

**Books to Read With One Hand: Erotic Autobiography, Victorian Sexology and Queer
Pornography.**

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MA by Research

University of York

English and Related Literature

March 2023

Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, one begins to perceive an intermingling of sexology and pornography in queer writing. Same-sex attracted men were using these two forms to discuss their lives in a relatively uncensored format. The integration of sexology into pornography and vice versa, and the shared autobiographical approach that characterises these writings, is here referred to as erotic autobiography: a self-fashioning narrative of eroticism written and consumed by same-sex attracted men and published either as pornography or sexology. This thesis argues that the texts studied – Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, the anonymously published *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, and *Teleny* – all represent an autobiographical move in queer writing with an underlying desire to disrupt the genres in which they are placed. By exploring the texts in this way I offer a study of the genres of erotic literature in the decades leading up to the development of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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Introduction

It has been clear since sexology's conception that the sexologist should loathe the pornographer, should assert himself as something *other* in order to be respected in his field, and for his field to be respected in the wider world. Similarly, why should the pornographer be interested in that which sterilises *his* domain? The crossover between sexology and pornography should, in theory, only exist because they are both concerned with the same thing: sex. However, the four texts in this thesis – two sexological and two pornographic – demonstrate the shifting of boundaries that was both possible and common in these two fields.

I create and explore the term *erotic autobiography* in this thesis to explore the ways in which pornographic writing and sexological writing blur into each other through the shared form of the autobiography. This term is expanded and defined in the next chapter. The texts used in this study have been chosen because of their representation of this erotic autobiography and their challenges to the boundaries of their genres. Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* was first published in 1886 as an exploration of sexual abnormalities, including paradoxia, anaesthesia, hyperaesthesia and paraesthesia.¹ Krafft-Ebing's work has been considered crucial in the formation of sexual modernity: Harry Oosterhuis, in his article "Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll", writes that "[a]s more and more private patients and correspondents came up with life histories that did not smoothly fit the established perception of psychiatry and contemporary bourgeois morality, the approach of Krafft-Ebing... became increasingly enmeshed in contradictory views and interests", that fluctuated "between the labelling of sexual variations as pathology and the recognition of the individual's particular and unique desires".² *Psychopathia Sexualis* is a text in which there exists a battle between sexual abnormality and sexual modernity, a provocation of the previously accepted sexual pathology model in a text which still cannot quite break free from such a model in order to move towards modernity. Krafft-Ebing's existence on the very cusp of sexual modernity is just one of the ways in which his text challenges genre: *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and the case studies included within, is a crucial text in my formation of erotic autobiography, challenging the boundary between sexology and pornography, contributing perhaps equal amounts to both.

¹ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Charles Chaddock (London: The F. A. Davis Company, 1894). See: for paradoxia 37; anaesthesia 42; hyperaesthesia 48; paraesthesia 56.

² Harry Oosterhuis, "Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll", *Medical History, suppl. Sexology, Medical Ethics and Occultism* 56, no. 2 (2012): 140, 144.

The other sexological text considered in this thesis, the second volume of Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, is devoted to the study of "sexual inversion". Sarah Bull's "More than a case of mistaken identity: Adult entertainment and the making of early sexology" offers a consideration of Ellis' texts as both laden with attempts to "distance himself and his work from 'pornographic' expression" and, apparently contrarily, full of "interest in erotica's potential as source material".³ This is the crux of erotic autobiography: sexology and pornography were, in the late nineteenth century, two sides of the same coin. It was crucial for sex research to distinguish itself from pornography in order to assert itself, which is why it is curious that Ellis himself wrote – though years later – a plea for "The Revaluation of Obscenity" in which he argues that censorship of and legislation against "obscenity" are fundamentally unjust. He writes: "[f]or, if we think of it, any attempt whatever to define "obscenity" - once we have put aside the vague emotional terms of abuse, "foul," "filthy," "lewd," "disgusting," etc. - in cool and precise terms cannot bring us to any crime against society. Taken in the wide sense, we may define it as that which arouses sexual love and desire".⁴ Even more curious is a subtle reference to the alternative title of *Teleny* – *The Reverse of the Medal* – when he writes that "it was the obverse of the human medal that was obscene, the reverse was indifferent".⁵ What emerges from this complex relationship between Ellis' sexological career and his desire to study erotica is remarkably similar to the boundary disruption seen in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, thus moving towards erotic autobiography.

The Sins of the Cities of the Plain, cited widely as the first openly queer pornographic novel, is situated firmly in the realm of erotic writing. Sarah Bull, in "Reading, Writing, and Publishing an Obscene Canon", considers *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* to be an erotic novel that contradicts an exclusively pornographic framework, due to its inclusion of the essays at the end of the text: she writes that "[t]he essays and the fictional narrative that together form *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* not only show that these genres each convey sexual knowledge and arouse sexual pleasure, but also demonstrate how they can speak to one another, forming a knowledgeable and pleasurable archive that is more than the sum of its parts".⁶ Between the above sexological texts and this pornographic one, one begins to develop a more comprehensive picture of the ways in which the genres of erotica and sexology were inextricably linked despite their supposed opposing concerns.

³ Sarah Bull, "More than a case of mistaken identity: Adult entertainment and the making of early sexology", *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 1 (2020): 18, 17.

⁴ Havelock Ellis, *On Life and Sex*, (London: Heinemann, 1948) 210.

⁵ Ellis, *On Life and Sex*, 218. The alternative title to *Teleny* is *The Reverse of the Medal*.

⁶ See: Drewey Wayne Gunn, "Babylon on the Thames", *The Gay and Lesbian Review* 24, no. 2 (2017): 38. Sarah Bull, "Reading, Writing, and Publishing an Obscene Canon", *Book History* 20 (2017): 241.

Disruption is what the three previous texts have in common, something which carries over to *Teleny*. *Teleny*, written and published anonymously in 1893 with dubious accreditation to Oscar Wilde, is a novel with, at its core, the desire to disrupt. By consistently depicting one relationship within the novel – that of Teleny and Des Grieux – as more ethical and more loving than those around it, the novel disrupts the narrative of queer promiscuity and presents a moral inversion in which heterosexual relationships are associated with rape, paedophilia and incest, whilst their relationship is idealised for the majority of the text.⁷ This is just one of many disruptions the novel undertakes. Frederick King, in his article “British Aestheticism, Sexology, and Erotica: Negotiating Sexual Discourses in “Teleny”” claims that “*Teleny* incorporates Aestheticism’s pursuit of sensation, sexology’s medical terminology, and erotica’s exploration of graphic sex and violence”.⁸ *Teleny* interrogates the boundaries between the three distinct fields of medicine, aestheticism and pornography.

This thesis argues that these four texts – two medical, two pornographic – create such a profound disruption of the genres in which they have been placed that the erotic autobiography must be introduced in order to fully explore their hybrid generic identity. The narratives in *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* become eroticised, as the narratives in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* become medicalised. This mutual dissemination is referred to as its own hybrid genre, erotic autobiography, which allows for an interrogation of the ways in which these texts function when placed into other genres with which these texts were at odds.

The first chapter of this thesis establishes erotic autobiography as a mode of reading the four aforementioned texts and breaks down its intentions. The second chapter places Havelock Ellis’ *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* and Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* in the realm of the pornographic, rejecting their prior sole categorisation as sexological texts. In doing so, these texts are opened up to new understandings and interpretations, particularly with regards to their depictions of the lives of same-sex attracted men. The following chapter takes a similar approach to *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny*, considering them outside of the realm of erotica, and reading them in the company of sexology. This chapter integrates the medicalising of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* with the resultant eroticising of the confessional form in order to demonstrate the complexity of the project of erotic autobiography and the entanglement of the two genres. It is at the point of confession that the erotic autobiography is at its strongest, as the four texts considered are able to exist on equal footing with similar stylistic qualities.

⁷ *Teleny* (London: GMP Publishers, 1989), 97, 57, 59, 43, 182.

⁸ Frederick King, “British Aestheticism, Sexology, and Erotica: Negotiating Sexual Discourses in “Teleny””, *Victorian Review* 41, no. 1 (2015): 164.

The thesis then considers the ways in which, once established, these erotic autobiographies challenge the status quo in the fourth chapter, ‘Understanding Erotic Autobiography’. This chapter is divided into three sections, beginning at the consideration of identity formation. Just as the erotic autobiography challenges the boundaries of genre, the autobiographers involved in it find their own identity boundaries and take a dominant role in the creation of the narratives surrounding same-sex attraction. Following this, I consider the ways in which the genre probes the boundaries of both erotica and autobiography, challenging its own genre and feeling out its own boundaries. Finally, I consider the ways in which the erotic autobiography relates *itself* to the sex act; the ways in which it challenges the necessity of the body in sex and the ways in which it explores textual intercourse in place of sexual intercourse. Throughout the fourth chapter, I revisit material used in earlier chapters in light of the development of my argument, providing further insight into earlier arguments.

What becomes clear throughout this thesis is that at the very core of the erotic autobiography is an uncheckable desire to push, disrupt and violate. Whilst sexology sets out to very clearly define and categorise, pornography’s approach to its subjects differs greatly: in Laura Kipnis’ 1996 text *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, she claims that pornography’s “greatest pleasure is to locate each and every one of a society’s taboos, prohibitions, and proprieties and systematically transgress them, one by one”.⁹ This probing of both its own boundaries and those of the categories with which it sits adjacent appears to be a pornographic impulse surfacing within the erotic autobiography. Perhaps, even, it is a queer impulse.

Queerness is the further commonality between the texts chosen for this thesis: they are all written by and about same-sex attracted men. The historical invisibility of lesbians has been well explored: Judith Bennett writes that “[l]esbian histories are, of course, even more challenging to construct [than those about gay men], for even fewer documents tell of past lesbians among either privileged or ordinary folk. Women wrote less; their writings survived less often... and they were less likely than men to come to the attention of civic or religious authorities”.¹⁰ Furthermore, the narratives in which same-sex attracted women existed were, in the late nineteenth century, entirely different to those of same-sex attracted men. In this thesis, then, I focus on the ways in which same-sex attracted men interacted with erotic autobiographical writing because, whilst same-sex attracted women were also discussed in sexological texts, their relationship with sexology and pornography was

⁹ Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), 164.

¹⁰ Judith M. Bennett, ““Lesbian-Like” and the Social History of Lesbianisms”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 1/2 (2000): 2.

dramatically different due to both their sexuality and their gender.¹¹ I am also aware that this thesis upholds a gender binary which is not accurate to the lived experiences of those about whom I write. Throughout both the texts studied and the Victorian era itself, many of these same-sex attracted individuals interact with gender in far more nuanced ways than calling them same-sex attracted *men* would suggest.¹² However, as with the topic of same-sex attracted women, this subject is owed far more space than I can give it in this present thesis.

Erotic autobiography is an inherently queer genre: it is disruptive in nature and resistant to categorisation. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's claim in *Tendencies* that "[q]ueer is a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*" encompasses the way in which I use the term.¹³ Donald Hall similarly writes in *Queer Theories* that "the concept "queer" emphasizes the disruptive, the fractured, the tactical and contingent".¹⁴ Both of these theorists lean into the disruptive nature of the queer label. It is this troubling nature, this disruption that I intend to call upon through my use of queer texts in this project. The core value of the erotic autobiography is the altering of genre, the shifting of categories and the disruption of the norm: how better to do this than with four queer nineteenth-century texts? The anachronism of labelling the men who wrote these texts as queer is something of which I am conscious: that these texts are queer by modern standards is undeniable. An interesting – and glaringly ironic – addition to the nuance of this anachronism is that the first usage of queer with regards to same-sex attracted men was by the father of one of the individuals briefly mentioned in this study: Lord Alfred Douglas. Lord Queensberry wrote in 1894 of "Snob queers like Rosebery" corrupting his sons.¹⁵ Aside from this usage, for a Victorian audience the word "queer" would have meant strange or ill. To use queer to describe the men in this study would, in light of this, be both inaccurate and inappropriate. Because of this, I refer to the texts as queer where necessary whilst the men who wrote them are referred to as "same-sex attracted" throughout in an attempt to resolve this discrepancy

¹¹ *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 310. Case 131 is an extensive, detailed and linguistically agile case regarding the relationship between a woman, S., and her beloved, Marie.

¹² I feel it is important here to note the excellent essays included in the trans-focused 2018 edition of *Victorian Review* which approach this subject in the depth it deserves. For a compelling summary of the importance of trans studies in Victorian studies, see Ardel Haefele-Thomas' "Introduction: Trans Victorians". Lisa Hager's "A Case for a Trans Studies Turn in Victorian Studies: "Female Husbands" of the Nineteenth Century" demonstrates the ways in which Victorian studies and trans studies can, and must, interact, offering a compassionate and informed consideration of the difficulties of applying modern labels to nineteenth-century individuals. Finally, Simon Joyce's "Two Women Walk into a Theatre Bathroom: The Fanny and Stella Trials as Trans Narrative" addresses the complications of claiming the identities of those who did not have access to the language that we would now use for them.

¹³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xii.

¹⁴ Donald Hall, *Queer Theories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5.

¹⁵ Douglas Murray, *Boise: A Biography of Lord Alfred Douglas* (New York: Miramax, 2002), 69.

in terminology. Whilst I could study this phenomena in heterosexual texts, my intention when using these queer texts is to tap into this troubling intention.

Defining Erotic Autobiography

Fundamental to the thesis is an understanding of erotic autobiography, a term applied throughout to the four key texts considered. To read *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* or *Teleny* as exclusively pornographic, and to read *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* as exclusively medical is to underestimate the impact and scope of these texts. The creation of erotic autobiography here is necessary: claiming that these medical texts are pornographic, or that the pornographic texts appear medical, is not fully demonstrative of the extent to which these texts disrupt the genres in which they are placed.

The name of this hybrid implies two features: eroticism and autobiography. Ivan Crozier writes in “Pillow Talk: Credibility, Trust and the Sexological Case History” that one of the early struggles of sexology was “trouble with defining what is to be counted as sexual: Desire? Lifestyle? Penetration? Other forms of stimulation?”.¹⁶ Havelock Ellis cites a similar difficulty in finding a simple definition of obscenity in *On Life and Sex*, as noted in the introduction of this thesis, suggesting that in many cases obscenity is merely that which “arouses sexual love and desire”. Defining something as complex as the erotic is a challenge which has existed for as long as the term itself has.

The common feature of most definitions of eroticism is sex. The Ancient Greek *erōs*, the etymological origin of the erotic, translates to “sexual love”. Richard Posner, in his book *Sex and Reason*, considers varying definitions of eroticism: whilst he uses erotic “to describe presentations and representations that are, or at least are taken by some viewers to be, in some sense “about” sexual activity,” he notes that others define it as an inoffensive pornography or as a piece of art “intended to arouse feelings of love or affection” rather than to arouse sexually.¹⁷ In the *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*, Gaëtan Brulotte and John Phillips write that “[e]rotic literature is defined here as works in which sexuality and/or sexual desire has a dominant presence”.¹⁸ The etymology, Posner, Brulotte and Phillips all define the erotic as something *to do with sex*.

Surely, then, sex is a prerequisite for eroticism. In his article, “What is the Erotic?” Bob Brecher challenges this thought, writing that “an erotic experience *need* not be sexual, despite the fact that most are”.¹⁹ Brecher highlights three other components to his definition

¹⁶ Ivan Crozier, “Pillow Talk: Credibility, Trust and the Sexological Case History”, *History of Science* xlvi (2008): 375.

¹⁷ Richard Posner, *Sex and Reason* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992), 356, 351, 352.

¹⁸ Gaëtan Brulotte and John Phillips, *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2006), x.

¹⁹ Bob Brecher, “What is the Erotic?”, *INSEP* 1, no. 1 (2013): 64.

of eroticism: postponement, transgression and acting.²⁰ He concludes: “[t]he elements of postponement and transgression together are enough to make an experience or phenomenon erotic. Sex, while not a necessary component, is usually part of such an experience, just because it occupies a central place in the story of our personae in this particular culture”.²¹ Sex is not essential, but common in this definition.

It is clear that the further one ventures into attempts to define eroticism, the more complicated the task becomes. The above definitions offer a spread of views on the definition of the erotic. Sex plays a dominant role in most of these definitions and it must be, for Brulotte and Phillips, heavily featured for a text to be considered erotic. The uncertain areas of these definitions are the necessity of arousal, whether the erotic must be inoffensive, and the extent of the crossover with pornography. It is clear that the pornographic texts I study in this thesis have the intention to arouse and I argue that many of the sexual depictions included in *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* were similarly intended by their authors.²² The division between offensive erotica and inoffensive pornography, though necessary in some areas, is more often founded in judgement of the value or morality of the literature than in any objective judgement. Brulotte and Phillips write that both “erotica” and “pornography” are “infected with a degree of judgmentalism”, and that “[t]he distinction between the erotic and the pornographic depends on arguments and stereotypes that are fundamentally subjective”.²³ It is for this reason that my project is formed around the erotic, rather than the pornographic: though both terms have a degree of judgement surrounding them, the pornographic is more often deemed offensive or crude, a moral judgement which is not appropriate or helpful in the study of my key texts.

The final crucial element of the eroticism of my project is its queerness. The use of *erōs* in this thesis is a reference to the same-sex attracted Victorian cultural relevance of *The Symposium*. Pausanius’ speech in *The Symposium* claims two types of *erōs*: “since there are two kinds of Aphrodite there must also be two [Erotes]”, a Common Eros and a Heavenly Eros.²⁴ This speech, due to its encouragement of Heavenly Eros between men and boys, became a touchstone for same-sex attracted men in the nineteenth century. In *British*

²⁰ Ibid., 65–66. Brecher defines his use of “acting” as deliberately ambiguous. He writes that acting is “a pretty standard way in which erotic and unerotic sex is distinguished, the business of our at once being both ourselves and not ourselves, where the mundane “inner” and “outer” become if not confused, then at least differently conjoined?”

