

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: A CHARACTER SINGER IN MALE  
ATTIRE: ANNIE HINDLE IN AMERICA,  
1868–1886

Rachel C. Ace, Master of Arts, 2017

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In 1868 Annie Hindle brought to the American variety theater male impersonation, in which a female character vocalist assumed a realistically male stage persona to sing men's comic songs about courting women. But Hindle's gender-transgressive behavior was not limited to the stage: her romantic relationships were primarily with other women, twice disguising herself in male dress to marry. Despite what appears a clear connection between the onset of male impersonation, gender-transgressive dress, and same-sex desire, scholarship on male impersonation has treated a reading of Hindle's act that engages with the category of sexuality as speculative. Through an examination of Hindle's repertoire and performance context, this thesis demonstrates that her performance should be read as a form of sexual commentary. Because in the nineteenth-century United States male dress signaled that a woman engaged in same-sex practices, this thesis reads male impersonation as a recognizable representation of unconventional sexual identity.

A CHARACTER SINGER IN MALE ATTIRE: ANNIE HINDLE IN AMERICA,  
1868–1886

by

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## **Introduction**

### **An English Character Singer Arrives in New York**

In 1868, a twenty-one-year-old English singer and comic called Hindle arrived in New York with a peculiar profession that was largely unknown in the United States. Concert saloons eagerly awaited the arrival of the young performer, and entertainment newspapers announced that soon “England’s Greatest Character Vocalist” would be seen and heard on the city’s variety stage.<sup>1</sup> Hindle’s routine involved dressing in a suit and singing the most popular sentimental and comic songs of the day, sharing a repertoire with esteemed variety performers such as Charles Vivian, Tony Pastor, and Master Barney. In a single set, Hindle would perform as several different characters including “a gent of the first water,” “a gent in the army,” “the Washington fop,” and “the lively young swell.”<sup>2</sup> The gentleman, the soldier, the fop, and the hard-living dandy were stock characters used by nearly every male comic singer. In fact, in terms of repertoire and performing style, there was seemingly little to distinguish Hindle from fellow character singers. What made Hindle remarkable was that she was a woman, but one that appeared, on the variety stage at least, in male attire.

Annie Hindle was the first male impersonator to perform in variety theaters in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Variety theater was a popular form of musical entertainment from

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<sup>1</sup> “Amusements,” *The New York Clipper* (July 18, 1868).

<sup>2</sup> “Music Halls,” *The New York Clipper* (December 19, 1869).

<sup>3</sup> For detailed biographical information about Annie Hindle, see Gillian Rodger, “Male Impersonation on the North American Variety and Vaudeville Stage, 1868–1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburg, 1998), 49–62.

the mid to late nineteenth century, catering primarily to members of the working class. It featured a number of short acts in a single performance, which might include burlesques, magic shows, acrobatics, and comic singers such as Hindle. The routine that Hindle and others performed was something akin to musical sketch comedy: a series of songs that portrayed different characters or scenarios. Performances were accompanied by an orchestra that varied in size between venues; major variety halls had a substantial orchestra run by an full-time music director.<sup>4</sup>

Having performed in London from the age of five, Hindle became one of a handful of women who performed men's comic songs in the music hall during her teenage years. Not only did she sing men's songs, but she assumed a realistically masculine stage persona; short and thickset, she cropped her hair into a man's style and sang in a low, contralto register.<sup>5</sup> Upon arriving in America she achieved immediate success and inspired many imitators. By the early 1870s, a small horde of women performers, in imitation of her, wore male attire and sang songs about champagne, nights-about-town, and escapades with women.

Hindle's gender transformation was not limited to the stage: she lived a significant portion of her personal life inhabiting a social role that, in nineteenth-century America, belonged strictly to men. After her month-long failed marriage to fellow character singer Charles Vivian, Hindle's subsequent romantic relationships

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<sup>4</sup> Gillian Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Gillian Rodger, "He Isn't a Marrying Man: Gender and Sexuality in the Repertoire of Male Impersonators, 1870–1930," in *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 112.



were with other women, most notably her dressers, with whom she was rumored to have been unusually close. In June of 1886, newspapers across the United States reported that Hindle had disguised herself as a man and, in a Grand Rapids hotel room, married her dresser at the time, Annie Ryan. Only six months after Ryan's death in 1892, Hindle once again disguised herself as a man and was remarried, becoming the "lawful husband" of one Louise Spangehel.<sup>6</sup>

Hindle's marriages to Ryan and Spangehel were well-reported in newspapers across the United States, both in local papers and major papers such as the *New York Times*. But even before Hindle was legally wed, her unusual romantic proclivities were hinted at in the pages of the entertainment paper, *The New York Clipper*. Throughout the 1870s snide remarks appeared occasionally in theatrical gossip columns hinting at especially close relations between Hindle and her female dressers, relaying stories of public altercations involving inebriation and stolen jewelry.<sup>7</sup> Hindle even published poems in the *Clipper* that depicted longing and unrequited love, nearly always addressed to a woman. When Hindle finally did marry, one columnist reporting on the wedding hinted at public knowledge of Hindle's relationships prior to Ryan, remarking knowingly that "in all [Hindle's] travels she had carried a 'dresser,'" with strategically-placed quotation marks to remove any doubt the reader may have had as to the role Hindle's dressers played in her life.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Wedded to a Woman," *The Pittsburgh Dispatch* (July 5, 1892).

<sup>7</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*, 142.

<sup>8</sup> "Wedded to a Woman," *The Pittsburgh Dispatch* (July 5, 1892).

Although Hindle was highly visible as a woman who pushed the bounds of her gender, she was by no means the only woman in nineteenth-century America to do so. Passing as male was in fact a common way for women to navigate relationships with, and often marry, other women; some women also chose to maintain their male presentation in everyday life and pursue employment and pastimes reserved for men. While this phenomenon was not unique to the nineteenth century, the United States saw increased public awareness of passing women from roughly 1850 onward stemming mainly from press coverage. The coupling of Hindle's relationships with women and her adoption of male attire, then, was far from singular.

The history of the onset of male impersonation in the United States is intimately tied to a history of women who loved other women; where and how these histories connect has yet to be explored in full. Scholars of the male impersonation act have interrogated the issue of same-sex desire in multiple ways and to varying degrees. Laurence Senelick understands Hindle's act, and others like it, as sites of unconscious wish fulfillment for women who desired other women.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Gillian Rodger has argued that a reading engaging with the category of sexuality is speculative at best and anachronistic at worst.<sup>10</sup> Senelick reads male impersonation in terms of a transhistorical lesbian identity, while Rodger warns

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<sup>9</sup> Laurence Senelick, "The Evolution of the Male Impersonator in the Nineteenth Century Popular Stage." *Essays in Theater* 1 (November 1983): 31–44.

<sup>10</sup> Rodger, "He Isn't a Marrying Man," 132.

against correlating nineteenth-century male impersonation with off-stage sexual and gendered behaviors that read, to a modern observer, as queer.

Each of these readings of male impersonation has been influenced by prevailing contemporary understandings of nineteenth-century sexual identity. The goal of this thesis is to approach early male impersonation with more recent methods and frameworks that allow us to ask questions about identities and behaviors in a way consistent with the period. Rather than ask how modern constructions of sexual identity inform nineteenth-century male impersonation, I ask how male impersonation might aid us in understanding sexual identity in its own temporal context. I will complicate existing interpretations by showing, through Hindle's repertoire and language through which she was depicted in the press, that her characters may have been read by her audience not as emasculated or deficient men, as Rodger has suggested, but as women dressed in male attire. By demonstrating that in the nineteenth century the adoption of male dress was a visual signifier of women who engaged in same-sex practices, I provide a reading of male impersonation as a recognizable representation of unconventional sexual identity.

### **Language and Terminology**

Annie Hindle, her wife, and other subjects who appear in this paper might identify today as lesbian, queer, gay, or transgender. These terms either did not exist, were not widely in circulation, or did not carry the same meaning in 1870 as they do today. They are, furthermore, reliant on an understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation that is specific to modern Western culture. I intend to avoid ascribing modern identities to Hindle and her contemporaries, who lived with a very

different understanding of what it meant to be male or female. In order to avoid hidden implications, I will simply try to describe identities, actions, and desires as accurately as possible using words that would have existed in the contemporary lexicon. Some scholars, such as Lisa Merrill, intentionally use the term *lesbian* in historical accounts of women who loved and had intimate relationships with other women; Merrill recognizes that the term carries ahistorical meaning, but invokes it as a means of acknowledging that these women understood their unconventional desires as an intrinsic part of their being.<sup>11</sup> I choose not to follow Merrill's model here since, as Jack Halberstam points out, "*lesbian* resonates for us as a term and as a sexual category . . . because we have come to see same-sex desire between biological females [*sic*] as a coherent set of terms."<sup>12</sup> I intend to avoid drawing unnecessary associations that may possibly obscure the individual lives discussed here, and will not use modern terminology to describe their behaviors or identities, however much we might recognize them.

Borrowing from Halberstam, I will use the term *cross-identifying* to refer to any woman who transgresses the boundaries of her sex, whether by assuming male attire on occasion, living her entire life passing as male, or engaging in romantic, sexual, or marital relations with another woman.<sup>13</sup> *Cross-identifying* is appropriate first because it is within the bounds of nineteenth-century understandings of sex as

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<sup>11</sup> Lisa Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 54

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

something that encompasses physical anatomy, aesthetic presentation, social behavior, and sexual relations; to cross out of the bounds of any of these categories was to transgress one's femaleness. Additionally, *cross-identifying* acknowledges that pre-twentieth-century sexual behaviors and identities are largely unknown to us, and leaves space for identities that are currently unaccounted for in the literature. At the same time, it allows for a self-consciously contrary way of existing that so many women who dressed in male attire or desired other women seemed to embrace.

### **Primary Sources**

Since Hindle's repertoire is an important part of my argument, I use for a primary source the *Annie Hindle Songster*, published in New York by Frederic A. Brady in 1869, a small paper booklet that contains lyrics to the songs that Hindle performed (see Fig. 1). Songsters, or collections of lyrics meant to be sung, were one medium for disseminating popular music in nineteenth-century America alongside sheet music and broadsides (commonly called "penny ballads"). An alternative to sheet music, the songster included only words and no musical notation, and was therefore accessible to members of the working class who could not afford pianos and had no reason to be musically literate.<sup>14</sup> Songsters associated with variety performers began to appear in the 1860s, a logical marketing choice by publishers since the majority of people attending variety shows were of the working class. A typical

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<sup>14</sup> Kirsten M. Schultz, "The Production and Consumption of Confederate Songsters," in *Bugle Resounding: Music and Musicians of the Civil War Era*, edited by Bruce C. Kelley and Mark A. Snell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 137.

variety audience would have no use for sheet music, but could still use a songster to sing the songs they heard in the theater.

For some lyrical sets, a songster might indicate the appropriate popular tune, but in other cases, the paired melody might be popular enough that it could be deduced from the lyric itself.<sup>15</sup> Names of tunes are provided for several songs in Hindle's songster, but for many there is no indication of the melody to which the lyrics were to be sung. The lack of musical direction, while it precludes any sort of traditional harmonic or style analysis, is in fact useful for our purposes because it suggests that the publisher's clientele was comprised of people who attended Hindle's shows, and would have known which tunes to attach to which lyrics based on their experiences with Hindle's own performances. It thus seems reasonable to assume that the *Annie Hindle Songster* provides an accurate representation of the songs one might expect to hear at a Hindle performance. Additional information about Hindle's repertoire can be gathered through press mentions of individual songs that she performed.

Newspapers are useful in formulating an understanding of how both Hindle and cross-identifying women were understood by observers. Because I am interested in how Hindle was portrayed to the newspaper-reading public and not only in the details of her performance, I have surveyed advertisements and theatrical gossip columns in addition to reviews and descriptions of her shows. Similarly, this project places as much importance on the facts of the lives of cross-identifying women as on

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<sup>15</sup> Irving Lowens, *A Bibliography of Songsters Printed in America Before 1821* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1976), ix.

their portrayal through public media. Because most of the events examined in this thesis transpired in New York, I relied predominantly on New York newspapers, including the *Clipper*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Herald*. The *Clipper* is an especially significant source on variety entertainment in New York. Established in 1853, it was the first newspaper devoted entirely to entertainment, including columns on boat racing, baseball, aquatic sports, and pedestrianism; in the 1860s the paper focused increasingly on concert saloons, minstrelsy, circuses, and variety halls, becoming the country's leading source for show business news between 1865 and 1875.<sup>16</sup> Virtually all contemporary writing on the beginnings of male impersonation, then, come from the *Clipper*.

