# “Being sexless, wilt thou be”: Nineteenth-Century British Poetry and the Challenge of the Androgynous Mind

by

Leslie A. Haines

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Approved by

Christopher Keirstead, Chair, Professor of English
Marc Silverstein, Professor of English
Jeremy Downes, Professor of English
Barbara Baker, Executive Director of the Women’s Leadership Institute

Abstract

This dissertation occasions a recognition and discussion of androgyny by taking on the challenge of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's nineteenth-century claim that "a great mind must be androgynous." Drawing on Judith Butler's contemporary concept of *undoing gender*, this project explores the tension between how some nineteenth-century poetic representations of androgyny produce restrictive performances that can "undo one's personhood," but also that can create spaces for *greater livability*. Each chapter exhibits why poetry as a genre became such a fertile site for testing the possibilities of the androgynous mind during the nineteenth century and how the idea of the greatness of the androgynous mind poses several challenges to readers through depictions of androgynous figures, language, and poets. These challenges include how to recognize, discuss, and teach androgyny given the dominance and, for the sake of being able to communicate, necessity to use normative binary language.

Starting with Coleridge's poem *Christabel*, the first chapter highlights the challenges presented by the androgynous character Geraldine by drawing out the tension between the destabilizing monstrous depiction and the sublime qualities of Geraldine's androgyny. Reading Lord Byron's poem *Don Juan* with attention to Byron's technique of self and culturally reflective poetic performances, the second chapter works to better understand how Byron's celebrity status simultaneously enhances and stifles his ability to engage in revolutionary poetics that produce *gender trouble*. The third chapter explores how Charles Algernon Swinburne's pendant poems, "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta," produce spaces for rebellion against

medical and legal classifications of sex, gender, and sexuality while simultaneously exhibiting the eponymous androgynous figures as objects of curiosity. The final chapter examines the complex play between gender and sexual identity produced by adaptations of Sapphic fragments in Michael Field's, *Long Ago*. The conclusion addresses more thoroughly how these poetic performances relate to contemporary feminist, gender, and queer theory. As using Butler's idea of *undoing gender* as a frame for reading suggests, the greatest challenge that we face with respect to androgyny is the challenge of achieving the goal of *greater livability.*

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## Introduction

In 1832 Samuel Taylor Coleridge remarked that, "The truth is, a great mind must be androgynous" (*Table Talk,* 96)[1] I begin this project by exploring the meaning of Coleridge's statement about the androgynous mind with regard to historical and literary contexts of understanding the word androgyny itself. [2] Androgyny proves difficult to define. The Oxford English Dictionary Online contains only one entry for the word androgyny, which is defined as a "The state or quality of having characteristics of both sexes or of being of indeterminate sex; *spec.* (originally) hermaphroditism, intersexuality; (now) the state or quality of being neither clearly male nor clearly female in appearance." As the current definition implies, and common sense tells us, androgyny can be a performance of gender just as much as a biological combination of the sexes. Perhaps paradoxically, when we consider the uses of the term, androgyny can also sometimes represent an unsexing or removal of recognizable characteristics of either sex. Furthermore, androgyny is sometimes seen as a taboo and sometimes as an ideal, not always independently since it is sometimes posed as both. While we cannot easily define androgyny, we can achieve an understanding of androgyny through illustrative literary example.

Virginia Woolf's feminist interpretation of Coleridge's statement about the androgynous mind speaks to the connection between androgyny and literary creativity. Woolf famously

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[1] Coleridge's statement about the *androgynous mind* appears in print in the 1835, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by his nephew and son-in-law Henry Nelson Coleridge.

[2] In the interest of brevity, and in order to emphasize the importance of the relationship between androgyny and the mind, I have condensed Coleridge's idea about the "great mind" being "androgynous" to the phrase *androgynous mind*.

explains her understanding of Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind in the sixth chapter of *A Room of One's* (1929), where she relates that:

> If one is a man, still the woman part of his brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought. But it would be well to test what one meant by man-womanly, and conversely by woman-manly, by pausing and looking at a book or two. (147-48)

While there is a certain appeal to Woolf's conception of the ideal androgynous mind as a revolutionary method of achieving equality of the sexes, it is, however, important to recognize that androgyny is not always understood as an ideal to feminists, gender theorists, and/or queer theorists.

As the imagery in Woolf's statement suggests, the androgynous mind (pro)creates through "intercourse" between a man and woman. Woolf's depiction of the androgynous mind as a fertilizing fusion of masculine and feminine qualities reveals a paradox of androgyny, which is that it relies on heteronormative ideals of empowerment posed as "intercourse" between the sexes. Furthermore, Woolf's interpretation of the androgynous mind demonstrates that androgyny is perhaps not able to be communicated outside the confines of the binary gender structure. Thus, while the ideal of the androgynous mind attempts to escape the confines of gender stereotypes, it also relies on those stereotypes to pose the idea of what qualities must be combined in order to achieve the androgynous ideal.

I am more interested in drawing out the tension between the androgynous ideal and its

practical implementation than I am in developing the possibility of a wholly progressive narrative of achievement of the ideal or wholly negating the revolutionary possibilities revealed by recognition of androgyny. Starting with Coleridge's statement about the androgynous mind as a critical frame for reading nineteenth-century poetic representations of androgyny, this project specifically examines how a few nineteenth-century British poets deal with and depict androgyny, while also revealing how poetic discourse became an important cultural site for confronting the challenges posed by androgyny. This is not a comprehensive study of androgynous representation in nineteenth-century poetry, nor does it promise to relate a historical progressive narrative about androgynous poetic performances or identity.

Although it is a mistake to impose a narrative of historical progress to the ideal of androgyny, because this ideal still poses the same sorts of problems now as it did in the nineteenth century; this does not negate the possibilities for revolutionary androgyny both historically and in the present. I apply contemporary theorist Judith Butler's idea from *Undoing Gender* to this critical conversation on the subject of revolutionary androgyny. Butler explains that, "[s]ometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life," but that, by undoing normative gender, one "can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has a greater livability as its aim" (1-5). Butler is calling for her readers to recognize the ways in which the performative attributes of non-traditional gender, which occur in a binary thought structure by expressing traditional genders in a non-traditional manner, can result in the stripping of ones humanity, or (and in some cases simultaneously) it can result in creating a more livable life.

While Butler does not use the term androgyny, it does become a useful concept to add to her idea of gender performativity. The concept of androgyny combined with the idea of gender

performativity, and particularly with the concept that we can and should engage in the acts of *undoing gender*, reveals the powerful awareness that the binary restrictions of masculine and feminine can be combined in a fluid and infinite number of ways. The equation becomes no longer *either* masculine *or* feminine. Nor does the equation simply become masculine, feminine, or androgynous, when we conceptualize androgyny within Butler's framework of gender performativity. Rather androgyny proves capable of becoming *all* of the above at any point in time, and even all at once. Thus, recognizing androgyny presents the occasion for engaging with Butler's idea of undoing gender by crossing and blurring traditional gender lines and creating possibilities for *greater livability*. In this project, I am interested in exploring how nineteenth-century British poetry creates performative spaces for greater livability through androgynous representation and recognition.

However, correctly applying Butler's ideas requires a look to her earlier work *Gender Trouble* in concert with her newer book *Undoing Gender*. Her previous assertion that "trouble is inevitable" when it comes to discussions of gender representation and performativity speaks to the trouble of applying binary language to fluid gender performances (*Gender Trouble*, vii). Perhaps, the trouble with defining the term androgyny is one of the reasons why there is not much critical interest in the subject of recognizing androgyny in literature. Trouble does indeed characterize the scholarly conversation on the subject as is demonstrated by the sometimes-contrasting definitions of androgyny. Some of the few critics who deal with the particular subject of androgyny in nineteenth-century poetry have attempted to define androgyny. Without a clear and common definition of androgyny, some of the critics who do study androgyny in literature attempt to create one. Others chose to skim over the trouble with definitions by simply accepting the broadest definition and moving on. However, I believe that it is worth dwelling upon the

trouble and not just the solution because seeing how gender has been troubled reveals both successful troubling of gender norms, as well as trouble with attempting to unify gender representations within the restrictive confines of binary logic. Just as it is important to see how gender is troubled and what troubles gender, it also proves important to view where spaces of restriction and spaces for greater livability are produced.

Diane Hoeveler, author of one of the few scholarly monographs on the subject, *Romantic Androgyny* (1990), takes issue with defining androgyny as synonymous with hermaphroditism. Hoeveler speaks to the issue of defining androgyny most directly in a short pedagogically focused article, "Shelley and Androgyny: Teaching 'The Witch of Atlas'" (1990). She explains in this article that when teaching Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Witch of Atlas," she presents "the general notion of androgyny as distinctly different from hermaphroditism" (93). Hoeveler continues, "The androgynous union of masculine and feminine principles in a psyche has long been confused with the presence of male and female sexual organs in one person." Here Hoeveler proposes the idea that androgyny is a "merger of psychic characteristics with the imagination. The image of the androgyne expresses the restoration of the psyche to its original, asexual wholeness, while the hermaphrodite represents an earthly and physical parody of that state." However, it seems to me that even if Hoeveler is correct in her distinction between androgyny and hermaphroditism—a distinction that clearly opposes the dictionary definition of the term—the fact that the distinction has "long been confused" suggests the historically minded critical need to interpret without such a clear-cut distinction.

In fact, according to an earlier critic on the subject, A. J. L Busst's understanding of androgyny in "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century" (1967), the attempt to distinguish between hermaphroditism and androgyny is "purely arbitrary and consequently often

contradictory" (1). I would have to agree with Busst about the results of the effort to differentiate between hermaphroditism and androgyny. Although, while I do not think that Hoeveler compellingly argues for her means of defining androgyny by distinguishing it from hermaphroditism, Hoeveler does nevertheless bring attention to idea that simply correlating androgyny with hermaphroditism is indeed insufficient. Although, unlike Hoeveler I see the insufficiency of the definition(s) of androgyny to be located in the method of defining itself. By defining androgyny, especially by attempting to fit it in a narrower box of characteristics or behaviors, we attempt to categorize androgynous sex, gender, and sexual identities using the very binary language that androgyny attempts to resist.

Thus, as a result of considering the context of Butler's statement about creating the possibility of greater livability, as well as noticing some of the restrictive and liberating performances of androgyny in the poems I interpret, my research has revealed that definitions and narratives of historical progress do not fit the topic of the androgynous mind. Nevertheless, while it is impossible to simply define androgyny, as well as impossible to create a historical progressive argument about a history of androgyny, it is not impossible to recognize androgyny and to discuss revolutionary histories surrounding the subject. With respect to *a* history of revolutionary androgyny, it is important to understand that although debatable, unlike a history of the feminist movement or a history of gay culture and rights, a history of androgyny remains unable to conform to any unified historical narratives. Instead, as those feminists and gay rights activists that do not see a unified history for their movements have suggested, when unified history is unable to be explored, we can turn to literature to discover histories revealed through narratives. Although an androgynous ideal has sometimes been celebrated and coopted by feminists, particularly some first and second wave feminists, as well as by the lesbian and gay

community, and also by rock stars like the late David Bowie, androgyny is usually performed on the subcultural fringes of revolutionary countercultural movements.

It is worth noting that while many feminists, gender, and queer theorists currently consider the theoretical promise of recognition of sexual equality by the performance of an androgynous ideal to be an ideological failure, there do remain some feminists, gender, and queer theorists both in the past and today that find theories of androgyny to be useful and revolutionary. Virginia Woolf is one example of an early feminist who thought androgyny might produce gender equality as we can extract from *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and as is illustrated by her fictional portrayal of the androgynously empowered *Orlando* (1928). Also, second-wave feminist Ann Ferguson argues for the unhindered freedom of the androgyne in "Androgyny as an Ideal for Human Development" (1977). Andrea Dworkin also argues for "the freeflow of natural androgynous eroticism" in her famous radical feminist book titled *Woman Hating* (1974) (189). Feminist scholar Carolyn G. Heilbrun discusses androgyny as an ideal and a goal for the future in her book *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny* (1967). According to Heilbrun, "[t]he ideal toward which I believe we should move is best described by the term 'androgyny'" (x-xi). Heilbrun explains that "[a]ndrogyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate."

In terms of more contemporary engagement with the subject of androgyny or non-heteronormative gender identity, recently deceased transgender lesbian activist Leslie Feinberg weaves narratives of transgender history in the book *Transgender Warriors* (1996). In this book Feinberg relates some historical stories of individuals who have not been able to so easily answer the question "Are you a guy or a girl?" Feinberg addresses one of the most significant troubles associated with gender, sex, or sexuality that fall outside the traditional binary norm, which is

that individuals representing genders outside the binary structure of masculine and feminine have been rendered invisible or subjects of hatred, fear, and violence. This invisibility is due to the restrictive nature of binary linguistic and thought structures, which Feinberg speaks to in the Preface to *Transgender Warriors.* Feinberg says:

> We have a history filled with militant hero/ines. Yet therein lies the rub! How can I tell you about their battles when the words *woman* and *man, feminine* and *masculine,* are almost the only words that exist in the English language to describe all the vicissitudes of bodies and self-expression? (ix)

Yet, by writing this book Feinberg helps readers to recognize sex, gender, and sexual identities that fall outside the heteronormative binary structure of male/female and masculine/feminine. Demonstrating literature's ability to relate histories of androgynous individuals and bring visibility to people who are often rendered invisible in history, Feinberg's novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), follows the protagonist, Jess, who identifies as a "he-she" in the 1950s-70s.

Bringing this subject even more into a contemporary light, there have been some fairly recent linguistic and legal revolutions in recognizing androgyny. On April 2nd, 2014, transgender activist Norrie won the right to remain gender "non-specific" on all legal documents in New South Wales, Australia. This case can be viewed as an example of revolutionary androgyny on both a linguistic and legal level. Another event that serves as a recent example of revolutionary androgyny is the addition of the word "hen" to *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok*, in May 2015. The Swedish Academy added "hen" as an already popularly used gender-neutral pronoun. This provides a third choice that either renders gender insignificant or can also be used when gender is unknown. There are already schools in Sweden such as Egalia Preschool in Stockholm where students are taught to exclusively use the gender-neutral pronoun in what

might be best described as a social experiment in how the adoption of androgynous language creates a more egalitarian learning and social environment.

As these examples demonstrate, it is not impossible to see how revolutionary and countercultural recognition of androgyny produces possibilities for creating liberating spaces for non-traditional sex, gender, and sexual identities—or as Butler put it "greater livability." For this project, I look specifically at the countercultural revolutionary presence of androgyny in some nineteenth-century poetry. It is not an arbitrary decision that I look at poetry from the nineteenth century. As Foucault rightly points out in the second part of his *History of Sexuality*, "The Repressive Hypothesis" (1976):

> We must therefore abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression. We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities; but – and this is the important point – a deployment quite different from the law, even if it is locally dependent on procedures of prohibition, has ensured, through a network of interconnecting mechanisms, the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities. (49)

Foucault's claim that the nineteenth century sees a rapid increase "of specific pleasures" and "the multiplication of disparate sexualities" suggests that to study the sexualities of this period is to study a period of increasing sexual awareness when "the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied" (53). Foucault explains that with regard to sexuality during the nineteenth century, "never heave there existed more centers of power; never more attention manifested and verbalized; never more circular contacts and linkages; never more sites where the intensity of pleasure and persistency of power catch hold, only to spread elsewhere" (49).

The nineteenth century is the point in Western history when the parameters were defined

and redefined producing the current culturally normalized heteronormative sex, gender, and sexual identities. As Foucault illustrates, "that if it [discourse on sex] carried with it taboos and prohibitions, it has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic" (53). Thus, although nineteenth-century manners and law are two centers of power that serve to restrict sexuality, the creation of boundaries between what is considered "normal" and fetish—what is seen as acceptable sexuality as opposed to taboo, is made visible and takes hold during the nineteenth century. Androgyny represents a type of non-heteronormative sex, gender, and sexual identity that increased in visibility and simultaneously became a subject of taboo in the nineteenth century. This period provides some clear examples of how androgyny both became more visible as part of the "sexual mosaic," creating what Butler calls the possibility for "greater livability." But also, androgyny was relegated to the status of not normal, taboo, and restricted according to nineteenth-century sexual power structures that still dominate today.

Therefore, while the subject of androgyny remains removed from the possibility of a narrative of social progress, by recognizing literary representations of androgyny, we create histories and understandings of androgyny in the nineteenth century that connect to our own current sexual power structures. People who actually physically perform and/or biologically represent the culturally taboo concept of androgyny, intersexual individuals and gender-benders, did in the nineteenth century and still do often remain invisible or pushed to the fringes of countercultural and subcultural revolutionary movements like feminism and gay rights. By interpreting nineteenth-century poetic depictions of both ideal and monstrous representations of androgyny, this dissertation will explore how the idea of the androgynous mind relates to the nineteenth-century sexual history of the edification of differentiated sex, gender, and sexual

identity, as well as to performances of revolution and restriction. I will reveal how the then forming, and now current, understanding of the difference between sex, gender, and sexual identity perpetuates and strengthens the system of binary classification of identities and establishes a deeper cultural sense of androgyny as an unspeakable subject of curiosity. I will explore how poetic representations of androgyny might work on a revolutionary level, by troubling gender identity. However, I will simultaneously explore how depictions of androgyny often also conform to heteronormative binary structures of understanding, and thus can lead to anti-revolutionary results. At the very least, the androgynous figure demonstrates the limits of language, which produces a challenge for nineteenth-century poets. Therefore, one of the first questions I will address with all the poets/poems I examine is: how does androgyny relate to language and create a challenge to the linguistic limitations of imaginative poetic vision?

Another challenge that androgyny poses is the challenge nineteenth-century poets pose against medical and scientific thought, or what we might now call "scientific knowledge" or "logico-scientific" modes of sense making, as opposed to poetic (narrative) forms of sense making.[3] Poetic representations of androgyny reveal the truth that sexual identity does not so easily conform to binary linguistic structures of understanding. With particular attention to the androgynous bodies of intersexual and gender-bending figures depicted in poetry as well as the androgyny performed by some poets themselves, I will explore the ways that representations of

[3] The terms "logico-scientific" and "scientific knowledge" as opposed to narrative modes of sense making have been developed and discussed in great detail by postmodern theorists, Jerome Bruner, *Actual Mind, Possible Worlds*, and Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*. While these terms are distinctly postmodern, they do appear relevant to nineteenth-century discourse since it is during this time period when, as Fredric Jameson describes Lyotard's theory in the Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*, the "relative retreat of the claims of narrative or story telling knowledge in the face of those of the abstract, denotive, or logical and cognitive procedures generally associated with science or positivism" appears to begin most notably taking hold on popular cultural modes of sense making. *The Postmodern Condition,* xi.

androgyny serve to destabilize heteronormative and patriarchal binary structures of sexual identity that have been instituted by scientific and medical language dating back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, I will also explore how poetic androgyny has been used by the heteronormative patriarchal culture of the scientific and medical community as a means to raise scientific thought and language over poetic thought and language by pathologizing androgynous poets and their poetry.[4]

Continuing with the challenges posed both to and by poets, I directly explore how androgynous poetic performance produces a challenge to literary and historical progressive narratives regarding gender, sex, and sexuality. While some feminist, gender, and queer theorists produce narratives that relate the stories of social progress, androgynous identity was and remains either a mythological (inhuman) ideal or in human form is still often seen as monstrous and in need of medical intervention. Thus, androgynous characters and performances in nineteenth-century poetry demonstrate how androgyny is either too fictionalized as a mythological ideal or too horrifying as a medical anomaly to be adopted by mainstream culture. While neither poetry or medical culture create a space of cultural unity for intersexual identities, some nineteenth-century poetry does significantly narrate the countercultural resistance to the mainstream, scientific, and medical opinion that there are only two sexes. It is my contention that this poetics of resistance, while not necessarily progressive in itself, proves valuable as disruptive poetic events that produce the occasion for discussion about normative conceptions of gender, sex and sexuality that even appear in some narratives of progressivism.

I believe that it is important to reiterate here that I do not intend to compose a

[4] Dino Franco Felluga, discusses the nineteenth-century distinctions between two types of poetry primarily represented by Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron. Scott's poetry is seen as a cure for the perversities of the world, while Byron's represents a contagious and dangerous cultural influence—a sickness—as the title of Felluga's book, *The Perversity of Poetry* (2005), suggests.

comprehensive history of androgynous representations in poetry. I move from the Romantic depictions of revolutionary androgyny in Coleridge's *Christabel,* to Byron's *Don* Juan, and then I bypass the middle Victorian era by exploring the proto-Decadent poems "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta" by Charles Algernon Swinburne, and conclude with an examination of the Sapphic verse of Michael Field. While there are some examples of what might be considered figures, who represent the androgynous mind in some middle Victorian poems such as Tennyson's, *The Princess,* and Barrett-Browining's, *Aurora Leigh*, these poems do not align with my particular focus. Ida's intellectual power and female autonomy in Tennyson's *The Princess*, which also includes perhaps the most famous incident of cross-dressing in Victorian poetry, as well as similar features of female intellectual power and autonomy demonstrated in Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, explore androgyny differently from the Romantic and Decadent poetic vision of revolutionary androgyny that I focus on here. These two middle Victorian poems depict internalized androgyny as mutually empowering for the sexes through heteronormative structures of empowerment, which is ultimately achieved through the joining of the sexes into marital unions between equals. This demonstrates a heightened middle Victorian discomfort with androgyny. Although, there are certainly historically revolutionary feminist lessons to extract from Tennyson and Barrett Browning's poems, they mainly revolve around heteronormative women's right to equal education and partnership in marriage. Tennyson and Barrett Browning's characters do not represent revolutionary androgyny that disrupt traditional binary understandings of sex and gender as more commonly occurs in Romantic and Decadent poetry.

Before jumping into the discussion of revolutionary androgyny in nineteenth-century poetry, it is first important that I set the stage for this discussion by closely reading Coleridge's statement that, "The truth is, a great mind must be androgynous." Starting with this statement we

can extract a clearer conception of how Coleridge specifically depicts androgyny, but also of the ways that androgyny was more generally understood during this point in history. What Coleridge poses as the androgynous mind, or more accurately what Coleridge's first editor and nephew/son-in-law, Henry Nelson Coleridge records, appears to be a dual-sexed, or dual-gendered, conception of androgyny. While mental androgyny, thus the concept of the androgynous mind, could be read as an unsexing and removal of both identifiably masculine and feminine qualities from the mind, contextualizing the statement demonstrates how this does not, however, correspond with the textual evidence regarding Coleridge's distinctive concept of the androgynous mind. Further examination of Coleridge's statement about the androgynous mind, as well as some of his other commentary, illuminates that femininity mingles with masculinity in the symbolic form of his vision of the androgynous mind.

Coleridge's remark about the androgynous mind does not end with that first sentence. Continuing on, Coleridge provides the name of a recent philosophical predecessor, Emmanuel Swedenborg. In fact, Coleridge directly correlates Swedenborg's name as an example of an androgynous thinker. As Coleridge explains, "Great minds – Swedenborg's for instance—are never wrong but in consequence of being in the right, but imperfectly" (*Table Talk* 96). The idea of an androgynous mind is embodied by the type of thought and personality that Coleridge specifically associates with Swedenborg. While there remains some ambiguity to the meaning of how a mind cannot be wrong, but is imperfectly "in the right," the implication suggests that the greatness of a mind does not rely on perfectly logical or rational thinking, but rather is imperfectly right by combining masculine logic and feminine emotion. This reading is further supported by Swedenborg's own ideas and writings.

Swedenborg's vision of spiritual wholeness occurs as a *bisexual* empowerment. The term

bisexual as it was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth century does not necessarily include what we would now call bisexuality, but rather is the expression of characteristics of both sexes, not an attraction to both sexes. It is important to note that in Swedenborg's writings there remains the possibility that bisexual characteristics might include or be performed through homosexual and/or bisexual attraction as aligns with our more contemporary use of the term. This is because Swedenborg does not necessarily align all male bodies with masculinity and all female bodies with femininity, but rather focuses only on the masculine and feminine soul as can sometimes appear in oppositely sexed bodies.

Although, Swedenborg's idea of bisexual empowerment is usually understood to be a heteronormative concept of strength through the unification of men and women's bodies and souls, in Swedenborg's view, sex of the body reflects the sex, or what we might now call gender, of the soul. The achievement of divine, psychic, and earthly unification with a person of the opposite internal sex, or gender as we would call it now, through spiritual, mental, and physical connection in marriage is the primary subject of Swedenborg's *Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore Conjugiali* (1768), or *The Delights of Wisdom Concerning* C*onjugal Love.* The idea of becoming empowered through the androgynous force of conjugal connection comes up in several of Swedenborg's other writings as well, most notably, *Arcana Coelestia* (1749-56), or *Heavenly Mysteries*. In this text Swedenborg's vision of the first human emerges as a mixture of pagan and Judeo-Christian creation myths. Swedenborg mixes the story of Eve's separation from Adam's body with the myth of the original third sex in "The Myth of Aristophanes" in Plato's *Symposium*. To Swedenborg the division of Eve from Adam's rib is a division of one person, like the division of the original third sex in "The Myth of Aristophanes." Thus, androgynous empowerment occurs when soulmates (re)connect. While the reconnection of the feminine and

masculine in the psychic and sexual union of marriage is what we find in Swedenborg's mythologies, his story does in fact trace back and find its origins in a unified body representing both sexes mentally and physically. Therefore, by naming Swedenborg as an example of the greatness of an androgynous mind, Coleridge associates the idea of the androgynous mind with division and divine reconciliation of the mind and body through marriage of opposing genders, which are not necessarily opposing sexes.

Turning back to Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind, beyond the example of Swedenborg, Coleridge continues to provide some more explanation about what types of thinkers clearly *do not* represent the greatness of the androgynous mind. Coleridge explains further that, "I have known *strong* minds with imposing, undoubting, Cobbett-like manners, but I have never seen a *great* mind of this sort" (*Table Talk* 96). From this statement, it is clear that a great mind—the androgynous mind—is not too strong, at least in the imposing way, and it is not overconfident, as Coleridge depicts pamphleteer and journalist William Cobbett. Thus, we can determine by the context of Coleridge's statement about the androgynous mind that open-mindedness, experimental, and imaginative thought, which is communicated in unimposing ways, is a trademark of the great androgynous mind.

This conception of the androgynous mind reflects Coleridge's method of unifying a philosophical manner of thinking with poetic vision. In his Lecture 68, which is the "Spenser" lecture from his *1819 Lectures on Shakespeare &co*. Coleridge poses Spenser as another example of an androgynous mind. This appears as a list on the topic of what distinguishes Spenser as a great English poet. He writes:

> Spenser's great character of mind, Fancy under the conditions of Imagination, with a feminine tenderness & almost maidenly purity—above all, deep moral earnestness—.

> The conception of Talus is, perhaps, the boldest effort of imaginative Power—as if no substance so untraceable to which the Poet would not give Life, as in a Swedenborg world. (411)

Here we see a description of Spenser's imaginative mind that mingles traditionally feminine "tenderness" and "purity" with the traditionally masculine language of "the *boldest* effort of imaginative *Power*." Spenser does not achieve the greatness of the androgynous mind through a spiritual union with his soulmate. Rather, Spencer's greatness is pulled from within himself, which suggests that the androgynous mind does include a combination of feminine and masculine qualities, but these qualities appear within and are expressed by Spenser as a single person. Spenser's androgynous greatness is not found through marital union. We do also see Swedenborg's name referenced again, but it appears more as a creator of a world, as a myth-maker or poet, than as a philosopher.

Instead of overemphasizing the philosophical connection Coleridge shares with Swedenborg, we should also enter the conversation about the concept of the androgynous mind as it speaks to the power of unifying philosophical thought with poetic vision. Unlike the masculine mind that associates rational logic with philosophical Truth, Coleridge indicates even more clearly now with his statement about Spenser, that poetic imagination, which does not produce overly-masculine surety but rather allows for a more feminine mode of imaginative creation, produces greatness. It is Spenser's "feminine tenderness," "maidenly purity," and "moral earnestness" that creates a new realm of "imaginative Power," just as Coleridge indicates Swedenborg did in his writings.

While there have been a variety of primarily philosophical and theological readings of Coleridge's concept of the androgynous mind, his idea of the androgynous mind has rarely been

used as a theoretical framework for reading his poetry. Yet if we closely read Coleridge's statement two possible interpretations of how to achieve the greatness of the androgynous mind are revealed. One is that philosophers and poets should combine masculine and feminine thought to achieve greatness. The great mind is an androgynous combination of masculinity and femininity. Or, another reading of this statement appears to be directed towards readers of poetry and philosophy just as much as the creators of these textual worlds, which is that the androgynous mind is a mind *for* the androgynous—an ability to recognize androgyny as a mark of greatness just as Coleridge demonstrates through his examples of Swedenborg and Spenser.

Therefore, by combining Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind with his poetry we more comprehensively interpret his statement about the greatness of the androgynous mind by actively seeking examples of androgynous greatness. Coleridge's poetry, as well as the poetry by Byron, Swinburne, and Michael Field that I will interpret in this dissertation, produces interpretive opportunities to discover the creative force, as well as destabilizing power, of the androgynous mind as both as a philosophical *and* poetic concept. It is not my purpose to show where Coleridge alludes to his idea of the androgynous mind in his poetry in order to demonstrate how or why it was his intention to produce poetry that directly correlates with his statement about the androgynous mind. Rather, I mean to fill a critical silence regarding how Coleridge's poetry performs his concept of the androgynous mind in order to explore specifically how this androgynous ideal relates to sexual order and disorder, socially and textually. I want to know what happens if we as interpreters chose to wholly embrace the idea of the androgynous mind.

Accounting for the nineteenth-century context of Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind, it is important to note that especially before Freud there were not such clearly separate

categorical distinctions between biological sex, gender role, and sexual identity. All three of these aspects of identity were thought to be "naturally" tied together. In *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (1998), Alice Dreger provides a historical account of the medical establishment of a binary model of sex during the nineteenth century. Significantly, Dreger explains how, in the nineteenth century, "hermaphrodites" were not always intersexual, which illustrates how there were not the hard-lined categorical distinctions between sex, gender, and sexual identity as we understand these separate aspects of identity today. Demonstrating this lack of distinction, Dreger explains how the term "hermaphrodite" was employed to describe transgender, gender-bending, homosexual, and feminist individuals. She says, "[t]he label 'hermaphrodite' was sometimes also given to people we would now call homosexuals, transvestites, feminists, and so on. But it was, by the nineteenth century, most commonly reserved for the anatomically 'ambiguous' bodies" on which she focuses her study (30). This is important to understand with regard to Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind, because even if we situate the androgyny in the mind—as "behavioral hermaphroditism" as it was sometimes called in the nineteenth century—a body that reflects the mind in its gender performativity fits more wholly with the nineteenth-century understanding of sex, gender, and sexual identity as inherently connected.

Also, importantly, Dreger argues that the medical authority over determining the "correct" (male or female) sex of ambiguous bodies is a product of nineteenth-century medical interest and intervention, in the form of exhibition, and attempts to "cure" hermaphroditic bodies. She reveals that the increased medical, as well as public, visibility and understanding of hermaphroditic bodies during this point in British history did not result in establishing another sex (or other sexes), but rather that it resulted in medical authority to categorize ambiguous or

androgynous individuals according to the heteronormative binary concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality that had already been established. The male/female sexual dichotomy, Dreger suggests, is further supported through the medical narrative that was codified during the nineteenth century. Medical men of the day began to use science as a means to distinguish cases of mistaken or ambiguous sex and to "cure" hermaphrodites restoring individuals to their "true" sex.

Medical exhibition of hermaphrodites was not uncommon in the eighteenth to nineteenth century. Thomas Brand's 1787 report titled, *The Case of a Boy Who Had Been Mistaken for a Girl; With Three Anatomical Views of the Parts Before and After the Cure*, demonstrates the public prominence and medical interest in "curing" ambiguous sex. Reviews for Brand's report can be found in the periodical titled, *The Monthly Review, Or Literary Journal* (1788) as well as in John Murray's well-read periodical, *The English Review, Or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature* (1788) (Griffiths 674 and Murray 69-70). These catalogs provided the reading public with reviews of recently published texts ranging from medical studies, to poetry and novels, as well as to political and religious works. The fact that this medical study is included in reviews of works that might be of interest to the general public speaks to the fact that ambiguous sex was a point of public curiosity, and that sex-sorting was fueled by a deep-rooted mainstream cultural anxiety about avoiding homosexuality.

As Dreger reveals in her *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex,* cultural anxieties about homosexuality fuel(ed) the medical project of finding ways to neatly categorize individuals into the male/female and masculine/feminine dichotomy. Dreger explains that when we look into the medical authority over sex-sorting and the medical motivation to "cure" intersexual bodies:

> one soon discovers that a significant motivation for the biomedical treatment of hermaphrodites is the desire to keep people straight. That phrase—keeping people straight—should be taken figuratively, but literally as well: medical doctors, scientists, hermaphrodites' parents, and other lay people have historically been interested in sorting people according to their sexes to avoid or prevent what might be considered homosexuality. (8)

Employing the terms from the period, there were few points of distinction between intersexuals, then called hermaphrodites, transsexuals, then called Mollies, and homosexuals, then called sodomites. While there was some understanding of the differences between these groups of individuals, as illustrated by the fact that there were terms for each separate group, the non-heteronormative aspects of these different identities similarly fed social and legal anxieties about homosexuality. But that there was simultaneously a place for non-heteronormative individuals on the cultural fringes and medical subjects and public curiosities.