²¹ Ibid., 67.

²² By authors, I here mean the authors of the individual case studies used throughout these two books.

²³ Brulotte and Phillips, *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*, x.

²⁴ Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Christopher Gill and Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 13. Note: This translation uses “Love” in place of Eros, whilst many other translations leave Eros untranslated. All capitalised uses of “Love” are to be replaced with “[Eros]” for ease of understanding henceforth.

Aestheticism and Ancient Greece, Stefano Evangelista writes that for the late nineteenth-century aesthetes, *erōs* was becoming “increasingly understood in distinctly homoerotic terms,” due to its association with Plato’s writing.²⁵ Similarly, Martha Vicinus’ “The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?” explores the ways in which “[t]he celebration of pedagogical eros in Greek literature became the cornerstone upon which late nineteenth-century [same-sex attracted] writers could construct a spiritual self–portrait”.²⁶ Using *erotic* in this thesis performs a dual function, both referring to the sexual depictions included in these texts and paying heed to the queer literary history of the term.

Having considered the complications of the erotic, I turn to the autobiography. All four of the key texts of this study present as factual depictions of key events in the speakers’ lives, with communication intended as the core purpose. Whether sexological or pornographic literature, this autobiographical trend remains. It is important here to note that when I claim that *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* and *Psychopathia Sexualis* are autobiographical works, I am referring to the case studies contained within them and not to the commentary provided by Krafft-Ebing or Ellis themselves. This thesis does not claim that all texts considered are factual accounts of real lives, but that their presentation as such is crucial in their contributions to erotic autobiography. Whether real or a falsehood, the autobiographical aspect of these texts is contributive to the distortion of sexology and pornography.

A crucial text in autobiographical studies is “The Autobiographical Contract” by Philippe Lejeune, in which he defines autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality”.²⁷ This definition offers a detailed breakdown of traditional understandings of autobiography. Similarly, James Cox defines the autobiography as “a narrative of a person’s life written by himself.”²⁸ Both of these texts assert three crucial points of autobiography: that the text must be a narrative, that the narrative must be about an individual’s life, and that this individual must be the one to write the narrative. Autobiography is, however, far more complex than these brief statements make it seem.

As Robert Folkenflik notes in *The Culture of Autobiography*, “[a]utobiography... has norms but not rules”: though Lejeune and Cox offer definitions, these are only the *norms* of

²⁵ Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 151.

²⁶ Martha Vicinus, “The Adolescent Boy: Fin De Siècle Femme Fatale?”, *Journey of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 1 (1994): 93–4.

²⁷ Philippe Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Contract” in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, trans. R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 193.

²⁸ James Cox, *Recovering Literature’s Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography* (London: Baton Rouge, 1989), 12.

autobiography.²⁹ Gertrude Stein notably wrote that “[a]nything is an autobiography”, touching on a crucial part of autobiographical studies: that autobiography is no longer just a genre.³⁰ Paul De Man writes in “Autobiography as De-Facement” that “[a]utobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts”, that “[t]he autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading”.³¹ It is this autobiographical moment upon which I build the genre of erotic autobiography: it is not autobiography as its own genre, but as a mode of reading. At some points throughout *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, there is alteration from Krafft-Ebing and Ellis which prevents these texts from being pure autobiographies. Similarly, the narratives of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* are both relayed through an interlocutor. None of these texts are perfect autobiographies, written by an individual without intervention. However, as De Man notes, it is the reading of them as such that allows them to become autobiographical.

Similarly, Max Saunders, in *Self Impression*, establishes autobiography as fundamentally ambiguous: “the term ‘autobiography’ has a radical ambiguity. It can mean a mode of writing that is separate from other forms... and that exists purely for telling the story of your own life. Or it can be used to describe something about all those other forms too”.³² De Man understands autobiography to be a mode of reading whilst Saunders remains comfortable in its ability to be both this mode of reading and a genre of its own. The radical ambiguity of the autobiography is exactly that which I seek to unpack in these Victorian erotic autobiographies: how do they flirt with this generic insecurity? How do they challenge the genres of sexology and pornography well as that of the autobiography?

If, as Saunders claims, autobiography and biography were the “quintessential Victorian genre,” if “not just history, but art, literature, thought – all human productions – were best accounted for biographically”, then it is only logical that the texts considered by the present study fall into this trend.³³ The pseudo-autobiographical approach of the pornographic novels *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* is an extension of the era’s desire to categorise, to confess, to biographize. What compounds this desire, for Saunders, is the tendency of nineteenth-century fiction to “[draw] deeply on auto/biographical material” and to lend such material “to characters who, though they might be writing their experience down for our benefit, are not presented creative artists, but as artless recounters and

²⁹ Robert Folkenflik, “Introduction: The Institution of Autobiography” in *The Culture of Autobiography*, ed. Robert Folkenflik (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 13.

³⁰ Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937), 5.

³¹ Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement”, *MLN* 94, no. 5, *Comparative Literature* (1979): 921.

³² Max Saunders, *Self Impression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

transcribers of their experience”.³⁴ The individuals who confess need no skill: these texts present a narrative without need for literary training, making the autobiographical text a genre available to all. Arnaud Schmitt summarises the power of the autobiography for those without literary training or talent: the “successful shift from act to full-blown autobiography... is most definitely not always a question of talent... of sincerity, even of leading an interesting life; quite on the contrary it’s often a question of luck, opportunities, of having enough gumption to take advantage of a particular cultural or historical context”.³⁵ This understanding of autobiography allows one to begin to understand its appeal for same-sex attracted men: where they could not explicitly depict their lives in popular literary genres for fear of condemnation or due to technical inability, the sexologist’s case study was the perfect platform upon which anonymous individuals with little technical or formal training could have their narratives published.

The queer autobiography is, moreover, a form of identity assertion and creation. Dallas Baker writes that “the reading and making of life writing can lead to the production of new subjectivities, new identities”, and that “[t]he experience of reading and writing about one’s own and others’ lives can be understood as components in... a practice of self-making”.³⁶ Autobiography’s concern with the individual’s internality, described by Lejeune as “concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality”, allows it to exist in a moment between history and fiction, something which scholars of the autobiography note often.³⁷ Louis Renza considers it “neither fictive nor non-fictive, not even a mixture of the two”.³⁸ Instead, he argues, “[w]e might view it... as a unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression”.³⁹ Not only is the act of autobiographical writing important for same-sex attracted men in the nineteenth century because of its ease of access, but because of the ability to use it to self-fashion one’s own identity, something I discuss further in ‘Reading Selves, Speaking Selves’.

Erotic autobiography is not only erotic in its contents – i.e. its discussion of sexual acts – but in its *form*: the autobiography is eroticised by the retelling and reliving of the

³⁴ Ibid., 11.

³⁵ Arnaud Schmitt, “From Autobiographical Act to Autobiography”, *Life Writing* 4, no. 4 (2018): 483.

³⁶ Dallas Baker, “Queer Life Writing as Self-Making” in *Offshoot: Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice*, ed. Donna Lee Brien and Quinn Eades (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2018), 14.

³⁷ See, for example, “Autobiography is in this sense the story of a life, but here there is a problem, for it is not the story but the history of a life”. Cox, 12. “Autobiography may be truthful or mendacious, for factuality is not crucial to its autobiographical interest.” Folkenflik, 14.

³⁸ Louis Renza, “The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography”, *New Literary History* 9, no. 1 (1977): 22.

³⁹ Ibid., 22.

sexual acts confessed thereby. This complex relationship is discussed at length later in this thesis. What comes of this which is of particular import to the erotic autobiography is the cross-contamination of the fields of erotic and autobiographical. Autobiography is eroticised by these texts in much the same way as the erotic becomes autobiographical. Erotic autobiography, then, becomes a disruption of itself, in the same way as it alters the generic position of the texts. It is clear that erotic autobiography cannot be the only genre to which these texts belong, but the four key texts considered in this thesis are unified by this approach. In *The Law of Genre* Jacques Derrida writes that “it is possible to have several genres, an intermixing of genres, or a total genre, the genre ‘genre’ or the poetic or literary genre as a genre of genres”, and this is what we begin to see as the creation of erotic autobiography develops: there belongs under the term erotic autobiography a plethora of different styles and origins of texts, all which carry one similar group of traits.⁴⁰ The genres of sexology and of pornography are not as important as their mutual dissemination into each other, and the erotic autobiographical desire to do so.

This definition of erotic autobiography is a touchstone. The following two chapters discuss the ways in which sexological and pornographic texts challenge their respective genres and blend together, notwithstanding the explicit opposition of sexology to the pornographic. Following this, I consider ways in which the erotic autobiography reevaluates identity and narrative, eroticism, autobiography itself and physicality in a curious attempt to both define its own parameters and to challenge all of the other genres it may touch whilst doing so. This thesis claims that *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, *Teleny* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* exist within the realm of the erotic autobiography and that this genre has two effects: first, that the genre of erotic autobiography is fundamentally a communicative device, creating community and sharing the narratives of same-sex attracted men in alternatives forums in which such a thing was possible; and secondly, that this genre is fundamentally, in both its form and its intentions, one of disruption, and of genre-bending.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre”, in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. David Duff (New York: Longman, 2000), 229.

⁴¹ This communicative effect of those texts that I have defined “erotic autobiography” has been noted by those such as Julie Minich, who writes that “queer life writing is... crucial to knowledge about human sexuality in its many and diverse manifestations”. Julie Minich, “Writing Queer Lives”, *The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. Scott Herring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 61.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis as Pornographers

Erotic autobiography thus defined, one must next consider the ways in which *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* adhere to such a definition. That these two texts are *about* sex is undeniable, and it is therefore unnecessary to eroticise them by the definition laid out in the previous chapter. In this chapter I flirt with notions and understandings of arousal, intention and reception in order to understand the ways in which Krafft-Ebing and Ellis move from the role of medic to the role of pornographer. For the duration of this chapter, the term pornography is used in lieu of erotica as a challenge to the forms of these texts, reading them as the exact thing sexology was attempting to distinguish itself from.

In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, case study 115 is distinct from the rest due to its extensive account of the sexual life of the individual being studied. Krafft-Ebing mentions case 115's arrest for "committing a misdemeanour with a countryman in a field", and his stay in an institute at thirteen, where he "practised mutual masturbation, seduced his comrades, and, by his cynical conduct, made them unmanageable".⁴² Krafft-Ebing, here, includes the pathological aspects of case 115's sexual life, those acts which created difficulty in his life. Once given the freedom to speak in his own words, however, case 115 offers a complete, (mostly) uncensored, self-directed account of the life and sexuality of a same-sex attracted man, without the interjections or alterations of a doctor or judge. Preceded by a brief medical overview on the awakening of his sexual instinct and masturbatory habits, case 115 proceeds to explain the ways in which he is "compelled to perform the sexual act".⁴³ Though in Latin, the following passage offers an intricate – and erotic – description of the sexual act.

Pene juvenis in os recepto, ita ut commovendo ore meo effecerim, ut is quem eupio, semen ejaculaverit, sperma in perinæum exspuo, femora eocrimi jubeo et penem meum adversus et intra femora compressa immitto. Dum hæc fiunt, necesse est, ut juvenis me, quantum potest, amplectatur. Quæ prius me fecisse narravi, eandem mihi afferunt voluptatem, acsi ipse ejaculo. Ejaculationem pene in anum immittendo vel manu terendo assequi, mihi ucquaquam amœnum est.

Sed inveni, qui penem meom receperint atque ea facientes, quæ supra exposium effecerint, ut libidine meæ plant sint saturatæ.⁴⁴

[Having taken the young man's penis in my mouth, so that by shaking it at the same time as my mouth, I make him ejaculate, I spit the sperm in the

⁴² Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 270.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 272–273.

perineum, I command the young man's thighs and send my penis against and inside the thighs that are compressed. While these things are happening, it is necessary for the young man to embrace me as much as he can. The things I told you I had done before bring me the same pleasure as if I were ejaculating myself. Getting an ejaculation almost in my anus or by rubbing it with my hand, it's both fun for me. But I have found that those who received my own penis and still do the things I described above, are perfectly satisfied with my lust.]

What this passage discusses is invariably pornographic: oral and intercrural sex, described in such detail, is reminiscent of certain passages of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* or *Teleny*.⁴⁵ It is difficult to comment on the stylistic aspects of this passage since it is translated from English to Latin and back again, likely distorting the original language used. Whilst included in a medical text, the ability and intention of this passage to arouse is undeniable. The sexual acts included within are detailed and intimate: case 115 forfeits no details, even the tenderness midway through the sex act of his lover's embrace – “While these things are happening, it is necessary for the young man to embrace me as much as he can” – contributes to the erotic effect of the passage. The eroticism here is multifaceted: first, since this passage is about sex, by the definition established in the previous chapter, this is erotic. We also see the *erōs*, the sexual *love* in this passage coming through in this tender embrace between the two men. Aside from both of these definitions, it is clear that this passage has potential to be arousing for both the men involved in the passage and, likely, for the reader.

Case 123 includes extended passages obscured by Latin which contain vivid and pornographic descriptions. Whilst case 115 described his experience of sex in a sterile, medical way – stating the acts with less emphasis placed on the pleasure he receives from such acts – case 123 approaches his description in complete openness and honesty. He writes that, when alone in a room with his partner, he desires to restrain him and, “membrum magnum purumque est, dominusque ejus mihi placet, ardente libidine mentulam ejus in os meum receptam complures horas sugere possum, neque autem delector, si semen in os meum ejaeulatur, cum maxima eorum qui "urnings" nominantur pars hae re non modo delectatur, sed etiam semen nonnumquam devorat.”⁴⁶ [If the member is large and clean, and I like its owner, I can suck his penis into my mouth for several hours with burning lust, but I am not pleased if the seed is ejected into my mouth, since the majority of those who are called "homosexuals" are not only pleased with this thing, but also sometimes devours the seed.] This individual, instead of listing the sexual acts in which he engages, discusses his “burning

⁴⁵ Depictions of sexual interactions between men, including masturbatory acts, oral sex, anal sex and intercrural sex are littered throughout the pages of *Sins* and *Teleny*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

lust,” his desire to “suck his penis into my mouth for several hours”. In comparison to this passage, case 115 appears tame. Case 123 further writes that he desires to watch while a strong young man “magna mentula proeditus rac proesente puellam futuat; mihi persuasum est, fore ut hoc aspectu sensus mei vehementissima perturbatione afficiantur et dum futuit corpus adolescentis pulcini tangan et, si liceat, ascendam in eum dum cum puella concumbit atque idem cum eo faciam et membrum meum in ejus anum immittam”.⁴⁷ [Gifted with a large penis, showing it, harasses the girl; I was convinced that my senses would be affected by this sight with the greatest agitation, and while he was fucking I would touch the young man's body on the couch, and if possible, climb on him while he was lying with the girl, and do the same together and I would put my member in his ass.] This voyeuristic desire to do to a man what that man was doing to another continues the sexual interest in power which case 123 establishes in his first pornographic passage when he speaks of his desire to restrain his partner. The sexual content of this passage is idealised and eroticised.

What limits the value of this text *as* pornography for the Victorian same-sex attracted men reading it is Latin obscuration of erotic moments. This, of course, is the intention of Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and their editors and translators. Krafft-Ebing, in the preface to the 1894 English translation of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, writes that “[t]he following pages are addressed to earnest investigators in the domain of natural science and jurisprudence. In order that unqualified persons should not become readers, the author saw himself compelled to choose a title understood only by the learned, and also, where possible, to express himself in *terminis technicis*. It seemed necessary also to give particularly revolting portions in Latin rather than German”.⁴⁸ Defending the inclusion of “revolting portions” in this way is in response to individuals like Dr. A. von Schrenck–Notzing, who commented the following on the circulation and impact of the text:

It may be questioned whether it is justifiable to discuss the anomalies of the sexual instinct apart, instead of treating of them in their proper place in psychiatry... Moreover, attention has been directed to the baneful influence possibly exerted by such publications as “Psychopathia Sexualis”. To be sure, the appearance of seven editions of that work could not be accounted for were its circulation confined to scientific readers. Therefore, it cannot be denied that a pornographic interest on the part of the public is accountable for a wide part of the circulation of the book.⁴⁹

Here we see why, in the twelfth edition, Krafft–Ebing felt it necessary to defend his work with the claim that, in this edition, “[t]he number of technical terms has been increased, and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 297.

⁴⁸ Ibid., v.

⁴⁹ Ibid., vii.

the Latin language is more frequently made use of than in former editions”.⁵⁰ However, what becomes clear is that this Latin censorship is more for the peace of mind of the medical community than it is for Krafft-Ebing’s own, since both he and his translator agree that the utility of these studies far outweighs the potential damage. In fact, what transpires in this Latin censorship of these sexual passages is that they indicate far more about the anxieties of the doctors than they do anything else. These anxieties, ironically, betray the doctors’ intentions, contradicting them and illuminating the passages of erotic content far more than had they been left uncensored. One need only cast a brief glance over any page in either text and immediately locate sexually explicit scenes due to their Latin translation. Though this censorship prevents some individuals from being able to read further than this, the use of Latin to *highlight* sexual moments allowed for those who could translate it to quickly and easily locate moments of erotic content.

