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Bodies and Money: Mapping Homosexual Interactions in Late-Victorian London

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The Wild(e) Nineties

Introduction

As I reflect on my Skidmore career—particularly on my time within the English department, but additionally in disciplines beyond—I realize the human body constitutes a prominent through line in my work. Across two other departments—namely History and Philosophy—my interest in the human form and its meanings sustains, and I cannot recall a single semester during which questions of embodiment failed to make an appearance in my coursework. I have examined Caliban, Uriah Heep, and the famous Moor Othello; I consulted the anatomical illustrations of Andreas Vesalius in my *Science and Nature in the Renaissance* course; and, during my sophomore spring, I contemplated the body in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenal field. My desire to consider the human form thus remains; however, most recently, my curiosity extends to questions about bodily movement in and across contexts.

My interest in the traveling figure arose in the first half of 2016, during the months I spent at Goldsmiths, University of London. There, I passed most of my time outside class exploring the streets of East London. When I returned to the United States and found myself working on a farm, I consulted Google Maps heavily, "street view-ing" the little roads I walked on across Shoreditch and Whitechapel, and eyeing my friend's rooftop from above, recognizing the deck chairs where I sat on a few sunny afternoons. What I recollect and miss most about London are the points I can locate on a map; I dropped many a mental "pin" while I was there, and subsequently imbued certain sites with personal meaning. Many of these "pins" fall on interstitial places, between neighborhoods and final destinations. They include tube stops where I frequently switched lines, places where I made American friends, and a few corners I learned to walk by quickly. A few class readings in the *Wild(e) Nineties* present the metropolis as an influence all its own during the 1890s. With my fondness of London in mind, it seems only

natural to me that the connection between the body and movement, maps, and the spaces in the metropolis to which humans attach and derive meaning inform the substance of my culminating work in the English Department at Skidmore.

The development of metropolitan life during the nineteenth century gave rise to questions of personal visibility and individuality among city-dwellers. The presence of the flanêur and the dandy across London's streets brought meaning to the male body. In parallel to the growing visibility and meanings of different human forms, specific sites and neighborhoods across London received certain reputations and associations. The meanings of bodies and urban spaces mutually informed each other during the later decades of the 1800s. Areas like Leicester Square became known simultaneously for theatre and prostitution and the Haymarket was notorious for cruising.

In tandem with the increasing interpretability of male bodies on display, the male homosexual was becoming a more recognizable feature in English fabric. As far back as 1553, laws prohibiting sodomy produced a hush in matters pertaining to same-sex love; however, alongside London's rapid growth during the nineteenth century, more public interest—assessed by news coverage and such pornographic novels as *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*—pointed to the topic of homosexuality, though little of it was permissive. The reputations of certain locations across London and general appearance of men created opportunities for homosexual men to seek relationships and sexual encounters. As homosexual activities and partnerships became more visible, the 1885 Labouchere Amendment marked a shift in the tone of homosexuality's treatment—universal condemnation for homosexuals' apparent distastefulness marked news reports. Despite the new legislation, fears of misdemeanor incarceration did not seem to deter

homosexual men from being themselves in the city of London, as we see in the example of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the case study of Oscar Wilde.

The presence of homosexuality[1] during the Late Victorian period is undeniable. The question what social and cultural elements informed its appearance on the backdrop of London remains uncertain, and is my primary interest in this capstone. Much of my secondary information relies on the scholarly work of Matt Cook and Morris Kaplan. Their books, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality* and *Sodom on the Thames,* detail pertinent geographic and cultural associations, much of which I use to map homosexuality onto London's streets (I provide a graphic at the end). Most broadly, I seek to map and understand *how* exactly London—its culture of male embodiment and its geography—contributed to easier, albeit illegal, experiences of life for homosexual men. The male homosexual body—growing more visible in city life—and its performance were problematic in any space, even in literary discussion; however, it was less problematic when high social class informed its appearance. The specifically homosexual body was identifiable, was freer if wealthier, and became more meaningful than other male bodies, such as the flâneur and the dandy.

Section I: The Metropolis and the Body in Urban Spaces

During the Victorian period, the city of London emerged as an ever-present factor in discussions of English life. On the whole, urban development and the effects of city life were concerns of many in the nineteenth century, as several writers establish. Fin-de-siècle publications point to the city as problematic: some feared that metropolitan life asserted a dangerous power over individuals. Among those publishing at the time—though several years after the turn of the century—was Georg Simmel, who took on the city in his 1903 essay, *The*

Metropolis and Mental Life. Within its pages, he claims that the "deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life" (61). To Simmel, metropolitan life gives rise to a struggle: an individual wishes to retain the "independence and individuality of his existence," yet he must do so in direct confrontation with societal constraints and the "weight" of history. Broader aspects of city life, considerations of "culture," thus work against the expression of one's individual self: societal pressures and powers make the metropolis "sovereign" over the individual in urban life.

Simmel proffers a means by which individuals attempt to escape the self-squashing pressures that arise amidst life in the city. He states that

> one seizes on qualitative distinctions, so that, through taking advantage of the existing sensitivity to differences, the attention of the social world can, in some way, be won for oneself. This leads ultimately to the strangest eccentricities, to specifically metropolitan extravagances of self-distanciation, or caprice, of self-fastidiousness, the meaning of which is no longer to be found in the content of such activity itself but rather in its being a form of being different; of making oneself noticeable. (65)

As Simmel establishes, the city removes an individual's sense of having a unique self. While the city-dweller struggles against the fetters of metropolis-induced commonness, he tries to play on his fellow urbanites' prevailing "sensitivity" to human variation—informed by social and cultural awareness—and asserts minute personal differences to the extent of performing the

"strangest eccentricities." Simmel warns that attempts to self-distinguish have no meaning but to insist that the individual himself wishes to be conspicuous, and thereby easily visible.

