English Studies in Canada

Listening Queerly to Teleny and Trilby

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Volume 46, numéro 2-3-4, juin–septembre–décembre 2020

New Sonic Approaches in Literary Studies

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1111321ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2020.a903558

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Éditeur(s)

Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE)

ISSN

0317-0802 (imprimé)
1913-4835 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Roskams, V. (2020). Listening Queerly to Teleny and Trilby. *English Studies in Canada*, *46*(2-3-4), 161–180. https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2020.a903558

Listening Queerly to *Teleny* and *Trilby*

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There is something queer about listening to music in late-nineteenth-century literature. Scenes of public musical performance in two novels with very different publishing histories—one of the best-selling novels of the century, *Trilby* (George du Maurier, 1894), and the privately circulated erotic novel, *Teleny* (anonymous co-authorship, 1893)—have in common their identification of listening as a space of queer possibility. The ability of texts to disclose and enclose queerness gains particular resonance at this *fin-de-siècle* moment, with new understandings of identity producing the categories of hetero- and homosexuality. Voicing homosexuality in the repressive legal atmosphere of late-nineteenth-century Britain required recourse to codes and circumlocutions: famously, it was "the love that dare not speak its name."[1] Authors turned to the expansive semiotic potentialities of music, then, to avoid naming in language desires, behaviours, or identities which might be suspect. Taking a sonic approach to texts revivifies these layers of meaning which were once muted. In thinking sonically about these novels, moreover, we can understand them as contemporary

1 The phrase, originating in the poem "Two Loves" by Lord Alfred Douglas, was made famous during Oscar Wilde's trials in 1895; see Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*.

ESC 46.2–4 (June/September/December 2020 [Published May 2023]): 161–180

readers understood them: as novels with richly sounding backgrounds and afterlives.

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While much of the work in this volume deals with sonic material, I am looking at objects whose sonic dimensions are implicit, not immediately evident, although not necessarily buried deep. References to music in the literary text have traditionally been figured in terms of allowances (permitting the text to engage the auditory) and limitations (gesturing to sounds it ultimately cannot create in and of itself). Yet a central claim of my work on music in literature is that any musical reference, allusion, or interpolation provides a resonant moment within a reading experience which always necessarily implicates some degree of listening (as Angela Leighton proposes in *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*). By approaching these texts sonically, we not only restore the oral and aural dimensions which have attached to works of literature throughout history, but we draw attention to the importance of thinking about orality and aurality in the representation and taxonomization of non-normative sexualities and identities in the late nineteenth century and perhaps beyond. That is, we can look (or hear) beyond the traditional wealth of written material (across literature, medical writing, and legal documents) to restore the sounding body at the centre of the formation of new understandings of identity in the period. Resituating the reader as a listener reveals differing treatments of music in the construction of queer identities and communities in *Teleny* and *Trilby*.[2] The musical performance functions, in *Teleny,* as a voicing of desire among a closed readership, and in *Trilby,* as a destabilization of gendered and sexual categories, its subversion alleviated for the novel's large readership precisely because, within the limits of the text, the music remains silent. Silence might be a virtue in the repressive context into which these novels were published, but by considering the workings of sound, musical allusion, vocality, and affect in these texts, we can enrich, and even challenge, our perspective on the "unspeakability" of queerness in this period.[3]

In both novels, the representation of musical performance functions as an extradiegetic mediation for the reader, whose position as member of a wider, reading audience forms a point of comparison for the narrower,

2 My understanding, throughout this paper, of the reader as a listener is based on the work of Lawrence Kramer, particularly his recent talk on "The Song Pact: How the Novel Sings."

3 On the idea of the "unspeakable," see H.G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, particularly chapter 5: "'A Strange and Indescribable Feeling': Unspeakable Desires in Late-Victorian England," 157–98.

listening audience within the narratives. Looking at music in these novels enhances our understanding of their production and reception. Throughout this article, I lay stress on coteries and afterlives as aspects to which a sonic approach is essential (and indeed inevitable: with respect to *Trilby,* at least, I consider recreations of the novel on stage and on film). In literature, performances are often sites of indeterminate meaning with the ability to shape and disturb our sense of identity and community. *Teleny,* which ties music to affirmation and particularizes the queer listener as a distinguished, receptive, and privileged identity, was produced by a coterie of men and, initially, circulated privately among men. *Trilby*, on the other hand, deals with the mass and was read (and re-enacted) by the mass. I take up Roland Barthes's notion of the "grain of the voice" (from the eponymous 1972 essay) to open complementary and contradictory workings of queer listening within and without these novels. I mean to emphasize Barthes's sense of the grain as "the materiality of the body emerging from the throat," a quality which facilitates a bodily connection between singer and listener (279). The "grain" denotes the individuality and intimacy of performed music, befitting it to a discussion of the characters in these novels, whose hearing of music awakens their own queer identities while denoting the queerness of those to whom they are listening; they share, in music, an embodied encounter which does not require close proximity.

