

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: SHADES OF GAY: REPRESENTATIONS OF MALE
 SAME-SEX DESIRE IN FRENCH LITERATURE,
 CULTURE, AND IDEOLOGY FROM 1789-1926

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“Shades of Gay: Representations of Male Same-Sex Desire in French Literature, Culture, and Ideology from 1789-1926,” provides a critical overview of ways of representing homosexuality in France from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. More specifically, I contend that the emergent nineteenth-century gay subculture influenced not only the way socio-political and medico-juridical sources represented and defined sexual and gender identity but that nineteenth and early twentieth century authors followed suit, contributing to the construction and deconstruction of social definitions of sexual and gender identity through literature.

The first chapter of my thesis, titled “Preparing the Palette: Gay Male Literature from 1792-1910,” surveys the works of nineteenth century authors who created the framework for a homosexual epistemology that would structure representations of homosexuality during and after the nineteenth century.

In the second chapter, entitled “Through the Looking-Glass: Representations of Fin-de-Siècle Homosexuality in the Works of Jean Lorrain,” I explore the influence of science on

representations of homosexuality, especially with regard to criminal and degenerate images of the homosexual in the works of Jean Lorrain.

My third chapter, entitled “Scandalous Sexualities: the Baron Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen and the World of Apologetic Impropriety,” addresses the relationship between scandal, journalism, and literature in the works of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen. This chapter also questions whether *Akadémos*, the journal orchestrated by Fersen, can be considered France’s first gay journal.

The fourth chapter, entitled, “For the Love of Boys: Ephemeral (Homo)sexuality and Platonic Politics in the Works of Achille Essebac” pioneers an analysis of the works of Achille Essebac, the first such study in English. The final chapter, titled “The Trouble with Normal: the Politics of the Closet in the Works of André Gide,” analyzes the dichotomies silence/disclosure and desire/restraint in the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth century works of André Gide, contradictory notions that are of particular interest in the context of sexual and gender identity study.

Ultimately, I contend that the authors examined in my dissertation pull from social, ideological, cultural, as well as political representations of sexuality and gender to create an antagonistic and pugnacious literature that contributes to the contemporary definition of homosexuality.

SHADES OF GAY: REPRESENTATIONS OF MALE SAME-SEX DESIRE IN
FRENCH LITERATURE, CULTURE, AND IDEOLOGY FROM 1789-1926

by

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Introduction

At the end of a panel entitled “Internationalisation par la traduction: quels enjeux pour la littérature en français” (“Internationalization through translation: the stakes for French literature”) where I was speaking on translating queer identity at a Conseil International d’Études Francophones (CIEF) conference in 2010, I was asked to explain my work and mention the authors I intended to include in my dissertation. I can only assume that this was an attempt by the chair and commentator to politely bypass questions about the topic of my discussion on the problems of linguistic transgenderism in translation. Nevertheless, I listed what I assumed to be several run of the mill examples of representations of male same-sex desire in French literary works: *Monsieur de Phocas* by Jean Lorrain, *Les Hors nature* by Rachilde, and *Sodome* by Henri d’Argis. No follow-up, no questions. After the panel, the reaction of a seemingly concerned listener would become the resounding echo for conversations like these in literary circles: “...but that’s not literature! What about Proust?!”

The bulk of this work has grown out of pure frustration. While for a long time held captive in the “*Enfer*” of the *Bibliothèque nationale* (Angenot 1986), if readers can today obtain with rare frustration nineteenth and early-twentieth-century French novels featuring male same-sex relations, they are seldom displayed in the vitrines of the few remaining bookstores in France and are even less rarely listed on academic syllabi. Published scholarship on these works is even more inconspicuous. When scholarly

works do appear, they often focus on universalizing male same-sex desire through a single author's representation (Haus 1992; Segal 1999), historical accounts (Greenberg 1988; Merrick and Regan 1996; Peniston 2004, 2007; Merrick and Sibalis 2001), or disparately related content-based studies (Angenot 1986; Lamarre-Stora 1990; Aldrich 1993; Saslow 1999; Vargo 2003). To be sure, these theoretical and historical studies have undeniably contributed to specific knowledge surrounding homosexuality in nineteenth-century France and more generally. However, the majority of non-canonic literary works fleetingly mentioned in these studies are often highlighted through their singularity rather than their place in the ever-expanding corpus of nineteenth and twentieth-century French literature featuring male same-sex desire. Indeed, as Michael Wilson astutely points out, looking outside of canonicity is the best chance "of moving beyond official and elite sources to discover how 'popular' understandings of same-sex sexuality were articulated, shaped, and circulated" (Merrick and Sibalis 2001, 190). What's more, I would add that it is not just about looking outside of the canon. Rather what is exponentially more interesting and more helpful to understanding representations of male same-sex desire in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century literature is the comingling of these often neglected works with the socio-cultural, ideological, and historical currents that make them a part of the "popular understandings" of same-sex sexuality in the first place. More than just an idle pun, the title of this dissertation and its contents point to and hope to fill in parts of this gap in historical, cultural, and literary knowledge.

A study like this is important for several reasons. While LGBT and Gender Studies have exploded in the United States since the 1970's, the same is not always true

in French departments, creating missed opportunities for critical study and theoretical intercommunication. Frequently considered inconsequential, gay male literature is often unduly represented by a handful of authors known more for scandal or canonic works than for contributions to socio-cultural and political ideologies. My dissertation intends to expose an underrepresented minority literature in the hopes of creating interdepartmental and intercultural connections that can be used within and outside of the French pedagogic system to more fully understand the development of ideologies surrounding gender and sexuality of the past and their influence on those of today.

Shades of Gay: Representations of Male Same-Sex Desire in French Literature, Culture, and Ideology from 1789-1926 provides a critical overview of ways of representing homosexuality in France from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. More specifically, I contend that the emergent nineteenth-century gay subculture influenced not only the way socio-political and medico-juridical sources represented and defined sexual and gender identity but that nineteenth and early-twentieth-century authors followed suit, contributing to the construction and deconstruction of social definitions of sexual and gender identity through literature. Through the discursive mingling of these definitions, an epistemological discourse surrounding homosexuality emerged. Ultimately, this discursive version of homosexual culture broadened the meanings that one might attribute to male same-sex relations, emphasizing that discourses about same-sex relations were significant elements in the cultural system, forming parts of power relationships and therefore guiding and influencing individuals as they participated in these relationships.

An obvious criticism of this work would be its lack of female authors as well as representations of female same-sex relations. While this is certainly a fair assessment, looking into lesbianism in the nineteenth century and its representations in literature, while not completely dislocated from, is outside of the limits of this study. With the notable exception of Rachilde, few female authors of the nineteenth century wrote about male same-sex desire. While a question for another study, the reasons for this could be the rise of the more active female figure in society and its representations in literature. These representations certainly grew out of the movements that featured the “femme fatale” figure from Prosper Mérimée’s *Carmen* (1847) to representations throughout the fin-de-siècle period (Braun 2012) or the rise of French feminism and women’s active role in French politics in the late nineteenth century (Moses 1985; Lehning 2001) among others. And while female same-sex sexuality was represented by both male and female authors during the century (Sand 1861; Balzac 1956; Baudelaire 2001; Zola 2013), lesbianism as a sexual orientation was often regarded with a much less disdainful lens by contemporaries (Davray 1895). Socially however, women who took on masculine characteristics posed just as much of a threat to the gender rules guiding the dominant bourgeois ideal as feminine homosexuals (Aaron and R. 1978).

Some of the guiding questions of my study have focused on gender identity and sexual orientation and therefore relied heavily on the theoretical works of authors like Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997; Sedgwick 1985, 1990). Butler’s notion of the “performativity” of gender and Sedgwick’s approach to the “homosocial” are crucial to any study on gender identity and sexual orientation and are explored in several chapters throughout this dissertation. Some of the questions that

informed this study are: What socio-cultural and/or ideological systems informed definitions of masculinity in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries? What forms did “masculinity” take? How, if at all, do these forms inform male same-sex desire? How, if at all, did representations of male same-sex desire inform notions of masculinity? What forms did male same-sex desire take? Is there a difference between male same-sex desire in literary works written by gay men, straight men, bisexual men? How did social power systems represent masculinity and male same-sex desire? How did these representations inform literary works? Did literature have an influence on the social perceptions of masculinity and male same-sex desire? Ultimately, this is not just a study of homosexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in France, but rather a critical survey of the myriad ways in which French society, literature, and culture expressed male same-sex desire over a period that came to epitomize both sexual and social revolution in France.

Laying Down the Law: Code and Enforcement in Nineteenth-Century France

As the ideological foundation of the Ancien Régime crumbled during the revolutionary days of 1789, so too the last homosexual would be subjected to the flames of the *bûcher* for crimes against nature. Changes made to the French penal and criminal codes as well as the legal systems after 1789 decriminalized sodomy and removed the death penalty for all sex crimes (Bullough 1979; Peniston 2004). Both the French penal code of the Constituent Assembly on 25 September 1791 and the Napoleonic code of 1810 were silent on sodomy between two consenting adults making France the first European country to decriminalize homosexuality. Even in 1803 when the government

canvassed the nation's criminal court system only two asked for the inclusion of a provision penalizing sodomy (Merrick and Regan 1996, 83).¹

The reasons for the decriminalization of sodomy after the fall of the Bastille 14 July 1789 have provoked much debate. Some researchers attribute the omission of the sodomy laws to the homosexuality of Second Consul then Arch-Chancellor Jean-Jacques Régis de Cambacérès (Zeldin 1979; Haus 1992) or to the much-debated sexuality of Napoléon Bonaparte (Richardson 1972). However, both David Greenberg and Michael Sibalis have convincingly shown that the five jurists responsible for the criminal code, far from being influenced by a sexual attraction to men, were liberalist swayed by the rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment and while they might not have approved of male same-sex relations, did not find them subjectable to criminal law (Greenberg 1988; Merrick and Regan 1996).

But what exactly did it mean to say “two consenting adults”? If the law was silent about same-sex activities in private, the police certainly executed a raucous voice against what was considered “crimes against decency” (*attentat à la pudeur*) in public basing their cases on several articles in the Napoleonic penal code of 1810. The penal code contained articles on rape and sexual assault (#331-333), public offenses against decency (#330), and the incitement of youth to debauchery (#334-335) (Peniston 2004).

Article 331 punished these crimes against decency only when accompanied by violence, however in 1832, a new provision provided for the arrest of any whose attacks were aimed at minors under the age of eleven; the law raised the age to thirteen in 1863 (Peniston 2004). This law however was much more commonly exercised in cases of men with girls than men with boys, even though no distinction was overtly made in these

rulings between heterosexual and homosexual acts (Jackson 2009).² Article 334 was related to “incitement of youth to debauchery” (youth being defined as under the age of 21) and was harshly punished, especially in cases of prostitution and in cases where the “adult” had a specific influence on the “minor” such as school-teacher, priest, or guardian. Moreover, it was this article that would cause the arrest of a large majority of homosexuals in the late nineteenth century, including the case involving Jacques d’Adelsward-Fersen in 1903 and many provincial cases between priests/schoolteachers and young boys (Aaron and R. 1978; Patrick 1993; Peniston 2004; Ogrinc 2006; Dubuis 2011). These laws were applied to sexual crimes between men and women, men and men, and women and women however there is much evidence to suggest that some of them were largely used to discriminate against men who had sex with other men, especially when in public (Peniston 2004).

While there was no distinction between the age of consent at the turn of the century between homosexual and heterosexual acts, there would be a change in 1942. Under the provisional government of Marshal Pétain, Chief of State for the Vichy regime between 1940-1944, article 334 of the Penal code would penalize any homosexual act between partners under the age of twenty-one, while the same act between their heterosexual counterparts (above the age of thirteen) would remain unpunished (Jackson 2009). Under the government of General Charles de Gaulle in 1945, article 334, which punished homosexual acts for those under the age of twenty-one, was relisted under 331 and 331.1 continuing the tradition of banning “immodest or unnatural acts” for those under the age of twenty-one in order to protect against the corruption of minors (Jackson 2009). Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, president of the Republic from 1974 to 1981, reduced

the age of consent to eighteen in 1974. Today, the age of consent in France has been lowered to fifteen between consenting adults (French Penal Code 2011).

The bulk of this dissertation focuses on literature rather than biography and therefore examines, in only a small sense, the possible real-life same-sex relationships that many of these authors had. Using the information available, even when including Gide, only one of the authors publicly violated any of the sexual misconduct laws respective to the countries in which these relationships took place. The vast majority of these authors spent their sexual holidays in Italy, where homosexuality was decriminalized and where poor families actually often profited from these authors' monetary favors in exchange for their adolescent males (Aldrich 1993). Many also spent time in North Africa, a region that Anne McClintock has convincingly described as a "porno-tropics" for the European imagination (McClintock 22) and where young male prostitutes were easily obtained. What's more, many of these authors' sexualities, including three of the four main authors examined in depth,³ were public knowledge and only one, Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen, was ever personally subject to any of these laws.⁴ With only a few exceptions—most notably André Gide's autobiography and Achille Essebac's novel *Partenza vers la beauté*—the majority of the novels featured in this study speak about relationships between adult men, relationships between adolescent boys, or legal relationships between older men and young adults (by nineteenth and early-twentieth century standards respective to countries). These clarifications are important in order to avoid the ahistorical and uninformed assumption that these authors fall into the contemporary category of pedophile.

That's So Gay...or is it? : Contemporary Ways of Defining the Homosexual in Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth-Century France

Speaking about male same-sex desire in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France was a slippery slope for several reasons. On the one hand, the French lexicon that informed discourses about male same-sex desire during the nineteenth century expanded beyond the laconic definition of hetero- or homosexual anal sex or sexual relations between people of the same sex that had characterized the eighteenth-century juridical and religious term sodomite (Merrick and Bryant 1996). This pithy nomenclature was indeed handy when male same-sex desire was criminal in that its reach was both expansive enough to allow leeway for legal interpretation and specific enough to term practicing homosexuals without hesitation. With the decriminalization of homosexuality after the 1789 Revolution, such a definition based on sexual practice was certainly not as pragmatic and an array of terms to describe male same-sex identity emerged (Foucault 1990). On the other hand, while this newly invented or sometimes borrowed lexicon of homosexual denominations was often semantically very distinct, it could also be the source of much confusion in that authors, sexologists and scientists, sociologists and journalists did not all use the same words to define the same identities or conversely used the same terms to describe disparate identities creating abundant overlap and contradiction. While still in some instances based solely on sexual practice, the majority of the French nomenclatures for male same-sex identity after its decriminalization came from a lexicon formed from a mix of gender-based, role-based, and age-based terminology.⁵

Louis Canler, who joined the police force in 1820 and was eventually placed as chief of the detective division (*Service de sûreté*) in 1849 would term all homosexuals “antiphysicals” and create an entire lexicon of terms: *persilleuses*, *honteuses*, *travailleuses*, *rivettes*, *tantes*, and *petits-jésus* based on the feminine characteristics that they exhibited, their ages, their sexual preferences, and their social and operative positions in the homosexual subculture (Canler 1882). Félix Carlier, chief of the vice squad (*Service des mœurs*) during the Second Empire focused half of his book *Les Deux prostitutions* on the relationships of working-class boys with middle-class men. For him, “true pederasts” were driven by sexual desire while “false pederasts” were mostly prostitutes participating in the mass exchange of money and pleasure and were more often than not blackmailers (Carlier 1887). Many of the terms he used to describe male prostitutes: *galantes*, *entretenués*, and *pieurreuses* were borrowed terminology from female prostitution.

While pederasty and pederast (*pédérastie*, *pédéraste*) had been the common, however uniformed, term for male same-sex desire during the century appearing in the medico-juridical treatises of the famous sexologist Auguste Ambroise Tardieu (1788-1841) (Tardieu 1859) and reaching its peak in the apologetic works of André Gide (Gide 1924), sodomy was often used as well allowing for, in some instances, the two terms to overlap.⁶ The umbrella term “homosexual” was coined by Austrian-born Hungarian journalist, Károly Mária Benkert (1824-1882), in 1869, but did not gain acceptance until the 1890’s after the publication of Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s (1840-1902) *Psychopathia sexualis* and was rarely used in literary works to describe male same-sex desire before 1900 (Greenberg 1988).⁷ Another popular term, “Uranian,” was coined by Karl Heinrich

Ulrichs (1825-1895) in the 1860s and conveys the idea of a women's soul trapped in a man's body (*muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*) (Bullough 1979), a concept with which Théophile Gautier was familiar and used in his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Gautier 1876). Carl Westphal's (1833-1890) concept of "contrary sexual feelings" (*konträre Sexualempfindung*) or "inverted sexual instinct," popularized the notion of inversion and inverts (*inversion, inverti*) which for some described the most effeminate and deplorable of homosexuals (Gide 1924) and for others was a universalizing nominal category to describe men who had sex with men, boys, or males who had male same-sex desires on which they did not act (Dubarry 1896; Chevalier 1893).

It is important to underscore that while scientists and sociologists used a wide array of terms to describe homosexuals based on their sexual practices, ages, behavior, and gender orientation, the majority of authors who wrote about male same-sex desire were much more brevilouquent. While the most common way to denominate a homosexual in a nineteenth-century novel was by convention-laden situations and descriptions, there were three terms that stand out for most as universally descriptive of male same-sex desire: pederast, invert, and sodomite. This does not however mean that these terms all indicated the same gendered identity or sexual orientation. Indeed, the infamous Proustien invert, the baron de Charlus, has fairly little in common with Adolphe de Champlan, the titular invert of Armand Dubarry's novel *Les Invertis* (Proust 1946-7; Dubarry 1906). In a similar vein, the exemplary pederast that Gide describes in his apologetic treatise *Corydon* (Gide 1924) would be hard pressed to identify with the pederasts described in Tardieu's sexological treatise *Etudes médico-légales sur les attentés contre les mœurs* (Tardieu 1859). What's more, the definition of sodomite that

Gide gives in his private journal in 1918 (Gide 2012) is much more curt and bathetic than the impression given of Jacques Soran, the sodomite of Henri d'Argis' novel *Sodome* (d'Argis 1888).

The use of a constantly contradicting vocabulary and lexicon when representing male same-sex desire during the nineteenth century advances the notion of an unstable and incoherent model of sexual identity, the birth of a “species” as Foucault termed it (Foucault 1990, 43). Indeed, as Michael Wilson asserts, the texts that feature male same-sex desire “are marked by the very difficulty their authors faced in trying to make sense of their subjects” (Cryle and Forth 2008, 120). What’s more, it also points to what Judith Butler has termed the “discursive performativity” of names, a notion that highlights the ultimate fungibility of these social and sexual indicators (Butler 1997, 14) but also undergirds the importance and power of naming as a tool of social recognition and existential threat. Indeed as Butler states, “One ‘exists’ (through names) not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*” (5) (emphasis in original). Naming then becomes a discursive tool that, when wielded under interpellative conditions, reveals the definitional power possible behind its utterance in the social sphere. This dissertation will explore the social and ideological influence that naming has both for the addresser and addressee in several sections.

On the Shoulders of Giants: Making Sense of Male Same-Sex Sexuality Through Greek and Roman Pederasty

In his work *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*, Jeffrey Weeks states the need to distinguish between “homosexual behavior, which is universal, and homosexual identity, which is historically specific” (Weeks 7).

Indeed, it would be a naïve and fruitless endeavor to claim that the homosexual identities exposed in the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were carbon copies of the Greek and Roman traditions of pederasty on which many nineteenth and early-twentieth-century literary representations of homosexuality were based. However, the shadow of Plato's philosophical silhouette is cast into the path of many of the authors who figure in this study. Not one author however, not even Gide whose infamous defense of pederasty, *Corydon*, which mimics a Socratic dialogue and describes as it defends a modern version of pederasty, explores in depth the reasons for the prominent link between representations of homosexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the Ancient Greek and Roman traditions of pederasty. This does not mean however that these reasons do not exist.

While the *essential* distinctions made by Plato concerning male same-sex desire and pederasty may have been unknown to many if not all of the authors in this study, the relationship between a younger *eromenos* and older *erastes* that Plato most notably described in *Phaedrus* (Plato 1995) was one of the most exploited themes when representing male same-sex desire during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This intimate bond between an older teacher *erastes* and a younger student *eromenos* finds its corollary in the iconic nineteenth century novelistic form, the *Bildungsroman*, which by definition described the formation (*Bildung*), in a pedagogic sense, of a younger male through life experiences or by an older male (Jost 1969). Whether this literary form naturally accepted male same-sex desire through ideological shifts in literature or authors intentionally inserted it into this already popularized form is a question open to further inquiry. However, its ubiquitous use, appearing in some form in nearly fifty percent of

the novels studied in the first chapter of this dissertation alone, proves that it must have been more than just literary coincidence. Indeed, the familiarity of this form to nineteenth-century readers would have easily camouflaged the minute insertion of a sexual desire running from teacher to student or visa-versa. For the purpose of this study, the use of this novelistic form for describing male same-sex desire can be seen as early as 1835 between Eugène de Rastignac and Vautrin in Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* and as late as 1925 in André Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs*.

This focus on pedagogy between an older male and younger adolescent was also historically relevant to fin-de-siècle sociology and the laicization of France under the Jules Ferry (1832-1893) reforms (1879-1886). While the confessionals of early modern France had certainly heard the laments of many homosexuals wishing to be healed from their sinful nature, late-nineteenth-century France regarded the church with a growing cynicism based both on the active participation of Republicans to laicize France (Lehning 2001), scientific positivism (Comte 1844), but also the active distrust of the clergy who were known to take advantage of their positions and act on their pederastic penchants (Aaron and R. 1978; Dubuis 2011). Several of the authors in this study, most notably Jean Rodes and Octave Mirbeau, highlight the sexual corruption of the French religious school system using, as representative of this depravity, a perverted version of the *erastes/eromenos* relationship.

It was not just the pedagogical relationship between the *erastes* and *eromenos* that attracted many of these authors. The translation of Plato's insistence on ascetic and transcendental love into works that featured male same-sex desire would have aided in redefining homosexuality outside of the hypersexualized and criminalized interpretation

given to it during the first half of the century by sexologists such as Tardieu, later by criminologists such as Cesare Lombroso, and as seen in several fin-de-siècle works by social moralists (Tardieu 1859; Lombroso 1887; Budé 1883; Davray 1895; Bureau 1908). Plato distinguishes between three types of friendship/love all based on desire: *concupiscent* love based on corporeal desire; *irascible* love based on love of moral character; and *intelligible* love or *dialectical* love based on a union with intelligible beauty or the soul (Plato 1972; Ludovic 1976). He places this last as the ultimate expression of love since the soul can never change, whereas the body and moral character of the beloved are always temporal. However, for Plato, love and friendship (*amicitia*) are a journey during which all three types of love may or may not be courted. Indeed, flirtation with one, especially an inferior form, is only a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. He considers this journey a rather natural progression as long as the end result is intelligible love, devoid of hyper-physical or moral hindrances (Plato 1972). In terms of homosexual representations, Plato's theories capitalized on several promising aspects of male same-sex desire. Plato built sensuality and male same-sex desire into his ideological philosophy making physicality appropriate, in some instances, as a means to an end. This of course would have proved useful to nineteenth and early-twentieth-century homosexuals who could use this notion to justify their behavior pointing to the transcendental teleology if backed into an ideological corner. Ultimately, many authors would highlight this transcendental aspect to male same-sex relationships while pointing, in a nuanced way, to the possibility of a restrained sensuality as well.

With the notable exception of the decadents whose focus on perversion and licentiousness made it difficult to extol sexual asceticism (Praz 1951; Ridge 1961), the

vast majority of the authors in this study that present male same-sex relationships as positive also present them as almost if not completely sexless. Indeed, male same-sex relationships are more often than not presented as akin to the close social bonds of the “homosocial” so eloquently presented by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her groundbreaking study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (Sedgwick 1985). As Sedgwick states, it is through desire that it is possible to theorize the “unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (Sedgwick 1985, 1-2). The “unbrokenness” of this continuum is a notion that this dissertation analyzes in several instances.

And while the scandals that affected many of these authors’ lives make apparent a contradiction between the ascetic theories exposed in their novels and actual practice, it does not however mean that disregarding overt sexuality in their works was not without benefit. Indeed, the decision to take the sexual out of the homo to focus rather on the transcendental social and existential bonds that can exist between members of the same sex certainly softened the often flamboyantly confrontational edges that would have surrounded a more explicit description of male same-sex desire.

The choice of the *eromenos* as the sexual ingénue of most of these stories is also conform to the description of the French adolescent male by many of the emergent theories on sexuality of the fin-de-siècle period. In several of the novels presenting male same-sex desire, the younger of the two males is presented as bisexual and often has a female love interest that conflicts with the homosocial bonds that tie him to the older male in the story. Moreover, several of the works featuring older male narrators, most notably those by Achille Essebac, the poems of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen and those of

Jean Lorrain, speak to the flirtatious fluid sexuality of the youths they encounter, present themselves as bisexual through poetic verse, or explore the possibility of bisexuality in adolescent Greek and Roman personages respectively. Indeed, it has been suggested that the allure and danger associated with the fluid sexuality of the adolescent boy can be compared to that of another of the fin-de-siècle's stock characters: the femme fatale (Vicinus 1994).

While Freud immediately comes to mind as someone who championed the innate psychosomatic bisexuality of all humans (Freud 2010), the majority of the authors in this study, with the exception of André Gide who discovered Freud after the publication of *Corydon* (Pollard 1991; Steel 1977), would have had little or no knowledge of Freud's theories. However, they most certainly would have encountered the nascent theories on the bisexual nature of male adolescence studied *ad nauseam* at the end of the century to try and explain homosexual behavior in adult males (Krafft-Ebing 1886; Chevalier 1893; Saint-Paul 1910; Ellis 1962; Bullough 1979; Greenberg 1988).⁸

But the sexual orientation of the *eromenos* was much more interesting and complex than what the term bisexuality could describe. As the *eromenos* moved away from adolescence and towards adulthood he took on the *erastes* position. Anachronistically using modern terminology, his sexual evolution then is as follows: homosexuality (pederasty), heterosexuality, and bisexuality.⁹ As a youth, he is sexually oriented towards an older *erastes* (homosexuality/pederasty), in young adulthood he would presumably take a wife (heterosexuality), and in adulthood he would remain married but also have the option of continuing a relationship with a younger *eromenos* (bisexuality). It should also be stated that the period between young adulthood (before or

when the young adult takes a wife) and adulthood could be very short if not overlapping (Dover 1989; Halperin 1990). As soon as the youth sprouts facial or pubic hair, he is no longer allowed to take the passive position in the *eromenos/erastes* relationship and can at this point take an *eromenos* of his own. The importance placed on adolescence in Greek and Roman tradition as opposed to childhood and adulthood finds its contemporary correlary in what John R. Gillis has called the “discovery of adolescence” in fin-de-siècle Europe (Gillis 1981). Indeed, Gillis convincingly argues that it was only during this period (1870-1900) that adolescence as a concept in social age relations became apparent, economic and social distinctions making the modern conception of adolescence before these dates impossible.

The ever-fluctuating sexual orientation of the Greek and Roman adolescent was both beneficial and precarious to many of the advocates of a return to Greek and Roman pederastic ideology such as André Gide, Achille Essebac, and Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen. For authors that wrote positively about male same-sex desire, this sexual fluidity tempered social antipathy towards these novels by creating narrative ambiguity. Since the sexual orientation of one or more of the characters of these novels is almost never completely clear, both enthusiasts and adversaries of male same-sex desire could read with a clear conscience. Similarly, the act itself of writing about male same-sex desire, however nuanced, helped to circulate the notion, especially prevalent in fin-de-siècle literature, of sexual fluidity countering the rhetoric of sexual definitiveness strictly associated with nineteenth-century bourgeois morality (Ridge 1961; Lehning 2001). Increased exposure to the fluidity of sexuality however did not come without consequences. The numerous moral treatises at the end of the century provide ample

evidence of the social angst provoked by the idea of masculine fluid sexuality (Budé 1883; Davray 1895; Bureau 1908).

To further mitigate the fears associated with sexual dissidence, many homosexuals rhetorically situated their sexuality in terms of aestheticism, another of Plato's theoretical notions for pederasty. In Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima of Mantinea states that love yearns for beauty, perfection, and happiness but possesses none of these. Comparing heterosexual love and love for boys, she states that physical pregnancy requires a woman whereas mental pregnancy, a glimpse of pure love and beauty, can only be found in boys (Plato 1892). This intelligible love of which Plato spoke is indeed a transcendental connection, devoid of hyper-physical or moral hindrances, that focuses on Beauty, both of the soul and mind. Many of the authors in this study were quick to capitalize on this connection between Beauty and male same-sex desire. Indeed, it was with this type of aestheticized rhetoric that Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen would attempt to exonerate himself during his own trial for crimes against decency after the "black mass" scandal of 1903,¹⁰ that Achille Essebac would use to describe his love of adolescent Italian bambini,¹¹ and that André Gide would adopt in his defense of pederasty in *Corydon*.¹²

This focus on aesthetics was not only paramount in defining and defending male same-sex desire in the fin-de-siècle period. As Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce has pointed out, the most notable fin-de-siècle literary movement, Decadence, is also marked by an "aesthetic conception of a life to be lived as passion and imagination, as beauty and poetry" (Praz xv). What is even more interesting is the common correlation made between this artistic fin-de-siècle movement and homosexuality as a prevailing theme in

that movement (Praz 1951; Ridge 1961). Like the fin-de-siècle adolescent, and the *eromenos* of the Greek and Roman period, the ideology behind the decadent dandy-esthete, the main protagonist of the decadent movement and many of the novels of this study, is marked by a fluid sexuality that frustrates categorization (Ridge 199). It is also in the dandy-esthete that fluid sexuality marries an aesthetic notion of life (Ridge 1961).

The objectification, fragmentation, and destabilization of the discourse that informed representations of the male body and masculinity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries might easily be discerned in the numerous treatises that attempted to put the nebulous masculine identity of the dandy into focus (Balzac 1938; Barbey d'Aurevilly 1988; Barbey d'Aurevilly 1966; Baudelaire 1961). According to Rhonda K. Garelick, the dandy married an "aesthetic sensibility" that might anticipate the twenty-first century's niche ideology, "camp," with an almost hyper-masculine persona that begs to be noticed, to be "pure presence" (Garelick 20-22). Through the dandy, males were described as double-sexed beings (Barbey d'Aurevilly 1966, 710) with a penchant for exhibitionism, something they share with women (Raynaud 1918). By collapsing two incommensurable sexes into shades of gender, the dandy certainly gives his audience something to look at: a male body that at once conforms to and is at odds with hackneyed perceptions and articulations of what it meant to be masculine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ultimately, the sheer number of works in which gendered and sexual nonconformity and social and artistic ideologies commingled in the dandy-esthete helped to ground male same-sex desire in the zeitgeist of the times making male same-sex sexuality more familiar and immediate.

The Silent Mediator: Bisexual Politics in Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth-Century French Ideology

It should be pointed out that unlike today, where the opposite might be true (Ochs 1996), bisexuality at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, even among men, was much more tolerable than homosexuality. There are several reasons for this. On the one hand whereas homosexuality was represented as a static point, bisexuality allowed for an inter-sexual sliding between heterosexuality and its blackwashed counterpart on the continuum of sexual desire. To put it another way, unlike Oscar Wilde who would famously state to André Gide at a café in Blida, “I hope you are like me. I have a horror of women. I only like boys” (Gide 2001), openly or indirectly assuming a bisexual identification stamped a much less permanent mark on sexual identity. Creating an inhabitable space between binary opposites, bisexuality simultaneously expanded sexuality’s range of desire as well as made sexual identity multidimensional. Moreover, bisexuality also obviated the absolutist and essentialist rhetoric that polarized homosexuality against heterosexuality, expressing rather a situational sexual orientation that could inadvertently protect against discrimination while still defending a sexually fluid model.

Enmeshed in the very fabric of late nineteenth and early-twentieth-century sexological and psychoanalytic study, bisexuality was for many the loose string that served as the evolutionary link between homo- and heterosexuality (Ellis, 1905/1942; Freud, 1905/1962; Krafft Ebing, 1886/1999; Chevalier 1893). Even if sexologists and psychoanalysts had not yet come to the sexual anarchic language of Austrian psychologist and Freud contemporary Wilhelm Stekel (1860-1940),¹³ the possibility of a

“transitional” or “situational” bisexuality (Klein 1978) helped to assuage the fears of a permanent relocation of sexual orientation into homosexuality’s base camp. Bisexuality could indeed further withstand much vilification when one considered that it was in theory, although not necessarily in practice, like Achille Essebac’s “ephemeral homosexuality,”¹⁴ temporally fettered to adolescence. Many homosexuals sought a redefinition of terms in the hopes of creating a more socially acceptable form of homosexuality, using bisexuality and an apologetic aestheticism as their transitional locum. As was already stated, this homosexuality was often haloed by, in a first instance, the pedagogical *paidierastia* of the Greeks, which accepted an inherent bisexuality in all free citizens (Bullough 1979), as well as the newly championed *Freundesliebe* in Germany, a social and sexual movement that married psychological, moral, educational, and ascetic apprenticeship with Attican *paidierastia* (Oosterhuis 1991). In both instances, heterosexuality was the natural destination and bisexuality was as a necessary panacean detour (Klein 1978).

The first chapter of this dissertation, titled “Preparing the Palette: Gay Male Literature from 1792-1910,” surveys the works of nineteenth-century authors (gay, straight, questioning, and homophobic) who created the framework for a homosexual epistemology that would structure representations of homosexuality during and after the nineteenth century. In the remaining four chapters I discuss how four authors, Jean Lorrain, Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen, Achille Essebac, and André Gide, navigate the surge of representations of homosexuality already available to them with their own individualized conceptions of homosexual identity. One of the major arguments of my

dissertation is that approaches to representing homosexuality during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not unilateral but rather myriad. Consequently, I argue the importance of analyzing the interaction and interconnection of socio-political and socio-cultural representations of sexuality and gender with literature and authors.

In the second chapter, entitled “Through the Looking-Glass: Representations of Fin-de-Siècle Homosexuality in the Works of Jean Lorrain,” I explore the influence of science on representations of homosexuality, especially with regard to criminal and degenerate images of the homosexual in the works of Jean Lorrain. In this chapter, I also discuss the symptomatic relationship between decadence and (homo)sexuality.

My third chapter, “Scandalous Sexualities: the Baron Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen and the World of Apologetic Impropriety,” addresses the relationship between scandal, journalism, and literature in the works of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen. This chapter also questions whether *Akadémos*, the journal orchestrated by Fersen, can be considered France’s first gay journal.

The fourth chapter, “For the Love of Boys: Ephemeral (Homo)sexuality and Platonic Politics in the Works of Achille Essebac” pioneers an analysis of the works of Achille Essebac, the first such study in English. This chapter analyzes Essebac’s works through the Platonic ideology on which his notions of homosexuality are based as well as discusses the temporal caveats that Essebac, and many gay authors of the fin-de-siècle period, placed around homosexual possibilities. In this chapter I also look into the politics of homosexual recognition through the “gay gaze” and how this recognition was represented in Essebacian discourse.

The final chapter, titled “The Trouble with Normal: the Politics of Closet Definition in the Works of André Gide,” analyzes the dichotomies silence/disclosure and desire/restraint in the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth century works of André Gide, contradictory notions that are of particular interest in the context of sexual and gender identity study. Ultimately, I contend that the authors examined in my dissertation engaged with social, ideological, cultural, as well as political representations of sexuality and gender. In turn, they used these representations to create antagonistic and pugnacious literary works that contributed to the contemporary definition of homosexuality, whether impartial, militant, or homophobic, of the time as well as to the lasting definitions of homosexuality that can still be understood today.

¹ Of course, one might point to the ultimate irony of “freeing” the homosexual “other” from political legislation since in 1805 Napoleon would revamp the vicious “1685 Code Noir” so that it might be applicable to the Antilles.

² One distinction however that was made was an 1832 law that defined rape exclusively as between a man and a woman involving vaginal intercourse; sexual assault was used for men with other men (Peniston 2004)

³ It is less concrete whether Achille Essebac lived as what would today be considered openly gay and indeed the term and concept would be anachronistically placed in any case. There is however much information that exists that points to public knowledge of Jean Lorrain’s, Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen’s, and André Gide’s sexuality.

⁴ see chapter three

⁵ Throughout this dissertation, I will use male same-sex identity and homosexuality as neutral terms when discussing these texts unless a specific term is used by an author in which case I will use that term

⁶ Both Tardieu (Tardieu 1859) and Gide (Gide 1924) make a clear distinction between the two terms, clinging to the Greek and Roman definition of pederast as an older male who loved younger boys and sodomite as a man who has sex with another man. Tardieu however will later broaden his definition and make it synonymous with the umbrella term homosexual

⁷ it was however used in several scientific and social treatises of the Belle Époque period: Davray 1895; Saint-Paul 1910

⁸ several authors reference fin-de-siècle scientific theorists in whose works bisexual theories were explored: Binet-Valmer 1910; Bonnetain 1883; d’Argis 1888; Dubarry 1906; Rachilde 1897; Rodes 1904

⁹ understandably this is applying modern terminology to Greek and Roman tradition for whom the notions of “bisexuality,” “homosexuality,” and “heterosexuality” would have made no sense; for contemporary terminology and ideology see Williams 1999; Dover 1989

¹⁰ see chapter 3

¹¹ see chapter 4

¹² see chapter 5

¹³ Stekel would claim in his work *Bi-Sexual love* (1920) that it was in fact monosexuality that was abnormal and deviant, nature having created and determined all creatures to be necessarily bisexual beings (Stekel 1946)

¹⁴ see chapter 4

Chapter 1: Preparing the Palette: Gay Male Literature from 1792-1910

While the main part of this dissertation concentrates on the specific works of four individual gay male authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it might be argued that uprooting these authors from an already firmly established nineteenth-century *homo-corpus* would not only be reductive but also antithetical to the title of this study. To speak in terms of “shades of gay” is to already assume a primary network of themes and ideologies about homosexuality that was visible and yet nuanced, structured and yet sometimes obscure and disparate. In terms of thematics, it is to posit a system of interconnected ideas about homosexuality shared between a common motive and theme. It is also to speak of individuals, whether fictive or factual, and therefore of created or assumed homosexual identities. Additionally, because gay male literature, like its other nineteenth-century thematic counterparts, most notably Romanticism, Naturalism, Decadence, and Symbolism, was as much bound to the books from which it emerged as to the ideologies that it socially represented, speaking in terms of “shades of gay” is inevitably a social and political discourse inseparable from the volumes in which it is found. While this chapter is by no means meant to be exhaustive of all gay male literature from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the hope is to outline the primary framework for “thinking gay” during this period and how this knowledge translated into literary works informed by and oftentimes informing social discourse. It is for these reasons that a survey of the themes and authors that preceded Jean Lorrain,

Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen, Achille Essebac, and André Gide seems absolutely crucial to understanding the social, political, and literary atmosphere out of which the works of these four authors emerged.

Please Select Your Gender: Representations of Male Homosexuality Through “Gender-Bending”¹ Rhetoric

In his iconic work *Making Sex* (1990), Thomas Laqueur exposes the epistemological shift in thinking about sex and gender from the Greeks to Freud. According to Laqueur, the pre-enlightenment process of thinking about sex was tied to a one-sex model whose social discourse was deeply embedded in gendered thinking rather than biological “fact.” Men and women were aligned along an axis of metaphysical perfection whose “telos was male” (Laqueur 6). Deviation, then, in whatever biological form it took, was inherently feminine in nature. This one-sex model, however, had certain advantages as evidenced in the Greek and Roman epistemological system. With only one sex, desire was oriented around gendered attributes, allowing for male same-sex desire to be “naturalized” in the socio-political system. Ultimately, the male body was equally capable of attraction towards males (or in many cases young boys) as well as towards women, each type of desire serving a different but important socio-ideological function (Williams 1999).

Considered by Laqueur an epiphenomenon before the Enlightenment, sex in the nineteenth century became an ontological factor decisive to the identification process. With the advent of nineteenth-century sexology, the late one-sex model “gave way [...] to a new model of radical dimorphism, of biological divergence” (Laqueur 6). If however, the one-sex model was epistemological in nature, the two-sex model was

inexorably political. The body became a set of distinct proofs used to “support or deny all manner of claims in a variety of specific social, economic, political, cultural, or erotic contexts” (Laqueur 152). Indeed, in Laqueur’s interpretation, gender is collapsed into sex or subsumed by it, making anatomy the decisive etiological factor for reading and controlling the body after the eighteenth century.

While Laqueur’s text has rightly been acclaimed a seminal work for sexuality and gender studies, his argument lacks a necessary addition. Nineteenth-century sexology, while espousing the biological determinism thread into the medical discourses of the time, was not exclusively invested in exposing the incommensurability of sexed bodies but even more so in what those bodies did and how their actions were expressed through sexed and gendered attributes, especially when those sexed or gendered expressions marked the body as deviant. Moreover, it should be added that while many of the authors discussed in this section would have read or at least been exposed to sexology’s literary stronghold, the average French citizen would only have accessed these ideas through literary fiction, medical treatises being, for the most part, a niche market reserved for the scientific (Oosterhuis 2000). Furthermore, much of the literature that will be discussed in this section and in which sex and sexuality are examined show a marked preference for exploring the implications of sex through gender and sexual expression as opposed to only through biological taxonomy. Pointing to two epistemological planes of self-expression, the works examined in this section demonstrate a marked understanding of the essentialist dictums surrounding the nineteenth-century body while also presenting conflicting performative expressions of gendered experience (Butler 1999) that question the social primacy of the biological so important to Laqueur’s analysis. Indeed, if gender

“intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities,” (4) then it is through the examination of discourses that highlight gendered expression that we might interrogate the notion of identity in its myriad modes of presentation. Ultimately, rather than being dissolved into essentialist and determinist discourses on biology, gender in the nineteenth century became the body’s expression of sex and sexuality, eclipsing the idea of just two sexes with a myriad of possible sexualities and an equally innumerable combination of gendered expressions.

In a letter dedicated to his life-long love Mme Hanska, opening the fantastical tale *Séraphîta* (1834), Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) states the goal of his literary project: to create a story which would in its imperfect design represent “quelque chose” (“something”).² Balzac ends the letter: “Le voici donc, ce quelque chose” (“Here is that something”) (Balzac 1834, 208). A puzzling beginning to one of the better known and according to the author more eloquent of his works. Published in 1834, *Séraphîta* introduces an “être” (“being”) (208) that embodies both masculine and feminine gendered characteristics in a body that seems to defy the world’s imposed heteronormative dichotomy. Born to parents instructed in Emanuel Swedenborg’s (1688-1772) theories of human corporeal transcendence of which s/he herself is an example, Séraphîta/Séraphitüs desires to understand perfect love, a love that transcends the male/female dichotomy. A neutral palette onto which sex is brushed through gender and sexuality, the titular character uses gendered expressions, such as appearing more masculine to h/er feminine love interest, Minna, and more feminine to h/er masculine love interest, Wilfred, in order to bend gender and surpass the early constraints that Minna and Wilfred seem to impose on h/er body (221). Moreover, in a post-modern

twist to a historical phenomenon Balzac also plays with what will be described in the twentieth century as linguistic “gender-bending” (Livia 1997) manipulating linguistic indicators such as the pronouns used to describe the titular character: being recognized by Minna’s father as “mademoiselle” (Balzac 1834, 226), to Minna as Séraphitüs, or “*lui*” [“him”] (266).³ Moreover, Séraphitüs, the name that Minna gives to this being is significant since naming has been shown to be an artificial form of domination (Haraway 1991, 215), a linguistic power system that delimits and “render[s] substantial” (Butler 1997, 35). Naming with a masculine nomenclature then restabilizes the heteronormative power dynamic between Minna and this being, allowing their relationship to be comprehensible. Indeed, Séraphitüs must be man if he is to be loved by a woman (Minna). Like the “performative speech act” described by Judith Butler in her work *Bodies That Matter* (1993), the naming of the titular character, to Minna’s mind, epistemologically produces that which it names allowing for a gendered and sexed social recognition between the addresser (Minna) and the addressee (Séraphitüs).⁴ Indeed, by calling her a man, the only thing that makes sense, s/he must be one. In a Foucaultian sense (Foucault 1990), Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs states that man arbitrarily names what transcends his comprehension in order to control it (Balzac 1834, 219). However, this performative speech act fails in the context of the narration since Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs does not self-identity or identify others as either male or female, but an idealistic blurring of these biologically prescribed indicators. This idea is underscored in the narration, in one instance Séraphîta stating to Wilfred that man’s myopic sense of vision tries to understand the world through only visible forms (sex) making a reality that conforms to his sense of the world rather than allowing the spirit to see what lies beyond the visible,

to the depth of things (gender) (Balzac 1834, 229-231). Unable to avoid an anachronism, we might call this character transgender or gender queer (Warner 1993; Feinberg 1996; Prosser 1998; Salamon 2010) since the word hermaphrodite would be quite inadequate, semiotically pointing only to a biological function. Ultimately, it is through the presentation of h/erself to others, the narration that s/he creates, that Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs explains h/er very queerness during the story. And while the narrator of the story is forced to represent gender queer with the necessary pronominal indicators (il [he]/elle [she]), he is quick to explain the eponymous character's gendered expression: "Nul type connu ne pourrait donner une image de cette figure majestueusement mâle pour Minna, mais qui, aux yeux d'un homme, eût éclipsé par sa grâce féminine les plus belles têtes dues à Raphaël" ["No known sort would be able to give form to this figure majestically male for Minna, but who, to a man's eyes, would have eclipsed the most beautiful of Raphael's busts by her feminine grace."] (221).

It could be interesting to place Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs into some type of third category outside of/or composed of male and female, like the one mentioned most famously on the sign hanging above the door to the Maison Vauquer in *Le Père Goriot*: "*Pension bourgeoise des deux sexes et autres*" ("Bourgeois pension for men, women, and others") (Balzac 1843, 305). But this would be doing no justice to Balzac or to his fantastical tale. The self-proclaimed secretary to the historian that was nineteenth-century French society (Balzac 1842-1848), Balzac's fiction relays the complicated social dynamic surrounding gender, sex, and sexuality of the nineteenth century to the contemporary and modern reader. Many of Balzac's most famous protagonists defy gendered stereotypes while also defying normative sexuality. This is hardly surprising

since as Phillippe Berthier states in his convincing study of homosexuality in Balzacian literature, “Balzac est fort suspect de bissexualité” (“Balzac is largely suspect of bissexuality”) pointing to the “paternal friendships” he enjoyed with the beautiful young boys of Paris (Berthier 147).

As Richard Berrong states, Eugène de Rastignac, the arriviste hero of *Le Père Goriot* is constantly being presented through images of gender inversion (Berrong 58), described, to give just one example, as gentle like a little girl (Balzac 1843, 430). Diana Knight, in a Sedgwickian analysis, believes that Rastignac occupies the “middle stretch” (Knight 173) of a homosocial continuum (Sedgwick 1985), displaying all but homosexual desire in his dubious relationship with the self-proclaimed “tante”⁵ of the Parisian underworld Vautrin. In *Illusions perdues*, Lucien de Rubempré, another Balzacian social climber, is half female (Balzac 1874, 407), behaving like a woman who “believes herself courted” (34) with his life-long friend David Séchard. In *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, Lucien is qualified a “femme manquée”⁶ (Balzac 1846, 94) who after many failed attempts at succeeding in the social cesspit of Parisian life commits suicide much to the chagrin of his fervent admirer and mentor Vautrin (disguised as the Abbé Carlos Herrera) who, in *Le Père Goriot*, also courted Eugène de Rastignac. Both of these protagonists are intimately linked with Balzac’s notorious shapeshifter, Vautrin, and to my knowledge, only openly “outed” homosexual in *La Comédie humaine*. Ironically, Vautrin is also one of the most masculine characters of this massive literary production, described as a strapping fellow with large shoulders, a well developed chest, apparent muscles, square hands marked at the knuckles with thick red hair (Balzac 1846, 313). Countering most of the gendered physiological stereotypes attributed to homosexuals of

the time (Tardieu 1859), the description of the more supple nature with which Vautrin deals with Rastignac, Lucien, or even Théodore Calvi (the young adolescent to whom Vautrin is chained while in prison (Balzac 1846, 15)) is never hyperbolically feminized. In fact, Vautrin has none of the negative characteristics associated with homosexuals of the period (Berrong 57). Indeed, one might be tempted to state, following Berthier, that through Vautrin, homosexuality is given a more complete, less stereotyped analysis, removed from both the common folklore and aberrant pathology society attached to homosexuals and placed in a shifting network of social forms of desire (Berthier 176).

Of course Vautrin is not the first or last incarnation of a hypermasculine homosexual in French literature. The infamous Duc de Blangis from *Les 120 Journées de Sodome* (1785) by the Marquis de Sade is head of an aristocratic circle of *débauchés* all intent on a sadomasochistic and scatological four months of pleasure. However, unlike the notorious Balzacian protagonist, the Duc de Blangis does not reserve his pleasure for men, opening the floodgates of debauchery to either or a combination of the sexes. But it is not his sexual preference that makes this character interesting for an analysis of gender and sexuality. While Blangis is an active participant (in both senses of the word) in all of the sexual saturnalia of the inaccessible castle in Saint-Martin-de-Belleville, he also assumes the passive role in sexual acts with men, supporting the “attacks” of his active partners with the same passion as those he would later give when the desire to change roles took him (Sade 15). This idea of changing roles highlights the fluidity with which many authors, including Sade, viewed the link between gender, sexuality, and sex as it calls attention to the “performative” nature of gender (Butler 1999). Indeed, the Duc de Blangis, described as inexorably virile, with an almost

continual erection (Sade 15), cedes his übermasculine expression to a more passive orientation when confronted with the Adonis-like beauty of Hercule (one of the young boys initiated into the circle), fluctuating between genders, Sade states, without even noticing (Sade 296-7).

It would, of course, be less than nuanced to say that these two examples represent a marked preference to present homosexual men (even when assuming the active role) as more often than not masculine. Indeed, most of the authors discussed in this chapter favor a more feminine description of their homosexual protagonists. The eponymous character in Joseph Méry's 1867 novel *Monsieur Auguste* is described as having the moral weaknesses of a woman (Méry 47) attributed to his feminized heart and a passive pusillanimity (229), which the narrator states, is worse than cowardice (93). Scrutinized throughout the novel by his hypermasculine unrequited love interest Octave for his overindulgent feminine *toilette*, Auguste is a necessary component to the novel's main goal, presenting a panegyric to true (read: heterosexual) love and to women (1-2). It is no surprise then that novel ends with Auguste's complete humiliation and banishment from the house into which he was supposed to marry. Whereas Octave will, in no uncertain terms, turn Auguste's former fiancée, Louise, into a faithful and loving wife after their apparently more than fruitful honeymoon night (272-3), highlighting, above all else, the need for a "man" in the bedroom (269).

In a key storyline from Joris-Karl Huysmans notorious 1884 publication *À Rebours*, the degenerate aesthete Des Esseintes meets a hoyden circus acrobat dubbed miss Urania who during a notable performance loses all feminine graces to be transformed first into an androgynous figure and finally becomes completely masculine

(103). This gender shift in miss Urania provokes an equally noteworthy transformation in Des Esseintes who, confronted with a being that now prefers a more dominate position, “éprouver, de son côté, l’impression que lui-même se féminisait” (“felt, for himself, a certain effemination”) (103). Rather than revolt him, this gendered exchange of form produces a sexual exchange of function that exalts the protagonist.

In Abel Hermant’s 1888 novel *Le Cavalier Miserey*, Jean-Baptiste-Louis Miserey is described as an ephebe-like mix of boy and woman, young with pale blond hair, thin with a sought after elegance, accentuating his womanly hips with *culottes anglaises* (Hermant 1888, 12). During the medical exam necessary for the start of his military service he is named by the doctor a “girly-boy” (43). Barely through the fruits of puberty, he exhibits the gendered ambiguity of the young Italian adolescents that so inspired the works of Achille Essebac and Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen.⁷ This comparison with the prepubescent boy is not without intent. As Martha Vicinus points out “[t]he [adolescent] boy personified a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence, making possible fantasies of total contingency and total annihilation” (Vicinus 91). Indeed, in Paul Bonnetain’s 1883 novel *Charlot s’amuse*, this idea of the ultimate pleasure and danger the adolescent boy represents comes full circle. A sort of novelistic treatise on the dangers of onanism, *Charlot s’amuse* recounts the story of a effeminate young *collégien* who after suffering at the hands of the pedophilic practices of priests languishes in a state of perpetual conflict with his sexual and gendered orientation. Once the young protagonist meets Julien Leroy, another young boarder, the liminary possibilities of Charlot’s gender expression are explored. The letters exchanged for five years between the two students reveal a slow transformation from male same-sex

desire to a more traditional presentation of male-female exchange, “Naturellement, Charlot était la femme, toujours dominé, mais se vengeant inconsciemment, par une coquetterie réellement féminine, et infligeant à Lucien les tortures qu’une véritable maîtresse lui aurait fait subir” (“Naturally, Charlot was the female, always dominated, but unconsciously made up for it by inflicting on Lucien all the tortures associated with a true mistress”) (184). Later, when Charlot decides to try to fight his penchant for men, he chooses, not surprisingly, a prostitute who is made up like Titus, resembling a young boy (238), or again with Camélia who had masculine allures and was dressed up like a sailor (246). Faced with his complete sexual impotence with women, Charlot becomes the predatory corruptor of youths that social and psychiatric theorists of homosexuality feared (Tardieu 1859; Canler 1882; Garnier 1885; Carlier 1887; Chevalier 1893).

In Hermant’s 1895 novel *Le Disciple aimé*, Jean-Baptiste, in spite of his seventeen years, is described as a precocious child with a mouth that is in a constant state of seductive pout (Abel 1895, 1). He quickly falls for George Moore’s beauty, a fourteen-and-a-half-year old Californian boy, described as completely masculine, who comes to stay at the boarding school. Rather than play the coquettish courtship games that Jean-Baptiste attempts in order to win over the affections of his classmate, George frequents café-concerts with the other boys and quickly falls for one of the habitual performers, Maria-Concepcion, further cementing his masculinity. Much like the love triangle of *Monsieur Auguste*, George is the necessary masculine point in the triangle that is formed by the more effeminate Jean-Baptiste and George’s female love interest Florence. But George is not immune to the feminization of the more effeminate male classmates. Under the influence of Jean-Baptiste, George loses all self-confidence. As

the moral and religious education that Jean-Baptiste takes it on himself to confer to George takes hold, Jean-Baptiste becomes convinced that he can no longer go into the world alone. This lack of masculine prowess is noticed by Florence and during a particularly effeminizing tirade aimed at George's masculinity she states: "Si tu n'es pas ton maître, tu n'es pas un homme; et si tu n'es pas un homme, je ne t'aimerai plus" ("If you are not master of yourself, you are not a man; and if you are not a man, I will no longer love you") (84).

In Armand Dubarry's novel-treatise *Les Invertis* (1896), Adolphe de Champlan, one of the titular inverts, is presented with Tardieuesque physiological stigmata highlighting his feminine nature including: exaggerated breast muscles, as well as abnormally robust hips, an almost absent amount of facial hair, abnormal development of the buttocks, and a hermaphrodite's skin (Dubarry 21-2, 35, 77) (Tardieu 1859). If the physiological signs of gender inversion were not enough, Adolphe, like Des Esseintes before him, has a certain fetish for decadent materiality. In this instance, his penchant is for feminine apparel and undergarments, at times dressing up in women's clothing to satisfy his abnormal cravings. And much like Huysmans anti-hero des Esseintes, Adolphe brings his decadent femininity to his décor, surrounding himself in lavish hyperbolized materiality including bronzes, plaster casts, photographs, and painted miniatures all representing the male form (64).

Paul-Eric de Fertzen, in Rachilde's *Les Hors nature* (1897), is presented as a feline, highlighting both his graceful femininity and egotism, while his older brother, Jacques-Reutler Fertzen is hairless and childlike (41). However if the older of the two is presented with boyish characteristics, he assumes the more masculine role in the story,

his brother Paul, in Jacques' words, being "such a woman" (41). Much more a political statement than anything else, the feminized side of Paul is exacerbated by his half Prussian genealogy during a period of time after the Franco-Prussian war when French men's masculinity was in danger because of France's crushing defeat that damaged the country's pride (Maugue 1987). Clearly understanding this social undercurrent, Paul verbalizes the need to prove his masculinity to his brother, to show that he is not a coward or effeminate like the Prussians that his brother abhors (Rachilde 1897, 57). Moreover, much like Adolphe from *Les Invertis*, Paul has a certain penchant for cross-dressing, lavishly adorning himself in decadent feminine garb for a carnival event, much to his brother's chagrin.

