

## Comparative Sapphism

It is a truth universally acknowledged by readers of nineteenth-century literature possessing an interest in sapphism: they ordered this matter better in France. Odd women, romantic female friends, passionately devoted sisters and cousins may shadow British narratives of courtship and marriage; otherworldly female creatures drawn to women may occasionally creep into its supernatural fiction. In almost every case, however, those British texts refuse to define any relationship between women as explicitly sexual. For representations of women whose desire for women is unmistakably sexual—and it is that desire I am calling lesbian, and those representations I am calling sapphic—one must cross the literary channel from England to France.

Comparative studies of British and French literature have paid little attention to sapphism even though critics have long defined the difference between the two national literatures as sexual, particularly with respect to the novel. For most comparatists the sexual difference between nineteenth-century British and French literature is exclusively heterosexual: against the staid British novel of courtship throbs the French novel of adultery. But the lack of any British counterpart to the sapphism that thrived in France shows that the difference between the two literatures is also homosexual. With respect to heterosexuality, nineteenth-century French and British novels offer a contrast between two kinds of presence; with respect to sapphism, the contrast is between presence and absence. It would thus seem that the critic who compares nineteenth-century French and British sapphism is in the paradoxical position of comparing something to nothing.

One overlooked factor, however, complicates this opposition. Although nineteenth-century British writers did not produce an indigenous sapphism, French sapphism entered England through the mediation of the British periodical press. Throughout the Victorian era (1830–1900), British periodicals, whose readers often numbered in the tens of thousands, published numerous reviews of French literature that frequently discussed the work of Balzac, Gautier, Baudelaire, and Zola, including their sapphic texts.<sup>1</sup> While the British novel avoided sapphism, British criticism defined it as an element in the difference between national literatures, thus producing a domestic sapphism aimed at the general public—a British sapphism that alluded to lesbianism, but always and only as foreign.<sup>2</sup>

The British sapphism purveyed by articles in the periodical press was, as we will see, a discourse that applied to lesbianism the periphrasis and circumlocution that Ed Cohen and William Cohen have analyzed in Victorian accounts of men put on trial for sodomy and gross indecency.<sup>3</sup> Like knowledge of sex between men, knowledge of sex between women was expressed in language that disavowed both that knowledge and its object. When discussing French sapphic texts, reviewers used the now familiar rhetoric of the “open secret,” in which, as D. A. Miller and Eve Sedgwick have argued, homosexuality can only be connoted, not denoted, and becomes visible only as a pattern of elision.<sup>4</sup> By the same token, a pattern of elision and circumlocution around sapphism becomes a sign of sapphism’s visibility.

And a pattern there certainly was, one that prevailed over the heterogeneity of the authors who wrote the numerous articles about French literature that appeared in a wide array of British periodicals over a seventy-year period. Reviewers of French literature ranged from men and women obscure even in their own time to authors whose prestige as novelists and critics endures to this day. Some of the more famous reviewers of French literature were popular novelists, such as Eliza Lynn Linton, Margaret Oliphant, Vernon Lee, and George Moore. Others were polymaths whose areas of expertise included French literature, such as George Lewes, George Saintsbury, Leslie Stephen, and Andrew Lang. Lang, for example, was a folklorist and translator of Homer who also wrote many articles on French authors. George Saintsbury was a prolific critic of French literature who began publishing with an essay on Baudelaire for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1875, wrote numerous essays and books on French, British, and European literature, and in the 1890s edited a forty-volume translation of Balzac.<sup>5</sup>

The reviews cited here are drawn from periodicals representing diverse formats, prices, religious views, and political orientations. Reviews

of French texts (translated and untranslated), French authors, and French literature appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Westminster Review*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Contemporary Review*, and the *Edinburgh Review*, in *Cornhill*, *Blackwood's*, and *Pall Mall* magazines, and in the *Spectator*, the *Athenaeum*, *Temple Bar*, and *Belgravia*. Those periodicals differed significantly from one another with respect to format, audience, religious views, and political bent. Some were published weekly, some monthly; the *Edinburgh Review* was Whig, the *Quarterly Review* Tory, the *Fortnightly Review* freethinking under John Morley's editorship (1867–82). Some, such as *Blackwood's*, *Dark Blue*, and the *Westminster Review*, were directed at an intellectual readership, while others, such as *Cornhill*, were designed to be read by all members of middle-class families.<sup>6</sup> Varied as these publications were, when confronted with French sapphism their contributors displayed a remarkable unanimity in what they said and how they said it.

In what follows, I excavate Victorian critics' awareness of French sapphism; analyze those critics' rhetorical maneuvers, political intentions, and aesthetic commitments; and highlight some of the surprising findings about Victorian sexuality and Victorian literature that emerge from a reading of this archive. Let me signal my main claims at the outset. First, the visibility of French sapphism in the British periodical press indicates that the Victorian general public was aware of lesbianism and could be expected to understand even highly coded references to it. Many have argued that the Victorians produced so few sapphic texts because of a pervasive ignorance of lesbianism in Victorian England, pointing to the paucity of references to lesbians in juridical, legal, and medical records of deviance. British reviews of French sapphism suggest, however, that we have been looking in the wrong places for knowledge of sex between women and that such knowledge surfaced regularly in a genre focused on aesthetics and culture (the book review) and in a medium defined by middle-class respectability (the periodical). Second, British reviews of French sapphism reveal that Victorian critics often linked their condemnation of sapphism to a rejection of realism. This conjunction leads me to challenge the common assumption that realism was *the* dominant aesthetic in Victorian England and to question the received view of the relationship between lesbians and realism: that realism relegates lesbians to the status of the spectral, the apparitional, and the fantastic. Victorian critics perceived the lesbian not as a ghost but as a sign of the real, as the embodiment of a desire that could never transcend materialism and sensuality. For the many Victorian

critics who considered realism to be a morally debased, empiricist aesthetic, realism was not antithetical to sapphism but the most plausible aesthetic in which to couch it.

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### British Critics and the French Sapphic Canon

In order to introduce the sapphic canon, let me begin at the nineteenth century's end, with Havelock Ellis's "Sexual Inversion of Women," published in 1895. "Sexual Inversion in Women" is best known as one of the first sexological works to define lesbianism, but it also deserves a place in the history of literary criticism as one of the earliest formulations of a sapphic canon. Ellis's article is a model of cosmopolitanism, written by an Englishman for an American journal and replete with medical and anthropological evidence from England, Spain, Italy, Germany, and the United States. Ellis opens with a sweeping generalization: "Homosexuality has been observed in women from very early times, and in very wide-spread regions." The reader expects a similar expansiveness from the literary claim that immediately follows: the "passion of women for women has, also, formed a favorite subject with the novelist."<sup>7</sup> Yet the footnote to Ellis's comment about novelists has a very limited historical and national range: of the twelve authors Ellis cites—Diderot, Balzac, Gautier, Zola, Belot, de Maupassant, Bourget, Daudet, Mendès, Lamartine, Swinburne, and Verlaine—only Diderot wrote in the eighteenth century, and only Swinburne, albeit often identified by his compatriots as in effect a French writer, was English; the remaining ten sapphic authors wrote in nineteenth-century France (141–42).

In his comments on one of the French novels he cites, Ellis refers to a "*liaison*" between two women, emphasizing the French origins of the term by italicizing it (142). In so doing, he underscores the common association of nineteenth-century France and French literature with lesbianism. The mark of France often accentuates the sapphic strain in Victorian stories of odd women: it is in France that Miss Havisham completes Estella's education and that Miss Wade transmits her "History of a Self-Tormentor"; it is in French, if not in France, that Brontë sets her eccentric Lucy Snowe, and Wilde his perverse Salomé.<sup>8</sup> In her study of lesbianism in literature, Terry Castle looks to France to restore the lesbian body to Anglo-American literature, arguing that "it was precisely by way of *Nana* that [Henry] James found an ingenious means of treating the subject of

lesbianism”; that British lesbian couples signified their bond through imagined encounters with Marie Antoinette; and that what she calls the “count-erplot of lesbian fiction” emerged in a twentieth-century British novel set in 1848 Paris.<sup>9</sup>

Critics who equate the literary history of lesbianism with nineteenth-century France display so much unanimity in their choice of texts that they have established what Elisabeth Ladenson calls a “canon of lesbianism in French literature.”<sup>10</sup> Scholars repeatedly select the same works: Balzac’s *La Fille aux yeux d’or* (1835), *Séraphita* (1834), and *La Cousine Bette* (1846); Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), which, according to Ellis, “made the adventures of a woman who was predisposed to homosexuality and slowly realizes the fact [its] central motive”; “Lesbos” and “Femmes damnées (Delphine et Hippolyte),” two of the condemned poems from Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857); and Zola’s *Nana* (1880), which, again according to Ellis, “described sexual inversion with characteristic frankness.”<sup>11</sup> Although each of those texts represented lesbianism in complex, sometimes elliptical and equivocal ways, nineteenth-century critics and authors ignored those complications by citing them as signs of lesbianism. When the narrator of Adolphe Belot’s *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme* (1870) tracks his errant wife to an apartment containing copies of *La Religieuse*, *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, and *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the reader is meant to decode instantly what the misguided husband, who can only imagine a male rival, understands only in retrospect: that his wife and her female best friend are conducting a sexual affair. Within a text like *La Religieuse*, even within *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme* itself, lesbianism is never denoted, but once Belot uses Diderot’s text to connote lesbianism, he concretizes its status as a lesbian sign.<sup>12</sup>

Havelock Ellis identified the French sapphic canon and discussed lesbian sexual practices as part of a controversial project to create a public discourse that characterized homosexuality neutrally, even positively. In so doing, Ellis broke with the rhetoric prevailing among British literary critics, who throughout the nineteenth century operated under and reinforced constraints on any explicit discussion of homosexuality. British critics were unable to condemn sapphism outright, as they did novels of adultery, because to do so would have required demonstrating and purveying knowledge of sexual practices and desires of which everyone, they believed, should be kept ignorant.<sup>13</sup> To resolve the conflicting demands of censure and censorship, British critics short-circuited meaning and made their discourse circular, repeatedly using negation, ellipsis, periphrasis, and met-

onymic allusion to indicate without actually explaining why *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and *Nana* made them so indignant.

