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## The Book Beautiful: Aestheticism, Materiality, and Queer Books

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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THE BOOK BEAUTIFUL  
AESTHETICISM, MATERIALITY AND QUEER BOOKS

(Monograph)

By

Frederick D. King

Graduate Program Department of English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

*The Book Beautiful: Aestheticism, Materiality, and Queer Books* studies the multimedial art of decorated books of the British Aesthetic Movement (1880-1900). Incorporating textual scholarship and queer theory, the project considers how the language of sexual intercourse, as it was expressed through Aestheticism's conception of *Eros*, influenced a textual intercourse between literary content and bibliographical design. Paying particular attention to the influence of book design, typography, and illustration, the decorated book is reread as a total work of art that is realised when diverse concepts of beauty and eroticism are bound together in a single edition of a book. The result of these diverse artists collaborating on the creation of beautiful books for publishers The Bodley Head and Leonard Smithers Ltd., was a queer revision of literature as a material art form and of the book as a multimedial medium of creative expression capable of circulating a discourse of beauty and sexuality realised through the integration of literary and material creative expression. Chapter 1 places the emergence of the queer book in the history of the nineteenth century's Revival of Printing, paying particular attention to the influence of William Morris's work with the Kelmscott Press and what he called his "Ideal Book," in order to demonstrate how the collaboration of Oscar Wilde, Charles Shannon, and Charles Ricketts on *A House of Pomegranates* expresses Aesthetic ideas of beauty within the material exigencies of industrial bookmaking practices. Chapter 2 looks at John Gray's volume of poetry, *Silverpoints* as the product of a textual intercourse between the author and the book's designer, Charles Ricketts, in order to explore how the performativity of Gray's Aesthetic persona – an Aesthetic ideal momentarily realised in Gray's recitation of his work – finds a life of its own in the material book. Chapter 3 revises Linda Dowling's philological concept of the "fatal book" in order to read Oscar

Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley's bibliographical collaboration on *Salome* for The Bodley Head, as a Decadent ars erotica, a text that represents sexual dissidence as a sacred cultural discourse. Chapter 4 examines Leonard Smithers's publication of *The Savoy* as a queer periodical by revising the act of reading as a masturbatory textual intercourse between contributors practicing self-reflexive critical analysis. The project concludes with a look at the sexual politics that leads to the demise of the queer book within British Aestheticism.

## Keywords

Aestheticism; *A House of Pomegranates*; Arts and Crafts Movement; Arthur Symons; Aubrey Beardsley; The Bodley Head; Charles Ricketts; Charles Shannon; Chiswick Press; cultural materialism; cultural revision; cultural revolution; David McKitterick; Decadence; Elkin Mathews; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick; *fin de siècle*; Gérard Genette; heterosexuality; heterotextuality; homosexuality; ink; Jerome McGann; Johanna Drucker; John Gray; John Lane; Joseph Grigley; Judith Butler; the Kelmscott Press; Leonard Smithers; Michel Foucault; nineteenth-century book history; Oscar Wilde; Peter L. Shillingsburg; queer books; queer space; queer theory; reproductive futurism; Richard Altick; *Salome*; *The Savoy*; sexual discourse; sexuality; *Silverpoints*; textual intercourse; Walter Pater; William Morris; *The Yellow Book*.

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## List of Abbreviations

- AB* Ian Fletcher's *Aubrey Beardsley*
- AF* Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*
- ARCC* Western Libraries= Archives and Research Collections Centre
- BD* G. A. Cevasco's *Breviary of Decadence*
- BL* British Library
- BM* Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*
- CH* *William Morris: The Critical Heritage*
- DG* Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- EC* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*
- EN* James G. Nelson's *The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head*
- G2G* Peter L. Shillingsburg's *From Gutenberg to Google*
- IB* William Morris's "The Ideal Book"
- JG* Ian Fletcher's *The Poems of John Gray*
- HOP* Oscar Wilde's *House of Pomegranates*
- HSI* Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*
- HSII* Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*
- PD* James G. Nelson's *Publisher to the Decadents*
- PSR* Judith Butler's "Performance Acts and Gender Constitution" from *The Performance Studies Reader*
- ROW* Charles Ricketts's *Recollections of Oscar Wilde*
- RT* Peter L. Shillingsburg's *Revisiting Texts*
- T&H* Ruari McLean's *Thames and Hudson Manual of Typography*
- VP* Ruari McLean's *Victorian Book Design*

## Introduction

### What is a Queer Book?

By problematising the collaborative efforts that contribute to bookmaking practices, this project studies the impact that discourses of same-sex desire, circulating within the culture of British Aestheticism, had on the production of decorated books in the 1890s. I am specifically interested in how various art forms that concerned Aesthetes in the late-Victorian age including illustration, typography, bookbinding, and literary composition, merge when two or more conceptions of what makes a book beautiful are conjoined within a single text. This project extends Wayne Koestenbaum's interests in male collaboration and "the struggle to define male bonds along a spectrum [or] continuum that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called homosocial" (3). Koestenbaum was interested in male collaboration or "double writing as an intercourse" or "scene of analysis, in which the active collaborator hypnotizes his passive mate" (7), but his work does not directly address the historical concerns of "textual production" (9), in regards to publishing, bookmaking, authorship, and Aesthetic discourses of same-sex desire specific to the late-Victorian age. I address the bibliographical collaboration with literary writing because Aestheticism, I argue, reconceives the act of writing, not simply as a lexical process, but as a multimedial act of creation that considers and incorporates the many hands that contribute to making the book beautiful.

Intentionally, I reference Oscar Wilde's 1882 lecture, "The House Beautiful," in the title of this project, in part, because the essay takes very seriously what amounts to the useless beauty of home décor and interior design. In this lecture (which he coincidentally

delivered for the last time in my hometown of Saint John, New Brunswick on 13 October 1882 [O'Brien 395]), Wilde asks his audience "to build and decorate your houses more beautifully," not by "pillag[ing] Europe for their pleasure" in a way only the wealthy can, but with "designs of worth and beauty" available to those of modest means "at little cost" (401-402). Wilde, promoting the tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement while also privileging the aesthetic ideals of the later Aesthetes and Decadents, presented what was at the time, a thoroughly modern concept of beauty, a "lighter and more graceful style of furniture . . . suitable for our peaceful times" (409).

Wilde directly addresses the book beautiful in his study of the house beautiful, insisting that "an old library is one of the most beautifully colored things imaginable," especially since modern bookbinding in the early 1880s was "one of the greatest drawbacks to the beauty of many libraries" (414). For one of the most well-known and influential writers of the Victorian *fin de siècle*, the book's physical beauty is worth as much consideration as the text written within its covers. This idea held true, not only in his very popular and successful lecture, but also after Wilde's return to England when his contemporaries and supportive niche publishers of beautiful modern books emerged in the 1880s and 1890s as part of the Aesthetic Movement's pursuit of new sensations and moments of pleasure. This project will focus on these modern books as they emerge from an *avant garde* fascinated with the pleasure of material beauty and specifically the queer beauty of beautiful books produced by a multisensory collaboration between sexually dissident artists, writers, and critics.

I first considered the idea that books could be queer when I read an original collection of poems by John Gray, published by the Bodley Head in 1893, called

*Silverpoints*. I sat in Western Libraries Archives and Research Collection Centre (ARCC) studying this strange book with boards thicker than the total number of pages it encased. Though I could not name the pattern, the embossed design of gold latticework and willow leaves seduced me with its peculiarity. This unfamiliar book felt exotic: tall and thin with a spine, typically a means of identification, strangely left blank. In contrast, the front and back boards spoke loudly with their decorative gold lattice aesthetically tempting me to open the book. Inside the covers, there was no gold leaf, but the poetry's italicised type hailed the cover's elaborate aesthetic. The print strained my eyes and I could not understand why someone would print poems in a font that measured only 0.2mm in height. I then read the poems. I had read some of Gray's work before but I was unimpressed. Gray's poems were homoerotic and the spiritual implications of his imagery regarding late-Victorian culture were interesting; however, in terms of literary value, Gray's poetic skill did not move me the way, say, Michael Field's poems evoked a powerful sensuality with wordplay. My impression of Gray's poetry changed when I reread his work within the space of this peculiar book because it demanded my physical interaction. The poetry read like a secret that required decoding. I had to hunch myself forward into the book to see. I had to use my finger to keep my place and remain focused. The delicate beauty of each word demanded my attention and poetry suddenly became a physical activity: poetry was alive and I was touching its life on the page. I discovered a series of poems that were not only homoerotic (my original interest in reading Gray and Aesthetic poetry more broadly), but also aesthetic, performative, playful, decadent, and melancholic. What I realised was that Gray's poetry did not move me outside of the context of this book because they did not constitute a complete creative project. His

poetry was one element of a multimedial project – a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, at least in the sense of a Wagnerian total artwork, but without a central authorial vision – contingent upon and materially realised within the context of reading this strange and delightful book.

The material book, and its design, which I later discovered was the creation of Charles Ricketts, seemed as if it were somehow *a part of* the poetry. The material elements of the book were not just having a conversation with the poetry – it was more physical than that. The only metaphor that seemed appropriate for this material interaction was sexual intercourse. In effect, the book sensually responds to the poetry and, perhaps, the poetry responded back to the book. Intrigued by my response as a reader, I began to construct a dissertation project encompassing literature, book history, aestheticism, queer theory, and cultural materialism. After two years of secondary and archival research, I discovered elements of what I term “queerness” in other books.

Subsequent research supported my initial response as a reader as I learned to read books, not for the literature within, but for the interaction between literature and the material book and to see that interaction as a communicative medium for creative expression. My response to the book was not only intellectual but sensual: instead of the poetry transporting me somewhere else, it drew me into its physicality, exploring sensation and touch with a homoeroticism that scholarship often associates with the Uranian poets of the 1890s, but also through the artistic quality of the book in my hands.<sup>1</sup> The book seemed to have a desirable affect, one bound up in the complex emotional states that associated late-Victorian Aestheticism with discursive practices of same-sex desire. The book may not have a gender, or even a sexual identity, but could it be queer?



## I.1 How Can a Book Be Queer?

The term “queer” did not find common association with same-sex desire and social activity until the turn of the century. However, one need only begin to read Victorian literature to see the term’s extensive use in the nineteenth century. Queer was something peculiar, strange, unexplainable or even “unspeakable.” Elaine Showalter, for example, notes how the word “blackmail” by the 1880s, “immediately suggested homosexual liaisons” and that the word queer “entered English slang by 1900 in relation to homosexuality (112). Queer Theory later emerges out of the discourse of identity that resulted from the Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Movement, revealing sexual and gender identities as social constructs in order to challenge essentialist assumptions about behavioural norms. Queer Theorists like Judith Butler reveal normative social constructs of sex and gender as “exclusionary” tactics that define the norm by identifying the abnormal. Butler notes that “the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation” (*BM* xvii). Queer Theory seeks to bring attention to this exclusionary speech act, historicising and theorising the nature of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “an endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century” (*EC* 1).

Reclaimed and informed by a theoretical school, “queer” is not a reference to either a sex act or a sexual identity; rather, “queer,” is a discursive act of interrogating the regulation of sexual practices, a methodology defined by Sedgwick in *Tendencies* (1993)

as seeking out an “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” (8). These moments of slippage destabilise the presumed naturalness of sexual norms, allowing us to locate the queer within texts (ex. books and bodies) produced within a heteronormative culture. In this sense, queer reading becomes a material practice.

Queer reading is also a social practice and queer readings of the Victorian age turn to discourses of sexual dissidence in order to study same-sex desire and gender androgyny. Alan Sinfield sees queer reading as a process in which it “will not be sufficient to anticipate a single, coherent interpretation [of a text]; we must expect texts to reveal faultlines, and must consider the disparate reading conditions in which diverse decodings will be possible” (9). Sinfield asks the queer theorist to seek out “stories that address the unresolved issues, the ones where the conditions of plausibility are in dispute, require most assiduous and continuous reworking” in order to determine how these historical faultlines elaborate our conception of culture (4-5). Sinfield’s faultline metaphor suggests an unstable structural base within texts in which truth about sex and gender has no self-consistent answer or explanation. Unlike the homosexual “species” that is identified and labelled at the end of the nineteenth century (Foucault *HSI* 43), queer reading challenges identity constructs by reading cultural “mechanisms,” not as something to oppose politically, but as systems of identification that Michel Foucault tells us “produce knowledge, multiply discourse, induce pleasure, and generate power” (73), in order to play with the absence of the innate – to create alternative constructs that destabilise heteronormative conceptions of sexuality and gender.

In many ways, the queer returns to nineteenth-century usages of the word to

signify peculiarities in meaning formation but applied to sexual practices that heteronormative sexual discourses cannot easily explain. Aestheticism at the Victorian *fin de siècle* was certainly peculiar in its reapplication of sexual desires and practices as a means of accessing sensational experiences that would inspire creative and critical output. Decorated books that emerge from British Aestheticism in the 1890s contain an erotic discourse both in their literary content and in their material construction that provides readers with multiple, often incongruent, material expressions of difference bound by a material intercourse of their creative output within these beautiful books. This multimedial discourse, I argue, is the direct result of Aesthetic concepts of experiencing sensation (whether sexual, social, artistic), as not only a verbal act but as a physical interaction, offering an intercourse between words, images, material construction, and decorative design – a bodily expression of the senses. The books that result from this *textual intercourse* can be seen then as an extension of the myth of Uranus and the birth of Aphrodite – a collaborative creation available outside of human reproduction – produces what I call queer books.

The myth of Uranus is the story that Diotima relates to Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. Diotima explains that, for some men, instead of creating children with women, “the creative desire is of the soul,” so, instead of taking “physical . . . recourse to women [they] long to beget spiritually” so that the philosopher, poet, and artisan births a “progeny” of “wisdom,” “virtue,” “moderation and justice” (90). This progeny of course is the result of the violent severing of Uranus's penis from his body mixing with the ocean to birth Venus. While the product of male creative force, it is also a bloody pagan ritual of violence and sex. The beauty that emerges from this violent, sexual act is not a

beauty of harmony and proportion, but a sensual beauty of appetite and accident. As Koestenbaum points out, the homoerotic collaboration between men constructing texts is reminiscent of birth and sexual reproduction (3); however, I argue that, unlike a child, the queer book is a perverse inversion of reproduction. Because it is the creation of multiple male hands, because as a product it is decidedly unproductive as an object created, sold, and purchased, based largely on its material beauty, and because it parodies the heteronormative with, what Dennis Denisoff calls the “sexually coded discourse” of “semiotic ambiguities” (9) that transforms the book into the realization of British Aestheticism’s most provocative and dissident conceptions of sexuality.

This study of decorated books created by Aesthetes of the 1890s began to unfold as a study of the book as a body born of Aesthetic poets, prose writers, and dramatists, together with the work of designers and illustrators like Charles Ricketts and Aubrey Beardsley. Reading beautifully decorated books of Aesthetic literature and art through materialist queer theory and textual studies scholarship by authors such as Judith Butler, Johanna Drucker, Joseph Grigley, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Peter L. Shillingsburg, allowed me to consider new ways of reading books as collaborative constructions or architectural spaces in the manner that Wilde describes in his “House Beautiful” lecture. Commonalities among these queer books include: the study and expression of artificial beauty; an interest in *Eros* – especially its male-to-male eroticism; and artistic expression as a conversation between mediums performing a *textual intercourse*, a term I borrow from Early Modernist scholar Jeffrey Masten who defines it as the “intersection of the sexual and the textual” (5).<sup>2</sup>

The physical sensations of reading with its visual and tactile influences were

particularly important for works of the Aesthetic Movement. British Aestheticism, beginning with the work of Walter Pater, reconsidered how art could be understood as a cultural experience through individual perceptions instead of being defined by the artist's intention or the work alone. Art was understood as a critical experience – of going to a museum or opening a book – that allowed Aesthetes to feel and express their response to the sensations that art stimulated. Sensation and perspective redefined art for the Aesthetes so that beauty, at least according to Pater, was relative (xxix). Aestheticism placed abstract philosophical theory about art in discursive contact with the physical experience of sharing space with art - reading, observing, reacting, and even touching art's beauty. Pater advocates for a definition of beauty "in the most concrete terms possible" in order to find "the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it" (xxix). In other words, the art critic and the creative artist are readers, and as such, they must recognize their influence on the art object and specify their unique experience of sensation in response to that work of art. Instead of focussing on sexual intercourse, the Aesthete "regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind" (xxx). Such relations between art and art critic privilege a textual intercourse between the critic and the work of art whereby the object of beauty stimulates all of the Aesthete's senses (sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch). To that end, a work of literature must be read, not as an abstract concept disseminated through the medium of the book, but as a physical or bodily experience, disseminated by the many hands that contribute to the creation of the edition that stimulates as many senses as possible for both its creators and for the reader.

What follows is a study of how the material book of the 1890s emerged as a site where aestheticism, decadence, sexual dissidence, and the revival of printing intersected, creating multimedial literary experiences in the form of beautiful, queer books. The critical reading I provide is, in part, a response to the sensations stimulated by the queer book, undertaken in the tradition of Walter Pater's conception of Aestheticism. I read a selection of queer books: Oscar Wilde's collection of fairy tales designed and illustrated by Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, *A House of Pomegranates* (1891); John Gray's collection of poems designed by Ricketts, *Silverpoints* (1893); Wilde's collaboration with artist Aubrey Beardsley on the book for his play *Salome* (1894); and, Leonard Smithers's collaboration with Beardsley and Arthur Symons on the periodical *The Savoy* (1896). Through the lenses of queer theory, textual studies, and book history, I will study how a group of beautifully decorated books challenged literary practices through the conjoining of multiple mediums based on the sexual discourse of *Eros* in British Aestheticism.

## 1.2 Aestheticism's Queer Revision of Greek *Eros*

The 1890s was a period of experimentation in British arts when discourses of sexual dissidence, gender inversion, and homosexuality came to the fore both before and after the Oscar Wilde trials of 1895, and a time when *avant-garde* culture began to read gender roles as social constructions instead of biological characteristics or essentialist norms. Artists, writers, and critics who sexualized "the male body as an object of aesthetic delight" distorted the "manly" ideal of Victorian culture, influenced by Charles Kingsley's trope of the "muscular Christian" (Adams 150, 153). These writers and artists found unique opportunities in an expanding publishing industry to contribute to the

creation of books with characteristics of sexual dissidence and inversion. These queer books reflect the disruptive discursive practice of Aestheticism's *Eros* via a material discourse of bibliographical dissidence and inversion.

Aestheticism, of course, is not a sexual discourse in the same sense that we would read sexology or legal discourses of sodomy. Aestheticism is largely concerned with art and art criticism. Emerging from a variety of influences including the Pre-Raphaelite Movement; University-level studies of Classical philosophy, history, and myth (especially the Hellenic Greeks); scholarly studies of the European Renaissance by leading Aesthetes Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, and Oscar Wilde; and, an emerging *avant garde* that favoured the Renaissance over practices of Victorian Medievalism in the Arts and Crafts Movement.

This merging of schools of thought found its first British expression in Pater's essays that were compiled for *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) which was a call to awaken all the senses to the impact that art has on our bodies and our minds. To awaken a multitude of senses simultaneously, meant a more pleasurable experience, and art that could achieve the effect on the observant Aesthete was held in the highest regards. Music, in particular, was idealised because of how it merges form with content in a manner that will not allow the listener to separate the two (88).

This philosophy of Aestheticism is seemingly sexless; however, criticism by Richard Dellamora, James Eli Adams, and Stephano Evangelista has established the link between sexual discourse and Aestheticism's concept of Neo-Platonism. Dellamora's *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (1990) was "a first attempt at a synthetic study of desire between men as it figures in sexual-aesthetic

discourses in England during the nineteenth century” (1). Dellamora studies literary expressions of desire between men in Victorian literature from Tennyson to the dissident figures of the *fin de siècle*, paying particular attention to the language of same-sex desire unique to Victorian aesthetic culture in order to show how the sexual scandals of the 1890s led to an “antithetical categorization” by sexology that privileged heteronormative sexual practices and “labell[ed] as perverse” any deviations (216). Adams’ book *Dandies, and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (1995) complicated this discourse by problematising the binary differentiation of masculine versus effeminate behaviour, pointing out the changing conception of what it was to be normal – in regards to sex and gender – at different periods of the nineteenth century. Most importantly, both Dellamora and Adams complicate the cultural concerns regarding Aestheticism, not simply as a concern for male-to-male sexual behaviour, but as a concern regarding gender performance and what Adams calls the “spectacle” of masculinity in Victorian England (11-12).

More recently, Stephano Evangelista’s *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (2009) demonstrates how same-sex desire was conceived and privileged within Aestheticism’s discourse of sensation. Evangelista notes that Oscar Wilde, in his more Decadent interpretation of Pater’s Aesthetics, understood *Eros* “in distinctly homoerotic terms” and found that the Platonic ideal was “fundamentally akin to the aesthesis [practice of consciously experiencing sensations] promoted by Pater” and other aesthetes of the *fin de siècle* (151). A culture of beauty that privileges the male body as an ideal form emerges from Pater’s epistemological concept that “knowledge is dependent on physical sensation, specifically on the sensation of



pleasure” (Evangelista 151). Wilde, and the other aesthetes my project examines, try “to claim a space for the Platonic idea of *Eros* within the aesthetic life, pushing to its limits aestheticism’s use of ancient Greek material in its experiments with modern sexual identities” (151). Aestheticism’s perception of sexuality is based on a materialist reading of classicism and the Western world’s intellectual heritage as the multisensory response of the human body to contact with beauty. All sensations and desires become available for the critic’s reflective analysis.

Evangelista’s work makes Walter Pater a central focus for the study of sexuality and Aesthetics in the 1890s. Pater famously took the concept of the Renaissance outside of periodisation, changing it into an ongoing aesthetic conversation, rejecting the tenets of medievalism touted by Morris. Pater changed how the critic perceives art and its place in culture. Because of his work, there was no overriding era, epoch, or universal truth to be experienced when looking at Leonardo Da Vinci’s “La Gioconda;” rather, this and other beautiful works of art were important because they evoke the critic’s aesthetic passion and reveal how artists that could “penetrat[e] into the most secret parts of nature preferred always the more to the less remote [or] things of a peculiar atmosphere and mixed lights” (70), suggesting a “curiosity” for the unfamiliar, “exotic” or even queer, forms of beauty over more familiar or traditional tropes (70). That passion came from a scholarly understanding of the history of art, but also from the individual’s unique experiences of culture. Through a combination of appreciation and experiential limits imposed by time and personal experience, Pater could share his ekphrastic analysis of his sensual response. Pater read the past, and his audience heard his reading through the filter of their own individual perceptions of the world. The critical reader will interpret his

words, just as Pater interprets his readings of the past through the limits of his own experience as both an Oxford-trained scholar and as someone who personally understood same-sex desire. For Pater, these limits of, and possibilities to experience new sensations became possibilities for creation.

Evangelista notes that with “dialogues like the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato argues that the love of boys is not only compatible with, but desirable for philosophical activity” (150). Citing Linda Dowling, Evangelista claims that “a revisionist reading of the *Symposium* [. . .] enabled Wilde, alongside Pater and the Uranian poets among others, to formulate a counter-discourse for the ethical justification of male homosexuality in modern culture” (150-51). Evangelista is referring to the epistemological conception of knowledge dependent on the physical sensation of pleasure (151). Sex is a physical sensation that can evoke, inspire, and create beauty. Aestheticism recognised that the critic’s understanding of beauty was dependent on knowledge gained from an intellectual education and physical sensation.

Significant to Pater’s theory of Aestheticism is that “fervent friendships” such as those shared between Johannes Joachim Winckelmann and “many young men more beautiful than Guido’s archangel” inform and enrich creative expression (123). For Pater, the focus is on “the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects” (xxx). The homoerotic is made sensual and the orgasmic response is poured into the critic’s own work: his writing, his art, his own work of beauty. John Addington Symonds, in “A Problem in Greek Ethics” (1897), notes a differentiation between “two separate forms of masculine passion” in Hellenic culture – “a noble and a base, a spiritual and a sensual” (233). Symonds suggests that while base sexual desire was certainly fulfilled between men, they also

idealised the nobler form. This was not to say that noble bonds between men seeking spiritual connection and fulfilment did not include sexual intercourse. Rather, their sexual intercourse was part of a larger discourse between their bodies and their minds. Aestheticism took the energy of sexuality—the orgasm, the desire, and the self-restraint—and re-purposed those expressions into works of art such as the work put into the decorated books of the period. This work adapted what Foucault calls the “art of making use of pleasure” to the individual’s personal needs and desires (*HSII* 59).

The book becomes the medium of exchange for Aestheticism’s emphasis on sensation exchanging perceptions of beauty and knowledge for the hitherto uninitiated. Readers could not all touch the ancient remnants of Greece or Renaissance Italy, but Pater, as a critic who had visited these great works, could bring his knowledge to others. His books become experiential substitutes, portals that brought his readings of the past into the nineteenth-century present, allowing readers to experience Hellenism and *Eros*, a revised past, in the present moment. For example, Evangelista reads Pater’s discussion of the “moral sexlessness” of the male nude’s beauty (Pater 142) as an insincere performance and interprets Pater’s portrayal of Winckelmann as one who has lived “an intensely erotic life, practising his theory that the fulfilment of homoerotic desire is integral to the process of understanding ancient art” (33). Queer sexual desire is accessible within Pater’s sexless text because his vague references to homoeroticism were advantageous for his contemporaries and acolytes. Art evokes pleasurable sensation, producing a knowledge base only knowable through physical touch. Through desire for touch, for sensation, Pater makes love between men erotic, suggesting that *Eros* can change same-sex desire, from a vulgar physical act like sodomy, into a philosophical position—or, as a sexual discourse fully integrated with an aesthetic position on the intellectual pursuit of beauty. Such transference is noticeable, I

argue, in Aestheticism's contribution to the decorated book in the 1890s. It is not so much that these books were the embodiment of homosexuality; instead, they were the embodiment of *Eros*, with the capacity to "unite human beings no matter what their sex happened to be" (Foucault *HSII* 202). This is not to say that differences are resolved into a collective harmony; rather, differences are presented together in the same space and through their contrasts and diversities, they offer the sensation of sexuality as a discursive experience, within the textual body; or, in the case of my study, a book.

Pater's conception of the critic's subjectivity or perspective was appealing in a movement that encouraged the idea of the new chivalry (same-sex desire) as tied to the concept of aesthetic criticism. The new chivalry, bolstered by writer and Editor Charles Kains-Jackson, was a means of conceiving creative output as the result of a union between physical male beauty and aesthetic wisdom.<sup>3</sup> Using Achilles and Patroclus as models for an emerging genre of chivalric writings by aesthetes and activists, men like Edward Carpenter and George Merrill, Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, designers Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, and even close heterosexual friends Leonard Smithers and Aubrey Beardsley, fashioned their own relationships as platonic love or heroic comradeships. Sex was not a biological abnormality or a criminal vice, but an element of Aestheticism's beautiful perception of the material world. Until Aestheticism revised Hellenism for a nineteenth-century discourse of sexuality, Victorians lacked a language for communicating same-sex desire without turning to the cold pathologies of sexology or crude colloquialisms for anal sex. *Eros* became the defining term for the Aesthetic presentation of sexuality.

*Eros*, according to Foucault, can only be experienced when the beloved reciprocates the lover's desires because it was a "dialectic of love" (*HSII* 241) that united lovers of any sex (202). Like the queer book, there is a mutual intercourse where both the object (the text

or beautiful youth) and the reading subject (the book designer or lover) have their desires reciprocated so that dialectics of desire form between mutually desiring subjects. Unlike marriage, such a contract in Greek culture “did not [necessarily] depend on the existence of an erotic relation in order to constitute itself and define its rules” (Foucault *HSII* 202). According to Foucault contracts between older men and male youths were “a relation to truth” – a truth found within the unique and subjective experience of a shared intimate love where a “master of truth [the more experienced male lover] teaches the boy the meaning of wisdom” (239, 243).

*Eros* was dependent upon materiality, an object to stimulate one’s senses. At the same time, the physical connection of sexual desire and pleasure was a means to a greater end. As Symonds notes, such “love, like poetry and prophecy, is a divine gift, which diverts men from the common current of their lives; but in the right use of this gift lies the secret of all human excellence” (276). The book was an opportunity to join words with the beauty of design, the construction of paper, bindings and ink, so that literary and artistic masters could conceivably indoctrinate the inexperienced reader through physical sensations of sight and touch. Discursive *Eros* (in the era of the Labouchere Amendment) displaced Aestheticism’s erotics or erotic contents through mediating vehicles such as books where explicit narratives of sex between men and other practices could not be legally printed.

### 1.3 A Queer Theory of Textual Intercourse

The discourse of sexual desire and pleasure found in Aestheticism directly informs the unique textual intercourse that, I argue, can be found in the queer book. In order to understand the queer book as the creation of a textual intercourse between multiple mediums, it is important to consider scholarly work in textual studies in the twenty-first century.

Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux and Neil Fraistat note that this “field is far-flung,” and “its most compelling energies are directed toward reimagining the methods, objects, and goals of textual scholarship” (5). Textual studies encompasses traditional bibliography, the history of print culture and the codex book, as well as the influence of poststructural theories regarding sign systems and meaning generation (5-6). D. F. MacKenzie and Jerome McGann are rightfully credited for bringing together the disparate elements of textual study into an interdisciplinary theoretical context that re-conceives the “idea of text as words printed on a page” (5). Today, the field continually grows, re-dividing and merging three main concepts of the text (that is, bibliography, book history, and analysis of material sign systems) in new ways. Textual studies is the product of poststructuralist analysis of social constructs, considering divergent ideas of the “text” – literary and material – and their ability to inform and change one another within the book’s material *body*.

Queer theory allows me to apply those innovations to the book because it offers a language for playing with the unintentional, the accidental, the unspoken, and the unexplained parts of the book’s communicative body. The meaning derived from the book’s multimedial language is not necessarily the meaning intended by the author or any other collaborator contributing to the book’s creation. Judith Butler, in *Bodies that Matter* (1994), criticizes cultural norms of sex and gender as “a regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality” that controls sexual conventions through discourse (xxi). Butler writes:

The effects of performatives, understood as discursive productions, do not conclude at the terminus of a given statement or utterance, the passing of legislation, the announcement of a birth. The reach of their signifiability cannot be controlled by the one who utters or writes, since the one who utters them does not own such productions. They continue to signify in spite of their authors, and sometimes against

their authors' most precious intentions. (185)

The human body signifies within the realm of the social regardless of our intentions. No one controls his or her performativity because concepts of innate sexual identity are constructed and imposed on the body based on initial genital identifications assigned at birth. Like the body, a book, I argue, is another material body with expectations imposed upon it as a commercial media and medium of circulation within commodity culture since the nineteenth century. Victorian readers expected their focus to be on the printed page, assuming that the art of the book is found in its literary content – a poem, essay, novel, or play. The queer book offered a deviant body that threatened the perceived foundations of the book. We can read queer books via Butler who notes “regulatory schemas [for example, assumed gender or bibliographical norms] are not timeless structures, but historically revisable criteria of intelligibility which produce and vanquish bodies that matter” (Butler *BM* xxii). Queer bodies, including queer books, reflexively trouble cultural norms of the literary marketplace by communicating a playful awareness of its socially constructed limits within the institutionalised power structures of the Victorian *fin de siècle*.

The performative body of the book is not necessarily the focus of all textual theory, specifically editorial theory such as the growing field of Genetic Criticism with its focus on changes made in various manuscripts and published editions.<sup>4</sup> As a form of editorial theory, Genetic Criticism assumes a meaning derived from authorial intention and deviations from those intentions found in the editing process, errata, and published editions. My work is better served by textual scholars who focus on particular editions as creative works of art. For instance, Sukanta Chaudhuri addresses the merging of differing purposes in the study of books. Chaudhuri's work supports the importance of the edition as a unique artistic expression, not of the author's intended text, but as an art object that circulates within print

culture and literary history. She notes how “[b]ibliography and textual study” traditionally limit their analysis to “the ‘material metaphors’ of utterance,” or “the physical embodiment of a text” (22) and criticises editorial theory’s resistance to finding meaning in specific editions in order to focus on literary meaning “latent in the text from the moment of conception” (22). This idea of studying the utterance of a particular edition is important because instead of studying “the text” – that is, editorial and genetic criticism’s conception of changing lexical content tracked through its creation and editorial history – I will examine a single edition, or iteration within the material context of the book in order to understand the traits it inherits from its various contributors, but also to determine the unique creation that emerges from the material object.

Textual scholar Gérard Genette provides a language for the study of the book in *Paratexts* (1987, English Trans. 1997), his study of the material impact of publishing on textual and literary meaning. Genette breaks down the elements of the book as follows: *epitextual* elements such as advertising, word of mouth, published reviews; *paratextual* elements, or organizational elements such as the table of contents, pagination, titles and subtitles; *iconotextual* elements such as illustration and binding design; and *peritextual* elements such as typography, quality of paper, and binding materials (1-13). His works allows us to consider that the Victorian reader did not simply absorb the author’s language but also the non-verbal languages or codes present in the material book and in the literary marketplace. By reading the book in this post-structural fashion – decentring the socially constructed supremacy of the literary author as the book’s centre of meaning – it is possible to study the impact of the book in the late-nineteenth century as a textual language that consisted of, in a material sense, *a complex interaction of hands* competing and influencing the reader to experience literature materially.



In order to consider the material elements of the book as communicating with literary content, I am extending Genette's focus on the material conditions of reading by integrating his focus on "the linguistic status of the text" (7) to iconotextual, epitextual, and peritextual elements of the book. Genette examines *paratextuality*—the written material within and surrounding the book being studied. Paratext refers to the layers of discourse in a book and the complex process by which "the meaning of [the paratext's] object depends on the object of its meaning which is yet another meaning"(410). In other words, there are thresholds of meaning in book production that reach beyond authorial intention; presentation, advertising, and the reader all generate significations that any analysis of the book must take into account. These thresholds exist at the level of titles, subtitles, prefatory material, and endnotes. Genette reveals that textual influence is far deeper than typography and illustration. In fact, the book's meaning is dependent on the sorts of choices made by typesetters and papermakers. The art of the book, despite its commodity status, creates meaning that, like it or not, affects our reading of books. With queer books, the textual elements are reflexively present, demanding the reader consider bibliographical expressions as an element of the book's literary body. Genette concedes that "paratextual value" can also exist in the "iconic" elements of illustration, and in "material" elements, such as typography, though his own focus is on language and other non-iconic elements (7), a concession that provides him the opportunity to apply his ideas to the consideration of the material and iconic elements that he chose not to address.

Genette's work does not directly address elements such as iconotext and peritextual elements such as typography that come into play in this project; therefore, I turn to Peter L. Shillingsburg's work in *Revising Texts* (1997) and *From Google to Gutenberg: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (2006) for a differentiation between lexical and

bibliographical codes. Throughout this project, I will assess literary meaning in conjunction with textual deviation and the creative influence of the queer book's "bibliographic codes" (i.e. design features [constituting Genette's epitextual, peritextual, and iconotextual elements more broadly])" in order to see how they change our reading of the book's more traditionally analysed "lexical codes" (i.e. "letters, accents, and punctuation") (Shillingsburg *G2G* 16).

The multiple hands, i.e. contributors, to the book as Aesthetic object provide an opportunity for textual scholars to fulfil Shillingsburg's call for textual studies to go beyond the archival and editorial functions of bibliography and to "focus more attention on presenting the interpretive consequences of their textual studies in literary critical essays and books" (*G2G* 7). Shillingsburg wants textual scholars to theorise the material book's "performance field" – that is, "where the performance text" or literary content "is 'played' according to the rules of the reader's particular game of textual interaction and further limited by the performer's capabilities and resources" (*RT* 84). Like Butler's concept of performativity, Shillingsburg shows an awareness of the limits imposed by the social contract that defines the body of the book. The author cannot control how that body signifies because he or she cannot control how the reader, publisher, or book designer, reads the body of the book. The author's intentions are defined by the rules of textual interaction as well as design choices and publishing budgets that sometimes "signify . . . sometimes against their author's most precious intentions" (Butler *BM* 185). Focussing on the material and its effect on lexical analysis, Shillingsburg's work is probably the best take on textual studies as a space for literary analysis. Such an analysis allows me to look past the conventional boundaries between the visual and the verbal. These books are queer, not simply because they confound conventions of heteronormative sexual discourse but because they offer dissident perspectives on sex by troubling or disrupting the reader's cultural assumptions of what a

book is supposed to *be* in regards to genre, texts, or even as a specific discursive sexual practice.

Jerome McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991) expands our understanding of the material book of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through his research on the "complex (and open-minded) histories of textual change and variance" within critical editions and reprints of classic literature (9). McGann's book theorizes the contributions of material elements in the production of textual meaning. He claims that "[l]iterary works do not know themselves, and cannot *be* known, apart from their specific material modes of existence/resistance [because] they are particular forms of transmissive interaction" (11). McGann reinforces Genette's claims that the material text physically influences literary meaning, whether it is a typo, typographical choices or limits, or editorial decisions regarding which authorial edit to accept or reject. McGann examines editing as "an act of interpretation" (27), looking at the editorial history of works such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The House of Life* through its various printings between 1869 and 1904. Such interpretive collaboration "involves many people," and was a process that, while "always collective," was "not always consciously or wilfully cooperative" (60). This was a vital consideration for most decorated books of the nineteenth century (as it is today) where publishers, and not authors, typically chose the book's designer. McGann's work makes room for a transmissive interaction that constructs themes of sexual difference through the merging of different artistic visions of sexual desire within one edition. Regardless of authorial intention, illustrations, the means of distribution, and the design of the book all factor into meaning formation for the reader. McGann questions the existence of an original, or *ur-text*, through his complex exploration of the textual elements that trouble our awareness of an original book. I would suggest that McGann's claim means literary content is not the single defining

feature of the reading experience. By decentring lexical content, I will explore how the process of material production generates meaning through an intercourse between the lexical and the bibliographical elements of the book.

Take for example *A House of Pomegranates* (a book explored in further detail in Chapter 1). Three of the four stories that make up the 1891 *édition de luxe* already appeared separately in the periodical press. Is the edition of my study a less relevant iteration of the stories than their original publications? What does this collection of disparate works say about the one original text published for this edition? The experience of the 1891 edition also features distinct interruptions of Wilde's authoritative vision by the mediums of visual art and typesetting. Have Ricketts and Shannon somehow failed as book designers by imposing meaning or interpretation onto Wilde's work? I would resist this reading and turn instead to McGann's claims regarding the role of illustration and bindings as part of literature's material mode of existence. The 1891 edition of *Pomegranates* exists and holds a meaning different from the previously published periodical stories and from the critical or children's reprint editions available today. Queer books as editions represent unique textual and cultural experiences. Differences go beyond a study of the paratextual and iconotextual elements, suggesting that the edition could be read as a textual installation where literature forms part of a multisensory discourse of Aestheticism between literature, materiality, and temporal location.

Cultural and material context is a central theme for Joseph Grigley in *Textualterity: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (1995), a study of visual art through the lens of literary criticism and bibliography. Grigley's work demonstrates a fascination with difference, not as a problem to solve, but as an experience that imbues text with meaning. His "book is about the transmission of cultural texts" and how artworks "undergo change as part of the process

of being disseminated in culture. Variation, drift, [and] rupture” are elements, Grigley argues, that “alert us to the fact that the dynamic aspects of culture are not merely temporal but consist of different kinds of temporality” (1). Reading visual art textually through the theoretical lenses of eugenics and artificial selection, Grigley defines “textuality” as an examination of how our perception of a piece of art undergoes “continuous and discontinuous transience as it ages, is altered by editors and conservators, and is resituated or re-territorialised in different publications and exhibition spaces” (1). Grigley points out the mutability of literature that is found in the study of collaboratively published decorated books through his focus on how changes in space and time destabilize the concept of an original and multiply the number of authors of an art installation. “Textuality” comes closest to my concept of the queer book in regards to a current theory of the object of art defined by both its content and its context.

In order to return Grigley’s concept of the art installation to my study of the book edition, an important work to consider is Johanna Drucker’s *The Visible Word* (1994). Drucker’s study of *avant-garde* typography as a material element of written language in early-twentieth-century Modernism is an innovative approach to literature because it considers how artists can manipulate the book’s materiality to communicate a message where words are insufficient. Drucker is specifically interested in typographical expression because she believes that “visuality in poetic form” can have a significant impact on poetic meaning (4). The physical presentation and circulation of a text informs and changes it:

The force of stone, of ink, of papyrus, and of print all function within the signifying activity—not only because of their encoding in a cultural system of values whereby a stone inscription is accorded a higher stature than a typewritten memo, but because these values themselves come into being on account of the physical, material

properties of these different media. Durability, scale, reflectiveness, richness and density of saturation and colour, tactile and visual pleasure—all of these factor in—not as transcendent and historically independent universals, but as aspects whose historical and cultural specificity cannot be divorced from their substantial properties.

(45)

The book's materiality cannot help but inform how we read a book and it is important to understand how these elements interact with literary content because by removing the lexical from its bibliographical context, the reader's interpretations of meaning can be altered. Drucker's approach to the materiality of literature is strikingly similar to my own; however, we also differ in important respects. Her book studies the singular vision of the Modernist artists of the twentieth century and continental artists of France. She is specifically interested in writers such as Filippo Tomasso Marinetti and Guillaume Apollinaire, who were consciously experimenting with typography and had control over how publishers printed their books. I am more interested in the unintentional generation of meaning or intentional typographic and illustrative experiments that resisted authorial intention. The accidents and alterations created textual communities of queer sex as a discursive practice and proposed collaboration as producing disunity as a creative statement.

