Abstract
This dissertation examines the trade in pornographic texts in London during the late Victorian period. It argues that not only are these texts underrepresented in scholarship, but also that they provide vital historical documentation on the evolution of sexual thought and were among the first to acknowledge the link between sexuality and identity. This dissertation establishes a narrative of the publishers, writers, and consumers involved in the pornographic book trade and their material connection to the study and history of sexuality; the basis of this history is extensive archival work and research informed as much by what information was available in archives and, sometimes more importantly, by what was missing. In detailing the history of pornographic books and how the trade functioned in the metropolis of London—and Britain more generally—this dissertation focuses on a new intellectual movement, closely aligned to sexology but without medical pretense, that prefigured contemporary understandings of sexuality. Certain publishers took greater risks with the material they published in response to expanding readerships that created a world of fantasy that was increasingly introspective. This dissertation argues that late Victorian pornographic books reflected and, in some cases, magnified the interior sexual lives of readers. The content of the pornographic texts in this study progressively presented readers with sexualities that were increasingly connected with self-identity rather than simply series of acts. Collector cultures grew alongside this evolution in pornographic books and, as a result, created niche markets for books as aesthetic objects as well as for their specialized content. This dissertation makes new and original critical interventions in important areas of book history and print culture studies. The examination of the pornographic book trade during that latter part of the nineteenth century argues that exploitation and adaptation or earlier literary sex book traditions resulted in new presentations and understandings of the impact clandestine books could have on sex. This dissertation is the first significant scholarship on the 1899 novel Des Grieux and also the first to positively identify publisher William Lazenby.
Lay Summary
The main argument of this dissertation is that pornographic literature of the Victorian period should be considered with the same earnestness as other literature from the same period, if not more. Because pornographic literature was illegal at the time and creating or even owning it was illegal, individuals involved in its production necessarily took steps to avoid the long arm of the law and other vigilante groups who were trying to put an end to what they considered immoral writing. The effect of pornography being outlawed was that it was not subject to the same censorship as mainstream literature, so authors could say whatever they liked. I assert that the unvarnished honesty that was one outcome of the illegality of pornographic texts provides new understandings of print culture in the Victorian period and Victorian attitudes toward sex. The lasting legacy of this literature, I argue, requires a re-evaluation of Victorian literature and this is what this dissertation accomplishes.
Preface
This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent, lit AF work by the author, Justin O’Hearn.
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Dedication

To Carla.
Introduction
The Pornographic Book Trade in London, 1870-1900

London in the late Victorian period experienced an unprecedented explosion in the availability of reading material. A confluence of factors was responsible for this shift and two were chief among those: the substantial decrease in the cost of book production and an increase in literacy and readerships. From about 1866 to 1900, the cost of paper dropped by approximately two-thirds, thanks largely to improvements in the mechanization of paper manufacturing, improved availability of raw materials, poorer quality papers, and less wastage in the manufacturing process (Weedon 67). I begin with these facts because they are key to the literary and cultural shifts that took place in Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Book and print culture histories of the Victorian period are predicated on the ways these economic and technological changes influenced reading and readerships in the period. The history presented in this dissertation is also bound to these facts. What *Sins Between the Pages* presents is a novel account of the parallel textual history of pornographic print and book culture in Victorian Britain that builds on existing scholarship in offering new insights on oft-elided and under-researched areas of print culture. This study focuses specifically on the period between roughly 1870-1900, and it contains the first full scholarly treatment of the elusive publisher William Lazenby who was, I argue, the most significant figure in the sex book trade for his contributions to the industry as well as to the history of sexuality in print. As well as the first full account of Lazenby, the research leading to this dissertation uncovered a copy of the lost-to-scholarship 1899 erotic memoir *Des Grieux* and presents it for the first time in a discussion of the genealogy of books representing sex and identity.

Histories of Victorian book culture have already established that increasing production, lowering of cost, rising literacy rates, availability and affordability of reading materials resulted in a
utopia for Victorian readers regardless of their place in the hierarchy of the British class system. The rehearsal of this history is accurate and gets largely to the heart of the matter. The problem with understanding and speaking critically about Victorian reading has been framed by Helen Small thus:

> Until recently, and for understandable reasons, the ‘reading public’ and its representative ‘common reader’ were keywords in our historical and literary critical vocabulary. It is, after all, difficult to describe such broad phenomena as the spread of literacy, or the rise of the novel, or the development of a mass market for print without invoking a ‘general public’.

(Small in Raven 264)

The “reading public” and “general reader” are, per Small, problematic but necessary terms scholars use to elucidate the rise of Victorian reading. These broad categories are useful for a study of mainstream Victorian print culture. This dissertation explores print culture issues similar in scope to other studies such as James Raven’s *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (1996), Alexis Weedon’s *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1916* (2003), and Richard Altick’s *The English Common Reader* (1957). Where my study differs significantly, however, is that it does not have the luxury of using agreed upon, albeit imperfect, broad categories of readers since the texts examined in this dissertation were neither public nor general.

This dissertation grapples with these notions of Victorian reading, but from the perspective of the complex world of the clandestine trade in what I am calling sex books rather than pornography, for reasons that will become clear. To this end, it is necessary to acknowledge the complexities of mainstream Victorian publishing as the world of sex book publishing was susceptible to the same forces—in the market as well as print and collector cultures. The history of the sex book trade provides an alternate lens with which to view Victorian print culture; this history, I argue, has far-reaching implications not only for how Victorians actually lived and experienced sex and sexuality in their time, but also the way we, as scholars and students of literary history, perceive
and discuss Victorian relationships to sex and print. *Sins Between the Pages* examines what is known about Victorian publishing practices and investigates how the publication, trade, and use of sex books worked within and alongside the established open systems of publishing.

Each chapter of *Sins Between the Pages* treats a unique aspect of Victorian sex book print culture and history. The first chapter, “Pornographic Lives and Erotic Cultural Memory,” traces the alternative print culture created in the nineteenth century by the trade in sex books and the individuals who created communities around the trade. I argue that individuals on opposing sides of the trade—producers and suppressors of sex books—are imbued within the pages of sex books and their efforts resulted from the exploitation of collective memory while at the same time fashioning a new kind of memory that has informed accounts of the history of sex books. The concept ‘erotic cultural memory’ is used to distinguish between the concept of historical fact and what was recorded in Victorian sex books. In this chapter, sex book writers, publishers, and consumers are considered as a network of interconnected yet separate individuals along with the people actively trying to suppress the trade and have laws passed in order to do so. The torsion between producers/supporters of the sex book trade and the suppressors coalesces in the personage of key sex book publisher William Lazenby who was, until this study, an under researched but pivotal figure in the history of sex book print culture. This dissertation establishes, for the first time, Lazenby’s identity by making use of archival records and sifting through the publisher’s own attempts at obfuscating his identity to stay ahead of the law.

William Lazenby was charged and sentenced three times for crimes relating to selling and producing obscene material between 1871 and 1886 and his use of an array of pseudonyms is recorded in court records and newspapers, leading to confusion about his true identity. *Sins Between the Pages* establishes his true identity as William Lazenby, a bookseller originally from Ipswich, Suffolk, who conducted business at various London addresses throughout his active years. What
makes Lazenby such an important figure in the history of London’s sex book trade is not simply his business, but the way he conducted his business and the decisions he made regarding the kinds of materials he would create and distribute. William Lazenby knew the value of exploiting erotic cultural memory. The concept of erotic cultural memory is an important factor in my study of sex books. This phrase was influenced by Neil Bartlett’s *Who Was That Man?* (1988) and Mark Turner’s *Backward Glances* (2003); both these works highlight the importance of sexually marginalized populations—in their respective cases, gay men in twentieth century London and New York—recognizing that a shared and memorialized past is integral to the reality of the present. To that end, erotic cultural memory as I employ it throughout this study is a concept that informs late-Victorian sex book producers and Lazenby in particular, and which relies on exploiting the shared memories and experiences of readers to bring a sense of verisimilitude and urgency to the works he produced. By making use of cultural touchstones in many of his works, Lazenby provided readers with sex books that were not grounded simply in fantasy but were also a reflection of a presumed erotic cultural memory that helped make his books catalysts for new avenues of publication.

Lazenby was the enabler of the refractive connection between adjacent worlds—the pornographic and the real—and the central examples of Lazenby successfully exploiting this connection are found with his periodicals and the erotic memoir *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (1881). The best known of all Lazenby’s serial publications, *The Pearl* (1879), is a collection of songs, bawdy poems, and serialized erotic fiction; however, I contend that his later periodical, *The Cremorne* (1882), is a pointed exploitation of readers’ erotic cultural memories and thus signifies an important fact about Lazenby’s place in the history of London sex book traders. The title of the periodical was a reference to the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens that had, by 1882, been closed for five years but retained important social cachet to readers who may have attended the gardens on social occasions.

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or, perhaps, knew it only by reputation. The Cremorne Pleasure Gardens was a place where sexual ‘pleasure’ was procured by gentlemen seeking the services of the prostitutes who worked there. (Nead 131). The sexual pleasures of the gardens, however, were clandestine and not necessarily apparent to all in attendance. A similar in-the-know process is at work in calling a collection of erotic poems and stories *The Cremorne* and such naming represents a tidy microcosm of the trade in sex books in the late Victorian period: things hidden in plain sight and easily legible to insiders.

Approaching Lazenby’s most notorious text with his ability to exploit erotic cultural memory in mind, *Sins of the Cities of the Plain, or Recollections of a Mary Ann* tells us significantly more about the business of sex books as well as the various means by which Lazenby successfully used sex and scandal to create a legacy for himself that has not been fully realized until this dissertation.

The publication of *Sins* in 1881 was a pivotal moment in the history of sex book publishing because of the unique admixture of truth, fiction, pornification, and appeal to memory contained within its pages. The memoir itself is the story of Jack Saul recounting his experiences as a male prostitute in London that were thought, until recently, to have been completely fabricated, with Saul himself being simply a provocative fictional character. In actuality, Saul was a real person who led a tumultuous life as a prostitute in both his native Dublin and in London from the early 1880s before retiring from that life and taking up as a domestic servant in the late 1890s (Chandler 69). *Sins* was compiled using the “recollections” from Saul’s life that he had ostensibly written himself or conveyed to a third party; these “recollections” were mixed in with details from the infamous 1870 Boulton and Park cross-dressing scandal. The addition of (fabricated) details from the scandal in which two men, Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park (otherwise known as Stella and Fanny), were accused of “conspiracy to commit a felony” gave *Sins* an added verisimilitude for readers by capitalizing on the cultural memory of a sex scandal that had been widely covered in the news. *Sins* offered readers a supposedly behind-the-scenes account of the events at the centre of the Boulton
and Park scandal through Jack Saul’s recollections; however, Saul, who was born in 1858, would have been a boy of 13 in Dublin at the time of the scandal (Chandler 69). Nevertheless, Lazenby had created a hybrid erotic memoir that would be an influence for the genre for the remainder of the Victorian era.

By mixing the veracity of the real-life Saul with the sensational story of Boulton and Park, Lazenby leveraged the erotic memoir to an extent that capitalized on the excitement of a first-hand account. Jack Saul is unabashed about his attraction to members of the same sex and accepts this as part of his identity. Saul referred to himself as a “professional sodomite,” prefiguring queer movements that would reclaim derogatory terms used as sources of empowerment. The term “Mary Ann” in the subtitle of the work, is applied to Saul by his wealthy patron Mr. Cambon. Cambon reports that Saul “seemed not at all to like the name as applied to himself, saying that that was what the low girls of his neighbourhood called him if they wished to insult him” but that the money offered to Saul to write his memoirs would “make up for that” (Sins vol. 1, 20). Saul seems aware of who he is but is also a business person. The Boulton and Park material in Sins also suggests that Fanny and Stella were aware of their sexual identities. Sins was a turning point in the print history of sexuality and one of its uses in this dissertation is as a frame through which other erotic memoirs rely upon and manipulate memory to prefigure a new era of sexual understanding.

William Lazenby is the culmination of sex book publishing in the Victorian period, taking the mantle from his immediate predecessor William Dugdale, who died in 1868 and whose career has already been discussed in great detail by scholars such as Iain McCalman and Sarah Bull. My treatment of Dugdale is indebted to these accounts and my study contextualizes the publisher as an integral part of the public fight against censorship in the mid-nineteenth century. Dugdale’s outspoken nature and publishing activity gave him the dubious honour of partly inspiring the

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Obscene Publications Act of 1857. He also represents a stage in the evolution of the sex book trade that culminated in the Book Mania and Book Beautiful movements of the 1880s and 1890s (Hanson 787). Lazenby was Dugdale’s immediate successor and likely worked with him before the older publisher’s death; I contend that Lazenby took his predecessor’s career as a cautionary tale and learned from the mistakes he had made and tailored his own business practices accordingly, resulting in sex books’ transforming literary radicalism by the end of the century.

Following from the insights of the individuals who made the Victorian sex book trade, chapter 2, “The Victorian Trade in Pornographic Texts,” charts the shift in the sex book trade throughout the nineteenth century and offers a socio-historical reading of the trade alongside the demise of politically radical print culture and the rise of sexology to produce a genre that, by the end of the century, was marked by a literary shift that exposed inward sexual feelings as a new site for political agitation. To further frame the context of the nineteenth century sex book trade, the dissertation outlines the business practices of the epicentre of the trade located in London’s Holywell Street (also known as Booksellers’ Row), which was demolished in 1901. The history and geography of Holywell Street are crucial to the history of the English-language sex book trade of the nineteenth century. In *Victorian Babylon*, Linda Nead describes Holywell Street as a “great, dark spider at the centre of a web of obscenity,” a contention that my dissertation questions given my newly uncovered information about William Lazenby’s business practices that were largely undertaken far away from Holywell Street in what could only be a purposeful manner (Nead 179). While I take no issue with Holywell Street’s status as an important marketplace for books of all kinds—indeed, many Victorian antiquarian book collectors praised the disorganized and overflowing shops for containing many sex books—my intervention focuses on locations outside of Holywell Street (Whitten 9, Diprose 257). In the nineteenth century, Holywell Street was divorced from its medieval roots as a pilgrimage site on the way to Canterbury; its modern roots as a Jewish
trading centre and, later, its reputation as a disreputable place for obtaining obscene works were the more common associations. It is no surprise that the street was the public face for obscenity in London and calls for its destruction were repeated throughout the nineteenth century until it was finally torn down to make way for the widening of the Strand.

While many booksellers in Holywell Street offered sex books to select customers and did a robust trade there—William Dugdale, for instance, had multiple storefronts on the street run under various names with members of his family—the Holywell Street market itself posed a risk to booksellers and consumers alike under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. For upper-class connoisseurs of sex books, an in-person trip to Holywell Street was out of the question. Sex books could be procured more discreetly in other areas of London, even though one of Holywell Street’s claims to fame was easy access to multiple escape routes should authorities decide to raid a shop at any given time. Throughout the Victorian period, consumers could patronize shops offering sex books in Soho or Camden Town if they wanted an alternative to Holywell Street. Booksellers also relied heavily on mail order for a good portion of their business.

I scrutinize the bookseller/consumer relationship throughout this dissertation and the methods used by both to ensure that materials reached the intended customer and steered clear of authorities, both official—the police, post office, and courts—and self-appointed moral vigilantes like the Society for the Suppression of Vice. As the trade in sex books grew through the nineteenth century, in turn affecting (and effecting) diverse readerships which put demands on booksellers to cater to new markets and price points, the trade itself became less exclusive as book ownership became more commonplace (Weedon 160). In addition to producing cheaper volumes for a variety of consumers, the market had to find new ways to entice its upper class clientele. The result of the expansion of the sex book market was a splintering into niche markets, something that had begun in mid-century and reached a full zenith by the 1890s when éditions de luxe were offered as much for
their aesthetic features as their content. *Sins Between the Pages* offers an examination of the consumer experience of shopping for sex books as a microcosm of the broader print culture in which the materials were produced.

By looking at some catalogue offerings by booksellers, my dissertation situates the selling of sex books within the playful context of the production and publication of the materials themselves. Regardless of the growth in the book industry during the Victorian period, books nevertheless remained a luxury item and ownership and access to them was not a right taken for granted. Access to books and reading materials underwent enormous growth, but these items still came at a price, with free libraries not becoming the norm until the twentieth century. Keeping in mind the continued status of books as luxury items associated with leisure, it follows that shopping for books was a pleasurable experience. This dissertation juxtaposes the experience of shopping for sex books with what the books themselves represent in the way they were produced. I argue that there was an unspoken understanding between bookseller and certain customers that buying sex books was a lark. Knowingly skirting the law and possessing suppressed works was a risk, albeit a calculated one for the average sex book consumer that undoubtedly added intangibly to the thrill of buying the books themselves.

By offering close readings of some sex book catalogues, I consider them as historical documents in their own right: these are texts with a specific purpose and an expected outcome. The distribution of these texts mirrors the patterns of distribution of sex books themselves. Often, however, they omitted any identifying information about the bookseller. Catalogues were sometimes included in books themselves or mailed to specific customers. In some cases, booksellers would issue two versions of a book catalogue: one including their mainstream offerings and another with a few pages of sex book titles pasted in separately. The catalogues of sex booksellers were made to look, if not unattractive, then certainly muted in style so as not to attract any special attention. It is
only upon closer inspection that it becomes clear a sex book catalogue is offering something other than the everyday fare of their mainstream counterparts. Oftentimes, deciphering a catalogue required reading codes and looking for specific words. A common tipoff in many catalogues was the inclusion of, to give one example, anything “French,” such as “French Prints,” “French Letters,” or simply French book titles (“A Catalogue” n.p). Knowing what to look for in a catalogue acted as a shibboleth for consumers that aided booksellers in weeding out anyone not already in the know.

In my treatment of sex book catalogues as texts, I trace their production and diffusion throughout the nineteenth century and their increased importance in the sex book trade. Catalogues record the evolution of the sex book trade: as the titles on offer became more sophisticated and diverse, so did the catalogues advertising them. In some cases, book catalogues were themselves designed to be desirable objects that catered to specific markets. Deluxe catalogues—which were famously the hallmark of Leonard Smithers, publisher of the first homosexual romance in English, *Teleny* (1893)—followed the trajectory of the increasing availability and access to sex books that coincided with the rise of the book market in general in Victorian Britain. Publishers and booksellers needed to distinguish themselves from the various cheap editions and pamphlets that were being offered in Holywell Street and in other catalogues. While offering luxurious editions was certainly a way to differentiate one’s wares from another’s, this dissertation contends that the contents of sex books are more often what set different publishers apart. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the genre of erotic memoir.

Turning to that genre, chapter 3, “The Erotic Memoir,” also looks back in literary and sex book history to reveal a genealogy of the erotic memoir genre that coincides with the inward-looking aspects of sexual identity building through a series of memoirs that presented readers with an increasingly self-aware style of narrative. This chapter’s examination of the erotic memoir produces a genealogy of the genre from the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth. The reliance
of Victorian sex book producers on earlier erotic memoir traditions is an important aspect of my study on the genre, showing that the memoir’s reliance on memory draws not only on living memory but also on an idealized memory of an imagined past. William Lazenby again plays an important role when considered among the publishers who presented challenges to traditional memoir narratives and added a sense of ambiguity as well as authenticity to his published works by including familiar places and social and cultural touchstones that would be familiar to readers. Lazenby and his contemporaries who published erotic memoirs were, I argue, pivotal figures in the literary history of sexuality for introducing ideas, identities, and concepts that otherwise were restricted to the specialist practitioners of psychology or medicine. Erotic memoirs exposed readers to new worlds cleverly through the exploitation and appeal to collective memory.

The erotic memoirs at the heart of this dissertation were chosen because each represents a singular shift in the evolution of the genre as the nineteenth century wore on. The four-volume Lazenby publication *The Romance of Lust* (1876) anticipates the panoply of sexual escapades of the later eleven-volume *My Secret Life* (1888-1894). Both *Romance* and *My Secret Life* are treated as fundamental explorations in sexual fluidity as well as historical documents, with the latter actually doing double duty as a reference work. *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (1881) and *Letters from Laura and Eveline* (1883), also both Lazenby publications, are prime examples of the ways real-life events can be exploited and pornified in erotic memoirs. *Letters*, the contrived sequel or follow-up to *Sins*, took the experiment of its predecessor to another level by inserting Jack Saul’s and Ernest Boulton’s female personae from *Sins* (the titular Laura and Eveline) into a completely fictional narrative. The epistolary style of *Letters* is reminiscent of earlier works, particularly *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), tacitly acknowledging the genealogy of the erotic memoir. *Letters* pushes new boundaries in the erotic memoir as the characters vacillate between sexual role-play as women, as “hermaphrodites,” and as “sodomites” and actual self-awareness of individual sexual identities that
had only recently been theorized by sexual science (Letters 7). As a pair, Sins and Letters were meant to entice readers not because they were beautifully bound in top grain leather or printed on Japanese vellum. In fact, the books were rather quickly and cheaply produced (although their selling prices do not reflect this). The two memoirs tempted readers into an inner world and inducted them into an exclusive community and, perhaps, invited them to identify with the nonnormative characters and sexualities in the vicarious fantasy they afforded. I contend that the line between fantasy and introspection in Sins and Letters is a fine one.

This dissertation also closely examines another pair of texts that present further deviations from the established patterns of the erotic memoir. Teleny (1893) and its “Prelude” Des Grieux (1899) make no claim to authenticity as part of their appeal to readers, but it is difficult to separate them from the memoir genre since their framing and importance to the genre are unmistakable. Teleny both as a text and a narrative is disruptive in that it was produced in a round robin style by many hands that, according to bookseller Charles Hirsch, included Oscar Wilde (Teleny 171). Other scholars have speculated on the Wilde question and have been unable to conclude decisively about Wilde’s involvement. This dissertation’s approach to Wilde’s involvement factors into questions regarding the circles of writers that were operating in London in the early 1890s and their various connections, of which Wilde was likely a known quantity. Wilde notwithstanding, Teleny stands as a key document treating biologically essentialist arguments about sexuality with seriousness, including contemporary medical theory. Teleny uses this knowledge throughout what is, in actuality, a framed love story between two men, the titular Rene Teleny and his lover Camille Des Grieux, who narrates the story through an interlocutor. Teleny reflects not only an important shift in the way sexualities were linked to identity and biology, but also the way in which queer communities in the late Victorian period were formed in maintained. The novel stands as a testament to the burgeoning

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3 Colette Colligan has made the significant point that neither Wilde’s papers nor his contemporaries make any mention, even in passing, about the work during his lifetime (Colligan Publisher’s 216).
project of casting homosexuality as not simply a series of acts but an identity. In doing so, *Teleny* recapitulates normative heterosexual practices—weddings, love, and desire—by presenting the homosexual as a legitimate counterpart. I contend that one of the underlying outcomes of *Teleny* is as a signal that, in keeping with the ideology of Victorian progress and prefigurations of the Modern era, the fluidity that underscored understandings of sexuality were making way for new medicalized categories and structures.

The counterpart to *Teleny*, the so-called ‘prelude’ that takes place before the events recounted in *Teleny*, was published six years later. *Des Grieux* (1899) which, before this dissertation, was almost wholly unstudied by scholars, presents another compelling evolution in the erotic memoir genre that has raised perhaps more questions than I am able to answer as the scholar who brought the slim volume to the public for the first time. This being the case, however, the text has revealed astonishing insights and connections to *Teleny* and the continuing investigation of Victorian sexuality and the growing trend toward the examined sexual life that, I assert, erotic memoirs played a vital role in documenting. Like *Teleny*, *Des Grieux* relies on a mediated account of sexual escapades before turning to the titular character only in the final pages of the text. None of the expected patterns of an erotic memoir are followed, leading to a narrative that makes for a disjointed and often uncomfortable read. What this dissertation documents, however, in terms of what work *Des Grieux* does as an erotic memoir, is that the descriptions of sex are never satisfactorily resolved. The characters are constantly sexually frustrated and never fully in control, forcing them to confront the interiority of their sexual desires in a way that no other erotic memoir in this dissertation does. *Des Grieux* is a textual turning point that centralizes the idea that sex and sexuality are a matter of body as well as mind, although this discovery comes at a significant price for characters in both *Des Grieux* and *Teleny*. The erotic memoirs that came before *Des Grieux* offered increasingly larger forays into the sexual introspection that this dissertation shows culminated with the end of the nineteenth
century. To a large extent, this shift in the erotic memoir mirrors the sex book trade’s increasing self-awareness that it was perhaps facing an intractable change along with the times. The recognition of more select and diverse markets notwithstanding, booksellers could rely on smaller but significant portions of the market to sell their products.

The fourth and final chapter on Victorian sex book collections and collectors, “What is a Collector?,” looks back on two integral Victorian sex book collections and the people who compiled them. The act of looking back on these collections facilitates looking forward to the chapter’s exploration of the afterlives of these sex book collections. My examination of collectors and collector culture through the looking backward/forward dichotomy encapsulates the purpose of this dissertation as a whole: namely, to place Victorian sex books within their original context(s) and to provide links to the legacy they have created in histories of sexuality in print in order to advance literary understandings of what these under-researched materials can provide given proper scholarly attention. Antiquarian book collecting was not a new pastime in Victorian Britain, but it was an increasingly popular one and what set it apart from earlier periods was the notion of a collection as an individualistic and private endeavour rather than a semi-public one (Egginton 350). Maintaining a personal library was a masculine pursuit and, in delineating collections both personal and housed by the state, this dissertation asserts that the acquisition, use, and afterlives of sex book collectors and their collections facilitates modern understandings of censorship and the urge to preserve. To this end, Walter Benjamin’s edict that “ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects” offers a succinct guiding principle both for the pursuit of collections and the state of the sex book trade that supplied the collectors during the period of this study (Benjamin 429).

Throughout the course of this dissertation, the notion of a collector culture is implicit when discussing the sex book trade in broader terms and the most important factors in that discussion are differentiating the types of collecting that publishers and booksellers facilitated and, to a great
extent, contrived in response to the growing demand for books. The most important collector of sex books during the Victorian period was Henry Spencer Ashbee (1834-1900), who was also known by his pseudonym Pisanus Fraxi. Ashbee, a textile trader and world traveller, was intimately familiar with book collecting circles, and he assembled the largest collection of Cervantes titles outside of Spain. His alter ego, Pisanus Fraxi, was a renowned sex book collector and bibliographer of sex books. Fraxi’s key bibliography of sex books was published in three volumes between 1877 and 1885. The Ashbee/Fraxi collections were left to the British Museum on his death in 1900, where the Cervantes was welcomed with enthusiasm and the sex books were suppressed, purposefully ignored and, in some cases, lost or destroyed.

This dissertation’s treatment of Ashbee and his collection(s) showcases what one man was able to preserve in terms of both historical, material objects and bibliographical information. Ashbee was a scholar of sex books who knowingly affixed his name to an underrepresented facet of book collecting in the mainstream. It is my contention that Ashbee had the ability to foresee the importance many of the texts discussed in this dissertation and in the ever-expanding field of pornography studies. He took it upon himself to preserve as much as possible for a future time when the gatekeepers of history also agreed about the importance of all the materials he left behind. As much as was possible during his lifetime, Ashbee was a public scholar of sex books.

This dissertation also presents the first substantial study of a Victorian book collection now housed at Trinity College, Oxford. It belonged to the Danson family of Lancashire. The collection represents the culmination of three generations of book collecting that began in the 1850s; and its well-crafted selection of sex books runs to some four hundred and fifty titles. The Danson collection represents the best example currently available of a complete Victorian sex book collection that has not been dispersed at auction or through years of neglect. The collection is, for all intents and purposes, in its complete state.
I use the Fraxi and Danson collections as case studies in Victorian sex book collecting and the motivations for each. The collections themselves are quite different in scope, with Fraxi’s collection erring on the side of completionism while the Danson collection is much more of a curated effort that reflects the personal scholarly interests and pursuits of a family. The most prominent question I seek to answer with this study of collectors is exactly where they fit within the grander scheme of the sex book trade. Fraxi has suggested that there were two distinct types of collector: those who read and those who did not (Centuria lii-liii). Fraxi’s dictum implies that, as a rule, those collectors who read (that is, those with sufficient education and background to know what was what) knew what items were worth collecting on account of their status and education while those who did not read were merely taken with the idea of acquiring broadly for show. The Dansons present an intriguing case study in the course of Fraxi’s dual-identification system for collectors because they collected broadly on subjects that interested them, and, they prominently displayed their collections with beautiful custom bindings and gilding on many of their volumes.

My treatment of collector culture in Britain during this period relies on the broader sex book culture that underpins this dissertation as a whole. Where communities were built around expanding understandings of sexuality as is shown regarding erotic memoirs, such communities of collectors were established in a similar fashion. Ashbee was (in)famous for gatherings at his private chambers at the Inns of Court at Gray’s in London, sharing his knowledge and showing off his collections to fellow sex book collectors. Gatherings of like-minded individuals garnered support for a common cause and in some cases the result could be a book like Teleny. In other cases, however, the result was a members-only club of privileged men actively skirting the law and benefiting from the protection their status afforded them. Whether collectors, writers, publishers or booksellers, the important notion is that strength in numbers was an integral aspect of all corners of the sex book trade.
By way of concluding the dissertation, I reflect on aspects of the key players in the Victorian sex book trade who wrote, published, and purchased texts and, in some cases, were proto-activists for free speech and freedom of expression. This is considered with the luxury of the last hundred or so years of progress toward more open scholarship and access to collections of material that would have once meant jail time for possession. This dissertation ends with some conclusions about the who, why, and how of Victorian sex books. The materials required to complete this dissertation were readily accessible in most cases, and my dissertation shows that these barriers to access have shifted over the centuries; access to sex books evolved over the course of the nineteenth century right alongside phenomenal changes between the pages. The reasons for these changes are manifold and many have been outlined in this introduction and will be elaborated in the study that follows. Sex book collections are ephemeral and the best thing scholars can do is to use them judiciously to further expand the knowledge of their respective fields. It is my hope that this is what I have done in this dissertation.
Chapter 1
Pornographic Lives and Erotic Cultural Memory

To study the production and trade in sex books in the late Victorian period is to study both obfuscation and memory. Those involved in the sex book trade – including publishers, printers, authors, and booksellers centred specifically in London – kept a low profile by necessity in order to stay one step ahead of authorities, who had the power to decide what constituted ‘obscenity’ and then to seize and destroy any materials they deemed obscene. The materials that sex book publishers and sellers were at risk of losing contained depictions of sex, of course, but they were also a record of the time and context in which they were produced. One of this study’s central arguments is that these books turn a past that was at risk of remaining hidden into a legible one. Tim Dean, in his introduction to Porn Archives, argues that

by preserving traces of nonnormative pleasures, porn facilitates not only the tracking

but also the reactivation of these pleasures; and it may do so without requiring

imaginary identification to experience them. Porn archives are important not least

because sexual minorities use them as a form of cultural memory (10)

Erotic cultural memory was the Victorian sex book’s stock-in-trade and an important impetus for their preservation and further study today. This chapter traces the development of an alternative print culture created and preserved through sex books by analyzing and evaluating communities and

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4 Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to ‘sex books’ rather than ‘obscene’ or ‘pornographic’ books. Not only is ‘sex books’ a less fraught term than ‘pornography’ or ‘obscenity,’ it is also more inclusive and descriptive of the kinds of materials discussed in my study. A number of the texts in this dissertation contain depictions of sex but are difficult to categorize into a universally agreed upon definition of ‘pornography.’

5 ‘Obscenity’ is a legalistic term historically used by authorities and is notoriously difficult to define in terms of the subject(s) of this chapter and dissertation. For a fuller account of ‘obscene’ and ‘obscenity,’ Katherine Mullin’s chapter in Prides on the Prowl (eds. David Bradshaw and Rachel Potter), “More Deadly than Prussic Acid: Defining Obscenity After the 1857 Obscene Publications Act” deals with the issue at greater length than I am permitted here.
individuals responsible for building that culture. My use of the phrase ‘erotic cultural memory’ recognizes the “sexual minorities” mentioned by Dean above as not simply the people who may have identified as such (*i.e.* LGBTQ+) in the Victorian period, but also those who made it their business to present and preserve sex and sexuality in the form of books. Contemporaneous and future (modern) readerships are another important factor in the collective erotic cultural memory of sex books, and these are dealt with in more detail through the genre of the memoir presented in Chapter 3. The focus in this chapter is on the progenitors and opponents of the Victorian sex book: how their lives are imbued within its pages, and ultimately how a collective erotic cultural memory was integral to the creation of what sex books became over the course of the nineteenth century.

None of this means erotic cultural memory is necessarily an accurate recounting of events. Laura Doan has pointed out in her study of modern queer collective memory that “collective memory envisages an ‘undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth,’ emphasizing achievement and pride but also persecution, suffering, and struggle” (Doan 118). Doan’s case study of the martyrdom and hagiography of Alan Turing in queer cultural memory discourse has many parallels to the discourse of erotic cultural memory that I am presenting here. The most obvious Victorian parallel example is Oscar Wilde and his persecution, which is discussed in the last section of this chapter, but the trade in sex books and the people within that trade can also be victims of the same sort of hero worship. Rather than hero-making, my study gives credit to many of those responsible for creating an alternative print culture that supplements the field of Victorian book history and print culture.

The culture of seizure and destruction of sex books and other materials was a direct result of the first Obscene Publications Act (OPA) of 1857 and actions of private vigilante groups such as the Society for the Suppression of Vice (SSV), whose mandate was to “preserve the minds of the young

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6 With the full knowledge that these terms and vernacular to describe one’s sexual identity was in its infancy during the period under discussion.
from contamination by exposure to the corrupting influence of impure and licentious [materials].” (“Varieties” 32). The SSV’s morality brigades collected intelligence for London’s Metropolitan Police force to help conduct raids on many in the sex book trade after the passage of the OPA. Those in the sex book trade, in keeping with the mounting legal concerns and threats of imprisonment if caught, had little choice but to respond by obfuscating their businesses and identities, as generations of criminals did before them albeit with one notable exception: before the passing of the OPA, a sex bookseller’s stock could not be seized and destroyed so, if he were to be indicted, his business could continue even if he were sent to prison. Maintaining pseudonyms and various addresses meant that anyone with a significant stock of sex books might have a better chance of skirting the law and hanging on to some of their wares. Using aliases and multiple addresses to stash contraband materials is a time-tested technique of criminals. Sex booksellers’ playfulness in using pseudonyms was not, however, entirely about operating outside the law. The self-referential way sex booksellers obfuscated their identities, leaving intriguing traces of themselves within and without their materials and businesses, made up a large portion of the sex book print culture code necessary for it to flourish. Indeed, this self-referentiality provides a parallel textual history of Victorian literature.

Sex booksellers themselves do not tell the entire story, however. Sex books in the Victorian period constitute a refraction of the broader context of social mores in general and the politics of publishing and print culture in particular. It was not unusual to find blatant references to current events and self-referential allusions to the sex book trade encoded within the pages of sex books. Also common was deliberate obfuscation between the covers of sex books as a reaction to shifting movements in morality and law. People involved in sex book print culture, either directly as producers, authors, purveyors, and consumers, or those whose scandalous lives were used to inform

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7 For the purposes of my study the male pronoun will be used. While there were certainly women involved in the Victorian pornographic trade, records of their involvement (police/court documents and publication information, for instance) are exceedingly scarce.
the culture, added to the milieu that the core subject of this chapter – the prolific sex book
publisher, bookseller, and author William Lazenby – exploited. Lazenby’s publications, perhaps
unknownst to the publisher himself, would become historical documents in their own right
because of his editorial choices to exploit current events. I suggest that William Lazenby was a
master at wielding the “indeterminacy and fragmentation” of erotic cultural memory in the same way
that Mark Turner has suggested many writers and artists of the mid- to late-nineteenth century did in
their imagining of the city of London itself. In Turner’s formulation, these artists and writers used
the “gaps and uncertainties created by this vision of modernity [to open] up a space, both real and
conceptual, for the [gay] cruiser to inhabit,” and I argue that Lazenby has similarly exploited the
space of erotic cultural memory for readers to inhabit (Turner 7–8). Lazenby was a master of
obfuscation little remembered or researched by scholars, but he provides a link to some of the most
important developments not only in sex books of the late Victorian period, but also to sex scandals
that exposed London and the world to discourses on aberrant sexualities. Lazenby ran in well-
connected circles of gentlemen producing sex books while at the same time capitalizing on cultural
memory by exploiting the details of scandals such as the Boulton and Park cross-dressing affair.
Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park had caused a public stir in 1870 when the pair of men were
arrested outside a theatre in London’s West End and charged with “with intent to commit a felony
[sodomy]” (“Men in Female Attire” 6). In finessing the details of the ensuing trial for his own use,
Lazenby introduced Jack Saul into these events—a character who would eventually find his way out
of the pages of sex books and into newspapers and the collective public conscience. Indeed, Saul
would later become a touchstone for immorality and indecency in the wake of yet another scandal in
London involving alleged sex between men. While Lazenby was all but out of the sex book business
by the time Oscar Wilde found himself defending his own “immoral” writings on the witness stand
in 1895, I will argue that Lazenby’s work and influence nevertheless contributed to the culture that
informed the line of interrogation that led to the conflation of Wilde the man with the product of his pen (Holland 291).

Lazenby, thrice convicted and imprisoned for his business in the sex book trade, existed not on the margins of Victorian society but in the thick of it, almost invisibly. His imprisonment also made him something of a martyr for the cause of freer sexual expression and his importance to the sex book trade during his most active years cannot be understated. So successful was he at leading multiple lives that his true identity had remained a mystery until my research uncovered and pieced together the facts of his life. Lazenby’s keen eye for exploiting and blurring the lines between the real and the fictional resulted in forcing a re-examination of Victorian print and sexual culture based on the contribution of Lazenby’s publishing and cultural output. More so than many of his contemporaries in the sex book trade, Lazenby’s varied trade presented not only a challenge to the establishment mainstream publishing industry but also represented a new mode of sex book publishing in terms of experimentation with subjects that nobody else had been able to represent as successfully. Lazenby, whose mainstay had been flagellation literature, offered a smattering of other genres that incorporated new ideas about sexual categories—homosexual, lesbian, and transgender especially, though the modern vocabulary for these lay far in the future—while Lazenby the man led, what can only be surmised, a relatively banal existence apart from his brushes with the law.

Looking back on his lives, trials, and output, however, reveals a calculating yet evanescent character whose influence reverberated through sex book print culture and the law until at least the end of the nineteenth century. Viewed through historian Pierre Nora’s construction of memory versus history, Lazenby’s contributions to erotic cultural memory can be delineated. In Nora’s terms, “memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects” (Nora 9). Memory is built upon things that can be touched or enacted—experiences that can be recorded, disseminated, and examined. Lazenby, by virtue of soliciting the experiences of a number of writers that helped
create the works he sold, traded in creating collectively composed artifacts comprised of erotic
cultural memory. Distinct from memory is history, which “binds itself strictly to temporal
continuities, to progressions and relations between things,” something that was less important in the
milieu of Lazenby’s contribution to erotic cultural memory (Nora 9). The massive disruptions and
temporal interruptions within Lazenby’s work as a publisher—three prosecutions necessitating a
number of pseudonyms and underhanded criminal techniques—resulted in his works being less of a
defined and discrete history of sex and sexuality and more in keeping with preserving a particular
moment.

Most active in the 1870s and 1880s, William Lazenby was known by no fewer than five
pseudonyms. His true identity is not the most important focus of this study, though it will play a
significant role in delineating Lazenby’s activities and impact on the Victorian sex book trade.
Rather, what Lazenby did during his most productive period was unlike anything other men in his
business had done with quite the level of success. Lazenby’s output between 1870 and 1886
encompassed some 40 original titles including novels, memoirs, pamphlets, and serials—with many
suspected to include work by Lazenby’s own hand—along with producing a number of reprints
from his predecessor William Dugdale.8 was a departure from what other sex book publishers had
been doing from the mid-Victorian period onward. Lazenby’s books included subjects and topics
that ranged from flagellation—the English vice, as it came to be known—to transgender and other
subjects not yet fully explored or categorized. The fluidity of Lazenby’s output mirrored the sexual
fluidity of the pre-medicalization of sexuality.9 Lazenby’s publications were a part of the signalling

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8 The number of titles produced by Lazenby during his known active period is a constantly evolving number. Bibliographies such as Pisanus Fraxi’s Bibliography of Prohibited Books (1879-1884) and Peter Mendes’ Clandestine Erotic Fiction in English, 1800-1930 (1998) are invaluable resources and my own archival research has led to the discovery of Lazenby titles not included in the standard erotic bibliographies.

9 The rise and influence of sexology from Europe during this period had a great impact on English literary output and, inevitably, sex books. See Heike Bauer’s fundamental English Literary Sexology (2009)
shift toward discrete gender and sexual categories that would gain prominence in the late Victorian era and evolve into today’s sexual identity categories.

Lazenby had a unique talent for fictionalizing real life events and persons, in order to capitalize on his potential readers’ cultural memories. His fictionalized and ‘pornified’ accounts of events would prove to have a significant afterlife that blurred boundaries between fiction, fantasy, and truth. While Lazenby opportunistically exploited cultural memory by pilfering and adding an erotic flair to scandalous persons and places, the opposite also happened when his own creations began to appear outside the pages of his sex books. This was the case most notably with Lazenby’s character Jack Saul, who first appeared (in fiction) in the 1881 pseudo-memoir *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and who appeared again (in historical reality) as a criminal witness in a trial involving a male brothel in London’s Cleveland Street eight years later. Long after he had ceased producing volumes of his own, moreover, Lazenby himself remained a spectral figure in the eyes of the law for his associations with other known sex book publishers.

Lazenby first gained notoriety in the world of sex publications as a purveyor of erotic photographs and books in Blue Cross Street, in London’s Leicester Square. Lazenby—reported to be conducting business under the name Henry Ashby, one of his many aliases—was indicted in 1871 for selling “by means of advertisements…certain books” for as much as “£9” while others, “not for sale at any price,” could be rented for “10s a week” (“Wholesale” 4).10 Lazenby’s sex book rental business likely took as its model the circulating libraries such as Mudie’s which had become popular from mid-century. As interest in and accessibility to reading materials grew, so did sex books and Lazenby—not unlike the astute Charles Mudie—obviously had a keen eye for methods of expanding his business. In addition to the sale of “certain books,” Lazenby was also in the bespoke love letter business at this time, having advertised for a “young lady who would correspond with a gentleman

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10 It is worth noting that a decent middle class income in the 1860s and 1870s was only £160 and that still meant skimping on necessities such as food. A salary of closer to £100 per annum was more common (Sigel 180).
in the ‘most fervid style’ at the rate of 10s a letter,” a service that demonstrated a certain canniness as one of Lazenby’s most important works would be an epistolary novel from two ‘ladies’ writing in a similarly ‘fervid’ style entitled Letters from Laura and Eveline and published in 1883 (“Wholesale” 4). The variety of Lazenby’s early businesses—for which he was sentenced to eighteen months’ imprisonment with hard labour in July 1871—foreshadowed the rest of his known career as a player in the sex book trade of late-Victorian London. Lazenby was at once a niche publisher but also a kind of clandestine publisher’s Everyman, with works in his catalogue appearing in a range of price points. Other publishers, especially nearing the end of the nineteenth century, offered éditions de luxe with expensive bindings, paper, and covers aimed at the bibliophile market, but Lazenby’s offerings were more content and discretion focused.

It was clear that, from the time of his first imprisonment in 1871 until his third in 1886, Lazenby’s variety, fluidity, and willingness to capitalize on scandal and collective social memory served his business model well. Among many of Lazenby’s productions were reprints from his predecessors, most notably William Dugdale, who was active in the sex book trade from 1822 until his death in 1868. Lazenby republished so many Dugdale titles, in fact, that it can be surmised that he may have worked alongside the late publisher or had somehow arranged to obtain Dugdale’s catalogue upon his death; at any rate, the publishing overlap between the two men is significant enough to warrant further study, which appears below. Along with these Dugdale reprints, Lazenby issued a number of texts that have been in part or wholly attributed to him as author and publisher.

Curiosities of Flagellation (1875), a text that would have appealed to a readymade readership with the burgeoning flagellant market is attributed to Lazenby by the contemporary erotic bibliographer with a penchant for flagellation literature, Henry Spencer Ashbee. Lazenby at one point used this name as a pseudonym but chose the alternate surname spelling ‘Ashby.’ Writing his erotic bibliographies under the pseudonym Pisanus Fraxi, Henry Spencer Ashbee claimed in the third volume, Catena
Librorum Tacendorum, that “the publisher [of Curiosities of Flagellation] is also the author; his initials, W.L.” (Catena 252). There is little reason to doubt Fraxi; his is the standard for erotic bibliography and it is clear throughout the three volumes that he was personally acquainted with many in the sex book trade. Additionally, writing under a pseudonym offered Ashbee a certain freedom of expression otherwise unavailable to his respectable public persona as a textile merchant and book collector of good repute. ‘Pisanus Fraxi’ was a playful reworking of the Latin for ‘ash’ (fraxis) and ‘bee’ (apis) that, as Ian Gibson has observed, also suggests a scatological joke: pisanus becomes “piss anus” (26). Name-play was an important part of the self-referential nature of sex book print culture, as evidenced by Lazenby’s use of the name ‘Henry Ashby’ as one of his many aliases. Fraxi engaged in this play with Lazenby throughout his bibliography by dropping small hints about the publisher’s identity.