It is important to note that there was little distinction between intersex exhibition in medical or freak shows. The German born Gottlieb Göttlich, an intersexual individual who was born in 1798, traveled all over Europe, including to London, as a medical exhibition and freak attraction. Göttlich was, in fact, against the idea of surgical sexual assignment because Göttlich made a living off of voluntary exhibitions for the medical community, as well as for the public. Göttlich found empowerment by making money from public displays of ambiguous sex. Therefore, although we should understand the culturally restrictive aspects of non-heteronormative sex, gender, and sexual identity, Göttlich's story shows how there were also possibilities for individual empowerment in some respects for those who do not neatly fit the normative mold. It might seem odd to call a freak show empowering, however, the fact that

people who work as freaks create a subcultural community of "freaks," and are able to make money off of public curiosity, does simultaneously become a means for liberation from and engagement with mainstream culture, notably as a means for financial gain and autonomy in the subcultural fringes of society.

I am not the first to see this unifying connection between different *queer* experiences and (sub)cultures. Rictor Norton produces a history of queer (sub)cultural unity in his book titled *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual* (1997). Norton explains that he uses "the word 'queer' in such a way to subsume the meanings of words such as homosexual, homophile, homoerotic and homosocial." He explains further that the separation of these terms, "involve false distinctions rather than continuity (homosociality is little more than homosexuality with a fig leaf)" (8). Norton exposes the fact that these false distinctions are tied to upper-class theoretical language rather than working class realities where the terms "faggot, dyke and gay . . . more accurately reflect the working-class reality which formed gay (sub)cutlures." As Norton does in his more recent book, *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2007), I would also include individuals that could fall under the description of androgynous, such as gender-benders and transsexuals, as falling under the unifying term, queer.

As Norton illuminates in *Mother Clap's Molly House*, the eighteenth and nineteenth-century term Molly has come to be understood as "gay" or "homosexual" man, but this does not strictly mean that the men labeled Mollies were exactly what we might now call gay or homosexual. Mollies were generally sexually non-heteronormative men, who were often working class, that gathered in the coffee shops, taverns, and brothels that were called Molly Houses. These places were called Molly Houses because their customers were primarily what we might call effeminate men, as indicated by the feminine name Molly. These men enjoyed the

Molly House as a semi-public place to openly experiment with their sex, gender, and sexual identities. Not all patrons were in fact what we might now label gay, but they were more generally queer. For this reason, I find that Norton's work creating a queer (sub)cultural unity is useful to this project in two ways. First, Norton demonstrates that while queer culture has been suppressed socially and legally, with capital punishment for homosexual sex under the Sodomy Laws of the era, there is also a history of thriving and publicly well-known subcultural spaces for queerness. But also, as Norton's chapter on the 1726 raid of Mother Clap's Molly House demonstrates, the places for queer cultural unity were always subject to violent invasion and possible outing by legal authorities. This speaks to the cultural anxiety and mainstream cultural authority that worked to keep men and women in their heteronormative roles and that sent Lord Byron abroad in self-exile for his non-heteronormative sexuality. I will discuss Byron's connection to Molly (sub)culture, and to the raids of the White Swan Molly House, in more detail in my second chapter. However, more generally Norton's history of Molly (sub)culture reveals that there was a public space on the fringes of culture, where queer men were able to find the freedom to explore non-heteronormative gender and sexuality, but that it was not always a safe place, just a safer place than at a public house or the theater.

Reviewing how these queer (sub)cultures relate to Coleridge's concept of the androgynous mind, the historical view of queer (sub)cultural unity draws out an important challenge of this idea. One challenge of the androgynous mind is the challenge of understanding the both simultaneously liberating and restrictive aspects of androgyny, as queer performativity during a time when homosexuality was punishable by death. Poems, unlike the Molly Houses, were spaces that offered possibilities of greater livability for androgynous individuals without the threat of a raid, but that certainly still could function to publicly out poets and cause other

scandals relating to a poem's androgynous subject, as I will most directly discuss in the next chapter when I focus on Coleridge's *Christabel*, and the androgyny of the character Geraldine. Thus, while there is a space for experimentation with non-heteronormative sex, gender, and sexual identity within the confines of a poem, poets still had to consider reputation and propriety, which resulted in some veiled performances of queer identity, poets taking pen names as the two lesbian women composing as Michael Field do, and other rhetorical devices that serve to distance writers from their subjects if the subjects appear queer. Therefore, one of the most important challenges of Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind is the challenge of not only taking the more commonly heteronormative view of the idea of the androgynous mind, as a mind of a great poet or thinker that marries feminine and masculine qualities, but also the view that androgynous mind should be read as a call to readers to not only marry masculine and feminine qualities in our own mind, but to also adopt a mind for androgyny. One challenge of the androgynous mind is actually finding the subverted and restricted performances of androgyny and/or queer identity in the works we read.

Starting in the first chapter with one of Coleridge's original poetic productions, I will read his poem *Christabel* with particular attention on the androgynous performance of Geraldine. As I will reveal with my close reading of Coleridge's poem *Christabel*, while the androgynous mind represents an ideal, albeit destabilizing, form of androgyny, the character Geraldine in the poem performs a horrifyingly destabilizing type of androgynous identity that is described as monstrous, but that also has sublime qualities associates with the ideal of androgynous mind. The fact that Geraldine's body does not so easily conform to binary understanding of sex, gender, and sexual identity marks her as a figure of rebellion against sexual identity norms, but a terrorizing figure of rebellion. I will discuss how the androgynous gender performance of Geraldine

troubled nineteenth-century readers and critics, and how it still troubles contemporary critics. Also, I will explore how the fragmentary form and publication history of *Christabel* relates to its depictions of androgynous sex, gender, and sexuality. I will pay particular attention to the Coleridge family's subversion of revolutionary readings of gender, sex, and sexual identity that appear in the poem through edits and the addition of glosses that subvert and undermine Geraldine's androgynous identity.

The second chapter will explore Lord Byron and his poem *Don Juan,* with attention both to his biographical involvement with cross-dressing, as well as the character Don Juan's cross-dressing scenes in the poem. This chapter will both demonstrate important differences in understanding intersexual and transsexual figures, as well as the significant lack of difference in nineteenth-century conceptions of androgynous sexual identity. Even though it is now often considered offensive and incorrect to view transsexual individuals as androgynous, especially with sensitivity to the fact that transsexuality implies identification with the opposing binary gender identity to that of an individual's biological sex, in *Don Juan* we do see what classifies as an androgynous performance of cross-dressing.[5] Don Juan's androgynous gender performance when dressed in drag, reveals a pervasive nineteenth-century social anxiety about the fear of mistaken sex, but specifically with regard to men inhabiting women's spaces. The fact that Don Juan passes as a woman through costume and performance illustrates a growing awareness of the difference between biological sex and the performance of gender. While Byron certainly does not ever designate the two aspects of identity in these terms, he does demonstrate an emerging

[5] In her article, "Their she Condition," Susan J. Wolfson explores sexual difference through the cross-dressing gender performance of Don Juan. This article provides a frame for my argument. However, unlike Wolfson, I do not take the view that Byron writes a progressive pre-feminist text in terms of its relationship to women's gender politics. While he does radically reevaluate "categories designed to discriminate men from women," I do not read it as a precursor to feminist reevaluation of these categories

nineteenth-century understanding of the difference. Furthermore, the fact that Byron himself, as well as his character Don Juan, scandalously perform androgynous gender, and that this pubic and poetic performance empowers Byron as an infamous public curiosity demonstrates how androgynous performance can produce poetic empowerment through the coopting of socially destabilizing figures. Byron's androgynous performances do not serve to empower individuals who would have been considered androgynous in the nineteenth century, but he does produce a poetic depiction of the performativity of gender. Also, Byron empowers his own celebrity through scandalous depictions of androgyny that paradoxically finds power in highlighting the perversity of poetry.

In my third chapter I will explore *decadent androgyny* performed in Charles Algernon Swinburne's pendant poems "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta." In these poems he uses ekphrasis to meditate upon two different androgynous figures from art and literature. Both the intersexual body of Hermaphroditus and the cross gender literary performance of Fragoletta produce the occasion for Swinburne to poetically celebrate exhibit each figure as a beautiful, yet grotesque, object of curiosity. In doing so, the poems serve to hold a mirror up to Victorian readers. The poem allows for readers to see the hypocrisy behind their reverence for the classic art and literature, especially with consideration of restrictive Victorian views of sexuality. Swinburne shows Victorians their dirty secret, that they are actually attracted to art that destabilizes and contradicts Victorian sexual propriety. Also, Swinburne demonstrates how poetry might have the potential to become a space that produces greater livability for androgynous figures because his poetry celebrates and gives shape to figures whose sex, gender, and sexuality fall outside the boundaries of binary medical and scientific classification. In some respects, the poem becomes an empowering place of exhibition of androgynous figures because

the poem dwells upon the beauty, even if also paradoxically monstrous, of these figures. Rather than seek to cure bodies in order to make them fit the binary structure of sexual classification, the poetic voice admires these bodies specifically for being different. Yet, like a freak show that exhibits non-heteronormative bodies for the purpose of entertainment, Swinburne's poetry both objectifies and creates a culture for androgynous identity.

My final chapter is dedicated to the poetic personae of Michael Field. The two women who co-author under this pseudonym, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, create a performance that crosses gender lines in multiple ways. The poetic character of Michael Field sometimes appears to be a heterosexual man, sometimes a gay man speaking of homoerotic desire through lesbian subjects by adopting the voice of Sappho, and eventually as masculine-masked women when the women's real identities were eventually revealed to the public. I will begin this chapter by focusing on how their first collection of poems, *Long Ago,* performs Coleridge's ideal of the androgynous mind by crossing and recrossing the boundaries of gender identity. The poetic production of two female poets using a male voice writing about bisexual desire demonstrates the revolutionary power behind Coleridge's concept of the androgynous mind. According to literary scholar, Elizabeth A. Primamore, these two female poets are empowered to reveal their erotic same-sex desire in the Victorian world of poetic publication by producing a cross-gender poetic performance that positions the poet as a man using lesbian desire as a way to discuss homoerotic attraction between men ("Michael Field's Sapphic Communities"). I will follow this discussion of their first collection of poems with some readings of their other poems that express bisexual desire through androgynous gender performance. However, while they do trouble gender in some empowering ways by poetically performing their bisexual desire, this is not without trouble associated with their use of a male personae. Michael Field's masculine

performance is so real that I have had students who did not read the introduction in the course anthology complain that Michael Field is a misogynistic man who objectifies women. While my students might be on to something in regard to possible misogyny and objectification of women, the fact that students often assume that the poet is a misogynistic male speaks to the possibly too successful crossing of gender boundaries that these two women poets navigate. This illustrates exactly the problem some feminists find with the concept of androgyny. By successfully adopting a masculine poetic persona, Michael Field demonstrates how the challenge to create an ideally androgynous poetic voice leads to their paradoxically becoming so masculine that the feminine part of their identities appears lost and produce characteristically heteronormative objectification and subjugation of lesbian subjects.

In my conclusion I address more thoroughly how these poetic performances relate to contemporary feminist, gender, and queer theory. I also address pedagogical concerns as applies to the subject of androgynous poetic performance. I end with the final challenge of the idea of the androgynous mind, which is the challenge of how to teach the concept both in its nineteenth-century context as well as with respect to issues surrounding the term and idea of androgyny today. I summarize how contemporary critics might attempt fair readings of androgynous performances with attention to the historical context, but also with respect to current politics and theories related to sex, gender, and sexuality. I explore the ways that we might make meaning from androgynous poetic performances with attention to how they do and undo normative concepts of gender, sex, and sexuality, as well as modes binary sense making. It is my hope that by the end of this dissertation I will provide possible answers to the question: How do we teach poetic performances of androgynous gender, sex, and sexual identity that considers historical context but that does not necessarily create a narrative of historical progressivism?

## Chapter One: "A sight to dream of not to tell": Undoing Gender and Freakery in Coleridge's *Christabel*

"A sight to dream of not to tell" (254).[6] These words could easily be mistaken for click-bait on a social networking site or as the ballyhoo of an old freak show advertiser. However, these provocative words do not appear in an online advertisement or to entice us to step behind the curtain to view a freak show. The phrase appears in the bedroom scene of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Christabel* (1816). I make the connection between this phrase and advertisement that is meant to shock and spark curiosity because I intend to demonstrate how Coleridge invites his readers to come gawk at this text, but particularly at the bedroom scene found within the poem. In this chapter, I will detail how in the bedroom scene of *Christabel*, Coleridge invites us to gawk, along with the eponymous protagonist, at the androgynous figure of Geraldine. I will continue by examining how Geraldine's androgynous performance relates to Coleridge's idea of the *androgynous mind* and why it is important that we consider readings of Geraldine as an androgynous figure with respect to our understanding of the nineteenth century, as well as to current discussions surrounding gender, sex, and sexual identity.

The unspeakability of Geraldine's description points to a monstrous wonder hidden just beyond our linguistic understanding, but not entirely beyond poetic and imaginative vision. The words "[a] sight to dream of not to tell," entices readers to read deeper into the poem in order to attempt to better understand through imaginative interpretation what it is about Geraldine's

[6] From the 1834 edition of *Christabel* found in *Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge.

naked figure that is revealed in the bedroom scene. The phrase captures the reader's attention, but also produces the occasion for poetic interpretation of what might be imagined rather than what is easily known and described by language—particularly the language of binary logic. Geraldine is put on exhibition in the poem as a figure who does not conform to the binary language and logic that is commonly used to classify sex, gender, and sexual identity, thus creating an interpretive challenge to readers. Nineteenth-century as well as contemporary readers are challenged to imagine a figure that cannot be spoken or classified according to the usual binary heteronormative language and logic. We are challenged to visualize in our minds-eye a figure that does not conform to the binary language that is necessarily used to describe Geraldine's gender, sex, and sexuality. Coleridge is not just saying that Geraldine is an ugly or monstrous figure in the Gothic sense but hints at ambiguities of gender and sexuality being at the root of what makes her unrepresentable.

In the poem *Christabel* we encounter Geraldine as a form and identity that is best understood outside of the traditionally binary linguistic representations of sex, gender, and sexuality—as an *androgynous* figure. In this chapter, I combine my close reading of the bedroom scene with a historical overview of critical interpretations that support my claim that Geraldine's body, which is marked by its unspeakability, is an androgynous form that resists the confines of binary language and thought. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how Geraldine's androgynous form disrupts the restrictive presence of binary linguistic structures for classification of gender, sex, and sexuality, and forces readers to imagine a figure that cannot be described with the current language available. My close reading of the poem combined with its critical and publication history will serve to evidence my claim that despite the reliance on binary language, the poetic resistance to binary classification of sex, gender, and sexual identity in the poem

*Christabel* creates a space that is a simultaneously restrictive and revolutionary space for *undoing gender*.

As I detail in the introduction to this dissertation, contemporary gender and literary theorist Judith Butler describes the concept of undoing gender in her book *Undoing Gender* (2004) by explaining that, "[s]ometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life," but also that it is possible when undoing normative gender to "undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has a greater livability as its aim" (1-5). Relating Butler's concept of undoing gender to the poem *Christabel*, I will explore how this poem produces such possibilities for greater livability, while simultaneously also upholding normative ideas of gender, sex, and sexuality. By reading the poem *Christabel* and imagining the androgynous representation of Geraldine—as a figure that represents hermaphroditic, lesbian, and/or cross-dresser identities—we produce a space in our own imagination of *greater livability* for individuals who represent these historical non-normative sexual identifications, as well as more contemporary identities of sex, gender, and sexuality. While this poem does open possibilities of *greater livability* within the imagination for non-normative sex, gender and sexual identity, readers also simultaneously witness a performance of restriction and objectification. We observe an "undoing [of] one's personhood" through adherence to normative conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality that render Geraldine as a freak, medical anomaly, vampire, and/or man in disguise.

It seems necessary at this point that I explain my choice to distinguish between historic and contemporary terms for non-normative identities, such as my use of the terms hermaphroditic and cross-dresser in the previous paragraph rather than the more contemporary terms intersex and transgender with reference to Geraldine's identity. In order to achieve a more

accurate understanding of androgyny in its nineteenth-century and contemporary contexts, I will be required to use both historical and contemporary terms. Although some terms share similar meanings, and although I do employ a broad concept of androgyny, I do not think that it is correct or fair to use certain period specific terms interchangeably such as the commonly used term from the nineteenth-century, hermaphrodite as a synonym for intersexual, or cross-dresser (or Molly) to mean transgender. The terms intersex and transgender are specifically contemporary words often considered to be synonymous with hermaphrodite and cross-dresser, although not quite synonymous with respect to some important definitive distinctions that allow insight into historical cultural contexts of understanding non-normative sex, gender, and sexuality. The words intersex and transgender imply an understanding of the distinctions between sex, gender, and sexuality that we currently uphold. However, the terms hermaphrodite and cross-dresser better fit the nineteenth-century view and treatment of individuals with ambiguous or unknown sex, gender, and/or sexuality.

In her book, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (1998), historian Alice Dreger explains that during the nineteenth and early twentieth-century the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality were intertwined among legal authorities, lay people, and most notably among medical men. As she sets up her historical discussion of the biomedical construction of our contemporary concepts of the sex that stem from encounters between hermaphrodites and medical men Dreger explains that:

> Today "sex" is considered a strictly anatomical category; "gender" is used as a category of self-and/or social identification (to say something is "gendered" as opposed to "sexed" implies some doubt that it is naturally' linked to anatomical sex); and "sexuality" is a term used to refer to sexual desires and/or acts. Although I employ these terms as

> specified here in the subsequent discussion, these distinctions are not self-evident and were not drawn in the period under consideration. (10)

As Dreger reveals in her research that displays several medical cases of hermaphroditism in the nineteenth-century, the mingling of the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality exposes the connective aspect of all cultural anxieties that are drawn to the surface by the appearance of bodies representing non-normative sex, gender, and/or sexuality. What this reveals is that the project of medical doctors was ultimately fueled by a desire for "keeping people straight," which Dreger says "should be taken figuratively, but literally as well" (8). Dreger exposes that "medical doctors, scientists, hermaphrodites' parents, and other lay people have historically been interested in sorting people according to their sexes to avoid or prevent what might be considered homosexuality." Although Dreger's focus on medical exhibition of hermaphrodites situates the cultural discussion of ambiguous and/or androgynous bodies around scientific literature, I believe that it is also important to look to other cultural productions of the period in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of nineteenth-century cultural anxieties in unison with counter-cultural revolutionary symbolism that was also sometimes tied to exhibitions of a variety of androgynous bodies.

By devoting particular attention to the androgynous performance of Geraldine, I intend to reveal how Geraldine performs a horrifyingly destabilizing type of androgynous identity that is described as monstrous both during the nineteenth century as well as now. But also, I will show how Geraldine's androgyny produces revolutionary effects associated with Coleridge's ideal of the androgynous mind. I will demonstrate how one thing that we can interpret with a sense of certainty is that Geraldine's description, which falls outside the traditional binary language used to classify sex, gender, and sexuality, rebels against nineteenth-century understandings (as well

as current understandings) of gender, sex and sexuality. The unspeakability of Geraldine's androgyny highlights the connections between issues of gender politics and issues of linguistic insufficiency in terms classifying gender, sex, and sexual identity. Such linguistic insufficiency points particularly to the problems with the binary logico-scientific thought structures that were elucidated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that remain culturally dominant forms of sense making today.

Although the term logico-scientific is a postmodern term, it nevertheless represents the language and thought, with specific regard to classifying sexual identity, that took hold during the nineteenth century, and still dominates our current view of sex, gender, and sexual identity. Therefore, by highlighting the poetic rupture of identity and language that takes place in the bedroom scene of *Christabel,* I will show how Coleridge invites readers to witness the way that the language of logico-scientific classification has increasingly become the means for understanding sexual identity in the nineteenth-century. Classifying humans according to binary terms proves insufficient to conveying Geraldine's non-normative sexual identity. Coleridge uses poetic language that destabilizes and undoes systems of binary logico-scientific modes of sense making, particularly dichotomous classifications of sex, gender, and sexuality, by requiring that readers embrace non-normative identity as we imagine Geraldine. We might be able to read this poem as a rebellion against medical and scientific language and authority. However, this reading is troubled by the fact that Coleridge's poetic language is not able to transcend binary heteronormative language and logic and must use the dichotomous gender terms to describe a character that does not fit the terms. After all, Geraldine is eventually labeled using feminine pronouns in the poem. Thus, while poetic language attempts to communicate the unspeakable in seemingly revolutionary ways, this unspeakability becomes an exhibition of Geraldine as a

medical anomaly, freak, monster, or man in disguise. Geraldine becomes an object of public curiosity, horror, and anxiety.

First it is necessary to establish Geraldine's non-conformity to binary understanding of sex, gender, and sexual identity. This is best done by combining close reading of the poem with some of its historical and contemporary criticisms, parodies, and continuations in order to demonstrate the interpretive possibilities regarding Geraldine's androgynous identity. The history of critical recognition of Geraldine's androgyny demonstrates how the androgynous gender performance of Geraldine troubled nineteenth-century readers and critics, and how Geraldine's androgynous figure still troubles contemporary readers and critics. To these ends, I will show how Geraldine challenges nineteenth-century as well as current binary classifications of sex, gender, and sexual identity, sometimes creating imaginative space for greater livability but also resulting in what is best broadly labeled as Geraldine's *freakery.* The term *freakery,* as I use it here, is intended to provide an understanding of the nineteenth-century exhibitionism of bodies that are defined by either being normal or *freaks*.

In her introduction titled, "From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," which appears at the beginning of a collection of essays in the book *Freakery* (1996), editor and historian Rosmarie Garland-Thomson explains the meaning of the term *freakery.* As Garland-Thomson poses it, *freakery* encompasses "a single amorphous category of corporeal otherness" (10). What Garland-Thomson is getting at with her use of the term *freakery* is that the generalized category of *freak* is embodied as a multivalent figure defined by exclusion from the model(s) of culturally normative bodies. As I will illustrate with my close reading and critical history of *Christabel,* Geraldine's inability to fit models of heteronormative sex, gender, and sexual identity results in what Garland-Thomson calls *freakery*. Garland-Thomson suggests

that "what we assume to be a freak of nature was instead a freak of culture." Freaks inhabit a cultural category produced by the process of what Garland-Thomson calls *enfreakment,* which "emerges from cultural rituals that stylize, silence, differentiate, and distance the persons whose bodies the freak-hunters or showmen colonize and commercialize" (10). I claim that not only is Geraldine stylized, silenced, differentiated, and distanced from normative bodies within the poem but that other poets, critics, and editors colonize and commercialize Geraldine's body producing her *enfreakment*. Taking the idea a bit further, I also intend to demonstrate how the poem as a whole has been critically subjected to rituals that produce its *enfreakment* as a literary text.

So, what is it exactly that we are gawking at in the bedroom scene? It is certainly something more than simply a pornographic gaze on the naked form of a woman. Before I argue that Geraldine's androgyny can and should be interpreted simultaneously as monstrous, divine, human, otherworldly, restrictive, and rebellious, it is important that I establish that we are invited to gawk at Geraldine as an androgynous body. When Geraldine is first introduced in the poem, Geraldine is not posed as a he or a she, but rather as a genderless voice whose moan is heard from the other side of an oak tree in the dark woods. Before her figure is revealed to be that of "a lady strange" Geraldine is referred to by the pronoun *it* (71). Coleridge writes, "*It* moaned as near, as near can be, / But what *it* is she [Christabel] cannot tell." [emphasis mine] (39-40). With respect to why I use the term "she" to describe Geraldine, this is simply because she is described using this restrictive binary term for sex and/or gender at later points in the poem. However, as I intend to show my readers, the terms signifying Geraldine's femininity and femaleness are revealed to be tenuous and complicated with regard to how the poem portrays Geraldine's sexual identity. In the lines above, rather than the voice of a he or she, Geraldine is initially presented as

an unknown "it" that moans from the other side of the oak tree when we as readers, along with the protagonist Christabel, first encounter Geraldine. The fact that we are introduced to Geraldine with an ambiguous and genderless moan ties sexuality to a figure of unknown sex foreshadowing the eventual climatic moment when Christabel sees Geraldine's androgynous naked form just before they engage in a not-so-veiled sexual encounter.

The first noise we hear about and from Geraldine is her moan, which is an explicitly non-linguistic type of vocalization. Here in the beginning of the poem we encounter Geraldine, the "lady strange," as someone who is initially associated in this poem with non-linguistic communication. Geraldine's moan from the other side of the "old oak tree" where Christabel was compelled to "kneel beneath" and pray for the safe return of her betrothed is the language of what cannot be said linguistically, but that can nevertheless be understood through the non-linguistic means of creating human understanding through imagination—namely by our imagining what Geraldine communicates with her moan (35-36). This is how Coleridge introduces Geraldine as a figure that is tied to the non-linguistic mode of creating understanding by forcing the reader, along with Christabel, to imagine the meaning through interpretation of the situation.

There have been many critical imaginings of Geraldine and her relationship with Christabel that note Geraldine's non-heteronormative gender, sex, and/or sexual identity. Some critics have been celebratory of the poetic resistance to heteronormativity and some have found Geraldine disturbing, disruptive, and perverse. Soon after the first publication of *Christabel*, in the 2nd June 1816 *Examiner* review of the poem, William Hazlitt famously declares that, "There is something disgusting at the bottom of Coleridge's subject, which is but ill glossed over by Della Cruscan sentiment and fine writing—like moon-beams playing on a charnel-house, or

flowers strewed on a dead body" (207). Clearly Hazlitt finds the subject perverse and grotesque. However, it remains unclear what he thinks the subject *is* and precisely what it is about the subject that appears disgusting. We can extract some clues about what it is Hazlitt finds disturbing. It appears that the perversity of the poem lies not alone, but in combination with "Della Cruscan sentiment and fine writing," which for contemporary readers would have signified feminine emotion and artifice. The Della Cruscan poets were a small circle of English poets that formed in Italy during the late eighteenth century and who found inspiration in, and imitated styles of, Italian poetry and poets such as Petrarch and Dante. This group of poets experimented with Italian forms like the sonnet, elegy, terza rima, and ottava rima, and embraced the romanticism of the Italian Renaissance's poetic tradition by representing the subjects of erotic and courtly love. By marking *Christabel* as a poem that reflects Della Cruscan sentiment Hazlitt's criticism invokes Italian femininity and poetic artifice, which to Hazlitt seems to be a part of what is "disgusting at the bottom of Coleridge's subject." This points to Hazlitt's discomfort with the mingling of femininity and masculinity in terms of poetic style, a discomfort that was certainly also heightened by the androgynous gender performance of Geraldine.

Looking at another review from 1816 published in the *Champion*, an anonymous reviewer asks on the 25th of May, "What is this all about? What is the idea? Is Lady Geraldine a sorceress? or a vampire? or a man? or what is she, or he, or it?" (166-67). The poem's "disgusting" subject, as Hazlitt put it, might simply be interpreted as its lesbian vampire subject, which is how many past and contemporary critics imagine it. In his book *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime* (1996), Warren Stevenson addresses how androgyny creates the sublime in *Christabel.* Stevenson sees *Christabel* as "A fine, wild poem about a devout maid and a demon," noting how "'Christabel' begins at the witching hour in a forest outside a castle" (19).

However, Stevenson too quickly assumes that Geraldine should be read as "the vampire witch" who once carried over the threshold into the castle "proceeds to physically ravish" Christabel (75). Stevenson sees *Christabel* as Coleridge's "attempt to 'transform Wordsworth,'" by which he means "to portray a creative metamorphosis of their relationship in which its spiritual essence would be simultaneously concealed and revealed" (73). Therefore, although Stevenson does stress androgyny by connecting it to poetic form, he is less interested in nuancing Geraldine's androgynous character than he is in exploring the more biographically-based psychoanalytical "allegory of Coleridge's 'ravishment' by the physically dominant Wordsworth, whose nature-based philosophy had made severe inroads into Coleridge's Neoplatonism" (75). Stevenson's idea could be taken further if he addressed Geraldine's androgyny in a more inclusive manner. That is to say, Stevenson falls into the trap of too quickly assuming her lesbian identity. In many ways, Stevenson's interpretation of *Christabel* opens an opportunity to explore how Geraldine's body relates to the body of the poem itself. However, by focusing on the relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth—by seeing the poetic allegory of "physic transference and quasi-homosexual rape" as an allegory for Wordsworth's dominance over Coleridge—Stevenson stops short of fully exploring the possibilities and cultural anxieties revealed by Geraldine's androgynous form.

In her book, *Romantic Androgyny* (1990), Diane Hoeveler falls into the same trap of too quickly categorizing Geraldine as lesbian. Hoeveler responds to the tradition that Stevenson's book develops out of, which is the tradition of critical emphasis on biography when it comes to psychoanalytical readings of *Christabel.* According to Hoeveler the critical focus on biography has allowed for readings of the poem such as Norman Fruman's, which suggests that *Christabel,* "reveals Coleridge's psychological legacy of 'unresolved incestuous conflicts, hatred of women,

divided personality, fear of sex, homosexual impulses, female demons issuing threats and punishments, and fiends in the disguise of loved ones" (176). Hoeveler responds to these critical explorations of the poem, which look to find meaning from outside the text, by drawing focus back to action of the poem itself within its nineteenth-century cultural contexts. Diane Hoeveler explores a less biographically-based, but nevertheless psychoanalytical reading of the poem noting that, "[t]he poem itself reveals a fear and hatred of women that need not be based on his [Coleridge's] personal history since this sort of misogyny was a cultural reality, endemic to Coleridge's era (and, one might add, to ours)."

The sort of misogyny that Hoeveler means here is a "fear of all women." According to Hoeveler, Coleridge's "fear of all women" is revealed not just through the symbolic image of Geraldine as the figure of the *femme fatale.* But rather, Coleridge's "creation of Christabel, her [Geraldine's] double and alter ego, bespeaks his fear of *all* women, even those who convincingly appear to all outward appearances to be good and chaste." This fear of women is tied to both Coleridge's "conscious and unconscious opinion of them [women] as perverse, sexually voracious, predatory, and duplicitous." While Hoeveler does relate what she depicts as Coleridge's fear of all women to "a cultural reality, endemic to Coleridge's era," she continues to explain this cultural reality through a Freudian lens turning back again to what this reveals about Coleridge's psycho-social reality and less to what this reveals about broader cultural fears revealed through the critical and public reception of the poem and its publication history. Unlike Stevenson's primary interest in biographical and formal concerns and Hoeveler's exploration of Freudian notions of gender and sexuality, my goal is to place Coleridge's efforts more firmly within cultural and medical discourses of androgyny and freakdom at the time and within a broader historical and literary context.

Of all the critical engagements with Geraldine's sexuality and the bedroom scene that I have read, Camille Paglia's interpretation of Geraldine in her book *Sexual Personae* (1990) exemplifies what happens when we analyze the poem without clear attention to its historical and literary contexts. It cannot be denied that Paglia's lesbian vampire interpretation is well evidenced within the poem by Geraldine's need for Christabel to carry her over the threshold into the house, by her strangeness, and by her hypnotic seduction of Christabel. Also, Paglia's interpretation is well founded if we consider the fact that Coleridge's contemporary reviewer asks if Geraldine could be a witch or a vampire, which were figures closely tied to lesbianism in nineteenth-century literary tradition and cultural myths. However, Paglia ignores other aspects of Geraldine's non-normative sexual identity that call into question not only her sexuality, but also her sex. Rather than calling into question Geraldine's sex, Paglia interprets Geraldine by highlighting the interpretive possibilities that rely on more socially acceptable female homoeroticism.

Paglia's reference to the *Champion* review ignores how the reviewer raises multiple questions of interpretive possibilities. The *Champion* review begins, "Mr. Coleridge's Poem is at present the standing enigma which puzzles the curiosity of literary circles" (166). Although, the anonymous reviewer appears uncomplimentary, the reviewer does draw attention to the significant breadth and variety of interpretive choices left up to the reader. This expansive interpretability, in fact, appears to be at the core of what disturbs this reviewer who asks, "What is this all about?" This question demonstrates the reviewer's desire for clarity of understanding, which the poem resists with its troubling of binary language and dichotomous views of sexual identity. The reviewer seems aware of the connection between how this poem disrupts binary linguistic sense making with particular attention to the way that this form of sense making can

prove insufficient in terms of labeling sexual identity. After asking whether Geraldine is a sorceress or vampire, the reviewer questions whether she is a man or if Geraldine is neither a man nor a woman. The reviewer asks, "what is she, or he, or *it*?" [emphasis added].