Havelock Ellis’ censorship and inclusion of pornographic content is more complex than that of Krafft-Ebing. One of the most explicit case studies included in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, history XX, contains no direct quotation from the individual about whom the study is written. What is most curious about this study is what Ellis chooses to include in the individual’s case and what he censors. Ellis appears to have two reasons for his inclusion of the erotic passages which he allows to remain in his text. Either the erotic moment is, in his mind, not erotic; or it is not indicative of any pathology aside from the sex of its participants. In this particular study, Ellis notes three key sexual experiences in XX’s life. Though Ellis’ retelling of this case prevents it from being a true autobiography, these experiences appear to be lifted directly from XX’s own accounts. This study is used with the awareness that it is an account retold by Ellis and, therefore, potentially altered. However, the communicative value of this individual’s confession remains, even in light of the language being altered. The first key sexual experience in XX’s life according to Ellis is a sexual dream in which the individual “imagined himself the servant of several adult naked sailors; he crouched between their thighs and called himself their dirty pig, and by their orders he performed services for their genitals and buttocks which he contemplated and handled with relish”.⁵¹ The second, “[b]etween the age of 8 and 11 he twice took the penis of a cousin into his mouth, after they had slept together; the feeling of the penis pleased him”.⁵² The third, a sexual encounter with a group of boys, in which “[t]hey sat around the room on chairs, each with his penis exposed, and the boy to be punished went around the room on his knees and

⁵⁰ Richard von. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. F. J. Rebman (Physicians and Surgeons Book Company, 1931), viii.

⁵¹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Volume II Sexual Inversion* (The F. A. Davis Company, 1918), 140.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 140.

took each penis into his mouth in turn”.⁵³ Common in these three events is the inclusion of some element that Ellis perceives as deviant: whether the subjugation of a minor by dominant adults, incestuous acts, or sexually humiliating acts (which Ellis highlights by following this particular retelling with a decisive “[t]his was supposed to humiliate him”). That these three sexual accounts were the only ones provided to Ellis by XX is unlikely. The individual relays his sexual life in enough intricacy that Ellis summarises his sexual journey as follows:

The methods of satisfaction have varied with the phases of his passion. At first they were romantic and Platonic, when a hand–touch, a rare kiss, or mere presence, sufficed. In the second period sleeping side by side, inspection of the naked body of the loved man, embracements, and occasional emissions after prolonged contact. In the third period the gratification became more frankly sensual. It took every shape: mutual masturbation, intercrural coitus, *fellatio*, *irrumatio*, occasionally *pædicatio*; always according to inclination or concession of the beloved male.⁵⁴

In this case what we see is a conscious removal of same-sex sexual acts that are not pathological or irregular. This exclusion of non-pathological sexual acts between men from a sexological text suggests that Ellis regarded same-sex attraction as non-pathological. Due to this lack of censorship, this study remains an uncensored and sympathetic insight into the sexual desires and life of a same-sex attracted individual in the nineteenth century.

History XXI follows a similar theme to XX, though Ellis allows the individual to speak in his own words, to tell his own story. This history begins in a similar way, in the recollection of sexual dreams, including one in which he imagined himself “in a tank with [his] three lovers floating in the water above me. From this position [he] visited their limbs in turn; the attraction rested in the thighs and buttocks only”.⁵⁵ Following this, the individual explores his childhood relationship with a “cold–blooded” older boy.⁵⁶ During this relationship, his companion insists upon the individual’s passivity, and takes full control of all sexual interactions between the two, giving XXI very little satisfaction. He receives some satisfaction in the culmination of this relationship, when from his cold–blooded companion he “received an embrace which for the first time gave [him] full satisfaction”.⁵⁷ As in history XX, the rest of this individual’s sexual life is not published, with a brief summary being provided that he has “found a companion to love [him] in the way [his] nature required”.⁵⁸ The relationship between XXI and his cold–blooded former lover, though pornographic in its

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 145–146.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

descriptions, is included, whilst XXI's relationship – undoubtedly sexual – with this new companion is reduced to a brief assertion of his happiness, an approach which, as in history XX, appears to suggest that Ellis will not include same-sex sexual relations which are not otherwise deviant.

Until this point I have speculated on the reasons why Ellis selectively includes pornographic moments in his case studies: either that they are indicative of some pathology, or do not indicate inversion. The first suggestion, that these acts are pathological, finds support in Ellis' discussion elsewhere in the text of masturbation. Alan Hunt, in his 1998 article "The Great Masturbation Panic and the Discourses of Moral Regulation in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain," identifies the period of 1880 to 1914 as the period of the "attack on masturbation", something which is clearly seen in Ellis' *Studies*.⁵⁹ Ellis has a section in the text on the causes of inversion which considers masturbation as a possible factor, despite concluding that "there is little in the history of [his] male cases to indicate masturbation as a cause of inversion".⁶⁰ This being noted, however, he does not deny that he believes that "masturbation, especially at an early age, may sometimes enfeeble the sexual activities, and aid the manifestations of inversion".⁶¹ Whilst he does not necessarily cite it as a cause of inversion, masturbation remains, for Ellis, something worthy of discussion, and something which has negative sexual health effects. Considering masturbation to be pathological and worthy of inclusion suggests that the inclusion of the erotic passages throughout the case studies is due to their pathology. If this is indeed the reason behind Ellis' inclusion of these elements, it places the same-sex sexual acts which are *excluded* within the realm of 'normal' sexuality. The normality of sexuality is particularly complex: in Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex", she argues that the sexual morality at play in Western culture "grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged", that whilst "heterosexuality is acknowledged to exhibit the full range of human experience... all sex acts on the bad side of the line are considered utterly repulsive and devoid of all emotional nuance".⁶² For Rubin, masturbation and homosexuality both fall under the umbrella of sexual deviance. Where Ellis' censorship interacts curiously with Rubin's theory is in Rubin's argument that vice is relegated to the underprivileged. Ellis appears to disrupt this, allowing for the vice of the underprivileged to be a part of the study, but the same-sex attraction of these individuals is allowed to remain unscrutinised.

⁵⁹ Alan Hunt, "The Great Masturbation Panic and the Discourses of Moral Regulation in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 4, (1998): 579.

⁶⁰ Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 276.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶² Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality", in *The Gay and Lesbian Studies: Reader*, ed. David Halperin and Henry Abelove (New York: Routledge, 1993), 14–15.

Considering the alternate theory, that the acts Ellis includes are not indicative of inversion, then it is specifically inverted acts which are excluded, and this exclusion indicates a deeper fear of the social contagion of same-sex attraction. Passages that are retained in the studies which initially appear erotic, through this lens, are perceived as something that falls short of homosexuality. History XX proves useful again here: the sexual acts described are often qualified by Ellis' own opinion of the homosexuality or purpose of the act. After writing about the sexual contact between XX and his cousin, Ellis immediately interjects that “[n]either of these cousins was homosexual”.⁶³ After noting the sexual punishment XX was involved in with five of his male cousins, Ellis is quick to qualify that “[t]his was supposed to humiliate him”.⁶⁴ History XXI demonstrates a similar thing: it is insisted that, throughout his relationship with the cold-blooded individual, XXI is the passive, unknowing, often reluctant object of sexual desire. XXI writes that their relationship “became to [him] a dry sort of ritual”, claiming that he felt like “a despised instrument, the mere spectator of an act”.⁶⁵ It is therefore feasible that Ellis, believing any of these acts to not be indicative of inversion, did not deem them arousing and thus was not concerned that they may promote same-sex sexual behaviours.

Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* instead censors moments of sexual intimacy, those that he, in the preface, deems “particularly revolting”.⁶⁶ Extended passages of Latin in case 115 and 123 obscure the pornographic accounts of the sexual lives of these individuals, since they depict healthy and varied homosexual sexual relationships. Put simply, Krafft-Ebing censors all, whilst Ellis selectively omits. What is particularly curious, though, is that – aside from these extended passages – very few words or acts are successfully censored by the Latin translation. When, in case 94, the individual writes that “in a mild state of intoxication, I grasped him *ad genitalia*”, very little of what occurred in this moment is obscured from even the casual reader.⁶⁷ Similarly, in the later claim that “it came to immissio penis in os, with resultant ejaculations”, all words but “os” can be deduced and, even in the absence of understanding “os”, sexual meaning and communicative value remains.⁶⁸ Of course, it is difficult to fully know the extent to which individuals may have understood Latin, even in such brief portions. However, following Dr. Schrenck Notzing's comments on the “pornographic interest” of the text, the large circulation and its numerous editions suggest that laypeople *were* able to translate and understand the censored portions. This pornographic interest, however, was not exclusively for same-sex attracted men: the moments of the text

⁶³ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 147, 149.

⁶⁶ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, v.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 192.

that are censored by Latin are not only inverted sexual moments, but heterosexual ones as well.⁶⁹ Krafft–Ebing treats the same-sex and opposite–sex attracted individuals the same throughout *Psychopathia Sexualis*, suggesting that this censorship is for the sexual content and eroticism of the passages, rather than the same-sex interactions.

A final, crucial consideration of the eroticism of these texts is what the studied individual hopes to achieve from his inclusion in them: what is the purpose of his confession, of his conclusion? Is he aware that his life will be published in such a way? The sources of the case studies included in both *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* are disclosed: most are in–person confessions, letters written to the doctor, or auto/biographies provided by another doctor to Krafft–Ebing or Ellis. It is uncertain whether any of these individuals consented to their own inclusion in these texts. However, since the cases studied in this thesis are not from the first editions of either Ellis’ or Krafft–Ebing’s texts, they were likely aware of the future publications of their confessions. In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, case 114 concludes his letter in the following way: “[p]ardon me, Professor, if I close without a signature. Do not try to find me. I could tell you nothing more. I give you these lines in the interest of future sufferers”.⁷⁰ This desire to help, to find, to reach out to other same-sex attracted individuals is found in many of the case studies of both texts: many of these individuals are reaching out, not because they feel that their attraction style is unnatural or unhealthy, but because they wish to share their lives with people similar to themselves. History XX “is convinced that his sexual dealings with men have been thoroughly wholesome to himself”; history XVII “appears to think that male attachments are perfectly natural”; history XXI claims that “[u]nder sexual freedom I have become stronger”.⁷¹ All of these closing statements suggest that these individuals have consulted the doctors not only out of struggle with their sexual attraction to those of the same sex, but also, having seen the broad publication of similar medical accounts, out of the belief that the platform these texts offer would be effective in sharing their experiences. The anonymity of these letters, though crucial for the confessing individuals’ safety, hinders the ability of these documents to foster an in–person community, but does not undermine their value as one–sided relational documents, distributed across many countries and passed through numerous hands. In this way, then, these documents had a wider reach than pornographic content published at a similar time and, because of this, could have a wider erotic impact.

Krafft–Ebing’s case 94 uses an earlier edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* to explain his condition to a friend, and seeks help from Krafft–Ebing to “transform [him] into a man of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 269.

⁷¹ Ellis, *Studies*, 144, 135, 156.

normal feeling”.⁷² Here we see, of course, the other side of the *purpose* of confession: the urge to find a cure. Case 94 approaches Krafft-Ebing in this way, as does 109, who is “much troubled about his sexual perversion, and wishes to be freed from it at any price”.⁷³ Common throughout these case studies is communication: inverts who wish to communicate their stories to others, who wish to communicate their trauma to a doctor, who wish to explain their identity to friends and peers. *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies* both allow the invert a voice with which to explain themselves whether positive or negative.

Whilst Krafft-Ebing and Ellis omit complete, detailed accounts, they allow through far more sexual content than one would expect from a censoring individual. The pornographic nature of many of their studies remains. What we see here is a new form of pornography, of erotic writing, a genre-bent sexology which distributes not only condition and cure, but sexual gratification on a large scale, and to a far wider audience than was ever possible for independently published pornographic texts.

⁷² Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 194.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 243.

Pushing Back: *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* as Confessional

The pornography of sexology considered, what of the sexology of pornography? It is on the level terrain of life writing that the sexological begins to alter the pornographic. It is through confession that the integration of sexology and pornography begins. Krafft-Ebing and Ellis' case studies are pornographic and the doctors themselves become pornographers by proxy: *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* push back, creating a confessional eroticism reminiscent of sexology.

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* discusses, though briefly, the function of confession in Victorian culture and the ways in which it was used to control, redefine and monitor sexuality. Confession was, to Foucault, "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth": it was integral to the nineteenth-century understanding of life.⁷⁴ Though religious in origin, the confession had, by this period, spanned beyond the confines of the Church.⁷⁵ Secular confessions, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* and Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, were becoming more common.⁷⁶ Moreover, as Foucault claims, the confession was now something one did "in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell anyone else".⁷⁷ Confession was now no longer restricted to the Church, and was moving into the home, the school, the hospital and the romantic sphere. Viewing confession as the result of power that is "relayed through so many points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us" is crucial in my understanding of the ways in which the key texts of this thesis engage with the confessional form.⁷⁸

At play in this form of confession is not only a narrative of one's life, but a series of intricate flirtations with power as well. The texts considered in this thesis are all inescapably bound up in the complexities of the confessional dynamic in ways which invariably contribute to their own relationships with eroticism. Slavoj Žižek, in *The Ticklish Subject*, comments on this, noting that there is a "self-referential turn in the relationship between sexuality and its disciplinary control: not only does the confessional self-probing unearth

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (Penguin Books, 2020) 58.

⁷⁵ See, for example, St Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961). Written between AD 397 and AD 400.

⁷⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. Peter France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Originally published 1790. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. (London: Vintage Books, 2013). Originally published 1821.

⁷⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 59.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

new forms of sexuality – *the confessional activity itself becomes sexualized, gives rise to a satisfaction of its own*”: confession *becomes sex*, just as sex becomes confession.⁷⁹ The genre of the erotic autobiography, the *autobiography* itself, is the result of the confessional content, whilst the relationship between the narrators of each text and their anonymous interlocutors introduces the other fundamental aspect of confession: that of the listener.

The listener is crucial in the confession: in traditional Catholic confession, this is the priest; in sexological confession, this is the doctor. The requirements for the individual to whom one confesses are unfixed, but Foucault’s conclusion is that one cannot confess without the “presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who... is the authority who requires the confession”: the individual to whom one confesses must be representative of, or personally hold, some power.⁸⁰ Both Krafft-Ebing and Ellis become this listener, this authoritative figure to whom their patients confess, and do so both in their own authority and by the authority of the medical profession as an emerging power in nineteenth-century Europe. Their presence is, therefore, predictable and known. What is less predictable is the involvement of a listener, a doctor-figure in both *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny*, to whom the narrative owes very little. Though the individuals to whom the protagonists of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* confess do not explicitly hold authority positions, their presence nonetheless creates the speaker/listener dynamic required for confessional narrative, and for the creation of the autobiography. The movement of these pornographic novels into the realm of life writing is a crucial aspect of their redefinition as erotic autobiography.

The Sins of the Cities of the Plain is presented as a confession from Jack Saul, the titular “Mary-Ann” to Mr Cambon, an individual who first approached Saul as a client, and who later requests the full recollection of Saul’s sexual life. Regarding Saul’s confession, Cambon asks that he “write it out, or give [him] an outline so that [he] might put it into the shape of a tale”.⁸¹ For Saul’s autobiography, the interlocutor pays “a fiver a week” for “thirty or forty pages of note-paper... tolerably well written”.⁸² This creates a confessional dynamic between speaker and listener, shaping the text more clearly as confessional, though with a slight difference to traditional confession: that of the financial contribution, explored further in this chapter. Taken entirely from Saul’s manuscript and presented – and likely edited – by Cambon, without overt interjection or questioning, the narrative of Saul’s life is presented by this anonymous listener to the reader, without any clear intention aside from the verbatim presentation of Saul’s tale. Compared to *Teleny*, in which the editor interrupts the narrative

⁷⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 2000) 254.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸¹ *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (Virginia: Valancourt Books, 2014), 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

frequently, this case study style narrative appears more confessor-led, since the reader is only reminded of Cambon's shaping hand through headings and sections such as: "Early development of the pederastic ideas in his youthful mind", "Some frolics with Boulton and Park", and "Further recollections and incidents".⁸³ These headings provide the confession with structure, shaping the narrative in the ways the editor desires; highlighting moments he deems particularly relevant or noteworthy and subordinating moments he feels are less so. In this way, the editor can guide the reader and the narrative without directly inputting his own thoughts, a technique reminiscent of that which is done by Ellis within his case studies.⁸⁴

Teleny, on the other hand, approaches the confessional form more directly. As in *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, the guiding voice provides access to the narrative, censors, interjects, introduces and concludes. *Teleny* begins "[t]ell me your story from its very beginning, Des Grieux," said he, interrupting me", establishing, from the first page, that this individual is intrinsically involved in the guiding of the narrative: he is willing to interrupt Des Grieux and request details of his life, both here and elsewhere in the text.⁸⁵ This individual notes, in the prologue, that "gradually [he] obtained from [Des Grieux] a full account of their relationship".⁸⁶ The inclusion of "gradually I obtained" suggests an initial resistance or hesitance from Des Grieux to disclose the details of his relationship with Teleny. This suggests that the relationship between Des Grieux and this anonymous editor is more formal than friendly since Des Grieux's confession required coaxing and was not immediately easily and freely shared. Of course, this could merely be the reluctance of an individual to disclose details of a tragic relationship so soon after it has ended, but the dynamic it creates between the two is curious nonetheless. The speaker asserts that "[t]he following account is not, therefore, a novel. Rather it is a *true* story", again framing the text as factual and confessional, rather than fictional.⁸⁷ The movement from sexological confession into pornography here is striking. The anonymous individual questions Des Grieux throughout the novel: shortly after hearing of Des Grieux and Teleny's first sexual encounter, he questions if Des Grieux "shuddered at the thought of having another man for a lover", then again suggests that he "would have been loath to have yielded [his] body for another man's pleasure".⁸⁸ This interest from the anonymous listener is

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 10, 45, 63.

⁸⁴ The way in which Ellis' case studies are structured imply a question-answer format to his approach: many of his studies end with a clear statement on the moral or legal implications of same-sex attraction as though answering a question. This kind of feature is perhaps a ghost of Ellis' editing influence. History XVIII, XX, XXI and many others conclude with such moral commentary.