There is also something specific to decorated books of late-Victorian-British Aestheticism. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's book, *The Artist as Critic* (1995), is a comprehensive study of illustration in late-Victorian publishing practices and serves as an important reading of illustrated books of the late-Victorian period through the medium of gender and sexual discourse. While she includes the making of *belle lettres* and Beardsley's illustrations for *Salome* in her study, Kooistra takes a broader look at illustration's relationship to literature as forming a book that embodies "bitextuality." The illustrator

becomes an interpretative reader of the text, effecting a dialogic that blends visual (illustration) and verbal (language) features of the text into a dialogue “in which various forms of power, knowledge and desire are enacted and disseminated” within the boundaries of the book’s covers (5). This bitextual dialogue occurs in various forms across the spectrum of Victorian illustrated books. Recognizing the implications of bisexuality, she addresses the danger of universalizing her concept and suggests that “the two texts of illustrated books function rhetorically as two sexes;” as a result, “the hermaphroditic condition of having two sexes in one person, and the erotic condition of being attracted to both sexes” exist simultaneously (11). Each textual element has a separate existence, influencing my reading of the interdependent hands of various collaborators. Kooistra’s reading of the illustrated book is theorized around a female-male binary, problematising essentialist and oppositional perceptions of gender and sexuality. Differences work together, not in harmony, but in conflicting and various ways. Kooistra does not establish a new norm but a means of reading the illustrated book as a collaborative creation born of the artists’ diverse desires.

The sexual relationship for Kooistra emerges from the reader’s desire to read and explore both the text and the illustration. What is important is that literary content does not dominate the reader’s desire for meaning so that, like the difference between male and female, the difference between literature and illustration is not dependent on one sex or element dominating the other. Kooistra’s work provides a means of sexualising the book’s material expressions. Her ideas are of particular interest in the study of Beardsley as an illustrator of Wilde’s *Salome*. The text becomes an intercourse between two elements of the book: illustration and literature. I take this division of the book’s material elements further, keeping in mind the ideas of Grigley and Drucker in order to consider the elements of the book beyond the binary oppositions of gendered materiality that Kooistra deftly complicates.

Nicholas Frankel also studies the designer and the author as a collaborative joining of text and design. In Frankel's own words, his book *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books* (2000) implies a theory of reading focussed not on the figure of the author, still less on the search for textual meanings that the author might have sanctioned, but concentrate[s] instead on the graphic embodiment or visual semiosis of the text as it appears before our eyes (which in the modern era, as Genette implies, amounts almost always to a semiotics of the printed book). (5)

Resisting any "biographical imperative" in reading Wilde's work (6), Frankel grounds his approach in the theories of Jean Baudrillard and sees Wilde's books as "scenes of production, collaboration, and inevitable compromise, where message tends to a merger with medium" (6-7). He emphasizes the text as "a collaborative endeavour, contingent on the material circumstances of its production" (9), directing his textual criticism towards the reader's perspective of the book as a whole work of art. Frankel's focus on Wilde allows him to examine closely the unique qualities of the beautifully decorated books of Aestheticism released in the early 1890s.

While my study of queer books decentres the writer that Frankel privileges, I am interested in his reading of decoration as a "material performance of language" which "lends Wilde's writings its appearance of narcissism, artifice, or obsession with its own 'written' condition" (10). In his chapter on Ricketts and Wilde's *The Sphinx*, Frankel asserts, "the sphinx itself is merely the catalyst or spark that ignites the speaker's excessive imagination" so that the reader's focus is drawn to "the dreamlike effects produced 'in' the poem's speaker" (166). For Wilde "how the poem looked or sounded was everything" (171) and Frankel criticises non-decorated editions of the poem outside of the context of Ricketts's work, leaving *The Sphinx* "artificially divorced from its 'decorations'" (173). Wilde edited



with the design in mind and his literary work is informed, even changed by his collaboration with Ricketts on the material publication. In sexual terms, Wilde can be read, at least in this instance, as a considerate lover in the discursive practices of textual intercourse. The book is queer because textuality shapes, changes, and develops literary meaning, not just for Wilde as poet, but for the reader experiencing the dreamlike symbolism of the material book.

Frankel concludes by reiterating that his concern is “with the book as a visual device for a textual performance” that makes demands “on the eye as much as the mind” (177). Performativity and the material body are important considerations for contemporary queer theory where sexual identity is socially constructed. While modern conceptions of sexuality are not necessarily relevant to sexuality in the 1890s, one certainly informs the other in a complex and problematic relationship. Frankel leaves me at a place where textuality is a material and literary collaboration that mimics the multisensory experience of sexual intercourse between two or more people. The textual intercourse that realises a queer book has a direct impact on lexical content and in some cases, as Frankel demonstrates with Ricketts’s design influencing how and what Wilde wrote for *The Sphinx*, bibliographical coding can be as much of a determinant of the end product. How these elements merge, how the collaborators penetrate each other, is only realised when the book is printed and distributed.

## **I.4 Queer Books in Summation and the Project’s Organisation**

The textual intercourse that constructs the queer book emerges as a consequence of sexual dissidence and the Aesthetes who privileged the beauty of the material book. A heterogeneous collection of artists found that the beauty of the material book, informed by discourses of queer sexual desires and pleasures, enhances, and can even change the

increasingly mass cultural experience of reading. The larger commodity market for books created by what Richard Altick refers to as “the mass reading audience” (3) allowed additional space for smaller markets of niche collectors for rare and beautiful *belle lettres*. The speciality bookshop, with its expensive antique books and collectable *belle lettres*, did not stand in opposition to the mass-produced books and magazines of industrial production; on the contrary, the Aesthetic book was the result *of* that industry: they are interconnected. Queer books, like other decorated books, are designed to look beautiful, but also as peculiar, and different from other books on the shelf. Aestheticism gives the book a queer material identity through designs that indicated to both consumers and other people who see the consumer with the book, that the intended reader was part of a specific cultural movement, a subculture of Aesthetes whose discourse of beauty and art criticism are informed by a study of the sensual and by a language of Eros. Like the Aesthete, Queer books had no uniform size, shape, colour, design, or print; each edition offers an opportunity to create new aesthetic sensations by materially referencing sexual dissent through varying forms of textual dissent.

“What is a Queer Book?” has explored how British Aestheticism’s discursive sexual practices inform and define the subversive textual practices of the queer book. I have outlined theories of sexuality and textuality, showing how both queer theory and Aestheticism can influence the theoretical work of textual studies in the mode of important scholars such as Joseph Grigley, Johanna Drucker, and Peter L. Shillingsburg. Intersecting queer concepts of the body with bibliographical theorisations of the book, the queer book emerges as a collaboratively defined body – a communicative, multisensory edition-as-installation piece where conflicting concepts of beauty, sensuality, and sexuality inform a textual intercourse between the bibliographical and lexical codes of the book that queers our understanding of what books can and could be.

Chapter 1, “The Kelmscott Press and the Foundations of the Queer Book,” examines the history of the decorated book in nineteenth-century Britain through the Revival of Printing and the central role of William Morris’s commitment to artisan bookmaking at the Kelmscott Press. I study Kelmscott books for their opposition to the mass-produced cheap books of the day via a decorative return to medieval printing traditions. I will argue that the Kelmscott Book, an innovative and important step in the Revival of Printing, changed industrial printing through Morris’s study of hand-made bookmaking. Morris’s commitment to realising his ideal book inspires the development of queer books. Using the example of Oscar Wilde’s *A House of Pomegranates* as designed by Charles Ricketts and with illustrative contributions of his lover, fellow-artist Charles Shannon. I will explore how *Pomegranates*’ flawed design and cobbled together presentation is the result of an intercourse between both the form and content of the book, as well as between the rules laid out by Morris for his “Ideal Book” and the cost-saving measures associated with industrial printing and design.

Chapter 2, “*Silverpoints*: Textual Intercourse and the Aesthete Poet” looks at typography and book design as media of textual poetics for intercourse with poetry. I will examine John Gray’s *Silverpoints*, using the analogy of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), in order to consider how Gray’s Aesthetic persona is transformed into a performative subversion of the iconic Aesthete poet – a symbolic persona only fully realised and immortalised in the queer book. Where the process of becoming a symbol was ultimately destructive for John (and Dorian) Gray, I will study how the textual intercourse of the queer book can become the Aesthetic symbol that no individual could sustain.

Chapter 3, “*Salome*: Queer Book as a Decadent *Ars Erotica*” focuses on Wilde and Beardsley’s conflicting conceptions of the figure of Salomé as they converge in the book for

*Salome*. Their competing visions result in a book of sacred sexual dissent – a queer book that reflects a multitude of sexual experiences at one, realising a cultural statement of sexual dissidence through an intercourse of their material conflict. Advancing Linda Dowling’s concept of the “fatal book,” this chapter proposes the queer book as a figure of Decadence, defining its beauty through the intersection of Wilde’s tragedy and Beardsley’s grotesque visual interpretation of sex and death.

In Chapter 4: “*The Savoy: Reading the Male Body*,” I turn my attention to a periodical publication from Aestheticism’s darkest hour in the wake of Oscar Wilde’s trials. I will explore the unique but ultimately failed attempt by publisher Leonard Smithers to integrate Aestheticism’s discourse of sexuality into popular periodical culture. *The Savoy* (1896) is a collaborative reimagining of *Eros* as a means of rereading critical analysis as a self-reflexive and sexualised study of the male body in the act of self-analysis. The poem, the short story, the illustration, the book design, and the critical essay become opportunities for the male reader to examine the male body in the act of reading. What results is a periodical that asks the reader to reconsider desire and beauty outside of identity constructs and to read the periodical as a queer site of subversive male desire. I will show how men reading other men offer an opportunity to integrate the body, the textual or material self, in the study of beauty and the work of art criticism. The project will then conclude with a review of how the integration of British Aestheticism, Queer Theory, and Textual Studies offers new insight into late-Victorian literature as a multimedial discipline dependent upon the integration of form and content within the material book.

## Chapter 1

### The Kelmscott Press and the Foundations of the Queer Book

The queer book of the *fin de siècle* emerged out of and in response to the nineteenth-century Revival of Printing. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the queer book appears as a site of what Judith Butler calls “collective contestation” (*BM* 173) – a beautiful work of art that, like the politics of the term queer, does not reflect either consensus or autonomy. As much as the queer book subverts late-nineteenth century bookmaking practices, it is also a product of those practices. The queer book, then redeploys, twists, and queers “prior usage;” however, it too is subject to similar changes and distortions of its material and aesthetic form (173). The beauty of the queer book redeploys William Morris’s concept of the “Ideal Book” with a collaborative effort of creation that integrates handmade bookmaking practices with the innovations of industrial printing technologies. To illustrate that redeployment, I will pay particular attention to the role of Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement before turning to the emergence of the queer book. I will then offer a detailed analysis of Oscar Wilde’s *édition de luxe* of *A House of Pomegranates* (1891) for Osgood and McIlvaine with illustrations and design work by Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. In the case of *Pomegranates*, this intercourse achieved an expression of beauty that re-imagined the body of the material book as a site of textual intercourse, publishing accidents, and creative queering.

The queer book is, in part, a self-reflexive recognition that most individual writers and artists have little to no control over the work that emerges from the inherently collaborative experience of publishing. These books contest the illusion of authorial control and position material elements of the book as resistant to a singularly constructed meaning –

it is an intercourse of meanings. Contests and disputes do not necessarily end, especially in regards to creative conflicts over book production. Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and Charles Ricketts were not men with vast economic resources who could pay to ensure their ideal book came to fruition in the manner that I will show William Morris was capable of securing. Instead, their ideas of beauty merged with other people's ideas of beauty – even finding conflict with each other when their work was placed in the same book by publishers like John Lane and Leonard Smithers. The result was that the queer books that came to market at the Victorian *fin de siècle* did not belong to a single author or designer but were the product of a collective contestation imposed by publishers that demanded adaptability and responsiveness to the possible influences of publishing choices, printing technologies, and marketing priorities. All of these influences factor into the creative object born from the artistic desires of the various contributors. The resulting queer book is what Butler calls “a necessary and inevitable expropriation” that signifies “in spite of” its authors/contributors (BM 185). Various contributors are forced into conversation with one another and compelled to adapt to the influence of other creative contributors within the pages of the book. The *boundedness* of the codex as a single unit, if not a work of harmony, must be a work of contestation where original ideas and creations intersect, creating a new conception of beauty, realised in the brief moment of the creators' intercourse, imbuing the book with its own composite character.

The significance of bounded contestation in the queer book is how the interaction of these multiple collaborators reflects the idealisation of the Aesthete engaging with his or her multiple senses. Aestheticism demands that the critic allow his senses to influence and even change his reading of a work of art. “Our education,” Pater tells us, “becomes complete in proportion as our susceptibility to these impressions increases in depth and variety” (xxx).

The influence of a multitude of senses does not interfere in our reading of a work of art; instead, the sensory perceptions complicate and enrich the experience in a beneficial manner. Like this multisensory experience, the multimedial expression of the queer book is enriched by the various perspectives contributing to its material formation.

To understand the queer book as a queering of signifying signs and symbols, we need to better understand what sort of beauty or material production these books redeployed. What did the beautifully decorated book look like before Aestheticism queered its beauty? The challenge in answering this question comes from where the queer book emerges: the Revival of Printing and the Arts and Crafts Movement. These movements were themselves a discursive response to modern bookmaking culture and actually worked as a redeployment of medieval bookmaking practices into the modern world. The difference is that these medieval bookmaking practices were able to achieve an uncompromised ideal book under the controlling hand of the poet, romance writer, bookmaker, designer, socialist, and publisher, William Morris. Morris achieved an ideal that no one else was able to achieve and managed to avoid the compromises that emerged in conventional bookmaking practices, eschewing industrialised bookmaking and realising the handcrafted excellence that he believed had not been achieved since the early-fifteenth-century innovations by printers beginning with Johann Gutenberg and ending with Nicholas Jenson. After this, Morris sees compromise, what he calls a “decline” of the book with Renaissance-era experiments of Aldus Manutius in the late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth centuries (“Printing” 6-7). However, I read this compromised book as a site of collective contestation – a necessary collaboration between the economics of nineteenth-century industrialised bookmaking and the ideals of Morris’s handcrafted book realises that the queer book. While these books are very different from Morris’s Kelmscott book, at the same time, I am arguing that the queer book owes its revised

conception of beauty to the incorporation of Morris's ideals into its textual intercourse with modern publishing practices. Ricketts's work serves as a queer reading of the Revival of Printing – a subversive application of Morris's ideals onto modern industrial bookmaking practices. *A House of Pomegranates*, as a queer book, shows that the foundations of quality modern bookmaking and mechanised print that Morris disapproved of were actually built on and honour the technological innovations that Morris revived in his Kelmscott books.

## 1.1 The Revival of Beautiful Books

Frédéric Barbier claims that the nineteenth century was witness to a “second revolution of the book” (Gutenberg's printing press being the first), with the industrialisation of the publishing industry (13). This industrialisation of bookmaking and the mass production of poor quality books for a growing reading public was also the central motivation for one element of the Arts and Crafts Movement in particular – the Revival of Printing. The Victorians were introduced to the work of designers Walter Crane, William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Emery Walker, among others, whose literary themes and bookmaking helped to define Victorian Medievalism. Their work marks a return to the traditional English arts, crafts, and architecture that dominated culture before the European Renaissance turned English art away from Gothic conventions towards more classical models of beauty.

Beyond classicism, modern industrial bookmaking practices saw the literary marketplace glutted with low-quality, cheaply made books. Frustrated by poor-quality printing, designers and bibliophiles Walker and Morris saw no reason why high-quality materials could not be used in the production of books except for “[c]ommercialism,” which demands not only cheap paper but “the use of type too small in size to be comfortable reading” (Morris & Walker 11-12). With economics as a design priority, printers sized type



painfully small, filling the page with words and leaving only the thinnest of margins so that three-decker novels and other works of substantial length could fit into portable single-volume reprints. Illustration was a common practice with serialized novels in Victorian periodicals, part-issue publications, as well as other works such as annuals and collections of poetry. However, these illustrations, for the most part, served to emphasise plots twists and to attract “a public unaccustomed to reading” (Altick 335). This was particularly true of the penny magazine, in which “[e]ven the illiterate found a good pennyworth of enjoyment” (335). Illustration was a decoration meant to appeal to readers with minimal literacy.

This is not to say that all book illustration outside of the revival of printing was cheap or terrible. Recent scholarship by Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa SurrIDGE examines the “narratological function of images in the plot of the illustration serial novel” in order to demonstrate how illustration was “intrinsic to the first reading experience of the mass Victorian public” (66). While these works could be beautiful and contributed to the reading experience in important ways, there was no attempt on behalf of illustrators or periodical editors to change or problematise the author’s literary intentions. The story was still the story of the writers to direct and while illustration and context certainly informed the reader, these works did not constitute sites of collective contestation.

At the same time, much illustrated fiction in the nineteenth century was little more than a disposable commodity, cheaply made and easily discarded. The cheaply produced modern book privileged cost efficiency and profit at the expense of beauty and quality workmanship. Take for example the yellow-back or “mustard-plaster” novels of the late-nineteenth century (McLean *VP* 103). Figure 1-1 shows a yellow-back edition of Wilkie Collins’s *Hide and Seek* (1854) published by Smith, Elder & Co. in 1872. Note the yellow glaze used on the paper (McLean *VP* 104). This colour choice had to do with the cost of

printing as does the black frame that surrounds the roughly drawn image of Mary Grice, the mysterious child around whom Collins's sensational plot revolves. As you can see, there is an attempt at decoration. There is a red framing design within the black background. The illustration is prepared as monochrome illustration and then stamped in a three-colour-job done for this book in red, blue, and black. Ruari McLean notes these stamped colour illustrations were also done in red, green, and black (*VP* 104-105). The yellow-glazed paper adds a fourth colour to the mix at no additional cost. In terms of quality, note how the blue of Mary's sash does not stay in the lines and that the eyes of the figures closest to Mary are drawn the same as hers. Most of the yellow-backs were illustrated and decorated by a single man – Edmund Evans – better known for the quantity, rather than the quality of his work (104-105). The art of the design is primarily an advertisement demanding attention at railway-station bookstalls among hundreds of other books sold by Smith, Elder, & Co. and their competition.

Advertisement is crucial to the yellow-back design. If you look at the back cover (fig. 1-2), you will note that it is a tightly printed list of books by the same publisher: all octavos, “*uniformly bound in limp cloth, price 2s. 6d. each.*” The publisher is not interested in giving you a collectable book with artistic value. The 350-page book crams 200,000 words into its pages with a painfully small pica type and almost no margin. The book, from the perspective of a bookmaker like Morris, is ugly, designed for no more than short-term reading, convenient advertisement for the publisher's list, and disposability for the consumer. These cheap books were what Morris despised – commercial, ugly, and mass-produced without care or craft.

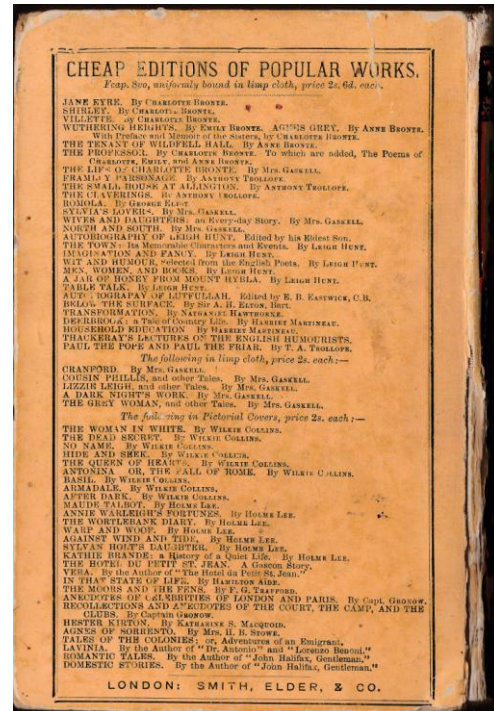
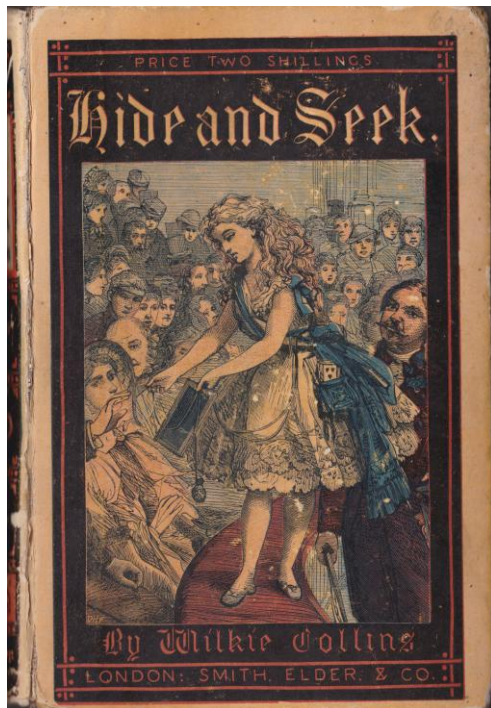
One of the first steps towards a quality modern book was evident in the 1860s when Dante Gabriel Rossetti began to design books for the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Elizabeth Helsinger notes Rossetti's attentiveness "to the presentation of poems: the printing, layout, illustration, and binding" in the books he designed for himself and his family members such as poet Christina Rossetti (175). Helsinger emphasises how

Rossetti managed to control the forms in which readers and viewers encountered his art and that of his friends and family to a degree quite unusual then or now.

Describing his published work as an art of words or of images or even of the two in parallel is inadequate. His is an art of the book. (175-176)

Rossetti saw books as "objects to be designed" (Helsinger 175); however, while beauty was important to him, his designs were partly responding to the market changes of the 1850s and 1860s. Amidst this period of economic stability in England, he, like many other designers and decorators, "saw an opportunity to make a respectable living from decorative arts by creating works that reflect the realistic values of middle-class consumers" (177). Rossetti's designs for books served as "the distinguishing mark . . . of a family of writers and the broader social and artistic circles to which they belonged" (189). His designs make the Pre-Raphaelite school a product line or brand while simultaneously distinguishing the work of their coterie from mass culture, making for "an unresolvable tension between autonomy and collectivity [within] Rossetti's artistic ambitions" (189). His books are innovative in terms of their simple beauty. Rossetti designed his decorative texts as a collective, representing a harmonious union between like-minded writers and artists who sought to present a common discourse of aesthetics opposed to industrialism and Victorian social conventions. As a vanity project, there was no expectation of profit or a potential business model. Rossetti's book would not offer consumers an alternative to the cheap books that flooded the market.

To be popular and successful as a business proposition, it would take an appeal to the fashionable Victorian middle-classes – an ethical compromise in regards to selling the Arts and Crafts to the modern Victorian consumer. To understand the business of Arts and Crafts, as well as the beautiful book's revival of Medieval Arts, we must turn to William Morris.



**Fig. 1-1 (left)** "ugly" cover of a yellow-back for Collins' *Hide and Seek* (1872). Courtesy Private Collection of Frederick D. King and James E. DuPlessis. **Fig. 1-2 (right)** the backside of the yellow-back for Collin's *Hide and Seek* (1872). Courtesy private collection of F. King and J. DuPlessis

Morris's works draws attention to the commercial transformation of Pre-Raphaelite art by the Arts and Crafts movement. Morris joined Rossetti, as well as Ford Maddox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, architect Philip Webb, mathematician Charles Falkner, and painter Peter Paul Marshall to form Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (M.M.F. & Co) on 11 April 1861, "a commercial venture whose ultimate purpose was to transform the British public's appreciation of the decorative arts" (Harvey & Press 6). This business, however, was not a profitable venture until Morris took what was little more than a hobby for Rossetti and the others and turned it into Morris & Co. in 1875 (11). Morris's larger investment of time and

money into the original venture meant that he was financially dependent on the firm and profit had to take priority. The decision to transform a creative endeavour into a successful business is a form of professional conflict between commercial demands and creative ideals – a conflict that faced many nineteenth-century artists seeking means to survive in the modern economy. Morris's work with the firm is significant, in part, because he redeploys the tenets of craftsmanship and the Pre-Raphaelites in order to create a market, and by extension an audience, for beautifully handcrafted goods. Once he found his success and Morris & Co. was profitable, he could then develop an art project that privileged art over commercialism. Financial security was a necessity to make the beautiful books Morris wanted to make if he were to operate within the market system of capitalism in Victorian England. This compromise allowed him to turn from the high art ideals of Rossetti towards the improvement of everyday workmanship that was to define his own art. His commercial business tied craftsmanship to the economic system. However, market demand is what defined his success in business and his output as an artisan, paving the way for Morris to establish the Kelmscott Press in 1889.

Morris became a central figure in the Revival of Printing with Kelmscott, publishing his first book in 1891, *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. Morris's essay "The Ideal Book" (1893) later outlined his priorities in book design. Morris did not intend book design and illustration to outshine literary content. Quite the opposite; he insisted that, "ornament must form as much a part of the page as the type itself, or it will miss its mark, and in order to succeed, and to be ornament, it must submit to certain limitations, and become architectural." As a work of architecture, the book consists of its various parts: paper, ink, binding, covers, and literature. These elements are intended to merge into a harmonious whole whereby "a book ornamented with pictures that are suitable for that, and that only, may become a work

of art second to none, save a fine building duly decorated, or a fine piece of literature” (72-73). The books of Kelmscott reflect Morris’s architectural ideals and his revision of the past became an opportunity to create a demand for beauty and quality workmanship in everyday life.

Morris made use of Kelmscott to publish his fantasy romances, and to re-publish editions of his earlier works, such as *A Dream of John Ball* (1886) and an eight-volume edition of *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-70). However, he was also interested in publishing literary masterpieces that demonstrated what he saw as English culture at its greatest, including *The Works of Chaucer* (1896) and John Ruskin’s *The Nature of Gothic, a Chapter from the Stones of Venice* (1892). By reprinting these titles through Kelmscott, Morris placed his own romances in material companionship with Chaucer and Ruskin while also reflecting his intense desire to integrate medieval literature and art into everyday life for his Victorian audience. Instead of compromising his ideals for the market, he created a product whose beauty would demand a compromise from the low-cost, high-profits mentality of the Victorian marketplace.

Morris’s work consistently argues for the rights of artistic expression for working-class tradesmen and labourers. He called for a return to the gothic style of the middle ages – a period Morris perceived as an ideal moment in English culture for the development of indigenous English arts and crafts. He noted that books of the Middle Ages were “thoroughly ‘Gothic’ as to their ornament” (“Early Woodcuts” 10), a style that emerges, Morris claimed, from a religious society where “the force of tradition” within Germanic-English culture birthed a “unity of epical design and ornament” (“Woodcuts” 3). For Morris, the Gothic represents a united culture without class. He suggests a collective cultural unity in the imagery of the church’s architecture and design among the Germanic and Northern peoples

of Europe. This aesthetic “supplied deficiencies of individual by collective imagination,” that according to Morris, “ensured the inheritance of deft craftsmanship and instinct for beauty in the succession of the generations of workmen [and] cultivated the appreciation of good work by the general public” (“Woodcuts” 3). Drawing on the work of John Ruskin, Morris believed that English art before the Renaissance reflected a unified cultural practice, what he imagined as a shared indigeneity as a cultural foundation for the peoples of the British Isles. Instead of changing his art to suit his culture, he uses his art to inspire cultural change for the sake of accessible, everyday beauty.

Morris communicates these ideas, not just in his writing, but in the material designs of the Kelmscott book. Michelle Weinroth argues that the page in a Kelmscott book “disables the purely intellectual eye and frustrates a literal utilitarian mode of reading. This ornamented text both ‘agitates’ the mind [ . . . ] and breaks open new grounds for understanding the aesthetic frame as the element that induces three-dimensional thought” (58). Like the queer book, Kelmscott books are more than circulatory mediums. Design informs and changes perceptions of literary content. Kelmscott books were works of art and the result of Morris’s singular conception of material beauty and cultural practice. While his business practices demanded that his artistic vision be necessarily revised to meet the demands of the marketplace, there would be no negotiation with the market in the achieving the hand-crafted beauty of his books. What is so significant is the autonomy with which Morris could realise his ideal fantasy of beauty and the beautiful book. Regardless of collaborating partners and regardless of who wrote the literary content, all of these elements are rallied to appease the pleasure of Morris’s textual imagination.

According to Morris, by the end of the fifteenth century, the influence of the Renaissance sees the *degeneration* of the work of English artisans. Morris laments that the

Gothic art of the middle ages “was succeeded by a singularly stupid and brutal phase of that rhetorical and academical [sic] art, which, in all matters of ornament, has held Europe captive ever since” (“Early Woodcuts” 10). Formal rules set by artists of the Mediterranean and France superseded England’s unique culture and limited art to a practice available only to the wealthy and politically connected. Morris sees the Renaissance as an interruption in the collective culture of Britain’s Anglo-Germanic heritage. The Gothic harks back to an idyll of “collective art” where “the men who build it up not only give their gift of free will, but give it joyfully day by day, and take as they give, to the extinction of moody pride, to the fostering of goodwill” (“Gothic Revival II” 91). In effect, everyone is an artist-socialist and society is a collective of “friends and good fellows” (91). For Morris art had to be an expression of social unity whereas he associates the Renaissance with values of a hierarchical European aristocracy: the ostentatious glamorisation of wealth held in the hands of the few at the cost of ignorance for the many. Such a system denigrated the artistic efforts of tradesmen and serfs, people Morris anachronistically equated with the nineteenth-century proletariat.

Morris’s message of an idealised collective culture of arts and crafts was consistent. R. Jayne Hildebrand notes how Morris’s work privileges “collective historical agency and change” over “alienation and stagnation” (23). Morris’s work at Kelmscott reflected his ideals but also revealed the autonomy required to achieve those ideals. The hands of his collaborators, printers, papermakers, or binders were bound to Morris’s desire to realise *his* vision for collectivity. Morris saw himself as re-creating Britain’s artisan culture, suggesting that the modern artist had to be indoctrinated in his ideals before a real collaboration was possible. Until that day arrived, Morris would make all the decisions.

Morris lamented the loss of quality that came from industrialization and insisted that the solution lay in the hands of “handicraftsmen, who are not ignorant of these things like the



public, and who have no call to be greedy and isolated like the manufacturers or middlemen” (“Decorative Arts” 26). Without pride of artisanship, the worker was emasculated, silent, and useless. Morris, frustrated with the working-class tradesmen who failed to demand quality product from their employers, asks when the artisans of the working class will “see to this and help to make men of all of us by [. . .] selling goods that we could be proud of both for fair price and fair workmanship” (“Decorative Arts” 26). According to Morris, modern factory workers, if they want to recover their manhood, must challenge the current labour system by changing the way in which they produce goods. However, during his lifetime, he retained control of fount design, page layouts, title page design and “special lettering” (Harvey and Press 17).<sup>5</sup> Charles Harvey and Jon Press stress that Morris’s “personality so dominated the enterprise that his executors decided that it should close on completion of the work in hand when he died” (17). He may have wanted a socialist Utopia for everyone but it would be *his* Utopia.

Morris, in his rejection of neo-classical influences, seeks a mythic foundation that can narrate a reinvigoration of English art through a return to its Gothic roots. “By going back to their *true source*, the arts could once again begin to develop normally and organically” (Peterson xxii, my emphasis). This meant reinventing the bookmaking process from its beginnings in artisanship. Disappointed by earlier attempts to make *The Earthly Paradise* a beautifully decorated series of books in the 1860s with illustrations by Edward Burne-Jones, Morris saw only limitation in the mechanized bookmaking practices of his contemporaries. There was no economically sound means in the 1860s to reproduce all of the Burne-Jones illustrations that he wanted to include (Peterson xvi). With Kelmscott Press, Morris could now re-imagine the book’s peritextual materials: type, founts, ink, bindings, and paper.

## 1.2 Building the Kelmscott Book

In order to rescue the book from the damage done by industrial manufacture in the name of efficiency, Morris felt he had to make changes at the level of the very cellulose fibres that hold the page together. Cellulose is ““found in nature as the *cell* walls of plants’ in the form of minute threads which have certain remarkable properties” (McLean *T&H* 94). According to Ruari McLean, these “fibres vary greatly in size, strength and exact nature from plant to plant, and in ease of extraction” (94). Wood chips, rag made of cotton or linen, straw, bamboo, mulberry bark, nettles, and esparto grass have long cellulose fibres that hold the paper’s ingredients together once formed into a sheet (94). The longer the cellulose, the stronger the paper; most vegetable matter has cellulose fibre, but much of it is not long enough to support a quality paper. For the Kelmscott book, in order to be worthy of works by Chaucer and Ruskin, the structure had to withstand the wear and tear of time.

Machine-made papers for mass-produced books were, for Morris, typically difficult to read with a dull “grey page” that obscured the print (*IB* 68, 72). Many nineteenth-century bookmakers turned to acidic papers made from either mechanical or chemical wood pulp mixed with esparto grass due to an increasing demand for books and the rising cost of handmade papers (McKitterick “Changes” 94-95, 104; Altick 277). David McKitterick notes how the Royal Society of Arts complained that the paper used in these books “was easily marked and next to impossible to repair satisfactorily” (104).

The problem was the ingredients used to make paper at the end of the nineteenth century: chemically treated wood-chips. Earlier in the century, paper’s dominant ingredient was rag—literally cotton and linen rags discarded by members of the public and collected by paper manufacturers from the dust heaps. However, by the late-nineteenth century, only the more expensive papers were pure rag content. Since the financial crisis of the 1820s, paper

costs (i.e. rag costs) rose due to an increase in market demand that coincided with a decrease in supply (McKitterick “Changes” 92). In other words, there were more and more readers as the century progressed and not enough cheap cotton rag to keep up with growing demand. As a result, experiments began to arise that sought cheaper sources of paper. McLean indicates that these cheaper mechanical or chemical pulps were “the result of grinding de-barked wood logs on a grindstone under a stream of water, which fragments the fibres” (McLean *T&H* 97). Manufacturers began to rely more frequently on wood pulp mixed in with their rags in order to make the more expensive rag material spread further over more products. Wood pulp did not make a quality paper (McKitterick “Changes” 95). Only newspapers, penny magazines, and other forms of print that had expected short life spans would use 100% wood pulp. Most papermakers would use wood pulp mixed with cotton, linen, or esparto grass in order to make a better quality, low-cost paper for the book trade. However, few of these books survive. Acidification of the low-quality, chemically-processed wood-chip paper has erased most books published for wider markets from the mid- to late-nineteenth century in Britain from the surviving archive (McKitterick “Introduction” 16-17). In other words, books became disposable. While a democratisation of reading occurred with books becoming available to an increasingly wider and economically diverse market, something was lost in quality as suppliers attempted to meet demand.

D. C. Coleman points out how, before mechanised papermaking, England, like other countries, saw a rise in Paper Making Associations which would train individuals for positions as skilled tradesmen, able to command wages through their guild’s rules. However, such organisations were on the wane as early as the 1820s and 1830s. Members with “Cards of Freedom” numbered 3,000 in 1825 but only 700 by 1874, “of which 420 worked in the nineteen vat mills which remained in the country” (Coleman 285). Skilled vat men earned

anywhere from 14s to 30s. per week in 1820s Northumberland and Durham, while machine mill labourers as early as the 1840s in Scotland earned in the range of 10s to 18s per week with children earning even less (302). Subsistence wages, substandard work conditions, and the repetitive efforts of menial labour resulted in an unmotivated and disinterested labour force. Morris understood this degradation of the working class as the root cause of a market glut of poor-quality cheap books.

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**Fig. 1-3 Example of the Kelmscott Press's quality paper. From *The Earthly Paradise*, Volume 1 (1896). Note the edges of the paper where the density is visible. This is a quality linen paper that stands in opposition to the cheaper wood pulp papers. Permission Pending Harry Ransom Center, Austin TX.**

Kelmscott operated in the midst of this papermaking revolution. Never had so many options existed before, even options without acidic wood pulp. Yet Morris was still unsatisfied. His solution for the Kelmscott book was to buy his supplies only from producers of hand-made paper. This is why he turned to Joseph Batchelor & Son in 1890 to make the paper for *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. Morris had the paper used by Kelmscott books made entirely of linen, based on a fifteenth-century pattern from northern Italy taken from Morris's sample of Bolognese paper dated to 1473 (see fig. 1-5 for an example). Morris's insistence on linen suggests a return to old methods of bookmaking that stressed quality over efficiency. Pure rag was the only option for Morris who sought, anachronistically, to abide by the standards and practices of medieval artisan culture (McLean *T&H* 98). Morris could

find no other papermaker in the whole of England who made hand-made paper that he approved of; as a result, he turned to Batchelor & Son as his sole paper supplier for the life of the Kelmscott Press (Thompson 160).

Batchelor & Son would go on to design three watermarks exclusively for Kelmscott books: “Primrose” or “Flower,” “Perch,” and “Apple,” marking the page as a Kelmscott creation and eliminating the papermaker’s credit from their handmade paper (Kelvin “Letter 1779”, 223-n225). Morris imprints his mark paratextually onto the page; every part of the book is his creation. Batchelor & Son enabled Morris’s singular vision; however, by always turning to his own preferences, he creates an artificial harmony – a return to the rough-hewn quality of middle-English artisanship based entirely on Morris’s idea of the beautiful.

With his handmade paper secured, Morris arranged for Henry Baud of Brentford, Middlesex to produce his vellum editions and Jaenecke of Hanover to produce his ink. While Morris would have preferred to work with all English suppliers, the quality of his ink, and the use of linseed oil in its making, were more important to him than its nationality (Thompson 160). He would not allow, for example, chemical treatments for removing oils from inks. Instead, he insisted on the use of stale bread and raw onions to remove grease in the ink’s production. The product then had to be “matured” for “six months, after which the organic animal lampblack [the type of oil being burned] was ground into the mixture” (Thompson 161). While Morris did not directly control the means of production, relying on secondary suppliers, he managed to oversee and narrate a story of quality and design with Kelmscott’s material assembly.

The page, densely stamped with his golden type and designs that smothered the white page and ivory vellum with its dark black ink, is an attempt to focus the reader’s eye on the book’s literary content. The materiality leaves no space for marginalia. The page is so

elaborate, one fears damaging its unified effect by scrawling in the margins. The margin, as I will argue in more detail in Chapter 2, plays an important role in reading; it allows room for pencilled notes so that we can remember our reactions to themes and metaphors that emerge and allow for subjective interpretation. At least with chapter and book openings, Morris fills every crevice with a large typeface, red marginal paratext, and foliage: Morris's hand fills the margins. White space, spaces where there is room for disagreement, are filled with the dark and strong voice of Kelmscott's black ink imposing an interpretation onto the reader; it is a book without any compromise to reader interpretation.

The very lettering of a Kelmscott book visually interprets the literary content. Morris created three different founts of type, that is, type design punched into metal and used by his printers at both Chiswick and Kelmscott. First it was the Troy and Chaucer types "based on the clearest model which he knew, the Mainz Bible printed by Peter Schoeffer in 1462, which was 'simpler, rounder, and less spiky' than most Gothic scripts" (Thompson 161). Respectively these were his large and small sizes of a gothic "black letter" type that Morris felt were more readable than the Roman types typical since the invention of the Caslon type in the eighteenth century (161). He then improved on these types with his Golden type in 1891, which is what he used in most of the Kelmscott books (161).

Chiswick Press was the initial choice for Kelmscott printing needs before Morris's purchase of an Albion hand press in January 1891 (Kelvin n247). It was also the choice printer for Morris's trustees after his death. From Chiswick's accounting ledgers, we can see evidence of Morris's hand and the costs incurred due to the quality of paper he required for his works. For example, Chiswick ledgers show that they charged Morris £16.2.6 in 1890 to print seventy-five paper and three vellum copies of *The Story of Gunnlaug*. This included a two-ream supply of Chiswick's own paper. Even before he began publishing with Kelmscott,

Morris was willing to reduce profits in order to create his ideal book.<sup>6</sup> Such large costs for a limited print run suggest that Morris's ideas were potentially marketable. As a means of comparison, Chiswick Press charged equivalent prices to print Leonard Smithers's edition of Oscar Wilde's anonymously published *Ballad of Reading Gaol*. *Reading Gaol* cost £12.8.3 for an initial run of 430 copies (thirty printed on Japanese vellum on Chiswick's own handmade paper), and £11.8.6 for an additional reprint on February 8<sup>th</sup>, only days after the first print run. The third printing of *Reading Gaol* cost another £12.19.0.<sup>7</sup> These costs, considering the material differences and the nature of the work (popular ballad poetry versus academic lecture series), indicates that the investment in material production was worth it due to expectations of high return in the market for Morris's works.

For William Morris, creative revision was necessary in order to accomplish a subversive approach to the marketplace and economics. His books were a singular, authoritative representation of the ideal book, beautiful by his standards. Where he had to revise his ideals in order to retain a successful business in the Victorian economy, Kelmscott was the one project where he would not bend to anyone else's needs. For Kelmscott, Morris demanded that the consumers revise their conception of beauty and pay for the quality craftsmanship he was offering. Papermakers, ink manufacturers, and printers would have to change their modern methods if they wanted to help Morris make his beautiful books. This authoritarian model was the only way that Morris saw for achieving his ideals. He was fortunate to be in a financial and social position to make such demands and see his ideals come to fruition. Not everyone who designed beautiful books was in such a position. The queer book emerges when Aesthetes, who admired Morris's beautiful books, wanted to create equally beautiful works but, instead of being able to demand changes to the production process from printers or publishers, instead of demanding high prices from the consumer,

they needed to redeploy or queer their conception of what they considered beautiful. This queer conception of the beautiful book resulted in new ideas about the modern bookmaking and, in some instances, generated queer books.