Barthes's example is not only useful for his theorization of the materialized eroticism implicit in listening experiences but also for his musings on the essential lack that is manifest when we describe music in words. Reflecting on how we reduce musical works when we describe them with epithets, Barthes makes a comparison with the ambivalence of self-identification: "The man who provides himself or is provided with an adjective is now hurt, now pleased, but always *constituted*" (179). Although he is not specifically discussing the late nineteenth century, it is remarkably apt that Barthes should collate the process of representing music in the text and the process of "constituting" the self, since much late-nineteenth-century writing resorts to music with precisely this aim. At a time of proliferating terms for denoting non-normative sexual and gender identities, music offered a discursive means for both affirming and evading what was predicated by those terms.[4]

4 David Deutsch (in the chapter "Distinguishing a Musical Homoeroticism: Pater, Forster, and Their Aesthetic Descendants" in *British Literature and Classical Music*, 139–84) gives several examples of music's value to queer writers in "distinguishing" and naming their identities, while Fraser Riddell (throughout *Music and the Queer Body*) suggests productive ways to read against this paradigm,

Recent criticism has established the tendency among authors of this period to refer to music to encode queerness, either through allusions to music with charged meaning for certain communities of listeners (notably, Wagner's), or simply through the invocation of an art form whose "resistance to legibility," in Judith A. Peraino's term (7), had been celebrated by German Romantic Idealists at the beginning of the century, as it transcended linguistic and mimetic significance.[5] Beyond literature, the idea of music became attached to notions of male homosexual identity emerging across Europe. This was in part due to the long-standing association of music with the feminine, coupled with the concept of sexual inversion, which posited that homosexuality in men was caused by an excess of feminine characteristics. Sexology—a nascent discipline in the late nineteenth century—identified male homosexuality with an affinity for playing and/or listening to music. For the activist Edward Carpenter, gay men possessed "a strong artistic sense, especially in the direction of music" (154). Havelock Ellis writes in *Sexual Inversion,* the first major English-language work on homosexuality: "It has been extravagantly said that all musicians are inverts; it is certain that various famous musicians, among the dead and the living, have been homosexual" (295). Ellis's reference to the common cultural assumption that "all musicians are inverts" is mirrored in the remark of Marc-André Raffalovich, one-time associate of Oscar Wilde, that "in certain coteries, the word musical … appears to have become a synonym of pederast [homosexual]" (188).[6] Wilde himself draws on this association—conscious that its resonance would be limited to "certain coteries"—when the "low, musical voice" of Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* prompts the title character to muse that "music had stirred him like that" (21). Crucially, this music functions like a "subtle magic" (22) whose exact relationship to the identities of Dorian and Henry is, like the relationship between the two men, never quite defined.

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arguing that some queer writers use music to resist the taxonomization being impressed upon them in the period.

5 See Law, "'The perniciously homosexual art'"; Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*, 24–56. On gay Wagnerites, see Ross, *Wagnerism*, 302–21, and Mitchell Morris, "Tristan's wounds: On Homosexual Wagnerians at the *fin-de-siècle*," in *Queer Episodes*, eds. Fuller and Whitesell, 271–92. On German Romantics and music, see Daverio, *Nineteenth-Century Music and the German Romantic Ideology*.

6 As I noted previously, terms proliferated and were permeable in this period—Carpenter preferred "Uranian" and the adjective "homogenic" over "homosexual," while others referred to "Urnings," "similisexuals," or Ellis's "inverts."

Wilde's subsequent experience—as he was prosecuted under the notorious Labouchere Amendment and his novel was produced as evidence against him in court—was a reminder of the need for "circumlocutions" to refer to homosexuality (as Raffalovich described the use of the term "musical").[7] The two novels I discuss here—not generally discussed together in criticism—address musical "circumlocutions" differently, but in their association of music with queerness they have productive similarities. *Teleny* has often been attributed to Oscar Wilde, but its use of sound to advance homoerotic encounters and affirm queer identity is far removed from the vague allusiveness of *Dorian Gray.*[8] *Trilby* invests music with an ability to simulate non-heteronormative affect, but it does so with less "constitutive" identificatory results, to return to Barthes's idea. Different publication and reception contexts shape the different manifestations of queer listening in these novels: extending Barthes's ideas about the voice, I look at how *Trilby*'s vocalization of queerness, as a mass sensation in publishing, theatre, and film, contrasts with *Teleny*'s invocation of a displaced but potent "grain."