While Lazenby was writing, publishing, and selling sex books in the 1870s, his most prolific period was between 1879–1886. During these seven years Lazenby published, in an imitation of the Victorian serial, his most well known periodical The Pearl—a compendium of reprints and original compositions, some penned by Lazenby himself. The magazine’s poetry, short stories, and serial long-form writing was issued in three volumes between 1879 and 1880 followed by four Christmas annuals. In addition to The Pearl, Lazenby published two other periodicals during the same period: The Cremorne (1882) and The Boudoir (1883). The Cremorne is particularly redolent with erotic cultural memory because of its association with the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens, a notorious London locale known for its open attitudes to sexuality and prostitution. Before its closure in 1877 the Cremorne Pleasure Garden was a place of leisure “open to the male visitors to invite attention and solicit acquaintance” with the many women who frequented the gardens, some of whom were undoubtedly prostitutes (Acton qtd. in Nead 131). While the gardens were not obscene in an ostentatious manner, and the business of pleasure was conducted furtively, they nonetheless were a distinct threat
to the delicate social order. A microcosm of Lazenby’s broader business, Cremorne Gardens was a place requiring initiation to gain access to its more clandestine forms of pleasure. The choice of *The Cremorne* in 1882 as a title was significant for its geographical association and exploitation of collective cultural memory, but it was also significant in the manner that it followed from other established Victorian periodicals that took their names from places in and around London and thus also shared in those places’ cultural and social associations. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, for instance, was associated with Pall Mall in London, known for its many gentleman’s clubs, thus ostensibly imbuing the publication with the probity of respectable journalism. In reality, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, under the leadership of editor W.T. Stead, courted infamy by initiating the investigative tactics of tabloid journalism in its exposé of child prostitution in Britain when Stead actually purchased a young girl for *Gazette* story “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” in 1885.

Britain, and London especially, had been undergoing a marked change in how scandal was handled in the public arena since the early nineteenth century. This is certainly evident in terms of publications such as the *Gazette* and other modes of representing scandal but more to the point is that admixture of classes and sexes, especially in the West End, signified the beginning of the shift from a private to a more open and visual culture than ever in the city’s history. This shift is especially remarkable from about mid-century when “the liberating effects of a new visual culture and environment, particularly for women and working people” presented a significant challenge to the status quo of what jurists would have preferred for Britons and, most urgently, Londoners (Walkowitz, *Dreadful* 48). The “new visual culture” in class terms can be traced, as Judith Walkowitz explains, to upwardly mobile populations especially comprised of women that had begun crossing the east-west divide in London. The rise of disposable income and the middle class had distinct effects on traditionally higher class activities such as leisure shopping in places like Piccadilly Circus. This visual culture also has roots in the sex and, to a lesser extent, sex book trade. With the closure
of many of London’s molly houses in the early nineteenth century, many homosexuals found themselves pushed into parks and other public and semi-public spaces. Other situations, such as the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens, afforded more of what Walkowitz calls the “liberating effects” of mid-century London’s shift to a more visual culture (48). Especially troubling for the Metropolitan police were gatherings that were “beyond [their] operational reach and will,” namely, homosexual men in parks and other public spaces (Cocks 73). Jurists made laws in an attempt to thwart the threats of increasingly public sexuality but it was up to the police to enforce these laws. Enforcement was more often than not an ineffectual scheme since the police often “felt they could not present a watertight case” so, for the most part, they tolerated places like the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens, where sexual liberties could be, if not halted, at least kept in check (69).

The agreements between Cremorne Pleasure Gardens’ patrons and the police were an open secret. Lazenby himself would have been cognizant of the culture of pleasure and, after its closure in 1877, noted that the absence of the gardens would likely create a wanting public or, in other words, a readership with an exploitable cultural memory. The editorial Lazenby wrote for the preface of The Cremorne positions the magazine as a simulacrum of the former pleasure-seeking liberties of the gardens:

THE MAGAZINE, of which this is the first number, is intended to supply a want—long felt often expressed…where is the journal the individuals of both sexes, who have determined to get from life the acmé of enjoyment; the maximum of pleasure with the minimum of pain, can regard as specially devoted to their interests? Echo answers, “where?” but we answer, in reply to echo, here in ‘The Cremorne Magazine.’ (Cremorne no. 1)

11 Private clubs where men could dress as women and mock-marriages were performed. These houses were generally ‘safe’ places to engage in same-sex activities, though they were often raided by police. More detailed information on molly houses will be provided in later chapters.
The magazine, Lazenby is arguing, fills the void of desire left by the gardens’ closure. Notably, the short editorial acknowledges the pleasure missed by both men and women, an unusual acknowledgement of female desire for a Victorian sex book and society more broadly. Considering Lazenby’s willingness to publish widely on uncommon sex and sexualities, however, his acknowledgement of women in The Cremorne is indicative of his more inclusive approach to sex, at least from a business perspective. It should be noted, however, that acknowledging female pleasure and desire could be viewed as in the service of Lazenby’s male readership. As a stand-in for the real Cremorne Pleasure Gardens, Lazenby’s magazine is a nostalgic re-creation of the physical gardens’ universalized leisure and pleasure which relied on collective memory for its desired effect. Whether The Cremorne could capture the spirit of the original is immaterial. The name itself was a visceral reminder of freedom previously afforded to pleasure-seekers as well as the Gardens’ reputation as a licentious locale; its stated objectives borrowed from the unwritten rules of the space formerly known as the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens which had, by 1882, been almost entirely built over. The Cremorne was, however, not the longest-lasting cultural association used by Lazenby to entice and, eventually, give readers something tangible outside the pages of a clandestinely produced book.

BOULTON AND PARK

A year before publishing The Cremorne, William Lazenby published what purported to be the memoir of a male prostitute named Jack Saul entitled The Sins of the Cities of the Plain, Or Recollections of a Mary Ann (1881). Over the course of Saul’s ‘recollections,’ a term indicating that the contents of the book are not simply impressions or reminiscences but rather an authoritative record of events, Saul shares his sexual experiences ranging from his first boyhood romps with his hirsute cousin Jenny to his induction and initiation into the world of contemporary London homosexuality. Saul’s recollections also include forays into bestiality, hermaphroditism, and prostitution, the two latter becoming central to his narrative. What is significant about the latter experiences is the company
Saul kept. He claims to have attended a ball with the infamous Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park, the cross-dressing pair better known to Londoners of the time as Stella and Fanny. This account was followed the next year by a trial that kept newspapers busy feeding the public’s prurient appetite for the scandal. Saul’s recollection of Stella and Fanny includes witnessing the acts they had been charged with conspiring to commit, retold in lubricious detail not available at the trial. Peering through the keyhole of a door—in an intertextual nod to the famous scene from John Cleland’s classic erotic memoir *Fanny Hill* that would become a trope—Saul “found [he] had a famous view of all that was going on in the next room” (*Sins* I: 98) and proceeded to detail every “*arbor vitae*,” “glowing red head,” “crinkum-crankum,” and “spending” (I: 98–101) experienced by the participants.¹²

Saul’s version of events is wholly more complete than the version presented at Boulton and Park’s trial, as the prosecution had relied mostly on character assassination rather than any physical or eyewitness testimony to imply the guilt of Boulton and Park. Their trial amounted to a backlash against, and a case study of, the new visual sexuality that had been gaining momentum since mid century. That Boulton and Park, two men frequenting the West End of London dressed as women and accompanying numerous men to theatres, had successfully passed themselves off as ladies was treated as a crime unto itself. The presiding magistrate, without evidence, accused the pair of “inciting people to commit an offence…[and] inveigling people into rooms to try to extort money,” a technique used by male prostitutes that is explored in *Sins* (“Men in Female Attire” 6).

Opportunities for extortion and blackmailing of homosexual men would reach new heights in the mid-1880s with the infamous Labouchère amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which would make any suspicion of contact between men a potential criminal offence. One witness

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¹² The significance of *Fanny Hill*’s influence on Victorian sex books—and the keyhole trope in particular—is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
confessed to having “treated Boulton as a gay woman [prostitute]” in a private box at the theatre even though Boulton had resisted his advances (“Boulton & Park Prosecution” 5).

The larger offence, and the one which the court had a difficult time articulating, was the relationship between Boulton and Lord Arthur Clinton, MP. The trial provided evidence that the two had been playing at mock-marriage, with Boulton even going so far as signing off letters and printing calling cards with the name “Lady Arthur Clinton.” Lord Arthur himself had died under mysterious circumstances—most likely suicide—before the trial, so he was unavailable to answer for the supposed offences. The court proceedings tried Boulton’s and Park’s characters, rather than any unlawful physical contact, although physicality underpinned the entire affair. The trial culminated with a police surgeon acting impudently and without any official authorization or request to examine the genitals of the pair to look for evidence of sodomy. The police surgeon in question had likely used as the basis for his physical exam of the pair the 1857 work of French criminologist Auguste Ambroise Tardieu’s *Étude Médico-légal sur les attentats aux moeurs* (*Forensic Study of Sexual Offences*), which proposed that sodomy left physical traces on the body such as a pointed penis and funnel-shaped anus. Ironically, Tardieu’s homophobic? theory would find its way into *Sins* and, later, the homosexual romance novel *Teleny* (1893).

There were, of course, no actual witnesses to the acts the pair had been accused of ‘conspiring’ to commit. Although the pair were acquitted due to a lack of evidence at their trial, Saul’s account gives a detailed version of the event at the centre of the scandal, a secret ball with men dressed as women accompanying men of stature to Haxell’s Hotel in the Strand, by providing many more salacious details that were never part of the original trial. Focusing on whether Jack Saul’s account is the true uncensored version of the Boulton and Park affair is to chase a mirage. Capitalizing on the affair for the book and Lazenby’s experience and acumen in reading the market in order to exploit the collective conscience of his readership makes *Sins* a unique document that
straddles, and then blurs, the divide between truth and fiction. Jack Saul’s recollections turned out such a success that *Sins* spawned a sequel—written by Lazenby, according to Pisanus Fraxi—in 1883 entitled *Letters from Laura and Eveline* in which Saul and Boulton return in their respective fictional female guises introduced in *Sins*—the titular Laura and Eveline, respectively (*Catena* 403). Frederick Park, though featured in *Sins* alongside Boulton, plays a much smaller part in *Letters*, appearing only briefly as a bridesmaid named Selina during the nuptials held in a fictionalized version of an early nineteenth century molly house, decorated in the style of a Roman “temple of Priapus” (*Letters* 6) that, Jennifer Ingleheart argues, “provides an example of a society in which the pleasures of sex and in particular of a huge phallus are celebrated, not downplayed or censured” (Ingleheart 154-155).

Ingleheart is writing specifically about a scene from the novel *Teleny* that appeared in 1893—ten years after *Letters from Laura and Eveline*—but her thesis that the Victorian sex book’s presentation of marriage rituals between men in classical attitudes heightens the celebratory action of such scenes is sound. The second part of Ingleheart’s argument posits that these marriage scenes contrasted “with other receptions of antiquity of the period” and elucidates the retrospective argument that Victorian sex books had made a tradition of appealing to the shared erotic cultural memory of antiquity (Ingleheart 154-155). Ingleheart’s premise here is in keeping with scholars such as Will Fisher, Richard Kaye, and others who have examined the queer use of Renaissance and classical/antiquity imagery by Victorian homosexuals. The wedding scene and appeal to antiquity seen in *Letters* and later texts forms part of this tradition that reaches an apex in Victorian sex books by the end of the century. 14


14 In my discussion of *Des Grieux* in Chapter 3, I argue that novel’s teleology is rooted in antiquity and early modern queering of texts.
The sexual stakes in *Letters* are elevated to such a degree that the reader is never sure whether the events depicted are meant to be in earnest, humorous, or some combination of the two. Pisanus Fraxi’s description of the book’s events, “as disgusting as they are absurd…filthy and impossible,” gives some insight into the problematic nature of the subject matter and its wavering status as either serious or comical (*Catena* 403). In *Letters*, Laura and Eveline both pen letters to their friend Louis H—(presumably Louis Hurt, roommate of Boulton and Park and one of the co-accused charged with conspiracy to commit sodomy in the original affair) telling of their ‘mock-marriages’ and subsequent honeymoons with wealthy men. In saying that it is unclear whether the events are meant to be taken seriously or not, what I mean is that the husbands appear either wilfully ignorant of their new brides’ penises or whether they are simply taking a fetish to its extreme. The third option, of course, is that the husbands’ ignorance is deliberate and by having their male partners masquerade as female provides a cognitive dissonance from the reality of their natural sexual impulses. This is to say nothing of the protagonists: it is unclear whether Laura and Eveline themselves are merely playing at being female or they are what might nowadays be labelled transgender or intersex.

The ambiguity of *Letters* cannot be dismissed out of hand as a method of avoiding categorization of the various sex acts and sexualities contained therein. In fact, categorization as anything other than ‘aberrant’ was something of an impossibility in 1883. The word ‘homosexual’\(^\text{15}\) was not in widespread usage at this time, let alone what we would today label transgender. The term ‘invert,’ applied to men who displayed feminine behaviours but loosely equivalent to homosexual, might have been more descriptive in the period; however, the word continually applied to the book’s title characters is hermaphrodite. One of the things Lazenby accomplished with *Sins* and *Letters* was

\(^{15}\) ‘Homosexual’ as a term for a sexual identity has its origins in Continental sexology from the late nineteenth century. The Victorian period was essential in establishing the idea that same-sex desire was not simply a set of acts—which had traditionally been the case, as reflected in sodomy laws—but rather an identity that could be categorized with respect to those acts.
an early exploration of sexualities that were only slowly being categorized and medicalized as identities and paraphilias; in this way, these works form a vital sexual document that, though by no means scientific, provide a look into gender identity and homosexuality presented in the form of a non-specialist discourse. From flagellant works to a number of classic English sex books like *Fanny Hill* (1749) or *The Lustful Turk* (1828), Lazenby never missed a publishing opportunity when it presented itself. As discussed above, Lazenby recognized the value in exploiting scandal. The Boulton and Park affair was chief among the scandals he exploited and, in the process, he introduced an heir to their notoriety, Jack Saul, in *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*. Less than a decade after *Sins*’ publication, Saul would once again appear in print. In 1889, however, it would be in the pages of newspapers rather than a clandestinely published pseudo memoir. Recalling Boulton and Park’s initial notoriety and the key scene in *Sins*, a person calling himself John ‘Jack’ Saul appeared as the star witness to sexual improprieties between an upper class man and a young male prostitute at an infamous brothel in London’s Cleveland Street.

**CLEVELAND STREET JACK SAUL**

There are many narrative and chronological inconsistencies between the person who claimed he was Jack Saul on the stand of the Cleveland Street trial and the character from *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*. The two, however, were indeed the same person who was exploited for two different ends. Saul the memoirist from *Sins* was a verisimilar character whose recorded experiences as a ‘Mary Ann’ in London were intermingled with fictionalized accounts added by publisher William Lazenby so that Saul was placed in situations where he could not possibly have been. The most telling of Saul’s recollections that he could not possibly have taken part in was the Boulton and Park affair of 1870, when the real Saul would have been a boy of 13 in Dublin (Chandler 65). Lazenby’s decision to capitalize on Boulton and Park’s infamy when publishing *Sins* in 1881 was not surprising, considering his penchant for exploiting erotic cultural memories such as Boulton and Park and the
Cremorne Pleasure Gardens. Inserting Jack Saul as a character into the Boulton and Park narrative was an effective way to exploit and expand on an already scandalous event that, in turn, generated one of its own. Jack Saul the literary character subsequently informed a kind of subcultural world that turned him into a cultural phenomenon in his own right.

Saul reappeared nine years after *Sins*’ 1881 publication, as the star witness in the 1890 libel suit involving a newspaper editor who had accused the Earl of Euston, Lord Arthur Somerset, of visiting a male brothel in Cleveland Street for the purpose of procuring sex with young men. In the ensuing trial, Saul’s unabashed testimony of his involvement as an employee of the brothel flouted the law at the very real risk of incriminating himself on sodomy and gross indecency charges under the Labouchère Amendment to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. The stipulation, most famously used to prosecute Oscar Wilde for ‘gross indecency’ in 1895, stated that “any male person who in public or private commits or is a party to the commission of or procures (a) or attempts (b) to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency (c) with another male person” can be sentenced to up to two years’ imprisonment with or without hard labour (UK Parliament *Obscene* sec. 11, para. 7). Saul, by his own admissions on the stand, absolutely fit the criteria for sexual criminality according to the amendment. In a statement to police he admitted that he earned his “livelihood as [a] sodomite” (*R. v. Parke*) and referred to himself at the trial as a “professional sodomite” (qtd. in Kaplan, *Sodom* 187). Saul even testified to the fact that the police turned a blind eye to his activities, suggesting “the police have had to turn their eyes to more than me” when asked how he and other sex workers had been able to operate for so long with what appeared to be impunity (qtd. in Cocks 69). Saul’s response is a reminder that, as in the case of the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens mentioned previously, the police were wont to ignore situations “beyond [their] operational reach and will” which were especially prevalent in the West End—where Cleveland Street is located—and parks throughout the city of London (Cocks 73). The police
habitually tolerated gatherings of sodomites, especially if conducted in private because solid cases, let alone convictions, were difficult to come by. Judith Walkowitz has suggested, following Michel Foucault, that “Victorian culture actually produced, multiplied, and dispersed [sexuality]. This volubility led to the special privileging of sexuality as the core of a private identity, which was dangerous when made public” and that “through the incitement, prohibition, and normalization of desire, these discourses facilitated the policing of society” (Dreadful 8-9). The normalization of sexuality as part of private identity problematized the legal prosecution of acts in the late Victorian period. Jack Saul would prove another significant challenge to state power’s impotent effort to subdue a strong sexual identity.

Saul’s incriminating testimony failed to prove the case that Lord Arthur Somerset had knowingly visited the brothel in Cleveland Street to procure sex with men. The judge and jury believed Somerset’s testimony that he had been attracted to Cleveland Street on the basis that he had been handed a card in Piccadilly Circus advertising female “poses plastiques” at number 19 and had promptly left once he realized that it was a ruse (“West-End Scandals”). Flimsy as Somerset’s story was, the real controversy was Saul’s free admissions of the various crimes he had been involved with. The trial judge, Lord Henry Hawkins, and MP Henry Labouchère (namesake of the amendment) were both incensed that no mention of prosecuting Saul had been made. In the judge’s closing remarks “he marvelled much that no mention had been made of prosecuting [Saul]” and, in an aside, remarked that it made his “blood hot to hear of that wretch going about with his paste ring and silver headed cane” (“Lord Euston’s Libel”). Saul, by merely being allowed a continued existence, was an affront to established systems of legal and moral norms. After the trial Labouchère penned an inflammatory editorial in the morally conservative periodical Truth lamenting that “the Public Prosecutor, apparently, has made up his mind not to prosecute the creature Saul” (Labouchère). Both men, and other newspaper reports, referred to Saul as a “loathsome, detestable
beast” (“Lord Euston’s Case”), or “creature” (“The Charge of Libel”). This is no doubt the case seeing as the language used to describe Saul interpellates him as a sexual other, a lower-class corrupter of morality. We cannot know whether the persons who described Saul in subhuman terms were familiar with *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* or *Letters from Laura and Eveline*, though it would not be in any lawman’s best interest to mention if he were. Had Saul been known outside of the codified circles of London sex books and prostitution it was not readily apparent in the media’s coverage of the Cleveland Street trial. What little is in the public record about the Jack Saul of the Cleveland Street trial comes from police reports, his own testimony, and the newspapers reporting on the trial. By his own admission, he had knowledge of another homosexual scandal in his hometown of Dublin.

The Dublin Castle scandal of 1884 involved “rumours of a homosexual ‘ring’ in Dublin Castle, “the centre of power of the [English] colonial administration [in Ireland]” (Hanafin 413). Accusations against the Postmaster General of Ireland, Gustavus Cornwall, were brought about by two Irish Nationalist MPs who ran a libellous story in the militant nationalist journal *United Ireland* in which the authors claimed Cornwall had been compelled to announce his retirement based on “certain researches [they] were compelled to make into his heroic past,” alluding to the Postmaster’s hasty defence of his friend (and supposed lover) Ellis French, who had been first accused of indecent acts (“At Bay” n.p.). Saul, in the Cleveland Street police reports and on the witness stand, claimed these as the accusations he had been called to Dublin to testify for. Saul’s Dublin testimony was rejected on the grounds that the information he had offered was too old. His story also runs into problems of corroboration because “none of the evidence was published either in the Irish or English newspapers, and…all court records were destroyed in the Irish civil war” and no court record of the allegations or Saul’s rejected testimony survives in the archives that do exist in the British Postal Archive (Hyde, *Love* 132). All that is known for certain is that Saul was arrested in
London in 1884, transported back to Dublin where he gave a statement regarding the scandal at Dublin Castle, and that his testimony was thrown out and he was returned to London (Chandler 107).

Although the details of Saul’s life in London’s underground homosexual world are scarce and gleaned largely from his testimony in the Cleveland Street court case, the existence of Sins of the Cities of the Plain and, to a lesser extent, Letters from Laura and Eveline provide a relay where the two Saul personæs converge: on the one hand, Saul was a self-confessed male prostitute who escaped criminal punishment in two separate scandals even though he unabashedly implicated himself as a sexual deviant and criminal under the law. Conversely, the literary Saul’s recollections of a long sexual career both private and professional make the memoirs published by Lazenby useful texts that document some of the erotic realities of unseen Victorian sex while catering to the erotic imaginations of readers. Saul’s recollections in Sins were a mixture of fact and fiction and were likely the result of a collaborative effort by a coterie of writers, including possibly Lazenby himself. The recollections, according to Sins, were commissioned by a wealthy patron named Mr. Cambon for the sum of “a fiver [£5] a week” for “thirty or forty pages of note-paper a week, tolerably well written” for four weeks (Sins I: 19). Lazenby’s 1881 edition, limited to an initial print run of two hundred and fifty copies, depicts a London that has sexual secrets kept by many men, both powerful and lowly, capable of being shared only within certain spaces. Cleveland Street and other scandals of the period are a reflection the types of communities prevalent in the novel and the novel is, in turn, a refraction of real life events. The book’s clandestine publication and limited distribution suggest a mirroring of the events and audience for such a work. This literature, while not a trustworthy historical source based solely on what appears on the page, provides at least a glimpse into the culture of subversive underground communities representing dangerous sexualities. People like William Lazenby

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16 Further details of Saul’s biography have been laid out in Glenn Chandler’s The Sins of Jack Saul (2016) and are discussed more in-depth in Chapter 3.
successfully reached, and perhaps cultivated, niche audiences for these types of works and offered readers the chance to share in an open secret, provided they were initiates into London’s sex book print culture.

**Lazenby and the Law/Lazenby as Mirror**

Lazenby, his competitors, and partners all worked around the laws that had been put in place to try and eradicate erotic materials from England. These laws necessitated a certain degree of secrecy and obfuscation on the part of sex book producers. The Obscene Publications Act of 1857 (OPA), was the set of laws lobbied for by the Society for the Suppression of Vice (SSV) with the aim of eradicating sex books and other ‘immoral’ publications. The SSV, originally founded in 1802 and guided by principles grounded in Christianity, was headed in the latter half of the nineteenth century by morality reformer Lord Teignmouth, C.H. Collette. A lengthy editorial in the periodical *The Athenæum* by decadent poet Algernon Charles Swinburne in 1875 pointed to the SSV’s mandate and hypocrisy in attempting to suppress great works of contemporary and classical literature. Swinburne suggested to Mr. Collette that there was a popular book which “on the principle of the present Society, does most emphatically demand and require universal and rigid suppression or castration going under the title *Bible*” (“Suppression”). The SSV redoubled its efforts to stamp out “low and vicious periodicals” and other materials they deemed immoral, obscene, or blasphemous after the passing of the OPA (“Varieties”). Under the act the sale and distribution of “immoral” and other “obscene” materials—including blasphemous texts—was deemed “more deadly than prussic acid, strychnine or arsenic,” according to Lord Campbell, the key proponent of the act’s passing after whom the act was nicknamed (qtd. in Nead 150). The OPA allowed authorities to seize and destroy any materials deemed ‘obscene,’ a circumstance Lazenby found himself in at least three times. The act’s vague definition of ‘obscene’ turned out to be problematic, with individual magistrates and police chiefs being allowed to decide what, in their opinion, was deemed obscene. The SSV during
this time also took on a larger role by collecting intelligence on behalf of police who, apart from an initial rise in obscenity prosecutions, did not have sufficient resources to devote to the cause over the long term. The definition of obscenity was challenged in 1868 in *R v. Hicklin* in which Chief Justice Cockburn defined—without any mention of sex, it should be noted—obscene materials as those which had a “tendency to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall” (qtd. in Cohen 103). The vague and obfuscatory definition of obscenity became the guide law enforcement was to use in determining a work’s status as something obscene; it also added a dimension to the OPA involving the favourite subjugated groups requiring protection from the world’s ills, namely, women and children. Though it was never appealed to explicitly, the Hicklin ruling would play no small part in helping to establish Oscar Wilde’s writing as ‘immoral’ at trial in 1895.

Staying one step ahead of the law is the hallmark of a good criminal. A great criminal, perhaps, is one who can not only stay one step ahead but who can hold a mirror up to the law and state power to reveal its flaws. Exposing hypocrisy and society’s flaws has been, and remains, the domain of satire, but sex books—specifically William Lazenby’s brand, in this instance—can be as powerful a technique as satire in doing this same sort of work, if only in a more unorthodox manner. Through the medium of books, Lazenby provided readers with materials that would entertain and give some context to the world of sex. As Lisa Sigel has stated

> Victorian pornography neither fulfilled the promise of liberation nor guaranteed complete subordination; it did not provide the utopia or the dystopia of which people dreamed. Instead, it offered something much more nebulous, flexible, and interesting than most critics acknowledge: a way for people to make sense of and understand their world through the subject of sexuality (Sigel *Governing* 13 – 14)
Lazenby was the enabler of the refractive connection and understanding between adjacent worlds—the erotic imaginary and the real—and Jack Saul is the best example of the way Lazenby straddled this divide and left a legacy of calculated defiance. Lazenby’s own identity was itself an embodiment paralleling his publications and creations. The fluidity and obfuscation of his true identity mirrors not only the fluidity of Victorian understandings of sexuality but also adds an important dimension in assessing him within his profession.

Of his three known prosecutions for various crimes involving obscene and indecent publishing and materials—in 1871, 1876, and 1886—Lazenby was never indicted under the same name twice. In the 1871 indictment for selling obscene photographs, The Times reported that the accused was named both “William Lazenby, alias Henry Ashford” (“At Marlborough-Street” 13) and “Henry Ashby, alias William Lazenby” (“Middlesex Sessions” 11). While The Daily Telegraph (“Obscene Prints” 12) and Pall Mall Gazette (“Summary” 6) reported the accused only as William Lazenby, two other news outlets—British Journal of Photography (“Immoral Photographs” 345) and Lloyd’s Weekly (“Wholesale Seizure” 4)—repeated The Times’ “Ashby alias Lazenby” construction. Records of the Old Bailey indicate that, in 1876, William Lazenby was found guilty of “feloniously inciting [certain persons] to sell, utter, and publish…obscene and scandalous printed books and printed articles” in addition to inciting same to procure said materials (“William Lazenby”). The Old Bailey record also indicates the 1871 conviction of Lazenby. Court session rolls as well as the Middlesex Criminal Register both record that Lazenby had been using ‘Henry Ashby’ as an alias (Session Rolls 17 July 1871/Middlesex Register 17 July 1871). By the time of Lazenby’s third and final known trial and conviction, in 1886, he was sentenced to two years’ hard labour for selling “lewd books, indecent photographs, and other articles” under the name Duncan Cameron (“Duncan Cameron”). However, as in Lazenby’s first trial and conviction, the names used in the news reports offer little cohesion. The Times reported the accused as “Duncan Cameron, otherwise Lazenby”
(“Duncan Cameron, Otherwise” 12) and, later, “Donald Cameron” (“Donald Cameron” 12).

Another report names him as “Henry Lazenby, alias Anderson” (qtd. in Mendes 440). It was reported that Cameron/Lazenby used different names depending on the address he was using. A witness for the prosecution testified that at a certain location he was “not to ask for Cameron but Lazenby” when obtaining obscene books. Further problematizing the matter of names was the warrant served on Duncan Cameron upon his arrest in 1886 (“Duncan Cameron, Otherwise” 12). The warrant, intended for Cameron, actually read “Lagenley”—possibly a misreading of Lazenby—to which Cameron reportedly replied “that is not my name; it is Cameron” (“At the Guildhall” 4). The inability to consistently identify Lazenby under one name is a testament to his sophisticated system of obfuscation and one of the best reasons he may have been able to avoid more convictions. For the sake of comparison, his predecessor, William Dugdale—a flamboyant purveyor of sex books who made little effort to conceal his business or identity—was jailed no fewer than six times for dealing in obscene materials (England and Wales).

Unlike Dugdale, Lazenby’s modus operandi was not to draw undue attention to his business by not drawing attention to himself. Using various names and addresses were two important methods of obfuscation, but Lazenby’s business was also run quietly. Unlike his contemporaries in the sex books trade, it is unclear how he advertised his works. News reports mention his catalogue trade—indicating a large mail order component of his business, which was not an unusual practice at the time—and the few newspaper advertisements that are verified as Lazenby’s mention only seeking business partners “to carry out a quiet but most profitable business” (“Seven Hundred Pounds”) or warning readers that to “spare the rod [is to] spoil the child” (“Spare”), this latter deliberately written

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17 The SSV had campaigned against the ever cheaper and more efficient British Post, arguing that it facilitated the trade in obscenity. They weren’t wrong about the fact, helping to prompt the Post Office Protection Act 1884 which imposed fines and possible imprisonment on anyone “enclosing any indecent or obscene print, painting, photograph, lithograph, engraving, book, or card, or any indecent article” in the post.
in coded language likely as an appeal to readers (and potential readers) of the flagellation literature that was Lazenby’s semi-specialty. William Lazenby the publisher, bookseller, unremarkable “commercial traveller” (“Henry Ashby” 11), and, later, “respectable-looking old man” (“Objectionable” 3) represented in his personage the wider cultural and social context of his publishing and business practices. Lazenby was the threshold between the real and pornified worlds. His constant identity switching and methods of obfuscation mirrored the very laws he continually broke. Where definitions of obscenity obfuscated in their vague non-sexually-specific language and private moral vigilantes like the SSV mandated to “check the spread of vice and immorality” throughout Britain, Lazenby responded in kind by goading both de facto and self-appointed authorities with a unique brand of playful obfuscation that was so effective it continues to stump researchers to this day (“Varieties” 32). Combining what is confirmed as true about Lazenby, which is precious little, in connection with the aftereffects of his publishing activities, a clearer picture of the world Lazenby not only operated in but, to a large extent, created comes into focus.

We know that Lazenby employed numerous pseudonyms, but the most notable are ‘Duncan Cameron’ and ‘Henry Ashby,’ the only names associated with real persons with whom Lazenby was likely affiliated. In the first instance, Charles Duncan Cameron was an army officer and commander in wars in Africa and Turkey as well as a British diplomat in Turkey and Africa and consul for Her Majesty in Abyssinia in the 1860s. Charles Duncan Cameron’s entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography conspicuously omits an important aspect of his life: he was a fan of flagellation literature and counted among his friends key flagellants Edward Bellamy, Richard Monckton-Milnes, Richard Burton, Algernon Swinburne, and quite possibly others in the 1860s (Mendes 9). The fact that one of Lazenby’s publishing mainstays was flagellation literature—he published no fewer than six explicitly flagellation-focused novels and there are countless flagellation scenes amongst the rest of his catalogue—and commandeered the name ‘Duncan Cameron’ points to a connection between
the two men. Though there is no documented evidence proving they knew each other, it is unlikely that they were strangers. With the real Cameron dying at Geneva in 1870 and Lazenby not known to be publishing independently until around that time, Lazenby’s appropriation of the name was likely an homage to the real Cameron that would have been lost on anyone not privy to Cameron’s secret life. It did Lazenby no harm that the name was highly respectable, Cameron’s secret life as a flagellation fan a closely-guarded secret. Lazenby was known to pay nominal respect to predecessors, joking in the editor’s preface to *The Pearl* in 1879 that the title “Dugdale’s Ghost” had been bandied about before settling on *The Pearl* (Pearl I: 1).18

In a similar vein the pseudonym ‘Henry Ashby’ was a respectable one. The bibliographer Henry Spencer Ashbee is perhaps the most well documented example of a Victorian bibliophile leading a double life. On the one (public) hand Ashbee was a respectable textile trader, traveller, and book collector while, on the other (clandestine) hand, he was a studious sex book bibliographer. Lazenby’s editorial in *The Pearl* could almost be a description of Ashbee’s dual lifestyle; he writes that men “have only to keep up appearances by regularly attending church, giving to charities, and always appearing deeply interested in moral philanthropy, to ensure a respectable and highly moral character” and Ashbee did these things routinely (Pearl I: 1).19 The evidence suggests that Lazenby and Henry Spencer Ashbee knew each other or, at the very least, knew of each other. Ashbee—writing, of course, as Pisanus Fraxi—makes various allusions to Lazenby/Cameron throughout his three-volume erotic bibliography, most importantly in entries for *Letters from Laura and Eveline* and Lazenby’s periodicals *The Pearl* and *The Cremorne*. In his assessment of *Letters* Ashbee—writing, of course, under the *nom de plume*, Pisanus Fraxi—notes that the book is “from the pen of its publisher” and ends by informing readers it “possesses no literary merit whatever” (Fraxi, *Catena* 403). Most of

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18 It is also worth mentioning that this same editorial claims *The Cremorne* was a possible title for *The Pearl*. As we know, Lazenby did publish a periodical titled *The Cremorne*, albeit two years later.

19 Ashbee’s double life is well documented in Ian Gibson’s *The Erotomania* but further details do not fit my purposes in this chapter.
Lazenby’s known catalogue is given consideration in the bibliography, though seldom dealt so harsh a blow as the entry for *Letters*. Fraxi identifies deceased publishers and others involved in the erotic book trade by name in his bibliography. Fraxi does not hesitate in naming two generations of Lazenby’s direct predecessors throughout the three volumes; William Dugdale and George Cannon appear in a number of Fraxi’s bibliographical entries. This candour is juxtaposed to the restraint shown in not stating Lazenby’s, or any other living publisher’s, name explicitly. In this regard the coyness in lines such as “printed in Brussels for a London bookseller [referring to Lazenby]” (Fraxi, *Index* 314), “by the pen of its publisher” (Fraxi, *Catena* 246), and “the publisher is also the author; his initials, W.L.” (Fraxi, *Catena* 252) at once keep Lazenby’s identity a secret from authorities but also reveal daring glimpses that readers—and, presumably authorities—in the know could have figured out. Ashbee gives just enough information that anyone sufficiently informed could figure out he was referring to William Lazenby but with the requisite obfuscation that was both Ashbee’s and Lazenby’s stock-in-trade, in public at any rate.

Significantly, Ashbee directly names Lazenby/Cameron in his personal erotic book collection that constitutes the principal component of the British Library’s Private Case Collection. The inscription “Lazenby, 1875” (qtd. in Kearney 250) is found in Ashbee’s copy—presumably a reprint—of *Le Libertin de Qualité* (1783). In a later volume, a reprinted flagellation text entitled *Memoirs of the Life, Public and Private Adventures, of Madame Vestris* (1885), Ashbee noted “Received of Cameron | Jany 5, ’86,” (qtd. in Mendes 144) in his personal copy. A third direct mention of Lazenby appears in a handwritten note in Ashbee’s personal annotated copy of his bibliography, located in the British Library. Across the page from the entry on the 1865 Dugdale publication of *The New Epicurean* Ashbee scribed “*The New Epicurean* was reprinted by D. Cameron (Lazenby),”

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20 At Lazenby’s 1876 trial it was revealed that Lazenby had been planning to print and issue circulars from Belgium in order to avoid prosecution for printing in the UK (Reynolds’s 24 September 1876). The Customs Consolidation Act, prohibiting such materials from import into Britain, had been passed that same year and any obscene materials intercepted would have been subject to prosecution.
(Fraxi, *Index* 314) stating explicitly what could only safely be hinted at in the bibliographical entry. The divide between Ashbee’s quasi-public output writing as Fraxi and his private collection is such that the notoriously private bibliographer replicates the duality employed by Lazenby in his own production.

Ashbee openly but coyly wrote about the real world of sex book publishing by “Privately Printing” his bibliography under the Fraxi pseudonym but also contributed frequently to the scholarly Oxford journal *Notes & Queries* using permutations of his own and Fraxi’s name, for the purposes of advertising the bibliography. The earliest mention of the first volume of the bibliography, *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, was 5 May 1877 in which “Fraxinus” responds to an earlier query regarding the name of a comic opera alluded to entitled “Lady B—’s [Bumtickler’s] Revels” and, Fraxinus helpfully notes, “a full account of these and many other works…is given in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*” (Fraxinus 357-358). By redacting the word “Bumtickler,” Ashbee ensured censors would have no objection to printing his loosely disguised advertisement and that bibliophiles in the know would understand the meaning of the article. In August of the same year, a contributor calling himself “Apis” responds to a similar query and appends a similar advert for the *Index* (Apis 136). Astute readers could likely have put together the fact that ‘Fraxinus’ and ‘Apis’ are Latin for ‘ash’ and ‘bee’ and that the author of the bibliography, Pisanus Fraxi, is an anagram of these Latin words. Combining these clues with another response mentioning the *Index* written by “H.S.A.” in May of the same year and it couldn’t have taken much for those who knew (of) Ashbee and his reputation and passion for book collecting and bibliography to figure out that he was the likely author of the *Index*. In 1880, the year the second volume, *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum*, was printed, “H.S. Ashbee” penned an entry in *Notes & Queries* and made passing mention of the work.

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21 Ashbee’s erotic bibliography was, like many of the books within its pages, was ‘privately printed’ and under the pseudonym Pisanus Fraxi. Ashbee was known, however, to casually promote the reference work by mentioning it in *Notes & Queries*. The first instance occurring in the 26 May 1877 edition of N&Q in which “H.S.A” writes to note he has found the first volume of the bibliography useful in finding information on editions of the parodic “Essay on Women.”
No such entries are found in *Notes* for the third volume, *Catena Librorum Tacendorum*, in 1885. Perhaps by this time Ashbee’s notoriety had been firmly established amongst London’s sex book literati.

I offer Ashbee’s well-documented name play and obfuscation as a model for Lazenby’s own practices. Ashbee, in the course of providing one of the most useful reference works on sex books in the form of his extensive bibliography, also documented the culture in which people in the field could hide in plain sight by carefully exploiting mainstream publications to communicate and market to potential customers. Ashbee’s use of various names in *Notes & Queries*—Fraxinus, Apis, H.S.A., and H.S. Ashbee—was playful and, perhaps, foolhardy, though Ashbee managed to steer clear of obscenity laws and authorities. What Ashbee’s association with sex books indicates is that he was not only an avid collector of sex books but also likely well-connected with the print culture that produced sex books in London and elsewhere. Ashbee (as Fraxi) makes it clear in his bibliography that the entries are not to be confused with a catalogue of his personal library, but that he has indeed clapped eyes on every title given a bibliographical entry, warning that “imagination leads to lies in bibliography” (Fraxi, *Catena* 488). In order not to tell lies in his entries, Ashbee is indicating to readers that he had access to many more sex books than he held personally and that leads to much speculation about just who his bibliophilic acquaintances were. Of course we can point to Ashbee’s notes referring to Lazenby/Cameron but it is difficult to establish a reliable and thorough narrative about Lazenby based on these fleeting references. Ashbee is known to have entertained other bibliophiles but his acquaintance with Lazenby is most important to this dissertation’s new insights on the mystery of Lazenby as well as the sex book trade in general. Rather, the confluence of court records, news reports, and census information has given a more robust picture of who exactly William Lazenby was. Lazenby’s identity is cemented in the 1886 Central Criminal Court’s prisoner’s list for 1886 which lists under Duncan Cameron’s prosecution, the aliases and previous prosecutions
of William Lazenby (‘Central Criminal Court’). This evidence, paired with Lazenby’s known addresses and cross-referenced with census records, portrays William Lazenby as a family man from Ipswich, Suffolk who lived mostly in Lambeth and conducted his business in London from at least 1870 until his final conviction in 1886.

William Lazenby was a person who existed and produced a significant number of sex books during the 1870s and 1880s. He did not exist in a vacuum, however, and this is borne out in the fact that many of the titles linked to him were collaboratively produced. A great deal of the work published by Lazenby’s predecessor, William Dugdale, in the 1860s and earlier is known to have been collaborative and Lazenby’s output is no different. Lazenby was a slippery character who used pseudonyms—Henry Ashby and Duncan Cameron, among many others—to obfuscate his identity and, presumably, to protect his family. Lazenby’s predecessor, William Dugdale, on the other hand, had a public reputation as a roguish seller of obscene materials. Dugdale, in addition to employing his extended family to run his businesses on Holywell Street while he was imprisoned, took legal action against the Society for the Suppression of Vice, suing in “an extraordinary case” an SSV agent for “unlawfully entering his dwelling-house with seven policemen…and forcibly taking away divers [materials]” (“Court of Exchequer”). Dugdale was such a legal gadfly, in fact, that he was a major catalyst for Lord Campbell passing the Obscene Publications Act that made such seizures commonplace in obscenity investigations. In short, there is no question about Dugdale’s identity; he is well documented. Besides the identity issues surrounding Lazenby, many of the original texts he issued came from three well established coteries known to have been producing sex books for Dugdale, “one of the most prolific publishers of filthy books” until his death in 1868, according to Fraxi (Index 127). The principal coteries were headed by Richard Monckton-Milnes (who later became Lord Houghton), explorer and arabophile Richard Burton, and James Campbell Reddie, who had acted as a go-between for Dugdale and various writers. What is significant about all these
men and many of their known acquaintances is that they were public men involved through various above board clubs such as the Anthropological Society of London. Selected members would meet semi-secretly, in an offshoot of the Society, under the name “Cannibal Club” (Mendes 9). The Cannibal Club was likely the origin of much collaborative sex book writing. Members of the club produced texts under the guise of, yet removed from, anthropological science that created an “unbroken tradition of phallic worship that tied English life to the ancient world…and wrote the phallus in grand symbolic design across the world so that everyone worshiped from below” (Sigel, Governing 73-74), a technique used in the group’s anthropological writings that is also evident in many sex books from the period.

The “unbroken tradition of phallic worship” espoused by the Anthropological Society and the Cannibal Club were likely different in scope and origin. In an 1870 presentation to the Society on the topic, Hodder Westropp made clear the distinction between factions of phallic worship: indecent ideas attached to the phallic symbol were, though it seems a paradox to say so, the result of a more advanced civilization verging towards its decline, as we have evidence at Rome and Pompeii…we must carefully distinguish among these phallic representations, a religious side, and a purely licentious side. (48)

The sex book trope of phallic worship that was especially prevalent amongst Lazenby’s works was firmly rooted in the latter, “purely licentious,” camp (48). Perhaps the most striking example of this “licentiousness” can be found in Lazenby’s Letters from Laura and Eve line, which features a Priapic temple and ceremony for the mock-marriages of its titular characters, complete with “splendid silver-gilt candlesticks…represent[ing] the emblem of our worship a huge priapus, set straight up as we like to see them in life, the bases being composed of finely-moulded testicles” and “two beautifully-carved effigies of Priapus, with monstrous pricks” (Letters 6-7). That “Priapi abounded in every decoration” is indicative not only of the direction the story eventually takes but also acts as an
anthropological quasi-religious justification for the events taking place at the mock-marriage ceremony, and everything that comes after (Letters 12). The mock-marriage ceremony is an allusion to the Boulton and Park case in which evidence was read stating that Stella (Boulton) and Lord Arthur Clinton had taken part in such a ceremony; the baroque penile wedding ceremony in Letters is without doubt a complete fabrication, though likely inspired by clubs and similar ceremonies in the early nineteenth century ‘molly houses’ where “the nuptials celebrated therein generally involved only the most temporary bonds of intimacy and seldom lasted longer than the ‘Wedding Night’” (Norton 100).