## Secondary Sources

The bulk of scholarship on male impersonation in the United States has been produced by musicologist Gillian Rodger and theatre scholar Laurence Senelick who, as mentioned above, interpret the male impersonation act in vastly different ways. Senelick published the first scholarly reading of impersonation in his 1983 essay, "The Evolution of the Male Impersonator in the Nineteenth-Century Popular Stage," in which he argues that realistic male impersonation was a distinctly American phenomenon, and for some, an "expression of Lesbian wish-fulfillment."<sup>17</sup> According to Senelick, the United States offered unique social and economic opportunities for young women who wore male attire to pursue masculine work that otherwise would

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<sup>16</sup> William D. Slout, *Broadway Below the Sidewalk: Concert Saloons of Old New York* (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1994), xiv.

<sup>17</sup> Senelick, 33.



Fig. 1: Front cover of the *Annie Hindle Songster*, 1869, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



have excluded them. Senelick argues that because American law did not prohibit gender-transgressive dress as did many European laws, and American women tended to be visible in active professions, the United States provided an environment in which the art of realistic male impersonation could flourish.

While it is true that the male-passing woman was intrinsic to the development of male impersonation, Senelick perhaps overstates American society's tolerance for public gender-transgression. A survey of mid-nineteenth century newspapers from New York and San Francisco reveals numerous cases of women who were arrested for dressing in male attire and frequenting male-coded venues such as concert saloons and billiards halls. Citing Annie Hindle's marriage to Annie Ryan and the many love letters that Hindle received from female fans, Senelick suggests that the male impersonation act catered to the unconscious same-sex desires of both performer and certain female audience members. His instinct is correct in linking male impersonation with unconventional sexuality, but as this thesis argues, there was nothing unconscious about the performance and its reception; in fact, the connection was understood not only by women who desired other women, but by the majority of Hindle's audience.

I draw biographical information on Hindle and general information about male impersonation primarily from the work of Gillian Rodger, including her Ph.D. dissertation, "Male Impersonation on the North American Variety and Vaudeville Stage, 1868–1930" (1998); the article based on that dissertation, "He Isn't A Marrying Man: Gender and Sexuality in the Repertoire of Male Impersonators, 1870–1930" (2002); and her book *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater*

*in the Nineteenth Century* (2010). In her essay “He Isn’t a Marrying Man,” Rodger presents a reading in opposition to Senelick’s.<sup>18</sup> Rodger argues that the early male impersonator would not likely have been understood as having anything to do with transgressive sexual behavior before the turn of the century because the homosexual was not yet a recognizable figure. Male impersonation in the 1870s, she claims, was seen as a humorous denigration of upper-class masculinity; the appeal of the male impersonator to the working-class white American man was in her mocking portrayal of the effete, upper-class Englishman. Rodger theorizes that before medical discourse on homosexuality emerged, there was no grounds for an audience to recognize gender-transgressive dress onstage as related to gender transgression off the stage, and therefore the male impersonator could appear realistically male without drawing negative attention to herself as a sexually transgressive figure. It was only once discourse on homosexuality was disseminated widely that male impersonators presented themselves less realistically as men, often wearing fitted jackets or tights and keeping their hair long, in an effort to distance themselves from the emerging stereotype of the mannish woman or lesbian.

Rodger revisits male impersonation in her 2010 book, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century*.<sup>19</sup> Here Rodger provides a possible account for the gendered aspects of male impersonation: because some of the comic songs performed by impersonators are about the romantic

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<sup>18</sup> Rodger, “He Isn’t a Marrying Man.”

<sup>19</sup> Rodger, “Champagne Charlie: The Fantasy of Leisure for the Working Man,” in *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*, 127–46.

shortcomings of men, she theorizes that women would have enjoyed the humor in these songs, while men would have taken the lyrics as advice. She allows greater room for the possibility of male impersonation representing transgressive sexuality, no longer arguing that Hindle's audience could not have associated male impersonation with gender transgression off the stage. At the same time, she maintains that it is simply not possible to know whether Hindle's audience understood her performance as being in any way related to her personal life. These disparate accounts of male impersonation are a result not of different evidence, but of different theoretical frameworks that describe same-sex behaviors and public understandings of transgressive sexuality in the nineteenth century. The modern scholarship on nineteenth-century sexual attitudes that informs this study will be reviewed in full in the first chapter, along with a more detailed analysis of Rodger's and Senelick's work.

## **Scope**

Hindle performed in various cities along the upper east coast, and in the Midwest (a list of venues where Hindle is documented to have performed is given in Appendix II), but this thesis focuses on New York for several reasons. First, the city has a long and ever-changing tradition of pastiche entertainment that includes variety theater as it emerged as an independent art form in the 1860s.<sup>20</sup> While independent variety quickly spread across the upper east coast and eventually the western United States, variety entertainment originated in the minstrel halls and concert saloons of

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<sup>20</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1140.

the Bowery and Broadway. Especially important for this thesis is the centrality of musical theater to moral and sexual debates in mid-nineteenth century New York, which will be discussed in the second chapter. As previously mentioned, the New York-based *Clipper* is nearly an exclusive source of information on variety before 1875, so any newspaper-based investigation into early variety theater must be somewhat localized. Finally, Annie Hindle started her career as a comic singer in New York when she first arrived from Britain, making New York the American birthplace of male impersonation.

My analysis of male impersonation focuses on the years between 1868 and 1886, the years that mark the beginning of Annie Hindle's career and her marriage to Annie Ryan that triggered her decline in popularity.<sup>21</sup> By pure coincidence, 1886 was also the year of publication for Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the first medical text to name and describe "sexual instincts" that were considered unnatural, such as bestiality, pederasty, and homosexuality.<sup>22</sup> The modern notion of homosexuality is thought by some to be traceable to *Psychopathia Sexualis* and other early German sexological texts, which drew a causal relationship between homosexuality and cross-gendered behavior, dress, and sometimes anatomy. Because I am interested in nineteenth-century gendered and sexual identities in the United States as they may have existed before the advent of this body of scientific literature,

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<sup>21</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*, 143.

<sup>22</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, "General Pathology," in *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study, Twelfth Edition*, trans. Dr. Harry E. Wedeck (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1965), 77–479.

1886 seems to be an appropriate bookend for this thesis (although realistically this discourse did not make its way to the United States until close to the turn of the century).

## **Organization**

Chapter one serves as a literature review of scholarship on nineteenth-century homosexuality in Western society, including the first works in nineteenth-century sexology, early gay and lesbian history produced during the gay-liberation movement of the mid-twentieth century, the work of social constructivists such as Michel Foucault, and more recent scholarship influenced by queer theory in the 1990s. This review establishes the theoretical context within which I will analyze the relationship between early male impersonation and same-sex behaviors between women. Additionally, it places conflicting interpretations of the male impersonation act in context with contemporary scholarship on same-sex practices and identities, in order to demonstrate that the normalization of the Foucauldian understanding of homosexuality drastically influenced the degree to which a gender-transgressive performance could be considered an embodiment of same-sex desire in the nineteenth century. Finally, I will discuss relatively recent work in gender and sexuality studies in order to establish the historical and theoretical framework on which I am basing my own reading.

Chapter two argues that, based on the content and spatial context of Hindle's performance, her act can and should be read as a form of sexual commentary. I will first trace developments in the illegitimate theater and its relationship with sexually transgressive performances, from the separation of legitimate and illegitimate theater

in the 1840s to the development of independent variety in the 1870s. This history, a long negotiation of what was acceptable in various public spaces, made the variety hall of the 1870s into a space that allowed representation of transgressive sexual behaviors and identities that were not tolerated elsewhere. Because much of the negotiation that took place concerned sexual acts and behaviors, the variety hall was an especially potent site for gendered and sexual critique. To read Hindle's act as it may have represented unorthodox gendered or sexual practice, then, makes sense within the context of variety.

Using the theoretical and performance contexts outlined in the previous two chapters, chapter three is an analysis of Hindle's performance as it might have been read as sexual commentary. Drawing on Hindle's repertoire and contemporary press descriptions, I demonstrate that Hindle may not have been seen by her audience as merely representing a series of male characters, but as a female character singer in male attire, and that as such she would have signified the figure of the passing woman or female husband who navigated life passing as male. I will then explore out the implications of this connection between gender transgression on and off the stage, both for other gender-transgressing women, and as a reflection of contemporaneous discourses that served to repress such women within the dominant culture. Ultimately I argue that Hindle's act reinforced narratives that served to preserve the dominant order by portraying the passing woman as fictional, or unreal, but at the same time provided a point of identification for women like her.

Annie Hindle's act serves as a text for reading sexual and gender politics in the nineteenth-century United States. Scholars have interpreted her and other early

male impersonators as representative of repressed same-sex desire, or alternatively as having little to do with the twentieth-century understanding of sexual identities. Accepting the latter claim, I contextualize my interpretation within what we now know of nineteenth-century understandings of sexual and gendered identities. In doing so I contribute a historically-grounded reading of male impersonation as a possible representation of unconventional sexual identities and behaviors during its time. Focusing on male impersonation and its relation to the ways in which same-sex practicing subjects spoke and were spoken about (or, just as often, deliberately *not* spoken about) in the mid-late nineteenth century, I analyze a performance practice that symbolizes sexual behaviors and identities that are transgressive, marginal, or even unspeakable. I ask what such a performance might look like, where it is allowed to take place, and what its implications are for those whom it represents. Finally, this study examines the relation between a performance of marginal or transgressive identity and dominant social structures that allow such a performance, but necessarily exclude the identity that it represents. I will demonstrate that a performance can reiterate popular discourses that serve to repress a marginalized subject, while at the same time providing a space in which the marginalized subject may find meaning and identity on a personal level.

## **Chapter 1: Reading Sexual Identities in the Nineteenth Century**

Analysis of male impersonation in terms of unconventional sexual identity rests on the prerequisite question of whether gender-transgressive dress and behavior was seen as constitutive of sexual identity in the nineteenth century in the same way it is today. Gillian Rodger and Laurence Senelick have addressed this question using different theoretical approaches, yielding two disparate interpretations of what Annie Hindle and other early male impersonators could have represented to their audiences. In this chapter I provide a history of gay and lesbian, and later LGBT and queer, scholarship and its methods for addressing the question of pre-modern sexual identities. This literature review will serve three purposes: first, to establish the historical context in which Annie Hindle performed; second, to contextualize Rodger's and Senelick's readings of male impersonation within contemporary scholarly approaches to same-sex practices and identities in the nineteenth-century United States; and finally, to establish my own framework for analyzing Hindle's performance.

### **Scholarship on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century**

Published in 1966, Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* was the first major study of Victorian sexual attitudes. Marcus draws upon Freudian psychoanalysis, medical records, and fantasy-erotic literature to analyze sexual subcultures and



fantasy in Victorian England.<sup>1</sup> He notes that with the exception of legal and medical records suppressing masturbation and denying childhood sexuality, and pornographic literature that included mention of cross-gender dressing and sadomasochistic practices, transgressive sexuality was generally expunged from Victorian public life. Marcus's view exemplifies the notion of nineteenth-century sexuality that prevailed for much of the twentieth century: that nineteenth-century middle- and upper-class Anglo-Americans were sexually repressed, freed only intermittently in fleeting moments of deviance and scandal.<sup>2</sup> Peter Gay argues that this model reveals more about the twentieth century than the nineteenth: twentieth-century subjects tended to look upon the nineteenth century not only with perverse voyeurism, but with a feeling that the modern relationship with sexuality was liberated and evolved compared to that of the past. The repressive model was proof of the progress that Western culture had achieved.