Instead of acknowledging how this review is a review that questions interpretation, Paglia construes it as a review that provides interpretation. I claim it does both simultaneously, but that it is important to recognize and consider the questioning aspect of this review. Paglia is too quick to jump to her conclusion about Geraldine being a lesbian vampire. To be fair, her interpretation of Geraldine is just a small part of her project of sketching a literary lineage of pagan eroticism in order to "demonstrate the unity and continuity of western culture," rather than the modernist view of the fragmentation of culture (xiii). Geraldine is just one persona out of hundreds that Paglia uses as examples of the pagan sexuality that she claims unifies artistic and literary tradition. The vastness and trajectory towards unification of Paglia's project leaves several points, such as her recognition of Geraldine's androgyny, with little room for detailed and nuanced discussion. Thus, while Paglia does recognize briefly Geraldine's androgyny, she does little to demonstrate to her readers how she achieves this interpretation—only referencing "Shelley's vision of the archetypal phallic woman"—and does not address how a hermaphroditic vision might relate to and differ from an interpretation of Geraldine as a lesbian (332).

Relating the story of Shelley's first encounter with the poem *Christabel*, Paglia explains that: "When in Geneva Byron recited some memorized passages, Shelley shrieked and rushed from the room. He was found trembling and bathed in sweat. During the description of Geraldine, he saw eyes in the nipples of Mary Godwin, his future wife (331-32)." This is where Paglia calls Shelley's vision "the archetypical phallic woman." Continuing, Paglia explains that "Coleridge's imagination is invested not in 'the virtuous of this world' but in daemonic personae

of hermaphrodite force." Here Paglia speaks to the possibility of reading Geraldine as a hermaphrodite, but she only reads the hermaphroditic figure as daemonic, which appears unfitting given some nineteenth-century treatment of hermaphrodites as humans with medical abnormality or monstrosity as opposed to the more ancient and pagan view of hermaphrodites as daemonic monsters or gods.

The increasing medical study and treatment of human hermaphroditism during the nineteenth century speaks to a medical, legal, and public interest in understanding how to recognize and categorize individuals with ambiguous sex. Medical study of ambiguous sex results in the simultaneous creation of a space for such individuals through recognition, but also restriction in terms of these individuals always falling outside the dichotomous norm of understanding sex as either male or female. It is important to comprehend the historical view of hermaphrodites to consider the fact that during the nineteenth century there were medical and freak show exhibitions of hermaphrodites. Dreger explains the connection between medical exhibition and freak shows when she reveals that:

> Although researchers and practitioners had started to notice patterns in forms of hermaphroditism by the early 1800s, generally throughout the century medical and scientific study tended to focus less on particular types of hermaphroditism than on particular cases. The cases that generated the most discussion were not necessarily those that were the most unusual or representative anatomically, but those that were the most readily accessible and the most bizarre biographically. (51)

One such case is that of Gottlieb Göttlich. Telling his story of being born a girl and transforming to a man at puberty, "Göttlich's tale was seriously doubted by the medical men who saw him only as an adult in the 1830s" (52). Yet, he toured and capitalized financially as a hermaphrodite

on exhibition traveling throughout Europe and the British Isles. As a matter of fact, "when a corrective operation was offered him, 'Göttlich declined all surgical aid.' He remained 'adverse to a proposal of this kind, since it would at once deprive him of his…easy and profitable mode of subsistence'" (53).

There was also the famous case of Herculine Barbine, another nineteenth-century hermaphrodite who had her journals published by Ambroise Tardieu in 1874 as "Histoire et souvenirs d'Alexina B" ("The Memoirs of Alexina B"). Dreger explains that Barbin, "made her/himself exquisitely available via sensational memoirs and ultimately the suicide on the rue de l'École-de-Médecine in Paris" (51). While both these very famous examples of hermaphroditic individuals become public after Coleridge's composition and publication of *Christabel,* they serve as two particularly well known examples that demonstrate the increasing public and medical curiosity surrounding the subject of hermaphroditism. These examples also illustrate the nineteenth-century *enfreakment* of androgyny.

Another important aspect of understanding sexual identity with consideration for the nineteenth-century point of view is how the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality are more entwined compared to our present differentiation of these categories. In 1750 French medical doctor George Arnauld de Ronsil attempts to answer the question "Hermaphrodites or no?" in his "Dissertation sur les Hermaphrodites" ("Dissertation on Hermaphrodites"). He also questions what role surgeons should play. Ronsil asks his readers to consider whether they think that hermaphrodites, or certain types of hermaphrodites, "call for the attention of a surgeon" (10). Ronsil characterizes the surgeon as one whose "principle concern is to lend a helping-hand to those who are thus disfigured by nature" (10-11). The surgeon, according to Ronsil:

> omits nothing in his power to redress and set her [nature] to-rights again, by prudent and

> skillful operations; and sometimes he is happy enough to succeed, either by retrenching useless and superfluous parts, or by joining those which are separated, or separating those which are joined against the order of nature, or by laying those open and bare, which are concealed and covered. (11)

He explains the difference between people who fit the categories of the "male hermaphrodite," "female hermaphrodite," and "perfect hermaphrodite" (16). These categories alone demonstrate the medical interest in sex-sorting individuals with ambiguous sex.

However, this sex-sorting was not entirely biologically based. According to Ronsil, the female hermaphrodite is a woman with the aggressive sexuality of a man. We might call this a gender performance now as opposed to a marker of sex. Ronsil explains that the enlarged clitoris of the female hermaphrodite:

> having the same figure with the penis of the man, yet without being perforated like it, makes them [female hermaphrodites] almost resemble eunuchs, who can enjoy coition without the perfect consummation of the venereal act. The Greeks called these women τριβάδες, whence comes, I imagine, the old French word *ribaude*, which signifies a lewd woman; such was the famous Sappho (18).

The connection Ronsil makes with Sappho illustrates the mingling of biological sex with gender and sexuality that medical practitioners took at the time. More importantly, to our understanding of *Christabel*, Ronsil goes so far as to suggest that lesbian sexuality is a result of a physical condition—something that can and should be medically cured. Hermaphroditism is not only associated with medieval monsters or bad omens, but rather is also viewed during the nineteenth century to be a socially disruptive, yet nevertheless, medically comprehensible condition affecting some humans physically as well as psychologically. The broad and entwined

nineteenth-century understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality provided little distinction between what we now recognize as intersexual, transgender, and homosexual.

Also, it seems important to understanding the nineteenth-century view of androgyny, but particularly hermaphrodites, to consider the exhibition of art depicting hermaphroditic subjects. For example, we should consider the cultural effect of the exhibition of the Hellenistic sculpture *Sleeping Hermaphroditus,* which is by an ancient Greek sculptor and was unearthed in the early seventeenth-century. This particular statue (one of many copies of the same figure) was displayed in the nineteenth century as well as now lying on a Renaissance mattress of marble which was created by the Italian artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini in 1620. This statue of the mythical hermaphrodite was a work of art that Coleridge most likely viewed, and it certainly influenced nineteenth-century understanding of hermaphroditism. In the 2008 book titled, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Fine Arts* (2008), by Martin D. Paley, explores the strong possibility that Coleridge saw the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*. Paley explains that in Rome Coleridge saw several works of art at the Villa Farnesina with his friend Charles Allston where they saw Raphael's Galatea and the Cupid and Psyche frescoes. Coleridge and Allston also visited the Villa Borghese and, although it is not recorded in journals or letters, there is little doubt that he also showed Coleridge the Palazzo Borghese, where the sculpture of the Hermaphrodite, which Paley reveals "Dalmazzoni calls 'of unspeakable beauty . . . a living creature'" was housed (37). This sculpture was later moved to the Villa Borghese and can currently be viewed on exhibition in The Louvre. Regardless of whether or not Coleridge saw this particular statue, he was certainly aware of its form and the mythological, as well as the medical intermingling of the two sexes that it represented.

The different understanding of hermaphroditism, one based on medical science and the

other of mythical gods/demons, both affect interpretations of the Geraldine's sexuality. During the nineteenth century intermingling of the two sexes did not represent the same cultural anxieties that it did when the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* was created, copied, and eventually rested upon a Renaissance pillow of marble. Some of the differences between the cultural anxieties expressed by this statue during the times of its creation as opposed to during the nineteenth century can be explained by Phyllis Rackin's description of the reversal of attitudes that occurred between the Renaissance and the Victorian period in regard to the differences between the sexes and expressions of intense sexuality as was understood during these historical periods. In the chapter of the book *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England* (1993) titled "Historical Difference/Sexual Difference," Rackin explains that:

> Valuing sexual passion, the popular wisdom of contemporary culture associates it with the more valued gender, assuming that men feel it more strongly. Despising lust as a mark of weakness and degradation, Renaissance thought regarded excessive lust in men as a mark of feminacy. Reduced to its simplest terms, it is the difference between seeing heterosexual sex as the place where manhood is proved and affirmed in a conquest of the female and seeing it as the place where it is contaminated and lost in congress with her. The danger was that husband and wife would become, quite literally, one flesh, a fantasy that was explored in fables and images of passionate lovers transformed into monstrous hermaphrodites. (47)

The Ovidian myth of the nymph Salmacis, her rape of Hermaphroditus, and her prayer to the gods that is granted melding both their bodies into one with neither male nor female forms, demonstrates the dangers of female lust and male entanglement in with her body that ultimately results in loss of masculinity. After all, the form of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* appears more

feminine than masculine with the addition of male genitalia to demonstrate less of a feminized male form, but rather a monstrously female form.

As Rackin further explains, "the union was seen as dangerous not simply or even primarily because it was a union but because it was a union of *flesh*" (48). The anxieties that are brought to the surface by human and artistic figures of hermaphrodites changed greatly in the nineteenth century with the development of modern medical science. The more ancient fears that hermaphrodites are the result of some curse, bad omen, or the pseudo-medical result of maternal impressions wanes in the nineteenth-century, as freak shows gain popularity and medical men begin to claim authority over the "proper" labeling of individuals with doubtful sex. In fact, hermaphrodites had become just as much a subject of public and medical amusement and curiosity as they were a subject of fear. During the nineteenth century hermaphrodites remain part of the public imagination as a monstrous mythical creature like the ones found in art and literature, but also prove a medical anomaly and even voyeuristic interest. Paglia's lack of attention to the variety of possibilities posed by hermaphroditic interpretations of Geraldine reflect her biases and perspective on gender, sex, and sexual identity, which does not allow for the same sort of unintelligibility as Butler's idea of undoing gender suggests. In fact, Paglia is well aware of the issues gender theorists might take with her "stress on the truth in sexual stereotypes and on the biologic basis of sex difference," which Paglia knows will "cause some controversy" (xiii). While Paglia is clearly too skilled a close reader to discount Geraldine's androgyny, her adherence to ideas of "woman's ancient mystery and glamour," and her Freudian view of "the mother as an overwhelming force who condemns men to a lifelong sexual anxiety, from which they escape through rationalism and physical achievement," confines her ability to explore Geraldine's androgyny in its more accurate nineteenth-century contexts, as anything

other than a "demonic personae of hermaphrodite force"(xiii). Her restrictive view of gender, sex, and sexual identity impede her sense of interpretive possibility, which is opened by the androgynous identity of Geraldine.

Paglia is not the only critic who too quickly avoids the possible androgynous readings of Geraldine as a hermaphroditic or cross-dressing character. Many critics confine Geraldine's androgyny to the recognizable subject of lesbian eroticism. In R*omantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (1999), Andrew Elfenbein explains that:

> When *Christabel* appeared in 1816, it changed the history of lesbian representation. Previous works had treated sex between women as a matter for pornographic interest, satirical commentary, scandalous exploration, or titillating innuendo. *Christabel*, for the first time, made lesbianism sublime. (177)

Elfenbein's interest in how *Christabel* "changed the history of lesbian representation" is insightful in terms of the difference between this poem and past representations of lesbianism, which he claims results in making lesbianism sublime. However, I believe that by expanding upon Elfenbein's idea of *Christabel* making lesbianism sublime to include other forms of non-normative sex, gender, and sexual identity—to include androgyny—we can more fully explore historical and contemporary critical resistance and distaste for the poem and thus more fully understand social resistance to androgyny.

According to Elfenbein, "What had been a mildly amusing or shocking topic became a matter of almost sacred mystery. In *Christabel*, sex between women loses the characteristic corporeality of eighteenth-century representation" (177). While I do agree with this view in terms of the textual reliance on imagination—its eroticism and not its pornography— as well as its clear avoidance of political or didactic purpose, Elfenbein's restricted interpretation of the

poem's lesbian eroticism avoids more nuanced readings of the representational complexity of the bedroom scene. Reading Geraldine as a lesbian too quickly dismisses the inherent exchange between corporeality and the metaphysical in this scene that is marked by ambiguous and androgynous eroticism. As Elfenbein suggests "a blank space in the text marks an event so burdened with sublime horror that it cannot even be spoken." However, I question the self-evidence of Geraldine's sex when Elfenbein explains that, "In most contexts, the line 'A sight to dream of, not to tell!' if used to describe a *female* body, would describe one so beautiful that it defied language [emphasis added]" (185). To Elfebein, the words "A sight to dream of, not to tell!" actually "describes the opposite [of female beauty], a sight so shocking that its horror demands silence." Thus when Elfenbein relates how "Coleridge wisely cut a line specifying the ugliness of Geraldine's body and thereby ensured that, at least on first reading, the line would retain its ambiguity" he fails to explain what this ambiguity might appear in the form of, which is Geraldine's ambiguous sex. Here Elfenbein avoids dealing with the issue of what it is about Geraldine's naked form that could be considered so shocking that it becomes an occasion for experiencing sublime horror.

When exposed, Geraldine tells Christabel that her body bears "This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow" (270). Seeing this mark occasions Christabel's (and the reader's) encounter with the sublime. This is a sublime encounter that is particularly marked by the corporeal nature of carnal bodies. What we see in the bedroom scene is not a transcendence from the corporeality of lesbian eroticism, but rather a drawing out of the tension between the corporeal and metaphysical aspects of the sublime experience. The lines of the climactic moment marked by the eroticism of Christabel's body lying next to Geraldine read:

And *see*! the lady Christabel [emphasis added]

Gathers herself from out her trance;

Her limbs relax, her countenance

Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids

Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—

Large tears that leave the lashes bright!

And oft the while she seems to smile

As infants at a sudden light! (311-18)

As suggested by the words "see, limbs, lids, eyes, tears, lashes, smile, and infants" language associated with corporeal experience and the body mark this climactic moment. The reader is directed to gawk again here, as implied by the call for the reader to "see" how Christabel's body reacts to Geraldine's body once again emphasizing corporeal experience.

The fragmentary and unintelligible nature of this poem produces a blank space to be imagined by readers. Rather than reading the blank space surrounding the event of Christabel and Geraldine's sexual encounter as representation for lesbian sex or transcendence from the material world, I propose that this poetic blank space opens interpretation to an incommunicable encounter between Christabel and Geraldine, who could be imagined as a lesbian vampire, a man in disguise, and/or a hermaphrodite. The possibility of reading Geraldine as any number of androgynous forms—as a lesbian, as a man in disguise, and/or as a hermaphrodite—illustrates a very real nineteenth-century source of legal, medical, and cultural anxiety, which is how to identify and classify individuals who do not conform to heteronormative binary models of sex, gender, and sexual identity. The blankness surrounding the bedroom scene in *Christabel* does not indicate some sort of transcendence from the material world, but rather demonstrates the simultaneous cultural material awareness and silence surrounding non-normative sexual

identities, which proves a material and ideological problem.

Elfenbein seeks to answer why the encounter between Geraldine and Christabel differ from past lesbian representation. I believe that it is worth exploring the possibility that this radical difference is because the encounter in this scene should not be confined to the more culturally accepted representation of lesbian eroticism. Rather, sublime horror is produced by the ambiguous androgyny of Geraldine's sexuality. Elfenbein explains how the bedroom becomes "a blank space in the text" that produces an encounter with the lesbian sublime. He relates how the scene "marks an event so burdened with sublime horror that it cannot even be spoke. Like a cultic rite that remains known only to initiates, lesbianism in *Christabel* points to mysteries forbidden to ordinary mortals" (177). This vision of the lesbian sublime speaks to Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind. Elfenbein's argument that "Lesbianism in *Christabel* enabled more discriminating readers to demonstrate their finer aesthetic taste by recognizing Coleridge's alchemy of the obscene into the sublime [. . . ] *Christabel's* pioneering transformation of shocking or disreputable representations into high art" does influence my own reading of this scene (177-78). Coleridge combines "shocking or disreputable representations into high art" to achieve an effect of sublime horror. Nevertheless, I believe that this horror relates to the ambiguity of Geraldine's sex and that it is intellectually and culturally productive to consider all the possibilities of Geraldine's non-normative sexual identity.

Chris Koenig-Woodyard's work uncovering the many parodies of Coleridge's poem helps to shed new light on how contemporary readers registered the poem's ambiguities about gender. In his article, "sex-text: 'Christabel' and the Christabelliads" (1999), Koenig-Woodyard explores the oral and print publication history of the poem itself as well as of its parodies, some of which were recited and circulated before the poem made it to press. Starting with "An

Overview of the 'Christabel' Parodies," Koenig-Woodyard explains that:

> Between 1816 and 1832, no less than seven verse parodies of 'Christabel' were published. The parodies, considered in combination with the 15 'Christabel' continuations published between 1815 and 1909, position the poem as one of Coleridge's most often emulated works in the nineteenth century. (5)

The poetic history of the poem *Christabel* is enriched through an understanding of these parodies and continuations. But, more importantly, like the reviews, parodies and continuations of Coleridge's poem illustrate the cultural anxieties drawn to the surface by the androgynous form and subject of the text.

One parody in particular that Koenig-Woodyard discusses gets right to the heart of anxieties over androgyny. David Macbeth Moir, both a physician and writer, parodies *Christabel* with his "Christabel, Part Third."[7] Moir's parody contains "a strong current of sexual scandal," according to Koenig-Woodyard, which is punctuated by Geraldine's impregnation of Christabel. In Moir's spoof of *Christabel* we see the cultural anxiety of men inhabiting women's spaces through disguise as Koenig-Woodyard suggests, but also as a hermaphroditic male if we include other biologically possible explanations. Moir's parody exposes the fear of men being able to find their way particularly into a naïve virginal woman's bed by exploring the possibility of Geraldine's biological sex being different from her outward appearance. This is indeed a fitting spoof of the scene coming from a medical man. What we now could now call Geraldine's performance of femininity is exposed to actually not be a reflection of her sex.

Moir's poem capitalizes on horrifyingly non-normative sexuality of *Christabel* to achieve

[7] Koenig-Woodyard explains that this parody of *Christabel* appears in the June 1819 issue of *Blackwoods* under the pseudonym Morgan O'Dourghty that was often used by Irish journalist and poet William Maginn, but used by David Macbeth Moir in this case.

a laugh. But the fact that readers are supposed to laugh at the fact that Geraldine is a man in disguise in "Christabel, Part Third," demonstrates through humor what is seen as culturally acceptable and what is not. Like the French medical doctor George Arnauld de Ronsil, who characterizes the surgeon as one whose "principle concern is to lend a helping-hand to those who are thus disfigured by nature," in his *Dissertation sur les Hermaphrodites,* Moir performs poetic surgery by providing greater clarity into the sexual category of Geraldine. By giving her the ability to impregnate Christabel, Moir sex-sorts Geraldine. Moir's humorous depiction of Geraldine as a man in disguise or hermaphrodite is funny precisely because it takes to an extreme one of the feared outcomes (pregnancy) surrounding the cultural anxiety associated with men entering women's spaces in disguise and/or as an unknown hermaphroditic male. Moir's poem highlights the fact that the possibility of Geraldine's maleness could be interpreted by the androgyny of Geraldine in Coleridge's *Christabel.*

Coleridge once took Hazlitt to task for over-simplifying the poem by spreading the idea that Geraldine is a witch and/or a man in disguise. A flyleaf in the copy of the 1816 edition given to his son Derwent in 1819 relates Coleridge's complaint against Hazlitt.[8] Coleridge writes, "…Geraldine is *not* a Witch, in any proper sense of the word. That she is a man in disguise is a wicked rumour sent abroad with malice prepense, and against his own belief and knowledge, by poor Hazlitt. Unhappy man!" (40). Hazlitt like many other critics and parodists attempt to restore order or make sense of the the poem, and particularly the character Geraldine, by sex-sorting and categorizing her sexuality (2). Contemporary critics still often focus their energies on determining Geraldine's precise sexual identity. However, by taking seriously the editorial and critical history of the poem, combined with the history of poetic parodies and continuations, we

[8] This letter to Derwent was first reproduced in John Beer's, "Coleridge, Hazlitt, and 'Christabel'," in *The Review of English Studies*, 1986.

are provided with the groundwork to explore the nineteenth-century, as well as current, cultural anxiety surrounding the androgyny associated with the subject and fragmentary structure of the poem. What Elfenbein characterizes to be a loss of corporeality in the silence surrounding the erotic connection between the two women in the bedroom scene, and what Hoeveler sees as a psychological revelation of patriarchal social fears of women, disregards an obvious textual marker of the climactic event that is central to all discussions of this poems sexuality—the exhibition of Geraldine's naked body, which very well may not even be the body of a woman. Keeping in mind that Coleridge's contemporary anonymous critic asked in the *Champion* review of the poem about the character Geraldine, "what is he, she, or it?" exposes the necessity of considering reading Geraldine as not only a possible lesbian, but also hermaphrodite, or a man in disguise. Koenig-Woodyard explains that, "The circularity of the *Champion* reviewer's commentary demonstrates the poem's frustrating indeterminacy; 'what is it all about' gives away to more specific thematic and interpretive inquiries about genre, ontology, biology, and sexuality only to return to 'it'" (1). We do not get a clear picture of Geraldine's biological or sexual characteristics. Thus, what this early review demonstrates is that Geraldine has always been simultaneously interpretable as a lesbian, hermaphrodite, and/or man disguised as a woman.

As Koenig-Woodyard reveals, the effort to answer these questions of indeterminacy avoids the long-standing history of the poetic opening-up to questions, rather than to answers. Even Coleridge's own nephew, Henry Nelson Coleridge, offers no insight into answering what it is exactly that Geraldine represents, asking in his *Quarterly* review of the 1834 publication of Coleridge's *Poetical Works,* "Who and what is Geraldine—whence come, whither going, and what designing? What did the poet mean to make of her? What could he have made of her?" Henry Nelson Coleridge then concludes that he is "not among those who wish to have

'Christabel' finished. It cannot be finished." Geraldine's androgyny represses our ability to neatly categorize Geraldine's sexuality according to the binary model that was edified by medical doctors in the nineteenth century. Like a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite on exhibition in a medical and/or freak show, Geraldine undoes normative categories of sex, gender, and sexuality. However, this exhibition does not provide a clear picture of how precisely her sexuality differs from the normative models. Rather than attempting to answer, "Who and what is Geraldine?", Coleridge's poem resists answers. It is clear from the critical history and the history of parodies and continuations, that Coleridge's undoing of normative sexuality combined with an undoing of normative poetic structure struck a sour chord with some critics, readers, and authors in the nineteenth-century.

Beyond the fact that Geraldine does not fit the proper nineteenth-century ideal of womanliness, she also exposes the horrifying limits of binary language and thought, which must be supplemented with imaginative interpretation. The exhibition of her naked form reveals something that is unspeakable and only comprehensible to the unconscious mind. Christabel and the speaker lack the ability to easily describe Geraldine's naked form. The speaker's attempt to describe Geraldine's deformities troubles the confines produced by binary description of human form and exposes the terror of the unclassifiable. Both the limits of language and the power of imagination are revealed through the poetic possibility of taking comfort in what is not able to be classified or understood. The unspeakability of the bedroom scene demonstrates how poetic force lies in what Coleridge's contemporary poet John Keats calls "Negative Capability" (71).[9]

Keats actually coins this term in the year following Coleridge's publication of *Christabel.*

[9] Described in his 21st of December 1817 letter to his brothers George and Thomas found in *Letters*.

Keats relates to his brothers a point of his poetic theory that can also be applied to Coleridge's poem *Christabel.* Keats explains, "I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is comfortable being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." In fact, Keats does directly relate this idea to Coleridge, as he continues by explaining that "Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge." I argue with Keats when I claim that the strength of Coleridge's poetic imagination is found in both his comfort in the unknown, but also the reader's ability to embrace what cannot be understood or known through binary language and logic. This is the revolutionary effect of this androgynous poem.

According to Coleridge, "a great mind is androgynous." The revolutionary effect of the androgyny of Geraldine is the creation of a space to imagine sex, gender, and sexuality outside the dichotomous normative view. For this reason, I believe that this poem is best comprehended, and should be taught in ways that allow for its androgynous ambiguities to be drawn out and explored. However, this should not be done with the intent of figuring out what Geraldine is precisely and what moral we might extract from her non-normative sexuality. Rather, the answer I propose to the *Champion* reviewer's question, "what is it all about?" is that the answer lies in the question itself. It is a poem that draws out the tensions between what is known and unknown, what can be easily communicated and what cannot, and particularly what might be categorized as masculine/male and feminine/female. This tension is a tension worth meditating given our current cultural discussions and depictions of subjects expressing sex, gender, and sexuality outside the heterosexual norm. Non-normative characters and individuals continue to be seen as culturally disruptive. For example, the "bathroom wars" that have recently taken place are

indicative of western society's lingering need to strictly classify sex, gender, and sexual identity. The recent push for fair and just accommodation of transgender needs, and the backlash against it, speaks to the necessity to create spaces of greater livability through our interpretation of this poem. What bathroom would Geraldine use? We have no idea, and that is part of the beauty of the poem.

## Chapter Two: More than Pantomime: Byronic Parody, Cross-Dressing, and Laughing at the Fantasy of an Original Gender in *Don Juan*

In response to accusations that the shipwreck scene in Cantos II of *Don Juan* might be plagiarized, Lord Byron explains in a letter to his editor and friend John Murray that, "Almost all *Don Juan* is *real* life, either my own, or from people I knew" (355).[10] Confirming Byron's method of writing was inspired by his own life experiences, albeit in a negative light, John Keats assesses Byron's reference to biography and real-world events in a letter that he sends to his brother George. Keats writes: *"*You speak of Lord Byron and me – There is this great difference between us. He describes what he sees – I describe what I imagine – Mine is the hardest task."[11] Unlike what Keats describes as Coleridge's ability to "let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery,"—a capacity to be "comfortable being in uncertainties"—Keats characterizes Byron's poetry as unimaginative and too bound to the *real world* to be worthy of literary praise.[12] While Coleridge's imagination allows him to swing from the tethers of *reality,* as discussed at the end of the last chapter, Byron, as Keats poses it, takes on the simple task of writing only what he sees. Essentially, Keats does not think Byron's method of writing demonstrates poetic genius, which Keats connects, like many early nineteenth-century poets and critics, to transcendent imagination.[13] Keats writes in a letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey, "The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream: he awoke and found truth." As

[10] Letter to John Murray, 23 August 1821.
[11] Letter to George Keats, September 1819.
[12] Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December 1817.
[13] Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 Nov. 1817.

Keats describes it, imagination is something beyond the corporeal realm. To Keats the imagination is transcendent and creative sense that produces new realities and coalesces into "truth." Byron, as Keats poses it, does not transcend the earthy realm and create new realities.

Echoing similar sentiments to those of Keats, William Hazlitt criticizes Byron's poetry for its self-referential elements in his book titled *The Spirit of the Age* (1824). Comparing Byron to Sir Walter Scott, Hazlitt writes, "In reading the Scotch Novels, we never think about the author, except from a feeling of curiosity respecting our unknown benefactor: in reading Lord Byron's works, he himself is never absent from our minds" (123-24). Hazlitt implies that the absence, or at least periphery position, of Scott's personal character and experiences from his works marks Scott's writings of a greater literary merit than Byron's. By taking issue with the inseparability of Byron's personal character and life experiences from his poems, Hazlitt, like Keats, calls into the question the scope of Byron's imagination and thus the literary quality of Byron's work. Although Hazlitt's statement that, "in reading Lord Byron's works, he himself is never absent from our minds," is negative in tone, Hazlitt importantly signifies how Byron's public persona is a vital element of interpreting Byron's poetry. After all, despite Keats's and Hazlitt's criticisms, as well as others that judge Byron's work as less imaginative and/or too tied to reality and therefore less literary, Byron's success as a poet was palpable during his life and was noticeably tied to depictions of his own experiences and public persona.

In fact, Byron is now often posed as the first European modern cultural celebrity.[14]

[14] I do not mean to argue this point. There are scholars and critics who disagree about whether Byron is the first modern celebrity. In Ghislaine McDayter's book, *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Cutlure* (2009), she argues that Byron's cultural and political influence, both exhibited and produced by the "hysteria" among his (feminine) fans, marks the beginning of modern (effeminate) celebrity and popular culture. As, I do with gender, by adopting Butler's theory of gender performativity, I prefer to take a more nuanced approach to the history of celebrity culture and simply suggest that he is a significant example of one of the first notably modern celebrities.

Biographer and cultural historian Fiona MacCarthy depicts, in her definitive biography, *Byron: Life and Legend* (2002), "Byron's transformation into the first European cultural celebrity of the modern age [that] has often been described in terms of startling overnight success following publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* in March 1812" (x). As MacCarthy explains, the fact that the first edition of *Childe Harold* sold out in three days was unprecedented at the time. The impressive speed at which the public bought all the copies of *Childe Harold*—a long poem that most would not be able to read in only three days, much less disseminate positive reviews—indicates that it was not the quality of the poem alone that sparked public interest. It was interest in the poet himself. Clearly, before the publication of his first major poem, Byron had already become a public figure. Although Byron expresses his own surprise following his immediate success after publishing *Childe Harold,* when he writes in his memorandum, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous," MacCarthy exposes that public curiosity over Byron the poet and his poems was a result of Byron, and his friend and publisher John Murray, employing some novel contemporary marketing techniques unique to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*Letter and Journals of Lord Byron* 347).

Indeed, we should be careful not to read Byron's surprise in complete earnest. Although the swiftness at which *Childe Harold* sold out was surely unexpected and does evidence a very different form of literary celebrity from that of fame and success after the spread of positive reviews from the reading public and critics, we should be careful to not too easily let Byron's quotation about his sudden rise to fame wholly inform our view of his success as a celebrity amounting to some completely unplanned phenomenon. Byron was, after all, a well-known exaggerator. MacCarthy's biography of Byron sheds light on the nature of his fame and the effects of his lasting reputation on his familial and literary decedents. She details:

> the ambition Byron felt as 'the most powerful of all excitements'; the degree to which he created and then manipulated his visual image, attempting to control the reproduction of his portraits; the complex and fascinating intertwining of his personal celebrity and literary reputation; his bitterness when fame turned to notoriety, and its consequences for the future generations of his family and entourage. (x-xi)

MacCarthy applies contemporary understanding of celebrity culture and modern marketing demonstrating how Byron, and his publisher and friend John Murray, pioneered some branding techniques that produced Byron's celebrity—described by many as the phenomenon labeled Byromania. Ghislaine McDayter succinctly summarizes the meaning of this term in her book, *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* (2009), "Byromania was an extra literary event that could no longer be constrained by the usual terms of artistic "fame." What London was witnessing in the frenzy of Byromania was instead a symptom of the birth of the larger phenomenon now known as celebrity culture" (4).[15] In the end Byromania was not simply confined to London, Byron's status as a modern popular culture celebrity is indeed a noteworthy example of one of the first international modern celebrities. What is more is that Byromania occurs at a time of increasing literacy, improvements in printing technology, and a growing commercial culture in which marketing techniques are employed to distinguish brands as unique.

During the nineteenth-century European culture becomes saturated with commodities that regularly employ branding techniques emphasizing the unique qualities of each similar product. This is not very different from the techniques used by poets to distinguish themselves during the Romantic era as unique, as an individual who stands out among the masses—as a genius. In his article titled, "Building Brand Byron" (2002), Nicholas Mason points out that, "Until recently

[15] For more on Byromania see Wilson, *Byromania; Portraits of the Artist in Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century Culture*, 1999.

Byron scholarship has paid little attention to the commercial contexts of 'Byromania,' instead taking its lead from Byron's legendary claim to have 'awoke one morning and found [him]self famous'" (424). Mason contends that the "regular repetition of this quotation in explaining the events of March 1812 is to some degree understandable, as overnight fame *seems* right for a figure whose entire legend is built on hyperbole." However, Mason asserts that "not only does the quotation diminish the fame that Byron enjoyed prior to *Childe Harold*, but leads to a mystification of the processes involved in producing and marketing a best-seller."

