

Double Agency in George Du Maurier's Novel *Trilby*

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Abstract

George Du Maurier's best-selling 1894 novel *Trilby* tells the tale of a tone-deaf artists' model who is transformed into an opera diva under the hypnotic influence of the musical genius, Svengali. Throughout the novel, Svengali is portrayed as a beastly creature, and he appears to be the undisputed villain, since Trilby dies under his hypnotic spell. However, Trilby is not merely an innocent victim of an evil magician. At the beginning of the novel, she is an assertive androgynous character who challenges and threatens traditional Victorian concepts of gender and sexuality. In order to affirm their own masculinity and power, Trilby's three English friends, Little Billee, Taffy, and the Laird, transform her into a conventional, dependent Victorian woman. In my view, the Englishmen are the novel's real villains, since Svengali is only able to use her after they have transformed her. Chapter 1 discusses Trilby's relationships with the three English artists, particularly with Little Billee. Chapter 2 outlines Trilby's relationship with Svengali, and it looks at the way in which critical interpretations of Du Maurier's villain have changed in the past century. Chapter 3 deals with the similarities between Little Billee and Svengali as they each use Trilby in order to realize their own dreams of artistic success. Du Maurier's novel was a phenomenal success when it was first published. Although it became relatively obscure as the twentieth century progressed, as we approach another fin-de-siècle, critical interest in the novel is reviving. Although I do not think *Trilby* will ever be as popular as it was in the 1890s, it deserves its modest revival because it tells us a great deal about Victorian sexual politics, and it serves to remind us how far the struggle for social and sexual freedom in our own century has come.

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Introduction

The title character of George Du Maurier's best-selling 1894 novel *Trilby* is a tone-deaf artists' model who is transformed into the opera diva, La Svengali, under the hypnotic influence of the musical genius Svengali. At first glance, Svengali appears to be the novel's undisputed villain, as Trilby dies under his hypnotic spell. However, both Du Maurier's story and his characters are much more complex than perhaps even he realized or intended. Trilby is not merely the helpless victim of an evil wizard; she is a complex double agent who challenges and threatens conventional Victorian concepts of gender and sexuality. Agency implies empowerment and activity. At the beginning of the novel, Trilby is an assertive androgynous character who "thoroughly [knows] her own mind, and never los[es] much time in making it up" (Du Maurier 71). The three British artists—Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird—find her androgyny and assertiveness threatening, and in order to affirm their own masculinity and their own positions of power within a patriarchal society, they destroy Trilby's androgyny and transform her into a dependent, conventional Victorian lady. Svengali is only able to possess Trilby's mind and to instrumentalize her—that is, to turn her literally into his musical instrument—once the Englishmen have effected this transformation. To complicate the matter further, when Svengali turns Trilby into La Svengali, his identity becomes inseparable from hers. La Svengali becomes a subversively androgynous character who transcends the rigid sexual boundaries the three English artists have tried so hard to uphold.

Although Trilby's musical transformation is the most obvious indication of her double agency, she is a double agent long before she is turned into the opera diva La Svengali. The narrator of Du Maurier's novel claims that although Trilby is sexually experienced, she possesses a "virginal heart" (42). Such a bold assertion spawned a great deal of critical commentary. A reviewer for *Outlook* declared,

The drawing of Trilby's character is morally untrue. In life innocence is not retained after virtue is lost; and character drawing which is morally untrue is morally unwholesome. (qtd. in Platt 4)

Du Maurier anticipates such criticism as the narrator of his novel admits,

My poor heroine . . . had all the virtues but one; but the virtue she lacked (the very one of all that plays the title-role, and gives its generic name to all the rest of that goodly company) was of such a kind that I have found it impossible so to tell her history as to make it quite fit and proper reading for the ubiquitous young person so dear to us all. (Du Maurier 40)

By confessing the impropriety of his novel's subject matter, Du Maurier challenges the rigid Victorian moral system in which female sexual desire was rarely acknowledged and never openly discussed. Several critics, including Isaac Hull Platt, who wrote *The Ethics of Trilby: With a Supplemental Note on Spiritual Affinity* (1895), and John G. Hawley, who edited *An Appendix to Trilby* (1895), applauded Du Maurier's daring stance and harshly criticized their society for perpetuating the sexual double standard.

The question of *Trilby*'s morality was so controversial because Du Maurier portrayed his unmarried, sexually experienced heroine in a sympathetic light. However, the integration of spiritual purity and physical sexuality which Trilby embodies was something which all Victorian women, particularly respectably married ones, constantly struggled to achieve. As Ehrenreich and English point out,

Women were urged by the health books and the doctors to indulge in deep preoccupation with themselves as "The Sex"; they were to devote themselves to developing their reproductive powers, their maternal instincts, their "femininity." Yet they were told that they had no "natural" sexual feelings whatsoever . . . In fact, sexual feelings were seen as unwomanly, pathological, and possibly detrimental to the supreme function of reproduction. (30-31)

Victorian women constantly had to reconcile the physical, sexual demands of marriage and motherhood with the vision of their supposed angelic innocence and spiritual transcendence.

Du Maurier satirizes the society which places such impossible demands upon its women when he writes,

I had fondly hoped it might one day be said of me that whatever my other literary shortcomings might be, I at least had never penned a line which a pure-minded young British mother might not read aloud to her little blue-eyed babe as it lies sucking its little bottle in its little bassinette.

Fate has willed it otherwise. (41)

Although he maintains that Trilby has a “virginal heart,” Du Maurier claims that he simply cannot hide or ignore the reality of her sexual experience, and he mocks society for disguising sexual realities behind a thin veil of purity and innocence.

Trilby’s double agency is suggested not only by her sexual history, but also by her androgyny. She is a “very tall and fully-developed young female” who enters the artists’ studio wearing “the gray overcoat of a French infantry soldier,” “a short striped petticoat” and “a huge pair of male slippers” (14). After Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird recover from the shock which Trilby’s unconventional apparel and her assertive manner produce, they decide that “she would have made a singularly handsome boy” and that “it was a real pity she wasn’t a boy, she would have made such a jolly one” (16). However, in spite of their efforts to relate to Trilby as an honorary male, Trilby’s androgyny threatens the three Englishmen’s concepts of their own masculinity. In order to reassure themselves of their own gender identities, Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird are compelled to transform Trilby into a conventional woman so that her gender agrees with her biology, but as they transform her into a proper, conventional, dependent woman, the three artists deprive Trilby of the assertiveness and individuality which make her so attractive at the beginning of the novel.

Interestingly, many critics in the 1890s failed to recognize or to acknowledge the role that the three Englishmen play in bringing about Trilby's demise. In fact, a reviewer for the American magazine *The Independent* dismissed the tragedy of Trilby's sexual past and ignored her fate as he admired Du Maurier's "delightful romance":

Mr. Du Maurier, apparently in deference to the current craze for heroines that have been seduced, or are just going to be, bedaubed the first fifty pages of his otherwise clean story with the telling of how his pure heroine, a *blanchisseuse de fin*, had been led astray and so forth. That is to say he unnecessarily goes behind the true door of his story to wash some dirty linen, and then he sets forth, and no sooner have we forgotten the washtub than we are spell-bound with as delightful a love-tale as ever was told.

It is a man's story, told between liberal potations and long whiffs in a place where boxing gloves, fencing foils and Indian clubs are set over against the more strictly picturesque properties of a bohemian studio in Paris. ("Du Maurier's Latest Story" 1380-81)

Presumably, the "dirty linen" to which the reviewer refers is Trilby's supposedly immoral sexual past, whereas "the true door of his story" refers to the three Englishmen's friendship with each other. By denying the importance of Trilby's sexuality and by failing to acknowledge the ways in which Trilby affects the dynamics of the male trio's friendship, this critic is very similar to Du Maurier's narrator and his fictional artists who insist that their relationship to Trilby is simply one of "*bonne camaraderie*" (Du Maurier 73). Moreover, this critic fails to recognize that washtubs figure prominently throughout Du Maurier's narrative and that they are indeed crucial to the story's moral aspect. The three Englishmen bathe every day, and are even referred to as "nice clean Englishmen" (294). However, it is the supposedly unclean Svengali, not the three English heroes, who orders Trilby a bath and who symbolically repurifies her after she is rejected by the respectable Englishmen.

Most critics did not deny that the question of Trilby's morality was essential to Du Maurier's story. However, several critics and readers wished for

a happy ending to Du Maurier's novel. Some simply wanted Trilby to live rather than die at the novel's end, and others hoped Trilby and Little Billee would get married once Svengali was dead. A critic for *The Manchester Guardian* who reviewed the 1895 play that was based on Du Maurier's novel, wondered,

Why does Trilby die? Not because she loves Svengali—the play is clearer on that point than the novel. Is it because she cannot marry Billee? But that possibility almost vanishes in the play, and the excision of half a dozen words would remove it altogether. . . . Happy endings are often inept because in defiance of the moral and logical necessities of the situation. But a happy ending in this case is possible and justifiable. (qtd. in Kilgarriff 472)

In his 1895 parodic play *Thrilby in Two Acts*, Joseph Herbert provides the happy ending which so many playgoers and readers desired. After the evil Sphagetti dies, his hypnotic spell over Thrilby is broken. Little Willie declares, "Now that the spell is broken we can be married" (29). Thrilby responds, "Yes, if only to spite Du Maurier" (29).

Twentieth-century critics have dealt with Little Billee and his friends much more harshly than nineteenth-century reviewers did. In contrast to the 1895 critic who admired "the kind, brave manliness of [Trilby's] three friends" (qtd. in Kilgarriff 471), Martha Banta asserts,

The males in Du Maurier's novel are men only through the convention of their chronological age. Actually, they are boys who have yet to grow out of the diminutives and nicknames by which a paternalistic society has given them a kind of probationary identity. Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee—all three—do not add up to one adult masculine figure. (20)

In my opinion, this apparent flaw in the Englishmen's characterization is in fact an essential component in what makes the novel so complicated and such an interesting examination of the concepts of gender and sexuality. Whereas Trilby is transformed from an assertive androgynous figure into a proper Victorian lady, Little Billee is a feminine figure who is never quite transformed into a man.

Although he is ostensibly in love with Trilby, he is much more strongly attracted to the masculine qualities of her voice, and to male musicians such as the singer Glorioli and the musician Svengali. Little Billee is in fact threatened by Trilby's assertive manner and her freedom of sexual expression. He attempts to remove the sexual threat she represents by appropriating her creative power. The first time he meets her he figuratively dismembers her by sketching the outline of her foot on the studio wall and making it a symbol of his own creative ability. He further destroys her sense of autonomy when he sees her posing nude and passes a moral judgment upon her. In my view, Little Billee and his friends are the real villains in the novel because they are the ones who begin the process of destruction that results in Trilby's death.

In my opinion, *Trilby* was so popular because it daringly challenged the rigidly-defined sexual and moral codes upon which Victorian society was based. Although it faded into relative obscurity as the twentieth century progressed, interest in Du Maurier's novel is reviving as our own century draws to a close. I think this is because in the late twentieth century, as in the Victorian age, women are struggling to find their voices within a patriarchal society, and as this happens it is natural to look at other works which challenge conventional sex and gender roles. Many twentieth-century critics recognize that Trilby is not simply destroyed by an evil hypnotist, but rather by the much greater force of patriarchal society. Both Little Billee and Svengali destroy Trilby as they try to appropriate her creative power. Leonée Ormond points out that "Svengali and Little Billee are both geniuses, and each *uses* Trilby to further his own art" (Introduction xxix). George Taylor asserts, "Trilby gets torn in half between the lachrymose respectability of Little Billee and the diabolical sensuality of Svengali" (98). Martha Banta argues that as Little Billee chalks "the soul-stirring outline of [Trilby's] foot . . . upon a wall," and Svengali "thrusts his dark sexual longings upon her diaphragm, throat and mouth," it "is noticeable that Trilby's identity is continually being anatomized" (21). However, in spite of the similarities between Svengali and Little Billee, Svengali is presented by Du Maurier and is interpreted by critics as "a malevolent villain

if there ever was one" (Purcell 66), while Little Billee is merely criticized as being "an unsympathetic character" (Ormond, *George Du Maurier* 453). The perceived difference between Little Billee and Svengali arises from the fact that Svengali is not only a musician who uses Trilby's voice, but also an expert hypnotist who possesses and exploits her mind.

After Svengali hypnotically cures Trilby's migraine headache, the Laird warns Trilby,

He's a bad fellow, Svengali—I'm sure of it! He's mesmerised you; that's what it is—mesmerism!¹ . . . They get you into their power, and just make you do any blessed thing they please—lie, murder, steal--anything! (Du Maurier 60)

Svengali does not induce Trilby to do any of the horrible things the Laird fears he will. However, when he hypnotically possesses her mind, he possesses her sexually as well. One of Du Maurier's readers who was concerned about the sexual implications of Svengali's relationship with his hypnotized diva "contended that the relations of Trilby with her hypnotizer were chaste, so far as her consciousness of them went, and decided to find out if he were right by writing to the novelist" (qtd. in Gilder 23). Du Maurier responded,

In answer to your letter of September 24th, I beg to say that you are right about Trilby. When free from mesmeric influence, she lived with [Svengali] as his daughter, and was quite innocent of any other relation. In haste, yours very truly, G. Du Maurier. (23)

¹ Throughout this thesis I use the terms "hypnotism" and "mesmerism" interchangably. However, they were not originally synonymous. The term "mesmerism" is derived from the name of Franz Anton Mesmer. As Ilza Veith points out, Mesmer "theorized that by means of an invisible and impalpable 'universal fluid'" human beings were subject to cosmic influences (222). He thought that disease "was due to an imbalance of the universal fluid and cure could be effected by bringing the patient into contact with its source" (222). Since human beings are bipolar as magnets are, "the magnet appeared to be the logical instrument by which the cosmic powers could be conveyed to the patient" (222). Therefore, Mesmer referred to his method as "animal magnetism." The Scottish physician James Braid coined the term "hypnotism." He asserted that "hypnotic phenomena are induced solely by an impression made on the nervous centres without any 'mystical universal fluid' or other substance passing from operator to patient" (Veith 225-26).

Interestingly, both the concerned reader and Du Maurier seem determined and anxious to defend Trilby's chastity and therefore her honor. However, neither one of them denies that there is a sexual component to La Svengali's relationship with her hypnotizer. Indeed, since society did not allow women to consciously express their sexuality, unconscious experience through dreams, trance states or hysterical reactions provided the only outlet for female sexual expression.

Although Du Maurier portrays Svengali as an irredeemable villain and many critics interpret him as such, Svengali is really feared by the three English artists because he is unconventional. When Svengali mesmerically cures Trilby's headache, he does so out of sincere concern for her, and she is extremely grateful to him. However, the Laird fears him because his method is "unnatural" (Du Maurier 60). Indeed, the Laird's reaction to Svengali is one which the Viennese physician, Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) often had to face. Maria Tatar points out that Mesmer had a great deal of difficulty convincing the medical community to accept his concept of animal magnetism. However, he

had little difficulty gaining access to the most exclusive Parisian salons. Whether the French were suffering from nervous disorders or indigestion, from gout or ennui, they thronged to Mesmer's clinic. (13)

Many of Mesmer's patients "were society women suffering from a fashionable ailment of the time known as the *vapeurs*. The disease, which today might be diagnosed as a mild form of hysteria, rendered its victims vulnerable to nervous fits and fainting spells" (15). As groups of women sat around the *baquet*² awaiting the onset of the "magnetic crisis" in which obstacles would be

² "A round wooden tub about two feet high [which] was filled with iron filings and bottles of magnetized water extending from the centre of the tub to its circumference. Jointed iron rods protruded from holes pierced in the lid of the tub. The patients, ranged in rows around the tub, grasped these rods and applied them to the diseased areas of their bodies. In order to avoid loss of the precious fluid, each person held the thumb of his [or more likely, her] neighbour between his own thumb and index finger to forge a chain of communication. A rope

successfully removed to allow the harmonious flow of magnetic fluid, "delicate perfumes floated in the air" and "soft music played on the pianoforte or glass harmonica--on occasion by Mesmer himself--kept the fluid in steady circulation" (14). Mesmer began his unconventional method of treatment because as Veith points out "he began to be increasingly aware that the therapeutic limitations of the medicine of his day compared unfavorably with the widened knowledge of human physiology and pathology" (221-22). Tatar agrees that "the gentle passes of the hand, the soothing music played in Mesmer's chambers, and the comfortable surroundings for the séances provided a welcome alternative to the potions, purges, and leeches prescribed by more conventional physicians" (13). Mesmer's critics objected to the fact that he could not provide any authoritative medical evidence that his treatment was effective. Moreover, the concept of animal magnetism became associated with the expression and display of female sexuality,³ and it is this, perhaps, which Mesmer's opponents found most threatening.

Svengali's hypnotic control of Trilby's mind and his public display of La Svengali links him not only to Mesmer, but to the eminent French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893). As Elaine Showalter points out,

Svengali's ability to dissolve Trilby's physical and emotional pain through hypnosis connects him to Jean-Martin Charcot, who, in his Paris clinic at the Salpêtrière hospital, had staged public displays of hypnotized, hysterical "divas" in the 1880s and 1890s. (Introduction xxi)

attached to the tub and passed around the patients' bodies linked them together in one great magnetic chain" (Tatar 13-14).

³ Most of Mesmer's patients were women who apparently looked forward to the "crisis" which magnetic treatment provoked: "The master, raising his fingers in a pyramidal form, passed his hands all over the patient's body, beginning with the head, and going downwards over the shoulders to the feet. He then returned to the head, both back and front, to the belly and the back, and renewed the process again and again until the magnetised person was saturated with the healing fluid, and transported with pain or pleasure, both sensations being equally salutary. Young women were so much gratified by the 'crisis' that they begged to be thrown into it anew; they followed Mesmer through the hall, and confessed that it was impossible not to be warmly attached to the person of the magnetiser" (qtd. in E. Hart 32).

Svengali, Mesmer and Charcot are all complex double agents. They all use unconventional treatments in a sincere attempt to ease their patients' pain, but they all do so in a theatrical manner which alerts the suspicions of their audience. In addition, the practices of Mesmer, Charcot and the fictional Svengali are all associated with the exploitation and display of female sexuality, and it is this which made them controversial in the 1890s and which continues to arouse the interest of twentieth-century critics as well.

Because she undergoes the most dramatic transformations in the novel, Trilby is Du Maurier's most obvious double agent. Most critics recognize and discuss the many dualisms that are apparent in the novel. In her biography of George Du Maurier, Leonée Ormond discusses Trilby's linguistic duality in relation to Du Maurier's own bilingual upbringing. Ormond and other critics, including Elaine Showalter, George Taylor and Martha Banta, outline some of the similarities between Svengali and Little Billee to show that both the artist and the musician use Trilby in order to succeed in their respective crafts. In my thesis, I discuss Trilby's relationships with Svengali and Little Billee and I deal with the ways in which her dualisms arise. My thesis differs from other critical works on *Trilby* because I deal not only with Trilby's dual nature, but with Svengali's and Little Billee's as well. In my opinion, Little Billee and his friends are even more villainous than Svengali is because they are the ones who initially alter Trilby's nature and make her susceptible to his influence. However, for the most part, critics have overlooked this as they focus on the artistic rivalry between Little Billee and Svengali. Furthermore, by emphasizing the sexual rivalry between the musician and the artist, most critics fail to note that there is a strong element of sexual attraction between them. In my view, these subversive undercurrents and covert tensions are what make the novel truly interesting.

Trilby is the center around which the novel's subversive undercurrents swirl. In this thesis, I will discuss how her double agency affects, and is affected by, her relationships with the other characters in the novel. Chapter 1 discusses Trilby's relationship with the three English artists, particularly with Little

Billee. Chapter 2 outlines Trilby's relationship with Svengali, as well as the way in which critics in both the 1890s and 1990s have reacted to and interpreted Du Maurier's villainous musician. In the third chapter I deal with the similarities between Little Billee and Svengali as they each use Trilby in order to realize their own dreams of artistic success. In the conclusion I address the questions of the novel's phenomenal popularity, its potential subversiveness and Du Maurier's reaction to his success. Although biographical information about Du Maurier does not significantly affect my interpretation of *Trilby*, in the conclusion I will draw on some biographical material to suggest some possible real-life models for Du Maurier's fictional characters, and I will discuss Du Maurier's own double agency as he struggles to challenge Victorian society while staying just inside its decorous bounds.

Chapter 1

"You Have Changed Me Into Another Person": Trilby's Transformation from an Assertive Bohemian Androgyn into a Proper Victorian Lady

In her biography of George Du Maurier, Leonée Ormond declares, "Trilby . . . is a classic Victorian heroine" (451). She then lists the characteristics which made Trilby so attractive to fin-de-siècle readers: "Gay,⁴ impulsive, generous, and enchantingly natural, Trilby's personality dominates the novel, and provides that combination of charm and exuberance which the Victorian public found so irresistible" (451). While I agree with Ormond's assessment of Trilby's character, I do not think that those traits necessarily constitute a "classic Victorian heroine." In fact, I think Trilby appealed to a large number of Victorian readers precisely because she was refreshingly different from conventional Victorian heroines. In contrast to the angelically pure young women of much Victorian fiction, Trilby is a sexually experienced heroine who freely expresses her sexuality when she poses in "the altogether" (Du Maurier 16). Du Maurier was highly praised by some and roundly criticized by others for sympathetically portraying his unmarried, sexually experienced heroine as a woman with a "virginal heart" (42). However, whether they admired Trilby and applauded her characterization or censured Du Maurier for his "morally untrue" representation (qtd. in Platt 4), many critics failed to recognize that from the moment Trilby enters the artists' bohemian apartment, Little Billee,

⁴ Definitions of the word "gay" occupy a page and a half in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Ormond uses the adjective according to the first definition the OED offers: "1a. Full of or disposed to joy and mirth; manifesting or characterized by joyous mirth; light-hearted, exuberantly cheerful, sportive, merry" However, the second definition of "gay" is: "a. Addicted to social pleasures and dissipations. Often euphemistically: Of loose or immoral life. Esp. in *gay dog*, a man given to revelling or self-indulgence. b. Hence, in slang use, of a woman: Leading an immoral life, living by prostitution" (409). This was a common pejorative term used in the 1890s. Although Ormond does not use it in this sense, her description of Trilby is rather ironic, since the question of Trilby's morality is what made the novel so controversial.

