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INTRODUCTION

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H. Rider Haggard's 1887 best-seller *She: A History of Adventure* contains what could be taken as a byline of *fin-de-siècle* market society; according to Ayesha, immortal queen of the civilisation of Kôr, "the world is a great mart . . . where all things are for sale to whom who bids highest in the currency of our desires" (1998, 182). Of course, remarking that "woman's beauty can ever be bought with gold," Haggard's goddess notes what must be painfully clear to an immortal—that the economic structures that underpin sex relations are as old as sex and exchange themselves. But there is something strikingly current in this statement which emphasises the boundlessness of human appetites and a freer, more capacious definition of the commodity. As existing scholarship spearheaded by Lawrence Birken (1988), Regenia Gagnier (2000) and others- demonstrates, the move, at the end of the nineteenth-century, towards new models of economic thought which presented "economic man" as an unproductive, self-maximising consumer marked the transition from a marketplace centred around the fulfilment of "needs" to one ministering to anything that might, potentially, be desired. Ayesha's mart, actuated by desiring subjects who select from an infinite range of terrestrial pleasures, goods and services, provides a fitting sketch of a late nineteenth-century marketplace in which—at least as far as (neoclassical) economists were concerned—"value", or more fittingly "price", was determined by a subjective and theoretically insatiable consumer. As Regenia Gagnier remarks, "new" economic man's "advanced stage of development was signified by the boundlessness of his desires. He must choose from a whole universe of goods on display" (Gagnier 2000, 20). In an economic milieu popularly defined by the escalation of human appetites, "desire" itself had effectively become an economic category.

The emphasis on desire in the arena of economics ran roughly parallel to an inclusion of economic principles in the study of desire. In his influential 1988 study, *Consuming Desire,* Lawrence Birken shows that "consumerist values [were] already evident in Freud's preanalytic work" (43); Freud's "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), for instance, mapped patterns of nervous discharge (culminating in pleasure) which closely resembled patterns of consumer spending—a bias that anticipates the "economic point of view" developed in his later work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Birken, however, points out that sexology took slightly longer than economics to fully establish a model of individualistic desire. His study describes a three-phase transition (1870-1895; 1895-1915; 1915-beyond) from productivist to consumerist patterns of thinking in the discipline. As he explains, in the early stages of sexual science, heterosexual reproduction (a functional analogue of economic productivism) was interpreted as a "normal" expenditure of sexual desire; homosexuality, on the other hand, was regarded a perversion. The discovery "of ever more complex and subtle forms of sexual variation" led, in the latter part of the nineteenth century and opening decades of the twentieth, to the abandonment of this "idea of sex as social need in favor of the idea of sex as individualistic desire" or "object-choice" (indicative of a consumerist ethos) (95; 99-100). Ayesha's maxim, presented here as a striking exemplar of the primacy of individualistic desire within the *fin-de-siècle* economy, arguably substantiates the residual productivism described in Birken's chronology; indeed, that the immortal queen's object of desire is the reincarnated lineal ancestor of her long-dead lover might well gesture towards the (re)productive imperative seen as the natural product of heterosexual desire.

Constituting some of the major developments in late nineteenth-century economic and sexological thought, the cross-fertilisation of theories relating to idiosyncratic desire and consumer choice is both indicative of the kinds of questions that inform this volume and a

springboard for more conceptual readings of the late-Victorian "economy of desire." Principally, the question this book aims to address is: how and why do issues of sexuality, desire, and economic behaviour intersect in the literature (and culture) of the Victorian *fin de siècle*? Amongst the range of implied "hows" are matters tropological (how, for instance, does the period's literature articulate desire through the motif of economy?); contextual (how do fully-embodied economic phenomena relate to literary representations of sex, pleasure and desire?); and formal (how do *fin-de-siècle* writers deploy poetic/narrative/metrical economy to articulate various forms of "unacceptable"—often homoerotic—desire?). The "whys," on the other hand, pertain to those political, theological, and aesthetic ends that the dialogue between "economy" and "desire" employs.

Because sexual science locates a particular kind of economy within the unstable somatic territory of the desiring body, critical studies of the last twenty years have chiefly schematised "libidinal economies" as a favoured trope of the modernist "fiction of interiority," the formal experimentalism of which would seem to replicate the psychoanalytically-conceived libidinal impulse. Joseph Allen Boone's influential 1998 study *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism,* for instance, has done much to establish a connection between the "radical subjectivity" of modernist aesthetics and sexological theories of libidinal energy/economy. Boone's professed aim is to investigate how the "techniques and strategies whereby something like "consciousness" and something like a "stream" of libidinally charged thoughts, images [and] desires . . . are insinuated into the trajectories of an array of more or less experimental fictional narratives engaged in exploring the inner life . . ." (5). Though Boone is prepared to accept that the roots of this form of narrative and sexual economy are pre-twentieth century—for instance, he reads Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) as a "'Victorian' precursor" to the "quintessentially unstable" libidinal narratives of the modernist period—he is only interested in nineteenth-

century fiction insofar as it anticipates a particular kind of modernist aesthetic (33; 35). While his study offers valuable insight into the narrative economy of post-Freudian experimental literature, Boone's own silences imply support for a chronology which consigns the literature of the 1880s and 90s to the much noted interregnum between the (apparently austere) literature of the Victorian period and the (libidinally-charged) literature of modernism.

