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‘Vers le sabbat’ : Occult Initiation and Non-Normative Masculinity in
Jean Lorrain’s *Monsieur de Phocas* (1901)

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The new socialism is a movement that is not just
political, but also magical and sexual.¹

Jean Lorrain (1855-1906) is considered one of the most representative authors of French decadence, with A. E. Carter presenting him as the prime example of *fin-de-siècle* literary debauchery.² Like his own queer literature, Lorrain often rose to notoriety and was known for his effete style.³ An alleged homosexual and the manifestation of the dandy-aesthete, Lorrain declared that ‘je ne suis qu’un miroir et l’on me veut pervers’ [I am only a mirror that people wish to be perverse].⁴ This extravagance, as well as his role as a journalist – the ‘fanfaron de vices’ [braggart of vice]⁵ – positioned him perfectly as a ‘literary observer of the *bas-fonds* of society’.⁶

Although Lorrain has fallen into obscurity in recent years, much like Decadence itself, ‘inferior to the canon from which it has fallen away’,⁷ the connections between homosexuality and transgression have generated much discussion by critics of Lorrain’s *Monsieur de Phocas*, with most agreeing that the author provides us with a homosexual discourse.⁸ This article aims not only to reclaim a non-canonical author and text, but to address also the dearth of attention paid to occult overtones that run parallel to the narrative of male homosexuality in the novel, which subvert the traditional (misogynistic) assumption of witchcraft in particular as an exclusively female ‘crime’. I will focus on what I identify as the apex of the narrative – the Witches’ Sabbat – arguing that the representation of witchcraft tropes in the novel links to the presentation of non-normative masculinity through comparable engagement with marginal practices.

Hugh B. Urban’s assertion that religious and sexual transgression can be mobilized against dominant social discourse will be demonstrated, providing a ‘profound transformation from a

terrifying medieval nightmare of heresy and social subversion into a modern ideal of personal empowerment and social liberation'.⁹ This will ultimately reveal Decadence to be a similarly iconoclastic and rebellious practice through which mainstream ideologies are rejected and agency is asserted.

Fin de Siècle, Fin de Sexe

It is axiomatic that the end of the nineteenth century saw a crisis of gender.¹⁰ However, critical engagement with occult undercurrents that ran parallel to these debates has been scarce even though in *Là-bas*, perhaps the most notorious Decadent text to deal with the occult, Joris-Karl Huysmans explicitly states that 'alors que le matérialisme sévit, la magie se lève' [while materialism rages, magic rises].¹¹ This quotation suggests that recourse to the occult was seen as an attempt to re-enchanted an increasingly banal, commercialized world. Just as Charles Baudelaire once exclaimed that 'le vieux Paris n'est plus' [the old Paris is no more],¹² so too did his *fin-de-siècle* successor, Huysmans, declare that he sought to find 'une compensation aux dégoûts de la vie quotidienne' [compensation for the disgusting nature of daily life].¹³ Robert Ziegler illustrates this stagnant modernity with an illustration from Lorrain's 'Lanterne magique', in which two theatregoers lament the loss of Gothic fantasy in favour of modern rationality.¹⁴

Interestingly, this is the only reference to the work of Lorrain in a text devoted to the occult in *fin-de-siècle* culture, which also contains no mention of the construction of masculinity within Lorrain's narratives. This article aims to demonstrate that this has been a scholarly oversight: it builds on Amy Clukey's assertion in her study of English modernist and occult enthusiast Mary Butts that 'the body of literary criticism exploring modernist engagements with occultism remains small, considering the extent of the occult revival' at the *fin de siècle*, with much scope for development, especially with regards to gender.¹⁵ This oversight is unusual when we consider the role that gender played in late nineteenth-century occultism. Indeed, Urban describes the rise of a *magia sexualis* in tandem with a *psychopathia sexualis* in the West at the same

time,¹⁶ a relationship that both Alex Owen and Joy Dixon problematize in relation to sexual ‘immorality’, masculinity, and their connections to occultism. Dixon suggests that *fin-de-siècle* occultism was ‘a man’s world’,¹⁷ while Owen notes the establishment of magic in the Golden Dawn as the exertion of one’s willpower upon the world, drawing on medical concepts of a ‘masculine temperament’.¹⁸ However, when we consider that sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter theorized ‘a connection between the function of priest and invert’,¹⁹ it becomes clear that marginality and transgression are potent features of *fin-de-siècle* Decadent occultism.