⁸⁵ *Teleny*, 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

curious: is he a friend probing for more information; or a doctor, attempting to better understand the inner workings of his patient? This ambiguous relationship allows for speculation from the reader. The reader is aware that Des Grieux and this individual have been sexually intimate, but is also aware that this individual is repeatedly pushing for Des Grieux's full confession. Since it is never confirmed either way what the role of this listener is, there remains an ambiguity in their relationship which allows the reader to interpret the confession in both a sexological and non-sexological way. This ambiguity allows for the reader not only to interpret this relationship either way, but in both ways as well. In this way, we see sexology and pornography fully integrated in the relationship between these two men, since it is impossible to tell whether Des Grieux's companion is a doctor or a lover, or if he is both.

There is a functionality to the confessional nature of sexological texts like *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*: sexology was a field in which the very thing being studied was not easily accessed by doctors. The psychology of sex, that which Krafft-Ebing and Ellis both dedicated their careers to, could not be accessed without its willing confession by the patient. Whilst it is functional for Krafft-Ebing and Ellis to present auto/biographies of their patients' lives, what is not as clear is the function of confession in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny*. The question then follows: what does this confessional nature contribute to the pornography of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny*? Here, we see the beginnings of the blurring of boundaries typical of the erotic autobiography.

Once the pornographic begins to encroach upon the medical, there occurs a reciprocal shift in which confessional structure is eroticised by its inclusion in pornography. In her book *The Culture of Confession*, Chloë Taylor argues that, with regards to confession, "[w]hen power became interested in sex, a sexualization of power occurred": if power moves into the realm of sex, it is only inevitable that that power becomes sexualised or fetishised by those upon whom the power is being exercised.⁸⁹ The sexualisation of the relationship between he who confesses and the authority who listens is clear in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*: it is a lover that obtains Saul's confession, requesting a full account of his sexual history. The profession of this individual is unknown, but his wealth is apparent from his apartment, housekeeper and food offering of rump steak, oyster sauce and champagne, and his educational level is clear from the compilation of the manuscript and the headings he includes therein.⁹⁰ The relationship dynamic between these two individuals is clearly portrayed in the first chapter, contrasting *Teleny*'s lack of development in this regard. A key facet of the sexual relationship between the two is the financial imbalance: the first time

⁸⁹ Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009) 75.

⁹⁰ *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, 4.

Cambon requests confession is *during* one of their “orgies of lust”, offering financial recompense for it on top of the money he is already paying Saul for his sexual services.⁹¹ Responding to this by deferring the question asserts Saul’s own power, declining the immediate request for confession, despite the financial coercion on offer, and acts as a refusal to allow his identity and sexual life to be defined on another’s terms. Power imbalance, such as this, is an integral part of the sexual play of these two individuals: the power imbalance created by the confession, by their class differences, by their sexual preferences, and by the financial coercion are crucial in their relationship dynamic. In “Confession as Cultural Form: The Plymouth Enquiry”, Anne Hartman refers to a confessional master/slave dialectic in which “it may look as if the master has all the power, but since he is in a relationship of dependence with the slave, the slave has the potential to disable the power relation”, and that, in this way, “Because there are always two positions or players, confession lends itself to [such an] analysis”.⁹² A three-dimensional analysis such as this, considering the symbiosis of the relationship between he who confesses and he who receives the confession allows one to broaden further the ways in which confession can be eroticised.

The relationship between Saul and his Cambon in the opening pages of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* demonstrates Hartman’s suggestion of reciprocity between dominant and submissive. Shortly after Cambon’s request for confession, Saul ties him down and flagellates him, dominating him completely. To follow the organisation of confession with the immediate power play of Saul “tying [him] down over the easy chair, so that [he] could not flinch or get away from the application of the rod” suggests an attempt to reassert power in the relationship.⁹³ Similarly, Saul comments that Cambon is “not so young as [he is]” and on his “moderate sized cock”, again subordinating him during the sex act as part of the power dynamics with which the two play.⁹⁴ Saul’s power over this figure is clear from the start, despite the class differences between the two. Cambon’s attraction to Saul, particularly Saul’s penis, has “quite a fascinating effect upon [him]”, to the extent that he devotes a paragraph to it – longer in the ‘Badboy’ version of the text – and subsequently follows Saul down a “little side street” out of curiosity and sexual attraction.⁹⁵ With the power of sexual attraction comes, particularly at this point in time, the threat of exposition. Under the Labouchère Amendment of The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, “indecency between Males” or

⁹¹ *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, 10.

⁹² Anne Hartman, “Confession as Cultural Form: The Plymouth Inquiry”, *Victorian Studies* 47, no. 4 (2005): 537.

⁹³ *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3, 4, xxi. Note: The “Badboy” version of the text is not lifted from the original manuscript, but a falsified version of the novel. In this case, I include reference to it to demonstrate the obvious attraction of the speaker to Jack Saul, and the way in which this is hyperbolised by this Badboy edition.

“The attempt so to procure” was outlawed in both public and private, with the punishment being that of imprisonment.⁹⁶ Whilst Graham Robb argues that this had little impact, since “[c]onviction rates in the ten years before and after the Amendment were practically identical (55 per cent and 56 per cent), and there was no significant rise in prosecutions until the 20th century”, this does not offer us the full picture.⁹⁷ The lives of same-sex attracted men, though conviction rates did not significantly rise, were significantly altered, leading to this amendment being dubbed the “Blackmailer’s Charter” since it “suggested vaguely that any man committing - and anyone helping him to commit - ‘any act of gross indecency’, whether in public or in private, should be liable to up to one year’s imprisonment”.⁹⁸

Using this threat of exposition and the power play which results of it, Saul’s friend, Wilson, repeatedly coerces his clients out of more money, something which he appears to get equally as much pleasure out of as the sex work he performs.⁹⁹ Moving away from a simplistic domination/submission dynamic here is important in order to fully understand the complex and symbiotic power relations involved in confession as an erotic form. Through erotic confession, this text establishes a nuanced, power-heavy dynamic which contributes to the erotic atmosphere of the text. In this way, *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is an erotic autobiography which pushes the boundaries of pornography, of sexology and confession, and of the presentations of sexual power play, particularly with regards to prostitution.

In *Teleny*, the listener’s power relationship to Des Grieux is mostly ambiguous, but they are at one point described by this individual as “the most intimate of friends”.¹⁰⁰ Indicative of this intimacy and implying a sexual relationship between the two, Des Grieux comments “[a]s for my cock, or yours, its bulky head...”, implying that the two have been sexually intimate and challenging the idea that their relationship is solely professional.¹⁰¹ It is also possible that the eliciting of Des Grieux’s confession by a doctor-figure is a power dynamic that the two intend to create as part of a complex sexual interaction. The recollection of his sexual relationship with Teleny could provide Des Grieux with sexual satisfaction in its retelling, and, much like in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, the listener is equally as likely to take sexual pleasure from the listening to or reading of the confession’s erotic moments. The inclusion of the confessional in the sexual realm introduces a further complexity to the confessional format: that of confession *as* an act of sex. This sex of confession is created by two interrelated aspects of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and

⁹⁶ R. W. Burnie, *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885* (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1885), 6.

⁹⁷ Robb, *Strangers*, 20-21.

⁹⁸ David Hugh, *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality, 1895-1995* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 17.

⁹⁹ *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, 63.

¹⁰⁰ *Teleny*, 191.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

Teleny: the fetishisation of authority and the inclusion of the confessional form as part of the erotic content of these two erotic autobiographies. This confessional sex act is not performed just by confessor on authority, but by authority on confessor: both are involved in the act and contribute equally to the fantasy created.

Establishing confession as sex is further supported by the context in which Saul provides his confession to his editor. Here, the confession is not only elicited during the sex act but is an extension of it. Saul, as a prostitute, is paid for his sexual engagement by his clients.¹⁰² During the sex act, his client requests – for more money – that he write a comprehensive sexual history, thus extending the sex act beyond that moment and essentially requesting Saul create for him a private pornographic novel. This sexual transaction is profitable to both parties: Saul is paid handsomely and the individual who commissioned this erotic autobiography receives lasting erotic pleasure from Saul. Here, Foucault’s comment that “[w]e have at least invented a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure” becomes particularly appropriate.¹⁰³ The confession *about* pleasure becomes, in itself, pleasurable and what is created is an infinite feedback loop of pleasure, discussion, and the recreation of pleasure through this discussion. The repeated confession of one’s sexual experience eventually teaches one to associate sexual interaction and confession and, eventually, confession with arousal.

Confession becoming a sex act in this context does not necessarily mean that it is used as a sex act in all other contexts. However, in Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Ellis’ *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, it appears to play such a role. If the confessional is used in erotica as a sexual act, then its existence elsewhere must also, to some extent, be laced with eroticism. This being the case, the hundreds of confessions gathered by Krafft-Ebing and Ellis become similar in form to the collection of Saul’s and Des Grieux’s own erotic autobiographies. Could this sexual aspect be contributive to the number of these confessions? Harry Oosterhuis, in his “Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll”, touches on this, writing that “[f]or many of Krafft-Ebing’s... patients and correspondents, the whole process of telling or writing their life history, giving coherence and intelligibility to their torn self, might result in a ‘catharsis’ of comprehension”.¹⁰⁴ This statement links the assertion of identity with catharsis, the relief of confession here being a focus. It is plausible to push this catharsis one step further, to a sexual catharsis as has been above claimed. Oosterhuis continues to note that “several of

¹⁰² The word “prostitute” is used here due to how the individuals of these texts describe themselves. Though sex worker is now a more commonly used term, it would be anachronistic to apply such a modern term to the men discussed in these texts.

¹⁰³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 71.

¹⁰⁴ Oosterhuis, “Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll”, 152.

Krafft-Ebing's... patients, correspondents and informants did not just play a passive role", that they were active in seeking confession, rather than it being something which required extraction, suggesting a pleasurable aspect to the act of confession.¹⁰⁵ This catharsis, the erotic experience of confession itself, renders the confessions submitted to Krafft-Ebing and Ellis as miniature pornographies, eroticising these sexological confessions further.

Until this point I have predominantly discussed the eroticism of confession for the confessor, rather than for the authority who requires it. The receiver of confession – whether that is this authority or, further on in the text's literary existence, the reader – also experiences the eroticism of confession. In *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, the authority figure pays for Saul's confession as an extension of Saul's sex work and in *Teleny*, the implied sexual relationship between authority and Des Grieux suggests that the extraction of confession functions as part of their sexual dynamic. Of course, this is not suggesting that *all* authority figures receive pleasure from confession, but that, for some, the reception of confession establishes an arousing power dynamic or merely, in its discussion of sexual life, arouses by its very contents. As seen above, both Jack Saul's Cambon and Des Grieux's anonymous friend act as both sexual partners and confession-receivers, altering the role of the doctor-figure, of the listener. Ivan Crozier writes that what has prevented medical case histories from literary consideration in the past is the assumption that "all medical writing will be written in a passive, unbiased voice", that doctors could – and must – detach themselves from the studies in which they engaged.¹⁰⁶ If this was commonly the case, the inclusion of a sexualised authority who reciprocates that sexual interest in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* is a further generic challenge issued by these erotic autobiographies. Jeffrey Wallen, in his text *Closed Encounters: Literary Politics and Public Culture*, considers this argument: if all academic writing must be unbiased, removed from the subject, how can one write about pornography? How can one study sexual encounters? He writes that "[p]ornography undermines a pretence to a critical distance and a stance of aesthetic judgement, insofar as it negates any pure claim of disinterestedness. A purely "disinterested" experience of pornography... is finally no experience at all".¹⁰⁷ Bound up in the complexities of erotic confession is the relationship between listener and he who confesses; between doctor and patient.

What is established here is a confession which is not only erotic for he who confesses, but for he who receives. To bend the genre further, how does the reader of erotic autobiography experience the confessions within them? The reader's erotic experience with

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰⁶ Crozier, "Pillow Talk", 377.

¹⁰⁷ Jeffrey Wallen, *Closed Encounters: Literary Politics and Public Culture* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 102.

confession is intentional in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny*, since their purpose as pornography is the arousal of the reader. However, more crucially, erotic autobiography's eroticisation of the confessional form establishes a dynamic in which the reception of another's medical confession is sexually enjoyable for a reader completely detached from the narrative. Robert Beachy argues in "The German Invention of Homosexuality" that "[f]or a few, reading materials, including the publications of... Krafft-Ebing, took the place of human contact", indicating, though perhaps not explicitly, that this could be the case.¹⁰⁸ The voyeuristic sexual pleasure found in the private confession of another's sexual secrets introduces, then, another element which draws back to erotic autobiography's challenging tendencies: the progression of the text beyond the two individuals initially involved in the confession, the enacting of the sex act upon those not physically involved, something which I consider in my final chapter.

The question of where the reader stands with regards to erotic autobiography is a complex one: it concerns the potentially non-consensual distribution and invasion of some of the most intimate private confessions and the voyeurism of confessional accounts of the sex lives of many individuals. We can also never know the intention of the individual confessing; we may never know whether they were aware of the future distribution of their confession, although it is likely that they were aware this would happen, especially since the case studies considered in this thesis are not in the first editions of *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*.

Under Foucault's understanding of confession, that one cannot confess "without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who... is the authority who requires the confession," but that "[t]he obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us".¹⁰⁹ The authority to whom we confess need not carry any authority at all, since the "power that constrains us" has ingrained the very notion of confession so deeply within our psyches that confession seems like a natural and necessary process. In this way, the reader holds the same position of authority as the specific individuals who elicit it initially. Krafft-Ebing and Ellis are, of course, the original medical authorities, performing the role originally carried by the priest; but this does not mean that they are the only confession-listeners, nor are either of them the only one who "requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile".¹¹⁰ If the authority is he who has the right to judge, having heard the confession,

¹⁰⁸ Robert Beachy, "The German Invention of Homosexuality", *Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 4 (2010): 818.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 61, 60.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61–2.

then the doctor is no more qualified than the casual reader: confession requires only a confessor and an individual who listens. Furthermore, if any reader can replace the authority figure in the practice of confession, the confessions littered throughout the pages of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, *Teleny* and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* are sexual acts performed by the individual confessing upon the reader, reaching across the very recesses of hidden society, enabling sexual contact between educated, same-sex attracted men across space, and across time.

The sexualisation of confession is a fundamental part of the formal challenges issues by those texts which I have defined as erotic autobiographies. The confession is sexualised not only because of its sexual contents, but because the form *itself* is transformed by the erotic autobiography into sex. To confess, here, is to incite arousal, to evoke sexual feeling, and to engage in an erotic discourse with another individual in which power, language and truth are sexualised. What is of most importance here is the demonstration of the erotic autobiography's desire to tease genre, to push it to its limits: how can one fuck one's doctor? How can confession be sexual? How can sex be confessional? How, whilst Krafft-Ebing and Ellis encroach on the pornographic world, can queer pornographers disrupt the medical, sexological realm? The erotic autobiography concerns the dual integration of the two spheres of pornography and sexology into the middle of their unsuspecting venn diagram, and it is upon the seemingly neutral ground of confession that we see this begin to take effect.

Understanding Erotic Autobiography: Reading Selves, Speaking Selves

Understanding erotic autobiography to be that described above, the question follows: what are those involved in these erotic autobiographies attempting to do? The creation of erotic autobiography involves, in its confessional narrative, a crafting of the self for its authors. In typical Foucauldian fashion, discourse *creates* identity: he writes, in *The History of Sexuality*, that confession, in Western tradition, is “one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth,” that “[t]he truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power”.¹¹¹ Individualisation and confession are, to him, inextricable. Understanding that the ritual of confession creates identity, asserts identity, allows one to read the erotic autobiography in a different light. This chapter is a fine-grain exploration of *how* this Foucauldian work occurs. Where I part from Foucault, however, is the question of agency. The same same-sex attracted men who author these texts are reading them: there is power in their production of these texts. This chapter seeks to explore the relationship between the developing queer identity and the consumption and production of narratives about this identity. The application of modern identity theory to the queers of the past is a challenge: David Halperin’s essay “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality” claims that “[c]urrent analytic models that attempt to [document historic sexuality] by mapping shifts in the categories or classifications of an otherwise unchanging “sexuality,” or by insisting on a historical distinction between premodern sexual acts and modern sexual identities, simply cannot capture the complexity of the issues at stake”.¹¹² There is nuance required here. Because of this, this chapter does not argue for or against any specific identity, but instead explores the ways in which the narratives created and used in these autobiographies is indicative of and produces the internal identification with same-sex attraction.

The erotic autobiography is an integration of the ideas of sexology and pornography. To homogenise the genres of sexology and pornography in this way causes pornography to be viewed through the lens of sexology, and vice versa. The classifying intent of doctors such as Krafft-Ebing and Ellis influences the minds, lives and literature of same-sex attracted men, including their pornography. This integration of the two fields occurs first at the point of publication and distribution. Thomas Laqueur notes, in “Masturbation, Credit and the Novel During the Long Eighteenth Century”, that occurring very rapidly at the same time was “[t]he spectacular growth of a subset of publishing, for example, of books to be read with one hand – i.e., of pornography – and of popular medical tracts about sexuality – also probably

¹¹¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 58, 59.