Letters takes creative license with the much less ostentatious molly weddings which is especially significant because the ceremony taking place is for two couples comprised of titled men—Lords Arthur and Rasper—marrying their brides Laura and Eveline, respectively, who self-identify as ‘hermaphrodites.’ The hermaphroditic self-identification further links the English narrative to the ancient past; the justification that “Hermaphrodites of ancient times were really the types of this delicious double sexuality which the passive Sodomite enjoys” demonstrates the writer’s—speaking through the narrator, Eveline—engagement with contemporary debates within the Anthropological Society (and surely the Cannibal Club) that tied “English life to the ancient world” not only in terms of phallicism but other arenas of sexuality as well (Letters 82-83). The events in Letters are built upon the foundation laid successfully by Sins of the Cities of the Plain and its successful tie-in with the Boulton and Park scandal. While not sharing a great deal of consistency with its source text outside of character names, Letters utilizes Sadeian pleasure principles to ramp

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22 ‘Sadeian’ refers to what the Marquis de Sade described as the “delights of Sodom” in Philosophy in the Boudoir. Specifically, “To fuck women in the rear is but the first stage of buggery; Nature wishes that men should practice this fancy with men above all” (Sade 56 - 57). In Letters this becomes interpreted as “delicious and exquisite [pleasure] beyond the power of words to express…the act of giving up and changing one’s sex and becoming a woman, to be the mistress of a man, who treats you exactly as a girl” (81 - 82)
up the events until they become almost parodic, making the ‘mock’ in mock-marriage a key feature that might today be called ‘camp.’

Texts dealing in phalicism and phallic worship, inversion (homosexuality), and even tribadism (lesbianism) were a means to say what could not be said openly for marginalized groups. Even with the probity of the Anthropological Society it was not socially acceptable to openly defend ‘perversion’ with deference to the ancients or ‘savages.’ This made such works necessarily niche publications. It stands to reason that those who would produce and publish such works would be coteries of men already initiated into the scenes depicted. The number of Lazenby’s publications suspected of being written in whole or in part by him is astonishing. Of the fifty or so titles that are reasonably assured of being Lazenby publications, about sixteen are thought be the product of his own pen, including major works in his periodicals and some novels, most notably Letters from Laura and Eveline (1883) and the flagellation narrative Curiosities of Flagellation (1875).\(^{23}\) Drops in Lazenby’s production and publication appear to coincide with his imprisonments. While there is a conspicuous absence of material about Lazenby after his conviction in 1886, his name was still familiar to authorities more than ten years later. A warrant issued in 1897 by the Home Office on another matter stated that “‘Lazenby is a man who is well known…as one of the most inveterate dealers in indecent wares in London’” and provides a fertile clue that Lazenby may well have still been in the trade under a different, unknown, identity (qtd. in Colligan Publishers 31).

Also worthy of mention is the completely unremarkable coverage of Lazenby during his trials in 1871, 1876, and 1886. It is no surprise that Lazenby would not have been treated like a major figure in the sex book trade in the early or mid 1870s. After all, there was plenty of competition at this time and his most well known works had yet to be published. The 1886 trial garnered the most media coverage, though it was certainly not the spectacle and scandal of the

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\(^{23}\) I am, again, indebted to the work of Pisanus Fraxi and Peter Mendes in determining the output of Lazenby’s publishing career.
Boulton and Park or Cleveland Street trials. There was, of course, little to sensationalize. Lazenby was a dealer in lewd materials rather than an active member of any significantly scandalous sexual subculture, so far as the courts were concerned. To wit, he is described in 1886 as a “respectable looking old man” and, although he was a thrice-convicted criminal, his business no doubt had and maintained the appearance of respectability, on account of its likely clientele (“Objectionable” 3). Lazenby, the respectable looking old man, catered necessarily to wealthy individuals, considering that many of the titles in his catalogue ran between four and six guineas apiece. It is likely he could pass by unnoticed in Victorian society, just a man going about his business. His crimes certainly would have been ‘immoral,’ though not showy, as in the cases of Boulton and Park or Jack Saul. Lazenby, like Henry Spencer Ashbee, likely had the advantages afforded with successfully living a double life.

Describing himself as a “commercial traveller” after his arrest in 1871 for selling obscene photographs to an undercover detective in a sting operation, Lazenby offered that he had merely been “paying a visit to the real delinquent for whose actions he was in no way answerable” (“Wholesale” 4). The jury in his trial, unmoved by his wrong place/wrong time defence, found him guilty and the magistrate lamented the “frightful pollution of young persons’ minds which [his] trade produced in schools and private families” (“Henry Ashby” 11). The magistrate’s comments show the 1868 definition of obscenity as “that which tended to deprave or corrupt” in action (qtd. in Cohen 103). The berating language, however harsh, used by judges handing down sentences to Lazenby pales in comparison to the bestial and subhuman rhetoric used to lecture Jack Saul or Boulton and Park. Lazenby was never referred to as “wretched” or a “creature” hell-bent on luring good men (and perhaps women) into unnatural dalliances. Lazenby’s public life, based on census information, included a wife, children, and occupation as a bookseller. His private life was as a well

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24 £4.4s to £6.6s
connected supplier of illegal goods who likely counted among his acquaintances and business partners some of the more respectable members of Victorian society, his contemporaries and namesakes Charles Duncan Cameron and Henry Spencer Ashbee to name just two. Of the thousands of books, photos, and other materials seized from Lazenby during the course of his three known trials, it seems that prosecutors did not attempt to conflate the subject matter of the texts he dealt in with the person who stood accused before them. No mention is ever made in the trials of Lazenby authoring obscene texts. As far as authorities knew he was simply their purveyor. Authorial intent would not be put on trial until 1895 when Oscar Wilde took the stand to defend his writing as well as his character. Wilde’s ‘sodomitical’ texts would elevate “tending to deprave or corrupt” from theory to practice.

**The Wilde Trials**

During the course of Wilde’s first trial, in which he accused the Marquess of Queensberry of issuing an obscene libel against him in the form of a calling card indicating Wilde had been a “ponce and somdomite [sic]” (Holland 4) the Queensberry defence turned the question to whether Wilde’s writing “corrupted and debauched the morals” of divers young men (Holland 291). In the pre-trial report the defence laid out the argument that Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and a short story, not written by Wilde, but appearing in the same volume as a list of his epigrams in the Oxford undergraduate magazine *The Chameleon*, “The Priest and the Acolyte…encouraged unnatural vice” (Holland 291). Queensberry’s attorney, Edward Carson, inconspicuously applied the definition of obscenity set by *R. v. Hicklin* to attack Wilde’s character and prove that *Dorian Gray* was indeed an obscene work that portrayed an older man corrupting the morals of a younger man; the next part of his strategy was to conflate the author with his work and to suggest that “only a person with

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25 Translated from the Marquess of Queensberry’s poorly spelled language into English, the card reads “posing sodomite.”
intimate knowledge of these practices would write about them” and that, furthermore, with this intimate knowledge Wilde would have no grounds to defend against Queensberry’s alleged libel (Stern 8). Wilde’s lawyer called the defence’s strategy of establishing *Dorian Gray*—a novel which had been freely available in libraries and book stalls for five years previous to the trial—to be obscene and then using it to attack that writer’s persona and actions a “very extraordinary method of attack” (Holland 41). The accusations levelled against Wilde’s writing and its proximity to ‘immoral’ works such as “The Priest and the Acolyte” were meant to have the effect that they would go some way to proving the defence’s case that he not only wrote books that had the *tendency* to corrupt, but that his writing was a direct result of an immoral life spent entertaining young men—of classes well below his station—which informed his writing, especially *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Using *Dorian Gray* as part of a strategy to prove Wilde had been posing as a sodomite brings together elements of the cases discussed previously. In the Boulton and Park trial, the burden of proof and question of intent was similar— the Crown’s challenge was to prove that the pair had been conspiring to commit sodomy by dressing as women and playing at mock-marriage—in short, the pair were given the identity, even if not explicitly named, of sodomites based on an intent, or conspiracy, to commit the act and entice or lure others into doing the same. Though the pair were acquitted, the Boulton and Park trial was a character assassination similar to Wilde’s, with the prosecution hoping to prove that the two were sexually deviant, without any persuasive physical or eyewitness evidence. Similarly, Jack Saul, though never tried for his admitted part in the Cleveland Street affair, was judged by the court of public opinion on his actions as a “professional sodomite.” In William Lazenby’s trials he was accused of having dealt in material—textual and photographic—that was judged to have the “tendency to corrupt” morals. Only Lazenby’s business practices and wares—immoral though they may have been judged—not his body or personal affairs were on trial.
Lazenby had the luxury of an unremarkable appearance and presentable heteronormativity on his side; he was an ostensibly respectable businessman in a less-than-respectable trade, according to the law. Lazenby was never himself accused of sexual deviancy, though he remained a threat to public morals and indeed was accused of corrupting “young persons’ minds” and at least one specific young man (“Henry Ashby” 11). In his 1876 trial Lazenby was indicted for “unlawfully endeavour[ing] to incite” one Charles Harris to “sell certain lewd and obscene books” (“Indecent Publications” 3). It was a foregone conclusion in all of Lazenby’s trials that the materials he was accused of selling were, under the Hicklin ruling, ‘obscene.’ However, unlike in Wilde’s trial, the prosecution never attempted to equate the subject matter of those publications with Lazenby’s body or his actions and sexual identity, only his business. Ruining Lazenby’s character would have proved a moot endeavour in these trials, since the “respectable looking” Lazenby had no fame, no cachet, and, perhaps most importantly, his immoral wares did not have their origins in his mind, character, or habits as far as authorities were aware. It is possible that Lazenby’s trials would have elicited a stronger public response had Lazenby himself been considered the inspiration for the content of the books he sold, rather than merely their purveyor and corrupter by proxy. In the eyes of obscenity laws, the police, prosecution, and magistrates’ jobs were done by indicting Lazenby and destroying the materials seized in his premises. The court Recorder in Lazenby’s 1886 trial even went so far as “mentioning a recommendation…highly commending the conduct” of law enforcement in the case (“Donald Cameron” 12).

Even though these three trials were reported on and, at least in the cases of Boulton and Park and Jack Saul, highly sensationalized, they did not contain the distinction of a famous author being tried on what can be summarized only as a perfect culmination of charges. With Wilde the qualities of scandal, fame, and prurience merged to make his case one of the most famous in British history overall but, more importantly, his trials were cumulative. Wilde’s case was not merely
concerned with obscenity or immoral behaviour, it was a combination. Because his writing was not explicitly obscene, a case had to be made that his work, behaviour, and, by extension, Wilde himself, had the “tendency to deprave and corrupt.” The literary evidence against Wilde had dissipated by the time of his third trial, when he stood accused of gross indecency, it was nevertheless “a palimpsest in the prosecution’s cache of evidence” and he was found guilty and sentenced to two years’ hard labour (Stern 6). The “palimpsest” of literary evidence against Wilde marked the culmination in the policing of obscene texts from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. Wilde’s associations with young men and the perceived nature of Dorian Gray’s obscenity proved to be enough to convict him. Wilde’s home was never raided (unless one counts, of course, the public auctioning of his possessions at his house in Tite Street during his third trial) nor were his belongings seized in any attempt to prove his guilt on the page. Rather, Wilde’s writings were, for the most part, freely available to the public and carried his name on the title page. Contrary to people like Lazenby, Wilde was a shameless self-promoter and attached his name and reputation prominently to his own work, never shying away from the spotlight and, even if he had, he would have been difficult to miss.

Wilde’s libel trial against the Marquess of Queensberry ended with Wilde’s counsel interrupting the defence’s opening remarks to accept that Queensbury was not guilty of libel. The reason for this is clear from the trial transcript: Queensberry’s counsel had prepared a docket of young men who would testify not to Wilde’s ‘posing’ as a sodomite, but rather his acting as one. After having presented the opinion that characters and events in Dorian Gray were inspired and informed by Wilde’s own sodomitical practices, the defence would not have had a hard time going one step beyond and removing doubt that Wilde had acted in the manner they said he did. The caveat that came with the verdict of not guilty for Queensberry was “that the [alleged libel was] true in fact and that the publication was for the public benefit” (Holland 282). The turn of phrase “for the public benefit” was, of course, in reference to the accusation that Wilde was a posing sodomite
and, now that the verdict had been returned ‘not guilty,’ it would be a matter of record that members of the public were duly informed of the danger posed by Oscar Wilde and, it followed, his writing.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has outlined the case for the Victorian sex book being a site of erotic cultural memory and a few of the personages that were a part of the sex book’s print culture, willingly or otherwise. William Lazenby was jailed no fewer than three times for his role in selling and warehousing obscene writings and materials; his influence on the sex book trade in Britain was remarkable, his name still able to put authorities tasked with intercepting obscenity across the United Kingdom’s borders on alert almost ten years after his last known whereabouts. Even if Lazenby were dead in 1897, when the warrant bearing his name was issued, his inclusion and the statement—written, of course, in the present tense—that he “‘is a man who is well known…as one of the most inveterate dealers in indecent wares in London’” it is a fitting legacy for the man who had made a career of capitalizing on scandalous and (in)famous names (qtd. in Colligan, *Publisher's* 31). A close study of William Lazenby shows that, while the question of his true identity is not unimportant, his ability to exploit erotic cultural memory through his publications left an indelible mark on the print culture of sex books in the Victorian period.

Whether it was in recreating the lost pleasures of the Cremorne Gardens or pornifying and transcending a scandal, Lazenby’s works were engaged with not just the sex book print culture and its associated social networks but Victorian society at large. By publishing and writing a number of works that challenged notions of sexual normativity, Lazenby was not only challenging obscenity laws but, perhaps unwittingly, also giving voice to the emergence of various sexual categories that would not gain acceptance or prominence until the twentieth century. While his own trials and convictions failed to reflect on the broader scope of Lazenby’s work, he is himself not even a
footnote in the history of sexuality; however, by the time Oscar Wilde brought his case against the Marquess of Queensberry it was clear that the cumulative effect of productions like Lazenby’s and an ever-increasing sexually visual culture combined and found a perfect scapegoat in the author of The Picture of Dorian Gray. Wilde did not begin his action against Queensberry in order to defend his writing but was made to defend the question of sin in Dorian Gray, to which he replied, “he who has found the sin has brought it” (Holland 78). Queensberry’s defence had found Wilde’s sin and was prepared to expose it before the trial was brought to a sudden conclusion by the prosecution. It was in that moment that Wilde became exposed and his inexorable downfall began in earnest. Because Wilde was not a sex book writer, he had been caught off guard and instead created a spectacle. Although Lazenby was imprisoned three times for dealing in sex books, he was able to blend back into the fold without much notice and avoided martyrdom because of it. As a personage William Lazenby, integral though he was to the trade in sex books in the late Victorian period, was secondary to the material he dealt in. Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, was the acknowledged creator of materials that, though never explicitly stated in his first trial, were interpreted as having a “tendency to deprave and corrupt,” with the through line being that since Wilde created such works and refused to comment on their morality he himself possessed the same tendency.

Taken as a whole, the people and events in this chapter form a significant part of what I have termed a parallel textual history of Victorian print culture. The reliance on common cultural touchstones and the ambiguity that existed in the space of the erotic allowed the culture to flourish. This chapter has also delineated the space between history and memory to elucidate the ways that Victorian sex books were reliant on the latter category while ultimately contributing to the former. In all, this chapter has highlighted that the stories of people are often elided in recounting histories yet by shifting the focus onto lives, a clearer picture from an unlikely source emerges.
Chapter 2
The Victorian Trade in Pornographic Texts

HOW TEXTS WERE CIRCULATED

When discussing the Victorian sex book trade, there is a tension between notions of the private and the public which underpins the entirety of the discussion. Put simply, sex books were a public medium that could express one's most private thoughts, experiences, or fantasies. This tension lays the groundwork for this chapter and, to an extent, this entire dissertation along with the use of cultural memory. On the progression of Victorian sex and sexuality through the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Miller has written that we are accustomed to considering the inward turn toward questions of sex and sex psychology in literature of [the late Victorian era] as protomodernist…threads of modernism emerge from radical literary discourse at a moment when radical discourse is losing its rhetorical coherence around the issue of class. At this moment the enduring radical working-class discourse of free print and free expression fastened easily to the biopolitical domain of sexuality, now the central arena for censorship activity. (Miller 297)

Implicit in Miller’s observation that censorship battles had shifted from strictly political spheres to the biopolitical by the end of the nineteenth century is the idea that the trade and circulation of sex books was central to the shift. This premise is useful to the purposes of this chapter, as it provides a discursive guide to the lineage of the sex book trade from the Regency period to the end of the nineteenth century and argues that the ostensibly private domain of sex was at once a question of inward feelings but also a site of political agitation by the end of the century. The growth of the sex book trade has been discussed in the previous chapter and this chapter will continue with that line of interrogation by focusing on logistical and geographical concerns of the trade. In presenting an account of the trade throughout the century and the relationships it forged between booksellers and readers, the inherent political tension in the private consumption of a public medium remains an
essential hinge of the discussion.

Circulating sex books in Victorian London meant keeping one step ahead of authorities who, as noted in Chapter 1, were under immense pressure from moral vigilantes like the Society for the Suppression of Vice to keep that which had the “tendency to deprave and corrupt” out of everyone’s possession (qtd. in Cohen 103). Special consideration was given to those populations perceived as most vulnerable by the dictates of British social hierarchies: women, children, and the (largely uneducated) masses. Bookseller Charles Carrington laid bare the claim that he should be sorry to see the day “such Literature, like the daily newspaper, placed within the reach of the ‘Man in the Street’” (“Catalogue of Rare and Curious” n.p.). Examples of the techniques some sex booksellers used to evade authorities are as clever as they are devious. Leonard Smithers—the infamous publisher of *Teleny* as well as decadent authors Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, and Ernest Dowson—prepared for surprise raids on his shop by keeping pornography “in Gladstone bags under the counter…[so] the bags could be quickly taken to the nearest railway station and deposited until it was safe to reclaim them” (Nelson *Letters* 55). Other publishers, such as the mysterious publisher and bookseller discussed in the previous chapter, William Lazenby, kept their stock at numerous addresses in order to avoid losing everything in a raid on one location. Lazenby’s predecessor, William Dugdale, however, was the undisputed master of the sex book stash, running his business at numerous addresses along with members of his family, all of whom made use of numerous London addresses and pseudonyms, creating a kind of sex book hydra over four decades spanning from roughly 1822 until his death in 1868. This chapter is not entirely about texts staying put or hidden, however. It is more about the methods utilized by producers and distributors of sex books to ensure materials reached paying customers. Keeping materials hidden from authorities—while certainly a consideration—was not nearly as important as ensuring their safe arrival to the consumer. The former was merely a pitfall in pursuit of the latter.
This chapter takes into consideration the business practices of a few key players in the sex book trade from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, effectively plotting the growth of the trade alongside mainstream reading materials as the century progressed while markets for printed materials boomed as printing technology advanced, prices dropped, literacy increased, and taxes on paper and stamps were abolished. The cost of books by the end of the century was substantially reduced in large part due to “mechanization of the process of manufacture…improved quality of paper leading to less wastage” and the availability of “poorer quality papers which cost less,” which in turn made books more commonplace and available to many (Weedon 67). By the 1890s, for instance, the market for books had grown to such an extent that publishers had to begin catering to a variety of readerships who bought, at the low end of the market, cheaply-produced pamphlets and novels, to the higher end consumer and collector for whom éditions de luxe were produced. More books meant that “the exclusivity of book ownership was eroded” and the pricing of books tended to reflect class structures keeping “certain price formats,” especially those priced in pounds sterling or guineas,26 “beyond the pocket of the lower classes” (160). With book ownership becoming more common from mid-century, the next section of this chapter illustrates a ludic exchange between a sex book consumer and a catalogue offering titles for sale; this is considered in light of the shopping habits of the emerging middle classes in Britain at the time. Books as objects of desire coincided with the Revival of Print movement in the 1890s and had a substantial effect on the sex book trade. As extensive republication of older works in new deluxe formats and new “categories of being” such as homosexual and transgender persons concurrently made their way into the pages of sex books, these works were coveted even more by collectors (Sigel 151).

The effects of the geography of Victorian London on the trade and relationships between booksellers and consumers will reveal the ways in which the epicentre of the trade in Holywell

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26 One guinea was equal to one pound one shilling and was indicative of an upper class pricing format.
Street—a bastion of old London adjacent to one of the modern metropolis’ busiest and most important thoroughfares and, in the eyes of many morally-panicked reformers, a major blight in the city—created a haven for pornographers and their customers. Holywell Street’s status as a place to find rare and antiquarian volumes aided in protecting those selling sex books. The street, I argue, became something of a patsy in the sex book trade. While the street was certainly ground zero for many aspects of the trade, it was also a relatively easy target because of its visibility and medieval approach to marketing, with its ground level shops’ wares spilling out of the confines of the bookshelves inside and out onto the thoroughfare, as if in mockery of the modern and orderly retail shops all over London that were increasingly patronized by the newly emerging middle classes.

Holywell Street, situated near the Strand, was a congestion point in an ever-expanding metropolis. The street was a vestige of an older London, and its sordid history as a site of disreputable commerce lingered throughout the nineteenth century. The holy spring and pilgrimage site that gave the street its name had long since been covered over and it was better known, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a Jewish ghetto housing textile merchants and later, of course, books. In a material sense, the street evolved from a place of textile to textual trade. Or, as some reformers would have contended, rags to rags.

A fictionalized scenario in a short story by twentieth-century author Roald Dahl gives an account of a shady second-hand bookseller that is a good approximation of the Victorian trade in sex books. In “The Bookseller” a swindling London book dealer, William Buggage, an unscrupulous Cockney who reads like an exaggerated pastiche of roguish Victorian dealers like William Lazenby, his predecessor William Dugdale, or successor Leonard Smithers, ostensibly makes his living dealing in rare books in Charing Cross Road, just “up from Trafalgar Square” (Dahl 711). Buggage’s shop, however, contains “not a single valuable first edition” (Dahl 713). Instead, his business consists of perusing obituaries in The Times and Daily Telegraph and correlating the names of recently deceased
aristocrats and wealthy gentlemen with the *Who's Who*. Upon confirming the status of his unwitting, and now deceased, ‘patrons’ Buggage sends falsified invoices to grieving widows requesting the deceased’s payment for “very rare…and rather costly” titles ‘provided’ prior to the gentleman’s death (Dahl 724). Buggage generally has little trouble collecting on overdue accounts, with cheques for transactions with dead men who had never so much as heard of William Buggage silently and promptly settling non-existent accounts. Buggage’s bogus invoices list mostly fictional titles such as “*Three Naughty Nuns*” and “*How to Pleasure Young Girls When You Are Over Sixty*, private printing from Paris” that are reminiscent of those readily available from Victorian catalogues such as Ward’s of Holywell Street (Dahl 724). Titles like *Private Scenes in a Nunnery* and *Seduction Unveiled*, “a complete exposure of the various artful methods of seducing young ladies” grace the pages of Ward’s catalogue, calling to mind those fictional titles used in Dahl’s story (Ward’s 1-6). One book that is something of a pornographic classic “*Love in Furs* by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch” —the etymological namesake of the word ‘masochism’—is listed in one of Buggage’s victim’s bills, albeit incorrectly titled (Dahl 724). The book’s more accurate title is *Venus in Furs*. The books listed by Buggage in his spurious receipts are not actual titles of pornographic texts; instead, they suit his blackmailing purposes as pornographic titles because they are plausible-sounding simulacra.

The scenario created by Dahl is not so different from the Victorian pornography trade. The story is contemporary to the late twentieth century but the anxieties around ruined social standing and reputations because of one’s ostensible reading habits echo the very real threat of social, not to mention ostensibly moral, ruin associated with the collecting and trade of sex books in the Victorian era. Dahl’s story is certainly a satire on the censorship that still existed in the twentieth century—the story first appearing in the January 1987 issue of *Playboy*, a publication sympathetic to censorship.

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27 *Who's Who* is an annual guide first published in 1849 listing biographical details of important people around the world.
28 Image 2.9
struggles—though the focus of ire in the tale is not necessarily the books themselves. Rather, the immorality of the shady book dealer who threatens respectable men’s characters through the shame associated with a taste for ‘dirty’ books eventually catches up with him when he is caught defrauding the widow of a blind man. The books he ‘sells’ are themselves of little consequence even though some are labelled “banned in U.K.” (Dahl 724). When arrested by the “Serious Crimes Division, Scotland Yard” no mention is made of the precarious legality or morality of the books in question (Dahl 728). By threatening to name and shame respectable gentlemen, William Buggage utilizes a neo-Victorian form of sexual blackmail. In the Victorian context, Judith Walkowitz has noted that the “volubility [of sexuality] led to the special privileging of sexuality as the core of a private identity, which was dangerous when made public,” which is central to what Buggage exploits in Dahl’s story (Walkowitz 8-9). It is conceivable that some enterprising Victorian confidence man could have easily given these consumers the Buggage treatment for, as nineteenth-century journalist W.H. Davenport Adams remarked: “It is said that a man or woman may be known by the company he or she keeps; a truer index to character is the books they read” (qtd. in Flint 253). This chapter outlines the circulation of sex books in Victorian London and the people who gave life to the sex book print culture of the late nineteenth century.

Consumers

Although the trade in clandestinely produced and illegal texts in London centered around Holywell Street, consumers had more than one way of obtaining the books they sought. A few mid-Victorian sex book catalogues with marginalia by “J.B. Murdoch, Esq” show one way in which consumers could interact with catalogues of sex books and other clandestine material (Ward’s n.p.). Significantly, it appears John Burn Murdoch (born ca. 1822), the man whose marginalia appear on the catalogues in question, was an Edinburgensian advocate and philanthropist who donated funds to the Church of Scotland’s Education Scheme (Home and Foreign 259) in addition to books to the
Mitchell Library in Glasgow (Report 24). According to Scotland census information on Murdoch from 1861 to 1901 he was a respectable, married father of five. Murdoch managed to lead lives in two distinct worlds in a way we have only thus far seen from the perspective of those on the retail and publishing side of the trade in sex books, such as Henry Spencer Ashbee and William Lazenby. Murdoch’s inscriptions in the margins of the catalogues provide invaluable context [for…?]. By inscribing his name across the tops of these catalogues, Murdoch has unwittingly opened the way for a more in-depth analysis of relationships between the sex book purveyor and consumer. I would be remiss to not state from the outset that the distinct possibility exists that these catalogues were not sent to, owned by, or inscribed by J.B. Murdoch, esq. Placing his name at the top of catalogues containing such titles as Onanism Unveiled, Amorous Sites of London, or The Utility of Flagellation was a risky move and, considering Murdoch’s upstanding reputation and position, it is not outside the realm of plausibility that these materials could have easily been used to blackmail him. This chapter proceeds on the assumption that these catalogues were indeed the property of John Burn Murdoch, advocate, and that he is one and the same with the hand that inscribed their pages.29

One such catalogue, issued by Strand bookseller William Ward, depicts Cupid and Psyche, the former pulling a bed sheet from the latter, to reveal her naked form as well as the title “Bachelor’s Gallery of French & English Choice Facetiae, 67 Strand” (Ward’s n.p.).30 William Ward’s shop at 67 Strand was situated not far from Holywell Street and lay a short distance to the west near Waterloo Bridge.31 Murdoch has provided light-hearted commentary on what a “divine” scene this is and his fantasy of being a part of it. This initial inscription by Murdoch is simply a bit of play, although it reveals at least one variety of relationship between the sex book and its end user. The commonly-used euphemism to describe a certain types of sex books, ‘facetiae,’ has its origins in the

29 These catalogues are housed in the Lilley Library at the Indiana University along with many other items comprising the “London Low Life” collection.
30 Image 2.9
31 Image 2.14
Latin word for jest; the word facetiae is itself doubly descriptive for the content of many sex books—many, especially periodicals, contained bawdy stories and poems—and also does work in helping describe the relationship between booksellers and consumers. Murdoch’s playful marginalia in the catalogues, such as his additions to illustrated scenes and translations of certain French words, are one indication of the kind of interplay between the serious business of obscenity and its lighter side as a form of entertainment. Murdoch’s other marginalia largely concern price comparisons amongst booksellers, but this cover image indicates and expands on the playfulness already present in the sex book trade at the professional level. The ways in which purveyors and producers of pornography were forced to hide their identities and skirt the law by using pseudonyms and false information prompted otherwise respectable men like Henry Spencer Ashbee to take the chance of risking exposure by dropping hints in public forums such as Notes & Queries about his real identity.

In examining Murdoch’s commentary closely over the course of a few catalogues we can draw some conclusions about consumer experiences in the sex book trade and how booksellers and publishers attempted to cultivate and curate a certain type of experience for customers. Sellers of sex books operated in, of course, the same market as other booksellers and were cautious about the type of language used in their catalogues, especially if the shop’s name and address were included. Customers, of course, knew what to look out for when spying sex book catalogues.

In the first pages of Ward’s catalogue Murdoch has immediately unveiled important facts about the world of booksellers. Atop the page headed “Rare and Curious Works” Murdoch has appended “the prices written here [in Murdoch’s hand] are the ones charged by H. Smith 37 Holywell St. Strand, or W. Johns 35 Holywell St.” (Ward’s 1) seemingly without realizing that Ward’s competitors, H. Smith and W. Johns, were aliases used by William Dugdale (1800 - 1868) and his son William John Dugdale (1824 - ?). It is a reasonable assertion that Murdoch was unaware that

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32 Image 2.9
these names referred to essentially the same person by glancing toward the back of the catalogue on
the page advertising “French Letters.”

Savvy shopper that he was, Mr. Murdoch noted that Ward’s advertised graduated pricing of “12s, 15s, and...21s per dozen” for “these invaluable articles” was much higher than “W. Dugdale’s best quality 6[s]/dozen” (Ward’s 16). In looking at Murdoch’s annotations in this particular catalogue it becomes clear quickly that ‘H. Smith’ (William Dugdale) offered consistently lower prices than William Ward, generally offering the consumer a 1s or 2s per title saving. The editions on offer in Ward’s catalogue, however, were neither exquisite nor éditions de luxe and, it stands to reason, that among its recipients would be those who, like Mr. Murdoch, were conscious of pricing in the market and seemingly not averse to shopping around for a decent price. A picture of the Victorian sex book marketplace begins to emerge with the realization that the vast majority of the titles in Ward’s catalogue were pamphlets and magazines selling for under £1. In comparison, titles published and marketed to bibliophiles and collectors in a higher income category routinely cost in excess of £2.2s—that is, 2 guineas and up, a price point more indicative of status. Costlier sex books were, according to the Victorian bibliographer Speculator Morum “generally, if not always, designed for the higher, or at all events the richer, classes of society” and were seldom made available to those in the lower strata of society (Morum xix). That is not to say that Ward’s and Dugdale’s customers were not well off by Victorian standards. Lisa Sigel has pointed out that “any money spent on pornography needed to be money that could be easily written off as a loss” because there was no guarantee the customer shopping by catalogue would ever receive his goods on

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33 Condoms made of sheepskin which, perhaps not so oddly, make frequent appearances in pornographic texts.
34 Image 2.10
35 Even though William Dugdale published a pamphlet entitled The Exquisite, his wares were not exactly fitting of that particular adjective.
account of authorities’ cracking down on mail order pornography from mid-century onward (Sigel 89).

More telling are Murdoch’s annotations in another contemporary catalogue, one likely issued by Dugdale himself. The catalogue as it stands contains no identifying information and was likely originally included as an insert in the back of another catalogue or a book purchased from Dugdale. The title reads simply “A Select Catalogue of Books; Facetious and Amorous” and gives the instruction that the texts advertised may be obtained where the purchaser obtained the catalogue itself (Select). Annotations on the copy in question look as though they are in Murdoch’s hand. What stands out when reading over the catalogue is the large number of works in French whose key words Murdoch has taken pains to translate. The words Murdoch chose to translate are invariably of a theme—“bordel” (brothel), “le pucelage” (maidenhead), “la pudeur” (chastity), “la jouissance” (sexual enjoyment), to name just a few—but perhaps the most interesting bit of marginalia in the entire catalogue is an image drawn by Murdoch. Roughly three-quarters down the bottom of the final page of the catalogue in the right-hand margin, next to the French title “Godemiche [sic]”—which, in English, translates as ‘dildo complete with scrotum’—Murdoch has provided his rendering of the said implement (Select). This small punctuation, which I am calling a phallicule, when paired with the other annotations in the catalogues, is an intriguing textual clue into the relationship some consumers had with pornography. In the case of Murdoch, for instance, his annotations point to a consumer with specific tastes having fun whilst catalogue shopping: not unlike the leisure shopping, for instance around Piccadilly, that gained popularity in the Victorian period.

Catalogues were a means of obtaining pornographic materials that represented an entire network of open yet surreptitious trading; a riskily public destination for a private hobby. For every catalogue and prospectus issued there was necessarily a brick-and-mortar building containing the

37 Image 2.12
38 image 2.11
people issuing said materials and dealing publicly or semi-publicly, though carefully. Some of these dealers, such as Leonard Smithers, William Dugdale, and William Lazenby, and the means they devised to evade detection and skirt the law will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Catalogue shopping offered ostensible protections to consumers in terms of choice; the choice, namely, between a somewhat risky in-person appearance at a brick-and-mortar shop to buy pornography or sending payment through the post. Involvement with or handling sex books immediately placed the consumer within the realm of illegal commerce. To be vulnerable both socially and legally by keeping a collection of sex books was a risk many Victorian men seemed willing to take. Leonard Smithers is documented as having purchased collections of sex books from estates at the request of grieving family members worried that a man’s reputation would be tarnished should it be found out he kept such books in his collection. In the case of a High Court judge whose widow found “his large library of erotic books” she immediately “sent for Smithers to take them away” (Nelson 49). Smithers promptly collected the library’s contents, in a sense doubling his profits as he had provided the judge with many of the books in the first place.

While shopping for sex books from a catalogue did not pose the same risks to men as doing so in public might have, I suggest that the act of receiving, interacting with such books, and ordering them from a catalogue represented a type of vulnerability for men. The vulnerability of shopping for sex books was done on men’s terms—control over producing, printing, and procuring sex books was the domain of well-to-do men catering for other well-to-do men—unlike the vulnerability experienced by women who were beginning to enter the public economy as leisure shoppers. The wares offered in the catalogues capitalized on the thrill of forbidden knowledge and this was, at least partly, by the design of booksellers. Shopping via catalogue was not the same as in-person shopping in terms of risk-taking behaviour; it offered consumers a way of circumventing geographical and bodily dangers while remaining titillating enough through perceived exclusivity and coded
language—‘curious,’ ‘rare,’ ‘facetious,’ for example—that may have contributed to the thrill whilst the risk it added was negligible. Indulgence with mitigated, yet real, consequences would have been an attractive selling feature for catalogue shoppers.

As we have seen thus far with Murdoch, his annotations provide important extratextual context to the listings that are arranged in an orderly fashion. Dugdale’s catalogue is a straightforward affair that lists twenty five, mostly English, titles on the recto of its single page. The verso of the sheet offers descriptions of “A Catalogue of French Prints” and “Petite Bibliotheque [sic] Joyeuse,” a list of amorous titles in French. Ward’s catalogue features a more complex organizational structure, being a catalogue of sixteen pages plus covers. In addition to “Important Medical Works”—‘medical’ only in the loosest sense, as these works are mostly out-dated instructional sex guides and carefully-worded descriptions of other kinds of sex books—the catalogue features all manner of “Rare and Curious Works,” “Gentlemen’s Select Songs,” “French Plates,” and the aforementioned “French Letters” (condoms), all at a dearer price than Dugdale, as Murdoch reminds us (Ward’s 1-16). The orderliness of the catalogues in question is an emulation of the way the catalogues’ publishers likely envisioned their products being consumed: neatly and succinctly so as to allow an imagined ideal consumer/collector to find what he needed easily and promptly place an order by remittance in the soonest possible post. For comparison’s sake I have provided a page from a ‘respectable’ book publisher’s catalogue as a baseline example of the kind of model that those in the sex book trade were emulating when producing catalogues. The catalogue of Thomas Thorp is similar in design to Dugdale’s in that it presents a simple listing by title or, in some cases, by author. Thorp’s catalogue, which runs to twenty-nine pages, lists mostly travel, religious, and literary texts along with some scientific texts (on physiognomy, for instance). Although the catalogue’s description uses the phrase “curious books,” a phrase commonly used in sex book

39 Image 2.13
40 Image 2.12
catalogues, there is no evidence that it is being used euphemistically but rather as a catchall for
difficult to classify volumes. There is nothing remarkable in the construction of Thorp’s catalogue,
and that is precisely the point. It is a dry rehearsal of information necessary to potential customers
that, on glancing, would not elicit any reaction from a viewer uninterested in “Books, Ancient and
Modern.” With the exception of sex booksellers’ catalogues that included images to catch readers’
attention, the idea behind most sex book catalogues would be to not draw undue attention from
unwanted eyes.\footnote{Image 2.9}

The internal organization and professional look of the catalogues cannot be overlooked in
terms of the booksellers’ own interests in portraying a semblance of legitimacy. What Murdoch
shows us, however, is a shrewd consumer with specific tastes in reading material treating the
catalogue jovially and annotating it while it entertained and informed him, providing an important
interpretation of the catalogue itself. The catalogue is thus transformed from an orderly reference
guide into a ludic text. The publisher himself has, of course, facilitated the consumer’s foray into
playful engagement with the catalogues by using the obfuscating vernacular of the pornography
trade and labelling his wares “Facetious and Amorous” (\textit{Select} n.p.) out of necessity; the language
used by pornographic booksellers and advertisers had to be carefully chosen in order to continue the
facade of respectability which would, in turn, afford them plausible deniability should authorities get
hold of catalogues and attempt to prosecute.

A later example of a sex book catalogue shows the procedures for making catalogues had
not changed in the roughly half century since Ward’s and Dugdale’s catalogues discussed above.\footnote{Image 2.15}
The catalogue, “A Choice Collection of Rare & Curious Books,” issued in 1889 by Edward Avery, is
a straightforward numbered listing of titles offered for sale taken from “the library of a well known
amateur” (“Rare and Curious” n.p.). The cover straightaway indicates to prospective readers what
kinds of material are featured inside. Reading through the list of books, it is clear that this catalogue is somewhat more explicit than the earlier examples and offers lengthy descriptions of some titles, never shying away from explicit language. This small catalogue, spanning twelve pages between its teal covers, indicates that, by agreeing to go past the cover, the reader has entered into a tacit agreement with the (unnamed) bookseller that the materials within are of a certain variety. By deliberately giving sparse information on the cover except those few keywords familiar to the sex book consumer, the bookseller issues at once an invitation to the connoisseur and a warning to the uninitiated. Opening the cover reveals that it is unlikely many of these catalogues were acquired accidentally by this latter group, however, since the “Notice” presumes that the consumer knows where to send the “Amount of Purchase” in order to “facilitate delivery of [their] order” (Avery ibid n.p.). This indicates that the catalogue may have been included in another packet or sent to a select group of vetted subscribers. Also of interest, in comparison to the catalogues annotated by Murdoch, is that this catalogue appears to have been annotated by the bookseller himself. On the back cover other titles are listed for sale, added by hand in pencil. These annotations do not indicate the kind of playfulness present in Murdoch’s annotations but they are a reminder that the sex book business was not an arm’s-length affair between booksellers and consumers. It was, by necessity, intimate. A mutual trust had to exist between the two factions if anyone was to buy or sell pornography.

**BOOKSELLERS & DEALERS**

Referring to sex books and other materials depicting sex but using the legalistic term ‘obscenity,’ Member of Parliament and Justice Lord Campbell famously declared it to be “more deadly than prussic acid” in the arguments for the 1857 Obscene Publications Act (hereafter OPA): a serious-sounding indictment of sex books, to be sure. (qtd. in Mullin 13). Lord Campbell’s

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43 Image 2.16
proclamation served to lay the groundwork for the nineteenth century’s battles over how obscenity
was to be recognized and adequately prosecuted. The OPA was instigated partly in response to
William Dugdale’s public tribulations with the law concerning his business(es) in the sex book trade.
By the time of his death in 1868 Dugdale had been arrested numerous times, mostly for his
involvement in the sex book trade. Dugdale is the first link in the chain in the narrative of the sex
book trade and obscenity prosecutions through to the end of the century. Picking up after his death
in 1868, Dugdale’s successor was not a member of his vast family network who had operated in
Holywell Street, but rather the elusive William Lazenby, whose known active years as a publisher
and bookseller saw him offer numerous Dugdale reprints as part of his own catalogues. Sprinkled
throughout Lazenby's original offerings, many of them thought to have been by his own hand, were
various Dugdale titles like *The New Epicurean* (1875), *Elements of Tuition* (1880), and *The Birchen Bouquet*
(1881), texts with a focus on flagellation pointing toward the robust market for the so-called English
vice. Lazenby all but disappeared from the scene in 1886—whether he died, continued his life under
another assumed identity, or dropped out of the trade is something we simply do not know. The
next publisher and bookseller to consider is Leonard Smithers, who represents an important
evolution in the sex book trade after Dugdale and Lazenby. Like his predecessors, he made
important innovations in response to the expanding market for sex books, not least of which was
producing books that were desirable as physical objects; Smithers’ books were luxury items, often
marketed to wealthy collectors.

Dugdale and his contemporaries mostly had their beginnings as radical pressmen and Iain
McCalman has suggested that “the least edifying but most portentous achievement” of these men
was the “pioneer[ing] development in nineteenth-century England of a new profession and a new
commercial branch of literature” (McCalman 235). In short, McCalman is speaking of the
burgeoning market for sex books in England that Dugdale and his contemporaries played a
significant part in establishing. In the early nineteenth century Dugdale was involved in radical publishing and political circles. In 1819 he was implicated in the Cato Street Conspiracy, a plot to murder Prime Minister Liverpool and British cabinet members, but he was never charged with any criminal wrongdoing. Dugdale’s printing experience up to that point had been with political tracts and he brought that experience with him to the sex book trade. His first foray into clandestine publishing was a pirated version of Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* in 1822. The first erotic text linked to Dugdale as a publisher was a reprint of the 1769 amatory novel *The History of the Human Heart*, which he published in 1827 as *Memoirs of a Man of Pleasure*, taking advantage of both the title of the classic John Cleland novel *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), as well as the memoir genre as a major market force in the sex book trade. Dugdale continued in that trade for the next four decades, making a name for himself, according to Pisanus Fraxi, as “one of the most prolific publishers of filthy books” and becoming a target for people like Lord Campbell and the Society for the Suppression of Vice (Prohibitorum 127). Dugdale was a man who could, and often would, cause a stir. At his 1857 trial for publication of “obscene prints on three several occasions and…publication of an obscene libel” he reportedly “rose in the back part of the court in a very excited state” claiming that he had been illegally taken from his home and that the charges against him had not been brought before a magistrate: Dugdale was arguing that the police had abused their power in apprehending him (“Court of Queen’s Bench” 11). He claimed he had not been informed of the charges or the witnesses against him. The *Times* reporter dispassionately speculated “probably the defendant wished to have his trial postponed” (“Court of Queen’s Bench” 11). Dugdale was nevertheless committed to trial, the jury being shown the materials he was accused of selling and they, “without hesitation, found [him] guilty” (“Court of Queen’s Bench” 11).

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44 The Metropolitan Police Force was a relatively new form of authority in 1857, having only been created in 1829 by Prime Minister Peel, so it is likely that Dugdale’s complaints had some merit.
Dugdale seemed to have no fear of being imprisoned and may have even cultivated relationships with powerful people and authorities over the course of his career. Journalist Thomas Frost, as a young man, was once employed by Dugdale and recalled in his 1886 memoir running into his former employer on Holywell Street in about 1861. Dugdale, described by Frost as a “hoary sinner,” did not recognize his former employee and had reportedly handed the journalist a volume on adultery as an enticement to enter his shop (Frost 54). Dugdale was meant to have been incarcerated at this time but was released on the authority of the Home Office on advice of the prison surgeon. Frost wonders whether Dugdale’s early release was the result of some other circumstance—namely, political influence. Frost wrote, concernedly, that “it would be an instructive lesson in the science of promoting morality to learn at whose instance the certificate was given, and by whom it was supported when laid before the Home Office” (Frost 54-55). Although Frost was posing a serious question about the accountability of authorities—it is possible that Dugdale had leverage over powerful people in the same way Roald Dahl’s William Buggage had—there is more than a little admiration in his words. Frost is writing as a seasoned journalist though the light-hearted phrase “the science of promoting morality” conveys the foolhardiness of legislators’ attempts to control morality by prosecuting obscenity and its purveyors; it was as much a science in Victorian Britain as it is today, that is to say, about as weak and ineffective a science as is possible to conceive.