Taffy and the Laird, along with the narrator, and perhaps Du Maurier himself, begin to transform her into a stereotypical Victorian lady.

Ehrenreich and English point out that from the mid- to late nineteenth century,

Literature aimed at female readers lingered on the romantic pathos of illness and death; popular women's magazines featured such stories as "The Grave of My Friend" and "Song of Dying." Paleness and lassitude (along with filmy white gowns) came into vogue. It was acceptable, and even fashionable, to retire to bed with "sick headaches," "nerves," and a host of other mysterious ailments. (18)

For those who objected to this trend in female fashion, the novel *Trilby* and its title character, at least as she first appears, would have been a welcome relief. Indeed, Du Maurier's unconventional androgynous character made a much greater impact on the Victorian public than the listless heroine who dies gracefully at the novel's end. James D. Hart points out that Du Maurier's novel was

much admired by young girls, who made *Trilby* their model in all but a few of the more questionable aspects of her behavior. Girls by the thousands yearned for feet as graceful as hers, spoke of their own as "Trilbies," wore *Trilby* slippers, cultivated a so-called "Trilby-type" of beauty, and dressed themselves in *Trilby* hats and coats (decorated with costume jewelry shaped like *Trilby*'s own foot). (194)

Trilby's assertiveness inspired Victorian women as well. In *Trilbyana: The Rise and Progress of a Popular Novel* (1895), Gilder relates an incident in which

A married woman, aged twenty-nine, got into a dispute with her husband, recently, as to the morals of the young model, and proved her point by "smashing him over the head with an earthenware jar." (24)

Gilder criticizes the woman's behavior by referring to her actions as "intemperate." He also patronizes her when he asserts, "The fact that he [the

husband] got his head broken proves little—except the folly of arguing with a woman" (24). However, this incident demonstrates that some women, at least, were unsatisfied with the conventional, passive roles which society had imposed upon them, and it certainly gives new meaning to Du Maurier's own words: "So the pitcher went to the well once more" (95).⁵

Trilby, as she first appears in the novel, breaks the rigid Victorian boundaries between the sexes in a way that is both natural and appealing. The comfortable integration of gender identities which Trilby represents is suggested initially, very fittingly, by the sound of her voice, "a portentous voice of great volume, and that might almost have belonged to any sex (even an angel's)" (Du Maurier 14). Trilby's physical appearance lives up to this vocal prelude, as her figure is that "of a very tall and fully developed young female, clad in the gray overcoat of a French infantry soldier" (14). Trilby's eccentric fashion sense bespeaks her unconventional personality. In contrast to the pale, listless and weak heroines of much Victorian popular literature, Trilby is "a sunny and ever-welcome vision of health and grace and liveliness and unalterable good-humour" (73). Indeed, Trilby's androgyny extends to the very core of her being, and it is this which appealed to Du Maurier's Victorian audience and which makes her attractive to late-twentieth-century readers as well. Bram Dijkstra argues,

The ideal of the androgyne, as it developed in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, expresses one of the most ancient concepts of Western civilization, that of the original, harmonious, sexually integrated constitution of the person before being divided into the artificial, externalized opposites of male

⁵ Once Trilby realizes that Little Billee is shocked at seeing her posing in "the altogether," she becomes ashamed and she is unable to model effectively anymore. As she poses for Carrel's students, she drops the pitcher she is holding, and begins to cry. Carrel takes her home, and on the way she tells him about her dilemma. He feels responsible for causing her grief because he "induced her to sit for the figure." He ponders "deeply and sorrowfully on such terrible responsibility," since he has "grown-up daughters of his own," but "in an hour's time they got another model and another pitcher, and went to work again. So the pitcher went to the well once more" (95). Essentially, Carrel recognizes the sexual double standard, but by going on with his work as if nothing had happened, he perpetuates it. The situation described in Gilder gives Du Maurier's scenario an ironic twist.

and female. The ideal of the androgyne expresses humanity's yearning to return to that primal state of perfect interior balance. ("Androgyne" 63)

Trilby, in keeping with this image,

bore herself with easy, unembarrassed grace, like a person whose nerves and muscles are well in tune, whose spirits are high, who has lived much in the atmosphere of French studios, and feels at home in it. (Du Maurier 14)

She is very comfortable with her identity, and it is this "confounded Trilbiness" (129) which both fascinates and irritates her newfound bohemian friends.

Many Victorians were delighted by Trilby, with her "strange medley of garments" (14), her easygoing manner, and her freedom from the rigid constraints of traditional gender roles. Several critics praised Du Maurier for challenging the sexual double standard through his characterization of Trilby. In 1895 John Hawley wrote,

George Busson Du Maurier has in this book performed . . . a special service to humanity. In England and in the United States it is the prevailing code that a woman who is known to have, or have had, a lover, is irredeemably lost, *if she is found out*. What hypocrisy among people who care nothing about the utmost laxity of morals in a man provided he does not parade his practices too openly! The author of *Trilby* has shown us that a woman may have sinned and still be among the noblest of her sex, and most worthy to be the wife of an honest man. (v)

In the same year, Isaac Hull Platt, like Hawley, strongly indicted society for perpetuating the sexual double standard. He asserted that on an abstract level, there is no moral difference between the sexual promiscuity of men and women. Theoretically, the fault is one of action rather than of gender. However,

Concretely, it [female sexual promiscuity] presents a more serious menace to certain established conventions of society as at present constituted. It is a greater offense against respectability, and, to those who worship respectability as their Holy Ghost, it is the unpardonable sin. Moreover, woman, in history, having occupied a subordinate position to man, it has been regarded as her duty to her lord and master so to conduct herself as best to meet with his approval and best to minister to him; while man, not being under corresponding obligations to woman, was naturally left more free. . . . But the freedom of woman cannot be attained until this invidious distinction has ceased to exist. (6)

Du Maurier's androgynous heroine seems to embody the freedom which Platt advocates. However, Trilby's freedom is regrettably short-lived. From the moment she enters the artists' studio, the men around her manipulate her identity until the individuality which makes her so charming is completely destroyed.

The first time Trilby enters their apartment, Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird are rather taken aback by her appearance. Instead of recognizing her androgyny as a delightful integration of gender, they view Trilby as a peculiar, sexless, almost inhuman "creature" (Du Maurier 16). They are "curious and half embarrassed" (16) as they observe "a figure that seemed just then rather grotesque in its mixed attire of military overcoat and female petticoat and nothing else!" (17). Once Trilby introduces herself she takes on human dimensions, but the three "musketeers of the brush" (30) cannot relate to her until they have assigned her a definite gender identity. The narrator claims that Trilby "would have made a singularly handsome boy" (16). Furthermore, he says, "one felt instinctively that it was a real pity she wasn't a boy, she would have made such a jolly one" (16). The three bohemian artists agree with this assessment as they accept Trilby into their circle of friendship as an honorary male. Indeed, the narrator insists that "with all this familiar intimacy there was never any hint of gallantry or flirtation in any shape or form whatever--*bonne*

camaraderie voilà tout” (73).⁶ Fraser Harrison suggests that the Englishmen focus on Trilby’s masculine qualities in order to remove the sexual threat which her femininity poses:

It is reasonable to suppose that men will place an especially high value on the emotional satisfaction to be derived from male friendship during periods when they feel that their prowess is being threatened, rather than flattered, by women. Undoubtedly, the late ‘eighties and ‘nineties was such a period. (129)

Before Trilby comes into their lives, the three artists’ bohemian existence is untainted by the “kill-joy complications of love” (Du Maurier 35), and they are quite determined to keep it that way.

In spite of the narrator’s claims to the contrary, the three bohemian artists cannot deny Trilby’s sexual appeal, and they must acknowledge her dual gender identity. After several months of being acquainted with Trilby,

One day Taffy remarked to the Laird: “Hang it! I’m blest if Trilby isn’t the handsomest woman I know! She looks like a grande dame masquerading as a grisette—almost like a joyful saint at times. She’s lovely! . . . And then, . . . what a trump she is! Why she’s as upright and straight and honourable as a man.” (103-04)

Trilby presents a puzzling anomaly to a society in which masculinity and femininity were seen as mutually exclusive gender categories which were inherited along with biological sexuality. Harrison points out,

It was claimed that men were *naturally* more courageous, pugnacious, energetic and inventive (the adjectives are Darwin’s), whereas the gentler sex was naturally more domesticated, passive, imitative and emotional. These fundamental characteristics, which had been inherited from our remotest ancestors, were said to be irremovably imbedded in every member of even the most civilized races. (28-29)

⁶ “Good-fellowship, that was all” (Hawley 25).

By eluding conventional gender classification, Trilby threatens the three Englishmen's concepts of their own masculinity. They cannot accept her until they have remodeled her into a conventional Victorian lady and her gender is made to fit her female biology.

The three bohemian artists appreciate Trilby's energy and innovation when it helps them with their work:

If a costume were wanted, for instance, she knew where to borrow it, or hire it or buy it cheaper than any one anywhere else. She procured stuffs for them at cost price, as it seemed, and made them into draperies and female garments of any kind that was wanted, and sat in them for the toreador's sweetheart (she made the mantilla herself), for Taffy's starving dressmaker about to throw herself into the Seine, for Little Billee's studies of the beautiful French peasant girl in his picture, now so famous, called "The Pitcher Goes to the Well." (Du Maurier 72)

However, if Trilby opposes the artists' ideas, her assertiveness becomes rather annoying, and even threatening, to her bohemian friends. Although the Laird initially seems to patronize her "irrepressible Trilbyness" (76), he is rather disconcerted by fact that "Trilby dearly love[s] her own way" (76). When she decides where to seat the guests at the Christmas feast, he claims that Trilby "assume[s] an authority that [does] not rightly belong to her" (129). "Trilbyness" is no longer an "irrepressible," amusing personal trait; it has become a "confounded" (129) breach of social convention. This seems rather odd, since women were generally given decision-making authority within the domestic sphere. However, perhaps the table settings represent a microcosm of the larger social hierarchy. Because the party occurs at the Laird's home, he should sit at the head of the table and he should have the authority to direct and to control the rest of the domestic hierarchy from this position of power. He is frustrated because Trilby does not submit easily to this conventional practice. However, in his illustration entitled "My sister dear" (Fig. 1), Du Maurier shows that Trilby is eventually put in her proper place. As the men sit around the table, Trilby, Mme. Vinard and Angèle Boisse are sitting off to the

side, eating their meal separately from the host and guests, calmly and benevolently beaming upon the jovial male crowd.

In spite of all their efforts to relate to Trilby simply in the spirit of *bonne camaraderie*, the three Englishmen cannot ignore her femaleness. Although she has an unconventional personality, the fact remains that Trilby is physically a woman and as such she is expected to fill a certain social role. The Englishmen are relieved when Trilby gives up her modeling career to become a domestic angel of the house, and when she is nearing her death and has become passive and weak, Taffy, the Laird and Little Billee all think "that this last incarnation of Trilbyness [is] quite the sweetest, most touching, most endearing of all" (303). As Bram Dijkstra points out, it is only when Trilby is weak and dependent that she

become[s] of more than merely prurient interest to our clean-cut trio. Her deadly illness, in fact, brings virtuous inaccessibility to the woman whom they once feared as a "tall, straight, flat-backed, square-shouldered, deep-chested, full-bosomed young grisette," a woman who, with a frankness never permitted mid-century British women, had bestowed warm favors on the men who loved her "for love's sake." Given this habit, Trilby's heart was inevitably originally wrapped in "a thin slimy layer of sorrow and shame." But under the eyes of our trio of masculine heroes the cleansing power of dying instantly transforms her from a sinner caught in the depths of vice into the very woman of their "clean" British dreams. (*Idols* 35)

Once Trilby loses all her physical "strength and straightness and elasticity" (Du Maurier 303-04), she also loses her intellectual self-assuredness and the sexual autonomy which it implies. Trilby no longer threatens the Victorian social and sexual order; instead, her helplessness reaffirms the men's position of power.

Even before Du Maurier transforms Trilby into a non-threatening, languishingly desirable heroine, Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird admire her most for her stereotypically feminine qualities. Like any proper Victorian woman, Trilby

knew when to talk and when to laugh and when to hold her tongue; and the sight of her sitting cross-legged on the model-throne darning the Laird's socks or sewing buttons on his shirts, or repairing the smoke-holes in his trousers was so pleasant that it was painted by all three. (73)

The idyllic domestic scene which Trilby's pose suggests clearly inspires the artists. Their paintings of Trilby are like blueprints of perfect Victorian womanhood. Indeed, life seems to imitate art as Trilby begins to demonstrate some stereotypically feminine characteristics. First of all, she exhibits "natural" feminine domesticity. In fact, she is "tremulous[ly]" happy (73) as she shops, cooks and caters a meal for her three English friends. Cominos points out that in addition to being viewed as domestic angels,

Women were praised for their 'child-like innocence and infantine simplicity'. ⁷ They were brought up to be clinging and dependent and their relatedness to the world was a highly dependent one. (Cominos 161)

At first glance, this description of Victorian womanhood does not seem to apply to Trilby or to describe her relationship to the world around her. However, the "three British hearts" of Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird are "touched" by the "eager childish clinging" (Du Maurier 73) that in their eyes characterizes Trilby's friendship with them. Furthermore, as they contemplate the future of their "little quartet" (83), the three Englishmen picture Trilby as a passive and dependent woman, while they imagine themselves as independent and active:

the *trois Anglîches* came in time to feel for Trilby quite a peculiar regard, and looked forward with sorrowful forebodings to the day when this singular and pleasant little quartet would have to be broken up, each of them to spread his wings and fly away on his own account, and poor Trilby to be left behind all by herself.

⁷ Cominos' quotation is taken from J. B. Bury, "The Insurrection of Women," *Fortnightly Review*, n. s. 52 (1892), 652.

They would even frame little plans whereby she might better herself in life and avoid the many snares and pitfalls that would beset her lonely path in the Quartier Latin when they were gone. (83)

Clearly, the three Englishmen attempt to diminish the sexual threat Trilby poses by emphasizing her vulnerability and by affirming their own strength. The three English artists intend to remake Trilby into a lady only to abandon her, leaving her no longer equipped to survive in bohemia. Indeed, although they do not consciously plot to abandon her, this is essentially what happens when Taffy and the Laird transform Trilby into a conventional domestic angel and then agree with Mrs. Bagot that a marriage between Trilby and Little Billee would be inappropriate because of Trilby's social and moral background. Ironically, by domesticating Trilby, the three Englishmen render her no longer "at home" (14) in her world.

The artists' ambivalence toward Trilby's gender identity is complicated by the fact that Little Billee, who is greatly admired by his two friends, is androgynous as well. Physically, Little Billee

was small and slender, . . . and had a straight white forehead veined with blue, large dark blue eyes, delicate, regular features, and coal-black hair. He was also very graceful and well-built, with very small hands and feet, and much better dressed than his friends. (7)

Little Billee seems to be Trilby's male counterpart. However, he does not embody a harmonious integration of gender identities as Trilby does. Martha Banta asserts, "Trilby O'Ferrall is presented as a complete self," while Little Billee is only a fragment of a man, if he can be seen as a man at all:

Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee—all three—do not add up to one adult masculine figure. Rather, the boyish worship Billee gives to Trilby is returned to him by Taffy and the Laird who treat their little friend as the perfect child and woman. (20)

Little Billee's androgyny does not give his character an indelible stamp of distinctive individuality. In a sense, he is hardly distinguishable from any other "refined, sympathetic, and elegant" (Du Maurier 71) Victorian heroine. This is because Little Billee's mother, Mrs. Bagot, raises her son as if he were a girl, and Little Billee responds to people and situations in stereotypically feminine fashion. He is prone to hysterical fits, and, as we shall see, he is sexually attracted not to women, but to masculine qualities in the female voice and to male musicians.

Little Billee's androgyny is not as convincing or appealing as Trilby's is because he does not reflect the "state of perfect interior balance" (Dijkstra, "Androgynie," 63) which defines the ideal androgynie. In addition to being "physically small and weak" (Du Maurier 270), Little Billee is "incapable of self-control" (270). In other words, Little Billee exhibits many of the symptoms of the female hysteric. Ehrenreich and English point out that

hysteria appeared, not only as fits and fainting, but in every other form: hysterical loss of voice, loss of appetite, hysterical coughing or sneezing, and, of course, hysterical screaming, laughing, and crying. (40)

Because these symptoms had no discernible organic basis, some people began to suspect that women feigned hysterical fits in order to get attention.⁸ Ehrenreich and English suggest that these

accusations had some truth to them: the hysterical fit, for many women, must have been the only acceptable outburst--of rage, of despair, or simply of *energy*--possible. (41)

⁸ Some people also claimed that hysteria was not a disease exclusive to women. Ernest Hart, a contemporary writer on mesmerism and hypnotism, asserted that "hysteria, even in its most highly-developed eccentric and extreme forms, is by no means the exclusive privilege of the female sex, although it is their more general attribute" (37). Jean-Martin Charcot, a neurologist who worked at the Salpêtrière, a famous asylum for women, also denied any connection between gender and hysteria. However, as we shall see, in practice, the hysterical woman's physical sexuality was inextricably linked to her psychological disorder.

This is certainly true in Little Billee's case. Throughout most of the novel, Little Billee is merely a passive observer of events. The Laird argues with Trilby, jokes with her and comforts her. Taffy, with his immense physical strength, protects her from Svengali's grotesque and frightening sexual advances. In contrast to his two friends, Little Billee never does anything with or for Trilby. Instead, he spends most of his time simply gazing at her. When Trilby leaves Paris, Little Billee is shocked into action, but the only time he forcefully expresses his opinion is when he is in the throes of a hysterical fit. After he finds out that Trilby has left Paris, Little Billee "tear[s] and rav[es] about in his rampage, knocking over chairs and easels, stammering and shrieking, mad with excitement" (Du Maurier 111). However, Little Billee's hysterical fit is ultimately an ineffective means of expression, because as his illness is treated, he is forced into a more passive role than ever.

A contemporary critic, Albert Vandam, severely condemns Little Billee,

who, instead of trying to discover her [Trilby's] hiding place, allowed himself to be stricken down with brain-fever. "He could not help that," objects the reader. Yes, he could; the resolution to go after her and bring her back like a man would have kept off the malady. (443)

Indeed, hysteria was almost always viewed as a woman's disease, and it was also frequently seen as a disease of the will. In his book *Entartung* (1892), which was translated into English as *Degeneration* in 1895, the physician Max Nordau attempted to explain the decay of late nineteenth-century society from a scientific standpoint. He asserted,

Untended and unrestrained by attention, the brain activity of the degenerate and hysterical is capricious, and without aim or purpose. Through the unrestricted play of association representations are called into consciousness, and are free to run riot there. They are aroused and extinguished automatically; and the will does not interfere to strengthen or to suppress them. (56)

Vandam declares that if Little Billee had exerted his will power as any proper man should he could have easily avoided his debilitating physical illness. However, his solution is not as simple or obvious as it appears to be, because, according to Nordau, the hysterics lack of will power does not merely result in physical illness; it is the result of a neurological disorder. Either way, the hysterics lack of emotional control is seen as weak, abnormal and socially unacceptable. Nordau draws on evolutionary theory as he declares, "Degenerates, hysterics, and neurasthenics are not capable of adaptation. Therefore they are fated to disappear" (540). On the other hand, those who are capable of exerting their will and controlling their nervous impulses are destined to survive. Vandam does not draw upon scientific evidence as Nordau does, but he implies nonetheless that innately weak femininity has no place in the masculine realm of intellectual initiative.

Vandam finds Little Billee's passivity socially unacceptable because, according to conventional Victorian thought, a man's physical masculinity implied that he was naturally aggressive and energetic. Little Billee's passivity, then, is aberrant and threatening to the sexual order. However, Little Billee is not entirely to blame for his "feminine" reaction to stress. Ironically, Little Billee's mother, Mrs. Bagot, who seems to represent "a straightforward study of a conventional woman" (Ormond, *George Du Maurier*, 457), is responsible for this breach of social convention. Essentially, she raises her son as though he were her daughter. Cominos points out that in upper-class Victorian society,

until the young daughter was safely brought to maturity, her virtue was the responsibility of her mother who knew the dangers of life and from what girls ought to be protected. (165)

For respectable Victorians,

"innocence" or "pure-mindedness" or "inherent purity" was an exalted state of feminine consciousness, a state of unique deficiency or mindlessness in their daughters of that most

elementary, but forbidden knowledge of their own sexuality, instincts and desires as well as the knowledge of good and evil . . . It was the joint enterprise of cooperative daughters and mothers or parents who spared no effort to shield their daughters from a reality which the genteel classes perceived to be sexually contaminated. (Cominos 157)

The narrator of Du Maurier's novel makes it clear right from the beginning that Little Billee "was innocent of the world and its wicked ways" (10). Indeed, Mrs. Bagot self-righteously claims that before Little Billee moved to Paris and was exposed to life in the Latin Quarter, "My son was as innocent and pure-minded as any girl" (144). Mrs. Bagot blames Trilby for irreparably damaging Little Billee's carefully cultivated innocence, and she implies that such a social crime is impossible to forgive.