Occult Practices, Occult Sexualities: Theorizing the Marginal

Fin-de-siècle occultism tapped into historically marginal and transgressive practices which ran counter to Christian and patriarchal society. George McKay notes that while the word ‘occult’ refers to what is hidden, it can be extrapolated to refer to ‘hidden or marginal figures or narratives’. In this way, ‘occulture’ becomes a ‘culture of resistance’ through its engagement with the marginal.²⁰ Occulture can thus be considered as a crystallized form of social anxiety associated with patriarchal disruption, and can be appropriated in order to subvert dominant discourses.

Critics such as Urban have pointed out that the black arts and illicit sexuality have historically gone hand-in-hand,²¹ with Dixon noting the longstanding links between religious and sexual unorthodoxy.²² Charges of sexual indecency have historically been brought before several religiously marginalized and disenfranchised groups throughout history.²³ In particular, such charges have been levelled against those accused of witchcraft, whose alleged practices represented ‘a forceful and popular challenge to the existing structure of power’.²⁴ In a late nineteenth-century context, the links between the occult and sexual transgression can be seen in the work of Aleister Crowley, who utilized the ‘psychologised magic of the *fin de siècle*’ and an ‘anarchic sexuality’²⁵ to undercut Victorian morality with the aim of the ‘renegotiation of the self’.²⁶ For this reason, it is useful to bring these theories of marginality together through the lens

of Gayle Rubin's 'charmed circle', which compares acceptable sexual practices to those which are detrimental for the patriarchy, creating an inner, acceptable circle of practices in contrast to an outer, marginal circle.²⁷ Apart from the obvious lexical connections between a 'charmed' circle of sexuality and the occult, it is clear that occult practices are equally located on the periphery of society, providing some *locum tenens* through which to explore and interrogate sexuality.

Decadence, Occultism, and the Appeal of Witchcraft

The end of the nineteenth century saw a proliferation of occult fraternities which emerged at the same time as new social identities, and as such were characterized by the anxieties surrounding gender at that time.²⁸ Matei Călinescu has described Decadence as 'the rejection of the tyranny of tradition', and so it is unsurprising that some Decadent writers saw fit to engage with occultism, given this atmosphere of iconoclasm and gendered rebellion.²⁹ Owen notes that *fin-de-siècle* occultism was founded on 'the inadequacies of a life stripped of any meaningful spiritual component, the perceived threat to individual and aesthetic autonomy posed by a developing mass culture, the dependence of modes of modern rationality on a particular characterization and positioning of the irrational',³⁰ but also that this aestheticization of nineteenth-century *ennui* drew from the 'modernity' of the Decadents.³¹ This modernity, with its love of artifice, was founded in turn on the Schopenhauerian tenet of 'perception as intellectual'³² – Decadence, like occultism, offered the artist-initiate the opportunity to dismantle and shape their world.³³ Indeed, it would seem at times that *fin-de-siècle* occultism and Decadence were one and the same, with parallels between Owen's criteria for occultism and Arthur Symons's description of Decadence, characterized by an 'intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an oversubtilizing refinement upon refinement [and] a spiritual and moral perversity'.³⁴ As such, while literary representations of black magic provided new perspectives, 'the value of occultism lay in its ethical transgressions', with Decadence providing a unique space in which to comment on sexual and gender taboos, ultimately highlighting the artificial and illusory nature of these social constructs.³⁵

While the connections between Decadence, occultism, and gender have been examined,³⁶ few scholars have looked at the peculiar image of witchcraft in novels, which is surprising when we note Corinne Fournier Kiss's assertion that the nineteenth century was obsessed with the witch hunts.³⁷ Images of witchcraft appear in George Sand's *La Petite Fadette* (1849), and it has been noted that Jules Michelet's pseudo-historical treatise *La Sorcière* (1862) was based on Sand's reconciliation between Christ and the Devil in *Consuelo* (1842-1843).³⁸ This particular use of occult imagery becomes interesting for my argument in relation to non-normativity because whereas membership of an actual occult fraternity often meant conforming to bourgeois expectations, witchcraft has always been viewed as inherently transgressive.