Teleny is both about, and arose from, male homosocial orality. Written by an anonymous coterie of men in London around 1890, the novel's opening pages call back to these origins by presenting a conversation between the protagonist, Camille Des Grieux, and a male interlocutor. Robert Gray and Christopher Keep note that this frame for the novel "restlessly pushes the act of exchange between men to the fore," as "the very form of the novel, as a dialogue between men, also serves as a model for its communal or collective authorship" (198). The dialogic form institutes listening—between men—as the novel's focus and *modus operandi,* as the musical opening scene proceeds to underline. Des Grieux attends a performance by the Hungarian pianist René Teleny, whose playing the former experiences in terms of potent musico-erotic affect. Des Grieux's narration emphasizes the inextricability of these forms of affect, binding music to his queer experience and, moreover, validating the inclusion of music in his narrative. He is elaborating on the "Hungarian" "fioriture" or technical aspects of Teleny's playing when his interlocutor says: "Well, never mind … do go on with your story" (9). Yet Des Grieux insists: "you cannot disconnect him from the music of his country," subsequently declaring that "in

7 On Wilde's trials, see Cohen.

8 Gray and Keep (193–94) explain that *Teleny* was attributed to Wilde due to his involvement in circulating the manuscript while the novel was composed in a "chain-letter fashion" and because of his association with its publisher, Leonard Smithers, but Wilde's authorship has never been proven.

beauty, as well as in character, [Teleny] was the very personification of this entrancing music." This interlinking of musical and erotic appeal provides not just the subject but the model for the novel's telling: Des Grieux's narrative, as he seduces his interlocutor, will work like the melodies which "begin by shocking us, then by degrees subdue, until at last they enthral us" (9). As Gray and Keep point out, there is a further layer to this model, as they call the novel "but the verbal complement to a physical act of seduction" (198). Contemporary readers, belonging to coteries like that which produced the manuscript of the novel, would have re-enacted its dialogic form and partaken, themselves, in the pleasure it describes. They would have approved of its placement of music at the very outset of the relationship between Des Grieux and Teleny, affirming music's ability to facilitate queer experiences.

This interlinking of musical and erotic appeal provides not just the subject but the model for the novel's telling.

The authors of *Teleny* use the language of physiological affect to describe Des Grieux's reaction to Teleny and his music: "my whole body was convulsed and writhed with mad desire. My lips were parched, I gasped for breath; my joints were stiff, my veins were swollen" (10). As Shannon Draucker has recently explored, this language recalls contemporary psychopathological discourses which posited extreme susceptibility to music as evidence of nervous disease and hysteria (148–50). Like Draucker, however, I read these elements in *Teleny* as reclaiming the idea of extreme affect to validate the embodied pleasures of queer listening, not to imply its pathological underlay. For instance, music enables Des Grieux to imagine a rhythmical pleasuring which takes place in time with Teleny's music, as a "heavy hand" moves "up and down, slowly at first, then fast and faster" (10–11). Des Grieux reaches a climax, of course, with the music. His analeptic recounting of the moment to his interlocutor even suggests the music's lasting effects, as he describes: "some drops even gushed out—I panted—" (11). The text's elliptical mimicry of the rhythmic ending of both sexual pleasure and a musical piece is, subsequently, re-enacted in the narration of Des Grieux (and the reader vocalizing the text, who must follow the pauses in their narration).

The scene draws on a perennial belief in music's tactile possibilities, validated by mid-Victorian research into the capacity of bodies to physically resound when exposed to sonic vibrations (Draucker 149). *Teleny* creates a specifically queer context for this phenomenon by locating what we might call the music's "input" and "output" in male bodies, which experience mutual pleasure as a result. Meeting Teleny backstage, Des Grieux learns that the former hallucinated, while playing, visions of the Alhambra, Egypt, and Hadrian and Antinous, all coded allusions to homoeroticism

which a late-nineteenth-century reader of a certain persuasion would have recognized (18).[9] They exactly parallel the "strangest visions" Des Grieux has described as he listened to Teleny (9). This sameness becomes motivic throughout the novel, and Des Grieux is singled out as Teleny's "sympathetic listener" and ideal lover by the individuality of his response to music (14). He is markedly unable to participate in the most customary expression of pleasurable affect when the music ends: "I was powerless to applaud, I sat there dumb, motionless, nerveless, exhausted" (11). To a degree, Des Grieux's alienation from the crowd around him—made up largely of heterosexual women who are also attracted to Teleny—invokes the gulf between individual and group that marked queer experiences in this period, as closeted and/or discreet queer individuals were cast off from a sense of community (Robb 156–73). Yet the performance scene, at the same time, validates Des Grieux's desire and identity. Draucker studies how the novel draws on contemporary science to "[emphasize] the *naturalness* of the erotic relationship between Teleny and Des Grieux" (158). The performance scene also proffers a mediated response for the novel's readership which condones and celebrates the queer listener's sensation. Des Grieux's particularization anticipates his relationship with Teleny, validating the parasocial sensations he has felt as a listener: as Teleny basks in applause, Des Grieux is sure the former's eyes are "seeking mine and mine alone" (11).

