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The Aesthetic Book of Decadent Literature, 1870-1914

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in English

By

Daniel Patrick Williford

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Aesthetic Book of Decadent Literature 1870-1914

By

Daniel Patrick Williford

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Joseph E. Bristow, Chair

This dissertation argues for a reading of English Aesthetic and Decadent literature within the context of the limited-edition, artistically produced aesthetic book. Within studies in print culture and the history of the book, late nineteenth-century England is an established center in the revival of fine arts printing owing to the influence of the Chiswick Press, the Daniel Press, the Kelmscott Press, the Doves Press, the Vale Press, and the Eragny Press. Yet little scholarly attention has been paid to the overlap of these efforts in artistic book design with the literature of the Aesthetic and later Decadent movements.

In the first chapter, I argue that Pre-Raphaelite artist and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Poems* (1870) was the first book of literature that sought to be a total art object, designed and illustrated by Rossetti himself. I also discuss Simeon Solomon's *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1871) as the first aesthetic book of symbolist literature that was based on Rossetti's *Poems*.

The second chapter focuses on Aesthetic theorist Walter Pater's collaboration with the printer Charles Henry Olive Daniel in their production of *An Imaginary Portrait* (1894) as a

limited-edition book. I suggest the way that Pater's story, within the context of Daniel's printed volume, can be read to show that people who had a highly-refined aesthetic sensibility often constituted a rare and even an elite psychological type. I show that his work frequently centers on representations of same-sex desire, and I suggest that Pater's Aesthetic theory is also a theory of queer personhood.

The third chapter concentrates on Charles Ricketts's and William Llewellyn Hacon's Vale Press. I show that the aesthetic book has a particular valence when it is also a work of Decadent literature. Within Decadence as a literary movement, an ironic appropriation of Aestheticism allows a community of writers to portray same-sex desire as a style of artifice against nature. Once Aestheticism becomes associated with effeminacy and psychological androgyny, the aesthetic book of Decadent literature becomes the model of a rare, refined, and collectible object that prefigures the community formation of queer outsider identities.

The dissertation of Daniel Patrick Williford is approved.

Helen E. Deutsch

Johanna R. Drucker

Arthur L. Little

Joseph E. Bristow, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

DEDICATION

To Maryann McDonald

*The mother will not turn, who thinks she hears
Her nursling's speech first grow articulate;
But breathless, with averted eyes elate
She sits, with open lips and open ears,
That it may call her twice. 'Mid doubts and fears
Thus oft my soul has hearken'd; till the song,
A central moan for days, at length found tongue,
And the sweet music well'd and the sweet tears.*

—Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

M.A., English, University of California, Los Angeles, 2010

B.A., English, St. Mary's College of Maryland, 2003

with a concentration in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Instructor, Mentor Language Institute, Beverly Hills 2014-2015

Adjunct Instructor, Critical Theory and Social Justice Department, Occidental College, 2013-2014

Research Assistant, June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives, Center for the Study of Women, UCLA, July-August, 2013

Teaching Associate, Department of English, UCLA, 2007-2011, 2012-2013, 2014

Dissertation Fellow, William A. Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, 2011-2012

Teaching Assistant, Department of English, UCLA, 2006-2007

Research Assistant, *The Decadent 1890s*, NEH Summer Seminar at The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, July-August, 2009

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Graduate Student Representative, Sawyer Seminar Planning Committee, UCLA, Winter 2009

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Instructor, Critical Theory and Social Justice Department, Occidental College

Introduction to Critical Theory, Instructor (Spring 2014)

Special Topics: Reading RuPaul: Camp Culture, Gender Insubordination, and the Politics of Performance, Instructor (Spring 2014)

Representing L.A.: Imagined Spaces and Living Places, Instructor (Fall 2013)

The Queer Novel, Instructor (Fall 2013)

Introduction to Critical Theories of Sexuality, Instructor (Fall 2013)

Teaching Associate, Department of English, UCLA

10A. Literatures in English to 1700, Professors Chris Chism & Claire McEachern (Fall 2014); Professor Matthew Fisher (Fall 2008 and Fall 2010)

4W. Critical Reading and Writing, Instructor (Winter 2011, Fall 2012, Winter 2013, Spring 2013)

M50. Introduction to Visual Culture, Professor Kathleen McHugh (Spring 2011)

162B. Later Romantic Literature, Professor Robert Maniquis (Spring 2010)
85. American Novel, Professor Christopher Mott (Fall 2009)
150B. Shakespeare: Later Plays, Professor Michael Allen (Spring 2009)
10B. Literatures in English, 1700 to 1850, Professor Saree Makdisi (Winter 2009 and Winter 2010) and Professor Lynn Batten (Summer 2009)

Teaching Assistant, Department of English, UCLA

10A. Literatures in English, 1850 to Present, Professor Claire McEachern (Spring 2008)
10C. Literatures in English, 1850 to Present, Professor Lynn Batten (Fall 2007); Professor Joseph Bristow (Winter 2008)

PUBLICATIONS

“Where Lesbians Live Forever: Video and the Historical Subjects of Lesbian Existence,” *The June L. Mazer Archives Resource Book*, Center for the Study of Women, UCLA. Spring, 2014.
“Queer Aesthetics,” *borderlands* special issue “Jacques Rancière on the Shores of Queer Theory,” Fall 2009.
(Review) “The House of Yes,” *Film and History*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Spring 2004.
“Anti-Imperialism in the Buffyverse: A Challenge to the Mythos of Bush as Vampire-Slayer,” with Samuel Chambers, *Poroi*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2003.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Clark Dissertation Fellowship, UCLA Center for 17th- and 18th-Century Studies, 2011-2012
Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, UCLA Graduate Division, 2008
Geneva Boone Award, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, for outstanding thesis project in English, 2003

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Jacques Rancière and the Promiscuous Text,” *Southland Conference: Genre Matters*, UCLA, May 20, 2008.

LECTURES AND TALKS

“Queer to the Letter: Language and Subjectivity in Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis*,” *The(e)ories: Advanced Seminars in Queer Research*, University College Dublin, May 15, 2005.
“Oscar Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*,” guest lecture, *English M101A: Pre-Stonewall Gay and Lesbian Literature*, Professor Arthur Little, October 16th, 2010.

Introduction: The Decadent Book of Aesthetic Literature

The topic that I am addressing in this dissertation is what I am calling the “aesthetic book” as a phenomenon of nineteenth-century English literature. By the aesthetic book, I mean the book of contemporary literature that was produced in a high-quality, collectable form by artisan printers who sought to revive preindustrial techniques and design elements. Yet I arrived at this topic early in my research not by a straightforward interest in the history of the book, but rather as a trend that I saw in connection with minor literature of the 1890s by writers who sought to push the boundaries of social mores by experimenting with the form and subjects of literature. This literary movement in England known as Aestheticism and later as Symbolism or Decadence occupied heated debate at the end of the century. Since the movement that I was interested in centered on controversial figures like Oscar Wilde and his circle, and derived from the doctrine of Aestheticism formulated by Walter Pater, I was interested in the relationship between the artistically-printed book and its literary content. Was there a reason that Decadent literature so often took the form of the aesthetic book? How might a reading of this literature be affected by a consideration of its aesthetic and material context?

This concept of the aesthetic book could not have happened prior to the advancement of Aestheticism, a philosophical and artistic movement that radically foregrounded the arts, in their various mediums, as necessary to the growth and development of society. Therefore, I begin with the start of English Aestheticism in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, and specifically with the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti’s earliest efforts as part of the art journal *The Germ* (1850) expressed an interest in mixing the plastic arts with the literary arts specifically through the craft of printing. I analyze Rossetti’s first published book of poetry, *Poems* (1870), as the start of the aesthetic book, since he not only wrote the literature but also designed the binding,

typographical layout, and interior illustrations. I also discuss a lesser-known second-generation Pre-Raphaelite artist, Simeon Solomon, whose homoerotic paintings were styled after Rossetti. I analyze Solomon's only literary work, a privately printed prose poem called *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1871) as another influential example of aesthetic book production because of its elaboration of the psychology of same-sex desire. From there I move on to a book by Walter Pater, *An Imaginary Portrait* (1894), to show the development of Aestheticism as both a philosophy and a movement in the arts as it is tied to fine arts printing. Finally, I discuss the influential works of Charles Ricketts and Charles Haslewood Shannon, artists whose work in the book arts is synonymous with English Decadence. I specifically focus on Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, revised 1891), John Gray's *Silverpoints* (1893), and Michael Field's *Roman Trilogy* (1898-1903) as representative of the aesthetic book of Decadent literature. In each case, I read a literary text within its bibliographic context in an effort to show that the aesthetic book was intended to be a total art object. My discussion shows that to separate the literary work from its material context is to miss an important part of the work itself. Therefore, I make a claim for the aesthetic book as an art object in which the literary and bibliographic materials are each necessary components, conceived in relation to one another.

Although William Morris is a central figure in established discussions of Aestheticism and the revival of fine printing, his work is marginal to my project because it is not part of the Decadent movement in literature. For this reason, I began my research by focusing on the Vale Press, whose founders Ricketts and Shannon produced several of Wilde's aesthetic books. My approach, therefore, stands at the intersection of the history of the book and the study of Decadent literature, and thus I seek to define what I call the aesthetic book of Decadent literature.

It soon became clear to me that in order to accurately position Decadence within the context of the Printing Press Revival, I would have to show its relation to earlier philosophical theories of Aestheticism, the most significant of which was the work of Walter Pater. I argue throughout this dissertation that Decadence is both a critique of and an extension of the philosophy of Aestheticism, yet to make this claim I have had to clarify the meaning of both of these terms. By focusing specifically on a little-known aesthetic book, Pater's *An Imaginary Portrait* printed by the Daniel Press, I argue that Pater's theory of Aestheticism is ultimately tied to a humanistic and hopeful notion of the psychological development of an individual mind through the studied contemplation of sensory stimulation. In other words, Pater's Aestheticism implies that the stimulation of the senses prepares the mind for a more profound intellectual growth. *An Imaginary Portrait*, I contend, depicts the way that the external world acts upon the individual from the time of childhood, and thereby creates a psychological subject. The limits of that psychological subjectivity can be expanded through the cultivation of the senses, which is achieved through the study of art and literature. An examination of Pater's collaboration with the Daniel Press involved an art object that was carefully designed and beautifully printed. This volume allows me to show that Pater's theory is ultimately grounded in the phenomenal world. In this volume, the story that the volume contains cannot be separated from the material through which the volume exists: the ink, the paper, the font, and the layout on the page are integral to every aspect the text.

It might seem that a discussion of the marriage of form and content in an artistically produced book of literature would have to begin with William Blake (1757-1827), who carved the words of his poetry into copper plates alongside elaborate illustrations, blurring the lines

between a printed text and a printed image.¹ But in fact I argue that it begins with a group of artists and writers known as the Pre-Raphaelites, who revived interest in Blake, since Blake died in relative obscurity, and canonized him as part of English Romanticism by modeling themselves on him. Specifically, it was Dante Gabriel Rossetti whose Aesthetic poetry and Aesthetic paintings expressed his philosophy of art.

Walter Pater, one of the leading philosophers of Aestheticism in England, used a method of historical art criticism to cite numerous examples in the cultural progress of European in order to show that the very figures that represented moments of growth or rebirth were often the rare geniuses of their age, geniuses who managed to perceive something greater through their art. Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) features numerous examples of this sort. Writing on the Renaissance artist Michelangelo, Pater says that the classical Greek method of sculpture created perfection without any sense of feeling; and that Michelangelo created an entirely new approach to sculpture:

[The Greek way] involved for the most part the sacrifice of what we call expression; and a system of abstraction which aimed always at the broad and general type, which purged away from the individual all that belonged only to him, all the accidents of a particular time and place, left the Greek sculptor only a narrow and passionless range of effects: and when Michelangelo came, with a genius spiritualised by the reveries of the middle age,

¹ William Blake, (1757-1857) is now canonized as one of the leading poets of English Romanticism, which took place across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He used methods of relief etching and engraving in his work, but primarily the former to create his "illuminated books," which were composed of prints that contained illustrations and text together. His primary medium was not the typical letterpress printing that used typographical forms, but rather hand-drawn lettering within a printed image.

penetrated by its spirit of inwardness and introspection, living not a mere outward life like the Greek, but a life full of inward experiences, sorrows, consolations, a system which sacrificed what was inward could not satisfy him. To him...work which did not bring what was inward to the surface, which was not concerned with the individual expression, character, feeling, the special history of the special soul, was not worth doing at all.²

It is no accident, on my reading, that Pater's historical examples of "special souls" were often queer figures – that is, people for whom there was evidence of sexual or gender nonconformity, such as same-sex desire (Michelangelo, for example, wrote love sonnets to men and was fascinated by male beauty). The intended subtext was that "special souls" who lived a philosophically grounded "life full of inward experiences" was the mark of the artistic spirit, and was the ideal condition to cultivate through aesthetic education. The other, more shadowy subtext was that same-sex desire was one characteristic of unusual, special, rare types – possibly evidence of a more nuanced internal psychology.

Michel Foucault, it is well known, wrote in 1976 of the "Other Victorians," those psychological/social "types" who were categorized discursively in the nineteenth century through discourses of science, medicine, and law.³ Human sexuality was "disciplined,"

² As there were several editions of Pater's famous and influential work (it was revised in 1877, 1888, and 1893), each with significant changes not the least of which was the title, I must note here that this excerpt is from *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London, Macmillan, 1873), 56.

³ Foucault's opening chapter, "We 'Other Victorians,'" obliquely references Steven Marcus' *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966). He does so to advance his own theory that challenges the so-called repressiveness of the Victorian era, arguing instead that it was a period that saw a "multiplicity of discourses" around the sexual practices of the socio-political subject.

according to Foucault, and only legitimized in terms of the privacy of the bourgeois family's domestic life. Although Foucault's point is to challenge the notion of his own era, whereby political movements based on sexual identity sought to transgress the supposed repression of the Victorian period (what he terms the "repressive hypothesis"), he nonetheless describes the "proliferation of discourses" beginning in the Victorian era concerning sexuality.⁴ This proliferation constituted a "science of sexuality," classifying the "appearance of peripheral sexualities," the "...numberless family of perverts who were on friendly terms with delinquents and akin to madmen. In the course of a century they successively bore the stamp of 'moral folly,' 'genital neurosis,' 'aberration of the genetic instinct,' 'degenerescence,' or 'physical imbalance.'"⁵ Of course, it would be incorrect to say that the artists and writers of the late Victorian era identified themselves in these scientific terms of "homosexual," "heterosexual," and so on. Instead, I would suggest, it was a technique of medical and legal institutions to seize on the art and literature of this period that sought to subversively portray a complex range of psychological experiences despite the implication of impropriety. Theorists of sexuality like Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis were accomplished literary critics, if nothing else.

This point is made eloquently by Ellis Hanson in his essay concerning Oscar Wilde's self-understanding of his non-normative desires in the aftermath of Wilde's trials. Speaking specifically of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the translation of which inaugurated the term *homosexual* into English, Ellis refers to its original publication in 1886 as

See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*, Michael Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1983), 35.

⁴ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 38.

⁵ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 40.

an “ugly moment,” a “medical sleight of hand” that turned a work of literature into a work of sexology⁶:

Without any consultation with the author, Krafft-Ebing split Sacher-Masoch’s name in two and coined the word masochism to define a pathological, degenerate, and perverse sexual appetite for pain and humiliation. In one stroke, he turned romance into medical history and a famous aesthete into a notorious case study in perversion. Sacher-Masoch’s novel *Venus in Furs* (1870) ceased to be art, ceased to be Aestheticism, and became instead sexology.⁷

Hanson’s point is to say that Wilde, too, was subject to the reclassification of his art as criminal evidence and psychological studies. I wish to point to the way that the aesthetic book as a collaborative effort among communities of artists was an aesthetic way of negotiating non-normative social identities prior to being eclipsed by the discursive turn towards self-naming based on sexual object-choice.

As late as 1895, Joseph Bristow reminds us, Oscar Wilde was fairly ignorant of such medical categories of identity as homosexuality, even as he was being tried for sodomy. “Only by the *fin de siècle*, in the years roughly contemporaneous with the three trials that Wilde underwent in the spring of 1895, were researchers of psychology, medicine and social science making for the first time cardinal distinctions between homosexuals and heterosexuals.”⁸

⁶ Ellis Hanson, “Wilde’s Exquisite Pain,” in *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 105.

⁷ Hanson, “Exquisite Pain,” 105.

⁸ Joseph Bristow, “‘A complex multiform creature’: Wilde’s Sexual Identities,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 198.

Therefore, in the time period that I am tracking, from 1870 to 1914, I cannot refer to a uniform social identity based on sexuality, but rather to a set of texts that portray sexuality and gender in ways that, frankly, do not conform to the strict binary that these terms imply. Using works of contemporary queer theory, I at times will refer to aspects of my sources and their authors as “queer,” by which I mean representations of gender and sexual desire that are atypical of – and sometimes subversive toward – the social expectations of their historical context.⁹

In this introduction, I seek to lay the groundwork for the readings that follow by describing the complex set of circumstances that lead to Aestheticism and Decadence. To do so, I will first address the debates about design reform in England that preceded the later Arts and Crafts movement because this movement is especially important to the revival of artistic printing techniques that produced the aesthetic book. The Arts and Crafts Movement’s concern of educating the working class on design and aesthetics had dual purposes, both of which were

⁹ I am drawing from the field of queer theory, as it overlaps with Victorian studies of the past few decades. Works that began to incorporate Foucault’s critical study on the nineteenth century discourse of sexuality defined *queer* as an alternative to the homo/heterosexual binary, in part to show the historical inaccuracy of attributing an identity based on sexual object-choice to figures who were producing work prior to the twentieth century. Influential early works that helped to situate Foucault’s framework into a renewed field of *queer* sexuality studies include: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Theresa de Lauretis, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: An Introduction” in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3, No. 2 (1991); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

pragmatic. The first was to raise the competitive value of English manufacturing by placing greater emphasis on the study of art and design within the working class. The second was the moral and didactic value of the fine arts and literature that ought to, many argued, encourage healthy and respectable moral values. Debates about design reform were eclipsed by political theories that called into question the spiritual and moral decline engendered by industrial production and capitalism. Debates about aesthetics called into question the notion that art should have a socially viable utilitarian function. I will discuss the Printing Press Revival of the later nineteenth century in relation to these debates: on the one hand, a critique of capitalist production, and on the other, a critique of utilitarianism.

I will then describe Aestheticism as a movement in the arts and literature informed by the continued development of Aesthetics within academic and philosophical discourse. The stakes of such a movement were above all social: a concern of the proper subject of art and a fear of its corrupting influence led to censorship, and in response Aestheticism promoted a theory of art as having an elite place in modern culture which should make it impervious to moral judgments. By defining Romanticism against Classicism, Aestheticism argued that art must include the exploration of the full range of human emotions and sensory perceptions, and that artists were to be respected as rare individuals who were atypical in their ability to perceive, contemplate, and represent the human experience. Further, the student of Aesthetics should contemplate art from this perspective, unconcerned with how realistically it portrayed its subject or with the moral fitness of either its subject or its creator. Having been trained in the study of beauty, the Aesthete was highly refined and cultured and could therefore appreciate art for its own sake.

Finally, I will describe Decadence as a literary movement that took Aestheticism as its starting point, but which also critiqued it. Decadence was in part the effort of a group of artists

and critics to import into England the movement in France that had overturned the old order of art and literature in search of new and modern forms of expression. Having exhausted the beautiful, Decadence was equally concerned with the morbid, the ugly, the perverse, yet without taking a final, moral stance. Efforts to shock and offend the public created a subculture of minority types: Bohemians, artists, urbane young people who reveled in experiencing the pleasures of London's underbelly, effete men and odd women, political radicals, criminals. Whether these types were exaggerated fictions, or whether they formed a true community of social outsiders, they nonetheless were the characters that populated Decadent literature. The aesthetic book of decadent literature becomes the code through which one could identify him or herself with this community of social subversives. But codes take on a life of their own, and Decadent literature came to be read as evidence of mental disease, criminal threats, and even racial degeneration.

Therefore the texts that I have selected along the way speak as much to the history of psycho-social abnormality as they do to the history of the book. Although I have attempted to be interdisciplinary in my methodology, this is ultimately a work of literary criticism, and my focus in each section is to interpret the literature to show that it participates in the historical context that I outline in this introduction. I examine the aesthetic books of literature by Pre-Raphaelite writer-artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Simeon Solomon, before moving on to a discussion of an aesthetic book by Walter Pater. I then focus my discussion on the aesthetic books of English Decadence, specifically those produced by the Vale Press in the 1890s, including works by Oscar Wilde, John Gray, and Michael Field (coauthors Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper). In each of these studies, I draw attention to the sexual dissidence and gender subversion that are at play in the literature (and in some cases in the accompanying illustrations).

I. The Nineteenth-Century Revival of Fine Arts Printing

The late nineteenth-century revival of fine arts printing, which I will refer to as the Printing Press Revival, is crucial to my study of the aesthetic book.¹⁰ In particular, artists who were associated with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society were regularly giving lectures on the design and history of book printing by the late 1880s. This renewed interest in old-fashioned methods of printing has its own historical context in nineteenth-century England that is connected with larger philosophical and political debates about the fine arts and the decorative arts. In terms of the decorative arts, there was an effort beginning especially around the 1830s to increase the quality of British merchandise in order to compete with European countries that were the established leaders in high-quality art and design. Although increased industrialization of production using cheap materials was largely to blame for the low quality of British goods, there was a sense that the workers who produced these goods were themselves lacking in a refined sense of design—e.g., an aesthetic sensibility.

¹⁰ While I will cover specific aspects of the Printing Press Revival in each chapter, several studies of the topic are particularly important to my project. For a recent critical text, see Nicholas Frankel, *Masking the Text: Essays on Literature and Mediation in the 1890s* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2009). Useful and influential sources on the topic include Colin Franklin, *The Private Presses* (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions, 1969) and John Russell Taylor, *The Art Nouveau Book in Britain* (New York: Taplinger, 1966). I was aided by the substantive introduction in Robert M. Seiler, *The Book Beautiful: Walter Pater and the House of MacMillan* (New Brunswick, NJ: Athlone Press, 1999). For early treatments of this topic, see Holbrook Jackson, “The Revival of Printing,” *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), 255-66; Charles R. Ashbee, *The Private Press: A Study in Idealism* (London: Essex House Press, 1909); and *The Art of the Book: A Review of Some Recent European and American Work in Typography, Page Decoration, and Binding*, ed. Charles Holme (London: The Studio, 1914).

Educational reform in England included a reform in the artistic education of workers and craftspeople. This led to the establishment of a network of schools which specialized in art and design. Students who intended to pursue a trade in the decorative arts were trained in principles of design and in the history of art. The Crown also established a series of museums as well as the British Museum Reading Room so that the public could develop a proper sense of design by looking at various examples of works ranging across historical time periods and across cultures. Large public exhibitions combining fine art, decorative art, and historical artifacts became increasingly common. It is within this context where the public was encouraged to study the history of art and design that spurred an interest in the history of the book as a historical craft.

With some notable exceptions, this revival begins in the 1880s as part of the Arts and Crafts Movement, for which William Morris was the best-known figurehead.¹¹ The Arts and Crafts Movement grew away from the earlier efforts of education reform because of its focus on the worker rather than the state or commercial competitiveness. This movement argued for a return to the Guild structure of an earlier age, in which craftspeople organized socially and politically according to areas of specialty, such as weavers, metal workers, ceramicists, and stonemasons. Following the influence of Karl Marx, Morris and others promoted the spiritual and moral importance of the working class. Unlike the fine arts, Arts and Crafts were the things that were produced to be used in everyday life, and yet historical examples showed the extent to which an aesthetic sensibility of the design of everyday things had been lost due to capitalist industrialization. Morris argued that workers should learn the history of their craft and should

¹¹ The development of the Arts and Crafts movement in theory and practice from 1880 through the 1920s is described through original documents in Mary Greensted's *An Anthology of the Arts and Crafts Movement: Writings by Ashbee, Lethaby, Gimson, and their Contemporaries* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2005).

develop techniques that would lend an artistic sense of design to the goods they produced. The study of traditional methods of production was related to ideas of Socialism, where workers fought against the alienating effect of the factory and regain the moral and spiritual advantage of their work.

In a sense, this was a "reverse" aesthetic theory of design: rather than an interest in the effect that aesthetic experiences have on the perceiver, the Arts and Crafts movement drew attention to the way that good or bad design was the measure of a just society and a moral politics. Within this philosophical reaction to industrialization, there was an effort to bridge the gap between the refined and educated person of learning, who knew good design because of the privileges of upper-class society; and the common worker who was ignorant of good design because lower class society could not afford beautifully made things. For those who championed Arts and Crafts Socialism, the conflation of class and design sensibility was evidence of the corrupting effects of capitalism. By looking back to earlier British and European societies, one could find a model of a classless society in which even a relatively poor or common citizen was surrounded by beautiful, hand-made things simply because he or she learned traditional techniques out of necessity.

In this sense, the interest in outmoded processes of printing, typography, bookbinding, and all manner of book arts was part of a larger interest in traditional methods of handicrafts. But the art and craft of book production is unique, because it carries with it the literary contents of the books themselves. Medieval and Renaissance literature was enormously popular in the nineteenth century, and decade after decade brought newly available versions (often in translation) of texts culled from the archives of the British Library and museums. All manner of

English life, but especially the arts and the academy, absorbed the historical artifacts of the archive. What was old was new: modern trends were frequently historical.

During the nineteenth century in England there was a sudden surge of output in terms of print culture. The reading public could not get enough, and newspapers, journals, and books proliferated. The mass production and large-scale availability of literature allowed for a minor, reactionary market of high-quality books for the discerning collector and the lover of fine literature. In a sense, this was nothing terribly new. But by the 1880s and 1890s, several small presses appeared and became known for producing small runs of beautifully designed books printed on high-quality papers and bound by hand. To collect these beautiful books had several significant implications: it may show that one is educated and knowledgeable about the history of the arts; that one is interested in literature as a fine art rather than as popular entertainment; and that one is supportive of radical politics that questions the influence of capitalism from an ethical perspective. As Elizabeth Miller has pointed out, there was an important overlap between print culture and radical politics in England during the late nineteenth century, which she labels “slow print” in light of the reaction against the speed of industrial printing technology. “The term slow print... suggests that late nineteenth-century radical literature’s challenge to mainstream print culture was largely temporal – slow as opposed to fast,” but, she argues, it also implied scale: small as opposed to large.¹² “The print community that emerged in British radical circles... directed itself... to a small-scale audience, a political and aesthetic counterculture, a public that defined itself against mass-oriented, mainstream print culture.”¹³ Miller focuses on

¹² Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 3.

¹³ Miller, *Slow Print*, 3.

the use of small presses to promote radical politics through literature and newspapers, whereas I focus on the artistic book: yet in terms of speed and scale, both are similar, and show that there were many ways in this context that people were *defining themselves* against mass culture.

The effect of design and education reform, however, led to a notion of art as having social value in educating and instructing the ignorant population on how to recognize beauty. Aesthetic beauty, in all of its forms, was linked to morality: what is beautiful is right and good and just; and what is ugly is corrupt, evil, and unjust. This is clear in the critical philosophy of both John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold.¹⁴

I wish to draw important connections between the nineteenth-century archival revival, which included exhibitions, reprints of forgotten literary works, and the aesthetics of pre-Industrial Europe, and overlapping historical projects that looked to the past for alternate modes of expression and identity. Therefore, what I call an archival aesthetic is that which reflects a contemporary style as a series of mixed allusions and appropriations of ancient civilizations or medieval sources up to the Italian Renaissance. I show that this increasing access to museums, libraries and other archives spurs a type of aesthetic historiography that is evident in every aesthetic book that I analyze. The archival aesthetic allows for subversive appropriations and codes of identification that would have not otherwise have been possible to articulate publicly.

¹⁴ For a broad Marxist discussion of the effect of materialist philosophy on nineteenth century English aesthetics, see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). Williams says that Ruskin's theories led to a "deadlock" because he had "an image of society without energy" lacking the "necessary social commitment" (Williams, *Culture and Society*, 147). On the other hand, Morris, a follower of Ruskin, "sought to attach [the movement's] general values to an actual and growing social force: that of the organized working class. This was the most remarkable attempt that had so far been made..." (Williams, *Culture and Society*, 148).

The resultant aesthetic books that make use of this archival aesthetic allow the book object to be read as an archive in itself.

The Decadent writers who, in looking backwards to the past in order to articulate dissident sexual identities, were participating in a larger archival revival that had a number of important political implications. What is central to my project is the influence of various archives, libraries, and museums on both the design and content of the aesthetic book of Decadent literature. However, the idea of access to such collections grew out of an interest in educating the general public and also to raise the tastes of English citizens. Lara Kriegel's recent work of cultural history shows that design reform was not just a debate of the 1880s Arts and Crafts movement, but instead started in the 1840s as a concern for English competitiveness in the global consumer market.¹⁵ Kriegel's assessment of design reform shows how it overlapped significantly with the introduction of British museums well before the Great Exhibition of 1851.¹⁶ The Government School of Design opened in 1837 after public debates in parliament

¹⁵ Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ The 1851 London Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, also known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition or simply The Great Exhibition of 1851, is a turning point in the history of museums. Robert W. Rydell describes it as the original World Fair, arguing that “[i]ts success launched a world fair movement that, by 1900, ringed much of the globe.” Robert W. Rydell, “World Fairs and Museums” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 136. It has been read by Tony Bennett in his seminal essay as the start of the “exhibitionary complex” that aligned modernity with spectacle and display. Bennett claims that the Great Exhibition of 1851 “brought together an ensemble of disciplines and techniques of display” and then “translated these into exhibitionary forms which, in simultaneously ordering objects for public inspection and ordering the public that inspected, were to have a profound and lasting influence on the subsequent development of

revealed widespread distress about, to put it simply, England's lacking design sensibilities.¹⁷ In all areas of manufacturing, England lacked a competitive advantage in comparison to France and India in particular.¹⁸ The Government School of Design was meant to teach "practical design" for industrial use. It later became the National Art Training School, with over 150 schools throughout the nation. Debates over the curriculum itself, Kriegel shows, suggest the complex social implications in studying design. One issue was the use of figure drawing in the school, which some felt was inappropriate and even subversive to principles of industrial design. The start of the Arts and Crafts movement, of which the aesthetic book was a part, lies in the debates over design reform. Kriegel locates the debate over design reform within the establishment of state-run education, arguing that "[t]he Government School was a staging ground for important discussions about aesthetic principles and artisanal practices that would inform the project of design reform for decades to come."¹⁹ For Kriegel, these debates informed the cultural politics of the museum, yet they show instead that debates about design, art, and museums were already political, and implicated in a nationalist assertion of English identity.²⁰ Whether English design

museums, art galleries, expositions, and department stores." Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations*, 4 (Spring 1988): 74. It has important implications in terms of Britain's understanding of itself as an imperial power not seen since the Roman empire. The exhibition had a great impact not only on the public, who attended in great numbers and were duly impressed upon by the dazzling array of art and craftwork on display; but also on industry and commerce. See, for example, Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, 19-20.

¹⁸ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, 22.

¹⁹ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, 22.

²⁰ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, 23.

or English art or English morality, the search for essential Englishness was the basis for a hyper-vigilance of influence on a people in transition to modernism. Design, then, could mean something more than ornamentation or marketplace value: it could carry with it social values, external influences, and even identity itself.

Out of the project of design reform comes not only the ground for the later Arts and Crafts movement (and arguably Aestheticism itself), but also the justification for the use of exhibitions as instructing and guiding the nation. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was indeed enormously influential, especially in amplifying the importance of design reform. Even more significantly, as many scholars have noted, the exhibition brought about a more nuanced understanding of the consumer; or of the citizen as cultural consumer and one who thus exerted his or her own preferences and tastes.²¹ The utilitarian reformer Henry Cole had been an advocate of reform with regards to copyright, patent law, and industrial design training, and through his connections with public officials he used the momentum of the exhibition to found the Museum of Ornamental Art. The goal of this museum was to extend the sort of training that the exhibition had offered to lay observers merely through exhibiting ideal works of design and craftsmanship. The average citizen, then, needed to be reformed along with designers and producers, in order to recognize and support good design as consumers in the marketplace. To

²¹ Kevin Hetherington, for instance, claims that the exhibition was one of production, where consumption figures “indirectly and somewhat paradoxically.” It was ultimately a show of “the products of the factory but one dressed up in the guises of an amalgam of the ‘dreamhouses’ of the shop, the bourgeois interior, and the museum.” Kevin Hetherington, *Capitalism’s Eye: Cultural Spaces of the Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2011),: 15. See also the collection of recent essays surveying the critical debate of the Exhibition in *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Louise Purbrick (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001).

that end, the Museum of Ornamental Art had not only a small collection that was purchased by the state from the Great Exhibition at Cole's insistence, but also a showcase of bad design called the Gallery of False Principles.²² The presence of the museum implied that the average citizen was obligated to know design principles in order to develop taste that was supportive of national prosperity.²³ Looking at aesthetic objects and interpreting them based on proper training was indeed a political occupation, "an expressly moral pursuit for an increasingly democratic age."²⁴

In 1857, the Museum of Ornamental Art was expanded and relocated to become the South Kensington Museum (which, since 1899, has been named the Victoria and Albert Museum). Cole's growing ambition and influence (he was named Secretary of the Department of Practical Art) allowed him to develop a number of institutional collections and even gardens for public use. Kriegel notes that Cole shifted in his aim from educating consumers on design principles to providing a space of art and ornament that would enlighten and uplift the working class.²⁵ The association of state museum collections as democratic spaces of cultural access exceeded mere rhetoric: working-class citizens who had trouble traveling out to South Kensington demanded a more local museum location. The South Kensington opened a museum

²² Ann Cooper, "Cole, Sir Henry (1808–1882)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed May 11 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5852>.

²³ Put differently, Bennett interprets Cole's influence as reflecting the normative regulation of behavior through instruction. "Going to a museum, then as now, is not merely a matter of looking and learning; it is also—and precisely because museums are as much place for being seen as for seeing – an exercise in civics." Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 102.

²⁴ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, 160.

²⁵ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, 168.

branch in London's East End, and that new branch, the Bethnal Green Museum was enormously popular with the working poor of the East End.

My own reading of the archival aesthetic of the aesthetic book (which could also be called a "museum aesthetic") argues that people with dissident gender or sexual identities used the new modes of exhibition and political-discursive spaces to articulate for themselves a way of identifying with alterity. In surveying Orientalist anthropological exhibitions in Europe, Timothy Mitchell argues that people repeatedly encountered the world as a spectator, engendering a particular relationship between the individual and the world of "objects" that Europeans seemed to take as the experience of the real. This reality effect was a world increasingly rendered up to the individual according to the way in which, and to the extent to which, it could be made to stand before him or her as an exhibit.²⁶

I argue that this "reality effect" of the "exhibitionary order" should be brought to bear on the concept of Decadence in order to suggest that Decadence was a way for artists and writers to construct a world that was spectacularly artificial, temporally dislocated, and at play in a "world of objects."

II. Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, Romanticism

At the same time as there were developments in design education, throughout the philosophical study of Aesthetics and in the fine arts, a sustained interest in the history of Romanticism and its emergence in the eighteenth century brought about a proliferation of critical

²⁶ Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order" in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. (London: Routledge, 2001), 500. For a discussion of British Aestheticism as a social movement directed at the lower classes, see Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Working Classes, 1870-1900: Beauty for the People* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

inquires into exactly what constitutes *beauty*. Whereas German Idealism introduced Romanticism in the fine arts in many countries, its influence in England was especially significant in literature. The legacy of Coleridge, the early Wordsworth, and the writings of Lord Byron were without question fully engaged with Romantic thought, yet in their aesthetic theories there was a distinctive understanding that the use of Art was not necessarily founded on a utilitarian view of the moral instruction of society. For Wordsworth, the famous "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that brought about a new form of poetry was nonetheless the result of the careful cultivation of the mind of the poet:

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. ...so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects...we shall describe our object...of such a nature...that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.²⁷

Although for Wordsworth it was necessary that one have a healthy and proper moral constitution in order to recognize the beautiful, the shift was toward the poet as a unique type, "possessed of more than usual organic sensibility," more sensitive and more fully aware of the beautiful in the world around him. Coleridge, too, constructed a notion of the poet as an unusual type of person, who was highly perceptive to sensory things, and who could translate the

²⁷ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98. The "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* was first included in the 1802 edition.

spiritualizing effect of perceiving something beautiful (usually in nature) into a literary form that could then be transmitted to others.²⁸

In order to challenge the growing notion that art was useful to society and commerce as a kind of moral education, Aestheticism gained momentum in England, as it sought to refocus the study of beauty onto art itself: to see the products of the artist as something rare, unique, and intellectually challenging. Aestheticism was the study of art *without* a moral imperative: it was the study of art for its own sake; and of the artist as a person of rare or exceptional ability to experience the subtlest sensory and emotional processes of the mind. This movement really begins with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which formed in 1848 and which technically disbanded in 1854. Rossetti is particularly important because of his influence both on painting and on poetry. His depictions of sensuous beauty and scenes dense with sensory stimuli were ornate and often erotic. In both his art and his poetry, he was accused of moral ambiguity, which drew reproach from critics. For his own books of original poetry, the first of which did not appear until 1870, and for his sister Christina Rossetti and close friend Algernon Charles Swinburne, Rossetti designed the layout, produced illustrations, and hand-crafted the bindings, creating what I deem the first examples of the aesthetic book. Rossetti's *Poems* would later be charged by one critic as “fleshly,” implying that it was immorally sensual.

²⁸ This is the usual reading of, for example, Coleridge's poem “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” (1797). According to Jerome J. McGann, Coleridge is crucial to defining the emergence of “poetry of sensibility and sentiment.” Jerome J. McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 19. Maureen McLane discusses Coleridge's invocation of the “more than common sensibility” of the poet in the development of his aesthetic theory in *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and Discourse of the Species* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 28.

Robert Buchanan's critical review of Rossetti's *Poems* not only brought the term "fleshly" into prominence, but it ironically bolstered the movement of Aestheticism by inviting the published responses of Rossetti and Swinburne. Buchanan reviewed Rossetti's poetry in a lengthy essay for the *Contemporary Review* in 1871 using the pseudonym Thomas Maitland. He begins that review by noting that both Rossetti's paintings and poetry share qualities that he implies are morally suspect: the "combination of the simple and the grotesque," "morbid deviation from healthy forms of life," "sense of weary, wasting, yet exquisite sensuality."²⁹ Buchanan suggests a psychological aberration based on Rossetti's portrayal of emotional sensitivity: "nothing virile, nothing tender, nothing completely sane; a superfluity of extreme sensibility, of delight in beautiful forms, hues, and tints, and a deep-seated indifference to all agitating forces and agencies, all tumultuous griefs and sorrows...."³⁰ Buchanan's language sets the tone for the same critique of Aestheticism and its adherents by combining a critique of the poetry itself with an implication of immorality, gender deviance, and psychological disturbance. He includes Swinburne in his dislike of the "fleshly school," but argues that Rossetti's work is more egregious because he is an adult man, whereas Buchanan casts Swinburne as a mere petulant boy, offensive but harmless: "It was only a little mad boy letting off squibs; not a great strong man, who might be really dangerous to society."³¹ Buchanan goes on to comment: "It is quiet different, however, when a grown man, with the self-control and easy audacity of actual

²⁹ Thomas Maitland [Robert Buchanan], "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," *Contemporary Review* 18 (August-November, 1871): 336-37.

³⁰ [Buchanan], "Fleshly School," 336.

³¹ [Buchanan], "Fleshly School," 338.

experiences, comes forward to chronicle his amorous sensations....”³² He is incensed at what he sees as the poet “putting on record...the most secret mysteries of sexual connection...with so sickening a desire to reproduce the sensual mood, so careful a choice of epithet to convey mere animal sensations. ...it is neither poetic, nor manly, nor even human...it is simply nasty.”

Buchanan yokes together both Simeon Solomon and Rossetti in charging the English public with indecency in their support of the artists of this school. “Painters like Mr. Solomon,” Buchanan decries, “lend actual genius to worthless subjects, and thereby produce veritable monsters....”³³

As established by Buchanan, the use of the term “fleshly” as a derogatory charge of Aestheticism includes the accusation of immorality, psychological aberration, sexuality, monstrosity, and social threat. Buchanan does not invent these associations, but he makes clear the danger in which artists who follow Aestheticism are put.

Swinburne, too, contributed to the movement of Aestheticism in England in important ways: as a poet, as a critic, and as an academic of Romanticism and French symbolism. His poetry was primarily concerned with experimenting with the possibilities of rhyme and meter in the English idiom, and the subjects of his writing were frequently lurid, erotic, and sensuous. A similar debate about the utility of art and the propriety of the subjects of art that had been raging in France, especially around the work of Charles Baudelaire, whose writings fascinated Swinburne.³⁴ Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal*, published in 1857, led to his being tried and fined for violating laws of public decency. Portions of the text were censored, and as a result there was a

³² [Buchanan], “Fleshly School,” 338.

³³ [Buchanan], “Fleshly School,” 339.

³⁴ On the transmission of Baudelaire in England, see Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

reaction from sympathetic avant-garde artists that created a theory of art which excepted art from moral critiques, and posited that art should be judged based on its aesthetic merits alone. When Swinburne translated Baudelaire into English in 1868, he was the first to invite the influence of French Decadence into English literature.

When the same debate occurred in England regarding the Pre-Raphaelites and Swinburne, critics like Walter Pater articulated theories of art that were an alternative to concerns about morality and propriety, arguing that it was the job of the aesthetic critic to contemplate the entire range of intellectual and emotional ideas that a work of art or literature conveyed without making a moral judgment. Pater became the leading English philosopher of Aestheticism when he began publishing articles expounding his aesthetic theories in popular literary newspapers. When his first book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, appeared in 1873, many critics saw it as promoting a dangerous sort of hedonism based on his suggestion that the goal of life was the experience of the greatest variety of sensory stimuli in a lifetime. Not surprisingly, Pater's theories were based on his readings of the Romanticists, of Rossetti and Morris, and of Aesthetic philosophy. Although Morris was not decadent, and is left out of my project frankly because he is not queer, he still was the occasion for Pater to contemplate the purpose of literary Aestheticism from the perspective of critical philosophy. In his review of Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere: and Other Poems* (1858) and the *Life and Death of Jason: A Poem* (1867) and *The Earthly Paradise: A Poem* (1868) in the *Westminster Review* (although unsigned), Pater considers what it means to read a work of literature in a time far separated from its original context, especially considering the strangeness of Morris's tales which are not meant to be historically accurate documents but rather translations or appropriations. The effect on the work is strange, according to Pater: "It is a finer ideal, extracted from what in relation to any

actual world is already an ideal. Like some strange second flowering after date, it renews on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age, but must not be confounded with it.”³⁵

Pater implicitly responds to the growing discussion, especially of Matthew Arnold, of the progression of European culture in terms of Hebraism and Hellenism, or the Classical and the Romantic. Pater says, instead, that Romanticism is not representative of a linear historical progression, but a mode in which people of a particular culture attain an elevated perception of the possibilities of artistic feeling: “The writings of the romantic school mark a transition not so much from the pagan to the medieval ideal, as from a lower to a higher degree of passion in literature.”³⁶ As Pater analyzes Morris’s poetry throughout the essay, he finds in it a pagan spirit which has the “continual suggestion...of the shortness of life; this is contrasted with the bloom of the world and gives new seduction to it; the sense of death and the desire of beauty; the desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death.”³⁷ Pater relates this impression to the sciences, which tell of the material processes of thought in the brain happening in a constant state of flux, giving way to a philosophical question of how to exist in the world: “Not the fruit of experience but experience itself is the end...How can we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.”³⁸ In the final paragraph, Pater describes Rousseau as contemplating death, desiring to extend life, and realizing that the way to make the most of his remaining time was “by intellectual excitement,

³⁵ [Walter Pater], “Poems by William Morris,” *Westminster Review* 90, no. 178 (October, 1868): 300.

³⁶ [Pater], “Poems by William Morris,” 301.

³⁷ [Pater], “Poems by William Morris,” 309.

³⁸ [Pater], “Poems by William Morris,” 311.

which he found in the clear, fresh writings of Voltaire.”³⁹ His point is that Morris’s poetry offers the same possibility in his nineteenth century English context:

...[W]e have an interval and then we cease to be. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest in art and song. For our one chance is in expanding that interval....High passions give one this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, political or religious enthusiasm, or the ‘enthusiasm of humanity.’ Only be sure it is passion, that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art’s sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments sake.”

Pater’s essay on Morris’s Aesthetic poetry was re-written as the “Conclusion” to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which as I have already said was a key statement in the shift of Aestheticism to Decadence. That conclusion keeps the philosophical insights of the original essay, but is purged of all references to Morris.

Pater specifically challenges Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) by invoking the dictum of "art for art's sake." Arnold claims to define culture as having noble ends beyond the mere curiosity of personal interest toward the greater benefit of society as a whole:⁴⁰

But there is of culture another view, in which not solely the scientific passion, the sheer desire to see things as they are, natural and proper in an intelligent being, appears as the ground of it. There is a view in which all the love of our neighbour, the impulses towards action, help, and beneficence, the desire for stopping human error, clearing human

³⁹ [Pater], “Poems by William Morris,” 312.

⁴⁰ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London: Smith, Elder, 1869), 7-8.

confusion, and diminishing the sum of human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it, – motives eminently such as are called social – come in as part of the grounds of culture, and the main and pre-eminent part. Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a *study of perfection*. It moves by the force, not of merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good.⁴¹

Arnold implies that to resist making a moral judgment was to make only an aesthetic judgment. Pater uses similar language as Arnold, but Arnold ends at a very different conclusion: what he calls Hellenism asserts itself at times of rebirth, but when the moral strength of a nation begins to decline, Hebraism succeeds Hellenism. Whereas Pater sees the possibility of a rebirth, or renaissance, in the nineteenth century, Arnold sees the need for a return to Christian authority. “Eighteen hundred years ago it was altogether the hour of Hebraism; primitive Christianity was...the ascendant force in the world at that time, and the way of mankind’s progress,” Arnold writes, until the fifteenth century when “the main road of his progress then lay for a time through Hellenism.”⁴² Arnold argues that the Enlightenment phase in historical development of man had corrupted things, and a corrective was imminent:

For more than two hundred years the main stream of man’s advance has moved towards knowing himself and the world, seeing things as they are, spontaneity of consciousness; the main impulse of a great part, and that the strongest part, of our nation, has been towards strictness of conscience.... This contravention of the natural order has

⁴¹ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, (1869), 8.

⁴² Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 165.

produced... a certain confusion and false movement, of when we are now beginning to feel... the inconvenience. In all directions our habitual courses of action seem to be losing efficaciousness, credit, and control, both with others and even with ourselves; everywhere we see the beginnings of confusion, and we want a clue to some sound order and authority. This we can only get by going back upon the actual instincts and forces which rule our life, seeing them as they really are, connecting them with other instincts and forces, and enlarging our whole view and rule of life.”⁴³

Like Pater, Arnold sees poetry as the means to return to a natural truth in the human conscious, but his conviction on this point is founded on his Christian faith. Ultimately, Arnold is arguing for a return to Hellenism, that is to say the possibilities of culture to induce society to seek in beauty a love of balance and perfection. Hebraism, he argues, can become overly strict and rigid. But Arnold’s view of art is that it has a moral obligation for the improvement of society, and this is what Pater counters in his focus on aesthetic contemplation as an end in itself.

