By the end of the century, the coherence of sexual relations between women would depend totally on difference between women, with Havelock Ellis writing that women seek out racial difference or some other kind where there’s not an obvious gender difference. In the same moment, however, movements toward companionate marriage increasingly prioritized symmetry and equality between opposite-sex partners—the defining tenants of erotic similitude. Similarly, conservative defenders of marriage were relying on the (female) aptitude of sympathy to justify—by emotionally overcoming—the massive structural inequalities between men and women in marriage. In this way, marriage reformers and traditionalists *alike* attempted to overtake what had historically been the cultural definitions of relations between women, during the same period that heterosexual difference was being newly projected onto lesbians. On both sides of the “Woman Question”’s political spectrum, then, lesbian was being usurped in service of heterosexual marriage.

Whether the sexual trope of erotic similitude, or the platonic trope of sympathetic female friendship—and as we have seen, these two traditions have always been complexly historically bound—relations between women were understood as governed by sameness and equality. Indeed, traditions of perfect equality in same-sex friendship prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century were

*predicated* on the impossibility of equality—and the subsequent foreclosure of true friendship—between opposite sex spouses. Elizabeth Wahl writes

Over the course of the seventeenth century... women began to turn to one another for encouragement of their social aspirations and for those emotional ties that were largely absent in other aspects of their lives. In constructing a discourse of female friendship that would describe and strengthen this often utopian enterprise, women writers and intellectuals staked their claim to a classical tradition of *amicitia* despite the fact that this practice of platonic friendship had long been considered an exclusively masculine preserve.... Writers as diverse as Brantôme and Montaigne had scorned the idea of passion or any egalitarian relation between husband and wife and had suggested that men should seek solace for their intellectual and emotional needs through their friendships with other men. 96

Unsurprisingly, such friendship-relations often slid into romantic and erotic bonds between women. But even when they did not, close bonds between women continued to offer this perfect equality, even after it had disappeared between men.<sup>184</sup>

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “[f]emale friendship assumed a crucial role in novels that revolved around companionate marriage and assumed that parents could no longer legitimately choose husbands for their daughters.” Instead, “friendship should partially or wholly define the ideal

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<sup>184</sup> By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, homoerotic equality between men had faded and was preserved only between female same-sex friends; “[f]riendship between boys was... described as a phase that ended when one of the men married, and it was understood in terms of rivalry, hierarchy, and sexual difference. Female friendship enforced an altruistic economy of reciprocity and a model of subjectivity based on cooperation, and its repertoire of bodily gestures emphasized contact between undifferentiated body parts such as hands, eyes, and lips. Male friendship feminized both of the boys involved, but was more often described as feminizing one more than the other, resulting in a couple modeled more on the exaggerated gender differences of hierarchical marriage. Even when female friends adopted behavior associated with men, their relationship was still seen as intensifying the femininity of both parties. As a result, female friendship was more often compared to companionate marriage, which asked both husband and wife to develop traits associated with feminine forms of sociability” (Marcus *Between* 86-87).

relationship between husband and wife,” such novels argue (Marcus *Between* 85). This was in part because of the economic differences between women and men: “defined by altruism, generosity, mutual indebtedness, and a perfect balance of power.... female friendship offered a vision of perfect reciprocity for those who could afford not to worry about daily survival” within “a capitalist society deeply ambivalent about competition” (Marcus 4). Indeed, Marcus traces the roots of Victorian notions of female friendship to the same traditions as does Wahl: “such philosophers as Aristotle and Montaigne had associated friendship with equality, similarity, and a reciprocal affection based on reason, in contrast to marriage, perceived as a naturally hierarchical relation based on irrational passions that defied control” (85). As we have seen, it was Montaigne’s writings that undergirded erotic similitude as *amicitia* for women. Victorian female friendships were often cemented by giving a “lock of hair” (Marcus 4)—the same token exchanged by female lovers participating in the tradition of erotic similitude in the early modern period, where “[t]he productivity of lesbian love is limited to the production of love itself or to its aesthetic memorialization in bracelets of hair or the lyric poem” (Traub 338-339).

Marcus shows that male-female marriage appropriated not only the tropes of female friendship, but also the realities of female marriages in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. In her study of the work for marriage reform done by women in female partnerships, she says such women were “the vanguard of the movement to modernize marriage, for their relationships anticipated the increasing equality of husbands and wives gradually written into law over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Marcus 194).<sup>185</sup> During the 1860s, marriage rates began to

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<sup>185</sup> Of such women, “[t]hrough individual, customized legal agreements, women in female couples obtained some of the rights that the state automatically conferred on married couples. Their legal status as unmarried women allowed them to have a socially recognized spouse and to keep the economic autonomy that legally married wives relinquished under the doctrine of *couverture*.... female marriage appears... to have been a primarily middle- and upper-class phenomenon. Working-class women who earned their own money also formed couples with other women, but it was more common for one member of the couple to live as a man” (Marcus *Between* 194-200).

drop, and the idea that marriage was not absolutely crucial for life “undid the notion of marriage as the union of opposite sexes, each requiring the other to supplement a lack, and harmonized with a modern understanding of companionate marriage based on similarity and friendship” (Marcus 210). In 1869, John Stuart Mill said, in *The Subjection of Women*, that “‘likeness,’ not difference, should be the foundation of true unions, and that marriage should be modeled on what ‘often happens between two friends of the same sex’” (Marcus *Between* 210). It was during this same decade that Clementina Hawarden’s photographs of her daughters, and Wilkie Collins’ *Woman in White*, offered women together in arrangements of polar opposition; the same period saw difference increasingly emphasized between women in same-sex couples as inversion took hold. In other words, the first English national invert type ascended *concurrently* with calls for likeness between opposite sex couples.<sup>186</sup>

Not just lesbian marriage reformers and feminists like John Stuart Mill were turning their attention to female relations, however, and not everyone wanted them to provide a more egalitarian model of marriage. Tracing the shifting meanings of sympathy between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Rachel Ablow writes,

as sympathy’s significance as a way to consolidate communities diminished, its function as a structure through which the subject is constituted in relation to

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<sup>186</sup> Martha Vicinus’ analysis is different: “[w]omen frequently referred to each other as ‘sister,’ the most egalitarian relationship they had in a nuclear family.... The widespread use of the sororal metaphor may have been a cover for something more intimate. [though s]everal nineteenth-century literary works, including Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” (1862), portray intensely eroticized sisterly love.... the sister metaphor, although crucial to female friendship, was not commonly used by women when they wished to indicate something deeper than equal friendship. Intimate friends were not united by sisterly ties, but by a stronger emotion. Neither patriarchal superiority nor sororal equality carried the appropriate feeling, for one signified too much power and the other too little” (xxvi). Vicinus’ argument is that lesbian “merg[ing] with the beloved” often occurred between *unequals*, citing “long[ing] for the potentially suffocating embrace of mother-love” (*Friends* 111). A prominent example in her study is the (largely one-sided) relationship between George Eliot and Edith Simcox, but this exception proves my rule: when Eliot told Simcox that they were just friends, the younger woman wrote her, “‘Sober friendship seems to make the ugliest claim to a kind of equality; friendship is a precious thing indeed but between friends I think that if there is love at all it must be equal, and whichever way we take it, our relationship is between unequals’” (Vicinus *Friends* 123).



others did not.... its significance may have actually increased as it came to serve as a way to differentiate between public and private spheres, to define gender difference, and to *defend the legal status quo regarding marriage*. 3, emphasis mine

Defenders of marriage *inequality* also invoked sympathy—that feminized affective mode—to try to paper over the structural violence inherent in marriage law.<sup>187</sup> The argument, on this side, ran that the care and mutual interest shared by husbands and wives would protect women from abuses like Walter’s, with which the law empowered husbands.<sup>188</sup>

There is an upsetting rationality to this usurpation of sympathy—which, as Ellis and Marcus demonstrate, is a mode of relationality originating between women, cultivated in friendship, and only finally *transferred* to the opposite sex spousal relation—to protect patriarchy (Marcus *Between* 26). We have already seen that *couverture* is the *structural* analogue of sympathy’s *affective* mode collapsing and intermingling two subjects, as William Blackstone writes in *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1756).

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every little thing.... For this reason, a man cannot grant any thing to his wife, or

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<sup>187</sup> Thanks to Dr. Eliza Rodriguez’s DEI work for the line “I don’t care what’s in your heart; I want to see structural changes!”

<sup>188</sup> Ablow writes, “in the debates that led up to the passage of the Custody of Infants Bill (1839), the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), and the Married Women’s Property Act (1870), *couverture* was often conflated or confused with several other popular notions of what it means for two people to come together: the Christian notion of husband and wife constituting ‘one flesh’; the Platonic notion of soul-mates as two halves of a single being; and domestic ideologists’ claims regarding husbands’ and wives’ sympathetic bond.... Conservatives... tended to insist that sympathy arises from the identity of interests and absence of competition that result from *couverture*” (10-12).

enter into covenant with her: for the grant would be to suppose her separate existence; and to covenant with her, would be only to covenant with himself. Ablow 10

The implications for consent of this arrangement are horrifying: not until 1891 were men “denied... ‘conjugal rights’ to their wives’ bodies without their wives’ consent” (Ledger 11).

Whether people wanted women’s rights, or to keep them without, heterosexuals were stealing from women in the same historical moment that inversion asserted women in love were as unlike one another as possible. I turn now to *Great Expectations* to discuss this reversal of tropes defining male-female relations and female-female relations, and the limits of these reversals.<sup>189</sup> I suggest that Miss Havisham and Estella are yet another 19<sup>th</sup>-century callback to Elizabeth I, and that Pip’s affective abjection at Estella’s hands is a gendered choice of femme bottomhood intended to secure him a place in the two women’s *suffisaunce*. Beyond the way in which Pip feminizes himself sartorially, as Marcus notices, I argue Pip feminizes himself via affects of bottomhood. Dickens both articulates and tests men’s novel interest in *suffisaunce* as female power-from-below and the related merging of equal subjects available to women in relationships of sympathy.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> For Prizel, the main Dickens text for sympathy *qua* the lesbian “urge to merge” is *Bleak House*: “Esther and Ada are easily assimilated under the rubric of the Victorian romantic friendship, and it would be simple to begin and end the inquiry into their relationship there. But the merge of subjectivities that occurs between the women exceeds that of the romantic friendship trope and suggests, if not a sexual relationship per se, a lesbian literary and erotic structure.... “Esther... externalizes herself and projects herself onto and through Ada” (279-280).

<sup>190</sup> Ablow argues that “critics’ sense of the ‘reality’ of Dicken’s characters... reflects the novelist’s attempt to define a new aesthetic organized around feelings commonly identified with domesticity. Rather than seeking either to “produce pictures that shall impress by their close and truthful resemblance to something or other in real nature or life’ (as in realism), or to take ‘the mind out of itself into a region of higher possibilities, wherein objects shall be more glorious, and modes of action more transcendent, than any we see’ (as in idealism), Dickens’s aesthetic seeks to establish what I argue is a specifically wifely relation to readers. It seeks to make them love both him and his characters, in other words, and so to ‘influence’ them in much the same way that a wife might influence her husband” (19).

## *Dickens' Misery*

Dickens thematizes male-female gender reversal throughout the novel to raise the question: to what extent can a male subject like Pip become a femme bottom? Most of these moments are comical and passing, demonstrative of the way in which Dickens' novels are often governed by a single idea from the highest thematic level, down to syntax. In the first pages of the novel, Pip examines his parents' burial spot, and misunderstands the tomb's inscription of their relationship to one another as suggesting that his father has become God's wife: "I read 'wife of the Above' as a complimentary reference to my father's exaltation to a better world" (32). As a young man, Pip describes his friend Wemmick's intended, Miss Skiffins, as "a good sort of fellow" (230). Every time Wemmick steals his arm around her, she "took off that girdle or cestus... and laid it on the table" (233). As Sharon Marcus has argued, clothing is crucial to how Dickens signals Pip's desire to feminize himself; here, Wemmick's male body itself becomes female attire. The oscillation of Wemmick's character—zipped up and somewhat brutal when he inhabits the cutthroat public sphere coded male, affectionate and generous in the domestic familial space coded female—shows the importance of gender bifurcation in the novel, and the possibility of switching genders via affect, according to different contexts.

More significant are moments like the introduction of Miss Havisham's relation Camilla, alongside her husband, or "Mr. Camilla" (67). The jarring erasure of a man's name in favor of his spouse's calls unwonted attention to the more normal disappearance of women in marriage to men. Further, the fact that the husband is called by his wife's first name, which is gendered as surnames are not, feminizes him in a potentially ridiculous spectacle of reversal. Such spectacles serve to raise the question of what *kind* of power women could or could wish to inhabit in this

historical moment.<sup>191</sup> This question is most pressing vis-a-vis the most powerful character in the book, the property-owning Miss Havisham, who dances the young people male and female like puppets. Pip's sister sarcastically says to her husband, Joe, "[u]nless you call Miss Havisham a he. And I doubt if even you'll go so far as that" (39). As I argued in chapter one, the question of whether Elizabeth I was really a man was part of a project to render her female power as a usurpation of male power both comical and grotesque.

Miss Havisham is a figure for Queen Elizabeth, most tellingly in the sense that her property is based on a place Elizabeth I once stayed, and pronounced, "satis" when asked how she liked it, close to where Dickens lived. She and Estella both recall the virgin queen in their constantly remarked upon queenliness, as when Miss Havisham says to Pip, "'so you kiss my hand as if I were a queen, eh?'" (183). Miss Havisham's ability to affect time points to the temporal scrambling that allowed Elizabeth to claim youth to the end of her life, biologically impossible reproductive capabilities, and even immortality. Yet another (white) woman in white, the figure Miss Havisham cuts—as Elizabeth would have, had she married—is of an elderly bride, an anachronously aged virgin, all in white (43-44).

19<sup>th</sup>-century fascination with Elizabeth I suggests that she did indeed manage to live forever, just as Pip feels the power of Miss Havisham's refusal of normal time *actually* affect his reality: "I felt as if the stopping of the clocks had stopped Time in that mysterious place, and, while I and everything else outside it grew older, it stood still" (97). Marcus notes that "Victorian reviewers who denounced Miss Havisham as implausible, eccentric, and 'bordering on the monstrous and loathsome' attributed her pathology only to her monomaniacal refusal to

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<sup>191</sup> Dickens was certainly not alone in producing such spectacles. Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*, a Victorian rewrite of *The Faerie Queene*, is a comical but non-trivial exploration of the phenomenon of what it means when there is a "woman on top." See Carolyn William's chapter, "Transforming the Fairy Genres: Women on Top in *Iolanthe*."

recognize the passage of time” (*Between* 170). I want to suggest that it is Dickens’ repeated assertions that Miss Havisham overwhelms Pip’s sense of rational time that upset contemporary audiences. She rebukes him, ““There, there! I know nothing of days of the week; I know nothing of weeks of the year,”” and indeed, when he leaves her time-stopping presence, he thinks “I had fancied, without thinking about it, that it must necessarily be night-time. The rush of the daylight quite confounded me” (47). Later, he recounts, “I fell asleep recalling what I ‘used to do’ when I was at Miss Havisham’s; as though I had been there weeks or months, instead of hours: and as though it were quite an old subject of remembrance, instead of one that had risen only that day” (55). Because Pip’s normal sense of time is overwhelmed, and his narration is our own access to events, Miss Havisham cannot be dismissed as a crazy old virgin, whether detestable or comic; like Elizabeth I, she is powerful enough to *realize* the temporally impossible.

Estella’s own queenliness is also linked to *her* ability to scramble time. Pip notes,

Though she called me ‘boy’ so often, and with a carelessness that was far from complimentary, she was of about my own age. She seemed much older than I, of course, being a girl, and beautiful and self-possessed; and she was as scornful of me as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen. 43

Estella’s “self-possession” is the *suffisaunce* of a woman, like Elizabeth, who, possessing herself—and thereby doubling herself as both the haver and the had—has enough. This dizzying circuit of self-multiplication and self-sufficiency is matched by defiance of age and time resulting, we are told, from “being a girl.” Pip reminds the reader several times that “[t]here was no discrepancy of years between us, to remove her far from me... but the air of inaccessibility which her beauty and her manner gave her, tormented me in the midst of my delight” (187). As with Griselda’s imperviousness and Elizabeth’s exclusively female spaces, Estella is

“inaccessible” to Pip (as a boy); this very arrangement of gender affects temporality, making Estella seem older than she is, as Elizabeth had seemed younger than she was.

We can start to see Pip’s pleasure in suffering—his bottomhood—in combinations like “torment” with “delight,” as I will discuss further in a moment. Nevertheless, in this same scene, Pip remarks on

The air of completeness and superiority with which she walked at my side, and the air of youthfulness and submission with which I walked at hers, made a contrast that I strongly felt. It would have rankled in me more than it did, if I had not regarded myself as eliciting it by being so set apart for her and assigned to her. 185

Though Pip uses the language of *suffisaunce* when he calls Estella “complete,” this takes on quite a different cast when he assumes that he himself “elicit[s]” her performance of sufficiency and “superiority,” *because she doesn’t get to decide who she will marry*. In this passage, Dickens suggests two things: first, that what looks like female completeness and superiority is—in men’s eyes, at least—merely a performative response to women’s structural powerlessness (in this case, how women often marry under circumstances of compromised volition). Secondly, Pip is compensated for his only *seeming* abjection by his real power over the girl, as he imagines it. In a further turn of the screw, Dickens offers us a woman in the parental, not to say patriarchal, position of deciding whom Estella will marry—raising, perhaps, the question of whether we should “call Miss Havisham he”?

In the next chapter, *suffisaunce* requires access to rooms (and houses) of women’s own. Miss Havisham’s power inheres in her property ownership. Beyond the historical invocation of Queen Elizabeth, “Satis House” refers us to *suffisaunce* as women’s satisfaction, to their

“completeness,” or enoughness. Estella explains to Pip, “‘Satis; which is Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew, or all three—or all one to me—for enough.’” “‘Enough House!’” Pip replies (43). Estella goes on, “[i]t meant, when it was given, that whoever had this house, could want nothing else. They must have been easily satisfied in those days, I should think” (43). The irony is that Miss Havisham is a supremely *unsatisfied*, rapaciously vengeful and manhating virgin. In order “‘to wreak revenge on all the male sex,’” Miss Havisham put “‘this figure of myself always before [Estella],” turning the younger woman into a man-punisher by doubling herself (137, 313).<sup>192</sup> The multiplication of the female self is one of the hallmarks of *suffisaunce*, opposite the blending or merging of women. This is the difference of *suffisaunce* from its diminishments like erotic similitude: *suffisaunce* comprehends not only the collapse of two women in love, but also the doubling (or multiplying) of a single female self. The mirror has been a central figure, from Spenser’s “mirrors more than one” for Elizabeth, of which Britomart is one, as she is also the allusion of Tennyson’s magic mirror. Sure enough, Pip recounts that at the end of their relationship, Miss Havisham “‘looked... at herself in the looking-glass.... As she was still looking at the reflection of herself, I thought she was... talking to herself” (45).

Estella, too, has many selves, all of whom reject and exclude Pip: she “‘seemed to be everywhere,” and he sees her where she is not, “‘walking away from me.... her back towards me.... ascend[ing]... as if she were going out into the sky” (49). (Lytton Strachey records that one of her ladies saw Elizabeth I up and walking about when she was in fact on her deathbed—or

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<sup>192</sup> Marcus offers a slanting theory of the accessory as both path or canal, and means of penetration that resonates with the switchiness of *suffisaunce*: “social and psychic bonds between women are usually understood as accessories to the desire between men and women, but accessories are not always subordinate and secondary. In law, an accessory bears responsibility for an act even if absent from its commission, and in fashion, accessories pull together an ensemble. Estella is Miss Havisham’s accessory, and as such is essential to her character. Accessory has the same root as access—the right to approach, enter, or make use of. While Miss Havisham may seem to be a mere accessory to the love story between Estella and Pip, she is the gatekeeper who controls Pip’s way to his lady love. Pip’s determining encounters with the female dyad at the center of *Great Expectations* teach him that to gain access to a woman he must embrace the path of femininity and transform himself into a female accessory” (*Between* 173).

deathfloor—where she had been for days, a phantom sighting suggesting the Queen’s fantastic self-doubling and ability to be in two places at once (284-285)). Estella’s indifferent “ascension” in this passage also suggests her topping of Pip.