Ellipsis often took the extreme form of refusing to name sapphic works by title. In one of the very few nineteenth-century British reviews of Baudelaire's work, George Saintsbury refers to Baudelaire's "Lesbian studies." Especially when capitalized, *Lesbian* could mean "from or of Lesbos" and not "female homosexual." Saintsbury, however, does not associate the term with the Greek island, nor even with Baudelaire's poem entitled "Lesbos," which itself links *Lesbian* to *lesbian* ("Lesbos, où les Phrynés l'une l'autre s'attirent"). Rather, he anchors the meaning of the term in female homosexuality by referring it to the "passion of Delphine" and thus to the sapphic poem "Femmes damnées (Delphine et Hippolyte)." Saintsbury thus signals his understanding that Baudelaire wrote sapphic poems and is so familiar with Baudelaire's "condemned pieces" that he knows how many lines they total, but not once does he quote from or name "Femmes damnées" or "Lesbos."<sup>14</sup>

Leslie Stephen used a similar strategy when, in an 1871 article titled "Balzac's Novels," he discussed Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or* without giving its title. *La Fille aux yeux d'or* was first published in France in 1834 and 1835 in the *Scènes de la vie parisienne* as part of a series of three linked works collectively entitled *Histoire des treize*. Few British critics ever mentioned it, and as late as the 1890s George Saintsbury excluded it from an English translation of *The Thirteen*, noting in his preface that "[i]n its original form the *Histoire des Treize* consists . . . of three stories: *Ferragus* . . . *La Duchesse de Langeais* . . . and *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*. The last, in some respects one of Balzac's most brilliant effects, does not appear here, as it contains things that are inconvenient."<sup>15</sup> British critics who read French were probably aware of *La Fille*, since their articles often referred to French editions of Balzac's complete works, as well as to *Ferragus* and *La Duchesse de Langeais*, the other two works that made up the *Histoire des treize* in the *Comédie humaine*. In 1896 Leonard Smithers, known as a publisher of both Decadent literature and expensive pornography, published a limited, illustrated edition of *La Fille aux yeux d'or* with a translator's preface by the poet Ernest Dowson. Given its reputation as a work about forbidden sexual practices, it is not surprising that until 1886 no review of Balzac's works referred to *La Fille aux yeux d'or* directly by name.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the critics who did not name *La Fille aux yeux d'or* also did not discuss it, a simple form of critical neglect that could have had multiple motives or none. Leslie Stephen's "Balzac's Novels," published in

the *Fortnightly Review* in 1871, is more striking: Stephen devotes an entire paragraph to Balzac's "most outrageous story" without ever providing that story's title. Even more curiously, Stephen comments on the story by extensively paraphrasing but never directly quoting its opening pages.<sup>17</sup> As a result, only one who has already read the tale, can recall it, and has it to hand can identify that the "most outrageous story" is *La Fille aux yeux d'or*. Stephen's elision of *La Fille's* title suggests that reading the story would be so dangerous that he can neither direct his readers to it nor even acknowledge that he himself has read it. In writing about a sapphic text, Stephen goes against the critical grain by concealing instead of demonstrating knowledge of his subject. At the same time, however, Stephen's choice of paraphrase over quotation means that instead of keeping Balzac's words separate from his own, he has put them into his own words, made them his own in the very process of disowning them. And in another of the paradoxical effects characteristic of censorship rhetoric, because only those who *have* read the forbidden *Fille* can understand what Stephen is talking about, his prose creates a community based on the very thing he intended to suppress: shared knowledge of *La Fille aux yeux d'or* and the lesbianism it represents.<sup>18</sup>

Critics who, unlike Stephen, were willing to name sapphic titles were no more willing than he to discuss the content of sapphic texts, even if only to condemn it. Instead, they reverted to ellipsis, negation, and circumlocution so consistently that a cumulative reading of their reviews establishes the blatant refusal to speak about sapphism as *the* way to speak about it. An 1866 *Saturday Review* tirade against Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* excoriated the poems as "unspeakable foulnesses" that depicted "the unnamed lusts of sated wantons." The reviewer took as his "only comfort" the belief that "such a piece as 'Anactoria' will be unintelligible to a great many people, and so will the fevered folly of 'Hermaphroditus,' as well as much else that is nameless and abominable."<sup>19</sup> As poems that overtly depict sapphism and bisexuality, "Anactoria" and "Hermaphroditus" confer on the indeterminate terms "nameless" and "unspeakable" a specific and easily determined meaning. Although intended as synonyms, "nameless" and "unspeakable" register the contradictions of a rhetoric that simultaneously wants to stigmatize sapphism and make it invisible. The reviewer calls the poem's subjects "nameless" in order to enact his wish that they have no name, but he belies that namelessness with the term "unspeakable," which suggests that the poem's subjects do have names, but ones too awful for him to utter.<sup>20</sup> In an 1889 essay titled "Some of Balzac's Minor Pieces," George Moore, an admirer of Balzac and Zola,

explained that he could only list the titles of Balzac's queerest hits: *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, *La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin*, *Une Passion dans le désert*, *Séraphita*, and *Sarrasine*. Moore allies those texts with "the strange, the perverse, the abnormal" and suggests that he would like to write about them but can do no more than name them: "[I]t would be both interesting and instructive to analyse these strangest flowers of genius, but having regard for the susceptibilities of the public, I will turn at once to Massamilla [Doni]," a story of heterosexual intrigue whose plot he recounts at length. Moore's use of the word "susceptibilities" suggests a set of competing publics: a censorious one he cannot risk offending, a vulnerable one he cannot risk harming or infecting, and a queer one that he cannot risk arousing.<sup>21</sup>

Such hyperbolic ellipses, whose characteristic expression would be "I'm so shocked that I can't say why," had their corollary in the redundant understatement "It's so clear that I don't need to explain." Eliza Lynn Linton, a novelist and frequent contributor to the *Saturday Review*, wrote a series of articles in 1886, published in *Temple Bar*, entitled "The Novels of Balzac." Cannily relating lesbian characters to gay ones in order to avoid naming what they have in common, Linton writes that the "love of la cousine Bette . . . for Valerie is emphatically in all things of the same kind as that of Vautrin for Lucien."<sup>22</sup> What kind of love, one might ask, was the love of Vautrin for Lucien? Vautrin, Linton explains, "watches over [Lucien] as tenderly, if not so purely, as a mother."<sup>23</sup> But Linton offers no further explanation and praises Balzac for providing almost none himself. Linton approves of the "trenchant touch" with which Balzac depicts "the various corruptions of society": "A rapid hint—a side flash—one word—happily a mere gesture, photographs a whole moral tract which only the initiated see and of which the ignorant remain ignorant." She then specifies that Balzac's linguistic economy saves the ignorant reader from gaining knowledge of homosexuality: Balzac, Linton states, "shows us Vautrin's secret by a touch as rapid as a fencer's riposte—an allusion as obscure as a cypher —."<sup>24</sup> Linton's telegraphic, paratactic prose mimics the compactness and the inscrutability she praises and has the same ostensible purpose she ascribes to Balzac: to bleed explanation from representation, to show not only without telling but practically without showing. When her own discussion threatens to reveal too much about Vautrin's secret Linton replaces coded understatement with outright ellipsis: Vautrin's apparently selfless love for Lucien has, we are told, "a baser thread than appears on the surface in this double life—but with that we need not meddle."<sup>25</sup>

As a supplement to ellipsis, British critics of the French sapphic canon added two tropes of substitution: antonomasia and the pronominal



adjective. In antonomasia a proper name supersedes a descriptive term; critics frequently used proper names to avoid using terms for women who had sex with women (*lesbian*, *invert*, *sapphist*, and *tribade* were among the several available at the time). Often the proper name was that of a contemporary or classical author associated with sapphism or homosexuality; sometimes an allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah or the name of a literary character served as the substitute.<sup>26</sup> The *Saturday Review* article on *Poems and Ballads* worried that if Swinburne published enough, "English readers will gradually acquire a truly delightful familiarity with . . . unspeakable foulnesses" that would allow them to grasp "the point of every allusion to Sappho . . . or the embodiment of anything else that is loathsome and horrible."<sup>27</sup> Arthur Waugh wrote that Swinburne "scrupled not to revel in sensations which for years had remained unmentioned on the printed page; he even chose for his subject refinements of lust, which the commonly healthy Englishman believed to have become extinct with the time of Juvenal."<sup>28</sup> As Terry Castle and Emma Donoghue have shown, the English had associated Juvenal with sapphism for centuries.<sup>29</sup> Intended as veils that would conceal sapphism, the proper names *Juvenal*, *Sappho*, *Catullus*, and *Swinburne* became instead veils that outlined it.

Antonomasia was potentially endless in its circularity. Baudelaire's sapphism was termed "Juvenal," Swinburne's sapphism "Juvenal," "Sappho," and "Baudelaire." Critics evoked the sapphism of Gautier's work by alluding to Catullus, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and the Plato of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*; they designated Balzac an author of queer texts by comparing him to the Shakespeare of the *Sonnets*.<sup>30</sup> Every term in the antonomasiac series became interchangeable, so that just as Swinburne's sapphism was called "Juvenal" or "Baudelaire," Zola's sapphism was called "Swinburne."<sup>31</sup> In an article on Zola, Vernon Lee noted that "Nana . . . gradually extends her self-indulgence (not accompanied by shades of Swinburnian empresses, but, as she comfortably believes, of real ladies, of *femmes du monde*) to regions not usually included by those who seek merely a *good time*: sane and without bad intentions, she enters the happy hunting-grounds of monomania and crime."<sup>32</sup> The reader who has Zola's novel *Nana* to hand can determine that Lee's Swinburnian empresses are sapphic and that Lee is alluding to the episode in which Nana has an affair with another woman, Satin, because, like Leslie Stephen writing of *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, Lee is paraphrasing Zola's novel without acknowledging it. Lee's comment that Nana believes her actions to be the same as those of "real ladies, of *femmes du monde*," echoes the justification of Nana's lesbian affair with Satin in Zola's text: "Why, it was done everywhere! And she

named her woman friends, and swore that society women did it too"; in the original French, the phrase for "society women" is "dames du monde."<sup>33</sup> The comparison is instructive: where Zola uses free indirect discourse ("Why, it was done everywhere!" is narration, not quotation) and thus merges his narrator's voice with Nana's, Lee separates her views from Nana's with the phrase "as she comfortably believes." By avoiding direct quotation of Zola's text, Lee refuses to confer on his words the denotative status that might then also extend to the lesbianism his text depicts. As recent critics and biographers have shown, Lee had an acute and negative awareness of lesbianism, whose overt sexuality she rejected in favor of romantic female friendships based on ideals of purity and beauty.<sup>34</sup> Since to attack lesbianism directly would reveal her intimate knowledge of it, Lee distances herself and the reader from lesbianism by displacing Nana's "crime" onto euphemism ("Nana's self-indulgence") and literary allusion ("Swinburnian empresses"). As if to compensate for the extent to which Swinburne had in effect become a synonym for *lesbian*, Lee then obscures the allusion to Swinburne through a double elision (Nana is "not accompanied by shades of Swinburnian empresses" [emphasis mine]).