According to a Romantic view of aesthetic experience that Pater sought to draw forward, the more one cultivated his or her sense of beauty, the more he or she could experience in art the full range of human intellectual and emotional sensations. In fact, this was the goal of life, and the goal of art. And in light of new ideas of “good” art, which were diverging from art as simply classically representational, such an aesthetic judgment was not simply how good or bad a work of art was according the older, classical models. It therefore became about the feelings that a work provoked in the reader/viewer. That much of this debate happened in the popular press, despite being academic and specialized, was appropriate to the Kantian notion of Enlightenment,

⁴³ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 166.

which included a theory of aesthetics.⁴⁴ Followers of Aestheticism began to embody this rather controversial idea of the amoral aesthetic contemplation of art: the worship of beauty and the religion of art.

In philosophy, aesthetics is the study of the beautiful, or in some cases an attempt to define beauty abstractly. Pater is not only a scholar of Romanticist philosophies of art based on German Aestheticism, but was himself a close reader of Immanuel Kant's revolutionary work in defining the aesthetic sense as an essential form of human understanding. Pater reads Kant in particular through Hegel and Fichte, and all endeavor to apply Kant's *Critique of Judgment* to aesthetic criticism. Kant famously interrogates statements about beauty as revealing an aesthetic sense of judgment that is distinct from other forms of cognition. Therefore a taste for beauty and art designates someone who is of a philosophical mind, educated in order to train his or her judgment of taste. For Kant, there can be no rules of taste that define a universal concept of beauty, "For every judgment from this source is aesthetic, i.e., its determining ground is the feeling of the subject and not a concept of an object."⁴⁵ There is a certain feeling that can be communicated, which is "from a deep-seated ground, one shared alike by all human beings," according to Kant, and this feeling can be trained into a refined judgment of taste.⁴⁶ The critiques

⁴⁴ For an excellent summary of Kant's theory of philosophical critique as a part of Enlightenment, see Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Nicholas Walker, trans. James Creed Meredith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 62.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 62.

of the philosopher of aesthetics demonstrate this faculty without stating universal criteria of beauty:

For this reason some products of taste are looked on as exemplary — not meaning thereby that by imitating others taste may be acquired. For taste must be an original faculty; whereas one who imitates a model, while showing skill commensurate with his success, only displays taste as himself a critic of this model.⁴⁷

An exemplary case that nevertheless cannot be subsumed to concepts would, Kant says, “may more appropriately be called the ideal of the beautiful. While not having this ideal in our possession, we still strive to produce it within us.”⁴⁸ The aesthetic branch is a crucial part of Kant’s notion of Critical Philosophy, which ultimately ensures political autonomy through open and public discussion in a democratic society. Aestheticism has its roots in a humanistic philosophy that sees the development of a society as contemporaneous with the intellectual development of an individual.

III. Decadence, Degeneration, and Social Topographies

As I have established, the aesthetic book was the product of the design reform movement and the archival aesthetic that it engendered; it was the product of a socialist political resistance to industrialization; and it was an articulation of the theory of Aestheticism, whereby the intellectual recognition of beauty was achieved through the experiences of the physical senses. By the late nineteenth century, to be an Aesthete meant that one was highly refined (to the point of artifice); knowledgeable about all of the arts as well as the history of aesthetic philosophy; highly sensitive and perceptive; intellectually elite and morally ambiguous. An aesthete

⁴⁷ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 62-63.

⁴⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 63.

demanded beauty above all else, especially as he or she was particularly sensitive to the very finest aspects of aesthetic products. Therefore, the individual who could appreciate literature as an art form, concerned only with its aesthetic merits and not with its utilitarian value or moral appropriateness, would also understand the importance of the physical details of the book that carried such literature: the binding, the quality of the paper, the typography, the illustrations. Just as the aesthete was a highly refined and rare type of person, unusually sensitive and perceptive of sensory details, the aesthetic book was a rarified product of an artist, printed and bound by hand, historically informed, and distributed in small runs which ensured its audience members that they were the minor few rather than the thoughtless mass.

To put it simply, Aestheticism meant the contemplation of beautiful things in order to develop oneself spiritually, and therefore there could be no separation from the physical book and the literature printed in it: both provided the means through which the aesthetic contemplation of beauty could take place.⁴⁹ Opponents of Aestheticism seized upon the sexual connotations of such deliberate sensory stimulation, and worried that it was overly sensual without a clearly defined moral endpoint. Despite this, the ambitions of Aestheticism were often in the direction of the morally good and ethically robust conduct of individuals, especially in relation to social and technological upheavals.⁵⁰ It therefore derived from Romanticism in two

⁴⁹ For a crucial introduction to the aesthetic book, see John Russell Taylor, *The Art Nouveau Book in Britain* (New York: Taplinger, 1966). While I do not take up his terminology of the “art nouveau book,” his book is one of the best overviews of the movement, such as it was.

⁵⁰ While I argue that there is a crucial distinction between English literary decadence and Aestheticism, despite their equally crucial overlaps, there is disagreement on such categorization. Literary historian Cassandra Laity, for example, employs the phrase “decadent Aestheticism” in much of her work, at times mixing terms inconsistently, such as “British Decadence and/or Aestheticism” and “Decadent/Aestheticism.” See Cassandra Laity, “Editor’s

main ways: first, the theory that contemplating literature and art was useful for spiritual and intellectual insights; and second, that the cultivation of the self had the potential to bring about a new phase of growth and development in society.

The two leading English figures of this brand of Aestheticism were William Morris and Walter Pater, and it is no accident that Pater had Morris in mind when writing his famous "Conclusion" to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* which was, for later generations, the doctrine of literary Decadence. Pater is often described as the unwitting father of English Decadence because of the fact that his work was so influential on Decadent literature and yet he is more appropriately understood as the leader of English Aestheticism, often critical of his own followers. I argued previously that Decadence was both an extension of aesthetic philosophy, but also a reaction to its utter seriousness and academic austerity. Both Pater and Morris, in different ways, exemplify this serious, academic, austere approach to art and literature.⁵¹

In *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882), which is one of the earliest surveys of Aestheticism, the critic Walter Hamilton notes that the movement is a favorite topic of ridicule in

Introduction: Beyond Baudelaire, Decadent Aestheticism and Modernity," *Modernism/modernity* 15, no. 3 (September 2008): 427-28. Elsewhere, however, Laity makes a unique point about the tendency for modernism to create a link to Romanticism through the disavowal of the intermediary period of decadence: "As Frank Kermode's Romantic Image affirms, modernist continuities with the Romantic past excluded the Decadents' explorations of 'forbidden' sexualities, androgyny, and role reversal in favor of the less disruptive 'Romantic image' of the muse which sustained the I-thou relation between male subject and female object." Cassandra Laity, "H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadence and Modernist Women's Writing," *Feminist Studies* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 461.

⁵¹ For a different but important discussion of the relationship of Aestheticism to Socialism and politics of gender, see Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

English society, and yet is a movement that has brought about enduring works of art and literature. While caricatures in *Punch* that mock aesthetes and dandies, and plays such as Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* (1881) and F. C. Bernard's *The Colonel* (1881) critiqued the movement using "satire and ridicule," Hamilton argues that "the so-called Aesthetic school has now been in existence some years, and is likely to survive the attacks which a portion of the press levels at it, the more so because by far the greater number of its assailants neither study its works, understand its aims, nor appreciate the undoubted good it has wrought."⁵² The aesthetes, Hamilton says, "having first laid down certain general principles...have endeavored to elevate taste into a scientific system, the correlation of the arts being the main feature of the scheme; they even go so far as to decide what shall be considered beautiful, and those who do not accept their ruling are termed Philistines, and there is no hope for them."⁵³ Hamilton describes the aesthetic movement in England as beginning with the Pre-Raphaelites and John Ruskin, and designates as the poets of the aesthetic school Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Oscar Wilde. Hamilton is an apologist for the maligned movement, noting a distinction between pure or higher Aestheticism and pseudo-Aestheticism, or "the affected and superficial Aestheticism which has been forced into a hot house existence by caricaturists, and fostered by those who mistake artistic slang and stained-glass attitudes, for culture and high art."⁵⁴ The former is instead a "modern intellect striving to realise a lofty ideal, and to attain that beauty in Art which abounds in Nature."⁵⁵ Hamilton's connecting Pre-

⁵² Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1882), v.

⁵³ Hamilton, *Aesthetic Movement*, vii.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, *Aesthetic Movement*, 142.

⁵⁵ Hamilton, *Aesthetic Movement*, 142.

Raphaelitism to the modern movement of Aestheticism allows him to align his defense of it with Ruskin's defense of the Pre-Raphaelite painters' truer, more natural medievalism. Hamilton writes:

So also in Aestheticism there is much that is old, as old indeed as are beauty and truth, simplicity and grace; and as Ruskin deemed it necessary thirty years ago to enter a protest on behalf of the Pre-Raphaelites, to show how their aims were misunderstood, and their genius unappreciated, so I, in a plain homely way, have sought to point out the good there is in the modern artistic revival, known as the Aesthetic movement. It has already wrought much in the improved taste shown in poetry and painting, in dress, furniture, and house decoration; there is still much for it to achieve.⁵⁶

The Aesthetic movement, then, is both a new way forward but also a revival of older forms. The modern artist must also be a historian of the arts.

While Hamilton locates the start of the movement in the 1850s, the influence on the Pre-Raphaelite artists and on Ruskin himself was notably Alfred Tennyson. In "Touching Forms: Tennyson and Aestheticism," Angela Leighton describes Tennyson as an ambiguous precursor to the Aesthetic Movement.⁵⁷ Leighton points to essays, including one by Arthur Hallam in 1831 that was regularly reprinted throughout the century, which describe Tennyson's work in notably aesthetic terms.⁵⁸ She also notes that the very term *Aestheticism* is first used in English in

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *Aesthetic Movement*, 143.

⁵⁷ Angela Leighton, "Touching Forms: Tennyson and Aestheticism," *Essays in Criticism* 52, no.1 (2002).

⁵⁸ Leighton, "Touching Forms," 57-59. [Arthur Henry Hallam], "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," *Englishman's Magazine, from April to August Inclusive* 1 (London: E. Moxon, 1831), 616-28.

reference to Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters" in an 1855 essay by George Brimley.⁵⁹ Tennyson, Leighton argues, "consciously or unconsciously, offers the nineteenth century one of its most memorable, sensuous, aestheticist voices".⁶⁰ A closer look at both the Hallam essay and the Brimley essay reveals some of the anxieties around Tennyson's Aestheticism which were to carry through the entire movement.

Hallam, who was a close friend of Tennyson and who was the subject of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) following his death in 1833, seeks to place Tennyson in an emerging tradition of poets who are unusually perceptive to beauty for its own sake in comparison to poetry that represents philosophical or rational ideas. The two English forerunners, Hallam says, are Shelley and Keats, who in their genius are "poets of sensation rather than reflection," who "lived in a world of images," and who were acutely perceptive to sensations from the external world: "their fine organs trembled into emotion at colours, and sounds, and movements, unperceived by duller temperaments."⁶¹ Yet Hallam notes that it requires a particular type of person who can make a life of sensation productive rather than leading to corruption:

We do not deny that it is...dangerous for frail humanity to linger with fond attachment in the vicinity of sense. Minds of this description are especially liable to moral temptations...upon them...it is incumbent to remember that their mission as men...is of

⁵⁹ Leighton, "Touching Forms," 58. G[eorge]. B[rimley]., "Alfred Tennyson's Poetry," in *Cambridge Essays: Contributed by Members of the University* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1885), 226-280.

⁶⁰ Leighton, "Touching Forms," 65.

⁶¹ Hallam, "On Some Characteristics," 617.

infinitely higher interest than their mission as artist, which they possess by rare and exclusive privilege.⁶²

It is Hallam's point that Tennyson's poetry is of this "new school," such as when he describes the lyric "Adeline" (1830) as beautiful: "how original is the imagery, and how delicate! How wonderful the new world thus created for us, the region between real and unreal!"⁶³

Similarly, Brimley's essay on Tennyson's art associates the poet's technique with aesthetic principles but also warns of the moral ambiguity that such poetry produces. The mystical effect that Tennyson's poetry creates is, for Brimley, best understood as a literary version of landscape painting.

The principle [of landscape painting] consists in a combination of landscape and figures in which the landscape is not merely background to the figures, or the figures animated objects in the landscape, but the two are dynamically related, so that the landscape is described as seen and felt by the persons of the scene, under the influence of some emotion which selects objects congenial to its own moods, and modifies their generic appearances...⁶⁴

As Leighton points out, Brimley's description of "The Lotos-Eaters" is crucial for employing the term Aestheticism: "*The Lotos Eaters* carries Tennyson's tendency to pure Aestheticism to an extreme point. It is picture and music, and nothing more."⁶⁵

⁶² Hallam, "On Some Characteristics," 618.

⁶³ Hallam, "On Some Characteristics," 627.

⁶⁴ Brimley, "Alfred Tennyson's Poems," 229-30.

⁶⁵ Brimley, "Alfred Tennyson's Poems," 237.

By the next decade, Brimley nascent theory of Aestheticism becomes more fully theorized by critics like Pater, such that it becomes a recognizable movement in mainstream discourse, commonly associated with the Religion of Art. Apart from serious charges of fleshliness, a new critique of Aestheticism emerged through satire. From the mid 1860s to the mid 1880s the illustrator George Du Maurier regularly contributed cartoons to the humorous magazine *Punch* that satirized the leading figures of the aesthetic movement.⁶⁶ As I have mentioned already, the movement was lampooned in the comic opera *Patience; or, Bunthorne's Bride* by Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert, which was first performed in London in April of 1881.⁶⁷ In February of 1881 the farcical play *The Colonel* debuted, which had been adapted by F. C. Burnand to include villainous Aesthetes who attempt to swindle a wealthy family by teaching them the tenants of Aestheticism. So while Aestheticism was criticized and mocked, it also had, by the 1880s, a long and distinguished history as a movement in art and literature. At best, Aestheticism was the doctrine of a philosophy of spiritual growth and cultural elevation, making its ends a kind of greater good for society. In Pater's Aestheticism, there is a moral ambiguity that nevertheless has a philosophical ethics of spiritual improvement. Derived in part from Pater, the decadent movement is happily a pseudo-Aestheticism, ironic and self-mocking, provocative

⁶⁶ *Punch* ran from 1841 to 2002. For a related discussion of Du Maurier's art, see Dennis Denisoff, "'Men of My Own Sex': Genius, Sexuality, and George Du Maurier's Artists," in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147-70.

⁶⁷ In her reading of *Patience*, Carolyn Williams schematizes the portrayal of traditional and alternative gender roles to show the ways that the latter are mocked and the former recuperated. See Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), especially 151-86.

and morally fraught. For this reason, I argue that Pater is part of the Aesthetic Movement in England, and yet is also one of the primary influences on decadence.

Throughout nineteenth-century England, Aestheticism had become associated with controversy, and both its supporters and detractors were at times dogmatic. Karl Beckson describes the central “mythology of Aestheticism” as the Religion of Art, or the worship of beauty.⁶⁸ Beckson argues that the “transformation of art into a ‘substitute religion’” was due to the crisis of faith that had been particularly destabilizing in nineteenth-century England: it was “an ironic inversion of spiritual loyalties on the part of many who, in the late 19th century, had either lost their Christian faith or had suffered from unsettling doubt.”⁶⁹ Beckson contends that the religious celebration of Romanticist writers such as William Blake and John Keats by the aesthetes was part of this mythology of the Religion of Art. Keats’s “association of Beauty with Truth..., in his wish for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts, and in his high devotion to a life of Art, he was widely regarded as the prototype of the martyred artist,”⁷⁰ Beckson argues, thus establishing a spiritual precedent for the socially outcast artist who allowed Aestheticism to become a movement that implicated social identities. “The idea of the artist as exile or outcast is derived, of course, from Plato..., but the idea of artist as saint and martyr is most commonly associated with the 19th century in the Romantic and particularly in the later Aesthetic Movement.”⁷¹ Beckson describes Pater’s novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) as exemplary of the

⁶⁸ Karl Beckson, “A Mythology of Aestheticism,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 17, no. 4 (1974:), 233-49.

⁶⁹ Beckson, “Mythology,” 233.

⁷⁰ Beckson, “Mythology,” 234.

⁷¹ Beckson, “Mythology,” 234.

way that the artist attains a spiritual growth through the ritualized aesthetics of religion, but in a way that circumvents Christian doctrine with that of Aestheticism. Pater's novel features the spiritual journey of a young man who encounters different types of pagan religion before coming into contact with a group of clandestine Christians in Antonine Rome. The moments of most intimate contact involve Marius and contact with young men with whom he enjoys, for example, the sensual experience of a book. According to Beckson, Pater's protagonist "does move towards 'elevation of soul, generosity, humanity' through the Christian experience. In short, the effects of religious devotion are achieved through the efficacy of ritual and Christian example but without personal commitment to the faith."⁷² Not surprisingly, the Religion of Art is, for Beckson, encoded with sexual dissidence: "The association of priesthood, Aestheticism, and homosexuality is one of the more interesting facets of the Aesthetic Movement."⁷³ The spiritual quality of a devotion to beauty and art not only does not foreclose, but perhaps leads to, forms of desire that are alternatives to norms of heterosexuality. Unlike decadence, Aestheticism strives to find such alternatives through a philosophical commitment to self-improvement through the contemplation of beauty.

Joseph Bristow makes an even more potent point about Pater's *Marius*, which is classified as an aesthetic novel.⁷⁴ Pater's fiction of a young student of philosophy in a transitional historical period, Bristow notes, centers on Marius's "heightened sensibility." Bristow cites as a particular example a moment of sentimentality around Marius's homoerotic friendship with an

⁷² Beckson, "Mythology," 240.

⁷³ Beckson, "Mythology," 242.

⁷⁴ Joseph Bristow, "The Aesthetic Novel, From Ouida to Firbank," in *A History of the Modernist Novel*, ed. Gregory Castle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 48.

older tutor on the occasion of “a beautiful book,” which “serves as the kind of decorative object that often stands at the center of much aesthetic fiction.”⁷⁵ The style of writing in that book is aesthetic, and the fact that they perceive it and are excited by it shows their inclination towards beauty: “Such recognition positions these friends as the aesthetes of their age.”⁷⁶

Aestheticism lent a philosophical justification of the freedom of artistic expression, in which artists and writers were able to explore previously forbidden aesthetic subjects, especially in terms of sexual desire and “ugly feelings” (such as disgust, shame, ugliness, cruelty, etc.); without landing on a final moralizing message that accorded with the mainstream views.⁷⁷ But the pseudo-scientific study of social evolution posited that populations eventually declined, and even reverted, to a pre-Christian state of moral dissolution, ultimately leading to the ruin of society. Criminal, sexual deviants, and racial minorities were symbols of Britain's age of decline, which by the 1880s and 1890s were associated with the emerging discourse of degeneration. Simultaneously, other discourses well apart from those of traditional academic study were formulating theories of social types: categorizing people according to the way that they represented a divergence from an idealized citizen that was understood as normal. Fields of sexology, criminology, and psychology were rapidly advancing, oftentimes by making dubious claims about the differences of people based on physical, racial, and genetic attributes. There is a strange back-and-forth between such vilifying of non-normative types and the growing

⁷⁵ Bristow, “The Aesthetic Novel,” 48.

⁷⁶ Bristow, “The Aesthetic Novel,” 49.

⁷⁷ The term “ugly feelings” is inspired by Sianne Ngai’s book of the same title, which examines the aesthetics of envy, irritation, anxiety, “stuplimity,” paranoia, and disgust. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

acknowledgement of non-traditional ideas of gender and sexual dissidence. Ironically, by taking up the notion of Decadence despite its negative connotations, artists, writers, and followers of the avant-garde used art and literature to explore what was supposedly the evidence of social decline: the morbid, the sexual deviant, and the criminal. Meanwhile the pseudo-medical literature took the products of decadent artists and writers as evidence for their own theories: medical journals became rife with a kind of literary and art criticism focused on the morbid psychology of these supposedly rare geniuses and the corrupting influence that they had on society. I see a connection between socially “marked” people, especially those who became part of the Bohemian society where modern art challenged traditional social beliefs, and the creation of the aesthetic book of literature.

What was ultimately expressed in Decadent literature, when presented in the form of the aesthetic book, was the self-appointed designation of a minority identity that defied the usual expectations of the social order. That this was especially gendered and frequently depicted sexual desire as something complex and varied, makes the aesthetic book of Decadent literature the embodiment of an alternative identity, which took place at the cusp of the designation in psychology of homosexuality and heterosexuality. I cannot say that the aesthetic book is directly about homosexuality or gender subversion. However, in describing the complicated nexus of conditions out of which the aesthetic book emerged, I hope to show that it overlaps in meaningful ways with the expression of dissident sexual and gender identities at the end of the nineteenth century.

In November 1893 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* published a lengthy essay by the literary critic Arthur Symons called “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” which

characterizes and charts what he calls “the latest movement in European literature.”⁷⁸ Symons notes that the terminology could also be Impressionism or Symbolism, where all three name something similar, but Symons concludes that Symbolism and Impressionism might be sub-categories of Decadence.⁷⁹ Symons asserts that Decadence “has no relation with that old antithesis of the Classic, the Romantic,” but instead that it represents something new, which is “[t]he most representative literature of the day....”⁸⁰ By 1899, Symons revised and enlarged this essay and published it as *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, in which he contradicts himself slightly concerning the shared root of Romanticism, arguing that Symbolism was preceded by “the offshoot of Romanticism which produced Baudelaire, Flaubert, the Goncourts, Taine, Zola, Leconte, de l’Isle,” a list that he categorizes loosely into movements of Realism and Impressionism.⁸¹ The brief period between Realism and Impressionism and the movement that he calls Symbolism produced Decadence, according to Symons’ later writings.⁸² In the span of

⁷⁸ Arthur Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 87, no. 522 (November, 1893), 858.

⁷⁹ Symons, “Decadent Movement,” 859.

⁸⁰ Symons, “Decadent Movement,” 858-59.

⁸¹ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: W. Heinemann, 1899), 6. The same book was published in a “revised and enlarged edition” by E. P. Dutton in 1919.

⁸² In a dense sentence at the start of an article about William Blake, W.B. Yeats traces a lineage across one hundred years and two countries to further define symbolism: “The recoil from scientific naturalism has created in our day the movement the French call *symboliste*, which, beginning with the memorable ‘Axel,’ by Villiers de l’Isle Adam, has added to drama a new kind of romance, at once ecstatic and picturesque, in the works of M. Maeterlink; and beginning with certain pictures of the pre-Raphaelites, and of Mr. Watts and Mr. Burne-Jones, has brought into art a new and subtle inspiration.” His point is to say that Blake “was certainly the first great *symboliste* of modern times, and the first of any time to preach the indissoluble marriage of all great art with symbol.” Incidentally, this article

six years between the *Harper's* essay and the book, Symons saw a broader category of Symbolism as the defining movement, especially related to French literature.

Both of Symons' texts are particularly useful for defining Decadence, although the task of portioning out texts into various categories of "minor movements" has only limited value to literary criticism.⁸³ For my purposes, Decadence retains the historical notions of gender and sexual deviance that other movements do not. When it is spoken of in terms of the psychological or the emotional – unlike Impressionism, for example – it often includes words like "diseased," "sick," and "nervous"; when it is discussed in terms of gender or romance, it often includes words such as "effeminate," "perverse," and "unnatural"; and when it concerns the topic of morality it is "corrupt," "insincere," and "ambiguous."⁸⁴ Thus when the style or content of works that are linked to Decadence include these same words, they seem to imply that the work identifies psycho-sexually abnormal (in late nineteenth-century understandings of sexuality), or what I tend to call queer, people.

In the *Harper's* essay, Symons makes clear the link between literary Decadence and disease, although he does so in a non-judgmental manner, since he notes that writers themselves have identified with such designations, subverting the ideals of health and vigor: "These terms,"

appeared in Symons's own periodical the *Savoy*. (William Butler Yeats, "William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy: I. His Opinions Upon Art," *The Savoy*, 3 [July 1896], 41).

⁸³ A category based on time rather than content quickly formed in the early twentieth century, that is, literature of the "fin-de-siècle" or "the 1890s." Considering the difficulty of defining Decadence, these categories have remained in popular use.

⁸⁴ On the typical discourse that surrounds Decadence and Decadence as a social critique, see Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

he says “have been adopted as the badge of... noisy, brainsick young people....”⁸⁵ Citing the Goncourts, Huysmans, and Ernest Hello, Symons makes clear that his pathological diagnosis is not an offense to the proponents of these new schools, who themselves delight in identifying as sick, nervous, corrupt, and dark. Symons goes further to say that modern urban life is itself unhealthy and artificial, and so that these writers are being truthful in their artificiality of style:

[T]his representative literature of to-day, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease. Healthy we cannot call it, and healthy it does not wish to be considered.... This unstable equilibrium, which has overbalanced so many brilliant intelligences into one form or another of spiritual confusion, is but another form of the *maladie fin de siècle*. For its very disease of form, this literature is certainly typical of a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-inquiring, too languid for the relief of action, too uncertain for any emphasis in opinion or in conduct. It reflects all the moods, all the manners, of a sophisticated society; its very artificiality is a way of being true to nature: simplicity, sanity, proportion—the classic qualities—how much do we possess them in our life, our surroundings, that we should look to find them in our literature—so evidently the literature of a decadence?⁸⁶

Symons suggests that the “classic qualities,” which include sanity, are not a part of modern life and so therefore should not be sought for in modern literature. Decadence treats topics that are as high culture topics that are base and crude and suggests that such topics are appropriate to art and literature, but doing so invites a dangerous scrutiny.

⁸⁵ Symons, “Decadent Movement,” 858.

⁸⁶ Symons, “Decadent Movement,” 859.

IV. Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 1, “The Pre-Raphaelite Intervention,” I show that the aesthetic book of literature begins with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Dante Gabriel Rossetti in particular was deeply impressed by both Blake and Keats, and he arguably modeled his literary work on the former. He was known as the “poet-painter,” and which of those two art forms was the primary one in his career oscillated across the decades of his life. Because of Rossetti’s far-reaching influence, I detail his own complex history as an artist, a translator, and a poet. As early as the 1840s, while still a teenager, Rossetti began formulating a theory of art that went counter to the establishment. In particular, he questioned the academic style of the Royal Academy and instead was inspired by the early work of John Ruskin for whom the artist should paint “true to Nature.” For Rossetti and fellow painters William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais, this meant returning to a more natural style of painting that was less exact in terms of technical precision – that is, to the later Medieval period, prior to Raphael and the Renaissance painters. Truth to nature, therefore, did not mean an accurate representation of reality based on well-practiced techniques, but rather the true perception and feeling of the artist.⁸⁷

Rossetti in particular was just as passionate about literature, especially the English Romantics and poets of Medieval Italy. Much like the later movements that he inspired, Rossetti used his art to portray art: the subjects of literature were the favorite subjects of his painting. This also included the subjects of his own poetry, which he depicted in paintings that, at times, included excerpts of the text embedded in the frame. In detailing the history of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Rossetti’s early work as an artist and translator, I show the many

⁸⁷ On the history of Pre-Raphaelite art, see Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2007).

ways that Rossetti prefigured and inspired the generations of like-minded artists and writers that followed him. English Aestheticism and even Decadence would be impossible without Rossetti. Not only did Pater write about Rossetti in formulating his own theories of Aestheticism, but, as Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell have shown, Oscar Wilde and Charles Ricketts were fanatical in their appreciation of him.⁸⁸

I go on to survey Rossetti's work as an illustrator and book designer, work that he carried out for his own books and those of his milieu including Christina Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne. I focus my reading on what I regard as the first aesthetic book of Aesthetic literature, Rossetti's *Poems*, which appeared in 1870. He brought out the book with F.S. Ellis, the bookseller who had become the publisher to the select group of writers that included the Rossettis, Swinburne, and Morris. Rossetti's attention to the details of the binding and design of the cover page are an important example of the idea that the physical body of the book was itself a work of art that conveyed the sensory experience of the literature it contained.

I then read another example of an aesthetic book, this time one that is much less known, although its author was revered among the English Decadents. Simeon Solomon's *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* was also published by Ellis, with a binding, cover page, and interior illustrations done by Solomon. It was Solomon's only work of literature; he was an accomplished painter who was deeply impressed by the Pre-Raphaelite school. Solomon's prose poem is important as an early example of literary Symbolism on the theme of the psychological struggle of physical versus spiritual love. The allegorical figures throughout the text match many

⁸⁸ This point is especially made throughout Bristow's recent work on Wilde and Thomas Chatterton. See Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Oscar Wilde's Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of Forgery* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015).

of Solomon's paintings, leading some to read *A Vision of Love* as something of an explanation of or textual guide to his art. The artworks that *Solomon's text* appears to depict were for their time courageously homoerotic, and Solomon himself struggled with falling in love with men who did not have reciprocal feelings. He became a social outsider and an outcast, after being arrested and imprisoned twice for "indecent" behavior in public bathrooms. I read *A Vision of Love* against this background to show that it participates in the creation of a "type" of creative, tortured artist.

In my second chapter, "Walter Pater's Aestheticism and the Space of the Book," I analyze a little-known volume of Pater's that the Daniel Press printed by hand. It is a single short story of Pater's, one that originally appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1878, which C. H. O. Daniel designed and printed as a collectable volume for sale at a charity auction. This title, I argue, is notable for both its bibliographic significance and for the pseudo-biographical story that it contains. I analyze the former, its bibliographic significance, based on a discussion of the place of the Daniel Press in the Printing Press Revival. Daniel was especially known for reviving the Fell type after finding it disused in the archive of the Oxford University Press. His design preferences were similarly historically informed, preferring the sparse look of eighteenth-century typography. The book of Pater's that he printed by hand on an Albion Press that is now kept in the British Library was delicate and beautifully constructed using high-quality materials. For my purposes, it exemplifies the aesthetic book.

I go on to analyze Pater's story in terms of his own Aesthetic philosophy, which was so influential to the generation that followed him. The story is of a sensitive child coming into aesthetic consciousness in the house where he was raised. The child is fascinated by the sensual attributes around him: the colors of flowers excite him, the play of lights and shadows are melancholic, and the pictures of a book cause him pain out of empathy. I argue that Pater shows

the influence and impact of aesthetic details on the psyche, and I show how this relates to the theory he presents in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. I make that point that Pater's many references to Romantic writers help him to construct the notion that the artist is of a rare type, unusually sensitive and perceptive, an artist who is constituted differently from the average person even in childhood.

The third and final chapter focuses on the book arts of Ricketts and Shannon, whose Vale Press (1896-1904) is arguably the culmination of the aesthetic book of Decadent literature. Ricketts especially wrote a treatise on the revival of fine arts printing, and in it distinguishes himself from his contemporary, William Morris, by showing the historical models for the design, typography, and illustrations of his book work. I discuss the formation of an elitist circle of dandies and aesthetes that gathered at the home of Ricketts and Shannon, also called the Vale, in order to discuss their shared interest in art, aesthetics, and French decadence. I first discuss the journal that Ricketts and Shannon produced, modeled on *The Germ* of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which led Ricketts to collaborate with several key writers of the English Decadent movement.

Ricketts's best-known book arts work was for Oscar Wilde, who, at the height of his celebrity, collaborated with Ricketts to produce ornately decorated, hand-printed, high-quality books in very limited runs. Wilde was clearly promoting himself as a writer not for the masses but for the cultural elite, who would value his book as a work of art in itself. I analyze in particular Ricketts's designs for the single volume edition of the *Picture of Dorian Gray*, and then I read *Dorian Gray* as alluding to Wilde, Ricketts, and the poet John Gray in its portrayal of a dandy whose immersion in decadent Aestheticism exerts a corrupting influence on him. As the story consists of overt references to J.-K. Huysmans's French novel *À Rebours* – a novel,

incidentally, that exerts the most corrupting influence on the protagonist Dorian Gray – I analyze Huysmans's narrative in order to discuss its thorough presentation of French decadence, which itself adopts an ironic and self-satirizing mode. I argue that Wilde imports the decadence of Huysmans's anti-hero Jean des Essentes in order to critique Aestheticism.

I then discuss another of Ricketts's designs, regarded as the quintessence of the decadent book even at the time of its publication, John Gray's *Silverpoints*. Ricketts modeled every part of this volume, from its unusual dimensions and large margins, to its delicate italicized font, on fifteenth-century Italian printing, especially that of Aldus Manutius. I provide an extensive analysis of the poems throughout *Silverpoints* in order to show that they literally and stylistically translate French decadence into English. Gray was especially interested in the poetry of Paul Verlaine, whose scandalous relationship with the young poet Arthur Rimbaud was well known. Gray, the supposed model for Dorian of Wilde's novel, struggled with the spiritual implications of his own same-sex desires following a period of immersing himself in the underworld of London and Paris and making a name for himself as an outrageous dandy-poet. Gray is particularly important because he is a decadent writer who most directly confronts the topic of homosexuality. He eventually converted to Catholicism and lived the rest of his life in celibacy with his partner Marc-André Raffalovich. Raffalovich wrote a book that is part of the minor field of Sexology called *Uranisme et unisexualité : étude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel* (1895), where he puts forward a theory of alternative sexualities based on his reading of artists and historical figures (a list that includes Wilde and Verlaine).

Finally, I analyze a trilogy of closet dramas by Michael Field produced in richly illustrated volumes by the Vale Press. As the penname of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, Michael Field represents another queer formation, in this case an aunt and niece who lived as life

partners and worked collaboratively. I discuss their Roman trilogy, consisting of *The World at Auction* (1898), *The Race of Leaves* (1901), and *Julia Domna* (1903) as works of English Decadence. These are particularly interesting in speaking to the designation of decadence as a pejorative term that is frequently used to describe the late Roman empire in decline. The three plays occur across a span of about twenty years and portray several figures related to the Emperor Commodus, whose corruption signals the decline of imperial Rome in the minds of nineteenth-century Europe. It is during the Latin decadence of this era that some of the most outlandish examples of same-sex romance and gender crossing are discussed in works of history, most notably, Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). By portraying Roman decadence, Cooper and Bradley effectively comment on the connection between nineteenth-century decadence and the burgeoning study of human sexuality.



Figure 1. Title page for *The Early Italian Poets from Ciullo d'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri* (1861) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Chapter 1: The Pre-Raphaelite Intervention

The fact that the late nineteenth century, where I locate the emergence of the decadent appropriation of the aesthetic book in England, is inextricably tied to a much earlier literary/artistic/critical movement is stated plainly by Jerome J. McGann: “The renaissance of printing that took place in the late nineteenth century utterly transformed the way poetry was conceived and written. In England, William Morris and D.G. Rossetti stand at the beginning of a poetical history that to this day shows no signs of abatement. The evolution of the modernist movement could (and at some point should) be written as a history of book production and text design.”¹ Although Morris’ Kelmscott Press was formed in 1890 and performed beyond Morris’ death in 1896, and although Rossetti’s influence and popularity continued to grow after his death in 1882, to trace their influence in art, literature, and book production requires examining the many phases of their prolific careers, starting as early as the 1840s. If for McGann the modernist movement that, in the 1990s, showed “no sign of abatement” must include the history of book production and text design centered on the careers of Rossetti and Morris, then for the decadent book such a formidable history is especially crucial.

In this chapter, I focus on touchstone productions of fine arts printing that I argue become models for the later aesthetic book of decadent literature: specifically Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Poems* (1870) and Simeon Solomon’s *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1871). In doing so, I gloss the history of a vast network of artists, writers, printers, and publishers that worked collectively in order to provoke cultural and social movements in England through their aesthetic productions. Since this is a history that covers a lot of ground it is as much about the critical promotion of Romanticism as a literary movement that started in the 1790s as it is about the

¹ Jerome J. McGann, “The Rationale of HyperText,” *Text* 9 (1996): 19.

modernist movement that remained influential as late as the 1990s. In other words, I outline in broad strokes a history that is necessarily beyond the purview of this chapter. My purpose in doing so is twofold. First, my aim is to describe decadent literature as part of a longer history of aesthetic book production. Second, as it is the overall contention of my project that decadent literature of the late nineteenth century is too often divorced from its literal context of the printed book, a connection that has been better attended to in criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, my purpose here is also to apply this rich critical discussion of the interrelationship of literature and visual design within Pre-Raphaelitism to the decadent movement. This chapter therefore begins with a description of Pre-Raphaelitism with Dante Gabriel Rossetti at its center and then concentrates more specifically on Pre-Raphaelite book design that draws in historical and contemporary literary criticism. Thereafter, I focus specifically on the significance of *Poems* and *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* for my overall discussion of the aesthetic book.

I. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the “Morbidity P.R.B.”

The Rossetti family is preeminent in Victorian literature. Thanks especially to feminist readings of her poem “Goblin Market,” Christina Rossetti’s legacy has nearly outpaced her older brother Dante Gabriel’s within the canonization of British Victorian literature.² Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s influence on Victorian culture and writing is more often described than read, with Tennyson and the Brownings being the most prominent examples of the style of poetic narratives that invoke a mystical medievalism, which fueled critical articulations of Aestheticism now

² See, especially, Virginia Woolf, “I am Christina Rossetti,” in *The Common Reader, Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1935), 237-44; and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “The Aesthetics of Renunciation,” in their hugely influential feminist critique of nineteenth-century literature, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 53-80.

understood as crucial to mid-Victorian literature. Dante Gabriel Rossetti is just as well known now for his drawings and paintings, even though some of his Pre-Raphaelite “brothers” are more prominent in nineteenth-century British art history.³ The Rossetti siblings’ middle brother William Michael occupies the quieter, background role of literary critic and family archivist that is no less important because he did all he could to promote the influence of the Rossetti family and to enable his contemporaries to do the same. Maria Rossetti, the eldest of the four Rossetti children, made her own minor contributions to literary criticism, and was a major influence on her three younger siblings.⁴

The siblings’ parents were well-connected, highly learned, and variously talented: their father Gabriele Pasquale Giuseppe Rossetti (1783–1854) was a scholar of Dante Alighieri who moved to London to escape death in Italy due to his involvement with a revolutionary political

³ Julian Treuherz puts it thus: “Rossetti’s real achievements have become obscured, and he is now associated not so much with originality or modernity as with a morbid and languorous sensuality,” and suggests that interpretations of his work have “been clouded by overdependence on biographical interpretation, often depicted in exaggerated terms” (Julian Treuherz, “‘The Most Startlingly Original Living’: Rossetti’s Early Years,” *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* [Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2003], 12. In “What’s Wrong with Rossetti?” William E. Fredeman cites the question asked by Evelyn Waugh in assessing the challenge that Rossetti poses by not fitting neatly into critical interpretations of his literary works and his painting, which, Fredeman argues, “do point to something inherently disturbing about Rossetti’s art and poetry...that...inhibit[s] or preclude[s] criticism.” He suggests rephrasing the question: “What is wrong with Rossetti’s pictures and poems that they appear less important or less interesting than his life?” (“Introduction: ‘What is Wrong with Rossetti?’: A Centenary Reassessment,” *Victorian Poetry*, 20, no. 3/4 [Autumn-Winter, 1982]: xvi).

⁴ Susan Elkin, ‘Rossetti, Maria Francesca (1827–1876),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed Nov. 8, 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24142>

group that participated in the efforts to unite Italy.⁵ He taught Italian at King's College in London, published poetry, and stayed involved in Italian politics from afar. Frances Mary Lavinia Polidori (1800–1886), their mother, brought the family into connection with Italian literature and politics through her father, Gaetano Pollidori, and connected British literature and medicine through her brother, John William Pollidori. Her father was a writer, literary scholar, translator of English literature into Italian, and a prominent lawyer. He had an interest in private printing, and set up his own printing press in his home, which counted some of the first publications of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti when they were just children.⁶ John

⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, “Gabriele Rossetti,” accessed November 08, 2014,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/510197/Gabriele-Rossetti>. The *Risorgimento*, or Resurgence, is the name of the movement between 1815-1871 which finally resulted in the united Kingdom of Italy.

⁶ These are, according to Jerome J. McGann's bibliography at *The Rossetti Archive*: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Sir Hugh the Heron*, (London: Privately Printed at G. Polidori's, 1843), and Christina Rossetti, *Verses* (London: Privately Printed at G. Polidori's, 1847). See *The Rossetti Archive*. ed. Jerome J. McGann. (Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities: University of Virginia, 2002) <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/rossetti/index.html>. <accessed November 7, 2014,>. Their grandfather Polidori's press is even mentioned in Henry R. Plomer's influential article “Some Private Presses of the Nineteenth-Century,” *The Library* 1, no. 1 (1 December 1899): 419-21. Plomer's article is notable for its comprehensive, early treatment of the topic, and is cited more thoroughly in a number of places elsewhere in my project. Plomer notes that Polidori was already a printer/publisher before starting his private press from his home: he was “head of the firm of G. Polidori and Co., printers and publishers... which in 1796 issued an Italian translation of [John Milton's] ‘Paradise Lost.’ He was also the translator and editor of several other Italian books.” His first privately printed book was produced in 1840 and was no small feat: an octavo edition of the *Works* of John Milton in Italian, in three volumes, of which 284 copies were printed and 250 were for sale, according to Plomer. The “two little volumes” of his grandchildren are described by Plomer, the first being “a small quarto of twenty pages” by “Gabriel Rossetti, Junior” when he was thirteen; and the second a duodecimo volume of

William Pollidori is best known for his friendship with Lord Byron (he was also his physician), which is recounted in the preface to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818, revised 1822 and 1831) when she was with her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron, and Polidori entertained themselves one night by writing ghost stories. Pollidori's became *The Vampyre* (1819), one of the first vampire tales in English that would later inspire Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and hers became *Frankenstein*.⁷ If their mother did not ever publish literature or criticism in her life, she most likely was influential by her own education and by connecting the Rossetti children with a family of Anglo-Italian scholars.

Around the time of this first printing endeavor, at age thirteen, Dante Gabriel Rossetti entered the influential art school Sass's Academy. Founded by painter Henry Sass, the school was meant to train young artists in preparation for entering the Royal Academy. According to J.B. Bullen, Rossetti worked there under F.S. Cary and "attended irregularly until 1845," and at the end of that year entered the Antique Academy of the Royal Academy, though, according to

poems by "Christina G. Rossetti," prefixed with a note on the text written by Polidori to explain that the author was "of tender age." Plomer found no details on the quantity printed of either, but William Michael Rossetti says of *Sir Hugh the Heron* that later in life his brother was embarrassed by this early work, and that "He once got me to destroy a rather considerable stock of copies which remained in my hands" (William Michael Rossetti, *Bibliography of the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* [London: Ellis, 1905], 6). For my purposes, this background makes clear that the Rossetti children understood from a very young age that writing literature and printing it in bound volumes were not discrete activities but two parts of a complete literary product.

⁷ As told by Mary Shelley in the "Introduction" beginning with the 1833 edition. See Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), v-xii.

Bullen, “he was never able to accept its conservative regime.”⁸ In 1847 he sought out Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893) – himself only twenty-four years old – for private lessons in painting and drawing. By this time Brown was leading a bohemian life as an artist, having studied at the Antwerp Academy and produced several works of history, portraiture, and three pictures based on the poetry of Lord Byron.⁹ In 1844 and 1845 he had several submissions rejected from competitions seeking works to decorate the Palace of Westminster.¹⁰ He and Rossetti worked together in this capacity for only a short while, but became lifelong friends and influenced each other’s styles across their careers. At this time Rossetti met and befriended William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) and John Everett Millais (1829-1896), and Hunt and Millais developed innovative pictorial styles and treatments of paint that Brown and Rossetti were impressed and influenced by.

Millais and Hunt were close friends at the Royal Academy in London, and were together developing defiant theories of art against the school’s conservative, academic approach to painting.¹¹ Hunt’s exhibition debut in 1845 was at the Royal Manchester Institution with a painting titled *Pity the Sorrows of a Poor Old Man*. A year later, in 1846, Millais made his debut

⁸ J. B. Bullen, ‘Rossetti, Dante Gabriel (1828–1882)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed Sept 7, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24140>.

⁹ Tim Barringer, ‘Brown, Ford Madox (1821–1893)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed Nov. 8, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3604>.

¹⁰ Barringer, “Brown.”

¹¹ They met in 1844 while painting copies in the British Museum, a common practice for art students that required special approval. Millais encouraged Hunt to reapply to the Royal Academy after he had been twice rejected. SEE Judith Bronkhurst, ‘Hunt, William Holman (1827–1910)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed Nov. 8, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34058>.

with *Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru* at the Royal Academy's annual exhibition. Rossetti had been struck by Hunt's *Eve of St Agnes*, exhibited at the annual exhibition in 1848, which was also a portrayal of a poem by Keats.¹² The three formed a sketching club in 1848, the Cyclographic Society, to which Rossetti's first contribution reflected his concurrent literary passion at that time, a drawing titled "La Belle Dame sans Merci," based on John Keats's 0000 poem of that title. The society included about a dozen artists and worked by the circulation of a sketch followed by written criticism from each member.¹³

Malcom Warner notes that during this time, the Royal Academy was still very much under the influence of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), who had become its first president when it was founded in 1768.¹⁴ Reynolds was revered and respected for founding the British school of painting, and his series of lectures delivered during the Academy's annual awards ceremony between 1769 and 1790, published as *Discourses on Art* in 1797, was widely read in

¹² The scene depicts the "escape of Madeline and Porphyro from the castle," as William Michael Rossetti puts it. He quotes Hunt as being surprised by his brother's coming up to him "boisterously and in loud tongue" and "made me feel very confused by declaring that mine was the best picture of the year." Dante Gabriel had been similarly enthusiastic the year prior, according to his brother, on seeing Hunt's portrayal of a scene from Walter Scott's *Woodstock*, but it was not until the exhibition of *The Eve of St. Agnes* that Rossetti asked Hunt if he could visit. William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir by William Michael Rossetti*, 2 vols. (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895), 1:120-21.

¹³ William Michael lists the group as: Millais, Rossetti, Hunt, John Hancock, William Dennis, N. E. Green, J. T. Clifton, Walter Howell Deverell, J. B. Keene, T. Watkins, James Collinson, Richard Burchett, F. G. Stephens, Thomas Woolner, and J. A. Vinter (William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:121).

¹⁴ Malcolm Warner, 'Millais, Sir John Everett, first baronet (1829–1896),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed Nov, 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18713>.

Europe throughout the nineteenth century. They establish his neoclassical theory of the study and practice of art, in which he insisted that students should follow the masters of the Italian Renaissance. According to Warner, “Reynolds encouraged young British artists to follow in the Renaissance tradition, to revere Raphael, and to aspire to the classical ideal—that perfect beauty never found in nature but attainable by the artist through careful selection and improvement,” whereas “Hunt and Millais reacted against this view and resolved to paint people and things just as they found them, observing the particular features of actual models in detail.”¹⁵ Apart from their many critiques of the Royal Academic style, the latter is most crucial to the painters that would form as a result the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as an alternative community of artists: a focus on the natural subject, or truth to nature, was the defining feature of their theory of art. From a distance, the distinctions are quite subtle, but Reynolds’ theory of a “composite” of ideal elements in, for example, the human figure, which is therefore impossible in reality and thus distinguishes the goal and skill of the artist in “careful selection” is opposed to portraying things as they really are: truth to nature became the mantra of Millais, Hunt, Rossetti, and the rest of the brotherhood when it formed.