Not only self-multiplied, Estella and Miss Havisham are often collapsed into one. Herbert tells Pip, “[t]here has always been an Estella, since I have heard of a Miss Havisham;” his use of articles deindividualizes the women, as though they are a structural pair who must go together—there cannot be one without the other (142). Dickens suggests that they are the same person when Miss Havisham asks whether her ward is “tired of me?” Estella responds, “[o]nly a little tired of myself.” Even more telling is Miss Havisham’s demand that she say right, that she “[s]peak the truth... you are tired of me” (238). The “truth” is that being tired of herself, of Estella, *is* being tired of Miss Havisham. Pip conflates their names when he wheedles for a day off, to go “make a call on Miss Est—Havisham” (86). Indeed, they do share a name, as Pip learns when he asks whether “Estella’s name, is it Havisham or---?’ I had nothing to add” (189). This absence of any addition or potential contribution from Pip highlights Estella’s “completeness;” it seems impossible for him to give her his own name, or make her “Mrs. Pip.”

Nevertheless, Pip seems to seek and enjoy his own abasement. He wishes for nothing more than to be with Estella, without any delusion that she causes him anything but suffering: “I asked myself the question whether I did not surely know that if Estella were beside me at that moment instead of Bidly, she would make me miserable?” (101). He locates his happiness in his *unhappiness* when he acknowledges his desire for that which hurts him, “thinking how happy I should be if I lived... with her, and knowing that I never was happy with her, but always miserable” (212). Reflecting on his sad state, Pip narrates “Estella was so inseparable from all my restlessness and disquiet of mind, that I really fell into confusion as to the limits of my own



part in its production” (213). The intermingling of subjects he narrates, here, resembles that between Estella and Miss Havisham, but Pip produces it by yielding Estella all the power over his interiority. Pip’s “confusion” as to the “limits” of his “own part” is one of many moments when he asserts the collapse of himself with Estella by which he hopes to participate in a historically female form relationality—similitude between women.

Sharon Marcus argues that “*Great Expectations* shows how a man’s desire for a woman is shaped by his identification with the desire between women woven into the fabric of the family, everyday life, and consumer culture—the very stuff of the Victorian novel” (170). For Marcus, this reading of Dickens serves as a case study for the way in which, as she argues, desire between women was both regular and important, rather than oppositional in the Victorian period. I want to suggest that Pip’s collapsing of desire with identification is *also* exemplary of men’s attempts in the period to usurp the affective structures that produced merging between women, and power-in-submission vis-à-vis men. In a moment when men wanted to preserve their structural power over women in marriage but deny doing so, the equality that had culturally-historically defined women’s bonds with *each other* suddenly became valuable. If Marcus helps us see that idealized female friendship was the model for egalitarian male-female marriage between 1830-1880, I want to add that female friendship as she describes it has a much longer history as erotic similitude. We can see this especially in the exchange of locks of hair. We must historicize Marcus’ reading of Pip’s “portmanteau,” as “a figure of infinite containment and endless envelopment, a holder for the clothes that enclose Pip that can itself be placed in another container” that “materializes his desire to combine incorporation of a feminine other with envelopment by her” (*Between* 184). Erotic similitude—the trope of utter symmetry and equality that was supposed to render female relations utterly insignificant—was always constructed as

exactly such a *mise-en-abyme*. Now, suddenly, the female envelopment of the *mise-en-abyme* is not meaningless, but coveted. Marcus identifies a trope from a very long history of lesbian representation—but not as such. Recognition of such genealogies is an affordance of *suffisaunce*, part of the disciplinary intervention I want to claim for lesbian temporality as method.

Given that idealized female friendship is a descendent of erotic similitude in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the second intervention I want to make is to show how the tropes governing female homosexuality and heterosexuality reversed in the second half of the century. A quarter of a century earlier than we have imagined, inversion was already at work in England to render relations between women imitative of opposite gender relations. Indeed, the Griseldean power-from-below Ellis theorized in 1842 may even have contributed to the transformation of female homosexuality into psychic heterosexuality. It is easy to imagine that men were threatened by women's acceptance of their superiority if women thereby found themselves looking down on the husband, who was merely "quite good enough." I have been tracing men's responses to *suffisaunce* in different historical moments; most often, it manifests as the reinsertion of masculinity or maleness into feminine economies of self-sufficiency. In the case of *Great Expectations*, Pip does not accuse Miss Havisham or Estella (figures both for Queen Elizabeth) of usurping masculinity. Instead, he tries to insert *his own male self* into their feminine economy. The main vector of Pip's self-feminization, in Marcus' argument, is his sartorial stylization:

Pip's desire to have Estella is inseparable from his desire to be Miss Havisham, but it is also intimately related to a wish to occupy Estella's place as a fashionable doll, set off by jewels and lovely clothes, attracting the admiration of a wealthy woman of leisure. As Miss Havisham's erotic object, Estella models what Pip wants and wants to be. The narrative cannot separate Pip's desire from his

ambition to become her.... so that he can inhabit the female dyad. *Between* 168-169

In Marcus' reading, Pip's "gender-crossing" is social, situational, and bound up with desire—erotic and otherwise. Then again, all genders are social, situational, and bound up with desire—erotic and otherwise.

So is Pip a trans character? This is an unanswerable question, but also, I suspect, the wrong question. It *is* possible to represent interiority on the page that differs from what other characters in the novel can see; Dickens certainly could have written such a novel. We know from scholarship like Emma Heaney's that transfemininity and transwomanhood have never been "new" in literature, any more than in real life. Pip is not trans in my reading, though I have no doubt that another close-reader could make a compelling argument otherwise. (In such a case, trans-girl-Pip would make for a fascinating juxtaposition to Miss Havisham, as a woman with unusual material privilege. The power to decide who girls must marry and to dispose of large amounts of property were overwhelmingly male in the period; one of the marriage reforms under debate underpinning all this gendered, affective work was the Married Women's Property Act.) Pip's transness is the wrong question because in such a case, Dickens would *still* be posing the question of what it means for a character who is a woman to possess the legal rights of men over women. Because Pip moves in the world as a man, there is a difference between his affectively feminized suffering or bottomhood, and the suffering of wives with no legal recourse or defense against theft of property or rape. The difference is that between feelings or intentions, and structures. Feelings—like sympathy—cannot, in the end, overcome or undo structural power imbalances, as defenders of the marital status quo hoped (or pretended) they would. More productively than asking whether Pip is trans, then, I propose to examine the structures to which

different characters have access, and in our real-life moment, continue to fight against the foreclosures of trans people's access to human rights.

My final addition to Marcus' argument is that not only are Pip's clothes and ornaments feminizing, he also performs affective, relational femininity and bottomhood to try to become a girl in his desire for and identification with the two women. When Pip explains that despite Estella's scorn for him, "it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life" (184), he lays claim to the interpenetration of subjects inherent to conceptions of both sympathy, and erotic similitude—historically feminine orientations and relations. In an even more dramatic moment, Pip tells Estella

"You are part of my existence, part of myself.... You have been in every prospect I have ever seen... on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets.... you cannot choose but remain part of my character." 285

In this instance, Pip's claim to *suffisaunce* with Estella—his multiplication of her everywhere, and he himself as one of her selves—is bound up with his menacing removal of her choice. The shared self that sympathy produced was supposed to obviate violence, at least as it was invoked by conservatives to keep marriage the way it was (an apparatus for disappearing women's agency and choice). A man taking away woman's choice is one of the most historically persistent forms of patriarchal violence. Pip arrives at such a position of male violence, incongruously, *through* invocation of a historically female form of relationality.

It gets dicey. I do not want to claim essential genders for affects, or essential affects for genders. But I do want to trace correlations between gendered situations and affective responses. If a classic girlfriend formulation is "I'm not mad, I'm just sad," this is exactly how Pip positions

himself vis-à-vis Bidy, saying “‘Biddy... I am not angry, but I am hurt.’” Anger is a competitive, powerful emotion, demanding action, contest, redress (Ngai 7, 27). Women have a notoriously hard time accessing anger, and often metabolize rage into sadness, even depression. This is situational, one suspects; there’s often nothing realistically to be done about the things women are angry about. Refusing to feel anger can be self-protective. By the same token, explicitly rejecting anger and invoking hurt, instead, can be a form of subtle, side-long power. For one thing, the rhetorical effect is to announce that there is something *to* be mad about—even though one is not. By vocally choosing woundedness instead of fury, or announcing that one is downtrodden—paradoxically—one claims *superiority* in having risen above anger. Saying these words to Bidy, Pip narrates that he “gave her my hand at parting;” one imagines his hand on top of hers in womanly fashion. He goes on to recount her response from his own perspective: “[n]o, don’t be hurt,’ she pleaded quite pathetically; ‘let only me be hurt, if I have been ungenerous’” (223). Although Pip has made himself the victim, Bidy is now “quite pathetic” in his eyes, suggesting the power of the position he takes.

But is this a femme, or a bottom position? If the kinds of popular knowledge—even stereotypes—I have been invoking resonate as true, it is because women are, historically, structurally disempowered, their unhappiness often the result of material conditions like the proverbial “second shift:” the lion’s share of childcare or housework in addition to holding a job. Femininity and bottomhood have significant overlap because bottoming means, (in part), being without power—but being so *intentionally*. As such, bottomhood can be inhabited by persons of any gender, and is, perhaps, *more* easily inhabited by people who are *not* truly powerless.<sup>193</sup> I call Pip a femme bottom not only because he maneuvers himself into the kind of affective

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<sup>193</sup> The difference between heterosexuality and butch-femme—like that between kink and abuse—is play with a *chosen* power dynamic, rather than an inherent, structural one, under conditions of patriarchy.

power-from-below that often seems to be women's best recourse: he also elicits Bidley's wish to take on the hurt he asserts she has done him. This signals their sameness through the shared and reversible feelings belonging to the female tradition of erotic similitude.

Though Pip claims to suffer at Bidley's hands, the women who top him much more significantly are, of course, Estella and Miss Havisham. When confronting the latter about the harm she has done him, he bursts out, "'O God bless you, God forgive you!' In what ecstasy of unhappiness I got these broken words out of myself, I don't know" (285). We have seen Griselda perform, and Sarah Stickney Ellis theorize, the power of being injured and offering forgiveness. Such is the position Pip takes. In a further twist of abjection that really renders Miss Havisham abject, Pip relinquishes even his own authority of forgiveness, begging God to forgive she who has harmed him, instead. This allows him to imply that she has transgressed against a much higher—indeed, the highest—authority, rather than merely injuring his mortal self. Vertiginously switching wretchedness, here, recalls the shared and switching "hurt" of which Pip accused Bidley and she immediately begged to take on, again positing similitude between boy and woman. The paradox of femme bottomhood—where powerlessness, injury, even abjection render the sufferer superior—is registered in the oxymoronic phrase "ecstasy of unhappiness." In addition to rapturous, out-of-self-transcendence resonant with *suffisaunce*, "ecstasy" suggests euphoria, pleasure, perhaps even satisfaction. All this comes *though* "unhappiness," and echoes Pip's earlier "tormented" "delight" around Estella. He gets a perverse pleasure, as well as power-from-below, by inhabiting the affective suffering that constantly allows him to assert Estella's "superiority" (185) and "ascend[ancy]" (49)—she above him; he is the bottom. Dickens asks, to what extent can men usurp the femme/ bottom power-in-yielding felt in Sarah Stickney Ellis' advice to women? Dickens asks this in a moment when men are appropriating female affective

forms like sympathy that I am suggesting are not only historically feminine, but historically lesbian. What answer do we find in the novel?

Pip's bottomhood, in moments like his "ecstasy of unhappiness," tends to catapult him to the top, as we saw when Biddy became "quite pathetic[]." In the later passage, Miss Havisham begins to address Pip in an "unwonted tone of sympathy," saying she wishes to "serve" him, and going so far as "dropp[ing] on her knees at [Pip's] feet." I will argue in a moment that Pip's toppiness is inescapably structural. Here, when confronted with Miss Havisham's affective abjection (that he has cultivated), Pip feels "terror" (311). But even in this moment—which is to say, even affectively—Pip quickly adjusts to his new power over her, narrating

she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride, found vengeance in.... in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences... her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker.... And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania...? 312

Pip's pious language about Miss Havisham's unnatural and the ungodly "revers[als]" suggests inversion, the perversion of natural womanhood or womanliness. Pip further insinuates Miss Havisham's inversion in the phrase "master mania" which, though more idiomatic than "mistress mania," nevertheless suggests that in bottoming to herself—being mastered by "vanity of sorrow"—she has served a male master. Pip's emotional intervention restores Miss Havisham's proper gender: "[t]here was an earnest womanly compassion for me in her new affection" (312).

Though it allows him to overmaster Miss Havisham, Pip pronounces himself “dissatisfied” several times throughout the novel, suggesting that his femme bottomhood does not lead him to *suffisaunce*. He says, ““I never shall or can be comfortable—or anything but miserable... unless I can lead a very different sort of life from the life I lead now.... see how I am going on. Dissatisfied”” (99). Later, he says he is “dissatisfied with myself” (112). That satisfaction eludes Pip is illuminated by what Griselda performs and Sarah Stickney Ellis theorizes. For them, *suffisaunce* is predicated on sufficiency—under conditions of extreme suffering—*of the self to the self*.<sup>194</sup> The posture Pip takes is the opposite. Even beyond blaming his circumstances or others for his dissatisfaction, he locates his insufficiency within the very self that ought to sustain him under the adverse circumstances he continually chooses (suffering in love for someone who scorns him). Perhaps it is because he seeks feminization through abasement that Pip’s bottomhood *itself* excludes a relationship of lesbian *suffisaunce*: even erotic similitude and sympathy (the Victorian evolution of the former) require perfect equality. Emotional suffering at her hands cannot make him into Estella’s equal or same.

### *Bottoming from the Top*

Alternatively, perhaps Pip cannot find “satisfaction” with himself because he never truly bottoms. Recounting a night spent at Miss Havisham’s, he says

It was the first time I had ever lain down to rest in Satis House, and sleep refused to come near me. A thousand Miss Havishams haunted me. She was on this side of my pillow, on that, at the head of my bed, at the foot, behind the half-opened door of the dressing room, in the dressing room, in the room overhead, in the

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<sup>194</sup> We should remember that women’s supposed inability to be self-sufficient is what historically bars them from the male tradition of *amicitia*.



room beneath—everywhere.... I felt that I absolutely could no longer bear the place. 240-241

This passage asserts, again, the multiplicity of Miss Havisham's self. But though she is at first on top of Pip, and in the next moment underneath him, it is the *place* that tops him, and that breaks him. Satis House, Miss Havisham's property, is her real power. It is a power that Pip cannot *bear*. The word calls up the root of "suffering" as "bearing from beneath," with the implication of sexual bottoming as being literally underneath someone, as well as the paradoxical power inherent in suffering *and* in bottoming: having strength enough to "bear a burden." And this, Pip cannot do. That he has "lain down" in Satis House suggests the supine, prostrate position of the bottom (rather than "spending the night" or even "sleeping"), and reinforcing such a reading of Pip's inability to bear from beneath that the suffering bottomhood he claims should entail.

Even though she is everywhere in the passage describing Pip's overnight at her house, it is telling that nevertheless, it is the *house*, and not Miss Havisham herself, that Pip cannot "bear." Miss Havisham's power to top Pip—as a woman—comes from her property ownership, a power that was structurally male in the period. Pip's inability to "bear the place" suggests that though he seeks the position of bottom affectively, continually claiming hurts and suffering, he does not *actually* want to switch when it comes to structural power. In other words, Pip relinquishes all agency when it comes to affective bottomhood, insisting that he cannot help but love a woman who makes him miserable, but he cannot "bear" woman's inhabitation of structural power metonymized by "the place." "The place" is Satis House, that allusion to the self-sufficiency of another exceptionally powerful—indeed tyrannical—woman. Dickens reveals the machinations of men's affective claims to the merged and harmonious selves promised by sympathy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under legal conditions that made structural equality impossible.

Compare Pip's inability to lie down and bear "the place" with his "feeling that it was ungenerous to press myself upon [Estella], when she knew that she could not but obey Miss Havisham" (236). Again and again, only at the level of his *feelings* does Pip refrain from "press[ing] himself upon" Estella in this highly sexual image; one, moreover, that perfectly reverses the positions of "suffering" as "bearing from beneath." Here, Pip is the burden borne from below by Estella, a weight pressing "upon" her. Dicken's choice of preposition emphasizes the verticality—the toppiness—of Pip's pressing weight. Consistently with his exclusively affective sacrifices of self, only Pip's delicate feelings restrain him from pressing the weight of himself atop Estella. He does not wish to be "ungenerous." One of the most important affective modes of self-sacrificing sympathy *qua* 19<sup>th</sup>-century *suffisaunce* is generosity, especially in the face of hurt, as Sarah Stickney Ellis assures the women of England they should expect to be; as Griselda was; and as Pip continually claims to be by the women around him. But more important than Pip's "feeling[s]" is the fact that he fully intends to take advantage of Estella's lack of choice, and looks forward to the day when she will belong to him, even resting easy with his supposed suffering in anticipation of the reversal of their power. We should recall the moment when he assumes that her present disdain for him is a reaction to his much more real, future power over her. Never once does he indicate that he will sacrifice his will to Estella's, or even that he finds it distasteful to marry someone who doesn't want him. Pip has no need to press himself upon her affectively; he can even claim nobility of feeling, here, because *structurally*, he is already on top of her, pressed upon her by default.

That it is Miss Havisham whom Estella must "obey"—who takes away her choice in a mode we should identify as historically patriarchal, despite Miss Havisham's gender—is Dickens' contemplation of the question: does power change when the genders of individuals

inhabiting it are reversed? We have seen this question levelled thoroughly at Elizabeth's monarchical power. In the Dickensian context, Miss Havisham is the exception that proves the rule: material, structural power matters most. Ironically, Miss Havisham turns out *not* to be Pip's secret benefactor; his patron is a man of the lowliest class and social position, an escaped prisoner totally stripped of rights. Despite these vectors of abjection, this man can look at Pip with "proprietaryship," because he has funded his class mobility (260). Let us turn, now, to Dickens' subtle, comic, and chilling representation of the way in which structural power generally accrues all on the male side, Miss Havisham notwithstanding.

Pip's rival for Estella's hand sheds light on the situation of male-female marriage in terms evoking *suffisaunce* as power-from-below, *and* feminized turning-inward as response to structural powerlessness. Jaggers toasts Estella's marriage

"The stronger will win in the end, but the stronger has to be found out first. If he should turn to, and beat her.... he may possibly get the strength on his side; if it should be a question of intellect, he certainly will not.... So, here's to Mrs. Bentley Drummle... and may the question of supremacy be settled to the lady's satisfaction! To the satisfaction of the lady *and* the gentleman, it never will be."

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Normative renaming of the female partner in marriage has been restored. Dickens humorously refers to Camilla's husband as "Mr. Camilla," but it's not a joke when Estella's name—first and last—disappears into a man's, as Mr. Bentley Drummle. Their shared identity is *his*.

Conservative invocations of sympathy in defense of marriage simultaneously justified and obfuscated this exact situation. Jaggers' language of satisfaction evokes *suffisaunce*; he asserts that men and women cannot inhabit *suffisaunce* together, that it must be a contest between them.

He implies that there are different kinds of strength—male and female—and that it *is* possible for female strength to beat male strength. But the “beating” of such a contest becomes literal, where strength most pressingly means the brute strength with which men are often superior (the premise of Sarah Stickney Ellis’ advice to women), and further, with which men were typically allowed, legally, to beat their wives. This is the inherently violent structure underpinning women’s strength as “bearing,” rather than beating—and, likely, bearing beatings, from time to time. Affectively topping Pip does nothing to change this situation of vulnerability to male violence for Estella. Perhaps part of Pip’s horror at Jagger’s toast is his realization that, for all his affective bottomhood, he is inextricably implicated in the power that would allow Drummle to beat Estella. Suffering in love, even sacrificing oneself, does not undo structural privilege. He sickeningly realizes, perhaps, that one cannot achieve equality by getting on the bottom.

Dickens mocks sympathy as assuring the mutual interests of husband and wife by showing that these simply become the husband’s, as does the shared marital name. In the case of Mrs. Bentley Drummle, Dickens raises the specter of domestic violence as an extreme possibility under this normative arrangement. But in the case of Joe’s parents, and in utterly Dickensian fashion, he’s sarcastically explicit about the link between affects of suffering sympathy, and patriarchal brutality. Explaining why he allows Pip’s sister to treat them both so tyrannically, Joe tells Pip about how his own father “hammered” his mother and himself as a child: when his mother would take Joe and run, “my father were that good in his hart that he couldn’t abear to be without us.” So, Joes father would come after them, and the “hammering” of both would continue (35). This wifely, maternal, and infantile abjection is based in physical violence, not emotional suffering like Pip’s. When Joe describes his father as good in his heart, and unable to bear separation from his family, he comically describes his abusive father in the same terms of

suffering sympathy that Pip continually claims. Pushing to a ridiculous extreme male sympathetic marital connection to woman as insurance against abuse, Dickens exposes the absolute absurdity of relying on men's loving feelings to prevent cruelty.<sup>195</sup> Further, though Pip is no wifebeater, Joe's use of "abear" (to say that his father had no ability to "bear" his wife and child's absence) aligns him with Pip, who could not "bear" Satis House. Though Pip affectively chooses bottomhood, his structural position on top is immovable, resembling most closely Bentley Drummle's, and that of Joe's father.