Rather than following a line of thinking that "carries with it the sense that the book sells itself, independent of the promotional efforts of the author, publisher, and retailer," my reading, following along with MacCarthy's and Mason's, examines the way that Byron the poet and his poetry are mutually marked by the promotional processes involved in an exchange of commodities. And as we now see with many rock stars, the commodity culture surrounding Byron's celebrity status is in part informed by his androgynous counter-cultural public persona.[16] The androgynous performances that take place in his poems, which are popular culture productions of the day, are also seen as extensions of Byron's own persona. Thus, moving towards how Byron's celebrity status relates more particularly to the topic of this dissertation, I

[16] David Bowie is the first androgynous rock star that comes to mind as an example. In fact, I am interested in pursuing the strong correlation I see between Bowie's and Byron's celebrity personae in a future article. There are some obvious connections to be made to the artistic and political significance of androgyny on the formation of both Byron's and Bowie's personae. Certainly, Bowie's music video "Jazzin' for Blue Jean" (1984), illustrates just how recognizable the connection is by the alter-ego Bowie plays in the video named "Screaming Lord Byron." However, this connection could be an entire article, therefore, I will not spend too much time on this connection here. Although, I will add a few more names to the list of androgynous celebrities to help demonstrate my point that this is not an uncommon mode of celebrity branding: Lady Gaga, Robert Smith, K.D. Lang, Annie Lennox, Boy George, Marilyn Manson, Prince, Patti Smith, Adam Lambert, Grace Jones, and I could name more (many of my readers probably have thought of some they wish I had added to the list), but I hope this list sufficiently illustrates my point.

examine the ways that androgynous gender performance in the poem *Don Juan* relates to the androgynous gender performativity of Byron himself, demonstrating sexuality outside the traditional binary structures both within the countercultural frames of the poetic text but also as a part of the popular and widely disseminated modern celebrity culture of the period. By investigating into the critical reception of Byron's final and incomplete poem, *Don Juan*, with attention to the critical reception of Byron's "body" overall, we gain a deeper understanding of Byron's branding methods and how his public persona produced a complex conversation about androgyny at the time.

As we understand well today, not all celebrities achieve fame for the quality of their artistry or their works, but rather through public interest in their personal lives and then by extension interest in their other endeavors such as writing. It is along these lines that Keats and Hazlitt pose Byron's self-reflective poetic performances as a defect of Byron's work. However, this very same flaw is also exactly what made Byron such an influential and widely-read poet in his lifetime. For most of the scholars who make a differentiation between Byron's celebrity and the type of celebrity achieved by previous poets (and public figures) the difference appears as a difference between the public interest and publicity based on the persona of poet, as we see with Byron, compared to public interest in the poet because of the quality of the poet's works, which fits Hazlitt's description of Scott's literary fame. Indeed, the fact that Byron's readers have generally been just as interested (if not more interested) in his public persona as much as they have been interested in his poetry, should be considered regarding the nature and impact of his contributions to literature and culture. However, it is a false assumption to devalue Byron's poetic merit simply because he fits the role of modern cultural celebrity. Instead of hastily assuming Byron's lack of literary worth because of his celebrity status, as others have done, I

believe that by reading Byron's poem *Don Juan* with attention to Byron's technique of self and culturally reflective poetic performances, that we can better understand how his celebrity status simultaneously enhanced and stifled his ability to engage in revolutionary poetics—but most particularly poetics that produce the occasion to trouble gender.

In the last chapter I explored how Coleridge's character Geraldine appears distinctively separate from Coleridge's gender normative masculine public persona. In this chapter, I will discuss how Byron's androgynous poetic performances reflect and react to his own androgynous gender performativity, which empowered him as cultural celebrity and ultimately as a poet. However, the poetic correlation between Byron's life and experiences and the events and characters in his poems extends beyond simple biographical connection. Rather, the poetic connections to *real* life extend to the social and political bodies of nineteenth-century Britain and Europe, as the following lines found in the poem *Don Juan* that expose: ""Without, or with, offence to friends or foes, / I sketch your world exactly as it goes" (711-12). By directly addressing his readers, Byron indicates that he reaches beyond simply describing what he sees. Rather, he claims to describe the world as his nineteenth-century readers would also see it. What he tells readers here is particularly radical in nineteenth-century British culture—a culture that values propriety and respectability—which is that he does not worry about who he offends. Instead, Byron asserts that he is concerned with reflecting reality as it is.

When Byron writes the now commonplace phrase in Canto XIV that "Tis strange—but true; for Truth is always strange, / Stranger than Fiction" he indicates that life experiences are sometimes more extraordinary than fictional stories (801-8). And, in the case of Byron's life and experiences this could certainly be arguable. He continues this comment on the strangeness of truth over fiction by addressing what he considers to be a problem with nineteenth-century

literary criticism, which is that the critics often value a moral story over a *truthful* story. Following his statement about truth being stranger than fiction, Byron briefly reminisces about what novels could gain from the strangeness of reality, which he indicates to be the moral complexities of human experience. Bryon writes:

> How differently the world would men behold!
> How oft would vice and virtue places change!
> The new world would be nothing to the old,
> If some Columbus of the moral seas
> Would show mankind their souls' Antipodes. (804-8)

Here, Byron poses himself as the explorer-poet, up against complacent novelists—as "some Columbus of the moral seas," who dares to break from the traditions of the old world and show nineteenth-century readers the moral ambiguities exposed when readers view the southern regions of human soul.

Significantly to understanding Byron, although Keats claims Byron writes about *his* world as it is, Byron asserts that he writes *your* world as it is. Keats's, Hazlitt's, and other criticisms of Byron's self-reflective poetry, stem in a large part from early nineteenth-century biases about the nature of the individual and poetic genius. However, in the Dedication of *Don Juan*, Byron questions the "narrowness" of defining poetic genius in terms that "make wreathes for you [Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth] alone" (38). The elevation of the poets that represent the Romantic ideal of genius is humorously called into question in the Dedication. In a mocking sing-song verse, Byron starts by taking jabs at the formulaic dryness and repetitiveness of Southey's poetry, particularly since being named Poet-laureate. Byron depicts Southey's poetry as being:

Like ‘four and twenty Blackbirds in a pye;

‘Which pye being opened they began to sing’

(This old song and new simile holds good),

‘A dainty dish to set before a King,’

Or Regent, who admires such kind of food;— (8-12)

Then, painting Coleridge as “a hawk encumbered with his hood,” Byron ridicules the nonsense of Coleridge’s “metaphysics,” saying that “I wish he would explain his Explanation” (13-16). And, following his criticisms of Southey and Coleridge, Byron critiques Wordsworth’s “new system [of poetry] to perplex the sages” that is represented by his incomplete work *The Excursion* (25-28). Byron reminds readers that Wordsworth “has given sample from the vastly version” and then adds the amusing remark that “’Tis poetry—at least by his assertion” (27-29). Here we see Byron question the poetic vigor and quality of his poetic elders. Byron makes a space for himself among the poetic greats of the period by representing himself as a youthful cosmopolitan “who, wandering with pedestrian muse / Contend not with you on the winged steed” (57-58). He does not try to inhabit the same sort of distant and, as Byron depicts it, restrictive role of the mythic Romantic genius. Instead, Byron creates his own brand of poetic genius that is in direct opposition to the previous ideals of poetic genius in poetically and socially destabilizing ways.

Turning back to the criticisms of Keats and Hazlitt against Byron’s self-reflective verse, it is important to understand that their criticisms reveal an emerging nineteenth-century view of “both the human and the social body,” and anxieties produced by the new scientific world view. In his book titled, *The Perversity of Poetry* (2006), Dino Franco Felluga explores the double-featured idea of romantic genius. Felluga explains, through comparison of Byron and Scott, how

by the end of the eighteenth century the language of medical sciences had come to be applied to poets and their poems categorizing them as either spreaders of social disease or the cure. Byron represents the corrupting diseased genius who spreads his corruption by disseminating his writings while the consumption of Scott's writing functions as a salve against social disease through his moralizing poetics and novels. Felluga details that during the eighteenth century "A new way of thinking about both the human and social body came to the fore" (13). This new mode of thought was one "that then facilitated the figuration of Britain as an analyzable and diagnosable whole." According to Felluga:

> To be civilized was a mark of both distinction and threatened extinction, a figuration that grew out of not only the ancient tradition of the melancholic great man but also a new rhetoric of nerves that was applied equally to the man of letters and to the woman of sensibility in the period. It is out of this conflation of traditions and tropes that the new figure of the man of genius emerged.

While Felluga convincingly argues his point about the pathologization of genius without fully expanding on the specifics of how non-normative gender performance relates to the rhetoric of nerves, the connection he makes here to "the woman of sensibility" and "the man of genius" is worth dwelling upon.

Expanding on Felluga's claim that "Although at first lauded, genius was by the end of the eighteenth century a rather fraught category, conferring both authority and infirmity," I intend to demonstrate that another culturally significant factor in the popularity and eventual backlash against Byron's poetry comes particularly from the public curiosity and anxieties produced by Byron's androgynous gender performativity and androgynous gender performances in his poetry. Unlike the androgyny of Geraldine's ambiguous sex or gender that we see in *Christabel,* which

appears distinctively separate from Coleridge's gender normative masculine public persona, Byron's androgynous poetic performances reflect and react to his own androgynous public persona. Referencing Byron's personal connection to both his male and female characters Hazlitt asserts:

> Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart; the one is a capricious tyrant, the other a yielding slave; he gives us the misanthrope and the voluptuary by turns; and with these two characters, burning or melting in their own fires, he makes out everlasting centos of himself. (*Spirit of the Ag*e 123)

With this assessment of Byron's characters, Hazlitt speaks to how Byron's poetry reflects his own persona. With the word *centos* Hazlitt illuminates, how Byron's poetry can be read as fragments of the poet's self. Hazlitt describes Byron's poetry as a collection of work that more than alludes to the author, it is composed of self-referential connections that are divided between the characters of both sexes, and androgynously synthesize within Byron's own poetic persona.

Importantly, Hazlitt hints at the androgyny of Byron's poetic personae, not his own public persona. To Hazlitt, Byron appears on the exterior as man as he "makes man after his own image," but Byron makes "woman after his own heart." Thus, Hazlitt insinuates that Byron's female personae in his poems demonstrate some aspect of Byron's own internal effeminacy of character. Taking this a bit further, the idea that Byron "makes man after his own image," speaks to the superficiality of Byron's masculinity. Hazlitt symbolically outs Byron by suggesting that Byron's masculinity is a facade. By representing Byron's exterior masculinity as an artifice covering his interior femininity, Hazlitt characterizes Byron's male body as a form of cross-dressing that disguises his psychic femininity. However, it also remains that, in the end, Byron's masculine persona dominates his internally feminine qualities. This critique of Byron by Hazlitt

demonstrates how Byron's androgynous persona, which in this case reads as effeminate-male, was seen to infect poetry in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, it suggests how we might start to understand the ways that Byron challenges heteronormative culture not just as an androgynous mind, but as an androgynous body as well. I will return to this point shortly, but first I have some further exhibits that I believe are necessary to more wholly illustrating Byron's androgynous gender performativity and its significance to his poetry.

Offering a comparative viewpoint of Byron's androgyny, Romanticist Susan Wolfson claims in her book, *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* (2006) that, "dandy Byron tweaked bad-boyism with feminine flair" (137-38). Wolfson explains how interest in Byron is not just associated with his "bad-boyism" but rather Wolfson points out that his "bad-boyism" is "tweaked" by his "feminine flair" that she reveals sparks public interest and curiosity in the man and his poems. Femininity marks Byron as different from other playboys, rule breakers, and/or libertines of the day. Instead of filling these common masculine roles in the typical manner, Byron modifies the character traits associated with the "bad-boy" by performing a simultaneously feminine and masculine public persona—an androgynous dandy persona. Evidencing Byron's more physically feminine qualities, Wolfson explains that, "Meeting him [Byron] in 1811, Isaac D'Isreali was shocked by a 'fantastic and effeminate thing,' 'all rings and curls and lace'; 'he looked more like a girl.'"

Differing from Hazlitt's assessment of the internal qualities that mark Byron as androgynous, D'Israeli provides a complimentary external picture of Byron's androgynous public performance in terms of how he dressed and carried himself with some typically feminine characteristics. D'Isreali's language suggests that Byron's effeminacy makes Byron a spectacle, but not one that is a freak or *disgusting* medical monstrosity, like Coleridge's androgynous

character Geraldine. Remember how Hazlitt famously declares that, "There is something *disgusting* at the bottom of Coleridge's subject [emphasis mine]" (*Examiner* 207). However, as D'Isreali poses androgyny here, Byron is described as a "*fantastic* and effeminate thing" [emphasis mine]. The word *fantastic* speaks to something that is not repulsive, even though it is shocking or out of the ordinary. *Fantastic* expresses the appealing, whimsical, and visionary qualities of Byron's androgyny. It is precisely the *fantastic* nature of Byron's androgynous gender performativity that empowers him mutually as a celebrity and poet. Significantly both Hazlitt's and D'Isreali's remarks illustrate two ways of reading Byron's androgyny. Hazlitt notes how Bryon's characters reflect his psychological androgyny (his dual-sexed internal nature) and D'Isreali speaks to the outward qualities of Byron's androgynous gender performativity as an effeminate-looking man (as a dandy). In both cases gender is posed in heteronormative, essentialist, and binary structures in which Byron's gender and the gender of his characters sometimes do not so easily fit.

Weighing in on Hazlitt's statement that "Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart; the one a capricious tyrant, the other a yielding slave […]" in her book *Romantic Androgyny* (1990), Diane Hoeveler cites Hazlitt's remark as she explains that "at the same time Byron depicted womanly women and manly men, he also explored the notion of feminizing his male characters and masculinizing his female characters" (161). Byron does not just cross gender lines in his poetic performances. Rather, he blurs the lines of traditionally dichotomous genders by mingling typically masculine and feminine attributes in both his male and female characters, which mutually reflect on Byron's own androgynous persona. Along with Byron's own androgyny, the title character of *Don Juan* serves as an example of the motif of androgyny or as Hoeveler poses it—a feminized man. Relating to Byron's own sexuality,

Hoeveler says that, "From an ad hominem perspective—the only kind most people are interested in anymore—Byron's bisexuality makes him the major English poet most germane to the motif of the androgyne" (86). Here Hoeveler conflates the meanings of the term bisexuality, and undermines the personal and social significance of the androgynous public performativity that produces Byron's non-normative sexual persona as the poet but also of his characters performances of androgynous personae. By blending current understanding bisexual as attracted to both sexes with the nineteenth-century understanding of bisexual as an expression of characteristics of both genders and/or sexes, Hoeveler produces a misleading argument that it is only Byron's sexual preferences and interest in Greek myths that make him "most germane to the motif of the androgyne."

By simply relating the motif of the mythical dual-sexed ideal of the androgyne to Byron's bisexuality, Hoeveler binds Byron's androgyny strictly to Platonic roots. While it is true that Byron's interest in ancient Greece and his discourses with Shelley on the topic of Platonic love do suggest a tie to these roots, a closer examination of the how the subject of the Platonic androgyne relates to Byron's androgyny reveals that the ancient Greek allegory about the nature of love is only one aspect of Byron's bisexual gender performativity. The Platonic androgyne represents the power of heteronormative erotic connection. Any time that we see a possible Platonic heteronormative ideal of the joining of opposite sexes in *Don Juan*, it does not prove to be the sort of soul-mate connection, forever bound as one, connection symbolized by the Platonic androgyne. The Platonic ideal of the androgyne involves the original combination and eventual separation of the two essentially distinct sexes. The Platonic androgyne is dual-sexed because it joins the male and female bodies, which when separated in this allegory seek erotic reunion through heterosexual intercourse. However, in *Don Juan* the romantic connections and

disconnections that occur demonstrate a passionate and exciting, but ultimately fleeting and consumable form of erotic connection. The androgynous ideal is not produced by a combination of the sexes, but rather Byronic androgyny is performative and tied to what we could now label Bryon's erotic bisexuality—to his attraction to both sexes. Nevertheless, even though Hoeveler conflates these terms, Hoeveler makes an important connection here to Byron's sexuality and his publicly fascinating androgyny. I take this aspect of Hoeveler's argument further by suggesting that public and critical interest (sometimes in the form of disgust and/or disapproval) in Byron's androgynous public persona empowered the motif of a particularly Byronic form of the androgyne, which produces rebellion against heteronormative views of sexual identity.

Significantly to this as a discussion of androgyny, Wolfson provides several examples of contradictory accounts of Byron's effeminacy, which are also tied to his label as a dandy. She quotes Byron himself illustrating his own affiliation with dandyism when he said, "I liked the Dandies […] I had a tinge of Dandyism in my minority—& probably retained enough of it—to conciliate the great ones—at four & twenty.———I had gamed—& drank—& taken my degree in most dissipations'(*BLJ 9*: 22)" (137). Byron seemed quite happy to associate himself with the scandal of adopting a then modern male style that was associated with effeminate gender and artifice. Furthermore, this played into Byron's paradoxical posturing as a liberal and an aristocrat. Dandies, after all, were predominantly upper-class men who shook up the traditions of gentlemanly decorum and traditionally proper masculine style. The dandy is not quite a drag performance, but rather walks the androgynous line of normative masculine gender performance despite the effeminate affectations. Leigh Hunt emphasizes the effeminacy of Byron's dandyism when he, referencing Byron's play *Sardanapalus* "cattily etched the Sardanapalian gender-effects" (138). Wolfson provides the following statement reflecting Hunt's view of Byron's

effeminacy:

> He had a delicate white hand, of which he was proud; and he attracted attention it by rings. [. . .] He often appeared holding a handkerchief, upon which his jewelled fingers lay embedded, as in a picture. He [. . .] had the remnant of his hair oiled and trimmed with all the anxiety of Sardanapalus. (Wolfson 138)[17]

Here Hunt uses Byron's own effeminate character, Sardanapalus, to attack Byron's similarly effeminate qualities.[18] Wolfson provides more examples, Scrope Davies description of witnessing Byron sleeping one night looking like "Sleeping Beauty," as well as Carlye's association of Byron's dandyism with aristocratic forms of effeminacy. Yet, Wolfson also shows contradictory descriptions of Byron's gender performativity like his friend Mary Shelley's defense of Byron's manners associated with the aristocracy when she says that, "'Although, essentially spoiled he was not pampered in luxury. [. . .] he possessed none of those habits of effeminacy' evident in 'our young self-indulged aristocracy'" (Wolfson 138). In fact, demonstrating the complex critical relationship between Hazlitt and Byron, even Hazlitt comes to Byron's defense of his masculinity when he argues "Lord Byron is a pampered and aristocratic writer, but he is not effeminate, or we should not have his works with only the printer's name to them!"("On Effeminancy of Character" 254). Hazlitt points out a common truth in the publishing world of the nineteenth-century, which is that most writers who were not what we could now call "cis gender" men were published anonymously. In many ways, it is impossible to separate Byron's androgynous gender performativity from his aristocratic ties because the upper-classes, it is clear even from the few statements above, are already associated

[17] Full text of original "Portrait of Lord Byron" by Leigh Hunt can be found in *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, vol. 11, 1828, pp 11-12.
[18] *Sardanapalus* tragically depicts the corruption and failings of its protagonist who Byron describes as possessing an "effeminate heart," King of Assyria, Sardanapalus. Act I, Scene I, 5.

with effeminate-masculinity.

A particularly potent account of Byron's androgynously both feminine and masculine personality comes from Byron's contemporary, friend, and historian, George Finlay. In Finaly's, *A History of Greece* (1877), he explains Byron's dual-natured character, highlighting Byron's ambiguous and androgynous gender performativity, when he writes:

> His [Byron's] character and his conduct presented unceasing contradictions; it seemed as if two different souls occupied his body alternately. One was feminine and full of sympathy; the other masculine, and characterized by clear judgment. When one soul arrived, the other departed. In company, his sympathetic soul was his tyrant alone, or with a single person, his masculine prudence displayed itself. No man could then arrange facts, investigate their causes, or examine their consequences with more logical accuracy, or more practical spirit. Yet, in his most sagacious moment the entrance of a third person would derange the order of his idea; judgment fled, and sympathy (generally laughing) took its place. Hence he appeared in his conduct extremely capricious, while in his opinions he had great firmness. Often, however, he displayed a feminine turn for deception in trifles, while at the same time he possessed a feminine candor of soul and natural love of truth which made him often despise himself as much as he despised others for what he called brazen hypocrisy. (325)

Here we see not only some of the qualities of character associated with masculinity and femininity of character during the period, but we also see the public and personal effects of Byron's *gender trouble.*

These tensions: the disagreements about how to interpret Byron's gender, and how to read performances of gender in his poems, how to make sense of the ties between Byron's

gender performativity and his affiliation with the aristocratic class, and both the ways that Byron did have some control but also had a lack of control over how his gender performances would be read by his audiences, all fittingly illustrate an important characteristic of Butler's idea of gender performativity. Byron's gender performativity and the gender performances of *Don Juan* illustrate Butler's claim that "The body has its invariable public dimension, constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine" (*Gender Trouble* 21). Certainly, Byron understood the full extent of the violence hetero-normative gender restrictions, since it was the heightened restrictions on sexuality that ultimately lead him into self-exile from England in 1816. Louis Crompton illuminates the life and death stakes and the heightened need for maintaining heteronormative sexuality and gender during the nineteenth century when he explains why he writes his book titled, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th Century England* (1985):

> What first drew me to the early nineteenth century was not, in fact, Byron, but the discovery of an unprecedented number of executions of homosexuals in England in the statistical reports of his day. In the centuries between the Inquisition and Hitler this suggested a persecution of perhaps unparalleled durations and intensity and raised the question of social origins. Why should England, of all countries, with its reputation as a pioneer of civic freedom, have experienced so ugly an episode? (1)

While my dissertation does not necessarily answer the question of why England should "have experienced so ugly an episode?", I do add to the project of sketching "a history of attitudes toward homosexuality in Western civilization." Instead of questioning why nineteenth-century England "experienced so ugly an episode," which is indeed one important question in the quest for social justice and change, I ask how to avoid and do away with similar attitudes that remain

in our culture? And, I ask how literature can help us to do so by exposing the *gender troubles* as well as providing occasions for *undoing gender*.

As MacCarthy states, "Byron's innate sexual orientation towards boys explains many of the lingering puzzles of his history. His secretly acknowledged history of sodomy, a crime then punishable by execution, provides the only convincing reason for his exile in 1816, […]" (xiii). The freedom from hetero-normative restrictions, the autonomous and pleasurable *undoing gender* in which Byron engaged demonstrates a significantly paradoxical element of gender performativity, which is that, "The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence" (*Gender Trouble* 21). Byron's expression of sexual agency in his homeland could result in his death. Thus, Byron makes the choice to leave his homeland and its strict sexual laws for parts of Europe that allowed him more sexual freedom. While Byron is permitted more freedom in some ways, his choice shows how "The body can be the agency and instrument of all these [mortality, vulnerability, exposure to the gaze, touch, and violence of others], as well, or the site where 'doing' and 'being done to' become equivocal" (*Gender Trouble* 21). What, in contemporary terms, the effects of Byron's gender performativity reveals is that, "Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever our own."

Byron may have performed the part of a self-ruling, free, able to do as he pleases aristocrat. However, when it comes to Byron's true sense of autonomy, it becomes clear that he is posturing, and that this posturing works to build his status as a celebrity. Ian Denis writes in *Lord Byron and the History of Desire* (2008), "Byron's early fame and power clearly owed much to his lofty posture or pose of autonomy, of independence, or proud defiance" (15). Denis continues his argument that, "All three terms are roughly synonymous with an indifference to the

desires of others." However, this indifference is importantly also only posturing, it is a fantasy, a fiction that Byron performs as part of his public persona and the development of his brand of literary celebrity. Standing out among "the 'herd' as his Manfred rather insultingly puts it," Byron publicly and dangerously performs non-heteronormative gender. However, as is clear from the disagreeing views of about his effeminacy of character and physicality, and by his reactions against and/or in response to some particularly significant claims about how his gender, sex, and sexuality in the public sphere, that Byron was aware that the interpretation of his gender, sex, and sexuality is not wholly something he has control over. He is engaged in the "struggle for rights over [his] own [body]," which is "not quite ever [his] own" (*Gender Trouble* 21). It seems clear from his actions in the case of his self-exile after accusations of incest with his half-sister, but even more damning and violently punishable by law, of accusations of sodomy. These events, as well as other noteworthy moments of Byron's ambiguous and/or androgynous gender performativity show that he was quite unable to "deny the fact that [his] body relates [him]—against [his] will and from the start to others."

Perhaps, it should not come as a surprise that Byron's two most androgynous literary gender performances, found in the play *Sardanapalus* and *Don Juan,* were composed during Byron's life abroad. While Byron's literary reputation still produced the need for some writing between the lines, using coded speech, and even performing moments of heightened masculinity to maintain masculine authority, Byron was allowed and took more freedom of expression in this context while living in the more sexually free Italy and Greece. By finding the freedom to blur the lines of gender, particularly when doing so with a sense of parody as a subversive performance, Byron's androgynous gender performances in *Don Juan* shed light on the fact that the notion of an original gender identity is based on a fantasy that is perpetuated through

heteronormative language and cultural practices. The cross-dressing performances in *Don Juan* parody gender in a way that, as Butler claims regarding contemporary drag performances, expose the performativity of gender. Although, Byron and his contemporaries would not use these contemporary terms to describe this fantasy and institutional policing of gender, sex, and sexuality in heteronormative culture, *Don Juan* demonstrates this awareness to all his readers across history.

Non-heteronormative characters are brought to life in the imaginations of readers of *Don Juan*, and not just through the characters of Don Juan and the narrator. The scene in the second Canto in which Don Juan is found washed ashore after the shipwreck by Haidée illustrates one of the many role-reversals of normative gender by female characters that appears throughout the poem. Placing Don Juan in the position usually occupied by a damsel in distress, Haidée comes to his aid like a prince in a fairytale and wakes him with her kiss, which "Seemed almost prying into his [mouth] for breath" (898). There are some other obvious examples of women in the poem stepping outside their normative roles that are worth noting as well, such as the historically based character of Catherine the Great who, of course, represents the non-normative role of a woman emperor. Also, there is the cross-dressing of the duchess of Fitz-Fulke that punctuates the sixteenth Canto. However, I do not mean to imply that this rebellion from the dichotomous view of sexual identity, particularly gender, should be read as empowering to women or as a full-force cultural rebellion against gender norms. As Susan Wolfson explains about the social politics of *Don Juan in* her article "Their She Condition": Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*" (1987), "evidence of Byron's—and many others'—sexism and patriarchal bias is clear and compelling" (585). Nevertheless, Wolfson also claims that there are moments in the poem *Don Juan* that advocate for the liberal feminist cause despite the sexism and patriarchal biases that are

also part of the poem. This speaks to the complexities of power and the politics of sexual identities that do not always so easily feed into feminist narratives of social progress.

Androgyny has been argued as a failed ideal of first and second wave feminists. However, while there are problems with an ideal that promotes women having to perform gender in a more masculine manner (like men in heteronormative culture) to find a voice and social empowerment, I think that this viewpoint forgets non-essential nature of gender with respect to sex. Also, it disregards the pragmatic practice some early feminists did engage by performing empowerment through adopting traditionally masculine traits thus becoming androgynous as a means of social and political enfranchisement. Given the fact that what has been considered traditionally masculine is often presented as the strongest and most powerful human traits, it does seem appropriate that many early feminists attempted to achieve rights towards women's suffrage through androgynous gender performance. This historical perspective of androgyny is significant to understanding the revolutionary effects of androgyny in a nineteenth-century context. Furthermore, what androgynous performances draw to the surface and reveal to both nineteenth-century and contemporary readers is that there is not necessarily an essentially feminine or masculine nature associated with one sex or the other. Rather, androgyny demonstrates that both femininity and masculinity are wrapped up in the complexities of gender performativity. Androgyny shows us that there is no such thing as a wholly masculine or feminine identity, but rather that gender performativity occurs across a wide spectrum of masculine and feminine physical characteristics, clothing choices, behaviors, language, and other cultural practices.

Wolfson explains that "Byron's politics are neither persistent nor consistent. Even granting the notoriously adept ironies of *Don Juan*, its politics of sexual difference prove

remarkably complex and unstable" (585). Directly referencing the cross-dressing in *Don Juan* Wolfson argues that:

> The cross-dressings of *Don Juan* are thus significant not so much for showing the poem's male hero appropriating and internalizing female otherness (indeed, his very name implies a parody of that masculine tradition), as for provoking the poem's readers to attend to what happens—politically, socially and psychologically—when women and men are allowed, or forced, to adopt the external properties and prerogatives of the other.

Wolfson is careful to explain that "Byron's poem does not, finally, escape the roles fashioned and maintained by his culture, but it does explore the problems of living with and within those roles" (611-12). Ultimately, with the cross-dressings in *Don Juan* "Byron foregrounds the artifice that sustains much of what we determine to be 'masculine' and 'feminine'." Through the androgynous personae in *Don Juan,* readers engage with a poem that troubles and "plays against the codes and laws of gender."

Claiming that Wolfson's article, while interesting, does not make significant contributions to discussions about androgyny, Warren Stevenson cites that "Most of the poem's cross-dressing takes place in the harem scenes of cantos 5 and 6" (99). Stevenson interprets these scenes claiming that they "are basically meant to be good fun." Although, Stevenson provides no explanation for how we know these scenes "are basically meant to be good fun." The assumption that appears central to this interpretation is that the parody is pantomime only meant to elicit a laugh from the reader. However, Stevenson does give credit to "[t]he only such incident [of cross-dressing] that [to him] seems to have any profound significance," which he finds in Canto XVI (99-100). He explains that Fitz-Fulke's masculine disguise as the Black Friar combined with her predatory role seducing Don Juan," most clearly depicts the motif of the androgynous

sublime. This is indeed a powerful scene of both externally performed androgyny in the shape of costume and the what might be called the performative androgynous quality of female of sexual dominance. Stevenson explains that, "in this instance her [Fitz-Fulke's] strategic sensuality disguises itself as not merely masculinity, but also spirituality." Clearly, Stevenson's interpretation of what incidents of cross-dressing are significant and what one's are not relate directly to what fit his discussion of the subject of the "androgynous sublime," meaning the ways that androgyny serves as a motif that both shows the beauty and terror of nature (in this case humans being very much a part of nature), while also inducing terror and desire to better understand the vastness of the unknown, unspeakable, and unconfinable (ultimately spiritual) experience(s) beyond binary logic.

While, I do take issue with Stevenson's assessment of parody, which I will come back to briefly. It is important to note how Stevenson's interpretation exposes one of the ways that discussions of androgyny by contemporary literary critics often avoid the obvious connection between androgyny and homosexuality, instead opting for asexual or heteronormative readings of the cross-dressing scenes. For example, Stevenson claims that "The concept of woman as man's spiritual preceptor, particularly in times of crisis, runs throughout Byron's poetry," citing Byron's "Stanzas to Augusta." The lines Stevenson provides:

> In the desert a fountain is springing,
>
> In the wide waste there is still a tree,
>
> And a bird in the solitude singing,
>
> Which speaks to my spirit of *thee*. (87)

Stevenson asserts that these stanzas show the male poet's ability to access and insert into his poetry what he poses as his unique gift to experience and translate into his poetry feminine

spiritual insight and emotional release. This is an essentially heteronormative reading of the motif of androgyny where the empowering combination of masculinity and femininity occur through the connection between male and female individuals.

The only type of androgynous performance that Stevenson finds significant in *Don Juan* appears in the scene where Juan and Fitz-Fulke embrace in a way that alludes to Plato's "Myth of Aristophanes." The only significant performance of androgyny is one that, although inclusive of homosexual bonds, ultimately promotes heteronormative connection as is the case in Plato's story. In contrast to Stevenson's argument, which subverts the connection between Byron's gender performativity and the androgynous performances of his characters, Wolfson argument provides a more biographically and historically nuanced reading of the cross-dressing scenes in *Don Juan*, Wolfson explains that, "The cross-dressings of *Don Juan* also and undeniably, reflect a more private, and more privately coded, issue: Byron's homoeroticism" (585). Stevenson avoids seriously considering the connections between Byron's non-heteronormative gender and sexuality and concludes his discussion claiming that Byron's "exploration of the mode and motif of the androgynous sublime, interrupted as it was by his untimely death, ends with a moral wrapped inside an enigma" (100). This is actually where Stevenson's interpretation aligns with Wolfson's more general point that "Byron's sexual politics are neither persistent nor consistent," and with my claim that it is the enigma, the inconsistencies, and particularly to this project of *gender trouble* that is worth drawing out, not necessarily to provide an answer to questions about who fits the terms masculine, feminine, and/or androgyne, but rather to be able to learn to find comfort in the undefinable and unconfinable moments of androgynous performance (585).

Wolfson explains, the poem's complexity and instability results in "sexual disorientation." By exposing the "sexual disorientation" produced by the poem, Wolfson

convincingly argues that traditionally heteronormative signs of difference "break down, invert, and radically call into question the categories designed to discriminate 'masculine' from 'feminine'" in the poem. It is in the incidences of cross-dressing that take place in the poem where Wolfson argues that the "sense of dislocation" is provoked "with particular agitation." She continues to explain that," Such agitation, not surprisingly, can generate a conservative counterreaction—a series of defensive maneuvers to reinscribe sexual orthodoxy." Thus, Wolfson explains that:

> The fictions of *Don Juan* serve Byron in part as an outlet for homoerotic material in disguise, but its cross-dressings accomplish something else as well, for they put his imagination in touch with heterosexual politics by animating a set of social signifiers that challenge conventional expectations and customary boundaries of demarcation. Some of these transfers and transgressions emerge as farce, but not exclusively, for Byron implicates them in deep (if not fully sustained) counterplots that perplex the terms 'male' and 'female'—both politically and psychologically construed—and thereby unsettle, even dismantle, the social structures to which gender has been assimilated. (592)

Wolfson says, "As the issue of mobility suggests, *Don Juan* at times complicates the language of gender in ways that focus on the definition of self in gendered society, and may even expose the political investments of those definitions" (591).