As Des Grieux describes, his musical pleasuring and his parasocial sensation form "something more than a hallucination" (11), as the couple begin a physical relationship. Musical affect is not a point of pathological anxiety, but, rather, the performance space grants a kind of affordance in the way Terry Castle has noted of nineteenth-century women attending operas to watch their beloved divas. The opera theatre, writes Castle, "was one of only a few public spaces in which a woman could openly admire another woman's body, resonate to the penetrating tones of her voice, and even imagine (from a distance) the blood-warmth of her flesh—all in an atmosphere of heightened emotion and powerful sensual arousal" (203). In a similar way, music simulates and participates in the arousal shared by this novel's male protagonists, while also providing the rhythmic impetus for the development of their relationship and enjoining the reader to recognize the potentialities of queer listening for themselves.

9 On queer writing's use of classical allusions and exoticism, see Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, and Robb, *Strangers*.

To extend the parallels between queer listening within the novel and queer participation in the novel, we might reflect on how *Teleny* invests erotic power in the hand, that which both plays music and writes a manuscript. The remembrance of Teleny's "perfect hand … rather large than small, strong yet soft, and with long, tapering fingers" induces Des Grieux to expound to his interlocutor on the "manifold feelings produced by the touch of a hand" (13). Among the varieties of hands he describes, "Some hands are coy, others paddle you indecently" (13; "paddle" will later be used to describe masturbation). At the end of this encomium is the "magnetic hand, which seems to have a secret affinity for your own; its simple touch thrills your whole nervous system, and fills you with delight" (13). Already, Des Grieux's description of Teleny's performance has indicated his ability to thrill the "whole nervous system" of the listener with whom he has a "secret affinity." This paean to the hand lends credence to Des Grieux's suggestion that the musical pleasuring he has experienced may not have been a hallucination but that it instead registered the *direct* affect of Teleny's hands, via the piano on which he produces music. Indeed, the hand is further invested with direct erotic power when Des Grieux calls Teleny's hand "sweeter, softer … than any woman's kiss," and continuing, "I felt his grasp steal slowly over all my body, caressing my lips, my throat, my breast" (13).

The focus on the hand in this passage, like the point about Des Grieux's alienation from the rest of the audience, raises questions about how far the novel's mediation of music for its reader also constitutes an affirmation of queer experience. The hand as a locus of desire, after all, suggests displacement. If, for Barthes, the "grain of the voice" refers to "*the encounter between a language and a voice,*" "the dual production" of language and music (181), *Teleny*'s avoidance of the voice in favour of the hand might register the impossibility of *giving voice* to the love that dare not speak its name. Compared to *Trilby,* which abounds with vocal music, *Teleny* centralizes instrumental music in a gesture to its inability to speak openly, which was affirmed in its publication context, as the text initially circulated in a limited edition of just two hundred copies (Mackie 511).[10] Teleny's pianism, like the novel's private publication, provides a discreet outlet for the experience of desire between men.

However, to unduly focus on the voice, or vocalization, as the only possible expressive affirmation of queer identity overlooks this novel's

10 Incidentally, *Teleny* does include singing: it occurs between Teleny's appearances onstage and is treated remarkably elliptically by Des Grieux, as he says dismissively: "I think there was some singing" (7).

exploration of tactility as an alternative affirmatory strategy and, therefore, its investment in the hand, the place from which both music and text emanate. Indeed, although Barthes focuses mainly on the voice, he suggests: "The 'grain' is the body in the voice as it sings, [but also] the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (188). Recent work by Fraser Riddell, too, has explored the "sensory intensities and eroticism inherent in *fin-de-siècle* literary depictions of physical contact with musical instruments and scores and in feeling the material touch of music in performance" (138), and thus proposed the legitimacy of reading non-vocal music along the eroticized lines traditionally associated with the voice in music studies.[11] In *Teleny,* the "hand as it writes" has erotic potential, as does the hand as it plays. In its ability to "steal slowly over all [Des Grieux's] body," Teleny's hand enacts the connection at a distance which Barthes would attribute to the grain of the voice. Imagining hands in this way might, then, invite the reader to think of hands outside the narrative—those which put words to paper and turn the pages of the book—and invest them with an erotic potential founded on the musical suggestiveness of Teleny's playing hands. In this way, *Teleny* rejects the "codes, metaphors, or veiled language" common to other queer narratives—especially, as my introduction noted, those which featured music—"hinging instead on frank depictions and narrations of sexual acts" (Draucker 143). As the example of the hand demonstrates, "*Teleny* draws parallels between musical and sexual encounters to cast both as deeply embodied experiences that ignite equally potent pleasures, desires, and sensations" (Draucker 144) and, I suggest, to draw the reading experience into this realm.