### 1.3 Binding Books: A Queer Reading of Morris's Ideal Book

In order to demonstrate how the queer book is a subversion of the ideal book, I want to compare William Morris's Kelmscott book with a book designed by Charles Shannon for Leonard Smithers Ltd. – the first printed edition of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899). The manner in which *Earnest* queers beauty is specifically important in regards to the role that binding plays in the book beautiful.

Looking to the past, Morris sought to rebirth the ideals and cultural values he associated with medieval culture. Morris's socialist ideals and appreciation of the beautiful inspire his monologic model of textual harmony – a chivalric code of cultural and bibliographical myth desperately lacking in an industrialised society and in the bookmaking industry. Many of the Aesthetes, including Pater, Wilde, and Ricketts, had great appreciation for his work. Ricketts wrote in *A Defence of the Revival of Printing* about the “great debt owed by book lovers to the late William Morris for motives in decoration (such as the half-borders) that to [his] knowledge are not to be found in old printed books, and for which he was indebted (if at all) to the great periods of decoration and illumination” (11). Even here, we see that Ricketts's interpretation of Morris already diverges from Morris's self-portrait of the Revival of Printing. Ricketts read Morris's ideal book as a subjective reading of beauty, crediting Morris's “ornamental tendency” for his own work and suggesting that while the gothic beauty and Artisanism of the fifteenth century may have inspired him, his work was also the product of his own imagination (11). Morris believed he was reviving an old, lost art



whereas Ricketts saw that he inadvertently created something original, subverting conventions of artisanship and (in effect) queering the medieval tradition of the handcrafted book. Aesthetic designers sought originality within existing aesthetic structures; materially engaging with bookmaking as a new art, a new project that emerged from a revised perception of Morris's bookmaking practices that Morris had not considered. Taking this inspiration into the world of commissions and contracts as a designer, several Aesthetes would revise the industrially-printed book of the nineteenth century.

The reading experience is at the heart of Morris's work. To be specific, covers and binding were not a decorative priority; instead, his books emphasised the decorative interior: the page and the literary content as the focus of all beauty and Artisan skill. Paul Thompson notes Morris's complete lack of interest in binding: "Kelmscott Press books were bound either in white vellum, which made them floppy and difficult to hold, or with plain grey-papered millboard sides. Although these were not strong no margin was allowed for rebinding in leather" (155). Morris's use of limp vellum to bind Kelmscott books gives them a distinctive appearance but these books were not jewel boxes to appreciate on display in one's library (See fig. 1-4 for an example). His goal, according to Peterson at least, was comfort for the reader, not promotion in the shops (xxx). His lack of interest in quality binding distinguishes Morris from other, younger, designers of the period associated with Aestheticism and Decadence of the late-Victorian period.

Take for example, Charles Shannon's simple design for Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Published two years after Wilde's release from prison, it seems to show little interest in elaborate design at first glance (see fig. 1-5). Smithers published this first printed edition of the play after the success they had with *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* the year before (Nelson *PD* 201-202). A border of five golden feathers subtly decorates the book's

lilac-coloured boards. The elaborate stem of the feathers suggest beautiful quill pens referencing writing, and, most notably, an author who is entirely absent from the book.

FIG. 1-4 and 1-5

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**Fig. 1-4: A limp-vellum binding of the Kelmscott *Earthly Paradise* (1896). Permission Pending Harry Ransom Center, Austin, TX. Figure 1-5 Cover design for Oscar Wilde's anonymously published *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899) created by Charles Ricketts. Permission Pending Harry Ransom Center, Austin, TX.**

It was common knowledge that Wilde wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde even autographed one hundred copies of the thousand-copy print run (Nelson & Mendes 341). However, Smithers expressed frustration to Wilde that “the book is so identified with you that [the newspapers] won’t review it” (qtd. in Nelson *PD* 212). *Earnest* was Wilde’s most recent play, still performing to full houses when he was arrested in 1895 so its connection to Wilde was notorious. Despite what appears to be an attempt to sell a play and disassociate it from its controversial author, the book reflexively plays with Wilde’s absence. The name of the play only appears on the spine and while the quills appear to surround something as if they were a decorative boarder, what they surround is a blank space. The design emphasizes the author’s absence by drawing attention to the blank space where Wilde’s name could appear. The lilac colour of the book enhances its status as a delicate object of beauty and the empty space asks the reader, not only what is missing, but *why* it is

missing. The book's design engages with editorial choices and asks readers to pay attention to that interaction as well as the obvious decision to leave Wilde's name unprinted.

Wilde's material absence tells readers that to speak his name is now an indecent act, reminding them of why he is socially indecent. Wilde's arrest and, more particularly, the charge of "gross indecency," haunt the book's design. The result was a socially inappropriate work of whimsy that, in the vein of Wilde's play, a work about mistaken and hidden identities and the concept of identity as an act or performance, textually makes light of Wilde's tarnished reputation, and reflects an intercourse between the play and Wilde's celebrity through material presentation. The reality was that Wilde was destitute, the book did not sell well, and he suffered consequences that this text ignores with its whimsical beauty. However, *The Importance of Being Earnest* remains a fanciful work of art that honours the tone of the play and presents the play as something tied to Wilde as an artist, not to Wilde as a victim.

Contrast this complex intersection of commodification and aesthetics with the Kelmscott Book. Morris's primary concern was for readers to enjoy the experience of his reprint of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or to escape into the quasi-medieval world of one of his romances, whereas designers like Ricketts thought of the finished aesthetic object. Morris was concerned with the beauty of the printed page, not the beauty of the book on display in the bookseller's shop. Aestheticism subverted marketing techniques in a manner that made the commercial realities of their work into opportunities for art (as we will see in subsequent chapters). While Shannon was supportive of readers seeking to read the play, he also used the material book as play and the gossip surrounding its author. Morris had no interest in marketing and promotion in binding design. The 1899 edition of *The Importance of Being Earnest* was a queer book because it was the product of an intercourse between art and

marketing. The demands of the market are seemingly in contrast to the artistic ideals of a book that emerges from the Aesthetic Movement; however, the collective contestation demanded from their integration subverts the ideals of the book that Morris insisted were only possible when the book stood outside of industrial and commercial bookmaking practices. By redeploing his ideals to the financially necessary limits of industrial bookmaking, the queer book raised the commercial product above the fray through designs that were artistic *and* served as promotion. The book's disruptive aesthetic is the queer consequence of a textual intercourse between art and commodification – a compromise that embodies the book's representation of the beautiful.

The bindings used on Kelmscott books also demonstrate beauty; however the beauty of a Kelmscott book emerges from a respect for traditional bookmaking practices whereas the queer book represents collaboration between artisanship and technological innovation. Archived copies of *The Earthly Paradise* re-published by Kelmscott are good examples of Morris's vision, allowing the material book and the literary text to stand in harmonious unity (see fig. 1-4). Today, these volumes are dirty and worn from usage; the ribbons that held the books closed have browned and become rough over time. The vellum, while stiff from time (less used copies are cleaner, softer, and more flexible), is thin. The vellum is the substantive material of the binding without any card or wood covers within the binding. The result is that the reader's sense memory forgets about the covers once he or she open the book because the soft covers curve to the shape of the pages being read. Conceivably, the reader could even curl back the pages and cover on either side as readers do with modern trade paperbacks (a concept best left unproven in the confines of the British Library).

The main differences between these two works are the role of nature in art, and the role of the bookmaker in literary expression. For Morris, art is a reflection of nature – a

celebration of man's relationship to nature, demanding that art turn to nature for its inspiration. Morris says in "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages" that "The mediæval workman not only lived amidst beautiful works of handicraft, and a nature unspoiled by the sordidness of commercialism; but also he was deeply imbued with a sense of the epic of the World, as it was understood in his day" (4). The epic implies a story for everyone, a story of culture and a story of consensus. Emphasised with a design that recalls nature and narrates man as the centre of the natural order, Morris positions the epic as an ideal form of literature and as an ideal perspective on culture. The influence of nature is something that those outside of commercial culture in the nineteenth century could engage with and understand so it offered the best metaphors, inspiration, and forms of beauty for art to imitate. Art here is an imitation, without qualities that do not already exist in nature.

In contrast, Aestheticism privileges art over nature. In Wilde's "The Critic as Artist" Ernest complains to Gilbert that "the artist [should] be left alone, to create a new world if he wishes it, or, if not, to shadow forth the world which we already know . . . with her fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection [in order to] give to it a momentary perfection" (Wilde 344). Wilde's dialogue, partly in jest, but partly in all seriousness, privileges art's ability to create over nature's creations. This queer perspective on beauty – that artists can improve upon the work of nature – allows the artist to reveal what nature cannot. Gilbert later tells Ernest in the second half of the dialogue that the artist "will always be reminding us that great works of art are living things – are, in fact, the only things that live" (374). Art creates and its creations are the only things that are alive. Nature is not alive until art improves upon or represents it. If art is a discourse, and Aestheticism a sensual discourse of beauty, then nature can only come alive once art textually interferes with it and creates something new. Art then becomes a textual intercourse between artist and nature in which the artist dominates

and nature submits to his or her will.

For Morris, this turn to the artificial is part of the decline in the beauty of Arts and Crafts that occurred in the Renaissance. The basis of his passion for the printed book is the work of the world's earliest printers inspired by the illuminators and scribes who came before the printing press. Aestheticism is less nostalgic, and queers nature by making it secondary to man-made art and subverting the order of things that Morris reads as a given. Nature, God if you will, is subverted and the most powerful creators are the artists and poets. This subversion allows Aesthetes to be less absolute in their critique of industrialised bookmaking because the beauty they seek to create does not have to live up to an idealised original. While the cheap yellowbacks and penny magazines of the nineteenth century were terribly constructed, Aesthetes did not blame their ugly materiality on the technologies used to construct them. Instead, where Morris saw decline, the Aesthetes saw an opportunity to create a new art designed for modern printing technologies, finding new ways to make beautiful books cheaply, collaboratively, and even beautifully.

Another factor to consider is cost. Unlike Morris who demanded small runs in order to accommodate handmade products, Aesthetic bookmakers like Shannon, Beardsley, and Ricketts embraced the new technologies used by mass-produced books, changing perceptions of those industrial mechanics from the cheap vulgarity that Morris saw, into an employable medium improved upon by the interference of an artistic hand. Industrialisation did not limit Aestheticism's decorated books to what was handmade; instead, mechanized processes such as photomechanical illustration and the limits of weaker grey ink, created possibilities to use the book's material construction for artistic invention. By allowing their medium to inform their methods, these innovative young designers allowed art and industry to collide within material experiments of bookmaking.

Decorated books of *fin-de-siècle* Aestheticism emerged out of small publishing houses seeking to compete in a market where books “became furnishings”; in other words, many collectors desired “ornate cloth bindings” in order to “enhance the appearance of their libraries” (McKitterick “Second-hand” 647). Some publishers were quick to recognize that “book collecting in some quarters was little better than investing, and produced large-paper editions or *éditions de luxe* to suit” (657). Strange experiments resulted from a desire to appeal to consumers willing to pay high prices for beautiful books. It is this market for collectable books, combined with cost saving measures available through modern industrial printing that offered Aesthetes an opportunity to manipulate mechanized printing practices.

Morris sought to reject modern bookmaking practices in order to return to the origins of printing and to reject modern technologies. He revised his ideals for the sake of his other business practices, placing himself in a position to later create what he saw as an ideal and beautiful book. Aesthetes invert this act of compromise by altering their art to available means of production. Thinking queerly, Ricketts, Shannon, and other bookmakers saw an opportunity to alter the art they created in order to take advantage of what the automated printing press could do. This resulted in a new Aesthetic that I have only, so far, touched upon with *The Importance of Being Earnest*. To fully understand the beauty of queer compromise, I turn now to *A House of Pomegranates*.

## 1.4 A Queer Redeployment of the Ideal Book

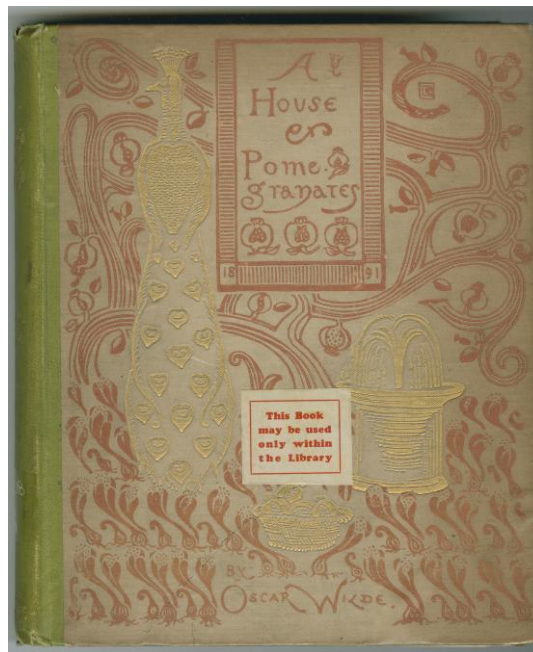
One of the reasons the queer book emerges is because of a growing and diverse literary market where small niche publishers could find success. In *The English Common Reader* (1957), Richard D. Altick shows that the market for literature expanded by the end of the nineteenth century because of multiple social and cultural factors. He cites an English

population that reached 32.5 million by 1901; the Forster Education Bill of 1870; the spread of literacy in the previous decades; increases in average family incomes by as much as 80% in the latter half of the century; and the reduction of the work week which “increased the amount of leisure the average man had for reading – if he wished to read” (365). This exploding market made room for special-interest works to find space in the bookshops as intelligent entrepreneurs sought a feasible cost-profit ratio by which to sell books to a small consumer base. In addition to publishers, other partners in the book industry found means to both support themselves and distribute their artistic visions for a small but appreciative coterie of Aesthetes, New Women, and other followers of the English *avant-garde*. Young typographic designers sought to make their books more beautiful and competitive in a market overcrowded with badly made books. Illustrators following the long tradition of pictorial representations in novels and poetry sought new ways of working creatively with available mechanical processes for print and plates. Writers sought to find new means of marketing their writing in the increasingly unpopular genres (i.e., unprofitable literary forms in the mass market) of poetry, drama, and the prose essay. The final decade of the Victorian age saw a new and widespread cultural fascination with classical models of book design that challenged how Victorians read.

Compare the uniformity we have seen in Kelmscott books with the peculiarly cobbled-together appearance of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon’s design for *House of Pomegranates*. For one thing, despite being partners – living together, working together, and lovers – they have very different visual styles, seemingly separating their roles in both art and, perhaps, in life too. In addition, we must also take care to consider Wilde’s contribution and influence to the creation of the book. While Wilde’s story can be read as a Christian allegory for the beauty bestowed on a just leader by the power of God’s light, it becomes



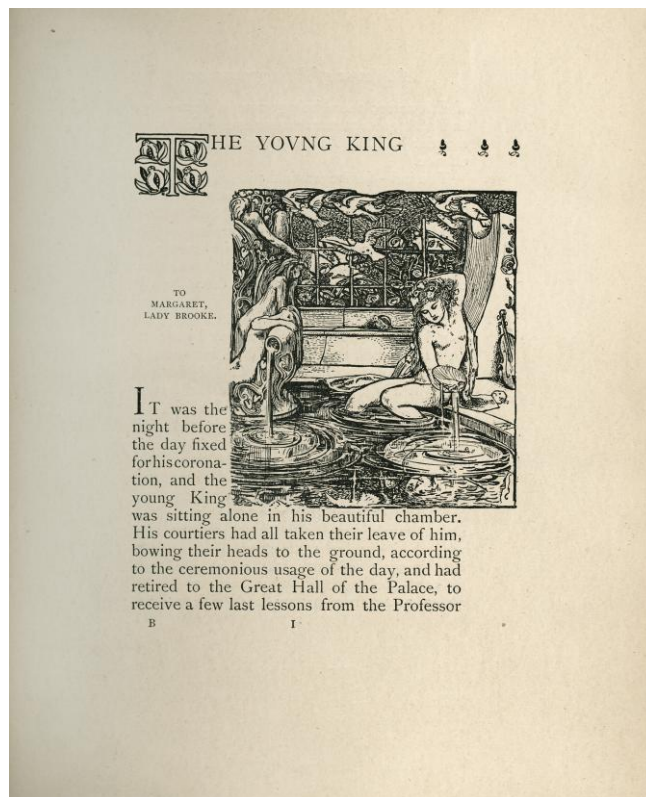
something else in the hands of Ricketts. Ricketts's cover design depicts a garden; however, this is not Eden but a garden of Greek and Aesthetic origins in the legends of Persephone eating the fruit of Hades, of consuming tempting desires (see fig. 1-6). Gathered in a golden basket, the fruit of this garden, the fruit of knowledge has only a peacock on guard with its back to the reader. The reader is free to access the fruit of knowledge if he or she dares. The garden promises access to secret unspoken ideas visually suggested but only indirectly considered within Wilde's prose.



**Figure 1-6 Binding design for the *édition deluxe* printing of *A House of Pomegranates* by Charles Ricketts. Image Courtesy Western Libraries' Archives Research and Collections Centre.**

Queer books, because of their emphasis on the material and the competing hands of their many collaborators, involved an element of self-awareness that relied on, and at the same time, subverted, material and social practices concerning the book and accepted norms of beauty. *A House of Pomegranates* demonstrates an attempt to create new visions of beauty, eroticism, and sensuality that formed a textual intercourse between modern printing practices and Morris's conception of the Artisan book. This discourse meant that inevitably, accidents would and did occur such as those that dominate and define *Pomegranates*: fading,

raised print on glossy paper, garish colours, and a heavy, uncomfortable book. However, these accidents were the result of an intercourse of textual discourses that recognise and subvert the confines of regulatory performance that defined social organisation for the Victorian middle classes. These accidents, while odd, even queer, are beautiful. As much as Morris would like to have returned to a medieval work ethic, such a return was not possible for most bookmakers and writers. Instead, the queer book was the result of different creative perspectives on beauty and the demands of commodity culture – a redeployment of Morris’s ideals that was unfamiliar, discomfoting to conceptions of textual and sexual practices, and, as a result queer.



**Figure 1-7 Image of the young King drawn by Charles Ricketts for the first page of the story. Image Courtesy Western Libraries’ Archives Research and Collections Centre.**

Oscar Wilde saw an opportunity within existing culture to use the fairy tale as a site of an Aesthetic sexual discourse, the discourse of *Eros*. Published with a run of only one

thousand copies and priced at a guinea, *House of Pomegranates*, as Wilde himself insisted, did not specifically aim at a children's market; if anything, Wilde targeted adults, specifically the "connoisseur market," the consumer that emerged in the late-nineteenth century, who paid high prices for material quality in literary production (Markey 141). The opposite of a mass commodity, these books were, at best, modestly successful and marketed to maximize profit from small sales in the hundreds and occasionally in the thousands in the case of rare commercial successes like *The Yellow Book* (1894-1897) (Nelson EN 108). These books were the symbolic objects of a subcultural community of primarily male Londoners with a shared interest in unique aesthetic examples of beautiful bookmaking, literary prose, and heterogeneous textual intercourse. While honouring Morris's art of constructing the beautiful page, Ricketts, who was hired by the publisher, along with Shannon, to design *Pomegranates*, incorporated design practices that destabilized the centrality of literary content to the book.

The specific example of "The Young King" from *House of Pomegranates* demonstrates the collaborative creation of literary meaning. "The Young King" is the story of a beautiful youth of sixteen who is recognised in his role as a monarch only by the beautiful raiment of the institution: his crown, sceptre, and cloak. However, dreams haunt the beautiful boy king and reveal to him the origins of his material symbols of authority representing the ugliness of his tyrannical power: slavery, war, death, and subjugation. The King cannot wear these symbols of power to his coronation. At the ceremony, he instead wears the robes of the peasant farmer, appearing as if he is not worthy of the crown he is to receive. Everyone rebels. However, when the young King turns around to face his people light from the stained glass of the church shines on him to reveal his superior beauty. His natural robes become beautiful, his "dead staff blossomed," anointing him King with the materialisation of lilies,

roses with stems of silver and leaves of beaten gold. His natural appearance improves through a supernatural artificiality—filtered through the window of stained glass. He looks like nature, but an artificial enhancement of nature (*HOP* 24). It is not nature, but art, whether it is the art of an interfering God or the art of the stained glass imposing an unnatural aesthetic onto the King's body. The crowd recognizes the young King because of a materialization of artificial beauty, earthly, material symbols that resemble the ill-gotten raiment he discarded; his power, in turn, is given legitimacy.

Certainly, queer books are not the first works to engage multiple senses but they are the first where multiple media are deployed in a manner that enriches the eroticism, even homoeroticism, of children's stories. Specifically, with *House of Pomegranates*, this was the first "children's book" to concern itself materially with ideas of eroticism and Aesthetic beauty. We see this eroticism from the first page of "The Young King" (see fig 1-7) where Ricketts depicts the young King as an androgynous youth, bathing in a pool. The King first appears to be within nature because of the rock formation under the waterfall filling his bath. However, the young King is indoors, enclosed within a building as depicted by the window he foregrounds. This is not nature, but an artistic reproduction of, even improvement upon, nature. Protected from the harsh realities of his Kingdom by his beautiful walls, the King is not aware at this point of the harm that his beautiful life produces. The boy is also nude, asking the reader to sexualise the beauty of the youth's body that reflects his innocent mind, and his pre-lapsarian lack of shame in regards to his nudity – on display to the reader as an object of androgynous beauty. The violin in the background and the female sculptures where the water emerges suggest music and a chorus that sings and celebrates the beauty of the boy groomed as the symbol of leadership. His innocence is celebrated in this scene as an ideal from which to rule. The eroticism of the image emphasises the King's inner beauty evident to

the reader of the book, while obscure to the King's own people. His innocence of the ways of the world will provide him with a means to resist their corrupt pleasures.

In addition to his eroticised and idealised beauty, suggestive references to unspoken ideas surround the young King. The unspoken corruption of his court and the brutality that produces his symbols of power also desire a display of the King's youthful beauty. The artifice of his beauty is something his people are willing to kill for if threatened with its absence. At the end of the story, the King's light and his beauty shine forth in a manner that redefines nature as another form of art. His is a supernatural light of beauty that bestows jewels and raiment that surpasses the beauty of earthly symbols. Like Ricketts's bath, Wilde's description surpasses nature to create something even better – the astounding beauty of art. While this transformation allows for an interpretation dependent on God's interference, the King's innocence generates this moment of queer beauty. His androgynous appearance disrupts regulatory notions of masculinity and femininity by suggesting that beauty and the soul transcend gender. The book also presents sexuality as innocent, especially the sexuality of a beautiful androgyne like the King. The youth's inverted beauty disavows regulatory notions of sex as a function of the ideological apparatus of marriage and reproductive sex. His transformation is something that the King has created in order to bring a new, more powerful moment of beauty to his people. It is not the timeless beauty of inherited objects, but the peculiar, or queer, beauty of the boy, revealed to his kingdom only for a brief Paterean moment. The light of the window exposes an imaginary beauty born of his protection from influences of the outside world allowing him to retain the innocence, simplicity, androgyny, and finery of a child into his coming of age. He becomes the beauty of good and “the saints in their carven niches seemed to move. In their fair raiment of a king he stood before them, and the organ pealed out its music, and the trumpeters blew upon their

trumpets, and the singing boys sang” (Wilde *HOP* 24). Music sings of the youth’s beauty secreted within a heteronormative world and exposed in a moment when “no man dared look upon his face, for it was like the face of an angel” (24). Only the artist looks on his beauty. This is the secret; Wilde and Ricketts know that secret and share their vision of that beauty with their reader. The secret is spoken without explicit words of the eroticised beauty of the Aesthete’s vision of the male youth’s beauty but that beauty is only spoken at the end of the story. Ricketts never draws this moment. Instead, Wilde paints his portrait using ekphrasis to share the vision. What Ricketts draws instead is the beauty of a society humbled by the beauty of the young King (see fig. 1-7). His beauty, the ideal beauty of Aestheticism’s conception of *Eros*, awes his people into an ecstatic desire for the King’s beauty, a beauty only now revealed to them by the artificially filtered light of the artisan’s stained-glass window.

The book’s beauty, like the young King’s, is similarly a challenge for the general public, to see and appreciate. While appealing to a similar aesthetic as the handmade books of Kelmscott, these works were more affordable because of their incorporation of industrial printing processes and adaptability to affordable resources. This often meant relying on many collaborators to bring the book to market. The queer book’s textual intercourse is not limited to two contributors. While the text of “The Young King” remains the same, the visual imagery creates an atmosphere within the binding of the book provided by Ricketts and, to a lesser extent, by Charles Shannon who designed the faded images that separate each story.

Anne Markey tells us that Shannon had the drawings printed in Paris using a new process that damaged the images, leaving Shannon’s work disfigured and “barely visible” (141, see fig. 1-9). While accidental, the fading speaks to an important textual reality of the book. The images are shadows of an original where the reader can make out faint traces of

scenes from the story. Their faintness does not capture these moments in full detail. Instead, while completely inadvertent on Shannon's part, the images provide the stories with a sense of incompleteness as if the stories are unfinished and waiting for the reader to imagine their full meaning and creative potential. *House of Pomegranates* sold poorly, failing to capture the imagination or the spending money of its intended market; however, there exists a textual discourse where Wilde, Ricketts and Shannon are engaging with the ideas of Decadence, and also with ideas of sexual dissidence. While Wilde's writing style and reputation lends itself to such an association, Ricketts's work in particular draws out the subversive suggestiveness of Wilde's prose.

Despite the fact that these drawings emerge as they appear, most likely, because of a printing accident, they were still included in the book. In effect, the publisher felt that they would enhance or speak to the text in some manner or other resulting in their inclusion despite their flaws. Criticism thus far on *House of Pomegranates*, however, does not consider the textual meaning that emerges from the faded images. For example, Josephine Guy & Ian Small comment on the failure of the designs for this book (81-82). This failure, they claim, is largely due to Shannon's contribution of plates at the beginning of each story. Critics at the time were also very hard on the bookmakers for this error. No one actually details what this error and new printing method is, but it was likely an issue with the level of resin and heat applied when the book was printed (Guy & Small 82). While these faded images are unintended, they are beautiful symbols of contestable beauty and problematic image of childhood innocence that each of the four stories explores.

"The Birthday of the Infanta," in which the laughter of a precocious child and heiress to the Spanish Empire motivates the court clown – who now sees himself as others see him – to commit suicide, does not suggest a brightly coloured and vibrant image of conventional

Victorian childhood. This Catholic and alien child is blind to the queer beauty of her Dwarf who lives to bring joy to her life. Her ideology derives from a culture with no patience for the Dwarf's appearance: "indeed, some of the violets themselves felt that the ugliness of the little dwarf was almost ostentatious, and that he would have shown much better taste if he had looked sad, or at least pensive, instead of jumping about merrily, and throwing himself into such grotesque and silly attitudes" (45). Just as the community destroys the Dwarf's colour and cheer, Shannon's image mutes the image of the Infanta as if to condemn her cruelty and diminish what her culture accepts for beautiful.



**Fig. 1-8: Charles's Shannon's drawing for "The Birthday of the Infanta" by Oscar Wilde. Permission Pending Western Libraries' ARCC.**

Wilde was certainly not endorsing a reading of the Dwarf's appearance as an object

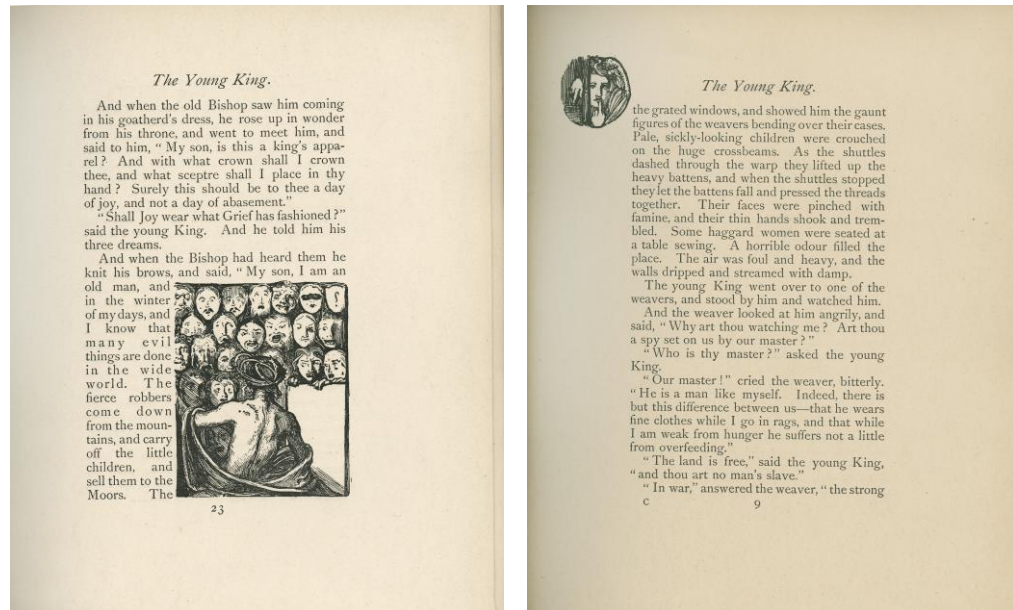


of ridicule. In fact, the humanity he imbues in the Dwarf makes him beautiful regardless of the attitudes of the children. While the children of the court only see ugliness, Wilde's conception of the Dwarf as beautiful speaks, not simply to the man's spirit or outlook, but to the complex and diverse forms in which beauty can be revealed. Wilde sees its beauty because of his trained Aesthetic eye and he seeks to pass on the realisation of this beauty by stimulating the reader's sympathies and heightening the sense of the man's shame.

Shannon's work, if not matching the bright colour of Wilde's prose, certainly comments on the faded and inappropriate vision of beauty that the Infanta and her little friends spew, causing the death of the Dwarf. To picture him as ugly, when his spirit is so beautiful, also seems inappropriate. There seems to be a parallel here with the dwarf who sees beauty in all things, blind even to the ugly ideology of the Infanta with the condemnation of sexual dissidence within wider Victorian culture. Shannon's image transforms the story into a broader allegorical condemnation of a society that destroys beauty it cannot perceive. Shannon erases from view the cruel words of the Infanta's world, distorting the reader's ability to confirm her beauty. There is room in Shannon's drawing for the Infanta to be as ugly as she perceives the Dwarf to be. Exactly what beauty is and what its standard should be remains unclear and undefined creating a slippage between the binaries of beautiful and ugly that the brat princess establishes.

Of course, Shannon's contributions were not the only elements to come under fire. Critics were equally hard on Ricketts's binding designs but these criticisms suggest an expectation of a book that would attract children. One critic went so far as to characterise the book as "Sinburnian" – referencing the book's sexually perverse eroticism (Guy & Small 81). A book covered in pomegranates and written by Oscar Wilde potentially alerts the knowledgeable consumer of Aesthetic literature that this was a book worth considering. Like

Persephone, the aesthetic reader would be tempted to taste its fruit, a temptation symbolising the queer discourses of identity, beauty, desire, and difference – the key elements of Aestheticism’s sexual discourse.



**Figure 1-9 The reaction of the mass public to the king's beauty. Image Courtesy Western Libraries' Archives Research and Collections Centre. Figure 1-10 An example of the medallion's urging the reader to remain silent in the face of an open secret. Image Courtesy Western Libraries' Archives Research and Collections Centre.**

Another example of the queer book’s material narration of story and meaning is Ricketts’s decision to design medallions that interact with Wilde’s stories and appear in various places throughout in the side, top, and bottom margins without any apparent pattern. The randomness makes them more startling, especially in “The Young King” where the medallions depict strange faces alerting the reader to an unspoken secret; bug-eyed faces with their index fingers held to their mouth almost begging for the reader’s silence regarding the contents of the book (see fig. 1-9). The reader is asked to interact with the story and appreciate the aesthetics of Wilde’s writing. The medallions extend the sense of unspoken desire – perhaps even a desire for which there are no words, only images – for the beautiful King throughout the story and they stop only when his beauty is revealed to the masses. The

secret is exposed. The beauty, his god-like ideal, is exposed and the crowds are too afraid to look on (see fig. 1-10). However, Wilde looks on and shares the vision in his ekphrastic realisation of youth's ruling beauty. Ricketts does the same in the image of the boy's revelation. Ricketts offers the reader an opportunity to view the boy's back and to see parts of the King hidden from the crowd. Ricketts's designs arrest an erotic moment of queer beauty in the form of the beautiful and innocent young man.

I read the King's beauty as queer because of the way Ricketts and Wilde each present his gender ambiguity as an queer form. The book's aesthetic beauty is intertwined with the young King's body, defined by an *Eros* associated with the beautiful innocent youth, whose body distorts "regulatory schemas" of sex, gender, sensuality, and beauty (Butler *BM* xxii, 9). Ricketts's drawings and binding design only appear in this edition. This is the only edition where he invites the reader to open up and enter a garden of pomegranates, a garden of sin and temptation, appropriating the King's innocence for sex and desire. What was, on the surface, a children's book, was, since its release in 1891, criticised for "the 'fleshy' style of Mr. Wilde's writing [a not-so-subtle reference to Robert Buchanan's criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and specifically the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as the fleshy school of poetry]" (Markey 142). Anne Markey notes that critics complained how "the ultra-aestheticism of the pictures' seemed 'hardly suitable to children'" (142). I am arguing for a queering of this reading of the book as a multimedial artistic achievement – a body revealing its queerness to the reader only within the pages of the book.

The *édition deluxe* of *The House of Pomegranates* serves to illustrate how books are not the material distribution of a singularly realised literary work, but structures built by many hands with often conflicting conceptions of beauty. The tactile experience of decoration becomes a "signifying activity" (Drucker 45), making the accidents and errors of

textual intercourse an opportunity to create new conceptions of the beautiful as a multisensory activity involving sight, touch, and the pursuit of pleasure. The space of the decorated book becomes queer through a desire to present beauty and the ideas of desire in ways that distort assumptions of what is beautiful. *A House of Pomegranates* is not the ideal book of William Morris's vision. Instead, it is a queer book born of an intercourse between his visions of the beautiful book and the technological and material realities faced by Oscar Wilde, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. Wilde's use of imagery alongside Shannon's flawed illustrations and Ricketts's emblematic designs realise a queer site of collective contestation: a redeployment of William Morris's idea of the beautiful book that realises an alternative concept of beauty, merging different interpretations of Aesthetic philosophy and beauty into the body of the queer book.

## Chapter 2

### *Silverpoints: Textual Intercourse and the Aesthete Poet*

Today, Oscar Wilde serves as the symbol of British Aestheticism; however, Aesthetes in the 1890s found an ideal symbol – a young male poet beautiful of both body and mind – in the form of a young man named John Henry Gray. In 1889, Wilde met Gray at the home of mutual friends, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. Ricketts was indoctrinating Gray to the poetry, art, and theories of the Aesthetic Movement in England and France – a process that culminated in his introduction to Wilde. Wilde would complete Gray’s Aesthetic education, introducing him to some of the more Decadent strains of the movement and securing Gray’s reputation as “Dorian” Gray.

This education, while a sensual experience, was not necessarily as hedonistic as Gray’s nickname suggests. Gray’s biographer, Jerusha Hull McCormack, describes how Ricketts “taught Gray to see, to discriminate, to explore,” allowing him to see the world from a perspective “as wonderful now as things were in childhood” (26). Gray’s indoctrination into Aestheticism’s discourse of sensuality incorporated concepts of sexual desire into one of the multitude of experiences that would inspire his creativity and ability as a poet. In contrast, the perception of Gray’s relationship with Wilde as hedonistic and shallow was due to his association with the fictional Dorian Gray. Gray and Wilde were in the most intense period of their relationship in 1889 when Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890); later, Gray would become “Dorian,” going so far as to sign at least one of his letters to Wilde “yours ever, Dorian” (Frankel *DG* 13). McCormack resists the idea that “the tragedy of [Gray’s] life as ‘Dorian’ Gray” was based on a sexual affair with Wilde (50). Instead, she sees Gray’s tragedy as his “conscious exploitation of Wilde’s attraction towards him,”

suggesting that despite his later rejection of the “Dorian” persona, Gray was not a victim of Wilde’s desires but was complicit in nurturing a public persona that took on a life of its own (50). The public persona of Gray, as the iconic Aesthete Poet, was a collaborative invention. Just as Basil Hallward, Henry Wotton, and Dorian Gray were all complicit in creating the monstrous persona of Dorian Gray, so too were Charles Ricketts, Oscar Wilde, and John Gray complicit in creating what came to be a performative symbol of the Aesthete Poet. The resulting work of art from this three-way discursive intercourse between Ricketts, Wilde, and Gray was not Gray the man, but an *objet d’art* – a portrait capturing the beauty of “Dorian” Gray – a dainty little book called *Silverpoints* (1893).

*Silverpoints* is the strangely beautiful book I referenced at the beginning of this project – a beautiful book that garnered attention and publicity for its elaborate bibliographical features rather than for the poetry it contained. However, I argue that the book is a result of a textual intercourse between an artist and a poet both interested in exploring the complex sensations evoked by aesthetic beauty. The book, like John Gray and Dorian Gray, takes on the role of a blank canvas, allowing Ricketts and Wilde to paint its beautiful body with the colours of Aestheticism and Decadence. What resulted, however, was neither their individual visions, nor Gray’s, but an Aesthetic beauty with a life, and perspective on beauty, of its own – the symbolic Aesthete Poet.

McCormack’s *John Gray: Poet, Dandy, Priest* (1991) details Gray’s rich history as a struggling, working-class civil servant, who sought entry into the world of the Aesthetic Movement as a poet. Gray became as famous for his beauty as he was for his poetry and for his role as the ostensible original for “Dorian” Gray in Wilde’s novel. Gray, who supported his extravagant lifestyle on his £200 annual salary as a Second Division Clerk at the Foreign Office, spent his nights in the West End of London or, on the weekends, in the fashionable

haunts of Paris (McCormack 104). Gray happily absorbed everything offered to him by Ricketts and Wilde, as well as his comrades among the French *symbolistés*: Félix Fénéon, Jules La Forge, Pierre Louys, and eventually his partner in life Marc-André Raffalovich. The Aesthetic effect of Gray's readings for the Rhymer's Club and other formal gatherings made his reputation; he was multisensory in his recitations, merging physical beauty with poetic accomplishments. Gray's readings recollected Walter Pater's description of music as "a matter of pure perception . . . in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only [but] present one single effect to the 'imaginative reason'" (88). Similarly, Gray's art was a welding together of both his performed recitation with his poetry. While there were certainly poets with better writing skills, none could deliver the sensation of the Hellenic male ideal of the Aesthetic Movement like Gray.

Arthur Symons writes how, at one of these readings, Walter Pater was so overcome by Gray's reading that he asked him to repeat his recitation. According to Symons, Pater's deep satisfaction and realisation of a moment of pleasurable sensation was marked by a "certain expression [that] passed over Pater's face . . . he asked Gray to say it over again [and the] rest was silence" (McCormack 70). For Pater and the other Aesthetes in the room that evening, the memory of Gray's iconic performance would remain, and, perhaps even "burn always with this hard, gem-like flame" (Pater 152). His aesthetic contribution was not his poetry but the way his poetry was in dialogue with his own beautiful body – an intercourse of mind and body resulting in the momentary realisation of the Aesthetic Poet.

The momentary experience of "Dorian" Gray was translated to the pages of *Silverpoints*, a text which became a subversive *performative*, realised by a textual intercourse between Gray, his poetic and personal influences, the ambitions of Oscar Wilde, the

investment of John Lane and Elkin Mathews at the Bodley Head, and the designs of Charles Ricketts. Lane and Mathews published *Silverpoints* because of the insistence with which Wilde promoted Gray's work. The book is a collection of poems: some are original compositions while others are loose translations, or what Gray calls "imitations," of a number of Paul Verlaine works that celebrate, imitate, and interrogate Aestheticism as an artistic movement, as a way of life, and as a way to love. Many of the poems included are dedicated to some of the most important English and French poets and writers of the day, including Wilde, Fénéon, and LaForgue.

The life of the Aesthete Poet as embodied by Gray was short-lived. Gray joined Aestheticism's circles on the arm of his lover Oscar Wilde in 1889 and walked away in 1893 on the arm of another lover, Marc-André Raffalovich, rejecting not only Wilde, but also his own Decadence, condemning his time spent with Wilde, and the Aesthete Poet that their intercourse created, as hedonistic sin. Wilde would turn to Lord Alfred Douglas, while Gray found himself in the midst of a psychological breakdown and a crisis of identity (McCormack 97). Gray found comfort in his new lover and companion Raffalovich. Once more, Gray offered himself as a blank canvas for another artist who helped him transform into another vision of ideal beauty: the repentant, chaste, Catholic, and God-fearing figure of Father Gray.