By drawing out the tensions between traditional gender categorization, androgynous performances expose political and social investments in keeping people easily categorized in terms of sex and gender, and we see that the desire to keep people sorted between masculine/male and feminine/female stems from two sources of anxiety notably reflected in the poem *Don Juan*. We see the anxieties surrounding men inhabiting women's spaces such as fear

that deceiving women in this way might result in perversity, voyeurism, or rape, as is suggested might have occurred with Dudu, Don Juan's unsuspecting bedmate, in the Harem scenes. But also, the fear of the deception of women who form intimate connections with men who do not hold authority over their bodies according to patriarchal order. That is, the scenes that expose the fear of the father's loss of control over his property in the marriage market and/or the fear of cuckoldry. We see such anxieties drawn to the surface as we witness the interactions and repercussions of Don Juan's connections to Donna Julia, Haidée, Gulbeyaz, and even Lady Adeline.

These heteronormative anxieties produce some of the drama and humor in the poem, such as occurs when Don Juan gets an erection when sleeping disguised as a harem girl next to one of Gulbeyaz's harem, Dudu. It is certainly meant to be dirty and shocking joke when we read Dudu's story of dreaming that she was reaching for an apple and stung by a bee when sleeping with the disguised Don Juan. While this sort of humor derives from a social fear of heterosexual men inhabiting women's spaces when dressed as women, there is nevertheless, also an overarching engagement with themes and anxieties surrounding homosexuality and other forms of ambiguous sexuality that is central to the political effects of the parody of gender norms that occurs in this poem. In her essay on the topic of gender performativity and gender parody, "From Interiority to Gender Performatives" (1999), Judith Butler explains that, "The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied with the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities" (363). In many ways this aligns with Wolfson's argument about the sexual disorientation produced by the cross-dressings of Don Juan, "that perplex the terms 'male' and 'female'—both politically and psychologically construed—and thereby unsettle, even dismantle, the social structures to which gender has been assimilated" (592). However, both

Butler and Wolfson note how feminists have questioned the effectiveness of "such parodic identities" with respect to achieving the goal of gender equality. According to Butler feminists have come to understand the cultural practices of cross-dressing and drag "to be either degrading to women […] or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping within the practice of heterosexuality" (363). While it is true that there are some ways that these cultural practices rely on essentialist and heteronormative concepts of gender identity, I agree with Butler's evaluation of such gender parodies in how they complicate ideas of gender essentialism and can help us to better understand that "the inner truth of gender is a fabrication."

Furthermore, Butler reveals that even though parodies of gender in the form of cross-dressing and drag "are clearly a part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization." To put it succinctly these imitations "effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself" (364). When considering this aspect to the cross-dressing scenes in *Don Juan*, a need to take the scenes themselves seriously because they reveal this myth of originality and in doing so rebel against heteronormative norms for identity and perhaps even the concept of identity itself. When the performer, in this example Don Juan's, sexual anatomy does not match their gender according to normative practices more than a simple distinction between the performer's anatomy and gender takes place. This simplification of drag and cross-dressing performances causes Stevenson to underestimate the cultural impact and revolutionary possibilities in the harem scenes of Cantos V and VI, reducing their effect to the simple comic effect of parody.

Rather, a more nuanced and culturally relatable reading occurs if we follow Butler's reasoning when she explains the event of a drag performance in which "we are in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and

gender performance" (364). This is what we witness when we see Don Juan cross-dressing in the harem scenes. Significantly, the tensions between these "contingent dimensions of significant corporeality" are particularly made notable by the dramatic irony of the reader knowing Don Juan's anatomical sex and his sometime more and sometimes less normative gender performances throughout the poem. The cross-dressing scenes do not just parody the ability to be fooled by costume, language, gesture, and other aspects of gender performance, but also parodies the audience's own expectations for normative performance. Performances of non-normative gender "suggest a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance."

Butler's assessment of the levels of parody possible in drag performance compliments Wolfson's explanation that:

> The cross-dressings of *Don Juan* are thus significant not so much for showing the poem's male hero appropriating and internalizing female otherness (indeed, his very name implies a parody of that masculine tradition), as for provoking the poem's readers to attend to what happens—politically, socially and psychologically—when women and men are allowed, or forced, to adopt the external properties and prerogatives of the other. (611-12).

Although, as with most drag performance, "Byron's poem does not, finally, escape the roles fashioned and maintained by his culture," Wolfson's claim that "it does explore the problems of living with and within those roles." According to Butler, parody "by itself is not subversive" (363). Yes, as she asserts, "there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony." Although, it is possible to

read the cross-dressing scenes in *Don Juan* as "repetitions [that have] become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony." I claim that this has more to do with critical bowdlerization of the text than it does with its possibilities to trouble and undo normative concepts of gender.

Wolfson claims that *Don Juan* produces "heightened forms of transvestite drama and verbal cross-dressing," and that by doing so, "Byron foregrounds the artifice that sustains much of what we determine to be 'masculine' and 'feminine'" (611-12). She explores how this engages readers in "elaborate plays against the codes and laws of gender." Following Wolfson's lead, I ask that my students read the poem with a nuanced view of troubling gender, meaning that we look for both the revolutionary and confining effects of non-heteronormative performances in the poem. As readers, we can choose to read the cross-dressing scenes on a surface level as simple parodic mockery for the sake of fun or a laugh. However, when I teach this poem I find it not only much more illuminating for students' understanding of nineteenth-century sexual politics, but also an effective means of entering important contemporary discussions about sex gender, and sexuality to examine how the gender performances in the poem, combined with an understanding of Byron's androgynous gender performativity, demonstrate the paradoxically freeing and binding, individual and communal, and personal and political nature of gender performance and performativity. By looking for places in the poem where gender is troubled and/or undone, and by locating most of these places in humorously parodic moments, readers are invited to let our guard down and to laugh at the way we are all confined and engage in confining ideals of heteronormative sex, gender, and sexuality. As George Carlin writes in his autobiography *Last Words* (2009)*:*

No one is ever more herself or himself than when they really laugh. Their defenses are

> down [...] They are completely open, completely themselves when that message hits the brain and the laugh begins. That's when new ideas can be implanted. If a new idea slips in at that moment, it has a chance to grow. (250)

When I start class discussion about the harem scene in *Don Juan*, I ask students: "What is funny about this scene? And, why is it funny?" Students are generally quick to respond that the vulgar discovery of Don Juan's sex by an erection is shocking and humorous. It is precisely because it is scandalous that the harem scene is funny to students. Thus, I am able to host a discussion about why the situation is so shocking and humorous.

There are students who do start off laughing at the situation with respect to thinking it is funny that the cross-dressing as disguise works. However, there are always students who bring up the fact that sometimes it is difficult to assess someone's biological sex based on their outward appearance. Thus, students open the discussion to the topic of understanding how gender is parodied in a mocking manner, but also how gender parodies reveal performativity of gender—how it reveals that there is no original gender. The humor that the cross-dressing scenes produce in *Don Juan* allows for students to engage with the ideas of gender performance and performativity in a way that brings their defenses down. As occurs when we read the events that lead to the discovery of Don Juan's biological sex in the harem scene, readers are invited to realize that the parody of cross-dressing is not a parody of one sex or the other or even wholly a reversal of sex. Instead of switching gender roles by cross-dressing, Don Juan actually parodies the binary conception of gender altogether by becoming both at once. This performance of gender outside the binary is humorous. And, it is the laughter that distracts students from focusing on defending essentialist views of gender identity. The humor in the harem scene, as well as all the other parodic scenes of cross-dressing and cross-gender performances within the

poem, produce a classroom environment in which students openly engage with the ideas of gender trouble and undoing gender, both as individuals and importantly as a community.

## Chapter Three: Hermaphrodites on Display: Ekphrasis as an Approach to Producing 'some brief space' of Androgynous Exhibition in Swinburne's "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta"

In this chapter I start with the claim established by the previous chapters that poetic discourse became a significant means of challenging the heteronormative and binary view of sexual identity established by medical and legal authorities of the nineteenth century. As medical and legal discourse became increasingly dominant by the mid-nineteenth century, there appeared some notably destabilizing examples of poetry that challenged the medical and legal rhetoric of the time. Two particularly striking examples of poetic rebellion against medical and legal classifications of sex, gender, and sexuality, appear in Charles Algernon Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866) in the pendant poems "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta."

By representing the erotic beauty of the statue *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, and by exploring the poetic voice's erotic desire for the *hermaphrodite* character, Fragoletta, Swinburne's poems produce spaces for admiration and simultaneous erotic objectification of the two title characters. Swinburne's poems produce spaces of sexual liminality for nineteenth-century and contemporary readers. What I mean by sexual liminality in this instance is that these two Swinburne poems create transient spaces in which performativity and performance, bodies and figures, and masculinity/maleness, femininity/femaleness, and the synthesis of these binary categories of sexuality are explored, constructed, and destructed. Furthermore, the space of sexual liminality is not confined to one poem or subject, but rather accentuated through combined reading of both poems, as well as through familiarity with the literary and artistic subjects of Hermaphroditus and Fragoletta

Both poems are enriched by knowledge of the subjects beyond the confines of the poems. Comprehension of "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta" finds deeper understanding through knowledge of literary and artistic history that calls for the reader to reach for meaning beyond the confines of each of these poems. Familiarity with both subjects' histories infuse each of these poems with artistic culture(s) of the past and the present. Notably to the mode of depicting androgyny and/or sexual ambiguity in "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta," both poems pose sexual liminality as a threshold moment in which literary and visual art are compared as modes for depicting and eroticizing non-heteronormative bodies, experiences, and characters. In these poems, Swinburne's use of the poetic technique of ekphrasis serves to expose the hypocrisy of Victorian bowdlerizing of Classical and foreign art and literature. Accounting for the fact that the statue of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* and the character Fragoletta depict non-normative sexual identities in these poems, I mean to look at how the poems function to parody the parameters, both then and now, of how we define sexual identity particularly as something someone can *be*— as something we *are*— as opposed to something we *become.*

With respect to "Hermaphroditus" the liminal moment produced by Swinburne's poem crosses gender and genre lines drawing the reader's attention to the sexual performance of the statue of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus.* The sexual performativity of the poetic voice parallels and troubles the performance of the statue, drawing out the tensions between what we now term sexual performance and performativity.[19] Furthermore, by parodying the Victorian bowdlerization of the statue's association with a myth taken from Ovid's *Metamorphose*s, which certainly destabilizes ideals of binary sexual identities, the poem becomes a space for

[19] Employing Judith Butler's contemporary ideas of *troubling* and *undoing gender*, serves to frame how Swinburne's poems *trouble* conventional boundaries of medical and legal classification of sex, gender, and sexuality in the Victorian era.

questioning the confining structures of dichotomous understanding of sexual identities. The poem's sculpted subject depicts a non-heteronormative human body, sculpted in ancient marble that indicates Classical recognition of non-heteronormative human forms. Thus, the statue itself, like Coleridge's *freak* Geraldine, visually challenges the medical and legal rhetoric of the day that uphold binary models of sex.

As the poetic voice of "Hermaphroditus" admires the statue, the voice expresses a non-heteronormative erotic desire that is ignited by the figure of the statue. And, as readers are walked through the viewing of the statue, we become part of a parody of sexual normativity. The poem exposes the real-world problem of sexual normativity both as appearing inaccurate to varieties of human forms and erotic experiences, but also as normativity serves to therefore objectify and make freaks out of non-normative subjects. Like Coleridge's androgynous figure Geraldine, Swinburne renders *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* as simultaneously an image of the divine androgyne and a monstrous hermaphrodite. Swinburne parodies the tensions between the two different cultural understandings of androgyny demonstrating that whether we read the figure as divine androgyne or monstrous hermaphrodite, the result is nevertheless a separation from normative society. *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, like Geraldine, is a *freak* to be put on display.

By closely reading these two poems with attention to the tensions between ideas of sexual identity, as aligns with performance, and sexual fluidity, as performative acts creating ever-changing sexual identities, I intend to demonstrate how we can make Swinburne's poems into spaces for current imagining and reimagining of the gender barriers. This is an important discussion to be having now, and worth engaging historically with the nineteenth century, because the nineteenth-century heteronormative and binary models of sexual identity remain prevalent in contemporary culture. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler asks the "question of what

it might mean to undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" (1). Butler does provide an answer, in a way, by claiming that one way one steps outside typical gender norms is by parodying the matrix of heteronormative gender classification. And, as I intend to demonstrate through my close-reading of Swinburne's poems, the effects of ekphrasis and chiasmus produce a parody of not only Victorian reverence for Classical art, but occasions a parody of art itself as less effective than literature at portraying the true nature and diverse experiences of humanity. By closely reading these two poems with attention to the tensions between ideas of sexual identity, as aligns with performance, and sexual fluidity, as performative acts creating ever-changing sexual identities, I intend to demonstrate how we can make Swinburne's poems into spaces for current imagining and reimagining of the gender barriers.

An ekphrastic poem describes, in illustrative detail, a work of art. However, the purpose of employing the technique of ekphrasis is rarely to simply translate the form of visual art to literary art. Rather, ekphrasis meditates upon, narrates, and often interprets the visual object of artistic creation to elaborate upon, expand, challenge, and sometimes even change, the possible meaning(s) of the object. John Keats's, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," is a common example of an ekphrastic poem. I have no doubt that the canonical status of Keats's poem results, in part, from its socially acceptable and culturally agreeable ekphrastic subject—an urn depicting scenes of pastoral life, notably including a heteronormative couple that remains ever about to kiss. However, whether the subject is socially agreeable or not, ekphrastic poetry almost always produces purpose(s) that reach beyond artistic translation, one of which is often evaluation of the differences between the mediums of visual and linguistic representation.

While Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" invites reader to reconsider the images captured on the urn in terms of the frozen state in time of a visual art, the conclusion of Keats's poem does

not offer insights that are easy to make sense of for the reader. His final lines end with the enigmatic statement that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50). Yet, while this indeed is not a sentence to be made logical sense of, we can comprehend the meaning through lyrical interpretation. In fact, one way we can make some sense of Keats's ending statement, is that both the limits of language and the power of imagination are revealed through the poetic possibility of taking comfort in what is not able to be classified or understood. Keats famously coins a term for this comfort in the unknown, which he calls, *Negative Capability.* In a letter to his brothers Keats describes *Negative Capability*, which "is when a man is comfortable being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."[20] According to Keats's poetic theory, a poet then should embrace what cannot be understood or known through binary language and logic, but also implicitly so should readers of poetry. The illustration of this enigmatic mode of thought is a revolutionary effect of Keats's ekphrastic poem.

Similarly, the need for the reader to embrace the unknown is also an effect of the ekphrastic poetry of Keats's later nineteenth-century poetic predecessor, Swinburne. The revolutionary effect of ekphrastic poetry requiring that readers find comfort "being in uncertainties" brings me to the first poem I focus on in this chapter, which is Swinburne's "Hermaphroditus." Swinburne's poem demonstrates how the ekphrastic effect of creating imaginative spaces in time can occasion evaluations and reevaluations of the ekphrastic subject as it traverses time. Swinburne's "Hermaphroditus" produces the poetic event of restoring connections between the Hellenistic statue, *Sleeping Hermaphroditus,* (and its many copies), the Renaissance marble bed on which this particular copy of the Hermaphroditus statue lies, and the

[20] Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21 Dec. 1818.

nineteenth-century viewer's encounter with it in the Louvre[21]. Also, as luck would have it, there is a strong connection made between the nineteenth-century viewer's experience and present-day viewer's experience since the statue of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* remains on display in the Louvre. By showing the ever-frozen-in-time presence of the statue of the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* throughout several historical eras including the future, Swinburne invites readers of his day, of the present, and even further into our future, to reevaluate the Victorian, and currently culturally maintained, binary model of sexual normativity—he invites his readers to "take [poetic] comfort in the unknown."

My principal claim is that Swinburne's poem produces a space of sexual liminality both for nineteenth-century and contemporary readers. By musing on the subject of the aesthetic beauty of the androgynous statue sometimes called the *Borghese Hermaphroditus* and sometimes called *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* (even its name resists set classification) and exploring the erotic appeal of the sexually ambiguous figure, Swinburne's poem produces a space for admiration, simultaneous erotic objectification, and also ultimately *enfreakment* of the title central figure of the poem. What I mean by sexual liminality in this instance is that Swinburne's poem creates a transient space in which performativity and performance, bodies and figures, masculinity/maleness, femininity/femaleness, and the synthesis of these binary categories of sexuality are all constructed and destructed. Notably to the mode of depicting androgyny and/or sexual ambiguity in the poem "Hermaphroditus," sexual liminality produces a threshold moment

[21] This ancient statue was discovered in Rome at the start of seventeenth century. It was given to Cardinal Scipione Borghese after it was unearthed and he had the statue by an unknown Hellenistic artist laid on a bed of marble, which was crafted by the artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini. It was displayed as part of the Borghese Collection until 1807, when Napoleon Bonaparte purchased it from Camillo Borghese and put it on display in the Louvre. Astier Marie-Bénédicte provides more detailed information about *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* on the Louvre's curatorial website: https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/sleeping-hermaphroditos.

in which literary and visual experiences with art are compared as modes for depicting and eroticizing non-heteronormative bodies and experiences.

The liminal moment produced by Swinburne's poem crosses gender and genre lines drawing reader's attention to both the sexual performance of the statue itself and the cultural bowdlerization of the statue's association with the myth of "Hermaphroditus and Salmacis," found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The myth itself unquestionably destabilizes Victorian ideals of binary sexual identity on several levels including what qualifies as normative bodies, when the male and female become one in the end, but also destabilizes ideals of gender normativity. After all, the female Salmacis rapes the male Hermaphroditus in Ovid's myth. The poem's sculpted subject depicts a visually non-heteronormative human body, sculpted in ancient stone that indicates Classical recognition of non-heteronormative human forms. Thus, the statue itself visually challenges the medical and legal rhetoric of the day, as well as the present, by physically embodying the trouble with binary models of sexuality. But the literature, starting with Ovid's myth and developed through the restoration of the myth in Swinburne poem, takes this destabilization further by associating it with performativity that destabilizes gender normativity even within the minds and bodies of normative looking males and females.

Simultaneously, the ekphrastic technique exposes that unlike how Keats poses truth and beauty as one in the same at the end of his "Ode on A Grecian Urn,"— Swinburne's poem both unifies the visual and literary arts but also more poignantly demonstrates the tensions between the beauty of visual art and the truth(s) expressed in literary art. In the final stanza of "Hermaphroditus," Swinburne compares the stone imitation of human form to the stories that give the stone subject a life in the imagination. The following lines draw out the tension between the eternally frozen and unfeeling, yet beautiful, state of the statue and the way that literary and

cultural narratives animate the same figure in the mind of the viewer:

> Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear—
>
> Though for their love our tears like blood should flow,
>
> Though love and life and death should come and go,
>
> So dreadful, so desirable, so dear? (47-50)

First, calling attention to the statue's "gracious eyes that never made a tear—," Swinburne reminds his reader of the unfeeling, inanimate, yet visually pleasing figure of the statue, *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*. The reference to "our" (the viewers') flowing tears, like blood, exposes how the immortal, yet never living, androgynous statue becomes a destabilizing object of desire for the mortal viewer. It is the tears of love for the statue that are shed by the viewer that infuse Hermaphroditus with life. The stanza ends with a question mark, leaving us to consider how the viewer's contrasting, albeit not contradictory, feelings of fear and awe when taking in the sight of the statue, infuses the statue with a life. And furthermore, these lines depict how Victorian culture favors the frozen state of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus's* visual beauty over the truth of the ancient and foreign mythological figure's traumatic and culturally destabilizing story.

Tensions between Victorian cultural fetishizing of visual artistic beauty compared to the truths depicted by the destabilizing literary narrative(s) are drawn out to the point of contemporary cultural rebellion in the poem, "Hermaphroditus." The willingness of the Victorian viewer to gaze upon, and even express erotic love for, a statue of the dual-sexed figure becomes more destabilizing than the figure itself. It is not the ancient Greek statue in the Louvre that occasions several Victorian critical protests against vulgarity. Rather, it is the appearance of the foreign statue in Swinburne's English poem, the poetic voice's love for it, and the glimpses of the story(s) surrounding the figure of Hermaphroditus that produce a greater effect of rebellion

from Victorian cultural norms. Significantly, Swinburne only provides fragmentary description of the statue and what we might call "translation" of the myth and of the statue from visual to literary art. Christopher Keirstead describes Swinburne's modes of translation in *Victorian Poetry, Europe, and the Challenge of Cosmopolitanism* (2011), as distinctly not working towards "the idealized sense of a closure or difference—"not trying to make the translation appear untranslated (116-117).

Victorian critical discourse surrounding the poem demonstrates that it is not the statue itself that is too vulgar or destabilizing for Victorian audiences and critics. Rather, as Victorian poet and critic, Robert Buchanan, makes clear, it Swinburne's poetry itself that is too vulgar for mass consumption. In his infamous criticism of *The Fleshly School of Poetry* (1872), Buchanan depicts Swinburne as one of the poster-children for a group of "unwholesome," body-focused, cosmopolitan, and perhaps most damningly, hermaphroditic poets. Not surprisingly employing medical rhetoric, Buchanan calls poetry by these "Bohemian" poets, a *cancerous disease*. Buchanan writes, "There lies the seat of the cancer—there, in the Bohemian fringe of society. [. . . ] There it is, spreading daily like all cancerous diseases, foul in itself and creating foulness" (7). The word Bohemian in Buchanan's critique should be read as a word with two meanings. Swinburne is an unconventional artist, "on the fringe of society," and is Bohemian in this sense. But also, Swinburne's poetry derives its inspiration and material from foreign sources, with the word Bohemian symbolically signifying Swinburne's poetic translations of foreign subjects and stories.

Particularly focusing on Swinburne's translations that depict "cultural and sectarian clashes," Keirstead asserts "that there was something uniquely subversive about his [Swinburne's] kind of translation, something beyond 'fleshliness'" (118). It is Swinburne's

translation of European literature, and in "Hermaphroditus," European art, that produces the most objectionable transgressions against Victorian propriety. While Buchanan does not specifically comment on "Hermaphroditus," –he writes that "Mr. Swinburne belongs to Baudelaire. The offensive choice of subject, the obtrusion of unnatural passion, the blasphemy, the wretched animalism, are all taken intact out of the "Fleurs de Mal'" (22). Buchanan continues to explain that he will not focus his critique of Swinburne's poetry on individual poems because, he claims, "It would be tedious, apart from the unsavoriness of the subject, to pursue the analogy [between Swinburne's, *Poems and Ballads*, and Baudelaire's *Fluers de Mal*]." Then Buchanan explains about his broad critique of Baudelaire's influence on Swinburne, writing, "Perhaps the best plan is to give a few specimens of Baudelaire's quality, and leave the reader to compare them with Mr. Swinburne's book at leisure." One problem Buchanan seems to have with Swinburne's poetry is that Buchanan cannot easily make sense of Swinburne's translations, and thus, seems to struggle to locate specific passages that demonstrate Swinburne's own *fleshly* poetics. This is certainly due to mingling of Swinburne's poetic voice with that foreign poets.

In his general critique, Buchanan disparages the idea he sees promoted by *The Fleshly School,* which is "that the body is greater than the soul, the sound superior to sense; and that the poet, properly to develop his poetic faculty, must learn to be an intellectual hermaphrodite, to whom the facts of day and night are lost in a whirl of aesthetic terminology" (32). Of course, Buchanan's binary division of day from night, what we might also call black from white, exposes a dichotomous and restrictive view of poetry as something that should make "sense" according to upheld binary conventions of language, but even more particularly of Victorian scientific language. This critique leaves little doubt that Swinburne's poem about the admiration

of an androgynous figure would certainly fall into category of unwholesome, cosmopolitan, and hermaphroditic poetry. However, Buchanan's criticism appears less focused on the poetry itself than on the poet. Swinburne appears to become the center of Buchanan's criticism.

Discussing Buchanan's treatment of Swinburne's Sapphic poetry in her enduring and influential book, *Victorian Sappho* (1999), Yopie Prins explains how Buchanan's criticism "turns Swinburne into a castrato figure" (158). Prins exposes how "Buchanan's ad hominem attack" in *The Fleshly School of Poetry* reduces Swinburne "to 'an intellectual hermaphrodite,' not unlike the 'the reduction ad horriblem of . . . intellectual sensualism' in Baudelaire's poetry." Interpreting how Swinburne's Sapphic verses "disarticulate" the body, and how Swinburne "fundamentally, calls into question the figure of the body itself," Prins reveals that the "threat posed by Swinburne is less the immorality of the man than his abuse of language, which may or may not lead to various forms of bodily abuse." Significantly to this study, Prins illustrates how the disarticulation of the Sapphic body results in interpretations of Swinburne's "transgressive language as a transgression of gender." Prins explains that:

> Sappho is associated with the question of voice in a way that binds together gender and genre inextricably: through Sappho we can trace the gendering of lyric as a feminine genre, not because we assume she was the first poet to speak as a woman, but because the assumptions of voice in lyric reading produces Sappho as a feminine figure that does not speak." (27)

Similarly, the unspeaking androgynous figure of *Sleeping Heramphroditus*, produces a transgressive effect upon gender and genre by simultaneously articulating and disarticulating the ancient androgynous figure of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*. Swinburne's poetic meditation upon an androgynous figure from Classical mythology and art, directs readers' attention to the classical

statue as an object of curiosity. Holding a mirror up to readers, "Hermaphroditus" expresses reverence for this destabilizing figure of Classical art despite restrictive Victorian views of sexuality. The ultimate transgression of "Hermaphroditus," is that Swinburne *shows* Victorians, even those like Buchanan, their dirty little secret, which is that they are, in fact, attracted to foreign visual art that destabilizes and contradicts their expressed desire to conform to the boundaries of Victorian sexual propriety.

As the poem begins Swinburne invites readers to envision the erotic beauty of the statue by starting with a description of seeing the statue from behind. Deceptively looking like the goddess Aphrodite, the backside of the statue appears as the statue's most feminine form. From the backside of the statue Swinburne approaches, where he and any viewer in his position see a glimpse of its breasts, its long feminine hair, and its wide feminine hips. The phallus is hidden at this point, thus the language that Swinburne starts with takes an initially heteronormative tone as he writes, "Lift up thy lips, turn round, look back for love, / Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest" (1-2). Here, with the self-same poetic voice of Swinburne's own, we experience the first vision of the statue's feminine beauty as it is approached from behind. By this point in the poem we experience with Swinburne the beauty of the statue as it lies on its bed of Renaissance marble with a coquettish lifting of its lips and looking back for love. However, *blind love*, as described here, is juxtaposed with the statue's visual form and the persistent gaze of on-lookers. Hermaphroditus, like Keats's "Grecian Urn" distills the life of the body(s) it represents.

When Hermaphroditus's lips are further described they are given the life-like quality of weariness, "Of all things tired thy lips look weariest" (3). Yet, it is important to note that they only look this way. The lips are statue-lips and are not capable of weariness, but rather reflect the

projected weariness of the viewer's gaze, "Save the long smile that *they* (emphasis mine) are wearied of" (4). At this point, Swinburne turns to the mythological roots of the story of Hermaphroditus. Swinburne does not fully reveal the horrifying events of the naiad Salmacis's rape of the son of Hermes and Aphrodite that permanently fuses the two forms, male and female, into one. Rather, Swinburne hints at the horror of the transformation occasioned by the rape and the wish of Salmacis to be forever one with the masculine object of her desire, when he writes, "Choose of two loves and cleave unto the best; / Strive until one be under and one above" (4). The word *cleave* markedly carries with it opposing meanings. It is a Janus word, a contronym, or what in this context could be considered a hermaphrodite word. To cleave onto something, which is the most literal reading of these lines, is to bind together. However, it also commonly means to split apart. The violence usually associated with the hacking meaning for the word *cleave* also alludes to the violence of Salmacis's wish and actions that binds her with Hermaphroditus. The synthesis of the meanings of the word cleave emphasizes the ability of poetic language to carry with it meanings beyond the language of binary logic. The phrase "Strive until one be under and one above," serves as a double allusion. It suggests the act of the rape as both an aim and a struggle. It is Salmacis's intention to bind with Hermaphroditus and when she finally does achieve her wish, this phrase embodies the "one be[ing] under and one above," body Hermaphroditus becomes when transformed. Because of this violence, Hermaphroditus becomes both a monstrous and aesthetically beautiful vision of what generally appears to be a woman's body on the top, and even with the wide hips, a man's body on the bottom, as obviously indicated by the phallus.

Continuing, Swinburne exposes how the statue itself calls into question Victorian propriety:

And whoever hath seen thee, being so fair,

Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;

A strong desire begot on great despair,

A great despair cast out by strong desire. (11-14)

Victorian sexual normativity is troubled by the beauty of the statue. The words "being so fair" take on two meanings that hint at the statue's destabilizing effect. The "whoever hath seen thee," could be the one described as "being so fair," but also the statue could be described as the object "being so fair." Interpreting this line with both possible meanings in mind exposes how both the "fair" or modest, sexually "innocent," Victorian viewer gazes upon an object that is "fair" in terms of artistic beauty (rather than modesty or Victorian sexual propriety). Just as Salmacis and the poetic viewer is attracted to the naked form of Hermaphroditus, there remains a significantly traumatic event that occasions the combining of male and female form in the myth of Hermaphroditus. The combination of the sexes that produces this figure comes from "A strong desire begot on great despair, / A great despair cast out by strong desire." The chiastic effect of these lines, the near reversals of the words, also imply a balance or peace found in the violent combining of the sexes. For Salmacis rape dispels her great despairing desire for Hermaphroditus. By raping Hermaphroditus and having her wish granted, Hermaphroditus and Salmacis become one body and mind. Thus, these two final lines of the first stanza demonstrate the paradoxically violent despair of the event as well as the desire quenching effect of the melding of female and male into one. When the two become unified, Hermaphroditus's "great despair [is] cast out by [Salmacis's] strong desire." This destabilizes Victorian norms by alluding to the taboo subjects of the myth including rape of a man by a woman, erotic pleasure out of pain, and the synthesis of the male and female form in the flesh, as is rendered in stone as the

form of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*. Here we see where the vision of the character intersects with exhibitions of human hermaphrodites in the nineteenth century.

In the following stanza, Swinburne further develops a meditation, not only on the destabilizing form of the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, and the mythological character that the statue represents, but also incorporates a deeper exploration of the connection and tension between visual and literary depictions as liminal spaces. Starting with the line "Where between sleep and life some brief space is / With love like gold bound round about the head, / Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs wed" (15-16). Readers are invited to explore this liminal artistic space created by the vision of the statue as something depicting human form, albeit non-normative. It is literally not living, or even sleeping, as the statue's name and human form suggest. Instead, it remains on a threshold of what is alive and comes closer to crossing that threshold through the act of bringing it to life in the imagination. For most Victorian viewers, to imagine the *life* of the statue destabilizes sexual normativity further than the visual image of combining male and female forms. Imagining the life of Hermaphroditus calls to mind both the scandalous (by Victorian standards) Classical myth, as well as images of freak-show and medical exhibitions of hermaphrodites that have by this point in the nineteenth century become a common living-human-object of public curiosity.

The medical use of the words "Sex to sweet sex," describing the mingling of the sexes in the statue both bowdlerizes it through medical terminology, while also paradoxically drawing attention to the nearly pornographic nature of the Classical story and the statue itself (17). Appealing to Victorian sexual propriety the description of intercourse is punctuated by an allusion to Victorian sexual morality, which views sex as an act of wedlock. When Swinburne writes, "Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is *wed* (emphasis mine)," he parodies

bowdlerization of the myth as well as the statue it depicts. Continuing, the poem turns to the problem of strictly dividing the sexes with the appropriate wording, "Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his / To waste wedlock of a sterile kiss" (18-19). Swinburne's language demonstrates how the Victorian medical and legal culture of keeping people straight, comes down to the idea of sex as a means for procreation, which is then seen as a "waste wedlock" when a partner proves sterile. The sterility of the hermaphroditic figure also exposes a common Victorian misunderstanding of various forms of intersexuality. People considered "true hermaphrodites" were generally believed to all be sterile, while "pseudo-hermaphrodites" were considered really either male or female. In nineteenth-century England, it was seen as the distinct ability and job of medical men to discover, treat, and cure "true hermaphrodites" and "pseudo-hermaphrodites" into better fitting the binary model.

Swinburne illustrates how the English idea of sex for procreation does not align with the Classical sense of sex as an act of pleasure and the conjugal joining of soul mates—of two parts combining to create a greater whole—"Love made himself of flesh that perisheth / A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin" (23-24). The idea that the mortal human flesh is a "pleasure-house," aligns love with what Swinburne implies to be one of love's *kin*, which is lust. Yet, the heteronormative English concept of marriage and sex as an act of procreation rejects the idea of the body becoming a "pleasure-house" through erotic union leaving each sex separated, unopen to love, and especially to love's *kin*—lust! Swinburne continues describing love's pleasure-house by saying, "on the one side sat a man like death, / And on the other a woman sat like sin" (25-26). This dichotomous view of sex, gender, and sexuality renders men a destructive force to love, aligning them with death, and women who seek love and sex are aligned with the impurity of sin.