Simmel's assertion that the individual's desire to be eye-catching has grounds. The self-differentiation he discusses was ever-present in metropolitan life, even before the start of the nineteenth century. The preoccupation with physical appearance (and thus "making oneself noticeable") was a recurring theme throughout the Victorian period, well into its final decades, and informed city life. The practice to stand out among fellow urbanites grew in popularity, and was highly present during the 1890s. The greatest evidence of British façade-revering culture arose in the popularity of a specific method of self-styling among wealthy men: dandyism. In an essay on the subject, Chevalier D'Hamilton constructs an analogy between the dandy and the artist: he writes, "as the painter's spirit is reflected in his canvas, so the dandy['s] is also reflected—in his own mirror" (D'Hamilton). If the artist's "spirit" is his unique, creative force, and is observable in all work he produces, so was this force apparent in the dandy's "canvas" of his own physical appearance. The dandy did not create a new work outside himself to display his "spirit" as the artist did; rather, his own male form was simultaneously a working canvas—as he adorned himself in his clothing each day, and his own final work, when he regarded himself in the mirror. The practice of dandyism, therefore, allowed the dandy to embrace the "self-fastidiousness" and "caprice" that Simmel discusses. The concern over of his appearance constituted his "spirit," and alongside the outfit changes of each day, the dandy's strict attention to his outer configuration allowed him to embrace whatever mood changes he experienced. As he walked about in urban settings, the dandy was a conspicuous figure, drawing the eyes of his fellow city-dwellers. His soul's energy attended to the "form of being different" and making himself "noticeable." The dandy fit into a category of male body: he was the one putting himself

on display after hours of preening, and his put-together-ness was identifiable immediately. The dandy was susceptible to identification, and ever visible.

The dandy was not the sole configuration of male body apparent in British metropolitan life during the nineteenth century. The dandy had another sharer in city streets; however, he remained unnoticeable. This fellow was, like the dandy, also of the leisure classes: the flâneur. The flâneur, always a male, as Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst explain in their anthology, *The Fin De Siècle*, "was characterized by his freedom to roam through the streets of the nineteenth-century metropolis, observing without being observed, strolling and watchful, without ever interacting with the other social actors in the city" (Ledger and Luckhurst 54-55). The flâneur initiated the gaze in urban spaces; his game was observation, and thus he occupied a space opposite to that of the dandy. While the dandy received eyes upon his body in the metropolis, the flâneur cast his eyes upon the bodies around him. As they both were products of the leisure classes, which offered them particular advantage in the city, the dandy and the flâneur took advantage of the permeable boundaries of London streets; they both roamed about its neighborhoods.

The desire to assert individuality, in spite of the anonymity-inducing streets of the metropolis, informed the way Late-Victorian men moved around in London. As the examples of the dandy and the flâneur establish, the act of emphasizing one's uniqueness frequently arose in the form of bodily presentation and movement. Bodies as they appeared and as they moved around London came to hold different meanings in different spaces (and these different spaces carried certain associations independent of those inhabiting them). One's style of dress, thereby, was not the sole informer of one's individuality. Understandings of the male form in the city leads naturally to considerations of understandings of the male homosexual body.

Section II: Representations, Perceptions, and Practices of Homosexuality Pre-1885[2]

Sins of the Cities of the Plain (or its alternative title *The Recollections of a Mary-Ann, with Short Essays on Sodomy and Tribadism*) placed an erotic filter over the streets of London upon its publication in 1881. The pornographic novel centers on a variety of homosexual encounters that transcend demographic groupings, primarily in terms of class and geography. Its title is a reference to the biblical cities of the plain, of which Sodom and Gomorrah are most resonant; in the Book of Genesis, God destroys those two cities on the understanding that their inhabitants were sinners. The 1881 title thus implies an account of those offenses belonging to the biblical cities. However, because the novel takes place in England in the nineteenth century, the projections of sin are transpositional: London is consequently a city full of sinners, and one deserving God's destruction.

The alternative title references "a Mary-Ann," who goes by Jack Saul, and narrates later portions of the novel. *The Oxford English Dictionary* offers that a "Mary-Ann," commonly used in a derogatory sense, is "an effeminate man, or one who takes a female role; a male homosexual" (OED). The name "Mary-Ann" appears in several moments throughout the novel; its primary usage in the alternative title implicates the contemporary and societal position of homosexuality. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the earliest appearance of the term "Mary-Ann" in an 1868 German text discussing London. The prevalence of the term "Mary-Ann," as it existed a decade prior to *Sins'* publication, indicates a sociological awareness of homosexuality. Simultaneously, as the term is disparaging to male homosexuals, "Mary-Ann" hints at a broader cultural perception: while parts of society were conscious of homosexuality, their stances condemned it. While it is not likely that non-heterosexual individuals were recognizable on a

broad, populace-wide scale between 1868 and 1881 in London, the terminology indicates that their presences were at least somewhat visible in society.

By its two titles, therefore, *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* or *The Recollections of a Mary-Ann* proposes a narrative in which the performance (homosexuality) and performers (namely "a Mary-Ann") of sin influence the character of the city itself—and deserve God's destruction. The work acknowledges the cultural disapproval of same-sex activity in its title; however, by its tone and content, it flouts that disapproval. The narrative asserts a thriving world of homosexuality through its dexterous handling of the urban backdrop. The names of London's streets and squares freckle each page and resonate with any reader, past or present, who possesses even a minimal command of the city's geography. These were the streets along which flâneurs and dandies of the leisure classes walked; sweeping from points about the West End to the greenery of certain Royal Parks, and the then-novel presence of tube stations in between, *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* depicts same-sex encounters and asserts a homosexual class existing alongside and within metropolitan life.

The narrative opens with emphasis on a specific, historically significant London square in its very first sentence: "the writer of these notes was walking through Leicester Square one sunny afternoon last November" (Saul Loc. 65). Clearly not of the working classes, the "writer" pursues leisure time on a stroll in London. From its first mention, Leicester Square becomes a reference point to the novel; it drops a "pin," if you will, and the story continues. Observing, and making no note that others observe him, our narrator inhabits the metropolitan space in the manner of the flâneur. He wastes no time in delving into a description of the "Adonis-like figure" belonging to a young fellow, which proceeds immediately into the subtleties of an erotically charged, same-sex pursuit. The narrator's sunny-day stroll is far more than that—his

eyeing of the young fellow indicates his flâneur role, and he is simultaneously 'cruising' to pick up a partner. The account seems like a realistic beginning to a homosexual encounter: the narrator seeks the "Adonis" as he walks down side streets, and the two make conversation before a store window. Their chat arouses no suspicions of homosexuality; they are simply two men, looking into a storefront. Their speaking tone shifts, however, as the pair exchange sexual remarks about a woman in a photo in the store's display. During this tête-à-tête, the narrator (whose name we learn later is Mr. Cambon) informs the man (later, we learn he is Jack Saul) that the two share "much in common" and suggests the continuation of their dialogue in "some other, more appropriate locale" (Loc. 109). The two male forms inhabit a public sphere as they stand in a London street, and the "more appropriate locale" Mr. Cambon intimates a private setting; considering their commonality, it is only right and "appropriate" that they proceed to behind closed doors. Mr. Cambon interprets Saul's body, and draws conclusions as to what it means when they go into private quarters. The assumption underlying all aspects of their exchange is that Saul's sexual inclinations are like those of Mr. Cambon.