Witnessing his father's treatment of his mother has a strong effect on Joe. He says that seeing "my poor mother... a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days... I'm dead afeered of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong t'other way" (38). The result is that he allows his wife to have *all* the power over their household, which she uses to abuse both Joe and Pip physically as well as verbally. Joe is a male bottom of sorts, too. But crucially, Joe realizes that the structures supporting abuse are all on the side of the man. *His* male bottomhood—bearing it when a woman hurts him—is compensation for the material inequalities between men and women (and children) that led to his and his mother's constant "hammering," and return to the hammerer every time.

When Pip and Estella meet again after her years of hard marriage, she confirms that Drummle has taken everything from her, as Walter took everything from Griselda. She says, "[t]he ground belongs to me. It is the only possession I have not relinquished. Everything else has gone from me, little by little, but I have kept this. It was the subject of the only determined resistance I made in all the wretched years" (379). That she refers to the "ground" she retains

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<sup>195</sup> Perhaps structural power, like that of Elizabeth I, cannot *but* produce violence.

anticipates the subject of the coming chapter, which takes up the relationship between women's property ownership, and English nationalism expressed as love of the literal *land* of England, her "ground," Elizabeth's body, in an earlier period. During this exchange that ends the novel, Pip tells Estella that he "work[s] pretty hard for a sufficient living" (380). He has found a different kind of sufficiency than *suffisaunce*. This question of his livelihood is crucial: Pip *has* been structurally abject, all along, in terms of a working wage. He gives up his working-class training as a blacksmith in Joe's forge at Miss Havisham's urging, and is left with nothing, a useless "gentleman" with nothing but debts.

The reason Pip was so eager to offer up his reliable material future is, I suggest, above all because he abhors becoming black in Estella's eyes. Of the choice, Pip explains

What I dreaded was, that in some unlucky hour I, being at my grimmest and commonest, should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in.... I was haunted by the fear that she would... find me out, with a black face and hands. 83

Alongside the constant emphasis on Miss Havisham as a queenly (white) woman in white, Pip's abhorrence of blackness returns us to Elizabeth's "blackamoor" expulsion, the white English nationalism underlying her claims to endogamy, and the history of lesbianism's racial and national abjection away from England. Indeed, the language of black slavery is all over *Great Expectations*, most often as hyperbolic expression by white characters of their servitude. Perhaps Dickens critiques the way in which marriage reformers compared women's legal status in marriage to that of the chattel slave. Hegel defines personhood as land ownership, freedom from need to sell one's labor (Rose 150). But the question of what it means to *be*, instead of to *own* property, is literal in the case of the chattel slave that marriage reformers invoked to complain of women's exclusion from property ownership. The next chapter turns to "property itself" as

defined by the exclusion of women, and to the continuing relationship of white English nationalism to lesbian identities.

## 5. Bricks and Mortar: Suffisaunce as Material Condition

*Suffisaunce* as power-from-below, bearing a burden from underneath, is well and good. However, I turn in this chapter to the concrete substrate, the material conditions that *suffisaunce* requires *and* entails—space and place for women to be alone/ together, the financial independence to secure rooms and houses of women’s own. The MED defines *suffisaunce* first and foremost as “enough; an adequate supply, quantity, etc. of something... abundance, plenty; wealth.” It is this aspect of *suffisaunce* that E. M. Forster’s 1910 novel *Howards End* and Virginia Woolf’s 1928 speeches that became *A Room of One’s Own* illustrate, simultaneously engaging the temporal lag and relapses that characterize *suffisaunce* as literary-historical organizational rubric, grounded in the temporality of female sexuality. Though produced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these texts seem stuck in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, Forster and Woolf both subtly rewrite Victorian narratives by simply ignoring or misrepresenting the history of female relations; like my own project, Woolf’s text looks back on the early modern period as well. Woolf undertakes to “describe under what conditions women lived, not throughout the ages, but in England, say in the time of Elizabeth;” in thinking about women’s poverty and lack of education, Woolf dwells the longest with the early modern period. She frames her talk through the shifting narrative voices of a Mary Hamilton, Mary Beton, Mary Seton, and Mary Carmichael, or four “Mary’s,” which refer to a 16<sup>th</sup>-century ballad about ladies to Mary, Queen of Scots (*Room 41*). Though by the turn of the century, British sexological inversion was

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<sup>196</sup> J. Hillis Miller explains that “[o]ne of the many ways in which *Howards End*... is continuous with the great tradition of the English Victorian novel” is the narrative style: “Forster’s narrator... not only knows everything and is able to move at will back and forth in time and space as well as in and out of the characters’ minds. He (or she or it) is also present as a constant garrulous, ruminative commentator on the persons and their story” “[o]ne of the many ways in which *Howards End*... is continuous with the great tradition of the English Victorian novel is in its (184).



established, Woolf and Forster write as though it were possible to return to the Victorian period—or perhaps an even earlier one, in Forster’s pastoralism and Woolf’s use of the early modern—to imagine a different kind of female queerness. These 20<sup>th</sup>-century texts dwell with the past to write a script of *suffisaunce* instead of homosexuality, both producing something paradoxically unnamable which nevertheless has only one leg in abstraction, and the other firmly planted on material property.<sup>197</sup>

First, I will read *Howards End*’s illustration of a spiritual register of female queerness tied to land and country that is not inversion, but that necessitates the same substrates of practicality and material possession the novel associates with medicine. Then, I will dwell extendedly with Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* in order to establish that inversion promised men that they would know a lesbian when they saw one; that lesbianism does not “pass” unknown. Finally, I will argue that *A Room of One’s Own* thumbs its nose even more explicitly at sexology than did *Howards End*, offering a theory of relationality between “normal” women that refuses reduction to friendship or to sexuality, but requires above all that women have enough to exist on their own terms.

### *The Seen and the Unseen*

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<sup>197</sup> My argument that Forster *re-* or *overwrites* narratives of inversion runs counter to Vybarr Cregan-Reid’s that in the period of *Howards End* and after, Forster was trying to “find a sufficiently descriptive vocabulary for talking about something new. His literary output during this period attempts (and sometimes fails) to find a mode of writing... to discover the finer contours that might exist in relations between men.... attempting to explore something for which there was not already a rich vocabulary” (446-447).

A contemporary review in the *Daily News* noted that “Mr Forster’s method is a sort of bridge between that of Mr Conrad and that of Mr Galsworthy”<sup>198</sup> A study in temporal bifurcations, *Howards End* is set in a moment when “humanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London,” and is populated by binaries of residual Victorianisms and emergent 20<sup>th</sup>-century structures of meaning (7). Honorable love for a 19<sup>th</sup>-century pastoral English landscape is juxtaposed with the imperialism and scramble for material gain that precipitated the Great War. The lingering value of landed property appears side by side with the register of movable property and urban finance capital. Unnamable female bonds that express love of place rooted in attachment to nature compete not only with the demands of the hetero-patriarchal family—which views land and place only as property—but with masculine medical expertise that insists upon diagnosis and definition.<sup>199</sup> While the novel prefers “imaginative” feminine queerness to practicality, property, and positivism, Forster shows that women require access to property in its grossest material sense to be able to “connect” with each other (72, 159).

*Howards End* juxtaposes the Schlegels, a moderately wealthy and thoroughly feminized family of partial German descent, with an extremely wealthy, entirely masculine, and scrupulously English family called the Wilcoxes. Margaret, the elder Schlegel sister, contrasts the two households: “ours is a female house.... I mean that it was irrevocably feminine, even in father’s time.... all we can do is see that it isn’t effeminate. Just as another house that I can mention, but won’t, sounded irrevocably masculine, and all its inmates can do is to see that it isn’t brutal” (37).<sup>200</sup> The novel represents binaries beyond the temporal and the gendered, as the

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<sup>198</sup> David Lodge notes this in his Penguin introduction (xxv).

<sup>199</sup> See Yonatan Touval’s “Colonial Queer Something” for a discussion of how in *A Passage to India* and *Maurice*, “sexuality can be seen to have become increasingly associated with place in Forster’s aesthetic vision,” most pressingly, in those texts, in a post-colonial vein (455).

<sup>200</sup> The femininity of the Schlegel household, in spite of a brother’s presence, and even, as Margaret notes, when the father lived, might be considered a modern version of Elizabeth I as woman without father, brother, or husband, which we also saw in *The Woman in White*. Introducing the orphaned siblings, Forster’s narrator follows two long

two families epitomize opposing poles of “the seen” or the “outer life,” and “the unseen,” or the “inward light” (85, 23).<sup>201</sup> The first category can be understood as expansion—urban as well as imperial development, and the accumulation of material wealth. The second is a regard for the physical land of England as a spiritual home. The Wilcox men treat every event like a board meeting with an itemized agenda. Theirs is the “outer life... in which telegrams and anger count.... There love means marriage settlements; death, death duties” (23). In Helen’s view, “the whole Wilcox family was a fraud, just a wall of newspapers and motor-cars and golf-clubs... if it fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and emptiness” (22). So with finance capital, in which Wilcoxery strives always for more, and which is also always liable to fall. Mr. Wilcox, the perfect gentleman, is a “man who had carved money out of Greece and Africa, and bought forests from the natives for a few bottles of gin” (241). Because of them and men like them, “month by month the roads smelt more strongly of petrol, and were more difficult to cross, and human beings heard each other speak with greater difficulty, breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky. Nature withdrew; the leaves were falling by midsummer; the sun shone through dirt with an admired obscurity” (92).<sup>202</sup> Forster’s narrator seems to favor the feminine:

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and complex paragraphs about each of the sisters with a new paragraph of two short sentences: “Little need be premised about Tibby. He was now an intelligent man of sixteen, but dyspeptic and difficile” (25-26).

<sup>201</sup> The most obvious reading of *Howards End* is that the life of the inward light and the unseen requires money. Like Woolf’s argument that women’s cultural productions are inferior because women have not had the material support that the production of good literature requires, Forster explains that Leonard Bast, with his romantic sensibilities, “knew he was poor, and would admit it; he would have died sooner than confess any inferiority to the rich.... But he was inferior to most rich people.... He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as lovable. His mind and his body had been alike underfed, because he was poor” (39). Bast is an intelligent and imaginative soul hungry for education and culture out of his financial reach; the novel is largely the story of his ruin in a reversal of the “wealthy-man-takes-advantage-of-poor-woman” trope.

<sup>202</sup> When we turn to Woolf, we will see that she, too structures an opposition between women and men, and similarly describes the latter as having always “had money and power, but only at the cost of harboring in their breasts an eagle, a vulture, for ever tearing the liver out and plucking at the lungs—the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition which drives them to desire other people’s fields and goods perpetually; to make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas” (38).

“historians of the future will note how the middle classes accreted possessions without taking root in the earth, and may find in this the secret of their imaginative poverty” (128).<sup>203</sup>

But while the Schlegels dwell with ideas, with art and beauty, they go in for politics only in the vaguest sense: “[t]emperance, tolerance, and sexual equality were intelligible cries to them; whereas they did not follow our Forward Policy in Tibet with the keen attention that it merits” (24). Their easy wealth allows them to dwell on the unseen inner life, and one of the novel’s most crucial moments is when Margaret realizes that they “stand upon money as upon islands. It is so firm beneath our feet that we forget its very existence. It’s only when we see someone near us tottering that we realize all that an independent income means” (51-52).<sup>204</sup> The novel’s most famous line is “Only connect!,” and it is the novel’s work to connect these two ways of life: the one that thinks *only* of money, and the one that can afford to forget money, and think ideas (159). At stake is England herself.

England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through the mouths of all her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary motion, blew strong against her rising seas. What did it mean? For what end are her fair complexities, her changes of soil, her sinuous coats? Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea...? 150

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<sup>203</sup> Robert K. Martin writes that “Forster’s great accomplishment... is to make the ‘unnatural’ Schlegel sisters, products of London, with their suggestions of lesbianism and incest, be the true inheritors of nature, while the Wilcoxes are now barred from the land by a congenital failing—hay fever” (269). Miller argues that Forster’s equivocal narrator “measures the characters by their responses to the unseen” (187). Nevertheless, while “[a]ll the elements are present in *Howards End* for a strong feminist reading of the novel... is not all that easy to figure out just where Forster stands. His narrator gives the Wilcoxes their due for the efficient exercise of patriarchal power” (*Others* 196).

<sup>204</sup> My focus is on the Schlegel-Wilcox plot more than the Leonard Bast plot, which, here, throws into relief the Schlegel sisters’ privilege.

Alluding to the line “This precious stone set in the silver sea” from the nationalist speech about England from *Richard II*, Forster performs the backward-looking tradition of *suffisaunce* by creating a referential link to a much older text that is itself a history play (II.i.46).

To forge the “connection” that will answer the question of the “end” of the “jewel in a silver sea,” a friendship that is at times uneasy is struck up between the two families. The most narrative attention is paid at the novel’s start to the tacit but unmistakable attraction between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox, wife and mother to the male Wilcoxes, and much Margaret’s senior. Forster’s depiction of *suffisaunce*—which the novel calls “the Holy of Holies,” as we will see—is embodied by Mrs. Wilcox. How the two families originally know one another is unclear; the novel simply opens with the younger Schlegel sister’s visit to the Wilcox’s property: “[p]erhaps it was [Ruth Wilcox] who had desired the Miss Schlegels to be invited to Howard’s End, and Margaret whose presence she had particularly desired” (55). This “desire” between Margaret Shlegel and Ruth Wilcox is characterized as haunting, before and after Mrs. Wilcox’s death, when Margaret *becomes* Mrs. Wilcox (the second). In a gender-reversed Sedgewickian triangulation, after Wilcox’s proposal to her, “Mrs. Wilcox strayed in and out, ever a welcome ghost; surveying the scene, thought Margaret, without one hint of bitterness” (142). (During this proposal, Margaret thinks of Mrs. Wilcox: “They proceeded to the drawing-room.... Had Mrs. Wilcox’s drawing-room looked thus at Howards End? Just as this thought entered Margaret’s brain, Mr. Wilcox asked her to be his wife” (140)).<sup>205</sup> As a trope for representing lesbian desire, ghostliness blurs and blends the outlines of individuals; as with *suffisaunce*, it is difficult to tell

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<sup>205</sup> Margaret’s eventual marriage to Wilcox seems not to interfere with her perpetual virginity. Like Griselda’s imperviousness to Walter’s punishments, “[i]f he [Wilcox] was a fortress she was a mountain peak, whom all might tread, but whom the snows made nightly virginal” (156).

where one woman ends and the next begins.<sup>206</sup> Thus do Margaret and Ruth Wilcox come to share an identity as Mrs. Wilcox.

Before this fusion comes to pass, however, Margaret is anxious to form greater intimacy quickly with the older woman, and Forster's most explicit evocation of *suffisaunce* appears, characteristically, in the negative:

Was Mrs. Wilcox one of the unsatisfactory people—there are many of them—who dangle intimacy and then withdraw it? They evoke our interests and affections, and keep the life of the spirit dawdling round them. Then they withdraw. When physical passion is involved, there is a definite name for such behavior—flirting—and if carried far enough, it is punishable by law. But no law—not public opinion, even—punishes those who coquette with friendship, though the dull ache that they inflict, the sense of misdirected effort and exhaustion, may be as intolerable. Was she one of these? 67

Forster raises the example of “physical passion” to say that what is between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox is *not* something so easily recognized (nor legislated). In the next section, Virginia Woolf will also imagine a female relationality much more difficult to legislate or censor than was *The Well of Loneliness*' definitively sexual relationship premised on imitative heterosexuality. The question of Mrs. Wilcox is “satisfactoriness,” or lack thereof, comes on the heels of a “newborn emotion” with which the two women shake hands after a failed party. Breaking into a new line after the single sentence with which this new section begins—“[s]everal days passed”—Forster

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<sup>206</sup> De-corporealizing the lesbian body, on the one hand, turns presence into absence by desexualizing the lesbian. On the other hand, ghosts and haunting turn absence into presence, creating possibilities that *any* woman could be haunted by diffusive lesbian sexuality impossible to pin down.

makes the reader ache with Margaret's yearning (67). What is between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox is "new" not only to them, but unknown and unregulated at the societal level.

And yet, there *was* a recognizable model for desire between women at the moment Forster was writing; he calls it up only to reject it as an explanation for the younger woman's feelings. Having made a rude blunder, Margaret rushes to call upon Mrs. Wilcox, and "the curious note was struck again" (61). Mrs. Wilcox asks,

"I—I wonder whether you ever think about yourself... I almost think—" "Yes?" asked Margaret, for there was a long pause—a pause that was somehow akin to the flicker of the fire, the quiver of the reading-lamp upon their hands, the white blur from the window; a pause of shifting and eternal shadows. "I almost think you forget you're a girl." 62

With their gaping age difference operating as plausible deniability, Forster ambiguously raises the possibility of Margaret's masculinity: perhaps she forgets that she is a girl and behaves as though she were a grown woman, or perhaps she forgets that she is a girl, and behaves as though she were a boy. The latter is how British sexology understood female homosexuality *qua* inversion. But it is not inversion that eroticizes the quivering light and flickering fire of Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox's friendship. Instead, their queer attraction is a "curious note"—something strange and unfamiliar. Forster's nostalgia and the novel's bifurcated temporality revise history by simply ignoring it: as though sexology had not already inscribed female homosexuality, Forster goes back in time to write it differently. This gesture of refusal will be repeated still later in Woolf's 1928 tactical rewriting of the history of 19<sup>th</sup>-century female friendship.

The relationship between the gay novel and homosexuality as identity category is reimagined in Natasha Hurley's *Circulating Queerness: Before the Gay and Lesbian Novel*.

Examining the emergence of a subgenre defined by homosexuality... requires that we attend not just to the depictions of interactions, desires, or identities of characters but to the formal productions of social worlds in which those characters make sense as protagonists.... the queer novel is not just the product of newly emergent sexual identity categories. Homosexuality doesn't just come to be named and then have novels written about it, even though the emergence of the very terms *homosexuality* and *inversion* did obviously shift the vocabulary we have for describing the novels in which they appear. It can be recognized in abstract terms only when enough concrete details have accumulated to make the abstraction possible as such.... we might say that rather than the gay and lesbian novel emerging in the wake of the very term *homosexuality* the detail-accumulating, world-making project of the novel may well have made homosexuality possible as an abstraction. 14-15

Though the category of the homosexual existed when Forster was writing, he refuses to name it, addressing sexology only glancingly. While *Howards End* could be called a lesbian novel, it might more properly be called a novel about abstraction *itself*—"the unseen," "the life of the spirit," and the "curious note." Miller makes clear the incommensurability between identity categories and "the unseen:" "distinctions of class, nation, gender, and so on, could be measured as true or false by comparison with other accounts of Edwardian society. Nothing can measure or validate the black hole of the unseen" (*Others* 202). Forster temporally scrambles Hurley's formulation, resisting legible classification of homosexuality in favor of something undefined.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Martin and Piggford write that "[o]ne of the 'queerest' elements of Forster's work is his insistence on the peculiarities of passion, a force that constantly works to undermine any move to a reassuring 'gayness.' Forster's sense of a constantly baffling eros that can strike at any moment, touching anyone, and that is not gentle and loving



Forster implicitly renders the novel's setting anachronous, writing as though female homosexuality were not yet a thoroughly developed and inscribed identity,

*"Odd Girls" and "Property Itself"*

In a further turn, while it might seem that the novel's most compelling element is the "curious" queerness that attends Mrs. Wilcox and Margaret, the misdirection of property merely an avenue for opening queer possibilities; in fact, real estate is the novel's proper focus. Mrs. Wilcox loves nothing more than her house and farmland at Howards End, which she brought to her marriage in a state of disrepair. Her eminently practical husband salvaged it, but, though "[h]e felt strongly about property," he does not love Howards End (171). In the bedroom meeting that initiates their more intimate friendship, Margaret is "interested when her hostess explained that Howards End was her own property," and "bored" when she describes her in-laws and marital family ties (61). In all their years of marriage, Mr. Wilcox never knew of the "pigs' teeth" set into the wych elm that made such a significant part of his wife's emotional landscape. Mrs. Wilcox tells Margaret of them immediately: "[t]here are pigs' teeth stuck into the trunk, about four feet from the ground. The country people put them in long ago, and they think that if they chew a piece of the bark, it will cure the toothache. The teeth are almost grown over now, and no one comes to the tree" (61). Years later, as the second Mrs. Wilcox, Margaret refers to this feature of the landscape to Mr. Wilcox's bewilderment. Margaret conceals that it was Mrs. Wilcox who told her of them, maintaining a secretive connection beyond the grave to the first Mrs. Wilcox, excluding the living man who triangulates them (176).