This dichotomous view results in Love "with veiled eyes and sobs, between his breath," unwilling to enter the pleasure-house he built (27).

Importantly, to the subject of this poem, love between the opposite sexes is divided in a way that produces a barrier from love entering the relationship. Yet, there are also barriers from love entering the androgynous figure of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*. Hermaphroditus symbolizes a non-normative combination of the sexes that although "sterile" combines the sexes producing one whole pleasure-house of flesh-like stone. However, meditating further on the statue's association with love Swinburne rhetorically asks; "Love is it love or sleep or shadow or light / That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?" (29-30). His answer comes in the next few lines when he writes, "Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right" (33). It seems that love touches the statue, but does not enter its \consciousness. The statue is, after all, a representation of the flesh, and only living fleshly beings are conscious. The statue remains an ultimately beautiful and uncanny imitation of love's pleasure-house.

Swinburne asks, "To what strange end hath some god made fair / The double blossom of two fruitless flowers?" (37-38). These lines problematize the idea that to be desirable a figure must fall within the binary categories of sexual identity. The strangeness of the statue's fairness attributes both the qualities of a freak and of something beautiful. God appears in the lower-case, which certainly fits with the polytheistic mythology of the ancients, but could additionally open interpretation to the idea of the creator of the statue itself— the artist— becoming "some god" through creation of the statue. Yet to Victorian viewers of the statue, whether made by a "god," or an artist turned god through the act of creation, the creator ultimately makes a barren beauty in the form of a hermaphrodite. Moreover, the dual-sexed statue remains frozen in form and time. While, the "god" who creates literature –the poet and his ancient predecessors in this case—

comparatively create a story that procreates through its dissemination. The sterility of the statue as a work of art mimics the perceived infertility of the Victorian hermaphrodite. However, the poem troubles the idea that to be fruitful requires fertility, because both the artist and the poet become creators who produce beautiful fruit out of "The double blossom of two fruitless flowers." The sterile object of the statue is revealed to fruitful to the creation of Swinburne's poem. Swinburne's erotically charged descriptions of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* prove fertile, in some ways more abundantly than the most fertile living humans, because the poet and the artist create something that will outlive humans of their day.

As the poem continues Swinburne's language reflects a sense of poetic entanglement with the statue that leads to confusion and distress brought about by the barren and frozen beauty of the statue. When he writes, "Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear," we could read this line as a reflection upon fears induced by a feeling of love generally, but more specifically of love felt for a barren object of beauty—love of art (43). As Swinburne continues to muse upon the feeling of fear-like-love induced by the statue he answers his question, "Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear?" with an opposing statement, "Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know" (43-44). The chiasmus in these lines demonstrate the feelings of confusion between fear and love felt by the poet as he gazes upon the androgynous form of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*. By switching between thinking that the feeling that the statue occasions is not love but fear, to thinking that it is not fear but love, the love that produces the poem seems to be a love propelled by an unintelligible inquisitiveness about the statue's nature.

The statue is loved by the viewer but is incapable of love. It is a lifeless material form, yet, as a mythological character, the statue is given a life in the imagination of its viewer. Also, it its sex appears neither male nor female, while simultaneously also appearing both male and

female. *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* appears as an uncanny figure, both dead and living, male and female, familiar and strange. Swinburne asks the statue, "Or wherefore should thy body's blossom blow / So sweetly, or thine eyelids leave so clear / Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear—" (45-47)? With these lines he questions the reason why the statue would be so beautiful, yet lifeless. Then interjecting upon his question *to* the statue Swinburne emphasizes the dynamic established between the gazer and the statue, as an always unrequited love. The words, "Though for their love our tears life blood should flow, / Though love and life and death should come and go," emphasize the love of the human observer as opposed to the unfeeling stone lifelessness of the statue (48-49). Then continuing with the question, "Or wherefore should they body's blossom blow," Swinburne expands upon the question by asking why the love experienced as the observer is "So dreadful, so desirable, so dear?" (50). Why does love of art, especially art that destabilizes the binary normative sexual identity, become love that is complexly felt as something *dreadful, desirable,* and *dear.* An answer to this rhetorical question about the nature of love for art, and specifically for the non-sexually normative beauty of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus,* is that the statue's dreadful bareness and non-normative identity makes it desirable as an object of beauty and an oddity, thus making it dear. The statue transcends cultural ideas of love as a connection between a heteronormative man and woman. By directing the feeling of love towards an object that looks like both sexes, Swinburne emphasizes how it is already neither man or woman as a statue, but also that it is a statue representing both and neither simultaneously. This reflects what the poem adds to the statue, which is a life in the imagination of the reader. Whether we, as readers, have seen the statue in the Louvre or not, it is brought to life in the mind and even further given life-likeness through depictions of the scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

As an object of beauty and curiosity, it is not the statue alone that makes it "So dreadful, so desirable, so dear." Knowledge of the story of Hermaphroditus is revealed to have the effect of enhancing the feeling of love for the statue. Depictions of the myth make this poem transcend simple objectification of a beautiful form. Rather, incorporating the violent and lustful rape of Hermaphroditus gives life to the statue in a way that provokes sympathetic feelings from the reader for the character that occasions the statue. Ending with an affirmation of the love for the statue as an object come to life through the story, Swinburne indicates how literature brings to life the figure of Hermaphroditus when he asks a final rhetorical question:

> Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
> Beneath the woman's and water's kiss
> Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
> And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
> And all the boy's breath softened into sighs;
> But Love being blind, how should he know of this? (51-56)

The answer, of course, is that this personification of Love cannot know Hermaphroditus's sexual identity by gazing upon the statue. The statue must be translated through poetry for Love to realize the sexual identity of Hermaphroditus, not to mention the violent and culturally destabilizing gender performances of the mythological characters. Ultimately, the ekphrastic poem "Hermaphroditus" does produce a common result of ekphrastic poetry, which is a rhetorical gesture indicating how literature and not the visual arts bring life to Hermaphroditus. Literature, unlike the visual arts, is capable of more wholly depicting the violent eroticism and violating compulsions that make lovers, like Salmacis, do harm to their beloved by transforming the object of their affection into an extension of their own being. But also, this poem in some

respects, becomes an empowering place of exhibition of an androgynous figure because of a different form of love explored in the poem. Swinburne's poem dwells upon the poet's love for the beautiful statue, but not for its traditionally feminine exhibition of beauty. Rather than seek to cure the body and attempt to make the Hermaphroditus fit the binary structure of sexual classification that takes hold during the Victorian era, Swinburne displays *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* as an object of curiosity, but an object of curiosity to be admired for its unique beauty.

While I do focus more of my attention in this article on the poem "Hermaphroditus," it would take the poem out of context if I were not to, at least briefly, consider that the poem that follows in *Poems and Ballads*, "Fragoletta," is clearly meant to be a pendant poem to "Hermaphroditus." The next poem, "Fragoletta," begins, "O Love! what shall be said of thee? / The son of grief begot by joy? / Being sightless, wilt thou see?" (1-3). These lines naturally seem to follow and build-off of the enigmatic question that concludes "Hermaphroditus." While the figure Swinburne alludes to in this poem is a contemporary character of the time created by French novelist Henri de Latouche, Fragoletta, like the mythological character Hermaphroditus is a hermaphrodite. In the novel by Latouche the character called Fragoletta seeks out love from both sexes and engages in affairs with a brother and a sister. Fragoletta, whose name means "little strawberry," is an enticing hermaphrodite that is not a combination of two separate beings unified through a violent rape, but rather an individual with non-normative sexual characteristics that still seeks union with other human beings. Although Fragoletta, like Hermaphroditus, represents a combination of the sexes, this combination does not result the union of bodies and souls, but rather produces a disunity between language and the true biological possibilities outside the binary structuring of sexual identities. When Swinburne asks, "O Love! what shall be

said of thee? / The son of grief begot by joy? / Being sightless, wilt thou see/?" readers of the poem turn back to the ideas explored in "Hermaphroditus" of both a masculine figure of love and of blind love. Yet, it is not love's blindness to the violent combining of the sexes when Salmacis's rape of Hermaphroditus results in their unification, but rather, as fits Latouche's story, it is blindness to the sex of love itself and blindness to the sex of the beloved that comes into question. The masculine personification of Love is something Swinburne calls into question as he continues asking, "Being sexless, wilt thou be / Maiden or boy?" (4-5). We could interpret these lines several ways, all of which draw attention to the androgynous nature of love itself. Whether we interpret love's androgyny as a metaphor for a feeling experienced by all sexes, love as something that transcends sex, or love directed towards an androgynous object of desire, the sexually ambiguous nature of love remains central to the lines of questioning that occur in this poem.

As is done in "Hermaphroditus," Swinburne mingles desire with an emotion in a chiastic structure. Just as "Hermaphroditus" represents "A strong desire begot on great despair, / A great despair cast out by strong desire," Fragoletta becomes, "O sole desire of my delight! / O sole delight of my desire!" (21-22). This inverted structure signifies the emotional confusion produced by the non-normative figure, but also importantly points to the ever-obsessive gaze of the viewer who looks at the non-normative figure. This enamored gawking is further emphasized and illustrated as something grotesquely carnivorous when Swinburne continues, "Mine eyelids and eyesight / Feed on thee day and night / Like lips of fire" (23-25). The feeding-gaze of the viewer consumes Fragoletta and makes of her consumption an erotic sacrifice of sorts where the fire-like gaze of the viewer both kisses and further consumes Fragoletta. Fire, after all, burns with when it kisses.

Further establishing the connection between the subjects of the poems "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta," Swinburne then speaks of a statue. Fragoletta is the name associated with the hermaphrodite character in Latouche's novel. However, in the novel there is a noteworthy scene in Naples when the hermaphrodite character Fragoletta (called Camille in her feminine form) is compared to the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* (60-61). Thus, both alluding back to the poem "Hermaphroditus" and the scene in the novel *Fragoletta*, Swinburne begins his next stanza with the words, "Lean back thy throat of carven pearl," which could certainly be a metaphor for a person's white and statuesque neck, but also makes the reader think of the white neck of *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* (62). Once again, ekphrasis occurs through the double-allusion of the novel's reference to *Sleeping Hermaphroditus.*

As the poem continues, Swinburne mingles images of the statue *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, with Venus, and the character Fragoletta. The descriptions that follow also combine allusions to the novel *Fragoletta* with allusions to another story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* which is the story of Pygmalion. The androgynous imagery of a statue-like beloved climaxes in a wish for the beloved to come to life through love. Swinburne writes:

> Cleave to me, love me, kiss mine eyes,
> Satiate thy lips with loving me;
> Nay, for though shalt not rise;
> Lie still as Love that dies
> For love of thee. (56-60)

The contranym "cleave" appears again in this poem. The tension expressed with this word is the tension between the poetic voice both wanting to bind—to cleave—with the beloved, while also knowing that the passions of love once satiated will result in its death—in its cleaving apart—

through the releasing of the passion that fuels erotic love.

After embracing the beloved statue-like hermaphrodite, Fragoletta's "throat of carven pearl," is symbolically brought to life "where my kiss hath fed / Thy flower-like blood leaps red / To the kissed place" (63-65). The eroticism of these lines both recalls the image of the blush of rushing blood that occurs on the places of the body that the lover kisses, but here Swinburne also brings life to the Fragoletta as Pygmalion does his statue. However, unlike with Pygmalion, once the statue-like figure is brought to life, the perfection of the love for the statue fades. The final sentence of the poem points to the nature of the poetic voice's erotic love for Fragoletta, which is that it is consuming and fleeting—as the imagery of fire repeatedly suggests it burns too hot until it burns out for lack of fuel. It seems predestined that love would fade between the poetic voice and Fragoletta when Swinburne writes, "Love's wings are over fleet, / And like the panther's feet / The feet of Love" (68-70).

The conclusion of the set of pendant poems speaks to the complications of love that fall outside the confines of Victorian sexual normativity by focusing on erotic love, or lust, for sexually non-normative figures. Like a freak show or medical exhibition that displays bodies for entertainment, Swinburne's poems both exploit and create spaces for realization of what we might now call sexual performativity that does not conform to Victorian, as well as contemporary models, of sexual normativity. In a sense, this essay attempts one of the various answers to Swinburne's question in the first stanza of "Fragoletta," which is "Being sexless, wilt thou be / Maiden or boy?" The answer my reading of these poems suggests is that it does not have to be an either/or question. We can answer "yes and no" or "neither," and the poem's subject and form suggest this fluid reading of gender.

The ekphrastic and chiastic effects of the poems "Hermaphroditus" and "Fragoletta"

demonstrate through parody a poetic means for escaping the illogical rationalisms of medical and legal rhetoric that categorize people's sexual identities according to binary terms. These poems show readers that to think of sexual identity in terms of being, as a performance of being female/feminine or male/masculine, produces a fallaciously static impression of human sexuality. The statue and statue-like figures are in a sense always *sexless*, that is, they are marble and not flesh. However, the figures of Hermaphroditus and Fragoletta are brought to life in these two poems by creating liminal spaces where Swinburne parodies the idea of these hermaphrodite subjects being "Maiden or boy." By bringing life to the figures of Hermaphroditus and Fragoletta, Swinburne parodies the binary model of sexual identity. Thus, Swinburne's poems, while in some ways feeds off the Victorian curiosity in freaks, also provides a liminal space for considering a question we still deal with today, which is the limited choices of boxes we have to check—Male• or Female• ?

## Chapter Four: The Androgynous Mind(s) of The Poetess(es): Undoing Binary Gender and Heteronormative Eroticism in "Michael Fields's" Sapphic Lyrics

With the poems in the 1889 book of poetry titled *Long Ago*, Michael Field, the pseudonym for the collaborative poets and playwrights, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, undertake the "delightfully audacious" project of translating, transforming, and expanding upon Sapphic fragments to construct complete lyrical poems.[22] Inspired by the "passionate pleasure" they took in Henry Thornton Wharton's, *Sappho: Memoir, Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation* (1885), the romantically entwined aunt and niece pair of collaborative poets write as women writing as a man (Michael Field) translating and transforming another man's (Wharton's) literal translations of fragmentary transcriptions of the poetry of the enduringly most famous Poetess in Western literature, Sappho. As the previous sentence demonstrates, the complex play between gender and adaptations of Sapphic fragments in *Long Ago* becomes difficult and wordy when an attempt is made to describe the identity of the poetic voice(s). Notably the gender play that occurs as a result of the matrices of the multi-voiced poetic personae that becomes Michael Field demonstrates that there is a significant gap in our language when it comes to finding ways to communicate the complexities of Michael Field's gender. Michael Field's gender is also further complicated by the generically transgressive collaborative and derivative aspects of Michael Field's lyrical voice as well as by the biographical contexts of the women behind the

[22] In the "Preface" of *Long Ago*, Michael Field writes, "When, more than a year ago, I wrote to a literary friend of my attempt to express in English verse the passionate pleasure Dr. Wharton's book had brought to me, he replied: 'That is a delightfully audacious thought—the extension of Sappho's fragments into lyrics. I can scarcely conceive anything more audacious'" (1).

pseudonym. However, I believe that by applying theoretical understanding of Coleridge's early nineteenth-century, but lastingly influential, idea of the greatness of the androgynous mind combined with Butler's current ideas about gender performativity and undoing gender, that we acquire some useful ways of thinking about and expressing gender that work to better unravel, comprehend, and communicate Michael Field's gender, the transgressive effect of Michael Field's Sapphic lyrics, and just as importantly improve our appreciation of Michael Field's intriguingly innovative lyricism.

On the most superficial level—or to the reader that knows nothing of Michael Field's identity—the voice of the poet is rendered androgynous through the incorporation of Sapphic fragments that mingle the feminine voice of Sappho with the masculine voice of Michael Field. However, there have not been many readers that have been unaware that Michael Field is a pseudonym for a collaborative pair of women poets. The pair behind the pseudonym were outed as collaborative women poets by their friend, mentor, and fellow poet Robert Browning well before their 1889 publication of *Long Ago*. In a letter to Browning dated November 23rd, 1884, Bradley writes, "Spinoza, with his fine grasp of unity says: 'If two individuals of exactly the same nature are joined together, they make up a single individual, doubly stronger than each alone,' i.e., Edith & I make *veritable Michael*" (*Works and Days,* 6). Notably, Bradley claims that she and Edith believe, like Spinoza, that the unification of "two individuals of exactly the same nature" become "doubly strong" compared to that of each individual. Certainly, the fact that Bradley and Cooper collaborate as same-sex partners has much to do with how they combine to "make *veritable Michael*." Yet, it is not simply their collaborative sameness that Bradley and Cooper find important to their poetic personae. Concealed collaboration and hidden female authorship were, before Bradley and Cooper were outed as Michael Field, central

components of their poetic personae.

Bradley continues to express some reasons why she and Cooper desire to hide their collaborative female authorship and Bradley provides examples of the effects of their exposed female authorship with, it seems, the hope of dissuading Browning from revealing any further details of their identities, particularly their secret of dual collaboration. Bradley pleads:

> And we humbly fear you are destroying this philosophic truth: it is said the *Athenaeum* was taught by you to use the feminine pronoun. Again, someone named André Raffalovich, whose earnest young praise & frank criticism gave me genuine pleasure, now writes in ruffled distress; he 'thought he was writing to a boy—a young man . . . he has learnt on the best authority it is not so.' I am writing to him to assure him the best authority is my work. But I write to you to beg you to set the critics on a wrong track. We each know that you mean good to us: & are persuaded you thought by 'our secret' we meant the dual authorship. The revelation of that would indeed be utter ruin to us; but the report of lady-authorship will dwarf & enfeeble our work at every turn. (*Works and Days* 6)

Unfortunately, Bradley already knew she was correct about the revelation of Michael Field's female authorship serving to "dwarf & enfeeble" their work. She provides an example of how the removal of Michael Field's masculine mask troubled their poetic peers, with her anecdote to Browning about the poet André Raffalovich, in which Bradley recounts Raffalovich's distress after learning that the liberties he took writing to Michael Field were actually received by a "lady." Raffalovich, who was also a notably culturally transgressive poet whose own homoerotic poetry destabilized heteronormative fin de siècle culture, nevertheless, demonstrates a traditional view of the female sex as delicate, sensitive, and ultimately not able to engage in the

world of masculine poetic discourse. Raffalovich expresses with distress that he is concerned about how he wrote to a woman as he would write to a man, which indeed illustrates why Bradley and Cooper would want to be read by their peers and critics in the masculine voice of Michael Field.

In the end, Browning's outing of Michael Field as a pseudonym for a feminine poet, might not have been all that surprising to Bradley and Cooper. Although Browning was a close friend and mentor to Bradley and Cooper, Browning obviously expresses discomfort with ambiguities of gender both personally and poetically. In a letter dated 19 June 1870 to Isa Blagden, Browning reveals how his discomfort with ambiguities of gender specifically affects his reception of poetry. Browning writes:

> Yes,—I have read Rossetti's poems—and poetical they are,—*scented* with poetry, as it were—like trifles of various sorts you take out of a cedar or sandal-wood box: you know I hate the effeminacy of his school,—the men that dress up like women,—that use obsolete forms, too, and archaic accentuations to seem soft—fancy a man calling it a lilý—lili*é*s and so on. Swinburne started this with other like Belialisms. (*Dearest Isa* 336)

As Browning's demonization of the "effeminacy" of the Pre-Raphaelites demonstrates, the ambiguous gender performances of "the men that dress up like women" so deeply troubled Browning that he negatively criticized their poetry based on the troubling ambiguous gender performances of the poets. Browning's critique of the Pre-Raphaelites takes issue with the ambiguous gender of the poets, reflected in their public personae, but also significantly, with the "soft" style of their poetry. Clearly Browning aligns ambiguous gender with not just a lesser, more effeminate, style of poetry by comparing Rossetti's poems with "trifles" found in a box, but Browning takes his criticism further by demonizing Pre-Raphaelite poetry as a style that

"like other Belialisms" was "started" by Swinburne. We also see evidence of Browning's discomfort with ambiguous gender in his personal life with respect to well-known disagreements he had with his wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, over her choice to dress their son, "Pen," in an androgynous style. As a boy, Pen was dressed by Barrett Browning in ruffles and velvet and his hair was kept in long ringlet curls As is commonly known, however, it was soon after Elizabeth Barrett Browning's death in 1861, that Browning had his twelve-year-old son's hair cut short and started dressing Pen in more traditionally masculine English clothing of the period. Browning's personal and artistic discomfort with ambiguities of gender certainly demonstrates what might have, in part, motivated Browning to out Bradley and Cooper as the women behind the pseudonym.

However, it seems more important than hiding their gender, Bradley and Cooper were invested in hiding their collaborative authorship. Yet as Bradley's letter to Browning demonstrates, Bradley sensed the impending second betrayal of Michael Field's secret of collaborative authorship by their friend Browning. Bradley thought that the revelation of the collaborative aspect of their lyrical poetry would "be utter ruin to us," and it certainly seems she was not far off the mark with her assessment of the seriousness of keeping the duality of their authorship undisclosed. Yet, by the time *Long* Ago was first published, the collaborative female identity of the writers behind Michael Field's poetic voice was well-known. In actuality, Bradley and Cooper's work was, both during their lifetime and afterwards, affected poorly by critical and public knowledge of female collaborative authorship. In one of the few, and still the most recent, biographies about Bradley and Cooper, *We are Michael Field* (1998), Emma Donoghue expresses her surprise at discovering that *the Michael Fields*, as she notes they were often called, were far from periphery figures of Fin de Siècle London literary, artistic, and scholarly circles.

Donoghue writes:

> I could hardly believe that such good poets, taken so seriously by their peers in the 1880s and 90s, could be completely forgotten a hundred years later. Today a reader is most likely to come across a glancing reference to the Michael Fields in a biography of one of their famous male friends, among them John Ruskin, Robert Browning, George Moore, Oscar Wilde or George Meredith. Generally they are characterized as pathetic literary hangers-on; and the prejudices against women writers (especially collaborators, spinsters and lesbians) that dogged their career still linger on. (1)

Publishing their plays and poems and mingling with the literary elite as the women behind the pseudonym, the Michael Fields (also sometimes simply the Michaels or the Fields) were actively engaged figures of London literary circles.[23] However, despite how well-known and published they were, reception of their writings waned throughout their lifetime and they died in near obscurity. This was in many ways due to the general modernist turn away from late Victorian poetics. However, the near erasure of Michael Field's poetry was also surely a result of the "prejudices against women writers (especially collaborators, spinsters and lesbians)." [24]

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[23] Like Donoghue, I use of this plural version of the pseudonym to recover its common use by their literary cohort. But also, I employ this pluralized version of their pseudonym because it best communicates Bradley and Cooper's unified poetic personae as the Michael Fields. This plural version of their pseudonym emphasizes how they play with the ideas of individual and collaborative personae of the author. This plural version of their personae emphasized how the Michael Fields are always becoming both a combination of singular voice and a unified plurality of voices. Throughout this chapter, I will use their name this way to emphasize both the plurality of voice and the knowledge of dual authorship among their contemporaries. I will use Bradley and/or Cooper when emphasizing their separate identities, actions, or writings. And, I will use Michael Field, in the singular, when discussing what we can read as wholly unified aspects of Bradley and Cooper's poetic personae.

[24] For more about the effects of the knowledge of female collaborative authorship on Michael Field's popularity and reputation see: Mary Sturgeon's, *Michael Field*, 27-9; Angela Leighton's, *Victorian Women Poets,* 203-4; Marion Thain's, *Michael Field: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle*, 43.

While Bradley and Cooper were known to the public to be the aunt and niece pair who wrote as Michael Field in their day, they were generally regarded as spinsters and not as same-sex lovers. The erotic nature of their relationship was most likely recognized by some very close friends and family members, however, there is little evidence to suggest gossip among friends or public knowledge of their erotic relationship.[25] It seems that there was not much interest in prying into Bradley and Cooper's erotic connection during their lifetime. In her chapter on Michael Field in *Studies of Contemporary Poets* (1921), their contemporary and friend, Mary Sturgeon, does hint at a secretive, passionate, and unknowable aspect of the union "of two lives which burned in a single flame of creative ardour right up to the gates of death" (347). However, Sturgeon asserts that the biographical details of Bradley and Cooper's unification as Michael Field, "is a veiled history; and although we may someday know more about its poignant joy and pain, I imagine that the veil will never be completely rent." Indeed, there are many details of the poetic and erotic connection between Bradley and Cooper that will always remain unable to be understood and known with any surety.

However now that we, and Michael Field, are becoming less strictly confined by a Victorian sense of propriety, we have been able to increase our historical and poetical understanding Michael Field and the women behind the name. While many of the androgynous performances in Michael Field's poetry can be located and interpreted regardless of readers' knowledge of Bradley and Cooper's personal lives, critics continue to demonstrate that biographical understanding of Bradley and Cooper's personal eroticism helps us to more wholly appreciate the eroticism at the heart of Michael Field's poetry. Thus before addressing the

[25] There is an exchange of letters between Katherine and Edith in April of 1885 that suggests Emma, Edith's mother and Katherine's sister, had attempted to keep Edith and Katherine separated. The letters can be found in *The Fowl and The Pussycat*, 127-33.

androgyny found in Michael Field's poetry, I find it necessary to first explore some biographical details that shed light on the androgynous bisexual eroticism that fueled Bradley and Cooper's collaboration. Through the work of biographical and literary historians we have started to lift the veil of history by exploring and exposing not just the individual and public personalities of these two women, but importantly, how the Michael Fields's erotic relationship was at the heart of their poetic collaboration.

One revealing aspect of reading their journals and letters demonstrations that the traditional pursuit for attempting to locate biographical connection between the poet and the poetic subject(s) is displaced to an exploration into how the connection between the Michael Fields's, both romantically and literarily, complicates the idea of the individual genius as the ideal creator of lyrical poetry. The shared writings in letters and journals, some signed and in the voice of Michael Field, demonstrate a further level of devotion to writing as a unified persona that transcends simple performance of a part. Thus, while knowledge of the individual biographical details of Bradley and Cooper are available, it is the way that the parameters of their collaboration include their personal lives and writings, such as their shared journals, that certainly changes how we might read the poetic voice of Michael Field as much more than a mask—as a performative poetic persona and not a performance. Michael Field became not simply a mask or an illusion for a public audience, but rather, Michael Field became an important part of Bradley and Cooper's private bond. Self-knowingly writing in the exposed pseudonym, Bradley and Cooper play with the parameters of the poetic persona of the poet, and most notably, experiment with parameters of gender and collaborative voice through the erotically charged unification as lovers and writers

Significantly Michael Field's poetic voice, whether readers are aware that Michael Field is a pseudonym for Bradley and Cooper or not, remains androgynous. However, knowledge of Bradley and Cooper's individual identities makes the androgyny of Michael Field more complex than as a simple incorporation of the voice of the opposite sex. Michael Field as the composer of *Long Ago* is a man, a woman, women, and none of these identities all at once. My inquiry into the androgynous eroticism at the heart of the Michael Fields' lyrics is inspired by a question Yopie Prins asks in her lastingly influential book *Victorian Sappho* (1999) which is, "How shall we read these poems written by two women writing as man writing as Sappho?" (74). Prins answers this question by exploring the ways in which Michael Field's lyrics capitalize on the masculine tradition of Greek scholarship by expanding upon the fragments of Sappho and creating a multi-voiced and transgressive model of Sapphic poetry. As Prins perceptively demonstrates, the poems in *Long Ago* draw out the tensions between masculinity and femininity, singular and plural, the viewer and object of the viewers gaze, life and death, and past and present (among other dichotomies). The Sapphic collaboration of Bradley and Cooper as Michael Field, at the fin de siècle and still today, remains stealthily transgressive on both cultural and literary levels.

While collaborative writing is nothing new, certainly in drama and even in some forms of poetry, doing so specifically in the lyric form works to destabilize conventions of the genre itself. Prins explains, "The genre of the lyric is commonly understood, at least in its late nineteenth-century definition as the written representation of an utterance not addressed to another person but spoken in private, a voice not heard but 'overheard' by the reader" (75). Thus, Prins convincingly claims that the development of Michael Field's multi-voiced Sapphic poetry "destabilizes the Sapphic signature" (74). Michael Field radically "doubles" the voice of "the

'original' lyric poet [Sappho]," thus, 'If the lyric as a genre assumes a single speaker, then Michael Field-as-Sappho simultaneously exploits and explodes that generic assumption" (75). While "Bradley and Cooper, writing as Michael Field, writing as Sappho, allow the signature to be read as plural," the Michael Fields's methods and the central role that their romantic connection plays in their creative process certainly also allows the Sapphic signature to be read as "*possibly*, lesbian" (75). However, by employing the term *possibly,* Prins is perhaps both understating and overstating Bradley and Cooper's lesbianism by aligning lesbianism with a set identity rather than with ever-in-flux matrices of gender and erotic performativity. While I am not going to dive into the issue of Bradley and Cooper's possible lesbian identities right at this point, I will return to this topic later in the chapter, where I hope to provide a more nuanced account of how their eroticism troubles normative concepts of identity by pushing against the confines of the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy. The dichotomy of either being understood as a pair of heteronormative spinsters *or,* now more commonly, as lesbians is often employed by critics when describing Bradley and Cooper's eroticism and gender play both in their personal lives and as the poet Michael Field.

Indeed, the fin de siècle poetry of the Michael Fields was rebelliously Sapphic on many levels in their time and was especially so for encompassing both Victorian meanings for the word *Sapphic*.[26] As Prins explains, "they turn to Sappho, whom they certainly understand to be Lesbian in more than the proper sense of the name, in order to develop a model of lyric

[26] In her book *Michael Field* (2007), Marion Thain brings up the Victorian double meaning of the word Sapphic as a reference to poetic style inspired by Sappho and also as a term for same-sex eroticism, particularly between women. Thought-provokingly, Thain notes that, "If the Sapphic and 'Michael Field' masks – doubly mediating narrative voice in *Long Ago* – are designed to evade issues of gendered voice, it is hardly surprising thi Michael Field's Sappho appears framed explicitly by heterosexual narratives at the same moment that the Sapphic was beginning to represent a homoerotic identity" (61).

authorship in which voice is the effect of an eroticized textual mediation between the two of them rather than the representation of an unmediated solitary utterance" (76). The Michael Fields "manipulate the conventions of authorship in ways that cross-couple gender and genre" (76). And in doing so, "Bradley and Cooper open Victorian Hellenism to the possibility of lesbian reading that allows for the circulation of Greek Eros among women as well as men" (77). Prins explores the ways in which Bradley and Cooper poetically build upon Wharton's amateur scholarly project of translating, representing, and it might even be said, incarnating Sappho in his book *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation*.[27] Inspired and informed by Wharton's book, Bradley and Cooper, as Michael Field, produce their own incarnation of Sappho, while also simultaneously exposing Sappho's mortal absence from the set of lyrics appropriately pointing to her historical place in the literary past, which is emphasized by the title of the book taken from a translation of part of a Sapphic fragment, *Long Ago*.[28]

Transcribing, translating, and transforming Sapphic fragments into their own contemporary poetry that is simultaneously separated from the author(s)'s self by the pseudonym, and by combining their words with the salvaged words of Sappho, the Michael Fields produces lyrics that exalt androgynous thought and eroticism. The Michael Fields's androgynous thought and eroticism is significantly communicated through multi-voiced and androgynously gendered collaborative duality. Whereas many of the Romantics writing earlier in the nineteenth century propagated the idea of poetic genius stemming from a heightened sense of individuality, as is suggested by Coleridge's statement about the androgynous mind when he

[27] Henry Thornton Wharton was a natural scientist, ornithologist, surgeon and self-professed amateur Hellenistic scholar. His book, *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation,* was, and remains, his most well-known and academically exciting contribution to Hellenistic studies.

[28] The words "Long Ago" echo the Sapphic fragment that translates to, "I loved thee once, Atthis, long ago" (Wharton 76).

writes; “The truth is, *a* great mind must be androgynous.” [emphasis added], Michael Field’s duality proposes a new and more destabilizing androgynous way to transcend to the level poetic genius. Rather than posing their androgynous genius as stemming from a heightened sense of individuality—from a singular great mind—the Michael Fields’s write what has increasingly come to be seen as artful, experimental, and culturally transgressive poetry by creating their own collaborative and androgynous model for poetic production that synthesizes genders, genres, and individuals.