### *Nineteenth-Century Sexology*

Fueling the repressive hypothesis was the fact that there exists little to no explicit public discourse on sexual behaviors or desires for most of the nineteenth century. In the United States, the only texts that explicitly mention same-sex practices are in criminal records of individuals arrested on charges of sodomy. As Graham Robb points out, the high number of sodomy charges has led many to assume that the

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Gay, "Historiography: Victorian Sexuality; Old Texts and New Insights," *The American Scholar* 49 (Summer 1980): 372.

nineteenth century was a “homophobic gay hell” that persecuted those suspected of engaging in same-sex practice. It is useful to note, however, that sodomy was understood to include a number of acts besides those involving two people of the same sex: sodomy, debauchery (extramarital affairs), incest, and bestiality all fell into a category of offenses characterized as “general unlawfulness.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, not all of those prosecuted were homosexuals.<sup>4</sup>

With the nineteenth century came a new understanding, undoubtedly influenced by Darwinism and the naturalization of the nuclear family under industrialism, of sexual offenses as being one of two types: those that violate marital law, and those that violate the natural order. Out of the latter category developed the field of sexology, which originated as a study of “sexual perversions” and an attempt to diagnose their perpetrators. Among the first sexologists was the German physician Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose seminal work, *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*, published in 1886, was the first to name and describe such perversions in extensive detail.<sup>5</sup> *Psychopathia Sexualis* is comprised primarily of individual case studies, organized into categories including homosexuality, inversion (feelings of partial or full alignment with the opposite sex), masochism, sadism, and necrophilia. Out of these case studies Krafft-Ebing developed a taxonomy of

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), 38.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study, Twelfth Edition*, trans. Dr. Harry E. Wedeck (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1965).

perversions, described as psychiatric disorders, and listed physical and psychological symptoms of each condition.

Krafft-Ebing devotes more than one hundred pages to homosexualities of varying degrees and types. Central to his gradient of case studies is the idea of inversion, or the presence of characteristics associated with the opposite sex. Inversion could describe an individual's preferred style of dress, the activities in which they take part, or, in some cases, feelings of possessing incorrect anatomy (individuals who might today identify as transgender). Case studies are categorized into individuals for whom "sexual desires and inclinations for the same sex [do] not more deeply affect character" to "cases in which males are females in feeling; and vice versa women, males," and finally individuals "in whom not only the character and all the feelings are in accord with the abnormal sexual instinct, but also the frame, the features, voice, etc."<sup>6</sup> The goal of the study was to determine which factors—physical, mental, or environmental—contributed to the development of the "abnormal sexual instinct" which would come to be known as homosexuality, and how physicians could identify such an afflicted person. The first large body of academic discourse on sexuality originated, in large part, as an effort to diagnose and "cure" homosexual patients.

### *The Liberation-Era Transhistorical Model*

The lack of non-medicalized discourse on queer historical subjects was challenged by the gay liberation movement, which began in the late 1960s. The

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 306–462.

movement called for radical visibility in response to violence and censorship; part of this effort was the production of gay and lesbian scholarship that constructed a new history of homosexuality in the United States in order to make visible subjects that were previously erased.<sup>7</sup> Much like Laurence Senelick's study of Annie Hindle, the primary goal of liberation-era scholarship was to unearth historical subjects who might be read, in the modern vernacular, as gay or lesbian.

The first scholarly account of ordinary homosexual subjects in the United States was Jonathan Katz's *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (1976). In this work, Katz draws from a wide range of American sources, covering more than four hundred years, with the goal of documenting the experience of the gay subject in the United States. He writes in direct defiance of the medical discourse initiated by the work of Krafft-Ebing, stating that "the psychological-psychiatric economic professionals must be divested of their power to define homosexuals; Gay people must acquire the power to define ourselves."<sup>8</sup> In a chapter entitled "Passing Women: 1782–1920," Katz presents eighteen case studies of American women who lived their lives passing as men in order to pursue masculine activities such as romantic relations with other women, economic independence, and political power. Although Katz does not label these women as lesbians—and, indeed, emphasizes his intention not to define them or make assumptions of any sort—the act

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

of placing them into *Gay American History* envelops them into the concept of a transhistorical gay American experience.

Alan Bérubé, an activist as well as a scholar, pursued similar goals in his early work on gay history. His essay “Lesbian Masquerade” studies passing women who appear in San Francisco press archives, calling them “the most visible lesbians of nineteenth-century America.”<sup>9</sup> Bérubé writes with the clear priority of coalition building; his research is localized and was originally presented in San Francisco as an illustrated lecture in 1979. The histories of these passing women became a point of identification and a tool for mobilization of queer subjects in the twentieth century.

### *The Constructivist Model*

Due to its political goals of visibility and community building, early liberation-era scholarship tends to rely on the idea of a transhistorical gay or lesbian identity, or that gay and lesbian subjects existed in the era preceding our own. The essentialist thought inherent in this scholarship was challenged in the late 1970s with a branch of scholarship that developed a social constructivist model of homosexuality. Constructivists argued that the modern concept of a gay or lesbian identity is particular to the present, not an objective reality, and that its development can be traced through recent history. Their work was also political: if it is true that sexual identities are not natural or immovable, it follows that the oppression of people with certain sexual identities is not natural or immovable either. The constructivist

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Bérubé, “Lesbian Masquerade,” in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, ed. John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 41.

argument was another approach to gay liberation, but one that sought to move beyond mere visibility, and question the very structures that force invisibility in the first place.

Perhaps the most famous of the constructivist works on sexuality is Michel Foucault's landmark *History of Sexuality*, first published in 1976, which interrogates medical, religious, political, and popular discourse on sexuality. Foucault's work is primarily an analysis of power; it is a study of who controls discourse on sexuality, what they say, and to what ends they speak. He argues that to categorize non-reproductive sexual practices as "perversions" was to encourage a sexuality that was "economically useful" and "politically conservative"; in other words, a sexuality that fits into the framework of the bourgeois nuclear family.<sup>10</sup>

According to Foucault, this early sexological discourse affected a shift in public understanding of sexual behavior and especially perpetrators of transgressive behaviors. Whereas perversions had been considered illegal acts, Krafft-Ebing crystallized the sexual pervert into a holistic being, all the physical and psychological traits of whom were symptomatic of the affliction. Foucault draws special attention to the categorization of the homosexual:

The psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The

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<sup>10</sup> Foucault, 37.

sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.<sup>11</sup>

When Foucault writes that the new “species” of the homosexual was characterized by their embodiment of traits associated with the opposite gender, he is often interpreted as meaning that early sexology was the point of origin for the homosexual, and that there was no repertoire of knowledge surrounding same-sex behaviors before 1870. His claim is in fact much narrower: only that early sexology was the point of origin for the idea that a homosexual is a certain type of person. Nevertheless, this work is often cited in constructivist scholarship that argues against recognizable sexual identities before the turn of the century, an argument supporting the idea that male impersonation could not have indexed sexual identity in the 1870s.

Several nineteenth-century studies published in the 1980s, such as Lillian Faderman’s *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, rely on this constructivist model of pre-modern sexuality.<sup>12</sup> Faderman’s book, an important work on romantic relationships between women and their changing place in society, argues that for much of the nineteenth century, romantic friendships between women were both commonplace and socially acceptable. Faderman suggests that while there is no way of knowing whether romantic friendships were sexual in nature, she believes that they most likely were not; in her opinion, romantic friendships were more closely aligned with female

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>12</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981).

independence and emotional attachment than they were with sexual eroticism. She bases her argument on the assumption that until sexological discourse emerged in the 1870s, women did not have an acute awareness of their own sexualities, and there was no concept of a lesbian identity that involved some sexual element. For this same reason, their friendships did not alarm or offend men. Faderman assumes that relationships between women were not associated with sexual practice or maleness until inversion appeared in medical discourse.

Theoretically similar is Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's essay on the "New Woman" as the point of origin for the modern lesbian identity.<sup>13</sup> The New Woman was a middle- or upper-class white American born between the late 1850s and 1900 who was independent, often went to college, and frequently remained unmarried. In the nineteenth century, when a sharp distinction existed between the private and public spheres, with women typically assigned to the former and men to the latter, the New Woman represented a threat to both the existing social order and assumptions about the naturalness of gender, which had long gone unquestioned. One of the first reactions to this threat was a concerted effort by male doctors and academics to prove the innate biological differences between men and women. They claimed that the male body is governed by the brain and the heart, while the female body is governed by its reproductive organs. By expending too much energy thinking, the New Woman

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<sup>13</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870–1936," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncy, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1989), 265.



was draining energy from her more vital organs—her ovaries and uterus—which would eventually atrophy, and she would begin to appear man-like.<sup>14</sup>

Another scientific effort to quell the threat of the New Woman came around the turn of the century, when Krafft-Ebing's figure of the invert had made her way into popular discourse. In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing defines four different categories of the homosexual, the most severely afflicted being the invert who, sex organs aside, was virtually indistinguishable from the opposite gender.<sup>15</sup> The invert, or mannish lesbian, represented the dangers of women attempting to assume male roles, and served to demonize the New Woman at a time when feminists were first seriously demanding equality.

Smith-Rosenberg follows Foucault's constructivist model in order to demonstrate the means by which male physicians used women's sexualities to launch a political attack on them. Unfortunately, the resultant conclusion is a rather extreme manifestation of the theory: in stating that "by 1900 male physicians had unveiled their new construction [of the mannish lesbian]," she implies firstly that there was no awareness of the masculine woman before 1900, and additionally that male physicians had a specific agenda in constructing this figure.<sup>16</sup> While there may be truth in this statement, Smith-Rosenberg possibly overstates causality and isolates medical discourse as the modern lesbian's singular point of origin.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>15</sup> Krafft-Ebing, 329.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 268.

For much of the 1980s the constructivist model became the normative one, especially in the context of women who pursued romantic and sexual relationships with other women. The lack of textual evidence in journals, medical, or legal documents explicitly naming sex acts between women has, for many, confirmed the hypothesis that women were not partaking in them. Although Foucault's discussion of early sexological discourse was in fact a minor part of a much larger argument, a majority of scholars of sexuality took his work at face value and maintained that homosexuality was not culturally legible in the United States before sexological categories became normalized close to the turn of the century.

### *Queer Theory*

Historical sexuality studies shifted once more with the development of queer theory in the early 1990s. Building on Foucault's methodology of analyzing power structures by way of deconstructing discourse, queer theory calls for not only the deconstruction of identities, but a deconstruction of the essentialist-constructivist argument itself. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick addresses this debate in one of the seminal works of queer theory, *Epistemology of the Closet*, arguing that people may choose either the constructivist or essentialist stance at different times, depending on which will be more politically productive in the particular moment.<sup>17</sup> She also fears that to continue the debate risks doing historical damage, for although scholars tend to consider our historical knowledge complete enough to deconstruct the identities of historical subjects, it is almost certainly not.

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<sup>17</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

Finally, Sedgwick addresses the violence she finds inherent in constructivist-essentialist thought, stating that “there currently exists no framework in which to ask about the origins of development of individual gay identity that is not already structured by an implicit, trans-individual Western project or fantasy of eradicating that identity.”<sup>18</sup> Jack Halberstam makes a similar comment in his introduction to *Female Masculinity*, impishly questioning scholars who assume that two women living as a married couple would not also have been in a sexual relationship, when it is so much simpler to assume that they would.<sup>19</sup> On a more serious note, he asks what, if anything, is to be gained by arguing that these relationships were not sexual. Both scholars imply that the desire to locate either a point of origin of the modern gay identity or proof of its transhistorical nature is motivated by the same drive to categorize and control that informed Krafft-Ebing’s research one hundred years earlier.

Scholarship influenced by queer theory has moved away from both the search for a genesis of the modern homosexual, and the desire to interpret sexual identity as something transhistorical. Instead, scholarship dating from the early 2000s seeks to describe the way subjects understood themselves and one another at their specific historical moment, without attempting to forge a connection with the present. One such work is Graham Robb’s *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*, which investigates same-sex desire in Europe and America, the obstacles it faced, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 55.

the societies that it created. Examining the lives of “strangers”—ordinary, anonymous subjects—Robb first describes the treatment of nineteenth-century homosexuals by the law and by medical professionals, then discusses elements of their personal lives and how they sought out and contacted other like-minded people, and finally elements of gay culture that have received mostly heteronormative treatment by scholars and the public. Robb openly disagrees with Foucault in his introduction, and reminds the reader that many people misinterpreted Foucault to mean that gay people have no history or culture before the 1870s. He contends that not only have homosexual societies and subcultures always existed, obscured to modern scholars by coded language, archaic words, and euphemisms, but that gay men and women were more widely tolerated in the nineteenth century than they were previously believed to have been.