It was Reynolds and his persistent influence that the young painters were challenging, and not, as William Michael points out, that they were unimpressed by Raphael or the Italian Renaissance painters. The young painters nicknamed Reynolds “Sir Sloshua,” where slosh, according to William Michael, was their own derogatory term used “to indicate a hasty, washy, indeterminate manner in painting, neglectful of severe form and accurate detail, and lavish of unctuous vehicle.”¹⁶ According to William Michael, the three were particularly eager to do

¹⁵ Warner, *Millais*.

¹⁶ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:157 n. 3.

something new and fresh, and resented a bland conformity that they saw as the style in British painting of their day. All three, William Michael says:

Contemned the commonplace anecdotal subjects of most British painters of the day, and their flimsy pretences at cleverness of execution, unsupported either by clear intuition into the facts of Nature, or by lofty or masculine style, or by an effort at sturdy realization...the British School of Painting, as a school, was in 1848 wishy-washy to the last degree; nothing imagined finely, nor descried keenly, or executed puissantly. The three young men hated all this. They hated the cant about Raphael and the Great Masters, for utter cant it was in the mouths of such underlings of the brush as they saw all around them; they determined to make a new start on a firm basis.¹⁷

In looking towards early masters, especially alternatives to the Renaissance masters, William Michael says, they saw “a manifest emotional sincerity, expressed sometimes in a lofty and solemn way, and sometimes with a candid *naïveté*”; they wanted to imitate the sense of a new, genuinely felt, natural spirit in art such as they saw in these early works: “they saw strong evidences of grace, decorative charm, observation and definition of certain appearances of Nature, and patient and loving but not mechanical labour.”¹⁸ They were strongly against “conventionality, as a lifeless application of school-precepts, accepted on authority, muddled in the very act of acceptance, and paraded with conceited or pedantic self-applause.”¹⁹

In 1917 Elbert N. S. Thompson wrote of Reynolds’ instruction for students of art to use English literature as a model and source of inspiration—a point that is much more in line with

¹⁷ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:126.

¹⁸ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:127.

¹⁹ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:127.

the Pre-Raphaelites.²⁰ Thompson says that the *Discourses* “formulate a theory of painting which elevate that art to a kinship with the then more firmly established art of poetry.”²¹ Thompson notes that Reynolds had a careful, thorough theory of art that included familiarity with extensive philosophical discussions of the arts, linking poetry to the plastic forms. So while it would be wrong to reduce his influence to something too rigid and stodgy, Thompson nonetheless says: “The first established principle of the eighteenth-century literary criticism that Reynolds applied to painting is, study the masters of old.”²² In rejecting the Royal Academy (which often along the way had rejected them), the three young painters formulated for themselves an identity that drew from the spirit in philosophy and literature that would come to be known as Romanticism, which sought to construct the figure of the artist as one who is more perceptive and sensitive, who feels things more deeply and who uses art to express these deeply-felt and spiritually-profound truths.

It is crucial that, at this very moment in 1847, Rossetti discovered William Blake, and drew from his influence in a way that, though perhaps without designs to this end, led to Blake’s rescue from obscurity and corresponding promotion as one of England’s best poets of the Romantic movement. According to William Michael, the philosophy of art that defied convention and sought out a more genuine movement of bohemian outsider artists was, for Dante Gabriel, inspired by incidental notes written by Blake in an original manuscript that he chanced to purchase. Though he was already, according to his brother, “a hearty admirer of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*,” he was offered by a British Museum attendant the purchase of an original Blake manuscript, “crammed with prose and verse, and with designs.” He

²⁰ Elbert N. S. Thompson, “The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds” *PMLA* 32, no. 3 (1917): 339.

²¹ Thompson, “Discourses,” 339.

²² Thompson, “Discourses,” 347.

came up with the ten shillings, and with William Michael copied out all of the poetry and prose from the manuscript, which proved highly influential to him:

His ownership of this truly precious volume certainly stimulated in some degree his disregard or scorn of some aspects of art held in reverence by *dilettanti* and routine-students, and thus conduced to the Præraphaelite movement; for he found here the most outspoken (and no doubt, in a sense, the most irrational) epigrams and jeers against such painters as Correggio, Titian, Rubens, Rembrandt, Reynolds, and Gainsborough — any men whom Blake regarded as fulsomely florid, or lax, or swamping ideas in mere manipulation. These were balsam to Rossetti's soul, and grist to his mill.²³

As a regular visitor to the British Museum archives, Rossetti may also have read Reynolds through Blake, since, as Martin Postle notes, the second edition of Reynolds' *Discourses* “appeared in 1798: William Blake's extensively annotated copy belongs to the British Library.”²⁴

The Rossettis' promotion of Blake is itself a significant part of Victorian literary history, but Dante Gabriel's interest in Blake is useful if we take him as a model. Unlike the artists with whom he was forming a theory of art that went against the institutions of art education, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was as much a poet and writer, and a figure such as Blake would have been a model of the poet-painter that Rossetti aspired to be.

During the period that led up to the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Dante Gabriel was just as devoted to writing and poetry, having already written an early drafts of

²³ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:109.

²⁴ Martin Postle, ‘Reynolds, Sir Joshua (1723–1792),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed Nov 9, 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23429>. Note, this is merely my conjecture; I do not know of any critic who makes this claim.

several of his poem famous poems— “The Blessed Damozel,” “My Sister’s Sleep,” and “Jenny”—when he was eighteen. Although many of these works would appear in later books, notably his *Poems* of 1870, they began at the same time that he was training as an artist, and he worked and reworked, perhaps in light of the paintings that portrayed characters from them. William Michael also notes that Dante Gabriel had a sustained side-project of translating into English little-known poets from Dante Alighieri’s era, which were published in 1861 as *The Early Italian Poets*. According to his brother most of these were done during the period between 1845 to 1849, during which time he made “continual incursions into the Old Reading-room of the British Museum, hunting up volumes of the most ancient Italian lyrists,” implying that Rossetti’s contributions to English literature included his making available works that were all but lost in the archive; not to mention bringing into vogue the Romantic writers, especially Blake, Keats, and Shelley, who had fallen out of favor in the decades after their deaths.

1848 was a crucial year for Rossetti’s entire career, according to McGann: after finishing his first painting under Hunt’s guidance, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9), he was developing his painting while at the same time “working on or finishing a series of remarkable writings (among them, “The Blessed Damozel” and most of the translations that eventually appeared as the *Early Italian Poets* in 1861). It was in this year that the core set of Rossetti’s artistic and poetical touchstones began to coalesce in a practical way. Thus, 1848 marks not only a European watershed (given the revolutions that erupted in several parts of the Continent), it is equally the year of Rossetti’s emergence as a serious—indeed, an epochal—figure in British art and poetry.”²⁵ It is also worth noting that this year marked the publication of Richard Monckton

²⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), xviii.

Milnes's *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats*, which sought to extend the reputation of Keats and to rescue it from obscurity. Of the Romantic poets, Byron was still famous, and Shelley had his wife to keep his reputation going, which became her primary work for much of her life after his death. While Keats had always had the literary critics in his favor, his death at so young an age threatened his work with being forgotten, and in his "Preface" Milnes makes a case for publishing Keats's letters, which were passed to him by Keats' friend Charles Brown, with additions by Keats's family and friends, by suggesting that his reputation was in need of repair.²⁶ He calls him "a man, whom the gods had favoured with great genius and early death, but had added to one gift the consciousness of public disregard, and to the other the trial of severe physical suffering."²⁷ Milnes says that he took Brown's archival materials and "engaged to use them to the best of my ability for the purpose of vindicating the character and advancing the fame of his honoured friend."²⁸ Milnes projects the image of Keats as having fallen into disrepute especially after the circumstances of his death in 1821, which was due to a long painful battle with tuberculosis, but seemed to follow shortly after a harsh critique in the *Quarterly Review*:

I perceived that many, who heartily admired his poetry, looked on it as the production of a wayward, erratic genius, self-indulgent in conceits, disrespectful of the rules and limitations of Art, not only unlearned but careless of knowledge, not only exaggerated but despising proportion. I knew that his moral disposition was assumed to be weak,

²⁶ Richard Monckton Milnes, "Preface," *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1848), 1: ix-xix.

²⁷ Milnes, *John Keats*, 1: ix.

²⁸ Milnes, *John Keats*, 1; xi.

gluttonous of sensual excitement, querulous of severe judgment, fantastical in its tastes, and lackadaisical in its sentiments. He was all but universally believed to have been killed by a stupid, savage article in a review, and to the compassion generated by his untoward fate he was held to owe a certain personal interest, which his poetic reputation hardly justified.²⁹

The young Pre-Raphaelite painters, especially Rossetti, would have been sympathetic to Milnes defense of Keats, arguing as it did against a reductive view of his bohemian eccentricity and supposedly moral weakness: “I had to show that Keats, in his intellectual character, revered simplicity and truth above all things, and abhorred whatever was merely strange and strong...”³⁰ Milnes helps to create the image of Keats as an artist of genius who challenged convention and suffered for it: “I had also to exhibit the moral peculiarities of Keats as the effects of a strong will, passionate temperament, indomitable courage, and a somewhat contemptuous disregard of other men...”³¹ William Michael writes that his brother discovered Shelley in 1844 on hearing that there was a writer of the Byronic epoch “even greater than Byron,” and then that “Keats followed not long after Shelley, in 1846 or perhaps 1845.”³² He says that Dante Gabriel “considered himself to have been one of the earliest strenuous admirers of Keats.”³³ As William Michael tells it, Dante Gabriel sought out the lesser-known or forgotten writers – examples he

²⁹ Milnes, *John Keats*, 1: xvi-xvii.

³⁰ Milnes, *John Keats*, 1: xviii.

³¹ Milnes, *John Keats*, 1: xviii.

³² William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:100.

³³ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:100. He adds, without explanation, that “this can only be correct in a certain sense.”

gives include the works of Charles Wells (he credits Dante Gabriel with inciting Swinburne's republication of one of his dramas in 1877) and Charles Maturin (whose great-nephew Oscar Wilde would rename himself after Maturin's protagonist in the famous Gothic romance *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1828) after being exiled from London society following his imprisonment). In 1847, William Michael says, all authors "took a secondary place in comparison with Robert Browning," with whom Dante Gabriel became passionately attached.³⁴

Although it was a period of time when Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Hunt, Millais, and others were establishing themselves as a new movement in the plastic arts, it was as much a period of work in literature for the group's singular poet-painter, Rossetti. Although he would publish his writings intermittently in publications over the decades that followed, many of the works that appear in his 1870 volume *Poems* were first written during this period.

William Michael Rossetti locates the start of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the autumn of 1848, after Rossetti, Hunt, and Millais had all recently become acquainted and were meeting at the home of Millais' parent's in London. This particular evening the men lighted upon a copy of Carlo Lasinio's *Pitture a fresco del Camp Santo di Pisa* (1812), a book of engravings that depicted fourteenth-century murals on the walls of Campo Santo, the Gothic cemetery in Pisa, Italy. William Michael Rossetti cites Holman Hunt in recording that the discussion over these engravings "caused the establishment of the Præraphaelite Brotherhood."³⁵ The frescoes of Campo Santo were completed across three centuries, beginning in the fourteenth century and ending in the seventeenth, and so it is interesting that a group of artists who defined themselves against the high Renaissance style as denoted by Raphael (1483-1520) would have been inspired

³⁴ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1: 101-02.

³⁵ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1: 125.

by a record of paintings that were completed before, during, and long after that art-historical moment. William Michael notes some particular painters when he says that the engravings “give some idea of the motives, feeling, and treatment, of the paintings of Gozzoli, and of those ascribed to Orcagna and other mediaeval masters,” whereas McGann confusingly describes it as containing “engravings from fifteenth-century paintings attributed to Giotto, Memmi, Gozzoli, and other early Italian masters.”³⁶ The first frescoes were applied around 1360, and the fourteenth-century artists cited, Giotto di Bondone (1266/7-1337), Lippo Memmi (c.1291-1356), and Orcagna (Andrea di Cione Arcangelo) (1308-1368), may have represented the earliest of these “mediaeval masters,” whereas Benozzo Gozzoli (1421-1497) was of a later generation altogether, and one that overlapped with Raphael. But it is also noteworthy that they came to understand their own theory of art through Lasinio’s engravings, which were marked by a style of outline rather than pointillist shading, and the book of engravings becomes an emblem of the way that a book can be found by happenstance, in someone’s home or in an archive, and can carry images great distances from their origins of time and place. In the 1850s and 1860s, as I discuss below, many members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, most notably Dante Gabriel Rossetti, become known through their engravings for books and periodicals, which marry image and text in a way that becomes central to his work as a poet-painter.

Citing Hunt, William Michael Rossetti says that the designation of Pre-Raphaelites ““had first been used as a term of contempt by our enemies”” in response to their early, informal verbal

³⁶ Jerome McGann, “Pitture a fresco del Camp Santo di Pisa: Scholarly Commentary,” *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Research Archive*, accessed Nov. 10, 2014, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/n2745.l33.radheader.html>. McGann says that Rossetti later acquired a copy of the 1828 edition.

critiques rather than on any work they had completed. In contrast to the less rigorously academic (i.e. formal technical) methods developed in later centuries, the medieval Italian painters exhibited a style that showed less depth and less accuracy in perspective, but were for that reason “truer” in feeling because they were interested in expressing a spiritual ideal (in particular, of the Catholic church). Finding in this style an example of great art that was an alternative to the static and formal Royal Academy, William Michael says: “it was with this feeling, and obviously not with any idea of actually imitating any painters who had preceded Raphael, that the youths adopted as a designation, instead of repelling as an imputation, the word Præraphaelite.”³⁷ But even such theories and principles of an approach to art were not always distinct or consistent. The notion that the artist should be “true to nature” and to paint directly from nature or models rather than copying other works of art was made as a passionate critique of the British School of painting in their day, but did not make a narrow prescription as a method of painting. Against the assumption that Ford Madox Brown refused to join because of these severe limitations, William Michael observes: “Some such rule as a theory may perhaps have been in some degree of favour with the Brotherhood at one time or other; but I am certain it was not acted upon even in their first fervid year.”³⁸ Their appropriation of a term of derision represents the way that they were constructing themselves purposefully as outsider-artists, which arguably became a model for the same technique used much later by the Decadents. More important, their aesthetic theories demonstrate their engagement with aesthetic critics, most notably John Ruskin (1819-1900); and, I argue, also demonstrate their invocation of British literary Romanticism in drawing attention to

³⁷ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:127.

³⁸ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:127.

the feelings and intentions of the artist as one who translates a particular sensitivity and attitude into an aesthetic form that can be apprehended by others.

By the time that the young artists were forming the brotherhood, Ruskin had already started publishing volumes of *Modern Painters: their Superiority in the Art of Landscape Painting to the Ancient Masters* (Volume I, 1843; Volume II, 1846) and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), the latter being based on a serialized essay, *The Poetry of Architecture* (published in the *Architectural Magazine*, 1837-38). Robert Hewison notes that two review articles in the *Quarterly Review* in 1847 and 1848 extend his early theories on art and architecture.³⁹ Although it was only with *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* of 1849 that Ruskin published under his own name, he was increasingly well known in English literary circles, having befriended Monckton Milnes and J. M. W. Turner. Hunt wrote in his memoirs that around the late 1840s a fellow student told him about Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and when he seemed eager to know more, arranged to have a copy lent to him for twenty-four hours. He stayed up all night to read it, and wrote: "of all its readers, none could have felt more strongly than myself that it was written expressly for him. When it had gone, the echo of its words stayed with me, and they gained a further value and meaning whenever my more solemn feelings were touched."⁴⁰

William Michael Rossetti downplayed Ruskin's influence in their formation, correcting what he calls a misperception: "Neither was Ruskin their inciter, though it is true that Hunt had

³⁹ Robert Hewison, 'Ruskin, John (1819–1900),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed Nov 28, 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24291>. These were reviews of: Lord Lindsay's *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* and Charles Eastlake's *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*.

⁴⁰ William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), 1:73.

read and laid to heart in 1847 the first volume of *Modern Painters*, the only thing then current as Ruskin's work. I do not think any other P.R.B. (with the possible exception of Collinson) had, up to 1848 or later, read him at all."⁴¹ Still, the theory that galvanized the brotherhood to the idea of truth to nature and as a corrective to the assumption that the "ancient masters" were far more accomplished than the "moderns" lies at the heart of Ruskin's work.

Ruskin wrote *Modern Painters* in defense of Turner, specifically in response to a harsh critique of Turner's Royal Academy showing in 1842.⁴² Hewison notes that later editions of these first two volumes as well as later volumes of Ruskin's study expand a critique based on his study of the history of European painting through bookish study and museum tours. Hewison says that "[i]n Pisa and Florence he began to examine early Italian painters such as Fra Angelico, the so-called 'primitives' who were beginning to attract scholarly attention thanks to Alexis Rio's *De la poésie chrétienne dans son principe, dans sa matière, et dans ses formes* (1836), which Ruskin read on the journey."⁴³ In that book, which was translated into English in 1854 as *The Poetry of Christian Art*, Rio shows a common theme of the spiritual-poetic appreciation of early European art as something truer in feeling if not as accomplished in form: "if we reflect that in these rude works were deposited the strongest and purest emotions of their hearts, as well as the liveliest creations of their imaginations . . . fixing our attention less closely on the surface of things, we endeavor to penetrate more deeply into their nature."⁴⁴ The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was indebted to Ruskin's emerging theories of aesthetics, and Ruskin was part of a

⁴¹ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel*, 1:135.

⁴² Hewison, "Ruskin."

⁴³ Hewison, "Ruskin."

⁴⁴ Alexis-François Rio, *The Poetry of Christian Art* (London: T. Bosworth, 1854), 2.

larger movement that sought to pose philosophical and social questions through theories of aesthetics, forging a new movement in art history and criticism.⁴⁵ While all of these influences were likely mutually constitutive, for my purposes the point here is that Rossetti was instrumental in the development of British Aestheticism through both theory and practice, through painting and literature, and through philosophy and historical analysis.

In spring 1849, London's first exhibition season after the group officially formed brought some of their works into public notice. Rossetti was the first to exhibit a painting signed PRB at the Free Exhibition in Hyde Park in March, 1849, which was his *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, painted under the mentoring of Hunt when they shared a studio together. Hunt, Millais, and the painter and fellow Royal Academy student Collinson were all admitted into the Royal Academy exhibit that same 1849 season, and each included the PRB initials embedded in the image. This was, thus, the public launch of the newly formed movement that would come to be known as Pre-Raphaelitism.

⁴⁵ Leslie Williams notes that when Millais' *Iphigenia and Cymon* was rejected by the Royal Academy's 1848 exhibit for being a stylistic satire, *Punch* printed its own satire of the many who were rejected by printing a letter of complaint from "an imaginary artist." Leslie Williams, "Painting for Reputation: The Pre-Raphaelites, John Ruskin, and the Victorian Press" (*Nineteenth-Century Prose* 24, no. 1 [Spring 1997]: 74). It is signed "ONE OF THE NINE HUNDRED REJECTED ONES," and describes two works in the two popular styles of the day: "Medieval-Angelico-Pugin-gothic, or flat style, and the other after the manner of the Fuseil-Michaelangesque school." The latter, Williams says, is "[t]he older and more acceptable style of the Royal Academy" and the first, "the newer one based on a renewed interest in fresco painting as medieval or flat" (Williams, "Painting," 74). This comical jibe nonetheless makes us aware that it is likely the case that the Pre-Raphaelite movement gets credit for an aesthetic turn towards a flatter, archaic style when it was in fact underway already at the point they formed.

Millais' *Lorenzo and Isabella* followed the archaic "flat style" that the PRB espoused, and was accompanied by a passage from Keats's poetry.⁴⁶ Hunt exhibited his first painting branded PRB, which was based on Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel and was titled *Rienzi Vowing to Obtain Justice for the Death of his Younger Brother, Slain in a Skirmish between the Colonna and Orsini Factions*.⁴⁷ Williams notes that the initial reactions to all four painters was positive: "one can see that the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of returning to an earlier, more realistic and exact art was not at all rejected in the first year they appeared."⁴⁸ But in 1850 reactions from the press would become considerably more mixed, in part due to the religious-political fervor engendered by Tractarianism/the Oxford Movement, since common subjects of the PRB were biblical, and the reference to pre-Renaissance Italy was specifically Catholic.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Williams, "Painting for Reputation," 74-75.

⁴⁷ Bulwer-Lytton's historical novel *Rienzi, The Last of the Roman Tribunes* was published in 1835 by Saunders & Otley.

⁴⁸ Williams, "Painting for Reputation," 75.

⁴⁹ The Oxford Movement was primarily concerned with reinstating some older traditions of worship into the Anglican Church service, and was based on a scholarly reading of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* and the *Book of Common Prayer* (texts which had formally established the Protestant Revolution of the sixteenth century that saw England break away from the Roman Catholic Church to form the Church of England under Henry VIII). A series of pamphlets published from 1833 to 1841 called *Tracts for the Times* argued that the Church of England was not intended to have done away with aspects of worship like administering the Holy Communion, and argued for a reinstatement of some of the customs that had come to be associated with Catholicism. The result of this dispute was a fracturing of the Church of England into those who saw it as Reformed, and those who emphasized its Catholic origins (sometimes called Anglo-Catholicism). That crises of faith in England in the nineteenth century frequently led to a conversion to Catholicism shows that the public took the debate seriously as one that was both scholarly and institutional, but also personal and spiritual. Because Anglicanism had come to define itself as politically opposed to

In June 1850 Charles Dickens wrote a mocking review of the Royal Academy exhibit that centered on a critique of the PRB.⁵⁰ Dickens chides the painters for the false premise of their revisionist movement by facetiously congratulating them for boldly putting right the “low revolution in Art” by Raphael and his contemporaries – they, he notes, who were emboldened with a preposterous idea of Beauty—with a ridiculous power of etherealising, and exalting to the Very Heaven of Heavens, what was most sublime and lovely in the expression of the human face divine on Earth—with the truly contemptible conceit of finding in poor humanity the fallen likeness of the angels of GOD, as raising it up again to their pure spiritual condition. This very fantastic whim effected a low revolution in Art, in this wise, that Beauty came to be regarded as one of its indispensable elements.⁵¹

Although satirical and therefore perhaps not as earnestly repulsed as it seems, Dickens makes a scathing condemnation, implicitly moral, of the PRB that was not unprecedented among critics. To view their work, he goes on, one must “discharge from your minds all Post-Raphael ideas, all religious aspirations, all elevating thoughts; all tender, awful, sorrowful, ennobling, sacred, graceful, or beautiful associations” and turn to a subject that is “for the lowest depths of what is mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting.”⁵² In the same year *The Times* and *Punch* were similarly mocking, and the *Athenaeum* was also critical of Rossetti’s painting in particular. Williams notes

the decadence of Catholicism, the Oxford Movement’s influence on nineteenth-century aesthetics cannot be over-emphasized, although it is not within the purview of my project.

⁵⁰ Charles Dickens, “Old Lamps for New Ones,” *Household Words* 12 (15 Jun. 1850). It was only in March that the first issue of *Household Words* appeared, in which all contributions were anonymous but which, as a whole, was noted as “Conducted by Charles Dickens,” who co-owned the weekly journal of news, literature, and satire.

⁵¹ Dickens, “Old Lamps,” 265.

⁵² Dickens, “Old Lamps,” 265.

that *The Times* accuses Hunt and Collins of “intolerable pedantry” and a “grotesque style,” and she points out that in mocking both the paintings and the critical reaction, *Punch* “gleefully fixed upon the disease metaphor,” calling one of the paintings “purely pathological,” seeming to depict people in various stages of illness.⁵³

As a result of the increasing criticism of the 1850 exhibition, Collinson left the brotherhood and Millais and Hunt offered less controversial pictures in 1851. Yet *The Times* took its harshest aim at the brotherhood’s showing at the 1851 Royal Academy exhibit, galvanizing three years of controversy and calling to mind some of the language of the later “Fleshly School” controversy and of the Decadents generally:

We cannot censure at present, as amply or as strongly as we desire to do, that strange disorder of the mind or the eyes which continues to rage with unabated absurdity among a class of juvenile artists who style themselves “P.R.B.,” which being interpreted means *Præ-Raphæl-brethren*. Their faith seems to consist in an absolute contempt for perspective and the known laws of light and shade, an aversion to beauty in every shape, and a singular devotion to the minute accidents of their subjects, including, or rather seeking out, every excess of sharpness and deformity. Mr. Millais, Mr. Hunt, Mr. Collins, and in some degree Mr. Brown, the author of a huge picture of Chaucer (No. 380), have undertaken to reform the arts on these principles. The Council of the Academy, acting in the spirit of toleration and indulgence to young artists, have now allowed these extravagances to disgrace their walls for the last three years...⁵⁴

⁵³ Williams, “Painting for Reputation,” 78-79.

⁵⁴ “Exhibition of the Royal Academy, First Notice,” *The Times* 20 (3 May 1851): 8.

A second article in *The Times* from the same month continues the critique, referring to the works of Collins, Millais, and Hunt as “affected,” “[addicted] to an antiquated style,” “a mere servile imitation,” a style of “mannerism and conceit,” arguing finally that their “morbid infatuation which sacrifices truth, beauty, and genuine feeling to mere eccentricity, deserves no quarter at the hands of the public,” and that even “patronage...lavished on oddity” should not bother with “these monkish follies” and “aberrations of intellect.”⁵⁵ It is *through* the work and criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite artists that some of the earliest articulations in England of anxieties of moral influence begin to confront the notion of a “pure art” that has only the aesthetic ends of a passionate, sensitive artist-genius to answer to. What eventually becomes known as “art for art’s sake” and the “worship of beauty” against the demands of philistine middle-class values seems to come about organically with Rossetti, Hunt, and Millais. The fact that critics connect their dislike of the PRB aesthetic with psychological disease, moral corruption, and odd or eccentric personalities sets a precedent for identical confrontations between the decadent pose of avant-garde bohemianism and anxieties of immoral influences in the art and culture of that milieu.

Concerned for the reputation and financial exigencies of the brotherhood amidst this growing criticism, Millais approached his friend, the poet-critic Coventry Patmore (1824-1896) to come to the defense of the young painters. Through Patmore, Millais and Ruskin became friends, and during 1851, the same year that *The Times* printed the critical reviews, it also printed two letters of response from Ruskin in defense of the Pre-Raphaelites.⁵⁶ He signed it “The Author of ‘Modern Painters,’” notable because that book brought him into prominence as an art critic through his impassioned defense of Turner against a similar newspaper review that

⁵⁵ “Exhibition of the Royal Academy, Second Notice” *The Times* 20 (7 May 1851): 8.

⁵⁶ The first letter appeared in the May 13, 1851 issue, and the second in the May 30, 1851 issue.

critiqued the worth of J.M.W. Turner's landscape paintings (a review, incidentally, that was also based on a Royal Academy exhibition).⁵⁷ In his first response regarding the PRB paintings, Ruskin justifies his authority by acknowledging several deficiencies in the subject or execution of some of the reviewed paintings, and further denounces their "Romanist and Tractarian tendencies."⁵⁸ Just as he created his own aesthetic theories through a thorough defense of Turner, Ruskin put the Pre-Raphaelite's theory of art in his own terms, especially those of the *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3). In his earlier work on architecture, Ruskin reads the progression of architectural style through a progressive view of history wherein nations rise into prominence through moral virtuousness and then decline into decadence through excessive culture. Thus, he defends the PRB as harkening back to an earlier, more pure culture of art and faith as a way of implying that the modern age was threatening decline:

⁵⁷ [Rev. John Eagles] "The Exhibitions. British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, Etc.—1836." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 40, no. 252 (October, 1836). The review mentions three of Turner's paintings, i.e. *Juliet and Her Nurse*, *Rome from Mount Aventine*, and *Mercury and Argus*. Eagles lists numerous painters in his critical review, of which Turner is only one, but he is particularly critical of Turner's influence as a representative of Modern Painters, especially in comparison to the Old Masters, even lamenting that Turner was previously worth considering: "Turner has been great, and now when in his vagaries he chooses to be great no longer.... It is grievous to see genius, that it might outstrip all others, fly off into mere eccentricities, where it ought to stand alone, because none to follow it" (Eagles, "The Exhibitions," 551). Eagles has disdain for the whole show, arguing that this showing represents a "false English School of Art," vowing to "wage perpetual warfare with extravagant absurdities, though they be sanctioned by the whim of genius, academical authority, or the present encouragement of foolish admirers" (Eagles, "The Exhibitions," 543).

⁵⁸ [John Ruskin], "The Pre-Raffaellites," *The Times* 20 (13 May 1851): 8.

They intend to return to early days in this one point only—that, as far as in them lies, they will draw either what they see, or what they suppose might have been the actual facts of the scene they desire to represent, irrespective of any conventional rules of picture making; and they have chosen their unfortunate though not inaccurate name because all artists did this before Raphael's time, and after Raphael's time did not this, but sought to paint fair pictures rather than represent stern facts, of which the consequence has been that from Raphael's time to this day historical art has been in acknowledged decadence. Although this was not the PRB narrative as the artists themselves present it, Ruskin reads them as correcting the decadence of modern historical art, and thereby attempts to cut off accusations of moral ambiguity and sensuality.

By August, Ruskin had expanded the two letters into a pamphlet called *Pre-Raphaelitism*, published by John Wiley. In doing so he set up one of the most productive decades of his work on aesthetic theory, and made use of the controversy around the PRB to gain prominence, while lending his authority to aid the young painters. In the preface to the pamphlet, he inserts himself in no uncertain terms – and not without merit – when he quotes the advice in his own *Modern Painters* and then by declaring that his advice has “at last been carried out, to the very letter, by a group of men who, for their reward, have been assailed with the most scurrilous abuse.”⁵⁹

II. *The Germ* and Aesthetic Book Design

The mixture of literature and visual image is part of the Pre-Raphaelite innovation in art, and was central to the young men's artistic project. In late 1850 Hunt and Rossetti gathered supporters around them in order to produce a monthly magazine, for, as William Michael

⁵⁹ John Ruskin, *Pre-Raphaelitism* (London: John Wiley, 1851), 5. Quoted from his “Preface,” signed “August, 1851.”

Rossetti says, “the promulgation of Pre-Raphaelite principles in painting and poetry.” “The first number, extending to forty-eight large octavo pages, illustrated with etchings, appeared in January, 1850, and was published by Aylott and Jones. The title, suggested by a friend at the inaugural meeting, was *The Germ*. Each issue was to have one illustrative etching “executed with the utmost care and completeness.”⁶⁰ A review in the *Critic* asserts that “the essays on Art are conceived with an equal appreciation of its meaning & requirements” and the Standard of Freedom described it as original: “We know, however, of no periodical of the time which is so genuinely poetical and artistic in its tone.” These and others were printed in the first issue of the *Germ*, demonstrating the Rossetti’s savvy with self-promotion.

The journal establishes a number of important connections between philosophies of representation and critiques of emergent methods in contemporary art and poetry. It does so, according to the introductory manifesto, in order to add authenticity to common discussion about art from the point of view of artist. Of writing regarding “the principles of Art” little is contributed by “Artists themselves.” The unsigned manifesto asserts a definitive statement on art, inspired by the work of John Ruskin: “With a view to obtain the thoughts of Artists, upon Nature as evolved in Art, in another language besides their *own proper* one, this Periodical has been established.” Yet the paper is open to more than just artists, as long as contributions help to “enunciate the principles of those who, in the true spirit of Art, enforce a rigid adherence to the simplicity of Nature either in Art or Poetry.” Ideologically, the periodical establishes that art is more than technique; it is a philosophy. Further, drawing from the democratic ideals of the enlightenment, the newspaper is self-produced, suggesting that through printing and production a

⁶⁰ A review from *John Bull*, partially printed in the first issue, claims: “A well executed Etching in the medieval style accompanies each number.” “Review of *The Germ*,” *John Bull* 30, no. 1522 (11 Feb. 1850): 91.

group that is otherwise silent or absent from the domain of public discourse can create a textual community within the safe confines of a monthly production. Finally, each of the four issues of *The Germ* enacts the principle of mixing visual art, poetry and fiction, and art theory within a single object, suggesting that *one language*, or, in other words, one formal discourse is insufficient for the type of project that the PRB was interested in. If the primary language of visual artist—their *own proper* one—is in images, then this periodical allows them to speak authoritatively in a critical or literary discourse also.

The magazine also elucidates the principle of Pre-Raphaelitism that is influential for decades, even as the group became dispersed and disunified. The primary claim is that High Art is only judged for its coherence to the rules of classical works, whereas the writer claims that High Art ought to be judged in comparison to how much it “copies nature”: fine art delights us from its being the semblance of what in nature delights . . . if he copies nature, with a like inability to distinguish that delectable attribute which allures him to copy here...we then have the artist, the instructed of nature, fulfilling his natural capacity, while his works we have as manifold yet various as nature’s own thoughts for her children.”⁶¹ In a revival of Romantic-era aesthetic philosophy, the writer suggests that the truth of “low subjects” to the real feelings of the artist is more important than the artificiality of a properly executed technique that “merely copies.”⁶² What is the subject proper to art? the essay asks, but answers that the subject of art includes “every thing or incident in nature which excites, or may be made to excite, the mind and the heart of man as a mentally intelligent, not as a brute animal, is a subject for Fine Art, at all

⁶¹ “The Subject in Art (No. 1), *The Germ: Thoughts Toward Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art* No. 1 (January, 1850): 14.

⁶² “The Subject in Art (No. 1),” 14.

times, in all places, and in all ages.”⁶³ The notion of what affects or influences such works of art might have on viewers is spoken in the language of phenomenology, whereby the art objects evokes a subjective response: “emotions, passions, actions (moral or intellectual) according in sort and degree to the heart or mind-moving influence of the objects represented.”⁶⁴ Though speaking in terms of a Ruskinian “truth to nature,” the essays in the first issue of *The Germ* argue for the exceptionality of Art and especially the Artist. In that they are breaking from traditional modes of artistic representation, including by the subject of the work and the techniques of rendering it, the artists express a certain anxiety over how their work might be received. They make the claim for High Art, even when techniques and subjects would be seen from Classicism as improper.

What is most significant, however, about *The Germ* is that it is the first publication that Rossetti published his poetry, some of which would be included in *Poems*.

III. F.S. Ellis – The Pre-Raphaelite Publisher

By the end of the 1860s Frederick Startridge Ellis began to shift from his primary business as a book seller and manuscript consultant towards publishing for a growing group of young artist-writers with whom he had become acquainted. Ellis met William Morris through his book selling firm, but became close friends beyond business acquaintances. Morris’s own collection of rare manuscripts and antique books was exemplary, and Ellis advised his purchases while most likely competing with him for purchases. Morris’s first works of aesthetic poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858) and *The Life and Death of Jason: A Poem* (1867)

⁶³ “The Subject in Art (No. 1),” 14.

⁶⁴ “The Subject in Art, (No. 2),” *Art and Poetry: Being Thoughts Toward Nature* No. 3 (March, 1850): 118. Note that the periodical revised its name starting with the third issue.

were published by Bell and Daldy.⁶⁵ But beginning with *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) Ellis began to publish some of Morris's literary writings as well as his translations and lectures, and this established a long working relationship between the two. In 1869 Ellis published Morris's first work of translation, *Grettis Saga: The Story of Grettir the Strong*, which he translated from Icelandic with Eiríkr Magnússon. By the end of 1869 Ellis had partnered with White and produced a new edition of Morris' *The Life and Death of Jason*. The following year Ellis & White published another translation of Morris's with Magnússon called *Völsunga Saga: The Story of the Volsungs & Niblungs with Certain Songs from the Elder Edda*, and in 1873 Ellis & White published Morris's *Love is Enough or The Freeing of Pharmond, A Morality*. In 1875 Ellis & White published Morris and Magnússon's *Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales* as well as Morris's own translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In 1877 Ellis & White published Morris's *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*. In 1878 Ellis & White published a small book which reprinted Morris's lecture delivered to the Trades' Guild of Learning titled *The Decorative Arts: Their Relation to Modern Life and Progress*, which was expanded to include several lectures in an edition put out by Ellis & White in 1882 titled *Hopes and Fears for Art: Five Lectures delivered in Birmingham, London, and Nottingham, 1878-1881*. It is notable that during this prolific time for Morris, Ellis was not his exclusive publisher by any stretch: Morris continued to publish with Reeves and Turner, and even with Ellis's business rival Bernard Quaritch, Macmillan, Bell and Daldy, and several others.

⁶⁵ My source for Morris's bibliographic details of this section is Temple Scott, *A Bibliography of the Works of William Morris* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897). Scott lists F.S. Ellis in his "Preface" as having helped compile the bibliography (and lists other notable bibliophiles including H. Buxton Forman, Frederick H. Evans, Aymer Vallance, and Gleeson White).

Ellis published one of Algernon Charles Swinburne's most significant works, *Songs before Sunrise*, in 1871, which followed up on the highly controversial yet critically acclaimed *Poems and Ballads* of 1866. The later is one of the most significant works of poetry from the Victorian era, and in particular is representative of the decadent movement in literature. *Songs before Sunrise* had a more specific thematic concern, which is indicated by its dedication to the Italian political reformer Giuseppe Mazzini. Its topics were of contemporary radical politics and ideals of democracy and liberty. The year prior, in 1870, Ellis had published a small book by Swinburne on a similar subject, titled *Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic, September 4th, 1870*.

Ellis attempted to take over publishing Christina Rossetti's literature for children when Macmillan offered her a less-than-favorable contract for her follow-up to *Goblin Market* and *Prince's Progress*, titled *Sing-Song*. Because the first two books were produced as aesthetic books with illustrations and bindings contributed by her brother, Macmillan was disappointed with finding them to be unprofitable, and, according to Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, he would require more control over the publication of *Sing-Song* while paying Christina Rossetti a small percentage of sales and then only after costs were recouped.⁶⁶ At her brother's urging, Ellis offered to publish the book with much more profitable terms. Dante Gabriel Rossetti was encouraging all of the Pre-Raphaelite writers to "concentrate their forces" under one publisher, Kooistra notes, for their mutual benefit, and Ellis published Christina Rossetti's collection of short stories *Commonplace* in 1870. Because *Sing-Song* was intended to be a heavily illustrated children's book, Ellis eventually became concerned that the cost of putting out the book would

⁶⁶ Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 93.

make it ultimately unprofitable, and after delaying production for a year or more he eventually reneged on publishing it.⁶⁷ Earlier on, around 1869, Christina Rossetti described Ellis' growing engagement with her circle in a frequently quoted limerick:

There's a publishing party named Ellis
Who's addicted to poets with bellies:
He has at least two –
One in fact, one in view –
And God knows what will happen to Ellis.⁶⁸

The poet that Ellis had at this time “in fact” was William Morris, and the one “in view” was Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was on the verge of committing to publishing with him but hesitated because, according to a letter he wrote to Swinburne, Morris was “so fearfully prolific that one would feel like the mouse looking upon the mountain...” He was swayed by the fact that Swinburne and Ruskin were considering publishing with Ellis. By 1870, Rossetti was encouraging Swinburne to follow him to Ellis, clearly with the implication that it would benefit them as a group: “I hope you are going to give your new book to Ellis, who I think is really a straightforward fellow and deserves to publish for us all. It would be most pleasant to concentrate our forces. My sister is now going to him with a first edition of her old things (including additions) and also with a book of 101 Nursery Rhymes (illustrated by herself!) which she has lately produced.”⁶⁹ Although the latter project did not work out with Ellis, it was in this

⁶⁷ Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti*, 94-97.

⁶⁸ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to His Publisher, F.S. Ellis*, ed. Oswald Doughty (London: The Scholartis Press, 1928), xxxi.

⁶⁹ Rossetti, *The Letters*, xxxi-xxxii.

context that Ellis worked with Dante Gabriel to bring out *Poems*, and it was also at this time that Solomon was putting together his book under Ellis' name.

IV. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter-Poet-Bookmaker

By the time that Rossetti's *Poems* appeared in 1870, he had been circulating his poetry for over twenty years. His three simultaneous projects—painting, poetry, and archival translations of Renaissance Italian poetry—all began when he was a teenager, and all were in progress throughout the decades that led up to the publication of *Poems*. While the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood marked a movement in painting and in aesthetic philosophy that brought Rossetti and his peers to the notice of the public in the 1850s, he published little and exhibited his artworks rarely. By the end of the 1860s he was well known to an elite group of writers and academics as a poet-painter whose literary innovations came in part from his work as a literary historian and translator. For these reasons, *Poems* was something of a collected volume and a survey of Rossetti's literary career, and as a large and varied text it contains works that span his entire adult life and address a range of themes, interests, and philosophical perspectives, all of which influenced the Decadent writers who read him avidly.

Rossetti struggled to compile a complete collection, and was anxiously working on additional material up until the very month of its publication. He hoped to expand the book to 300 pages, and he accomplished over 280 pages of material (blank end pages would bring the number of leaves to 300). It is arranged in three sections: "Poems," "Sonnets and Songs, towards a work to be called 'The House of Life,'" and "Sonnets for Pictures, and other sonnets." The first section contains twenty-six poems, three of which are translations of François Villon, a polemical French poet of the mid-fifteenth century. The bawdy and sensual topics of Villon added controversy to Rossetti's volume, but nonetheless connect *Poems* to his earlier

publications of Medieval Italian poetry, emphasizing his poetry as a purposeful translation, as it were, of archival continental forms in a way that links his literary works to the artistic intervention of the Pre-Raphaelite school. The rest of the poems of this section conform to various genres, and many are lengthy narrative ballads such as “The Staff and Scrip,” “Dante at Verona,” “Jenny,” “Sister Helen,” and “The Stream’s Secret.” In the second section, Rossetti all but “previews” a future work via a sonnet sequence of fifty sonnets that recast the story of Dante and Beatrice in Rossetti’s own autobiographical and philosophical terms.⁷⁰ The eleven short poems that follow the sonnet sequence are titled individually, but each in sequence is numbered “Song I.” through “Song XI.,” linking them in a way that would also be expanded into a complete form in a later incarnation. That later incarnation, called *Ballads and Sonnets* (Ellis and White, 1881), is composed of the complete “House of Life” sequence along with a section of “Ballads,” one of “Lyrics,” and one of “Sonnets.”⁷¹

In 1883, a year following Rossetti’s death, Walter Pater wrote an essay on Rossetti, which, as McGann notes, focuses primarily on the significant influence of *Poems*.⁷² In its opening paragraph, Pater describes Rossetti as “the leader of a new school,” despite his death, and bases this statement on Rossetti’s most significant and most popular work, “The Blessed Damozel.” Noting that this poem was first written when Rossetti was eighteen, Pater captures the

⁷⁰ The completed “House of Life” sonnet sequence would appear a decade later as part of *Ballads and Sonnets* (F.S. Ellis, 1881).

⁷¹ In this sense, the “Sonnets and Songs” section of *Poem* fulfilled its promise of being provisional, i.e. “towards a work to be called ‘The House of Life,’” as the book titles that section. The fifty “House of Life” sonnets are expanded to 102 sonnets in 1881’s *Ballads and Sonnets*, which also contains eight “Ballads,” thirteen “Lyrics, &c.,” and twenty-five additional “Sonnets.”

⁷² It is dated 1883 when it first appears in print, which is in Walter Pater’s *Appreciations* (1889).

influence of *Poems* as it portrays Rossetti himself as a unique figure who represents the Romantic notion of the artist as an unusual, sensitive, insightful figure who necessarily disrupts the status quo. To recognize Rossetti's work as innovative and valuable is, according to Pater, to identify as part of a "special and limited audience":

It was characteristic of a poet who had ever something about him of mystic isolation, and will still appeal, perhaps, though with a name it may seem now established in English literature, to a special and limited audience, that some of his poems had won a kind of exquisite fame before they were in the full sense published. *The Blessed Damozel*, although actually printed twice before the year 1870, was eagerly circulated in manuscript; and the volume which it now opens came at last to satisfy a long-standing curiosity as to the poet, whose pictures also had become an object of the same peculiar kind of interest. For those poems were the work of a painter, understood to belong to, and to be indeed the leader, of a new school then rising into note; and the reader of to-day may observe already, in *The Blessed Damozel*, written at the age of eighteen, a prefiguration of the chief characteristics of that school, as he will recognise in it also, in proportion as he really knows Rossetti, many of the characteristics which are most markedly personal and his own.⁷³

Pater praises what he sees as Rossetti's "transparency" and genuineness of style, ironically due to Rossetti replicating a similar naïve "truth" in the "early Italian poets," but by implication in agreement with the Pre-Raphaelite philosophy of the "truth" of the artist to express what he thinks and feels. In his earlier essay titled "Aesthetic Poetry," which was first published as a review, "The Poems of William Morris," and was later adapted in the controversial "Conclusion"

⁷³ Walter Pater, *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), 228-29.

to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater ends by assigning Rossetti the designation of “aesthetic poet” and describing poetic Aestheticism in a way that is recognizably decadent:

One characteristic of the pagan spirit the aesthetic poetry has, which is on its surface—the continual suggestion, pensive or passionate, of the shortness of life. This is contrasted with the bloom of the world, and gives new seduction to it—the sense of death and the desire of beauty: the desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death. But that complexion of sentiment is at its height in another “aesthetic” poet of whom I have to speak next, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.⁷⁴

For Pater, Rossetti exemplified the duality of sensuality/desire and death, a duality that became a primary topic of decadent poetry. And for Pater, “The Blessed Damozel” is a key example of this theme in the work of Rossetti.

“The Blessed Damozel” remains one of Rossetti’s most enduring works of poetry. Composed of twenty-four six-line stanzas, it was written in response to Edgar Allan Poe’s “Lenore” (1843), and sought to portray the story of the death of a lover not, as Poe did, from the perspective of the surviving male but from the perspective of the dead female as she looks down from heaven. It is a work of aesthetic poetry, representing the school of Aestheticism that the later British decadent artists would both draw from and respond to. As an early example of

⁷⁴ Pater, *Appreciations*, 227. In *Appreciations*, this essay is called “Aesthetic Poetry,” but is a revised version of an unsigned review of William Morris that was first published in the *Westminster Review* in 1868. Note that this ending paragraph from *Appreciations* is different in the other two published versions (that is, the *Westminster* review of Morris and the “Conclusion” from *Studies*), namely in that only this version specifically mentions Rossetti, presumably by way of a transition to the Rossetti article that follows. It is notable that this single piece of writing appears in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, in different contexts and with different titles: it was clearly a crucial text for Pater’s aesthetic philosophy, as I discuss in my “Introduction,” above.

British Aestheticism (considering that it was first composed in the 1840s), it shows both a strong influence of Poe, Tennyson, and the Brownings, but also represents Rossetti's own unique contribution to the movement, especially in that it takes the spiritual quality of love as a given, and extends the autobiographical sequence of love into the realm of philosophical theory and aesthetic practice. It is especially in the sensual quality of aesthetic details that the poem shows the influence of the "art for art's sake" mantra. For example, the poem opens with a mystical symbolism about the protagonist: "the blessed damozel" (an archaic version of damsel) is leaning on "the gold bar of heaven" holding three lilies in one hand and with seven stars in her hair.⁷⁵ There is no further narrative significance to these numerological symbols within the poem. The poem tells the story of the damozel looking down on the galaxy (she is so high up that she can barely see the sun), and while she watches time as it "shake[s] through all the worlds," she longs for her lover to join her in heaven.⁷⁶

Like his paintings, Rossetti's poem embeds a sensual depiction of idealized feminine beauty within a character-driven narrative that at the same time borders on allegory. It describes details of her robe and hair in a way that implicitly eroticizes her body:

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,

⁷⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Blessed Damozel [Text B, 1870]," *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Collected Writings*, ed. Jan Marsh (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), 12. Marsh includes both the 1850 version, which was published in the first number of the *Germ*, and the 1870 version from *Poems*. As I am concerned here with the poem in the context of the book, I will quote from the 1870 version (what Marsh calls "Text B"), and will not in this case be concerned with the textual differences between the two.