In similar ways, Kathryn Simpson's more recent *Gifts, Markets and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf* (2008) aligns the "experimental modernist forms and aesthetics of Woolf's writing" with the characteristics of "fluidity" and "indeterminacy" that Hélène Cixous, in her feminist analysis of the gift, attributes to female acts of non-monetary exchange (6). For Simpson, gift-giving is a constitutive feature of the "libidinal economy" of Woolf's writing, the purpose of which is to circumvent the "heteropatriarchal social order that capitalism seems to keep in place" (2). Like Boone, Simpson describes a fictive "economy of desire" that, if it does not precisely draw on early twentieth-century psychosexual discourses, certainly reflects (stylistically) the kind of volatile libidinal current described in them. But perceived similarities between the libidinal impulse and modernist stylistics are not the sole means through which "economies of desire" have been keyed to the early twentieth-century cultural moment. Describing Woolf's exposure to an "increasingly impersonal and rigid economy," Simpson situates her writing's "dynamic interconnection" between economy and desire in the context of the financial instability (and "fiscal . . . retrenchment") of the 1920s (4-5). Woolf's construction of a gift-orientated "feminine libidinal economy" is read as a response not only to anxieties about the stability of monetary value but, more generally, the "(all-pervasive) ethos of capitalism," the "impersonality of commodity culture" and the heteropatriarchal motors of capitalistic exchange (2; 4; 5).

At the *fin de siècle* people were already expressing resistance to the development of modern consumer culture; the banking crises of the 1890s raised fears about financial

stability; and the ensuing market centralisation led people to remark on the “impersonality” of financial institutions and corporations.[1] The conditions that, as far as Simpson is concerned, opened the door to Woolf's narrative “interconnection [between] the social, the economic and representations of desire” could already be said to exist, albeit in an earlier form, at the end of the nineteenth-century (4). Why, then, do we not talk about a late Victorian economy of desire in the same way that we talk about the libidinal economies of modernism?

In his analysis of *Villette,* Boone claims that Brontë's novel enters a “libidinal terrain rarely trespassed in Victorian fiction” (40). Perhaps, like others keen to lend coherence to the periodisation of the era, Boone does not include the literature of the 1880s and 90s in his definition of “Victorian fiction”.[2] In fact, evidence of the “libidinal terrain” traversed by writers and thinkers of the *fin de siècle* is plentiful. For decades scholars have commented on late nineteenth-century representations of male same-sex desire (and scrutinised the “enforced hiatus” of homosexual literature following Oscar Wilde's 1895 conviction for acts of gross indecency (Gagnier 1987, 162)); they have debated how the pornographic literature of the *fin-de-siècle* relates and responds to dominant cultural discourses and they have described the ways in which anxieties about threatening female sexuality have been transposed into grotesque images of feminine evil.[3]

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[1] See Gail Turley Houston's chapter “Bankerization panic and the corporate personality in *Dracula* ” Turley Houson 2005, 112-131

[2] For instance in *The Victorians* Philip Davis concludes his analysis in 1880, the year of George Eliot's death and a time when, as Davis puts it, the “high moral seriousness” of the realist project gave way to a “late Victorian aesthetic” (2004, 6).

[3] For a detailed analysis of (late) nineteenth-century pornographic literature see Marcus 1966; Cohen 1996, 107-111. Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (1986) is a foundational study of the literature and iconography of late nineteenth-century misogyny.

That there is no well-established critical discourse surrounding the idea of a *fin-de-siècle* (literary) economy of desire could, then, be due to the fact that unlike literary modernism, the writing of the *fin-de-siècle* does not have a coherent set of aesthetic or stylistic characteristics to anchor such a discussion. So, for example, while Brontë's *Villette* cannot seriously be said to access a libidinal territory unknown to nineteenth-century writers, in its commitment to the representation of interior states, it *does* provide a stylistic/structural foothold (Boone calls it "proto-modernist") for later, specifically Freudian, conceptualisations of libidinal energy/economy. Although existing studies of the *fin de siècle* have tried to move away from "end-stopped, tragic readings of the period" nuancing remarks, such as Raymond Williams's, that characterise it as a "working-out . . . of unfinished lines", the sheer range and diversity of the period's literature make this process difficult (Marshall 2007,3; Williams 1963, 165). The critical consensus is that, while it is productive to organise *fin-de-siècle* literature around such general themes as "cultural and political conflict," or "socio-cultural fragmentation," the "issue of definition" remains, to use Gail Marshall's words, "impossibly muddied" (Ledger and McCracken 1995, 4; Marshall 2007, 3).

