

mentioning Heidegger, Husserl, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty as primary sources for the theoretical framework.

Well-researched, diverse, and comprehensive, Wolfreys's thought-provoking interdisciplinary study opens up new ways of seeing ourselves and the world. A broad and wide-ranging monograph, *Haunted Selves* is a valuable contribution to English cultural and literary studies and is compelling reading for academics and non-academics alike. The book is an insightful mapping of what Wolfreys calls 'the expropriation of the self' and a skilful exploration of how English narratives simultaneously embed and enact the spectres of the self, space, and memory (3). Wolfreys weaves a complex web of literary connections, combining rigorous theoretical output with close reading of narratives which shaped the English literary landscape of the last 200 years, all written in a rich and stimulating prosaic style. Wolfreys is a gifted storyteller and sharp theorist, who often loses himself in the interpretation of literary texts, a fact which reflects his great enthusiasm for literature. This idiosyncratic aspect is definitely one of the highlights of the book: getting and letting oneself get 'carried away' in the wondrous worlds of fiction and simply delighting in the act of reading (199). All in all, Wolfreys invites readers to find new ways of understanding the poetics of space, self, and memory in a study that is a superb tribute to storytelling, celebrating the enduring power of literature: the quintessence of *Haunted Selves* is beautifully captured in the memorable phrase 'through literature, we survive' (19).

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Dustin Friedman, *Before Queer Theory: Victorian Aestheticism and the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 248 pp., \$34.95 pb, ISBN 9781421431482

Sarah Parker and Ana Parejo Vadillo, editors, *Michael Field: Decadent Moderns* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), 300 pp., \$80.00 hb, ISBN 9780821424018

Dustin Friedman's *Before Queer Theory* and Sarah Parker and Ana Parejo Vadillo's *Michael Field: Decadent Moderns* re-examine fin de siècle authorship, moving well beyond earlier LGBTQIA2S+ interventions that contended with Foucault's reverse discourse and the burgeoning sexological discourses which proliferated at the end of the century. Neither Friedman's nor Parker and Vadillo's collection affirms an

argumentative allegiance between scientific discourse and the ‘real’ subject – that the medical category ‘homosexual’ finally produced and legitimated a queer subjecthood. Instead, these authors broaden their conceptions of subjecthood, turning to art rather than science or politics to address the relationship between subjectivity and non-normative desires, whether the transgressions be of same-sex desire or the erotic boundary-crossings between human and nonhuman or, additionally, in the case of the author-pair Michael Field, incestuous intergenerational intimacies. Both works ask readers to re-invest in aestheticism as a site for a hopeful and radical queer politics despite decadent authors living in, and producing art within, a deeply alienating and homophobic society. In his introduction, Friedman goes so far as to argue convincingly that the aesthetes cultivated a queer-affirming discourse where ‘one might *want* to be queer, when being so provides the opportunity to be part of an emancipated artistic vanguard, charged with the self-appointed task of reimagining how life might be lived’ (7, original emphasis). Essentially, Friedman offers readers a historical glimmer of an early mode of queer self-determination and, in doing so, illuminates an alternative genealogical branch to Queer Theory’s negative turn that he calls ‘*erotic negativity*’ (4).

Rather than following directly in Leo Bersani’s and Lee Edelman’s footsteps, in which ‘*queer negativity*’ arrives out of a distinctly psychoanalytic – Freudian and Lacanian – discourse, Friedman starts with Hegel and Kant, who end up being most predominantly embraced by Walter Pater and his ‘art for art’s sake’ movement. Instead of a self-shattering that is annihilating and driven towards death, erotic negativity poses a self-shattering where the fragmentation of a previous self gets remade into a new subjectivity capable of a defiant resistance to a hostile social world. Friedman connotes such a queer position as freeing and advantageous because it is ‘not easily attainable by those who never have to question their place in the order of things’ (23). The first chapter, which covers Pater’s writings on the eighteenth-century art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann, articulates how the self-shattering transformation occurs specifically in the viewer’s experience of the art piece. Through an aesthetically indifferent experience with Greek sculptures, Winckelmann actually uncovers, or perhaps recovers, the homoerotic motivations of these originary Greek artworks and ultimately reveals his own personal homoerotic desires as truth. Friedman understands this revelation of sexual self-knowledge as *Bildung* without teleology, without static endpoint. The negative re-forms the subject not through a stabilising of identity but through a critical and continual process of sexual self-awareness. When turning to

Michael Field's ekphrastic poems, Friedman argues that Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper are more invested in negativity as objective and embodied in the artwork itself rather than the viewer. The focus on Michael Field's indifference rests on their refusal to stay in their gendered lane, constantly writing and performing and occupying a variety of gendered subject positions.