In her introduction to *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928*, Martha Vicinus states a similar intention: rather than refusing or attempting to deconstruct the idea of a premodern homosexual identity, Vicinus engages with the possibility of multiple and complex identities that interact with class, nationality and race.<sup>20</sup> She offers an alternative to Faderman’s assertion that because women had no language to describe their desire for other women they could not conceptualize themselves as sexual beings; perhaps the case was not that women *could* not name their sexualities, but rather that they *would* not name their sexualities. After all, same-sex relations were associated with prostitutes and other degenerate figures. Women

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<sup>20</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), xxiii.

who left behind journals and letters were usually upper-class, white, and educated; in other words, they were respectable and potentially had much to lose by naming their desires in writing. Like Graham Robb's strangers, they wrote in their journals and to one another using metaphoric language derived from Biblical and Classical sources as well as literary depictions of nature, leading scholars to believe that the concept of homosexual desire between women was initiated with early published works of sexology. Vicinus warns against ascribing too much importance to these medical discourses, arguing that it would be reductionist to assert that the mere existence of a scientific vocabulary suddenly made these women's desires "real."<sup>21</sup>

As an alternative to a linear narrative, *Intimate Friends* is structured as a series of vignettes; each chapter is an account of a historical subject who loved other women. For the scope of her study, Vicinus finds that the most prominent signifier of same-sex desire was gender inversion, although interpretations changed between subjects.<sup>22</sup> She illustrates the way that each woman interacted with the notion of gender inversion and how it related to their love for other women.

In *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam examines nineteenth-century male-passing and androgynous women and the discourse of inversion alongside twentieth-century stone butch culture, drag kings, and transgender men, in order to question what exactly constitutes masculinity. In the second chapter, "Perverse Presentism: The Androgyne, the Tribade, the Female Husband, and Other Pre-Twentieth-Century Genders," Halberstam suggests a multiplicity of identities associated with masculine

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., xxix.

women that are particular to the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Halberstam believes that rather than establishing new sexual identities at the turn of the century, sexological works in fact homogenized the numerous and varied masculine identities that existed well before the turn of the century. To apply the term “lesbian” to every cross-identifying woman in the nineteenth century impedes an understanding of the way these women may have understood themselves.

### **Scholarship on Male Impersonation**

Understanding the historiography of nineteenth-century homosexuality and gender-transgressive behaviors elucidates the contradictions between Laurence Senelick’s and Gillian Rodger’s readings of male impersonation. In his 1983 essay, Senelick guesses that female viewers unconsciously received Hindle as representing the figure of the lesbian. His argument is clearly aligned with the pre-constructivist understanding of homosexuality present in the works of liberation-era scholars, as he assumes the existence of a lesbian identity before the twentieth century. His description of impersonation as “an expression of Lesbian wish-fulfillment” also evokes Freudian ideas of unconscious desire and repression, suggesting that while a transhistorical lesbian identity existed, it was not understood in nineteenth-century society. In suggesting that female fans knew instinctively that Hindle’s adoption of male attire translated to homosexuality, Senelick links sexually-transgressive

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<sup>23</sup> Halberstam, “Perverse Presentism: The Androgyne, the Tribade, the Female Husband, and Other Pre-Twentieth-Century Genders,” in *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 44–73.

behavior with gender transgression; but at the time of this essay's publication there was not yet a theoretical framework for justifying this claim.

Gillian Rodger's first work on male impersonation, "He Isn't a Marrying Man," clearly works from within the constructivist framework established in the 1980s. She presumably sees the publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis* as the first association of same-sex behavior with gender-transgressive behavior, as she believes that Hindle's audience would not have recognized a woman in male attire singing of courtship with women as embodying any sort of transgressive sexual behavior. Rodger was also likely influenced by the intentional disassociation of homosexuality with gender deviance that took place in liberal gay and lesbian politics following the AIDS crisis in the 1990s. In an assimilationist move, activists attempted to lobby for civil rights by aligning themselves with normative, heterosexual values such as marriage, the nuclear family structure, and normative gender presentation. To argue that in recent history gender-transgressive behavior did not index sexually-transgressive behavior is a similar political move to studies like Foucault's that demonstrate that the modern homosexual identity, and therefore the modern homosexual's oppressed position, is not immovable.

In her later book, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (2010), Rodger is less insistent on the unrecognizability of sexually-transgressive individuals and instead suggests simply that there is no way of knowing whether a variety audience would have read same-sex desire onto a male impersonation performance. This later point of view does not contradict post-queer-

theory scholarship, which allows for premodern homosexualities to exist in some form.

As the question of modern sexual identity becomes less urgent in the field of sexuality and LGBTQ studies, historians and theorists are able to ask increasingly complex questions that treat same-sex behaviors, and attitudes toward them, as objects of analysis rather than political action. Work like Halberstam's accepts that modern sexual identity is socially constructed, but with the understanding that its constructed nature does not preclude premodern sexual behaviors and identities from existing. But rather than making the search for identity and its origin the central question, such scholarship accepts the possibility of these identities and uses them to interrogate broader issues. I follow a similar methodology in my analysis of Annie Hindle's male impersonation performance. My argument depends on the existence and recognizability of individuals who practiced gender-transgressive behavior in the nineteenth-century United States; but after explaining and providing evidence for this phenomenon, I will use that understanding to ask the questions of what a performance of transgressive sexuality meant in the 1870s, both for singer and audience, and how such a performance might have been shaped by, and contributed to, dominant discourses on same-sex behaviors and gender-transgressive identities.



## Chapter 2: Sexual Transgression and the Variety Theater

One of the most popular numbers in Hindle's repertoire was the *swell song*, which revolved around the character of the upper-class man-about-town who is preoccupied with his appearance, gambling, drinking, and courtship.<sup>1</sup> When performing the swell song, Hindle would stroll about the stage in trousers, boasting of her popularity with women.<sup>2</sup> In her song "The Business Girls," for example, Hindle sings of her flirtations with young women, unbeknownst to their parents.

With their dress and bonnets all combined,  
They look so pretty, neat, and fine,  
They quite upset the gentlemen with their fascinating way;  
They like a jolly lark, pray pardon the remark.

But they're straight and honest facts that I'm stating;  
They've such a pretty wheedling tongue,  
Their song is "Go it while you're young,"  
And for their little freaks there's no dictating.

Some patronize the different halls,  
Others—parties, plays and balls,  
'Tis then they look as elegant as any fairy queen;  
They'd fascinate a noble's son,  
And don't they like a bit of fun,  
Especially when they know that by their ma's they are not seen.

As Gillian Rodger points out, a cross-dressed performance with sexual undertones as in "The Business Girls" seems shocking by mid-nineteenth-century standards. Not only did Hindle's adoption of trousers mean that her legs were visible, surpassing the

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<sup>1</sup> Gillian Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Gillian Rodger, "He Isn't a Marrying Man: Gender and Sexuality in the Repertoire of Male Impersonators, 1870–1930," *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 114.

bounds of decency for women, but such an aggressively sexual persona was unusual for a female performer, even compared to other working-class variety singers.<sup>3</sup> There is also the obvious problem that, at face value, Hindle is woman describing romantic and possibly sexual activity with other women: non-normative at best, though possibly not stigmatized to a degree comparable to the twentieth century.

Despite the clear transgressive elements in Hindle's act she was met with only praise from her audience and critics, save for a handful of off-the-cuff remarks about her singing voice.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it seems counterintuitive to assume that her performance was read along unorthodox gendered or sexual lines. In this chapter I will show that Hindle's performance appears to have played within the bounds of gender and sexuality, more so than scholars have previously thought. This type of sexual commentary did not ostracize Hindle as a performer, because the variety theater was an ideal space for such a performance to take place. I will demonstrate that the variety theater of the 1860s and 1870s was both a site for negotiating issues of sexuality, and a space that allowed representations of transgressive acts and identities that were not tolerated elsewhere, in order to establish the basis for my interpretation of Hindle's act.

### **Play on Sexuality and Gender**

An examination of Hindle's songster and reviews suggests that her performance may have had more to do with issues of sex than previously thought. We

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>4</sup> "City Summary," *The New York Clipper*, September 4, 1869.

have assumed that because she specialized in male impersonation all her characters were male, but in one song in her songster, titled “Winking at Me,” the narrator is female. In it, the narrator tries to perform her set but is constantly distracted by the men in the audience winking at her:

To sing to you nightly,  
It’s a pleasure, I see,  
For the gents in the house  
All keep winking at me.  
Winking at me, winking at me.  
Now how can I sing,  
While they’re winking at me?

The lyrics also suggest that she flirts back, pointing out individual men who display interest:

There’s a gent sitting there,  
Dressed in elegant taste,  
By the side of a lady,  
His arm round her waist.  
An artful deceiver I fear he must be,  
For while he makes love to her,  
He keeps winking at me.

Hindle transforms herself here into an active participant in courtship, as she draws a parallel between herself and the woman sitting next to the man who is winking at her, turning her into a potential object of desire for her audience. This persona stands in stark contrast with the previous reading of Hindle as almost asexual, serving primarily as a figure for class critique. Not only is Hindle portrayed here as sexual, but her persona is, at least in part, female, which contradicts our understanding of her as representing strictly male characters. We do not know whether she performed this number in male or female attire, but either way it is reasonable to say that the idea of playing with gendered presentation—whether by switching between male and female

personas, or assuming a masculine appearance while singing as a female character—was an intrinsic part of Hindle’s act. An early *Clipper* review supports this idea with a direct comparison between Hindle and William Lingard, a well-known female impersonator, stating that “Annie Hindle made her first appearance in this city, dressed in male attire and sang songs something of the Lingard type.”<sup>5</sup> One of Hindle’s contemporaries, Lingard appeared on the variety stage in male and female attire alternately; when he did assume a feminine appearance it was exaggerated to the point of satire through bodily affect.<sup>6</sup> Part of Lingard’s act, then, was a critique of femaleness. That is not to say that Hindle’s act necessarily served the same purpose, but it is important to note that interrogations of gender and sex were not alien to the variety stage.

Impersonation seems to have been as much an exploration of and play on differently-gendered presentations as it was an act of impressive mimicry. Moreover, the presence of “Winking at Me” in Hindle’s songster suggests that her act was also in some sense a play on sexuality. The next part of this chapter explains how the variety theater developed into a space that allowed for representations of transgressive sexuality that were not permissible in public life or high-class entertainment, so that we may then read Hindle’s act as such.

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<sup>5</sup> “City Summary,” *The New York Clipper*, September 4, 1869.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music in America* (New York: Random House, 1948), 168.

## **Illegitimate Theater and Issues of Sexuality**

In the late 1860s and early 1870s, around the same time that Annie Hindle first came to the United States, variety theater was developing as a form of musical entertainment that skirted the boundaries of morality. But theater in New York was always a site of negotiation between what was and was not socially acceptable, especially regarding issues of sex. Independent variety was the result of a series of legal and moral reforms imposed upon working-class theater that eliminated elements, such as alcohol and prostitution, that were too far removed from what was socially acceptable. Everything that was not criminalized—namely, sexualized feminine spectacle—remained uneasily tolerated until close to the turn of the century.

### *Gender Stratification and Sexual Morals*

The concern over sexual morality, women, and the stage is in part traceable to the gendered division of life into the public and private spheres during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>7</sup> With industrialization, the livelihoods of most working-class Americans shifted from agriculture and artisan trade to factory work. This change devastated New England's economy, which was almost entirely dependent on agriculture. Young men traveled west after economic opportunity; young women, nearly all of whom had married in eighteenth-century New England, were suddenly met with fewer options. Some women also traveled west, but those who could not afford the journey moved to cities like Lowell or Lawrence to work in garment factories or find work as

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<sup>7</sup> For a more extensive analysis of bourgeois discourse and gender stratification see Carol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1985), 79–89.

housekeepers. Because their labor was not considered skilled, young working-class women were paid unlivable wages and their need to marry grew more urgent. Meanwhile, the separation of work and home meant that public and private life became polar opposites; men left the house to work and women, unable to earn a significant income due to workplace discrimination, were gradually confined to the home.