Teleny's identification of musico-erotic potential in language itself confirms the writers' intention to coax their readers into an embodied simulation of the queer listening they describe. At one point in Teleny's performance, the music "[seems] to whisper" to Des Grieux in verse:

> Could you not drink his gaze like wine,
> Yet through its splendour swoon
> In the silence languidly
> As a tune into a tune? (10)

The swooning of "a tune into a tune" prefigures the unification of Teleny and Des Grieux after the performance, as Gray and Keep describe: "the two are enjoined in a circuit of mutual desire that effaces the distinc-

11 See Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body*, 99–137, for readings of embodied and disembodied voices; I also explore the voice as erotic interchange in discussing *Trilby* below.

tion between their separate consciousnesses and exposes each to a fluid exchange of identities" (198). The verse, employing standard poetic techniques of rhyme, alliteration, and repetition, invokes sound and guards against the "silence" to which it refers. Language gains the incantatory, seductive patterns of music. The opening scene's musical affect is recreated in language when Des Grieux traces his sensations, the morning after his first encounter with Teleny:

> when I came to myself, his name was ringing in my ears, my lips were muttering it, and my first thoughts reverted to him. I saw him—in my mind's eye—standing there on the stage, bowing before the public, his burning glances rivetted on mine … The image of Teleny haunted me, the name of René was ever on my lips. I kept repeating it over and over for dozens of times. What a sweet name it was! At its sound my heart was beating faster. My blood seemed to have become warmer and thicker. (11–12)

The name itself becomes a repeated note, transferred from imagined sound ("his name was ringing in my ears") to vocalized ("my lips were muttering it"), until it is invested with erotic potential just like the music in the opening scene ("my heart was beating faster"). In this way, the words written onto the page by the authors are ascribed erotic potency through juxtaposition with music, drawn together in the image of the hand. This process affirms the sounding power of the text, countering any sense we might have that, because it circulated privately, it is necessarily covert or closeted.

Turning to *Trilby,* we similarly find words taking on an incantatory quality. The 1931 movie *Svengali* (directed by Archie Mayo) enhances the original text's spell-like language: we see the pianist, later conductor, Svengali (John Barrymore) staring at Trilby (Marian Marsh), telling her "*you shall see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali*!" (Du Maurier 72). This phrase, which accompanies Svengali's idle dreams of adulation in the novel, becomes a hypnotic trigger in the movie, as the entranced Trilby repeats back to him "*Svengali! … Svengali! … Svengali!*" In novel and movie, this phrase returns when Trilby is dying of nervous exhaustion, worn down by Svengali's protracted mesmerism (Du Maurier 420). It is not only the conductor's name which sounds a drone-like note in the novel. The narrator's commentary, as Trilby performs the French military song "Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre" under Svengali's watchful eye, notes how the refrain "*Mironton, mirontaine, mirontaine*"

"becomes a dirge," which the text simulates by including several verses of the song (315). Even the tale's main location becomes spell-like as the narrator muses on the aural dimensions and transformations of texts: "Paris! Paris!! Paris!!! The very name had always been one to conjure with … as a mere sound on the lips and in the ear, or as a magical written or printed word for the eye" (8). Drawing together language's appeal to the "ear" and the "eye," the phrase recalls *Teleny*'s gestures to its enacted, performed afterlife. Yet to listen (queerly) to *Trilby* was a markedly different prospect. This text and its reception remind us of "the written word's mixed silence *and* audibility" (Leighton 4, italics added).

George du Maurier's novel could hardly be more different from *Teleny* in publication context: while the latter circulated initially in just two hundred copies, *Trilby* is estimated to have sold two million copies in the first two years following its publication in America (Freedman 91). Its tale of the tone-deaf *grisette* enchanted by the sinister mesmerist, who unlocks the power of her voice to create a singing sensation, captivated audiences on both sides of the Atlantic, immediately spawning theatrical versions (including spoofs). More than this, the tale was re-enacted by readers in more amateur settings: Jonathan Freedman records a society benefit in New York devoted to "Scenes and Songs from *Trilby,*" discussions among reading groups, recreations at burlesques, and even a "*Trilby* evening" organized by the Daughters of the American Revolution (92). *Trilby* was received as a sounding text by its contemporary audiences, who would have had to tackle the eclectic range of music featured in the novel: most challengingly, perhaps, "Chopin's impromptu in A flat," which Svengali performs on the piano in an early scene, but which is later vocalized by La Svengali—the name under which the mesmerized Trilby appears (13, 317). As one contemporary response to the novel grumblingly pointed out, the Impromptu in A flat "ranges over four octaves and a third," and even transposing the higher passages down an octave, "hopelessly mutilating Chopin's music," would still leave the problem of the piece's unrelenting pace, so that the "best trained vocalist" would be "without breath after a few bars" (Southgate 47). Indeed, the novel admits the near impossibility of La Svengali's performance but makes this a factor of its appeal: "The like of that voice has never been heard, nor ever will be again" (307).