⁷⁶ Rossetti, "The Blessed Damozel," ed. Marsh, 13.

But a white rose of Mary's gift
For service meetly worn;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.⁷⁷

Her robe hangs loosely or possibly even open down the front, from “clasp to hem,” or in other words from neck to ankle, and the sensual description of her hair being the color of “ripe corn” invokes the image of the swollen fruit of that phallic summertime plant. The gold bar that she leans on is the bridge across the ether between heaven and “the void,” and from there she is described as watching souls floating “up to God” “like thin flames.”⁷⁸ One of the best-known lines of this poem is in the description of her leaning and watching these souls float to heaven:

Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.⁷⁹

Amid the sadness of her longing, the poem invokes the warmth of her breasts as having warmed the gold metal bar that she is pressed against, and the warmth of her arm has slightly wilted the lilies, which are softened and lying against her skin. Although she is a spirit in heaven, she is nonetheless distinctly embodied and warm-blooded, which has the effect of merging the sensual and bodily with the spiritual and mystical in a way that would have been shocking to a primarily Protestant Victorian English society. Regarding “The Blessed Damozel,” Pater describes the

⁷⁷ Rossetti, “The Blessed Damozel,” ed. Marsh, 12.

⁷⁸ Rossetti, “The Blessed Damozel,” ed. Marsh, 12-13.

⁷⁹ Rossetti, “The Blessed Damozel,” ed. Marsh, 13.

unexpectedness of “sensible imagery” in a “theme so profoundly visionary”: “The gold bar of heaven from which she leaned, her hair yellow like ripe corn, are but examples of a general treatment, as naively detailed as the pictures of those early painters contemporary with Dante, who has shown a similar care for minute and definite imagery in his verse.”⁸⁰

Almost as influential as the poetry are Rossetti’s innovations in book design. Rossetti was involved with the design and layout of the text, preferring to work from a series of printed proofs that involved, given his many revisions, costly typesetting and small print runs.⁸¹ Rossetti designed the binding, endpapers, and title page, and was involved with all decisions regarding the layout of the text and the materials used. By the time he had designed the binding, Rossetti had already established a style of bookbinding that countered what he found to be ugly and unpleasant in commercial publishing: he had designed the binding of two of his own books, as well as two of his sister’s, one of his brother’s, and one of A.C. Swinburne’s. The images for these first designs show his style, which uses a gold-stamp on either a dark cloth (green, black, or blue) or on white, and a design that tends to divide the plane of the front cover, back cover, and spine into rectangles, accentuated by simple circular designs. According to Treuherz, Rossetti was particular in the aesthetic details of the bibliographic “frame” of these literary works: “He took a great deal of trouble to choose the colour and feel of the cloths and to position the gold lines and motifs of his designs subtly, to emphasize the relationship between the fronts, backs and spines of his books. His designs were spare, simple, and elegant, far more advanced in these

⁸⁰ Pater, *Appreciations*, 230.

⁸¹ Rossetti arranged to “pay rent” to his printer, Strangeways & Walden, for the ongoing revisions to the typeset pages. See McGann, “Scholarly Commentary,” <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1870.raw.html>.

respects than contemporary Victorian bindings.”⁸² For the binding to *Poems*, Rossetti used a circular mesh pattern in the rectangular panels on which are illustrations of flowers, some of which overlap with the negative space thereby creating a dimensional effect. Since they are blocked in gold on dull-green cloth boards, there is a high-contrast metallic look that enhances this effect. A similar pattern is used on the interior blue-green endpapers printed with indigo ink, for which Rossetti used a stock of paper that his father had brought from Italy, increasing the personalization and collectability of each copy. A smaller number of a *de luxe* edition featured a larger octavo format and a differently colored paper binding.

Much as been said on Rossetti’s influence as a painter-poet, that is, his pursuit of symbolic representation in both the plastic arts of drawing and painting as well as in literature. Specifically in reference to the “double work of art,” Rossetti often treated one narrative – usually with the same title – in a visual form as well as a literary form. Aesthetic philosophy was interested in exploring the various moods, modes, and sensations that aesthetic experiences could invoke, and did so often by using the language of one art form to talk about another (for example terms usually applied to music were applied to painting; terms of painted color were applied to poetic language). The result in the arts was the effort to reproduce the effects of one art form in another in order to explore new possibilities in representation: symbolism in painting derived from literature and symbolism in literature derived from painting; impressionism in painting inspired impressionistic writing, both of which sought to create the immediate sensation of a moment without concern for narrative or metaphor. In *Poems*, Rossetti literalizes the mixture of techniques of the artist with the linguistic medium of the writer by treating the book as a total art object. As McGann says of *Poems*, “Its impact was enormous, not only for its innovative style—

⁸² Julian Treuherz, et al., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 220.

which is what Pater devotedly explicated—but for its revelation of the possibilities of expressive book design.”⁸³ In “Rossetti’s Iconic Page,” McGann refers to the book as a development of Rossetti’s theory of the book: “the continued stress Rossetti places on the idea of the total book and (correlatively) on the relation between iconic and verbal expression. ...By 1870...he has evolved ways to enrich the decorative design without sacrificing simplicity of form.”⁸⁴ Rossetti is important not only as a painter and poet, but also in treating the book of literature as also an artistic production. For McGann, this is something like the start of the later turn towards fine arts printing in aesthetic literature:

An important issue comes into view here: the extent to which the decorative features of a text can be made to function in the conceptual ways. The entire program of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and of the Renaissance in Printing particularly, is grounded in the conviction that ornamental and nonlinguistic forms, including the decorative forms of book design and typography, might embody ideas and conceptual content.⁸⁵

The very philosophy of Aestheticism implied the play between the mental faculties and the material world. Taken at face value, this would come to implicate the relationship between literature and its material, printed form at the level of the total artistic effect that was produced.

⁸³ Jerome McGann, “Poems (1870) Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Scholarly Commentary,” *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive*, Accessed Sept 6, 2014, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1870.raw.html>.

⁸⁴ Jerome McGann, “Rossetti’s Iconic Page,” *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture*, ed. George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2001), 126.

⁸⁵ McGann, “Rossetti’s Iconic Page,” 127.

Inspired by Blake, Rossetti was the first English poet to put an aesthetic philosophy to bear on the book design of his own literary work.

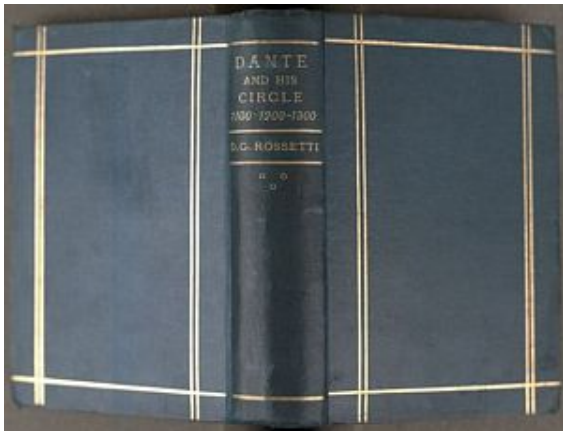


Figure 2. Binding for *Dante and his Circle 1100-1200-1300* (1860)

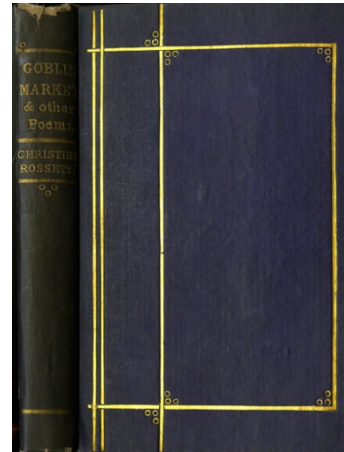


Figure 3. Binding for *Goblin Market and Other Poems* by Christina Rossetti (1862)

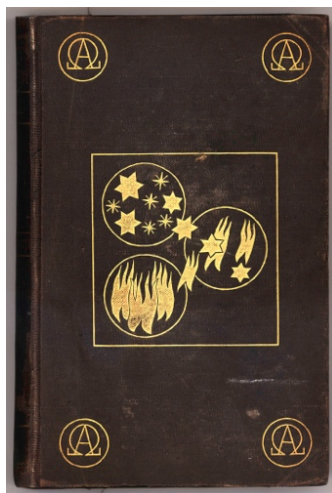


Figure 4. Binding for *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri part I - the Hell* by William Michael Rossetti (1865)

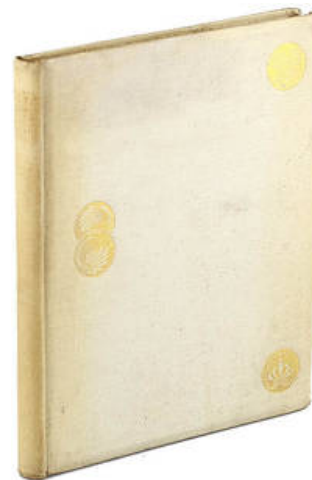


Figure 5. Binding for *Atalanta in Calydon* by A. C. Swinburne (1865)

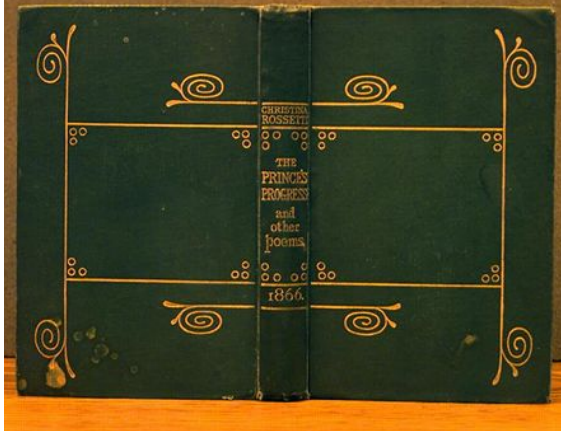


Figure 6. Binding for *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* by Christina Rossetti (1866)



Figure 7. Binding for *Poems* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1870)

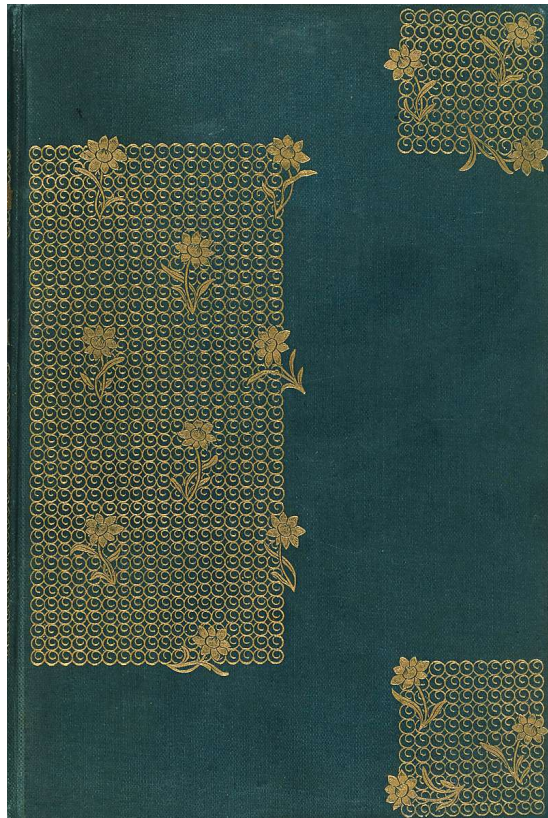


Figure 8: Detail of front cover design for *Poems* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1870)

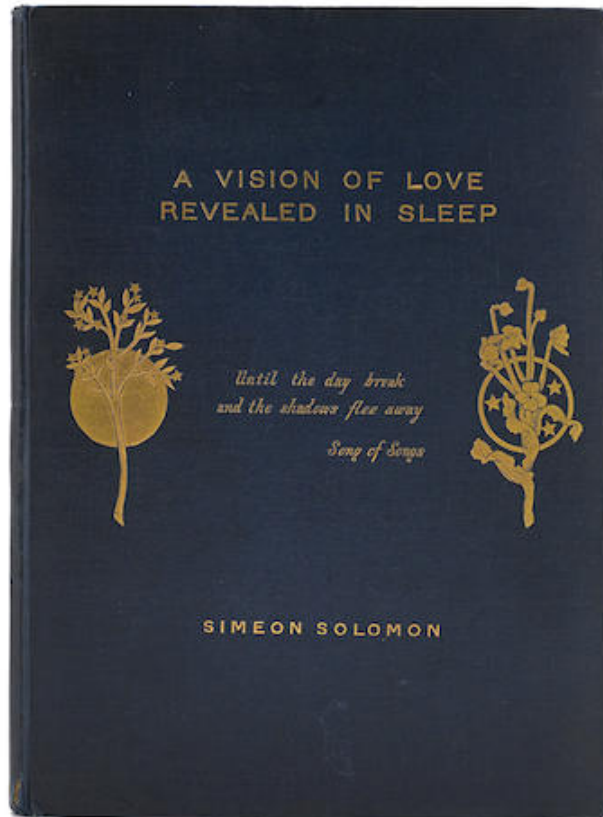


Figure 9. Cover of *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* by Simeon Solomon (1871)

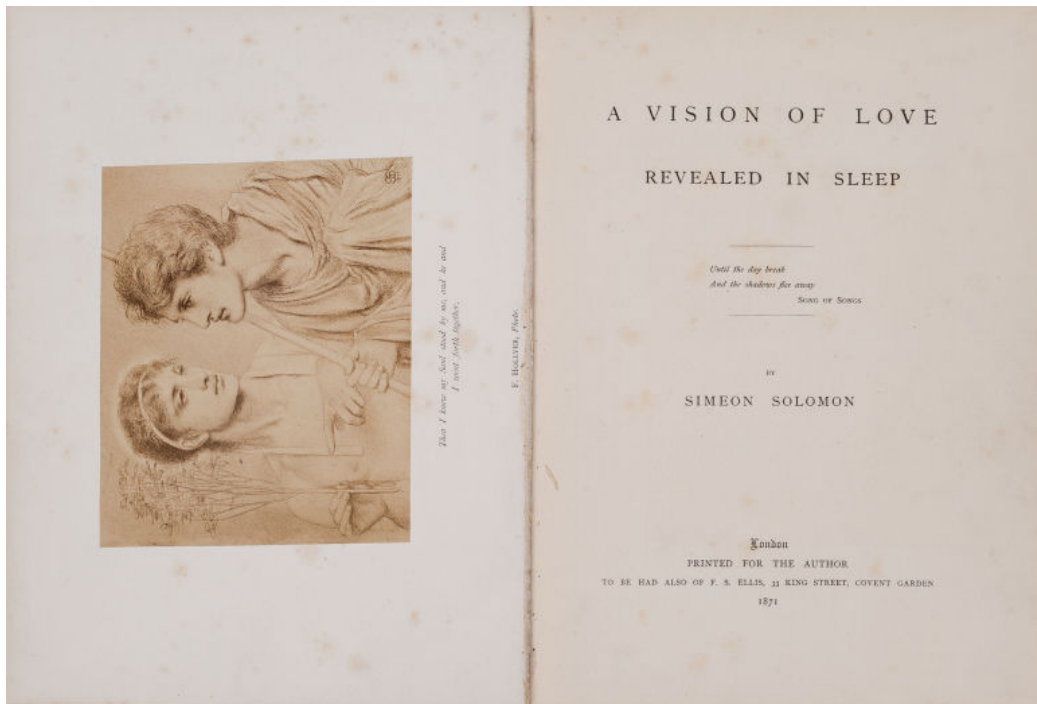


Figure 10. Frontispiece and title page for *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* by Simeon Solomon (1871)

V. Simeon Solomon's Aesthetic Book of Queer *Love Revealed*

Simeon Solomon's biographical record is filled with mentions of an early hope and promise, a rising prominence as an artist, and omissions and deletions in response to his so-called tragic downfall. He was twelve years younger than Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and was associated with the second-generation of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement along with Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris, as a young student who both admired and was immensely influenced by Rossetti, Millais, and Hunt, but who also extended the style that the brotherhood represented. He was thought of as a prodigy and a genius in artistic ability, and those men were immediately impressed with Solomon when they first encountered his work, although Solomon was not yet eighteen years old. His downfall, which involved arrest and imprisonment for engaging in public sex acts in 1873 and 1874, is meaningful to my project in part because those biographical omissions and deletions happened throughout the community of artists and critics, who earlier encouraged and supported his work, in response to Solomon's increasing openness about his same-sex desires, including his representation of same-sex love in his artwork and, finally, his arrest in London in 1873 for having sex in a public restroom that was known as a cruising spot.⁸⁶ This biographical detail is closely related to Solomon's single published literary work, *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (F.S. Ellis, 1871). In that book, I argue below, Solomon explores same-sex love as part of an aesthetic philosophy and as a religious/spiritual metaphor, and in this way, as I demonstrate here, he is responding to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's

⁸⁶ I will employ the term cruising in its modern context, which implies a pro-gay identification with anonymous public sex culture. In this context, cruising refers to sexual encounters in public locations such as parks or restrooms, which have often worked as meeting-spots because they are known informally among a subculture of men who seek out sex with other men.

bio-mythological aesthetic. It is therefore meaningful that Solomon's book is published a year after Rossetti's through Rossetti's friend and publisher Ellis, since the book is philosophically, thematically, and aesthetically linked to Rossetti's *Poems*. While far less known than Rossetti's volume, *A Vision* is a key example of the aesthetic book of Decadent literature, both because of the fact that its literary content is an example of the literary symbolism that precedes or begins the decadent movement in literature, and because it self-consciously fuses the literary text with an aesthetic art object according to the tenets of Aestheticism.

Solomon was admitted to the Royal Academy in 1855 when he was only fifteen, and made his debut in the annual Royal Academy exhibition in May 1858 with his painting *Issac Offered*. Almost all of Solomon's early paintings and illustrations were based on Jewish, Christian, and Mythological subjects. Gayle M. Seymour argues that there is a connection between his Old Testament paintings and drawings and his own artistic exploration of identity, especially in what she describes as the "post-Emancipation era" for Jewish people in England.⁸⁷ Beginning in 1828 through 1858, British Jews gained increasing legal, commercial, and religious rights and social acceptance. Much of the early praise of Solomon's exhibited work as an artist was in response to his paintings that depicted scenes from the Old Testament or which depicted customs of traditional and contemporary Jewish life, which posed a potential difficulty in an anti-Semitic culture. According to Seymour, "Solomon's open affirmation of his Jewish origins, as expressed in his Old Testament paintings and drawings, may well be one of the most

⁸⁷ Gayle M. Seymour "The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings: The Search for Identity in the Post-Emancipation Era," in *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Colin Cruise (London: Merrell Publishers, 2005), 13.

significant aspects of his early work.”⁸⁸ For Seymour, these works “reflect the concerns and tensions of the wider Jewish community” with regards to assimilating themselves into the dominant Protestant community, but they also have a personal valence related to Solomon’s non-normative sexual identity: “[O]n a more personal level they also illuminate Solomon’s internal struggle to define and, ultimately, legitimize his own homoerotic yearnings.”⁸⁹

Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that one of the reasons that Solomon’s treatment of Jewish themes was widely praised was because they were deemed “appropriate to his religious and racial background,” but that when he turned to Classical themes his friends were “much less sympathetic.”⁹⁰ During the period in which Solomon’s work gained notice, the 1860’s, Victorian experienced a Classical revival that had, Prettejohn notes, two prongs: the idealistic Greek Hellenism and the sensual and violent Roman decadence. While Solomon’s body of work seems to embody Matthew Arnold’s distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism that was central to his critique of culture in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Prettejohn says:

In the Victorian Classical revival as it developed in the 1860s, there emerged a division no less sharp than Arnold’s Hebraism and Hellenism, between the Greek ideal (as in the paintings of Leighton and Watts) and the Roman decadence. *Habet!* And *The Toilette of a Roman Lady* were pioneering examples of the latter category, and led the way for

⁸⁸ Seymour, “Old Testament Paintings and Drawings,” 14.

⁸⁹ Seymour, “Old Testament Paintings and Drawings,” 18. See also Gayle M. Seymour, “Simeon Solomon and the Biblical Construction of Marginal Identity in Victorian England,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 33, nos. 3/4, (1997): 97-119.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Prettejohn, “Solomon’s Classicism,” *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Colin Cruise (London: Merrell Publishers, 2005), 39.

painters such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema, later the most prominent painter of such subjects. Moreover, the two Roman paintings were the largest and most important paintings of Solomon's career, his major statements at the Royal Academy exhibitions.⁹¹ Solomon's visual works as well as his literary work in *A Vision* take on the supposed separation of Hebraism and Classicism, finding in a hybrid of the two a symbolic language to portray a queer social identity. Similarly Cruise sees as connection between his religious and historical images, his artistic philosophy, and his identity:

Ultimately we might see other intentions behind Solomon's subject paintings – the advancement of a religion of beauty and the declaration of his sexuality. The first of these – Aestheticism – might be characterized by several formal qualities of the works: the colour combinations and the references to musical or other non-visual sensations, like the sound of the harp or the smell of incense. But there were popular perceptions of links between Aestheticism as an art practice, Ritualism as a religious practice, and sexual preference.⁹²

In other words, Solomon was advancing Aestheticism in art and literature by specifically engaging with its implied gender and sexually dissident forms of identification.

The book is a slim volume of a mere thirty-seven pages with one illustration as a frontispiece before the title page. It measures 26 x 20 x .8 centimeters with a binding of blue cloth stamped with a gold gilt design by Solomon himself. The cover design is reminiscent of Rossetti's cover designs of the sixties, in being bare, arranged in rectangular rows and columns,

⁹¹ Prettejohn, "Solomon's Classicism," 41-42.

⁹² Colin Cruise, "'Pressing all religions into his service': Solomon's Ritual Paintings and Their Contexts," in *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Cruise (London: Merrell Publishers, 2005), 62.

and with allegorical symbols centered on circles. It features three rows down the center of the page: the top tells the title of the work in all capital letters, and the bottom features the authors name in the same style as the title only in a slightly smaller font. In the middle row, a short italicized quotation from the *Song of Songs* of the Bible reads: “Until the day break and the shadows flee away,” The quotation is sandwiched between the two illustrations. To the left, a branch of myrtle is centered over a solid circle, and to the right a bouquet of poppies is centered over a circle in outline, surrounded by three stars. The design recalls Rossetti’s bindings for William Michael Rossetti’s *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri Part I—the Hell*, which was published by Macmillan and Co. in 1865, which contained three circles in the center of the cover representing each part of *The Divine Comedy*, one containing stars, one flames, and one a comet. Solomon’s design also recalls Rossetti’s design for A. C. Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) published by Edward Moxon and Co., which features four circles on the cover each containing “stylized plant forms based on the patterns of Greek vases” to refer to the “classical spirit of Swinburne’s poem.”⁹³ A similar design for another Rossetti binding for Swinburne’s *Songs before Sunrise* published by F. S. Ellis during the same year that Ellis published *A Vision*, features three circular illustrations on the cover, one which depicts the rising sun, one which depicts the moon, and one which depicts the stars, which were adapted from Rossetti’s previous designs for the wooden frame of his painting *Beata Beatrix* (0000). Finally, there is a similarity too in the style of illustrated flowers on the binding of Rossetti’s *Poems* from the previous year, and a similarity in the way that the flower illustration extends beyond the background of the background pattern of the circle, as though one illustration were laid on top of another.

⁹³ Treuherz et al., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 221.

Solomon's book is clearly meant to be grouped with this collection of texts by the Pre-Raphaelite Aesthetic poets.

The inner illustration is in fact a photograph an engraving by Solomon, the photograph having been taken by the celebrated Victorian photographer Frederick Hollyer, and Hollyer is credited with a prominent caption on what is the very first page of content. The engraving shows the two main protagonists of the tale, one the narrator, whose vision comes on him while he sleeps, and the other his guide, who is his Soul. The guide holds a flowering branch and wears a headband, symbolizing his position as one of spiritual truth, and the narrator is covered in the folds of a dark cloak and holds a staff, symbolizing his readiness to undertake a journey. Beneath the illustration is a quotation from the text befitting the beginning of the text in that it is the beginning of the narrators journey early in his vision: "Then I knew my soul stood by me, and he and I went forth together." Since there were numerous paintings, drawings, and illustrations by Solomon that depicted scenes from the allegorical tale, it easily could have been a heavily illustrated work, as indeed some critiques felt it should have been. But since this is the only illustration, it suggests that the reader is led from Solomon's established body of visual works into the body of the literary work, that by turning the page the reader leaves behind the visual representation into the literary representation that is nonetheless all about "vision," as the title indicates.

The effect is that the book is needed as a way to represent something through literature that cannot be represented in the same way through the image, which is particularly poignant for a visual artist. What ends up being represented, arguably, is the very personal exploration of the artist's identity in relation to love, lust, desire, and friendship, with a valence that is highly homoerotic. There is something, according to the opening illustration, that must be taken up by

the book object separate from the visual work of art: the later is incompatible with the work that the former will do. This incompatibility is emphasized by the awkwardness of the single featured illustration: it is a landscape orientation on a page that has a portrait orientation, meaning that it is printed sideways and requires that the reader rotate the book on its side to look at the illustration and to read its caption. In a beautifully constructed book by an artist, this aesthetic awkwardness must be read as purposeful, inviting the reader to orient him or herself differently, to reconsider Solomon as a visual artist, and to “go forth” on the autobiographical-mythological journey that the book offers.

The title page repeats the structure of the cover, with the book’s title and author featured both above and below the quotation from the Song of Songs. Certainly, the reference to the Song of Songs is central to the book, although there is no clear explanation as to why. The most obvious reason, however, echoes the autobiographical quality of the book: the canonical biblical book Song of Songs is also known as the Canticles or the Song of Solomon: in other words, the Song of Solomon citation demonstrates that it is a rewriting of central Western texts of love by way of mythologizing the personal experience of Simeon Solomon. Further, many scholars now read the text as rewriting the idealized notions of spiritual love in terms of same-sex desire. In the Song of Solomon, two lovers are in dialogue about the joy and pleasure of their erotic passion for one another, and both describe the other’s physical beauty. It is attributed to Solomon, one of the prophets who was known as the Son of David and who was the King of Israel from about 970-931 BCE. He was also known as the Wise King who at first was noble and then who fell into sin and idolatry, turning away from God and taking on multiple wives. Simeon Solomon may have identified in two ways with the loaded symbolism of his last name: first, that the book of Solomon’s, the Song of Songs, is about love and sex; and second that Solomon

represented spiritual crises and the failure of the spiritual ideal. If it is true that *A Vision* tells, in part, the story of Simeon Solomon's same-sex desire, then the connection to the Song of Solomon is apt: it is the story of love and sexuality and of the spiritual salvation of a man who worries that he has sinned against God.

At the bottom of the title page, the publisher is somewhat side-stepped, indicated that the book was privately printed. It reads "London / Printed for the Author / To be had also of F. S. Ellis, 33 King Street, Covent Garden / 1871." Although the book was printed in a run of 500 copies and intended for sale, the cover page makes clear that it is not made available by the publisher in a traditional sense. This may have been to distance Ellis from the growing concern over the reputation of Solomon, but according to Simon Reynolds in a letter to Oscar Browning Solomon suggests that Ellis is the publisher by name only, and that he himself published the book in part to cut the costs of producing it:

I have made a careful drawing of a frontispiece and I am thinking of designing a simple cover myself. I am going to publish it MYSELF but Ellis (Rossetti's publisher) was with me yesterday and has kindly given me permission to put his name in the titlepage—I hope it will assure? I do not expect to make anything, certainly very little, by it but I must not lose—its price will be 5/-....I am very glad you approve of my plan and, apparently, do not think it 'in-for-a-dig' for me to publish myself, the fact is that it is the only possibility of making the thing at all pay, getting 3/9 for a 5/- book that will cost getting to at least 2/9 with the incidental expenses and selling only a limited number of copies would be a dead loss—I really think it will be a nice book—I should so like you to see it in its finished form.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Reprinted in Simon Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon* (Stroud: Catalpa Press, 1984), 33.

Following the cover page, the dedication hints at a further personal backstory that no researcher has fully identified. It is written in Latin with an antiquated Roman type of all capitals, each word separated by an asterisk: “VRBI * ROMAE * MESNI * MAIO * ANNO * MDCCCLXIX / IN * MEMORIAM / D * D * D,” which translates as “In Rome in the month of May in the year 1869 / In remembrance of / DDD.” Solomon had been visiting Italy on a number of occasions, the first being for nearly a year from September 1866 to August 1867 during which time he saw Florence and Rome with his sister Rebecca, and later Rome and Naples with his friend and fellow artist Henry Holiday. In 1869 he visited Italy again with his Oscar Browning, with whom he had recently become close friends, and the two visited again in 1870. According to Cruise, “his former friends would later note that he may have been forced to flee for legal reasons, possibly related to his homosexuality,” and that it was during this trip that he wrote the first incarnation of *A Vision*, privately printed as *A Mystery of Love in Sleep: An Allegory*.⁹⁵ The dedication, however, seems to locate the text in Rome 1869, which either means that this was the date of its composition or else the date of the experience that it describes. In either case, the book is tied to one of the two trips to Rome with Oscar Browning, leading some to wonder if the dedicatee, “D. D. D.” is Browning himself. Considering the autobiographical detail of the possible “trouble” that was the impetus for the final trip during which Cruise says the work was composed, it is all the more significant that the sense of “flight” or escape out of a concern for one’s safety is implicated in the quotation on the book’s cover, not to mention the reading of the text that foregrounds its concern with the spiritual and psychological implications of same-sex desire.

⁹⁵ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 184-85.

Why, then, the significance of the quotation “Until the day break / And the shadows flee away,” not only to this book but to numerous other paintings and drawings by Solomon? For example, a small chalk drawing dated 1869 seems to be a version of the illustration that was included as the book’s frontispiece, which depicts two male heads side-by-side, one glowing as if a non-material spirit, and the other with a crown of small white flowers, with an illustrated ribbon scroll at the bottom that features the same quotation. In the biblical *Song of Solomon*, a young beautiful woman is longing for the young man she loves. She cannot be with him at will because she is at her mother’s house and cannot freely leave. On two occasions she does run through the streets of town in search of him, wearing a veil but calling out for him and, when questioned by guards, asking for him. The second time the guards beat her for being out alone. When they speak in dialogue, it is because the young man has come to her mother’s house, and at least on one occasion she invites him in and they spend the night together. This is the first of two times that the line occurs. She first hears his voice and sees him outside her window:

[H]e cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.⁹⁶

Eventually, she tells him to leave until nightfall so that he will not be caught: “My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.”⁹⁷ Later, the male lover describes the beauty of the young woman, longing for her, with language like that

⁹⁶ Song of Sol. 2.8-10 AV.

⁹⁷ Song of Sol. 2.16-17 AV.

of the aesthetic poets, especially Rossetti: he says that she “has doves’ eyes within thy locks,” “thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks” and referring back to the earlier passage where she has commanded him to flee like a gazelle over the mountains, he describes her breasts as two baby gazelles: “Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.”⁹⁸ Throughout the *Song of Solomon*, sensual, erotic language uses numerous descriptions of flowers, spices, scents, and fruits as metaphors which linger on details of male and female bodies, kissing, and sex, and therefore shows that biblical texts are a central reference to aesthetic poetry, especially that of Rossetti. But the reference is all the more meaningful for Simeon Solomon because it describes erotic desire using aestheticized descriptions of all five senses in order to tell the story of a love that is nearly impossible, threatened at every turn by the restraints of social mores. Locked in their family’s houses, in a town watched by violent guards, the lovers seem only to be make use of poetic descriptions in language in place of any experience of physical contact.

Leading up to the publication of the book, Solomon’s drawings and paintings seemed to tell of same-sex love as something spiritual but also filled with longing to the point of being melancholy. Several notorious drawings of Eton schoolboys embracing, including *Love amongst the Schoolboys* (1865) and *Eton Schoolboys* (1867) suggest an idealization of youthful homosocial environments where a certain amount of same-sex affection is allowed. “In the Summer Twilight” (1869) seems to show the same scene of adolescents walking while holding each other’s arms or embracing, but the adolescents are older and this time some of them are

⁹⁸ Song of Sol. 4.1-6 AV.

young girls. In the center of that image a young man makes eye contact with his female companion as though they are romantically involved, while a younger boy pulls at his arm with both hands embracing him affectionately. The central opposite-sex couple are flanked on either side by a male same-sex pair and a female same-sex pair embracing affectionately.

In *The Bride, the Bridegroom and Sad Love* (1865) and *The Bride, the Bridegroom, and the Friend of the Bridegroom* (1868), the central opposite-sex couple who are to marry are alongside a friend, Sad Love, who longingly holds the hand of the bridegroom. In the former, the bridegroom is turned away from the friend and kisses the face of his bride while his hand reaches back to allow his friend to lightly hold just one finger. Colin Cruise describes the drawing as based on the Gospel of St. John 3:29, but with a reference to the Song of Solomon that alludes, according to Cruise, to Rossetti's *The Beloved* ("*The Bride*") of 1865. Cruise notes the biblical reference as: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."⁹⁹ According to Cruise, Solomon's is a unique interpretation of the passage that emphasizes the position of a queer person who is left out of the social custom of marriage and who is rejected by his male lover:

Solomon's reading is unusual, emphasizing the love, or—more strictly—the sexual desire between two men. AS such this is a provocative reading. The 'Sad Love' of the title acts both as an ideal or allegory of rejected love and, because of the position of the hands, as the bridegroom's actual deserted sexual partner.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ John 3:29 AV.

¹⁰⁰ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 155.

In the later version of the picture, the bride is patiently to the side, arm-in-arm of her groom while he is turned toward “the Friend of the Bridegroom,” who kisses his hand. It was dedicated to Walter Pater.

As Cruise notes, a version of this drawing once existed as a painting, which is now lost, and was panned in the *Annual Register*'s attempt to give an “account of the ‘Art’ of 1869 by noticing some of the chief Exhibitions.” In it they suggest that the Dudley Gallery should be better supported, and suspect that it is the fault of the management, citing “The Bride, the Bridegroom, and Friend of the Bridegroom” as a prime example:

...[W]e are grieved to see that a painter, who promised so well, now exhibiting a work which gives us far more pain than pleasure. The maudlin sentiment, gross affectation, and poverty of form are certainly not cancelled by the beauty of colour or delicacy of tone; whilst the almost blasphemous adaptation of the quotation from Scripture to such a subject is as opposed to good taste as it is painful to a right-feeling mind.¹⁰¹

The language of inappropriateness, perversity, and psychological illness had become common in reviews of Solomon's art by this point, along with the sentiment of “disappointment” at his supposedly wasted early promise. As the context in which *A Vision* was written and published, these details suggest that the dense allegory of the prose poem can be read as part of an ongoing representation of a queer sexual identity and the feelings of isolation that such an identity would have involved, and also can be read as Solomon's response to the growing accusations against his respectability as a person and as an artist.

¹⁰¹ N. s., “Art,” *The Annual Register of World Events: A Review of the Year 1869* 111 (London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1870). Also quoted in Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 155.

The first effort of the text is to situate itself in relation to historical precedents as a type of authentication, or a self-appointed legitimacy and authority. It is a text that meant to be read in relation to transformative literary traditions: of myth, with allusions to Biblical and Classical tales; of spiritualized Epic poetry such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*; and of the Romantic repurposing of historical tropes to articulate the subjective and the psychological. In his review, the homophile critic John Addington Symonds described the book as explaining his visual works: "Mr. Solomon's prose poem is a key to the meaning of his drawings. It lays bare the hidden purpose of the artist, and enables us to connect picture with picture in a perfectly intelligible series."¹⁰² Symonds suggests that the story unites into a narrative a collection of artworks, each of which had either been shown singly over years, or not shown publicly at all. In this sense, the text enacts the Pre-Raphaelite double work of art, but does so in a sense of making his paintings into a body of work that is indexed, or catalogued, by the story. The text, therefore, sets up a central metaphor that Solomon grapples with: one of visibility. The title announces the text as "a vision," which alludes to the problem of vision as a material act of the body and the difference of looking and seeing compared to a vision as a symbolic function of knowledge. In *A Vision*, to see is to know, and the guide makes clear that the protagonist must be properly conditioned to behold the terrible things that can then be "made visible" to him: shown to him visually, but therefore also revealed to him in the form of absolute truth. To see/know in *A Vision* is also a danger, since its narrator is repeatedly warned that the sadness, or else the purity and light, of the revelation could literally shock the body into unconsciousness. What it means to be

¹⁰² John Addington Symonds, "Solomon's 'A Vision of Love' and Other Studies," *Academy* 21, no. 2 (1 April 1871), 189-90.

unconscious in the state of sleep could, perhaps, be to wake up, to end the vision, but in any case it is a danger that is warned against but rarely encountered.

The narrator experiences a vision, or a visionary mystical experience while asleep, though just before daybreak “when dreams wrap us about more closely, when a brighter radiance is shed upon our spirits.” The narrator-protagonist is awake enough to say that he is “musing and thinking” on the sayings of a “wise King” (i.e. King Solomon, since the text is quoting from the *Song of Solomon*) and then a slippage occurs in which he is pulled back into an unconscious state that is this time a spiritual vision: “Then there came upon me a vision, and behold, I walked in a land that I knew not, filled with a strange light I had not seen before; and I was clad as a traveller.”¹⁰³ While the narrator has the experience of a vision “coming upon” him, the text specifically commands sight: “behold.” The unfamiliarity is also visual, as he walks in a land “filled with a strange light I had not seen before.” The land is unfamiliar according to the clause “that I knew not,” but the visible light is of a type “I had not seen before,” suggesting that light, which implies brightness, darkness, color, and possibly warmth, is a type of knowledge with which one is usually familiar, until it becomes “strange.” As in a dream, where one sometimes knows things only at the point of realizing that knowledge, the narrator “beholds” the “vision,” he perceives that he is “clad as a traveller,” with a staff and a “colourless garment,” with his “eyes cast upon the earth,” moving as if on a journey. The narrator then effects a split between the figure in the vision, whom he watches and describes and sometimes is, and his own *spirit*, personified as an entity outside of himself, who speaks to and guides him. Instead of passively receiving a vision, the narrator makes a demand:

¹⁰³ Simeon Solomon, *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (London: F. S. Ellis, 1871), 1.

Then I besought my spirit to make itself clearer before me, and to show me, as in a glass, what I sought; then knowledge came upon me, and I looked within my spirit, and I saw my yearning visibly manifested, and a great desire was borne, and sprang forth and strengthened my feet and quickened my steps.¹⁰⁴

Soon after the narrator gives birth, in a sense, to his Soul by the act of his spirit, which has begun to “stir within me”: “my frame appeared to be rent, and a faintness full upon me, and for a little space I knew nothing, so powerfully the spirit wrought within me.”¹⁰⁵ The narrator recovers, and lifts up his eyes to see his Soul standing behind him. Though what he saw in his spirit as “visibly manifested” was yearning and desire, which induced the spirit, now an artistic craftsman, to wright an artwork, which could itself be one of Solomon's paintings:

and behold, the form of one stood by mean, unclothed, save for a fillet binding his head, whereof the ends lay upon either side of his neck; also upon his left shoulder hung a narrow vestment; in his right hand he bore a branch of dark foliage, starred with no blossoms; his face had on it the shadow of glad things unattained, as of one who has long sought but not found, upon whom the burden of humanity lies heavy; his eyes, half shaded by their lashes, gave forth no light.¹⁰⁶

For Solomon, the eyes of any anthropomorphized abstraction radiate light outward from them: they do not see, exactly, but reveal; and they also give a visible image of the purity and health of the soul. When the narrator “gazed into the lampless eyes of my Soul, I felt that I saw into the

¹⁰⁴ Solomon, *A Vision*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Solomon, *A Vision*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Solomon, *A Vision*, 2.

depths of my own spirit, shadow meeting shadow.”¹⁰⁷ The narrator describes himself as being spiritually troubled and confronts his soul in order to understand himself, but in the Vision he is split into a mortal spirit and a soul that is something greater than he himself. It is not just a splitting of the body from the soul, but it is to lay claim to a true and essential spiritual being as well as to see in his lived body a spirited experience that is in need of discipline.

On my reading, as in many critical interpretations, the tale is not only homoerotic, but is also an example of an early identification with sexual dissidence and same-sex desire. The journey and its revelations are direct to the specific aim of “revealing Love,” one who is an angelic and beautiful young man which is shown in a series of visions to suffer from abuse and neglect. The ultimate goal in the vision is to look upon and experience directly True Love, or “the Very Love, the Divine Type of Absolute Beauty, primeval and eternal, compact of the white flame of youth, burning in ineffable perfection” for which his spirit feels a strong, passionate desire.¹⁰⁸ Spiritual love, however, still tends to occur between people on earth, even if it transcends the physical, and so Solomon seems to describe the desire for a type of love that is more than sex: the bond of companionship and the “other” through which the highest form of love is experienced. In this sense, it is not hard to read the text as making a claim for the moral validity of same-sex love on earth, which is a topic of tension beginning at this time period in Europe.

Yet I think we overlook some aspects of the text and its production as the articulation of an identity that is already understood in knowing groups of insiders. I read it as taking part in an ongoing concern of artists in England regarding the correct way to negotiate the desires of the

¹⁰⁷ Solomon, *A Vision*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Solomon, *A Vision*, 36.

flesh in a way that elevates the Soul rather than leaving it denigrated, and the place of art in this process. Solomon's queer desires could be useful in this pursuit in that it becomes a metaphor for this struggle of Love over Sex. It partakes in the method of making a claim for its presence in history, but also to argue that the progression away from sin and vice that was engendered by Christianity might nonetheless lead to a type of same-sex love that is no less beautiful than the love between man and woman, which is so often the topic of art.

It is not just the fantasy of finding true love or of transcending the mortal world; it is an aestheticization of the experience of desire and passion, where art is the medium through which, in the nineteenth century as well as in an older conception of art as being for religion, one can experience oneself abstracted into a series of symbols that divide the self and make it accessible. Solomon expands aesthetic theory to the space of the art gallery; and introduces a type of ekphrasis through a series of images. This is an important philosophical concept, and makes Solomon an important part of the Aesthetic Movement, but it also is a type of self-analysis. The technique of the narrative play of multiple images combines images and text in the way that only an aesthetic book can. And so his Soul, at various points, notes in a speech act the process by which the narrator *looks* and then *knows* his authentic self: "Thou hast looked upon me, and thou knowest me well, for in me thou but seest thyself, not hidden and obscured by the cruel veil of flesh."¹⁰⁹ At times, the act of looking at the self is also an act of textual interpretation: "Looking upon me thou shalt read thine inmost self, as upon a scroll, and in my aspect shall thy spirit be made clear."¹¹⁰ Here the word aspect refers to a way of looking, and so the guide, his Soul, introduces the practice whereby looking at Soul will show the narrator *where* and *how* to look: he

¹⁰⁹ Solomon, *A Vision*, 2.

¹¹⁰ Solomon, *A Vision*, 3.

looks at himself looking. Seeing and looking are not proprioceptive functions in this sense, but rather as with art one learns a way of seeing by looking at an image. In the vision, looking is also a process of cleansing, so the spirit will “be made clear,” although the text notably avoids clarity of meaning in the abstract symbols of spiritual and material life. With such a distinction made regarding the Soul, the meaning of spirit is doubled: while spirit is more commonly a synonym for the soul, it is in this text the self which animates the body with life but which is separate, and speaks to the intellectual character of the person on earth. In *A Vision*, the spirit is “at work” inside of the narrator, and the spirit “feels,” “understands,” responds emotionally, and threatens, at last, to die out if it is overwhelmed. The spirit is a reflection of the true self to which the Soul can allow access. Again, Solomon introduces a multiple self that exists on the highest levels of a god-like being and at the level of the life of an individual in existence. The spirit is like the medium of existence, but unlike the Soul, which can be denied and abused, the spirit is something closer to mortal being. The Spirit can become misdirected, and is childlike in both innocence and in its restless energy. The *conscious self* is the result of *spirit and animal body*, and the Soul is something eternal, enduring, and in relation to God. Solomon’s aestheticization of desire produces visible objects and texts that can be read, but which also expose some sort of inner self of which one is not always conscious. In learning to read the true self in order to attain True Love, Solomon then teaches, through the publication of this book, a method of self-analysis that paves the way for a psychological representation of the unconscious, in which the “true self” can be “read” through a process of articulating and then deciphering images of a psychic life.

One has the sense that Solomon daringly asserted his inclusion in the world of artistic representation, even as his desire was for the love of a man instead of a woman: it would have been easy enough to create paintings that were more easily legitimated. In reading the text as a

representation of homosexual identity, we risk assuming that the contemporary critics who argued that his talent was wasted by his insistence on portraying same-sex desire and other sensual themes that led to hostility and ruin. But on reading *A Vision*, I argue that Solomon was perhaps less of a champion for homosexual identity as a proponent of art as a spiritual process through which experience is made imaginative, and the material art object is in place of physical sex, thereby allowing a true spiritual love its rightful place. It is not only the suggestion of a possibility, but also takes for granted the problems of sexual desire as being detrimental to the Soul.

The narrator's Soul promises that a series of Visions will prepare him to receive the full vision of Love, for which the narrator feels a painful desire. The Soul is the guide in the direction of something "true" or "pure," which is to say a love that can be lived legitimately in the hostile real world. "By me alone shalt they attain until the end I know thou seekest, for he whom we go forth to find may only in his fulness be manifested by my aid; for when he appears to those who, with dimmed eyes, grope in the waking darkness of the world, I am put aside, and he is not fully know."¹¹¹ Sex, desire, and the pleasure of sins and vices prevent finding the true love that he seeks. Sex without love is soulless; yet love requires sexual desire to manifest. Solomon must figure out a way to seek/know true love while keeping his soul present, and since marriage is not an option, it must be a sexless, though not a lonely, process. This is the process of the text, and is charitable and progressive in that it applies to any loving feelings that are not legitimate in sexual terms but which can allow one to have a life of companionship and religion.

Solomon helps to articulate a concept of identity that is metaphysical because he endeavors to find a way to experience what is true and good even when he does not have the

¹¹¹ Solomon, *A Vision*, 3.

ability to marry a woman. For this reason, he looks to spiritual practices, and finds that the feels that cannot manifest physically can manifest aesthetically towards spiritual ends. What he denies is that the desire itself is a sin that excludes him from the spiritual realm.