In an effort to legitimize their hegemonic position in the economic class system, middle-class white men employed the rhetoric of manifest destiny, reason, and scientific discourse in order to explain their natural superiority to other social groups. To explain the economic inequality between women and their husbands, scientists investigated the gendered division of labor as well. Citing anatomy as the deciding factor, doctors determined that because women were ruled by their reproductive organs, their natural purpose was to bear children and raise them in the home; men, ruled by their hearts and minds, were able to tackle more difficult work that required both physical strength and intellect.<sup>8</sup> Because the raising of children within the nuclear family unit was natural and correct, monogamous and reproductive sexuality were enforced, while acts of sodomy, extramarital affairs, and prostitution were illegal.

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<sup>8</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870–1936" in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. by Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncy, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 267.

For women, pursuing a career of any sort was discouraged both on personal and systemic levels, but to pursue acting as a career was especially disreputable. In fact, acting represented the antithesis of everything a woman was encouraged to do:

In the mid-nineteenth century the predominant image of the actress was as a woman cut off from polite, middle-class society by her “unwomanly” behavior, offstage as well as on . . . actresses were seen as the representative embodiment of artifice, self-promotion, sexual availability, and public display at a time when middle-class women were enjoined to be selfless, chaste, domestic, and “true.”<sup>9</sup>

Because women were expected to stay at home and tend to private life, to display oneself on stage was considered inappropriate and immodest. Still more incriminating was the association between the theater and prostitution. Since the mid-1600s prostitutes ran their business out of theaters, and theater managers in the United States frequently reserved the top tier of boxes for these practices; it was common knowledge that the theater was not a place that respectable women frequented.<sup>10</sup> The actress, as a woman who placed herself in front of the public gaze and allowed herself to be “hired for amusement,” was not much better than the prostitute in the eyes of moralists.<sup>11</sup> She was implicated along with prostitutes in being promiscuous, both through proximity and because her livelihood depended on being looked at by large groups of men.

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<sup>9</sup> Lisa Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 69.

## *Feminized Spectacle*

In the 1840s and 1850s, theatrical entertainment in the United States branched off into legitimate and illegitimate theater, the first belonging to the upper and middle classes, and the latter to members of the working class. Legitimate theater included serious plays, such as those by William Shakespeare; illegitimate theater included musical comedy, pastiche entertainment, and museum shows. The theatrical divide was caused in part by tensions between the working and upper classes. Rioting and general rowdy behavior by working-class men in the pit escalated until it interfered with the productions being staged, to the frustration of both performers and other audience members. Eventually law enforcement officers and theater managers stepped in to monitor behavior in the theater and restrict ticket sales, ultimately barring working-class patrons from attending shows.<sup>12</sup>

Robert Allen cites two other causes for the separation: the first was a process of “sanctification,” or elimination of vulgarity or profanity from the legitimate theater in order to attract audience members from the growing middle class; the second was a process of “feminization,” or the creation of a venue that aligned with middle-class sexual morals.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing a potential audience in women of the middle class who were not comfortable entering into the rowdy space of the theater, some entrepreneurs made alterations to their venues to appeal to this untapped audience. They eliminated alcohol and banned prostitutes from entering their theaters so that bourgeois women

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 63–69.

<sup>13</sup> Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 64.



would not fear association with immoral activity if they chose to attend. Additionally, managers integrated men and women on all levels of the auditorium, including the pit, in an effort to create a calmer, quieter environment. The normalization of these changes yielded a theater that was now significantly populated by women and boasted a civilized, respectable reputation. Women could also perform in the new legitimate theater without being considered promiscuous or associated with prostitution. The famous Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, who toured the United States with immense popularity in 1850, even came to represent ideal middle-class femininity for her audiences in the United States.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the 1840s the legitimate theater had generally shed its reputation as a rowdy, masculinized space, and instead represented middle-class ideals and respectable femininity.

### *Concert Saloons*

Though illicit behaviors had been expelled from legitimate theater by the 1850s, they were permitted to continue in illegitimate theater, what was essentially musical sketch comedy. The most notorious venue for illegitimate theater in New York was the concert saloon, which jointly offered alcohol, variety entertainment, and women in basement venues below the sidewalks. Concert saloons emerged as a result of industrialization and the shift from farm labor to factory labor; because the new workplace environment did not facilitate socialization during the work day, activities like storytelling and singing were relocated to leisure spaces such as the saloon.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>15</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 13.

Working-class men, at the end of their shifts, congregated in taverns, music halls, and saloons to drink and socialize. In the 1830s, some saloons hosted singalongs several nights a week, which came to be known as “free and easies” and, by the 1850s, were a staple of saloon entertainment. By the end of the 1850s, the free and easy expanded to include magic tricks, ventriloquism, comedy, skits, and stories, establishing the format for what would later become variety theater.

The concert saloon represented all that was forbidden in the public eye, a low-  
other “structured around the very elements the bourgeois theater had struggled so  
hard to expunge.”<sup>16</sup> Central to the concert saloon show was the sexualized female  
body as spectacle, both on the stage and off. A typical concert saloon show included  
female minstrel troupes who would sing, dance, and perform acrobatics wearing only  
flesh-colored leotards and gauze skirts.<sup>17</sup> Another standard of the saloon show was  
the *tableau vivant* (living picture) in which performers would arrange themselves and  
stage props into a replica of a famous painting or statue, which typically depicted  
nude or semi-nude figures.<sup>18</sup> In addition to watching the women onstage, men could  
interact offstage with the “pretty waiter girls” who served drinks at virtually every  
saloon.<sup>19</sup> They were perhaps the defining feature of the concert saloon experience,  
and certainly were the hallmark of the concert saloon’s degenerate reputation.

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<sup>16</sup> Allen, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Allen, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd R. Morris, *Incredible New York: High Life and Low Life from 1850 to 1950* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 49.

Dressed in low-cut bodices, short skirts, and boots, waiter girls served drinks to patrons, and flirted with men who came to the saloon unaccompanied by a female partner. Their interactions with patrons were often physical; the waiter girl was paid to sit in the male patron's lap, cuddle with him, and keep his seat warm when he rose from his chair. Some waiter-girls were also prostitutes who ran their business out of booths attached to the saloon.

David Monod observes that the concert saloon functioned as a “dream world, a site of male fantasy,” or a kind of participatory theater for working-class men.<sup>20</sup> Women who sang and danced on the stage sometimes interacted with male audience members, winking at them and sometimes addressing them directly during or between songs. Occasionally audience members were invited to join the action onstage. Customers could look at the scantily-clad women performers and project their desires onto them, then see their desires actualized through physical interactions with the waiter girls. The conceptual transfer from sexualized performances to real sexual interactions provided concrete grounds for the same anxieties over saloon performers that had plagued actresses in the theater of the 1840s. A woman performing in the concert saloon was perceived as immoral and perpetually sexually available, more so than other actresses, because the saloon facilitated and even encouraged association between what happened on the stage and the physical exchange between saloon patrons and waiter girls.

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<sup>20</sup> David Monod, *The Soul of Pleasure: Sentiment and Sensation in Nineteenth-Century American Mass Entertainment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 126.

## **Moral Panic and the Rise of Independent Variety Theater**

Two broad changes in the late 1850s and early 1860s affected the nature of variety entertainment. First, variety halls began opening independently of saloons, initially in New York and quickly spreading to cities across the northeastern United States. The variety hall differed from the concert saloon in that its sole purpose was to stage variety performances, whereas the saloon existed primarily to sell drinks and the performance merely provided background for drinking and socializing. Many early independent variety halls were managed by performers rather than businessmen or saloonkeepers, opening up the variety show to a wider range of acts. Because of their connections in the theater world, performer-managers could book circus acts, burlesque troupes, pantomime acts, and ventriloquists. A variety show came to include three separate acts, each preceded by a musical overture.<sup>21</sup> By the mid-1860s, the variety hall was its own site of illegitimate theater that shared performers and sexualized spectacles with the concert saloon, only lacking the pretty waiter girls. When moral reformers targeted New York concert saloons, the independent variety hall was implicated alongside them.

Moral panic over entertainment in the 1860s emanated mostly from city residents of the middle and upper classes. Working-class dance halls and drinking saloons were traditionally thought by outsiders to encourage drunkenness, gambling, and sexual immorality; this reputation was exacerbated by the coalescence of sins

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<sup>21</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 32.

offered inside the concert saloon.<sup>22</sup> The city's seedier saloons were located along the Bowery, a street that was roughly fourteen blocks of billiards parlors, dime museums, street performers, saloons, and brothels, and looked upon with fear and disgust by the wealthier residents of Broadway, which was located several blocks west. As variety entertainment became popularized, concert saloons started opening in areas occupied by residents of the middle and upper classes, such as Broadway. These saloons tended to be cleaner and less raucous than saloons in poorer areas; many were located in large basement halls with ornate bars, space for an orchestra, and private lounges in which champagne was served.<sup>23</sup> But the better venues and higher entrance fees did little to ease the worry of moral reformers, for alcohol and waiter girls still plagued the establishments. In fact, to concerned members of the middle and upper classes, the influx of concert saloons on Broadway was emblematic of the morally degrading influence that sexualized variety had on impressionable young people, and the disorder that working-class entertainment invited into formerly respectable areas.<sup>24</sup>

### *The 1862 Concert Saloon Bill*

In 1862 the New York State legislature passed the Concert Saloon Bill, a law that prohibited the sale of alcohol and employment of waiter girls at theatrical, musical, or otherwise ticketed entertainment venues. Additionally, the law required

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<sup>22</sup> Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19<sup>th</sup>-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 200.

<sup>23</sup> Morris, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 64.

that owners of such venues obtain a state license before continuing business.

Although nominally the bill was directed at the concert saloon, it implicated all forms of illegitimate theater where alcohol, men, and women intermingled; it was formative in the development of the variety hall which, in 1862, was still in its infancy. Variety managers were forced to modify their halls in compliance with the bill, which affected the variety format in several ways. Some managers simply halted ticket sales, exempting themselves from the law; others discontinued the sale of alcohol, relying instead on ticket sales for revenue.<sup>25</sup> Still others constructed partitions between the serving area and theater; since the law specifically prohibited alcohol from being sold in the concert hall, separating the two spaces would prevent illegal action from taking place.<sup>26</sup>

While the law included provisions regulating tickets and alcohol sales, the moral panic was predominantly sexual, with waiter girls at its center. Whether they were ideologically aligned with moral reformers or entertainers, journalists nearly always foregrounded waiter girls in reports on the Concert Saloon Bill. One critic from the *New York Times*, for example, called the newly-drafted law the “bill for the suppression of the Concert-saloon brothels,” allotting three-quarters of the column to waiter girls and claiming “everybody knows that there are no more corrupt means of

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<sup>25</sup> Assembly of the State of New York, Ninety-First Session, *Annual Report of the Adjutant General, Transmitted to the Legislature January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1868*, vol. 2 (Albany: Printing House of Charles van Benthuysen & Sons, 1868), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 66.

livelihood than those shamelessly resorted to by all the women engaged in all the dens the Legislature were asked . . . to shut [down].”<sup>27</sup>

The fear surrounding the waiter girls, however, had more to do with social control than it did with unbridled sexuality. Allen argues that as economically independent working-class women, the waiter girl embodied every opposite of the bourgeois feminine ideal, making her automatically into a figure of sexual degeneracy.<sup>28</sup> It was irrelevant that in many cases, waiter girls did not actually sell sex, or have anything to do with the prostitutes in the saloon. Although sexualized entertainment and feminine spectacle were still feared and ridiculed, official legal action only targeted the women waiters, with no mention of performers.