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but powerful and disruptive prevents any easy binaristic demarcation between the 'straight' Forster and the 'gay' Forster" (4).

Mrs. Wilcox can accommodate Wilcoxery, but is herself a creature of a different breed. She “seemed not to belong to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it” (19). She embodies pastoralism, and endeavors to share it with Margaret by inviting her to Howards End. The novel poses the invitation to see Howards End as the consummation of the women’s charged friendship.<sup>208</sup> Margaret is already inclined toward “the unseen” by way of her Germanic tendency towards the spiritual, but at first unprepared to fully comprehend the spiritual meaning of home rooted in the land. She first politely but unwisely declines. Then, with “her mind... focused on the invisible”

[s]he discerned that Mrs. Wilcox, though a loving wife and mother, had only one passion in life—her house—and that the moment was solemn when she invited a friend to share this passion with her. To answer ‘another day’ was to answer as a fool. ‘Another day’ will do for bricks and mortar, but not for the Holy of Holies into which Howards End had been transfigured. Her own curiosity was slight. She had heard more than enough about it in the summer. The nine windows, the vine and the wych-elm had no pleasant connections for her, and she would have preferred to spend the afternoon at a concert. 73<sup>209</sup>

As the most famous line of the novel is “only connect,” the absence of connection for Margaret at this point is telling (159). The novel will connect Margaret to Howards End, and to Mrs. Wilcox: “in after years,” Margaret was “to hear of [Mrs. Wilcox’s strange request to leave her

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<sup>208</sup> Benjamin Bateman theorizes the invitation as a “counterweight” to interpellation: “[w]here interpellation locates the subject in relation to present circumstances, the queer invitation encourages a move beyond into unknown territory, opening a horizon of possibility.” He suggests *Howards End* offers “a more dynamic understanding of subjectivity in which rigidifying interpellations intermingle with queer invitations.... [that] work to undermine the social norms against which certain kinds of erotic and non-erotic intimacy—same-sex, cross-class, and inter-generational, to name only a few—are judged to be abnormal, inferior, insane, irresponsible, unproductive, or simply pointless” (181).

<sup>209</sup> In the Judaic tradition, the “Holy of Holies” is “[t]hat part of the Tabernacle and of the Temple which was regarded as possessing the utmost degree of holiness (or inaccessibility)” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*).

Howards End] when she had built up her life differently, and it was fit into position as the headstone of the corner” (87).

Along with the term “headstone,” Mrs. Wilcox’s haunting presence is built up by the effect on Margaret like the visitation of a ghost when she finally finds out that she was left Howards End: “Margaret was silent. Something shook her life in its inmost recesses, and she shivered” (293). It is only natural that Mrs. Wilcox should become an “ever... welcome ghost” after her death, since, as the “Holy of Holies,” she had one foot in the realm of the spirit even in life. The *suffisaunce* between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox goes further than Castle’s formulation of lesbianism as haunting; not only is Margaret attended—doubled—by Mrs. Wilcox’s spirit; she literally *becomes* her. Miss Avery, the old servant, gives Margaret a fright by mistaking her for “Ruth Wilcox,” though at this point in the novel, Margaret *is* the “Mrs. Wilcox?” Miss Avery addresses. Margaret “stammer[s]” in response, “‘I—Mrs. Wilcox—I?’” (172).<sup>210</sup>

Piercing through to the significance of Mrs. Wilcox’s felicitously termed “queer and imaginative” invitation, Margaret rushes back to her: “‘I will come if I still may,’... laughing nervously. ‘You are coming to sleep, dear, too. It is in the morning that my house is most beautiful... I dare say they are sitting in the sun in Hertfordshire, and you will never repent joining them’” (72).<sup>211</sup> Margaret says in return, “‘I shall never repent joining you.’” Mrs. Wilcox

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<sup>210</sup> Miss Avery executes Mrs. Wilcox’s will, passing on her note, and insisting that Margaret take up residence at Howards End, though neither of the new Wilcox couple intends it. When she fills house with Margaret’s things, Margaret thinks she is more shrewd than senselessly old (231). Bateman psychologizes: “[I]like the Freudian melancholic who introjects the ego of the lost loved one, Margaret becomes Ruth, taking on the trappings of her life as a way of coping with her untimely death.... She admits that she does not love Henry, but by marrying him she retains a connection with Ruth, trying to preserve what was permanently lost. In this way, when Miss Avery, the housekeeper, mistakes Margaret for Ruth at Howards End, her mistake may reveal a deeper truth” (190).

<sup>211</sup> Bateman also recognizes the queer temporality at play in this scene: “[i]f in Hebrew ‘inviting’ is equivalent to ‘making time,’ as Anne Dufourmantelle speculates in her response to Derrida’s seminars on hospitality (76), then Forster’s queer invitation might be said to inaugurate a temporality for non-normative desires and relationships; to make time, that is, for queerness to incubate and thus find a future” (181). This is not unrelated to the issue of property, as “Elizabeth Outka reads the novel’s anxiety over modernity’s incursions upon tradition against the backdrop of an exploding turn-of-the-century market for furnishings made to appear ancient and authentic.... the home comes to house multiple generations and temporalities under one roof and thus make space, in a sense, for

replies, “it is the same” (74). Mrs. Wilcox *is* Howards End; she is “the same” as her place of birth, which is here called “the Holy of Holies:” a literal place—the tabernacle—that houses the Holy Spirit. The Holy of Holies exceeds, but also requires, the physicality of a mere house of “brick and mortar.” Benjamin Bateman suggests that “same,” here, could refer to Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox themselves, “mutually extending themselves in response to an invitation whose enunciation neither can own, both because neither knows where it will lead and because, having revived the invitation, Margaret blurs the line between inviter and invitee” (185). This blending of subjectivities, the reversibility or confusion of subject and object, doer and done-to, is the grammar of *suffisaunce*, where one woman becomes two (or more), and two (or more) become one.<sup>212</sup> It need not be a sexual grammar; Bateman notices that Helen and Margaret’s voices occasionally “merge” as do Margaret and Ruth’s (191).

Mrs. Wilcox’s “passion” is explicitly opposed to her wife- and motherhood. Right at this moment, “Before imagination could triumph, there were cries of ‘Mother! Mother!’” the Wilcox family arrives and swiftly bears Mrs. Wilcox away (74). The effect is devastating. What is curtailed by the interrupting hail, “Mother!” is “imagination,” another “abstraction” like “the unseen” and the “curious” of the “curious note.” It isn’t that Margaret is queer and the family is straight. Rather, what *happens* between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox in this moment produces a new kind of intersubjectivity:

So long as their friendship rests upon familiar conventions such as dinner parties... [Margaret] feels at ease; but a surprise invitation to an unvisited locale

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time. We might then argue that Ruth’s queer invitation makes time for a queer future but also makes space for a queer past that is under threat of extinction” (Bateman 196).

<sup>212</sup> By contrast, the family’s hail offers no possibility for the switching of *suffisaunce*: where the invitation is “reversible,” the call of “mother!” is interpellative, disciplinary, and uni-directional. As she returns to her family, “Ruth’s voice has been silenced, her body re-encased between husband and child, the markers but also the boundaries of her identity and social mobility” (Bateman 186-187).

challenges her to engage Ruth on terms disarticulated from normative relations. It isn't quite that accepting the invitation would threaten to reveal to these women unseen sides of each other, but rather that it would threaten to generate new aspects of their subjectivities. Bateman 184

The unpredictable social and erotic possibility I call *suffisaunce* contrasts with the identity-category-perversion or defect of which the Wilcoxes suspect the Schlegels. Mrs. Wilcox abruptly dies. She requests, by a handwritten note delivered posthumously, that Margaret should inherit her house. Her baffled and angry family speculates on Margaret's sexual manipulation of Mrs. Wilcox: "[t]he question is—.... The question is whether Miss Schlegel, during the fortnight we were all away, whether she unduly—'." Mr. Wilcox, "whose nature was nobler than his son's," opines "I don't think that," and the two men seem to dare one another to say what "it" is. The son returns, "Don't think what?' 'That she would have—that it is a case of undue influence'" (83). The Wilcox men can only translate as possible "undue influence" the two women's bond that leads Mrs. Wilcox to imagine Margaret as the best inheritor for her property.

The Wilcoxes ignore Mrs. Wilcox's wish; their sense of the mother's filial obligation is outraged, but more, their sense of business is outraged. Her wayward passion is aligned with "the unseen" and the heterosexual family with "the seen." Mrs. Wilcox's

desire for a more inward light had found expression at last, the unseen has impacted on the seen, and all that they could say was 'Treachery.' Mrs. Wilcox had been treacherous to the family, to the laws of property.... How did she expect Howards End to be conveyed to Miss Schlegel? Was her husband, to whom it legally belonged, to make it over to her as a free gift? Was the said Miss Schlegel to have a life interest in it, or to own it absolutely?.... Treacherous! Treacherous

and absurd!... The note, scribbled in pencil, sent through the matron, was unbusinesslike as well as cruel, and had decreased at once the value of the woman who had written it. 85

The Wilcoxes respond entirely in the register of business, of property.<sup>213</sup> For Mrs. Wilcox to dispose of her property on an informal note to a new, but extraordinary, female friend, is inscrutable, anathema to property law and the hetero-patriarchal family it supports, much as Mrs. Wilcox's "imagination" is opposed to her role as wife and mother. But more than the mere negation of these, beyond a simple queer anti-sociality, Mrs. Wilcox's wish suggests a different kind of sociality, one where a "queer and imaginative" bond is enough to justify one woman bequeathing property, a house of her own, to another. Forster makes room for an under-inscribed form of female homosociality signaled by "imagination."

For it would be a mistake to read the relationship between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox by way of the homosexuality inscribed, by 1910, in medicine and in the "gay novel" alike. The implicitly male gaze that produced the late-19<sup>th</sup>- and early-20<sup>th</sup>-century lesbian is referred to in Dr. Mansbridge, "a very young man," whose masculinity is apparent even in his name. He asks questions about the Schlegel women's "normal[ity]," and, in the language of sexology, their defects "congenital or hereditary" (246). British sexology prioritized certainty, pathology, and taxonomy; in the novel's idiom, "label[s]."<sup>214</sup> We should associate British sexology with the

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<sup>213</sup> Bateman is readier than I to dismiss property on the side of Wilcoxery, writing of the moment at the train station that the Wilcox "car itself might be understood as a kind of insurance against the unfamiliar often encountered in train travel. Margaret and Ruth understand, as the Wilcox clan does not, that the accumulation of capital can be at once a protection from danger and an impediment to intimacy" (186). His reading of the will is that "Ruth bequeaths the house to the person who understood its extra-pecuniary value" (187). While house does have significance as more than just property, Ruth's own insistence is always that it has value as the most literal thing, as simple bricks and mortar.

<sup>214</sup> Martin notes that *The Longest Journey*'s Rickie "wishes 'we were labelled' (LJ 64) at precisely the historical moment when homosexuals were indeed being labeled, a process that brought at once a greater ability to control sexual activity (since the homosexual was now visible...) and a counterdiscourse... of homosexual self-affirmation. If *The Longest Journey* does not precisely label (the word 'homosexual' does not appear in the text), Rickie's plea with

novel's pole of the "outer life" and "the seen." To answer Mansbridge's questions about Helen Shlegel, Mr. Wilcox invokes the correspondence between artistic inclination and deviance that we have seen already in sexological assessments of Tennyson: "[a] tendency toward spiritualism and those things, though nothing serious. Musical, literary, artistic, but I should say normal" (246). Though the explicit question is whether Helen is mad, this moment in the text stages the masculinist positivism that informed sexology, as revealed by language like "congenital" and the "black and white:"

Science explained people, but could not understand them. After long centuries among the bones and muscles it might be advancing to knowledge of the nerves, but this would never give understanding. One could open the heart to Mr Mansbridge and his sort without discovering its secrets to them, for they wanted everything down in black and white, and black and white was exactly what they were left with. 282

Though a stock expression for "all one thing or the other," the phrase "black and white" nods to the symmetrical binary opposition of the photographic positive and negative's blacks and whites I have suggested helped inform the Victorian cultural imaginary of female sexual inversion. Forster's narrator subtly invokes sexology in this passage to assert its inadequacy to understand people, though ironically, understanding is of primary importance to inversion's regime, as Woolf will make clear in the next section.

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its invocation of David and Jonathan and of Shakespeare's sonnets takes part in a barely coded discourse of difference and historical continuity" (263). He argues that *The Longest Journey* "opposes a codified law based on property and a 'natural' law based on desire," whereas in *Howards End*, "[t]he question of property is addressed more directly through the house whose name is the title of the book, as well as through the question of fixed incomes and investments. It is Forster's only book in which both of the main characters are women, and in which the female (as well as the feminine) contests male privilege. Ruth Wilcox brings together her role as fertility goddess with her role as spirit of place to challenge the world of absentee ownership, whether of houses or countries" (Martin 265-266).

While *Howards End* raises the specter of something in excess of sexology's black and white certainty, to define it—to "label" it—would be to destroy it. Forster reaches instead for the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century phrase "'odd girls'" to describe that which is non-normative about the Schlegel sisters (8). A way of referring to women who are strange—"queer and imaginative," perhaps—as much as to women without men, or "extra" women in excess of male partners, this description harkens to George Gissing's 1893 novel *The Odd Women*. In the 1890s, homosexuality (and the homosexual novel) were not as fully disciplined as they would be by 1910, and Forster's choice of an outmoded and vague euphemism suggests his preference for the "queer and imaginative" possibilities that preceded the sedimentation of identities (and their symptoms) under sexology's regime. Forster's gesture resonates with Heather Love's project in *Feeling Backwards*, which gathers "several late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century.... dark, ambivalent texts... register[sing]... painful negotiation of the coming of modern homosexuality" (4). We might add *Howards End* to the cluster of works she identifies as exhibiting a

feeling of backwardness in relation to the coming of modern homosexual identity.... While contemporary gay, lesbian, and queer critics tend to see queer subjects during this period as isolated and longing for future community, these texts... turn their backs on the future: they choose isolation, turn toward the past, or choose to live in a present disconnected from any larger historical continuum.

Love 8

One affordance of the suggestive, undefined, anachronistic queerness of "odd girls" as Forster's phrase of choice is the emphasis on separation from men like Wilcox and Mansbridge, with their striving materialism and medical positivism, that is crucial Forsterian *suffisance*, "the Holy of Holies." When Margaret hears Mr. Wilcox describing her sister to Mansbridge, "[a] new



feeling came over her: she was fighting for women against men. She did not care about rights, but if men came into Howards End it should be over her body” (247). As Woolf will (half) jokingly insist that some things can only be said in the absence of men, “odd girls” are women without men, women divided from men by the competition between sexology, and that which is queer about the Schlegel sisters.

Nonetheless, the crux of the novel is that imaginative queerness between women requires the same material props as any other form of relationality. Forster makes this clear when the Schlegel sisters wish to spend one night alone together at Howards End before Helen, hiding her pregnancy (and therefore acting strangely), leaves for the continent, unwed, to have her baby. The most significant moment of the novel is when Mr. Wilcox denies this request, though ironically (and tellingly), the property ought to have been Margaret’s all along. Refusing his second wife’s wish much as he ignored his first wife’s, Mr. Wilcox says to his son,

“The house is mine—and, Charles, it will be yours... I won’t have it.” He looked angrily at the moon. “To my mind this question is connected with something far greater, the rights of property itself.... I shall do what I can for Helen, but on the understanding that they clear out of the house at once. Do you see? That is a *sine qua non*.” 278

The Wilcox response that “property itself” is at stake when women wish to be alone together reveals the way in which “property itself” is organized around the exclusion of women from spaces of their own; “property itself” serves to keep women from being alone together.

*Suffisaunce* requires that women, sisters as well as lovers, have “enough”—that relative of my medieval term—for a house, or, as Woolf will put it, at least a room, of their own.

Approximately two decades before Woolf makes this argument explicitly, Forster suggests that

without “property itself,” without “enough; an adequate supply... plenty; wealth,” women cannot be alone together, and so there is no proper subject to appreciate the imaginative queerness that Howards End, the “Holy of Holies,” affords to those who can recognize it (MED). The direction of Wilcox’s anger towards the moon is, if not lesbian comic relief, levity on the side of the feminized natural world.

*“Bricks and Mortar” and “The Holy of Holies”*

Howards End has value in two registers—the seen and the unseen—which, as I have suggested, is the rubric of meaning in the novel as a whole. A suburban medium between rural England and business-like London, neither an estate reminiscent of the landed aristocracy, nor the most modern form of middle-class wealth (movable property), the house is middling, and so can “connect.” Howards End is both the “Holy of Holies,” *and* its simple material property value, its “bricks and mortar.” In the passage where the narrator explains that “[a]nother day’ will do for bricks and mortar, but not for the Holy of Holies into which Howards End had been transfigured,” it might seem as though Howards End is *actually* the “Holy of Holies,” and bricks and mortar invoked only for contrast. But in fact, “bricks and mortar” is already a repetition at this point in the novel. The recurrence of the phrase reveals its meaning. The invocation of “bricks and mortar” in Margaret’s realization of Mrs. Wilcox’s sacred invitation calls back to the earlier moment in the novel when the older woman made an unfashionable guest at a Schlegel lunch of artistic comment and debate. There, Mrs. Wilcox resists the younger woman’s too wholesale insistence on Ideas as the spirit of a place. Margaret argues, “[d]iscussion keeps a house alive. It cannot stand by *bricks and mortar* alone;” Mrs. Wilcox replies, “[i]t cannot stand without them” (66, emphasis mine). In this earlier moment, the Living Word (evoked by

man's inability to "live on bread alone") refers to that which exceeds simple material property. And yet, crucially, Mrs. Wilcox insists on the necessity of simple materiality, pointing out that man cannot live on the Word alone, either. As a material place where women can be alone together, Howards End reconciles the registers of "bricks and mortar"—the practicality and acquisitiveness of Wilcoxery—with what becomes possible when women are alone together—imaginative queerness, or the "Holy of Holies." *Suffisaunce* contains and requires both these registers, a mode of queerness more imaginative than sexological, and simple "enoughness."

"Only connect!" suggests oscillation or alloy between the masculine register of the seen outer life, and the queer feminine, environmentalist patriotism which truly "see[s] her:" feminized England "lying as a jewel in a silver sea." Howards End appears as this middle way when Margaret finally visits the place:

She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty, and, starting from Howards End, she attempted to realize England. She failed—visions do not come when we try, though they may come through trying. But an unexpected love of the island awoke in her, connecting on this side with the joys of the flesh, on that with the inconceivable.... it had been hidden from Margaret until this afternoon. It had certainly come through the house.... Then, veering back into warmth, it dwelt on the ruddy bricks... 175

This passage sets the pole of striving male energy ("hurrying men"), moveable property ("luggage"), and polluting technology ("motor-cars") against "earthly beauty," with nationalism appearing as appreciation for the physicality of the land: "love of the island."<sup>215</sup> This latter pole

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<sup>215</sup> In their introduction to *Queer Forster*, Robert K. Martin and George Piggford note that E. M. Forster's role as the temporary "private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas State Senior in 1921-22" on his second trip to India "made

is represented by “the inconceivable,” which resonates with the “queer and imaginative,” “curious note” struck between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox, a queerness that exists only in imagination, perhaps even beyond its limits. The “unexpected” quality of Margaret’s love for the island invites an association between pastoral, environmentalist patriotism and the queer feminine connections the novel describes as “imaginative” and “curious.” Both loves are surprising and strange, unsystematic and unsystematized. The queer “inconceivable” is connected with and sexualized by “the joys of the flesh,” and all of this occurs through the magic of *Howards End*, down to its “ruddy bricks.” So again the “veering” movement from spiritual queerness back to the material “bricks” of the old phrase “bricks and mortar.” Neither register alone is enough; *suffisance* is both, and connection is all.

Forster inscribes a new moment in the long national genealogy of the English relationship between women’s love (“the unseen”), and patriotic love for a feminized England (“love of the island”) by suggesting that the latter requires the former. And yet, if women do not have houses of bricks and mortar of their own in which to be alone together without the interruption of husband and children, then neither can appear. Forster makes this implicit claim in a historical moment when shared spaces for women’s solitude were heavily debated, as Barbara Black explains in her work on the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century clubs.