Mr. Cambon's interpretation of Saul's body is correct: their day takes them away from the area of Leicester Square and into Mr. Cambon's home near Baker Street Station—a two-mile distance across London's streets. Thus they transition from spheres of public to private, and also across neighborhoods. Once inside Mr. Cambon's residence, his housekeeper serves the two a heavy meal and a lengthy, social evening follows. It is finally here, in private chambers, that the men mutually introduce themselves. Cambon's guest presents himself as "Jack Saul…of Lisle Street, Leicester Square, and ready for a lark with a free gentleman at any time" (Loc. 128). Saul notes that he hails from Leicester Square—where the two men first meet.

At the time of the novel's publication, Leicester Square was a center of theatre, and the historic Alhambra Theatre was on the Square's eastern end. Additionally, it was the epicenter of the break of a cross-dressing scandal, the narrative with which *Sins* later engages. There existed also a historic underbelly to the square: a Mrs. Ormiston Chant addresses a seedier side of the neighborhood. She writes about what lurked behind the Empire Theatre, particularly, which remains to this day at the northern section of the Square. There waited certain "evils": "highways to ruin the young," and thus "opportunities for the vicious, stimulants to traffic in human lives" (Chant 69). Though expressed in somewhat unclear language, the note of human trafficking establishes the presence of prostitution, particularly of younger individuals, at the rear of the Theatre, perhaps waiting for a member of the wealthier classes to stroll by, somewhat like the meeting of Mr. Cambon and Jack Saul. Chant hints at the dangerous potential of the Square; "opportunity" to follow a "vicious" path prevails, alongside incentivizing "stimulants" to engage with human trafficking. Following this "vicious" path are Jack Saul and Mr. Cambon.

As it first manifests in early passages and weaves consistently throughout, the novel utilizes geographic precision to assert the enabling and somewhat "vicious" power of the city. They both meet while walking across London, and the streets allow them the very possibility to explore. Mutual interpretations of their bodies bring them together, as Mr. Cambon speaks to Saul once he believes Saul to be homosexual. The text's narrative relies on a journalistic relationship with the map of London: naming locations, identifying bodies, and noting what happens in various spots. Readers familiar with the British capital would know exactly where these two figures are when they arrive at Mr. Cambon's home near the Regent's Park. As literary critic Matthew Cook notes in his authoritative text *London and the Culture of Homosexuality,* novels such as *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* "deliberately placed sexual fantasies as

documentary and consequently appeared to elaborate the dynamics of an actual urban subculture" (Cook 19). That is, these dynamic elements: constant shifts in locale, space, time, and involved individuals (and thus bodies) indicate a spread of homosexual activity across London.

The novel holds a mirror to Late Victorian realities in forms beyond sexual mapping, which becomes evident as the narrative continues. The question of male appearances and visual perceptions of male homosexuality are additionally prominent. As Mr. Cambon initially makes note of Jack Saul's dazzling appearance that first pretty day in Leicester Square, while himself being the flâneur, he observes that the young man "wore auburn hair, and sparkling blue eyes, which spoke as plainly as possible to [his] senses, and told [him] that this handsome youth must indeed be one of the 'Mary-Ann's' of London, who [he] had heard were often to be seen sauntering in the neighborhood of Regent Street, or the Haymarket, on fine afternoons or evenings" (Saul Loc. 73). The bright-eyed "Adonis" is likely thus feminine in his appearance, and Mr. Cambon is able to identify Saul's non-heterosexuality immediately. Thus, Mr. Cambon attributes meaning to the body of Jack Saul; perhaps their less-than-savory meeting place weighs in on Mr. Cambon's assessment.

Mr. Cambon's assessment of Saul as a "Mary-Ann" has contextual implications beyond homosexuality and asserts the significance of and sensitivity to class. In this primary context, it is unclear if the usage of "Mary-Ann" is intentionally disparaging to the young man—the *OED* notes the word's usage in the year before *Sins of the Cities*' publication in an erotic magazine called *Pearl*, where its intention is also unclear. The two men discuss an informal book deal: Mr. Cambon requests a narrative form of Jack Saul's sexual escapades in London, for which Saul requests payment of twenty pounds. He suggests the title of "The Recollections of A Mary-

Ann,"—the alternative title to the full text—though Saul "seem[s] not at all to like the name as applied to himself. He says that 'Mary-Ann' was what the low girls of his neighbourhood called him if they wished to insult him; however, he says at last, 'the four fivers will make up for that' (Loc. 183). The identities of the "low girls" are unclear; they are likely female prostitutes, as Saul's "neighbourhood" is Leicester Square. In Saul's mind, nonetheless, his future receipt of twenty pounds will "make up" for the slurs that these "low girls" cast on him, and thus repair his hurt at the statements of his neighbors.

Money and its ability to heal insult are at the fore of Saul's perspective. The text's stance on social status—and thus financial preoccupations—is fully evident. Mr. Cambon and Jack Saul are of different classes of society. Financial gain is an appropriate concern for Saul to have, and he takes care of his priorities in his choice of being with a specific class of men: he seeks "free gentlem[e]n." Implicitly, Mr. Cambon is a suitable representative of Saul's desired sexual demographic. Requisite to Mr. Cambon's social status is personal wealth—the enjoyments of which he shares with Saul. Mr. Cambon is "free," and therefore unoccupied, passing his time walking through London as men of his leisure class did. With such time on his hands, the hours the two spend together transcend a simple, mutual desire for sex. They dine on oysters and rump steak, finish off two bottles champagne, and enjoy brandy and cigars beside a fire, which Mr. Cambon's hired domestic help serves to them. Besides treating Saul to a lavish evening, Mr. Cambon agrees to grant him additional payment for the writing project they discuss. The interests of the two men are distinct and evident: Mr. Cambon desires sex, company, and nonfictional sexual chronicles; Jack Saul desires twenty pounds to put his experiences to paper and the fine treatment that a wealthy male partner can provide. Whether or not Saul is deeply fond of Mr. Cambon is not entirely relevant: brought together by the meaning of city streets

while they were cruising and the interpretability of the male form, the two come together and operate on the level of financial transaction.