As Samuel puts it in the Bible, 'rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft',³⁹ and both Michelet and Charles Leland use the image of a witch leading a Sabbat to conjure forth images of peasant revolt against a patriarchal, Catholic aristocracy, with Michelet's coven fighting for class equality⁴⁰ while Leland's subversive, Italian messiah Aradia leads her coven with the charge to poison their feudal lords.⁴¹ Witchcraft has historically been considered as feminine, and as a specifically patriarchal marginalization of femininity. Indeed, the Witch Hunts are popularly thought of as a female holocaust, but nearly 25% of the accused were men.⁴² This is a key point in my argument that witchcraft presents us with a unique, and often elided, form of transgression for men, and specifically homosexual and non-normative men. As Arthur Evans notes in his study of historic witchcraft and homosexuality, 'heresy became a sexual rather than a doctrinal concept', which demonstrates the 'intimate connection between Gay men, heresy, and witchcraft'.⁴³ Although the freedom espoused by Aradia and Michelet's witch refers to liberation from the medieval feudal system, it will become clear in the following study of *Monsieur de Phocas* that Lorrain is able to build on these images of social revolt and emancipation and apply them to the manumission of non-normative masculinity. In this way, witchcraft becomes a unique trope to be appropriated by Decadence in order to reflect its remit of a schism with establishment culture.

Flight to the Sabbat: *Monsieur de Phocas* (1901)

Non-normative masculinity and corruption are at the core of Lorrain's novel. The protagonist, the duc de Fréneuse, is a typically Decadent anti-hero who is beset with fetishes and phillias which the core antagonist, Ethal, feeds with art, whilst purporting to cure Fréneuse from his afflictions, noting that 'la génie dénué [sic] de la raison enfante des monstres' [genius devoid of reason gives birth to monsters].⁴⁴ This narrative of corruption and subversion builds to a zenith in the chapters concerned with a dinner party culminating in a traditionally Sabbatic gathering that takes place in a recognizably Decadent environment. The dinner party consists of guests whom Ethal refers to as 'quelques cosmopolites' [some cosmopolitans], with 'cosmopolitan' referring to the implied decadence and debauchery of contemporary Parisian culture (139), which echoes Carter's description of *fin-de-siècle* Paris with its 'rouged cheeks, painted lips, drugs, dance-halls, theatres, vice-haunted quays and boulevards'.⁴⁵ Non-normativity seems to be a common attribute of all the guests, with the hint of male homosexuality most notable, as well as the implied incest between two English siblings. Ethal tells Fréneuse that he would perhaps prefer the brother of Maud White, and it could be argued that the incestuous relationship between the two siblings provides an almost acceptable, heteronormative paradigm through which Fréneuse can experience his attraction to Reginald. Indeed, we are told that 'tant cette ressemblance de l'un et de l'autre les désexuait' [their resemblance to each other desexed them] (141), both 'androgynizing' the siblings and fulfilling Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's queering of René Girard's 'erotic triangle', by which 'a calculus of power [is] structured by the relation of rivalry between the two active members of an erotic triangle [...] often in which two males are rivals for a female'.⁴⁶

In this way, by amalgamating societal undesirables and deviants, Lorrain presents us with the traditional image of the Witches' Sabbat, a choice reflected in the name of this chapter, and from which this article takes its name. In his study of male witchcraft, Schulte notes that 'by attending the Sabbat, [a man] had become a member of a subversive group of felons whose moral standards represented the reverse of contemporary norms'.⁴⁷ In a late nineteenth-century

context, this early modern imagery still evoked sentiments of counter-cultural revolt, with the well-known anti-Semite Drumont comparing the Dreyfus Affair to the Witches' Sabbat, saying that 'c'est bien le Sabbat, c'est-à-dire la parodie sacrilège et le blasphème contre la Vérité et la Patrie' [it is well and truly the Sabbat, that is to say, a sacrilegious parody and blasphemy against Truth and the Fatherland].⁴⁸ Thus, engagement with the occult and in particular that of traditional witchcraft marks a turning away from patriarchal, heteronormative society.