¹¹² David Halperin, “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality”, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 88.

books read with one hand”.¹¹³ Not only were the two fields growing in parallel, but many of the key players overlapped: Sarah Bull writes that “[b]illing themselves ‘gentleman publishers’, entrepreneurs like Harry Sidney Nichols, Leonard Smithers, and Charles Carrington published expensive editions of erotic fiction, printed on handmade paper and set in luxury bindings. Alongside these works, they published and sold scientific works on sexuality, framing them, too, as luxurious, collectible erotica”.¹¹⁴ Smithers published *Teleny*, Charles Hirsch was involved in *Teleny*’s creation, and claimed to have sold Oscar Wilde *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*.¹¹⁵ As Bull argues, the men who published erotic fiction and the men who published sexological texts were, more often than not, the same men. Smithers, here, is a key name, as *Teleny*’s original publisher and the distributor of sexological works, likely including two of the key works in this field at this point in time, *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Frederick King, in “British Aestheticism, Sexology, and Erotica: Negotiating Sexual Discourses in “Teleny””, writes that “[b]y incorporating sexology’s scientific language, Carrington and other publishers such as Smithers could claim works of pornography as educational works of sexual science designed to promote public health”.¹¹⁶ The suggestion that it was the publishers and distributors who presented pornographic texts such as *Teleny* as sexological works undermines the ways in which these texts adopt sexological forms throughout in ways which the publishers could not control. This integration of sexological language and structure may have been an attempt to present erotic writing as the stuff of scientific study, but the identity explorations throughout these erotic texts suggest that the authors were actively reading sexological texts and integrating the issues of such texts into their erotic writing in an enmeshing of the genres of sexology and pornography.

That the men writing erotic autobiographies were reading both medical and pornographic literature concerning others like them is clear. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Ulrichs’ *The Riddle of “Man-Manly” Love*, written between the years 1864 and 1879. This text is a collection of essays asserting both a homosexual identity similar to that which we would recognise today and arguing for the full decriminalisation of same-sex sexual acts. Ulrichs’ text, a blend of medico–political writing and confession of personal experience, is an early example of erotic autobiography, not fitting comfortably in medicine, erotica, or life–writing. His text lacks the impersonal academic voice, instead pleading to the consciousness of his reader with rhetoric such as “[w]hat gives you the right to prevent two

¹¹³ Thomas W. Laqueur, “Masturbation, Credit and the Novel During the Long Eighteenth Century”, *Qui Parle* 8, no. 2 (1995): 3.

¹¹⁴ Bull, “More than a case of mistaken identity,” 15.

¹¹⁵ *Sins*, vii.

¹¹⁶ King, “British Aestheticism, Sexology, and Erotica: Negotiating Sexual Discourses in “Teleny””, 162.

people from having a loving relationship in body and soul, who want to find happiness together, which is everybody's right?"¹¹⁷ He does, however, include case studies throughout the text and follows a logical, quasi-scientific reasoning, particularly in his sections of "Anthropological Studies on Man-Manly Love".¹¹⁸ His blurring of genre in this way, though his erotic touches are few, places Ulrichs as a prototypical example of erotic autobiography.¹¹⁹ Ulrichs poses a problem in the study of erotic autobiography: he seamlessly integrates these genres in such a way that he appears to be a flawless example of the genre-bending desires of erotic autobiography. In this study, however, such radical examples of this blending are less relevant than those which demonstrate a broader shift between sexology and pornography. Ulrichs' inclusion here is as a prototype of erotic autobiography, an example of the texts same-sex attracted men were reading which influenced the creation of the erotic autobiography.

One of Ulrichs' most important contributions to the conversation surrounding the identity of same-sex attracted men is that of language. He distinguishes between "Urnings" and "Dionings"; men who are attracted to men and men who are attracted to women respectively.¹²⁰ His cultural impact was broad: he is referenced by Ellis' history XIX and XXV and by Krafft-Ebing himself as well as his cases 115, 122, 123 and 146. Ellis even includes a note early in the text that the term Urning had "a considerable vogue, but [was] too fanciful and high-strung to secure general acceptance", and pays his dues to Ulrichs by writing that "[t]he first in the field in modern times was Ulrichs who, as early as 1862, used the appellation "Uranian"". ¹²¹ Edward Carpenter, in his *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society*, written in 1894 acknowledges Ulrichs and the terminology of the Urning.¹²² Robert Beachy's *The German Invention of Homosexuality* states that, like Krafft-Ebing's writing, Ulrichs' works also "took the place of human contact".¹²³ It is clear that Ulrichs' text reached a great audience and had lasting cultural implications in the understanding of same-sex attraction both for those who experienced it and for those studying it.

Urnings, or those who possess "Uranian love", are "a class of individuals who are born with the sexual drive of women and who have male bodies".¹²⁴ Here, there is an attempt to define same-sex attraction under a trans-metaphysics, a movement towards an argument

¹¹⁷ Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love*, trans. Michael Lombardi-Nash (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994), 119.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62, 63.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹²¹ Ellis, *Studies*, 2.

¹²² Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: The Labour Press Society Limited, 1984): 18.

¹²³ Beachy, "The German Invention of Homosexuality", 818.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

for an innateness of identity. This theory is adopted by all of the four erotic autobiographies considered in this thesis. Krafft-Ebing, in the 1931 edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* considers “eviration” to be the second stage of the development of the manifestation of same-sex attraction.¹²⁵ He writes that “[i]f, in cases of antipathic sexual instinct thus developed, no restoration occurs, then deep and lasting transformations of the *psychical* personality may occur. The process completing itself in this way may be briefly designated *eviration (defemination in woman)*”.¹²⁶ Following this, he writes that, in certain cases of sexual inversion, “[t]he patient undergoes a deep change of character, particularly in his feelings and inclinations, which thus become those of a female”.¹²⁷ This is then exemplified by case 128, who writes to Krafft-Ebing that “[m]asculine pursuits do not interest me. I prefer novels and going to the theatre. I am effeminate, sensitive, easily moved, easily injured and nervous”.¹²⁸ The adoption of a theory posited by a same-sex attracted man over half a century earlier into mainstream sexological writing demonstrates both the pervasiveness of such a theory and the perceived evidence for it. Ellis similarly adopts this theory, explicitly stating that “[a] homosexual tendency may thus be regarded as simply the *psychical* manifestation of special characters of the recessive sex, susceptible of being evolved under changed circumstances”.¹²⁹

Similarly, the pornographic texts challenge physical sexual categorisation. If Ulrichs’ suggestion that same-sex attracted men are a third gender is read, understood, and adopted by Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, then its adoption by the pornographic texts considered is only logical. Ulrichs claims that “[e]very Uring is born with this [feminine] discomfort,” something that we certainly see throughout *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny*, though perhaps discomfort is not the most apt terminology in some instances.¹³⁰ From the first page of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* Jack Saul is regarded as equally feminine and masculine: Cambon writes that he was “taken by an effeminate... with almost feminine features” contrasted by a “very extraordinary development of the male appendages”.¹³¹ Contrary to the discomfort theorised by Ulrichs, there is a fetishisation of this sex-altering narrative, both

¹²⁵ This edition is used here due to Krafft-Ebing’s more thoroughly realised understanding of same-sex attraction. This understanding is, at this point, far closer to the arguments made by the same-sex attracted men that he previously studied and that tell their life stories throughout the other erotic autobiographies considered in this thesis. In this way, the 1931 edition picks up and summarises themes which are at play in both earlier editions of this work and in the earlier erotic autobiographies better than the earlier edition used elsewhere in this thesis. *Eviration*: The assumption of feminine characteristics, more commonly referred to as feminisation.

¹²⁶ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1931), 297.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 301.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³⁰ Ulrichs, *The Riddle*, 93.

¹³¹ *Sins*, 3.

from this editor and elsewhere in the text. Saul attends a ball in which he “[does] not believe there was one female in the room, for I groped ever so many of them, and always found a nice little cock under their petticoats”.¹³² Sexual engagement here is enmeshed with the simultaneously feminine and masculine body. This is not limited to this ball, and the invocations of the Boulton and Park narrative throughout contribute further to the fetishisation and sexualisation of Ulrichs’ proposed feminine discomfort. Saul, and the other characters within this text, are not uncomfortable with this inborn femininity in themselves and others, but are instead aroused and titillated by it. *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* uses this sexualisation of the hermaphroditism adopted by all of these erotic autobiographies in order to disrupt narratives of suffering: the novel presents the lives of same-sex attracted men as joyous, varied and sexually rambunctious, a pornotopic escapist interpretation of Ulrichs’ theories.¹³³

Teleny also adopts this fetish, though Des Grieux appears to receive more discomfort in his femininity than Saul. Ulrichs notes that “[t]he Urning is not a man, but rather a kind of feminine being when it concerns not only his entire organism, but also his sexual feelings of love, his entire natural temperament, and his talents.”¹³⁴ To Ulrichs, the femininity of same-sex attracted men is not exclusively a sexual thing, as in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, but can also be an emotional awareness or heightened feeling. same-sex attracted men were considered, as Matthew Sweet notes, “phenotypically male and psychologically female”.¹³⁵ Whilst *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* takes a physical and sexual approach to the feminisation of same-sex attracted men, *Teleny* focuses more on this interest in psychological trans-metaphysics. Krafft-Ebing writes of feminine and masculine temperament that “[a] woman loves with her whole soul. To her love is life; to a man it is the joy of life. To him misfortune in love is a wound; but it costs a woman her life, or at least her happiness”.¹³⁶ Des Grieux and Teleny are both described within the novel as “two handsome young human beings of refined sensibility, highly-strung” and prone to “flights of passion, which will doubtless not be understood by most men”.¹³⁷ Couple this with both of their suicide attempts when they feel that their relationship has ended and the picture that is created is one of extreme emotional sensitivity, more akin with Victorian conceptions of

¹³² Ibid., 41.

¹³³ It is particularly interesting here to consider the – albeit dubious – sequel to *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, *Letters from Laura and Eveline*, in which terminology such as “arse-quim” and narratives of enlarged clitori replace descriptions of penises. The body, in both of these texts, is a malleable and alterable thing, and is fetishised for its femininity by the lovers of these indeterminately sexed individuals.

¹³⁴ Ulrichs, *The Riddle*, 36.

¹³⁵ Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 197.

¹³⁶ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 14.

¹³⁷ *Teleny*, 192.

feminine feelings than of masculine. Teleny and Des Grieux are – more often than not – described as physically male, but this suggestion that they are mentally female is an adoption of Ulrichs’ feminine discomfort. This feminising of same-sex attraction demonstrates the erotic autobiographical desire to locate and violate boundaries not only of genre, but of physical sex as well. Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and the authors of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny* all present a theory of mental hermaphroditism regarding same-sex attraction, as demonstrated above.¹³⁸ The autobiographical genre allows same-sex attracted men to create narratives which accurately depict the ways in which they understand their own relationships and desires in this way, replacing narratives of deviance and criminality with hermaphroditic, biological and amoral explanations.

A crucial theme of these erotic autobiographies is that of the innateness of identity, adopting the idea of a biological, unchangeable difference from Ulrichs’ theories. Ulrichs writes that “[t]he Urning, who is born to love men and horrified by women, consequently is acting naturally when he, following his natural inclinations, flees from sexual contact with women and satisfies his sexual drive in the embrace and in sexual contact with some young man”.¹³⁹ This argument that same-sex sexual attraction is natural is one which Ulrichs staunchly defends throughout *The Riddle of “Man-Manly” Love* and which is adopted by the confessing individuals in *Teleny*, *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Throughout *Teleny*, Des Grieux grapples with his identity, struggling with his attraction to men and lack of attraction to women. He claims that “I afterwards came to the conclusion that I had felt the first faint stimulus of love already long before, but as it had always been with my own sex, I was unconscious that this was love” and that “Reason is no bridle to a passion which... is so deeply engrafted in our nature that reason can neither cool nor mask it”.¹⁴⁰ This love, this passion of which he speaks is, for him, exclusively for men. His desire to engage with men is not exclusively for sexual gratification: his sexual relationship with Teleny is more complex than a sequence of sexual acts, it is one of love, of enduring passion and care for his partner. This relationship is live-giving and identity affirming and allows both participants to achieve a full union with the beloved: “[their] breath gave life to [their] two beings”.¹⁴¹ Underpinning the whole relationship is the suggestion that these two individuals are *supposed* to be united, that it is in their *nature* to be attracted to each other,

¹³⁸ Hermaphroditism, though no longer used in reference to humans, is used here with reference to Ulrichs’ statement that “We Urnings, who are a special sexual species, are *similar to hermaphrodites*. As a *third sex*, we are on the same level as the male or female sex, but we are independent of the male or female sex, fully separate from both.” (Ulrichs, *The Riddle*, 36). Though no longer appropriate, the thesis uses this terminology instead of intersex or similar due to the clear anachronism.

¹³⁹ Ulrichs, *The Riddle*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ *Teleny*, 57, 158.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 110–111.

and to men in a broader sense. There is a similar creation and seeking of shared identity in *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Case 115 in *Psychopathia Sexualis* refers to himself as part of a group of similarly identified individuals, writing that “the majority of ‘aunts,’ like myself, in no way regret their abnormality, but would be sorry if the condition were to be changed”.¹⁴² This association of himself with other same-sex attracted men, alongside such an assertion that this “condition” is unchangeable – or something they are unwilling to change – creates an idea of community, and from it, of identity.

The influence of Ulrichs’ work on all four of the erotic autobiographies considered, and the ways in which these four texts then grapple with the theories proposed suggests that same-sex attracted men such as Ulrichs had far more control of the narrative than has previously been attributed to them. The individuals writing erotic autobiographies use the autobiographical form to define and assert their own identities. What is confession if not the crucial act of self-definition? To craft one’s life story and present it in such a way that one is perceived in exactly the way one desires; that is the core of confession. The confession of one’s acts and thoughts does not exist within a vacuum of truth. When one confesses, one shapes the tale told. This is what we see in the texts considered. Graham Robb suggests, in *Strangers*, that “[n]ot all homosexuals were the passive victims of interfering ideologues and medical missionaries”, that “[t]he traditional view of 19th century homosexuals as a helpless, silent minority, blinking in the torchlight of investigative doctors should at least be called into question”.¹⁴³ Reading the autobiographical writings of the four key texts of this study allows one to understand more than just a rejection of this helpless narrative of same-sex attracted men; it demonstrates the ways in which these men *sought out* doctors and pornographic modes of writing in which they could, without legal intervention, reinvent the narrative. Case 115 in *Psychopathia Sexualis* mentions Ulrichs as a method of signalling his identity as same-sex attracted, and history XXV in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* uses the term “uranian” alongside “homosexual” and “homogenic” when describing his identity and the identity of others with whom he has been acquainted.¹⁴⁴ It becomes clear, throughout the study of these texts, that the individuals writing them were instigators, not subjects.

Though reading and producing these erotic autobiographies in both sexological and pornographic literary circles, the narratives outside of these circles were more difficult to alter with any real impact. To write a broadly-published, widely-read text one had to adhere to certain conventions and restrictions, something which these fringe circles did not

¹⁴² *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 274.

¹⁴³ Graham Robb, *Strangers* (London: Picador, 2004), 67–68.

¹⁴⁴ Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 164, 163.

require.¹⁴⁵ The autobiography, then, could rebuff certain narratives often associated with same-sex attraction, particularly those of silence, that which Bosie Douglas referred to as “the love that dare not speak its name”.¹⁴⁶ Antonio Sanna, in his essay “Silent Homosexuality in Oscar Wilde’s *Teleny* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*,” writes of this theme that “[t]he aggressive enactment of heteronormative legislative power [causing] the systematic silencing of late–nineteenth–century homosexuals, who came to be very concerned about the possibility of being publicly exposed and ruined”.¹⁴⁷ Sanna argues that *Teleny*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* all invoke a narrative of silence as an “implicit queer rhetorical strategy to counter the late-Victorian medical discourses”, that it is a “silence of resistance”.¹⁴⁸ For Sanna, silence is invoked in these late-nineteenth-century queer texts as a direct and explicit reference to homosexuality, a resistance where resistance could not be loudly spoken. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick flirts with a similar idea, noting that the homosexuality’s “very namelessness, its secrecy, was a form of social control”.¹⁴⁹ Such narratives of silence were prevalent in nineteenth-century discourse on same-sex attraction: Robb notes that “reporters were often instructed by judges to omit the loathsome details, either for the sake of decency or to guard against the possibility that readers might try out the unspeakable acts for themselves and cause an epidemic of unnatural vice”.¹⁵⁰ This unspeakable vice was silenced, for fear that it would multiply if publicised, except in sexology and underground erotic writing. However, whilst this argument sits well with widely published and distributed novels such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or in newspaper narratives, a privately published pornographic text such as *Teleny* does not fit so comfortably into this category of silent resistance. There is nothing silent about the same-sex sexual acts found within *Teleny*. Though the narrative pays heed to the underground nature of same-sex attraction, the reader is privy to all that goes on in the sexual lives of the men about whom the text is written. In fact *Teleny*, as with the other three key erotic autobiographies of this thesis, presents a narrative of disrupted silence, of open and – mostly – uncensored speech.

¹⁴⁵ *The Picture of Dorian Gray* flirts dangerously with this line between moral acceptability and queer depiction, ultimately being used as evidence at Wilde’s trials (*Oscar Wilde*, Richard Ellmann).

¹⁴⁶ Alfred Douglas, “*Two Loves*” & *Other Poems* (Michigan: Bennett & Kitchel, 1990), 25.

¹⁴⁷ Antonio Sanna, “Silent Homosexuality in Oscar Wilde’s *Teleny* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*”, *Law and Literature* 24, no. 1 (2012): 24.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37, 36.

¹⁴⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 95.

¹⁵⁰ Robb, *Strangers*, 26.