It seems clear that representing homosexuals through gender-bending rhetoric served several purposes. On the one hand, authors like Balzac and Sade produced oppositional narratives that countered the socially expected feminized homosexual written into the literary corpus by authors like Méry, Huysmans, Rachilde, and Dubarry. Of course, these narratives work as counterpoints to those more universal narratives on homosexuality creating what De Certeau has called in a socio-linguistic context "a new disposition of the whole" (De Certeau 79). While not common in the discussed literature, these masculine gays did however socially exist forming a sub-category of homosexual male identity, something Tardieu only brushes over in his treatise (Tardieu 1859). Indeed, the passive more effeminate homosexuals were more easily analyzable by "scientific" criteria because of their critical distance from masculinity and therefore the norm. But the feminized literary homosexual also reveals an ideological necessity in the social sphere. For authors like Méry, Rachilde, Bonnetain, and Balzac, the more

effeminate male character is often balanced by a more masculine love interest (whether male or female) or secondary lead undergirding the heteronormative fundamentalism of France in the nineteenth century (Ridge 1961; Lehning 2001). Moreover, one might say that the masculine homosexual pair socially and literarily did not make sense in most nineteenth-century literary minds. And because the vast majority of feminized homosexuals in these works meet a tragic end, the portrayal of the male-with-questionable-sexuality/effeminate homosexual pair was justifiable to a literary audience both in form (resembling in some sense a heterosexual male/female couple) and in function (the effeminate homosexual meets some type of tragic end). Ultimately, the gendered images of homosexuals presented during this period played into both hackneyed social and ideological perceptions on gender, sexuality, and identity but also, in many cases, challenged these ideals with counter examples that helped to disturb the ideological solace with which gender and sexuality were represented throughout this period.

Dissecting the Palette: Scientific Representations of Homosexuality

While the use of oftentimes-exaggerated gendered attributes was a common literary trope when presenting homosexuality in nineteenth-century French literature, many authors went right to the source and based their novels directly on the sexological treatises and scientific theories of the time. Hardly disguising this current, many even went as far as to preface their works in the style of the treatises themselves. Joseph Méry starts *Monsieur Auguste* in such a way stating the need for a rigid finesse and nuanced rhetoric when writing about these sensitive (read: homosexual) topics (Méry 1-2). In the preface to *Charlot s'amuse*, Bonnetain states that the novel was conceived through a

“conception médicale...[comme une] thèse pathologique” (“medical design...[like a] pathological treatise”) (Bonnetain viii). And while the topic is heinous, the thought behind the novel was moral “comme une leçon de l’École de Médecine [...] moral comme une étude de Tardieu” (“like a lesson from the École de Médecine [...] moral like one of Tardieu’s studies”) (ix). The novel-treatise *Sodome* (D’Argis 1888) has its own sexological treatise right in the middle of the narration speaking of the need to study homosexuality in any form possible, letting caution and hesitation give way to courage and frankness if comprehension is an end goal (D’Argis 4-5). In a similar vein, Dubarry, a journalist and scientific popularizer, states in *Les Invertis* the need to bring to the forefront the aberrations that are inherent to humanity, highlighting, by paraphrasing Tardieu’s apologia (Tardieu 1859), the importance of sexuality in the lives of the French and the even more important necessity to understand it (Dubarry 9). Moreover, as Vernon Rosario has pointed out, Dubarry legitimizes his representations of the erotic by deploying “medical protagonists who deliver lengthy, well-documented lectures on ‘perversion of the sexual instinct’” (Rosario 4).

While the prefaces to these novels oftentimes reveal the ideological and political undercurrent of the work and times in regards to homosexuality, much of what was written in the novels themselves can also be linked back to sexological thought on homosexuality in the nineteenth century. Jacques Collin, aka Vautrin, aka Trompe-la-Mort, is one of the most obvious literary nods to the then popular ideological link between homosexuality and criminality as espoused by social and scientific theorists such as Auguste Ambroise Tardieu in France and Cesare Lombroso in Italy (Tardieu 1859; Lombroso 1887). Mixed up for the majority of the *Comédie humaine* with the bottom

feeders of the Parisian social sphere, complicit in several iniquitous social schemes, and constantly taking on different personas to foil the police intent on catching him, he is Balzac's man with the not-so-secret sexual secret. He is at times described as a "tante" (Balzac 1855, 39), the underground homosexual term for a prison pimp (Peniston 2004) as well as belonging to a third sex (Balzac 1855, 40).

The titular character of Bonnetain's novelistic treatise on onanism *Charlot s'amuse* is also treated as criminally deviant. Much like Pierre Garnier's medical treatise on the topic (Garnier 1885), the novel treats Charlot, at first, as an innocent victim of insuppressible nocturnal emissions, only to be followed by a desire for mutual masturbation fueled by the squalid desires of the school priests (Bonnetain 83-4). This progression is important since, in the novel, the young boys (homo)sexuality is only awakened when provoked and therefore not necessarily inborn, what Tardieu would term "acquired homosexuality" (Tardieu 1859). But Charlot's angelic complicity is quickly perverted as the effects of constant self-pleasure wreak havoc on the young boys physiology and psyche. With his friend Origène, the progressively degenerate Charlot commits the irreversible and ineluctable crime of sexual pedagogy (Bonnetain 103), initiating a pure youth into the demonic sect of homosexuality, one of Garnier's biggest fears for French adolescent boys (Garnier 1885). Their relationship is quickly qualified as criminal and vile ("immonde") because, parroting Garnier's medical treatise, homosexuality provoked by onanism destroys the mental and physical health of French citizens (Bonnetain 107).

Dubarry's 1896 novel *Les Invertis*, also falls into the category of criminalizing homosexuality through sexology. For Dubarry, like for Tardieu, understanding

homosexuality is necessary in order to control its social contamination. However, comprehension should not be read as toleration since Dubarry underlines only two possible social teleologies for the nineteenth-century homosexual: incarceration or institutionalization (Dubarry 12). Similar to Bonnetain, Dubarry highlights the sect-like nature of homosexuality, its “members” initiating unsuspecting victims into their flyblown habits (77). But for Dubarry, the contagion is not homegrown, but rather cultured in Prussia. Still socially bruised and battered from the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians, it is hardly surprising that Dubarry would place the locus of the homosexual issue in the enemy’s home base (128). Besides the ravages of war, the Prussian crime is a homosexual endemic that could spread across Europe like wildfire under the pangermanic egotism of the Prussian people. Plagued by a degenerate heredity that is already producing Sodom’s children, the Prussian homosexual husband, according to the author, hides in the closet of a less than convincing heterosexual marriage (141).

Throughout the century, authors spoke to the etiology of homosexuality in a variety of ways, many times through a combination of sexological theories, newly minted psychological studies, and hackneyed conceptualizations that had existed for centuries. The titular character of *Monsieur Auguste* is described as having a “sickness of the soul” (Méry 228-9). What’s more, he is a man with the heart of a woman (229), similar to Karl Ulrich’s *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*, also mentioned to explain Mademoiselle de Maupin’s strange gender-bending story (Gautier 109). This intrapsychic battle between sexed body and gendered soul while condemned by science (Greenberg 1988; Kennedy 1997) was not lost on the authors who wrote about homosexuality. Des Esseintes of *À Rebours* battles the entire novel with a body whose

hereditary feminization ritually saps the protagonist's ability to function both in society as well as support his overly decadent lifestyle (Huysmans 1884, 1). In *Sodome*, Jacques Soran is perpetually affronted by this interior conflict, having inheriting the hysterical temperament of his mother (D'Argis 21), producing a fragile feminized soul exacerbated by the absence of his father and a loveless home (20). At one moment in the text he ponders the possibility of a "soul doctor," concluding that maybe there are some incurable illnesses (115-6). Dubarry also mentions this possibility in the preface to *Les Invertis* calling the sexologists that study homosexuality "anatomists of the soul" (Dubarry 10). It is not surprising then that Dubarry qualifies inversion as "une monstruosité psychologique, par laquelle [...] une femme est physiquement femme et psychiquement homme, un homme physiquement homme et psychiquement femme" ("a psychological monstrosity, by which [...] a woman is physically woman et psychically man, a man physically man and psychically woman") (34) pointing back to Ulrich's formulation.

Stemming from Darwinian theories on evolution and directly influenced by the ideas surrounding the monumentally significant publications *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* by Bénédict-Augustin Morel (1809-1873) and *Entartung* by Max Nordau (1849-1923), representations of homosexuality evolved from an intrapsychic battle between body and soul/mind to a corporeal devolution that could be scientifically explained through heredity (Morel 1857; Nordau 1894; Pick 1989; Donaldson-Evans 2000). A part of but diverging from sexology, the theory of degeneration made heredity the etiological factor for (homo)sexual deviation.

Charlot s'amuse, we are told, is intended to expose all the possible horrors produced through a degenerative heredity (Bonnetain vii). An absent father coupled with a grandmother locked up in a mental institution (24) and a nymphomaniac mother who confesses unbridled bouts of impassioned masturbation to her priest/lover, Charlot is conceived during a night of lust (48), literally condemning him to a life of degenerative suffering. Formally a family boasting roughneck soldiers (Huysmans 1924, 1) as shown in several of the portraits hanging in the castle de Lourps, the Des Esseintes bloodline of *À Rebours* is thoroughly polluted by a hyperbolized decadence that feminized the males, intensified by intramarital practices. The lone descendant of a once illustrious family, Jean Des Esseintes confronts the world both anemic and excitable (2). Raised in a silent household where friendship failed to replace the fizzled out romance of his hysteric mother and alcoholic father (D'Argis 19-21), Jacques Soran of *Sodome* will end the novel an *aliéné* in a state of general paralysis finally admitted to a hospital at Noirchain. Henry de Kehlmark from *Escal-Vigor* will also be diagnosed with an incurable case of nervous irritability (Eekhoud 1899, 96), explained, in part, by a not-so-distant blood relation to a past Henry de Kehlmark, reputed lover to Frederick the Great of Prussia (10). The titular character of *Sébastien Roch* (1890) by Octave Mirbeau also suffers from the decadent extravagance of a bourgeois father intent on making his family part of the illustrious echelons of Pervençhères. However, once placed in the Jesuit school Saint-François-Xavier, Sébastien's perverted heredity is awakened by the ignoble advances of the Père Kern whose teachings and sexual suggestions condemn Sébastien to an unremitting state of self-hatred, forever soiled, to his mind, as an object of horror (Mirbeau 2003b, 169). Adolphe and Florine, the two titular inverts of *Les Invertis*, are both handicapped by a

maternal taint that imparted, we are told, the soul of a daughter to her son and the soul of a son to her daughter (Dubarry 35). Citing psychologist Valentin Magnan (1835-1916), the narrator states that the brother and sister team illustrate the classic definition of congenital inversion: the “cerveau d’une femme dans la boîte crânienne d’un homme et le cerveau d’un homme dans la boîte crânienne d’une femme” (“the mind of a woman in the skull of a man and the mind of a man in the skull of a woman”)(35; Magnan 1895). However congenital this vicious disorder might be, Dubarry is clear to spotlight vice as at least partly to blame (Dubarry 34). Many of the young boys at the collège Saint-Vincent d’Égleyrac of Gascogne in *Les Adolescents* were also born to degenerate families. One of the main protagonists, Paul Viannes, saw his father die of cerebral fever, his mother was nervous and weak of character (read: hysteric) with a base intelligence (Rodes 34). Indeed, many of the young boy’s homosexual tendencies, while certainly being exacerbated by a degenerate heredity, are also enflamed by the masturbatory proclivities espoused in the solitude of the dormitory (66), echoing the warnings of Garnier’s treatise on onanism (Garnier 1885).

Foregrounding the scientific shift from degeneration theory to psychology at the end of the nineteenth century, Rachilde has a doctor classify the younger of the two de Ferzten brothers in *Les Hors nature*, Paul-Eric, as neurotic (read: homosexual) (Rachilde 1897, 307) a category hardly unknown to the older brother, Jacques Reutler, himself harboring a secret that he qualifies as the worst of all opprobrium (read: homosexual) (185). However, hereditary degeneration is not absent from Rachilde’s novel either, but rather politicized. Echoing French sentiment after the Franco-Prussian war, Paul-Eric de

Ferzten is born from a line of tainted Prussian blood (70-78). Those Prussians who, the *Les Invertis*' author states do not have wives only male lovers (Dubarry 128).

Lucien, the eponymous character of Jean Binet-Valmer's novel *Lucien* (1910), forms part of an overly stereotyped narrative triangle with a father, François Vigier, who studies experimental psychology, the father's doctor friend Batchano who helps to study Lucien's case, and Lucien, the titular invert. And if having two doctors in the novel was not enough play on homosexual stereotypes, there is also Destrem, the prefect of the police for the IIIe République, echoing the homosexual/criminal dichotomy incarnated by Vautrin in Balzac's trilogy. What makes the novel such an interesting analysis of representations of homosexuality is the father-doctor/son-homosexual dynamic that plays out throughout the novel. While the father sees the nobility in his son's soul, the doctor cannot help but analyze the degeneration of his son's body (Binet-Valmer 60-1). A desired myopathy on the father's part, it is the doctor Batchano who points out François Vigier's self-delusion with his son, hoping to appeal to the father's more scientific rationality. As more empirical evidence of Lucien's homosexuality is exhibited, Lucien's mother becomes the culpable bulls-eye for diagnosing hereditary degeneration. Vigier sees in her, as well as in Lucien's sister, a possible source of the corrupted blood that must be the cause of his son's disorder (65). Once François Vigier learns of Reginald Lovell, Lucien's love interest in the story, his once blind eye is opened to not only his son's condition but to the criminal nature of his penchants. With this knowledge, a light is now cast on his son's involvement in the corruption of a presumably innocent young boy (75). Eventually François Vigier will renounce his hopes of having a son that will successfully carry on his name and dedicates his life to his scientific work, investing in an

empty version of scientific positivism that will prove fruitless. In the end, the narrator sums up this overarching theme of the novel: “L’ignorance est la même que toujours. Et l’œuvre de François Vigier, cette œuvre qui l’a placé au-dessus des hommes [...] cette œuvre ne sert de rien.” (“Ignorance is the same as always. And François Vigier’s work, this work that placed him above men [...] this work is useless”) (321).

While the sexological tinge to many of the works examined in this section was on a purely negative basis in terms of homosexual representations, that is not to say that many authors did not represent their characters and themes through sexological theories to a positive end. If *Vautrin* is certainly linked to all the sordid happenings of the underworld in the *Comédie humaine*, it is not his homosexuality that requires him to wallow in Parisian squalor, quite the opposite (Berrong 56). It is ultimately his unremitting love for Lucien de Rubempré at the end of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* that leads him to become a member of the police force that hunted him down throughout his stint in Balzac’s corpus and officially elevate himself in the social sphere.

Using the inadvertent genetic strike of heredity as a buffer, Georges Eekhoud removes the social blemish of homosexual fault from his main character in *Escal-Vigor*, stating that since puberty the timid nudity of his male classmates provoked in Henry de Kehlmark troubling ecstasies (Eekhoud 1899, 200). And while these excitations were a cause of horror in the young boy’s mind, the knowledge that they had always existed in him coupled with subsequent readings of ancient texts on the topic allow him to rise up against the “sexual orientation” (202) of the majority. Surprisingly, even an author like Dubarry whose vitriolic attack on homosexuals in his novel *Les Invertis* leaves little to be desired, still cannot argue with the inborn nature of the disease, calling for, of all things,

compassion for the uncontrollable desires of the inverts. In an almost Hirshfeldian rhetoric (Hirshfeld 2000), he states that information and clarification are the best prophylaxis (Dubarry 10-11). Jacques Reutler de Fertzen, the older of the two brothers in *Les Hors nature*, also believes in social tolerance when faced with the inexplicable nature of emotions. After his brother is pigeonholed by a doctor as suffering from a hereditary based neurosis, Jacques Reutler exposes the prescribed nature of homosexual classifications countering the assertion that after several clinical courses the doctor is capable of a taxonomy of feelings (Rachilde 1897, 308). Homosexual penchants are also normalized, in a sense, in many of the novels featuring young boys in religious schools, the precarious and fluid nature of adolescent sexuality (Garnier 1885; Krafft-Ebing 1886; Chevalier 1893; Saint-Paul 1910; Ellis 1962) used as a foil to the demonization of homosexuality both by religion and hereditary science (Hermant 1895; Mirbeau 2003b; Rodes 1904).

If we are to take Foucault's findings as axiomatic, then the readiness of authors to base representations of homosexuality on scientific discourse makes perfect sense. Indeed, as calling sex by its name became more difficult and costly, control and subjugation increased in political and social value. In the nineteenth century, previously unspoken discourses, specifically those surrounding deviance and sexuality were observed and codified by science transforming once silent sexualities into policed bodies (Foucault 1990). Many of the authors in this section used these scientific discourses to present homosexuality through the petri dish representations that science offered. Through these representations the literary consumers who would have otherwise remained ignorant of scientific theories on sexuality were socially instructed through art

(Rosario 1997). Other writers however turned the scalpel back on medicine exonerating, in a sense, male same-sex desire by pointing to hereditary rather than individual culpability. If the homosexual was indeed born in the nineteenth century (43), it was, as is shown through these authors, through his pathologization.

Ancient “Shades of Gay”: Representations of Homosexuality Through the Greek and Roman Tradition

Even if science was routinely used against itself by authors to sweeten the acerbic rhetoric of sexological treatises on homosexuality, much more was needed by those authors whose intent was to provide a congenial backdrop for homosexuality given the oftentimes bitter diagnostics outlined by the majority of sexologists and sociologists in the nineteenth century (Tardieu 1859; Garnier 1885; Carlier 1887; Chevalier 1893; Magnan 1895). For the authors that desired a change in representation, the answer seemed to be in the past. Representing homosexuality through Greek and Roman ideological thoughts on male same-sex desire helped to distill the scientific from the narrative created by sexologists establishing not only a connection with a recognizable and for the most part accepted system of past morals but also gave way to the rise of a neo-pederasty modernized by nineteenth-century ideologies. At a time when social upheaval was ripe, stemming from the innumerable revolutions that ravaged the French ideological landscape, and masculinity was in constant peril (Maugue 1987), the social benefits of “Greek love” were seen by some as undeniably useful in the reparations necessary to reconstruct the social bedrock of European life and to include homosexuals in it (Symonds 1908).⁸

For many authors, the thematic link between modern day homosexuality and its pederastic past was a nuanced one. In *Illusions perdues*, Lucien de Rubempré is described in terms of Greek male beauty, a mix of robust masculinity and soft feminine allures (Balzac 1874, 31-2), as well as compared to one of the better known homosexual martyrs, Antinous (123). This is hardly surprising since the young arriviste's devotion to Jacques Collin in many ways mirrors that of Antinous' to the emperor Hadrian. Moreover, like the selfless sacrificial actions of the infamous adolescent, Lucien, in a sense, sacrifices himself by suicide so that Collin might advance in society.⁹ Indeed, this unambiguous allusion to the love between the young ephebe and the Roman emperor is also used to reference homosexuality in Méry's novel, *Monsieur Auguste*. As a reconciliatory gift, the titular character gives a print to Octave after a fight over their tumultuous relationship. Certainly a conspicuous gesture on Auguste's part, the subject is the emperor Hadrian embarking with Antinous on a ship to Egypt (Méry 64-5). In Rachilde's novel, *Les Hors nature*, Paul-Eric de Fertsen baptizes his relationship to his brother by using "Hadrian" as Jacques Reutler's unofficial surname (Rachilde 1897, 328). These thematic nods to the relationship between Antinous and Hadrian are likely due in part to John Addington Symonds' *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (1879), one of the first in-depth explorations of the historical figure and one that greatly influenced writers, poets, and historians in Europe during this time (Waters 206). But it was also, according to Sarah Waters, the amenability of the historical figure and story to those narratives for which artificiality one out over nature "that facilitated [Antinous'] reinvention along aesthetic and decadent lines" (Waters 218).

The most common allusion to Greek and Roman ideology was to the pederastic relationship between *eromenos* (younger student) and *erastes* (older teacher) whether in classic or perverted form.¹⁰ Pointing to the Greek and Roman relationship also mirrors the teacher/student relationship in the popular literary form, the *Bildungsroman*. Itself a compilation of older genres and sub-genres, the *Bildungsroman* illustrates the pedagogic formation of a character molded after the image of his creator/instructor (Jost 1969). But in the pederastic version of this nineteenth-century staple genre, the (sexual) nature of the relationship between student and teacher is often put into question.

In the Balzacian trilogy *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, Vautrin adopts this creator/instructor role for Eugène de Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré respectively. For Rastignac, who Vautrin states he has taken as a student (Balzac 1843), the lesson centers on obedience and revolt, both apt emotions when speaking of social advancement and (homo)sexuality in the social sphere. Rastignac will eventually opt for social revolt, like his mentor, but unlike his mentor will never fully assume the sexuality to which many characters hint in the *Maison Vauquer*.¹¹ For Vautrin, as for the Greeks and Romans, the greatest of all relationships is one between men (432), a possible reason for placing his trust almost exclusively in young male characters. After their initial encounter in *Illusions perdues*, provoked by Lucien de Rubempré's melancholic beauty (Balzac 1874, 530), a pedagogic relationship will develop between the younger social climber and the older prison pimp. And even if Vautrin pedagogic principles result in a perverted version of the pederastic tradition, ultimately leading to Lucien's fall from the heights of the social ladder and subsequent suicide, the bond between the two characters is described as "noble, beautiful, and

sublime” (Balzac 1855, 96) echoing the majestic nature of the male same-sex relations revered by the Greeks and Roman (Plato 1892; Greenberg 1988; Dover 1989).

The militaristic relationships described in *Le Cavalier Miserey*, especially between the titular character and his life-long friend Swift, border on what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has termed the “homosocial” (Sedgwick 1985, 1-2). For Sedgwick, relations between men teeter on a continuum between overtly homosexual and homosocial behavior, the latter missing only the desirous component of the former. And while *Le Cavalier Miserey* does mention desire in these relationships between men in the military, particularly the desire to be observed by the older lieutenants whom the younger soldiers hold in such high esteem (Hermant 1888, 95-8), the narrator is quick to heterosexualize the male bonds stating that they mostly resemble those that attach a man to a woman, especially when the bond borders on the excessive (101). These homosocial military relationships however oftentimes mirror the *erastes/eromenos* affinity of the Greek and Roman tradition, the younger *eromenos* being the young inexperienced soldier, the older *erastes* the more experienced generally older soldier attached to the younger by a pedagogical as well as homosocial bond. Enforcing this thematic echo of the Greek and Roman tradition, Jean-Baptiste-Louis Miserey, despite his eighteen years, is described in ephebe-like terminology, his prepubescent body giving him the distinctive allure of an adolescent boy (43-44).

Also simulating the Greek and Roman tradition of the *erastes/eromenos* relationship, Henry de Kehlmark, in *Escal-Vigor*, takes the young, hairless Guidon Govaertz, away from his rural home where he is tagged a savage as well as a “girly boy” because of his asocial and feminine behavior (Eekhoud 1899, 220, 45). Once at the

château Escal-Vigor, Henry assumes a pedagogical position for the young Guidon determined to tame the young brute (122). Like the *erastes* of the Greek and Roman tradition, Henry teaches the young boy to read, write, draw, and paint, invoking Plato, Montaigne, Achilles, and Antinous as inspiration, hoping that a healthy dose of (homo)culture might bring the boy out of his introverted state.¹² After being told a perverted philosophical tale of the extremes to which one man will go to win the affection of another (162-5), the young boy admits his love for Henry. Interestingly enough, the superior intimate connection that the Henry/Guidon relationship exhibits is not lost on the other characters in the novel. While Henry's groom notices and negatively comments on the equivocal relationship that develops between the two protagonists, Blandine, once destined to be Henry's wife, highlights the relationship as "l'absolue élévation d'un grand amour d'homme à homme" ("the absolute worth of a great love between men") (154).

Indeed, this idea of the transcendental nature of pederastic love was capitalized on by several of the authors of this section. Contemporary British gay activist, John Addington Symonds defines it as "a passionate and enthusiastic attachment subsisting between man and youth, recognised (sic) by society and protected by opinion, which, though it was not free from sensuality, did not degenerate into mere licentiousness" (Symonds 1908, 8). For Jacques Soran in *Sodome* this transcendental love is represented by the Aristophanian "soul mate" (Plato 1994) the elevation of one heart towards another, the "aspiration vers une sublime amitié sans sexe" ("aspiration towards a sublime friendship without regards to sex") (D'Argis 50). In *Romances sans paroles* Verlaine also speaks of this misplaced "half." Hoping to celebrate with Rimbaud in exile the

“âmes sœurs que [ils sont]” (“the soul mates that [they are]”) (Verlaine 1874, 10). Moreover, he names homosexual love “heroic” (Verlaine 1889, 97) because built on the splendors of the soul and blood.

Of course not all of the literary representations of the *erastes/eromenos* pedagogic tradition are intended to extol male same-sex bonds. Many of the authors of the late nineteenth century, like Jean Lorrain,¹³ took cues from the burgeoning decadent movement and perverted the transcendental representations of the Greek and Roman tradition of pederasty to fit the literary taste of the times as well as describe the overwhelming zeitgeist of the fin-de-siècle. Others took full advantage of the perverted possibilities of a homosexual *Bildungsroman*, using the unusually close bond between the *erastes* and *eromenos* to point to the transmissibility of homosexuality. While parroting social and scientific treatises, many of these authors evoke among other things homosexuality as a pandemic contagion (Budé 1883; Garnier 1885; Davray 1895; Bureau 1908).

In *Charlot s’amuse*, this reiterated social qualm of Garnier’s treatise (Garnier 1885) is lived out through a perverted version of the pederastic tradition. Charlot, the young ephebe-like *écolier*, is taken under the wing of a nymphomaniac priest who instructs the impressionable youth in his genetic perversion (Bonnetain 102). Once initiated into the sexual stronghold of male same-sex pleasure, the young Charlot takes over the perverted *erastes* role, from then on polluting the other frail, desiring masculine psyches in the pension with an education that will brutalize rather than purify their moral standing. In *À Rebours*, Des Esseintes will also encourage the debauchery of two young adolescents. The first, Auguste Langlois, a sixteen-year-old pauper, who asking for a

light for his cigarette will instead ignite an ephemeral pedagogic relationship with the decadent aesthete. Momentarily providing the youth with the luxuries he knows the boy could not afford on his own, Des Esseintes hopes in turn to produce a delinquent and decadent disciple, one more enemy for the society that he hates so much (Huysmans 1924, 73). Unlike the idealistic nature of the Greek and Roman tradition of pederasty where producing law abiding and morale male citizens was the pedagogic cornerstone of the male same-sex relationship (Ludovic 1976; Greenberg 1988; Dover 1989; Halperin 1990; Williams 1999), Auguste Langlois will be forced in the end to lie, steal, cheat, and kill in order to keep up the lifestyle to which Des Esseintes has accustomed him (Huysmans 1924, 73). The second is a nameless young *écolier* Des Esseintes meets on l'avenue de Latourg-Maubourg and with whom he will develop a relationship gravitating not towards the transcendental pedagogic philosophy of the Greeks and Romans but rather towards the hyperbolized sexual extravagance of the Decadents. A classic sign in sexological terms of excessive masturbation (Garnier 1885), the young boys eyelids are "haloed in blue" (Huysmans 1924, 108), revealing why this dubious friendship that lasts several months, is, among all the memories that stuck out in Des Esseintes life, the one that towered over all others.

The relationship between the seventeen-year-old orphan, Henri Laus and Jacques Soran in *Sodome* also illustrates this perverted version of *erastes/eromenos* pedagogy. The education provided by this male same-sex bond is twofold. On the one hand, Jacques Soran's homosexuality is crystallized by his *complete* attraction to Henri: a connection between similar souls (D'Argis 251) but also an attraction between an older male and the adolescent nature of Henri's young male body (227). But while the original

Greek bond was built on an aptly recommended asceticism, the nineteenth-century gay novel often proves that this chastity was easier theorized than put into practice. Indeed, rather than keep the relationship innocent, Jacques takes the first opportunity to explore the young boy's body during a trip down a mineshaft, both characters erotically covered in black soot. And while the usually homophobic tirades of the narrator are momentarily silenced, calling the scene an "alliance de deux âmes qui, un instant, ne purent oublier qu'elles avaient un corps" ("union of two souls who, for an instant, were able to forget that they had bodies") (263-4), the male same-sex bond between the two will soon be broken when Jacques realizes that this physicality has tarnished the sublime union for which he had been searching. Once the relationship is re-virginized towards a homosocial bond, Henri cracks under the pressure of abstinence and takes a female provoking a murderous rage in Jacques for which he is eventually institutionalized.

For some authors, the Greek tradition provided a welcome backdrop for their stories based on male same-sex desire, one that would allow the interpretive distance between Greek and Roman male same-sex relations and modern sexual aberration to be shortened. Indeed, this could be interpreted as an attempt to mitigate public perceptions concerning a once familiar topos and a socially emerging sub-culture. However for those authors whose goal was to expose homosexuality's "true colors," the Greek tradition also provided a deprecating relay, turning a once accepted and widely practiced philosophical ideology into the decadent social contagion feared and loathed by the majority.

Pedagogic Perverts: Religious and Instructional Representations of Homosexuality

It is certainly true that after the fall of the Paris Commune (18 March 1871-28 May 1871) the overwhelming zeitgeist of the first ten years of the Third Republic was dominated by a desire to establish a new ‘moral order’ based specifically on religious principles (Mayeur 6). However after 1879 and during the Jules Ferry reforms (1879-1886), the ideological scale tipped heavily towards the laicization of the State and social life revealing a widespread anticlerical sentiment that saturates many of the works written during this period (84). In terms of gay texts, the anticlerical nature of society and desire for educational reform proved the perfect backdrop for those authors who wished to criticize the church, its educational practices, but also homosexuality.

Far from religious sentinels of moral order, the priests in *Charlot s’amuse* are described as bestial sexual predators, ravaging the bodies of the young schoolboys with their sexual frustrations (Bonnetain, 112). And while the files of the church are said to be full of unpunished monstrosities tucked away by a forgiving magistracy and clergyman that share the guilty party’s pleasure, the majority of the blame in Bonnetain’s tale falls on Charlot, declared guilty of, not just complicit in, the crime of homosexuality even after his egregious rape by the frère Hilarion (144). The religious confession that he is forced to make to the Marist coupled with the subsequent religious education on the scope of his guilt informs Charlot’s quondam innocence of its now sinful nature reviving in the late nineteenth century the Foucaultian importance placed on the confessionals of pre-Revolution France (Foucault 1990). It is not until his friendship with Lucien Leroy that Charlot will glimpse the possibility of a male same-sex bond that is not initially

soiled by an imposed religious morality. Eventually, however, this attachment will provoke his descent from the idealist graces discovered with Lucien into the loathsome state of self-hatred he will adopt by the end of the novel. After discovering his hereditary taint through sexological readings on his condition (Bonnetain, 162) and several unsuccessful attempts to counter degeneration through the prescribed homosexual panacea that women seemed to represent for sexology and religion (245), he plans the date for his suicide, the night before the 14 July, ultimately highlighting his position as an outcast in society.

The titular character of *Abbé Jules* is also not the bastion of clerical values. The uncle of the narrator, he grew up in a despotic household and is described by the narrator's parents as synonymous with vice, debauchery, crime, and mystery (Mirbeau 2003a, 35). In many ways contributing to the debauchery of the young male students by announcing to the depraved priests the suspect friendships that formed out of the social solitude felt by the young *écoliers*, abbé Jules also routinely ferrets out the priests whose sinful hands visit the young boy's dormitories at night (58). Far from formally condemning either the young boys' curiosity nor the older priests' conduct, abbé Jules vocalizes while contributing to what he sees as the total degeneration of the religious system (73). He is eventually banished from the order and will take up the education (read: perversion) of his nephew, the narrator, only to succumb himself to the degradation of his moral, mental, and physical capacities aggravated by his own licentiousness.

Also by Octave Mirbeau, *Sebastien Roch* is as much a social commentary on the immoral self-indulgence of the clerical order as it is a personal reflection into the past of the author. Like the titular character, Mirbeau attended and was expelled from the school

about which he writes in the novel (Mirbeau 2003b, 7). A renowned Jesuit school welcoming both aristocratic children as well as those of commoners, l'école Saint-François-Xavier houses more than just a mix of social classes, but also shelters the decadently sexual saturnalia of the parish priests. Sébastien Roch first understands his own homosexual penchants in the voluptuous regards of father Kern (136-142). Once father Kern realizes the scope of his hold on the young boy's curiosity, he cloaks his sexual desire under the auspices of pedagogic concern. However it is not the religious writings prescribed by the school that father Kern teaches Sébastien during their intimate sessions. Instead, he awakens the young mind with texts by Dante, Shakespeare, Hugo, and Chateaubriand (144). Eventually growing tired of the spiritual nature of their relationship, he takes the student unawares in the shadows of a hidden office of the school (160). Far from the abject horror felt by Sébastien after the encounter, father Kern's nonchalance becomes a poison in the eponymous character's mind. Slowly it saps his mental and physical health until he is eventually expelled from the school for suspicion of homosexuality with another classmate, Bolorec, an insinuation made by father Kern himself. The sordid reputation now attached to the young student will follow him throughout his life making it impossible to avoid the denigrating stares of the townspeople as well as be with a woman without being assailed by memories of the dormitory (260-3). In the end, he will join the army at the start of the Franco-Prussian war and revisit his secondary school days when Bolerac resurfaces in the same brigade. But like their chance meeting in the Jesuit school, their reunion in the French army will not last long. Sébastien is quickly killed in a surprise attack, highlighting the physical and mental deterioration of his once promising masculinity.

For the young schoolboys in Jean Rodes novel *Les Adolescents* the students' mind is perverted by the religious pedagogy of the Bible itself. Specifically, the *Song of Solomon*, the narrator states, awakens in the students the most noxious of proclivities (Rodes 29). Coinciding with the period of pubescent sexual pioneering, the religious education of the collège Saint-Vincent d'Égleyrac exacerbates an already fragile adolescent sensitivity, corrupting the conscience of the young boys with apotheosized yet condemned visions of the flesh, love, and sin. It is a feminizing educational system that abets the initially clandestine relationship between fourteen-year-old Paul and twelve-year-old Julien (34). Taking full advantage of his knowledge of the young boy's sexual curiosities, the abbé Meyrac invites the two students into his office allowing their sordid behavior to be displayed in front of his covetous eyes, even attempting to intervene with a kiss that is quickly refused and the cause of a necessary self-banishment (84). Many of the students limit their furtive sexual experimentation to a quick, almost fraternal embrace. Some, we are told, already have their place in hell (143). One of these devil-may-care students, Georges Néronde, is described as overly feminine with an already ripened sexuality (142). His prey is Henri Mériel, a fourteen-year-old newcomer whose degenerate bloodline makes him overly sensitive to the moral restrictions of the church and school and yet equally influenced by the tortures of his adolescent body (131). If Henri has already tested the waters with Norbert Gueldrain, their quick embrace described as the unification of kindred souls (168-9), the nocturnal caresses instigated by Georges are anything but Aristophanean in nature. No words, no feeling, only jejune actions that provoke shame and disgust are used as descriptors (189).

In *Le Disciple aimé*, it is also between the students themselves, not necessarily the priesthood, that sexual exploration reaches a head. Indeed, the young students satisfy their need for companionship by reading together in almost too close quarters exhibiting childish behaviors that are *almost* always innocent in nature (Hermant 1895, 13). In the novel, the seventeen-year-old protagonist Jean-Baptiste adopts the perverted role usually associated with the priesthood. Described as a precocious child whose father died of consumption (1-2), Jean-Baptiste is quickly enamored of the beauty of a new fourteen-and-a-half-year-old American student, George Moore (13). George is described in masculine terms, quickly becoming a part of the virile pack of young students. Jean-Baptiste is more effeminate because of a bout of hereditary consumption and corrupting homosexual penchants, characteristics that quickly turn George's glances away from him and towards the more stable homosocial bonds of the other male students. After the summer break, George returns less a boy with a dubious sexual orientation and more a man affirmed in his heterosexuality attaching himself to Florence much to the chagrin of Jean-Baptiste. In a fit of anxiety, Jean-Baptiste reveals the clandestine relationship to the girl's father who sends her off to Germany, and Jean-Baptiste frantically attaches himself to George taking over his education (154). As the education progresses, George's mental capacities and physical health decline, the young man losing all self-confidence and becoming convinced of his need for Jean-Baptiste. George finally escapes the clutches of Jean-Baptiste's obsessive attraction by fleeing to Paris. To compensate for his loss, Jean-Baptiste becomes indecorous and simulates the rape of his obsession by violently masturbating to one of George's portraits after which his health permanently falters (214). After one last-ditch attempt to mend his tattered relationship with the one over

whom he obsesses, Jean-Baptiste succumbs to his physical and mental deficiencies and dies.

Jacques Soran, of *Sodome*, also discovers a taste for homosexuality in secondary school. According to D'Argis, the *collèges* of late nineteenth-century France were the chance breeding ground for problematic relationships between young isolated boys starving for attention and priests overwhelmed by unsatisfied affections (28). Indeed in *Sodome* like in *Charlot s'amuse*, the same priests who demand confession are also those who originally provoke the guilt by forming unhealthy relations with the boys, keeping the link between the guilty party and absolving teacher that might stronger. Centered on the Foucaultian analysis of deviant sexuality and discursive practices before the nineteenth century (Foucault 1990), the "incitement to discourse" of these religious schools in late nineteenth-century France uses the confession as a way to lay bare the human body and its desires. It is indeed this confessional necessity demanded by l'abbé Gratien that allows Jacques' ignorance to an ill-defined feeling evolve into knowledge of personal deviance that will lead to his institutionalization at the end of the novel. But if religion is the cause of, at least in part, the awakening of Jacques' homosexual desires, it also claims to be the cure, the abbé Gratien proclaiming himself the doctor of Jacques' soul (162). The narrator, however, is less than convinced of the church's ability to heal the sexual deviancy of its wayward followers highlighting the cult-like nature of the house of God throughout history and its less than convincing curative prescriptions (160). In the end, Jacques will fail to absolve himself of the guilt provoked by his religious teachings and after a failed murder attempt on a former lover will be institutionalized in a Parisian mental hospital.

Homosexuality certainly had its place at the heart of fin-de-siècle education, especially in France's waning religious school program. For many authors, highlighting homosexuality as a contagion was a way to expose the wayward sexual practices of priests who were often associated with pederasty and the corruption of minors (Angenot 1986; Dubuis 2011). Moreover, many of the authors used homosexuality as a way to explore the homosocial nature of the French religious school system, exposing the fluid sexuality of these youths as at once a danger to French masculinity and an innocent rite of passage into adulthood (Dubuis 2011). Ultimately, the anticlerical literature of the fin-de-siècle period exposes the ideological tenor of the time, a bourgeois society with a low moral threshold and an insatiable curiosity for (sexual) transgressions.

Camouflaging Gay: Military Representations of Homo(social)sexual Behavior

In 1814, Jacques-Louis David finished his monumental neoclassical work *Leonidas at Thermopylae*. Painted during the fifteen-year period of Napoleon's reign (1799-1814), the piece evokes an austere and meditative Spartan king Leonidas stoically reflecting his imminent martyrization as well as that of his fellow companions-in-arms who, faced with the massive swell of Xerxes's Persian army, would perish so that their fellow Greeks would have time to mount a proper defense. The feeling that the painting evokes however is not of despair or fear, but rather fraternal jubilation, the band of Spartan brothers eagerly awaiting the moment when they might protect and die for the men they call comrades. And this, almost nude, as they affectionately embrace each other's muscular bodies in what might be considered the ultimate homoerotic military image. A common trope in nineteenth-century war and military fiction, the fraternal bond between men in the military and its translation in the Arts stems from a

longstanding nineteenth-century war-driven atmosphere starting with the Revolutionary Wars (1792-1799) against the royalists, the Counter-Revolutionary forces of exiled nobles and officers of the French Royal Army, to the Napoleonic campaigns in Italy and Egypt (1796-1799), Austria and Prussia (1805-06), the disastrous campaigns in Spain and Russia (1807-1814), all the way through to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) of the late nineteenth century and the bloody uprisings of the Parisian Commune (1871). During this period, combat theory at its most elementary level was rethought by many influential military men including General Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821) to colonel Charles Ardant du Picq (1819-70) and Marshal Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934) who all believed that the best strategic maneuver against enemy forces was increased intimacy (male bonds) between soldiers (Martin 2011). This idea, while not radically new if one considers Plato's advice in the *Symposium* that an "army of lovers" (Plato 1994) makes the strongest regime, certainly diverged from the eighteenth century model where strong class divisions made mutual respect and companionship in arms an almost impossible endeavor. As the more segregated Royal Army became the more egalitarian Revolutionary Army, the opportunities for increased male intimacy rose (Martin 2011). This idea can be seen at the top of the ranks, Napoléon for instance publicly weeping over the death of his dear friend Marshal Jean Lannes or the suspiciously tender epistolary correspondence he had with General Junot, to the (open) homosexuality of Second Consul Jean-Jacques Régis de Cambacérès, to the memoirs of the lower-rank officers who established a military vocabulary to speak of the close fraternal intimacy between soldiers (Martin 2011). After the crushing defeat of Napoléon in 1815 and the marked anti-militarism of the Restoration, many soldiers were left with only *demi-soldes*

(half-pensions) that forced them to retire with their military comrades, forming a type of “military marriage,” in order to avoid the fate of a large majority of post-1815 soldiers who begged on the streets or vagrantly wandered the countryside. The fiction of the nineteenth century picked up on these themes producing a vast array of novels that feature homosocial (Sedgwick 1985) and homoerotic military bonds.

Honoré de Balzac’s military connection runs deep. After escaping from creditors and setting up shop in a lavishly decorated apartment south of the Latin Quarter, the staunch royalist allegedly decorated his mantle with a small plaster statue of Napoleon on whose saber he would have attached a paper stating, “What he began with the sword, I shall accomplish with the pen.” Besides this illustrative parenthetical translating both the monstrous literary ambitions of the author but also the recognizant nod to the exploits of the most famous nineteenth-century warlord, Balzac also wrote an entire section of his gargantuan study of French social types, *La Comédie humaine*, focused on military life: *Scènes de la vie militaire*. Indeed, several of these works feature illustrious military characters who form intimate relationships between themselves and other soldiers in the ranks and veterans.

Les Chouans (1829) centers on the conflict between French Republican soldiers and Breton loyalist guerillas during the Revolution and the Consulate in 1799. A veteran of the Revolutionary Wars and rising in the ranks during the Napoleonic campaigns in Iberia and Austria, Major Hulot continues his military career during the Restoration, in spite of his allegiance to the Napoleonic cause. Loved by his soldiers and admired by his enemies, Hulot, like Balzac’s Jacques Collin, seems to harbor a secret: a certain disinterest in women. Having spent a lifetime in the close military quarters of the army

where homosocial bonds thrive, Hulot is deeply emasculated when Mademoiselle de Verneuil is sent from Paris invested by Napoleon's chief of police Fouché with the powers to override his authority in state matters. In a telling conversation with Captain Merle, Verneuil asserts her authoritative rights over Hulot: "son devoir (Hulot) était donc d'obéir à ses supérieurs!" ("his duty (Hulot) was indeed to obey his superiors!"). Speaking to Hulot's behavior Captain Merle explains: "Faites mes excuses, mademoiselle [...] mais les femmes, voyez-vous, ça n'est pas son affaire" ("Accept my excuses madam [...] but woman, you see, are not really his thing") (Balzac 1874a, 87). Perhaps a more nuanced version of the chief of police's statement about Jacques Collin in *Le Père Goriot*: "Apprenez un secret? Il n'aime pas les femmes" ("Want to know a secret? He doesn't like women") (Balzac 1843, 437). Whether this revelation in *Les Chouans* echoes the homoerotic tendencies of Balzac's famous criminal mastermind or not, it does however confirm the obvious, as a military man, Hulot's main emotional attachments are with men. This is reaffirmed by Hulot's affective response to the death of Adjutant Gérard, "il m'a tué mon pauvre Gérard" ("he took from me my poor Gérard") (Balzac 1847a, 266), the double possessive is telling. And later in *La Cousine Bette* (1848) we learn that Hulot has spend the past thirty years not in the company of a wife or mistress, but in the company of a fellow soldier *Beau-pied*, ostensibly the only person capable of understanding the retired major. This virtual espousal of men into military pairs is undergirded in the novel by many masculine duos all embracing the homosocial bonds of a dubious fraternity: *Beau-pied* and *La-clef-des-coeurs*, *Larose* and *Vieux-chapeau* (Republican soldiers); *Marche-à-terre* and *Pille-miche* (Chouans).

The titular character in *Le Colonel Chabert* (1832), also by Balzac, exemplifies the hardships of many of the Napoleonic soldiers during the Restoration period but also points to the precarious link between homosocial bonds and homosexuality. Hyacinthe Chabert, earned his colonel stripes in the *Garde Impériale* participating in the Napoleonic campaigns in Egypt. Gravely injured and left for dead under a mountain of bodies at the bloodbath battle of Eylau on February 1807, Chabert narrowly escapes suffocation only to spend the next ten years in German hospitals and prisons. When he finally returns to Paris in 1817, he discovers his widowed wife, Rose Chapotel, remarried and with two children, is now the Comtesse Ferraud and has all but liquidated his funds by minimizing his succession. After a meeting with young Parisian lawyer, Derville, who he asks for help in regaining his name and inheritance, Chabert regretfully realizes that France, like his wife, has forgotten the soldier that fought and died for its well-being and relinquishes the legal claims on his marriage and property. Reverted back to a state of anonymity and abandonment, Chabert seeks the help of an old sergeant of the Imperial Guard named Vergniaud. In spite of his lowly conditions, Sergeant Vergniaud opens his doors to the wayward colonel, making him, in some sorts, a co-parent to his three children. If Derville is abhorred by the bare-earth floors and straw-stuffed beds that Chabert has comfortably accepted as his new life, the colonel justifies the uncanny approval of his conditions with a military adage of the past: “C’est vrai, monsieur, nous ne brillons pas ici par le luxe. C’est un bivouac temperé par l’amitié” (“It’s true, sir, luxury does not shine on us here. It is a bivouac softened by friendship.”) (Balzac 1874c, 28). And when scolded by Derville for the conditions that Vergniaud offers up to Chabert, the old sergeant replies: “il [Chabert] a la plus belle chambre. Je lui aurait donné la mienne, si je

n'en avais eu qu'une [...] enfin à la guerre comme à la guerre" ("He [Chabert] has the most beautiful room. I would have given him mine, if I had had only one [...] I mean when in wartimes...") (33). After Vergniaud's tragic bankruptcy, Chabert is forced to leave the comfort of his former military companion and share the fate of so many other post-1815 military veterans, begging on the streets for survival. He is eventually sentenced for vagrancy in 1819 and sent first to Saint-Denis and then later to Bicêtre¹⁴ in 1820 where he will spend the next twenty years of his life in the homosocial conditions so familiar to him. Once there, Chabert reassumes his childhood name, Hyacinthe, which as Brian Joseph Martin shows onomastically "links him to a long history of fraternal, homosocial, and homoerotic fellowship" (Martin 196), Hyacinth being the youth loved by both Apollo and Zephyrus whose blood was made into the flower of the same name after his death.

In the Balazacian short story *Médecin de campagne* (1833), Major Genestas travels from his garrison in Grenoble to a small mountain village bordering the Savoie where Dr. Benassis has gained a medical reputation that he hopes will prove useful for his ailing son. Invited into the doctor's circle of friends, Genestas chances on two military men living out their retirement together, Gondrin and Goguelat. Having served in Italy, Egypt, France, and Germany as well as in the Revolutionary Army of 1792, Gondrin is a *pontoniers* (bridge maker) who is described by his muscular vitality and hairy-chested virility, much like Vautrin in *Le Père Goriot*. Like the titular character in *Le Colonel Chabert*, Gondrin has returned penniless to a Restoration France that has turned its back on his sacrifices. Building on familiar gendered stereotypes for masculine couples, Gondrin is described as hardworking and virile, whereas Goguelat is garrulous

and gregarious, making them a sort of husband/wife duo. Sharing Goguelat's pension the two men live in a widow's house where Goguelat is described as Gondrin's "housewife" (Balzac 1874b, 372) further cementing this dichotomy. This homosocial relationship is mirrored by the relationship that develops between doctor Benassis and Major Genestas. Often sharing intimate bedtime conversation after Gondrin and Goguelat's nightly barnyard tales, Benassis and Genestas, whose bedrooms are only separated by a staircase, fortify their friendship by telling the intimate secrets of their past lives. But the fraternal bond between these two men is permanently broken when both men fall in love with the same woman, Judith. In an act of double betrayal, Sergeant Renard marries Judith and fathers a child who Major Genestas will adopt once his former sergeant is killed and Judith dies. Through the cathartic act of self-revelation in the comfort of the homosocial circle, both Benassis and Major Genestas grow closer, Benassis finally revealing to the major, "Vous connaissez seul, capitaine, le secret de ma vie" ("You alone captain, know the secret of my life") (484). And like the missing Aristophanean halves of the *Symposium*, the link between the two men is described as preexisting their meeting in the story, Benassis stating, "nous étions amis sans nous connaître" ("We were friends without knowing each other") (484).

Trained at the French Naval Academy in Brittany in 1867 and serving as a naval officer before embarking on numerous trips throughout the French colonial empire, Pierre Loti, pseudonym of Julien Viaud, had a certain penchant for sailors. After rising to the rank of naval captain and grand officer of the Légion d'Honneur in 1914, he would at sixty-four ask to be remobilized at the outbreak of the First World War so that he might once again be in the company of the men in uniform he admired and desired so much.

Continuing the homosocial traditions of the Balzacian military novel while espousing the homoerotic tendencies of his own military experience, Pierre Loti recounts in his novel *Mon Frère Yves* (1883) the fraternal intimacy between Yves-Marie Kermadec and an older officer Pierre also the narrator of the story. Full of erotically charged descriptions of the nude soapy bodies of seamen cleaning the ship, and each other, in nothing more than tassel bonnets, there is also however a moot sexual complicity between the two main protagonists, translated through the gay narrative regard represented most clearly in the novels of Achille Essebac (Loti 294-300).¹⁵ Admiring the new recruit from afar, the narrator voyeuristically describes his physical beauty, tall and trim like an ancient Greek, with muscular arms and an athletic build. Indeed, his beauty is also not lost on the other recruits (10-11). The narrator states that at times, he understands in Yves' melancholic regard new and unspeakable "things" (93), that Yves "avait [...] des *manières de moi* [Pierre], des idées, des sensations pareilles aux miennes" ("had [...] *a similar way about him, like me* (Pierre), ideas, sensations similar to mine") (93) (emphasis in original). Whether these thoughts and sensations that are so close to those of the narrator are homosexual in nature is never fully developed in the novel. It would however be difficult to overlook the semi-autobiographical nature of the story, Pierre, the narrator, inspired by the real-life intimate friendship between Loti and fellow sailor Pierre Le Cor (Martin 257). And even if the secret intimacy that connects the two protagonists remains homosocial in nature, the homoerotic descriptions of the other sailors by the narrator leaves ample room for doubt at least concerning his own sexuality. What the narrator does abundantly develop however is the disastrous results of a precipitated marriage between Yves and Marie. Ultimately, Marie assumes the unwanted triangular point of an

already comfortable homosocial bond between the two men. However, it is a marriage that the narrator qualifies as a convention. Yves, like many other seafarers, had “épuisé autrefois tous les genres de sottises [et] avait fini par un mariage” (“already exhausted all other idiocies [and] had finished with a marriage”) (138-9). And while the marriage between Marie and Yves is full of drunken and sometimes violent episodes ending with constant thoughts of familial abandonment on Yves, the story ends in a fairly conventional manner: deciding to stay married. However, his decision to spend his marriage out at sea flanked by the fraternal companionship of his beloved sailors opens the doors of ambiguity.

Mirroring the fraternal bond of Pierre and Yves, the titular character of Abel Hermant’s 1888 novel *Le Cavalier Miserey* and his sous-lieutenant Swift offer another example of the intimate bond between men in uniform. Described in the beginning as boyish, almost epebe-like (43), Miserey forms part of the artificial family found in the barracks where couples are constructed from the familiar links described as those that attach a man to a woman in marriage (101). Like Yves, Miserey for a brief moment decides to leave the comfort of the military hearth so familiar to him, thinking the caresses of a woman might compete with the virile companionship found with his habitual bunkmates. After abandoning the ranks, and setting up a clandestine existence of constant personal shame and unease with Blanche he is ultimately disappointed, the sensuality he imagined to be found with a woman completely absent (163). However unlike Yves his return to military life is not greeted with the fraternal comradery that he had expected. Labeled a deserter, he is ostracized and beaten, forever excluded from the homosocial circle of the men he loves.

In the 1892 novel *La Débâcle*, Émile Zola gives an account of the French defeat, resistance, and insurrection during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the Paris Commune of 1871 while chronicling the intimate relationship between two soldiers Jean Macquart and Maurice Levasseur who survive war's brutality in each other's care. From different social classes, the soldier pair's relationship develops amid the shared support and devotion of the comrades. Placed together in small units or troupes, six to a single mess kit, each group develops into a virtual family, one person cooking, the other cleaning, others setting up the tents or cleaning weapons (69). In these close quarters the relationships between the men quickly evolve, exaggerated by the sense of dependence the soldiers feel between themselves (83). Initially, like the Balzacian soldier pair Gondrin and Goguelat, Maurice and Jean are portrayed as an odd couple. However despite their different social class, education, and rank the eventually transform into a symbiotic pair Jean taking it upon himself to clean and bandage Maurice's feet after several days of interminable marching (100). Soon after, the two become an inseparable duo, using the familiar *tu* and addressing each other with affectionate diminutives "mon vieux" ("old chap") and "mon petit" ("my little one") (100). After the defeat at Sedan on September 2, 1870 that ended the Second Empire, many soldiers were left to look to each other for survival in increasingly hostile territory. Having escaped to the safety of the Ardennes, Jean and Maurice express their joy in a fraternal embrace that skirts the precarious border between the homosocial and the homosexual: "Et ils se serraient d'une étreinte éperdue, dans la fraternité de tout ce qu'ils venaient de souffrir ensemble; et le baiser qu'ils échangeèrent alors leur parut le plus doux et le plus fort de leur vie, un baiser tel qu'ils n'en recevraient jamais d'une femme" ("And they embraced with a frenzied

grasp, based in the fraternity that highlighted all that they had been through together; and the kiss that they exchanged then seemed the sweetest and most important of their lives, a kiss that they would have never received from a woman”) (478). However unlike the seemingly happy Balzacian military couple in *Le Médecin de campagne*, Zola’s soldier pair will not live out retirement in one another’s fraternal company. In the end, Maurice deserts his communal life with Jean and the army to join the Parisian Commune, whereas Jean will rejoin the ranks in the hopes of reconnecting with his lost friend. When they finally do meet up again it will be on opposing sides of the barricades in Paris. In an ironically horrible and sexually charged twist of fate, Jean will mistakenly penetrate Maurice with his bayonet, eventually killing him after a final embrace.

The homosocial bond so prevalent in military fiction also finds its corollary in one of Flaubert’s unfinished works *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1891). Flaubert had already painted a distasteful portrait of military homosexuality in his 1862 work *Salammbô*, where military camps replaced the country and living in masculine pairs spawned “d’étranges amours—unions obscènes aussi sérieuses que des mariages, où le plus fort défendait le plus jeune au milieu des batailles” (“strange loves—obscene unions as serious as marriages, where the strongest defended the youngest in the heat of battle”) (Flaubert 1879, 320). However if the couple formed by the two inseparable copy-clerks in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, like the masculine couple in the Balzacian novel *Les Cousins Pons* (1848a), certainly fits into the homosocial and borders on the equivocal, the narrator never does explicitly label the two men as homosexual. A chance encounter on a sweltering Parisian afternoon near the Canal Saint-Martin, Pécuchet is immediately smitten by the lovable nature of Bouvard and the two form an instantaneous, symbiotic

relationship (Flaubert 1891, 2). The two men, Pécuchet, an interminable bachelor at forty-seven, and Bouvard, a widower, are immediately bond together by secret fibers (11), the union between the titular characters described, like many of the other male same-sex bonds in this chapter, as profound and absolute (17). After inheriting a considerable sum when Bouvard's father dies, the two men decide to leave Paris and form a virtual married couple in the countryside near the town of Chavignolles in Normandy. In their search for constant intellectual stimulation, the pair comically flounders through almost every branch of knowledge from agriculture and chemistry, to the biological and anatomical sciences, gymnastics (whose masculine athletes, we are told, excite both men's desires (244)) to literature, grammar, history, religion, the arts, and philosophy. It is in this last category that the odd couple ponders love and relationships. Following an experimental method, both men attempt their luck at courtship, Bouvard with Mme Bordin, Pécuchet with Mélie his maid. Like all their other endeavors, the attempt at self-made libertines comically ends with a unlucky turn of fate and a venereal disease (242-3), the two titular characters concluding with a tender embrace that life is better to live without women (243). Like the unfinished ending of the novel, Flaubert only gives a rough sketch of the true nature of the titular couple. But this preliminary outline does underscore the profound impact that the homosocial ideal had on literature and ideology at the time.

