

**Fair Readers of Pornography:  
Narrative Intervention & Parodic-Didactic Style in Captain Charles Devereaux's *Venus in India***

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<1> Two simple words, “you” and “reader,” as Robyn Warhol argues in *Gendered Interventions*, have been dismissed by critics and theorists as signals of lazy or bad writing: “The technique of pretending to confide in a ‘dear reader’ is traditionally associated with novels that are, at best, drearily didactic and, at worse, cloyingly sentimental. Even in more recent criticism, which has rehabilitated narrative intrusion as one of the many conventions that combine to form the genre of the novel, the ‘dear reader’ intervention is usually only defensible insofar as it is ironic” (xiii). However, these “narrative intrusions” can create extratextual possible worlds for the reader—can work to further engage the reader with the storyworld and to tease out parallels between the actual world of the readers and the storyworld of the text. Explorations of “narrative intrusions”—better termed by Warhol as “narrative interventions”—by Warhol and others such as Garrett Stewart tend to focus on canonical works and popular mainstream novels from the middle and late nineteenth century but ignore one form of popular yet illicit Victorian fiction: erotica.<sup>(1)</sup> As a means of opening applications of narrative intervention to sub-rosa literature, this project is a study of one work of late Victorian pornography: Captain Charles Devereaux's *Venus in India*. Devereaux's text was selected because of its intriguing use of narrative interventions by a male narrator to addresses female narratees. Through the narrative interventions, Devereaux parodies the didactic novel form and engenders various the possible worlds of sexual desire that cross the boundary from the storyworld into the actual world.

<2> Devereaux uses narrative interventions to address a promiscuous audience (an audience of men and women—but also here a term that plays on various characters' sexual promiscuity), and he pays sustained and specific attention to his female narratees (and by extension to a female narrative audience<sup>(2)</sup>). Devereaux's narrative interventions, which address women more frequently than men, normalize and/or police female sexual desire and various sex acts while simultaneously demonizing other forms of desire and sex. One effect of the interventions and style is the creation of various possible worlds that “evoke sympathy and identification from an actual reader [or narrative audience]” (Warhol, *Gendered* 32). Through gender-specific narrative interventions, Devereaux creates a parody of the didacticism common to Victorian realist novels and allows his readers to construct at least three possible bridges between the text and the actual world.

### **1. Representations of Sex & Desire in *Venus in India***

<3> *Venus in India* is allegedly Devereaux's autobiography; however, there is no historical evidence to support the claim, and the text is best classified as fiction. In his introduction to a twentieth-century reprint of the narrative, Milton Van Sickle argues, while “Captain Charles Devereaux” is likely a fictional creation, “the author was undoubtedly stationed in India [...], for he has more than a passing acquaintance with the locale” (11). Van Sickle notes that the text contains “a few minor [historical]

mistakes, but these are mistakes which a writer could easily make, looking back on his sojourns in India from a distance of ten or fifteen years" (11).<sup>(3)</sup> Regardless of the doubts as to the authenticity of the author, because the text was published with Devereaux listed as the author and with Devereaux as the autobiographic narrator, I will continue the tradition of referring to him as both the author and narrator. In *Venus in India*, Devereaux, a married man, recounts his affair with a married woman as well as affairs with three young unmarried sisters. The narrative also detours into stories of prostitution, rape, and voyeurism. Primarily a pornographic text, the novel<sup>(4)</sup> draws on travel narratives, memoirs, and other licit genres.

<4> Devereaux's text is divided into two volumes. In the first volume, Devereaux leaves his young and sexually enthusiastic wife, Louie, in England and reports for a tour of duty in northwestern India at the close of the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880). Volume one is set at his first post under the command of Major Searles. Having made no promises of fidelity to Louie and eschewing the proffered sexual favors of several Indian women, the first volume details Devereaux's affair with Lizzie Wilson, the wife of an absent army officer. Vignettes in volume one recount Devereaux and Louie's passionate marriage; Devereaux's disappointment with the lack of pornographic detail in Theophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*; Lizzie's memories of losing her virginity; Searles's predilection for sodomy and Searles's wife's new career as a high-priced prostitute as her means of punishing her husband for sodomizing her; and Searles's attempted rape of Lizzie and subsequent beating by the enlisted men. The second volume follows Devereaux to his next station in the mountains of northwestern India. Now under the command of Colonel Selwyn, Devereaux, still forswearing Indian prostitutes and adding the abandoned Irish wives of enlisted men to his list of women he will not have sex with,<sup>(5)</sup> pursues three virgin sisters: Fanny (age 16), Amy (age 18), and Mabel (age 12 or 13, Devereaux is vague about her exact age), the daughters of Colonel Selwyn. Before he deflowers any of the young girls, Devereaux interrupts two Afghan men who are attempting to rape Fanny and Amy; both girls still retain their "maidenheads" after the rape (Fanny because Devereaux arrived in her room at the start of the attack and Amy because she was anally assaulted). Within weeks of this incident, their virginity "falls a prize to [his] stalwart lance" (Devereaux 184). The second volume also includes acts of voyeurism and frank discussions of birth control methods as well as of oral sex and other forms of foreplay. The second volume closes with Devereaux and Mabel's first sexual encounter and with Devereaux's promise to continue in the third volume with details of his further sexcapades. There is no record of the third volume, and it seems to never have been published.