The problem for Gray was that his Aesthetic performance of the beautiful dandy-poet was never his to control. What he thought of as a performance was in fact *performative*, a cultural imposition demanded by both the expectations of the Aesthetic Movement and his own conceptions of what it meant to be an Aesthete. Butler refers to performativity in relation to the normative or the regulatory schemas of gendered and sexed behaviours. She says that sex is "one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable . . . qualify[ing] a body



for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (*BM* xii). We tend to think of this as a demand for regulated gender and sexual behaviours; however, Butler tells us that regulation also applies to subversive resistance – another performative norm – a norm that allows culture to recognise his or her subversive position within that culture. The word “queer,” she tells us, “dialectically reinstalls the version it seeks to overcome” in order to accommodate a politics of “abjection” that allows for a revised history from a queer perspective (xxix). The Aesthetic pose, a revised conception of the dandy and the poet, becomes another performative – a subversive performative born of the same culture that establishes the norms it resists.

Certainly, that performative lives on in the queer book; however, the historical record does not recognise the progeny of that intercourse. Instead, criticism has subordinated Gray’s poetic achievements to late-Victorian critical reception of his Aesthetic mentor’s innovative book design. I argue that the queer book actually complicates the relationship between the lexical and bibliographical, offering a richer multisensory text for critique. Charles Ricketts created a design for *Silverpoints* that captures the beauty of Gray’s poetic alter ego in a material form that would outlast the youthful beauty of the innocent Gray. Like the beautiful portrait that Basil Hallward paints of a then-innocent Dorian Gray in Wilde’s novel, there is a similar attempt with *Silverpoints* to create an object “that will remain always young” (Wilde *DG* 102). However, the beauty of the painting is not entirely Hallward’s creation. Likewise, *Silverpoints* is not entirely Ricketts’s creation. Both are dependent upon the queer book’s textual intercourse.

Gray’s poems integrate the Aesthetic *poseur* with a sensitive Christian, a humble civil servant with the beauty of a masculine working-class man, and an enthusiastic poetry student immersed in the study of French Symbolism. Gray, as a poet, is part of a larger aesthetic

project that births this book. Gray's poems alone cannot represent the Aesthetic experience of "Dorian" Gray the Poet; the erotic beauty of Gray interpreted through *Eros* motivated Ricketts, Wilde, Lane and Matthews to create *Silverpoints*, a book bibliographically affecting what Peter L. Shillingsburg calls the reader's "sense of what kind of text is 'contained' in the document" (*G2G* 16). What the book contains is an expression of desire. *Silverpoints*, unlike Dorian Gray, unlike John Gray, and unlike Gray's performance of the Aesthete Poet, endures as a "beauty that does not die" (*DG* 103).<sup>8</sup> As the performative progeny of Ricketts's, Wilde's and Gray's Aesthetic discourse of beauty, pleasure, and desire, *Silverpoints* is a creation of textual poetics – an intercourse between the body, the content, and the influence of the collaborators of the queer book.

## 2.1 The Poetics of a Textual Liaison

With the exception of numerous references to its material design, *Silverpoints* is a decidedly understudied collection of poems. To this day, Linda Dowling's 1977 essay, "Nature and Decadence: John Gray's 'Silverpoints'" for *Victorian Poetry* (15:2) remains one of only two peer-reviewed articles on his work. Dowling was also the first to complain that critics have ignored Gray's poetry while paying overt attention to *Silverpoints'* material design (160). Dowling tells us that Gray's speakers "are considerably less substantial than the art or nature they confront" (166), suggesting an imbalance within his poems that explains the critical emphasis placed on *Silverpoints'* material body. Dowling's essay turns away from the material text in order to understand the "self-irony and parody" of Gray's poetic collection. Dowling's work opened an opportunity to understand Gray better as a poet; unfortunately, few critics have taken up the cause.

Several biographies of Gray have appeared by Brocard Sewell (1963), G. A. Cevalco

(1982), and most significantly, the two by Jerusha Hull McCormack (1991, 2000). All of these works emphasize Gray's personal life, especially his later life as a priest in the twentieth century. The second biography reads like a novelisation of the first; however, McCormack's first biography (1991) is the best attempt at understanding Gray's relationship to other *fin-de-siècle* writers and artists, especially Oscar Wilde. Like McCormack, Cevasco's 1992 article for *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, published about fifteen years after Dowling's article, studies Gray's significance as a poet again. Cevasco looks at both the book and the poetry and, like Dowling before him, sets out to reconsider Gray's poetic value. He is especially interested in Gray's "dandiacal aloofness" and the "dreamlike mood" of the poetry that "avoid[s] clear statement" (107). What Cevasco and Dowling note in terms of the dream-like, half-formed, visions of Gray's poetry is what I see as evidence of his poetry being only part of his art. There is a missing ingredient in their analysis – the material text. While other critics make note of Charles Ricketts's design work and *Silverpoints'* relationship to the niche market for beautiful limited editions of new poets in the 1890s, none considers the materiality of the text as an integral part of Gray's poetic expression of Decadent beauty.

McCormack's work offers weight to Gray's contribution to *fin-de-siècle* literature and culture, so much so that Joseph Bristow, in his essay collection *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem* (2005), dedicates five pages of his introduction to an analysis of Gray and *Silverpoints*. Like McCormack, Bristow isolates the material design of the book from his analysis of Gray's poetry, emphasising the book's materiality over poetic substance. However, Bristow warns his readers to resist the assumption that *Silverpoints* is "the empty-headed work of an attractive young man after whom Wilde lusted" (22). Because of an apparent need within literary criticism to separate poetic analysis from the confines of material publication, we do

not yet fully understand Gray's poetry. I agree with Bristow; rather than being some mindless beauty who published for the shallow appreciation of superior poets and artists, Gray's art is collaborative. Gray's poems are incomplete, but it is because his art as a poet hinges on the performance of his work. His beauty was not the crude display of his body to satisfy the vulgar desires of his coterie, but the well coiffed design of a smart, but untrained layperson whose ideas found expression via the men who admired him as poet and as a beautiful man. The full beauty of Gray's poetic vision is appreciable only within the confines of the single edition of *Silverpoints* published by the Bodley Head. *Silverpoints* is a unique art object because it is dependent upon a reading of the poet's body – the material experience of "Dorian" Gray (McCormack 54). What I mean is that instead of trying to understand Gray as a poet, separate from the decorated book, it is important to study the book as the embodiment of Aestheticism's ideal art.

Gray performs the sort of material analysis that is applicable to *Silverpoints* as a multisensory work of art, enhanced and completed by a material poetic of design and cosmetics. Gray's poem, "The Barber," imagines the tactile experience of creating an aesthetic persona out of the human body. The speaker dreams of himself as a barber and *cosmetiste* who, with his "marble trough" in hand, creates a vision of beauty from the body of his final mistress (III, 20). The Barber's art is commercial; yet, profit does not motivate the speaker. His dreamed craft affords him the opportunity to birth an artificial beauty. The dream becomes tactile in the second stanza (see fig. 2-1).

I moulded with my hands

The mobile breasts, the valley; and the waist

I touched; and pigments reverently placed

Upon their thighs in sapient spots and stains,

Beryls and crysolites and diaphanes,  
 And gems whose hot harsh names are never said.  
 I was a masseur; and my fingers bled  
 With wonder as I touched their awful limbs. (II, 12-19)

The barber sculpts bodies, touching them, bleeding for them, contorting nature to create a decadent vision of artificial beauty. This discourse becomes performative through the construction of the book. Charles Ricketts takes Gray's poetry as *his* rough-hewn marble, stylistically distorting Gray's poetry with Aldus italic.

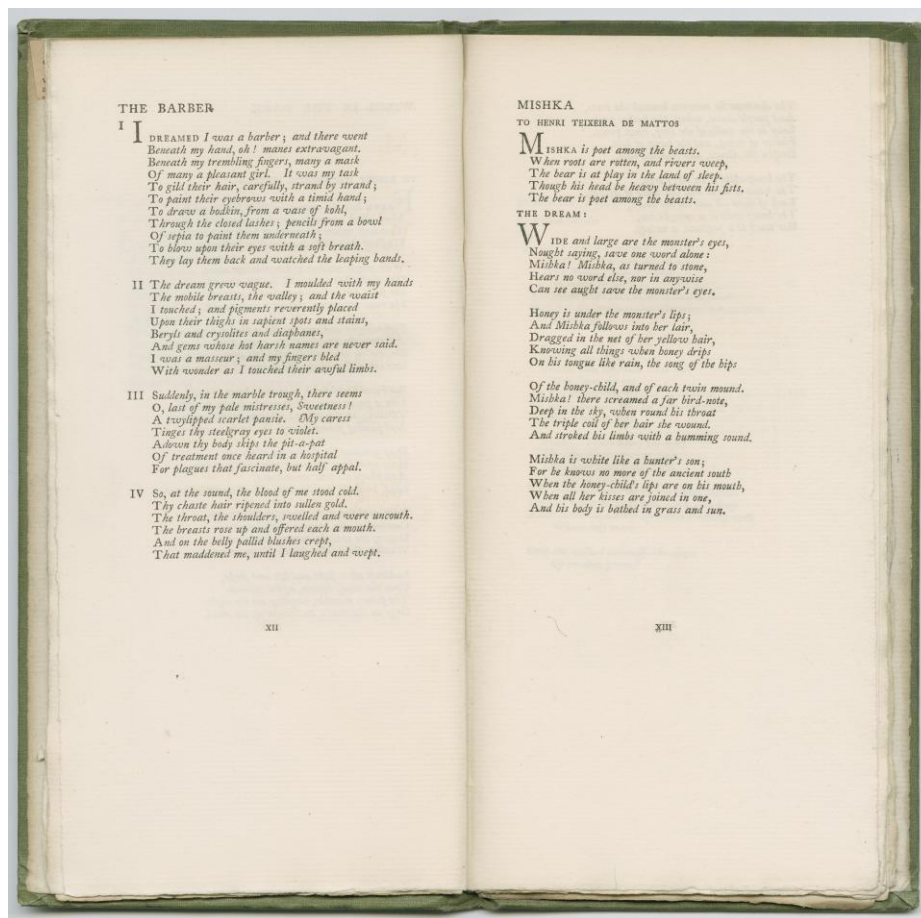


Figure 2-1 "The Barber" and "Mishka" as they appear in *Silverpoints*. Note the large expanse of margin and the small-italicised type that Ricketts uses. Image Courtesy Western Libraries' Archives Research and Collections Centre.

Late fifteenth-, early-sixteenth-century Italian bookmaker Aldus Manutius designed

the Aldine italic type used by Ricketts, for his octavo series that began with a 1501 edition of Virgil (Davies 40, 42). Aldus, as most scholars of his work shorten his name to, did not punch type himself. Like Ricketts, he designed type by hand, taking advantage of the skilled labour of Francesco Griffo (aka Francesco da Bologna) who punched all of his type for him. Helen Barolini's mention of its other names – “chancery hand” and “Aldino” – is important. While the latter term subtly includes Francesco's name in the final syllable, “chancery hand” is the cursive hand adopted at the Vatican in 1431 for its “beautiful and clear formal style of handwriting” (Barolini 80). The type is significant in two ways regarding Ricketts's knowledge of his profession: first, cursive handwriting is not print. Aldus liked the type because it took the impersonal and artless printing press and gave it a renewed relation to the illuminated manuscripts that came before print. Ricketts's adoption of the type for the entire text makes it look like a handwritten document, a personal and intimate diary or account kept by “Dorian” Gray. Second, chancery hand is the official hand of God's representative on earth. Because of the heavy influence of Catholicism on the Aesthetes, and not forgetting Gray's own conversion shortly after the release of this book, Ricketts is almost committing an act of sacrilege, provocatively converting the hand of God into the hand of the Aesthete poet. As a result, the book is personal, spiritual, heretical, and parodic.

By recreating Aldus Manutius's saddle-book complete with the italic he created, Ricketts cites his influences, placing *Silverpoints* into a discourse of beauty that privileges classical conceptions of *Eros* as a means to queer the medieval conventions that dominate book decoration and typography in the late-nineteenth century. Just as Ricketts cites his sources, Aestheticism, as a form of queerness, becomes an act of citation. Citation is a performative that, according to Butler, quotes previous socially constructed gender and sexual behaviours in order to point out their inauthenticity. Butler describes “queerness” as

“enact[ing] performativity as citationality for the purposes of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy” (*BM* xxviii-xxix). The queer book enacts that resignification with a textual discourse that hails the origins of modern conceptions of *Eros* as a language for experiencing sensations derived from the experience of beauty, even subversive conceptions of beauty such as those of Aldus Manutius and the Aesthete Poet.

Gray rejected his reputation as an Aesthetic Poet; however, *Silverpoints* cites and resignifies his rejection, making Aesthetic beauty out of Gray’s previous engagement with Aestheticism’s sexual discourse. The book is not an oppositional force in culture, solely existing to defy textual convention. Butler’s idea of queerness as citationality attempts to reach beyond “a ‘reverse-discourse’ in which the defiant affirmation of the queer dialectically reinstalls the norm it seeks to overcome. Rather, this is the politicisation of abjection in an effort to rewrite the history of the term and to force it into a demanding resignification” (*BM* xxix). The queer book demands a resignification of the concept of book. It is not a means of circulating Gray’s poems but a textual intervention into the discourse of bookmaking, offering a new sense of beauty that emerges from the erotic experience of reading with multiple senses. At the same time, the book extends an existing discourse of erotic beauty, originating in Aestheticism’s conception of beauty where content and form merge to create a single beautiful Aesthetic object.

Simultaneously, Gray’s poetry becomes a reflexive comment on *Silverpoints* as a presentation of form and style. “The Barber” consists of a highly structured series of couplets written in an iambic pentameter and organized in four stanzas of diminishing length (from eleven lines to six while totalling thirty-two) without any specific poetic purpose in its form. This structure serves to mask content while emphasizing artificiality with form, drawing attention to the art of making. The poem and design both draw our attention to surfaces and

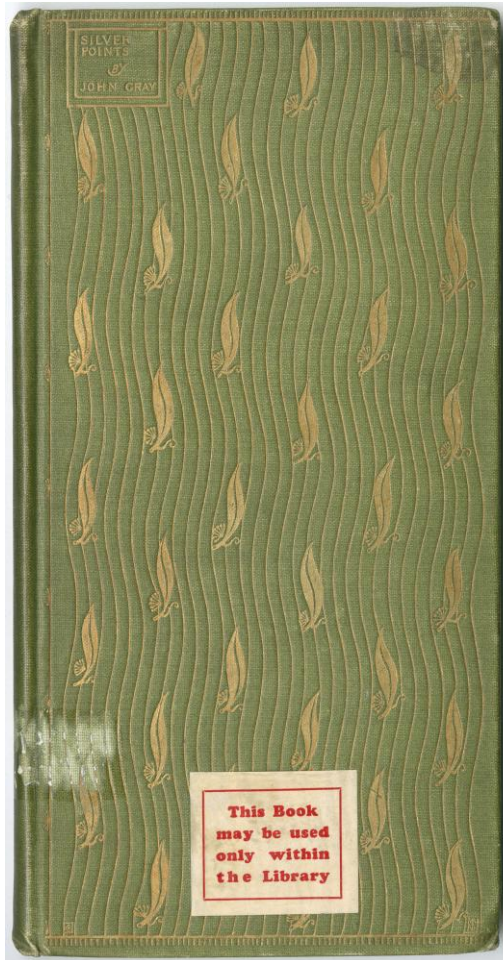
artifice – style *as* content. Ricketts and Gray each become barbers, moulding artificial beauty that emphasizes style over metaphysical abstraction. This layering of masks obscures the poem and reflects the discourse of art obscuring nature, allowing the reader to touch the “mask” hidden in a dream of being a barber.

*Silverpoints*' artifice speaks to the vision Ricketts offers Gray's poems. The book becomes the Aesthetic poet through its artificial beauty. The book, like the beauty of the woman recreated by the barber, is almost grotesque: a “twylipped pansie” with “steelgray eyes” that the speaker will make “violet” (III, 22-23). She is obscured as the “dream grew vague” and the barber alters her imperfect, muted, natural self, making *vibrant* that which is *gray* (note the obscured pun) (II, 12). The artifice infuses the object and the poem with definition and space, revealing the beautiful body as a performative parodied with a subversive textual intercourse between the bibliographical and the lexical. The material beauty of the Aldus italics, an anachronistic and visually obscuring typeface, transforms this decadent 1890s poem into a material realisation of Walter Pater's concept of Renaissance art. Art reigns supreme as the book's artificial design obscures, distorts, and, because art is superior to nature, queers the natural beauty of the poem submitting nature to aesthetics. The tools of beauty are limited, both in the barber's cosmetics and scissors, and in the book designer's ink and fount.

*Silverpoints* reflects a creative intercourse between Gray and Ricketts. Ricketts's artifice transforms the reader's experience of poetry; it suggests that Gray's poetic language is a pale mistress, an aesthetic element conquered by the “caress” and “mask” of the book's design. This is an erotics, not in the conventional sense of human bodies interacting and penetrating one another in intercourse, but a textual erotics, a poetic intercourse between the body of the book and Aestheticism's discourse of a beauty idealised and associated with John



Gray. As a queer book, *Silverpoints* is a queering of literary expression, transforming the book from a circulatory medium for lexical expression, and transforming the book into a multimedial expression where bibliography becomes a poetic structure in intercourse with lexical poetry, citing the performance of the Aesthete Poet.



**Figure 2-2: The front cover of *Silverpoints*. Note the straight lines bordering the design at the top, bottom and left hand side. Ricketts leaves his cage open so that the reader may enter to the right. Image Courtesy Western Libraries' Archives Research and Collections Centre.**

Aestheticism is a multisensory means of communication that reflects the Movement's interests in sensual and/or sexual experience. As David Halperin notes, the means of "organizing human erotic life" are unique to a particular space and time in culture and, as a result, we achieve our best understanding of same-sex desires in the past through the

historical lens of the culture from which it emerges (22). Aestheticism emerges from a revised discourse of *Eros* taken from the study of Hellenism. Pater tells us that the Aesthetic effect of art communicates through an “ideal” beauty – “a distinction, like genius or noble place” (133), found in the “moral sexlessness” of the male body (142). The male body remains erotic but sexless because appreciation of the nude male form speaks to “the finer aspects of nature, the finer lime and clay of the human form” (133). Stephano Evangelista explains how, in Ancient Greece, the

gymnasia, where athletes exercised naked, were the schools of art, frequented by philosophers and artists alike. Public nakedness and physical exercise ritually enact the principle of individual freedom that is for [Johann Joachim] Winckelmann [and for Walter Pater’s reading of Winckelmann] the governing ideal of the Hellenic world. It is for this reason that among the visual arts of antiquity Winckelmann favours sculpture, with its interest in the idealised beautiful body, especially the male body. (27)

Art is dependent upon physical experience – the body of the athlete gives physical sensation to Aestheticism’s ideals. While this interaction is technically sexless, the beauty of the male body offers an erotic sensuality shared between men as the basis for both art and art criticism. This is why Gray’s audiences appreciated his recitations. It was the intercourse between his poetry with his own bodily beauty which his audience wanted to experience – technically sexless, but intensely erotic in its sensuality. The queer book is an iteration of that sensory intercourse, only the body is that of the book, not a poet.

*Silverpoints* is a citation of Gray’s earlier Aesthetic performance and Aldus Manutius’s bookmaking practices. However, its existence rewrites these contributing influences into a performativity that overpowers these creative contributions to give the book

its own character, a representatively peculiar iteration of Aestheticism's sexual discourse. The poet and the book of poetry, much like language and materiality for Butler, "are fully embedded in each other," interdependent "but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e. reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other" (*BM* 38). The context of the book defines poems by tying the personality or meaning of the poems to the body with which they are associated. As I have noted, textual criticism has not necessarily approached *Silverpoints* in this manner, typically investigating the book or the body of the book separately from literary expression. Shillingsburg tells us that "bibliographical codes," Genette's peritextual elements, such as fonts, whitespace, and binding, tell "readers the ways in which they should read the lexical text," that is, "text, letters, accents, and punctuation" (*G2G* 16). Aestheticism's play with language in order to evoke sensory response demands a physical engagement with art. Aestheticism is deeply material; therefore, it is no wonder that decorated books of Aesthetic literature are so materially communicative, using bibliographical codes in conjunction with literature's lexical tradition. The reader cannot separate the book from the poetry or the poet.

## 2.2 The Performative Body of the Aesthete Poet (i.e. the Book)

Just as Gray's poetry is bound to Aestheticism's material expression, the material creation of *Silverpoints* is bound to Gray. Many of Gray's poems are translations or "imitations" of poems by Paul Verlaine and other *symbolistes*. Similarly, Charles Ricketts translates Gray out of the metaphysical realm that poetry often occupies into a textual discourse between poetry, design, decoration, and visual interpretation. Ricketts's work does not highlight Gray as a central figure; instead, he merges Gray into the book's aesthetic design, giving a characteristic body and personality to this particular *belle lettre*. The collaboration is

recognised in the text but that collaboration is second to the citation of the Aesthetic Poet (i.e. the Iconic symbol) that results from their textual intercourse. Ricketts's binding and typographical designs reflect a privileging of book over artist in many ways, making it easy to overlook Gray's literary accomplishments. However, Ricketts's astonishing design and typographical work is also a material *recognition* of Gray's consequence as an Aesthete – drawing attention to the book as a poetic iteration, in body and spirit of the iconic Aesthete Poet.

Both artists appear on the cover page and the reverse but are diminished and made secondary to the gold-pressed lattice-design (see fig. 2-2). Ricketts reduces the size of the title, author, and designer names on the cover, giving prominence to the design work and directing the reader's eye to the art of the book, rather than the name of the poet. The author's identity is secondary to the project as an aesthetic totality. Where Ricketts appears as only "C.R." in the bottom right hand corner, Gray's full name appears equally small. The title of the book, *Silverpoints*, is larger but Ricketts again demands that the book's name demur to its own Aesthetic imagery. The book displaces not only Gray as author, but also Ricketts as the Aesthetic designer, and even the Bodley Head as publishing house. The result is that the cover's title resembles an artist's signature in the corner of a painting hanging in a gallery. It is not just the binding that is a work of art; the entire book works, as Grigley argues about published editions (Introduction 14-15), as an installation piece, to be appreciated for its own beauty and quality without a focus on authorial justification. This queer presentation of the material book prompts the reader to pick it up out of aesthetic curiosity and discovers the iconic Aesthete Poet.

*Silverpoints* is a performative body that cites the textual intercourse between Ricketts and Gray. Performativity, according to Butler, "is real only to the extent that it is performed,"

either by conforming to or, by contesting social expectations regarding gender and sexual practice (*PSR* 161). Performativity is about everyday society and culture and the role that people or material objects play in that society. Performativity is not necessarily conscious performance whereas Aestheticism embraced a cultivated performance, a parody that subverted signifiers, including bibliographical code. Take Oscar Wilde for example. Wilde's performance of the aesthete dandy, according to Dennis Denisoff, did not position Wilde "outside of the dominant system" of sexual discourse (5). He positioned himself side-by-side with cultural norms of masculinity by performing the dandy – a figure identified with "an elite class that possessed refined tastes and values" that allowed Wilde to "claim upper-class privileges" regarding sexual behaviour (Denisoff 7). Wilde's persona is transformed by a literary mode of sexual discourse, taking power from the financially elite in order to create an artistic elite. Wilde performed aristocratic privilege, and as a result, his "unconventional sexual desires" became associated with his behaviour and with the dandy's traditional role of "assumed prowess with women" and "[i]n the eyes of most of the public [he could] pass as [a] 'ladies' man'" (Denisoff 7). By citing the performative role of a dandy libertine, Wilde, as aesthete, could engage in same-sex activities, thus transforming the persona of the dandy into another altogether queer persona amongst dandy-aesthetes "involved in unsanctioned relations" (7). Denisoff argues that "[s]exual ambiguity became inscribed upon the persona as a characteristic hyper-awareness of performed and assumedly actual identities" (8). In other words, the two meanings of the dandy began to emerge from within the performance of the dandy; not only was Wilde the heteronormative ladies' man, he was also a sexual deviant who had sex with men.

This performance of the dandy applies to the queer book's citation of the Aesthete Poet. Shillingsburg's concept of the book's "bibliographic codes" refers to the "appearance

of the document – the type fonts, the formatting, the deployment of white space, the binding, and perhaps also the pricing and distribution method” (*G2G* 16). Genette called these the paratextual, peritextual and epitextual features of the book (40). The meaning of a text, as I have already established, reaches beyond the words and language of literary content – the “lexical codes” of the book (*G2G* 16). The book’s material presentation, like printed words, makes meaning. The performative body of the book penetrates, and is penetrated by, the content. According to Ruari McLean and Robert Bringhurst this presentation, in a well-made book, honours the ideals of the author and centralises the literary text in order to make a book that is complimentary and in harmony with perceived authorial intentions. McLean says that “[p]oetry above all things wants to be allowed to speak for itself and should – usually – be set as plainly as possible (*T&H* 165). For McLean, the good typographer and bookmaker does not stand in the way of, or interfere in, the relationship between reader and author. There is a privileging of authorial intention in McLean’s work because he does not want type to change a poem’s intended meaning.

What is interesting is that *Silverpoints* interferes in poetic meaning by imposing interpretation. However, the interference becomes intercourse because it cites Gray as original author of the Aesthete Poet. This figure is an Aesthetic body performing a vision of what the poems should mean by citing the memory of Gray’s recitations. That body is not limited to the paper or the binding. The body of Gray’s poems is typographical, printed on another body of Van Gelder paper. McLean’s caution reveals the power of type to change meaning, suggesting that the typographer’s creative powers can supersede the author’s if he or she chooses to do so. Bringhurst says that “[t]ypography is to literature as musical performance is to composition, an essential act of interpretation, full of endless opportunities for insight or obtuseness” (19). So while a good typographer does not interfere in a poet’s

meaning, he or she can manipulate interpretations of the poet's meaning. McLean supports this when he notes how "[m]uch typography is far removed from literature, for language has many uses, including packaging and propaganda" (Bringhurst 19). In other words, elements of Aestheticism infuse the book's performance of Gray's poetry with poetics that emerge from choices of type, whitespace, and binding.

Shillingsburg, in *Resisting Texts* (1997), warns, "[p]roduction processes notoriously tamper with a linguistic text in ways both beneficial and detrimental to it as a representation of the essayed version" (91). Proponents of authorial intention like D. F. McKenzie and Jerome McGann may cringe to think that "economic necessities and accidents of production performances" sometimes "shape (sometimes to shape out of existence) the subtleties of the creative performance" (Shillingsburg *RT* 91). However, for my purposes, it is these accidents of economic necessity, mixed with the creative choices and material limits of the book's designer that queers the book.

*Silverpoints* communicates in a manner that Gray's poems, on their own, cannot. Take for example "Les Demoiselles de Sauve" from the 1892 issue of *The Dial*, which appeared a year before its republication in *Silverpoints*. Instead of the delicate, Aesthetic fragility of its appearance in the latter, *The Dial* presents Gray's poem in a large pica designed to match the large, magazine quality of the journal. Ricketts and Shannon's journal, *The Dial*, appears to be designed to capture attention on a glutted journal market through size and design. A delicately printed poem in a sparsely filled journal would appear abnormal. For *Silverpoints*, Ricketts decreases the size and alters the book design in order to reinterpret who Gray is as a poet.

"Les Demoiselles de Sauve" is about the subtle machinations, or performance, of courtesans. The women Gray writes about are beautiful performative creatures walking in

gardens as if they were walking in church. They celebrate beauty, not of nature's making, but of the landscape architect's design. Artificial beauty is celebrated as Jacqueline blushes in a shade that matches the painted nails on her fingers tips (4-5), Berthe bows her head like a Saint in the presence of the sun, refusing to allow the "pink faces of the skies" to be compared to her own image (7-9), and Ysabeau holds "eglantine" to her "bursting lips," paying homage to the eternal beauty of nature. Nature is idealised and reveals the limits of their own performative beauty as mutable.

FIGURE 2-3

REMOVED FROM PUBLISHED DISSERTATION

FOR COPYRIGHT PURPOSES

**Figure 2-3 "Les Demoiselles de Sauve" by John Gray, as it first appeared in the first issue of Ricketts and Shannon's occasional journal *The Dial*. To give you an idea of how large the font is, the page measures 14" tall and 11.5" wide. Permission Pending Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.**

Within the context of *The Dial* (see fig. 2-2), Gray's poem seems a condemnation of Aestheticism's privileging of the artificial, or unnatural. First, the poem has no dedication and is enormous in size. Taking up the central part of a page that measures 14" tall and 11.5" wide, *The Dial* presents as a folio; there is nothing delicate about the poem's presentation. The enormity of the poem suggests an enormity of purpose: the poem is saying something declarative and of the magnitude that its presentation emphasises. The presentation also changes the reader's focus; the small font of *Silverpoints* demands a careful reading simply for the sake of understanding the poem through its type. The large letters in *The Dial* allow



the reader to scan the poem quickly and move on to the next work in the journal. Focus is on character names, not the beautiful and delicate descriptions of the poem. Instead of focussing on the setting and atmosphere of the flowery poem and its relationship to the book as a whole, the reader turns to the next poem or work without reconsidering the poem within the larger context of the magazine. The reader is not encouraged to linger, to read each word carefully, to caress the page while reading, metaphorically, and literally.

Within the context of *Silverpoints*, reading is made complex because of typographical and paratextual choices made by both Ricketts and Gray. First, Gray includes a dedication to “S. A. S. Alice, Princesse de Monaco,” a living woman of the court who married the crown prince, Albert of Monaco. If Gray wanted to condemn the artificial beauty of upper-class women of the court, why dedicate the poem to a woman who was also his friend (Fletcher 292)? The poem is also the first poem within *Silverpoints*, positioned to introduce the reader to the conceptions of Aestheticism and Decadence with which so many of Gray’s poems engage. The context suggests an alterity absent from its first publication. The surface design of the poem is presented as a performance, suggesting that the poem is attempting to say something that its narrative surface is not directly addressing. Within the context of *Silverpoints*, the bowed heads of the ladies seem ironic in response to the “Tangles” that serve as “a snare to catch the tapering toe” (15). The women resist being ensnared by nature, ignoring its beauty and keeping their eyes towards the ground, cynically watching for the snares that may entrap them. The reader, almost forced into a close reading by the extra-small pica of type used by Ricketts and the printers at Folkards, notices subtler ideas that are not as noticeable in a quickly scanned journal. The intimacy of the saddle book design encourages readers to carry the book in their pocket and read repeatedly. The book calls for an intimate reading of the poems and allows the reader to carry it with them. The artificial

aesthetics of the book are also typographically intimate; as a result, the Aesthete Poet, seemingly impersonal in its artificiality, is actually a very personal expression when read multimedially.

Typographically, Ricketts's choice of a leaf design for the "B" initial that begins the poem also hails the "orchard" and "springtime grass" of Gray's poem (13-14) as well as the willow leaves that decorate the exterior binding of the book. The style of presentation pulls us out of the poem. As the first poem of the collection, it was traditional to italicise the first entry as a sort of prologue for the rest of the book. However, Gray's poem is the first of an entire collection of italicised works. Ricketts changes the reader's approach to Gray's work. With *The Dial*, anyone could casually glance at the poem – even from a distance; now, the reader has to hold his or her gaze and read the poem in this small type. There is a delicacy to Gray's argument that Ricketts cites with the delicacy of type, subtly demanding that the reader to pay closer attention.

Through Ricketts's textual citations of Gray's poetic style, *Silverpoints'* typography affects a bibliographical poetic – a material stylisation of the literary that demands the reader engage physically with the book as an emotional and psychological expression. "In a well-made book," Bringhurst says, "the letters are alive. They dance in their seats. Sometimes they rise and dance in the margins and aisles" (19). The queer book resists this perception of the book and the bookmaker because the book makes itself known in conversation with the reader and the author. Take for example the wide swathes of white space that Ricketts leaves on every page. Bonnie Mak explains the role that whitespace plays when we read, particularly when reading silently (17). Mak states that whitespace "enhances the legibility and comprehensibility of the page," offering spaces between words so that the eye can rest, both visually and cognitively (17). "By leaving space on the page unfilled," she says,

“designers provide openings for readers to pause and consider the thoughts they have encountered. Readers are given the opportunity in these zones to contemplate, consider, and question ideas, and may even be encouraged by the empty spaces to add their own thoughts to the page” (17). White space is a time for contemplation, consideration and critique. In the case of *Silverpoints*, the cue to pause is transformed, and whitespace becomes an expressive art of discursive space – a material gap or fissure that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has told us is the textual basis of queer reading (*TEN* 8).

The queer book, at least in this instance, takes the role of whitespace to an extreme. Probably the most famous reaction to the white space of *Silverpoints*, and the most satirical, comes from Ada Levenson who stated that she had

suggested to Oscar Wilde that he should go a step further than these minor poets; that he should publish a book all margin; full of beautiful unwritten thoughts, and have this blank volume bound in some Nile-green skin powdered with gilt nenuphars and smoothed with hard ivory, decorated with gold by Ricketts and printed on Japanese paper, each volume must be a collector’s piece, a numbered one of a limited ‘first’ (and last) edition: ‘very rare.’

He approved. (qtd. in Beckson 318)

The whitespace is part of the expression conveyed in *Silverpoints*. The book does not simply mediate between the poems and reader, but asks the reader to put considerable effort into consideration of the book’s material beauty and that beauty’s relationship to the poems contained therein. The whitespace leaves room for the material sensuality of the book to suggest new desires as yet unimagined by any of the book’s contributors. Like the green carnation that puzzled Wilde’s audience and critics in regards to its meaning, the book’s whitespace offers room to disagree, room to tease and play with suggestions, as Levenson

demonstrates, and consider new means for poetry and Aestheticism more broadly within the space of pages that make up the reader's own "very rare" edition of *Silverpoints*.

## 2.3 The Textual Intercourse of Gray, Ricketts, and Wilde

In Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Basil Hallward imposes something of himself onto Dorian Gray when he paints the portrait. As a result, the portrait is not an image of the young man with whom Basil is sexually infatuated, but a material realisation of Basil's sexual infatuation. Basil tells Lord Henry Wotton that he has "put into it all the extraordinary romance of which, of course, I have never dared to speak to him. He knows nothing about it. He will never know anything about it. But the world might guess it; and I will not bare my soul to their shallow, prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under their microscope" (Wilde *DG* 85). Dorian, of course, does discover Basil's secret love for him, while the reader discovers that the aesthetic ideal that Basil loved was not the real, complex, troubled Dorian that Henry manipulates, but the idealised, youthful, "harmony of soul and body" that Basil finds so appealing about Dorian (84). The "real" Dorian will not endure time; only the idealized portrait of Basil's image – an aesthetic symbol of innocent beauty, an imitation – remains. Dorian realises this and contributes to the realisation of the painting by imposing his own ideals of immortal beauty onto the work. The result is a creature, influenced by the characteristics of Dorian and Basil but an entity in its own right – a life form born of an intercourse between the desires of two desperate men, with tragic consequences for both.

While certainly not as tragic, *Silverpoints* is also the result of a textual intercourse of the desires of two artists. Citing its provocative designer and the conflicted and troubled poet John Gray, *Silverpoints* is a queer conception of "Dorian" Gray the Aesthete poet. This conception is reminiscent of what Shillingsburg calls a "performance field . . . where the

performance text is ‘played’ according to the rules of the reader’s particular game of textual interaction [in this case, Aesthetic discourses of textual intercourse] and further limited by the performer’s capabilities and resources” or, budget and materials available to make the book (*RT* 84). Ricketts’s hand brings material expression, a textual poetics that helps to make *Silverpoints* a queer book, capturing an ideal of the Aesthetic poet, based on his reading of Gray. Gray himself admits that he was the creation of Ricketts, suggesting that his performance of the Aesthete Poet, as a performative realisation of Ricketts’s desires and Gray’s desire to please Ricketts was in part motivated by his own desire to be accepted by the Aesthetic Movement (McCormack 50).

The Aesthete Poet configured as queer book finds a lexical representation in Gray’s poem “Mishka,” an important conception of the artist as a beautiful object whose social performance is transformed into a performative parody (see fig. 2-3). He is the beautiful hero seduced into the arms of a *femme fatale*, sexually submitting to her caresses. He refers to this “beast” as “she” in lines 12, 13, 19 and 24, and while the immediate implication of the poem is that of a heterosexual seduction, the context of *Silverpoints* complicates this association. The feminised beast dominates his male body, forcing him into the role of the poem’s sexual object of desire. Mishka, through his beauty, captivates the eyes of the monster (6, 10) and she must “drag” Mishka into her lair with a “net of her yellow hair” (6, 18). Through his own seduction, she lures him into her clutches unawares. Mishka’s beauty is defined by his naïve innocence. He is forced into nature as “his body is bathed in grass and sun,” held in nature’s clutches and seduced by its false, monstrous beauty. This natural landscape cites the artificial landscape of Ricketts’s green cloth book with its golden cage; the pastoral becomes art’s abstraction of nature. “Mishka” is an anti-pastoral, making nature into a false trap that seduces male beauty away from exploring “more of the ancient south” (22). Artifice envelops

Mishka just in a manner that reminds the reader of how Ricketts's designs envelope Gray. In its refusal to allow the reader and Mishka to dig below the surface, the book, as with the poem, tells us that there is nothing below the surface – there is no real “Mishka” or Aesthete Poet to discover under the artifice of the book's poetics. The book's performativity is a reflection of the performativity of its creators.

Charles Ricketts discovers the beauty of the Aesthete Poet in his connection to John Gray, though Gray will never realise that beauty seen by Ricketts and other Aesthetes. While Ricketts and Gray remained friends for the rest of their lives, Gray's involvement with Wilde in 1889 and 1890, and later by his relationship with Raffalovich, severed the initial intensity of their connection. The only means Ricketts had to preserve the Gray he imagined was with his skill as a bookmaker. Through *Silverpoints*, Ricketts materially preserves who Gray was for him. At the same time, unlike Basil's painting which serves as a mirror into Dorian Gray's soul, *Silverpoints* takes on a life of its own. Whereas Hallward is determined to rid art of “autobiography” in order to regain art's “abstract sense of beauty” (Wilde *DG* 85), Ricketts finds delight in preserving his subjective reading of Gray's Aesthete Poet.

Wilde, like Lord Henry, saw Gray as a blank canvas on which to paint his vision of the beautiful Aesthete Poet. Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* during the height of his relationship with Gray in 1889 (Frankel “Introduction” *DG* 13). Gray was thirteen years younger than Wilde and, as with Ricketts, did not have a strong enough personality as yet developed to do anything but absorb Wilde's teachings and transform himself into the Poet of his mentor's queer imagination. Like Dorian, Gray finds himself striving to be the thing he never was. Instead, he strives to become the ideal that Ricketts and Wilde desired to see in his beautiful face and body. He desired to be what they wanted to see.

Gray captures a moment in his life as the Aesthetic Poet and the influence of Wilde as

mentor with “Summer Past: To Oscar Wilde” (xv). Gray returns to his use of garden imagery – gardens being artificial recreations of nature – in order to present Wilde as one of the “great trees” to pass its “pearl” unto “the proud leaves” below (5-6). Wilde as the tree becomes a sanctuary where “the eves” lull “song-tired birds to sleep” so that “other things might tell their secrecies” (15-18). The suggestion of secrets shared between Wilde and his acolytes is sexualised with adjectives describing leaves curling in “ecstasy.” The secrets they share imply both sensual pleasure and sexual desire when we hear the speaker whisper about “the stern gods” who “keep/Their bitter silence” (20-21) as if the sleeping birds, or the culture that allowed the tree of Wilde to flourish, may find out their secrets. The end suggests that holy trees are “song-set” as if a moral contagion, resistant to change, will silence their secret sharing and “unfurl eternally the sheen/Of restless green” (23-24). These are not secrets so much as Aesthetic philosophies of Decadence and beauty that integrate poetics with bodily senses, including the erotic.

The poem ends questioning the order of things. The role of nature suggests that all of these figures are natural elements in the world, but for a green lawn to be unfurled is to landscape or as part of the process of artificially re-constructing nature’s beauty that may interrupt the secrets shared between tree and leaf. Simultaneously, then, the poem casts natural elements as artificial – an artificiality enhanced by the stylised willow-leaves and green dyed boards of the book. Nature becomes an art – an artificial imitation displaced from and improving upon the natural. The speaker suggests a beautiful intimacy, where the tree (Wilde), nourishes his acolyte Gray, with his knowledge and wisdom regarding Aesthetics and poetics. The integration of bodies into philosophical initiation has erotic connotations without being explicitly about sexual penetration. It also suggests sexual pleasure derived from a creative bond between the acolyte and his poetic mentor. The sensuality of

Aestheticism and its incorporation of all sensory experience, including the erotic, nourish Gray and his generation of Aesthetes for good and for ill. Remember, while the poem and the book propose what may appear to be a queer Eden, the reality had consequences outside of the Aesthetic Movement that were decidedly not idyllic.

Continuing Gray's naïve fantasy, Ricketts's idea of the garden transforms Gray's portrayal of a natural relationship between Wilde and Gray into another Aesthetic pose. As with the other poems in the book, "Summer Past" is made into a typographical challenge with the small Aldine italics in a sea of white space. This white space exists within the cage surrounding the cloth bound book. While there is room to contemplate for the reader and for the poet, such repose is only available in the confines of the book. *Silverpoints*, with its golden cage stretched out over a sea of green cloth that binds the book is another artificially constructed garden. British Aestheticism takes nature and uses art to improve upon it. In fact, Vivian in "The Decay of Lying" tells us that Art reveals "Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out" (Wilde 290-91). Ricketts, a student of Aestheticism and Gray's mentor, transforms his acolyte's natural imagery into artifice, an element of irony born from the bibliographical alteration of Gray's lexical expression. In this environment of a green-bound Decadence, the book leaves the reader in a sea of whitespace to wonder what sort of repose and comfort Wilde, as the great tree, could actually offer.