Not all military novels featuring tightly knit homosocial bonds play out on a positive note. At the end of Dubarry's novel *Les Invertis*, the reason for the story's mysterious subtitle (*le vice allemand*) becomes clear. At first this subtitle seems completely misplaced. Indeed, not a single character in the novel is German and not one

person ventures into German territory during the storyline. It is in fact the crushing defeat at the hands of the Prussians during the Franco-Prussian war that seems to inspire both the treatise-based second half of the novel as well as its seemingly cryptic subtitle. If Martin states that during the period of *la Revanche* (1871-1914) the homosexual was often used as a type of scapegoat for France's military defeat (Martin 258). If this is the case for Dubarry's novel it is not because homosexuality is intrinsic to France indeed quite the opposite. He states that the homosexual taint is barely visible in France and when it arrives with more puerility and character than anywhere else (Dubarry 121-22). Rather than emasculate an already beaten and battered France, the narrator deports the sexual aberration to the Prussian territory, demonizing the vanquisher as a country full of invert. Pointing to the numerous studies done in Germany on pederasty and inversion, specifically by gay advocate Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), a militant "pervert" (138) the narrator states, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1922) who wrote an apologetic treatise on the topic (Krafft-Ebing 1999), the narrator concludes that it is in Germany that a study on homosexuality would bear the most fruit since it is there that man knows best how to love man (140). Moreover, he warns against the impending pangermanism, stating that the war has emboldened a race made up of married pederasts whose children already suffer the biological taint of their fathers' homosexual indiscretions (141). In the end, with the right defenses, specifically keeping the enemy (the homosexual and the German) behind tricolor lines, heterosexuality and the vitality of France will prevail.

Alienating the homosexual to foreign borders was a common thematic at the end of the nineteenth century. It can be seen in Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen's *Lord Lyllian*

(1905),¹⁶ as well as Rachilde's 1897 novel *Les Hors nature*. Rachilde's novel recounts the story of two brothers, Paul-Éric de Fertzen, a decadent dandy who resembles both the self-indulgent esthete of Huysmans novel *À Rebours* as well as the titular character of Fersen's novel *Lord Lyllian*, and his more masculine brother and self-proclaimed invert (Rachilde 1897, 228) Jacques-Reutler de Fertzen. In a twist of fate, Paul learns that he has a Prussian background, his father haven been killed during the Franco-Prussian war by the French and Paul having been born in Prussia. He is therefore, in a double sense of the word, the French enemy, a decadent homosexual contributing to France's ideological and biological degeneration as well as a Prussian and therefore enemy to the Republic (Rachilde 54-6). For Reutler, the Prussian race is guilty not only of all manner of sexual deviation but also of the feminization of the race and cowardice (56-7). To aid his brother conquest his feminine tendencies, Reutler places innumerable women in his path, One such woman, Marie, a local girl with degeneration in her blood as well (she is a pyromaniac), becomes Reutler's last ditch effort in helping his brother conquer the tendencies that have made him deviate from a natural sexual course. In the end Reutler cannot stomach the thought of his brother in an embrace other than his own and forces him to promise never to allow Marie into his bed. Infuriated when she hears this, Marie sets fire to the brothers' estate and the two bedfellows are sacrificed in a purifying scene of homosexual martyrdom and heterosexual vengeance.

Conceptualizing a thematic palette for gay literature in the nineteenth century is certainly helpful in outlining the ideological notions that were invested in the literary, social, and scientific writings on homosexuality at the time. By exposing the different

primary themes with which homosexuality was colored, the ideological nuances through which homosexuality was represented are more easily understood and analyzed. However, the fluidity of this thematic spectrum is a given. The appearance of many of these novels in not one but several of the outlined thematic categories undergirds the notion of “shades of gay” in that homosexuality in the nineteenth century was a composite identity that was written about in a synthesized rather than a homogeneous form. The following chapters will contemplate more thoroughly this established palette of homosexual representations, each individual author sampling from this prepared thematic spectrum. While it might seem more apparent to insert the following four chapters into the first, making one large survey of thematic representations of homosexuality, this would have minimized the importance of Jean Lorrain, Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen, Achille Essebac and André Gide who while pulling from these themes, created a corpus of idiosyncratic works that in their entirety represent a *homo-corporis* distinctive to each author while remaining part of a larger tradition of gay texts and themes. It is for this reason that I have decided to separate them from the larger whole, hoping that highlighting their originality from the group to which they are inexorably linked might generate interest in works and authors rarely or even never studied in the French tradition.

¹ This term is borrowed from Livia 1997

² All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated

³ For another example of this as well as an analysis of this type of linguistic “gender bending” see Gomolka 2012

⁴ see also Austin 1962

⁵ while translating directly as “aunt” the noun “tante” also described a gay male pimp in the nineteenth century

⁶ This term is not easy to translate to English. In modern parlance, one might translate it as “janegirl” (which is not all that common) or more pejoratively “sissy-boy” or “girly-boy.” A “homme manqué” would be its linguistic opposite which would be translated as “tomboy.” The lack of a clear word that is

not almost exclusively pejorative in English for the masculine version of a “tomboy” points to the linguistic and semantic inequality between gendered terms.

⁷ see chapters 4 and 3 respectively

⁸ Symonds, like Gide after him, would envision this however only for certain homosexuals, specifically the “masculine” ones. Like Gide, Symonds wrote against effeminate men and believed that masculine homosexuals were the “normal” homosexuals; others were sick (Symonds 1896, 1908).

⁹ Socially marred by his attempts at Parisian social climbing, Lucien finally succumbs to the oppressive weight of the lifestyle he so desperately desired even after Vautrin (disguised as the abbé Herrara) several attempts at saving him. Through several narrative detours linked to Lucien’s suicide, Vautrin is made a part of the police system that relentlessly tracked him throughout the three novels.

¹⁰ For more on this relationship see Greeberg 1988; Williams 1999; Ludovic 1976

¹¹ For example, Mlle Michonneau explains that Rastignac supports Vautrin, “il n’est pas difficile de savoir pourquoi” (“It is not difficult to understand why”) hinting at the more than fraternal nature of their liaison (Balzac 1843, 465)

¹² Plato was probably the most famous writer on male same-sex desire of the ancients; Montaigne was suspected of homosexuality, especially with his friend Étienne de la Boétie ; Achilles has been noted as the lover of Patrocles; Antinous was the reputed lover of the emperor Hadrien

¹³ see chapter 2

¹⁴ Created in the seventeenth-century by Louis XIII as a hospice for disabled soldiers, Bicêtre is the less prestigious version of the Invalides, Chabert having been denied access to latter because he is unable, having given up the lawsuit against his wife, to prove his identity as a veteran.

¹⁵ see chapter 4

¹⁶ see chapter 3

Chapter 2: Through the Looking-Glass: Representations of Fin-de-Siècle Homosexuality in the Works of Jean Lorrain

“Tous les goûts sont dans la nature”

Lorrain, *La Maison Philibert* (1904)

“A Fécamp, lorsqu'on est fils et petit-fils de marins et d'armateurs, on doit être armateur ou aussi marin, ou alors on passe pour incapable, n'être bon à rien !” (“In Fécamp, when you are the son or the grandson of sailors or ship-owners, you must also be a sailor or ship-owner, or you are considered incapable, a good-for-nothing!”) (Normandy 17). The ideological determinism that spices the words of Paul Duval's mother, Pauline Mulat (1833-1926), would certainly not have fallen on deaf ears. Her comment offers a possible explanation for the Renaissance-man persona that would become infamous under the pseudonym Jean Lorrain during the second half of the nineteenth century. Like many Normand children of some wealth, at nine Duval was sent to a boarding school where his temperament could only be described as nervous and anxious (Normandy 35), a psychological and physiological impairment from which he would suffer until his death in 1906. This madcap and often neurotic personality would not serve him well during his school years. In 1868, he entered *cinquième* at l'école Albert-Legrand, a Dominican boarding school in Arcueil. Later in 1872, the more mature Lorrain would nostalgically recollect the bond between himself and another Albert-

Legrand student, Withold de Klock, in a poem dedicated to his childhood friend entitled “La Marguerite.” While an interpretation of self-pronounced homosexuality would be far from valid at this point, the poem does point towards a marked comprehension of emotional and possibly sexual attraction for men. It was at l’*école* Albert-Legrand then that Duval would first experience a part of his sexual personality that would be filtered into the majority of his works as well as make up one of the grandiose themes of the Decadent movement of which he would soon be a part.

It is also around this time that Duval confirmed his desire for a literary career, albeit against the wishes of his father, Aimable Martin Duval (1815-1886), who provided only minimal financial help. Given a saddle horse and some leisure money while established at Rocheville, Duval quickly came under the influence of Judith Gautier (1845-1917), eldest daughter of Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) and wife to Bordelais poet Catulle Mendès (1841-1909). Under her sway, Duval’s residence was quickly graced with the decadent overflow of idle knickknacks that would be one of the aesthetic mainstays of the Decadent movement. Inspired by Gautier’s love of the Orient, Duval would embellish the small town streets with his ostentatious strolls in a dragon-embroidered kimono, stone-facing his fellow citizens. Her influence however was not only vestimentary, Judith helped to cultivate Duval’s literary discernment as well as instilling in him a taste for Asiatic cultures which would stay with him throughout his literary career.

In 1875, Duval was called for military service. It is during this period that he had his first experiences with society’s underbelly, frequenting prostitutes with his fellow soldiers, or seeking out homosexual adventures alone. Later, he would state that it was

the army that taught him every vice (76). In 1878, Duval finally found himself in the literary capital of France, choosing le Quartier Latin as his home. The location is not surprising since this was also the world of some of the most famous Parisian cafés (Café de Cluny, le Vachette, le Soleil d’Or, Café de la Rive Gauche, and le Café Harcourt) and brasseries, a contribution of the failed Second Empire (Haine 1996). Around his new home, Duval would not only be exposed to one of the iconic meeting spots of Sapphic love, Le Rat Mort, but would also, in the Café de la Rive Gauche, encounter Émile Goudeau (1849-1906), founder of the *Cercle des Hydropathes*, a group of young bohemian students which formed the roots of the Decadent movement and was determinant in Duval’s future career (Pouey-Marquèze 1986; Seigel 1986). While the time spent in such places would furnish many of his works with their ideological obsession with the perverse and sordid, it did not however bode well for his studies. In 1880, Duval returned home after two years of school with nothing but failure for baggage. After much discussion, his father finally ceded completely to his son’s desire for a literary career but admittedly refused to allow him to publish without a proper pseudonym. By chance, it was Mme Duval who assumed the task of deciding on one and with a capricious flick of her wrist sealed her son’s fate when a pin she had thrown haphazardly landed on the entry, “lorrain,” in an open dictionary. It’s simplicity won the young boy over immediately and Jean Lorrain was born.

Lorrain’s first years in Paris, devoid of the paternal yoke that certainly stifled his literary output, were incredibly formative. It was during this time that he first glimpsed the works of Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) whose fantastical paintings often based on the beauty, pathos, and perversity of Greek mythology would figure highly in his own works,

and met fin-de-siècle author Marguerite Eymery, known as Rachilde (1860-1953), during a meeting of the *Hydropathes*. Ultimately the *Hydropathes* would not just provide Lorrain with a life-long admirer and friend. After the opening of the notorious cabaret, *Le Chat noir*, founded in 1881 by Rodolphe Salis, a journal by the same name would be inaugurated under the direction of the *Hydropathes*' founder and in which Lorrain would publish his first poetic verse. It is certainly fitting that it would be in this journal, described as “frondeurs, iconoclastes, voire anarchistes” (“frondeur, iconoclastic, even anarchical”) (Normandy 109), that Lorrain would first allude to homosexuality in a poem published the 2 September 1882 entitled “Modernité” (“Modernity”) (128).

After the death of his father in 1886 and several lackluster reviews, Lorrain chanced upon a meeting with Edmond Magnier (1841-1906), the director of the journal *L'Événement*, founded by Victor Hugo in 1848 to support the then prince Louis-Napoleon. Given the reputation that followed Lorrain as a decadent (used as a pejorative in most literary as well as social circles), it was certainly a stroke of luck when he was accepted as a *chroniqueur*. Ultimately, his journalistic endeavors would make his pen infamous for being unbiased, unflinching, and unapologetic. After the translation in 1885 of the scandalous and often vituperative chronicle “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” an English publication by the journalist and partisan of the “new journalism” school William Thomas Stead (1849-1912), Lorrain would inaugurate his often venerated, more often feared *Pall-Mall Semaine*. These op-ed's based on the English model cemented his public persona as a journalist. Interestingly, Lorrain did not back away from his well-known and often commented homosexuality, even after Henry Lapauze, journalist for the *Événement*'s rival publication, *Le Parisian*, highlighted his all

too amicable friendship with noted homosexual and author, Pierre Loti. Lorrain should therefore be considered one of France's first "out" gay journalist.

Lorrain's new position at *L'Événement* opened the often hermetically sealed doors of many of Paris' most influential salons. In 1891, he would form an influential friendship with one of the Decadent movement's most renowned affiliates, Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907). An admitted homosexual, he and Lorrain would venture into some of the dodgiest parts of Parisian subculture including the meeting places of underground homosexuals at *Les Halles* as well as the cabarets for inverts *Rue de la Vertu*.¹ It was also at this time that Lorrain met Oscar Wilde. His relationship with the author was shaky at best. Lorrain would shrink away from an intimate friendship with him during Wilde's trial but would come to his defense later at the time of the publication of *Portrait of Dorian Gray* in 1895, going as far as publishing a *Pall-Mall Semaine* in which he defends the author's literary moral stance against the stigmatizing hypocrisy of both British and French societies (563). For Lorrain, literary freedom is a sign of societal evolution and attacks against it can only be explained in terms of intellectual degeneration. He would continue his admiration for the author until Wilde's death in 1900.

He travelled to Spain and Algeria in 1891, most likely influenced by the exoticism that enthralled the city of lights during the *Exposition universelle* of the same year. Lorrain would chronicle every step of his voyages and would publish them in stages in *L'Echo de Paris*, and later in separate volumes, *Heures d'Afriques* (1899), *Heures de Corse* (1905), and *Voyages* (1921). It was also during one such trip to Venice that Lorrain would come face to face with the subject of the third chapter of this dissertation,

Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen, who, according to Lorrain, provided a touristic view of the city's most lascivious neighborhoods. He would speak to this encounter in a 1910 publication *Palléastres*. Like many homosexual authors who visited these "exotic" lands, Lorrain would understand "Orientalized" sexuality as freed from the Draconian morality of Third Republic France (Said 1994, 1997). He would, for life, feel that the air and sensationalized moral freedom of the Orient was a cure-all to his anxious neuroses.

Even with the success and friendships that were cemented in France's capital, Lorrain spent the latter days of his life on the Riviera and abroad. Both his devastating break with fifteen-year-friend Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), ignited by a *Pall-Mall Semaine* of the same year in which he blames the famous stage actress for going back on her word to play a character of his in a Parisian theater, and the constant verbal flogging of his works by critics (including *Le Massacre d'une Amazone. Quelques Plagiats de M. Jean Lorrain* by Hector Fleischmann in August 1904) made Lorrain bitter towards the Parisian capital. In a letter to J.-F. Merlet in 1903, Lorrain expressed his desire for seclusion from a city and its inhabitants that once colored the idyllic dreams of his youth (D'Anthonay 851). His health failing, Lorrain intended to finish his days in Nice but was called back to the capital on 12 June 1906 because of business affairs with his publisher Ollendorff. After a whirlwind of expositions and several customary salon and café appearances, Lorrain was bed-ridden the 29 June by a hemorrhage and perforated colon. Immediately called to his bed, his doctor refused to perform subsequent operations given his seemingly terminable case. Pumped full of morphine to help ease his passing, Lorrain died the 30 June 1906 with his mother by his side.

This chapter will be divided into two large sections. The first, “Monsters in the Closet: A Decadent Critique of the Sexological Representations of Homosexuality in Lorrain’s *Monsieur de Bougreton*, *Monsieur de Phocas*, and *Le Vice errant*” discusses the socio-scientific representations of male same-sex relations, specifically in regards to fin-de-siècle decadence and degeneration theory. Moreover, this section questions whether three of Lorrain’s works might be read as a critique of fin-de-siècle scientific positivism. The second section, “Perverting pederasty: (Re)presenting Greek and Roman Homosexuality Through a Decadent Aesthetic,” looks into the ways in which Lorrain perverts Greek and Roman ideological views on homosexuality through a fin-de-siècle lens. These works are interesting in that they stand in stark contrast to the idealized images of Greek and Roman pederasty presented in the majority of the works by homosexuals in this dissertation and theorize the possibility of a ideological shift in perspective in regards to fin-de-siècle male same-sex relations.

Monsters in the Closet: A Decadent Critique of the Sexological Representations of Homosexuality in Lorrain’s *Monsieur de Bougreton*, *Monsieur de Phocas*, and *Le Vice errant*

“Il n’y a rien de malsain en art. –Ça c’est une théorie”

Madame Baringhel, Jean Lorrain

On 10 April 1886, Anatole Baju (1861-1903), one of the Decadent movement’s most notable albeit ill-respected publicists, started his new review *Le Décadent* (to which Lorrain contributed) by declaring modern man and society “déliquescents” (“effete/decadent”). Modern politics were equally neurotic and gutted of interest (*Le Décadent* 10 April 1886). Two years later, disenchanted by the surging wave of

boulangisme,² Baju would about-face and cheer on the younger generation for its verbal sandbagging of the War Minister's swelling political platform ('Boulangier hué par la jeunesse,' *Le Decadent* 1-15 May 1888). In so doing, the often apolitical nature of the Decadent movement espoused Parisian politics. As Jennifer Birkett points out this is a much-overlooked portion of the decadent purview: "decadence is not only an aesthetic and moral but also a social and political question" (Birkett 16). It is hardly surprising then that the admixture of decadent ideology and socio-political concerns would be found in the works of an author whose vitriolic journalism lobbed Parisian society with constant ideological criticism and who ironically, because a part of the Decadent movement, animadverted on its followers in three of his works: *La Petite classe* (1895), *Madame Baringhel* (1899), *Pelléastres* (1910). It would be however a mordant commentary not on *boulangisme* but on another, more personal aspect of late nineteenth-century ideology and socio-politics, sexology,³ that would pepper the discourse found in *Monsieur de Bougreton*, *Monsieur de Phocas*, and *Le Vice errant*.

As public distrust in the speculative positivism of the medical discourse that stained the pages of innumerable journals and treatises from mid-century forward grew, it was only natural that literature and journalism would soon chide the "truth" put forward by nineteenth-century lab coats (Oosterhuis 2000). Indeed, after 1861 the French press launched antipsychiatry campaigns as the liberalization of Louis-Napoleon's regime mitigated the severity of the 1852 press laws. One of the mainstays of the antipsychiatry criticism was the inability of doctors to convincingly link the psychological and physiological phenomenon that they described. Indeed a link that was essential for the foundation of their claims and theories (Dowbiggin 1991; Oosterhuis 2000).⁴ Because

mental alienation showed no physiological evidence, specifying cause and effect was inexact and, as Ian Dowbiggin emphasizes, “an alienist was virtually free to indulge his own tastes and preconceived ideas” when classifying etiologies (Dowbiggin 30). Indeed, of the many “unusual” transgressions that sexology studied, sexual and gendered nonconformity were hit hard by science’s often fantasizing wrecking-ball. From hackneyed physiologic reductionism (Tardieu 1859), to the explosion of the stopgap diagnosis of hereditarianism and degeneration after 1857 (Morel 1860; Moreau 1887; Nordau 1894), the myriad analyses of sexual and gendered nonconformity seemed illimitable (Oosterhuis 2000). Regardless of the diagnostic gloss science decided to apply to it, sexual nonconformity and especially homosexuality was almost exclusively a form of moral, mental, and physiological degeneration. In the same manner, gendered transgressions, indeed crossing the rigidly established lines of bourgeois gendered socio-cultural institutions, were equally threatening (Maugue 1987; Nye 1993).

While not stated as intentionally linked like the more famous Balzacien model,⁵ *Monsieur de Bougrelon*, *Monsieur de Phocas*, and *Le Vice errant* are more than just an in depth study into the range of representations occupied by homosexuality and gender nonconformity during this period. Through decadent ideology and through the figure of the decadent dandy-esthete, Lorrain is able to criticize fin-de-siècle sexology in several ways. On the one hand, by highlighting its diagnostic failures and hyperbolized speculations, he is able to recast late nineteenth-century alienism in a decadent mold, highlighting science’s devolution in terms of sexuality and gender analysis, essentially infecting science with the very disease it was trying to cure. Second, as Phillip Winn asserts, the thematic of homosexuality, often ignored by critics of decadent literature, is at

the heart of the decadent sexuality that in turn greatly influenced the entire ideological spectrum of the Belle Époque (Winn 159). As Decadence then is shown to be an almost socially universal trait through sexological discourse and in literature through decadent ideology and the dandy-esthete, homosexuality as decadence is resituated into normalcy and stigmatizing science is cast into the margins. Ultimately, Lorrain celebrates a fin-de-siècle ideology that was steeped in the decadence of the time, pointing to ideological resignation, not science, as an official cure.

Ghosts in the Closet: Homosexuality as Spect(acle)er in *Monsieur de Bougreton*

If the diegetic existence of the eponymous character of Lorrain's 1897 novel is dubious at best, described from the beginning as existing in a world of myths (Lorrain, 1897, 17-8), resembling death (25), the product of boredom or the drunkenness produced by the city of Schiedam (195), outside the narration *Monsieur de Bougreton* as a social type certainly exists, a fact attested by numerous critics. A contemporary and admirer of Lorrain, Rachilde makes this point in an 1897 edition of the *Mercure de France* stating that Bougreton is a macabre and excessive figure reminiscent of Barbey d'Aurevilly (1808-1889) (Rachilde 1897). A comparison that is certainly not far from the truth given the fraternal nature of Lorrain's friendship with the dandy-esthete and author of *Les Diaboliques* and d'Aurevilly's even more infamous social flamboyance. In his critical study of Jean Lorrain, Philippe Julian affirms this possible connection: "In his masterpiece (*Monsieur de Bougreton*), Lorrain's debt to Barbey is immense, in his style, and even in the main protagonist: a terrifying and touching caricature of the old dandy" (Jullian 119).

Indeed, Bougreton is more than just a literary copy of one of the fin-de-siècle's most infamous male stock characters and its even more notorious real-life counterpart. Bougreton when understood as a socio-political discourse expounds upon the thematic haunting of society and late nineteenth-century French ideology by the specter of the dandy-esthete and in turn sexual and gendered nonconformity. More than this however, the narrative that Lorrain explores in *Monsieur de Bougreton* lacks the negative stereotypes often associated with nineteenth-century homosexuality. Rather it presents a counterexample of homosexuality filtered through the sexual and gendered nonconformity of the dandy-esthete.⁶ To borrow De Certeau's terminology, the narrative created by Bougreton's story haunts the overarching sexological discourse on homosexuals in fin-de-siècle society by presenting a narrative "counterpoin[t]" (De Certeau 78) to it. As De Certeau states, these types of oppositional narratives, of which certain narratives about homosexuality would be a part, haunt larger social discourses by filtering the rules and products that already exist through their very particularity (78) making them both defensive and opportunistic. Indeed, *Monsieur de Bougreton*'s narrative contradicts the scientific notions of mental degeneration, criminality, and prostitution written into the existent medical discourse on homosexuality through the eponymous character's acute mental capacities presaging the descriptions of homosexual genius that Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) would offer some years later (Hirschfeld 2000). Despite the repressive aspects of scientific discourses on homosexuality, *Monsieur de Bougreton* proves that there are some types of creative resistance, of which some specific narrative representations of homosexuality are a part, to these limitations to self-representation. In the end, the commingling of narratives of gendered and sexual

nonconformity and of the social and artistic ideologies of the dandy-esthete in *Monsieur de Bougreton* and in Lorrain's works more generally help to ground male same-sex desire in the zeitgeist of the times making male same-sex sexuality more familiar and immediate.

One of the more interesting narrations, and the most central to the notion of Bougreton's sexual identity, is the story surrounding the relationship of the titular character and M. de Mortimer. But it is also through the description of their relationship, while shepherding his followers through the couple's artistic stomping grounds, that the artistic intelligence and ideology of the eponymous character is revealed. Through the presentation of not his but Mortimer's favorite painters, Francisco Goya (1746-1828) described as "the fantastical in reality," Antonis Mor (1517-1577) as "the sublime in the horrible," and Doménikos Theotokópoulos (El Greco) (1541-1614) as "at once infernal and celestial" (Lorrain 1897, 74-5), Bougreton expounds upon the decadent artistic ideology of the past. Through this ideology, he nostalgically links himself to history while he connects with his absent companion, Mortimer, in bombastic, hyperbolic, sexually charged rhetoric (74-5). But his descriptions of the artists and their paintings are not all visual explicators. Bougreton uses the ideologies of these painters to critique the rampant contemporary Philistinism that, first constructed on a highly protestant platform, later married a Draconian morality prohibiting anything that titillated the eyes and lead to the eventual death of "joy," "luxury," and "lust" (76-7). Indeed, Bougreton's carefully crafted discourse on art takes to task sexology's degenerative charge by simultaneously promoting to readers a decadent aesthetic and through its promotion highlighting

Bougrelon's analytic mental capacities, a characteristic that was considered diametrically opposed to the degenerative conditions of homosexuality and decadence (Nordau 1894).

Like Bougrelon, Mortimer is physically absent from the narration, only acknowledged and discursively created by Bougrelon's story, and subsequently through its retelling by the anonymous "je." Albeit lacking in physicality, Mortimer plays an integral part in Bougrelon's current geographic situation, since the latter is banished because of their abstruse relationship (Lorrain 1897, 32). Their friendship is described as heroic (32) and sublime (56), a spirituality that borders on the religious (68), all notions that directly hint at the transcendental qualities of the Greek and Roman male bonds of pederasty (Ludovic 1976) but also to the equivocal "homosocial" bond possible between men (Sedgwick 1985). If, as already shown, decadent art is one of the building blocks of their connection, it is certainly the ambiguous sexuality and androgynous gendered characteristics of decadent artistic forms that constitutes the corner stone of their mutual love for these paintings. This fact is evident in their common fascination with the androgynous nature of the nymph in Botticelli's *Primavera* in front of which the two men become "agitated" (Lorrain 1897, 69). This link to androgyny is all the more important when one considers the often sexually and gender ambiguous description of ephebic heroes of Ancient Greece to which both of the two characters will be compared later in the novel (Dover 1989; Williams 1999). Reminiscing about their lost friendship, Bougrelon eulogizes his friend stating his pride in having been the comrade in exile, the dauntless Patroclus to Mortimer his Achilles (Lorrain 1897, 174). While Winn claims that nothing in the narration betrays "the conventional bounds of friendship" (Winn 136)

between the two men, the homosexual reference to these brothers-in-arms is not lost on the reader.

For another point of comparison, Bougreton claims to have had only three mistresses while living in Florence. Foregrounding artistic idealism and the materiality of the decadents, two of the three women exist only in artistic rendition: a portrait by de Vinci and one of Luini. Ostensibly the portrait entitled *Salome with the Head of St. John the Baptist* by Bernardino Luini (1480-1532), the portrait presents an image of Herodias, femme fatale, coyly holding a severed head on a silver platter. Surprisingly, Bougreton wishes to take the place of the vanquished, victim of this “terrible” and “exquisite” woman, gaining sexual gratification from his submission to her (59). Certainly a Freudian analysis based on masculine castration by a more powerful feminine figure would be a propos in Bougreton’s case. However this is not the only femme fatale described in Bougreton’s narration. Barbara Van Mierris, hypothetical mistress of both Mortimer and Bougreton, even though neither of the two is able to seduce her, is a true sadist. In a perpetual state of mental anguish after being raped, she transforms a self-prescribed sexual continence into undue torture for a colossal Ethiopian hired as a servant for her perverse services (117). A woman of beauty, she forces this servant to undress her, wash her, and redress her daily (118). Resulting from this Tantalusian punishment, she is found one morning strangled, a huge gaping wound on her neck and a breast bitten to the point of bleeding.

While very few women are presented in the novel, a misogynistic current certainly victimizes those who slip into the narration. All the women described, while beautiful, are dangerous, crazy, perverse or all of the above. It would be interesting to

place the homosexual male not against but beside the femme fatale type as a way to understand the at once complimentary and contradictory nature of these two stock characters in late-nineteenth-century fiction. It is as if the effeminate homosexual esthete must concurrently love the femme fatale for the power she exerts over the men she conquers—a power he does not have—and fear her for these same reasons. And while the narrator himself states that for five years, Bougreton truly loved Barbara in spite of her manic tendencies (122), this is a “closeted” safe zone remark since he could never actually obtain her. In reality, no man can possess her. It is however a dualistically beneficial relationship since as he hyperbolically pines for her, he hides his (homo)sexuality and her status and power as a femme fatale exponentially grows.⁷ Their complicit relationship is mutually beneficial, and in some ways respectively perverse.

Far from apocryphal in nature, the etymology of the title character’s name speaks volumes to the sexual context in which Bougreton will be situated. While Phillip Winn also highlights the commonality between the name of the novel’s eponymous character and the mistress of the real-life dandy on which Bougreton would have been based (d’Aurevilly’s mistress: Mme de Bouglon) (Winn 121), the rampant usage of “bougre” as a pejorative nomenclature for homosexuals at the time would not have gone unnoticed, even to uninitiated readers.⁸ Moreover, at the very pronouncement of his name, the sexual identity of Monsieur de Bougreton haunts him. Separated out into parts and turned around: Bougreton—Bougr/e/l’on—l’on est bougre (“One is a ‘bugger’”), is hardly inconspicuous. Ultimately, being tagged as a “bougre” transforms the assumed heterosexuality of Bougreton into a possibly un-assumed homosexuality, discursively

pulling Bougreton from the closet merging the socio-political position of the late nineteenth-century aristocrat with the deviant sexuality of the decadent dandy.

But it is more than just Bougreton's name that haunts the story. *Monsieur de Bougreton* is a series of interrelated accounts given by Bougreton to a group of all male listeners (he addresses the group as "messieurs") of which the anonymous "je" narrator is a part and after which the "je" recounts his experiences to the reader. While the narrator filters the narration through an obvious subjectivity, the actual narration is based on the almost interminable vocal meanderings of Bougreton as he guides his listeners through the canal-lined streets of the Netherlands. Indeed, the story starts and ends with Bougreton, risking to self-efface when he disappears from the narration. Twice in fact the "je"-narrator of the story threatens to leave the country with the group when Bougreton does not present himself for their usual tours of the city's museums and streets. Once Bougreton reappears, usually more extravagantly made up than his last visit, the story recommences. Robert Ziegler comments on this discursive phenomenon: "Bougreton himself is a construct of discourse, a tale that depends on its existence, existing only as long as disbelief is suspended seemingly dead when the text is concluded" (Ziegler 73). This focus on the discursive aspect of Bougreton, coupled with the necromantic narrative channeling of his character by the narrator after each disappearance undergirds the spectral aspect of homosexuality in the story as it highlights the individualized spectacle created by each disappearance and reappearance of the titular character. Furthermore, the assumed heterosexuality of the narrator and his group is placed in question through their desire to be part of the spectacle created by Bougreton's narration. To be sure, the homosociality (Sedgwick 1985) of the group is threatened by

Bougrelon's sexual nonconformity haunting the sexual dynamic of the group through association.⁹

Ultimately, to speak within the context of the spect(acle)er is more than just an idle pun. As Rhonda Garelick points out, the dandy-esthete himself is an individualized spectacle, "a highly stylized, painstakingly constructed self, a solipsistic social icon" (Garelick 3). However, the solipsistic philosophy that the dandy espouses can never be fully realized. Steeped in the Classical tradition of Alcibiades, Caesar, and Catiline (Garelick 1998), dandyism, like gender, is a copy with no known original (Butler 1990). Like his predecessors before him, Lorrain would copy d'Aurevilly and in turn create an ideological "mode that a whole class could copy" (Birkett 191). Indeed, Bougrelon will fascinate his audience not because of a non-reproducible individualized ideology, but rather because of the commercial familiarity of this ideology. He is a "recited figure" (Lorrain 1887, 18), a product of a rising commercialist ideology thrown into the social marketplace. Moreover, the serial nature of *Monsieur de Bougrelon* (published in *Le Journal* from 30 January to 10 May 1897) attests to this fact. Indeed, the printing of the second episode of *Monsieur de Bougrelon* above the juridical minutes related to Lorrain's dual with Proust further highlights the commercialization of both the ideology behind the dandy and by extension (homo)sexuality.¹⁰ In this instance, the publication then commercializes and "spectacularizes" both novel and social/sexual performance. In essence, Bougrelon, as well as the dandy-esthete he represents, creates social reality through a flamboyantly decadent performative discourse that recites old forms made relevant only through their individualized performances.¹¹ In *Monsieur de Bougrelon*, Lorrain marries the commerciality of the dandy-esthete with a narrative on

homosexuality that counters certain hackneyed notions of sexual nonconformity put forth by sexology. Ultimately, Bougreton's homosexuality is so acceptably familiar because homosexuality haunts the dandy-esthete like it haunts the Decadent movement and therefore late nineteenth-century France.

Dandies in the Closet: Decadent (Homo)Sexuality as Panacea in *Monsieur de Phocas*

In a 1901 letter to Jean Lorrain by Joris-Karl Huysmans, the author of the iconically decadent novel *À Rebours* (1884) states:

Mon cher Lorrain,

Je crois franchement que votre littérature reste le plus sérieuse de mes vices [...] je ne puis m'empêcher de savourer les odorantes saumures dans lesquelles marine l'âme de M. de Phocas. (Lorrain 2001, 17)

My dear Lorrain,

I truly believe that your literature remains the most serious of my vices [...] I cannot help but savor the aromatic brines in which the soul of M. de Phocas steep.

In many ways written in the shadows of Huysmans' novel, as well as those of de Sade and the *roman noir* movement of the first half of the nineteenth century,¹² *M. de Phocas* is a fictionalized panorama of the physiological, psychological, and moral decadence of a population of readers lived out in full by its titular character. Denis Neveu called it "the bible for decadent novels" (Winn 154), for Philippe Julian it is the "most bizarre of the decadent novels" (Jullian 257), and Hélène Zinck states that it is representative of the

“disillusioned [populous], rejecting all notions of scientific progress [...] observing the multiple perversions of their contemporaries in a world headed down the drain” (Lorrain 2001, 19). Published in serial form in *Le Journal* from 1899-1900, the novel is made up of the dizzying, often delusional journal entries of the duc de Fréneuse. Through the influence of his arcane illness, he assumes the role of M. de Phocas, a heterogeneous social pastiche of the notions of a dynamically unstable fin-de-siècle masculine and sexual identity. Moreover, it is through this mélange of socio-ideological indicators of fin-de-siècle homosexuality that Lorrain will critique late-nineteenth-century society as suffering from the same affliction with which it taxes its degenerates. Rather than the oppositional narratives espoused in *Monsieur Bougrelon*, *Monsieur de Phocas* celebrates decadent perversion, including sexual and gendered nonconformity, as a sign of the times. Ultimately, fin-de-siècle ideology becomes acceptable only through the espousal of decadence and deviant sexuality making decadent (homo)sexuality a social panacea.

From the exact etiology of Phocas’ mysterious illness, his psychosomatic identity disorders, to the form of the journal itself, much of *Monsieur de Phocas*, novel and character, is a patchwork of composed representations of transgressive (homo)sexuality from throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, like the identities assembled from the disparate case studies that plagued the works of early sexologists like Tardieu (Tardieu 1859), what can be gleaned from Phocas’ identity is informed by the eponymous character’s physical actions, psychology, and physiology. Also similar to these studies, the story that makes up *M. de Phocas* is heavily edited by the narrator-editor chosen by Phocas to safeguard his journals. If the narrator-editor is carefully chosen by Phocas it is because he alone can understand and embrace the (sexual) affinities that exist between

guide and confidant (Lorrain 1901a, 10). However, also like mid-nineteenth-century sexologists, the narrator-editor is quick to point out the critical distance between himself and the subject of this “case” study. Pointing both to Lorrain’s “Orientalism” (Said 1979) and the fin-de-siècle notion of homosexuality as exterior to France, the narrator-editor states that Phocas brought back “every vice” from the Orient (7).

While neither Phocas, Ethal, nor the narrator-editor ever pronounces the exact nature of Phocas’ affliction, their silence speaks volumes given homosexuality’s common nomenclature and title of François Porché’s (1877-1944) book on the subject *L’Amour qui n’ose pas dire son nom* (*The love that dare not speak its name*) (Porché 1927). However, parroting the economy of religious and scientific terminology used to describe homosexuality in the nineteenth century, it is Phocas himself that gives the first clues. He calls his illness an “inner demon” that has tortured and haunted him since adolescence, maybe childhood (Lorrain 1902, 10-11). Similar to the modern day dualistic debate between the essentialist and constructionist nature of homosexuality, Phocas hesitates throughout the novel between an acquired and congenital interpretation of his own “sickness.” This is not surprising since during the nineteenth century, medical examinations into the nature of homosexuality followed a similar path from an acquired interpretation of homosexuality (Tardieu 1859) to a congenital interpretation based on psychological and in some cases physiological debilitation (Chevalier 1893; Krafft-Ebing 1999; Hirschfeld 2000; Saint-Paul 1896).¹³ Like the flamboyant description of Noronsoff in *Le Vice errant* (Lorrain 1901b), Phocas is also described physiologically in a surge of unmistakable descriptors that make this unnamable sickness corporeally betray him. He is dressed in a tight fitting green suit with the pale hands of a courtesan that are foppishly

adorned with “campy” jewelry (3-4) mirroring the often hyperbolic and caricatured descriptions of Parisian homosexual dress put forward by sexologist Tardieu in the 1850’s (Tardieu 138).

But the link between the description of Monsieur de Phocas and those of Tardieu’s inverts does not stop there. After the radical transformation of Paris in the 1850’s and 60’s under Napoleon III and the Baron Haussmann, groups of young men flocked to the city from the provinces hoping to take advantage of the new opportunities for middle-class and working-class men, creating new subcultures, among which the homosexual subculture (Jordan 1995; Peniston 2004). With more people in the city, more crime ensued and police used the physiological indicators that Tardieu would put forth in his treatises as guidelines for hunting down homosexuals, inextricably linked to crime, in the city’s center. For sexologists this added a new element of necessity to medico-legal research and for Tardieu a marked importance for sexology (Tardieu 120), creating criminalizing social narratives that police were all too quick to apply to homosexual men (Canler 1882; Carlier 1887). It is hardly surprising then that this link between homosexuality and criminality would be part and parcel to the transformational story of the duc de Fréneuse/Monsieur de Phocas.

The numerous episodes where Phocas’ fascination with murder are examined are like so many narrative crossroads which lead to the stories final destination: the assassination of Ethal, Phocas’ “doctor/teacher,” by Phocas and Phocas’ subsequent self-liberation. Like the connection made by Tardieu (Tardieu 1859) and Dr. Magnan (Magnan 1895) in France and Cesare Lombroso (Lombroso 1887) in Italy, for Ethal crime and sexuality are intimately linked. Indeed, Ethal equates murder with a natural

instinct “as sacred as love” (Lorrain 1901a, 153). In Phocas’ case however, it is not sexuality in and of itself that nourishes the criminal nature of a murderer, but rather the nagging heteronormative social hold on that sexuality that brings out the monster. In a journal entry the 18 December, Phocas, awake next to a sleeping prostitute, describes his vampiric desire to revisit the bluish blemish left by his lingering kiss (23). Soon after, he is conquered by an overwhelming urge to adopt the murderess role, his hands suddenly strained around the prostitute’s throat. His desire: to murder her, to strangle her, to prevent her from breathing (23). The gender of the desired victim is more than just a narrative fluke. With the exception of the final act (the murder of Ethal), all of Phocas’ neurotic delusions fueling thoughts of murder are targeted towards females. Whether it is her inability to sexually satisfy him, their knowledge of his “affliction,” or her grotesque façade (287), this intentional misogyny is not misplaced. While relegated to a secondary plan in the novel, most of the feminine characters in *Monsieur de Phocas* and in Lorrain’s *oeuvre* are described in unfavorable terms. One need only read Lorrain’s virulently antifeminist *Une Femme par jour* (1896) to be convinced. Winn describes this tendency in *Monsieur de Phocas*: “the old Altorneyshare is a ghoul, the English ladies from the opium party are all idiots and has-beens, those that are figured by Ethal are even more neurotic and detestable” (Winn 202).

While the female sex fuels this desire for murder, its ultimate target is a man. Growing tired of Ethal’s “curative” methods, Phocas snaps and brutally murders him. But the murder of Phocas’ “teacher/doctor” is much more than just the chief narrative spike in a story filled with a dizzying array of eclectic journal entries. Similar to the prescriptive measures of late nineteenth-century psychiatrist Dr. Lauppts (1870-1937)

(Saint-Paul 1910), Ethal's pedagogic philosophy is based on the dualistic principle of extreme albeit incomprehensible medical dependence as well as forced orientation towards a prescribed and constructed normalcy. After Ethal is summoned to Brussels by an anticipated letter, Phocas contemplates the place that his makeshift mountebank has assumed in his life. Like an intense hunger, Ethal's absence has proven how necessary he has become to Phocas (Lorrain 1901a, 108). But it is not Ethal, the person, that qualifies the absence felt by Phocas for in the same breath he states his fear and hatred for the British "doctor" (108). It is rather the promised "cure," the delusional ideal surrounding this promised corrected state of being, that Phocas misses when Ethal is gone. Much like the "corrective gay therapy" still prescribed by right-wing evangelical platforms today, these palliative measures were and still are at best superficially ameliorative if not completely ineffective. It is in this sense that *Monsieur de Phocas* could be interpreted as an inverted *Bildungsroman*. Rather than enlighten Phocas to a socially assimilationist state of consciousness, Ethal's education perverts its already "perverted" student. It is only by eliminating the "doctor/teacher" that Phocas is lead to self-emancipation. Ultimately, Phocas seems completely cognizant of this unexpected upshot describing Ethal as a "poisoner" and a "sorcerer" (372). He was the unwilling and unconscious instrument in Ethal's devious plot. By murdering Ethal, he saves himself (372).

After his first encounter with Ethal, Phocas claims to have left the studio of a prodigious artist, the meetings filling Phocas with a sense of joy, a feeling elicited by the complicit fraternity created between him and someone that shares his "tastes." Ethal quickly becomes his "bien-être," a reassuring and calming voice that drowns out the

raucous barks of his internal struggle (103). Also of note, once in the presence of a “case” similar to his, Phocas claims to no longer be haunted by the green-blue eyes that jumpstarted his neurotic episodes (103). But the ephemeral moment that this homosocial fraternity first provides is quickly perverted by a panicky distrust that will last the length of the novel. He quickly doubles back on his original assessment claiming to be under the charm of a profoundly troubling charlatan (85). Once a source of soothing elation, Ethal’s knowledge of Phocas’ desires morphs into a fear of revelation, a physical and mental angst as to the use of this knowledge. Ultimately Phocas states his fear of Ethal and the abominable suggestions that his voice provokes in him (107).

Indeed, the scientific method that makes up Ethal’s suggestions is ambiguous at best. From befriending Claudius’ old “patient,” Thomas Welcôme, (who in an ironic twist of fate turns Phocas against his “doctor/teacher”), to visiting Gustave Moreau’s (1826-1898) gallery 14 rue de la Rouchefoucauld or the nightmarishly Baudelairean *La Luxure* by James Ensor (1860-1949), to the egregious and unbridled dinner parties where opium and hashish are served on a silver platter, Ethal’s suggestions for treatment are much less an antidote for homosexuality than a lesson in his own decadent ideology. Presenting decadence as a medicinal cure rather than debilitating disease is certainly within the realm of Lorrain’s often snarky and confrontational rhetoric. And hardly unfathomable given the number of moralizing works that, based on the scientific observations of sexology and psychiatry, would take to task the writers of the fin-de-siècle period for their debilitating hold on an already morally and physiologically weak consumer market (Budé 1883; Nordau 1894; Davray 1895; Scipio 1908).

One of the more interesting “treatments” that Claudius recommends is an examination of an engraving sent from Audenardes of *Les Trois fiancées* by Javanese Dutch painter Jan Toorop (1858-1928). The painting represents three figurations of women: on the left, a female innocently holding her hand to her heart while with a charitable gaze looking into the eyes of a naked younger female rising up to kiss her; in the middle is a thinly veiled female form whose body is all but completely visible to the onlooker, highlighting both its curves and her downward glance towards the nudes praying at her feet; on the right, a devilish figure whose glassy stare directly engages the onlooker while a distraught feminine form seemingly begging for atonement bulges from an entangled mesh of lines and curves below her. It is this third woman the “fiancée from Hell” (109) who immediately engages Phocas and who Ethal chooses as the one who has the “regard” that Phocas has been searching for and that haunts him (110). Phocas states that it is this woman, with her smile and glance, who would be his cure (109). The mention of this painting in Ethal’s cure and in the novel itself is certainly not fortuitous given the abundance of intertextuality found in *Monsieur de Phocas*. Indeed, the three feminine figures all represent stock female identities in Lorrain’s bag of narrative tricks. It is rare in one of Lorrain’s novels, poems, or plays to find a female character who does not lean towards the innocent motherly figure, of course drained of all sexual attraction, the cult-like object of worship and therefore not considered for sexual interaction (like Lorrain’s relationship with Sarah Bernhardt and Liane de Pougy), or the vampiric femme fatale whose power and sexuality are to be admired from afar but whose body and sexuality are equally unattainable. This tendency to represent women as devoid of sexuality for the homosexual man has its corollary in today’s modern homosexual

culture. As Winn states: “The cult devoted to Judy Garland [...] to Marilyn Monroe and to Catherine Deneuve by the gay press is enough to prove these men’s adoration of these women whose image is sacred and, critical detail, devoid of all sexual value” (Winn 228-9).

But it is not just artistic renditions of women that Ethal intends for Phocas. After Welcôme lambasts his former mentor and warns Phocas of the peril he now faces remaining under Ethal’s inimical influence (Phocas 1901a, 212), Welcôme will implore Phocas to follow him to Alger, Cairo, or Tunisia, all nineteenth-century gay destinations (Aldrich 1993) as well as destinations believed to be the home of (homo)sexual licentiousness (Said 1979, 1994). But Ethal cannot allow his entranced patient to deviate from his prescribed path and denounces Welcôme’s method with his own prescription: life with a woman (Lorrain 1901a, 236), regurgitating the take-a-wife-and-be-cured rhetoric put forth by Lorrain’s contemporary Dr. Laupts (Saint-Paul 1896). Of course Phocas knows all too well the impossibility of such an action, having stated from the very beginning his sexual impotence with women (Lorrain 1901a, 30).

To understand the dynamic between Ethal and Phocas, Winn points to the Stevensonian nature of the two characters stating that Ethal is Phocas’ “Mr. Hyde” (Winn 186). At best a user-friendly exaggeration, this would be to analyze the two characters as the same person and deny the interaction between the two distinct personalities, not to mention overlook the doctor/patient dynamic that was at the heart of contemporary scientific representations of homosexuality (Foucault 1990; Oosterhuis 2000). And even if a battle with internalized homophobia is a link between the Stevensonian short story and the cardinal characters in *Monsieur de Phocas*¹⁴ (Ethal having repressed or having

been presumably “cured” of, while Phocas seeks a cure from a denied or disregarded homosexuality) both *Phocas* characters are also perversely decadent in philosophy, ideology, and characterization and therefore cannot represent monstrous polar opposites. Jennifer Birkett might be closer to the truth in stating that Ethal “liberates the evil double in Phocas’ personality” (Birkett 204). Although this analysis also seems a bit inverted since it assumes that the duc de Fréneuse was not wickedly decadent *ab initio*. The comparison however is not lost, only misplaced. It is homosexuality that is the monster in the closet, not Ethal, and therefore more accurately, Phocas’ murderess moment is propelled forward because of Ethal’s inability to accept his own homosexuality or cure it, and concomitantly do the same for Phocas. It is then the treatment that emboldens the disease rather than cures it. Or conversely, the treatment creates the disease, by calling it as such, and then necessitates a cure that calls for subsequent treatment. This literary bait-and-switch in *Monsieur de Phocas* of course points back to the scientific hustle of sexologists like Tardieu and psychiatrists after him who created a social need for their field by terming and therefore creating diseases, linking them to social degradation, and after highlighting through fearmongering the need for futile treatments or incarceration (Pick 1989; Oosterhuis 2000).

If homosexuality is the monster in the closet, then what is the cure? It would seem for Phocas, like Lorrain, embracing decadence as a philosophy and therefore homosexuality is the cure. But this last component is essential to the procedure. Ethal fails not because his decadent philosophy is noxious to Phocas (Phocas certainly shares many of Ethal’s decadent tastes) but because Ethal leaves out this last but important aspect of the decadent ideology, fluid sexuality (Garelick 1998). It is this same missing

link that forced Welcôme to abandon his “treatments” with Ethal and search for a cure elsewhere.

While Lorrain never achieved complete liberation from the clutches of the Parisian morality that stifled his decadent impulse, trying but ultimately dying in the city from which he so desperately wished to escape, Phocas will take Welcôme’s advice and look elsewhere for liberation. Similar to the Baudelarean philosophy expounded upon in “Invitation au voyage,” (Baudelaire 2001) as well as the notion of the Orient as an “escapism [of] sexual fantasy” (Said 1979), for Welcôme, sexual and social liberation do not exist in France (Lorrain 1901a, 222). Indeed, Welcôme advises complete disconnect with Western ideology (228). Certainly in line with the decadent aesthetic given its ideological obsession with Orientalized extravagance, this advice also highlights the Oriental discourse running through the novel as well as its association with homosexual liberation and self-realization (Said 1979, 1994). By singling out the infamous “gay destinations” (Tunis, Alger, and Cairo) that would be part and parcel to Achille Essebac, Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen, André Gide, and Jean Lorrain’s literary aesthetic, Welcôme also clarifies both his and Phocas’ “condition” through geographic innuendos. Indeed, this new ideological notion is steeped in the fantastical Orientalist idealism of late nineteenth-century France (Said 1979). Ultimately, Phocas’ decision to murder his unsuccessful doctor and to explore the beauty of “unchanged races” (Lorrain 1901a, 405) speaks to the multitude of fin-de-siècle (homosexual) decadents whose adoption of an escapist decadent ideology would allow them to find solace in these countries away from the reach of late nineteenth-century morality (Said 1979; Aldrich 1993). Indeed, the conclusion to the work instantly interconnects Phocas with the fraternal diaspora of

artists, expatriates, and homosexuals that ventured south for liberation from hexagonal bourgeois morality (Pratt 1981) as it promotes decadence as a cure-all ideology.

Degenerates in the Closet: Expressing Homosexuality Through Hereditary Degeneration in *Le Vice errant* (1901)

The final installment of Lorrain's literary paseo through gay male representations harkens back to another of his preferred literary genres. The fantastical novella and its style run rampant through Lorrain's bibliography and for good reason. Lorrain had a strong connection with these imagination provoking stories, a far more intimate connection than with the travel and scientific books that he states replaced them (Lorrain 1902a, 1-2). While *Le Vice errant* certainly shares elements with the fantastical, its core is steeped in the scientific notion of degeneration expounded upon in Krafft-Ebing's iconic medical text *Psychopathia Sexualis* published in 1886,¹⁵ as well as those by Morel and Nordau (Morel 1857; Nordau 1894; Pick 1989; Krafft-Ebing 1999; Oosterhuis 2000). Far from the criminalizing elements found in Tardieu and Lombroso's works, Krafft-Ebing's treatise on antipathic sexuality traces the evolution of deviant sexuality back to heredity and degeneration. He states that individuals tainted with antipathic sexual instincts display neuropathic predispositions "related to hereditary degenerate conditions" which "may be clinically called a functional sign of degeneration" (Krafft-Ebing 1999, 239). While he would later rebuke this position entirely, based on the many intellectual and artistic homosexuals that negated the idea of mental instability or degeneration, degeneration theory was so incredibly influential that authors such as Zola and the Naturalist school would pull from its findings to enumerate their own literary ideology (Pick 1989).

A mini *Rougon-Macquart* in its own right, *Le Vice errant* traces the tragic history of the Noronsoff family. The story of Wladimir Noronsoff orbits around a mix of the scientific and the fantastical, the Russian prince being struck down by a “strange case of atavism, an ancient curse” (Lorrain 1902a, 119). But the story does not start with the Wladimir who will be the decadent hero of the story. Rabastens, the medical doctor that presides over Noronsoff’s strange case of hypersexual perversion tells the story of Wladimir Noronsoff, a violent barbarian who, in 1415, attacked a bohemian woman and her lover when she refused his sexual advances. Seizing the young lover and his bohemian princess, the prince and his men viciously beat the man to the point of bleeding while throwing the young girl to Russian peasants who repeatedly raped her in front of the eyes of her half-conscious lover. While the young bohemian girl died from her inflictions, the lover decided to avenge his mistress not by killing the prince, but by entering into the room of his wife, Héléna Strowenska, in the middle of the night and drugging her with a sleeping-beauty-like narcotic while he continuously played maleficent Bohemian airs on his guitar. The next morning she awakened to a hyperbolized sexual lust, described like a dog in heat (121), bestially humping any figure in sight and bringing shame to the house of Noronsoff. So uncontrollable was her lust, she had to be put down, her husband crushing her head between two gigantic stones. Before poisoning himself in front of the instructional judge, the Bohemian man who cursed the family promised that his vengeance would continue throughout the centuries, the Noronsoffs forever cursed with hypersexualization (122).

One of the more interesting facets of the narration is the questionable nature of the narrator, Doctor Rabastens. At the beginning of *Chauve-souris*, a shorter story that

precedes *Les Noronsoff*, the narrator explains the doctor's credentials, saying that "*M. Rabestens*" (93) (my emphasis) was known throughout the world and the Riviera. The medical designation missing from the description of the doctor's qualifications (*M.* and not *Dr.*), possibly points to the position of health officer (*officier de santé*) rather than actual doctor,¹⁶ placing his medical credentials in doubt. Indeed, regardless of how well known he is by the social elite in the south of France, the narrator also puts into question his exact specifications stating that *M. Rabestens* was "sort of" a doctor, never really being able to completely understand his medical position (93). Much more of a storyteller himself than an actual doctor, his medical visits consist of anecdotal amusement for the sick, described as both "moral and immoral" (94). This description in the novella that directly precedes *Les Noronsoff* serves several purposes. On the one hand, the doubt with which the narrator of *Chauve-souris* describes the doctor who will recount his experience with *Noronsoff* creates a narrative ambiguity around any scientific truth that might be used in future diagnoses. But as Winn states, the narrator quickly falls under the spell of the eloquent words of the doctor and like him "the reader is supposed to undergo the same influence as the storyteller, allowing himself to be seduced little by little" (Winn 218). It would certainly be relevant then to see in this narrative construction a literary jab at the medical profession that would marginalize so-called degenerates like Lorrain himself with a seductive and oftentimes fear-inducing medical rhetoric. But the suspect nature of the doctor is also expounded upon at the beginning of *Les Noronsoff*. Rather than base his diagnosis in empirical evidence based on physiology or etiology, he masks and buffers the dubious scientific notion of degenerate heredity with the less trustworthy nature of the fairy tale, allowing for the credibility of his diagnosis to be

grounded in myth rather than fact: “—D’abord croyez-vous à la magie, à l’atavisme et à la puissance des envoûtements? Si vous n’y croyez pas, inutile que je commence.” (“First, do you believe in magic, in atavism and the power of spells? If not, it is useless for me to start”) (119). The most interesting aspect of this citation is the mix of science (atavism) and the fantastic (magic, spell) as if their intermingling was actually part and parcel to a rational explanation for a malady. Lorrain by no means hyperbolizes this scientific mixology of putative fact and enticing fiction. As Ian Dowbiggin has pointed out, at its root, degeneracy theory was a blanket term used to bridge the gap between biology and psychiatry, referring both to “experienced mental state and its underlying physiological counterpoint” even if degeneracy theorists showed “no conclusive competence in either capacity” (Dowbiggin 8). After 1850, this term and its adjectival corollary “atavistic” would sprout up like weeds in the writings of sexologists and psychiatrists. Dr. Laupts, to give one example, calls the congenital defects of inverts “atavistic, hereditary” (Laupts 1896, 9) and states that inverts are “atavistic products” (Laupts 1910, 7-8).

It would be seemingly impossible to make this comparison without speaking of one of the most feverishly circulated publications on degeneration of the late nineteenth century, *Entartung (Degeneration)* (1892) by Max Nordau. The influence of this work on nineteenth-century ideology and literature has already been well documented (Praz 1951; Senelick 1993; Dean 2000). Indeed, however similar this work was to many of the major scientific treatises of the time that dealt with the ideas surrounding degeneration theory, one of the main points of interest for literary criticism is Nordau’s virulent philistinism, attacking the authors themselves who he felt aided in the decline of

humanity because of the pornographic content made readily available to a much more diverse reading public. In the preface, dedicated to none other than criminologist and noted proponent of the link between homosexuality and criminality, Cesar Lombroso, Nordau states that several of these “degenerates of literature” have obtained a troubling success in the last couple of years exercising a corruptive influence on the views of a whole generation (Nordau vi). While he was not the first to use the term, that going to Bénédict-August Morel in 1857, degeneration became both the cause and the effect of a cultural decline that was both a metaphorical reimagining of Paris as a decaying ancient Rome but also a pejoratively taxonomic term applied to social groups such as prostitutes, homosexuals, and the working class, all of which threatened to overturn the already vacillating social body (Pick 1989). The danger lay in the domineering nature of sex at the end of the century, something from which the authors could not seem to “extricate themselves” (Dean 72). It is not that sex was bad, quite the opposite in fact. With a continuously plummeting population rate (Gillis 1981), the ravages of the Franco-Prussian war, and the economic downfall that followed, the question was not whether or not people should be having sex, but who should and with whom. Lorrain was a prime example not of too much sex talk but of the effeminizing nature of talking and thinking about certain types of sex too much (of course homosexuality was one of these types). But the idea was not just thematically superficial. Nordau also argued that the once virile pen of the masculine writer became flaccid, for lack of a better analogy, under the contaminating philosophy linked to degeneration. This degenerative philosophy coupled with the hereditary taints of a once thriving French social body is easily discernible in the last of Lorrain’s truly decadent works.