Mrs. Bagot's judgment of Trilby is certainly harsh. However, Little Billee's exposure to Trilby's nudity and his recognition of her sexual nature do indeed tarnish his "innocent little life" (140). When Trilby finally accepts his marriage proposal, Little Billee commemorates the occasion by becoming extremely drunk. His drunken revelry is a code for his sexual initiation, for after

he had quite slept off the fumes of that memorable Christmas debauch, he found that a sad thing had happened to him, and a strange!

It was as though a tarnishing breath had swept over the reminiscent mirror of his mind and left a little film behind it, so that no past thing he wished to see therein was reflected with quite the old pristine clearness. As though the keen, quick, razor-like edge of his power to reach and re-evoke the bygone charm and glamour and essence of things had been blunted and coarsened. As though the bloom of that special joy, the gift he unconsciously had of recalling past emotions and sensations and situations, and making them actual once more by a mere effort of the will, had been brushed away. (140)

After Little Billee's symbolic initiation into the world of physical sexuality, he is uncontrollable. For the first time in his life, he violently rebels against his

mother, and he will not listen to "reason" (156) when Taffy and the Laird try to talk to him. A doctor is sent for, who prescribes a period of prolonged rest.⁹ This treatment is effective, for once Little Billee recovers, his "nature seem[s] changed" (156). He only asks about Trilby once, and then he only briefly mentions her. Little Billee's obedience and passivity are effectively restored.

Ehrenreich and English point out that although medically enforced passivity was a common treatment for female nervous disorders, "it was the field of gynecological surgery that provided the most brutally direct medical treatments of female 'personality disorders'" (34). Women's physical sexuality was greatly feared because many people believed that a woman's acknowledgment or expression of physical sexuality would lead to an intellectual revolt against her husband's authority. In order to curtail this anticipated sexual insurrection before it reached the social or political level of society, the clitorectomy, or the "surgical removal of the clitoris," became a common medical "cure for sexual arousal" (34). Ehrenreich and English assert,

Patients were often brought in by their husbands, who complained of their unruly behavior. When returned to their husbands, 'castrated,' they were 'tractable, orderly, industrious and cleanly' . . . [T]he point should be clear: late nineteenth-century medical treatment of women made very little sense as *medicine*, but it was undoubtedly effective at keeping certain women--those who could afford to be patients--in their place. (35-36)

Mrs. Bagot certainly wishes to keep Little Billee in his place as a submissive, obedient quasi-daughter. While Mrs. Bagot blames Trilby ostensibly for causing Little Billee's collapse, she really despises Trilby because she views the former model as a predatory male seducer whose sexual threat undermines her maternal authority over her innocent Little Billee. Mrs. Bagot regains her power over her son by calling upon the medical profession. During his convalescence,

⁹ Ehrenreich and English point out that a prescription of "isolation and uninterrupted rest . . . was used to treat a host of problems diagnosed as 'nervous disorders'" (33).

Little Billee experiences an emotional vivisection which is very similar in its effect to the sexual surgery performed on rebellious women:

It was as though some part of his brain where his affections were seated had been paralyzed, while all the rest of it was as keen and active as ever. He felt like some poor live bird or beast or reptile, a part of whose cerebrum (or cerebellum, or whatever it is) had been dug out by the vivisector for experimental purposes; and the strongest emotional feeling he seemed capable of was his anxiety and alarm about this curious symptom, and his concern as to whether he ought to mention it or not. (Du Maurier 168)

Although Little Billee has not had a literal operation, his sexuality is brought effectively under control by his medically prescribed and carefully monitored passivity. When he awakens, he does not remember his short-lived rebellion. Instead, he is grateful for "all the patient love and kindness that had been lavished on him" by his "sweet sister" and his "dear, long-suffering mother" (159). Mrs. Bagot is relieved to find that, during the course of her son's illness and convalescence, Little Billee's emotions are redirected into the proper channels. It is very odd that Mrs. Bagot treats Little Billee as a daughter, especially since Little Billee has a sister. It is even more strange that a male character metaphorically undergoes female sexual surgery. By subverting not only social gender roles, but conventional views of physical sexuality as well, Du Maurier seems to question the notion that a person's biological sexuality predetermines his or her emotional and intellectual capabilities, and in doing so he challenges the entire Victorian moral and social system. However, he never overtly connects Little Billee's biological sexuality to his emotional vivisection, so in spite of the fact that Du Maurier daringly treads the fine line between convention and anarchy, he stops just short of overstepping the bounds of decorum.

Du Maurier seems to censure conventional views of morality through his characterization of Mrs. Bagot. Indeed, Leonée Ormond claims that Mrs. Bagot's "hatred of Trilby, seen in terms of her possessiveness, is powerful and

convincing" (*George Du Maurier* 457). However, while Mrs. Bagot is satirized for her narrow-minded religious views in her last interview with Trilby, her opinion of Trilby's moral status is generally supported by the other characters in the novel. Mrs. Bagot is utterly appalled to discover that her innocent son is engaged "to a washerwoman--a figure model--and Heaven knows what besides!" (Du Maurier 144). She indignantly asks Trilby, "If you are so *fond* of him, will you ruin him by marrying him; separate him from his sister, his family, his friends?" (146). Trilby asks Taffy if Mrs. Bagot's fears are well-founded, and he responds, "Oh, Trilby, things have got all wrong, and can't be righted! I'm afraid it might be so!" (146). In spite of the fact that she has given up modeling by this point, Trilby has not truly been forgiven as her friends and the narrator claim. She is still subject to the harsh judgment of respectable society, and Trilby's "virginal heart" (42) does little to redeem her in the eyes of a very protective and extremely respectable Victorian mother.

In contrast to Mrs. Bagot, Trilby's mother does not raise her daughter according to conventional standards. Trilby's mother makes no effort to "shield [her] daughter from contaminated reality" (Cominos 157) as proper Victorian mothers should. In fact, it is she who gets Trilby into the business of nude modeling and who sets Trilby on the path toward sexual ruin. The narrator claims that

no pressure of want, no temptations of greed or vanity, had ever been factors in urging Trilby on her downward career after her first false step in that direction--the result of ignorance, bad advice (from her mother, of all people in the world), and base betrayal. (Du Maurier 41)

In a letter she writes to the Laird, Trilby describes more specifically her mother's role "in urging [her] on her downward career" (41):

I never thought anything about sitting before. I sat first as a child to M. Carrel. Mamma made me, and made me promise not to tell papa. It soon seemed as natural to sit for people as to run errands for them, or wash and mend their clothes. . . . And I have done

dreadful things besides, as you must know--as all the Quartier knows. Baratier and Besson; but not Durien, though people think so. Nobody else, I swear--except old Monsieur Penque at the beginning, who was mamma's friend. (96-97)

Although Trilby recognizes that her mother is responsible for introducing her to the world of physical sexuality, her letter is more a pathetic acknowledgment of her past than a remorseful judgment of it. Trilby only becomes ashamed of her nudity and of the free sexual expression which it implies when she fails to meet Little Billee's conventional standards.

Little Billee is sickened by the thought that Trilby sits for the figure, and he is utterly shocked when he sees her doing it, because by posing in "the altogether" (16), Trilby openly acknowledges the reality of human sexuality which Little Billee has been shielded from for his entire life. Although Little Billee knows that Trilby is a model for the figure, he has never acknowledged the physical fact. Instead, he wishes that

Trilby could be turned into a young lady--say the vicar's daughter in a little Devonshire village--his sister's friend and co-teacher at the Sunday school, a simple, pure, and pious maiden of gentle birth. (39)

By imagining that Trilby is a stereotypically pure Victorian woman, Little Billee attempts to repress the sexual threat that her occupation suggests. As well, by turning Trilby into a conventional woman, Little Billee hopes to become a conventional man.¹⁰ Trilby unwittingly gratifies Little Billee's fantasy when she appears one day as "a new character, *en demoiselle*, with a little black bonnet, and a gray jacket of her own making. To look at . . . she might have been the daughter of an English dean--until she undertook to teach the Laird some

¹⁰ The narrator implies that when Little Billee undergoes his emotional vivisection he loses his manhood, because when Little Billee regains his emotional capacity after hearing La Svengali sing, his manhood is restored. As Trilby is dying, Little Billee fervently declares, "A mere look from your eyes, a mere note of your heavenly voice, has turned a poor, miserable, callous brute back into a man again!" (220).

favourite cancan steps" (81). Just as Little Billee is almost convinced that Trilby might really be the proper young lady he wants her to be, she does something which no "pure and pious maiden" (39) would do.

In contrast to Trilby, the vicar's daughter Alice is the epitome of pure and conventional Victorian womanhood. Little Billee thinks of "how fair she [is], and how innocent, and how well and carefully trained up the way she should go—the beau ideal of a wife" (204). Since Alice is a model of feminine perfection, the sexual side of her nature is not even considered. As Cominos points out,

It was commonly assumed that men "from the nature of their physical constitution and training" were disposed to exaggerate the physical side of love. Less passionate in temperament and educated to a different ideal or standard, genteel women were disposed to minimize the physical and to exalt the emotional and spiritual side of love. They desired affection, not sensuality; the best wives and mothers knew little or nothing of sexual indulgence. (159-60)

As a paragon of innocence, Alice seems to be Trilby's opposite. However, the two women are not as different as they at first appear to be.

Both Trilby and Alice exert their sexual authority over Little Billee's unconscious mind. As I have pointed out, Little Billee's acknowledgment of Trilby's physical sexuality irrevocably alters his perceptions, and it results in his unrestrained, hysterical behavior. Although his passivity is restored, he is greatly disturbed by the emotional vivisection he experiences, and he dreams that Alice restores his power of feeling by kissing him:

Alice alone, in all the world, has got the healing touch for me now; the hands, the lips, the eyes! I know it—I feel it! I dreamed it last night! She looked me well in the face, and took my hand—both hands—and kissed me, eyes and mouth, and told me how she loved me. Ah! what a dream it was! And my little clot melted away like a snowflake on the lips, and I was my old self again, after many years—and all through that kiss of a pure woman.
(Du Maurier 206-07)

Little Billee admits that such a kiss necessarily involves a sexual component when he says, "I've never been kissed by a pure woman in my life--never! except by my dear mother and sister; and mothers and sisters don't count, when it comes to kissing" (207). However, as soon as he acknowledges Alice's physical sexuality, he begins to worry that he will not be able to exert any kind of social authority over her. Ostensibly, Little Billee fears that he will not be able to override the vicar's religious authority over Alice, and it is a religious disagreement between the two men which ends Little Billee's courtship with her. However, Little Billee is not really worried about Alice's religious views. Instead, he fears her sexual power. In his dream, Alice adopts the role of the fairy-tale prince who brings the sleeping victim back to life. Her kiss is a mark of authority which threatens his masculine supremacy at the same time that it restores his emotional vigor. The threat must be removed, "And so no more of sweet Alice with hair so brown" (218).

In spite of the narrator's and Little Billee's dismissal of Alice, her psychological connection with Trilby remains intact. Although the two women never meet, from the beginning of the novel they are associated through music. The only song which Trilby knows is "Ben Bolt," and she sings it all the time:

Oh, don't you remember Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?
 Sweet Alice, whose hair was so brown,
 Who wept with delight when you gave her a smile,
 And trembled with fear at your frown!
 (qtd. in Gilder 31)

While the narrator describes the vicar's daughter as "sweet Alice with hair so brown" (Du Maurier 218), the verse might describe Trilby just as well. Like Alice, Trilby has "short, thick, wavy brown hair" (14), and she has a similar disposition as well. The three bohemian artists notice her "tremulous happiness" (73) when she spends time with them, but the narrator points out that if there was the "slightest look of gravity or boredom on one of those three faces" Trilby "made herself scarce at once" (72). Once Alice, the vicar's

daughter, is gone from the narrative, the song and Trilby remain. Alice's story becomes even more closely connected with Trilby's when Trilby is transformed into the opera diva La Svengali. As Little Billee listens to La Svengali sing, the effect of Alice's dream kiss is realized:

Little Billee didn't applaud. He sat with his head in his hands, his shoulders still heaving. He believed himself to be fast asleep and in a dream, and was trying his utmost not to wake; for a great happiness was his

As the first bars of the song came pouring out of her parted lips (whose shape he so well remembered), and her dove-like eyes looked straight over Svengali's head, straight in his own direction--nay, *at* him,--something melted in his brain, and all his long-lost power of loving came back with a rush. (243)

The narrator asserts that, as La Svengali sings, "the essence of innocent, high-spirited girlhood" (251) is in her voice, yet it is the "seduction" (242) of her voice which reawakens Little Billee's emotions. Clearly, feminine purity and female sexuality are not diametrically opposite, as many Victorians insisted. However, since there was no acceptable outlet through which physical sexuality could be consciously expressed, female sexuality could only be released through the workings of the unconscious mind.

Although the duality of Victorian womanhood was rarely expressed or consciously realized, motherhood embodied the conflict between pure-minded innocence and the physical reality of human sexuality. Fraser Harrison points out that

Whereas motherhood was extolled as the loftiest state of achievement to which a woman could aspire, a form of sainthood, the mechanics of copulation, pregnancy and childbirth were made the subject of a comprehensive conspiracy of silence This division of mind from body, this turning of women against themselves, served its function as the guarantor of, among other things, virginity and fidelity, for as long as women despised and disdained their physicality, they were prevented from even acknowledging their sexuality, and therefore from putting it at risk. (55)

Trilby is feared precisely because she acknowledges her sexuality. Little Billee tries to repress his fear of Trilby by imagining her as a mother-figure. As Trilby gazes at Little Billee with a "brooding, dove-like look of soft and warm solicitude. . . in a waking dream he would remember that his mother had often looked at him like that when he was a small boy, and she a beautiful young woman untouched by care or sorrow" (Du Maurier 76-77). However, Little Billee's vision of Trilby as a pure and innocent mother does not last long, for just as his fantasy reaches its zenith, "the thought that Trilby sat for the figure would go through him like a knife" (77). Despite Little Billee's best efforts to purify Trilby in his imagination, the physical reality of her lifestyle continually intrudes.

Ironically, the transformation of Trilby which Little Billee so fervently desires only begins to occur once he sees Trilby posing in "the altogether" (95) and he is forced to confront the reality which he has tried so hard to imagine away. When Trilby recognizes that Little Billee is "*shocked* at seeing her sitting there" (92) she becomes ashamed:

This new-born feeling of shame was unendurable--its birth a travail that racked and rent every fibre of her moral being, and she suffered agonies beyond anything she had ever felt in her life. (95)

Although this moral awakening is painful, it is necessary, for it represents Trilby's first step toward becoming a refined and proper Victorian lady. The narrator notes that before this catastrophic event,

whether by long habit, or through some obtuseness in her nature, or lack of imagination, [Trilby] was equally unconscious of self with her clothes on or without! Truly, she could be naked and unashamed--in this respect an absolute savage. (77)

Once Trilby recognizes the impropriety of her occupation and decides to give it up, she experiences "a strange new feeling--that of a dawning self-respect" (99).

Although the narrator applauds Trilby's redemption, I do not think it is really Trilby's new-found self-respect that he admires. Instead, he seems relieved, along with the three English artists, that Trilby has become aware of and decides to conform to the conventions of social respectability.

Once Trilby has "confessed and been forgiven" (99), she can truly become a Victorian angel of the house. She quits smoking, and she goes about happily doing domestic chores. Even more importantly, "she would luxuriate in" her new-found spiritual cleanliness "for evermore" (99). However, instead of freeing Trilby's spirit, her moral awakening destroys her individuality and confines her to a restrictive, conventional role. As Harrison points out,

Of all the modes of confinement imposed upon women in the nineteenth century, the most deceptive and pernicious was embodied in the widely-accepted notion of woman as the moral saviour of her baser mate. In an age when the power of established religion was unusually vigorous, the idea of woman as an angel whose halo cast a feeble but priceless ray of light upon a black and evil world of man's making possessed a deeply persuasive appeal. . . . To worship her was to renounce one's sinfulness and ascend to a purer way of life. (42)

Trilby becomes such an angel under the influence of the three English artists. Although Little Billee recognizes Trilby's mortal weakness, after her conversion, Little Billee imagines her as a saviour who is the embodiment of pure femininity and sacrificial love. At the Christmas Eve mass,

a wave of religious emotion rolled over Little Billee and . . . it seemed to him that he stretched out his arms for love to one figure especially beloved beyond all the rest . . . not the sorrowful figure crowned with thorns, for it was in the likeness of a woman; but never that of the Virgin Mother of our Lord.

It was Trilby, Trilby, Trilby! a poor fallen sinner and waif all but lost amid the scum of the most corrupt city on earth. Trilby weak and mortal like himself, and in woeful want of pardon! and in her gray dove-like eyes he saw the shining of so great a love that he was abashed; for well he knew that all that love was his, and would be his for ever, come what would or could.

(Du Maurier 125-26)

Elaine Showalter points out that “turning [Trilby] into a maternal figure, literally putting her on a pedestal, is one of the ways the English men distance themselves from her sexuality, and the threat it presents to their quasi-marital bliss” (Introduction xx). Furthermore, by imagining Trilby as his personal saviour, Little Billee claims possession of Trilby, and uses her as a symbol of his own creative power.

Trilby’s spiritual transformation is reflected by a change in her physical appearance. Her face gets thinner, her freckles fade, she lets her hair grow, and her mouth, “always too large, took on a firmer and sweeter outline” (Du Maurier 101). In addition, Trilby is no longer characterized by her direct, penetrating gaze. Instead,

a new soft brightness came into her eyes that no one had ever seen there before. They were stars, just twin gray stars—or rather planets just thrown off by some new sun, for the steady mellow light they gave out was not entirely their own. (101)

Indeed, Trilby is not entirely herself anymore. She has become a creature of the artists’ making, and they are unquestionably proud of their achievement.

Trilby’s moral transformation is reflected not only by her changing physical appearance, but also by her altered linguistic habits. When Trilby befriends the three Englishmen, one of the first things they notice about her is that she speaks “quite French French—of the most colloquial kind” (21). In the fin-de-siècle, anything written in French was assumed to be sexually provocative, so Trilby’s linguistic looseness subtly implies her sexual habits. Indeed, many of Du Maurier’s critics, if they weren’t already outraged by the fact that Trilby is a heroine with a sexual past, accused Du Maurier of trying to hide something by writing large portions of his novel in French. This is shown rather humorously by a clip from *Trilbyana: The Rise and Progress of a Popular Novel*:

E. C. of New Albany, Ind., thinks that “Trilby’s” possibilities as a vehicle of evil to the much considered American “young person”

are emphasized by a conversation recently overheard by her between two feminine "young persons" in Indiana. "What is this 'Trilby' everybody is talking about?" asked one of these. "Oh," replied the other, "it's a book--a novel." "They say it is awfully bad," said the first young person. "Yes, I've heard so; but it isn't so at all. I read it clear through, and there wasn't anything bad in it. I didn't like it either; there is too much French in it." "French?" commented the first young woman; "well that's it, then--all the bad part is in French." (Gilder 24)

Du Maurier, who was very sensitive to criticism, did his best to allay such fears by preparing an appendix which translates most of the novel's foreign phrases. The editor, John G. Hawley, claims,

The Appendix was prepared by the author in leisure moments, so that his children might read *Trilby* without the vexation of thinking that perhaps the author of *Trilby* had concealed some of his thoughts by expressing them in foreign languages. Friends who saw it asked for copies, and so it has been printed. (i)

In spite of this defense, however, Trilby's sexuality is clearly linked to her linguistic habits.

Elaine Showalter points out that as the three Englishmen feminize Trilby, they Anglicize her as well (Introduction xx). They notice that "Trilby speaking English and Trilby speaking French [are] two different beings" (Du Maurier 75). Trilby's French is

that of the Quartier Latin--droll, slangy, piquant, quaint, picturesque--quite the reverse of ungainly, but in which there was scarcely a turn of phrase that would not stamp the speaker as being hopelessly, emphatically "no lady!" (75)

In an attempt to correct this deficiency, her friends lend her English books. As a result, "she grew more English every day; and that was a good thing" (75). Ormond argues, "The whole novel can be read as a clash between French and English traditions and temperaments" (*George Du Maurier* 452). She asserts,

"The climax of this clash between English prudery and French promiscuity comes in the scene where Little Billee discovers her posing . . . in 'the altogether'" (452). Ormond interprets Trilby's decision to give up modeling as "a victory for English respectability" which is "achieved at the cost of her innocence and her joy in living" (452). Indeed, Trilby only becomes upset when she thinks about the situation in English:

At first she wondered in French: French of the Quartier Latin. She had not seen Little Billee for a week, and wondered if he were ill . . . Then she began to wonder in English--nice clean English of the studio in the Place St. Anatole des Arts--her father's English--and suddenly a quick thought pierced her through and through . . . Could it possibly be that he was *shocked* at seeing her sitting there? (Du Maurier 92)

After this realization, as Trilby's physical transformation becomes noticeable, "she [is] no longer slangy in French" (101), and undoubtedly, according to the Englishmen, that was a good thing. Just as the three artists cannot accept Trilby's androgyny, they do not accept her bilingualism. They desexualize her speech and they destroy her androgyny to create an image of conventional, non-threatening womanhood.

Many of Du Maurier's readers viewed his novel as a radical departure from conventional Victorian fiction because his androgynous heroine is so vibrant and interesting. They tended to either ignore Svengali altogether or to treat his role as musical genius and evil hypnotist as completely separate from the bohemian existence of Trilby and her three English friends. However, such a distinction is not as clear-cut as it appears to be. While Svengali may effect the most obvious change in Trilby by transforming her into La Svengali, her split personality is prefigured in her French and English selves, and also by the destruction of her integrated androgynous gender identity. Trilby herself recognizes the changes which the Englishmen have wrought when she writes in a letter to Taffy, "You have changed me into another person--you and Sandy [the Laird] and Little Billee" (153). When Trilby leaves the Latin Quarter, she

has no vivacity or individuality left. As Showalter points out, "By the time Svengali finds her, she is an empty shell" (Introduction xix). Svengali, as we shall see, continues the process which the Englishmen have begun as he uses Trilby to create an image with which to satisfy his own desire.