Fundamentally, what we see throughout these autobiographies is the complete disruption and upheaval of the silencing of same-sex attraction. Sex, love and the social lives of these men are writ large in both the pornographic novels considered and the sexological confessions. The erotic autobiography becomes, here, the epicentre for that “epidemic of unnatural vice” that Victorian morality protectors were excessively concerned with. Confessional form, the ability to tell all of one’s life, is, perhaps, the greatest undermining of the narrative of silence. With large-scale published texts by or about same-sex attracted men being restricted to the use of the rhetoric of silence to convey queerness, and with media outlets and courtrooms omitting the details of sodomitic crime, both pornographic and sexological erotic memoirs were both able, in different ways, to present an open and thorough exploration of the lives of same-sex attracted men in the late nineteenth century. Those studied in sexology and those writing erotica were the same individuals, or moved in the same circles as such individuals, and these individuals were aware of the narratives of silence surrounding them. The disruption of these narratives is a reasonable response thereto, particularly when these individuals felt, as Ulrichs writes, “[excluded] from human society”.¹⁵¹

The texts studied in this thesis disrupt narratives of silence by their very existence. Though they directly address narratives of silence within their pages, these individual challenges fall short when compared to the moments in which the texts speak the loudest; during the detailed narratives of a community of men who have sex with men – both real and fictionalised. If silence is the dominant theme of queer existence, erotic autobiographies surely find the antidote in confession. In this way, the confessional form and the identities created within and shared between erotic autobiographies defy the silencing narrative imposed by late nineteenth-century society upon same-sex attracted men.

What emerges from this is a community of individuals consuming texts and, through the autobiography, responding to that which they have read. The publishing and selling of sexological and erotic texts by the same publishers contributes to the dissemination of ideas and themes between them, and Ulrichs acts as an early prototype for the erotic autobiography’s blending of the two and becomes a reference point for themes and ideas later adopted by same-sex attracted autobiographers. These same-sex attracted men did not, however, only consume sexological or pornographic texts, but were part of a wider literary heritage in which expressions of their sexuality were limited to certain codified narratives, particularly those of silence. These individuals use the autobiography to disrupt these mainstream narratives and develop an alternative literary narrative of same-sex attraction in which the autobiographical genre allowed them to openly discuss their sexual lives. The

¹⁵¹ Ulrichs, *The Riddle*, 71.

exploration of this alternative narrative – that of erotic autobiography – in this way becomes an exploration of the self, of personal genre and self-assertion.

Understanding Erotic Autobiography: Boundary Flirtations

Boundaries of the Erotic

My understanding of the erotic, provided in the first chapter of this thesis, allows for a working definition of erotic autobiography. However, once the erotic autobiography begins to disrupt its own genre, breaking down the erotic, I turn to Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex," which provides a brilliant analysis of the hierarchy of sexual activity in terms of moral righteousness and "sexual value." For my analysis of the boundaries of the erotic, I use her analysis in figure 1 of "[t]he charmed circle" and "[t]he outer limits" of sexuality. In her "outer limits", she places sexual acts that are homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, commercial, alone, group, casual, cross-generational, public, pornographic, sadomasochistic or with objects.¹⁵² Though Rubin's model is critical of these structures of sexual hierarchy, I use this model to demonstrate the dominant mode of thought regarding sexual deviance/acceptability. Of course, this model does not explore sexually arousing content, but provides a model for the acceptability of sexual behaviours which I extrapolate to represent the potential eroticism of such behaviours. Following this model of what 'should' and 'should not' be sexually acceptable, I explore the ways in which the erotic autobiographies probe the boundaries of the erotic and challenge these outer limits.

Thomas Joudrey's 2015 article "Penetrating Boundaries: An Ethics of Anti-Perfectionism in Victorian Pornography" draws attention to the tendency of Victorian erotica to "[grapple] with the terrifying prospects of bodily decay, suffering, and mortality, placing potency on a razor's edge . . . [eschewing] utopian fantasies of purity and immortality to reckon instead with the ephemeral pleasures of vulnerable bodies".¹⁵³ Instead of a world in which none of these things exist, Victorian erotic autobiography builds a world in which illness, trauma and struggle all *contribute* to its eroticism and the vulnerability of the human experience becomes part of the sexual act. Here, Joudrey writes about the physical vulnerability of the body, but it is not unreasonable to expand his argument: what he reads as "the ephemeral pleasures of vulnerable bodies" is, put simply, the pursuit of pleasure, in spite of the external world being imperfect. Joudrey's claims to anti-perfectionism are particularly fascinating with regards to their application, that which he calls war wounds.¹⁵⁴ These war wounds can be both physical and mental, and procure from the individual with whom one becomes intimate a kind of respect: "[t]he wound, earned during sex, elicits awe and

¹⁵² Rubin, "Thinking Sex", 13.

¹⁵³ Thomas Joudrey, "Penetrating Boundaries: An Ethics of Anti-Perfectionism in Victorian Pornography", *Victorian Studies* 57, no. 3 (2015), 424.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 429.

deference.”¹⁵⁵ Wounding becomes, here, a form of foreplay: physical and emotional struggle becomes conducive to eroticism in its very tendency to challenge the form, to challenge the notion of what can and cannot be sexually arousing. With this understanding of the sexual function of wounding, one can begin to understand the ways in which Victorian erotica sexualises the supposedly non-erotic, the sadomasochistic.

Emotional wounds, left on the mind rather than the body, function within *Teleny* in a similar way to Joudrey’s conception. Whilst physical wounding plays a role in the wider narrative of *Teleny*, its role in Des Grieux’s personal experience, in his confession, is far less relevant than the emotional struggle he experiences. Confessions such as “so when I understood what my natural feelings for Teleny were, I was staggered, horrified; and filled with dismay, I resolved to stifle them”, appear to undermine the sexual fantasy that has been generally regarded as the purpose of erotic writing.¹⁵⁶ Conscious thoughts of suicide, repression and shame, and of fear all appear challenging to eroticism, but function within this text as part of the peaks and troughs of the erotic narrative.¹⁵⁷ *Teleny* fixates upon sex as marking, as scarring, as damaging. The result of the sex act with Teleny, Des Grieux’s feelings are mental marks which cause him turmoil to the point of a suicide attempt. Des Grieux is indelibly marked by his feelings for Teleny, which make life a burden. And yet, this turmoil does not degrade the eroticism of the novel, but renews it: this wound contributes to the sexual narrative, it is eroticised by its contribution to the erotica. Des Grieux’s passion, that “[he] had tried to stifle... had burst out with renewed strength, entirely mastering [him]”, and this moment becomes erotically charged in the very turmoil it imparts, and in the sharing of this turmoil.¹⁵⁸

Inner turmoil and confession coalesce to eroticise Des Grieux’s most vulnerable moment: his attempted suicide. Des Grieux describes his experience to his doctor-figure as follows:

Before me in the mist, Teleny – like a vaporous angel of light – seemed to be quietly gazing at me with his deep, sad, and thoughtful eyes; below, the rushing waters had for me a syren’s sweet, enticing voice... I was already climbing on the parapet, decided to seek forgetfulness in those Stygian waters, when two strong arms clasped me tightly and held me fast.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 429.

¹⁵⁶ *Teleny*, 70. See, for example, Steven Marcus’ *The Other Victorians*, 46.

¹⁵⁷ Through Rubin’s understanding, I consider the eroticisation of suicide attempts and ideation a form of masochism.

¹⁵⁸ *Teleny*, 109–110.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

The desire to enter the mist, and its similarity with the beloved and the description of the water below as siren-esque, establishes a dynamic of sexual intrigue in the suicide attempt. To step into the mist, to fall into the water is, for Des Grieux in this moment, reunion with the beloved. It is no coincidence that the desire to enter, to become one with the desired individual is included here, in Des Grieux's darkest moment: his motive, here, is somewhat sexual. Following this contemplation of ending his life, Teleny pulls him down from the parapet, his "two strong arms" anchoring him back to the world in which the beloved exists. Regardless of Des Grieux surviving this attempt or not, he achieves – in his mind – sexual reunion with the beloved. His turmoil is healed both by his death and by his survival. In this way, Des Grieux eroticises his own suicide attempt as he retells it to his doctor. This not only challenges the boundaries of eroticism, but acknowledges the role that the confessional format has in the creation of an erotic dynamic throughout this text. In confessing this trauma, Des Grieux eroticises it through his language choices and unintentionally the confessional form.

Perhaps the most traumatising, though unquestionably sexual experience in the text is the fatal wounding of a Spahi, included as part of a description of an orgy, and intended to contribute to the eroticism of the text. The scene in which his fatal injury occurs transitions from intensely erotic to traumatising in just moments: Des Grieux claims that "[w]e were all breathless with excitement, seeing the intense pleasure the Spahi was feeling, when all at once, amidst the perfect silence that followed each of the soldiers groans, a slight shivering sound was heard, which was at once succeeded by a loud scream of pain and terror from the prostrate man, of horror from the other".¹⁶⁰ Here, pain and terror integrate seamlessly into the breathless excitement of the scene, making terror and arousal virtually indistinguishable. Prior to his injury, the pain the Spahi feels contributes to his sexual pleasure and, by proxy, the sexual pleasure of the onlookers. That the bottle is "ripping and almost quartering him" arouses both Spahi and observer and the Spahi claims that "[i]t did pain a little, but now it's all over", as his pain subsides into pleasure.¹⁶¹ Distinguishing between erotic and non-erotic pain here becomes all the more difficult: the ripping felt by the Spahi is explicitly erotic for both himself and his observers until, at the point of the bottle breaking, it ceases its arousing effect. The bottle breaking removed from this passage, it is impossible to know at what point the arousal ceases and terror begins. More likely, in fact, is that the two, for a moment, coexist. The Spahi finds pleasure in the traumatising of his own body. Pushing the limits of pain and pleasure contributes to his sexual play; the idea and feeling of ripping, for him, does not imply trauma but complete pleasure. This masochism, though clearly sexual, falls under

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 155.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 154.

the taboo umbrella of sexual acts and, though not exclusive to erotic autobiography, the challenging of the sexual norm contributes to the boundary probing of the genre.

It is important to note that this scene also exists in the landscape of Des Grieux's emotional trauma and erotic autobiography. Des Grieux notes that, following the shattering of the bottle, there was "a general *sauve qui peut*", a prompt exit of all onlookers.¹⁶² This allows him – and all other observers – to remain one step removed from the Spahi's death. This allows the scene to continue its eroticism, since the worst of the trauma Des Grieux experiences is a sexual interaction gone awry, rather than a death. The pain felt by the Spahi is erotic, then non-erotic, but never life-threatening until Des Grieux is removed from the situation, thus allowing for the man's death to be reduced to merely another sexual trauma, another war-wound: it is nothing more than a minor part of Des Grieux's sexual history. The narrative quickly moves on from this trauma. Des Grieux begins the next chapter with "[t]ime passed—" before being interrupted by the doctor-figure asking "[t]ell me, rather, what became of the poor Spahi?".¹⁶³ The implication that Des Grieux intended to continue the narrative without further mention of whether the Spahi died or not suggests that this event, to him, was nothing more than a subplot in his life. The Spahi's physical trauma does not last and, ultimately, is not what kills him: his death, a suicide, ends any lasting suffering from his wound. For himself and those who witnessed the imparting of the wound, it does not last.

I have previously argued that Ellis' inclusion of sexually traumatising moments in his case studies have been excluded from censorship since he assumed they could not be read as homosexual. This argument from *Teleny*, however, suggests that the trauma of these studies could be eroticised and contributes to the erotic narrative of each study in the same way. It could be that Krafft-Ebing's willingness to include, and allow to be eroticised, traumatised minds and bodies within his case studies had established a compulsion to do the same in other narratives about same-sex attracted men, the remnants of which could be seen in both *Teleny* and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Retelling history XX, Ellis includes a description of the punishment of an individual who was made to go "around the room on his knees and took each penis into his mouth in turn", with the intention of humiliation.¹⁶⁴ This sexual degradation functions in a similar way to *Teleny*'s sexualisation of traumatised experience. Trauma, particularly sexual trauma, confessed to another, retold within the context of erotic experience in this way becomes sexually arousing for listener and/or speaker, alongside its sadomasochistic interest. Sexual trauma is not inherently arousing: it is its inclusion *as* erotic in an erotic narrative which implies that these traumas function as such. Context is crucial in erotic interpretation.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁶⁴ Ellis, *Studies*, 140.

Furthermore, in XX's confession of his experience, the power dynamics at play also contribute to the eroticism of the scene. Whilst Ellis writes that the boy performing oral sex on his peers was "to be punished", XX does not appear to have experienced the experience in that way.¹⁶⁵ There is an ambiguity to the identity of the boy being punished which implies that this role may be assumed by a different individual each time, or could even have been XX himself. This introduces a domination/submission dynamic that is distinctly erotic. XX's relationship with domination and submission is certainly one of great arousal, as he recalls his sexual dreams of submission to nude, adult sailors invoking a similar narrative of complete submission.¹⁶⁶ This sexual punishment, as included in the confession of this individual, appears to push again at the boundaries of eroticism. These scenes are certainly arousing, particularly to this individual. The fantasy of submission surpasses any actual punishment occurring and the recollection of this punishment to Ellis re-eroticises the interaction. The sexualisation of power imbalance, the eroticism of confession and the sexualisation of trauma all coalesce here to eroticise this confession of trauma and find, for erotic autobiography, yet another boundary that it can eroticise.

What is particularly interesting throughout *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is an absence of this erotic trauma for Saul. He is aroused by others' trauma, but his own is scarcely mentioned in the text. Confession, a deeply personal act, requires an honest account of one's inner life, *including* difficult or traumatised moments, yet Saul either does not have any, or omits them. Whilst Saul does not undergo mental struggle or major physical injury, what we see throughout this novel is a less injurious relationship with trauma than Des Grieux has. For Saul, trauma is merely a facet of sex, just as kissing or genital contact. Throughout the novel, there are three crucial manifestations of sexual trauma that Saul fetishizes: pain, struggle or resistance, and marking. The first, pain, is present in almost all of his sexual encounters, though he rarely admits pain in passive sex. However, the most obvious application of this is the passage at the end of the text on birching. It is the first time in the text that Saul admits great pain, to the point that, at times, it comes across as anti-erotic. He writes that, even at the thought of being birched, "[his] poor prick had fairly shrunk up into his skin", the fear of pain removing all sexual appeal from this moment for him.¹⁶⁷ The birching begins, relentless, and he "wincd under the pain" and "almost screamed out".¹⁶⁸ Resistance, however, is futile for him and the pain soon brings pleasure, he writes "I began to experience a decided feeling of pleasure, my prick standing as hard as possible".¹⁶⁹ The transition from such pain that he loses sexual interest – a great feat for Saul – to

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶⁷ *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, 51.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 52.

complete pleasure suggests that even the anti-eroticism of his shrunken penis at the beginning of the passage was contributive to the whole sexual experience. The pain of this encounter and the way in which this pain subsides to allow for pleasure to be experienced retroactively eroticises all pain mentioned in the novel further, since even this pain – the worst Saul feels throughout the novel – is easily eroticised.

Saul also relays a story told to him by another prostitute, George Brown, who, rather than enjoying masochism, as Saul does, prefers to inflict pain upon his lovers. He tells Saul – and Saul tells his editor – of his exceptionally painful penetration of a young man called Joe, whom he eventually sells to a sexual club. Upon penetrating Joe with his finger, the boy “[screams] with pain and apprehension,” crying “Ah! oh! dear sir! Oh! oh! pray don’t; you’ll split me!”¹⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, Brown mentions “[i]t must have been awfully painful, for he writhed and struggled to free himself from me, and went flat on the bed with a deep sigh, which would have been a scream but for the gag”.¹⁷¹ Throughout both this novel and the other erotic autobiographies considered, the pain always subsides to a pleasurable experience, an idea which pervades throughout much other erotic writing.¹⁷² However, for Joe, this is not the case, something which arouses Brown further. He notes that “[t]he fact that I was inflicting awful pain only added to my lust... I pushed on till... I could see little drops of blood ooze from him at every motion of my prick”.¹⁷³ Here, inflicting pain is crucial to Brown’s sadistic sexual satisfaction, regardless of the effect it may have upon his partner. The eroticisation of inflicting pain, coupled with the above consideration of the eroticisation of receiving pain suggests that the erotic autobiography is concerned with sexualising traumatising experiences for both oneself and others. The death of the Spahi and George Brown’s domination of Joe both demonstrate the ways in which the flexing of the boundaries of what is and isn’t sexy can be pushed too far by aroused individuals.

Elsewhere in the text, Lady Diana and Miss Wilson resist Saul’s sexual advances, thus establishing a similar dynamic to Brown’s sexual experience with Joe. Their resistance, in Saul’s eyes, is part of the sexual act, and not a genuine resistance. What is, in all other situations, sexual assault functions here as commonplace sexual play. During Saul’s sexual interaction with Lady Diana, he “struggled” until Diana finally yields to his attacks.¹⁷⁴ Miss Wilson’s complete subjugation by Saul and another man in which she is described as “powerless in [their] hands” uses a similar fetishisation for a lack of consent.¹⁷⁵ This

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 73, 74.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷² An obvious example here is Marquis de Sade’s writing, such as *Justine*, or the definite interest in sado-masochism found in *Letters from Laura and Eveline*.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 28, 29.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 53.

interaction, the systematic humiliation of the young lady, is something which Horner – the other man involved – “took quite a particular pleasure in”, and that Saul claims to have “never enjoyed anything more”.¹⁷⁶ The sadism at play here is clear, and the integration of mock–assault into sexual play is a further way in which the text sexualises and fetishises trauma. The difference between *Teleny* and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is striking: whilst *Teleny*’s concern with traumatised experience is emotional, is eroticised predominantly by its inclusion in the retelling of Des Grieux’s life; the characters in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* revel in it, they enjoy the struggle of the sex act. Trauma, here, is eroticised before its confession, and eroticised again in its retelling.