The last in the line of some notoriously decadent heroes, Noronsoff combines many of the aberrant traits of his fictional brothers, the monomania of Bougreton and the perverse neuroses of Phocas. *Les Noronsoff*, however, does not stop at these traits adding a degenerative physique to the mix making the novel a glance into the sobering effects of a prolonged and grotesque mental anguish enhanced by a tainted heredity. His extravagance and decadent bravado is described as the crowning jewels of a line of crimes, madness, and blood (Lorrain 1901b, 143). Like Lorrain himself, his vestimentary extravagance is part and parcel to his public persona. Noronsoff's hands are covered with ornate jewelry and he dresses himself in frocks adorned with the most extravagant and certainly "campy" jewels and passementerie¹⁷ pointing back to Phocas and Tardieu's physiological indicators (Tardieu 1859). Indeed, also like the author, Noronsoff prefers the company of swindlers and flawed, shifty men (Lorrain 1901b, 144), realizing the fear of hierarchically based social mixing that sexologist contended homosexuals promoted (Tardieu 1859). It has certainly been well documented that Lorrain spent much of his life in the Parisian underbelly where according to Thibault D'Anthonay he let out his inner lout (D'Anthony 363). While they might have shared their company, Lorrain and Noronsoff do not share their monetary situation. When in Paris, Noronsoff invites extravagantly dressed diners who receive gold-plated cigar boxes as gifts. However, like Bougreton and Phocas before him, Noronsoff showed a cruel disregard for women and Paris quickly grew tired of his misogynistic manners (Lorrain 1901b, 138-40). Feeling hostility in the air, Noronsoff settles into the Riviera, joining others in what Mary Pratt has called in another context a "Voyage South" narrative (Pratt 158), where "a cornucopia of Europe's forbidden fruits [...] is offered up to the questing hero, who

accepts them all and then, depending on the strength of his European virtues, either extricates himself [...] or disappears for good” (Pratt 158).¹⁸

Similar to *Monsieur de Bougreton* and *Monsieur de Phocas* where homosexuality is a flamboyantly silent thematic that is revealed discursively, rarely physically, Noronsoff’s crown of thorns is only slightly blunted by a heterosexualized rhetoric and it seems clear that homosexuality is at the crux of his affliction. Besides the all too obvious references to Ancient Greece and Rome that will be discussed in a subsequent section, the rhetoric of the incurability of the passed down “curse” aligns itself with the newly emerging theories of homosexuality as a congenital and no longer acquired condition such as explored by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Havelock Ellis, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing (Sullivan 2003; Merrick 2001; Greenberg 1988). Noronsoff seems to realize the unalterable nature of his condition all too well pointing back to the counterfeit credentials of the doctors who claim to be able to heal him. Noronsoff states:

Eh bien, monsieur le docteur [...] que pouvez-vous faire pour moi? Rien de plus que les autres, n’est-ce pas. Rien, absolument rien! [...] Vous me direz aussi que je puis guérir....avec des soins et *en me privant de tout ce que j’aime*, n’est-ce pas? [...] Je ne vois les médecins que pour me convaincre de leur fausseté (Lorrain 1901b, 151) (my emphasis)

Well doctor [...] what can you do for me? Nothing more than the others, right? Nothing, absolutely nothing! [...] You’ll also tell me that I can be healed...with treatments and by *depriving me of everything that I love*, right? [...] I only see doctors to convince myself of their falsity

Sexual abstinence as a panacea for the homosexual condition was certainly not unfounded in sexological rhetoric. Many of the sexologists, even some who believed it a congenital condition (Krafft-Ebing 1999), prescribed sexual asceticism, especially from masturbation which was believed to only enhance homosexual penchants (Garnier 1885), as a way to divert the sex drive from its natural, or in the case of homosexuals, unnatural realization.¹⁹

However, contrary to the seemingly insatiable lust drive of those who suffered the curse before him, Noronsoff does not display the same sexual vigor that one might expect after presented with the germane narrations that precede his. In fact, Noronsoff never actually has sexual contact with anyone throughout the narration. His main focus seems to be rather to decadently present his sexual desires to others in order to gage social reactions, usually faced with disgust rather than the universal awe he seems to expect. In one such scene in the chapter entitled “Souper de Trimalcion,”²⁰ ill-considered diners are placed before a seemingly innocent spectacle thinly covered by a layer of gauze until the precise revelatory moment when they can take in the living still life that Noronsoff has imagined for the *plat de resistance* of his party. When the gauze is removed, the guests are confronted with three naked men, their unkempt bodies pointing to the fishing trade or porters (Lorrain 1901b, 258). While the nudity and certainly gender of the models cause the nonplussed reaction of the crowd, the sheer perversity with which the men are posed compounded by the sexually suggestive nature of their tattoos was too much for the crowd to handle (259). As Winn points out in his analysis of the scene, all of the possible angles of the male nude body are exposed to the confounded onlookers from the feet to the heads as well as a carefully placed tattoo of a vulture (on the middle of the

torso), its talons gripping an unspeakably “strange perch” (Winn 243). A decadent analysis of this fleshy dessert course would reveal not only the sexual inclination of the delusional prince but also the extravagance of his decadent ideology. But for the astonished gazers the tripartite male still life is nothing more than a scandal, its artist a “sick man” (Lorrain 1901b, 258). Its creator however is described as reveling in the panic and alarm of the onlookers ultimately enjoying parading his socially categorized perverse degeneration for a seemingly eager audience (259).

While Noronsoff’s tale ultimately takes a turn for the worse, the eponymous character dying after an Adonis themed party flops when the guest of honor is a no-show, it is not Noronsoff who is to blame. Taking to task degeneration theory and the modern culpability that it engendered, Noronsoff states that it is “the vampirism” of the first Wladimir that filled him with the soul of an already dead man (349). Indeed speaking in terms of heredity and atavism mirrors the end of century analysis of homosexuality as congenital (Chevalier 1893; Krafft-Ebing 1999; Hirschfeld 2000; Saint-Paul 1896) and therefore, like Noronsoff’s terminal tirade, exonerates, in some sense, the individual homosexual from fault. This does not mean, however, that Lorrain’s decadent philosophy whitewashes guilt. Condemned by a corrupted anatomy to bask in a life of decadence, Noronsoff, like Phocas, Bougreton and Lorrain is the product of an extreme civilization, the looking glass of fin-de-siècle France (Lorrain 1901b, 349).

Perverting Pederasty: (Re)presenting Greek and Roman Homosexuality Through a Decadent Aesthetic

“Trahit sua quemque voluptas”

--Lorrain, *L'Ayrenne; Fards et poisons*

“Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexim”

--Lorrain, *Du Temps que les bêtes parlaient*

Like Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen, Achille Essebac, and Gide after him, Lorrain would cast many of his homosexual representations in an antique mold. Indeed, Marie-France David-de Palacio states that the reference to Antiquity in Lorrain's works is omnipresent (de Palacio 44). The interest can be found in a communication of ideas: a dialogue between the newly emergent homosexual ideology of the Decadent period and the Ancient models of pederastic male same-sex relations represented and lived by the Greeks and Romans. Lorrain is an interesting case of this intermingling of ideologies especially since the majority of the works featuring Greek and Roman pederastic ideology that surround the Decadent movement rely on the ascetic and transcendental nature of male same-sex relations in Greek and Roman ideology. By way of contrast, decadent works that feature male same-sex relations often marry the perverse to sexuality rather than the idealized theories of pederasty expounded upon by the Greeks and Romans. Ultimately then, Lorrain's works are an important point of departure for analyzing the works that will be the focus of the last three chapters of this thesis, all of which place Greek and Roman theories on pederasty at the heart of their ideologies and life philosophies but also many of whom pull from these decadent re-presentations of Greek and Roman pederasty.

While it would be a somewhat arduous task to cherry-pick through the economy of references to Suetonius, Juvenal, Tiberius, Virgil, and Nero (to name only a few) in the works of Jean Lorrain, it would certainly have its critical advantages. De Palacio, who did a similar study, states: “Lorrain’s prose is composed of a sort of harlequin of references to Antiquity, formed from the most diverse ingredients” (de Palacio 48). Though de Palacio’s findings are disparately interesting, they give however the terminal impression that Lorrain was only interested in Antiquity for the decadent aesthetic that seemed to mirror fin-de-siècle ideology. Indeed such an interpretation makes homosexuality a stale, fallow recitation borrowed and inserted into Lorrain’s already decadent works and takes away any critical value from the references other than being superficially referential. And while De Palacio does acknowledge the reinvigorating spark that Lorrain’s work gives to these images (44), his analysis remains cosmetic mainly showing how Lorrain recites Greek and Roman sources, recopies models, and regurgitates rhetoric, rather than reinvesting them with value by showing their ultimate fungibility. Indeed, by reevaluating these terms through his own ideology, Lorrain highlights their semantic variability, or to borrow Butler’s term, their “discursive performativity” (Butler 1997, 14). To be sure, his novels, short stories, and poems allowed contemporary readers to revisit the ancient forms of pederasty through a very modern phenomenon, homosexuality and fin-de-siècle decadence.²¹ What emerges from this communication of ideologies is less a vapid network of similar ideas and more a marriage of the ideal of the pederastic relationships of Greek and Roman ideology with the perverse decadence of fin-de-siècle France. Ultimately, Lorrain reappropriates and reevaluates these terms and their ideological baggage, indeed their “condensed

historicity” (Butler 1997, 3), reciting them through his own decadent discourse connecting two seemingly disparate ideologies through male same-sex relations.

In “V” from the collection of poems *L’Ombre ardent* (1897), Lorrain describes the perverse nature of an Italian ephebe, undoubtedly cognizant of the power of his allure: “C’était là le passé de crime et de folie/Qu’évoquait à mes yeux ton sourire mauvais,/Et, ce que je songeais tout bas, tu le savais,/Douteux adolescent, énigme d’Italie. O périlleux miroir d’une époque abolie!” (“There it was, past crimes and madness/That, in my eyes, your malicious smile evoked/Dubious adolescent, Italy’s enigma. Oh dangerous mirror of an abolished era!”) (Lorrain 1897, 51). The allusion here is double. On the one hand the Greek and Roman aesthetic and ideology swell up in the poetically visual allusion of the ephebe perverted by the cocked smile, revealing the witting and coquettish sexual advances of the youth. On the other hand, the aphorism that starts the last line highlights the reflective nature of the smile, echoing back the nostalgic memories of a lost social ideology as well as the desire of the onlooker. Moreover, poeticizing the ephebe resurrects the defunct ideologies “forgotten” (51) in the past as well as allows the sexual promise to be polarized on both ends: the ephebe is “perverse” and a “magic potion” (51), the receptive onlooker is transfixed by this perverted advance, quickly placed under its spell. The importance of the polar nature of attraction between ephebe and poet cannot be understated since it is this same affective mutuality that, contemporarily speaking, releases homosexuality from perversity and places it back into the orbit of normality, both partners desiring the other. Indeed, this discourse on mutual perversity counters the predatory, proselytizing nature attributed to the homosexual in many of the social and sexological works of time (Tardieu 1857; Canler 1882; Carlier

1887; Lombroso 1887; Bureau 1908). But, it is also this same affective mutuality that perverts the idealized pederasty of the Greeks. For the Greeks, sexual desire was necessarily a one-way street based on a strict moral system and necessary social hierarchy. For the Greek and Romans, the *eromenos* submitted to the advances of the *erastes* “out of gratitude or admiration, not lust” (Greenberg 150). Moreover, the youth was never to vocalize or “corporealize” his desire to be courted or initiate courtship but rather be “coy, to resist, to test the sincerity and worthiness of his lover” (Greenberg 148). Lust would have stigmatized the youth as permanently effeminate—bordering on prostitution and breaching the rules of *pudicitia* (Williams 1999)—attracting social opprobrium and halting the metamorphosing effects of pederasty, namely masculine adulthood. This technique of perverting the sexual innocence of the ephebe will be continued in the works of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen and Achille Essebac.²²

In the section entitled “Les Éphèbes” dedicated to Gustave Flaubert (who was no stranger to ephebic delights)²³ Lorrain explores the link between idyllic pederasty and decadent perversity even further. For Lorrain, ephebes are often androgynous and nameless beings with immodest profiles and poisonous lips, complicit in overseeing “criminal love” (Lorrain 1897, 229-230). Some of the most famous ephebes of the Greek and Roman tradition figure in Lorrain’s poems. Ganymede has the particular traits of the passive beings loved by the perverse gods (230); Hylas is a “ripe fruit polished by Hercules’ kisses” (233); Iacchus (Dionysus) is a god perfect for those “unspoken” loves (244). Bathyle’s sexuality is enhanced by his lascivious dance “[s]a tunique s’écarte aux rondeurs de ses reins./Sa tunique s’écarte et la blancheur sereine/De son ventre apparaît sous sa toison d’ébène” (“his tunic opens to expose the roundness of his hips/His tunic

opens to expose the serene whiteness/Of his stomach which appears under an ebony down”) (235). Like the anonymous ephebe of the poem “V”, Bathyle is described as coquettish and promiscuous, his “œil inhumain/Fixant les matelots rouges de convoitise,/Il partage à chacun son bouquet de cythise/Et tend à leurs baisers la paume de sa main” (“inhuman eye/Covetously hawking the sailors,/With each he shares his bouquet of golden-chain/And presents to their kisses the palm of his hand”) (235). Probably one of the most interesting and undoubtedly one of the most perverse interpretations of the ephebic tradition of Greek and Roman myth is the poem entitled “Narcissus.” What makes this poem so intriguing is that Lorrain metaphorically inverts the storyline, having Narcissus orgasm (“sa chair vibre...”; “his skin vibrates...”) as he slips into the river that mirrors his own reflection (232). The ellipse is more than conspicuous.

In *Monsieur de Phocas*, Lorrain also connects with the ideology of the Greeks and Romans by presenting a decadent version of the *erastes/eromenos* tradition. In a chapter entitled “L’œil d’éboli,” Claudius Ethal presents Phocas, as part of his “treatment,” with a wax model of an ephebe-like Italian boy ravaged by the effects of tuberculosis. Unwanted in any artistic studio because of his anorexic frame (Lorrain 1901a, 134), Angelotto was taken in by Ethal. Above all, the lines that tuberculosis engraved on the young boy’s face and his sickly demeanor intrigued the artist. Fully conscious of the boy’s declining health, Ethal demanded that he pose for long hours, not wanting to lose this chef-d’oeuvre of masculine puerile suffering. The description of the modeling sessions quickly takes a perverse turn. More indicative of a metaphorical rape than an artistic endeavor, the artist fiercely attacks the wax with his tools, experiencing a fullness of pleasure never before imagined (135). The young boy’s health, completely devastated

by the vampiric influence of Ethal's artistic fervor, quickly fails and he succumbs to his infirmity. However, while Ethal's perversity is continuously described in the novel as a possible danger to both Phocas and Welcôme, the decadent perversion written into the relationship between Ethal and Angelotto is also tempered by Ethal's actions in regards to the boy's sickness. Echoing the more paternal and instructive nature of the *erastes* position, Ethal provides the young Italian with remedial infusions, lung purification treatments, as well as a bed warmed by a strategically placed stove (135). He also calls in a doctor, knowing full well that the boy is beyond the point of medicinal cures, and gives money to the family to pay for the funeral expenses after the boy's death. Ultimately, in a perversely decadent twist to the position of protector that Ethal assumes, the beauty in this relationship is the willful insistence to reimage puerile suffering not in the heroic imagery of the Greeks and Romans, but in the doleful disintegration of innocent youth raped by the ravages of life and fin-de-siècle artistic ideology.

This image is juxtaposed in the novel with another more classic version of the *erastes/eromenos* tradition. For the eleven-year-old Phocas, Jean Destreux, a young farm hand, was an only friend, a protector from the hostility of the world (298). The young Destreux represents strength and health (300) as compared to the superficial delicateness of those of his social caste (303). Indeed, Phocas' heart races with anticipation as he slips away from the castle at Fréneuse to catch a glimpse of the older boy as he comes home from the fields (300). Like the *erastes* of the Greek and Roman tradition of pederasty, Destreux teaches the young Phocas through stories (301-2), through physical training (302), and through friendship (302).²⁴ The relationship between the older Destreux and the young Phocas reimages a male same-sex relationship built on happiness and the

connection between masculine souls (316), similar to the intelligible bonds of the Platonic tradition.²⁵ When, after Destreux's accidental death, Phocas is confronted some years later with the lamenting verse of Musset's poem "Adieu" that also starts the chapter, he is able to discern how crucial Destreux was to his own self-identification. Phocas recites: " 'Un jour tu sentiras peut-être/Le prix d'un cœur qui vous comprend' Maintenant, je sais pourquoi j'ai pleuré" ("One day you will maybe realize/The importance of a heart that understands you' Now, I know why I cried") (295) (emphasis in original).

Noronsoff in *Le Vice errant* also takes on the perverted *erastes* role to the sons of the vampiric Shoboleska. Both children, Nicolas seventeen and Boris fourteen, are charming blonds with large violet eyes fringed with long lashes (Lorrain 1901b, 163). While the relationship between Shoboleska and the prince is described as fragile and precarious (166), her influence on his actions is undeniable but mitigated by the desire that he has for her two young sons (166). However, his intentions are not just paternal. During one of his famous soirées, he coquettishly plays with Nicolas' hair, his hand slowing down between each tightly sprung curl (171). Even Noronsoff's mother seems to fear the actions of her son, and even more so the complacency of Shoboleska who seems to be selling the innocence of her two boys wholesale (157).

With the arrival of Lord Férédith and Algernoon Filde to southern France, Noronsoff takes his love for Shoboleska's two boys even further, planning a party in the youngest boy's honor to impress his newest obsession, Lord Férédith (264). Pointing to the etymological analysis of Algernoon Filde's name (the first name of Swinburne (1837-1909) and an alteration of last name of Wilde), Gwenhaël Ponnau helps to elucidate the

homophile penchants of the prince as much as his attraction to the boy around whom the extravagant party will be constructed (Ponnau 113). This analysis could not be more helpful given Lorrain's love for the British poet Swinburne (D'Anthonay 74) and his personal association with the notorious homosexual British outcast. It is also Filde who seems to discover quite quickly the thinly veiled homosexuality of the prince. At their first meeting, while hawking Noronsoff with one eye, Filde compliments the beauty of Boris, the younger of the two Shoboleska boys (Lorrain 1901, 280). Filde immediately sees the glass-eyed stare that Noronsoff feverishly places on Boris after his compliment and concludes his cheeky scrutiny by whispering some poetic verse (actually an auto-citation from Lorrain poem, "Alexis" from *Sang des dieux* 1882) into Noronsoff's ear (280). The young prince is less than amused. The narrator states: "Noronsoff n'aima pas d'avoir été deviné par le poète" ("Noronsoff did not like having been figured out by the poet") (280).

However scandalized the prince is by the susurrant "outing," Noronsoff will however internalize the Greek association by planning the Riviera's most extravagant party to impress Lord Férédith, with the young Boris as Adonis, the main attraction. Indeed, it should come as no surprise then that Noronsoff's intentions for his spectacle are less than innocent, sexual undercurrents overshadowing any artistic surface objectives. Described as a pretext for nude expositions (293), some three hundred men and women (mostly from the outskirts of the Riviera's elitist areas) make up the procession. Moreover, Noronsoff oversees all the preparations of the spectacle including the mandatory twenty-minute nude examination of each and every hopeful participant. After exhaustive and round-the-clock preparations, the party will never take place,

Shoboleska having clandestinely planned every suggestion in order to financially and socially ruin and humiliate the prince. In the end, it is she who will marry Lord Férédith, keeping her two sons away from the party causing its ultimate failure and the subsequent bed-ridden state of the prince. Before his death, Noronsoff reveals to the doctor the toll that this life of “ennui” has had on him, calling himself one among others who were born “on the margins of life” (*à côte de la vie*) (333). A homosexual undercurrent is easily recognizable.

While the image of the *eromenos/erastes* relationship is more clearly visible in works that distinctively feature a younger male character, the ideological notions of Greek and Roman pederasty are certainly recognizable in Lorrain’s works even if aged beyond the years of their classic representation. In *Monsieur de Phocas*, the tripartite relationship between Phocas-Ethal-Welcôme shares with classical pederasty many traits that should be examined. While the relationship between Phocas and Ethal is ambiguously strained at best, in some sense Ethal does assuage the psychological and existential solitude of the forlorn Phocas, having been cast, Ethal states, from the same mold: “je connais votre cas, c’est le mien” (“I know your case, it’s mine”) (Lorrain 1901a, 87). As the remedies prescribed by Ethal border more and more on the strange and perverse, the link that connects the two characters constantly unhinges, developing into a pathetic version of opposing forces: mutual dependence and desired liberation. However, like the older *erastes* for the younger *eromenos*, Ethal’s instruction becomes necessary to Phocas’ self-understanding and therefore temporarily transcends the fear that it provokes: “Ce mystérieux causeur me raconte à moi-même, donne un corps à mes rêves, [...] *je m’éveille* en lui [...] et pourtant cette haine atroce et cette fureur de meurtre

qui grandissent” (104) (“This mysterious raconteur recites my own story to me, gives a body to my dreams, in him *I come to life* [...] and yet this atrocious hatred and murderous rage that is growing...”) (emphasis in original). Of course, to call this relationship a form of classical pederasty would be to pervert it, and this is precisely what Lorrain does. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Pausanias speaks to the endgame of the mutually beneficial relationship between the *erastes* and *eromenos* stating that “the lover (*erastes*) [is] capable of increasing wisdom and other aspects of goodness, the boy (*eromenos*) eager to learn and generally to aspects of goodness” (Plato 1994, 19). Rather than invert Phocas’ lascivious moral platform, the pederastic undertones of Ethal’s education invert the cure that it promises, making Phocas’ education a decline into immorality rather than an elevation into a socially acceptable morality.

This was however not the first youth that Ethal’s “education” perverted. It is Phocas who first explains the precarious link between his mentor and Thomas Welcôme, highlighting, above all, a nefarious complicity that leaves Welcôme irreparably scarred (Lorrain 1901a, 210). If the sexual innuendos concealed in Phocas’ explanation do not raise sufficient suspicion, Welcôme himself states that like the eponymous hero, he too knows the “infirmity” (*mal*) from which Phocas suffers and that rather than cure him, Ethal only exacerbated his case. The curious rhetoric that Welcôme uses to describe his past aggressor leaves little doubt to the diagnosis of Ethal as a closeted homosexual, stating that Ethal was less than a dilettante in terms of “vice” and “aberration” (212). Of course, the lexicon under which this description falls comes directly from the medicalized and social notions of homosexuality that emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century (Tardieu 1857; Davray 1895; Moreau 1887; Krafft-Ebing 1959).²⁶

It is not only Ethal however who has skeletons in his closet. The back-story of Sir Thomas Welcôme is shaded in mystery until Ethal, fearful of the attachment growing between former and current student, decides to reveal the reasons for Welcôme's current geographic situation, essentially attempting to pit *eromenos* against *eromenos*. Formally attached to an older and independently wealthy M. Burdhes with whom Welcôme and others celebrated the rituals of an unknown cult of the "Extreme" (Phocas 1901a, 266), the young Irishman soon found himself banished from London after Burdhes is found assassinated in a small house on the outskirts of the city. Skepticism soon arose since Welcôme was not only an affiliate of Burdhes' sect, as well as Burdhes' favorite student, but also set to inherit the victim's millions (267).²⁷

As opposed to the almost immediate attraction that Phocas has for the young Thomas Welcôme, handsome and with green and purplish-blue eyes (Lorrain 1901a, 188-9), Ethal is described as resembling the "duc d'Albe's dwarf" (99) painted by Antonio Moro (1517-1577) that Phocas would visit several times at the Louvre. Soon after their initial meeting at an opium-smoking soirée at Ethal's, Welcôme becomes not only Phocas' "golden boy," but also appropriates Ethal's role as teacher and therefore *erastes*. While younger than Phocas and therefore more fit for the *eromenos* role, Welcôme assumes the *erastes*' position of instruction, enlightening Phocas on the benefits of travel as a form of moral and social escapism, pedagogically contrasting himself with Ethal whose confrontational methods seem to only exacerbate Phocas' case. Robert Ziegler explains: "Welcome's [*sic*] promised remedy depends not on an impassioned commitment to a given course of action, but on constant movement and detachment from all places and all things" (Ziegler 1986, 315). Welcôme's philosophy is, of course,

similar to the idealist exoticism and Orientalism of which Said spoke (Said 1979), pointing to an “elsewhere” that shelters promised solutions to real problems. As Jennifer Birkett stated so well, the ideology of decadence in literature and society is often fraught with “imaginary solutions to real problems.” Indeed, the artists “sell their own desires to the populace as the image of a common dream, building on a thin foundation of historical fact the edifice of outrageous but seductive lies which is their own private fantasy” (Birkett 4). Welcôme lauds the therapeutic benefits of an itinerant existence stating that in order to cure the “sickness” that afflicts them both there is only one solution: “travel” (Lorrain 1901a, 222). Welcôme states: “Évitez les gens, évitez Ethal, étudiez les races; l’une d’elles vous donnera le regard que vous cherchez et vous trouverez dans celle-là votre âme” (“Avoid people, avoid Ethal, study races; in one of them you will find the regard for which you are searching and in that regard you will find your soul”) (222). The places that Welcôme suggests leave little guesswork as to the end goal of these “soul-searching” trips. Tunis, Alger, and Cairo were of course all associated with young male prostitution but also, for the discrete males that traveled there, represent an Orientalist reconstruction of Arcadian ideology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Said 1979; Aldrich 1993). It would seem then that Welcôme’s “cure” is actually an inverted version of Ethal’s: the latter prescribing asceticism from homosexual encounters whereas the former would in fact mandate the “disease” as a cure.

Lorrain’s connection to the Ancient theories and images associated with Greek and Roman pederasty are important for several reasons. First, the admixture of decadent perversity and idealized male same-sex relations of the Greek and Roman tradition provides a ideological model from which the authors of the third and fourth chapters of

this dissertation will pull to expound upon their homosexual ideologies. And while the neuroses of the Decadent movement will be for the most part abated in their works, authors like Achille Essebac and Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen will use the “perverted ephebe” as a foil to the image of the predatory pederast started by the Tardieu tradition (Tardieu 1857). Contemporarily speaking, Lorrain gave late nineteenth-century readers a new perspective on male same-sex relations and the homosexual, both in print and in reality, and while neuroses and decadent perversity weigh heavy in these representations, they are also a sign of the times, proving that humanity itself was tainted with the same aberrations earmarked for deviant sexuality (Pick 1989). In many ways, Lorrain’s most iconic works speak to the new normalcy, providing an extravagant backdrop that mirrored modern society’s newly antipositivist stance and nascent sexual and gender fluidity. With a cocked smile and a flamboyant pose Lorrain would say “Je ne suis qu’un miroir et l’on me veut pervers” (“One would like to see me as perverse and yet I am but a mirror”) (D’Anthonay 761).

¹ Later, after a chance meeting with sexologist Dr. Raffalovich, Huysmans would shrink back from his homosexual past, pointing to the beguiling nature of Lorrain who, he states, dragged him into “the world of sodomites” (D’Anthonay 422-3). After Huysmans’ conversion to Catholicism and the publication of his canonic work *À rebours*, the relationship between the author and Lorrain grew cold.

² The social movement that described an eclectic group of radicals who under general Georges Boulanger (1837-1891) capitalized on the frustrations of French conservatism and planted the seeds for French nationalism and modern socialism

³ I am using sexology as an umbrella term for a scientific movement started in the 1850’s that would later become the psychiatric, psychological, and psychoanalytic movements of the fin-de-siècle period. Under these sciences would be included the degenerative and hereditary movements of the 1870’s and 1880’s which were of extreme importance for talking about homosexuality.

⁴ It should be noted that some scientists did claim to have found physiological markers of mental alienation that would later hold little to no empirical weight (Dowbiggin 1991)

⁵ *Le Père Goriot* (1834) ; *Illusions perdues* (1837-1843) ; *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1834-1847)

⁶ for more on the sexual and gendered nonconformity of the dandy-esthete see the introduction; see also Birkett 1986; Garelick 1998

⁷ This idea also fits into the “defensive literary bisexuality” category explained in chapter 3 which examines the works of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen

⁸ Winn also points to the unpublished novella by Huysmans *La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran* (1888) as a possible starting point for the genesis of the name even though, as he points out, the two title characters hardly resemble each other; for more on homosexual vocabulary during the nineteenth century see: Courouve 1985.

⁹ As Sedgwick states, it is through desire that we might hypothesize the possible link between the homosexual and the homosocial (Sedgwick 1985, 1-2).

¹⁰ The publication points back to homosexuality since the dual was initiated because of Lorrain's accusations against Proust, exposing his possible homosexual penchants. But it also points to homosexuality because of the connection made between the decadent hero and the homosexual (Garelick 1998)

¹¹ for more on "performative discourses" see De Certeau 1984; Butler 1993

¹² For a good overview of the Decadent movement's literary forerunners see Praz 1951

¹³ For a good overview of this evolution see Oosterhuis 2000

¹⁴ For an article on silent homosexuality in Stevenson's short story see: Sanna 2012

¹⁵ a French translation appeared in 1895

¹⁶ The notion of Rabastens as an *officier de santé* would actually be a heavy critique on the notion of medicine at the time given that after the reorganization of the profession under the Law of 19 Ventôse Year XI (10 March 1803) proceeding the suppression of the medical faculties and the Société royale de médecine, the medical profession lost much of its former esteem and especially these newly appointed *officiers de santé* who received much less training and were represented as "country quacks" similar to Charles Bovary in *Madame Bovary*. For more information see Dowbiggin 1991 and Donaldson-Evans 2000

¹⁷ For a good description of Lorrain's appearance see Octave, Uzanne 1913

¹⁸ For many Europeans at the time, the Riviera, including Italy and Southern France were considered southern and therefore exoticized. See Aldrich 1993

¹⁹ Some Darwinian eugenicists, including Georges Vacher de Lapouge (1854-1936) would call for a scientific and futuristic utopia, a "biocratie" (Taguieff 81) in which the natural selection that exists in nature would be exercised by a governing elite, allowing for mandatory sterilization and castration of "indesirable beings" (84). One can only imagine that Noronsoff would be among this group.

²⁰ Trimalchio is a fictitious character in the *Satyricon* by Petronius. He plays a minor role in the section entitled *Cena Trimalchionis* in which this freed slave has obtained power and wealth and desires to show it off with lavish dinner parties. It should be noted that homosexual themes are present in the story

²¹ For information on homosexuality as a modern phenomenon see Foucault 1990

²² see chapters 3 and 4

²³ One of the more noteworthy examples of Flaubert's homosexuality comes from a letter that he wrote after a trip to Egypt and his own homosexual experience in a bathhouse with a "jeune gaillard grave de la petite vérole", he states "Ça m'a fait rire, voilà tout. Mais je recommencerais. Pour qu'une expérience soit bien faite, il faut qu'elle soit réitérée." ("It made me laugh, that's all. But I would do it again. In order to do something right, you must do it a second time.") (Cited in Winn, 93)

²⁴ For more information on the instruction of the eromenos see Ludovic 1976 ; Dover 1989 ; Williams 1999

²⁵ see introduction and Ludovic 1976

²⁶ Of course, these terms were also used for centuries to describe homosexual behavior by the church. See Greenberg 1988

²⁷ While no murder was directly involved, the story of Welcôme-Burdhes echoes the Wilde-Douglas scandal of 1895 in an inverted form: Wilde being the older version of Welcôme, Douglas the younger version of Burdhes. After all, Lorrain was no stranger to scandal having written against Huysmans in *Le Journal* during the Fersen scandal of 1903, blaming the writer for having perverted the young Fersen's mind with stories of black masses (Huysmans *Là-bas*, 1891) in a series entitled "Le Poison de la littérature: Messes Noires" (D'Anthonay 846). The connection between Lorrain and Fersen is also a point of interest especially since, as Winn notes, Welcôme seems to be modeled in his flamboyantly extravagant image (Winn 190).

Chapter 3: Scandalous Sexualities: The Baron Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen and the World of Apologetic Impropriety

"To regret one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the soul"--Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

Son of Louise Emilie Alexandrine Vührer (1855-1935) and Axel d'Adelswärd (1847-1887), Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen was born on 20 February 1880. His heritage dates back to the Baron Georges Axel d'Adelswärd, a Swedish officer who was captured by the French in 1793 and imprisoned in Longwy. While there, he married the daughter of a French notary who was the oldest cousin of Count Hans Axel von Fersen. Von Fersen was aide-de-camp to General Rochambeau who fought with the French troops in the American War of Independence. Later, while positioned as a diplomat, Von Fersen helped to arrange the escape from Versailles to Varennes for the French royal family in 1791, not surprising since he was rumored to be Marie-Antoinette's lover and kept a lengthy correspondence with her throughout the trials and tribulations of the 1789 Revolution and the Terror (Andress 68-9). Jacques' grandfather, Renauld-Oscar d'Adelswärd (1811-1898), found an iron and steel industry in Longwy-Briey, bringing welfare to a floundering district and later wealth to Jacques in the form of a hefty inheritance. In 1848, Renauld-Oscar d'Adelswärd was appointed deputy for the Meurthe district in the National Assembly in Paris and befriended another deputy and none other

than *Les Misérables* writer, Victor Hugo. After the coup d'état in 1851, he and Hugo spent time together in exile on the island of Jersey (Ogrinc 2006).

According to Roger Peyrefitte, author of the highly investigated but fictional biography of the author, *L'Exilé de Capri* (1959), Jacques' youth was split between insouciant summer hazes and dysfunctionally organized school years. More in tune with the capricious spirit of the young child, the summer months were spent with guardian and family friend Viscount [Elie Marie] Audoin de Dampierre who accompanied the youth on outdoor vacations with his grandfather on Jersey. It was during one of these vacations that Fersen would meet an unidentified blond Eton schoolboy to whom he dedicates the poem "Treize ans" in the volume *Chansons légères. Poèmes de l'enfance* (1901) and with whom he would experience his first intimate (homoerotic) relations. For most of the year, Fersen lived in Paris, partly in boarding schools and partly, after his father's death, with his mother and two sisters, Germaine Juliette Fernande (1884-1973) and Jeanne Yvonne Marguerite (called "Solange," 1866-1942). Fersen also had a brother, who died young, and is remembered in a poem entitled *in memoriam*.

During his secondary school years Fersen lived an itinerant academic existence, ping ponging between the ivory towers of Parisian education: the Collège Sainte-Barbe-aux-Champs, the Lycée Michelet in Vanves, the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly, the Collège Rochefort, and the École Descartes. While an explication for the seemingly endless string of schools that Fersen attended is not given, one might deduce from Fersen's character as a decadent, narcissistic non-conformist that he might have been a difficult study and certainly would have been a challenge for his teachers. His collection of poems entitled *L'Hymnaire d'Adonis* (1902) audaciously captures the boredom and

humdrum nature of his boarding school years as well as the dubious “homosociality” (Sedgwick 1985) of his contacts and adventures with his fellow (male) classmates.

Understandably, given the flurry of beguiling activities that bustled behind the scholastic scene, Fersen had initial difficulties obtaining his baccalaureate to go to university. When he did, Fersen enrolled in school in Geneva and in 1898 published his first collection of poems, *Contes d'amour* (1898). Hesitating between a career in diplomacy and politics, he took courses at the *École des Sciences Morales et Politiques* at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Subsequently, he was able to live a seemingly carefree lifestyle, at least monetarily, after receiving a healthy inheritance at the death of his grandfather. At first, his devil-may-care existence catered to his madcap personality. However, Fersen desired a name in literature, something his works alone were not able to procure him. Seemingly adrift in competing currents of a galvanizing but feckless youth and a desire for formal notoriety, Fersen eddied around Parisian literary salons, attempting to anchor himself in its notorious literary circuit. After his first two publications, a miscellaneous volume of poetry appeared *Ébauches et débauches* (1901), followed by a novel *Notre-Dame des mers mortes* (1902) inspired by his trip to Venice.

A lamentable twist of fate, Fersen would achieve the notoriety he so desired after a 1903 scandal involving Parisian schoolboys at his home on 18 avenue Friedland. The scandal marks such a turning point in the writer's life that the third part of this chapter will be entirely dedicated to it and its aftermath.

While the scandal cost Fersen much of his reputation, his fiancée, and the scorn of his family, it did however lead to a self-revelation that would prove invaluable to his life.

After his release on 3 December 1903 and his failed attempts at reconciliation with his fiancée, Blanche de Maupéou, Fersen decided to leave France. He chose Capri, an island known for the community of artists, expatriates, and infamous homosexuals (André Gide, Oscar Wilde, Lord Alfred Douglas, the Marquis Donatien Alphonse de Sade) who had previously fled there or called its shores home (Aldrich 1993). Fersen purchased land in a small valley known as Unghia Murana opposite the ruins of Tiberius' palace, Roman emperor from 14 to 37 AD. After an accident involving a local worker employed in the construction of the aptly named Villa Lysis (Fersen's residence) caused Fersen to flee Capri, he met a fourteen-year-old construction worker selling newspapers while in Rome. The beauty, charm, and youth of Nino Cesarini instantly magnetized the inexperienced author and he convinced the boy's parents to allow them to return to Capri together, Nino serving as Fersen's secretary. This was the start of a life-long relationship that only ended with the author's death.

In 1905, the pair visited Sicily, stopping in Taormina to visit the photographer the Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden (1856-1931), known for his Grecian accounts of classically adorned and nude Sicilian boys. According to Peyrefitte, it was during this time that Fersen met with Kuno von Moltke (1847-1923) and Philipp zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld (1847-1921), the two unlucky Germans who two years after the Fersen scandal would make their own headlines in the German press after "gotcha politics" outed them as covert homosexuals under the then Kaiser Wilhelm II (Vargo 2003).¹ In 1906, Nino and Fersen left for China, a trip that would not begin but certainly fast track Fersen's growing addiction to opium. He returned with a collection of 300 pipes (Ogrinc 2006).

The harridan to Jacques' now nostalgic youth, adulthood brought with it the nagging effects of social morality. It also brought the realization of an ever-present age gap between him and his constant companion, Nino, allowing jealous paranoia to chip away at the bedrock of their relationship. This fear, however, was not necessary misplaced. During a trip to Venice, Nino met Alexandrine (Sasha) Ricoy Antokolsky, who eventually followed him back to Capri and tried to seduce him. Fersen fought back in a collection of poems entitled *Ainsi chantait Marsyas* (1907) vociferously attacking Sasha and reminding Nino of the dangers of capricious whims with females.

After the appearance of the novel *Et le Feu s'éteignit sur la mer...*(1909), an all too poignant critique of the Caprese residents and their often hostile thirst for gossip, a formal decision was made to pursue the expulsion of the author from the island. Given the choice to leave or to be exiled, Fersen chose the former and returned to France. There, he would dedicate his time to the literary review *Akadémos. Revue mensuelle d'art libre et de critique* (January 1909-December 1909), which might be considered France's first gay journal. This journal will be examined in detail in the fourth section of this chapter.

As World War I loomed over the European continent, Fersen was asked to present himself for military service. However, due to an extensive penchant for opium, he was found unfit for military service and was hospitalized for addiction where he secretly substituted one vice for another and started taking cocaine. Released from treatment but declared incurably ill, he returned to Villa Lysis where he resumed his old habits. *Hei Hsiang. Le Parfum noir* (1921), his last published volume of poetry would be dedicated entirely to his uncontrollable taste for opium. It was at the Villa, in 1923, that a mixture

of cocaine and champagne would eventually kill the author, pronounced a suicide by most commentators even though the doctor who signed the death certificate, Dr. Gatti, gives a heart attack as the official cause of death (Ogrinc 2006).

This chapter will be divided into three sections. In the first, “View From the ‘Other’ Closet: Poetic Passion and ‘Defensive’ Bisexuality in the Works of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen,” I will explore the nature of bisexuality in the author’s works and discuss whether bisexuality might be considered an ideological scapegoat rather than a sexual orientation in the life and works of the author. It is in this section that I also examine Fersen’s works as a defense mechanism serving to covertly express as they dissimulate an all too obvious homosexuality, a concept employed by many other homosexual authors of the time. In the second section, “Sex, Love and Other Drugs: The 1903 Scandal That Rocked and Secured Fersen’s Career,” I examine the nature of homosexual scandal, Fersen’s in particular, in the media and its effects on homosexual culture whether social or literary. By looking at the poetry and novels produced in the wake of this scandal, I argue that Fersen mediates an in depth analysis of how (homo)sexuality at the time functioned when straight-armed by the iron-fisted bourgeois morality of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The third and final section, “Band of Brothers: Fersen, *Akadémos*, and France’s First Gay (?) Journal,” examines the twelve-month run of the journal created by Fersen in an attempt to rehabilitate “l’autre amour,” as he states. This section will explore whether *Akadémos* should be considered France’s first “gay” journal and if not how to analyze it within French gay history.

View From the “Other” Closet? : Poetic Passion and “Defensive” Bisexuality in the Works of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen

“The degree and kind of a man’s sexuality reach up
into the ultimate pinnacle of his spirit”

--Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Perhaps one of the most interesting and most frustrating themes in the works of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen, and many other fin-de-siècle authors who wrote about homosexuality, is the constant struggle between a love of boy and woman. Ostensibly, Fersen’s initial engagement to Blanche de Maupéou only crumbled under the progressively oppressive weight of the 1903 “black mass” scandal and its aftermath. Be that as it may, the relationship between Fersen and Maupéou was constructed on the shifting sands of a “bisexual”² orientation, about which, we must imagine, Blanche was all too aware but to which, at least initially, she decided to turn a blind eye (Peyrefitte 1959). Soon after, his life-long relationship with Nino Cesarini was, at least in theory, hedged by the same platonically based ascetic and pedagogic pederasty that seasoned his, Achille Essebac, André Gide and many other homosexual authors’ literary works during this period. However, this ascetically driven sexual ideology is certainly incredulous when understood in the long term. So incredulous in fact that many of Fersen’s contemporaries would, in literary passages of their own, pepper his life with, on the “puritanical” end of the spectrum, calumnious lies, and on the more raucous end, Sadesque intrigues.³

If the end of Fersen's life was punctuated by a long-term male same-sex relationship as well as several minor male same-sex deviations from his beloved Caesarinian theme, it might seem unimportant to look more closely at the bisexual language found in Fersen's works, casting it aside as so many nugatory ripples in an otherwise groundswell of homosexual rhetoric. Even with his marriage plans to Blanche de Maupéou, it is hard to read Fersen, works and life, and not interpret blatant homosexuality. One might even hypothesize, as I would, that Fersen was most likely not bisexual and that the bisexual rhetoric found in his works was more a literary and social proxy. Indeed, even as early as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sexual orientation could be placed in Gordon Allport's lexicon of "labe[ls] of primary potency" (Allport 1954), and therefore needed to be carefully navigated in society. Ultimately, rather than being the externalized expression of a "historical," "sequential," or "concurrent" bisexuality (Klein 1978),⁴ I will argue that speaking in terms of bisexuality for Fersen but also for many other homosexual authors allowed for some semblance of normalcy through partial sexual foreclosure.

If deviance is the response of a privileged social group to a behavior rather than a quality of a specific individual (Becker 1963), so adopting bisexual rhetoric in some cases might be interpreted as the tutelary response by authors such as Fersen to claims of homosexual deviance rather than a qualifier of sexual orientation. In other words, to borrow a term used by Robyn Ochs in her article "Biphobia: It goes more than two ways," authors like Fersen might have been assuming a form of "defensive" bisexuality (Ochs 1999)⁵ by which their sexuality was presented as at once a covert cipher and an aboveboard panegyric. This is not to claim, like Edmund Bergler that bisexuality is

essentially the nonadmission of homosexuality, or rather to use Bergler's phraseology "a state that has no existence beyond the word itself" (Bergler 80). Ultimately, unlike today, where the opposite might be true (Ochs 1996; Hall and Pramaggiore 1996), bisexuality at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, even among men, was much more tolerable than homosexuality.⁶ Indeed, bisexuality might have seemed the perfect situational sexual orientation allowing for an ephemeral foreclosure of homosexuality at certain periods where male same-sex relations might have been too sexually explicit for those most subject to social vituperation.

Published in 1902, *Notre-Dame des mers mortes* tells the story of the twenty-year-old esthete Jacques de Liéven who comes to Venice for poetic inspiration and is certainly, at least in some sense, autobiographical. Indeed, the main protagonist, like the author, spends the better part of his youth an intern in various Parisian *collèges*, loses his father at a young age, and is from Sweden (Fersen 1902, 36-7). Also like the author, Jacques' bisexuality is placed in contest with a more elusive but equally appropriated homosexuality that haunts him throughout the narration.

At first sight, during a night at the theater, Jacques associates Contarinetta with the desire for a love that would transcend the corporeal. A descendent of the ancient Venetian doges but stripped of all titles by an avaricious bloodline, Contarinetta has been forced to sell all her belongings to survive, too proud to ask for help from others. Perhaps more pitiful than the story of her past, Contarinetta is blind, forced to white cane the Italian streets. While hawking Contarinetta at the theater, Jacques associates the blind girl's expressionless gaze with the need for love; a need that he states has haunted him (28). Moreover, the knowledge of her blindness and the vision of her as she admirably

strives to visualize the performers through their vocals provokes in him an equally invasive pity which the narrator states is the purest form of love (29). The question the story advances then is not how did love haunt him, but which love and what form this ill-defined love might have taken?

As Jacques contends with his woolly emotions towards Contarinetta, his stifled personal history resurges throughout the story in billows of nostalgic “memories of love” (*souvenirs d’amour*) described as his first and the most chaste (22). These memories are all expressed through the intimate attachments that developed with his male friends from *lycée*. Ultimately like the “ephemeral homosexuality” described by Achille Essebac,⁷ these “lost loves” (40-1) between young boys would deceive him, time and age qualifying them as capricious and socially defunct. Soon after, Jacques remembers his last trip to Venice where, like for Achille Essebac in *Partenza....vers la beauté!*, gazing at youthful males becomes a source of ultimate pleasure (51). Conversely, seeded in intimate suffering, the joy of seeing the young Venetian boys is juxtaposed with the self-revelation that he was alone (51). Ultimately, Jacques’ ideal of love is based in the past, in these “memories of love” (all with other males) and therefore can only linger in the present through memories and in theory (52). Infused with common homosexual tropes that are spiced by all too conspicuous references to the orientation of the protagonist’s sexual desire, Jacques’ story seems to mirror the temporal caveat that Lord Lyllian will place on homosexual love in Fersen’s 1905 social satire *Messes noires: Lord Lyllian*, which states that age makes homosexuality vulgar (Fersen 1905, 200).

It is not surprising then that the feeling of pity that Jacques, no longer in the flower of his youth, reserves for Contarinetta evolves into a type of love. A proclaimed

esthete, Jacques explains his ideology on love as a cult for anything beautiful, anything that suffers (Fersen 1902, 95). Ultimately, Jacques will renounce sensual love because, the narrator states, the most intense love is a love that forgoes (139). Comparable to the platonic ideals (Ludovic 1976) that Fersen will make the backbone of his descriptions of male same-sex desire and which he would use in his defense during the 1903 trial, the love between Jacques and Contarinetta in *Notre-Dame des mers mortes* also advances the theories on (homo)sexual abnegation that would be primordial to André Gide's homosexual apologia *Corydon*.⁸

Understanding Jacques' ascetic love as a type of rejection, Contarinetta shies away from their relationship, eventually exposing herself to a broken heart and consumption. With her death, Jacques succumbs to the fear of living a life without his feminine safety net and violently commits suicide (315-16). Written a year before the 1903 scandal, this fiction runs parallel to Fersen's own tragic love story with Blanche de Maupéou, who like her fictitious counterpart, seemingly blind to the all too obvious homosexuality of her fiancé, places all her bets on a fragile house of cards one play away from tumbling.

If *Notre-Dame des mers mortes* is a contemporary example of the interpretive instability of writing bisexuality against a largely homosexual past and a present based on a prescribed asceticism, *Le Baiser de Narcisse* (1907) explains fluid sexuality through Greek and Roman mythology. Milès, the protagonist of the tale, spent the majority of his youth in the gynaeceum under the care of Séir, a robust athlete whose tunic we are told, he preferred to his mothers caresses. Like the eponymous mythological hunter, Milès' beauty provokes both awe and veneration. He is compared to a stunning apparition in

whom youthful fragility takes the place of masculine virility (Fersen 1912, 7). Too fragile for the life to which his father-master would destine him (trader, warrior, athlete), Milès conforms more to Ulrich's formulation for homosexuality—*anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*—so common in homosexual turn-of-the-century rhetoric: a woman's soul trapped in a man's body (8).

More suited to the frock than the sword, Milès travels to Attalée to enter into a mystical sect at “Adonis-aux-mains-d'ivoire” where young epebe-like priests are scantily dressed in pellucid cloaks that show off their juvenile and muscular forms (15). After the sacrifice of a fifteen-year-old boy, Milès' body is subjected to the oiled and perfumed hands of the initiators. Through this exotic ritual of corporeal exploration that results in a “blinding extasy” for Milès (17-8) the space between the homosocial bonds of fraternity and homosexual desire is definitively blurred (17-8). When his naked body is finally exposed, he attracts the attention of a young male participant, Enacrios, who quickly becomes his friend, united by what the narrator calls a “secret affinity” (25). However, like Jacques in *Notre-Dame des mers mortes*, Milès falls for a feminine handicap, in both senses of the term. This young girl, called “the little limper,” is described as horribly unsightly, save for her magnificent eyes (28). After a chance kiss between the two, Enacrios commits suicide provoking the protagonist's self-exile.

En route to Byblos, Milès is taken prisoner and sold in a slave market to the famous architect Scopas, known for his scandalous morals (47). Freed because he is beautiful, Milès is placed in the care of artist Ictinus where his exotic beauty enslaves him to the artist's desires. Enhancing the bisexual rhetoric in the story, Milès' beauty is placed in contest with Briséis', a roman courtesan described as beautiful like the Virgin

(57). While both models inspire the artist, Briséis, as the Virgin, is absolved of all sexuality whereas Milès' body is full of sensuality (57). However the attention Milès receives from Scopas, Ictinus, and Briséis, is according to him misplaced and unbidden. For the young boy, nothing but egotistical lust infringes on his body (67). Ironically, for being so beautiful, his search is not for earthly pleasures but rather an ungendered connection that transcends physicality. Reaffirming the bisexual rhetoric of the tale, he states: "mais qu'il paraisse, celui-là que j'attends, ou qu'elle s'éveille, celle-ci dont je songe" ("let him appear, the one (masculine) for whom I wait, let her awaken, the one (feminine) about which I dream") (68).

Beauty in this story, like in the mythological tale on which it is based, becomes more a curse than a blessing. A combination of the original myth and a variation on Pausanias' (110-180) version, the story culminates in a tournament where among the participants of Briséis' dance, a young adolescent stands out from the crowd, so similar to Milès, one would have said his twin. Enamored by his own image, Milès approaches the young double and kisses him. A bit trite and calculable, the two flee together provoking the suicide of Scopas and Briséis' ultimate dementia. The fate of the two lovers, however, is already written into the unfortunate title of the story. One night while bent over a rock to better see his reflection in the water, Milès slips and drowns in the river.

It is certainly not surprising that the novel is dedicated to "N.(ino) C.(esarini)" given that it was also at this time (1907) that the somewhat surreptitious relationship between Fersen's long-time lover and the Sicilian import, Alexandrine (Sasha) Ricoy Antokolsky, began. The novel clearly translates Fersen's own frustration with his young lover whose emotional indifference towards him might have stood out against the fresh

interest provoked by Sasha. Moreover, the tripartite relationship in the novel (the young double-Milès-Briséis) and in life (Fersen-Nino-Sasha) brings to the fore the complicated contemporary misgivings of assuming homosexuality completely, hovering between temporally fettered sexualities, and the difficulty of ignoring a socially prescribed heterosexuality.

While the rhetoric that speaks to sexuality and desire in *Notre-Dame* and *Le Baiser* is certainly amenable to a biographical interpretation, ultimately it is expressed through fictional accounts. Fersen's poetry however exposes a much more personal ideology on how desire functions through socially exposed sexual orientations. "La Légende Passionnée," the first section of Fersen's 1901 publication *Ebauches et débauches* touts a heterosexual love constructed by society that both troubles and intoxicates (Fersen 1901, 3). Like all the relationships with women in his novels, the love that Fersen describes in this first set of poems is idealized in an ascetic setting, described as virginal and Virgilian (15). While sexually bridled, this does not however mean that these were emotionless relationships. It is clear from the poetry that Fersen experienced a much-hated emotional indifference from the feminine side of society. Ostensibly, this was caused by the constant rumors about his well-known sexual penchant for boys, something he himself exposed in his works.⁹ He speaks directly to this in one of the poems:

Qu'ai-je fait sinon t'aimer ? [...] Tu écoutes parler l'hypocrisie et le mensonge comme si leur rire engendrait des fleurs. Qu'il y-a-t-il (sic) de bas à aimer [...] Probablement celles qui t'ont détournée de tes résolutions

premières ignorent totalement en quoi réside le Beau, le Vrai, le Bien...(Fersen 1901, 20)

What have I done if not to love you? [...] You listen to hypocrisy and lies as if their laugh made flowers grow. How can love be considered vile [...] Probably, those (in the feminine) who made you change your mind were the first to totally ignore exactly what is Beauty, Truth, Goodness...

While the feminized “tu” remains anonymous throughout the poems, the poem’s purpose is much more identifiable. Writing becomes at once an emotional outlet for Fersen’s suffering as well as (a) literary proof of his (bi)sexuality. Indeed, the poems in this collection attempt to categorically dismiss all fears as to his amative choice by speaking to his desire for women, as well as antithetically reveal so many stages in the resolution of conflicting emotions by exposing his hatred for women and his desire for boys. Published well before the 1903 scandal, the poems in *Ébauches and débauches* open the door onto a life plagued by sexual-orientation-based slander and confusion that seemed to distance women from him as well as force Fersen to poetically attach them to him. What these poems do then is weld together the idea and expression of bisexuality as well as the disclosure and production of homosexual discourse revealing an interesting continuity between the two sexual orientations.

Indeed, while Fersen’s bisexuality is a literary defense rather than an actual sexual orientation, the idea behind bisexuality, as Loraine Hutchins points out in “Bisexuality: Politics and Community,” can “distur[b] the set of assumptions that sexual orientations and attractions are binary, exclusive, either-or categories” (Hutchins 241). Indeed,

Michael du Plessis also comments on bisexuality's ability to change social perceptions stating: "Bisexuality challenges given notions of how sexual communities or so-called sexual 'minorities' are formed" (du Plessis 41). Of course this idea of the fluidity of sexuality and the social and ideological effects it has, especially in relation to bisexuality, already finds its place in the fin-de-siècle mindset as espoused by social and psychiatric theorists (Ellis 1934, 42; Freud 1940, 2010; Krafft-Ebing 1959, 1999). By contributing to bisexuality's social depiction through his works, Fersen is complicit in both challenging nineteenth and early-twentieth-century bourgeois notions of rigid sexual categorization (Aron 1978) but also, for many of his works that feature bisexual rhetoric, in highlighting the frustrating spaces between sexualities revealed through his own personal sexual evolution.

If homo- and bisexuality are not mutually exclusive orientations for Fersen but rather so many versions of a poeticized sexual ideology, it is interesting then that he never rhetorically marries them in his poetry, always poeticizing women and boys independantly. This is important since their separation in verse could reveal an unintended contradiction in Fersen's theory on love and eros, or a more ostensive contradiction between poetic theory and actual practice in regards to (bi)sexuality. One of the most arresting poetic antitheses in Fersen's body of poetry is the invariant weaving together of his love/hate relationship with women. In a poem entitled "Il est si doux d'écrire" in the collection *Les Cortèges qui sont passés* (1903), Fersen exalts the joy of writing while thinking of his feminine lover, especially the escapist discourse that seems to emanate from her eyes (Fersen 1903, 39). Of course, the desire to escape (his feelings for women) could certainly be read into a homosexual interpretation of this poem but is

not the intent at the moment. In the same collection in a poem entitled “La Haine,” Fersen performs a poetic about-face, stating his contempt for the “gueuse” (“beggar woman”) that makes him suffer in love, threatening to crush her insolent breasts under the weight of his fingers (55-6). Women for Fersen are less realistic love interests and more the ideal of an impossible sexual orientation. Or rather, because women are intrinsically bound up within the compulsory heterosexual discourse (Rich 1980) inherent to bourgeois society in late-nineteenth-century France, a discourse that also guides in some sense Fersen’s sexual expression, frustration is inherent to his poems which translate a socially challenged sexual orientation and necessary reorientation towards the female sex. Indeed, this is the reason, it would seem, that his emotions towards women are so fungible in his poetry. They are at once something prescribed by society, but equally proscribed by his homosexuality. Ultimately love, as bourgeois heterosexual society defines it, is a lie and only a “retour au passé, une vie nouvelle reposant sur une vieille croyance, sur un idéal déjà très ancien” (“return to the past, a new life based on an old belief, on an ideal already ancient”) (Fersen 1903, 14) can make love understandable.