Perhaps to be expected, the two men of different social classes approach their encounter from distinct perspectives. Mr. Cambon, when he first observes Saul, makes assumptions around which areas the young man might "saunter": Regent Street and the Haymarket. The history of these locations corroborates the novel's depictions. *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* has an undeniably "documentary" element once we learn from Cook that

> Regent Street and the Haymarket were also notorious for prostitution and these streets came to represent both sexual and consumerist excess: places of frivolous purchase by day and unsanctioned sexual transaction by night. Men seeking sex and relationships with other men appear to have taken advantage of these developments and the West End became a popular cruising ground, apparently confirming the association of homosexual behavior with fashion, effeminacy, and monetary transaction. (14)

Mr. Cambon seeks sex from Jack Saul; their encounters become weekly events and are chronologically similar to their first meeting. The initial evening they have together—libation-heavy and feast-like—certainly fits the bill for Cook's classification of "consumerist excess." The transactional element of the relationship between Mr. Cambon and Saul, as previously outlined, places the young man into the order of male prostitute; additionally, his more feminine appearance (to honor the "Mary-Ann" label) affirms the London culture that Cook describes. Elements of the homosexual encounter between Mr. Cambon and Jack Saul are correlative historically and literarily. As the two men interact within London, and as Jack Saul's account

unfolds, it is increasingly clear that the factor of social class informs the city's role in homosexuality during the Late Victorian era.

Additional elements of *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* further bolster the significance of the city's geography, particularly in terms of Saul's ability to make money as a male prostitute. At the beginning of the sixth chapter Saul notes an establishment off Portland Place—a club owned by a Mr. Inslip according to the London Directory. He remarks that it was at this particular establishment where his "fortune would be at once assured" (Loc. 776). He spends several evenings a week hired by men to pose as a female date at various formal events, and thus utilizes the club's patrons as a springboard to enter the social sphere of London. Saul's confidence in his ability to profit from his work at the Portland Place "Molly Club"—establishments for aristocratic men seeking sex with other men—is attributable to its hefty membership fees: "no gentleman was admitted to the freedom of this establishment unless he first paid an admission fee of one hundred guineas, besides a handsome annual subscription and liberal payments for refreshments and the procuration of street "Mary-Ann"s, soldiers, or youths like myself" (Loc. 782).

Moments alluding to financial compensation for homosexual acts permeate *Sins of the Cities of the Plain.* In particular consideration of the "handsome" fee of a yearly subscription to the club of Portland Place and the formal events that Saul attends as a hired date, it is clear that in the novel, the practice of homosexuality requires financial freedom in one or both parties.[3] Saul seems to take pride in his wealthy clientele in Portland Place; what draws most of his attention is the promise of payment and the thought that men will gladly pay great sums for his company. The ability to initiate and enjoy homosexual experiences, therefore, requires one to be of the upper classes.[4] As Saul's experience establishes, the practice of homosexuality in the

novel cannot be—and is not—without money changing hands; nor is it possible without the backdrop of London. While homosexuality is the factor that unites these men, their ability to commune with each other requires wealth and access. These moments present the influence of London's streets: the city itself fosters complex relationships between members of different classes.[5]

Saul notes that the "extent to which sodomy is carried on in London between gentlemen and young fellows is little dreamed of by the outside public" (Saul Loc. 885). Casting the general "public" as those "outside," Saul posits the practice of homosexual behavior—across age groups and social classes—as exclusive. His critical assertion that Londoners are generally unaware of the city's homosexual aspect has grounds considering the narrative he presents. Saul's clients draw him across the city: he calls on men near Temple, Cornhill, and Grosvenor Square. For him, sodomy is all over London: its spread is vast across the city, but it remains invisible to many, and thus enables its practice. His textual reference to sodomy comes just before a provocative allusion to the Boulton and Park case; he enters the discussion of it by addressing the reader directly with a casual question: "You remember the Boulton and Park scandal and court case?" The formulation is familiar, as if asking a friend if he or she remembers a common acquaintance. The question, in fact, provocative: he highlights the exclusivity of knowledge while acknowledging that it, in certain instances, has had great publicity.

Saul's expectation of readers to be familiar with the case is reasonable: in the contemporary moment, many were familiar with the scandal, owing to the amount of publicity it received. The surnames he mentions refer to Ernest 'Stella' Boulton and Frederick 'Fanny' Park, who cross-dressed while attending theatrical performances as audience members around London's West End, generally. When in women's garb, it was not entirely evident that they

were, in fact, male; in male costume, they looked highly effeminate. Their appearances for those who regarded them were a source of confusion, as they did not appear quite male or female. In alternating male and female costume, the two caused a stir by their unconventional appearances and attention-getting manners. These entrances went on over the course of months; while some might have found their appearances disagreeable, they did not face arrest until they were spectators at the Strand Theatre. They were self-made spectacles: Boulton and Park's loud self-presentation in London extended to the "strangest eccentricities" that Simmel notes. Just as the dandy, in his sleek self-fashioning desires eyes on his body, so desired Boulton and Park. The pair differed little in mindset from the dandy: they simply costumed themselves unconventionally, and performed additionally to receive the gaze of other theatregoers. Before police arrested Boulton and Park in April of 1870, a superintendent witnessed one of them "repeatedly smile and nod at gentlemen in the stalls" in a provocative fashion (Police). While their conduct was not, in fact, criminal, their appearances and manners said something dangerous about the meaning of the male body and sexuality. Boulton and Park were not the recognizable dandies that simply wanted attention; rather, each of their bodies fit the bill for an interpretation of a "Mary-Ann," and thus together made a show of homosexual bodies. Their physical appearances forced the public to engage with what they had "little dreamed of" as happening in London. Boulton and Park's cross-dressed presences were physical assertions of a homosexual subculture. Their bodily performances took the previously invisible homosexual form into broader light. Their choice to attire themselves in traditionally female was an assertion of the freedom of the body in city spaces, and pointed to a type that people did not yet recognize.

The Times rotated the headline "The Young Men in Women's Clothes" for several days in May of 1870, following Boulton and Park's arrests on the grounds of conspiracy to commit

the felony of sodomy. The headline forges a connection between cross-dressing males (which in public spaces created spectacle) and homosexuality. A significant point of contention during the trials concerned the extent to which newspapers covered the matter. *The Times* of London made its position on the matter clear, and an article expressed a justification of its coverage. Some newspapers wanted to cast their journalistic eyes, out of curiosity, on the pair. Other news editors felt the matter too horrid to cover. To discuss Boulton and Park would be to affirm the existence of homosexuality in the capital.