Even as women’s clubs seemed to foster a new degree and kind of female sociability, feminine clubland was often described as providing female members with the chance for solitude. Although peace and, indeed, solitude were celebrated as among the joys clubmen were entitled to, discussions about feminine clubland

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his implication in the colonial project inescapably clear, even as he employed his satirical wit at the expense of the colonial establishment in a number of letters home and eventually in *A Passage to India*. As a white Briton, Forster could not establish the kind of democratic relations he sought, or claimed he sought: he was inevitably implicated in colonial power and guilt” (13).

far more frequently raise the issue of female aloneness. Like men, women joined clubs to escape the demands of domestic roles and obligations; however, for obvious reasons having to do with the separate spheres ideology, this particular appeal of club life was both more desirable for women and also more controversial—especially when it seemed that women were joining clubs specifically to seek a reprieve from their children. 225

Women's access to spaces where hails of "Mother! Mother!" could be avoided was a national threat at the turn of the century, but Forster argues in 1910 that women's solitude produces the right kind of nationalism.

There is a paradox on both ends. Forster again invokes "sufficiency" in the negative to say that "the inner life" without the practical outer cannot make for *suffisaunce*: "if insight were sufficient, if the inner life were the whole of life, their happiness had been assured" (157).<sup>216</sup> "Insight," or the "inner light," is not enough; a certain amount of Wilcoxery is required. The trouble is that Wilcoxery itself refuses dialectic. It is all "black and white," and so cannot register the value of middle ground, which *Howards End* literally is. Mr. Wilcox says: "[n]o, we have all decided against *Howards End*. We like it in a way, but now we feel that it is neither one thing nor the other. One must have one thing or the other'" (116). This rejection of literal middle ground is

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<sup>216</sup> Miller explains a different, but related central paradox: "[t]he unseen remains just that: unseen. It is therefore unknown, submerged, obscure, invisible. It cannot be returned to the same. It remains heterogenous to any act of understanding. It is 'wholly other.'.... Margaret's phrase, uttered when she still hopes to change Henry Wilcox to something nearer her own vision, 'Only connect!,' by which she means 'Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted' (183) is often taken as the pinnacle of wisdom in *Howards End*. This consoling and optimistic slogan is not, however, compatible with the irreconcilable opposition shown everywhere in the novel between 'life's daily gray' (142) and the urgent demand made by the unseen. The latter leads to action that can with difficulty, if at all, be reconciled with the prose of everyday life. The prose and the passion remain in conflict. Attempts to connect them are rarely successful. Margaret conspicuously fails in getting her husband to connect the prose and the passion or to have even a glimpse of the unseen. The calling that being aware of the unseen makes is the highest vocation, the most demanding, the most absolute, even though it lays on those it calls a responsibility impossible to fulfill.... It is not a demand to do this or that, but a demand to be and feel in a certain way that then leads spontaneously to right action. That the action is right, however, cannot be verified by any preexisting code of ethics or moral behavior. You can never know for sure that you have responded rightly to the demand that the unseen makes" (*Others* 200).

interpreted by Miss Avery, the housekeeper, as a rejection of nature's feminine pole: "[t]his house lies too much on the land for them. Naturally, they were glad enough to slip in at first. But Wilcoxes are better than nothing.... They keep England going" (233). Most of what we know of Miss Avery is that she rejected a man's proposal in her youth for no apparent reason, and that she is committed to seeing Mrs. Wilcox's will to have Margaret at Howards End followed.<sup>217</sup> While Mr. Wilcox takes her around Howards End, describing its mismanagement before his own arrival, Margaret "saw two women as he spoke, one old, the other young, watching their inheritance melt away. She saw them greet him as a deliverer" (173-175). In this vision, the first Mrs. Wilcox is the younger woman, Miss Avery the older, but their anonymity allows for this vision equally to refer to the anachronistically spectral (im)possibility of Mrs. Wilcox and Margaret's union at Howards End. Wilcoxery may have saved the women's inheritance—a Woolfian touchstone—and may "keep England going," but not through "love of the island" or the ability to "see[] her." The expansionist, materialistic energy of Wilcoxery saved Howards End when they "slipped in," which phrase suggests a masculine (hetero)sexuality not altogether recommendable insinuating itself into the rundown farm, figured as the feminine sexual recipient of Wilcoxery. Howards End-*cum*-bottom affords both the pastoral magic and practical prop required to form a subject who can appreciate the "queer and imaginative" "Holy of Holies" as much as "see[] her"—England, herself.

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<sup>217</sup> According to Martin, "[w]eddings serve as the external sign of patriarchal power, and it is thus telling that the guardian of the house should be Miss Avery, who had refused Tom Howard's offer of marriage. If Dolly, whose principal occupation seems to consist of bearing children and whose nickname indicates her childishness and conventional femininity, can classify Miss Avery, and thereby dismiss her, as an 'old maid' (HE 200), Margaret recognizes a kinship with the older woman. Miss Avery is Forster's presentation of a spirit of the land, a chthonic deity as well as a guardian of the matrilineal.... the novel is feminist in its concern for spiritual inheritance continuation and against unnatural, or male, ownership" (267).

*Normal and Abnormal Women: Hall, Stopes, and Woolf*

From this account of queer inheritance of bricks and mortar I turn to Virginia Woolf's address of property inheritance and its relationship to femme homo-relationality. The talks that became *A Room of One's Own* centered on the differences between men's and women's access to the requisite resources for achievement and contributions to culture.<sup>218</sup> While Woolf's argument is primarily about women and fiction—"if you consider any great figure of the past, like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Brontë, you will find that she is an inheritor as well as an originator"—at the heart of this matter is *literal* inheritance (*Room* 109). Both writers are concerned with the material conditions of *suffisaunce*. Mrs. Wilcox's willing of her property to a woman not her offspring is matched by Woolf's premise about what women require to produce intellectual work—and, I will suggest, to "like" one another. Woolf establishes the former very early in the text, through one of her narratorial "Mary's."

What had our mothers been doing then that they had no wealth to leave us?  
Powdering their noses? Looking in at shop windows?... Mary's mother... had  
thirteen children.... Now if she had gone into business; had become a  
manufacturer of artificial silk or a magnate on the Stock Exchange; if she had left  
two or three hundred thousand pounds... we could have been sitting at our ease  
tonight and the subject of our talk might have been archaeology, botany,  
anthropology, physics, the nature of the atom, mathematics, astronomy, relativity,  
geography. If only Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had  
learnt the great art of making money.... Only, if Mrs. Seton and her like had gone  
into business at the age of fifteen, there would have been—that was the snag in

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<sup>218</sup> Jane Marcus calls *Room* "a Marxist-feminist theory of literary criticism," reading Woolf's novels to arrive at the conclusion that "Marriage is a primitive form of private property" (*Patriarchy* 75-77).

the argument—no Mary.... Moreover, it is... useless to ask what might have happened if Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had amassed great wealth and laid it under the foundations of college and library, because, in the first place, to earn money was impossible for them, and the in second, had it been possible, the law denied them the right to possess what money they earned.

*Room* 21-22

*Suffisance*, or women having enough, threatens the hetero-patriarchal family because it suggests that women might own (rather than *be*) property, and might refuse to reproduce that manner of family, which reproduction, Woolf points out, forecloses women's moneymaking.<sup>219</sup>

Alternatively, Forster suggests, having produced such a family, women might entail what property they own to women not even their daughters.<sup>220</sup>

What Woolf says happens when women have rooms of their own resonates with Forster's explanation of the ungovernable attraction between Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox: "no law—not public opinion, even—punishes those who coquette with friendship." For Woolf, as for Forster, relationships between women are liable to exceed friendship when a room with a lock on the door is available—while still not being inversion. The focus of this section is Woolf's use of *The Well of Loneliness* as a foil to enunciate affection between *feminine* women in the very moment

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<sup>219</sup> Elizabeth Abel writes, "[b]iological motherhood in *Room* disqualifies literary maternity: childlessness, the narrator observes, is the only link among the four great nineteenth-century women novelists; Judith Shakespeare's suicide reiterates the fate of Mary Hamilton (the unnamed Mary of the Child ballad from which Woolf draws her narrative persona), who went to the scaffold for murdering her illegitimate child. Through her choice of authors for *Life's Adventure*, Woolf situates *Room* in relation to the birth control movement that emerged in England in the 1920s" (88). I will discuss Marie Carmichael Stopes at much more length in this section; for now, I want to simply note that Abel also connects money with giving birth: "[s]uggestions of parthenogenesis... write men out of the figures of birth pervading *Room*. The narrator's purse, for example, supplied with money by her aunt, procreates autonomously: 'It is a fact that still takes my breath away—the power of my purse to breed ten-shilling notes automatically. I open it and there they are' (37). Parthenogenetic or lesbian, the mothers that figure origins in *Room* are not mothers who reproduce biologically" (89).

<sup>220</sup> It is hard to know how ironic was Forster's statement, noted by Virginia Woolf in 1928, that "'he thought Sapphism disgusting, partly because he disliked that women should be independent of men' (*Diary* 3:193)" (130). Joseph Bristow records this exchange in "*Fratrum Societati*: Forster's Apostolic Dedications."



when female masculinity's signaling of desire for women was increasingly inescapable. But Woolf and Hall are more aslant than at odds with one another. Without negating the deeply sexological female masculinity that Hall represented, as most scholars have assumed, Woolf asserts the reality of something sexology was anxiously at pains to negate: femme homo-relationality. If, as I've argued, and will elaborate in the following sections, sexologists claimed that women who liked women were masculine and rare as a means of removing lesbianism from English womanhood, then Woolf argued that women's affection for women was normal and regular.<sup>221</sup>

Woolf, like Forster, theorizes a version of homo-relationality that refuses inversion's medicalized definitional certainty. In this section, I argue that by invoking Marie Carmichael Stopes—sexologist to the “normal”—as authoring a story about women who work together and “like” one other, Woolf calls attention to *non-inverted* women's need for sociality, material access to spaces of their own, and self-determination—what Chaucer's Wife of Bath called “maistry.” Woolf argues that women's poverty is compulsory heterosexuality: “my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me, and substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for my perpetual adoration, a view of the open sky.”<sup>222</sup> Women's financial dependence cannot be extricated from female sexuality; the “freedom to think of things

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<sup>221</sup> The history of ideas about relationships between Victorian women goes something like this: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg says that before the invention of homosexuality, intimacy between women was regular. Adrienne Rich's theory of the lesbian continuum includes all kinds of relationships, but because it rejects compulsory heterosexuality, women risk violence. Esther Newton, Lisa Duggan, and Terry Castle say that both older paradigms desexualize lesbianism, and that their repudiation of men leaves no room for female masculinity (Marcus *Between* 10). Sharon Marcus writes, “[i]ronically, what all of these arguments share is an assumption that the opposition between men and women governs relationships between women, which take shape only as reactions against, retreats from, or appropriations of masculinity” (*Between* 10).

<sup>222</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Frances Wilder wrote “The world would say that a physical relationship between two of the same sex is an unspeakable crime... but... because of the ‘economic slavery’ of women, ‘normal sex’ is ‘more degrading’” (Newton 565). According to Jane Marcus, the aunt who left Woolf a “legacy” was Caroline Stephen (*Patriarchy* 85).

in themselves” Woolf’s narrator finds is sexualized as “the greatest release of all” (*Room* 39).<sup>223</sup>

While narratives of female masculinity rendered lesbian sexuality an easy-to-spot imitation of male heterosexuality, the desire Woolf theorizes in *A Room of One’s Own* is much less easily recognized.<sup>224</sup>

Woolf, like Forster, again conjoins land and country to rejection of inversion. I have argued that inversion made possible the first English female homosexual type at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, solidifying the correspondence between female masculinity and sexual inversion.<sup>225</sup> But if inversion had finally made female homosexuality domestically palatable at the turn of the century, in 1928, Woolf abjects inversion *itself* onto other nationalities, renewing a centuries-old English tradition with a dizzying twist. Ironically, Woolf makes the invert a foreigner in order to clear space for the “normal” Englishwoman’s affections.<sup>226</sup> Where her characters’ homosexuality coincides with gender-deviance, Woolf emphasizes their non-Englishness.<sup>227</sup> As Madelyn

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<sup>223</sup> Woolf suggests that financial independence is worth even more than the franchise: “The news of my legacy reached me one night about the same time that the act was passed that gave votes to women. A solicitor’s letter fell into the post-box and when I opened it I found that she had left me five hundred pounds a year for ever. Of the two—the vote and the money—the money, I own, seemed more important” (37).

<sup>224</sup> As this chapter emphasizes material conditions, we should note the potential differences between Woolf’s lecture as speech, versus published text. Jane Marcus writes, “[w]hen Woolf asked the students to check whether Sir Chartres Biron or Sir Archibald Bodkin was not eavesdropping, that they were all women in the room, the obscenity trial for *The Well of Loneliness* was still in progress” (“Sapphistory” 166). In fact, the obscenity trial would not begin until the following month. It is possible that Woolf knew who would be presiding over the obscenity trial, or she may have added these lines between the speech and its written publication the following year, 1929.

<sup>225</sup> As always, multiple models of female relationality circulated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: “the figure of the lesbian in England during the first decade after the war registered as paradox: invisible and visible, spectral and palpable” (Doan *Sapphism* xix). Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf both noted that all of London seemed to be talking about sapphism (Doan *Sapphism* 24); the 1920s were a moment of discursive ambiguity about sexual identity as object choice versus lifestyle (Doan *Sapphism* 25). Esther Newton and Lara Doan both argue that prior to the publication and obscenity trial of *The Well of Loneliness*, interpretations of devoted female friendships erred on the side of innocence, and that after *Well*, all that changed (Newton 561-562, Doan *Sapphism* xi-xii).

<sup>226</sup> From Elizabeth I to WWI, *suffisaunce* has always been wrapped up with British endogamy: see Deborah Cohler’s “Sapphism and Sedition: Producing Female Homosexuality in Great War Britain.” Jane Garrity argues that women modernists’ “produce fiction that formally engages in some way with modernism innovation while thematically coalescing around a concern with women’s relation to English national identity” and “questions the polarization of nation and modernism” (11).

<sup>227</sup> Madelyn Detloff has thoroughly argued this point. *Between the Acts*’ “Miss La Trobe, who directs a pageant depicting centuries of English history at a time of national crisis, is described as an outsider: ‘With that name she wasn’t presumably pure English. From the Channel Islands Perhaps?’ Her presumed foreignness is quickly linked to suggestions that her gender performance is not respectable, that she not ‘altogether a lady’” (4).

Detloff notes, *Mrs. Dalloway*'s Doris Kilman is characterized in a mode often used by sexologists to describe feminists and lesbians. She

loses her teaching position as a result of her pacifist beliefs (marking her as pro-German and insufficiently British)... Both Sally Seton and Clarissa are, unlike Doris Kilman, *properly* British despite their youthful homoerotic dalliance, by virtue of being married to wealthy gentlemen whose interests are explicitly aligned with the British Empire. Detloff 4

My focus will be on the way in which Woolf's non-inverted, but queer, female personages are "normal" by merit of their femininity more so than by their alliance with patriarchal nationalism.<sup>228</sup> But nationalism and normative femininity continued to be inextricable, especially given the addition of eugenics in Woolf's period (Detloff 4). It is against this racialized, nationalistic backdrop that Woolf invokes "the normal" when she insists on the regular femininity of women who feel affection for other women.

Meditating on women's feelings about one another, the narrator of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* finds that nothing can actually be said about women's bonds because of men's interruptions.

For it cannot be denied that when women get together—but hist—they are always careful to see that the doors are shut and that not a word of it gets into print. All they desire is—but hist again—is that not a man's step on the stair? All they desire, we were about to say when the gentleman took the very words out of our

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<sup>228</sup> Brenda Helt advances a theory of Woolfian "bisexuality," writing "[i]n her work of the 1920s, Woolf challenged trends to construe same-sex desire as a distinguishing characteristic of a sexual identity type and also essentialist ideas about male and female character traits underlying theories of androgyny. Against these trends and ideas she expressed a much older understanding of women's same-sex desires—a belief that they are common to most women—and promoted it as epistemologically, aesthetically, and politically more useful to women than the beliefs about bifurcated sexual identity and dual-gendered minds that were being promoted by sexologists and some members of the avant-garde" (131).

mouths. Women have no desires, says this gentleman, coming into Nell's parlour, only affectations.... 'It is well known,' says Mr. S. W., 'that when they lack the stimulus of the other sex, women can find nothing to say to each other...' And since... it is well known (Mr. T. R. has proved it) 'that women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion,' what can we suppose that women do when they seek out each other's society? 121-122<sup>229</sup>

This male voice can be traced to the male-dominated science of sex of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>230</sup> Here, as she will in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf seriously engages the claims that women do not like each other underpinning arguments against spaces for female privacy and sociality. Sharon Marcus is technically correct in writing that Woolf was one of the first feminists to incorrectly assert that women did not have important platonic bonds in the Victorian period (257). However, Woolf is not mistakenly ignoring, but rather purposefully eliding, the important Victorian histories of female relationality that Sharon Marcus and others have uncovered.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Adam Parkes reads this moment of *Orlando*, "it is extremely difficult to pin the narrator down to a particular sex. The claim to sexual neutrality may be a male pose designed to give the air of impartial authority, perhaps like that of the judge and lawyers who settled the case of Hall. Yet at the beginning of the episode, the narrator seems to shift uncertainly from the position of a female observer, who has access to women's quarters, to another realm where the voice is implicitly detached from the women ('they' as opposed to 'we'), yet not necessarily associated with the man whose unwelcome step is heard on the stair. And the voice of Mr. S.W., appealing to the supposedly 'objective' authority of common knowledge and the quasi-scientific 'proof' of Mr. T.R., seems to parody precisely the claim to 'immunity' that the narrator makes a few lines later. It is ironic, after all, to find the narrator's own anxieties betray a comic concern for 'facts' and 'truth'" (446).

<sup>230</sup> It has often been noted that *Orlando* is a satiric send-up of sexology. Joanne Winning writes that Woolf "invoke[s] the discursive form of the case history, suggesting that this text is a study of the figure 'Orlando.' Taking the form so favored by the 'biologists and psychologists' who speculate endlessly on the 'odious subjects' of sex and sexuality as a base model, Woolf turns the notion of the case history on its head.... as we witness when it comes to questions of 'sex-change,' it is necessary 'to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination.' Woolf thus parodies the supposed scientific objectivity of the theorist of inversion" (383). See also Brenda Helt's "Passionate Debates on 'Odious Subjects': Bisexuality and Woolf's Opposition to Theories of Androgyny and Sexual Identity," P. Moran in *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma*, and Madelyn Detloff's "Modern Times, Modernist Writing, Modern Sexualities" in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*.

<sup>231</sup> The life-writing that Marcus examines in *Between Women* unsurprisingly shows that myriad forms of "relationships between women were a constitutive element of Victorian gender and sexuality," and that "Victorian

Discourses about women's aversion to other women had already, contemporaneously, set up the fiction that women are never friends. Sexological inversion, defining love between women as imitative heterosexuality governed by polar gender difference and so inhabited by exceptional aberrations, asserted that only abnormal women feel affection for one another.

*Orlando* was published on the 11th of October in 1928, the same month that Woolf gave the talks at Girton and Newnham Colleges from which the text of *A Room of One's Own* would be distilled.<sup>232</sup> Nell's parlour is not a "room of her own;" gentlemen walk right in, as Woolf addresses in her speech: "all the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character.... Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the *common* sitting-room" (67, emphasis mine). In the oft-cited "Chloe and Olivia" section of *Room*, Woolf will again meditate on female friendship, in a voice closer to her own, and again stage the silencing effect of male surveillance. In *Room*, she interrupts *herself*, saying that before she can say "Chloe liked Olivia," she must be sure that Sir Chartres Biron is not hiding somewhere in the room. Biron was the magistrate who presided over the obscenity trial of *The Well of Loneliness* the same year.<sup>233</sup>

Given the resemblance of the two passages from *Orlando* and from *Room*, we might understand *Orlando*'s interrupting gentleman as prefiguring Biron himself, especially in light of Woolf's description of him at the trial, which occurred a month after *Orlando*'s first publication. After attending the obscenity trial, Woolf called Biron a "debonair, distinguished magistrate.... all black & white, tie pin, clean shaved.... something like a Harley St. specialist investigating a

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society, in which marriage between men and women was a supreme value, did not suppress bonds between women but actively promoted them" (*Between* 4, 26).

<sup>232</sup> Katherine Stephen, purveyor of "evangelical patriarchal Christianity" and Woolf's first cousin, had been the principle of Newnham several years before Woolf gave her talk there (Marcus *Patriarchy* 82).

<sup>233</sup> The obscenity trial took place at the Bow Street Police Court on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November of 1928 (McCleery 43). Woolf and several others in the Bloomsbury set were prepared to come to Hall's defense on the stand, but were ambivalent enough to be "relieved" that they didn't have to (Parkes 436).

case” (Medd *Scandal* 172).<sup>234</sup> In fact, Woolf’s real-life account of Biron imitated her art on two counts. Not only the male domestic authority from *Orlando* now inhabiting the full weight of the state, but the male medical expert of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) appears in the appellation “Harley St. specialist.” In that novel, three years previous, Septimus Smith is dubiously treated by promoter of the “rest cure” Sir William Bradshaw, in Harley St. (67-73). Woolf’s description of Biron sounds most like *Orlando*’s “Mr. S. W.” or “Mr. T. R.,” though it is unclear there whether these are more gentlemen like the one whose tread is heard on the stair just before he barges in, or the medical professionals he cites to explain women to themselves.<sup>235</sup> Woolf’s description then more fully assimilates the gentlemanly censor to medical practice, comparing Biron to “a Harley St. specialist” come to examine, discover, and pronounce.