Like those who looked up to him, Wilde was also learning and acquiring new sensations. Wilde is cast as mentor for a generation of Aesthetes, when he was really their more famous colleague. Wilde as tree, in the hands of Ricketts, becomes an artificial source of nourishment – a decorative symbol for poetic influence naively romanticised by an



inexperienced young man. The tree becomes almost parodic in the sense that Denisoff says parody is “a temporal, interdependent, and not easily controlled strategy that will hopefully bring attention to the mixed and changing motivations of people whose sexualized critiques of aestheticism assisted in sustaining its cultural cachet” (12). The sexuality of “Summer Past” is realized through a dialogue between biographical and lexical codes. The tree is not really a tree, but a symbol of creative life – a life of decadent hedonism, that Gray left Ricketts’s side to join – one of many young men who fell at the roots of Wilde’s celebrity in an attempt to share in his fame and fortune of the early 1890s. The book is the thing trapped in time. John was not Dorian; *Silverpoints* is Dorian and John, as Father Gray, would later take every opportunity to “buy up and ‘immobilize’” any copy of *Silverpoints* he found, gladly condemning the symbolic Aesthete Poet to obscurity (Sewell 14). Despite John Gray’s efforts, the Aesthete poet lives on through the material beauty of the remaining copies. The book becomes the creation of both innocence and experience, a lesson learned and a beautiful tragedy.

## 2.4 Penetrating the Aesthete Poet

*Silverpoints*, as a textual intercourse between creative artists merging multiple mediums of expression into a single work, does not *recreate* (*re-produce*) the past; instead, it cites the past and its makers but its character is new. The book’s multisensory presentation creates meaning because it is not simply the type on the page, but the way the type is presented, the italics speak a rich history of the Aesthetic movement, its celebration of Hellenism, and its debt to the Renaissance and Aldus Manutius. Shillingsburg tells us that words, unlike speech, have “no intonation or tones at all, no facial expressions or gestures except explicitly verbalized ones, no rhythms, accents, or musical indications” (*G2G* 47). This reading of

words, not necessarily poetry, allows us to see Gray's poetry as a canvas onto which the book's design paints intonation, gesture, accent, making poetry more like music where form becomes indistinguishable from content. As Pater says in "School of Giorgione," "All art aspires to the condition of music," and while many poets and painters struggle to set boundaries that separate "the matter from the form," *Silverpoints*, as a queer book, manages "to obliterate" that distinguishing line by becoming more than the sum of its parts (Pater 86).

Gray's poems, as part of the book, penetrate Aestheticism, revealing layers of surface each with its own sense of beauty and ability to trigger a sensational and pleasurable response. "Le Chevalier Malheur" speaks to both the sexuality and the spirituality of the book's creative textual intercourse between Gray and his mentors. The poem, presented in an accentual Anglo-Saxon verse form, compliments the medieval theme of knightly adventure. Gray uses the metaphor of penetration as the speaking knight is pierced by a fellow knight's "unpitying lance," conquering him in battle (4). This first penetration by a lance threatens to kill him, pouring forth his blood in an ejaculatory "single crimson jet" (6). The poem takes more overt sexual license as the speaker falls to the ground in defeat and his vanquisher forces on him a second penetration, that of his mail clad fingers which "he thrusts into the wound," reviving the speaker who declares: "At once within me bursts/a new noble heart" (13-20). The fallen knight is not dominated in his passive reception of the other knight's phallic lance and fingers; he is revived in a second ejaculatory response to repeated penetration. Significantly, touch revives him, a tactile experience of spiritual ecstasy that suggests a communal bond with homoerotic overtones as one man's life-giving force injects new life and inspiration into another man's heart. Significantly, the conquering knight offers *new* life to his comrade. One knight revives his fellow knight – one Aesthete brings to life another Aesthete Poet so that he can create something new – something that will not allow

him to be defeated as he was the first time he jousts. Equating penetration with the restoration, or at least, new opportunities to pursue creative fulfillment, Gray's poem presents a queer moment where the text becomes the new life that the Aesthete Poet may now live. As a book, the Poet is stronger than he was as Gray's persona. Presentation is relevant because the reader is drawn to the book for its material beauty just as aesthetes such as Oscar Wilde, Andre Raffalovich, Charles Shannon, and Charles Ricketts were drawn to Gray's physical beauty. His father figures, his lovers, his friends, penetrate Gray, perhaps not sexually, but certainly at a spiritual level with an aesthetic tenet warning him that "Once only can the miracle/avail—Be wise!" (35-36). The queer book is the new life, the last chance for the Aesthete Poet to be immortalised. This burning, gem-like Paterean moment will pass and never return for the penetrated Knight or the poet.

Since "Le Chevalier Malheur" is also "Imitated from the French" of Paul Verlaine – what G.A. Cevasco calls "liberal translation" (112) – Gray can "take certain liberties" in his interpretation of a challenging French symbolist poet (Cevasco, 110). He intermixes translation with his own original poetry, making the reader who is familiar with Verlaine's work conscious of layers of interpretation – a queer citationality – from Verlaine's imagination to Gray's imitation and finally to Ricketts's gilding. Ricketts's work obscures Gray, decentering his authorship and representing his efforts through the book's material beauty. Gray's imitations extend to his own performative persona, influencing the character of the book.

James G. Nelson credits Gray with making the decision to call the book 'Silverpoints,' which he claims speaks to the silverpoint as a tool. A silverpoint is a "stylus which leaves on the surface of paper prepared with certain oxides a faint but indelible mark, the silverpoint was used by such masters as Botticelli and Dürer and in the later nineteenth

century by Alphonse Le Gros and Burne-Jones to create the most delicate of drawings, whose silver-gray effect was especially delightful” (Nelson *EN* 200). Poetry, Nelson tells us, is related to the material in the naming of the book. Usage of a silverpoint, the typographer’s lance or a small metal rod pressing minute metal particles onto the page, implies a one-time act that cannot be repeated because of the delicacy of the work. The knight’s one-time offer of orgasmic rebirth is reflected in the book’s own status as a limited edition. The title reflects Ricketts’s role in the creation of the text as well as the role of material design – that is, the textual poetics that complete Gray’s poetry. Ricketts presents Gray’s thirty poems *as* aesthetic design, beautiful material objects for the reader to appreciate. Depth becomes layers of surface as the heart’s blood of the penetrated speaker spurts forth into the material world. The queer book’s presentation decentres our perception of poetry as representative of the poet’s thoughts – i.e. a signifier of an original signified. The material book with its multiple authors is an inseparable part of Gray’s poetry.

Like the hand that penetrates the knight’s heart and revives him in an orgasmic awakening of sensation and spirit, Gray’s poetry is revived by the hand of Ricketts who takes a half-finished idea of aestheticism, limited by poetry as a single discipline of language, and pierces it with his pencil, and Aesthetic vision, informing Gray’s work with the beauty of his Aesthetic persona. Ricketts’s careful editing of the text caused delays in the book’s publishing – a habit that would continue to characterize Ricketts as a bookmaker (Delaney 76).

Ricketts matches Morris rule for rule in his books, demanding “bold” and “legible” type, that the “two opposite pages form one unit” and “that the upper margin should be a little larger than the inside margin, that the fore-edge margin would be the next in size, and the lowest the greatest of all” (Ricketts 34-35). He also prefers papers made by “Batchelor &

Arnold” in terms of English-made papers (35). Ricketts, however, subverts his own rules, willing to challenge and bend his designs to the limits of technology available to him. While Ricketts insists that designers “[u]se decoration only when it can be urged as an added element of beauty to the book, let it accompany the text, and not gobble it up” (Ricketts 36), he bends his rule without contradicting himself. And, true to this motto, Ricketts uses little design other than typography in the pages of *Silverpoints*. Instead, he finds other ways to penetrate Gray’s work.

Connection, collaboration, and intercourse are crucial to understanding the materiality of Aestheticism’s multisensory philosophical body. The loss of that communal interaction is worse than death. In his poem to Jules Laforgue, Gray examines Aestheticism’s social world from the perspective of preternatural death as one dead body speaks to another seemingly silent corpse (see fig. 2-3). McCormack notes that “Did we not, Darling,” contains imagery taken from several sources including Charles Baudelaire and Emily Dickinson (134). Two lines of one of Laforgue’s poems serve as an introduction to the poem in place of a title that originally appeared in Laforgue’s own publication of *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté* (1890) (McCormack 134, n280). Ellis Hanson notes how the poem depicts the “sexual dilemma” of same-sex desire: “Confronted with the self-righteous indignation of others,” Gray’s lovers commit suicide only to find themselves physically separated in their graves, “conscious, sensible, dreaming perhaps, but unable to touch each other, unable perhaps to hear each other” (316). Hanson describes the “blackening and rotting away of the flesh” as “a metaphor for the repression that was all too often the fate of the Victorian homosexual,” unaware if his lover will even remember him when he awakes (316).

The speaker notes the lack of intercourse that comes from the experience of having one’s sensations triggering by beauty among like-minded Aesthetes. The poem shares the

experience of losing that community by figuring the poet in isolation. Death is not an end here, but a change, or a queering of life that perpetuates the alienation of the poem's speaker and his implied listener. Even isolation, loss, and death, can be beautiful if appreciated. The dead speaker presents a queer perception of alienation obscured by the limited audience for decorated texts and further by a subcultural inference of erotic desire between men. The dead speaker is alone, "Deep in the dear dust" (13), and yet, he serves as a site of aestheticised isolation. Their deaths do not make the scene tragic; the tragedy is their physical and intellectual isolation from one another. *Silverpoints* is a space of materialized disruption, "a well-sought bed," where same-sex desire may rest, express its *ennui*, and circulate as an aesthetic discourse.

Displayed beside one another, "Did we not, Darling" and "Lean back and press the pillow deep" (see fig. 2-4) display a conflict between emotional connection and the practice of Aestheticism and of Decadence. Both poems speak of love and physical touch. Touch is denied the speaker and his beloved in the first (xvii). Both are men, now dead and buried. Even in death they are kept apart as if they are still "spat upon" (4) in the afterlife as they were in life by those outside their Aesthetic intercourse. In the second (xviii), the lover and the beloved are touching; the speaker seems to touch his wife or lover's stomach as she carries their child. At first, this reads as a return to heteronormative sexual desire and love; however, we should first look at Ian Fletcher's notes on the poem where one of his sources suggests that the poem's dedication "E. M. G." is a typo and should have read "H. M. G.," his mother's initials (*JG* 297). If Fletcher's sources are correct, then the child being born is Gray; lonely death is contrasted with the bitterness of a heteronormative birth. The promise of his parents is blighted by a world that allowed this child to die in "melancholy" (14). With

both poems, we can see an anxiety in Gray's work regarding identity, sexuality, the soul, and even his own birth. He and men like him "Walk on the earth like other men" but they are not like other men. They are unique sexually and creatively. The conjoining of sex with text is a key element to understanding the Aesthetics of Gray's poems and the Aesthetics of *Silverpoints*. *Silverpoints* captures life and death.

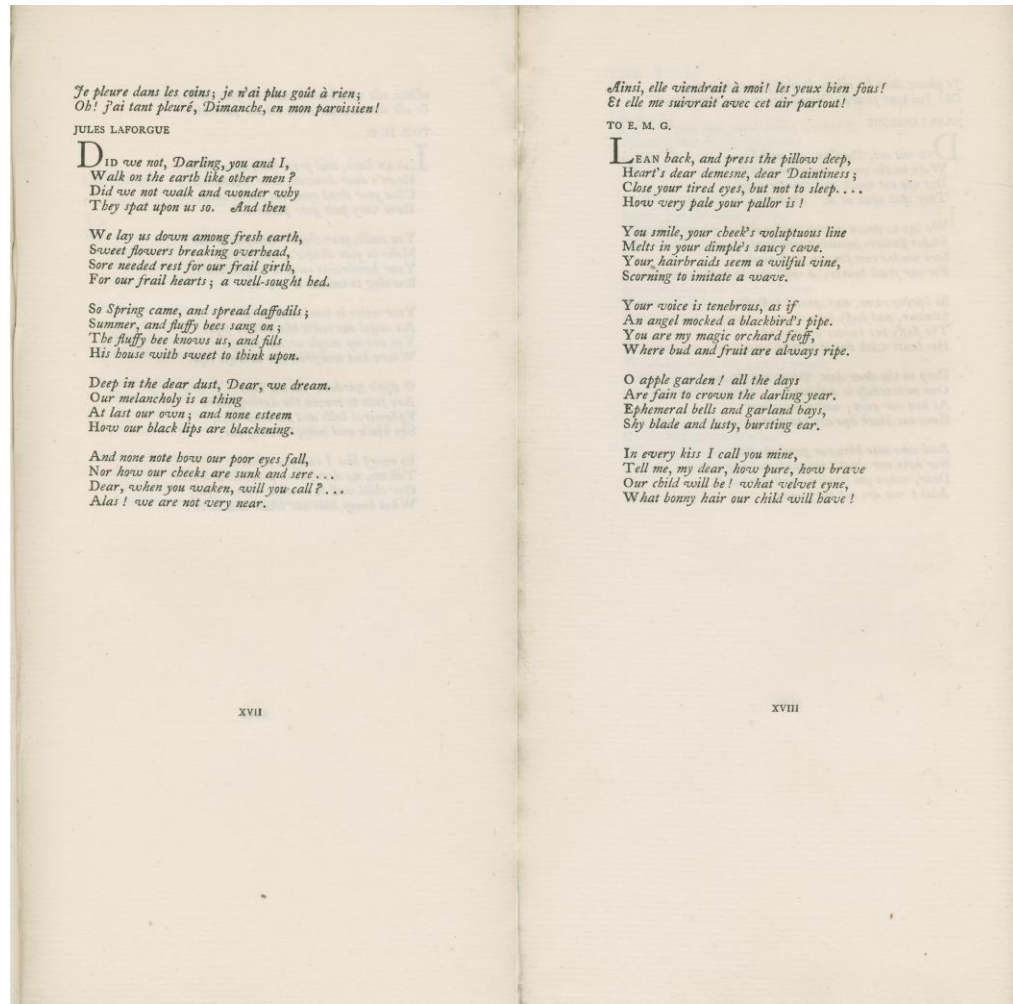


Figure 2-4 "Did we not, Darling" and "Lean back, and press the pillow deep" as they appear in *Silverpoints*. Image Courtesy Western Libraries' Archives Research and Collections Centre.

Death even precedes life in the collection with his poem to Laforgue prefacing the poem dedicated to the woman who gave him birth. The citation of the Aesthete Poet, in the textual intercourse between Gray, Ricketts, and Wilde, supersedes Gray's natural life –

privileging “Dorian” Gray over John Gray the man. The Aesthetic poet who lives in the white space of *Silverpoints* may not have been Gray as he really was, but “Dorian” Gray, the Aesthetic ideal, the symbol of the sexually dissident, Decadent, and Aesthete Poet of the 1890s as an intercourse of literary skills and material aesthetic performativity.

## 2.5 The Dilemma of *Eros* and the Cost of the Queer Book

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an ironic tragedy. It is tragic because of Dorian and Basil’s deaths, and the corruption of beauty played out in the mythic figure of Dorian. It is ironic in the subtle humour – a macabre fantasy that allows art to live and thrive in a way that men fail to achieve. Beauty in the human body, a creation of nature, is finite and mutable. Dorian, despite his attempts to become a timeless and ageless work of art, succeeds in only killing himself and restoring immortality and perfection to the painting he robbed in order to cheat nature. The material object, the surface beauty, is the immortal ideal. The flawed human being is the failed creation, the weak stuff of nature that strives to be as beautiful as art but fails miserably.

Gray failed in his attempt to perform Aestheticism. He would go on to write more poetry and live a long life. While Gray owned a collection of 1890s *belle lettres*, Ellis Hanson notes that “he turned their bindings to the wall” and refused to allow guests to see them (322). His connection to British Aestheticism was never denied but it was never discussed. The queer book evokes sensations and responses from those who engage with these books. Gray may not have considered them queer books but he was clearly aware of their power to evoke a response from the reader. The books may not have committed the sins he was so ashamed of in his later years but he saw how they could evoke sensuality through their material beauty. The books spoke what he no longer wished to have spoken and so he



silenced them by severing their ties to the critical reader – at least the ones who came to his home for dinner.

At the same time, there is something terribly tragic about Gray's life of repentance as a priest. There is a sense that, in addition to hiding the book he helped to birth, he also hid the performative self that helped produce that volume. This rejection extended to a casting away of the material elements of his life. For example, while the sexual connection between Gray and Raffalovich "must have been readily apparent to many, . . . they both made a concerted effort to avoid any discussion of the subject," insisting on a staged formality and emphasis on "ritual and social correctness" that was likely "motivated by a profound fear of scandal" (Hanson 322). McCormack notes how Gray never recovered from Raffalovich's death and that at the end, he had returned to his poetry for comfort and his "gift of vision and his power of giving rare expression to what he saw" (Father Bernard Delany, qtd in McCormack 258). These later works were, for the most part, spiritual reflections, never returning to Aestheticism. His greatest work as a writer remains *Silverpoints* and that is, in part, because of the larger Aesthetic project of the queer book that his poems help to shape.

Dorian and Basil die. The damage done to these characters in *Dorian Gray* is really about the abuse of Aestheticism – Dorian, in his pursuit of hedonistic sensation without the balance of Aestheticism's philosophies and scholarship, fails in his Decadent turn as an Aesthete. He ultimately only sees the hedonism and obsesses over his erotic desires. Raffalovich and his detestation of sexual intimacy ultimately lead to John Gray's condemnation of his own past and his martyrdom as priest and disciple of God. Gray tries to kill the Aesthete Poet but instead, denies his own performativity and succeeds only in killing his connection to the beautiful materiality of the Aesthetic Movement. Was John Gray a victim of manipulation and exploitation by other Aesthetes like Wilde and Ricketts? Perhaps;

but I think, like Dorian, John Gray misunderstood Aestheticism's sexual discourse of *Eros* and its appreciation of beauty in all of its forms, for the normative constructs of sodomy and homosexuality that had nothing to do with Aestheticism or with *Silverpoints*.

*Silverpoints* is like the painting at the end of *Dorian Gray* – complicated by the personal histories that went into its creation, but a subject in its own right. *Silverpoints* survives, not because of any one contributor's importance, but because of its own aesthetic value. The book's textual poetics enacts the performative discourse that Butler tells us we cannot escape. The reader cannot escape the discourse of queer desire that the book pulls him or her into. The book offers a "phantasmic investment" (Butler *PSG* 157) – a textual poetic or bibliographic code of sexual discourse that, like language for Butler, "operates by means of the displacement of the referent [Gray], the multiplication of signifiers at the site of the lost referent and only works as signification to the extent that the referent remains irrecoverable" (157). The "Dorian" Gray that John once embodied was a performative that cannot be recovered. The Aesthete Poet is not reborn in the book; instead, the Aesthete is born, realised in a manner that was unachievable in the body of a single man. What the queer book of *Silverpoints* signifies is the Aesthete Poet who never was.

## Chapter 3

### *Salome: The Queer Book as a Decadent Ars Erotica*

The 1894 Bodley Head edition of Oscar Wilde's *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act*, with drawings by Aubrey Beardsley, is a symbolist work of Decadent aesthetics almost akin to an art installation.<sup>9</sup> It is a site of contestation where Wilde and Beardsley's aesthetics are in visible conflict throughout the pages of the book. That conflict refigures sensuality as a Decadent, even fatalistic desire and the sensations of sexual pleasure as murder and death. With a queer sense of beauty, *Salome*, in its exploration of a sexual aesthetic resembles what Linda Dowling refers to as the "apocalyptic mode" of Literary decadence; that is, an "independent linguistic life as something mysterious, disruptive, [or even] evil" in which the "unspeakable" is given voice and social conventions are destroyed (161). Decadence accomplishes this fatalistic interpretation of beauty and sexual desire through an "unutterability topos," that Dowling cites as "the familiar convention that asserts the total inadequacy of language to express what is meant" (161). Dowling's work emphasises the linguistics of the lexical text, but as per Shillingsburg, the bibliographical coding, the imagery and book design by Aubrey Beardsley in the case of *Salome*, also speaks, or rather, implies the unutterable. The queer book, I argue, extends Dowling's idea of a fatal book beyond the linguistic limits of lexical content in order to consider the intercourse of lexical with bibliographical materials as a multimedial "language possessing a dangerous life of its own" (163). In other words, the sexual discourse of *Salome*'s material body, the body of the book, is a dangerous object, a Decadent *ars erotica*.

*Ars erotica* refers to the passing down of sexual practices and discourses within a culture. Michel Foucault introduces the term in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* in order to show how numerous cultures treat the erotic as an art in which "truth is drawn from

pleasure” and “pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden” (*HSI* 57). The *ars erotica* views sexual pleasure “in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul” (57). Sex becomes something that connects the body with the spirit, making pleasure and the desire for pleasure a sacred practice – one that requires discourses, such as those found in books of *ars erotica* in order to initiate men and women into the sacred traditions of sexual practice within a culture (*HSI* 57-58). Unlike the fatal book of Dowling’s apocalyptic mode, it suggests that any disruption that results from discovering the sexuality within is not evil, so much as unfamiliar – the role of the *ars erotica*, then, becomes one of indoctrination and in the case of Decadence, its *ars erotica* would indoctrinate the reader into the secrets of sexual dissidence at the *fin de siècle*. One of the important secrets of sexual dissidence that *Salome*, as a contribution to the *ars erotica* of the *fin de siècle*, reveals, is that to express sexual desire openly or to experience dissident pleasure risks social consequences – alienation, imprisonment, or even death. *Salome*, as a queer book, portrays the self-destructive queer fantasy of realising unconstrained, selfish, and unquenchable desires indoctrinating the reader into the sacred interpretation of Decadence and the nihilistic beauty of *Eros* in late-Victorian England.

*Salome*, as queer book, takes on the characteristics of *ars erotica*, an “erotic art” that Foucault says, conceives of “truth [being] drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience” (*HSI* 57). As a work that speaks to the concept of sexual dissidence in late-Victorian culture, *Salome* presents a Decadent and often self-destructive truth – truth, that is, as it is conceived and constructed by the Aesthetic Community. I argue that the social construction of Decadence as a philosophy of artistic expression helps to explain not only the horror of the first edition but how the book can also

offer an interpretation of that horror as a stimulant for beautiful and pleasurable sensations.

How can the nihilism of Wilde's play be beautiful? If we read *Salome* as a work of realism, or as a fairy tale with a moral to the story, then we cannot read the death and destruction that characterises the play as beautiful. The destructive events in the play become terrible object lessons about the misuse of power and the dangers of uncontrolled sexual hedonism. Wilde's play on its own, without Beardsley's illustrations, lends itself to such a reading. The author creates a sense of tragedy that uses *Salome* to implicate late-Victorian culture's condemnation of female hysteria and homosexual doom as sexual deviance and perversion.<sup>10</sup> However, *Salome* is not a work of realism; instead, it is a Symbolist drama imagining Salomé as a figure of tragic beauty and a symbol of the decadent erotics of the early 1890s. So while its sexual discourse is self-destructive, as a Decadent work of *ars erotica*, it also incorporates elements of irony, parody, and satire in such a way that asks the reader to experience the sensation of sexual dissent and the desperate desire to experience ideas about sex and gender that are socially taboo, regardless of the consequences that result. It is this pursuit of sensation, the desire to touch one's desire that trumps the self-destruction and the nihilism of sexual dissent.

In addition to Wilde's interest in French Symbolism and its rejection of both realism and universal symbols, something strange occurs when publisher John Lane has Beardsley's images integrated into the play. With graphic images of leering hermaphrodites, drawings where it is difficult to differentiate Salomé from Iokanaan, caricatures of Wilde in images depicting moments of utmost seriousness, and anachronisms that interrupt the historical setting with symbols of 1890s' Decadence, the dark tragedy of the play becomes ironic, even ridiculous. The melodrama begins to laugh at itself as the images transform Wilde's symbolist tragedy into a decadent joke.

The textual intercourse of imagery and poetic theatre transforms *Salome*, the book, into what Joseph Grigley describes as an art installation. Grigley explains how

In conventional arts discourse, the word installation is used to connote a wide array of meanings varying from the act of mounting or hanging an exhibition (to install and deinstall [sic] a show), to a synonym for exhibition (an installation is thus simply an exhibition), to a genre of art in which the work is installed in relation to a given space (installation art). The installation of an artwork, like the installation of a literary text, is in all of these apparitions essentially a *pose*, at least in the sense that it constitutes a certain visual alignment of the work vis-à-vis its surroundings. (123)

The reader reconceives *Salome*, not as a play, but as a multimedial book that contains a play. The play is in conversation with its material publication, with its cultural context at the historical time of its publication, and is open to interpretations imposed by printers, publishers, and book designer Aubrey Beardsley. This installation is not *the play*; in fact, Grigley's book resists the very idea of an originating work of art. Instead, it is what Grigley calls a pose, aligning Wilde's work with the work of Beardsley on the figure of Salomé (see End Note 9 regarding use of accents and italics), who by 1894, is a cultural, even sacred, symbol of decadent beauty and dissident erotics.

*Salome*, as a book, takes on the symbolic significance of the eponymous figure. Because of this reference to a cultural and aesthetic tradition, it is important to consider Grigley when he says that

artworks tend to incorporate [historical and cultural] events, retain traces of them, and continue to exist as artworks that are marked by time, marked by the organic environments and social contexts through which they must pass. They are not destroyed even if they are physically disfigured or reconfigured, even if their maker's

explicit intentions are subverted. (59)

While the cultural significance of *Salomé* has been lost to time and transformed by twentieth-century reinterpretations of the character, one interpretation of her significance in the context of British Aestheticism is retained in the Bodley Head edition. Beardsley's satirical interpretations of the violent and deadly intercourse of desires presented in Wilde's play do not ruin other interpretations of Wilde's work; instead, in this one iteration – in the queer book published by the Bodley Head in 1894 – the play becomes one part of a theatrical intercourse with Beardsley's images creating something entirely unique to the Bodley Head edition. I am specifically interested in how the conflict and intemperate passions between Beardsley and Wilde at the time of the play's preparation for publication influences the character of this book. Disagreement over the production of *Salome* between Wilde, Beardsley, and publisher John Lane, along with the ephemeral interpretation of symbols found in Symbolism, the dark, even diseased humour of Decadence, as well as the commercial motives of the publisher, come together to create the queer book.

### 3.1 A Note on Decadence

Before I go further, I want to clarify what I mean by Symbolism and Decadence in relation to British Aestheticism. Decadence was a term used almost interchangeably with both Movements and, as a result, they can become conflated in a problematic way. Decadence and British Aestheticism both emerge, and are influenced by French Symbolism, a movement that used symbols, originally “identifying sign[s]” in subversive ways (Mathieu 9). Artists such as painter Gustave Moreau, novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans, and poet Stéphane Mallarmé, “sought to communicate to the reader or viewer a personal message of a spiritual, moral, or even religious nature” by playing with a slippage of meaning in sign systems and

signification (9). While *symbolistes* understood the social contract implied in established symbols – they were supposed to mean what everyone within that culture agree they mean – “they often ignored the traditional explanations given in them, preferring interpretations of their own” (10).

For example, the figure of Salomé represents a subversive revision of a biblical story, originally about King Herod, but transformed by European artists in the nineteenth century into a myth of the *femme fatale*. Puvis de Chabannes was the first to foreground Salomé in one of his paintings in 1856 (Mathieu 25). However, it was Joris-Karl Huysmans who, in *A rebours* (1884), has his Decadent protagonist, Des Esseintes, after purchasing Gustave Moreau’s two portraits of Salomé, declare her

the symbolic deity of indestructible Lechery, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the accursed Beauty, chosen amongst all others by the cataleptic paroxysm that stiffens her flesh and hardens her muscles; the monstrous, the indiscriminate, irresponsible, unfeeling Beast who, like Helen of Antiquity, poisons everything that comes near her, everything that sees her, everything that she touches. (46)

In spite of her destructive power over others, Des Esseintes’s characterisation of Salomé is beautiful. Her beauty emerges from her dissident challenge of conventional portrayals of gender and sexuality. What is critiqued as unhealthy or destructive becomes beautiful because it offers the observer a means of changing his or her conception of socially constructed limitations imposed in everyday life. Decadence destroys, with pleasurable abandon, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s idea of “the collective Mind of a Country” (qtd. in Dowling 24) – what Linda Dowling calls “a national essence” or a “linguistic interaction . . . posited between collective and individual minds” as a “central belief among Victorians” (24).

Decadence is a strain of Symbolism closely associated with British Aestheticism, but



differing in the tone because of how Decadence locates beauty in places where beauty is difficult to pinpoint (even misinterpreted as ugly by the general public). Arthur Symons uses “Decadence” as a catch all for both Symbolism and Impressionism. “Healthy,” Symons cautions, “we cannot call [Decadence], and healthy it does not wish to be considered” (136). It is an “unreason of the soul,” an “unstable equilibrium, which has overbalanced so many brilliant intelligences into one form or another of spiritual confusion . . . the *maladie fin de siècle*” (136). When Huysmans celebrates Salomé for her hysteria, her violence, and her self-destruction, it is a celebration of the Decadent pose.

Many outside the Aesthetic Movement, such as Max Nordau, criticised Decadence for its morbidity and degeneration. Decadence is associated with the fall or the decline of empire and political power. Max Nordau directly associates the movement with the decay of the species, claiming that Decadence “denotes a state of society which produces too great a number of individuals unfit for the labours of common life” and unable to contribute to the social “organism” (301). These single cells that have decayed “cease likewise to subordinate their energy to the total energy of [society], and the anarchy which takes place [as a result of this failure to contribute use-value to society] constitutes the decadence of the whole” (301).

Nordau, among others, assumed, in his idealisation of the social organism, that modern society was a normal, even ideal cultural development. Any deviation from that social norm, any art or political position that offers a demonstrable critique of social and political convention was the fault of deviation – a failure of diseased individuals to contribute to the perpetuation of society’s existing power structure and cultural ideals. There is no room in the late-nineteenth century for political and social dissent. Medical science transformed dissenting sexual and gendered behaviours into diagnosable pathologies (homosexuals) and diseases (hysterics) that were harmful, not so much to the afflicted individual, but to the

health and well-being of an imagined social organism.

Those diagnosed as unhealthy dissenters, such as the Decadents, embraced its pose of *ennui* and self-destruction. The difference was in how they applied the term “unhealthy.” For critics like Nordau, it was a condemnation, drawing on medical discourses of hysteria, phrenology, and sexology’s concept of abnormal sexual perversions and gender inversions in order to denounce the movement’s cultural dissidence. However, those within the Decadent Movement, used terms like “unhealthy” and “morbid” ironically, in order to defy those who condemn them for failing to understand their desire to create art that planted seeds of doubt regarding the health of the supposed social organism’s existing structures.

Holbrook Jackson lists the chief characteristics of the Decadence as “Perversity,” “Artificiality,” “Egoism,” and “Curiosity,” insisting that “all inquisitiveness is in the nature of life asking for more” because “the accumulated experiences and sensations” of culture are not enough (64). The Decadents wanted more, demanding “wider ranges, newer emotional and spiritual territories, fresh woods and pastures new for the soul,” rejecting the limits of society as it stands and demanding new ways to live, to think, and to perform (Jackson 64-65). The Decadent is unhealthy, but that unhealthiness emerges from *ennui* – that is, dissatisfaction with the way things are and a demand to enact some resistance to the collective conventions of Victorian culture that motivates their *ennui*. Decadence is a demand for new sensations that provocatively disrupt social order, even if realising those sensations demand the ultimate act of self-destruction. The sensations evoked by such beauty are seen as worth the possible sacrifice of existing social order; it would even be worth the ultimate sacrifice – death.<sup>11</sup>

This Decadent pose is the basis of the queer book, *Salome*. The symbol of Salomé envisioned by Decadent *symbolistes* inspired both Wilde and Beardsley (Jackson 63). It is

this symbol that appears in the pages of the Bodley Head book. In a historical and politically appropriate setting, the play is not a work of historical romance or realism. Both Wilde and Beardsley colour their respective words and drawings with contemporary references to Aestheticism, Decadence, French Symbolism, and sexual inversion. The desire of Herodias's Page for his friend the soldier Narraboth; Salomé's gift of a green carnation to the same soldier; her toilette filled with recognisable Decadent novels; the *avant-garde* women's fashions in Beardsley's drawings – all of these features subvert the play's temporality, disrupting any sense of realism and mocking any attempts at a moralistic interpretation. The play is set in both the biblical past and the Decadent 1890s. However, like Symbolism, there is a transformation of the symbol in the play; it is not the symbol of Salomé generally accepted but personal interpretations of her symbolism. With at least two different perspectives on what Salomé as symbol could mean the resulting book, *Salome*, is the consequence of a creative intercourse.

The artificiality of the play, its symbolic movement, poetic language, and illustrations, transform a shared myth into a celebration of the unhealthy, an exploration of the morbid, death and violence as acts of beautiful creation, and self-destructiveness as a satirical comment on late-Victorian culture. Beardsley's imagery heightens this destructive aesthetic of the play for the reader – so much so, that his work at times dwarfs the play. It is as if the images do what Salomé does to Iokanaan – impose an unwanted intimacy. Beardsley's vision was not Wilde's vision; as a result, the book is changed into something even more subversive, emphasising the fantastic elements of Wilde's symbolist play further with a visual presentation that matches the violence of the play but presents it ironically in order to emphasise the symbolic tenor of the work. The play, however, fights back with an equally aggressive conception of beauty and desire that deepens the controversial images,

making the Decadence of Beardsley's vision an exceptional *symboliste* vision of Aesthetic poetry and dramatic tragedy. The material book, by its very materiality, makes the play even more unrealistic, unbelievable, and suggests a more interesting reading of Wilde's play as an amoral, Decadent, and multisensory art project, unique to the 1894 edition.

### 3.2 The Queer Book as *Ars Erotica*

*Salome* becomes a sacred text of Decadence beauty. Romana Byrne recently revived the concept, questioning "Foucault's *ars erotica/scientia sexualis* dichotomy," in order to reconsider the existence of an *ars erotica* within Western culture (2-3). Byrne differentiates Western examples of the sacred sexual text by redefining the role of the text, not as being "concerned with intensifying pleasure to the point of shattering bliss" but as an aesthetic sexuality where "pleasure is valued 'in relation to itself,' as it is within the *ars erotica*," with a "capacity to serve as a form of social communication and self-creation" (4). Byrne is not arguing for the utilitarian purpose of an *ars erotica* but reconceives it as a functioning discourse of pleasure, a product of, or means through which, Aesthetes can explore dissident sexual desire. *Salome*'s erotic dissent is the result of layers of symbolic meaning written on the book by Wilde, Beardsley, John Lane at the Bodley Head, and the printers at T & A Constable. *Salome* is not Wilde's vision, nor is it Beardsley or Lane's vision. It is a queer text that speaks to various forms of sexual desires through a mutable and multimedial communication format. As a result, the book as *ars erotica* conveys the opportunity for difference, for the queerness that dominates this project.

The Bodley Head edition was a translation of Wilde's original French play published in 1893. Inspired while reading Flaubert's "Herodias" from *Trois Contes* (1877), Wilde was

still a student of the French language relying on Pierre Louys and Stuart Merrill, friends who “aided him” with his writing of the play (Ricketts *ROW* 51). Richard Ellmann notes that Wilde also consulted, at different stages, with Adolphe Retté and Marcel Schwob (353), multiplying the number of hands involved in the writing of the play in a way that we rarely consider today. Since Wilde wrote his other plays without such help, I think it is important to point out how the possibility of any of these consultants influencing the final written play. Even if Wilde retained control of the story and had final say over his translation, it is impossible to say that he did not include ideas that emerged from these various consultations. The further one investigates the creation of *Salome*, the more decentred Wilde is as singular author and the more the book becomes a cultural intercourse between some of the most important Aesthetes, *symbolistés*, and Decadents from both sides of the English Channel. That intercourse becomes more notable once we get to the English publication.

Wilde did not choose Beardsley for this project. In fact, he rebelled against the decision. G. A. Cevasco writes that, “[a]gainst his better judgment, Wilde was finally persuaded by his close friend Robbie Ross to allow Beardsley to complete the illustrations for *Salome*” (*BD*112). Wilde’s was quite ambivalent about Beardsley. Wilde writes to Mrs. Patrick Campbell in March of 1894, telling her that Beardsley was “a very brilliant and wonderful young artist” and that his drawings for *Salome* “are quite wonderful” (Holland & Hart-Davis 587). However, we know from a letter written by Ellen Beardsley (Aubrey’s mother) that the conflict between the two artists arose because of *Salome* and lasted until Beardsley’s death, despite Wilde’s kind words to Mrs. Campbell. Mrs. Beardsley wrote to John Lane, criticising him for sending her a copy of a review of Beardsley work, countering the article’s claims, and saying, “he was most decidedly not in pictorial art what Wilde was in literature. One has only to look at the illustrations to *Salome* to see that. At any rate Wilde

resented them very much and they were enemies in consequence.”<sup>12</sup>

In *Recollections of Oscar Wilde* (1929), Ricketts writes in the “Postscript” to Raymond that Wilde, who was inspired by Gustave Flaubert’s *Temptation of St. Anthony* and *Trois Contes*, was offended by “Beardsley’s entire disregard for Flaubert’s spirit of remoteness, ritual and romance” (51). This was the basis of Wilde’s criticism of Beardsley’s *Salome* illustrations. Ricketts attributes the following differentiation to Wilde:

My Herod is like the Herod of Gustave Moreau – wrapped in his jewels and sorrows. My Salomé is a mystic, the sister of Salammbô, a Sainte Thérèse who worships the moon; dear Aubrey’s designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybooks. (51-52)

Wilde’s comments certainly offended Beardsley who Ellmann tells us stayed clear of Wilde during this period, primarily because of other conflicts brewing with the creation of *Salome*.

Wilde had asked his tempestuous lover, Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas, to translate his French play into English, seemingly, in order to give the idle young man something to do after having done almost nothing creative during the past year (Ellmann 379). Douglas’s translation was not up to par and when Wilde pointed out the problems and edits that were necessary, Douglas was furious. Douglas began to send Wilde a series of angry letters that turned the older artist’s legitimate criticism into an ugly and mean-spirited war of words. It was not until the very real possibility that Wilde would walk away from their “fatal friendship” that Douglas calmed down (379). Robbie Ross intervened in the conflict, pointing out to Wilde his unrealistic expectation of translation skills from Douglas when the young man had little experience with French (379). Douglas was able to walk away from the commission with his pride intact, and Wilde could repair, and even redo the translation himself (Ellmann 380).

Beardsley wrote to Ross about how Lane and Wilde pulled him into the middle of the “*Salome* row . . . between Lane and Oscar and Co. For one week,” he teases, “the numbers of telegraph and messenger boys who came to the door was simply scandalous” (qtd. in Ellmann 380). This is when Beardsley offered to provide a translation himself since Douglas’s was unsuitable (Ellmann 380). Wilde, however, was not interested in hiring Beardsley as a translator and the flurry of telegraphs broke down into an “acrimonious fourway controversy between Lane, Wilde, Douglas, and Beardsley” (380). The result was that, instead of receiving a translation credit, something Douglas now equated with a tradesman’s receipt, Wilde honoured him with a dedication that he decided to read as “a tribute of admiration” (qtd. in Ellmann 381). The ugliness of this conflict, and the impact it had on Beardsley and publisher Lane at the Bodley Head, was typical of Douglas’s lack of professionalism in regards to his public association with Wilde. However, it was also an extension of the level of collaboration that Wilde found necessary to write and publish the play.

Wilde had no control over the book’s final design and vehemently disapproved of choices made by John Lane at the Bodley Head regarding the book’s design. With Ricketts, he would have gotten stylized arabesques sitting in the background of his book, highlighting his words for the reader and possibly creating the harmonious whole that Morris idealised. With Beardsley, he knew that he would get provocative drawings that spoke to and challenged textual supremacy – what I having been reading as a queer book. Wilde did not want Beardsley’s art to overshadow his own, and I would argue that it does not. Instead, Beardsley’s art takes a place at the forefront of the material text, and unlike Ricketts’s designs, offers characters and interpretations, performing a reading of Wilde that is not what the author intended, but that reflects the theme of social discord instigated by Salomé in the

play. Beardsley's book design is a complex interpretation that Wilde was certainly capable of understanding once his emotional connection to the book's creation was in the past. *Salome* represents a Decadent turn to sexual and social dissidence communicated through the provocative and disruptive effect of Beardsley's visual intercourse with Wilde's poetic vision.

FIGURE 3-1

REMOVED FROM DISSERTATION

FOR COPYRIGHT PURPOSES

**Fig. 3-1: Aubrey Beardsley's Colophon imprinted onto the back cover of *Salome*. Note the rough blue canvas that Wilde thought "coarse." Permission Pending Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.**

Beardsley wrote to William Rothenstein in September 1893 before the book's release to say, "The *Salome* drawings have created a veritable *fronde*" (Mass et al. 54). Before its release, he knew he was generating controversy, and with controversy comes fame and, with any luck, more work for Beardsley. The delay in publication, however, was causing Beardsley considerable stress. He was even more distressed when he found out that Lane was not publishing all of his drawings, leaving out three submissions (Sturgis 161). Lane took creative control, control he had seemingly handed to Beardsley by favouring the artist over Wilde's preferences. Lane now held the reins on just *how Beardsley* the book would become.