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Trilby was experienced through sound like *Teleny* but in a far more public manner, which only continued as the novel was adapted for the screen. Numerous silent versions were produced in the early decades of the twentieth century, followed by the aforementioned *Svengali* featuring Barrymore and a British version in 1954. As Freedman records, discussions

immediately following the novel's publication included the topic, "Can *Trilby* Be Produced Onstage" (92). Ascertaining how stage productions managed to replicate La Svengali's eclectic and unlikely repertoire is difficult, given that contemporary commentators did not tend to remark on the music performed in the play. "Ben Bolt," a ballad of 1842 which had had its run of popularity long before *Trilby* gave it a second lease of life, could have been performed without difficulty, while the vocalization of Chopin's Impromptu may have been prudently avoided. The approach to music in movie adaptations is, naturally, easier to discover. While the 1954 *Svengali* eschews all the novel's original musical material, opting instead to show La Svengali performing Schubert's "Ave Maria," Brahms's "Lullaby," and some impressive—but perhaps not superhuman—operatic numbers, the 1931 version includes "Ben Bolt" and Svengali playing a Chopin Impromptu on the piano. La Svengali also vocalizes, although not the Impromptu as indicated in the novel. Despite the best efforts of the 1931 movie, the music described in Du Maurier's novel remains impossible to truly hear, and the uncapturable "grain" of Trilby's voice, as Barthes would have it, is experienced only within the language of the text. In turning to think about its representation of queer listening, we might remember that *Trilby*'s subversiveness is contained within a sonic experience which is, already, foreclosed as impossible—if none the less desirable.

Music analogizes and incites the disruption of gendered categories in *Trilby.* This is anticipated from the first appearances of the three characters who are the focal point of the later performance: Svengali, Trilby, and Little Billee, the artist in love with Trilby who watches from the audience. All three are identified by characteristics which challenge the gender binary. On Trilby's first appearance, we learn that "[she] would have made a singularly handsome boy" (16). She enters in "military drag," in what Neil Davison calls "a performance that opens the space of what will become her enticing androgyny" (90). Little Billee's stature is suggested by his nickname: he is "very graceful and well built, with very small hands and feet," prone to effusive displays of emotion, and has a fondness for homosocial relations: "[he] liked to feel the warm contact of his fellow-man at either shoulder and at his back" (6, 232). Svengali's gender variance is suggested by his "disagreeable falsetto" (12), and it is through the voice in particular that gender is disturbed in this novel.[12] Foreshadowing the unsettling

12 As Davison notes, this suggestion of "third-sex status" is one way—among very many—in which Du Maurier associates Svengali with anti-Semitic tropes, combining long-standing prejudices (about dirt and greed, for instance) with specific beliefs borne from *fin-de-siècle* discourse (75, 81–82). Although not

power of her later performance, Trilby's voice is early on described as "an incipient *tenore robusto,*" "that might almost have belonged to any sex (even an angel's)" (16, 14). Du Maurier's phrasing of "any sex," rather than "either," implies a gender spectrum, which is reinforced by the subsequent reference to angels, traditionally ambiguously gendered. Moreover, it is at the contralto pitch (historically sung by young boys and castrati) that Trilby's voice most impacts her queer listeners. As Dennis Denisoff notes of the later performance scene: "Little Billee's appreciative climax occurs when the voice reaches the highest male range" (160). Svengali, too, is "especially thrall" (59) to the contralto, urging a reading of Trilby's vocality as, in Terry Castle's term, "homovocality" (228). And as Riddell points out, Billee's appreciative climax is anticipated by his response to the Italian tenor Glorioli in an earlier scene, described in terms that "ascribe to [the voice] a pleasurable power of physical coercion that verges on the sado-masochistic" (107). While the spectacle of La Svengali ostensibly involves male rapture caused by female performance, looking more closely at the sonic properties of this novel brings it closer to the context of *Teleny,* which features a male "input" and "output" for its music.

Indeed, as he listens to this "*tenore robusto*" issuing from a female body but at a man's command, Billee experiences "hot shame" (312). The term "shame" was a recurrent "circumlocution" for male homosexuality in late-nineteenth-century literature. In *Dorian Gray*, shame marks the titular portrait ("the origin of all his shame") but also conspicuously appears in Basil Hallward's euphemistic accusations about Dorian's activities: "They say that you corrupt every one with whom you become intimate, and that it is quite sufficient for you to enter a house for shame of some kind to follow after" (146, 145). Moreover, Denisoff writes that the voice itself provides a euphemistic, culturally sanctioned cover for the exploration of desire among men, "function[ing] for Little Billee and Svengali as a transit point for erotic interaction couched in a discourse of artistic appreciation" (158). The voice as "transit point" (an idea complemented in Barthes) becomes evident as a triangulation of desire is set up between Trilby, Svengali, and Billee, and even the violinist Gecko. Music underpins the phenomenon Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has revealed to be ubiquitous in the "male-centred novelistic tradition of European high culture," wherein "the bond that links two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that

central to my discussion here, it is a conspicuous fact—as Davison and Freedman amply explore—that Du Maurier brings together gender/sexual variance and cultural heterogeneity in the figure of the Jew.