Similar to Achille Essebac’s cult of beauty and the Greek and Roman ideology on which it is based (Ludovic 1976; Dover 1989), love and desire in Fersen’s poetry are often defined through aesthetics. Or as Fersen states, love is beauty in whatever form that beauty takes (Fersen 1903, 48). What this belief in the gravitational pull of beauty does is replace the bipolar points of homo- and heterosexuality with a continuum of fluctuating desire ultimately avoiding a mutually exclusive situation. Indeed, plaiting together the rhetorical threads of discourses on homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality, leaves, in different sections of Fersen’s poetry and his works, loose ends that

synchronously foreground situational sexualities throughout the work rather than a globally concrete sexual orientation. Or to say it another way, through an intricate brocade of sexually fluid rhetoric, Fersen's poetry never qualifies a conclusive sexual orientation and therefore gives the allusion of an admitted bisexuality. This does not however mean that the presentation of sexuality through sexual fluidity, asceticism, or aesthetics is without a nagging heteronormative backdrop.

A combination of theoretical form and function, "Le Mâle" from *Ébauches* describes the difficult situation that a bisexual presentation can pose for men of Fersen's time. Gabriel Cheneville, a literary throwback to the melancholic romantics of the early nineteenth century, struggles with a repressed penchant for men that resurfaces over the course of the story, forcing the protagonist to prove his own heterosexuality through the rape of a woman. Living a life, in theory, based on a sexual asceticism, Gabriel feels safe from the pangs of carnal desires (264). His ideology is steeped in the idealistic notions of Greek and Roman pederasty where love is a love for Beauty: a combination of spirit and form devoid of lust (264) (Ludovic 1976). However, like the contradictory nature of many homosexual authors' sexual ideologies based on these ascetic theories (including Fersen and Gide), ascetic philosophy and sexual practice in this story run on contradictory but parallel plains of thought and action.

Desiring to get away from Paris, Gabriel settles on a house in Meudon, outside of the city in the southwest suburbs of Paris. But this house will offer him no refuge from his internal desires. Full of paintings that represent vice and moral calamities that he both fears and to which he is drawn (269), Gabriel is forced to face the lustful physicality that he has promised to avoid. As he reads a Virgiliennesque poem by Malherbes that touts the

beauty of a young shepherd seduced and sexually explored by the sirens, Gabriel cannot help but identify with as he shamefully lusts after the young shepherd. But it is not the poem itself that shadows him with shame, nor the masturbatory practices to which the narration hints during his reading (272), but rather the connection that he makes between the desire that the poem provokes and the past love letters that that he remembers sending and receiving after he left secondary school (272). And while the gender of the recipients of these love letters are not mentioned, the poetic provocation that incites the memory of them—the young shepherd—leaves little doubt that the recipients of Gabriel's letters were masculine.

Not sure of how to mediate these feelings, he goes to church where the necessity to perform acts of contrition forces him to survey his past transgressions hoping to relieve himself of any impure moments. Religion, however, proves incapable to help him and as eroticism overwhelms his nerves (282-3) he loses consciousness falling on the marble floor. His malady is explained as a blackout caused by the excessive heat, however Gabriel seems all too capable of understanding the crux of the problem. Once alone, he sits and cries (280). At twenty-years-old, the memories of the infinite episodes from his formative years—exchanged regards, letters, kisses—return to haunt his virginal body (292). Incapable of assuming an all too conspicuous homosexuality, he pounces on an unsuspecting woman in the park, rips off her skirt, and throws it to the ground as he spasms on top of her motionless body (295). Nonplussed and disgusted by his own actions, Gabriel runs off, we are told, like an animal (296). Indeed, the end of the story then points not away from but through homo- and bisexuality and towards the dangers provoked by compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). Ultimately, through the story

Fersen exposes the dangers of a prescribed asceticism, a closeted homosexuality, as well as the even more dangerous influence of heteronormative sexual culture in nineteenth-century bourgeois France.

Similar to the Essebacian idea that Art has the ability to beautify what one might consider savage (Essebac in *La Jeune champagne*, 88), Fersen's ideological belief in the transformative power of art seems to be anchored in the idea of exposure as a possible prejudice neutralizer. And while the majority of his early works rely on a sexual tug-of-war between homo- and heterosexuality with a never pronounced but always readable bisexuality hanging between, one year before the scandal that would change his life Fersen decided to dedicate an entire volume of poetry to the topic that would be at once his ultimate salvation and destruction: young boys. *L'Hymnaire d'Adonis* (1902) is a collection of poetic verses dedicated entirely to the nostalgic adventures of his youth with young boys, to the gatherings that would cause his ultimate arrest in 1903, and to the memory and beauty of an age lost to time, revitalized in his writings.

A veritable panegyric to masculine youth and the male body, *L'Hymnaire*, like the introductory works of Achille Essebac, laments the loss of the Attican religion of Beauty (Fersen 1902, 1-2). Also like Essebac's works, *L'Hymnaire* creates a contradictory discourse surrounding homosexuality presenting it as at once naturally occurring, sexual, sensual, aesthetic, and ascetic. The poems, while they may seem self-loathing in a grand sense, are much more about constructing a web of support and exposure through colorful and erotic exchanges of information that, he states, will not be "unfamiliar" (73) to those who read him. Works like these then contribute to the queer "culture-building" practices of which Michael Warner speaks in *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Warner 1993).

Certainly an *aigre douce* figure, the beauty of the young boy is at once “liberating” (Fersen 1902, 45), the “poison” (57), and the divine pain (6) from which the homosexual suffers. And while love with a female is never an actual option—their flesh described as poison to the soul (22)—male same-sex relations are no closer to reality. Like for Achille Essebac, homosexuality for Fersen exists in “missed occasions,” (*occasions manquées*) like in “Sketch” where, although the scene is admittedly sensual, the young lover slips off without a goodbye or the shepherd leaves at dusk before any sexual act can be completed (72, 21). Certainly to avoid scandal, in the majority of the poems in which a more sexual tint is evident, the protagonists, like in Achille Essebac’s *Dédé*, are both of the same young age. Indeed, in “Réveil,” a poem that describes the mutual masturbation of two young adolescents, both boys are thirteen-years-old (66). The section, *Les Cendres de tes yeux*, an obvious nod to adolescent masturbation (Garnier 1885), discusses the more sexual nature of the French school system for boys. For Fersen, it is a time to celebrate, where love is divine because young. Could he have partaken in an unspoken love when he was young, he wonders now at twenty? (Fersen 1902, 110) His answer to the question provokes skepticism. Rather than partake of the fever that the love of a young boy causes him (115), he will trick himself with a young girl, a reflexive jolt back to the “defensive” bisexuality found in many of his other works. Immediately after, Fersen remembers the dormitory at thirteen. Ignoring the neurotic tag that adults would place on his behavior, he and another boy enjoyed each other’s company (118). To what degree, we are not told. With hindsight however, Fersen understands the innocence with which these two young sexual explorers experienced their desire and the prejudice they will ultimately face as adults.

While deeply inmeshed in Fersen's sexual ideology, bisexuality should not however be read as specifically indicative of sexual orientation. Rather, Fersen's works should be read as an experiential and experimental space, where the author feels safe to express love and desire, often cloaked in a wavering sexual indecision. Indeed, by wielding "bisexuality" as a defining category not distinct from but concurrent with homo- and heterosexuality, Fersen gains some sort of definitional leverage over the range of sexualities possible between males, between males and females, and within male sociability. Fersen would, of course, not be the only author to do this. Following the works of Achille Essebac, the German homosexual reactionaries (Oosterhuis 1991), and serving as a precursor to several of the themes on which André Gide would elaborate, Fersen annexes his works to those whose sexual ideology foreclosed an absolute admission of homosexuality, preferring to soften definitiveness with situational and defensive nonconformity.

Sex, Love, and Other Drugs: The 1903 Scandal That Rocked and Secured Fersen's Career

"La lune oublie, les étoiles
oublient, mais les hommes n'oublient pas"

Roger Peyrefitte, *L'Exilé de Capri*

Nestled in the Tyrrhenian Sea on the south side of the Gulf of Naples, Capri, an insular refuge that boasts such famous visitors as Roman Emperor Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus (42 B.C.E-37C.E), is known for more than just its august caverns and sapphire-blue grottos. In mythology, it was the island of the sirens, those nefarious temptresses who lured sun-drunk sailors towards certain shipwreck with their enchanting voices. In

history, it was a secluded paradise known by its visitors for its liberalist morals and hedonistic ideology. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those whose pockets were deep enough to enjoy its splendors ventured out of metropolitan Europe to enjoy all that the island had to offer. One such tourist, a wealthy German business tycoon, Friedrich Alfred Krupp (1854-1902), traveled to Capri in 1902 to immerse himself in this isolated wonderland's wine culture, rugged landscape, friendly locals, and most specifically beautiful boys. These young Adonis' were not only a throwback to the idealist images celebrated in such mythologically based sculptures as Michelangelo's *Apollo belvedere*. They were also known to be sexually available to the foreign visitors that graced the shores of the island looking for an escape from the sobering morality of most late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century social policies. Krupp was one such tourist. Before long, his insatiable appetite for the local delicacies of the island became a problem and he was officially banished.

One militant political faction known as the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (German Social Democratic Party), attempting to gain ground in the German social arena, hoped to point out the sexually deviant elephant in the room of the moneyed elite exposing and therefore linking homosexuality with "corruption" in this specific segment of the social sphere. Friedrich Alfred Krupp became one of the first victims of this nascent social practice of public gay outing. Through the left-wing newspaper, *Vorwärts* (*Forward*), Krupp's sexual indiscretions on the island of Capri, including the reason for his exile and his social improprieties in Germany, went public. Nonplussed by the clarion reproof of the journal and its readers, Krupp desperately denied the accusations, going as far as attempting to cover up the glaring evidence

against him by admitting his wife into a mental institution for fear that her testimony to his past social gaucheries might incriminate him further. Unlike in France where homosexuality could not “in theory” be prosecuted when practiced behind closed doors, Germany still punished same-sex passions as a crime under paragraph 175 of the German penal code (Oosterhuis 1991; Vargo 2003). This, coupled with his eminent status in the German elite proved too much for Krupp. The capitalist took his life the same year.

In 1906 and 1907, Maximilian Harden (1861-1927), pen name of Felix Ernst Witkowski, a disgruntled Jewish publisher with an interest in public affairs, published several inflammatory articles intended to morally incriminate the then Kaiser Wilhelm II. Rather than attack him directly, Harden lambasted the Kaiser’s closest male companion, the sixty-year-old Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld (1847-1921). While it is unclear whether the Kaiser and the Prince were actually physically intimate, it was clear that the Prince had a sexual relationship with another of the Kaiser’s top officials the Count Kuno von Moltke (1847-1923).

Harden did not mention any specific names, but the articles themselves were not so nuanced that the German public could not deduce the identities that were the targets of the accusations. If the German elite were keen to the homosexual relations that happened among them behind closed doors, the fog of socially created red herrings had for a long time blinded the social middle classes to these facts. The knowledge that the Kaiser had two homosexuals directly working under him enflamed social distrust that put into question the Kaiser’s own sexual orientation. In order to snuff the flames of social discontent, the Kaiser feigned shock and quickly revised his public rhetoric to one of disgust at the thought of such flagrant betrayal at his court. As the Kaiser distanced

himself from his once beloved companions, Moltke was forced to resign from his position and Eulenberg fled to Switzerland.

Antagonized by this socially inflicted exile, Eulenberg returned to Germany, hired a lawyer, and confessed to the violation of paragraph 175 of the German penal code being subsequently absolved of all charges; Moltke, not content with confession, decided to fight the allegations raised against him, suing Harden in civil court for libel charges. With the evidence mounting against him (his wife testified in court that after the first two nights of their marriage the couple never had sex again) Moltke received a guilty verdict after six days of testimony (including that of Magnus Hirschfeld who testified to Moltke's homosexuality after analyzing the affidavit of Moltke's wife) and the libel charges against Harden were dismissed. The fact that a person of such low standing could attack such a high-positioned official and even possibly target other prominent Germans did not sit well with the elite. Indeed, the libel case against Harden was reopened in 1907 and a technical flaw was exposed. The testimony of Moltke's wife was dismissed once medical professionals confessed to having previously diagnosed her with hysteria making her an unreliable witness. Harden was ultimately sentenced to six months in prison.

Sandwiched between these infamous gay scandals were the equally notorious *messes noires* of Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen. In 1903, the same year of his illustrious marriage plans to Blanche de Maupéou, from a respected aristocratic and wealthy Protestant industrialist family, Fersen was arrested on suspicion of corrupting minors as well as offending public decency on the rooftop of his home 18 avenue Friedland. On 10 July, *le Figaro*, the same journal that announced his marriage plans, also ran a bout of

yellow journalism sensationalizing the event as “a Parisian scandal.” The article read: “Under the authorization of M. de Valles, examining magistrate, MM. Hamard et Blot, chief and deputy chief of security, arrested yesterday the baron d’A., twenty-three years old, who lured young boys to his bachelor pad avenue de Friedland and indulged in true saturnalia. His accomplice, the count W. [...] got away” (Peyrefitte 103). Fersen and the unnamed W. (Albert François de Warren), were accused of holding black masses twice a week involving countless adolescents from Paris’ most prestigious circles of society (Ogrinc 10). Far from being insulated pockets of homosexual debauchery, as the journals described them, some of the most talked-about of Paris’ elite came to gawk at the exhibitionist style *tableaux vivants* and *poses plastiques* that Fersen displayed at his *garçonnière*. Even Liane de Pougy, one of Paris’ most beautiful and well-known courtesans and dancers would pose there as the Callipygian Venus.

The scandal putatively erupted after a failed blackmail attempt by a dismissed valet who demanded one hundred thousand francs in return for his silence on delicate indiscretions all taking place at the baron’s home. When Fersen’s mother refused to pay, the valet denounced Fersen to the police. A “petit Jésus” (the colloquial term for a young male prostitute supported by an overbearing “tante” or pimp) whom Warren had initially solicited for sex on the streets of the Champs-Élysées before subsequently taking to one such “messe noire” at Fersen’s residence confirmed the accusations made by the valet.

Fersen was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for examination under the doctors Notet, Magnan, and Vallon who diagnosed him with “insanity, alcoholism, and epilepsy inherited from his grandparents” (Ogrinc 15). Moreover they stated that Fersen had accumulative brain damage stemming from youth, accusing him of congenital lying, as

well as a damaged sense of moral hygiene and responsibility resulting from his presence in various boarding schools throughout his formative years. Fersen was transported to the prison hospital in Fresnes to undergo the “necessary” medical treatment.

The trial began on 28 November in the ninth chamber of the Tribunal de la Seine presided over by the judge Bondoux. In his defense, attempting to disarm the charged miscomprehension of the court that saw in his transgressions a contradiction between “art and morals,” Fersen spoke of the spectacles being “misplaced literature,” confirming his intentions for these soirées as a refined and pedagogic mixture of art and culture (Peyrefitte 120). Defining his actions through the classical aesthetics of Greek and Roman practices might have been comprehensible within the inner circle of elites that shared his homosexual penchants, but fell on deaf ears in the court. A guilty verdict was quickly pronounced. Having already served five months, Fersen was released while Albert de Warren stayed in prison to appeal to a higher court.

The courts decision to sideline the charges of offense against public decency concentrating only on the illegal conduct between a number of boys and two young men is telling. By keeping the first charges in the background, the focus could be placed on the fear-based rhetoric of homosexual proselytizing. The schools, aspiring to assuage the by that time anxious parents of the children affected, published a press release stating: “The two doors (to the school) [...] are strictly monitored, both at the open and close of the schoolday” (Peyrefitte 111). Indeed, this release only amplified the commonplace narrative of the predatory homosexual casting devious shadows on the carefree doorsteps of Parisian *écoles*. Moreover, the court’s decision highlights an operative “closeting” of

highbrow homosexuals. Among the noted visitors to Fersen's *soirées*, only two were mentioned by name: Count Guy d'Harasat d'Etchegoyen and Abbé Marin.

Once released from prison, Fersen made a forlorn attempt at reconciliation with his fiancée, Blanche de Maupéou, only to have the doors of matrimonial bliss slammed in his face. Unable to shoulder the burden of constant public disapproval and humiliation, he decided on a voluntary exile to the island of Capri, instantly interconnecting himself with the diasporic fraternity of artists, expatriates, and homosexuals that called its shores home.

This short historical promenade through the early twentieth century's most publicized gay scandals is not without premeditated destination. While Krupp, Eulenberg, and Moltke were forced out of the closet but remained ultimately silent about the experience, Fersen continued the printed attention given to his social solecism by adding his name to the byline of numerous works that take the scandal as their main subject. By hedging his miscues in a carefully crafted narrative of revelatory literary production, Fersen mediates a more profound analysis of how (homo)sexuality at the time functioned when stiff-armed by the draconian bourgeois morality of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Moreover, his perhaps unorthodox reaction to scandal by literary production changes the social dynamics of (homo)sexual exposure, dominated at the time by journalism.

Indeed, H.G. Cocks advances in his book *Nameless Offenses: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* the fundamentality of the press in the "articulation of a public discourse which described homosexual desire" (Cocks 78). Cocks states that late-

nineteenth and early-twentieth-century journalistic practices evolved through a precarious web of antithetical positions in reference to sexuality. These included the emerging politics of liberalism in publicity whose goal was to unbiasedly communicate all forms of social and sexual indiscretions. To be sure, this position stood in stark contrast to the draconian morality that made the press complicit in hushing the sexual miscues of some while highlighting the social contagion and morale corruption of the homosexuality of others. Stuck between a rock and a hard place, many of the journals that clarioned the sexual faux pas of the upper classes were forced to develop, Cocks states, a “formulaic response to the coverage of incedent assaults, involving the use of asterisks, ellipsis and euphemism” (Cocks 81). This technique allowed for liberty of exposure while eclipsing salacious content in carefully chosen discretionary rhetoric. While the nuancing of scandalous language was certainly a shared practice for the journals that exposed Fersen’s case *en masse*, this does not however mean that they avoided the yellow nature of sensationalistic journalism that was part and parcel to the “norm work” that Ari Adut says helps structure publicity and respond to transgression (Adut 2008). This can be seen in the progress of journalistic exposure of the Fersen scandal, an evolution that consistently hesitates between transparent disclosure and “closetesque” silence.

Most of the echoes of the Fersen scandal jounced between six of Paris’ most read journals: *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Matin*, *La Presse*, *Le Petit Journal*, and *L’Aurore*. *Le Petit Parisien* (10 July 1903) launched the investigation with its laconically provocative title “Scandaleuse Affaire” (“Scandalous Affair”). However, if the title is meant to chip away at the reader’s curiosity, the article itself is less than mesmeric stating: “The Public Prosecutor’s department for the Seine has been struck by such a

scandalous affaire that we will not burden our readers with it” (*Le Petit Parisien* 1903). If *Le Petit Parisien* only names Fersen by the “le baron d’A..., [who] lived on avenue Friedland” (*Le Petit Parisien* 3), *Le Matin* (10 July 1903) hyperbolizes the breviloquence of its Parisian *confrère* with its title: “Black Masses...A huge scandale—Arrest last night—Orgies and Saturnalia” while hardly advancing much more information. Initially avoiding involvement leaving “to others the care of making historiographes of this scandalous affaire” (*Le Petit Parisien* 10 July 1903, 3), the 11 July issue of *Le Petit Parisien* dedicates three whole columns to the scandal, advancing the notoriety of the principle players as reason to stray from their initial reserve (3). Contrary to the image that the collective conscience has of the “homosexual predator,” Fersen is described in the same issue as not being “like other young idlers of his world.” Indeed, he is “raffined,” “lettered,” and “a poet in his spare time” (*Le Petit Parisien* July 11 1903, 3).

It is in *Le Matin* of the same day that the title of an article exposes the names of the two guilty parties: “Black Masses: in full bacchanale...sadistic exploitis—Jacques d’Adelsward and Albert de Warren—Orgies and saturnalia—heart-wrenching tales—Escape of one of the guilty party” (*Le Matin* 11 July 1903). It is also in this article that the story will be expounded upon in full with almost five columns of information including proposing homosexuality as a possible social contagion, explaining that “during a certain setback,” Albert de Warren would have picked up indiscible morals and brought them back to high society (3). Pointing to the hypocritical nature of many of the journals that catered to the upper class elite, *Le Figaro* of 11 July takes up the same themes as its associates with the noticeable difference of lambasting its journalistic brothers for exposing in print the names of the two “honorable families” (3) already

struck hard by the affair. However, in the same breath, *Le Figaro* ironically exposes “the baron Jacques d’Adelsward, 22, avenue de Friedland” as the guilty party, backhanding the more tawdry journals by stating that *Le Figaro* was given no choice but to publish the names since the other journals did not follow *their* initial discretion (*Le Figaro* 11 July 1903). The journal *L’Aurore* will on both days, 11 and 12 July, take up the same story, only adding that sometimes the “joyous reunion took place in the countryside” and is the first to highlight Fersen’s place among the literary elite (*L’Aurore* 11 July 1903, 5). If this was not enough to incite readers to buy the journals and feed off the paucity of fresh information that they provided, a note at the bottom of the journal in the section *Dernières Nouvelles* of *L’Aurore* 12 July reveals that not only were Fersen and Warren involved directly with the scandal but that “a banlieue preacher [...] was also allegedly compromised in this vilanous affaire” (*L’Aurore* 12 July 1903). *Le Petit Parisien* on 13 July would go even further adding investigative reporting—the watchword for the emergent “new journalism” movement (Cocks 2003)—to the repertoire of catechizing probes and interview the mothers of the two accused. According to the paper, Mme de Fersen will shrug off her son’s indiscretions as so many “vicious childish amusements” naively asking: “is it really that serious?” (*Le Petit Parisien* 13 July 1903, 3). Mme de Warren will staunchly defend her son saying he will certainly return from his exile in New York to exonerate himself and that he is completely innocent in any case (3).

By the 14 July 1903, the affaire had become political and the journals were taking sides. *Le Petit Parisien* of the 16 July 1903 concludes that Jacques “is neither deranged nor demented” but rather “lost.” Indeed, his display of vice was if anything ostentatious

not vicious (*Le Petit Parisien* 16 July 1903, 3). In *L'Aurore*, an article by J. Philip, whose title “Putrefaction” shows no discretionary hesitation, states that if Jacques is neurotic, or an unimportant decadent, he is above all an insignificant man who was too rich, too noble, too lazy, incapable of pulling up his own britches (*L'Aurore* 16 July 1903, 1). While these comments might reveal a slight tint of *schadenfreude*—the journalists being of an inferior class—Philip states that Fersen is not representative of society at large, but rather of his infected caste (*L'Aurore* 16 July 1903, 1).

If many of the journals paint a despicable, if mesmerizing picture of the baron and de Warren, the scandal, and its participants, given the delicate topic social bias on the information presented is surprisingly minimal. Many of the journals will help present Fersen’s defense. In *Le Matin* Fersen, while never denying hosting the “black masses,” although never calling them as such, defends against ever having “defiled” the children that attended his pagan representations stating his fascination with Greco-Roman culture and art and their influence on these *soirées* (*Le Matin* 17 July 1903, 2). Moreover, *La Presse* of 12 July presents an interview with J.-K. Huysmans (1848-1907), author of the famous “black mass” novel *Là-bas*, who refutes many of the claims stating “there is no trace of information indicating black masses” (*La Presse* 12 July 1903). And again on 18 July, *La Presse* presents a similar interview with Jules Bois (1868-1943), author of *Le Satanisme et la magie* (1895), who believes Fersen only participated in parodies of black masses (*La Presse* 18 July 1903).

While scandals can certainly sweep up individuals into a collective swell of incrimination, this does not however mean that the wake of these episodes is nothing but affective turmoil with no actual social value. In fact, for Fersen, the outcome of the

scandal was a great deal of situated literary self-expression. Indeed, in personally examining the scandal through literature, many of Fersen's works can serve as ideological benchmarks against which the social conscience on scandal and (homo)sexuality is interrogated. Consequently, scandals become less the clarion echoes of singular transgressions and more, to borrow Ari Adut's term, "historical events" (Adut 35) that have the ability to highlight and transform norms and social structures. Ari Adut states in his compelling book *On Scandal* that the end product of scandal is often contamination of the public or individuals and provocation by challenging the public, authorities or both (Adut 22). Indeed, both effects, he states, "produce meaning, alter the moral standing and well-being of those they touch, and place them in an unbidden affective state" (Adut 23). Ultimately, it is in this vein that the literary production that speaks to the 1903 Fersen scandal should be read: as situational pockets of cathartic and erosive literature that make and contest moral claims in public, shot through with moral language, and that invite readers to interrogate the normalizing rhetoric against which it is written. In this case, literary art derived from scandal becomes an "engine of aesthetic dynamism" (Adut 5).

Finished while in prison and published after Fersen's release, *L'Amour enseveli* (1904), echoes the contemplative gay lament initiated by Oscar Wilde in his now infamous 1898 poem *The Ballade of Reading Gaol*. Indeed, *L'Amour enseveli* traces the tragic evolution of its author as he realizes and questions how his sexual deviancy precipitates the permanent loss of heterosexual love, heteronormative bliss, and social conformity.

A nostalgic recollection of the history of his love with Blanche de Maupéou, the beginning of the collection can be read as an ironical attempt to skew social perceptions of a now tarnished public image by highlighting his heterosexuality. The dualistic love/hate nature of the poems is expressed by the title of the collection, *L'Amour enseveli* (*Buried Love*): a love birthed through social conventions and buried by social scandal. Far from the Baudelarian self-inflicted spleen of “L'Héautotimorouménos” (Baudelaire 2001), Fersen understands his destroyed relationship as the end term in a journalistic progression of ignominious slander. Speaking directly to his fiancée, he states his fears: that the image Blanche will remember of him will be based on the libelous accusations of the scandal and therefore falsified (Fersen 1904, 14). Brimming with a state of constant emotional uncertainty, the poems in this collection attempt to fray the narrative fabric sewn from the media-based social image of the poet.

Initially boasting a love that reanimated the dull dreams of his heart (7), the poems quickly turn sour, accusing Blanche herself of becoming a “Judas” (61) who, like the others, will eventually fall prey to the currish slander of journalistic calumny. In a section entitled “La haine,” Fersen attacks his accusers directly calling them cowardly, torturing a defenceless child (30) as well as “wolves” hungry for carnage (31). Ultimately he charges them with capitalizing on the mediatic appeal of the Procrustean rules of sexual conformity in society while overlooking his “innocence” which will one day bring the truth to light (81).

If the beginning sections of the collection lament the loss of heterosexual love, the latter sections of the collection speak through a seemingly schizophrenic hubris that places Fersen on a path towards homosexual martyrdom. In a section entitled “Dialogue

dans la nuit,” the author articulates his story through the transcendental gesture of Christ calling to his unknown brothers who share his suffering. He states that he “traîn[e] après [eux], comme on traîne une croix,/[Leurs] desires accablés sur les chemins du monde” (“drags after them, like one drags a cross/Their overwhelmed desires on the paths of the world”) (91). Like the destiny of the Christian savior, the accusations of sexual blasphemy attributed to Fersen were predestined from what he calls the torment of having been born (91). But this torment is not self-inflicted, but rather comes from those who tag homosexuality sexual impropriety (93). Fersen is certainly not alone in this opinion. In a 1903 letter to the author from a close friend, satirical poet, anarchist polemicist, and contributor to Fersen’s 1909 literary review *Akadémos*, Laurent Tailhade writes: “Vous voilà donc, monsieur, grâce à la particularité de vos humeurs [...] Un gentilhomme de votre rang, de votre fortune, a le droit de s’amuser quand et comme bon lui semble” (“There you are, sir, thanks to your particular (sexual) disposition [...] A gentleman of your rank, of your fortune, has the right to amuse himself when and how he sees fit”) (Tailhade 136-8). Even if the French author does accuse Fersen of irresponsibility (141), Tailhade seems to believe that homophobia comes from the miscomprehension of those who have not read Juvenal, Virgil, or the history of Augustus (140-1) pointing, because of Fersen’s social position and education, directly to class warfare. If scandals are “moral phenomenon,” the products associated with scandals, like *L’Amour enseveli*, are ultimately shot through with the same moral language as the scandals themselves, acting as the “central references in the collective consciousness of societies” (Adut 34-5). Ultimately as a product of the 1903 scandal, *L’Amour enseveli*

contests moral claims against homosexuality quite publicly through literary publication, Tailhade's letter only affirming the contestatory nature of Fersen's stance.

While the poems that directly follow the scandal translate a writer caught in a web of social incomprehension and anger, the novel *Messes noires: Lord Lyllian* (1905) advances a calculated response to the author's social indiscretions. Dedicated to the "former examining magistrate" of Fersen's own case, the novel addresses the idea of scandal directly from its introductory pages: "Le scandale forme, de nos jours, la plus chère distraction des sociétés choisies, et vous passez, à le créer, pour un homme célèbre" ("The scandal forms, nowadays, the most cherished distraction of chosen societies, and you pass, in creating one, for a famous man") (Fersen 1905, 1). Moreover, in a bout of snarky introductory wit, we are told that the magistrate who judged Fersen's case was not only the impetus for the novel's publication, but that he is actually complicit in the scandal, having frequented the eponymous Lord Lyllian with Fersen, "enjoying" his company quite a bit (2).

Like its cheeky dedication, the story follows the titular character Lord Lyllian through his eccentric sexual evolution culminating in his participation in one such "black mass" that ultimately leads to two suicides and the title characters murder. While the satirical fabric used to dress the story is plush with tongue-in-cheek patches and decadent eccentricities familiar to Belle Époque readers, the author needles in biting social commentary on the hypocrisy of a modernized and industrialized Europe, and more specifically a philistine bourgeoisie.

Playing off a common sexual trope in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century gay male literature, lord Lyllian is presented as a sexually charged ingénu (Fersen 1905, 26). A sixteen-year old youth restless from the pangs of puberty, lord Lyllian quickly succumbs to the previously unknown joys of solitary masturbation and quickly after to Edith Playfait, the fourteen-year-old daughter of a rich industrial from Glasgow (27). However the excitement of pubescent sexual exploration is short-lived. Without explanation, Edith is whisked away with her family, Lyllian left more neurotic than ever (30). With the arrival of Harold Skilde (Oscar Wilde), not so subtly presented as a foppishly adorned writer whose works were favored by a certain elite (31), Lyllian is officially initiated into homosexual subculture. Rather than conceal his penchants, Skilde lived surrounded by admitted lovers, earning the epithet “the last of Caesar’s postiches” (31-2). Echoing the dualistic relationship between the *erastes* and *eromenos* of Greek and Roman pederasty, the attachment that develops between Skilde and Lyllian is described as not vulgar or profane nor lustful but rather a pedagogical relationship where Lyllian might learn to read hearts like one reads the stars (34). The description of Lyllian’s cultivation under Harold Skilde paints an almost Attican still life brushed with such literary greats as Shakespeare, Bryon, and Tennyson (all purportedly gay authors). However, this burgeoning throwback to an idealistic platonic apprenticeship does not stay chaste long. Surprised on Christmas Eve while abandoning himself to the joys of masturbation (40), Lyllian buckles to Skilde’s candid advances, allowing himself to be violated “like a pretty woman” (40).

If Lyllian ultimately espouses a submissive role to Skilde’s more experienced sexual nature, he is certainly less so when he shares the stage with a feminine

counterpart. As an epistolary correspondence resumes between Lyllian and Edith, a seemingly hyper-masculine and no less heteronormative doppelganger of the lord professes his desire to be the male in the relationship, the dominator of the two (50). But like many of Fersen's other male characters, this bisexual orientation is confounding at best. Indeed, this newfound virility is steeped in the language of duty and salvation not desire and eros: "Aimer Edith—rejoindre Edith—oui, le devoir, le salut étaient de ce côté là!" ("To love Edith—to join Edith—yes, duty, this is where salvation is!") (50). Ultimately, Lyllian's worst enemy is a miscomprehension of himself, or better, the nagging fear of an all too honest self-revelation. He is not however completely oblivious to his inner sentiments. Walking passed some storefronts on his way to mail an epistle to Edith, his ballooned ego is quickly deflated in the glass' reflection: a fragile, sad body is the image that bounces back; hardly the "silhouette" of the seductive Don Juan he has created for himself.

He will however assume the role of another of history's celebrated male silhouettes. At the suggestion of Skilde, Lyllian will adorn the costume of Adonis in a makeshift *messe noire* to celebrate the recent divorce and arrival in Athens of Lady Cragson, one of Lyllian's flaky admirers and past lovers. Enamored by his reflection in the pool of participants at the *messe noire*, Lyllian drowns in narcissism and self-aggrandizement. Love-struck by Lyllian's beauty, much like the others, Lady Cragson gravitates towards the thrown of the foppishly dressed egotist with words of admiration and amorous avowals (having left her husband for him). She is quickly repelled. Nonplussed by Lyllian's seemingly contradictory actions, she takes out a dagger and kills herself (67). Skilde will also fan the flames of Lyllian's emblazed ego only to encounter

a disheartening flicker. Angered and dejected, Skilde attempts to poison the lord, ultimately breaking their bond and ending up in prison. A letter sent to Lyllian by Skilde from behind bars reveals Fersen's own opinions on bourgeois morality and Dionysian sexuality. Skilde writes:

Plus de mirages et plus de mensonges : La prison...C'est bien, j'accepte.
A bas les masques ! Les juges ne me font pas peur. Ils m'accusent
d'avoir corrompu la jeunesse, d'avoir souillé l'enfant, par mes exemples et
par mes écrits. Je sais toute la bêtise, toute la cruauté et toute la vindicte
qui animent leur accusation. Et je les voue au mépris de la postérité. (79)

No more mirages and no more lies: prison...Yes, I accept it. Down with
the masks! Judges do not scare me. They accuse me of having corrupted
minors, of having defiled youthful minds by my example and by my
writings. I know all the stupidity, all the cruelty and all the convictions
that animate their accusation. And to them, I dedicate the contempt of
posterity.

If the reader is impressed by the forward thinking nature of the letter, Lyllian is left impassive (83). Soon after, Lyllian takes on the scandal himself in apologetic variation during a monologue discussing the gossip that surrounds him. Lyllian states of himself:

Je connais ma reputation actuelle [...] Lord Lyllian! Oui, vous savez bien, cet
Anglais de 20 ans [...] Vous flairez mes tares, mais vous évaluez ma jeunesse.
Vous applaudissez à mes (sic) hontes, mais vous désirez mes yeux, comme si mes
yeux étaient pour vous [...] Un acteur à scandale, un cas pathologique? Ces deux

en vérité. Indeed my boy. Scandale, scandale? Mais tous vous êtes passions de scandale!... (107)

I know my reputation [...] Lord Lyllian! Yes, you know, this twenty year old Brit [...] You expose my faults, but you assess my youth. You applaude at my shame, but you desire my eyes, as if my eyes were for you [...] A scandalous actor, a pathological case? Both in truth. Indeed my boy. Scandal, scandal? You are all obsessed with scandal!... (107)

Mirroring Tailhade's letter to Fersen during the scandal, Lyllian blames his misfortunes on the world, those people who made him easy prey because of his name and money (107-8). This tirade against homophobia and the scandals it seems to produce is continued in a conversation with Sicilian painter Chignon. A biting critique, Lyllian denounces the age of consent laws established in France in 1804 under the Napoleonic code, specifically targeting Article 334 "incitement of youth to debauchery" which listed twenty-one as the minimum for consenting adults (Peniston 2004). It was precisely this article that gave Fersen the most problems during the 1903 raid of his apartment. Applying jocular logic Lyllian relativizes desire stating: "J'ai vingt ans. C'est plus près de treize que de quarante. Et si la fraîcheur d'impression des uns me plaît d'avantage que la pédanterie ou le cynisme des autres, j'ai bien le droit de l'aimer" ("I'm twenty years old. That's closer to thirteen than to forty. And if the freshness of the younger ones appeals to me more than the pedantry or the cynicism of the older ones, I certainly have the right to love them") (Fersen 1905, 160-1). Enmeshed in this judgment of bourgeois ageism is the familiar trope, already mentioned in Tailhade's letter to Fersen, of historical blindness. Obsessed with sexuality while striving to keep it under lock and key, ascetic

bourgeois morality reduces the transcendental bond between two men to masturbation and rape (161), unable to understand male same-sex love through a Greek and Roman ideology. Lyllian opposes these hypersexualized conventions to the most divine love in the world, concluding that something that has lasted centuries cannot be against nature (161-2).

By speaking of male same-sex relationships in the pedagogical terms of Greek and Roman pederasty, Lyllian muzzles the bourgeois barks against a proselytizing homosexuality that would promote Dionysian sexuality and sordid morality. In an especially obvious possession of one of his own creations, Fersen speaks through Lyllian to denounce the hyperbolized fear pitched at parents by media, school, and politics after the youthful identities that posed in the *tableaux vivants* 18 avenue de Friedland in 1903 were exposed. “Où se trouve la souillure?” (“Where is the filth?”) Lyllian asks, “Est-ce sur les lèvres de Narcisse ou sur celles de Messaline?” (“On the lips of Narcissus or those of Messaline”). An obvious nod towards masculine beauty, female promiscuity and by extension bourgeois hypocrisy, Lyllian concludes: “Qu’il-y-a-il près de l’école? Le bordel” (“What is near the school? The brothel”) (162-3). This anti-bourgeois rhetoric is undergirded soon after as Lyllian and the prince Skotieff discuss the pharisaical nature of society in regards to self-expression in the arts:

On lit Jean d’Alsace, Achille Patrac, ou M. de Montautour [...] Tout ça s’accepte avec le masque [...] My Lord, à Paris comme ailleurs [...] Révélez-vous aux maîtres-chanteurs, désobligez votre portiere ou votre journaliste [...] Là, comme partout, règnent la sottise, la lâcheté, le mensonge... (163-4)

We read Jean d'Alsace, Achille Patrac, ou M. de Montautour [...] And we accept it as long as it is masked [...] My Lord, in Paris like elsewhere [...] Get caught up with blackmailers, offend your doorman or your journalist [...] There like everywhere else reigns stupidity, cowardice, lies...

Fersen is clearly referencing the sometimes “scandalous” nature of authors such as Jean Lorrain (Jean d'Alsace), Achille Essebac (Achille Patrac), and Robert the compte de Montesquiou (M. de Montautour), all known homosexuals, all critiqued for their often conspicuous portrayal of it. Not surprisingly, Fersen himself would have professional and personal relationships with each one of the authors: Achille Essebac publishing in his literary review *Akadémos*, meeting Montesquiou at the same time as Proust, and finally with Jean Lorrain who, according to Peyrefitte (Peyrefitte 1959), came to his defense during the 1903 trial.

Similar to the ephemeral homosexuality described in Achille Essebac's works, Lyllian's sexual orientation is bookended by an increasingly distant youth and a more and more ominous adulthood. Whether theory actually mirrored practice, this notion of ephemeral homosexuality is a common thread in the progressively plush homosexual literary fabric in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France. By temporally limiting “active” male same-sex relations to, as Plato prescribed, the peach fuzz that announced adulthood, homosexual authors tempered what seemed socially deviant with Attican ideology (Dover 1989; Halperin 1990 ; Williams 1999). In a contemporary sense, sexual promiscuity could be written off as a byproduct of the burgeoning and bemusing sexual pangs of adolescence. However, adulthood brought with it the family unit and therefore conformity to societal heterosexuality. Lyllian understands this all too

well. Rather than his first whiskers however, it is the first wrinkle that will announce his demission (Fersen 1905, 170). For Lyllian this day comes sooner than expected. Resolved in his decision to socially conform to a constructed ideal, Lyllian announces his engagement to a woman. As the possibility of a heterosexual union evolves, Lyllian receives one last visit from his sordid past (194). André Lazeski, a model who posed in one of the *messe noire* staged by Lyllian and with whom it is presumed a sexual relationship existed, arrives at Lyllian's. Not willing to accept Lyllian's sexual betrayal with a woman, Lazeski pleads his case, stating that rather than defile his character, Lyllian exalted his heart and spirit with his love (197). Because what was between the two men was false and villainous (199), Lyllian advises Lazeski to put the past behind him and move on. At the end of the novel, homosexuality is no longer the most divine love (161-2) but an illusory chimera that must be abandoned in adulthood. Age makes it vulgar, Lyllian states (200). Not able to accept Lyllian's regressive oration, Lazeski pulls out a revolver and fires on his past lover and then on himself.

While not directly related to the 1903 scandal but indirectly linked to its effects, *Hei Hsian: Le Parfum noir*, released in 1921, two years before the author's death, is a collection of antagonistically melancholic and idyllic poetic versus dedicated almost entirely to opium. Fersen had for some time given himself over to what he called the blue miracle (Fersen 1921, 8).¹⁰ It was a drug that would restore the calm of his life and allow him to turn a blind eye to his aging (8) and mankind (5-6). The poetry in this simultaneously macabre and solacing volume is indicative of a life worn out by slander, sexual escapades, and drug use. The volume is also indicial of a notion that Fersen seems to have adopted at the end of his life: homosexuality, whether couched in Attican

rhetoric, submerged in pedagogic principles, or haloed by aesthetic or ascetic principles will discordantly exist with contemporary society. It is then by creating another world, with the help of these opiates, that Fersen can contemplate his life as a homosexual and those who share his forlorn state (13). Completely enslaved to the drug that would be his undoing, Fersen presents these poems as a gateway into the experience of his antithetical world of pure nirvana coupled with perpetual sorrow, both directly associated with his homosexuality. This microcosm of opiate-based ambivalence helped to alleviate the all too real pain of a life played out in an almost constant personal exile on a public stage. Love, at the end of Fersen's life, can hardly compare to the needles that fill his veins with solace as they empty his mind of discord. But if love is going to survive, it must be, like Fersen's relationship with Nino, in a couple (45). This idea is undergirded by a series of poems dedicated to the Wilde trial. In one such poem, Fersen expresses his contempt for Alfred Douglas who abandoned his long-time lover and added to the bloodthirsty media campaign that smeared his image (57). For Fersen, Douglas occupies the worst of all positions: a friend and traitor to his cause (59), a brother in arms, who turned them against his own to protect himself. Fersen will not repeat these acts. It is hardly surprising that Fersen's last poem takes Prometheus as its subject. Like the eternally punished Titan who brought fire to mankind, Fersen wants to be remembered as the afflicted martyr who enlightened his contemporaries to the unremitting struggles of homosexual love (66) even if through his scandalous sexuality.

Band of Brothers: Fersen, *Akadémos*, and France's First Gay (?) Journal

Because still on the youthful wing
The scent of innocent beauty lies
That touched by a stranger scatters and dies—
This love must I tenderly sing.
Yet since you think it a dirty thing
Have dragged it through fear and infamy
And kept in the dark under lock and key—
This love will I freely sing.
To love's persecuted my song I bring
And to the outcasts of our time
Since happy or not this love is mine—
This love dare I loudly sing.
John Henry Mackay, *Der Eigene*

Taking the advice of Georges Eekhoud (1854-1927), friend, future *Akadémos* contributor, and *connaissanceur* of literary gay scandals himself after the publication of his novel *Escal-Vigor* (1899), Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen would contact Magnus Hirschfeld personally to talk about the “brotherhood” that the German activist seemed to have created between the members of his Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (1897) and touted in his journal *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (1899-1923). It is also through this correspondance that Fersen would discover and immerse himself in Adolf Brand's *Der Eigene* (1896-1931), a gay journal whose *Freundesliebe* (friend-love) theory and ideology would greatly influence his own works (Oosterhuis 1991; Jackson 2009). In a letter to Eekhoud, thanking him for the contact he had secured for him with Hirschfeld, the French author reveals the conceptual timbers that would form the framework of Fersen's future journal *Akadémos*. His desire, he states, was to found an art, philosophy, and literature review through which, little by little as to avoid scandal, its contributors could rehabilitate the “other love” (Lucien 15). However, if in theory a French journal dedicated to the “other love” seemed noteworthy and certainly achievable, in practice the idea faltered from the get-go. This is clearly seen in a subsequent letter to

Eekhoud from the villa Lysis on Capri 4 August 1908, in which Fersen reveals the definitive form that his journal will take. In his description, “the other love” is nowhere to found. The review now will boast a serialized novel, two or three short stories, two poems, two pages of music, a letter from Paris, literary critiques, theater, art, something from abroad, and the reproduction of a piece from Antiquity or Modernity (16). Even if the journal leads off with a thematic backfire, with only the title to hint at its Platonic offerings, there were good reviews. Charles-Henry Hirsch tickled Fersen’s ego in the well-respected journal, the *Mercure de France*, saying *Akadémos* was “a sumptuous review, printed in luxury and good taste” (*Mercure de France*, 137). If Fersen’s ambitions for the journal were expressed in the explosive fever pitch of his original letter to Eekhoud exposing his journal as a proxy for the mediatisation of the French gay social movement, many of Fersen’s ideas would never come to be. The idea to produce a bi-monthly journal would be reiterated in May of 1909 after reviewing his sales but would quickly sour when the reality of the homosexual movement in France became clear. Membership to the review was halting, mainly, he states, because enthusiasts found it dangerous to join (Lucien 17). But Fersen cut a wide enough swath in the beginning months to attract many of France’s most illustrious and well-established writers of the time (Henri Barbusse, Colette Willy, Laurent Tailhade, Robert Scheffer) whose contributions to the journal certainly bolstered its fledgling beginnings. And Fersen would not limit his scope in hexagonal terms. Many of the reviews and pieces that made up the pages of the journal were focused on the cultural activities and literary productions outside of France’s territories including works by Elisar von Kupffer, Arthur Lyon Raile

(Edward Perry Warren), John Henry Mackay, Walt Whitman, and Xavier Mayne (Edward Irenaeus Prime Stevenson) (Ogrinc 29).

While perusing through the some 2,000 pages of the twelve issues of *Akadémos: Revue mensuelle d'art libre et de critique* (January 1909-December 1909), the literary ethos of the journal and of its contributors becomes quite clear. Parroting Fersen's own works as well as those of Achille Essebac (who would contribute to the review in October 1909 with a piece entitled "Palastres d'aujourd'hui"), the editors speak to the nostalgic loss of an ideology that cherished and admired "Beauty" for beauty's sake (*Akadémos* 15 January 1909, 1). Not surprisingly, this was an ideology whose aesthetic focus also exonerated, at least in theory, the homosexuality of many of its authors: "nothing that is beautiful can be a crime" (1) states their inaugural message. According to the editorial statements of the first issue of *Akadémos* 15 January 1909, it is the conceited platitudes of society, the modernization and industrialization of cities, even the hysteria of the telephone that muffles the importance of Beauty, outspoken by the cacophony of the modern world. The articles, art, philosophical treatises, musical scores, poems, fictional works, etc., that would be presented throughout the review were to be inspired by misunderstood beauty (1) and encouraged by uncensored art (2). The editors of the journal promised a point of view free of "platitudes and preconceptions [...] pledg[ing] a return to the tradition of Greek simplicity and natural paganism" (Ogrinc 29) carved from the memory of ancient marbles and "forgotten poems" (*Akadémos* January 1909, 2).

The clarion call of Fersen and those who would contribute to the journal is clear and piercing in its ideological and philosophical tenor. With surprisingly hawkish

undertones, the inaugural address to all subscribers is a literary call to arms demanding ideological emancipation from an all too sobering modern Philistinism: “Allez, vous autres dont l’enthousiasme vient d’Athènes, allez libérer [...] la France Latine de ces decadences slaves [...] de ces préjugés judéo-chrétiens” (“Come on those whose enthusiasm is rooted in Athens, let’s liberate [...] Latin France from these Slavic decadences [...] from these Judeo-Christian prejudices”) (*Akadémos* January 1909, 1-2). However, if the inaugural address crests in a slightly hyperbolized bout of anarchist militancy, this initial fervor quickly wanes by the end of even the first edition. Certainly, Fersen and the editors hoped the magazine would ply France’s departments, catering to the needs of and possibly emboldening closeted homosexuals in any number of the country’s more remote regions. The journal itself though was not touted as such. Unlike Hirschfeld’s *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* and Brand’s *Der Eigene*, *Akadémos* was not internally branded as a gay journal. In fact, according to the editors themselves the journal does not claim to respond to the tastes or desires of a certain sect or elite (113), nor is it intended, like its German predecessors, to aggress by any social bias.¹¹

Despite the more pacific nature that the French journal would ultimately assume, preferring to inundate its readers with a flood of discrete literary material rather than submerge them in the rising tide of conspicuous homosexual writings, *Akadémos* could not help but hug the shores of its original intentions to foreground “the other love.” In the first edition, *Akadémos* launches with a daring eulogy to Raymond Laurent, short-lived secretary to the literary review and friend of Marcel Proust, who committed suicide at 22 “pour l’amour d’un bel *Américain*” (“for the love of a handsome American man”) (*Collectif*, Donnay)(emphasis in original). Fersen states that Laurent’s grave was dug by

the struggles of this “other love” and by his contemporaries (*Akadémos* January 1909, 68). Roger Peyrefitte rhetorically questions the choice to place the eulogy in the maiden issue of Fersen’s journal in his novel *L’Exilé de Capri* (1959), specifically challenging Fersen’s decision to make a provocation out of this young unknown man’s death (Peyrefitte, 233). However rhetorical the question might be, the answer seems quite simple. It was to the nameless homosexuals of France, those who shared the author’s vision for a return to an Attican zeitgeist, that Fersen’s journal was originally intended and to whom the burden of this “other love” would have weighed the most heavily.

But reaching these homosexuals was easier said than done, even if the arm of Fersen’s social circle was far-reaching. Certainly, the effects of the 1903 scandal that blacklisted Fersen from the social scene, transforming him into the *bête noire* of Paris, and forcing him into Caprese exile, still rippled beneath the surface of 1909 elite mentality. It would also not have helped that after the publication of the first issue of *Akadémos*, with its all too in-your-face dedication to the loss of one of their own, many of the better-known authors that Fersen had announced as contributors to future issues would shy away from the project, particularly after the reaction of Laurent’s family to their son’s eulogy (*Archiveshomo*). In theory, what Fersen needed was a literary Trojan horse, a journal that would appeal to the homosexuals of the time with its “gay” content and subsequently sack the contemporaries behind their own lines with its list of distinguished and putatively heterosexual writers. The eventual hope was that the Argus-eyed social censors standing watch against homosexual content, and possibly against Fersen himself, might doze off to the point of making the journal a “good buy” for discreet homosexuals looking to connect to a social group like those already established

in Germany and a socially acceptable purchase for the heterosexual aesthete wanting to discover “Beauty” in all its forms. *Akadémos* then should not be read as satisfying a social deficiency in France (gay advocacy journalism), but rather should be understood as a literary stopgap, not *really* a “gay-themed” journal, like its German counterparts, but still providing a social service to the homosexual community while working under the auspices of “art libre” and “critique” as referenced by its title. Indeed, a queer “culture-building” institution just the same (Warner xvii).

Guy Delrouze, in an op-ed written for the July issue of *Akadémos* entitled “Le préjugé contre les mœurs: son origine, sa valeur, ses dangers” (“Prejudice against morals: its origin, value, and dangers”) states that homosexuality was considered scabrous because it was never contemporarily treated by an author or a philosopher in a journal or a review, the public only hearing about it from oftentimes injurious media coverage (*Akadémos* July 1909, 9). This critique of the tenacity of circumscribed treatments of homosexuality would certainly have hit home for the creator of *Akadémos*, especially after the 1903 scandal that left him to welter in a mire of slanderous opprobrium. It is certainly not surprising then that Delrouze’s piece would speak specifically to this point, asking how in the twentieth century one can justify digging into a man’s private life to find arguments against him, his honor, his fortune, when he has committed no act against the community or an individual (2). He calls homosexuals martyrs that never asked for their cause (10) and states that homosexuality has nothing to do with criminology or pathology but rather the common right to love (24). While undeniably powerful in its abrasive and dissentient position, this piece was, of course, the exception not the rule and is hardly representative of the bulk of *Akadémos*.¹² Like Hades

among the Olympians, Delrouze is the literary outcast that simultaneously haunts Fersen's journal as a reminder of what was supposed to be and internally protects those others who write with him from the fringes.

An "all-gay-themed" journal might have seemed undesirable and unseasonable to Fersen for several reasons. First and foremost, *Akadémos* was, as was already stated, not a militant journal however anarchist its social and literary undertones might seem. Fersen, like Achille Essebac, preferred to expose homosexuality through a certain ideological lens rather than canvass French society kowtowing to an all too hostile social and political base. This is why he chose a literary review, not a social or political platform, as his blank slate, allowing for social, artistic, political, and philosophical ideas to develop organically, without, as he states, a social or political bias by the journal itself.¹³ By intermingling both "homosexual" and "non-homosexual" themes in the journal,¹⁴ Fersen softens the redoubtable image of the socially feared bugbear that homosexuality represented in the heterosexualized consciousness of the time. Moreover the choice to espouse both "non-homosexual" and "homosexual" themes in his journal echoes the bisexual ideology that tints the rest of Fersen's literary body. Whether this last point was intentional or not it does highlight the author's continued attempts at social dissimulation, even in 1909, of a by this point affirmed and long-familiar homosexuality.¹⁵ And while Nino Cesarini, Fersen's long-time partner, is by no means absent from the journal—serving as "M. le gérant" (the book-keeper)—as well as contributing and reviewing many works while serving in military service, Fersen chose to use a pseudonym ("Sonyeuse") when publishing the pieces in the journal that tip more heavily towards the homosexual side of the scale. It would seem then that like his works,

Akadémos represents a psychological give-and-take between an acquiesced but still publicly tepid homosexuality¹⁶ and the heterosexuality that girthed Fersen's life and times.

In addition to all this, there is a decidedly “queer” nature to the journal itself. In bringing together both homosexuals and “heterosexuals”¹⁷ under the literary roof of *Akadémos*, another of the original goals of the editorial team is realized: to liberate sexual orientation from dissimulation and live love without the social mask constructed from society's heteronormative plaster (Lucien, 143). Indeed, by writing for the journal the contributors place themselves in a very queer position (in both senses of the term). By writing alongside admitted homosexual authors in a journal that was considered to be, at least in some sense, a homosexual journal, they allowed themselves to be at once associated with an agenda that might be considered homosexual but also bridged the gap between this agenda and heterosexuality. Effectively, in placing themselves outside of heterosexuality but not within the confines of homosexual identity, they advanced a collective entity that became more than the sum of its parts, recognizable from the ideas, writing, and culture left in its wake. Simultaneously mirroring the literary ideology of the “art pour l'art” movement and resurrecting the Attican philosophy of autotelism, *Akadémos* points to artistic self-expression as a social safe-haven in and of itself. This is, in fact, what makes this journal stand out from those that came before it. It is not the “homosexual” nature of the journal that is important, but rather its “bisexual” ideology, the queerness of its composition, its insistence on presenting beauty in artistic expression first that speaks to the importance of the journal at the time. According to William Ray in his informative work, *The Logic of Culture: Authority and Identity in the Modern Era*,

culture “simultaneously connotes sameness and difference, shared habit and idiosyncratic style [...] the effortlessly inherited residue of social existence, and the expression of a striving for individuality,” (Ray 2001, 3). One might argue then that *Akadémos*, with its ultimately queer approach to the presentation of Fersen’s ideology, is a crowning expression of the antithetical notions of culture, giving rise to individual initiatives while simultaneously confronting and revising the social guidelines and traditions that fortify them, indeed, creating a very queer space for social and literary expression.

¹ Discussed further in the third section.

² I am placing bisexual in quotations because this chapter will discuss whether bisexuality was indeed a sexual orientation for Fersen or whether, as I will argue, it was only a literary and social defense against a much less accepted homosexuality

³ See particularly Georges-Anquetil, *Satan conduit le bal* (1925); Dr. A.S. Lagail (Alphonse Gallais), *Les Mémoires du Baron Jacques : Lubricités infernales de la noblesse décadente* in Patrick Cardon (ed.) (1993). *Dossier Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen*. Lille, Cahiers Gay-Kitsch-Camp.

⁴ Klein differentiates between four types of bisexuality: a stage in the coming out process (transitional bisexuality); a past experience that differs from the self-identification in regards to sexual orientation of the present (historical bisexuality); a relationship with both men and women but with only one specific gender at any given time (sequential bisexuality); a relationship with both men and women with both genders at any given time (concurrent bisexuality). See Klein 1978.