Chapter 2

"And You Shall See Nothing, Hear Nothing, Think of Nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!": The Rise and Fall of Du Maurier's Demon

Throughout Du Maurier's novel, Svengali is described as a filthy, animalistic creature whom Trilby fears and the Englishmen despise. Even more frightening than his repulsive physical appearance, however, is the psychic control which Svengali exerts over Trilby's susceptible mind. He discovers her psychic malleability when he uses mesmerism to cure her migraine headache. He tells her that he will take her pain and keep it as a souvenir, and that she in turn will "*see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*" (60). Eventually, this frightening prophecy is realized as Svengali turns Trilby into the famous opera diva, La Svengali. The idea of Trilby as an innocent victim of Svengali's occult powers captured the imaginations of late Victorian readers, who, as Taylor points out, "loved to be shocked" (93). However, Svengali's utter failure with another musically-inclined model indicates that he is not the infallible wizard he appears to be. Nor is he a purely evil villain who destroys an innocent victim, for Svengali does not reject or betray Trilby after she is harshly judged and cruelly discarded by Mrs. Bagot, Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird. As Svengali helps the destitute young woman, his human, sympathetic side emerges. Although it is overshadowed by his other, less commendable qualities, it exists nonetheless. Svengali is, as we shall see, a complex double agent whose dual nature emerges most strongly when he interacts with Trilby.

In 1895, Du Maurier's novel was adapted for the stage by the American playwright Paul M. Potter. The play, which bore the same name as the novel,

was produced by Mr. A. M. Palmer's company at the Boston Museum on Monday, 4 March, 1895, and achieved so great a success that several companies were immediately put upon the road to play it throughout the country. Its first production in

New York, with the original cast, occurred at the Garden Theatre, on April 15. Hundreds of people were turned away from the door for want of room to accommodate them; and an offer was received from Mr. Beerbohm Tree, the eminent English actor, for the privilege of producing the play in England, where he himself wished to impersonate Svengali. (Gilder 8)

As Kilgarriff points out, Tree got his wish: "In September of the same year [1895], Tree first appeared as Svengali at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, and on October 30th the play opened at the Haymarket Theatre in London. It was to be Tree's most celebrated role" (433). Potter's play, like Du Maurier's novel, was immensely successful. However, in spite of the fact that the play retained the novel's title, the emphasis had shifted from Du Maurier's lovable heroine to Tree's portrayal of Svengali as a demonically frightening, yet undeniably fascinating character.

In Potter's play, Svengali's hypnotic possession of Trilby begins in much the same way as it does in Du Maurier's novel. Shortly after he hypnotically cures her migraine headache, Svengali admires the sheer power of Trilby's voice and he recognizes that she has a "quick, soft, susceptible heart" (Potter 446). However, he wonders why Trilby does not reciprocate his admiration and why she is so oblivious to his love-making:

... but when I play to you the "Adieu" of Schubert, you turn another way--you roll your cigarette--you look at Litre Billee--you do not look at Svengali--Svengali who looks at you with all his eyes and all his soul. (446)

Trilby responds, "I wish you wouldn't stare at me like that, Svengali . . ." (446). As Svengali continues to speak, Trilby turns away from him, because the next stage direction indicates "*He is behind Trilby, who is looking straight at the audience*" (446). However, in spite of the fact that she has broken Svengali's ocular connection, by the time he finishes his speech, Trilby is spellbound. After this demonstration of his hypnotic power, Svengali hypnotizes Trilby on several subsequent occasions. He eventually induces her to write a farewell

letter to Little Billee, after which he takes her and performs his most daring hypnotic feat of all. The next time we see her she is transformed into the famous opera diva, La Svengali. However, even as she performs, the focus remains on Svengali. Although we hear about the confusion at Trilby's last disastrous performance, we do not witness her distress on stage. Instead, the audience watches Svengali die a grotesque and spectacular death. Throughout Potter's play, Svengali is in the spotlight. As a result, it is he who made the greatest impression on Potter's Victorian audience, and it is his name rather than Trilby's which has survived well into the twentieth century.

Svengali overpowered Trilby not only as a hypnotist, but as a dramatic creation as well. On September 9, 1895, ten days after Potter's play opened in London, a reviewer for *The Manchester Guardian* declared,

Mr. Beerbohm Tree has found one of the great parts of his life--some, no doubt, will think it the greatest--in Svengali The facial play was masterly, and there was a short mirthless laugh and a kickout of the leg behind for Gecko's benefit, when Svengali thought himself unusually clever, which were miracles of uncanny realism. Particularly interesting was the scene with Mrs. Bagot and the Rev. Dr. Bagot, in which the gesture of the hands by which it was conveyed that Trilby had sat for "the altogether" was half comic and wholly sinister--a very triumph of expressiveness. This deeply studied, picturesque, and always interesting piece of acting was, of course, one of the great features of the performance. (qtd. in Kilgarriff 472)

The reviewer goes on to say that Dorothea Baird's "rendering of the part of Trilby" was "hardly less important" (472). However, he does not compliment her acting as much as he praises those who cast her in the role:

To have found such a Trilby is an unheard of good fortune. Miss Baird looks the part almost to perfection: she has precisely the charming smile which Mr. Du Maurier gives to Trilby;¹¹ and by

¹¹ Du Maurier's illustrations "fixed" the appearance of his characters before the play was ever performed, and the similarity between his illustration of Trilby and Dorothea Baird really is quite striking. (see Figures 2 and 3)

some happy gift of nature or art or both, she is able to play the part with the unhackneyed freshness and candour which it before all required. (472-73)

On November 2, 1895, a reviewer for *The Era* interpreted the performance in much the same manner as the earlier reviewer had. He observes, "The slight sketches of subordinate character are necessarily moved into the background, and Svengali is made to loom up tremendously, Satanically. And wonderfully does Mr. Beerbohm Tree depict the overpowering Jew Mr. Tree's Svengali is so grand an impersonation that the question at once suggests itself--when will he play Shylock?" (474). Of Dorothea Baird the reviewer is not nearly so complimentary. He admits that "Miss Baird, besides being all that could be desired in the matter of teeth and 'extremities,' is original." Furthermore, "she charmed her audience as the real Trilby charmed the three students" (475). However, instead of recognizing Baird's potential as an actress, the reviewer claims,

Whether she has capacity for greater things than her excellent interpretation of Trilby's mesmeric trances and Trilby's death is to be proved. What we have to record is that at no point of her performance did we feel the least shortcoming or inadequacy. (475)

Part of the reason that reviewers were more strongly impressed by Tree's performance than by Baird's is that Potter's interpretation of the novel gives no credit to Trilby's initial strength and vitality. Right from the beginning of the play, Potter's heroine is "timid" (446) and "bashful" (447) rather than independent and self-assured. In contrast to this, Svengali, as *The Era* reviewer notes, is "overpowering" (474). Indeed, it would not have been at all surprising if the audience had left the theatre murmuring, "Svengali, Svengali, Svengali."

Jules Zanger argues that

Tree's dramatization of *Trilby* transformed Du Maurier's Svengali from a sinister, but certainly human figure with comic

dimensions, into a demonic, monstrous Black Magician who dominated the play. (33)

Indeed, Du Maurier's Svengali, at least to begin with, is not so much an evil magician as he is an egotistical show-off. The first time Svengali hypnotizes Trilby, he does so to cure her migraine headache. He is genuinely concerned for Trilby, who is obviously very ill, and there is no immediate indication that Svengali has any ulterior motives. He and Trilby go into the Laird's apartment, and once Svengali has an audience he cannot pass up the opportunity to perform. What begins as a favor ends up as an exhibition as Svengali uses Trilby to display his hypnotic expertise. The Laird, prompted by Svengali, asks Trilby to open her eyes, to open her mouth, and to stand up, "But Trilby was spellbound, and could not move" (Du Maurier 57). The Laird is "surprised out of his usual self, and most painfully impressed--and his own impressiveness grew upon him and impressed him still more" (60). While Trilby admits that Svengali makes her feel rather nervous and vulnerable, her relief overrides her apprehension. She exclaims to the Laird, "But he's cured my pain! he's cured my pain! Ah! you don't know what my pain is when it comes!" (60). However, the Laird refuses to acknowledge the positive effect of Svengali's hypnotic influence. Because he does not understand Svengali's power, he sees it as threatening and unnatural. The Laird warns Trilby,

"I wouldn't have much to do with him, all the same. . . . I'd sooner have any pain than have it cured in that unnatural way, and by such a man as that! He's a bad fellow, Svengali--I'm sure of it! He's mesmerised you; that's what it is--mesmerism! I've often heard of it, but never seen it done before. They get you into their power, and just make you do any blessed thing they please--lie, murder, steal--anything! and kill yourself into the bargain when they've done with you! It's just to terrible to think of!" (60)

Trilby is just as susceptible to the Laird's suggestion as she is to Svengali's hypnotic influence. As the Laird speaks, he "loom[s] quite prophetic" (60) and

Cold shivers went down Trilby's back as she listened. She had a singularly impressionable nature, as was shown by her quick and ready susceptibility to Svengali's hypnotic influence. (61)

The more time Trilby spends with the English artists the more frightened of Svengali she becomes. Although she continues to suffer from "pains in her eyes" after Svengali's mesmeric cure, Trilby "prefer[s] to endure them rather than seek relief from *him*" (84). Eventually, her opinion of Svengali's mesmeric power is almost identical to the Laird's. Indeed, as the Laird and his friends transform Trilby into a stereotypically submissive lady, their influence over Trilby's mind becomes just as powerful as Svengali's hypnotic control.

In spite of the Laird's dire warnings, Svengali is not an infallible wizard. In fact, Svengali's hypnotic control over Trilby is continually challenged by the three English artists. Although Svengali's hypnotic gestures frighten Trilby, the musician's intellectual powers are no match for Taffy's physical strength. The narrator points out that whenever Svengali threatens to mesmerise Trilby, Taffy

would interfere with a friendly "Now then, old fellow, none of that!" and a jolly slap on the back which would make Svengali cough for an hour, and paralyse his mesmeric powers for a week. (84)

In addition to thwarting Svengali's intellectual power, Taffy overwhelms him physically. The morning after La Svengali's amazing performance in Paris, Little Billee sees Svengali. He approaches the musician, who deliberately spits in his face. This infuriates Little Billee and he lashes out, "but with no effect; he couldn't reach high enough, for Svengali was well over six feet" (275). At this point Taffy appears, and just as he has rescued Trilby from Svengali's advances, he defends Little Billee:

Taffy, who had dogskin gloves on, put out his right hand, and deftly seized Svengali's nose between his fore and middle fingers and nearly pulled it off, and swung his head two or three times backward and forward by it, and then from side to side, Svengali

holding on to his wrist; and then, letting him go, gave him a sounding open-handed smack on his right cheek. (275)

Svengali's subsequent fear of Taffy and his hatred of Little Billee prove to be a lethal combination. The narrator points out that Svengali "never recover[s]" (282) from his encounter with Taffy:

He was thinking about it always--night and day--and constantly dreaming at night that he was being tweaked and slapped over again by a colossal nightmare Taffy, and waking up in agonies of terror, rage, and shame. All healthy sleep had forsaken him. (282)

Just as Svengali is plagued by the memory of Taffy's physical abuse, he is tormented by the knowledge that he will never be able to induce Trilby to love him:

He had for his wife,¹² slave, and pupil a fierce, jealous kind of affection that was a source of endless torment to him; for indelibly graven in her heart, which he wished to occupy alone, was the never-fading image of the little English painter, and of this she made no secret. (282)

Eventually, Svengali is so overwhelmed by jealousy and hatred that it kills him. Nina Auerbach argues that Svengali "dies of a heart attack while trying to mesmerise [Trilby] to new heights of genius" (285). However, Svengali dies before Trilby even comes out onto the stage. As the audience awaits La Svengali's London début, "the band came in by degrees and tuned their

¹² Svengali and La Svengali are referred to as "Monsieur et Madame Svengali" (269), and Little Billee assumes they are married: "And the remembrance of them--hand in hand, master and pupil, husband and wife--smiling and bowing in the face of all that tumult they had called forth and could quell, stung and tortured and maddened him" (256). However, Svengali and Trilby never really are married. After Trilby is reunited with the three Englishmen, Little Billee asks her, "And did he marry you?" Trilby answers, "Well--no. He couldn't, poor fellow! He'd already got a wife living, and three children" (298). After Svengali dies, we find out that "the comic wife, and three children . . . had been humorous inventions of his own" (310). In John Ragir's interpretation of Du Maurier's novel, Svengali invents this comic wife as a defense when Trilby refuses to marry him, and clearly within the novel, Svengali invents a wife, La Svengali, when Trilby is entranced and cannot refuse him.

instruments" (285). Shortly after this, Svengali appears to take his place in "the middle box on the grand tier." He is "deathly pale" but it is the shock of seeing the three Englishmen, especially Taffy of whom he is so afraid, which ultimately kills him:

He caught sight of Taffy and met his eyes, and Taffy said: "Good God! Look! Look!"

Then Little Billee and the Laird got up and looked.

And Svengali for a moment glared at them. And the expression of his face was so terrible with wonder, rage, and fear that they were quite appalled--and then he sat down, still glaring at Taffy, the whites of his eyes showing at the top, and his teeth bared in a spasmodic grin of hate. (285)

At this point, Svengali dies. Trilby is then led onto the stage where she gives a disastrous performance of "Ben Bolt" after the theatre manager prompts her to sing. It seems clear that Svengali's hypnotic interaction with Trilby does not directly cause his death. Instead, his mesmeric powers grow increasingly weaker under the Englishmen's influence, and when he sees Taffy, Little Billee and the Laird at La Svengali's London concert he dies of shock and fright.

In Potter's play, one might argue that Svengali is indeed killed by the effort of hypnotizing Trilby. Near the beginning of the play Svengali boldly claims,

Ah, ha! The day will come when you will stare at me--when I shall be the famous Svengali, and hundreds of beautiful women--Prinzesses, und Contesses, und serene English Altessen--shall fall in love with me--and shall invite me to their palaces, and pay me a thousand francs a day to play to them. . .

(He is behind Trilby, who is looking straight at the audience)

. . . but Svengali will not look at them, he will look inward at his own dream, and that dream shall be all about Trilby--to lay his heart, his genius, at her beautiful white feet. And you shall see nothing, hear nothing, think nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali . . .

(He takes Trilby's hand, gloats over it and kisses it. The arm falls heavily to her side. Svengali awakens her with two quick passes of his hand; he and Gecko exeunt on tiptoe). (446)

However, as the play progresses, Svengali finds it increasingly difficult to mesmerize Trilby, and as he exerts the mental energy required to do so, his physical vitality is slowly drained. As he prepares to leave Paris with Trilby, Svengali exclaims, "Ach! My strength, my genius--my life is passing into hers. If I take not care, it will kill me" (455). Just before La Svengali is scheduled to perform in Paris, Svengali laments, "Always thinking of that miserable little painter still . . . If I could awake her--but it is too late. My life has passed into hers. And every note she sings I know that it is killing both her and me . . . but tonight she will sing like a nightingale" (460). The stage directions indicate, "*His breathing is heavy; his hand is on his heart*" (460). After Trilby's brilliant performance in Paris, Svengali is so weak that he can hardly lift his baton, and as Trilby goes back out to perform again, Svengali collapses and dies. However, since his mesmeric powers ultimately reach beyond the grave to lull Trilby to her death, Svengali's weakness is quickly and easily forgotten while his evil hypnotic power makes a lasting impression.

As Trilby's death scene demonstrates, particularly in the novel, the threat posed by Svengali's diabolical hypnotic power is intimately linked to his race. Shortly after he dies, a portrait of him arrives from "out of the mysterious East! The poisonous East--birthplace and home of an ill wind that blows nobody good" (Du Maurier 330). As Trilby stares at his picture she sings one last song as La Svengali. She then gasps Svengali's name and dies. Trilby seems to be victimized by Svengali's demonic power and killed by his poison. However, Svengali's Jewishness does not make him unequivocally evil and malignant. In fact, the narrator claims that Jewishness is a necessary component of genius. Indeed, Little Billee's genius is due to the fact that in his

winning and handsome face there was just a faint suggestion of some possible very remote Jewish ancestor--just a tinge of that strong, sturdy, irrepressible, indomitable, indelible blood which is of such priceless value in diluted homoeopathic doses. (8)

Of course this implies that Svengali, as a full-blooded Jew, is poisonous. However, as Trilby sings her last song under Svengali's influence, she does not seem to be reacting to a deadly toxin. Instead, she becomes more angelically pure than ever. As the entranced Trilby vocalizes Chopin's "Impromptu in A flat," she

hardly seem[s] to breathe . . . It was as if breath were unnecessary for so little voice as she was using, though there was enough of it to fill the room--to fill the house--to drown her small audience in holy, heavenly sweetness. (332)

Although the narrator implies that Svengali's poisonous influence causes Trilby's death, by giving her a heavenly voice he purifies rather than corrupts her.

Ironically, through his hypnotic control of her mind, Svengali also restores Trilby's sexual freedom. Trilby's psycho-sexual release is suggested by her apparently effortless vocalizations of Chopin's music. The narrator claims that Chopin's "Impromptu in A flat" is an "astounding piece of music that . . . few pianists can even play" (251), yet as La Svengali vocalizes it during her Paris début, "there is not a sign of effort, of difficulty overcome" (253). As she sings it on her deathbed, "It all seemed as easy to her as opening and shutting her eyes, and yet how utterly impossible to anybody else!" (332). La Svengali drives her audience wild with delight. Indeed, both her effortless manner and the effect she produces are reminiscent of Frederick Chopin (1810-1849) himself. After struggling to become accepted in the Parisian music community, Chopin became a popular performer at upper-class French salons. In October 1839, Ignaz Moscheles, a fellow-composer, wrote in his diary,

For the first time I understood his music and why women go into raptures over it . . . Those harsh inartistic modulations which I have never been able to master, no longer shock me, for he glides over them imperceptibly with his elf-like fingers. His touch is as soft as a breath . . . In the world of piano players, Chopin is unique. (Jordan 176-77)

Svengali's "touch on the keyboard," like Chopin's, is "unique" (Du Maurier 64), but it is Trilby who transforms that unique touch into a symbol of sexual freedom. Svengali and Trilby are not merely a master and slave. Instead, they become combined in *La Svengali*, a strangely androgynous figure who transcends not only musical conventions, but rigidly defined social and sexual boundaries as well.

Throughout Du Maurier's novel, music, mesmerism and sexuality are inextricably intertwined. Shortly after Svengali uses mesmerism to cure Trilby's migraine headache, he recognizes her vocal potential. After this incident, Svengali continually attempts to mesmerise Trilby. When his "love-making" (88) is thwarted, he responds by "play[ing] Chopin's funeral march more divinely than ever" and "as he played the lovely melody he would go through a ghoulish pantomime, as though he were taking stock of the different bones in [Trilby's] skeleton with greedy but discriminating approval" (105). Music and mesmerism are indeed an integral part of Trilby's death, but as she dies, images of spiritual life replace those of physical decay. Indeed, when Svengali hypnotically induces the dying Trilby to sing, her enchanted listeners interpret her song as "the most divinely beautiful . . . musical utterance ever heard out of a human throat" (332). Svengali is both a subhuman "demon" (105) and a superhuman genius whose dual agency is expressed through his musical genius and his hypnotic expertise.

Although Svengali's dual nature emerges most strongly when he interacts with Trilby, his divine genius and his diabolical tendencies are apparent even when Trilby is not present. After Svengali and his assistant, Gecko, perform for Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird, the three Englishmen enthusiastically acknowledge that Svengali is "a truly phenomenal artist" (25). The narrator observes that as Svengali plays "Ben Bolt" "on his elastic penny whistle" (25) he invests the tune with "a strange, almost holy poetic dignity" (24). In fact, the narrator claims, "Svengali playing Chopin on the pianoforte, even (or especially) Svengali playing 'Ben Bolt' on that penny whistle of his,

was as one of the heavenly host" (47). ¹³ However, his divine musical personality is overshadowed by his satanic qualities. In Satan's second appearance in the Bible, he appears before God, "And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job, i, 7; qtd. in B. Stevenson 382). Like Satan,

Svengali walking up and down the earth seeking whom he might cheat, betray, exploit, borrow money from, make brutal fun of, bully if he dared, cringe to if he must—man, woman, child, or dog—was about as bad as they make 'em. (Du Maurier 47)

Even people within the music community who presumably see more of Svengali's angelic qualities than most other people do recognize the diabolical aspect of his nature. Signor Spartia, "the greatest singing master in the world" (195), acknowledges that Svengali is "an immense artist and a great singing-master" (197). However, in response to Little Billee, he agrees that Svengali is "also une fameuse crapule" (195). ¹⁴ Signor Spartia implies that Svengali is especially bad, because not only does he call him a blackguard, but he does so in French. No one at this gathering mentions Svengali's hypnotic power, if they are even aware of it. However, they still recognize that Svengali is unmistakably dual-natured.

¹³ Interestingly, "Ben Bolt" is not about a heterosexual love relationship between Ben Bolt and Sweet Alice as it first appears to be. Instead, it is a song which celebrates the long-lasting friendship between two men who were former school mates ("And of all the boys who were schoolmates then, / There are only you and I"). The narrator is reminiscing about people who have died (Sweet Alice, the old schoolmaster) and places that have changed (an old cabin, a mill), but he is really celebrating the fact that his friendship with Ben Bolt has remained constant and unchanged. Near the beginning of Du Maurier's novel, this is how the three English artists see their friendship. Trilby disrupts this vision by introducing the "kill-joy complications of love" (Du Maurier 35). By comparing "Ben Bolt" to the music of Chopin, the narrator reinforces the notion of male friendship and homosexual attraction, because, as I discuss in Chapter 3, Little Billee is much more attracted to Svengali's musical genius, especially when he plays Chopin's music, than he is to Trilby's body. ("Ben Bolt" qtd. in Gilder 31-32).

