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**QUEER DECADENT CLASSICISM: LATE-VICTORIAN
REPRESENTATIONS OF ANCIENT ROMAN LITERARY CULTURE**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

By

Tara Thomas

March 2021

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ABSTRACT

Queer Decadent Classicism:

Late-Victorian Representations of Ancient Roman Literary Culture

Tara Thomas

For late-Victorian authors and sexologists, Roman literary culture was essential to the development of the British decadent movement. My dissertation explores how authors including Walter Pater and Michael Field return to Roman epicureanism and decadence as a way of justifying their literary style and personae as gender and sexually nonconforming authors. Scholarship in the history of sexuality and nineteenth-century classical studies has tended to focus on the relationship between Victorian homosexuality and Greek pederasty using an older model of gay and lesbian studies. From this perspective, Victorian homophiles constitute homosexuality on the basis of Greek pederasty, reversing the discourse of the state to justify a newly constituted homosexual identity. My dissertation, by contrast, examines Victorian and Roman gender-sex deviancy from a queer theoretical lens. This research brings queer theory's resistance to identitarian politics into Victorian neoclassical literature. Starting with the premise that an excess of sexual and gender categories flourished in imperial Roman society because the Romans neither sanctioned nor criminalized same-sex desire, I discuss how late-Victorian authors revived queer Roman literary history to prefigure their dissent from predominant gender-sex paradigms. "Queer Decadent Classicism" thus explores how nineteenth-

century authors forged a genealogy from Roman literary figures and imagined a queer aesthetic history.

My first chapter, "'Aesthetically, Very Seductive': Pater's Homoerotic Epicureanism in *Marius,*" explores how *Marius the Epicurean* (1885)*,* an historical novel, published the same year England re-criminalized homosexuality and set in second-century CE, the period affiliated with the rise of decadence and decline of Rome, represents a specifically Roman queer literary culture. I argue that Pater showcases several different models of homosocial intimacy available to Roman men. Within the novel, Marius's "natural epicureanism" becomes not only a philosophy and lifestyle but also the literary style that Pater's modern-day narrator self-consciously affiliates with nineteenth-century decadence. Tracing the roots of modern decadence to Epicurean philosophy helps Pater justify the connection between queer desire and aesthetic philosophy. After making a case for how Pater theorizes queer decadence in terms of a modern-day epicureanism, I turn my attention to Pater's inserted translations, which he frames with homoerotic scenes between men. I show how the epicurean principle of egalitarianism allows Pater to reconstitute representations of homoerotic scholarship that level the conventional power dynamics of the ancient Greek world. Whereas the *eromenos*, the pupil philosopher and youthful lover, had for the most part acted as interlocutor in Greek dialogues, Pater imagines a more collaborative Roman literary community of co-authorship. Each homoerotic scene of classical reception Pater features in his novel—which includes literary criticism, translation, and adaptation of the classics— showcases

collaborative authorship between men. Moreover, I demonstrate how Pater constrains heteronormativity within the inserted translation, while allowing homoerotic lives to flourish in the Roman world of the second century, formally echoing the decadent Roman world's less restrictive hold on queer sexualities.

The second chapter, "Metamorphic Aesthetics in Michael Field's Ovidian Poems," introduces unpublished poetry by the co-authors and lovers Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who wrote classically themed poetry under the masculine pseudonym Michael Field. This chapter discusses how they turned to Ovid's erotic epic to experiment with "mutatas formas"—textually as well as physically changed forms--to prefigure unfixed and fluid gender and sexual subjectivities. The first part introduces Field's dramatic trialogue on the Philomela myth. In their version, two sisters change into a mating pair of songbirds, thus rewriting Ovid's story about the power of sisterhood into a late-Victorian story about a queer feminist relationship. The second half of the chapter introduces Field's Aphrodite poems, inspired by Sappho, written on the topic of the "gods in exile" popularized by Pater in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) and subsequently used to analogize experiences of persecution, exile, and censorship under the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. I discuss Field's Aphrodite series, comprised of their unpublished translation of Sappho's "Hymn to Aphrodite" and *To an Exile,*. arguing that this project merges Sappho's Lesbian symbolism with Ovid's metamorphic characters and poetics to articulate more clearly the model of queer feminist kinship they first explored in the Philomela trialogue.

In my third and final chapter, I introduce Michael Field's Roman Trilogy, a series of metatheatrical closet dramas situated in decadent Rome and featuring queer pantomime dancers, entitled *The Race of Leaves* (1901)*, The World at Auction* (1898)*,* and *Julia Domna* (1903)*.* I argue that the genre of tragedy enables authors to disentangle queer decadence from its imperial history. Examining Field's *Roman Trilogy*, I explore how Field re-elevates pantomime dancers, generally taken as symptoms of Roman decadence, to their origin as the creators of Greek tragedy according to Aristotle. On the one hand, this reevaluation helps Field make a case for the emergence of aesthetic decadence from the Greeks. On the other hand, Field also offers the pantomime's queerness—gender fluidity and pansexuality—as a model of non-conformativity emerging alongside Greek pederasty.

Interrogating the Victorian decadent movement's queer representations of Roman decadence through the genres of the novel, lyric, and drama, my dissertation contributes to a lacuna in both Victorian and history of sexuality studies. I make a case for understanding decadence as a literary style and a philosophical lifestyle that developed apart from and in opposition to imperial decadence. By understanding decadence's resistance to institutionalized forms of sexuality, I suggest that decadent authors anticipated queer theory's insistence on ambiguity and fluidity, and in an anti-identitarian sexual politics we find mirrored in the experimental forms they created.

x

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the influence of Roman literature on the archive of modern queer decadence in the English tradition. I discuss the discourses of non-normative sexuality that appear in the reception and adaptation of Roman literature and history. The chapters of this dissertation focus on case studies of adaptations and fictions about same-sex desire in the classical Roman world in order to consider the influence of Roman literature on queer decadence in the context of the criminalization of homosexuality in fin-de-siècle England.

"Queer" connoted "oddness" in people who rejected marriage and reproduction and was considered derogatory well before the 1890s and into the 1980s.[1] "When queer was adopted in the late 1890s," Heather Love explains, "it was chosen because it evoked a long history of insult and abuse—you could hear the hurt in it" (2). As a politically reclaimed term, "queer" attempts to extricate non-normative desires and acts from some of the identity politics assumed by the terms LGBT. I use the term to describe queerness's elusiveness, its non-static resistance to a single, clear identification. The term also highlights fin-de-siècle decadents' resistance to modern sexual discourse that saw non-heteronormative desire and gender nonconformity as atavistic and criminal. During the time that Sigmund Freud was beginning to conceptualize his psychoanalytic framework of sexuality inspired by reading the

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[1] Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History,* Mari Ruti's *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects,* and Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* provide extensive discussions of queer negativity (a term that has come to include but not be limited to the "anti-relational" branch of queer theory).

classics, English decadents and sexologists were dramatizing the classics to explore

similar frameworks and analogize their own experiences.[2] Fin-de-siècle decadent and

aestheticist writers moved in the same circles as sexologists like Havelock Ellis, John

Addington Symonds, and Edward Carpenter, with whose affirmative homophilic

writing (as well as Symonds and Carpenters' own creative work) informed their own

engagement with queer classicism.

Queer thus encompasses both the emerging identity of the homosexual and the

more flexible, fluid sexual invert; like sexual inversion, queer acknowledges gender

as well as sexual difference, and it recognizes gender nonconformity, transition, and

play as a category that signifies not only sexual role play between same-sex pairs but

quite often proto-trans identities. Most of the writers in this study rejected

identification with Havelock Ellis's new term "sexual invert" and they did not view

same-sex sexual acts as criminal. I thus use "queer" to capture the complexities of the

non-normative sexualities of the characters I consider in this study and their authors'

viewpoints on sexology. Fin-de-siècle authors' archives reveal a wealth of terms to

describe non-normative sexualities; "Lesbian," "Sapphic," "Roman," "Latin" took

their place alongside "fellow," "deviant," and "decadent," which sometimes signified

sexual non-normativity. Wilde's circle incorporated themselves into Greco-Roman

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[2] Michael Field, for instance, dramatizes the life of the late-antique empress Theodora in a drama that explores its resonances with *Oedipus Rex* in *Equal Love* (1896), three years before Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1896). I discuss Michael Field and Freud's different treatments of the oedipal triangle in greater detail in "Queer Decadent Historiography: Michael Field, Victoria Cross, and Theodora," *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism* 5 (Summer 2020): 57-79, 67. Print.

mythology, giving each other pet names that reflected their sexuality. Reminiscing about Wilde shortly after his death, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon recollected to the lesbian duo Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper) that Oscar had once playfully confessed of himself that: "he was a late divinity who needed worshippers + liked them to throng his courts. But Ricketts, he said, was an early, man-eating deity, who no sooner saw a worshipper than he caught him + tore him to pieces" (MS.46789.165). The women of Wilde's circle also incorporated themselves into this mythology. Bradley and Cooper themselves, as Yopie Prins has discussed in detail, fantasized that they were the Greek maenads and that their beloved dog Whym Chow was a Bacchic "maenad's cub" (MS.46787.57). Queer women used Greco-Roman myth and ancient languages as code to convey eroticism.[3]

This dissertation contributes to the work of queer theorists interested in what Fradenburg and Freccero call "the historiographical equivalent of subversive reinscription" (xviii). My work attends to how Roman "desires, residues, and repetitions" are represented by and helped shape the identities of sexual and gender deviants at the fin de siècle. These authors' novels, poetry, and dramas revise Roman myth and history to queer ends in ways that reveal historical continuities between classical and Victorian understandings of gender and sexuality.

The authors I discuss forged a connection between same-sex desire, aestheticism, and the cultivation of the classics, which they explored in literature and art at the turn

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[3] Ellen Crowell's "Telegraphing in Queer Cipher," *VISAWUS Victorian Futures Conference,* California, Nov. 2019 is which queer women invented a cipher that incorporated mythic and modern queer icons is one such example.

of the century. The sexologist Havelock Ellis identifies an aesthetic "homosexuality"[4]

"stimulated by the ardent and hyperesthetic emotions of the poet," which he viewed

as being cultivated "under the influence of a classical education" (*Sexual Inversion*

713, 787). British aesthetes like Wilde, Ellis says, are born with "a congenital

antipathy to the commonplace, a natural love of paradox, and…the skill to embody

the characteristic [of 'sexual inversion'] in finished literary form" (793). In an attempt

to define fin-de-siècle literary style in an essay, published first as "The Decadent

Movement in Literature" (1893) and later redacted and renamed *The Symbolist*

Movement in Literature (1899), Arthur Symons describes the defining characteristic

of literary decadence to be perversity: "perversity of form and perversity of matter are

often found together" in "Greek and Latin" as well as English decadence (*The*

Symbolist Movement in Literature 81). [5]

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[4] That the etymology of "homosexuality" is itself "a bastard term compounded of Greek and Latin elements," as Ellis writes in *Sexual Inversion,* was not lost on Ellis and his contemporary, Edward Carpenter, who coined the term "homogenic" in an attempt to linguistically purify terms to describe same-sex desire, riding it likewise of its Latin hybridity in preference for the Greek (*Sexual Inversion*).

In my dissertation, I examine the self-defined literary decadence of the British fin-de-siècle as emerging from a predilection for the classics and queer desire. I turn to classical-themed decadent literature in order to consider its relation to the classical past. The British decadents strategically revised classical literature and mythologized historical events. They intentionally perverse translations and loosely adapt

Figure 1 "Venus," Under the Hill, Aubrey Beardsley (1907)

classics in a way that underscores the aim of *l'art pour l'art,* which they share with the Aestheticism Movement*,* which often appears more grotestque and/or more campy than their aestheticist counterpart's beautiful, classical portrayals (like Beardsley's depiction of Venus or Pater's parody of *The Satyricon*). Other times, they transform campy Roman decadent literary into more serious "high" form. My dissertation thus prompts a reconsideration of what constitutes "decadence," since the works discussed herein vacillate between camp and pastiche. This "perversion" takes place at the intersection of form and content, with highly stylized, borderline

ekphrastic descriptions of queer and sometimes pornographic scenes. It is self-consciously hybrid, intentionally highlighting anachronisms, mistranslating tone, and pastiching Victorian sexual repression. The decadents turned to the past for more fluid, flexible models of queer gender and sexuality, which they recuperated in "high" literary art—the historical novel, poetry, and tragedy written in the tragic mode in addition to incorporating campy scenes we generally affiliate with decadence.

While scholars have discussed the relationship between Greek Hellenism and Victorian same-sex desire, they have largely overlooked Roman classicism in this context. John Addington Symonds's *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) provides a probable explanation for the late-Victorian preference for Greek classicism when he argues that "Greek Love" (pederasty between men) was unique to Greek culture; in fact, he declares that the rise of the Roman Empire led to the fall of Greek pederasty. Thus, as Symonds suggests, ancient Greece became the glorified culture—and language—celebrating honorable, state-sanctioned same-sex love, while ancient Roman culture condemned same-sex love and passed stringent laws upholding sexual morality. The fact that it is through ancient Rome that many Greek myths come to be known was not lost on fin-de-siècle queer decadent writers, who embraced the paradox of the cultural preservation of a (homo)erotic culture by a morally heteronormative society.[6]

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[6] See Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism,* Alkalay-Gut's "Aesthetic and Decadent Poetry," *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow, and *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, ed. Hall and Murray for discussions on the importance of paradox and also classical and religious themes in decadent poetry. Hanson discusses what he calls "the dialectic of

Symonds differentiated between "Greek Love" and "Roman Love," prompting

other fin-de-siècle authors to follow suit. For Symonds, "Greek Love" became a way

of distinguishing between state-sanctioned, spiritual same-sex relationships between

men in the form of pederasty. He shows that "the Greek mind" "discriminate[d]

between vulgar and heroic love" (6 *Greek Ethics).* Symonds describes "the nobler

type of masculine [Greek] love" as unique in its patriarchal institutionalization and

affiliation with the spiritual. These two types of same-sex love, "a noble and a base, a

spiritual and a sensual," he finds personified in Eros under the twofold titles of

Ouranios (celestial) and Pandemos (vulgar, or *volvivaga)"* (*Greek Ethics* 6). Greek

Love, he writes, is what "more than anything else distinguishes the Greeks from the

barbarians of their own time, from the Romans, and from modern men in all that

appertains to the emotions" (7). Symonds illustrates the debasement of same-sex love

in ancient Rome through their adaptation of the Ganymede myth. Ganymede, to

whom Zeus grants immortality and eternal youthfulness in trade for his

companionship, became a model for pederasty. Symonds critiques what he terms the

debasing of Ganymede's name to a stereotype, thus echoing Xenophon's Socrates

who reminds his audience pederasty is first and foremost a pedagogical institution.[7]

He points to the etymological difference between Ganymede (ganu—to take pleasure,

mede—mind) to make his case for the return to the more classical understanding of

shame and grace" of the decadents, who celebrated the relics of homoerotic culture in
Roman Catholicism after having converted from paganism (indeed, many of these
authors appear in my dissertation, though I focus on their earlier and also pagan
writings).

[7] See Xenophon's *Apology.*

the dynamic between the older, wiser *erastes* and the younger, beautiful *eromenos* as

a pedagogical relationship:

> To the Romans and the modern nations the name of Ganymede, debased to
> Catamitus (*catamitus*, the boy of the pedastic duo), supplied a term of
> reproach, which sufficiently indicates the nature of the love of which he
> became eventually the eponym." (6 *Greek Ethics)*

The divisiveness Symonds reads in the linguistic transformation of the Greek

Ganymede as an emblem of same-sex love and spiritual union against the Roman

Catamitus as a pejorative[8] serves to demonstrate changing attitudes about ancient

Greek and Roman same-sex desire in the late-Victorian imaginary.

Classical same-sex love appears notably in Havelock Ellis's groundbreaking

study of homophilic love, *Sexual Inversion* (1897). Joseph Bristow has shown how

Ellis's groundbreaking and widely popular study, which included the history of Greek

and Roman homophiles, helped to discredit Max Nordau's theory of degeneration and

to "dissociate homosexuality from pathology, and thus made a positive move towards

sexual liberation" (80).[9]

Havelock Ellis, like Symonds, also differentiates between Greek and Roman

homoerotic love:

> Homosexuality mingled with various other sexual abnormalities and excesses,
> seemed to have flourished in Rome during the empire, and is well exemplified
> in the persons of many of the emperors…many of them men of great ability
> and, from a Roman standpoint, great moral worth—are all charged, on more
> or less solid evidence, with homosexual practices" (104)

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[8]

[9] In his article, "Symonds's History, Ellis's Heredity," in *Sexology in Culture* (1998),
Bristow discusses the Ellis/Symonds collaboration and their different views on
"sexual inversion" in detail.

Edward Carpenter, another homophile affiliated with the Aesthetic Movement, echoes this distinction between Greek and Roman attitudes about same-sex desire in *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908). Relics of the "noble…genuine passion" of Greek Love remain in Roman pastoral poetry, as Carpenter records, yet the majority of Roman queer culture, as he sees it, fell prey to their "materialist spirit," and consequently "could only with difficulty seize the finer inspiration of homogenic love" (20). The bulk of Roman literature, he suggests, gave "expression to its grosser side" (20). A central premise to this dissertation is that the late-Victorians affiliated Roman nonnormative gender and sexuality with sexual inversion just as they affiliated Greek *pederastia* with homosexuality, yet not all fin-de-siècle authors were so cynical about the pre-/modern inversion and decadent nexus. On the contrary, many authors suggest that Roman queer culture was more liberatory than prescriptive state-sanctioned pederasty; authors like Pater and Michael Field explore a greater range of homoerotic relationships, from lifelong partnerships to casual one-night stands at orgiastic symposia. Because pederasty was never institutionalized in Roman culture, a multitude of queer positionalities existed that were not as constricted, enabling queer existence and expression to flourish. Although many fin-de-siècle texts characterized Roman culture as debased by comparison to Hellenic homoeroticism, a large corpus of decadent and aesthetic literature recuperates Roman literature and culture to celebrate non-normative gender and sexuality beyond the Greek institution of pederasty.

"Greek Love," according to Symonds in *Sexual Inversion*, was as a more spiritual form of homoeroticism, yet elsewhere he sings the praises of Roman Love, which he celebrates precisely because of its materialist form. In "Lucretius," an essay published in the *Fortnightly Review* (1875), he celebrates "Roman Love" for its overwhelmingly sublime quality and predilection to privilege physical love and comradeship over the institutional attachment of marriage. Here, he differentiates Roman Love from Greek Love in terms of Lucretius's Epicurean philosophy, the philosophy of pleasure recorded in *de rerum natura.* Symonds argues that Lucretius influenced Rome's materialist attitude surrounding erotic desire, whose undertones of sadomasochism he highlights:

> [Lucretius] treats physical desire as a torment, asserts the impossibility of its perfect satisfaction. There is something almost tragic in these sighs and pantings and pleasure-throes, and incomplete fruitions of souls pent up within their frames of flesh" (48).

Roman Love, he argues, is more elemental because it is suppressed, "pent up," in favor of the higher pleasures. It is because Roman Love is first repressed that its surfacing is cataclysmic, the main distinction Symonds finds between the Greek and Roman treatments of *eros*:

> In the whole Lucretian treatment of love there is nothing really Greek…. Love in Lucretius is something deeper, larger, more elemental than the Greeks conceived, a fierce and overmastering force, a natural impulse which men share in common with the world of things. Both the pleasures and the pains of love are conceived on a gigantic scale…. The acts of love and the insanities of passion are viewed from no standpoint of sentiment or soft emotion, but always in relation to philosophical ideas, or as the manifestation of something terrible in human life. ("Lucretius" 47)

The Sublime aesthetic with which Symonds details the Roman conception of love is notable. It evokes the scale and excess characteristic of the Roman imperial world, including imperial literary culture. To Symonds, "[o]nly a Roman poet could have conceived of passion so mightily and so impersonally, expanding its sensuality to suit the scale of Titanic existences, and purging it from both sentiment and spirituality as well as all that makes it mean" (48). Far from characterizing Roman passion in terms of degeneration, Symonds elevates Lucretius's secular philosophy from conflation with hedonism by emphasizing its purification of "all that makes it [passion] mean".

Notably, Symonds willfully transforms the Lucretian Epicurean philosophy of pleasure itself, since Lucretius's discussion of sexual frustration and erotic dreams is administered through poetry not to titillate the reader but rather to teach temperance as an antidote to pain-inducing love. Lucretius employs this extensive explicit descriptions of erotic dreams and sex in book four of *de rerum natura* (c. 50 BC) as a praeteritio in order to discourage his followers from acting on their erotic impulses, since erotic/physical pleasures are deemed baser than psychic pleasures in the Epicurean belief system. Lucretius intends to expel erotic dreams not embellish them, yet Lucretius includes extensive explicit descriptions of erotic dreams in book IV of *de rerum natura,* which Symonds paraphrases here:

> We seem to see a race of men and women, such as have never lived, except perhaps in Rome or in the thought of Michael Angelo, coupling in leonine embracements that yield pain, whereof the climax is, at best, relief from rage and respite for a moment from consuming fire. There is a life daemonic rather than human in those mighty limbs; and the passion that bends them on the marriage bed has in it the stress of storms, the rampings and the roarings of leopards at play. (48)

Symonds views the Roman negative attitudes towards love as in tune with the ennui of modern decadence. Symonds appreciates the frank eroticism of Lucretius, likening him to classical and modern writers emblematic of stylistic and thematic decadence: "the *vice égrillard* of Voltaire, the coarse animalism of Rabelais, even the large comic sexuality of Aristophanes" yet with the sublime passion that makes his a distinctly Roman decadence (48).

Roman Love, specifically pre-Christian ancient homoeroticism in Roman culture, is crucially glossed over in homophile histories of same-sex sexuality from the turn of the twentieth-century gay writers until very recently, since even Symonds publishes his commentary on Lucretius separate from his other essays on celebratory Greek Love. Symonds' conception of Epicurean love as epitomizing Roman same-sex relations paints a bleak picture of ancient Roman same-sex love. Moreover, his characterization of Roman homoerotic *eros* does not account for the fact that, in spite of pederasty's comparative lack of institutionalization under the Roman empire, homoeroticism thrived in imperial culture. In fact, pederasty's lack of institutionalization in ancient Rome, as Jennifer Ingleheart explains, enabled men to explore alternative outside of the rigid models and regulations stipulated by the state.[10] Roman same-sex desire celebrates sexual sameness over difference, as Ingleheart explains:

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[10] Ingleheart's *Masculine Plural* and "Introduction: Romosexuality," *Ancient Rome and the Construction of Modern Homosexual Identities* both address Rome's distinctly different conception of same-sex relationships.

[Rome] adhere[d] to a less rigidly structured age-related model of same-sex

relationships than that of Greek pedagogical pederasty; Roman texts contain

more examples of men's desire for and sex with other adult males, and have

thus been read as authorizing same-sex relationships which involved partners

defined by their same-sex attraction rather than their desire for the sexual

other. (6)

By differentiating between Greek and Roman sexuality, scholars like Ingleheart, and

Craig Williams before her, have made important steps in scholarship on ancient

history of sexuality. Both scholars explore same-sex relationships in ancient Roman

literature, arguing that Roman homoeroticism is more heterogeneous than that of

ancient Greece. Working at the intersection of ancient history of sexuality and

Victorian classical reception, I aim to provide an historically specific understanding

of how late-Victorian decadent and aestheticist authors explored ancient Roman

proto-GLBTQ relationships in literature.

Studies at the intersection of ancient Greece and late-Victorian culture have

received much attention over the past decades with studies like Dowling's *Hellenism*

and Homosexuality (1994)*,* Tracy Olverson's *Women and the Dark Side of Victorian*

Hellenism (2009)*,* David M. Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (1990)*,*

Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho* (1990), and Stefano Evangelista's *British*

Aestheticism and Ancient Greece (2009)*.* Scholarship on ancient Roman gender and

sexuality in the late-Victorian imaginary often examines it in terms of homosexuality,

as does Craig Williams's *Roman Homosexuality* (1999); more recently, Laura

Eastlake's *Ancient Rome and Victorian Masculinity* (2019) contains a chapter exploring how Wilde and Pater model aesthetic masculinity on that of the Romans. My intervention is to examine how the less stringently enforced sexual morality laws of ancient Rome and Roman subcultural (as opposed to culturally institutionalized, state-sanctioned) practice of Greek pederasty enabled a greater flexibility to gender and sexual positionalities and relationalities; studying and adapting historical and fictional ancient Roman characters into their writing enabled late-Victorian decadent authors to theorize a queerness that sometimes included but was not limited to same-sex desire.

Throughout this dissertation, I explore how fin-de-siècle decadent and aestheticist authors adapt and revise ancient Latin literature and literary history, a revisionist historiography that depicts imperial Rome as a space where queerness thrived beyond and in spite of heavily legislated forms of sexuality. Late-Victorian decadent literature recreates public queer culture through scenes of symposia, bacchanalia, and pantomime dances. Moreover, Decadent subculture frequently revive these public spectacles to inspire their art. Charles Ricketts transformed a real-life bawdy symposium into a scene for his illustrated edition of Longus's ancient Greek novel, *Daphnis and Chloe* (c. 2nd century AD; 1893)*, a playful transformation from modern decadence to ancient Hellenism.[11] Late-Victorian decadent Roman-

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[11] The image features Ricketts, Shannon, Thomas Sturge-Moore, Lucien Pissaro, Reginald Savage, and C.J. Holmes (notably, nude and appearance intentionally altered by Ricketts) (Michael Field Notebook 12; Vol. XII (ff. 94-5) 1898., British Library, Add MS 46787).

themed literature also portrays same-sex romantic relationships that reject the finality and social restrictions (of gender, class, age) of state-sanctioned pederasty. For instance, Pater introduces Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto not as a former pederastic duo but rather as lifelong partners and collaborators.

Many late-Victorian classically trained authors express a nuanced understanding of the distinctions between Greek and Roman same-sex desire. They acknowledge that the Romans practiced forms of homoerotic desires and activities that were not "learned, borrowed, or imported by Romans from Greece" (64). The fin-de-siècle authors I focus on in this dissertation acknowledged that, as Williams has shown, "the only practice that was associated with Greece was the peculiarly Hellenic tradition …not homosexuality but *paiderastia*, the courtship of free youths by older males" (64). In fact, the Romans prohibited these types of relationships, objecting to the public display of homoeroticism between free men as *sturprum,* "disgracef[ul] illicit behavior" (Williams 62). Because pederasty and other homoerotic activity was punishable under the Roman adultery laws, same-sex lovers "follow[ed]…a strict code of plausible deniability" (Richlin, 16-17). Amy Richlin has discussed how Roman literature abounds with comedic representations of homoeroticism that reveal the social stigma attached to criminalized same-sex acts. Richlin poses that this resulted in Symonds and other late-Victorians to perceive ancient Roman culture as comparatively coarser than that of ancient Greek (11).

In their imperial Roman historical fiction and literary adaptations, fin-de-siècle authors depict same-sex desire and relationships in specifically Roman terms.

Both Pater and Michael Field explore how Roman same-sex love beyond the institution of pederasty in order to represent more egalitarian co-authorships and romantic relationships. Through so doing, both Pater and Michael Field recuperate ancient Roman homoeroticism by showing decadent culture to be a space through which homophilic people exercised a greater erotic autonomy than that of ancient Greece. With age, class, and other restrictions reinforced by Greek pedagogical pederasty lifted or playfully appropriated, Roman queers could explore new erotic dynamics and configurations of same-sex relationships. Their literature contains both pastiches of bawdy homoerotic characters and scenes (the gender-bending pansexual pantomime dancer and the orgiastic symposium) as well as earnest explorations of same-sex romantic relationships between male citizens and freeborn women.

Out of a vast array of Roman-themed Victorian literature featuring fascinating depictions of premodern gender and sexuality, I have chosen to focus on those written between the recriminalization of 'homosexuality' with the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 and the immediate aftermath of Wilde's death in 1900. All of my sources are inspired by or adapt Roman imperial literature and feature both mythic and historic characters (sometimes both in the same text). The historical timeframe focuses on the period from the beginning of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, in 161 to the regicide of Geta by his co-emperor brother Caracalla in 211 AD. Modern historians considered Marcus Aurelius "the last good emperor" and characterize the period following his death as an era of imperial opulence and decline.

The literature that I have selected depicts queer decadent protagonists and were popular among other decadent authors in their own time. Chapter One focuses on *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater's historical novel about an Epicurean poet-philosopher who counts Apuleius, Lucian, and Marcus Aurelius amongst his friends. When Oscar Wilde met Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper (Michael Field) for the first time, they bonded over their shared admiration of Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean,* which Wilde exclaimed was the greatest Victorian prose ever written (*Michael Field* 240). Bradley and Cooper include one of Pater's translations (and incorporate it into their title) of Marcus Aurelius taken from the pages of *Marius* as an epigraph to the Roman Trilogy's *A Race of Leaves* (1901)*,* the subject of Chapter Three. Chapter Two features unpublished poetry of Michael Field that revises myths from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) to queer ends and incorporates themselves and their cohort into this mythologized world.[12]

My first chapter, "'Aesthetically, Very Seductive': Pater's Homoerotic Epicureanism in *Marius,*" explores how this historical novel represents a specifically Roman queer literary culture which Pater compares to that of modern decadence. I argue that Pater showcases several different models of homosocial intimacy available to Roman men in various philosophical, theological, and martial circles, and Marius's

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[12] The *To an Exile* poems evoke Wilde's own exile and include mythic figures they affiliated with Wilde ("a late divinity needing worshippers"), Charles Ricketts (Pan, "a man-eating deity"), and themselves (maenads) and they figure their own incestuous relationship in their lesbian adaptation of the Philomela myth. See for instance the 1900 volume of *Works and Days* (166)

observations of and participation in male homoeroticism are essential to his development as an epicurean philosopher whose experience of the world is rooted in materialist (physical as well as philosophical) pleasures. Within the novel, Marius's "natural epicureanism" becomes not only a philosophy and lifestyle but also the literary style that Pater's modern-day narrator self-consciously affiliates with nineteenth-century decadence.

In the first part of the chapter, I show how tracing the roots of modern decadence to Epicurean philosophy helps Pater justify the connection between queer desire and aesthetic philosophy, a connection that appears elsewhere in Victorian fiction featuring Epicureanism. I show how Pater draws on other earlier Victorians like Walter Landor, whose Imaginary Portraits, a genre Pater famously adapts elsewhere, includes a dialogue where Epicurus encourages two courtesan-philosophers to resist marriage and maintain their sapphic relationship. After making a case for how Pater theorizes queer decadence in terms of a modern-day epicureanism, I turn my attention to Pater's inserted translations, which he frames with ekphrastic homoerotic scenes between men. I show how the epicurean principle of egalitarianism allows Pater to reconstitute representations of homoerotic scholarship that level the conventional power dynamics of the ancient Greek world. Whereas the *eromenos* had for the most part acted as interlocutor in Greek dialogues, Pater imagines a more collaborative Roman literary community of co-authorship. Each homoerotic scene of classical reception Pater features in his novel showcases homoerotic collaboration and authorship between men.

I focus on Marius and his companion Flavian's fictional co-authorship of the historically unattributed, undated *Pervigilium Veneris* and the collaboration between the lifelong pederastic duo Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto. Pater's historical fictional novel presents an entirely homosocial world wherein homoerotic philosophical collaborators create and critique heterosexual literature, translations of which he inserts into the novel. I pose that, by restricting heteronormativity to the confines of inserted texts, Pater allows homoerotic lives to flourish in the Roman world of the second century, formally echoing the decadent Roman world's less restrictive hold on queer sexualities. Through so doing, Pater inverts the modern novel's focus on the marriage plot, instead turning to the ancient novel, most notably Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (c. late-2nd c. AD), to represent a heterogeneous erotic culture.

The second chapter, "Metamorphic Aesthetics in Michael Field's Ovidian Poems," introduces unpublished poetry by the co-authors and lovers Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper. This chapter discusses how they turned to Ovid's erotic epic to experiment with "mutatas formas"—textually as well as physically changed forms—to prefigure unfixed and fluid gender and sexual subjectivities. The first part introduces Michael Field's dramatic trialogue on the Philomela myth. In their version, two sisters change into a mating pair of songbirds, thus rewriting Ovid's story about the power of sisterhood into a late-Victorian story about a queer feminist relationship.

The second half of the chapter introduces Field's Aphrodite poems, inspired by Sappho, written on the topic of the "gods in exile" popularized by Pater in *The Renaissance* (1873) and subsequently used to analogize experiences of persecution, exile, and censorship under the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. Field self-consciously aligns their poems' focus on the Cult of Aphrodite with the decadent men's "gods in exile" trope to theorize a more inclusive queer decadent community. I discuss Field's Aphrodite series, comprised of their unpublished translation of Sappho's "Hymn to Aphrodite" (1899) and *To an Exile* (begun in 1899 and completed in 1901)*,* arguing that this project merges Sappho's Lesbian symbolism with Ovid's metamorphic characters and poetics to articulate more clearly the model of queer feminist kinship they first explored in the Philomela trialogue.

In my third and final chapter, I introduce Michael Field's "Decadent Trilogy," *The Race of Leaves* (1901)*, The World at Auction* (1898)*, and Julia Domna* (1903).[13] The trilogy features an enslaved Greek tragic pantomime dancer, Pylades, as its protagonist, a figure who utilizes his erotic art to incite his audience into rebellion against an empire ravaged by the Antonine plague and subsequent starvation during a period of decadence and imperial power struggles. I argue that Pylades—represented as a gender-fluid homoerotic character—enabled Michael Field to disentangle imperial decadence from aesthetic decadence.

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[13] Although Michael Field wrote *The World of Auction* first, in dramatic time it is the second in the trilogy.

Michael Field characterizes Pylades' decadence as a residual effect of ancient Greek culture, reviving the pantomime's roots as the inventor of tragedy whose art enables him to transgress otherwise rigid gender and sexual norms. In this way, they distinguish Pylades from the other outrageous forms of Roman spectacle they feature in the dramas: the flagellation of the dancer himself and Commodus's humiliating comedic pantomimes and performance of sex in public. Michael Field's recuperation of pantomime dance from Roman culture is predicated on pantomime's Greek origin; however, it is Roman decadent culture that elevated pantomime as its highest artform. Roman culture, they seem to argue, is worthy of reconsideration precisely because they put the queer artist who celebrated gender and sexual queerness on centerstage.

Interrogating the Victorian decadent movement's representations of queer epicurean and decadent Romans characters through the genres of the novel, lyric, and drama, my dissertation contributes to a lacuna in both Victorian and history of sexuality studies. I make a case for understanding decadence as a literary style and a philosophical lifestyle. Notable fin-de-siècle authors like Pater and Symonds forged a connection between epicureanism and decadence, a philosophical genealogy that prompts us to expand our definition of decadence. The term decadence pejoratively denoted degeneration and decay but for many it also more positively encompassed a philosophy of pleasure and poetry. Roman literary culture enabled late-Victorian authors to experiment with high literary forms as opposed to the campy pastiche typically affiliated with modern decadence. Decadent authors writing Roman decadence resisted and indeed critiqued the popular entertainment of comedic farces

and violent spectacles in favor of tragic and "serious" genres. Moreover, they represent proto-GLBTQ characters in tragic rather than comedic genres. Whereas in both Roman and Victorian literature, queerness is represented comedically, in "low" art like campy music hall performances and comedy, authors like Michael Field and Walter Pater portray queer Roman characters in the tragic mode whether it be in historical fiction, epic, or tragedy. Through so doing, they reconceptualize decadence for a modern audience.

The authors I study trace an alternative genealogy from modern decadence through epicurean philosophy and classical decadence, a "double-decadence" to so speak. In their Roman-themed work they represent homoerotic artists whose art and life represents the desire to forge new relationalities beyond the institutions of heterosexual marriage and homoerotic pederasty. By understanding decadence's resistance to institutionalized forms of sexuality, I suggest that decadent authors anticipated queer theory's insistence on ambiguity and fluidity, and in an anti-identitarian sexual politics we find mirrored in the experimental forms they created.

CHAPTER ONE

"Aesthetically, very seductive":

Pater's Homoerotic Epicureanism in *Marius*

In this chapter, I discuss the epicurean philosophy and decadent Rome of

Walter Pater, whom Yopie Prins calls the "queer uncle" of the fin-de-siècle aesthetic

and decadent classicists (*Ladies Greek,* 208). My focus is on the historical novel that

fin-de-siècle English aesthetes such as Oscar Wilde and Michael Field considered the

greatest prose written in the nineteenth-century, Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885).

By focusing his novel on homosocial philosophical collaboration and co-authorship

between men which he inscribes using the classic homoerotic discourses of pederasty,

comradeship, and brotherhood, Pater situates himself alongside Walter Savage

Landor and John Addington Symonds, authors whose reception of Epicureanism

focus on same-sex *eros.* The chapter examines the influence of Epicureanism on the

development of Roman *eros*, specifically same-sex philosophical erotic relationships

between men and the literary movement they produced. In the first part, I examine

how Pater portrays Epicurean homoerotic discourse between men as a more

collaborative literary model than ancient Greek pederasty. In the second part, I explore how these homoerotic literary collaborators theorize a new translational practice based on Epicurean style and erotics.

I show how the Roman literati of Marius's world revive classical homoerotic discourse and do so in order to create a community that reimagines what types of homosocial bonds between men are possible. I argue that the homoerotic bond Pater focuses on is a collaborative relationship between men representative of two types of masculinity, the warrior ideal and the *cinaedi*, the latter of which Pater reclaims from its pejorative history, embracing the figure of the adult passive same-sex desiring subject as one capable of both philosophy and pleasure. My chapter thus explores how Pater imagines alternative homoerotic bonds between men based on uncompetitive, unparanoid bonds between women that Sharon Marcus recognizes at the heart of Victorian culture's emphasis on female relationships. Pater's homosocial community enables these types of bonds to flourish among men; however, he represents bonds between men as fleeting, reflecting the Epicurean viewpoint of the fleetingness of life and finality of death. The death and departure of Marius's companions reaffirms his "natural epicureanism". As a good Epicurean, Marius learns to embrace these homoerotic friendships as they pass, memorializing them in beautiful Silver Age poetry.

Published in 1885, the year England recriminalized homosexuality between men, Pater's novel depicts Marius living in an almost entirely homosocial world and engaging in various homoerotic, intimate friendships. Epicurean philosophy

advocates the practical goal of living a happy life and understands pleasure (*voluptas*) to be the greatest good. In this philosophy, to quote the Victorian classicist W.H. Mallock who satirized Pater and the Oxford Movement and twice translated Lucretius, "all conscious life comes into existence with the body, and disappears with its dissolution" (Mallock x).[14] This materialist philosophy decenters the human and disenchants the deities, understanding that humans, nonhuman animals, and gods all emerge from the natural world. To the Epicurean, retreating from political and social life and surrounding oneself with beauty and friendship is, to quote Pater, "success in life" (*Renaissance,* 210). An intellectual life surrounded by one's friends is the Epicurean's ideal. Epicureanism, Pater makes clear, is not only a philosophy but also a lifestyle, a lifestyle that endorses same-sex relationships over marriage, encouraging homoeroticism between men for pleasure's sake alone.

Within the novel, Pater frames the protagonist Marius's meditations on Epicureanism and its residual traces in later philosophies around a series of homosocial scenes of classical reception between men. The erotic homosociality of metaliterature that Pater depicts in his modern historical novel is a faithful reception of Latin literature, since authors from Catullus to the fifth century CE Apollinaris, as Amy Richlin has written, depict homoerotic metaliterary scenes, usually dinner parties, where men write literature about writing/sharing/reciting literature, a trope popular across genres. Pater's novel is thus an historical novel in the sense that it is a

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[14] Mallock's novel, *The New Republic* (1877), satirized the Oxford Movement and features a Mr. Rose modeled after Pater.

pseudo-autobiographical modern novel set at the end of the Pax Romana in 2ⁿᵈ century CE *and* in the sense that it is an historically accurate depiction bearing some resemblance to the ancient novel's metaliterary scenes and intertextuality.

Pater weaves together homoerotic scenes of reading, translating, critiquing, and inventing classical literature situating queer classical reception, suggesting that the homoerotic spirit of Hellenism lives on not through uninstitutionalized pederasty but rather through collaborative authorship between men (a model we shall see Michael Field—women lovers and co-authors—appropriate in practice in the following chapter). Like Foucault's observation that the late-Victorian formation of heterosexuality was contingent on the creation of the homosexual identity, Pater's Marius, his lovers, and his friends invent mythical stories, dialogues, and orations about heterosexual love. Exposing this intricate network of queer literati in second century Rome, Pater shows collaborative authorship to be an unsanctioned yet predominant model of same-sex romantic and intellectual partnership at the heart of Roman culture.

Epicurean Intimate Friendship

The representation of Epicureanism as a philosophy promoting same-sex eros was not, however, a late-Victorian invention. Epicurean's inclusive, erotic philosophy came into the English language first through one of Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* (1829). Landor imagines a dialogue between Epicurus and a romantic couple of philosophers and courtesans, Leontion and Ternissa. Although Lucretius's Latin didactic poem *De Rerum Natura* (1ˢᵗ c. BC) was rediscovered in the

early modern period, the section on eros remained expurgated from English

translations until the twentieth century, when W.H.D. Rouse translated it for the 1924

Loeb edition.[15] Largely inaccessible to the general readership, the Victorian public

could gain access through the Epicureans' philosophy of eros through reading

adaptations of Epicurean philosophy. One widely read representation of Epicurean

sexual ethics was Walter Landor's "Epicurus, Leontion, and Ternissa," an imaginary

conversation that portrays Epicurus collaboratively developing his philosophy with

his intellectual equals: a romantic partnership of two women courtesan philosophers.

Landor's imagined dialogue caught the eye of Charles Ricketts, the queer decadent

illustrator and publisher who republished it as *Epicurus, Leontion and Ternissa* in

1896.[16] The title itself, with its omission of the Oxford comma, emphasizes the

homoerotic connection between the eponymous women philosophers whose fictional

romance inspired Epicurus to coin his philosophical school. The connection between

Roman and British Decadence is intricately linked to philosophy and pederasty, the

later of which authors like Walter Pater, Charles Ricketts and his collaborator and

lover Charles Shannon, and the poets Michael Field expand to include cross-class,

gender-inclusive, and non-ageist love.

The school of Epicurus advertised itself as a philosophy for the masses and

included women, prostitutes, slaves, and non-citizens among its scholars.

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[15] See David Butterfield's "Contempta relinquas: anxiety and expurgation in the publication of Lucretius's *De rerum natura,*" in *Expurgating the Classics* (2012) for a detailed history of censorship.
[16] Landor, Walter Savage. *Epicurus, Leontion and Ternissa.* London: Hacon & Ricketts, 1896.

Epicureanism granted the right to practice philosophy to everyone. Because studying philosophy in the ancient world frequently included practicing pedagogical pederasty or otherwise engaging in homoerotic pedagogy, Epicureanism thus also extended these practices beyond the gender, class, and age requisites of "Greek Love," a term fin-de-siècle sexologists used to describe ancient Greek same-sex love between men. Epicureanism valued erotic reciprocity decoupled from the institution of marriage, and Lucretius encouraged his disciples to indulge in isolated reciprocal erotic acts as an alternative to marital sex (which he warns can result the burden of over-reproduction).

When Epicurean erotic philosophy was adapted by the English decadents, it was done so explicitly to adopt an anti-institutional and anti-identitarian Epicurean lifestyle, eschewing modern sexual identitarian politics that solidified the identity of homosexuality before rapidly recriminalizing it. The revival of Epicurean erotics in the fin de siècle England, I argue, reflects a turning point in English history. If the long nineteenth-century saw the exponential rise of English literacy, the fin-de-siècle marked an increase in women's and working-class Latin literacy. Latin was more widely taught than ancient Greek, which was only taught to the upper classes. When fin de siècle queer authors adopted Latin rather than Greek literature and myths to explore GLBTQ themes, they did so in order to reach a more expansive audience. In other words, fin de siècle queer authors deployed Latin self-consciously in order to develop a more inclusive queer subculture that eschewed misogyny and exclusivity. To do so, they turned to Epicureanism and homoerotic bonds between women.