In a second form of substitution, critics of sapphic texts replaced verbs and nouns with a cluster of recurring adjectives: *unnatural*, *artificial*, *morbid*, *obscene*, *immoral*, *perverse*, *impure*, and *diseased*. Those adjectives functioned as pronouns that syntactically modified words like *story* or *poetic imagination* but semantically replaced words like *invert*, *lesbian*, or *sapphist*. By using such adjectives, reviewers could substitute negative evaluations of sapphism for accounts of what prompted their disapproval. Leslie Stephen described Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, we will recall, as his "most outrageous story," without giving the story's title or explaining what made it outrageous. George Moore associated *La Fille* with Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* when he included it in his roster of Balzac's "strangest flowers of genius" and then explained one adjective ("strangest") tautologically with a string of others that qualified the works listed as "abnormal," "bizarre," "strange," "perverse," and "exotic."<sup>35</sup> A commentator on *Mademoiselle de Maupin* wrote that Gautier puts "forward wanton evidences of abnormal disorders and unhealthy moods of passion"; his "morbid expressions" are themselves "the evidence of disease," and his heroine pursues knowledge of humanity "in a very unnatural manner."<sup>36</sup> Swinburne, we are told repeatedly, dwells on "morbid cravings and monstrous appetites," on "what's lowest, most perverted, and extreme in nature"; *Parallèlement*, Verlaine's collection of sapphic poems, exhibits "perversity, moral and artistic."<sup>37</sup> In citing these remarks, I have not separated them from explanations of what

made the texts at hand perverse or morbid. The adjectives *perverse* and *morbid* did not modify exegeses of character and plot but substituted for them. In the amalgam of excess and lack typical of a rhetoric that cannot designate its subject, the lacunae of ellipsis were filled with the redundancies of tautology.

That sapphic texts so consistently elicited adjectives such as *morbid*, *perverse*, and *unnatural* suggests that reviewers replaced specific references to lesbianism and homosexuality with general terms of opprobrium, as did a host of Victorians writing in other domains. A concordance of a recent anthology titled *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, which collates texts drawn from law, science, literature, and politics, would reveal that words like *morbid*, *degrading*, and *unnatural* are among those recurring most frequently throughout the volume, often in tandem with outright ellipsis.<sup>38</sup> John Symonds took for granted that terms such as *unnatural* and *perversed* were equivalents for what he called sexual inversion, and he alternately rejected and employed those adjectives to describe the sexuality for which he sought greater tolerance.<sup>39</sup> The same adjectives resurfaced in Havelock Ellis's essay "Sexual Inversion in Women," although Ellis used them to redefine lesbianism, not to condemn and elide it. Sexual inversion, wrote Ellis, is an "abnormal passion," but only in the numerical sense; and only in a few, not all instances, was lesbianism "morbid" and "vicious." Heterosexuality itself could be unnatural and perverse: for "the congenitally inverted person the normal instinct is just as unnatural and vicious as homosexuality is to the normal man or woman, so that in a truly congenital case 'cure' may simply mean perversion."<sup>40</sup>

As with other forms of substitution, the censorious adjectives that so consistently replaced references to sex between women finally stood for the signs they were meant to supersede. Yet the adjectival litany applied to sapphic texts also complicates what until now I have presented as a one-to-one relationship between sapphism and the British reception of Balzac's, Gautier's, and Zola's texts. While only in the case of homosexuality did British critics refuse to specify exactly what made them so indignant, their assessment of texts as "obscene," "morbid," "perverse," "eccentric," and "diseased" was in no way limited to sapphism. Reviewers of *Villette*, for example, used the same words when they consistently faulted its protagonist Lucy Snowe for being "eccentric," "morbid," deliberately "queer," and "perverse." In explaining those judgments, however, they never cited her theatrical cross-dressing, her flirtatious relationship with Ginevra Fanshawe, or her fascination with other women's bodies; they listed as the substance of those adjectives Lucy's "moodiness," "melancholy," and

"sluggish despondency."<sup>41</sup> The English sensation novel was frequently indicted in terms similar to those used to describe sapphism; Margaret Oliphant, a novelist and frequent contributor to *Blackwood's*, criticized the sensation novel for being replete with "disgusting" stories of bigamy and seduction by authors possessing either "forbidden knowledge" or a "morbid imagination."<sup>42</sup>

The labels affixed to French sapphism were also attached to French literature that represented sexual transgressions other than lesbianism, in articles spanning decades by authors both hostile and sympathetic to French literature and thought, publishing in periodicals with diverse, even opposed political programs. An 1833 review of recent French novels attacked "scenes of licentious indulgence, or revolting atrocity" that depicted "adultery or incest."<sup>43</sup> W. R. Greg, a prolific contributor to the periodical press who is now known for his articles on prostitution and the redundancy of women, also wrote several articles on French literature. In an 1855 essay in the *Edinburgh Review* Greg described modern French literature as "diseased to its very core," an instance of "talent perverted," "morbid" and "dangerous," preaching a "tone of sexual morality . . . lax and low," catering to a "demand for what is unnatural, extravagant, and bad," and devoted to situations both "grotesque" and "improbable," exemplified in "monstrous, harrowing, unnatural conceptions."<sup>44</sup> George Lewes described the suggestions of incest in Balzac's *Père Goriot* as "revolting" in 1844, and as late as 1903 Lionel Strachey called the suggestions of incest in *La Curée* "monstrously grotesque."<sup>45</sup> Leslie Stephen characterized Balzac's entire oeuvre as "strange, hideous, grotesque," the work of an author with "morbid tendencies" and a "taste for impossible horrors," whose *Comédie humaine* was "a collection of monstrosities, whose vices are unnatural."<sup>46</sup>

When Hannah Lynch attacked Zola's detailed accounts of pregnancy and childbirth in *Fécondité*, she differed from critics writing about sapphism by documenting exactly what she reviled in Zola's work, using the lengthy citations typical of Victorian reviews. Her language converged with that of critics of sapphism, however, when she condemned this thoroughly heterosexual text for its "morbid uncleanness," "nauseous abundance of obscenities," and its characters' "vices" and "perversities."<sup>47</sup> When British critics placed sapphic texts on a continuum with other French representations of sexual transgression, they replicated a move often made within sapphism itself, for *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, and *Nana* also linked lesbianism to male and female cross-dressing, male masochism, prostitution, and adultery, all often qualified as exotic in the orientalist sense of the term. By using identical terms to evaluate represen-

tations of lesbianism, homosexuality, adultery, prostitution, and incest, critics created a broad category of sexual transgression associated with French literature.

How can the British reception of French sapphism in particular and French literature in general explain the comparative difference between French and British sapphism with which we began? Because British reviewers, male and female, writing across the social and political spectrum of the periodical press, used a rhetoric that clearly signaled their awareness of sapphism's lesbian content, we cannot adduce sheer ignorance of lesbianism to explain why there was no nineteenth-century British sapphism. And because Victorian critics responded to representations of heterosexual and homosexual infractions alike with similar expressions of outrage, hostility to homosexuality alone cannot explain the Victorian refusal to depict lesbianism in literature or its unwillingness to discuss such depictions explicitly. To explain the sapphic difference between nineteenth-century British and French literature we must instead place it in larger contexts, and several plausible ones present themselves. One such context would be the British mistrust of France as a site of political and sexual revolution. In 1850 a *Dublin University Magazine* critic conjoined sexual mores and French political forms when he accused George Sand of ministering to "the vicious appetites and dangerous ambition of a depraved democracy."<sup>48</sup> W. R. Greg related French literature's sexual content to the French people's political longing for a "universal liberation from all bonds."<sup>49</sup> In 1890 William Barry contended in the *Quarterly Review* that the "license of the eighteenth century culminated in '89 and '93" and led to "a literature which is read by hundred of thousands, and which inflames while it expresses their vilest fancies."<sup>50</sup>

The orientalism of Victorian critics could also explain the rejection of sapphism in particular and French literature in general. British reviewers associated French fiction with a notion of the East that indiscriminately included Islamic and Indian religions, Arab literature, Chinese society, and a Mediterranean culture historically linked to ancient Greece and Rome. Orientalist allusions accreted around Balzac's queer texts. Linton noted that Vautrin's story was "one of those impossible romances which hold us like an Arabian Nights' tale"; George Parsons located the source of *Séraphita* in "a mass of occult doctrine, the origins of which must be sought in the theosophy of India."<sup>51</sup> In her review of Zola's corpus, Emily Crawford, a journalist who wrote many articles about France, noted that Zola had not founded naturalism but "brought into it new blood from Italy and the Levant." Crawford identified that "new blood" with an

ancient and Eastern brand of sexuality: "In the Mediterranean States south-east of the Alps, the Satyr has survived Jupiter, Apollo, and Minerva." Seeking to explain how France had come into contact with the East, Crawford pointed to Venice, which she claimed "was in more direct contact with the Levant than any other Italian city and picked up some survivals of the ancient cults of Syrian gods and goddesses that must remain nameless in this article." By means of Venice, Asia Minor's sexual corruption had converged on European literature, since "[t]hat Bride of the Adriatic [Venice] was the root and stem of the tree which has had for its fruits the books quoted in the Vizetelly prosecution" (Vizetelly was prosecuted for publishing English translations of Zola and other French authors).<sup>52</sup>

A third explanation that could encompass the British hostility to French representations of lesbianism *and* adultery would be opposition to any autonomous female sexuality. Literary critics and historians have documented the British animadversion to female sexuality outside the framework of marriage, along with the British fear of novels as incitements to female sexual fantasy.<sup>53</sup> During the eighteenth century, British fears about reading's effect on women were directed at novels in general, including British novels. In the nineteenth century, British reviewers began not only to differentiate between the more respectable British novel and its less respectable French counterpart but also to contrast and defend the reading practices of Englishwomen against those of Frenchwomen. With rare exceptions, British critics identified women's novel reading as more democratic in England, more restricted in France. In France, they argued, marriages were usually arranged, and because novels emphasized passion, French literature had to focus not on loveless marriages but on adulterous liaisons driven by desire. Because French novels so frequently depicted adultery, French parents forbade them to unmarried daughters, who, British critics asserted, were under strict family control.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, reviewers claimed that in England young, unmarried women enjoyed great liberty and were thus allowed both to read novels and to be heroines of novels. But because young women were allowed to act in and read them, British novels had to focus on lawful courtship and marriage so that they would be suitable for their audience.<sup>55</sup>