Whatever the truth behind Dugdale’s early release, his business practices, criminal and otherwise, would help set the standards for the traffic in sex books and the interplay between obscenity and the law that would come to characterize the trade in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the Victorian “book hunger” would reach its apex (Weedon 157). This “hunger” would be the purview of Dugdale’s successor, William Lazenby. Lazenby was active from at least 1870 in the sex book trade, the year of his earliest known publication. Though no bibliography is

45 Times 14 October 1861 for details.
provided in reports of Lazenby’s first arrest, they do indicate that “upwards of 1,700 photographs and books of a grossly indecent character” were seized from his premises near Leicester Square (“Wholesale,” 4). The session rolls from the ensuing 1871 trial list “thirty five…wicked lewd bawdy and obscene libels” amongst the items confiscated and used to commit Lazenby to two years’ imprisonment with hard labour (Middlesex Sessions MJ/SR/5367). The titles of the obscene libels are not given in the court record or newspaper reports. It makes sense that the overwhelming majority of items seized from Lazenby’s premises were pictures and photographs; his previous occupation before coming to London from Yorkshire was as a “photographic printseller” (Chandler 1 March 2016 TS). In terms of the books seized by authorities, it is likely that Lazenby was not yet publishing his own works but rather selling Dugdale’s back stock. Lazenby’s first known publication was a compendium of bawdy poems and lyrics titled Cythera’s Hymnal in 1870. He would cement himself as a sex book publisher of note, however, with the four-volume memoir The Romance of Lust, published between 1873-1876. The first publication thought to be authored in part by Lazenby was his Letters from a Friend in Paris (1874). Lazenby’s authorship, ostensible or otherwise—first suggested by Pisanus Fraxi (Henry Spencer Ashbee) and later detailed by Peter Mendes—of various works throughout his catalogue marks an important distinction between himself and his predecessor. Though Dugdale’s publishing and selling career spanned nearly half a century, he was not known to have authored any of the works he sold. Dugdale was a prolific publisher of original works from various sources, ranging from medical texts new and old to flagellation narratives and memoirs produced by coteries of men who produced works for him and would go on to do the same for Lazenby. The earliest work of Dugdale’s known to have been reprinted by Lazenby was The New Epicurean by Edward Sellon, printed originally by Dugdale in 1865. According to Fraxi, Lazenby’s 1875 edition differed only in “a change of the termination of the impress into ‘(reprinted 1875)”

46 ‘Obscene libels’ in this this case refers to the ‘books of a grossly indecent character,’ as an obscene libel was, by definition, a written work. The adjectives in the trial session rolls tell the story of the nature of these obscene libels.
(Prohibitorum 314). The remainder of the 1870s saw Lazenby not only publishing original works, but many that are alleged to have been the product of his own pen. The majority of his Dugdale reprints appeared between 1880-1885 and account for some twenty percent of his fifty or so known publications.

The features of Lazenby’s relationship with Dugdale while the elder bookseller was still alive and in business are unknown; however, judging from the records available, Lazenby appears to have been a more cautious businessman than his predecessor. Lazenby took other precautions to ensure minimal interaction with the law. By operating his businesses largely through mail order and not keeping a shop front in Holywell Street (unlike Dugdale and his family) Lazenby dramatically reduced his visibility and vulnerability to the law. When he did get caught up, however, Lazenby made no grandiose shows in court, unlike his predecessor who was a vocal political opponent of censorship. By the time Lazenby had established himself in the sex book trade, the OPA had been in force for almost two decades, even if it had by the 1870s become more or less a token bit of legislation that the Metropolitan Police infrequently enforced, much to the chagrin of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Presumably, Lazenby had learned from his predecessor’s actions that it did not pay to be a sex bookseller with the loudest voice in public. Perhaps also, as suggested by Thomas Frost in his recollection of Dugdale in the 1860s, cultivating relationships with officials in exchange for certain protections was the best course of action.

Dugdale, who had helped establish some of the standard practices for the sex book trade in London—namely by setting up bookshops in and around Holywell Street and using his background as a radical pressman to control printing and distribution of his materials clandestinely—had a political as well as a commercial stake in the trade, whereas Lazenby benefited from the political groundwork that had been laid by Dugdale and his radical press contemporaries. Dugdale, along with his predecessor and partner George Cannon, helped publish and distribute bawdy anti-
government and anti-monarchy squibs throughout the Regency Period, a practice which segued easily into publishing sex books (McCalman 206-207). Although politics and freethinking had been the catalyst for these early English pornographers, their move into sex books was likely a financial decision after the succession of George IV and the end of the Regency and the Cato Street Conspiracy—a plan to murder all British cabinet ministers—failed. Dugdale and Cannon then began pursuing other publishing avenues, namely, sex books. With the turmoil of the early century largely faded, it does not suffice to say that Lazenby had no political stake in the successful continuation of the sex book trade; rather, it means only that his work benefited from the pioneering efforts of his predecessor and he was free to expand the genre with his own contributions. By the end of the nineteenth century a number of radical writers were drawn to the “cause of open sexual discussion in the public sphere” and Lazenby’s works, if not explicitly a part of the radical open sex movement, at least fit within the new radical narrative taking place (Miller 259). A look at Lazenby’s known bibliography reveals a bold selection of titles that offered his readers choices ranging from flagellation narratives such as *Curiosities of Flagellation* (1875), *Colonel Spanker’s Lecture* (1878), *Experiences of Flagellation* (1885) to sexual memoirs such as *Amatory Experiences of a Surgeon* (1881), *Autobiography of a Flea* (1885), *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (1881) to compilations of bawdy poetry, short stories, jokes, and serialized long-form writing. These latter are mostly found in the periodicals for which Lazenby is best known: *The Pearl, The Boudoir*, and *The Cremorne*. Lazenby was seemingly able to connect with readers by providing glimpses of erstwhile infamous persons—namely the cross-dressing duo, Fanny and Stella, who feature in *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*—and places in his publications, discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

Lazenby’s tenure in the sex book trade coincided with the explosion of demand for books and reading materials. As a result of increased demand, specialty markets in texts were becoming viable on a large scale. Lazenby’s publications were not the *éditions de luxe* that would find their way to
market in the 1890s, they were rather collector’s editions of a different sort. Instead of gilded bindings and luxurious paper stock, Lazenby provided the market with texts that were made with relatively cheap materials—though the prices of his novels did not reflect this—but dealt in subject matter that was not necessarily part of the public consciousness, such as ‘new’ types of sex (homosexuality). Amongst the many flagellation narratives offered by Lazenby, there were works such as *Autobiography of a Flea* (1885) which, on first glance, is Sadeian in scope with its depiction of lascivious clergyman continually raping and terrorizing a girl called Bella but is, in actuality, a cognitively dissociated tale of heroism on the part of the titular flea, who is also the narrator of the story. The anti-clerical undertones of *Flea* are an implicit form of radicalism that add to the action. The flea documents every act of debauchery on Bella and the other characters but also, in one instance, attempts to thwart her ravishing by a man. Convinced that he had done all he could to help Bella, the flea attaches himself to her genitals while she is being raped “to satisfy [his] natural cravings,” indicating both a lustful satisfaction as well as a brutal scene involving blood (*Flea* 77). *Flea* is also an incest and pederasty narrative, wherein the same clergyman and family members assault a young boy in addition to the main female victim. Unlike in Sade’s own narratives, sodomy with males does not seem to be the ultimate form of pleasure in *Flea* but, rather, it is something simply done and accepted without much fanfare. Flagellation narratives made up a good number of titles in Lazenby’s catalogue and for good reason: flagellation appears in almost every Victorian sex book, in some form, and was a popular genre in its own right. It is clear that Lazenby and the others writing his original works were fans of the Marquis de Sade and even attempted to write in that tradition. Lacking in *Flea* is the philosophical unseating of pleasure from the body to more cerebral forms that Sade is famous for. Sodomy and sexual violence are indeed regarded as the acme of pleasure in both; however, when sodomy occurs between men throughout *Flea* it is quickly
‘corrected’ by enjoying a woman/girl “in the natural way” (Flea 178) whereas in Sade sex between men is the “altar [at which Nature may] be most devoutly worshipped” (Boudoir 56-57).

Sexual violence is practiced and even celebrated in Flea but passive sodomy is given less significance than brutal scenes of rape and incest. However, a monologue indicates that, in addition to violence, the “introduction of crime…adds a zest” to those acts that are already “wrong” and “disallowed” and, therefore, “worth seeking” (Flea 117-118). It is worth keeping in mind that, at the time of Flea’s writing and publication in 1885, sexual criminality had changed with the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (hereafter CLAA) which not only raised the age of consent but also made sexual contact, or suspicion of such, between men more easily indictable. The author(s) of Flea would have been well aware of the consequences of this legislation as well as the sensations that were part of its genesis: namely, incidents such as the Boulton and Park trial and the culture of “sex between men and its fallout” that existed in Britain leading up to that (Upchurch 2). 1885 was also the year that “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” was published in the Pall Mall Gazette, a sensational exposé wherein the editor of that paper, W.T. Stead, actually purchased a 12-year-old girl in order to highlight the widespread human trafficking in London, which largely catalyzed the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Flea is conspicuously more cautious about its treatment of sex between men than Sade or even Lazenby’s earlier works, namely Sins of the Cities of the Plain (1881) and Letters from Laura and Eveline (1883), indicating perhaps a hesitation on the part of the author(s) of Flea to wade into the waters of same-sex relations in the wake of the CLAA. This did not seem to be the case when it came to sex involving minors who could not legally consent. Sexual acts that were considered criminal under English law helped Flea revivify Sadeian materialist arguments on the sexual pleasures afforded, and therefore condoned, by Nature. Sade opines that “‘Tis inconceivable that Nature would tolerate anything that offends her” and that “the pleasures of sodomy, incestuous relations, violations and so forth” are condemned by man rather than Nature
(Sade Boudoir 64). By reiterating the divide between Nature’s and man’s laws in Flea and other works, Lazenby was not only updating the terms set down by de Sade but also documenting the changing landscape of sex, sexuality, and criminality in the late nineteenth century, a landscape that focused not solely on discrete physical acts but concomitant identity politics that many porn panics of the era—not to mention nowadays—were rooted in.

Lazenby seized the opportunity to provide his customers with hard-to-find works that propounded the idea that sexuality and identity were not mutually exclusive. In the case of those texts which were difficult to find because they did not yet exist, Lazenby took it upon himself to turn author and provide customers with what he believed they wanted. There is no better example of this than his 1883 novel Letters from Laura and Eveline, which acted as sequel to the 1881 ‘memoir’ Sins of the Cities of the Plain, whose authorship is still an open question.47 By writing Letters, the epistolary novel about the two titular characters’—both “hermaphrodites”—wedding nights and honeymoon at sea with their gentleman husbands, Lazenby may have simply been fulfilling a niche in the market for texts about intersexed, transgender, or homosexual relations—concepts that had not yet circulated widely in popular discourse outside of specialized medical circles. What is more revealing is that these were niches to be filled at all: it points to an audience that is increasingly informed on the cutting edge of scientific and sexological thought. Lazenby’s role as more than publisher and bookseller becomes apparent if his motives for providing such works are examined. Even if he acted from a purely business perspective (which seems the most likely scenario) he, perhaps unwittingly, became a historian or archivist of sorts by committing ink about aberrant sexualities and sex practices to paper. Lazenby’s knowledge of sexualities suggests that he may have

47 There is speculation that Sins was authored by James Campbell Reddie, who worked with Dugdale and then Lazenby as author and acquirer of original texts, and quite possibly Pre-Raphaelite painter Simeon Solomon. New information on the identity of the subject of Sins, Jack Saul, by playwright and genealogical researcher Glenn Chandler may suggest that Saul himself may have actually collaborated on the memoir.
been in touch with highly diverse circles, more so than might be expected of a bookseller or publisher of sex books.

Lazenby’s addition of two terminal essays at the end of Sins only adds to the speculation that he was part of a community that made advances in the history of sexuality. The essays in question make historical cases for sodomy and tribadism; they are wholly disconnected from the narrative and have been criticized as “entirely insignificant” (Fraxi, Catena 194) and “of little interest” (Sins [2013] xviii), tacked onto the book for no purpose. The first admonishment, by bibliographer Pisanus Fraxi (Henry Spencer Ashbee), suffers from lack of perspective as his interests as a collector and bibliographer pertained only to texts’ immediate effects at the time he was compiling his three-volume bibliography in the 1880s. Homophobia might have influenced Ashbee’s opinion as his documented interests were squarely in flagellation texts. On the other hand, Wolfram Setz, editor of the 2013 edition of Sins, is focused only on ferreting out those references to homosexuality in the nineteenth century that conform to his narrow twentieth and twenty first century definition. Setz does go on to say, however, that Sins “is an important cultural and historical document” which would make Lazenby, by extension, a cultural and historical documentarian (Sins [2013] xviii). What is important is that the terminal essays anticipate the move toward a biological essentialism that was picked up by the author(s) of the first homosexual romance novel in English, Teleny, and showed Lazenby to be more than a seller, compiler, and author of sex books. Rather, Lazenby—businessman though he was—knew the importance of the terminal essays’ rhetoric historicizing and justifying same-sex relations in both men and women.

While it is unclear whether Teleny’s original publisher, Leonard Smithers, was connected to the composition of the novel, he was acutely aware that the rhetoric on sexuality and essentialism espoused by the novel was important not only from a scientific perspective but, importantly, from a

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48 Tribadism is a synonym for lesbianism and is the word used in the terminal essays.
business one as well. *Teleny* contains many passages that argue for sexuality’s integral link to identity—an idea well ahead of its time—and that homosexuality was biologically essential. The author(s) of *Teleny*, following *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, included the work of French sexologist Ambroise Auguste Tardieu on the effects of sodomy; *Sins* uses Tardieu to offer information on the well-established practice of sodomy in France. The terminal essay in *Sins* offered that Tardieu had examined “two hundred and seventeen cases of passive sodomy” in France, establishing how common the practice was there and, by implication, reassuring British readers it was no sin at all, but rather a foreign (French) pleasure (*Sins* [2013] 85). *Teleny*, on the other hand, utilized Tardieu in a different manner, almost satirically. Tardieu is alluded to in a lengthy monologue that gives an account of sodomy throughout history, following the terminal essay of *Sins*, and refers to “a modern medical book [Tardieu’s *Étude médico-légale sur les attentats aux moeurs*],” which discusses “how the penis of a sodomite becomes thin and pointed like a dog’s, and how the human mouth gets distorted when used for vile purposes.” (*Teleny* [2010] 48). These two ‘facts’ are immediately countered by the speaker’s observations that he has never seen a prostitute whose “mouth was crooked” and that his or his lover’s penis had retained “its bulky head” though they had engaged in sodomy on countless occasions (49). Even the “thin and pointed” penis “like a dog’s” is celebrated in *Teleny*: Des Grieux describes Teleny’s penis as “slightly tapering” (49) which “relates to aesthetic elegance [and] not habitual deformation…almost as if it were a still life” (Bristow “A Few Drops” 154). What the thematic subject matter shared between *Sins* and *Teleny* indicates is that these works were not written in isolation from one another and, indeed, the latter was more likely than not to have been influenced or inspired by the former.

Lazenby took what Dugdale had begun to its logical extension by publishing works that were at once more explicit as well as more specialized than his predecessor’s, if not more political. By the time Leonard Smithers was publishing books, it was clear that he was building on the foundations
laid by his predecessors and taking full advantage of the late century’s rise in not only literacy but also a number of advances in commercial book markets. Smithers fancied himself a publisher of exquisite works and counted Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, and Aubrey Beardsley amongst those he published. Unlike Dugdale or Lazenby, Smithers’ editions, be they sex books or others, were grandiose affairs that catered to a wealthy collector class that had emerged throughout the late nineteenth century’s revival of printing. According to one of its adherents, Charles Ricketts, the Revival of Print movement in the 1890s “aimed to make of the printed book something more than a mere trade commodity” and saw the production of books that were desirable not just as reading materials but objects in and of themselves (“A Defence” 417). One contemporary critic writing for the Athenaeum noted that the new beautiful books were “designed to tickle the eyes of the groundling” in response to the concomitant mass markets for books though, in practice, the availability of éditions de luxe was limited to those with the requisite funds (417). Many of Smithers’ publications, groundling eye ticklers that they were, targeted wealthier readers. Though he is most (in)famous for publishing decadent works by the likes of Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde, Smithers’ 1893 publication of Teleny, like Lazenby’s publications on non-normative sexualities, may have been more a financial decision than a political one; though he had published sex books in the past, most notably with his former business partner H.S. Nichols, Smithers was not, at the time of Teleny’s publication a major player in their production. Regardless of his motives, it is clear from the presentation of the two-volume novel—printed on watermarked Dutch Van Gelder paper with intricate page decorations and wrapped in salmon pink covers—that Smithers was targeting a specific market for this work, which had an initial print run limited, supposedly, to only 200 copies. As noted above, Smithers’ productions were luxury items, éditions de luxe that were not only expensive to purchase but also to produce. Wilde remarked that the publisher was “accustomed to bringing out books limited to an edition of three copies, one for the author, one for [himself], and
one for the Police,” expressing frustration over Smithers’ habit of releasing costly books in small runs that were likely to catch the eye of authorities before his authors could get sufficiently paid (qtd. in Nelson 202). Smithers, according to Nelson, “took it as a cardinal point of his publishing endeavours to make the physical book an appropriate vehicle for the text and graphic art” and his publications bear this out, though they often did so to the detriment of Smithers’ authors’ bankbooks (Nelson 107). A significant part of Smithers’ business was through mail order catalogues and he was famous for his prospectuses which were often as immensely deluxe as the offerings within. Smithers also had a London shop in fashionable Bond Street where he sold “books which all true Bibliophiles will appreciate, covet, and hoard” (qtd. in Nelson 44).

Conceptualizing the Victorian trade in sex books through the efforts of these three publishers—and they were only three among many—offers a way of differentiating and connecting the three major epochs of the Victorian trade as well as the various manners sex books and ‘obscene’ items were produced and exchanged. Inextricably tied into the modes of trading is the erotic, moral, and physical geography of London in its era of re-envisioning itself as the modern metropolis at the centre of the world’s greatest empire. Victorian London drew comparisons to the biblical Babylon, most famously in W.T. Stead’s “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon.” While others, most notably Lynda Nead, have put forth the idea that the ‘Modern Babylon’ moniker was a fitting one for late Victorian London at the height of Empire as a whole, I am pursuing a more narrow swath of the biblical allusion by focusing on the sex book trade and its physical and moral geographies.

**Geography of the Sex Book Trade**

In looking back to Victorian geography to tell a story about the trade in sex books, the researcher must rely on what information has survived and that can never be placed back in its
original context. Neil Bartlett refers, in *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde*, to the geography of queer London in the 1970s and 1980s and claims that if one wishes to reinterpret [a] particular geography, to piece together those details, to imagine what it must have been like…then they will need more than what survives in the newspapers to help them. What survives can never give a complete picture.

(126)

Bartlett’s work reassesses the idea of the culture of Victorian homosexuality as a whole using twentieth century queer London as a guide in much the same way Mark Turner connects his “queer present to a knowable and certain queer past” (Turner 8). My use of Victorian geography is different in scope to Bartlett’s or Turner’s in that my purpose in this section is not to necessarily connect to my present but to rather connect two seemingly disconnected presents of the nineteenth century. By piecing together the geography of the sex book trade and its politics through the entirety of the century, I am linking the late Victorian sex book trade to its earlier radical counterpart and providing a context for the public-facing trade in private identity. Looking at what survives from the Victorian period provides my study with the raw materials and tools to re-examine London’s sex book trade at a geographical level. To go beyond the surface of primary materials, however, will provide the necessary insight to make a case for a London that operated alongside what is commonly supposed to be ‘Victorian’ or, as Stephen Marcus declared in his classic work *The Other Victorians*, “add to and thicken our sense of the Victorian reality” (Marcus 105).

Victorian London, as in the modern city, was characterized by a vast social divide between eastern and western portions of the city. The east, of course, was occupied by the poorer classes and higher levels of street crime whilst the west was home to affluent citizens who were better equipped to avoid or at least navigate the legal system thanks to the privilege and status that usually accompanies wealth. The most famous and explicit depictions of the wealth and class divides in
London can be seen in Charles Booth’s colour-coded poverty maps, produced between 1886 and 1900. The colour-code descriptions—black, dark blue, light blue, purple, pink, red, and yellow—of various areas throughout the city ranged from “Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal [black]” to “Upper-middle and upper classes. Wealthy [yellow]” (London School of Economics). Most of the area immediately surrounding Holywell Street, in the west end and one of the epicentres of the Victorian trade in pornography, coded as red, signals that it is “middle class. Well-to-do” (LSE) while, for comparison’s sake, a number of places surrounding the area of Spitalfields in the east London borough of Whitechapel, a location most famous for the Jack the Ripper murders in 1888, are coded in black. Booth’s maps are a helpful tool in visualizing wealth and class divides and are certainly open for interpretation; however, my aim in extrapolating the geography of the pornography trade is not simply to reduce it to a simple analysis of income and class. The geography scrutinized throughout this chapter takes into account the relative economic power of particular areas of London. More importantly, however, I will specifically examine the key features of Holywell Street’s physical and moral geography that made it a natural fit for a centre of the Victorian pornographic book trade. In addition to Holywell Street’s physical situation at the centre of the trade, I will also scrutinize the moral geographies and practical logistics of those involved in pornographic underworlds of Victorian London and how distribution patterns of sex books were affected both in and far away from the ‘epicentre’ of the trade in Holywell Street. Undertaking these analyses will map the flourishing of the sex book trade until the end of the nineteenth century, how it helped facilitate social conditions resulting in a diverse customer base, and, consequently, more diverse reading material.

On the eve of Holywell Street’s destruction in 1900, in order to make way for the widening of the nearby Strand, an article appearing in The Athenaeum gives an account of how the antiquated,

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49 Image 2.1
50 Image 2.2
irregular, and “insulated block” of Booksellers’ Row—as Holywell Street was sometimes referred to in the latter half of the nineteenth century—was capitalized upon by those wishing to avoid interactions with authorities (Roberts 336). While the shops at street level were occupied mostly by antiquarian as well as sex booksellers, often in the same shop, “the upper parts, being handy to Fleet Street 51 and Paternoster Row, were largely inhabited by the lower strata of journalists, publishers’ hacks, and men who were quite safe in its manifold intricacies from the clutches of the sheriff’s officers” (Roberts 336). This report gives some idea of the unusual layout of Holywell Street and the ways it was architecturally and geographically situated to house various clandestine activities. From its commercial beginnings as a place where mostly Jewish traders sold second-hand textiles through to its more infamous history as a place to shop for second-hand, rare, and indictable books the street was, by mid-century, “disordered, crumbling, labyrinthine, rather than straight, singular, and purposeful” (Nead 179). Holywell Street offered a stark contrast to the unprecedented new infrastructure—the Underground, to name just one massive example—and architectural projects London had embarked on during the nineteenth century in an effort to do away with the old and bring the city in line, in spatial terms, with the ideology of progress that bolstered the empire during Queen Victoria’s reign. At the turn of the century, “from an architectural point of view” the street was “an anachronism” and a place filled with “printed matter…‘of a class totally unfitted to circulate among respectable people,’” nothing more than a troublesome blot in the city because it was a relic of ‘old’ London not in line with the modern metropolis that was springing up around it (Roberts 337). In addition, various forms of moral corruption had been encoded into the common conception of the street by centuries of marginalized residents in the otherwise respectable West End of the city.

51 Fleet Street was, in the Victorian age as well as today, metonymical with the national press in Britain.
Holywell Street’s unique or, rather, irregular architecture and street curvature made it an easy place to escape from in a hurry, as many of its buildings offered multiple egress options. Thanks to its placement between many streets—some Holywell Street buildings had access to multiple busy thoroughfares, allowing for quick getaways that police could not predict or successfully man—it is easy to see why the street became a haven for those wishing to remain hidden. One such building is mentioned specifically in the four-volume Lazenby novel The Romance of Lust. A man of leisure is noted to have “taken a small set of chambers at Lyon’s Inn…where he had a complete library of bawdy books and pictures,” the location likely a knowing nod to the proximity of Lyon’s Inn to neighbouring Holywell Street (Romance 416). Geographically speaking, Lyon’s Inn would have been the ideal lodging for anybody holding contraband reading material as it “faced Newcastle Street, on its eastern side, between Wych Street and Holywell Street; one entrance led to it from the latter, and also another through Horne Court,” not to mention the protection afforded by one of the Inns of Chancery (Old and New 32). The famous Half Moon sign between nos. 36 and 37 marked the entrance to a small passageway between Holywell Street and the Strand. The passageway appears on few contemporary London maps and is seldom named except in descriptions of the street and its inhabitants. It had once been “part of a great thoroughfare” but had, by the nineteenth century, become a narrow passage wide enough only for a single person (Diprose 257). A comparison between maps of the street throughout the nineteenth century variously show Holywell Street as straight, more or less parallel with neighbouring Strand, but in actuality it had a slight curve that was exacerbated by the various shops’ wares spilling out onto the street that “imposed a gait” on the window shopper (Whitten 9). As the photo and maps from 1868 and 1878 show, Holywell Street was not only curved but also varied in width on its east end, terminating at the intersection with

52 Image 2.4 and 2.5
53 Image 2.3
54 Image 2.6
55 Image 2.4 and 2.5
Wych Street\textsuperscript{56} where Aldwych and the Strand now meet, still facing the St. Clement Danes church. Holywell Street’s layout did not jibe with the vision Victorian modernizers had for London. It was more or less a medieval alley adjacent to one of London’s busiest thoroughfares and its “abominable little labyrinths of tenements crowded and huddled up together” significantly slowed down the business of the growing modern city (Sala qtd. in Nead 163). The street’s labyrinthine layout meant that the Metropolitan Police or Society for the Suppression of Vice would often find themselves up against multiple Minotaurs in close congested quarters. It is not difficult to imagine customers—not unlike our catalogue annotator, J.B. Murdoch, Esq.—visiting the crowded shops in Booksellers’ Row, scanning the stacks and patiently waiting for others to clear out in order to ask to peruse more ‘voluptuous’ material not on display.

The old-fashioned crowding of buildings in Holywell Street led to congestion on the street itself. With street-level shops’ wares spilling out into the street, “if you hurried you might knock over one of the gilt-framed old portraits or landscapes propped outside Wheeler’s picture shop” (Whitten 9). While the new retail spheres in Piccadilly and other fashionable shopping destinations in London were evolving into perambulatory spaces and spaces to be seen, with straight, clean buildings, sight-lines, and footpaths, and mesmerizing window displays enticing customers into the stores, Holywell Street stood, during an important transition period, as a throwback to an era when shopping was a much more ramshackle and less refined affair. Holywell Street began as a sacred space where there was “buried that perennial spring that…was hallowed by its appropriation to pious uses” by pilgrims on their way to Canterbury (Diprose 174). The street got its name from the holy spring described in twelfth-century cleric William Fitzstephen’s \textit{History of London} as “sweete, wholesome, and cleere; and much frequented by schollars and youth of the citie in summer evenings, when they walk forth to take the aire” (qtd. in Timbs 767). The actual spring, by the Victorian period built over, was

\textsuperscript{56} image 2.7
supposedly located under number 24 Holywell Street where the Old Dog Tavern stood not too far from William Dugdale’s shops at numbers 16 and 37 (Timbs 767). From its beginnings as a holy site for pilgrims and scholars to its more scandalous existences linked to trade, Holywell Street’s reputation was irrevocably enmeshed within its physically and morally dubious spaces.

By the end of the nineteenth century Holywell Street was commonly seen as a nuisance in the way of metropolitan progress. Its history was many times removed from its association with being a holy site and, instead, linked not only with the trade in scandalous books but also with the perceived taint of the Jewish traders who had established the street in the early nineteenth century as a market for second-hand clothing and textiles. Later in the century, Holywell Street’s transformation from a Jewish ghetto to the so-called Booksellers’ Row made way for traders like William Dugdale to overtake and capitalize on an already marginalized area in the heart of an expanding and bustling city. *The Athenæum* lamented on the eve of the street’s destruction, “of history, Booksellers’ Row, like the needy knife-grinder, has none,” that is to say, according to that author, once the street had been finally demolished, the memories of its establishment and trade would prove evanescent, somehow forgetting that the very act of writing about Booksellers’ Row would add to posterity in the medium that had given the street part of its history in the first place (Roberts 336). Holywell Street, an urban relic with a less than stellar history located on the fringe of the respectable West End, was synecdochic for the trade in sex books and its physical geography was but a single factor that contributed to its moral geography.

Calls for the street’s demolition persisted throughout the Victorian era and the street continued to exist until the early twentieth century, when it was demolished along with Wych Street to make way for a more homogeneous thoroughfare free from the obscenity that some argued stained the street. Holywell may have been at the concentrated centre of the trade in sex books that moral crusaders and authorities were determined to shut down, but it was not the only location in
London where one could obtain obscene works. While the trade in sex books was a highly profitable endeavour for many booksellers in Holywell Street, it by no means represented the majority of any known booksellers’ business. I contend that the community of sex booksellers in the street acted more or less as a social network even as they competed with one another, mutually aware of the risk in the nature of their business. The symbiotic nature of their social network would have helped make Holywell Street a safer space to conduct business. In the case of William Dugdale, his network included most of his family so that, in case of a police raid, his business would remain more or less intact at the many locations operated by his family members, at various addresses in Holywell Street and close by in Drury Lane. Other booksellers and publishers of sex books, however, did not operate at all in Holywell Street, a fact which offers an intriguing counterpoint to the argument that a cohesive geographic community was necessary to the trade in sex books (Nead 65).

It is well documented that many booksellers kept various residences and offices from which to run their businesses. By looking at William Lazenby’s known addresses—following from the examination of his aliases in Chapter 1—mapping the coordinates of his businesses leads to the conclusion that he was a man who was able to blend in with established codes of conduct and steer clear of trouble (for the most part). Lazenby successfully produced and supplied texts during his known career between 1870-1886 (and possibly longer!) with relatively little attention from the authorities. Lazenby’s active years represent a period of time in which the mainstream and sex book trades in Britain reached an apotheosis in production. Between the 1830s and 1870s there was a “book hunger” in Britain as a result of technologies and economies of scale, mentioned previously in this chapter, that allowed books to be produced in greater quantities and “that only in the 1880s did production begin to catch up with demand” (Weedon 157). This meant that cheap editions and other more affordable text formats were available to the ever-increasing number of readers in Victorian Britain. The Revival of Printing and beautiful book movements of the 1890s, with their
predilections for collector’s editions and *éditions de luxe*, was, in part, a reaction to this proliferation of reading materials being cheaply produced in both mainstream and underground print cultures (Nelson 107). Lazenby’s wares were by no means tactile or aesthetic luxuries—although many were priced luxurious—but they were plentiful and his business took place largely outside of Holywell Street and the environs that made up the sex book trade in that part of London. Lazenby’s trade was a much more diffuse affair lacking a centrality that, as with his actual identity, makes him difficult to track with a high degree of certainty. However, my study of his personal/business geography represents the first and most comprehensive study of its kind on this publisher.

By successfully obfuscating his identity, I contend Lazenby avoided more trouble with the law than he received. He was convicted three times—all under different names—while his predecessor William Dugdale was convicted six times and arrested a good many more (*England and Wales Criminal Registers, 1791-1892*). The major difference, of course, between Dugdale and Lazenby is that the former was a vocal and visible part of the trade. Dugdale’s later business addresses were concentrated in and around Holywell Street. Lazenby was never known to have had a storefront in Holywell Street or even a traditional storefront at all. No account of Lazenby’s trials makes mention of a storefront, though early on he is known to have lived and worked near Holywell Street, operating a mail order business at Blue-Cross Street near Leicester Square. Lazenby almost unquestionably worked for or with Dugdale before the older man’s death in 1868, placing him within the ambit of the Holywell Street trade. In addition to Dugdale’s shops in Holywell Street, we know that he operated printing offices nearby as well. One account from the memoir of Victorian journalist Thomas Frost places one of Dugdale’s printing offices in Wych Street, directly across from Holywell, “through a dark and narrow passage on the north side…[in a] dingy and dilapidated

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57 I owe a debt of gratitude to Colette Colligan’s book, *A Publisher’s Paradise* (2014), for providing the basic model for such a study.
building, the ground-floor of which was closed, and the room above approached by wooden steps from the outside” (Frost 52 - 53). It is possible that Lazenby worked in a place like this for Dugdale as an apprentice or partner in learning the printing and bookselling trade. As it stands, there is no documented evidence that Lazenby was involved in the Holywell Street trade but it is highly unlikely that he would not have been involved in some manner with those who did business there. Because no records have been uncovered to confirm this hypothesis, however, the examination of Lazenby’s business that follows relies on the records that do exist and what they say about his role in the sex book trade in a post-Dugdale London.

The earliest known mention of Lazenby comes in 1871 when he was convicted of selling “certain obscene books, prints, &c” to a police sergeant and his residence is listed as “11 Blue Cross-Street,” the name of Orange Street between Whitcomb and St. Martin’s in the Leicester Square area (“At Marlborough” 13). This location is significant for several reasons: the first is that this neighbourhood was known for its theatres, gin palaces, and other pleasures and was, subsequently, the haunt of Jack Saul, the male prostitute 58 whose ‘memoirs’ are recorded in Lazenby’s Sins of the Cities of the Plain (1881). Lazenby’s Blue-Cross residence was also near the two hubs of the sex book trade during the period, Soho and Holywell Street. It was in Soho, not far from Leonard Smithers’ own shop in Bond Street, where a bookseller named Charles Hirsch famously claimed he counted Oscar Wilde among his clientele and allegedly collected the manuscript that would become Teleny in 1893. Most important, however, is that Lazenby was located less than one mile from where Holywell Street stood at the time (where a series of drab concrete buildings housing diplomatic offices now stand) and we know that Lazenby operated a mail order business from this residence because police had received “numerous complaints that by means of advertisements in low publications persons…obtain[ed] [obscene pictures] by remittances to a particular address” and this was the

58 Until 2016, it was unknown whether Saul was a real person. Playwright and researcher Glenn Chandler has successfully identified Saul through records in the UK and Ireland in his book The Sins of Jack Saul.
address where Lazenby’s stock of over 1,700 prints and books was seized (“Henry Ashby” 11). After two years’ imprisonment with hard labour, Lazenby’s next known address was south of the Thames and to the west in Lambeth, where he was arrested again in 1876 for selling obscene books and prints.

The Lambeth address marks a significant move away from the locales of Holywell Street and Soho, and Lazenby would spend the rest of his known career in London geographically isolated from these hubs of the sex book trade. The question is why he chose not to trade in Holywell Street and what role the geography of his known addresses played in the trade outside of the epicentres of Victorian pornography. From trial reports it seems that Lazenby’s chosen business model was mail order rather than brick-and-mortar shop fronts. His trade in books and prints necessitated warehouse and office space only and his printing was not performed in house but rather contracted out, often overseas to Belgium or Holland. In his 1876 trial it was reported that Lazenby had proposed to “issue some circulars from Antwerp” in order to avoid involving English printers that had become a target thanks, presumably, to the Obscene Publications Act 1857 which all but eradicated pornographic printing from England and forced most production overseas, mostly to continental cities, chiefly Paris, Amsterdam, and Brussels (“At Lambeth” 11). By 1885 “the combined forces of the police, New Scotland Yard, and the National Vigilance Association59 successfully eradicated the production of pornography in England” though they were unable to eradicate pornography entirely (Sigel 84). Those pornographers who had been producing pornography in England until this late point simply “began shipping the materials from abroad to escape prosecution” while Lazenby had been doing this since the 1870s at least (84). With the passing of the Customs Consolidation Act in 1876, anything deemed “indecent or obscene” was prohibited from importation (Customs Consolidation Act 182). Lazenby’s business away from Holywell

59 The NVA were the successors of the Society for the Suppression of Vice.
Street may have meant that he had built a following amongst his clientele that did not require whatever advantages the street provided to its many booksellers—quick egress and plenty of spaces hidden from view of authorities—and it also indicates that Lazenby’s clientele may not have been keen to patronize shops along Holywell Street. Lazenby may have run an exclusive by-appointment-only business catering to certain clients, but the available evidence suggests that the main thrust of his later business was as a wholesaler of sex books.

The most telling evidence that Lazenby had cultivated a business model unique from those in Holywell Street or Soho comes from his final known prosecution in 1886 in which four different addresses were raided by police. Three of the four addresses—all upmarket west London locations—had stock seized by police. The stock included thousands of “books, photographs, stereoscopic slides, and prints” and two of the addresses were located just around the corner from one another, one an office and the other Lazenby’s main warehouse (“Duncan Cameron” 12). Lazenby conducted business at his office in Furnival Street and kept the majority of his stock around the corner at Norwich Street, according to a witness, Jesse Wilby, who testified against Lazenby. Wilby was, himself, a seller of ‘indecent’ books and was charged with their sale with the so-called “Novelty Publishing Company” in 1882 (“Jesse Wilby” 10) and indicted again in 1886 for attempting to sell “obscene literature” (“At the Greenwich” 3) to boys at Eton College. The volume of goods seized at Lazenby’s addresses indicates that, by 1886, he was a major force—perhaps the major force—in the sex book trade in London and, if not simply a significant rival for any of his competitors in Holywell Street or elsewhere, likely one of their suppliers.

What set Lazenby apart from many of his contemporaries and competitors is that his business did not involve commercial displays, even though it is clear from accounts of his early arrests that a mainstay of his wares were visual representations of sex, as many pictures and photographs were always seized from his premises. In opposition to the more or less medieval style
of trade in Holywell Street, with its shop windows and inventory spilling out of shop doors and into the street, Lazenby’s business model was not one of prominent display but rather a more reserved or, perhaps more accurately, curated method of providing clients with the materials they sought. Jesse Wilby’s testimony indicates that Lazenby operated his business out of an office rather than a storefront, which is an important distinction since this fact alone goes some way to telling what types of clientele Lazenby serviced. The lack of Lazenby catalogues from the years of his known activity is also telling. There are catalogues issued by Lazenby’s business partner, Edward Avery, in the 1890s which feature mostly Lazenby works but none issued from the man himself have survived and may never have existed. It is difficult to envision a stranger happening upon Lazenby’s doorstep in Furnival Street to ‘browse’ through the available wares; alas, it would not have been browsable if the stock were kept warehouse style rather than a more customer-friendly retail setup. Based on the evidence from newspapers and court reports on Lazenby’s practices of warehousing materials in various locations and meeting patrons one on one in an office rather than a shop, coupled with a mail order business, he limited his potential for exposure to authorities. As a sex book wholesaler, Lazenby would have positioned himself at the centre of the trade without exposing himself to the same legal risks that other sellers were subject to in terms of attempting to keep up the facade of a mainstream bookseller while also maintaining a stock of materials that could not be openly displayed. Lazenby, the producer and wholesaler of sex books, would have had no need to keep a stock of mainstream titles if his clientele were part of the sex book community of resellers. What would also set Lazenby apart from other sex booksellers is the conspicuous absence of any mention in court or newspaper reports of his dealing in non-obscene materials.

If, as Lynda Nead has suggested, Holywell Street “sat, like a great, dark spider, at the centre of a web of obscenity…that generated obscene publications; displayed and advertised them and sold them on to other sellers and hawkers” then Lazenby certainly must have had some dealing with
others in the business located there (Nead 179). His offices and warehouses, located at a safe distance from the “great, dark spider” on Nead’s web, allowed him to go scrupulously about his business. The distance between Holywell and Lazenby’s business was more than geographical and physical in nature. During the debates surrounding the OPA, Lord Campbell was interrogated as to whether private collections and so-called high art would be susceptible to the same scrutiny, seizure, and indictment under the proposed act. The worry was that the vaguely defined term ‘obscenity’ would apply to classic works held, presumably, by the wealthy in private collections, not to mention numerous nudes on display in the nation’s museums. Campbell quelled fears that items held in such collections would be subject to the same scrutiny as items intended for mass consumption that could be deemed obscene; the act as passed applied to obscene items “for the Purpose of Sale or Distribution, Exhibition for Purposes of Gain, lending upon Hire, or being otherwise published for Purposes of Gain” (Obscene Pub. Act 717). Such vague language absolutely included upper class collections but, of course, the duty of deciding what fit the legal criteria was in the hands of authorities. A visible print culture is altogether more immediate—and less mediated—than one behind closed doors and accessible only to a select few. The reason that Holywell Street was the main target for scrutiny from authorities and anti-obscenity vigilante groups was because of its highly visible nature. It may have been the “great dark spider” at the centre of London’s web of obscenity, but that also made it a prime target. By operating on the fringes of London’s great web and keeping his trade more or less shut off from the censorious scrutiny of the authorities, Lazenby’s clientele could be reasonably assured of privacy. By keeping out of the more common visible trade, operating outside the confines of the social and geographical networks of what I would call the mainstream sex book trade, Lazenby opted for a business model that traded in sex books, for certain, but also placed him at the top of the supply chain.
CONCLUSION

Through an examination into the geographies—moral and physical—of the sex book trade in late Victorian London, this chapter has demonstrated ways communities were formed around a clandestine commerce. Exploring the careers of William Dugdale, William Lazenby, and Leonard Smithers gives an idea about the shifting economies and markets of the sex book trade as the nineteenth century wore on; the books these men, and others, traded began life as radically indecent texts and, by the end of the century, had taken on a different form of radicalism, one that was more implicit but no less important than the political writings of some eighty years prior. The function of the sex book trade continually evolved as market niches were filled and consumers were given increasing choice of the materials they wished to purchase. Interaction between sex booksellers and consumers was also evolving and indeed democratizing. Studious collectors such as Henry Spencer Ashbee necessarily had a different relationship with the sex book trade than the more casual, playful approach of a consumer such as John Murdoch, the annotator of the mid century catalogues discussed at length in this chapter. While not quite Charles Carrington’s “Man in the Street” gaining access to sex books above his station, consumers like Murdoch represented a class of sex book consumers whose enjoyment came from interacting with all aspects of the trade (“Catalogue of Rare and Curious” n.p.). Above all else, this chapter’s emphasis is on the idea that communities coalesced around sex book trade throughout the nineteenth century, which produced immense consequences on the moral, intellectual, and physical geography of London.
Chapter 2 Images

Image 2.1: Booth’s Poverty Map Detail, Strand/St Clement Dane. Image: London School of Economics.

Image 2.2: Booth’s Poverty Map Detail, Spitalfields. . Image: London School of Economics.
Image 2.3: Half Moon Passage (undated photo)

Image 2.4: Holywell St & Half Moon Passage ca. 1868. Image Credit: MAPCO

Image 2.5: Holywell St. ca. 1878. Image Credit: MAPCO
Image 2.6: Holywell Street ca. 1901.
Image 2.7 East end of Holywell and Wych streets
ca. 1901. Image: Peter Berthoud
Image 2.8: Undated cover of Ward’s Catalogue. Image: Indiana University
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5-10. Various sets of prints, each set containing twelve prints, highly coloured, representing different scenes of love and intimacy. Each set is a quarter in.

11-20. Various sets of prints, each set containing twelve prints, highly coloured, representing different scenes of love and intimacy. Each set is a quarter in.

21. The Amours; a set of six prints, beautifully coloured, representing the scenes of love and intimacy. Each a quarter in.

22. The Amours; a set of six prints, highly coloured, representing the scenes of love and intimacy. Each a quarter in.

23. The Amours; a set of six prints, beautifully coloured, representing the scenes of love and intimacy. Each a quarter in.

24. The Amours; a set of six prints, highly coloured, representing the scenes of love and intimacy. Each a quarter in.

25. The Amours; a set of six prints, beautifully coloured, representing the scenes of love and intimacy. Each a quarter in.

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of the capital in a series of letters from Sir Charles F. to Lady James. Composed in
French. £1 11s. 6d.
Image 2.13: The cover of a ‘respectable’ bookseller’s catalogue, December 1885.
Image 2.14: Ward’s Bookshop, approximately, at 67 Strand.
Image 2.15: Edward Avery catalogue ca. 1889. *Album 7* British Library Cup. 264.g.48. Author’s own image.
Notice.

To facilitate the delivery of your Order, please enclose the Amount of Purchase.

Image 2.16: Edward Avery catalogue ca. 1889. Album 7 British Library Cup.264.g.

48. Author’s own image.
Chapter 3
The Erotic Memoir

The genre of erotic memoir is important in the genealogy of sex books, and especially for the period covered in this dissertation, roughly 1870-1900. The erotic memoirs that will be discussed in this chapter look backward to narrative traditions anchored in the eighteenth century yet they are also prescient texts that have a distinct element of forward-looking that has, as yet, not been fully elaborated in scholarship. Erotic texts of the Victorian period were brimming with repetition; this is why Steven Marcus’ notion that the “ideal pornographic novel…would go on forever”—what he has coined “pornotopia”—has been consistently reconsidered over the past half century (195). Erotic fiction, however, is necessarily finite; it is not an infinite loop. The physical limitations of the sex book (or any book, for that matter) demand that it necessarily end, even if no narrative conclusion is reached. A sex book reaches the end of its paper supply as well as its story. The erotic memoir was a popular genre of sex book in the later nineteenth century and one that, by its nature, did not rely on tidy conclusions but rather engaged readers in the memories presented as a contained narrative. The concomitant rise in literacy rates and growing markets in the reading public (as discussed in previous chapters) meant that sex books in the Victorian period could also grow by leaps and bounds. This chapter will focus on the function of the erotic memoir in the growth of sex book culture to the end of the century. Considerable attention will be paid to the ways in which erotic memoirs prefigured studies and theories of sexuality in their conventions and eventual deviations from these same conventions. The admixture of unrealistic depictions of sex with plausible enough actors and situations makes the erotic memoir a compelling genre for a study such as this. Memoirs can tell us a great deal about the ways Victorian consumers may have used or interacted with the texts. The erotic memoirs in this chapter—and the erotic memoir genre as a whole—presented readers with a couple of key dilemmas: one, the presentation and exploration of
subject(s) that were not necessarily representative of everyday experience (one brand of escapism) and, two, a subject position that, in Lisa Sigel’s words, “dissolve[s] any certainty of analysis” (Sigel “Looking” 229). This chapter will use the notion of the subject position put forth by Sigel as a guide to the ways in which the subjects of the various memoirs discussed herein presented challenges to narrative traditions in sex books as well as to Victorian readers’ own preconceptions of what constituted a work such as an erotic memoir. The memoirs under consideration in this chapter were an outgrowth of a familiar genre—indeed, a narrative tradition—but made a larger impact by troubling that familiarity in both content and context.