<5> Throughout the novel, Devereaux clearly delineates between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" sex acts. Deflowering young virgins? Acceptable as long as they give some sign of approval (which can be very, very vague). Extramarital affairs? Acceptable as long as no promises of fidelity have been explicitly made. Oral sex, hand jobs, contraception, voyeurism, fondling unconscious women, raping a cousin? All fine, according to Devereaux. The only sexual taboos presented in the text are sodomy and some rapes (namely rapes Devereaux does not commit himself). Presenting himself as a man both deeply in love with his wife and deeply interested in sex (he repeatedly refers to sex as a form of worship, hence the novel's title), Devereaux leads his narratees and narrative audience into wilder and wilder sexual situations, building on their acceptance of one sex act as "normal" in order to have them accept more sex acts as "normal."

## 2. Narratees, Narrative Audiences, and Narrative Intervention

<6> Devereaux employs direct address of his narratees and narrative audience through his use of "you," "reader," and "readers." Through these interventions, Devereaux as author-narrator-character attempts

to situate his reader (both imagined and actual) in the narrative and to blur the distinction between the narratee and the narrative audience. As James Phelan asserts, there is not always a need to distinguish between Gerald Prince's narratee and Peter Rabinowitz's narrative audience "because in many narratives the differences are nonexistent or negligible" (135). Moreover, Phelan argues that the narratological narratee and the rhetorical narrative audience (in a slightly revised form) are complementary theories; "Let Prince's definition of narratee stand: the audience addressed by the narrator (the enunciatee). Let Rabinowitz's definition of narrative audience be modified: the actual audience's projection of itself into the observer role within the fiction" (145). In "Reception and Reader," Phelan and Rabinowitz explore the ways in which an actual reader (or narrative audience) receives a text. Their work on readers and reception is central to understanding Warhol's *Gendered Interventions*. For Phelan and Rabinowitz, "an actual reader needs to recognize that it [a narrative] is an invented artifact [...] and, at the same time, to *pretend* to be a member of the narrative audience who takes what he or she reads as history and treats the characters as real. Having this double consciousness is another aspect of reading in the authorial audience of fiction" (140, their emphasis). The narrative audience is the actual reader/receiver of the narration; "the narrative audience considers the represented characters and events to be real and believes that the fiction narrated is a history. As opposed to the narratee, it is not so much a figure 'out there' in the text as a role that the text asks (or requires) the real reader to play" (Prince par. 13). The authorial audience is the audience the author imagines when composing the text, which may or may not be aligned with the narrative audience. "Much of the flavor of a work stems from the relationship between the authorial and narrative audiences," including the ways in which the two audiences do not overlap (Phelan and Rabinowitz 142). Devereaux addresses a mixed sexed group of narratees and rhetorically urges his actual readers to identify themselves with the narratees. In addressing male and female narratees, Devereaux provides a means by which actual male and female readers can align themselves with the textual "you" and the "reader."

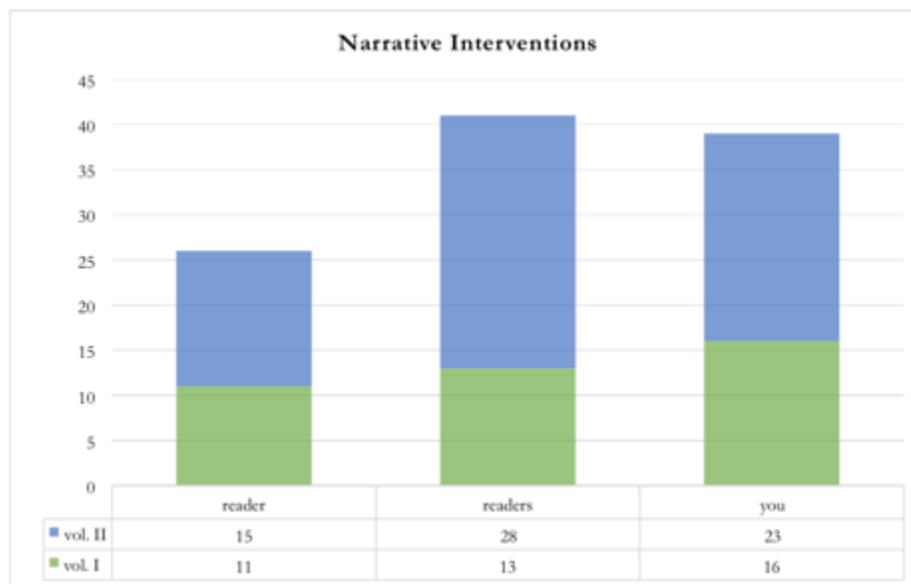
<7> Narrative interventions such as the ones Devereaux uses were common strategies in Victorian novels, as Warhol and Stewart each illustrate. Warhol argues, "Narrative interventions help to position the reader in relation to the text, at the same time expressing the novelists' own goals, either ironically or explicitly" (*Gendered* xii). She divides narrators who use narrative interventions into two categories: distancing and engaging. A distancing narrator "who intervenes to address a narratee does so to set the actual reader [narrative audience] apart from the 'you' in the text," whereas an engaging narrator "strives to close the gaps between the narratee" and narrative audience (Warhol, *Gendered* 29). Rather than seeing narrative interventions as disruptions, intrusions, or signs of bad writing, Warhol explores how interventions in Victorian novels, especially interventions by engaging narrators, affect the narrative audience and connect the author to the audience through the narrator-narratee relationship. Warhol's feminist approach to authors and narrators centers on embodiment:

Who is speaking? To whom? In what circumstances? These most basic questions of classical narrative theory provide the starting place for a feminist narratological study of narration. For a gender-centered analysis, the personification of narrator and narratee implied in the usage "who?" and "to whom?" is entirely appropriate, because feminist narratology so often treats a text's situation of enunciation as if it were an exchange between embodied persons. (Warhol, "Authors" 39)