In his book *Sex Scandal*, William Cohen writes that the case of Boulton and Park "occurred at the point when the homosexual was first becoming identifiable within a sociomedical taxonomy, but was not yet recognized as a juridical subject" (75). That is, while limited consciousness of homosexuality existed within spheres of medicine and society in general, laws lagged behind (the Labouchere Amendment was to come fifteen years later). There was no law to deter the appearance of homosexual men across London's streets and in its theatres. Anti-sodomy laws required extensive proof of recent activity (and thereafter the involvement of doctors' examination and testimony at trial), which was an extensive judicial undertaking. In the case of Boulton and Park, the medical examination proved inconclusive, and the Crown had no choice but to acquit the men. They caused such public outcry, and such a stir by their bodily presences. Their case highlighted societal desire to condemn the eye-catching male body, yet there was no definitive law that could decrease their visibility. The 1870 Boulton and Park case formulated ties among the geography of London's West End, theatre, and the homosexual body, which *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* reasserted a decade later.

Section III: Perceptions and Legislation

In 1533, during the reign of Henry VIII, an "Act for the Punishment of the Vice of Buggery" deemed the "detestable and abominable vice of buggery committed with mankind or beast" a felony offense (Raithby). No specific aspect of the law addressed same-sex activity, and any act of sodomy received the same societal disdain and punishment. English legislation remained the same until 1885, when the male homosexual came under new juridical treatment. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, as a whole, re-legislated the vice-filled streets of London. In addition to the corruptions of heterosexuality, the rise in the visibility of homosexuality made London a Victorian Sodom and Gomorrah, as Saul had asserted four years earlier.

It was due time, in the eyes of many, that London undergo a legally fueled moral cleanup. In *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,* W. T. Stead likens the city of London to a labyrinth. He writes, the "maw of the London Minotaur is insatiable, and none that go into the secret recesses of his lair returns again" (34). Stead thrusts London into metaphor, and it becomes a space inhabited by a hungry beast. A predator lurks in Stead's conception of the city, and that creature is partly recognizable—the minotaur is half man, half bull. Stead constructs London as a negatively charged realm, eager to consume those who enter its dark spaces. London is uncertain in its twists and turns, and a vaguely familiar, eternally malicious creature that seeks to draw individuals into its "secret recesses" inhabits it.

By Stead's classification, as well as Labouchere's, homosexuality could thrive in these shadowy conditions. Immorality marked London, and it thus was an enabling and permissive force in regards to homosexuality and its practice. Havelock Ellis writes that "the development of urban life renders easier the exhibition and satisfaction of [homosexuality] as of all other forms of perversion" (63). The "exhibition and satisfaction" of male same-sex desire was what

Labouchere sought so violently to repress, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act contained a portion called the Labouchere Amendment, which made any sort of homosexual activity a misdemeanor offense.

Henry Labouchere slipped in a small clause called 'outrages on the public decency' into the Bill, while the House of Lords met to address the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in the summer of 1885. Labouchere sought to dissolve the role he felt the city was playing in enabling homosexuality. He saw it as a moral outrage, comparable to the outrages of child prostitution and human trafficking. With very little discussion, Sir Henry James, the Attorney-General, passed into law the following:

> 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, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be liable at the discretion of the court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour. (Mead and Bodkin 81)

The Amendment is a combination of vague—what does "gross indecency" mean?—and precise language. The wording sets its target on the spaces and conditions wherein men might attempt to, or actually have sexual relations with each other. Cook notes that Labouchere sought to "reclaim the private as a province for the law in respect of homosexual activity" (43). The broadness of the term "gross indecency" "acknowledged a diversity in the possible expressions of homosexual desire" (43). Even consensual acts in private quarters made men susceptible to criminal charges. The male homosexual body and its performance, therefore, was not simply a moral offense in no matter what space it appeared, but also illegal, and thus more meaningful

than two other, recognizable male forms (the flâneur and dandy) which strolled freely and constantly in London's streets. The law, therefore, in its wording, metaphorically imprisoned the gay male body and warned against its expression; a word uttered to the wrong person could take that body out of metaphor and place it into an actual prison cell. H. Montgomery Hyde, in his book on the history of homosexuality in Britain, writes that the phrase "in private" "open[ed] the door to the practice of blackmail," the problem of which surfaced in both 1889, at the break of the Cleveland Street scandal, and also in the case of Oscar Wilde (136). Thus the arms of the law came to ensnare the private circumstances of certain homosexual encounters.

Section IV: The Cleveland Street Scandal

The economy of homosexuality that *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* sets forth appears fully in the realities of Late Victorian London during the summer of 1889, nearly a decade after the novel's anonymous publication. Metropolitan Police discovered the operation of a male brothel in 19 Cleveland Street, near Tottenham Court Road. Apart from its location in central London, raising concerns about the spread of homosexuality, what became the Cleveland Street scandal incited alarm in terms of public morality. The scandal asserted the role of London's permeable boundaries, between neighborhoods and among different social classes, as mechanisms that enabled homosexuality to remain, despite legal constraints. Just as the affair between Jack Saul and Mr. Cambon flourished by grace of their mutual knowledge of Leicester Square as a cruising ground and ability to move around London, so did the Cleveland Street brothel.

Upon the investigation of small thefts in London's General Post Office, located slightly south and to the east of Cleveland Street, police conversed with young men who worked as telegraph delivery boys. After finding more than appropriate sums of cash in one young man's

pocket (Charles Swinscow), police learned that he was working as a male prostitute in Cleveland Street. The distance between his two workplaces was significant at the time, at a little more than two miles. Police questioning led to a man named Harry Newlove, who recruited young boys to work at the brothel—after first engaging in sexual acts with them in the post office's toilets. The boys offered unabashed testimony, which was rare and dangerous, considering the legal climate of 1889. The uncovering of the brothel brought about extensive news coverage; unlike the Boulton and Park case of nineteen years prior, the question on many reporters' minds was the role of social class and its influence in courtroom proceedings.