¹⁴ "an infamous blackguard" (Ormond, Notes 398).

Ironically, in spite of the fact that Svengali is recognized as a great musician, he never achieves the fame he imagines he is entitled to. He tells Trilby that

He will be all alone on a platform, and play as nobody else can play; and hundreds of beautiful Engländerinnen will see and hear and go mad with love for him—Prinzessen, Comtessen, Serene English AltesSEN. They will soon lose their Serenity and their Highness when they hear Svengali! They will invite him to their palaces, and pay him a thousand francs to play for them; and after, he will loll in the best armchair, and they will sit all around him on footstools, and bring him tea and gin and *küchen* and *marrons glacés*, and lean over him and fan him—for he is tired after playing for them for a thousand francs of Chopin! (85)

In spite of his vivid imagination, Svengali never becomes the object of such an adoring harem. Indeed, he seems rather ordinary as we find out that “his real name is Adler; his mother was a Polish singer; and he was a pupil at the Leipsic Conservatorio” (195, 197). Svengali’s dream is realized, however, through the figure of La Svengali:

She was a handsome woman, with hair down to her knees She sang at Silozech’s, and all the fellows went mad and gave her their watches and diamond studs and gold scarf-pins. (198)

La Svengali seems to represent Svengali’s triumph. However, he eventually becomes jealous of his own creation as she takes the spotlight and he fades into the shadows. Even Gecko, Svengali’s assistant and his only friend,

no longer cared for the master. All Gecko’s doglike devotion was concentrated on the slave and pupil, whom he worshipped with a fierce but pure and unselfish passion. The only living soul that Svengali could trust was the old Jewess who lived with them—his relative—but even she had come to love the pupil as much as the master. (282)

La Svengali eventually becomes a source of frustration and torment to her master. During a practice at Drury Lane he hits her, and in the minds of Trilby's friends and admirers, the memory of this physical abuse far outlives any recognition of Svengali's musical success.

Right from the beginning of the novel, Svengali's divine musical genius is eclipsed by his repellent physical appearance. The narrator describes Svengali as

a tall, bony individual of any age between thirty and forty-five, of Jewish aspect, well-featured but sinister. He was very shabby and dirty . . . His thick, heavy, languid, lustreless black hair fell down behind his ears onto his shoulders, in that musician-like way that is so offensive to the normal Englishman. He had bold, brilliant black eyes, with long heavy lids, a thin, sallow face, and a beard of burnt-up black, which grew almost from his under eyelids; and over it his moustache, a shade lighter, fell in two long spiral twists. (11, 13)

It is interesting that Svengali's physical appearance even renders his "musician-like way[s]" offensive. Perhaps this is because music, especially Chopin's music which Svengali plays and admires, has sexually suggestive undercurrents and is therefore impure. Svengali's impurity is further emphasized by the fact that he never takes a bath. Moreover, there is clearly no chance for his redemption, since he proudly announces in French, "Mais comme che ne me baigne chamais, che n'ai rien à craindre!" (134). ¹⁵ In contrast to Svengali's non-hygienic routine, the Englishmen each bathe every day, and their physical cleanliness is clearly meant to indicate their intellectual and moral purity. After Svengali dies, Trilby is happy to be reunited with "[t]hree nice clean Englishmen, all speaking English" (294). However, the Englishmen's purity is a

¹⁵ "But since I never bathe, I have nothing to fear!" (Ormond, Notes391). On this occasion Svengali is responding to another person who has said that he nearly drowned at the Bains Deligny, and he was saved by his bootmaker, to whom he owed money. Svengali says that he also owes the bootmaker money, but he will never have to pay his debt because he never bathes. Of course the fact that Svengali never pays his financial debts further establishes his villainy.

facade, since they are responsible for draining Trilby's vitality, depriving her of her self-assuredness and individuality, and slowly killing her in the process.

Trilby does not initially share the widespread dislike of Svengali. This is because she is both sexually and musically expressive. She does not conform to Victorian standards of purity as she bestows her sexual favors; nor does she recognize conventional musical standards. Because Trilby is free from the constraints of convention, she is not prejudiced against other unconventional individuals such as Svengali. However, as Trilby becomes "more English" (75) and less boisterous, she becomes afraid of Svengali. After the Laird's solemn pronouncement on the dangers of mesmerism, Trilby is as much repulsed by the memory of the musician's physical touch as she is by the thought of his mesmeric power. As she thinks about Svengali's hypnotic cure, she is "haunted by the memory of Svengali's big eyes and the touch of his soft, dirty finger-tips on her face; and her fear and her repulsion grew together" (61). With his "matted black mane" (52), his "mongrel canine snarl" (105), a voice like a "hoarse, rasping, nasal, throaty rook's caw" (105) and the physical aspect of a "long, lean, uncanny, black spider-cat" (84), Svengali becomes "a baleful and most ominous" (83) sexual predator who overshadows Trilby's formerly carefree existence.

Martha Banta asserts, "Sexuality, of course, is implied by Svengali's obsession and the hold he exerts over the hypnotized woman in his power" (20). Indeed, even before he transforms Trilby into La Svengali, his sexual advances are elaborate hypnotic experiments:

... he would playfully try to mesmerise her with his glance, and sidle up nearer and nearer to her, making passes and counter-passes, with stern command in his eyes, till she would shake and shiver and almost sicken with fear, and all but feel the spell come over her, as in a nightmare, and rouse herself with a great effort and escape. (Du Maurier 84)

Eventually, Svengali quite literally becomes Trilby's nightmare as he succeeds in sexually possessing her unconscious mind:

He seemed to her a dread powerful demon, who . . . oppressed and weighed on her like an incubus--and she dreamed of him oftener than she dreamed of Taffy, the Laird, or even Little Billee! (105)

In his illustration entitled "An incubus" (Fig. 4), Du Maurier represents Svengali as a huge, malicious spider. This recalls the first time Svengali hypnotized Trilby, who had declared, "He's a rum 'un, ain't he? He reminds me of a big hungry spider, and makes me feel like a fly!" (60). However, Trilby's subsequent nightmarish vision is not moderated by her original sense of relief. The Laird and his friends have destroyed Trilby's confidence in herself and without this self-assuredness she is unable to fend off Svengali's threatening advances. Trilby has become the metaphorical fly who is caught in the spider Svengali's hypnotic web. She struggles to escape, but Svengali infects Trilby with a mysterious mental poison, sucks out her vitality and ultimately kills her.

Although he is able to hypnotically control Trilby even after his death, Svengali's utter failure with another musically-inclined model indicates that he is not invincible. Honorine Cahen, like Trilby, is a sexually experienced "model for the figure--a very humble person indeed, socially" (49). She is not androgynous as Trilby is, but she is also dual, as is indicated by her name. The narrator asserts, "Mademoiselle Honorine Cahen (better known in the Quartier Latin as Mimi la Salope¹⁶) was a dirty, drabby little dolly-mop¹⁷ of a Jewess" (48-49). "Honorine" indicates sexual purity, but the name is merely a deceptive label which conceals the sexual reality:

¹⁶ "'salope' means slut" (Ormond, Notes 375)

¹⁷ "Specifically, a professional strumpet, but see quot., 1851. 1833. Marryat, *Peter Simple*, ch. iv. 'The captain says we are to take the young gentleman on board directly. His liberty's stopped for getting drunk and running after the dolly-mops!' 1851. H. Mayhew, *Lon[don] Lab[our] and Lon[don] Poor*, IV, 234. 'Those women who, for the sake of distinguishing them from the professionals, I must call amateurs, are generally spoken of as dolly-mops'" (Farmer 305).

"For where did all those five-franc pieces come from—*hein?* —with which she had tried to pay for all those singing lessons that had been thrown away upon her? Not from merely sitting to painters—*hein?* " (52)

Although this is ostensibly spoken by Svengali, the connection between the words and the speaker is rather vague; in any case, the narrator obviously shares Svengali's disgust. Du Maurier clearly intends Mimi's prostitution to provide a contrast to the way that Trilby bestows her sexual favors. While Mimi is only concerned about earning a profit, and is presumably indiscriminate in her choice of sexual partners, Trilby is "[l]ike an amateur, in short—a distinguished amateur who is too proud to sell his pictures, but willingly gives one away now and then to some highly-valued and much-admiring friend" (41). The conclusion Du Maurier wants his readers to draw is clear: Mimi is a disreputable, filthy creature who hardly deserves the name Honorine, while Trilby is a good woman who is simply "too quick to love and trust" (40). Indeed, this is what Ormond concludes when she assesses the situation:

The other grisette of the novel, *Mimi la Salope*, is not treated so leniently, but she has none of Trilby's redeeming qualities The extenuating circumstances for Trilby's immorality are elucidated, her father's early death, her lax upbringing, and the amoral atmosphere of the Quartier Latin. Du Maurier is careful to point out that her personal habits are clean and respectable.
(George Du Maurier 451-52)

However, before we follow the narrator's and Du Maurier's lead in condemning Honorine, perhaps we should consider the role which prostitution played in maintaining the purity that was so highly valued in respectable Victorian society.

As we have seen, proper Victorian women were seen as asexual "angels of the house," while men were seen as intensely sexual beings who were "disposed to exaggerate the physical side of love" (Cominos 159). If Victorian

sexual boundaries were to remain intact, something, or someone, was needed to fill the implied gap between the perceived asexual purity of the respectable Victorian woman and the natural sexual urges of the Victorian man. The prostitute fulfilled such a role. As Susan P. Casteras points out,

The stability and sanctity of the home and of the family itself rested to a considerable degree on the existence of prostitutes, to whom gentlemen might resort because of the taboos of gentility and the idealized, nearly sexless purity ascribed to the 'angel in the house.' The double standard thus dictated that the harlot would serve as a safety valve to the institution of marriage. (131)

The Victorian notion of sexual purity was maintained by the pervasive and threatening undercurrent of sexual impropriety. Du Maurier acknowledges this sexual duality through the figure of Honoreine/Mimi la Salope. Her name suggests that honor and sexual impurity may not be separable. However, Mimi is ultimately condemned by the narrator, Svengali and the three English artists, and Du Maurier's readership is meant to condemn her as well. Any honor she may have had is inevitably overshadowed by her sexual immorality, and she is condescendingly dismissed as the narrator declares, "And so, no more of 'la betite Honoreine'" (52). Here, just as it seems Du Maurier is on the verge of launching a full-scale attack against the Victorian sexual double standard, he abandons a provocative character and a challenging idea and he retreats comfortably back into convention.

Honoreine's dual sexuality is suggested not only by her name, but also by her voice. She has "a charming voice, and a natural gift of singing so sweetly that you forgot her accent, which was that of the *tout ce qu'il y a de plus canaille*" (49).¹⁸ Honoreine's sweet voice implies musical purity. However, in spite of the narrator's claim that her musical charm overrides her vulgar accent, the sexual implications of her musical vulgarity cannot be so easily dismissed. After

¹⁸ "as vulgar as possible" (Hawley 7).

Svengali hears her sing he “volunteer[s]” to teach her (49). In response, Honorine

went to see him in his garret, and he played to her, and leered and ogled, and flashed his bold, black, beady Jew’s eyes into hers, and she straightaway mentally prostrated herself in reverence and adoration before this dazzling specimen of her race. (49-50)

At first Svengali is quite proud of his “conquest” (48). However, he soon becomes annoyed and frustrated because he cannot control her mind or mold her voice. Just as Mimi is sexually experienced, she is already set in her musical ways, and before Svengali “could teach her anything he had to unteach her all she knew; her breathing, the production of her voice, its emission—everything was wrong” (50). Honorine “work[s] indefatigably” (50), but no matter how hard she tries, she cannot please her tutor. Svengali simply does not understand her voice. He suffers a devastating musical defeat, and his implied sexual conquest fails as well.

In contrast to Mimi’s “sordid mercenary little gutter-draggled soul” (50), Trilby has a “virginal” (42) and “susceptible” (58) heart. However, Svengali is only able to instrumentalize her after she has become an Other. After Trilby is rejected by the respectable society that Mrs. Bagot and the three Englishmen represent, she and her young brother Jeannot, who is widely supposed to be her son, move to “a village called Vibraye” (159) in Northern France. Jeannot becomes ill and dies, after which Trilby returns to Paris. She wants to “hide in Paris” and to “escape from Svengali” (296) who had written to her at Vibraye to say he was going there to get her. However, by the time she arrives in Paris Trilby has lost all her money, and she “ha[s]n’t the courage” (296) to go to her friend Angèle’s place. She is about to return to the artists’ studio when she “remember[s] Little Billee was ill there, and his mother and sister [are] with him” (298). Trilby no longer feels comfortable in the bohemian atmosphere of the Latin Quarter, and she is no longer accepted by Little Billee and his friends. The only person to whom she can turn is someone else who is “only to be

endured for the sake of his music" (88) and who is otherwise relegated to the fringes of society--namely, Svengali. Ironically, after the "nice clean Englishmen" (294) reject Trilby, Svengali symbolically purifies and revirginizes her. When Trilby is telling the three Englishmen of her ordeal, she claims that Svengali

was very kind, and cured me almost directly, and got me coffee and bread and butter—the best I ever tasted—and a warm bath from Bidet Frères, in the Rue Savonarole. It was heavenly! And I slept for two days and two nights! And then he told me how fond he was of me, and how he would always cure me, and take care of me, and marry me, if I would go away with him. He said he would devote his whole life to me, and took a small room for me, next to his. (298)

Once Trilby has been cleansed and purified, Svengali can begin to transform her into La Svengali. This seems both to suggest that Trilby was unclean or impure before she came to him and to justify the Englishmen's rejection of her. However, Svengali would never have been able to transform Trilby at all, beginning with the bath, if she had not first been cast out by Little Billee, Mrs. Bagot, Taffy and the Laird. Svengali is only able to instrumentalize Trilby once she has been rejected by respectable English society as an Other. Essentially, this lays the blame for Trilby's fate on the Englishmen's and Mrs. Bagot's shoulders rather than on Svengali's. Indeed, the fact that Svengali can instrumentalize Trilby proves her virtue and affirms her purity in spite of her usage by the Englishmen.

Ironically, the narrator implies that, almost from the first time Trilby and Svengali meet, they are meant to be together. Whereas Trilby has "all the virtues but one" (40), Svengali has "but one virtue" (46). When Trilby and Svengali are combined in the figure of La Svengali, Svengali's "love of his art" (46) is mixed with Trilby's virtuous qualities, and together they achieve the "state of perfect interior balance" (Dijkstra, "Androgynie" 63) toward which all people strive. The opera diva becomes a spiritual figure through whom both

Svengali and Trilby are redeemed of their earthly sins. When Trilby sings her last song as La Svengali, she uses "the essence of her voice . . . the pure spirit, the very cream of it" (332). The three Englishmen and Mrs. Bagot are so enchanted by Trilby's "divinely beautiful" (332) song that as she dies, her physical impurity is completely forgotten. Svengali's spiritual purity is not as clearly established, but it is suggested nonetheless. After Trilby dies, Little Billee is jealous of the fact that she has gone to join Svengali rather than eternally waiting for him. Although he calls Svengali a "ruffian" (337), Little Billee imagines that the musician and Trilby have been joined in death and that together they will "make better music than ever" (337). Since Trilby's spirit has undoubtedly risen to heaven, and since Svengali's music has always been considered divine, if Svengali and Trilby are making music together "in some other life" (337), Svengali must have become as spiritually pure as Trilby has.

La Svengali is not only a spiritually purified entity; she is a purifying agent as well. Shortly before she dies, Trilby redeems the much-abused Mimi la Salope. As Trilby nears her death, Mrs. Bagot, who has suddenly become a fervent admirer of the famous, but ostensibly mad singer, interrogates Trilby about her religious beliefs. She asks, "Are you prepared to meet your Maker face to face! Have you thought about God, and the possible wrath to come if you should die unrepentant?" (321). With a resurgence of her characteristic "Trilbyness," Trilby claims, "I've been repenting all my life!" (321). She asserts that God is merely an idea of perfection to which one must aspire, and that any form of artistic expression is a kind of prayer. Trilby then tells the dumbstruck Mrs. Bagot about a time she heard Mimi la Salope sing:

"I suppose she sang it very well, for it made old Bastide Lendormi cry; and when Père Martin *blagué*' d him about it, he said--
 ""C'est égal, voyez-vous! to sing like that is to *pray!*" "
 "And then I thought how lovely it would be if I could only sing
 like Mimi la Salope, and I've thought so ever since--just to *pray!*""
 (323)

Mrs. Bagot is appalled, but Trilby remains undaunted as she challenges society's conception of Mimi as an irredeemable "salope." Honorine is degraded by this label, and her immorality is affirmed by Svengali's treatment of her. Because she is impure, he is unable to instrumentalize her. By the time Svengali discards her, Mimi has become "a mere mud-lark of the Paris slums—her wings clipped, her spirit quenched and broken, and with no more singing left in her than a common or garden sparrow" (52) rather than "the queen of the nightingales" (50) he promised her she would be. When Trilby becomes La Svengali she is acknowledged as the "queen of the nightingales" (315). However, when she defends Mimi, Trilby seems to bestow this esteemed musical title upon her, and as she does so she restores Mimi la Salope's honor.

Trilby's defense and admiration of Mimi la Salope are undercut by the fact that her so-called friends firmly believe she is insane. Similarly, her attempt to convince them of Svengali's human, sympathetic side ultimately fails. The three artists are blinded by their prejudice, and although the narrator concedes that Svengali's love for Trilby "seems to have been deep and constant and sincere" (328), Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird are not so convinced. However, since Svengali is dead they can hardly interrogate him, so they begin to doubt Trilby instead. The Laird believes that "Trilby [is] a fraud" (303), and all three artists eventually conclude that at the very least Trilby is quite "insane" (304). They question her identity, and although the narrator claims that "[t]ruth looked out of her eyes, as it always had done—truth was in every line of her face" (303), the bohemian artists never really accept her opinion as truth, especially where Svengali is concerned. Moreover, the artists' negative opinion of Svengali is affirmed by Gecko, who asserts, "Svengali was a demon, a magician!" (347). The glimpse of Svengali's humanity which Du Maurier offers is eclipsed by descriptions and illustrations of his demonic capacity, and it is these visions which most impressed the fin-de-siècle consciousness and which have survived into the twentieth century.

Although most people in our century are unaware of its literary origins, the word "Svengali" has become a familiar term in our vocabulary. It denotes

"one who attempts usually with evil intentions to persuade or force another to do his bidding" (*Webster's* 1166). In general, the diabolical image of Svengali which predominates in Du Maurier's novel and which is emphasized in Potter's play is the one which has survived. However, perhaps we in the twentieth century are just as dual-minded as our Victorian counterparts, for not everyone views Svengali as unequivocally evil. In his 1989 play, *La Svengali*, John Ragir elaborates the episodes to which Du Maurier's Trilby refers when she talks about the time she has spent with Svengali. By doing so, Ragir gives Svengali the voice which Du Maurier denies him, and the audience is allowed to see first-hand that although Svengali is disreputable in many ways, he can be sympathetic and sincerely passionate as well. As in Du Maurier's novel, Svengali coldly discards Mimi la Salope because she has a "very little" voice which "[cannot] be trained . . . for real music" (Ragir 23). However, for the most part the musician seems to treat Trilby with respect. His lovemaking does not resemble the grotesque advances of a predator about to pounce on its prey. Instead, his attempts to express his desire are sincere and passionate:

Your hands are strong and beautiful. (*He examines her hands.*) They are smooth; I have not made them hard with work. And your feet, the prettiest feet in Paris, as you once said. (*He fondles her feet. Trilby looks away.*) And so fine. I love your feet. The Chinese kiss the feet of the Emperor. You are my empress. (*He kisses her feet.*) You have no idea how you rule over me. You rule because you won't resist, you just accept me like dead weight. The simple fact you still look away . . . And I can never look at another woman. All I see is you, my empress . . . (27)

Although Trilby is grateful to Svengali and is quite affectionate toward him, she does not return his love, so Svengali attempts to induce Trilby's passion hypnotically. He entrances her, and then he asks, "You love Svengali?"

Trilby: Yes
 Sv: You love Svengali very much?"
 Trilby: (*in deep trance*) Yes.

Sv: Let us see. (*Trilby sleepwalks a show of passion, kissing, clasping. Svengali tries to fool himself into believing this, but finally thrusts her away.*) Enough, enough. Even a whore has more passion, my little golem. (35)

Clearly, Svengali is not happy with the artificial display of which his creation is capable. Like Pygmalion, Svengali wants a real woman to love him. However, Svengali's wish never comes true. The only way Svengali can induce Trilby to show passion is to pretend he is "little Billy" (35) and his desire for Trilby is never satisfied. As in Du Maurier's novel, Svengali abuses Trilby because he is frustrated by the fact that although he can control her mind, he cannot possess her heart. However, Svengali seems far from demonic as his hypnotic power fails him. Instead, he is simply a rather pathetic human being.