⁵ Robyn Ochs describes “defensive” bisexuality as “someone who is homosexual but continues other-sex relationships as a cover for their homosexuality” (Ochs 1999)

⁶ see introduction

⁷ see chapter 4

⁸ See chapter 5

⁹ This seems all the more ironic when one considers that Fersen paid for much of the publication and editorial expenses for his novels and poetry, in reality acting as both the ground and conduit of public and private muckraking (Ogrinc 2006)

¹⁰ the first written knowledge of this being in *Le Sourire aux yeux fermés* written during 1903 in which he mentions the discovery of opium (Ogrinc 22)

¹¹ This, of course, was less necessary in France than in Germany since homosexuality, while still hawked and punished in France, had been decriminalized since 1789 unlike in the Prussian states where a more militant stance might have seemed necessary.

¹² With the exception of the paucity of poems that Fersen himself would write for the journal (many of which would laud the feminine form) the largest portion of the review that would be considered specifically “gay” is the serialized novel, *Les Fréquentations de Maurice*, by Marcel Boulesin (pseudonym Sydney Place)

¹³ Of course I acknowledge that as the editor of the journal, Fersen would choose the pieces that would appear and therefore a “parti pris” would in some sense be inevitable. Since we do not have any information on how Fersen chose the works (i.e., whether they were read blind or whether he was indeed overwhelmed by submission to the point of allowing him to be very selective) it would be difficult to make any assessment on the choices as a whole. It is very clear however that many of his friends (Collette Willy, Robert Scheffer, Victor Litschfousse, and Tancrede de Visan) would appear a number of times throughout the journal’s run.

¹⁴ I do not wish to imply here that there is such a thing as a specifically “homosexual” theme. There are however pieces in the journal that take on specifically homosexual situations and language (*Les Fréquentations de Maurice* for example) and others where there is no conspicuous trace of homosexuality per se. This is why I prefer “non-homosexual” to “heterosexual.” By avoiding the normal dichotomic split of “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” one could theorize the idea of “bisexual” writing or what might be considered “queer” today but are not necessarily “homosexual.”

¹⁵ According to the information I have reviewed, Fersen did not have any relationships with females after his failed marriage attempt with Blanche de Maupéou. He would however have several close female friendships, most notably with American lesbians Katie and Saidee Wolcott-Perry (the two hyphenated their names to express their commitment to each other) who ardently defended the author after the 1903 scandal and would remain faithful supporters and admirers of his works until a falling out later in life. (Aldrich 1993)

¹⁶ I do not mean to suggest that the public did not see Fersen as a homosexual. In fact, after the scandal of 1903 and the publicity he received on the island of Capri this would certainly not have been the case. I do feel, however, that while Fersen “lived” openly as a homosexual, he preferred to represent himself publicly as a bisexual or even as a heterosexual with intermittent penchants towards younger boys. Without any actual testimony by the author as to why he would portray himself this way, we can only deduce that the social conventions of the time and possibly his own issues with self-identification would have played a large role in this split sexual personality. The fact that Gide, Verlaine, and Oscar Wilde in England also did this speaks to a larger social cover that many homosexual men seemed to adopt at this time.

¹⁷ I place “heterosexuals” in quotations since there is no evidence that all of these contributors that publicly lived heterosexual lives were in fact heterosexual.

Chapter 4 : For the Love of Boys : Ephemeral (Homo)sexuality and Platonic Politics in the Works of Achille Essebac

L'éphèbe offre une beauté plus durable que la vierge ; et cet espoir de durée suffit seul à justifier sa suprématie.

Paul Adam

In late February 1905, a French student studying in Germany walked onto the *grande promenade* in Bonn, freshly bathed and perfumed, with a bouquet of flowers and a copy of Achille Essebac's *Dédé* in his left hand, a revolver in the right. After reading several of his favorite passages from the novel, he carefully placed a bullet into his right temple in plain view of disconcerted onlookers. Happily a bad shot, the eighteen-year-old suffered solely entrance and exit wounds, only to be subsequently condemned to the *Maison nationale de Chareton* by his father upon comprehension of his son's motives. Upon admission, he was diagnosed with “*aliénation mentale caractérisée par des idées religieuses et perversion sexuelle*” (“mental alienation characterized by religious ideas and sexual perversion”) (Ferray 2008) and was thereafter presented as a case study by the residing psychiatrists at the hospital: André Antheaume and Dr. Parrot in a communication given to the *société médico-psychologique* under the title *Un Cas d'inversion sexuelle* of the same year. Two days prior to his suicide attempt, a letter was sent to his family expressing the incitement to such a desperate act:

Judging the future by the past, I envision the future as *good* if I love women or as *ignoble* if I love boys...I don't want to belong to

women...Therefore...I must die! [...] If you wish to retrieve my body, it will be either at the cathedral in Cologne or in Bonn. Cologne and Bonn were the cities where Dédé lived—a character in a novel that was my only consolation in these last times [...] Before dying, I'll read a few pages about Dédé. Then, with my ideal in my mind's eye, with the name of Hector on my lips, I will die... (Peniston 2007, 200)

The description of this scene brings to mind the romantic copycat suicide attempts brought on by the publication of such melancholic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and *René* (1802) by François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848). In both novels, the protagonists are sensitive, passionate young men who find themselves at odds with contemporary society and deem life, in the end, unlivable.¹ These literary masterpieces have stood the test of time, deemed classics in their respective literatures. However, *Dédé* (1901), the novel whose idealist representation of the homoerotic relationship between two *collégiens*, eventually becoming the last solace of this young gay Frenchman, seems to have all but fallen into literary oblivion since its rise to fame. This was, however, not always the case.

Upon its publication, *Dédé* was greeted with much literary acclaim. This positive sentiment would continue through its subsequent ten editions, as well as with the six other works that Essebac would publish during his literary career (Aldrich 1993). Jean-Claude Ferray, author of the only indepth study of the author and his works, notes that *Dédé* enjoyed “considerable success” heralded in its time by the critics, especially

surprising considering the topic around which it was centered. As for Essebac, the author, he was unanimously considered a writer of great talent (Ferray 41).

Looking into the life of Achille Essebac is no easy feat. Ironically, Ferray entitles this part of his book: “*the little we know of him.*” Born on 29 January 1868 to Joseph Achille Bécasse, founder of a gas lighting enterprise in the 9e arrondissement in Paris, and to Clémence Joséphine Delarue, a well-off Parisian, Henri Louis Achille Bécasse would have two brothers: the oldest, Jacques Victor André born on 27 January 1867 and the youngest, Charles Joseph Maurice born 22 November 1874. As noted by the last names of the author and father, Achille (Bécasse) Essebac would eventually change his *patronyme* for seemingly obvious reasons.² While there is little information available on his early years of schooling, he did spend his formative years, between the ages of 7 to 13, at the *college des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes de Passy* in the 8th arrondissement. This is a period of time that would remain fond in his memory and one that resurfaces through literary devices in several of his novels. Ferray hypothesizes that, after his *études secondaires*, Essebac probably took several courses at the *École des Beaux-Arts*.

The literary ambitions of the young Essebac are evident from the early age of fifteen when he published his first work, *Un Drôle de mouchoir* (Ferray 175-176). From the age of sixteen, the author made several trips abroad including a trip to Italy (a country where he undoubtedly met many of the young ephebes described in his works) which he would revisit at twenty-three. He also traveled to Spain, Holland, and Morocco.

The publication of his first novel *Partenza....vers la beauté!* (1898), a first person narrative voyage to Italy, reveals Essebac’s true literary merits. *Littérature viatique*, or

the travelogue, already constituted a vast literary genre attempted by such greats as Goethe, Chateaubriand, Stendhal, Alexandre Dumas, and Guy de Maupassant in the nineteenth-century, and Montaigne in the sixteenth-century, among others.³ Essebac, however, unlike the others, would ground his work on the aesthetical beauty of Italy in the glory of youth and masculine beauty. While this first work was not recognized for its poetic discourse and revitalization of the literary, touristic, and artistic discourse on Italy to the extent it might have deserved it did, however, in spite of its fervent anti-heteronormative and anti-conformist messages, entice an editor, Chamerot et Renouard, and was published. Whether sales reflected success or not, *Partenza* was indeed a huge professional achievement for Essebac since publishing a book that clearly challenged heteronormative ideology by exalting the beauty of young males, as Ferray states a book that “frisait l’indécence” (“skirted indecency”), was a feat in and of itself (Ferray 33). Certainly more noteworthy when considering that the very year of its publication (1898) a law was reinstated in France banning the sale, distribution, and exposition of images, pictures, and emblems of obscene objects that went against the moral grain (Lamarre-Stora 1990). A law to which *Partenza* would certainly have fallen prey had it been more widely circulated.

In 1902 and 1903, following the astonishing success of Essebac’s second novel, *Dédé*, published by Ambert et Cie, the author witnessed his greatest success in the literary world. Essebac continued his relationship with the editors Ambert et Cie to produce two new novels: *Luc* (1902) and *L’Élu* (1902). Also during this year, the first translation of *Dédé* into German by Max Spohr, was released, adding to the already impressive success of the novel. This last remark deserves a brief *aparté* for reasons that

will soon become clear. While Albert et Cie were not known as specialist editors,⁴ Max Spohr was in fact quite connected to an atypical area of study. With Edouard Oberg, Franz Josef von Bülow, and Magnus Hirschfeld, Max Spohr co-founded the *Comité Scientifique Humanitaire*.⁵ Because of Spohr's translation, *Dédé* was made available to a whole new audience of literary and social critics. Indeed, one such critic, Eugen Wilhelm applied the epithet "homosexual writer" to Essebac in Magnus Hirschfeld's journal *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* after reading the work. Henceforth Essebac was considered a homosexual writer in France.

To this newly designated and possibly nefarious tag, "homosexual writer," Ferray partially attributes the definitive silence of Essebac after 1910. His publication schedule certainly seems to reflect some type of life altering event. Essebac's career started in 1898 at age thirty with the publication of *Partenza*, continued by the subsequent publication of three novels in two years (1901-2): *Dédé*, in 1901, then two novels in the span of a year: *Luc* and *L'Élu* in 1902, all three with a categorically homosexual theme. In 1903, Essebac would publish *Les Boucs*, a novel that is out-of-print as well as untraceable as far as I have been able to deduce and from which Ferray does not cite. 1904 sees the publication of *Les Griffes* (1904) a novel that Ferray claims has no homosexual themes (Ferray 65), a statement with which I can only half-heartedly agree. *Les Griffes* is followed two years later by *La Nuit païenne*, a much shorter novel that exposes intrigues of the *bal des Quatr-z-arts*, an annual exhibition of art and naked bodies put on since 1892 by the students of the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Finally, *Palestres d'aujourd'hui* a short novella based on Plato's *Lysis*, published in Jacques d'Adelsward-Fersen's short-lived gay themed literary review *Akademos* in 1909, and *Les Perles*

meurent Essebac's swan song, published in journal 8 August/September edition of the review *Pan* in 1910.

Before laying out an analytic plan for this chapter, there is one last mystery attributed to this already enigmatic writer to discuss: why after 1910 does Essebac's voice, before so strong, affirmative, and I would contend gay militant, fall silent? There is, of course, the somewhat career decaying sobriquet "homosexual writer," the international import in 1902 after the translation of *Dédé* into German. The year that saw the publication of *L'Élu*, arguably Essebac's most pederastic novel, also saw the arrest of one of France's most well known homosexuals and Essebac's contemporary and friend: Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen. A writer with a known penchant for young adolescent males, Fersen was condemned to six months in prison following a scandal aptly designated "scandal of l'avenue de Friedland" for the place in Paris where it took place or "scandale of degenerates" after those who participated. Known as a *messe noire* ("black mass"), he and other known homosexuals took to the rooftop of his Paris apartment to enjoy each other's company as well as that of scantily dressed young boys masquerading in Greek and Roman garb. Although Essebac is not known to be one of the partygoers on this occasion, he is known to have been a close friend of Fersen's and to have participated in previous *messes noires* at l'avenue Friedland (he would also come to Fersen's defense shortly after his arrest). After, the press saw an open shot at authors like Fersen and Essebac and took it, criticizing, like Maurice Talmeyr does in *L'Action française*, their literature as having pushed the limits of decency too far. What Ferray calls "apostolat esthétique" ("apostolate esthetic"), Essebac, like Oscar Wilde and Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen, would be seen as attracting youths to their own form of

religion based in homosexuality and would consequently be attacked by journals, more notably the antirepublican French press (Ferray 65). Of course this is similar to the accusations of gay piedpipping lobbed at homosexuals by right-wing evangelical groups today. According to Ferray, during this affair Essebac had at least one moral supporter: his younger brother Maurice with whom he lived for five years, 42, rue Maubeuge and later 18, rue de la Douane. While living with his brother, Essebac produced the majority of his works: *Dédé*, *Luc*, *L'Élu*. Upon his brother's marriage, Essebac seems to have found himself alone in Paris, without the familial ties that might have kept him grounded and made him feel secure during his years of writing against the current of pre-established social norms.

After the publication in 1909 of the short novella *Palestras d'aujourd'hui* in *Akadémos* and then finally in 1910 with the publication of *Les Perles meurent* in the review *Pan*, no literary trail of Achille Essebac exists; in fact, no trail at all. In 1926, he would lose his mother at the age of eighty. He would live only ten more years dying alone of a lung disorder at his house boulevard Richard-Lenoir the 1 August 1936. He was laid to rest in one of two family vaults in the Montmartre cemetery.

This chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section “Questionnable Friendships...?: Platonic Love and Discourse in Essebacian Ideology” will explore the use of Platonic theories on love and friendship that Essebac's works espouse. I will argue in this chapter that Essebac's use of Platonic theories to explain his ideology of male same-sex love can bring into relief the possible link between the two necessarily separated male social experiences: homosociality and homosexuality. The second “Adonis' Children: The Cult of Intermediary Youth and Ephemeral Homosexuality” will

examin Essebac's obsession with youth and the limits of homosexuality in its relation to age during the fin-de-siècle period. The third "Here's Lookin' at You Kid: The Gay Gaze and the Power of Recognition" will study the importance of the *regard* as a speech act in Essebac's works as well as its possible bearing on the actual mutual recognition practices between homosexuals of Essebac's time. Finally, the concluding section: "Somewhere Before the Rainbow: Essebacious Call for Acceptance" will situate Achille Essebac's works in relation to the social movements of which he a part.

Questionnable Friendships... ? : Platonic Love and Discourse in Essebacious Ideology

"L'aveu que je fais est cynique. Je le sais. Ce que je vais écrire est immoral. Peut-être [...] Donc, que ne me lisent point les prudes et les timorés [...] Rivés aux exigences de la chair, toute beauté vainement les frôle, en laquelle ne s'incruste pas le sexe vers quoi tend le rut béat de leur peau [...] Ces pages veulent ignorer le rut."

Achille Essebac, *Dédé*

Such is the advice given by Marcel at the start of his adolescent journal to those lucky enough to have read a copy of Achille Essebac's most beloved and well-known novel. One might easily notice in these simple but suggestive remarks the confrontation of the lamented vestiges of Greek and Roman theories on love and friendship with early twentieth century bourgeois morality. In *Dédé* and in the whole of Essebac's work, male same-sex love is always placed above vapid sexual encounters.⁶ It tends rather towards a spiritual, transcendental appreciation for the intense and mutually complete recognition possible between members of the male sex. It is not surprising then that the first part of this chapter will discuss the importance of Platonic theories on love and friendship in the whole of Essebac's work. Rather than fall prey to an immediate contradiction, given the

sometimes scandalous attention that Essebac's works have incited, I feel the need to mention that my intention in this section is not to suggest that Essebac's conception of friendship and love between the male sex is lacking in *sensuality*, which is, clearly, not the same as *sexuality*. Nor do I intend to hypothesize that outside the constraints of Essebaccian narrative rhetoric (Essebac purportedly participated in the vilifying *messes noires* at l'avenue Friedland), Essebac did not, or those that vocally adhered to these theories⁷ do not exhibit a desire for something beyond the idealized masculine connection constrained by the asceticism that these works seem to promote. Moreover, Essebac's novels could be said to overflow with sensuous descriptions and overtly suggestive scenes. Ferray certainly said it best: Essebac's narrative style "skirts indeceny."

However, if the descriptions of his characters and the presentation of scenes in which this ideal of masculine love and friendship is negotiated flirts with impropriety, Essebac is careful never to cross the sometimes obscure demarcation that surrounds it, and, when close, to soften what harshness might reveal itself in lyric and always poetic discourse filtered through an ideal of masculine relations. This is what distinguishes the whole of Essebac's work from many other homosexual writers of the period, placing his works in a shaded area somewhere between outright discursive queerness and borderline heteronormativity. Indeed, because of a constant shift between asceticism and sensuality, his works and male characters are constantly fluctuating on ill-defined points of a homosocial/sexual continuum (Sedgwick 1985). If Judith Butler states in *Excitable Speech* that there is a certain "discursive performativity" (Butler 1997, 14) to language that allows for a disruption in the happy continuity of social definitions by offering counter or alternate examples, then by reevaluating the terms through which male same-

sex relations have been presented, those very terms might be returned to the speaker and then “cited against [their] original purpose” (Butler 1997, 14; De Certeau 1984). Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, homosexuality had accrued a stigmatizing, definitional sediment. Indeed, a historicity that became internal to its representation (Butler 1997). Through its re-presentation through referential language to the Platonic system of pederasty, Essebac’s works attempt to resituate homosexuality outside the constraints of its nineteenth-century historicity by working through a Greek and Roman ideology that was morally more accepting.

“Palestres d’aujourd’hui: À Propos de la rentrée,” Essebac’s penultimate publication communicated in 1909 in the first gay compelled periodical in France, *Akadémos*, is a nostalgia driven visionary sigh for the loss of the antiquated youth-venerating ideology favored by Plato. Indeed, in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France this ideology quickly fell prey to the stern voice of a too quick to arrive adulthood and the even sterner theologically and heteronormative based morality of La Belle Époque (Surkis 2006; Zeldin 1970; Accampo 1995). In this short story, Essebac speaks towards a modernity in which Plato’s famous epebes, Lysis and Menexenus, are still present but struggle with a different set of morals principals (*Akadémos* 518). For Essebac, modernity has not killed the ancient sensual verve that stirred between the bodies of these young boys. It has, however, perverted the ideology under which the esthetic beauty of these friendships was embraced and supplanted them onto a sterile backdrop promoting a socially skewed perception of the limits of masculine relationships.

If the survival of La Belle Époque’s reinstated libertarian republicanism rested uneasily on a morally stringent socio-political ideology, Essebac’s call for the return to a

time that celebrated the male same-sex love described between Lysis and Menexenus might have fallen on dead ears. However, Essebac states, this does not condemn their story to Antiquity but rather necessitates a rewriting in a more modern setting (518). His works then are an anachronistic re-citing of Greek and Roman theories of male same-sex love through and against a modern backdrop. This link, of course, between the Greek and Roman tradition of male same-sex desire and homosociality is not without meaning since as Sedgwick states: “for the Greeks, the continuum between ‘men loving men’ and ‘men promoting the interests of men’ appears to have been quite seamless” (Sedgwick 1985, 4). Indeed then the reuse of these Platonic theories on male same-sex relations can be read as an attempt to abridge the discursive distance between these two masculine positions. Moreover, this literary reawakening that expresses a different and yet familiar form of male same-sex love is esthetically driven and poetic, shrouded in the transcendental recognition between similar desires that while engaging in homoerotic sensuality, transcends the abject vulgarity associated with homosexuality in many of the socio-political works at the turn of the century (Davray 1895; D’Urville 1874; Bureau 1908; Magnan 1895; Saint-Paul 1896). In doing so, Essebac’s works also take to task, through this recitational process,⁸ the idea of what constitutes the *homosocial* (Sedgwick 1985), its relationship to homosexuality, and where and how within these modern limits desire between men can be expressed and negotiated.

In a chapter dedicated to Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (1477-1549), a sixteenth-century Italian painter nicknamed *Il Sodoma* and known for his fondness of boys, the narrator of *Partenza* contemplates the current stigma to express admiration for the young masculine body without the familiar stigmatic tag born from the often-made unhappy

coupling of homosexuality and debase morality. He states that certainly Bazzi understood the joys in celebrating the youthful male body, enough so for inspiration for one of his most iconic paintings *Saint Sébastien* (Essebac 1898, 236), which has also become a gay symbol over the centuries (Kaye 2002). But the most pressing problem, states the narrator of *Partenza*, is not the works themselves but the desire evoked by the descriptions and representations of the beauty of male bodies and the assumption that this in turn involves transgressing moral codes of accepted sexuality. What seems to surprise the narrator above all is the misunderstanding of Bazzi's contemporaries about the role of Art in the creation and admiration of male beauty. For Essebac, and seemingly for Bazzi, the representation of the young male form through Art must always transcend base morality when born from respect and admiration, similar to the *irascible* love of which Plato spoke (Plato 1972; Ludovic 176). Like in the painting by Bazzi, the descriptions of the beauty of the young adolescent males that the narrator describes from his trips through Italy intend to speak of the love of male beauty through the transcendent ideology of Platonic pederasty. These descriptions then recite the love of the male form through an ideological framework that intentionally omitted sexuality. Ultimately, *Partenza* is a referential prelude to a literary and social ideology that will be re-cited throughout the whole of Essebac's works, and after in many of Gide's as well, in the hopes of reworking this idealized image of male beauty back into the literature of the time.

Following the epigraph of this chapter, Marcel, in *Dédé*, criticizes a readership more interested in pornographic lust than true love (Essebac 2009, 9). Moreover, in a letter addressed to the Comte Luigi V. -L. that prefaces the novel, Essebac confirms the

purity of these memoirs pointing to the age of the writer as proof that base morality is absent from the narration (7). If Marc Angenot states in *Le Cru et le faisandé* that homosexual discourse in novels after 1889 became more prevalent, but still suffered from the prejudices of past epistemological discourses on homosexuality (Angenot 122), Essebac's preface and Marcel's introductory comments are all the more important. By pointing away from the possibility of homoeroticism in the journal and highlighting the homosocial bonds between the two boys, the novel is reoriented away from its expected vulgarity and towards the seemingly familiar homosociality of *collégiens* during adolescence. But this homosocial space is also a precarious one in that the close bonds that it solicits also purportedly nurture the fluid sexuality that many fin-de-siècle authors and psychiatrists feared (Bonntain 1883; Garnier 1885; Hermant 1895; Rodes 1904; Mirbeau 2003b). At the *rentrée*, Marcel describes his first feelings about André Dalio (Dédé), citing a feeling of spiritual transcendence when Dédé's hand was first given to him to hold by the Director of the school (Essebac 2009, 9). Indeed, Marcel is quickly transformed by the relationship. A self-described little ingrate, living side by side with Dédé has taken over his heart and transformed him into a thinking and loving being (21). This description of the benefits of homosociality between *collégiens* is also strongly reminiscent of the transformational relationship between the *erastes* and *eromenos* of Greek and Roman pederasty (Ludovic 1976; Bullough 1979; Williams 1999) and may not seem divisive in and of itself. Indeed, it remains benign even as Marcel proclaims his love for Dédé, a sentiment he places above any he has had for young girls and women (Essebac 2009, 9). Physicality between the two boys, and therefore corporeal desire, will come into play later in the novel but when it does it is constantly confounded by

discursively placed Platonic ideologies that speak to the transcendental qualities of the desires. For example, the first kiss is described as close to those exchanged with one's mother or a fraternal embrace, but with something much more profound (85), like two souls melting into one (86). However this Aristophanian echo also playfully blurs the lines between homosociality and homosexuality. Even as Marcel categorically asserts their chaste intentions, stating that neither one was searching for base pleasure (62), the reader is placed in a position that must constantly waver between indefinite points on the described continuum of desire positioned between homosociality and homosexuality. What the two boys seem to recognize in each other is the comprehension of a similarity that is informed by as it transcends desire, further blurring this relation through platonic discourse (Ludovic 1976; Plato 1892). Marcel revels in finding a child "like him" (Essebac 2009, 62), who he would have loved as a brother. But the fraternal nature of the relationship is called into question by the troubling call of Dédé's lips (62). Indeed, it is the confrontation of the conditionally based fraternal relationship with an-other love and the possibility of "other joys" (62) that places the two boys' relationship within and yet without the citational boundaries of homosociality. Moreover by placing desire in-between, the homosocial is drawn back into the orbit of the "potentially erotic" and therefore hypothesizes, as Sedgwick has so articulately stated, "the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (Sedgwick 1985, 1-2).

In *Luc*, Julien, a twenty-two year old student at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris becomes enamored with the beauty, grace, and budding sensuality of the eponymous hero, a twelve-year-old choirboy who has made it big at the theater. Like Marcel, Julien is placed in a complicated position vis-à-vis homosociality. Rather than conforming to

the models of heterosexual relationships available to him at L'École des Beaux-Arts where a bourgeois mentality permits loose women and errant sexuality for young unmarried males, Julien searches for an affectionate relationship, something more than fraternal (Essebac 1907, 47). He will establish this "liaison" with Luc Aubry. The friendship that develops between the two is platonically described as "love's sister" (50). For Julien, staying within the boundaries of homosociality will mean to eliminate sexual desire from his friendship with Luc. For Luc, homosociality is contrasted with a heterosexual tinge when he falls for Jeannine (his childhood sweetheart). But Luc will keep this relationship as well as the one with Julien completely chaste benefiting more from the Agathonian self-disciplinary connection (Plato 1892) of the homosocial bond between him and Julien than he would have from sexual pleasures. And while Julien is less sure of his ability to keep his adoration chaste, in the absence of the corporeal, he comprehends the possibility (Essebac 1907, 51-2).

In Essebac's fourth novel *L'Élu*, Pierre Pélissier, a twenty-two year old art student just back from a trip to Rome, contemplates the search for a love that would transcend the corporeal, the "celestial" love of which Pausanias spoke (Plato 1892). Like the love between Dédé and Marcel, the love for which Pierre searches will exalt the soul rather than the flesh (Essebac 1902, 12). This is because Pierre understands the temerity of passion. Like Plato, he seems to see passion as a heedless instinct that must be transcended through a carefully constructed sexual abnegation rather than capricious physical alleviation (134; Ludovic 181; Plato 1892). Indeed though, this abnegation is not without corporeal expression. While the narrator does not indicate what exactly a "chaste caresse" might entail, he does however state that Pierre encourages them as a

natural politeness between bodies (Essebac 1902, 134). A somewhat equivocal contradiction in terms, intimacy between males, for Pierre, can include moves outside the realm of pure chastity, but only when these caresses are born from thoughts of purity. This does however follow in Plato's footsteps since while the philosopher did of course preach complete sexual self-discipline towards the end of his life,⁹ his earlier works make room for some intimacy between lovers as long as the end result was a love that transcended the physical (Ludovic 174-80; Plato 1892). The same cannot be said for Essebian heterosexual encounters.

Stefanina, an overly sexualized parasitic female villain who takes advantage of the young disadvantaged Djino before Pierre's arrival in Italy will eventually tarnish the innocence and purity of the young boy's soul and body. The narrator, however, as well as Pierre, is quick to point out that even while Djino gives in to the sexual pangs of his adolescent body at the hands of Stefanina, aptly nicknamed *la Sanguisuga*, he is not to blame. It is in fact women who are the aggressor; women who put the purity of his soul in contest with the "wild bestiality" of the females he encountered (Essebac 1902, 207-8). Informed by a complete misunderstanding of the formation of male youth, women, in many of Essebac's novels, are placed in the position normally assigned to the predatory homosexual in social and scientific discourse: courting carnal sensibility in young adolescents in an almost bloodthirsty way. Stripping the young Djino of his youthful purity and insouciance, traits that attract the masculine characters, the females in the novel confuse the maturity of his mind and body, leaving him physically and mentally exhausted (208). Of course the self-indulgent nature of Essebian feminine lust for these young boys is also warned against in Plato (Plato 1892).¹⁰

In *Les Griffes* (1904), the two main protagonists, Daniel and Graciniano have a suspiciously close relationship. If Graciniano, however, is engaged to the small Spanish town of Tolède's ideal of virtue, Jacinta, it is a marriage that will never be consummated during the story. Indeed, like in the pederastic tradition, Graciniano's idea of true love is chaste and not soiled by corporeal desires (Essebac 1904, 51-2). In fact, the narrator states that Graciniano loves Daniel in a way that this word rarely describes and which could not be further from the immoral intemperance with which most practice it (81). It is then similar to the "irascible" or intelligible love of the platonic system (Plato 1972), a love between souls, a constant and consistent love that is only possible, according to Plato, in male same-sex relations (Plato 1994, 56; Ludovic 174-80).

The love that Graciniano has for Jacinta is more aptly designated as idealized admiration, a sentiment that would, in a similar form, grace many of the pages of André Gide's works when describing his relationship with his wife. While heterosexuality is implied in the novel's narration by the link between male and female bodies, the relationship cannot be designated heterosexual in the standard sense since desire is completely absent. Indeed, in the absence of desire, heterosexuality, like homosexuality, loses its most distinctive quality and is easily confounded with homosociality under similar conditions (Sedgwick 1985). However, unlike the admiration felt between Graciniano and Jacinta, the bond between the two male protagonists actually grows stronger and more dubious after Graciniano is confronted with a forlorn heterosexuality. Graciniano will give in to his carnal pangs when his father's ex-lover returns to Tolède in search of the destruction of the family (Graciniano's father and by way of him Graciniano) that abandoned her. She cannot, of course, give Graciniano what Daniel can:

a spiritual connection and mutual recognition that goes beyond sexuality. She will, however, like Stefanina in *L'Élu*, take full advantage of an adolescent body screaming of pubescent anticipation. After his sexually errant mistake, Daniel, not Jacinta (who abandons him after the news), is there to comfort Graciniano. He caresses Graciniano with familiar words of comfort that parrot those, we are told, “the conquered lover would say to the lover who wishes to be conquered” (Essebac 1904, 131).

The value of reviving this Greek and Roman model of male same-sex relations, especially in the moral atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is certainly not to be discounted. An excess of treatises warning against the dangers of immoral literature inundated the literary market in and around the time of Essebac's career starter *Partenza*. Eugène de Budé, author of *Du Danger des mauvais livres et des moyen d'y remédier* states that behind the candy-coated exteriors of these novels that entice by way of literary bewitchment hides a “refined immorality.” Of the many issues he sees with these dangerous books are the loss of familial duties as well as social and domestic divisions and suicide (Budé 15-6). Eugène de Budé goes even further to state that overly sexualized literature is the direct cause of patricides, fratricides, infanticides and attacks against religion (63). These ideas were also reiterated, framed by science, in Nordau's immensely popular work on degeneration *Entartung* (Nordau 1894b).¹¹ While this commentary might seem desperate, opinions such as these were enough to cause a social and ideological crisis that provoked the reinstatement of several pre-Revolution censorial laws. These laws were seen as necessary under the Third Republic especially because of the increase in literacy rates: from seventy-five to ninety percent at the beginning of the Republic to nearly ninety-five percent in the years 1899-1904 for the

areas in and around Paris (Lamarre-Stora 1990). Laws such as that of 29 July 1881 punishing all “assaults on morals” by all means of publication were meant to prevent the contamination of citizen’s minds. Indeed, nobody could afford weakened citizens after such an embarrassing defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1871.

But it is not just the revival of Platonic theories on love that makes Essebac’s works unique. As was previously stated, it is the way in which he presents them. If Essebac’s works skirt the borders between the homosocial and the homosexual without an always obvious reader awareness, it is because any transgressions are couched in a poetic discourse that seems to allow no place for indecency. Indeed an anonymous author in *La Jeune Champagne* is quick to point this out, stating that Essebaccian language is exact and somptuous, with a rich tonality in the choice of phrasing which is particular to the author (*La Jeune Champagne* 380). Indeed when cast in this language, he states, “[les] scènes perdent leur caractère érotique, et l’on n’a pas même l’idée de songer à la morale violée” (“the scenes lose their erotic character, and one does not even think of moral transgressions”) (380). Ironically, this critique points both away from and to the moral transgressions *possible* in Essebac’s works. Indeed, many of Essebac’s works flirt with impropriety but never fully engage with it, highlighting rather the transcendental nature of male same-sex relations even while alluding to their (possible) sensuality. Ultimately, it is not just redefinitional space that Essebac creates through his narrations but rather a space that reappropriates what Sedgwick has called “historically residual definitions” (Sedgwick 1985, 90) of homosexuality. As Sedgwick has stated this type of reappropriation is indeed a powerful tool for whomever acquires rights of definition, control, and manipulation of the ideological representation of how close the homosocial

and homosexual are on a socio-sexual continuum (86). By reappropriating the Greek and Roman models of male same-sex relations reworked through a modern esthetic, Essebac forces readers to see intimacy between males in a form that was not new and certainly for the literary elite who would have been familiar with Greek and Roman literature quite familiar. However through its re-citation the limits of male same-sex relations are redefined in modern terms and through this redefinition, reinserted into a citational practice dominated by heteronormative representations of male relations.

Adonis's Children: The Cult of Intermediary Youth and Ephemeral Homosexuality

In his critical study of age relations and history, John R. Gillis calls the historical period surrounding Essebac's works the "discovery of adolescence"¹² (Gillis 1981) in Europe. Indeed, the period from 1870-1950 was a time of social and sexual concern for many authors and psychiatrists whose focus was on the formation of French youth after the implementation of the Jules Ferry reforms (Budé 1883; Davray 1895; M...Madame C de 1901; Bureau 1908). Moreover, also during this period the adolescent male was the focus of many treatises on the innate bisexuality of humans (Krafft-Ebing 1886; Chevalier 1893; Saint-Paul 1910; Ellis 1962; Bullough 1979; Greenberg 1988). The importance of this formative period in a boy's life was also a worthy topic of discussion in many of Plato's dialogues¹³ and Pausanias, of note, fears the unstable notion associated with adolescent male intellect and sexuality and warns against excessive interaction with them (Plato 1892).

Indeed, Essebac also places considerable emphasis on the period of adolescence¹⁴ in his works. He considers adolescence, specifically that of young boys, as a period

during which sexuality and gender can be fluid entities, similar to Greek, Roman and Butlerian models respectively (Dover 1989; Halperin 1990; Butler 1993). Like the period during which the socio-pedagogic link between *erastes* and *eromenos* is so vital (Ludovic 1976; Greenberg 1988; Williams 1999), adolescence, for Essebac, is a period that molds and shapes the future social and sexual character of men, and therefore needs to be fully explored and celebrated. It would be misleading however to globally apply this notion of masculine instruction, *Dédé's* most distinguishing theme, to all of Essebac's novels. It is true that most, if not all of the young boys represented in Essebac's novels progress through the narrative by means of some type of self-reflective or exteriorly provoked evolution highly focused on the fluidity of gender and sexuality in adolescence. It is equally true that many of these novels focus on the relationship between a slightly older male lead and a younger ephebe-like character.¹⁵

For this reason, Essbacion youth should be examined not as a time period per se—one that would be necessarily bookended by definitive numbers—but rather as a fleeting notion always headed towards an undesired adulthood and heterosexuality. To be sure, for the author of *Dédé* the temporal limits to sensual and sexual freedom placed on adolescence only highlights the subsequent need for self-exploration. Indeed, the ephemeral seems to grace the lips of almost every character in Essebac's corpus, including the narrators in all of his works. The dedication in *Partenza* to the young Italian boys Essebac met on his travels is exemplary of such a homage:

Aux petites marchandes de fleurs [...] à Rome; Aux gamins effrontés de Naples ; A Pio, le petit aveugle florentin ; A tous ces jolis visages pleins de soleil, de sourires et de beauté, [qui] furent la joie et le charme

inexprimables des heures trop brèves passées là-bas, [...] leur frère très humble dédie ce livre (Essebac 1898) (my emphasis)

To the young flower merchants [...] in Rome; To the cheeky little boys of Naples ; To Pio, the little Florentine blind boy ; To all the pretty sun-soaked faces, smiling, beautiful faces, *who were the inexpressible joy and charmes of the hours too brief spent in their company*, [...] their brother dedicates this book (my emphasis)

The characteristics of the young adolescent boys in this dedication revive the narrator of *Partenza* allowing him to piggyback on the liberty and freedom that emanates from the young *bambini* that surround him wherever he goes (19). Similar to Michel's vampiric connection to young Arab boys in Gide's *L'Immoraliste*, the relationship between the narrator of *Partenza* and the Italian youths he meets is one of give and take: the narrator feeds off of the youthful insouciance of the young males while the young boys receive money and attention (19). Of course, this relationship was part and parcel to the "southern voyages" that were so common for fin-de-siècle gay male elite, works like *Partenza* acting as makeshift gay travel guides for those whose pockets were deep enough to travel to the south in search of these so coveted youthful males (Pratt 1981; Aldrich 1993).

In *Dédé*, Marcel, like the narrator of *Partenza*, laments the operative changes effected by the passing from adolescence to adulthood (Essebac 2009, 129). For him, this intermediary period permits, as it limits, the sensuality that slowly develops between

him and Dédé. For Marcel, however, these limits are incomprehensible at the time. It is only a long while after, when reflecting back on youth, that the importance of youth becomes clear (26). It is also during this period that desire is most fluid, allowing for, according to the narrator, a transient pardon of sexual transgressions. Indeed, many of the late-nineteenth-century psychologists and psychiatrists spoke with cautionary rhetoric to the dubious sexuality of young adolescent males during this period (Krafft-Ebing 1886; Chevalier 1893; Saint-Paul 1910; Ellis 1962). In fact, this fluid desire is both exalted and feared by Marcel. For the narrator, time changes desire, hedging it in discursive, spacial, and physical limits all intent on protecting against vulnerable relations. Moreover, fluid desire, in adulthood, is warped by a much more rigid system of heteronormatively based contingencies and therefore “offends against order” as Mary Douglas would say (Douglas 2008). This is something that Marcel, as an adult, understands all too well. Speaking of those with whom he shared this notion of sensual and sexual freedom during his adolescent *vacances*, he reiterates the encumbering sexual rigidity that comes with adulthood, lamenting the happy delusion that he and his friends shared during their adolescent years (Essebac 2009, 158-9). Ultimately, as Dédé grows ill, the thought of the young boy surviving death is transformed in Marcel’s mind from a fervent desire to a shameful antagonism. Adulthood for Dédé would mean surviving death and therefore sexual conformity. Indeed, Marcel contends that adulthood for Dédé inevitably means finding a woman and forgetting men (162). Like the roses in Ronsard’s infamous poem, Dédé should be plucked from the earth in his prime, while his adolescent grace still permits the questionable relationship between the two boys. As Dédé lay dying at the end of the novel, the limits of male same-sex relations become clearer as

death (highlighted as feminine in the text “*elle* (Death) *doit* venir”) speeds up time and reveals the man that he will have to become (172).

In *Luc*, the narrator’s description of the eponymous character teeters between youth and adulthood, a dubious innocence showing signs of a nascent virility the narrator states (Essebac 1907, 27). However, when Luc is hired to star on stage next to Déah Swindor, a demi-monde actress who would rival Zola’s infamous Nana, his unblemished childhood confronts the guileful nature that will be needed to survive the “cabotin” lifestyle of the Parisian stage. His debut into the racy underbelly of Parisian entertainment soils his juvenile orientation towards the world (35). Julien Bréard, the twenty-two year old École des Beaux-Arts student whose relationship with Luc matures over the course of the novel is also described as existing in this intermediary stage between youth and adulthood. At twenty-two, Julien is still a child and has the fresh face of an ephebe (45). But youthful physical descriptions are never to be read as markers of sexual innocence. The Essebacian adolescent embodies the rather specious purity that fin-de-siècle social theorists feared so much in the adolescent male (Budé 1883; Davray 1895; Bureau 1908). Relying on litotic language, Essebac points the reader towards the “perverted” nature of this youthful period with a description of Julien’s eyes. Covered by a “mauve veil” (Essebac 1907, 45, 61), his eyes are surrounded by the somber rings that are a sexological indicator of masturbation and nascent sexual exploration (Garnier 1885). Essebac applies the same litotic formula to Luc when speaking of the nocturnal delights the young boy must be discovering (Essebac 1907, 80). These illusions to the eyes are key to understanding the importance of this period of adolescence. While never

outrightly exposing it as such, male adolescence is revealed through the joyful anguish of an ever-present nascent sexual desire that intices as it invites.

Even if the narrator never divulges the exact content of Luc's dreams, his relationship with Julien, as well as a description of a childhood friend highlight the sexual fluidity that characterizes this intermediary period of adolescence. As Luc daydreams, three images are juxtaposed: the beauty of the naked male body of Édouard (his childhood friend), that of Julien, and lastly that of Nine: "Et le souvenir d'Édouard nu encore auprès de lui tout à l'heure s'estompe en les poudres fines d'un pastel [...] Il pense à Julien en fermant à demi les yeux—puis à Nine...Nine?...?" ("And the memory of Édouard naked and still next to him blurred into the fine powders of a pastel painting [...] He thinks of Julien while half closing his eyes—then of Nine...Nine?...") (Essebac 1907, 206). The double ellipse coupled with the question mark certainly allows for an open interpretation into the object of Luc's desire. The juxtaposition created by the comparative triangle—Édouard Davilliers (a young *lycéen* who will take the place of Nine as Fanchette in the production of *Le Mariage de Figaro* and whose virility is placed in question several times in the novel), Nine, and Julien—undergirds the almost playful quality attributed to youthful sexuality discussed thus far in this chapter. It also plays with, if not queers the notion of the homoerotic in the love triangle¹⁶ described between the three protagonists in relation to Luc: Luc-Nine-Julien, Luc-Édouard-Julien. In the first, Nine acts as the "passive recipient" of male desire. She is not able to function as a subject, only as a mediator between the unrecognized, or more likely unspeakable homosexual desire between Luc and Julien pointing to the definition of erotic rivalry highlighted by René Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Girard 1965). Sandwiched

between the two male protagonists, Nine inadvertently allows for a symbolic sliding away from an ineffable or unrealizable homosexual desire and towards a non-threatening homosociality. Indeed, Nine acts as the narrative heterosexual buffer to homosexual desire. Moreover, because Julien decides to be with her after Luc is gone, she also highlights the compulsory nature of heterosexuality in adulthood while symbolically assuming Luc's place as Julien's object of desire. In the second triangle, Édouard, who plays the role of a female in the production of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, is described as "fragile" with the "soul of a butterfly" (Essebac 1907, 258), a young boy whose virility one might doubt had his tailor not taken care to provide ample evidence, states the narrator (176). The gendered fluidity with which he is described in the novel is not surprising since the other adolescent male protagonists also fluctuate between outright virility and conspicuous feminine traits. Ultimately then, since Édouard's gender is placed in doubt, the inevitable kiss between Fanchette (played by Édouard) and Chérubin (the role Luc plays, traditionally played by a female) in the play might be described as some type of gender queer: Édouard playing a woman and socially and corporeally described as such kissing an adolescent male whose sexuality has been described as fluid.¹⁷ This innocent kiss allows Édouard, who is biologically male however feminine his description, to act as a mediator to the more desired, although never consummated, kiss between Luc and Julien, again permitting a suspect sliding on the continuum back towards homosexual desire. Indeed, the two erotic triangles in the novel highlight the fluidity that Essebac, as well as many authors, attach to sexuality and gender during this period of adolescence.

Unlike Dédé, however, it will not be an illness that will destroy Luc's youthful nature but rather a double dose of poison. In the first, Luc poisons his body with a heterosexual love that cannot compete with the impossible amour that he cannot share with Julien. In a desperate attempt to assuage the paroxysm of sexual frustration, he gives in to Nine's lustful plea. However the description of their lubricious embrace is couched in a deleterious rhetoric that points to the destruction, rather than the exaltation of Luc's body and soul (236-7). Not surprisingly, Julien's name is not absent from the description: "Et tout, tout ce corps que *Julien connaît si bien* s'exprima cette nuit même dans l'audacieuse nudité qui [...] *déchira son cœur d'un impossible amour*" ("And this whole body that *Julien knows so well* expressed itself this same night in an audacious nudity that *tore his heart away from an impossible love*") (236-7) (emphasis in original). The whole of this citation reveals hidden references to the true object of Luc's desire and to the type of love ("l'oeuvre charnelle") (236-7) he has just suffered with Nine. Luc will subsequently take his life with a dose of poison with no known antidote. Julien will take his place next to Nine, now carrying the fruit of Luc's spiritual and corporeal destruction.

L'Élu, Essebac's fourth novel might be hailed the twentieth century's apogee to the young male figure writ large. The novel abounds with lengthy and extremely sensual descriptions of the *ciociari* of Italy that art student Pierre makes his male models. A description that from the very beginning establishes the novel's tone, the narrator describes Pierre Pélissier's first experience with the Italian youths:

L'enfant avait, sans que Pierre l'en eût sollicité, tranquillement ouvert, devant lui, sa tunique complaisante [...] Son jeune corps luisait, sous ce voile [...] ses formes parfaites en faisaient [...]

l'adorable statue vivante d'un jeune dieu oublié en le giron
d'Hellas, matrice de beauté (Essebac 1902: 13-4)

The child had, without Pierre having requested, quietly opened, in
front of him, his soft tunic [...] His young body glistened, under
the veil [...] the perfection of his form made him [...] the adorable
living statue of a young god forgotten in the bosom of Greece,
matrix of beauty

In addition to the depiction of the *birichino*¹⁸ swooned over by narrator and male characters alike, *L'Élu* also follows the thematic trajectory of Essebac's first three novels in depicting with great enthusiasm, the joy of the "not quite man/no longer child" position, especially in the *ciociari* enlisted to pose nude for art student Pierre. Like Lucien, Pierre is twenty-two but is not described as such. He, like the young male *birichini* in the novel, still displays the imprint of an adolescence not willing to cede its place to adulthood. His lips are said to contain all the grace of adolescence under the slender traits of a precocious mustache (12). Best described as "sweet" (*gentil*), he is completely unaware of his natural beauty and elegance (13). While Pierre's description is conform to this youthful intermediary period between childhood and adulthood that Essebac has thus far made standard in his works, he only benefits from the puerile indifference towards fluid sexuality from a distance. Pierre is conscious of the socially created scope of acceptability between him and the boys he meets on the streets of Italy

even if it creates missed opportunities, like having placed money in rather than having kissed the hand of a young *bambino* in the Italian streets (14).

While the statuesque models that pose nude for Pierre rival the beauty of their antiquated brethren, they also display the intermediary characteristics between youth and adulthood defined in Essebacian discourse. Lucio Bolli, one of the *ciociaro*, is described as almost a man, yet with a youthful indifference that highlighted his childish personality. However this description should not read as sexually inexperienced. The narrator states that the excitement on his lips belies any assumption of sexual innocence (54). Another, Giovanni Bocchi, not quite sixteen, was hardly innocent, with a beautiful chest that barely supported the charming virility revealed by the perverse look in his eyes (54). What seems to be so enticing about these young bodies is less the age as an exact numerical value, but rather the still ill-defined social notion that surrounds them, always in reference to sensuality, beauty, nascent sexuality, and supposed sexual fluidity, again all aspects of male adolescence highlighted by social theorists and psychiatrists of the time (Krafft-Ebing 1886; Budé 1883; Chevalier 1893; Davray 1895 ; Bureau 1908 ; Saint-Paul 1910; Ellis 1962). Indeed, it is the notion of short-lived seduction, the ephemeral flowering of youthful bodies that attracts Pierre to these adolescents. Male adulthood is described rather as the flower already faded and therefore not nearly as enticing to an Essebacian ideology (Essebac 1902, 183). Ultimately, this is because the innate sexuality of the male adult is already a given, already associated with and negotiated through its “natural” coupling: the feminine body and therefore compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). The value in the intermediary stage is at once the hesitance

and overtness with which the body announces its foreboding sexuality and the social and moral flexibility that time seems to afford homosexual activity during this period.

While neither of the protagonists in *Les Griffes* is formally attracted to the youth that surround them, they do nonetheless fall categorically into the Essebacian thematic of intermediary youth and the fluid notions of sexuality and gender that it seems to mediate. Daniel, a Spanish-born Frenchman who returned to Spain to marry Jacinta-Maria-Conception, is described as having the “soul of a young girl” and lips that announced his youthful kindness accentuated by the still childish timber of his voice (Essebac 1904, 8-11). Originally from Castille, he has inherited the Spanish idiosyncrasies that highlight the feminine nature of his precocious sensibility (11). The narrator hints at Daniel’s conspicuous attraction to the young lieutenant, Graciniano (Jacinta’s future husband), in an ironic and litotically based description of Graciniano in his uniform. Embellished by a collared jacket, similar to those of Toledian choirboys, Graciniano gracefully masculine neck is accentuated, something that, the narrator highlights, Daniel seemed to notice (32-3). Moreover, it is the enticing mix of youthful and almost feminine characteristics mixed with naissant adolescent virility embodied by Graciniano that attracts Daniel. When Sevilla, a fin-de-siècle femme fatale character, arrives to take revenge on Graciniano’s father for having abandoned her after the birth of her illegitimate son, Graciniano is at risk of being forced into manhood by her lustful gaze and tempting sexual allure. At first, Graciniano hesitates between the questionable friendship that he shares with Daniel, the all too chaste relationship shared with Jacinta, and the ardent advances of a hypersexualized Sevilla. When Sevilla calls him *mocito* (127), Spanish for “all grown up,” he panicks and the incumbent weight of the need to satisfy his sexual desire becomes

unbearable. Graciniano succumbs to Sevilla's proposition only to subsequently regret his actions. He will be rejected by Jacinta and no longer capable, now a man, to support his henceforth unacceptable relationship with Daniel. The story ends with Daniel's abject horror at the sight of Graciniano, now a man after his encounter with heterosexuality (243).

Like in *Luc*, the relationships described in *Les Griffes* form a tripartite composition that should be analysed further: Daniel-Jacinta-Graciniano and Daniel-Sevilla-Graciniano. In the first, Jacinta, the female, again represents the impossibility of subjectivity. To use Sedgwick's terminology, she is an "absolute of exchange value" (Sedgwick 1985, 134) in the construction of men's gender constitution and sexuality. Engaged to Graciniano, but also described as Daniel's destined wife, she exists only in her relation to either of the two men and yet can satisfy neither one of them. It is this unsatisfied desire that will ultimately link Daniel and Graciniano together in the novel and establish the necessary link between homosociality and homosexuality. In the second, Sevilla is placed in a position to disrupt the happy connection established between the two young men. She is the one who tears Graciniano away from his intermediary youthful insouciance and forces him into the world of adulthood and therefore heterosexuality.

Ultimately, homosexuality in many of Essebac's works is temporally fettered by age. While there are no important adult protagonists in Essebac's corpus, the oldest being the narrator of *Partenza* who speaks to but never acts on his desire for the youthful Italian boys he meets, adulthood in Essebaccian discourse seems to announce compulsory heterosexuality making homosexuality necessarily ephemeral. Of course, this sexual

ideology mirrors in many ways the “compulsory heterosexuality” of which Adrienne Rich speaks (Rich 1980) but also that was part and parcel to fin-de-siècle bourgeois morality (Aron and Kempf 1978). Moreover, the emphasis on the fluidity of sexuality and gender during this period of adolescence that so marks the works of Essebac and other authors¹⁹ also points to its ambivalent ideological social position since sociologists and psychiatrists also spoke to the fragile sexuality and gender identification of adolescent males (Krafft-Ebing 1886; Budé 1883; Chevalier 1893; Davray 1895; Bureau 1908; Saint-Paul 1910; Ellis 1962) in the fin-de-siècle period. To be sure, this representation by sociologists and psychiatrists is more often than not couched in fear rather than adoration. These ideas surrounding the ephemerality of homosexuality and the fluidity of sexuality and gender in adolescent males will be further explored and ultimately theorized in the works of André Gide, the subject of the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

Here’s Lookin’ at You Kid: The Gay Gaze and the Power of Mutual Recognition

Oh ! dans le tumulte des récréations, dans le silence des études, la pâleur des jeunes visages, la musique fléchissante des voix !...Les yeux ! les yeux !...Surtout les yeux !! (*Dédé* 33)

The mystery and power of the gaze has been celebrated by the pens of some of the most infamous writers of the past. One of the most famous, and not surprisingly given the Essebacian penchant for his theories, Plato spoke of the eyes as the window to the soul (Plato 1972). Certainly one of the constituent facets of the nascent gay subculture in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France, evident even in the modern acronym that became synonymous with the LGBT movement, recognition between individuals with

similar sexual orientations or gender identities remains an important pivot point on which hinges the creation of an identifiable community, shared identity, as well as ideology for homosexuals. Furthermore, this recognition should be studied as at once communal and reactionary, necessary because of the discriminatory practices and even violence expressed today towards a notably repudiated population. Moreover, this mutual recognition, the identificatory gay gaze, has been globally and linguistically recognized by the neologism “gaydar,” a term expressing the mysterious yet important self-conscious connection that is purported between members of the LGBT community (Willow Lawson 2005; Colzato 2010; Bering 2009). It is reasonable to assume that in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France the need for mutual recognition practices would have been even greater. Indeed, Vernan A. Rosario states that thanks to secret signs, pederasts during this period “could recognize *each other* even more easily than they could be recognized by doctors” (Rosario 76) (emphasis in original). During this time, homosexuals, and certainly the practice of homosexuality, was still mostly relegated to the clandestine.²⁰ While William Peniston convincingly shows in his study *Pederasts and Others* that at the end of the century the visible presence of homosexuals in Paris was elevated enough to tag it a veritable subculture, the persecution of those who ventured out of the shadows to which their vice was condemned was uncompromising and therefore the acute ability for a mutual recognition would have been vital. And even if the modern term “gaydar” is only anachronistically applicable to turn of the century France, Peniston does highlight the existence of notable conventions of mutual recognition between homosexuals mentioning the copycat practices of the police of the time who

apprehended potential homosexual offenders by mimicking the furtive glances and identificatory habitudes of those they hawked (Peniston 2004).

Ultimately, however, the gay gaze is quite raucous even in its silence. If silence can be considered a “performative utterance” in that it can in certain instances change the social reality it describes rather than only passively describe a given reality (Austin 1962), then the gay gaze, as a silence that announces a change in social reality (confirming an unknown about sexual identity), might be considered a speech act. Indeed, Sedgwick states that “closetedness,” the silence in regards to the admission of homosexuality, is also a “speech act” (Sedgwick 1990, 3). But, Sedgwick states, this silence is not particular but “a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (Sedgwick 3). The gay gaze then is interesting in that through it both silence and speech are rendered pointed and performative on the same plane defined through a field made up of knowledge and ignorance. In regards to knowledge or ignorance of (homo)sexuality, the gay gaze can help to mobilize the flows of energy, desire, meaning, and identities that form the relationship between the known and unknown of homosexual identity for individuals. Ultimately, for Achille Essebac, the gay gaze is a recognizable idiosyncratic speech act that informs its participants and recipients of a desire that helps to constitute and reveal (sexual) identities that are similar to those represented by the gaze itself.²¹

For the narrator of *Partenza*, this mutual recognition is seemingly all the more necessary in the absence of a common language. Remembering a trip to Tanger in his youth, the narrator describes such an instance of mutual recognition. As his young guide Mohammed’s eyes meet his, the narrator is surprised when the Arab boy reaches to give

him a flower he has picked, a childish way of displaying sentimental interest (Essebac 1898, 84-5). This memory provokes in him another, during a trip to visit Abdul-Aziz, the young sultan of Morocco. The narrator states that his eyes solicited something indescribable as the sultan's gaze probed (*fouiller*) his own (85-6). Indeed, this citation is an excellent example of the rampant Orientalist ideology present at the turn of the century (Said 1979), the young adolescent males described through the regurgitated discourse of hyperbolized "Oriental sex" (190). Countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany, and the French-occupied territories in Northern Africa were assumed (not completely devoid of reason) to be hotspots for the sexual fluidity and moral liberty that was associated with sexual licentiousness, the oriental body ideologically linked to hypersexuality (Said 1979; McClintock 1995). Many authors such as André Gide, Oscar Wilde, Jean Lorrain, Jaques d'Adelsward-Fersen (who found his life-long lover in Italy) including Achille Essebac made visits to these countries in search of young boys in an atmosphere that was purportedly accepting of male same-sex relations (even if the majority of this "ideological acceptance" was based in underground prostitution). Moreover, Ferray mentions that many of these authors were in Morocco around the same time (Ferray 2008). But the gay gaze was more than a descriptive system of power relations between a colonizer and the colonized.

During a trip in Italy to Mount Vesuvius the narrator of *Partenza* says that the regards of his young guide Agostino are warm, melancholic, and most of all interrogating (Essebac 1898, 106). Returning from a trip in Greece, the narrator meets an unknown passenger who arrives, as if by chance, in his train car. Hardly a word spoken and the

mutual recognition is cemented, the “common tenderness” between the two wayward flaneurs easily discerned through a glance (185).

With an emphatic and seemingly anticipative optimism, Marcel, in *Dédé*, starts his narration with a self-conscious nostalgia-driven declaration to those who might have shared in his joy of the initiative regard. He describes this ocular initiation as both provocative and pathological/perverse (*maladive*) (Essebac 2009, 13). The adjective “initiés” (“initiated”) is the semantic cornerstone of the citation. One might easily glean from it the sanguine aspiration towards a fraternally comprehensive homosexual ideology of which his journal would become a part. For not only does it indicate that mutual recognition might indeed have been practiced and recognized as such among a specific group of people, but it also serves as a didactic preface to the whole of his works. Indeed, in prefacing his most celebrated novel with a nod towards mutual recognition, the work itself should be regarded as an instance of the gay gaze. Ultimately, the work offers itself up for reader acknowledgement, speaking to the “performative aspects of the text,” making it a site where definitions of homosexuality are created and deconstructed in relation to particular readers (Sedgwick 1990, 3).