The Concert Saloon Bill achieved two things beyond articulating what was not tolerated in the illegitimate theater by criminalizing prostitution and the sale of alcohol. First, it stated by omission what *was* tolerated in the illegitimate theater: sexualized female spectacle. Although the alcohol, waiter girls, and women onstage were all cause for moral panic, the women onstage were not mentioned in the moral reform law, and many theater managers preserved female spectacle as part of their attraction. The lack of mention suggests that while sexualized performances in the variety hall were not in accordance with the moral standards of lawmakers, they were not dangerous enough to criminalize.

The second effect of the Concert Saloon Bill was to reflect the middle class’s revulsion at the moral transgressions that took place in the illegitimate theater. The

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<sup>27</sup> “The Concert-Saloon Bill,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1862.

<sup>28</sup> Allen, 76.

concert saloon was looked upon as the low-other of the legitimate theater even before moral reform took place, but the passage of the Concert Saloon Bill reinforced the difference of the illegitimate theater. Indecent variety was tolerated within the concert saloon or variety hall so long as laws were upheld, but this arrangement served as a reminder that racy variety halls were not embraced by the dominant middle-class culture. In this way the variety theater was understood from the outside as an institution with the potential to tolerate morally transgressive behaviors.

### **Annie Hindle's Performance Context**

It was a long and fragmented process of expulsion and reform that led to the development of the independent variety hall as a space with the ability to articulate acts, behaviors, and identities that were otherwise shunned by society. Nowhere is there a comprehensive list of the theatres in which Annie Hindle sang, but the *Clipper* documents her performing at several venues that also hosted burlesque performances, such as the Theatre Comique in New York and several others in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the Midwest. We are then able to infer that, at least some of the time, Hindle was singing in theaters where performances regularly pushed moral and sexual boundaries. Such a space provides an ideal setting for, and might indeed amplify, a performance that negotiates between what is socially acceptable and what is not. In order to better describe these theaters and the role they played in nineteenth-century society, I will borrow from sexuality studies the concept of *twilight*.

Twilight was introduced by Anna Clark as a solution to the trouble historians encounter when attempting to describe sexual practices and desires that do not fit the prescriptive model of social and sexual behavior, but are not altogether condemned or



forbidden. For illustration, Clark presents a case study from 1863: a divorce trial in which an admiral charged his wife, Helen Codrington, for having affairs with male officers. Codrington had indeed been sharing her bed with another person, but with a woman, well-known feminist Emily Faithfull. Codrington insisted that the admiral had tried to molest Faithfull, to which the admiral responded by providing a “sealed packet” of evidence about Emily, who mysteriously withdrew her testimony, probably for fear of her relationship with Codrington being outed.<sup>29</sup> Though the contents of the packet were never released, rumors circulated about the “romantic and credulous” Codrington and her “dangerous friend.” Neither woman was imprisoned, but both were forced to withdraw from the public eye. Despite the lack of public discourse explicitly naming and condemning their relationship, rumors and gossip indicate that the public did know exactly what Codrington and Faithfull were doing, and did not view their activities as acceptable behavior. At the same time, this unspoken understanding was not considered grounds for legal action.

As Clark points out, this case does not fit into the prescriptive model that historians in the late twentieth century used to discuss homosexuality in the nineteenth century. Following the hypothesis of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, scholars typically operate with the understanding that before homosexuality was medicalized, there existed no notion of sexual identities, only sexual acts. But even without the concept of the stigmatized identity “homosexual” or “invert,” the public appears to have understood what kind of woman Faithfull was, at least well enough to

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<sup>29</sup> Anna Clark, “Twilight Moments,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, nos. 1–2 (2005): 139.

have condemned her actions through word of mouth. Here, historians are faced with our lack of language to describe an act that is understood but not named; legal, but not encouraged or accepted. Clark argues that describing these actions as twilight acts

...can help to fill a conceptual gap in the literature on the history of sexuality, a gap that makes it difficult to describe sexual relationships, desires, and practices that were neither celebrated—like marriage—nor utterly forbidden, deviant, or abject like incest or, during some historical periods, sodomy.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, twilight describes actions and desires that, while not encouraged or concurrent with prescriptive social ideals, were not persecuted either, and were even intentionally ignored. It names practices for which the lack of public discourse does not imply lack of knowledge or nonexistence. It is particularly useful for understanding public attitudes toward same-sex sexual practices in the nineteenth century, which has puzzled historians because of the lack of surviving discourse explicitly naming it, openly tolerating it, or outright condemning it.

Clark developed this conceptual framework specifically for thinking about sexual practices and desires, but it is useful for writing about any practice or circumstance that embodies the tension between what is accepted and what is prohibited. The variety theater fits Clark's description, and might then be called a twilight space. This concept facilitates our reading of male impersonation as a form of sexual commentary, because in the twilight space of the theater it could have been perceived as sexual even with its highly transgressive element. At the same time, as we will see in the next chapter, recognizing the theater's twilight nature illuminates the role male impersonation might have played in shaping societal opinions at large.

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<sup>30</sup> Clark, 141.

### **Chapter 3: Embodying the Female Husband**

In the previous chapters we have seen that same-sex practices were associated with cross-gender dress even before the advent of sexology in the late nineteenth century, that Annie Hindle's act can be interpreted as a form of sexual commentary, and that a sexually transgressive act would have been permitted within the twilight space of the variety hall. With this context established, I will now analyze what it meant for Hindle to appear in male attire singing about courting women, as she often did. Many of the songs in her songster deal with themes of courtship, ranging from casual encounters, as in "The Business Girls":

With their dress and bonnets all combined,  
They look so pretty, neat, and fine,  
They quite upset the gentlemen with their fascinating way;  
They like a jolly lark, pray pardon the remark

to enamored pursuits of female opera stars, as in "The Baronet":

I knew an opera singer once, and deep in love I fell,  
She had a voice that tinkled like the sweetest silver bell.  
I used to take her every night, in cabs to the stage door,  
So happy, little dreaming, the bad luck for me in store.

Because of her songs' subject matter and the fact that much contemporary press called Hindle an impersonator of male characters, Hindle is often read in terms of maleness. Rodgers suggests that Hindle's maleness (or, rather, lack thereof) was in large part what made her funny to her audience: "reinforcing working-class manhood by actively undermining middle- and upper-class ideals in performance and in depicting socially more powerful men as failing to meet standards of working-class

manhood.”<sup>1</sup> I propose that, additionally, Hindle’s audience might have received her in terms of her femaleness, where her characters represent not emasculated or deficient men, but women singing and dressing as men. As a female character singer in male attire, Hindle would have indexed the recognizable figure of the passing woman or female husband, the cross-identifying woman who navigated life and marriage by passing as male. I will explore the implications of this connection between gender transgression on and off the stage, as a reflection of contemporaneous discourses that served to repress cross-identifying women within the dominant culture, but also as a source of identification for other women like Hindle.

### **She, He, or It?**

The primary indication that Hindle was read in terms of femaleness is the gendered language with which she was depicted in reviews and advertisements. Reporters refer to her nearly always as “Miss Hindle,” in the same manner as other female character singers, sometimes calling her “lady,” and always using “she” and “her” as pronouns. Also notable is the use of language that highlights Hindle’s femaleness. For example, an advertisement in the *Clipper*’s “Amusements” column states that: “There is a quaintness of manner about Miss Hindle that the generality of Character Ladies do not seem to understand. She is subdued and quiet in everything she attempts, and in Male Characters Miss Hindle may be said to stand alone.”<sup>2</sup> The repetition of “Miss Hindle” and comparison to other “Character Ladies” paint Hindle

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<sup>1</sup> Gillian Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 129.

<sup>2</sup> “Amusements,” *The Clipper*, July 12, 1868.

as simply another woman singing in variety who happens to perform as male characters rather than female. By highlighting her “quaintness in manner” and calling her “subdued and quiet,” this advertisement projects onto Hindle behavioral ideals of middle-class femininity in the nineteenth century. It also suggests that some element of Hindle’s performance is markedly feminine, to inspire such a description.

The gendered quality of this language is especially noticeable in comparison to the way Hindle was talked about after her marriage to Ryan, which was often in masculine, gender-neutral, or intentionally vague terms. This switch was probably due in large part to a comment Hindle herself had made: After the wedding, a reporter from the local paper followed Hindle and Ryan back to their hotel room insisting upon an interview, convinced that Hindle’s marriage coupled with her skill in male impersonation proved that she was a man. After several hours of harassment Hindle emerged from the room and, in an effort to shoo the reporter away, confirmed that she had indeed been male all along. The resultant confusion surrounding Hindle’s gender manifested in Hindle being called “he” and “she” alternately, or sometimes “her or him”; one columnist even referred to Hindle as “she, he or ‘it,’” leaving room for the possibility of an identity not quite male or female.<sup>3</sup> From 1886 on, the question of Hindle’s gender was intrinsic to her act and foregrounded in advertisements and reviews; before then, she read both onstage and in writing as definitively female.

Despite her perceived intrinsic femaleness, Hindle’s masculine appearance was still emphasized. In photographs Hindle appears in poses similar to male singers,

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<sup>3</sup> *Chicago Inter Ocean*, June 8, 1886.



Fig. 2: Cabinet card of Hindle in costume as a Union soldier, ca. 1870s, Thomas Houseworth & Co., San Francisco.



Fig. 3: Lydia Thompson of the British Blondes, ca. 1870s, photo origin unknown.



Fig. 4: Character singer George Leybourne, undated, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

sitting with a firm posture and staring straight into the camera rather than smiling coyly or looking to the side like other female singers (see Figs. 2, 3, and 4). Reporters frequently described her in terms of her dress, for example: “Annie Hindle opened on Monday evening, singing her character songs in male attire” and “Miss Hindle’s merits in change songs in male attire are well known.”<sup>4</sup> Their language suggests that Hindle’s stage persona was that of a woman, sexualized to some extent, but one who dressed and sang in male attire. We have seen that spaces in which Hindle performed tolerated representations of vulgarity or sexual promiscuity that were not accepted elsewhere. Because of this performance context, one need not exclude sexually transgressive readings of Hindle’s act when trying to account for its gendered aspects. Quite the opposite: the simplest interpretation is a direct reference to gender-transgressing behavior in women off the stage; specifically those who had romantic relationships with other women.

### **Cross-Identifying Women in the United States**

Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* introduced the idea that sexual inclinations toward people of the same sex (the so-called “abnormal” sexual instinct) meant that a person was also biologically inclined toward gender inversion, or exhibiting mental and physical characteristics associated with the opposite sex. But these ideas must have existed in some form before their medicalization in the 1880s, as Krafft-Ebing drew his evidence from a number of case studies in which individuals report experiencing same-sex desires as related to feelings of gender inversion. In

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<sup>4</sup> “Variety Halls,” *The Clipper*, March 2, 1872, and “Variety Halls,” *The Clipper*, June 8, 1872.

fact, plenty of evidence suggests that gender inversion and same-sex practices were thought to be related before the emergence of sexology. Several studies of women and same-sex practices in the nineteenth century reveal both individual subjects for whom gender transgression was integral to their understandings of their own sexual inclinations, common behavioral patterns that suggest that cross-gender dressing was a widely-used method for navigating same-sex relationships, and even a common understanding that cross-gender dress signified fringe sexual behavior.

### *Cross-Gender Dress and Same-Sex Practices*

The clearest window onto the life of a woman who loved other women in the early nineteenth century is the diary writing of Yorkshire gentry woman Anne Lister (1791–1840), who journaled in code about her many relations with women. Lister did not adopt male garments, but nevertheless understood herself as masculine: in gait, social position, and sexual relations. Jack Halberstam recognizes masculinity as being intrinsic to Lister’s identity and the way that she interacted with other women, citing Lister’s many fantasies of having male anatomy, of being a “husband” to her female partners, and her dislike of “anything which reminded me of my petticoats.”<sup>5</sup> Martha Vicinus argues that Lister and others possessed not some innate sense of masculinity, but rather adjusted to the normative social scripts with which they were surrounded; that is, heterosexual marriages between men and women.<sup>6</sup> In other words, presenting

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 71.