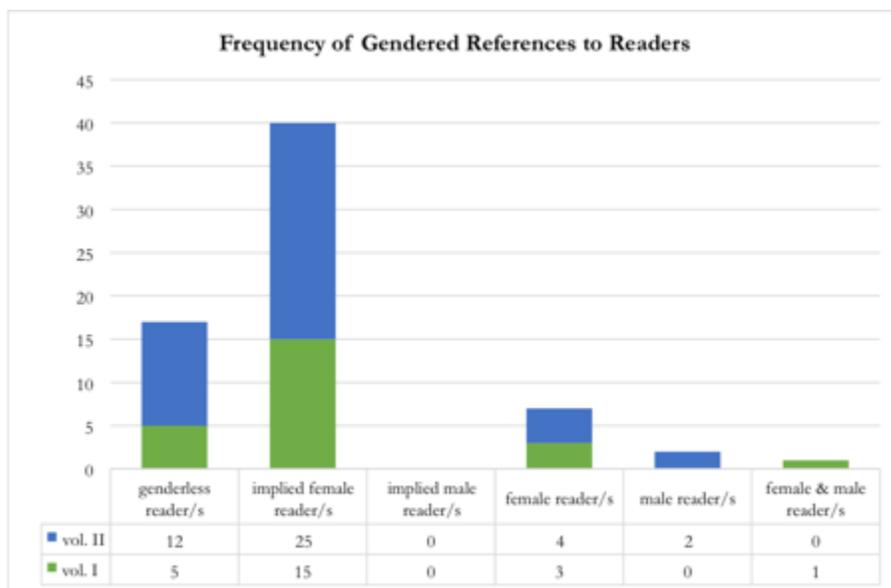
For Warhol, "the identity, experience, and socio-historical circumstances of the author—not to mention the reader—are important in understanding the ways that narrative participates in the politics of gender" ("Authors" 39); "too deeply invested in poststructuralism to place much value on 'authorial

intention,' feminist narratology nevertheless asks how the author's gendered experiences of a particular time in a particular place affects the structures he or she employs in putting together the story and discourse that comprise narrative" ("Authors" 39). While Devereaux's sense of morality is, quite clearly, radically different from the morality of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Gaskell, and other realist authors Warhol discusses, Devereaux, Stowe, Gaskell, and other nineteenth-century realist novelists use engaging narrative interventions to the same effect: to "communicat[e] between themselves [the author or narrator] and a living, breathing audience" and "to persuade audiences on matters of morality and politics" (Warhol, *Gendered* 195). Devereaux's uses of "you" creates an intimacy between the author and the reader, an intimacy which is reinforced by the reader's awareness of his/her position as a voyeur throughout the novel. Moreover, in creating that sense of intimacy, Devereaux attempts to also align his reader with his sexual mores in much the same way that Warhol argues that Stowe attempts to align her readers with her political mores.

<8> Devereaux's narrative interventions are present throughout the two volumes, although the frequency and form vary. While Devereaux does use "you" to address the narratee and narrative audience,(6) the most common narrative intervention is his address of the "reader" and "readers":



While "reader(s)" and "you" are gender-neutral words, Devereaux explicitly addresses a male and female audience. In volume I, after eleven addresses to the reader that either were gender-neutral (in that there were no adjectives to modify the noun) or could connote a female narratee/narrative audience or femininity (in that there were adjectives such as "gentle" and "fair" attached to the noun), Devereaux addresses "my readers, male and female" (49). In fact, of the sixty-seven addresses to the "reader(s)," most either explicitly address female readers (10.4%) or use adjectives to imply the presence of female readers (59.7%); the remainder of the readerly addresses are gender-neutral or connote male readers:



Devereaux only directly refers to only male narratees twice: “my male readers” (195) and “my soldier readers” (273), but he refers explicitly to female narratees seven times: “my girl readers” (143; 196), “my tender girl readers” (73; 123), “dear girl readers” (139; 196), and “my sweet girl readers” (56). But more frequently, the author-narrator uses adjectives that connote femininity: “dear” or “dearest” (nineteen times), “gentle” (twelve times), “fair” (four times), “patient” (three times), and “sympathizing” and “anxious and generous minded” (once each). While men can certainly be dear, gentle, patient, sympathizing, anxious, or generous, the terms themselves conjure images of expected feminine behavior during the nineteenth century. Of the fifty-seven addresses to the “reader(s)” that do not carry explicit gender markers (such as “male,” “female,” “solider,” or “girl”), only seventeen do not have adjectives and none have adjectives that connote masculinity.

### 3. Parodic-Didactic Style

<9> Some of the genre-centered ways in which Devereaux parodies mainstream novel forms are readily apparent: the memoir is only concerned with sexual conquests, the travel narrative is only concerned with way in which travel allows him to meet new sexual partners, and the not-quite three-volume “realist” novel is only concerned with the realities of the narrator’s bedroom. These parodies quickly rise to the surface, and such genre parody is a long-standing hallmark of English-language pornography.<sup>(7)</sup> The narrative inventions embedded within the story are also parodic, although less obviously so. Warhol points to “earnest” narrative interventions as a hallmark of Victorian realism (*Gendered* xiii). The combination of an engaging narrator and earnest narrative interventions allow “the text [to produce] a real event, an exchange of ideas that the novelist hopes will result in real consequences” (Warhol, *Gendered* 203). These interventions are a bridge between the story and the discourse: “What engaging direct address attempts to do that neither distancing address nor apostrophe can do is to insist that it is ‘only a (true) story’ by alluding to the presence of the actual reader in the engaging ‘you,’ a presence that is literally real as long as someone is perusing the passage of address and receiving the message” (Warhol, *Gendered* 204). The narrative interventions conflate the narratees and the narrative audience. That conflation of narratees and narrative audience allows the actual readers to situate themselves in the possible worlds created by the text.