The scenarios of reading that nineteenth-century British critics elaborated for French women underscore once again the connections they made between heterosexuality and lesbianism. For British critics, the peculiarities of French marriage made novels a sexual commodity; their female readers thus formed an erotic community organized around a shared plea-

sure in novel reading. When they imagined what might happen when such reading took place, female encounters with the heterosexual transgressions within novels often led to visions of women using books to have group sex across class lines. In an article titled "French Novels and French Life," published in *Macmillan's* in 1877, Caroline Peyronnet, using the pseudonym Honoré de Lagardie, wrote that in France "the chief consumers of novels are . . . shop-girls and ladies' maids, who devour them; then, alas! young married women, whose first use of their newly-acquired liberty is to seize on the forbidden fruit of their girlhood, novels and the minor theatres."<sup>56</sup> The word "devour" takes on a sexual cast when novels are described as "forbidden fruit," and the use of eating metaphors to describe the reading of working and middle-class women creates a bond of sexual appetite among them, a bond made even more cohesive when their desires converge on the same object. As the paragraph continues, the book's status as a token of sexual exchange among women intensifies:

[T]he only customers publishers can reckon on . . . are the circulating libraries. The volumes which come from these pass from the grisette to the great lady but are never allowed to lie on the table of a well-ordered drawing-room. She who reads them hides them in her bedroom, or secretes them under the sofa cushion if a visitor is announced. There is a guilty joy in the indulgence, and the volume, moreover, is generally soiled and unseemly in more than a figurative sense.<sup>57</sup>

This passage demonstrates a link between reading and autoeroticism whose pervasiveness has been noted by many scholars.<sup>58</sup> Peyronnet exhibits the female reader in her bedroom, emphasizes the privacy, secrecy, and guilty pleasure of her reading, and even suggests that the reader's aroused body makes direct contact with her book, which thus becomes "soiled and unseemly in more than a figurative sense." Less familiar is the lesbian element of this scene: when the book passes from the working-class "grisette," known for her sexual freedom, to the lady liberated by marriage, sexual pleasure is transmitted as well. Although in this vision of sexual exchange, female readers do not make direct contact, the image of the same book passing from one masturbating woman to another suggests a mediated form of sex between women, brokered by the circulating library. Female reading is thus a problem because it both exposes women to (hetero)sexual content and enables (homo)sexual relations. Reading places those two apparently distinct forms of sexuality on a continuum of activities in which women wriggle free of male, familial, and marital control.

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## Idealism, Realism, Sapphism

Hostility to revolutionary politics, to "the oriental," and to female sexual autonomy could each plausibly explain why British critics called French sapphism and French novels perverse, morbid, and unnatural—but each can account for only a portion of their responses. Hostility to French revolutionary politics cannot explain why critics rejected the British sensation novel. Many reviewers never linked France to the East. Nor can hostility to female sexual independence explain one of the knottiest puzzles of the British reception of French literature: the widespread critical appreciation of George Sand. Certainly, the British periodical press often attacked Sand as a novelist and as a person; how could they not, given her French nationality, her affiliation with revolutionary ideas, her frequent recourse to Byronic orientalism, her use of the novel to criticize marriage and justify adultery, and her reputation as a woman who dressed in men's clothes and had sex outside marriage with both women and men? More astonishing is the high number of reviewers, some friendly to French literature, some hostile to it, who from the 1830s on noted all these facts and nevertheless accorded Sand the highest place in French literature, well above Sue, de Kock, Dumas, Janin, and even—or especially—Balzac.<sup>59</sup> An 1833 *Edinburgh Review* article predominantly hostile to French fiction lamented Balzac's "cynicism" but praised Sand's *Indiana* and *Valentine*, novels that indicted marriage, as works "in a calmer, truer, and better spirit than those with which we have been occupied."<sup>60</sup> George Reynolds, who modeled his popular *Mysteries of London* on Eugène Sue's work and who translated French authors, including Paul de Kock and Victor Hugo, also wrote *The Modern Literature of France* (1839). A review of that work cited Reynolds's high opinion of Sand as "an *hermaphrodite* of intelligence, combining in her soul the masculine ideas and spirit of the lords of the creation with the delicacy and softness of her own sex." The anonymous reviewer concurred with Reynolds, writing appreciatively of Sand's "gallant effort to revolutionize the social position of her sex" and her "transcendent genius," which "scorned the vulgar trammels of matrimony." He also complimented her for being "more intellectual and less anatomical" than Balzac, as did George Lewes, who contrasted Sand's "earnest error" to Balzac's "immorality."<sup>61</sup> In 1855 W. R. Greg called French literature "diseased to its very core" but exempted Sand, noting that she had "gradually worked herself free from all the turbid and unlicensed sensuality which disfigured her earlier productions, and that a manlier tone, a better taste, and a higher



morality have grown upon her year by year.”<sup>62</sup> Nina Kennard’s 1886 review of Sand’s correspondence with Flaubert stated, with no negative comment, that Sand looked like she belonged to the “troisième sexe” and elected her to the literary pantheon because “she remained an enthusiast, a believer in good, a troubadour singing ideal art and love.”<sup>63</sup> An 1892 review titled “The French Decadence” compared Sand favorably with de Maupassant: “It was said of George Sand that . . . she ‘always wrote like a gentleman.’ M. Guy de Maupassant is a gentleman . . . but he does not write like one.”<sup>64</sup>

What is the common denominator of these statements? In stating that Sand followed the established code of a gallant gentleman, that she transcended the vulgar, the anatomical, and the sensual, and that she differed from realists and naturalists by expressing her belief in the good, the moral, and the ideal, British reviewers recognized and approved in Sand an aesthetic that has only recently received attention from twentieth-century critics: idealism.<sup>65</sup> Naomi Schor’s *George Sand and Idealism* and Margaret Cohen’s *Sentimental Education of the Novel* have shown that in nineteenth-century France the aesthetics and poetics they respectively call “idealism” and “sentimentalism” were influential predecessors of realism and remained prestigious alternatives to it throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> The British response to George Sand suggests that Victorian critics also assigned pride of place to their own version of idealism, reserving their greatest praise for novels whose characters exhibited the ideal and idealizing qualities of faith, altruism, self-sacrifice, and love. Like their French counterparts, British critics were suspicious of detailed descriptions of material objects and bodies, as well as of plots that established self-interest, knowledge, and power as the engine of social life.<sup>67</sup> Naomi Schor has shown that French idealists emphasized political utopianism, Margaret Cohen that French sentimentalists appropriated the poetics of tragedy.<sup>68</sup> British idealists differed from their French counterparts in that they did not believe that novels should convey a utopian or tragic worldview but rather that literature should communicate a moral vision shaped by accepted religious and social values. Although British idealists insisted on the novel’s moral purpose, they rejected romance, melodrama, and fable in favor of everyday life, unity of plot, developed characters, and plausibility; hence the ease with which scholars of British novel theory have portrayed Victorian idealists as realists only.

At the same time, however, British idealists saw no contradiction between plausibility and conformity to a moral code, “lifelike characterization and good ethical doctrine,” because their notion of verisimilitude was saturated by social convention.<sup>69</sup> While French novelists and critics op-

posed realism to idealism, Victorian critics tended to *blend* the two. The ease with which Victorian criticism and novelists combined an interest in verisimilitude with an allegiance to moral norms has led twentieth-century critics who define realism in terms of French literature to deem the Victorian novel non-realist. Hence, for example, Erich Auerbach's exclusion of Victorian novelists from his magisterial literary history of realism, *Mimesis*, and hence the frequency with which critics concede that the Victorian exemplars of realism—Dickens, Gaskell, Trollope—fail to be fully and consistently realist.

A reading of Victorian literary criticism shows that Victorian critics called the aesthetic to which they subscribed "idealism" far more often than they called it or described it as "realism." In a philosophical context, *ideal* meant conceptual or imaginary, confined to the realm of thought. In Victorian literary criticism, however, *idealism* referred to the belief that *literary representations should be governed not by mimesis and fidelity to reality but by values, by adherence to ideas of the good*. As the Victorian author Edward Bulwer Lytton put it, "Art concerns itself only with the realm of ideals; it is not the imitation but the 'exaltation of nature.'"<sup>70</sup> Kenneth Graham, in *English Criticism of the Novel, 1865–1900*, has noted that "the moral ideal, or a specifically Christian ideal, or, most frequently, a belief in the absolute nature of the social code" dominated Victorian aesthetics.<sup>71</sup> Other major studies of Victorian theories of the novel (by Richard Stang, Edwin Eigner, George Worth, and David Skilton) have, however, overlooked the importance of idealism. Instead, they have focused on equating Victorian critics' rejection of the outlandish improbability associated with romance with a Victorian anticipation of realism as defined by Henry James, in which mimesis, verisimilitude, and objectivity are preferred to authorial intervention and poetic justice.<sup>72</sup> Yet for the many Victorian critics who distinguished romance from the ideal there was no conflict between verisimilitude and poetic justice, realism and idealism: for those critics the standard of verisimilitude in realism was not based on objective, empirical norms but on moral values. As Margaret Oliphant asserted in an article entitled simply "Novels," a "sublime respect for sentimental morality and poetic justice . . . distinguishes the English public. . . . The wicked people are punished and the good people are rewarded, as they always should be."<sup>73</sup>

Idealism was not only, as Richard Stang concedes, a coherent alternative to realism; for the majority of British critics writing in the periodical press, it was the preferred alternative. When Victorian critics referred to realism or to constitutive aspects of realist poetics, it was often to compare

them unfavorably with idealism or to defend them as being alloyed with idealism. Even critics who supported realism had to acknowledge that idealism was the more highly valued approach. In the 1862 introduction to his novel *Basil* (1852) Wilkie Collins justified basing his story “on a fact within my own knowledge,” on something “real and true,” by explaining, “My idea was, that the more of the Actual I could garner up as a text to speak from, the more certain I might feel of the genuineness and value of the Ideal which was sure to spring out of it.”<sup>74</sup> In an 1858 essay titled “Realism in Art” George Lewes asserted that “[r]ealism is . . . the basis of all Art” but had to clarify that “its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism.”<sup>75</sup> Alfred Austin, a frequent contributor to the periodical press in the 1860s and 1870s who was appointed England’s poet laureate in 1896, wrote an article titled “Our Novels” for *Temple Bar* in 1870 that seemed to adopt what we now call a realist position by objecting to lapses in verisimilitude. But even as he argued that fiction should be faithful to reality, he conceded that “the novelist is not bound to hold the mirror up to Nature”; rather, the novelist “has a perfect right to imagine [the world] better than it really is, and so to describe it. But his ideal must be loftier than the real he abandons for it. . . . The novelist . . . should describe life either as it is or as it ought to be; *the latter application and employment of art being, in our opinion, the higher of the two.*”<sup>76</sup> When he states that a novelist would be justified in abandoning empirical precision for a moral vision of life “as it ought to be,” Austin is articulating the central principle of idealism.