In volume four of *Imaginary Conversations* (1829)*,* Walter Savage Landor

(1775-1864) includes an invented conversation entitled "Epicurus, Leontion, and

Ternissa." The decadent publisher Vale Press, run by the romantic and artistic

collaborators Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, published an aesthetic edition of

the dialogue entitled *Epicurus* in 1896. Due to Walter Pater's appropriation of the

imaginary portrait genre published throughout the 1880s and collected in *Imaginary*

Portraits (1887)*,* Landor's Epicurus loomed large in the fin de siècle aesthetic and

decadent imaginary. In his dialogue between Epicurus and his students, the historical

philosopher Leontion and her fictionalized same-sex lover Ternissa, Epicurus praises

the romantic devotion between the two women:

> EPICURUS
> That white arm was then, as it is now, over the shoulder of Ternissa; and her
> breath imparted a fresh bloom to your cheek, a new music to your voice. No
> friendship is so cordial or so delicious as that of girl for girl; no hatred so
> intense and immovable as that of woman for woman. In youth you love one
> above the others of your sex; in riper age you hate all, more or less, in
> proportion to similarity of accomplishments and pursuits; which sometimes (I
> wish it were oftener) are bonds of union to men. In us you more easily pardon
> faults than excellences in each other. Your tempers are such, my beloved
> scholars, that even this truth does not ruffle them; and such is your affection,
> that I look with confidence to its unabated ardour at twenty. (23)

Landor imagines an unusual and distinctly Epicurean romantic scene between

women. In his imaginary dialogue, Landor suggests that it is from observing same-

sex love between women that Epicurus developed the erotic principles of his

philosophy. When Leontion lamentingly anticipates having "to survive the loss" of

homoerotic love in future womanhood, Epicurus declares: "Incomparable creatures!

may it be eternal! In loving ye shall follow no example; ye shall step securely over

the iron rule laid down for others by the Destinies, and you for ever be Leontion, and you Ternissa" (24). His observation of two women philosopher-lovers inspires him to extend homoerotic love as a permissible type of relationship that can exist beyond the traditional institution of pederasty.

Looking backward, Landor adapts Epicurus's philosophy on homoerotic love into a model to counter nineteenth-century characterizations of homoerotic desire between men and women. His observation that ardent love between young women later warps into rivalries based on admiration and similitude indicates that, as Marcus argues, feminine homoerotic bonds were well within normative expectations for womanhood. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussion about how homoerotic desire between men ultimately explodes in violent "homosexual panic" resounds in Landor's Epicurus's lament that "bonds of union to men" were more like those between women (*Epistemology of the Closet*, 19; Landor, 23). Yet, turning backwards to Roman philosophies of homosocial relationships between women, instead, allows Landor to theorize an alternative to the dynamic of rivalry and internalized homophobia perpetuated in modern literature's depictions of relationships between men.

As Landor's Epicurus continues discussing homosocial and heterosexual bonds with Leontion and Ternissa, he expands their example into a new philosophy of friendship and love. Echoing *De Rerum Natura,* Landor's dialogue concludes by presenting the Epicurean ideal homosocial relationship: "a middle state between love and friendship, more delightful than either, but more difficult to remain" (xlix).

Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* popularized the association of Epicurean

philosophy as signifying hedonistic homosexuality in the Victorian imaginary.

Women's same-sex love thus became the basis of the Epicurean homoeroticism for

the Victorian non-Latin-reading public and to the fin de siècle queer decadent

classicists who adopted Landor's emphasis on the homoerotics of Epicurean

philosophy. As we shall see, Pater in particular enacts Landor's Epicurus's wish,

creating a world where same-sex eros between men resembles the loving

relationships of women rather than the competitive relationships of men, and is

untethered to the twin institutions of pederasty and marriage.

Decadence and Epicureanism

By the time Ricketts had reprinted Landor's "Epicurus, Leontion and

Ternissa" in 1896, Pater, Symonds, and others had already begun popularizing

Epicureanism's erotic philosophy amongst fin de siècle homophilic aesthetes. Edward

Fitzgerald, a poet revered by the aesthetes, for instance, compared Omar Kayyám to

Lucretius in his preface to *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, the Astronomer-Poet of

Persia* (1859).[17] Following Fitzgerald's observation, W.H. Mallock loosely translated

passages from *De Rerum Natura* in *Lucretius on Life and Death in the Meter of Omar

Khayyám,* printed by the Bodley Head in 1900. Epicurean philosophy had also

entered into conversations surrounding the newfangled evolutionary sciences. In *The*

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[17] Five editions of Fitzgerald's translation were published in the nineteenth-century; the first four with substantial revisions during his lifetime and the fifth edited posthumously. See John D. Yohannan's *Persian Poetry in England and America* for a detailed account of the popularity of Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyám in late-Victorian England.

Atomic Theory of Lucretius Contrasted with Modern Doctrines of Atoms and

Evolution (1884), John Masson observed that Epicureanism anticipated the

nineteenth-century concept of evolution in its explanation that atoms and all the

things they form are driven together by a desire to merge predicts Charles Darwin's

account of sexual selection. Yet whereas nineteenth-century evolutionary biology saw

reproduction as pleasure's sole purpose, Epicurean philosophy viewed pleasure itself

as the goal, an incentive echoed in Pater's "Conclusion" to the *Renaissance:* "not the

fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end" (210).

Unlike Epicurus of Landor's light-hearted approach to the topic of same-sex

love between women, Symonds and Pater turned to same-sex love between men,

grappling with Landor's much earlier observation that eroticism between men was

overshadowed by the rivalries masculinity reinforced, unlike women who maintained

positive intimate bonds into adulthood. In his 1873 *Fortnightly Review* article entitled

"Lucretius," Symonds argues that there is a distinctly Roman type of eros from

"Greek Love," a euphemism for same-sex love, that developed out of Lucretius's

antiphrastic poetic elaboration of Epicurean sexual ethics. When Lucretius

loquaciously describes all of the desires, fantasies, and sexual acts that the good

Epicurean will refrain from, only occasionally indulging in, he elucidates the

paradoxical dialectic of pleasure and pain attractive to fin de siècle decadent writers:[18]

Yet whereas Ellis Hanson has explored the decadents' exploration of this trope

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[18] See Ellis Hanson's *Decadence and Catholicism.* Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 1998.

extensively in decadent Catholic-themed work, Symonds links it to the much earlier

Roman Epicurean philosophy:

> Lucretius, who treats of physical desire as torment, asserts the impossibility of its perfect satisfaction. There is something almost tragic in these sighs and pantings and pleasure-throes, and incomplete fruitions of souls pent up within their frames of flesh. We seem to see a race of men and women, such as have never lived, except perhaps in Rome or in the thought of Michael Angelo, coupling in leonine embraces that yield pain, whereof the climax is, at best, relief of rage and respite for a moment from consuming fire. (48)

This characterization of Roman eros derives from the Epicurean hierarchy of pleasure

that privileges philosophical over physical pleasure, friendship over marriage, casual

infrequent sex over love, thereby, as Landon's Epicurus reiterates, espousing intimate

erotic friendships over heterosexual marriage. "The decadent," as Ellis Hanson has

distinctly declared, "is addicted to his own longing, his desire to desire without

respite" (4). Pater's novel traces modern nineteenth-century decadence back to

Epicureanism. Pater views Epicurean philosopher as a precursor to the modern

decadent and Roman love as a euphemism, connoting homoerotic and queer

attachment, that by the fin-de-siècle became nearly as popular as "Greek Love". For

Pater and Symonds, two men whose works were foundational to the decadent

movement as well as the field of sexology, Roman Love depicted an exquisitely

torturous GLBTQ existence under an oppressive empire, while the Latin language

enabled them to more widely disseminate queer discourse.

In *Marius the Epicurean,* Pater explores the residual traces of ancient Greek

pederasty, "Greek Love," within decadent Roman literary culture through these

scenes of reception—literary criticism, translation, and adaptation of the classics. In

her recent work on Roman sexuality, Jennifer Ingleheart has observed that, contrary to the assumption that Roman "homosexuality" simply imitated the ancient Greeks, it was actually quite different, and, she argues, more akin to modern homosexuality. Along with a specifically Roman celebration of Priapus and well-endowed men, as well as the greater volume and space given sexual subjects, Ingleheart suggests that the Romans had a greater variety of (homo)erotic configurations because they never institutionalized Greek pederasty:

> [Rome's] adherence to a less rigidly structured age-related model of same-sex relationships than that of Greek pederasty; Roman texts contain more examples of men's desire for and sex with other adult males, and have thus been read as authorizing same-sex relationships which involve partners defined by their *same*-sex attraction rather than their desire for the sexually *other*. (*Ancient Rome and the Construction of Modern Homosexual Identities,* 6)

Following Ingleheart's observation, I suggest that Pater recognized in Epicurean philosophy and Roman culture new, alternative models of same-sex intimacy. Throughout *Marius the Epicurean*, Marius surveys the Latin literary canon, and Pater intertextualizes Roman literature that focuses specifically on homoeroticism including but not limited to Tibullus, Catullus, Lucian, Apuleius, and, of course, Lucretius. When Pater embeds heterosexual literature, he frames them with scenes of homoerotic reception between Marius and Roman authors like Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto, Lucian, and Apuleius. Latin Literature comes to represent a new model for homoeroticism between men to counter Platonic pederasty, disaffiliating age from same-sex relationships in ways that made it possible for adults to live an erotic homosocial lifestyle.

Unlike Symonds, who, as Amy Richlin observes, "wrote…damningly of Roman male-male love" in contrast to elevated Greek pederasty, Pater views "Roman Love" in terms of a more expansive, egalitarian, and heterogeneous queer literary culture than "Greek Love." In *Marius,* he represents a specifically Roman queer decadent literary culture. The Epicurean's principle of egalitarianism allows Pater to reconstitute representations of homoerotic intellectual scholarship that level the conventional power dynamics of the ancient Greek world. Whereas the *eromenos*, the pupil philosopher and youthful lover, had for the most part acted the part of interlocutor in Greek dialogues, Pater imagines a more inclusive Roman literary community of co-authorship. His historical novel imagines itself inserting into extant Roman literature a text that appropriates literature depicting various classical homoerotic types of characters, from the youthful beloved, *eromenos,* to the adult reviled *mollis* or *cinaedus,* derogatory names used to describe men who maintained the effeminate, passive role of the *eromenos* into adulthood.

Roman Love and Co-Authorship

Pater's Marius depicts Roman homoerotic, philosophical collaborations between men that, unlike Greek pederasty, represent more leveled power dynamics that led to a new understanding of authorship. Pater represents a Roman world where same-sex men collaborate more equally together regardless of age, class, and other considerations. Queer collaboration is the heart of imperial Roman society as depicted

in *Marius,* and Pater depicts these homoerotic collaborators as the authors of a literary decadence that emerged out of Epicurean philosophy within a decadent empire.

Marius's community abounds with romantic and literary partnerships, situating the titular character (a fictional, predominant Roman Epicurean philosopher) within a social milieu that includes Marcus Aurelius, Cornelius Fronto, Apuleius, and Lucian. Translating Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche" together, Marius and his companion Flavian discover the delightful secrets of eros, before co-authoring the *Pervigilium Veneris*. Pater's fictionalized Emperor Marcus Aurelius and the orator Cornelius Fronto retain their pederastic relationship into middle age, devoting an entire chapter to their relationship, which Pater relays through inserted passages from their amatory epistolary correspondence. Elsewhere, a scene loosely based on a bacchanalian dinner party from Petronius's bawdy *Satyricon* (late-1st c. AD) sets the stage for the authors Apuleius and Lucian to recite the latter's dialogue *The Halcyon* (early-2nd c. AD). The final inserted translation is another Lucian dialogue, *Hermotimus* (2nd c. AD), which Pater frames with a countryside scene of cruising between his friends Hermotimus and Lucian.

Throughout the novel, Pater's Marius observes and experiences various types of bonds between men in order to show that homoeroticism continued to play an integral part in the scholarly life of Rome in spite of the fact that the Romans never institutionalized pederasty. Indeed, Pater suggests that the Romans' lack of institutionalization actually enabled a greater variety of same-sex relations to flourish.

Pater shows Greek pederasty to be one of many models, unofficially adapted by the Romans as a gateway for exploring same-sex love. Numerous relationships throughout the novel break the mold. The first scene of intimacy in the novel is both implicitly and explicitly framed in terms of Greek pederasty: the young adult Marius has an eroticized intellectual encounter with an older priest of Asclepius who recites Plato's *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BC)*,* the dialogue espousing eros between men. I will discuss the intertextuality of the passage in the context of translation below, but for now my point is that Pater represents Marius's introduction into Greek pederasty in theory and praxis as if it were an initiation into homoerotic life as opposed to, as the Greeks would have it, a finite period of young adulthood. In contrast to the Greek model where power differentiations abound, Pater represents Roman homoerotic literary discourse as collaborative, with both men taking a prominent role in the literary criticism and development of new discourse.

Roman Love resists the temporal and class constraints of Greek pederasty, embracing collaborative authorship to ritualize bonds between men. Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto become lifelong lovers and collaborators, while Marius and Flavian invent a new philosophical school before the latter dies of the Antonine plague, and Marius eventually falls in love with another companion, the knight Cornelius. In all these instances, vernacular Latin becomes a language of love between men. Marius and Flavian explicitly quote Cornelius Fronto encouraging his beloved Marcus Aurelius to use the Latin language for its neologisms and golden prose in the preface surrounding their translation of "Cupid and Psyche" (68). Pater's

Marius and Flavian, they deliberately chose to write in Latin because it is both "popular and revolutionary," a "*proletariate*" language accessible to a wider audience. Choosing Latin as the language to express same-sex desire, as opposed to the less widely taught, elitist Greek, Marius and Flavian (and by extension Pater) make practicing same-sex desire and acting in non-gender-conforming ways a possibility for more than just a select elite. Ingleheart has recently discussed how modernist authors like Philip Gillespie Bainbrigge (1890-1918) and his Cambridge circle, were "far from alone in using Latin as an intimate homoerotic language and therefore that its living tradition as an erotic language carries on in elite homosocial circles into relatively recent times" (*Masculine Plural* 3). Pater is a predecessor to the movement that aimed to reclaim Latin's classical homoeroticism. *Marius the Epicurean* attempted to disseminate Roman Love to a more than elitist college circle, in keeping with the Epicurean tenant that everyone was entitled to learn and practice philosophy and sexual dissent.

Pater depicts Roman Love as complexly woven into Roman daily life than in the Greek tradition. His decision to depict Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto in terms of a lifelong romantic, philosophical companionship suggests how foundational same-sex companionships were to imperial Roman life. Pater models Marius and Flavian after Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto, the Roman emperor and the orator and Aurelius's instructor and probable lover, whom Pater fictionalizes as romantic lifelong collaborators in the novel. In 139 CE, Fronto's reputation as the

"foremost orator of his time" led him to be selected as the future emperor's rhetoric instructor (Richlin 4).

Amy Richlin's *Marcus Aurelius in Love: The Letters of Marcus and Fronto* tentatively presents the correspondence between the two renowned Romans as a romantic or intimate friendship: "maybe," Richlin poses, "they fell in love" (4). Richlin observes that, of the Victorians, "only Pater shows signs of having set eyes on the Marcus-Fronto letters," since he cites their correspondence in the chapters focuses on the relationship between the two men (7). Drawing from Aurelius and Fronto's collaboration, Pater extends the historical pederastic relationship between the two into a lifelong companionship. In his retelling of Aurelius's life in Chapter thirteen, Pater privileges this queer archive of romantic letters, rediscovered in the nineteenth century, over more prominent Roman histories like the *Historia Augusta.* The Aurelius-Fronto correspondence is the only real, extant set of love letters from classical antiquity, another way Pater positions Latin as the language of homoerotic discourse and places same-sex eros at the heart of imperial Roman culture.

It is crucial that Pater uses Marcus Aurelius, known as the last good emperor whose death marks the end of the Pax Romana, as opposed to decadent emperors such as Nero, Commodus, or Elagabalus, to depict Roman Love because it provides a counternarrative to the assumption homoeroticism was a symptom of the decadence that enabled Rome's decline. Instead, Pater suggests homoeroticism was an integral component of imperial culture. In the chapter highlighting the Aurelius and Fronto companionship, Pater incorporates anecdotes, translates passages, and fleshes out

Aurelius's domestic and political life based on their correspondence. The chapter's title, "The Mistress and Mother of Palaces," purports to highlight the Empress Faustina, yet the entire chapter focuses on the extended fictional relationship between Fronto and Aurelius.

The title evokes the interchangeability of Marcus Aurelius's mother and mistress/wife within the Aurelius/Fronto correspondence; "Lady" is used to address both Aurelius's own mother and wife, both of whom appear less prominently than Aurelius's children. In the chapter, like the correspondence it incorporates, Pater emphasizes not the heteroreproductive relationship between Aurelius and the mother of his children, but rather the intergenerational relationship between Fronto and Aurelius. Faustina remains, as in the letters, "a cipher…less of a presence than Marcus's mother" (Richlin 18). Pater diminishes her role as maternal figure while highlighting Aurelius and Fronto's paternal role in raising the imperial children. In Fronto's role as imperial teacher to Aurelius's children, he becomes the secondary caretaker, a father figure within the household. Historically, Fronto educated both Aurelius and his children, although the imperial pupil and his tutor became increasingly distant after the former's marriage.[19] In Pater's fictional account, Fronto is a lifelong mainstay in Aurelius's palace, and the two collaboratively produce poetry while raising the children.

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[19] In a letter written a year after he married, Aurelius told Fronto he had become disinterested in rhetoric (Letter 42, Richlin 139-140). Richlin observes that "the relationship deteriorated drastically after that point" (21).

Pater extracts his accounts of the Aurelius household not from Roman history but from the intimate letters between the two men, constructing a picture of domesticity that situates Faustina and Aurelius in terms of a heterosexual marriage of convenience that relies on the lifelong pederastic companionship between Aurelius and Fronto to help ensure domestic bliss. Moreover, these translations and allusions to the correspondence, both inserted translations situate the same-sex couple as co-parents who jointly nurture the Aurelius children: "*our* little one is better," reports Aurelius in Pater's own translation (160, emphasis mine). The Aurelius children frequently provided the duo a pretext for romantic discourse to be written in the absence of the beloved. Fronto writes that seeing the similarity between the emperor and his children reminds him of his beloved, and parental affection supplements his romantic affection for Aurelius in his absence: "[I] will…give a thorough kissing to her tiny little hands and those tiny little fat feet than to your royal neck and your mouth" (145). Incorporating passages about Aurelius and Fronto's co-parenting emphasizes how same-sex romantic partnerships were a crucial, harmonizing element to Roman imperial domesticity.

Pater also explicitly incorporates the romantic element of their partnership within *Marius the Epicurean*, inserting his own translations professing their longing for one another, "as superstitious people watch for the star, at the rising of which they may break their fast" (160). The passages elucidate a romantic aspect to this eroticism as well, distinguishing the same-sex lovers from "superstitious people" and alluding to "their very dreams of each other" (160).

"If I ever see you in my dreams…there's never a time when I'm not putting my arms around you and kissing you thoroughly…. When your image…catches my eye on my way, this never happens without jolting from my mouth the gape and dream of a kiss." (144)

Romanticizing the dynamic between Aurelius and Fronto revises the Victorian assumption that Roman same-sex love was somehow less evolved, cerebral, and celestial than that of ancient Greece. Pater's revisionist history presents Aurelius and Fronto as lifelong partners whose intense romantic love, intellectual collaboration, and co-parenting situates them comfortably within the heart of normative culture. Not dissimilar to Sharon Marcus's observation that female homoerotic friendships between women were secondary romantic relationships that continued after female friends had married, Pater presents Aurelius and Fronto as having a prominent, even primary, romantic relationship that takes precedent over the marital relationship between Aurelius and Faustina (the latter of whom exists only in statue form in *Marius*).

Pater seems to have used loosely used the homoerotic collaborative relationship between Aurelius and Fronto as a model for that between Marius and Flavian in the novel. Although the chapter featuring the relationship between Aurelius and Fronto appears after Marius and Flavian begin their collaborative partnership, Pater depicts them in similar terms, developing the fictional characters' partnership based in part on a passage of the Aurelius and Fronto correspondence when they directly discuss their collaboration. In the novel, Marius transcribes and later disseminates *Pervigilium Veneris,* the poem that Flavian had written on his deathbed. The scene of dictation and transcription between the collaborators is reminiscent of

the Aurelius and Fronto correspondence. During one of their separations, Fronto had sent Aurelius one of his orations, which Aurelius recited for an imperial audience before transcribing in his own hand in a letter recounting his performance. Fronto romanticizes the occasion in an embellished letter:

> "you adapted your eyes and your voice and your gestures and especially your mind for my use. I don't see any one of the classical writers at all who was luckier than I am…. I'm not surprised that a speech decorated by the distinction of your lips gave pleasure….What words could I use to express my joy that you sent me that old speech of mine written out by your own hand?....For every letter on the page, that's how many consulships, that's how many laurels, triumphs, victory robes I think I achieved…. My speech will live on because it was written by the hand of Marcus Caesar. Why, even someone who scorns the oration will lust after the letters; someone who scorns what was written will hold in awe the one who wrote it down" (118-19)

By orating and transcribing Fronto's speech, Aurelius plays an active role in disseminating it into Roman culture. The self-deprecative diminishing of the oration itself foregrounds the act of collaborative dissemination. The beloved's act of orating is described erotically, "your lips gave pleasure," and affectionately, written "by your own hand." The power dynamic between *erastes* and *eromenos* within the Fronto and Aurelius relationship is clearly due to Aurelius's status as emperor, as the letter acknowledges. Within *Marius the Epicurean,* however, Pater uses them as an example to illustrate a type of Roman Love that overturned classical homoerotic dynamics putting the *erastes* as philosophical and poetic authority above the *eromenos* who consistently played the passive interlocutor and beloved. The element of collaborative authorship and dissemination between men, as Fronto anticipates when he writes that "someone…will lust after the letters…will hold in awe the one

who wrote it down," becomes central to Pater's construction of homoerotic discourse in the novel.

After having studied Greek and Roman classics from Plato to Lucretius, Marius and Flavian join the Roman literati, creating their own poem, *The Pervigilium Veneris,* The Vigil of Venus. Pater describes a scene of collaborative authorship, where an ailing Flavian, suffering from the Antonine plague, lies on his deathbed composing the poem aloud while Marius "sat and wrote at his dictation, one of the latest but not the poorest specimens of genuine Latin poetry" (98). Pater, as external narrator, affiliates the poem with a decadent Silver Age style. Describing this style as a new appreciation of Latin language and neologism, he echoes Cornelius Fronto's request to Aurelius in the correspondence to write using a "tincture of 'neology' in expression—*nonihil interdum elocutione novella parum signatum*" (68). Pater's Marius and Flavian represent a cross-class same-sex romantic relationship between poets who embrace the Latin vernacular in order to write collaboratively. Latin was widely taught in Victorian public and private schools, thus making its homoerotic literature more accessible. It became even more accessible with the publication of Karl Heinrich Ulrich's Latin language journal, *Alaudae* (1889-1995), which included queer texts and aimed to revive Latin as a living language.

In *Marius the Epicurean,* Pater explores scholarly homoerotic discourse in the Latin tradition. In fact, it is through forming community outside of the boundaries of the school and its hierarchal structures that the Epicurean philosopher Marius, like Epicurus before him, develops an alternative homoerotic philosophy. Like Landor's

Epicurus who develops his homoerotic philosophy by observing women in love (with women), Marius and Flavian develop their first collaborative lyric that illustrates their developing decadent style based on a popular refrain they hear on the streets of Rome. The song's refrain espouses equal love for the experienced and inexperienced, the requited and unrequited, and, we can infer given the gender ambiguity I discuss in detail below, the same-sex as well as heterosexual lover. Pater inverts the hierarchical Greek model of pederasty and philosophy, wherein the Greek philosopher teaches a naive pupil who submits his body in exchange for knowledge as Marius does to the priest.

Instead, this Epicurean model explores two philosophizing schoolboys of differentiated class acquire their philosophy of eros from the vernacular Latin-speaking Roman public. Pater attributes Marius and Flavian with the invention of the *Pervigilium Veneris,* the "Vigil of Venus," an extant unattributed Latin poem, imagining it to have been co-written by same-sex Epicurean lovers. Marius and Flavian insert the Epicurean principle of egalitarian love into a love lyric, just as Lucretius used the medium of poetry to disseminate Epicurus's philosophy.

The lover-collaborators extract from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* an Epicurean poetic style, a secular understanding of the gods, and an erotic philosophy that they weave into the body of their co-authored *Pervigilium Veneris.* Hearing a popular refrain "from the lips of the young men" on the streets of Pisa inspires Flavian and Marius to create a love poem that, like "the magnificent *exordium* of

Lucretius" is "addressed to the goddess Venus" (93). The Proem of *De Rerum Natura* begins with the apostrophe to Venus:

> aeneadum genetrix, hominum diuomque voluptas,
> alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
> quae mare nauigerum, quae terras fugiferentis
> concelebras—per te quoniam genus omne animantum
> concipitus uisitque exortum lumina solis (DRN 1-5)
> Life-stirring Venus, Mother of Aeneus and Rome,
> Pleasure of men and gods, you make all things beneath the dome
> Of sliding constellations teem, you throng the fruited earth
> And the ship-frieghted sea—for every species comes to birth
> Conceived through you, and rises forth and gazes on the light. (1)

Like Lucretius's understanding of Venus as simply an embodiment of human desires, they describe the lover's sentimental current setting forcibly along his veins," his "purely physical excitement" so overwhelming that "he can hardly distinguish it from the animation of external nature, the upswelling of the seed in the earth, and of the sap through the trees" (93). The poetic statement explicating the intentions behind *Pervergilium Veneris* loosely paraphrases Lucretius's understanding of the goddess who represents erotic pleasure.

Marius and Flavian listen to young, enamored men joyfully singing a popular lyrical refrain, "*cras amet qui numquam amavit, / Quique amavit cras amet!*", a refrain that Pater leaves untranslated and that is notably devoid of a gendered love object (99). The *Pervigilium Veneris* is a poem written to a post-Lucretian secularized Venus, wherein the poet sings to Venus, symbolic of the natural world in springtime, and feature young women celebrating their experiences of discovering heterosexual love, before the ungendered poet inserts his own exclusion from love in the final stanza. By inserting the poem in *Marius* as a poem written collaboratively by a same-

sex partnership, Pater shows homoeroticism to be at the heart of ancient Roman culture. Moreover, Pater shows young men within the world of the novel ventriloquizing the refrain the young women sing in the poem, exploring a flexibility of gender roles in Roman culture. Although stanzas of the *Pervigilium Veneris* contain gendered language that situates eros within a heterosexual context, Pater excludes them from the novel. He includes only the poem's ambiguous refrain and an allusion to the poet's tragic exclusion, making available the possibility that the beloved is either "a boy with girlish limbs or a woman," to quote Lucretius's indiscriminate description of the potential beloved (Rouse). Inserting the *Pervigilium Veneris* within the context of same-sex romantic and poetic collaborators and extending the fragment into a complete poem, Pater emphasizes the love lyric's queer origin. Moreover, he retains the oral tradition from which the lovers collaboratively write the lyrics in order to draw attention to the fact that same-sex love is prevalent enough in Roman society that the popular lyrical refrain does not gender the beloved.

Pater's historicization of the *Pervigilium Veneris* within homoerotic discourse between men draws from the lyric's final stanza, in which an ungendered poet announces their exclusion from the otherwise inclusive system of eros.[20] Until the final stanza, the entire poem celebrates a community in which Roman culture will permit both lovers who have loved before and lovers who have never loved to love in the future. The equal love expressed throughout the poem is disrupted by the poet who bemoans their expulsion from this inclusive amatory world: "illa cantat; *nos*

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[20] I use the singular "they" to emphasize the gender ambiguity of the poem's speaker.

tacemus; quando ver venit meum?" ("she sings; we are silenced; when will my spring come?" (90). While the poem focuses on women singing about the universality of love, the ungendered poet expresses the exclusion of themselves and their beloved through the first-person plural "we are silenced."[21] Because neither the poet's nor the beloved's gender is stated, the poem's conclusion leaves open the possibility of same-sex love. Pater invents an origin for this mysterious unattributed poem that elaborates the ambiguity of the final stanza. From the ungendered poet's slip into the first-person plural he invents collaborative authorship between two same-sex lovers.

Co-authorship and literary collaboration ritualizes romantic bonds between men in *Marius,* transforming the structure of the closet, with its silence, censorship, and subtext, into a framing device with which to juxtapose institutionalized and unsanctioned love. It is no coincidence that Marius describes the poem they compose as "a kind of nuptial hymn" that features "the thought of nature as the universal mother, celebrated the preliminary pairing and mating together of all fresh things" (98). It is a clear echo of Lucretius' language about a secularized Venus, the embodiment of pleasure from whom "all things" are conceived.

Fin-de-siècle authors take note of the resonances between Lucretius's understanding of sex and love with that of Darwin's sexual selection. In *Lucretius on Life and Death* (1900), Mallock compares Lucretius to modern scientists:

> Lucretius was, so far as the knowledge of his time would allow him to be, as completely and consciously a scientific man and a physicist as Darwin, or Huxley, or any of our contemporary evolutionists. Indeed his doctrines,

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[21] I use the singular neutral "they" to emphasize the poet's speaker's indeterminant gender.

allowing for certain inevitable differences, are astonishingly similar to theirs; and his general conception of the conclusions to which all science is tending may be said to be absolutely identical. (vi-vii)

Mallock continues by making the comparison between the concept of natural selection with Lucretius's understanding that men are subject to the same rules of reproduction and death as all other nonhuman living and nonliving things. Fin-de-siècle poets writing literature inspired by Epicureanism, whether Lucretius himself or, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter Two, Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* discovered in this earlier imperial Roman literature an understanding of sexuality in elemental, materialist terms. Roman literary culture celebrated sexuality as a natural phenomenon worthy of cultural elevation in the highest form: epic poetry. Queer decadent poets increasingly adapted this tradition, especially after the recriminalization of homosexuality, because it presented queer erotic desire as both natural and cultural, something existing in the natural world that was worthy of cultivation in high literary form.

Inspired by Lucretius and the dissemination of his poetry in earlier imperial Roman literature like Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche," Marius and Flavian give birth to a new voluptuous literary movement celebrating fleshy love in rococo style. Pater directly attributes the development of this style to homoerotic desire:

Marius noticed there, amid all its richness of expression and imagery, the firmness of outline he had always relished so much in the composition of Flavian. Yes! A firmness like that of some master of noble metal-work, manipulating tenacious bronze or gold. Even now that haunting refrain, with its *impromptu* variations, from the throats of those strong young men, came floating through the window:
    Cras amet qui nunquam amavit,
    Quique amavit cras amet!

—repeated Flavian, tremulously, dictating yet one stanza more. (99)

Pater associates aesthetic with bodily form in this passage, as he increasingly describes Flavian's "composition" in terms of the embodied masculine physical beauty of the ancient bronze statue and contrasts his ailing body to "strong young men" he formerly resembled. On Flavian's deathbed, the duo rush to complete the *Pervigilium Veneris*. Marius, *"*haunted by a feeling of the triviality of such work," longs for a break from "those hours of excited attention to his manuscript" in order to appreciate his "purely physical wants of Flavian" before his death (99). The scene echoes the final stanza of *Pervigilium Veneris,* describing romantic partnership who are excluded from love and who desperately long for a future when their "twittering notes [will] be heard" and their love accepted. Pater's framing adaptation concludes with a deathbed scene between the dying Flavian and Marius, showing that their same-sex intimacy is fleeting:

> in the darkness Marius lay down beside him, faintly shivering now in the sudden cold, to lend him his own warmth, undeterred by the fear of contagion…. "Is it a comfort," he whispered then, "that I shall often come and weep over you?" –"Not unless I be aware, and hear you weeping!" (101)

Pater concludes the scene with an intimate goodbye between men. Marius's last words to Flavian promise him that he, like a Roman widow, will return to weep over Flavian's grave, while Flavian echoes the Epicurean atomistic understanding that there is no afterlife. When Marius comes out of mourning, he helps to disseminate Flavian and his poetic philosophy, earning himself a place among the prominent Latin poets of his day.

Queer Decadent Translation and Adaptation

Pater made quite an impression on the aestheticist and decadent authors who read *Marius the Epicurean* when it was first published in 1885. Pater self-consciously translated decadence into the English language through an historical novel mimicking the French illicit yellow book he likens to the Roman golden book, titling the novel after the Greek philosophy of pleasure preserved through Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, widely considered to be one of the major contributors to the Hellenization of Rome.[22] The novel is also situated on the cusp of Roman decadence, its central characters represented as inheritors of an aestheticized philosophy of pleasure. Pater's contemporaries lauded *Marius the Epicurean* as the English golden book; Oscar Wilde called Pater "the one man in this century who can write prose…take *Marius the Epicurean*—any page" while George Moore professed that Pater's novel made him fall in love with English:

> "Marius the Epicurean" was more to me than a mere emotional influence, precious and rare though that may be, for this book was the first in English prose I had come across that procured for me any genuine pleasure in the language itself, in the combination of words for silver or gold chime, and unconventional cadence, and for all those lurking half-meanings, and that evanescent suggestion, like the odour of dead roses, that words retain to the last of other times and elder usage…."Marius" was the stepping-stone that carried me across the channel into the genius of my own tongue. The translation was not too abrupt; I found a constant and careful invocation of meaning that was a little aside of the common comprehension, and also a sweet depravity of ear for unexpected falls of phrase, and of eye for the less observed depths of colours, which although new was a sort of sequel to the

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[22] See "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* by Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (1) and Monica Gale's "Lucretius and Previous Poetic Traditions" from the same volume for a more detailed account on Lucretius's indebtedness to Greek literature.

education I had chosen, and a continuance of it in a foreign, but not wholly unfamiliar medium, and so, having saturated myself with Pater, the passage to De Quincey was easy. He, too, was a Latin in manner and in temper of mind; but he was truly English….

Likewise, when Oscar Wilde conversed with Michael Field about Pater's novel. When they met at a salon in the summer of 1890, they discuss translation and language-choice in terms of its "colour-forces": "there were certain colour-forces in English—a power of rendering gloom—not in the French," Wilde says, distinguishing the colors of French as pink and blue while the colors of English, silver and gray, are more suitable for describing the "dignity and gloom" of Spanish. Latin is viewed as sharing with English a similar tendency towards grayscale gloom, a synaesthetic translation from classical to modern language described in terms of affective reactions to the visual impression of reading the printed word. In a similar vein, Pater's *Marius* uses gold—golden literature and imagery—to describe specifically decadent, Roman-to-English literature. This aestheticized theory of translation extends conventional understandings of translation as a rendering of text from one original language into another.

Decadent translation is often ekphrastic, since it accounts for forms beyond the text, including textual but also other textiles, architecture, landscape, sculpture, jewelry, and music. It is queer in that instead of unmistakably converting one specific text or thing into another form, it frequently poses as the original work itself, an oxymoronic translated facsimile. In *The Renaissance,* Pater wrote, quoting Matthew Arnold, that aesthetic criticism intended to "see the object as in itself it really is," prompting Michael Field, another fin-de-siècle author whom I'll discuss in my next

chapter, "to translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures [as well as other art forms] sing in themselves" (*Sight and Song* v). Queer decadent translation, by contrast with aesthetic criticism, is the willful, often perverse, translation of already queer and decadent literature and art in order for the invisible translator to revive the sensibility of the work in question. It decentralizes the role of the writer in favor of the art objects, an attempt to recuperate characters' and objects' affects that consequently redefines even as it conceals the role of the translator. As Rose writes, the consequence of the translated text posing as the original work is that "the translator becomes invisible and the foreign [original] writer visible," for as Rose also points out, translation reflects not only characters and objects but also the translator and the original author (46). The masquerade of decadent translation is queer because it revels in performing a form it knows to be not unchanging but rather metamorphic; it is specifically queer, with the linguistic performance featuring non-normative identities and desires. It is also decadent, literarily with an emphasis on highly stylized, poetic language, and thematically with its eccentric and excessive aesthetic and sexual materialism.

As we see in *Marius,* queer decadent translation is invested in the veiling and revealing the practice of translation, and the ambiguity of origins that it highlights being both aesthetic and sexual: having overheard schoolboys chant a song about heterosexual love, Flavian extends it into a vigil, which Marius transcribes, thus creating the *Pervigilium Veneris,* on Flavian's deathbed as he dies enwrapped in the loving arms of Marius, thus enacting the poet's prophecy that he himself will not love

tomorrow. Decadent translation's emphasis on exploring affect becomes especially interesting in terms of the classics, since Greek and Roman queer texts are translated differently in Pater in particular and decadent literature in general. Whereas in Greek fin de siècle writers write more cryptically, queer Roman intertextuality and translation is more explicit, more campy.

Pater compares Marius's pleasure-based philosophy to decadence, which he defines as literary style inextricable from lifestyle, while divorcing decadence from its association with decay and degeneracy. At a symposium attended by renowned Roman literati, Marius wraps himself in the cloth of decadence, the *flammeum*, a flame-color bridal veil, whose "golden fibre" Pater appreciates in the obscure classics he anthologizes in the novel. Pater engages in what I'm describing as a queer decadent translational practice—the practice of explicitly inserting translations (which themselves are deliberate perversions of the Latin) while simultaneously implicitly performing another version of the story. Queer decadent translation materializes in the novel consistently around texts about marriage rituals, including especially stylistically and thematically decadent texts like Martial's poem comparing his lover's jewel-bedazzled hands to his poetry or Apuleius's decorative description of Psyche's marriage to a snake monster. Pater inserts historical, mythic, and literary instances of heterosexual marriage into the text at moments when Marius and his companion imitate the narratives of queer, campy versions of the story. These campy adaptations imitate the content and language of Roman homoerotic literature. Ingleheart has argued that for modernist homoerotic authors like Philip Gillespie

Bainbrigge, "[t]he Latin language…offered…models for writing in a very direct manner about sex" (99). Pater employs Latin's "coy euphemisms" and erotic "frankness" into *Marius*'s scenes of homoerotic reception, scenes that have largely gone undetected as such due to the novel's overwhelming emphasis of philosophical meditation over plot.

Having argued that Pater portrays a Roman homosocial collaborative partnership contingent on Rome's adaption of the Epicurean rather than pederastic model of homoerotic relationship, I now examine two scenes more closely for the homoerotic discourse these collaborative authors produced. Throughout the novel, Pater emphasizes the inherent queerness of supposedly heteronormative texts featuring marriages like Apuleius's Cupid and Psyche's, the inserted stories of which he frames with Marius enacting various marriage rituals with his companions, culminating with Marius cross-dressing in the late-Empress Faustina's wedding attire as Apuleius's bride. The campy adaptations with which Pater frames his inserted translations represent an atomically and aesthetically Epicurean translational style while the erotic philosophy they espouse is also consistent with Epicurean sexual ethics' emphasis on friendship and fleeting, detached sex. Pater highlights Lucretius's materialism through his practice of doubly translating, through framing his inserted translations with campy adaptations. The flickering, gilded synaesthetic language together with his impressionistic recreation of the original scene is deeply indebted to Lucretius's understanding that all things, including mental as well as physical images, are the result of the different configurations of atoms. Pater appropriates Lucretius's

atomic poetics, the way in which Lucretius uses form to convey his materialist philosophy, to explore the relation between translation and adaptation, original and copy, earnest and parodic recreation. Pater applies Lucretius's poetic conception of Epicurean philosophy to form on a greater scale, atomically reconfiguring elements from the inserted translation into the framing parodic scene. Pater includes both an adaptation embedded in the frame narrative and an inserted translation, inserting these classic Roman texts within a homosocial discourse from which he imagines them to have emerged. In other words, Pater calls originality into question, experimenting with the aestheticist motto that life imitates art; by retroactively embedding these texts within homoerotic contexts imitative of the translated texts, he shows homoeroticism to be at the heart of Roman culture.

The first scene sets the stage for this contrast between Roman and Greek queer culture. As a young man troubled by a childhood illness, Marius convalesces in a temple of Asclepius. Marius awakes from a dream in which a large snake (the metamorphosed god of medicine Asclepius) slithers around his body to find a "youthful" priest of Asclepius sitting on his bed gazing at him affectionately. Marius the retrospective narrator associates his younger experience with the "recent initiate" of "unnatural pleasure" from Plato's *Phaedrus,* the homoerotic initiation to "love of visible beauty" (250e-251a). Pater incorporates Marius the narrator's paraphrase of Plato's *Phaedrus* in which Socrates describes the interconnectedness between the body and soul as a 'winged' soul, evoking the quill of a pen and euphemistically an erect phallus. In his translation, Stephen Scully notes that Plato deliberately eroticizes

the passage, using euphemistic language to describe sexual arousal: "With other words in this passage referring to growth, swelling, and pulsing, it appears as if the double entendre ["wing's stalk"—"erect phallus"] is fully intended" (Scully, 251b ff. 77 32). Pater's mentor Benjamin Jowett's translation of *Phaedrus* translates the eroticism as follows:

> As he receives the effluence of beauty through the eyes, the wing moistens and he warms. And as he warms, the parts out of which the wing grew, and which had been hitherto closed and rigid, and had prevented the wing from shooting forth are melted, and as nourishing streams upon him. (Plato, 556)

The passage in *Phaedrus* continues to embellish the pleasures of sexual gratification before turning to its consequent unfolding into madness and torment, an understanding of love we see echoed in Lucretius's description. Marius echoes Plato's masturbatory language, describing the priest gazing affectionately at Marius as he begins lecturing him on topics he "found afterwards in Plato's *Phaedrus*, which supposes men's spirits susceptible to certain influences, diffused, after the manner of streams or currents, by fair things or persons visibly present" (53). As in Plato's original, Marius embeds homoeroticism as the subtext of a philosophical discourse that seeps over onto the surface through ejaculatory, phallic imagery: "thought[s] arose in his mind," culminating with a climactic "relief from distress" (53). Marius continues to recount two very different versions of the events he holds in his memory:

> The memory of that night's double experience, the dream of the great sallow snake and the utterance of the young priest, always returned to him, and the contrast therein involved made him revolt with unfaltering instinct from the bare thought of an excess in sleep, or diet, or even in matters of taste, still more from any excess of a coarser kind. (55)

Marius's "double experience" evokes Lucretius's passage on erotic dreams, expressing confusion about whether the dream is truly reality or only fantasy. The layers upon layers of subterfuge exist on the level of translation: Marius listens to the priest's Latin description of Greek philosophy that Pater then paraphrases in English. And they also stratify different sexual ethics: the celebratory homoerotics of Plato that Pater aligns with the Roman followers of Asclepius and Marius's Epicureanism that prompts him to repress as a means through which to control his (homo)erotic desires. In a psychoanalytic reading of the gigantic serpent Marius recollects, the serpent represents either an autoerotic dream or a repressed homoerotic encounter with the priest of Asclepius; Pater could easily justify this to Victorian censors, since Asclepius had the power to metamorphosize into a snake. Pater's prose in this scene also functions on two narratological levels. On the one hand, Pater allows the youthful character Marius to indulge in pleasure, enjoying the sexual acts of the present. On the other hand, Pater incorporates the retrospective narrator Marius's more temperate Epicurean development. The older, retrospective narrator Marius, who has learned to "revolt with unfaltering instinct from the bare thought of excess" enables Pater to simultaneously to relish in the younger character Marius's enjoyment of "*bare…excess,*" the physical pleasure and "the love of visible beauty", that led him, like Plato's Socrates, to ascend from material to philosophical pleasure (53, emphasis mine).

Unlike the episode above, the other lengthy scenes of homoerotic discourse within the novel focus on Latin literature translated by the fictional Marius and

Flavian as well as other notable Roman authors who collaboratively translate and create the scenes they translate, frequently adapting their own experiences. The dual translational practice of paratextual adaptation and inserted translation appears throughout *Marius*, as does Pater's manner of elucidating similarities between Epicureanism and other philosophies. In what follows, I examine the queer relationship between translation and adaptation using Pater's Marius's engagement with "Cupid and Psyche" as the central example, since it is the touchstone of Pater's translational theory.