Analytical uncertainty is central to my study of the memoir as a convenient vehicle for all facets of real and fantastical sexual experience. At the root of the erotic memoir is the underlying notion that it contains a story which straddles the divide between plausibility and unlikelihood. Readers were presented with claims of erotic memoirs’ authenticity by publishers’ advertisements guaranteeing, for instance, the “simply and honestly true” memoirs of Walter in *My Secret Life*.60 Capitalizing on the name as well as seeking to add a literary legitimacy to an erotic memoir, publisher Charles Carrington brazenly stated that “no other than Oscar Wilde” was the author of *Teleny*.61 Anybody can write a memoir of erotic episodes that may be, on average, unremarkable and uninteresting if the experience is too run of the mill or, put another way, too similar to those of readers. There is not, to my knowledge, any erotic memoir describing scenes in which the subject—usually a male—has only one sex partner; this would serve only to remind readers of their own lives, which is not the role of fantasy. The tension between fact and fantasy is integral to erotic memoirs and it means that when it comes to matters of reporting about sexual experience, there is always an intermixture of fact and fantasy, that the fantasies are at least equally important as the ‘facts,’ and that they have as much if not more meaning to them, we must in our examination of

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60 Image 3.1
61 Image 3.4
these documents pay as much respect to their errors and falsifications as we do to those parts of the account which seem, in the usual sense of the expression, to have actually happened. (Marcus 114)

Though Marcus’ seminal work was written over fifty years ago and his ideas challenged by subsequent generations of scholars, the above sentiment remains one of the most salient points about the problem of the slippage between truth and fiction that occurs when reading or studying these works. The studious, cynical, and skeptical reader or scholar ought to recognize the near impossibility that everything written in an erotic memoir actually occurred. Though it would be remarkable if it turned out that *My Secret Life*’s Walter was a real person who actually wrote an eleven volume erotic memoir about his sexual escapades, such speculations are less important than what the text itself does as a documentation and refraction of the era and genre it is representing. The work becomes less about discerning truth from fiction and more about interpreting the discrete events, actions, and opinions depicted. Walter and the voluminous text claiming to contain his sexual memoirs are both important and active pieces of what I have called earlier a parallel textual history of the later Victorian period.

Further to Marcus’ thoughts on the role of fantasy, Kate Flint argues that “novelists rely on their contemporary readers to bring particular associations and connotations to bear on individual texts and on specific habits of reading” and it becomes readily apparent that the context(s) readers brought to Victorian erotic memoirs helped shape the meanings generated by those readers. (Flint 246). If we’re looking at the forest for the trees regarding fantasy, it is in the underbrush where fantasy lives and thrives; in simplest terms, I am in agreement with Flint that the reader themselves bring meaning to a text. The texts themselves are, of course, not neutral agents in the reader/text relationship and that is what this chapter will elucidate throughout the erotic memoirs under discussion. The texts—*My Secret Life, The Romance of Lust, The Sins of the Cities of the Plain, Letters from
Laura and Eveline, Teleny, and Des Grieux—are set apart from something a (male) reader could potentially live himself. This is, of course, not the entirety of what erotic memoirs did in the late Victorian period. The anchoring of erotic memoirs in earlier narrative traditions, their tendency toward sexological prescience, and their unique place within print culture and book history coalesce to make the late Victorian erotic memoir worthy of robust scholarly discussion.

What is also unique to the memoir genre, and beneficial to sex books in general, is that a memoir need not confine itself to narrative structures in the same way as fiction and autobiography do. A memoir depicts first-hand accounts of episodes from a life, as opposed to a unified narrative of events that comprise a life, so there is little need or justification for adhering to specific parameters of storytelling or narrative resolution. In fact, following Steven Marcus’ pornotopia, a sex book with a satisfactory resolution risks negating the entire premise (promise?) of sexual fantasy: a resolution destroys the fantasy by containing it. Autobiography, as opposed to memoir, tends to indicate a sustained narrative “about a person, whereas a memoir does not have a person as its subject. Its focus is memory, either its recording or its sketching” (Rak 487). It is not enough, however, to simply put together a series of erotic episodes and experiences, true or not, without an appeal to the importance of memory. Erotic memoirs construct a world in which there is tension between truth and fiction by making claims to a text’s or writer’s authenticity, by refracting social mores, by including historical events or figures in the fantasy, or reflecting contemporary sexological and scientific discourse from a vantage point that couches memory from the perspective of non-normative experience; this is the case with memoirs told from a non-heterosexual point of view. It seems crucial to many erotic memoirs to present a panoply of experiences in order to substantiate the explicit or implicit promises made to readers which act as an unspoken agreement that stipulates the terms under which the reader will act as participant in the private narrative. Heike Bauer makes the argument that Continental sexological discourses influenced English sexologists such as
Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter whose work, in turn, would influence artistic and literary output and that the act of translation privileged the male perspective of the *scientia sexualis* and, specifically, discourses around inversion.62 Bauer challenges “the view that sexological discourses [were] merely descriptive and prescriptive scientific formulae,” and further makes her case by redefining sexology to include literary production to show that “ideas and concepts are open to transformation and adaptation” (Bauer 17).

While this chapter is not strictly about sexology, I find Bauer’s tracing of the sexological genealogy in the late nineteenth century through the discourses created through the act of translations—both the translation from German into English and the translation of the science of sexology into art—to hold important keys to helping understand the erotic memoir and its own interplay with the *scientia sexualis* and the transitioning of the form and its privileging of the male perspective, specifically on inversion. Bauer’s work highlights a blind spot in Victorian sexology that occluded discourses of female perspectives on inversion and, in conversation with the present work, the omission of female perspectives vis-à-vis the erotic memoir is a regrettable necessity due to the scope and frame of this chapter and the work as a larger whole. What this chapter focuses on is the perspectives of an increasingly diverse number of erotic memoir subjects which reveals a narrative history that only scratches at the surface of a complex sexuality that, for my purposes, was most straightforwardly told through mostly male perspectives. In the short period under discussion in this chapter, the erotic memoir was subject to the influence of an older narrative tradition which gave it an anchor to facilitate the relationship between readers and the text but it also became progressively unmoored from this tradition by the turn of the century and something new was happening that maintained a cursory resemblance to earlier works.

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62 Inversion was the term used to describe one, usually a male, who adopted behaviours typical of the opposite sex. Often, it was used in the sense of what would today be described as homosexual but it was also applied to those who did not conform to the norms of their imposed gender.
**My Secret Life**

*My Secret Life*, the erotic memoir of ‘Walter’—no surname or other identifying information is given—which ran to eleven volumes and was published between approximately 1888 and 1894, is the *ne plus ultra* example of the genre and its various permutations and conventions. The protagonist, Walter, leads two lives: one, as an English gentleman, implying privilege, respectability, and self-control, and the other—the ‘secret’ life—as a seeker of sexual experiences and pleasures. Walter experiences an array of carnal pleasures without social repercussions, presumably thanks to keeping his secret life just that, a secret. *My Secret Life*’s eleven volumes are thought to have been released over six years beginning in 1888 and, as an erotic memoir, they are the prime example of the genre and its conventions in the Victorian period (Mendes 161). It claims to contain Walter’s “erotic existence, or *private confessions* and autobiography” that are “set down day by day, from boyhood onwards” and told from the perspective of an aged Walter (“My Secret Life or The Modern”). 63 *My Secret Life* should not be considered an autobiography because “as far as Victorian autobiography is concerned, this meant that the focus was for many years on a limited canon of ‘great’ male-authored works, created by a sense that only certain kinds of people have a ‘right’ to autobiography” whereas the memoir highlighted key events from a life and was not viewed as a complete narrative with the requisite introspection demanded by autobiography (Sanders 3). Though *MSL* is probably the erotic memoir that comes closest to autobiography, the fact remains that it is couched as a confessional memoir dealing with the sexual aspect of Walter’s life; other details pertinent to his life are conspicuously absent. The important factor in thinking of *My Secret Life* as memoir rather than autobiography is that “autobiography was more likely to reveal the truth of character” (Nussbaum 314).

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63 Image 3.1
An advertisement for the early and exclusive edition of *My Secret Life* also claimed that “no words can paint its peculiarities, because it is simply and honestly true” (*Album* 7 Item 65). Initially, according to the marketing around the work, only six copies were published, although this was probably a fabrication to create the illusion of scarcity and increase demand for the set with a total asking price of £100 that “cost the author the trifle of £1100” and seven years to complete (*Album* 7 Item 65). The “simply and honestly true” portion is the most important aspect of the advertisement, and also the most problematic. Truth claims in erotic memoirs are part of an ironic game played between reader and author(s): whether the events of the memoir happened or not, the belief that they are true is a necessary part of the fantasy. In addition to being the ideal example of erotic memoir, *My Secret Life* is also a reference work: each of the chapters in the eleven volumes contains subject headings and there is an extensive index listing “almost at a glance the large number and variety of amusements which the sexual organs afford to both men and women” (*My Secret Life* 2316). The contents of *MSL*’s eleven volumes are organized by specific subjects. Walter’s completist methodology and status as a respectable and authoritative memoirist give *MSL* the components necessary to justify its sharing shelf space with other reference works. I will argue *MSL* exemplifies an attempt to reach specific readerships based as much on its cover price as its encyclopedic qualities. Other kinds of pornographic texts used similar referencing techniques, usually under a scientific or medical guise. Well-known contemporary examples include the works of ‘Dr. Jacobus X,’ pseudonym of Victorian sex book publisher Charles Carrington, such as *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology…By a French Army-Surgeon* (1898) that masqueraded as scientific medical works on sex and sexuality. Earlier in this study I presented the catalogue of a sex book dealer called Ward’s who was offering “Important Medical Works” such as *Nature’s Secret Mirror* and *The Ladies’ Silent Friend*, the latter promised readers “curious and highly interesting details with private and important advice”

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64 Image 3.1
65 Image 3.1
Even other memoirs used a faux-medical framework: William Lazenby issued *Amatory Experiences of a Surgeon* in 1881. *MSL*, however, remains the best example of a referenced work marketed as memoir rather than a pseudoscientific text in the period.

For readers, *MSL* has the added feature of being ‘true.’ While it is unlikely that *MSL* was the product of just one author, the collective authors of the volumes had perhaps knowingly invoked Samuel Johnson’s edict that

> he that sits down calmly and voluntarily to review his life for the admonition of posterity, or to amuse himself, and leaves this account unpublishéd, may be commonly presumed to tell truth, since falsehood cannot appease his own mind, and fame will not be heard beneath the tomb. (342)

The introduction of *MSL* appears to fulfill Johnson’s principle, as the unnamed editor of the volumes relates the instructions given to him by Walter, who had fallen ill, to destroy the manuscript upon his death. Portions of the book may be based on the lived experiences of the author(s).

Cumulatively, Walter’s secret life was busy enough to keep a group of people occupied for a lifetime.

Walter himself asks, in the preface to *MSL*, “does every man kiss, coax, hint smuttily, then talk baudily [*sic*], snatch a feel, smell his fingers, assault, and win, exactly as I have done?” (*MSL* vol. I 13). He asks this rhetorically as a way of situating readers, further confirming their agreement that what they are about to partake in will be a peek behind the curtain of a man’s most private confessions: the appeal to the truth of Walter’s confessions stokes the engine of the fantasy. The unplanned publication of *MSL* only adds to the fantasy of the memoir’s truth, in the Johnsonian sense. This short passage also confirms that the subject, Walter, might indeed have a much greater breadth of experience than the Everyman but his motivations in putting down his memoirs are not all that different from those who would read them. In this way, apart from the copious amounts of

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66 Image 2.10
sex Walter or any other erotic memoirist depicts, the reader reaffirms his capacity for self-control. As Harry Cocks has established, Victorian “masculine respectability and good character…were mainly about moral self-possession, the dominion of the will over the passions and the ability to postpone personal gratification, all of which were essential measures of middle-class rectitude” (Cocks 119). Walter’s public life adhered to Cocks’ formulation; he was a man who appeared completely in control of his passions and gratification because this was how one successfully led a double life, presumably. The prominent Victorian doctor and sexual reformer William Acton had promulgated a theory that control over the sexual urges was a power of the intellect and it was these “moral capabilities which distinguished man from the animals” (Mort 61). Masculine self-control was reaffirmed by Charles Darwin in The Descent of Man as one of the “highest forms of sexual development” because it was governed “by reason and knowledge” (Mort 87). By living vicariously through the lechery of the protagonist, the reader has allowed himself to share in and mentally mimic the experiences described while maintaining the appearance of complete control. The privilege afforded in reading sex books—apart from the inherent privilege in the material object itself—is such that the reader, on one level, participates in proscribed acts and, on another level, claims no responsibility for the acts themselves. The reader maintains composure outwardly while indulging in an escapism not unlike that found in mainstream literature.

Although reading erotic memoirs can be viewed as a kind of escapism, so too is it a method of reinscribing social stratifications and the superiority, moral and imperial, of the target audience for whom costlier texts were produced. Stratification of class was as prevalent in the range of pornography available as in everyday Victorian life. By the end of the century, a collector class had emerged and the most exclusive erotic literature had its access limited by either smaller print runs or prohibitive price structuring, MSL being a great example of both these tactics. A contemporary

\[67\] For the sake of period context I am working with the assumption that the ideal—which is not to say only—reader for the erotic memoir was male.
advertisement for *MSL* exclaims that “only six copies were printed…we persuaded the writer to allow four copies to be sold, as he desired to destroy the limited edition by fire before his death” but, as stated above, this scarcity is almost surely a marketing technique, as there are at least 6 full and 2 partial sets confirmed in existence (Mendes 166). In addition, the purchase of a commodity like pornography brought with it the inherent risk that the reader may not get a return on his investment as “postal confiscations, pornographers’ frequent moves, and the lack of assurance that letters would reach distributors meant that the purchased goods might never arrive” (Sigel *Governing* 89). If *MSL* presented the broadest range of sexual experiences, it is only because its writer(s) and publisher(s) saw a demand in the market for a work that could be considered categorically comprehensive, like a literary encyclopedia of sex.

Before *MSL*, other examples of memoirs filled various niches within the market. John Cleland’s 1749 *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, commonly referred to as *Fanny Hill*, is the singular touchstone for Victorian erotic memoirs. *Fanny Hill*’s importance as a genre-defining text extended well into the late nineteenth century and beyond. The book itself plays no small role in the action of *MSL* as Walter uses it throughout the voluminous memoir, in mimicry of the erotic memoir as a genre, as a touchstone and inspiration for his own sexual escapades as well as his own recording of them. Walter recollects that, before beginning to record his memoirs he had scarcely read a baudy book, none of which, excepting *Fanny Hill*, appeared to me to be truthful: that did, and it does so still; the others telling of recherche eroticisms or of inordinate copulative powers, of the strange twists, tricks, and fancies of matured voluptuousness and philosophical lewdness, seemed to my comparative ignorance as baudy imaginings or lying inventions, not worthy of belief; although I now know, by experience,
that they may be true enough, however eccentric and improbable, they may appear to the uninformed. (Preface 8)

Walter’s engagement of the reader through his comparison to a book any consumer of erotic memoir would have been familiar with is a clever way to both nod to the narrative tradition as well as to set up the expectation and assure the reader that *MSL* contains true events that are seemingly beyond belief. Further in his preface Walter—almost prefiguring Heike Bauer’s criticism—explains that “Fanny Hill’s was a woman's experience. Written perhaps by a woman, where was a maid’s written with equal truth? That book has no baudy word in it; but baudy acts need the baudy ejaculations” (Preface 8). Walter does not go quite so far as to champion a woman’s sexual perspective, instead choosing to use *Fanny Hill* as a counterpoint to his own narrative; the former did not contain “baudy words” so the reader can rest assured that Walter’s will.

This is not to say that Walter has no respect for *Fanny Hill*. Walter uses *Fanny Hill* throughout *MSL* as a way into the hearts and minds (and bedrooms) of various women. He lends *Fanny Hill* to women, presumably using Fanny’s feminine perspective to his advantage to set the women he pursued at ease. In one instance, Walter recollects “we began to look at *Fanny Hill*…she looked intently at the pictures. I explained their salacity. ‘Hold the book dear, and turn over as I tell you.’ Then I put my fingers on her cunt again. How sensitive she was. ‘Let’s come upstairs.’ ‘No,’ said she, reluctantly, but up we went, and fucked again” (Vol 3 ch XVIII 590). Walter’s use of *Fanny Hill* worked as a calming and arousing tool was working both on his objects of desire as well as his readership. *Fanny Hill* was not some obscure text known to a select few: since its initial publication in 1749, it had never been out of print and every major Victorian sex book publisher produced an edition. *MSL* and *Fanny Hill* were, in this regard, contemporaneous works as were their subjects, Walter and Fanny. *Fanny Hill*, both the character and the text, shared spaces with Victorian erotic memoirs and that becomes abundantly clear throughout this chapter. While *MSL* is the apotheosis
of the Victorian erotic memoir, another text that predates it by over a decade helps exemplify the
conventions of the genre and serves an important role in the chronology of erotic Victorian
memoirs that would eventually gesture away from those conventions and shift focus to alternative
desires and depictions.

**The Romance of Lust**

_The Romance of Lust_ (1873) is largely in line with the expected narrative arc of the erotic
memoir: sexual episodes from early life to adulthood told from the perspective of a mature, though
not necessarily elderly, age. At four volumes, however, it is easily outstripped by _MSL_ in length and
breadth of experience, though that does not lessen its importance to the development of the erotic
memoir genre in the latter portion of the nineteenth century. _Romance_ is ostensibly the memoir of
one Charles Roberts, who begins at age fifteen recounting his earliest sexual encounters with a
married woman, his governess, and, eventually, a full complement of other licentious encounters
that find Charles partaking in various morally (and legally?) proscribed acts with relatives and even
other men. Charles often resorts to the defense of acts that are at variance with common law and
Victorian morality by declaring that incest, for instance, “stimulates our passions and stiffens our
pricks, so that if even we be in the wane of life, vigour is imparted by reason of the very fact of
conventional laws” (57). The excitement resulting from proscribed acts stems from their
transgressiveness. The memoir follows, in the first three volumes, a pattern of curiosity, naivété, and
initiation into the secrets of the “lust” promised by the title. Charles is initiated by various mature
women who are led to believe they alone have claimed his virginity; the taking of male virginity by
lecherous females is a reversal of the sex book trope that prizes female virginity. Charles, from the
outset of the memoir, is a subversive subject as he is given the more traditionally female
characteristics of sexual ingénue and prize to be won. Charles stumbles his way through his early
sexual experiences, but is soon in control of the majority of his encounters, manipulating ladies and
gentlemen alike in their pursuit of his virginity or, to use a parlance more befitting of the erotic memoir tradition, his maidenhead. The apotheosis of pleasure in Romance is always anal intercourse. Charles first experiences the pleasures of sodomy with his female partners and plays both active and receptive roles with these women, the latter effected via what were taken as enlarged clitorises that behaved just like penises, a scenario that will later form the basis of consummating wedding nuptials in Letters from Laura and Eveline. As the memoir continues, however, it is clear that Charles has a taste for same-sex love in all its forms. Charles’ sexuality is fluid and telling of the lack of correspondence between sexual acts and discrete categories of sexual identity. In other words, Charles’ sex acts do not equal identity, though this would begin to change later in the century and is evident in a few of the later memoirs discussed in this chapter. For Charles Roberts—and his partners—oscillating between objects of desire regardless of sex and gender is seemingly effortless. Transgression for Charles is a straightforward matter so long as the main aim is pleasure. It would seem that Charles Roberts is, in this way, a representative model of the Victorian libertine who embodied the carefree existence of one who is not constrained by his behaviour to a specific sexual category. Charles does, however, indicate throughout the text that certain of his actions are against common law, showing a great deal of self-awareness on the part of the author(s). The proscribed acts may have also heightened readers’ enjoyment of the text.

Throughout this section on Romance and Charles Roberts, I will—in addition to fitting the book into the genealogy of the erotic memoir—remark on the subversive nature of the book and its protagonist by looking back to Fanny Hill. I argue that that Romance (and indeed Charles) reconfigures the former. Romance says something about not only the history of the genre but of the precarious line its authors were straddling by using Charles’ sexual subjectivity to portray a feminized—though not necessarily feminine—form of maleness for a largely male audience. Romance presents an alternate form of male sexual escapades while also according with the tacit agreement
readers should have come to expect from erotic memoirs by this point: that the story therein is an authentic one, reflecting and refracting societal norms.

The final volume of Romance, more so than the preceding volumes, gives clues to the ostensible authenticity of the memoir. Using Victorian pornographic bibliographer and collector Henry Spencer Asbhee’s insight into the book’s production as a starting point, it should not be surprising that the memoir is “not the produce of a single pen, but consists of several tales…woven into a connected narrative by a gentleman, perfectly well known to the present generation of literary eccentrics and collectors” (Catena 188). This description was copied verbatim by bookseller Charles Carrington in an 1899 catalogue offering Romance for sale to collectors. The gentleman who “connected [the] narrative” was William Simpson Potter, a sex book collector and traveller who was likely involved in various round robin compositions of erotic literature from the 1860s until his death in 1879 (Mendes 236 – 237). It is in volume four of Romance that the authors hint at common connections within the pornographic book trade in London. This link between the fictional world and the real world in erotic memoirs was significant because it reiterates the discrete nature of the book trade—a physical system with real people at its core—and the fantasies portrayed within the books, whose veracity is somewhat less clear cut. Situating the fantasy within real geography could allow the reader to more easily fold into the narrative. At this point in the memoir, Charles has matriculated to King’s College and taken lodgings “in Norfolk Street, Strand, for the convenience of being near” the school (Romance iv 3). Charles’ sodomitical partner, Mr. MacCallum, had, at the same time, “taken a small set of chambers at Lyon’s Inn…where he had a complete library of bawdy books and pictures,” which is also near King’s College (Romance iv 17). McCallum was lucky that Lyon’s Inn “faced Newcastle Street, on its eastern side, between Wych Street and Holywell Street; one entrance led to it from the latter” and that easy access to Holywell Street, where much of the

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Image 3.2
trade in pornographic materials in Victorian London was centered, would have allowed him to build his collection (Thornbury 32).  

*Romance* is a text that uses place as a way of reaffirming its authenticity. Later, a specific address in Paris appears in Charles’ memoir, 60 rue de Rivoli, where “an old bawd” resides and Charles arranges to organize a viewing of “some rear operations between two men” (*Romance* iv 74). The building at 60 Rue de Rivoli is the Hôtel de Ville, or city hall, of Paris. The idea that an old bawd offering amusements of the flesh would reside there is a pointed reference to the more *laissez-faire* French attitudes toward sex and, ultimately, the publication of sex books which, beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, was moving operations out of London and into Continental cities such as Paris and Brussels (Sigel *Governing* 84). Apart from a reading of the Hôtel de Ville address as an allusion to Paris’ relatively freer sexual environment, its inclusion reinscribes the mythology of French vices; the connotation of ‘French’ as synonymous with ‘sexual’ or ‘lechery’ persists in our modern language (French kissing, French letter, *etc.*) as it was in the language of Victorian England. Readers familiar with Parisian and Continental sexual reputations would recognize the multi-faceted jape of the address and perhaps also read it as a jab at British prudery regarding sex: if there are “scenes of real sodomy” being offered at Paris’ city hall—quite openly by the sounds of things—what a comparably buttoned-up bore London life must be. Rue de Rivoli’s importance to Parisian life reinscribes, perhaps, the connection between the London upper class pornography consumer and access to exclusive materials and acts that were placed well out of the reach of the lower class reader. Viewing the ‘French vice’ of sodomy at the Parisian address was, in a word, exclusive: exclusive in taste as well as carnal knowledge. Sodomy was routinely expurgated—or simply not present in the first place—in a number of erotic texts. The most well known example of an expurgated sodomy scene

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70 This is the same location that, in Chapter 2, was argued to have been an ideal location for anyone housing a sex book collection on account of the various egress opportunities.

71 The ‘English vice’ being, of course, flagellation.
might be the one published in *Fanny Hill* that is still sometimes subject to elision in modern editions. The infamous scene between two men, which Fanny witnesses and commits to paper in her memoir, leads her to immediately feign moral indignation, describing “so criminal a scene” that she “had the patience to see to the end, purely that [she] might gather more facts” (Cleland 195). Fanny is conditioned to see the two men’s actions as “criminal” yet she vigilantly watches through the keyhole until they have finished, ostensibly so that she may report all she has witnessed. When she does report the incident—after the perpetrators “make a safe retreat” on account of Fanny tripping over “some nail or ruggedness in the floor,” knocking her unconscious—to the house madam, the older woman gives a brief lecture condemning these “unsexed, male misses” and leaves it at that (Cleland 196). The incident is presented and given a proper condemnation befitting eighteenth century British morality, but it was nevertheless included in the book and that is what is important. *Romance’s* inclusion of a scene in which characters would view sodomy is, once again, a nod to and subversion of the tongue-firmly-in-cheek faux indignation in *Fanny Hill*. Charles views “an actual scene of sodomy” (IV 75) directly in front of him in the inner sanctum of 60 Rue de Rivoli to its conclusion. Unlike the comparable scene found in *Fanny Hill*, Charles’ indignation comes not in the form of a prescribed reaction to the scene that has just played out in front of him. Instead, it makes him rather more inquisitive about the operation as he discovers the peepholes which peer into the room where the act takes place. Charles lightly chastises the old bawd for allowing peepers and admits “it is well [he] resisted any complicity [in the] action” (IV 77) that had just transpired as he knows young men who engage in such displays have an “infamous habit of *bantage*” or blackmailing well-to-do gentlemen “who were got within their meshes” (IV 76). It is telling that, upon witnessing sex between men, Fanny Hill resorts to the language of immorality while Charles Roberts is intimately more bothered by the potential for personal financial loss and, possibly, the shame and anxiety connected to having one’s secrets exposed. If Charles is a nineteenth century subversion of
Fanny, we cannot help but read them in their contexts as representatives of similarly precipitous sexualities: the homosexual and the female, respectively. Romance is an example of an eroticization of male homosexuality that delineates along lines of wealth, class, age, and power.

In addition to depicting male homosexuality, Romance contains geographical clues about the clandestine book trade. As mentioned previously, portions of the action in Romance take place in and around Holywell Street and the narrative seems self-aware of the connections it is making, partly because its authors were part of the world of sex books. Other erotic memoirs and sex books relayed certain information to readers, in the form of a clandestine kind of product placement. Examples of characters in one sex book enjoying other titles by the same publisher were not uncommon. The Lazenby-published novel Randiana also makes mention of “a quiet hotel in Norfolk Street, Strand” near Holywell Street, casting a geographical reference similar to Romance (62-63). Another sex book mentioning other titles explicitly is Lazenby’s 1885 Love With Safety in which characters refer to the periodical The Pearl (32) but also to titles of books which may have never existed. The Galant Confession and Diable du Corps (43, 67) may be simply a bit of fun on the part of Love with Safety’s author(s), but it is worth mentioning that a catalogue of Lazenby titles was included as an appendix in the publisher’s original printing but that the appendix is absent from subsequent printings, though the other appendices remain (Mendes 145-149). A number of Lazenby titles are “recommended” to readers in the final pages of Love and Safety (note the change in the title from ‘with’ to ‘and’) in the 1925 reprint I was able to examine, though additions of later titles had obviously been made. The inclusion of these titles—Autobiography of a Flea, Maidenhead Stories, School Life in Paris, and Flossie—speaks to the longevity of Lazenby’s impact on sex book culture beyond his own time.

Sex books’ inclusion of real-life book titles and geographical landmarks bolstered their claims to authenticity: these were ways of connecting with readers by sharing familiar names and
spaces. This strategy/tactic was discussed extensively in chapter 1 in terms of the periodical which took its name from the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens and William Lazenby’s, knack for straddling the real and fictive worlds in his publications, including *Romance of Lust* and *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*. The authenticity of an erotic memoir can only be enhanced by the inclusion of (real) places familiar to readers, but the purpose of including specific addresses could also have an instructional function, making erotic memoirs and other kinds of erotic texts useful not only as entertainment but also as guidebooks in the tradition of the *Yokel’s Preceptor*, a supposed “warning to the inexperienced” (2) on how to navigate London’s various temptations, with particular areas to avoid. In actuality, the *Preceptor*’s warnings were disingenuous and actually part of an elaborate joke that spoofed groups like the Society for the Suppression of Vice and other moral authorities, self-appointed to uphold decency on religious or other grounds. Contrary to the mandate of the SSV that had “laboured unremittingly to check the spread of open vice and immorality” by keeping “impure and licentious books, prints, and other publications” from youth, the *Preceptor* was a guide to all the sins London had to offer, from gin and gambling palaces to the best places to find visceral pleasures suiting any taste (“Varieties” 32-33). Productions like *Preceptor* were geographical guides veiled in irony, a technique that was used all over the clandestine book trade, though perhaps a bit more subtly executed in erotic memoirs. Geography that can be traced back to either the clandestine book trade or notorious events is a unifying factor within all the memoirs included in this study, apart from adding a level of authenticity. At any rate, mapping the sexual city and its available sins seemed to be part of the larger *raison d’être* of many erotic memoirs. Even if Victorian readers never experienced first-hand the pleasures available at the addresses mentioned, it makes sense that these works may have enabled and encouraged sexual tourism.
**SINS OF THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN**

Directly engaging with the *Yokel’s Preceptor’s* warnings about “monsters in the shape of men, commonly designated *Margeries, Pooffs, &c*… [who] actually walk the streets the same as the whores, looking out for a chance!” *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is the clandestinely published 1881 memoir whose subtitle, *Recollections of a Mary Ann*, is a clear indication of its subject matter (5–6). The “Mary Ann”—a more up-to-date but still pejorative term than Margerie for an effeminate man or male prostitute—in question is the memoir’s subject and ostensible author, Jack Saul. “Recollections” form the basis of this or any memoir. In the case of *Sins* the reader is asked to consider from the outset these recollections from the memory of an ‘authentic’ source, even though in terms of his position in society his word would not have necessarily been granted the kind of trustworthy privilege afforded to someone of higher status. In the case of *Sins*, however, first-hand participatory knowledge eclipsed the respectability of the participant. The reliance on memory, whether the events portrayed are fictive or not, immediately frames the memoir genre and establishes the level of credibility of the source. In Saul’s case, the memories being provided offer information not generally available but also somewhat lacking in credibility. Saul’s position as a prostitute would have immediately identified him as low class.

What sets *Sins* apart from other memoirs, however, is Saul’s duality as a literary character and a living person. The next time the name Jack Saul would make a public appearance was in 1890 when he turned witness for the prosecution in a scandal involving a male brothel at 19 Cleveland Street, London, where he had worked and lived under the direction of proprietor Charles Hammond. In the course of the libel trial that was brought against a newspaper editor for alleging the Earl of Euston had patronized the brothel, Saul appeared as a witness and gave testimony that he was employed, in his own words, as a “professional sodomite” and that he had accompanied the Earl to the brothel so the latter could procure sex with young men and boys working there (qtd. in
Kaplan 187). In the course of Saul’s testimony, he also admitted that he had offered evidence in a similar scandal involving Dublin Castle officials in his native Ireland five years earlier, but that his information was considered by the presiding magistrate in the trial too old to be of use. Not much of what Saul said on the witness stand correlates with the recollections in *Sins* and some details directly contradict the memoir. For example, the Saul in *Sins* claims to be of the “farmer class in Suffolk” while the Saul of Cleveland Street was of Irish heritage (10 – 11). *Sins* publisher William Lazenby’s roots are, not coincidentally, in Suffolk. The UK census of 1881 lists William Lazenby as a “bookseller age 47, born Ipswich, Suffolk” and currently living in Lambeth with his wife “Louisa, bookseller’s wife, age 40” (UK Census 1881 accessed via Ancestry). Ten years prior, the census lists Louisa Lazenby living at “11 Blue Cross Street”—the exact address given for Lazenby on his arrest in that same year, 1871—without William at home, presumably because he was serving his jail sentence (UK Census 1871). The crucial point of Saul’s duality is how his name and character straddle the boundaries between history and fiction as a relay for sexual identities. Saul’s association with three significant homosexual sex scandals of the late nineteenth century—Boulton and Park, Dublin Castle, and Cleveland Street—afford him a unique position as an authentic voice for erotic memoir.

In order to establish that Saul’s recollections are in fact worth the reader’s time and money, the memoir is first framed by a wealthy patron called Mr. Cambon, who narrates in the first person, recounting his meeting with an “effeminate but very good-looking young fellow...dressed in tight-fitting clothes” who was “favoured by nature by a very extraordinary development of the male appendages” (3) and whom he follows to a picture gallery, following almost exactly the Preceptor’s tongue-in-cheek ‘warning’ that such “sods…generally congregate around picture shops” and subsequently hires for sex (6). After some curated description reminiscent of the surfeit of pornographic texts available in Victorian London of Cambon’s and Saul’s multiple sexual
encounters, Cambon wishes not to “pall his readers [with] repetition of [their] numerous orgies of lust” but instead opts to “content [him]self” with presenting the memoirs he has commissioned Saul to write at a rate of £5 per week beginning with a section entitled “Early Development of Pederastic Ideas in His Youthful Mind” (10). Cambon’s sexual relationship with Saul enhances the authenticity of the narrative that follows. Having been with Saul himself, Cambon’s experiences are a seal of approval that Saul was the real thing. Cambon, as Saul’s patron and no longer involved sexually with Saul, takes on the role of publisher and editor of the recollections as they are presented to the reader. The retainer he pays Saul for his writing echoes arrangements between Victorian sex book publishers and authors. Specifically, William Lazenby, who likely had a number of writers producing work for him. Cambon paying Saul for both sex and literary output is a fascinating and perfect microcosm for the sex book trade and for the subject positions Saul himself occupies. As this chapter will show, Saul was at once a literary creation and a real life person. He really was a male prostitute who worked at a brothel. The literary Saul mirrored the real Saul in manifold ways and the two characters also differed in many important aspects. The fact, however, that both Saul’s sex and his literary labour were paid endeavours affords *Sins* a unique position among erotic memoirs in equating the work of sex and the work of writing as concurrent occupations. Saul represents a tangible link between the worlds of sex and books in a way no other erotic memoir subject in this chapter does. The relationship between Saul and Cambon echoes the relationship between publishers like William Lazenby and the writers he employed. The similarities between Cambon and Lazenby do not end with patronage, however: Lazenby himself had an authorial and editorial hand in many of his works in a way the fictional Cambon has in *Sins*.

In presenting Saul’s recollections as a commissioned lot, the narrative is straight away framed in such a way that it is distanced from the other erotic memoirs under discussion in this chapter. It is not a found narrative but rather a purpose-built diarizing of episodes from a sexual life. Portions of
the text feel like a case study in sexuality rather than a text meant strictly for pleasure. Saul’s memoir is comprised of first person accounts of every kind of sexual experience, from boyhood through adulthood: pansexual, amateur to professional, delivered via Mr. Cambon, acting pseudoanthropologically, making Saul variously a didactic tool as well as an object of desire. Saul’s very identity is sexual and this was amplified in the sequel to *Sins* as well as later, when the real Jack Saul appeared in the public eye as part of the Cleveland Street male brothel scandal.

The memoir is reminiscent of many Victorian sex books in its use of flagellation scenes and repetitive descriptions of copulation. However, *Sins* also includes unique scenarios that fall outside the scope of expected or canonical sexual encounters: among these are a scene of bestiality and instances of hermaphroditism and gender inversion, as well as inter-racial sex. The memoir ends abruptly and is followed by short essays in defense of sodomy and, surprisingly, ‘tribadism’ (lesbianism) that make no claim to having been penned or inspired by Saul and appear out of nowhere and out of sync with the rest of the narrative. It is not until the 1893 novel *Teleny* that a pornographic *Bildungsroman* with a more traditional narrative structure and denouement emerges. The difference, of course, is that the memoir genre of which *Sins* is a part offers its readers a supposedly more authentic experience if they believe the subject to be a real person. In other notable erotic memoirs, there is little evidence that the subject is an actual person and little to sustain the illusion that the memoir is, in fact, true. This was not the case with *Sins* as it has since been shown by Glenn Chandler that the subject of the memoir and the man calling himself Jack Saul in the Cleveland Street scandal were the same person.

*Sins*’ publication in 1881 is significant: it is the first known instance of Saul’s name appearing anywhere in print. If the events of the memoir are to be believed, however, Saul had been involved in a notorious scandal ten years prior in London’s West End. Just before a chapter entitled “Some Frolics with Boulton and Park,” Saul recounts an integral scene in the 1870 Boulton and Park cross-
dressing scandal in which the two defendants, Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park—dressed in their female guises as Stella and Fanny, respectively—were accused of conspiracy to commit a felony (as sodomy was termed) with Member of Parliament Lord Arthur Clinton and others (Sins 45). In Boulton and Park’s trial a year later, it could not be proved that the felony had taken place and many of the details were deemed too shocking to be published in the papers, but Saul’s recollection recounts the unproven act with Lord Arthur in great detail from a voyeuristic keyhole perspective, furnishing every last detail. It is worth mentioning that the view through a keyhole or similar small aperture was, by the time of Sins, a well-established generic trope of the erotic memoir going back to at least Fanny Hill and likely even before that. Fanny Hill’s iconic keyhole scene, in which Fanny watches two men be intimate with each other—no sex is described in the scene—is infamous for its depiction of homosexuality and for being excised from editions throughout its two and a half centuries in print. Sins’ keyhole scene pays explicit homage to Fanny Hill. Upon putting his eye to the hole to watch Ernest Boulton and Lord Arthur Clinton in the next room, Saul notes that he “had a famous view of all that was going on in the next room. It put [him] in mind of the scene between two youths which Fanny Hill relates to have seen through a peephole at a roadside inn” (Sins 38). In Saul’s case, his use of keyholes for spying goes back to his youth when he used the same technique to watch his family’s dairy maid dressing, though he laments he “never saw very much except those lovely titties and neck in the process of washing or changing her frock” (Sins 16-17). Spying through keyholes or peepholes in Sins is more than a quick device to portray some sexual action; it acts as a coda, nodding to the conventions that have persisted from earlier narrative traditions.

In his three-volume sex book bibliography, Pisanus Fraxi suggests that the descriptions of Boulton and Park in Sins “would almost appear to have been sketched from personal acquaintance,” although he gives no further information as to why this might have been the case (Catena 195). The main problem with the idea that Saul witnessed the events depicted in Sins in 1870 is that he would
have been only thirteen years of age and living in Dublin at the time. This information was only recently uncovered by Saul biographer Glenn Chandler, who has proven that Jack Saul was “as real as Irish potatoes” (Chandler “Jack Saul”).

Although Chandler’s biography establishes a narrative and timeline for Saul and his family, many questions still remain regarding the authenticity of Sins as an erotic memoir. Chandler suggests that the events of the book are given a new verisimilitude with the discovery of the real Jack Saul which is, to some extent, true. The fact is, however, that Sins bears the marks of multiple authors, a theory that I have been working on since first reading the book and which problematizes any argument regarding strict verisimilitude. What we can say for sure about Jack Saul and Sins is that he was a real person, but it remains unclear exactly how much, if any, input he had into crafting the memoir. Saul as the catalyst or inspiration for the erotic memoir, rather than author, presents no issues to my treatment of it as a memoir that relays between the fictional world and the real. Chandler’s The Sins of Jack Saul seems to be working under the assumption that Saul was the sole author of Sins. Based on my research, it is much more likely that the book was authored by multiple hands. The text may have been begun by sex book author and collector James Campbell Reddie and/or artist Simeon Solomon who then handed the manuscript to publisher William Lazenby upon Reddie’s death in 1877. There is also a possibility that pornographic bibliographer Henry Spencer Ashbee had a hand in Sins as he is known to have inherited much of Reddie’s work and collection in 1877. A collaborative or round robin effort was a common method of producing a book like Sins. Saul’s accounts are likely equal parts fact and fiction with Lazenby et al editing heavily in order to work in the Boulton and Park material, to say nothing of the terminal essays which was another Lazenby hallmark: non-sequiturs to fill white space.

In Fanny & Stella, a recent study of the Boulton and Park scandal by Neil McKenna, the author takes speculation about Saul and his alter-ego a step further and fearlessly mixes facts from
the Boulton and Park trial with *Sins*’ description of what Saul witnessed through the keyhole. McKenna sets up Saul’s recollection of his view of Ernest Boulton and Lord Arthur Clinton at the drag ball at Haxell’s Hotel as something that ought to be taken as fact. McKenna boldly describes Saul as one “whose bawdy recollections of that night were closer to the bone, in every sense,” although it has been thoroughly proved that Saul was nowhere near that Hotel (or London, for that matter) at the time of the actual events that were at the centre of Boulton and Park’s trial (McKenna 230). Works like McKenna’s stand as a testament to the power of appropriating and narrativizing real-life events to augment readers’ enjoyment of a particular work across genres. Small fictions abound in McKenna’s biography. In addition to fearlessly quoting *Sins* as though it were fact, he fallaciously inserts Frederick Park into the completely spurious sequel *Letters from Laura and Eveline* and quotes from it as though it were factual. To give but one small example to illustrate the point, McKenna parenthetically states that “Fanny [Frederick Park] was fond of calling [the anus]…her ‘arse-quim’” and a note indicates that the example is drawn from *Letters*, even though the text did not feature Park at all (McKenna 177). McKenna’s admixture of fact and fiction emulates a quality of Victorian erotic memoir. *Sins* is a particularly good example of the tension between fiction and veracity in the memoir genre; on the one hand, it is difficult to believe the memoir as it is and discerning Victorian readers would not have been remiss to have kept this in mind as they read. The first lines of Saul’s memoirs read:

> Dear Sir, - I need scarcely tell you that little cocks, and everything relating to them, had a peculiar interest to me from the very earliest time to which it is possible for my memory to carry me back to. (*Sins* 27)

From the very beginning of Saul’s narrative through to his final reminiscences, he continually relays experiences seemingly aimed at striking familiarity in readers. Saul’s early trysts with his cousin Jenny
or a dairymaid, boarding school experiments with other boys, up to sexual involvement with army officers are just a few of the experiences Saul recollects that may be relatable to the average reader.

As if Saul’s own narrative were not enticing enough for readers, the book closes with additional material that is separate from the memoir. Briefly mentioned above, essays in defense of sodomy and tribadism appear after an abrupt terminal incest scene in Saul’s memoir. There are no indications of the essays’ authorship and there is no evidence that they are meant as a continuation to the narrative of Jack Saul. Rather, they are supplemental to the preceding text. Ashbee considers them “entirely insignificant” (Catena 195) and the editor of the most recent modern edition of Sins renders them of “little interest” for their lack of commentary “on the legal situation in England [and] nothing on attempts to explain and justify ‘man-manly love’” (Sins xviii), but these hasty dismissals are short-sighted. I concede the essays may appear to have limited value apropos of the preceding text, but they compel re-reading a text like Sins or any other sodomitical text—sodomitical, of course, meaning texts which are offering readers insights into worlds of sodomy and/or other non-procreative sex acts or ‘deviance.’ The first essay, entitled “Arses Preferred to Cunts” gives historical examples of sexual deviance from “Nero [having] his mother” (83) to a contemporary “gipsy found guilty, first of all of having his own donkey, and afterwards a neighbour’s little boy” among other examples (85). Largely, however, it appears to give a pedestrian discussion on sodomy and not much else. The essay on tribadism, “a vice which every man in his heart looks on with kindly eyes” (88), likens it to the equivalent of sodomy that a female turns to “when she has exhausted every lech of the male fancy” (89). Rather than being masterpieces of rhetoric in the defense of these topics, the essays serve as a medium to speak freely about them and offer a rare space for non-derisory perspectives. The work done by the essays echoes much of the editorializing efforts of Victorian sex books: namely, the essays exploit the issues they are discussing and attempt to strike a blow against the censoriousness of those who disagree. Much like Lazenby’s editorial preface in The Pearl, in
which he explains the logic behind the periodical’s name “in the hope that when it comes under the
snouts of the moral and hypocritical swine of the world, they may not trample it underfoot, and feel
disposed to rend the publisher, but that a few will become subscribers on the quiet” (Pearl 1).
Lazenby is accusatory and provocative in his use of the ‘pearls before swine’ excoriation. *Sins’*
terminal essays use a similar tactic: they are a sleazy-sounding cover for indignation against those
their authors likely view as the same hypocrites who would at once censor sex books but also, more
than likely, enjoy them.