As Prins claims, the coalescence of Bradley and Cooper’s individual identities into the figures of Michael Field and Sappho creates a radical new model for the Victorian Lesbian (and lesbian) lyric. Explaining how the Michael Fields’s poetic encounter with Sapphic fragments in *Long Ago* uniquely adds to Victorian Sapphic studies and experimentation with the lyric, Prins writes, “The poetic doubling of Sappho by Michael Field differs from Wharton’s scholarly project, however, in redefining lyric authorship by means of collaboration that destabilizes the Sapphic signature more radically than do the ‘selected rendering’ collected by Wharton.” (74-75). As Prins poses it, the Michael Fields’s redefinition of the lyric destabilizes the singular voice of the lyric poet by rendering the voice plural as well as “possibly lesbian.” Wharton’s book, on the other hand, avoids weighing in on Sappho’s same-sex eroticism, even choosing to refer to Sappho and her followers as Aeolian, rather than Lesbian, “maidens,” and focusing most notably on the myths of her heteronormative connections when recounting the stories of her life. While Wharton does in some ways present Sappho as an ideal figure of women’s equality to men (as an ancient version of the Victorian New Woman), by posing her as an example of women’s ability to create immortally brilliant poetry, Wharton also upholds certain narratives that present Sappho as a heteronormative figure of feminine domesticity. Wharton explains how in Sappho’s

time, "Aeolian women were not confined to the harem like Ionians or subjected to the rigorous discipline of the Spartans," thus, were educated and free to express themselves and mix equally with men, "to an extent unknown elsewhere in history" (12). Yet, Wharton nevertheless does reestablish feminine domesticity and heteronormativity to Sappho and her poetry by presenting her as "Unrestrained by public opinion, and passionate for the beautiful, they [Aoelian women] cultivated their senses and emotions and developed their wildest passions." Certainly, Wharton's focus on Sappho's passionate sensibility, combined with detailing the myths that present the possible heterosexual affairs and marriages of Sappho, while avoiding the stories of her same-sex erotic connections, restores heteronormative order to the life of Sappho. Building on Prins's reading, I intend to demonstrate how Bradley and Cooper's method and the effect of their incestuous and lesbian, or as I mean to clarify, bisexual, lyrical collaboration opens up reading to a then radically new idea of the androgynous mind of the poet that explores eroticisms which culturally then, and often now, destabilize heteronormative society and language by remaining "outside the field of love" (Butler, 160).

To better understand the evolving purposes and uses of the pseudonym Michael Field by Bradley and Cooper, it is important to remember that when they first started using the name, Michael Field did serve to mask the poets' gender and dual-authorship. However, as I have already noted, by the time *Long Ago* was published, their female sex and dual collaboration was known to most readers of their lyrics. Yet, they continued to use the pseudonym. This begs the question, what else does the pseudonym do besides hide Bradley and Cooper's female dual authorship? The pseudonym, as Ruth Vanita appropriately suggests in her book *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (1996), did serve as a mask, but more significantly, Vanita claims that the pseudonym eventually serves to unify the two

women, not just as writers but also lovers. Referencing the well-known fact that Browning outed Michael Field as two women, Vanita writes, ""Katherine Bradley pointed out to Robert Browning, in a letter expressing distress at his having revealed their secret to the press, that the male pseudonym was necessary for them to be able to write freely in a social setup that simultaneously idealized and despised women" (118). Vanita references the November 23rd, 1884, letter that Bradley writes to Browning, citing the important point that Bradley makes about reception of female-authored texts when she tells Browning that, "we have many things to say that the world will not tolerate from woman's lips" (311). Bradley asserts that one reason that they wanted to keep their female authorship secret is that "we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventions," and that by telling this secret Browning is, "robbing us of real criticism, such as man give man." But also, revealingly, Bradley makes metaphorical connection between Michael Field, the poet, and "Gods" that "learn little from the stupid words addressed to them at their shrines: they disguise; meet mortals unsuspecting in the marketplace and enjoy wholesome intercourse" (311). While Vanita accurately explains how women were both idealized and despised, thus like Gods, "learn little from the stupid words addressed to them at their shrines," and kept out of the masculine world of the "marketplace" where they might "enjoy wholesome intercourse" with one another, I think it is also worth observing that the connection with the Gods also hints at nineteenth-century ideas of transcendent poetic genius and love.

Part of the unique gender and erotic play of Michael Field, as Vanita perceptively explains, is that "[t]he male pseudonym was, however, not just a ruse to forestall male bias. It was also, like the age difference, part of the erotic charge between the two women" (119). Important to understanding Michael Field's persona, is the fact that Michael Field occupied a place in Bradley and Cooper's personal lives as "They continued to write under this name long

after their identity was well-known and used it in private interaction too" (119). Referencing the couple's common use of masculine pet-names, pronouns, and even the initials M.F. that they had "emblazoned on their luggage," Vanita illustrates that "The name Michael Field provided them with the kind of oneness bestowed by a married surname" (119). Of course, this sort of marriage-like name unification does fit well with Bradley and Cooper's claim that they lived like a married couple. However, their likeness to a traditionally married couple is purposefully posed as an approximate likeness by Bradley and Cooper. Referencing Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous nuptial and poetic union Bradley writes, "Oh! love. I give thanks for my Persian [one of Bradley's many nicknames for Cooper]: those two poets, man and wife, wrote alone; each wrote; but did not bless or quicken one another at their work; *we are closer married* (emphasis in the original)" (*Works and Days* 16). Bradley's words make it clear that the Michael Fields's erotic and literary connection is approximately like that of a similarly literary heterosexual married couple, however, the Michael Fields's erotic and literary unity is approximate because it is, as Bradley proposes, a superior form of unification—a transcendent connection. As implied by Bradley, the Michael Fields's relationship surpasses that of traditional heteronormative nuptial ties, and this is specifically owing to their collaborative unity as writers when they compose under the name Michael Field.

This aunt and niece pair unite as writers and lovers under one name and live fairly openly as a couple of sorts during the turn of the century. While only their private writings expose their erotic connection and their self-proclaimed "closer married" unification as compared to heterosexual couples, the cultural norms that allowed for homosocial affections (and even shared beds) between women, especially women who were related, made it easy for Cooper and Bradley to pass as spinsters. At a time when England was at the height of legal punishment for men who

engaged in same-sex erotic encounters, Bradley and Cooper's same-sex erotic connection was generally not pried into or detected (other than by family). If there were suspicions and rumors among any of their friends or within literary circles, the nature of their connection was not gossiped about, enquired into, recorded, or exposed. The Michael Fields were easily embraced by several members of the literary elite and provided the subcultural insulations of the aesthete artistic community that necessarily allowed for them to experiment with the lyric as a means to express nonheteronormative eroticism in verse.[29] Even in their time, the nonheteronormative eroticism of Michael Field's poetry was certainly detected by peers and critics. Mary Sturgeon even seems to deflect readers from prying too deeply into the eroticism depicted Michael Field's verse when she writes; "And if, as I sometimes think, one might measure the stature of a poet by a capacity for loving, then these two are great indeed. Of course, I do not mean only sexual passion, although that has its place. But it is kept in its place" (353). As Sturgeon's reading of Michael Field's eroticism being "kept in its place" suggests, the pseudonym functioned to allow Bradley and Cooper to remain separate from the eroticism in their verse. Even as critics and peers knew they were the writers behind Michael Field's name, Bradley and Cooper's sexes being opposite from their pseudonym appears to have distanced them enough from their verse that the homosexual eroticism appears to have been read as a product of the production of their poetry. The eroticism of their verse comes through the voice of the aesthetic poet Michael Field, and not as a product of Bradley and Cooper's same-sex erotic connection.

[29] There were, and remain, some important differences in the way lesbian eroticism has and continues to be publicly received, understood, as well as how it relates to legal regulation of sexuality. Just as it is today, lesbian sexuality was a part of nineteenth-century pornographic culture targeted towards homosexual men, thus is in some ways, supported by popular cultural male fantasy. But also, lesbian sex was then, and still in many ways remains undefinable. Legally speaking, the sodomy laws of the nineteenth century, to which the Michael Fields's friend Oscar Wilde fell subject to punishment, requires penetration of a penis as proof of the homosexual sex act.

One thing that cannot be denied, is that the incestuous aspect of Bradley and Cooper's relationship played an important part in their ability to openly express their affections in public environments. Of course, this is because, as we now know, their family relationship provided the perfect situation to conceal their queer eroticism. Bradley and Cooper's signs of affection were easily masked as the common feminine homosocial behaviors shared between female kin and close friends. Even if some literary friends or critics knew of, or suspected, the incestuous eroticism of Bradley and Cooper's relationship, Bradley and Cooper's same-sex marriage-like relationship was supported by practices of the privileged classes of the time. As Carolyn Tate argues in her article "Lesbian Incest as Queer Kinship: Michael Field and the Erotic Middle-Class Victorian Family "(2013), actually serves to stabilize Bradley and Cooper's culturally destabilizing same-sex attraction. Tate explains that:

> the Victorian period was a time of intense anxiety and ambivalence about incest. Incest was at the center of the Victorian era's most contentious legislative debates even though sexual contact between family members was technically legal. Victorian journalists and social reformers reviled the 'single room' conditions of the poor cramped quarters, while members of the middle classes defended their right to marry cousins and deceased wives' sisters. (181)

Tate relates that "our current understanding of incest is heavily influenced by a feminist analysis that connects incest to patriarchal privilege" (181). Tate does not argue against this understanding, but rather, adds that "thinking of incest in terms of class privilege will help us make sense of the contradictory values strategically deployed to defend some forms of erotic family affection and vilify others" (181). Tate provides a critical review of some Victorian studies that "document the erotic dynamics of the bourgeois Victorian family, helping scholars to

separate rhetoric from reality" (181). Though Tate contends that several studies have revealed significant aspects of the suppressed history of nineteenth-century middle-class incest and the debates surrounding incest, "they all allude to but fail to take into account how queer forms of incest both troubled and reinforced bourgeois family values" (182). Referencing Bradley and Cooper's relationship, Tate confronts the perplexing issue that the Victorian period "offers the most public and prominent example of queer incestuous coupling," yet there remains a "lack of queer incest narratives in recent Victorian studies" (182). Through an unraveling of the ways that the Victorian middle-class culture validated "close ties between brothers and sisters, cousin marriage, and the desire to marry one's sister-in-law," all of which "reinforced the prerogatives of heterosexual object choice and marriage," Tate also exposes how "the erotic effect that characterized the Victorian family also offered opportunity for same-sex attachments" (185). Crucially to this chapter, an understanding of how incest played an important role in Bradley and Cooper's erotic connection will help us to better understand the poetic and biographical gender and erotic performativity of Michael Field. Tate exposes that, "within a historically conventional bourgeois family arrangement, Bradley, as the spinster sister-in-law, surrogate mother, and erotic object of affection for her niece, presents a way to think about lesbian incest as queer kinship" (182).

In her book, *Undoing Gender,* Judith Butler writes about the need to better define and differentiate various forms of erotic experiences that are too ambiguously posed and often conflated. Indeed, Bradley and Cooper's poetry offers us a chance to better understand, define, and differentiate the often suppressed and unspoken forms of love that Tate calls "lesbian incest as queer kinship." The method and the effect of Michael Field's lyrical collaboration as a means to explore their same-sex incestuous relationship opens up reading to lyrical eroticism that often

falls "outside the field of love" (160). This catchy quotation of Butler's that I have just referenced for the second time, is not simply about *any* form of eroticism that occurs "outside the field of love." This quotation is specifically found in the part of Butler's discussion about the incest taboo in *Undoing Gender*. Butler claims that, just as we need to be able to create a language that includes and distinguishes between various forms of gender performativity, we also must be able to discuss and distinguish between different forms of incest. As Butler explains:

> When the incest taboo works in this sense to foreclose a love that is not incestuous, what is produced is a shadowy realm of love, a love that persists in spite of its foreclosure in an ontologically suspended mode. What emerges is a melancholia that attends living and loving outside the livable and outside the field of love. (160)

While several critics have already dealt with Michael Field's Lesbian lyrics, lesbianism, and the relationship of their poetic gender play and biography, Tate remains the only critic that I have found who dedicates serious attention to the considerably important incestuous aspect of Bradley and Cooper's relationship. Furthermore, it seems that another kind of love has fallen outside the field of scholarly inquiry into the Michael Fields, which is Bradley and Cooper's bisexual eroticism. As their journals, letters, and diaries expose, both Bradley and Cooper experienced erotic attraction to men, thus it seems more correct according to our current definitions of sexuality to call them bisexual rather than lesbian. Importantly, bisexual eroticism frames our understanding of androgyny in Michael Field's work differently than lesbian eroticism. By challenging the confines of both heteronormative and homosexual eroticism in a way that mingles these forms of eroticism, thus becoming both heteronormative and homoerotic, and always falling outside the boundaries of depicting an easily definable erotic identity.

I have only been able to find one other scholar, Martha Vicinus, who is interested in looking at Bradley and Cooper's same-sex relationship in light of their bisexual eroticism. While there is recorded evidence on Bradley and Cooper's flirtations, attraction, and even deeply emotional and erotic connections to some men in their lives, most scholars have, as Vicinus claims in her article "'Sister Souls': Bernard Berenson and Michael Field" (2005), avoided the topic of Bradley and Cooper's attractions to men. Vicinus explains that, "When Bradley and Cooper were first added to the pantheon of lesbian writers, few feminists were interested in their mutual fascination with men, and especially with one as egotistical as Berenson" (327). According to Vicinus, Bradley and Cooper's relationship with each other and to their pseudonym was drastically altered by their erotically charged friendship with Berenson who was a "finely knit, elegant young man [who] shared their distaste for political action and their belief in an aristocracy of artistic souls" (329). In many ways aligning with Coleridge's idea of the greatness of the androgynous mind, Berenson, like Bradley and Cooper, finds transcendent power in the artist's ability to undo binary confines of gender performativity and eroticism. Furthermore, like Bradley and Cooper's androgynous gender performativity, Berenson's androgynous gender performativity was also informed by his purposefully androgynous performances and gender-play. Explaining both Berenson's androgynous gender performativity as well as his active role in performing androgyny a means to achieve greatness of mind, Vicinus illuminates that:

> As a late-nineteenth-century Jew, Berenson was already stereotyped as half-feminine and half-demonic, and he only intermittently struggled against the role. He frequently characterized himself as a highly sensitive, feminized receptor of impressions. The opening lines of his autobiography declare his feminine, maternal nature, and a page later

> he describes falling in love not as an active choice but rather as the overwhelming desire 'to be absorbed by her, to end in her.' (329)

Berenson's feminine depiction of how he feels love functions to demonstrate how he sought to "absorb" the feminine, to become one with the opposite sex," not by owning his lover in the typically Victorian masculine manner, but rather "to be absorbed by her, to end in her." His androgynous power is not found like the early nineteenth-century Romantic absorption of the feminine into the masculine mind and persona of the poet, but rather, androgynous greatness is achieved in a sense by losing himself—by letting love connect him to and allow for him to wholly immerse his masculine self into his feminine beloved.

Even more explicitly aligned himself with one of Bradley and Cooper's favorite symbols for androgynous power when, "Following an evening of high-minded conversation, Bradley recorded her delight the 'M. Berenson assures us he is the faun, the faun of [our] *Callirrhoë.* He goes about enjoying himself—his mission is to make others fauns'" (330). Speaking to the effects of Berenson's faun or Dionysian persona, Vicinus relates that:

> The androgynous Berenson fed the gender fantasies of Bradley and Cooper. Masculinity has long been an essential element to their own relationship, with each donning a variety of male nicknames. [. . .] They not welcomed the challenge of incorporating a new erotic masculinity into their lesbian relationship and their poetry. (330)

According to Vicinus, before Berenson, the Michael Fields explored lesbian desire, or more appropriately what Vicinus calls "female sexual subjectivity." However, Vicinus claims that Bradley and Cooper's relationship with Berenson took their exploration and play with gender and eroticism in a different direction, "Berenson, who championed Walter Prater's aestheticism of pleasure, became both their muse, teaching them to see art more fully, and their beautiful faun,

and art object that they partially possessed because they supported him financially and emotionally." Ultimately, the effect of the dynamics of their androgynous gender-play and Bradley and Cooper's roles as financial and emotional supporters of Berenson leads to a reversal of "the literary cliché of the aesthetic movement by transforming a beautiful man, rather than woman, into an erotic object." While Berenson's role in Bradley and Cooper's lives make the reversal of gender roles in aesthetic eroticism more palpable in both their personal lives and more explicit in their written works, there are nevertheless clear illustrations of such reversals of erotic gender roles depicted in *Long Ago.*

While Berenson had not entered Bradley and Cooper's lives until 1890, so well after the publication of *Long Ago*, I claim that although Berenson did change the dynamics and ways that the Michael Fields reflected heterosexual, or more accurately, bisexual, desire in their writing, we can still locate playful exploration of bisexual eroticism and androgynous reversals of power relations between men and women, with men becoming objects of desire in *Long Ago.* Berenson's influence on Bradley and Cooper, and on their work as Michael Field, is dramatic and noteworthy because of the way that Cooper's infatuation with him destabilized the monogamous same-sex relationship she shared with her aunt. For Cooper, Berenson's "presence was so intoxicating, so exciting, that she could not trust herself to enjoy him. She still struggled to balance her two loves, 'the red sacramental glow for my own Love' and 'the demon-fires' or 'the Doctrine's [Berenson's nickname given to him by Bradley and Cooper] fathomless pool in [her]'" (344).

Unfortunately, Berenson was not fond of writing letters, "and Bradley probably culled those that survive, but those that remain all testify to his continued attraction to Cooper as a fellow spirit." However, from what we can piece together it is clear that both Berenson and

Cooper fell into the Grecian role of the androgynous boy who is the object of an aristocratic elder's desire. Cooper filled this androgynous role in her relationship to Bradley and Berenson filled a similar role, with Bradley becoming an erotically charged matriarchal figure for Berenson, albeit the eroticism between Bradley and Berenson was never physically consummated as it was between her and Cooper. The similarities between Berenson and Cooper elicited a deeper and more destabilizing attraction between Bradley and Cooper, because much of their personal and poetic union hinges on the principles of sameness being key to their higher personal and poetic unification. Yet, "Because Berenson was her [Cooper's] own soul, her heterosexual love for him actually confirmed her homosexual identity, her Henryness"—Henry is one of the many nicknames that Bradley gave to Cooper which specifically points to Cooper's role as the androgynous boy-like object of desire for Bradley (348). While the androgynous sameness shared by Berenson and Cooper does in some ways "confirm her homosexual identity," I would add that it does so by playing out the tensions between her bisexual desire and the idea of a fixed lesbian identity that continues to dominate our understanding of Bradley and Cooper's monogamous same-sex union.

Accounting for ways that the Michael Fields play with androgynous, same-sex, and heterosexual desire in their poetry, I intend to explore how Bradley and Cooper's *incestuous queer kinship*, that is tied both to their same-sex monogamous relationship as well as to their attractions to men, affects the way that their poetry has been and continues to be consumed in their time and in ours. I look at how the erotic and poetic models Michael Field utilizes, and even creates, highlight and subvert some particularly transgressive aspects of Bradley and Cooper's love. But most specifically, this chapter questions what happens to our understanding of Michael Field's lyrical eroticism when we, as readers, mingle the nineteenth-century idea of Michael

Field's poetic predecessor Coleridge and his concept of the *androgynous mind* of the poet with Judith Butler's contemporary ideas of *gender trouble* and *undoing gender*?

Among several possible answers to this question, the most important answer to this question occurs through demonstration of the ways Michael Field's poetry combined with and understanding of some historical and contemporary gender discussions occasion conversations we currently need to be having about the history of sexuality. Particularly, Michael Field's poetry exposes a literary history of sexuality that reveals ways of understanding gender and sexuality that did and continue to undo normative concepts of gender and sexual identity. While biographical context remains central to understanding Michael Field's poetry and how we consume it, the rest of this chapter will primarily demonstrate how close reading of Michael Field's poetry, paired with some basic knowledge of Bradley and Cooper's erotic relationship, reveals a revised version of Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind of the poet that influences feminist ideas of androgynous empowerment.

Beyond how the Michael Fields contributed to emerging feminist ideals of androgynous empowerment, the following close readings reveal how Michael Field's poetry troubles gender by demonstrating the power of the androgynous mind of the poet through transgressive gender and genre performativity. As I have already implied, I will not just explore Bradley and Cooper's female-female erotic connection as relates to lesbian eroticism. Rather, by incorporating Coleridge's influential idea of the androgynous mind with Butler's theories, I will explore how the synthesized dualism at the heart of Michael Field's poetry uses normative and nonnormative eroticism to explore their specifically incestuous same-sex relationship that is not necessarily wholly lesbian. It is important that we attempt to not let their incestuous bisexual same-sex eroticism be conflated with the, in some ways more specific and in some ways too vague, term

lesbianism as we understand it today. The incestuous and bisexual aspects of Bradley and Cooper's relationship have been subverted, even erased from their biographical history, and thus from our understanding of how their biography relates to the particular form of queer eroticism in the poetry of Michael Field.

Looking back in time and to the present we find some useful methods for understanding Michael Field's poetry, as well as how to articulate the doubly nonnormative erotic structure of the incestuous same-sex relationship shared by this pair of unified poets and reflected in their verse. A combined encounter between some of Michael Field's poems, the ideas of the androgynous mind, gender trouble, and undoing gender, along with some necessary biographical and historical context sheds light on some of the troubling ways that current culture continues to perpetuate Fin de Siècle assumptions of normative gender and sexuality. Thus, I argue that Bradley and Cooper's lyrics drawn from translations of Sappho can function as sites for cultural translation that give consumers of their poetry a means to imagine and discuss eroticism that occurs outside of binary linguistic definitions and/or that is seen as too taboo for polite conversation. I will demonstrate how poems in *Long Ago* add to understanding the important similarities and differences between the Fin de Siècle's newly emerging feminine (and feminist) idea of androgynous mind of the poet and how Michael Field's poems function to reveal gender trouble and ways of undoing gender through literature.

Like all the poems in *Long Ago,* the first poem begins with an epigraph of a Sapphic fragment in the "original" and foreign Aeolic Greek, "Αὐτὰρ ὀραῖαι στεφανηπλόκευν·." Further marking Sappho's lyrics as immortalized fragments from the ancient world, the Sapphic fragments are differentiated from Michael Field's "delightfully audacious" extensions of Sapphic lyrics by appearing in the color gold throughout the originally color printed text of *Long Ago.*

The effect of beginning with the emblazoned ancient Greek simultaneously highlights Sappho's text as valuable and immortal while also marking her fragments as a foreign lyrical ruin recovered from the past. Sappho becomes a voice speaking from the grave through the literary device of prosopopoeia while also simultaneously transmuting into the voice of Michael Field. Sappho's foreign voice that speaks from the grave is translated by Michael Field into the words of the first line of the poem, "They plaited garlands in their time" (1). As occurs through all translation, Sappho's words transform throughout Michael Field's book of poetry into sometimes slightly and sometimes strikingly different meanings from the original text. Wharton's literal translation of the same Sapphic fragment reads, "But in their time they plaited garlands" (93). Michael Field removes the conjunction and in doing so changes the meaning of the words from an incomplete contrasting statement. By removing the point of unknown contrast—by removing "But"—Michael Field changes the fragment to make it a complete statement that stands alone. By removing the conjunction, Michael Field illustrates the importance of lyrical unity to the method and literary purpose of *Long Ago*.

As a project, *Long Ago* adds wholeness of meaning to Sappho's lyrics by *plaiting* them into Michael Field's completed poems. Michael Field's voice resurrects Sappho's voice by adding missing lyrics to the Sapphic fragments, thus becoming both the resurrected voice of Sappho and mutually the voice of Michael Field. By translating, transforming, and expanding upon Sapphic fragments to create original lyric poetry, Michael Field's voice envelops Sappho's and the poetic voice(s) become simultaneously singular and multiple, but also importantly feminine and masculine. Sappho's singular feminine voice becomes Michael Field's singular masculine voice while also becoming both voices—both sexes—at once. The voice becomes the always androgynous "they." The words that begin the poem, "They plaited garlands in their

time," brings life to Sappho, to her historical chorus of Lesbian women followers, and to the predominantly male transcribers and translators who disseminate her lyrics across historical, cultural, gender, and genre boundaries. The image of the young women who "plaited garlands in their time" not only creates an idyllic picture of past women's lyrical collaboration but also symbolically engages a broader community in the process of Sappho's lyrical creation.

The garland is a common symbol associated with *the* poet. The "they," the choruses, that weave poems (plait garlands) do so as a part of a much larger community that transcends boundaries of culture and time. The pastoral image of a Lesbian chorus plaiting garlands significantly resurrects Sappho's collaborative communal past, but also comes to represent poetic collaborators beyond the historical Lesbian community of women that follow and sing with Sappho. The Michael Fields become a part of this community. Thus, while the "They" references Sappho's community of women followers from the past, it also integrates the Michael Fields's voice(s) into the community who "plaited garlands in their time." Therefore, one of things that all the Sapphic lyrics in *Long Ago* (re)gain by translation and incorporation into Michael Field's poems is a wholeness that is occurs as a result of multi-voiced androgynous collaboration. Michael Field brings collaborative unity back to the fragments of Sappho through multi-voiced transformation of Sappho's words into new words with meanings that are expanded upon in each of the poems in this collection. Michael Field transforms Sappho's lyrics to recreate the poetic wholeness that has been lost to time, which also draws attention to an importantly different way that Wharton's translations changed Sappho's meaning from the original.

Indeed, while Wharton's translations of Sappho appear "closer" to the original in terms of literal meaning, Wharton's translations transform Sappho's words from the original by stripping them of the lyricism heard in the ancient Aeolian. Wharton renders Sappho's poetic words

unpoetic, but as he puts it, "I have contented myself with a literal English prose translation, for Sappho is, perhaps above all other poets, untranslatable" (vi). Clearly, Wharton understands that literal translation is imperfect, however, necessary to the project of rendering Sappho's lyrics into English. Additionally, as Wharton reminds his readers, the words he translates come to us already altered through transcription. Wharton details that the fragment "But in their time they plaited garlands" comes to us, "Quoted by the Scholiast on Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* 401, to show that plaited wreaths was a sign of being in love" (93). The context of Sappho's words come already transformed by the Scholiast on Aristophanes that uses this fragment as an illustration "to show that plaited wreaths was a sign of being in love." Thus, Sappho's words, in this example, come to English readers of *Long Ago* through from the scholia of Aristophanes, and then informed by the literal translations done by Wharton, and then through the poetic reworkings of Sappho's lyrics into the poetry of Michael Field. These steps of transcription, translation, and adaptation emphatically mark Sappho's presence throughout *Long Ago* as foreign, ancient, and unknowable without transformative translations. Through Michael Field's translations and adaptations, Sappho's voice transforms into a new voice that speaks through Michael Field, the implicit singular voice of the lyric poet—the "I'—that speaks in this poem becomes an unquestionably plural voice.

Nonetheless, that all remains an oversimplification. The complex exchange between the silent multiplicity of the "they" (the Lesbian chorus) and the prosopopoeia of the feminine voice of Sappho by the masculine Michael Field that also unifies the dual voices of the two women poets behind the pseudonym produces both a unifying and differentiating effect with respect to binary concepts of gender and sexual identity. This unification of masculine and feminine, as well as singular and plural voice(s) results in a matrices of gender performativity that resist

simple definition and produces what we might necessarily call an androgynous performance that plays with gender in a way that troubles binary gender definition and heteronormative sexuality by troubling the idea of identity that is something fixed and tied exclusively to the individual. As Butler explains in *Undoing* Gender:

> The particular sociality that belongs to bodily life, to sexual life, and to becoming gendered (which is always, to a certain extent, becoming gendered *for* others) establishes a field of ethical enmeshment with others and a sense of disorientation for the first-person, that is, the perspective of the ego. As bodies, we are always for something more than, and other than, ourselves. (25)

By translating and adapting Sapphic fragments, the voices we can read as the speakers from *Long Ago,* do indeed create "as sense of disorientation for the first-person." The deceptively neatly defined identity we can assign to an individual is no longer made possible when the implied speaker of the poem becomes multi-voiced, and indefinably gendered, speakers.

As I discussed in the first chapter, Coleridge's idea of the imaginative androgynous mind of the great poet, occasions a means for producing a space for poetry to give life to genders and sexualities that are often relegated to the world of fantasy. Even as such nonnormative genders and sexualities do exist in the reality of the waking world, they exist beyond the confines of binary logic and language. Significantly, Butler insightfully explains that:

> Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others

> otherwise; it establishes the possible of excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home. (29)

While Bradley and Cooper claimed to be apolitical, their poetry does indeed engage in the socio-politically transgressive act of bringing life to fantasies of gender and sexuality beyond the binary, while also exposing the fantasy that has been embraced as reality that the individual *is* a certain sex and/or gender and that what they *are* constitutes their desire in a heteronormative structure that is upheld by binary logic. What the Michael Fields produce with their poetry is a space for increasing the possibilities of becoming genders and sexualities beyond binary definitions that dominate ideas of heteronormative and individual identity. These poems produce a space not for "merely producing a new future for genders that do not yet exist" (31). But rather, *Long Ago*, provides a space for imagining genders that "have been in existence for a long time, but they have not been admitted into the terms that govern reality."

In Poem II, Bradley and Cooper writing as Michael Field writing as Sappho evoke the power of fantasy—of the imagination and dreaming—to produce erotic connection with a lost and/or unrequited love. Taking Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind of the poet beyond that of the individual, Michael Field's poetry produces a site for multi-voiced androgynous performance and erotic play that is not altogether livable in the binary logic that dominates what has come to be thought of as reality. The Sapphic fragment beginning the poem, "Ὀφθαλμοις δὲ μὲλαις νύκτος ἄωρος·" translates to "And dark-eyed Sleep, child of Night" in Wharton's literal renderings (86). However, as occurs throughout Michael Field's book of poetry, Michael Field transforms the Wharton translation to produce lyrical wholeness. With respect to this line Michael Field replaces "And" with the verb "Come," thus removing the fragmentary conjunction and evoking, with the word "Come," Sleep as "thou child of Night," to "Give me thy dreams, thy

lies" (1-2). The idea that dreams are lies suggests that dreams give life to things that are not true or understood in the waking world and, in the context of this poem, gives life to unrequited erotic desire. Like Christabel's unspeakable encounter with Geraldine in the dream-trance scene at the climax of Coleridge's poem, *Christabel*, it becomes clear that androgynous imagination is required to transcend binary logic. In Michael Field's poem dreams appear as a form of transcendent truth, even as they are lies, because as the following line reveals, dreams provide the poet/lover with a means to live the truth of their love—dreams bring "The pleasure day denies" (4).

Beyond the erotic pleasures of dreams, another truth that dreams reveal is that not all human thought, feeling, and experience can be confined by the restrictive binary logic that rules the language of the waking world. Referencing mythologies of Sappho's life with the line, "Put me on Phaon's lips to rest," this poem evokes the story of Sappho's tragically unrequited love for Phaon (11). It should not go unnoticed that like Bradley and Cooper, Sappho is often viewed as a lesbian poet. However, the poet from Lesbos—the Lesbian poet—might not have actually been lesbian as we tend to think of lesbian identity these days. According to legend, because of unrequited love for Phaon, Sappho killed herself by jumping from the Leucadian cliffs. Yet, Wharton notes in "The Life of Sappho" section of his book that, "The story of Sappho's love for Phaon, and her leap from the Leucadian rock in consequence of his disdaining her, though it has been so long implicitly believed, does not seem to rest on any firm historical basis" (13). While it has been argued by several, particularly feminist and lesbian, scholars that the stories of Sappho's erotic connections to men might have been created to normalize her sexuality, I would also claim something similar occurs when we completely disregard the stories of her erotic connections with both sexes. Like Bradley and Cooper, Sappho's character has been subjected

not just to attempted cultural erasures of their same-sex eroticism, but even further to erasure of their more fluid eroticism that we might now, for lack of a better term, call bisexual.

The story of Sappho's unrequited love for Phaon, while in many ways far from an ideal depiction of heteronormative love, is a product of cultural subversion of Sappho's same-sex eroticism, which has in turn has resulted in erasure of Sappho's bisexual eroticism. Yet Michael Field, knowing that the myth of Sappho unrequited love for Phaon and resulting suicide is both historically and erotically inaccurate, nevertheless chose to include this narrative throughout *Long Ago*. However, unlike many accounts of this myth about Sappho's heteronormative love and death, Michael Field's allusion to this story does not restore heteronormative order to the narratives of Sappho's life. Rather, Michael Field plays with the tensions between heteronormative relationships and homosexual eroticism by synthesizing the two as distinctively bisexual desire. The "I" referenced in Poem II could be read as Sappho speaking in the first person. In that case, Sappho escapes the reality of the waking world in her dream-state. Referencing her love for Phaon, the dreams of Sappho "bring the kiss I could not take / From lips that would not give" (5-6). This reflects the story of Sappho's unrequited heterosexual desire for Phaon. However, it is worth taking notice of the fact that the story of Sappho's suicide, while establishing a heteronormative desire, does so violently and in a way that for Sappho becomes ultimately unlivable. Thus, a possibility that heteronormative eroticism poses in the poem, is that of a destructive force that render's Sappho's life unlivable when she experiences the pain of Phaon's unrequited desire. Therefore, as the poem demonstrates, even as the story of Sappho's love for Phaon restores heteronormative order to Sappho's biography, it also can be understood as an illustration of the unlivablity of confining desire to the violence of heteronormative eroticism.