By the early 1870s, Rossetti and Solomon both made influential achievements in locating the aesthetic treatment of literature, from the perspective of a trained artist, on the beautifully produced book. As I discussed in my introduction, this decade was a turning point in the articulation in England of Aestheticism as a philosophy, a movement, and even a cultural phenomenon that became so widely discussed that it could be mocked in general periodicals. It is the work of Walter Pater in the 1870s that fuels the debate over Aestheticism, whose proponents advocated the specialized realm of art against the reactionary warnings of the danger of immoral culture on a society in a phase of historical transition. In his discussion of both Rossetti and Solomon, as I will show in my next chapter, Walter Pater creates himself as the leader of English Aestheticism and the inspiration for the following generation of Decadent writers.

Chapter 2: Walter Pater's Aestheticism and the Space of the Book

In this chapter, I examine a critically neglected example of the aesthetic philosopher Walter Pater's interest in the decadent book: the Daniel Press edition of *An Imaginary Portrait: An Imaginary Portrait* (1894). One of the most fascinating "beautiful books" of the fin-de-siècle fine printing movement came about through a collaboration between the controversial Oxonian aesthete Walter Pater and the independent publisher and printer Revd. Charles Henry Olive Daniel. Daniel had established the Daniel Press at Worcester College, Oxford, where he held a series of prestigious positions until he was elected Provost in 1903.¹ *An Imaginary Portrait* was really a printing specimen of the Daniel Press that reprinted a short story that was previously published as "Imaginary Portraits: I. The Child in the House" in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1878. This was the first of Pater's so-called "imaginary portraits," a fictional prose form that he invented, which frequently focuses on the aesthetic sensibilities and education of its male protagonists. Scholars concur that "The Child in the House," which is something more of a second title rather than a subtitle, comprises a semi-autobiographical story of the suburban home in Hackney that Pater moved from when he was twelve years old. Significantly, Pater's decision to allow Daniel to reprint this story in book form is itself unique, since, during his lifetime, with the exception of his only published novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and his collection of

¹ Daniel's career at Oxford had many phases: he was elected to a fellowship in 1863, ordained deacon in 1864, was dean in 1865, vice-provost in 1866, junior bursar in 1870, proctor in 1873, and in 1903 was the first person to be elected provost by the fellows. He remained in that position until his death in 1919. He held other positions at Worcester, including councilor and alderman, and wrote the history of Worcester in 1900.

stories titled *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), his books consisted of an edited series of non-fiction essays that were published exclusively by the prestigious house of Macmillan.²

The title of the Daniel Press edition requires some explanation and hints at the ambiguity of Pater's intentions for his fictional works, most of which he thought of being as of the prose form of the imaginary portrait. Although the story is frequently referred to as "The Child in the House" (which, for clarity, I will do throughout this chapter), its proper title according to the Daniel edition is *An Imaginary Portrait by Walter Pater*. When it was first printed in *Macmillan's Magazine* in August 1878, the story was listed in the contents page as "Imaginary Portraits. The Child in the House. By Walter H. Pater."³ On the page of its original periodical context, there is one clear title, "Imaginary Portraits," with a paragraph-level subheading of "I. The Child in the House," and with the author's name printed at the end, as was the magazine's custom.⁴ The way that the title functioned in the magazine suggested an ongoing series of imaginary portraits, of which this is the first. In fact, there was a series of these short stories published by *Macmillan's Magazine* between 1885 and 1887, and then collectively as *Imaginary Portraits*, issued by Macmillan and Co. in 1887.⁵ These were "A Prince of Court Painters" (October 1885), "Sebastian Van Storck" (March 1886), "Denys L'Auxerrois" (October, 1886), and "Duke Carl of Rosenmold" (May 1887)—the latter appearing in the magazine during the same month that the book was published. None of these four short stories was printed in the

² For a detailed discussion of Pater's interest in the aesthetic design of the books that Macmillan published, see Robert M. Seiler, *The Book Beautiful: Walter Pater and the House of Macmillan* (London: Athlone Press, 1990).

³ Walter H. Pater, "Imaginary Portraits. The Child in the House," *Macmillan's Magazine* 38 (August, 1878).

⁴ Pater, "Imaginary Portraits," 313.

⁵ Walter Pater, *Imaginary Portraits* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1887).

magazine under the primary title of “Imaginary Portraits,” and Pater did not include “The Child in the House” in the collection of that title (it appeared posthumously in *Miscellaneous Studies* [1895]).⁶

As an imaginary portrait, with the generic ambivalence that such a category suggests by merging literary fiction with painting, and portraiture with the imaginary, “The Child in the House” marks the first of Pater’s works of prose fiction and a turning point in his career. Once he had established himself as Oxford’s cosmopolitan philosopher of aesthetics, an art historian of Renaissance Europe, and a classicist of Greek philosophy and literature, Pater was increasingly interested in writing fictional stories that were informed by his vast knowledge of the history of aesthetics. Apart from the four short stories above, nearly all of Pater’s fiction fit the genre of an imaginary portrait. During the same year that he wrote “The Child in the House,” Pater began what would become his novel *Marius the Epicurean*, subtitled *His Sensations and Ideas*.⁷ The same year he also began a short story that is thought of as a second part to “The Child” called “An English Poet,” which was never published in his lifetime or even in the edited posthumous collections, but was published in 1931 in the *Fortnightly Review* by May Ottley, a pupil of

⁶ Walter Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays*, ed. Charles L. Shadwell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895). For a thorough examination of the essays that comprise and are related to *Imaginary Portraits*, see Lene Østermark-Johansen, *Walter Pater: ‘Imaginary Portraits,’* (Milton Keynes: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014).

⁷ Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1885). Robert Seiler, citing Gerald Monsman, states that “Pater probably began working on *Marius the Epicurean* in autumn 1878. The evidence suggests that, by 1881, he was well into the project” (Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 43); however, most scholars describe the novel as being written between 1881 and its publication year as 1885.

Pater's sister Clara, as "Imaginary Portrait II. An English Poet."⁸ The two texts are thought to form part of a trilogy that includes "Emerald Uthwart," another imaginary portrait that was first published in *New Review* in June and July of 1892. Other short fictions that are part of this genre in Pater's oeuvre include "Hippolytus Veiled" (*Macmillan's Magazine*, August 1889) and "Apollo in Picardy" (*Harper's Magazine*, November 1893). Finally, the first five chapters of Pater's projected second novel "Gaston de Latour" appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* between June and October 1888, and was later published by Pater's Oxford colleague Charles L. Shadwell in 1896. In his preface, Shadwell connects *Gaston* to the broad category of the imaginary portrait: "The work, if completed, would have been a parallel study of character to 'Marius the Epicurean' ... something of the same motive appears in some of the Imaginary Portraits, such as Sebastian Van Storck, and Duke Carl of Rosenmold, undertaken about the same time."⁹ For this reason, Seiler refers to "The Child" as "the origin and the paradigm of [Pater's] imaginative work."¹⁰

In what follows, I consider in detail the circumstances that led to the publication of the Daniel Press edition of "The Child in the House," which appeared on June 12, 1894, a month before Pater's unexpected death from a heart attack at age fifty-four. In this chapter, I begin by focusing on the distinctive qualities of this remarkable example of late Victorian fine printing before proceeding to the notable relations between the aesthetic qualities of this publication and the type of aesthetic education that Pater records in his "imaginary portrait." My discussion bears

⁸ Details of the history of this "suppressed" essay can be found in Ernest Fontana, "Whitman, Pater, and 'An English Poet,'" *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 14, no. 1 (1996).

⁹ Charles L. Shadwell, "Preface" in *Gaston de Latour: An Unfinished Romance* (London: Macmillan, 1896), vi.

¹⁰ Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 42.

out the connection between the literary content and the material production of the decadent book: my analysis focuses not only on the style and form of its narrative, but also the style and form of its production, such as its paper, typography, size, and arrangement as a book. As a work of the Daniel Press, it is a very important example of late Victorian printing, and takes one of the earliest publications of a prominent aesthetic theorist as the material of the decadent form of production.

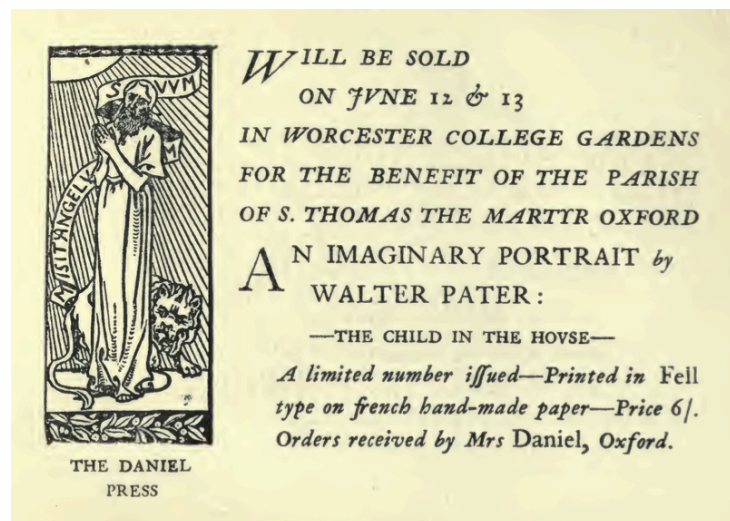


Figure 11. Prospectus issued by the Daniel Press announcing the availability of *An Imaginary Portrait* by Walter Pater: *The Child in the House*. Printed in the Fell Type featuring the insignia of the press.

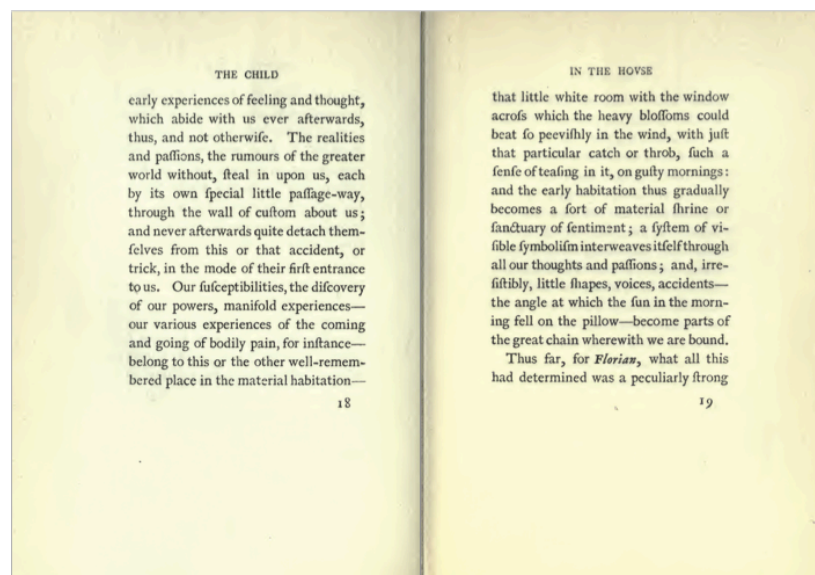


Figure 12. Sample two-page layout of the Daniel Press edition of *An Imaginary Portrait* using the Fell type.

from the wood and the bricks of it; half, mere soul-stuff, floated thither from who knows how far. In the house and garden of his dream he saw a child moving, and could divide the main streams, at least, of the winds that had played on him, and study so the first stage in that mental journey.

The *old house*, as when Florian talked of it afterwards he always called it, (as all children do, who can recollect a change of home, soon enough but not too soon to mark a period in their lives) really was an old house; and an element of French descent in its inmates—descent from *Watteau*, the old court-painter, one of whose gallant pieces still hung in one of the rooms—might explain, together with some other things, a noticeable trimness and comely whiteness about everything there—the curtains, the couches, the paint on the walls with which the light and shadow played so delicately, might explain also the tolerance of the great poplar in the garden, a tree most often despised by English people but which French

IN THE HOUSE

he saw a child moving, and could divide the main streams, at least, of the winds that had played on him, and study so the first stage in that mental journey.

The *old house*, as when *Florian* talked of it afterwards he always called it, (as all children do, who can recollect a change of home, soon enough but not too soon to mark a period in their lives) really was an old house; and an element of French descent in its inmates—descent from *Watteau* the old court-painter, one of whose gallant pieces still hung in one of the rooms—might explain, together with some other things, a noticeable trimness and comely whiteness about

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Figure 13. Detail of the original version of “Imaginary Portraits. I. The Child in the House” from *Macmillan's Magazine* (October 1878).

Figure 14. Detail of the Daniel Press edition of *An Imaginary Portrait* showing his use of the Fell type.

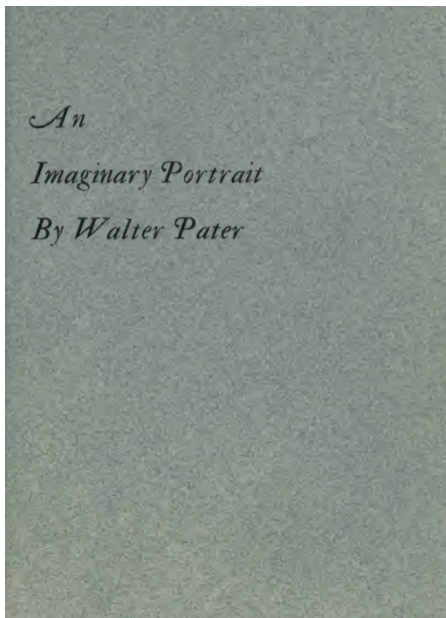


Figure 15. Blue-gray paper cover of the Daniel Press edition of *An Imaginary Portrait* showing the italic Fell type.



Figure 16. Title page of Daniel Press edition of *An Imaginary Portrait* showing the Fell type.

I. The Daniel Press and “The Child in the House”

Book historians often cite the Daniel Press as one of the most influential publishers in the fine arts press movement, partly because of Daniel’s immense success at running the press from Oxford University. According to bibliographer Falconer Madan, between 1874 and 1919 Daniel produced fifty-eight books.¹¹ Many of these publications were pet projects that seem to be related to Daniel’s Oxford colleagues and associates. Despite the tendency to describe this period as a revival of the hand press, fin-de-siècle artist-printers and authors of modern, cutting-edge literature were rescuing from a banal consumerism the very form that literature takes, which is to say *the book*. It was therefore not merely a revival of an older form of bookmaking, but was also the practice of an aesthetic philosophy in which physical form and literary content were meant to be one and the same. In other words, it was part of an avant-garde literary movement that included book production as part of literary production.¹² There are several important points that need discussing: what distinguishes the Daniel Press is Daniel’s flouting of economic advantages (in other words, his was not primarily a for-profit venture); his intricate ties to Oxford and the Bodleian Library; his training and knowledge as a librarian and historian; and his unusual interest in promoting minor contemporary writers with his press work.

¹¹ Falconer Madan, *The Daniel Press: Memorials of C. H. O. Daniel, With a Bibliography of the Press, 1845-1919* (Oxford: Daniel Press, 1921). Madan categorizes works of the Daniel Press into two periods: Frome Books (1845-1861) and Oxford Books (1874-1919) (Madan, *Daniel Press*, 49-50). The former is more for the purposes of historical/biographical record, since those texts were produced by Daniel and his family for the purpose of learning to use the press, and the texts are mostly minor experiments or church handouts (Madan, *Daniel Press*, 49).

¹² This point about the rise of aesthetic book printing as a form of experimental literature is explored more fully in Margaret D. Stetz and Mark Samuel Lasner, *England in the 1880s: Old Guard and Avant-Garde* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989).

Before collaborating with Pater in the 1890s to print *An Imaginary Portrait*, Daniel had become friends with a coterie of influential artists and writers, though he was never associated with their controversies and scandals. He printed original works by Robert Bridges, Richard Watson Dixon, Henry Patmore, Margaret L. Woods, Herbert Warren, Laurence Binyon, Edmund Gosse, and others. Though he was known to be friends with Pater, the printing of *An Imaginary Portrait* was their only joint work. Daniel was solidly of Oxford society, and his work often involved the history of Oxford University's people, libraries, and collections as part of a larger effort to secure the accomplishments in relation to the English nation.

A printed announcement to promote the sale of Pater's book featured the printer's mark of the Daniel Press along the full height of the printed text, associating Pater's writing with the press as a collaborative event. The printer's mark also appears on the final page of the book, and was designed by the artist Alfred Parsons as a saintly figure of Daniel himself, with the Latin inscription, "Misit Angelum suum," which roughly translates as *he sent his angel*, from the Vulgate (Daniel 6:21-22). The printed announcement centers the title, author, and subtitle beneath the advertisement of its sale: "Will be sold on June 12 & 13 in Worcester College Gardens for the benefit of the parish of S. Thomas the Martyr Oxford." Beneath the title of the book, the announcement suggests the collectability of such a choice literary object: "A limited number issued — Printed in Fell type on French hand-made paper — Price 6/. Orders received by Mrs Daniel, Oxford." All of the type is italicized except the book's title and author, centered on the page and offset by the space around the capital *A*. It reads "An Imaginary Portrait by Walter Pater: —The Child in the House—." The letter u is rendered throughout with the roman character v, giving a sense of gravity due to the archaic and classical convention. The

announcement itself emphasizes that this work is valuable as much as an art object as a work of literature.

An Imaginary Portrait by Walter Pater is petite. It measures 6 and $\frac{3}{8}$ inches by 4 and $\frac{5}{8}$ inches, a duodecimo with eight pages per sheet instead of twelve. The creamy white, ribbed paper is touted as “French hand-made,” bearing the watermark of the highly regarded Rives paper mill. The sixty-eight-page volume was printed as a limited edition of 250 copies and was priced at 6s. when it was put on sale at an Oxford charity event, “A Venetian Fête in aid of St. Thomas’s Parish,” where it sold out within hours. It was printed using “small pica roman leaded” type in the Fell font, with a wide margin on the bottom and outside margin of each page. Each edition is hand-numbered, and features an ornamented title page, a colophon with the printer’s mark. The book is covered with pale blue-gray projecting paper bearing on the front the title and author, and on the back the date “1894” is printed between ornaments.

It is representative of the style of the Daniel Press, which was less ornately illustrated compared to the fine arts printing presses such as the Kelmscott Press, the Doves Press, the Vale Press, and at times the Chiswick Press, which, arguably, took cues from Daniel’s early experiments with hand-printing literature. *An Imaginary Portrait* is small and handsome, the “French hand-made paper” being in excess at the front and back, as though the paper itself is meant to be appreciated as part of its work. The printed paper cover was something rare as well, if only because it suggested that the book ought to be bound according to the taste of the purchaser, but without leaving it entirely bare: this middle-weight cover emphasizes that the book object is the work of a printer, rather than a binder.

Daniel’s use of the Fell font makes the book an important sample in the history of typography, since Daniel is credited with helping to revive John Fell’s extensive library of fonts,

which Fell purchased in the seventeenth century in order to establish the Oxford University Press (also known as the Clarendon Press at Oxford or the Sheldonian Press, both being the names of various properties where printing at Oxford was done). Daniel began to use types from Fell's collection at Oxford in the late 1870s, to which Madan and others have credited a revival of a style typography derived from seventeenth-century Dutch foundries and popularized by Fell until William Caslon reformed English typography in the mid-eighteenth century.¹³ Fell was not a type designer, but rather collected punches and matrices (the moulds used to reproduce type pieces and typeset matter) primarily from Holland, so that Oxford could print its own texts in-house. In typography, Fell is an ambiguous name for a disparate and historical collection of these types, which were used almost exclusively by the press at Oxford from the 1660s to the 1790s.¹⁴ The collection fell out of favor and were forgotten, "degraded by neglect to the deplorable condition from which they have at length been rescued," as Horace Hart put it in 1900.¹⁵ Daniel began to use them in his printing, which brought about an awareness of the forgotten typographical archive, and when Hart was appointed Controller of the Press in 1883, he

¹³ As Madan has it: "It is not too much to say that the discovery of the old matrixes and punches which Fell had procured for the Sheldonian Press was a chief element in turning the scale in favour of a new and vigorous campaign of printing. ... The success of this discovery was immediate: the old-faced type, the ornaments which we re supplied to Mr. Daniel with it, and not least the way in which the ornaments lent themselves, without without combination, to form varied devices, all were found to suit the projected literature. The Printer set himself to his task, and... in ten year's time the Press was recognized as destined to be famous, and to be a pioneer in the restoration of Style in English printing" (Madan, *Daniel Press*, 157-58).

¹⁴ Horace Hart, *Notes on A Century of Typography at the University Press, Oxford 1693-1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900).

¹⁵ Hart, *Notes*, xvi.

undertook an extensive project to catalog and renovate the collection, putting it back into use at the Clarendon Press.¹⁶

The Fell types that Daniel favored were a mix of the small pica roman and small pica italic style, and the look of the Fell types has been favored since its revival for its austere, handsome look and its typographical tie to a printing tradition that is specifically English, and even more specifically Oxonian. In *An Imaginary Portrait*, the font includes many archaic letterforms, such as the roman *V* used in place of *U*, a long *s*, and the extensive use of ligatures, so that the reader of the 1890s would encounter an unfamiliar look whose archaic conventions rendered it less readable but nonetheless did not detract from its visual appeal. Pater's late Victorian short story appears in the context of something from a past time. It is a distant mode of articulation, making the work feel temporally dislocated, yet belonging to the archive of English writing; it had typographical links to England's earliest printed texts, connecting it to John Fell's efforts to turn Oxford into a location of printing to rival those on the Continent.

¹⁶ The end result of the project was "the cataloguing and representing of the old Types, Matrices, and Punches, which remain in Oxford to this day," leading to a detailed book that tells the history of the collection and, more significantly, reproduces the eight "University Press Specimens" that began with Fell and ended in 1794 (Hart, *Notes*, xii). Hart's *Notes on A Century of Typography* "traces, classifies, and arranges alphabetically" 7,632 matrices and 2,906 punches, and in the process fixes or restores many (Hart, *Notes*, xiii). Curiously, Hart never mentions Daniel: "When I had once become aware of the existence of so interesting a collection as is here represented, I conceived it to be my duty, as Controller of the Press, to save the ancient printing materials belonging to the University from a state of rust and confusion. But to put them into anything like order, some research was necessary, and some record desirable. ... in the end, this book has been prepared" (Hart, *Notes*, xiii). It is possible that Madan's bias towards crediting Daniel (above) was a corrective to Hart's leaving him out of this history.

Pater, who habitually revised his work, corrected the original version of the text that appeared in the pages of *Macmillan's Magazine*, and through this printing allowed the somber story of a young boy's childhood to be revived and remembered in a far more lasting material form.¹⁷ The publishing history of the story is recorded obliquely in the Daniel's edition, since the date of its original publication is printed at the end of the text, followed by the date 1894 printed on the back paper cover. As a work of the Daniel Press, "The Child in the House" was Pater's only book that was inextricably linked to the history of Oxford and the Bodleian Library, as Daniel himself would forever be.

II. The Material Conditions of Aesthetic Philosophy

Daniel's attention to the details of the material aesthetics of the book is particularly important for a fictional text of such an imposing aesthetic philosopher as Pater. Pater was the most influential philosopher of aesthetics in England from the time that Macmillan published his first book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873).¹⁸ In the "Preface" of this book, Pater

¹⁷ In comparing the original 1878 version with this 1894 version, I found a dozen or so minor changes and corrections, mostly to the choice of wording (one-word omissions might have aided in the typesetting, but it is more likely that these were Pater's edits to the content separate from considerations of the page). One noticeable change is the use of italic fonts for proper nouns, such as Florian, Watteau, Julian, and Cecil. That this typographical change had a distinctly visual effect, rather than changing the meaning or intention of the literature, shows that the revisions were partly at the level of visual aesthetics.

¹⁸ Walter H. Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873). Further citations are to this edition unless otherwise noted. The book had a total of four editions in Pater's lifetime (1873, 1877, 1888, 1893), and starting with the second edition of 1877 was renamed *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, due to the criticism that the book was something far more philosophical than an account of a historical period. Significant, too, was the fact that the "Conclusion" of the first edition, which was something of a manifesto of art for art's sake,

describes the aim of the aesthetic critic as becoming increasingly aware of the impressions that beautiful things make on the subject through the senses.¹⁹ It is not, he claims, to define in the abstract a universal notion of beauty.²⁰ And with the “original facts” and “primary data” of one’s own sensory impressions, Pater claims, the aesthetic critic develops a refined sensibility that allows him or her to be affected to a greater degree by beautiful things.²¹ Although he suggests that this is a process of developing the spirit of the self and of the age at large, he also implies that some people are already in possession of a nature – an unusual psychology, perhaps – that makes them more perceptive to beauty.²²

What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects....To him all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal.... “The ages are all equal,” says William Blake, “but genius is always above its age.”²³

Here Pater implies what I want to emphasize in my reading of Daniel’s printed specimen: that details such as the feel of the paper or the shape of the letters speak in particular to the

had gotten such a strong critical reaction that Pater removed it in the second edition, and restored it in an edited form with the 1888 edition.

¹⁹ Pater, *Studies*, vii.

²⁰ Pater, *Studies*, vii-viii.

²¹ Pater, *Studies*, viii.

²² Pater, *Studies*, ix.

²³ Pater, *Studies*, x.

temperament of the abnormally perceptive “genius.”²⁴ The story of the child in the house is put forward in part as a kind of influence of beautiful words in the form of a beautiful book, but it also reaches out to a reader who may him or herself relate to the strange sensations of the aesthetic temperament that Pater wishes to model and to encourage.

The story is one of memory, history, and the aesthetic experiences of a material world through which its protagonist, Florian Deleal, forms his subjectivity. As such, the Daniel Press edition seems to enact, through the art of printing, something similar to what the story tells. It is the story of a sensitive child coming into an aesthetic consciousness in the house where he was raised. But it is told in the third person by an adult narrator, whom many read as Pater himself, merging with Florian’s dreamy reverie his own sense of the strangeness of childhood, where the personality is formed through minor, early, even random, impressions.²⁵

The biographical similarities between Pater and the fictional Florian Deleal are enough that the story is often called autobiographical.²⁶ Florian is in his thirties and prompted by a chance encounter to recall the house of his childhood, in an unspecified suburb in England,

²⁴ The fact that he quotes William Blake is meaningful, because he connects his own implied genius to the Romanticist whose work most exemplifies the fusion of form and content: Blake not only printed his own books, but drew the writing within illustrations as part of relief etchings that he then hand-printed. Blake was first popularized in England by A.C. Swinburne, whom for Pater was an influence and a rival.

²⁵ Monsman, as I discuss below, goes so far as to refer to “Pater-Florian.” Gerald Monsman, *Walter Pater* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 75.

²⁶ In his catalogue of the Daniel Press cited above, Madan, who knew Pater well, describes the story this way: “The well-known essay entitled ‘The Child in the House’ is one of Pater’s most delicate character-drawings, and is believed to be largely autobiographical. It portrays the development of a sensitive child’s mind in an old-fashioned house near a city, and forms a desirable little volume” (Madan, *Daniel Press*, 114).

where he lived until the age of twelve. Monsman describes this as a “fictionalized autobiographical sketch” where Pater “gives an idealized impression of the large old-fashioned garden at Enfield and of the ancient, rambling mansion of his great-aunt in Kent.”²⁷ Pater’s family, according to A.C. Benson, first settled at Stepney until the death of Pater’s father.²⁸ The family then moved to Enfield, “and here at an old house, now demolished, with a big garden, in the neighbourhood of Chase Side, the children were brought up,” until he was fourteen and sent to the King’s School, Canterbury.²⁹ Arthur Symons confirms that “[t]here is much personal detail in [*The Child in the House*], the red hawthorn, for instance; and he used to talk to me of the old house in Tunbridge, where his great-aunt lived, and where he spent much of his time when a child.”³⁰ In the story, the child is unusually smart and perceptive, as was Pater, and the child’s father dies while away working for the military, which was true of Pater as well. The house is described as having a French influence, with a painting by Watteau hanging in the living room insinuating the fact that Pater’s own family may have been related to Jean-Baptiste Pater, a student of the famous court painter.³¹ Describing the Daniel Press edition, an anonymous reviewer of the American newspaper *The Nation* from August 1894 treats the book as a prized item and reveals a familiarity with Pater that speaks to his high reputation at the time of his death.³² With “a now touching and almost tender interest,” the reviewer notes that “it has never,

²⁷ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 17.

²⁸ A.C. Benson, *Walter Pater* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), 2.

²⁹ Benson, *Pater*, 2.

³⁰ Presently known as Tonbridge, in Kent. Arthur Symons, *A Study of Walter Pater* (London: Charles J. Sawyer, 1932), 105.

³¹ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 17.

³² N. s., “Notes,” *The Nation* 59, no. 1521 (August 23, 1894), 143.

until now, appeared in book form,” and describing it as being made “with all the care and taste which distinguish the Daniel press. There are in all only sixty-one broad-margined pages, but they will be conned by all lovers of the beautiful in literature with a warmth and eagerness proportioned to their contents and not their number.”³³ The reading of the story as autobiographical is, for this reviewer, why the imaginary portrait is valuable. The story is one of insight into Pater’s genius:

is nothing less than an exquisite record of the earliest recoverable impressions of Mr. Pater’s own rare childhood. Mr. Pater’s first published essay appeared when he was but sixteen years of age. His graceful and poetical reminiscence of his first psychical unfolding gives still stronger evidence of his extraordinarily early development.³⁴

When reviewing the story for the *Academy* a few months after it first appeared in 1878, the art critic John Miller Gray (1850-1894) described it as having too many personal details to be accurately called an “imaginary” portrait.³⁵ Noting Pater’s growing eminence as a scholar, Gray says: “We have been looking for other things from him, Greek studies and what not, and now instead of these great matters comes this strange elfish child, described with the same elaboration, the same subtle simplicity, with which we have been used to see Mr. Pater handle a Leonardo picture.” The reference to Greek studies and Leonardo mark the distinctive turn in

³³ “Notes,” *Nation*, 143.

³⁴ “Notes,” *Nation*, 143.

³⁵ N. s. “Magazines and Reviews,” *Academy* 328 (Aug. 17, 1878), 166. The review is unsigned, but Seiler attributes it to Gray, saying that they met through a mutual friend in June of 1878 and became “close acquaintances.” In 1885, Gray favorably reviewed *Marius the Epicurean* in two separate publications: *The Academy* and in the *Edinburgh Courant*. In the former review, Gray describes Pater’s novel as a finished portrait, and deems *The Child in the House* its “initial sketch” (Robert M. Seiler, *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* [New York: Routledge, 1995], 120-23.).

Pater's work from that on which his prominence as a scholar was built toward creative and autobiographical writing, since by 1878 he was well established as a leading critic and historian. His "Notes on Leonardo da Vinci" appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869 and was revised for *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* when it was published in 1873. Here Gray is prescient: Pater's article "A Study of Dionysus" of 1876 would later be published posthumously in *Greek Studies* (1895). For Gray, Pater's story is meaningful because it seems autobiographical of an eminent scholar – it is not the distant, disinterested critic of the Leonardo picture that it is reminiscent of:

And yet there is a difference, a touch of realism, of intimacy in the details which seems to make the title, *Imaginary Portraits*, a misnomer. So that, in spite of all that is sure to strike the casual reader as unreal and uncanny and over-characteristic, the fancifulness of the paper is balanced by a truth and accuracy of detail and background, which will convey a good deal to many. ...The indelibility of early impressions...will prove a stone of stumbling to some readers, we imagine, but which may well be taken as a minute and exquisite study of the origin and modes of growth of a certain temper of our day, rare, but perfectly recognisable.³⁶

Similarly, in his biography of Pater, published just twelve years after his death, when Pater's legacy was still felt, Benson finds that in "The Child in the House" and "Emerald Uthwart" it is "obvious that a certain autobiographical thread is interwoven."³⁷ In a later passage, Benson reads the story with empathy for the young Pater: "One realises with a painful intensity with what a

³⁶ "Magazines and Reviews," 143.

³⁷ Benson, *Walter Pater*, 4.

shock of bewildered emotion Pater must have realised as a child the first lessons of mortality.”³⁸ While he says that they should not be taken literally, they are to him as to other critics indicative of Pater’s unusual intelligence: “It is clear, however, that he was instinctively alive to impressions of sense, and that his mind was early at work observing and apprehending a certain quality in things perceived and heard, which he was afterwards to recognise as beauty.”³⁹ Still, Benson goes on to read the descriptions of a child who was fascinated by beauty and pained by death as autobiographical: “These were the dreams of childhood, the unchecked visions of the sheltered and secluded home; at Canterbury came a wider, nobler, richer prospect of beauty.”⁴⁰ Just as Gray thought Pater’s sketch worthy of a review, Benson saw its publication as an event: “[T]he year 1878 is memorable for the first appearance of one of his most beautiful works, the one, in fact, which can be recommended to any one unacquainted with Pater’s writings, as exhibiting most fully his characteristic charm. *The Child in the House* is the sweetest and tenderest of all Pater’s fancies...”⁴¹ For Benson the story is as much about Pater’s rare genius as it is about a universal feeling of longing for the innocence of childhood. In it, he says, “we see a boy deeply sensitive to beautiful impressions,”⁴² who is melancholic and lonely because of his sensitivity:

The child whose nature is thus sensuously perceptive is often so much taken up by mere impression...that there is little leisure, little energy to give to the simple affections of

³⁸ Benson, *Walter Pater*, 81.

³⁹ Benson, *Walter Pater*, 81.

⁴⁰ Benson, *Walter Pater*, 6.

⁴¹ Benson, *Walter Pater*, 78-79.

⁴² Benson, *Walter Pater*, 80.

life... Thus the pure art of the conception lies in the picturing the perfect isolation of the childish soul, — not a normal soul, it must be remembered, — though perhaps the haunted emphasis of style... may tend to disguise from us how real and lifelike indeed, how usual an experience, is being recorded.⁴³

The story excites interest for both its poetic style but also because it is read as autobiographical, suggesting that Pater was a beloved figure, especially in Oxford. This is made clear in the memoir of one of his former students, the artist C.J. Holmes, who says: “His books, the ‘Renaissance,’ ‘Marius the Epicurean’ and the recently published ‘Imaginary Portraits,’ rendered him, for many of us, the most important personage in Oxford.”⁴⁴ A student at Brasenose in the late 1880s, Holmes describes the ongoing excitement that undergraduates felt about Pater’s work:

If Pater’s public repute first impelled us to read him, it was by the exciting novelty of his message and the manner of its delivery that he held us. Novelty, excitement; —the words may now sound quaintly, but to repressed youthful Victorians the aesthetic ideal of life as outlined, with purple ink, in the Epilogue to the ‘Renaissance,’ and expanded more helpfully in the two later books, was nothing less than a revelation.⁴⁵

Less favorable a mention of the story is in Mrs. Humphry Ward's review of *Marius the Epicurean*, in which her praise for Pater's novel is described through a dismissal of “The Child in the House” as a failed first attempt. After describing Pater's notoriety, she notes that the story marks Pater's turn to fiction: “Then came an attempt in a totally new direction—the curious story

⁴³ Benson, *Walter Pater*, 82.

⁴⁴ C.J. Holmes, *Self and Partners* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 103.

⁴⁵ Holmes, *Self*, 103.

The Child in the House, of which a fragment appeared in Macmillan in the course of 1879. The author never finished it; nor is the fact to be seriously regretted.”⁴⁶ Ward suggests that *Marius* is more successful because it was less autobiographical:

The disguise furnished by the story for the autobiographical matter, of which it was obviously composed, was not a particularly happy one; above all, it was not disguise enough. Some form of presentation more impersonal, more remote from actual life was needed, before the writer's thought could allow itself fair play. Such a form has now been found in the story of *Marius the Epicurean*.⁴⁷

For the literary critic Arthur Symons, if not for Ward, the fact that “The Child in the House” did not appear in Pater’s *Imaginary Portraits* was regrettable, and in his review of that book he suggests that the story had a ready audience by the time that Daniel published it:

Had that other Imaginary Portrait, The Child in the House, published nine years ago in ‘Macmillan’s Magazine’, appeared, as we had every reason to suppose it would, in company with the four later portraits, the likeness would have again been apparent, for the childhood of Florian Deleal in the old house with its wonderful garden, carries us

⁴⁶ “M. A. W.” [Mary Augusta Ward], “Marius the Epicurean,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 52 (May 1885): 133.

Reprinted in Seiler, *Critical Heritage*. Mary Augusta Ward was later well known as the author of the novel *Robert Elsmere*, though she published fiction under the name Mrs. Humphry Ward. Seiler notes that T. Humphry Ward was one of Pater’s earliest pupils and later a colleague at Brasenose; and he observes that Pater reviewed *Robert Elsmere* for *The Guardian* in 1888.

⁴⁷ Ward, “Marius the Epicurean,” 133.

back, almost unconsciously, to the childhood of that other imaginative boy in the castle and gardens of Goito.⁴⁸

Here Symons describes the portraits as reflecting a certain type of “personality” or “soul” that he likens to Robert Browning’s *Sordello* (1840), which portrayed a fictionalized version of the historical figure Sordello da Goito, a famous Italian poet of the mid-thirteenth century who appears in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*. At the start of his review, Symons likens Pater to Charles Lamb, and notes that throughout Pater’s work Pater chooses to analyze historical figures selectively: “only those types of artistic character in which ‘delicacy’, an exquisite fineness, is the prevailing feature.”⁴⁹ After Pater’s death, the story appeared finally in *Miscellaneous Studies*, it received far more critical attention due to the prestige of the publisher and to its wider distribution.

Reviewers capitalized on the ability to read “The Child in the House” concomitantly as representative of Pater’s style but also Pater’s character. One unsigned review in the *Nation* found the story particularly insightful, saying that “the fundamental endowment of his nature is most strikingly revealed in [it].”⁵⁰ Since it was “undoubtedly a portrait of Mr Pater’s own childhood,” the reviewer reads it as a sign of something unusual, “peculiar” and saved from being a sign of disease by Pater’s “superfine sense” as an artist:

It has a singular interest and value because it sums up all the peculiarities of his style and manner, as well as of his temperament. It is a picture of an extremely sensitive artistic

⁴⁸ Arthur Symons, “Walter Pater: ‘Imaginary Portraits,’” *Time* 6 (August 1887), 160. Reprinted in Seiler, *Critical Heritage*.

⁴⁹ Seiler, *Critical Heritage*, 176.

⁵⁰ N.s., “Pater’s Last Essays,” *Nation* 62, No. 1606 (April 9, 1896), 291. Reprinted in Seiler, *Critical Heritage*.

temperament, taken with all the shades, the nuances, of some peculiarly delicate process.

This hyperaesthesia, which verges upon disease...remained with Mr. Pater simply an exquisite organ, a superfine sense with which he took in the world so vividly that his impressions became far more real to him than any thoughts or processes of reason.⁵¹

Hyperesthesia, a neurological disorder that is defined by the abnormal increase in sensitivity to sensory stimuli, indicates the way that the kinds of psychological abnormality that are romanticized as an artistic passion are, by the 1890s, being taken up by medical discourses that propose to identify psychological disorders in the name of social health. This reviewer diagnoses the story's child and Pater himself in a gesture that merely gives both the benefit of a certain doubt concerning their potentially diseased psychology.

In other words, Pater was hugely successful if his intention with the story was to provide an alternative way for people to think of him against the persistent threat of suspicion towards him of a disreputable effeminacy and a dangerous and preying influence on the young men of Oxford. The alternative description is one of genius, necessarily atypical, which was articulated in German philosophy of the Romantic era: therefore, if the story draws from Pater's personal history, it does so to situate Pater in a tradition of artists whose exceptional aesthetic intelligence and passionate temperament are apparent from an early age. It is, in 1878, Pater's first attempt at the start of his rising prominence as an authority of Aestheticism, to identify himself through Florian's example as one of a queer set of artists and poets who live apart from society in an aesthetic existence. Florian is one of the many figures from Pater's work who embodies an exceptional mode of existence, and the story is overt in being richly informed by imagery that is associated with Romanticism. Having published essays on Coleridge in 1866, Wordsworth in

⁵¹ "Pater's Last Essays," *Nation*, 291.

1874, and Romanticism in 1876, Pater's first foray into fiction coincides with his move away from the Renaissance to Romanticism in his work as an aesthetic critic. He revives and amplifies, as part of the Aesthetic Movement that he takes part, the image of the English Romantic poet who lived and, it seems, died, for the sake of art. It is the Keats sitting at dusk in the English garden feeling sorrow for the gladness of the nightingale until he no longer knows if he is awake or asleep; Wordsworth's poet, whose "spontaneous outpouring of feeling" is art when it comes from a pure, sensitive soul; the Coleridge who sits in the lime-tree bower, noting that through memory he can re-experience the sights and sounds of nature which make one "who's soul is pure" "awake to Beauty"; or the Percy Bysshe Shelley who stares in awe of Mont Blanc, translating, as only the sensitive poet can, the ancient soul of Nature to man. The child in the house is the child of Romanticism, now grown, but belonging to a rare "type" of person who is able to "concentrate the soul of his age into art." In his essay titled "Romanticism" (1876), Pater contends with the opposition between classical and romantic, clarifying their distinctions but also clarifying the false opposition between the two, he uses the metaphor of a house to distinguish the perceptiveness of the aesthetic critic:

But in that *House Beautiful*, which the creative minds of all generations—the artists and those who have treated life in the spirit of art—are always building together for the refreshment of the human spirit, these oppositions cease, and the *Interpreter* of the *House Beautiful*, the true aesthetic critic, uses these divisions only so far as they enable him to enter into the peculiarities of the objects with which he deals.⁵²

⁵² Walter H. Pater, "Romanticism," *Macmillan's Magazine* 35 (November 1876), 64. This essay was later printed as "Postscript" in *Appreciations: With and Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889). That volume also reprinted the essays on Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Lamb.

Pater's point about romanticism is that it was not a moment in time, but a quality of certain people at certain times in history:

But the romantic spirit is in reality an ever-present, and enduring principle in the artistic temperament, and the qualities of thought and style which that and other similar uses of the word romantic really indicate, are indeed but symptoms of a very continuous and widely-working influence."⁵³

Pater's interest in aligning himself with the romantic spirit gives some indication as to why his first work of fiction, so autobiographical, bears in it such an intimate relationship with a leading figure of English Romanticism, Charles Lamb. Just as Daniel thinks about the historical archive of printing when he sets out to revive printing as an art, Pater's work often revives his precursors as a way of positioning his work in historical cycles rather than at the endpoint of a temporal line. Writing about Lamb's work in literary criticism, Pater seems to describe his own goals as a critic: "he feels the poetry of these things, as the poetry of things old indeed, but surviving as an actual part of the life of the present."⁵⁴ "The Child in the House" bears such striking resemblances to Charles Lamb's dreamy fictions of childhood and the space of the house as a way of demonstrating his theory of Romanticism by invoking Lamb as exemplary of both a style and a method of literature. Pater's story evokes a kind of subjectivity that is specific to English Romanticism, as he describes in Lamb: "And with him, as with Montaigne, the desire of self-portraiture is, below all more superficial tendencies, the real motive in writing at all—a desire

⁵³ Pater, "Romanticism," 64.

⁵⁴ Pater, *Appreciations*, 115-16.

closely connected with that intimacy, that modern subjectivity, which may be called the Montaignesque element in literature.”⁵⁵

III. Charles Lamb’s Aesthetic Criticism

Pater’s story one of the becoming of a certain kind of queer subject, “the noting, namely, of some thing in the story of his spirit—in that process of brain-building by which we are, each one of us, what we are,” but a subjectivity envisioned inside of a Romantic ideology of the artist. For all of the similarities to Pater’s personal history, the story is also undoubtedly a reincarnation of Charles Lamb’s “Blakesmoor in H—shire,” from *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833), where an adult narrator journeys to “look upon the remains of an old great house with which I had been impressed in this way in infancy,” only to find that it was demolished.⁵⁶ Though with a less sensual dreaminess in his description, Lamb describes through fleeting memories the walls, rooms, furniture, colors, decor, and sounds that surrounded him in childhood: “I was a lonely child, and had the range at will of every apartment, knew every nook and corner, wondered and worshipped everywhere.”⁵⁷ Pater’s language seems to have been influenced by Lamb’s, whose narrator recalls that “A strange passion for the place possessed me in those years,” kept from wandering off by “the spell which bound me to the house.”⁵⁸ In “Blakesmoor,” there is, as in

⁵⁵ Pater, *Appreciations*, 117.

⁵⁶ Charles Lamb, “Blakesmoor in H—shire,” in *Elia and The Last Essays of Elia, The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas, 2 vols. (London: Methuen and Co., 1903), 2: 154. The original collections of these essays are as follows: Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* (London: Edward Moxon, 1823) and *Last Essays of Elia* (London: Edward Moxon, 1833).

⁵⁷ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 155.

⁵⁸ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 155.

Pater's story, a sense of the early influences of home, but also of the early signs of a personality that emerges out of or in spite of it:

these were the conditions of my birth—the wholesome soil which I was planted in. Yet, without impeachment to their tenderest lessons, I am not sorry to have had glances of something beyond, and to have taken, if but a peep, in childhood, at the contrasting accidents of a great fortune.⁵⁹

Surrounded by the antiques and artworks and portraits of his ancestral family, he remembers the attention he paid to fantastical objects around him—for example, in the Marble Hall,

...with its mosaic pavements, and its Twelve Caesars—stately busts in marble—ranged round: of whose countenances, young reader of faces as I was, the frowning beauty of Nero, I remember, had most of my wonder . . . There they stood in the coldness of death, yet freshness of immortality.⁶⁰

And in the backyard garden, remembering some statue of a Roman deity, the narrator asks if his “idol worship” was the sin that caused the old house to come to ruin, the story ends: “I sometimes think that as men do not die who die all, so of their extinguished habitations there may be a hope—a germ to be revived.”⁶¹ In “The Child in the House,” Pater seems to connect his childhood home, and perhaps his own artistic identity, with a Romantic tradition via Lamb's story of memory and loss.

⁵⁹ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 155-56.

⁶⁰ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 157.

⁶¹ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 157.

In Pater's essay on Lamb, he constructs a sort of literary portrait of the man as a form of aesthetic criticism. Lamb is a beloved figure whom Pater suggests hides, beneath a "quiet life" an artistic temperament that is vital and passionate:

In his writing, as in his life, that quiet is not the low-flying of one from the first drowsy by choice, and needing the prick of some strong passion or worldly ambition, to stimulate him into all the energy of which he is capable; but rather the reaction of nature, after an escape from fate, dark and insane as in old Greek tragedy, following upon which the sense of mere relief becomes a kind of passion...⁶²

Pater describes Lamb as a "collector," a "true essay writer," a scholar, a critic: but each in ways that are tied to his essential person rather than to even a technical skill or overt accomplishment. Pater identifies Lamb as something like a Romantic aesthetic critic, and implicitly aligns himself with a tradition but also a "type," or personage that includes Lamb: "...in truth, to men of Lamb's delicately attuned temperament mere physical stillness has its full value; such natures seeming to long for it sometimes, as for no merely negative thing, with a sort of mystical sensuality."⁶³ Like Keats's "negative capability," Pater suggests that the artistic temperament is more willing to dwell on difficult feelings for the sake of art, giving, Pater says of Lamb, "a wonderful force of expression, as if at any moment these slight words and fancies might pierce very far into the deeper soul of things."⁶⁴ Pater's "The Child in the House," since it makes out of biography something imaginative, describes the essential type of person who, within a Romantic

⁶² Pater, *Appreciations*, 124-25.

⁶³ Pater, *Appreciations*, 124.

⁶⁴ Pater, *Appreciations*, 124.

philosophy, is best understood as the figure of the artist, who is therefore in many ways exemplary, with an aesthetic intelligence that defines whole eras in human history.