There are however many analyzable instances of the gay gaze within the novel itself. In the absence of words, Marcel explains in an almost ontologically explicative remark how the eyes not only express, but also explain and therefore create homosexual desire. He states that Dédé must have noticed everything that escaped from his eyes, especially the trembling reserve that could flower into something more, that could express living and being (*vivre, être*) (Essebac 2009, 61). What banal parlance might have failed to adequately express between the two young boys, silence seems all the more

able to communicate. In Essebacian discourse, the (homo)sensuality and (homo)sexuality that might expose the transgressive underpinnings of homosociality between men are playfully litotic rather than hyperbolic. Moreover, while words would have certainly diluted the intensity of desire, actions between the two young boys are analogously trumped by the power of the gaze. It is from the eyes, not the lips, Marcel states, that the knowledge of their unavowed tender attachment becomes known (87). Ultimately, when death has devastated Dédé's youthful nature, it is in Dédé's eyes, overflowing with "muted secrets" (181-2) that Marcel seeks to find the still truth that sickness and society has silenced from his lips.

The gay gaze plays a significant role in Essebac's third novel, *Luc*, as well. At their first meeting initiated by Déah Swindor, the infamous actress under which Luc suffers an occupational and sexual apprenticeship, Luc instantly deduces the intentions of Pierre's embracing gaze: "Et Lucet devina que celui-là voulait être son ami..." ("And Lucet surmised that [Pierre] wanted to be his friend") (Essebac 1907, 48). The semantic field in which the verb "deviner" ("guess/surmise") might be included quickly becomes a part of the gay code established throughout Essebac's works. Moreover, it is this semantic field, characterized by doubt and therefore necessitating exploration, that charmingly plagues the Essebacian protagonist. After their initial greeting the narrator adds that from the initial encounter between Luc and Julien, the young actor also guessed (*devenir*) that Julien was a sweet and loving young lad (51). Integrated into the discourse of the gaze, the act of "guessing/surmising" ushers the reader and the protagonist through an evolutionary thematic curve that promotes a shared discovery of information regarding the relationship between characters by way of subsequent acts or codes. However, it is

not only the putatively gay protagonists that are initiated into the world of codes and the non-dit. Woman protagonists seem to recognize just as easily the clues that surround them. The apparent homosexuality of Édouard (the young *lycéen* chosen to play Fanchette in the provincial production of *Le Mariage de Figaro*) and Robert (his childhood companion) is described as “troubling” (178). It is a relationship quickly decoded by Nine who notices the suspicious repetition in Robert’s description of Édouard and his daily activities. Equally, Édouard’s mother worries over the frequency of Robert’s visits (178). Nine recognizes the affection between the two young boys and is not quick to judge, believing it natural that two “similar beings” might be attracted to each other, stating that it should not be judged “immoral” (184). She is not however so sympathetic in her realization that Lucien and Luc might share this same attachment, a realization that provokes restlessness and worry as well as a desire to regain control over Luc (179). Interestingly enough, homosexuality for Nine assumes an unthreatening position when shaded in the intimate actions exterior to her on a personal level, and yet, personally threatens her when identified in a person over whom she is supposed to have some (heterosexual) influence. Ironically, the homophobia she exhibits in regards to the Lucien/Luc couple is the same homophobia that is built into the patriarchal institutions whose male-dominated kinship systems would also oppress her as a female. Ultimately however, it is through the rules and practices associated with the compulsory heterosexuality that these same patriarchal institutions promote that she claims rights to Luc (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Sedgwick 1985).

In *L’Élu*, the homosexuality of Pierre is anchored in a nuanced comparison made between himself and the art instructor, Peterson, with whom he works, both having

traveled to noted “gay” destinations: Greece, Spain, Morocco, Egypt. Indeed, the narrator states that the two men bond over lively stories full of *curious* anecdotes (Essebac 1902, 50). This clarification is important since it creates a point of reference to which the reader must constantly refer when faced with scenes of potential mutual recognition between Pierre and Djino later in the novel. At first timid to pose nude in front of Pierre, indeed the only Italian *ciociaro* to express timidity in front of the artist, Djino finally agrees to allow Pierre to recreate his image on canvass. It is during these initial *séances* that Djino’s eyes reveal the object of his youthful desire. In a first session, Djino’s eyes are described as “piercing” and “humid” as he watches Pierre. His eyes finally catching those of the artist, they smile at each other “connivingly” (*complices*) (74-6). Indeed, understanding the recognition that occurs in scenes such as these allows the reader to better understand the leading reserve among this young *ciociaro*, partially aggravated by Djino’s unspeakable attraction for Pierre. This attraction will be later confirmed as pushing the limits of the homosocial during one such *séance* when Djino’s body exhibits a “plaisir évident” (“unmistakable pleasure”) (76) at Pierre’s farewell caress. However, once Pierre decides to take Djino back with him to France as the young Italian ends his sixteenth-year, an operative change occurs in Djino’s ability to channel his sexual frustration through the virtuous channels of Pierre’s adoration. This change, which for nine days forces Djino away from Pierre, places him in the hands of the lascivious mistresses of Paris. His young body exhausted from the perils of sleepless nights spent in the company of lascivious, unkempt, injurious women (236), Djino returns home, ashamed and dying. His illness, while never fully disclosed, most certainly is a contracted case of syphilis. On his deathbed, Djino, like Luc, offers up his naked

body one last time to Pierre's gaze. In his final hour, Djino passes with the artist's name on his lips, desiring nothing more, we are told, than to be the subject of Pierre's regard (303-4).

With the exception of *Partenza* and *Dédé*, a third-person narrator conscientiously shepherds the reader through the Essebacian novel. This is key to the gay gaze in that the reader is coerced into seeing the world that is chronicled before him through the eyes of a not so subtle admirer of ephesian youth and male same-sex desire. Moreover, in controlling the ideological tenor of the gaze, the narrator wields some powerful definitional leverage over the range of interpretations possible when discussing male bonds and therefore controls, in a sense, the "reader relations" with the text (Sedgwick 1985). In *Partenza*, a third-person narrator is not needed since the first-person narration favored throughout the novel is that of the author himself and therefore by definition queered. *Dédé*, the nostalgic journal on youthful male same-sex relations written by Marcel, also favors a first-person narration, that of Marcel, and therefore is filtered from within the novel through a gay lens, queering that of the readers. In *Luc*, it is through the laudatory narrative descriptions of Luc himself that the focus of the heterosexual lens is skewed. The narrator describes him as "too beautiful," his nectar-scented lips revealing a puerile grace like what one would find on the streets of Italy. Had it not been for the freshness of his age, "one would dare pluck from his lips" (Essebac 1907, 27) the pressing need for love and affection that his body seems to express. What is seemingly scandalous about these descriptions and inherently present in the queering of the Essebacian lens is the conditionally based incitement to an act: "on eût osé cueillir sur ces lèvres" ("one would have dared pluck from his lips") (27). In other words, through the

narrative gaze the desire of the narrator is transferred to that of the reader, linking homo- and heterosexuality through a conditionally (*eût*) tempered desire and representation. In another instance, Luc pays a chance visit to Julien's studio to discuss stage secrets, art, and literature. Here the narrator describes Julien's first encounter with the seemingly intangible beauty of Luc's body as he poses for a painting of *Daphnis*, Pan's ephebian lover. The description is of the sheepskin strap that just barely covers as it enhances the contours of his almost naked body. The narrator highlights the shadows around his midsection drawing the reader's gaze, through the narration, to the smoothness of his stomach and the curves of his upper thigh (73). At the sight of Luc's naked body, Julien feared the imaginative prerogative of his hands and the curiosity of his lips (80) (what they "would have done"), forcing himself to be satisfied with the "intoxication of the regard" (80).

In *L'Élu*, the narrator hyperbolizes the sensuality with which Djino exposes his naked body to the reader. As he slowly undresses "in a way that normally young boys ignore" (Essebac 1902, 73), he allows his shirt to coquettishly slide off his hips revealing the pure nudity of a revived Attican god (74). In contrast with these idyllic descriptions of male bodies, females are cast in a much more dubious light. In one instance after a theatrical performance, the narrator describes the bestial character of one such female, described as a "shewolf taking her prey by force," (128) she fails to control her lustful nature when confronted with the beauty of Luc's body.

What might be unique in the Essebacian sense is that the gay gaze is not always recognizable as such to the reader. Essebac weaves coded discourse into the fabric of each of his novels, a discourse that calls for interpretation through a distinctly queer lens.

While the protagonists in the novels seem to take the gaze at face value, mutually recognizing each other, the reader is constantly placed in a precarious position often questioning whether to affirm or doubt this same homo(social)sexual recognition between protagonists. In *Partenza*, the doubt would be placed on the fluid (homo)sexuality of the *bambini* that the narrator meets during his travels, described as coquettish and cheeky but never overtly homosexual. In *Dédé*, the eponymous protagonist embodies this doubt. In both *Luc* and *L'Élu* the two older protagonists are clearly revealed as having a penchant for the youths that they befriend, however both Luc and Djino have relationships (mostly sexual) with women and are therefore described through this rhetoric of doubt. Graciniano, in *Les Griffes*, would best conform to this idea, however as has already been stated, Daniel's homosexuality must also have been placed in doubt since the novel was deemed "heterosexual" enough for mass publication in a journal without censure (Ferray 2009). This necessitates, then, a reader complicity that must by definition be queered, or else be shrouded in a heteronormative-based (mis)reading. Indeed, so that the heteronormatized reader might understand Essebian ideology, so that he might *see* the male body, masculinity, and sexuality the way in which Essebac intends, the exterior gaze habitually filtered through a heterosexual lens, arguably the lens of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century reader, must now be channeled through a queer one. This last point has in fact important theoretical and socio-ideological implications.

If Essebac's focuses on specific representations of masculinity, the male form pulled from Greek and Roman art and ideology, and male same-sex relations, he in turn highlights the subsequent absence of these same representations elsewhere in time. Pierre, in *L'Élu*, expresses this very frustration when looking for these representations

outside of Antiquity: “Only women!” he proclaims (Essebac 1902, 38). Thomas Laqueur argues in *Making Sex* that the articulation of two incommensurable sexes after the Enlightenment was distinctly “political,” (Laqueur 152) meaning arising because of and through gender-based power struggles. Indeed, this is at least in part due to the new post-revolutionary bourgeois male needing an unambiguous body that was not shaded in the gendered rhetoric of the one-sex model, a model that left him dangerously open to some degree of femininity and therefore in a weakened state of being (Laqueur 8). The masculine then was represented through the established unity, coherence, and stable status of the masculine body, masculinity, heterosexuality, and the male as perceiver (Nye 1993; Connell 2005; Reeser 2010). Queer representations of males arise then when socio-ideological or socio-political structures allow for the masculine body to be subjected to the harsh objectifying fragmentation that necessarily accompanies the gaze. Indeed, the bloom of a homosexual subculture in the nineteenth century was such a moment. Ultimately, masculinity was forced to redefine itself, as other representations of the masculine were made readily available. Indeed, the seemingly inherent stability of the image of masculinity during the fin-de-siècle period was undermined and fragmented. If Todd Reeser states in *Masculinities in Theory* that there is a close relation between looking and masculinity (Reeser 110), it is certainly because the female body has more often than not been the recipient of this power-laden dialectic process of visual fragmentation and objectification (Mulvey 1999). However, it is not just the female body that might suffer from the able scrutiny of the masculine perceiver. Masculinity and therefore the sexuality associated with it, might be defined, categorized, and more importantly altered by this regard. In a general sense, Reeser states that the way in which

the masculine regard sees, “construct[s] masculinity [...] because men create certain types of bodies in the visual field that correspond to their ideas about gender” (Reeser 110). This visual field is based largely on a process that doubles-back on itself. By not looking at masculinity, or rather, by assuming that we know what masculinity looks like, new images of masculinity are difficult if not impossible to find. By representing the rainbow of possibilities through which one might articulate masculinity, the male body, and with it masculine sexuality, Essebac in essence destabilizes the dissimulation process that would allow the male body to evade the regard and therefore remain unmarked and unchanged in its dubious position of coherence and indomitability. In doing so, he places the masculine body in direct contrast with its privileged position as a unified, coherent, and stable perceiver and allows for masculinity and its sexualities to be seen in equivocal shades rather than the impossible primaries that had, for some time, become the standard.

Somewhere Before the Rainbow: A Literary Call for Acceptance

Mes frères qui, jusqu’ici, auront eu la patience de me suivre [...] mes frères me comprendront, soit qu’ils partagent un sentiment, ou qu’ils veuillent bien me pardonner une faiblesse, --si faiblesse il y a. Pour les autres, le sourire entendu que je devine—et que je brave—sera l’ivraie perdue en la moisson blonde de mes joies intérieures [...] Le reste !... (*Partenza* 279)

In 1931, Laura Thoma, from Zurich, was visiting Berlin where she noticed an abundance of lesbian clubs and returned home with a desire for the same. Soon after she would write a letter to the periodical *Garçonne* complaining of the difficulties lesbians faced in Switzerland. After a second published piece in *Garçonne* pleading for the formation of a woman’s club, her desires would be answered with the formation of “Amincitia” in Zurich. At the first meeting, only a mixed crowd of seventeen, it became

clear that the desire was not for a women's club per se, but rather a club for women-who-love-women. Hearing of a men's group: "Excentric-Club Zürich," which seemed to have adopted a similar ambition, a demand was made to join forces and an offer of collaboration was quickly accepted. For close to a year, the two groups met and during this time published the first edition of *Freund-schafts-Banner*, the forerunner to the infamous *Der Kreis* (Keenedy 1999; Jackson 2009). In 1932, Karl Meier, a Swiss-German actor (known as "Rolf"), would take over the magazine and give it its distinguishing name. In 1942, *Der Kreis* would begin to publish in French, and from 1951, English pages began to appear giving the once Germanocentric publication a much broader and certainly eager audience. Rather than promote the "lascivious" homosexuality that seemed to be the norm, Meier fostered a "high-minded homosexuality that "elevated comradeship above sex" (Jackson 65). It is this ideology that would convince him to prefer his *Freundesliebe* (comrade love) to the commonly used terms *pederasty* or *homosexuality* that, to his mind, reeked of either boy-love or hypersexuality. Moreover, it is this ideology that would prove the basis for the first long-term all-gay French publication, *Arcadie*, inaugurated by André Baudry in 1954. The goal of both publications was social at its base rather than overtly political. Julian Jackson states in his book *Living in Arcadia* that the French magazine came about at a time when organizations throughout the West began defending a common vision of homosexuality; "They defended a broadly 'reformist and 'assimilationist' agenda espousing the view that homosexuality should be neither subversive nor the preserve of some artistic elite" (Jackson 111).

I use these examples, not to create an anachronism in my argument, but rather to situate Essebac's ideology in reference to future writers and reformist. Achille Essebac is part of a long-line of writers, among which André Gide plays a formative role, that would promote a modern-take on an antiquated view of homosexuality, probably based on the known social acceptance of the Greek and Roman ideological model in its time. Ultimately, the Greek and Roman ideological model on which his representation of male same-sex relations is based contrasted itself with the more liberal, indeed hypersexual representations of male same-sex relations found in socio-political literature (Budé 1883; Nordau 1894; Davray 1895; Bureau 1908) and mediatized, through novelistic and theoretical fear-mongering throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²²

Criticizing Essebacian ideology from a modern perspective, which seemed to promote and characterize homosexuality through sexual inactivity especially after adolescence, would be quite easy. Ideologies however are historically situated. Today, one would hardly criticize the first gay activists for not having advocated for marriage equality when such a demand would have been completely misplaced in time. Besides the representation of an "elevated comradeship above sex," what these three gay militants—Meier, Baudry, and Essebac—have in common is a need to express their sexual orientation through public discourse. Ultimately, their bond is cemented through a community shared through journals, periodicals, and novels highlighting and promoting the "culture-building" work that Michael Warner states is a substantive part of the gay and lesbian movement (Warner xvii). Essebac's corpus is an obvious nod to this desire. To conclude I would like to return to the image presented in the beginning of this chapter: that of the young Frenchman who, reading Essebac's most famous novel, decided to

attempt suicide after identifying with a literary image of male same-sex relations that reflected his shared ideological desire. Unfortunately for him, the idealized representation of the two young male's recognition of male same-sex relations did not seem realizable. Nevertheless, if this one case can be seen as representative of a larger audience that might have read these novels, we might understand the influence that these works must have had. Moreover, the compulsion to express a positively represented ideological view of homosexuality that might be beneficial to particulars in society or society as a whole is clearly represented by and within Essebac's corpus. Some of the most poignant moments of the Essebaccian thematic come from the protagonists themselves and the all-consuming but sometimes impossible desire to express a true version of what they believe and who they are in terms of sexual and gender orientation.

In one instance, the narrator of *Partenza* speaks of the suffering that suppression of identity causes, as it stifles self-acceptance, as well as distorts one's vision of the world (Essebac 1898, 81). Like the initiators of *Der Kreis*, the narrator desires to express his particular emotions to open ears, to share this emotion with someone who shares his particular feelings (81-2). In *Dédé*, as Marcel grows older and starts to better understand the hypocrisy of the world that surrounds him, the poetic voice that used to describe the joys of cautious and calculated regards as well as timid yet assertive caresses, becomes coarse with defiance and reason. Comparing the love of male youth with the cult of religion he deplors the notion of lionized customs (like prayer) while the love he shares with Dédé is shunned because ideologically unestablished (153). Ultimately, the journal he writes about his love for Dédé becomes the ultimate unabashed apologue of the need and achievement of self-expression and homosexual self-realization.

It is not always the main protagonist that gives us the best glimpse of this notion of self-expression in Essebac's novels. In *Luc*, as the eponymous character's career on the stage begins to grow, he receives a passionate letter from a man whose ideology has been changed by the power of Luc's naked body. Despite his initial reticence, provoked by the unease of a male writing to another male to laud his beauty, the young man sends Luc a letter which subtly speaks of his now combative stance against the reigning bourgeois morality after having accepted his attraction to another man who happens to also be the recipient of the letter (Essebac 1907, 142). What is clear from this letter is less the desire of a man to flatter a performer, than the idea of Art as a catalyst for social action and change. Held back by an ideological viewpoint taught to him since gradeschool, the author of the letter was compelled by the beauty of Luc's naked body as a figure of Art. Indeed, this compulsion allowed him to express himself in the most accurate way he can, through admission of his homosexuality.

L'Élu takes this notion head-on with both its narration (the sensual descriptions of male nudes) and its protagonists (art student Pierre). A question that pervades the entire novel, Pierre wonders why the female stands high on her artistic pedestal and no longer the masculine figure (Essebac 1902, 283). He finds the answer not in the nature of man per se, but in the universal favor of the term "normal" which obstructs an already feeble (*atrophiée*) intelligence (137) allowing artistic expression to comfortably remain stagnant in its representations, especially in regards to the male nude. The work of the artist then is to question this normal by expressing a range of other possibilities that more closely mirrors the social possibilities available.

If in 1954, the Mattachine Society newsletter listed nine publications of interest to the homophile movements: *Vennen* (Denmark), *Sesso e Libertà* (Italy), *Der Kreis* (Germany), *Arcadie* (France), *Vriendschap* (Holland), *Weg* (Frankfurt) *Hellas* (Hamburg), the ICSE²³ newsletter (Amsterdam), and *Die Gefahrten* (Frankfurt),²⁴ it was surely due to the fact that in each of these respective countries, homosexuals were able to recognize the necessity for a concerted effort at visibility and certainly the benefits of knowing that others like them existed in the world. There can never be too much weight placed on this last idea and Essebac, while first and foremost an author and artist, must have understood the need for this specific type of social message of recognition and acceptance translated through beautifully articulated poetic prose. It is certainly not a coincidence that all three main protagonist in *Dédé*, *Luc*, and *L'Élu* must in the end die and leave behind the one man that truly loves them. Homosexuality was not possible for them outside of the confines of adolescent sexual fluidity and insouciance. However, if it can be said that Essebac channels his voice through the characters that he chronicles, his inspired message might best be revealed through the narrator in *Luc* who seems to understand more than anyone the power derived from knowledge, recognition, and reactionary expression. Ultimately, the narrator laments Luc's incomprehension of how false, because human, the morals mitigated by the narrow-minded laws of society can be, highlighting "other" knowledges as one such "culture-builder." As if spoken directly to the reader he states, "si Luc avait su [...] Si Julien avait su" ("If Luc had known [...] If Julien had known") (Essebac 1907, 264).

¹ I will add that *Dédé* does not commit suicide but rather dies naturally in Essebac's novel. I use these two novels only as a comparison between cause and effect : literature affecting, influencing, and/or amplifying an ideological viewpoint.

² “Albert Dauzat, qui signale, dans son *Dictionnaire*, que le surnom *Bécasse* est attesté en 1261, dans la région de Dijon, ajoute: ‘la bécasse symbolisait déjà la bêtise’.” (“Albert Dauzat, who notes, in his *Dictionary*, that the surname *Bécasse* dates back to 1261, in the Dijon region, adds ‘la bécasse already symbolized stupidity’.”). Today the word designates either a migratory bird or a “femme stupide ou d’aspect ridicule” (“stupid or ridiculous woman”) according to the *Trésor de la Langue française* (Ferry 2009)

³ Goethe : *Voyage en Suisse et Italie* ; Chateaubriand : *Voyage en Amérique et en Italie* ; Stendhal : *Rome, Naples et Florence* ; Alexandre Dumas : *Une année à Florence* ; Guy de Maupassant : *Sicile et La vie errante* ; Montaigne : *Journal du voyage en Italie par la Suisse et l’Allemagne* ;

⁴ It should be mentioned that Ambert et Cie were not specifically known for publishing novels with subversive themes; *Les Confessions d’un enfant du siècle* by Alfred de Musset and *De l’Amour* by Senancour were both published by this editor. Three editors known for publishing what might be considered *littérature faisandée* or *clandestine*, categories into which Essebac might be included, at the time were: J. Gay, Poulet-Malassis, and Vital-Puissant (Lamarre-Stora 1990)

⁵ Created in 1897, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (*Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee*), was a social organization that campaigned for the social recognition of homosexual and bisexual men and women. For a discussion of the contributions of this committee see : Conrad, Peter and Joseph W. Schneider. *Deviance and Medicalization : From Badness to Sickness*. Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1992; Wolf, Sherry. *Sexuality and Socialism: History, Politics, and Theory of LGBT Liberation*. New York: Haymarket Books, 2009; Connel, Raewyn. *Masculinities: Second Edition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

⁶ The same cannot be said for sexual encounters between men and women.

⁷ Like Gide will do in *Corydon*

⁸ for more on “citationality” see De Certeau 1984; Butler 1993

⁹ see especially *Laws* and the *Republic* (Plato 1892); it should also be noted that Plato would condemn all superfluous desires including ones between men and women not just homosexual

¹⁰ see especially the dialogues by Eryximachus, Agathon, Diotima in the *Symposium*

¹¹ Nordau also speaks specifically to the problems associated with literature, writing, and degeneration creating a fantacizing link between science, art, and morality

¹² Gillis defines adolescence during this period as between the ages of 10 and 20 (Gillis 104)

¹³ specifically the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Lysis*

¹⁴ In terms of age, based on the characters in Essebac’s novels, adolescence would be defined from twelve to mid-twenties. It should be noted however that adolescence, for Essebac, is not about definitive numbers. This will be discussed in this section.

¹⁵ Only the first four of his novels specifically focus on this: *Partenza*, *Dédé*, *Luc*, and *L’Élu*; the age of the narrator in *Partenza* is never explicitly mentioned but we may assume this was Essebac’s second trip to Italy and therefore that the narrator is twenty-three or thereabouts; Marcel and André of *Dédé* are both fourteen; Luc is twelve at the beginning of the narrative and Julien Bréand is twenty-two, Essebac states though of

Julien: “c’était un gamin” (45); Pierre Péliissier, from *L’Élu*, is twenty-two as well, but again Essebac states he “paraissait sortir du collège” (9), Djino is sixteen

¹⁶ for more on narrative love triangles see: Girard 1965; Sedgwick 1985; Reeser 2010; Malden 2010

¹⁷ for more on gender queer see Warner 1993

¹⁸ Essebac uses several Italian diminutives to describe the youth of the novel, however *birichino* is used most often and denotes not only a young boy but also the idea of mischievousness and slyness which underline the playfull sexuality that the narrator, author, and main male characters seem to underline.

¹⁹ See chapter 1

²⁰ Peniston makes a very important distinction here between social classes. While the data available through police regards and court cases is ample at this time, most if not the vast majority is informative for only a specific social bracket. There is little information available about the homosexuality and practices of the upper echelon of society since they had the means to live and practice in private, and when caught, to pay-off the police/judge in charge of their case. They were however the class that fell prey the most to blackmail from the lower classes. I mention this because all of Essebac’s characters would benefit from this *vie aisée*, with the exception of Djino from *L’Élu* who Pierre adopts as it were.

²¹ For more information on speech acts see Butler 1997.

²² See especially chapter 1 and the introduction

²³ International Committee for Sexual Equality founded in 1953

²⁴ see Jackson, *op. cit.*

Chapter 5: The Trouble with Normal: The Politics of the Closet in the Works of André Gide

“Trompe-la-Mort ne se laisserait pas aborder par une femme, dit l’agent. Apprenez un secret? Il n’aime pas les femmes”

Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*

“Vous devez vous y entendre mieux que moi, M. de Charlus, à faire marcher des petits marins... Tenez, voici un livre que j’ai reçu, je pense qu’il vous intéressera... Le titre est joli: *Parmi les hommes*.”

Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*

Even if representations of the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century homosexual were written and defined *ad naseum* through literature, sexology, psychology, and the newly emergent fields of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, the social and literary vigor surrounding the not so secret secret was hardly banalized at the turn of the century even with its rampant social exposure. On the contrary, the fine antennae of public attention tuned into any drama of gay display and disclosure was if anything heightened by the moralistic and nationalistic atmosphere that was famous for hyperbolizing representations of deviant (sexual) behavior, especially public articulations about the love famous for not being named. But the construction and articulation of an epistemology of homosexuality available to the public and identifiable by homosexuals themselves was rarely played out *en plein air*. Science, sexology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and religion confined knowledge about homosexuality to examination rooms, annals, and confessionals while simultaneously exposing this knowledge through critical publications and ideological fear

mongering. Through a “minoritizing” and “universalizing” (Sedgwick 1990, 47) rhetoric that forced nineteenth-century gays into bathhouses and brothels, urinals and bushes, to spaces that gave a deceptively comforting notion of protection and surreptitiousness, the idea of the “closet” was born. In his critical work, *Closet Space*, Michael Brown defines the closet as “a term used to describe the denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men. It describes their absence—and alludes to their ironic presence nonetheless” (Brown 1). More than just a constantly forming and contradictory system of oppression and concealment, the closet has the power to shape the core of an individual’s personal history, working, with every new encounter, in fundamentally formative and destructive ways to erect new closets, both social and individual, that exact from gays new requests and seizures of secrecy and disclosure.

Much of the energy surrounding issues of homosexuality and the closet since the beginning of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century has been mobilized by the symptomatic relation of homosexuality to broader social binaries like secrecy/disclosure, public/private, minoritizing/universalizing, heterosexual/homosexual, desire/restraint, subject/object, inside/outside. Indeed, representations of homosexuality and the closet have been solidified by the enabling but often maddening incoherence of these social binaries. These binary oppositions, complicit in the creation and diffusion of information on homosexuals and homosexuality, complicate the notion of homosexuality as an identity that is perpetually forced in and out of secrecy, a type of “open secret.” However, as D.A. Miller suggests, the phenomenon of the “open secret” does not bring about the collapse of binarisms or their ideological effects, “but rather attests to their fantasmatic recovery” (Miller 207). Ultimately then, a study of the construction,

discovery, and presentation of the closet offers ample opportunities for engagement with the binaries that make up its very foundation, with how they function, and their connection with homosexuality. If as Sedgwick states “the closet is the defining structure of gay oppression of [the twentieth] century” (Sedgwick 1990, 71), it is important to look into the relations of the closet, those between the known and the unknown about homosexuality, an inquiry capable of being exceptionally revealing, according to Sedgwick, about the explicit and inexplicit surrounding homosexual definition (3).

This chapter will focus on representations of homosexuality with regards to the notion of the closet in the works of André Gide. Among the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s most divisive gay writers, as well as the best known of all contemporary French writers during the second half of his career (Weightman 591), André Gide earns his place of merit as easily in the LGBT community as he does in the French literary master canon. But it is more than just gay themes and social recognition that make Gide a more than obvious choice when looking into representations of homosexuality and the closet throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His works are especially known for relating to the personal while still engaging with the imaginative progressivism that makes him as a part of fin-de-siècle decadence as the social libertarianism that would define the early twentieth century. While a Sainte-Beuveian analysis of Gide’s works would be more than banal given the surplus of critics who have already written with this lens (Manning 2004; Pollard 1970, 1991; Martin 1998; Lejeune 1975), the autobiographical notions in his works can help to inform research on the construction, display, and function of homosexuality and the closet in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The epigraphs that start this chapter provide an interesting look into the complex interplay between homosexuality, definitions of the closet, and open secrets in the period surrounding Gide's work. Criminal mastermind of the Balzacian trilogy *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, Vautrin exhibits varying degrees of "closetedness" throughout the *Comédie humaine*. While he is strategically self-conscious in his social relations and public discourse, his place "in the closet" of one of the nineteenth century's most famous literary worlds is ultimately conspicuous. As evidenced in the first epigraph, the closet is never really the safe haven it is purported to be. It is itself formed by an already existing contradiction: constructed by the often oppositional discourse of secrecy and disclosure, both having equal agency in the construction of social reality, discourse, and identity. The closet works at both the exterior level, creating what Sedgwick terms the "*spectacle of the closet*," as well as the interior level, what she calls "*the viewpoint of the closet*," (Sedgwick 1990, 223) (emphasis in original). For most who have frequented Vautrin's company, his sexuality is no secret, however it is *understood* as a secret in the novel, a notion that complicates an analytical reading of the text by forcing the reader to not know something that is perpetually given to him as knowledge. Vautrin moves about in what might be understood as a glass closet, his sexual orientation only protected from disclosure by the very notion that it is supposed to be secret. However, far from condemning him to the social cesspits of the Parisian underbelly, his sexuality plays a critical role in his catapulting into the juridical stratosphere, eventually becoming chief of police in Paris. But a study into the construction of the closet in reference to this notoriously unlawful shapeshifter would be difficult if not completely anachronistic. While Vautrin is one of

the earlier, if not earliest, and more developed examples of a reoccurring gay persona in a French literary work, ultimately Vautrin is too saturated with the early-nineteenth-century medical stereotypes that connected homosexuality to criminality to be seen as exemplary of nineteenth or early-twentieth-century homosexuality or its relations to the closet.

The same could be said of the intended addressee of the second epigraph, Proust's most celebrated *La Recherche* homosexual character, M. de Charlus. A prominent Parisian aristocrat in the high social circles of the faubourg Saint-Germain, M. de Charlus is in his forties when he first meets one of the twentieth century's most famous narrators. He is described laconically as a woman (Proust 1946, 11-12) and compared to the race of beings for whom the ultimate ideal is masculine because of their feminine nature (33-4). Throughout the text, the reader is privy to numerous "outings" of Charlus by the narrator (ex: the sexually charged scene between the baron and Jupien) and the commentary of secondary and foil characters (like in the second epigraph to this chapter) not to mention his place at the head of the chapter *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. But at the heart of the text, Charlus revels in the seemingly surreptitious nature of the closet, parading himself through the most lavish houses of Proust's world often unawares of the seething judgment focused on him. More a deleterious treatise on stereotyped homosexual identity than the first part of a novel, the introductory section of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* universalizes a discourse on homosexual desire which supplants love with an unquenchable lust for the unattainable (34-5). Unlike in Gide's work where love and desire are definitively split but available, the Proustian homosexual thrives on a desire for the impossible, a heterosexual male. Proustian homosexuals must therefore resort to prostitution or surreptitious and ephemeral encounters with questionable heterosexuals,

bisexual males, or closeted homosexuals in order to alleviate their sexual fervor. Indeed the narrator states: “leur désir (des homosexuels) serait à jamais inassouissable si l’argent ne leur livrait de vrais hommes, et si l’imagination ne finissait par leur faire prendre pour de vrais hommes les invertis à qui ils se sont prostitués” (“their [homosexual’s] desire would be forever insatiable if money did not provide them with real men, and if, in the end, imagination did not allow them to see these inverts, to whom they prostitute themselves, as real men”) (Proust 1946,7, 35-5). For this Freemasonry of gays that inhabit Proust’s world (38), desire is consequently insatiable. Indeed, it must have been quite a meeting when Gide with his long-term love interest Marc Allégret would dine with the infamous author in May 1921 effectively negating Proust’s impossible love theory for homosexuals (Billard 190). Perhaps it is in the well-documented aversion Proust had to personal identification with the term homosexual that we can find the theoretical grain to Proust’s theory on homosexuality (Haus 12-14), or perhaps more personally the unrequited affection he shared with Alfred Agostinelli, quite possibly the unattainable heterosexual that fueled the *Sodome et Gomorrhe* chapter (129). While Proust’s efforts in constructing a literary documentation of early-twentieth-century homosexuality are not without extreme merit and certainly offer valuable insight into the construction of a specific type of twentieth-century gay “closet,” the theme of homosexuality in Proust is too full of distortions, half-truths, scientific shibboleths, and extreme bouts of internalized homophobia to use as a backdrop to understanding how the closet functions for homosexuality at the turn of the century.

While some have accused Balzac of at least a latent and suspect bisexuality (Berthier 1979), the Balzacian characters that teeter between outright or closeted

homosexuality are not seen as representative of the author in any known way. And while Proust's life was filled with homosexual scandal and secrecy (Haus 1992), his major work condemns as it exposes the type of homosexual it represents and M. de Charlus cannot be said to intentionally mirror Proust. Gide however had a certain penchant for writing in the first person and sewing together his character portrayals and narrators with anecdotal threads so similar to those that made up the fabric of his personal life that the line between fiction and fact are more often than not blurred beyond distinction. Some of his more prominent contemporaries were quick to pick up on this precarious aspect of his works. In June of 1897, just after his release from Reading Gaol, Oscar Wilde would comment on *Nourritures terrestres* (1897), one of Gide's early works, by saying: "dear, promettez-moi : maintenant n'écrivez plus jamais JE [...] En art, il n'y a pas de première personne" ("dear, promise me: no longer use 'I' [...] In art, there is no first person") (Martin 310). Wilde was no stranger of course to the noxious effects that writing about homosexuality, however nuanced, could have on an author's life. He was also not the only author to school Gide on his writing technique. In his journal on 14 May 1921, Gide recounted one of only a handful of encounters with Proust. Having brought the *La Recherche* author a copy of his homosexual apologia *Corydon* and speaking about the construction of his *Mémoires* (that would become his autobiographical work *Si le grain ne meurt...*) Proust famously stated "Vous pouvez tout raconter [...] mais à condition de ne jamais dire: *Je*" ("You can say anything [...] as long as you never say: I") to which Gide wrote: "Ce qui ne fait pas mon affaire" ("which does not work for me") (Gide 2012a, 208-9).

While many of his contemporaries feared for the publication of some of his more personal works in the first person, on a socio-political level this proclivity for using “I” is important for several reasons. On the one hand, Gide is contributing to the emergent project of imagining a discourse in the first person that could express the same-sex sexualities that were also being developed and defined through social action and discourse outside of the literary field. He inheres therefore within a history of social category construction, transformation and constitution; those novel categories that would become what we know of today as the LGBT family. And while the vocabulary to use, the phraseology to adopt, even the terminology available was fraught with contradictions and disagreement, the circulation of a discourse surrounding positions in reference to the closet can be seen as the *basso continuo* of Gide’s works. In his work, *Never say I*, Michael Lucey states that “Gide experimented a great deal with the kinds of acts and statements that we have come to recognize as constitutive of the ritual of coming out” (Lucey 5). This “ritual of coming out” includes the production of representations of homosexuality whether affirming an “open” sexuality, a more allusive “closetedness,” or some combination of the two. These representations however have a more expansive formative reach than just exclusive indicators throughout the LGBT community.

In his article “Description and Prescription” Pierre Bourdieu states that political action “aims to make or unmake groups—and, by the same token, the collective actions they can undertake to transform the social world in accordance with their interests—by producing, reproducing or destroying the representations that make groups visible for themselves and for others” (Bourdieu 127). Indeed, the works of authors like Gide could therefore be said to have political bearing in relation to homosexuality in that they

contributed to the definition of social groups that would, in turn, be socially recognized. Likewise, in producing countercurrents to the already existing representations of homosexual groups, Gide works are also deconstructive in the sense that they redefine categories by weakening or overturning completely the foundations on which contemporary representations of homosexuality were built. Ultimately, Gide's literary project is interesting in that it simultaneously expresses the process of treating a particular subject while also developing a literary and aesthetic way of presenting it, essentially theorizing the "doings" of the closet and the "beings" of an out gay man.

The Secret's "Out": Discursive Uses of Secrecy and Disclosure to Describe the Closet and Homosexuality in the Works of André Gide

"C'est pour pouvoir enfin parler un jour, que je me suis contraint toute ma vie."

--André Gide, *Et Nunc manet in te*

In his iconic work on autobiography, Philippe Lejeune qualifies Gide's corpus as an "*espace autobiographique*" ("*autobiographical space*") (Lejeune 1975), highlighting both the expansiveness of the author's project as well as the personally reflective nature of Gide's works. It is indeed no secret that Gide had a certain narcissistic weakness for writing in the first person; a writing style that constantly flirts with the autobiographical. Ironically, among all his works, it would be his autobiography *Si le grain ne meurt* that would suffer the most apposite critiques in terms of personal disclosure. In a journal entry 5 October 1920, Gide recounts a conversation with literary critic, author, and personal friend, Roger Martin du Gard (1881-1958) who spoke to Gide of his ultimate disappointment with *Si le grain ne meurt* saying that Gide sidestepped his topic either

being too afraid or prudish to have dared truly speak of himself, ultimately hiding behind a cloak of ambiguity and secrecy (Gide 2012a, 205). The most interesting piece of Du Gard's statement however is not the critique he makes of Gide's work. Rather it is the presumptive idea behind the critique itself: Du Gard states that Gide dodged his subject, indicating an expected specificity which one can assume, given their intimate relationship, points to a more complete description of Gide's sexuality, something ultimately missing from the majority of Gide's autobiographical work.

Si le grain ne meurt is fundamentally the paradoxical product of two contradictory projects: one that speaks of an ideal childhood incubated in a puritanical home and the other that hints at a disesteemed sexuality that battles and in one short section ultimately liberates itself from a moralizing system of oppression. Gide opens his autobiography with a description of his first instances with the "bad habits" (Gide 1955,10) that would ultimately expel him from school and send him on a path of self-reflection into desire and sexual identification. His innocence is complete in regards to the actions he has committed, ascribing them to naïve childhood amusements with a friend, only learning later that they went against the moral grain. For most of his life and works, Gidean desire is a concept "glauque," as Jean Lorrain would say: confusing, obscured by contradicting modes of thought (10). While never completely disclosed in the first part of his autobiography, the closet is readily readable through coded discourse, especially in the relationship that develops between him and his cousin Albert. Nothing overtly sexualized is ever admitted and the platonic rhetoric used is never meant to suggest any such descriptions, rather this relation, like many of those described in the works of previous nineteenth-century works, favors the pedagogic apprenticeship of the

erastes/eromenos coupling: the older Albert educating the younger Gide in music, morality, politics, nationality, etc. Moreover, Gide's rhetoric in reference to his cousin is spiced with terminology reminiscent of a pederastic lexicon: adoration, soul, natural inclination, attention, sympathy (78; 135) (Ludovic 1976; Greenberg 1988; Dover 1989; Plato 1994), finding in Albert a mutual comprehension that he states risked being less understood by his mother and the rest of the family (Gide 1955, 135).

His relationship with his cousin becomes all the more important as a buffer to a necessarily closeted life outside of the family estate. The young Gide had few friends at school, describing himself as melancholic and sullen (107), quickly becoming disillusioned by the opposing forces between his natural penchant towards men, openly showing affection, and the condemnatory accusations of the boys with whom a friendship did emerge. In one specific episode of unmindful disclosure, the young Gide approaches a school friend for a fraternal embrace only to be quickly rebuked: "Non; entre eux, les hommes ne s'embrassent pas!" ("Non; between each other, men do not embrace!") (173). In this instance, the closet is revealed through the corporeal speech act of the failed embrace, which to the recipient acts equally as a threat to his masculinity and sexuality, what Sedgwick terms "homosexual panic" (Sedgwick 1985). The response is equally formative in relation to the closet in that the recipient quickly forecloses the possibility of reciprocation through an adamant admission of his heterosexuality and equally fervent affirmation of his masculinity which in turn places Gide's in question. Indeed, this episode highlights the fact that the relations surrounding the definition of the closet are intimately linked to those surrounding heterosexuality (Sedgwick 1990).

We might understand the narration in *Si le grain ne meurt* as a specific discourse on morality, one based on Gide's puritanical upbringing but also his desire to distinguish himself from this upbringing, through which and possibly against which the conditions of the Gidean closet were formed. As a specific discourse on the closet written against the backdrop of a bourgeois cultural discourse, Gide's autobiography is unique in its contextual position and quite possibly the first homosexual autobiography to present a coming-out story. Gidean discourse is often ambiguous, overly self-conscious, and contradictory. Perhaps Gide said it best in his autobiography: "Je suis un être de dialogue; tout en moi combat et se contredit" ("I am a discursive being; everything in me is combative and contradictory") (Gide 1955, 280). But this contradiction is also part and parcel to the architecture of the closet. In essence, the closet is nothing but an assumed social indicator of identity that collapses in on itself when pronounced by the-one-in-the-closet but can never be revealed by anyone other than the-one-in-the-closet (Sedgwick 1990; Brown 2000). Indeed, as Judith Butler points out in *Excitable Speech*, to come out of the closet is not merely a descriptive utterance but is illocutionary, performing what it describes; it "constitute[s] the speaker as a homosexual" (Butler 1999, 107). Ultimately then, speaking of the closet, unless to come out of it, is inextricably linked to the personal but can never rightly be discussed in the first person for fear of stepping out and obliterating the closet. It is then in nuanced discourse, similar to the rules for speaking of homosexuality at the same time, that one can read the contours of the closet.

Indeed, allowing the often equivocal conditions of the closet to speak through discourse could play a large role in why, for instance, Roger Martin du Gard found Gide's autobiography so unsatisfying. Gide states himself that for a long period he was

drawn to words that left a great deal up to interpretation, words like “uncertainty” and “inexpressible” (Gide 1955, 246), words that point to as they point away from their subject of articulation. But keeping words unspoken and unexpressed, as Butler has shown, is just a way to lock them into place, “arresting the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose” (Butler 1997, 38). Linguistic ambiguity, on the other hand, is important when examining the relations between the closet and society especially in an early-twentieth-century context. At this time, so much of the meaning behind the terms that would designate men-who-love-men were considered unalterable because firmly established by the medical authorities that were in powerful “interpellative” positions (Butler 1997). While in a “lived” context these terms had been in a constant state of evolution since the beginning of the nineteenth century (Courouve 1985; Peniston 2004). Consequently, the meaning behind sexual nomenclatures for one person, in one context varied greatly when transferred to another person and another context. Indeed, Nietzsche, an author that greatly influenced Gide, explains that language is “a mobile army of metaphors, [...] a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people” (Said 1979, 203). It is here that all three authors meet through theoretical impulse. Indeed, while heavily critiqued by Said for his *Orientalism*, Gide and Said both see the pitfalls and the advantages of this “iterability” of terms (Derrida 1988; Butler 1997). For Said, in both *Orientalism* (1979) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) the material East is discursively created by the constant barrage of “citations” (Butler 1993, 1997) that point back to Western representations of the Orient found in works that feature an exoticized and eroticized

Orient. Indeed, like many that Gide would write. These “citational practices” (Butler 1993, 1997) fix and delimit names giving them a “historicity” internal to the names themselves, a practice of “repetition that congeals, that gives the name its force” (Butler 1997, 36). For Gide, these same citational practices would distort the image of the “normal” pederast (Gide 1924, 29) famously outlined and defended in his homosexual apologia *Corydon*. In essence then, both Gide and Said, while in somewhat different contexts, wrote against the historicity of terms as agents of social and ideological materialization, creation, and control, hoping to highlight their linguistic vulnerability through reappropriation. Ultimately, looking into the function of the discourse of the closet and the words used to articulate it by gay authors like Gide can help to rebut the seemingly immutable nature of established definitions, especially ones about homosexuality, and highlight the transformative processes of such discourses.

With Gide’s cardinal trip to Africa his first homosexual experiences are openly recorded. After the initial publication of *Les Cahiers d’André Walter*, a period of dissipation, unruliness, and deceptively satisfying inquietude ensued with Paul Laurens (1838-1921) in Africa (Gide 1924, 256). In a sense the perfect foil to the restrictive sexual philosophy of *Les Cahiers*’ protagonist, Gide’s African sojourn would provide a much-needed liberation from bourgeois and European morality, especially heteronormativity. Far from the hypocritical probity of late nineteenth-century France, Gide began to see a new vision of individual morality. In Africa the author abandons the Sisyphean moral bolder that weighed down the André Walter of *Les Cahiers* and adopts the more hedonistic viewpoint of *Les Nourritures terrestres*’ protagonist Ménalque (Gide 2012c). In the heat of the African climate, the common moral system under which

Europe was suppressed seemed outdated and consistent with a religious ideal away from which Gide was moving. The author became persuaded that each individual had a specific role to play on earth and that any effort to submit to a common rule was a type of personal betrayal (Gide 1955, 273-4). However, Gide never explains how one might know this specific role and how his newly adopted magnetism towards social and moral diversity could be adapted to his nascent sexual explorations with young Arab boys. This moral philosophy does however work well with the specificity of homosexuality allowing individuals, like Gide, to carve out their own path towards morality, much like Michel will do in *L'Immoraliste* (Gide 1930).

With the inherent diversity of another country and a personal moral vision in development, Gide enters into a phase of philosophical and religious skepticism that will allow him to contemplate the contours of his own personal closet as well as his sexuality and will later be reflected in his works (Gide 1955, 285). With all this personal exploration, one might be taken aback by the decision to marry his cousin Madeleine Rondeaux in 1895. It would be easy to point out the social hypocrisy that would allow two cousins to marry but snuff any male same-sex relationship, however his marriage to Madeleine was more about *convenance* than anything else. In fact their marriage would remain unconsummated because of a personal philosophy on the separation of love and desire that would first be used to legitimize his (hetero)sexual self-restraint with his wife and later more fully developed in a homosexual (pederast) context in *Corydon* (286). Although unlike with his homosexual apology *Corydon*, Gide would not use his autobiography as a defense of pederasty or the (homosexual) acts he committed (309). Regardless of his uncharacteristic modesty, Gide must have known that a work like his

would benefit many closeted homosexuals looking for the mutual comprehension that Gide would state he shared with men like Oscar Wilde in whose presence social masks were thrown off (332). Indeed, the disclosure of his time with Wilde is important because it is during this period that Gide would understand that the life of complete (hetero)sexual asceticism was in fact far from an sexual ideology that could be easily if at all supported. In Africa, with Wilde and among the Arab youths that would so mark his writings and life philosophy, Gide would find his “normal” (343) as he states. One can assume, I believe, with a reasonable amount of certainty that *Si le grain ne meurt*, in some respects, represents a gesture of goodwill to all closets, be they open or closed, to learn a bit more about a shared life moment that led to individual liberation at least for one writer (360).

However this “normal” would come at a price. As Edward Said states, virtually all of the authors who traveled to the Orient (including Africa) after 1800 went there for sexual experiences unattainable in Europe. Like Gide, they found in the Orient different types of sexuality that, because untouched by Europe’s moral shadow, seemed less guilt-ridden and more libertine (Said 1979). Of course, as Said mentions, in time “Oriental sex” (190) was thrown into the capitalist marketplace and became like anything else, the product of mass culture. For Gide, Africa became a place where his sexuality could be explored without fear of public reprobation. Whether completely accurate or not, the sexuality of the adolescent Arab boys in Gide’s works, both fiction and non, is fluid and not hindered by categorical appellations such as hetero- and homosexual. But as Gide explores his homosexuality through the adolescent boys he meets, his works in which they are featured, contribute to the culturally exploited myth of a sexually liberated

northern Africa. Ultimately, “coming out” in *Si le grain ne meurt* and in the many other homosexual works situated in southern France, Italy, and northern Africa is intimately linked with the eroticization, exoticization, and capitalist exploitation of the youths who so inspired these artists, presenting these areas as what Anne McClintock has termed a “porno-tropics” (McClintock 22).

If *Si le grain ne meurt*, in Du Gard’s opinion, misses the opportunity to express homosexuality in fuller terms and is therefore criticized for only partially disclosing the discovery of Gide’s homosexuality where the author could have theorized his “coming out” of the closet, Gide has a makeshift defense. In his autobiography he states: “[m]on intention pourtant a toujours été de tout dire. Mais il est un degré dans la confiance que l’on ne peut dépasser sans artifice, sans se forcer” (“my intention was always to say everything. But there is a line when confiding secrets that one cannot cross without artifice, without forcing the discourse”) (Gide 1955, 280). Gide’s conclusion to this anecdote is indeed quite pertinent: perhaps the truth is more easily accessed in fiction (280).

It would of course be quite audacious to consider Gide so closely linked with his first person narratives as to incite constant recognition between author and narrator/character but equally imprudent to separate him so far from the narrating “I” as to farcically tear it from any personal orbit around the author. Gide himself stated most candidly in his journal on 5 October 1920, that to look at each of his works individually would distort his message, whereas the whole of his works would reveal a more comprehensive understanding of his identity (Gide 2012a, 206). Using this idea as a springboard, an analysis into the discourse of secrecy and disclosure throughout Gide’s

works can help to highlight the difficulties in the presentation of the early twentieth-century closet.

An autobiographical study of youthful unrest that uses the first-person confessional form that would become a mainstay in many of Gide's works, *Les Cahiers et les poésies d'André Walter* (1891) met critical success while falling short of catching the public's attention. Like many of Gide's more infamous personages, André Walter shares the biographical notes of his creator's life journal, and most famously the distinct patrimonial split between maternal and paternal national characteristics. Born in Paris to an Uzesian father and Normand mother, Gide would make reference to the formative effects of his binational upbringing several times throughout his life.¹ A work about the conflicts within a soul devoted to an ideal of chastity, *Les Cahiers* is split into two notebooks: the *cahier blanc* which describes angelic chimera and the *cahier noir* which describes the narrator's fall into madness and despair. A fictive mirror to a life theory that Gide would later develop in his homosexual apologia *Corydon*, the first notebook speaks to the inherent struggle between physical desire and idealistic love, with, at times, the hyperbolized dramatic discourse reminiscent of the French Romantics. What is interesting in the discussion of love and desire is that it is unclear whether André Walter's attraction is homosexual or heterosexual in nature. While disclosing his ideal attachment to Emmanuèle, who Pierre Louÿs would unquestionably equate with Gide's wife Madeleine in a letter to his brother Georges the 7 October 1895,² Walter's journal entries share not the desire for physicality with the one he loves but rather the horrors of the flesh, the presumptive corruptor of souls (Gide 2012b, 52).³ Indeed, the majority of the *cahier blanc* is a battle of wills between a desiring body, although the desire is not

always or exclusively heterosexual, and the need to vanquish this desire through personal restraint. Like the pederastic relationships described by the shepherd apologist in *Corydon*, the heterosexual relationship in *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* never oversteps the most puritanical decency. Interestingly enough, it is possibly what André Walter fails to disclose fully in his journal entries that says the most about the unquenchable desires that eventually lead to his madness. Placing aside for a moment the voyeuristic descriptions of young Breton boys bathing on the beach and in rivers and the desire to be close to their sun-kissed skin—an anecdotal image that appears simultaneously in André Walter's journal (Gide 2012a, 145-6) as well as André Gide's 1892 publication *Paysages* about his trip to Bretagne (Gide 2012a, 261)—rather than speak directly of homosexuality in *Les Cahiers*, male same-sex desire is substituted with hyperbolic prose touting heterosexual chastity. Used as a type of sexual foil, extreme heterosexual chastity points both away from homosexuality by its very nature, but also directly towards the closet door when peppered with references to a more furtive homosexuality like in the aforementioned example. Indeed, homosexuality is sequestered behind a necessarily chaste heterosexual closet door; a precarious positioning that challenges the assumption of “traditionally” heterosexual sexuality by overemphasizing the need for it.⁴ If there is no binary division to be made between what one says and does not say in reference to the closet, what becomes important then is the “ways of not saying such things” (Sedgwick 1990, 3). Indeed, “closetedness,” as Sedgwick states, is not a performance initiated by a particular silence but by “a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (3). André Walter's closet then could be said to take form around this hyperbolized discourse on heterosexual

chastity which in turn silences, by way of contrast, homosexual desire. This choice highlights, through fear or self-denial, the difficulty with which homosexuality would assume a position as a creator of epistemologies and points rather to its otiose nature in contrast to heterosexuality's productive social utility (52). Indeed, by emphasizing heterosexual chastity, a specific type of knowledge is given to the reader for interpretation, one that highlights normalcy and neutralizes abnormality. Ultimately, rather than stating his homosexuality outright as such, his particular closet is shaped by the emphasis given to its opposite. Of course, as Sedgwick points out, heterosexuality itself only came into being as a social category in correlation with the "discovery" of homosexuality (Sedgwick 1990).

Conceived as early as 1894 and composed the summer of 1897 to be published by the *Mercure de France* in 1903, *Saül* also recounts the story of a secret desire enmeshed in the cloak of heterosexuality. In the play, king Saül discovers his own hidden secret identity while searching for the answer to another secret, the name of his successor. Saül wishes to enquire into the future of the kingship and as the drama precedes Gide associates the question of this secret with another—namely the sexual desire which Saül gradually realizes is at the heart of his attraction towards David. The queen first introduces David into the presence of the king. Having admitted the waning if nonexistent desire that the king feels for her (Gide 1942, 26), she hopes to gain access to the king's secret through the beauty of the youth. There is obviously something unhealthy about Saül's infatuation with both Saki his young ephebe-like cupbearer and David who does not seem at first to understand the sexual element present in the king's regard. As Saül's son Jonathan, a foil to David's virile character and self-determination,

grows closer to David the king's jealousy is enflamed to a murderous head. After hearing the queen refer to David as "Daoud," an affectionate sobriquet used by Jonathan towards David that the king himself is not permitted to use, Saül kills the queen in cold blood. It would be interesting to look at this instance of secrecy and disclosure through an Orientalist lens, since "Daoud" is also Arabic for David. While it is clear that the king's jealousy is incited not because the queen might have had a chance with the young David, but because the king is not allowed the desired verbal intimacy that the queen unfairly assumes, the homosexuality present between David and Saül and David and Jonathan is quite different. While Saül attempts to force himself on David highlighting the physical aspect of his desire, the relationship that quickly develops between David and Jonathan is based on mutual love and affection, a seemingly obvious precursor to the two types of homosexuality that would be explicated later in *Corydon*. The physical aspect of Saül's relationship with David however is directly related to the imperialist discourse and authority that is at the heart of the story (Said 1979). Saül, like the European colonialist, is in a position of authority and power vis-à-vis David. Indeed, this power is revealed through his desire to sexually colonize David's body and his belief that no other character, including his wife and son, can lay claim to it if he cannot. Through the intimate appellation, "Daoud," used in a familiar setting throughout the play, David is orientalized and ascribes to what Mary J. Pratt has called the Arab's "*disponibilité*" ("availability") (Pratt 163) for the European colonizer. Because of Saül's hegemonic position over the young boy, like one Gide would have over the Arab youths he would meet in Africa, David should be made available to him, even though he is not. However, Saül will, in the end, fall prey to his secret desires and perish with his son at the hands of

the Philistines; David will take the thrown. Gide would write to Paul Valéry the 22 October 1898 to say that Saül symbolized the personal drama which stems from any vice (Pollard 331); Valéry would later confess his shock at the play's "perversion" (Martin 313). Gide would also explain in 1927 to Catholic critic Victor Poucel that the subject was in essence an antidote to *Les Nourritures terrestres* (1897): the play displaying a character whose fall from grace and powerlessness were underscored by his lack of resistance to temptation (Pollard 335). It is certainly possible that Gide wrote *Saül* as a literary countermeasure to the Epicurean philosophy of *Les Nourritures terrestres*. But also perhaps as a warning to the type of homosexuality embodied by Saül, the physically emboldened homosexual who desires the pleasures of the flesh, an idea that runs counter to the homosexual philosophy that Gide was starting to develop. It is exactly this type of homosexuality that Gide would criticize in *Corydon*, even if he already assumed this position several times in North Africa with the Arab youths he sexually exploited. In addition, given the date during which the bulk of the work was written (summer of 1897), *Saül* could also be the literary aftertaste of seeing such a homosexual, a broken and battered Oscar Wilde, the summer of 1897 after Wilde's release from imprisonment in Reading Gaol.