As the above intertextuality illustrates, Pater's Marius's autobiography mediates between surface level and subtextual explorations of sexual ethics and experiences. Taken together, the explicitly embedded texts provide the blueprints for understanding the repressed erotic encounters Marius the narrator ambiguously records in order to chart his journey from wavering youthful pleasure-seeker, exploring the delights of Platonic eros, to an older ascetic Epicurean who successfully controls his desires. In the subsequent chapters of *Marius,* Pater develops a style to match the erotic content. Pater engages with what I'm describing as a queer decadent translational practice—the practice of explicitly inserting translations while simultaneously implicitly adapting these translations within the paratextual novel. This technique, as I have discussed above, both disseminates Lucretius's Epicureanism and derives from specifically Lucretian poetics. Crucially, Marius diverges from Lucretius by conceiving of Epicureanism as a philosophy that privileges homoeroticism as the realm of creativity; Pater's creative adaptations are

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entirely homosocial, and arguably homoerotic. The inserted translation is consistently 'straight' in both the sense that it is a literal translation and that it is a heterosexual one. The framing narratives all adapt the inserted translation and add homosocial scenes of classical reception—reading, translation, orating—between men whose actions mirror those within the inserted text. Pater thus reappropriates eros in Latin literature into a homoerotic discourse between men.

"Cupid and Psyche" epitomizes the relationship between the homoerotic paratext and heteroreproductive text, and becomes the touchstone of Marius's aesthetic style. Pater explicitly outlines his translational practice in the chapter following his inserted translation of Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche" from *The Metamorphoses,* thereby using "Cupid and Psyche" as an exemplar for this new model. Apuleius's original myth, "Cupid and Psyche," the marriage between physical eros and spiritual psyche, describes the mortal woman Psyche's sexual curiosity and gratification upon marrying Cupid, whom she believes to be a giant snake monster. The story concludes with Psyche's immortalization and the birth of Cupid and Psyche's daughter Voluptas. Apuleius personifies the primary principle of Epicurean philosophy: *voluptas*, which is only attainable through equal love. The story serves the dual function in *Marius* of articulating an allegory for the philosophy's emphasis on the relationship between eros and psyche*,* physical and philosophical/psychological spirit, and the egalitarian dynamics it emphasizes, since Psyche's immortalization levels the power dynamics of the relationship, as the framing narrative makes clear.

In the chapter "The Golden Book," Pater frames his translation of "Cupid and Psyche" with a homosocial scene between Marius and Flavian. The dynamic between the youthful philosophers, Marius, a young nobleman, and Flavian, a slightly older freeman, is one Pater Pater's characters disregard Roman sexual politics, dismantling the traditional power dynamic that stipulated strict age and class distinctions for the roles of passive and active sexual partners. Like other decadent Roman texts, particularly *The Satyricon,* Pater upends Roman sexual roles by making the younger, aristocratic Marius the passive partner of the more intellectually advanced and sexually dominant freeman Flavian. Pater describes Marius as Flavian's "servant in many things"; the lovestruck Marius becomes "sentimental" as "their intimacy grew" and Flavian's "sway over him" increased (64). Homoerotic "intimacy" is coupled with the Lucretian atomic language of "sway[ing]" things, like atoms attracted to one another merging together, the two love objects becoming increasingly magnetized to one another. Marius retrospectively insinuates that he and Flavian practiced Lucretian homoerotic friendship, alluding to Flavian as the love object:

> in a world where manhood comes early, to the seductions of that luxurious town, and Marius wondered sometimes in the freer revelation of himself by conversation, at the extent of his early corruption…. His voice, his glance, were like the breaking in of the solid world upon one, amid the flimsy fictions of a dream. A shadow handling all thing as shadows, had felt a sudden real and poignant heat in them. (65)

The hazy dreamlike existence Marius describes alludes to the nine-hundred-line passage about eros from book four of *De Rerum Natura*; the passage begins by describing an erotic dream before proceeding to describe explicitly multiple erotic encounters. Pater echoes Lucretius's observations of youthful nocturnal emissions:

"when Manhood has made / Seed in their limbs…then images invade, / Images of some random body or other—bringing news / Of a lovely face and radiant complexion's rosy hues." (138, DRN IV.128-1033). Acknowledging the homoeroticism included in Lucretius's elaborate passage about sex, W.B. Yeats called it "the finest description of sexual intercourse ever written" (DRN IV.128-1033, quoted in Arkins, 148). In his lengthy description of the erotic passions, Lucretius lingers over the description of sexual fantasy as if it were reality, which Pater echoes in order to subtly indicate the physicality of Flavian and Marius's love. His memory of their youthful erotic intimacy is one he can acknowledge orally, "in the freer revelation of himself by conversation," yet necessarily censors in print. On the one hand, this censorship is historically accurate and in keeping with Roman etiquette stipulating that men not acknowledge when sexual acts accompanied erotic relationships. On the other hand, the encoded homoerotic language is typical of Pater and his disciples, for whom textual censorship became a means of evading persecution. Pater describes Flavian's "natural affection" for Marius, who sees in "[t]he much-admired freedman's son" a "natural aristocracy" because of his predilection for "sensuous gifts" and homoerotic love (65). Furthermore, Pater places Marius and Flavian's partnership in contrast to pederasty explicitly, giving the biography of Flavian's former master turned patron and *erastes*, who had gifted him Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (also known as *The Golden Ass*).

Pederastic patronage was the means through which Flavian came to be free and become educated. Yet rather than perpetuate the sexual politics inherent within

the stratified system of Roman slavery and patronage, he discovers in the book that

his patron gifts him an alternative erotic lifestyle. Just as Apuleius's Psyche ascends

from mortal to immortal, becoming Cupid's equal, Pater levels the power dynamics

between the two young same-sex lovers. In fact, it is through reading this myth that

the homosocial pair theorize a same-sex egalitarian relationship, a literary

collaboration that produces the translation Pater renders for *Marius* and attributes to

Marius in partnership with Flavian. Pater inserts the translation within the context of

Marius and Flavian's initial reading of the text. Like Cupid and Psyche, the

companions lie in a makeshift bed learning the lessons of love:

> two lads were lounging together over a book, half-buried in a heap of dry
> corn, in an old granary…. They looked round: the western sun smote through
> the broad chinks of the shutters. How like a picture! and it was precisely the
> scene described in what they were reading, with just that added poetic touch in
> the book which made it delightful and select, and, in the actual place, the ray
> of sunlight transforming the rough grain among the cool brown shadows into
> heaps of gold. What they were intent on was, indeed, the book of books, the
> "golden" book of that day, a gift to Flavian, as was shown by the purple
> writing on the handsome yellow wrapper, following the title Flaviane! It
> said…. It was perfumed with oil of sandal-wood, and decorated with carved
> and gilt ivory bosses at the ends of the roller.
> (*MTE* 67)

Pater illuminates the parallel he creates between the adaptive frame narrative and the

inserted translation, enveloping the texts and their characters in glitzy yellow

signifying decadence. This is notably the first instance of the English appropriation of

the decadent French tradition of enwrapping erotic novels in yellow covers, nine

years before *The Yellow Book* instantiated English decadence. *The Yellow Book,* an

English periodical was published by Elkin Matthew and John Lane at The Bodley

Head from 1894 to 1897 and was affiliated with the British Aestheticism and

Decadence movements. Its yellow cover, like Pater's, paid tribute to the French

tradition of wrapping lascivious literature in yellow covers. Pater aligns Marius and

Flavian with the protagonist, Jean des Esseintes, from Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À*

rebours, who also devours the classics.

In this scene, the narrator described as "truant reading" between the

schoolboys Marius and Flavian, the boys escape their rowdy companions in order to

read the opulent golden book Flavian's former master, current patron, and, it is

heavily implied, *erastes,* gifted him. Matthew Potolsky has described at length how,

in *Marius the Epicurean,* Pater envisions a decadent genealogy through the exchange

of erotic aestheticist books between men. These books serve a didactic purpose for

Marius, who, as I argue below, becomes much more than a passive receiver of

knowledge: the narrator deems his own philosophical writing renowned enough to

feature in the genealogy of decadent literature that is the novel itself. [23] Wilde, who

worshipped *Marius,* may have had Pater's titular character in mind when he

characterized Dorian Gray as a decadent connoisseur of books, becoming "to London

of his own day what to imperial Neronian Rome the author of the *Satyricon* had once

been" (278). Both Wilde's Dorian and Pater's Marius turn to decadent Roman

classics, whether the orgiastic symposium or the insatiable delights of Psyche, to

inspire their own modern homophilic pleasure-based art and life.

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[23] See Matthew Potolsky's *The Decadent Republic of Letters* discusses Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* for a more comprehensive reading of book collecting and queer genealogy.

As Marius and Flavian begin devouring the text, "[t]hey looked round" and begin recognizing the similarities between art and life: "it was precisely the scene described in what they were reading" (67). Apuleius's story about Psyche's erotic curiosity and subsequent initiation become, for Marius and Flavian, a didactic handbook for discovering the Epicurean fusion of erotic and philosophical pleasure. Through this golden, fleshy display of same-sex intimacy—of two men lying together on a makeshift bed reading scene after scene of Psyche discovering the intimate pleasures of the marriage bed—prompts a reconsideration of homoerotic scenes in the Victorian (historical) novel. The scene of reading between Marius and Flavian conspicuously conceals homoerotic love; the description of gold and yellow colors everywhere work paradoxically to both conspicuously conceal the homoeroticism of the scene and spotlighting the homoerotic couple.

Moreover, the impressionistic description suggests this fleshy scene might be explicitly erotic, the blending of dappled lighting, illuminated objects, and glowing subjects insinuates the merging together of bodies. Pater adapts Lucretian atomism to this ekphrastic scene. Epicureanism understands the world to consist of tiny atoms that swerve together to form objects before disintegrating, then merging into new forms. Pater loosely enacts Lucretius's example of atomism. Lucretius uses "ligna" and "ignes," wood and flame, to exemplify the material transformation of atoms, from wood to fire, and also the formal, linguistic transformations language affords, since "ligna" and "ignes" contain many of the same letters. As this "blandest" scene of a dingy granary made of dull wood transforms into a gilded, fiery scene

reminiscent of Lucretius's flame and Psyche's gilded palace, Pater's language becomes more elevated, transforming from clunky syntactical arrangements of mundane objects into floral prose poetry about gilded objects. In the "Golden Book," Pater sutures together Lucretius's example of atomic poetics and erotics, impressionistically enacting the metaphor of the flame symbolizing sex: "as the two panted together, both burning with one flame". Pater's explanation of what satisfaction should feel like, "a hard gemlike flame," stems from the Epicurean thought, a thought he elaborates in *Marius,* which was intended to clarify the philosophy put forth in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance.*

The initial line of the following chapter, "Euphemism," emphasizes that Pater intended the relationship between the framing narrative and the inserted translation to be read as a new translational practice he elaborates in the remainder of the novel. This translational practice bears similarity to Oscar Wilde's philosophy of the art critic. Wilde argues that the art critic brings his own subjectivity and creativity to his object of critique, and Pater, in a similar manner, shows translation to be subjectively and aesthetically filtered through the mind of the translator. Pater's narrator interjects in order to clarify that "Cupid and Psyche"—and by extension, the other translations he inserts in the novel—should be read as the retrospective narrator Marius's translation, a translation onto which Marius has impressed his own affective responses to: "the famous story that composed itself in the memory of Marius, with an expression changed in some ways from the original and on the whole graver" (92). The embellishments and excessive flourishes with which Apuleius lightheartedly tells

his original comedic story "Cupid and Psyche" becomes, in Pater's *Marius the Epicurean,* a tragedy reflective of the romantic limitations institutionalized love imposes. It becomes in Pater both a critique of marriage as well as a reflection of the queer experience that disallows homoerotic companionship between men that extends beyond the scope of pederasty.

In the translation, Pater deliberately renders Apuleius's purple prose into a "changed" and "on the whole graver" translation that, I argue, reflects Marius's understanding of the world in Epicurean terms. After having admired the decadent book's "purple writing on the handsome yellow wrapper," Marius discovers within what he understands to be a discrepancy between Apuleius's licentious themes and upbeat tone with what he interprets as tragic subject matter. Consequently, Pater's translation deliberately represses the stylistic decadence of the original, instead sublimating Marius's affective response stylistically onto his translation, developing a translation "on the whole graver." In other words, Pater's dictum on homoerotic Roman literary history might be "first as farce, then as tragedy."

Where Apuleius utilizes a humorous tone and excessively ornamental language to depict tragic moments lightheartedly, Pater privileges empathetic fidelity to the characters over stylistic fidelity to the original author. Preferring an ascetic style indicative of characters' negative affective responses to sexual oppression and punishment, Pater's deliberately understated translation relies on a linguistic censorship and condensation that reflects Marius's Epicurean and foreboding despair for Flavian who will soon die of the Antonine plague. For example, Pater

significantly downplays Apuleius's linguistic tone and excess in the passage depicting

Psyche and her family objecting to her arranged marriage. William Adlington, whose

translation was the most popular to a Victorian audience, translates Apuleius's

verbatim, loquaciously describing Psyche's family's despair:

> Maeretur, fletur, lamentaatur diebus plusculis. (Apuleius)
> "they began to lament, and weep, and passed over many days in great sorrow"
> (Adlington).
> "For many days she lamented" (Pater)

In contrast to Adlington's literal translation, Pater completely erases the family's grief

and tempers Psyche's. In his understated translation, Pater represses Apuleius's

melodrama. Whereas Apuleius utilizes synonymic tryptics, onomatopoeia, and

superfluous, descriptive language to extend Psyche's suffering in an elaborate poetic

passage detailing her suffering, Pater condenses the synonymic triplet to simply

"lament," elides modern punctuation that emphasizes her pain, and deliberately

diffuses Apuleius's depiction of suffering, transposing it onto Marius himself as

empathetic translator. Apuleius's Psyche saturates the page with her tears, as the long

vowels and liquid consonants culminate in elisions that create ululations reminiscent

of her bemoaning, crying, and lamenting. Constricting the mellifluous onomatopoeia

of Apuleius's passage is a deliberate choice for Pater, whose prose gained praise

elsewhere precisely for its sumptuousness.

     Pater's translation is focalized through Marius whose Epicurean subjectivity is

reflected in the translation's individualization and contained sorrow. Pater describes

Marius as an empathetic translator who recuperates and reprivatizes Psyche's grief.

Furthermore, Pater's Marius turns back to Apuleius's original Latin to emphasize

specifically Epicurean sentiments and allusions contained within the original. Pater's translation draws out the connection between the sacrifice of Iphigenia, which Lucretius uses to illustrate religion's injustices with the marriage of Psyche. The ritual ceremony Lucretius depicts in his retelling of the sacrifice of Iphigenia ironically alludes to "the customary ritual[s] of marriage" and describes her as "a stainless maiden" "at the very season for marriage" (Leonard and Smith, 211-212).[24] Apuleius echoes Lucretius's comparison between heteropatriarchal sacrifice and marriage when he describes Psyche's impending "feralium nuptiarum," her funereal wedding. Pater recuperates the Epicurean undertones of the story in English for the first time, transforming what Adlington glossed as "Psyche's wedding" into "her deadly bridal":

> now the nuptial torch gathers dark smoke and ashes: the pleasant sound of the pipe is changed into a cry: the marriage hymn concludes in a sorrowful wailing: below her yellow wedding-veil the bride shook away her tears; insomuch that the whole city was afflicted together at the ill-luck of the stricken house. (Pater, 72)

Pater's translation echoes Lucretius's description of Iphigenia's sacrifice:

> By the hands of men up to the altar, not that she be married
> With solemn ceremony, to the accompanying strain
> Of loud-sung bridal hymns, but as a maiden, pure of strain,
> To be impurely slaughtered, at the age when she should wed,
> Sorrowful sacrifice slain at her father's hand instead. (DRN 1.95-99, Stallings, 6)

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[24] Lucretius incorporates references to the animal sacrifice, the performances of the bride's abduction by bridegroom, of lifting the bride over the threshold, and of the bride's performative trembling resistance to her marriage.

Here Pater reworks the quote which appears primarily in Lucretius to demonstrate religious skepticism in order to emphasize Psyche's transformative experience of erotic love. Pater's translation of this scene contains within it the Epicurean belief in disconnecting from institutions and political life to engage in a pleasure-based life. Silencing the patriarchal performance of Psyche's father the King's mourning, Pater's Marius redirects us to Psyche's own misguided grief.

The translation stifles heteropatriarchal melodrama in order to emphasize Psyche's experience. It is a gesture that reads as both a feminist and as a queer translation, since, as Pater tells us, the translator imbues in it Marius's identification with the character Psyche. Recognizing his own disavowal of heteronormativity in Psyche's objection to arranged marriage, Pater's Marius translates Apuleius's comedic marriage story into a severe tragedy. He gives Psyche's character the Epicurean's affective temperance, thus using her to epitomize Roman Love, a love riddled by negative affects characteristic of Pater's own situation as a closeted man in late-Victorian England.

As the retrospective narrator Marius inserts his translation into the historical fictional autobiography, he follows up his earlier emphasis on Apuleius's text's indebtedness to Epicureanism by intentionally ambiguously translating to reflect the philosophy's sexual ethics. After having incorporated an Epicurean critique of heterosexual marriage into his translation of Psyche's arranged ceremony, Marius translates the remainder of "Cupid and Psyche" in a manner that disentangles the myth from heterosexual convention and reinterprets it as an Epicurean text. Pater

deliberately mistranslates heterosexual and otherwise gendered language in order to make possible a queer reading of the text. For example, whereas the original text contains references to Cupid and Psyche's love as marriage and marital consummation ("connubium"), an institution frowned upon by the Epicureans, Pater's Marius willfully interprets marital union as the vaguer "sweet usage," uninstitutionalizing and ungendering erotic love.

Elsewhere in the translation, Pater disentangles gender from sex, mistranslating "uterus" to the gender-ambiguous "bosom." Although this rendering carefully conforms to "contemporary ideas of propriety," as Turner suggests, it also strategically detaches the myth from heteroreproductivity. It allows Pater to imagine the metaphorical conception of *Voluptas*, the child Psyche and Cupid conceive, in terms of a homoerotic collaboration that gives birth to the lyrical *Voluptas* that Marius and Flavian will go on to produce. Transforming lighthearted playful original myths into graver, tragic translations, Pater omits aspects of Apuleius's writing that we might recognize as decadent. Rather than completely erasing Apuleius's decadent style, however, Pater intentionally downplays the decadence of the original in his literal translation while displacing that decadence onto the adaptating frame narrative as we see him do above with the gilded homoerotic scene of reading and translation. This metanarration weaves together the classical and modern decadent style with Epicurean sexuality.

Decadent Poetics: Adapting "Cupid and Psyche"

Following his translation from Apuleius's original comedic myth to solemn tragedy,

Pater proceeds to adapt and otherwise allude to the myth throughout the novel in

campy adaptations. The novel itself incorporates multiple versions and adaptations of

the "Cupid and Psyche" myth, while the overarching narrative with which these

versions are embedded itself also loosely adapts the myth. In Roman literature, the

iconic Roman "Cupid and Psyche" was adapted and appropriated many times over;

Pater incorporates some of the bawdiest adaptations into *Marius* while allowing the

overarching narrative to become an adaptation in itself. *Marius the Epicurean* reads

simultaneously allegorically (the young Marius learning to temper eros in favor of

psyche) and literally (the young Marius, like Psyche, comes to a more

philosophical/spiritual plane of existence through discovering the pleasures of

physical love. While "[m]ainstream nineteenth-century readers dealt with canonical

authors by reading *around* the erotic," Pater explicitly, stealthily alludes to bawdy and

invective comedy in (homo)erotic Latin literature in order to figure Marius himself as

Psyche. Pater uses this technique of adapting and alluding to homoerotic literature

while inserting solely heterosexual complete literal translations throughout *Marius* in

order to show how inextricable homoeroticism and rhetoric were in the ancient

Roman imaginary. So integral is homoerotic discourse to Roman culture that Pater

neither highlights it with an extended translation nor censors it within the subtext of

his historic novel. From Plato to Tibullus to Lucian, Pater intertextualizes homoerotic

allusions in *Marius*, often layering allusion upon allusion. He creates a taxonomy of

ancient Roman same-sex homoerotic interactions of which pederasty is just one.

Another way Pater shows homoerotic discourse to be at the heart of Roman culture by showing how prevalent GLBTQ appropriations of the marriage of Cupid and Psyche were in imperial Roman literature. He inserts his own adaptation within *Marius* that elaborates on these other queer adaptations. In so doing, Pater repeatedly figures Marius as Psyche through the layering of various different hypotexts, some of which are themselves parody the original "Cupid and Psyche" myth. Genette terms this practice of engaging with and conflating various hypotexts "contaminated poetics." More contemporaneously, Max Nordau introduced the concept of degeneration by comparing the ways in which "forms," by which he meant gendered human bodies as well as literary texts, "lose their outline" becoming "*morbid deviation[s] from an original type*" (emphasis original, Nordau, 16). Pater's decadent adaptation encompasses Nordau's observation that textual and sexual "contaminated poetics" go hand in hand, since in decadent literature "[e]legant titillation only begins where normal sexual relations leave off" (13). Pater's decadent translation embraces cross-dressed and homoerotic flirtations in the metaliterary setting of the dinner party. Richlin has noted the popularity of literature about dinner parties between literary men in imperial Latin literature, another means through which Pater accurately historicizes his novel to emphasize the prominence of homosocial and homoerotic literary collaboration and community.[25] Pater palimsestically alludes to various ancient Roman hypotexts that parody Cupid and Psyche to queer means in a scene where Marius makes his debut as a famous author at a symposium honoring Apuleius.

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[25] See the introduction to *Marcus Aurelius in Love: The Love Letters* (12).

When Marius makes his entrance at the symposium honoring Rome's great authors—

including Lucian and Apuleius—he appears cross-dressing in the attire reminiscent of

Psyche herself:

> He was already most carefully dressed, but, like Martial's Stella, perhaps
> consciously, meant to change his attire once and again during the banquet; in
> the last instance, for an ancient vesture (object of much rivalry among the
> young men of fashion, at that great sale of the imperial wardrobes) a toga, of
> altogether lost hue and texture. He wore it with a grace which became the
> leader of a thrilling movement then on foot for the restoration of that disused
> garment (218)

The luxurious scene spotlights Marius surrounded by the luxurious commodities of

decadent Rome, showing him to have popularized the trend of imperial men like

Emperor Elagabalus cross-dressing in Roman women's bridal gowns. Marius is

described as cross-dressing in Faustina's dress that he purchased at auction, an act

that would align him with Elagabalus's gender performativity and sexual non-

conformativity in the Victorian imaginary, notably portrayed in the lavish 1888

painting, *The Roses of Heliogabalus*, by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Lawrence Alma-

Tadema (Figure 2). Alma-Tadema's iconic painting depicts Elagabalus lounging at a

symposium, wearing, like Marius, a golden toga. The painting itself epitomizes

decadence's excesses—Elagabalus's guests literally , having over-indulged, lie

drowning in a sea of rose petals after an over-indulgent party. While the scene does

not depict Elagabalas as overtly queer, all the dinner guests gaze erotically at a cluster

of guests whose physical proximity and positioning suggest the rose petals censor

erotic acts.

Figure 2 "Roses of Heliogabalus" (1888), Lawrence Alma-Tadema

This portrayal of Marius and the other philosophers at the dinner party fuses together

what I understand to be two distinct yet overlapping types of decadence: stylistic

decadence, a post-Lucretian literary style, and imperial decadence, the obscene

extravagances of imperial culture under Nero (37-68 CE), Commodus (161-192 CE),

Elagabalus (204-222), and other notorious emperors known more for their wasteful

spending, sexual digressions, and despotic rule.

Pater appropriates the myth of Cupid and Psyche in this campy scene: Marius

proudly enters wearing a golden dress that Pater tells us is Faustina's wedding gown

Marius purchased at auction (another indicator of imperial decline was the auctioning

off of the empire and its commodities). Pater's scene evokes Elagabalus lounging at a dinner party dressed in a golden toga, and as Marius enters, he feels the homoerotic gazes of the writers upon him. When he leaves, it is with Apuleius in a scene mimicking the abduction of Psyche in the traditional reenactment of the rape of the Sabines, and Pater abruptly ends the chapter: "and the discourse broke off suddenly." The lacuna suggestively situates the scene between Marius and Apuleius as a campy reenactment of "Cupid and Psyche" or the heterosexual marriage ceremony more generally. Incorporating a queer adaptation of the myth created by Apuleius himself is yet another way Pater revises Roman literary history to queer ends.

Throughout the scene, Pater embeds layers upon layers of homoerotic allusions to imperial Roman parodies and adaptations of "Cupid and Psyche" and other marital literature. Unlike Pater's Psyche, who shamefully hides her unwiped tears below her golden gown, Pater's Marius "wore it with a grace," flamboyantly performing feminine elegance for the literary crowd. In his "carefully" selected flamboyant dress, he is self-conscious and considers changing clothes many times during the banquet. Pater deliberately misattributes the dress to Martial's lover Lucus Verus Stella in order to encourage readers to envision Marius as a nervous bride. Karen K. Hersch describes the *flammeum* as "the only bridal garment that instantly marked the wearer as a bride," whose color, it was presumed, "was associated with the protection of the bride" (105). Pater miscites epigram 5.79 in which Zolius nervously sweats his way through eleven different outfits over the course of dinner; however, the gown that Marius wears clearly evokes the flaming bridal veil from

Callistratus in epigram 12.42. Pater thus conflates the two by allowing Marius to be deliberately described as nervous, yet at the same time alluding to the *flammeum* of the same-sex wedding showing Marius as a blushing bride. This intentional miscitation directs readers to the epigram humorously depicting a same-sex marriage. In the Martial epigram to which Pater alludes in Marius's drag performance of marriage, the poet asks Rome to accept the marriage between Callistratus and Afer:

> Bearded Callistratus as a bride wedded the brawny
> Afer in the usual form as when a virgin weds a husband.
> The torches shone before him, a wedding-veil [flammea] disguised
> his face, nor were the words of thy song, God of
> Marriage, unheard. A dower even was arranged. Do
> You not yet think, O Rome, this is enough? Are you
> Waiting also for an accouchement?
> (Loeb, 346-349, Epigrams I:XII, XLII)

Martial's poem emphasizes that the same-sex intimacy between Callistratus and Afer is not the pederastic relation between the *erastes* and the *eromenos*, the former taken to be the older, masculine, dominant lover while the latter takes the role of the younger, effeminate, passive beloved. The poem speaks instead to Roman culture's use of queerness as a comedic manner, and Pater which Pater appropriates here to signify his own queer parodic adaptation.

The scene continues with a recitation of *The Halcyon* by Lucian, thereby attributing the dialogue to him and situating it within a homoerotic context that once again diminishes women while highlighting homoerotic relationships between men. The dialogue is a debate between men about the accuracy of human knowledge through the example of the Halcyon and Ceyx myth. The myth tells the story about the devoted Halcyon whose husband Ceyx was lost at sea; Halcyon entreats the gods

to turn her into a bird, so she can wander the seas seeking her husband. Socrates resolves that humans should remain epistemologically humble, for myths like these demonstrate the possibility of supernatural occurrences only the gods could enact. He determines to continue retelling the Halcyon and Ceyx myth to promote fidelity and faith:

> 'O tearful songstress! that will I too hand on to my children, and tell it often to my wives, Xantippe and Myrto:—the story of thy pious love to Ceyx, and of thy melodious hymns; and, above all, of the honour thou hast with the gods!' (222)

Pater's inserted translation is another instance in which a woman appears in the novel, yet only through her absence. Women metamorphose into birds or are allegorized as the *psyche*, they are mentioned in their absence or without detailed physical description. When Marius visits Cornelia, the woman whom everyone expected his companion Cornelius to marry, Pater spends eight pages reveling in Cornelia's "aesthetically, very seductive" house, but never once mentions her physical appearance (228).

Purging embodied heterosexual women from scene after scene, Pater's continuous allegorization of women serves to highlight how, as Irigaray has notably written, "the *very possibility of a sociocultural order requires homosexuality* as its organizing principle" (*This Sex Which is Not One* 192). Yet whereas Irigaray, writing in the 1970s, takes "homosexuality" to mean the homosocial exchange of women between men, Pater, I'm arguing, disembodies women in order to show homoerotic relationships between men to be at the very heart of culture. Making women invisible embodiments of ethical ideals (*psyche, fidelity, faith*), Pater asks his Victorian

audience to imagine same-sex relationships existing within a marriage/romance plot that involves neither triangulation nor homosexual panic between men, nor even homosocial friendship between women, but rather same-sex loving partnerships between men whose relationships are modeled on Epicurean erotic friendships. The literary culture's appropriation of marriage rituals to sanctify same-sex partnerships is a theme that continues upon the dialogue's conclusion.

The framing narrative continues layering allusions and embedding multiple adaptations in one, painting Marius as a Psyche or Halcyon, a Roman bride. When Lucian concludes the dialogue, the dinner guests turn their attention to "the courtesans in their large wigs of false blond hair" who "were lurking for the guests". While the other members of the party turn their attention to the prostitutes, Marius and Apuleius leave together. Marius flutters out of the party, escaping for fresh air like the metamorphosed Halcyon. The scene of Apuleius's party more closely resembles a scene in Petronius's *Satyricon*, where the fictional character Psyche stages the performance of sexual initiation imitative of "Cupid and Psyche" between innocent youth for her voyeuristic patrons to catalyze an orgy (19). Like Petronius's Psyche with her voyeuristic visitors, Marius and Apuleius watch the dinner guests' debauched behavior from afar as they begin engaging with courtesans, while Marius admiringly compares Apuleius to the courtesans at the party: "himself with locks so carefully arranged, and seemingly so full of affectations, almost like one of those light women there, dropped a veil as it were" (223). Pater's insinuating language continues to imply that the interaction between Apuleius and Marius is flirtatious;

they "converse intimately," differentiating between Lucian's and Plato's beliefs, before Apuleius 'abducts' Marius, as if he is performing the final ritual of the marriage ceremony: the reenactment of the Rape of the Sabines where the bridegroom seizes the bride, carrying her home where he performatively "rapes" her.

Apuleius and Marius imitate another pair of guests Petronius focuses on: "Quartilla, who became "highly excited by all this playful obscenity, rose to her feet herself, seized Giton, and dragged him into the chamber." Pater's Apuleius likewise lays his "hand…in the darkness on the shoulder of the speaker, carried him away, and the discourse broke off suddenly" (224). Pater thus uses contaminated poetics to homoerotic ends in *Marius*, where the framing narrative adapts a queer version of the inserted "straight" translation of "Cupid and Psyche." A principle of inversion is at the heart of this decadent poetics: Pater inverts gender-sex and genre expectations, permitting homoeroticism to exist within austere tragedy as well as campy comedy, and showing the framing paratextual homoerotic discourse to be not an adaptation or copy of the original text but actually the original.

Pater layers various literary allusions, forging an analogy between Marius's camp performance and his technique of translating. Marius's translation, like his bridal performance, "covers and conceals the original textual body with a new text," thereby demonstrating that the translation as the drag performer is "not derivative of the original but both are, in fact, derivative" (Rose 43). Pater's campy performances of heterosexual marriage ceremonies draws attention to the act of translation as "the redressing of a body of meaning into the clothes of another language" (Van Wyke

2010). Recent queer translation scholars have discussed how translation can explore the idea that just as "[g]ender is a performance of repeated acts which are covered up, […] translation [too] is a performance of repeated words which are covered up by a cloak of originality" (Rose 47). In the case of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean,* palimpsestic, contaminated translations of "Cupid and Psyche" become the means through which he demonstrates how homoerotic discourse is central to Roman society. Incorporating humorous and parodic allusions to the marriage of Cupid and Psyche as well as more general comedic depictions of same-sex marriage within these adaptations serves to underline Pater's overarching theme of same-sex romantic co-authorship between men within the novel.

Scholarship on Pater has tended to reinforce the idea of "the warrior ideal" of masculinity; I am arguing, by contrast, that Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* makes space for both the appreciation of the warrior ideal *and* the *cinaedus*.[26] Scholars like Linda Dowling, Norman Vance, and Laura Eastlake have written convincingly about Pater's construction of masculinity in the novel, interpreting *Marius* as a novel upholding Victorian ideals about masculinity. Eastlake writes that Pater constructed it as a counternarrative revising the Victorian assumption that a lack of "masculine vigour" symptomatic of decadence catalyzed the decline and fall of the Roman empire (190). She argues that Pater's account of Rome's decline shows "uncompromising masculinist attitudes" about empire, rather than decadence, to be

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[26] See especially Linda Dowling's "Victorian Manhood and the Warrior Ideal," in *Hellenism and Homosexuality*, 32-66.

the cause of imperial decline. Pater's Marius and his aesthetic circle embody an Epicurean homosocial subculture who are critical of Roman imperial masculinity and the culture of rivalry between men. Eastlake continues to argue that Pater constructs a "universal and unifying philosophy which can accommodate in a single masculine identity aestheticism, moral virtue, and masculine ideality" (191).

I am arguing, by contrast, that Pater does indeed hold butch masculinity as Marius's ideal in the novel, yet Marius that Marius himself is depicted as dainty, submissive, and attracted to this warrior ideal has been overlooked by scholars. To quote Proust's narrator in *In Search of Lost Time,* Marius too "belonged to that race of beings…whose ideal is manly simply because their temperament is feminine." Pater's construction of Marius as a bride imitating Apuleius's Psyche and Martial's Callistratus acutely highlights the continuity between the Roman depiction of the *cinaedi* and the Victorian depiction of the sexual invert.

Throughout the novel, Pater constructs several scenes between men that situate Marius as Psyche or more generally as a Roman bride with his bridegroom by his side. Pater convincingly constructs a virile masculinity to which Marius is powerfully attracted, but he also constructs a feminine, passive masculinity in Marius himself. The youthful Marius whom the priest of Asclepius appreciates as a young *eromenos* becomes in adulthood the *cinaedus.* Craig Williams describes the distinction in detail in *Roman Homosexuality: "*Whereas the aduld *cinaedus* was an anamolous figure, deviant in his womanish being and effeminate desires, the beautiful boy (*puer*) was…an acceptable, even idealized object of Roman men's penetrative

desires" (183). Because the only legally acceptable homoerotic sex object in imperial

Rome was an enslaved youth, free men—both young and older—who continued

playing the passive role "were socially stigmatized and served as an unfailing source

of humor" (Richlin, 11). Making his titular character a passive homophilic adult,

Pater reclaims the *cinaedus* from its pejorative usage in a similar manner that the

twentieth-century GLBTQ community has reclaimed queer.

Appropriating heteronormative culture's invective comedic portrayals of the

cinaedus by embracing dressing in drag as Psyche and alluding to Martial's comedic

epigram about the same-sex wedding, Marius creates himself as a literary figure

whose work and lifestyle represent a bottomy masculinity. Marius's effusive

effeminacy and passivity is celebrated throughout the novel, especially in contrast to

his intimate companions. He is "attract[ed]" to his companion and mentor Flavian,

"over [whom]..his dominion was entire" and "Marius…became his servant in many

things" (64). As their "intimacy" increases, so does the "sway" Flavian has over

Marius, who describes his powerful attraction to him in detail. They first meet in a

scene of cruising. As he "see[s] Flavian for the first time…he gazed curiously":

> [T]he roving blue eyes…seemed somehow to take a fuller hold upon things
> around him than is usual with boys. Marius knew that those proud glances
> made kindly note of him for a moment, and felt something like friendship at
> first sight….Flavian … wore already the manly dress; and standing there in
> class…he was like a carved figure in motion, thought Marius, but with that
> indescribable gleam upon it which the words of Homer actually suggested, as
> perceptible on the visible forms of the gods. (63)

The visual intensity and attention to physical detail shows Marius drawn first to

Flavian through erotic attraction, while "friendship at first sight" appropriates the

romantic "love at first sight" explicitly to situate the duo within the dynamics of Epicurean homoerotic friendship. Whereas Lucretius seems to reinforce the tradition of pederasty because he stipulates that the philosopher is the active masculine partner when he indulges in sex with a "boy (*puer*) with girlish limbs," Pater's Marius innovates this model of erotic friendship through his celebration of an alternative passive masculinity in adulthood (DRN IV.1052-57, Stallings, 138 emphasis mine).

As Marius grows older, he more emphatically fashions himself as a *cinaedi* through his attraction to Cornelius, a knight from the Twelfth Legion, which characterizes him as a Christian but more important for my purposes here situates their relationship as homoerotic comrades-in-arms:

> [T]he very person of Cornelius was nothing less than a sanction of that reverent delight Marius had always had in the visible body of man. Such delight indeed had been but a natural consequence of the sensuous or materialist character of the philosophy of his choice…. the body of man was unmistakably…itself the proper object of worship, of a sacred service, in which the very finest gold might have its seemliness and due symbolic use. (203)

The passage reinforces the inextricability of same-sex desire to Epicurean thought, while also differentiating Marius as a supplicant figure distinct from the dominant masculine man he admires. Moreover, through the Flavian and Marius relationship, Pater connects the ancient comrades-in-arms and erotic friendships to the medieval Christian ritualized relationships.

This scene between comrades reinforces Pater's leitmotif of Marius as Psyche; Marius, like Psyche, admires his radiant companion. Pater describes Cornelius,

illuminated by "bars of sunlight, that fell through the half-closed shutters" dressing in

a reverse striptease, a scene resembling bridal preparations for a wedding ceremony:

> "[Cornelius] bethought himself of displaying to his new friend the various articles and ornaments of his knightly array—the breastplate, the sandals and cuirass, lacing them on, one by one, with the assistance of Marius, and finally the great golden bracelet on the right arm, conferred on him by his general for an act of valour. And as he gleamed there, amid that odd interchange of light and shade, with the staff of a silken standard firm in his hand, Marius felt as if he were face to face, for the first time, with some new knighthood or chivalry, just then coming into the world" (130).

Pater describes the ritualistic aspects of this intimate redressing as a new type of

chivalric romance. The whole passage renders an otherwise inconsequential scene of

a knight dressing into an aestheticized, homoerotic ritual of the beloved dressing his

lover. Cornelius's knightly dress is strikingly virile compared to Marius's toga, and

Marius passes with him through the *Flaminian Gate* into Rome as if carrying his

bride across the domestic threshold. In a later scene, the pair reunite at the marriage

of Marcus Aurelius's daughter Lucilla to Lucus Verus. At the conclusion of the

ceremony, as the emperor performs the abduction of the bride, carrying her over the

threshold, Marius and Cornelius themselves exit together, eloping on a vacation

resembling the Victorian tradition of a honeymoon. Pastiches and parodies of

marriage as Pater deploys them in *Marius the Epicurean* can be viewed as reverse

discourse, an attempt on Pater's part to represent the heterogeneous nature of Roman

relationships and masculinities.

Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, with its queer adaptive frame narrative and

straight inserted translations, sheds light on the aestheticist motto that life imitates art

and provides precedent for playful experiments where artists translate the queerness

of daily life into heterosexual fiction. It anticipates later decadent adaptations by literary collaborators like Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts, the same-sex romantic couple and collaborators who ran the Vale Press or Michael Field, the lesbian co-authors Bradley and Cooper who cite Pater's *Marius* in the preface to their

Decadent Roman Trilogy (discussed at length in Chapter 3).

Figure 3 "At the Wedding Feast," Daphnis and Chloe (1893), Charles Ricketts

Shannon and Ricketts divulged to their neighbors, Bradley and Cooper, that

Ricketts' woodcut illustrations for *Daphnis and Chloe,* the ancient Greek novel, were

based on an actual dinner party they had hosted at their home in Richmond. "At the

Wedding Feast" in *Daphne and Chloe* features Shannon and Ricketts posing as the

newlyweds Daphnis and Chloe, while their friends Thomas Sturge Moore, Lucien

Pissaro, Reginald Savage, and C.J. Holmes surround them in celebration (Figure 3).[27]

Following Pater, queer decadent collaborators incorporated their life into art and vice

versa, transforming their same-sex romantic partnerships into illustrations for fin de

siècle reprints of classical literature.

Through his loose adaptation of "Cupid and Psyche" as a leitmotif for

Marius's philosophical and material journey through life, Pater turns to the ancient

novel of Apuleius to reconceptualize the modern realist novel. Pater's homosocial

frame narrative shows literary heterosexual marriages to be a product of homoerotic

collaborations between men. He thus overturns the modern novel's focus on the

marriage plot by resituating homoerotic philosophical and intellectual endeavors at

the heart of narrative. This innovation inspired Pater's disciples to follow his path by

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[27] Ricketts's illustration, "At the Wedding Feast" from *Daphnis and Chloe* featuring
Ricketts, Shannon, Thomas Sturge Moore, Lucien Pissaro, Reginald Savage, and C.J.
Holmes (who, we learn, proudly posed naked for his portrait). Michael Field
describes a conversation with Ricketts and Shannon in their co-authored
autobiography: "We say how we like the portraits of them in the wedding-feast of
Daphnis & Chloe. We ask is the feaster by himself on the opposite side of the table
John Gray. "No, it is Holmes." And they go on to assure us that it is Holmes, though
the hair & appearance has been generally altered, as Holmes was silly at the time &
troubled to be shown so entirely naked" (Michael Field Notebook 12; Vol. XII (ff.
94-5) 1898., British Library, Add MS 46787).

turning to decadent Rome for ancient models that prefigured their own gender and sexual nonconformities.

CHAPTER TWO:

Queer Metamorphic Desire in Michael Field's Ovidian Poetry

Greco-Roman mythology and legend abound in same-sex desire, gender transformation, metamorphoses into animals for love, and pederasty that fin-de-siècle writers featured in their queer decadent literature. Alfred Edward Houseman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) includes only two Greco-Roman themed poems, both of which feature homoerotic and queer desire; the first, a love affair between the human speaker and the god Mercury, and the second, a man who falls in love with a boy-statue.[28] Symonds' *Many Moods* (1878) is a collection of poems almost entirely devoted to same-sex love between men set in Italy throughout the ages. A. Mary F. Robinson's *The New Arcadia* (1884), Michael Field's (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper) *Long Ago* (1889) and *Sight and Song* (1892), Amy Levy's *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* (1884), and other fin-de-siècle collections also feature classical mythology.

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[28] XLII situates Hermes as an imaginary homoerotic comrade of war. LI imagines a Pygmalion-like instance where the speaker's beloved boy statue comes to life.

A subgenre of the decadent, classical-themed literature of these writers is the theme of the gods in exile, which these writers began to use as a metaphor for the criminalized queer poet at the turn of the century. In this trope, the Greco-Roman gods go into exile to escape their persecution under Christianity. In some versions of this story, the god, often Venus or Apollo, is discovered to be odd, and is accused and persecuted as a pagan god, a vampire, or other supernatural being, whose offense is often a sexual crime or seduction. The gods cleverly escape their execution and once again disguise themselves in a new place. Pater popularized this trope to the Wilde circle in his chapter on Pico della Mirandola in *The Renaissance* (1878), and it appears again in Symonds's *Many Moods*, Vernon Lee's (Violet Paget) *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales* (1890), Aubrey Beardsley's *Under the Hill: The Story of Venus and Tannhauser* (1896) and also in Michael Field's unpublished poetry journals from 1900 and 1901.[29] Wilde's circle creates this queer decadent mythology to express same-sex desire in a modern homophobic society. This chapter explores specifically how fin-de-siècle women, too, appropriated the trope of the gods in exile, expanding the trope from a metaphor generally employed in order to explore homosexuality between men into a broader exploration of non-normative desires, sexualities, and gender identities. Michael Field's *To an Exile* (1900), like their "Philomela" trilogy (1901), represents mythical women who refashion their punishment—metamorphosis and exile—into an opportunity to imagine alternative

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[29] Michael Field's *To an Exile,* a series of eleven poems in the Bodleian journal MS.Eng.Poet.D.66, is their most notable achievement. The poems evoke Aphrodite, presumed to be in exile, and catalog a series of queer figures from Ovid.

communities that decentralized the (hu)man and foster queer and nonhuman companionships.

After the Oscar Wilde trial (1895) prosecuting him under the new Labouchere Amendment (1885) for "gross indecency,"[30] and his death in exile in 1900, his poet-friends Michael Field, the pseudonym of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, aunt and niece lovers and prolific poets and dramatists, produced a series of unpublished poems based on various the classical myths in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[31] Taking up the mythology of Ovid, the poet exiled for "a poem and a mistake" (*carmen et error*), as their predecessor, and reworking a story of confused kinship relations, Bradley and Cooper situate the Philomela trialogue within the tradition of queer decadent mythology (Simpson 3).[32] This trilogy, entitled "Procne," "Philomela," and "Tereus," retells the Philomela myth in order to address late-Victorian women's experience of same-sex love and exile. While Bradley and Cooper intercalate elements of the original myth into the poems, the poems also function as an aesthetic experiment in communicating love between women.