In Lamb's "Dream Children: A Reverie," there is another mystical and impressionistic example of a short story focused on the confusion between a dream and a memory, and the theme of childhood, old houses, and even story-telling.⁶⁵ The narrator is telling stories of his childhood to a group of children seated around him, one of whom, Alice, is his own daughter. He tells them of their great-grandmother Field, and how good and pious she was until her death by cancer, and about his own memories as a child of visiting her in her "great lone house" which Pater's story seems to invoke. The narrator remembers "roaming about that huge mansion," which incidentally was haunted by two ghost infants that appeared as apparitions to his grandmother, but did not rattle her because, she claimed, "those innocents would do her no harm."⁶⁶ The house, the narrator notes, is known by the children because it is the scene of a popular English ballad called "The Children in the Wood," about a cruel uncle who kills his young niece and nephew in order to collect their inheritance. The house is that uncle's house, and their grandmother is merely the keeper of it while the current owner has moved to "a newer and more fashionable mansion."⁶⁷ In the ballad, "fearfull fiends did haunt his house" and "his landes were barren made" as punishment from god for his crime.⁶⁸ The house had even featured a wood

⁶⁵ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 100-03.

⁶⁶ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 100.

⁶⁷ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 101.

⁶⁸ Anon., *The Children in the Wood* (London: Jennings and Chaplan, 1831), 13. The unsigned preface to this edition mentions Lamb's story: "The admirable Elia, in his Essays, makes mention of an old mansion-house in Norfolk, traditionally reported to have been the residence of the 'cruel unkle'; and that, on a mantel, the whole story was carved in oak, 'down to the Robin Red-breasts'" (*The Children*, 4).

carving of the famous tale mounted “on the chimney-piece of the great hall” but a “foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it.”⁶⁹ As if in anticipation of “Blakesmoor in H——shire,” the house “afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away....”⁷⁰

As a memory of impressions of an old house from childhood, Lamb’s “Blakesmoor” is therefore intertextual within the two collections of essays attributed to Elia, but it also becomes a purposeful textual reference within Pater’s story. Just as Florian remembers the *old house* as having a “comely whiteness about everything there – the curtains, the couches, the paint on the walls with which the light and shadow played so delicately” and the “old-fashioned, low wainscoting went round the rooms, and up the staircase with cared balusters and shadowy angels,”⁷¹ Lamb’s narrator of “Dream Children” recalls “roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out...”⁷² He describes and playing among the fruit trees of the “spacious old-fashioned gardens,” and, like Pater’s child, is impressed by the colors and the “fine garden smells around me.” Similarly in “Blakesmoor,” Lamb’s narrator is impressed by the memories that the old house evokes: “Why, every plank and panel of that house for me had magic in it. The tapestried bed-rooms – tapestry so much better than painting – not adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots” and “the costly fruit garden, with its sunbaked southern

⁶⁹ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 101.

⁷⁰ Lamb, *Works*, 2; 101. Note that this story appeared in Lamb’s first collection of 1823, where “Blakesmoor in H——shire” appeared in the second collection of 1833. See note 34, above.

⁷¹ Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan’s*, 313-14.

⁷² Lamb, *Works*, 2: 111.

wall....”⁷³ The two stories of Lamb are clear references and planned precursors to Pater, whose sentimentality for the same geographic area is just one of the coincidences that he has with Lamb.

Through his reverie, Florian recreates the house and the child in it, “half-spiritualised” and watches to see “the gradual expansion of the soul which had come to be there” to “study so the first stage in that mental journey.”⁷⁴ But it is the blending of the material context with the mysterious source of something inborn that, the story suggests, blend together to form the distinct parts of an individual personality. “Through the law that makes the material objects about them so large an element in children's lives, it had actually become a part,” the narrator explains, referring to the “soul” of the child inside of that material existence.⁷⁵ If this necessary aspect of the mutually constitutive relationship between the material—read historical—context of a person and his or her own essential being is central to Pater's aesthetic philosophy, it is here represented in a stripped down form, since the child is naive and uninformed and therefore proceeds innocently and by instinct, being formed through the finite world around him or her. In Pater-speak, this effect is dreamy, sensuous, and without focus: “inward and outward being woven through and through each other into one inextricable texture—half, tint and trace and accident of homely color and form, from the wood and the bricks; half, mere soul-stuff, floated thither from who knows how far.”⁷⁶ A child may not feel in a state of constant flux and influence and blending as the narrator here would have it: but then, we do not read the narrative of a young

⁷³ Lamb, *Works*, 2: 155 and 2: 157.

⁷⁴ Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan's*, 313.

⁷⁵ Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan's*, 313.

⁷⁶ Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan's*, 313.

child but rather the memory, brought on by a dream that was incited by a chance encounter with a stranger, of a grown man of his childhood home that then becomes an impossible view, from the outside, wherein Florian watches the child interact, emotionally and physically, with the domestic world out of which he is forever formed. At the risk of taking too literally the style of Pater's storytelling, I would argue that the slippage between multiple perspectives of the same consciousness at different stages, who can both observe objectively and externally but also note the subtle internal feelings and sensations of this self, multiplied in time, is not just an effect of Pater's poetical and sensuous style, but is itself a description of the complexity of the psychological self.

I have described the child in Pater's story as the queer child, in this case queer denoting the figure of non-normative sexually and gender identity, and also to the child with an abnormal intelligence who, perhaps as a result of [his] feeling out of sync with norms and expectations that surround [him] seeks alternative representations in aesthetic objects like art and literature. But Pater is certainly not a proponent of a sexuality-identity, in part because such an identity was not available to him in the way that it is in the twentieth-century. Queer children, Kathryn Bond Stockton argues, come into existence in the twentieth century, and even then are marked by a historical silence. "The silences surrounding the queerness of children happen to be broken — loquaciously broken and broken almost only — by fictional forms. Fictions literally offer the forms that certain broodings on children might take. And certain broodings on children are facilitated, generally, dramatically, by our encountering a still ghostly child."⁷⁷ The ghost is the specter of gayness, which helps to show the inherent *queerness* of childhood itself: "As it

⁷⁷ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.

emerges as an idea, [this ghost] begins to outline, in shadowy form, the pain, closets, emotional labors, sexual motives, and sideways movements that attend all children, however we deny it. A gay child illuminates the darkness of the child.⁷⁸ Because the gayness of children is somewhat impossible to articulate without conflicting problems of subjectivity and temporal narratives of being and becoming (in that, for example, gayness as tied to sexuality would apply less clearly to children; and in that the gay child is often only discussed by the gay adult who reads his or her identity back into childhood, after the process of self-identifying as gay), the gay child for Stockton is emblematic of queerness in its late-twentieth century theoretical context: “Odd as it may seem, *gay* in this context, the context of the child, is the new *queer* – a term that touts its problems and shares them with anyone.”⁷⁹ Focusing on the temporal delay of growing up, the developmental “lingering” of the odd child, Stockton claims that queer children grow “sideways.”⁸⁰

Similarly, Florian struggles with confused feelings that disrupt the immediate moments of childhood and cause him to confront time obliquely: he “began to note with deepening watchfulness, but always with some puzzled, unutterable longing in his enjoyment, the phases of the seasons and of the growing or waning day.” By noticing time going by and feeling in such noticing a sense of sadness or loss, Florian seems to linger, ghostly, and in a sidelong direction, at the edges of time, blending in a confusing way with the seasonal changes of the natural world: he watches “that almost too austere clearness, in the protracted light of the lengthening day, before warm weather began, as if it lingered but to make a severer workday, with the school-

⁷⁸ Stockton, *Queer Child*, 3.

⁷⁹ Stockton, *Queer Child*, 4.

⁸⁰ Stockton, *Queer Child*, 37.

books opened earlier and later; that beam of June sunshine, at last, as he lay awake before the time, a way of gold-dust across the darkness....” Although Florian risks being absorbed completely by the external world, he is brought back to himself when he experiences pain through the penetration of a bee sting and then from a burn when an “older boy taught him to make flowers of sealing-wax.” His experience is certainly one of “the pain, closets, emotional labors, sexual motives, and sideways movements” that Stockton says are the conditions of the queer child. Indeed, Florian is interested in death and ghosts, mirroring his ghostly, haunting, lonely existence about the house. He is made aware of ghosts by overhearing the stories that adults tell, and realizes that the dead do not always stay motionless, “but led a secret, half-fugitive life in their old homes, quite free by night, though sometimes visible in the day, dodging from room to room, with no great goodwill towards those who shared the place with them.” Florian is described as reconciling these “sombre questionings” of life and death by finding comfort in religion, and then by taking great comfort in the aesthetic elements of religious ceremony. But in fact it is a retreat, in Stockton’s words, to the fictions of art and literature. Florian’s primary literary source is the bible, and specifically the images in the bible, since children are more likely to look in a book for pictures rather than text. “He pored over the pictures in religious books, and knew by heart the exact mode in which the wrestling angel grasped Jacob, how Jacob looked in his mysterious sleep, how the bells and pomegranates were attached to the hem of Aaron’s vestment, sounding sweetly as he glided over the turf of the holy place.” At one point he thinks of his father, now dead, as a soldier permanently and valiantly in another land, and imagines him through such biblical illustrations, specifically Joshua 5:13-5:14: “a grand, though perhaps rather terrible figure, in beautiful soldier’s things, like the figure in the picture of Joshua’s Vision in the bible.” Elsewhere, he begins to feel a pained sadness out of

empathy for the suffering that seems inherent in life, and he recalls seeing Jacques-Louis David's ugly caricature of Marie Antoinette with her hands bound, readied to be executed.

A book lay in an old book-case, of which he cared to remember one picture—a woman sitting with hands bound behind her, the dress, the cap, the hair, folded with a simplicity which touched him strangely, as if not by her own hands, but with some ambiguous care at the hands of others—Queen Marie Antoinette, on her way to execution—We all remember David's drawing, meant merely to make her ridiculous. The face that had been so high had learned to be mute and resistless; but out of its very resistlessness, seemed now to call on men to have pity, and forbear: and he took note of that, as he closed the book, as a thing to look at again, if he should at any time find himself tempted to be cruel.

When, in moments like this one, Florian recognizes something in a book, the Daniel edition becomes the highly aestheticized book that the reader, if he or she is a sensual and sensitive person, recognizes as beautiful; and therefore the queer child is the point of recognition, through aesthetics, of the queerness that otherwise makes one feel abnormal and alienated. The child does not necessarily care about the artistic or political history around the drawing in the book that he finds in an old bookcase, but instead recognizes in the subject's expression some humanity that he implies is a critique of the artist for being cruel. The things one finds in books, therefore, always offer the opportunity of connecting with a queer community through a process of interpretation that affords recognition. In some instances, when that recognition is more purposefully erotic, then we might call it innuendo or codified homosexuality; but Pater situates this communal recognition in aesthetic philosophy.

Monsman points to a note that Pater had written to himself on a scrap of paper which said: "Child in the House: voilà, the germinating, original, source, specimen of all my

imaginative work.”⁸¹ Monsman reads the story through an unfortunate psychoanalytic interpretation of parenthood, insisting on the autobiographical insight in Pater’s narrative of childhood:

This antagonism that Florian-Pater initially feels towards the absent father is, typically, that sense of a broken wholeness, the absent godhead, halves disjointed. Although the connection is not overtly stated, certain militaristic-biblical figures (Joshua, Jacob, Aaron, Moses) assume the paternal role and develop the idea of the recovered father as the ‘sacred double’ who is ‘at once the reflex and the pattern’ of the child’s nobler self.⁸²

Citing Philip Toynbee’s statement that, by 1882, the scandalous Pater “had suddenly evaporated, to be replaced by that old pussy-cat ‘Walter Pater’ with whom posterity has been so much more familiar. ...the new Pater became almost a joke for his old-maidishness and sever propriety.”⁸³

Monsman accepts the view of Pater’s withdrawal from identification with an ostentatious celebrity: “that metamorphosis of doubt into a creed which others, more willing that Pater to play the decadent, celebrated long after he had opted for respectability by a kind of self-cancellation.”⁸⁴ Monsman reads Pater’s interest in writing fiction in connection with a crisis: through “fictional forms” Pater “expressed his yearning for a refuge from the threatening ‘abyss.’” Monsman locates a “creative crisis that caused him to abandon a midpoint the

⁸¹ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 80. He cites the following source: *Letters of Walter Pater*, ed. Lawrence Evans (Oxford, 1970), xxix.

⁸² Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 79.

⁸³ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 3. The article he cites is Philip Toynbee, “Rebel into Pussycat,” *Observer* (16 August 1970), 21.

⁸⁴ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 3.

autobiographical ‘trilogy’⁸⁵ as taking place in “about 1887-88,” which he concludes had its origin “in the childhood loss of both Pater’s father and mother.”⁸⁶ Pater was finally confronted with his psychological struggle to “recover paternity,” according to Monsman’s psychoanalysis when his elder brother died in 1887, the same time that, Monsman says, Pater refused a “public paternal role” “[o]wing to the hostility of critics who irrevocably linked him with those errant sons, his decadent disciples....”⁸⁷

Monsman dances characteristically around the fact of Pater’s non-normative sexual identity. What was most dangerous for Pater’s career and his person was the fact that, by the 1880s, he was associated with a subculture that was being policed for its openness to the “polymorphous perversions” of non-normative sexual and gender identities. His “decadent disciples” included Oscar Wilde and Simeon Solomon, both of whom were arrested for homosexual acts. The criminal pervert was, in the final decades of the twentieth century England, being increasingly named in the language of a social and moral threat to the social order; the immorality of elder men posed a special danger by way of an enticement and influence which young, impressionable men were especially susceptible. To say that Pater was experiencing an “artistic crisis” attributed to childhood trauma is to pretend that the “hostility of critics” was merely one motivation for Pater to adopt a position of “severe propriety” in his own life, if not in his writing. In fact, Pater spoke not only for a philosophy of Aestheticism as a type of creative self-expression, but also for a queer otherness that he enunciates in his critical and literary works.

⁸⁵ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 3.

⁸⁶ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 4.

⁸⁷ Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 4.

When he was writing “The Child in the House,” Pater had been confronted with threats and social rejection due to his exploration of sexual desire between men, in his work, and the implications for and rumors of his personal identification with behaviors deemed illegal and grotesque. While it would be inaccurate to read it as a direct response to his critics and Oxford authorities, it was certainly a time when he resisted being corrected on moral grounds. He also was surrounded by young men still in their teenage years who struggled with the same pressures concerning their dissident sexual desires. I read his portrait of the child as a reflection on the earliest evidence of his desires, passions, and pursuits; as a story not of childhood itself, but of the queerness of childhood, or, perhaps, the development of a *queer* child. He implicitly makes a case for the legitimacy of a certain type of person, whose innate *desire for beauty* can be channeled into the work of art, the church, or scholarship.

Kevin Ohi reads “The Child in the House” as “a narrative of artistic development that focuses centrally on an eroticized gaze at childhood and death.”⁸⁸ Ohi argues that innocence is a term that Pater applies to a pre-Christian conception of sex that is sympathetic with same-sex desire.⁸⁹ The erotic gaze is made available, according to Ohi, by the autobiographical frame of the story – but in this case, it is not Pater’s veiled autobiography, but the autobiography of the narrator as he remembers himself as a child. Thus, he argues, that the story “depicts a startlingly perverse aesthetic education,” whereby the artist finds pleasure in a failure to narrate his own development. “The story makes it impossible to assume the convergence of remembering artist and remembered boy; the gap thus introduced makes explicit the potential eroticism of this

⁸⁸ Kevin Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture: The Erotic Child in Pater, Wilde, James, and Nabakov* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 51.

⁸⁹ Ohi, *Innocence*, 50.

autobiographical project, of an older man's yearning gaze at the boy he once was."⁹⁰ While I find that Ohi's reading is simply unsupported by the story because the child is not eroticized by the narrator's gaze, his reading is meaningful in showing that Pater's narrative can be read as an erotics of innocence around the queer child. Ohi might be replicating the tendency to read a text for evidence of its writer's homosexuality, seeing homosexuality as so pervasive that it gives itself away, or in Michel Foucault's words: "Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away." For this reason, the language of queerness allows an alternative rendering of anti-normative articulations of subjects of sex and gender, which speak to strategies rather than diagnoses. Ohi acknowledges that his reading is related to problematic understanding of homosexuality as a kind of narcissism and thus a developmental flaw, but is nonetheless uncritical of his own potential homophobia: "The effect is thus similar to accounts of the narcissistic roots of homosexuality and intergenerational desire; one desires the child one once was or as the child one has remained." While he argues for a difference in emphasizing "estrangement and alienation" rather than narcissism, he undoes the queer politics of this position by making the narrator's description of his youth one of literal sexual desire: "an experience of self-difference makes possible a seemingly more literal erotic encounter. In Pater's version of the aesthetic education, the becoming spectral...occurs through, and makes possible, an erotic gaze at the child."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ohi, *Innocence*, 51.

⁹¹ Ohi, *Innocence*, 54.

Heather Love has referred to Pater's emotional/intellectual response to the scandal around his sexual behavior with young men as leading to an "aesthetics of failure," how "secrecy and concealment" became, for Pater, an "investment in failure and in victimization" when "his position of educational and national privilege could be maintained only by fending off the constant threat of exposure."⁹² Love connects moments in Pater's fiction and nonfiction to a form of resistance that is based on identifying with being an outcast and an exile, in a life that is passive, quiet, and melancholy. Reading Pater's analyses of Botticelli's figures, Love sees an effort to describe queer subjects, outsiders, with an air of loss that she sees as "the result of their alienation from dominant social structures...outside structures of kinship."⁹³ Like "The Child in the House," where Pater invokes a past that can only be accessed through memory or through the materials that survive, Love's reading of Pater's analysis of these sad figures in the history of art add to his queer perspective of social identity. "The spatial displacement of these figures is matched by a temporal displacement: they fall outside the home but also outside of the linear narratives and ordered temporalities of blood kinship. These figures are outside time, suspended in an endless present of indecision."⁹⁴

⁹² Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 57.

⁹³ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 64.

⁹⁴ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 64. In his review, Dustin Friedman disagrees with Love's reading of Pater, in part because she fails to account for his explicit homoerotic moments: "If anything, Pater's passivity is often least apparent where his representations of male homoeroticism are most explicit, which suggests that the relationship between Pater's politics of passivity and his non-normative desires might be more complex than Love allows for, in her analysis" (Dustin Friedman, "Reviews," *Textual Practice* 24, no. 1 [2010], 177.).

IV. Pater's Sexual Scandal

The incident so often alluded to, but rarely described in detail, implicates Pater through the hearsay of a group of undergraduates. Pater became well known just after *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* was published, and for a decade or more he would be regularly surrounded by students who were enamored with him and his writing. One student, nineteen-year-old William Money Hardinge, spent time with Pater and exchanged letters, and was known among peers to talk frankly of sex and same-sex love. It was when another student reported Hardinge's lewd, homosexual sonnets that college officials became involved, and Hardinge and many other students were interviewed about what they knew. Benjamin Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek and Master of Balliol College, spoke with Pater behind closed doors, and following that discussion Pater broke ties with Jowett, his former mentor. It is only in recent decades that scholars, especially Billie Andrew Inman and Laurel Brake, found letters in archives from the students themselves that anything more than shame-filled circumspect references to Pater and Hardinge has been shared.

In 1874, when Pater was threatened with having his reputation ruined over the homosexual scandal of one of his students, Pater's career was promising but precarious. His *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* had been out for a year and established his influence as the proponent of Aestheticism (but also established him as a subversive, willing to openly confront the mores that so characterized the Victorian age). He was a Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, where he lectured and tutored undergraduate students while delivering papers to the Old Mortality Society. He had flirted with adopting the style of a dandy, including a top hat and green silk tie, becoming already something of an icon, at age thirty-five, to a minority group of Brasenose undergraduates. Pater was famously, around this time, denied a fellowship at

the request of his onetime mentor Benjamin Jowett, who had ascended to the position of Master of the college by that time. If, for Toynbee, the “new Pater” of the 1880s was a bore in comparison to his earlier image, it may well have been by necessity: he escaped a public investigation only because Jowett wanted to avoid “ruining for life” the reputation of the teenage undergraduates who were involved.

Pater did not directly address the contemporary discussion of same-sex desire and criminal perversions at any point in his career. But his work is infused with allusions to same-sex desire and homoeroticism, and he regularly lectured on the work of Plato and Socrates, which he read from the Greek, and was therefore acquainted with the “Problem in Greek Ethics.”⁹⁵ He was friends with men and women who were also writing about and experimenting with the “polymorphous perversions” of desire. While it is a mistake to read Pater’s writings as communicating in an encoded form his identification with homosexuality, and worse to read his writings as reflecting latent desires of which he was unable to acknowledge, I maintain that “The Child in the House” addresses the myriad “labels” that were increasingly produced by the study of criminal psychology and antisocial anomalies. To support this analysis, I read “sensitivity” as a characteristic of a child who exhibits from an early age an atypical constitution. “The Child in the House” describes the formation of a queer subjectivity through the aesthetics of desire, but it

⁹⁵ This is a reference to both the ongoing debate as to whether university students should encounter discussions of pederasty in Greek classics and to the book *A Problem in Greek Ethics* by John Addington Symonds, privately printed in 1883 and published in 1901. For a fuller discussion of the academic debate between Pater and Jowett, see Lesley Higgins, “Jowett and Pater: Trafficking in Platonic Wares,” *Victorian Studies* 37, no. 1 (Autumn, 1993): 43-72. For an argument about the “aesthetic Platonism” that linked aesthetics to sexual identity during this period, see Stefano Evangelista, “‘Lovers and Philosophers at Once’: Aesthetic Platonism in the Victorian ‘Fin-de-siècle,’” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36, no. 2 (2006): 230-44.

does so without making any universal statements about childhood or sexual identity. “The house of the brain” is the thinking, feeling space which holds the capacity for desire, but which does not direct desire to any specific end.

But perhaps Pater took the threat seriously, and destroyed all evidence of his private affairs, so that no easy claim can be made about his sexual identification. It was first in the two biographies that immediately followed his death that the details of the incident with Hardinge were revived. Benson’s biography was the sanctioned one, and because he was a friend of Pater’s the Pater sisters were cooperative with his efforts in 1904-1906. Thomas Wright’s 0000 biography was unauthorized, and although he names a number of trustworthy sources, he is less concerned about enforcing a Pater of faultless reputation. In chapter 29 of his book, subtitled “1874: Jowett’s Salutary Whip,” Wright helps to create a Pater who was flamboyantly immoral, obstinate and misguided, in whose work one can see evidence of a disturbed psychology.⁹⁶ Wright states that Pater was “certain” to gain “that coveted office the Proctorship,” (having already planned on the extra income, as “he had already calculated the amount of pleasure in continental travel that the extra remuneration would afford”) yet was entirely unsuitable for it: “The strengthless, timid, irresolute Pater, followed at a respectful distance by a pair of ‘bull-dogs’ and doing the policeman’s work of the University, would have been a sight both remarkable and rememberable.”⁹⁷ Wright portrays Pater as being in need of discipline; and applauds Jowett for exercising it. Jowett had been “distinctly displeased” with *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, “and he summed up its author in a particularly stinging epigram

⁹⁶ Thomas Wright, *The Life of Walter Pater*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1907), 1: 255.

⁹⁷ Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 255-56.

which it is not necessary to repeat.”⁹⁸ Pater, Wright explains, spoke too liberally—though about what he does not say; all that Wright will admit is that “when [Pater’s] tongue ran away with him, as it had a habit of doing, his best friends felt uncomfortable. Several of them cooled towards him, while others, though they continued the friendship, were troubled with an uneasy feeling (justifiable or not) that he was doing a certain amount of harm in Oxford.”⁹⁹ Wright’s pretended objectivity—“justifiable or not”—implies that the bias which favors Jowett in his telling is based on objective fact. What the facts are remain obfuscated in Wright’s hedging at any detail. Having noted Pater’s “tendency” to speak in a way that made friends cool, uncomfortable, uneasy, concerned, Wright says:

Jowett’s animosity towards Pater was increased by the construction which he put upon the rumours to which the inconsequent talk just alluded to gave origin — matters being brought to a head by a casual observation made by a common friend to Jowett; and having said this—that is, just sufficient to justify Jowett—we have said enough.”¹⁰⁰

One would hardly know that there was a specific event that Wright is discussing except for when he gives it away obliquely: “this incident,” “this affair,” “the matter,” and yet above he can only say that Pater was guilty of “inconsequent talk” that led to “rumours” and an unofficial “observation.” Wright is so unwilling to make a frank reference to same-sex desire or same-sex romance that he can only refer to a vague, unnamable thing in Pater that Jowett heroically corrected: “We can only say—with the whole of the facts before us—that Jowett’s conduct throughout this affair was that of a Christian and a gentleman. He could not possibly have dealt

⁹⁸ Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 255.

⁹⁹ Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 255-56.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 256.

with the matter more skillfully or more delicately.”¹⁰¹ “The consequence” of Pater’s undisciplined speaking, Wright says, “was that Pater lost the coveted post (worth from £300 to £350 for the year) which fell instead to Mr. John Wordsworth.”¹⁰² Wright speaks of Pater’s loss of both a position and financial as being the direct result of the ambiguously described “incident.” After Jowett’s salutary whipping, Wright tells a very specific story where, on Tuesday June 16th, at St. John’s College Gardens, Pater attended the Flower Show of the Royal Oxford Horticultural Society and was both “moved” by the spectacle but also anxious, even cagey:

In the midst of these floods of colour and sound moved on man to whom nothing seemed to appeal. It was Walter Pater, who passed restlessly hither and thither with lowered head. Presently he saw sauntering a few yards off the friend to whom reference has been made. “Do you know,” he whispered, as he passed him, “that you lost me three hundred pounds?”¹⁰³

The anecdote of a passing whisper to “the friend,” presumably Hardinge, is impossible journalism, but serves to dramatize Pater’s awareness of his loss and the psychological effect it might have had on him (but also to emphasize that he is the superficial and hedonistic Aesthete, who is driven by carnal desires: flowers, money, and young men). Here, too, in what was originally the final pages of Volume 1, the pause to the “second half” of Pater’s life, Wright seems to justify his own academic interest in this dubious figure when he suggests that Pater was rescued, in a sense, spiritually, from an otherwise destructive path towards homosexuality:

¹⁰¹ Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 256.

¹⁰² Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 256.

¹⁰³ Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 259.

The gain, however, to Pater was infinitely more than the loss—for, henceforth, he kept a very wayward tongue under stricter control; and one may allocate to this period the beginning of the nobler Pater.”¹⁰⁴

Billie Andrew Inman notes that when Hardinge left Oxford in September of 1874, Brasenose nominated John Wordsworth as University Proctor, and she concludes that “it is likely that Jowett did tell the President of Brasenose that Pater was not the sort of man who should have a wider influence,” although, Inman says, he could just have easily have been passed over “on the grounds of irreligion.”¹⁰⁵ Whatever Pater’s personal feelings on the matter, he was under pressure to situate himself intellectually apart from the charges, as it were, of “indecent” conversation, of influencing undergraduates toward immorality, of having sex with men, and especially of identifying openly as a homosexual. It was at a time when his notoriety was new enough, and controversial enough, to topple; and he was on the brink of establishing himself as a leading critic and intellectual of his day. For Inman, “the theme of victimization and the tendency to glorify suffering entered Pater’s works after 1874 and ... most of his works published over the next four years were written as veiled responses to criticism of his life and influence.”¹⁰⁶ But in “Child in the House” and other works, I see instead an effort on Pater’s part to identify a certain type of artistic personage who has existed in different time periods of Western culture, and who is best understood through the Romantic concept of the artist as extraordinary. Less a self-martyring as Inman might have it, Pater was, I would argue, made gravely

¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 259.

¹⁰⁵ Billie Andrew Inman, “Estrangement and Connection: Walter Pater, Benjamin Jowett, and William M. Hardinge” in *Pater in the 90s*, ed. Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991), 14.

¹⁰⁶ Inman, “Estrangement,” 19.

aware of how he might be labeled a criminal based on “inferences that could be drawn” from his work, his company, and his “mannerisms and conversation.”

Despite the precariousness of his position at Oxford, Pater was successful in publishing, and had built a strong relationship with Daniel and Alexander Macmillan. His first piece for *Macmillan’s Magazine* was “Romanticism,” printed in November of 1876, the same month that Alexander Macmillan wrote to Pater to request a revised edition of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which had been, in all ways, a success.¹⁰⁷ By March 1877, the second edition was printed, and Pater had secured in Macmillan and Co. a profitable business relationship.

In April of 1878, Pater wrote to one of Macmillan’s general editors, George Grove, who by then was the editor of *Macmillan’s Magazine*.¹⁰⁸ He writes:

I send you by this post a MS. entitled ‘The House and the Child,’ and should be pleased if you should like to have it for Macmillan’s Magazine. It is not, as you might perhaps fancy, the first part of a work of fiction, but is meant to be complete in itself; though the first of a series, as I hope, with some kind of sequence in them, and which I should be glad to send you. I call the MS. a portrait, and mean readers, as they might do on seeing a portrait, to begin speculating: what came of him?¹⁰⁹

In this early planning stage of his first work of fiction, Pater describes the story as the first of a series, and takes full advantage of his good standing with the Macmillan and Co. to shore up, via the promise of a series of exclusive short stories, an outlet for future publications with the magazine that could then be the basis of another book. He explains the impressionistic,

¹⁰⁷ Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 74.

¹⁰⁸ Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 83.

¹⁰⁹ Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 83.

experimental nature of the writing by designating for it a new genre of fiction: “I call [it] a portrait.” Considering the autobiographical details embedded in the story, it is noteworthy that Pater does not at first use the phrase “imaginary portrait.” If Pater did indeed see himself disguised as Florian Deleal, then he must have enjoyed the fantasy of readers speculating forever after “what came of him?” and the irony that the “him” of this question is the writer of this literary portrait—and a successful essayist of *Macmillan’s Magazine*.

So while “The Child in the House” is often read as a story about childhood itself, with its attendant mysteries, naive and impressionable perspectives, and the universal self in some miniature form, it is also a specific analysis of one man's psychological development. The stakes of the latter point are not made explicit: what does Florian seek to understand in analyzing his childhood development? Considering that this is understood as semi-autobiographical, and that it is one of Pater's “Imaginary Portraits,” complicates any reading of this story as being one concerning “childhood” in an abstract or universal sense.

The physical attributes and artifacts of the house describe an aesthetic influence that is more French than English, and therefore the English home is the carrier of a foreign, yet benign, presence. The implication, of course, is that the inhabitants of the home are descended from a French aristocratic family, whose lineage ties directly to the Rococo artist Jean-Antoine Watteau, who died in 1721 at age thirty-six—the approximate age of Florian himself. As the English, in the nineteenth century, were under the influence of the French anxiety over the decline, through decadence and moral corruption, of a great empire, the house can figure even further as the cultural context of a shifting class consciousness and of the confluence of European populations adjusting to an emergent global identity.

The family lineage that is noted in connection to Watteau has other implications, specifically what we would now understand as genetic, but which would have been understood similarly as the inborn tendencies that derive from one's ancestry. Florian, that is to say, descends from an influential and well-regarded artist, suggesting that he had the potential, more so than other children, to be artistically and aesthetically perceptive. In fact, such a cultural-ancestral influence “might explain,” according to the narrator, the taste and style of the decor in the house, chosen according to the temperament of the family: “the curtains, the couches, the paint on the walls with which the light and shadow played so delicately, might explain also the tolerance of the great poplar in the garden, a tree most often despised by English people, but which French people love, having observed a certain fresh way its leaves have of dealing with the wind, making it sound in never so slight a stirring of the air, like running water.”¹¹⁰

In other words, the influences on an aesthetic, artistic, sensitive temperament are bound up in one another: the child of the house exists in an environment whose every sensory detail relates to the tastes and interests of that child's family. Not unlike the perpetually unresolved understanding of “nature versus nurture” as an explanation of human individuality, Pater lays the scene for the necessary interplay of inborn potential and the material context out of which one develops. Pater seems to want to emphasize this confusing inseparability of the “essential self” and the “historically contingent,” yet to what end? It seems that this story wants to either demonstrate that there is an “essential self” that turns every person into a unique and individual experience of human-being; or else that there is no metaphysical “being” that exists prior to the very historical contingency out of which an individual is formed.

¹¹⁰ Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan's*, 313.

While I would argue that the text works at redirecting such a separation of “external influence” and “inherent, individual inclinations,” the frame tale of its telling always multiplies the subject—the child—since that subject is being told through the memories of his elder self. Florian describes, in rich and vivid detail, the house that encapsulates his child-self. Therefore, no statement is factual, but rather every description is mediated through Florian's memory, and perhaps by his own attempt to organize the world of the “old house” so as to provide a narrative of his present-day self. Are all of the details that Florian notes, as he imaginatively explores the house that is accessible by his memory, only knowable because he was that sensitive, artistically inclined child? Does that child's sensual intercourse with the material world immediately around him tell us less about the universal experience of childhood and more about Florian's unique traits? Noting the ugliness of the chimney fog from the nearby city, Florian states that the child has no sense of beauty that overrides the innocent excitement of new and novel sensory impressions:

For it is false to suppose that a child's sense of beauty is dependent on any choiceness, or special fineness, in the objects which present themselves to it, though this indeed comes to be the rule with most of us in later life; earlier, in some degree, we see inwardly; and the child finds for itself, and with unstinted delight, a difference for the sense, in those whites and reds through the smoke on very homely buildings, and in the gold of the dandelions at the road-side, just beyond the houses, where not a handful of earth is virgin and untouched, in the lack of better ministries to its desire of beauty.¹¹¹

To be prompted by sensory impressions to “see inwardly” might derive from an inherent and preternatural “desire of beauty,” though, again, it remains unclear if this is a general trait in

¹¹¹ Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan's*, 314.

the condition of “being a child.” Whether or not it is a universal trait, it seems a general possibility that a child is inclined toward beauty, as it “finds for itself... a difference for the sense...in the lack of better ministries to its desire of beauty,” and does so “with unstinted delight.” At a group level, humanity would seem to have an inborn drive for beauty, and an automatic feeling of pleasure in “seeing” (or receiving sensory inputs) the external world “internally,” which might be to say that the mere pleasures of sensation are a motivation that are as innocent as childhood.

The matured “sense of beauty” that is dependent on “choiceness, or special fineness, in the objects which present themselves to it,” which becomes the “rule” later in life, although “to most,” but not all, might be said to extend from this inherent impulse to desire beauty. If “better ministries” to this desire come to bear on the person, he or she may have an enlarged, better informed, and vastly refined sense of beauty; but it might also corrupt, through other motivations, that innate desire, or alienate people from what is naturally, innocently beautiful by rearticulating beauty as something rare, unreachable, fantastical, or otherwise unattainable.

Without being overly schematic, the story, then, might also represent in an allegorical form the “anxiety of aesthetics” that had motivated a European movement in historical criticism for going on a century. Beyond representing the inborn-constitution of its inhabitants, the structure of the mind that is directly tied to whatever is inherited from the ancestry that precedes life, the house is also figured as the protective shell that mediates the child's encounter with and understanding of the “larger world.” High garden-walls become the backdrop to flowering vegetation, and create the sense of a mysterious external world of the town that the child perceives but from a distance:

The coming and going of travelers...the shadow of the streets, the sudden breadth of the neighboring gardens, the singular brightness of bright weather there...the coolness of the dark, cavernous shops round the great church...a citadel of peace in the heard of the trouble.¹¹²

Though its mystery is enticing, the outer world offers threats that the garden wall, the home, the father who notes the Latin names of the plants, the mother who reads to the child, all assist in protecting the child from a too-sudden introduction to a harsh reality. Yet, like the smells that waft over the garden wall, details of the outer world make their way to the consciousness of the child:

The realities and passions, the rumors of the greater world without, steal in upon us, each by its own special little passage-way, through the wall of custom about us; and never afterwards quite detach themselves from this or that accident, or trick, in the mode of their first entrance to us.¹¹³

Somehow, a greater and more complete understanding of the world beyond the domestic interior is available to the child in the form of fugitive knowledges that invade the protective wall of the home, and “the wall of custom about us.” Yet what Florian describes does not seem to be directed towards a “warning” issued to society to be ever vigilant to the external influences that may come through in an unmediated or uncontrolled way. Rather, it is the accidental way that the child accumulates knowledge and understanding that is, in a way, considered more humane, because it is a diffuse and softened form of the blunt realities of the world. The experience of the child in the house is one shrouded in a protective, mediating influence of family, and one in

¹¹² Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan's*, 314.

¹¹³ Pater, “Imaginary Portraits,” *Macmillan's*, 315.

which knowledge accumulates through accidents, sometimes delivered by way of rumor, reality, passion, through secretive “little passage-ways,” so that information is never separate from the “wall of custom” and accidental incident that brings it into perception.

This idea of a matrix of contingencies through which the phenomenal world is perceived is crucial to Pater's aesthetic philosophy. But in “The Child in the House” Pater makes a direct connection to a childhood psycho-sensual development that involves innumerable unknowable variables—those inborn and those that are contextual in history, from epochal changes down to the day-to-day accidents that constitute existence. On my reading, one dimension of the significance of Pater’s aesthetic theory is its connection between the study of aesthetic objects and the influence on one’s psychological development that such study exerts. Pater, then, is a transitional figure between aesthetics and psychology, especially in that psychology as a discipline emerged from the study of, on the one hand, the historical trajectory of human development (via Darwinism and Marxism) and, on the other hand, the classification of criminal aberrations and abnormal constitutions (via criminology and sexology). The English decadents, by flagrantly taking up the subtle implications of the pleasures of art over reality and the erotics of sensual impressions found in Pater’s writings, extend Aestheticism into an age of urban industrial life and critique its seriousness by treating its tenants with irony. In the following chapter, I make just such a claim within the study of the aesthetic book.

Chapter 3: The Decadent Vale Press

The primary materials that I have analyzed in the preceding chapters show the development of the aesthetic book, in which form reflects the literary content. Aestheticism was the mode of literature that promoted art as a realm of open possibilities, exploring thought and feeling through contemplating the various arts. As I have argued, these works often invited controversy and critique for being overly sensual and yet offering no clear, socially acceptable moral conclusion. The development of a post-Aestheticism movement – one that was both an extension of these principles but also an ironic critique of them – became prominent in the late 1880s and early 1890s as writers and artists in England imported French *décadence*, both literally in producing translations, but also as models for a new mode of literature.¹ To arrive at the aesthetic book of specifically Decadent literature, I will focus on a series of texts that are associated with English Decadence. There is really one primary producer that uses the aesthetic book as the form of literary Decadence, and that is the Vale Press.

“The Vale Press” is something of a shortcut nomenclature for the work of Charles Ricketts, and artist and art critic who exerted significant influence on the English Decadents through his various ventures. This is because some of the most significant works that I will discuss below were done by Ricketts prior to the official founding of the press, and also because the Vale Press really was not a press as such, but a publishing firm run by Ricketts and his business partner W. L. Hacon (the press work was done at the Ballantyne Press, but was

¹ As I show in my introduction and below, it would be more accurate to refer to French Decadence/Symbolism/Impressionism, as no one label applies to a group of French poets and writers who were variously categorized in each but who overlapped.

designed and overseen by Ricketts). The Vale was also the name of the studio and home that Ricketts and his partner Charles Haslewood Shannon lived in and worked, which became the gathering place for a community of writers and artists who shared the same aesthetic sensibilities.² So at the risk of being inaccurate, I propose to consider “the Vale Press” to mean the entire body of work in the area of book arts by Ricketts and Shannon, although the publishing firm of that name lasted only seven years (from 1896 to 1903).

By the time the Vale Press was formed in 1896, Ricketts and Shannon had established themselves not only as artists and craftsmen in London, but also as aesthetes of the post-Pater school. As they shared a home and a business, Ricketts and Shannon were partners in life, and were most likely lovers, although they rarely identified their relationship as romantic in any direct sense. Ricketts was the more social and ambitious of the pair, and situated himself in order to both protect and promote Shannon, whom Ricketts felt had the artistic potential to obtain recognition as a great oil painter. While Shannon never quite realized this wish, he worked steadily throughout their lives together, and many of Ricketts’s early business decisions were motivated by the long-term plan for Shannon’s artistic fame.

Ricketts was an accomplished artist in his own right, and the two met in 1882 as teenagers while apprenticing with a wood engraver following training at the City and Guilds Art School in Kennington, London. In 1888 they established their home/studio in Chelsea London and for ten years it was the meeting place of a circle of young artists and writers who shared a

² Hacon and Ricketts sold their books at their shop called “At the Sign of the Dial,” the address of which, printed on the title page of most of the works of the Vale Press, was 52 Warwick Street, Regent Street.

philosophical commitment to cosmopolitan Aestheticism.³ They named their home the Vale and it became the location of their first venture, the art journal named *The Dial*, which ran from 1889 to 1897. What I hope to show in terms of book design overlaps what Matt Cook has argued concerning Ricketts and Shannon’s “house beautiful,” that is, the way that the two men cooperated to create an aesthetics of the domestic space portrays a queer identity and queer identification.⁴ The space of the home, including their time at the Vale, is, Cook argues, tied to the social, legal, and cultural context of late nineteenth century London. “Legal prohibition and social disapprobation hedge the ways Shannon and Ricketts constituted their homes, opened them to visitors, and presented themselves as a partnership.”⁵ Cook does not attempt to identify a common type, but rather sees in their aesthetic partnership an example of the way that queer attachments were negotiated, despite the difficulty presented when we attempt to apply twentieth century nomenclature of identity based on sexual object-choice (that is, the two men were not clearly in a homosexual marriage): “Though far from representative, unpacking Shannon and Ricketts’s homes provides a model for discerning the multiplicity and complexity of queer identification and difference.”⁶ In this chapter, I enlarge this notion of the queer domestic space to the queer community of collaborators centered on Ricketts and Shannon’s bookmaking. To once again cite Cook: “[they and] their circle were accommodating of different configurations of

³ According to Yeats’s autobiography, the Vale held something like an open studios every Friday night. William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats Vol. III: Autobiographies*, ed. Douglas Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 114.

⁴ Matt Cook, “Domestic Passions: Unpacking the Homes of Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts,” *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 3 (July, 2012): 618-40.

⁵ Cook, “Domestic Passions,” 623.

⁶ Cook, “Domestic Passions,” 621.

intimacy, and they marked out their disjunction from perceived norms or expectations in multiple and not only sexualized or eroticized ways – via art, collecting, and literature, most notably.”⁷ Their aesthetic material and social world was queer, if not in directly sexual ways, and their example or influence represents the way that queer identity often proceeds through aesthetic modalities even when they imply erotic desire.

Between the years of 1888 and 1890, Ricketts met and collaborated with Oscar Wilde, John Gray, and Michael Field (the coauthors Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper), and his relationship with each of them carried through the rest of their lives. Ricketts (and by default Shannon), therefore, represents the center of a community of writers and artists whose works refer to one another and whose books become objects of collaboration that defy traditional notions of authorship. The total work, the literature along with its aestheticized bibliographic context (which often includes custom illustrations by Ricketts and Shannon), speaks to this community formation through which the people involved worked to articulate an identity that was as subversive as the art they promoted. Gray, along with his life partner Marc-André Raffalovich, Ricketts and Shannon, Bradley and Cooper, and of course Oscar Wilde, all were involved in romantic relationships that provided an alternative to the heterosexual couple. In this chapter, I analyze the way that the Vale’s decadent aesthetic books portray sexual and gender nonconformity as part of the aesthetic experimentation that is commonly referred to as *fin-de-siècle* literature, or literature of the 1890s.

I will briefly discuss important moments in J.-K. Huysmans’ novel *A Rebours* (1884) that act as an early critical discussion, albeit in a fictitious setting, of French decadence, and then I will discuss the impact that this had on Wilde as reflected in *Dorian Gray*. I will then show the

⁷ Cook, “Domestic Passions,” 622.

relationship between Dorian Gray and the Vale Press circle of artists and authors, before finally discussing some of the most meaningful Vale Press works. My discussion of *A Rebours* relates to British decadent literature and the aesthetic book in to key ways: first, Huysmans' novel succinctly describes the decadent movement that was then "getting under way" in France, which John Gray's *Silverpoints* (1893) sought to translate into English literally and in an exemplary fashion. Second, it is one of the main texts on which Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, revised 1891) is based, and is more than likely the book that Dorian Gray reads just after his mystical prayer that ensures his permanent youth is made. Crucially, the fact that Dorian's physical appearance will never reveal the truth of his hedonistic lifestyle is inspired by *A Rebours*: Dorian is "poisoned by a book." Since the single-volume edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was partly designed by Charles Ricketts, and since the three principal characters are said to be modeled on Wilde/Pater, Ricketts, and John Gray, the novel is a key work in describing the aesthetic book of decadent literature in 1890s England.

I. The *Dial* and Community Formation

It was through compiling the inaugural issue of *The Dial* in August 1889 that Ricketts and Shannon began to work with a number of writers and artists who contributed work to it, sometimes at Ricketts's request. There were only five issues of the magazine in all, but true to its subtitle, "an occasional publication," these were produced every few years with no set schedule.⁸

⁸ Issue no. 1 of *The Dial* was published in August 1889, at 36 pages with seven illustrations and nine written pieces including an "Apology" describing the purpose of the periodical; issue no. 2 was published in February 1892, at 33 pages with six illustrations and twenty written pieces; issue no. 3 was published in October 1893, at 32 pages with ten illustrations and eleven written pieces; issue no. 4 in 1896, at 36 pages with nine illustrations and seven written pieces; and Issue no. 5 in 1897, at 26 pages with ten illustrations and eight written pieces.

It was also a vehicle of self-promotion, allowing Ricketts to send courtesy copies of the publication to select figures with a personal note of introduction attached. It is commonly thought that this is how Ricketts and Shannon were introduced to Wilde, who eventually worked closely with them to define a style in the design of many of his published works of the 1890s.

According to Jerusha Hull McCormack, by the late 1880s Ricketts and Shannon were “young and enterprising, the center of a growing circle of influence” in the London art world, and around 1888 John Gray became one of their intimates.⁹ At this time Gray was, according to McCormack, relatively unknown, “defined by a birth certificate, a brief school report, and entry regarding his matriculation at university and a dry civil service record,” and “how they met is unknown.” But he was quickly gaining a reputation through his participation in the new generation of literati in London. His readings of material at meetings of The Rhymer’s Club were recorded in the journals of its members and it was clear that Gray made himself visible. It was not only his youthful beauty, but also the efforts he made to affect the styles and manners of a Dandy that made an impression on people.¹⁰

In 1889 *The Dial* appeared, perhaps motivated by Ricketts and Shannon’s desire to publish their own mix of critical prose, literature, and artwork in the style of the Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ* (1850). It was certainly part of a trend in the 1890s of “little magazines,” the most famous of which were *The Yellow Book*, *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*, and *The Savoy*.¹¹ The first issue featured almost exclusively the work of Ricketts and Shannon (also listed as the

⁹ Jerusha Hull McCormack, *John Gray: Poet, Dandy, and Priest* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press), 21.

¹⁰ The only other contributor was the artist Reginald Savage, who worked with Ricketts and Shannon for many years.

¹¹ In 1896-1897, Shannon collaborated with J. W. Gleeson for another art and literature journal called *The Pageant*.

journal's editors) and Gray. Gray's article "Les Goncourts" was one of the first critical appraisals in English of the literary and historical work of the two French brothers who were notoriously naturalist and decadent. His short story, "The Great Worm," was accompanied by an illustration by Ricketts. There were several illustrations as well by Shannon and literary and critical pieces by both Ricketts and Shannon.