The Witches' Sabbat can be broadly understood as a regular gathering of witches in order to worship the Devil. However, medieval imagery of the Witches' Sabbat has its roots in the conflation of many folkloric strands, notably the Wild Hunt led by Diana.⁴⁹ In this way, the Witches' Sabbat can be held as a symbol of feminist revolt, as seen in the works of Michelet and Leland. As such, it is unsurprising that Lorrain's Sabbat should feature the feminine as a focal point. Maud White can be considered to open the Sabbat with an intertextual, almost liturgical, reiteration of Albert Samain's 'Le Bouc noir passe au fond des ténèbres malsaines' [The Black Goat Goes to the Bottom of Unhealthy Darkness], alluding both to unconventional love with its references to 'l'amour qui doit demain engendrer la haine' [the love that must tomorrow engender hatred], but also to witchcraft, with Samain noting that 'minuit sonne au coeur des sorcières obscènes' [midnight rings in the heart of obscene witches] (147). Fréneuse muses that this recitation 'semblait incarner un rite, un rite de religion oubliée' [seemed to embody a rite, a rite of a forgotten religion], whilst Ethal notes that this 'appel aux larves' [call to the larvae] has seemingly summoned guests to the salon, with Fréneuse suggesting that 'la voix lente de Maud les évoquait' [the slow voice of Maud evoked them] (146-47). This of course has further significance, not only suggesting that the guests of the party itself are ghoulish, not of this world, and ultimately non-normative, but that they have been summoned there by an unknown force.

Decadent imagery of apostasy and atavism flows through the allusions to non-normative religion, which are furthered by calls to prelapsarian Egyptian religion, and particularly the cult of Isis, with Ethal declaring: 'mettons Prêtresses de la Bonne Déesse, n'est-ce pas? puisque aucun

homme n'était admis aux mystères d'Isis' [let us appoint Priestesses of the Good Goddess; since no man was admitted to the mysteries of Isis] (150). This once again marks the refusal of patriarchal religion, and indeed the Patriarchy at large. Max Nordau's 1892 treatise *Entartung* [*Degeneration*] described a 'dying world',⁵⁰ and Brian Stableford notes that the cultural pessimism that emerged from this theory caused the Decadents to associate the implied decline of Europe with the decline of several historic civilizations, even Sodom and Gomorrah.⁵¹ Indeed, the decline of Rome is often attributed to the introduction of Greek decadence, including 'homosexuality, whoring, and elaborate and costly banquets',⁵² while John Addington Symonds asserted that 'the pursuit of beauty in Greece had ended in death' – both features that returned and characterized *fin-de-siècle* Decadence in conjunction with the emergence of new sexual and social identities.⁵³

The narrative has been associated with the Sacred Feminine from its outset via the reference to the goddess Astarté in the subtitle of the novel as well as her narrative implication: it draws upon the 'simultaneous [historical] cult of Astarte, Isis, and Aphrodite', an unsurprising syncretism given the shared attributes of these goddesses.⁵⁴ As the Sabbat continues, Lorrain builds on the Isian imagery (perhaps as a syncretic proxy for Astarté) but contradicts the suggestion that no man was admitted to her cult by placing all the men at the salon – even those non-heteronormative men – around Sophie, noting that no woman was presented (154). This syncretic and queer nature of deity was previously presented to us in the novel with the description of a dancer who was 'à la fois Aphrodite et Ganymède, Astarté et Hylas' [at once Aphrodite and Ganymede, Astarte and Hylas] (78). This androgynous syncretism is significant for non-normative masculinity when we consider Sarah Waters's assertion that both Ganymede and Hylas (alongside Antinoüs) have historically also been associated as 'homoerotic icons', providing the 'nineteenth-century Greek Lover [i.e. homosexual or invert] not just with a historical precedent but with a model for his own retrospective yearning'.⁵⁵ This marks an archetypally Decadent inversion of the traditional masculine-feminine binary and could be viewed as a non-

normative male identification with the transgressive female archetype epitomized in the patriarchal disruption that the Sacred Feminine represents.