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[30] The Labouchere Amendment, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, criminalized same-sex acts between men: "Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with an other male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof, shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour" (48ε49 Vict. C.69).

[31] Throughout this chapter, I intentionally use the singular penname 'Michael Field' with the plural form of verbs. I deliberately do this to highlight the feminine plurality that the single masculine name masks.

[32] In *Tristia,* Ovid writes: "perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error, / alterius facti culpa silenda milli".

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* written in 8 AD, was considered a marginal text by Victorian standards. However, although *The Metamorphoses* was not taught in classics programs across the country in the nineteenth century, English poetry from the early modern to the Romantic periods abounds in Ovidian transformations.[33] *The Metamorphoses* is known as a formally and thematically transgressive text. The first lines of the text promise to tell a continuous tale from the beginning of time to the present day in "mutatas…formas," changed forms, and Ovid indeed proceeds to switch forms in several different ways (Ovid I.1). First, *The Metamorphoses* marks Ovid's change of genre from elegiac to epic poetry. However, he stops short of proclaiming to write within the genre of epic, for, although he composes in dactylic hexameter, his topic is not quite that of traditional epic poetry, which usually focuses on war. Recognized as a self-consciously transitional author writing on the cusp of the creation of a distinct Roman literary tradition, Ovid frequently revises classical Greek myths, subverting epic's martial themes to themes of romance that bring

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[33] The core texts of the classical program at Oxford, *Literae humaniores*, the greats, at this time, were Aristotle's *Ethics,* Plato's *Republic,* and in Latin, Vergil's *The Aeneid*. The classical programs at both Cambridge and Oxford taught a limited number of canonical texts, leaving it up to the students to stumble across others. Symonds, for example, discovered Plato's *The Phaedrus* and *The Symposium,* both which discuss pederasty, through Jowett assigning him to read Plato's *Apology* (Dowling 67-68). In *Marius the Epicurean,* Pater's semi-autobiographical protagonist compares ancient and modern "truant reading" as the greatest benefit of institutionalized education; the books omitted from the curriculum were circulated secretly between men whom Pater describes in terms of the *erastes*/*eromenos* dynamic of institutionalized pederasty (67).

gender and sexuality to the forefront.[34] Additionally, the characters themselves

change forms—the majority of stories in the *Metamorphoses* deal with the physical

transformation of gods and humans.

In the poems I introduce in this chapter, the Philomela Trilogy and *To an Exile,* Michael Field, like Ovid, fuses formal and thematic metamorphoses. I

discovered these poems within the Bodleian Library's Michael Field Papers, which

hold dozens of their poetry journals. These journals contain both published and

unpublished poetry; Michael Field clearly intended many of them, like Philomela and

To an Exile, to be published either in collections they were currently working on or

posthumously by their literary executor and fellow poet, Thomas Sturge Moore.[35] *To an Exile,* completed in October of 1900, appears twice in the unpublished journals.

The poems harken back to a Sapphic past in order to rewrite Ovidian metamorphoses

in queer feminist terms that also speak to Michael Field's position as sexual/aesthetic

exiles. Michael Field correlates their own experience as queer aesthetic exiles with

that of Wilde. The momentous decline in sales of their poetry and poetic dramas after

Robert Browning had 'outed' them as two women authors writing under the male

pseudonym resulted in Michael Field having to retire from London to the more

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[34] For a detailed discussion of Ovid's role in classical Greco-Roman literary history, see "Ovid and Ancient Literary History," by Richard Tarrant in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid.*

[35] The early and final drafts of poetry are easy to distinguish in the Bodleian Library, because Katharine Bradley copies neat, unedited versions into later journals. On the covers of these journals are frequently written "to be published," the pseudonym Michael Field, and inside Bradley includes a table of contents. Additionally, these unpublished manuscript journals reorganize the order of the poems in order to group them thematically and formally for publication.

affordable suburban Richmond. In their autobiographical writing, they describe their move to the suburbs as an expulsion that simultaneously enabled them to live more openly as lovers. They considered their lack of popularity in terms of the broader censorship of fin de siècle homophilic authors like Wilde, attributing public disinterestedness in their writing in part as a rejection of women writers espousing what they saw as the classics' erotic aesthetics.

Whereas in *To an Exile,* Michael Field develops a poetic form to complement their queer, feminist reading of Ovid, in the Philomela Trilogy, Michael Field expresses more interest in metamorphoses from human to nonhuman to allegorize their relationship. Written the autumn of 1901, the Philomela Trilogy enacts a feminist deconstructive translation of Ovid's version of the Philomela myth. .[36] It is likewise there, in Ovid's most brutally and empathetically portrayed rape story, that Michael Field gains inspiration for their alternative ending to their story.

Michael Field not only strengthens the bonds between sisters in Ovid's story, they show them to be transcendent. Incorporating gender and kinship transformations that take place elsewhere in *The Metamorphoses* and that Ovid enacts in order to resolve and at times make possible otherwise queer and taboo desires, Michael Field depicts the women's metamorphoses from human familial relations to nonhuman

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[36] My use of "lesbian" is in keeping with that of Michael Field. In the diaries especially, they use "lesbian" and "sapphic" as adjectives to express same-sex desire between women practiced within a genealogy linking modern and ancient same-sex desiring poets. I focus on lesbian representation here as one of many iterations of identity Michael Field and Bradley and Cooper adopted; generally, I understand the poets as queer, their gender and sexual fluidity forever shifting and resisting modern prescriptive identities.

romantic relations between a mating pair of songbirds. The Philomela Trilogy is a

significant piece of this unpublished corpus because it is the only poem, to my

knowledge, where Michael Field engages overtly with the theme of incest that

characterized their own relationship as aunt-and-niece lovers. It is thus no accident

that Michael Field turns to Ovid to celebrate queer love and desire.

In many cases in *The Metamorphoses,* mythological characters transform in

stories that highlight their non-normative gender or sexuality. A cluster of stories

similar to the Philomela myth I discuss below tells of Zeus' attempted rape of

women; in the stories of Daphne, Syrinx, and Io women are turned into animals and

plants to escape rape and the wrath of the gods. Tiresias is changed from man to

woman and back again and asked whether men or women experience more

pleasure.[37] In another story, Iphis, born female but raised male, falls in love with a

woman; they are allowed to marry only after Iphis is transformed into a man.

Together, these stories create a mythology more permitting of non-normative

sexuality and gender than Roman society was at the time, which Ovid acknowledges

at the end of *The Metamorphoses* when he teasingly praises Augustus—known for his

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[37] Michael Field recounts Tiresias's adventures in *Long Ago*, and his/her experiences of gender transition and sexual pleasure take up the most space out of any poem in that collection (*Long Ago* 77-79). The poem, 52, is Michael Field's poem for the Sappho's fragment "εγων δ' ἐμαίτα τοῦτο σύνιδα" (d' emautai touto sunoida), which they quote in their preface and which Wharton translates as "And this I feel in myself" (Wharton 80). In *Victorian Sappho,* Prins analyzes the poem's intricate language as an exploration between singularity and plurality, feminine and masculine, producing a gender fluidity that explores the complicated personal and poetic dynamics between Michael Field and Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper (93).

sexual promiscuity and rumored same-sex acts—as an emperor who is "a most righteous jurist [who] promote[s] the laws" (*Met.* XV.833-4).[38]

The concluding narrative of the sixth book of *The Metamorphoses*, the Philomela story is often read as an origin story about mournful poetry.[39] After having married Tereus, the king of Thrace, and giving birth to Itys, Procne begs her husband to let her see her sister, Philomela, who still lives at home with her father, the king of Athens. When Tereus travels to Athens to pick up Philomela for a visit, he becomes overwhelmed with her beauty. With Philomela's help, he convinces his hesitant father-in-law to let her visit Procne, and they begin their journey to Thrace. Tereus locks Philomela into a shed and rapes her as soon as they land, cuts out her tongue, and returns home to Procne with a tale of her death. Meanwhile, Philomela weaves a tapestry relating the story of her brutal rape, which she sends to Procne. Procne rescues her, and they avenge themselves on Tereus by killing Itys, his son, and feeding him to his father. When Tereus realizes what they have done, the women flee, and all three of them metamorphose into birds.

Michael Field's Philomela Trilogy

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[38] Augustus passed the Justinian Law (*rex iulia de adulteriis*) around 18 CE as part of his moral law reform; this law made transgressive sex a crime, forbidding sex between citizens and freemen, same-sex sex acts, and permitting the *paterfamilias* to punish transgressions of wives, daughters, and their lovers with death. See Langlands' *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (20).

[39] See Sarah Carter's "Rape, Revenge, and Verse: Philomela" in *Ovidian Myth and Sexual Deviance* for a discussion of Philomela in the early modern period in England and Yopie Prins' *Victorian Sappho* for a discussion of Philomela and the nightingale in the Romantic and Victorian eras.

By the time Bradley and Cooper adapted the Philomela myth in 1900, it had

functioned as a metaphor for the transformative power of poetry for centuries, long

before Keats' famous nightingale. Returning to the source of the myth rather than to

the English poetic tradition, Bradley and Cooper revive Philomela as an embodied

character, emphasize her resistance to being reduced to metaphor, like the Victorian

Philomela, instead turning to simile in order to strengthen—and at times eroticize—

homosocial relations between women. Their decision to use the dramatic monologue

to structure their exploration of the complexity of kinship ties between Philomela,

Procne, and Tereus demonstrates their attentiveness to the original, even as they forge

feminist translational approaches to adaptation, since it is Philomela's direct speech

that articulates the social mores Tereus violated by raping his wife's sister:

> 'Oh, what a horrible thing you have done, barbarous, cruel wretch! Do you
> care nothing for my father's injunctions, his affectionate tears, my sister's
> love, my own virginity, the bonds of wedlock? You have confused all natural
> relations: I have become a concubine, my sister's rival; you, a husband to
> both. Now Procne must be my enemy. Why do you not take my life, that no
> crime may be left undone, you traitor? Aye, would that you had killed me
> before you wronged me so. Then would my shade have been innocent and
> clean….sooner or later you shall pay dearly for this deed. (Ovid, Met. VI.
> 533-44)

Bradley and Cooper's adaptation of the Philomela myth expands this impassioned

speech to explore the complicated kinship relations Philomela expresses.[40] The poems

are written in Bradley's handwriting yet were likely composed by Cooper and her

together. In other words, there are traces of both Michael and Field in the poems, as

Bradley served as the classics expert of the two, while Cooper was credited for their

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[40] I quote the poems in full, given that they are unavailable in print.

poetic genius.[41] In the journal, MS.Eng.Poet.D.68, Bradley and Cooper rework

Ovid's classical myth to highlight the relationship between women and to imagine a

more genuinely remorseful Tereus.

Focusing on the intimate bonds between women strengthened on account of

heteropatriarchal violence, Bradley and Cooper depict homosocial bonds between

women complicated by same-sex and incestuous desire and marriage.[42] They retell

the Philomela myth as a homosocial communion between sisters, a version of

womanhood that challenges the centrality of heterosexual marriage to modern

society. [43] Michael Field thus reworks the Victorian trope of sisterhood most

famously depicted in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), clearly echoing

and extending Rossetti's trope of intimacy between women as birds:

> Golden head by golden head,
> Like two pigeons in one nest,
> Folded in each other's wings,
> They lay down in their curtained bed:
> …
> Cheek to cheek and breast to breast

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[41] Bradley and Cooper's pseudonym developed out of the nicknames their friends knew them by. Bradley was known as Michael and Cooper as Field. Marion Thain writes that the name signifies "not just the name of single, male author, but also two names of two women authors" (4-5 *'Michael Field': Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle*).
Stefano Evangelista's "'Two Dear Greek Women': The Aesthetic Ecstasy of Michael Field" in *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece* is dedicated to the treatment of Michael Field's poetry, especially Edith Cooper's early poetry under the mentorship of Bradley.
[42] I follow Yopie Prins in reading Michael Field as a lesbian because of they wrote in the Sapphic tradition, both in the sense that they write in the genealogical poetic tradition of Sappho's Greece and about various sexualities including same-sex desire.
[43] In this sense, Michael Field challenges what Sharon Marcus views in *Between Women* as the Victorian compatibility of intimate relationships between women and heterosexual marriage.

> Locked together in one nest.
> …
> One content, one sick in part;
> One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
> One longing for the night.

Helena Michie explains how this sisterhood trope depicts "the sexual and the pure woman":

> The capacious trope of sisterhood allows for the possibility of sexual fall and for the reinstatement of the fallen woman within the family; fallen sisters…are frequently recuperable through their sisters' efforts in a way forbidden to other Victorian fallen women. Sisterhood acts as a protecting framework within which women can fall and recover their way, a literary convention in which female sexuality can be explored and reabsorbed within the teleology of family" (17-18).

Ovid's Philomela myth contains within it the redemptive trope of sisterhood recognizable to a Victorian audience, a trope Michael Field reworks in order to explore same-sex desire under the guise of normative sororal relations within the nuclear family.

"A new species of poetry": Michael Field and the Dramatic Trialogue

By the time Bradley and Cooper wrote their dramatic trialogue in 1901, the dramatic monologue had become an identifiable, if tendentiously defined, new genre of lyrical poetry. As Arthur Hallam wrote of Tennyson's innovative lyric in 1831: "we contend that it is a new species of poetry, a graft of the lyrical onto the dramatic" (Hallam 133).While scholars acknowledge Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson as the English poets who helped solidify the dramatic monologue as a genre, they have also recognized a precedent in the classical rhetorical device, *prosopopoeia*, wherein the poet ventriloquizes another's direct speech, such as Ovid does in his *Heroides*

(Pearsall 15). Jonathan Culler provides a useful, loose definition of dramatic

monologues as lyrics that "vividly dramatize distinct historical characters (generally

fictional) in specific circumstances, as they respond to a situation, debate with

themselves, or interact with implied audiences" (265). Culler further distinguishes

between two types of the nineteenth-century dramatic monologue, identifying distinct

English and French traditions: "[u]nlike the English dramatic monologue, it [the

French] is more ritualistic than fictional" (268). Browning and the English poets

utilize mimesis, "portray[ing] a fictional speaker through his or her own words,"

while the French poets like Mallarme and Valery privilege "mythological rather than

historicized personages" whose soliloquies are interior, dream-like meditations

instead of imitative actual speech (265). The French dramatic monologue, epitomized

by Mallarme's "L'Apres-midi d'un faune" ("The Afternoon of a Faun"), with its

frenzied satyr fantasizing a morning tryst with the nymphs, is the target of Max

Nordau's critique of the genre as one epitomizing decadence and degeneracy.[44] Out

of these two traditions emerges an understanding of the French dramatic monologue

as the decadent monologue—depicting salaciousness for art's sake only—and the

English dramatic monologue as something different, namely Aesthetic, where lyrical

loquaciousness exists for beauty's sake, in order to explore characters and their

situations at unnecessary length. The decadent dramatic monologue may have its

roots in the French poets, yet decadent lyricists like Charles Swinburne and the

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[44] Nordau describes a Parisian theatrical scene, where "on stage a poem of
approximately dramatic form" is recited, while lights, perfumes, and a magic lantern
displaying dimly lit forms overwhelms the audiences' senses.

Aleister Crowley wrote decadent monologues in English that challenge the strict division both their contemporaries and more recent scholars have drawn between the two national traditions. Early English decadent monologues like those of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866) adhere to the French, mythological model more closely when exploring transgressive sexualities, while later ones like Crowley's speakers in *White Stains* (1898) invent unique fictional characters, more characteristic of the English monologue, to explore sexual transgressions and taboos ranging from homosexuality to necrophilia. By the time Michael Field wrote the Philomela trialogue, then, the decadent dramatic monologue was a fully established form that transgressed national boundaries, and its thematic elaboration of sexual desire, usually non-normative and otherwise taboo sexual desire.

I read Michael Field's Philomela sequence as a dramatic trialogue engaging with both the French and English traditions, while harkening back to Ovid's "mutatas formas" in order to adapt "a new species of poetry" that places queer, feminist voices in dialogue with men. Michael Field utilizes the French tradition's exploration of interiority over exteriority, as well as their interest in the mythological over historical character. On the one hand, like their French counterparts, all three characters, Procne, Philomela, and Tereus, engage in non-normative and otherwise taboo sexual desires; on the other hand, they break from the French tradition by privileging the English tradition's focus on character development over erotic revelry. Michael Field was familiar with this corpus; indeed, they record in their co-written diary their delight at having read the salacious French books Ricketts and Shannon gifted them.

Yet they were nevertheless insistent on putting themselves at a distance from modern decadent literature.

The Philomela trilogy may take for its subject matter the mythohistorical figures more likely to appear in the decadent tradition, yet the lyrics more closely resemble the English aesthetic dramatic monologue of Tennyson and Browning. Later in the century, Walter Pater would define 'aesthetic poetry' as lyrics who formalize historicism, engaging "with the questions raised by the act of representing the past within the present, and its concern with differentiating as well as including the past" (Thain 86). If Pater found earlier resonances in the dramatic monologue for his theorization of aesthetic lyric more broadly, so Pater's influence on Michael Field enabled them to envision a queerly original approach to that lyrical form that matched their appropriation of what fin de siècle women writers were taught by Pater, their "queer uncle" from whom they developed a classic, homophilic aesthetic (*Ladies Greek* 208). Michael Field's aesthetic, dramatic trialogue queers this mythohistoriography via Pater, yet they also insinuate themselves into the English tradition by contrast to Browning and Tennyson, while deliberately echoing both authors' style. Quite unusual for Michael Field, who was fiercely independent of literary influences, the Philomela trialogue does seem to engage more closely with their literary predecessors than Mary Sturgeon has observed of their oeuvre more generally:

> Traces of Browning we should take for granted, he being so greatly admired by them; yet such traces are rare. And still more convincing proof of their independence surely is that in the Age of Tennyson they found his laureate

suavity too smooth, and his condescension an insult. (31-2)

Independent as they were, Michael Field nevertheless pays tribute to both Browning and Tennyson in their experimental dramatic trialogue. "Procne" and "Philomela," two lonely, isolated "Mariana"-like characters owe something to the mellifluous, melancholic language of Tennyson, while their "Tereus" resembles Browning's menacing villains with their thundering discordant speech. Even so, the two exuberant women are figures for Bradley and Cooper, who assertively insert their "one song" together as Michael Field, "against the world" of literary relations in order to give birth to their own "new species," a harmonized "mutatas formas" that is the Philomela trilogy.

Robert Browning had acted as a literary mentor to Bradley and Cooper from their earliest publication under the pseudonym Michael Field, *Callirrhoe* (1884) until his death in 1889, when he advised their first volume of co-authored poetry, the extensions of Sappho's lyrics entitled *Long Ago* (1889). Browning and Michael Field formed an allegiance based on their shared interest in Victorian Hellenism, sharing each other's as well as the late Elizabeth Barrett's translations of Greek classics with one another. In *Victorian Sappho*, Yopie Prins discusses how the publication of *Long Ago* served to situate "Michael Field within an elite circle of poets who turn to Greek literature to redefine the language of English poetry, and Michael Field's assumption of poetic authority draws on the cultural prestige of Victorian Hellenism" (76). Although Browning had 'outed' Michael Field as two women to the reading public just as the newspapers were beginning to review *Long Ago,* he nevertheless served as

advisor and proponent of their poetry as an exemplary model of Victorian classical scholarship.[45] Browning's sponsorship of Michael Field and subsequent exposure of their pseudonym reveals the complexities of the late-Victorian counter-culture within classical reception. Although by the late-Victorian era, the field of classical reception had become more accepting of the homoerotic counter-discourse produced by scholars like Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds, the exchange between Browning and Michael Field exposes a hesitancy to permit Victorian women acceptance as authorities on the subject. In other words, while Browning promoted Michael Field's ascent as authorities within the world of Victorian Hellenism, he nevertheless represented to Bradley and Cooper the misogyny within that world they critiqued and resisted in their public and private literature.

Although deeply critical of both Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning's single authorship and semi-autobiographical poetry, Bradley and Cooper admired and, as I will argue, emulated their classically inspired verse. In their jointly written autobiography, *Works and Days,* Bradley writes: Those two poets, man and wife, wrote alone; each wrote, but did not bless or quicken one another at their work; *we are closer married*" (WD 16). They likewise critiqued Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) and their correspondence for their contemporaneity:

> They have the hideousness new-born animals. It is the recent + callous love
> that is so painful to me in them…Love should not come as a <u>new experience</u>

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[45] Bradley and Cooper's private correspondence and autobiography disclose how the relationship with Browning was grounded in their shared interest in Victorian Hellenism. Prins additionally notes that Browning recommended Michael Field's *Long Ago* to scholars interested in "the uses of Greek learning" (*Victorian Sappho* 76-7).

to any woman. She should belong to Aphrodite the first time she looks at her face in the mirror. She should feel behind her the inheritance of Eve, Cleopatra, Queen Mary, Juliet. Womanhood should 'be to her the evocation of Love—+ the ancient sovereignties of the god be hers by right…. In the love-letters of the two poets there is triteness because no divinity receives their love into a divine universe—neither God nor nature there is no light beyond sunlight nor radiance from sunny days; no shade of myrtles, nor darkness from higher stars. (WD 1899. 55)

Engrained in their critique of the Brownings is a resistance to modernity in favor of pre-modernity, privileging mythohistoriography over contemporaneity. Michael Field puts forth a poetic theory that privileges the mytho-historic subject over the Romantic subject's frequent conflation with the poets themselves, an anthropocentric worldview Michael Field refuses, not because they object to semi-autobiographical poetry but because they object to the disenchanted heteropatriarchical modernity. Reenchanting the love lyric, in fact, enabled Michael Field to figure themselves as love (song) birds whose transformative lyrics themselves critique and enact that transformation from heteropatriarchal to homophilic lyric. Through exploring the new form of the dramatic monologue, Browning intended to return to "a more 'objective' form of lyric," the objectivity of which Browning grounds in the 'male' poet (Culler 265). Michael Field alerted to the misogyny of their mentors, rejecting further communication with John Ruskin after he had critiqued Bradley's "strong views and exuberant personality" as well as "her passionate friendships with women" (Ehnenn 75). Turning to other literary mentors like Browning, Pater, and Tennyson, they cultivated relationships with these literary giants without failing to critique the misogynistic undertones inscribed in the poetic theories. "'One sentence of Mr. Pater's which I would not say I could never forgive, because I recognize its justice;

but from which I suffer, and which was hard to bear,' Bradley once commented,

"…he speaks of the scholarly conscience as male" (*Victorian Sappho* 78). Bradley

and Cooper never professed to be feminists, nor did they engage much with political

activism, as yet, as Diana Maltz has rightly suggested, their literary accomplishments

and the works themselves speak volumes about their radical views about not only

gender equality but even gender-elimination and gender-fluidity.[46] By inventing the

masculine pseudonym to disguise themselves as two women dramatic lyricists,

Michael Field situates themselves at an even more 'objective' distance from the

characters they explore in the Philomela trilogy. They thus incorporate Browning's

English dramatic monologue's profession to objective, critical examination through

the lens of the 'queer,' same-sex, gender-bending personas of the decadent tradition

in earnest, a hybrid form that tames the decadent and queers the aesthetic lyric. The

dramatic monologue provides an objective distance between the lyric and the poet(s),

while the mythological subject matter used as a simile for their own experience as

same-sex interfamilial, intergenerational lovers grounds their relationship in an

enchanted, romantic past.

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[46] Ana Parejo Vadillo's "'Sight and Song': Transparent Translations and a Manifesto
for the Observer" and Jill Ehnenn's "Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer
Aesthetics in 'Beauty and Ugliness" and *Sight and Song,*" *Women's Literary
Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* both discuss Michael Field's
poetics as a response, in part, to Walter Pater's aesthetics. Ehenenn's discussion of
how Michael Field elaborates a queer, feminist response to Pater's objective aesthetic
theory is especially relevant to their similar approach to Browning's poetry. Diana
Maltz makes this suggestion in her essay "Katharine Bradley and Ethical Socialism,"
in *Michael Field and Their World,* ed. Stetz and Wilson.

Michael Field's Philomela trilogy critiques heteropatriarchy and celebrates homosocial—even homoerotic—love that Nordau critiques as being depicted in the dramatic monologue (Nordau, 16). Bradley and Cooper were not the first Victorian women poets to give voice to classical women in ways that critiqued the heteropatriarchy. Amy Levy's "Xantippe" (1889) is a dramatic monologue where Xantippe, a classical Dorothea Brookes exacerbated by her Casaubon-like husband Socrates, repudiates Socrates in an explosive speech critiquing his proliferation of women's oppressive role in Greek society and concluding with her splashing wine onto his face.[47] Levy's "Xantippe," like Bradley and Cooper's poems, likewise can be read as a critique of how the late-Victorian counter-cultural homoerotic classicism still tended to exclude women classists and discourage that discourse's appropriation to validate same-sex desire between women. Michael Field's dramatic trialogue, by contrast to Levy's single lyric, envisions a space through which women can and do discourse with men. The traditional dramatic monologue's single, silent interlocutor multiplies and is given agency. They rewrite the non-normative and taboo Philomela tale as a tripartite dramatic monologue where each character's speech functions as an aesthetic eloquence that, taken together, function doubly as poetry and debate,

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[47]See *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy (1861-1889),* ed. Melvyn New. The parallel between Xantippe and Dorothea Brooke, whose ill-fated marriage to the inadequately trained yet pedantic classicist, Casaubon, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-2) would be evident to a Victorian audience.

making a case for alternatives to heteroreproductive marriage and alternative forms of kinship.[48]

The triangulated desire of Ovid's Philomela myth is formalized through Michael Field's creation of a tripartite dramatic monologue, a "dramatic trialogue," so to speak.[49] Michael Field transforms the Victorian invention of the dramatic monologue into a new form—an innovation otherwise unheard of in Victorian poetry—the dramatic trialogue, wherein each poem takes for its speaker a different protagonist and each poem converses with the others. "Procne," "Philomela," and "Tereus" all call and respond to one another, disrupting the teleological ordering of the assumptively heterosexual lyric. In her study of the Victorian dramatic monologue, Cornelia Pearsall has argued how, far from its traditional understanding as a genre of unnecessarily superfluous expansion, the dramatic dialogue is a political vehicle through which speakers seek transformation, using the rapturous power of the monologue itself to enact that transformation.

> In a Victorian dramatic monologue a speaker seeks a host of transformations—of his or her circumstances, of his or her auditors, of his or herself, and possibly all these together—in the course of the monologue, and ultimately attains these by way of the monologue. Dramatic monologues exhibit the mechanics and imperatives of persuasive speech, drawing particularly on the logic of similitude. (36)

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[48] I am indebted to Cornelia Pearsall for her comments on an early draft of this chapter, and her groundbreaking work on the English dramatic monologue, *Tennyson's Rapture*, which helped me to clarify Michael Field's innovations to the genre.

[49] Thank you to Cornelia Pearsall for her generous feedback on this chapter, especially for suggesting that Michael Field's Philomela trialogue represents a type of dramatic monologue otherwise unheard of.

The dramatic trialogue even more compellingly enacts feminist and queer transformations, because it gives voice to not one but three protagonists at once, permitting multiple perspectives to persuade the audience—Tereus and the Victorian public, especially cis-heterosexual public—to differentiate between rapture and rape, consensual same-sex love and heterosexual violence. Michael Field thus translates Roman into Victorian form, inventing a tryptic type of dramatic monologue. It is through Ovid's polyvocality and "mutatas formas" that Micheal Field transforms the relatively "new species of poetry" into the lyrical triptych that allows traditionally marginalized characters a platform to debate and enact their own transformations. Philomela and Procne, speaking alongside Tereus, thus, become figures for the late-Victorian women poets, classicists, and activists who inserted themselves into conversations concerning gender and sexuality. Although like the traditional dramatic monologue, each poem in the Philomela Trilogy is capable of standing on its own, yet, when taken together, they represent a triangulated dialectical poem. The poems speak back and forth to one another in a triangular temporality that eschews the teleological structuring of traditional literary sequences. Each poem dialogically engages with the other two poems. "Procne" begins with Procne addressing Tereus and ends with her addressing Philomela; "Philomela" begins with her speaking to Procne and ends with her addressing Tereus, and "Tereus" begins with him addressing Philomela and ends with him addressing to Procne.

The triangulated structure of the poem highlights the erotic triangulation the Philomela myth represents, an arguably new form of erotic triangulation in Victorian

literature, wherein the same-sex dyad does not acquiesce to the homosexual one, but rather attains recognition as an alternative, even superior romantic form, one that cherishes homoerotic rapture over heterosexual (marital) rape. *Rapere* in the dramatic monologue takes two forms: the rapturous romantic union between the two women and the "ravish[ment]" used to describe both marital sex and rape of the sisters by Tereus, which I will discuss below in more detail. The structure of the poem thus supports my argument that Michael Field's dramatic trialogue is primarily a space to explore queer romantic love, since formally the most continuity exists between the two sisters' poems, as if the two together form the "one song" the first poem describes the two women harmoniously embodying. This harmonious union rings clear throughout the two highly elevated, aesthetically pleasurable lyrics, situating them together in stark contrast with the discordant harsh style that elucidates Ovid's Tereus's barbarous brutality.

"Procne," "Philomela," and "Tereus" extend Ovid's detailed descriptions, enacting a retrospective encapsulation of the Ovidian myth and exploring the homosocial love that frames Ovid's tale through the dramatic trialogue beginning with Procne's request that Tereus to bring Philomela to Thrace: "Tereus, go, fetch my sister from her home.[50]" The first poem incorporates the basic plot of the myth: the ill-fated marriage between Procne and Tereus, Procne requesting Tereus to bring her

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[50] I transcribe these from the handwritten manuscript, keeping Michael Field's punctuation and spelling intact.

Philomela, and their transformation into birds.[51] The first four lines of the poem form

a direct address to Tereus in the first person singular; line 5-18 address an unknown

auditor in the first person plural, Procne switching into the plural form representative

of Philomela and her as a pair; in the final four lines, 19-23, Procne apostrophizes

Philomela.

The initial line boldly initiates the drama, inscribing within it a deliberate

innovation by having Procne not passively request but aggressively demand that

Tereus "go, fetch" Philomela. From its introductory line, Michael Field's "Procne"

enacts what Luise von Flotow might describe as feminist translation, the act of

deliberately over-translating in order to draw out of an 'original' text nuances in ways

that inscribe in the translated text itself a feminist critique.[52] In Ovid, Philomela

entreats her husband for the sororal reunion:

> "If I have found any favour in your sight, either send me to visit my sister or
> let my sister come to me. You will promise my father that after a brief stay
> she shall return. If you give me a chance to see my sister you will confer on
> me a precious boon."

Omitting the opening "si gratia" with which Ovid begins Procne's request and

transforming the other conditional tenses into the imperative command, "go, fetch,"

Michael Field under-, over-, and mis-translates strategically in ways that characterize

Procne as an already disgruntled wife. Procne subverts ancient Mediterranean gender

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[51] In Ovid's version of the myth, Procne and Philomela turn into nightingale, "their feathers stained with blood" for the filicide of Itys. Tereus, who transforms as he attempts to chase down the sisters who flee from him, turns into a hoopoe, "with the look of one armed for war" (*Met* VI 665-675).

[52] See Luise von Flotow's "Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices, and Theories".

roles by ordering her husband, a transgression emphasized by her imperative

dehumanizing command for him to "go, fetch," a command that characterizes their

relationship one with inverted gender roles, with the woman as dominant and man as

submissive, clearly intended as dehumanizing given that the command is generally

reserved for the obedient household dog.

Once Tereus exits the scene to fetch Philomela, Procne breathes a sigh of

relief. She employs antiphrasis in order retrospectively to reveal the sisters' mutual

loneliness since their separation in a way that counterintuitively conjures up

Philomela's presence in Tereus's absence. The spatial and temporal distance between

them is simultaneously stressed and diminished as Procne strains her mind to imagine

her sister at her side. Procne commands away the thought of Procne's "lonely

weaving" at home in Athens, a vision of solitary loneliness she entertains alongside

her own experience of "lonely nights" in matrimonial company (6, 7). These visions

dissipate as she conjures up Philomela's presence in an ekphrastic description of

Procne watching Philomela rush through the doors. Procne admires her "*peplos*"—a

Greek dress—as it clings and "folds" against her body (3). Michael Field rewrites the

moment when Tereus watches Philomela enter the room, "attired in rich apparel, but

richer still in beauty" ("magno dives Philomela paratu, / divitior forma"), and

appropriates Tereus's heterosexual gaze in Ovid to describe Procne admiring

Philomela (VI.451). This moment contrasts with Procne's description of forgetting, as

the ability to visually imagine her sister begins to fade.[53] Procne "lose[s] vision" of Philomela's "lonely weaving" in Athens, while she, Procne, spends "lonely nights" "ravished to [her] marriage-bed" (6-8). She refers to her wedding night with Tereus as her being "ravished," an echo of Ovid's Latin "rapere" used to describe Tereus's rape of her sister, while the "secret, incommunicable hours" signifies not only the silencing of the rape victim but also the censoring of same-sex homoerotic love the ending of the poem only implies. From the Latin "reddere," meaning to return, to surrender, to take revenge, and to narrate, "our rent sisterhood" contains the entire myth in one phrase, as Bradley and Cooper's Procne and Philomela recount their torn bond, their surrender to Tereus, their reuniting, and their revenge.

In contrast to the disruption of kinship roles induced by heterosexual desire in the Philomela myth, Procne stresses the intimacy of the homosocial bond between women, whose two songs merge into one, much like Bradley and Cooper's own united voice as Michael Field. Procne reminisces about the time before her marriage in a language that foreshadows their transformation and reunion as nightingales: "As two birds / That warble to each other through the trees / Our bosoms rose + fell; we had one song" (13-15). In this simile of shared communication, a unity of language and thought emerges. Michael Field allegorizes the transformation of their relationship through the depiction of sisters metamorphosing into a mating pair of songbirds. Utilizing the rhetorical structure of simile to compare rather than directly

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[53] See Hilary Fraser's work on the lesbian gaze, especially "A Visual Field: Michael Field and the Gaze," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32.2 (2006), 553-571.

conflate Philomela and Procne's transformative relationship, the poems grapple with

social anxieties about homosexuality, age of consent, and incest that both personally

preoccupied Michael Field (as aunt-and-niece lovers) and society at large, since the

same amendment act that criminalized homosexuality had originally been passed to

raise the age of consent.[54] The enchanted world of Roman mythology provides

Michael Field with a paradigm for envisioning their own metamorphosis from the

interfamilial, intergenerational, and gendered aunt and niece into the immortal,

ungendered songbirds, the symbol of lyrical "poets and lovers evermore".

Retaining the human sentiment of 'roses' as a symbol of intimacy between

lovers in the non-human realm, the image of the birds whose "bosoms rose + fell"

become, in the "turn" of the poem, an image of a woman embracing her beloved's

"small rose-body in my arms" (13, 20). In this 'turn' of the poem, past memories

dissipate as Procne seemingly successfully evokes an alternative present with

Philomela at her side. "It is not Athens I desire—O Child" conjures up a seemingly

present Philomela, now addressed in the second-person (19). Michael Field formally

slides into the intimate language of love poetry that mirrors Procne's desire to

whisper endearments to her beloved while holding her in her arms. The proleptic

insertion of the sisters' impending metamorphoses as a metaphor for the

transformative power of love between women highlights the inherent queerness of

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[54] The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 raised the age of consent and
recriminalized homosexuality. Michael Field scholars have grappled with the
question of what age Bradley and Cooper developed a romantic relationship with
attention to the problem of age of consent. See especially Kate Thomas's "'What
Time We Kiss': Michael Field's Queer Temporalities" (GLQ 13.2-3, 2007).

Ovid's original tale, since it frames the narrative as a triumph of queer love over heteroreproductive matrimony.

Bradley and Cooper's descriptions of Procne's desire for Philomela replace Tereus's desire for Philomela in the original myth, making desire between women central to Michael Field's retelling of the myth; this desire between women remains intentionally ambiguous and suggests a transformation from sisterly and to romantic love. One way that Michael Field emphasizes this transformation from familial to romantic love is by embedding lyrical love poetry's trope of apostrophe from the speaker to the beloved, whose response we shall hear in the following poem, a call and response echoing Procne's characterization of the woman's "one song". Procne continues by correcting the misconception that her sorrow is a result of homesickness for Athens. "It is not Athens I desire—O Child, / Thyself" clarifies that home, for Procne, is not a geographical location but contact with Philomela (19). Unlike the songbirds who remain faithful to both site and selected mate, Procne resists both, instead proclaiming her desire to be for Philomela. The image of the birds, whose "bosoms rose + fell," now becomes explicitly physical in the union of Philomela's "rose-body" in Procne's "arms" (20). Ovid's sororal birds become in Michael Field a mating pair.

In the second poem, "Philomela," the speaker pronounces her reciprocal love for her sister, yet while Michael Field indicates with the title and subsequent story that the speaker is Philomela, the speaker's address becomes ambiguous, indicating the merger between Procne and Philomela:

> Sweet as the way to the fountain on shady hill-side,
> Glad as the breaking of dawn on the dew of dewdrops,
> Showest the face that is bearing me, Procne, to thee. (1-3)

The speaker begs the addressee to show her the face that will unite them, whom we presume to be Tereus but who in fact turns out to be at once Procne and Philomela. Awakening after one of "the lonely nights," Philomela frequents a "hill-side" fountain to watch rosy dawn bouncing light off of dewdrops: "the dew of dewdrops, / Showeth the face that is bearing me, Procne, to thee." Whereas at first glance the poem seems to suggest it is the face of Tereus approaching whom Procne spies, the line simultaneously transforms the poetic conceit of the lover seeing the beloved's reflection in water. Philomela willfully misrecognizes her own reflection for that of her sister, an act that her "sweet" eagerness and anticipation walk to the fountain suggests is a repeated ritual. Marion Thain has compared Micahel Field's "Already to mine eyelids' shore" to John Donne's "A Valediction: Of Weeping," arguing that Bradley and Cooper rejected the prevalence of Victorian lyrical absence in favor of presence, "morph[ing] elegy into love lyric because the other is always present" (113). Thain argues that Micahel Field's poetry is more metaphysical, less solipsistic than Victorian poetry because their "dual vocality" creates a theatrical experience wherein the eye / I is performative—it encompasses all the various speaker / audience positionalities available between Bradley, Cooper, and Michael Field, while performing within the world of the poem a drama resembling the dramatic monologue because Michael Field is a "fictional persona whose voice they invoke to contain their dual vocality" and "the audience ceases to be mute and enters the poem vocally"

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(115). When Michael Field write actual dramatic monologues, rather than the lyrics *like* the dramatic monologue, they indeed echo Donne's language of presence as opposed to the Victorian—Tennyson or Browning—language of absence. Moreover, they invert the affect of love lyric, too, transforming the tragic teardrop into a hopeful dewdrop, the microcosm for the world dawning rather than dying, as Donne's euphemistically concludes, while lovers reunite rather than separate, inextricably connected through their lifelong relationship and single pseudonym.

Sexual sameness rather than difference distinguishes Michael Field's dewdrop from Donne's lover's teardrops that mark heterosexual difference or Ovid's Narcissus's narcissistic similitude.[55] Its resemblance to Donne's conceit of the lover seeing the beloved's face in his teardrops elucidates the image as romantic just as its resemblance to Ovid's Narcissus underlines that the romance is based on the attraction to not only sexual but also interfamilial sameness. It is another way that these poems deal unapologetically with same-sex incestuous love, since the dewdrop reflects the familial resemblance that allows Philomela to see "the face that is bearing me, Procne, to thee." Between "me" and "thee" is "Procne" herself, who as the older of the two women in Michael Field's version bears a resemblance to Bradley as the aunt of the couple. "Bearing" holds the weight of both physically bringing, carrying, as well as the more maternal connotation of giving birth and rearing, a reference that recollects Bradley's role as primary caretaker within the Cooper household after the birth of Emma Cooper's second daughter made her an invalid. Michael Field cleverly

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[55] John Donne's "A Valediction of Weeping" and Ovid's "Echo and Narcissus"

utilizes the dewdrop poetic conceit to examine the literal and figural similitude of their relationality as same-sex, interfamilial, and intergenerational lovers. The result is an anti-Oedipal understanding of Procne and Philomela as a merged, assemblage, two women like two birds through whose "one song" they imagine their distinct different bodies (erotically) united as "one + for one + of one" as Philomela insistently repeats throughout her monologue.[56] The numerology of three ones highlights Michael Field's queerness, since the erotic triangulation here erases Tereus completely, refiguring the typical erotic triangle's focus on heteropatriarchy (because even Sedgwick and Marcus's formulas resolve in heteroreproductive marriage) as a triumph of same-sex love between women.

In this model, triangulated romantic relationships function much differently; the same-sex pair of the love triangle do not rival one another for the opposite-sex's favor, nor to they serve as intimate friends who support each other's heteroreproductive life. Instead, the same-sex pair makes use of well-established institutions and acknowledged ideological relationalities in order to justify their love for one another at the rejection of their heterosexual suitor. Thus Michael Field's Procne and Philomela justify their love based on their sisterhood, rejecting Tereus, a quite literal symbol of heteropatriarchial violence just as, as we saw in Chapter 1,

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[56] Foucault describes Deleuze and Guattarri's idea of anti-Oedipality as an erotic art, whose "seemingly abstract notions of multiplicities, flows, arrangements, and connections, the analysis of the relationship of desire to reality" has embedded within it the answers for how desire can "deploy its forces within the political domain and grow more intense in the process of overturning the established order" (xli "Preface" to *Anti-Oedipus*).

Pater's Marius and Cornelius justified their love based on their brotherhood, praising yet rejecting the Madonna-like potential heterosexual love interest. Fin de siecle erotic triangles frequently utilize this trope of same-sex love as brotherhood and sisterhood, where same-sex lovers love openly and with the support of the opposite sex lovers as well, forging a gay and lesbian alliance through the symbol of kinship. The trope appears as early as Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* and Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon's illustrations for *Daphnis and Chloe*, where Ricketts and Shannon hosted a dinner party during which they drew their illustrations, using themselves as a stand-in for Daphnis and Chloe themselves. The two pairs of lovers, Bradley and Cooper, Ricketts and Shannon, discussed this idea of queer solidarity in terms of kinship in 1898, two years before Michael Field themselves explored the trope in literature:

> Brothers of the Sword (men who married men, with a train of bridesmaids, + whose bed fingers were blessed by the Church) their Sisters of the Cross (women who married women, with a train of groomsmen, + were blessed by the Church foot tied to foot). (Add.Ms.46787,95)

Significantly, it is within Ovid's world that taboo sexuality, not only figuring same-sex love in terms of kinship but also exploring same-sex love between kin, is explored. The enchanted, distant, mythical world of Ovid provides Michael Field on the one hand with the temporal and spatial distance from themselves they need to explore the taboo subject and on the other hand with the enchanted, fantastical world to make such an exploration possible. Not unlike Iphis and Ianthe's same-sex love and gender fluidity, and like Myrrha and Cinyras's daughter-father incestuous affair, Michael Field's Philomela and Procne mythologize their own same-sex interfamilial

attachment, perhaps in order to exorcise their own anxieties about the non-normativities that inhibited their relationship.

Moreover, in this first stanza, Michael Field's speaker reads alternatively as Philomela addressing Procne and as Procne addressing Philomela, an ambiguity they develop in the following two stanzas, as the speaker continues to evoke Procne's name in what might be either the nominative or vocative case.