<10> Devereaux's use of the autobiographic style with his position as an engaging narrator and the blurring of the distinction between the narratees and the narrative audience create the illusion of a truthful narrative that recounts real events. Moreover, it creates another layer of voyeurism: while some characters watch others having sex in the novel, the narratees and narrative audience are watching all of the sex acts presented. The reader becomes a participant in the narrative by reading the narrative, but the extent to which the reader sees himself or herself as part of the story depends on "the degree to which an actual reader can or cannot identify with" the narratees (Warhol, *Gendered* 27). By addressing female narratees, Devereaux attempts to close the gap between some of his readers (namely women, who in the late nineteenth century would not be assumed to be readers of erotica) and his text.

<11> Warhol also points to the use of the "dear reader" as a well-worn convention of sentimental and didactic fiction by the late nineteenth century, a concept also explored by Stewart. Devereaux's erotica can be read as a parody of the didactic realist novel: through these interventions, he attempts to align the audience, especially female readers, with the narratees, to convince the readers of the narrative's truthfulness, and to have the readers act on lessons learned from the text. If "every engaging address to 'you' simultaneously reminds the narratee (and the actual reader) that the story is only a fiction and encourages the reader to apply to nonfictional, real life the feelings that the fiction may have inspired" (Warhol, *Gendered* 43-44), then Devereaux writes with the hope of his readers applying the fantasies presented in the text to their actual lives. It is in large part the didactic style, which itself is constructed by the narrative interventions, that leads to the creation of various possible worlds for the narratees and narrative audience. Warhol hints at the links among narrative intervention, narrative style, and possible worlds in her analysis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's realist novel:

When the narrator of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* speaks to "you, generous, noble-minded men and women of the South—you, whose virtue and magnanimity and purity of character, are the greater for the severe trial it has encountered," the speaker can have no certain knowledge of the virtue and magnanimity of actual Southern readers, nor of the Southern affiliations of any individual actual reader. Operating in a context where her information about the "real you" may be faulty, the narrator tries to win "you" with the ingratiating rhetoric of her engaging appeal. And if she can thus draw you in, she could possibly change your mind; if she does change your mind and you happen to be a Southern slave owner, she might change the world. (Warhol, *Gendered* 33)

Warhol's linking of these three structures in Stowe's novel can be repurposed for an analysis of Devereaux's novel:

When the narrator of [*Venus in India*] speaks to ["everyone [sic] of my dear girl readers [who] will allow that it is an awfully pleasant thing to have their own sweet bubbies and delightful mound felt and caressed by the man whom they admire" (Devereaux 196)], the speaker can have no certain knowledge of the [passions and desires] of actual [female] readers, nor of the [sexual history or experiences] of any individual actual reader. Operating in a context where [Devereaux's] information about the "real you" may be faulty, the narrator tries to win "you" with the ingratiating rhetoric of [his] engaging appeal. And if [he] can thus draw you in, [he] could possibly change your mind; if [he] does change your mind and you happen to be a [female reader who does not think sexual desire is "normal" for women], [he] might change [the sexual norms of the actual] world. (Warhol, *Gendered* 33)

Through the didactic narrative interventions, the reader can create possible worlds of sexual desire, possible worlds that could spill over into their actual lives.

#### 4. Possible Worlds of Sex & Desire

<12> Warhol hints at the variety of possible narrative worlds that can be spawned by an engaging narrator: “The task of the engaging narrator [...] is to evoke sympathy and identification from an actual reader who is unknown to the author and therefore infinitely variable and unpredictable” (*Gendered* 32). A possible effect of engaging narrative interventions is cross-world identification: in “Mimesis and Possible Worlds,” Lubomír Doležel posits that “fictional worlds are accessible from the actual world only through *semiotic channels* by means of information processing. [...] [A]n actual reader can ‘observe’ fictional worlds and make them a source of his experience, just as he observes and experientially appropriates the actual world” (485, his emphasis). Engaging narrators attempt to align the actual reader and the “you” or “reader” addressed in the storyworld; if the alignment is successful and the reader does take up a position close to that of the textual “you,” then cross-world identification between the actual world and the storyworld becomes possible. Warhol argues, “Narrative interventions help to position the reader in relation to the text, [while] at the same time expressing the novelists’ own goals, either ironically or explicitly” (*Gendered* xii). “When the engaging narrator speaks to a ‘you’ that stands for the actual reader [...], the text produces a real event, an exchange of ideas that the novelist hopes will result in real consequences” via cross-world identification (Warhol, *Gendered* 203). If the actual reader is “infinitely variable and unpredictable,” the Doleželian possible worlds created by the reader interacting with the text could also be infinitely variable and unpredictable; however, by narrowing the focus to likely readers of *Venus in India* in the late nineteenth century, some finite and somewhat predicable readers and possible worlds can be traced. There are at least three possible worlds created by the engaging narrator, the narrative interventions, and the parodic-didactic style of *Venus in India*: (1) a normalizing world which affirms female heterosexual desires, (2) a policing world that defines and delineates women’s sexuality, and (3) a titillating world designed for heterosexual male pleasure. The text defines the terms of readerly possible world constructions, and both the text and its readers are situated in a culture that also defines the conditions for fictional world creation.