Throughout his play, Ragir focusses on Svengali's romantic failure rather than on the musician's hypnotic success. When he cures Trilby's migraine headache, Svengali claims he has taken her pain into his heart (7), and in a sense, he dies because his heart is broken not only physically, but emotionally as well. When Svengali sees Billy and Taffy at Trilby's London performance, he is confronted once again by the reality that Trilby will never love him:

La Svengali rules the brilliant opera house, and lives in my spotlight. Highnesses and Countesses fling their jewels at her feet. Princes and rich men weep and are happy. Trilby lies in my shadow, yet she is always looking at him. Even alone, locked in her room, she sits looking at him. Asleep she is mine! But asleep! How much pleasure can you have from a corpse? It stinks. It doesn't move. And it dreams, dreams of him. Little Billy, the name leaps out of my mouth and bites my eyes. This dream, Trilby--of Billy, Taffy, happy children, proper English life--this is nothing, this is no life. Here am I, Svengali, who has made you this and still wants you. (*Svengali sits in a glazed look of fury. Trilby begins to sing, and as Svengali dies, she loses her ability to sing*) (36)

As he glares furiously at the two Englishmen, Svengali feels he has lost everything he has worked so hard to achieve. However, any sympathy we may

have for Svengali is undercut by the fact that after he dies he continues to possess his corpse-like diva. As she stares at his cape and cane, Trilby goes into a trance. She "sings a vocalization of Chopin's *Impromptu in A Flat*" (38), after which she falls into Billy's arms, murmuring, "Svengali . . . Svengali . . . Svengali" (38). Despite the fact that Ragir's play allows us to see Svengali as a human being rather than a beastly creature, in the end, Svengali's human failures become insignificant compared to his artistic, hypnotic domination.

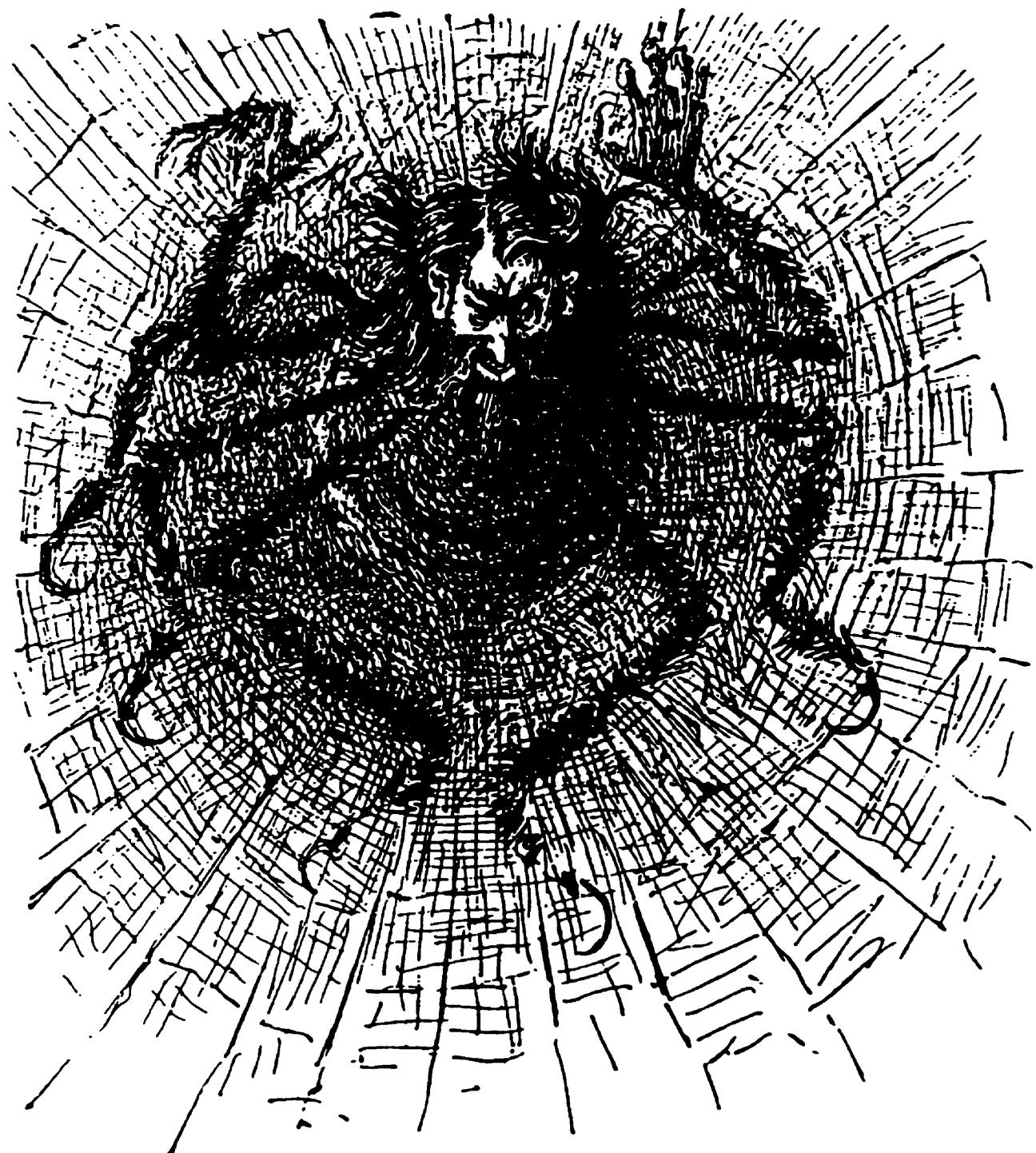
In Du Maurier's novel, Svengali is a beastly creature who exists mainly to provide a contrast to the "nice clean Englishmen" (294) who claim to be Trilby's friends. The playwright Paul Potter and the actor Herbert Beerbohm Tree highlighted Svengali's diabolical qualities to such an extent that he became an embodiment of pure evil which dominated the play and held the minds of the Victorian public in a grip of terror and fascination. This demonic vision has survived well into the twentieth century. However, in his 1989 play, *La Svengali*, John Ragir elaborates the episodes in which Trilby lives with Svengali. While Ragir acknowledges that Svengali is far from perfect, he interprets Svengali as a man who is also capable of human sympathy and passion. Ultimately, these qualities are overshadowed by Svengali's occult powers. However, as his failure with Honorine demonstrates, Du Maurier's "demon" (347) is not the invincible wizard he appears to be. Nor is Little Billee, Svengali's sexual and artistic rival, as innocent as he seems. Both the painter and the musician use Trilby in order to express their artistic genius, and as they battle to possess her body and to control her mind, they are both ultimately responsible for her death.



Figure 3
Dorothea Baird as Trilby



Figure 4



An incubus

Chapter 3

The Art of Seduction: Trilby as the Conduit and the Captive of Masculine Creativity

Throughout Du Maurier's novel, Little Billee's artistic talent is compared to Svengali's musical virtuosity. The narrator asserts that Little Billee's "touch on either canvas or paper was like Svengali's on the keyboard—unique" (64). However, while Little Billee and Svengali are both masters of their respective arts, they each need Trilby in order to reach their full artistic potential. Trilby provides the inspiration for Little Billee's world-famous painting, "The Pitcher Goes to the Well," and she literally becomes Svengali's voice as he transforms her into the opera diva, La Svengali. However, as Trilby becomes Little Billee's artistic prop and Svengali's "statuesque muse" (Taylor 98), she is drained of her physical vitality and she is robbed of her intellectual and sexual freedom. Trilby seems to be the victim of a deadly artistic battle between the painter and the musician, a battle which Svengali ultimately wins. However, in spite of the fact that Trilby fades away as beautifully and gracefully as any proper Victorian heroine should, her death is much more subversive than it appears to be. When she dies as La Svengali, Trilby eludes Little Billee's artistic grasp. Svengali cannot dominate Trilby's spirit in death either, since he could not possess it while she lived. La Svengali does not become Svengali's eternal slave; instead she represents his feminine counterpart, and together they become an androgynous unit which transcends the rigid Victorian sexual boundaries that Little Billee has tried so hard to uphold.

The narrator declares, "All beauty is sexless in the eyes of the artist at his work" (78). However, none of Trilby's English friends seems to share this view. From the first time Little Billee meets her, his aesthetic admiration of Trilby's physical perfection is intimately linked to his sexual desire for her. Little Billee is both shocked and thrilled as Trilby unabashedly kicks off her slippers to reveal a pair of "astonishingly beautiful feet" (16) which are

a true inspiration of shape and colour, all made up of delicate lengths and subtly-modulated curves and noble straightnesses and happy little dimpled arrangements in innocent young pink and white. (16-17)

Throughout his “innocent little life” (140) Little Billee has never been allowed to overtly express his sexual desires, so he must project his feelings through the medium of his art. As Banta points out, Trilby’s foot becomes an “erotic substitute for those other ‘real things’” such as “breasts, buttocks or thighs” which “Du Maurier’s descriptions of his beautiful model choose to omit” (21). Moreover, by turning Trilby’s feet into sexual objects and then chalking the outline of one of them onto the studio wall, Little Billee figuratively dismembers Trilby. In doing so, he removes the sexual threat which Trilby’s aggressive individuality implies, and he makes her perfection merely a symbol of his own artistic virility.

Like Little Billee, Svengali figuratively dismembers Trilby in an effort to appropriate her feminine creative power. In great detail, he dissects and analyzes Trilby’s voice. He compares the roof of her mouth and the entrance to her throat to grand architectural structures and he marvels at the perfection of her teeth. Svengali rapturously describes Trilby’s “little tongue,” her embalming breath and her leather lungs, and he compares the bridge of her nose to “the belly of a Stradivarius,”¹⁹ exclaiming, “[W]hat a sounding board!” He concludes his litany by declaring,

Votre coeur est un luth suspendu!
Aussitôt qu’on le touche, il résonne . . . (Du Maurier 58)²⁰

¹⁹ “A violin by the famous Italian craftsman Antonio Stradivarius (c. 1644-c. 1737)” (Ormond, Notes 377).

²⁰ “Your heart is like a strung lute ! / As soon as one touches it, it resounds . . .” Author unidentified (Ormond, Notes 377).

As Svengali analyses the sheer power of Trilby's voice, he recognizes not only her vocal potential, but her suitability as an instrument which can be manipulated by a virtuoso such as himself.

Clearly, as Svengali metaphorically dissects the physical components of Trilby's voice, he begins to instrumentalize her as well. He completes the process by hypnotically transforming her into La Svengali. Ernest Hart, a contemporary writer on hypnosis, recognized the connection between musical genius and hypnotic expertise when he asserted that a hypnotized individual "is as an instrument on the keys of which the operator can play his own tune" (22). However, as La Svengali, Trilby is not merely a finely-crafted instrument; she becomes Svengali's voice. When Svengali had begun his musical career,

he had ardently wished to sing, and had studied hard to that end in Germany, in Italy, in France, with the forlorn hope of evolving from some inner recess a voice to sing with. But nature had been singularly harsh to him in this one respect--inexorable. He was absolutely without voice, beyond the harsh, hoarse, weak raven's croak he used to speak with, and no method availed to make one for him. (Du Maurier 47)

When he meets Trilby, he recognizes her vocal potential as well as her hypnotic susceptibility, and he uses her to realize his own dream of operatic success:

He had but to say "Dors!" and she suddenly became an unconscious Trilby of marble, who could produce wonderful sounds--just the sounds he wanted, and nothing else That Trilby was just a singing-machine . . . a voice, and nothing more--just the unconscious voice that Svengali sang with. (352)

Obviously, Trilby does not become anatomically fused with Svengali. However, their identities become so closely intertwined that they cannot survive without each other. Trilby's susceptible heart is inseparable from Svengali's, so that when he dies of heart failure, Trilby must die as well.

Long before her physical demise, Trilby figuratively dies as the opera diva La Svengali. Under Svengali's hypnotic spell, the beautiful La Svengali is a

mere automaton. Those who are unaware of the psychic control which Svengali exerts over the opera diva interpret her trance-like state as a sign of mere stupidity. The singing-master Signor Spartia tells Little Billee that La Svengali is “belle comme un ange—mais bête comme un pot” (197).²¹ However, La Svengali is not stupid; she is psychically dead. Svengali’s assistant, Gecko, points out that “when Svengali’s Trilby was singing . . . our Trilby had ceased to exist . . . our Trilby was fast asleep . . . in fact, our Trilby was dead” (353). Gecko says this in order to implicate Svengali; however, all the male characters in the novel find Trilby most enchanting when she sings under the influence of Svengali’s hypnotic spell, and they think she is most beautiful as she is dying, because her weakness and death affirm their strength and superiority.

Hélène Cixous draws on the fairy-tale tradition to interpret the dynamic between female passivity and masculine creativity:

Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to come and wake them up in their beds, in their glass coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women. Beautiful, but passive; hence desirable: all mystery emanates from them. It is men who like to play dolls. As we have known since Pygmalion. Their old dream: to be god the mother. The best mother, the second mother, the one who gives the second birth. (562-63)

Svengali is indeed god-like as he manipulates Trilby’s psyche and controls her voice. Moreover, as she sings, La Svengali’s voice is “like a broad heavenly smile of universal motherhood turned into sound” (Du Maurier 242). The narrator asserts, “A woman archangel might sing like that, or some enchanted princess out of a fairy tale” (242). Trilby is Svengali’s sleeping beauty as her figurative death becomes a symbol of his creative ability.

As we have seen, Trilby’s figurative death as La Svengali is inextricably linked to her physical demise. However, long before she gazes at Svengali’s lethal portrait, indeed long before Trilby even becomes La Svengali, Svengali’s

²¹ “As beautiful as an angel—but as stupid as a pot” (Ormond, Notes 398).

desire for her is associated with images of death. When Trilby does not respond to Svengali's "love-making" (88), he provokes her attention by describing her as a corpse on display at the morgue:

"One fine day you shall lie asleep on one of those slabs--you, Drilpy, who would not listen to Svengali, and therefore lost him! . . . And over the middle of you will be a little leather apron, and over your head a little brass tap, and all day long and all night the cold water shall trickle, trickle, trickle all the way down your beautiful white body to your beautiful white feet till they turn green." (86)

Svengali tells Trilby, "And people of all sorts, strangers, will stare at you through the big plate-glass window" (86). On another occasion when Svengali finds out that Trilby has burned his love letters, he declares,

"You shall have a nice little mahogany glass case all to yourself in the museum of the École de Médecine, and Svengali shall come in his new fur-lined coat, smoking his big cigar of the Havana, and push the dirty carabins²² out of the way, and look through the holes of your eyes into your stupid empty skull, and up the nostrils of your high, bony sounding-board of a nose without either a tip or a lip to it, and into the roof of your big mouth, with your thirty-two big English teeth, and between your big ribs into your big chest, where the big leather lungs used to be . . . And then he will look all down your bones to your poor crumbling feet and say, 'Ach! What a fool she was not to answer Svengali's letters!'" (104-05)

Svengali's "vicious imaginations" (105) are like a fairy-tale gone awry. Trilby's corpse is on display in "a nice little mahogany glass case," like that of a conventional Sleeping Beauty, but the vision of contamination and decay which Svengali conjures up is far from flattering or beautiful. This is because Trilby, at least at this point, is not passive like a traditional fairy-tale heroine. Instead of welcoming Svengali's advances, she has dared to exert her autonomy by

22 "Medical students" (Ormond, Notes 384).

burning his letters. Svengali punishes her by threatening to display her rotting corpse for all to see. Svengali's hideous scenario places Trilby in the ultimate position of passivity, since she is not merely sleeping or magically entranced, but dead. However, in spite of the graphic detail Svengali provides, his "vicious imaginations" are not very different from conventional fairy-tales. In his repellent vision, Svengali imagines himself as both active and powerful. He places himself in control of Trilby's destiny and he reaffirms a conventional patriarchal balance of power.

Although the narrator claims that Svengali's vivid descriptions of his imagined dissection and exploration of Trilby's dead body are merely "vicious imaginations" (105), his necrophiliac fantasies are not as far removed from reality as they might seem. Indeed, images of the sexual exploration and dissection of female bodies pervaded fin-de-siècle culture. As Elaine Showalter points out,

For the nineteenth century, eagerness to open up the woman and see deeply into the secrets of her body and of creation was central to the process and method of science itself. This passion for observation and analysis was manifested first in the development of scientific, medical, and gynecological instruments, then in dissection, and finally in sexual surgery. (*Sexual Anarchy* 129)

Scientific observation and dissection of the female body were not merely methods by which to learn about reproductive structures and processes; instead, medical exploration became a means through which to control women socially. Showalter points out that in late nineteenth-century society,

If the rebellious New Woman-- "the shrieking sister" --or the prostitute could be turned into a silent body to be observed, measured, and studied, her resistance to convention could be treated as a scientific anomaly or a problem to be solved by medicine. (*Sexual Anarchy* 127-28)

Indeed, doctors and scientists rather effectively maintained the existing sexual order. They either prescribed passivity and deprived women of their social contacts, or if that treatment was not successful, doctors performed, or threatened to perform, sexual surgery on assertive or rebellious women.

Ehrenreich and English assert that "Medicine stands between biology and social policy, between the 'mysterious' world of the laboratory and everyday life" (5). Generally, this seems to have been true in late Victorian society, since doctors exploited their medical knowledge of the female reproductive system in order to control women socially. However, the boundary between the private laboratory and the public sphere was breached in the autumn of 1888 when Jack the Ripper brutally murdered and mutilated five prostitutes in the Whitechapel district of London's East End. The Ripper murders exemplified the doubleness by which the Victorian age was characterized. Judith R. Walkowitz points out that a "compelling aspect of the Whitechapel murders was their mystery, the secrecy and impunity with which the murders were committed in public spaces" (550). Furthermore, the Ripper murders represented a brutal physical response to the social conflicts between the sexes which had gained momentum in the Victorian age as some women began to rebel against the restrictive roles which society had prescribed for them. As Walkowitz points out,

All the murders were accompanied by acts of sexual mutilation, committed with some apparent skill and knowledge of the female body. Indeed, the principal objective of the murderer seems to have been evisceration of the body after the victim had been strangled and had her throat cut. When the murderer had enough time, the uterus and other internal organs were removed, and the women's insides were often strewn about. (550)

Jack the Ripper, which was the popular label attached to the unidentified killer, turned the mystery of female sexuality into a terrifying, yet fascinating public spectacle. After the second murder, a doctor from the London Hospital recalled

that the murderer “had removed certain parts of the body not normally mentioned in polite society and this perversion almost more than the murder itself excited the frenzy of the large crowd which gathered round the spot during the following day.” (Walkowitz 551)

Jack the Ripper’s victims were not literally public exhibits in the way that Trilby’s imagined corpse is. However, as a crowd gathered around the spot where the second grisly murder occurred, the victim, Annie Chapman, became an object of public fascination in a society obsessed with sexual dualisms. All five of the Ripper’s victims were prostitutes—women who “transgress[ed] the narrow boundaries of home and hearth and dare[d] to enter public space” (544). Presumably, Jack the Ripper was punishing women who publicly displayed their sexuality. By eviscerating his victims, the Ripper quite literally removed the women’s sexual power and took it into his own hands. When crowds gathered to view the aftermath of these grisly attacks, they could catch a fascinating glimpse of a forbidden sexual world, and at the same time they could assure themselves of their own sexual purity and propriety.

Svengali, with his frightening threats and his figurative dismemberment of Trilby’s corpse, is certainly a figure who arises from the post-Ripper discourse. Although Svengali does not literally put Trilby’s rotting corpse on display, he is portrayed as a dangerous sexual predator and as such he is implicated as the novel’s irredeemable villain. In contrast, “our three friends” (Du Maurier 262), Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird, are presented as the novel’s heroes. However, in spite of the fact that they do not imagine Trilby dead or threaten her as Svengali does, the three bohemian artists find Trilby most attractive when she is on the verge of death. Bram Dijkstra points out that in much fin-de-siècle art, “the dead woman” is represented as an “object of desire” (*Idols* 51). He discusses an 1895 painting by John Collier entitled “The Death of Albine” (Fig. 5), in which the artist “deliberately painted Albine as if she were still merely sleeping rather than dead” (58). Dijkstra asserts,

The peculiar, somewhat boudoirlike atmosphere created by these colors [the red flowers] and the rich draperies, joined with the subtle modulations of the woman's body, her right knee raised ever so slightly to hint at the soft curvature of her belly and loins, are ample indications of the dubious sincerity of the painter's interest in the spiritual and inspirational aspects of his subject. Instead he made the painting a striking expression of the erotic ambiguity of the Victorian ideal of passive womanhood--the dead woman--indicating how easily a painterly homage to feminine self-sacrifice could shift toward a necrophiliac preoccupation with the erotic potential of woman when in a state of virtually guaranteed passivity. Late nineteenth-century men were fascinated by woman's ability to be, in du Maurier's words, "an unconscious siren" even when on the verge of death. (58)

Dijkstra suggests that the artistic preoccupation with dead women which characterized so much late Victorian art arose out of "the Trilby fad" (58). This may be true to some extent, since "Trilby-mania" seemed to affect every imaginable aspect of fin-de-siècle culture. However, artistic and literary representations of dead or dying women were popular long before *Trilby* was written. Indeed, by having his heroine die gracefully and beautifully, Du Maurier seems to be following a firmly established literary convention rather than creating a new literary trend.

Whether Trilby's death was a cause or an effect of the artistic trend toward the portrayal of beautiful dead women, the fact remains that the artists in Du Maurier's novel find Trilby most attractive as she is dying. The narrator asserts that the hearts of Trilby's bohemian friends "were daily harrowed as they watched her rapid decline" (Du Maurier 311). However, their sadness is eclipsed by their admiration:

Day by day she grew more beautiful in their eyes, in spite of her increasing pallor and emaciation--her skin was so pure and white and delicate, and the bones of her face so admirable! (311)

The narrator declares that "Trilby's pathetic beauty" is "so touching, so winning, in its rapid decay" (317) that even Mrs. Bagot cannot resist her

charms. Furthermore, as she dies, Trilby becomes an artistic inspiration to her friends. As she sits on her throne in the “genial little court of bohemia” (311), the Laird, Little Billee, and two of their friends, Lorrimer and Antony, draw “those beautiful chalk and pencil studies of her head which are now so well known” (311; see Fig. 6). As they study Trilby’s emaciated beauty and draw pictures which will be viewed by a curious and admiring public, the bohemian artists are essentially no different than Svengali when he “tak[es] stock of the different bones in her skeleton with greedy but discriminating approval” (105). By representing Trilby as a dead or dying spectacle, Svengali and the artists usurp Trilby’s vitality and use her as a conduit through which to express their own creative power.