The eroticisation of pain is not the only boundary of sex pushed by these texts. Threat and coercion are both sexualised by the narratives of *Teleny* and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*. In *Teleny*, Briancourt – a former lover of Teleny’s – sends Des Grieux an anonymous note reading “[i]f you do not give up your lover T—... you shall be branded an *enculé*”.¹⁷⁷ This threat to expose the relationship between Des Grieux and Teleny and brand Des Grieux a catamite is immediately preceded by an extended sexual interaction between Des Grieux and Teleny, thus undermining the erotic effect of the interaction: one is left with fear, rather than sexual satisfaction. This disruption of the sexual mood by Des Grieux’s “utter prostration” after reading the letter is odd, considering the status of the text as, supposedly, pornographic.¹⁷⁸ We see here an interruption of the erotic with the fear of incarceration, of social outcasting and potential physical danger. This fear, however, does not interrupt the eroticism of the narrative for long: following their next sexual encounter, Des Grieux states that “I recovered my senses and my eyes fell again on the repulsive anonymous note”.¹⁷⁹ Teleny assists Des Grieux in resolving the problem, tells him who the anonymous author of the note was, and abates his fear, allowing the two to form further trust. This threat to their relationship is not only resolved, but allows for their relationship to deepen and their sexual interactions to continue. What remains, though, is the lingering threat of exposure, now introduced and constantly in the background of their relationship.

The existence of this threat of exposure, and of the Labouchere amendment’s influence on the lives of same-sex attracted men, however, does not stop Cambon from following Saul down a side street and propositioning him, inviting him to “have a cigar and a chat with me, as I see you are evidently a fast young chap, and can put me up to a thing or two?”.¹⁸⁰ To this, Saul replies “[p]ut your thing up, I suppose you mean”, a clear sexual

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 53, 54.

¹⁷⁷ *Teleny*, 132.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁸⁰ *Sins*, 4.

innuendo.¹⁸¹ In this interaction, what appears most curious – particularly to a modern reader – is the lack of apprehension or turmoil about Saul’s sexuality, or even his political opinions: to proposition a stranger, especially at a time when the very act of doing so could land one in difficulty with the law is a dangerous decision. This establishes the text as taking place in a Victorian London which, though this danger of the law is still present, is far more relaxed in this regard than it was in reality.

Though relaxed, this threat of the law is not entirely absent: Cambon informs Saul “[I] wish to keep myself out of trouble” when asked why he is not more forward in his request to engage Saul sexually.¹⁸² A more obvious example of this is Saul’s recollection of the lives of the prostitutes with whom he works. Young Wilson uses the threat of “[raising] the house” and the fear of exposure, to manipulate more money out of a potential client.¹⁸³ George Brown also uses this same threat of exposure to manipulate clients out of their money, openly calling them by their full names in public alongside accusations of sexual misconduct.¹⁸⁴ These narratives represent a kind of retribution narrative, an eroticised exchange in which the power of the client is yielded to the prostitute. Young Wilson claims “[t]here’s nothing like bleeding one of these old fellows; and young ones are better still”, whilst George Brown clearly takes great joy in the extortion of Simeon Moses, noting smugly “[y]ou should have seen him start as I mentioned his real name”.¹⁸⁵ To these two men, there is a sexual satisfaction in the retributive fantasy. There is a consistent association in their lives between sex and finance, and it is only reasonable to suggest that the ascertaining of more money may, to these individuals, hold some sexual satisfaction, particularly in light of their demonstrations of the enjoyment of such manipulation. The eroticisation of the law and the power it gives to these individuals is just one reason why the author of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* does not entirely remove the criminality of gross indecency from the erotic fantasy of the text. Not only is there this eroticisation of the law, but the eroticisation of another of Rubin’s “outer limits”: that of commercial sex, or sex for money.

What becomes clear, upon the study of these erotic autobiographies, is that, within them, there exists a desire to probe the boundaries of what can and cannot be considered sexual. The distressed, pained, traumatised body is a site upon which sexual fantasy can be enacted and which the enacting of those fantasies creates. Similarly, the coercive, threatening power of the law is sexualised, contributing to the erotic play of the characters in the novels. Perhaps this is, as Joudrey writes, “the typical stuff of Victorian erotica”, or perhaps it’s

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸² Ibid., 4.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 65.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 64, 65.

indicative of what we have already seen of the queer erotic autobiographies considered: the desire to disrupt, to alter, to redefine categories.¹⁸⁶

Boundaries of the Autobiography: Moral and Legal Conversations

On the reverse of the medal of this generic formation is the attempt to define the autobiographical. As discussed in the previous section, these erotic texts exist in a moment in which they are feeling out the boundaries of what it means to be erotic. This attempt at self-definition includes the eroticisation of topics that may not be often considered such. The autobiography is similarly being flexed by the attempts at genre-defining from these texts. All of the erotic autobiographies present themselves, as I have previously mentioned, as literary accounts of an individual's life. The autobiographical nature of these texts is crucial in their existence and in their study in this thesis. Throughout these erotic autobiographies, though, there is speculation on socio-political issues which functions as a challenge to the autobiography itself. The personal, introspective nature of life writing is put into question through the discussion of legal issues and the reference to events which occurred outside of the autobiographers' personal experiences. As Deborah Britzman writes in "Queer Pedagogy and Its Strange Techniques", the queer project's

...bothersome and unapologetic imperatives are inherently transgressive, perverse, and political: transgressive because it questions the regulations and effects of binary categorical conditions... perverse because it turns away from utility even as it claims deviancy as a site of interest; and political because it attempts to confound instituted laws and practices by putting into place queer representations on their own every day terms.¹⁸⁷

Here we see the political imperative move into the spotlight, as well as the transgressive as the autobiography is shifted and redefined.

The desire to challenge legal and moral opinion is pervasive throughout all of the erotic autobiographies considered. Des Grieux, when asked by the anonymous interlocutor "you did not consider sodomy a crime?" responds "[n]o; had I done society any harm by it?".¹⁸⁸ Here, the author of the text asserts not only Des Grieux's own identity, but the inextricability of that identity from legality. As he accepts his feelings for Teleny, his first true act of identity assertion is to address the moral and criminal status of the sex acts in which he had engaged. This argument for legalisation and acceptance has a role – though

¹⁸⁶ Joudrey, "Penetrating Boundaries", 424.

¹⁸⁷ Deborah Britzman, "Queer Pedagogy and Its Strange Techniques", *Counterpoints* 367 (2012): 294.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

often minor – throughout all of the erotic autobiographies considered, and the assertion of same-sex attraction’s innateness is a common thread throughout. In *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, history XXIV’s only direct contribution to his own autobiography is “[a]s a medical man, I fail to see morally any unhealthiness, or anything that nature should be ashamed of, in connection with, and sympathy for, men”.¹⁸⁹ History XX, though not in his own words, is able to comment politically through Ellis: Ellis writes of him that “[a]lthough he always has before him the terror of discovery, he is convinced that his sexual dealings with men have been thoroughly wholesome to himself, largely increasing his physical, moral, and intellectual energy, and not injurious to others. He has no sense whatever of moral wrong in his actions, and he regards the attitude of society toward those in his position as utterly unjust and founded on false principles”.¹⁹⁰ What we see through both of these histories is the assertion that they are doing no harm, echoing Des Grieux’s “had I done society any harm by it?”.¹⁹¹ History XXV, allowed full control over his autobiography, writes in the final paragraph that “the tragedy of our fate is that we whose souls vibrate only to the touch of the hand of Eros are faced with the fiercest taboo of all that can give our lives meaning”, and asks “[h]ow long are the western moralists to maim and brand and persecute where they do not understand?”.¹⁹² Morality and harm-reduction are crucial in all of these arguments for social equality. These petitions for equality in themselves are historically significant challenges of the criminal status of same-sex sexual intercourse, but their inclusion in these erotic memoirs is curious in their challenge to the autobiography. In a case study of one’s own life and love, why are these men using their limited space and time to argue a case that wasn’t directly under threat by the discussion in which they are engaged? In the limited space these individuals have to write their erotic confessions, they choose to write politically and, in doing so, assert not only a challenge to the political issues with which they grapple, but to the genres in which they are placed. Identity, genre and politics all clash here as the external and internal collide.

Such political assertions are less frequent in Krafft-Ebing’s case studies: though still common, one cannot guarantee that there will be one at the end of each study, as in Ellis. Case 115 is the most noteworthy in this case, writing at length in the close of his statement about the ways in which he feels that his identity should not be policed. Here, I use “identity” and not sexual habits out of respect for his personal usage of “Aunts”, an identity term used similarly to how we would now use “homosexual”.¹⁹³ Political commentary and identity assertion here unite under a straightforward statement that

¹⁸⁹ Ellis, *Studies*, 162.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁹¹ *Teleny*, 133.

¹⁹² Ellis, *Studies*, 168.

¹⁹³ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 274.

...the majority of ‘aunts,’ like myself, in no way regret their abnormality, but would be sorry if the condition were to be changed; and, moreover, since the congenital condition, according to my own and all other experience, cannot be influenced; therefore, all our hope rests upon the possibility of a change of the laws with reference to it, so that only rape or the commission of a public offence, when this can be proved at the same time, shall be punishable.¹⁹⁴

Here, in what is intended as an account of a life, we find instead a conclusive statement petitioning for the legalisation of those “affected with inverted sexuality”, himself included.¹⁹⁵ Case 115 is, then, not only one of Krafft-Ebing’s most erotic studies, but it is also one of his most political ones: though an eroticist and an autobiographer, he also takes the role of theorist, speculator. In his study, this individual asserts his own identity, the identity of others like him, and communicates openly and unflinchingly about his own sex life, resisting the societal restrictions placed upon him.

Though they push at the autobiographical form through their political assertions, the case studies found in Krafft-Ebing’s and Ellis’ texts are certainly autobiographical nonetheless. However, *Teleny* and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* are less confidently placed in the category of autobiography. H. Montgomery Hyde writes, in *A History of Pornography*, that “[a]lthough some of the details of the incidents described in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* may be exaggerated for effect, the work is based upon fact and no doubt gives a faithful enough picture of a seamy side of contemporary London life”.¹⁹⁶ The reference to real events – specifically real trials and scandals – is something which both *Teleny* and *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* use as an anchor to reality and to present as more factual, though this pulls one out of the autobiographical nature of the text. *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* has a chapter titled “Some Frolics with Boulton and Park”, two individuals who were arrested whilst wearing drag to the theatre in 1870.¹⁹⁷ In the text, Boulton and Park are introduced by Saul in the following way: “[y]ou remember the Boulton and Park case? Well; I was present at the ball given at Haxell’s Hotel in the Strand... Boulton was superbly got up as a beautiful lady, and I observed Lord Arthur was very spooney upon her”.¹⁹⁸ Matthew Sweet writes that Boulton and Park were “charged with frequenting the Strand Theatre with the intention to commit a felony”, and that they were “intimate connections” of Lord Arthur Clinton.¹⁹⁹ The depiction of Boulton and Park is intended to be

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 274.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 274.

¹⁹⁶ H. Montgomery Hyde, *A History of Pornography* (London: Heinemann, 1964) 141.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 45. For more detail on the Boulton and Park case, see Neil McKenna, *Fanny and Stella: The Young Men Who Shocked Victorian England* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014).

¹⁹⁸ *Sins*, 38.

¹⁹⁹ Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians*, 198.

as close to reality as is possible. Not only is this case included in the novel as a wry nod to reality, in the essays at the end of the text, the speaker states that “[j]ust as this is going to press there is a case in the London *Daily Telegraph* of July 9, 1881, in which a corporal of the Scots Guards is caught in the act of committing an unnatural offence at a coffee house in Lower Sloane Street”, an article on a real case which Neil Bartlett located and reprinted in his text *Who Was That Man?*²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Sarah Bull, in her article “Reading, Writing, and Publishing an Obscene Canon”, writes that “*Sins* depicts its protagonists’s sexual confessions as a true record of events that may be extrapolated to understand the sexual practices and psychology of young male “sodomites””.²⁰¹ What we see throughout *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* is an assertion of the narrative as a confession despite our understanding of the novel as fictional.

Teleny also adopts real cases and includes them in its narrative, most notably that of the Bishop of Clogher. Des Grieux says to his anonymous editor: “[o]ne you have most likely read about, for it was in all the papers at the time it occurred. An elderly gentleman, whose name I have quite forgotten, was silly enough to be caught in the very act of sodomizing a soldier – a lusty young recruit lately arrived from the country. The case made great ado, for the gentleman occupied a foremost position in society, and was, moreover, not only a person of unblemished reputation, but a most religious man besides”.²⁰² Though not as transparent as the references in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, which use dates and names, this is a clear reference to the case of Percy Jocelyn, Bishop of Clogher, in 1822. In *The Great Unfrocked: Two Thousand Years of Church Scandal*, Matthew Parris writes of the case that “in July 1822 [Jocelyn] was discovered in the back room of the White Lion, public house, in St Alban’s Place, off the Haymarket, with a soldier named John Moverly”.²⁰³ This scandal was so broad that, according to the Archbishop of Canterbury “it was not safe for a bishop to shew himself in the streets of London” and that “the Home Secretary was prepared to pervert the course of justice to prevent a trial taking place in this country”.²⁰⁴ The reference in *Teleny* to a religious man “sodomizing a soldier” would likely have called this particular case to mind.

Why, then, do these two erotic autobiographies include these detailed, specific references? Not only do they challenge the erotic by the inclusion of reference to cases in which prosecution has occurred for the very acts included within the texts, but they challenge the autobiographical in the process. Life-writing is the detailed recounting of one’s own life and the events through which one has lived. The inclusion of events in which the protagonists

²⁰⁰ *Sins*, 82. Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1988), 104.

²⁰¹ Bull, “Reading, Writing, and Publishing an Obscene Canon”, 240.

²⁰² *Teleny*, 158.

²⁰³ Matthew Parris, *The Great Unfrocked: Two Thousand Years of Church Scandal* (London: Robson Books, 1998), 146.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

are in no way involved is a curious choice from the speaker, but appears to be intended to ground the texts in reality. The blurring of genre typical of erotic autobiography is evident here, in the shifting between factual depictions of late-Victorian London and erotic exaggerations.

Whilst *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* integrates factual elements directly into the erotic plot of the text, the only line drawn between the “Essays” and Saul’s “Recollections” is their physical separation. The author of these essays is ambiguous: there is no confirmation that it is Saul, and the tonal shift of the writing appears to confirm that it is likely not. In “A Short Essay on Sodomy, Etc”, the speaker appears to be an academic, writing speculatively on how he has made “the most careful research” into his claims.²⁰⁵ The vagueries at play here are clear: there is little behind these claims that would resist any legitimate interrogation. The speaker writes that “although we have made the most careful research, we do not know of many professional male sodomites in London”, a wry comment which suggests that the speaker has spent considerable time searching for “professional male sodomites”.²⁰⁶ Jokes like this, implying the speaker’s proximity to the subjects on which he writes, undermine the faux-academic, detached approach he takes to sodomy. In this way, this essay takes the academic, the doctorly commentating voice and eroticises it in a wry parody. Similarly, in “The Same Old Story: Arses Preferred To Cunts”, there is a short study supposedly written by a headmaster of a school. The narrator writes that “[t]he prevalence of sodomy amongst schoolboys is little suspected of being so general as it really is. Only lately a medical man of large practice was called in to consult with the master of a large academy, where it appears the scholars had learnt something much more interesting than Latin or Greek. His tale is given just as he related it to the doctor”.²⁰⁷ This introduction frames the narrative which follows as a medical account, provided by the master of a school to a doctor, though its legitimacy is undermined by humorous comments with same-sex implications such as describing the sexual learnings of the boys as “much more interesting” than Latin or Greek. Though this kind of interjection creates a journalistic tone, its lack of condemnation of the sexual interactions of the boys allows for a humorous reversal of the scandalising, newsworthy narratives usually presented. This framework does not, however, prevent the account from being clearly intended as erotic. In this essay, the master confesses to the doctor “[t]he fact is, doctor, I couldn’t help frigging myself, and we all seemed to come at the same time”.²⁰⁸ Not only is the experience being erotic for the headmaster contributive to the eroticism of the scene, but the detailed description of the ways in which “the boys were

²⁰⁵ *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, 84.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

fucking each other's arses" proves that this particular essay is intended to directly parody and eroticise sexological works such as Krafft-Ebing's or Ellis'.²⁰⁹ The content aside, here, as previously seen, the inclusion of the doctor and the role of confession is invariably contributive to the erotic elements of erotic autobiography. This "essay" acts, in itself, as a microcosm of the wider text and the wider genre of the erotic autobiography: the confession to the doctor is a parodic erotic act and, in its very parody of erotic confession, it alerts one to the ways in which the narrative of the novel itself contributes to the very genre it parodies.

What is seen throughout all of these erotic autobiographies is an exploration of the boundaries of their own genres. The pornographic, the sexological, the erotic and the autobiography are in flux, and the description of same-sex attracted individuals within these texts adds another layer of uncertainty of definition. Because of this, what is seen throughout all of these texts is a consistent push towards the extremes of that which they study: the scope of the erotic is tested and the definition of autobiography is challenged. Fundamentally, the challenges laid down in the project of defining the erotic autobiography are reinstated here as it begins to redefine itself. How can one pin down the definition of the erotic, of the autobiography, when the texts to which you are attempting to apply such a definition are threatening to undermine it at every turn? The genres of erotic and autobiography are thus upturned, and the final project of erotic autobiography follows: the disruption of its contents.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 83.

Understanding Erotic Autobiography: The Intercourse Itself: Textual Intercourse and Telepathy

We witness occurring throughout all four of these erotic autobiographies a movement towards the complete removal of the body as an element of sex. That is not to argue that, for same-sex attracted men, sex is not or was not a physical experience, but instead to argue that the boundaries of sex in these erotic autobiographies were being pushed in much the same ways as they push the boundaries of genre. Considering Krafft-Ebing and Ellis' texts as erotic, the sexual power dynamics of confession, the creation of community and identity from a distance; all of these things contribute to the creation of a non-proximate sex act, a sex *without* the body. The dual definition of intercourse – both sexual and communicative – is used throughout this chapter as a flirtation with the ways in which these erotic autobiographies broaden the sexual act beyond just the physical, using social intercourse as sexual intercourse.