> Procne, I sing in my heart, but her name I say not!
> Only from depths of a well or from earth's mid hollow,
> Only from covert forbidden, in white Colonus,
> Hidden from sight with the leaves of the vines + laurel,
> Baffling the ear with a chorus of feathered songsters,
> Could I invoke the delights that in tumult haunt me,
>
> One + for one, + of one is the love that wrings me.
> Chill I have seemed to my dearest the while she
> Finding no speech that should answer + ease her kisses
> Now shall I answer + ease them + break in laughter;
> Tereus is proud in his heart as I trip beside him,
> Bearing me back as a trophy from hard-fought battle.
>
> Rest! Shall he ask me to rest who am winged + speeding?
> "Tereus delay not, a laggard is soonest weary-
> Tereus"! He trembles, he holds me, a swooning takes him
> Surely he suffers, his forehead sweats branching dew-marks.
>
> Yet will I hasten, I fear him again, his gloomy
> Vigilant eyes, + that sudden arresting movement;
> Vainly he babbles, beseeches I, -"Tereus, Tereus"-
> Bear me, divine cries away to the earth's mid-hollow. (4-23)

Bradley and Cooper continue to embed the original myth into the dramatic monologue, while asserting the mutual bond between the two women. The second poem begins with Philomela's response to Procne, as she silently anticipates the impending reunion, transcribes her story upon the tapestry, and transforms into a

songbird. Michael Field utilizes the ambiguity the dramatic monologue permits between the poet and speaker, utilizing the rhetoric of simile rather than metaphor in order to compare rather than conflate same-sex desire between humans and non-human animals. The distance allotted by the simile allows them to depict same-sex erotic affection between the two women making love as opposed to depicting them as metamorphosed mating songbirds. Doing so resists anthropomorphizing the nightingale, writing against the nineteenth-century lyrical tradition. Attracted as they were to the natural world, Michael Field was beginning to experiment with animal subjects in lyric; that they explore same-sex love between women who transform into birds speaks to their interest in discovering same-sex unions in nature. Michael Field might have turned to Ovid's Iphis and Ianthe, for an example of homophilic women, yet the story might be read as implicitly homophobic, since the myth does not condone but rather corrects same-sex love between two women by transforming Iphis into a man, thereby metamorphosizing it into a heterosexual love story. The story also contains within it a non-essentialist understanding of same-sex desire, which was contrary to Michael Field's belief in their queer identities. When Ovid's Iphis laments her same-sex love, she describes same-sex love from a non-essentialist position," turning to the nonhuman animal world to exemplify same-sex relations as not a "natural normal affliction":

> Cows do not love cows, nor mares, mares; but the ram desires the sheep, and his own doe follows the stag. So also birds mate, and in the whole animal world there is no female smitten with love for female. (Met. IX 731-735)

Although Iphis and Ianthe is the most straightforward representation of same-sex love between women in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* the story also provides a corrective conclusion, resolving the taboo same-sex love through gender transformation. As women whose identities were closely tied with both same-sex love and gender fluidity, the story's emphasis on same-sex love as unnatural would have been unappealing as source material. Whereas in Iphis and Ianthe, Ovid's Iphis observes that birds and other animals only engage in heterosexual sex ("*aves coeunt*"), Michael Field found in Ovid's Philomela and Procne myth a positive portrayal of lifelong, transcendent love between women (Met. IX.732). Through so doing, Michael Field rectifies Ovid's representation of same-sex love between women as a product of culture, describing instead a 'lesbian' love that fuses on the one hand the essentialist understanding of same-sex love as natural and innate and on the other hand the constructionist understanding of same-sex love as a product of cultural conditioning (Jagose 8).

In the story of Philomela and Procne, where same-sex love never resolves through institutionalized human heterosexuality, as it does in Iphis and Ianthe, but rather through the non-human natural reunion of a same-sex mating pair of songbirds, turning to Victorian science's recognition that some birds mate with birds of their own sex, a fact Havelock Ellis recounts in *Sexual Inversion.*[57] Utilizing Victorian

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[57] Ellis cites ancient and modern accounts of homosexuality among birds in the absence of the opposite sex: "they would soon begin to have sexual relations among themselves, the males sooner and more frequently than the females." Additionally, Aristotle "noted that two female pigeons would cover each other if no male was at hand" (97).

scientific culture to rewrite one of Ovid's most brutal stories of heterosexual violence as a homosocial love story between women, Michael Field's Philomela Trilogy reworks the heteropatriarchal tradition of classical reception, providing within it a space for women and others to explore alternative gender and sexual positionalities. Philomela's physical exile to the woods is turned inward, becoming an internalized, psychological exile, like Procne's own in the poem named after her. Her tongue mutilated, Philomela can only answer Procne's song with the encoded language of the tapestry, as she must "baffle" in order to "invoke the delights that in tumult haunt me" (8, 9). The line, "One + for one, + of one is the love that wrings me," emphasizes the "one song" between the sisters Procne mentions in the first poem (10; "Procne" 13). Bradley and Cooper seem to confirm the deliberate ambiguity of the speaker here, emphasizing the repetition of sameness that exists between sisters and also between same-sex lovers. The intimacy between speaker and addressee, the merging of subject and object, of first and second person, and the insistent repetition of them as "one" excludes the third term, Tereus, insisting on their (exclusive) love.

Further, Philomela is liberated by the intradiegetic nature of Michael Field's poetics, since she seems to be already aware of the fact that she will reunite with her sister at the moment Tereus attacks her. Bradley and Cooper use the myth performatively in these dialogues as if the characters already know their destiny. The plot of this myth might already be known, but their version of events is what is new. Their diegetic approach allows Procne and Philomela to become all-knowing mythological figures who can thus transcend linear time within the logic of the

poems. Bradley and Cooper also create a non-linear temporality, a temporality that

deconstructs the teleological heteropatriarchal narrative, replacing linear with a

fragmented temporality that allows Field to insert proleptic moments of

homosociality in order to allow the sisters to survive traumatic present moments.

Disjointed, collage-like narratives that jumble temporal linearity and weave various

temporal streams-of-consciousness have been discussed by both scholars of trauma

and queer studies as a literary strategy through which to cope with and to express

marginalization and persecution.[58]

While the overarching poem "Philomela" is chronological, Michael Field

proleptically embeds the sisters' reunion and their metamorphoses. Prolepsis here

functions as the means by which Philomela can cope with the present trauma; as she

begins sensing the danger she is in, she prophetically conjures up future moments that

enable her to fight off Tereus. From the "earth's mid hollow," the stone hut to which

Tereus abducts her, she elucidates the future moment of the two sister songbirds

singing about the present moment, "Baffling the ear with a chorus of feathered

songsters" in order to "invoke the delights that in tumult haunt me" (5, 7-8). Michael

Field likewise transforms Ovid's description of a terrified Philomela who, "vainly

call[ed],…often on her sister" into the proleptical future reunion, answering

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[58] Hong Zeng's *Semiotics of Exile* describes how the motif of exile in literature across time and place demonstrates a "deconstructive poetics" characterized by disjointed, mosaic language expressive of an "inability to belong" (2). Within queer studies, Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings* and Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards* approach trauma from a queer theory perspective, exploring narratives that arise from sexual trauma and trauma induced by sexual persecution and exile respectively.

Philomela's wish with her sister's appearance: "Chill I have seemed to my dearest the while she murmured, / Finding no speech that should answer + ease her kisses" (Ovid Met. VI.526; 11-12). This imagined intimate future reunion provides Philomela with the determination to weave her story, even as it happens.

The poem thus becomes Philomela's tapestry, fragmenting the narrative in order to incentivize her survival: "Now I shall answer + ease them + break in laughter" (13). Crucially, Michael Field omits much of Philomela's subsequent anguish; her clairvoyance instead enables her to critique Tereus's violence as he commits his crimes. Michael Field elaborates on Ovid's Philomela who chastises Tereus, turning Philomela into a proto-feminist heroine who understands Tereus to be performing the violence of heteropatriarchy. She "breaks in laughter" to see "Tereus…proud in his heart" at her attempted escape, recognizing in his brutality the violent masculinity inscribed in the epic tradition, with herself "as a trophy" he carries from "hard-fought battle" (13-15). Instead she embraces her own lyrical tradition. Foreshadowing her metamorphosis into a songbird, she taunts him as she continues to flee: "Rest! Shall he ask me to rest who am winged + speedy?" (16). The concluding two stanzas of the poem recount Philomela's rape as she continues to entreat him to bring her to her sister, then, when she anticipates his second attack, to "Bear me, divine cries away to the earth's mid-hollow," a poetic rendering of Ovid's Philomela's regretful survival of the brutal attack: "I dearly wish you had murdered me first, before you so vilely assaulted my body" (23; Met.VI.539-40). Concluding the poem with Philomela's last words, Michael Field severs the poem with an allusion

to the second violation—the mutilation and subsequent second rape—of Philomela

before returning home to tell Procne the invented story of Philomela's death.

"Philomela" forges a continuity in the homosocial bond between women during the

moments the original epic renders their bond to be broken.

I read this as Michael Field forging a genealogy between past and present

women, both a genealogy of lyricism and a shared history of heteropatriarchal

oppression. Michael Field's "Philomela" signals their own aesthetic innovation, of

transforming Ovid's epic into the lyrical poetry Philomela devises in an attempt to

articulate her own experiences, a failed attempt that, as we shall see, Michael Field

develops as a figure for their own failure once their poetry was discovered to have

been written by two women.

The final poem tells the final part of the myth from Tereus's perspective and

significantly revises the ending. Upon returning home, Tereus finds Procne waiting

for her husband and sister: "Procne, thou on my threshold standest-gazing, / Standest

tremulous" (1-2). In this poem, Tereus, continuing Ovid's myth where "Philomela"

concludes, returns home to Thrace to his expectant wife. Tereus describes seeing the

"tremulous" Procne watching him approach, anticipatory and anxious upon noticing

Philomela's absence, which he mockingly acknowledges:

> …hast thou no name to call?
> Call now, call on the wide air, call on Athens,
> Turn away from my face + invoke the winds:—
> Procne, sweetest she is, + sweet her motion;
> I, beholding you both, denied your praises,
> Till I saw her alone, her eyes in welcome. (2-7)

Whereas Ovid describes Tereus recounting the tale with "pretended grief and told a made-up story of death," Michael Field's Tereus extends the myth to include the fabricated tale (565-6). In this tale, Tereus recounts the moment he meets Philomela as a moment, transforming the male gaze Ovid repeatedly describes as predatory and erotic, into one reciprocated by Philomela's "eyes in welcome".[59] Tereus's version of the story creates a narrative out of Philomela's declaration in Ovid that "Now I am my sister's rival, / you are married twice over and Procne must be my enemy" (536-7). Michael Field's Tereus recreates from the original a story about an erotic triangle, where Tereus successfully breaks the homosocial bond between sisters triumphing through having 'conquered' both women. The trilogue as a whole modifies the typical Victorian formulation of the erotic triangle of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Sharon Marcus, reconfiguring it to include two women and one man, wherein one woman and man rival for the affection of the beloved, whom herself rejects the heterosexual dyad in favor of same-sex love between women. Michael Field's "Tereus" channels Browning's dramatic monologues of villainous men whose paranoia about their wives' adultery culminates in murderous rage, depicting Tereus with psychological depth explaining his reasoning behind his murderous actions.

Taunting Procne to call out for her sister, Tereus retells the story of Philomela begging her father to let her visit Procne in Thrace. He confesses to Procne, "I,

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[59] Ovid writes "The sight of this pure young woman made Tereus hot with desire" (449), "As Tereus watched, his hands strayed mentally over her body. / He eyed her kissing Pandion, her arms encircling his neck. / Her every action served to provoke, to inflame and to feed/ his lust" (480-2).

beholding you both…/ …saw her alone, her eyes in welcome" (6-7). Here Tereus

misreads Philomela's desire for Procne, confusing his desire for Philomela with her

desire for her sister. As Philomela makes her rejection of him clear, Tereus's lust

increases:

> Lo, I tremble to own her more sweet than thou
> Swift her Voice in its wild, full-throated cadence,
> Swift the passion that broke through her simple words,
> "Stay not, Procne desires me." Then I saw her,
> over eye-lids + lips + firm white shoulders
> Beauty bright as the dew that tips the lilies,
> Fervid, piercing as sunset within their leaves,
> Circled, brake from her:

Unlike Ovid's poem, which focalizes Philomela's beauty through Tereus's piercing

male gaze, Michael Field's version disrupts Tereus's violent stare with Philomela's

own furious protestations, inverting the gender roles of Ovid that emphasize

Philomela's passivity and Tereus's dominance. Tereus "trembles" effeminately at

Philomela's aggressive rejection, his brutally violent response a reaction to his

emasculation. In Michael Field's Tereus's version of the myth, it is Philomela's

active defiance incites him to violence; Tereus's brutal rape and dismemberment of

her tongue is described in part as Tereus's reaction against having been emasculated

by her, an attempt to reinstate his authority through heteropatriarchal violence:

> Mute she walked beside me,
> Pausing not by the grove of oleander,
> Fount, or coolness of heart + desired waters,
> Tracks where under the plane-tree Sleep was sleeping,
> But with heart of a mortal, god-befrenzied,
> Set her face the joy of thy face, beloved;
> I, beholding her, loved her, loved thy darling,
> All the bliss of her life pressed through her heart-throbs
> Perfumed, glowed through her body: swift the sun stroke:

<div align="center">Mourner, pass to thy mourning, bewail thy dead. (8-24)</div>

Tereus responds by situating Philomela as Procne's rival, a reference to Philomela's accusation in Ovid that Tereus "confused all natural relations" making her "a concubine, [her] sister's rival" and Tereus "a husband to both" (*Met.* VI 537-8). The preceding lines emphasize the social consequences of Tereus's having transgressing Roman sexual mores on Philomela:

> Now she passes away, her face is covered,
> Face that never must hurl on mine reproaches,
> Blank her stare on my eyes, my speech, my gestures,
> Slow her flushing, + slower her dark-spread grief:
> Honoured, noble in spirit, her I lie to,
> Her I love + despise not—Philomela! (25-30)

In the stanza, the invented tale of Philomela having "pass[ed] away" simultaneously comments on her fallen status (25). As a rape victim she has metaphorically "passed away," since through Tereus's transgression of having raped his wife's virginal sister would have had the consequence of destroying her *pudicitia*, her sexual virtue, the Roman woman's most prized possession. Michael Field translates Ovid's poetic rendering of the social consequences of sexual transgressions as a physical blemish. Ovid's "shame-blanched face of her wretched sister" (ora[…] miserae pudibunda sororis) becomes in Michael Field's version the "dark-spread grief" of "the [h]onoured, noble spirit" (Met.VI.604; 28, 29). "Pudibunda," the compound word merging the idea of "pudor," the behavioral restraints one puts on oneself based on their awareness of society's judgement, with "rubor," an individual's physical blush signifying moral self-consciousness, is an embodiment of the concept of *pudicitia*.

Michael Field's translation encompasses "pudibunda" as the embodiment through the "flushing" face of Philomela, who "covers" her head in shame (28, 25).[60]

Threatening Philomela not to "hurl on mine reproaches," Michael Field's Tereus recounts to Procne the moment when Philomela defiantly reprimands him for destroying not only her virtue but the virtue of her family (26). His retelling erases her proud defiance. Displacing the shame Philomela later expresses to her sister upon their reunion onto this earlier moment following her rape, Michael Field rearranges Philomela's affective responses, showing Tereus rejoicing at having destroyed her virtue. In translating directly from Ovid the sister's "shame-blanched face," (ora miserae pudibunda sororis), Michael Field's Philomela's "dark-spread grief" of "[h]onoured, noble spirit," contains the original myth's commentary on the social consequences of rape on the victim. It also evokes the moment in Ovid when Philomela, upon being rescued by her sister, blushes with downcast eyes, revealing not only her personal remorse but also her self-conscious awareness at the socio-ethical crime of Tereus's transgression and its consequences on her social position (*Met* VI.604-606).[61] Strategically displacing Philomela's social consciousness and affective responses to rape, Michael Field elucidates Ovid's polyvocal techniques

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[60] See Rebecca Langsland's "Introduction" to *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome,* which discusses "pudibunda" as an embodiment of *pudicitia* in further detail.
[61] Rebecca Langsland discusses the etymology of "pudibunda" in terms of the Roman ideal of pudicitia, sexual virtue, which she observes was founded not so much on sexual abstinence and purity but the types of sexual activities one engaged with: it "is often about *not* participating in prohibited sexual activities"

using the tripartite monologue to innovate and to critique the myth from a feminist perspective.

Exploring the interior workings of Tereus's mind as he commits his violent crime allows them to comment on the violence of heteropatriarchy. Elaborating his narrative exposes the ways that traditional mytho-historiography reinforces Roman sexual mores, allowing the predominately heteropatriarchial authors to willfully rewrite events. That *pudicitia* is customarily a womanly ideal suggests that Roman sexual mores disproportionately affected women. Michael Field seems to suggest that these myths about heteropatriarchial sexual violence, as well as other taboos, as Foucault might say, serve to reinforce the very sexual activities they prohibit. Moreover, elaborating on Tereus's cruel justification of his rape allows Michael Field to differentiate sexual heteropatriarchial violence from other sexual taboos like the same-sex love and incest they explore in "Procne" and "Philomela." Their adaptation of the Philomela story thus serves as a feminist recuperation of mytho-historiography that revises Roman sexual mores in ways that exonerate the women the 'original' myths and the laws they perpetuate unjustly punished.

In Michael Field's Philomela trilogy, the revenge plot at the end of the myth is replaced with descriptions of Philomela and Tereus' regret. Tereus reflects on his rape of Philomela in the final stanza, where he regrets having raped his wife's virgin sister and describes his heartbreak over Philomela.

> Thou most exquisite flower trod down in darkness,
> Trampled, sported by my hands, how dear to ravish!
> Locked thy life with its secret, locked thy torture,
> All thy hours are the hour that thy will forbade.

> Sweet, but surely I loved thee: bitterer torment,
> Anguish worse than I dreamed or forced thee suffer
> Poisoned, ate through my flesh as rust eats metal
> ("Tereus," 31-37)

Tereus reveals that he feels "anguish" "worse than" he could have imagined and worse than he "forced" Philomela to "suffer". Rather, his "anguish" is caused by the sisters' revenge. Philomela and Procne "[p]oisoned" Tereus who retells the moment when he "ate through my flesh as rust eats metal", that is, the moment when Tereus "ate" the "flesh" of his son, Itys. The moment forces Tereus to reconcile with his mortality, for through it he realizes he is not "god-like". Tereus realizes he is not exempt from taboo acts and heinous crimes that gods commit. Unlike Zeus, who went unpunished for sex crimes and recognized human attempts to trick him into committing cannibalism, as in the Lycaon myth, Tereus is punished.

Michael Field situates Tereus' tale as one among the many instances in Ovid in which a powerful man, god, or king, attempts to kidnap and rape a woman he loves; in their version, however, they describe Philomela as one of Diana's followers, a reference not only to her chastity but perhaps also to her same-sex desire, since Diana and her followers shunned men.

> When I, god in my longing, but not god-like,
> Wooed thee, not as a creature thy hands could tame,
> Fondled swan of the stream or lustrous serpent,
> Bull, or hovering bird, or ivy-sprinkled
> Satyr, eagle of Ida, or wide-horned Ram
> Striking joy on thy eyes with silky fleeces,
> Dew of gold on the air, or glaring fire-beam,-
> Wooed thee, mortal-bedazzled, lost in wonder.
> Hadst thou—Winds of the cavern, flames of Altua
> Throes that rush through your core, + see the back baffled.

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> Nay, no element strives as strove my bosom
> When I found in thy beauty no quick of love.
> Ares, father to thee I shout in triumph,
> What was Semele's self, its dust its ashes!
> Lo, I offer thee quarry wrung from Dian
> Lo, my refuse, my wrecking, my great remorse. (31-53)

Tereus reflects on his rape of Philomela with regret; he reiterates that he violently attacked her out of love. Unlike Zeus's successful rape of women, disguising himself as creatures women want to tame, Tereus fails to attract Philomela. He describes himself as "god in my longing, but not god-like," pointing to Zeus's disguised seduction of characters throughout Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, equating his passion with that of the gods (38). He enumerates Zeus's various rapes under the guise of other creatures—Leda as a swan, Europa as a bull, Antiope as a satyr, and also the story of Ganymede, whom he ravishes as an eagle before taking as his *eromenos*–[62] as well as instances including Cadmus caressing his wife after he had been transformed into a snake, a story that stands apart from the rapes of Zeus and also evokes Ovid's description of Philomela's severed tongue "as the severed tail of a mangled snake is wont to writhe, it twitches convulsively and with its last dying movement it seeks its mistress's feet" (Met.VI.559-60). These stories, like the Philomela myth itself, are stories of seduction gone awry.

Whereas Ovid's mythological ending celebrates transcendence and sublimation, Bradley and Cooper's modern ending renders communion between

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[62] The story of Ganymede and Zeus is one repeated in queer decadent writing. It is notably discussed at length in Symonds' *A Problem in Greek Ethics* and mentioned in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

women impossible, a comment on gender relations in modern times. The Philomela trilogy as a whole thus acts as an allegory for the Victorian woman, who passes from same-sex love between women into the heterosexual realm of marriage. Taken in a late-Victorian context, Bradley and Cooper's depiction of same-sex love between Procne and Philomela would not necessarily have been shocking; however, their relationship as aunt-and-niece lovers complicates this reading. As Marcus states in *Between Women*, homoeroticism between women was one of the "dominant codes of femininity" (113). Because "Victorian society accepted female homoeroticism as a component of respectable womanhood and encouraged women and girls to desire, scrutinize, and handle simulacra of alluring femininity," Procne's desire to embrace Philomela would have passed as normative homoerotic behavior between women (112).[63] Indeed, Procne and Philomela's relationship as sisters would necessarily have normalized the display of affection. These factors made Philomela and Procne safe subjects with which to explore Bradley and Cooper's own relationship.

Because Bradley and Cooper never explicitly discuss incest in poetry, their rewriting of Philomela and Procne to emphasize physical intimacy and love between the women contributes to an ongoing discussion about the portrayal of their relationship as lovers. Scholars have argued that Michael Field reads as queer because there is no singular way to pinpoint their identity—as the masculine Michael Field, as

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[63] Marcus distinguishes homoerotic relations between women from lesbian relations: "Precisely 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" (*Between Women* 113).

incestuous cross-generational lesbians, as two women who variously identified as aunt and niece, mother and child, husband and wife, as Greek maenads, and as Christ and St. John.[64] Kate Thomas has pointed out that both Michael Field's oeuvre and current scholarship avoid addressing the fact that Bradley and Cooper's relationship was incestuous. Thomas interprets Bradley and Cooper's "It was deep April" as a poem implicitly about incest; she argues that they reveled in the queerness of their relationship. While I agree that the poem embraces non-normative love—"my love and I took hands and swore, / against the world, to be / poets and lovers evermore"— it elides defining precisely what is queer about this love. The Philomela trilogy, then, is the only Michael Field poem to my knowledge that takes same-sex love and desire as its explicit subject.

Michael Field could explore issues of love between women, specifically the potentiality of homoerotic and incestuous love between Philomela and Procne because the Philomela myth was a part of the English literary tradition and Victorian classicism. Exploring intimacy between women through Roman mythology would have been an acceptable literary exercise for women poets at the turn of the century, especially when the subject, Philomela, was such an integral part of the nineteenth-

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[64] See Martha Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale," Jill Ehenenn's "Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in "Beauty and Ugliness" and *Sight and Song*," *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture*, Yopie Prins's "Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters," *Victorian Sexual Dissidence,* Frederick Rodin's *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* for examples of the various ways Bradley and Cooper envisioned their relationship. Kate Thomas's "'What Time We Kiss': Michael Field's Queer Temporalities" offers an overview of scholarship on Michael Field and what makes him a queer figure.

century poetic tradition. Yet, by the time they wrote the Philomela trilogy, Bradley and Cooper had already been exposed as two women writers, and the subject matter of what is arguably Ovid's most brutal rape story in *The Metamorphoses* would have been considered distasteful and unsuitable for publication. Thus if they had decided against its publication in order to censor themselves, it was more likely due to the descriptions of violence than any fear of backlash over Procne and Philomela's relationship.

As trained classicists and poets who saw themselves in conversation with decadent authors like Pater, Symonds, and Wilde, Michael Field and their circle found Ovid's poetry especially appealing because of both its queer potentiality and Ovid's own sexual transgressions. As a poet exiled for "a poem and a mistake," what many deem were sexual in nature, Ovid becomes a predecessor of Wilde, who lived out his life in exile and had his work censored. Michael Field was aware of this history, and in Ovid's Philomela myth, saw an opportunity to describe the experience of women under sexual morality laws. While as women they were exempt from persecution under the Labouchere Amendment, which only targeted same-sex acts between men, Bradley and Cooper felt increasingly ostracized by the community for both their work and their position as queer women. The Philomela trialogue thus enabled them to consecrate their relationship through poetry.

Michael Field's Sapphic Metamorphic Poetics

By the time Michael Field 'translated' Ovid's Philomela into the queer feminist adaptation I presented above, they had already been experimenting with the

idea of natural ekphrases—the translation of one natural form into another—for over a year. In their autobiographical journals written concurrently with the Philomela trialogue and *To an Exile,* which I will discuss below, they express the desire to articulate in poetry how "the sea translates the earth" and how animal experiences might translate into poetry. In another instance, upon watching their dog, Musico, observing the birds, they speculate: "if one could be sufficiently small, one would be caught by [birdsong]…One would like to learn the notes of the birds." Their attempt to do so is recorded in the Philomela trialogue, which they included as a part of *Music and Silence,* an ultimately abandoned book of poetry, the title evocative of Musico, and representative of the nonhuman perspective of the world they desired to record. In their diary entries written at this time, Musico is frequently referred to as simply Music, creating what I read as an intentional elision between their nonhuman companion and the poetic vision they espoused.

Michael Field's interest in translating the natural world not as a poet who anthropomorphizes but rather as a poet who captures the essence of the metamorphic subject itself reads as an extension of their former ekphrastic and translational experimentations, where they attempted to "translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves; to express not so much what these pictures are to the poet, but rather what poetry they objectively incarnate" (*Sight and Song* v). In *To an Exile,* a series of eleven eleven-lined poems written in 1900, Michael Field's poet passively observes a marshland, an ecology comprised of various metamorphosed humans and gods, whose music they record while postponing

their own prayer to Aphrodite, "too mutinous for speech." Unlike Sappho, whose celebratory "Hymn to Aphrodite" (also called Sappho 1) Michael Field contrasts with their own censored hymn, Michael Field envisions themselves as exiled queer poets among the Ovidian metamorphic characters that haunt Aphrodite's marshland. This contrast situates the classical Greek past as a bygone time where poets could celebrate same-sex desire between humans, in contrast to the homophobic present where modern poets self-exile themselves geographically and through self-censorship. *To an Exile* demonstrates Michael Field's effort to express this experience poetically. In light of the Wilde trial, when Greek and Latin became risky signifiers for queerness, Michael Field deploys queer classics differently to discover another, safer, mode of communication between queer outcasts.

Michael Field reads Ovid's *Metamorphoses* via Sappho, and therefore backwards since Sappho far predates and indeed influences Ovid, in order to invent a formula for articulating nonheteronormative desires through a world that decentralizes the (hu)man perspective. In other words, Michael Field's *To an Exile* blends Sappho's feminine worldview with Ovid's metamorphoses in order to generate a more feminist ecological poetry than is possible with Ovid's text alone. In Sappho's lyrics they find the more direct, free flowing celebration of love that inspires them to reimagine exile as an opportunity to create new and positive forms of nonheteronormative intimacy.

To an Exile first appears as a series of three undated poems inserted between Michael Field's unpublished translation of Sappho's "Hymn to Aphrodite," entitled

"To Aphrodite," which bears the date April 29, 1898 (MS.Eng.Poet.E.138). They
later returned to the previously abandoned poems, expanding the series to include an
additional nine poems completed on October 21st, 1900 (MS.Eng.Poet.D.66). [65]
Sappho's poem, commonly referred to as "Hymn to Aphrodite," is translated by
Michael Field in the poetry journal MS.Eng.Poet.E.138 and later copied into
MS.Eng.Poet.D.66. In it, Michael Field translates love between women specifically in
physical terms, a translation that makes the lesbian thematics of the text concrete.
Michael Field's translation forges an intimate connection between Sappho and
Aphrodite as well as Sappho's new lover, creating a lesbian triangulation between the
two mortal women and the goddess. I include Michael Field's translation of Sappho
1, which they entitled "To Aphrodite" below:

> Queen! Aphrodite, of the bordered throne,
> Break not my heart with anguish + distress;
> Hear from afar, + fall upon my moan:
> If ever thou didst hear, I pray thee, bless
> Even that old way as once before! Afar,
>   Leaving thy father's house,
> Quickly thou camest in the fair yoked car
>   Thou yoked'st to espouse
> Thy Sappho's wrongs. Oh, let me see the fleet
> Sparrows that drew thee—hearken
> The flapping wings that through wind-heaven beat,
>   And fall, + darken
> The earth they fall on: come, + question me
> As then, most blessèd one, even with thy smile,
> What in my mad heart I desired to see,
> What Beauty to my bosom I would wile.
> "For she who would not take thy gifts before
> Herself shall give, for gift of thine shall pray

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[65] That is, "To Aphrodite" appears twice in the journal, once on either side of *To an Exile,* thus framing these poems as their own appeal to the goddess in the tradition of Sappho.

And she shall follow thee who fled away,
And she who loathed to love shall love thee sore."
So come thou too again, this time, even now!
      Loose me from cares that darken,
All that my heart attempts, + knows not how,
And cannot bring to pass, accomplish thou,
Confederate goddess, hearken!

    (Bodleian Library, Michael Field Papers, MS.Eng.Poet.E.138.13-14, April 29 1898)

Michael Field translated "Hymn to Aphrodite" nine years after they published their translations and extensions of Sappho's lyrical fragments in the 1889 volume *Long Ago.* I read their deliberate exclusion of Sappho's only extant unfragmented lyric from that collection makes its inclusion here all the more provocative; it signals their maturation as two women classicists as well as one singular poet, a symbiotic trilogy whose translation of the only unfragmented extant Sappho lyric symbolizes them coming to terms with themselves in all their various and fluid gender, sexual, and relational identities. *Long Ago* presented itself as an aesthetic extension of Sappho's fragmented lyrics by a masculine poet. Yopie Prins convincingly argues that Michael Field enacts a lesbian poetics in the published lyrics by both ventriloquizing Sappho and situating themselves—two modern women-loving classicists—in dialogue with her. Thus, whereas Michael Field's earlier *Long Ago* depends on fragmentation to form identification with other women-desiring women across time, "To Aphrodite" depends on wholeness. Its unfragmented state complements its subject matter, where the triangulation between women emphasizes a desire for reciprocity: Aphrodite responds to Sappho's evocation whose beloved subsequently reciprocates her love.

Michael Field's translation is remarkable because it homoeroticizes the relationship between the human poet Sappho and the nonhuman goddess Aphrodite. Whereas in the original, Sappho calls on the disembodied Aphrodite to help her woo her disinterested beloved, Michael Field's translation homoeroticizes this relationship between the two women. Michael Field's Sappho entreats Aphrodite to "Break not my heart with anguish & distress" as if Sappho's unrequited love were for Aphrodite herself. In the following line, Henry Wharton translates "hear my voice afar, and listen," Michael Field writes "hear from afar, & fall upon my moan," a translation transforming Sappho's desperate cry to a disembodied Aphrodite into an homoerotic image of Aphrodite descending to earth to embrace the "moan[ing]" Sappho.[66]

The ease with which Sappho is able to conjure up and commune with Aphrodite is situated in direct contrast to Michael Field's *To an Exile*, where the women poets defer their own request for same-sex love, describing themselves as censored, exilic poets, like Oscar Wilde (or even Ovid), awaiting a homophilic future. The poetry and corresponding autobiographical journal entries both significantly contain notes about Wilde's decline and death, establishing a connection across time between the exiles of Ovid and Sappho and Wilde's own. The literal space of exile is a forest surrounding a bog in *To an Exile*, and it is significantly a place in northern England that Michael Field frequented in 1900 that they called "the Forest." In the

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[66] Henry Thornton Wharton's *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings, and a Literal Translation* (1885) was the most complete translation available in English. Michael Field admired and emulated Wharton both in "To Aphrodite" as well as in the fragments.

diaries, Michael Field describes their discovery of the bog in detail, and I include the

entire entry below because they incorporated language from the prose into the poems

I discuss below.

> Thursday August 2: "Aphrodite."
> "It is gray very gray in the late afternoon. We descend by the forest from the home-spring. In a slope of the moorland we come on a mass of bog-myrtle. It spreads downward with the lie of a glacier—a surface of balm, that enriches the air, that has in its greenness the discretion of a censor. It rustles +there is perfume—a perfume of ritual, a smoke, kindled by peat, sent up to the far-away goddess of Paphos. It breathes from the north—it has a yearning to be round her, that her own myrtles have never breathed. It nestles-+ the gray afternoon is languid; the strenuous branchlets in the gray wind stir passions + adoration. We want what only Aphrodite could have given us, before her fall, before the disuse of her altars. We are sad remote worshippers, hot with pain. Leaving the bog we turn into the forest by a cleft one tall pine flanks on one side, + a toad-stool on the other. It is chokingly silent. Honeysuckle springs naked to the top of trees, ivy-stems are shagged like satyrs + their hair shines fiercely. There is a coarse turmoil of half-lighted vegetation, the soil is gross with lack of air—we have a sense of monsters" (British Library Michael Field Diaries, 1900, 98)

 The eschatological ecology of the marsh is Aphrodite's lair, where "monsters"

congregate to celebrate Love. The autobiographical entries in *Works and Days* they

wrote concurrently with the poetry demonstrate how Michael Field eroticized their

experience of the marsh ecology, fantasizing it as a space where "monsters" and other

metamorphic characters go to worship the goddess Aphrodite. This is a highly

stylized, decadent description of a natural landscape: ritualistic smoke and perfume

sweeten the air that "yearn[s]" and "stirs passions + adoration" while the ambrosial

honeysuckle is "naked" and the ivy are "satyrs". The landscape thus becomes queer

space, where sinuous creepers become bacchanalian hybrid human-animal satyrs,

twisting their limbs around trees Michael Field describes as naked women; whiffs of

smoke and perfume evoke Arthur Symons decadent poetry about cigarettes and synthetic perfume.[67] The modern disenchantment of the world is reversed in Michael Field's *To an Exile* that embraces modern natural sciences to reenchant the natural world in decadent terms. Decadent natural reproduction also takes the place of heteroreproductivity in *To an Exile*, where Aphrodite and her metamorphic worshippers copulate, propagating an excess of erotic characters in metamorphic form: reeds, myrtles, laurels, pools, and streams.

Rooting eroticism, especially homoeroticism, in nature provided Bradley and Cooper with a way to theorize nonheteroreproductive love in modern terms outside of sexology, for their appreciation of the erotic nature of the Forest's ecology reveals an understanding of modern evolutionary science even as the poetry privileges nature's premodern enchantment. Displacement from the city into the forest ecology enables them to rewrite homosexuality not as an atavistic deviance (as the sexologists would have it), but rather, as a naturally occurring sexual phenomenon in an ecological system.[68] Disengaging from the London literary circles where circulating ideas about sexology (and Havelock Ellis himself) enabled Michael Field to reconceptualize sexual and gender deviance in alternative, non-sexological terms. Bradley and Cooper displace the sexual from culture and into the ecology of the forest with its

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[67] In Arthur Symons's *Silhouettes* (1892)*,* he appeals to his audience to appreciate the synthetic scent of patchouli before launching into a poetic volume in praise of modernity's decadence: prostitutes and dancers, absinthe and cigarettes, and artificial perfume and makeup become things worth memorializing in verse.
[68] Kathleen Frederickson's "Queer Speciation: Darwin On and Off the Farm" in *Victorian Studies* not to mention her comments on an early draft of this paper has been useful in thinking through this paper.

unscrutinized, non-hierarchicalized gender-sex system, with its sensuality and its

nonlinguistic noises. Such displacement enabled a reconceptualization of queer

human gender, sex, and sexuality in terms of the nonhuman-oriented evolutionary and

ecological sciences rather than an anthropocentric sexology. Whereas the fin de siècle

sexologists created an anthropocentric "erotic speciation," as Gayle Rubin has called

it, Michael Field forges an erotic inter-speciation more akin to critics like Myra Hird,

for whom non-linear biology provides new avenues for understanding queer theory's

interest in boundary transgressions, including symbiotic interspecies relations as well

as "a growing catalogue of homosexual, transgender, and non-reproductive

heterosexual behaviour in animals [and plants] that defies the traditional

homosexual/heterosexual boundary" (Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 149; Hird 87). Michael

Field entertains a world in which various species of vines—honeysuckle and ivy—

intertwine, a floral equivalent to the debaucherous satyrs—whose hybrid bodies are

comprised of human and goat body parts. The poets also likewise extend the

eroticism they see in nature to descriptions of the human, using nature as a metaphor

to lovingly describe women:

> "she [Edith] was like the Forest… her own infinitude springing up from the
> depths of herself…if you can get tired of the spring-flowers or the sweet-fern
> you may feel the chafe of her enclosure; if the simple, homely things in nature
> do not weary you, you will cling to her, + return, + be hers forever". (British
> Library, Michael Field Papers May 15, 1900, 69)

Here Bradley reverses Ovid's Daphne myth, in which Daphne turns into a tree rather

than submitting to Apollo's advances. A similar scene appears in another fin de siecle

poet's writing; in Mathilde Blinde's *Commonplace Book*, Blinde, during a

countryside walk with her friend, the poet Mona Caird, anthropomorphizes a tree: "We were struck by the singular outline of a hornbeam with the trunk + branches half thrown back curiously resembling a woman's body. It might have been some female struggling passionately to escape pursuit. Yea, Daphne herself changing into a shrub" (fol. 24-25).[69] Blinde describes the homoerotic gaze between the two women using the first person plural to record the experience of imagining the tree to be the Daphne escaping Apollo's pursuit. Bradley, by contrast, imagines her lover in terms reciprocity, where consensual sex is permitted ("you may") and long-term commitment makes Cooper (like Michael Field's Procne's Philomela) feel like home, "the simple, homely things in nature." Bradley describes her spiritual love for Cooper through the metaphor of "the Forest," while her physical love becomes the singular tree, monogamous and utterly erotic: "you may feel the chafe of her enclosure," "you will cling to her, & return, & be hers forever." Nature is a loving home to return to. It encourages *eros* between lovers, as they demonstrate in a springtime walk through the forest and into the marsh:

> We went out, Michael & I—together at last, after weeks of separation…I felt that companionship two lovers can only feel when the world has living walls round them of air & trees & sky, instead of … brick" (British Library Michael Field Papers, April 9, 1900, 47)

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[69] I am indebted to James Diedrick for his comments on an early draft of this paper during the Q&A of the VISAWUS 2018 "Victorian Futures" Conference in Palm Springs and for pointing out the similarity between this homoerotic passage and the one he discovered in Mathilde Blinde's archive, quoted from "A Profound Contribution to Victorian Studies" (http://mathildeblind.jamesdiedrick.agnesscott.org/news-notes/).

A few days after describing the marsh ecology as a sort of home outdoors, the assert

their desire elope to Aphrodite's haunt:

> I am full of dreams. Henry + I give up Paragon, + come here, leaning up
> against Nature, taking the comfort of her loneliness. Here we close in for our
> sunset, + here we die. We may travel + spend weeks in London, but <u>our final
> home is here.</u> (British Library Michael Field Papers, May 15, 69)

For Bradley and Cooper, the natural world is a sexual ecology, whose etymological

connection to *oikos*, meaning both "family" and "home," are never far from their

mind.

To an Exile fuses mythic, historic, and modern time and spaces together,

reimagining exile from culture as an opportunity to construct new positive collective

communities. Michael Field's investment in forging a genealogy of women artists

collaborating with (and "amid") the better known dandy poets creates a more

intersectional, collaborative queer aesthetics. In this, their poetics is evocative of Jose

Munoz's utopian queer temporality. Munoz writes that:

> The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints
> and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity….Turning to the aesthetic in the
> case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as
> queer aesthetics map future social relations….Queerness is essentially about
> the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete
> possibility for another world. (1)

The Ovidian poems allow Michael Field to explore non-(hu)man perspectives and to

imagine multiple collective perspectives simultaneously. This collaborative queer

aesthetic is central to the aestheticist philosophy of other fin-de-siècle women like

Vernon Lee, to whom interactive affect between the self and the other is central. In

Beauty and Ugliness, Lee introduces the concept of what she calls aesthetic

"empathy":

> "it is the beginning of sympathy, but in this primary stage the attention is directed entirely into the feeling which one attributes to the other, and not at all to the imitation of that recognised or supposed feeling which is the act of sympathising. (46)

Whereas aesthetic art critics like Lee (with her "psychological aesthetics) and

Bernard Berenson (in his concept of the "tactile imagination") experiment with the

interconnected performativity between the critic, artist, and the art object, Michael

Field's experimental, metamorphic poetics dismantles the hierarchy privileging the

poet by allowing the metamorphosed subjects to "sing [...for] themselves".[70] Mel

Chen draws attention to the ways "empathy hierarchies" reinforce social normativities

in terms of sex, gender, and other categories of difference, "where speaker and hearer

outrank third-person participants, humans outrank nonhumans, animates outrank

inanimates, and so on."[71]

From the initial poem's introductory lines, Michael Field disassembles the

empathy hierarchy the lyrical tradition insists upon, preferring the "natural" collective

melodies of the metamorphosed objects to the traditional dominance of the poet's

singular voice. The first poem of *To an Exile* introduces the marshland as an active

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[70] To quote the introduction of Michael Field's *Sight and Song* (1892). In *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896), Bernard Berenson writes that "'the essential in the art of painting [...] is somehow to stimulate our consciousness of tactile values, so that the picture shall have at least as much power as the object represented, to appeal to our tactile imagination" (5)..

[71] Langacker, *Concept, Image, Symbol* (248)

musical collective of the metamorphosed character Syrinx and Aphrodite herself,

represented as she is in classical art by disembodied myrtles:

> There are some sounds born but to rove + die,
> And in their dying mournfulest, most sweet;
> The reed-beds drop among their reeds a sigh
> Such as Pan never heard when in a heat
> He tore them for his lips. Some winds make moan
> As to themselves: + I have stood among
> Bog-myrtles swinging in a moory vale
> Moving their stems in covert + alone,
> Stooped over the wet turf, + caught the song
> Of these intricate branches as they swing,
> Of those low branches brushing to a gale.

The poem captivates its listener with nonlinguistic nonhuman music, which Michael

Field elucidates using highly aestheticized, onomatopoeic, alliterative language,

effectively eclipsing the syntactical sense-making of the poem. The rustling eliding

consonance of "s" sounds produces the effect of the natural flora in the wind. The

whispering and "sigh[ing]" of the metamorphic reeds and myrtles become multiplied

symbols of Syrinx and Aphrodite respectively, while the murmuring density of "m"

sounds produces "moan[ing]". Stefano Evangelista has argued that Michael Field's

floral symbolism in their *Long Ago* hybrid poetry—their translations and extensions

of Sappho's fragments—is "bolder than anything we find in Symonds, Pater, or even

Wilde, reliant as it is on libidinal tensions and explicit genital symbolism" (*British

Aestheticism and Ancient Greece* 110). The violets and roses that embroidered Field's

earlier Sappho poetry function more overtly to signal lesbian sex. They employ floral

imagery in *Long Ago's* poem LIV:

> The rose when she unfurls
> Is not so good,

> So fresh as they
> When on my breast
> They lean, and say
> All that they would
> Opening their glorious, candid maidenhood.

Michael Field's Sappho entertains the poetic conceit of the rose not, as is typical in love poetry, to euphemize sex in floral language but rather to emphasize the explicit eroticism between Sappho and her lovers. Twelve years later, criminalization of homosexuality and hypervigilant whistleblowers led Michael Field to cautiously encrypt same-sex desire more deeply than before. Floral symbolism is no longer employed as a poetic conceit but as a metaphor whose referent can only be inferred. In other words, surface level expressions of same-sex erotic intimacy disappears, replaced by floral symbolism more akin to Erasmus Darwin's erotic flower poetry that anthropomorphized floral reproduction in terms of human courtship.[72] Darwin's poetry describes the "biological sex" parts of flowers in gendered terms, presenting a variety of genders, sexualities, and relationalities including polyamory and same-sex partnerships. Michael Field's *To an Exile* likewise imagines an eroticized ecology.

Metamorphic poetics overwhelms the poem so completely, mesmerizing the reader with the tranquil noises of the marsh, formally echoing the framing narrative of the Syrinx myth. Michael Field is thus echoing Ovid's innovative tale. In Ovid, Mercury tells the tale of Syrinx and Pan in order to lull Argus, Hera's many-eyed giant who guards Io (metamorphosed into a cow), whom Mercury himself desired.