In both *Orlando*’s gentleman and in the “Harley St. specialist,” we can see a trace of Havelock Ellis, gentlemanly father of British sexology, whom novelist Rebecca West said always gave “in the most difficult circumstances’ the ‘inveterate appearance... of being a character out of *Cranford*,” who wrote of sexuality in “‘delicate, grave, rectory English” (Porter & Hall 166). Most tellingly, Woolf’s language of “black” and “white” refers to *Orlando*’s sendup of sexology’s photographically inspired emphasis on tonal poles. Inversion’s definition of desire is fundamentally based in polar oppositions, with a premium on black and white, as my chapter on photography argued. Tongue planted firmly in cheek, *Orlando*’s narrator asserts

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<sup>234</sup> Jodie Medd writes, “the uncompromising legal system that refuses to heed the voices of enlightened literary experts” at the obscenity trial replaced “the vanquished Victorian patriarch Leslie Stephen, posthumously struck dumb by the happy results of Bloomsbury’s sexual variations” (*Scandal* 160). Medd sees Stephen resurrected in “Woolf’s example of an evasive excuse, ‘the weak heart of a father’” not to testify in court (*Scandal* 171).

<sup>235</sup> Brenda Helt writes, “Woolf’s work of the twenties in general criticizes arrogant male scientific and medical assertions of knowledge about desire and the complex workings of the mind—especially the desires and minds of women. ‘Where shall I find that elaborate study of the psychological of women by a woman?’ Woolf asks her audience of educated young women (*Room* 81). She exhorts them to write such studies, for in spite of all the angry jabbings of the pen of Professor X and Professor Z, Woolf argues, ‘nothing whatever is known’ about the mind of women, for it has ‘no single state of being’ (101)” (141).

“Love... has two faces; one white, the other black” (63) to explain the romantic effects of Orlando’s sex change. This reasoning sarcastically echoes the sexological axiom that people can only be attracted to one another as opposite genders.<sup>236</sup> In describing Biron as “all black & white,” Woolf not only criticizes his positivism, the way in which everything must be one thing or another, but also suggests that Biron metonymizes sexology itself, linking male invasions of domestic privacy, legal, and medical authority all together.

Crucially, in the passage from *Orlando*, the narrator and the interrupting gentleman refer not to the invert, but to “normal” women, who do *not* like each other: “women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion.” While sexologists were only too eager to describe, diagnose, and define women’s sexual *abnormality*, the juridical-sexological authority embodied by all these “gentlemen”—Nell’s parlour intruder, Mr. S. W., Mr. T. R., Sir William Bradshaw, Sir Chartres Biron, The Harley St. Specialist, and Dr. Havelock Ellis himself—held that of the affections of “normal” women, there is little to say.<sup>237</sup> I do not just mean to say that feminine women’s affection for one another did not register

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<sup>236</sup> Eve Sedgwick puts it thus: “[e]nduringly since at least the turn of the century... there was, and there persists, differently coded (in the homophobic folklore and science surrounding those ‘sissy boys’ and their mannish sisters, but also in the hearts and guts of much living gay and lesbian culture), the trope of inversion, *anima muliebris in corpore virile inclusa*—‘a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body’—and vice versa.... one vital impulse of this trope is the preservation of an essential *heterosexuality* within desire itself, through a particular reading of the homosexuality of persons: desire, in this view, by definition subsists in the current that runs between one male self and one female self, in whatever sex of bodies these selves may be manifested” (87).

<sup>237</sup> Esther Newton sarcastically asks of Havelock Ellis, “What to do with the feminine invert? His solution was an awkward compromise: ‘A class of women to be first mentioned... is formed by the women to whom the actively inverted woman is most attracted. These women differ in the first place from the normal or average woman in that they are not repelled or disgusted by lover-like advances from persons of their own sex.... Their faces may be plain or ill-made but not seldom they possess good figures, a point which is apt to carry more weight with the inverted woman than beauty of face... they are of strongly affectionate nature... and *they are always womanly* [Newton’s emphasis]. One may perhaps say that they are the pick of the women whom the average man would pass by. No doubt this is often the reason why they are open to homosexual advances, but I do not think it is the sole reason. So far as they may be said to constitute a class they seem to possess a genuine, though not precisely sexual, preference for women over men.’ This extraordinary mix of fantasy, conjecture, and insight clashes with Ellis’s insistence that ‘the chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity’ (Newton 567-568).

as transgressive; I mean to say that feminine women's affection for each other often did not register *at all*.

*Inversion's Legible Female Masculinity: The Well of Loneliness*

At the start of the English 20<sup>th</sup> century, the mere “*suggestion* of lesbianism” operated to “taint” female friendships. Jodie Medd appropriates Valerie Traub's Renaissance category “‘impossible possibility’” to name this phenomenon. Historically responsible to her own period though Medd's work is, her use of the Renaissance category “‘impossible possibility’” is problematic. As I have shown, inversion itself was the intervening conceptual change of the late-19<sup>th</sup> century that transformed the English imaginary of lesbian impossibility (with no masculine difference between partners, how could sex occur?), into the real and immanent sexual threat posed by the “mannish woman.” Queer history as well as queer theory requires a transhistorical view.

In any case, my reading of Woolf suggests that “‘impossibly possibility’” might be a more apt appellation for female friendship *itself* in the period. Medd simultaneously admits that these “suggestion[s]” of sexuality were most often “target[ted at] women who challenge[d] the ideology of gendered separate spheres,” revealing that the women who were smeared as lesbians had *already* stepped outside of normative femininity (*Scandal* 16). Could “truly” feminine women, innocent of any gender transgression, actually like one another? Gentlemen thought not. Near her speech's end, Woolf says

I am reminded by dipping into newspapers and novels and biographies that when a woman speaks to women she should have something very unpleasant up her sleeve. Women are hard on women. Women dislike women.... a paper read by a woman to women should end with something particularly disagreeable. *Room* 111



The idea that women have no affection for each other was partly a post-sexological fiction, and partly Victorian holdover. Women “did not value solidarity... were not capable of a wider view and, therefore, had little sense of class, or group, or allegiance,” as Barbara Black notes in her study of 19<sup>th</sup>-century club-life. Most “damning” for women’s hopes of structured sociality, “conventional wisdom saw women as inherently competitive” (Black 219). It is within this context that Woolf complained that women had no “parallel sisterhood of intellectual inquiry and social conscience” to compare with men’s societies (Marcus *Patriarchy* 91).<sup>238</sup> Further, it became necessary for sexologists to assert that women don’t like each other because otherwise it was too hard to distinguish between “normal” women’s affection for each other, and homosexuality; Havelock Ellis wrote, “we are accustomed to a much greater familiarity and intimacy between women than between men,” and so homosexuality is “less easy to detect” (*Studies* 203-204). Whether earnest belief or protective fantasy (and what is the real difference?), the idea that women did not *have* relationships is partially to blame for “our lack of knowledge about women’s relationships” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Marcus *Between* 258).<sup>239</sup>

And yet, the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of absolute incitement to discourse about *some* kinds of female attachment. The root and nature of affection between women who *were* understood to be attracted to each other was the subject of copious writing in sexology and elsewhere. The exceptionalism of this type of woman—the invert—was precisely that: her exceptionalism. What allowed for the scrutiny and theorization of the invert’s inclination

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<sup>238</sup> Jane Marcus argues that “‘A Society’ is Woolf’s attempt to penetrate the mysteries of male secret societies like the Apostles.” “A Society” was met with an ire that Marcus’ interprets as the “British male’s paranoid fear that women’s loyalty to her own sex was a real threat to hegemony and the patriarchal family.” She goes on, “[t]he fraternity functioned as primary male bonding and demanded loyalty above a man’s loyalty to his family. It allowed attacks on authority but still reinforced the patriarchy. By the late nineteenth century, the Apostles served to find wives and professional jobs for their members, though they still idealized homosexuality and the ‘Greek view of life’” (*Patriarchy* 91).

<sup>239</sup> Sharon Marcus’ reading of the sections of *Room* in which I am most interested is as “a symptom of exactly the problem [Woolf] hoped it would correct: our lack of knowledge about women’s relationships” (*Between* 258).

towards other women was the anomaly of her own female gender. Epitomizing the volubility and visibility of the invert, in contradiction to the silence and invisibility of women's affections generally, was *The Well of Loneliness*' Stephen Gordon, whom I will discuss now at some length in order to set out the model Woolf supplements with her theory of the uninverted.<sup>240</sup> *Tout court*, "Stephen is a wholly legible invert spectacle" (Medd *Scandal* 188). Scholars have exhaustively documented the way in which inversion underwrites *The Well of Loneliness*; Stephen's gentlemanly father writes her name into a sexological volume (194), and Havelock Ellis wrote a preface to Hall's novel.<sup>241</sup> The visibility, the masculinity, and the oddity of the invert were all intimately linked. *Well*'s flashes of magical realism help explain Stephen's fate as a homosexual: with medieval logic, her parents' wish for a boy and selection of a boy's name influence her nature in the womb (11).<sup>242</sup> Hall's genre flexing in these moments suggests that Stephen's homosexuality is not of the regular world, that inversion does not strictly follow the rules of realism.<sup>243</sup> She calls the inverted "from birth a people *set apart* in accordance with some hidden

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<sup>240</sup> Radclyffe Hall also makes use of foreignness, exoticism, and blackness to configure lesbian sexuality. See Sarah E. Chinn's "Something Primitive and Age-Old as Nature Herself: Lesbian Sexuality and the Permission of the Exotic," and Jean Walton's "I Want to Cross Over into Camp Ground': Race and Inversion in *The Well of Loneliness*."

<sup>241</sup> Doan and Prosser explain that "Hall approached... Ellis with a typescript of her new novel" (2); Medd notes that Radclyffe Hall "literally inscribes Stephen into sexological texts: Stephen discovers the key to her sexual mystery when she unlocks her dead father's bookcase, digs out Krafft-Ebing, and finds her own name, written by her father, in the margins" (Medd *Scandal* 188).

<sup>242</sup> Contemporaries remarked on this: *Tatler* speculated "Sir Philip and Lady Anna Gordon had always longed for an heir. A son to inherit the lovely ancestral home among the Malvern Hills, of which they were so proud. Perhaps—who knows?—this intense longing for a boy may have had some psychological influence upon the character of their child while yet in her mother's womb" (Doan and Prosser 63). Another version of attenuated realism, or the natural going astray to bring about inversion, is the way in which lesbianism was attributed to women having done men's work in the war in public discourse of the 1920s. Taking on men's roles in labor seemed to have led to women to take on men's roles in love (Doan *Sapphism* 24). Though Stephen is a congenital invert—her homosexuality inborn rather than acquired—Hall writes her and the novel's other inverts "into history as valuable war volunteers" (Medd *Scandal* 162).

<sup>243</sup> Stylistically, the novel itself is more realist than many experimental or "high modernist"—and thus obfuscating—treatments of female homosexuality. Detloff notes that Hall's "[c]ontemporaries such as Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, and H.D. wrote less transparently (or less in keeping with the dictates of narrative realism) than Hall, but nonetheless composed and published works with recognizably homoerotic undertones during the same time period as Hall's obscenity trial" (2). Joanne Winning, however, refuses any hard divide between modernists' lesbian writing, and Hall's.

scheme of Nature” (Parkes 438, emphasis mine). The invert is a woman “apart” from other women; female masculinity corresponds with anomalous rarity.<sup>244</sup>

It was clear in the period that inversion made the invert an aberration, in that she was unlike other women. Newspaper reviews of *The Well of Loneliness* in the summer of 1928 called it “a study of *abnormal* relationships between women” (Doan and Prosser *Saturday Review* 50, emphasis mine); another said its “central situation arises directly from an *abnormality* in human nature” (Doan and Prosser *Glasgow Herald* 57, emphasis mine); still another noted that “of late the figure of the *abnormal* woman—the masculine woman—has been coming more and more clearly into the foreground.” (Doan and Prosser *Sunday Times* 55, emphasis mine). By contrast, the normatively feminine women with whom Stephen has relationships, enthusiastic participants though they are, were understood as “normal:” the book “has neither plot nor incidents, except the attempts of a wealthy female ‘invert’ to bend and tutor to her horrible will two normal young women” (Doan and Prosser *Truth* 70). The female invert’s abnormality is specifically her manliness. Another review refers to “the female invert, the man-woman” (Doan and Prosser *Times Literary Supplement* 51), and Leonard Woolf, writing for *Nation & Athenaeum* assessed Stephen as possessing the “body of a woman, but the mind and instinct of a man....” (Doan and Prosser 53). Unsurprisingly, scholars today have suggested that she resembles a transgender ancestor more than a lesbian one in queer literary history; Hall’s protagonist is physically like a man, carries a man’s name, and dresses like a man as often as possible.<sup>245</sup> But this

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<sup>244</sup> *Well* has often been understood to epitomize this situation, “prov[ing] constitutive of the woman-centered ideals of lesbian feminism in the early 1970s in its very default of them” (Doan and Prosser 16). Lillian Faderman, for example, in *Surpassing the Love of Men* “condemned the novel for not surpassing the love of men because it ‘morbidified’ lesbianism by representing it as masculinity” (Doan and Prosser 15).

<sup>245</sup> Jay Prosser writes “lesbian criticism has been characterized by the repeated attempt but persistent failure to make sense of Stephen’s masculinity and the heterosexual conclusion of the novel. Does this failure to fit Stephen within the framework of lesbian not suggest another subject in the novel, one that is not lesbian but heterosexual and male, or constituted by the desire to be heterosexual and male?” (129).

characterization is merely a thorough accordance with the sexological idea of a male soul trapped in a female body.<sup>246</sup>

I am not interested in claiming Stephen Gordon for one identity category over another. Instead, I want to ask what it means that when sexologists spoke of the invert, *they weren't actually speaking of women*. The most crucial way in which sexology set the invert apart from other women was by lending her a (hetero)sexuality borrowed from men. The female invert's affection for other women *was* her masculinity, and vice-versa. Being like a man, and being attracted to women (as a man), made of the female invert's heterosexuality and masculinity a möbius loop.<sup>247</sup> Not only was inversion reassuringly legible, it was *recognizable* as heterosexuality.

Even in the 1920s, it might have been possible to imagine a more felicitous combination of masculinity and womanly love for other women than Hall's depiction of Stephen, an unfortunate of nature who, in a happier world, would have been a boy. Queer theory has taught

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<sup>246</sup> Indeed, Prosser argues that "*The Well* and the category of inversion are... key to the emergence of the transsexual—to the interlinked literal and literary construction of the transsexual. The case histories of sexological inversion upon which Hall's novel relied so heavily for its material produced the transsexual narrative that has become the very symptom of transsexuality.... rather than inversion being a symptom or construction of homosexuality as it has been read, homosexuality was on the contrary one symptom of transgender. Cross-gender was structured into the very definition of inversion in its origins. Thus Ulrichs described his own male inversion as a case of 'a woman's soul in a man's body'" (130-133). On the other hand, Laura Doan suggests that "Hall felt considerable relief upon reading Ellis' sign-off on her project, for she—and Ellis too, one suspects—undoubtedly realized that her handling of sexual science was, at best, haphazard and, at worst, wildly eclectic.... That *The Well* both conformed to and deviated from Ellis's congenitalist view was first discerned as early as 1928 in the medical journal *Lancet*, which praises Hall's 'considerable dramatic skill,' but finds her 'emphasis... sometimes misplaced': 'The implication that the parents' desire to produce a son may alter the emotional affinities of the daughter born to them is difficult to accept'" ("Outcast" 163-164). Such a "'nurture over nature' etiology [was] antithetical to the congenitalists, whose major proponent was, of course, Ellis" (Doan "Outcast" 164).

<sup>247</sup> Halberstam explains, "[i]nversion as a theory of homosexuality folded gender variance and sexual preference into one economical package and attempted to explain all deviant behavior in terms of a firm and almost intuitive belief in a binary system of sexual stratification in which the stability of the terms 'male' and 'female' depended on the stability of the homosexual-heterosexual binary. When, some fifty years later, lesbian feminists came to reject inversion as an explanation for same-sex sexuality, they also rejected female masculinity as the overriding category of lesbian identification, putting in her place the woman-identified woman who is most often gender androgynous. In order to reconstitute to history of female masculinity, we actually have to accept that the invert may not be a synonym for 'lesbian' but that the concept of inversion both produced and described a category of biological woman who felt at odds with their anatomy" (146).

us to separate gender identification from sexuality and to be skeptical of any identity's claim to primacy. To untether masculinity from maleness is not this project. But, until we have fully learned to stop expecting unfemininity in women who love women, or indeed to lay to rest skepticism about the lesbianism of femmes—and this *is* that project—we owe a debt to “the mannish lesbian, of whom Stephen Gordon is the most famous prototype,” insofar as female masculinity, historically, “has symbolized the stigma of lesbianism” (Newton 560).

Whatever Stephen Gordon's infelicities for people who wish to love literary-historical female masculinity in an uncomplicated way—and I will refer to Stephen by female pronouns in my claims about inversion in the 1920s—masculinity like hers was essential to render female couples sexual. Middle class women's sexuality was a contradiction in terms. Esther Newton points out, “the New Woman had to enter the male world, either as a heterosexual on male terms (a flapper) or as... a lesbian in male body drag” (573). She offers broad but useful strokes: no matter what white, upper class women did together during the Victorian period, it was not legible as sexuality (561-562).<sup>248</sup> She also points out the double bind within the American, white, mainstream lesbian community of the 1970s. While “[h]eterosexual conservatives condemn *The Well* for defending the lesbian's right to exist,” for years, “lesbian feminists condemn[ed] it for presenting lesbians as different from women in general” (560). Though I have no wish to “condemn” *Well*, I am interested in lesbians as “women in general.”

Pace Newton, Stephen's female masculinity perfectly fit the hetero-patriarchal, medico-judicial structures represented by the Woolfian “gentlemen.” This is not a post-70's-lesbian-

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<sup>248</sup> Of “those who condemn Hall for assuming the sexologists' model of lesbianism,” Newton reasonably asks, “[j]ust how was Hall to make the woman-loving New Woman a sexual being?... despite Hall's use of words like ‘lover’ and ‘passion’ and her references to ‘inversion,’ her lawyer actually defended *The Well* against state censorship by trying to convince the court that ‘the relations between women described in the book represented a normal friendship’” (573).

feminist accusation, but a historical condition indicated by contemporary male reactions to the text. Contrary to what we have largely assumed in wake of the obscenity trial, men seemed not only unwilling to condemn *Well*, but to welcome it at the time of its publication.<sup>249</sup> I want to suggest that this is because *The Well of Loneliness* announced not only to gentlemen, but to the officer and to the blue-collar man that he would *know it* when he saw a lesbian, and could be sure that his wife wasn't one. Conservative publications like the *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post* urged recognition of the book (McCleery 38). The *Morning Post*, the "paper of choice for 'the retired senior officer and his family,'" published a glowing review of *Well* and its "...frankness free of offence" (Doan *Sapphism* 7). This review echoes Ellis' own private commentary on *Well*; he wrote in a letter that its "frank recognition of inversion" was the book's virtue (Doan *Sapphism* 7). Leonard Woolf's review, too, attributed "understanding and frankness" to the novel (Doan and Prosser 53). The term "frankness" is used in at least four reviews of *Well* in 1928.<sup>250</sup> Railway workers and miners wrote in support of the novel; one such wrote to say that he wanted to "understand" inverts (Doan *Sapphism* 29). This cross-class male emphasis on "understanding," facilitated by Hall's "frankness," is crucial. Working-class men's wish to "understand" the female invert demonstrates the same impulse as the gentlemanly science's insistence on transparency and truth telling.<sup>251</sup> What Hall did right, according to men in the

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<sup>249</sup> Only a few self-appointed male moralists out of touch with the culture were terribly upset about *Well* (Doan *Sapphism* 23). James Douglas' castigating review was not at all representative of responses to the novel, and scholars have been wrong to treat it as such; "immediate critical reception of *The Well of Loneliness* on publication on 27 July 1928 ranged from the positive to the lukewarm" (McCleery 39). Doan shows that the myth of lesbian panic in the 1920s is a fiction that has been projected backwards. Medd concurs that Douglas' opinion was more memorable than widespread (*Scandal* 163).