This is not to say that existing criticism entirely ignores the interplay between ideas of economy and desire at the *fin-de-siècle*. Particularly profitable strands of enquiry are those studies, like Regenia Gagnier's *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (2000), which focus on *aesthetic* philosophy and its relationship to the economy. Examining a "plurality" of nineteenth-century aesthetic agendas, Gagnier suggests that "[i]f economics . . . defined itself as the domain for the provision for the needs and desires of the people, aesthetics was in its most inclusive sense the apprehension and expression of the people's needs and desires at the level of sense, feeling and emotion" (145). In Gagnier's study, the physical bodies of the artist and perceiving subject become bearers of economic meaning. In the "political economy of art"—Ruskin's phrase for the movement

which concerned itself with the conditions of aesthetic production—labour theories of value shaped a philosophy of creative production which similarly centred on the physical body (of the artist).[4] But later, at the *fin de siècle*, "physiological aesthetics"—the title of an 1877 treatise by Grant Allen and term for the study of the psychological/biological foundations of aesthetic taste—focused on the "pleasured body" of the perceiving subject, that is to say the "man of taste" or the "critic" (Gagnier 2000, 135; 145). Calculating the maximum pleasure to be derived from the perception of beautiful things (resonant of Walter Pater's famous dictum to "get as many pulsations as possible into the given time"), physiological aesthetics rejected the political economists of arts' "concern for its producers" in favour of non-productive ethos of artistic consumption (Pater 1998, 153; Gagnier 2000, 135).

Gagnier's work not only maps parallel developments within nineteenth-century aesthetics and economics; pertinent to our own purposes, it demonstrates how sex and sexuality are implicated in theories of aesthetic production and consumption. Gagnier, for example, demonstrates how decadent writers recoiled from bourgeois notions of "purposive" or reproductive sexuality (the same "broadly heterosexual" productivism that underlies the applied aesthetics of Ruskin and William Morris) (Gagnier 2000, 128). The *fin de siècle*, she argues, witnessed the "cultural dialectic" between a "heterosexual aesthetic" and a "perverse" non-(re)productive aesthetic as seen, for instance, in decadence (139). The question of how homosexual writers of the *fin de siècle* positioned themselves in relation to biological and sexological thinking is one that has, and continues to be, of importance to literary critics. Martha Vicinus has similarly argued that, at the *fin-de-siècle*, homosexual writers pursued a productive imperative that did not, as such, challenge the heterogenital hegemony of contemporary sexological discourses. She points out that "[m]en and women whose sexual

[4] Gagnier explains that the labour theory of value theorised "that the cost of a commodity was the value of the labourer's wear and tear in production, plus the value of the labourers subsistence" (2000, 129).

lives were in opposition to biological reproduction did not defy its hegemony but, rather, insisted upon a superior option—art. Physical reproduction was replaced with metaphysical and artistic generation" (Vicinus 1994, 94).

Building on the valuable insights of Gagnier, Vicinus and others this collection brings together a selection of original essays to suggest a way of reading the *fin de siècle* cultural moment which renders the themes of economy and desire—and their meeting point in the period's literature—more salient. The collection has been organised into three key sections: Articulating Desire, which focuses on how the libidinal economy is expressed in language; Human Currencies, which considers the body's imbrication in economic exchange; and Queer Performativities which examines sexual economies of difference with an emphasis on the subversive erotics of parody and role-play. In practice, there is much dialogue between these themes but the libidinal economy / economy of desire / sexual economy is as slippery as this ranging nomenclature suggests: a lack of definition that is, perhaps, reinforced through the libidinal economy's association with the qualities of "indirection, incompleteness and self-reflex[ivity]" that define experimental modernist narrative. It has therefore been useful to think about language, the body and (linguistic / bodily) performance as the principal crossways of economics, sexuality and desire in the late nineteenth century (Boone 1998, 5).

Articulating Desire

In her seminal study, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994), Catherine Belsey reflects on previous writing about desire: "It has, of course, been done before – by poets, dramatists, novelists . . . But something seems to remain unsaid. And it is primarily this that motivates still more writing. Desire eludes final definition, with the result that its character, its nature, its meaning, becomes itself an object of desire for the writer" (1994, 3). As Belsey indicates, the linguistic signification—the nameability, classification and characterisation of desire is politically charged. In particular, it is through the politics of sexuality that Belsey

suggests Western culture's "understanding of desire is the location of resistances to norms, proprieties and taxonomies, which constitute a form of constraint" (1994, 4). In such figurations, desire inevitably emerges as a site of dangerous potentiality and transgressive (sexual) excess, generating anxieties about circulation, articulation and control. In attempting to organise and control questions of sexuality and potentially non-normative formulations of desire, Michel Foucault notes that "sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledge's, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it" (1991, 309). Yet, as Foucault suggests, when the "rational discourse of sex" operates as an instrument of state-power, "the things one declines to say" become a legitimate tool in the language of resistance (1991, 309). Indeed, taking up Foucault's remarks, recent advances in queer theory have witnessed an increasing degree of critical attention paid to the varying levels of silence, utterances, half-formed articulations and multiple voices. In *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (1999), Richard Dellamora for example, cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's conceptualisation of sexual "closetedness," which Sedgwick conceives of as "a performance initiated by the speech act of silence alone" (qtd. in Dellamora 1999, 4). But while such silence could be indicative of sexual or personal oppression, more recently, silence, has been considered to have affirmative significance. In "The Voice of Silence: Interrogating the Sound of Queerness/Raciality" (2008) for example, Esperanza Miyake proposes "that silence can be a means to hear a pin drop, a tool to make us listen to the sounds that are made *in* silence" (qtd. in Kuntsman 2009, 239). By scrutinising that which is not articulated, or that which appears textually absent or unutterable, it is possible to pay a greater degree of attention to otherwise marginalised, excessive or non-normative formulations of desire.