The two images that John Lane removed from the edition feature two of the most feminine representations of Salomé in the entire collection: "John and Salome" and



“Salome’s Toilette.” Both images feature bare-breasted, extremely feminine portrayals of women. While the excision of “John and Salome” makes sense due to Iokanaan’s appearance as an effeminated object of a bare-breasted Salomé’s less than subtle open-mouthed desire, the image of the toilette, even with her nudity, is traditionally female and actually serves to recapture Salomé’s role as object of desire. She bows her head, submitting to the control of her servants and the desires of men in the image, a submission that actually robs her of her androgynous power. The remaining toilette image has her fully dressed and shooting a look of frustration as she turns her head away from her harlequin hairdresser.

Beardsley relented to Lane’s judgement, however, and said, “considering the matter of *Salome* and I think the only feasible plan is to let the drawings remain in your hands. I quite recognize that they are legally your property as long as you consent to make them public, and that their transference to another publisher would only lead to trouble. I hope you may settle satisfactorily with Wilde” (Maas et al. 56). Beardsley is referring here to the more complicated negotiations that Lane was having with Wilde. Wilde was frustrated with the delays and with his lack of payment from the Bodley Head. The British Library holds a facsimile of a letter dated February 1893 (*BL RP 3196*) in which Wilde makes some of his typical demands of his publisher such as his declaration that “*Salome* will be ready in a fortnight.” He is printing “50 on large paper” and tells his publisher “they will be 10/- each – sale price. Of course you will have them at a proper reduction. But kindly let me have as you promised a formal note about the whole thing – so as to have no misunderstanding about the agreement.” Wilde also expresses concern in this letter for “a large number of my poems still unpaid for – will you kindly close the account and let me live and cheque on them,” as well as giving “Ricketts his honorarium.”<sup>13</sup> Lane, despite his desire to print some of the most innovative literature of the 1890s, also had a terrible reputation for not paying his authors

their rightful commissions. At every level, the interactions between the consultants on this book were tense and unpleasant.

*Salome*'s textual body reflects the diverse discourses of sexual desire and pleasure that are conjoined, or bound together in the book. A lack of agreement or even, at some times, the failure to conduct professional consultations during the book's creation. It is likely that neither Wilde's nor Beardsley's suggestions were considered when arranging the ten illustrations included in the 1894 edition. After the difficulties with the translation process and Wilde's reactions to Beardsley's drawings, it is likely that Lane even avoided contact with these men when he went to print. We know that he ignored Wilde's critique of the binding for *Salome*. Wilde called the blue canvas "coarse and common" (see fig. 3-1), suggesting that the "horrid Irish stuff" be used on other books and fearing that it would do the book, as well as Lane, "a great deal of harm" and insisting that Beardsley also "loathe[s]" the material (Holland & Hart-Davis 578-9). Since the canvas remains, Lane clearly went with his own choice. Additionally, there are no accounts of the decision process indicating that the typesetters and form makers on the floor of T&A Constable's printing press in Scotland made these final decisions. Jerome McGann gives credit to Mathews and Lane for the placement of images but I think this underestimates the influence of the printers. McGann writes:

Mathews and Lane had clearly decided to make bibliography trump interpretation as the primary criterion for placing the illustrations. With one exception, the designs are either inserted between (or before) the signature gatherings or they appear on pages with printed text. In such a case the play as printed would easily accommodate free-standing designs before the first signature and then after pages 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56, and 64, which is precisely – with one exception – where the designs come in.

The single exception –*The Peacock Skirt*—is pasted in facing page 2. But the textual irrelevance of that famous design only reinforces the decorative criterion governing the placement of Beardsley’s designs. (McGann *Victorian Poetry* 25)

The bibliographical motive for positioning the pictures indicates that the actual typesetters and printers, in consultation with Lane, chose how to space images throughout the book. Typesetters and designers at the printers typically set up a “layout” or presentation of their typographical design for the client prior to printing the book (McLean *T&H* 112). There is no indication that either the printers or publishers consulted Beardsley or Wilde during this process so the art of assembly fell to the business interests of Lane and the skill of the printers at the T and A Constable. The printer’s use of a line-block photomechanical methods to print both images and type offers the advantage of cost efficiency and time management associated with the line-block and photomechanical use of etched zinc plates. The basis for the order of the images seems to be where they would fit into the printed text most easily for the printers. This compromise heightens the lack of harmony between image and play already formed out of its conflicted and even angry creation. By the time T&A Constable received the book for printing, there was no controlling hand.

At the same time, despite a lack of control, the influence of both artists is readily apparent. Beardsley, through his illustrative signature (see fig. 3-1), merges artist with art. He objectifies himself with a symbol instead of using a signature. Beardsley is present, but he merges into the book’s aesthetic. Wilde receives little credit on the binding beyond the spine. The book is not a harmonious whole because it contests Wilde’s authorial intentions. Instead, *Salome* is a queer book because it is a unique agent of aesthetic and sexual discourse born out of discord, disorder, and compromise.

Elkin Mathews and John Lane finally published *Salome* in 1894. There are several

different quotes regarding the number of copies printed. Sturgis notes, “the print-run had been limited to 755 ordinary copies and 125 ‘specials’” (179). Frankel claims that there was a print run of 600 copies with 100 held back from sale (59). By contrast, Kooistra states that because *Salome* was printed at a commercial press [T&A Constable], it was “aimed at a wide distribution (880 copies printed)” (25). K. Anthony Ward provides his reader with a more detailed bibliographical record; his book is a guide to first editions for collectors and investors. He states that the Bodley Head released *Salome* as a “Small 4to. Limited to 875 copies. There were ‘500’ ordinary copies (but in fact 750) [in blue canvas boards” (365). He goes on to detail that the “First Edition in English” was also “the first illustrated edition” and that “Beardsley’s contribution was a pictorial title-page border, 10 full-page plates, a tailpiece, and a small cover design” (365). Three images were left out of the initial English-language edition and re-entered by John Lane for the “edition of 1907 (the 5<sup>th</sup> U.K. edition)” (Ward 365). Based on these descriptions, the copy I examined at the British Library was a *de luxe* edition, bound in green silk, while the copy I examined at the Harry Ransom Center (pictured in this chapter) was one of the ordinary copies in blue canvas. This ordinary copy is the version to which I will be referring henceforth.

The inside of the book also requires consideration. T & A Constable used “machine-made supercalendared papers, trimmed squarely at the edges” (Frankel 70). These papers, according to Frankel, tend “to reflect light off the page in ways that we are used to today, thanks to the glossy magazine, but that were unusual for works of literature in 1894” (Frankel 70). This was a new look. Cheaper, and lighter in weight, than the coated art paper that made Ricketts’s *House of Pomegranates* so heavy, supercalendared papers “are given a smooth finish by repeated rolling between hot and cold rollers,” ideal for “books where fine-line blocks or half-tones are included in the text;” however, “they are unpleasant in a book

because their shine is uncomfortable to the eye” (Jennet 182). Seán Jennet finds the sheen of *Salome* awkward for the reader. However, *Salome* as a queer book disturbs the conventional reading experience. The pages glow with light, emphasising the extreme black and white contrasts of the startling imagery and giving unfamiliar attention to the white of the page behind the printed play.



Fig. 3-2: "The Stomach Dance" by Aubrey Beardsley from *Salome* (Bodley Head, 1894). Image Courtesy Private Collection of F. King and J. DuPlessis.

Frankel notes how “the 1894 edition of *Salome* is shot through with knowledge of its own printing. The derangement of the verbal text that has resulted from the introduction into it of Beardsley’s pictures strikes the eye even today, especially when compared to the way

the 1893 text was printed” (Frankel 70). The book captures your eye and your hand as you read and turn the pages. The glossy feel gives the page, normally rough at this point in bookmaking (even high quality papers), an aestheticised surface. Supercalendared paper demanded that the reader spend time considering the surface of the page and be aware of the book as a material symbol of its literary content. Like Salomé’s performance of her dance of the seven veils, the material presentation of the book does two things at once: it seduces the audience with its beauty, and it pulls that same audience’s attention towards the material experience of sexual desire. The book’s audience, its reader, is aware of the book’s materiality but, at the same time, forgets that that very materiality informs the play’s communication of meaning because it communicates physically and not just lexically.

As a queer book, *Salome* is also a reflexive reading experience, drawing attention to its own creation and disruption of the literary with the material. The most self-reflexive image of queer-sexual empowerment in the play is Beardsley’s “The Stomach Dance.” Not only is this the moment when Salomé seemingly fulfils the desires of the male gaze, it is where she inverts that gaze and challenges the assignment of gender to sexual power. This image is almost a parody of the dance of the seven veils. She dances, with her stomach jutting out in a vulgar thrust of her abdomen as flowers dance mid-air beneath her ill-fitted black corset. The jester points the reader’s eye towards her genitals, emphasizing how she is displaying her sex for the consumption of the male gaze.

Brad Bucknell is right to emphasize how Beardsley’s drawings are not “mere reflections of what is taking place in the play,” but that images of Salomé conflate the story with its creators and that, as a book it “relies upon the interplay of verbal and visual signifying practices” (519, 503). Look in her eyes (see fig. 3-2). Salomé stares directly at the reader. She is smirking because she does not take the power of the gaze seriously. Linda and

Michael Hutcheon point out that Salomé “is not objectified by the gaze but empowered by it” placing power in the hands of “the one beheld and not in the beholder” (16). She too gazes at what she desires and the reader questions the authority of Herod’s gaze to enact authority over her body. She does not take her role as object seriously and while her dance fulfils Herod’s desires, Beardsley’s image mocks that desire with the image of a dance that captures the vulgarity of Salomé’s perverted stepfather. The image has her going through the motions. She is not paying attention; she is only biding her time. Despite Beardsley’s emphasis on her abdomen which suggests an emphasis on her genitals, the reader ultimately returns to her face. Her desirous gaze is queer because it disrupts the heteronormative objectification of the feminine for the gratification of male desire. Bibliographically, Beardsley’s image transforms *Salome* from a passive reading experience in which the reader imagines a vision for Wilde’s play, into an interactive multimedial experience where the book incorporates the reader’s role in the execution of its material interpretation of the play.<sup>14</sup>

As a body, Salomé has both male and female parts. Herod desires her assumed feminine innocence, but her lurid dance shows us a deep knowledge of desires that Herod has not considered. Beardsley injects the text with critical questions Wilde has already toyed within the play: What is a woman who has an Adam’s apple? What is a woman with sexual desire? Is she even a woman? As a symbolist figure, is she instead symbolic of uncategorized sexual desires? Is she an imaginative representation of sexual difference in men and women, unattached to a specific gender and made as androgynous as the hermaphrodite who greets the reader on the title page? I argue that she is all of these things. More importantly, she is a symbol of the book. Everything we associate with Salomé is something that the book is doing. The book is the object being held and read, and through the figure of Salomé, the book presents sexual dissent as a powerful act of subversion revealing dance as an act of deceptive

wisdom. Where Herod is blind to her sexual desires, the book shows us her mocking face and masculine neck. We see she is up to something because the book, as an *ars erotica*, lets us in on the Decadent joke. Her physical difference becomes an extension of the book's physical difference as a dissenting object of queer sexual discourse. *Salome*/Salomé's sexual differences are hidden within the material expressions of Beardsley's art and available to a reader who seeks expressions of sexual difference. The book, unlike the stage for which it was originally intended, is a space of intimacy where the reader can fully engage with its queer sexual discourse, away from the eyes of church and state without risking death at the hands of Herod's guards, or equivalent police force, acting on behalf of the Crown and country. Instead, as a book, instead of being a public performance, *Salome* transforms into a sacred revelation of sexual dissent realised in the intercourse of conflicting expressions by Wilde and Beardsley— a space of discourse that gives substance in the material poetics of the queer book's imagery.

### 3.3 *Ars Erotica* as Textual Installation

The history of *Salome* scholarship is diverse and contentious, based primarily on the complexity of its form. Petra Dierkes-Thurn in her recent book, *Salome's Modernity* (2011), studies *Salome* as a piece of theatre and examines the play's performance history on stage and film. Dierkes-Thurn goes so far as to read the play as an anticipation of Modernism, casting Salomé as a "utopian-dystopian image" that prefigures "modernist struggles with secular individualism and agency" (3). Cultural scholars consider Salomé as a sexually "subversive" *femme fatale* (Maier 211), challenging the use of the character throughout nineteenth-century art as a "ritualistic indictment of woman for her criminal demand for independent sexuality and desire" (222). S. I. Salamensky explores Oscar Wilde as



“spectacle” and presents *Salome* as intertextual homage to his literary and creative influences, i.e. his “many masters” (47). Salamensky distances the play from Wilde’s performance of “Oscar Wilde” and suggests *Salome*’s place within the context of the Aesthetic *avant-garde* of the late-nineteenth century. Print culture and literary marketplace scholars like Nicholas Frankel and Regenia Gagnier study *Salome* from the perspective of book history, placing the body of the book into conversation with the body of Salomé in the play.

Gagnier’s *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (1986) presents the play as “a spectacle of purposelessness, ‘unnatural,’ unproductive, and uncensored art and desire” (140). Gagnier is interested in how the play codes homosexuality for the reader through symbols such as the “little green flower” that Salomé promises to Narraboth as a reward for allowing her access to Iokanaan (Wilde 16). The chapter parallels Salomé’s “self-absorbedly confident” attention to “her own desires” (Gagnier 167) with Wilde’s “personal fantasy of the triumph of sexual love over the repressive forces of society” (169). Gagnier’s focus on biographical premonition and authorial intention does not consider how *Salome* could represent sexuality outside of Wilde’s own sexual experience and places the sexual pleasures of the play squarely into Wilde’s personal history. Gagnier’s reading transforms the play into a window for understanding Wilde’s sexual psychology; however, the queer sexual pleasures of the play are less specific and while open to such a reading, it remains a symbolic space that can code multiple sexual desires and pleasures in the materiality of the book.

Nicholas Frankel’s *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books* (2000) argues that *Salome* has no “single, definitive or authoritative ‘text’” and asks readers to “embrace the multiplicity of different *Salomes* [sic] that descend to us” (48). In regards to the 1894 Bodley Head edition that I am focussing on, Frankel says that the book’s reflexivity means that the “derangement

of the verbal text” with “Beardsley’s pictures strikes the eye even today, especially when compared to the way the 1893 [French language] text was printed” (70). While Frankel admits to the unique value of the material presentation of the 1894 Bodley Head text, he does not read it as definitive. “Clearly,” he says, “it will not do to mask [the play’s] internal contradictions by reducing Wilde’s play to a single ‘readable’ text” suggesting that there is no definitive text for *Salome* and that a “more adequate response . . . would be to acknowledge the demands these contradictions make on our historical understanding and to embrace the [play’s] multiplicity” (48). The multiple hands of Beardsley, Douglas, Lane, and Karl Henschel (Beardsley’s etcher or “sculpsit”) create the first of many *Salome* performances that prevent readers from ever knowing Wilde’s ideal text (Frankel 69). Frankel’s editorial approach to the text as edition provides insight into understanding both the play and Beardsley’s drawings as performance, but his focus on the play as a site of “contestation” does not go beyond what I have already established in regards to the textual intercourse that creates the play (49).

Considering Joseph Grigley’s conception of textualterity, the book can be interpreted as a material opportunity to influence the cultural dissemination of a work of art (3). The play is more than an example from the Wilde canon because, as a material book, the 1894 Bodley Head edition is an influential art installation. Like the presentation of a painting within a particular exhibition, English readers’ first exposure to *Salome* is heavily influenced, even altered from its original French manuscript, presenting an interpretation to the reader before there is an opportunity for that reader to imagine his or her own interpretation. As a result, the book as an intimate medium serves as the means of accessing a sacred interpretation of sexual dissidence. Sexual practice is enacted through the discourse of symbols between Wilde and Beardsley. Salomé is Wilde’s decadent *femme fatale*, but she is also Beardsley’s

hermaphroditic presentation of sexual difference. The merging of these visions results in an aesthetic sexuality that Byrne notes “is cultivated [within the *ars erotica*] through choice, demonstrating a deliberate strategy of self-creation as well as a mode of social communication” available to “potentially any individual on the basis of its . . . aesthetic value” (4). The sexual dissidence discovered in the book of *Salome* is not limited to a single interpretation. As a work of Symbolism, the iconic status of Salomé can stand for a multitude of sexual practices and desires that normative Victorian culture would disavow. As a work of Decadence, the book’s nihilistic portrayal of sexual dissent serves not only as a condemnation of cultural consensus regarding sexual differences, but it also affords the book an ironic narrative that hails Dowling’s concept of a “counterpoetics” for “a belated world, a place of hesitations and contrarities and exhaustions” (x).

Scholarly writing on *Salome* often seeks to find a taxonomical means of identifying and separating the genres in which Wilde worked. Such scholarship attempts an archival *consignation*, to use Jacques Derrida’s words, “aim[ing] to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (*AF* 3). Derrida questions the process of categorising, or consigning texts to categories and subcategories within an archive such as a library, a literary canon, or an author’s corpus. Such a “gathering together” (Derrida 3) means that subtle differences are lost, just as *Salome*’s symbolism can be lost when trying to place it in relationship with one of Wilde’s social comedies. Consigning all of Wilde’s work to his corpus means that we lose the opportunity to explore difference and the subjective experience of a single play. *Salome*, this particular edition resists textual consignation when presented as a material work as much influenced by Beardsley’s iconotextual contributions as it is Wilde’s lexical content.

The Bodley Head edition in English is an important iteration of *Salome* within literary

history as the only physical, albeit non-theatrical, performance of the play on English soil in Wilde's lifetime. Banned from the stage (for details on this, see Ellmann 351-52), *Salome* only reached the English through the book. That means that the book takes on the qualities of a closet drama, made provocative by censorship, and eroticised in a book like no other. It also means that the book, in 1894, was the only available performance. With both the green cloth *de luxe* edition and the coarsely-woven blue binding for the regular edition, an aestheticised flower on the front cover immediately characterises the book as alien (see fig. 3-3). This startling flower begs for closer inspection; however, that inspection reveals little about the flower's nature. The flower introduces Oscar Wilde's work to the reader through the eyes of the *fin de siècle*'s most infamous visual artist, Beardsley, as a strange artificial flower, something that looks natural, but improved by art. The cover also invites us to touch, to feel the coarse denim-like material giving *Salome* a body. Like its eponymous character, the book demands the reader notice, desire, and touch. The cover calls the reader into its aestheticised world where categories of identifiable creativity do not work. Its Decadent unreality demands that the reader reconsider what is natural and what is unnatural, as well as what is and what is not real.

Regarding the play, and the book's artifice, the strange imagery of Beardsley's pictures has left critics in continual disagreement over their relevance to the play. Karl Beckson insists that the images are "irrelevant to [ ] the play" (194). Ellmann suggests that Beardsley's "jocular impression of Wilde's face, as in the moon or in the face of Herod," has "sinister, sensual overtones," as if the counterpoetics of his imagery were intended as a vulgar insult from an artist Ellmann dismisses as "strange, cruel, [and] disobedient" (355). Other critics, such as Elliot L. Gilbert, see Beardsley's drawings as intrinsically tied to Wilde's play. The drawings are not illustrations of moments in the play – the sort of imagery

to which a Victorian reader would be accustomed. Rather, they are symbolist interpretations of the moods, ideas, moments, and feelings made aesthetic, “creat[ing] an imaginative world without reference to any objective reality” (Gilbert 147). By extension, where Wilde reflexively engages with the Biblical myth of the death of John the Baptist, Beardsley plays with Wilde’s reimagining of Salomé within the literary discourse of 1890s European Decadence.

FIGURE 3-3

REMOVED FROM DISSERTATION  
FOR COPYRIGHT PURPOSES

**Fig. 3-3: Cover design for *Salome* (1894). Letterpress blinding with gold leaf application. Note the coarse blue binding of this regular edition. Permission Pending Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.**

While Beardsley’s imagery takes on a domineering position in his textual intercourse with Wilde, I do not wish to suggest that Beardsley silences Wilde’s influence and controls the book’s generation of meaning. Beardsley’s imagery has a particularly important influence on the book, but like other queer books, it is the result of influences conjoining and creating something new and unexpected – a queer progeny. Linda Gertner Zaitlin notes how Beardsley’s “sinuous line with its serpentine whiplash,” along with his work’s other main characteristics, serve to dissolve “borders between picture and frame, flatness, and two-dimensional bodies” (147). Zaitlin argues that Beardsley’s works display their influences of not only “his adaptation of Japanese art” but of “William Blake,” “the signer Arthur

Mackmurdo, the furniture designer Thomas Jekyll, and the architect E.W. Godwin,” resulting in a modern visual that “crossed aesthetic frontiers and decisively shaped art nouveau” (147). Beardsley’s various styles and influences contribute to the character of the queer book, with or without Wilde’s consent. Beardsley’s approach is one of incorporated influences, imitation, and compromise. As a result, *Salome* is a powerful textual intercourse that decentres the author and the illustrator, dissolving the borders between their respective influences with a Decadent materiality with its own characteristic presentation. As queer book, *Salome* is the result of the conflicting intercourse between Wilde and Beardsley in making the book as well as the cultural politics of sexual dissidence in the 1890s.

### 3.4 Beardsley’s Role in *Salome*’s Textual Intercourse

To consider the queer book’s textual poetics, we must better understand its construction – the material elements and hands that participate in its creation. I want to turn first to Aubrey Beardsley and his drawing techniques, because very little is said in criticism about the process of printing his drawings. Much is made of his line and his Japanese-inspired linear style, but Beardsley’s work varies from the strange medievalism of his *Morte Darthur* [sic] (Dent, 1892), to the black and white curvilinear contrasts in *Salome* (1894), to his later experiments in shading for Leonard Smithers on Alexander Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* and *The Savoy* (1896). I do not think Beardsley’s career was long enough for us to see these as different periods; however, Sturgis notes that Beardsley had mastered at least several different styles, allowing him to take on a variety of work in book illustration, theatre posters, bookbindings, and caricature work (121). Robbie Ross noted Beardsley’s experiments in styles as opposed to the more typical experimentation in medium: “[u]nperplexed by painting

or etching or lithography, he was satisfied with the simplest of all materials, attaining therewith unapproachable executive power” (51-52). Ross claims that Beardsley’s work demonstrates how the “grammar of art exists only to be violated” (Ross 52). Beardsley’s diverse artistry and his willingness to “violate” art’s grammar are important to *Salome* because the drawings are not “typical” of Beardsley. Every project was a new challenge, both creatively and technically. Instead of being representative of Beardsley, the drawings considered in this chapter interconnect with the iconotextual statement of *Salome*, as book.

Beardsley’s art helps queer the book because his bibliographical methods are informed by the distorted perceptions of sexuality and gender that define Decadence as an Aesthetic Movement. This methodology leaves a space for interpretive possibilities that Wilde’s play alone did not offer. Beardsley was not naïve about bookmaking practices. His work shows a self-reflexive awareness of his position within a wider collaboration on preparing a book for publication. Beardsley stands in contrast to William Morris who, as I explained in Chapter 1, insisted on a completely artisan process without any automation or modern technology. This meant hand carving his illustrations into wood blocks in a reverse image in order to print every different design that Kelmscott used. Beardsley, while he could work with wood-blocks, used photo-engraving within the line-block printing process in order to capture the spirit of the wood-block method, while saving effort and money in terms of printing his work. Beardsley’s work was dependent upon an intercourse between artisan ideals and modern technology. This does not make his work less than Morris’s but a queer development of Morris’s model interpreted via a textual intercourse with the publishing practices of his employers.

Beardsley’s work is also dependent upon the collaboration of many hands. Layla Bloom notes that “[p]hoto-engraving enabled printers to chemically transfer and cut images

into printing blocks, resulting in an exact reproduction of the artist's original work" (28). There were "[m]any artists trained in the era of engraving" who "had trouble adapting to the new technology;" however, "Beardsley was one of a new generation of artists who experimented enthusiastically with the properties of this new 'line block' printing" (Bloom 28). He says the limits of technology as a creative opportunity. Line-block printing involved, at least for Beardsley, the use of "zincographs," a non-photographic method and form pioneered by Firmin Gillot in 1850s Paris (Gaskell 271). According to Philip Gaskell, zincography was more cost efficient than photographic reproduction and involved transferring "a line drawing in a greasy and acid-resistant ink on to a zinc plate and then etching it" (271). The greasy ink "protected the lines of the design from the acid and left them standing in relief, while the whites were etched, and subsequently routed, away so that the plate could be mounted and printed like a wood-cut" (Gaskell 271). Gaskell notes that zincographs largely replaced woodcuts in illustration and was modernized by 1872, creating "a line (or process) block as we know it today, by projecting a reversed photographic negative directly on to a sensitized zinc plate and then etching out the whites. Again the plate was routed mechanically and mounted for printing" (Gaskell 271). While Morris was adamant that these new methods were detrimental to a book's beauty, Beardsley had significantly fewer resources and less choice over the commissions he received so he had to adapt his style to his employer's demands. As Ross states, he diversified the sort of art he could produce, while familiarizing himself with modern methods of reproduction that were both cost efficient, and, when designed well, could compete with the beauty of a woodblock illustration.

Printing was collaboration for Beardsley. A "C.H.sc." appears on some of Beardsley's drawings. These initials stand for *Carl Hentschel, sculpsit*,



the signature of the man who prepared the zinc blocks from which *Salome*'s pictures were actually printed. Hentschel (who among other things was the model for Harris in *Three Men in a Boat*) had by this time done more than anyone else in England to perfect line-block technology. (Frankel 69)

Hentschel's presence via signature (see the bottom right corner of "Enter Herodias" for a good example), suggests that the industrial process was worthy of artistic recognition.

Hentschel's etchings and his work preparing photoengraved zinc plates for the printers is an important contribution to *Salome* as Beardsley's art. Print depends on collaboration between the technical crafts and the artists who made use of their skill. Beardsley was an innovator, but part of his innovation is his ability to utilise bibliographical collaboration in order to make the most of work produced using modern printing technologies.

Another celebrated illustrator and book designer, Walter Crane, was certainly aware of the innovations in printing that occurred during the early Renaissance when the later Gothic encountered Classical design (125). However, Crane defers to Morris's claim that eventually "The youthful spirit of the early Renaissance became clouded and oppressed, and finally crushed with a weight of pompous pedantry and affectation. The natural development of a living style in art became arrested, and authority, and an endeavour to imitate the antique, took its place" (Crane 129). The classical became a school by the nineteenth century against which the Arts-and-Crafts Movement's return to the Gothic was a rebellion. Crane associated changes in printing during the Italian Renaissance with changes in the nineteenth century to industrialised bookmaking, both of which allegedly degraded, and possibly degenerated, the book beautiful.

Crane admitted that Beardsley was a "very remarkable designer in black and white," whose "work shows a delicate sense of line, and a bold decorative use of solid blacks, as well

as an extraordinarily weird fancy and grotesque imagination, which seems occasionally inclined to run in a morbid direction” (Crane 218, 221). This backhanded compliment is the best Beardsley could hope for from the establishment of the Arts-and-Crafts Movement as a young upstart in his early twenties. Crane admits that “photographic-automatic reproduction” allows a designer the opportunity “to write out his own text in the character that pleases him,” making “his page a consistent whole from a decorative point of view” (Crane 174). Crane sees the benefit as a “unity of effect” (174); however, his idea of the page’s unity does not apply to the queer book. While these methods can ensure unity of design, Beardsley uses them in different ways. Beardsley saw the limits of the Arts-and-Crafts rebellion and the danger of idealising printing convention in their focus on a particular style. Instead, Beardsley’s innovations recall the experiments of the early Renaissance, in that he fuses *Japonisme*, neo-classicism, Decadence, the limits of line-block printing, and the revival of printing, transforming individual ideas into something new, original, unique, and dangerous in its refusal to conform to, or to placate, the moral hypocrisies of what he saw as the new establishment. Such art seems appropriate to the collaborative and conflicting body of the queer book and the discursive character of the *ars erotica*.

Creating the illustrations alone reveals multiple hands in intercourse with one another. Collaboration and conciliation do not end with the drawings but extend through all elements of the book. One of the first conciliations is price. How do you produce a beautiful *belle lettre* at an affordable price? Lane figured cost into most of the decisions made about *Salome* from the very beginning. Beardsley’s is one of these low-cost contributions because his technique of line-block drawings was affordable. One of the reasons for this is the cost of ink – one of the benefits of working in black ink is the price. A review of A. B. Fleming & Co., Ltd.’s price list for Litho and Letterpress inks reveals a significant price differential.

Letterpress black ink ranges in price from 1s to 10s for supplies, while red letterpress ink (as an example of the cost of colour ink) from the same company sells for between 4s 6d and 15s (5, 17). These price lists do not indicate quantities, suggesting that these are prices for a typical print run order. At the same time, the differential even between the lowest quality inks suggests that by printing in black the publishers saved money, as did the printers, for the work. It was therefore in everyone's interest that Beardsley created black ink drawings for his contracts. This decision did not lessen Beardsley's art; instead, it defined his art and provided an opportunity for Beardsley to create something unique that he may not have considered if production costs had not been taken into account.

Unlike Morris, who ran his own business and was in a position to make all of his books via a uniform process, Beardsley, much like Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, had to concede to the limits of printing technologies at hand. Frankel notes that "Beardsley's choices of paper, ink, and nib were determined by his awareness that black masses and sharp lines were what reproduced best by line blocking" (68). Frankel goes on to detail that Beardsley was using Whatman paper, Chinese ink (also known as India ink), and a fine Gillot nib (Frankel 68). With this in mind, consider the style of drawing that Beardsley is working in: linear non-realism with stark contrast between swathes of black ink against huge white spaces. Instead of detailed shading, he creates sweeping curvilinear lines. Line-block processes were not useful when working with detailed shading and tiny particular details. However, as we will see in the next chapter, Beardsley would eventually perfect shading using the same method for his work with Leonard Smithers. The process requires a more simplistic form to be effective and beautiful. As a result, Beardsley's interests naturally brought him to the increasingly popular style of *Japonisme*.

The influence of Whistler and Toulouse-Lautrec's use of "Japanese stylistic

elements” influenced Beardsley to take illustration in a new direction, incorporating techniques of Japanese printmaking, resulting in the presentation of “varied formal structures and techniques” that form a distinctly Western vision of Japanese art (Zaitlin 53). Zaitlin’s argument draws significant attention to an important element of otherness or difference represented in Beardsley’s art as multi-cultural and outside of Victorian visual tropes of realism. Not only does French Symbolism influence him, but he also takes influence from other parts of the world. Beardsley is part of an *avant-garde* movement that conjoined occidental traditions with traditions discovered by the peoples of the colonised orient. In terms of printing and book illustration, Beardsley is the most significant advocate for *japonisme* as a means of interpreting western culture. For Beardsley, that which is different is not a threat to English art but an opportunity to learn new and different means of creation. While *Japonisme* and the other influences on Beardsley’s work can be read as cultural appropriation, Beardsley’s work does not objectify or display Japanese culture for the pleasure of an English audience. Rather, Victorian England’s empiricist ethos is subverted because Beardsley’s drawing translate English and European culture through a non-Western lens, subverting Imperial supremacy and queering the power structure of artistic expression with a Decadent beauty created and defined outside of British culture. The influence of these various internationally derived practices changed book illustration and Beardsley’s success is significantly dependent on his innovative study of art from different cultures during his short career.

Beardsley’s drawings for *Salome* are not representations of events in the play. Beardsley is mimicking the symbolist narrative style that Wilde develops in his play. *Salome* is a form of poetry in its use of symbols and repetitions to say something abstract through material presentations of sexuality and gender. Frankel is right when he says that

“Beardsley’s illustrations match with their own aestheticism [Oscar] Wilde’s self-conscious, nontranscendent use of language in *Salome*” (68-69). Frankel points out that Beardsley is not simply illustrating Wilde’s play; instead, the reflexive imagery “destabilizes the notion of them as illustrations and returns us to Beardsley’s idea of them as pictures” (Frankel 69). The extremes of black and white were not simply technical requirements because Beardsley saw the medium’s limits as a challenge to create something new (with help from his zinc etcher Carl Hentschel). Beardsley’s experiment with black and white contrast reaches a creative apex with *Salome* and as a creative artist looking for new challenges he chooses to try new methods having mastered the line-block process. Technology for Beardsley is just like his nib or ink – a tool to help him achieve a creative expression. These tools allow him to communicate in a manner that stands equal to the ideas and themes communicate by Wilde’s written play. The result is a subversive beauty that is produced only through an intercourse of these artists with their many collaborators on this edition of *Salome*.

### 3.5 The Decadent Death of Salomé

Salomé dies at the end of the play and yet, she does not give the impression that she cares much about her death (let alone the fact that Iokanaan has himself been decapitated for her pleasure), gasping to herself in her final monologue, “What matter? I have kissed thy mouth Iokanaan. I have kissed thy mouth” (68). I do not mean to suggest that she glories in her death but I do mean to suggest that the reader should not take the death seriously. The iconic figure never begs for her life. Salomé does not scream from either fear or pain and considering that Herod has his soldiers crush her body with their shields, you would think that a psychologically present person would at least cry out. If we are to read her death

literally, as with a work of realism, then her death is a tragic moral warning about the consequences sexual excess. However, by reading it symbolically, her death becomes a philosophical moment, not only for Salomé, but also for the moon and for Wilde, with whom Beardsley equates Salomé in “The Woman in the Moon” (see fig. 3-4).



**Fig. 3-4: “The Woman in the Moon.”** Courtesy private collection of J. DuPlessis and F. King.

Herod insists that his men extinguish all light: “Put out the torches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves . . .” (66). To see Salomé realise her desires is to reveal the object of his desire to be an illusion. Her innocence was not real and the idea that his

desire for her, man's desire for woman, and the sun's light shining on the moon, are all representative of a social order that imbues objects with beauty and meaning comes into question. Herod has the light extinguished because her acts (as well as his) are unsanctioned. Her desires are unhealthy and a morbid mockery of his authority. He cannot witness her actions because to do so would validate her choices and diminish of his authority.

The queer book mocks even the orders for her death. Beardsley goes so far as to picture her being placed inside a cosmetic powder box, as if burial means a return to the toilette from which she came. Her death becomes a symbolic aesthetic without any real consequence other than a return to the materials from which the symbolic Salomé was born. Salomé's connection to the moon gives greater significance to Beardsley's choice to incorporate Wilde's face into the image. Is Beardsley suggesting the death of Wilde? While that may seem like a cruel joke of which Beardsley was capable, I think there is a better explanation rooted in the book's material interaction with the play. Just as the symbolic *femme fatale* dies, so does the author. Beardsley's extinguishes Wilde's light, his vision of Salomé with a Decadent bibliographical performance of *Salome*. We cannot clearly identify the author of the book *Salome* as Wilde. Beardsley and the many other collaborators displace that notion. In that case, if the image of Wilde is a parody, then it is a particularly devious moment of dark humour, mocking the very idea that the play is Wilde's work. The play was collaborative and it could be said that Wilde as author is just as symbolic as Salomé is symbolic of desire. It is not Beardsley's vision that extinguishes Wilde's influence either; rather, it is the queer book, born of this conflicting creative interference that defines the book that mocks the play's tragedy and replaces it with a Decadent, gleefully morbid, sense of humour.

Salomé's death becomes a moment of suppressed sexual Decadence – a violent and

bloody end but also an end that laughs at cultural authority. Salomé's death comes too late to stop her from realising her Decadent desires. The play represents those desires in a manner that makes them symbolic of sexual dissent more broadly. It also implies a reflexive reading of the play as a comment on its creation. Not only is Wilde as author of the book decentred, he is also a decentred playwright. Even Beardsley's reading of Wilde's play decentres his own space in the queer book. Beardsley's black humour emerges from a clearly conflicting relationship between him and Wilde and the intercourse of that complicated conflict becomes the theme of *Salome* as *ars erotica* – a queer book that ironically privileges the morbid character of sexual dissent that cannot be contained or controlled by any of its creators – even when Wilde kills her. She is the symbol of sexual dissidence, and while there are consequences to her criminal sex act (kissing Iokanaan's decapitated head), the need to pursue sexual fulfilment, to quench one's unbridled hedonism with an orgasmic realisation of sensory stimulation is valued over Salomé's continued symbolic existence.

Matthew Sturgis notes that “[t]he publication in February of the English edition of *Salome*, with Beardsley's startling pictures, brought him new status” (179). Both Wilde and Beardsley made their subversive reputations, especially in regards to sexual discourse, with the release of this book in 1894. Sturgis notes how “Wilde's reputation and the play's notorious history guaranteed it press coverage, and Beardsley's drawings were so original and arresting as to guarantee themselves a large proportion of that coverage” (179). Where Wilde was advancing his previously established controversial reputation, Beardsley's work took on a new reputation. Sturgis notes that it then “became something of a critical commonplace [after the release of *Salome*] that the drawings had subverted, if not completely reversed, the traditional relationship between author and illustrator” (179). I would further argue that the book's textual intercourse of the lexical and bibliographical made their



reputations. Just as “The Woman in the Moon” unites Wilde, Salomé, *Salome*, and the reader, *Salome* unites Beardsley and Wilde’s art into component pieces of the book’s queer sexual discourse. It is how illustration and play *come together* to make *Salome* that resulted in Wilde and Beardsley’s individual reputations. Kooistra notes that this “unifying connection is [. . .] social,” resulting from both men being “caught up in the period’s cultural politics” such as the Arts-and-Crafts Movement from which the queer book emerges (26). What Kooistra calls “individualistic aestheticism” is the “transgressive outsider whose rebellious performance subverts the authority of the patriarchal institutions of state and church” (Kooistra 132). The Aesthetics of individual artists such as Wilde, Beardsley, and the fictional dancer Salomé are set apart from the illustration and book designs in Morris’s medieval artisanship and from realist narratives that dominate the press and most fictional novels of the 1890s. Kooistra’s goal is to seek larger connections between the works of the period in an attempt to define the materiality of *fin-de-siècle* literature via a unifying principle. Within the books of the Aesthetic period, I argue that Kooistra’s search for a unifying principle for explaining how illustration integrates with literature of the *fin de siècle* meets resistance in the iconotextual experience of a queer book. Beardsley’s drawings for *Salome* are artistic interpretations of sexual dissent – a dissent that is more graphic and more confrontational than anything Wilde considered in writing the play.

Sturgis tells us that Beardsley “clearly enjoyed the air of danger and social subversion which surrounded the lives of his homosexual friends; and he enjoyed too the camp pose by which it was often outfaced” (162). Wilde could not have been surprised when his own caricature shows up in *Salome* several times. Sturgis notes that there is

an element of dramatic irony in [Beardsley’s] depiction of the author, dressed as a mage, heralding the arrival of Herodias and her attendants. More subversive,

however, was the recurrent appearance of the playwright's features in the Moon, the poor sad 'Moon' which, in the course of the play, was likened again and again to a 'mad', 'drunken' woman 'seeking everywhere for lovers'. Beardsley, it seemed, was transposing the sober symbolism of the play to a less elevated level, summoning the image of Wilde as the abandoned and effeminate sensualist . . . . He also undercut the erotic charge of the drama with intrusive obscenities in the details. What Wilde had sought to achieve through allusive verse, Beardsley reduced to mischief. (Sturgis 157-58)

What Sturgis characterizes as mischief I see as a penetrative act in the Beardsley-Wilde bibliographical intercourse. The book enacts an erotic penetration of Wilde's art with the art of Beardsley. The symbolic insult of the author actually distances Wilde from the play. It makes Wilde another character, a performer of the play instead of its maker. Ian Fletcher notes how "the face in the moon as a caricature of Wilde as it doubtless is; [ . . . ] is not invariably hostile. To insist solely on this level is to ignore the ambiguity of Beardsley's art" (Fletcher *AB* 78). Beardsley is not seeking to insult Wilde; instead, he is having fun with Wilde, giving materiality to Wilde's ambiguous imagery and using this imagery to influence a book that becomes a reflexive commentary on its own creation. Wilde's image – her cultural persona become tied to a contentious and subversive book of sexual dissent and queer desire. Just as Salomé the character and *Salome* the book are symbols, Beardsley makes Wilde into a third symbol of Decadent sexual pleasure.

*Salome* does not simply challenge the reader's understanding of the book as medium. We could apply such a poststructuralist reading of the book to most works, given enough textual theory and some time with the work of Genette and Shillingsburg. *Salome* is queer because the material book uses the model of sexual intercourse in order to play with meaning

physically in the book. Salomé is a symbol, a representation of sexuality in all of its diverse experiences within a material text. Sex is in Beardsley's hermaphrodite on the title page. Sex is in a transgressive flower made artificial with Beardsley's almost alien flora on the front board. Sex is in the homoerotic desires recited in the lament of Herodias's page for Narraboth. Sex is the presentation of female desire for the male body represented in Salomé's erotically charged courtship of Iokanaan where she expresses a desire to touch his phallic body. Sex becomes androgynous when Beardsley uses an Adam's apple to represent male sexuality within the body of Salomé during the stomach dance. Sex and the little death becomes a violent spectacle with the corpses of Iokanaan and Salomé strewn across the pages of the book. The book reflects and make complex the poetic ecstasy of Wilde's play, an ironic tragedy and a queer expression of sexual difference.