<sup>250</sup> The *Saturday Review* noted that the abnormality of Hall's protagonist is portrayed with "greatest frankness" (Doan and Prosser 50), and the *Daily Telegraph's* assessment ran: "it is remarkable as dealing with an aspect of abnormal life seldom or never presented in English fiction—certainly never with such unreserved frankness" (Doan and Prosser 65).

<sup>251</sup> Parkes suggests Hall's "primary concern was to establish the 'truth,' to persuade others to accept lesbianism as a 'fact.'" By contrast, "Woolf exploits the theatrical properties of sexual identities to create a whole world of performance that renders the rhetoric of sincerity ever more doubtful" (435).

period, was treat female inversion candidly. That which Stephen makes visible—what she is “frank” about—is the “true” heterosexuality underwriting female homosexuality.

Inversion like Stephen’s made lesbianism easy, and seemingly did away with the problem of the “normal” girls who nevertheless prefer women, the elusive threat of the femmes who walk among us, unknown. Conservative readers liked *Well*’s depiction of inversion because inversion *itself* was a highly conservative narrative. The network of military and patriarchal family implied in the *Morning Post*’s endorsement of Stephen’s female masculinity reveals the inversion model’s amenability to hetero-patriarchalism, particularly as embodied by Stephen—which is to say, depressingly, by her tragedy and failure. Cyril Connolly’s *New Statesman* review mainly complained of the novel’s lugubriousness, drawing an unself-conscious distinction between the tragic masculine lesbian and the femme who is better able to keep her chin up:

Stephen Gordon is a Victorian character, an *âme damnée*.... Sappho had never heard of the mark of Cain, she was also well able to look after herself, but never did she possess a disciple so conscious of her inferiority as Stephen Gordon, or so lacking—for 15s.!—in the rudiments of charm. Doan and Prosser 69

Connolly’s use of “charm,” and attention to the “mark of Cain” suggests causality between Stephen’s inability to pass—her marked masculinity, or unfeminine lack of charm—and her tragedy, as contrasted with the unmarked, or presumptively normatively gendered Sappho.

If Stephen’s inversion was “palatable poison” more so than “prussic acid” to hetero-patriarchalism, the question becomes: why was *Well*’s visible aberration model of female homosexuality censored at all?<sup>252</sup> At first blush, it perhaps does not seem strange that Woolf

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<sup>252</sup> While James Douglas’ damning review announced “I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel” (38), Sir Chartres Biron said “[t]he more palatable the poison the more insidious” in his judgement of the book (41). When Woolf fretted that *Room* would not be taken seriously, and worried that people

should have associated Chartres Biron, arbiter of the book's scandal, with the medicine of sex; the story itself is practically a sexological case study, with "Hall's text function[ing at trial] as a body of symptoms; the court's task was to diagnose its particular malady and, by extension, its author's disease" (Parkes 438). But we must pause when we realize that Biron—*ensor-cum-Harley St. specialist*—silenced the very epistemological regime that *gentlemen such as himself invented and endorsed*. I want to contend this is not a contradiction, because the gentlemanly science of sexology conceptualized inversion *such that it could always be caught*.<sup>253</sup> Availability to regulation like that imposed on Hall's novel—as well as the treatment of actual bodies brought before "specialists"—was always sexology's project.<sup>254</sup> The abnormality that defined the invert was so easy to police because it was so easy to spot. This explains the medico-judicial model's censorship of its own expression: it is not that the most agreeable version of female homosexuality was unaccountably censored by male authorities. It is rather that the most agreeable version of female homosexuality is imminently censorable by male authorities.<sup>255</sup>

The anomaly of inversion not only guaranteed that it was not to be missed but instead always "caught" (as was *Well*). It also cordoned the invert off from other women. For all that the invert is tragically alone, the flip side of abnormality is the invert's exemption from the strictures

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would see it as merely "a book to be put in the hands of girls" (Moran 22), she echoed and revised with high contrast this response to *Well* about acid in the hands of girls (and boys).

<sup>253</sup> Of Hall's own "pseudo-male" image and "type," Joanne Winning argues "this lesbian identity becomes indelibly conflated with the notion of obscenity and necessary censure" (378, 379). Most scholars agree that the downfall of Hall's novel was its earnest sincerity. Less serious novels like Woolf's *Orlando* escaped censorship (Parkes 436). Jodie Medd writes, "[u]ltimately—and ironically—the novel's seriousness and sincerity in its plea for social tolerance of sexual minorities were key to its obscenity prosecution and final ban" (*Scandal* 162).

<sup>254</sup> The *British Journal of Inebriety* exposed this logic: "[c]ertainly the suppression of Miss Radclyffe's serious psycho-pathological study without trial or authoritative judgement under an unjustifiable censorship strikes a blow at the liberty of scientific and medico-sociological literature, and will make it increasingly difficult in the future for authors and publishers to deal with certain medico-sociological problems in works of fiction" (Doan and Prosser 73). The terms here are telling: "psycho-pathological study" invites and deserves "authoritative judgement."

<sup>255</sup> My argument contradicts Parkes, who argues that "[t]he campaign against *The Well of Loneliness* opened in a manner suggesting that Hall had transgressed by breaching a conspiracy of silence that excluded lesbianism from early twentieth-century public discourse" (Parkes 436).



of womanhood.<sup>256</sup> Though Stephen Gordon is not invited to join hetero-patriarchy, she leaves it undisturbed.<sup>257</sup> Barred from the ranks of men, she also fails to expand the category of womanhood to show what *all* women are capable of: self-reliance, strength, even heroism. That Hall's own politics "had a lot in common with the overt grounds on which the trial was conducted" has often been noticed, but incorrectly understood as "[p]aradoxical[]." Hall felt that "woman's place is the home," and that "[o]ne of the most deplorable of post-war conditions is... the forcing of the wife and mother type of woman in to a business or professional career" (Parkes 438). Neither Hall's censorship for a deeply *normative* depiction of female masculinity, nor her own gender politics, are incongruous. Inversion's normativity—its appeal to professional gentleman and working-class men alike—was that it was a smoking gun.

When Woolf calls Biron a "Harley St. specialist," she realizes the function of the normative medical model of inversion. Because the "mark of Cain" renders the invert a marked target for juridical punishment, inversion is the most amenable version of female homosexuality to medico-juridical structures. In *A Room of One's Own*, to which I now turn, Woolf imagines a version of female love much more threatening to hetero-patriarchy than Hall's depiction of female masculinity. There, Woolf theorizes what she performs in the passage from *Orlando* with which I began. Arguing that *suffisaunce*—women's enoughness—is above all a matter of women's money and property, Woolf simultaneously suggests that incitement to discourse about

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<sup>256</sup> Medd gestures toward this when she writes "by Woolf's measure Hall's invert novel is an unsuccessfully simple and direct representation of female same-sex passion that, given its reliance on heteronormative codes of binary gender, still casts women 'by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex'" (*Scandal* 180).

<sup>257</sup> In 1975, Jane Rule wrote "When Stephen decides not to fight for Mary, she gives her to Martin much as one would give any other thing one owns. And though her altruism is sometimes associated with her female gender, it is more often likened to the virtues of Christ. It is courageous or foolhardy for a woman to behave like a man, but, since she accepts herself as a freak, since in fiction if not in life she is made to give up the ultimate prize, she is no political threat to anyone. The natural order is reasserted, and she is left on the outside, calling to God and to society for recognition" (87).

the visible difference of female inversion makes up a gentlemanly two-step with the requirement of silence about “normal” women’s noninterest in one another.<sup>258</sup>

*Woolf’s Non-Smoking Gun; or, Carmichael-Stopes’ Uninverted*

With this long preface behind us, we can now read the most important line from *A Room of One’s Own*—“Chloe liked Olivia”—with new eyes. Woolf arrives at this statement from a longer meditation on writing by women. She says that there are, in her contemporary moment:

poems and plays and criticism; there are histories and biographies, books of travel and books of scholarship and research; there are even a few philosophies and books about science and economics. And though novels predominate, novels themselves may very well have changed.... The natural simplicity, the epic age of women’s writing, may have gone. Reading and criticism may have given her a wider range, a greater subtlety. The impulse towards autobiography may be spent. She may be beginning to use writing as an art, not as a method of self expression. Among these new novels one might find an answer to several... questions. *Room* 79-80

Woolf is here saying that women’s writing has become theoretical. Not only are women writing directly about practical and theoretical questions (philosophy, criticism); even women’s novels can newly “answer questions.” This rhetorical gesture is a means for Woolf to claim that she herself is making theory, right here, right now.

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<sup>258</sup> Christine Froula notices that “*Room* practices what it preaches,” and the “certain affinity between Hall’s book and ‘Mary Carmichael’s’ *Orlando*,” as she understands the fictionalized “Mary Carmichael’s *Life’s Adventure*, published ‘this very month of October’” (195-196).

The type of theory that Woolf offers, in contradistinction to *The Well of Loneliness*, pertains to everyday women, to “normal” women, not a rare species of women who feel like men. Contrary to popular belief, such women *do* like one another—but also know to hide it from men. I will dwell at more length on the performative secrecy with which Woolf announces that women like each other in a moment; for now, I want to argue that Woolf’s interest is not in competing with Hall for the power of a single definition of lesbianism, as other scholars have almost exclusively contended.<sup>259</sup> To my mind, it seems that Woolf and Hall were not so much rivals for the definition of lesbianism, but rather talking about different lesbians. We should not read Woolf as encouraging masculine women to be more subtle, but instead as carving out space to talk about the uninverted.<sup>260</sup> In *Room*, Woolf elaborates something sexology thought was a contradiction in terms: femme homo-relationality.<sup>261</sup> The superiority of femininity to female masculinity in Woolf’s thinking is a counterpoint to sexology’s cordoning off of the female invert as 1) the only kind of woman who likes other women and 2) as such, rare and abnormal.<sup>262</sup> Woolf asserts that women like to be friends and rejects sexology in the same breath, but this is

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<sup>259</sup> Adam Parkes writes, “Woolf seems to have been reluctant to publicly endorse the image of the ‘mannish lesbian’ which, due in no small part to Hall, gained wide currency in Britain in the late 1920s” (435). Jane Marcus claims Woolf “didn’t think much of *The Well of Loneliness* as a work of fiction to truth or female experience.... her asides and sexual jokes... show Radclyffe Hall a trick or two, how to suggest that women sometimes do like women and avoid both the censor and lugubrious self-pity at the same time” (*Patriarchy* 169). Marcus glosses the “Chloe liked Olivia” line: “[a]n earnest feminist appeal to political solidarity would not be half as effective as shameless flirtation” (*Patriarchy* 169). As usual, in Marcus’ reading, *Well* is the scathing referent of “earnest appeals.” Jodie Medd argues that with “Hall’s scandal... as a turning point when invert proclamation supersedes lesbian suggestion, Virginia Woolf’s writing following the trial strategically reactivates lesbian suggestion to both cite and posit an alternative to Hall’s novel and its aftermath” (*Scandal* 177). Finally, Brenda Helt argues that Woolf’s distaste for *Well* was largely based in its depiction of the mannish lesbian (140), though she comes the closest to my perspective when she claims Woolf “criticizes all assertions of the knowability of desire and of stereotypical identifications based on that presumed knowability. Her criticism is aimed as much at those who identify according to the logic of the culturally sanctified ‘experts’ on gender and sexuality as it at those experts themselves” (142-143).

<sup>260</sup> Helt correctly notes that in Woolf’s fiction, “[m]ost... characters are ordinary; they are not rare types with unusual thoughts and desires” (148).

<sup>261</sup> Again, as Sharon Marcus makes clear, Victorian women’s lack of interest in each other is a post-sexological fiction, albeit one Woolf takes seriously on purpose.

<sup>262</sup> Woolf believed the “hetero/homo dichotomy” encouraged “culturally widespread homophobia that isolated women from other women emotionally, politically, and professionally” (Helt 132).

not to say that Woolf chooses friendship over sex. “Liking” between women resonates with the moment in *Howards End* when Margaret rejects Dr. Mansbridge’s medical authority in favor of “affection,” saying to her husband, “[i]t all turns on affection now.... Affection.... Surely you see. I like Helen very much, you not so much. Mr Mansbridge doesn’t know her. That’s all. And affection, when reciprocated, gives rights. Put that down in your notebook, Mr Mansbridge. It’s a useful formula” (248). Woolf suggests that sexology’s over-privileging of sexual difference occludes relationality among women precisely by imagining visible sexual difference between women the *sine qua non* of those relations.

Woolf indicates that her subject is the troubling figure elided by sexology—the “normal” female, or the femme—by claiming that “Chloe liked Olivia” in the context of the fabricated novel called *Life’s Adventure* by the quasi-fictional “Mary Carmichael” (80). It has often been noted that “Mary Carmichael” is Woolf’s appropriation of the maiden name of Marie Carmichael Stopes, author of *Married Love*, under which Carmichael Stopes published the novel *Love’s Creation*.<sup>263</sup> But scholars have so far not understood the rhetorical effect of Woolf’s invocation of Carmichael Stopes. Speaking in the fictionalized Carmichael Stopes’ voice when she announces that “Chloe liked Olivia” allows Woolf to subtly claim something supposed to be impossible: uninverted women’s affection for each other. *Married Love*, a sexological text to the heterosexual, begins with Carmichael Stopes’ proclamation that sexually abnormal readers “would do well to read some such books as those of Forel, Havelock Ellis, Block, or Krafft-Ebing, in order that his own nature may be made known to him” (21). *Her* book, instead, “is written about, and it is written for, ordinary men and women” (Carmichael Stopes 22). By

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<sup>263</sup> The birth control advocate’s name would have been familiar to Woolf’s audience; “[a]ccessible and immensely popular, *Married Love* made the groundbreaking argument that sexual knowledge, education, and pleasure were all necessary for a healthy marriage” (Medd *Scandal* 61).

imagining Carmichael Stopes as the author of *Life's Adventure*, Woolf assures her audience that Cloe and Olivia are “ordinary,” or normal women, and not the kind that Ellis or Krafft-Ebing would address.

Because “normal” women like Chloe and Olivia and the readership of *Married Love* are not defined by gender deviance, the erotic regard that may inhere between them is all the more threatening, because it is difficult to spot as such. But we need not even assume eroticism to register the provocation of Woolf’s declaration that Chloe liked Olivia (though, as I will discuss in a moment, Woolf invites us to do so, tongue planted firmly in her cheek). Debates over women’s clubs reveal that women’s sociality as much as women’s sexuality was antisocial, insofar as sociality was misunderstood and intentionally misrepresented *as* sexuality.

At the last gasp of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of women’s clubs automatically invoked abnormal sexuality, whether “the specter of the oversexed female or the nightmare of the desexed female” (Black 222). Indeed, a woman who would inhabit rooms with other women could not even be described without appropriating male terms; in 1894, the *Saturday Review* dubbed her “‘The Female Bachelor,’” who

gradually... claims a man’s “freedom” (582). Joining a club, having a latchkey, living alone or with a ‘chum,’ free to roam everywhere and at any time unchaperoned.... This ‘female bachelor,’ or imitative man, points to the flashpoint behind the very notion of women in clubs: the women’s emancipation movement.... In her 1899 journalistic investigation into the Pioneer Club, Dora Jones writes, ‘Country women who have heard it whispered that there is a smoking-room at the Pioneers’ still, I believe, mention the place sometimes with

baited breath, as the resort of alarming beings with short hair, strident voices, and unbecoming garments of a masculine cut' (410). Black 222

The female masculinity coincident with club life was a touchstone of female homosexuality *qua* inversion for Edward Carpenter, who conflated women's independence, female masculinity, and sex antagonism, writing "[t]he Modern Woman *with her clubs*, her debates, her politics, her freedom of action and costume, is forming a public opinion of her own at an amazing rate; and seems to be preparing to 'spank' an even thump the Middle-class Man in real earnest!" (*Love's* 66, emphasis mine).<sup>264</sup> Carpenter assumes that such women are inverted, indifferent to men because they are, in some sense, men themselves: "[s]uch women do not altogether represent their sex; some are rather mannish in temperament" (*Love's* 66).

The issue of clubs for women is worth pausing over, because "what Victorians called 'feminine clubland'" was "directly linked to the suffrage movement and its commitment to the democratization of access and privilege:" the Woolfian room. As Black writes,

[t]he logic of 'cleaving,' or splitting the costs, as a way of sharing the luxury through club membership appealed to women just as it had to men: cleaving made available and welcoming a beautiful space that could be enjoyed by members who could not, on their own, afford such a 'home.' The network of women's clubs that was invaluable to the suffrage movement also fostered a culture of connectivity.... because women's clubs were more likely than men's to be cross-class, they became a particularly effective instrument for social activism. 225

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<sup>264</sup> Doan notes that Carpenter was "not, technically speaking, a 'sexologist,' a term normally reserved for professionals in the field of sexology with training or expertise in science or medicine" ("Outcast" 165).

The stakes of the debate over women's clubs are precisely Woolf's terms: materially comfortable female spaces, women's togetherness, and their independence.<sup>265</sup> Each of these points of access was overwhelmingly understood to masculinize women, to render them *abnormal*.<sup>266</sup>

Invoking Carmichael Stopes is Woolf's understated means of fighting back against the appellation of "lesbian" with which women who wanted rooms of their own were policed. The intertextuality between Carmichael Stopes' writing and *Room* suggests that Woolf means to claim for femmes the trappings of independence that were unequivocally understood to masculinize women. Developing her argument for the necessity of space between men and women in marriage and the maintenance of same-sex friendships, Carmichael Stopes thematizes the risk of being overheard by the opposite sex. This is also the crucial framework of Woolf's "Chloe liked Olivia" passage. Opening her chapter on "Society," Carmichael Stopes writes, "If to the sincere and friendly question, 'What is most difficult in married life for the man?' one should get a sincere answer—that answer would be summed up in the words: 'Perpetual propinquity'" (146-147). In this section, she, even more explicitly than Woolf, nods to the double standard between men's and women's opportunities for same-sex sociality: "most books giving advice to young wives... tell[] them that a man should be allowed his men friends after marriage.

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<sup>265</sup> Gender segregated spaces make up an important narrative feature of *Well*, too, as Victoria Rosner argues, reading the structure of Morton as a "binary structure of gendered space... typical of English country-house architecture. Floor plans for such homes often show the house divided into male and female zones, with designations such as 'Young Ladies' Entrance,' 'Bachelors' Stairs,' 'Gentleman's Room,' Gentleman's Dressing Room,' and innumerable other variations on the theme.... Acute specialization and segregation in the division of space characterized the country houses.... At Morton the drawing room and the study form the architectural binary templates for gender from which Stephen is expected to choose" (320-321). To me, the most salient feature of this argument is the way in which female spaces like Anna Gordon's drawing room and Nell's parlour in *Orlando* are easily walked into by men, whereas at a study door, one knocks. In *Room*, Woolf writes "it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry;" so, too, I suggest, there must be a lock on the door if women are to "like" women (*Room* 105).

<sup>266</sup> The longevity of this understanding can be acutely felt up to, and perhaps beyond, the feminism of 1970s: "For feminists the main educational value of lesbian baiting has been its exposure of the very clear connection in men's minds between being 'unfeminine' and being independent. Being called unfeminine is a comparatively gentle threat informing you that you are beginning to waver, whereas being called a lesbian is the danger signal—the final warning that you are about to leave the Territory of Womanhood altogether" (Koedt *Radical Feminism* 247).

But this is not enough. There should be complete and unquestioning trust on both sides” (Carmichael Stopes 154). As Carmichael Stopes’ chapter title suggests, she as much as Woolf is concerned with women’s spaces and sociality.

I want to further suggest that we should read Woolf’s digression about men within earshot as an allusion to a passage in which Carmichael Stopes’ writes that husbands and wives need not go everywhere together, as is the social custom. Carmichael Stopes explains, even though spouses are separated at the table in social gatherings,

they are always within the possibility of *earshot* of each other, which very often deadens their potentialities for being entertaining. The mere fact of being *overheard* repeating something one may have already said elsewhere, is sufficient to prevent some people... from expressing their real views about important matters. 153, emphasis mine

This is the most striking moment of intertextuality between *Married Love* and *A Room of One’s Own*: Carmichael Stopes argues, as will Woolf, that the censorious barrier to sociality between (women) friends is the danger of being overheard by men. While Woolf’s allusions to the obscenity trial and even to Eve as the original Eavesdropper—which gender role Woolf reverses—have been noted, it has not been recognized that Woolf’s invocation of Biron nods to Carmichael Stopes’ discussion of heterosexual couples at the dinner table.<sup>267</sup> Reading from the fictionalized Carmichael Stopes’ *Life’s Adventure*, Woolf says, “I turned the page and read... I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women you

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<sup>267</sup> Lauren Rusk writes “through those listening women, the written texts addresses reading women... its primary readership. Woolf overturns the hierarchy that relegates women to the status of mere eavesdroppers on the Western tradition. In *A Room*, the patriarchs become those who overhear the discourse of the opposite sex” (24).



assure me?” Once she has looked around the room, she goes on: “[t]hen I may tell you that the very next words I read were these—“Chloe liked Olivia” (82). Like Carmichael Stopes’ guest who will not tell her friend a story if her husband is within earshot, Woolf will not announce that women *do* enjoy each other’s company, unless no gentlemen can overhear.