So strong was the critical investment in idealism that British critics could only defend authors we now think of as incontrovertible realists by turning them into idealists. In 1880 W. S. Lilly argued that Balzac’s “realistic power” was “united to and subserved a marvellous gift of idealization, whence resulted those colossal types, whose effect upon the mind is such as no servile copying of the living model, no direct imitation of the seen and actual can ever produce.”<sup>77</sup> An 1861 article titled “French Fiction—Its Better Aspects” identified a striving for idealism as one of those better aspects. Beneath French literature’s realist veneer and French authors’ apparently “cynical creations,” the reviewer detected “a yearning . . . for some other state than one of unaspiring indifference” and a shift away from “gross materialism” toward a “realism . . . vivified by the incarnate Ideal.”<sup>78</sup> A realist would call the lack of a moral position objectivity; this critic, as an idealist, calls the lack of a moral position indifference and cynicism, not because he actively objects to representations based on verisimilitude but because he considers moral values to be integral to the definition of truth. Vernon Lee’s article “The Moral Teaching of Zola” similarly makes clear

that the only way she could justify Zola's novels was to contain their realism within a larger idealist project. She emphasizes that her thoughts about his work are "connected rather with right and wrong than with ugly or beautiful, accurate or inaccurate," and explains that her "desire" is "to suggest what moral lessons Zola may bring to his worthier readers, by showing what lessons he has conveyed to myself."<sup>79</sup>

Because idealists were committed to representations based on social norms endowed with the status of transcendental moral values, they responded with intense disapproval to descriptions and plots detached from those norms. For idealist critics, neutral physical descriptions of reality were immoral, cynical, and antisocial because they failed actively to promote correct social values. As late as 1899 Edouard Rod diagnosed Zola's problem as his membership in a generation devoted to the "materialistic and narrow; which believed itself justified in denying the existence of realities that do not fall under the senses," an aesthetic credo that Rod directly opposed to Sand's "idealism."<sup>80</sup> The faithful transcription of reality became the abandonment of moral values and the debasement of nature since idealists understood nature not as a set of empirical facts but either as a source of social conventions or as a state that needed to be morally overcome and perfected. An encyclopedic approach that recorded all social types became a refusal of literature's duty to inculcate models of virtue. An 1839 review of George Reynolds's *Modern Literature of France* singled out Balzac as exemplifying the demerits of the French writers who "profess to draw from life": "Wherever literature follows instead of leading, imitates instead of creating . . . wherever nature is treated like the magazine of a magic lantern, in which beings the most beautiful or grotesque . . . are all *equally admissible* . . . a cynical hardihood [is] generally the result."<sup>81</sup> Using a commonplace figure for realist techniques and effects (the magic lantern) as an epithet, the reviewer disparages Balzac's inclusive understanding of nature as antisocial ("a cynical hardihood") and a servile abdication of duty ("following instead of leading").

Some Victorian idealists explicitly called the aesthetic they opposed "realism" or identified it as a representational commitment to the "real" and "reality."<sup>82</sup> The author of an 1878 article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* linked the "minuteness with which [Balzac] describes places and objects until they are pictured to our eyes" to Balzac's dedication to a "realism so perfect that no flaw could be discovered in it"; and J. A. Symonds wrote that Zola's "realism consists in his careful attention to details . . . and his frank acceptance of all things human which present themselves to his observing brain."<sup>83</sup> An even larger number of critics, who did not

use the term *realism*, disapproved of representations that depicted reality vividly but without respect to moral bounds because such representations lacked an ideal with which to delimit the material. What realists would call an objective and encyclopedic grasp of the world, idealists called “granting a bill of indemnity to all that is perverse and ungovernable in our nature.”<sup>84</sup> Alexander Innes Shand, a prolific journalist who wrote an article on Balzac for *Blackwood’s* in 1877, argued that Balzac’s detailed descriptions “carr[y] the conscientiousness of his art to a morbid extravagance”; by calling Balzac’s realism not only morbid but extravagant, Shand suggests that by the standards of idealism, which establishes reality ethically and not empirically, realism failed to be realistic.<sup>85</sup> Thus, William Barry, in his 1890 article “Realism and Decadence in French Fiction,” similarly charged Balzac with using “materialist and physiological methods” in order to depict the “abnormal, *not* the ideal.” Note that Barry’s phrase opposes the abnormal not to its nominally *empirical* opposite, the norm, but to its *ethical* competitor, the ideal. Balzac’s depictions are “abnormal” not because they lack statistical representativeness but because they lack decency. Indeed, Barry sees Balzac’s fiction as all too real when he associates it with materiality; but for Barry that materiality lacks representational authority: “With him [Balzac] the spirit is but a more finely-woven flesh. The whole world is artificial . . . or it is monstrous, unhealthy, chaotic.”<sup>86</sup> It would seem that nothing could be more natural and real than “flesh.” But Balzac’s materiality challenges the foundational supremacy of pure “spirit,” of the transcendental values that Barry believes should underwrite representation. Balzac’s fictional universe is “artificial,” hence unreal, in the sense that it fails to match up to the *beliefs* that should govern reality. And since the idealist legitimates sexual desire only as an expression of spiritual values and moral norms, Barry also criticizes Balzac for according a fatal power to “physiology” that makes the “ideal . . . powerless,” just as Linton disparaged Balzac for making “love . . . simply sexual . . . he pretends to nothing higher.”<sup>87</sup> For the idealist, an exclusive commitment to materiality and empirical reality was not only an impoverished mode of representation but a *morbid, depraved, and unnatural* one.

“Morbid,” “monstrous,” “unhealthy,” “unnatural”: Victorian critics applied the same terms to realism and to sapphism, and the British response to sapphism becomes clearer once we recognize its connection to the aesthetic debates about realism. British critics labeled both sapphism and realist texts “morbid” and “unnatural” because they associated both with fleshliness, sensuality, and representations of material embodiment that bypassed moral values.<sup>88</sup> British reviewers considered sapphism mor-

bid and perverse because they understood homosexuality as a carnal, utterly sensual form of desire that could never be idealized as love.<sup>89</sup> Because they deemed lesbianism irrevocably material, Victorian critics were attuned to how even the most nonrealist sapphic texts—those by Swinburne and Gautier—used detailed description to create reality effects. Henry Buxton Forman, for example, compared Swinburne's work to Dutch painting and police reports, two common figures for realism, then chastised Swinburne for "the falsity and impropriety of his ideal."<sup>90</sup> Forman considers Swinburne false not because he writes about the unreal—what could be more real than a police report?—but because he writes about the improper; his ideal, not his reality, is what Forman deems false. And lest we think that lesbianism would not be included in a Victorian list of improprieties, note that Swinburne himself linked lesbianism to the impropriety documented in police reports. In defense of Baudelaire's "Femmes damnées" Swinburne explained that the "side of . . . [Delphine and Hippolyte's] passion which would render them amenable to the notice of the nearest station is not what is kept before us throughout that condemned poem."<sup>91</sup>

To associate Swinburne and Gautier with realism now seems counterintuitive, given Swinburne's phantasmagoric poetry and Gautier's avowed relationship to aestheticism and French romanticism. The Victorian tendency to ascribe features of realism to sapphism is even more surprising because, as several scholars have shown, lesbianism has historically been deemed a spurious desire.<sup>92</sup> One would thus expect Victorian critics to have associated lesbianism with the unreal and sapphism with antirealism, and indeed a few reviewers did so. Writing for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1885, William Courtney, a philosopher who also contributed to and edited a number of periodicals, called Swinburne an "artificer of impotent emotions" and asked, "Is it experience, or morbid fancy, that dictates . . . poems . . . on an extinct type of Roman lust, or a love fragment of Sappho, or on the statue of the Hermaphrodite in the Louvre?"<sup>93</sup>

Far more frequently, however, critics associated Swinburne with an excessive and unseemly emphasis on physical characteristics, sensations, and desires that they considered unworthy of representation despite their registration as real, or rather because they referred to the real and nothing but the real. Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* were excoriated for their preoccupation with "fleshly things" and their exhibition of a "feverish carnality."<sup>94</sup> Unlike Shakespeare, who portrayed "the exquisite innate purity and rich idealism . . . of the passion," Swinburne's emphasis on the "carnal details" and "material" aspects of love led him to depict "morbid cravings

and monstrous appetites” and the “violent bodily pains and pleasures that terminate in the senses.” For this critic, states of pain and suffering “are least of all fitted for poetical or artistic use” because a “shriek or a swoon is so purely physical as to exclude for the moment the ideal element altogether.”<sup>95</sup> When this critic calls Swinburne’s representations of lesbian and other deviant sexual desires “monstrous,” he means not that such desires are fantastic but that they are unsanctified by moral norms because they derive from “the sensual appetite instead of . . . pure spiritual feeling.”<sup>96</sup> Far from lauding Swinburne for achieving realism’s impossible goal—creating a representation so vivid that it would attain the materiality of what it represents—this critic deploys materiality as a term of reproach because he does not consider mimesis to be the goal of representation. That a desire indubitably exists would thus be no justification for representing it; indeed, since the “purely physical” can only be impure, the more a desire exists in the register of reality alone, the less authority artists would have to depict it. “Monstrous appetites” should be absent from literature not because they do not exist but because they *should* not exist.