Parker and Vadillo's edited collection widens the scope of Michael Field's aesthetic indifference with several essays that interrogate their poetic occupancy of subject positions not their own, specifically positions of the nonhuman as well as their momentary formal refusals of dyadic bonds and routes of desire. In 'Betwixt Us Two', Sarah E. Kersh offers a brilliant close reading of the slippage of pronouns in the sonnet 'Whym Chow' about Bradley and Cooper's grief over the loss of their pet dog. By identifying the pronomial ambiguity in the final two lines, 'So it was wont to be betwixt us two—/How still thou lay'st deep-nosing on thy paw!', Kersh argues that 'two becomes an unreliable sign' (260). The uncertainty of the referent 'two' proliferates the possible dyadic relations within the poem: does 'two' distinguish the poet from the beloved or the beloved from the dog? Is the poet the composite of Michael Field? Or Bradley or Cooper individually? What about the beloved? The sliding scale of signification explodes the presumed solidity of the individual, of the subject, and of authorship, producing multiple interlocutors and routes of erotic desire between and amongst Michael Field, Whym Chow, Bradley, and Cooper.

Kate Thomas further cements Michael Field's aesthetic queer use of proxies and interlocutors but offers an important and needed critique of this poetic engagement. In her essay 'Vegetable Love', Thomas focuses on iterations of Michael Field's queer ecologies, including a reading of the bramble-bough as one that subverts developmental and progressive logics by having both flower and fruit coexist simultaneously, rather than one giving way to the other. Thomas recognises that, despite the beauties of constructing lesbian desire as vectored through the fruit or the vegetable, such constructions can lead to the racist and tired trope of Black female objectification as a prerequisite to white desire. In an incredibly nuanced close reading of Michael Field's diary-line, 'The intimacies we encourage with that negress-creature, the polished beet', Thomas reveals the potential pitfalls of metonymical scales that slide between the human, the animal, and the vegetable, and of placing one's construction of queerness on such an entanglement. Thomas argues that rather than garden as metaphor of love, '[Michael Field] need the beet to *be* woman and animal and vegetable together [...] but restricted to none of the above' (34, emphasis added).

The niece-aunt poetic collaboration relies on the logics of approximation and objectification – logics that are oftentimes the violent, daily realm of Blackness – in order to produce and uphold a construction of white lesbian desire. I found this particular critique of Field’s poetic practice a vital and necessary illumination to Victorian studies and queer history and the ways in which white queerness was, and still is, frequently concretised at the expense and diminishment of non-white subjects.

Though *erotic negativity*, like *queer negativity*, appears to remain a particularly white-centred project, Friedman’s focus beyond Pater to include Michael Field and Vernon Lee does offer a much-needed revision of *queer negativity*’s limited archive of white, gay, male bourgeois authors and subjects. The restrictions of such an archive reinforces the privilege white gay men have of seeing themselves articulated and represented in the historical record explicitly, such as in Pater’s discussion of Winckelmann, whereas lesbians have suffered under the logics of queer negativity, amounting to lacunae, absent-presences or Lacanian lack. Thus, lesbian history, without the same types of concrete visible traces as gay history, comes to be dismissed as unrecoverable and not worth theorising. However, in Chapter 4, Friedman locates a useable lesbian history in an aesthetic of the ghostly and of haunting in Vernon Lee’s supernaturalism where a ‘lesbian identity can be constructed by and for queer women out of artistic representations of female desire from the past’, highlighting how these representations are ‘ambiguous and equivocal’ (119). Rather than identifying queerness in empiricism, for queer women, spectrality is a premodern aesthetic experience of desire that is fluid and mutable. Ultimately, as an epistemological holdover from a pre-Enlightenment period, spectrality destabilises sexuality by destabilising gender, producing a bodily felt-sense experience of history instead of producing one based in logic, objectivity, and rationality.

Though Friedman does not situate Lee’s use of ghosts in the explicit Freudian context of melancholia, he does identify the relationship between haunting and loss: ‘the survival of ghostliness renders it not only a powerful agent for historical understanding [...] but also brings to light the irretrievable losses entailed by the advent of Enlightened modes of thinking’ (128). I see Friedman giving decadent roots to Judith Butler’s seminal essay ‘Melancholy Gender – Refused Identification’ (1995). A significant intervention of *Before Queer Theory* has to do with the potentially valuable insights queerness offers society writ large, rendered legible in the tangible forms of aesthetic objects. In Chapter 2, Friedman turns towards Pater’s embrace of his Oxford colleague Edward Burnett Tylor, a founding figure of anthropology as an academic discipline.