links either of the rivals to the beloved" (21). All three men desire Trilby, and two have been identified as "especially thrall" to the masculine tone of her voice. Earlier in the novel, Gecko's "large, soft, affectionate brown eyes, like a King Charles spaniel" are noted, as he keeps them "fixed in reverence on his master [Svengali]" while they play (12, 28). During La Svengali's performance (when Trilby, too, must keep her eyes fixed on Svengali), the effect is replicated and transferred to the listener, down to the canine metaphor: "[Billee's] love for Trilby became as that of a dog for its master!" (312). Unbeknownst to Billee at the time, that "master" is once again Svengali.

Listening in *Trilby*, then, is imbricated with a disturbance of gender and a triangulation of desire.

Gaze and voice function together to create a nexus of homoerotic desire around and through Trilby. Barthes's identification of the "grain" implicates a determination "to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing"—conveniently enough, Barthes's formulation here encompasses Billee's entire experience, as he listens to the woman singing *and* the man playing—and, as Barthes insists, "that relation is erotic" (188). Trilby's unawareness of the performance she is giving accords with the vocality Barthes describes when he writes: "The voice is not personal: it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul" (182). The "grain" derives not from Trilby's personality, or even her will, but is apparently latent in the specific materiality of her body: the mouth "like the dome of the Panthéon," the bridge of her nose "like the belly of a Stradivarius," and lungs in her "beautiful big chest" "made of leather," which Svengali anatomizes while identifying her potential (71). Yet when Billee hears La Svengali sing, he is not just in an erotic relationship with that body but with its queerly composite production (which Bruce Wyse has discussed as a "double voice" born of two "lacks"—Trilby's tone deafness and Svengali's meagre singing voice—creating a force depending on, and all the more mystifying and alluring because of, the involvement of two people).[13] Like Barthes's idealized voice, it "has no civil identity"—it is the bizarre product of two marginalized peoples—but its result is "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue" (182): as Du Maurier tells us, it sounds like "a broad heavenly smile of universal motherhood turned into sound" (308).

Listening in *Trilby,* then, is imbricated with a disturbance of gender and a triangulation of desire for and through the voice. Its homoeroticism remains subtextual in comparison to the accentuation of the couple, the mirrored duo, in *Teleny.* Queer listening in *Trilby* pertains significantly to

13 Wyse, "Double Voice and Extimate Singing in *Trilby*."

the novel rather than the story's later incarnations as, for instance, movies, suggesting there was something particularly productive about the text's sonic appurtenances for disclosing queer experience. The movie versions (necessarily) fall short of intimating that La Svengali's voice is "the apotheosis of voice and virtuosity," unable to provoke the same "wonder" and "revelation of what the human voice can achieve" (Du Maurier 310, 312). What they also lack, however, is the suggestion of Billee's profound, and queer, affect at listening to La Svengali. Indeed, both the 1931 and 1954 versions emphasize the story's heteroromantic aspects: in the former, Billee repeatedly attends La Svengali's performances in an attempt to win Trilby back from Svengali, and Svengali is so weakened by the force of Trilby's love for Billee that he eventually dies. In contrast, in Du Maurier's novel, Billee is "stung and tortured and maddened," after attending just one performance, by the remembrance of what he has seen (324). This sense of his pleasurable and pained affect, produced by sounds at the intersection of the masculine and feminine, is absent from screen versions. We might consider both these "lacks" as congruent and interrelated: the superlatively affective, near-impossible music and the queer listening it induces are both irreproducible outside the text of *Trilby*.

Aligning queerness with fantastical, unrealizable music, *Trilby* might resemble the late-nineteenth-century writing David Deutsch discusses in which "music frequently featured as a positive intellectual component of queer self-fashioning" (142). Appreciation for music whose high cultural cachet was generally agreed, and which required a high level of sensitivity and intellectual understanding, validated homosexual identity at this moment of its emergence. *Teleny*'s incorporation of music works in a similarly affirming manner. However, *Trilby* does not implement queer listening in the service of validating identity but, rather, suggests the heterogeneity of culture and of responses to it. The keynote of *Trilby*'s use of music is eclecticism, heralded by the "incongruous bill of fare" performed by La Svengali: an "absurd old nursery rhyme," a sentimental ballad, Hungarian *csárdás,* a Schumann *Lied*, a military march, and a piece "sans paroles," only playable on the piano (303, 307). The diverse audience, made up of musical experts, amateurs, and imperial and royal attendees, experiences laughter, tears, sympathy, enthusiasm, as well as Billee's sickness and faintness. *Teleny* communicated to its coterie of readers both by limiting its initial circulation and by delineating a sonic experience they would recognize as exalted. This experience was physiologically affective and facilitated an erotic encounter between men, but it also was mediated through the high-cultural classical music Deutsch specifies as positively