In an essay on *fin-de-siècle* fiction, Nicholas Ruddick suggests that "A desire might be culturally 'unspeakable' as a result of social taboos; but it can still be articulated in fiction via symbolic motifs" (2007, 190). Similarly, in *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian*

Fiction (1996), William A. Cohen claims that, in nineteenth-century literature, sexual or erotic content is often encoded. He suggests that:

> sexual unspeakability does not function simply as a collection of prohibitions for Victorian writers. Rather, it affords them abundant opportunities to develop an elaborate discourse - richly ambiguous, subtly coded, prolix and polyvalent - that we now recognize and designate by the very term *literary.* Like other restrictions upon expression, the conventions of sexual unspeakability serve writers as a productive constraint, contributing to a certain historical formation of the literary. (1996, 3)

Such literary formulations of unspeakable or unutterable desire gesture towards the (libidinal) economies of linguistic expression. Building on this work, the three essays in this section variously explore the ways in which language and text fail to adequately capture or express non-normative or excessive desire, which is expressed instead through an eroticisation of economic discourse, strict self-curtailment, or explorations of the immaterial associations of memory.

In the first chapter, "Always leave them wanting more… Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* and the failed circulations of desire" Ruth Robbins considers the multiple, queer formulations of competing and painfully unreciprocated forbidden desires in Wilde's play. Noting that these emerge as homosexual, incestuous, cross-class or necrophilic, Robbins demonstrates the disruptive, fatally destructive forces that they contain. Taking up Lyotard's proposition that "desire cannot be assumed, accepted, understood, and locked up in names," (2004, 19) Robbins points to the insufficiency of language to communicate or express particularly intense or perverse configurations of sexual desire, radically re-presenting the biblical retelling of *Salomé* as also a "story about what cannot be spoken" (p.#). Instead, illicit desire circulates through indirect, connotative moments of elaborate euphemism or through indirect intertextual reference. Indeed, it is through a careful reading of the cross-textual allusions (in nineteenth-century visual and literary culture) that the sexually voracious and "exotic - only one letter away from erotic" *femme fatale* figure of Salome silently comes into view (p.#). Robbins shows how Wilde's version of Salome, who is conventionally subjected to a

libidinous male gaze in contemporary art and literature, is paradoxically 'exposed' for scrutiny in Wilde's play by the strategic *removal* and *omission* of stage direction and textual detail—that which is not said. We are invited instead to recognise allusions to artistic and literary depictions of her performance, to fill in textual gaps with the mind's eye. Such recognitions implicate the (silently) watching audience in the transgressive potentialities of the play. Moreover, as Robbins argues, such lacunae and reversals generate tension: it is once Wilde renders Salome (a traditional object of desire) a sexually self-aware subject who "gazes back" and articulates desire that "all hell breaks loose" (p.#). For Robbins, intense formulations of sexual desire that can neither be defined nor consummated in *Salomé* can only be perversely articulated (or spent) as violence (and with fatal consequences). A play that "takes a serious view of desire," this is Wilde's most paradoxical statement about the economy of desire: an economy which, at the same time it quickens desire, denies its performative expression (p.#).

Unspeakable libidinal energy is similarly denied an explicit outlet in A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), the focus of Veronica Alfano's essay. Building upon a body of scholarship that considers Housman's homosexual proclivities, Alfano offers a highly nuanced queer reading of his first volume of published verse which sought to commemorate, mourn, and praise young male soldiers and athletes. But these short poems, which, as Alfano notes, often feature the admiring and momentarily lingering homoerotic male gaze, nevertheless stop short of engaging in that elaborate or detailed descriptions of "too-attractive boys" (p.#) Such constraint is imposed by the ballads' "discontinuous, repetitive, . . . restrained, . . . iterative and monosyllabic diction", a poetic curtailment that Alfano importantly terms a "ballad economy" (p.#). It is on this abridged, "form-based [and linguistic] economy," that Alfano centres her argument, viewing the multifarious opportunities through which speakers can simultaneously disclose desire without disclosing