Woolf rhetorically overplays the secret of femme homo-relationality, calling attention to “interest” in women’s secrets, and making so much of what has been “unrecorded” and “unsaid,” that one wonders *what* it could possibly be about:

if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping.... I watched too, very curiously. For I wanted to see how Mary Carmichael set to work to catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling, when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex. She will need to hold her breath, I said, reading on, if she is to do it; for women are so suspicious of any interest that has not some obvious motive behind it, so terribly accustomed to concealment and suppression, that they are off at the flicker of an eye turned observingly in their direction. *Room* 84

Rhetorically, Woolf demonstrates both the ridiculousness, but also the requirement, of the secret’s concealment.<sup>268</sup> The effect of conceptualizing female bonds—even women’s desire to be

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<sup>268</sup> The concealment of homosexuality is automatic; the very function of the heterosexism that requires homosexuality’s secrecy serves to keep it obscure, Eve Sedgwick points out: “there are remarkably few of even the most openly gay people who are not deliberately in the closet with someone personally or economically or institutionally important to them. Furthermore, the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like

alone—as marks of abnormality, is the provocation to ferret out the mark, to diagnose the secret of difference.

While agreeing with Woolf that women are always on guard against a scrutinizing male gaze, Forster suggests that it is the structure of the gender divide *itself* that produces information as secrets, rather than any actual secret. Forster's exceptional man (friendly and effeminate Tibby Schlegel) proves this rule. Socializing with a female cousin, the Schlegel sisters joke about Helen's abortive affair with one of the Wilcox sons. Abruptly, "[a] male—even such a male as Tibby—was enough to stop the foolery.... Helen could tell her sister all, and her cousin much... she told her brother nothing." Her secrecy is not "prudishness" or "precaution"—certainly Tibby is no Biron—but still there is "a feeling that she betrayed a secret into the camp of men, and that, however trivial it was on this side of the barrier, it would become important on that" (55-56). It may be that Woolf's "unrecorded gestures" and "unsaid or half-said words" between women when they are alone are trivial, but once caught by "the flicker of an eye turned observingly in their direction," they become "important."<sup>269</sup>

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Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure" (67-68). Sedgwick's emphasis on the economic and the institutional suggests that outness can threaten queers' ability to obtain and to keep their rooms, their houses of bricks and mortar.

<sup>269</sup> Sedgwick is helpful again for theorizing the way in which the privileged knowledge, or the secret, is *always* sex, especially whether there is somehow sex on a single side of the gender divide with which Woolf and Forster are both concerned. She writes, "[t]he process, narrowly bordered at first in European culture but sharply broadened and accelerated after the late eighteenth century, by which 'knowledge' and 'sex' became conceptually inseparable from one another—so that knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge; ignorance, sexual ignorance; and epistemological pressure of any sort seems a force increasingly saturated with sexual impulsion—was sketched in Volume I of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.... In some texts, such as Diderot's *La Religieuse*, that were influential early in this process, the desire that represents sexuality per se, and hence sexual knowledge and knowledge per se, is a same-sex desire. This possibility, however, was repressed with increasing energy, and hence increasing visibility, as the nineteenth-century culture of the individual proceeded to elaborate a version of knowledge/sexuality increasingly structured by its pointed cognitive *refusal* of sexuality between women, between men" (73).

The masculine impulse to apprehend that we have seen with regard to *Well*, and on which Woolf comments in the passage above, appears in *Married Love*. Carmichael Stopes does not depict the magistrate-*cum*-Harley-St.-specialist, but the husband's examination of his wife, more akin, perhaps, to the domestic authority invading Nell's parlour.<sup>270</sup> Carmichael Stopes writes, "[m]en like to feel that they understand their beloved." If a woman seems uninterested in her husband at times, "he will search among his wife's acquaintances for some one whom she may have met, for some one who may momentarily have diverted her attention" (37-38). This is another iteration of what Woolf performatively theorizes in *Room*: the desire to penetrate women's secrets. Carmichael Stopes goes on to explain, "the natural man at once seeks the explanation... in a rival.... he reaches what appears to him to be the infallible logical deduction: that either there must be some rival—or his bride's nature is incomprehensible, contrary, capricious" (38). Woolf suggests that it is the male gaze itself that renders women "capricious" when she writes of "women... alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex." Carmichael Stopes, too, then, makes it clear that it is the "incomprehensibility" of women that is intolerable. Faulty though it may be, "deduct[ive]" understanding of one's wife is the benevolent form of the gentlemanly interrupter of Orlando's narrator, who barges in to speak over women and tell them what they are.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> In a talk, I heard Silvia Federici say that for women—whose work is conceptualized as personal service and as such unwaged—having a husband or a father means the police is in the house with you. Being a waged person means being a reasonable (punishable) person; for the unwaged (unreasonable, female) person, corporeal punishment is all.

<sup>271</sup> Carmichael Stopes only gestures toward the malignant version of "[t]he typical self-opinionated male" who, "while a subject for laughter in plays and novels... is yet by no means extinct." Radical though it was, her book was meant to propitiate men; she does not treat of this type, but writes only of "his less exaggerated form" (149).

### *The Palimpsest*

Lesbian-feminists and queer theorists are not immune to the will to knowledge. Such scholars have historically searched for proof of sex between women in another register. A palimpsest of the Biron passage has often been imagined to offer irrefutable evidence of sex between Chloe and Olivia that is simply not there.<sup>272</sup> In this earlier draft of the talk, Chloe and Olivia momentarily *might* share more than a laboratory. In this version, Woolf writes that the pages stuck together right after “Chloe and Olivia shared a...” Then, visions of officials and book burnings enters the writer/ reader’s mind.

In the holograph draft notes for *A Room of One’s Own* (Monks House Papers, B.6) after ‘Chloe liked Olivia. They shared a \_\_\_\_\_/’ Woolf wrote: ‘The words covered the bottom of the page: the pages had stuck. While fumbling to open them there flashed into my mind the inevitable policeman... the order to attend the Court; the dreary waiting: the Magistrate coming in with a little bow... for the Prosecution; for the Defense—the verdict; this book is obscene + flames sing, perhaps on Tower Hill, as the compound (?) that mass of paper. Here the paper came apart. Heaven be praised! It was only a laboratory. Chloe-Olivia. They were engaged in mincing liver, apparently a cure for pernicious anaemia. Marcus *Patriarchy* 186, spelling original

This earlier draft is in fact *not* more sexually explicit than the one that we receive as the published 1929 text. Chloe and Olivia ultimately share only a laboratory. The mode of reference to female sexuality is the same, here, as in the final version. Both invoke, tongue-in-cheek, the intrusion of paranoid male assumptions about something (but what?) that it turns out Chloe and

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<sup>272</sup> Jane Marcus was the first to examine this earlier draft (*Patriarchy* 186).

Olivia *don't* share. There is no explicit lesbian content in this palimpsest that disappears in the published version of *Room*; in both cases, there is only the projected possibility of punishment. Scholars have read an absence of lesbian sexuality as presence based solely on the presence of a medico-judicial censoring gentleman *qua* paranoid reader. But in both versions of the text, the case is the same. To my mind, *this* result is more interesting than whether or not Chloe likes Olivia “like that.” Although there is no explicit statement of desire between the women, a gentleman is sure to appear, hiding in a cupboard or with a torch to burn the book, wherever women are alone together.

Most readings of the Chloe and Olivia passage strip it—and Woolf’s gesture of revision—of their richness, when they understand the former as a straightforward admission of lesbian sexuality, and the latter as self-censorship. Of the revision, Ellen Bayuk Rosenman writes, “[s]ociety might be ready to read and reward women writers, but lesbianism remained almost literally unspeakable” (639). Lauren Rusk agrees that the revision is self-censorship (25).<sup>273</sup> Even for Sharon Marcus, Woolf ultimately finds the “topic is too hot to handle” and “will not name directly” lesbian love (*Between* 258). Best, though, Adam Parkes appropriates Vita Sackville-West’s explanation of Woolf’s illness after a 1929 trip to Berlin to account for the excision: “‘SUPPRESSED RANDINESS’” (442).<sup>274</sup>

Even when scholars take a more nuanced view of Woolf’s revision, they still regard it as a qualitative change.<sup>275</sup> But the narrator of the draft does not actually imagine any scene between

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<sup>273</sup> Rusk also writes, “to convey [her] ideas to men who ignore women’s views, Woolf uses the strategy of saying ‘Don’t listen’-as a way of getting them to do just that” (Rusk 26).

<sup>274</sup> Parkes also compares Woolf with Hall, citing as their “crucial difference” this certain “reticence” (442). Obviously, I think we ought to read this moment as rhetorical strategy more than sexual shyness.

<sup>275</sup> Medd writes, “[a]lthough the suggestion of female homoeroticism lingers, it functions to satirize the meddling censors who seek out indecency where it does not exist, rather than admitting that the text—and the narrator’s imagination—might warrant suspicion. Repositioning Biron... as eavesdropping at a women’s homosocial gathering, the published passage suggests that the representatives of the law are prurient readers, not that Mary Carmichael might be a perverse writer.... in the manuscript, the narrator’s imagination is besieged in a way that foregrounds the

Chloe and Olivia; she imagines only the conflagration, the punishment (or cure) for a transgression (or disease) that remains totally unspoken, even in the supposedly more explicit palimpsest. This is continuous with the way in which only the name of Biron—the figure of punishment—suggests anything untoward about the way in which Chloe likes Olivia in the published version. Ironically, women having sex with each other is made to converge with women liking each other and working together under the very gentlemanly sign of patriarchy. A palimpsest ought to reveal something different, something lost to the better preserved or the final version of the text, but in this case, the palimpsest and the revision are seamless. In this way, Woolf again satirizes the notion of the secret. That which men must not overhear turns out to be innocuous; the palimpsest reveals nothing that is not explicit in the final draft. Like Wilkie Collins' woman in white with(out) a secret, the secret may be that there is no secret. Or perhaps if there is one, the secret is that it isn't really *much* of a secret, like Helen's "trivial" information that "become[s] important" only once "betrayed... into the camp of men." Woolf plays a trick on the gentleman by rendering his own presence that which sexualizes the Chloe and Olivia scene, but she also plays a trick on critics who think that in the palimpsest they have discovered something sure, finally proved the lesbianism of the text.

In fact, Woolf makes "liking" a matter of more than just friendship *by* performatively calling up the censors of female homoeroticism. In her speech, the figures responsible for trying to eradicate sex between women (by cordoning it off to abnormal women) become *themselves* the force that sexualizes "liking" between "normal" women. "Liking" is not a scandalous affect for women to share. For Chloe to like Olivia ought not disturb anyone's feelings or disrupt the

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force of law and leaves her rather shaken, and perhaps even a little guilty herself for imagining an indecent scene between Chloe and Olivia. In the published version, the narrator keeps her thoughts to herself while displacing Biron from the humbug and ceremony that legitimate his judicial authority, to reduce him to a comical character lurking at the periphery of her audience" (*Scandal* 179-180).

working of society. But, by the time Woolf announces this liking as a fact, she has given it an illicit charge by her reference to the magistrate who presided over the obscenity trial of *The Well of Loneliness*. Though Biron functions as a semi-ridiculous stand-in for male paranoia, Woolf's invocation necessarily refers her audience to lesbian sexuality. Both his and Bodkin's names are enough to evoke both tabooed sexuality, *and* the (predictable) failure of hetero-patriarchy to regulate women's relations (111). More seriously—and, I suggest, more importantly—by insisting that she cannot go on until assured no men are present, Woolf suggests that hetero-patriarchal governance prohibits women's *simply liking each other* and working together, as do Chloe and Olivia.<sup>276</sup>

Woolf strategically conflates what may well be chaste friendship with a proscribed, but empirically absent lesbian sexuality in four sentences, without ever allowing for the idea that she is talking about the exceptional subjects of sexology, but rather everyday women.

Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.... Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. Cleopatra did not like Octavia. And how completely *Antony and Cleopatra* would have been altered had she done

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<sup>276</sup> Brenda Helt points out that that Chloe and Olivia are not “abnormal” women, nor are they necessarily lovers: “[f]ar from hinting that Chloe and Olivia are lesbians, as many scholars have asserted, Woolf specifically refutes the facile association of lesbianism with feminism and women's professionalism. She does not mean to deny that women who work together might also experience erotic feelings for each other, however. That liking often includes the amorous, the erotic, even the sexual, is implied by Woolf's facetious references to Sir Chartres Biron and Sir William Joynson-Hicks, presiding magistrate and home secretary during the trial of *The Well*, who would make such intimacy a threatening perversion. Woolf instead reinforces an understanding that she implies has been held among women, though rarely documented in print: women's love for other women is a highly desirable and empowering emotive force common to most women, and not an identifying characteristic of a rare sexual type” (142). This reading occurs, however, in service of a theory of Woolfian “bisexuality,” which seems to me less productive. Moreover, Helt makes queer theory as a straw man: “[e]ven the logic of queer theory can fail to expose [the myth of heterosexual and homosexual mutual exclusion], because the queer is understood as necessarily non-normative in ways that continue to posit the heterosexual against the homosexual” (Helt 132). See Judith Butler's chapter “Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification” for her account of the way in which homosexual and heterosexual identity and desire are psychically inextricable from one another.

so!... All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends.... They are confidantes, of course, in Racine and the Greek tragedies. They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his nose. *Room* 82-83

Like Forster, Woolf makes much of the novelty of the historical moment, *not* as one in which the invert can walk free, but one in which women can be thought of for themselves, by themselves—a moment when regular women can like the things they like, including each other. The register of relationality for which “Chloe liked Olivia” is metonymic is varied and rich; like Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum, this register of relationality includes eroticism, motherhood, daughterhood, friendship. Though sexuality between women is half-jokingly included, what Woolf is getting at cannot be reduced to sex.

### *“Liking” and “Sharing”*

When it seemed as though members of Bloomsbury might have to testify on Radclyff Hall's behalf, Vanessa Bell worried that Virginia would forget where she was and blurt to the court everything of the group's frank and queer sexual experiments (Medd *Scandal* 171). Woolf's



performative check, in *Room*, that no men are present before speaking—the opposite of spilling secrets without thought to where she was—is a deliberate ironization. The mode of Woolf’s intervention, the irony with which she invokes Biron, is material to her theory of femme homo-relationality. Irony is always a double gesture: it is at once true that Chloe and Olivia’s friendship cannot be innocent once Biron has been invoked, *and* that the two women are innocent friends—only that Biron objects to that, too. By strategically conflating “novel” attention to women’s bonds with men’s worries about lesbian secrets when women are left alone in rooms together, Woolf simultaneously invokes an imaginary fear, laughs at it, *and* fulfills its threat. Only if there are no men present does it become possible to say that two women like each other, to admit the secret amongst ourselves.<sup>277</sup> What follows from Woolf’s gibe about men’s fear of what women do when they are alone together is the assertion that men cannot share in, let alone legislate, secrets that women know of themselves and each other, nor what women do by themselves and with each other. Woolf is only half joking; the other half might be a serious postulate that lesbianism can be understood as women simply being alone together, as Margaret and Helen wished to be at Howards End.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Medd’s excellent reading of “Woolf’s performance of self-surveillance,” is that she “acts out an awareness of realms of disclosure.” However, for her, it is “the supposed homosocial intimacy of the community she is addressing” that Woolf “ironizes,” and not, as it seems to me, the gentlemen crouching out of sight to hear women’s secrets (*Scandal* 181). Medd’s main distinction between Bloomsbury and the Hall trial is private versus public (165). In the wake of the latter, she asserts, a complicated recloseting of Bloomsbury occurred, of which *Room* is part: “[i]n *A Room of One’s Own*, it is not the frank utterance of ‘semen’ or ‘bugger’ that ushers in a change in ‘civilization,’ but the suggestion of lesbianism that is productively deployed to critique the social limitations placed on women’s relationships” (Medd *Scandal* 160, 176, 181). This is “in contrast to the exuberant delight [Woolf] takes in Bloomsbury’s sexual disclosure in the drawing room” (Medd *Scandal* 181). My reading diverges from Medd’s sense that Woolf is cowed by the censor: “Hall’s banned book disrupts Woolf’s own writing... because it confronts Woolf with the devastating power of the law and ‘society’ to threaten the writer” (*Scandal* 164). Woolf plays a complicated game that involves *no* self-censorship; in this I also disagree with the consensus that Woolf scrubbed any explicit “Chloe and Olivia” content from the final version of *Room*.

<sup>278</sup> I make this argument more robustly in “A Schoolhouse of Their Own: Economic Erotics in *The Children’s Hour*.”

While we are free to imagine that Chloe and Olivia *really* share more than a laboratory, it is productive to take their non-sexual bond at face value. For me, the crucial fact is that Chloe and Olivia are friends who share a laboratory—and *Biron is still a menacing presence*. What this suggests is that women alone together, women merely liking each other, registers as deviant sexuality to a censorious, hetero-patriarchal gaze. The prohibition on women’s simply liking each other—and, perhaps even more so, working together—renders women’s sociality, sexuality, and financial independence inextricable. In a gesture of reversal, Woolf uses this gaze for what it does best: the sexualization of female bonds where they would otherwise not be sexual. She satirizes but also makes the most of this conflation in order to theorize a mode of female homo-relationality unconducive to legislative regulation. If Biron were aghast that Chloe liked Olivia, what could be done about it? “Liking” evades sodomitical definition; is hardly “gross indecency.”<sup>279</sup>

Let us return for a moment to the idea that the palimpsest shows us a definitive sexuality absent from the revision. If it did, where would we find it? The verb that trails off for what Chloe and Olivia do together—alarming the reader that something worthy of the censor is coming—is “share.” Chloe and Olivia “share.” One effect of Woolf’s several narratorial “Mary”s, who blur and blend together, is to suggest a form of subjectivity that changes property relations, much as Margaret and Helen’s night alone at *Howards End* challenges “property itself.” When *suffisaunce* makes it difficult to say where I end and you begin, it is equally difficult to say what is yours, and what is mine. Women must share; insofar as there is a secret sexuality between Chloe and Olivia, it might be “sharing.”<sup>280</sup> Inhabiting rooms alone/ together, which requires

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<sup>279</sup> I also discuss the asymmetry of male and female homosociality at more length in “Schoolhouse.”

<sup>280</sup> Christine Froula reads *Room* as “anticipat[ing] Luce Irigaray’s image of women as the ‘goods’—objects of exchange in an economy of masculine subjects—getting together in a lesbian economy that eludes and mocks masculine control of women’s bodies and minds” (195-196). Madelyn Detloff offers the best reading of the

financial independence from men, is the requisite condition for women's liking one another, whatsoever that means. This chapter has focused on the material conditions of *suffisaunce*, which, with its Chaucerian etymology, is always fundamentally about enoughness. Through examination of texts that take as their basis women in houses and rooms of their own, this chapter treats enoughness more literally than have my others thus far, and complications to my previous explorations of women's self-sufficiency.

We might circle back to a final comparison between Woolf and Hall. Each writer expressed an opinion about what kind of homosexuality was unnatural and unacceptable. For Woolf, as we saw at the beginning of this section, sexual inversion itself was “‘perversion’” (Helt 138). For Hall, the invert was noble, and the woman who dressed as a man motivated not by sexual inversion but by the material gains that cross-dressing could facilitate was a “‘mad pervert of the most undesirable type’” (Moore 573).<sup>281</sup> In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argues that neither women's financial independence, nor affection for other women should depend on masculinity. When women are financially free to inhabit rooms alone/ together, a register of femme homo-relationality emerges—women's “liking” one another, but also “sharing.”

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palimpsest, linking “[t]he implied syllepsis, shifting from an erotic innuendo to a relatively staid workplace” to Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas* “that the economic freedom from male relatives made more possible by the 1919 Sex Disqualification (removal) Act enabled women who earned their own livings to make decisions without ‘prostituting’ themselves to male desires (whether sexual or social). The ‘educated man's daughter,’ Woolf writes, ‘need no longer use her charm to procure money from her father or brother. Since it is beyond the power of her family to punish her financially she can express her own opinions. In place of the admirations and antipathies which were often unconsciously dictated by the need of money she can declare her genuine likes and dislikes’” (2).

<sup>281</sup> Melina Alice Moore notes the difficulty of separating “‘stories of gender crossing... relevant to historicizing transgender lives’” from “‘passing’ as a form of deliberate masquerade to achieve greater freedom or financial gain” (573).

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