

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This original and provocative study discusses the work of authors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and argues that members of mainstream society grew to accept and even enjoy the non-normative sexuality of the Aesthetic Movement chiefly through works of parody and self-parody. Highlighting Victorian popular culture, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody* adds a new and important dimension to the theorizations of parody as a combative strategy by which sexually marginalized groups undermine the *status quo*. From W. S. Gilbert's drama and Vernon Lee's and Christopher Isherwood's prose to George Du Maurier's cartoons and Max Beerbohm's caricatures, Dennis Denisoff explores the parodies' interactions with the personae and texts of canonical authors such as Alfred Tennyson, Walter Pater, Algernon Swinburne, and Oscar Wilde. In doing so, he considers the impact that these interactions had on modern ideas of gender, sexuality, taste, and politics.

DENNIS DENISOFF is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Ryerson University, Ontario. He is the author of *Erin Mouré: Her Life and Works*, the editor of *Queeries: An Anthology of Gay Male Prose*, and the co-editor of *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*.

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
LITERATURE AND CULTURE 31

AESTHETICISM AND SEXUAL PARODY  
1840-1940

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
LITERATURE AND CULTURE 31

General editor

Gillian Beer, *University of Cambridge*

Editorial board

Isobel Armstrong, *Birkbeck College, London*

Leonore Davidoff, *University of Essex*

Terry Eagleton, *University of Oxford*

Catherine Gallagher, *University of California, Berkeley*

D. A. Miller, *Columbia University*

J. Hillis Miller, *University of California, Irvine*

Mary Poovey, *New York University*

Elaine Showalter, *Princeton University*

Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly syntheses and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

*A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.*

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# AESTHETICISM AND SEXUAL PARODY 1840–1940

DENNIS DENISOFF



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521800396](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521800396)

© Dennis Denisoff 2001

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2001

This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Denisoff, Dennis, 1961–

Aestheticism and sexual parody, 1840–1940 / Dennis Denisoff.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in nineteenth-century literature and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 80039 0

1. English literature – 19th century – History and criticism. 2. Aestheticism (Literature)
3. English literature – 20th century – History and criticism. 4. Parodies – History and criticism. 5. Sex in literature. 6. Parody. I. Title. II. Series.

PR468.A33 D46 2001

820.9'11–dc21 00–065160

ISBN-13 978-0-521-80039-6 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-80039-0 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02489-1 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02489-7 paperback

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*For Michael*

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1 Alfred Tennyson and the critical sexualization of aestheticism	13
2 The leering creatures of W. H. Mallock and Vernon Lee	30
3 Gigolo economics: W. S. Gilbert and the market value of parodic promiscuity	56
4 “Men of my own sex”: genius, sexuality, and George Du Maurier’s artists	71
5 Epistemological misfiring in the works of Ada Leverson and Robert Hichens	97
6 Max Beerbohm, Christopher Isherwood, and camp homage	120
Epilogue	144
<i>Notes</i>	151
<i>Works cited</i>	174
<i>Index</i>	188

*Illustrations*

1	“Nincompoopiana – The Mutual Admiration Society.” George Du Maurier, <i>Punch</i> , 14 February 1880.	<i>page</i> 44
2	“The Mutual Admirationists.” George Du Maurier, <i>Punch</i> , 22 May 1880.	46
3	“A Rising Genius.” George Du Maurier, <i>Punch</i> , 11 May 1878.	74
4	“The Coming Race.” George Du Maurier, <i>Punch</i> , 18 December 1873.	78
5	“Nincompoopiana.” George Du Maurier, <i>Punch</i> , 20 December 1879.	80
6	“The Marvellous Feat of Tree-lby Svengalivanised!” Artist unidentified. <i>Punch</i> , 16 November 1895.	88
7	“At the Pines.” Max Beerbohm. No date established. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. © Estate of Max Beerbohm, by permission of London Management.	130

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

The first people that have always come to mind whenever I have considered those whom I would like to thank for their help with this project are Paisley Livingston and Brian Trehearne. The study took on its initial form through discussions with both of them and, while it has changed extensively since our initial conversations, I still recognize their contributions throughout most of it. Over the years, there have been many people who have kindly commented on versions of this material or have discussed its subjects with me. Amongst those who have been most helpful are Henry Abelow, Richard Dellamora, Peter Dickinson, Jonathan Dollimore, Diana Fuss, Jason Haslam, Shannon Hengen, Robert Martin, Kathy Alexis Psomiades, Talia Schaffer, and Elaine Showalter. The one person who has helped me with this project from beginning to end is M. Morgan Holmes. He has read more versions than I can remember and has offered his appreciated opinion and advice on probably as much material that has ultimately been excised as appears in this final version. I dedicate the book to him with love.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding my research and the library staff at McGill University, Princeton University, Cambridge University, the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, and the British Public Library who helped me with my work. I would also like to thank Linda Bree and Rachel DeWachter from Cambridge University Press for their support, thoroughness, and unflagging attention to detail.

Earlier versions of the third and fourth chapters appeared respectively in *Mapping Male Sexuality*, edited by William D. Brewer, and Jay Losey (© 2000 by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press) and *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, edited by Richard Dellamora (© 2000 by Chicago University Press). My discussion of Christopher Isherwood in the final

Cambridge University Press

0521800390 - Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940

Dennis Denisoff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xii

*Acknowledgments*

chapter first appeared in altered form in *Performing Gender and Comedy: Theories, Texts and Contexts*, edited by Shannon Hengen (© 1998 by Overseas Publishers Association, published by Gordon and Breach Publishers).