Du Maurier, like his fictional artists, controls Trilby’s sexuality by representing her death as a sexually provocative event. His illustration of Trilby’s death scene, entitled “Svengali . . . Svengali . . . Svengali” (Fig. 7), suggests the ambiguous relationship, discussed by Dijkstra, between sleep, death and desire. Trilby is resting half-reclined against a pillow. Her legs are drawn up, her hands are crossed on her breast and her head is thrown back to expose her delicate neck. As Trilby dies, she gasps Svengali’s name as though she is responding to a lover. Indeed, this is how a hysterically jealous Little Billee interprets Trilby’s last words:

“Oh, Taffy! I haven’t slept for four nights--not a wink! She d-d-died with Sv-Sv-Sv . . . damn it, I can’t get it out! that ruffian’s name on her lips! . . . it was just as if he were calling her from the t-t-tomb! She recovered her senses the very minute she saw his photograph--she was so f-fond of him she f-forgot everybody else! She’s gone straight to him, after all--in some other life! . . . to slave for him, and sing for him, and to help him make better music than ever!” (337)

Although Little Billee emphasizes Svengali’s genius rather than his demonic power, he is jealous of the fact that Svengali is able to control Trilby’s sexuality from beyond the grave. The narrator makes it clear that Svengali’s “poisonous”

(330) influence is responsible for Trilby's death and he implies that Svengali is a vampiric demon who sucks Trilby's dying breath from her. However, Svengali would never have been able to control Trilby at all if the three bohemian artists had not transformed her into a passive, conventional Victorian lady. Indeed, Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird drain Trilby of her vitality long before Svengali ever hypnotizes her and they make no secret of the fact that they are irresistibly attracted to Trilby once she has become weak and dependent. As they lean toward Trilby's vulnerable, almost dead body, their possessive desire for the dying woman is as apparent as their concern for her, and they seem even more vampiric than Svengali does.

It is easy to overlook the roles which the bohemian artists play in causing Trilby's physical decline and death because Svengali is the one who diabolically possesses Trilby's mind and ultimately kills her through the medium of his lethal portrait. However, Little Billee's gaze is just as destructive as Svengali's hypnotic stare. Before Trilby meets Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird, she is quite unaware of the social and moral implications of female sexual display. The narrator observes,

It was poor Trilby's sad distinction that she surpassed all other models as Calypso surpassed her nymphs; and whether by long habit, or some obtuseness in her nature, or lack of imagination, she was equally unconscious of self with her clothes on or without! Truly, she could be naked and unashamed—in this respect an absolute savage. (77)

The narrator harshly judges Trilby and he implies that her innocence, instead of being desirable, is quite unacceptable. However, by ridiculing Trilby's sexual naiveté, the narrator actually exposes the hypocrisy of the Victorian sexual system. The purity of respectable young women which was considered so valuable and was so carefully guarded was not really based on innocence, but on the threat of sexual knowledge. As Cominos points out, "From a very early age feminine conscience was deeply penetrated with the fear of becoming aware of sensuality" (159). Since female power resided in sexual display, it had

to be carefully monitored and controlled. It could not be allowed to enable women to do things for themselves; instead it had to inspire men to do things. Without the necessary fear of sexuality, Victorian women upset the precarious balance between male activity and female passivity which upheld their society. Indeed, the sexual freedom which Trilby's innocence implies gives her the power and autonomy which most Victorian women did not have. When Little Billee goes to Carrel's studio on the day that Trilby is modeling, he does not merely see Trilby posing, he actively gazes at her naked body. By leaving the room and refusing to paint a picture of her, Little Billee fills Trilby with shame and deprives her of her sexual autonomy. Once Trilby becomes ashamed of actively displaying her body, her sexual identity can be much more easily molded and controlled.

Just as Svengali uses Trilby to realize his dreams of public recognition and success, Little Billee takes advantage of the incident at Carrel's studio to cultivate his artistic career. He is so distressed after he sees Trilby posing at Carrel's that he decides to go "off to Barbizon, to paint the forest" (Du Maurier 90). When he returns a month later, he brings "with him such studies as ma[ke] his friends 'sit up'" (100). M. Carrel is so impressed by Little Billee's work that the old master "invited him to come and finish his picture 'The Pitcher Goes to the Well' at his own private studio--an unheard-of favour, which the boy accepted with a thrill of proud gratitude and affectionate reverence" (100). Little Billee's introduction into upper-class Victorian society and his artistic success in London are also achieved at Trilby's expense. Little Billee is distraught after Trilby is rejected by Mrs. Bagot and decides to leave Paris. However, he eventually recovers from his illness, after which

he spread his wings and flew away to London, which was very ready with open arms to welcome William Bagot, the already famous painter, *alias* Little Billee! (169)

One might argue that Little Billee's success was destined to happen whether he had ever met Trilby or not. The narrator certainly implies this when he claims

that Little Billee is already famous before he earns his fortune from "The Pitcher Goes to the Well." However, this painting is undoubtedly his signature piece, and it is the one which immortalizes his reputation within the artistic community.²³ Moreover, even if Little Billee had never become as famous as he did in London's artistic community, Trilby still played a significant part in his future artistic plans. He wants to marry Trilby, and when he finds out that she has left Paris, Little Billee declares, "We were to have lived together at Barbizon . . . all our lives--and I was to have painted stunning pictures . . . like those other fellows there" (155). Whether he is at the centre of London's artistic elite or whether he lives and paints in the forest at Barbizon, it seems clear that Little Billee wants and needs Trilby to be an artistic prop or some fanciful creature to inspire his imagination. In a sense she does become his creature because when Little Billee sees Trilby posing at Carrel's, he usurps her sexual freedom and in doing so he achieves world-wide fame and fortune.

Ironically, shortly before the catastrophic revelation at Carrel's studio, the narrator boldly "state[s] a fact well known to all painters and sculptors who have used the nude model . . . namely, that nothing is so chaste as nudity" (77). He claims that "Venus herself, as she drops her garments and steps on to the model-throne, leaves behind her on the floor every weapon in her armoury by which she can pierce to the grosser passions of man" (77). The mystery of human sexuality lies not in nudity, but in the way we use clothing to conceal it:

If our climate were such that we could go about without any clothes on, we probably should; in which case . . . much deplorable wickedness . . . would cease to exist for sheer lack of mystery; and Christianity would be relieved of its hardest task in

²³ Speaking of Little Billee's success, the narrator claims, "Many of my readers will remember his splendid *début* at the Royal Academy in Trafalgar Square with that now so famous canvas "The Pitcher Goes to the Well," and how it was sold three times over on the morning of the private view, the third time for a thousand pounds--just five times what he got for it himself . . . this picture is well known to all the world by this time, and sold only last year at Christie's (more than thirty-six years after it was painted) for three thousand pounds" (Du Maurier 164).

this sinful world, and Venus Aphrodite (*alias Aselgeia*)²⁴ would have to go a-begging along with the tailors and dressmakers and bootmakers, and perhaps our bodies and limbs would be as those of the Theseus and Venus of Milo, who was no Venus, except in good looks! (78-79)

With his detailed discussion of the relationship between art, sexuality and morality, the narrator seems to defend both Trilby's professional choices and her personal lapse of virtue. He especially seems to reflect on Trilby's unfortunate sexual past and to censure a society whose strict moral system allows sexual abuse to occur behind a veneer of social respectability. If nudity and sexuality were treated as a natural aspect of human existence rather than being concealed and repressed,

there would be no cunning, cruel deceptions, no artful taking in of artless inexperience, no unduly hurried waking-up from Love's young dream, no handing down to posterity of hidden uglinesses and weaknesses and worse! (79)

The narrator comes dangerously close to challenging the entire Victorian moral system as he discusses the ethics of artistic creation. However, just before he crosses the line of decency and decorum he "humbly apologise[s] to the casual reader for the length and possible irrelevancy of this digression, and for its subject" (80). He claims that his defense of nudity arises from a purely artistic admiration of the human form, and in case anyone is not convinced of this, the narrator adds, "Nor, indeed, am I pleading for such a subversive and revolutionary measure as the wholesale abolition of clothes, being the chilliest of mortals" (80), both in the physical sense, and by implication, morally as well.

By referring to clothing as Aphrodite's armour, the narrator implies that women are responsible for luring unsuspecting men into their sexual lairs.

²⁴ Ormond's note: "Venus is the Roman name for the goddess, Aphrodite the Greek. Aselgeia is Greek for licentiousness and lust" (381).

However, many painters and sculptors throughout the ages have turned women's own sexual weapons against them. As Harrison points out,

Drapery slipping off a woman's body is a promise of nakedness, of erotic pleasure to come; it is, at the same time, a promise made independently of the woman's volition, for her body by its very existence and presence is an object of provocation. When an artist paints a woman whose clothes are about to slip off her, he paints a contradiction that only resolves itself in the eye of the spectator. In reality, if a woman is in the presence of a man, the moment when her clothes are half-on, half-off is invariably part of a process leading either to greater exposure or concealment, depending on her willingness or reluctance to commit herself to active erotic involvement with the man in question. If an artist selects this particular moment to paint and petrify, he is deliberately depriving the woman of her sexual autonomy, for he is forcing her to endure the perpetuation of a state of vulnerability which, in reality, she would not tolerate. (26-27)

Although Little Billee does not paint Trilby at the kind of sexually indecisive moment which Harrison describes, he does deprive her of her sexual autonomy when he sees her naked and imposes a moral judgment upon her. When she gives up her modeling career, Trilby gradually loses her sense of personal identity. At the beginning of Du Maurier's novel, Trilby is very sure of herself and who she is. In fact, she is the only character who introduces herself rather than simply being named by the narrator. However, as the three Englishmen transform her into a conventional Victorian woman, her distinctive "Trilbyness" gradually fades. Svengali continues what the artists have begun when he gives Trilby his name, but in spite of the fact that his villainy is the most apparent, it is the Englishmen who complete the destruction of Trilby's identity when they wonder "if she really *was* La Svengali" (Du Maurier 304). By the end of the novel, Trilby no longer knows who she is, but the three respectable Englishmen do not take any responsibility for the destruction they have wrought. They simply convince themselves that Trilby is insane, and that they are her gallant protectors.

After Svengali dies, Trilby has no memory of her experience as the opera diva La Svengali, and her vocal talent regresses to the level it was at when she first sang "Ben Bolt" in the Englishmen's bohemian apartment. Trilby's memory loss and her drastic vocal regression prompt both her so-called friends and her doctors to diagnose her as insane. However, the narrator observes,

Tuneless and insane, she was more of a siren than ever--a quite unconscious siren--without any guile, who appealed to the heart all the more directly and irresistibly that she could no longer stir the passions. (304)

Dijkstra notes,

now that she has ceased to be a direct sexual threat, Trilby is free to become the true sexless, high-Victorian feminine ideal: the woman who, in her very physical helplessness, makes no further overt erotic demands upon the male, guaranteeing him a restful respite from the energy-draining requirements of sexual involvement, and thereby proving to him that even in the 1890s, the heyday of the dreadful "new woman," she could still be the same as she used to be in her mother's day: a comforting emissary from the spiritual realm rather than a dangerous, competing inhabitant of the world of aggression and exchange. (*Idols* 36)

Indeed, the Englishmen find Trilby irresistibly attractive now that they can properly categorize her. However, I find Dijkstra's description of Trilby as "free" to become a conventional Victorian angel rather provocative and even disturbing. One can only hope he is speaking ironically, since Trilby is not free at all. While the men around her, and the conventional Mrs. Bagot, are rather relieved to find the conventional social hierarchy re-established, Trilby is imprisoned by their perceptions of her as a madwoman. On one of the rare occasions that Trilby is allowed to go outside, she, her doctor, and Marta, Svengali's relative who has stayed with Trilby as her maid, drive past a "French *blanchisserie de fin*, and the sight of it interested and excited her so much that she must needs insist on being put down and on going into it" (Du

Maurier 307). Trilby asks for employment,²⁵ but instead of supporting her and encouraging her interest in this active and healthy occupation, "Marta managed to catch the *patronne's* eye and tapped her own forehead significantly, and Sir Oliver nodded" (307). After they reaffirm Trilby's diagnosis of insanity, her decline is more rapid than ever, and she dies shortly thereafter.

Clearly, the conventional people around Trilby can manipulate her sexual identity by treating her as though she is insane. Indeed, long before she becomes La Svengali, the bohemian artists associate Trilby's free sexual expression with insanity. As we have seen, the first time the English artists meet Trilby they are shocked at her improper apparel. Although she is not naked, the narrator implies that she might as well have been, for he declares that the next time she arrives at the bohemian apartment, she is

clothed . . . and in her right mind, as it seemed: a tall, straight, flat-backed, square-shouldered, deep-chested, full-bosomed young grisette, in a snowy frilled cap, a neat black gown and white apron, pretty faded, well-darned brown stockings, and well-worn, soft, gray, square-toed slippers. (35)

This is clearly a much more conservative outfit than a petticoat and a soldier's overcoat. It suggests a conventional attitude of sexual passivity and feminine servitude, and it is therefore less threatening and more acceptable to the three respectable Englishmen. The narrator restates this stereotypical view of female sexuality when he claims, "For myself, I can only speak of Trilby as I have seen her—clothed and in her right mind" (78). Ironically, he makes this declaration right in the middle of his discussion of the sexlessness of beauty as it is seen in the eyes of the artist. The narrator reveals his own double agency by not recognizing or acknowledging the contradictions inherent in his own

²⁵ The laundry at which Trilby seeks employment is similar to the bath which Svengali had ordered for her when she sought his aid. Both the bath and the laundry represent cleansing or purification. It is as though Trilby can be repurified by asking for work at the *blanchisserie de fin*. It is interesting that such symbolic purification always occurs outside of Trilby's relationship with the Englishmen. This suggests that they are the contaminating agents by which Trilby is continually threatened and from whom she must be protected.

assertions. He suggests that female sexuality and madness are quite separate from the artistic expression of physical female beauty, but at the same time he implies that insanity and female sexuality are inseparable from each other.

The association between insanity and women's physical sexuality has a long and complex history. As Ilza Veith points out, the word "hysteria," which has been used throughout the ages to describe and explain a wide variety of female maladies, is

derived from the Greek word *hystera*, which means "uterus." Inherent in this simple etymological fact is the meaning of the earliest views on the nature and cause of the disease. It was formerly believed to be solely a disorder of women, caused by alterations of the womb. The association of hysteria with the female generative system was in essence an expression of awareness of the malign effect of disordered sexual activity on emotional stability. (1-2)

Ehrenreich and English argue that, in the nineteenth century, hysteria became a wide-spread "epidemic" (39) which was especially prevalent among "urban middle- and upper-middle-class white women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five" (40). Interestingly, Ehrenreich and English refer to hysteria as a "new disease" (39), yet Veith asserts that "it is encountered in the earliest pages of recorded medicine" (1). Perhaps these views can be reconciled by the fact that, although hysteria has been recognized throughout medical history, the nineteenth century marked the first time that women attempted to use the disease to their own advantage. As we have seen from Little Billee's situation, the hysterical fit was a means through which women, or in this case feminized men, could attract the attention of those around them and exert their pent-up physical and intellectual energy. However, this form of expression was not very effective, because as Ehrenreich and English point out, "ultimately it played into the hands of the doctors by confirming their notion of women as irrational, unpredictable, and diseased" (41). It is rather paradoxical that even though "doctors sometimes interpreted [hysteria] as a power grab rather than a

genuine illness" (39), for the most part, they "continue[d] to insist that hysteria was a real disease--a disease of the uterus, in fact" (41). By maintaining a connection between organic and psychological disorders, doctors could control both the physical sexuality and the socially-defined gender roles which upheld Victorian society.

Of course, not all physicians claimed to support the notion that there was an link between madness and female sexuality. Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) was one of the most respected neurologists of his day. Alan Gauld points out that in the late 1870s and early 1880s, Charcot and his pupil, Paul Richer, posited that hysteria was a disease which was "not confined to women and not specifically linked to frustrated sexual urges" (308). However, in spite of the fact that he denied any specific connections between gender and insanity, and between physical sexuality and mental disease,²⁶ in practice, madness, femininity and physical sexuality were all inextricably linked. Veith points out that because the hospital where Charcot worked, the Salpêtrière,

was a hospital for female patients, most of Charcot's patients were women, and among them he found symptoms that had not previously been recorded, namely, spontaneous pains in the region of the ovaries and the mammary glands. This suggested to Charcot that these regions were "hysterogenic zones." Because of this idea a peculiar device was developed, an "ovary compressor," and was frequently used in the Salpêtrière in an attempt to avert major paroxysms after the [symptoms] had become evident. (232)

Clearly, Charcot was an innovative and advanced thinker; however, in spite of his daring assertions about the nature of psychological disease, he was unable to transcend the restrictive views about the expression of women's sexuality that pervaded his culture.

²⁶ Charcot "wrote in one of his lectures: 'Keep it well in mind and this should not require a great effort, that the word 'hysteria' means nothing, and little by little you will acquire the habit of speaking of hysteria in man without thinking in any way of the uterus'" (Veith 232).

However, Gauld, who defends Charcot against allegations that the physician had “an excessive love of publicity, and of playing the great man” (307), nonetheless admits that Charcot’s lectures “were most impressive set pieces, prepared in advance down to the last detail They were delivered in a miniature theatre, and the theatrical impression was heightened by stage lighting, the use of photographic slides, and the somewhat excitable patients who were occasionally put through their paces” (307). McClary suggests that such a psychological stage is very similar to the musical stage on which the operatic madwoman sings. Indeed, when Svengali hypnotizes Trilby in order to transform her into an opera diva, he is both the psychiatrist who is displaying his patient and he is a conductor—“conducting [Trilby], in fact, just as if she had been an orchestra herself” (Du Maurier 240). Elaine Showalter suggests that Svengali’s hypnotic ability and the way in which he publicly displays his diva connects him to Charcot (Introduction xxi). However, there is a significant difference between the neurologist and Du Maurier’s fictional hypnotist. While both men are in control of virtual automata, Charcot remains distinct from his patients. In contrast, Svengali and his opera diva become an inseparable entity. Indeed, when the narrator of Du Maurier’s novel discusses La Svengali’s talent, he imagines her declaring, “for I am *Trilby*; and you shall hear nothing, see nothing, think of nothing, but *Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*” (Du Maurier 245). La Svengali entrances a captive audience as her voice transcends the boundaries of conventional music. She and Svengali become popular throughout Europe, and together, they transcend the rigid boundaries of the society which has rejected them both.

As she vocalizes Chopin’s “Impromptu in A flat,” “that astounding piece of music that so few pianists can even play” (251), Trilby seems to rise above not only musical convention, but above the sexually constricted role the Englishmen had tried to impose upon her. As she sings, “there is not a sign of effort, of difficulty overcome” (253). Her incredible vocal talent seems to suggest that her “nerves and muscles are well in tune” (14) once more. However, in spite of the fact that Trilby’s voice is so free, her mind is held

captive. The battle played out on the stage between sexual freedom and captivity is one which every Victorian woman had to face. Victorian women constantly had to reconcile the vision of their supposed angelic innocence and spiritual transcendence with the physical, sexual demands of marriage and motherhood. Whether he does so consciously or not, the narrator outlines this very conflict as he interprets Trilby's vocalization of Chopin's piece. As La Svengali sings, the notes suggest

Waves of sweet and tender laughter, the very heart and essence of innocent, high-spirited girlhood, alive to all that is simple and joyous and elementary in nature . . . all the sights and scents and sounds that are the birthright of happy children . . . Then comes the slow movement, the sudden adagio, with its capricious ornaments--the waking of the virgin heart, the stirring of the sap, the dawn of love; its doubts and fears and questionings; and the mellow, powerful, deep chest notes are like the pealing of great golden bells, with a light little pearl shower tinkling round--drops from the upper fringe of her grand voice as she shakes it. . . .

Then back again the quick part, childhood once more, *da capo*, only quicker! hurry, hurry! but distinct as ever. (251, 253)

Clearly, innocence and sexual knowledge, freedom and captivity, physicality and spirituality are as inseparable from each other as La Svengali is from Svengali. In a sense, every note the opera diva sings represents Victorian women's daily struggle to maintain their delicate balance in a world defined by dualisms.

As Trilby vocalizes Chopin's "Impromptu in A flat," the sexual suggestiveness of the piece arises not only from its ornamental, unconventional sound patterns, but from the identity of its composer as well. Chopin had gone to Paris in September 1831. However, Ruth Jordan points out that "after eight months in Paris, in spite of his popularity with fellow-pianists and the discerning few, Chopin felt he had made no headway" (115). Fortunately, just as he decided he would leave Paris, his luck changed. He was invited to play at an upper-class salon, "where he played so exquisitely that before he left he had several society ladies clamouring to become his pupils" (115). In Du Maurier's

novel, the first time Svengali plays Chopin's "Impromptu in A flat" he produces the same kind of effect on his listeners as Chopin had on his audience. However, Svengali's admirers are not high-society ladies; instead they are Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird. As Little Billee listens to Svengali play, he experiences an unforgettable musical awakening:

Little Billee's heart went nigh to bursting with suppressed emotion and delight. He had never heard any music of Chopin's before, nothing but British provincial home-made music—melodies with variations, "Annie Laurie," "The Last Rose of Summer," "The Blue Bells of Scotland." (Du Maurier 13)

The narrator implies that Chopin's music is quite the opposite of these "innocent little motherly and sisterly tinklings" (13). Therefore, as Little Billee listens to the beautifully-played music of Chopin, he experiences a sexual awakening as well as a musical one.