too much, or experience moments of self-censoring restraint, interruption or "understated self-expression", which in turn intimate at an intensity of illicit feeling. But beyond this, memory and nostalgia also make up a significant part of the queer formulation in the ballad economy utilised by Housman. For it is through the initial deployment and blending of the familiar (and therefore easily confused) notes of intertextual reference, that a conservative impulse to obscure and shield dissident desire from recognition is mobilised (in contrast to the sexually subversive deployment of intertextuality that Robbins observes in *Salomé*). "Intertextual echoes" in *A Shropshire Lad* instead solidify similitude between the reader and speaker to reduce but also embed "the strange, shameful, or illicit qualities of his speaker's fears and desires" (p. 4). Housman'suse of "regular rhythms, orthodox rhymes [and]frequent alliteration," forge memorable lines that, when coupled with the nostalgic pastoral themes of the ballad tradition, materialise the past and present; earlier moments of homoerotic desire are temporarily brought into immediate relief, while safely distanced in the intangible past. Adjusting Nicholas Dames's interpretation of "nostalgic forgetting," however, Alfano shows that the moments of forgetfulness that do take place in Housman's ballads act as a strategic tool to conceal homoeroticism. Reading "memory's failure's . . . through the lens of homoerotic desire" (p.#), Alfano discreetly speaks in accord with Judith Halberstam's recent work in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), in which forgetfulness is seen "to produce an alternative mode of knowing, one that resists the positivitism of memory projects," while rendering forgetfulness instead a "useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary" (2011, 69; 70).

Memory is likewise central to the associative, illicitly alternative and immaterial desire in Jane Desmarais's essay "Perfume Clouds: Olfaction, Memory, and Desire in Arthur Symons's *London Nights* (1895)." Tracing the material commodification of perfume through advertisements, Desmarais begins by demonstrating the distinctly eroticised female aura with

which it was associated in nineteenth-century visual culture. Symons, she argues, disperses his texts with "popular scents" not to reinforce these initial market or economic associations (as tacitly suggested by Catherine Maxwell), but to explore perfume's more intangibly associated libidinous configurations of desire as they emerge through memory. It is this indistinctly figured, vaguely articulated connotative relationship between memory and the vaporised, dispersed fragrance which indirectly "triggers images, memories, and yet at the same time resists clear possession," that evades fixed expression (p.#). In contrast to Housman's deployment of memory as identified by Alfano, Desmarais indicates that Symons "cleverly sidestep[s]" the "distancing and standardising effects of triggered memory" through the invocation of "the sense of smell, which enables him to keep closer contact with the actual experience (yearning, desire, loss)" (p.#). And yet Desmarais suggests that "there is a quality of attention to language and form that suggests the simultaneity of recollection's vibrancy and limitations" (p. #). Through a sustained analysis of "White Heliotrope," for example, Desmarais illustrates the ways in which the perfumed scent becomes associated with the recollection of a post-coital encounter - an "illicit eroticism." But it is the communication of the "*effect* of memory" and suggested "indistinctness" which is more firmly articulated through irregular rhythm and form, rather than the figurations of emotions or desires (p.#). In this way, Desmarais provides a convincing account of Symons's fixation on literary impressionism and the linguistic, immaterial formulations of libidinous desire in memory.

2. Human Currencies

Expressed in strikingly figurative terms, Marx's critique of the commodity value of labour-power has been critical in the construction of the human body as currency. In his polemic on the working day, Marx famously described how the worker is forced to sell his labour-power,

remarking that the “vampire [of capital] will not lose its hold on him “so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited” (Marx 1977, 224). In terms that emphasise the somatic foundations of alienated labour, Marx points out that through his indenture to the vampire capitalist, the worker can expect only diminishing returns from his enervated body-commodity. Feminist thinkers have expanded Marx’s critique of labour-power as commodity to include the subordination of women. In her 1977 essay, “Women on the Market,” Luce Irigaray presents a Marxist critique of the “use, consumption and circulation” of women’s bodies within patriarchal societies (1985, 171). For Irigaray the imposition of the social roles of mother (re-producer), virgin (object of sexual exchange) and prostitute (sex object for hire), are involved in an alienation of women’s pleasure which is structurally akin to the alienation of the proletarian’s labour-power. She points out that “all the social regimes of ‘History’ are based upon the exploitation of one ‘class’ of producers, namely, women. Whose productive use value (reproductive of children and of the labor force) and whose constitution of exchange value underwrite the symbolic order as such, without any compensation in kind going to them for that ‘work’” (1985, 173).

The three essays in this section consider how female writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represent human bodies as objects of exchange within (hetero-patriarchal) capitalist society. The first two, by Sarah Parker and Jane Ford, draw on the discourse of visual power relations and dwell on the various ways in which women’s economic subordination is rendered by the male gaze. Amongst nineteenth-century critiques of the way the female subject is commodified within a male-dominated scopic economy, Christina Rossetti’s sonnet “In an Artist’s Studio,” (composed 1856) as well as passages of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856), are popularly cited. Relatively recent recovery work on writers such as Michael Field (the authorial pseudonym of Katharine Harris Bradley, 1846-1914 and her niece and ward Edith Emma Cooper, 1862-1913), further

demonstrates that female homoerotic desire could be a powerful tool in subverting what Irigaray terms the "ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly" (that is, a masculine economy trading in female bodies) (171). In her analysis of Field's *Sight and Song* (1892)—a sequence of ekphrastic lyrics which describe Renaissance artworks—Krista Lysack, for instance, argues that Field circumvent the "acquisitive male-gaze" by investing typically silenced subjects with autonomous desire. Lysack argues that by celebrating a poetic discourse of "women's shared homoerotic pleasures" Michael Field anticipate "Irigaray's vision of commodity exchange as the realization of juissance or absolute desire" (2008, 131).