In his article "Revelation and Dissimulation in André Gide's Autobiographical Space" Scott Manning describes the correlation between the autobiographical pact and coming out. In the pact, he states, the author can only make a certain claim to authenticity by demonstrating that the story that is recounted is his or her own and therefore gives the reader permission through this pact to read the work as autobiographical. The coming out process works in a similar way since although one

might imagine another as homosexual, it would be to some degree always inaccurate in the absence of a clear statement of self-identification with this identity by the supposed homosexual. The coming out statement then can be seen as a speech act that takes a person from homosexual behavior to homosexual identity much the same way that the autobiographical pact allows for discussion of autobiography rather than just autobiographical detail in a work (Manning 320; Butler 1997).

However the Gidean hero never fully claims homosexual identity as his own, or states in so many words his connection with the term homosexual, pederast, or invert. Therefore, it is quite impossible to equate the terms directly with the characters of any given work. Rather, the Gidean novel often highlights the difficulty in arriving at this position, a notion that is possibly more interesting as it reveals an evolutionary path towards revelation rather than just nominative self-awareness and therefore the contours of the closet.

Published in May 1902 after an almost fifteen-year gestation, *L'Immoraliste* depicts Michel in the midst of this coming out process. But while we know that Gide was a pederast, it would be impossible to apply such a specific nomenclature to Gide's creation, Michel, even after the novel is finished.⁵ Recounted to middle school friends after a three-year absence, the story that Michel timidly delivers is incited by the need to reveal a secret, a need to speak and liberate him from an imprisoning silence (Gide 1930, 20). Like the story of Saül and André Walter's *cahiers*, Michel's story orbits around certain familiar binaries, specifically those of desire/restraint and secrecy/disclosure, binaries that equally encumber and advance the discourses surrounding the closet and homosexuality that are at the heart of *L'Immoraliste*. Ultimately, through the telling of

his story, Michel fails to reconcile a previous concept of self with a newly discovered one, ultimately floundering any attempt to “come out” through his *récit*.

Michel did not marry his wife for love, but to please his father (21). And like many of the decadent nineteenth-century anti-heroes with questionable sexualities that precede him, Michel is plagued by a mental and physical state of unrest and infirmity. It is through the many episodes of disquieting illness that the reader catches a glimpse not of heterosexual love, but a type of respect and affection that Michel has for his wife. Indeed, a respect and affection that flirts with heterosexuality without ever fully referring to it. The same could easily be said, of course, of Gide’s relationship with his wife Madeleine (Gide 1955). Rather than confide in his wife when his illness reaches an unsettling peak, Michel hides from her the blood he has been coughing up, much like he will hide his increasing attraction to the young Arab boys that Marceline will bring into his room to comfort him. Indeed, one of the first episodes that betray the codes of secrecy and disclosure for both Michel and Marceline occurs when Marceline introduces the youthful beauty of Bachir, one of many Arab boys that grace the novels pages, into the room to help Michel forget about his ailments (Gide 1930, 41-2). The choice of boys is telling. While Michel prefers the active boys whose desired health and vigor he observes through their translucent *gandourah*, those that Marceline chooses are weak and sickly (71). It could certainly be argued that Marceline understands all too well the penchant that Michel will never fully disclose and intends to contend with his perversion by presenting the most lackluster of specimens. This episode recalls the assumption Gide would make about his wife’s knowledge of his homosexuality in his work *Et Nunc manet in te* (1947). Often surrounded on their honeymoon by the *ragazzi* of the Italian streets,

many of whom Madeleine brought into Gide's company, Gide surmises that his secret was anything but when his wife sees her husband pied piping several young Saraginesco models upstairs to his apartment to be photographed. He states: "Elle le savait; je ne m'en cachais pas." ("She knew [what was going to happen with the boys]; I did not hide it from myself") (Gide 1947, 37-9).

But as Michel's health improves, he no longer requires the help of Marceline in seeking out his Arab companions. While his encounters with Bachir, Ashour, Lassif, and Lachmi are so many episodes in a string of homosexualized descriptions, the whole of the passage on pederasty is not meant to underline an evolution from sexual innocence to sexual perversion. Said mentions not the appearance of, but ultimately the painting over of the presence of the Algerian natives in Gide's work, especially in *L'Immoraliste*. Indeed, for Gide, he states, Algeria is nothing but an "exotic locale in which [his] own spiritual problems [...] can be addressed and therapeutically treated" (Said 1994, 183). If scant attention is paid to the Arab boys other than as sexual opportunities or transient thrills it is because they are nothing other than steps "along the way to [Michel's] self-knowledge" (192). Like France's imperialist empire itself, Michel holds these Arab boys only to benefit from them, to refuse them autonomy outside of his hold.

Moreover, Michel inheres within what Pratt would call a "Voyage South" narrative, a European protagonist who ventures south where "a cornucopia of Europe's forbidden fruits—illicit sex, crime, sloth, irrationality, sensuality, excessive power, cruelty, lost childhood—is offered up to the questing hero" (Pratt 158). And while the psychic effects of the sexual component of Michel's relationship with these Arab youths is questionable because unclear in the story, his voyage south does wreak havoc on

Michel's European consciousness, including the moral system to which he is expected to adhere. This idea is highlighted in the text when the young Arab boy Moktir, the only one of Marceline's picks whom Michel does not dislike is caught stealing a pair of scissors. This symbolic act against established systems of control contradicts the moral standards of Marceline but seems to confer with the newly developed morality of Michel to the point where after this day, Michel discloses that the young boy has become his favorite (73). This charm will endure even throughout time and space. When Michel returns to Biskra later in the novel in an attempt to recreate the conditions of past happiness that cured his former sickly state he seeks out the young Arabs from his first trip only to find them changed, sullied and grown-up, with the exception of Moktir. The immoral thief has just left prison and unlike the others has retained the image of strength and vigor that made him so enticing before.

In Normandy during the summer months, Michel's time is spent attending his estate as well as the youthful farmhands who work on it. Pierre first catches his eye. He is a vagabond who is tall, handsome and instinctual (187) but is quickly dismissed from the farm for the lascivious influence he could have on the others. Bute, another of the sordid youths peaks Michel's curiosity for these same reasons but is sent away because of Michel's fault. Charles, the son of the gardener, is described as a handsome lad, full of healthy vigor and well built (116). In Charles' company, Michel starts to forget his wife and takes on the youth as advisor to the farm. Michel's joy is peaked when their hands meet underwater as they catch eels and is intrigued by the invigorating pleasure of riding in Charles' company (119); both episodes during which Marceline is absent. While there is certainly a sensual aspect to the relationship that Michel and Charles share it is short-

lived, for Michel will ultimately reject Charles and his bourgeois values later in the novel. This rejection is important because it highlights the “Oriental” values that have taken over Michel, Charles being exemplary of modern European bourgeois ideals. If the lascivious joys that Michel discovers in Algeria are not those that he, as a European, is supposed to seek out, they are also unavoidable once he returns to Europe. Not surprisingly, most if not all of the young boys that Michel connects with on his farm are, like Motkir, linked to what Said has called the uncanny “queerness” of the Orient (Said 1979, 103), exempt from morality and seemingly sexually available. The final youth on the Normand farm that has an important and revealing impact on Michel is Alcide. The mysteries that surround the boy fuel Michel’s unhealthy curiosity. To obtain more information about him Michel must compromise his position as landowner more and more, turning a blind eye to the boy’s illegal poaching, but he seems unable to obtain any degree of confidence. When the youth suddenly disappears, Michel expresses a complete sense of isolation and solitude (Gide 1930, 205). This feeling of ultimate desperation is rooted in Michel’s desire to be like the youths that he so desires, to be liberated from a morality represented most ardently by Marceline his wife. Ultimately, it is the morality that Michel seems to have found in the Orient, once again what Said called the “living tableau of queerness” (Said 1979, 103), that Michel cannot escape, even when back in Europe. It is not to say that homosexuality, or in Michel’s case, pederasty would be the answer to his moral and ideological imprisonment. Indeed, even if the Orient is associated with the “escapism of sexual fantasy” (Said 190) and most specifically in Michel’s case, homosexual fantasy, it is not just Michel’s sexuality that is at play in the novel. It is clear that while for Michel the closet is a place of confinement and captivity,

it is also a place where morality can be transcended but only outside of European constraint and through the “Oriental” ideals that have now become part and parcel to his personal moral story. His immorality (in the sense of transcending social transgressions) is indeed possible because of how his “Oriental” experiences shaped the specificity of his closet, making his “coming out” possible in an Orientalized context.

Ultimately, the interplay between discourses of secrecy and disclosure help to reveal the contours of the Gidean closet. Indeed, while Gide can never actually articulate a closet discourse in the first person without revealing a secret that the closet is supposed to guard, the epistemological transactions that occur through this interplay allow Gide to bypass full disclosure of his sexuality and reveal, through equivocality, the way in which the closet often functions in fiction and in reality. This should not however be read as literary cowardice. Gide’s discourse follows quite clearly in the tradition of the homosexual authors that wrote before him, mirroring the “defensive literary bisexuality” of Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen’s works, the “ephemeral homosexuality” of Achille Essebac works, as well as the discourses surrounding Balzac’s notorious criminal Vautrin and Proust’s infamous invert M. de Charlus. This discourse based on the notions of secrecy and disclosure should be viewed then as an overarching thematic of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century French homosexual literature, a discourse, like the closet on which it is based, that at once conceals and reveals identity.

Formosum Pastor Corydon Ardebat Alexim: Transcendental Desires and Redeeming Restraint in Gidean Discourse

Corydon follows in a long tradition of treatises on masculine sexual nonconformity. From the anonymous pamphlet on masturbation, *Onania* in 1723 (Greenberg 366), Samuel Auguste Tissot's (1728-1797) dissertation *L'Onanisme: Dissertation sur les maladies produites par la masturbation* in 1760, the sexological and criminological works of the early and mid nineteenth century by Tardieu and Lombroso, the notion of degeneration popularized by Max Nordau's *Entartung* (Degeneration) (1892), and the advent of psychology and psychiatry at the turn of the century, homosexuality had been poked and prodded for the better part of one hundred and fifty years by the publication of Gide's homosexual apologia in a private release in 1911. While trying to avoid generalizations, it would be fair to assert nonetheless that the majority of texts in which a definition of homosexuality was put forth as a rule, abstract principle, loose or sweeping statement or even ontological law could not avoid the oppositional discourse of desire and restraint. In the 1850's Tardieu separated out homosexuals into active and passive pederasts for whom sexual activity is an often clumsily tackled choreography where one partner lures the other in a dangerous two-step that could send both participants careening towards incarceration (Tardieu 1859). Indeed, for Tardieu, the pederast's whole body shows the signs of such a desire: the passive pederast's backside plumping up, presumably to attract an active counterpart (Tardieu 1859, 143). For François Carlier, chief of police during the Third Republic, the sexual desire inherent in homosexuality not only leads to nefarious ends (usually prostitution) but also bastardizes the more vigorous natural inclinations like feelings of nobility and courage, as well as weakening ties to the family and the nation (Carlier 280).

And even if Gide would have no contact with Freud's theories until after the publication of *Corydon*,⁶ the notion of desire, drives, and sexual impulse in Freud's diphasic developmental model of sexuality is without question (Freud 1955; 2010).

Of course, this link between desire, restraint, and homosexuality is not otiose. Desire and restraint from desire has been shown to be a part of a system of discursive constructs all of which work in the service of social regulation and control of sexuality (Foucault 1990; Butler 1990). In social relations, desires are not merely causally reducible to the ostensibly sex-specific, but become manifest and interpretable signs of "sex" (Butler 1990). Desires then are inextricably caught up within the regulatory laws that govern "the hermeneutic principle of self-interpretation" (130). Indeed, as Foucault has stated, "the West has managed to bring us almost entirely—our bodies, our minds, our individuality, our history—under the sway of a logic of concupiscence and desire" (Foucault 1990, 78). In the works of nineteenth and twentieth-century authors like Gide, works that present the constant ebb and flow between desire and restraint, the intelligible spaces between a manifestly homosexual desire and its corollary opposite, including the more nebulous inter-regions on a continuum of desire, pose questions as to how much of this space is properly sexual. As Sedgwick argues, it is indeed by adding desire onto a continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual, for instance, that the "unbrokenness" of this continuum might be hypothesized (Sedgwick 1985, 1-2).

But Gide's work treads a different path than that of many of which came before it. Gidean desire is not a just a linear path towards an eventual purposeful action but rather an ever pivoting position built around caution and control. While the crux of *Corydon* is focused on a polemical relationship between science and morals, Gide's most

evasive task is to present homosexuality and therefore homosexual desire in terms of its “naturalness” in the hopes of convincing his contemporaries through a more in depth presentation than had been afforded homosexuals in the past. The interlocutor’s role then in the Socratic dialogue form that *Corydon* adopts is to act as an objective interviewer, giving a voice to past prejudice to be subsequently silenced by Corydon’s seemingly logical argumentation and Enlightenment-style *esprit de la raison*.

Corydon was engaged to a young girl whom he loved but without sensuality. The nature of this love is rooted in a childish ignorance to self-awareness and sexuality. Corydon’s love for his fiancée is really a lack of desire, or more precisely a lack of knowledge that any other desire besides that for a woman could exist and be entertained (23). The young girl however has a brother, Alexis, who is several years her junior and who, while sometimes childish, is full of a grace and a self-awareness that quickly catches Corydon’s attention (25). Of course this desire for youthful aplomb and vigor in *Corydon* is quite similar not only to the vampiric desire exhibited by Michel in *L’Immoralist* but also the perverse friendship between forty-six year old Freemason and Doctor of Science, Anthime Armand-Dubois of *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914), whose heart “beats faster” (Gide 1922, 12) when twelve year old Beppo, his lab-hand, enters the room.

As Alexis confesses his innermost thoughts and feelings, Corydon sees himself reflected in the adolescent’s refreshing naivety (Gide 1924, 25). Alexis, in turn, is very fond of Corydon and oversteps the bounds of friendship by making his desire to receive some “caresses” well known. Indeed this transgressing of the boundaries between the homosocial bonds that have developed between the two and homosexuality is quickly

staved. Corydon is clear that nothing impure occurred physically between the two. His conviction in regards to the importance of a severe austerity leaves little to be desired (25). Growing weary of where their relationship might go, Corydon chastises Alexis' affection calling it effeminate (26). Alexis attempts in vain to win Corydon's love and when all his efforts fail he commits suicide, leaving behind a letter explaining his feelings (26). The interlocutor of *Corydon*, like the medical establishment and literature had done before him, accuses Corydon of having incited the youth to debauchery. Corydon affirms however that reactions like the interlocutors' lead to condemnation and ineffective treatment because the doctors who treat these cases have little to no exposure to cases of what Corydon will later call "normal" pederasty but deal only with "unanistes honteux; qu'à des piteux, qu'à des plaintifs, qu'à des invertis, des malades" ("shameful Unranians with lamentable ones, plaintive ones, with inverts and sick ones") (28-9). Following Alexis' suicide, Corydon devotes himself to the medical field in order to help future pederasts by teaching them that they are not ill. After, the question of practice must be decided.

It is worth the aside to quickly define terms since while Gide does clarify his version of identities behind denominations, he is not, as Pollard notes, always consistent with his link between terms and definitions (Pollard 1991). The key term throughout this whole first section of *Corydon* is "pederast." Gide's work is not then a defense of homosexuality per se and can indeed be considered quite homophobic in certain sections. And while many of the points that will be made to justify Corydon's sexual identity and desire can be used in reference to the more universally neutral term "homosexual," Gide's desire was proscriptively exclusionist in nature. This might be because Gide

understood the primary dependency to language that someone in his position of definitional authority had to assume and therefore decided to recycle terminology rather than reinvent the wheel. Indeed, as Judith Butler states, sometimes we cling to certain terms because “at a minimum, they offer us some form of social and discursive existence” (Butler 1997, 26). Gide’s work, through the reevaluation of desire, redefines homosexuality through its historicity, through familiar terms, in an attempt to unfix them from the definitional sediment that had built up throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gide states in his journal in 1918: “J’appelle *pédéraste* celui qui, comme le mot l’indique, s’éprend des jeunes garçons. J’appelle *sodomite* [...] celui dont le désir s’adresse aux hommes faits. J’appelle *inverti* celui qui, dans la comédie de l’amour, assume le rôle d’une femme et désire être possédé” (“I call a pederast one who, as the word indicates, falls for young boys. I call a sodomite [...] one whose desire is directed towards mature men. I call an invert one who, in the comedy that is love, takes on the role of the woman and desires to be possessed”) (Gide 2012a, 203). This differentiation between *homosexualities* is also clear from the prefatory words with which Gide starts the 1922 edition of *Corydon* declaring the eventual absence of any information regarding either the homosexuals about which Proust speaks (*les invertis*) as well as those of the “third sex” referring directly to Magnus Hirschfeld (1838-1935) (Gide 1924, 8). For *Corydon*, as well as for Gide, pederasty and desire are equitable with masculinity, a reason that he speaks so highly of Spartan male same-sex desire (119), and it is on this basis that he inveighs against any form of homosexuality in which effeminacy might be a pervasive and therefore debilitating element. More problematically however, masculinity is never defined outright but rather only contrasted with effeminacy—

shameful, sick, puny, self-pitying homosexuals (28-9)—who in turn are linked to the female. Corydon explains this continuum of desire more concretely as he attempts to place pederasty among the “healthy” homosexualities. As Sedgwick has pointed out, having definitional propriety over the category of homosexuality has importance because of its “potential for giving whoever wields it a structuring definitional leverage over the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution” (Sedgwick 1985, 86). Indeed, in writing *Corydon* and in defining pederasty as necessarily masculine, Gide attempts to disrupt the definitional ties of effeminacy that had traditionally tethered homosexuality to femininity and reinsert pederasty into a socially accepted position among masculinities. Moreover, he also creates a space of revaluation, in the Butlerian sense (Butler 1997), where terms such as pederast can be returned to their speaker in a different or revaluated form and in turn cited against “their ordinary purposes, and perform a reversal of effects” (14). In fact, by reciting pederasty through a modern discourse against its homosexual counterparts (invert, homosexual, sodomite), Gide intends to reposition pederasty among the healthy social sexualities distinct from an abject *homosexuality*. But in so doing he also creates an exclusionary system for defining homosexuality that sets proscriptive and definitional limits to the acceptable forms of male desire, in turn reinserting violence into language by denying, through definition, certain homosexual existences.

Like heterosexuality, homosexuality is comprised of degrees and nuances that range from normal to abnormal: from Platonism to debauchery, abnegation to Sadism (Sedgwick 1985, 29). Indeed, there are many differences between the homosexualities described in *Corydon*. On a moral level, the sodomite is equated with vice and

debauchery, since the act is deliberate and therefore perverse. The invert, while most likely considered by Corydon to be an inborn affliction, is effeminate and at the extreme end of the continuum previously established. Homosexuality and “Uranism” are often used synonymously as umbrella terms but are not however to be confused or conflated with pederasty. The two most important terms to consider are pederasty and inversion, the former reflecting a “normal” male who desires a male youth, the latter a homosexual categorized by physical disease and immorality (Gide 1924, 123).

While desire is always present for the pederast, restraint is his moral keystone. But what does the relationship that Corydon envisions look like? The youth with whom he will fall in love will be between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two (128).⁷ However until the age of eighteen, he is more able to be loved than to love (128). This does not however mean that the relationship is not reciprocal since Corydon, like Gide, finds it quite natural to separate *amour* from *désir*. Albeit divorced from love, Corydon recognizes desire and the beloved’s need for some type of physical affection (*caresses*) (25) which he sees as an alternative to acts that would place him in either of two abhorred categories (sodomite/invert).

Even if love is the ultimate expression of the attachment between an adolescent and an adult male, to mention the need for chastity is also to recognize temptation. For the adolescent, desire is not fixed on a specific sexual object (104) rather it is outside influence that guides the ignited spark inflaming the appropriate object of desire. More desirable and desired than desiring, the adolescent is most safe under the wing of an older lover who can teach and mold him (128). Not only is this natural state of adolescent sexual indifference an attractive quality to Corydon, but it also echoes the constructivist

view established earlier in the dialogues. In Dialogue I, Corydon asserts that everything involving society and morals predestines towards heterosexuality, specifically mentioning theater, books, journals, the influence of elders, and salon environment. Of course, Foucault and Butler also critically examine this heteronormative regulatory system between knowledge/power/sex (Foucault 1990; Butler 1990). Citing Pascal and Montaigne as a philosophical crutch (36-7), Corydon rehashes a debate between Nature and Custom to conclude that heterosexuality is no more natural than homosexuality. Rather heterosexuality is itself an exhausted custom that reaches a bathetic naturalness only through its unchecked customary citationality (Gide 1924, 37).⁸ It is only through this process of unquestioned repetition that heterosexuality enters the realm of moral permissiveness and homosexuality, because seemingly less standard although equally common, becomes the opposite of morality.

Love however is a category that, for Corydon, does not differ in a heterosexual and homosexual context. Indeed, far from hindering philosophical thought through sexual bias, Corydon's sexuality aids in the development of a theory on love and desire. Based on abnegation and chastity, desire is subjugated by love, words that echo Gide's puritanical upbringing. What is however frustratingly brilliant is how close homosexuality gets to the homosocial in this formulation, as if to be subsumed by it. One could easily question how two males vowed to an ideal of chastity know that they are indeed homosexual? Can homosexuality exist without the sexual, without the desire? To repeat Sedgwick's conclusions, it is indeed the reinsertion of desire onto the continuum between homosexual and homosocial that the "unbrokenness" of the continuum might be examined (Sedgwick 1985). Conversely, can two heterosexuals devoted to an ideal of

chastity know that they are indeed heterosexual? Can heterosexuality exist without desire, without the sexual? While Gide does not give us an answer to these questions, he does however highlight this problematic in his works by carefully shading (homo)sexual desire in an hyperbolized need for abnegation. Consequently, many of Gide's works feature male protagonists whose desire is funneled through an ideal of chastity that is so egregiously necessitated as to place into question the nature and object of desire.

In *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*, the narrator addresses his beloved, Emmanuèle, in a string of increasingly manic journal entries describing an inner torment that centers on desire and restraint. The narrator's attempt at an ideal of chastity is constantly threatened with temptation from both an exterior and interior force that is at times overwhelmingly compromising. Among the many possible roots of the desire for (heterosexual) continence, two contrite descriptions of encounters with prostitutes and loose women stand out (Gide 2012b, 54, 115). In the same vein, a nightmare he experiences when already depraved from his constant contest with the desires of the flesh highly affects his emotional and mental state (157). This is however one of two dreams mentioned in sequence. This second dream represents a beautiful woman who exposes herself to the dreamer revealing a black hole where her sex would normally appear. The first, much more idyllic in nature, features an excited description of male children swimming and diving at the beach, their lithe sunburned bodies blanketed by the freshness of their surroundings (145). The narrator states his anger at not being able to be a part of their group, much like Gide would later state in *Si le grain ne meurt* his desire to be in the society of the youths that graced the streets with their puerile insouciance (Gide 1955, 302). While the descriptions are similar in tone, there is no specific link to love in either

passage, only desire. However if the dreams and experiences with salacious women provoke a desire for abnegation, the dream of male children fills the narrator with a sensual awareness that finds its corollary in a descriptive sequel that occurs in reality. The next morning at five André Walter sets out to put faces to his oneiric vision of bathing male adolescents (145). But he remains alone, as the children of his dreams are nowhere to be found in reality. Instead he peoples his loneliness by daydreaming of “beloved beings,” those svelte forms of children playing on the beach whose beauty pursues him: “j’aurais voulu me baigner aussi, près d’eux, et de mes mains, sentir la douceur des peaux brunes.” (“I would have liked to swim as well, next to them, and with my hands, feel the softness of their tanned skin”) (146). Given that much of the discourse on desire in this small section is centered on what would seem to be homosexual desire, especially when compared to the incitement to chastity that the dreams and encounters with women seem to provoke, a pederastic tag placed on the narrator of the journal would seem fitting. However, this episode on the beach is too limited in scale to the much larger discourse on desire to state definitively that André Walter, like Gide, is a pederast. It does however highlight the difficulty in speaking of homosexuality in the presence of a discourse that vacillates on the continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual (Sedgwick 1985). It should also be added that *Les Cahiers* were written before Gide’s travels to Africa (not however before he had become aware of his sexual temptations) and therefore ostensibly before any recorded encounters with young boys. Rather than call this section a glimpse of only homosexual desire, it might be more appropriate, given the vocabulary: “la caresse dans l’air,” “mes sens aigus,” “vibrations extraordinaires,” “je jouissais douloureusement” (“the caress in the air,” “my acute senses,” “extraordinary

vibrations,” “I painfully enjoyed myself”) to speak of the “defensive bisexuality” found in Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen’s works⁹ or perhaps hyperesthesia or masturbation, especially since this episode occurs in the *cahier noir* and therefore closer to the narrator’s collapse into madness, one of the purported symptoms of the solitary vice. It is indeed this lack of precision in André Walter’s journal that adds interest to the discourse on desire, the homosocial and homosexuality, and the closet, and one that, as a preliminary work, sets the grounds for a fuller theoretical notion on desire to be later related.

An ideological compromise to the strict ascetic morality represented in *Les Cahiers d’André Walter*, *Les Nourritures terrestres* (1897) is a lyrical collection of liberating books written by, what the prefatory note from 1926 calls, someone who used to be sick, a “guéri” (“someone who has been healed”) (Gide 2012c, 11). Much like Michel’s newfound interest in personal desire after his brush with death in *L’Immoraliste*, the once sick writer of *Les Nourritures* is someone who embraces life, like something he almost lost (11). The reader of *Les Nourritures* is invariably challenged by new experiences and an ardent disapproval of constancy such that a quick read seems to point to a glorification of desire and instincts at the expense of morality. But even Gide is quick to denounce this view. The work is an apology of individual salvation, the main component of which is based on Gide’s theoretical concept of “dénouement” (12). Gide defines this as a type of asceticism that focuses on the process of desiring rather than the desire itself (21). The adherent then is able to appreciate the end of desire all the more for having gone through the process of wanting. The book is also a literary purge for both its

writer and Nathanaël, its addressee, the narrator imploring Nathanaël to throw aside the book when he has finished, get out, and explore (*sors*) (15).

Nathanaël, the youth for whom the book is written, is also expected to purge through the teachings of *Les Nourritures*. The “Envoi” at the end of the work leaves no room for doubt as to the importance the writer places on self-awareness and liberation: “*Quitte-moi [...] Ne crois pas que ta vérité puisse être trouvée par quelque autre [...] Jette mon livre; dis-toi bien que ce n’est là qu’une des mille postures possible en face de la vie. Cherche la tienne.*” (“*Leave me [...] Don’t believe that your truth can be found by anyone else [...] Throw aside my book; tell yourself that it is only one of thousands of possibilities when faced with life. Search out your own*”) (163) (emphasis in original). While the call is not to complete debauchery, Nathanaël is encouraged to satisfy his desires while his lips are still beautiful enough to kiss (152-3). This Ronsardian echo is followed by a more Romantic lament as the narrator regrets that he is unable to return, even in literary spirit, to a time when his own lips might have graced those of Athman, the Arab youth who appears both in the narrator’s past joys (136-157) but also in the Algerian adventures described by Gide in his autobiography (Gide 1955). Of course, the link between northern Africa, homosexuality, and unbridled pleasures has already been pointed out by Said (Said 1979, 1994). It is certainly apposite then to heavily stress the importance of personal liberation since it is experienced, for many of these “past joys,” at the expense of young Arabs pointing to, like in *L’Immoraliste*, the subjugating relation between Gidean homosexual liberation and Orientalism (Said 1994). But the transient nature of these pixilated reminiscences also brings to mind the “ephemeral homosexuality” discussed in Achille Essebac’s narrations. Indeed many of the images of

homoerotic desire in *Les Nourritures* occur in small capriciously fleeting passages suggesting the temporary nature of their affective value making them all the more “exotic” by means of their impermanent status and geographical locale.

Like the two worlds experienced by Michel in *L'Immoraliste*, the narrator of *Les Nourritures* experiences homoerotic desire both in the heat of North Africa and in the countryside of Normandy. In the north of France, the narrator recaptures the moments when he played with young farmhands, whose sweating skin smelled so good (105). Other memories include the return of the hay wagons at La Roque asleep on the dry grass amongst the rough young drudges (101). In Algeria, the narrator celebrates, through the “Ronde de la Grenade,” the liberating nudity of children (75-80). Other images include the shepherd-boys in the gardens of Biskra (57). While most of these images, like those in *Les Cahiers*, are equivocal, some portraits are more explicit and reveal the scope of the narrator’s desire. In Chetma, the narrator hears the flute of his beloved shepherd-boy. He coyly asks, “Viendra-t-il? Ou si c’est moi qui m’approcherai?” (“Will he come? Or should I go to him?”). He follows quickly with an impatiently sensual “Berger, viens!” (“Shepherd, come!”) (140). In another instance two boys take the narrator to the pools at Gafsa where dangerous charms lie in the shadows (138). Also in the shadows, caresses are exchanged between the narrator and a young boy who followed him into a North African garden (52). Similar to the images presented in *L'Immoraliste*, *Les Nourritures* depends on the idea of an Orient that is at once sexually liberated and available to the Western consumer (Said 1979; Pratt 1981). It is in this sense that (homosexual) desire is possible to Nathanaël and especially so outside of Western morality. Moreover, many of the women in *Les Nourritures* are as caught up in this imperial discourse. Women are

mentioned on several occasions and also in reference to their availability to heterosexual intercourse, including prostitutes in Venice (70), courtesans in Biskra (136), and Meriem, an *Oulad*, mentioned as well by Gide during his visit to Algeria (121; Gide 1955, 304-305). However, there is a difference between the descriptions. While the women are described only as objects of delight, the masculine youths offer something quite different: the inspiration for a sentimental and principled charge of education. This sentimental and instructional difference between women and boys is indeed at the heart of the pederastic relationship so common in works featuring homosexual themes. *Les Nourritures* itself is an instance of the *erastes/eromenos* dichotomy: an older narrator writes the book and then gives it as instruction to the younger Nathanaël.

Besides the literary form of the book, there are several references to the pederastic relationship in the narration, references that help to inform Gide's notion of desire. Known from legend as a youth beloved by Hercules, Hylas is one of the narrator's preeminent companions. It is with Hylas that the narrator has shared his desires. But it is not a message of depravity that will grace Hylas' lips. He sings the "Ronde de la grenade," (75-80) a song that celebrates joy but also highlights the ultimate uncertainty of happiness for any soul. Another, more of a mirror for Gide's own thoughts, Ménéalque seems at first glance to precursor Michel from *L'Immoraliste*. Interestingly enough, Ménéalque will reappear in this novel with the intention of warning Michel against the masculine bourgeois consciousness that surrounds him (Gide 1903, 175), a morality against which *Les Nourritures* ultimately must struggle as well. And like Michel, Ménéalque will choose a youth to mentor. He first sees him at his school, speaking to him and spawning interest. Four days later the boy begins to follow him, a passage

reminiscent of des Esseintes' perverse encounter with an unknown boy on the streets of Paris in *À Rebours*. Ménalque's lesson to the boy is concise: the world is open for those who wish to go into it, and one should go into it (Gide 2012c, 67). Like the eighteen-year old Ménalque, the young boy will take these teachings and become a vagabond, learning above all to know his own solitude (67). Unlike Hylas who questions the very attainability of happiness, Ménalque's joy is real, made up of indiscriminate fervor (*ferveur*) (74). There is no difference for him between the love he shares with the least attractive of cabin boys on his boat (72) or the Venetian courtesan whose beauty overshadowed all others (72).

The narrator also shares in Ménalque's fervor having experienced, he states, every passion and every vice (24). However, unlike Ménalque, the narrator adheres to André Walter's doctrine that it is in the chastisement of the flesh that the purest pleasures are to be found (19). The ultimate expression of pleasure (*la volupté*) for the narrator and the ultimate lesson for Nathanaël then is love. Indeed, this conclusion might seem contradictory to the liberating suggestions given by both the narrator and Ménalque throughout the work. But these contradictions are also part and parcel to Gide's defining work *Corydon* and his personal life. For Gide, and for many other homosexual authors who used the transcendental asceticism prescribed by Greek and Roman ideologies as a defense for their sexuality, a contradiction between theory and practice in terms of desire is ever-present. Moreover, the addition of heterosexual desires onto the homosocial continuum that these ascetic theories favor seems to only increase the contradiction with which these works seem laden. However, there is a clear separation of love and desire in Gide's works. Given the religious undertones of the work, desire being understood as

one of many processes of pleasure through which one might experience God (Gide 2012c, 19), desire in *Les Nourritures* can also be linked to spiritual transcendence. Like his nineteenth-century predecessors who focused on Greek and Roman based representations of homosexuality, the move is to highlight the transcendental nature of homosexual love, the limits of which are undefined and eclipse any moral stigma placed on them when viewed through a spiritual lens. Indeed, this notion of love transfigures the *erastes/eromenos* dichotomy into a triangular relationship where God, rather than intellect and well-being, is the highest point. Of course, regardless of how eloquent and philosophical the notion Gide develops, in the end at least half of the desire in the book is linked to pederasty, something Gide's contemporaries would not have ignored however cloaked its delivery.

Published in 1926 after an almost seven year gestation, *Les Faux-monnayeurs* is Gide's most complex novel. Parroting the corrupt monetary discourse of the mid-nineteenth-century Balzacian novel and the intricate narrative web of Proust's *La Recherche*, *Les Faux-monnayeurs* is also Gide's most vocal description of male same-sex desire outside of *Corydon*. Indeed, it is also the novel in which the precarious link between the homosocial and the homosexual is most clearly featured through male same-sex desire. Implanted into the title of the work, one of the overarching themes of the novel is a concern with reality and appearance, indeed apt choices when depicting male same-sex relationships. The novelist, Édouard, explains this dichotomy in the novel when discussing the subject of the book he is writing which is also, through a *mise en abyme*, the novel we are reading. The subject as he sees it is "la rivalité du monde réel et de la représentation que nous nous en faisons. La manière dont le monde des apparences

s'impose à nous et dont nous tentons d'imposer au monde extérieur notre interprétation particulière, fait le drame de notre vie" (Gide 1925, 255) ("the conflict between the real world and the representation we make of it. The way the world of appearances imposes itself on us and the way we attempt to impose our own interpretation on the exterior world, makes the drama of our lives"). This statement is of course much more than a literary issue for Édouard who, through his desires, is also one of the more "outed" homosexuals in the novel. On a larger scale, this vision also inheres to a more global articulation of the cultural representation of homosexuality and the literary project of reimagining homosexual desire after personal interpretations recast into this "world of appearances." Through the novel and its representations of homosexuality, Gide takes control of the uses and consequences of "historically residual definitions" (Sedgwick 1985, 90) of homosexuality. Indeed, as Gide's first novel,¹⁰ and one full of representations of male same-sex desire, Gide plays with the articulations, both positive and negative, of homosexuality, articulations he had been developing up until this point, inserting them into a period after the Great War of growing humanitarianism, of confrontation with mankind's suffering, of religious doubts, and the birth of his life-long affection with Marc Allégret. Ultimately, through the representation of so many types of male same-sex desire, Gide's novel plays into what Butler has called the "discursive performativity," (Butler 1999, 14) of terms, a notion that points to the ultimate variability of the social appellations that define homosexuality.

The novel opens with a description of Bernard, an adolescent who learns from the first pages of the novel that he is illegitimate (a classic Gidean theme) and decides to leave his family. For help, the unworldly Bernard seeks out his closest friend Olivier.

Similar to the feminine descriptions of young males in the late-nineteenth-century novels featuring male same-sex desire, Olivier is described as affectionate (*tendre*) and blushing easily, his young ego suffering greatly from the distance that the other young boys in his group kept between themselves and him (Gide 1925, 11). Bernard spends the night with his friend and while much of the bedtime conversation is centered on Bernard's future plans outside the familial unit, they also speak of loose women, specifically Olivier's disgust towards his first visit with a prostitute. Bernard however does not share his distaste (37-8). While Bernard is described as having bisexual tendencies, his desire for an attachment with the young Olivier often places this sexuality in question.

Younger than the parental cluster of characters (Moliniers, Profitendieus, Vedels), around a decade older than the younger adults (Vincent, Laura, Douviers), but still intimately linked with the eighteen-year-olds (Olivier and Bernard), the thirty-eight year old writer Édouard is the linchpin of the narration. Indeed it is through Édouard that the traditional pederastic tropes of the novel can be most easily read. By way of Édouard's journal, Bernard and the reader first truly understands the nature of friendship, particularly the nuances of his friendship with Olivier and desire: "Son amitié pour Olivier était évidemment des plus vives [...] son coeur se raccrochait provisoirement à ceci d'une façon presque excessive; mais Olivier et lui ne comprenaient pas tout à fait de même l'amitié" (144) ("His own friendship for Olivier was undoubtedly very deep [...] his heart temporarily clung to this in a way that was almost excessive. But Olivier and he did not understand friendship in quite the same way"). Indeed it is the insertion of desire into the triangular relationship Bernard-Olivier-Édouard that helps shape the relational structure of the narration in terms of homosocial and homosexual connections. As he

continues to read through the journal that he stole from Édouard, Bernard begins to realize that Olivier might be hiding something from him. Through the journal, he understands another side of his friend that he could have never imagined and curiosity to know more mixes with a troubled unease. It might however be described in jealous terms especially since it is compared to the feelings Bernard felt seeing Olivier in the arms of his uncle Édouard for the first time (145). His jealousy is not misplaced. In a journal entry the 10 November, Édouard admits the interest he has in his young nephew Olivier, following him in the streets feigning indifference and an ironic detachment when caught during one of his surreptitious pursuits (157). While his methods are somewhat perverse in nature, he does however play a formative role in Olivier's literary career, candidly expressing his views on the young boy's poetry (45) and therefore playing into the more instructive properties of the pederastic relationship. He also candidly states the role that Olivier has played in his life, allowing him to see the profoundness of love possible between two men. Olivier's feelings for his uncle, like his uncle's feelings for him, will evolve throughout the novel, however their dual inability to express each other's love is highlighted throughout the narration (96, 100). Once their mutual feelings are finally revealed, feelings described as the highest form of bliss (387), Olivier is overwhelmed and attempts suicide. This suicide attempt linked to male same-sex desire is reminiscent of Georges Bataille's notion of the link between death and erotism (Bataille 1986). Bataille states that at the most fundamental level "[w]e are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity" (15). For "discontinuous beings" there are two choices to regain some sense of continuity. These are death and erotism. As a "discontinuous

being,” Olivier is faced with a choice: reject his discontinuity by violently attempting to join with another being through erotic activity or take his life. Erotic activity, as Bataille states, “always entails a breaking down of [the] established patterns [...] of the regulated social order basic to a discontinuous mode of existence” (18). Indeed, through erotism, like in death, a persistent personal discontinuity is substituted for a “miraculous continuity” (19). But homosexuality, especially in early-twentieth-century France, is a particular erotic prohibition of the “universal taboo against sexual liberty” (50) and therefore cannot be passionately acted upon without feelings of social and sexual transgression. Unable to physically act on his desires, Olivier chooses death but fails. After, when Olivier recovers, he confesses to Édouard his personal disgrace in his recent behavior but is careful to highlight that his shame is not connected to his love or to any secret mystery in his life (Gide 1927, 402). Of course, the hyperbolic nature with which he claims this only undergirds the notion that this admission is a lie that intends to dissimulate the truth behind his suicide attempt: his inability to act on his desires. Of course, his inability to admit this desire is inextricably linked to the immediate social taboo placed on it. As Bataille has noted, our sexual activity, including desires, are “sworn to secrecy, and everywhere, though to a variable degree, it appears contrary to our dignity so that the essence of eroticism is to be found in the inextricable confusion of sexual pleasure and taboo” (Bataille 108). As a particular prohibition of the universal taboo against sexual liberty, Olivier’s homosexuality is not just linked to Édouard in the novel.

Reminiscent of Jean Lorrain’s decadently corrupting male characters, the Count Passavant is described by Édouard as nothing more than a fraud (*faiseur*) (Gide 1927,

84). While he has met him several times and found him socially charming, everything Passavant does makes Édouard ill (84). Echoing the overarching theme announced by the book's title, it is Passavant's counterfeit nature that is so detrimental to Olivier's development. The relationship between Olivier and Passavant is rooted in opportunistic desire, a negative character trait eventually passed on to Olivier through Passavant's pernicious influence. The count discounts the need for moral probity since, as he states, the younger you are the less you are affected by scandal (265). Passavant's negative education peaks in an inimical aphorism mentioned at the end of one of Olivier's letters to Bernard. What he has learned from the count is that the great art in life is not to enjoy things but rather to learn how to profit from them (269). To borrow again from Bataille, for Passavant who is self-regarding, "pleasure [is] bound up with transgression" (Bataille 127). For Passavant, these transgressions are inextricably linked to the homosocial bonds that tie him to Olivier, indeed bonds whose homosocial nature is specious at best. Moreover, in Passavant's case, these transgressions are committed with complete disregard for what they do to their victim. Indeed, when things between the two raise eyebrows, Olivier admitting that the count effeminately calls him Olive and that his mother is weary of their relationship (Gide 1927, 266), Passavant is quick to brush aside the idea that there was any real affection between himself and the younger boy, wanting above all to avoid gratuitous scandal.

Boris, a timid boy who harbors a secret for solitary pleasures, embodies one of the last instances of deviant desire in the novel. Indeed, it is a secret that provokes his eventual examination by a psychiatrist. If as Bataille states the domain of eroticism is "the domain of violence, of violation" (Bataille 16), it is not a personal violence or

violation that causes Boris to be sent to the psychiatrist Sophroniska. It is a universal violence against and violation of the taboos against sexual liberty that makes Boris a threat to established systems of control and therefore in need of a cure. The representation of Boris and his behavior are all the more important since it is the first French novel to incorporate a detailed psychoanalytical analysis of a child (Steel 71-2). It is also interesting since much of the details of this encounter would be based on Gide's own experiences with Eugénie Sokolnicka (1884-1934), a twentieth-century French psychoanalyst and co-founder of the *Société psychanalytique de Paris* on which Sophroniska would be based. In the novel, Sophroniska is represented as a modern psychiatrist and her main objective is to get through Boris' psychological armor and learn his innermost secrets and desires. In this way she learns that when the child was nine, he was initiated into these clandestine practices by a boy several years his senior (Gide 1927, 256). The desire to be a part of the homosocial bonds between young male adolescents, a desire strong enough to break codes of sexual conventionality is key to one of the novel's main plotlines. At age thirteen Boris is placed in the Pension Vedel where his girlish and nervous temperament, presumably the vestiges of his youthful immorality, make him a black sheep among the other boys. At first the other boys in the pension are contentious with him, later they realize they can use him and will initiate the young Boris into their homosocial clan with a game of Russian roulette. Unlike his initiation into solitary pleasures, his desire to be a part of the homosocial bonds of this all-male fraternity of counterfeiters has lethal consequences. Olivier takes a chance on his youthful desires and pulls the trigger to prove his worth among men.

In the end, through many of his works Gide will condemn a desire that acts on its unbridled fervor since, to his mind, this type of emotion is ultimately impure. In *Si le grain ne meurt*, Gide concludes that love is most perfect when the heart and the flesh do not comingle (Gide 1955, 286-7). Indeed, this somewhat obscurantist and opportunistic message was also that of Achille Essebac and Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen. This message can be deceiving if it leads to the assumption that Gide, or Essebac, or Fersen for that matter, were more chaste than wanton in their lives. The assumption may be however exactly what these authors preferred the critiquing public to think. The little information available on Essebac's life makes it hard to gauge exactly what level of sexual abnegation he actually practiced in life, if any. The 1903 Fersen scandal that made national headlines makes it hard to believe that chastity was in any way shape or form coterminous with the author. For Gide, the picture that the first half of *Si le grain ne meurt* provides is certainly a puritanical portrait. Since we know from the second half of his autobiography as well as his longstanding relationship with Marc Allégret, an out-in-public relationship "unknown" only to his wife (Billard 2006), that chastity was not the cornerstone of his sexuality, it would be misleading and inaccurate to presume that in Gide's life literary philosophy mirrored substantive practice. The purpose of this discourse on desire and restraint throughout Gide's works seems twofold. Initially, it points to the internal struggle of a once closeted homosexual leaving behind the shadows and shackles of imprisonment. But it also transcribes a look-over-the-shoulder discourse into a plausible and familiar sexual theory that muted, through its puritanical undertones, the raucous and socially displeasing tones traditionally associated with nineteenth and early twentieth-century homosexual "outness."

¹ A seemingly small correlation between narrator and author, this dueling character trait would in fact make Gide spill much ink both in fiction and in reality. In one notable incident Gide would reprovingly question Maurice Barrès' (1862-1923) intensely nationalistic fervor in the novel *Les Déracinés* (1897), asking most famously in an 1898 article: "où voulez-vous, Monsieur Barrès, que je m'enracine?" ("where, Mr. Barrès, would you like me to place my roots") (Martin 319).

² "T'ai-je dit que Gide [...] se marie ? Il épouse la jeune fille qui s'appelle Emmanuèle dans *André Walter*. C'est sa cousine germaine. Autre mariage platonique" ("Did I tell you that Gide [...] is getting married? He's marrying the young girl called Emmanuèle in *André Walter*. It's his first cousin. Another platonic marriage") (Martin 266-7)

³ an idea reminiscent of a comment from Gide's autobiography in reference to his puritanical upbringing : "Mon éducation puritaine avait fait un monstre des revendications de la chair" ("My puritanical education made corporeal demands seem monstrous") (Gide 1955: 246)

⁴ This type of hyperbolic heterosexual chastity also appears in the 1895 satirical novel/treatise *Paludes*. One wonders to what end the narrator Tityre intends his comment on his unfruitful night with Angèle to whom he is reading his ever-changing novel on mediocrity: "Je m'en fus coucher chez Angèle. *Je dis chez et non avec elle*, n'ayant jamais fait avec elle que de petits simulacres anodins." ("I went to sleep at Angèle's. *I said at Angèle's not with her*, having never done anything with her other than little harmless nothings.") (Gide 1920: 46) (my emphasis)

⁵ and even with the knowledge that many of the ancillary episodes in the novel are based on Gide's homosexual adventures with Henri Ghéon in Northern Africa and Normandy (Pollard 336)

⁶ For more on Gide and Freud see Pollard 1991 and Steel 1977

⁷ Indeed both the range that Gillis (Gillis 1981) describes as "adolescence" during this period and that Achille Essebac uses for his "ephemeral homosexuality"

⁸ For more on "citationality" see De Certeau 1984, 1; Butler 1993, 1997

⁹ see chapter 3

¹⁰ in his dedication to Roger Martin du Gard, Gide qualifies *Les Faux-monnayeurs* as his "first novel"

Conclusion

After considering the significant number of works exposed in this study featuring representations of homosexuality in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century French literature, the comments of the concerned listener at the CIEF conference mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation and his ultimate concern for Proust alone seem quite inapposite. Indeed, rather than point to this reader's knowledge of the topic, highlighting Proust as *the* iconic example of nineteenth and twentieth-century gay literature only parrots the same hegemonic and elitist register with which many French university programs condemn French homosexual literature to the margins of the French canon. While the intellectual atmosphere at both academic national conferences and in modern French departments is slowly changing to be inclusive of works by non-canonical authors who write on homosexuality, change is slow, often frustratingly so.

More recently, at a 2013 Western Society for French History Conference (WSFH) panel entitled "Insiders and Outsiders: Crime and Deviance in France," I presented on the diffusion of scientific representations of homosexuality by nineteenth-century French literature. Much like the CIEF conference three years earlier, I was nonplussed when the panel chair admitted to having never heard of any of the authors mentioned during my presentation. Also like the CIEF conference, while the authors mentioned in my presentation were mostly non-canonical they were not however completely esoteric. After the presentation, a small group of attendees approached the presenters' table and expressed their interest in my topic. Their knowledge of the authors mentioned made me question their own research; among the group, several well-established researchers of

LGBT French history with whom I now have an email correspondence. This last anecdote is more than just personally relevant. Rather, it highlights the impact that these works can have on individual readers. The fact that this small group of researchers sought out my presentation because of its topical familiarity undergirds the community-creating possibility of these works. Indeed, this is historically relevant as well.

Those writers who spoke about male same-sex relations in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France aided in the creation and elaboration of received opinions and theories on sexuality and identity. Moreover, through the creation of a particular discourse and vocabulary designated to express homosexual desire, a personal, intellectual, and ideological gay itinerary was generated. However, it was not necessary to be homosexual to read, enjoy, or ideologically benefit from these works. But this did not mean that homosexuals and heterosexuals would have read them or written them in the same way. It seems that the majority of these authors sought a reader universality rather than the particularity that one might expect. There are several reasons for this. For those who wrote negatively about male same-sex desire the hope was to continue the fear-mongering, distortions, and shibboleths that had built up as social and ideological sediment throughout the centuries and specifically in the nineteenth century. Through these representations, homosexuality would be presented against the grain and the social or ideological principles against which it was portrayed were highlighted and secured as the norm. For others, representations of male same-sex desire were meant to revise and reroute social and sexual ideologies to create communal epistemologies that through a shared network of readers might proliferate and change social opinions. This is easily recognizable in the number of authors who were associated through the same literary or

sexual circles, many of them traveling together or to similar “gay” destinations (Aldrich 1993). Others still spoke more directly to a particular literary homosexual reading culture, determined to create fraternal ties through a common sexual appeal. But even these authors often reached out behind the specificity of their intended readership. Indeed, Gide who released only a limited edition of *Corydon* in 1911 allowed general sale in 1924.

This study then also participates in the communal aspect promoted by many of these works, intending to bring attention to overshadowed sexualities and deviant gender identities in order to provoke conversation and further study. Moreover, the intent was to expose an underrepresented minority literature in the hopes of creating interdisciplinary and intercultural connections that could be used within and outside of the French pedagogic system to more fully understand the development of ideologies surrounding gender and sexuality of the past and their influence on those of today.

Understanding representations of homosexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can never be fully divorced from a study of the socio-cultural, ideological, and historical currents to which they are inextricably bound. The nascent nineteenth-century gay subculture had a heavy-handed influence on the ways in which socio-political and medico-juridical sources represented and defined sexual and gender identity. Moreover, so did the authors that wrote about this subculture as they contributed to the construction and deconstruction of social definitions of sexual and gender identity. Through the discursive mingling of these definitions, an epistemological discourse surrounding homosexuality emerged, a discourse that governed and impacted individuals as much as ideologies and social structures.

Examining the ways in which the homosexual was represented over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this study posed several questions. First, it set out to define which ideological systems informed definitions of masculinity and sexuality in France in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and whether these ideological systems can be seen in literary representations of homosexuality. It seems clear from the literature, both fiction and non, that science, through sexology, degeneration theory, and psychiatry played an informative role in wielding definitions of masculinity and sexuality throughout this period. Moreover, in a social sense, representations of homosexuality were filtered through the scientific treatises that attempted to *taxonomize* unruly bodies in order to socially control them. This was especially important since homosexuality was no longer a criminal act in France and therefore much more than the police was needed to curb its proliferation. This connection however between science and law is important since by claiming to understand and be in control of these bodies, science in turn created a social and ideological need for this type of system of definitional power. And by linking this definitional power to the juridical structures that could minimize social exposure, science and the law became a powerful tool in society's authoritative task force against non-conformity. Due to the strong link between science and literature during the fin-de-siècle period, it is not surprising that many of the representations of homosexuality during this time were cast in a scientific mold. Additionally, by inserting contemporary scientific theories into the literature of the time when describing male same-sex relations, the French populace that normally would have had little to no access to these theories became overnight neophytes now subjugated to science's epistemological hold. A topic

for further study, since so many of the sexologists that studied homosexuality relied on case studies of (mostly) lower class male homosexuals, it would be interesting to create a narrative exclusively from these personalized discourses to examine the difference between (upper class) literary and strictly (lower class) (auto)biographical accounts of homosexuality. And if, as Foucault states, the doctor's office was the nineteenth century's makeshift confessional (Foucault 1990), it would also be worth looking into how, if at all, the real life confessionals that these case studies represented influenced the literary first person narrative that was favored by so many of the homosexual authors of the fin-de-siècle period. However, it must be remembered that science was not alone in informing social definitions of homosexuality and masculinity during this period.

By returning to the past, many authors sweetened the acerbic rhetoric of science with Greek and Roman models of male same-sex desire and masculinity. Classical allusions and ideologies provided the basis for ways to theorize masculine beauty and sexuality outside of the moral atmosphere of bourgeois France. The problem was that the ideal to which these authors often made reference was no longer a sociopolitical possibility. The elitist conception of social relations inherent to Greek and Roman representations of male same-sex desire was fraught with presuppositions that were no longer *du jour* within a bourgeois capitalist society. While it is unclear how many of these artists actually believed that the classical age could be supplanted onto the modern backdrop of fin-de-siècle France, their allusions to Antiquity were, at the very least, an utopian stance, a quest for a new society in which homosexuals would be accepted, where philosophy and sexuality commingled through classical virtues. While it is clear that many of the authors' sexual lives contradicted the sexual ascetic theories expounded upon

in their works, it would be interesting to look more closely at the social groups or homosexual communities that formed around works like *Corydon* or magazines like *Akadémos* in France or *Der Kreis* and *Der Eigene* in Germany to see how the sexual ascetic theories inspired by the Greeks and Romans were played out in real life situations.

The ideas behind a stable masculine body were also challenged through representations of male same-sex sexuality. While several examples of the uber-masculine homosexual exist in the literature of this period, most notably Vautrin from Balzac's trilogy and le duc de Blangis from Sade's tale, the effeminate male figure was the most common way to represent the homosexual male. Indeed, even the fluid sexuality of the adolescent male placed hackneyed notions of what it meant to a man in question. Both the scientific and psychological studies of the adolescent male during this period offer a fascinating look into the social fear surrounding sexual and gender identities that challenge the ideological strictures that "make a man." A topic for further study, it would certainly be interesting to look into how the fluid sexuality and gender identity of the adolescent male fits into the changing social and ideological fabric of the fin-de-siècle period that was both home to the decadent dandy and strict bourgeois morality. Ultimately, the gendered and sexual variability with which the homosexual was represented during this period point to the beginning of an "effeminophobia" which made the effeminate male the "haunting abject" of the gay movement, a notion that is still analyzable today (Warner 72).

Another question that this study posed in several aspects was whether a difference could be found in representations of homosexuality between straight, bisexual, and homosexual authors. Indeed, this question raised several issues. The first was the almost

impossible endeavor of qualifying sexualities during this period. As has been shown throughout this study, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sexuality itself was an evasive term that dodged interpretation while concomitantly being harassed by definition. While some of the authors, including the four main authors in this study, were at least in some sense “out” gay men, their constant reference to bisexuality and heterosexuality in their works (which were often in some respects biographical), makes speaking in terms of concrete sexualities difficult. Generally, those with the strictest ties to heterosexuality represented homosexuality in negative terms while those whose ties were to homosexuality more often than not presented homosexuality in a positive if misunderstood light. While the majority of authors presented in the first chapter of this study would have qualified themselves as heterosexuals, the hyperbolized persistence with which some of them distanced themselves from their topic of study or covered it in defamatory slander might be read as a defensive response pointing towards the closet rather than to an admitted, heterosexual orientation. Of course, this phenomenon of fervently antigay individuals eventually “outed” as gay would continue into the present age. One need only mention names like Ted Haggard, from the New Life Church in Colorado Springs, or Larry Graig, former Idaho Republican and U.S. Senator, who both found themselves in precarious sexual situations that “outed” them after they had, for years, spewed antigay rhetoric. As this study shows, the “epistemology of the closet,” to borrow Sedgwick’s term, in the works of André Gide, an admitted pederast, was multifaceted in the ways the closet was represented in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature. Further study is warranted in order to look into the manners in which the closet was represented in works by putative heterosexual authors who wrote on gay

themes and how these representations differ, if they do, from those of homosexual authors.

While not always defensive in tone, representations of homosexuality during this period helped to inform the ways in which sexuality and gender identity was recognized and analyzed. Indeed, it was during this period that sexual and gender studies were codified as legitimate fields of research both in science, sociology, psychology, and literature. To be sure, it was also this codification process that set the standard that normalized sexuality and gender as heteronormative. However against or with the grain they were, the sexual and gender identities that emerged out of representations of homosexuality during this period contributed to the circulation of preexisting and newly formed ideas about homosexuality inside Europe's borders and beyond. By speaking about it and writing on it, those who represented homosexuality in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France helped to insert their opinions and theories into the flux of mainstream culture that had for centuries excluded them. Ultimately, these authors informed and influenced the future epistemological range of possibilities that homosexuality could assume, provided a narrative space to express and criticize sexuality and gender identity, and produced a corpus of literature that provides a fascinating look into the myriad homosexualities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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