Traditional notions of gender stability are further subverted in typically Decadent fashion by the introduction of the Javanese androgynes, a stability that is only further subverted by their distinct Otherness as Javanese. As Fréneuse notes, ‘le sexe est si ambigu dans cette race’ [sex is so ambiguous in this race] (155). It is thus only fitting that they should lead the ad-hoc coven into what is jokingly described as ‘le commencement de l’orgie’ [the beginning of the orgy] (156), which would have traditionally been considered as the zenith of Sabbatic action.⁵⁶ This orgy comes to a close with the Duchess of Althorneyshare being described as ‘la madone du Vice, stigmatisée sous le surnom de Notre Dame de Sept-Luxures’ [the Madonna of Vice, denounced by the nickname of Our Lady of Seven-Luxuries] (158). The anti-Marian imagery of this description of the duchess is clear, and also draws her into Phillip Winn’s suggestion that Astarté – the shadowy personification of Fréneuse’s fetishes – is an anti-Madonna, deifying the duchess as Astarté.⁵⁷ The Sacred Feminine can thus be considered to run throughout this passage as a deliberately subversive counterpoint to patriarchal, normative discourse.

Another traditional trope of the Witches’ Sabbat is presented as the Sabbat continues with the consumption of opium, which in this setting is a specifically self-inflicted phenomenon that establishes associations with the flight to and from the Sabbat. The opium acts as a catalyst for imagined flights over ‘un fantastique et silencieux Paris vu à vol d’oiseau’ [a fantastic and silent Paris seen as the crow flies] (162) as well as ‘l’Inde légendaire et védique après l’Égypte mystérieuse’ [legendary and Vedic India after mysterious Egypt] (166). This use of a narcotic to initiate a spirit-flight echoes both Alexander Kuklin and Edward B. Tylor’s descriptions of psychotropic ointments that allegedly transported the witch to the Sabbat.⁵⁸ Indeed, these ‘flying ointments’ consisted of several intoxicating plants of the *Solanaceae* family, which cause a similar psychotropic effect to opium.⁵⁹ It is clear that Lorrain was aware of such a concoction, noting in his more overtly occult short story ‘La Princesse au sabbat’ that ‘la princesse, debout toute nue

devant la cheminée, se sent oindre et frotter d'une étrange pommade' [the princess, standing naked in front of the fireplace, anointed and rubbed herself with a strange ointment], only to find herself at the Sabbat.⁶⁰

In addition to the narcotic nature of both the flying ointment and the opium, Michael J. Harner argues that this intoxication often took a distinctly erotic aspect, which builds on Erich Hesse's assertion that 'the hallucinations are frequently dominated by the erotic moment'.⁶¹ This leads Harner to assert that the image of the witch and her broomstick 'was undoubtedly more than a symbolic Freudian act, serving as an applicator for the atropine-containing plant to the sensitive vaginal membranes', highlighting both the vehicular and phallic nature of the broomstick.⁶² The distinctly sexual aspect of the flying ointment can be symbolized both through the Javanese dance in which the androgynes 'ne faisaient qu'un seul corps à deux têtes' [became one body with two heads], as well as the guests circulating and fraternizing together in a manner that could be reminiscent of sexual congress (162). We read that Maud White '[était] allongée auprès de son frère' [was lying next to her brother] (160), while Ethal 'venait alors s'étendre entre Welcôme et [Fréneuse], et les danses du poison commençaient' [came to lie between Welcôme and [Fréneuse], and the poison dances began] (161), which once again alludes to Sedgwick's erotic triangle, albeit with three men, rather than requiring a female lens through which homosexual desire can be safely expressed.