Tylor had a theory of ‘survivals’, or those seemingly illogical holdovers from past generations that still remain in modern or contemporary times, emphasising that, once historically situated, such beliefs make sense. Both Hegelian negativity and Tylorian anthropology of survivals elicit similar responses of confrontational fear – the queer aesthete’s fear of coming face-to-face with their homoerotic impulses and the modern subject’s encounter with the ‘primitive’ traces of their contemporary ethics. Each experience is equally shattering, Friedman argues, and, as a result, reconfigures the subject. Rather than ‘justify queerness by showing how it conforms to socially acceptable liberal values’, Pater ‘uses anthropological theory to force liberals to confront the radical queerness, the polymorphous sexual perversity, that survives within their highest ethical ideals’ (70). By acknowledging self-shattering as an experience available to anyone regardless of their sexuality, Friedman suggests that Pater’s later styles force late-Victorian liberalism to confront the queer in us all.

Butler reveals then, in analysing the logics of the ungrievable loss of queer lives during the AIDS epidemic, that there is a queer object in us all that haunts in the form of melancholic gender identification. Compulsory heterosexuality requires repudiation of homosexual attachment; the loss of the homosexual attachment becomes an incorporated melancholic object where one identifies with the lost object instead of fulfilling a love and desire for the same-sex object. For Butler, the “truest” lesbian melancholic is the strictly straight woman, and the “truest” gay male melancholic is the strictly straight man’ (177).¹ I appreciate that *Before Queer Theory* places a prominent, much earlier node of signification on queer history’s timeline that aligns with the landmark birth site of Queer Theory: the AIDS epidemic. Before the 1980s and 1990s, there were the 1880s and 1890s that failed to mourn the cultural loss of premodern and pre-Enlightenment bodily epistemologies of mutability and fluidity through melancholic incorporation into decadent art forms and aesthetics. These artists and writers understand failure as liberation and personal autonomy. Friedman argues, rather than performing resistance to social precepts, which Jack Halberstam understands queer failure to be enacting, queer aesthetes actually released themselves from feelings of rejection and alienation from their homophobic society, engaging in late-Victorian scepticism about fixed subjects and absolute truths.

Such doubt in absolutes was also representative of an 1890s sexual dissidence that informed and inspired early twentieth-century sexual radicalism. Kristin Mahoney concludes Parker and Vaddillo’s *Michael Field* edited collection with a wonderful essay on the sculptor Eric Gill and

his relationship to Michael Field within the network of queer artists who had recently converted to Catholicism, seeing the religion as an ideal site for exploring non-normative sexual identities and kinships. Like Thomas, Mahoney importantly argues that ignoring the complicated and problematic parts of queer history in an attempt to tell a neoliberal 'It Gets Better' narrative only flattens 'our understanding of the complex and divergent directions in which radical sexual practice moved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (234). Mahoney's potentially risky focus on Eric Gill, a sculptor known for his incestuous relationships with his daughters and sisters as an experiment in sexuality and kinship, wholly pays off. Though this conclusion is an uncomfortable read, Mahoney rewards her readers for confronting that discomfort and in turn reminds us that not *all* forms of subversion of patriarchal ideology are ethically radical or even successful in moving us away from such violence. In lieu of glorifying these patriarchally oppressive relationship dynamics, Mahoney instead situates these practices as emanating from a queer Catholicism whose rhetorics afforded a variety of opportunities to undermine socially governed compulsory heterosexuality. Mahoney notes that 'the rhetoric of Catholicism certainly does something queer with familial language, undoing the stability of our understanding of what maternity is, of the division between fathers and sons, facilitating a series of substitutions and sublimations that blur and redefine kinship roles and the primacy of blood ties' (241). Mahoney brings both the collection, and this review, full circle. Perhaps late-Victorian uses of metonymy, metaphor, 'substitutions', and 'sublimations' offer a historically contextualised type of queer formalism.

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Note

1. Judith Butler, 'Melancholy Gender – Refused Identification', *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 5.2 (1995): 165–80.

Alicia Mireles Christoff, *Novel Relations: Victorian Fiction and British Psychoanalysis* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 288 pp., 3 illustrations, £34.00, \$39.95 hb, ISBN 9780691193106

Novel Relations draws upon the insights of British object relations psychoanalysis to reinvigorate our sense of how the self is formed through its encounters with others in the Victorian novel. Each of the four chapters