Distant intimacy is perhaps the essence of erotic writing. What is the purpose of erotica if not to perform sexual acts on individuals from a distance, to arouse without the physical involvement of one's own body? Jack Saul provides the anonymous editor of his notes with his erotic autobiography as part of their sexual transaction: he is paid money for it, it is requested *during* a sexual encounter, and it provides its reader – here, the editor and later, the reader of the published notes – with sexual pleasure. As a communicative piece of writing, an autobiography, it becomes a piece of *intercourse* between its author and its readers: it is, in its simplest form, a piece of sexual intercourse. Erotic autobiography becomes the epitome of bodiless sex, of sex of the mind. *Teleny*, similarly, exists as a form of sexual intercourse, between Des Grieux and his companion, and between Des Grieux and the reader. To understand Krafft-Ebing's and Ellis' studies to be enacting this distant intimacy is not an impossible leap, particularly in light of the texts' communicative intentions. Could it be that understanding that these texts are a form of sexual intercourse between he who confesses and he who listens contributes to the eroticism of the text? If one understands that the text one is reading is *intended* as sexual communication, does it contribute further to the sexual experience one has with the text, even if the sexual communication is not directed at oneself? If this is the case, erotic autobiography is dually sexually intriguing: firstly, because of its erotic content, and secondly, because of its erotic *existence*; the ways in which it *is* sexual intercourse. Having a conversation about sex *during* sex itself is perhaps the distilled idea here. What occurs, when sexing autobiography, is the sexualisation of the mind, of the communicative ability of the texts, the creation of sex without a body.

Textual intercourse can be read as a non-proximate sexual act: the erotic autobiography becomes a sexual act across an unknown distance. It has been acknowledged that the texts considered in this thesis functioned as a proxy–community for same-sex attracted men: as noted previously, Beachy writes of the way the texts of Krafft-Ebing and Ulrichs took the place of human contact for many of those who read them.²¹⁰ For men who could not access sex with other men, these “reading materials”, which likely included pornographic writing, provided an access to others who felt the same way as they did. We know that same-sex attracted men sought community at this time: case 115 writes in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, “[a]s soon as individuals that are affected with inverted sexuality become acquainted, there is a detailed narration of their experiences, loves, and seductions, as far as the social difference between them allows such entertainment”.²¹¹ What is essential here, however, is the relaying of the “loves, and seductions” of these men: the community certainly functioned as socially unifying, but its sexually unifying function was perhaps more crucial. Jeffrey Weeks writes, in “Inverts, Perverts, and Mary–Annes: Males Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” that “[t]he most basic purpose of the homosexual subculture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, was to provide ways to meet sexual partners”.²¹² In the absence of being able to *meet* one’s sexual partners, could the homosexual literary subculture of these erotic memoirs function from a distance, through textual intercourse? If these texts are erotic, as has been previously discussed, and, as Beachy claims, if they “took the place of human contact”, then they can be read as a form of sexual intercourse which does not involve the physical body. In this way, these erotic autobiographies themselves become a form of textual intercourse in which the body is removed and the sexual act is performed on the mind without the need of a proximate partner.

Not only do these texts perform textual intercourse on the mind by their very existence, but *Teleny* takes this interest in distanced sexual intercourse a step beyond: to that of telepathic sexual intercourse. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the sex in which Teleny and Des Grieux engage at Teleny’s first concert. Etymologically, telepathy is taken from *tele–*, meaning distant, and *pathos–*, meaning touch or intimacy: an oxymoronic notion that *Teleny* embraces. The name Teleny even alludes to this distance between Des Grieux and himself, the distant intimacy in which they must engage for much of their relationship. During Des Grieux’s masturbation at Teleny’s concert, the hand that

²¹⁰ Beachy, “The German Invention of Homosexuality”, 818.

²¹¹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 274.

²¹² Jeffrey Weeks, “Inverts, Perverts, and Mary–Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries”, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 202.

masturbates him remains anonymous. There is a linguistic disconnect between Des Grieux and the hand: he refers to it as “a heavy hand” or “the hand” rather than attaching a possessive pronoun to it.²¹³ The masturbation is described as follows: “something was hent and clasped and grasped, which made me faint with lust”.²¹⁴ Particularly curious here is Des Grieux’s disconnect from his *own* body: his penis, referred to as “something”, becomes detached from his body. The only connection between this “something” and Des Grieux’s body is that he feels the acts performed on it. Des Grieux is being masturbated by an anonymous, detached hand on his unknown, detached penis, a complete bodily detachment from sex despite his complete mental involvement. That the hand is moving “up and down, slowly at first, then fast and faster it went in rhythm with the song” suggests that, somehow, this hand is intrinsically linked with the music, and by extension of this, with Teleny himself, who creates the music.²¹⁵ Teleny is removed from this encounter by physical distance, but the distant intimacy clearly exists for him as well, as he later asks Des Grieux “[d]o you believe in the transmission... of feelings, of sensations?”.²¹⁶ The physical implication of the word “sensations” suggests that Teleny was aware of the masturbation Des Grieux experienced and likely intimately involved in it. His belief in the transmission of sensations makes it reasonable to deduce that this anonymous hand felt by Des Grieux is, indeed, an act of distant intimacy performed by Teleny.

Why, then, do these texts attempt to remove the body from the sex act? The individuals writing these texts – both pornographic and sexological – were, as previous chapters have explored, individuals with agency in the creation of their own identities. These men approached their doctors, or approached publishers as pornographers, and controlled their own narratives, in which they chose to include a removal of the body. This removal of the body has a few crucial effects: it aligns with Foucault’s act-identity shift and, as previously noted, allows the same-sex attracted men involved far more agency in their own identity creation. The act is within the realm of the body, whilst the identity is in the realm of the mind. In debodilying sex, one’s sexual behaviour is no longer just a physical aspect of one’s life, but instead an internal act, a desire, an identity. Removing the physicality of sexuality allows for an identity which does not rely on physical act for its assertion: many of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis’ studies consider themselves same-sex attracted before having sexual contact with men, as do Jack Saul and Des Grieux.²¹⁷ Sexual attraction and relationships

²¹³ *Teleny*, 30, 31.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

²¹⁷ See: Krafft-Ebing *Psychopathia Sexualis* Case 115 (269–274); Case 124 (298–299); Ellis *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* History VII (107–110); History IX (111–115).

between men at this point in history were predominantly understood to be purely physical affairs. It is curious to witness these men coming forward and disrupting the nineteenth-century narrative that sexuality is an act-based, external experience, rather than a thought-based, internal one. By stating that they have been attracted to other men for their entire lives and reaching “full consciousness of [their] inverted nature”, before having sexual intercourse with another man, these individuals disrupt the narratives of sexuality in which they exist.²¹⁸ In these unbodied erotic autobiographies, we witness a turning point at which the body, the *physical sex act* no longer defines one as a sodomite: it is one’s thoughts, one’s feelings, one’s desires that make one inverted, an Urning, or a homosexual.

Removing the body also removes the limitations of proximity from the sex act, allowing for sex across a distance and between individuals who have never met. This distant intimacy could provide same-sex attracted men who formerly had no access to intimate relationships with other men with a form of sexual and emotional contact. Erotic autobiography then becomes a way in which “individuals that are affected with inverted sexuality become acquainted”, across the barriers of distance or social exposure.²¹⁹ Of same-sex attraction, Edward Carpenter notes in *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society* that “[t]he Law, of course, can only deal, and only be expected to deal, with the outward and visible. It cannot control feeling; but it tries – in those cases where it is concerned – to control the expression of feeling”.²²⁰ This distant intimacy becomes a safer way in which same-sex attracted men could find sexual gratification without the risk of social exposure or imprisonment: the law cannot punish internal thought, only physical action, as proven in the Fanny and Stella trial.²²¹

In all forms of erotic writing, the text itself reaches out endlessly towards the reader without the body. However, in these erotic autobiographies, the combination of telepathic and textual intercourse, and the movement towards a deeper identification with the sexual acts in which these men engage, suggests a more complex relationship therewith. These texts issue a challenge to the forms of sex, not only legitimising the masturbatory, the pornographic and prostitution, but attempting to partially remove the body from the sex act. Though this appears in line with the Foucauldian act–identity shift, its relevance is deeper.

“I need scarcely tell you that little cocks, and everything relating to them, had a peculiar interest to me from the very earliest time it is possible for my memory to carry me back to.” *Sins*, 10.

“Well, you see I was predisposed to love men and not women and without knowing it I had always struggled against the inclinations of my nature.” *Teleny*, 51.

²¹⁸ Ellis, *Studies*, 113.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

²²⁰ Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society*, 49.

²²¹ Fanny and Stella were acquitted in part because there was no proof that they had engaged in passive anal intercourse.

The definition of what sex *is* is both a sexological and pornographic project to take on: pornographic because the pornographic is always trying to invent new ways to arouse and to sexualise the world around it and sexological because one of the pivotal battles of sexology was, as previously noted, “defining what is to be counted as sexual”.²²² The sex act was being defined and redefined by both of these genres, whilst those engaging in certain sex acts were defining themselves. same-sex attracted men were involved inextricably in an overwhelming overturn of what sex *is*, and likely were consciously contributing to this redefinition. The queerness of the erotic autobiography, here, reaches its climax.

²²² Crozier, “Pillow Talk”, 375.

Conclusion

The creation of the erotic autobiography is crucial in understanding the autobiographical nature of all four of these texts, and in the ways in which they represent a critical turning point with regards to sexual identity. Reading these four texts as autobiographical allows one to better understand the ways in which they can be understood not only as literary, but as individual case studies of the lives of same-sex attracted men in the late nineteenth century. Alastair Fowler writes in his book *Kinds of Literature* that whilst there are “literary laws of change... governing the formation and interaction of genres... individual works play a part too – especially originative and paradigmatic ones”.²²³ Though these texts do not enact massive change with regards to genre or literature, the four texts considered in this thesis – and Ulrichs’ *The Riddle of “Man–Manly” Love* – are all originative, establishing new understandings of autobiography, science and sex. The consideration of these texts as case studies further allows one to consider the ways in which same-sex attracted men actively shaped the medical narrative, and the agency they had in the movement towards a sexual identity with which modern readers would be more familiar. Their redefining of our understandings of sexuality, sexology and confession offer a taste of the primordial soup out of which Freudian psychoanalysis evolved.

Freud’s reading and awareness of the sexological erotic autobiographies studied in this thesis is no new discovery: in his 1935 “Letter to an American Mother”, upon telling the mother of a homosexual son that “[h]omosexuality is... nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness”, he calls upon Ellis to support his claim, writing “[i]f you do not believe me, read the books of Havelock Ellis”.²²⁴ Not only does Freud call upon Ellis, his understanding of homosexuality owes much to Krafft-Ebing: Birgit Lang, in “Normal Enough? Krafft-Ebing, Freud, and homosexuality”, notes that “Freud drew considerably on Krafft-Ebing’s concepts and terminology, yet, rather than undertaking a mapping of perversions, his theory of sexuality made homosexuality more acceptable and othered it at the same time”.²²⁵ Understanding Freud’s interactions with our erotic autobiographers, Diana Fuss writes in “Pink Freud” of Freud’s awareness of – and disagreement with – Ulrichs’s “theory of a “third sex...” on the grounds that positing a third or intermediate sex overlooks the significant role same-sex desire plays in every sexual identity formation”.²²⁶ Freud owes much of his understanding of homosexuality to the case

²²³ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 297.

²²⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Letter to an American Mother”, *American Journal of Psychiatry* 107 (1951): 787.

²²⁵ Birgit Lang, “Normal enough? Krafft-Ebing, Freud, and homosexuality”, *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2021): 100.

²²⁶ Diana Fuss, “Pink Freud”, *GLQ* 2 (1995): 2.

studies read in this thesis. Not only does he owe much of his understanding of homosexuality to these same-sex attracted men, but his heavy focus on the autobiographical study and confessional process can be attributed to those same men. The erotic autobiography, then, in its teasing out of the boundaries of sex, of sexology, of the confession, of the autobiography itself establishes a queer theoretical climate out of which Freud could emerge.

Freud writes in “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness” that “It is one of the obvious social injustices that the standard of civilization should demand from everyone the same conduct of sexual life – conduct which can be followed without any difficulty by some people, thanks to their organization, but which imposes the heaviest psychological sacrifices on others”, a clear alignment with those opinions of Ulrichs: “[c]onsidering the question of what is natural and what is unnatural, one would not apply a standard that is not in conformity with one’s *own* nature. All people must act according to their own nature and their sexual orientation”.²²⁷ His reference to the homosexuality of “Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.” reflects the commentary of Ellis, Wilde, Krafft-Ebing’s case 125, and Ulrichs.²²⁸ This desire to list queers of the past is a form of assertion found in *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* and *Teleny*, though these texts do not make specific reference to those individuals mentioned by Freud.²²⁹

All of this considered, the greatest influence of the same-sex attracted authors of these erotic autobiographies on Freud is not directly on his opinions of homosexuality or on which individuals of the past he considered homosexual, but on the self-fashioning of one’s confession. The erotic autobiography, above all, is a genre which allows for same-sex attracted individuals to both produce and consume their own narratives and the narratives of those similar to themselves. Freudian psychoanalysis owes much to the extended case studies of these texts. Carl Pletsch writes in “Freud’s Case Studies and the Locus of Psychoanalytic Knowledge” that “it is a fact that Freud’s case studies have been extremely

²²⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Freud On Women*, Ed. Elisabeth Young-Buehl, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992) 171. Ulrichs, *The Riddle*, 37.

²²⁸ Freud, “Letter to an American Mother”, 787.

“Leonardo da Vinci, whose ideals as revealed in his work are so strangely bisexual, lay under homosexual suspicion in his youth... Michelangelo, one of the very chief artists of the Renaissance period, we cannot now doubt, was sexually inverted.” Ellis, *Studies*, 32.

“It was such love as Michael Angelo had Known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself.” Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 150.

“He gave as examples Voltaire, Frederick the Great, Eugene of Savoy, and Plato... who were urnings.” Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 301.

“Plato, an urning.” Ulrichs, *The Riddle*, 66.

²²⁹ The essays at the end of *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain* make reference to the same-sex sexual desires of Augustus Caesar (86), Tiberius (86), Caligula (86), Nero (87), and Galba (87). Briancourt suggests to Teleny that Christ loved John as a “favourite disciple.” *Teleny*, 140.

important vehicles of the tradition of psychoanalytic knowledge” and that psychoanalytic knowledge is “[a] knowledge located in exemplary case studies and communicated as personal knowledge”.²³⁰ In a pre-Freud moment, these erotic autobiographies test out the boundaries of sex, confession, autobiography and identity in ways which Freud would very soon adopt and reshape into Freudian psychoanalysis.

Not only this, but studying these four texts as erotic autobiographies allows one to better understand the ways in which same-sex attracted individuals took control of the narratives being formed around them. In a world of discourses of silence, aside from the discursive explosion occurring in the medical community, these same-sex attracted individuals harnessed the erotic autobiography to steer public perception, through the confessions provided enthusiastically to medical professionals and through privately published pornography. This alters our understanding of the role of the same-sex attracted man in the formation of homosexuality and disrupts the Foucauldian argument that the proliferation of discourse on same-sex attraction in the medical community was motivated by one obsession: “to expel from society the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction”.²³¹ Foucault’s understanding of the same-sex attracted men about whom the sexological community wrote is as follows:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away.²³²

Could it be, from reading these erotic autobiographies in the ways demonstrated in this thesis, that this creation of the homosexual was guided by the same-sex attracted men themselves? They were not just passively involved as doctors studied and probed them on their inner workings and sexual lives, they instead took control of what was said about them through the very case histories Foucault mentions. These men became case histories, and through this becoming they became “a type of life, a life form”: the detailed study of their lives provided both by sexological literature and by pornography and the cross-contamination of these two genres allowed for the detailed, deeper understanding of

²³⁰ Carl Pletsch, “Freud’s Case Studies and the Locus of Psychoanalytic Knowledge”, *Acta Hispanica ad Medicinae Scientiarumque Histmiam Illustrandam* 2 (1982): 265, 297.

²³¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 36.

²³² *Ibid.*, 43.

the ways in which their sexualities affected their “total composition”. That sexology perceived homosexuality as “insidious” is inaccurate: Krafft-Ebing and Ellis were sympathetic to their patients and allowed for their patients to speak with little censorship or moral interjection.²³³ The erotic autobiography, though agreeing with Foucauldian theory in many points, departs here.

But why use the generic description of “erotic autobiography”? Why not just consider these texts autobiographical without the application of genre to them? Fundamentally, my aim in proposing this term is to create a lens through which to view the similarities between these texts, rather than their differences. What is crucial to my argument throughout this thesis is that the commonalities between these pornographic and sexological texts are more telling. In creating this cross-genre, then, I draw together these opposing genres of sexology and pornography in order to gain better insight into the lives of the men writing the autobiographical texts common across both.

²³³ “Havelock Ellis was an acute and sympathetic observer. His monumental *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* is resplendent with detail.” Rubin, “Thinking Sex”, 16.
 “In the context of their time, Krafft-Ebing... [seems] easily identifiable as progressive and open-minded.” Lang, “Normal Enough? Krafft-Ebing, Freud, and homosexuality”, 100.
 “Krafft-Ebing’s reputation as a progressive proponent of homosexual emancipation was certainly deserved.” Beachy, *The German Invention of Homosexuality*, 819.

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