<sup>6</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 7.



in a masculine fashion felt natural for women who loved other women not because of some biological determinism, but because they modeled their relationships after heterosexual ones as a means of negotiating their place within the dominant culture. In any case, Lister's diaries demonstrate self-conscious awareness of a connection between gender-transgressing behavior and same-sex desires.

Evidence gathered from within the United States further supports the hypothesis that gender inversion commonly went hand-in-hand with same-sex practices before the seminal works of sexology. Jonathan Katz's chapter on passing women in *Gay American History* includes case studies from newspapers, diaries, memoirs and medical reports that mention passing women who married, or otherwise had relationships with, other women between the years 1782 and 1920.<sup>7</sup> Katz's nineteenth-century case studies include "a curious married couple," two women living together "as man and wife," one of them assuming a male identity, and two male-passing Union soldiers "between whom an intimacy had sprung up." Alan Bérubé's "Lesbian Masquerade," includes the stories of Joseph (Lucy Ann) Lobdell, who lived most of their life as a man despite being designated female at birth, and was married to a woman for most of the 1860s before being taken to an insane asylum; "Mr L. Z.," who sought out acting lessons in order to better pass as male under the pretense of pursuing theater; and Jeanne Bonnet who, in the 1870s, regularly dressed in male attire to visit San Francisco brothels.<sup>8</sup> These diverse case

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<sup>7</sup> Katz, *Gay American History*, 209.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Bérubé, "Lesbian Masquerade," in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, ed. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 45.

studies demonstrate that there was not a single correct way to pass as male, and no prescriptive framework for a cross-identifying woman to understand her relationship with other women. But the recurring factor in each case is the adoption of male attire to allow or navigate romantic or sexual interaction with members of the same sex.

### *Passing Women and Female Husbands*

Vicinus speculates that gender inversion was such a prominent signifier of same-sex desire that women who passed as men, looked masculine in appearance, or wore masculine clothing would likely have been assumed to be romantically or sexually interested in other women.<sup>9</sup> Her theory is supported by stories in the contemporary press exposing passing women or female husbands who had been discovered, in male attire, attempting to marry other women or pursuing otherwise masculine activities. Female husband stories appear in crime or police bulletins such as the *National Police Gazette*, entertainment papers such as the *Yankee Clipper*, and more serious news sources like the *New York Times*, dating from roughly the 1850s onward, and reveal an apparent correlation between gender-transgressive dress and transgressive sexual practices.

One such story, appearing in the April 26, 1856 issue of *The New York Times*, reads: “A person was brought up before the Police Court at Syracuse on Tuesday, on charge of wearing male apparel while being a female, of making love to the Syracuse belles, and marrying a woman, &c.” The brevity of this headline and the inclusion of *et cetera* suggests that the three charges of dressing in male attire, engaging in same-

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<sup>9</sup> Vicinus, 475.

sex sexual relations, and marrying a women go hand-in-hand, and that the reader should be able to infer the rest of the story from the information provided. The reader's ability to understand this headline is dependent on their ability to connect gender-crossing dress with transgressive sexual activity.

This connection is also exemplified in an article from the August 12, 1870 issue of *The New York Times* about British burlesque performer Lydia Thompson and a female stalker she acquired in America:

The fair burlesquer, Miss Lydia Thompson, seems to reserve all her sensations for the special benefit of Chicago. Her encounter with the editor of the Times of that city was just beginning to be looked upon as an old "story," when a circumstance transpired a few days since which has helped to revive it, and make the details as fresh as ever. It appears that for some months past Lydia has been pursued and haunted by an insane woman calling herself Miss Ellen A. Griffin, and that the said Ellen, while in male attire, had fallen "madly" in love with her.

The episode culminated in Chicago, when Thompson assaulted Griffin and was subsequently arrested. During her trial, Thompson testified that the previous January, at a show in New York,

she received a basket of flowers and a diamond ring, accompanied by a note signed by the prisoner, requesting the pleasure of her acquaintance, and permission to visit her occasionally. She met the lady, who informed her that she was in the habit of dressing herself in male attire, and visiting the gallery, when she became infatuated with her performances.<sup>10</sup>

Twice the article mentions that Griffin is a frequent wearer of male attire, even asserting that Griffin was dressed as a man when she became infatuated with

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<sup>10</sup> "LYDIA THOMPSON: The Persecutions of an Insane Woman—Diamonds, Love-Letters, Poetry and Violence," *New York Times*, August 12, 1870.

Thompson, supporting Vicinus's theory that a mention of male attire was a veiled reference to same-sex sexuality.

The same assumptions are implicit in press coverage of Annie Hindle's marriage to Annie Ryan, such as a column in the June 8, 1886 issue of the *Chicago Inter Ocean*, the author of which seems to have felt a need to account for the fact that Hindle, despite having married a woman, had no history of dressing in male attire off the stage:

Annie Hindle, who has always worn petticoats, and who about fifteen years ago was married as a woman to Charles Vivian, the English comedian, and lived with him as a wife, was married, last night, as Charles Hindle, to Annie Ryan of Cleveland, Ohio. . . . She, he, or "it" has always dressed in female attire off the stage, though her dress was always of that style affected by young women who wish to appear masculine.

By qualifying that *though* Hindle had always dressed in female attire, she did so in a style that was in some way masculine, this excerpt reveals two assumptions: first, that women who marry other women habitually dress as men, as it was notable that Hindle typically wore dresses; second, that women who marry other women tend to be somewhat masculine in appearance. Contemporary press in the United States does, then, reinforce Vicinus's theory that for much of the nineteenth century, to assume the appearance of the opposite sex was a visual emblem of transgressive sexual practices.

The evidence presented above indicates that there was a public understanding of gender-transgressive dress and behavior as being related to, or perhaps synonymous with, same-sex sexual practices in women. Finally, there is the question of whether gender-transgressing behavior on the stage would have been associated

with gender-transgressing behavior off the stage. If Hindle's onstage persona could indeed have been understood as representing cross-identifying women, then we may speculate on the implications of Hindle's act, both for women who led lives similar to hers, and for the dominant culture watching from outside.

### *Male Impersonation*

Regardless of whether Hindle's audience had knowledge of her personal life, they were presumably aware of the female husband and passing women stories that circulated in the press. The existence of journalism for which the reader's ability to infer meaning is dependent on an assumed correlation between male dress and certain sexual behaviors strongly suggests that Hindle's audience would have made the same association when watching her sing about chasing women while disguised in male costume.

It is also plausible that her fans might have guessed at Hindle's own romantic proclivities. For female variety performers especially, audiences frequently assumed that promiscuous behavior on the stage reflected in some way an actress's behavior off the stage. This assumption stemmed from the long-standing association between acting and prostitution that was strengthened by the waiter girls of the concert saloon, onto whom patrons could project their fantasies about the performers on the stage.

Lydia Thompson, for example, was rumored to have a propensity for immodesty and disorderly conduct off the stage since her first tour of the United States; suspicions were confirmed when Thompson and several friends attacked the editor of the *Chicago Times* after a bad review in February of 1870 (see Fig. 5). The image of Thompson beating a man with a horsewhip became emblematic of the



Lydia Thompson and her compatriots whipping a *Chicago Tribune* editor, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

variety woman acting out of order.<sup>11</sup> If observers also assumed the male impersonator's performance to reflect her off-stage activities, it is possible that these off-stage activities included unconventional romantic pursuits.

### **Reinforcing the Female Husband Narrative**

One concern of Rodger's over including homosexuality in a reading of male impersonation is that a representation of homosexual behavior or identity would not have been welcome, as it would have been seen as threatening to the patriarchal social order: the passing woman or female husband served as a physical representation of a woman usurping male power and positionality. Especially threatening was the possibility that women might marry one another instead of men, as different-sex marriage was a primary means of enforcing women's economic

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<sup>11</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 163.

dependence on men. Given this fear, it is reasonable to ask whether a crowd of men would be entertained watching what they understood as a staged embodiment of the very figure that threatened them, and whether middle- and upper-class city residents and moral reformers would have allowed such a representation to occur in a public space. To address this concern, I will return to Clark's speculation that sexual desires and behaviors that did not follow prescriptive ideals did not inherently destabilize the conventional order, but in fact were sometimes complicit in maintaining dominant power structures. Hindle's act, far from being a destabilizing force, ameliorated the threat of the passing woman by presenting her as a spectacle confined to the twilight space of the variety stage. In fact, the way Hindle was perceived and talked about mirrors contemporary discourse on passing women and female husbands that portrayed them as fictional, illegitimate, and harmless.

### *Twilight*

Because the illegitimate theater was a twilight space, it allowed performances of behaviors that did not conform to societal standards of acceptability, so long as they were not strictly illegal. For this reason, sexualized burlesques and vulgar minstrelsy performances continued in the variety hall and concert saloon long after prostitution was criminalized. A male impersonation performance that indexed same-sex sexual behavior was as acceptable in the variety hall as a burlesque act because being a person with unconventional desires was not illegal. Same-sex sexual acts were illegal because they were categorized as sodomy along with oral or anal sex with women and acts involving children or animals, but it was the "unnaturalness" of

the act that was illegal, not identification as a person who practices such an act.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, just as burlesque shows that alluded to promiscuous or extramarital sexual behavior were not prohibited in the illegitimate theater, a theatrical allusion to sexual acts between people of the same sex would not be prohibited either.

While what Hindle represented was not illegal, it was certainly transgressive and potentially threatening to the prevailing social order. Thus a performance in the illegitimate theater had an othering effect on whatever was represented there; by repeatedly representing the female husband in a space that tolerates transgressive behaviors, Hindle reinforced that sexual behaviors between people of the same sex did not follow prescriptive social ideals. The variety hall creates yet another layer of containment: recall that performances were tolerated within the twilight space of the illegitimate theater, but at the same time these venues were not embraced by the dominant culture. Therefore by placing the figure of the female husband into the variety hall, Hindle established herself as being part of a repertoire of acts and behaviors that were understood as being walled off from the dominant culture. Male impersonation reaffirmed the female husband first as other, and second as being confinable to a space in which representations of transgressive behaviors were allowed because they would not significantly affect life outside of the theater.

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<sup>12</sup> Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 36.



### *Exceptionalism and Fantasy*

In addition to being confined spatially to the stage, Hindle's characters were confined by language describing her performances in reviews and advertisements. Critics frequently described Hindle as an incredible talent, and proclaimed that her ability to realistically impersonate male characters was extraordinary. An 1869 advertisement in the *Clipper* calls her "The Comic Idol of the Day," "inimitable," "brilliant," and "charming," declaring that "Hindle's style of dress, voice and action is perfection."<sup>13</sup> Often emphasized is her ability to quickly switch between characters, often described as "rapid changes" or, as one columnist from the *Clipper* put it, her "attractive *protean* specialties."<sup>14</sup> Public textual portrayals of Hindle tend to assert, first, that the realism of her impersonation was astounding; second, that very few women had this same ability; and third, that her ability to quickly switch between a number of characters was almost magical. Broadly speaking, she is most often described in terms of exceptionalism and fantasy, both of which worked to turn the female husband into a nonthreatening figure.

Reviews that emphasized Hindle's exceptionalism implied that to be able to present as convincingly male was such an odd skill that it deserved a place in the theater. Even among male impersonators, Hindle's realism in singing and dress was portrayed as remarkable, as if other male impersonators presented incomplete illusions that in some way betrayed their femaleness. In other words, most women did

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<sup>13</sup> *The Clipper*, December 4, 1869.

<sup>14</sup> "Variety Halls," *The Clipper*, March 2, 1872, and "City Summary," *The Clipper*, April 23, 1870.

not possess Hindle's ability to trick others into reading her as male; Hindle's ability to pass was an anomaly, even in the theater. Language that portrayed Hindle as being the exception rather than the exemplar of women who passed as male in turn made these women appear less threatening, because it implied that the disguises of most women who dressed in male attire were transparent. If most male-passing women were easy to spot, then they could be corrected before they caused any serious sort of disruption to economic or social institutions.