**Fig. 3-5 "The Climax" by Wilde on the verso and Beardsley on the recto. Courtesy Private Collection of J. DuPlessis and F. King.**

It is significant that Beardsley never provides an image of the kiss. He shows the moment of “The Climax” (see fig. 3-5) where Salomé floats in a state of ecstasy as she anticipates the realisation of her Decadent desires. It is a teasing image that matches Wilde’s stage directions where he calls for the theatre lights to be put out during the kiss. Salomé’s act of sexual dissent is symbolic. The reader is not supposed to see her act of necrophilia as a specific desire fulfilled. Instead, her desire is symbolic and the kiss is a symbolist moment of Decadence in which the fulfilment of desire threatens institutionalised authority (Herod), and while resulting in Salomé’s death, also suggests the potential for ensuing chaos. There are consequences for Decadence, but the consequences are desired, at least in the queer book, because the ensuing chaos that breaks down existing social authority provides an opportunity for Decadent discourses of the avant garde to create new conceptions of beauty and desire that are not marginalised within existing Victorian institutions of social organisation and control.

I do not read Salomé’s death in this edition as a punishment, but as a symbolic failure to silence sexual dissent in 1890s *avant-garde* culture. While she dies, she fulfils her desires. Death is not a relevant consequence in the symbolist context of the play because it does not stop her from enacting her sexual dissidence. Her Decadence results in her death but it also results in the weakening of Herod’s power. Similarly, the publication of *Salome*, the book, challenges the authority of the Lord Chamberlain who banned the play, offering a play that is even more heretical than anything Wilde would have staged, and adding a new level of sexual dissent that, while not appearing on stage, could potentially end up in the hands of many readers and indoctrinate them into the coded discourse of sexual dissidence and Decadent interpretations of British Aestheticism. Salomé’s death is the death of the author

and it is the death of creative control within the mechanics of the publishing industry – the book becomes a cultural object of sexual indoctrination, a Decadent *ars erotica* that kills, or at least decentres systems of creative control. The *ars erotica* as queer book positions the end result, the art installation, not as an ideal content, but certainly as an important event in the history of cultural dissidence in England.

## Chapter 4

### *The Savoy*: Reading the Male Body

Unlike other works that I have examined, the creation of *The Savoy* (1896), as with any periodical, was intended as a multi-collaborator project, featuring diverse works by various writers and artists and distributed to a readership first as a quarterly, and then as a monthly. What makes this periodical a queer book (not simply a single number, but the entire eight-number run) is how it incorporates an Aesthetic discourse of reading as both an intimate and a multisensory experience of the male body. Like most publishing businesses in the nineteenth century, *The Savoy's* publishing house, Leonard Smithers Ltd., was a decidedly homosocial affair, intensified by Smithers's choice to hire personal friends and acquaintances to publish, illustrate, print, and contribute to the books he released from the 1880s until his bankruptcy in the early-twentieth century. What was different about this particular homosocial environment was how *The Savoy* became an outlet for Aesthetic critique, and a queer reading, of the male body, positioning intercourse between the body and the mind as an object of beauty worthy of Aesthetic analysis.

The intensity of *The Savoy's* delivery of an almost exclusively homosocial lexical and bibliographical context meant that the periodical became a site where men were self-consciously analysing the male body as the object of critical reading. The rare female contribution is provided under a male pen name while the sole female name to appear in *The Savoy*, Fiona MacLeod, was actually the pseudonym of a male writer, William Sharp. The periodical retains a sensual tone throughout its numbers and the Aesthetes who contributed to the periodical, especially the visual contributions by Aubrey Beardsley, offer a self-reflexive awareness of the role that the reading subject performs in the creation of art and criticism.

I had the opportunity to discover *The Savoy* during the research period of my graduate studies. I was already very familiar with the periodical from my earlier undergraduate research on *The Yellow Book* (1894-1897). Studying *The Savoy*, and its founder Leonard Smithers, I was fascinated with Smithers's seemingly contradictory interest in the female body as a sexual object of desire and the simultaneous restriction of sexual discourse in *The Savoy* to a group of male Aesthetes. Smithers provided the critical apparatus and editorial assistance for various erotic works from the Middle East translated by Sir Richard Burton. He also published erotic novels that were often graphic sexual explorations (what some would argue were exploitations) of the female body. The use of women as exchange objects was clear, but what was unclear in *The Savoy* was why the focus of analysis turned away from the female body and shifted towards the male body during acts of reading, or critical analysis. In other words, why do contributions to the periodical repeatedly equate the act of reading with a reading of the male body?

The act of reading the male body is a self-reflexive act, one in which Aestheticism, with its interest in multisensory stimulation, demands that men, in their objectification of beauty, reconsider what they do to the body in a social discourse of desire. To study the body, as an Aesthete, is to be aware of one's own body and its sensory response to an object of beauty. Aestheticism's critical conjoining of the body with the mind in its multisensory reading of art allows *The Savoy* to enact a textual intercourse between men on a shared study of reading as a physical intercourse.

The multiple-contributor periodical emphasises this experience with a body that contains many different perspectives. *The Savoy* promotes this discourse of the male body through a self-conscious discourse of the homosocial. As Koestenbaum notes, collaboration "itself neutral, can mean many things" (3). By the end of the nineteenth century, homosocial

collaborations were “ferociously [laden] with the struggle to define male bonds along the spectrum including lascivious criminality and sexless chumming” (3). With varying expressions of the desire to touch beauty and to explore bonds between men, *The Savoy* encourages the contributing writer to pay attention to his act of reading with a self-conscious analysis of his object of study. Instead of reading the other, the object and its relationship with the world around it, the critic considers his own impact on the world via an analysis of the self while *reading* the other. The periodical becomes a Paterean space in which writers, as readers ask: What sensations do I, as a reader, feel when studying this painting, this writer, this artist? What does my act of analysing this object create within the context of my medium of writing? What do my body and its sensory response to beautiful stimuli tell me about the reading process? *The Savoy* queers the goals of reading by revealing the interest in the other, the text, as a self-pleasuring of the reader’s body.<sup>15</sup> Where *A House of Pomegranates*, *Silverpoints*, and *Salome* each focuses on an object of beauty and desire – the innocent youth, the iconic Aesthete Poet, and a sacred conception of Decadent sensuality – *The Savoy* addresses onanistic pleasure in knowing, not the book, so much as the reading body in the moment of pleasure. The collective publication of various contributors in their decidedly self-conscious portrayal of criticism becomes a multisensory, masturbatory (or onanistic) act that, despite its homoerotic connotations, is both desired and pleasurable within a homosocial context. Textual intercourse becomes an act of mutual masturbation, a shared homosocial critique of reading as self-analysis in the body of a queer periodical.

*The Savoy*’s textual intercourse resembles then, a kind of masturbation of the senses – a physical and intellectual contemplation of the self, the critical voice, and the male body. This discourse triggers the sensation of touching the self, feeling the sensations that result from self-conscious criticism. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes, queerness references



sexual differences that cannot be “organized into a seamless and univocal whole” (*TEN* 8). *The Savoy* demonstrates the adaptability of Aestheticism to these slippages by re-imagining male desire with a complex assemblage of works that redirect the desiring reader away from the object of his desire and towards his own experience. *The Savoy* is a queer book (or periodical) because it creates a medium for self-reflexivity that resembles a desire for the beautiful male body, positioned as the subject of critical desire.

How and what one reads informs one’s relationship, not just to the book, but also to the self and one’s own experience of desire and pleasurable contact. Reading as an act of feeling one’s own body and its sensory response to the object is made apparent in Kate Flint’s work on the woman reader. Nineteenth-century women discovered autonomy through the act of reading. Flint tells us, in her study of novels written for a female reading audience, that Victorian novels offered women “the recognition . . . of the need for active self-analysis and definition to go hand in hand with one’s social practices” (191). Reading taught women and other readers how to engage with culture and the self as a reading practice, suggesting a deeper understanding of what cultural images could suggest and mean. What resulted from censorship and acts of prohibition forced on women readers, according to Flint, was “unsurprisingly,” a newfound “inquisitiveness and transgression,” acts of reading that “were presented as crucial acts in the development of their consciousness” (213).

Clearly, women readers were not the only ones who practiced self-reflection. The idea of self-pleasuring is a continued interest in scholarship on reading practices. Stephen Arata points out how degeneration theorists like Max Nordau “often brought forward [literary works] as evidence of this or that type of degenerative illness” (18). For example, in his book, *Degeneration* (1895), Nordau condemns “Decadentism” and the Aesthetes as “servile imitators of [Charles] Baudelaire” whose works embody an “ego-mania” through

“its love of the artificial, its aversion to nature, and to all forms of activity and movement, its megalomaniacal contempt for men and its exaggerating of the importance of art” (317). Nordau associates the Aesthetic pose with mental illness. Arata writes how the literary imagination was also aligned with illness and disease. “To yoke imagination to disease is,” for Arata, “to invoke a model of literary activity” in which healthy and unhealthy texts are given “a new biological specificity” (18). Degeneration offered a chance for the theorists of the late-nineteenth century to read the body of the “degenerate subject” as “a text to be read, since he displayed the signs of his condition . . . on his body” (19). *The Savoy* inverts this reading of the degenerate body by taking the biological imperative out of the body as a text, replacing it with an Aesthetic search for beauty in new sensation. Pater tells the Aesthetic critic “to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodox[ies, even] of our own” (152). Unlike Nordau, who placed pleasures into moral categories, the Aesthetes saw all pleasures as having potential for generating beautiful moments for the reader. There is more pleasure than that sanctioned by Victorian social convention and a way of finding those pleasures is through a self-reflexive analysis of the reader’s body.

In *The Savoy*, reading becomes an act of critical analysis, an intense and multisensory study, not directed at the object of desire – the subject of the book or the beautiful image of the woman – but at the experience of the Aesthete reader’s reflexive consideration of himself exploring, even touching, his own body through the act of reading. An aesthetic, in its broader sense, is the study of perception via the senses (*OED*). Consequently, reading a book, just as studying a work of art, produced sensations which, according to George Henry Lewes, “invariably transmit its agitating influence to the heart” threatening the health and well being of the “feminine nature” (qtd. in Flint 55). Because reading evoked the passions, I argue that

reading as an act of critical self-reflection, was socially akin to other acts of self-pleasuring such as onanism. Just as female hysterics were a concern regarding female readers (Flint 58), masturbation, another act of self-analysis and self-consciousness, was seen by sexologists like Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing as a “premature and perverse sensual satisfaction” that “injures not merely the mind, but also the body; inasmuch as it induces neuroses of the sexual apparatus” while maintaining “imagination and libido in continuous excitement” (189). As we will see, the negation of the object cathexis, Sigmund Freud’s term for the female love-object, was seen as harmful to male health and well-being and a particular threat to sexual reproduction (76). To read, to touch the self, either one’s body or one’s consciousness, threatened heteronormative conceptions of the male body and mind.

Roland Barthes problematises the writer’s ability to know who the reader may be. Barthes reflexively asks of himself, “[d]oes writing in pleasure guarantee—guarantee me, the writer—my reader’s pleasure? Not at all.” Instead, as a writer, Barthes, and all writers, “must seek out this reader (must ‘cruise’ him) without knowing where he is” (4). It is this pursuit of pleasure when reading a writer’s work that creates a “dialectics of desire” for Barthes, a “site of bliss” in the process of writing. Barthes’s analysis of the disembodied reader (as well as the disembodied writer) is made material in the context of *The Savoy* because it incorporates a multitude of self-conscious readings of the writer *as reader*, resembling what Barthes calls a “[t]ext of bliss,” that is, a “text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts . . . unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions” (14). However, unlike Barthes text of bliss, *The Savoy* destabilises the reader’s relationship to the material book through a multisensory analysis of the writer’s reading body to the exclusion of an imagined reader or audience for the periodical. This intense focus on the writer’s self in the act of reading, queers the relationship between reader and writer by changing the rules of

Shillingsburg's field of play discussed earlier (Introduction 23). The social contract between writer and reader is broken through a discursive hyperawareness of the writer as another reader. The result is that while the reader can feel alienated by the self-conscious analysis performed by the contributors to *The Savoy*, their efforts create a new opportunity to reconsider the role of reading in meaning construction.

Barthes's concept of the text of bliss positions a self-gratifying exploration of reading as masturbatory. Barthes warns that the text of bliss "is never the text that recounts the kind of bliss afforded literally by ejaculation" (55). Such a literal act of masturbation is not what *The Savoy* offers. Heterosexual male desire, in various contributions to *The Savoy*, prompted a self-reflexive, even onanistic (i.e. masturbatory) reading of the male's own body in a state of desire. The queer book, as a periodical, presents man's relationship to his homosocial desire without the conventional intermediary of a female object to negate the homoeroticism of what amounts to a self-conscious desire *to* desire. The result is a reading space that serves as the site of textual intercourse between male writers, incorporating an *Eros* of male eroticism that is onanistically pleasurable, multisensory, and queerly communal.

## 4.1 Masturbation and the Erotic Male Body

Masturbation as a metaphor for critical self-analysis problematises the division of the homoerotic from the hetero-erotic, lacking a categorical division of such desires and pleasures within Aestheticism's sexual discourse of *Eros*. *The Savoy* considers the beauty of the self over the beauty of the other. The medical community pathologised such ideas of beauty as sexual disorders, making them socially unacceptable. This condemnation is linked with masturbation by sexology and positioned as a waste of sexual desire because it lacks a true object. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Krafft-Ebing conceives of masturbation as a

perversion that opens the door to other sexual abnormalities. “Impotent masturbators,” he suggests, are more likely to try “homosexual intercourse” than someone who does not masturbate (188). “Almost every masturbator,” Krafft-Ebing declares, “at last reaches a point where, frightened on learning the results of the vice, or on experiencing them (neurasthenia), or lead by example or seduction to the opposite sex, he wishes to free himself of the vice and re-instate his sexual life” (189). Masturbation becomes something the practitioner settles for, a weakness of body and character that prevents him or her from properly functioning in a heterosexual act of coitus. The act becomes destructive, harming the “pure glow of sexual feeling” and “the fire of sexual instinct” and revealing the character of the masturbator as “timid and cowardly” (189). Masturbation becomes a substitute or “equivalent of the avoided act” (190).

As a physical act of generating pleasure, Onanism in the nineteenth century was considered a form of communal uselessness or lack of productivity. Both Peter Gay and Diane Mason cite the anonymously published pamphlet *Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, And all its frightful Consequences, in both sexes, Considered* (1710 or 1715) as the first of many works printed on the evils of auto-eroticism (Mason 3; Gay 295). Throughout the nineteenth century, there were multiple works written on the subject by sexologists and moral activists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Jules Christian, and Henry Maudsley (Gay 295-306). Krafft-Ebing insists that

Nothing is so prone to contaminate—under certain circumstances, even to exhaust—the source of all noble and ideal sentiments, which arise of themselves from a normally developing sexual instinct, as the practice of masturbation in the early years. It despoils the unfolding bud of perfume and beauty, and leaves behind, only the coarse, animal desire for sexual satisfaction. (188-189)

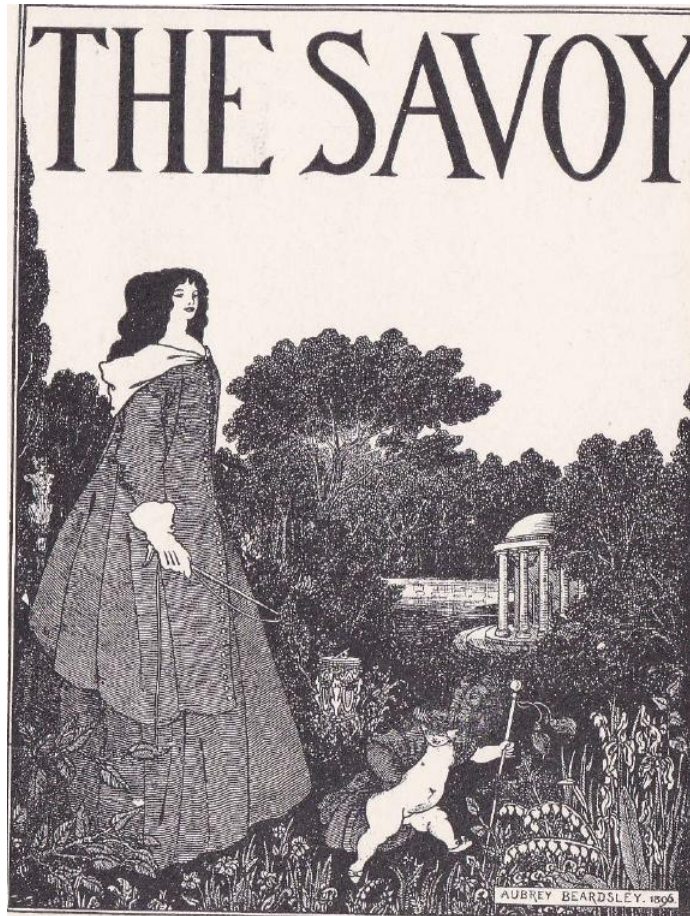
The patient ruins his or her ability to appreciate beauty when he or she gives into base sexual desires without interacting sexually with an object to mediate his affections.

Masturbation, however, is also oddly a social act for Krafft-Ebing. He claims that there is often a “seducer” – a congenital homosexual who, through sharing experiences of mutual masturbation with other men, effectively “produces” what Krafft-Ebing calls “the cultivated pederast” – someone who learns to prefer sex with men over sex with women (190). Homosexuality becomes something that can be caught and transmitted through acts of mutual masturbation and the implications for this transmission of what sexology deems sexual perversion, is not limited to sex acts. Instead, the metaphor of masturbation is extended within Victorian culture to other acts of homosocial bonding.

The male body as desirable, as seen through *The Savoy*'s queer textuality, is a significant materialisation of sexual dissent. The queer, unlike the heteronormative, is mutable and offers gaps and fissures for heterosexuality to be read queerly that are not otherwise available. Foucault notes how nineteenth-century sexual discourses were regulated “through useful and public discourses,” positioning “population” as “an economic and political problem” to be managed for the collective through the institutional monitoring of marriage, birthrates, family lineage, and inheritance (Foucault *HSI* 25). Sexual choices were secondary to the good of society, which was dependent upon the idealisation of sexual reproduction. With *Eros*, pleasure is not an identity but an experience of beautiful sensation. Evangelista notes that “Aesthetic writers like Pater, Symonds, and Wilde turn ancient Greece into a utopia in which the gratification of homoerotic desire is a subcategory of the aesthetic, and is therefore inseparable from artistic and intellectual activities” (19). This is not to say that critical analysis is equivalent to men having sex with other men; rather, critical analysis, in the queer context of *The Savoy*, becomes a shared act of reading the self as an intercourse

of body and mind, becomes a discursive theme that eroticises the critical and the homosocial by playfully engaging with homoerotic implications of sharing reading experiences as mutual masturbation.

This path to sharing self-consciousness begins on the cover of *The Savoy*'s first number (see fig. 4-1). Designed by Aubrey Beardsley, the binding and the title page each feature characters standing in the foreground but standing to the side, inviting the reader into the space unoccupied at the centre of the image. The cover image features a woman in formal riding dress with her black hair hanging long and loose down her back. She wears gloves and carries a whip as if she discovered us on the property immediately after her ride. She stands on the landscape left of centre so that the reader is drawn to what is behind her – a garden space with manicured lawns and a gazebo held up by a ring of Grecian columns that make it look like a neo-classical altar. In the foreground, one of Beardsley's putti dances with his jacket open, flashing his chubby little body while he leans on a cane. The original image was altered because, in an earlier version, the figure urinated onto a copy of the *Yellow Book* lying on the grass beneath his feet. However, this updated figure is genderless. There is nothing in the background for the woman and androgynous creature to foreground and, instead, invite the reader to consider an artificially manicured pastoral. The image represents a greeting visually turning material attention to the reader's own presence. Printed on pink boards (the first two issues were hardcover like the *Yellow Book* before being replaced by a cost efficient green paper cover more suitable when the periodical shifted to a monthly circulation with No. 3), *The Savoy* introduces the reader to his or her own presence as a reader becoming an interlocutor – communicating the textual intercourse of its creators to the reader. This process creates a social space for readers to exchange self-conscious experiences in the absence of an object on which to focus his or her desire.



**Fig. 4-2: Cover Design for *The Savoy* No. 1 reprinted for the collected numbers issued December 1896. Image Courtesy Private Collection of J. DuPlessis and F. King.**

The reader does not have a central representation, an objectified figure to desire within the pages; instead, the image draws the reader to the physical experience of touching the physical book. Like other sexual discourses within Aestheticism, the reader's experience with his or her hand is not necessarily an invitation to masturbate but a discursive event: instead of engaging with the body in a sex act, the Aesthete engages with his or her own body as a vessel for understanding and engaging with art. Such pleasurable stimulation of one's body, as we have seen, is read by sexologists and other authorities in Victorian culture as weak and anti-communal. As a result, because the person masturbating has not pursued the object of desire, he or she is characterized as self destructive – even intellectually onanistic. As Professor Teufelsdröckh would say, “Close thy *Byron*; open thy *Goethe*” (Carlyle 146, his



emphasis). In other words, to study oneself is an act of “lamenting and self-tormenting” regarding one’s own beauty (145). Such self-analysis is the wasteful hobby of the solipsistic or egomaniacal pervert. Instead, look to culture and society, find an object cathexis, and learn to contribute to a collective social body where “every being that can live can do something” useful to a productive society (Carlyle 150).

Aestheticism challenges this reading of the auto-erotic and the self as a cog in the wheel of Victorian society. We already know from Pater that the artist’s ability to see beauty in the male body is crucial to understanding Aestheticism more broadly (Pater 123). This argument is similar to the one used in *The Savoy* to encourage readers to find diverse interpretations of art and beauty within its numbers and contents without a central object to desire. The “Editorial Note” by Arthur Symonds tells us that the periodical has “no formulas, and we desire no false unity of form or matter. We have not invented a new point of view” (1: 5). *The Savoy*, in other words, was not a periodical whose contributors sought identification with an already homoeroticised Aesthetic Movement. The periodical accepted all art that it considered “good art” (1: 5), disavowing exclusive associations between Aestheticism and the now infamous homosexuals of London such as Oscar Wilde. The periodical presents as conjoining of multiple perspectives. Instead of rejecting Aestheticism or its sexual discourses of same-sex desire alluded to throughout Beardsley’s work, such as in *Salome*, *The Savoy* also invited and created alternative perspectives of beauty for all sensual pleasures and sexual desires. The result was a periodical that tried to appeal to readers interested in Aestheticism’s sexual discourse of creativity and sensation as a means to re-evaluate the relationship between the sensual body and the critical mind.

Freud would later connect masturbation directly to homosexuality with the idea of narcissism by using the mythic figure as the pathological “attitude of a person who treats his

own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is normally treated – who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities” (73). Freud, like Krafft-Ebing before him, interpreted masturbation as a substitution for another object of desire, specifically the female body. Freud also considered love for the opposite sex as normal, even ideal, for all men: “the highest phase of development of which object-libido is capable is seen in the state of being in love, when the subject seems to give up his own personality in favour of an object cathexis” (76). Aestheticism performs another object-cathexis. However, instead of pathologising the process, Aesthetes characterise desire as a physical reaction to pleasurable stimuli that can be cultivated into the appreciation of art and beauty.

*The Savoy* presents this reflexive curiosity in its textual body. The themes from the cover of No. 1 continues on the title page where two figures wearing black lace veils invite the reader in beyond the heavy curtains. This time, the sexually ambiguous figures in billowing clothes hold back a set of ornate curtains to reveal a table with two candelabras, a black masque, and the same whip the woman was holding on the cover. The image suggests that we are now following the same woman from the cover into the periodical, only she has left us behind. She leaves behind material clues as to her identity, but the room seems to only be where things are left by those who enter like a table in one’s foyer. Any object to take the reader’s attention remains elusive and yet hinted at by all the objects left behind, structurally suggesting the phallus (the whip and the candlesticks) – an allusion to male arousal as a metaphor for the experience of aesthetic curiosity.

The reader is alone in the foyer of a decadent salon without an object cathexis to contemplate in the chain of potential supplements found in the garden and on the foyer table. The reader has followed a woman, heteronormativity’s assumed object cathexis, from the

front cover inside and the reader is greeted by servants smirking at his or her assumed dilemma. Heteronormativity tells the reader that perhaps he or she has entered a brothel or bawdy house. However, the 2s 6p price of the journal is the only charge demanded. The woman who let us in is not the commodity and the periodical's contributors are not her pimps. Instead, the woman pimps the strange material space of *The Savoy*. While a market commodity, *The Savoy* offers pleasure as an inanimate object, but it is pleasure of the self that the periodical facilitates. The periodical also displaces the commodification of desire, offering its textual body as a material mediation, not as another object but as a means to connect the mind with the body. Revising heterosexual desire into an auto-erotic act shared, not with a female object, but with oneself mediated by the material book.

The lack of a woman, or at least the absent hostess, suggests that the act of masturbation replaces the object cathexis; however, Jacques Derrida tells us that this *real* object, which masturbation supplements, is just another supplement. Derrida, in his analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, in *Of Grammatology*, reads masturbation as "the experience of frustration," an attempt to "supplement the absent presence" or the real object of desire (154). However, Derrida complicates what that real or true object actually is. Masturbation works for sex the way that writing acts for speech, as a supplement (155). However, Derrida proposes that sex, just like speech, is another supplement for an untouched or unattainable origin: "Through this sequence of supplements," according to Derrida, "a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception. Immediacy is derived" (157). If there is no original and desire is the pursuit of an original, then the closest we can get *is* the sensory stimulation of self-reflection –masturbation – the state of pursuing desire, acts of deriving

immediacy, where nothing is attained but where all senses are stimulated. *The Savoy*, I argue, mediates a self-reflexive analysis of this pursuit of the original; it scrutinizes the act of critical analysis as the sensory stimulation of the reader's body. Aestheticism's discourse of sensual experience is an onanistic pleasure aware of a chain of supplements and consciously exploiting the pursuit of an object cathexis as a means of reading the body of the reader. There is no need within the masturbatory discourse of *The Savoy* to find the reader, as Barthes suggests; by recasting oneself as the reader, in the process of writing, bliss remains, so to speak, in the writer's own hands.

The narrators, literary and visual, focus on their own act of reading in the process of writing. The result is a form of homosocial bonding where men look at one another reacting to sensory stimulation. Ernest Dowson's poem "Impenitentia Ultima" is a good example of how the discourse of reading operates in *The Savoy* (1: 131). Dowson presents a narrator asking for the opportunity "to see and touch once more [his beloved], and nothing more to see" thereafter (4). The poem is a prayer that expresses the narrator's desire to study, once more, to read further, the beauty of his beloved in order to memorise and retain his ideal beauty. However, Dowson gives us no description beyond her "pitiful hands" and "hair" that he hopes to have "stream down and blind" *him* (13). Often, "woman" exists in art for the pleasure of man's gaze (e.g. Galatea, Helen of Troy, etc.); however, Dowson does not share his vision of beauty with the reader. We are not invited to gaze upon or penetrate her. Her beauty cannot be understood without analysing what it is that has been seen. Instead, he asks his audience to read his desire without an object to mediate his homosocial exchange of the erotic. It is his desire, not its object, which he seeks to communicate to his implied omnipotent listener. What she looks like is not the narrator's concern – her looks are for his appreciation only. He confesses that he "was free of all Thy flowers, and I chose the world's

sad roses” so that which nurtures him, his “bread,” offers only “bitterness and sweat” (5-6). This is a tragedy, but the tragedy does not show us what this speaker seeks to sacrifice his sight for; he only shows his audience, presented here as God, his speaker’s desires and fears. The speaker offers a reading of his body – the body of a man in love and desirous of a response. The final image of the poem is of the speaker, vowing: “I will praise Thee, Lord! In Hell, while my limbs are racked asunder,/For the last sad sight of her face and the little grace of an hour” (19-20). If God looks upon the narrator with pity, he offers his body as an object of analysis, something God may use in sadomasochistic service as payment. He commodifies his body and his self-awareness, and bodily self – not the object of his desire and love. Dowson’s poem is a reflection of the speaker’s body and mind, begging to experience the sensation of touching, or even seeing his beloved one last time. He does not praise her beauty. He refuses to show the object of his desire, suggesting that he believes no one else will appreciate the beauty that he experiences when he looks upon her so his best means of convincing God of his sincerity is to pray in a manner that displays his body in pain. His pain becomes a sensual, desirous, and even erotic sight. The reader is asked to read, in his body, not only his desires, but an opportunity for God to read his potentially sadomasochistic, and homoerotic, desire for the body of the poet in love.

Like writing, masturbation loses its exclusive ‘referential function’ and merges with the body uncomfortably “enact[ing] the impossibility of collapsing the distinction between penis and phallus” (Butler *BM* 31) and violating the conventions of homosocial reading. The act of masturbation does not supplement the lack of a woman; it is just like the woman because both are supplements for the lack of an original. For Dowson, the original would be a God that answered his prayers. By pointing this out to the reader, *The Savoy* becomes a periodical in which the lack of the original is ever present– absent in its presence but present

in its absence. By removing the female body as object cathexis, the homosocial discourse of *The Savoy* is only left with the male body and his mind in the act of gazing in the company of other men. The boundaries of Victorian homosociality are broken and the male body becomes a desirable and pleasurable aesthetic object for the homosocial journal's queer textual intercourse.

## 4.2 Publishing Aestheticism in Cosmopoli

I have left the history of *The Savoy*'s publication until now in order to offer a critical intervention that resists ideas of *The Savoy* as somehow exploiting British Aestheticism in the wake of Wilde's trials. The history of the journal, and of its publisher, deserves a more complex analysis. In order to accomplish this analysis while also historicising claims made thus far about the journal, we must consider Cosmopoli: a place both real and imagined where the erotic and the aesthetic found common ground in the hands of London's most infamous pornographer: Leonard Smithers.

Smithers, a former solicitor, began his career as an antiquarian bookseller while helping to establish a niche market for the sale of illegal erotica with fellow enthusiasts Edward Avery, William Lazenby, and Harry Sidney Nichols in the 1880s (Sigel 82). Throughout this period, Smithers edited, printed, and sold erotic literature that ranged from Sir Richard Burton's translation of *The Thousand Nights and a Night* (1884), to his collaboration with Burton on *Priapeia; or, Sportive Epigrams on Priapus by divers poets in English verse and prose* (1890), and the anonymous *Teleny; or, the Reverse of the Medal* (1893). Each of these works position sexual discourses of pleasure into the realms of illegal pornography, political dissidence, and the sacred sexualities of the "Orient." The book, for Smithers, was the material and cultural art form used to circulate these new and foreign

sexual discourses. Combining Aestheticism, his knowledge of the market for erotica, and his interest in eastern sexual philosophies, the publishing industry became an opportunity for Smithers to question and change how people read sex.<sup>16</sup>

The *Savoy* was the result of collaboration between publisher Leonard Smithers, literary editor Arthur Symons, and unofficial lead artist Aubrey Beardsley, an often conflicting, even competitive, collaboration that emphasised the presentation of male sexual desire. Smithers was immersed in the cultures of British Aestheticism and French Decadence. James G. Nelson notes how he enjoyed the company of poets and artists at various “saloon bar[s]” such as “the Cock in Shaftsbury Avenue” which served absinthe, and the Crown in Charing Cross Road “where such personalities of the Nineties as Lionel Johnson, Selwyn Image, Herbert Horne, and Victor Plarr gathered after the theater” (*PD* 93). Smithers would also join them at places like the Café Royal and the Poland in Soho – where Nelson notes Ernest Dowson “nightly admired the pubescent charms of [his poetic muse] Adelaide Foltinowicz,” and the Thalia, where Beardsley allegedly “once tried to ravish Horne’s [then] mistress in the supper room” (93). These homosocial bonds were sensual attempts at merging common intellectual and critical pursuits with shared experiences of bodily pleasure. Their sexual pleasure was seemingly heterosexual; however, the discourse of that pleasure was between men, a discursive form of mutual masturbation taking pleasure from reading the pleasures of each other.

Smithers’s experience of homosociality as a site of sexual and discursive pleasure greatly influenced his approach to literature and publication. The relationships Smithers shared with the men who worked with him, Burton, his printer Harry Sidney Nichols, and Wilde (who Smithers published anonymously after his release from prison in 1897), reflect Victorian homosocial conventions while openly playing with the boundaries of male

eroticism. Smithers shared his sense of provocation with Beardsley, with whom he would share a professional and personal bond with for the rest of the young artist's short life. Despite associations of Beardsley with the homoerotic discourses of British Aestheticism, Beardsley was not a homosexual or sexual invert. Matthew Sturgis notes that "Beardsley clearly enjoyed the air of danger and social subversion which surrounded the lives of his homosexual friends; and he enjoyed too the camp pose by which it was often outfaced" (162). Beardsley performed gender in his art and his public persona, much like Wilde and Gray, which spoke to a multitude of sexual desires, not just the homoerotic. These men had social personas steeped in appetite, desire, and male bodily response. They read themselves, while reading, and asked others to join their self-conscious conversation.

In letters exchanged between Smithers and Beardsley, we find a relationship between two intimate friends whose conversations take on a language of sensation that balances bravado with intimate confession. For example, in a letter postmarked 16 Mar 1897, Beardsley reveals graphic details about his illness. Suffering from tuberculosis, Beardsley writes that "The blood having stopped coming from the lungs, immediately begins to flow from the liver in considerable quantities via the bum. It seems my liver has become enlarged and congested. Perfectly beastly is it not?" (Walker 7). It seems that Smithers was a sort of confessor that Beardsley could turn to for support, both financial and emotional. They shared intimate details and reflections of their bodies. The two men also shared what Nelson describes as "a verbal arrangement . . . whereby Smithers would provide Beardsley with a weekly stipend" in return for exclusive publishing rights (Nelson *PD* 135). The close relationship between these two extended via Smithers to his wider social relations amongst the *avant garde*. Nelson notes how "Smithers not only served as a kind of social center around whom the younger generation of writers and artists gathered but, more important, of



course, served as their publisher, their mainstay against oblivion” (96). This social and business interdependence that Smithers nurtured made it so that writers like Symons and Dowson wanted to be associated with his publishing firm. He was not only an investor, but also invested in Aestheticism as a medium for homosocial bonding. While most businesses in late-Victorian England were based on homosocial relationships, Smithers had an approach that privileged the bonds of friendship over profit margins.

In addition to erotica, Leonard Smithers Ltd was an important publisher in the history of the Aesthetic Movement and its turn to Decadence in the 1890s. His publications included translations of Aristophanes, Balzac, and Zola, Symons’s *London Nights* (1895), Beardsley’s illustrated edition of Alexander Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (1896), Ernest Dowson’s *Verses* (1896), Wilde’s *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1897), and the first printed edition of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899). Smithers demanded high-quality books and while he continued to work with Nichols throughout his career, he preferred to use Chiswick Press whenever possible due to its “reputation of being the premier firm in its field” (Nelson *PD* 5). Smithers was interested in bringing little known works that subverted Victorian sexual conventions to the world’s attention – this resulted in his interest in both high art and less socially acceptable erotica privately published under the Erotica Biblion Society, located in the fictional land of Cosmopoli – essentially underground London’s publishing world of the erotic novel. For Smithers, Aestheticism’s self-conscious homosociality was a site where the erotic and the esoteric converged to the benefit of both. In a sense, their social circle and their queer output, was Cosmopoli.

By the time that *The Savoy* began to be published, Smithers had moved his shop from his humble rooms at Effingham House to the more “prestigious address of 4 and 5 Royal Arcade, Old Bond Street” (Nelson *PD* 48). The result was not a rational business plan so

much as a materialisation of Cosmopoli – a textual Aesthetic community creating new social discourses of sexual desire and practice. To take advantage of his growing reputation and the infamy of his friend Beardsley (whose work he held in high esteem), Smithers began a periodical that he hoped would come to signify his firm’s position as the premier *avant-garde* bookseller and publisher in London. *The Savoy* “turned out to be the finest and most typically ‘arty’ and ‘Ninetyish’ periodical of the decade and a direct response to what some referred to as the ‘death’ of [*The*] *Yellow Book*” (Nelson *PD* 58). In addition to the high-quality books that Aesthetes knew their works would appear in, Smithers was also known for his generous payments to struggling artists. Joseph Conrad, whose story “The Idiots” was included in No. 6, said that “Smithers paid two guineas per page of four hundred words” whereas the more popular *Fortnightly Review* only paid a guinea for every thousand words (qtd. in Nelson *PD* 60). Despite the business realities of profit that guided Smithers’s decisions, he “sincerely desired to provide a haven for the disaffected and outcast authors and artists” (60). Smithers nourished their bodies and, by extension, nourished their abilities as artists and critics with a space where they could exercise their Aesthetic practices of reading the body through acts of pleasure.

In addition to Beardsley and Smithers, editor and poet Arthur Symons also had a significant influence on *The Savoy*. We know from Nelson that Symons’s relationship with Beardsley was tense. He disapproved of Beardsley as co-editor in the manner Smithers originally conceived of the periodical; instead, Symons preferred to edit the journal independently and convinced Smithers to set it up as such (Nelson *PD* 62). Smithers would later boast his own role in editing of *The Savoy*, claiming that he himself was the art editor, “much to annoyance of my literary editor and to the great delight of Beardsley” (qtd. in Nelson 62). Symons promoted his friends and literary contacts as editor, publishing his friend

W. B. Yeats and translating French Symbolist works that he admired, such as Paul Verlaine's poem "Mandoline" (No. 1), Verlaine's essay "My Visit to London" (No. 2), and Stéphane Mallarmé's dramatic poem "Hérodiade" (No. 8) (Beckson & Munro, 115). Symons's womanizing also lived up to the excesses of Beardsley's erotic drawings. Karl Beckson and John M. Munro note that until his marriage in 1901, Symons would "frequent the Empire and Alhambra Theatres" as well as "the Crown and the Café Royal with the Alhambra dancers and with his literary friends" (Beckson & Munro 56, 117). A hedonistic pursuit of self-gratifying pleasure is implied by his regular haunts led to the creation of beautiful poems and essays "heightening the triviality of passing pleasures with the secondary dancers of the *corps de ballet* into the meaningful, symbolic design of art" (Beckson & Munro 56). However, in addition to dancers, portrayed by Beckson and Munro as equivalent to prostitutes, Symons also associated with the literary *avant-garde*, a largely homosocial coterie. It is these homosocial relations that presented Symons with the opportunity to edit the *Savoy* and bring his self-conscious sexual discourse, his critical analysis of the desiring male body, to the periodical.

Smithers turned to Nichols (his former partner in erotica) to print the first issue of *The Savoy* before turning to Chiswick Press for No. 2, thereby beginning *The Savoy*'s unstable bibliographical history of changing printers, binding designs, and circulation periods before its closure after eight numbers in December 1896. Laurel Brake notes how *The Savoy* sought to compete with *The Yellow Book* by charging half the price – 2s 6p to *The Yellow Book*'s 5s, placing the new journal on par with the less expensive and more popular magazines of the period (166). By offering *The Savoy* at 2s 6d, Smithers was moving beyond the limited opportunities found in the "old" reader. In the wake of Wilde's trials, *The Savoy* was both affordable and approachable. The periodical was appealing to new readers and an existing

audience unfazed by, or perhaps even attracted to, the sexual controversies that engulfed the Aesthetic Movement in 1896.



Fig. 4-2 Prospectus for *The Savoy* (1895). Courtesy Private Collection of F. King and J. DuPlessis

*The Savoy* is onanistic, not only because of its queer perception of sexuality, but because of its multidisciplinary textual presentation of sensual *self-gratification* as an aesthetic ideal. That presentation is influenced by the critical analysis of the sensuous male body that intrigued and even obsessed Beardsley, Smithers, and Symons in both their work and their social intercourse. The periodical presents visual art and literature that explores homosocial sexual discourse as an act of critical self-analysis. We see this onanistic pursuit of self in *The Savoy*'s initial advertising campaign. Beardsley's first design for the Prospectus

showed the figure of John Bull, “the personification of the nation . . . in a state of [albeit unsubstantial] arousal” (Nelson *PD* 69, see Fig. 4-2). The robust, even obese man on the stage suggests gluttony and this piece of epitextual commentary tells readers that *The Savoy* will satisfy even the greediest of tastes and desires. The design is intentionally salacious – a low-art interpretation of Decadence. He even publishes bad reviews of the first number in the advertising supplement of volume two. The epitextual marketing of *The Savoy* suggests that Smithers sought to “circulate notoriety” in order “to draw male readers from an expanded group of new consumers of the press” (Brake 179). However, the periodical exposes these readers to an even more challenging conception of *Eros* – the erotic male body as desirous to anyone willing to look, touch, or read.

Beardsley’s work challenges regulatory schemas of heteronormativity by emphasising the playful aspects of sexual arousal, portraying the image of an aroused man in order to attract readers. This is not the promise of sexually available women, though they are a recurring topic throughout *The Savoy*, but a promise to satisfy the *avant-garde* male reader with a reinforcement of his own ego while also playing with the hint of homoeroticism. The periodical reads the male body as a material projection of the heterosexual male’s critical mind – a projection that is both humorous and pleasurable.

With each number, Smithers saw sales sliding and reduced his print order with Chiswick Press from 3000 copies for Vol. II and III to 2400 copies for Vol. IV (Nelson *PD* 85). He also managed to reduce his costs of printing with Chiswick “from a high of £103.5.7 for the second number to a low of £38.16.1 for the fifth number” (Nelson *PD* 85-86). There was a constant battle waged by Smithers to balance the costs of business with his passion for high-quality *belle lettres*. Chiswick Press’s ledger accounts reveal notes that reflect the high-quality workmanship associated with the press. Smithers had to pay extra for the use of small

typefaces (small pica) and foreign initials to include accents and other letterings (BL MS 50916). Because Smithers privileged the pleasure of friendship's bonds over the bottom line, the business suffered and *The Savoy* would fold after only eight issues. Despite its financial failures, it stands as a creative success, presenting the male body as representative of a new mode of self-conscious reading.