Neither the narrator nor Little Billee would ever admit that Little Billee feels any sort of sexual attraction toward Svengali. Instead, they both claim that Little Billee loves Trilby. However, in spite of the fact that his admiration of Trilby's perfect bare foot has distinct sexual connotations, Little Billee seems almost repelled by the thought of having a real sexual relationship with her. As we have seen, after Trilby finally accepts Little Billee's twentieth marriage proposal, his perceptions become "tarnish[ed]" (140) rather than enhanced. Instead of pursuing a physical relationship with a woman, Little Billee channels his sexual desire into an admiration of masculine musicians. The narrator claims that Little Billee "had a reverence for woman. And before everything else he had for the singing woman an absolute worship" (49). However, what he admires most is not really the female voice, but the masculine qualities in a female voice:

He was especially thrall to the contralto—the deep low voice that breaks and changes in the middle and soars all at once into a magnified angelic boy treble. It pierced through his ears to his heart, and stirred his very vitals. (49)

A similar effect is produced when Little Billee hears Glorioli, “a tall, good-looking, swarthy foreigner” (193) who sings by night and is a wine merchant by day. As he sings,

from his scarcely-parted, moist, thick, bearded lips . . . there issued the most ravishing sounds that had ever been heard from throat of man or woman or boy! He could sing both high and low and soft and loud, and the frivolous were bewitched, as was only to be expected; but even the earnestest of all, caught, surprised, rapt, astounded, shaken, tickled, teased, harrowed, tortured, tantalised, aggravated, seduced, demoralised, degraded, corrupted into mere naturalness, forgot to dissemble their delight. (193)

Glorioli’s voice effectively breaks down the rigid social and sexual constraints by which Victorian society is defined, and Little Billee is irresistibly attracted to him. Indeed, “His voice got into Little Billee’s head more than any wine, and the boy could talk of nothing else for days and weeks” (194). Little Billee reacts to Glorioli’s singing in much the same manner as he does to Svengali’s piano-playing. Therefore, it is no surprise that when vocal and instrumental music are combined in the figure of La Svengali, the most divine contralto in the world, “Little Billee [loses] all control over himself” (243). After all of his efforts to force Trilby, and himself, into conventional gender roles, Little Billee cannot resist or deny the almost magnetic attraction by which he is drawn to the strangely androgynous figure of La Svengali. As he falls under La Svengali’s spell, Little Billee’s identity becomes entwined with hers, and when Svengali and Trilby die, Little Billee is destined to die as well.

When one first reads Du Maurier’s novel, *Little Billee*, Svengali and Trilby seem to form a rather conventional love-triangle in which two men, one good and one evil, are competing for the affection of a beautiful woman. Svengali and Little Billee are associated with each other throughout the novel, but the distinction between the good and worthy suitor and his evil opponent is not as clear as it initially appears to be. Both Little Billee and Svengali use Trilby in order to achieve their personal artistic goals, and as they manipulate

her identity, Trilby loses the sexual autonomy and the intellectual freedom which make her so attractive at the beginning of the novel. The narrator attempts to absolve Little Billee's guilt by having him take Trilby into his home to care for her during her final days. Similarly, the narrator firmly establishes Svengali's unforgivable villainy as Trilby dies under his poisonous influence. However, it is really Little Billee and his friends who destroy Trilby when they rob her of her sexual freedom and transform her into a conventional Victorian lady. While Svengali is far from blameless, when he blends his own identity with Trilby's he subversively restores the androgyny which Trilby has so regrettably lost. Furthermore, it is through the androgynous figure of La Svengali that Little Billee finally rediscovers his own sexual identity. Unfortunately, all three characters are destined to die. While Du Maurier challenges the Victorian social code, convention, at least within the novel, comes out the winner.

Figure 5
"The Death of Albine" by John Collier



Figure 6



A throne in Bohemia

Figure 7

95



'Svengali . . . Svengali . . . Svengali . . .'

Figure 8

"Pinel Freeing the Insane" by Tony Robert-Fleury



Conclusion

"Nothing Ever Happens but the Unforeseen": Du Maurier's Ambivalence About *Trilby*'s Success

In several places in *Trilby* the narrator makes fun of literary convention. On one of these occasions, when he is describing Little Billee's convalescence and illness, he asserts, "Of course the sympathetic reader will foresee" how Taffy and Little Billee's sister fall in love as they take care of the invalid Little Billee (163). The narrator then surprises "the sympathetic reader" by claiming, "As a matter of fact, however, nothing of this kind happened. Nothing ever happens but the *unforeseen*" (163). Indeed, this paradoxical axiom applies not only within the novel itself, but also to *Trilby*'s immense success as a best-selling novel, and Du Maurier's reaction to the "Trilby-mania" which his novel generated. Du Maurier admits that he was "surprised" and "rather distress[ed]" (Sherard 399) by his novel's popularity because he believed that "a 'boom' means nothing as a sign of literary excellence, nothing but money" (400). However, I think his ambivalence about his novel's success was produced by more than financial or literary concerns. Du Maurier took the public's reaction to his story very personally because, like his characters, he was a complex double agent, and his characters' double agency is inextricably linked to his own.

Du Maurier was born in Paris on March 6, 1834. His mother was English and his father was French, and Du Maurier "was brought up in both languages" (Sherard 394). When he was five years old, his family moved to London, but they returned to France a year later. Du Maurier grew up in Boulogne, but when he was seventeen years old he returned to London, where his father was then living. Du Maurier's father died in 1856, at which time Du Maurier moved back to Paris and spent a year studying art at Gleyre's studio, upon which Carrel's studio in *Trilby* was based. From there he moved to Antwerp, where he continued to study painting and drawing until he lost the

sight in his left eye. In 1860, Du Maurier went to London, where he began to work as an illustrator and a cartoonist for the magazine *Punch*. He wrote three novels: *Peter Ibbetson* was published in 1891, followed by *Trilby* in 1894, and finally *The Martian*, which was published posthumously in 1898. Du Maurier died in England on October 8, 1896.

Throughout his life, Du Maurier spent a great deal of time in both England and France, and according to Henry James, a close friend, he "was split in two" by his linguistic doubleness (qtd. in Ormond, *George Du Maurier* 403). In his 1897 article entitled "George Du Maurier," Henry James describes his subject as having a "temperament in which the French strain was intermixed with the English in a manner so capricious and so curious and yet so calculated to keep its savor to the end" (596). James asserts that in Du Maurier, "all impulse . . . was of one race, and all reflection of another" but he "leav[es] the mystified reader to put the signs on the right sides" (596). Perhaps the answer may be found by looking at the characterization of Trilby. When Trilby first meets the three English artists, she is impulsive and boisterous, and she speaks "quite French French" (Du Maurier 21). As she spends more time with her English friends, she becomes "more English" (75). This refers not only to her linguistic habits, but to her entire demeanor as she becomes reserved, submissive and conventional. Ormond declares, "The ultimate victory of Trilby's English soul was symbolic of Du Maurier's choice of England as his home, and his submission to a conventional and moralistic way of life" (452). While it is true that Trilby is transformed into a conventional Victorian lady, I do not think her transformation represents a victory either for "her English soul" or for Du Maurier. Trilby in fact is not English. Her father is Irish, "the son of a famous Dublin physician" (Du Maurier 42), and her mother is Scottish. Her parents met in Paris, and that is where Trilby was raised. Trilby's Englishness is imposed upon her by her three English friends. However, just before she dies, with a resurgence of her characteristic "Trilbyness," Trilby vigorously defends herself and her life against the conventional, respectable, English Mrs. Bagot. Moreover, as she dies, in a sense she casts off the

Englishness which has been imposed upon her. She dies with Svengali's name on her lips, and as she joins him in death her androgyny is subversively restored. It is hard to say whether Du Maurier consciously realized how potentially subversive his heroine's death was, but in spite of the apparently overwhelming victory for English convention, he shows that Trilby's intellectual strength and her personal integrity are never entirely destroyed.

Just as Du Maurier never completely conventionalizes his heroine, his villain, Svengali, is not entirely evil. One of Du Maurier's readers, S. M. Cox of Auburn, New York, observes, "Svengali is drawn with inimitable skill and with so much realism that the reader feels he must have been known and hated by du Maurier in all his repulsiveness" (qtd. in Gilder 28). Several real-life models have been suggested for Svengali.²⁷ However, I think that Svengali's character was at least partly based not on someone sinister whom Du Maurier hated, but rather on someone whom he liked and admired, namely, his friend Felix Moscheles. Moscheles and Du Maurier met when they were both art students in Antwerp. Moscheles was a talented musician who often wrote piano music to accompany Du Maurier's verse. However, in spite of the fact that he recognized Moscheles' talent, Du Maurier sometimes found it difficult to follow his friend's accompaniments, and he drew a picture of Moscheles at the piano, entitled, "Moscheles or Mephistopheles, which?" (Fig. 10). Even more important than the musical dualism which Du Maurier perceived was the fact that Moscheles was also an accomplished mesmerist. "Some time before he published his 'Trilby'" Du Maurier told Moscheles, "You'll see that I've used up all your Mesmerism and a trifle more in my new book" (Moscheles 9). Moscheles claimed,

²⁷ Ormond points out, "Du Maurier and his friends knew a Greek musician and pianist, Sotiri, but Armstrong [a close friend of Du Maurier's] is adamant that Sotiri is not the original of Svengali. The characterisation of Svengali as a musician seems to owe something to the performance styles of Nicolo Paganini. Another possible contender is Henri Litolff" (Notes 366). In another note, Ormond points out that Litolff was a "pianist, composer and music publisher" who was "a child prodigy and pupil of Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), the father of Du Maurier's friend Felix. Ormond claims that Litolff, "resident in Paris, and with his sinister beard, may be a strong contender for the role of Svengali" (368).

Mesmerism, or, as the fashion of to-day calls it, Hypnotism, formed so frequent a topic of conversation and speculation between du Maurier and myself, that it takes a very prominent place in my recollections. (51)

Du Maurier and Moscheles spent a great deal of time discussing the ways in which mesmerism could be used to probe the mysteries and possibilities of the unconscious mind. Moscheles asserted, "It was on one or the other of these excursions, I feel confident, that du Maurier was inoculated with the germs that were eventually to develop into Trilbyism and Svengalism" (59). Du Maurier no doubt found these discussions stimulating, as all three of his novels deal with some aspect of unconscious experience, but the idea of exploring the mystery of unconscious experience also terrified him.²⁸ As Svengali uses mesmerism to control Trilby's unconscious mind, he embodies Du Maurier's terror and fear, and he horrified Du Maurier's readers as well.

In contrast to the villainous Svengali, Little Billee is described as a "hero of romance" (Du Maurier 180). Ormond points out,

Several writers believe that Du Maurier's Little Billee was drawn from the painter and illustrator Frederick Walker (1840-75) The American painter James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) believed, with some justification, that the real original for Little Billee was Du Maurier himself. (Notes 365)

Lionel Stevenson argues that "in certain respects" Little Billee embodied

what du Maurier wished that he might have been. As a young art student he had hoped to become a great painter, until the loss of sight in his left eye condemned him to the less exacting work of black and white; and so in Little Billee he created a young genius

²⁸ Du Maurier wrote to Moscheles, "It's all very well to ask a nervous fellow to Antwerp and amuse him and make him ever so jolly and comfortable--But why, when the bleak November wind sobs against the lattice and disturbs the dead ashes in the grate, when everything is damned queer and dark . . . why should you make a nervous fellow's flesh creep by talk about mesmerism, and dead fellows coming back to see live fellows before dying, and the Lord knows what else? Why, Gad! It's horrid!" (Moscheles 59-60).

who moved straight from the Paris studio to fame and wealth and a place on the line at the R. A. (53)

In spite of his similarities to Little Billee, I do not think that Du Maurier necessarily intended to portray Little Billee sympathetically. While the narrator claims that Little Billee is a "hero" (180), I think Du Maurier intentionally defies convention by portraying the painter as a narrow-minded, self-righteous, and generally unattractive character. However, since Little Billee's unattractive personal traits are counterbalanced by the narrator's claims that Little Billee is a much-admired genius, Du Maurier's subversiveness remains a subtle undercurrent rather than becoming a direct challenge to literary or social convention.

I think Du Maurier was aware, at least to some extent, of his novel's subversive undercurrent. He certainly must have known that he was challenging conventional Victorian sexual standards with his sympathetic portrayal of a sexually experienced, yet innocent or pure-minded heroine.²⁹ However, in spite of the fact that Du Maurier spent much of his life mocking conventional English society as a social cartoonist for *Punch*, he also admired much about English life and he wanted to be accepted in English society. In *Trilby* this ambivalence is evidenced by the fact that every time he challenges Victorian concepts of sexuality and morals, just before he crosses the line of decorum, he retreats behind some conventional phrase or statement. Indeed, at the end of the novel, the narrator claims that a "useful, humdrum, happy domestic existence" (356) is the best kind one can have. Trilby's supposedly immoral sexual past, as well as her tragic death under Svengali's hypnotic

²⁹ In 1891, three years before *Trilby* was published, Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was published. Tess, like Trilby, is sexually experienced, yet Hardy challenged the Victorian notion of purity by labelling Tess, in the subtitle of his novel, as "A Pure Woman." Trilby arises out of the post-Tess discourse, and although the characterization of both Tess and Trilby gave rise to a great deal of critical comment, by the time *Trilby* was published, the public had already been exposed to the notion that a woman can be sexually experienced and pure at the same time. Indeed, Fraser Harrison suggests that Trilby "represented a type of sexuality that was in accord with public taste" (129).

influence, is all but forgotten, and the novel's subversive possibilities are conveniently dismissed as well.

Du Maurier was not prepared for his novel's phenomenal popularity, for when the first installment was published in *Harper's Magazine* in January 1894, it was an immediate success. In her glowing review of *Trilby*, Margaret Sangster declared,

There are people not a few who will remember the first half of 1894 not for the hard times, nor for the strikes, nor the yacht-races, nor any other thing of public interest or private concern, so much as for the pleasure they had in reading *Trilby* . . . Mr. Du Maurier's *Trilby* stands thus far by itself in magazine literature. Never before did the month intervening between instalments seem so long, nor did so many readers anxiously await the next development . . . And now the same readers are eagerly watching for the book, that they may call it their own. (883)

Edward L. Purcell points out that Du Maurier had "sold the book outright to the American publishing firm of Harper and Brothers for the relatively modest sum of \$10 000—including forfeiture of both royalties and dramatic rights" (62-63). However,

Harper and Brothers returned to Du Maurier the dramatic rights and began to pay a royalty on each copy of the novel sold after January 1895 . . . [Du Maurier] eventually collected more than \$135 000, and his publisher made nearly \$600 000 on the book version alone. The sales of the novel and the box office receipts from the stage dramatization totaled nearly \$1 million. (69)

In addition to the novel's financial success, it spawned several parodies and burlesques, including *Drilby Re-Versed*, *Thrilby in Two Acts*, *Frilby: An Operatic Burlesque* and *Trilby: A Burlesque of the Play of the Same Title* all in 1895, and *Thrillby: A Shocker in One Scene and Several Spasms* in 1896. Business people of all sorts took full advantage of *Trilby*'s popularity. An enterprising butcher in Philadelphia sold "Trilby Sausage" and "Trilby Ham," and "A Broadway caterer . . . mold[ed] his ice-cream in the shape of a model of Trilby's ever-

famous foot" (Gilder 25). In 1895, the Emerson Drug Company in Baltimore published an amusing pamphlet entitled *The True Tale of Trilby Tersely Told* to promote its Bromo-Seltzer.

Du Maurier was quite distressed by his novel's success. According to Henry James, Du Maurier viewed the "Trilby-mania" which his novel generated as "a huge botheration--the word in which he most vented his sense of the preposterous ado" (607). In the wake of *Trilby*'s popularity, Du Maurier experienced "an unappeasable alarm at the strange fate of being taken so much more seriously than one had proposed or had dreamed; indeed, in a general terror of the temper of the many-headed monster" (607). Although he had to face some accusations and attacks, in general, *Trilby* fascinated and delighted Victorian readers. *Trilby* enabled readers to catch a glimpse of a forbidden sexual world, but since it was set in the nostalgic comfort of 1850s bohemia and at the same time in a magical world beyond reality, it was sufficiently distanced from reality so that it did not pose a direct personal threat.

After Du Maurier's death in 1896, "Trilby-mania" died down, and although the figure of Svengali has survived as a cultural icon for an evil hypnotic manipulator, *Trilby*, the novel in which he appears, sank into relative obscurity as the twentieth century progressed. However, as we approach another fin de siècle, critical interest in the novel seems to be reviving.³⁰ I think this is partly because the late-Victorian fascination with the workings of the unconscious mind has carried over and has gained momentum in our own century. As well, in both centuries, the study of the unconscious and its relationship to personality development has been propelled by a strong undercurrent of sexual politics. Finally, the struggle for women's equality which was very controversial in the 1890s has continued and has seen a great

³⁰ In the past five years, five editions of *Trilby*, as far as I know, have been published. J. M. Dent published an edition without Du Maurier's illustrations in 1992, and a fully illustrated edition in 1994. Penguin Books in London and Dover Publications in New York also published 1994 editions. The most recent edition that I know of was published in 1995 by Oxford University Press. For this thesis, I have used the fully illustrated 1994 edition published by J. M. Dent.

deal of success in our century. Before her domestication by the three Englishmen, Du Maurier's *Trilby* was an unconventionally assertive character whom many Victorian women strove to emulate, and her strength may still serve as a model today. It is doubtful that *Trilby* will ever achieve its initial level of popularity again, but certainly, just as its heroine sang until the moment of her death, *Trilby* will not go quietly into a literary grave.



Moschæus, or Mephistophæus? which

Figure 10

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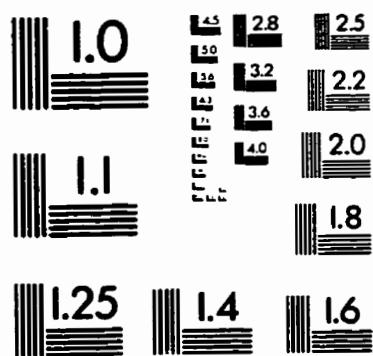
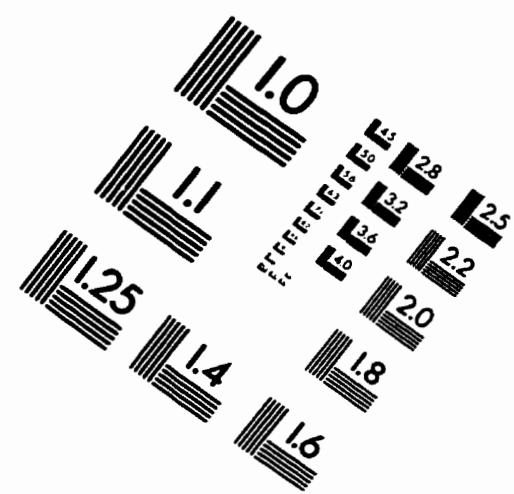
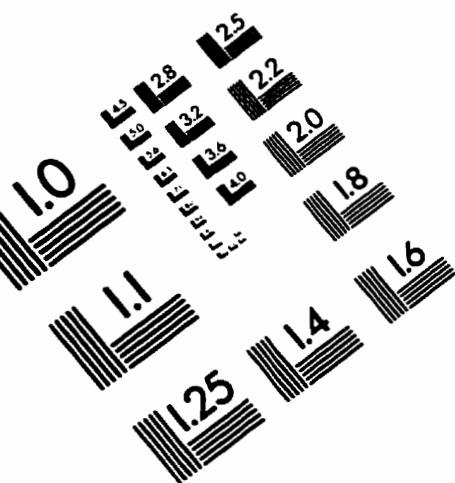
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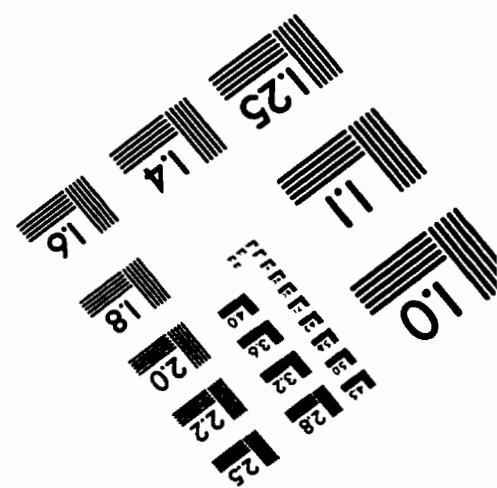
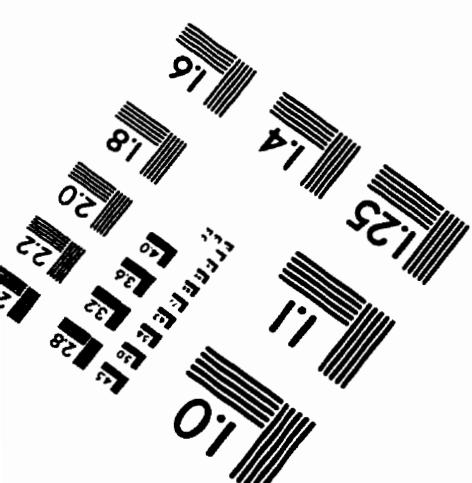
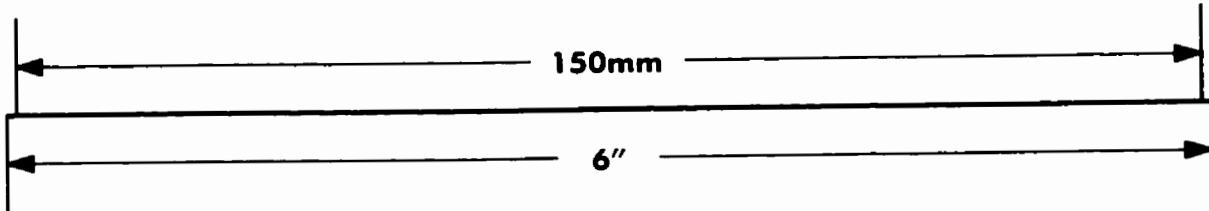
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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