If it surprises us to discover that Victorian critics linked their rejection of sapphism to their condemnation of crucial features of realism, we are surprised both because we associate the Victorian novel with realism and because critics have persuasively argued that realism is inimical to lesbian representation. Terry Castle, Marilyn Farwell, and others have argued that realism’s investment in the marriage plot, in narrative structures fueled by heterosexual desire, and in heteronormative notions of verisimilitude make it impossible for realist texts to represent women’s desire for women as anything but a disruptive, excessive, and spectral remainder of the real.<sup>97</sup> Recent critics differ from Victorian ones in assigning a very high value to the real; indeed, one might say that contemporary critics idealize realism. When realism is deemed the most worthwhile aesthetic, to be excluded from representations of the real is to be denied social value. A crossing of the realist and idealist wires makes the values assigned to representation (as ideal or not ideal) come to stand for the fact of representation (as real or not real). Critics thus assert that representations that deny lesbians social value also deny lesbians that other supreme value, representation as real.

Victorian critics, who did *not* value the real in and of itself, believed that French sapphism, far from reducing lesbianism to a spectral state, rendered it as all too real. Contemporary critics, who do value the real, equate the valence of a representation with its degree of realism and thus assert that when writers generate what in another decade we called

“negative images” of lesbians, they also relegate lesbianism to the realm of the illusory. Thus midway through *The Apparitional Lesbian* Terry Castle cites Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin* as one of several “overt references to lesbian eroticism,” an example of the “would-be salaciousness, shading at times into outright obscenity, so common in the nineteenth-century French literature of female-female desire.”<sup>98</sup> With the words “overt references” Castle asserts that Gautier depicts lesbian sexuality as real. With the phrases “would-be salaciousness” and “outright obscenity” Castle also suggests that Gautier devalues lesbianism. Castle’s sense that Gautier holds lesbianism in contempt explains why earlier in the same book she adduces *Mademoiselle de Maupin* not as an “overt reference to lesbian eroticism” but as a “derealization” of lesbianism that reduces it to “an essentially phantasmatic enterprise.”<sup>99</sup> Castle contradicts herself when she writes that Gautier depicts lesbianism as unreal, but her contradiction has a syllogism’s consistency: reality has a higher social value than spectrality; Gautier assigns lesbians a low social value; therefore Gautier does not depict lesbians as real.

That French sapphism gave lesbianism a realistic form does not negate contemporary critiques of French sapphism’s negative portrayal of lesbianism. The nineteenth-century authors who produced the sapphic canon did not represent lesbianism because they valued it or promoted it as an ideal but because as realists they claimed to separate representation from social values. What better way to demonstrate that a representation was unconstrained by conventions and governed only by material reality than to depict desires whose ratification was not that they were good but that they existed? Because idealism represented the world as it should be, idealizations of lesbian sexuality could only be produced by writers who believed and were willing to assert publicly that sexual desire between women was a moral good. Because realism represented the world as it was, realists felt authorized to represent sexual desire between women despite its outlawed social status since the exaltation of social conventions was not their justification for writing.

The French sapphic texts that so outraged British critics often condemned the lesbian desire they depicted, yet British critics responded as though the French sapphic canon constituted a lesbian manifesto. The British critical misreading of French texts stemmed from a perception that to speak of homosexuality at all was to advocate it. British writers refused to advocate homosexuality because they were hostile to it in and of itself, but they shared that hostility with many of the French writers who wrote about homosexuality at length. What the authors of the sapphic canon did not



share with British critics was an idealist aesthetic, in which to show things as they were was to argue that they should be. Idealists believed that disapproval of lesbianism could only be properly conveyed by refusing to represent it at all; realists saw no contradiction between portraying lesbian sexuality (this exists) and expressing narrative disapproval of it (this should not exist).

To conclude, let me return to the comparative gap between French and British sapphism with which I began and suggest that the absence of sapphism in England might be explained not by the dominance of realism in nineteenth-century British literature but by its relatively weak implantation. It has seemed obvious that realism was incompatible with sapphism because it has been so amply demonstrated that both British and French nineteenth-century realist novels have heterosexual, homosocial plots in which masculine desire works to contain female sexuality. That definition of realism, however, may be more true at the descriptive level (what realist novels did) than at the formal one (what realist novels must do). Nor does it explain why French nineteenth-century literature has so many dead and damned lesbians but Victorian literature has almost no lesbians at all.

British writers failed to produce a sapphic canon because as idealists they could not represent lesbian desire to a society that did not embrace it. Realists often asserted their difference from idealists by proclaiming that they wrote “for men, not for girls.” An 1871 *Edinburgh Review* article cited Swinburne’s self-defensive remark that the “purity” of art is “not that of the cloister or the harem”; cloisters and harems were often sapphic settings, but Swinburne invokes them here as metonymies for the female readers who lie outside the boundaries of “adult” art.<sup>100</sup> It may now strike us as ironic that realists excluded women by penning tales of girl-girl love. But in so doing, sapphic authors were making the realist point that the moral code embodied by the young female reader did not limit the content of their depictions, which would include even women outside the confines of normal femininity. A commitment to detailed portraits of a full range of social types, to representing what existed regardless of its social value, and to emphasizing matter and the body encouraged realists to represent sexual desire, especially desires marked as morally improper. In his translator’s preface to a limited 1896 English edition of *La Fille aux yeux d’or* Ernest Dowson invoked those aspects of realism when he defended the story’s “morbid . . . to certain minds horrible” subject matter: “It was in the scheme of the *Comédie Humaine* to survey social life in its entirety by a minute analysis of its most diverse constituents. . . . [I]n the great mass of the *Comédie Humaine* with its largeness and reality of life, as in life itself,

the figure of Paquita justifies its presence."<sup>101</sup> Dowson's comments exemplify why French realists so frequently represented lesbianism, and so frequently represented it as evil: not in order to derealize lesbianism but to appropriate it as a sign of the real.

Since French sapphism was fully compatible with anti-lesbian sentiment, and since Victorian England easily rivaled its neighbor across the Channel in its homophobia, we cannot explain the divergence between British and French literature solely in terms of the two nations' different attitudes to homosexuality. Rather, any explanation of their sapphic differences must also compare the two nations' aesthetic tendencies. Such a comparison suggests that there would have been more lesbianism in the British novel if there had been more realism and that British critics would have been more capable of commenting on French sapphism had they not been such thoroughgoing idealists.

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## Notes

1. For an overview of the British response to Zola, see William C. Frierson, "The English Controversy over Realism in Fiction, 1885–1895," *PMLA* 43, no. 2

(1928): 533–50. On the reception of Baudelaire in England, see Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

2. For example, an 1873 article in *Cornhill* magazine called Gautier's *Made-moiselle de Maupin* "so unashamed and profligate as to be to English ideas utterly intolerable" (Sidney Colvin, "Théophile Gautier," *Cornhill* 27 [February 1873]: 162–63).

3. See Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 143–56, 184, 195; and William Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 75, 90–93.

4. D. A. Miller, "Anal Rope," in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 132, 125, 124; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); idem, "Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot's *The Nun*," in *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 23–51. See also Jeff Nunokawa, "The Disappearance of the Homosexual in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," in *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1995), 183–90; and Patricia White, *UnInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

5. For more on these critics, see Harold Orel, *Victorian Literary Critics: George Henry Lewes, Walter Bagehot, Richard Holt Hutton, Leslie Stephen, Andrew Lang, George Saintsbury, and Edmund Gosse* (London: Macmillan, 1984); and Noel

Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984). On English literary criticism during this period, see Kenneth Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel, 1865–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).

6. On the Victorian periodical press, see Joanne Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers: The "Edinburgh" and the "Quarterly" in the Early Victorian Age* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989); Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982). On book reviewing in the periodical press, see David Skilton, ed., *The Early and Mid-Victorian Novel* (New York: Routledge, 1993); J. D. Jump, "Weekly Reviewing in the Eighteen-Sixties," *Review of English Studies* 3 (July 1952): 244–62; Laurel Brake, "Literary Criticism and the Victorian Periodicals," *Yearbook of English Studies* 16 (1986): 92–116; and Oscar Maurer, "'My Squeamish Public': Some Problems of Victorian Magazine Publishers and Editors," *Studies in Bibliography* 12 (1955): 21–40.

7. Havelock Ellis, "Sexual Inversion in Women," *Alienist and Neurologist* 16 (1895): 141.

8. For a reading of Miss Wade in relation to the category of the lesbian, see Annamarie Jagose, "Remembering Miss Wade: *Little Dorrit* and the Historicizing of Female Perversity," *GLQ* 4, no. 3 (1998): 423–52; on *Villette*, see Ann Weinstone, "The Queerness of Lucy Snowe," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18 (1995): 367–84.

9. Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 159, 107–49, 66. France also re-surfaces as a site for the production of Anglo-American lesbianism in Castle's chapter on Janet Flanner, 186–99.

10. Elisabeth Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 33.

11. Ellis, "Sexual Inversion in Women," 141, 142. See also Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 156; Jeannette Howard Foster, *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956; reprint, Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1985), 60–72, 76–78, 91–90; Henri Peyre, "On the Sapphic Motif in Modern French Literature," *Dalhousie French Studies* 1 (October 1979): 3–33; and Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981), 254–94.

12. Adolphe Belot, *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme* (Paris: Dentu, 1870), 143.

13. For a discussion of this rhetoric in legal discourse, see Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian Perversity and Victorian Marriage: The 1864 Codrington Divorce Trial," *Journal of British Studies* 36 (January 1997): 70–98.

14. Charles Baudelaire, "Lesbos," *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Laffont, 1980), 102; George Saintsbury, "Charles Baudelaire," *Fortnightly Review* 24 (1875): 503, 501, 502.

15. George Saintsbury, preface to *The Thirteen*, trans. Ellen Marriage (London: J. M. Dent; Philadelphia: Gebbie, 1898), ix. When in 1900, Harper & Row published a U.S. version of Saintsbury's edition of Balzac's works, *La Fille* was included

in *The Thirteen*, and Saintsbury excised the line about inconvenient matters from a preface that was otherwise identical to the one in the British edition. Walter Kendrick mentions that Saintsbury also excluded *Sarrasine* and *Une Passion dans le désert* from the British edition of Balzac's work ("Balzac and British Realism: Mid-Victorian Theories of the Novel," *Victorian Studies* 20 [autumn 1976]: 9); as I discuss below, George Moore associated those stories with *La Fille aux yeux d'or*.