### 4.3 Discursive Pleasure of the Self-Conscious Male Body

The self-conscious critique, an act of reading and of touching the material book, becomes a theme throughout the entire journal, demanding a reconsideration of control and power in the discourses of art and literature. While *The Savoy* No. 1 is full of images of women to be gazed upon, they are interspersed with poems, articles, and stories that focus on the reading subject instead of an object cathexis. The periodical may be masculine, but it turns a queer lens onto masculinity, conceiving man's desire as an object for scrutiny within Aestheticism's sexual discourse. Examples can be found throughout the eight numbers. These works serve to present heterosexual desire as a reinforcement of self-conscious, or onanistic, pleasure.

No story in the periodical better represents the sensual portrayal of the desirous male body in *The Savoy* than Beardsley's unfinished serial, *Under the Hill: A Romantic Novel* (Nos. 1 & 2). The first number of *The Savoy* finishes with the first instalment. This is the story of the Abbé Faufreleuche and his journey into the underworld kingdom of the beautiful Helen. Beardsley's aesthetic adventure is a satirical rewrite of a medieval romance, focussing the reader's attention on the Abbé himself. Beardsley begins with a dedication that harks back to the days of art patrons of the Renaissance, dedicating his novel to Prince Giulio Poldo Pezzoli, an important member of the Roman Catholic clergy. In the dedicatory epistle,

Beardsley comments on the practice of writing “epistles dedicatory,” noting how the practice “has fallen into disuse,” but one he finds to be “so very beautiful and becoming that I have ventured to make an essay in the modest art, and lay with formalities my first book at your feet” (1: 153). There is a performance of pride and vanity in what is traditionally a humbling gesture recognising one’s dependence upon a patron for their ability to continue making art. The dedication is sarcastic as he claims to be “desirous” of the Prince’s “protection” and hopes that he deems the decadent narrative of *Under the Hill* worthy of a place in the holy archive of the Catholic Church.



**Fig. 4-3 Abbé Faucreuche awaits the reader’s critique. *The Savoy* (8: 157). Image Courtesy Private Collection of J. DuPlessis and F. King.**

The dedication is also a continuation of the homosocial bond between Beardsley and



his real-life patron Smithers. Serving as a playful jibe at religious anachronisms while also flirting with his romantic and very personal interest in the Catholic Church, Beardsley also pays homage to the dissident discourse that defined his friendship with Smithers. It is also an elaborate, unsentimental, expression of his own sense of gratitude to Smithers for publishing his first (and only) work of literary prose. Beardsley's blasphemous act places attention on the author of the work as an object for his Prince to read. By accepting and reading his work, he becomes the object of erotic pleasure, not only for his representation of institutionalised religious authority, but also for his homoerotic reading of God as a reader taking pleasure in the male body.

In terms of the novel, while Helen is presumably the protagonist's object of desire, the reader's eyes are drawn to the Abbé's experience of his desire. His journey, his *desire* for Helen, is the focus instead of Helen's body. The Abbé is described as standing at the "ombre gateway of the mysterious Hill, troubled with an exquisite fear lest a day's travel should have too cruelly undone the laboured niceness of his dress" (1: 156). He seems to be at his quest's Castle Perilous, the moment when his virtue as a knight will be tested; however, his concern is about how others will perceive him as he enters the gate. His concern is for his own beauty, an aesthetic virtue, even finding his own vain distress to be "exquisite." He has "slim and gracious hands" and plays with "the gold hair that fell upon his shoulders like a finely-curved peruke, and from point to point of a precise toilet the fingers wandered, quelling the little mutinies of cravat and ruffle" (1: 156). The Abbé, standing at the gateway to his adventure, obsesses over his appearance. He is not the knight seeking his beloved. His beloved is himself – he wants to read others reading his body. Beardsley interrupts the story before he is even a full page in with an elaborate image of the Abbé Faufreleuche (see fig. 4-3), surrounded by a complex, chaotic landscape, fantastical and also manicured with orchids



and fairies and potted plants surrounding the image of the man posing. He poses self-consciously with plumes coming out of the top of his golden hair. He stares at the muff that remains on one hand, the hand that holds his fine jousting sword. This is not a man preparing for battle, but a gilded dandy entering a room full of important people and he wants to see the pleasure his appearance evokes. He touches himself standing at the gates. He is attracted to the idea of being on an adventure but it is the aesthetic experience of his own beautiful form on that adventure that most concerns the Abbé. His goal, standing at the entrance of the underworld, is to be seen making an entrance.

The part of the novel that Beardsley was able to complete (four chapters in total between Nos. 1 and 2) is about the aesthetic impressions of things as the Abbé Faufreleuche experiences them and his reactions to those things. Obscured by the beauty of her home is Helen. Helen is lost amidst detailed images of her toilette and the court that surrounds her at all times. She receives more reports of the Abbé than he of her. This inversion of the reader is a queering of heterosexuality because it is a self-conscious analysis of the dandy's beauty – his desirability during the act of reading his own onanistic pleasure.

#### 4.4 The Homosocial and the Sensuous Male Body

Thus far, my project has explored queer sexuality as a diverse experience that can encompass same-sex desire, female sexual desire, the beauty of the male youth, and the redirection of various sexual desires towards artistic creation and scholarly criticism. Aestheticism does not force a sense of unity or sameness so much as offer an opportunity to explore difference with queer books as spaces that transgress heteronormative constructs of power and sexuality.

Arthur Symons, Aubrey Beardsley, John Gray, Edward Dowson each experienced and

expressed their sexuality – both their desires and their identities – in different ways and those various concepts coalesce in the communal space of the periodical. What each of their works has in common is a consideration, not of the objects they desire (whether that be men or women), but their sensory experiences of beauty. The discourse of same-sex desire becomes a model for reading texts subversively – *Eros* becomes a form of critical reading.

For example, John Gray's contribution to *The Savoy*, "The Forge" (2:97-98), is very different from his poetry in *Silverpoints*, taking the steel worker as the beautiful object of the narrator's desire. The poem celebrates the ruggedly masculine working-class labourer as he forges the steelworks that come to dominate Victorian infrastructure. It is a filthy picture of a London, "under earth" alongside "graves" that "repeat the sayings of the dead" (9-10). The men of the forge work where only the dead dare to tread. It is a world of men, made into a bleak series of sensations: the sight of a man's tea cooling in a basin of "rust-red water" (29), the "rattle of tongs, slosh, and fume" portrayed as another world (38), a "Grown Chinese hell" (39) "[w]here strange gods heap the fire and trim the rack" (40). Yet, there is a majesty to man's conquering of the underworld, an "arena wherein stubborn stuff/With man locks strength" (56-57). This power, a masculine ideal, is the object of the speaker's desire. It is not his productive contribution to Victorian society or his work ethic so much as the physical and spiritual beauty of what he does "this day" and for "many days" to come (61). Tim Barringer studies this relationship between the male object as "the nexus of ethical and aesthetic value" for Victorian artists where beauty is interconnected to productivity as majestic (1-2). This is a fascinating turn for Gray as a poet, who, as we have seen in Chapter 2, was culturally and sexually central to the expression of the Aesthetic persona and the object of queer sexual desire. Gray positions the male heterosexual working-class man as another object cathexis to desire, touch, and appreciate. However, this object cathexis, as a male figure, returns us to

the male body equating the object of desire with the self.

While still subtle, the homoerotic desires expressed in Lionel Johnson's "Three Sonnets" (4: 75-76) are a more direct invasion of the homosocial space with same-sex discourse. Johnson romanticises this bond in "Hawker of Morwenstow," a Petrarchan sonnet addressed to the figure of a Hawker, clearly a leader, a "strong shepherd" for whom the speaker holds a secret love (1). The speaker sees their union as a bond between the "Catholic faith" and "Celtic joy" (6). The speaker's male beloved cannot return his love because he, too, is on "the Quest" for the Sangraal (9-10), which seems to stand in for the Hawker's exclusive commitment to his faith. He cannot see the role of "Celtic joy" in his life so he is out of the speaker's hands. Johnson interrupts the homosocial with an expression of homoerotic desire that makes the ongoing discourse of the male body a potential site of erotic intercourse.

After a second sonnet, "Mother Ann: Foundress of the Shakers," celebrating the feminine spirit of the Shakers Movement, Johnson, "Münster: A.D. 1534," reflexively turns towards the bodies of poets, "the golden men" with "visions, perfect and divine" (1-2). The poet's ideal is not necessarily the ideal of other men because sexual desire varies among individuals. This gives the speaker the power to decide how to perceive beauty for himself. Because of this sacred power, the poet can absolve sins, including his own. The poet's sins are not even necessarily sinful because "Our hands have torn in twain the Tables of the Law" and now "Sons of the Spirit, we know nothing more of sin" (10-11). They can possess the knowledge of "the mystic fruit" in order to "pluck up God's own knowledge" and allow "the Reign of Paradise to begin" (12-14). Heaven, paradise, is in the hands of the individual poet. The things, once sinful and resulting in being cast out of Paradise, and out of society, no longer hold such terror. Instead, Aestheticism and the Aesthetes have, or at least assert, the

power to take control of the discourse and change culture's concept of sin. The Poet, as Aesthete, queers our understanding of sin as something defined by the speaker and his or her own sensory analysis of their body. The authority of others does not impose definitions of sin. Instead, the Aesthete has the power to engage and queer concepts of sin as a mutable sexual discourse.

The homoerotic brings sensuality, if not sexuality, to discourses of desirous reading. This is not to say that non-sexual critiques or expressions of desire by a man for a woman are somehow secretly homosexual. Again, that would misread the queer. Instead, the desire for the other becomes a reading of one's own desire – a realisation of the role that desire and pleasure plays in the act of critical analysis. For example, Havelock Ellis's essay, "Zola: The Man and His Work" (1: 67-80) looks at the novelist of naturalism and his works through his personal biography. Ellis's essay is a reconsideration of the novelist vilified as "the man who has dragged literature into the gutter" with works equated with "moral sewage" (67). Ellis challenges claims that Zola was "no artist" by offering another perspective on his work – another look at the man as an artist (68). Ellis's defence of the writer is based on a re-examination of how Zola reads the world and how the novelist's perspective influences his own. Ellis writes that "[i]n his most characteristic novels, as 'L'Assommoir,' 'Nana,' 'Germinal,' his efforts to attain salient perspective in the mass of trivial or technical details – to build a single elaborate effect out of manifold details – are often admirably conducted" (69). Ellis argues that the coal mine is the "hero" of *Germinal*: "The details are not interesting, but they are carefully worked up, and the Voreux is finally symbolised as a stupendous idol, sated with human blood, crouching in its mysterious sanctuary" (70). Zola's attention to detail is what captures Ellis's appreciation; he sees in Zola's reading of the material body of the coal mine something beautiful to study. The object of that analysis is the

coal pit but it is less important for Ellis than the act of critically reading Zola's observation of the coal pit, capturing his highly detailed, materialist critique of the mine.



**Fig 4-4: “Chloe” by W. Rothenstein from *The Savoy* (1:109). Permission Pending Western Libraries’ ARCC.**

Ellis then engages in a critique of Zola's psyche and personal experience of sensation. He says that Zola's method “was rooted in the author's experience of the world. Life only came to him as the sights, sounds, [and] smells, that reached his garret window. His soul seems to have been starved at the centre, and to have encamped at the sensory periphery” (72). Zola's perspective is the product of his experiences of life and limited by his lack of experiences as well. Ellis seeks to understand that perspective in order to textually touch Zola and his writing as a novelist. “Zola's literary methods,” from Ellis's point of view, “are those of the *parvenu* who has tried to thrust himself in from outside, who has never been seated at the table of life, who has never really lived” (73). Ellis establishes Zola as a figure of alienation and offers his perspective to the reader as a model for the individual alienated from conventional society. Zola's critics are, for Ellis, the comments of people who have not tried

to see the world in the way Zola experienced it and Ellis's goal is to present his reading, his *view*, of that reader. Ellis, in his attempt to see what Zola sees, creates a work that actually presents the reader with a self-conscious analysis reading of Zola as a reader. He critiques Zola's writing and sees his own alienation within his own act of writing. By writing that experience, they touch.

We also come across what promises to be a female object, only to have the queer sexual discourse of the critical memory presented in William Rothenstein's "Chloe" (1:109, see Fig 4-4). Rothenstein's sketch presents an object to look upon, a woman interrupted by the artist's impressionistic presentation. Rothenstein's drawing is an outline. Her face suggests eyes without full representation of an identifiable face. The only discernable part of her nose is the shadow of her nostrils. Her dress is incomplete. The image is representative of the atmosphere surrounding the memory of a woman instead of *the symbolic woman*, as if recording the hazy nature of Rothenstein's memory. It is not the representation of "Chloe," but Rothenstein's memory of Chloe. What we see is his mind at work, not a model to admire or an idealised object. The object of Rothenstein's image is his memory – Rothenstein's representation of his own mind, an ephemeral shadow without a stable identity. The image visually engages with *The Savoy's* thematic presentation of male sexuality as a sensual self-consciousness, textually representing Rothenstein's analysis of his own mind and the limits of his fading memory. It is an act of sharing his own onanistic desire through the material representation of his mind in the moment of remembering.

The theme of the self-reflexive reading remains intense throughout the various numbers of *The Savoy*. The intersection of varying forms of the desirous reader is realised in depictions of men reading themselves or other men. In No. 1 alone, I have not yet mentioned Jacques L. Blanche's self-portrait "Thaulow: The Norwegian Painter and his Family,"

portraying himself as the *paterfamilias* with his brood (1: 132); W. B. Yeats's "The Binding of the Hair," where we are left *in media res* with the decapitated head of the queen's warrior beloved, falling from the bush and rolling over to stare up at her from her feet presenting the male body as the central object of analysis (1: 138); or, Selwyn Image's "Of Criticism and the Critic," a self-reflexive look at the art of criticism that directly addresses the reader and positions criticism as a monologic analysis of the writer made into an intercourse by the periodical. *The Savoy* becomes a site of textual intercourse, a mutual masturbation where writers read themselves and reading each other during the act of reading. Aesthetic discourses of same-sex desire instigated the publication of *The Savoy* giving the sexual discourse of the male body as a beautiful object of desire. The male body became a queer medium by which the reader could re-imagine sexuality and his or her own physical relationship to art, culture, and convention.

## 4.5 Onanistic Ecstasy, Commodity Failure

Aestheticism's emphasis on beauty was another political position that questioned heteronormativity and exposed gender and sexual binaries as social constructs. *The Savoy* highlights the slippages of sex and gender with an erotically charged homosociality that blurs the boundaries of desire and beauty constructed by Victorian culture. Brake says that while Aesthetic periodicals "distinguished themselves from many other serials of their day through their apparent exclusion of politics in favour of a proclaimed focus on literature and visual art, their 'aesthetic' discourses of naturalism, symbolism, nihilism, erotica, and graphics cohabit with insistent discourses of gender, with sexual as well as cultural politics" (146). Brake's comment speaks to the interdisciplinary nature of these periodicals and the politics of beauty. The homoerotic intersects with the heterosexual, replacing boundaries of

marginalisation with an intersection of difference enabled by the queer space of an Aesthetic community where discordant and diverse expressions of desire and pleasure are welcome.



**Fig. 4-5: One of Beardsley's phallic objects from *The Savoy* (8: 49). Courtesy Private Collection of J. DuPlessis and F. King.**

The final issue of *The Savoy* (No. 8) exclusively features the work of Symons and Beardsley. In a letter written by Beardsley to Smithers in December 1896, Beardsley laments that the “printing of Savoy no. 8 was a bit off” but snickers in the next sentence at Smithers’s apparent comments on his drawings for the last issue. “Yes *everything* is phallic shaped” (Walker, his emphasis, Letter XC, G. 93. H. I. 58). While subtle, every figure in the final issue of *The Savoy*, as drawn by Beardsley, can be envisioned as phallic in shape suggesting, again, that even when gazing at the female body, the reader is confronted with the erect sexual organ of the male body again and again (fig. 4-5 is an example of Beardsley’s personified phalli). The objects that Beardsley presents call attention to, the body of the reader and the self-analytical bodies of Symons and Beardsley as the final two contributors,



hails the male body as the origin that the object is supposed to cathect – at least as close to an origin as the signifying chain of supplements allows, of male heterosexual desire's object.

Symons's poem, "Mundi Victima" (8: 13-27), serves to lament both the end of *The Savoy* and the damage its loss has done to London's Aesthetic community. "The gates have closed" as the reader and the poet "are hurled/From the fixed paradise of our content/Into an outer world of banishment" (I: 2-4). Like Adam and Eve, they have been thrown out of the Garden of Eden never to return and never again to experience the opportunity that *The Savoy* offered. The poem is a goodbye to a lover but it works in its context as a goodbye to the periodical and to the reader. Symons's speaker talks about his "perverse horoscope" that "Marked in my life that love in me should swoon/Into the arms of strange affinities" (II: 3, 6). The speaker sexualises the relationship between his body and the periodical's body and admits that it is both strange and perverse. This is not heteronormative love at play, but another sort of bond among the contributors, a "mystical marriage of heaven and hell," or even a textual intercourse, doomed from the start (II: 24). The beloved's love was "fatal" to both of them, "a tragic ecstasy/Between disaster and disaster, given/A moment's space, to be a hell in heaven" (IV: 42-44). This is a doomed love, as in Symons's other poems, often recounting affairs with prostitutes and other women with whom he could not build a life or committed relationship. This was what Roger Holdsworth notes as part of Symons's imagistic style and desire to be a poet of the modern world. He pays "attention to the sexual underworld of the city, to prostitutes and their clients," and to imagery of "cigarettes, maquillage [i.e. cosmetics], tumbled beds and scented boudoirs" in a manner that had not been done in British poetry before (Holdsworth 12-13). So we are given a beautiful moment of goodbye: the speaker's beloved will marry another man who "rests his ring on my ring" (X: 71). Someone has tamed his wild transgressive love and made it heteronormative.

Underneath the surface of that performance, the beloved's love for him, he hopes remains. The poem also addresses the failure of textual intercourse to attract an audience with *The Savoy*.

Despite this unplanned end to the periodical, there was some hope that its ideas, loves, and beauties would continue on in another queer space, covertly operating in the same culture and society occupied by a false consensus of heteronormativity. Symons, in his last essay, "A Literary Causerie: By Way of Epilogue" (8: 91-92) criticises "the horrified outcry" that doomed the journal as a popular medium for growing Aestheticism in British culture (91). This was an "outcry for no reason in the world but the human necessity of making a noise—with which we were first greeted" (91). Symons laments that their mistake was, "we assumed that there were very many people in the world who really cared for art, and really for art's sake," finding at the end of the journal's life that "few people care for art at all, and most of these care for it because they mistake it for something else" (92). Symons decries the failure of the reading public to engage with the periodical theme of reading. Perhaps the masturbatory metaphor of reading was rejected by the reading public as a solipsistic reading of the self-conscious analysis as weak or anti-social. However, *The Savoy* is an attempt to consider the hands that create art as objects of desire worthy of critical analysis and close reading. Aestheticism provided contributors access to a revision of heterosexual desire in order to consider the beauty of the male body and the sensory experience of reading that stood parallel alongside heteronormative binaries of normal reproduction and abnormal sexual gratification. In addition, *The Savoy* aestheticises the sexual desires and pleasures of the male reading boy and sexual dissidence becomes, not a symptom of pathology but a beautiful sensation to share – a text of bliss in which the writer, as a reader, can experience sensual and bodily fulfillment.

## Conclusion

I have taken seriously Peter L. Shillingsburg's call to integrate theoretical practice with textual practices of bibliography and book history and my dissertation is an attempt to realise a development in the field of Textual Studies while also honouring the texts that serve as the foundation of my research. The study of Aestheticism and decorated books of the 1890s Aesthetic Movement provides a unique opportunity to study the ways in which queer theory and textual theory can intersect. Aestheticism's multimedial approach to art and art criticism means that Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and others were conceiving of their work not specifically as a literary or as a visual art form. Form merges with content and, as this project has demonstrated, the stimulation of multiple senses comes together with multiple mediums of communication in the body of the queer book.

I have already referred to Walter Pater's "The School of Giorgione" from *The Renaissance*, but it is worth considering its relevance to the merging of Aesthetic, Queer, and Textual theory at work in this project. "Art," Pater says, is "always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception" (88). In other words Art is an appeal to our senses and sense. The critic must hone his or her sensory perceptions and art that appeals to as many of our senses at once, "those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye or the ear only, but form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the 'imaginative reason'" (88). Art, at its best, is multisensory and awakens the critical reader's senses in as many ways as possible at once. Aestheticism anticipates our current interests in multidisciplinary study in the Arts and Humanities today and offers an important model for those studies, especially in regard to reading sexual discourses of dissent.

Pater's emphasis on harmony in his discourse of the senses is problematic for my approach but that is where I see Queer Theory's emphasis on distortion, disruption, and the pleasure of awkward questions to be of importance. Aestheticism's complex integration of same-sex desire into an idea of sexual difference and diversity via *Eros* offers a way to imagine queerness co-existing with, and even dependent upon, the heteronormative. For the Aesthetes, the methodology was cultural and historical revision, narrating alternative ways of reading the past in order to create queer spaces in which to exist in their present. That revision meant that sexual pleasure and desires could merge with acts of artistic creation and criticism so that sex becomes part of a larger discourse, an *Eros* of beauty.

To create these new discourses, it is necessary to work in a manner that appeals to all of our senses and revise the separation of art forms and creative mediums into a distorted or queer perspective on creative inspiration, beauty, and play. Aestheticism lets works of art be many things at once and different things for different people. Key to this Aesthetic is the material book where multiple creative mediums can interact and influence one another.

*A House of Pomegranates* combines Wilde's fairy tales and visual art by two different artists resulting in a book that is simultaneously children's fable, homoerotic fantasy, art installation, and a symbol of the Aesthetic Movement that is both flawed and beautiful. *Silverpoints* is a book of poems, a material presentation of the Aesthete Poet, Ricketts's erotic fantasy, Wilde's erotic fantasy, Gray's spiritual search, and Gray's worst fears about Aestheticism and hedonism. *Salome* is a theatrical performance captured on the page, a material representation of Wilde and Beardsley's conflict over the book's presentation, Beardsley's androgynous playground, and Wilde's decadent masterpiece. *The Savoy* is a failed business venture, a homosocial bonding exercise, a narcissistic orgy of the male body, a man's look at himself through Aesthetic eyes, and an attempt by a pornographer

to keep Aestheticism alive. The specific editions that I have studied in this project reflect all of these ideas and more.

There were many queer books that I could not include in this project. The structure of the project prevented me from fully considering “Michael Field” (Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper), whose beautiful books for *Long Ago* (1889) and *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* (1914) would provide opportunities to study the queerness of textual poetics through the lens of lesbianism and the concept of monogamous love. Laurence Housman’s work as poet, short story writer, playwright, and illustrator deserves further attention for his interpretation of William Morris’s work in woodcutting and the use of cultural myth to express sexuality through Christian acts of martyrdom in works such as *All-Fellows* (1896). Aleister Crowley’s *White Stains* (1898), published by Leonard Smithers, is an example of the sexual and the spiritual merging in a manner that defied heteronormativity, but also engaged the heteronormative through the typographical and paratextual practices employed in the presentation of his explicitly homoerotic and spiritualist verse. These works, and others, provide further research opportunities for me to develop this project post-dissertation. This project has not yet finished; however, this is not to say that the queer book is an enduring phenomenon. In fact, the queer book is a concept that is limited to the books made by Aesthetes and Decadents. After that movement petered out in the early-twentieth century, we can see an end, of sorts, to the creation of queer books.

Certainly, there is no official end, just as there is no official beginning to either Aestheticism or queer books. However, the queer book was the cultural product of a moment. I see the end of queer books as a cultural shift in the wake of the Oscar Wilde trials when discourses of homosexuality and abnormal sexual perversion overpowered Aestheticism’s discourse of *Eros*. Most publishers tried to distance themselves from Aestheticism’s newly-

labelled homosexual identity and obscured or even eliminated expressions of sexual and gender dissent from their books. *Eros* was erroneously conflated with sexology's ideas of homosexuality and, even worse, with the law's continued criminalisation of "acts of gross indecency" and sodomy. After Wilde's arrest, many publishers panicked about what to do with Aesthete artists and their queer concepts of sexual desires and pleasure.

The easiest solution was to distance the movement from the homosexual visually. *The Yellow Book* (1894-1897) was associated with Decadence and sexual dissidence, largely because of Aubrey Beardsley's visual editing and his own contributions to the periodical. After Wilde's arrest, Frederick Chapman, a Bodley Head manager covering for literary editor Henry Harland and John Lane, both of whom were out of the country, fired Beardsley and immediately expunged all of his work from the fifth volume of the quarterly. This firing, while drastic, was not reversed by Lane, nor did Harland fight to bring Beardsley back. They knew that, in order for the journal to survive, an ideological shift was necessary to convince readers that their journal was neither homosexual, nor abnormally perverted the way Wilde and Beardsley were clearly being defined. The *avant-garde* required a new interpretation, a new performance, a new discourse of beauty operating at a safe distance from Wilde and co. Instead, they got misunderstanding and frightened publishers.

*The Yellow Book's* shift, post-Beardsley, provides an important example of how queer textuality affected the reader and how its sudden absence changed the character of literary content, even heteronormativising previously dissident content. After the success of *Salome*, Bodley Head proprietors John Lane and his then partner Elkin Mathews employed Beardsley as Art Editor for their new quarterly periodical *The Yellow Book*. *The Yellow Book* exploited Beardsley's infamy and their more popular authors in order to promote the Bodley Head's unknown authors and their growing literary catalogue. Aestheticism and the suggestions of

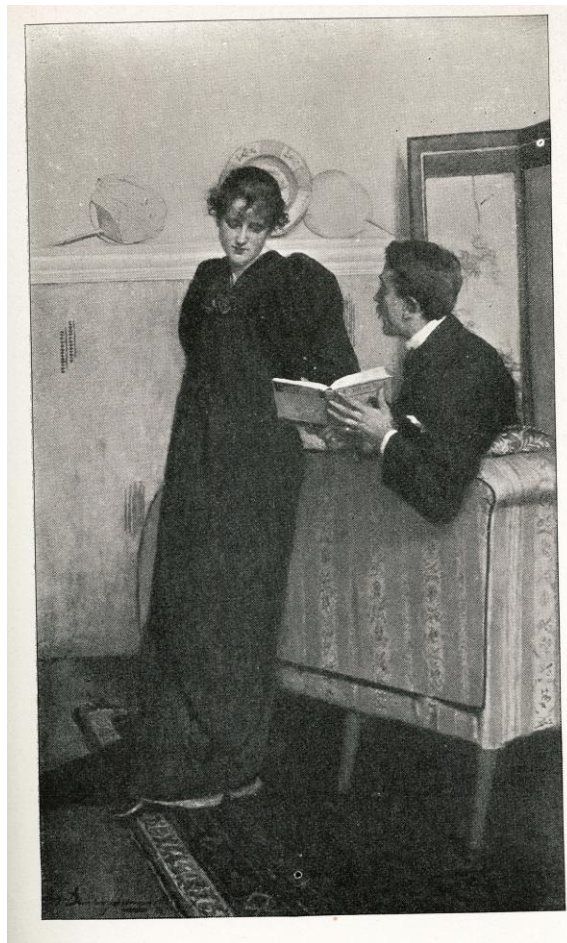
decadence and sexual dissidence in the quarterly were subtle enough to be perceived as decadent and homoerotic without the darker motifs of *Salome* or the overtly homoerotic aesthetic persona of *Silverpoints*.

The controversial Wilde was intentionally excluded from contributing, according to Lane at least, at the express request of Beardsley who maintained an awkward relationship with Wilde following the publication of *Salome* in 1894 (Sturgis 171). Wilde's sexuality was too overtly homoerotic and too dangerous to the financial stability of the publishing. However, Wilde would soon haunt *The Yellow Book* because of his arrest and eventual imprisonment for "gross indecency" in 1895. He was arrested, according to popular rumour of the time, with a "yellow book" under his arm. While he was not actually carrying a copy of *The Yellow Book*, the damage was done and John Lane "was entirely unprepared for this bracketing of Wilde with the *Yellow Book*" (Mix 143).

Beardsley was tied to Wilde bibliographically because of the success and celebrity instigated by their shared work on *Salome*. Shortly after Wilde's arrest in April 1895, Beardsley was fired and *The Yellow Book* lost the dissident materiality that Beardsley brought to the Bodley Head's flagship periodical. Katherine Lyon Nix notes that by Volume VI, Harland sought to make *The Yellow Book* "so innocuous as to attract no unfavourable comment but so interesting as to compensate for the loss of Beardsley" (166). Specifically, he ordered visual changes in an attempt to make *The Yellow Book* appear textually normative.

Volume VI offers good examples of iconotextual elements, illustrations and drawings that serve to create an iconotextual heteronormativity. An important example of the *Yellow Book*'s turn to the heteronormative is found in Gertrude D. Hammond's work "The Yellow Book" (VI: 117, see Fig. 4-2). The image features a man on a couch, leaning over to show

what appears to be Volume III of the *Yellow Book* to a demurely dressed woman who looks unimpressed with what she sees. Of course, she is not on the couch with him, but standing against the couch in sexless relation. She is the female object, mediating the reader's homosocial desire and mediating the reader's objectifying gaze. Note the position of one of the plates hanging on the wall behind her, standing in for a makeshift halo in this picturesque, domestic scene. *The Yellow Book* has been tamed by, of all symbolic figures one could imagine, the angel of the house.



**Fig. C-1: “The Yellow Book” by Gertrude D Hammond from *The Yellow Book* (VI: 117). Permission Pending Western Libraries ARCC.**

Dissidence became immaterial as the writer's material surroundings lost its yellow lustre and turned to the heteronormative. Aestheticism could not fully communicate its



queerness with only one creative medium (writing). With the loss of Beardsley's hand and his contribution to the periodical's vision, *The Yellow Book* no longer communicated as a queer book. The visual art, the provocative contrast of stories with images, sometimes ironically positioned as with the example above, sometimes intentionally changing the subject of the previous literary work, was missing. Beardsley's art and his choices of other artists changed how readers interpreted the literary content. *The Yellow Book* was more than stories and art: it was a tactile and social experience that created community and entrenched the London's *avant-garde* publishing culture. With no visual and tactile disruption of the reader's senses, the message of Aestheticism's sexual discourse was lost.

While much of the literary content explores queer discourses of sexuality, the periodical no longer engaged with those discourses. The textual intercourse was lost and the material book was no longer queer. *The Yellow Book* after Beardsley's departure is a symbol of shame, shame of its own queer content and sexually dissident contributors materially relying on the picturesque, the medieval, and realism in order to take attention away from *avant-garde* literature's contribution to discourses of same-sex desire that continued to challenge heteronormativity. Contributors spoke queer sexuality after Beardsley left, but they existed only within the periodical's lexical codes. No one could *see* or touch the *Yellow Book's* then abstract sexual dissent. *The Yellow Book* after Beardsley's departure remained a disjointed collection of beautiful works but it had lost its queer multidisciplinary outlook on 1890s London.

Just as the material book could queer literary, or lexical, content, it could also take it away. Despite richly Decadent and dissident works of Aesthetic sexual discourse like "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" by Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) and "Stories Toto Told Me" by Baron Corvo (Frederick Rolfe), *The Yellow Book* was no longer associated with sexual

dissent. While it was still an Aesthetic periodical, it used illustration and material presentation to reintegrate literary decadence into heteronormative conceptions of art and beauty. Even without the singular vision of William Morris, publishers of queer books conformed and by changing one element, by dulling one sense, readers were blinded to other expressions of dissent in the lexical text of the periodical.

While art in the twentieth century would continue to create multisensory expressions with material books, the emphasis on dissident sexual desires and pleasures found in decorated books of the 1890s Aesthetic Movement was lost. We can recover these queer books via the intersection of queer theory and textual studies because they offer an innovative perspective on the creative discourses of sex that emerge from 1890s decorated books, Aestheticism, and sexual dissidence.

I would also argue that the study of the book, especially queer books, is more relevant to criticism than considering the decreasing relevance of material books in contemporary society. A lexical code, the written word, is only one means of communication but even the written word is dependent upon typography, transcription, printing, publishing, and distribution. The queer book brings our attention to the complexities of our relationship to the material book and literature. The reader can touch sexual discourse for the sake of touching it – something queer theorists may want to consider as a means of integrating the material experience into critical analysis. The queer book is not a manifesto of change or rebellion, but a beautiful alternative point of view available to those seeking such alternatives.

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--- and Aubrey Beardsley. *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act: Translated from the French by*

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Byrne R. S. Fone describes the Uranians as young poets inspired by Walt Whitman's poetry and Edward Carpenter's *Narcissus and Other Poems* (1873) and his first volume of *Towards Democracy* (1883), to "begin their own labours in the 1880s. These writers sometimes called themselves Uranians and in their works celebrated homosexual love, between men and between men and boys" (78). Fone's use of the term "homosexual" is not accurate as these writers "derived their name from the writings of the German Karl Heinrich Ulrichs" who wrote pamphlets on same-sex desire and love between men "in which he employed the word 'Urning' to denote" same-sex desire between men (Fone 78). For additional details on the Uranian poets see Timothy d'Arch Smith's *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English Uranian Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) and Michael A. Lombardi-Nash's translation of Karl Heinrich Ulrich's collected pamphlets *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> With gratitude, I credit Dr Helena Gurfinkel who, while dining among a group of enthusiastic *fin-de-siècle* scholars at a pub in Exeter, UK, kindly (and quietly) pointed out that the term "textual intercourse," which I thought was a product of my own invention, was actually the name of a very important critical text by Early Modernist scholar Jeffrey Masten.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete reprint of Charles Kains-Jackson's essay "The New Chivalry," see *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook*, edited by Chris White (Routledge, 2002, p. 154).

<sup>4</sup> For details on the tenants and practices of Genetic Criticism, see *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-Textes*. Eds. Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrar, and Michael Groden. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> "Fount," according to *The Blueprint Dictionary of Printing and Publishing*, refers to "A complete set of sorts all of the same typeface and point size" (110). While the word "font" is sometimes used in American contexts, all of the typographers whose work I have read for this project use "fount" including Ruari McLean and Robert Bringhurst. Where I have chosen to use British spelling throughout this project, I have chosen to stay true to the British spelling of this term.

<sup>6</sup> Add MS50913 Chiswick Press Papers Vol. CXV 1880-1890. Source: The British Library Manuscripts Collection.

<sup>7</sup> Add MS 50917 Chiswick Press Papers 1898 to 1899. Source: The British Library Manuscripts Collection.

<sup>8</sup> For references taken from Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) I have chosen to use Nicholas Frankel's "Annotated and Uncensored Edition" for The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. The general and textual introductions, as well as the annotations, offer an important insight into the material construction of Wilde's novel. In addition, this is the first edition based on the manuscript material that Wilde sent to Lippincotts before editor Joseph Marshall Stoddart edited the text for publication in the magazine without consulting with Wilde over his changes (Frankel "Introduction" 38, 41). Each version of the novel has its own unique qualities, but because of the significance of Frankel's edition to Wilde scholarship, as well as his influence on my own work, it seemed appropriate to turn to this version of *Dorian Gray*.

<sup>9</sup> Please note that, as per the 1894 edition of *Salome*, I will not use an accent when referring to the book. However, Wilde and many other use the accent in reference to Salomé as a character. The difference is also intended to provide a visual referent so it is clear if I am speaking about the book or the character.

<sup>10</sup> For a full analysis of the characterisation of Salomé as a queer figure in Wilde's play and its relation to Aubrey Beardsley's illustration, please see my article, "Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and the Queer Space of the Book," published as a chapter in *Wilde's Wiles: Studies of the Influences on Oscar Wilde and His Enduring Influences in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Annette M. Magid (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013).



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<sup>11</sup> A relevant example of dying for beauty and art is the figure of Cyril Graham in Oscar Wilde's short story, "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." (1889). Cyril commits suicide in order to convince his friend, George Erskine, that his theory about the subject of William Shakespeare's sonnets is true. The art of his theory is more important than his own life and he sacrifices himself for the dissident beauty of the theory that Shakespeare wrote his sonnets to a beautiful male actor who performed the female roles in all of Shakespeare's plays. I would argue that this is a Decadent form of Aestheticism because Cyril's death is portrayed as a sacrifice for the beauty of his dissident theory.

<sup>12</sup> John Lane Company Records. Aubrey Beardsley 42. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>13</sup> RP 3196 Wilde, Oscar. Autograph Letter Signed to John Lane. Feb 1893. Eccles Collection, British Library.

<sup>14</sup> For further scholarship on Salomé's gaze, see Linda Hutcheon's "'Here's Lookin' at You, Kid': The Empowering Gaze in 'Salome'" in *Profession* (1998): 11-22 and Brad Bucknell's "On 'Seeing' Salome" in *ELH* 60:2 (1993): 503-526.

<sup>15</sup> Please note that my use of a male-gendered pronoun and emphasis on the male body is based on the focus on men and male bodies in *The Savoy*. I am in no way suggesting that women cannot engage in discourse of self-reflexive analysis.

<sup>16</sup> For a complete history of Leonard Smithers, his publishing firm, and his importance to the history of British Aestheticism, see James G. Nelson's *Publisher to the Decadents: Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, and Dowson*. Part of the Penn State Series in the History of the Book, 2000.

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## Curriculum Vitae

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### Education

- 2014 PhD - The University of Western Ontario (UWO)  
2009 MA - The University of Western Ontario (UWO)  
2008 Honours Qualification for BA - The University of New Brunswick, Saint John  
2007 BA - The University of New Brunswick, Saint John (UNBSJ)  
1998 BBA - The University of New Brunswick, Saint John (UNBSJ)

### Publications

- "British Aestheticism, Sexology, and Erotica: Negotiating Sexual Discourses in *Teleny*." *Victorian Review* (Forthcoming, Spring 2015).  
"Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and the Queer Space of the Book." *Wilde's Wives: Studies of the Influences on Oscar Wilde and His Enduring Influences in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Annette Magid. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013.  
"Queer Spaces and Strategic Social Constructions in Rao's *The Boyfriend*." *The Word Hoard* 1:1 (2012): Article 5. Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/wordhoard/vol1/iss1/5>

### Conference Presentations

- "Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic Model for Queer Community in 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.'" Annual Conference of the Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada. April 26-27, 2014. Banff, Alberta.  
"Inverting the Ideal Book: Charles Ricketts, Aubrey Beardsley, and Queer Textuality." 2012 Annual Meeting of the Bibliographical Society of Canada, May 28-29, 2012. University of Waterloo. Waterloo, ON.  
"Textual Intercourse and the Queer Poetics of John Gray's *Silverpoints*." Queer Research Day 2012. Sponsored by the Sexuality and Gender Research Group and the Western Queer Caucus. April 18, 2012. University of Western Ontario, London ON.  
"Textual Intercourse and the Queer Poetics of John Gray's *Silverpoints*." Decadent Poetics, a Conference organized by the Centre for Victorian Studies, 1- 2 July 2011. University of Exeter, Exeter, UK.  
"Love, Sexology, and Pornographic Didacticism in *Teleny*." "Sexology and Literature," a Member Organized Panel for the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English 54th Annual Conference, 28-31 May 2011. University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B.  
"The Queer Child and *The Hanging Garden*." Queer Times: A Graduate Student Conference, 22 May 2010. The University of Western Ontario, London ON.  
"The Spectacle of the Occult and Sexual Dissidence: Positioning Passive Men in the Victorian Spiritualist Movement." Victorian Studies Association of Ontario's Annual Spring Conference, 25 April 2009. York University, Toronto, ON.

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## Teaching Experience

Fall 2013 English 3886F: Sexuality and Literature: Special Topics  
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## Teaching and Research Assistantships

2014 Research Assistantship with Dr. Donna Pennee  
2013 Research Assistantship with Dr. Christopher Keep  
2012-2013 English 1020E: Understanding Literature Today  
2012 Research Assistantship with Dr. Manina Jones  
2011 Language Enhancement Academic Program, Continuing Studies  
2010-2011 English 2500E: The Novel, English Department  
2010 Language Enhancement Academic Program, Continuing Studies  
2010 Research Assistantship with Dr. DMR Bentley  
2009-2010 English 1024E: Forms of Fiction: Intro to Narrative, English Dept.  
2008-2009 English 1020E: Introduction to English Literatures and Cultures, English  
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## Academic Honours and Awards

2012 Graduate Thesis Research Award (UWO)  
2012 Faculty of Arts and Humanities Graduate Award (UWO)  
2011 Mary Routledge Fellowship (UWO)

## Comprehensive Examinations

Primary Field: Nineteenth-Century British Literature (Victorian Literature and Romanticism)  
Secondary Field: Twentieth-Century British and Irish Literature (Edwardians, Modernism, Postmodernism, and Contemporary)

## Graduate Course Work

Affectation and Affect: The Case of Oscar Wilde; Hysterical Symptoms / Historical Narratives (Darwin, Freud, Eliot, and Dickens); Weird Science: Psychological Research in Late-Victorian Literature and Culture; Suffrage, Sex, and Democracy in Early-Twentieth Century Britain; Romanticism and Genre; Queer Times.

## Memberships

North American Victorian Studies Association (NAVSA); Victorian Studies Association of Ontario (VSAO); Modern Language Association (MLA); Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE); The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP); Bibliographical Society of Canada (BSC).