<13> Shifts among these three possible worlds are linked to the narrative audience’s identification with the narratees. David Herman’s synthesis of Richard Gerrig’s transport theory and Marie-Laure Ryan’s fictional re-centering is key to the creation of the possible worlds for the narratee and narrative audience in *Venus in India*: “Gerrig uses the metaphor of transportation to characterize how readers make sense of the storyworlds evoked through print texts,” and Ryan explores “not just the relation between the world of origin and the target world but also the structure of the target world itself” (Herman 119; 120). Devereaux’s engaging narrator and narrative interventions transport the narrative audience into the storyworld and align the audience with the narratees in the text. While the narrative audience can resist the transportation and alignment, the structure of the text constantly attempts to reinforce the link between the narratee and audience through the use of “reader(s)” and “you.” These tensions between acceptance and resistance help to create the possible worlds for narrative audience. Moreover, the tensions in the Doleželian deontic system surrounding sex and sexuality (what is “permitted, prohibited, and obligatory” [Ryan para. 9])—tensions created by the narrator and the audience’s own deontic system—also affects creation of possible worlds for the narrative audience.

<14> In the normalizing possible world, the direct address of the narratees and narrative audience gives the female reader permission to enjoy and seek out sex, to have pre- or extramarital sex, and to use

birth control methods. With the exception of two instances of anal rape (Searles and his wife; an unnamed Afghan man and Amy) and two of vaginal rape<sup>(8)</sup> (Searles and Lizzie; another unnamed Afghan man and Fanny), the narrator condones all forms of sex acts and sexual appetites presented in the novel. The deontic system governing this world is two-fold: (1) while few sex acts are explicitly prohibited, many more are permitted, and (2) unlike the moral system publically espoused in the actual world, women and girls do have sexual desires and appetites (as long as those appetites are heterosexual and do not conflict with the ban on rape and/or sodomy). Devereaux's narratees are apparently not shocked by the condoned sex acts presented in the text; there are no instances in which the narrator has to convince his narratees, male or female, that the actions presented in the text are acceptable. This normalizing world subverts the real world taboos of the late nineteenth century about sex and specifically female sexual desire without explicitly mentioning the taboos. The didactic impulses in the text foster cross-world identification: if "I" (the actual female reader) enjoy the sex acts presented in the text, then my desires are "normal."

<15> The second possible world created by the text is the policing world. This world is related to the normalizing world but represents a shift in motivation and power. If the normalizing world empowers women, then the policing world disenfranchises them. Whereas the normalizing world is created by and for female readers who have acknowledged their desire by reading erotica and who are perhaps more likely to believe and act on Devereaux's claims that the represented sex acts are normal, the policing world reflects instead a male-centric view of female desire. Rather than women desiring sex of their own accord and having sex of their own free will (as in the normalizing world), female readers in the policing world are shown deontic systems of sex acts and desires and asked by the text to apply those to their own actual lives. However, the deontic sexual systems presented in the text reinforce many taboos of the actual world: homosexuality, anal sex, the coupling of sex and violence, vaginal sex with the man in a "subordinate" position, group sex, and other "non-normative" acts are either not condoned in the text or explicitly labeled as "deviant." The emphasis on the deontic split between what is permitted and what is prohibited in the storyworld serves also to emphasize the strict boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable desires in the actual world. The didactic style of *Venus in India* can have a policing function in this possible world. By showing female readers acceptable and unacceptable sex acts and desires and by ignoring other sex acts and desires, the text polices the female readers' sexuality: if the women in the novel enjoy these sex acts, then "I" (the actual female reader) should or must enjoy them, too. Condoning and condemning creates explicit boundaries for desires. Moreover, the male author-narrator reinforces the idea that what is condoned or condemned is ultimately a man's choice for a woman.

<16> The third possible world is one of male pleasure rather than female desire. The fictional female narratees and the imagined female narrative audience are present only to titillate the male narrative audience. The narrative interventions could create a world in which the pleasure of reading pornography for men is heightened by the idea that real women might also be reading the text and deriving pleasure from the reading.<sup>(9)</sup> This world is one that reinforces the taboo of female sexual desire (women aren't and shouldn't be reading the novel), while simultaneously subverting the real world taboo by creating a textual world that is centered on sexually active, and even sexually aggressive, women. In this possible world, women are the objects of male pleasure. Just as "I" (the actual male reader) can enjoy reading an erotic novel, "I" can also derive sexual pleasure from imagining women reading the text. The novel reinforces this quasi-voyeuristic pleasure of imagining a female audience reading a pornographic work by stressing the relationship between the male author-narrator and the female narratees/narrative audience. The sexual pleasure is double: the male reader can "see" the sex acts in the text, and he can also "see" the female reader enjoying reading about those same textual sex

acts. However, the female reader of the text is no more real than the women Devereaux encounters in the text; both are imaginary and conjured by the narrative in order to heighten the male reader's enjoyment.

<17> Each of these three possible worlds offers different explanations of the narrative interventions as well as of why the text refers to or connotes female readers more than male readers. In the normalizing world, the focus on female readers reinforces that it is normal for women to read erotica and to engage in the acts described. In the policing world, women are the objects to be contained by rules; they are directly addressed because their behaviors and appetites must be circumscribed by men. In the titillating world, the emphasis on female readers, who in this possible world are not real but only imagined, provides the male readers with the illusion or fantasy of actual women who read erotica and who have insatiable sexual appetites, just like Lizzie, Fanny, Amy, and Mabel in the novel. The normalizing world permits women to express their sexual natures; the policing world restricts female sexuality; and the titillating world erases women as agents and turns them into (fictional) objects of male fantasies.