At the break of the Cleveland Street scandal in 1889, a weekly London newspaper called the *North London Press* implicated several high-society men as patrons of the Molly House, including the Earl of Euston. In his article, the editor and owner of the *North London Press,* Ernest Parke, asserted that these gentlemen "were mixed up in an indescribably loathsome scandal" and suggested that authorities "allowed them to leave the country, and thus defeat the ends of justice, because [the men's] prosecution would disclose the fact that a few more distinguished and more highly-placed personages than themselves were inculpated in this disgusting crime" (Police, Nov. 25). Whether the high-society men visited the brothel is not as important as Parke's fixation on homosexuality as it pertains to class. He posits homosexual acts as adequately "loathsome," but compounds the case's horridness by suggesting the involvement of members of higher classes. Most offensive to Parke is the thought that lawyers attempted to protect bigger names from prosecution, while allowing those of lower classes to face the consequences of their crimes. Parke's outrage problematizes the role of social class in homosexual relations among the Late Victorians; certainly, if the Cleveland Street brothel was

anything like that which Saul describes off Portland Place, its clientele featured a number of wealthy individuals, whose names escaped attachment to the affair.

As it occurred four years after the passage of the Labouchere Amendment, the Cleveland Street scandal presented the potential damage of the "gross indecency" law, even without proof. For an individual in a position of social prominence, like the Earl of Euston, rumors of homosexual relations were potentially ruinous during the nineteenth century. Numerous *Times* articles name the Earl of Euston as highly active among the Freemasons in London. His social status was likely similar to another Freemason of earlier in the century named Henry Grey, who passed away "under a cloud of a possible homosexual incident, which ruined his reputation" (Hogg). As the libel case unfolded, it was Ernest Parke who went to prison for libeling the Earl of Euston. Nonetheless, as *Times* archives indicate, the Cleveland Street scandal did follow the Earl of Euston extensively (his name frequently appeared in articles regarding the case) despite his apparent lack of involvement besides entering the brothel once, thinking it was a different sort of establishment. In the nineteenth century, therefore, mere rumors of homosexuality were enough to condemn a man in high society, and the language of the law made it easy to blackmail men.

Section V: The Late Victorian Case Study of Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde found a note addressed to him one day at the Albemarle Club that publically named him a somdomite [*sic*]. Instead of doing nothing, Wilde initiated a libel case against the author of the note, the Marquess of Queensberry—the father of Wilde's lover, Bosie Douglas. The Marquess of Queensberry needed to justify the libel to prove himself not guilty, which necessitated proof that Wilde was indeed a sodomite. The case unfolded ironically: rather than

than the Marquess going to jail for libeling the writer, Wilde did, for acts of "gross indecency." The proceedings commenced officially in March of 1895, and during Wilde's questioning, he was not only defending himself and his reputation against allegations of improper same-sex desire, but also his "sodomitical" novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

A decade after the passage of the Labouchere Amendment, the trial of Oscar Wilde is indicative of the way in which homosexuality fell under juridical consideration and the question of morality or immorality fell to the wayside. Upon Wilde's accusation of the Marquess of Queensbury for libel, the defense rose to scramble for proof of Wilde's homosexuality. Considering the precedent of *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, the use of literature as evidence seems appropriate. While *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is non-pornographic, one can nonetheless see it as to some extent documentary, especially considering Wilde's assertion of the relationship between art and life.

The Picture of Dorian Gray reveals the significance of the homosocial bond—and so utterly to be construable as discussing homosexual love. For instance, a key scene in which Basil Hallward, the artist who paints the portrait of Dorian, confesses to him:

> Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you. I grew jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. (Wilde 132-33)

From a primary gloss, Basil Hallward's utterance to Dorian is emotionally vivid in its phrasing, and its candor characteristic of a deeply romantic bond. Dorian's "personality" "dominate[s]"

Basil, and he is thus overcome by feelings of admiration, as Dorian physically embodies the "ideal" which Basil quests for as an artist. Dorian as an "incarnation"—while textually that of the artist's "unseen ideal"—attaches a sense of otherworldliness, perhaps even a holy quality to his impact on Basil, which gains traction in light of Basil's subsequent "worship" of the young man. Basil's confession of jealousy and possessive inclinations complicates the worshipper-worshipped relationship that earlier lines establish. The tone of Wilde's writing is vastly different from the narration of Mr. Cambon in *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*; however, they share commonality in terms of physical appreciation. Basil's jealousy places Dorian in the realm of human interactions, and thus challenges the notion that Basil has a purely spiritual/artistic vision of him. The artist's feeling for Dorian thus transcends homosocial readings; a bond so deep as to be the sole constituent of Basil's happiness is not merely a deep friendship wherein Dorian is idealized. While Basil does not quite profess romantic love for the young man in this passage, his later statement that Dorian is "the one person in [his] life who has really influenced his art" and that Dorian does not understand "what it cost [Basil] to tell [Dorian] all" that he does raises further interpretive suspicions (134). Basil's emotional expense—as it "cost[s]" him to share what he does—does not resonate within the bounds of a friendship; the bond Basil feels towards Dorian is undeniably romantic, and the concealment which necessarily precedes confession is indicative of Basil's love for him.

The role of Dorian in Basil's art fulfills that of the muse, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, the muse is "a person (often a female lover) or thing regarded as the source of an artist's inspiration; the presiding spirit or force behind and person or creative act" (OED). While Dorian is not Basil's "female lover," he is nonetheless the key figure in Basil's life that informs his art, and the closeness of their relationship has romantic undertones that are in

keeping with understandings of the muse. As Wilde asserts in *The Decay of Lying* through the voice of Vivian, "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (Wilde 232). By Wildean standards, Art informs life, and the reality which life entails. Following this formulation, the homosocial and homosexual undertones present in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are not simply Art, as Wilde decided to craft his novel, but are thus inevitably that which Life "imitates."

Apart from significant moments of outburst in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a few instances pertain to the moral and geographic qualities of London. Early in the novel, when he initially reflects positively on the role of Sibyl Vane in his life, Dorian notes the motivation that takes him out into the streets on the day he sees her on stage. He says, "I felt that this grey, monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins…must have something in store for me" (84). Interestingly, Dorian posits London as something "monstrous"; he does this in a fashion similar to W. T. Stead in *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon.* While Dorian believes that he finds love in a shabby East End theatre, suspicious motivations underlie his desire to explore the city. He mentions the gray of London, but his primary focus rests in the number of people and opportunities for "splendid sins." Dorian does develop a fondness for opium later in the novel, but his desire to find vice and his enjoyment of it alludes to possibly homosexual encounters. His association with Sibyl Vane when he sees her play as Rosalind is curious in terms of performance and gender roles. Traditionally, young men played the female roles in Shakespeare, and thus a male would have performed Sibyl's role. It makes sense, then, that Dorian meets Sibyl when pursuing same-sex encounters.