In her enterprising comparison of the British *fin-de-siècle* writer, Amy Levy (1861-1889), and the American modernist, Djuna Barnes (1892-1982), in Chapter 4 of our collection, Sarah Parker adds nuance to existing critical readings of the visual economy of artist-subject relationships. By focusing on what she terms the "dead-woman muse," Parker demonstrates that Levy's and Barnes's poetry—composed on different sides of the 1900 divide (and indeed, different sides of the Atlantic)—offer strikingly similar critiques of how masculine writing idealises the female corpse. In their own verse, Levy and Barnes satirise the male writing-tradition which imagines the deceased body of the muse as an aesthetic and/or erotic commodity. At the same time as Barnes and Levy expose the misogyny implicit within the dead woman trope, Parker demonstrates that they invest it with more progressive possibilities through the inscription of female homoerotic desire. Terry Castle's 1993 theory of the "the apparitional lesbian"—which argues that "ghostly tropes" have simultaneously facilitated the expression of female homoerotic desire and "dematerialise[d] the threat posed by [it]" (Parker 2015, p.#)—is a key theoretical pillar of Parker's chapter. Through the pairing of Levy (writing in the 1880s and 90s) and Barnes (writing in the 1910s and 20s), Parker is able to break down "persistent demarcations between the Victorian and modern" to reveal an adjustment in the way homoerotic desire is inscribed on the corpse-muse (p.#).

Unlike Levy, whose verse deploys the kind of "spectralising" techniques described by Castle, Barnes's poetry reflects an aspiration to "'re-flesh' the lesbian body"; as Parker remarks "Barnes's dead women pulse with life: their lustrous hair continues to grow, their corpses sprout flowers and weeds, they move and jerk about beneath the earth" (p.#). If the fleshliness of Barnes's corpse-muse is not explicitly a repudiation of the necessity to spectralise lesbian desire, it certainly encourages a more fully-embodied lesbian aesthetic. Moreover conflating images of vitality and decay within the perverse body of the flowering corpse, Barnes "evades [offering] fixed representation": a move which disrupts the visual economy of the male gaze (p.#).

In similar ways Jane Ford's chapter, "Greek Gift and 'Given Being': The Libidinal Economies of Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales," demonstrates how essayist and writer of fiction, Vernon Lee (1856-1935) provided a corrective to the notion that hetero-patriarchal structures of desire immobilise female agency. Reading the short stories "A Wedding Chest" (1888) and "Dionea" (1890) through the critical lens of gift theory and informed by Luce Irigaray's figuration of women as "value-invested idealities," Ford finds in Lee a pattern of representing women as both subject and objects of desire, vulnerable to the nexus of exchange in a patriarchal matrix energised by "an erotic, libidinal impetus" (Irigaray 1985, 181; Ford, p. #). Taking up Lee's "mistrust of the practice of gift-giving," Ford considers her treatment of two gift events: devotional Christological giving and the mythic "Greek Gift". The reciprocity of the gift is vitally figured through the circulatory exchange of blood—as blood money—"a de facto somatic currency" devoured with vampiric-like energy (Ford p.#).

Just as Parker reveals the ways in which Djuna Barnes "re-fleshes" the female corpse, commoditising the body into a material reality that both empowers and disempowers sexual otherness, Ford illustrates that the asymmetrical power dynamics enacted at the heart of a gift exchange in "Dionea" (which is mediated through homoerotic attraction) renders the

eponymous protagonist as a "living corpse"—an apparently subjugated, slavish "given" "thing" to be objectified and possessed (p.#). Indeed, developing Robbins's earlier proposition that the Lyotardian libidinous economy risks "mix[ing] up" and reformulating a desire which views "people as things" (p.#), Ford underlines how Lee emphasises the very "thingness" of woman in a hetero-patriarchal gift economy. But it is strikingly through a "gift economy", according to Kathryn Simpson, that it is possible to "realise a subversive economy of desire" that "prioritise[s] a different set of values" (2009, 2). "Dionea" radically explores this potentiality, disrupting and resisting patriarchal narratives of control, ownership and knowability, which as in Robbins's essay, instead become desires of fatally consumptive, self-destructive libidinal excess. Ford astutely reveals Lee's alternative figuration of the gift: a gift that can invert and transpose supremacy to the female "given being," enabling a liberating realisation of an autonomous self.