<18> These possible worlds are best illustrated by analyzing specific addresses of the female narrative audience and by tracking the changes in how the passage can be interpreted across the normalizing, policing, and titillating worlds. In his first address of implied female readers early in volume one, Devereaux writes, "For my dearest wife, gentle reader, was the life of passion; she was not one of those who coldly submit to their husbands [sic] caresses because it is their duty to do so, a duty however not to be done with pleasure or joyfully, but more as a species of penance!" (18). While the first direct address of female readers does not occur for another 38 pages, once a female readership has been later established, this passage on wifely duty can be read as intended for the same female readership. In the normalizing world, the gentle female reader is aligned with Devereaux's wife—like Louie, the female reader is an enthusiastic sexual partner for her husband (or will be someday if she is not already married). In the policing world, the female reader is instructed to be more like Louie—the narrative tells this female reader, assumed to be a cold wife, to be more passionate. In the titillating world, the male reader can imagine his own wife (or other sexual partners) to be (perhaps secretly) as passionate as Louie.

<19> Later in the text, in recounting a bout of impotence, Devereaux imagines young Mabel's excitement if he decides to proposition her, and he declares to the readers that "everyone [sic] of my dear girl readers will allow that it is an awfully pleasant thing to have their own sweet bobbies and delightful mound felt and caressed by the man whom they admire" (196). In the normalizing world, that statement is taken as a given truth: all women—both the fictional characters in the story and the real women reading the text—enjoy these acts, and the real women's desires are validated by the narrative. However, for female readers in the policing world, that statement creates a different possible world; if "I" (the female reader) am told by the narrator that all women do enjoy these things, then "I" should as well, and if "I" do not, then "I" am abnormal and should seek to correct "my" sexual abnormality. In the titillating world, the actual female reader is subsumed by male desire; there are no actual female narrative audience, only the illusion of them to heighten the male reader's pleasure. In this world, pleasure and desire belong not the female readers (because they are in every sense of the word fictional) but to the male readers. The statement about female pleasure and desire can be read as a truth: all women enjoy these things, and therefore, men should engage in these acts with women. In each of the Doleželian worlds, agency shifts slightly: women actually enjoy these acts, women should or must enjoy these acts, or men are excited by the idea that women might read pornography and enjoy a wide variety of sex acts.

<20> Devereaux comments on the dangers of sex, especially for women, throughout the text. In his first direct address of female readers, Devereaux warns, "Every rose has its thorn, my sweet girl readers, and alas! most pleasures have their drawbacks. Happy are those who make the most of the rose and the least of the thorn" (56). This warning is explicitly for his female readers—and as Devereaux later reveals in the narrative, the two most dangerous thorns for a woman are pregnancy and public sanction. However, Devereaux offers solutions for both of these potential problems in volume two. He instructs his readers in forms of birth control, and he explicitly links birth control to freedom from public sanction:

The girl whose belly fills out, the effect of her too ardent love for the handsome youth, repents and repents bitterly for her "sin" because, for her, it is the most evil consequence which could follow upon the heels of the delicious poke, but not she, who protected from such unlucky results by her lover, careful and tender, enjoys her voluptuous meetings with him. Repentance, in fact, is all twaddle, and certainly will never come up, unless they have the realistic fancy opening a picture of approaching sorrow and misery.

Obey the commandment, "Thou shalt not be found out," and leave repentance and reproach in the background, my dear girl readers. (Devereaux 139)

Note, however, that both in this passage and in two later passages in which Devereaux uses birth control, preventing pregnancy is the man's duty—the woman must be "protected from such unlucky results" by the man, and Devereaux details how he protects Fanny, using language that is at once instructive and sexually charged:

Her filled grotto was overflowing and that reminded me that I must take care of Fanny. Kneeling down and telling her to let me do what I liked, I passed my hand up her thighs, and introduced two fingers, as far as they would go into her hot, soft little place. I used them like glove stretchers and succeeded in bringing another flow of imprisoned spend down my hand and wrist, and so relieved Fanny of what might otherwise have proved a dangerous burden. She asked me why I did that.

"I will tell you another time, darling. But come, let me wipe you once more, and then we will take a turn of the avenue and see whether anyone is coming out."

Fanny submitted to the further wiping with a voluptuous surrender of herself, which was exquisitely delicious to me. (249-250)

I was glad to explain [why I had put the sponge into Fanny]. I gently drew it out by the thin silken thread I had fastened to it, to the outer end of which I had also fastened a little cross-bar of silver, to prevent its being entirely sucked up into her, by the backwards and forward strokes of my passion, and I showed her the great quantities of spend which I had poured into her, and I explained to her the formation of her womb, and how necessary it was for her safety to prevent a possible baby, that the mouth of the womb should be prevented from being watered by the prolific produce of my ardor, and that, to still further deaden the vitality of that spend, I had used phrenyle. She quite understood me as I proceeded, and kissed me again and again, thanking me for the great care I took of her and saying that she had never thought of any danger. I told her I had written to Cawnpore for a powerful douche, and sent a receipt to be made up which would be more effective and pleasant than the phrenyle, as it would have rose water as one of its ingredients, and would have a more pleasant aroma; and then I proposed that she should get up, and let me wash her grotto, so that I might pay it again the homage of my kisses. To this she joyfully assented. I got a basin of water and a towel and bathed her hot

little spot. She enjoyed the freshness of the water, and when I had dried her bush and thighs she insisted on washing my shaft in her turn, laughing and happy. (262-263)