There remains the language that describes Hindle in terms of fantasy by emphasizing her quick transformations into a number of characters. Hindle's performance and the way that it was talked about demonstrated that to take on a persona of a different gender was a spectacular display of almost magical ability; the element of fantasy in such a feat made it suitable for the theater. Of fantasy and identity formation, Judith Butler writes 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."<sup>15</sup> In other words, to define fantasy requires a delineation between what is real and what is not real. Through Hindle's performance and the language used to describe it, male impersonation became a phenomenon of fantasy, thus situated beyond the limits of reality; male impersonation, for a woman to convincingly transform into a male persona, became what reality excluded. If Hindle's act was a spectacle of fantasy, and a cross-gender transformation was beyond the limits of reality, then passing women and female husbands who attempted the same kind of transformation fell beyond the limits of reality as well. For Hindle to

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 29.

appear as an onstage spectacle reaffirmed what the dominant cultural order needed to be true: that a woman dressing in male attire could never fully usurp the position and power of a man because a complete transformation was in the realm of fantasy, outside what was attainable in real life.

The musical comedy of the illegitimate theater was crucial to Annie Hindle's ability to portray a sexually transgressive persona without falling under scrutiny from legal and moral reformers, but this safety in turn played a role in turning what she represented, the female husband or passing woman, into an onstage spectacle that posed no real threat to the standing social order.

### *Reflecting Dominant Narratives*

The transformation of cross-identifying women into objects of fiction through public representation is not unique to variety. Rachel Cleves finds a similar running thread in ideas about the practice of same-sex union, even across different histories of gender and sexuality. She calls the *logic of impossibility*, in which observers consistently narrate instances of non-heterosexual marriages by invoking words such as “impossible” and “as if,” making impossibility into a “paradoxical form of acknowledgement” of same-sex acts.<sup>16</sup> According to Cleves, these textual gestures allowed outsiders to acknowledge unions between men or between women, while reinforcing the primacy of heterosexual marriage and the gendered ordering effect it had on society. She finds this pattern in female husband stories that circulated in the

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<sup>16</sup> Rachel Cleves, “‘What, Another Female Husband?’: The Prehistory of Same-Sex Marriage in America.” *The Journal of American History* 101 (March 2015): 1057.

press and in literature in the eighteenth- and especially nineteenth-century United States.

Female husband stories followed the logic of impossibility, employing “recognizable textual gestures of disbelief” such as exclamation points, quotation marks, and references to fiction that implied the female husband was anomalous, shocking, or culturally illegible.<sup>17</sup> For instance, an 1878 article from the *San Francisco Chronicle* entitled “A FEMALE HUSBAND. A Nevada Bride Marries One of Her Own Sex. AN EXTRAORDINARY AFFAIR” states: “The all-absorbing topic of conversation in town yesterday was the matter alluded to in our recent issue under the caption of ‘A Female Husband.’ Many regarded the story as incredible, scouting the idea that a woman could so long disguise her sex.” The words “extraordinary” and “incredible” indicate that the story is shocking and unbelievable to its audience, asserting the impossibility of a real marriage between two women. “All-absorbing” implies an element of novelty, despite the fact that the female husband stories circulated widely long before 1878: Cleves presents the case of James Walker, who was arrested in New York in 1836 and whose story was subsequently published in Florida, New York, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.

Cleve’s thesis that the language used to describe passing women in the nineteenth-century press was effective in undermining their legitimacy and repressing them from the dominant culture follows the same logic as my proposed reading of early male impersonation. Both the female husband story and the male impersonator serve to reinforce their subject’s nonexistence: the female husband story through

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1064.

language that employs the logic of impossibility, and the male impersonator through the language of fantasy and exceptionalism, and the otherness reinforced by performing in a twilight space.

### **Subverting the Female Husband Narrative**

But even as male impersonation reinforced cultural narratives that sought to erase her existence, Annie Hindle likely pursued her art form because it held personal significance for her. The poetry that Hindle published in the *Clipper* indicates that she was interested in public modes of self-expression. The following stanza in which she mourns over lost love, blatantly addressing a female subject, is exemplary of her published writing:

We met but once, and yet how fair  
Each form and feature. Few more rare  
Had ever met my gaze, and yet  
Can we that meeting e'er forget?  
Forget it? Never! while the sun shall rise  
Or with his parting rays light up the skies.

We met but once. Her merry peal  
Of laughter, which methinks I feel  
E'en yet, as coursing through my heart  
It sped—oh, can it e'er depart?  
Depart! No, never while I breathe and move,  
Or, pilgrim-like, through life's sad journey rove.<sup>18</sup>

The freedom with which Hindle uses feminine pronouns and the clear romantic themes in her poetry suggest that Hindle was interested in expressing her love for women through artistic endeavors, and felt no need to cloak her feelings in euphemism or code. As Vicinus and Halberstam discuss, a significant number of

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<sup>18</sup> Front page, *The Clipper*, November 22, 1879.

women, especially in the nineteenth century, seem to have understood and articulated their feelings for other women through feelings and acts of masculinity. Of course it is not possible to know how Hindle saw herself in terms of masculinity or femininity, but if she did follow the same pattern as other cross-identifying women, male impersonation was another medium through which she could represent her thoughts and desires.

As a public figure who represented unconventional gendered and sexual behaviors, Hindle has important implications for women in the United States who understood themselves as masculine or who were interested in other women. In *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*, Graham Robb examines the lives of pre-twentieth-century subjects who pursued deviant sexual practices and the ways in which they communicated and formed coalitions. In his fourth chapter he focuses on well-known middle- or upper-class subjects who were prominent public figures, known or assumed to be involved in same-sex practices and behaviors. Robb argues that such a figure could have offered a point of identification for the common woman or man who had no means of seeking out similarly-aligned people: “The widely reported misadventures and triumphs of prominent homosexuals helped to shape the self-image and social identity of people who were otherwise alone and adrift.”<sup>19</sup> Robb believes that someone whose sense of identity was not compatible with the prescriptive model of gendered and sexual behavior could still recognize themselves through publicly-transgressive figures. Similarly, after the publication of Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a number of correspondents wrote to Krafft-

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<sup>19</sup> Robb, 85.

Ebing expressing that reading about others who experienced similar sensations and desires had greatly eased their suffering and removed their sense of isolation.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, Hindle may have provided a source of identification for women who considered themselves masculine, desired other women romantically, or both, and potentially played a role in their own identity formation.

Female husband stories may have been of help to cross-identifying women who had no source for self-recognition other than reading of women who followed similar instincts, even if they were arrested for doing so. But male impersonation may have provided a more positive opportunity for identification by transforming the woman in male attire into a protagonist who was loved by her audience, rather than feared or ridiculed. Women were certainly aware of Hindle, as she is confirmed to have had a great number of female fans. The following excerpt from the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* illustrates her popularity:

It is a fact that this dashing singer [Hindle] was the recipient of as many “mash” notes as probably ever went to a stage in this country. Once she compared notes with H. J. Montague, that carelessly handsome actor at whose shrine so many silly women worshipped, but Hindle’s admirers far outnumbered his, and they were all women, strange as that may seem.<sup>21</sup>

According to this reporter, Hindle was more popular with women than even the most well-liked male character singers. (Notice also the author’s use of the logic of impossibility; by calling Hindle’s high volume of female fans “strange,” the author denies the possibility that women found Hindle as attractive as they would a male

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<sup>20</sup> Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>21</sup> “Wedded to a Woman,” *The Pittsburgh Dispatch*, July 5, 1892.

singer.) There is no way of knowing how many of her fans were also cross-identifying, but certainly Hindle created a space for women like her to watch their feelings and desires played out, and gain a sense of self-recognition.

## **Conclusion**

Referred to frequently as “Miss,” compared to other “character ladies,” and a singer of at least one burlesque song, Annie Hindle appears not to have been viewed in terms of maleness by her audience or critics. But she is not like contemporary female character singers either, who typically sang as young female characters in courtship with men, or about travel or adventure.<sup>22</sup> Hindle presented an alternate repertoire of gendered items and behaviors that included both female markers, like flirtatious interaction with male audience members, and cross-gendered behaviors, such as male dress, alcohol consumption, and conquest over women. She represented not simply a succession of male characters, but a female singer in male attire, the nontheatrical parallel of whom was the passing woman or female husband.

Returning to one of my original questions of how a performance can reiterate popular discourses that serve to repress a marginalized subject while at the same time providing a space in which the marginalized subject may find meaning, male impersonation seems to hold special potential for the study of cross-identifying women in the 1800s. As evidenced in the newspaper examples presented here, public representations of women who practiced gender- or sexually- transgressive behavior were negative, making them into anomalies, freaks, or criminals, as a means of

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<sup>22</sup> Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 96.



denying their existence and thus denying the threat they presented. Similarly, male impersonation was complicit in repressing the female husband and the threat she posed to the existing social order. By emphasizing that Hindle's ability to pass as male in a performance was unusual and incredible, critics and advertisements denied the ability of women to pass realistically outside of the theater. Hindle's performance inherently made the cross-identifying woman nonthreatening by virtue of the space in which she performed, reinforced by the emphasis that newspapers placed on her extraordinary talent and fantastic transformations.

On the other hand, because these elements made Hindle nonthreatening and her impersonation could easily be construed as not serious, she was free to embody the passing woman any way she chose, without worrying that her lighthearted songs about champagne and women would attract negative attention from moralists. The variety hall put Hindle in a unique position to provide other cross-identifying women with a means of self-recognition, and perhaps even a tool for identity formation. Perhaps the most incredible aspect of Hindle's performance was not her quick transformations or talent in mimicry, but her ability to find space for self-representation within—and despite—larger cultural narratives that claimed she did not, or could not, exist.

## Appendix I: Songs in Hindle's Songster and Corresponding Tunes

The Baronet (tune: "The Telegraph Girl")  
Lend a Helping Hand  
Dashing Young Fellow  
My Own, My Guiding Star  
Good-Bye, John (tune: "Chickabiddy")  
The Business Girls (tune: "Oh! My Wife")  
Pretty Jemima  
Beautiful Bar (tune: "Beautiful Star")  
The Curly Little Bow-Wow  
The Sailor Boy's Return  
The Handsome Postman  
Johnny Sands  
Kiss Me Quick  
Glorious Vintage of Champagne  
The Wolf  
Higginon and Vigginson (tune: "Among the Lasses O!")  
The Ladies' Way to Make Home Happy (tune: "Adam and Eve")  
Molly Dear (tune: "Low-Backed Car")  
Oh! Would I Were a Bird  
Happy Be Thy Dreams  
Oh! Kiss Me Again  
If I Had a Thousand a Year  
William Brown and Betsy Green  
Ever to Live Daily Scheming (tune: "Ever of Thee")  
I Vowed That I Never Would Grieve Her  
Gentle Annie  
Come Unto These Sands  
The Victim of Love  
Pat's Curiosity Shop  
Good News from Home  
My Wife Has Joined the Mormons  
Work, Boys, Work  
Up With the Lark  
Soft Place in His Head  
Winking at Me  
Early in the Morning, Merrily O!  
Good-Bye, My Love, Good-Bye  
My Rosa on My Arm (tune: "Sitting on a Rail")  
The Sailor's Grave  
Cumfuzleum  
The Life of a Soldier (tune: "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp")  
I Said I'd Follow Her Everywhere

## Appendix II: Venues where Annie Hindle Performed

Theatre Comique (New York, NY)  
Grand Opera House (New York, NY)  
Tony Pastor's Opera House (New York, NY)  
Metropolitan Theatre (New York, NY)  
The Olympic (Brooklyn, NY)  
Hooley's Opera House (Brooklyn, NY)  
Wild's Varieties (Buffalo, NY)  
The Alhambra (Philadelphia, PA)  
The Odeon (Newark, NJ)  
Front Street Theatre (Baltimore, MD)  
Odeon Varieties (Baltimore, MD)  
Baltimore Opera House (Baltimore, MD)  
New Central Theatre (Baltimore, MD)  
Neville's Varieties (Cumberland, MD)  
Theatre Comique (Cumberland, MD)  
Metropolitan Hall (Washington, D.C.)  
The Novelties (Fair River, MA)  
Cincinnati Variety Hall (Cincinnati, OH)  
Race Street Varieties (Cincinnati, OH)  
Bartine and Co.'s Opera House (Dayton, OH)  
Deagle's Varieties (Chicago, IL)  
The Varieties (St. Louis, MO)

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