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[72] See E. Darwin's *The Botanical Garden: Part II, Containing the Loves of the Plants.*

Mercury thus uses the reed pipe to tell the tale of seduction that he himself wishes to reenact, charming his listener into submission in order to kill him. Ovid's Syrinx myth is the only extant narrative from classical literature to "assign a story to a speaker, cut short that speaker, and then complete the story in his own voice, summarizing what the speaker would have gone on to say" (Murgatroyd 621). Retelling the embedded Syrinx myth using a similar narratological innovation that the framing Mercury and Argos tale from Ovid, Michael Field transforms the interwoven tale, "the story of a would-be rape…told to further the interests of an actual rapist" into a feminist version, in which the story of an unsuccessful rape frames the story of metamorphic characters who survive and thrive in their metamorphic utopia.

The poem features the natural reeds of a bog represented as the nymph Syrinx post-transformation yet still unviolated by the demigod Pan. In Ovid, Syrinx begs the water nymphs to transform her from human to nonhuman so that she might escape Pan's attempted rape. Michael Field, by contrast, suspends the half-human half-goat-god in the past, developing Syrinx's momentary homosocial bliss at her escape through metamorphosis into a queer utopian vision of the future. This queer ecopoetics transforms the metamorphoses of past persecutions into future pleasures: Michael Field does this by translating the negative affect of Ovid's metamorphosed characters, expressed in noises of complaint and resistance, into the positive musical and eroticized noises of queer collective intimacies.[73] Ovid writes:

> Panaque cum prensam sibi iam Syringa putaret,
> Corpore pro nymphaea calamos tenuisse palustres,

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[73]

> dumque ibi suspirat, motos in harundine ventos
> effecisse sonum tenuem similemque querenti.
> arte nova vocisque deum dulcedine captum
> 'hoc mihi colloquium tecum' dixisse 'manebit,'
> atque ita disparibus calamis conpagine cerae
> inter se iunctis nomen tenuisse puellae.

> And how Pan, when how he thought he had caught Syrinx, instead of her held
> naught but marsh reeds in his arms; and while he sighed in disappointment,
> the soft air stirring in the reeds gave forth a low and complaining sound.
> Touched by this wonder and charmed by the sweet tones, the god exclaimed:
> "This converse, at least, shall I have with thee." (Met. I.705-712)

Having overheard Syrinx, whose human voice is translated into a "new music and its witching noises" producing whispering, delicate noise in the wind, Pan, the "charmed" "god" ("deum captum") binds together the captured ("prensam") Syrinx to create the reed pipe, declaring his victory through human language (709, 705).

Michael Field demonstrates their familiarity with the original language of the Latin myth, with feminist translational choices that stress and invert the empathy hierarchy of Ovidian metamorphic poetry. Whereas Ovid's Pan is a "deum captum"—a god ambiguously simultaneously captivated and captured by Syrinx, he becomes in *To an Exile* I the *captured* god whose violent victory Michael Field erases while amplifying Syrinx's music that now echoes through the homosocial marsh (709). Michael Field's Pan, unlike Ovid's who violently captures the beloved's body only to realize he has instead had caught the marsh reeds, emphasizes the fact that the feminine poet passively catches—rather, overhears—the song. Michael Field thus becomes the Ovidian narrator who, like Mercury, interrupts the predatory speaker's narration of events in order to summarize the story. It is a moment when Michael Field seizes the feminist potentiality inherent in Ovid's ambiguity, deliberately over-

translating Ovidian poetics into that of a queer feminine poetics and transforming a violent heterosexual act into a non-violent homoerotic one. Seizing Ovid's soporific cadence as a method of narration intended to violently capture desired love objects and using it rather to coax Aphrodite—the goddess of love herself—and other metamorphic characters out of their exile, Michael Fields translates the tale in a feminist revision that incorporates themselves, like Ovid before them, into their poetry.

In *To an Exile* I cited above, the metamorphosed reeds (Syrinx) and myrtle (Aphrodite) haunt the poems opening lines with their music while Michael Field displaces Pan in time and space, delaying his introduction to the fourth line and arresting him in the past perfect tense that situates his exile in a specific past temporality, before permitting the "I" of the speaker to coexist harmoniously with "themselves," the now ungendered metamorphic characters (6). With the heterosexual violence of Pan now in the distant past, Michael Field describes the exilic space as a queer utopia, where metamorphic characters like Syrinx, Aphrodite, Adonis, and Anactoria, and other characters "sigh," and "moan" and "mov[e]" "covert and alone" yet collectively with anthropomorphic flora and fauna (3, 5, 8).

Michael Field emphasizes how temporal and spatial distance from heterosexual trauma enables the music of the mythic marsh women to change from the "mournful," "elegiac sorrow" of complaint in Ovid into the more celebratory communal "song" *To an Exile* records (I.2, X.9 ,I.9). The poet of *To an Exile,* "stoop[s] over the wet turf" listen to the "song" created by the collective movements

and noises of the metamorphic marshland flora and fauna whose "dying…most sweet" creates an erotic, metamorphic ecopoetics, the brushing, swinging, moving branches and reeds, like limbs, move together and culminate in an ecological petite mort.

This utopic space with its "sense of monsters" comes to embody classical monstrosity's hybridity, since Michael Field's inhabitants both figure as hybrid individual figures whose interactions with others they emphasize in terms of interspecies companionships. Underacknowledged mythical women whom the gods have metamorphosed into animals abound in the poem, yet unlike the masculine "gods of exile" popularized by Pater, Wilde, and others, they, like Aphrodite, are underappreciated. The fourth poem in the cycle peoples the bog with metamorphosed mythical women whose "maiden presence" is in present times ignored:

> MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.36
> To an Exile
> IV.
> Among the gods thou only art unheard;
> The vines are shaded, Zeus is in his oak;
> Where forest creatures drink, where stoops the bird,
> Men feel a maiden presence + invoke.
> And the mad priest to Hecabe still heaves
> Cries that draw crowds to sacrifice; they wait
> Huddled in secret streets, an impious crew:
> The lares chink, the pool of poppy leaves
> Left by Proserphina still fascinate:
> Men love to reconcile their mortal fate.
> Thy dazzling mysteries none look into.

Michael Field's poem calls for a revival of the mysteries of Aphrodite, critiquing modern men's worship of Christianity over classical Greco-Roman polytheism, which

permits the worship of the "Lares," the Roman household gods, alongside other more

ancient Greek and Roman gods like Aphrodite, Zeus, Hecabe, and Proserpina (IV.8).

The birds and "forest creatures" that evoke a "maiden presence" are creatures

Michael Field draws from Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* the wood nymphs and

metamorphosed birds—like Philomela and Ceyx—as well as Io, who metamorphosed

from nymph to cow and finally into the goddess Isis (IV.3-4). These metamorphic

characters whose ritualistic goddess worship of Aphrodite forms a mystic backdrop

for the poems are joined by a few human characters in the poetry cycle. Michael Field

inserts himself as a hesitant, albeit hopeful worshipper to Aphrodite in the second

poem:

> MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.34
> To an Exile
> II
> Even so to-day, goddess, to thee I stand
> With plaint prayer too mutinous for speech,
> Amid the myrtles of my dandy land,
> And know my prayer to thee can never reach,
> Can never even trouble thee. Asleep
> On the sea's blue floor, unshaded by sea-weeds,
> Thou liest tranquil where no ripples break:
> I would not have thee stir! Let me but keep
> Thine image in its wholeness; all my needs
> Shall fall away, such quiet beauty breeds
> Let me but dream thou never will awake.

Unlike Sappho's "Hymn to Aphrodite," which expresses the pre-modern celebration

of same-sex love and goddess worship, Michael Field's *To an Exile* I acknowledges

modern, pre-Labouchere Amendment self-censorship of poets writing about classical

antiquity, especially women writing (women-loving) women. It is through merging

the identity of the poet in exile for sexual mistakes and expression of non-normative

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love, like Ovid, Sappho, and Wilde, that Michael Field comes to identify their own "outing" as not the singular Michael Field but the plural Bradley and Cooper in terms of modernity's criminalization of homosexuality and post-Wilde trial self-censorship of homoerotic literature.

Unlike much pre-Wildean trial literature's subtextual homoerotics using Greek and Latin language and literary references, Michael Field's double-coded poetics goes a step further by using the songs of metamorphoses, the *noises* of already-metamorphosed characters, to signify sexual and gender dissonances of characters who find community with other others. The place of exile, located "amid the myrtles of my dandy land" links the masculine dandy poet identity of Michael Field, presumed by other unknowing fin-de-siècle figures to be a homophile dandy, to the plural "myrtles," signifying Michael Field's identity as two women (II.3). Duplicating the floral symbol of Aphrodite gestures toward their sexuality, since they developed their Aphrodite based on their translation of Sappho, whose ancient language understood the homophone 'myrtles' to signify both myrtle trees and labia.[74] Michael Field thus inserts himself into *To an Exile* as a singular poet, while Michael Field simultaneously inserts themselves as the plural "we" into the haven where queer outcasts (characters whom Michael Field considers outcasts)—Syrinx, Anactoria, Adonis, etc.—join together to celebrate the mysteries of Aphrodite,

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[74] The language of sex as well as the language of botanical science are indebted to Ovid, from whom linguists and historians of science adapted metamorphic language to describe the erotic and natural world. Ovidian characters populate *The Thesaurus Eroticus Linguae Latinae* (1833) as well as books on the natural sciences.

patiently waiting to "come out" of exile once the modern homophobic present has passed. Michael Field's Sappho's Aphrodite offers a refuge for Ovidian metamorphic characters and other classical outcasts, including themselves.

In the fifth poem of the cycle, Michael Field switches from the singular masculine speaker Michael Field to the plural feminine Bradley and Cooper:

To an Exile V.

We lack the hardihood, the opulence
Constant to dedicate to thee our powers:
O seasonable to our every sense,
Weary of pleasure in a few thin hours
How shall we learn thine energy of pain
If Anactoria heave an alien sigh,
Thy madness if Adonis touch his hound;
Thine ecstasy when roses fresh again:
Beauty is wrought, we stand uncraving by:
Thou movest, stirring through the ivory
Till for Pygmalion a sweet mate be found.

Beginning the fifth poem of the cycle with the word "We" flamboyantly "outs" the speaker of the poem not as the singular masculine poet Michael Field but rather two women poets. Transitioning abruptly and ostentatiously from "I" to "we" formally asserts the "hardihood, the opulence" that Michael Field counterintuitively suggests they "lack" passion, decadence, queerness in comparison to Anactoria, Adonis, and Pygmalion, all humans memorialized for non-normative love and whose deviancy Michael Field depicts as fantastical (V.1). The "uncraving" Bradley and Cooper suggest their exclusion is in part based on the fact that they lived relatively normative and fulfilling lives together (V.9). Because it was quite common for women to publish under male pseudonyms and for unmarried relations to live in lifelong

companionship, they were able to "pass" as relatively normative Victorian women, leaving their queernesses—their gender fluidity, same-sex desire, and incest—unnoticed. This silence, metamophorised through the silence of their hymn, was a consequence for their having lived fulfilling lives in partnership, unlike the unrequited, yearning desires of queer figures Michael Field catalogues in their *To an Exile. To an Exile* V depicts Anactoria, the beloved for whom Sappho longs in her "Hymn to Aphrodite," reacting to the love spell Sappho's Aphrodite cast over Anactoria in order that she "shall follow thee who fled away, / And she who loathed to love shall love thee sore" ("To Aphrodite" 19-20). "Heav[ing] an *alien* sigh," Anactoria's breathy sigh mirrors Michael Field's Sappho whose laments to Aphrodite contained the aches and pains of love, an eroticization that pays tribute to Swinburne's sensual hybrid lyrical poem "Anactoria."[75] Like Swineburne before them, Michael Field utilizes othering diction to exoticize Aphrodite and Anactoria, thereby affiliating same-sex and non-normative desire with the fantastical world of ancient mythology, in keeping with Ovid's characterization of non-heteronormative sex resulting in the reproduction of monstrous beings.[76] Aphrodite becomes a "foreigner, / An apparition from untraversed seas" and Anactoria an "alien," echoing Swineburne's celebration of same-sex love between Sappho and Anactoria

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[75] Swinburne's "Anactoria" itself incorporates and elaborates Sappho's "Hymn to Aphrodite"

[76] Ovid's Iphis observes that same-sex and non-normative unions both are monstrous and produce monsters ("monstra ferat" Met. IX. 736). Iphis gives as example the story of how Pasiphae loved a bull and afterwards gave birth to the Minotaur (Met. IX.737-740).

memorialized in poetry: "Yea, though their alien kisses do me wrong, / Sweeter though thy lips than mine with all their song" (Swinburne 121-22).

Michael Field also incorporates the Ovidian character Adonis, whom Aphrodite lovingly transformed into the delicately-petaled anemone after a wild boar fatally wounded him. Michael Field incorporates the love story of Venus (the Roman equivalent to Aphrodite) and Adonis into the poem in order to describe the goddess's "madness" upon discovering her lover had died. Michael Field's condenses the myth within a succinct line: "thy madness when Adonis touch if hound," a line that emphasizes the eros and ecstasy the story contains while elucidating the centrality of interspecies relations. Michael Field's line fuses Venus's two great madnesses, both of which Ovid depicts as a triangular relation between the supernatural goddess Venus, her human lover Adonis, and Adonis's canine companions. Adonis's hounds appear only twice in the myth alongside a mad Venus. In the first instance, Ovid depicts Venus crazy in love. She abandons her predilection for indoor activities in order to ramble through the woods "with her garments girt up to her knees…[She] cheers on the hounds and pursues those creatures which are safe to hunt" (MET. X.536-7).[77] In the second instance, Ovid blames Adonis's hounds for his untimely death. Michael Field imagines Venus having witnessed the deadly encounter rather than having "heard afar the groans of the dying youth" as Ovid writes:

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[77] "dumosaque saxa vagatur / fine genus vestem ritu succincta Dianae / hortaturque canes tutaeque animalia praedae, / aut pronos lepores aut celsum in cornua cervum / aut agitat dammas; a fortibus abstinent apris / raptoresque lupos armatosque unguibus ursos / vitat et armenti saturatos caede leones" (Met. X. 535-539).

Leaping down to the earth, she tore her dress from her bosom,

she tore her hair and violently, bitterly, beat on her breast (Met. X.719-23)[78]

Micahel Field suspends the myth in time with the conditional "if," weaving disparate

temporalities together in order to convey the sense of separation between lovers

recounted through interspecies interactions that foreshadow Adonis's impending

metamorphosis. Rerouting the narrative about heterosexual love between the goddess

and human through the image of Adonis affectionately petting his dog highlights the

myth's attention to interspecies love between human, non-human, and supernatural

beings, for suspending the myth in time allows the reader to entertain even more

interspecies relations because it allows the reader to imagine Adonis relating to

Aphrodite and the hounds in his various forms and states of animacy—the myrrha

tree-born Adonis, the human Adonis in life and death, and as the delicately-petaled

anemone in bloom and seed.

Michael Field depicts Ovid's Pygmalion, the sculptor who, unattracted to

human women, falls in love with a statue of his own creation. Michael Field

emphasizes the non-human and ungendered aspects of the statue who they simply

reference as Pygmalion's "sweet mate." The "sweet mate" who "stir[s] through the

ivory" encompasses Ovid's own description of Galatea's metamorphosis from

inanimate statue to animate human as a gendered transformation; in the original myth,

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[78] Ovid writes: "It chanced his hounds, following a well-marked trail, roused up a wild boar from his hiding-place; and, as he was rushing from the wood, the young grandson of Cinyras pierced him with a glancing blow" (forte suem latebris vestige certa secuti / excivere canes, silvisque exire parantem / fixerat obliquo iuvenis Cinyreius ictu" (Met. X. 710-12).

he describes the statue as "an image of perfect feminine beauty," a likeness rather than a real human woman, using neutered, ungendered nouns and pronouns to describe her, yet transitions to the female form of words to describe her in her metamorphosed human state.[79] Choosing to capture Pygmalion's ungendered "sweet mate" in the midst of its metamorphoses, as opposed to the metamorphic conclusion which resolves in heterosexual union between the now woman Galatea and Pygmalion, accentuates the myth's exploration of nonnormative desire. Ovid resolves these nonnormative desires with the transformation of the voluptuous nude statue into the blushing virginal bride, whose matrimony to Pygmalion produces their daughter Paphos. Michael Field's version by contrast highlights the pivotal moment of metamorphoses, a queer suspension that characterizes the myth's queernesses rather than its heteronormative ending. Each depicts sexual deviancy—lesbianism, interspecies love (love between human and goddess confused by an almost-erotic image of human and canine touch), and pygmalionism (as Havelock Ellis called statue-love)—in terms of inter-species and non-human "alien" non-normativity, inserting the human only in relation to the non-human in the poems.[80]

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[79] Ovid uses the neuter form to describe the statue until the final lines of the poem: "Corups erat! Saliunt temptatae pollice venae. / tum vero Paphius plenissima concipit heros / verba, quibis Veneri grates agat, oraque tandem / ore suo non falsa permit, dataque oscula virgo / sensit et erubuit timidumque ad lumina orbem / illa Paphon genuit, de qua tenet insula nomen." "Yes, it was real flesh! The veins were pulsing beneath his testing finger. Then did the Paphian hero pour our copious thanks to Venus, and again pressed with his lips real lips at last. The maiden felt the kisses, blushed and, lifting her timit eyes up to the light, she saw the sky and her lover at the same time" (Met. X. 289-294).

[80] Havelock Ellis includes a detailed section on Pygmalionism in *Studies of the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Selection in Man,* where he defines it as "the sexual love of

In the poems, Michael Field foregrounds the transformation of the space of

exile into a queer utopia through decentering the (hu)man poet while allowing exiled

figures to create new forms of intimacies. Michael Field depicts themselves as two

women who "lack the hardihood, the opulence" of these desirous mythical creatures.

Unlike these creatures whose desires are eternalized in myth, this lust is unsustainable

for Bradley and Cooper who "Weary of pleasure in a few thin hours". As they look

onto the bacchanalian scene they imagine unfolding before them, they "stand

uncraving by," desiring yet uncertain of how to revive the cult of beauty Aphrodite

represents during the modern persecution of homosexuality and other gender and

sexual deviancies. In other words, Michael Field calls upon what Dominic Pettman

has termed Ovid's "radically unstable ontology based on a promiscuous and

prescientific narrative of genesis and genus" in order to narrativize the sorts of gender

and sexual non-normativities that Victorian science was beginning to notice in nature

(73). They understood his metamorphic erotic world as an enchanted anticipation of

Victorian natural science's discovery of non-heteroreproductivity and non-linear

biology in nature and utilized their own hybrid lyrical form to fuse the fantastic with

the factual accounts of queer eros and interspecies community.[81]

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statues," "a rare form of erotomania founded on the sense of vision and closely
related to the allurement of beauty" (188).

[81] Pettman writes that "Ovid seems to anticipate some of the ways in which sex,
gender, and species *trouble* identity rather than acting as the flagship principles on
which it tries to construct itself (foundational concepts such as essence, soul, conatus,
ego, ipseity, integrity, and related names we give to the presumption of the self's
continuity through time, at least until death)" (74).

In *To an Exile*, Michael Field attempts to look outside of the human,

criminalizing language of law and sexology in order to explore an alternative queerer

future. Only after disassembling the empathy hierarchy of the lyric tradition does

Michael Field resolve the poems with a fusion between past and present. In the final

poem, Michael Field writes:

> Farewell, the dark streaked night is drawing on,
> By this wild marsh I may no longer dally,
> Farewell, farewell, the time of love is gone,
> And winter closes up this low-bushed valley;
> Yet from this dull + matted watercourse
> I have received thy breath as from a grave,
> Immortal, so thou breathest to thine own,
> So we receive thee, rich in our remorse,
> Our elegiac sorrow, till some brave
> Fair child of thine shall dare to priestly work,
> And draw thee upward, queenly, to thy throne.

In the final poem, Michael Field says farewell to the Forest, since encroaching winter

will prevent them from return until next year. Their quiet observational worship

during the spring and summer months aids in reviving Aphrodite, who begins to stir

as they leave. Michael Field describes the women poets gazing at Aphrodite's body

"white with golden whiteness, luminous" in "sovereign nakedness," a "brine-

drenched beauty" who begins, like Pygmalion's Galatea, to "movest, stirring through

the ivory" upon sensing Michael Field's desirous gaze (VI.4, VII.4, VII.7, V.10).[82]

Michael Field incants the almost biblical lines: "I have received thy breath as from a

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[82] Michael Field is echoing Ovid's description of Pygmalion's Galatea coming to life:
"The ivory gradually lost its hardness, / softening, sinking, yielding beneath his
sensitive fingers" (temptatum mollescit ebur positoque rigore / subsidit digitis" (Met.
X. 283-84).

grave, / Immortal, so thou breathest to thine own, / So we receive thee" (XI.6-8).

Michael Field insinuates that they have revived the mysteries of Aphrodite through the literal resuscitation of her body. This final poem encompasses the resolution between the modern Christian worldview they understood to have stifled ancient goddess worship, channeling the eroticized, mystical language of Christian devotional poetry in order to situate Sappho's Aphrodite as the feminine equivalent to Christ. The homoeroticism they depict between women in their earlier poetry is predominantly between human women. For instance, in their the titular poem XLIV from *Long Ago* (1889), they imagine Sappho longingly watching her maidens embrace: "they / together breathe till day" (23-4). In order to imagine same-sex desire between women as a spiritual experience, they turn to the homoerotic Catholic decadent poets like John Gray, whose *Silverpoints* (1893) Edith Cooper echoes in her 1907 unpublished poem "The Mirror Darkly." This unfinished, unpublished poem features a similar yet spiritualized homoerotic moment between Christ and St. John: "[t]hrough lapse of silence / falls, sigh on sigh, a kiss, / as stars fall" (MS.Eng.misc.e.342.29-30). Translating the devotional cadences from the Christian tradition between men via Sappho's human maidens thus enables Michael Field to resolve the disconnect between ancient Aphrodite worship and modern Christianity. Whereas in *To an Exile,* they voice complaint that "Among the gods thou only art unheard," because "Men like to reconcile their mortal fate" with Christianity, the final poem allows them to reunify god with goddess worship in the modern times (IV.1, 10). Just as Catholicism became a way for fin de siecle men poets to forge kinship

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communities outside of the heteroreproductive institution of marriage, they imagine a Greco-Roman revival that includes goddess worship as the means to create a community inclusive to not only same-sex loving men but also other non-conforming individuals.

In *To an Exile* II, Michael Field celebrated the immortal Aphrodite for whom "such quiet beauty breeds"; in *To an Exile* XI, they describe cross-temporal communion between the nonhuman Aphrodite and Michael Field the poet, as Michael Field learns from the metamorphosed characters how to propagate outside of the world of human heteroreproduction (TOE II.10). The problem of heteroreproductivity appears throughout their 1900-1901 poetry and autobiographical journals, where they at times bemoan the fact that their only children are canines and poetry, while at other times, as we shall see, they celebrate this "decadent" love for its embrace of the present moment.

In "Barren Love," the poem that follows the Philomela trialogue (which glaringly leaves out Itys, Procne and Tereus's child, whom the sisters kill), Michael Field describes their love in terms of flora rather than fauna:

MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.11

Barren Love

My love to thee is odour + sheer bloom:
    It has no room
For leaf, or lingering tendril, or deceit:
    It is my doom,
So coy. No fruit of it will ever be,
    No joy to thee, or me,
    No rapture at the close;
Even as the flower upon the almond tree

> That spreads an hour its orange + its rose,
> > Then falls back vacant to sterility.

March 20th (1900)

Same-sex love is more like the language of flowers than the language of animals

(humans included) for Michael Field because of the problem of posterity. They

compare their same-sex love to the flower that never matures into fruit, a decadent

metaphor that appropriates the Victorian trope of the woman's body as a flower to the

erotic coupling of two women, for whom sex is solely an act of "love." The sterile

almond blossom that dies rather than bearing fruit epitomizes decadence's fascination

with decay, while the negative repetition of joyous perpetuation reads doubly as

abstinence and as lack of reproduction: the dying blossom itself becomes

ambiguously a symbol of celebrating non-reproductive sex *and* a memorialization of

lovers who have abstained from partaking of non-heteronormative sex. Michael Field

relishes in the flower blossom's sensual beauty over its reproductive value,

transforming the Victorian trope of the woman as flower—a potential fruit bearer—

into a celebration of homoerotic love's ephemerality.[83] Poetry, Michael Field

suggests, provides same-sex women partnerships to transcribe an alternative to

heteroreproductive teleology, memorializing the metaphor of same-sex love as a non-

heteroreproductive propagation of flowers that bloom for beauty's sake alone. By

translating Sappho's Aphrodite and concluding *To an Exile* with the sexual union

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[83] I'm indebted to Ashley Miller's "Christina Rossetti's Botanical Women," which discusses botanical women figures in Rossetti's poetry in terms of heterosexuality, for helping me flush out this section on Michael Field's use of floral metaphors to discuss non-heteroreproductive love.

between Aphrodite and Michael Field, they insert themselves into a queer literary genealogy that promises to 'remember them in another time,' to paraphrase Sappho. The poets slip from the singular to plural first person, from Michael Field to Bradley and Cooper: "I have received thy breath" becomes "So we receive thee" together, a sort of poetic same-sex threesome in the guise of heteroreproductive lyric. This sexual union results in an impregnated Aphrodite, who Michael Field suggests will produce "some brave / Fair child of thine" in order to revive the cult of Aphrodite on a grander scale (XI.9-1). The poem thus fuses the human and nonhuman formally and thematically into a more egalitarian community, an alternative queer collective that dismantles differences between all that inhabit it. *To an Exile* XI gestures with prophetic undertones toward a queer future.

CHAPTER THREE:

"Our fair girl-boy":

Queer Decadent Pantomime

In the last chapter, I explored how Michael Field turned to Ovid to adapt his metaphoric poetics to queer ends in the Roman Trilogy, *The Race of Leaves* (1901)*, The World at Auction* (1898)*, and Julia Domna* (1903). Here I discuss how Michael Field similarly roots their exploration of queerness in ancient Roman literary history. In these dramas, Michael Field features as their protagonist the gender-bending pantomime dancer, an enslaved Greek who insists that his decadent art prefigured ancient tragedy and who embraces his queer identity. I argue that Michael Field's Roman Trilogy distinguishes queer aesthetic decadence from its usual conflation (by historians like Montesquieu and Gibbon) with imperial despotism. Through their protagonist, the enslaved Greek dancer Pylades, Michael Field forges a genealogy that shows queer decadence to have developed in tandem with tragedy and alongside

pederasty. By resituating the queer pantomime artist as the inventor of ancient tragedy, a relic of Greek Hellenism, Michael Field's Roman Trilogy attempts to elevate the queerness and decadence of ancient Roman aesthetic culture. Roman culture is worthy of revival precisely because it refocused its attention onto the queer decadent artist.

While modern pantomime performance flourished in popular culture during the English fin de siècle, the queer subculture affiliated with the post-Romantic aesthetic movement, Decadence, revived ancient pantomime performance. Aesthetic and decadent writers like Aubrey Beardsley and Michael Field introduced the pantomime dancer as a queer figure. Michael Field in particular locates the dancer's origin in Greek tragedy. Although pantomime dancers saw their heyday in imperial Rome, they are generally thought to have emerged out of the pre-Hellenic Dionysian ritual performances that inspired the creation of Greek tragedy. The ballet dancer of the ancient world, who referred to himself as the Greek orchēstēs, an "actor of tragic rhythmic movement," mimed ancient, often erotically themed, myths to an accompanying troop's libretti and instrumentals (Slater 121). The ancient pantomime dancer is characterized as a performer who utilizes his youthful androgyny to act all parts in an improvisational dance to a mythic libretto performed by a chorus to musical accompaniment. Although ancient pantomime did not become increasingly popular until Augustan Rome, it is older than drama itself. Indeed, Aristotle attributed the creation of classical drama to the pantomime dancers. The Romans celebrated pantomime dance and dramatic tragedy in order to reach "a higher plane of

civilization which they must try to comprehend and conform to" (Frank 179). For many Romans, pantomime was their only exposure to the Hellenic culture of their "heroic ancestors," and cultivating Hellenism was a means through which to resist cultural deterioration leading to decline (Frank 179). In this view, aesthetic decadence is genealogically connected to ancient Greece through this highly erotic, symbolistic dance with its pulsing beats, provocative plots, and semi-nude gender fluid dancers.

In this chapter, I argue that late-Victorian era writers like Michael Field revived ancient pantomime as means through which to figure themselves as queer decadent artists. Michael Field developed a counternarrative to challenge the assumption that the pantomime dancers themselves were symptoms of imperial decline, disentangling aesthetic decadence from other factors that catalyzed the fall of the Roman Empire. Decadent pantomime dancers resist imperial despotism, using their performance to critique oppressive politics and embrace transgressive gender and sexuality. I argue that decadent writers revise the figure of the pantomime dancer to imagine a new model, fusing queer's anti-identitarian politics via sexual inversion—a model that encompassed a variety of non-exclusive, often fluid gender and sexual positionalities. The pantomime artists of the ancient world were revered in Hellenic Greece for having invented drama, yet only under the Roman Empire did pantomime become the most popular form of entertainment. In the Victorian imaginary, I argue, ancient Rome came to signify queerness in a similar manner that ancient Greece signified same-sex love. Roman literature and culture enabled fin-de-siècle writers to prefigure not only homosexuality but also other forms of sexual and

gender non-conformity. The iconic pantomime dancer provided the perfect character to explore the inextricable connection between identity politics and art.

My chapter focuses on the pantomime dancer in imperial decadent Rome from Commodus's final days in 192 to the fratricide of Geta by his co-emperor Caracalla in 211. While the majority of Roman society suffered under strict sexual laws that the imperial elite frequently transgressed without sanction, the pantomime dancer mocked these laws through their public performances. The decadence of Roman emperors—imperial expansion and urban display of wealth and power—was frequently at odds with the pantomime dancers, whom the ancient historians depict as rousing audiences to anti-imperialist riots, seducing the emperors' wives against them, and lashing out when they are sent into exile. In the ancient Roman world, the pantomimes' public erotic performances gave them the platform through which to become active political agents who utilized their erotic power to manipulate both the imperial family and the general public in order to enact political change.

Fin de siècle writers were interested in extricating queer decadent aesthetic style from decadent imperialism, and the pantomime dancer provided them the rebellious, salacious queer artist who symbolized this resistance. Throughout the plays, Michael Field highlights the distinction between aesthetic decadence and imperial decadence. Performance arts in the Roman Empire were characterized by their extreme transgression of the boundary between mimesis and art. Anne Duncan observes how "audiences flocked to spectacles that blurred, crossed, or even eliminated the line between mimesis and reality" (188). Gladiator performances,

onstage executions of accused criminals, and pantomime dances epitomize this "extreme mimesis" for Duncan. Pantomime dancers had special license to transgress the boundaries between reality and art. The historian Macrobius records an earlier Pylades—the name given to all tragic pantomime dancers—who shot poisonous arrows at the audience while playing the role of Hercules; Augustus also banished this Pylades for having insulted a spectator. In Michael Field's *The Race of Leaves,* Pylades embraces his role as the single public figure in imperial Rome who is sanctioned to transgress the limit between reality and art. In fact, when the emperors Commodus and Pertinax stage spectacles exhibiting "extreme mimesis" in ways that harm and humiliate those they oppress, specifically enslaved concubines and dancers, Pylades seeks retribution through regicide. Here, Michael Field aligns queer decadent aestheticism with an anti-imperialist discourse quite distinct from traditional historiography's conflation of cultural decadence and decline. Queer decadent art's impulse, at least in the Roman Trilogy, is to react against exploitative imperialist politics.

Dancers provided late-Victorian writers a precursor to the fin de siècle persecuted queer decadent artists, and in the wake of the Wilde trial, pantomime historical fiction flourished as a queer art of resistance. In their co-written diary, Michael Field explained that they created a "Decadent Trilogy" whose protagonist is the tragic pantomime dancer Pylades in order to explore the struggling "artist in a

decadent age—like the present."[84] The dramatic trilogy is comprised of *The Race of Leaves* (1898)*, The World at Auction* (1901)*, and Julia Domna* (1903).

The Roman "Decadent" Trilogy
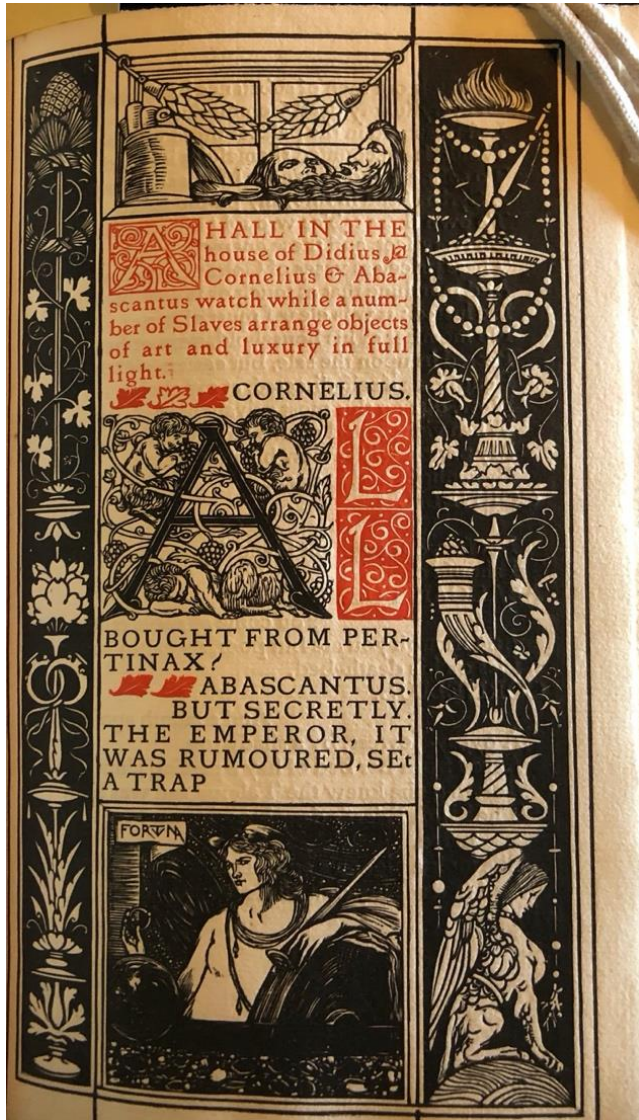
Figure 4 The World at Auction (1901), Charles Ricketts

The cover page Charles Ricketts illustrated for *The World at Auction* (1901) depicts the period between 192 and 211 in terms of Roman decadence (Figure 4). Rococo illustrations contain symbols like the vestal flame, thyrsus, sphynx, and the header contains tragic pantomime masks, masks that bear an uncanny resemblance to severed human heads. At the bottom of the page is an illustration of Pylades dressed as the Roman god Fortuna. A whip drapes loosely around Pylades/Fortuna's naked torso

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[84] MS.46785, fol. 195r. (1896, vol. 10)

and he holds a sword in his hand while staring deviously at the onlooker. The first

words of *The World at Auction* further define this decadent imperial world:

> A hall in the house of Didius Cornelius & Abascantus watch while a number
> of Slaves arrange objects of art and luxury in full light.
> Cornelius: 'Bought from Pertinax?'
> Abscantius: 'But secretly. The emperor, it was rumoured, set a trap.'

This is a world full of secrecy and regicide, art and luxury, where wealth replaces

primogeniture. These lines are written in red ink resembling blood. The red ink bears

the names of both the emperor and his subjects—slaves and freemen—and it bleeds

onto the next page's catalogue of imperial wealth on the following page (Figure 5):
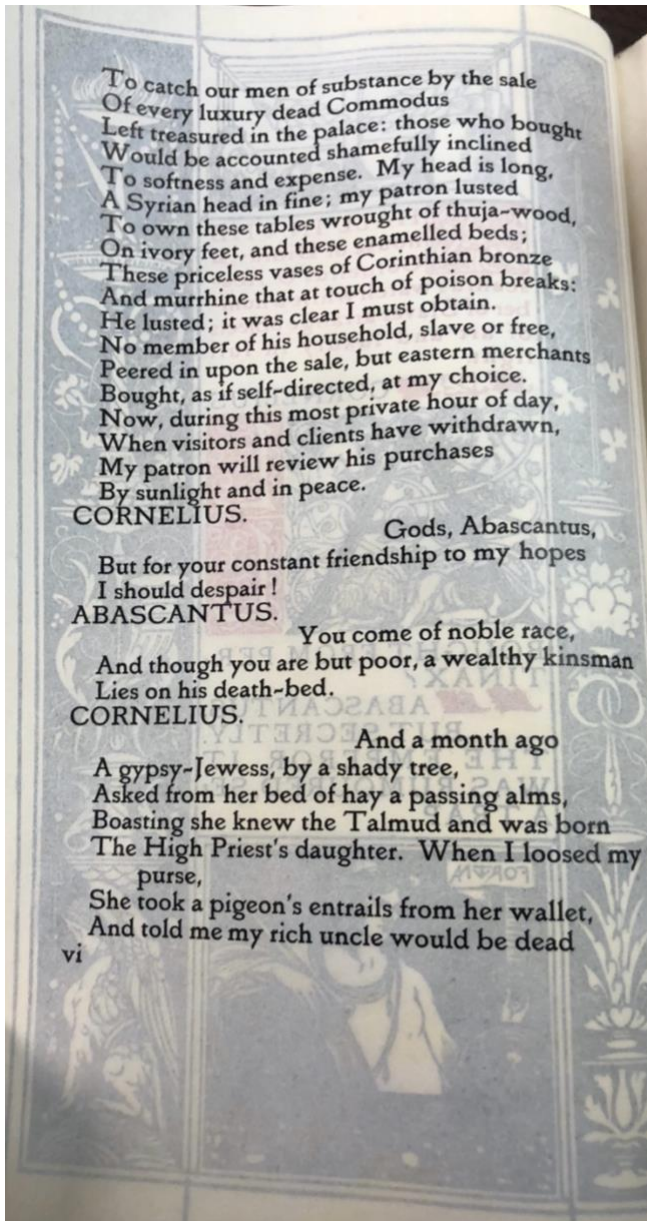
Figure 5 The World at Auction (2)

the lush carpets, furniture, masses of slaves, spices, and other goods that epitomized the growth of luxury under the Roman empire.[85] The clever penetration of red ink symbolizing the blood lust and erotic passion characteristic of Roman Decadence provides a socioeconomic commentary as well, for, as Rickett's illustration and Michael Field's play suggest, one major factor leading to the decline of empire was imperial Rome's misuses of their imperial subjects, emphatically explored through the sexual exploitation of the pantomime dancer.

Michael Field historicized the pantomime dancer as the precursor of Greek drama and as an ancient figure of sexual inversion, thereby situating a model of

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[85] See especially Toner, Jerry, "Decadence in Rome," *Decadence and Literature.* Ed. Jane Desmarais and David Weir. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Print.

queerness (including but not limited to homosexuality) that emerged alongside same-sex love yet was not fully embraced until imperial Roman times. Michael Field shows Decadent Rome to be worthy of reevaluation precisely because it placed the queer decadent artist on centerstage. I am interested in how decadent authors like Michael Field figured the pantomime dancer through the model of sexual inversion, whose understanding of gender and sexual variance they deemed more illustrative of the pantomime's queer persona than the more specific, exclusive understanding of homosexuality as a homoerotic orientation. Sexual inversion takes into account the Greco-Roman understanding that sexual deviancy is determined by deviancy from gender roles, and for classically trained queer new women writers, writing the pantomime dancer in terms of sexual inversion permitted them to begin forming a modern queer identity distinct from homosexuality.

This chapter briefly turns to Aubrey Beardsley's pantomime illustrations to establish late-Victorian queer men's homoerotic representations of the dancer in contrast with these fin de siècle women who used the pantomime dancer to explore queerness beyond the model of homosexuality between men. I first turn to Michael Field's "Decadent Roman Trilogy," *The Race of Leaves* (1901)*, The World at Auction* (1898)*,* and *Julia Domna* (1903), in order to argue that the duo attempts to elevate Roman pantomime dancers in the Victorian imaginary, rewriting history to locate the queer pantomime dancer at the heart of both Greek and Roman society. Michael Field thus significantly disturbs the classical *and* Victorian distinction between the virtuous, state-sanctioned Hellenic homosexuality and the debase, and un-

institutionalized gender and sexual "deviancy" of Roman decadence. Although the pantomime dancers were the progenitors of Greek tragedy, it was ultimately the Romans who revived and celebrated their decadent art and queerness.

Michael Field, revised fin-de-siècle representations of the pantomime dancer into a more gender fluid, pansexual figure who vacillates between the archetypal representation of the dancer as a passive model of sexual inversion in men to the more active and activist model of sexual inversion. This paper argues that Michael Field's dramas about the pantomime dancer deconstruct the gender/sex system in order to represent the dancer as a queer—gender/sex non-conforming—figure.[86]

Pantomime uniquely blends the poetic libretto, musical accompaniment, and mime dance. A chorus translates ancient Greek myths into a Latin libretto, while the pantomime dancer translates it bodily, transforming effortlessly between beloved and lover, pursuer and pursued on centerstage. Pantomime performances generally had only one pantomime dancer who acted all the parts. In one of the most popular performances, Leda and the Swan, the myth about Zeus transforming into a swan to seduce (or in some versions rape) Leda, the nearly nude dancer would dance both parts, using props like a scarf to indicate he is cross-dressing as Leda and using an arm as the swan's long, phallic neck. In a tragic performance, the pantomime would

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[86] In *The Poetics,* Aristotle writes that "Tragedy…was at first mere improvisation…originated with the authors of the Dithyramb," that is, pantomime artists. He continues to explain that, whereas pantomime performance generally had only one actor, "Aeschylus first introduced a second actor; he diminished the importance of the Chorus" in favor of the dialogue, thus bringing about the birth of drama (17-8).

attempt to move his audience to tears at Leda's plight or the lovers' romance; in a comedic performance, his goal would be to induce the audience to laughter at the salaciousness of his masturbatory performance of the taboo of bestiality.

Unsurprisingly, pantomime debates arose. Critics argued against the art's hypereroticism, calling it "unseemly and effeminate," while proponents considered it "the highest standard of culture in all its branches" (Lucian). Lucian argued against the critique of pantomime's cross-dressing by pointing out that drama likewise predominantly used cross-dressed men to act women's parts. Against the critique that the audience would be aroused by the gender-bending actors and encouraged to participate in the cultural taboos in the myths they performed, Lucian argued that pantomime is didactic, "the amorous spectator is cured of his infirmity by perceiving the evil effects of passion," and cathartic, "he who enters the theatre under a load of sorrow departs from it with a serene countenance" (Lucian 79-80). In *The Poetics,* Aristotle traces the development of drama to pantomime performance, yet by the second century A.D., its reputation as the origin of Greek tragedy dwindled and was replaced by pantomime dancer's notoriety as a symptom of imperial decadence. Ancient historians record the pantomime dancer's ability to manipulate the political landscape of imperial Rome using the power of seduction onstage, rallying his audience into action, and offstage, insinuating his political influence over his romantic partners, including the emperors and his family.[87]

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[87] The pantomime debates are well recorded by recent classical scholars. See especially W.J. Slater, E.J. Jory, and Edith Hall's edited collection, *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime.* For ancient authors' writing about controversies surrounding the

The Roman pantomime dancer is one prominent figure in imperial culture that publicly transgressed the strict gender, sexuality, and class distinctions in Roman society. Their celebrity and homoerotic appeal led them to gain social capital that enabled them to gain political influence over male citizens—especially the young knights seated in the first fourteen rows—of the audience. Although Roman society was notorious for not reinforcing the imperial legislature outlining of rigid sexual mores restricting the types of sex and sexual partners any given person might have, the pantomime dancer was the only figure who could blatantly flout and publicly dramatize these controversial transgressions on stage. Eager to historicize sexual dissonance and gender non-conformity, fin de siècle writers and illustrators were drawn to pantomime dance and its controversial dancer.

Michael Field appropriated the decadent trope of the gender non-conforming body, typically a figure signifying homosexuality between men, to narrate alternative deviancies acknowledging not only sexual but also gender difference. Unlike some male-identifying homophilic authors like Beardsley and Wilde, women writers were beginning to write historical fiction about queer subjects, like the pantomime dancer, whose orientations, attractions, and fluidity extends beyond "homosexuality," what John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis called "that bastard term compounded of Greek and Latin elements" (2). The sexologists express a discomfort in mixing the

pantomime dancer, see Lucian, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Macrobius, Libanius, Juvenal, Herodian, and Galen.