While neither of these passages include a readerly address, Devereaux has framed these passages with his earlier warning to his female audience about the dangers of pregnancy and his position that proper birth control methods will allow women to bypass the thorns and enjoy only the rose. For female readers in the normalizing world, these passages can be read as instructive (here is how to avoid pregnancy) or as affirming (how these characters have avoided pregnancy reflects how “I” as an actual woman have avoided pregnancy)—these passages affirm that women want to enjoy sex without worrying about pregnancy. Readers in the policing world receive a different message—these passages instruct them on what they should be doing without regard to whether they want to avoid pregnancy.<sup>(10)</sup> In this policing world, emphasis is put in the man’s role in birth control, namely that he is in charge of when and how birth control is used; the women’s role is then to passively accept the protection offered by her partner. Moreover, the passages can be read in this world as policing “acceptable” knowledge about women’s bodies. Fanny, like the reader in the policing world, should not know about her own biology unless instructed by her male partner. In the titillating world, birth control becomes sexy—Devereaux eroticizes the passages in which he uses birth control, blending the practical and the pornographic. Moreover, these male readers in the titillating world can enjoy the idea of women who willingly use birth control and who employ birth control in order to have more sex.

<21> In volume two, Devereaux writes, “With some girls it [sex acts, desire, passion] seems natural, others can be taught, but most require to be trained” (261). His uses of engaging narrative interventions and of a primarily female narrative audience encompasses all three possibilities outlined in the previous statement. The women in the normalizing world are “naturals” when it comes to sex; they enjoy sex and are willing to seek out their own sexual pleasures (including reading *Venus in India*). The women in the policing world must be trained, and *Venus in India* becomes an eroticized training manual. The imagined women in the titillating world are both natural and in need of teaching, and the male reader can fantasize about further instructing the “naturals” and beginning the educations of those who are eager to learn. Moreover, Devereaux constructs nearly every woman he encounters in the text as sexually active and willing, and he constructs all of his female readers as sexually active and willing—nearly no woman is out of bounds according to the narrative.

## 5. Conclusions

<22> Definitive editions of pornographic works from the nineteenth century are difficult to find. Because of the surreptitious means of publication and distribution and of the legal sanction levied against producers and consumers of pornography, a single pornographic work may be published and republished without careful tracking of what was in the original text. *Venus in India* is no different. In the Holloway House edition of the text, the following passage is not present, but in an online version of the text, the following passage is intact<sup>(11)</sup>—when or why the passage was dropped or added is unclear; however, the passage is notable for its address of both female and male readers:

Now, dearest reader, I hope you are interested in Fanny's sweet, thrilling little cunt, as I was. As interested in hearing about the fucking of it as I was also. Girls, darling, who may read these dear but naughty pages, I hope your delectable little cunnies are moistening and tickling with sympathy, and Oh! ye, my male readers, may those pricks, which I trust are stiffly standing, have sweet cunts to cool their ardor not far off! (Devereux vol. 2).

In three sentences, Devereaux shifts from a general “dearest reader” to “girls, darling, who may read these dear but naughty pages” to “my male readers.” He aligns his readers’ voyeuristic pleasures with his own sexual pleasures and acknowledges the purpose of erotica: the sexual arousal of the reader. This passage, perhaps more so than others in the narrative, works towards a cross-world identification, towards constructing an engaged narrative audience willing to act in the actual world based on the actions and emotions conjured by the storyworld. Granted the cross-world identification and creation of possible worlds is simpler than that of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which challenges the reader to take up the abolitionist cause; Devereaux is simply interested in a good poke.

<23> But pleasure and desire can be revolutionary, especially when it is women’s pleasure and desire that is being recognized. The normalizing world of pleasure and desire validates women’s sexuality—they are allowed to read such “naughty pages” while still being “darling” women (rather than monstrous women who have been polluted by sex). The policing world seeks to correct misunderstandings about sex and sexuality, specifically about women’s pleasure and desire; and while this world takes a corrective and absolute stance on “normal” and “abnormal” sexuality, stances that may preclude the reader’s actual experiences, the policing world is still radical in its construction of women as active agents in the bedroom (or in the garden or in the army tent or wherever they choose to have sex). The titillating world—the world in which the female readers are as fictional as the female characters, the world in which female readers are only constructed as another element of pornographic pleasure for the male reader—is also radical in its portrayal of women as active agents, but it is problematic in that these active female agents are only fictional. In the titillating world, such women are not real, are not to be found in the actual world. In this world, the male readers whose “pricks [...] are stiffly standing” while reading Devereaux’s narrative are wanting “sweet cunts to cool their ardor”—and these male readers’ pleasure at reading the erotica is, in the titillating world, heightened by imagining willing female partners in the actual world who have also read and been aroused by the same pornographic narrative. Moreover, Devereaux’s narrative leaves open all three of these possible worlds—the reader is allowed to construct/participate in any of these possible worlds (or even to move among all three worlds in a single reading).

<24> Warhol and Susan S. Lanser call for feminist/queer narratologists to “test our models against a broader range of world narrative forms and to learn from that process the limits of our current understandings of narrative form and function” (10). The study of sub-rosa narratives like *Venus in India* and other erotic novels can lead to a fuller understanding of not only the literary culture of the nineteenth century but also of the broader culture producing and consuming such works. Lisa Z. Sigel, in *Governing Pleasures*, situates her study of written and visual pornography within the concept of the “social imaginary,” which provides “people a way to organize their culture, to understand the actions, behaviors, artifacts, symbols, and signs among which they live. It acts not only on people but also through people as they continually cast, recast, and reconstitute their milieu in meaningful ways” (2). Sigel argues, “Writers and audiences, ideas and attitude, genres and conventions overlapped between the sub rosa and aboveboard, creating a mixture more heady and potent than either alone. Pornography is not the ‘underworld’ of Victorian literature, and the attempt to segregate it as such does an injustice to the complicated world of British society and cultural production” (10). Devereaux’s parodic use of narrative interventions and his incorporation of more aboveboard genres like the travel narrative and memoir points to the connection between the sub rosa and the mainstream. While *Venus in India* can certainly be read without an understanding of the various narrative and genre parodies, examining how the novel is in conversation with contemporary forms leads to a fuller understanding of both the text and its contexts.