Of course, the words here are not so simply Sappho's and it is not Sappho's story alone that troubles binary understanding of sex and gender along with heteronormative desire within the context of the poem. Another voice that speaks through this poem is that of Michael Field, which when read as a single masculine voice changes the story of Sappho's heterosexual love to a homosexual connection between Michael Field and Phaon. Thus, knowing that the Michael Fields are actually two women, the homosexual textual connection between the Michael Fields and Phaon both capitalizes on gay eroticism to speak to same-sex female eroticism while also depicting heteronormative eroticism by rendering the poetic voice(s) desire as feminine desire for a masculine beloved. The concluding lines of this poem, "Put me on Phaon's lips to rest, / And cheat the cruel day!" becomes both homoerotic and heteroerotic—ultimately, it becomes bierotic (11-12). Binary gender and sexuality are troubled by the play between masculine and feminine voices that takes place in the imagination. The dreaming imagination of the poetic voice transcends the "the cruel day" where Sappho's love remains unrequited and the unlivable language of binary logic confines erotic desire. Of course, if we read the voice(s) of the poem as Bradley's and Cooper's, then it is worth considering how the unrequited and unspeakable love of Sappho and Phaon symbolically becomes the unspeakable incestuous same-sex love shared by Bradley and Cooper. While the erotic nature of Bradley's and Cooper's love was certainly kept private, the heteronormative language used to describe their love masks both their same-sex and incestuous desire. Just as the stories of Sappho's love for Phaon and various other men, normalizes her erotic desire in some ways, it also troubles binary gender and eroticism by depicting bisexual desire by a woman who ultimately becomes aligned with lesbianism.

Certainly, Sappho and the Michael Fields's alignment with lesbianism has to do with some of politics of erotic power that occur in their poetry. By speaking about Sappho's unlivable

heterosexual desire Bradley and Cooper both highlight the violence and downfall of heterosexual connection while simultaneously showing how their erotic connection is something that requires imagination that transcends the binary logic that dominates heteronormative discussions of erotic desire; and, that ultimately transcends heterosexual Eros. We see this again in Poem V, which begins, "Οἵαν τὰν ὐάκινθον ἐν οὔρεσι ποίμενες ἄνδρες / πόσσι καταστείβοισι, χάμαι δέ τε πόρφνρον ἄνθος." Wharton's translation reads, "As on the hills the shepherds trample the hyacinth under foot and the purple flower [is pressed] to earth" (104). However, Michael Field's poem starts "As on the hills the shepherds tread / A hyacinth down, and withered / The purple flower / Is pressed to earth, and broken lies" (1-4). By altering trample to tread in the first line, Michael Field implicitly removes the violent power of the action by the shepherds. Rather than maintaining how the shepherds could be read as stamping the flowers down with powerful, and possibly contemptuous force, Michael Field's alteration of "trample" to "tread" produces the image of shepherds stepping upon the flower without purposeful force.

By translating the word to "tread," Michael Field does not entirely remove the violence of the action. The violence of the shepherds' stepping upon the flower is further developed and emphasized by the extended metaphor of dead flower that "broken lies" as symbolic of Sappho's treatment by Phaon, with Sappho being associated with the flower tread and broken under the foot of Phaon's "scorn and pride" (11). While Wharton's translation of Sappho's fragment does, in the case of the fragment that occasions this poem, produce a complete statement, it should not go unnoticed that Sappho's fragment is made whole by Wharton's addition of the words '"is pressed." Yet, Wharton's addition of words to complete the statement (grammatically speaking) nevertheless appears insufficient to creating lyrical wholeness.

Michael Field uses the extended metaphor of the shepherds crushing and killing of the hyacinth as a vehicle to draw out the erotic and poetic implications of the myth of Phaon's unrequited love for Sappho that leads to her suicide. The description of the hyacinth as a "witherèd" flower that "broken lies," appears as insertions by Michael Field to the original fragment that occasions this poem. The flower that is withered and broken could be read as the flower being withered and broken by the steps of the shepherds or read as a flower that is already in the delicate state of becoming withered and is thus easily broken when tread upon. The image of the withered flower remains open to either interpretation, which means that we can read both Sappho's "withering" as a result of her aging body or tired heart and as a result of the way she is affected by coming to terms with Phaon's diminished love for her. Reading the withering and breaking of the flower as simultaneously a result of Sappho's diminishing physical beauty and weariness of passion that comes with age as well as a result of the grief, she experiences due to losing Phaon's love, demonstrates how the two are intertwined in heteronormative narratives. As it plays out, heteronormative masculine love is fleeting because it is due to masculine desire for youthful beauty. As the change from "trample" to "tread" suggests, Phaon's fleeting masculine love for Sappho might not be purposefully cruel albeit so brutally painful for Sappho that she is nevertheless destroyed by the effects of his unrequited love.

Michael Field continues to illustrate the how dwindling feminine beauty associated with age troubles heteronormative erotic desire through the story of Sappho and Phaon. Michael Field writes:

> My beauty droops and fades away,
>
> Just as a trampled blossom's may.
>
> Why must thou tread me into earth—

So dim in death, so bright at birth? (17-20)

By referencing how her "beauty droops and fades away," the scene is set in these lines with a flower that is already in the process of wilting, "Just as a trampled blossom's may." Then the speaker asks, "Why must thou tread me into earth— / So dim in death, so bright at birth?" Here we see tensions play out to between feminine decaying beauty paired with undying love as opposed to masculine fleeting and ultimately destructive love that indeed troubles heteronormative eroticism. Sappho and Michael Field lament feminine decaying beauty. The decay of Sappho's physical beauty with age becomes a central point in the juxtaposition of the heteronormative ideal of feminine undying love compared to masculine fleeting love that appears throughout *Long Ago.*

One way that some scholars and readers have interpreted the juxtaposition is that it poses feminine immortal love as superior—and particularly more humane—when compared to masculine fleeting love. On many levels this is a fair reading. However, it seems to me that a more nuanced reading demonstrates that neither masculine nor feminine Eros are ideal. The narrative of Sappho's grief for Phaon's lost love that occasions her suicide suggests that the poetic genius Sappho, who stands as a peer among male poets, becomes so wrapped up in her undying love that she is driven to self-destruction. Thus, undying feminine desire is posed as a mutually destructive force, particularly when paired with masculine fleeting love. After all, it is not simply Phaon's fleeting love that results in Sappho's suicide. Rather, it is his fleeting love paired with her undying love that compels her to take her life. This does not altogether elevate feminine desire above masculine desire. Truly these lines trouble both masculine and feminine Eros, and ultimately, as solidified throughout Michael Field's book of poetry, androgynous Eros

(both masculine and feminine but also neither masculine or feminine) appears to become a higher form of connection.

Throughout *Long Ago* binary gender and normative sexuality are troubled by the mingling of masculine and feminine voices and heterosexual and homosexual eroticism. This book of poetry creates a space for the androgynous mind of the poet(s) to be consumed by readers, thus producing imaginative spaces that give life to genders and sexualities beyond those created by the binary logic that has dominated Western cultural understanding of these aspects of identity since the nineteenth century. More explicitly aligning poetry with the space for the imagination to give life to erotic identities beyond those made possible in the binary language of the waking world, Poem XLIV incorporates another biographical myth, or maybe—given the details of the Sapphic fragment— an educated guess, about a same-sex relationship between Sappho and one of her female companions, Atthis. In some ways, contradicting the assertion in Poem II and V that a woman's love remains eternal, Poem XLIV begins with the fragment "Οΰ τι μοι ϊ μμες ·." Wharton translates this fragment, "Ye are nought to me" (69). Michael Field removes the "Ye" from the first line of verse, turning the translation of the fragment to the simple exclamation "Nought to me!" While the Sapphic fragment's scornful statement initially appears as a statement directed at a particular individual, by removing the "Ye" Michael Field resists the fragment's statement as aimed towards a specific listener changing it to something more internal. While the poem does reveal that the words are directed to Atthis in the final line, Sappho's grief, rather than who she grieves, becomes the central focus of the poem.

Although, the line "Nought to me!" appears scornful and resistant to the idea of feminine eternal love or might even pose love between women as more fleeting than love between men and women, the poem demonstrates how immortal love that is unrequited remains a form of

love. However, in the case of the broken erotic connection, feminine eternal love becomes a form of love that has complex layers and is paradoxically combined with feelings of scorn. Immediately following the fragmented exclamation of "Nought to me!", Michael Field adds, "So I choose to say" (1). It is significant that the speaker(s) make a choice to say these words, because the idea that there is a choice to make about what words to say implies that there is a tension between the complexity of the speaker's feelings and how to communicate the complexity of such feelings. This poem demonstrates that the binary choice between love and scorn appears insufficient. Rather, what this poem reveals in the repetitions, silences, and tone is that the speaker does not necessarily wholly feel either love or scorn but simultaneously feels both love and scorn, therefore, both and also neither. The binary logic and language that upholds an opposition between love and scorn is troubled in this poem. The speaker echoes Sappho's words, "Nought to me," in the first line of every stanza in the poem. Michael Field's repetition can certainly lead a reader to question if this repetition actually demonstrates a preoccupation with the grief of lost love. Does the speaker protest the significance of the lost beloved too much?

The speaker asks, "Are not all things as heretofore / Now we have cast our love away?" This question that ends the first stanza invites readers to consider the lasting effect of love. Rather than demonstrate how Atthis has become nothing to the speaker, we are invited to answer the common question that many of us ask ourselves when we are grieving for lost love. Can things return to how they were before falling in love? Of course, the answer is more complicated than a simple *yes* or *no*. This poem does not attempt to answer this question. Instead the silence—the lack of an answer—demonstrates the lasting presence of grief and of Sappho's simultaneously contrasting feelings of both love and scorn for Atthis. Certainly, this shows that

Atthis is something to the speaker(s), albeit, something undefinable in the binary language that dominates heteronormative love narratives, which poses love as either entirely felt or opposingly replaced with scorn.

While Sappho is an implied voice in the poem, she is also character in this poem. Readers are encouraged to imagine how the character Sappho creates poetry as a result of broken erotic connection with the final stanza that reads:

> Nought to me! Wherefore dost thou throw
> On me that glittering glance, as though,
> Friend, I had ever done thee wrong,
> When the crowd asks me for the song,
> Atthis, I loved thee long ago?" (25-30)

Although the erotic connection between Sappho and Atthis is fragmented. Some form of friendship that is bound to a strong and productive poetic connection remains. We are encouraged to imagine Atthis's "glittering glance" directed at Sappho as she is part of the audience who listens to Sappho as she sings the song that the crowd encourages her to sing, "Atthis, I loved thee long ago." But, what is a "glittering glance?" This description remains open to interpretation a few different ways. The "glittering glance" of Atthis could be flashing with scorn, the pain of unrequited love, or embarrassment as the subject of the Sappho's song. The speaker/character of Sappho seems to take it this way. However, Atthis's "glittering glance" could contrastingly be glowing with love, friendship, and admiration for Sappho's song. Of course, by leaving this description open to both these interpretations, we might also interpret the "glittering glance" of Atthis to be more complicated than a binary, either a glance "glittering" with love or scorn. Rather, mirroring Sappho's complex feelings, we can read Atthis's eyes as

gleaming with paradoxical feelings that involve both love and scorn, but that are more accurately feelings that fall "outside the field of love." When presented as binary opposites, love and scorn leave many forms of affection and pain outside the definability of language. Just as the complexity of feelings experienced from long-term relationships do not so easily fall within the often passionate ideal perpetuated by heteronormative narratives, which pose the initial excitement of first falling in love as the ideal, so too does scorn fade into something still felt but felt differently and less passionately over time.

Significantly, the words, "Atthis, I loved thee long ago," that punctuate the poem appear as a quotation within the poem. Of course, on a literal level this is because it is the name of Sappho's song that the crowd asks her to sing as a part of the narrative of this poem. However, the quotation further edifies the idea that it is the voice of Sappho speaking and being implored to sing. However, simultaneously the quoted words remind readers that Sappho, Atthis, and their poetry are spoken events that occurred "long ago." Past mingles with present as Michael Field's poem gives voice and life to Sappho while also reminding us with her own words that the events that occasioned her words did, in fact, occur "long ago." The poem becomes an occasion to imagine and understand complexities of feeling beyond the binary of love or scorn and conceptions of time beyond past or present. Instead readers witness a mingling of love and scorn, as well as depiction of more complex and paradoxical feelings. Importantly, the blending of past and present demonstrates how past feelings of love and scorn remain both eternal while also ever in flux and changed by the passage of time. The past love and scorn are not forgotten or lost by time, however, love is transformed not simply to its opposite, but becomes indefinable and always subjected to the changeability of time.

Another notable poem that draws out the tensions between heteronormativity and depictions of gender beyond the binary, representations of nonnormative sexualities, and demonstration of erotic feelings beyond the binary of love or scorn capitalizes on the Sapphic fragment, "Ἔρος δαὖτέ μ' ὸ λυσιμελης δόνει, / γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον." According to Wharton's literal translation of the Sapphic fragment that is quoted by Hephaestion translates to, "Now Love masters my limbs and shakes me, fatal creature, bitter-sweet" (97). However, Michael Field's poem, XXVIII, begins with an abbreviation of Sappho's fragment itself. Sappho's fragment is abbreviated to, " . . . Ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὄττω / τις ἐρᾶται·" [ellipsis appear in Michael Field's translation]. This fragment is translated and transformed by Michael Field to the simple, "Love, fatal creature, bitter-sweet" (1). The body of Sappho, whose limbs are shaken by love in the fragment is removed from Michael Field's translation, thus we see Sappho's body disappear from this fragment. However, her body is already absent from the fragment because it comes to us—just as it came to Wharton, Michael Field, and other readers of Sappho—from quotations recorded by others. Sappho's words become Hephaestion's, then Wharton's, and then Michael Field's. Wharton's book shows readers that Sappho's words come to us already transformed through the poetic transcriptions of Sappho's chanted lyrics and translations into other languages. Yet, while Sappho's body is already removed from her fragments and transformed by translation, Michael Field reinserts Sappho as a figure through the Aeolian fragment and by referencing the biographical legend of her heteronormative affair with fellow poet Alcæus, in which she has been traditionally depicted as the lover who leaves him with the heartache of unrequited lost love.

Aligning with the story of Sappho breaking Alcæus's heart, Michael Field writes:

Love, fatal creature, bitter-sweet,

For my Alcæus I entreat.

Should I not plead? To wasting fires

A secret prey I live,

Yet, Eros, that which he desires

I cannot give. (1-7)

Sympathetically, the speaker who presumably could be Michael Field or Sappho asks for Alcæus to be freed from his feelings of love for Sappho. If we read the implied speaker to be Sappho, then she asks, "Who shall deliver him" (7)? Sappho's question is followed by an explanation of her inability to feel the same love for him causes her to weep, exclaiming at the end of the stanza, "Ah, can another mortal breast / Learn Sappho's pain" (11-12)! However, in the preceding line, if Sappho is the speaker then she is referring to herself in the third person. While it is certainly not unheard of for a speaker to refer to themselves in the third person, it does make uncertain and complicate the identity of the speaker in this poem. Whether Sappho or Michael Field, the speaker's empathy for Alcæus results in the speaker experiencing the pangs of Alcæus's grief and possibly, if the speaker is Sappho, guilt for not being able to love Alcæus as he does her. As the poem continues, it becomes apparent that heteronormative love, even before being unrequited, has resulted in Alcæus's dwindling poetic inspiration. With the lines, "When once his feet to me did stray, / He would forget the homeward way," readers encounter a depiction of Alcæus as a lover who follows Sappho like a lost puppy, rather than as her poetic peer (13-14).

In the final stanza the speaker prays that "O heavenly Muses, come" (19)! The poetic voice appeals to the Muses to come to Alcæus emphasizing the importance of his need to be inspired to create. Singing lyrics is posed as a life or death need for the poet Alcæus when the speaker says,

"He cannot live if he be dumb" (20). As it concludes, this poem suggests that artistic inspiration and production "alone can heal / A lover's wrong" (23-24). However, it seems to be heteronormative love that, in the narratives of Sappho's life, stifles poetic inspiration and production. Heteronormative love is presented throughout *Long Ago* as a form of erotic attraction that leads to an unlivable life for the poet. After all, the same-sex erotic connection and eventual fragmentation with Atthis occasions the song "Atthis, I loved thee long ago." Considering Bradley and Cooper's reputations for flirtation with men, as well as compelling evidence presented by Vicinus in her article about the erotic and poetic connection between Bradley, Cooper, and Berenson, it is fair to assess that while bisexual attraction informed the Michael Fields's conception of types of love and how love affects poetry, same-sex unification appears more productive. This does not, however, make Bradley and Cooper lesbians in the proper sense. Their bisexual eroticism draws out tension between depictions of heteronormative love resulting in poetic impotence and the eventual unlivablity of the poet's life with same-sex love producing creative unity that results in the ability to experiment with gender and to achieve a new feminist ideal of the greatness of the androgynous mind.

Perhaps most strikingly appropriate for two women poets writing as a man translating a woman, in Poem LII, Michael Field relates the Hellenistic story of the Tiresias's transformation from man to woman and back to man. Looking back to the Greek/Roman myth of the prophet Tiresias, Michael Field relates the story of Tiresias's transformation which, in the Ovidian version, results in Tiresias being cursed with blindness by Saturn and then bequeathed with prophetic powers by Zeus. As Ovid tells the story, Tiresias becomes a woman for seven years as a punishment by Hera/Juno after striking a pair of mating snakes and killing the female snake. Eight years after striking the snakes and becoming a woman, Tiresias once again strikes a pair of

mating snakes and returns to a man. Tiresias's experiences as both a man and woman lead to him being questioned by Zeus and Hera to settle a debate that they are having about whether women or men experience more erotic pleasure. Tiresias affirms Zeus's stance that erotic love is more pleasurable for women. However, Michael Field alters the myth and expands upon the question of which sex experiences more erotic pleasure by notably changing the story, mingling it with Sapphic elements in terms of Sappho's fragmented presence in verse and by adding depictions of Lesbian (and lesbian) eroticism.

This poem suggestively, and ironically (given the multiplicity of voices), begins with the Sapphic fragment, "Ἔγων *δ' ἐμαύτᾳ / τοῦτο σύνοιδα·*." This is the only poem in in the book that does not begin with a translation or adaptation of the Sapphic fragment that is the epigraph. Wharton translates the fragment that introduces this poem to, "And this I feel in myself" (67). The Sapphic epigraph's meaning, as well as Sappho's voice, is ironically further removed from this poem by the lack of translation in this English poem. Here Michael Field's bieroticism appears both most hidden and most prominent. In a poem that narrates Tiresias's dual-sexed experiences, Michael Field begins with the untranslated fragment meaning "And this I feel in myself." Only readers who do the work of translating the fragment are able to see the connection between the epigraph's statement, "And this I feel in myself," and the narrative of the poem that depicts the dual-sexed experience of the androgynous figure of Tiresias.

Through the narrative of the poem, Tiresias's dual-sexed experiences elevates androgyny and bieroticism to the become the source of Tiresias's prophetic ability. Michael Field translates and transforms the myth when they write:

> Thou hast been woman, and her deep
>
> Magnetic mystery dost keep;

Thou hast been woman, and can'st see

*Therefore i*nto futurity: (emphasis added)

The sentence that punctuates these lines demonstrates how Michael Field significantly changes the Ovidian version of the story by having Hera say that, "Thou hast been woman, and can'st see / *Therefore* into futurity:'[emphasis added]"(73-74). The word "Therefore" tells us that the gift of prophetic power is a result of Tiresias's experience of living as a woman. In the Ovidian version, however, the reason for Tiresias's prophetic ability does not so directly follow as a result of his experience as a woman. Zeus gives Tiresias the ability to see the future in response to Saturn blinding Tiresias after his response that women experience more erotic pleasure than men. In Michael Field's version of the story it is not ambiguous that the power of prophesy comes from Tiresias's dual-sexed experience. In Michael Field's poem, Hera continues to explain the connection between dual-sexed experience and prophecy when she says:

It is not that Zeus gave you [Tiresias] power

To look beyond the transient hour

For thou hast trod the regions dun,

Where life and death are each begun;

They spirit from the gods set free

Hath communed with Necessity. (74-79)

These lines highlight a significant connection between the synthesis of the woman/man, masculine/feminine binaries that permeate throughout Michael Field's poetry. This poem demonstrates how Michael Field plays with gender in their poetry in a way that elevates dual-sexed, fluid gendered, and more generally, androgynous experience. This uplifting of androgynous experience certainly aligns in many ways with Coleridge's elevation of the

androgynous mind. However, the early nineteenth-century adoption of the androgynous mind appears predominately to be a masculine envelopment of feminine thought and experience. Michael Field demonstrates an amended ideal of the greatness of the androgynous mind as something that can be literally represented by Tiresias's dual-sexed experiences and which ultimately results in the conclusion that feminine eroticism and experience is superior to masculine eroticism. Tiresias speaks from his experience as both sexes and exalts female eroticism above male, but also it is particularly Tiresias's experience as a woman that results in his mystical in his ability to see the future. By empowering feminine experience, particularly feminine eroticism, this poem reads as a feminist poem that removes the restraints of Victorian propriety that suppresses the power of feminine eroticism

Speaking to the feminist readings made possible by Michael Field's poetic depiction of the culturally unbalanced erotic power dynamics between men and women, we can locate a point where Michael Field explicitly poses the superiority of feminine eroticism over masculine eroticism despite cultural confines that suppress female eroticism in Poem XXXVI. Starting with the Sapphic fragment, Διὸς παῖς ὁ χρυός, κεῖνον οὐ σῆς οὐδὲ κὶς δάπτει, "Gold is son of Zeus, no moth nor worm devours it," this poem draws out the difference between male/masculine fleeting erotic love and female/feminine eternal erotic connection (Wharton, 126). The first stanza of this twelve-line poem reads:

> Yea, gold is son of Zeus: no rust
> Its timeless light can stain;
> The worm that brings man's flesh to dust
> Assaults its strength in vain:
> More gold than gold the love I sing,

A hard, inviolable thing. (1-6)

Starting with the emphatic agreement with Sappho's original, "*Yea*, gold is son of Zeus," (emphasis added) then proceeding to draw out further explanation of the metaphor between gold and love, this poem further explores the subject of how feminine Eros does not tarnish or decay over time. Eternal feminine eroticism transcends the physical world in this poem. The lines "The worm that brings man's flesh to dust / Assaults its [gold/love] strength in vain," accentuate how gold and the love of the speaker extend beyond our mortal form (3-4). It is worth noting the symbolism of the worm here extends beyond the literal worms that feed on a corpse. The worm can also be read as a phallic symbol that hints at masculinity being tied to decay, and also to the masculine consumption of erotic bodies that results in the eventual reduction and disappearance of erotic attraction to the already consumed body of the former object of erotic desire. Certainly, this poem, like others in the collection, calls into questions the sexual politics of heterosexual connection. Male consumption of women's bodies as expendable objects, was then, and remains an issue that is central to many feminist discussions including women's sexual autonomy, power dynamics between the sexes, and the resulting violence against women that some "traditional" ideas about heterosexual eroticism perpetuate. The division of the sexes, as illustrated in this poem, produces an eroticism that has more to do with power than with shared pleasure.

It is in the second stanza when it becomes undeniably clear that the eternal love of the speaker(s) is a specifically androgynous love, which is meant to be particularly compared to fleeting masculine love. The second stanza begins, "*Men* say the passions should grow old [emphasis added]," thus aligning masculinity with the idea that love's passion must deteriorate (7). Comparatively, the speaker proclaims in the following lines that, "With waning years; my heart / Is incorruptible as gold," (8-9). With respect to the speaker(s) gender, as already

discussed, Michael Field is readable as both a masculine and feminine speaker. Thus, this poem does not hold up the binary opposition of masculine/feminine. But rather, asserts androgynous love as transcendently eternal love. Given that the speaker(s) voice creates a poem, poetry itself aligns with androgynous love here as opposed to man's fleeting love. The speaker asserts that, "'Tis my immortal part: / Nor is there any god can lay / On love the finger of decay" (10-12). It is the androgynous poetic voice's "immortal part" to love eternally. The speaker(s) not only love immortally but record love eternally in verse.

It is worth noting the double-meaning of the word "lay" in the line that follows. In the most literal sense the concluding lines communicate that a god cannot "lay" a "finger of decay," or destroy the speaker's love. A god, or external force, cannot cause the speaker's love to die as does mortal flesh. But also, a god cannot "lay" in the poetic meaning of the word—only a poet creates songs (lays) of immortal love like the ones we read in *Long Ago*. To write poetry is a human endeavor that transcends gods' power to destroy the mortal form of the human body. Androgynous, eternal love, and poetic creation are held up in this poem as not only powerful enough to transcend masculine love but also to transcend the gods and mortal flesh. Eternally transcendent love and poetry are posed as products of the higher thought of an androgynous mind, while masculine love remains a fleeting product of fleshly desire. As Michael Field's poems demonstrate again and again, masculine love will ultimately decay. Furthermore, in these poems, when feminine eternal Eros is directed towards a masculine beloved woman fall prey to tragic pain of the increasingly unrequited affections of their male lover as masculine love decays. However, androgynous eroticism (which is tied to the androgynous mind of the poet) remains steadfast and lives beyond mortal bodies. While not necessarily showing feminine desire to be superior, same-sex eroticism, particularly between poetic women who push the boundaries of

traditional femininity, does appear to become a means for women to find something closer to ideal connection. Of course, in Victorian culture, as today, this speaks to the tensions and imbalances found between normative masculine and feminine erotic desire.

Ultimately, by reading *Long Ago* as poems speaking from a plurality of voices, we always encounter the speakers as a "they." This is significant because "they" is always neuter—always androgynous. "They" eliminates the problem of assigning a specific gender and as employed by Michael Field, "they" also suggests that a group consisting of multiple genders, sexes, and sexualities create something more lyrically whole. The Michael Fields's multi-voiced, bierotic, androgynous gender-play in their lyrics is indeed a permutation of Coleridge's' idea of androgynous mind, but instead of the androgynous mind of one poet, the Michael Fields's conceive of a new feminist concept of the androgynous mind that is specifically produced by transcription, translation, and adaption. By consuming Michael Field's poetry with this concept of how collaborative poetry creates androgynous voice(s) by synthesizing the words of many voices to create lyrical wholeness, we encounter historical and contemporary issues of gender trouble. But perhaps most importantly, we find in these poems' occasions and ways of undoing gender that require readers to imagine gender, sex, and sexuality outside the binary logic that dominates Western thought and language. Thus, while we may not find new terms for various ways of defining identity, we encounter depictions, in words, of identities that that produce occasions to question the binary system of identification and that allows for dialogue about the insufficiency of language when it comes to describing love that falls "outside the field of love."

# Conclusion

If your philosophy is not unsettled daily, then you are blind to all the universe has to offer

—Neil Degrasse Tyson

Inspired by Virginia Woolf's inquiry into Coleridge's idea of the androgynous mind by testing "what one meant by man-womanly, and conversely by woman-manly, by pausing and looking at a book or two," this dissertation provides poetic examples of what might be meant by the androgynous mind of the poet. This is not simply an intellectual exercise in understanding some fringe theory of a canonical English poet. By tracing versions of Coleridge's concept of the androgynous mind through some nineteenth-century poetic examples, we are able to gain a clearer perspective of the ways that some poets pushed against the heteronormative binary models of gender, sex, and sexuality that were propagated at the time.

Equipped with some knowledge of poetic resistance to binary normativity, we enhance our ability to see some of the ways that our current culture remains confined by binary concepts of gender, sex, and sexuality. We witness examples of how to trouble normativity through poetic practices that speak to the greatness of the androgynous mind and that illustrate non-normative gender, sex, and sexuality. These illustrations of non-normative gender, sex, and sexuality, while sometimes devices used by poets to shock and horrify readers, always hold the revolutionary potential of creating spaces for recognition of non-normative gender, sex, and sexuality. By depicting non-normative gender, sex, and sexuality, the poems in this dissertation have the power to open reader's imaginations to possibilities of gender, sex, and sexuality beyond the confines of the binary logic that dominates heteronormative and scientific thought

Adding to the historical perspective, Butler's ideas of gender performativity, gender trouble, and undoing gender, invigorates the poems with new ways and terms for reading that shed light on how poetry holds the power to create more livable lives by interpreting human experience and identity as something beyond that of binary logic and language. Embracing a Romantic vision of poetry, Victorian poet Matthew Arnold fittingly says in his essay "The Study of Poetry" (1880):

> More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science I say will appear incomplete without it.[30]

If we too embrace this vision of poetry, then we look to poetry to enlighten and console us. With respect to the purposes of this project, we look to poetry to produce occasions for imagining and producing more livable lives for individuals that do not easy fit normative ideas of gender, sex, and sexual identity.

Understanding poetry as a mode of communication that is capable of producing spaces of greater livability for those outside the binary norms does not mean that we abandon science as another means for understanding human gender, sex, and sexuality. What it means is that we recognize the limitations of science. It means that we see how scientific logic remains always incomplete without the realities exposed by the world of the imagination. Science uses binary models to comprehend the universe. The scientific method appropriately, for its purposes, works to remove human error and biases from the way that knowledge is gathered. This can, however, become an ultimately dehumanizing separation of fact from fiction—reality from imagination.

[30] Originally published as the introduction to T. H. Ward's anthology, *The English Poets.*

All too commonly misunderstandings of scientific thought as superior to all other forms of comprehending ourselves and our world have led, and continue to lead, to inhumanity. This is precisely why we need literature. By engaging with literary texts, we encounter and open our minds to understanding a diversity of human experiences. Importantly, the poems featured in this dissertation hold the power to open our minds to ways of understanding humanity outside the binary logic that dominates our normative conceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality.

We do not need to look hard to find ways that science has led to inhumane understanding and treatment of people who express non-normative gender, sex, or sexuality. Starting in the nineteenth-century homosexuality, then sexual inversion, was treated as a mental illness. While homosexuality has officially been removed from the American Psychiatry Association's list of mental illnesses since 1973, there are still psychologists today that engage in mentally damaging conversion therapy treatments. Also, today the medical practices of lying to intersex children (and sometimes their parents), as well as performing non-consensual and unnecessary surgeries to make intersex infants better fit the binary models remain prevalent. While these practices have started to be rethought, with California being the first State to denounce non-consensual unnecessary surgeries performed on intersex children in April of 2017, these surgeries and practices of lying to children and parents do alarmingly continue to occur and damage the physical and mental health of intersex individuals. Another obvious example of science being incomplete in terms of being prone to inhumanity, thus in need of literary intervention, is demonstrated by the classification of transgender as mental illness. Until only recently transgender individuals were prone to be labeled as having gender identity disorder. Again, we are on the verge of changing thinking that stigmatizes transgender individuals by assuming that transgender identity is a mental disorder. In June of 2018 the World Health Organization

officially removed transgender from the mental disorders chapter to the sexual health chapter of its 11th International Classification of Diseases catalog.[31] However, the fact that transgender is moved to the sexual health chapter highlights how transgender individuals remains an at risk group for not being able to receive appropriate medical care, for high HIV and suicide rates, and are commonly subjected to discrimination, legal barriers, and violence. The fact that we are in the process of changing the way we view non-normative gender, sex, and sexuality makes it all that more important that we imagine other models of normativity that promote greater livability for people who do not currently fit the heteronormative binary model.

By destigmatizing conversations about LGBTQI subjects through literary encounters we help to better complete the scientific endeavor to better understand the human mind and body, but also to make people's lives more livable. Of course, in order to develop a more livable reality for currently non-normative individuals, the medical community, legislators, and the general mass population all need to alter our heteronormative binary logic that has inaccurately posed human sexuality as an either/or mode of being. Instead, we need to think of humans as always becoming their gender, sex, and sexuality. These aspects of human identity are more accurately depicted along a spectrum and literature that depicts non-normative gender, sex, and sexuality does the important work of exposing the limits of binary logic when it comes to understanding human gender, sex, and sexual performativity. It for this reason that this dissertation is not simply a project separate from my teaching experiences, but also plays a part in my teaching practice.

When I teach the poems in this dissertation, students encounter literature as a mode of

[31] "The World Health Organization will stop classifying transgender people as mentally ill" Ben Pickman and Brandon Griggs, CNN https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/20/health/transgender-people-no-longer-considered-mentally-ill-trnd/index.html (accessed 22 June 2018)

expressing the spectrum of sexual performativity beyond the binary logic that has come to dominate our cultural understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality. More generally, students come to realize the power of literature to help us all to better understand and embrace a spectrum of humanity. This does not always occur without resistance. However, I have found that by teaching these poems, along with some knowledge of the theoretical framework of Coleridge's concept of the *androgynous mind* and Butler's ideas of gender performativity, gender trouble, and undoing gender, students feel better equipped for discussion and less resistant to the subject as we confront some important historical and contemporary contexts for our understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality. By providing historical theoretical context students become more comfortable with the drawing out the tensions in class discussion between poetic rebellion against, and simultaneous conformity with, sexual normativity. Also, by incorporating Butler's ideas of gender performativity, gender trouble, and undoing gender into the classroom conversation, students are further prepared to take part in current discussions regarding normativity and are provided with enlightening new language and ideas that creates the potential for reconsidering our gender normative views.

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