The vexed status of the gift also underpins Catherine Delyfer's account of Lucas Malet's *The Far Horizon* (1906). Delyfer shows how Malet is aware of the implicit self-interest in much gift-giving, but nevertheless wishes to reclaim the act as part of a "spiritual economy" which would stand in critical contrast to the dominant financial structures of the period. Delyfer notes how contemporaries of Malet, like Gissing and Oliphant, were, "quick to appropriate economic themes for financial treatment, mining contemporary financial events for characters and plots" (p.#). Malet's work must therefore be seen in the context of a common literary gamble of the period, a bet that contemporary economic habits and institutions would provide an artistic payoff. Malet takes this gamble further by projecting her own literary investment and its associated uncertainty of reward on to the ascetic saintliness of her main protagonist, Dominic Iglesias. As Delyfer points out, the treatment of his character, "literalises a transfer of value, or more exactly a displacement of creditworthiness .... his trajectory in the novel is conceived as a monetary curve charting the fluctuations of a

currency whose ups and down the reader is asked to follow" (p.#). Like the Wordsworthian attempt to create the taste by which a writer is enjoyed, *The Far Horizon*, in this account, gestures towards the set of not-yet-existing conditions necessary to appreciate its existence. It gambles on there being, in Emerson's words, "A higher work for Art than the arts" (Emerson 1869, 328). *The Far Horizon* is itself conceived as a gift which attempts to acknowledge self-interest (including its own) while looking beyond to it to an ideal of reception which is (perhaps endlessly) deferred.

Just as *The Far Horizon* is decisively bound up with temporal remoteness, it also responds to influences which are physically distant, especially in the context of colonial projects which often had their basis in the waxing and waning of particular financial speculations. As in Corvo's *Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* and Huysmans's *A Rebours*, Malet's version of exceptionalism is linked to sexual repression: "... at the end of the novel, when Malet has her protagonist die a sexually unspent man, and an un-repaid, un-thanked creditor to all those he has help materially and morally, she is in fact confirming Iglesias's capacity for indefinite deferral of gratification, this multiplying his value through eternity" (p.#). The diversion of libidinal currents is therefore seen as a crucial prerequisite to overcoming the conditions of the "machine man," the economic monad. Delyfer reveals how the thinking of the period—the efforts of Bagehot and others—encouraged writers to blur the lines between the literary and financial sphere, to see the literary work as a type of financial speculation, to see financial speculation as a species of imaginative (poetic) act.

3. Queer Performativity

In the sixteen years since Richard Dellamora asserted in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (1999) that the "gaying" of criticism of the late-Victorian period had at the time been "underway

now for more than a decade" the practice, has continued unabated (1). In the last three chapters of this collection, Matthew Bradley, Kristen Mahoney, and Jill Ehnenn show that there are still queer lives and texts to rediscover and re-read, and new ways to explore queer identities that have become increasingly familiar to contemporary critics of decadent literature. Identity politics, as we know, are at the heart of queer studies and have been since the late nineteenth century when the word "homosexual" became a demarcation. Whereas prior to sexological definitions sodomy had been considered "a temporary aberration," the homosexual was now a category, "a species" (Foucault 1980, 43). The criminalisation of homosexuality implicit in the Labouchère Amendment of 1885 concretised homosexual identity even as it drove it underground, and the Wilde trials of 1895 spotlighted the sexual economy—literal, metaphorical, and textual—that operated between gay men of the period.

In contrast, the lesbian has often remained hidden from public view. Terry Castle has discussed her "apparitional" status in cultural discourse and production; lesbian contributions to culture, she claims, "have been routinely suppressed or ignored, lesbian-themed works of art censored and destroyed, and would-be apologists . . . silenced and dismissed" (1993, 5). Moreover, unlike male homosexuality, in England lesbianism has been largely disregarded by the law albeit not because of the House of Lords's "indifference" but perhaps, as Castle suggests, due to its reluctance to call attention to it, fearing its proliferation (1993, 6). Martha Vicinus has also commented extensively on the "historical denial" of lesbianism. At the *fin-de-siècle*, she contends, lesbian eroticism was obscured by "the Victorian image of romantic friendships" which "lacked a conceptual framework to envision their relations as sexual ones" (Vicinus 1996, 219).[5] In her 1996 introduction to *Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Reader* she argues that faced with heteronormative assumptions that located desire in men, countered

[5] Much work has been done in the last twenty years, not least by Vicinus herself, to rediscover and reclaim the eroticism of these couplings. See for example Vicinus 2004, Newman 2005, Ehnenn 2008.

only by the asexuality offered by the romantic friendship, the early twentieth-century lesbian had little option but to embrace sexological definitions of sexual inversion and, in Butlerian terms, perform masculinity (Vicinus 1996, 219).[6] However, as Ehnenn demonstrates in Chapter 9 of our collection, in the creative and collaborative *fin-de-siècle* partnership, Michael Field, such stringent demarcations of gender did not always apply. As Ehnenn shows, in their libidinal lives they adopted positional variations as desiring subjects and the objects of their affections encompassed both men and women.

Complicating perceptions of the writers' "lesbian" sexuality, in her essay Ehnenn examines Michael Field through the critical lens of José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "disidentification". For Muñoz, both social constructivist and essentialist models of subjectivity have been "exhausted" and he argues against their efficacy believing that "neither story is complete" (5-6). It is this incompleteness that Ehnenn exploits, reading Michael Field's literary and autobiographical texts as "textual performances with queer implications" that theorise nineteenth-century representations of joint authorship, same-sex love, and cross-gender identification (p. #). Queering Michael Field's texts, yet challenging the tropes of sameness, coalescence and connubial unity that have characterised much critical analysis of their writings and private lives, she highlights the complex nature of their sexual and authorial role-playing, marking the shifts and breaks in Michael Field's collective production and noting the centrality of their affinity with Dionysian concepts of flux, change, and rebirth that they later translated into Catholic devotion.