To modern sensibilities, no profundities are to be discovered within these terminal essays;
however, to put the essays in their proper context a case begins to emerge that the appeal to history
and looking “with kindly eyes” upon same-sex relationships, is going some way to not only inform
readers but also to test the waters for deviation from the conventions of erotic memoirs. *Sins* itself is
a text that trades in both a degree of historical verisimilitude and narrative invention. The text’s close
admixture of fact and fiction is something of an experiment in the genre. The terminal essays, on the
other hand, appeal to actual historical and sociological facts and scenarios that gesture toward
further deviation from erotic conventions. This deviation is brought to fruition in *Sins*’ sequel *Letters
from Laura and Eveline*, which was written by publisher William Lazenby’s own hand, the same hand
that included terminal essays that were used to spread information but also to signal a possible
direction for future works. The terminal essays are the conceptual bridge that begat *Letters from Laura
and Eveline* and, perhaps indirectly, other erotic memoirs that deviated or troubled generic (and
sexual) convention. One need only look to Lazenby’s output after *Sins* to draw this parallel. In
addition to *Letters*, Lazenby also published *The Autobiography of a Flea*, the periodicals *The Cremorne*
and *The Pearl*, and other titles that continually deviated not only from the conventions of the erotic
memoir but sex book publishing as a whole.
Sin’s essay on tribadism mentions a “café in the Haymarket,” an area of London well known as a haven for prostitution, where a “Frenchwoman…offered a young English girl ten shillings to be allowed to kiss her cunt” (89). It is not difficult to imagine this would have been reasonably enticing to readers of erotic memoirs, although a relatively uncommon scenario. Texts featuring lesbian sex were not very common in sex books in the 1880s. By including this material, William Lazenby cleverly set up expectations for Sin’s sequel that featured various forms of female lust in the characters he carried over from Sin, Laura (Ernest Boulton) and Eveline (Jack Saul). The later text, written as an epistolary memoir billed as “An Appendix to the Sins of the Cities” and entitled Letters from Laura and Eveline, published two years after Sin in 1883, finds the titular characters in their female guises as two blushing young brides, in mimicry of the 1870 Boulton and Park affair in which the two young friends were accused of a conspiracy to commit the act of sodomy while dressed as women.

LETTERS FROM LAURA AND EVELINE

Presumably, one key selling feature of Letters is its association with Sin, which is accomplished through the subtitle, Giving an Account of their Mock-Marriage, Wedding Trip, etc. Published as an Appendix to the Sins of the Cities. This subtitle communicates to readers familiar with Sin that they can be assured of more of the same should they choose to procure a copy of Letters. Even later advertisements capitalize on Sin as a way to sell Letters. Or, put another way, Letters, itself an epistolary memoir, relies doubly on the memory of its readers and potential readers to entice them: before the reader has even opened, let alone received, his copy of Letters his own memories of Jack Saul, Ernest Boulton, and Frederick Park, whether solely from his reading of Sin, newspaper reports, or some combination of the two are brought to mind. In the process of actually reading Letters, memory is appealed to once again in the recounting of the wedding nights themselves, as

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would be expected of an erotic memoir. The epistles that make up the memoir are episodic, shining a light on a brief period of the two titular protagonists’ lives. The episodes detailed in the letters rely heavily on readers’ willing suspension of disbelief and perhaps the good will created by *Sins* to allow for the many physical anomalies and ambiguities present throughout the scenes described. *Letters* is a continuation of the subversion of the memoir genre that builds on the complex subject positions of protagonists such as *Romance of Lust*’s Charles Roberts and *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*’s Jack Saul. *Letters* owes its framing device, the epistolary memoir, to eighteenth and early nineteenth century novels and presents its titular protagonists as a couple of self-aware yet playful lechers. The modern term to describe *Letters* would be a campy romp, and it represents a new branch in the genealogy of the erotic memoir.

Any epistolary erotic memoir will inevitably draw a comparison with John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, more commonly known as simply *Fanny Hill*, which has been discussed in relation to *Romance of Lust* above. In thinking about *Letters from Laura and Eveline* as a descendent of *Fanny Hill*, Julia Epstein’s essay on the latter, “Fanny’s Fanny,” is informative. Epstein notes that the eighteenth century epistolary memoir’s letter-writing is necessarily “implausible”—in terms of the ability of the letter writer to set down their memoirs in such immediate detail—but that it represents more than its own simple productive or expressive activity…Letters structure and control these narratives and inscribe in their texts the duplicitously self-conscious self-awareness of their writers. At the same time they also inevitably weave sexuality and the body into their textual tapestries. The fundamental activity of a letter is to circulate, and a circulating letter can always be ‘purloined.’ While letters require the impulse of literal physical absence, they replace it with a surrogate presence (Epstein 138)

Epstein’s notion of a “surrogate presence” is a useful way to frame *Fanny Hill*, but it also applies equally to *Letters from Laura and Eveline*. Laura and Eveline’s epistles are written mostly whilst on a
honeymoon cruise with their husbands, addressed and eventually sent to their mutual friend Louis Hurt. *Letters*, as a published text, is at least twice removed from its original letter writers, who recorded their experiences on paper and then removed themselves from the equation once the letters were sent. Whatever the original purpose of the brides’ recording of their experiences is given new meaning once it is presented as an erotic memoir. Presumably, the letters themselves were in Hurt’s possession and subsequently published either by himself or another actor who necessarily shifts the context and meaning of the words as they are recorded. What readers receive in the form of the erotic memoir is what Epstein calls the “surrogate presence” of the long absent letter writer (138).

When those letter writers are self-professed “hermaphrodites” whose “arse-quim[s] throb like true cunt[s]” readers are tasked with re-formulating the writers’ sexuality and physicality (*Letters* 10). To clarify: Laura and Eveline, who occupy difficult subject positions as neither man nor woman, heterosexual or homosexual, or any other simple binary, are atomised and beyond what could reasonably have been labelled the normal expertise of a reader in 1883. I am arguing that their uncertain subject positions challenged what may have been familiar to a reader of unusual erotic memoirs such as *Sins of the Cities* or *Romance of Lust*, anchoring it in a familiar framework à la *Fanny Hill*, and upped the ante identity-wise. Consider this exchange between Eveline and a potential bed partner:

“my husband says I’m an hermaphrodite, as much man as woman, although the plumpness of my bosom indicates I am a female. I believe in his heart he’s disgusted with me already,” I said, in faltering accents and then burst into a sobbing fit, as if thoroughly distressed.

“Darling creature, whatever you are, you make me more madly in love with you than ever. Let me soothe your grief.”
His insinuating hand now found my clitoris, which was as hard as his own priapus, and I could feel his fingers playing with it in such a way as to make me long to have him. “Isn’t it awful to have such a malformation?” I sighed. “Every man will be disgusted with me!” (Letters 37)

Eveline seems confused and scared about her own subjectivity and indeed her own sexual identity. Her own uncertainty gives readers tacit permission to question what is going on and, perhaps, even invites them to identify with difficult subject positions and identities that may well have been outside their realm of experience.

Readers familiar with The Sins of the Cities of the Plain would have been forgiven if they instinctively speculated that Letters contained further exclusive sights of Boulton (and perhaps Park) and Jack Saul. What makes Letters unique among the erotic memoir genre is the relative certainty with which it can be deemed a complete fiction, unlike its predecessor which—as discussed above—was a mélange of Jack Saul’s real life and fiction. There is nothing within Letters, aside from names lifted out of the Boulton and Park affair, which would lead anyone to the conclusion that the letters themselves depict anything that actually happened. Letters functions at the level of fantasy masquerading as an authentic account that makes no appeal to authenticity apart from its surface allusiveness to Sins. Moreover, it recapitulates the conventional pattern of erotic memoirs. Letters capitalizes on arm’s-length authenticity, its tenuous association with another memoir of contentious veracity the only thing setting it apart, whereas the other memoirs discussed in this chapter are ostensibly authentic accounts doubling as objects of fantasy with the exception, perhaps, of Des Grieux, A Prelude to Teleny. The other memoirs are based on supposedly private affairs rather than well-publicized ones, so confirming their veracity proves more difficult than when a detailed court record of one’s private affairs exists, as in the case of Boulton and Park, whose trial has been mentioned already, and the newly uncovered facts about Jack Saul.
Letters stands out amongst many examples of the genre, however, as one in which sexualities and genders are treated as fluid and the participants in the action vacillate between sexual role-play and self-awareness of identities beyond the physical acts portrayed. The first letter, written by Laura (Ernest Boulton), describes her wedding night with Lord Arthur (as in Lord Arthur Clinton, the Member of Parliament involved in the Boulton and Park affair), and expresses at once confusion and excitement at the latter’s ‘discovery’ that Laura’s enlarged ‘clitoris’ makes her “like an hermaphrodite” after which the husband treats it exactly like a penis and remarks at how much further behind her vagina seems to be compared with other women (10). Scenes such as this first encounter are repeated throughout Letters and it is never made clear whether the husbands are ignorant of their partners’ biological sex or not. Since the memoir is entirely fiction, however, it is useful to reframe the contexts in which this sexual role-play or genital ignorance is presented. Letters acknowledges traditions from the early nineteenth century, namely, the Molly House and the epistolary memoir. In doing so, it subverts the conventions of late Victorian erotic memoir by departing from its conventions in re-imagining an earlier tradition. Letters’ main action follows almost identically the Molly House tradition of mock-marriage, which was a thinly-veiled form of same-sex play we might today term ‘camp.’ At the Molly House “the nuptials celebrated therein generally involved only the most temporary bonds of intimacy and seldom lasted longer than the ‘Wedding Night,’” which is exactly the pattern seen in Letters and can account for much of the ambiguity of the husbands’ ignorance of their wives’ genitals (Norton 100). Indeed, the meaning of ‘marrying’ in the Molly House was “synonymous with ‘fucking’” (Norton 100).

For the brides’ part, it is immaterial what their husbands believe about their genitals since it is, as Laura writes, “awfully delicious to be taken for a woman, and addressed as a woman” (13),

73 We can be reasonably assured that it is a penis because Boulton and Park were given thoroughly invasive – and unauthorized – physical examinations by a London police surgeon, the details of which were reported in the media. More detail is given about this below.
later described as a “delightful illusion” (17). Eveline expounds on the pleasures of being a ‘hermaphrodite’ by alluding to “hermaphrodites of ancient times” who enjoyed “delicious double sexuality which the passive Sodomite enjoys” (48). This appeal to the tradition of sodomy and pleasure is a nod to the Marquis de Sade who wrote, in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, that “to fuck women in the rear is but the first stage of buggery; Nature wishes that men should practice this fancy with men above all,” which was not so much a privileging of hermaphrodism but rather the idea that taking pleasure in what man considers unnatural originates in Nature herself (56 – 57). Self-awareness of sexuality, identity, gender, and pleasure of this sort runs throughout *Letters*, which explicitly references de Sade at various points, imbuing the characters’ pleasure with an animism similar to concept of Nature in Sade’s texts. It makes the hermaphrodites and their husbands pleasure-seekers who, rather than seeking to mimic heteronormative ideals of lust, romance, ritual, and physical sensation, create an alternate form of pleasure set apart from acceptable forms. By pilfering identities from the Boulton and Park trial as well as from Jack Saul, *Letters* embodies inversion by depicting real invert—that is, homosexuals or sodomites—and characters who have successfully upset traditional gender roles in Britain. ‘Inversion’ has evolved since *Letters* and has had myriad nomenclatural permutations. The characters in *Letters* can retroactively be viewed in terms of their aesthetic objectification, which made them successfully antithetical to Victorian morality. Laura and Eveline queer the erotic memoir by presenting events from a female perspective—a trope borrowed from earlier memoir traditions such as *Fanny Hill*—that is disruptive to the strict gender categories that events like the Boulton and Park scandal had thrown into stark relief.

Readers are not simply consuming a story but rather being inducted into an exclusive community. This is the same rhetorical move executed by Lazenby with his niche publications. Rather than presenting readers with beautiful leather-bound tomes worthy of a place of pride on a collector’s shelf, Lazenby invited readers to identify with the subjects and identities of his
productions, taking advantage of the same impulse which drove collectors of sex books to acquire them: namely, possessing what only a privileged few were able to. *Letters* resonates that same message simply by presenting the accounts of individuals that are so far removed from the usual experience of a Victorian reader that its look behind closed curtains is sufficient initiation into a world that, though fictive, was authentic enough for fantasizing. One outcome of the implicit authenticity of *Sins* and *Letters* was as a gateway for future texts to play with integrating reality. In addition, these texts helped establish paratextual communities of like-minded individuals to create more specific texts that further deviated from the norms and conventions of the erotic memoir. These texts—*Teleny* and *Des Grieux*—will be discussed at length in the next section.

**Teleny**

In a “‘charming little French book-shop in Coventry street’” (La Galliene qtd. in Colligan *Publisher’s* 216) near the end of 1890, a French bookseller called Charles Hirsch claimed that “a gentleman of forty years, large, fairly podgy, with the absolutely beardless face of a matte paleness…who wore on his wrist a row of thin gold bracelets garnished with coloured stones” came into his Librarie Parisienne and handed him a notebook with the instruction that it be given to a friend showing the calling card of the podgy customer in question, Oscar Wilde (*Teleny* [2010] 171). Hirsch alleges that the friend came a few days later, retrieved the notebook, returned it a few days hence, and that “the same ceremony took place three more times,” after which Hirsch happened to read the manuscript before returning it to Wilde (172). The manuscript, written in this round robin fashion according to Hirsch, became the homosexual romance novel *Teleny*, published clandestinely in 1893 by Leonard Smithers. The novel, which made, on its initial publication, no claim to being an ‘authentic’ account and not a memoir per se, functions nonetheless as a confessional that relies

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74 Though Hirsch claims to have mistakenly read the title as *Feleny*, his ‘mistake’ seems more like a calculated play on ‘felony,’ which referred to the unnamable offense of sodomy (*Teleny* [2010] 172).
unequivocally on episodic memory in the way a memoir does. The entire work and its provenance are an exercise in queerness, disruption, and memory. The book came into being in the queer manner described above and the narrative’s reliance on memory is constantly disrupted by an interlocutor who is listening to the story being told; this interlocutor is both an active and passive presence in the narrative, interrupting and interjecting by turns throughout the narrative, continually regrounding the story’s teller and reminding the reader that somebody is listening: a slightly jarring realization. The first line of the 1893 edition, which reads, “‘Tell me your story from its very beginning, Des Grieux,’ said he interrupting me; ‘and how you got to be acquainted with him,’” sets the narrative off in medias res (3). The unknown interlocutor interrupts a story already in progress to request that Camille Des Grieux, the novel’s protagonist, return to the beginning and then relate the story of his love affair with the mysterious Hungarian pianist, René Teleny.

_Teleny_ progresses like a Victorian _Bildungsroman_ with the exception that its romantic interests are both male and that Des Grieux does not begin his narration from childhood. Scenes from Des Grieux’s childhood were dealt with in the ‘prelude’ to _Teleny_, entitled _Des Grieux_ and published six years later, in 1899. There are also a number of explicit sex scenes and descriptions of sexual acts, which pornify aspects of a narrative that is otherwise a love story. Des Grieux’s account follows the familiar pattern of the erotic memoir, experiences from a life told from the perspective of an older person, interspersed with various forms of sexual initiation. The titular character is the singular object of desire for Des Grieux and that desire is not wholly physical; numerous times throughout the text, the relationship between the two men has supernatural characteristics with hallucinations and a kind of psycho-electric current running between them is described at various points. Unlike other erotic memoirs, however, _Teleny_ never makes explicit claims to verisimilitude and Des Grieux’s motivations differ from other memoirists: Des Grieux recounts his story to an interlocutor whose involvement is ambiguous and it is equally unclear who is reporting the interaction between the two.
It was not until Parisian bookseller Charles Hirsch republished *Teleny* in 1934 when he returned the novel’s setting to, he claims, its original London and reproduced—almost unbelievably—from memory, the prologue he says was part of the original manuscript as he had read it. Hirsch’s edition, which included his “Notice” that recounted the story of *Teleny’s* round robin production and Wilde’s alleged involvement, is a memoir-ization of the paratextual circumstances that brought the novel into being. If Hirsch can be believed, his would be the only version of *Teleny* that is ‘authentic’ and faithful to the long lost original manuscript. Hirsch points to a number of descriptive “improbabilities” in the 1893 edition of *Teleny* printed by Leonard Smithers who, it should be noted, originally published Wilde’s “Ballad of Reading Gaol” (1898) and would go on to publish unauthorized versions of Wilde’s works after the author’s death (174). These improbabilities are scenes ostensibly describing Parisian neighbourhoods and locales that easily map onto London locales with their “poor wretched houses” and stores “that sell fish, mussels, and chips” in addition to “sombre buildings…caked with soot” (174). After Hirsch indicated these improbabilities to Smithers, the publisher informed Hirsch that “he had touched up the text out of prudish scruples…[adding] that a definitive version existed” (174) and would be printed some day. Smithers died before being able to do this and the location of the manuscript for his definitive version was lost, prompting Hirsch to ‘correct’ what he acknowledged as a publishing error.

Hirsch’s version of the original text’s transmission necessarily privileges him as the authority in the same way as a memoir’s protagonist or narrator. Hirsch is the only source of the information on Wilde’s connection to *Teleny* and it is important to note that “neither [Wilde’s] papers nor those of his close contemporaries refer to the novel or Hirsch’s French bookshop” (Colligan, *Publisher’s* 213). Hirsch’s are also the only eyes that are alleged to have seen the manuscript version of *Teleny* with its “curious mixture of various handwritings, of erased parts, omitted, corrected or added pages by different hands” and it should stand to reason that his textual origin story is more easily
corroborated than those appearing in My Secret Life, The Romance of Lust, or any other supposedly authentic account (172). However, the opposite is true. Corroboration for Hirsch’s story is wanting. Before Hirsch’s, other attributions of Wilde’s authorship appeared in print in 1904, 1910, and 1921. The first, in publisher Charles Carrington’s 1904 advertisement, mentions that it “is stated on good authority” that the author is “no other than Oscar Wilde” (“List of Rare” n.p.). The next attribution comes in the introduction of Aleister Crowley’s The Scented Garden of Abdullah in which the occult author praises Wilde for “[voicing] openly…the passion between man and man” (qtd. in Mendes 253). Lastly, Wilde’s own son, Vyvyan Holland, reprimanded Wilde bibliographer Christopher Millard in a letter dated 5 August 1921, accusing the latter of leaving in “Uranian [homosexual]” passages of Wilde’s letters and thereby bringing an edition of unpublished Wilde letters “down to the level of Télény [sic]” (Holland). None of these attributions should be regarded as definitive and nobody but Hirsch claimed to have direct knowledge of Wilde’s involvement and, as noted above by Colligan, none of Wilde’s papers or closest contemporaries make any mention of Télény, Hirsch, or his bookshop. Of all the supposed revelations Hirsch made about Télény, the most relevant is the authorship question. The kernel of possibility that it might be a Wilde work has persisted throughout Télény’s publishing history since Hirsch’s 1934 edition. Télény is one model for the erotic memoir, even though it does not actively classify itself as memoir. Its mythology, unquestionably catalyzed by Hirsch, played a significant part in popularizing the work and continues to do so, even apart from Télény’s importance as a canonical queer text. The uncertainties of provenance, authorship, and authority in erotic memoir work in much the same way. On the level of vicarious living, Télény itself may fall short in comparison with an explicitly ‘authentic’ erotic memoir but its unusual (queer?) composition and publication history and narrative frame give it, in practice, the form of a memoir.

75Image 3.4
Hirsch’s recounted prologue—the *Avant-Propos* found in his 1934 edition—is told from the perspective of the interlocutor who interrupts Des Grieux at the beginning of the novel proper. Hirsch’s *Avant-Propos* inserts the interlocutor into the narrative as an active witness rather than a passive listener/interviewer with phrases such as “I had met [Des Grieux], then [before the beginning of the story], in the company of a young, well-known Hungarian artist named T***” (*Teleny* [1984] 21). This transcriber becomes a part of the narrative so the story being told to the interviewer in *Teleny* has also been transcribed by one who is directly involved within the story as it is being related; at points throughout *Teleny* it is made clear that the interlocutor and Des Grieux have been involved with each other sexually. This makes for an interesting mirroring of the ‘collaborative’ effort in getting the book to print. Hirsch’s prologue also places the transcriber as the “sole participant in the brief evening funeral rites that are customarily performed in Nice for sick foreigners who have come there to die” after Des Grieux’s death (22). This narrative event privileges whoever the transcriber might be in much the same way that Hirsch himself is privileged as the sole source of the unsubstantiated story behind *Teleny*’s composition. The choice of using an unnamed narrator through which to tell the story “constructs a scenario in which the very form of the novel, as a dialogue between men, also serves as a model for its communal or collective authorship” (Gray and Keep 198). Trusting the uncorroborated word of Hirsch about a text as important as *Teleny* is, at best, difficult and both the prologue and the story of the novel’s composition reflect hubris in the person(s) delivering both. If Hirsch’s account is accurate it “tells a larger story about juridical enforcement and media competition putting pressure on the clandestine book trade in London at the end of the century” as well as the formation of sexual identities (Colligan, *Traffic* 216).

The novel’s identity as a collaborative work, along with its subject matter, marks it as a queer text. The fact that the novel remains, officially, an anonymous work and, perhaps more troubling, the work of many unnamed hands lends an air of queerness to the process of writing. By banding
together to create *Teleny*, the authors were giving expression to an identity formed not solely on sex acts but on the desire to externalize their community anticipating its legitimization some day. Homosexuality as a kind of social desire is at the heart of *Teleny*. If Wilde did have a hand in writing *Teleny* there would be every reason to interrogate the text’s settings—London masquerading as Paris—and contexts further. Wilde’s attachment would lend a heretofore unprecedented form of legitimacy to a pornographic text. Wilde’s involvement, for my purposes in this chapter, is of secondary concern when thinking through questions of what *Teleny* itself represents as the impetus for bringing together a group of individuals to produce a text that would challenge not only conventions of memoir and novelization, but also to put forth arguments for the essentialism of sexualities and identities—something that is familiar from the terminal essays found at the end of *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*.

The novel’s composition as well as its narrative reflect the idea of collaboration and community formation in terms of social desire that becomes intertwined with the sexual. The fledgling gay social circles of the novel are inextricably linked to sex and desire, both sexual and social as Camille Des Grieux becomes initiated ever more thoroughly into London’s underground gay community through his association with René Teleny. According to Gray and Keep “*Teleny* frustrates the ‘man-and-his-work’ paradigm of authorship by offering an image of a queer writing practice characterized by fluidity, circulation, and exchange,” and the image of a community of like-minded men coming together clandestinely to compose a novel like *Teleny* tells its own story before pen is even put to paper (196). Identity formation is central to *Teleny*’s role in the canon of erotic memoirs, and although the novel “explicitly represents sexual practices between men for an audience who either enjoyed or at least sympathized with such practices, it still reinscribes these representations within the (hetero)sexual symbolic order that it sought to interrupt” (Cohen 810). What Cohen is getting at is the casting of Camille Des Grieux and Rene Teleny in familiar roles
reminiscent of heterosexual relationships: Des Grieux reads as a feminized character to Teleny’s boisterous yet reserved masculinity. The locus of control in the relationship is Teleny who physically dominates Des Grieux and instructs him in the ways of same-sex love while Des Grieux is often passive and remarks that he feels like “a man in front, a woman behind” when engaged in sex with Teleny (Teleny [2010] 97). The manner in which the relationship is set up is certainly reminiscent of a heterosexual arrangement. Des Grieux is described as a “sugar plum on a cake, something to be looked at and not touched,” when the couple arrives at an all-male ‘symposium’—read: orgy—and the host of the symposium, Briancourt, declares to the guests that the couple “are on their honeymoon yet and this fete is given in their honour” (118). Briancourt’s comments bring to mind not only the tradition of Molly Houses of the early nineteenth century in which mock-marriage was performed, but also the more recently published Letters from Laura and Eveline. Couching the relationship in these heteronormative terms is not a fault in Teleny since the text has the unenviable task of attempting to define what a loving, sexual relationship between two men might look like if it were allowed to flourish in the time of the novel. Although Teleny does its work of identity formation in resistance to an established order, it ultimately must do so within the system that actively opposes it.

Des Grieux, in one of many biologically essentialist arguments in the book, proclaims, “I know that I was born a sodomite, the fault is my constitution’s, not mine own” (Teleny [2010] 47). The essentialism of sexuality in Teleny is juxtaposed with the deliberate inclusion of scandalous Continental sexological discourse. Ambrose Tardieu’s 1857 Etude Médico-légal sur les Attentats aux Moeurs [Forensic Study of Sexual Offences] is alluded to as “a modern medical book” by Des Grieux as he finishes a monologue on homosexuality through history (48). Tardieu’s work likely inspired the temerarious police surgeon in the 1870 Boulton and Park affair who had taken it upon himself to examine the men for physical evidence of sodomy and reported his observations about their
genitalia in terms similar to Tardieu’s descriptions of sodomitical anatomy. Tardieu’s work focused on one kind of sub-normative set of perversions, specifically pedophiles, but the allusion by Des Grieux refers to the physiognomy of sodomites’ penises which “become thin and pointed like a dog’s” and the “human mouth gets distorted when used for vile purposes” (48). By engaging with real socio-historical accounts of homosexuality, such as Tardieu’s work which had gained some public notoriety during the Boulton and Park affair, Teleny does not need to rely on explicit appeals to the authenticity of its narrative. Teleny, unlike many earlier works, does not simply gesture toward queerness and homosexuality but is rather committed to recognizing the sexual identity of the homosexual. Teleny signals the shift from the relative sexual fluidity that had underscored understandings of sexualities in the Victorian period to the comparatively more rigid and medicalized categorical structures underlying identity categories that would become more familiar in the twentieth century.

**Des Grieux**

Anticipating sexual categories that would become prevalent in a post-Freudian context, Teleny’s counterpart or ‘prelude,’ *Des Grieux*, published in 1899, poses another challenge to the memoirization of Victorian ideas about sexuality and to the genre of erotic memoir itself. Like Teleny, Des Grieux is a framed narrative but gives no information about who is telling the story until roughly halfway through the book. The reader learns that it is the titular Des Grieux recounting his family history as it was written in a letter from his deceased grandmother. It is only the third and final chapter of the slim volume that deals in any way with Des Grieux’s own memories and on the whole the text more resembles a conventional first-person memoir. Circuitous though the book’s narratives may be, its focus is on the “recording or sketching” of memory, so we can affix to it the memoir label (Rak 487). The majority of the story centres around the narrator, Camille Des Grieux, who is one and the same character from Teleny, recounting the strange and tragic sexual history of
his paternal grandmother in “the hottest town of southern France” via a deathbed letter she had left to her son (Des Grieux 5). This method of storytelling—the found letter—evokes the gothic tradition and is similar in both Teleny and Des Grieux; the former is not told through the device of a found letter but rather, as discussed previously, through an unnamed interlocutor. Both texts, however, rely on the leitmotif of memory to create their narratives. Both texts are memoirs but they disrupt the genre through reliance on mediated accounts of memory. Des Grieux begins with bucolic descriptions of the unnamed “hottest” French town with Des Grieux’s young grandmother—with whom he shares the first name ‘Camille’—watching a young man who is in the town as part of a carnival and running a merry-go-round. The man watches a young couple go off to the woods to copulate which, in turn, gives him cause to masturbate while his mongrel dog sits by his side.

This opening scene depicts a strange kind of sexual transference as the young man has a psychic sexual experience vicariously through the couple; he is described as feeling what the couple is feeling as “he seemed to receive every thrust that was given, and to thrust himself at the same time…he could hardly understand who, or where, he was” (17). It is not explained how the narrator is able to confidently report that “all at once [the young man] felt as if he had become androgynous, and like an hermaphrodite” as he psychically gave and received the thrusts of the young couple (17). The scene becomes more psychically convoluted as Des Grieux’s grandmother, watching from a window, “felt within herself all the sensations [the young man] himself was undergoing” (25) and, at the climax, “both their souls seemed at the same moment to leave their bodies and commingle in an ineffable embrace” (26). This scene is reminiscent of Teleny and the connection described between Teleny and Des Grieux as an “uninterrupted current” that occurred between the two men as Teleny’s music enchants Des Grieux and gives him an overwhelming physical reaction, to the point of orgasm (Teleny 18). The contemporary sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing described a similar situation in a case study of a young man in 1888. Translated in Alienist & Neurologist, Krafft-Ebing
wrote that the young man received sexual satisfaction only from other males’ “kisses and embraces” or lying on top of them. He would “then almost immediately have an ejaculation, producing extraordinary gratification. It [his sexual gratification] seemed to pervade his whole body like a magnetic current” (Alienist & Neurologist 574). Krafft-Ebing’s description of this magnetic current is reminiscent of the feelings Des Grieux describes when discussing his attraction to men, specifically Teleny. The patient also described how he was “soon able to tell at a glance whether an individual had tastes kindred to his own,” characterizing exactly the form of recognition described in Teleny in the form of an electric current (573).

Des Grieux and his grandmother seem to share a strange power to psychically take on the sensations of others: the grandmother intensely feels what the couple are feeling and Des Grieux has numerous similar experiences in Teleny that he cites variously as hallucinations or dream states. In one instance Des Grieux fantasizes about Teleny in a trance-like state resulting in a “hallucination…so strong…that soon [he] fancied [he] could feel [Teleny’s] body on [his] own” (27) and in another he wakes from an erotic dream unsure whether the “stiff rod [he] was holding in [his] hand [was his own] or Teleny’s” (21). The strangeness of these psychic-sexual-transference scenes is an unusual device for an erotic memoir. Though the admixture of body and mind disrupts the surface vicariousness found in other examples of the genre, it does invite the reader to consider sex and pleasure multi-sensorially. By presenting a multi-sensorial approach to pleasure, Des Grieux anticipates the psychoanalytic turn toward sexual identities while at the same time evoking the multi-modal pleasures associated with the Marquis de Sade.

Rather than the reader following the sexual conquests and exploits of the central subject of the memoir, Des Grieux does not afford that experience to its audience. By making the first half of the narrative—that involving Des Grieux’s grandmother—removed from the primary account in both space and time, the book disrupts the expected patterns of an erotic memoir. The patterns of a
first-person accounting of sexual escapades that often explore a variety of acts and encounters that defy human physiology and endurance are standard in a conventional erotic memoir. The narrative in Des Grieux, however, begins thrice-removed from the story being told and the timeline in which it happened: Des Grieux recounts the story of his grandmother’s tumultuous life via a letter she wrote and left to her son (Des Grieux’s father). He tells the story to an unknown interlocutor much the same way as he does in Teleny except that in this case the interlocutor does not have an active role in the narrative but is rather a passive listener. There is no indication what importance the father attached to the letter, only that it made its way to Des Grieux. Lip service in erotic memoirs is often paid to alternative forms of desire (i.e. same-sex) but ultimately heterosexuality and male conquest over women is privileged more often than not. Des Grieux’s carnal scenes are more complicated and less satisfying for their participants, with resolutions beyond the standard torrents of ‘spendings’ found in conventional erotic memoir. The youth, “a common vagrant” is accused of possessing Camille and “abat[ing] her maidenhood” while she is thus hypnotized by him (Des Grieux 53). There is not a single instance of sex in which Camille (the grandmother) is fully in control of her faculties as she is either under the spell of the young man and/or under the influence of various narcotics she uses to treat her chronic insomnia, resulting in a perpetual waking dream state in which she pens the “sealed manuscript” which the memoir is based upon (99). The manuscript is “addressed to her son” who will become Camille Des Grieux’s father (99). Des Grieux’s grandfather, Gaston—from whom he receives the surname—is his grandmother’s cousin, though he is not Des Grieux’s biological grandfather: that is the “common vagrant” youth who shares a mysterious resemblance to the Hungarian pianist, Teleny (53).

This is all to say that Des Grieux suggests either that the title character’s biological grandfather and his future lover may be related or there is a continued lineage and past life regression between Des Grieux, Teleny, and his grandmother, which makes Des Grieux a multi-
generational narrative and sexual history. Camille (the grandmother), upon first seeing the youth’s face, questioned whether “she had felt its almost mystic fascination before…but where and when?” and settled on the notion that “in some former life…she felt sure that she had already loved him; that she had been his bride, in a happier holier world, in the realm of saints and martyrs” (22-23). This relationship, imagined or not, contains echoes of Teleny and Des Grieux whose bonds are compared to biblical characters as well as that of Antinoüs and the Roman Emperor Hadrian. Des Grieux opines whether his and Teleny’s souls are “knit” and whether “[he] was to love and hate him, as Saul loved and hated David?” giving some insight into Des Grieux’s state of mind about his increasingly troubled relationship with Teleny, one which was fraught with love, jealousy, and rivalry as in the biblical account of Saul and David (Teleny 26). Des Grieux likens himself and, in turns, Teleny, to Job, whose faith is continually tested by God in the Old Testament. In the first instance Des Grieux, being taken for dead after attempting suicide by drowning, wakes up in the morgue and, upon returning home, quotes verses from the Book of Job:

My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am alien in their sight...All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. Yea, Young Children despised me. (Job 19: 14-19 qtd. in Teleny 165-166)

These verses tell the story of Des Grieux’s own faith that had been tested by one who had loved him yet seemingly abandoned him. Des Grieux roams the streets looking for Teleny only to find him dead by his own hand, a dagger through his heart. At Teleny’s wake, Job is once again quoted. In reference to Teleny, “a famous clergyman” ended his sermon with “He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world,” thus ending Teleny’s existence for good, as well as the novel (Teleny 169). These final scenes are foreshadowed earlier in Teleny when Teleny mentions that he may in fact “die for [Des Grieux] one day” the way Antinoüs died for Hadrian in the Nile (Teleny
These biblical and classical allusions throughout *Teleny* are more than simply useful mechanisms for Des Grieux to relate the story of his relationship with Teleny. They are devices that help establish the link between Des Grieux and his grandmother Camille that may not be apparent upon first encountering Des Grieux. There is a consistency between the biblical and classical allusions in both *Des Grieux* and *Teleny* and some overlap between the figures that are mentioned in both. I am not insisting that this means one text cannot be read without the other as scholars have been reading *Teleny* without *Des Grieux* to great effect for decades. What I am suggesting is that the two texts, when considered together, reveal a continuity that extends beyond the allusions themselves and which clarifies that the story of Des Grieux’s grandmother and the vagrant is a model for the relationship between her grandson and Teleny.

The letter that comprises the memoir of the grandmother, Camille, contains classical and biblical allusions and descriptions that are, again, more than mechanisms to move the narrative along. As mentioned above, she feels as though she had known the vagrant in some previous life, in a world, as she says, “of saints and martyrs” (*Des Grieux* 23). Camille bears the child of the vagrant while married to her cousin Gaston, who believes himself to be the biological father. Gaston betrays Camille by taking a scullery maid as his mistress and Camille becomes increasingly despondent to the point of suicide “on account of the sin she had committed,” referring to her marriage but also to her relationship with the vagrant (97). She becomes obsessed with the image of Saint Sebastian, a Christian martyr who became an enduring gay icon in the Victorian period. Camille kneels before an image of Sebastian for hours on end and, it is mentioned, when she does so “during the menses” she is “almost wildered with devotion” (97).76 The saint’s Renaissance depictions—a svelte young man penetrated by arrows and tied to a tree looking ecstatic—were important in helping establish his

76 While ‘wildered’ might suggest a play on ‘Wilde’, it is beyond the scope of my reading of *Des Grieux* in this project to speculate on this sole clue (if one can call it that) to an association with Oscar Wilde which is not suggested anywhere else in the book.
place as an icon for Victorian homosexuals. Oscar Wilde, on seeing Guido Reni’s 1616 painting of the saint in Genoa, described Sebastian as a “a lovely brown boy, with crisp, clustering hair and red lips…raising his eyes with divine, impassioned gaze towards the Eternal Beauty of the opening heavens” (qtd. in Ellman 71). The way Sebastian ecstatically receives the arrows’ penetration, and the subsequent feminization of this imagery, was powerful for Victorian homosexuals. It is possible, as Richard Kaye has suggested, that “in the absence of a ‘community’ of homosexual-identified men, Sebastian signified the possibility of a homosexual identity or, more abstractly, a homosexual sublime” (Kaye 90). Camille’s obsession with Sebastian is working on two levels, then: in the first, she is making a narrative connection between her erstwhile vagrant lover and their preternatural relationship that is marked throughout the text and, in the second, the imagery of St. Sebastian was a codified message to readers aware of its significance and meaning. The mystery of Sebastian itself is sublime and that is transposed onto the vagrant. While she muses on a past life in which she and the vagrant may have been lovers on par with the great romances of history, Camille is also signalling the homosexual future of her grandson who, as I have shown, does the same thing by comparing his relationship with Teleny to classical and biblical narratives.

The relationship between Camille and the vagrant is further mystified upon Camille’s realization that she had known the youth before, in another life. Camille’s past-life regression coupled with the details that the youth hails from a country in which the “snake’s flower” grows wild “at Whitsuntide”—likely somewhere in Eastern Europe, and possibly as far away as Siberia—portray the vagrant as a paradoxically foreign yet familiar presence (Des Grieux 68). The *fritillaria meleagris* was introduced to Britain and western Europe in the fifteenth century so would be a familiar image for readers of *Des Grieux*. The vagrant is later accused of possessing “magic arts…[and] sorcery,” pointing to a connection with the Hungarian pianist Rene Teleny, who

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77 Image 3.5
espouses similar qualities (84). The flower the vagrant mentions is the purple-and-white-checkered *fritillaria meleagris*78 and, even though is only mentioned once, it is no small detail in *Des Grieux*. For the vagrant to say that the flower grows wild in his homeland is geographically significant in terms of the continuity between him and Rene Teleny both hailing from the ‘Orient,’ which imbues them with mystical powers, especially over their lovers. The vagrant is accused of using “magic arts,” “witchcraft,” and “sorcery” for seduction purposes throughout *Des Grieux* (84). Teleny also has mysterious erotic powers over his lover, so much so that Des Grieux is overcome in the first pages of *Teleny* by a psychic “heavy hand” on his “lap” which strokes his penis to climax in time with Teleny’s music (*Teleny* 7). Teleny goes so far as to suggest to Des Grieux that his “Gipsy element” and “ Asiatic blood” are responsible for the strong preternatural connection between the two (*Teleny* 15). Both Teleny and the vagrant prove to be the downfall of their lovers, with Des Grieux and his grandmother both driven to suicide on account of the mystical powers of these men.

The vagrant and Teleny, both from the ‘Orient,’ would have been, for Victorian audiences, pre-disposed to “licentious or deviant sexual behaviour,” ideas explored more explicitly in other erotic texts such as *The Lustful Turk* and the writings of Sir Richard Burton (Mason 80). Again, the *fritillaria meleagris* is significant: not only does it also have ‘Oriental’ origins, it is grown from a poisonous bulb and the flower itself, while pollinated by bees, is hermaphroditic and can regenerate on its own if necessary (Kew Gardens Website). The flower reiterates the mystery surrounding the two men who are at once beautiful, deviant, the acme of desire, and dangerous. *F. meleagris* is a relevant symbol for dangerous love in the texts under discussion perhaps for an unexpected reason: it is the flower that blooms in Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* when Adonis—whose name is synonymous with male beauty, youth, and love—is killed and “in his blood that on the ground lay spilled / A purple flower sprung up, check’red with white” (1167-1168). The association between

78 Image 3.6
Adonis and *f. meleagris* lends power to the myth that Adonis is a self-renewing entity. Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, building on Ovidian mythology, is a story imbued with gender ambiguity and unfulfilled desire: the issue at hand in *Des Grieux* and *Teleny* that is the cause of so much inner turmoil and, ultimately, tragedy in both memoirs (Jacobson 138). Des Grieux, his grandmother Camille, and the vagrant, in turns, are ambiguously gendered. The vagrant is described feeling as though “he had become androgynous,” (*Des Grieux* 17) meanwhile Camille “felt within herself all the sensations [the vagrant] himself was undergoing” (*Des Grieux* 25). Des Grieux, as a boy, describes himself tormented by other boys for being “as shy as a girl” (114) and, later in his life, as “a man in front, a woman behind, for the pleasure I felt either way” (*Teleny* 97).

The further association of the flower with the mysterious lovers of *Des Grieux* and *Teleny* imbues them with this same quality, which goes some way in arguing that, while the two memoirs are narratively at odds sometimes, there is continuity and rebirth in the characterizations of the lovers who are, themselves, only a function of their narrators’ (possibly shared) memories. Both the vagrant and Teleny are iterations of Adonis and the mythology associated with him in the (shared?) imaginations of the grandmother and Des Grieux; this, in turn, makes Des Grieux and his grandmother Venus-like characters, adding to the tacit feminization of Des Grieux. *Des Grieux* and, to a great extent, *Teleny* follow *Venus and Adonis* in what Madhavi Menon labelled a “teleological uncoupling of sex” (514). Menon argues that Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* is an unsuccessful poem because Venus fails to procure sex from Adonis thus rendering the possibility of an ending a moot point; nothing is *produced* in *Venus and Adonis*, partly from the lack of sex but, importantly, the lack of successful sex. Teleology, after all, is the study of final causes. Applied to *Teleny* and *Des Grieux*, Menon’s uncoupling of sex from teleology uncovers that the sex, though at times pleasurable (especially in *Teleny*) is *not productive* and ultimately ends in tragedy in both memoirs. Deriving pleasure from sex is not the final cause or outcome of the sex in these decidedly queer Victorian
texts. What is really happening is that the memoirs are rejecting the idea of a happy ending and offering a refutation of normative sexuality—offering to readers one likely outcome of living with a secret identity. Deviant sexuality begets deviant forms of memoirization, and this is at the heart of these two examples.

While *Des Grieux* and *Telony* may have offered deviant forms of memoir, the final chapter of *Des Grieux* takes a surprising turn by circling back to a more conventional style reminiscent of the early chapters in many earlier examples of erotic memoir. The narrative shifts from Des Grieux’s grandmother’s story to his own, beginning from his “claustral loneliness” as a child (*Des Grieux* 102). The final chapter relates Des Grieux’s childhood journey through school until about the age of 10 and ends with the words “End of Vol. I,” indicating the intention of a second volume of *Des Grieux* that might have filled the narrative gap of his adolescence to bring events up to the beginning of *Telony*. Alas, no second volume of *Des Grieux* is known to exist, so we are left only with the present text to analyze. This final chapter is an examination of the function of memory in forming Des Grieux’s identity as a homosexual. Beginning by informing his reader that he holds few memories of his childhood, he remarks that “it is astounding how some trifling facts sink deeply into a child’s mind and are never forgotten, whilst many important events pass entirely into oblivion” (*Des Grieux* 103-104) and later explains that “erotic words and subjects seem to cling with a particular tenacity to a child’s mind.” (*Des Grieux* 108). These two proclamations by Des Grieux can be used to define the genre of erotic memoir in a self-conscious way—episodic memories being the stock-in-trade of erotic memoir, the admission by a narrator that only certain memories are retained because of erotic qualities or trifling nature strikes me as doubly confessional. Des Grieux’s own memories are insight into his sexual genesis and, more than that, they offer readers a glimpse into the psyche of the character in a way not displayed in other erotic memoirs.
As Des Grieux presents his childhood sexual experiences—his diminutive arm having been used by a lecherous dressmaker to pleasure herself (106), some boys showing him their penises that made him question his own sexuality for the first time (111), various encounters with schoolmates of both sexes, and his watching as a masculine female school nurse entertains men of all ages—readers of conventional erotic memoirs may have found some familiarity with other examples of the genre. The masculine-looking woman is a trope found in other erotic memoirs discussed in this chapter. It is most notably found in *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* in which Jack Saul describes his masculine cousin Jenny, “a fine girl of about seventeen, who was slightly disfigured by a very hirsute appearance about her upper lip” (*Sins* 28) and his later sexual dalliances with this “hairy, lustful woman” as a precursor to his later sodomitical tastes (*Sins* 31). More important than the sexual experiences Des Grieux relates, however, are the ways in which he reveals himself and confronts his own origins as someone who is, perhaps, mentally unwell. Throughout his recollections, Des Grieux recounts the times that he was made to feel as though he had acted immorally or naughtily and is wracked with guilt. At the age of perhaps four he “instinctively felt that” allowing the lecherous dressmaker to pleasure herself with his body “was a naughty thing to do” and, not long after that incident, he seriously contemplates suicide for the first time in his life (*Des Grieux* 106). Des Grieux, in retrospect, comments on his “morbid sensitiveness” that had plagued him since he was a child made it difficult to “bear [the] shame” he felt when confronted with his sexual identity (111).