Picking up on the editorial "Apology" that put forward the purpose of the journal, one review noted an "extraordinary statement," which is quoted in the review:

If our entrance is not through an orthodox channel, it is not, therefore, entirely our fault; we are out of date in our belief that the artist's conscientiousness cannot be controlled by the paying public, and just as far as this notion is prevalent we hope we shall be pardoned our seeming aggressiveness.¹²

As the reviewer says, "it will be difficult for those readers of the Dial who have not been initiated into certain artistic mysteries" to "pardon the jargon" throughout the writing. Of one of Ricketts's poems, he argues that "it would require a special course of education to understand, much more to enjoy it." The review, which is overall favorable, especially concerning the quality of its production and its aesthetic appeal, ends with the prediction that the journal is not likely to become "generally popular," but "we can easily conceive its being adored by a small section of artists and art-lovers who admire beauty in execution—there is no question whatever as to the quality of Mr. Shannon's work—and do not object to extravagance and even absurdity in style." The review succinctly captures the intention of the journal to appeal to a select group who would recognize its language and style, having been properly "initiated" and "educated" to it. The

¹² Anon., "Current Literature," *The Spectator* 192, no. 3 (Aug. 31, 1889): 279-80.

aesthetic codes of the journal, like Ricketts' later decadent productions, allow for an interpretation whereby the reader is either an insider or an outsider to a select community.

As the story goes, *The Dial* was, at least in part, meant to promote the work and philosophy of the "Valeists," as they were sometimes called (in reference to the group of artists who gathered at the Vale). As such, Ricketts made sure to send copies to key figures of contemporary Art and literature by way of an introduction. Most critics repeat the story whereby Oscar Wilde was sent the inaugural issue of the *Dial* and responded by paying a visit to the Vale in person. As this was the start of his significant series of collaborations with Ricketts as well as the most likely explanation for how Wilde met Gray, the publication of the *Dial* is cited as a crucial biographical detail. Petra Clark states that when Wilde took over as editor of the *Woman's World* in 1887 he made an effort to raise its profile as an artistic periodical of higher editorial and aesthetic value.¹³ In an analysis of the artists who contributed illustrations to the journal under Wilde's charge, Clark notes, Ricketts provided "two full-page illustrations and two headpieces...as well as numerous headpieces and tailpieces, decorated initials, and several small embedded pictures" during the years 1887-1889.¹⁴ Clark argues that there is little discussion of this earlier collaboration, and that both Wilde and Ricketts may have contributed to the narrative whereby they were introduced via *The Dial*.¹⁵

During the 1880s Wilde had already had a series of phases of his career, having first earned a reputation as an outlandish and unapologetic dandy. He had published a book of poetry,

¹³ Petra Clark, "'Cleverly Drawn': Oscar Wilde, Charles Ricketts, and the Art of the *Woman's World*," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20, no. 3 (2015): 376.

¹⁴ Clark, "Cleverly Drawn," 378.

¹⁵ Clark, "Cleverly Drawn," 379.

a book of fairy tales, essays and reviews, and had completed a successful speaking tour in America where he professed the tenets of Aestheticism as applied to home décor. His short stint editing the *Woman's World* ended in 1889, a year that was to prove fruitful for Wilde and the start of a massively productive six-year period leading up to his trials and imprisonment. He was beginning to attract greater hostility as he participated in the development of English Decadence, and as his celebrity grew his intellectual and personal boldness did as well. In 1889, Joseph Bristow says, he published two crucial “long, intellectually ambitious essays” in the *Fortnightly Review* and in *Nineteenth Century*, and in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* his novella “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” appeared in August.¹⁶ That work is significant for two reasons: first, it confronts the homosexual implications of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence, which had been dedicated to a mysterious “W.H.” In the sonnets, a male narrator addresses a younger male in an overtly romantic and even erotic way. Wilde's story imagines two modern Aesthetes who discover a portrait of “W.H.,” which is the second significant aspect of this work, as it prefigures by mere months the writing of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde even commissioned Ricketts to paint the fabled portrait of W.H., and when he did so Wilde praised it highly.

II. The Poisonous Book of the Decadent Anti-hero

Around spring of 1889, Wilde was commissioned by J. M. Stoddart, editor of the American-based literary periodical *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* to submit a substantial short story for publication. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared in the July issue of *Lippincott's*, and reviewers immediately picked up on its central character's expression of same-sex desire set amid a decadent atmosphere.

¹⁶ Joseph Bristow, “A Chronology of Oscar Wilde,” in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xl.

Wilde collaborated with Ricketts on the binding and title page of the expanded version of the story that was published as a novel, by Ward, Lock & Co., in July 1891. This was the first of a series of collaborations creating a significant set of aesthetic books of Decadent literature: *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), *Poems* (1892), and *The Sphinx* (1894) are the most significant from the point of view of design, but Ricketts's involvement in embodying *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a work of art in the form of the book is crucial to understanding the relationship between decadent literature and aesthetic book production.

Two versions of the novel were produced, one being a typical sized book on high-quality paper printed in an edition of 1,000 copies, and the second a larger (foolscap quarto) deluxe edition in a run of only 250 copies. The smaller, crown octavo version measures 7.5" by 5", and the interior text is printed on smooth woven paper with uncut edges and grey-green end-papers. It features rough gray beveled boards stamped in gold gilt on the front cover, a white parchment paper printed in black ink on the back cover. The cover includes hand-drawn lettering with the title centered atop a design of ten small butterfly designs (also referred to as marigold; most likely non-representational designs) in the formation of an upside-down pyramid, which is also centered. The back features the title and author at the bottom. It also included buff-colored (that is, yellowish-beige) outer wrappers with the same designs, and lettering printed in brown. The more collectable foolscap quarto edition measured slightly larger at 8.5" x 7", and featured an expanded version of the cover design that included a total of fifty-five small designs in the same reverse-pyramid formation, this time including Ricketts' initials embedded in the design. The interior text of the deluxe edition was printed on a higher-quality paper: Dutch hand-made paper watermarked *Van Gelder* with uncut gilt edges. An extra page at the beginning makes mention of the limited run of this edition and is hand numbered and signed by the author. Both feature a title

page and a “Preface” title page in Ricketts’s hand-drawn lettering which resembles the same of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s bindings and title pages.

Nicholas Frankel describes the Ricketts’ design features as rejecting many conventions of Victorian publishing, the title page “shot through with a knowledge of its own perversity” and “announcing the book’s decorative pretensions.”¹⁷ The binding, he says, too “has been produced with a certain self-conscious perversity.” The perversity is in the archaism of the hand-printed lettering, which “rejects mechanical typefaces entirely” to strange effects in terms of design. Frankel argues that the effect is a purposeful disruption of expectations that figure the book as something unconventional, perceptible to the same exclusive audience as *The Dial*:

Many of the letters are interlaced by dots that interrupt the smooth procedures of word formation, most noticeably in the case of the word “By.” The descending limb of the letter R is self-consciously lengthened, most conspicuously in the words “Dorian,” “Gray,” and “Melbourne.” The letter *U* is written in the antique manner as a *V*. And obtrusive leaves—hand-drawn imitations of a printer’s fleuron—announce the book’s decorative pretensions, appearing adjacent to the novel’s title and imprint. Perhaps most noticeably the title page possesses a rigid symmetry that sits ill with the obvious fact of hand drawing.¹⁸

Frankel, too, notes that Ricketts’ insertion of his initials on the cover design works as a signature of the artist, “as if it were a work of art in its own right.”¹⁹ Finally, the use of a dust jacket,

¹⁷ Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 143

¹⁸ Frankel, *Decorated Books*, 143

¹⁹ Frankel, *Decorated Books*, 145

Frankel notes, was uncommon at the time, and “calls our attention to, as much as it protects, the book as a significant entity in its own right.”²⁰

If we read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as, in part, mapping the social world centered at the Vale onto a gothic novel in the decadent mode of Huysmans’ *À Rebours*, then these design elements refer to the interior narrative, which features all manner of aesthetic decoration, including deluxe editions of collectable books. A curious feature of Wilde’s novel is the fact that the protagonist Dorian Gray is so negatively affected by the sensuous world of Aestheticism, and the way that his love of art and artifice over the realities of life are equated with immoral, sinful behavior. Wilde was well aware that this was the basis of the critique against the movement of Aestheticism, of which he was known as a leading proponent. *Dorian Gray* is Wilde’s move toward Decadence, adopting the French influence to critique the seriousness and earnestness with which Aestheticism had previously attempted.

Dorian is drawn into a world of sensory experiences that becomes altogether hedonistic, violent, and corrupting due to the influence of a certain unnamed book. In a moment of pain at the reality of the actress Sybil Vane’s death (“How ugly it all was!”), Dorian opens the mysterious French novel, drawn to it by a physical beauty that contrasts the ugliness of reality: “His eye fell on the yellow book that Lord Henry had sent him. What was it, he wondered. He went towards the little pearl-coloured octagonal stand... wrought in silver, and taking up the volume, flung himself into an arm-chair and began to turn over the leaves.”²¹ The book creates a strange, sensual atmosphere that appears to entrance Dorian: “The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences...

²⁰ Frankel, *Decorated Books*, 145

²¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 106.

produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming....”²² The “curious, jeweled style” of the writing is that which “characterises the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of *Symbolistes*.”²³ It is morally ambiguous, as he could not tell if it was “the spiritual ecstasies of some mediaeval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner.”²⁴ Ultimately, “It was a poisonous book[,]” yet Dorian “could not free himself from [its] influence.”²⁵

Just as the hero of Huysmans’s novel does, Dorian “procured from Paris no less than nine large paper copies of the first edition, and had them bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods....”²⁶ Dorian mimics the novel by obsessively collecting beautiful objects around him, and Wilde mimics Huysmans’s novel in the lengthy, detailed lists of jewels, furniture, perfumes, artworks, and literature. The novel makes a telling observation concerning the psychological basis Dorian’s interest in aesthetic things: “For these treasures, and everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape, for a season, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne.”²⁷ Taking literally the lack of distinction between art and life, Dorian reads literature (especially the Latin decadence) but assumes that what he reads is a record of his own experience. “The hero of the wonderful novel that had so influenced his life had himself known

²² Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 107.

²³ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 107.

²⁴ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 107.

²⁵ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 107-08.

²⁶ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 108.

²⁷ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 119.

this curious fancy. In the seventh chapter he tells how...he had sat, as Tiberius, in a garden at Capri, reading the shameful books of Elephantis....”²⁸ The text explains that Dorian would read this seventh chapter “and the two immediately following” “over and over again,” until he pictured these various stories as though they were vivid works of art.²⁹ Eventually it is certain: “Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which eh could realise his conception of the beautiful.”³⁰ Wilde ironically makes reference to the common critique that the movement of “art for art’s sake” exerts an evil influence, and the anxiety that the fixation on the beautiful indicates a spiritual corruption.

When it was published in 1884, *À Rebours* (which is usually translated as either *Against Nature* or *Against the Grain*)³¹ was both shocking and influential. At this point, Aestheticism in England was at its height, and Oscar Wilde was coming into prominence as one of Aestheticism’s figureheads following Walter Pater, who reigned in Oxford as the philosopher of

²⁸ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 123.

²⁹ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 123.

³⁰ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 124.

³¹ Patrick McGuinness argues that *Against the Grain* would be a truer translation to the meaning of the French phrase that the original title makes use of. Where, McGuinness notes, *Against Nature* “is too reductive and unsubtle a title, and reflects the climate of its English reception rather than the range and complexity of the novel Huysmans wrote,” he says that “[t]o do something *à rebours* is to run countercurrent, to go against the flow, to do things the wrong way around; but it also suggests stubbornness, perversity, wilful difficulty....” The English title, in my opinion, invokes the language of decadence, especially in terms of gender and sexuality, far more than the cliché of going “against the grain,” and so taking McGuinness’s point into consideration, the “English reception” of the novel may have indeed foregrounded the implicit homosexuality and effeminacy of the decadent aesthete. Patrick McGuinness, “Introduction,” in Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 15.

Aestheticism. To what extent Huysmans's novel merely described decadence as a movement already in progress, and to what extent his work helped participate in bringing that movement about is difficult to distinguish with certainty. As Patrick McGuinness notes, "Huysmans' creation even found its way into fiction as every wit, dandy, or *femme fatale* had a copy ready to hand. The novel's hero, Duke Jean Floressas Des Esseintes – hoarder of literary treasures, lover of artifice, and liver of the artistically mediated life – had joined Edgar Allan Poe, Schopenhauer, and Baudelaire on the *fin de siècle* bookshelf."³² In this way, what Des Esseintes represents is confusingly citational: he is a type of person; his catalogue of interests is an index of modern art and literature; and his story is at times self-mocking and at times the model of an ideal. As a character, he is the model of the sickly and grotesque upper-class decadent figure who represents both the notion of decadence as decline and decadence as highly refined and aesthetic. He is also a type in its extreme, the dandy-aesthete, who is obsessed with literature, art, and philosophy, and who is exceptionally well read, educated, and critical of his present age. In other words, the novel is utterly ambivalent as to whether Des Esseintes as the decadent anti-hero is meant to be emulated or meant to mock a certain type of modern man. His efforts to seclude himself, for example, were typical of those who sought to escape from society into the realm of art. Yet, this is taken to an absurd extreme when Des Esseintes, having decided to journey to London after reading the novels of Charles Dickens, but on his way he is overcome by ennui and decides that the literature has given him the fullest experience of visiting London, and the actual city would surely be a disappointment: "I would be mad indeed to go and, by an awkward trip, lose those imperishable sensations. How stupid of me to have sought to disown my old ideas, to have

³² McGuinness, "Introduction," 15.

doubted the efficacy of the docile phantasmagories of my brain, like a very fool to have thought of the necessity, of the curiosity, of the interest of an excursion!”³³

In fact, Huysmans himself shares many of Des Esseintes’ interests, including modern French literature, poetry, and art; and his detailed knowledge of things like book-bindings and gemstones. Huysmans wrote two books of art criticism, as well as a book on precious stones, and his family owned a book bindery. Des Esseintes’ interpretations of art and literature are far too well informed and carefully thought to not have been informed by Huysmans’ own views. McGuinness argues that evidence for Huysmans’ ambivalent identification with his hero can be found in various letters to his contemporaries: to Zola, he wrote that the novel “expressed ideas diametrically opposed to my own,”³⁴ and that “this complete dichotomy with my own preferences allowed me to enunciate really sick ideas and celebrate the glory of Mallarmé, which I thought was quite a joke.” According to McGuinness, he wrote to Jules Laforgue that “When I wrote that chapter on modern profane literature in *Against Nature* and I praised Corbière, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, I thought I was writing for myself, and did not suspect that the whole movement was getting under way in that direction....”³⁵ Tellingly, he told his friend Théodore Hannon that the book, which would include “the ultimate refinement of everything: literature, Art, flowers, perfumes, furnishings, gemstones, etc.,” was “a very strange novel, vaguely clerical, a bit homosexual....”³⁶ Whether or not Huysmans is being semi-autobiographical is meaningful to the mode of critique that his novel enacts, i.e., to the accuracy of the aesthetic

³³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Baldick, 177.

³⁴ McGuinness, “Introduction,” 25.

³⁵ McGuinness, “Introduction,” 26.

³⁶ McGuinness, “Introduction,” 25

philosophy that its hero puts into effect in his own life. There are moments of clear mockery and farce in *À Rebours* – such as when he playfully creates an arrangement of perfumes in a room that becomes so stifled that he throws open a window for fresh air and passes out – but if they are a self-critique rather than a satire from without, then very stakes of what is presented in the novel shifts from mocking to self-examination. In fact, Des Esseintes constantly flirts with Catholicism in contrast to moments of sensual and immoral hedonism, and decades later Huysmans sees the novel as the early movement of his own spirit in the direction of his conversion to Catholicism. It seems very possible that Huysmans is being disingenuous when he tells Zola that Des Esseintes is in a “complete dichotomy with my own preferences.”

As Dorian would be in his image, Des Esseintes is susceptible to the influence of literature, and delights in literature that represents his Decadent tastes. In particular, he is fascinated with Latin literature of “the Decadence” of Rome, that is, when Rome was experiencing several centuries of decline in the first five or six centuries of the common era. Uninterested in the Latin language of “the Golden Age,” the largest of his book collection contained Latin works that “repetitious university lectures lump together under the generic name of ‘the Decadence.’”³⁷ Eschewing some of the great classical works, Des Esseintes is said to only become fascinated with Latin language with the poet of the epic during the reign of Nero, Lucan (39-65 CE).³⁸ Typical of the decadent style, Des Esseintes admired his “enameled and jeweled verse.”

But his favorite author is Petronius (27-66 CE), whose *Satyricon* is representative of Roman decadence as a kind of moral decline, where same-sex relationships among men were

³⁷ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 70

³⁸ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 72

portrayed as the evil excesses of an amoral civilization. In it, two Roman soldiers, Eumolpus and Ascyltus, fight to keep a boy lover named Giton, who, being particularly beautiful, is pursued constantly by others. Des Esseintes sees it as recording, without “prejudice or animosity” the “manners and morals of his time,” common life “with all its minor events, its bestial incidents, its obscene antics.” It becomes clear that Huysmans, or at least Des Esseintes, is suggesting a comparison between French Naturalism and the truthful, uncensored realism present in the *Satyricon*, although he seems to overlook the fact that the *Satyricon* (as its title demonstrates) is a satire. Summarizing the sexual excesses of the book that Des Esseintes prefers, Huysmans writes:

Elsewhere, in villas full of insolent luxury where wealth and ostentation run riot...the society of the day has its fling – depraved ruffians like Ascyltus and Eumolpus, out for what they can get; unnatural old men with their gowns tucked up and their cheeks plastered with white lead and acacia rouge; catamites of sixteen, plump and curly-headed; women having hysterics; legacy-hunters offering their boys and girls to gratify the lusts of rich testators, all these and more scurry across the pages of the *Satyricon*, squabbling in the streets, fingering one another in the baths, beating one another up like characters in a pantomime.³⁹

Various forms of sexual and gender dissidents are presented here as the perverse effects of a luxurious society in decline. Depraved, unnatural men fight for the affections of beautiful boy lovers while older men cross-dress, women are emotionally out of control, and prostitution is the norm. It is telling that Des Esseintes, who is highly susceptible in material and sensory aesthetics in combination with literary aesthetics, collects fifteenth and sixteenth century Dutch and Italian

³⁹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 73

copies of these classic texts: “he reverently handled the superb copy he possessed of the *Satyricon*, in the octavo edition of 1585 printed by J. Dousa at Leyden,” and elsewhere he mentions the author Apuleius, “whose works he had in the *edition princeps*, in folio, printed at Rome in 1469.”⁴⁰

The exaggerated material aesthetics of literature comes up frequently in the novel. He displays on a table the Edgar Allan Poe’s novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), “bound in sea-calf leather...specially printed for him on laid paper of pure linen, hand picked and bearing a seagull water-mark.”⁴¹ The famous twelfth chapter of Huysmans’s novel, which presents a detailed and historically informed critical survey of literature that defines the decadent taste, begins with a discussion of the lengths that Des Esseintes goes to obtain books printed in a highly aesthetic, refined style: “the truth was, he could not bear to have his favourite authors printed on rag-paper, as they were in other people’s libraries, with characters like hobnails in a peasant’s boots.” The aestheticization of the body of the book – including binding, paper, and even type and layout – set the aesthete apart from “other people,” and appropriately dressed the characters of quality literature with high-quality materials of the book.

Des Esseintes would work with artistic printers to create small or even single-edition runs of a text adapted to his preferred tastes. His discussion of type, paper, and bindings are a historical catalogue of the history of book printing. Huysmans accurately describes the options of very high-quality papers imported into France from locations that have a pre-industrial history of papermaking. It was not uncommon to make high-quality paper from cloth, but his use of

⁴⁰ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 75

⁴¹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 64

technical terms like flock (cut-up fabric) and rep (a durable ribbed fabric woven of wool) show that he is attentive to every detail of the materials he employs. He also mentions Vire, a small river town in France that was the site of many long-standing paper mills, and Lübeck, Germany, which had a candle-making industry. Wax candles were often wrapped in thin paper, and his sourcing of book paper from delicate and impractical candle paper flecked with gold made an entirely original book object. His efforts to make a one-of-a-kind book, in part, helped to set he himself apart as something rare, unusual, and unique, as it “mark[ed] his contempt for other bibliophiles.” He “always choos[es] unusual formats” signals the way that even the shape of the book itself communicated the aesthetic sensibility of the rare and refined connoisseur.

III. John Gray: Dandy, Disciple

During the influential decade of the 1880s, John Henry Gray, poet, translator, and eventual Catholic priest, went from age fourteen to age twenty-four. It was an ambitious time for Gray, who was largely self-taught and eager to gain distinction as a literary artist among the elite circles of writers in London and Paris. But it was also a time of struggle with his identity and one of spiritual searching. When his first book of poetry, *Silverpoints*, appeared in 1893, he had already begun distancing himself from life as an artist to one devoted to Roman Catholicism: he converted in 1890 and then suffered a mental breakdown in 1892. In 1893 he met his romantic life partner, Marc-André Raffalovich, and in 1901 he was ordained a priest. The two had a church built in Edinburgh where they lived out their days as a devout and ostensibly celibate same-sex couple, having mostly distanced themselves, spatially and ideologically, from the Bohemian London society in which they were raised.

That first book, *Silverpoints*, nonetheless occupies a meaningful place in the narrative of the decadent movement in England, and embodies metaphorically the nexus of relationships out

of which it was the result. It is exemplary as a work of decadent poetry, and as an aesthetic book designed and printed by one of the founders of the Vale Press just prior to its official start. Its production was encouraged and partially funded by Oscar Wilde, who had taken to the handsome, brilliant, significantly younger Gray, which helped bring Gray swiftly into London's artistic society. It quickly became known that the title character of Wilde's only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was inspired by John Gray, which was an association that Gray at first encouraged and eventually disowned.⁴² In fact, just as Dorian Gray is corrupted by the cynical philosophizing of the older, adoring Lord Henry Wotton, John Gray seemed to struggle with the spiritual implications of Wilde's irreverent and amoral interest in sensual pleasures – especially around same-sex desires and sexuality. Raffalovich, in fact, saw himself as rescuing Gray from Wilde, whom was once a friend of Raffalovich and then a declared enemy.

Several critics place Gray with two contemporaries as representing British literary decadence: Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson.⁴³ Dowson was known for promoting Aestheticism and living the lifestyle that he wrote about, including heavy drinking that led to his

⁴² Jerusha Hull McCormack claims that *Silverpoints* “achieved a certain notoriety for its ‘decadent’ verse, although its reputation may have sprung, at least in part, from Gray’s own notoriety as the reputed model for Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.” Although I argue that Gray is self-consciously positioning himself as a decadent poet, notoriously or otherwise, McCormack’s point here implies that we might read these texts, and the community of artists and writers that they represent, intertextually. Jerusha Hull McCormack, “Introduction: John Gray’s Prose,” *The Selected Prose of John Gray*. (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1992), xii.

⁴³ See especially G. A. Cevasco, *Three Decadent Poets, Ernest Dowson, John Gray, and Lionel Johnson: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1990), and James G. Nelson “The Nature of the Aesthetic Experience in the Poetry of the Nineties: Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and John Gray,” *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 17 (1974): 223-32.

early death at the age of thirty-three. Most of his poetry and prose was published in the 1890s and exemplified the themes and style of decadence. He was also a prolific translator, especially of French symbolists. Johnson, born in the same year as Dowson and outliving him by only two years, died at age thirty-five from the final in a series of strokes that was mostly likely related to his excessive alcoholism. Johnson, too, was a poet of the 1890s and one of its literati, known not only for his lectures and books of poetry and criticism, but also as a student of Walter Pater, a friend of Wilde, Alfred Douglas, Yeats, and others. Like Gray, both Johnson and Dowson converted to Catholicism in the early 1890s, and all three struggled to reconcile their aesthetic philosophy and decadent lifestyle with their spiritual development.

Gray's work is set apart from his contemporaries, the so-named Decadent poets including Johnson and Dowson, by his inclusion as one of the Vale Press writers, which places two of his primary volumes in the history of fine arts printing as well as in the history of fin-de-siècle decadent literature. I will focus my discussion on Gray's *Silverpoints* by first analyzing the text as a self-conscious translation of French *décadence* into English Decadence. I will then analyze the book as a work of the Vale Press, designed by Ricketts as an exemplar of his philosophy of fine arts printing.

Just beyond the title page, before the first poem in Gray's volume, is an epigraph taken from a poem by Paul Verlaine, which situates the book in purposefully as the British equivalent of Verlaine's *décadent* movement in France. The epigraph retains the French of the original and credits the author only by his initials: "...EN COMPOSANT DES ACROSTICHES INDOLENTS / P.V.," implying that the reader would recognize the controversial continental poet by his initials or not at all. It also speaks to the cosmopolitan and multi-lingual mode of Gray's decadent poetry, which is a literature of translation. Gray's volume of twenty-nine poems

includes translations (or what he calls imitations) of Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Charles Baudelaire, and even those that are original and written in English almost always have French titles. In imitation of Verlaine and his poetic contemporaries, Gray often includes a dedication to contemporary artists and writers, and these too cast his work as cosmopolitan and continental, by including dedications to Pierre Louÿs, Jules Laforgue, André Chevrillon, Henri Teixeira de Mattos, Felix Fénéon, and S. A. S. Alice, Princess of Monaco. But the epigraph does more than just present Gray's volume as being in the mode of the French decadent Verlaine: it cites Verlaine's "Langueur," which begins:

Jes suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence,
Qui regarde passer les grands Barbares blancs
En composant des acrostiches indolents
D'un style d'or où la langueur du soleil danse.
(I am the Empire at the end of decadent days,
Watching the pale tall Barbarians advance
While composing acrostics, in my indolence,
In a gilded style where the sun's languor plays.)

In a move of ironic appropriation that characterizes the decadent critique of a more philosophical Aestheticism, Gray reflects the negative implications of the aesthetic artist while also identifying with it. In the context of Verlaine's stanza, the epigraph announces that the book is the work of a poet who indulges in his composition while the empire, arrested in the decadence of its own success, is calmly invaded. Not just poetry or literature, which has the possibility of being noble and vigorous, but *acrostics*, a verse puzzle where the first letter or word of each line spells out a name or message. It is a playful, even childish take on the potential that poetry has to produce an

encoded or hidden message, adding to “Languor’s” point that the Decadent poet produces a work that is self-indulgent and without purpose, where style supersedes substance and achieves a message of futility, “in a gilded style where the sun’s languor plays.”

In Verlaine’s short four-stanza text, the narrator seems to both produce the decadent poetic text while ironically critiquing it, or critiquing the age or the historical moment of decline that it seems to represent: the narrator or the people of the age are weak and powerless, “the lonely soul aches with a vast ennui,” he declares, “lacking power, so feeble,” where life is futile, “all is eaten and drunk! No more to say!” It is the statement of the decadent writer that invokes the vast philosophical and political critiques of an empire in decline, and simultaneously invokes the individual man who struggles from a physical weakness and psychological depression. If the French *décadent* poets of the Verlaine school employ a humorous irony to muddy the intended message of the text, then Gray establishes that British Decadent poetry, derived as it is from the French school, can never be fully taken at face value. Comic irony is a way to both identify with the shameful or the absurd, but also a way to defend against the accusations of immorality, criminality, and effeminacy to which such identification makes one vulnerable. It is therefore a method that is particularly useful to creating identities that go against the grain of traditions of gender and sexuality.

The mode of decadence in literature is one of the first forms of modern camp, which later comes to dominate subversive art of the twentieth century: it ironically takes on and mocks the critique of modern man as a representative of an over-ripe, spoiled, immoral age. Significantly, this very characterization, both mocked and celebrated, is one of the effeminate dandy, the sensitive poetic male who has lost his masculinity and taken on an aestheticized pose or self-styled characterization. The aesthete was a figure who took on this persona more earnestly, from

the position of a philosopher of aesthetics with an elite, refined kind of masculinity resulting from vigorously cultivating oneself through art, literature, history, and the humanities. But the aesthete and dandy had by the 1890s become a figure that was mocked and derided in mainstream discourse, especially for his failure to conform to ideals of masculinity and for his potentially-criminal sexual deviance (whether a lover of prostitutes, erotic pain, or same-sex eroticism). By the 1890s, to announce oneself as part of the decadent movement was to ironically take on the characterization of an urbane, effete, art-loving dandy who is not only unashamed but also *invites* the negative associations that have been accumulating for decades.

By prefacing his text in this way, Gray boldly identifies himself with a literary movement imbued with controversy. Just as the tone of Verlaine's "Languor" is ironic in its ambivalence, Gray's book is playfully subversive, irreverent and sardonic, while also being a substantial achievement and a work of impressive academic ability. This is, I would argue, an early version of camp aesthetics, which is both academically informed and taken seriously as art, but also knowingly irreverent toward the dangers of adopting a controversial social identity that knowingly subverts norms of class, gender, and nationality. More important for my project is the fact that just such an impression – one of decadent aesthetics or *campiness* — would have been given before the epigraph: it is a mode that the text adopts in its physical stylization, in its bibliographic context, through the aesthetics of its printed form.

The volume is a compilation of poems and translations (or "inspirations," as Gray tends to call them), many of which had been published in periodicals including *The Dial* and *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* (1880-1902), a serial famed for its interest in combining different arts. It opens with the five-stanza "Les Demoiselles de Sauve," a short poem about three noble ladies from the southern French town of the title who pass through an orchard, though they are

dressed in formal attire.⁴⁴ It is dedicated to “S. A. S. Alice, Princesse de Monaco,” who was a patron of the arts married to Prince Albert Honoré Charles of Monaco. According to McCormack, the poem was first recited at a gathering of the Rhymers’ Club, of which Gray was a guest but not an official member, then was later printed in the second issue of the *Dial*, and was also read aloud by Gray at a dinner held by Frank Harris for the Princess herself before finally being printed in *Silverpoints* dedicated to her. It therefore represents the persona that Gray put forward as he sought to gain a reputation as a dandy and poet of London literary society in the early 1890s, and so it is fitting that it is the introductory text for *Silverpoints*.

In the poem, the three “beautiful ladies” seem to struggle through the natural landscape, with its wetness and thorns and too-low branches, while their elegant dresses contrast with the rustic pastoral scene. The opening and final stanzas mirror each other: at first they are “Beautiful ladies through the orchard pass;” and at the end, “Courtly ladies through the orchard pass”; in the

⁴⁴ According to Clive Scott, Gray’s work in translating French Symbolism shows its influence in the rhyme scheme of “Les Demoiselles de Sauve”: what Scott calls the “excursions” of form, or the heterostrophic poem, are manifested here as “off-balance tercets” in the form “aba|cde|fff|edc|aab,” which is an imperfect mirrored structure. As I show below, the narrative too has a mirrored form. Clive Scott, “The Liberated Verse of the English Translators of French Symbolism,” *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, Anna Balakian, ed. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2008): 138. Caroline Blyth inaccurately cites “Les Demoiselles de Sauve” as an example of the villanelle, which she claims is “the French fixed form with which Victorian poetry is most associated, especially in the ‘Nineties and the fin-de siècle” (*sic*). Caroline Blythe, “Introduction,” *Decadent Verse: An Anthology of Late-Victorian Poetry, 1872-1900* (New York: Anthem Press, 2011): 16. With Gray’s poem she also lists Dowson’s “Villanelle of His Lady’s Treasures,” and Wilde’s “Theocritus” as “all supremely decadent moments.” Yet Gray’s is missing the final couplet, and so is an incomplete villanelle, although his poem, being five three-line stanzas, clearly derives from that form. Blythe, “Introduction,” 17.

beginning they “Bend under crutched-up branches, forked and low;” and at the end “Bow low, as in lords’ halls”; at the beginning, their silk robes drag, “Trailing their samet palls o’er dew-drenched grass” while at the end one nearly falls as “springtime grass / Tangles a snare to catch the tapering toe.” Each of the three middle stanzas is a sketch of one of the ladies, wherein their personalities are suggested or else they each are a metaphorical personification. Jacqueline is described as “proud” but of an innocent femininity, as “pale blossoms.../ Blush to the colour of her finger tips, / and rosy knuckles....” Berthe, who is “high-crested” looks up through the leaves to watch the “pink faces of the skies.” She seems more confident in cerebral: she doesn’t just look, she “discerns, with slant, clinched eyes,” while enfolding her hands “Sainte-Margot-wise.” Comically, the poem likens her pose to St. Margaret of Scotland, the patron saint who helped spread Catholicism in Scotland in the eleventh century. Finally, Ysabeau “follows last, with languorous pace,” dreamy in contrast to the discerning Berthe, and sensual compared to the innocence of Jacqueline. She is trailing them in pace because she is distracted by smelling a handful of pink sweetbrier roses: she “Presses, voluptuous, to her bursting lips, / With backward stoop, a bunch of eglantine.” The language, the dedication to a princesses, and even the title rendered in French, elevates the text in contrast to the comical scene of stumbling women who seem nonplussed and out of place at the garden-variety nature that they precariously navigate.⁴⁵

McCormack describes the poem as “a kind of Burne-Jones medievalism *à la Japonaise*,” using an “aggressive artifice” to communicate Gray’s lack of interest in the opposite sex.⁴⁶ She

⁴⁵ Richard Cronin describes the poem as having “a title that disguises it as a translation from the French,” claiming that “Frenchness in the 1890s signaled modernity and a sensibility liberated from English bourgeois provincialism.” (*Reading Victorian Poetry* [Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012], 203-04).

⁴⁶ McCormack, *John Gray*, 61-62.

calls it “an elegant, if somewhat empty seduction of the masculine garden,” with the “design of neutralizing a feared woman, whether mistress or seductress.” Strangely, McCormack reads the poet/narrator as a primary character in the poem, as both “nature” and lover: “As naive Nature, he blushes for their practiced stratagems, provoking Berthe to a show of specious innocence.... Finally Ysabeau, the last, abandons all pretense, launching a sexual assault to which her lover responds with a feeble protest.”⁴⁷ For McCormack, the poem signals Gray’s effeminacy and his lacking heterosexuality: “Feminine insolence, masculine impotence: Gray’s ambivalence toward the other sex is, typically, exaggerated.... In these poems, his personal distaste found its embodiment in a distinctly period figure, the *femme fatale*.”⁴⁸

Linda C. Dowling reads the poem as representative of Gray’s typical aesthetic mode towards a theory of decadence as a critique of its predecessor, Aestheticism.⁴⁹ She locates the poem as derived from Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Laforgue, written in an “ironic mode” in the “dandiacal stance of passionate, analytical detachment.”⁵⁰ For Dowling, the three ladies represent “three late-Romantic attitudes towards nature,” which she calls Whistlerian (the innocent Jacqueline), Symbolist (Berthe), and Paterian (Ysabeau).⁵¹ Self-centered and oblivious, they are unsafe, and “they and the attitudes they embody are trespassing in nature,” according to Dowling, who reads the poem as a cautionary critique: “This is nature watching art’s narcissistic

⁴⁷ McCormack, *John Gray*, 62.

⁴⁸ McCormack, *John Gray*, 62.

⁴⁹ Linda C. Dowling, “Nature and Decadence: John Gray’s Silverpoints,” *Victorian Poetry* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 159-69.

⁵⁰ Dowling, “Nature and Decadence,” 163.

⁵¹ Dowling, “Nature and Decadence,” 163.

absorption in itself. . . . nature is poised to revenge herself by entrapping art's mincing pretensions and overthrowing its careful form."⁵² Although I find that Dowling's reading to be too schematic, and I do not agree that the schema would at all include the "Whistlerian," (although perhaps the Pre-Raphaelite or the Romantic in its place), her reading of the poem as a decadent critique of Aestheticism is precisely what I find to be the quintessential aspect of decadent literature of the 1890s that *Silverpoints* represents. One way that Dowling frames this critique is to say that Gray undermines Aestheticism's worship of Nature: "Throughout *Silverpoints* Gray dramatizes his sense of the dangerous limitations of late-Romantic Aestheticism by pitting its inflated notion of Art against a subtly rebellious nature."⁵³ This might be described as the Decadent revision of Aestheticism via the "ironic mode" of the French school, which exaggerates the paradox of Art that celebrates Nature to the point where Nature becomes unnatural. The worship of Art eclipses the Romantic meditation on a spiritualized Nature, and those who promote artifice as an ideal, however ironically, are Decadent. Thus, from a British perspective, Romanticism gave way to Aestheticism, and Aestheticism gave way to Decadence.

The dedications of poems to contemporaries such as Oscar Wilde ("Summer Past"), Charles Haslewood Shannon ("Crocuses in Grass"), Ernest Dowson ("A Crucifix") and Frank Harris ("Charleville") place Gray within the milieu of London's decadent writers and artists.

⁵² Dowling, "Nature and Decadence," 164.

⁵³ Bristow gives Dowling's reading a generous interpretation when he describes it as "a thoughtful critique of the kinds of female icons that an earlier Aestheticism had sought to uphold." (Bristow, "Introduction," in *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s*, ed. Bristow [Arhens: Ohio University Press, 2005], 22). Although there is some disagreement as to how much the poem is about the representation of femininity/female icons or the representation of literary styles, I find McCormack's interpretation of the ladies in this particular poem as *femme fatales* to be inaccurate.

Two poems, however, show another influence, that of Jules Laforgue, who had died in 1887 at the young age of twenty-seven from tuberculosis, but who nonetheless was widely influential in France for his use of blank verse and for pushing on the boundaries of the Symbolist movement to create what he called literary Impressionism. Two of Gray's poems in *Silverpoints* are curiously "titled" with lines from a single poem of Laforgue. The first, "Je pleure dans les coins; je n'ai plus gout à rien; Oh! J'ai tant pleuré, Dimanche, en mon paroissien! Jules LaForge" is in the form of an epitaph, and the second, "Ainsi, elle viendrait à moi! Les yeux bien fous! Et elle me suivrait avec cet air partout!" makes no mention of the original author. Including the original French lines of Laforgue's poem, rather than its title, preserves the Impressionistic blank-verse that made his work influential. It may have been that, since the original source of Laforgue's poem, a book titled *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté* that was published posthumously in 1890, this poem could be read as a literary tribute to Laforgue himself, while also placing Laforgue into the narrative of French decadent poetry that *Silverpoints* presents. The poem that these lines are selected from is "Figurez-vous une peu," which could be translated as "Imagine a Little," and which describes the feverish vision of a sick or dying narrator who is comforted by the memory of a woman that he is in love with. These lines in particular express the decadent attitude of depression, exhaustion, and even spiritual seeking. They could be loosely translated as "I weep in corners; I have no interest in anything; Oh! I wept, Sunday, to my parishioner!"

In Gray's poem, the narrator speaks nostalgically to his lover from the grave as he decomposes. Yet in Gray's poem there is a curious lack of gendered pronouns combined with a sense of injustice that suggests that the cause of the poetic malaise and sadness in the title, which is in fact an attitude that defines a literary movement, comes in part from feeling oneself to be a social outcast.

Did we not, Darling, you and I,
Walk on the earth like other men?
Did we not walk and wonder why
They spat upon us so. And then

We lay us down among fresh earth,
Sweet flowers breaking overhead,
Sore needed rest for our frail girth,
For our frail hearts; a well-sought bed.

In this poem, death is the “needed rest” of the two exhausted lovers who “walk[ed]...like other men” and yet were “spat upon.” By the end the two are forgotten, and finally left alone in their sadness. But just when the narrator describes a hopeful sort of refuge, the poem ends solemnly on the realization that the two lovers are separated permanently, perhaps in death.

Deep in the dear dust, Dear, we dream:
Our melancholy is a thing
At last our own; and none esteem
How our black lips are blackening.

And none note how our poor eyes fall,
Nor how our cheeks are sunk and sere...
Dear, when you waken, will you call?...
Alas! We are not very near.

In the penultimate stanza, the sense of being buried “deep in the dear dust” is comforting and even hopeful: together they “dream,” and feel a sense of isolation and shared affect, their melancholy “a thing at last our own,” forgotten by others since “none esteem” their decomposing bodies. Yet the romanticization of being cast out, sad, and lost to the world, is undermined by the rhetorical question, “when you waken, will you call?” since in asking the question the narrator is confronted with the realization that no such awakening will happen. Thus the final, disappointed note of sad loss: “Alas! We are not very near.” The Baudelairian attempt to use death as a metaphor for romantic escape fails with the reality of death’s permanence.

One of *Silverpoint*’s most original contributions is in its translations into English of controversial French poets of the Decadent or Symbolist schools. The final one-third of the book is dedicated to Gray’s original translations of Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, and Charles Baudelaire. *Silverpoints* is one of Charles Ricketts’ first major accomplishments as a book designer prior to founding his Vale Press. The title comes from a reference not to the tools of the poet but tools of the artist: silverpoint is a method of drawing using a pointed styli of soft metal on prepared paper, and was en vogue in the Renaissance era (popular with Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Dürer, Raphael, and Jan van Eyck). The book was published by “Elkin Mathews and John Lane at the Sign of the Bodley Head in Vigo Street” and printed by “R Folkard and Son, 22 Devonshire Street,” yet it is as much a product of Ricketts as it is of those who are named. But for his initials surrounded by three illustrated leaves printed as an illustration above the text on the last page that credits the printer, there is no mention of Ricketts in or on the book. Ricketts designed the binding, which featured a pattern of undulating vertical lines and leaves, and with a small rectangle in the upper left corner of the cover, surrounded by a double-line border, where the word “Silverpoints” is broken into two lines,

SILVER / POINTS, and the title and author's name are separated with a centered word "BY" that is handwritten rather than typed. It clearly references Rossetti's bindings even in these minor details, for example the way that the handwritten word "BY" features the stem of the Y as wrapping under and around the B, and the use of a box for the title atop a sparse pattern all of which is gold-stamped on a dark-green cloth.

Even before one might get a careful look at this cover, it is the physical form and shape of the book that announces it as something atypical and highly aestheticized: it is an extremely thin book at only thirty-eight numbered pages, but it is also thin in width at only 4.5" with an unusually elongated proportion at 8.5" in height.

In his *Defense of the Revival of Printing* (1899), Ricketts specifically cites this book as showing the "Italian influence" that he was then enamored with: "I was at that time, as I am still, utterly won over and fascinated by the sunny pages of the Venetian printers." and says specifically that the model of the book "was one of those rare Aldus italic volumes with its margins uncut," which he also calls an "Aldine 'Saddle book.'" He explains the form of the book as connected not only to Venetian printers, but to the cultural influences of those Venetian printers: "The name 'Saddle book' is of Persian origin, this format being placed in the pocket of a saddle on journeys that preclude other larger and more usual shapes; I give this for what it is worth, bearing in mind the oriental influences upon Venice, notably upon Venetian bindings."⁵⁴ In the collections of Aldine books, there is not a size called a "Saddle book," since all fit into the categories of the octavo, quarto, or folio sizes, and so it is possible that Ricketts is here exaggerating the historical factuality of the size and shape of his book, however it is notable that

⁵⁴ Charles S. Ricketts, *A Defence of the Revival of Printing* (London: Hacon and Ricketts, 1899), 21

Dorian Gray begins in the artist Basil's studio, where Lord Henry Wotton is found reclining on a divan, or small reclining sofa, fitted with "Persian saddlebags."⁵⁵

Most important, Ricketts distinguishes himself as a revivalist of fine arts printing and a historian and connoisseur of the history of the book through the unusual format of *Silverpoints*. The "rare Aldus italic volumes" is something of an understatement, since the Aldine Press, founded by Aldus Manutius in 1494 and continued by his family through 1597, was innovative in the late incunabula period, when printing was still new, and was known among other things for producing a portable, small octavo size and for the invention of a small italic type known now as Aldine type. Works of the press not only include the first available editions of many Classical Greek and Latin texts, but also represent Renaissance Humanism and the political ethos of the printing press. Ricketts not only cites the format of the book as inspired by Aldus, but it is also clear that the tight italic roman font, which defines the book's typographic effect, is a reference to the first italic font of the Roman alphabet which Aldus himself designed after the handwriting of two Italian scholars. Ricketts' own efforts to create innovations in various facets of bookmaking, as well as the Vale Press's output of dozens of editions of classic texts show his indebtedness to Manutius. It might be said that in the cultural Renaissance of fin-de-siècle Europe, Ricketts saw a parallel to the fifteenth-century fin de siècle of Italy.

Although minor, the woodcuts throughout *Silverpoints* are important in that they are the work of Ricketts, who contributed more elaborate woodcut illustrations to many of the Vale Press's later books. These small illustrative details also unify the volume, carrying from the cover design, through key parts of the poems, and to the colophon in the back, which bears Ricketts's initials. On the cover, the leaves are stamped in gold against a dark green cloth and

⁵⁵ Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, Bristow, ed., 49.

create a pattern atop undulating vertical lines. Ricketts suggests that the pattern was influential: “The cover of ‘Silverpoints’ published in an art paper has drifted back to me from places where my name is quite unknown on bindings, end-papers, wall-papers, and dress cretonnes.”⁵⁶

The other woodcuts occur as first-letter ornaments, and there are five in all (although only four originals, since one repeats). Each features the first letter of a poem nestled in the leaves that are stylistically uniform with the cover design. These first-letter ornaments are the only indication that the text is divided into sections, since the first occurs on the first of Gray’s sixteen original poems; the second at the start of “Parsifal Imitated from the French of Paul Verlaine,” marking the seven translations of his poems; the third occurs at the start of “Fleurs. Imitated from the French of Stephan Mallarmé,” marking his single translated piece; the fourth at the start of “Charleville. Imitated from the French of Arthur Rimbaud,” marking two translated works; and the last on the first of three translations of Baudelaire poems, “À Une Madone. Imitated from the French of Charles Baudelaire.” The final woodcut, featuring a single leaf and the initials “CR” matching the handwritten style of the title and byline on the cover. Since the book was completed just prior to the founding of the Vale Press, and since it was commissioned by a publisher and sold at a bookseller’s shop, it would be easy to overlook the important involvement of Ricketts as the book’s designer. The woodblock illustrations are the most significant evidence that this book, including its dimensions, its layout, its typography, and all of its aesthetic features, is a collaboration between poet and artist. As such, it would come to be known as the quintessential “decadent book.”