In contrast to Michael Field who, thanks to recent scholarship,[7] are of increasing interest to critics and students alike, the figures Bradley and Mahoney discuss in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively, have not been similarly reclaimed. The comparatively forgotten figure

[6] Here, Vicinus alludes to the theory of gender performativity developed by Judith Butler. See Butler, 1990.
[7] See in particular Thain 2007 and Vadillo and Thain 2009.

Eric Stanislaus, Count Stenbock (1860-1895), who is the subject of Bradley's chapter, is often considered derivative, a poor man's Oscar Wilde or real-life version of Joris-Karl Huysmans' degenerate protagonist, Des Esseintes, in *A Rebours* (1884); one whose works aspired to, but never reached the heights attained by his admired contemporaries. "A True Story of a Vampire" (1894), perhaps his best-known story, shares an Eastern European aristocrat with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), an exertion of mesmeric power that mirrors George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), and a vampiric depletion enacted via musical aesthetics that recalls that staged in Vernon Lee's 'A Wicked Voice' (1889), but despite its engagement with many of the recognisable tropes of late-Victorian fiction, it has failed to attract significant critical interest. The common assumption is that Stenbock is a poor writer and Bradley makes no apology for his literary merits, but he asks the pertinent question: "don't bad writers have a right to perform themselves and their sexuality too?" (p. #). In doing so, he raises an important point and one that is explored in detail in his essay. According to Bradley, posterity's treatment of Stenbock and his work underlines the value systems inherent in literary decadence. Labelling Stenbock "a parody too far" in a libidinal and artistic economy that itself relied to a considerable degree on "strategies of parody and parodic subversion," Bradley shows that both the writers and, subsequently, the literary critics of decadence have made value-judgements regarding what are "acceptable and unacceptable forms of perversity and performativity" (p. #). Astutely, Bradley identifies Stenbock and his work as bathetic. Whereas parody can be "energising," he argues that bathos is "de-energising" and "corrosive to the performed perversity of decadent sexuality" (p. #). For Bradley, Stenbock has been judged a failure both as writer and decadent aesthete in least in part because he presents us with an "'unredeemed' performance of perverse identity, a failed seriousness which misses even the aim of converting itself into camp subversion" (p. #).

The subversiveness of camp is also at the core of Mahoney's essay on Baron Corvo (Frederick Rolfe, 1860-1913). In her essay Mahoney asks how it was possible, in the homosexual panic that followed the Wilde trials, for writings by Corvo featuring a sexualised power dynamic between an older Englishman and young Italian youths to appear in *The Yellow Book* between 1895 and 1896. Mahoney notes that, although risqué in content, these works, later collected in *Stories Toto Told Me* (1898) and revived and extended in *In His Own Image* (1901), were "warmly received" (p. #). Corvo's stories centre on the libidinal value of the Italian adolescent male, "Toto", whose body, reproduced in sketches and photographs, circulates desire poised precariously on the line between art and pornography. Composed of saints' lives and Italian folklore, Toto's tales reinforce the conservatism implicit in what Mahoney calls the "erotics of inequality" (p.#), and this may have in part contributed to their acceptance. But the Arcadian photography practised by Corvo in life and in the stories by Corvo's avatar "Don Friderico", points to the sexual undercurrent that runs so close to their surface. As Stefano Evangelista writes, in the late nineteenth century, the homosexual writer and critic John Addington Symonds collected similar images produced by photographic studios in Italy that "specialised in the male nude," and circulated "hundreds of photographs from them" among friends at home whose access to English versions of such pornography had been curtailed by the zealous watchfulness of the National Vigilance Association (2010, 93). By 1890 Symonds was purchasing photographs taken by Wilhelm von Gloeden who, like Don Friderico, "took pictures of young men and boys, often in classical attitudes or classical settings" (Evangelista 2010, 94). While the class difference between Don Friderico and Toto appears to reinforce Regenia Gagnier's negative assessment of Corvo as one invested in and supportive of exploitative social hierarchies (Gagnier 2000, 150), Mahoney challenges this reading. Focusing on the camp performativity of such hierarchies in the Toto stories, Mahoney contends that Corvo, who had himself experienced

periods of abject poverty, exaggerates Don Friderico's abuses of power to tacitly critique them. "Read as camp" she argues, "the stories emerge as thoughtful and playful responses to the experience of hardship, oppression, and invisibility" (p. #).

As desiring subjects, the writers discussed in these essays—Michael Field, Count Stenbock, and Baron Corvo—are consumers in Ayesha's mart, that storehouse of worldly pleasures mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, and as producers of art informed by their sexuality, contribute to the libidinal economy of the *fin de siècle*. In their literature and their lives, they demonstrate the variegated nature of late-Victorian queer sensibilities, the parameters of which are constantly in expansion.

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