The recollections of Des Grieux lay bare the external and internal experiences and influences that resulted in his becoming the man we meet in *Teleny*. His story of a privileged yet solitary childhood “never having had any playmates of [his] own age” before being sent to school at the age of ten, “as shy as a girl, and on that account mercilessly plagued and made fun of” goes some way toward allowing readers to, if not identify themselves, then at least to aid in recognizing that events and feelings of individuals play a part in shaping a person (*Des Grieux* 114). Des Grieux’s self-
loathing does not cease throughout his memoir and he often comes back to his own feelings of uselessness in the world, admitting he would have “committed suicide had [he] known how to bring about [his] end” (Des Grieux 122). Even though he never mentions the story that precedes his own, that of his grandmother, the final chapter feels like the natural continuation of her tragic somnambulism. Des Grieux shares the family trait of suicidal ideations and appears, in his own narrative, destined for the same fate as his grandmother. So while Des Grieux’s own narrative gestures to earlier conventions of erotic memoirs, the subject himself derives little pleasure from the memories that have stuck in his head and formed him as a person. Instead, his own origin story is marked by loneliness and abuse at the hands of others who expect something different of him. It is perhaps the same reason volume two of Des Grieux never materialized: an erotic memoir that is all introspection and little pleasure would be a difficult sell.

_Teleny_ and _Des Grieux_ offer insight into a queer narrative form that did not reach its full prominence until well into the twentieth century. Setting aside the mythical component of the texts’ rumoured attachments to Oscar Wilde, they are both historical documents that encapsulate and present experiences and identities in a way that would be just as important even if Wilde had never had a suspected association with the texts. To read _Teleny_ or _Des Grieux_ is to participate in the worlds they create and represent, which is a function of memoir. The vicariousness of these texts is suited to a different purpose than the other memoirs discussed in this chapter and one could argue that the way(s) in which these texts involve a reader is by lifting the veil on alternatives to straightforward (and heterosexual?) memoir fare, offering stories from lives lived differently that signpost an emergent self-awareness of nascent sexual identities.

**CONCLUSION**

What the study of erotic memoirs from the Victorian period can tell us retrospectively about the emergence of self-aware sexualities and the imposition of nomenclature and categories has less
to do with copious descriptions of genitals in action and “the wonderful feats of coition some men tell of,” though these ought not to be discarded wholesale (My Secret Life 12). Rather, by mixing fact and fiction, the erotic memoir narrativizes that which could not necessarily be discussed openly; this is also the case for other genres of sex books, but the memoir’s claim to authenticity affords the genre a unique position on the boundaries of historical veracity and fiction. The memoir and its readers, then, are collaborators in an alternate version of reality, one that eschews the usual parameters set by social norms and common law to decry and criminalize certain acts, feelings, or urges as unnatural or unacceptably libidinous. The Victorian erotic memoir, while it was a genre that evolved with the times and ultimately prefigured something new, was rooted in earlier narrative traditions that it exploited and twisted to create something instantly recognizable to readers yet also novel. A major thread running through each text discussed in this chapter is Fanny Hill, whose central importance to the Victorian erotic memoir has been stated throughout this chapter. The continued influence of Fanny Hill on the sex book trade and the erotic memoir aided in establishing firm bases from which writers and publishers could challenge their readers with unfamiliar subjects whilst using a framework familiar to all with knowledge of sex books.

In terms of authenticity and historical verisimilitude, the erotic memoir has a few precarious problems in maintaining its claims. As has been shown, however, the point of the erotic memoir is not necessarily to be manifestly true or, for that matter, false. If an illusion of truth can be invoked, readers are able to maintain it on their own terms in order to make use of the material for projecting their own fantasies. Erotic memoirs give readers objects of desire while affording them the privilege of an imagined vicariousness. The participatory nature of these memoirs requires readers to enter into an unspoken agreement with the work and its narrative with the understanding that what appears as fantasy is real, recognizable, and likely accords with the passions of the reader himself. If the experience threatens to become too fantastical, the reader has recourse to other, more tangible
forms of pleasure in seeing his society refracted within the memoir’s broader contexts. In distancing himself from the sexual exploits of the memoir and focusing his energy on the geographical and other allusions throughout these texts, the memoir in turn becomes an exploration of the reader’s associations and memories of a place or his own intellect: this offers a different level of pleasure in the reading of erotic memoirs that is stimulating to the intellect. In this way, the reader’s engagement with the text is internal and private, not unlike the individualized experience of reading anything; he may return to the fantasy at any time he chooses. After all, this is the privilege he has paid for.

Erotic memoirs are contained, controlled pieces of writing. The erotic memoir is bound in two senses of the word: from a bookmaking perspective (it is literally bound in paper, cloth, or leather) and in terms of the imaginative limits of the narrative written on the pages. In these senses, then, these books are under the control of the reader who decides the course of action vis-à-vis the discursive relationship with the memoirs themselves. The texts discussed in this chapter, though important examples of their genre, were not distributed in great enough numbers in their original contexts to be considered by many outside of privileged circles with the means to afford them. And, in any case, a good number of those were likely shut up in locked cabinets or covered in nondescriptive bindings that would not arouse suspicion as to the contents within—a pleasure in the collecting, to be certain—only to be lost or at least unavailable to a wide readership. The erotic memoirs examined in this chapter prefigured examinations of human sexuality that, by the end of the century, had deviated from the prescription of simply recounting a man’s sexual conquests. It makes complete sense, therefore, that the epitome of conventional Victorian erotic memoirs, the eleven-volume My Secret Life, would be organized as a reference work. Its publication gestured toward the earnest study of sex and sexuality that, by the end of the nineteenth century, was in full swing and anticipated psychoanalysis and beyond. The other later memoirs added to the shifting milieu of books on sex in ways that may or may not have been anticipated by their authors. Nevertheless, the likes of Romance
of Lust, Sins of the Cities of the Plain, Letters from Laura and Eveline, Teleny, and Des Grieux were new outgrowths in the literary genealogy of erotic memoir that looked backward as often as they looked ahead. These books all contained and revealed secrets: not an author’s secrets necessarily, but human secrets that were ahead of their time.
Chapter 3 Images

Image 3.1: Charles Carrington advertisement for *My Secret Life* ca. 1900. Author’s own image.
Image 3.2: Charles Carrington advertisement for *Romance of Lust* ca. 1899. Author’s own image.
Image 3.3: Charles Carrington advertisement offering Letters from Laura and Eveline ca. 1899
Image 3.4: Charles Carrington catalogue suggesting Oscar Wilde authored *Teleny* ca. 1904. Author’s own image.
Image 3.6: *Fritillaria Meleagris* (aka the snake’s head flower).
Image: creative commons
Chapter 4
What is a Collector?

DEFINING THE COLLECTOR
This chapter takes into account what collectors did with their collections and what the collections themselves can indicate about the collectors. A guiding principle of this chapter, when it comes to thinking through what objects mean in terms of their owners, comes from Walter Benjamin’s essay “Unpacking My Library”: “Ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in [the collector]; it is he who lives in them” (Benjamin 492). This chapter will delineate collections as they were assembled and used during their owners’ lifetimes and explore how those collectors are inextricably linked with the afterlives of their collections. Following Benjamin above, this chapter examines what sex books collections can tell us about their collectors. The collections discussed in this chapter are sex book collections from the Victorian era, which were necessarily collected by a unique type of collector. Their uniqueness amongst collections and collectors, however, does not preclude them from possessing some more general traits of collecting as we know it. To better clarify the collector’s desire(s) and purpose(s) for collecting, the following definition is helpful:

We define a collector as a person who is motivated to accumulate a series of similar objects where the instrumental function of the objects is of secondary (or no) concern and the person does not plan to immediately dispose of the objects…a collector must also be motivated to accumulate these objects (McIntosh & Schmeichel 86)

McIntosh and Schmeichel point out that the collector, irrespective of the item collected, must be sufficiently motivated in order to keep and maintain a collection and that one of the key motivators may be an attempt at immortality; the idea being that collections may help the collector to symbolically achieve immortality in the way that having children and continuing a bloodline can be
seen as biological imperative. More specifically, they suggest that collectors’ motivations might be simply to “participate in [a] culturally approved activity in order to ward off awareness of their mortality,” which, I suspect, is somewhere closer to the heart of the matter than immortality itself (86). In other words, collecting is a distraction from the *memento mori* that is the passenger of all conscious beings.

This chapter is about collectors and collecting, specifically collectors and the collecting of sex books. The idea that collecting can be a distraction from our mortality as suggested by McIntosh and Schmeichel may suit modern populations in greater numbers since collecting is a pastime available to just about anybody regardless of wealth or class. The sex book collectors in this chapter were, more often than not, people with significant means, affording them the ability to collect as their whims dictated. These individuals, including Henry Spencer Ashbee, were also often well regarded as collectors of things other than sex books. Oftentimes, Victorian sex book collectors counted these book collections as only one of many in their diverse sets of interests. Collections of antiquities or other kinds of rare books were fashionable for wealthy collectors in the Victorian period and these were collections that could be shown off and publicly displayed. Personal libraries and conspicuous displays of a collector’s prowess were a useful way to physically mark the boundaries of class. The demarcation of “spaces devoted to specific leisure activities such as the music room [were] a physical and a symbolic marker separating the upper- and upper middle-class household from that of the lower- and ‘middle middle-class’” (Egginton 348-349). A book collection full of volumes of terrific scarcity would have been an automatic signifier of who was who in the world of Victorian book collecting culture and the class system more generally.

In the case of sex book collections, however, inconspicuousness was a consideration, and I interrogate the motivations of collecting a series of items that could not necessarily be displayed and flaunted the way other kinds of collections could be. For a contemporary Victorian view of a
collector, there is no shortage of literature from the period—especially late in the century, when rare and antiquarian book collecting had become a kind of craze among the wealthy—on the topic of books and their collectors. John Herbert Slater’s *The Romance of Book Collecting* (1898) provides a useful guide to the ‘rules’ of book collecting and lays out the following useful image of a Victorian collector:

Collectors, whether of books or anything else, are content at first with a little. Their requirements are indeed boundless, so far as number is concerned…after a while, however, a very natural desire to excel produces its inevitable result, and all sorts of arbitrary variations are catalogued and insisted upon by those who have plenty of money, and at the same time pride themselves on their discrimination and taste. (Slater 129-130)

Of course, much of Slater’s description here is applicable to collectors from his era as well as our own. What is worthy of mention here is that Slater takes for granted that the collectors he is speaking of are collecting conspicuously and, presumably, the objects themselves are legal. The desires at the root of what Slater is explaining, however, are universal. For the mainstream Victorian book collector, acquiring various editions of a single author’s work was an important, if sentimental, part of collecting. “Arbitrary variations” of a single author’s oeuvre would have been difficult for the sex book collector, considering that many of the texts were produced anonymously. This chapter’s main research question then becomes how Slater’s account might apply to sex book collecting. In the first instance, by the late Victorian period there was an established English sex book canon stretching back to John Cleland’s 1749 *Fanny Hill* that had not been out of print since its first publication. It was a staple of sex book publishers’ catalogues throughout the nineteenth century, having been reprinted twenty-six times from the time of its publication until the end of the nineteenth century (Colligan “Marcus’s” 13). A number of other titles, as Colette Colligan has suggested, contributed to the ‘canon’ that would have been available in many editions to enable
collectors to seek out the many variations. As far as sex books are concerned, the variations between editions could be great: sometimes entire scenes or chapters would be excised or imperfectly copied from one edition to the next. An infamous example of such textual instability in the genre is the excision of a sodomy scene from many editions of *Fanny Hill*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The question that underpins the motivations of the Victorian sex book collector is how their collections functioned for the collector. Signifiers of class status though they were, sex books were necessarily kept apart from other collections if there was any chance they might be seen by eyes that might pose a legal or social issue for the collector himself. Apart from the role of sex books as entertainment, what did collections of sex books do for the collector? As discussed in chapter 2, the sex book itself became an object of desire, valued for its aesthetic materiality as much as for its contents by the end of the century. With the emergence of the Book Beautiful movement “the sentiment for the physical book was, for [collectors]…a new phenomenon of feeling” but this is only a part of the totality of what Victorian sex book collectors valued about their collections (Hanson 787). I suggest that sex book collectors in the Victorian period were collectors of a different sort. They saw the value in their collections as collectible items, to be sure, but there was also historical value contained within the pages of these collections; sex books are important documentations of a time that contain not only reflections on the period but also, importantly, a record of what I have referred to earlier in this dissertation as erotic cultural memory. Interest in the contents of sex books as well the construction and appeal to this cultural memory are, I will argue, key to helping unpack the understanding of why people collected sex books. A recurring theme in this dissertation is that William Lazenby acted as a sentinel in the history of sexuality by producing items which showcased non-normative sexualities, giving his customers material that they might be able to identify with that had heretofore never before been available for certain identities. Sex books
collectors were also guardians of this history by virtue of their keeping and archiving of these materials.

I examine what collectors were collecting and employ critical tools to examine what it meant to seek and keep those collections in the period. I will do this by way of two primary examples of Victorian sex book collectors/collections. The first is the *ne plus ultra* of sex book collectors, bibliographer Henry Spencer Ashbee, who is an integral part of this dissertation and, frankly, any discussion surrounding sex book collections. Ashbee’s collection remains in the British Library, albeit in an incomplete state. The second collection considered will be the Danson Collection housed at Trinity College, Oxford. The Dansons were bibliophiles who began collecting in the mid-nineteenth century and continued at least until the 1930s. The collections that made up the Dansons’ extensive private library were passed down through three generations of sons until they were bequeathed to Trinity in the 1970s, where they have remained largely untouched and uncatalogued, save for the manuscripts and other items of interest and value to the larger libraries at Oxford. The sex book collection remains intact and I was given the opportunity to spend time examining the collection in the winter of 2016 by Trinity College. The Danson collection is, in my opinion, the closest available example of a Victorian sex book collection *in situ*, which is both a compliment and a criticism of its custodians as the college has been unable (perhaps unwilling?) to undertake the extensive work of cataloguing the collection since its arrival. Two guiding principles of the Danson collections seem to have been collecting titles deemed important to their many research interests and selling off as little as possible. The collection represents the sum of a multi-generational effort of bibliophiles to preserve a historically important archive.

In the introduction to the essential volume on sex book archives, the elegantly (if somewhat bluntly) titled *Porn Archives*, Tim Dean succinctly outlines the importance of preserving sex books and their archives. By preserving traces of nonnormative pleasures, porn facilitates not only the
tracking but “also the reactivation of these pleasures; and it may do so without requiring imaginary identification to experience them. Porn archives are important not least because sexual minorities use them as a form of cultural memory” (10). Dean’s explanation undergirds my examination into Victorian sex book collectors and collections. Using collections as a form of cultural memory and speeding the normalization of nonnormative pleasures, tastes, and identities is, I contend, key to what motivated Victorians to risk obtaining and collecting sex books in a time when every facet of the trade in sex books came complete with criminal penalties. Unlike contemporary publishers and producers of sex books in the Victorian period, the collections/collectors under scrutiny in this chapter had no run-ins with authorities based on their collecting proclivities. They are, nevertheless, historians who have helped preserve materials that would otherwise have been lost. Henry Spencer Ashbee, more than simply a preservationist or historian, was the progenitor of what we might call porn studies; his collection and three-volume bibliography of sex books was the first—and best—categorization of sex books until late in the twentieth century. Ashbee’s bibliographical work and his book collections ensured the preservation of as much of the world of Victorian sex book culture as was possible for one man to accomplish in one lifetime. The Danson library also represents a monumental preservation effort. It differs, however, in that it began as a Victorian collection but was continued for three generations into the twentieth century, largely unexamined and kept in private hands. The Danson collection then shows how a Victorian collection evolves when care and control over acquisition and retention remain more or less consistent after the original collector has been succeeded by others. Both collections speak to sex book scholarship in unique ways and this is why I have chosen them as case studies for this chapter. In addition to the collector living on in the collection as per Benjamin, the collections reveal the impact of their respective relationships to institutions which will be of significance to this study.
**Henry Spencer Ashbee**

In his matchless three-volume sex book bibliography, Henry Spencer Ashbee, writing under the pseudonym Pisanus Fraxi,\(^7^9\) stated that “immoral and amatory fiction,” is worthy of literary scrutiny and “must unfortunately be acknowledged to contain, *cum grano salis* [with a grain of salt], a reflection of the manners of anvils of the times” (*Catena* 254). Fraxi takes pains to justify the legitimacy of sex books in a manner that keeps a modicum of dignity for his gentlemanly endeavours. He continues to warn that these texts contain “vices to be avoided, guarded against, reformed, but which unquestionably exist, and of which an exact estimate is needful to enable us to cope with them” (*Catena* 254). Fraxi,\(^8^0\) with this short remark, was making his case for the collecting, cataloguing, and studying of sex books. Ashbee was a collector among collectors of sex books and his particular fascination was with flagellation narratives. He was known to travel in circles of flagellation authors and producers—for instance, there is little doubt that Ashbee knew and possibly worked with William Lazenby, the publisher discussed in earlier chapters whose publications and close circle of authors included many flagellants. Ashbee did not necessarily own every title that appears in his bibliography, but he had occasion to examine each one through his connections. His personal collection is now housed at the British Library, although years of institutional neglect and mishandling have rendered it incomplete. The Ashbee bequest, a donation of 8,764 titles in 15,299 volumes that made its way to the British Museum upon its namesake’s demise in 1900, was made up of large collections of rare and antiquarian books, most significantly a collection of Cervantes that included “748 collected editions,” the largest outside of Barcelona (“Named Collections”). In addition to having compiled the largest collection of Cervantes works, Ashbee had also penned *An Iconography of Don Quixote, 1605-1895*, originally published in July 1895. The British Library, then housed at the British Museum, was anxious to obtain the peerless Cervantes collection from

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\(^7^9\) The origins of Ashbee’s punning Latinate pseudonym are covered in Chapter 2.

\(^8^0\) Out of necessity, I will often refer to Henry Spencer Ashbee and Pisanus Fraxi as discrete persons.
Britain’s own renowned expert on the author in its possession. However, the Ashbee bequest also contained a rich sex book collection which, according to the terms of Ashbee’s will, the museum was also required to accept, with the important caveat that, at the curator’s discretion, duplicate copies, books in poor condition, and those found otherwise unfit could be destroyed or disposed of by other means. The remaining sex books were placed into the infamous Private Case collection, not properly catalogued, where they remained more or less under lock and key for half a century. The BM’s Keeper of Books at the time of the bequest, G.K. Fortescue, listed the number of Private Case books “of an erotic or obscene character” from Ashbee at 2,379 volumes (qtd. in Mendes 466). In a report dated 28 October 1900, one month after the bequest arrived at the British Museum, Fortescue asked that a total of six boxes with “duplicate copies together with a quantity of offensive matter which is of no value or interest and which could not possibly be distributed” be destroyed. It is still not known what may have been in those boxes or what actually became of them (qtd. in Mendes 466). In 1914, about one hundred Ashbee bequest duplicates were discovered at the British Museum and “presented to the Bodleian Library for preservation in the Private Case [aka the Phi] Collection there” though it is unknown whether these volumes were part of the boxes that had been ordered destroyed in 1900 (Cross 206-207). What we do know is that the first proper cataloguing of what remained in the PC collection only came about in the early 1980s with Patrick Kearney’s The Private Case, which is still regarded as the unofficial guide to the PC by the British Library. The reference librarians charged with handling PC inquiries in the rare books reading room at the BL referred to Kearney numerous times when I inquired about certain titles during my research. The BL also still relies on a Xeroxed hand list of titles for the Ashbee sex book collection.

What does this image and description of Ashbee’s collection have to do with the kind of collector he was? First and foremost, he was a collector who convincingly led a double life: he was at
once a ‘serious’ book collector, to which the extensive collection of rare and antiquarian volumes in his bequest attests; he was also a travel writer, textile salesman, as well as a compiler, bibliographer, and collector of sex books. He literally wrote the book(s) on Victorian-era sex books and, in addition to the bibliographical information contained within the three volumes of Index Librorum Prohibitorum, Centuria Librorum Absconditorum, and Catena Librorum Tacendorum Ashbee—writing under the pseudonym Pisanus Fraxi—offered criticism, advice, as well as his own take on the morality of the works he was cataloguing. The bibliography itself acts as a kind of virtual collection. It was, and remains, an indispensable tool for collectors and scholars of sex books. Fraxi’s bibliography is a meticulous study on the culture of sex books in his own time and the legacy of others who made up that culture, most notably James Campbell Reddie, an author, collector, and bibliographer of sex books whose extensive personal book collection made its way to Ashbee upon his death in 1878 (Fraxi Catena xlvii). Reddie had composed a manuscript version of a sex book bibliography that largely informed Fraxi’s own three-volume bibliography. I mentioned above that Fraxi stated that an “exact estimate is needful to enable us to cope with [the presence of erotic literature]” and this is definitely one of the functions his bibliography served (Catena 254). It was a mammoth undertaking to produce such a work and it is a stellar example of its genre that even includes a “General, Alphabetical and Analytical Index,” which occupies no fewer than fifty-eight pages where information on every title in the three volumes can be easily referenced and accessed. The index is a useful reference not only for titles of works and authors (including some pseudonyms), but also topics and subtopics covered by those works. For instance, under the heading of “Copulation” can be found more specific subtopics such as “Why lovers, full of desire, are impotent when they attain their object” or “Women are colder, but less easily satisfied than men” (Fraxi Index 495). These entries call to mind the index of another voluminous work from the same period. The eleven-volume erotic memoir My Secret Life, discussed in greater length in the previous chapter, contains a
similar kind of master index of subjects. Both ‘Pisanus Fraxi’ and ‘Walter’ were Victorian collectors of sex and their respective works bear this out. *My Secret Life* was one man’s collection of sexual experiences that, as I argue in chapter 2, are organized along with a detailed index for quick referencing by readers. Fraxi’s bibliography is similarly detailed in its references to specific themes and acts contained within the books it lists. The inclusion of this kind of minutiae speaks to the importance Fraxi placed on the contents of sex books, and he argued that they “‘held the mirror up to nature’ more certainly than do [books] of any other description” (Fraxi *Catena* xxxviii).

Before Ashbee’s death in 1900 made his book collections national treasures, Ashbee kept them in separate locations. The personal sex book library of Ashbee—stored during his lifetime at rented chambers in Gray’s Inn, an “all male preserve that afforded suitable secrecy” roughly a mile from his home in Bedford Square (Gibson 23)—contained a catholic assortment of titles in English, French, and German, which makes sense considering his inveterate travel and book collecting. At the time of the bequest, the “so-called ‘placers’ at the British Museum Library did their work with a slapdash insouciance” (Kearney 23). That is to say, Ashbee’s erotica was not given the consideration and care in cataloguing that it required, to such an extent that many of the volumes may have been misplaced, in turn making the project of reengineering exactly which titles were received in the bequest much more difficult. It has been estimated that, at one time, as many as “3,105 books were considered by the British Museum to be so shocking or so harmful that their very titles were suppressed from the public (in some cases since the 1840s)” in the PC collection. This number is significantly lower today as titles have been moved out of the PC and into the general catalogue as sensibilities over what is obscene have become, not exactly *laissez-faire*, but perhaps less dire than they once were (Cross 225). It is also helpful that access to the PC has become less restricted to readers at the BL. As late as the 1960s, many of Ashbee’s sex books had still not been properly accessioned and many had “simply been slung onto the dust-covered shelves [of the British Museum
...in no order whatsoever, and with no concern as to the books’ sizes, and therefore their protection from each other especially when unbound” (Kearney 23, original emphasis). This treatment of Ashbee’s collection stands in stark contrast with the careful and painstaking process of its original owner in not only building, but also in organizing and arranging it. All collectors are invested—in multiple senses of the word—in their collections, but Ashbee was a collector among collectors in terms of how he used the materials and the purpose(s) of his collection. It is not wildly conjectural to say that Ashbee would have presumably not approved of his collection being mishandled in such a way. His collection was that of a learned scholar of sex books, donated to a public institution where it could have a continued existence as a working collection. A working collection is one that sees regular scholarly use and its use is instructive in the creation of new knowledge. Taking the better part of a century to re-establish the Ashbee sex books as a working collection, the texts and the rest of the Private Case are now significantly more accessible to readers in the British Library than at any time in their respective histories. The titles, however, are still not easily searched and require a degree of knowledge on the part of the reader as to what one is looking for.

As a modern scholar, I am mindful that I am in a much more comfortable position from a research standpoint than those who have come before me in studying the Ashbee collection, with most of the bibliographical and cataloguing legwork having been done decades ago. Plenty of questions still remain, however, as to the Ashbee collection’s purpose and what kind of collector he was. We know from Pisanus Fraxi’s extensive preface to the Index Librorum Prohibitorum on the topic of collecting what his views on the importance of sex books were. Fraxi opined that sex books were “infinitely more interesting than their better known and more universally cherished fellows” and actually “acquire additional value [to the collector] in proportion to the persecution they have suffered, their scarcity, and the difficulty he experiences in acquiring them” (Fraxi Index XXVI). In
Fraxi’s view, there were two types of collector, quite simply “those who read and those who do not read,” the former having the requisite experience to know what ought to be acquired and the latter simply having “taken a caprice for collecting” (Fraxi *Centuria* li-liii). Fraxi fell, of course, into the former category. The Dansons, using Fraxi’s dual-model of collectors, were neither readers nor non-readers but something in between. The Dansons collected what interested them outside of their professions and seemingly gave little thought to the monetary value of their collections. Fraxi’s bibliography was useful to both kinds of collectors, though perhaps less so for those who “do not read” as they were more likely to have been more concerned—following Oscar Wilde’s famous proclamation on the cynic—with the price of their books rather than their value. Fraxi’s judgement of the two types of collectors is indicative of the demarcation within the sex book collecting world discussed at the beginning of this chapter: the separation of “upper- and upper middle-class households from [those] of the lower- and ‘middle middle-class,’” those of the lower classes perhaps thought to be incapable of being the ‘reading’ kind of collector (Egginton 348-349).

The division of class structures went beyond simply the collecting habits of sex book collectors and was actually a social signifier of identity politics. Ashbee was an expert bibliophile and his alter ego as Pisanus Fraxi was an open secret within the world of the sex book trade. Knowing Ashbee/Fraxi was something of a shibboleth in the collecting world. Nowhere is this better established than his personal, annotated copies of his bibliography held in the PC collection (though these are released to readers only after gaining special permissions). Along with many notes handwritten by Ashbee himself that give information about certain titles, there are also many paratextual elements in the books including letters written to Ashbee from authors, collaborators, and book producers variously complimenting him on the achievement or bemoaning their exclusion from his bibliography. An anonymously penned poem pasted at the end of the second volume,
*Centuria Librorum Absconditorum*, offers a look into the world of collectors and sex book fans

Ashbee/Fraxi inhabited.

To Pisanus Fraxi Esq.
Nor oak, or elm, but good sound Ash
Bonds to the breeze, no fear of crash
Preserves the mellifluous store
Gathered from Cythera's flowery shore
Oh! Happy happy, Bee
With hive safe up a tree
Far Above the world of war
Free from raids, police, or law.
28\textsuperscript{th} March 1879\textsuperscript{82}

The first significant reading is the play on the words ‘ash’ and ‘bee’ with “nor oak, or elm” and “mellifluous,” or ‘flowing honey’ as the word’s Latin etymology suggests. The simplistic and playful apiary imagery continues with “happy Bee” and “hive.” These clues are not the most difficult encryption to break if one were looking to figure out the true identity of Pisanus Fraxi. The references speak to the familiarity of the poet with Ashbee and the running joke of the open secret of his double life, one which he sportively cultivated with his numerous entries in *Notes & Queries*, dropping similarly transparent hints as to Fraxi’s true identity. The poem, of course, was not meant for public consumption and can therefore be understood as a private communiqué between friends at ease joking in such an incriminating manner. The rest of the poem, however, tells of Ashbee’s position in the hierarchy of both sex book collecting as well as Victorian society as a whole. The sylvan imagery, apart from a play on Ashbee’s name, indicates that Ashbee held a strong position “with no fear of crash” who was preserving the “mellifluous store / Gathered from Cythera’s flowery shore” or, rather, that Ashbee was a guardian of erotic literature who was personally inoculated against prosecution by authorities for his collecting habits. ‘Cythera’ was, of course, the Greek island that has been claimed as the birthplace of the love goddess Aphrodite. Classical allusion was a commonality in the world of Victorian era sex books and the association with Cythera

\textsuperscript{82} From Ashbee’s personal, annotated copy of *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum* P.C.14.de.3, transcribed by me.
held unique meaning to one of Ashbee’s contemporaries and a possible business associate, the publisher William Lazenby. As discussed in chapter 2, Ashbee and Lazenby more than likely knew and possibly worked with each other, and the mention of Cythera in the handwritten poem strengthens the connection as Lazenby was fond of the allusion in his publications. In 1870 Lazenby published a collection of obscene parodies and poems titled *Cythera’s Hymnal*. Ashbee was well acquainted with the publication, confirmed by a note in his own hand in his personal copy of his bibliography which claims “Frederick Popham Pike, a barrister of some standing” was “a principal contributor to *Cythera’s Hymnal*” (qtd. in Mendes 234). Pike was a part of a writing coterie familiar to Ashbee that produced texts for a few publishers including William Lazenby. In addition, another Lazenby title, *Autobiography of a Flea* (1885), lists ‘Cytheria’ (meaning ‘our lady of Cythera’ or, in other words, Aphrodite) as its place of publication. What is notable about this association is how close the subject matter of *Flea* is to the allusion to “Cythera’s flowery shore.” Though it is unknown who wrote the poem that appears in Ashbee’s copy of the bibliography, and there is not nearly enough evidence to positively identify William Lazenby, the strength of connection between the two invites that hypothesis.

The unknown poet indicates that Fraxi’s collection, his ‘(Ash)beehive,’ was in a secure position high up in the ‘ash’ tree “Far above the world of war / Free from raids, police, or law” which are the lines in the poem that speak the loudest to the culture of the sex book scene in London of the late nineteenth century. These lines build on the imagery of the safety of the ‘hive’ up a tall ‘ash’ tree, albeit in a more literal sense since, of course, police raids on those involved in the sex book trade were a very real risk. The poem was obviously written by somebody with personal knowledge of Ashbee and his collections. The location of Ashbee’s sex book library at Gray’s Inn is indicative, perhaps, of the protection it afforded him and the others he entertained there—notable sex book aficionados, producers, and collectors including Richard Burton and Richard Monckton
Milnes—as it was, and remains, one of the official Inns of Court in London. Gray’s Inn was a closed location accessible only to members of the bar, those who had yet to be called to the bar, and, of course, other men of stature or importance who were allowed to rent chambers there. As discussed earlier, maintaining libraries and other leisure spaces within the home physically and symbolically marked distinctions in the upper strata of class. Ashbee is a unique case as he maintained not only two discrete libraries but also distinct personae for each. Ashbee was something of a celebrity in Victorian book-collecting circles. His collection and alter ego as Pisanus Fraxi was an open secret, so much so that a note in an 1890 French article describing Ashbee’s Bedford Square (his ‘mainstream’ titles) book collection made light of the fact that Ashbee was living a double life. The author of the article joked that he “would refer only to the books Ashbee showed to those who had not been introduced to ‘his intimate friend and alter ego Pisanus Fraxi’” whose collection was housed at Gray’s Inn (qtd. in Gibson 127).

Ashbee’s library of sex books stored at one of the Inns of Court is reminiscent of another of Lazenby’s works, 1876’s Romance of Lust. In that erotic memoir, the narrator’s friend holds his library of sex books in “a small set of chambers at Lyon’s Inn [another of the Inns of Chancery], a sitting-room and bedroom, where he had a complete library of bawdy books and pictures to excite to new efforts passions pall’d with excess” (Romance of Lust 416). This description of the collector in Romance—who also happens to be a flagellomaniac—compares well with Ashbee’s seeming obsession with flagellation literature in the first volume of his bibliography and points toward a closer association with Lazenby than has been suggested by scholars thus far. It would be in keeping with the playful nature of the sex book trade for Lazenby to include this slight allusion to Ashbee in Romance of Lust. What this all amounts to is that it was likely the case that Ashbee’s collection at Gray’s Inn was well protected from the prying eyes of police and vigilante groups like the Society for the Suppression of Vice because Ashbee had the luxury of going about his business behind well-
guarded doors. Ashbee was not in the sex book business per se, at least not in the way people like Lazenby were, and his various privileges gave Ashbee a significant advantage in terms of avoiding run-ins with the law. Ashbee was a private collector in good societal standing; his position afforded him many advantages that allowed him to keep his affairs, and those of his influential friends and acquaintances, private.

The public/private divide that allowed Ashbee to be such a successful sex book collector did not exist in a vacuum. Collector culture in Britain had been well established by the time Ashbee began collecting books and, to take but one example, I point to an advert from a 1903 Charles Carrington catalogue. The advertisement in question represents a culmination of marketing to sex book collectors in class terms. He puts the matter of how (snobbish?) collectors likely viewed the proliferation of sex books succinctly: “We should be sorry to see the day when a larger edition is made and such Literature, like the daily newspaper, placed within the reach of the ‘Man in the Street’” (“Catalogue of Rare and Curious” n.p.). A top priority for authorities was taking down those producing sex books, but so long as sex books remained in a class of collecting available only to a select few, it was even less likely that authorities would bother with the private collector. This kind of ignominious commentary about the reading public or “man on the street” was an ingenious sales tactic that fed collectors’ desire for exclusivity. It also aided them to assert their position over the common reader, for whom such pursuits were largely unavailable, even though it has been well established that sex books and pamphlets were available at a variety of price ranges. The trend in stratification of collectors by class is deeply engrained in the language of some advertisers especially those who wished to disassociate themselves with the popular trade in sex books that took place in Holywell Street. The fear that the ‘man in the street’ would obtain sex books was not wholly shared by Ashbee, though it cannot be said that he necessarily approved of indiscriminately broadening their availability either. Writing as Fraxi, he noted that sex books were “pernicious and hurtful to the
immature,” a genre not for the young, feeble-minded, or the lower classes, say—a comment which ought to be accompanied by that most immense of salt grains—“but at the same time…study [of sex books] is necessary, if not beneficial” (Fraxi *Catena* lvi).

Such is the conundrum of Ashbee/Fraxi, who is at once a fervent collector and preservationist of sexual and erotic literature, and yet one with the ability to hold opposing views on the topic. His interest in the genre cannot be denied and it is certain that his involvement, scholarly though it was, extended beyond mere scholarly interests. Ashbee perceived the importance of sex books and, in his opinion, their relative innocence in comparison with other genres of literature that were more widely available and, according to his estimations, more harmful. He warned that “the connection of the sexes, legal or otherwise, can be injurious only when carried to excess.” He also opined “that more youths have become criminals through reading of the deeds, real or fictitious, of murderers, pirates, highwaymen, forgers, burglars, prison-breakers, &c than have ever developed into libertines from the perusal of obscene novels” (Fraxi *Catena* lvi-lvii). It would seem that Ashbee considered the penny dreadful a more deleterious force than the sex book. Ashbee’s distaste for the penny dreadful has a particular sting when it is taken under consideration that some of the authors of these stories were also sex book authors, a fact that Ashbee no doubt knew. For instance, journalist George Augustus Sala began his career writing penny dreadfuls; he is also associated with partaking in the creation of a few sex books such as *Cythera’s Hymnal, The Mysteries of Verbena House,* and *Harlequin, Prince Cherrytop,* among others (Mendes 9). Ashbee’s interest in sex books, irrespective of any personal sexual preferences or practices, was as a collector and scholar. Ashbee was an integral part of the preservation of much material that would otherwise have been lost had it not been for his collecting and bibliographic projects. Sadly, his sex book collection as it remains is incomplete and it is unlikely that we will find all that has been lost.

Ashbee was never prosecuted for dealing or possessing sex books, unlike contemporary
publisher William Lazenby or his predecessor William Dugdale. Ashbee’s position as a preserver of books may offer a clue here. Ashbee’s involvement in the book-collecting world of the late Victorian period leaves no question that he was a well-regarded collector of rare and antiquarian books who made his living in a respectable way as a textile trader and traveller. Was his double-life so successful that he was essentially able to collect and compile, at will, materials that posed a significant risk to the homeostasis of his family life and position within society if discovered? Ashbee’s dual-identity was less of a Jekyll and Hyde scenario and more like Batman: those in a position to know were in on Ashbee’s secrets and it would not have taken much investigative work to figure out his secret identity. Ashbee had this in common with Walter of My Secret Life, which is perhaps why Ian Gibson has made such a forceful case for Ashbee as the author of the eleven-volume memoir. While much of Gibson’s argument is circumstantial, one passage on the similarities between Ashbee’s and Walter’s styles of collecting is worth mentioning. Gibson writes,

Both are obsessive classifiers, Ashbee of erotic books, ‘Walter’ of vaginas. Where Walter compares and notes the variations between female genitalia, Ashbee can write pages about the tiny differences between editions of one work. Both say again and again that they are describing only what they have handled personally. Walter tends to sum up the qualities of a woman after describing his sex with her. In his travel diaries Ashbee habitually devotes some ‘General Remarks’ to the cities he has just visited. It may be added that both have a sharp eye for how much things cost, in the case of ‘Walter’ the ‘things’ include women: ‘My prick was in the cunt of a French virgin, at a cost of two hundred pounds’ (Gibson 205)

Gibson’s observations here do not make a severely compelling argument for Ashbee’s authorship of MSL but what he does accomplish is an interesting inventory of the habits of collectors and classifiers, a quality shared by both Ashbee and the author(s) of MSL/Walter. A collector spends a great deal of time lamenting the incompleteness of a collection, while Ashbee and Walter alike
presented their respective collections as, if not wholly complete, then from the vantage of collectors who had somehow amassed enough to sate their desires.

Henry Spencer Ashbee was an accomplished collector of rare and antiquarian books as well as a specialist in *Don Quixote*, while Pisanus Fraxi was a collector and preserver of erotica and sex books: that Ashbee could be so accomplished in these two fields is astonishing. Collecting and cataloguing sex books was a complement to Ashbee’s ‘legitimate’ collecting and preservation activities, and it is my assertion that his position as discussed above allowed him to skirt the law so long as a certain decorum was adhered to. It stands to reason that Fraxi’s collection was a repository for publishers such as Lazenby, who gifted a number of titles to Ashbee according to notes in personal copies of his bibliography.

Undertaking the project of cataloguing and publishing his bibliography of prohibited books was likely a boon to Ashbee’s renown and cultural cachet in the world of sex books; by compiling the bibliography, collecting becomes productive. His diaries indicate that, while Ashbee was compiling his bibliographies, he met frequently with important figures in the London trade such as Richard Monckton Milnes as well as collector Frederick Hankey and publisher Jean-Jules Gay on the continent (Gibson 85). Taking on the bibliographical project would have elevated Ashbee to the extent that publishers and booksellers sought him out to have their wares immortalized in what would become something akin to a *Johnson’s Dictionary* for sex books. Fraxi’s collection evolved from a personal one to a collection of record; although his bibliography was by no means a catalogue of his personal collection, it is indicative of his connections within the world of sex book collecting. It also bears repeating that he was linked into a network that contained every important Victorian sex book collection. Fraxi mentions James Campbell Reddie, Frederick Hankey, and William S. Potter (among others) by name. These men were not only important collectors, but they also helped produce a good number of the works that were circulated around London from the middle of the
century until their deaths in the 1870s and 1880s. Fraxi was the apotheosis of the Victorian sex book collector and to pass his collection on to the British Museum Library was not simply an act of giving by a well-heeled benefactor but a symbolic passing of carefully constructed knowledge to the institution. Ashbee’s bequest, however, can be read as a move calculated to force the nation’s hand into acknowledging the legitimacy of sex books. Cunningly, Ashbee made it a condition of his will that if the BM trustees wished to have his celebrated Cervantes collection and other important volumes, they must also accept the sex books. The trustees begrudgingly acquiesced to this condition. That it took the British Museum (and later the British Library) a good portion of a century to make the collection more or less publicly accessible speaks to the glacial pace of progressive thinking among the traditional gatekeepers of knowledge who determine what is fit for public consumption. In fact, even as late as the late 1980s, the British Library was still reticent about glorifying Ashbee’s sex book collection. In *Treasures of the British Library*—a colourful coffee table book published by the British Library—the Ashbee bequest is described as “rich in 18th-century books, with notable collections of Fielding and Sterne and a vastly augmented set of Nichols’s *Literary Anecdotes,*” all of which is true (Barker *Treasures of the British Library* 232). The next line notes that Ashbee’s libraries also contained “notable accessions to the Private Case, the repository of obscene and libellous books not normally available to the public,” then quickly redirects the reader to note that the collection’s “chief pride, however, was the Cervantes collection” (232). Neither Ashbee nor the Private Case is mentioned again throughout the entire book. The issue of restricting access to, or even discourse around, so-called sensitive collections is not a throwback to a bygone era. The same issues persist today for a modern collection that bears striking resonances with the Ashbee bequest.

An extensive collection of pornographic VHS tapes and other materials from the late twentieth century sits in archival limbo at the present moment in the UK. The identity of the
collector of these materials is not yet public knowledge, but it has been divulged that he was an anti-
censorship campaigner in Britain in the middle of the twentieth century and that there is “a formal
archiving of the documents relating to this man’s public activities and public life” (Mercer 412). The
issue lies in the fact that the current holders of this collection—two academics active in the
discipline of porn and censorship studies—are hesitant to donate the collection to any British
institution for fear that its fate will be similar to the Ashbee bequest, purposely forgotten or held up
in bureaucratic limbo over its content, and its association with the collector’s public archive
disavowed or ignored altogether. The collection itself, based on descriptions by its current
custodians, is an important time capsule relating to the distribution practices surrounding
pornographic videos (mostly homosexual in nature) and an extensive collection of private or
homemade videos of a similar nature. This collection of visual materials was carefully
assembled over many years. It contains material of a type that can make large national archives nervous, but is
also of such grand importance to the genre that it belongs in a facility with the means to properly
preserve the collection. Large national archives’ hesitation to house this collection raises all the same
issues that the Ashbee bequest must have presented to those in charge of the British Museum in the
twentieth century. When the archive decides to grant access to materials depicting sex and sexuality,
it begins generally with an array of special permissions and bureaucratic loopholes. The collections
are at risk of disappearing from an archive before even being properly accessioned. This is what the
current holders do not want, and they believe that “it is this precariousness that in many ways makes
this material of value and so important to preserve” (Mercer 412). If Ashbee is any kind of
indication, however, precarious yet worthwhile collections do eventually become accessible, it just
takes history’s gatekeepers a bit of time to catch up to the idea that representations of sex can
constitute historical documents and, if Fraxi’s own advice on depictions of sex and sex collections is
followed, these collections need to be acknowledged whether they are suited to an individual's taste or not and “an exact estimate is needful to enable us to cope with them” (*Fraxi Catena* 254).

Ashbee/Fraxi was a kind of Victorian Janus figure: the former looking to the past with his antiquarian book collecting interests while the other looks toward the future by ensuring the preservation of the entirety of the collection, including those materials that are more precariously placed in the pantheon of collecting. Ashbee's collections ensured the preservation of the material history his books held. By cataloguing and offering his essays on sex books, Pisanus Fraxi was all but assuring that, even if the materials themselves ceased to exist, there would be a record of them for future generations. \(^{83}\) Fraxi lays out the importance of preserving books that may have been deemed worthless, or even injurious, with words from one of the bibliographers who inspired and informed his own work:

> The most worthless book of a bygone day is a record worthy of preservation. Like a telescopic star, its obscurity may render it unavailable for most purposes; but it serves, in hands which know how to use it, to determine the places of more important bodies (Professor Augustus De Morgan qtd. in *Fraxi Index* li, emphasis mine)

It is as though Professor Augustus De Morgan, a nineteenth century British mathematician and bibliographer, was able to see the future of the Ashbee bequest, the Private Case, and sex book collections at large. The books bequeathed by Ashbee that were deemed worthless (or at least deemed unworthy of public scrutiny) have indeed, over a century after his death, come to represent a kind of guide to “more important bodies” – and also to a history of precarious and often obfuscated texts.

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\(^{83}\) It is worth remembering here that Ashbee also wrote an extensive volume on Cervantes, cementing his place in that history as well.
**The Danson Collection**

Henry Spencer Ashbee was at the top of the Victorian sex book collector pyramid and his collection is inarguably the most well-known of existing collections, which is why I have chosen to juxtapose a study of his collection with one lesser known. I turn now to the multi-generational collection of the Danson family. The Danson Library at Trinity College, Oxford represents the book collecting interests of three generations of its eponymous family, who originally hailed from Lancashire in the north west of England and would later become fixtures in Liverpool and Birkenhead where the family still has a home. The collection was begun in the middle of the nineteenth century by barrister John Towne Danson (1817-1898), passed down to and continued by his son Sir Francis Chatillon Danson (1855-1926), and, finally, custody was given to Sir Francis’ youngest son—his eldest having been killed in WWI—Lt. Col. John Raymond Danson (1893-1976).