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elevated state-sanctioned institution of pederasty practiced in the Archaic and Classical periods (from roughly the sixth through the fourth century B.C.), "Greek Love," with the queerness affiliated with decadent Roman culture, consolidated in the fin de siècle representation of the pantomime dancer.

The History of Sexuality and Classical Reception

Daniel Orrells had argued convincingly that "the reception of Classical antiquity was at the heart of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century systemization and taxonimisation of sexuality" (1). Scholarship on the intersection between classics and the history of sexuality from Symonds to Foucault has predominantly focused on delineating ancient Greek pederasty as a precursor to homosexuality between men. In *Hellenism and Homosexuality,* Linda Dowling has discussed at length how Benjamin Jowett's incorporation of Plato into the Greats Curriculum brought ancient Greek pederasty " vividly and compellingly to life". Foucault has famously made a case for viewing the nineteenth-century not "as an age of increased sexual repression" but rather one with "a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities," including, most notably, the solidification of the concept of (homo)sexuality as an identity in the late Victorian era. In *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality,* David Halperin has shown how the Victorians superimposed modern sexual identity onto classical Greek same-sex love between men, arguing that the modern social construct of sexual identity would have been unfathomable to ancient Mediterranean cultures for whom gender, not sex, was the basic category for constructing social personas. More recently, Halperin has revisited his earlier argument in order to take into account Eve Kosofsky

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Sedgwick's recognition that "discourses of sodomy or inversion do not disappear with the emergence of the discourses of homosexuality"; rather, these earlier models coexist with homosexuality, which itself, as Halperin adds, contains within it residual traces of inversion and other more ancient understandings of sexuality (*How to Do the History of Homosexuality* 11).

One of my interventions within this ongoing discussion about sexology and classical sexuality is to demonstrate how late-Victorian queer (other or more than homosexual) authors were engaging with gender and sexually non-conforming characters from Roman history using sexual inversion as a model for comparison, as opposed to the popular subcultural comparison between Greek pederasty and homosexuality. What has been overlooked in the history of classical sexuality is the extent to which much classical and postclassical literature about gender/sex, especially queer sexualities and genders, has come to us through the Latin rather than Greek tradition. From Lucretius's poetic elaboration of Epicurus's teachings about sex and gender relations to Friedrich Karl Forberg's 1824 anthology of ancient sex, the history of antique sexuality is largely recorded by the Romans as well as written in Latin. In *Masculine Plural: Queer Classics, Sex, and Education,* Jennifer Ingleheart makes the case for viewing classical Latin literature and language as a model wherein fin de siècle and Edwardian men could write "in a very direct manner about sex" (99). Ingleheart states that Latin became "the pre-eminent language in the post-classical era both of sex *and* of works intended for a select readership" (99). The homoerotic affiliation with the classics and its illegibility to women and other

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underprivileged groups, not to mention its justifiability as the language of science and legislature, made Latin the language of choice to discuss unorthodox gender and sex.

Sexologists as well as authors interested in extending the history of sex beyond the binarily constructed gender/sex turned to Roman literature written in Latin. Modern sexology's catalogues of sexual and gender variety were constructed in part based on Forberg's catalogue of ancient sexuality written in Latin, the 1824 *De Figuris Veneris.* Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds collected the case studies representing "sexual inversion," gender and sexual variety beyond same-sex love, specifically with Forberg's Latin catalogue in mind. In Ellis's *Sexual Inversion,* sexual inversion conflates gender and sexuality, yet their compendium of case studies provides a more complex, diverse representation of gender and sexual deviancy than they account for in the theory of "sexual inversion" as mannish women and effeminate men.

Scholars like George Chauncey and Gayle Rubin have explored the theory of sexual inversion's evasion of sexual and gender speciation in detail. Chauncey has explained that sexual inversion "did not denote the same conceptual phenomenon of homosexuality" but rather "referred to a broad range of deviant gender behavior, of which homosexual desire was only a logical but indistinct aspect" (116). When Gayle Rubin calls for a more dynamic, diverse theory of sex, she recommends scholars turn to late-Victorian sexology for its "well-developed ability to treat sexual variety as something that exists rather than something to be exterminated," as I discussed in terms of Michael Field's queer, metamorphic inter-speciation in Chapter 2 ("Thinking

Sex," 155). This is especially true of Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds's *Sexual Inversion,* the book that was developed out of Symonds's *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) that outlined the history of "Greek Love" from mythic to late antiquity. Symonds and Ellis both moved in aestheticist and decadent circles, both Symonds and the author Edith Ellis, Ellis's wife, were homosexual, and the collaborators' correspondence with other queer authors demonstrates the queer community's enthusiasm and willingness to contribute, if anonymously, to this new sexological anthology.

Sexual Inversion anthologized queer subcultural categories of gender and sexual deviancy and created a genealogy between ancient Greco-Roman and modern homosexuality and queerness. When fin-de-siècle queer figures like the hermaphrodite and the androgyne wrote their own case studies and autobiographies, they frequently framed their stories using Roman myths and Latin language sexology books.

Another intervention I am making within the history of sexuality is to discuss at length how fin-de-siècle women writers were engaging with the Roman classics to depict queer decadence differently than men. Whereas the trope of the lesbian and sexually inverted woman based on Sappho and other imagined Greek same-sex desiring figures in the French and English tradition have been discussed at length, no study to my knowledge has explored how fin-de-siècle women revised, translated, and adapted Roman decadent literature and culture. Yet it is not for lack of material. Largely because Latin was more accessible (and acceptable) a language for Victorian

women to study, perhaps also because it was less homoerotically encoded than Greek. The extant corpus of Roman literature likewise contains many more instances of women's queerness than Greek literature, thus queer women turned to Roman literature to rationalize their alterity. Take, for instance, Herculine Barbin, the French hermaphrodite whose autobiography Michel Foucault popularized. Barbin frames her own story, which traces how she eventually realized her gender difference after having discovered her same-sex attraction to women, with references Ovid's Iphis and Ianthe myth, about a girl who successfully entreats the gods to transform her into a man so she can marry her beloved:

> I confess that I was extraordinarily shaken when I read Ovid's
>
> *Metamorphoses.* Those who know them can imagine how I felt. As the sequel
>
> of my story will clearly show, this discovery had a special bearing on me. (18)

Barbin gestures toward her discovery of Ovid's tales, featuring Tiresias, Iphis, and Hermaphroditus' gender transitions, in order to set up her "big reveal." The myth, like Barbin's real life story, is a love story: Iphis falls in love with her friend, Ianthe, and bemoaning the fact that she is a girl and such things are unnatural, she beseeches the gods, who answer her, transforming her into a boy, thereby resolving the queer love into heterosexual marriage.

The second and final reference to Ovid directly precedes the moment when Barbin was forced by the state to transition into life as a man: "Doesn't the truth sometimes go beyond all imaginary conceptions, however exaggerated they may be? Have the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid gone further?" (87) In chapter 2, I discussed the central role

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* played in queer authors' writing at the turn of the century. Here, it suffices to say that queer authors found solace in Roman literature's representations of gender non-conforming subjects, mythic as well as historic. In *The Autobiography of an Androgyne,* the American "girl-boy" Ralph Werther uses Latin's encyclopedic erotic phraseology more frankly and specifically to describe his sexual encounters and predilections. When sexology failed to provide him with an adequate explanation for what we might now understand to be gender dysphoria, he turned to non-Western models of gender non-conformity that better resonated with his identity, and this new understanding motivated him to undergo castration surgery.

What Michel Foucault has called the genre of medico-libertine literature circulated among decadent literati. A correlation between modern autobiography and neo-classical adaptations is easily detected between these genres, evidence of fin-de-siècle queer writers' interest in delineating a queer genealogy that developed in tandem with cis-homosexuality.

Fin-de-siècle decadent writers, especially women, were beginning to write historical fiction exploring gender and sexually queer subjects that fit more neatly into the model of sexual inversion rather than that of homosexuality.

In the Roman Trilogy, Michael Field represents the pantomime dancer as a an anti-identitarian queer figure whose sexual acts and gender positionalities fluctuate, giving the specifically archetypal representation of the pantomime man as a "girl-boy," a passive invert and androgyne. Michael Field shows how Roman culture fully

embraced the pantomime dancer's queerness by elevating pantomime dance as the most popular performance art of the imperial Roman world.

Although the nineteenth century saw a decline in the popularity of antique Greek dancing, it remained "part of the 'night scene," since it "was an excellent pretext for women to undress" (Macintosh 43). From the 1880s onward, antique dance saw a resurgence on the popular stage at the same time that the queer classicist subculture became increasingly interested in the figure of the pantomime dancer, most famously depicted by Aubrey Beardsley in 1896. The pornographic publisher Leonard Smithers had published the *Sixth Satire of Juvenal* with Beardsley's illustrations in 1906, illustrations that embrace pantomime as a homoerotic character.[88] Beardsley fashions his dancer, Bathyllus, from the comedic school of pantomime dance, as a prototype of the modern homosexual whose gender-bending camp performance encodes his predilection to be a passive same-sex loving man. Pantomime performances became a popular form of entertainment for fin-de-siècle male homoerotic subculture. Beardsley's patron, Herbert Charles Pollitt, was also a famous Cambridge female interpreter and once partner to Aleister Crowley, whose renowned racy erotic dances and pantomime performances were known among the fin-de-siècle decadent community. Pollitt purchased Beardsley's original Juvenal

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[88] Joseph Bristow has recently discussed the female impersonator Herbert Charles Pollitt, who became notorious for his persona Diane de Rougy in the Cambridge fin de siècle homosexual subculture. E.F. Benson memorialized him in his novel, *The Babe, B.A.* (1897). Pollitt was a patron of Beardsley, who purchased the original illustrations of his Juvenal illustrations of Bathyllus. "Aleister Crowley's fin de siècle: From Decadent Drag to Demonic 'Sex Magick'," North American Victorian Studies conference, Columbus, OH, 2019.

illustrations of Bathyllus's racy camp performance. In these illustrations, Bathyllus tends to the homoerotic male gaze of his audience (and Beardsley to his). The comedic parody of heteroerotic myths highlights gender performativity to signify queerness. Comedic pantomime dancers appealed to decadent writers and performers whose intention was to make art (and love) against the grain.

In the *Sixth Satire,* popularly called "Against Women", Juvenal attempts to dissuade his friend from marrying a woman on account of women's unfaithfulness and promiscuity. Juvenal inserts the anecdote about three women audience members' erotic responses to Bathyllus's pantomime performance of "Leda and the Swan" into the satire. It becomes Juvenal's central premise that men ought to opt for homosocial companionship over heterosexual marriage:

> Can you find any woman that's worthy of you, under
>
> Our porticoes? Does any seat at the theatre hold one
>
> You could take from there, and love with confidence?
>
> When sinuous Bathyllus dances his pantomime Leda,
>
> Tucia loses control of her bladder [womb], and Apula yelps,
>
> As if she were making love, with sharp tedious cries.
>
> Thymele attends: naïve Thymele learns something.

Whereas Juvenal's intention was to utilize the women's responses as an example of their vice and infidelity, Beardsley's illustrations refocuses attention to the pantomime performer's seductive dance, magnifying it with two erotic etchings. Instead of reinforcing Juvenal's message that pantomime provokes sexual deviancy in

women, Beardsley embraces the sexual didacticism that Juvenal condemns. He essentially creates an illustrated guide to male penetration, updating and translating Juvenal's female audience into the predominantly male audience of Smither's press.

Juvenal's satire is inherently misogynistic and implicitly homoerotic in the sense that Luce Irigaray has discussed "hom(m)o-sexuality," that is to say, the satire espouses the rejection of the exchange of commodified women between men that Irigaray critiques, instead encouraging the homosocial community to persist in women's absence (171). Beardsley's illustrations extend Irigaray's sense of the term from homosocial to homoerotic, transforming Juvenal's vision of homosocial community into homoerotic consumption. He illustrates this by transmuting Bathyllus the eroticized pantomime dancer into the role of the fetishized, passive role traditionally played by women.
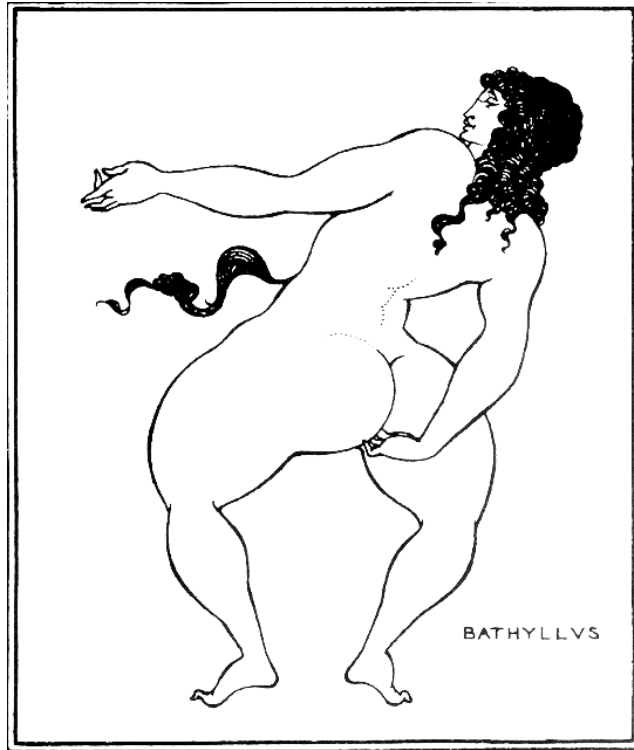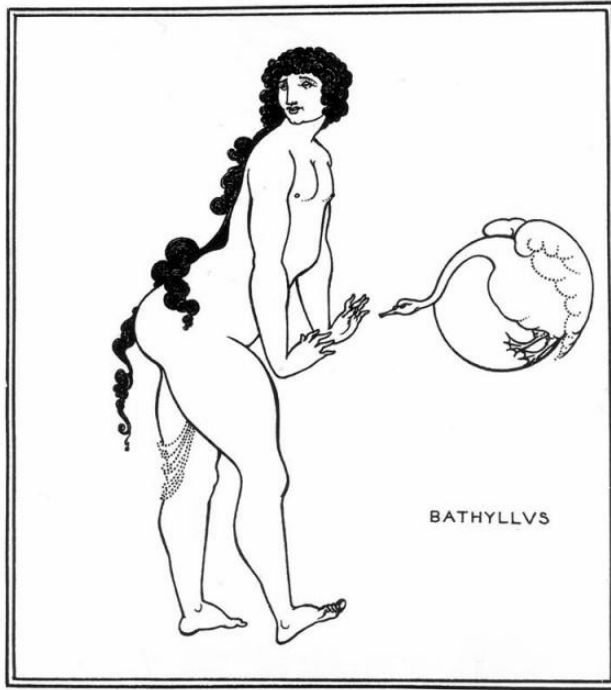
Figure 6 "Bathyllus Posturing"(1896), Aubrey Beardsley

Figure 7 "Bathyllus in the Swan Dance" (1896), Aubrey Beardsley

In both "Bathyllus Posturing" (Figure 6) and "Bathyllus in the Swan Dance" (Figure 7), the pantomime dancer plays the part of Leda, the Aetolian princess and Spartan queen whom Zeus seduced (and in some versions raped) in the form of a swan. "Bathyllus in the Swan Dance" features the dancer as Leda facing the swan in profile, his body slightly bent and hands guarding his groin as he looks slightly over his head, gaze directed away from the audience. Beardsley depicts the swan diving toward Leda, his long phallicized neck attempting to probe past the shield of Leda's hands. In the next illustration, Bathyllus as Leda turns his back to the audience, projecting his posterior to the audience. In this illustration, the image of the swan is absent, and Beardsley instead shows Bathyllus using his hand to imitate the swan's long neck, fondling his buttock to imitate Leda's rapture. The phallic tendril of hair that peaks out as Bathyllus gazes over his extended arm emphasizes the performance's homoeroticism. Beardsley's drawing illustrates that Bathyllus's the performance provides a pretext for the naked dancer to enact self-pleasure onstage, a sex act that imitates the homoerotic coupling between the passive Bathyllus and Zeus. Beardsley highlights the pantomime dancer's affiliation with the *cinaeda*, defined by an anonymous ancient lexicographer as "those who publicly shake their buttocks, that is to say, dancers or pantomime performers" (Williams 178). The classical scholar Craig Williams describes *cinaedi* as men who had a reputation for being "soft, effeminate, decadent, and, when it came to sexual practices, liable to play the receptive role" (Williams 178).

By situating erotic illustrations alongside the misogynistic original for the audience largely made up of men, Beardsley creates a homoerotic subtext wherein men gaze at the promiscuous dancer for their own amusement while critiquing women for doing so. Beardsley thus reinforces Victorian sexual mores for women while championing sexual deviancy for men in ways that speak to the late-Victorian ambivalences within the queer decadent community. Tracy Olverson cautions against the assumption that the late-Victorian discourse of Hellenism and homosexuality "should be seen as a sophisticated counter-discourse, which is both inclusive and positively subversive" (10). She stipulates that "it is not always clear how the male-identified aestheticism of Pater and his contemporaries can be 'liberatory' or positive for women" (10?). For Beardsley and his cohort, staged gender performativity in pantomime and cross-dressing performances afforded them a subcultural activity for embracing homoeroticism, yet these performances were not generally open to the women, nor did their fictionalized accounts promote the development of a similar subculture among women.

Consequently, the gender boundary crossing that occurs through the pantomime's performance, wherein the pantomime dancer performs Leda and the Swan playing both roles, becomes in Beardsley another instance in which gender non-conformativity and transformation is reduced to a trope for homosexuality. It specifically becomes an opportunity to historicize the passive male homophile in ancient Rome to show that same-sex love between men continued, in spite of the fact that Greek pederasty never became in institution in the Empire. Decadent women

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writers, by contrast, use the trope of the pantomime dancer as an opportunity to explore gender and sexual fluidity and transitionality. They appropriate this developing male homosocial subculture to a more inclusive queer performative mode. Narratives featuring pantomime dancers are frequently metaperformative narratives that explore adaptation, fluidity, and transition both formally and thematically.

One critical text that helped shift the discourse from homosexuality to a more inclusive queer classical reception was Maurice Emmanuelle's *Ancient Greek Dance,* a history that disassociated pantomime dance from imperial Roman history it with ancient Greek history as the institution from which Greek tragedy arose. Emmanuelle's critical study historicizes pantomime as Hellenic, reminding the nineteenth-century audience that, according to Aristotle's *Poetics,* the chorus of Greek tragedy emerged out of pantomime's dithyrambic dance. Emmanuelle connects the birth of Pylades's tragic school of pantomime dance to the rise of "Hellenistic effeminacy" recorded in the plastic arts (188).[89] He supplements the fragmentary history with ancient sculpture, piecing together a study of ancient choreography using multiple genres. Discussing pantomime performance as a distinct cultural institution stemming from ancient Greek times significantly helped to historicize the pantomime dancer as an alternative state-sanctioned figure distinct from pederasty's eromenos, the passive beloved of the proto-homosexual duo. It was thus that the study became appealing to late-Victorian women, who were interested in historical figures who

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[89] See Antonio Corso's "Love as Suffering: The Eros of Thespiae of Praxiteles" for a detailed account of this transformation in representations of Eros in the Hellenic period.

might be said to be queer outside of the exclusively male institution of pederasty. Especially given that Emmanuelle's study prominently featured effeminate men and emasculate women, the study enabled women to explore gender and sexual differences using sexual inversion theory as a starting point for experimenting with alternative non-conforming positionalities.

Michael Field (the women lovers and co-authors Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper) wrote a "Decadent Roman Trilogy," featuring the enslaved tragic pantomime dancer Pylades. After commissioning Charles Ricketts, the illustrator and editor of *The Dial,* as well as their good friend, to illustrate the Roman Trilogy, they immediately disputed the depiction of the pantomime dancer. The dispute, detailed in Michael Field's jointly written autobiography, illustrates Michael Field's intention to write against the male decadent tradition of depicting the pantomime dancer as a fetishized *eromenos* or *cinaedus,* the passive youth within the pederastic tradition:

> To return to Ricketts & his joy over the scandalous Pylades—our joy is much overcast by hearing that R. has had a vision of him 'dressed like Paris in 'Phrygian breeches,' & a band of jewels across his naked torso. He has 'beautiful long feet' & jewels round the ankles—also masses of hair. Michael in an agony of terror, dwells on the Greek body that befits our dancer & attacks the elongated slenderness of R's figures….Pylades! Michael & I had a sense of transfused congratulation at 'the breeches', remembering a few male nudes by Ricketts—very doleful. And those long feet tread over our imaginations hauntingly…! We had trusted our fair Greek would escape

illustration—but a dancer & a boy & a decadent! …. I have tried to suggest

that he began life simple & beautiful as Daphnis, & never became

unhellenised but we fear—we fear exceedingly!

Having studied Emmanuelle's *Ancient Greek Dance* extensively, Michael Field

resists Rickett's desire to depict "a decadent" body characteristic of his oeuvre

featuring phallicized elongated bodies and feet. Martha Vicinus and Jill Ehnenn have

written about another dancer to appear in Michael Field's work, the youthful

androgynous dancer from their ekphrastic poem on Wattaeu's *L'Indifferent*. Vicinus

notices fin-de-siècle women taking up the figure of the youth as an alternative model

for sexual inversion in women to the femme fatale. Ehnenn, by contrast, takes a

feminist approach, arguing that Michael Field appropriates the tradition of women as

art-object by fetishizing the effeminate youthful man.[90]

In my reading of the dancer, I understand Michael Field to be exploring the

inadequacies of gender/sex binary. Michael Field instead explores the pantomime

dancer in terms of the modern figure of the androgyne as well as a sort of "power

bottom". Michael Field describes him in terms of both gender and sexual deviancy.

They describe him as a "girl-boy," slang for the androgyne with predilections for

being the passive partner, while Pylades's proud declaration that "I give men pleasure

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[90] "Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in "Beauty and Ugliness" and *Sight and Song*," *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture,* Ehnenn and Vicinus, Martha. "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5.1 (1994): 90-114. JSTOR. 27 October 2016.

openly" situates him as same-sex desiring.[91] Creating Pylades as the principal

character of the dramas allows Michael Field to transgress the boundaries sexual

inversion between mannish women and effeminate men, while historicizing this

deviancy within Hellenism was an attempt to elevate queerness—indeterminant and

fluid gender/sex non-conforming identities—in the late-Victorian imaginary.

Elsewhere in the diaries, Cooper expressly asserts that "I am Pylades," and "I draw

Pylades out of myself," declarations that elucidate Michael Field's intention to

appropriate decadent male discourse to analogize their own experience as queer

women (Ms.Add.46785.312).

The pantomime's malleability enables him to pass effortlessly from a variety

of sexual and gender categories, and his role as the imperial pantomime dancer

sanctions, even requires his gender and sexual fluidity. Pylades's deep understanding

of imperial Roman sexual politics and his ability to elide categorization enables him

to resist and invert the conventions of sexual roles, which viewed the pantomime

dancer as a sexually available imperial concubine assumed to take the role of passive

beloved. Michael Field highlights Pylades's subversion of imperial sexual power

dynamics in a variety of ways.

In one scene, Cleander, Commodus's powerful chamberlain, makes a sexual

advance on Pylades, to whom he offers money to perform in private:

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[91] The history of the term "girl-boy" stretches back to Greco-Roman mythohistory. It is a term used in classical philosophical and mythic literature to describe the effeminate passive partner of a same-sex duo, one that entered the English language in the Renaissance via William Warner's *Albion's England* (1596) with a reference to Zeus's boy lover Ganymede (OED).

CLEANDER: (To Pylades)
　　　You shall earn twelve pieces
Of gold to-night at supper, if you dance
Your Pyrrhic[92] dance for one.
　　　And let your flutist
Be at your side in readiness, my sweet.
(He pulls the dancer's ear caressingly & goes out with his slaves in the
opposite direction)
PYLADES: (Breaking into laughter)
"Secutor!"

Spurning Cleander's playful sexual advances by jokingly calling him a "Secutor," a

gladiator whose attack relies more heavily on tactic (in this case money and flattery)

than on ambushing his victim, Pylades slyly averts the private performance, as well as

the implied sexual acts Cleander suggests.[93] Through candidly acknowledging

Cleander as a character type—a specific type of gladiator whose martial style matches

his strategy for attracting sexual partners— Pylades lightheartedly participates in

homoerotic imperial discourse. Mary Beard has discussed the figure of "the clever

comic slave who raised a laugh at the expense of his dim owner both subverted the

power relations of slavery as an institution, and, I suspect, served to legitimate them"

(137). In a similar manner, Pylades discerns from Cleander's indirect proposition a

vulnerability that enables Pylades to skirt his expected role as prostitute and

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[92] A martial dance practiced by ancient Greek dancers. Its origin in Dorian culture
and the context here link it to same-sex erotic practices in the ancient Mediterranean;
see especially David Halperin's "Heroes and Their Pals," *One Hundred Years of
Homosexuality* and Maurice Emmanuelle's *The Antique Greek Dance.*
[93] On the martial characteristics of the secutor, see Michael Carter, "Viewing the
Retriarius" (116) from *Roman Dress and the Fabrics of Roman Culture*

pantomime dancer, a strategy he repeats throughout the trilogy.[94] Pylades utilizes his

queerness to gain cultural power in situations when he would otherwise be powerless.

In another scene, Michael Field contrasts Pylades's Hellenic art with tragedy

and Commodus's decadent spectacle with comedy, in order to demonstrate how a

greater freedom to transgress traditional gender roles was afforded to the priests and

pantomime dancers affiliated with Hellenism than to the emperors who enforced strict

boundaries to begin with. In his previous performative scene, Pylades dances among

the Priest of Cybele and his castrated pages, the *galli,* who both the ancient and

modern world understood as orientalist symbols of same-sex alterity.[95] As Williams

has suggested in *Roman Homosexuality,* "the image of an effeminate Eastern dancer

lurked behind every description of a man as a *cinaedus…*and that behind the Eastern

dancer in turn lurked the image of the *gallus"* (177). Whereas Pylades artlessly

incorporates himself "amongst the pages" and their "mysteries," the emperor

Commodus jealously begs entry. The Priest of Cybele bars Commodus from initiation

into the mysteries of Cybele, demanding "you must put away your nature, / Your

manhood, pass a mutilated slave" (31). Michael Field employs the figure of the

gallus, a term frequently used classically to insult men who transgressed gender roles,

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[94] In a similar passage from *The World at Auction,* for example, Pylades acts the part of a drunken fool, who evades Didius Julianus's request for him to sleep with him by responding that he wants to continue his drunken revelry. To Didus's plea "I cannot sleep alone. Say, Pylades, / Poor lad, are you not weary?" Pylades responds, "Wine, more wine!" (He falls across the couch at Didius' feet, a drunken Bacchus). The incorporated stage direction notably emphasizes the fact that Pylades is playing the role of a drunken Bacchus, while his performed sleep enables him to escape the imperial Roman pantomime's expected sexual availability. (lxxxi).

strategically to show the enslaved and otherwise subjected gender and sexual others overturning power hierarchies in Rome. They taunt Commodus to castrate himself, an act that would render him gender- and thereby sexually other and would entail his demotion from emperor to the status of enslaved people and concubines. Pylades's status as an enslaved dancer whose social role sanctions his queer ambiguity enables him to effortlessly pass. Commodus, by contrast, must adhere to prescriptive gender and sexual societal expectations. In the drama, Michael Field shows Pylades reinforcing imperial sexual and gender dynamics, punishing Commodus for transgressing the bounds of what the Romans considered appropriate behavior for an emperor. Pylades demands that the emperors themselves abide by the sexual mores they institute. Moreover, he insists that queerness belongs to the artists and spiritual leaders who disseminate older, Hellenic wisdom into Roman culture.

Pantomime as a Queer Art of Resistance

Michael Field's thirty-two volume unpublished autobiography, *Works and Days,* contains blueprints and character analyses for the Roman Trilogy that provide insight about their intention for the dramas to represent the struggle of oppressed artists "in a decadent age, like the present." They intended the trilogy to analogize Roman Decadence with British Decadence, and their queer, enslaved Pylades is the struggling artist that Edith Cooper modeled after herself. The resulting Roman Trilogy thus uses the art of pantomime to subvert the power dynamics that exist between the emperors and the artists who serve them, between the socially dominant and the powerless. The distinction between the public and hidden social transcripts

that James C. Scott makes in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* is useful for understanding the ways that Michael Field inscribes and inverts the Roman imperial "dramaturgy of power" throughout the trilogy (50). Scott distinguishes between the public and hidden transcripts of both the powerful and powerless: the public, performative interaction between groups in which the powerful perform their power and the powerless enact their obedience versus the hidden, off-stage interaction between members of a same group. Michael Field employs this technique metatheatrically in the Roman Trilogy. Pylades reenacts ancient myths whose hidden transcripts critique tyranny yet whose public transcripts allow for the emperors to fancy themselves as the hero of the story. In the world of the drama, Pylades's performance incites the disgruntled citizens of the audience to react against the emperor to whom the pantomime seemingly attends. At the same time, Michael Field imbues within the dramas another hidden transcript: their attention to Pylades's status as a mistreated queer artist calls attention to the fear fin de siècle queer artists faced after the Wilde trial. On this metatheatrical level, the dramas mask their commentary of the precarity of fin de siècle queer artists by depicting queerness within the historical drama, an appropriate and safe aesthetic form and theme by Victorian standards.

The metatheatrical trilogy provides social commentary for the modern queer experience while within the world of the drama, Pylades uses his public performance to dissent against the oppressive politics of imperial Rome, imbuing the libretti that accompany his seductive dance with political critique. Michael Field envisioned the

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Decadent Trilogy as a "motif drama" focused on the enslaved pantomime dancer who longs for freedom:

> [It is about] an exquisite motive that has haunted me long—the Greek slave gazing at the free types his race has conceived in the statues brought to Rome. Pylades, a lovely slave-boy of fifteen, is gazing at the image of the god he is going to represent next day, when he makes his debut as dancer on the stage of the Theatre of Pompey. He is lost in the yearning passion for all that the free Greek has given to the marble[.] (Add.MS.46785.150)

The figure of Pylades as an enslaved, hypersexualized artist is significant for queer women artists writing in the wake of the British recriminalization of homosexuality and violent imperial history. Pylades, the name given to all tragic pantomime dancers, symbolizes the enslaved spirit of Hellenism, come back to seek vengeance on the decadent Roman empire.

When we are first introduced to Pylades, he entreats Apollo to help him succeed at his first dance in the Theatre of Pompey:

> (Pylades suddenly approaches the statue of Apollo.)
> PYLADES.
> O Genius, O my Patron, thou that guardest
> My tireless feet, the singers and the flutists
> Who sing and play, while I am dancing thee,
> Receive thy gifts of music and of verse:
> Dower me with thine own life, breathe through my motions,
> Act in me bodily, and fill all eyes
> With presence of thy godhead; for thou can'st,
> O Delphicus! (17)

Pylades imagines the spirit of Apollo contained in the pilfered Hellenic statue lying within the imperial palace. The apostrophe echoes a prophetic moment in *The Aeneid,*

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when Aeneas encounters his friend, the helmsman Palinurus, whom the gods had sacrificed in order to ensure Aeneas's fleets' safe arrival to Italy. After having fallen overboard, Palinarus swims to the Velian shore only to be killed and left unburied, and thus unable to cross over the river Cocytus to his final resting place. When Aeneas reunites with him in the underworld, Palinurus entreats Aeneas's guide, the Cumaean Sibyl, to help rest his soul. The allusion to epic prophecy situates Pylades, as an eastern traveler, as was Palinurus, a non-citizen ill-treated by the Romans. Both seek solace from the Romanized Apollo, Palinurus from Apollo's priestess at the oracle near Naples and Pylades from the Apollo statue in the Roman palace. The sibyl responds to Palinurus's supplication with a promise of memorialization:

> But heed my words, and in thy memory
> Cherish and keep, to cheer this evil time.
> Lo, far and wide, led on by signs from Heaven,
> Thy countrymen from many a templed town
> Shall consecrate thy dust, and build thy tomb,
> A tomb with annual feasts and votive flowers,
> To Palinurus a perpetual fame!"

 Michael Field's Pylades knows his history and mythology well, for pantomime dancers "must know the history of the world," "all that Homer and Hesiod and our best poets…have sung," and "the vast, nay infinite, mass of mythology" (Lucian). Yet Pylades does not merely "produce" all the stories he has "stored up in his memory" "when occasion demands," as historians like Lucian claim is expected of the dancers, he also becomes a poet in his own right, revising and appropriating lyrical language to create his own verse. Here he transforms the poetic conceit of the epic prophetic lyric "peoples…will be moved / By divine omens to worship your bones" into the

much more sensual, direct evocation for Apollo to "act in me bodily" (17). Michael Field's Pylades's lyric is much more intimate and animate; it evokes Apollo as not only the spiritually aesthetic "genius"—the muse spirit who inspires the artist—but also the bodily physicality of sex between men. The dancer's sensual evocation for Apollo to "act in me bodily" explores a highly eroticized understanding of queer historiography, where the spirits of aesthetic predecessors penetrate the present, collaborating with present queer artists to wreak havoc on their imperial Roman oppressors. Michael Field's Pylades calls on Apollo directly to comfort him during his enslavement, to inspire him to create divine art, and to help memorialize Pylades himself as a pantomime dancer to be remembered.

Michael Field describes this collaboration between past and present, mythic and historic queer figures, as an artistic collaboration, much like their own co-authorship; Pylades creates a series of mythic libretti with the help of Apollo and his pantomime troop, which aims to put into action a plan to liberate marginalized citizens from the decadent Roman Empire. Versed in reconstructing ancient fragmentary homoerotic lyrics since the publication of Sappho's extended fragments in *Long Ago* (1889), Michael Field now tried their hands at reconstructing the non-extant lyrical libretto. Michael Field creates three libretti for the trilogy. The first recounts Apollo's enslavement by Laomedon; the second retells Meleager and Atalanta's killing of the Calydonian boar, and the third recreates a Dionysian

performance (*The Race of Leaves* xvii, 26; *The World at Auction* 67).[96] Each

performance ultimately incites its audience to commit regicide.

Taken together, they create a mythic narrative highlighting the rebellion of poet gods

and heroes against various tyrannous rulers and emperors, transforming the figure of

the pantomime dancer from passive *cinaedi* into Michael Field's gender-fluid,

sexually dominant and politically active Pylades.

     As we shall see, within the world of the text, Michael Field's pantomime

libretti are not only an analogy for the oppression of queer artists under imperial

decadent Rome, but they also have a didactic purpose. Whereas in Beardsley this

purpose is to teach the audience deviant sexual practices, Michael Field's Roman

Trilogy mentions Pylades's erotic performances only in passing; the myths they insert

and stage focus exclusively on aggressive martial scenes of enslavement, rebellion,

and massacre, crafting the pantomime dancer into a prophet pontificating anti-

imperialist politics through his stimulating, seductive performances that "drive the

time along!" (75).

     The pantomime libretti become divine prophetic texts—as if Apollo had

answered Pylades' entreaties to "make me god of all"—that teach Pylades to utilize

the seductive, elusive, and transgressive power of his art to resist imperial oppression

(*Race of Leaves* 14). Pylades's character development in the Roman Trilogy

emphasizes his increasing awareness of his power as an artist; as his agency over his

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[96] On the Laomedon myth, see Apollodorus's *The Library,* 2.5.9 (205-207) and *The Illiad,* 21.444 (355); on the Atalanta and Meleager myth, see Apollodorus, 1.8.2 (63-71).

art increases, he increasingly selects libretti whose myths analogize imperial Rome's

mistreatment of subjects. In the first scene, Pylades determines to practice his

performance of Apollo and Laomedon; in the absence of his pantomime troop's

lyrical accompaniment, he "bring[s] to mind the canticle, / So often having heard it to

my steps":

> (*He sings, moving in pantomime to the words….*)
> PYLADES:
> …Young and lustrous, god and yet a servant, …
> Raise your heads erect, ye flocks, and listen
> To the note I strike from off my lyre!
> They have heard, they stand each head erected;
> Thus they wait the Grazing-Tune that woos…
> I have struck it: all submissive listen,
> Till they feed in mystery, advancing,
> Drawn to solemn paces by a spell;
> Then to sharper strains one way they hurry,
> Fleece by fleece around me, till I strike
> Sweet, soft notes that lay them down to slumber…
> I, a god, though servant of a king. (14-15)

Although they follow a typical blank verse, the frequent irregularity of the meter

accompanied by hard consonants creates a jarringly disharmonious poetics in the first

strophe, followed by a swift transition in the enjambed 15th and 16th line into "[s]weet

soft notes" that mesmerize the reader, like Apollo's flock, into soporific

"submission." The violent cacophony of the lyric, instrumental accompaniment, and

the rhythmic thumping feet and thrashing limbs of the choreography culminate into

an anticlimactic lyrical lull, indicating that he has successfully charmed his audience

into submission, thereby situating himself as a dominant seducer more akin to the

late-Victorian understanding of the sexually inverted woman than the pantomime

dancer's traditional denotation as a proto-sexually inverted young man.

When Pylades next performs in *The Race of Leaves,* he begins utilizing

pantomime's mythohistorigraphy as an outlet through which to enact change in

decadent Rome. The ancient historians record numerous instances wherein the

pantomime dancer provoked his audience, enchanted by his seductive charms and the

powerful music, into riots that threated the imperial power. Elsewhere he is known

for creating alliances with the young men of Rome, the gladiators and sons of

emperors, who could easily incite political antagonism to riots.[97] At this point in the

drama, Michael Field depicts a recently emancipated Pylades as a "our fair girl-boy,"

who embraces his role as public erotic figure—a position he continues to be chastised

for holding—to charm his audience:

> … I am:
> Enfranchised, and yet subject to the lash
> Because I give men pleasure openly,
> Where all can see, applaud, and have their fill.
> The gold-haired women woo me with their smiles,
> Their coin, their flatteries, and have their way
> Or not, 'tis all the same . . . and afterward
> I dance them as Pasiphaë or Byblis
> Or Cyprian Myrrha, and the judges own
> My women are seductive. (46-7)

Michael Field describes how Pylades has embraced the erotic liberties his aesthetic

form affords him. He celebrates the queernesses represented in Roman literature's'

myths, dancing to myths about sexual taboos: Pasiphaë's bestiality with a bull as well

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[97] See especially Slater, W. J. "Pantomime Riots," *Classical Antiquity* 13.1 (April 1994), 120-144.

as Byblis's and Myrrha's incestuous love.[98] However, Michael Field never staged these explicitly erotic dances, nor did they stage the many sexual favors Pylades is said to perform for imperial household members throughout the dramas. The Decadent Trilogy reprivatizes queer acts and orientations while at the same time strategically restaging the queer subject in order to critique the current regime and even enact political change.

Hellenic tragedy, whether pantomime or drama, becomes an aesthetic tool for political resistance, which Michael Field puts in stark contrast to Decadent spectacle—from Commodus's embarrassing and illegal cross-dressing pantomimes of Hercules's dressed as Hippolyta in *The Race of Leaves* to Pertinax's public, naked flagellation of Pylades in *The World at Auction.* Pylades not only critiques these imperial decadent transgressions by emperors, who were legally forbidden from performing pantomime and crossing gender boundaries, he punishes the emperors, and punishes them as if they were common citizens, sentencing them to death. In *The Race of Leaves,* Pylades enacts the regicidal plot against Commodus after he announces his intention to perform a sex act in public, "a wondrous vision / to hold men's lids apart, while Rome herself / Shall quake" (111). In *The World at Auction,* after Pertinax has Pylades physically lashed, naked and unmasked, in a sadomasochistic performance, Pylades organizes the regicide of that emperor too.

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[98] Ovid's *Metamorphoses* expands on these myths, giving as much space to detailing the sexual taboos and queernesses as to the human to nonhuman metamorphoses themselves.

In the above mentioned scenes, Michael Field is drawing a distinction between aesthetic decadence and imperial decadence. They forge a genealogy between the Roman tragic pantomime dance and Greek tragedy distinct from imperial Roman spectacles, and thus attempt to disentangle queerness and decadent aestheticism from imperial despotism. Pylades critiques and punishes emperors for their ill-attempts at recreating comedic pantomime and for staging obscene and violent spectacles to punish oppressed characters. Michael Field thus contributes to decadent historiography a view of history that takes aestheticism into account. They suggest that decadent art was not a symptom of imperial decline but that artists and their art actually suffered from despotic emperors like Commodus, who fetishized the artist, and Pertinax, who punished and attempted to censor his art.

A prime example of this is a scene in which Pertinax publicly humiliates Pylades for his sensual performances. The punishment scene is staged to draw the parallel between the most popular subgenre of Victorian pornography, flagellation erotica, with Roman spectacle, aligning modern with ancient Decadence. It epitomizes Decadent Roman performance's violent, erotic exploitation of the disenfranchised, while underlining Pylades's as an increasingly self-consciously politically resistant figure. A quarrel over a pantomime performance drawn from the historian Suetonius causes the rising action of the drama:

> When Marcus Curius the Praetor hissed,
> Our fair girl-boy with jeering finger showed
> His enemy to all. The Emperor listened
> Next morning to complaints, for Pertinax
> Was never friend to art, and gave command
> That Pylades should be chastised at noon

Upon the public stage (xii-xiii)

Cooper draws from Suetonius's account of two different pantomime conflicts during

the reign of Vespasianus in order to set the stage for Pylades's persecution and

vengeance.[99] An onlooker sympathetically describes the "stripped" dancer's "naked

face" during his punishment:

> He stood against the rods unflinchingly,
> His hum of pain was scarcely audible,
> And soon as he was loosed with mocking gesture
> He gave salute as if he took applause,
> But left the theatre with no golden youth
> Of Rome to give him escort. (xiii)

As Ruth Webb has written, "[t]here was also an important social distinction between

masked and unmasked performers in the ancient world, the mask providing a degree

of protection from the degrading publicity of the stage" (49).[100] Stripping Pylades of

his pantomime mask, Pertinax attempts to publicly humiliate Pylades, who defiantly,

"unflinchingly" tolerates the beating with little reaction, "[h]is hum of pain was

scarcely audible."

Michael Field emphasizes this public humiliation as characteristic of decadent

Rome through its crude blurring of performance and reality. Stripped of stage props

and forced to experience real pain in front of an audience, Pylades's punishment is a

stark contrast to the pantomime dances he willingly performs. The fact that the

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[99] Suetonius writes that "Hylas, a pantomimic actor, was publically scourged…on complaint of a praetor, … and Pylades was expelled from the city and from Italy as well, because by pointing at him with his finger he turned all eyes upon a spectator who was hissing him" (45).

[100] Ruth Webb "Inside the Mask: Pantomime from the Performers' Perspective, *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*

audience of the trilogy is denied access to Pylades's actual emotions provides an

affective shield to the performer, who repossesses his power over the performance

when he "gave a salute" "with mocking gesture" "as if he took applause." Pylades

essentially winks at the voyeuristic audience whom he acknowledges has taken

pleasure in watching his pain.

The scene is written to evoke the sadomasochistic pornographic scenes in

Victorian literature and Roman brothel frescos, scenes embodying decadence, than

the aestheticized, mimetic pantomime performance with which Pylades retaliates.

Striking for "days and nights" while he "lay sick and inconsolable," he finally

announces a performance at the Theater of Pompeii only to make his audience wait

even longer. He holds his audience, his delay demonstrating the power he holds over

all. Finally, he appears in the character of fiery Ajax who riles the crowd to madness:

> …Ajax held the scene,
> With movements full of curses, gory weapon
> And raging hands and head. The people rose,
> While "Pylades, our Pylades!" was shouted
> As if from earth to heaven. It seemed we saw
> The open breast of wrath before our eyes;
> Its conflagration seethed expressively,
> As, Proteus-like, the dancer took each figure
> And shape of rage---the vehemence and swiftness
> Of flame in motion, fury of a lion,
> And fierceness of a leopard; then the shaking
> Of oak the winds have lashed, or else the current
> Of Tiber's flood: it was a miracle!
> For by the outer gestures of his body
> His passion was discovered and released,
> And yet he knew what would become him best,
> And so behaved, not once too much transported
> Beyond his art's decorum. He had snatched
> A triumph out of shame; 'twas rarely done. (xiii)

Unlike the unhinged, violent excess of his public punishment, when Pylades returns

to the stage, he does so with controlling intention, channeling "[h]is passion" in a

"behaved" manner "not once too much transported / Beyond his art's decorum",

earning his audience's applause. A stark contrast to the violent erotics of imperial

decadent performance, Pylades's choreography echoes Lucian's treatise on

pantomime dance calling for dancers to avoid "an excess of mimesis" (di' huperbolen

mimeos"), an excess that, as Duncan writes, is characteristic of imperial Roman

performance.