⁵⁶ Ricketts, *Defence*, 21

IV. Founding the Vale Press

Ricketts's work with John Gray was a turning point in his career as a book designer, as its publication was symbolic of Ricketts's maturing style and was the time when he considering founding his own publishing firm. Prior to *Silverpoints*, and just after the "experiment" of the first issue of the *Dial*, Ricketts had been encouraged by Wilde toward bookmaking and design. It was through Wilde that Ricketts was put in touch with Wilde's publisher, Osgood and McIlvaine. Wilde's enthusiasm for Ricketts as bookmaker was based on a commission of a painting that Wilde had requested of Ricketts in 1889, shortly after their having become friendly. Wilde asked for Ricketts to paint a portrait in light of his scandalous short-story "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," which had appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1889. Wilde's story was implicitly homoerotic and treated in fictional form a curious literary-historical detail of same-sex love. The story concerned the historical possibility of William Shakespeare's love for a beautiful young actor named Willie Hughes based on the fact that the publication of the sonnet sequence was dedicated to an unknown "Mr. W.H.," in combination with the fact that the first dozen sonnets are clearly narrated by an older man who is addressing a beautiful young man, often in erotic and romantic ways.⁵⁷ In Wilde's story, Erskine is telling the narrator about a former friend, Cyril Graham, who was so fixated on a theory of the identity of the W.H. mention in the dedication of Shakespeare's sonnets that he commissioned a portrait of the unknown man in an effort to fabricate evidence for his existence. Wilde's story includes an embedded exegesis of the sonnets toward proving the theory that Mr. W.H. was a beautiful young man with whom Shakespeare was in love. Wilde comically undercuts the theory by the fact that the two main

⁵⁷ Even this dedication is ambiguous, because it is signed by the initials of the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, and so is not necessarily Shakespeare's doing.

characters are themselves unconvinced, and by the use of the artistic forgery, yet the story succeeds in putting forward a solid description of the presence of same-sex love in one of England's most celebrated writers. The portrait that Wilde had commissioned from Ricketts was to match the description of the forgery in the story, in a rather complicated example of life imitating art. In the story, the painting features a beautiful boy in the sixteenth-century style of the French Renaissance royal portraitist François Clouet:

It was a full-length portrait of a young man in late sixteenth-century costume, standing by a table, with his right hand resting on an open book. He seemed about seventeen years of age, and was of quite extraordinary personal beauty, though evidently somewhat effeminate. Indeed, had it not been for the dress and the closely cropped hair, one would have said that the face, with its dreamy, wistful eyes and its delicate scarlet lips, was the face of a girl. In manner, and especially in the treatment of the hands, the picture reminded one of François Clouet's later work.⁵⁸

Ricketts complied, completing the portrait with Shannon's addition of a worm-eaten wood frame in a style matching the Elizabethan era, to Wilde's delight. It is certainly tempting to imagine that Ricketts' painting of the portrait was to partly inspire *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Maureen Watry cites Ricketts's *Oscar Wilde, Recollections* (1932) when she says of the portrait: "So pleased was Wilde by the artists' creation that he secured Ricketts his first commission 'as a

⁵⁸ Oscar Wilde, "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 302-03.

designer of books and bindings’.”⁵⁹ The first of Ricketts’s works in book binding and layout was his contribution of a binding and title page for Wilde’s *Intentions*, published by Osgood and McIlvaine in May, 1891. In the same year Ricketts contributed the bindings to several of the publisher’s works: Wilde’s *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime and Other Stories* (July 1891) and *A House of Pomegranates* (November 1891), Thomas Hardy’s *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891) and *Tess of D’Urbervilles* (1891). After Osgood and McIlvaine had purchased the leftover stock of Oscar Wilde’s *Poems* (1881), the rights to it were transferred to John Lane and Elkin Mathews’s bookshop-cum-publishing house The Bodley Head.⁶⁰ The original copies were given a new binding and title page designed by Ricketts and issued by The Bodley Head in 1892, thus initiating Ricketts as one of the designers of that firm, whose reputation for aesthetic books of

⁵⁹ Maureen Watry, *The Vale Press: Charles Ricketts, a Publisher in Earnest* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2004), 7. Charles Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde, Recollections by Jean Paul Raymond & Charles Ricketts* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1932), 36.

⁶⁰ The details of the transfer of the rights to *Poems* requires some clarification: when its original publisher filed for bankruptcy in 1882, the rights to that book were purchased by the publishers Chatto & Windus, but according to Stuart Mason that firm did not issue another edition. Stuart Mason, *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1906), 316. At some point the rights were purchased by Osgood and McIlvaine, when they partnered to start a publishing house in 1891. In that same year, 1891, Wilde had worked with Osgood and McIlvaine to put out *Intentions*, *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crimes and Other Stories*, and *A House of Pomegranates*, and, due to Wilde’s efforts at introducing them, they had given Ricketts his start in the design of books. But in October 1891, Wilde legally transferred the rights to *Poems* to Lane and Mathews so that it could be put out by The Bodley Head – fortuitous timing, because Osgood died suddenly the following summer resulting in that publishing firm being dissolved. See Watry, *The Vale Press*, 13; James G. Nelson, *The Early Nineties: A View From The Bodley Head* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 95-97; Delaney, *Charles Ricketts*, 62-63.

minor writers was growing rapidly.⁶¹ With Elkin and Mathews, Ricketts contributed designs and illustrations for Lord de Tabley's *Poems, Dramatic and Lyrical* (1893), J. A. Symonds *In the Key of Blue* (1893), Gray's *Silverpoints* (1893), *Daphnis and Chloe* (1893), and Wilde's *The Sphinx* (July 1894).

Silverpoints is unique, however, because it was not a partial contribution by Ricketts, but rather conceived and designed entirely by him, and shows his development away from emulating Rossetti, toward a more thoroughly-founded idea of book design based on his research on Italian Renaissance printing. It was in 1892, as Watry notes, that Ricketts "concentrat[ed] his admiration on a particularly striking example" of Italian decorated books, which was Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia*, which Aldus Manutius printed with illustrations in 1499.⁶² Meanwhile, Watry says, Shannon's "discovery of George Thornley's translation of *Daphnis and Chloe* provided the first text for their printing programme." Thornley's seventeenth-century translation of a second-century Greek romance inspired Ricketts, together with Shannon, to branch out into publishing, though the costs involved would delay that endeavor for several more years. Both Ricketts and Shannon contributed to the thirty-seven woodcut illustrations that went into *Daphnis and Chloe*, which, along with the production of *Silverpoints*, helped to establish Ricketts's passion for the execution of a printed book that was a complete art object in itself.

The passionate efforts put into *Daphnis and Chloe* enticed both artists to focus on their next project, *Hero and Leander* by Christopher Marlowe and George Chapman. This would become the first book printed by the Vale Press in 1894, although it represents a transition away

⁶¹ See Nelson, *The Early Nineties* (cited above) and J. W. Lambert, *The Bodley Head 1887-1987* (London: The Bodley Head, 1987).

⁶² Watry, *The Vale Press*, 205.

from working with The Bodley Head, toward the full establishment of the Vale Press as an independent publisher. The colophon in the back describes the motivation for the book as well as its complicated publishing scheme:

This book with decorations designed and cut on the wood by Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon was begun at the Vale in November MDCCCXCII [1893] and finished in February MDCCCXCIV [1894]. This book commemorates the edition of *Hero and Leander* by Musaeus first published in Venice by Aldus in the year MCCCCXCIV [1494]. Of this edition only two hundred and twenty copies exist of which two hundred are for sale. The printing is by the Ballantyne Press London and Edinburgh. Sold by Elkin Mathews and John Lane at the sign of The Bodley Head in Vigo Street night the Albany.⁶³

But although it was not yet a work of the Vale Press proper, it was the first book to feature the insignia of the press, the printer's mark of an interlaced VP with a decorative flower.

The first book of the Vale Press was *The Early Poems of John Milton*, issued in April of 1896. In the first two years, the books of the Vale Press captured the aims of the press as creating collectible editions of worthy texts that were meticulously designed and sumptuously printed. The chosen texts were primarily Ricketts' favorites, and included classical translations, Elizabethan masters, and key works of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: Walter Savage Landor, Sir John Suckling, William Shakespeare, Michael Drayton, Thomas Campion, Matthew Arnold, William Blake, Henry Vaughn, Henry Constable, William Aldington, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were all included in the productions of the press in its first two years. The

⁶³ *Hero and Leander* (London: The Bodley Head, 1894), 112.

older texts were pulled from manuscripts in the archives of the British Library and edited by either Ricketts, John Gray, or Thomas Sturge Moore.

But two books of the Vale Press represented the only modern authors that Ricketts and Shannon were to incorporate into this canon of literary history: John Gray's *Spiritual Poems* (1896) and Michael Field's *Fair Rosamund* (1897). These two books were equally meaningful in the careers of both Gray and the Michael Fields (as Cooper and Bradley were known). For Gray, *Spiritual Poems* represented his break with his role as a young dandy of Wilde's circle as he moved toward Catholic priesthood. It showed, too, that his conversion to Catholicism still had important literary and aesthetic components. Like *Silverpoints*, *Spiritual Poems* was a book of translations and "imitations," from works that spanned time periods and languages (Latin, Spanish, German, and French). McCormack says that Gray "ransacked a wide body of religious poetry," presenting an eclectic "hodgepodge" in order to communicate his newly-awakened spirituality.⁶⁴ Apart from his break with Wilde, however, Gray remained intimate friends of Ricketts and Shannon and the Michael Fields.

Watry identifies Ricketts's encounter with one of Michael Field's works as a turning point in his interest in book arts.⁶⁵ As early as 1890, while attending the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Ricketts was captivated by Michael Field's *Tragic Mary* (1890), designed by Selwyn Image, and saw in it the possibilities for the art of book design.⁶⁶ Ricketts sent what he thought

⁶⁴ McCormack, *John Gray*, 167.

⁶⁵ Watry, *Vale Press*, 7. According to Watry, "two events that 'had a decisive influence on Ricketts's approach to book design' were the publication of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (London: Heinemann, 1890) and seeing *Tragic Mary* at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition (Watry, *Vale Press*, 7).

⁶⁶ Michael Field, *Tragic Mary* (London: George Bell, 1890).

was a single male author a letter of praise along with a copy of the *Dial*, and although Cooper and Bradley were not immediately impressed with the work, they were curious to meet Ricketts and Shannon.⁶⁷ They were eventually brought to the Vale by a mutual friend in 1894 and both couples were quickly enamored with the other. The Fields were at a point of transition in their career, having recently issued what would be the last of their volumes of poetry for nearly fifteen years, yet frustrated with the tepid reception of their verse dramas, including *Tragic Mary*. They, too, had been one of The Bodley Head's authors, but were dissatisfied after their play *Attila! My Attila!* (1896) was panned by critics.

V. Michael Field, the Roman Trilogy, and the Vale Press

After they first met Ricketts and Shannon in January of 1894, the established coauthors, Bradley and Cooper—who had by that time published five volumes of poetry and verse-drama—committed to their journals a supremely extravagant description of the two men, in a style that draws on these women writers' capacious knowledge of both Renaissance and modern art: “[Shannon] is like one of the comely angels of Della Francesca . . . a perfect Umbrian Gabriel, who only wants his lily-stem on his shoulder. Ricketts is an unauroeled, decadent Christ.” This striking image of two male artists, who had been intimate partners, combines the physical attractiveness of quattrocento Christian art with the secular modernity of fin-de-siècle Aestheticism and Decadence.⁶⁸ Besides combining the sacred and profane, this description is

⁶⁷ Delany, *A Biography*, 87. Delany describes them as “a sort of female counterpart to Ricketts and Shannon” and claims that they “were curious to meet these two young artists whose life together seemed to similar to their own.” (Delany, *A Biography*, 86-787).

⁶⁸ This specific reference is most likely to the Italian Renaissance painter Piero della Francesca's *Polyptych of Perugia*, which he created for the Franciscan convent of Sant'Antonio da Padova in Perugia in 1470. The polyptych

highly significant because it marks the beginnings of a life-long friendship between two pairs of same-sex lovers. Bradley and Cooper, who were aunt and niece, had been intimately involved since at least 1881, when the first collaborative volume of poetry was published. Within four years, as Bradley and Cooper's friendship with Ricketts and Shannon transitioned into one based in artistic collaboration, Michael Field would publish the first volume in their Roman trilogy—*The World at Auction* (1898), *The Race of Leaves* (1901), and *Julia Domna* (1903)—that comprises the most beautifully produced volumes issued from Ricketts' Vale Press, which was dedicated to printing exquisite editions of finely decorated aesthetic books aimed at the collectors' market.

In each of these volumes, Ricketts' dazzling designs for the title page depict scenes that come directly from the tumultuous action of this series of historical plays, which covers one of the most remarkable periods of the late Roman Empire, from the year 192 CE to 212 CE. This period was regarded as the point of decline of the Imperial power of Rome, and was infamous for the corruption that followed the reign of the well-respected Marcus Aurelius, when Commodus became notorious for his violence and self-indulgence; Didius Julianus purchased the position of emperor following Commodus' assassination, and Caracalla usurped the position of emperor by killing his brother Geta with whom he was to share the seat of power. Throughout the Roman trilogy, Michael Field dramatizes the purity of art in the face of a degraded imperial culture immersed in conspicuous consumption. More to the point, the kind of defiant art that Michael

was part of the collection of the Italian national painting collection of Umbria, housed at Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria when, in the nineteenth century, it became a national museum. The piece features a youthful Gabriel kneeling in the direction of the Virgin Mary. Bradley and Cooper toured Italian art galleries in 1889, guided by art critic Bernard Berenson.

Field celebrates during this notoriously degenerate period of Roman history derives its power from the sexual insubordination of the beloved pantomime artist Pylades, the only character who remains triumphant at the end of a dramatic cycle that covers thirty-one years. His irrepressible dance performances display his enchanting skills in using his lithe, attractive body to adopt countless personae in a Dionysian manner that magnetizes his Roman audience. It is through this historically minor figure of Pylades, who is largely invented by Field in these otherwise veracious narratives, that the figure of the artist intervenes to reframe the popular mythology of the fall of Rome.

In this section, I examine the production of this series and its printed form in order to read the trilogy as the expression of not only Bradley and Cooper's but also Ricketts and Shannon's aesthetic philosophy, in which art can reanimate figures of the past in order to imagine alternative configurations of the present. I read these works as a product of their *queer* collaboration, and the specific kind of historicism that informs it. Within this collaboration, Bradley and Cooper and Ricketts and Shannon, I suggest, invoke a shared commitment to a deeply historicist celebration of the erotic power of art whereby its sensuous properties are a source of identification in cultures hostile to sexual dissidence. Here I show that the collaboration between the two couples was part of an ongoing dialogue between them, in which each party informed the other's work, providing feedback and offering inspiration, since all four individuals took on similar subject matter through which they expressed their distinctive type of aesthetic decadence. They were decidedly historical in their approach, carefully researching details in the Reading Room of the British Museum, in the case of Michael Field, or replicating design elements from rare historical artifacts, in the case of Ricketts and Shannon.

I take up Frankel's assertion that the 1890s marked a distinctive moment when "writers and artists... both confronted and exploited art's inseparability from the physical media in which we encounter it." For Frankel, the material elements of literary texts signaled an evasiveness of meaning: in his view, at this time a work did not reveal a central, true meaning, and so it could not be reduced to the text alone. The "dress" of the text, which Frankel calls its mask, can undermine its surface meaning because it operates at both a linguistic and materially aesthetic level. "For considered in terms of its artistic productions, the 1890s was singularly preoccupied with 'masking' its texts. ...For these writers and artists, the literary 'work' was inseparable from the physical document or book. Perception was at the heart of the literary or artistic experience; and in some instances... perception constituted the most pressing subject of the individual work."⁶⁹ The Roman Trilogy, I argue, tells more than a story from the annals of history books; indeed, it does more than "tell," it itself performs its bookish identity as something polyvocal, out of time, and on the edge of intelligibility. This evasive quality of inherent truth is expressed not only by its asynchronous intertextuality, but also by it being the product of a collaboration, deprivileging the author as the primary creator of meaning. To take Frankel's argument to task, the queer collaboration of which these the volumes are the result is the mode through which self-evident identity can be refused, and the work of art can inscribe new ways of belonging to history. As Frankel would have it, "[m]asking the text thus means breaking readers of their blind faith in the immediacy of the artistic or literary work. ...It means questioning any assumption that significance is innate or that the artwork is self-sufficient so far as the production of meaning

⁶⁹ Nicholas Frankel, *Masking the Text: Essays on Literature & Mediation in the 1890s* (High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2009), 22.

is concerned.”⁷⁰ Rather than framing or consolidating the meaning of a work, its material qualities attest to the unfixed nature of the truth of things, making it available to new interpretations and thus keeping it untimely.

These three arresting volumes from the Vale Press are particularly striking because in both their design and their content they reproduce a verbal and visual sumptuousness about them that seems characteristically decadent and yet they challenge the relationship between form and narrative reproducing the decadence that they ostensibly critique. By taking up the historical source materials that informs the very concept of decadent consumption, political corruption, and imperial decay – which is the history of the fall of Rome – Michael Field’s plays perform a queer critique of late nineteenth century Imperialism while Ricketts’ adaptation of Renaissance book design nuances this critical capacity to critique the present by way of a historically informed reinterpretation of modes of production.

The subject of the Roman trilogy centers on several infamous characters, such as Commodus and Faustina, Didius Julianus, Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta, who ruled and fell during the early period of Rome’s decline, 180 CE to 212 CE. Ever since the appearance of Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1776, this period became a metaphor for the dangers of a civilization that was too prosperous, too contented, and too ambitious to be sustained, a metaphor that resonated throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover Gibbon’s famous work, which was celebrated anew in during the 1894 centennial commemoration of his death, forever linked Rome’s decline to the period of transition from paganism to Christianity. Therefore, Rome’s first few hundred years “after the death of Christ” was itself significant, because it is the beginning of the temporal cycle that gave the nineteenth

⁷⁰ Frankel, *Masking*, 24.

century its name – and this dating took place during a high-point of power of the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth-century in order to establish the dates of Christ’s birth and death. To write about the fall of Rome is to mark the relatively recent birth of the modern period, and to put the contemporary nation-state into a specific historical context.

In fact, in one of the few reviews that the text of the play received, one unsigned critic accused the Fields of doing poor service to Gibbon with *The World at Auction*, taking for granted that his work of history was their primary source.⁷¹ Titling the review “Gibbon and Water” in reference to it being a mere diluted version of his historical treatise, the reviewer says in no uncertain terms that they “have but little patience” for Field’s treatment.⁷² It starts: “Surely he did an ill service to letters who introduced Michael Field to the pages of Gibbon,” and accuses the play of being “Gibbon diluted into the waste and chaos of words.”⁷³ Not only does the review take agency away from the Fields by assuming, condescendingly, that they were introduced to Gibbon, rather than having come to his work through their own careful research, but they accuse the Fields of something like a perversion of Gibbon, who is simultaneously held up as honorable. “The narrative of Gibbon—direct, ironical, pitiless—says, it seems to us, all that can be said.”⁷⁴ Yet, the Fields, they argue, seize on the ugly, monstrous figures of the period in a way that “galvanises” them; the critique is typical of the concern of decadent literature for taking as its subject topics that are indecent and treating them with an ambiguous moral position:

⁷¹ N.s., “Gibbon and Water,” *Academy* 54 (July 30, 1898): 103.

⁷² “Gibbon and Water,” 103.

⁷³ “Gibbon and Water,” 103.

⁷⁴ “Gibbon and Water,” 103.

It might have been foreseen that those lurid and indecent figures of the *Historia Augusta* would have a most unholy fascination for imaginations always so weak on the side of sensitivity to the abnormal and the extravagant. And really these parricides and usurpers, these monsters of blood and lust, are not dramatic. They are too incredible, too aloof from the reasonable possibilities of humanity. They pass across the stage of history like horrible *ombres chinoises*; into living, breathing human creatures you cannot—without genius you cannot—galvanise them.⁷⁵

The reviewer makes accusations about the writers based, first, on the choice of subject matter as representing a psychologically unhealthy interest to begin with. Again assuming that Gibbon as the sole source, the reviewer quotes and summarizes his work, adding that Field cannot be said

[T]o have added anything to Gibbon, save some scenes of sickly amorousness, in which Pylades and the daughter of Julian, Didia Clara, play a prominent part. These serve only...to give Michael Field an excuse for some careful archaeology anent the performance, quite unrealisable by a modern imagination, of the pantomimes.⁷⁶

It ends with the stinging accusation of decadence, despite the irony of the play's staging of Roman decadence as a parallel to that of contemporary England: "Michael Field are two clever ladies, but they will not do much until they get into the open air, and out of this hothouse of decadent chronicle," adding that characters of the play "are not tragedy, but a disordered

⁷⁵ "Gibbon and Water," 103. *Ombres chinoises*, or Chinese shadows, was a European version of Chinese shadow-puppet theater that used cardboard cutouts to cast silhouettes, and which were often short, comical, and satirical. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "ombres chinoises," accessed September 6, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/art/ombres-chinoises>.

⁷⁶ "Gibbon and Water," 103.

dream.”⁷⁷ That “disorder” implies a psychological problem and “dream” is one of the most common topics of Romantic and Symbolist literature makes clear that literary Decadence is not merely the genre of this play, but its fault, and even its danger.

Although it takes place chronologically in the middle of the period the trilogy covers, *The World at Auction* was written and published first, and established for Michael Field the themes and subjects that the following two plays see through to completion. The journals that Michael Field carefully maintained reveal the pivot point on which they find *The World at Auction* to bear, which is the figure of Pylades a figure who appears in a diverse range of classical sources. Edith Cooper writes that the play is “the result of so much expression, experience, recoil, and absolute singleness of passion. . . . It contains my dream of the artist in a decadent age like the present, and my hymn to life and our great full-length portrait of a lost soul. . . . I shall never create another as dear to me as Pylades.”⁷⁸ As a portrait, the visualization of the whole of the play is represented in Charles Ricketts’ ornate and detailed title page, which is just one of the elements of the design and presentation of the play in its book form (See Figure 17). Bradley and Cooper saw Ricketts’ involvement as crucial, writing in their journals that his proposed designs were “true to the motives of *The World at Auction*,” noting that he is a publisher who was also an artist, “who makes the thought of publishing ‘The World at Auction’ tolerable. . . . by securing it almost privacy and yet conditions of permanence.”⁷⁹ In their journals, Bradley and Cooper are impressed by Ricketts’ enthusiasm for the project, noting that he discusses his ideas with them in uncharacteristic detail, although they give to him total control over the imagery and design. They

⁷⁷ “Gibbon and Water,” 103.

⁷⁸ Watry, *The Vale Press*, 143.

⁷⁹ Watry, *The Vale Press*, 143.

record his description of one of the main images for the page, a depiction of the goddess Fortuna, who “leans on a great wheel, a dagger or slave-whip in her right hand, her hair wreathed round the other hand that holds a crown; two attendants below hold sea treasures and laurel wreath, while the sword of jesting cuts sheer across her.”⁸⁰ The final product stays true to this planned design, and no other detail was overlooked in its production.

Several other aspects of the physical look of the volume warrant close attention. The paper bears the Vale Press watermark, “a VP interlaced with a leaf of wild thyme,” as Ricketts had it produced to his specification, and which was first used for *Hero and Leander* in 1894.⁸¹ This paper was made by Batchelor & Arnold, whose papers, Ricketts says, “cannot be matched out of this country.”⁸² The font is the Vale type, which Ricketts himself designed and cut based on his research into the history of printing, and in order to correct some of the past errors of design that had come to be customary out of tradition. Most important, he felt the need to design fonts as part of the larger project of “book building,” which included decorating and illustrating with woodcuts and “the designing of type to harmonise with them.”⁸³ His Vale type font was an experiment not only to use what was most successful in the history of type design, but also to take advantage of the precision that modern technologies allowed in the cutting of type and setting pages. In the Italian Renaissance, Ricketts explains, the foundational fonts were revisited: “the old vein was reopened, and reworked to suit the exigencies of the new material, i.e., type, and it is the duty of the modern student to note how this or that element was lost in the

⁸⁰ Watry, *The Vale Press*, 143.

⁸¹ Ricketts, *Defence*, 22.

⁸² Ricketts, *Defence*, 35.

⁸³ Ricketts, *Defence*, 18.

excitement of discovery, or else merely over-looked: to compare, reason and recast, that his type may fulfill the requirements and benefit by the conditions of his proper medium, and so become type – type only.”⁸⁴ Therefore Vale font represented the press’s approach to “book building,” which was to trace the genealogies of present aesthetics to points in history when they were conceived; and to then reconceive them, “to discard therefore all accumulated debasements, to hark back, not to the few good printers alone, but to the finest forms of penmanship, is the duty of the Designer of Type; but let him consult the spirit controlling them, for perfection in each art, or phase of it, is not of one period; great literatures, for instance, have left to subsequent epochs the theoretic side, the putting into grammar as it were of their efforts.”⁸⁵ Ricketts’ conception of the relationship between art and history is radically aloof from a linear conception of progress: great works of art and design produce conventions, and those conventions could and should be interrogated with each epoch *by the artist* of his or her age.

Similarly, in details such as the borders, Ricketts intends something far greater than ornamental decoration. The “purely Renaissance border” engraved for *The World at Auction* is in homage to “that most vital of old Italian decorated books, the ‘Dream of Poliphilus’” and “is an attempt on my part to express admiration for this forgotten designer.”⁸⁶ The Renaissance-style borders and initials throughout the Vale books are modeled from “unclassed borders and initials

⁸⁴ Ricketts, *Defence*, 6.

⁸⁵ Ricketts, *Defence*, 9-10

⁸⁶ Ricketts, *Defence*, 30-31.

[that] appear in Venice in books published about 1493...1500 or thereabout.”⁸⁷ Here, Ricketts’ professed knowledge of such specimens of book design belies the technological innovations from which he draws, and cultural debates in England with which he engages. According to the “Introduction” of an 1889 reproduction of the book by J[ohann] W[ilhelm] Appell, Assistant Keeper in the South Kensington Museum, *The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published in Venice in 1499 and better known as *The Dream of Poliphilus*, was written by “the art-loving Dominican Fra Francesco Colonna” and well known “to lovers of old Italian books and to true connoisseurs of the decorative art of the Renaissance.”⁸⁸ Appell’s publication features, according to the title page, “fac-similes of one hundred and sixty-eight woodcuts” that were “reproduced for the Department of Science and Art in Photo-Lithography” by W. Griggs, who was an innovator and proponent of a color photolithographic process. Thus in making reference to a historical touchstone of Renaissance printing, Ricketts invokes the museological order of the archive that I describe in Chapter One as constituting Nineteenth-Century British Historicism, as well as the technological innovations that paradoxically threaten the value of artisan craftsmanship, yet enhance the ability of a craftsman like Ricketts to “return” to the aesthetic traditions of the very finest examples of such craftsmanship for his own work.

⁸⁷ Ricketts, *Defence*, 30 (ellipses in original). It is worth noting that this incunabula era text was reprinted in 1889 with the subtitle “Facsimiles of one hundred and sixty eight woodcuts in the ‘Hypnerotomachia Poliphili,’ Venice, 1499.”

⁸⁸ J.W. Appell, *The Dream of Poliphilus: Fac-similes of One Hundred and Sixty-Eight Woodcuts in the “Hypnerotomachia Polihil,” Venice, 1499*. ([London]: Reproduced for the Dept. of Science and Art in Photo-lithography by W. Griggs, 1888.), 3.

The reference to this particular text is doubly-meaningful because it is a dreamy, pagan “art-romance” by a Renaissance Catholic friar that functions as a literary museum, with detailed descriptions of art, architecture, myths, monuments, and such a mix of learned references that it is as encyclopedic as it is narrative. In his introduction, Appell describes the fetishistic quality of the tale of this little-known author:⁸⁹

[Poliphilus]...is riveted by ancient edifices and monuments of amazing dimensions and marvelous construction, diffuse technical descriptions of which, occupying pages upon pages, are given. He beholds pyramids and obelisks, mysterious temples with beautiful gates and columns, altars and fountains, and architectural fragments in profusion. He rambles through crypts filled with sepulchral monuments bearing enigmatic devices...epitaphs...and other sculpture. ...[A royal feast] affords our author an opportunity of describing ... the most magnificent vessels and ornaments....⁹⁰

He experiences “four triumphal processions” and, in the Temple of Venus, “take part in some strange ceremonies.”⁹¹ He is carried by Cupid to an enchanted island, “their bowers and even the flower-beds and box trees clipt into various shapes, as well as the buildings, are lovingly and minutely described.”⁹² Thus, in this tale of the ahistorical encounters with lost artifacts, customs, and religions, Ricketts derives not only design inspiration, but clearly references the style of

⁸⁹ He describes the author as one “who possessed a considerable store of learning, and made a special study of the books of Vitruvius” (Appell, *Poliphilus*, 5).

⁹⁰ Appell, *Poliphilus*, 5.

⁹¹ Appell, *Poliphilus*, 5.

⁹² Appell, *Poliphilus*, 5.

images of its many woodcuts. In comparing elements from the pages of Michael Field's Roman Trilogy, the visual allusions are striking:

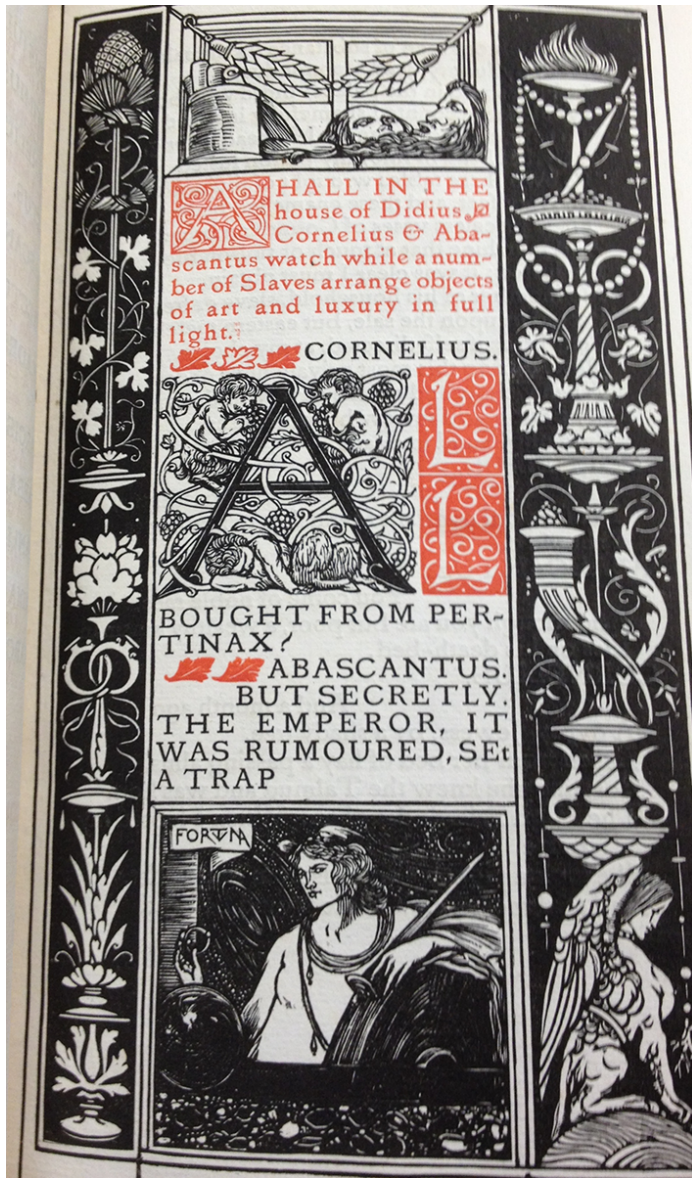


Figure 17. Border opening for Michael Field, *World at Auction* (1898)

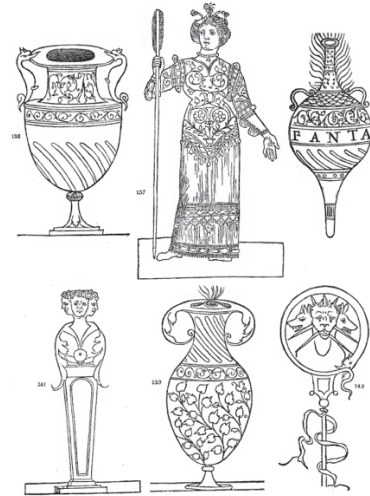


Figure 18. Woodcuts No. 136, No. 137, No. 138, No. 141, No. 139, and No. 142 from J. W. Appell's facsimiles of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphil* (Venice, 1499)

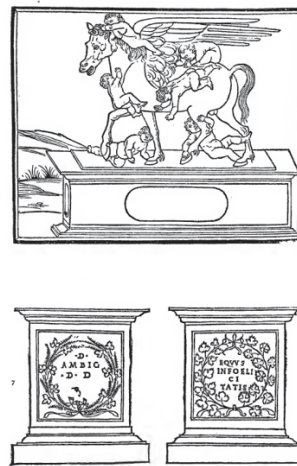


Figure 19. Woodcuts No. 6, No. 7, and No. 8 from J. W. Appell's facsimiles of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphil* (Venice, 1499)



Figure 20. Border opening for Michael Field, *Race of Leaves* (1901)

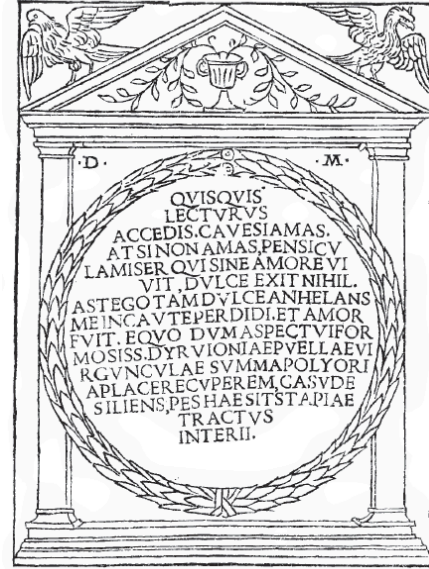


Figure 21. Woodcut No. 109 from J. W. Appell's facsimiles of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphil* (Venice, 1499)



Figure 22. Woodcut No. 25 from J. W. Appell's facsimiles of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphil* (Venice, 1499)



Figure 23. Border opening for Michael Field, *Julia Domna* (1903)

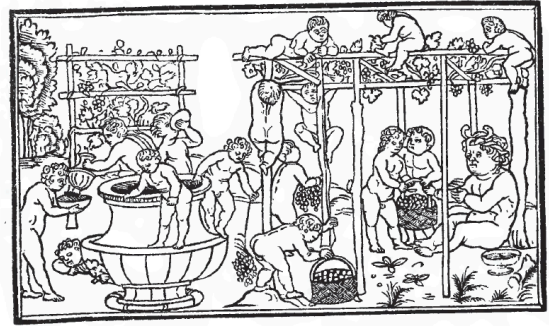


Figure 24. Woodcut No. 63 from J. W. Appell's facsimiles of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphil* (Venice, 1499)

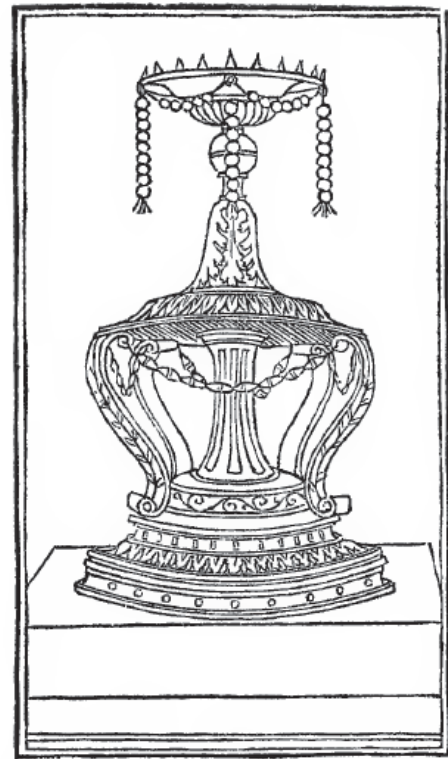


Figure 25. Woodcut No. 81 from J. W. Appell's facsimiles of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphil* (Venice, 1499)

While my point is not to trace all of the influences in Ricketts' design or style, which are indeed eclectic and which attest to his broad knowledge of art history, it is clear that the volumes of the

Roman Trilogy are built in the tradition of one of the best known volumes of Renaissance printing, and as such are situated aesthetically alongside it. The effect is a certain timelessness that marks these works as already belonging to the archive of art historical and literary artifacts.

Bradley and Cooper record their impressions of Ricketts' work in the journals in a way that gives the visual elements an animated and performative effect: of *The World At Auction*, Bradley describes "the most beautiful capital letter in the whole world – those satyrs at the teats of the grapes and one who has sucked too much," while Cooper elaborates on the design, "the border is greatly built up – full of the doom, the forces of chance and mystery, of the aesthetic joys and the triumph of the thyrses that are the makers of life in the play. The whole page is charged with meaning, continually brought before our eyes."⁹³ Considering the difficulty with which Michael Field had during this period with getting any of their plays to be staged, their visual description of the title page treats it like a performance, bringing the drama to life "before our eyes," and allowing the design of the text to become an alternative to a live theatrical performance.⁹⁴

On receipt of Ricketts' designs for the second volume, Bradley records triumphantly his successful plan to make Janus, "the two-faced god" "the chief figure" of the page. Cooper writes:

[I]t is a wonderful forerunner to the ripeness of the border of the "World at Auction."

Pylades is hidden under three vine leaves and a soft fir conelet. Even our rings are more

⁹³ Watry, *The Vale Press*, 143.

⁹⁴ Their only play to be performed was *A Question of Memory* (1893), despite their efforts to see *Attila, My Attila!* (1896) brought to the stage. See Joseph Bristow, "Michael Field in Their Time and Ours," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 162-65; and Jill R. Ehnenn, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 105-44.

severe in workmanship. The design is splendidly clasped by the medal of Comodus, the Amazon and her moon-shaped shield. The stability of the design is most imaginatively disturbed by a gust that sweeps the flame at the top of the page and blows it towards Janus, driving the loose leaves around him.⁹⁵

Of the final volume, she describes the central figure of the Temple of Vesta with the passion of watching a scene unfold: “The little Vesta in her shrine of freed columns has a tragic simpleness – such a thing to be violated by a murder! The Hearth is delicate and piteous as a young girl, in contact with crime. But the Fury who avenges it has eyes one must not see, or one would turn to stone. She is a monster of circumstance – this Medusa who must avenge a deed that has unnatured her.”⁹⁶

That the designs depict mythological references that are rather indirectly related to the narrative of the plays shows that Ricketts was not interested in merely illustrating the works. Fortuna, Janus, Vesta, and Medusa, each represent archetypal aspects of human nature and human history, and the elements of the page, “charged with meaning,” representing the “true motives” of the play, but also effecting an interpretation, a literal framing, that is extratextual.

Of *The World At Auction* and the trilogy generally, Ana Parejo Vadillo describes the Fields’s use of “outmoded” styles and genres such as the lyrical drama as a method of creating a critical distance through which to comment on the present.⁹⁷ Their brand of Aestheticism

⁹⁵ Watry, *The Vale Press*, 143

⁹⁶ Watry, *The Vale Press*, 143.

⁹⁷ Ana Parejo Vadillo, “Outmoded Dramas: History and Modernity in Michael Field’s Aesthetic Plays,” in *Michael Field and Their World*, ed. Margaret D. Stetz and Cheryl A. Wilson (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2007), 237-48.

required a distance, a sense of alienation, according to Vadillo: “Art must be alienating and alienated from the everyday reality. Through this alienation, art could question the materialism of everyday reality and expose the illusion of progress.”⁹⁸ In *The World at Auction* in particular, the notion that Rome is for sale to the highest bidder is a metaphor, according to Vadillo, for the commodification of life.⁹⁹ But in the figure of Pylades as a representation of the Nietzschean Dionysiac artist, Vadillo argues, had the power “of effecting liberation from the slavery and tyranny of the mechanical-commodified city.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Vadillo “Outmoded Dramas,” 240-1.

⁹⁹ Vadillo, “Outmoded Dramas,” 244.

¹⁰⁰ Vadillo, “Outmoded Dramas,” 248.

Conclusion

With the close of the Vale Press, Ricketts went on to gain greater recognition as an art historian, collector, and theatrical set designer. He destroyed all that remained of the various fonts and decorations that he had carved for use in Vale books. His protégé and former friend, Lucien Pissarro, began his own press in 1894, after studying engraving and printing methods with Ricketts, who at times employed and promoted Pissarro's art in England. The Eragny Press continued until 1914, and its last issue was a very small run of Michael Field's book of poetry *Whym Chow, Flame of Love*. The cycle of thirty poems was a memorial to the loss of their beloved pet chow dog. Pissarro's designs bear much influence from Ricketts's work, since the first sixteen books from the Eragny Press featured the Vale font. *Whym Chow* was the final aesthetic book of Decadent literature, as the literary movements of the late nineteenth century had begun to give way to new literary modes that were self-proclaimed as breaking from the traditions of the Victorian period.

By no means did artistic bookmaking as a mode of experimental literature vanish with the closing of small presses like the Vale, Eragny, and Kelmscott Press: on the contrary, they flourished. But aesthetically they shifted into an arguably more masculine style that suggested a reactionary reassertion of heterosexual masculinity. The aesthetics of print grew to encompass the speed and movement of modern industrial printing techniques, over the "slow print" model of printing press revival. For example, the movement of Vorticism (so named by Ezra Pound in 1913) was founded on an interest in capturing modernity in terms of speed with a terse, direct style of language and an aesthetics of abstract and geometric visual components. Wyndham Lewis, along with Pound, established a magazine called *BLAST* (1914-1915) that lasted only two issues before World War I proved a disruption. The first issue featured a manifesto in the style of

experimental typography that varied disruptively across the space of the page in terms of font size, capitalization, and line spacing. In a sparse, sans-serif font reminiscent of newspaper typography, the manifesto begins with a critique of English Aestheticism that charges it with an enervating effeminacy (here approximating some of its typographical qualities):

CURSE ITS CLIMATE FOR ITS SINS AND INFECTIONS
DISMAL SYMBOL, SET round our bodies, of effeminate lout within.
VICTORIAN VAMPIRE, the LONDON cloud sucks the TOWN'S heart.

A 1000 MILE LONG, 2 KILOMETER Deep
BODY OF WATER EVEN, is pushed against us
From the Floridas, TO MAKE US MILD.
OFFICIOUS MOUNTAINS keep back DRASTIC WINDS
SO MUCH VAST MACHINERY TO PRODUCE

THE CURATE of "Eltham"
BRITANNIC AESTHETE
WILD NATURE CRANK
DOMESTICATED POLICEMAN
LONDON COLISEUM
SOCIALIST-PLAYWRIGHT¹

Although *BLAST* was an English publication of the Bodley Head, it sought to promote Imagism and Vorticism as a rupture with English Aestheticism inspired by similar reactions coming from France, Italy, and the United States. As David Ryan has argued, the "flamboyantly designed" "decorative and ornamented" typography of the late nineteenth century "prefigured the

¹ Wyndham Lewis. *Blast 1*, ed. Bradford Morrow (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1997), 11.

progressive ideas of functionality and economy that underlie the modernist ideal, yet they gave rise to the reaction that resulted in change.”² Letterforms became simplified and drew inspiration from commercialization and low culture, despite having taking cues from Victorian typographers concerning the aesthetic potential of typography in literature.

Mallarmé had already initiated a poetics of arrangement that suggested a play between typographical arrangement and poetry, as with his *Un Coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* [A throw of the dice will never abolish chance] (1896), in which words and lines appear scattered across the page in varying type sizes and effects of capitalization, italicization, and the like. Rather than the harmony of the page that Ricketts sought to achieve, Mallarmé’s visual poetry disrupted visual harmony for an expressive effect that was tied to the meaning of the words. As Willard Bohn argues, Mallarmé “revealed a whole new realm of possibilities” with *Un Coup de dés jamais*, “[e]mploying each word, indeed each letter, as a visual counter, he brilliantly demonstrated just how radical visual poetry could be.”³ Bohn notes that poetry was “deeply affected” by technological developments that related to print production in what he calls “the crisis of the sign.”⁴ The French poet Guillaume Apollinaire championed Cubism and Surrealism in art and literature, and was inspired by Mallarmé when he developed what he called “Calligrammes” or visual poetry in which the arrangement of words and lines created pictures and other visual effects. His book *Calligrammes, poèmes de la paix et de la guerre 1913-1916* (the subtitle translates as *Poems of Peace and War*) was published in 1918.

² David Ryan, *Letter Perfect: The Art of Modernist Typography, 1896-1953* (Rohnert Park, CA: Pomegranate, 2001), 3.

³ Willard Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001): 18.

⁴ Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry*, 19.

The aesthetic philosophy of Futurism was also one that rejected historical aesthetics in favor of a visual and poetic aesthetic of speed and modernity. Founded by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the Manifesto of Futurism appeared as the preface of a volume of his poetry in 1909 and was translated into French in *Le Figaro* the same year. It declared a “new beauty: the beauty of speed.”⁵ It professes a “love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness,” and asserts a masculinist, aggressive characterization of the personality of Futurist art and aesthetics in contrast to the promotion of a dreamy Romanticism: “Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap.”⁶ It declares that war is “the worlds only hygiene” and promises to “destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind,” and to “fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.”⁷ Johanna Drucker has written on the play between typographic design and the industrial aesthetics of Marinetti arguing that his Futurist poetics confronted the visual representation of language at the level of the sign:

Marinetti struggled to develop a more accurate rapport between the representation system of language and its supposed referent. He did not question the relation between language and the field of reference, but foregrounded the material qualities of representation in his attempts to obtain a better correspondence. Typographic manipulation, in Marinetti’s opinion, could contribute to this process by generating novel effects which aided in the

⁵ F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos*.

Umbro Apollonio, ed. R. W. Flint (New York: Viking Press, 1973): 21.

⁶ Marinetti, “Manifesto,” 21.

⁷ Marinetti, “Manifesto,” 22.

destruction of normative syntax and the reinforcing effect of the linear mode in which literary language was conventionally constrained.⁸

Drucker notes the similarity between Marinetti's exploration of the separation between meaning, language, and material signifiers to Ferdinand de Saussure's philosophy of linguistics. Although his *Course in General Linguistics* was published in 1916, and Drucker does not claim that Marinetti was engaging with Saussure's philosophy, but rather that both signaled a turn towards linguistics that would dominate critical philosophy in coming decade.

Beatrice Ward in 1932 wrote an essay called "The Crystal Goblet" that argued for a more streamlined approach to typographic design, based on the theory that "printing should be invisible." Henry Krips argues that Ward represents the way that invisibility was a norm, that with Modernism came new ways of "seeing texts."⁹ Krips says that "...glittering gold leaf of an illuminated medieval manuscript may physically impact the eye...[b]ut such a gaze has nothing to do with the propositional content of the text, and in any case has little relevance for the modern printed book..."¹⁰ Ward's theory demonstrates the oppositional aesthetics to pre-Industrial printing methods that used ornate Roman fonts modeled on historical types.

⁸ Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 138. Drucker's work on book design, typography, and modernist art and literature is vital to this field. See also her *Theorizing Modernism: Visual Art and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and "Graphical Readings and the Visual Aesthetics of Textuality," *Text* 16 (2006): 267-76. For a discussion that argues for greater continuity between modernism and the nineteenth century aesthetic book, see Jerome J. McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁹ Henry Krips, *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 133.

¹⁰ Krips, *Fetish*, 133.

Thus the aesthetic book of literature took on theories and philosophies of the early twentieth century in light of the age of machines and the destructiveness of war. As I have suggested, the art of book production also arguably shifted away from the aesthetic markers of Decadence after Decadence became strongly identified with psycho-sexual aberration and national decline. The fall of Oscar Wilde and the rise of anti-Decadent modernist aesthetics were signs of the growing hostility towards the association between art and gender non-conformity. This is especially pertinent as discussions of homosexuality became more pronounced in medical and psychological literature, leading to a violent disciplining of gender and sexual norms that defined the 1950s. When communities of gays and lesbians in England and America took up homosexuality as a positive self-identity, Wilde was seen as a martyr to a political cause, and the Decadent aesthetic of fin-de-siècle England became, and remains, a source of queer affirmation.

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