It was John Raymond, a confirmed bachelor, who bequeathed the collection to his former college at Oxford upon his death in 1976. By the time John Raymond had inherited the collection, it contained almost 17,000 items ranging from archaeology texts and artifacts, Bibles, illuminated manuscripts from around the world, and, most germane to my study, around 450 sex book titles.

The following discussion of the Danson collection and its history serves as a second case study of a Victorian collector and the use(s) of their collections. The Dansons are a suitable case study based on the fact that theirs is, first and foremost, a Victorian collection, having begun sometime in the mid-1800s as a “working collection…used to support [John Towne Danson’s] various intellectual activities” which included Roman and British antiquities as well as numerous side interests, the history of print and erotica chief among them (“Danson Collection” 1). The Danson family, who were mostly in the legal profession, offer a spectacular example of professionals who embodied what David Pearson has termed “the collector’s instinct” (182). The topics of volumes

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84 In February 2016, I was granted unfettered access to the Danson collection at Trinity College, Oxford with the generous assistance of librarian Sharon Cure. Without her, much integral information of this dissertation would be missing. I owe her much gratitude for facilitating and allowing my access to the collection.
housed in the Danson collection are mostly unrelated to their custodians’ professional occupations. Pearson explains that this type of collector “acquires because he wants to learn and study, or because he wants to preserve that which may otherwise be lost, but also because the collecting instinct kicks in, the desire to own” (Pearson 182). The Dansons differ substantially from Ashbee in that their collections, complete in so far as they go with full runs of many series, periodicals, and sets, did not have what might be called a singular specialty or purpose. The Danson collection is polymathic, comprised of a series of small but carefully chosen cabinet collections, what David Pearson defines as “a small but perfectly formed collection which reflects an owner’s taste and style within limitations imposed by space or budget” (Pearson 186). It is impossible to say what volumes have been sold off or lost over the years, but the collection, as far as Trinity is concerned, was donated to the college in a “steady state” in which less important or valuable works were sold off by the Dansons as new and more valuable ones were acquired (“Danson Collection” 3). In other words, the collection, as far as Trinity’s curators can attest, is as complete as possible based on the information they have as to the contents they have some knowledge of. Based on my own inspection of the collection, the Dansons were, in addition to being prodigious cabinet collectors, “book maniacs,” those collectors who “[ply their] occupation in season and out of season, and to whom no privation or trouble is worth consideration so that this passion for collecting can be gratified” (Shaylor 3). The wide array of books about books and printing procedures in the collection indicate that the Dansons were Victorian bibliomaniacs, which Pisanus Fraxi would have characterized as “real lover[s] of books for their own sake” (Fraxi Index xxvi).

A number of significant bibliographical texts are also housed in the collection and, it seems, the last of the Dansons to hold the collection spent a considerable amount of time cross-referencing the collection with the 1936 erotica bibliography Registrum Librorum Eroticorum. The author of this bibliography was Rolf S. Reade, the pseudonym of Alfred Rose, a sex book collector and (like
Ashbee), bequeather to the British Library’s Private Case. Rose, again like Ashbee, also kept chambers at Gray’s Inn (Kearney Private 31). The *Registrum*, while an important bibliography, is often unreliable. It was compiled after Rose’s death by London bookseller and publisher W.J. Stanislas from work Rose had not yet finished: the two volumes contain serious omissions, incorrect information, and are nowhere near as thorough as Pisanus Fraxi’s three-volume bibliography, though it does purport to update Fraxi’s work (Kearney Private 32). The editor’s preface to the *Registrum* claims, correctly, that “since Ashbee’s book there has been no attempt to catalogue later works in this field or to remedy the omissions in the *Index Prohibitorum* [and Ashbee’s other two volumes]” (Reade xi). The title, *Registrum Librorum Eroticorum*, is a continuation of the playful and subversive nature in erotic bibliographies in homage to Fraxi. Where Fraxi was thumbing his nose at the prudery of the Church by mockingly choosing the title *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* for the first volume of his bibliography, Reade has gone a step further. In choosing Medieval over Classical Latin for the *Registrum*, Reade has mocked the classist intellectualism that was a hallmark of the Victorian sex book collecting world. Medieval Latin, unlike the learned Classical Latin used by the Roman elite, was based on a vulgate dialect which intentionally chose not to use the elite and is known for its forced rhyme patterns ending, often, with a –um suffix. Reade is tapping into this intentionally confrontational history with his use of this same, for lack of a better term, bad dialect. The choice of title indicates a bibliography of erotic literature for a more common and diverse audience, not a handful of elite collectors, but still useful to the serious collector. Reade’s project represents the way sex book collecting (and collecting as a whole) had changed since the Victorian period; it signifies a collector culture that is more accessible and more familiar to our present era.

Reade’s bibliography is compact and rather user-friendly, containing a straightforward list of books and short descriptions without the verbosity of Fraxi’s many essays and digressions. This

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85 I owe a debt of gratitude to Franky Garcia for his insights into Latin.
strength of Reade’s work is also a weakness, but it is not difficult to understand why a collector might choose to use his work over Fraxi’s. The *Registrum* “does not claim to be exhaustive,” though according to its editor, “it is far more complete as regards English erotica in particular than any other bibliography of its kind hitherto published” and this is perhaps the reason the Dansons chose it over Fraxi for indexing purposes (Reade x). It is also worth noting that John Raymond Danson was a contemporary of Alfred Rose and W.J. Stanislas and the men could have possibly known each other; in any case, the *Registrum* would have been, to Danson, the most up-to-date catalogue of sex books so it would only make sense to use it over something from the previous century. The Danson copy of the *Registrum* contains asterisks and annotations of all volumes in the erotica collection and the books themselves have the corresponding number from the bibliography written in their front covers. Also, if the books do not appear in the bibliography, this is also noted on the inside cover. Though the Danson collection contains a twentieth-century lithographic reprint of Pisanus Fraxi’s bibliography, there is no indication that it was used in the same manner as the *Registrum* by the Dansons for cataloguing purposes as it is a clean copy with no markings of any kind and this is somewhat telling of John Raymond Danson’s experience, or lack thereof, with the bibliographical study of sex books. In choosing to use Reade’s bibliography as a main source of information, Danson may have been misled on certain accounts as many of Reade’s entries rely on clandestine catalogues for their information. This indicates that Reade may not have personally examined the works (or even copies of the works) in his bibliography which is in direct contradiction of Fraxi’s “invariable rule” to never “describe a volume or edition which I have not examined” (*Fraxi Index*).

Of the some 450 volumes contained in the Danson sex book collection, there appeared few strong themes as regards the types of material collected. My main research goal in examining the collection was to uncover rare William Lazenby editions not known to exist outside the Danson

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86 Images 4.2 and 4.3.
collection. For example, the Dansons have the only known copy of a Lazenby edition of the short play *Harlequin, Prince Cherrytop* (1879). While these Lazenby volumes were of particular interest to me, I noted that the Dansons did not appear to be amongst the flagellomaniacs that Lazenby catered to. Rather, the Danson collection is a gallimaufry of sex genres, ranging from illustrated *éditions de luxe* to relatively cheap printings, though the majority are of considerable scarcity. There were many books in French and Italian and, to my surprise, a number of scatological works, though not in a sufficient enough quantity to warrant suggesting placing a coprophilic label on the Dansons or their collection. The scatological works—some examples include *An Essay Upon Wind*, *Bibliotheca Scatologica*, and *Anthologie Scatologique*, to name a few—are interesting because of what they suggest about the Dansons’ interest in niche categories and printings, something that is borne out in the rest of the library as well.

Like Ashbee’s collection, the Danson sex book collection was privately housed, but the Dansons’ was stored in amongst the larger rare and antiquarian collection and not at a separate site like Ashbee’s. It is worth mentioning, however, that the Danson library was housed at their country house, Dry Close, in the Lake District and their antiquities collections were housed in the city house in Birkenhead near Liverpool. With the artifacts in the city and the books in the country, it is tempting to read the Dansons’ collections as a secret life of a book collection, but there is no evidence that they went out of their way either to hide or to flaunt their discrete collections. It remains unclear whether the sex books in the country house were displayed prominently (or not), or even how they were arranged. Their arrangement in the library at Trinity offered no clues as to their original placement since the librarians have organized them roughly according to author. There is one surviving Danson family member who would have seen the collection as it was in Dry Close, but efforts to contact him have been unsuccessful. While in the library at Trinity, I was able to view a photograph of the collection as it looked at Dry Close circa the 1930s but, of course, it was
impossible to read which titles were on the shelves. Though the photograph depicted only one of the three library rooms at Dry Close, it was clear to see that every shelf containing books was on full view. As the collection was deemed a ‘working’ collection, it is fruitful to think about what that might have meant for the sex books which make up a small yet bibliographically diverse portion of the collection with titles from a variety of sources throughout Europe. It is easy to determine how the titles in the wider collection on antiquities could have been used as reference for archaeological interests and trips abroad, but how does one ‘use,’ for instance, an 1893 first edition copy of Teleny?

It seems that the Danson copy was, perhaps, one that was not used as it had been kept in its original salmon pink wrappings and was not bound in leather like many of the other titles in the sex book collection. As with Ashbee’s sex books, it seems as though the Dansons were similarly motivated by preservation but also a drive to own and admire their books. A large number of the Dansons’ sex books had been bound beautifully in leather with gilded spines and decorations, indicative of their attempts at preservation as well as presentation. Others, like the aforementioned edition of Teleny, had been given a simple protective case and preserved as they were.

If I were to summarize the Danson collection in one word, it would be ‘visual.’ The collection is clearly meant to be seen and enjoyed; its custodians took great care to ensure the volumes were well presented and spared no expense in keeping and preserving the collection. With the collection swollen by the 1920s, the library occupied “three communicating rooms at ‘Dry Close’… plus the large library room itself” (“Danson Collection” 2). Volumes were on display for aesthetic appreciation, if the many illustrated volumes and “English fine colour-plate books” and care taken in binding were any indication of the collectors’ priorities (“Danson Collection” 2). As much of a working collection as it may have been, the most important facet of the collection itself was its importance as a collection of objects. So, one possible answer to the previous question of

87 Images 4.5 & 4.6
precisely how the sex books were used may simply be that they were objects for admiration and joy of possessing. Whatever the underlying reason, the Dansons fit the criteria outlined by McIntosh & Schmeichel at the beginning of this chapter as to what constitutes a collector. Namely, if the function of the objects themselves is “of secondary (or no) concern” and their collection is not accompanied by a plan to “immediately dispose” of them (McIntosh & Schmeichel 86). They were also, consciously or not, preserving three generations’ worth of socio-historical documents.

Although the sex books comprise only a small section of the diverse materials in the library, they nevertheless were given considerable attention and care. Most of the volumes in the collection, with a few exceptions, had been beautifully rebound. What would have motivated the originator of the collection to begin amassing sex books only to have them bound in the same manner as his other books? Binding books is a way of personalizing them and marking ownership, as is pasting bookplates. It is curious that the Dansons did not use bookplates—a common practice with bibliophiles and collectors to this day—suggesting, perhaps, the intention of the library’s remaining always within the family, which it did for three generations. The sentimentality displayed by a number Victorian book collectors may offer some insight into the binding practices of the Dansons. Mid-century collectors (and earlier) “took it as read that desirable books were improved by being rehoused in new bindings according to the current taste” which is largely borne out by my examination of the Danson library (Pearson 200). Bibliographers often lament books that have “passed through the hands of Victorian collectors…[and] lost all trace of their original covers, together with endleaves, bookplates, and other evidence of early ownership and use which we now regard as important” because it makes provenance more difficult to discern (Pearson 200). A book’s historical context and testimony, however, completes the acquisition of a book. Walter Benjamin rightly declared that “dates, place names, formats, previous owners, bindings, and the like: all these

88 Image 4.7
details must tell [the book collector] something—not as dry, isolated facts, but as a harmonious whole” (489). The holistic approach to collecting that Benjamin is endorsing goes some distance to assuring collectors that their collection has a purpose beyond material or monetary value. This is evidenced within the Danson collection time and again. Books that were published contemporarily with the Victorian collector are, of course, somewhat exempt from these difficulties and were, in some cases, added to (known as grangerizing) by collectors, giving scholars and bibliographers much more information than they otherwise would have had (Pearson 200). This was the case with the Danson copy of Harlequin, Prince Cherrytop (1879) that contains an Edward Avery catalogue pasted in the back dating from no earlier than 1884 judging by the publication dates of the books advertised.

Many of Ashbee’s volumes contain one of his many personal bookplates as per one of the conditions set down in his will, since Ashbee donated the original plates to the British Museum expressly for this purpose (Gibson 150). Bookplates give important information about collectors and collecting. They are a personal mark on a book and vital to the longevity of the sex book as an object whose use is almost by definition private and often hidden. A bookplate can aid in tracing a book’s provenance, but whether or not a collector chooses to use bookplates is not indicative of what a collection’s purpose is or was, though I will suggest that their use points to a collector’s considerations about the afterlives of their libraries. Ashbee knew what the fate of his collections would be and so insured they would be somehow marked as his own. His will specified that a label be affixed to the spines of his books bearing the title ‘Ashbee Bequest’ and that his own bookplate ought to be affixed inside the front cover; however, the will also stipulated that this need not be done with titles that were to be “withheld from the Public,” that is, those entering the Private Case (Cross 207). As it turned out, the British Museum stamped and bookplated nearly all of Ashbee’s books, including those destined for the PC, thus ensuring, perhaps unwittingly, that Ashbee would forever be associated with each volume (Cross 207). The result of this decision gave Ashbee, if not
quite immortality, at least a lasting connection with the works that future collectors, curators, and scholars would recognize. It is worth noting that many of the volumes in Ashbee’s sex book collection are in their original bindings or were rebound with archival backboards by the British Library.

The Dansons, by contrast, spent a significant amount of time and money making certain that their collection was personalized to their aesthetic liking and the majority of the materials are in near perfect condition, although the older volumes have been stripped of identifying markers in accordance with the Victorian fashion for rebinding. It is impossible to say with any certainty what the originator of the collection, John Towne Danson, envisioned for his library, but it would not be outside the realm of possibility that he might have wished it to be passed down from generation to generation as a lasting legacy for all time. The last of the Dansons to hold the library, John Raymond Danson, had begun making arrangements for the bequest of his family’s books as early as 1932, some forty-four years before his death, but this does not mean that he did not care about the collection and the Danson family legacy via chain of custody. Although he never had any children to pass the library on to, there were other family members that could have taken custody of the collection. John Raymond Danson’s decision to bequeath the collection to his former college at Oxford denotes an acknowledgement that institutionalizing the collection could guarantee a better preservation effort and ensure that the collection could continue to ‘work’ outside the family and its individual intellectual pursuits.

**Afterlives of Sex Book Collections**

Thus far in this chapter I have focused on two important collections of sex books from the Victorian period. These are not by any means the only important collections, simply two well-known and relatively accessible examples. Though a significant number of the titles in the Private Case collection are from the Ashbee bequest, there have been other significant additions to the PC since
then. The PC is made up of portions from other collectors’ libraries such as those of George Mountbatten, Second Marquess of Milford Haven and Charles Reginald Dawes. Neither of these collectors, however, was actively collecting in the Victorian era, owing to their late birth dates (1892 and 1879, respectively). Even though it is possible that Dawes could have begun acquiring books in the Victorian period, it seems unlikely that a teenage bibliophile would have been able to count himself among the collector class of the élite guests entertained by Ashbee at Gray’s Inn. Neither Mountbatten’s nor Dawes’ collections can be considered Victorian collections. What these later collections suggest, however, is the longevity and importance of Victorian sex books to collectors. The Mountbatten and Dawes bequests, however, make up for the shortcomings of the Ashbee bequest as they contain many of the titles produced in England in the late Victorian period that are conspicuously absent from Ashbee’s collection. Collections from contemporaries of Ashbee are, sadly, missing from the public record. The whereabouts of collections from leading nineteenth century English sex book collectors such as William S. Potter, Coventry Patmore, and Frederick Hankey are unknown, though it is possible that some of their titles may have ended up in Ashbee’s collection (Hyde *History of Pornography* 180). Hankey, for instance, was a contemporary and close friend of Ashbee. The latter called him “a bibliomaniac in the fullest sense of the word” and noted that his collection, though small, was “most choice, and comprised objects and books, exclusively erotic,” the description of which exemplifies a style of collecting known in the Victorian era as a cabinet collection (Fraxi *Catena* l-li). Hankey’s cabinet collection would have been “a small but perfectly formed collection which reflects an owner’s taste and style within limitations imposed by space or budget” and it was numerous collections like this that Ashbee probably had access to throughout his time as a collector and bibliographer (Pearson 186). Ashbee gives no indication of what may have become of Hankey’s collection, however. It is possible that some or all of the titles made their way to Ashbee, but there is no record of this. Without these libraries, it is impossible to
guess at the afterlives of these collections. For research purposes, they should be considered lost or, perhaps to couch it in more hopeful terms as a sex book scholar, not yet found.

Of the collections that we do have, however, I will examine the lives and afterlives of those volumes and what the contexts of a private collection versus an institutional (ostensibly public) one mean for sex books. One perspective on the existence of sex book collections from the independent twentieth-century scholar of sexualities, Gershon Legman, provides an accurate, if somewhat harsh, introduction to the life cycle of sex books.

…rare copies of such works that have not been read to bits by their perverted enthusiasts, occasionally are preserved by compulsive (or perverted) book-collectors, and eventually find themselves bequeathed to, and segregated in the various levels of Hells and Infernos in public and university libraries (Kearney Private 40).

The image presented by Legman here promotes a view of the life cycle of sex books that was prevalent but far from entirely correct. Legman is adopting sensationalist rhetoric to lump all sex book users (and all sex books) together, erroneously. In breathlessly casting sex book enthusiasts unequivocally as “perverted” and “reading [books] to bits” until they are on the brink of becoming dust is to promote a false equivalency between the poor condition of some items held in collections and how cheaply some were produced to begin with. In actual fact—as has been shown in this chapter—sex book collectors by and large cared for their books as if they were cherished family members. Legman’s purported disapproval for the sex book “enthusiast” and “compulsive (or perverted) book-collector” notwithstanding, the notion of the afterlives of these collections as segregated and out of sight is a sound one. The prime example, of course, is the Private Case collection, but Legman refers specifically to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France’s ‘Enfer’ (translated as Inferno or Hell) collection, home to a collection of sex books that rivals the Private Case, in his comments.
The segregation of sex book collections was more or less the norm for much of the twentieth century in public institutions and university depositories. Other notable examples include the ‘Phi’ shelf-mark at the Bodleian Library (which allegedly contains some duplicates from the Ashbee bequest recovered from the ‘lost’ boxes in 1914) and the ‘Delta’ shelf-mark in the Library of Congress, which were not available in the general catalogues of their respective libraries for many years, very much like the Private Case and the Enfer. These other segregated collections have been distributed into the general catalogues of their respective institutions, which can sometimes lead to problems identifying which titles might be useful to a study. These collections were those not meant for public consumption but they were preserved—albeit sometimes reluctantly—nevertheless. I want to suggest that the image of prudish librarians and curators concealing sex book collections solely on moral grounds it is too facile an explanation. Alison Moore has posited that the curators of sex book collections were “propagating a vision of sexual knowledge as necessarily arcane, but propagating sexual knowledge nonetheless,” ironically—if unintentionally—mimicking the rhetoric of clandestine book advertising catalogues with their fear-mongering of the ‘man on the street’ gaining access to their wares (Moore 199). As well as limiting the knowledge contained within the collections, curators were also likely motivated by curbing “presumed misuse by the supposedly immoral masses and to ensure [collections’] preservation as something of great value” (Moore 199) a sentiment which is echoed in Legman’s admonishment of “perverted enthusiasts” (Kearney Private 40). It is plausible that pragmatism coincides with deciding to segregate and restrict access to certain materials, a practice still in use today. If certain titles or collections were considered too subversive to be housed in a national collection—especially a century ago—it was well within the power of those in charge to simply destroy materials. Instead, collections were mothballed, perhaps in anticipation of a time when their contents would be less prone to causing offence if offered for public scrutiny.
Ashbee’s bequest to the British Museum was a catalyst for the museum’s keepers not only to accept but, to a certain extent, to acknowledge that sex books were worthy of inclusion in the nation’s collective print culture history. Of particular interest, apart from Ashbee forcing the BM’s hand, is the motivation behind the decision to keep as many of the Ashbee volumes as it did, even though an undisclosed number were destroyed or otherwise disposed of. The first thing to note about the volumes known to have come from Ashbee is how few of them were printed in England or from English publishers such as William Lazenby and William Dugdale. Peter Mendes notes the peculiarity of the conspicuous absence of “illustrated pornographic books…produced in London” in the Private Case, considering that this is an area Ashbee’s bibliography “covers with great familiarity” (Mendes 467). The volumes from Ashbee are, like his bibliography, a diverse collection in chiefly European languages: English, French, and German. To take the bibliography, Ashbee’s annotations, and his known associates as a guide, it stands to reason that there ought to be significantly more works originating in England than there are in the collection. The infamous six boxes of items disposed of by the Keeper of Books in 1901 may have contained duplicates and books in poor condition but it is plausible that a considerable number of English books were also done away with as a kind of service to the nation. Perhaps this was done on ideological grounds, in an effort to preserve England’s good character, sustaining a prudish version of English identity while shifting attention to Continental perversions. Ashbee’s son, C.R. Ashbee, wrote in a diary entry in 1901 after seeing the bequest in its entirety that the British Museum had “kept some 8000 vols. of which it had no duplicates and let us hope will destroy a certain number which can be of no service to anyone on this earth,” giving no small indication that many volumes were likely destroyed with the family’s blessing (qtd. in Mendes 467).

Regardless of the makeup of the collection, it was not as though anyone would have been allowed to roam the stacks of what remained after the disposal of so many volumes. Access to the
PC was severely restricted for a majority of the twentieth century. This presents an intriguing possibility about how the British Museum (and later British Library) viewed the collection: necessary but necessarily out of sight. In fact, the British Library still houses a restricted collection that is not listed in the general catalogue and remains inaccessible to almost everyone: the Suppressed Safe (hereafter SS). The SS consists of titles “which have been pronounced libellous by a court, those which have been found to infringe copyright, and those which are at the time of deposit confidential” among other categories, access to which is considered potentially dangerous politically or a threat to the security of the information contained therein (Sharp qtd. in Kearney Notes Toward 8). I offer this brief glimpse into the justifications behind restricting the SS collection as a way of attempting to make sense of the ethos that brought about and sustained suppression of the PC collection over a century ago. Although the PC does not contain lists of personal information relating to British citizens or state secrets, it does contain specialized information that could have been at one time deemed unsuitable for any save those with highly specialized qualifications and/or those who could make a persuasive case for accessing the collection. It feels like a poor comparison to make between denying access to a collection containing state secrets and one containing depictions of sex, but it is worth noting that, in an era in which the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 dictated that the majority of the material in the PC collection was highly illegal, it begins to make more sense that the Keeper of Books did not wish to provide access to such material. Perhaps those materials which were the product of British society—that is, the titles in Ashbee’s collection that were produced in Britain—were considered especially important to keep out of sight.

As restrictions on ‘obscene’ literature were eased throughout the twentieth century (the Obscene Publications Act was amended and relaxed somewhat in 1959 and 1964), the Private Case

89 The word ‘obscene’ is a legalistic term which renders more opaque the already muddy waters of terminology regarding the materials under discussion in this dissertation, as mentioned previously.
became more accessible to researchers, although readers still required special permissions to view any materials. This was largely due to the efforts of English Marxist writer and critic Peter Fryer in the 1960s, who authored the first major study on the PC and made a convincing case for its importance as a collection. This was reported on at the time by the *Daily Mirror* [year?] and Fryer has been acknowledged as leading the charge to expose the hypocrisy of the British Museum’s secrecy surrounding the collection. Fryer’s book *Private Case, Public Scandal* was the catalyst for the scrutiny of the PC. Fryer summed up his critique of the BM’s restriction of the PC thus:

> Protecting books by making sure readers handle them properly is one thing.
> Protecting books, or readers, or the good name of the British Museum, by keeping titles out of the general catalogue and subject indexes is quite another (Fryer 27).

Fryer’s popular public criticism of the history and policies that led to keeping PC items away from readers became a *cause célèbre* and the *Daily Mirror*, a tabloid publication not known for its subtle approaches to scandal, picked up and disseminated the story of the collection that had “since the 1850s…grown a myth of a pit of indignity bathed in blue light” (“Behind Locked Doors” 9). The myth was largely perpetuated by the British Museum itself in its continual restriction of access to the collection and its requirement of any reader who asked to see a title “to have an interview with a museum official and then submit a written application,” after which permission was not even guaranteed (“The Odd Case” 11). While the books in the PC were well on their way to being transferred to the general catalogue at the time of Fryer’s exposé and the *Daily Mirror’s* reporting, the BM Trustees also decided that “no change in the procedure for the issue of such books to readers was contemplated” (Cross 221). Even though procedurally, accessing the PC was still a somewhat onerous task for researchers, some British Museum administrators had begun to adopt more liberal attitudes toward the PC in the 1960s. Director and chief librarian Sir Frank Francis remarked to the

For a more fruitful discussion of the issues with ‘obscene’ and ‘obscenity’ versus ‘pornography’ see Linda Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography* or Jennifer Doyle, *Sex Objects.*
Sunday Times [year?] that “there should be one place in London where people can study the darker places of the human mind” and that BM librarians were “keepers of books, not guardians of morals” (“Clearing Out” 22).

Peter Fryer follows Gershon Legman somewhat in his admission that the Private Case required some form of added security because “some people are kinky about such books. They cannot help themselves. Their fingers itch for a pencil, or a sharp knife, or the thrill of possession” (Fryer 21). Fryer builds on this sentiment when interviewed regarding the publicity surrounding the Private Case in the mid-1960s, once again invoking the “kinky people” who desire to steal the pages from sex books by the use of a piece of string moistened with saliva, pressed between pages and “after a few minutes a page can be easily—and quietly—removed by tearing down the damp line made by the string” (“The Odd Case” 11). Fryer and Legman were fond of writing off such persons as “kinky,” though I contend that book-page thieves may have been more business-minded than they were given credit for. After all, one of this chapter’s premises is that there has always been a robust collector trade in the books housed in the Private Case.

In contrast to the PC collection and the Ashbee Bequest, the Danson collection at Trinity College reveals a different story of an afterlife of a sex book collection. The total bequest made by John Raymond Danson was significantly larger than the Ashbee Bequest and contained many discrete collections, which were made short work of and distributed to appropriate divisions within the Oxford libraries (mainly the Bodleian) in accordance with the terms of Mr. Danson’s will. The bulk of the bequest resides in an eponymous library dedicated to the collection adjacent to the Old Trinity Library. The library is freely accessible to students of Trinity College and those with a scholarly interest in the materials it contains, though access for the latter category of readers requires establishing oneself with the college librarian and the possession of the bona fides to be granted a Bodleian reader’s pass. Unlike the British Library, the libraries at Oxford are not full-blown publicly-
funded institutions; although Oxford does receive some public funding and is a ‘public’ institution, it is ‘private’ in that it is entirely self-governing. The Danson Library is not Oxford’s most prized possession, though it is an important collection, and the sex books have remained largely untouched since their placement in 1976. There has never been any effort to restrict access beyond the ceremony and bureaucracy involved in accessing Oxford libraries, so why the dearth of scholars studying the materials held there? Like its counterpart in the British Library, the Danson Library has wanted proper cataloguing and entry into the general catalogue of the university. Unlike the PC, however, this want of organization stemmed from a lack of funding rather than any moral or legal imperative. Even as recently as 2016 the only catalogue of the sex books that exists is a hand list that offers little to no description of the volumes—the books have not even been assigned call numbers. The volumes in Phi collection at the Bodleian (with its own history of suppression) at least were given catalogue numbers. The Danson Library itself is a lovely space, custom built to house the collection in as close to a natural state—that is, undisturbed from its original context—as is possible to imagine outside of its original private context.

An interesting note regarding the Danson sex book collection: Mr. Danson would have been keenly aware of the kinds of troubles associated with housing such collections and stipulated in his will that, if Trinity wished, it could place the sex books “on deposit in the Bodleian Library,” effectively eliminating them from the remainder of the Danson library, which was comprised mostly of more mainstream antiquarian books (“Danson Collection” 3). Oxford colleges may choose to donate unwanted parts of collections to the Bodleian while still retaining ownership of the materials; this is partly what putting an item “on deposit” means. The on deposit option is most frequently used, however, for manuscript and other collections owned by colleges that do not have the resources to take appropriate care of the materials (Jones “Re: Ask”). With the Danson bequest, Trinity placed the manuscript material on deposit for this reason and made the choice to “retain the
bulk of the ‘special collections’ for the Danson Library which at the same time retained its status as a working collection (‘Danson Collection’ 3). There is a tension, however, in the term ‘working collection’ as far as the Danson sex books are concerned; namely that the collection has not actually been ‘working’ much since its arrival at Oxford. It is astonishing that more scholars have not referenced such an important collection. The collection’s lack of proper cataloguing has likely contributed to its (and especially the sex books’) not receiving the scholarly attention it deserves. Indeed, a confluence of factors has relegated the Danson collection to near obscurity. Even Peter Mendes, whose *Clandestine Erotic Fiction in English 1800-1930* is the most up-to-date and fundamental reference text in the field of erotic books of this period, did not appear to spend a great deal of time with the Dansons’ sex books. Mendes omitted important details in descriptions of some volumes he examined at Trinity. For the 1888 title *Nunney Tales*, Mendes erroneously states that the Danson copy is “lacking Vols. 2 & 3” but this is not the case (Mendes 168). The volumes are in fact bound together. Mendes’ description of the Danson’s copy of *Harlequin, Prince Cherrytop* receives only acknowledgement that it is in the collection, with no mention of the important catalogues added to the back matter. Whether the Dansons would have been content with the limited attention paid to their working collections we cannot know. Once a private collection is institutionalized, however, what is its legacy from the collector’s standpoint? Obviously, we cannot know what previous generations of Dansons think about having the collection housed in an institution rather than the private family library, but it is worthwhile to muse on the fact that it may now serve as a symbol of immortality for the namesake of the collection.

It was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, following McIntosh and Schmeichel’s guiding definition of what a collector is and does, that collectors’ motivations for amassing collections may serve as ersatz symbols of immortality in a way that children are symbols of one’s continued legacy in the biological sphere. To pass a collection containing thousands of books across
genres and centuries to one’s children might make the feeling of a legacy more palpable and diminish the collector’s threat of mortality significantly. It is of course impossible to state with certainty that mitigating the anxiety of death was a deciding factor in Mr. Danson’s decision to bequeath the collection to Trinity, though he did ensure that the name would forever be associated with the volumes in an institution that has been around for almost a millennium (about as close as is possible to come to immortality in the world of English books). It is notable that Mr. Danson first agreed to donate the collection when he was still a relatively young man (just thirty nine in 1932) and, as far as I can tell, he ceased adding to the collection save for a few bibliographies and other reference works. I cannot speak for the majority of the collection, but as far as the sex books are concerned, it appears as though Mr. Danson’s role became that of the archivist, preparing the collection for its permanent exhibition by becoming immersed in a bibliographic project.

The bibliographic project undertaken by Mr. Danson was an important stage in preparing it for its afterlife as a ‘working collection’ of sex books for future researchers and scholars. It is clear that Mr. Danson saw the need for paying close attention to a series of books that might otherwise be destined to a fate similar to the Private Case collection of mistreatment and little acknowledgement. It is possible that the debate that arose over the Private Case in the mid-1960s may have inspired Danson to seek to organize the collection in some manner. By attempting to catalogue the sex books, Mr. Danson was engaging in an important step in securing the afterlife of that part of the collection. It is telling that there is no pricing information to be found anywhere in the collection or the cataloguing undertaken. The spirit of the collection was obviously one in which the acquisition of titles that interested the collectors was of the greatest import rather than those which could be sold on for the highest price. Of course, relative obscurity may have been a factor in searching out certain titles. If he had so desired, Mr. Danson could have easily sold the entirety of the collection at auction for a large sum of money, though this may not have been the particular case for the sex
books. Patrick Kearney succinctly pointed to the main difference between “respectable” and “obscene” book collecting noting that “had [he] been a collector of Samuel Beckett or some other respectable modern writer there is probably nothing that [he] couldn’t turn up at short notice, provided [he] had the cash” whereas the secrecy with which sex books were treated rendered them a much rarer currency and consequently much more difficult to obtain, even those deemed unimportant or practically worthless to collectors (*Private Case 66*). Kearney remarked that he had been lucky enough to find rare sex books in abandoned stacks at second-hand shops more often than through more established channels. Having been part of a book-collecting family whose holdings partook of both the mainstream and obscene book trades, it stands to reason that Mr. Danson was well aware that, at the time, the market for sex books was not robust and that the titles in the collection would be better off if kept for study than possibly destined for second-hand misfit stacks.

In turning bibliographer, Mr. Danson’s project to catalogue the sex book titles may have stemmed from a desire to have the transition from a private working collection to a public one go off as smoothly as possible. Mr. Danson may have also been aware of the fact that the study of sex books was an important field, even if it had not been taken up in the mainstream of scholarship. He no doubt noticed the new prominence of the emerging field with publications such as Steven Marcus’ key study *The Other Victorians* (1966) and the political battles over the Private Case collection in the same era. Private libraries and “collectors have been important catalysts in opening up and generating interest in new fields of study,” something that Danson and others who have collected anything are no doubt aware of (Pearson 201-202). Collectors also help “us to recognise that previously neglected areas of our documentary output deserve more attention,” (Pearson 201-202) attention that has now turned the study of books which once “could not possibly be distributed” into a legitimate field of inquiry (Fortescue qtd. in Mendes 466).
CONCLUSION: A LEGACY OF SEX COLLECTING

This chapter has outlined acquisition and retention issues with sex book collections, specifically those of two notable Victorian collectors. Writing from the vantage point of the ostensibly more sexually laissez-faire twenty first century, however, comes replete with sets of assumptions regarding attitudes towards sex that are not necessarily that different from previous ages that have been discussed in this chapter. As a scholar, I would be remiss to neglect mentioning the state of institutionalized sex collections as they are in the present moment, always with one foot firmly rooted in the history presented in the preceding chapter. Jennifer Burns Bright and Ronan Crowley, in their 2014 essay “‘A Quantity of Offensive Matter’: Private Cases in Public Places,” offer a succinct account of one of the main issues with institutionalized collections:

Even though earlier practices that were intended to stymie the circulation of sexual materials, and that strove to separate the ‘honest and legitimate’ research from the ‘sex maniac,’ have given way to a broader platform of access, similarly relativistic, culturally shaped notions of propriety and prudery exist today for the documentarian who consults pornography. (Bright and Crowley 105)

Accessing and studying Victorian sex books seems comparably quaint, considering the opening of access to institutionalized collections throughout the twentieth century. Access to other forms of socially proscribed materials gives archivists and librarians the same pause as sex books did in living memory. Skittishness on the part of large national institutions to house modern ‘pornography’ collections, such as the VHS collection mentioned earlier, should strike a resonant tone with scholars of sex who know the history of such collections.

Physical depositories are neither a necessity for nor have a monopoly on cultural prudery.

Writing in the introduction to the inaugural issue, the editors of the relatively new academic journal
Porn Studies stated that they hoped the much-debated publication “will become a lively contemporary forum, a space for historical work, and an archive” (Attwood & Smith 3). The editors acknowledge the use of intellectual spaces as collections in themselves and that Porn Studies represents the state of the field, evidenced by the authoritative title. The journal, however, is another genre of institution, subject to the authority of its editors and reviewers in choosing what will and will not be seen in its pages. While publication decisions made by the editors of Porn Studies do not equate to censorship or restriction of access akin to something like the Private Case, editorial decisions necessarily fashion the contours of the authority of the given collection. The editors state that pornography has a “public presence as an object of concern” and that this is one of the guiding principles behind the journal’s publication while, at the same time, pornography is a “metaphor used to designate the boundaries of the public space” (Attwood & Smith 4). Designation of boundaries in public space is an apt signifier for any history of institutionalized access to sex and sexual materials regardless of the ideological rationale behind limiting access or not. It is difficult to know whether Porn Studies will be subject to widespread criticism as a gatekeeper to sexual knowledge in decades to come, but what is certain is that its attempt at amalgamating knowledge on pornography is nevertheless an institutionalized sex collection susceptible to the same pitfalls as the custodians of physical collections.

What all this means, then, is that we may never be out of the woods vis-à-vis collections of a sexual nature. Or, to put it another way, any collection—be it sex books, ideas, antiquities, or whatever—is subject to the constraints of its context imposed by those in charge. Collections, like collectors themselves, necessarily dissipate. This chapter has sought to shine a light on the issues around caring for sex collections—be they books or otherwise—and to trace how collectors’ materialism are embodied in their collections. Or, put another way, delineating that most intimate of relationships between a person and their objects. A collection, following McIntosh & Schmeichel,
might still be read as an attempt to keep knowledge of one’s mortality at bay. Throughout the
discussion of the various collections in this chapter, this seems like a solid gamble for the collector;
after all, the collectors themselves have proved to be as important than the collections they
amassed. For the sex collector, the risk that their collections—and their physical efforts—would be wilfully
forgotten by various gatekeepers was profound. Nevertheless, they persisted and, presumably, will
continue.
Chapter 4 Images

Image 4.1: The Private Case as it looked in the office of Eric Dingwall, British Museum, 1968. Photo used courtesy of Daily Mirror/Mirrorpix
Fred advises her to encourage her guardian’s advances, so
that he may surprise him in the art. On his part, he
undertakes to punish the Dr. by obtaining the favour of Mrs.
Phookall. In both intrigues he succeeds—he gets the pro-
drague into his power, and his wife with child. The Dr. also
enjoys Jenny, who is however already enuntia by John. The
denouncement is this, that the Dr. is made to believe that all
three children—all his wife, Sylvia, and Jenny, are his, and is
forced to give Sylvia an additional dowry, and Jenny a sum of
money, to induce their respective lovers to marry them. The
old man is however too proud of his supposed triumph over
their virtue to complain. These dialogues are put together
without any art, and the volume is valueless from a literary
point of view.

Theatre Royal, Olmprick. New & Gorgeou Pantomime.
entitled: Harlequin Prince Cherrytop, and the Good
Fairy Fairlight; or, The Fair—and the
25¢.

Size of paper 8½ by 5½, of letter-press 6½ by 3½ inches;
no signatures; pp. 31; on the title-page, which is printed in
red and black, are two broken lines; tailed paper; blue,
printed outer wrapper; issue 150 copies; printed in London;

price £1 11s. 6d.; date of publication July, 1879; three
oblong, coloured lithographs, which appeared some time after
the volume, badly executed, but possessing originality.

Of this clever f. d’espri, said to emanate from the same pen
as the Index Extoligam of Martial,* I leave the analysis
to the bibliophile whose notes I have already employed on
more than one occasion:

The authors, amongst whom it is rumoured figure a master of the “faddy
school,” have also been guided by the celebrated and really rare work of the
Earl of Rochester: Sallot &c. In both cases we find:

“Clarke, a writing maid, or maid of honour.”

Harlequin Prince Cherrytop follows closely the line laid down by the
ingenious gentlemen who annually contrive the Christmas pantomime,
opening at our principal play-houses. The first idea, according to the
popular rule, dubbed the “dark scene,” shows us the Cavern of the Demon
Mammon, who has laid a spell upon the Prince Cherrytop, and made
him become a merry to Osmon. The remaining scenes show the
struggle between self-seeking and the counter influence of the good
Fairy Fairlight, who of course profits the Prince, trying to coax him over to
the joys of wedlock with his beloved, Princess Shooltop, whom he eventu-
ally marries. There is an undertone relating to the rivalry of Dido, King
of Argosia, whose attendants presently reveal disease in all shapes and
forms.

The devil’s idea is cleverly worked out, and the liberty is plentifully
lavished with puns, allusions to the topics of the day, and paraphrases of
popular melodies. We believe that a “Harlequinade,” or series of acros

* John Dryden’s Elogia, p. 104.
* Gesta Romanum Elogiabrum, p. 166.

25¢.

of “music business,” was also contemplated, but at present it has not seen
the light.

This lieutenant-decal will show a laugh from the most opposite, as there
are for a vessel, no abominations to the all powerful red, we are the passion
as currently appears to us, as usual in comic works. With playful nature,
the author gently take off some of the themes of the day, and point a moral
as they gaily laugh at the tips and points which we bring upon ourselves by
our own stabilities, showing then some happiness it is to be found in
honest healthy sensual indulgence, without having recourse to assorted
designs or peculiar modes of enjoyment.
Image 4.3: Entry for *Harlequin, Prince Cherrytop* in the Danson’s copy of Reade’s bibliography. Author’s own image.
Image 4.5: The Danson collection in Dry Close (date unknown). Image courtesy of Trinity College, Oxford
Image 4.6: The Danson collection in Dry Close (date unknown). Image courtesy of Trinity College, Oxford
Image 4.7: books in the Danson erotica collection, many of which have been custom-bound.
Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, it was my intent to make a case for why sex books produced in the Victorian period should matter to print culture and literature scholars. This project represents the better part of a decade’s research in archives and reading broadly over topics related to sex and literature. Setting up my dissertation in socio-historical, geographical, and genealogical terms was the natural result of the catholic assortment of materials that went into its creation. While other scholars in this field take a more theoretical approach, that turned out to not be the most important methodological aspect of my dissertation. My purpose was to create a bridge between Victorian book and print culture and its parallel textual history offered by the clandestine production and publishing of sex books. Every person in the history of Victorian sex books—from Jack Saul through to publishers like William Lazenby or Leonard Smithers and beyond—lived the experiences described in this dissertation and were just as important to their literary world as more well known figures in mainstream publishing circles.

By examining the players in the sex book trade and fitting their business models and concomitant legacies into the broader history of print culture, this dissertation provides new ways of thinking about Victorian book production, sales, readers, and the relationship between producers and customers through advertising materials. It has shown that economies and market niches for mainstream books changed drastically from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century with sex books subject to the same trends and market forces. Whether or not publishers like William Lazenby knew it, their efforts at the end of the nineteenth century signalled a significant shift in not only the business of sex books, but also the ways in which sex was represented and interpreted. Sex books were a key component in anticipating sexual identity politics. The prescience of the sex book trade was anchored, of course, in looking back to what had come before and evolving more complex representations of sex on the printed page.
The erotic memoir is the genre that most powerfully captures the diversity of sexuality. While pseudo- and quasi-medical texts were another popular form of presenting information on sex and sexuality to the Victorian reader, erotic memoirs also had didactic capabilities in addition to being forms of entertainment and fantasy. Erotic memoirs are contained pieces of writing that privilege and rely upon memory to relay the experiences of their subjects – whether real or imagined. Memoirs are not sustained narratives of a life but rather episodes from a life pieced together to present a particular image. The memoirs explored in this dissertation represent a growing differentiation among branches in the genealogy of memoir. In these sex books, sexual escapades are always recounted but, over the course of the period studied in this dissertation, erotic memoirs become introspective pieces of writing in which identity over sexual conquest is given larger consideration. These later memoirs tell stories that not only contain fantasies but also afforded certain readers the ability to identify with characters whose sexualities were increasingly linked with identities and less invested in purely physical forms of pleasure: sexual identity was also presented as a socially important aspect of the erotic memoir. The pleasure of some of the erotic memoirs in this dissertation was also closely allied with identity, which is an important distinction when considering these texts as important to the history and development of sexualities.

A thread that runs through this entire dissertation is looking backward and forward within the fields of pornography or sex studies. This dissertation argued that collectors like Henry Spencer Ashbee were looking forward with their collecting, anticipating a time when the knowledge their collections contained could be treated like the antiquarian books that were revered in his own time by gatekeepers of history and knowledge. Even the Danson collection was a forward-looking one, albeit a collection whose scope was somewhat narrower in terms of the audience it was perhaps projected to serve.
This dissertation is itself a collection of ideas about Victorian print culture, book history, and the ways the trade in sex books opened new avenues for scholarship. At its centre is the idea that erotic cultural memory—the preservation and presentation of sex and sexuality exploited by sex book producers—played a key role in the success of sex books in the later nineteenth century. The reliance on erotic cultural memory along with a number of technical advances in book production and distribution models helped bring about a culture in which sex books were a medium of didactic entertainment. By homing in on what a collective readership might relate to and then exploiting that, sex book producers were engaged with their readerships in a kind of dialogue. This dissertation has relied on a similar tactic: by treating Victorian sex books alongside mainstream print culture and book history, my study is part of a larger ongoing dialogue that is born of a common tradition in scholarship. This dissertation, in a way, mimics the exploitation of erotic cultural memory in the sex book trade; however, I have relied on exploitation of the collective and established history of Victorian book and print culture to present a new way of thinking about Victorians, their books, and sex.
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