　　Michael Field utilizes the anecdote Lucian uses as a warning against extreme

mimesis to distinguish between Greek and Roman dancers, showing Pylades the

Greek remaining in control of his acting, unlike Lucian's story about the Roman

pantomime who, losing himself in the performance of the post-war competition

between Ajax and Odysseus, kills the supporting actor (83). Here, Michael Field

makes the case for distinguishing the pantomime dancer not as a symptom of imperial

Roman decadence but rather as a victim of it, insistently maintaining a distinction

between Hellenic aesthetic and imperial decadent mimesis. They revises the indecent

behavior of Lucian's pantomime in order to offer up an alternative, more antiquated

example of a pantomime dancer who channels his negative affects into dance,

utilizing "the constant creative tension between the conventions of the art," between

the "dance technique and the representation of character and action" to express

himself aesthetically (Webb 59). Similar to Ajax, who guards the defense without

attacking offensively, Michael Field depicts Pylades as a pantomime dancer who

strategically avenges within the constraints of his art. Moreover, Pylades likens the formalistic constraints of his art to the institutional constraints of his position; staying within the bounds of pantomime's mythic and choreographic rules justifies his performance of rebellion against his unjust persecution under the cover of art. Interestingly, Pylades's restrained pantomime performance of the constrained, strategic Ajax mirrors his earlier characterization of the "secutor" Cleander, who relies on his tactility rather than brute force to seduce and conquer.

Through so doing, Michael Field alludes to the intricate imperial pantomime political alliance between imperial martial subjects and the pantomime dancers they admired. Here Michael Field demonstrates how the earlier homoerotic private exchange between Cleander and Pylades was amplified by the public arena. Alliances that formed between the young pantomime dancers, "the great stars of antiquity," and young aristocratic and martial men in ancient Rome created "tension between the stage-struck youth and their elders" and brought about anxieties about "riots instigated by passions aroused by the nature of performance" (Slater 128, 138).

Field's Pylades demonstrates a self-awareness of the power he holds over his crowd, whose "great clamour rises" when he dances (liii *World at Auction*). Strategically choosing to depict the martial Ajax in his defiant performance against the emperor Pertinax, Pylades effectively appeals to the crowd, comprised largely of the imperial military youth who admire him, who "rose, / While 'Pylades, our Pylades!' was shouted" (xiv). While tactically keeping within the confines of his place as pantomime dancer whose art encourages mythical representations of militant

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resistance, Pylades riles his audience to action, gaining their sympathy and essentially inducing them to respond aggressively, indeed murderously, against the emperor Pertinax who instigated Pylades's punishment to begin with. Once again, the pantomime performance implicitly incites regicide.

The Pantomime Dancer as a New Woman Character

Coined by Sarah Grand in 1894, the term New Woman referred to highly independent, educated women who organized for women's rights, including suffrage, greater sexual freedom, and marital rights. Grand was frequently characterized as a sexual invert who assumed men's dress and whose critique of patriarchy was conflated with lesbianism. From the contemporary late-Victorian perspective, the characters of the decadent and the New Woman were frequently depicted, especially by critics, as co-conspirators of a revolutionary plot to disarm established culture and state institutions with their loosened sexual politics and disregard for conventionality. Linda Dowling notices that New Woman and decadent writers wrote the decadent as new and the New Woman as decadent, and their critics expressed an anxiety that these figures would lead to cultural and even political revolution:

> Convinced that both literary decadence and New Woman fiction sanctioned and incited an unrestrained egoism, critics repeatedly warned of the threat posed to the macrocosm of Victorian civilization if such dangerously volatile literary tendencies should enter into combination with other forces agitating for radical social and political change. (*The Decadent and the New Woman* 439)

While Dowling focuses on contemporary realist fiction, historical drama too depicts the decadent and the New Woman collaborating to create highly politicized art. Moreover, historical drama that focuses on imperial women and queer figures from

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(late-)antiquity enable authors like Michael Field to explore women's sexual liberatory politics of the New Woman with the same-sex and queer politics of the decadent. In the preface to *Attila, My Attila!* (1896), they explicitly declare their Honoria, sister of the Western Roman Emperor Valentinian the third, to be "the *New Woman* of the fifth century" (2). In the Decadent Roman Trilogy, Pylades collaborates with New Women figures like Marcia and Julia Domna, riles his women audience to action by playing Bacchus with his Maenads, and, through his performances of both the Maenads and Atalanta, he himself plays both the decadent and the New Woman in one.

Michael Field models Pylades sexual and aesthetic transformation from the effeminate decadent youthful man to the masculine aestheticist activist New Woman with the intention of decoupling the activism and aestheticism they represent from imperial decadence in order to resituate queer, feminist decadence as an anti-imperial aestheticist spirit.   The political role of Michael Field's pantomime performances becomes much clearer in the second libretto about Atalanta's role in the Calydonian boar hunt, since the libretto and the dramatic narrative to align Pylades with the Roman New Woman Atalanta, both non-conforming heroes who attempt to rescue the state from current sociopolitical crises. After an angry mob of Roman subjects forms outside of the imperial palace to protest—"a single shout / Of hunger after justice"— outraged due to the persistent famine and deaths caused by the Antonine Plague (41). The plague, documented most thoroughly by Galen, flared up during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 165 AD and persisted under Commodus's rule. The plague

significantly depleted the Roman population and the State's coffers, and thus led the

Antonine Plague to be considered a key event in the decline of the Roman empire.[101]

Michael Field's Eclectus explains how the mythic Caledonian boar that

Atalanta/Pylades slays becomes a symbol for Commodus' mismanagement of plague-

stricken Rome:

> ECLECTUS.
> Our exile tells the worst—
> Rome is plague-stricken, Tiber in full flood.
> Famine is in our streets, conspiracy
> Has been among us and has failed, revenge
> Is now among us and is doomed to fail;
> Treason is with the crowd. (25)

When members within the imperial household decide to assassinate of Commodus,

the pantomime troop steps in to assist, organizing an impromptu performance

featuring Atalanta's murder of the Calydonian boar.

Although he is to play the leading role of Atalanta killing the boar, Pylades

stealthily slips offstage as his pantomime troop to accompany Marcia, Eclectus, and

the athlete Narcissus to assassinate Commodus. In the ancient myth, Artemis sends

the Calydonian boar to wreak havoc on the countryside, killing men and cattle as well

as preventing crops from being sowed. After many die attempting to slay the boar,

Atalanta, the virgin anti-marriage huntress, volunteers herself and swiftly completes

the slaying. When the libretto commences, Pylades has already stealthily exited,

leaving his troop to play the libretto without his accompanying dance:

> CANTICUM

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[101] See "The Antonine Plague and the Decline of the Roman Empire," Sabbatani, S. and Fiorino S.

Within Arcadia, green and lovely land
The Calydonian boar
Ravaged: ….
But Meleager came from Calydon,
A hero, doughty-armed,
And with him Atalanta, huntress white,
With quiver-parted breasts.
Among the woods they ran,
And found the boar stretched in terrific sleep.
Aroused, he headlong fled
In lurid panic through obstructing trees,
That stood as to avenge
Their savage usage on their flying foe:
Motionless hunters, they
Helped in his death: the maiden's hurtling spear
Struck and her lover's slew.
GABBA.
They struck, they slew ....
(Enter Marcia with Eclectus.)
MARCIA
Go silently away,
All ye that wait the Emperor. He must sleep.
Disperse your watch, he will not come to-night.
I bid you hence. (76)

Like Atalanta and Meleager entering proudly after having slain the Calydonian boar,

Marcia and Eclectus disrupt the performance to announce the slaying of the emperor

Commodus, accentuating the analogy between the inserted myth and the dramatic

narrative. The pantomime troop rewrites the Atalanta myth to reflect to the dramatic

historical moment.

While the pantomime troop performs the libretto that rewrites Atalanta and

Meleager jointly killing the boar to frame Pylades's co-conspirators Marcia and

Eclectus, offstage, Michael Field's Pylades like the Greek Atalanta, commits the

assassination. Michael Field implies that Pylades frames Marcia and Eclectus to

protect himself. As soon as the co-conspirators clear the room, Pylades confesses: "What have I done? / I have betrayed him, and it is my blow; / From me, his Philocommodus, he falls" (80). Michael Field revises history as well as myth, rewriting historical accounts of the Commodus murder plot to imagine Pylades as the boy lover of Commodus, whom the historian Herodian only identifies as "Philocommodus" (Herodian, 1.17). Moreover, they rewrite Herodian's account of Pylades's innocence in order to paint him as a resentful sexual victim who plays a darker, more direct role in the regicide.[102] Shedding his role as Commodus's boy lover, Pylades assumes the role of Atalanta, the huntress who killed men who lusted after her, slipping off stage as the pantomime libretto begins to enact the real assassination of the emperor.

Atalanta became a crucial New Woman figure in the late-nineteenth century; her myths became the subjects of New Woman poetry and stories as well as the title of a feminist magazine for girls.[103] If Atalanta is a mythic proto-New Woman character, Pylades, by assuming her character, becomes aligned not with the male submissive, effeminate "sexual invert" but rather the feminist aggressor that characterized late-Victorian understandings of sexual inversion in women. In the final two dramas, *The World at Auction* and *Julia Domna,* Michael Field develops this

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[102] Herodian provides Michael Field with a detailed history of Commodus's assassination, which they loosely adapt, identifying Commodus's beloved Philocommodus (boy-lover of Commodus) with Pylades the pantomime dancer, who appears nowhere by name in Herodian's history. (Herodian *Lives* 1.17)

[103] In her dissertation, Petra Clark discusses *Atalanta* as a feminist girls magazine in more detail.

parallel between the pantomime dancer Pylades and his affiliation with strong mythic and later historic women characters.

By the end of *The Race of Leaves,* Pylades has mastered the power of pantomime as a vehicle for executing change in the Roman Empire; in *The World at Auction* and *Julia Domna,* he continues to accumulate power by negotiating relationships with each emperor and their household. *The World of Auction* emphasizes Pylades's role as a domestic and public agitator, for he strategically places the emperors at odds with both men and women within the palace, using his seductive and political power to gain favor with those in power at the time. My point here is that Pylades, whose residency in the imperial household extends longer than all the other characters, has an intrinsic understanding of imperial domestic sexual politics. On the one hand, Pylades provokes the young gladiators and praetors of his audience into organizing regicidal plots against each of these emperors, while on the other hand, he charms the emperor, his family, and his mistresses to create rivalries that prevent heteroreproductive futurity.[104]

By the time Didius Julianus comes into *The World at Auction,* the palace has become haunted with the ghosts of past emperors and the walls echo with the discontented mobs who protest at the palace gates. Didius is suspicious of everyone except Pylades, who gains his favor. Didius Julianus disowns the imperial family in favor of the pantomime dancer. He plainly rejects heteronormative reproductive

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[104] See especially W.J. Slater's "Pantomime Riots," which gives an extensive account of the politics of pantomime between men.

kinship ties to embrace the decadent, queer kinship Pylades offers: "My palace

daughterless, and now her mother / Forgets she is my wife… / …Are they not idols, /

Mere idols, with no comradeship to offer". Didius privileges queerness and decadent

art over heteroreproductive kinship: he "place[s] / One who was born a slave, and

practices / An execrable art, before the offspring / I [Manlia] bore you, your Empress

and the woman" and "take[s] a dancer's word / Against your daughter's" (78).

Pylades halts imperial progress by organizing the masses but also by seducing the

emperors, essentially using non-heteroreproductivity as a strategy for liberating the

empire.

After he succeeds at charming the men in the empire, Pylades appeals to the

women to help his cause. When Didius becomes increasingly maniacal, he summons

his beloved Pylades for a performance. Pylades uses the moment to send Didius over

the edge using a pantomime libretto that Michael Field depicts as driving the emperor

mad. Didius hears the angry voices of "people in the hippodrome, / Whose shouts are

not of friendship," in contrast to the stark silence of the imperial palace. The palace,

empty since he exiled his family, echoes with silence while Didius lists off the names

of the slayed decadent emperors to the hum of the angry crowd in the background.

Desperately, he summons Pylades to drown out the noise with "some gay and

celebrated scene" (66). Pylades begins summoning powerful mythic women,

foreshadowing the imminent rise of Julia Domna.

In the pantomime performances leading up to this moment, Pylades

deliberately rouses his male audience into action with his martial-themed

performances; now, Pylades, "[t]ricked out as Bacchus," sweeps "[t]hrough the cities" riling women to action with the dithyrambic dance of the bacchanalian mysteries attended by women:

> Women gather, maids or wedded,
> Rushing forth from old seclusion,
> Free as showers of April rain,
> Through the valleys, through the pine-stems,
> Singing, dancing for their pleasure,
> Not for pleasure of another,
> But because their breath is singing,
> And their feet the dance itself. (67-8)

Michael Field's libretto depicts women's sexual liberation happening through the Latin lyric in a way that resembles the argument Ingleheart makes that Latin was a language through which men could more frankly express homoeroticism, Michael Field utilizes the Latin lyric as a means for women to break from gender roles to express explicit sexual desire.[105] The women, no matter their social status, rush out of the domestic space, singing and dancing wildly through the streets and onto the mountainside "not for pleasure of another" but for their pleasure alone.

As Pylades continues his dithyrambic dance, the scene around him itself turns riotous: "[a]s Pylades is dancing, the howls from the hippodrome become wilder" (69). Pylades theatrically usurps Didius Julianus's imperial power, exploiting the stage as a place through which to influence the imperial patrons he serves. The scene describes the inversion of power between the emperor and his subject in gendered terms: Pylades assumes the role of the masculine Bacchus holding his phallic thyrsus

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[105] *Masculine Plural,* 99.

while Didius assumes the role of the hysterical woman who "shrieks" and falls into a faint after having "slip[ped] on the blood of Pertinax" (69). The instant when Didius slips on the blood of Pertinax during a festive party that escalates into a madness creates a parallel between Roman Didius and the British Macbeth, both avaricious rulers who foresee their impending downfall in the "corpses," "ghosts and spirits" who haunt their palaces (70, 57).

The Roman Trilogy dramatizes the last days of Rome in terms of haunting. The emperor Didius Julianus, like the others before him, feels the presence of the ghosts of dead emperors and consequently becomes paranoid, anticipating his own demise:

> a herald shouts "Caligula,"
> Then smoothing silence; and again the call
> And shout of "Claudius, Nero, Galba,"---names
> Of every murdered Emperor . . . "Commodus,"
> And lastly "Pertinax;" while after him
> Silence lies hungry.
> (The stillness is broken by fiercer cries from the hippodrome.)
>   Can there be such rage?
> Such harassing, fanged, ravenous, wild hatred,
> … Double horror
> Of phantasms and of the deep-mouthed crowd!
> I can but pace and pace, and wish that thunder
> Would shake that stony moonlight from the room,
> Or wish that I were buried . . . (66)

Emperors anxiously envision the "ghosts and spirits" of past emperors accumulating in the palace quicker than their artists can memorialize them through monuments (58 *The World at Auction*). Meanwhile, the imperial wives and daughters echo the sentiment of feeling in the present moment, always anticipating their impending death:

> (…[Lucilla] starts at the sight of her mother's statue.)
>   What stable whiteness!
> I would that I were human, she a ghost;
> But I am marble too; all things are done
> Round me as if round marble. Some events
> Come thus, while we are stone…(14-15 *The World at Auction*)

As Lucilla gazes at a statue of her mother Faustina, she reflects on the fact that, as Commodus's sister and formerly Lucus Verus's widow, she is a living statue, a sentiment Marcia echoes upon Commodus's death: "I grow a ghost and as a ghost most restless / To mingle with the living" (82 *Race of Leaves*). Throughout the trilogy, contemporary imperial characters feel intensely the presence of their ancestors in the marble statues and frescos lining the palace walls.

While the Decadent imperial aesthetics continue to accumulate statue after statue of newly deified Romans, both the imperial family and servants continue to view Hellenic art and their artists as more elevated and spiritual. Hellenic and other hypereroticized, orientalized characters like Pylades and the Priest of Cybele, who understand the Greek gods' spirits to be contained within the statue, conjure them for spiritual solace and aesthetic inspiration, as Pylades had with Apollo in the first scene of *The Race of Leaves.* And the imperial family reinforces the idea of the pantomime dancer (as well as the priests) embodying the spirit of Hellenism. After recognizing herself as a ghostly presence within the present moment, Lucilla turns to Pylades, addressing him as a mortal to a god: "Ye gods, / A messenger—with face like Ganymede's,/ … Apparition / From Paphos…. / You struggle, / Shame-faced and downcast, a mere mortal boy, / A slave, no matter if to me a god (14-15). Michael Field weaves Pylades into a mythohistoric non-heteroreproductive genealogy

stemming back to ancient Greece, to Zeus's boy lover Ganymede as well as Cupid, Aphrodite's son and messenger. Michael Field elevates Pylades by situating him as a figure of mythohistoriography, a conglomerate of historic, mythic, and fictional Hellenic characters that together personify the Hellenic spirit, as Symonds had defined it: "that organizing, moulding, and assimilating spirit which we recognize as Hellenic."

An eroticized, gender fluid body of marginalized texts about marginalized bodies, Michael Field's Pylades is a queer embodiment of Derrida's characterization of the archive: "the structure of the archive is spectral…neither present nor absent 'in the flesh,' neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met" (*Archive Fever* 54). Pylades is named Pylades after "his master" the original Pylades who founded the tragic school of dance, and he is named Philocommodus after the emperor who enslaves him: "They call me Pylades / my master's name … The other name I hate; I am a slave…[to] the emperor" (Add.46785.72). As Ana Parejo Vadillo has noticed, the Roman Trilogy is "full of that dusty research which gave decadence the odour of the antique" (204). Michael Field weaves together various Greco-Roman historic and mythic sources to create their Pylades.

A composite character from the mythohistoric past as well as dramatic present, Michael Field's Pylades is a composite character comprised of the spirit of Apollo and Dionysus, every single tragic pantomime to have come before him, and Orestes's beloved, also called Pylades. In Greek mythology, most notably depicted in

Aeschylus's tragedies, Orestes and Pylades were raised together and became lifelong friends; in late-Victorian classical reception, they came to signify same-sex love between men. Each scene of the pantomime dancer's conflict and romantic entanglement is drawn from ancient history's anecdotes about a variety of different pantomime dancers from various eras. Thus this palimpsestic dancer comes to embody pantomime as an ancient art of resistance, a spirit of Hellenism in modern imperial Rome. Pylades haunts the Roman Trilogy in plain sight, embodying the queer haunted historiography Carla Freccero has described as follows:

> The past is in the present in the form of a haunting. This is what, among other things, doing a queer kind of history means, since it involves an openness to the possibility of being haunted, even inhabited, by ghosts. What is transmitted in the cohabitation of ghostly past and present is related to survival, to 'living well,' and to the 'pleasures of mortal creatures,' survivals and pleasures that have little to do with normative understandings of biological reproduction. (80)

Whereas Freccero describes queer hauntology from the perspective of the present's admission of the past, Michael Field designated the reverse temporal perspective when they created Pylades, the queer, mythohistoric oppressed protagonist who haunts the imperial dramatic time. The Roman Trilogy focalizes the historical "present day" Rome through the queer mythohistoric "past" character of Pylades.

From his marginalized perspective, the (past and present) audience not only gains insight into the sexual and gender politics of imperial Rome, they also come to react powerfully either in solidarity with or aggressively against the political action he takes for the sake of survival or the worldly pleasure he takes for the sake of pleasure. In the dramas, queer hauntings within historical fiction shifts the paradigm of the past

cohabitating peacefully, if uneasily, within the present; here, the past rears its head in the present vengefully, forging alliances with those who recognize in the pantomime dancer their own disenfranchisement to conjure up a more egalitarian future.

Julia Domna, the final drama in the trilogy, stages the brotherly rivalry between the co-emperors Caracalla and Geta and their mother, Julia Domna, as riddled with Oedipal undertones; Michael Field situates Julia Domna alongside Pylades as the ringleaders who bring about the fall of the Roman empire. In *Julia Domna,* Michael Field explores the erotic triangular relationship between Caracalla, Geta, and Julia Domna to frame the fall of the Roman empire as a decline distinct from issues of queer sexual mores. Michael Field develops the mother-son relationship between Julia and Caracalla with incestuous undercurrents in order to contrast sexual excesses and taboos with the romantic, devoted same-sex love between Geta and Caracalla. For instance, when Caracalla gifts his mother a "splendid robe of gold tissue," the Roman bride's traditional marital attire, Julia Domna accepts the gift as a marriage proposal: "Beloved, / Our love is not of time or of its laws; / And for your gift, my first-born son, I take it" (19). When Geta enters and Julia realizes that she must decide whether to join him in Antioch or stay in Rome with Caracalla, she faints, falling into the later son's arms. After having "catche[d] her in his arms" Caracalla "whisper[s]" in Julia Domna's ear an entreaty for her to "Be mine, O more than Rome!" (19). The romantic evocation and marriage proposal highlights imperial decadence: the glitzy, golden garb is a bribe, since Caracalla offers for her to become the Empress.

Geta and Pylades, whom Michael Field depicts as same-sex companions, imagine escaping with the "dancers, Grecians and musicians" to Antioch, what was in the late-Victorian imaginary an orientalized, homoerotic space. Michael Field concludes the Roman Trilogy with the violent death of Geta and Pylades who fail to escape to eastern Antioch before being slain, a geographical gesture reorienting their love within the discourse of Greek pederasty. Unlike the previous same-sex relationships between Pylades the pantomime dancer and the various Roman emperors,[106] Geta and Pylades express an understanding of the sexual politics inherent in imperial power dynamics and a desire to subvert them in order to imagine an alternative future only feasible in the anachronistic space represented by imperially peripheral Antioch.[107]

Michael Field gifts Geta with the foresight to see the consequences of queer resistance, constructing him as an already entombed ghostly figure. Geta sagely observes that Julia Domna's pleas for him to remain in Rome are rooted in selfishness, "to save herself / Leave-taking agony she bids me die!". Geta's sense of

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[106] See Edith Hall's introduction to *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime* page 9, where she mentions how aristocratic men and pantomime dancers formed an alliance of dissent against the emperor's authority in order to continue producing pantomime performance during bans. Also see Slater's "Pantomime Riots".
[107] In the Roman imaginary, Antioch was affiliated with Hellenic culture. It is frequently cited in writing recording the pantomime debates as a city whose people celebrated the art: "the people of Antioch…have a happy knack in expressing their views on such subjects. They are a most intelligent people, and devoted to Pantomime; each individual is all eyes and ears for the performance; not a word, not a gesture escapes them" (Lucian). See A.F. Norman's translations of Libanius's orations about Antioch in the collected volume *Antioch as a Center of Hellenic Culture as Observed by Libanius* (2000).

himself as a queer specter is acutely linked to his desire to contest imperial culture in favor of the spirit of Hellenic culture. Upon seeing Pylades's grief-stricken face, Geta challenges him:

> Do you cloud?
> What is your grief?
> You are commanded to the feast to-night;
> The Empress wills you there. Nothing is changed,
> Nothing in all your life.
>
> PYLADES.
> With you in Rome,
> A statue cast away!
>
> GETA.
> Your power remains---it is the power to please.
> Nothing is changed between us. You will dance;
> I shall applaud you for a little while. . .
>
> PYLADES.
> Prince!
>
> GETA.
> And to save herself
> Leave-taking agony she bids me die!

Through Geta's understanding of the subversive political power of pantomime and Pylades's understanding of the instability of imperial rule, the co-emperor and the pantomime dancer come to recognize themselves and each other as spectral historical figures of a past haunting the (eternal) present. Like the statue of Apollo that opens the trilogy, Pylades recognizes Geta as "[a] statue cast away," another queer aesthetic spirit who "contests fiercely each emblem of authority as guarding his own monument". After Caracalla's brutal on-stage fratricide of Geta, Cooper represents a tranquil Pylades sitting wake over Geta. As a minor character fails to rouse Pylades

from his place at the deathbed: "O Pylades, but it is morning now, / Morning with outspread light that cannot enter / The form we love. Your cheeks are wan as his / We watch the dawn on, hopeless." The emphasis on the daylight, "Dead—in the daylight—A corpse!" and the repeated double entendre "mo(u)rning," stresses the affective dimension of temporality for the queer aesthete, though whose own death-like grief—"[y]our cheeks are wan as his"—and refusal to depart from the beloved prefigures their immortal reunion. Like Pater's deathbed scenes in *Marius the Epicurean* discussed in chapter 1, Michael Field represents the potential for a queer erotohistoriography as not yet in reach, since physical representations of same-sex love between men occur only in the liminal space of life and death, even as the representations themselves serve as monuments that immortalize intimately and aesthetically as opposed to excessively and decadently, memorializing queer intimacies that symbolize reckoning between past and present histories of imperial struggle. In the ultimate scene of the trilogy, Michael Field permits in Pylades's last moments an act of love to Geta:

> PYLADES.
>   While I am in my blood,
> Before I break to thee in Hades, Geta---
>   (He kisses his hands.)
>
> No more to dance to thee; in the lone reeds
> To wander with thee and be still for ever,
> For ever to be still and wandering!
>   (He rises & meets Tarantus & the Centurions as they rush in….They stab him: he falls dead at Geta's feet….)

The chiasmus, "be still for ever / For ever to be still and wandering", reveals the continued anxiety about the power dynamics that persist even in the romantic relationship between the formerly enslaved artist Pylades and the emperor Geta, while exploring the leveling and even inversion of this power in the afterlife, since in the world of the play he is depicted as gaining through his arts the power of prophecy and immortality. The lines rhetorically emphasize the link between the histories of Pylades and Geta. It concretizes the present bond with past and future through the repeated insistence on "for ever"—*for always*—and "still"—with its persistent timeliness, *even now as formerly.* The text lingers on the pivotal interval between life and death emphasized by the paradoxical presence of life and death in both characters. The chiasmus formally echoes this demarcation between life and death, death and afterlives, yet the liminal space between becomes a site of resistance as well, since the first clause represents the coupling of the speaker Pylades with "thee," his beloved Geta, while the mirroring clause occludes the 'you' altogether. The close textual and physical contact between Pylades's words and gestures with Geta's body, links the first clause to the two lovers' future afterlife together in Hades. The second clause imagines Pylades alone, as if to imagine he alone will "still" "for ever" haunt the present as the persistent, immortal spirit of Hellenism.

Michael Field concludes the Roman Trilogy with an aesthetic monument which aims to "embody the idea of immortality" that they deemed necessary in memorial representations of artists; it offers an example of queer aesthetic memorialization to counter the colossal imperial monuments canonizing the despotic

emperors. Situated between life and death, the physical touch of warm kisses against cold hands, punctuated by the two lovers' bodies interlaced recalls Elizabeth Freeman's understanding of queer historiography as an erotic bodily experience laden with the queer negative affect which incentivizes the queer specter's "willingness to be haunted" as an ethical orientation linking past and present queer histories towards the future (75).

The private, personal relationships in the Roman Trilogy dramatize an ancient history of sexuality in ways that explore distinctions between ancient Greek and Roman gender and sexuality. It portrays the pantomime dancer as a model of queerness that emerged in ancient Greece and was fully embraced in imperial Roman culture. This model of queerness takes into account not only western homonormativity between men but also women, colonized, and other disenfranchised people, and it also makes visible other gender and sexual non-conformitivities. Michael Field represents Pylades's death at the moment when he dedicates himself to a same-sex relationship with the only Roman emperor with whom he has a mutually romantic rather than mutually exploitative relationship. The power dynamics between the emperor Geta and the pantomime dancer Pylades seem to be leveled through their reciprocated same-sex affection, yet through the tragic conclusion Michael Field emphatically declares same-sex love and egalitarian sexual politics an impossibility in decadent Rome. Through so doing, they anticipate the strain of queer theory that emphasizes negativity and negative affect. Before queer theory, queer tragedy

reinforced resistances to primogeniture and heteroreproductivity while exploring the aesthetic as a means by which to forge alternative genealogies across time and space.

Metaphorically, Michael Field eradicates institutionalized homosexuality between men, leaving behind a decadent culture wherein alternative gender and sexualities can flourish. In the Decadent Roman Trilogy, Michael Field depicts a crucial point in imperial Roman history—a moment which historians generally characterize as a time of excessive decadence that resulted in imperial decline. They situate Pylades, and thus the queer artist, at the heart of Roman decadent culture in order to disentangle aesthetic decadence from imperial decadence. Michael Field's Pylades forges a genealogical connection between Hellenic aesthetic culture and Roman decadent culture, disentangling decadence from imperial despotism. Pylades is depicted as a tragic figure who attempts to preserve his decadent art and queerness as it increasingly becomes alternatively fetishized (by Commodus and Didius Julianus) and persecuted (by Pertinax). Unlike British pantomime, where cross-dressing becomes parodic and comedic, ancient tragic Greco-Roman pantomime more earnestly explores queerness, appealing to the audience to empathize with its oppressed subjects and permitting a space for them to understand their own queerness.

Queer Tragedy

The Victorian era, like the Roman, has traditionally been declared to be the death of tragedy—a post-Renaissance, post-golden age genre critics largely recognize as having produced unsuccessful drama. In the modern Victorian imaginary, Roman

tragedy failed because of the rise of decadent taste: it was not enough to witness imitative acting when audiences could now witness actual events. Tragedy of yore might have acted representations of outlandish and controversial themes, but Roman spectacles were consistently real. Tragic actors and pantomimes act out sexual taboos, yet Roman spectacles literalize them: for instance, a Roman woman who committed bestiality was sentenced to act out the Pasiphae myth to a Roman audience.

Indeed, the Decadent Roman Trilogy was Michael Field's first drama intended to be a closet drama, after having given up on ever staging another one of their tragedies. The closet drama lends itself to a queer reading, given the metaphor it contains, for being "in the closet" paradoxically signifies self-censorship while the privacy of containment permits a more explicit exploration of queer subjects. To be closeted is to be repressed, and writing the closet drama literalizes Derrida's characterization of repression as the archivization of suppressed desires, especially an excessive catalogue of queer desires. Michael Field's metatheatrical tragedy about a pantomime dancer epitomizes the closet drama. Edelman has argued that Shakespeare's tragedies are queer tragedies because they contain "queer excess," an excess of desires—political as well as sexual desires—whose effects are tragic but whose causes are undeterminable. Queer tragedy in Edelman's definition is not about "tragedy that is queer" but rather an excess "that cannot be recuperated by a reading," cannot be located as a tragic flaw within a single character (297).

Queer decadent drama luxuriates in an ambiguous excess of desires, both thematically and stylistically, and this distinction between aesthetic and imperial

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decadence is crucially delineated as a distinction between the high Hellenic art of tragedy and the parodic lower art of comedy. Queer decadent tragedy inverts class distinctions; whereas classical tragedy typically depicts catastrophic events of the ruling classes, queer decadent tragedy transforms the stock characters of ancient comedy into the protagonists of tragedy. The hero of the play becomes the tragic pantomime dancer, while the comedic pantomime dancer turned severe empress is depicted as a tragic character. Within the world of the queer decadent drama, an excess of desires without causes proliferates throughout the imperial world, yet the motive of the pantomime protagonist is quite clear: he seeks retribution for having been enslaved and his art having been appropriated. Michael Field intends to revitalize tragic pantomime as the antecedent to Hellenic tragedy, thereby exploring how pantomime as a multi-media genre whose subject matter deals with decidedly transgressive, usually tragic subjects, represents an aesthetic queer decadence. Queer decadent tragedy thus becomes a subgenre of fin-de-siècle decadence affiliated with Greek Hellenism via Rome, while Roman and French decadence in the English imaginary continue to be affiliated with comedy, especially camp and the parodic.

Queer decadent tragedy indulges in an excess of erotic and political desire; its floral language lingers on transgressive scenes and subjects, infinitely dwelling on the possibility of queer desire and memorializing longing, unrequited, and otherwise tragic love and desire. The tragedy of Leda and the Swan performed by Pylades ends in heartbreak; the comedy of Leda and the Swan performed by Bathyllus ends in a laugh-inducing masturbatory sexual climax. Moreover, tragic conclusions are queer

throughout the dramas, whether it be a hypereroticized infanticide or double murder of same-sex lovers. They are deliberately, explicitly queer in the sense that they depict queer couplings, and also in the sense that they foreclose the possibility of a reproductive future. Whereas decadent comedy makes a dismissive joke out of non-heteroreproductivity, tragedy dwells on queer futurity. Caracalla follows up his fratricide of Geta by slaying the youthful Pylades. Drunk on wine and "[g]iddy from slaughter," Caracalla effectively hands over his power to Julia Domna: "Mother, you must rule / I am too spent. / … You must give me rest, / Or else there is no ruler in the world; / Chaos has drowned it all" (103). Meanwhile, Pylades and Geta lie dying, their last words—"To wander with thee and be still for ever, / For ever to be still and wandering!" (112)—echoing the trilogy's motif of queer Hellenic spirits haunting the present decadent moment to avenge themselves from their imperial oppressors.

APPENDIX

Procne

Tereus, go, fetch my sister from her home.
I cannot longer live without her voice,
Her peplos folds, her fleeting through the doors.
Go: ah, I breathe more freely; he is gone.
And now I shall lose vision of the house
At Athens, of the lonely weaving there
Since our rent sisterhood, the lonely nights
Since I was ravished to my marriage-bed,
The secret, incommunicable hours.
I am a stranger, am I not a slave
To this dull son of Ares? As two birds
That warble to each other through the trees
Our bosoms rose + fell; we had one song:
And sometimes uttering, sometimes hearkening
A harmony grew up beside our thoughts!
Men fable I am pining for my home,
When Itys wearies me, + all this kingdom
Of Thrace is horrid to me as the woods.
It is not Athens I desire—O Child,
Thyself, thy small rose-body in my arms,
Thy mutterings, + thy fondness over me,
Thy breath in waking, + thy breath asleep.
(MS.Eng.Poet.D.68.22)

Philomela

Sweet as the way to the fountain on shady hill-side,
Glad as the breaking of dawn on the dew of dewdrops,
Showeth the face that is bearing me, Procne, to thee.

Procne, I sing in my heart, but her name I say not!
Only from depths of a well or from earth's mid hollow,
Only from covert forbidden, in white Colonos,
Hidden from sight with the leaves of the vines + laurel,

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Baffling the ear with a chorus of feathered songsters,
Could I invoke the delights that in tumult haunt me,

One + for one, + of one is the love that wrings me.
Chill I have seemed to my dearest the while she murmured,
Finding no speech that should answer + ease her kisses.
Now shall I answer + ease them + break in laughter;
Tereus is proud in his heart as I trip beside him,
Bearing me back as a trophy from hard-fought battle.

Rest! Shall he ask me to rest who am winged + speedy?
"Tereus, delay not, a laggard is soonest weary-
Tereus"! He trembles, he holds me, a swooning takes him
Surely he suffers, his forehead sweats branching dew-marks.

Yet will I hasten, I fear him again, his gloomy
Vigilant eyes, + that sudden arresting movement;
Vainly he babbles, beseeches I, -"Tereus, Tereus"-
Bear me, divine cries away to the earth's mid-hollow.
(MS.Eng.Poet.D.68.23)

Tereus

Procne, thou on my threshold standest-gazing,
Standest tremulous hast thou no name to call?
Call now, call on the wide air, call on Athens,
Turn away from my face + invoke the winds;-
Procne, sweetest she is, + sweet her motion;
I, beholding you both, denied your praises,
Till I saw her alone, her eyes in welcome.
Lo, I tremble to own her more sweet than thou
Swift her Voice in its wild, full-throated cadence,
Swift the passion that broke through her simple words,
"Stay not, Procne desires me." Then I saw her,
over eye-lids + lips + firm, white shoulders
Beauty bright as the dew that tips the lilies,
Fervid, piercing as sunset within their leaves,
Circled, broke from her: Mute she walked beside me,
Pausing not by the grove of oleander,
Fount, or coolness of heard + desired waters,
Tracks where under the plane-tree Sleep was sleeping,
But with heart of a mortal, god-befrenzied,
Set her face to the joy of thy face, beloved;
I, beholding her, loved her, loved thy darling,

All the bliss of her life pressed through her heart-throbs
Perfumed, glowed through her body: swift the sun stroke:
Mourner, pass to thy mourning, bewail thy dead.

Now she passes away, her face is covered,
Face that never must hurl on mine reproaches,
Blank her stare on my eyes, my speech, my gestures,
Slow her flushing, + slower her dark-spread grief:
Honoured, noble in spirit, her I lie to,
Her I love + despise not—Philomela!

Thou most exquisite flower trod down in darkness,
Trampled, spoiled by my hands, how dear to ravish!
Locked thy life with its secret, locked thy torture,
All thy hours are the hour that thy will forbade.
Sweet, but surely I loved thee: bitterer torment,
Anguish worse than I dreamed or forced thee suffer
Poisoned, ate through my flesh as rust eats metal
When I, god in my longing, but not god-like,
Wooed thee, not as a creature thy hands could tame,
Fondled swan of the stream or lustrous serpent,
Bull, or hovering bird, or ivy-sprinkled
Satyr, eagle of Ida, or wide-horned Ram
Striking joy on thy eyes with silky fleeces,
Dew of gold on the air, or glaring fire-beam,-
Wooed thee, mortal-bedazzled, lost in wonder.
Hadst thou—Winds of the cavern, flames of Altua
Throes that rush through your core, + seethe back baffled.
Nay, no element strives as strove my bosom
When I found in thy beauty no quick of love

Ares, father to thee I shout in triumph,
What was Semele's self, its dust, its ashes!
Lo, I offer thee quarry wrung from Dian
Lo, my refuse, my wrecking, my great remorse.
(MS.Eng.Poet.D.68.24-6)

Barren Love

My love to thee is odour + sheer bloom:
        It has no room
For leaf, or lingering tendril, or deceit:
        It is my doom,
So coy. No fruit of it will ever be,

No joy to thee, or me,
No rapture at the close;
Even as the flower upon the almond tree
That spreads an hour its orange + its rose,
Then falls back vacant to sterility.

March 20th (1900)
(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.11)

To Aphrodite

Queen! Aphrodite, of the bordered throne,
Break not my heart with anguish + distress;
Hear from afar, + fall upon my moan:
If ever thou didst hear, I pray thee, bless
Even that old way as once before! Afar,
Leaving thy father's house,
Quickly thou camest in the fair yoked car
Thou yoked'st to espouse
Thy Sappho's wrongs. Oh, let me see the fleet
Sparrows that drew thee—hearken
The flapping wings that through wind-heaven beat,
And fall, + darken
The earth they fall on: come, + question me
As then, most blessèd one, even with thy smile,
What in my mad heart I desired to see,
What Beauty to my bosom I would wile.
"For she who would not take thy gifts before
Herself shall give, for gift of thine shall pray
And she shall follow thee who fled away,
And she who loathed to love shall love thee sore."
So come thou too again, this time, even now!
Loose me from cares that darken,
All that my heart attempts, + knows not how,
And cannot bring to pass, accomplish thou,
Confederate goddess, hearken!
April 29 1898
(MS.Eng.Poet.E.138.13-14)

To an Exile (1900)

I.
There are some sounds born but to rove + die,
And in their dying mournfulest, most sweet;

The reed-beds drop among their reeds a sigh
Such as Pan never heard when in a heat
He tore them for his lips. Some winds make moan
As to themselves: + I have stood among
Bog-myrtles swinging in a moory vale
Moving their stems in covert + alone,
Stooped over the wet turf, + caught the song
Of these intricate branches as they swing,
Of those low branches brushing to a gale.
(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.33)

II
Even so to-day, goddess, to thee I stand
With plaint _ prayer too mutinous for speech,
Amid the myrtles of my dandy land,
And know my prayer to thee can never reach,
Can never even trouble thee. Asleep
On the sea's blue floor, unshaded by sea-weeds,
Thou liest tranquil where no ripples break:
I would not have thee stir! Let me but keep
Thine image in its wholeness; all my needs
Shall fall away, such quiet beauty breeds
Let me but dream thou never will awake.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.34)

III.
So secret + so humble + so dear
My worship of thee in this wide sweet gale,
'Tis as it were thine altar + thy bier,
O Aphrodite for thine altars fail;
And thou for many ages, years on years,
Deep in the bosom of the sea must lie
Till sager mortals once more shall be bent
On dance + rhythm, shall forget their tears,
Nor fearing death, nor knowing they can die,
Live for thy chariot as it passes by,
Live for the glory of its sheer descent.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.35)

IV.
Among the gods thou only art unheard;
The vines are shaded, Zeus is in his oak;

Where forest creatures drink, where stoops the bird,
Men feel a maiden presence + invoke.
And the mad priest to Hecabe still heaves
Cries that draw crowds to sacrifice; they wait
Huddled in secret streets, an impious crew:
The Lares chink, the pool of poppy leaves
Left by Proserpina still fascinate:
Men love to reconcile their mortal fate.
Thy dazzling mysteries none look into.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.36)

V.

We lack the hardihood, the opulence
Constant to dedicate to thee our powers:
O seasonable to our every sense,
Weary of pleasure in a few thin hours
How shall we learn thine energy of pain
If Anactoria heave an alien sigh,
Thy madness if Adonis touch his hound;
Thine ecstasy when roses fresh again:
Beauty is wrought, we stand uncraving by:
Thou movest, stirring through the ivory
Till for Pygmalion a sweet mate be found.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.37)

VI

Ah beauty loving Queen, what can we vow
To charm thee to our altar-steps, to us,
What mirrors of what forms [?] that even as thou
Are white with golden whiteness, luminous
As the air that circles round a shell, a dove.
We give scant honour to the train that follows,
Urges, or eddies round thy chariot;
Nor for the hand that carries them we love
Thy rose, thy poppy in its creasy hollows,
Thy swan-birds, the miraculous, swift swallows
That cloud thee as with wings, affright us not.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.38)

VII

And Love should both appall us + affright
We are tame Hestia's votaries + we cherish
The thick-veiled deity:==who stands in plight
Of sovereign nakedness is left to perish.
Ah lone one, ah abandoned! Fatherless
And fugitive, what should we say to her,
How draw that brine-drenched beauty to our trees?
Yet will we draw her in: the gods that bless
Come to us ever suppliant. Cythera
Must be received of us, a foreigner,
An apparition from untraversed seas.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.39)

VIII

A moment, + I see thee in thy folly;
Thy laughter's lovely guile, far from this marsh,
Where thou dost tingle through the melancholy
Of sunken stream, + furling brush wood harsh-
I see thee 'mid the myrtles of thy choice,
'mid blossoms shoulder-high, + scent that cloys;-
ah, not so blest who sees thee as who hears;
for Beauty in her fastness is a voice:
the happy gods forget all other joys
for music in its rich + mastering noise,
and Zeus himself listens through the spheres.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.40)

IX

Why art thou gone? Why closed beneath the surf?
And wind-struck currents of the eddying sea?
Thy feet should tread the fields of crocus-turf,
And the young shepherds hurt be healed of thee;
All pleasant ways of springtime on the land,
All bowers where youth weeps + has no redress,
All fountains where the maiden tips her bowl
Should be thy haunt, + thou art ocean-bounded!
And we who art without thee can but guess
How from a thousand hills, in their distress

Thou hard'st thy votaries + mad'st them whole.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.41)

X

Yet, even here the siren whispereth,
Yea, even here the sun doth softly fall,
Warming with western breeze the myrtle breath;
In this sad grove, embrowned [?] + musical,
Queen Aphrodite, thou art surely night,
Spreading thy golden fillets through the dawn
Low foliage, while thy burnished butterfly
Lost, stooping to the dim recess, discovers
The incense of a sacrifice that hovers
Drink of thy nostrils, savoured of thy sense.

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.43)

XI

Farewell, the dark streaked night is drawing on,
By this wild marsh I may no longer dally,
Farewell, farewell, the time of love is gone,
And winter closes up this low-bushed valley;
Yet from this dull + matted watercourse
I have received thy breath as from a grave,
Immortal, so thou breathest to thine own,
So we receive thee, rich in our remorse,
Our elegiac sorrow, till some brave
Fair child of thine shall dare to priestly work,
And draw thee upward, queenly, to thy throne.

Oct 21st 1900

(MS.Eng.Poet.D.66.44)

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