16. For examples of articles that name *Histoire des treize*, the *Duchesse de Langeais*, and *Ferragus* but not *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, see [Henry Sutherland Edwards], "Balzac and His Writings," *Westminster Review* 60 (July 1853): 199–200; [Alexander Innes Shand], "Balzac," *Blackwood's* 121 (March 1877): 302; and John Walter Sherer, "Balzac's Dreams," *Belgravia* 54 (1884): 439. Among the earliest articles I have found to cite *La Fille aux yeux d'or* by title are [T. E. Child], "Balzac," *Cornhill* 53 (May 1886): 476; and an American article by George Frederic Parsons, "Honoré de Balzac," *Atlantic Monthly* 57 (June 1886): 845.

17. Leslie Stephen, "Balzac's Novels," *Fortnightly Review* 15 (1871), 24.

18. Even in cases where critics eventually gave a sapphic text's title, they often began by establishing it as unfit to be spoken. For critics who did this with Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, see W. S. Lilly, "The Age of Balzac," *Contemporary Review* 37 (1880): 1009; George Saintsbury, "Théophile Gautier," *Fortnightly Review* 29 (March 1878): 429, 431, 433; and Colvin, "Théophile Gautier," 162–63.

19. "Mr. Swinburne's New Poems," *Saturday Review*, 4 August 1866, 145.

20. Arthur Waugh similarly asserted that Swinburne "scrupled not to revel in sensations which for years had remained unmentioned upon the printed page," but as though to undo Swinburne's work of mentioning, he refused to specify what those sensations were ("Reticence in Literature," *Yellow Book* 1 [1894]: 213).

21. George Moore, "Some of Balzac's Minor Pieces," *Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 46 (October 1889): 498–99.

22. [Eliza Lynn Linton], "The Novels of Balzac, III," *Temple Bar* 78 (December 1886): 498.

23. [Eliza Lynn Linton], "The Novels of Balzac, II" *Temple Bar* 78 (November 1886): 389.

24. [Eliza Lynn Linton], "The Novels of Balzac, I" *Temple Bar* 78 (September 1886): 198, 199.

25. [Linton], "Novels of Balzac, II," 388. On Linton's engagement throughout her career with infractions of sex and gender norms, often in order to attack them, see Deborah T. Meem, "Eliza Lynn Linton and the Rise of Lesbian Consciousness," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 4 (1997): 537–60. Meem insists somewhat anachronistically on reading Linton as a repressed lesbian suffering from "internalized homophobia" (559). "Officially Linton abhorred homosexuality, both female and male. . . . Only by tortured indirection can Linton own her desire" (558–59). It would be more accurate to say that during the nineteenth century, to speak negatively of homosexuality was almost the only way to speak of it, and therefore homophobic remarks can prove little about their speakers' sexuality.

26. For examples of references to Sodom and Gomorrah, the Cities of the Plain, see William Barry, "Realism and Decadence in French Fiction," *Quarterly Review* 171 (July 1890): 83; and Lilly, "Age of Balzac," 1024, 1016, 1017.

27. "Mr. Swinburne's New Poems," 145.

28. Waugh, "Reticence in Literature," 213.

29. On Juvenal and allusions to sex between women, see Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 102–3, 256 n. 9; and Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668–1801* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 44, 52, 212–14, 257.

Throughout the nineteenth century, British writers equated Juvenal and Catullus with obscene literature and with sapphism. When put on trial in 1888 for publishing an English translation of Zola's *La Terre*, Henry Vizetelly defended himself by citing Thomas Macaulay's comments earlier in the century that it was ridiculous to suppress an edition of Restoration drama when universities taught Juvenal's *Satire 6* and the poems of Catullus (*Extracts, Principally from English Classics: showing that the legal suppression of M. Zola's novels would logically involve the bowdlerizing of some of the greatest works in English literature* [London: W. Vizetelly, 1888], 4).

30. For the comparison between Baudelaire and Juvenal, see "Baudelaire," *Belgravia* 15 (October 1871): 450; for the comparison between Gautier and Plato as author of *Phaedrus*, see Andrew Lang, "Théophile Gautier," *Dark Blue* 1 (March 1871): 31; for comparisons between Gautier and Baudelaire and between Gautier and Alcibiades, who overtly expresses his desire for Socrates in the *Symposium*, see Evelyn Jerrold, "Thoéphile [*sic*] Gautier," *ibid.* 4 (November 1872): 281; and for a comparison linking Gautier to Catullus and Swinburne, see "A Parisian Pagan," *Dublin University Magazine*, n.s., 92 (July 1878): 73, 81. In "Some of Balzac's Minor Pieces," George Moore wrote: "Shakespeare's genius was unquestionably healthier than that of any of his contemporaries, yet he wrote the sonnets; Balzac's genius was unquestionably saner than any of his contemporaries . . . and yet Balzac wrote *La Fille aux Yeux d'ors*, *La dernière Incarnation de Vautrien*, *Une Passion dans le Désert*, *Seraphita*, and *Sarrasène*" (498–99, the misspellings are Moore's). On queer readings of Shakespeare's sonnets in the 1880s and 1890s, see Cohen, *Sex Scandal*, 191–225; Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 66; and Chris White, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999), 127 (excerpts from Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society* [1894]).

31. Swinburne himself both deployed and shrewdly exposed antonomasia when he said of Simeon Solomon, after the artist's arrest for having sexual contact with another man in public, that Solomon was "a Platonist, the term is at once accurate as a definition and unobjectionable as a euphemism" (H. Montgomery Hyde, citing the second volume of Swinburne's letters, in *The Love That Dared Not Speak Its Name: A Candid History of Homosexuality in Britain* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1970], 115).

32. Vernon Lee, "The Moral Teaching of Zola," *Contemporary Review* 63 (1893): 209, emphases in the original.

33. Emile Zola, *Nana*, trans. George Holden (New York: Penguin, 1972), 29; for the phrase "dames du monde" in the original French, see Emile Zola, *Nana*, trans. Colette Becker (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1994), 266.
34. See Kathy Psomiades, "'Still Burning from this Strangling Embrace': Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics," in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellalora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 21–42.
35. Moore, "Some of Balzac's Minor Pieces," 499, 498. Moore signaled his debt to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* when early in his literary career he published collections called *Flowers of Passion* (London: Provost, 1878) and *Pagan Poems* (London: Newman, 1881).
36. "Parisian Pagan," 82, 84.
37. Thomas Spencer Baynes, "Swinburne's Poems," *Edinburgh Review* 134 (July 1871): 82, 91; Arthur Symons, review of *Bonheur*, by Verlaine, *The Academy*, 18 April 1891, 362. Henry Spencer Ashbee defined "perversity" more precisely when he offered a description of Verlaine's *Les Amies*, included in *Parallèlement*, as six sonnets in rimes féminines sur l'amour saphique" (Pisanus Fraxi [Henry Spencer Ashbee], *dex librorum prohibitorum: bio-biblio-icongo-graphical and critical notes on curious, uncommon and erotic books*, vol. 1 [1877; reprint, New York: Jack Brussel, 1962], 42. Arthur Symons was well versed in French literature and a frequent contributor to the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Athenaeum*, and the *Saturday Review*.
38. White, *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, 20, 22, 32, 39, 42, 44, 48, 53, 60, 64, 73, 82, 85, 133, 213.
39. *Ibid.*, 71–73, 82–85 (excerpts from John Addington Symonds, *A Problem of Modern Ethics* [1896]).
40. Ellis, "Sexual Inversion in Women," 142, 144, 158.
41. On Lucy Snowe as "morbid," "diseased," "eccentric," and "perverse," see reviews in the *Nonconformist*, 16 March 1853, 224; *Littell's Living Age* 36 (1853): 29; and [Stopford Brooke], "Recent Novels," *Dublin University Magazine*, November 1853, 613.
42. [Margaret Oliphant], "Novels," in *Blackwood's* 102 (September 1867): 8, 260.
43. "French Literature—Recent Novelists," *Edinburgh Review* 57 (July 1833): 30, 337; the author is thought to be Thomas Moore.
44. [William Rathbone Greg], "Modern French Literature," *Edinburgh Review* 101 (January 1855): 115–16. For some of the numerous other instances in which French literature was qualified as "obscene," "perverted," and "morbid," see also [John Wilson Croker], "French Novels," *Quarterly Review* 56 (April 1836), which uses the term "pervert" to describe Raymond's seduction of Indiana in George Sand's *Indiana* (101) and calls the prostitutes in *Lélia* "monsters" (105); Croker, an expert on the French Revolution, contributed frequently to the *Quarterly Review*, including a notorious review of Keats's "Endymion" in 1818. See also [George Moir], "The Hundred and One," *Foreign Quarterly* 9 (May 1832): 349; and "Novels," *Monthly Review* 166 (December 1844), which argues that the distinctly French contribution to

the novel is “the inclination towards obscene scenes, the amalgamation of voluptuousness and cruelty,” often in the form of “adulteries,” “incest” (549, 550), and other “wanton freaks of an overstrained imagination” (555). In his notorious article “French Fiction: The Lowest Deep,” W. R. Greg saw French fiction as a symptom of “the hunger after the most diseased, unholy, and extravagant excitement,” steeped in “the voluptuous, the morbid, or the monstrous,” catering to “the jaded appetite and the perverted taste” (*National Review* 11 [1860]: 401, 405).

45. [G. H. Lewes], “Balzac and George Sand,” *Foreign Quarterly Review* 33 (July 1844): 289; Lionel Strachey, “The Books of Emile Zola,” *The Lamp* 26 (1903): 411.

46. Stephen, “Balzac’s Novels,” 17, 39.

47. Hannah Lynch, “‘Fécondité’ versus the ‘Kreutzner [sic] Sonata,’ or, Zola versus Tolstoi,” *Fortnightly Review* 73 (January 1900): 69, 75.

48. “French Novels and Novelists,” *Dublin University Magazine* 36 (September 1850): 353.

49. Greg, “French Fiction: The Lowest Deep,” 403.

50. Barry, “Realism and Decadence in French Fiction,” 81.

51. [Linton], “Novels of Balzac, II,” 385; Parsons, “Honoré de Balzac,” 843. On the association of sapphism with national otherness in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Lisa Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 12, 81.

52. Emily Crawford, “Emile Zola,” *Contemporary Review* 55 (January 1889): 95, 97–99.

53. Richard Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), notes how often British critics deemed French fiction unfit for young readers but does not convey how often female readers were singled out during the decades he considers (215–17). Only in the 1880s did the child replace the woman reader as the focus of campaigns against obscenity. On the female reader in nineteenth-century Britain, see Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); and Ruth Bernard Yeazell, “Podsnappery, Sexuality, and the English Novel,” *Critical Inquiry* 9 (December 1982): 339–40, 355.