regarded in this period. By contrast, *Trilby*'s rampant eclecticism stymies coterie identification. La Svengali's affective vocal power is not limited to well-regarded classical music but overwhelms her listeners in a variety of ways, in a variety of genres. Appropriately, the novel was read and re-enacted in the variety of locales described by Freedman. Its evocation of queer listening is then subsumed into a larger schematic of heterogeneity, wherein gender variance is merely another example of categorization being frustrated. Music is undoubtedly produced and experienced queerly within *Trilby*'s narrative, but it is worlds away from *Teleny*'s identificatory mediation of music. The multitude of pages spent describing La Svengali's voice, along with the eclecticism of her repertoire, ensure that *Trilby*'s music evades the predicate in the way Barthes discusses: no one epithet suffices to capture the experience of this singer of whom Gecko declares: "the like of her has never been! the like of her will never be again!" (439)

Returning to Barthes, I suggested previously that the differences between *Teleny* and *Trilby* might be considered in terms of the location of the "grain" which facilitates the embodied queer encounter. *Teleny* displaces its musical protagonist's grain onto the hand, a movement mirrored in the novel's private circulation but erotic intent. *Trilby* focuses on vocal music, speaking openly to a mass audience. In both cases, the descriptions of listening mediate the ways in which the novel was read—and listened to—by its contemporary audience. Yet I hope to have also shown a more complex relationship between the representation of queer listening within these novels and their reception by coteries and wider cultures. Attending to the musical qualities of *Teleny* ensures we do not read it solely in terms of the covert and repressed. H.G. Cocks makes a valuable argument against the "idea that the unsayable quality of homosexual desire in Victorian England was only a sign of repression," instead suggesting that the late nineteenth century's "cultural moment"—as, for the first time, homosexual identity became culturally visible and constituted—"provided, paradoxically, a series of opportunities for those who felt attracted by same-sex desire" (160). *Teleny*'s incorporation of music to write to, and for, its anticipated audience is a good example of one of these "opportunities." Rather than merely seeing the novel's limited publication and erotic genre as necessarily covert discourse, by studying its music we can uncover the authors' affirmative intent. The authors of *Teleny* used their novel's position, paradoxically, to write openly about same-sex desire and music: making the novel, as Draucker agrees, unique for its period, treating music not as a circumlocution but as an impetus for erotic experience within

and without the novel. It is only by considering the relations between the novel's mediation of musical response and the practices and sensibilities of its readers, that is, the novel's *resonances,* that *Teleny* can be understood in this more expansive manner. In the opposite way, *Trilby* makes use of the limitations of the novel. Du Maurier encodes queer listening as integral to a performance which he explicitly states can never be properly replicated or experienced outside the world of the text. In doing so, he claims, like the authors of *Teleny,* that queer interactions and allure are at the heart of musical performance, but he makes no claim on the reader to experience this for themselves. The "grain" of La Svengali's voice must be imagined: the reader cannot hear "the materiality of the body" as they read, whereas *Teleny* continually emphasizes the materiality of bodies, in the tale being related, in the framing narrative and in the reading of the novel itself.

A sonic approach therefore alters our understanding of what might constitute covert, coded, or disclosive discourses. Considering how these novels *sounded* for their initial readers, and how they sound today, challenges assumptions about texts solely based on a study of language and the contexts of composition, publication, and reception. In complicating the idea that *Teleny*'s representation of music aligns neatly with its private circulation, and that *Trilby*'s representation of music accords with an ability to vocalize openly and clearly, I suggest further complementarities between these texts. While they seem to be on opposite sides of a public/private, overt/covert dichotomy, looking closely at their sonic properties and afterlives reveals a closer relationship between these novels, rooted in their interest in how sound might function in the text. Taking Leighton's "silence and audibility" of the text as a point of departure, I have suggested how these novels implement these qualities differently in exploring queer listening, and both are valuable resources for theorizing the queer at this important point in history. *Trilby* ultimately reminds us how both music and queerness are "resistant to legibility," to return to Peraino's term, bringing together a superlatively affective performance and a play on gender fluidity within the imaginative—and above all fantastical—framework of the text. *Teleny* survives as an important counter to the circumlocutionary associations made between musical appreciation and homoerotic feeling in other queer writing, using music to enunciate identity. Yet both novels contain diegetic accounts of listening (as displacing, as affirming, as shameful, as jubilant) which suggest essential modes of thinking about the novel as a material, embodied experience circulating within and without queer communities at an important moment in the construction of mod-

ern identity. Taking these novels together, then, sheds light on complementary ways to restore listening (always, of course, hard to capture on the page for posterity) to a central place in our interactions with texts.

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