## Endnotes

(1)Following Manuela Mourão’s analysis of the difference between “erotica” and “pornography” and her discussion of the “issues of context and intention” and of “subjective interpretations of what constitute ‘acceptable’ sexually explicit images (erotica) and ‘unacceptable’ ones (pornography)” (573), I will be using the terms “erotica” and “pornography” interchangeably.(^)

(2)Here and throughout this paper, I use “narrative audience” as well as “reader” and “readers” to refer to the contemporary nineteenth-century audience for *Venus in India*. Any forays into the twenty-first century will be specifically marked as such.(^)

(3)As with other works of sub-rosa literature, the exact year of *Venus in India*’s publication is difficult to locate. While scholars agree the novel was originally published in Brussels or Paris, they vary on the year in which it was published. Milton Van Sickle places the publication of *Venus in India* in 1895. Sarah Bull, in “A Purveyor of Garbage? Charles Carrington and the Marketing of Sexual Science in Late-Victorian Britain,” notes the text was reprinted by Carrington in 1898, but she does not cite the original year of publication. In “Penetrating Boundaries: An Ethics of Anti-Perfectionism in Victorian Pornography,” Thomas J. Joudrey cites 1890 as the year the novel was first printed. Multiple online book sellers provide 1889 as the publication date, and the earliest publication date found in WorldCat is an 1889 edition published in Brussels.(^)

(4)Van Sickle steadfastly refers to *Venus in India* as a nonfiction memoir. In his introduction to the Holloway House edition of the text, Van Sickle takes the position that all events recounted in the narrative, with the exception of the story of Mrs. Searles exclusively “specializ[ing] in Viceroy’s” (11), are true, even though there is no historical evidence to support such assertions. Given the lack of external sources supporting Devereaux’s story (much less his existence) and given the longstanding tradition of pornographic fiction masquerading as memoir, I argue the text is best classified as a novel.(^)

(5)Devereaux does not explicitly address why he chooses to avoid Indian prostitutes and abandoned Irish wives. However, his aversion to these women does seem to stem from race and class prejudices; he frequently alludes to these women as less attractive and more animalistic. Devereaux also seems to pride himself on choosing his companions and may be avoiding these “less attractive” women in favor of more attractive “sporting” women.(^)

(6)“You” is more frequently used in the novel by characters addressing each other than by the author addressing his readers. There are 939 instances of characters using “you” to address each other, accounting for 96% of the uses of “you.” In the table that follows only the uses of “you” addressing the reader are included; uses of “you” addressed to other characters have been omitted.(^)

(7)*Fanny Hill* (1748), which is often cited as the first English erotic novel, parodies the memoir form and the epistolary novel, as does *The Lustful Turk* (1828). *The Autobiography of a Flea* (1887) takes a more tongue-in-cheek approach to parodying the autobiography as its narrator is a talking and writing flea who is highly interested in human sexuality. *The Sins of the Cities of the Plains* (1881) also uses the memoir form. This trend of genre parodies in pornography extends into twenty-first-century pornographic movies; for example, *Batman XXX* (2010) and *Man of Steel XXX* (2013) parody superhero films.(^)

(8)An important exception to his condemnation of rape is Devereaux's admission that he raped his cousin Emily: "I would like to see whether, as when I raped my cousin Emily, my second love, I could actually get into this sleeping girl [Lizzie], before she woke to find me in her glowing orifice" (45). The difference for Devereaux appears to be (1) whether the woman being raped "enjoys" the act and/or (2) whether the rapist and his victim "love" each other. When Searles assaults his wife, Mrs. Searles tells him to stop and later moves out of the house (and becomes a prostitute) in order to punish Searles for the rape. When Searles attempts to rape Lizzie, she struggles against him and tells Devereaux she does not like or love Searles. When the Afghan men rape Amy and Fanny, they do so as retribution for the British soldiers hiring women from their village as prostitutes.(^)

(9)In the twenty-first century, we can see similar parallels in reactions to the reading of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its sequels in public. Viral photographs circulated of men and women reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* in public spaces; these photographs were frequently tagged with commentary about how inappropriate it is to read such narratives on subways, on airplanes, in the doctor's waiting room, etc.(^)

(10)Interestingly, Devereaux is not concerned with sexually transmitted diseases, nor are his sexual partners. Moreover, it is only when he is with Fanny that Devereaux is concerned with preventing pregnancy. While one might assume that Lizzie, a married woman with multiple sex partners, might be better versed in birth control than the virginal Fanny, the narrative is unclear on why Devereaux does not take similar precautions with Amy or Mabel.(^)

(11)I used an online version of the text as a means of checking my counts for uses of "you," "reader," and "readers." I found all uses of these terms in the online version and then marked the uses in the Holloway House edition. This passage is the only one that did not align with the printed version of the narrative. Because it did not align with the printed version, I omitted these uses of "reader(s)" from the counts I used in this article. However, this passage is also so extraordinary in its uses of engaging narrative intervention that it needed to be included in the analysis. This passage does not appear in the Holloway House edition of the text, but it would have been on page 245 of that text, and the surrounding paragraphs are intact. In addition to this extra/missing passage, the online version of the text is notable for its uses of "cunt," "prick," and "fuck" where the Holloway House edition uses "grotto," "shaft," and "poke"—it is unclear which terms were used in the original edition of the novel.(^)

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