Neil McKenna argues in his biography of Oscar Wilde that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is Wilde's "attempt to explore and legitimize the powerful dynamics of sex and lust between men"

(McKenna 127). A scene between Alan Campbell and Dorian after he kills Basil Hallward complicates, but does not discredit this assertion. After Campbell refuses to burn the corpse for him, Dorian "took a piece of paper, and wrote something on it. He read it over twice, folded it carefully, and pushed it across the table" (Wilde 174). When he reads it, Campbell's "face became ghastly pale, and he fell back in his chair. A horrible sense of sickness came over him. He felt as if his heart was beating itself to death in some empty hollow." Dorian thus voices his regret that it had to come to the point of blackmailing his friend. It is unclear what Dorian writes on the paper; however, one might recall the reputation of the Labouchere Amendment: it made men susceptible to blackmail. As *The Picture of Dorian Gray* features countless allusions to homosexuality, it remains a possibility that Dorian threatens to incriminate Campbell, by note and consideration of Campbell's visceral response to the note. Wilde's awareness of the interpretability of his language gives credit to the possibility that he alludes to the Labouchere Amendment. With the statement of Dorian's regret that he has to use something so horrid against his friend, it is perhaps readable as Wilde's own criticism of the legal circumstances under which he wrote.

McKenna's assertion that Wilde seeks to legitimize homosexuality makes sense, especially in regards to the reception of the novel. General alarm at the palpable undertones of homosexuality aroused fear and anger in individuals when they read *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. After the first version's publication in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, Wilde chose to remove certain passages laden with homosexual allusions for the book version. Unfortunately, during his cross-examination, led by Edward Carson—someone with whom Wilde was on less-than-amicable terms in their post-Oxford years—Wilde had to answer questions based on the

Lippincott's version of *Dorian Gray*, which he yielded depicts "improper feeling" for a man to feel for another man.

Notably distinct from earlier descriptions of homosexuality, Carson's question regarding feelings as potentially "improper" speaks to the shift in general moral understandings of homosexuality. After 1885, any activity that was remotely sexual between men received the term "gross indecency"; here, we see the question of "indecency" and "improper[ness]" coming to inform the ways in which people discussed homosexuality. Additionally, Carson's phrasing complicates the discussion of homosexuality: by referring to the potential attraction between two men as "feeling," the emotional relationship undergoes legitimization. That is, while Carson's question projects the disapproving perception of homosexuality, it also affirms the potential for a bond in not presenting it as a perversion of sorts, which is visible, in particular, in news articles surrounding the Cleveland Street affair.

When posed with such an inquiry, prior to which Carson read a passage aloud (similar to the one analyzed above), Wilde spoke about Basil's described feeling for Dorian as "the most perfect description possible of what an artist would feel on meeting a beautiful personality that he felt some way was necessary to his art and life" (Holland 85). Wilde's remarks, while contextually in defense of his own work, simultaneously demonstrate the closeness between the author's own life as an artist and his art. In his courtroom justification, Wilde spoke from Basil's perspective—in keeping with the anti-mimetic construction of Life imitating Art. Wilde himself acknowledges that he identifies strongly with Basil Hallward's character; in a letter, he writes, "Basil Hallward is what I think I am" (*Letters* 362). Wilde's view on his character—as he expresses in his cross-examination—leads to questions of Basil's "idolatry" of Dorian. Seeming

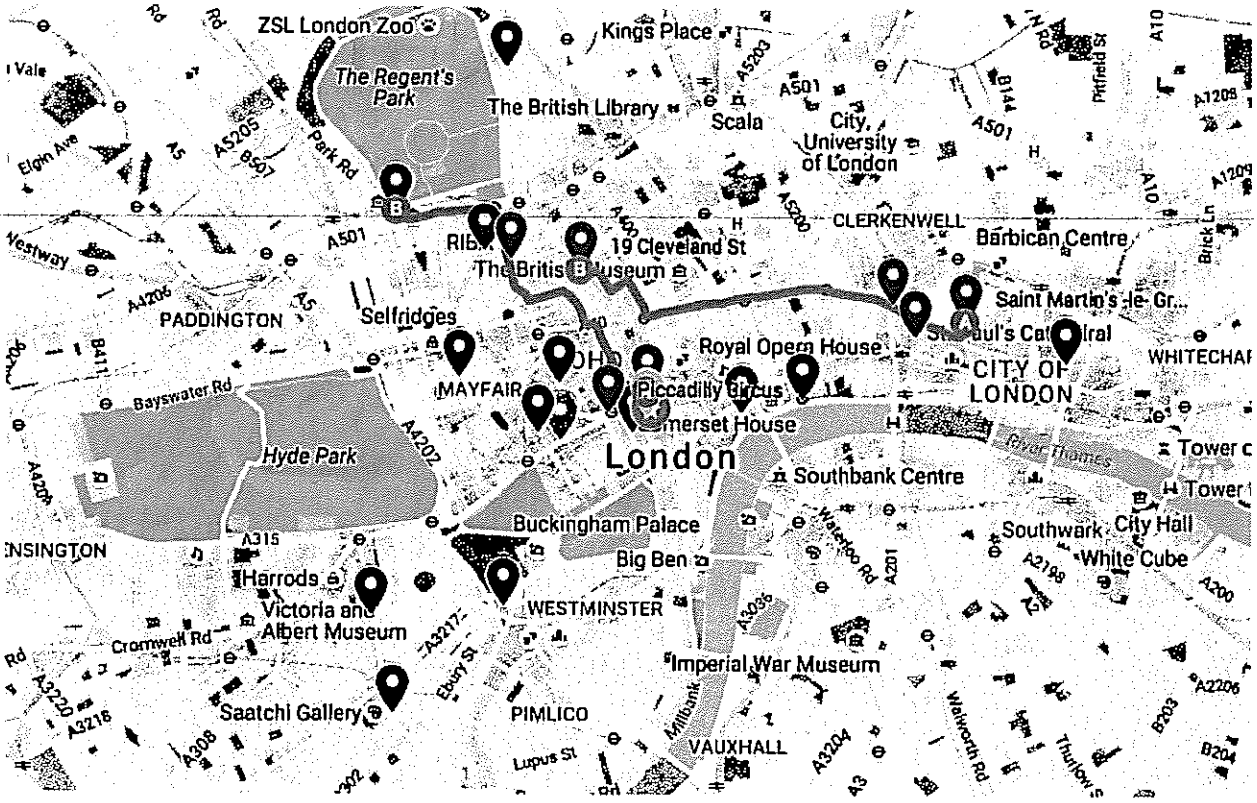
to be probing for a confession of allusions to homosexuality, Carson asks if Basil's "idolatry" is "anything to be concealed?" (Holland 93). Wilde yields:

> Yes, because there are people in the world who cannot understand the intense devotion and affection and admiration that an artist can feel for a wonderful and beautiful person, or for a wonderful and beautiful mind. Those are the conditions under which we live. I regret them. (93)

Wilde expresses wariness towards "people in the world who cannot understand" the esoteric bond an artist might have with a certain "beautiful person" or "beautiful mind," and thus legitimizes Basil's position. In the moments following, Wilde states, "I am not concerned with the ignorance of others," which undermines the logic with which he treats Basil's perspective—Wilde does concern himself with the "people in the world" (94). While one must acknowledge some distance between Wilde and his character Basil Hallward, Wilde does ground his defense of Basil's perspective in the contemporary moment; they are the "conditions under which [Wilde] live[s]" that justify the fictional artist's concealment of his "idolatry" of Dorian. Wilde's response to Carson is without gender; however, if one chose to substitute the words "artist," "person," and "mind" for simply "man," Wilde's statement would be a knock against contemporary gross indecency laws—those regrettable "conditions" that Wilde, and other homosexual men, had to live alongside in the 1890s. Wilde was unsuccessful in dispelling interpretations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a homoerotic text.

While Wilde's literary endeavors certainly informed the way in which individuals perceived the evidence held against him in his first and subsequent trials, Wilde's activity around the city of London—the bars, cafés, and hotels that he frequented throughout his life, even prior to meeting Bosie Douglas—revealed him thriving as a non-heterosexual male dandy in the dark

metropolis of London. While his home with his wife Constance was on Tite Street, Wilde did much moving across the city of London. Wilde was frequently visible in a variety of locations on any given day; the geographic life of Oscar Wilde saw him often between Mayfair and Soho. When he first met Bosie Douglas, the pair dined quite regularly at Café Royal—including once with the Marquess of Queensberry—on Regent Street and passed evenings at the Lyric Club. Together, they conducted an affair, and made themselves visible to the gaze of all Londoners. While not necessarily pursuing the attention of city-dwellers like Boulton and Park, Wilde's body and his sexuality were on display in the metropolis, and in a variety of locations. In combination with his visibility as a non-heterosexual male and the suspicion raised upon the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Wilde exemplified precisely that which people like Labouchere sought to suppress.



Conclusion:

The map above involves several layers that outline a number of locations pertaining to the homosexual geography of London between 1870 and 1895. Pins in navy blue are sites mentioned in *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*; in yellow are two locations relevant to the Boulton and Park Case. The starred location at the center of the map indicates Leicester Square, which is where Jack Saul and Mr. Cambon meet in *Sins of the Cities of the Plain.* The line between Leicester Square and the pin near to the Regent's Park indicates the distance between Saul and Mr. Cambon's neighborhoods. In magenta are locations relevant to the Cleveland Street scandal. The line between the easternmost magenta pin and the central pin connects the General Post Office where the telegraph boys worked and the location of the Cleveland Street Brothel. Finally, in green, I included a few locations relevant to Oscar Wilde. Most of them are hotels that McKenna mentions in his biography on Wilde: they include the Savoy Hotel, as well as the location of the Albemarle Club, which is where the Marquess of Queensberry left the famous somdomite [sic] note. As a composite of almost three decades of the homosexual geography in London, I have sought to display the extent to which publicized locations where men might meet, travel, or simply conduct their metropolitan lives is just like that of any city dweller.

The map displays points of homosexuality in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. It seems to me, however, that each point is a "pin" defined by one overarching factor: money. Wealthy bodies on display marked Late Victorian London. Among them existed non-heterosexual men who were able to travel across central and gentrified areas, living as many wealthy Londoners did, just as Oscar Wilde did before his arrest. Men in the metropolis—or those who were so inclined, at least—attempted to assert their individuality and made themselves visible. On sunny afternoons, like Mr. Cambon in Leicester Square, or dark nights, like Dorian

wandering about London's East End (not on the map), the metropolis was permissive of the gay male body, so long was he was dressed well and society was unaware of his activity. That is, so long as his non-heterosexuality remained invisible, he could do as he pleased. The lifestyle of the leisure classes sustained alongside the increased visibility of the male body, and thus the homosexual men who controlled the money controlled the map.

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[1] A note on terminology: I understand that the terms "homosexual" and "homosexuality" do not necessarily accommodate all sexualities that existed during the period that I discuss in my capstone. I alternate between the usage of "homosexual" and its variants "non-normative" and "non-heterosexual" to describe sexuality at the time. I do this for the sake of diminishing repetition, and additionally because the terminology of "homosexual" is most recognizable and understood by contemporary readers.

[2] The second section of my capstone is the longest of all the sections. In my research, I have found that considerations and understandings of homosexuality in the 1890s came through the shaping of perspectives in decades before, and that the question of homosexuality was far more nebulous and uncertain before the Labouchere Amendment passed in 1885. The Boulton and Park scandal of 1870 heavily influenced the trajectory of perceptions of homosexuality and informed the cultural associations that are present in both *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and in contemporary news coverage.

[3] I struggled to find the proper terms to describe homosexual activity in a fashion that is informed by knowledge that no sexuality is a personal choice. In this way, my concern is attributable to presentist ideas about how to talk about people and who they are. Nonetheless, I describe the real-life manifestations of homosexuality as a part of the "practice of homosexuality." It is a "practice" because of the contemporary socio-legal climate. That is, at the end of the nineteenth century, men of non-normative sexuality did not have opportunities to engage with others as they felt most natural to who they were, and by this, men who sustained relationships with other men necessarily sought them out. Thus, to the end of same-sex relationships in London, men performed "an action, a deed; an undertaking" (*OED*).

[4] The ability to enjoy oneself without concern of public perception—that is, getting caught—is a privilege not exclusive to wealthy men procuring gay sex by going to brothels in London or simply cruising (which we see with Mr. Cambon), but also the ability to carry on affairs with each other. Men of higher social standing were able to have relations with each other, whereas a partnership within the working class was a less feasible arrangement.

[5] The instances of cross-class homosexual involvement we see were most prominent, historically speaking, in the Cleveland Street scandal of 1889/1890, which I examine later. *Sins of the Cities* indeed figures into this conversation. Of the culture more broadly, Cook writes that "it was the wealthy who appeared to create the norms of homosexual behavior during this period as before"

and that "the homosexual subculture and condition was cast as decadent; one in which the working class could only 'pose' as 'sharers'" (38-9).

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