54. To cite one of many examples: “In France . . . no well-educated girl, whether noble or bourgeoisie, is ever allowed to read novels. . . . It is much to be regretted that French girls do not read the few novels which might safely be put into their hands, for the unfailing operation of the law of supply and demand would in that case stimulate the production of works of a purer and healthier tone to suit this new class of customers” (Honoré de Lagardie [Caroline Peyronnet], “French Novels and French Life,” *Macmillan’s* 35 [March 1877]: 389; see also Crawford, “Emile Zola,” 103).

55. For the notion that Frenchwomen required passion in novels because they lacked it in marriage, see Lagardie, “French Novels and French Life,” 393. For an account of the relationship between the different contents of the French and British

novel and the different marital status women had in each country, and the accompanying notion that French literature should be prohibited to British girls, see "French Novels," *Belgravia* 3 (October 1867): 78–81.

56. Lagardie, "French Novels and French Life," 389.

57. *Ibid.*, 389–90.

58. In addition to the work on the female reader cited above, see Cohen, *Sex Scandal*, 26–72; Thomas Laqueur, "The Social Evil, the Solitary Vice, and Pouring Tea," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, pt. 3, ed. Michel Feher with Ramona Nadaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone, 1989), 334–43; and Philip Stewart, *Engraved Desire: Eros, Image, and Text in the French Eighteenth Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 94–101.

59. On the frequently positive reception of Sand in England, see Patricia Thomson, *George Sand and the Victorians: Her Influence and Reputation in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); and Paul Blount, *George Sand and the Victorian World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979).

60. "French Literature—Recent Novelists," 357.

61. Review of *The Modern Literature of France*, by George Reynolds, *Monthly Review* 149 (August 1839): 463, 462; [Lewes], "Balzac and George Sand," 266.

62. [Greg], "Modern French Literature," 115.

63. Nina H. Kennard, "Gustave Flaubert and George Sand," *Nineteenth Century* 20 (November 1886): 704, 708. Kennard was a novelist and biographer who wrote many articles on Sand and on the French actress Rachel.

64. William Barry, "The French Decadence," *Quarterly Review* 174 (April 1892): 482.

65. In *George Sand and the Victorian World*, Blount recognizes that the preference for Sand was a rejection of realism when he writes that "[i]n contrasting Balzac and Sand, Lewes revealed a dominant Victorian preference for romanticism over realism" (71); however, when discussing Sand and novels, critics used the term *romanticism* far less frequently than they did *idealism*.

66. See Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

67. On sentimentalism and idealism as the prevalence of moral truth over material truth, see Cohen, *Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 50, and Schor, *George Sand and Idealism*, 13; and as the prevalence of the desirable over the probable, see *ibid.*, 41. On the scarcity of detailed descriptions and muting of the physical register in sentimentalism and idealism, see *ibid.*, 4, 19; and Cohen, *Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 54–57.

68. On idealism and utopianism, see Schor, *George Sand and Idealism*, 15, 21. On sentimental fiction's investment in the tragic collision of principles, see Cohen, *Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 89.



69. J. D. Jump uses the phrase to refer to the *Athenaeum's* two most important criteria for reviewing literary works ("Weekly Reviewing in the Eighteen-Sixties," 247).

70. Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Critical and Miscellaneous Writings of Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1841), 52–53, quoted in Stang, *Theory of the Novel in England*, 153.

71. Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel*, 77.

72. Stang begins *The Theory of the Novel in England* by contesting the idea that literary criticism of the novel began in France and was transported from there to England by George Moore and Henry James (ix); he adopts a Jamesian definition of realism and shows that British critics anticipated it, point for point. For a study of the extent to which ethics continued to suffuse even James's theory of realism, see Dorothy J. Hale, *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21–63. The question of national priority in novel theory seems to misrecognize the basic transnationalism of the novel (see elsewhere in this volume).

73. [Oliphant], "Novels," 261. See also Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel*, 78. My reading of Balzac's reception challenges that of Walter Kendrick, who argues that while reviewers objected to the content of Balzac's plots, they could not resist his realism ("Balzac and British Realism," 10).

74. Wilkie Collins, "Letter of Dedication," *Basil* (1862; reprint, New York: Dover, 1980), iii–iv.

75. George Lewes, "Realism in Art," *Westminster Review* 70 (October 1858): 493–96; the citation appears in an excerpt from the article, reprinted in Skilton, *Early and Mid-Victorian Novel*, 102.

76. [Alfred Austin], "Our Novels: 1," *Temple Bar* 29 (May 1870): 183–84, emphasis mine.

77. Lilly, "Age of Balzac," 1006. For a similar defense of Balzac as idealist, see "French Novelists," *London Society* 21 (1872): 308–17.

78. The "Ideal" to which the author refers is Jesus Christ as a principle of the world's transcendence of the material into the spirit. The author notes that British novelists "are yet, as a body, faithful to this, the only beautiful realism," and regrets that materialism has "even tainted the genius of George Eliott [*sic*]" ("French Fiction—Its Better Aspects," *British Quarterly Review* 33 [January 1861]: 110).

79. Lee, "Moral Teaching of Zola," 197. See also J. A. Symonds, "La Bête Humaine: A Study in Zola's Idealism," *In the Key of Blue and Other Prose Essays* (London: Elkin Matthews & John Lane, 1892), 111, 112; and Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel*, 57, 61.

80. Edouard Rod, "Emile Zola as Moralist," *Living Age* 222 (July 1899): 137, 143. Other examples abound: Joseph Forster wrote that "[o]ne touch of Zola degrades love, debases friendship, and robs the human heart of its one priceless so-lace—belief in the perfectibility of human nature" ("Eugene Sue and Emile Zola," *Bel-*

*gravia* 71 [February 1890]: 135). Hannah Lynch took issue with "Zola's strictly material conception of virtue," asserting, "We cannot accept that man was only born for physical sensation"; this anti-idealism is precisely what she associates with Zola's morbidity and perversion ("'Fécondité' versus the 'Kreutzer Sonata,'" 74, 76).

81. Review of *The Modern Literature of France*, 458–59, emphasis mine.

82. The article "Balzac and His Writings," in the *Westminster Review* 60 (1853), refers to Balzac as "the head of this realist school," committed to "the exact imitation of nature" (203). Another critic wrote that Balzac "accepted life as it was, and described it as he found it," and that his work lacked the moralism that would be opposed to "his hard and sometimes tedious realism" ("Honoré de Balzac," *London Society* 21 [1872]: 316). Throughout his article on the British response to naturalism from 1885–1895, Frierson cites critics who used the terms *realism* and *naturalism* interchangeably to describe Zola's work, which he notes was often linked to Balzac's ("English Controversy over Realism in Fiction," 537 n. 10).

83. "Balzac," *Gentleman's Magazine* 21 (December 1878): 617; Symonds, "*La Bête Humaine*. A Study in Zola's Idealism," 131. See also "Honoré de Balzac," *Temple Bar* 54 (1878): 547.

84. Review of *The Modern Literature of France*, 460; the author is quoting, approvingly, from an article by "Mr. Keratry, a French critic of a very high order of talent in the *Livre des Cent et Un*, and entitled 'The Men of Letters of the present Day (1831–2)'" (459).

85. [Shand], "Balzac," 319.

86. Barry, "Realism and Decadence in French Fiction," 58, 63.

87. [Linton], "Novels of Balzac, III," 499, and "Novels of Balzac, II," 391.

This aspect of Balzac's work also linked him to orientalism for British critics who criticized Eastern societies for failing to idealize women's souls and instead treating them as pure flesh subjugated to men's physical desires.

88. As late as 1920 Arthur Symonds, whose critical career peaked in the 1890s, wrote apropos of Baudelaire's "Femmes damnées" that lesbians "live only with a life of desire, and that obsession has carried them beyond the wholesome bounds of nature into the violence of a perversity which is at times almost insane." Symonds blends the older lingo of idealism with the more recent one of sexology (*Charles Baudelaire: A Study* (New York: Dutton, 1920), 33). Less frequently, realism and sapphism were also both associated with money, the medium of material interests (see Barry, "Realism and Decadence in French Fiction," 62).

89. On the belief that homosexuality and idealized sentiments were incompatible, see the courtroom speech cited in Cohen, *Sex Scandal*, 113–14; Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*; Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1912; reprint, New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1921): "to confuse Uranians (as is so often done) with libertines having no law but curiosity in self-indulgence is to do them a great wrong" (25).

90. [Henry Buxton Forman], "Algernon Charles Swinburne—Poet and Critic," *London Quarterly Review* 31 (January 1869): 371, 374, 373. Forman was a post office employee and literary critic who edited Elizabeth Barrett Browning and William Morris and contributed frequently to *Tinsley's* and the *London Quarterly Review*.

91. Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Under the Microscope* (1872), quoted in Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition*, 73.

92. See Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*; Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies*, 81; and Valerie Rohy, *Impossible Women: Lesbian Figures and American Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

93. [William Leonard Courtney], "Mr. Swinburne's Poetry," *Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 37 (May 1885): 601.

94. "Mr. Swinburne's New Poems," 145.

95. Baynes, "Swinburne's Poems," 77, 82, 89. The reviewer links Swinburne's poetry to the sensation novel: "As the object of the sensational writer is to produce the strongest effect, he naturally tends not only towards the physical, but towards what is extreme, revolting, and even horrible in our physical experience" (94).

96. *Ibid.*, 77.

97. See Marilyn Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*; Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies*; Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and White, *UnInvited*. This argument has also been made about queer representation in general (see, e.g., D. A. Miller, *Bringing out Roland Barthes* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992], 45).

98. Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 156.

99. *Ibid.*, 34, 35.

100. "Swinburne's Poems," *Edinburgh Review* 134 (1871): 73. On the association of lesbianism with cloisters and harems, see [Ashbee], *Index librorum prohibitorum*, xxxiv–xxxv. On Balzac's exclusion of female readers, see Cohen, *Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 112–18. In his defense of the "realistic novelist" George Moore wrote, "Let us renounce the effort to reconcile these two irreconcilable things—literature and young girls" (*Literature at Nurse* [1885], quoted in Frierson, "English Controversy over Realism in Fiction," 535).

101. Ernest Dowson, "Translator's Preface," in Honoré de Balzac, *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, trans. Ernest Dowson (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896), vii.