Another witchcraft trope – the witches' teat – appears towards the end of the Sabbat in the passage entitled 'Smara' which takes its name from a vampiric reverie by Charles Nodier, further implying the evocation of an occult power.⁶³ The witches' teat was held to be the spot on the witch's body from which she suckled her familiar, an act that Deborah Willis has suggested represents a perversion of maternal power – another powerful image of gender-bending.⁶⁴ Fréneuse notes that an 'effroyable ennemi conquérait [sa] chair. Toute une armée d'énormes chauves-souris [...] de l'espèce dite vampire, suçait [son] sang' [a dreadful enemy conquered his flesh. An entire army of enormous vampire bats were sucking his blood], an act that he

reciprocates, instinctively biting the bat and drinking its blood (167). The image of the bat of course evokes associations of vampirism in addition to the implication of a witches' teat, but Fréneuse's reciprocation of the act further underlines his non-normativity and marks his now willing compliance with the Sabbatic actions, while also representing the Decadent obsession with death and decay.⁶⁵

'Vivre sa vie': A Coming Out Narrative

The Sabbat and its aftermath are linked inextricably with a homosexual conflict against society as both Ethal and an Irishman named Welcôme vie for Fréneuse's attention with Welcôme suggesting that 'vivre sa vie, voilà le but final; mais [...] nous avons contre nous notre éducation et notre milieu, que dis-je?' [living one's life is the ultimate goal; but [...] our education and environment are against us, what can I say?] (181). This ultimately highlights Ethal's actions up to this point of the narrative as a toxic obstacle to liberation. Welcôme suggests that by meeting one's demons head-on and internalizing them, Fréneuse will overcome his anxiety. He is told,

laisser entrer l'univers en soi et prendre ainsi lentement et voluptueusement possession du monde [...]. Là seulement, Astarté vous apparaîtra dans quelque belle fleur humaine, robuste et suant la santé, trop rose et trop rousse avec yeux mystérieux de bête, telle la bouchère au profil d'Hérodiade

[let the universe enter you and you will easily and sensually take possession of the world. Only in this way will Astarté appear to you as some beautiful human flower, robust and emanating health, too pink and auburn with mysterious eyes of a beast, like the butcher with the profile of Herodias] (180).

The reference to Herodias here once again underlines the connections to witchcraft, with Leland equating his pagan messiah Aradia with Salomé's mother,⁶⁶ while Hutton suggests that Aradia is simply the Italianized form of Herodias.⁶⁷ As such, I would argue that, in this scene, Welcôme gives expression to an act we would today refer to as 'coming out', using a rehabilitated image of Astarté and witchcraft as a metaphor for homosexual desire and self-acceptance.

This ultimately provides a stark counterpoint to Ethal's misogynistic, *vagina dentata*-inspired version of Astarté, who 'entre ses cuisses fuselées, au bas renflé du ventre, à la place du sexe,

ricanante, menaçante, [avait] une petite tête de mort' [had a small sneering and menacing skull between her tapered thighs, below the low bulge of the belly where her genitals ought to have been] (207). This image not only perpetuates male fears of the feminine at the *fin de siècle*,⁶⁸ but also acts as a prophylaxis against normative sexuality. Indeed, queer desire is often presented in Decadent texts as the new norm to which people may aspire, perhaps best demonstrated by Raoule's longing for a brand new, strange love in Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénu*s.⁶⁹ Welcôme's call to arms thus acts as a panacea for Fréneuse against all the false promises that Ethal has made throughout the narrative, with the protagonist noting that 'j'écoutais cet homme [Welcôme], comme on boit un philtre' [I listened to this man as one would drink a potion] (182). This once again draws on occult imagery, while associating it with a curative 'coming out' narrative.

Fréneuse later notes that because of Ethal he walks through the forest of Tiffauges described by Huysmans as 'un envoûté, un misérable et fol ensorcelé des magies noires d'autrefois' [an enchanted, miserable fool bewitched by black magicks of yesteryear] (211). By intertextually imposing Durtal's hallucinations of the historical Gilles de Rais from Huysmans's *Là-bas*, Lorrain once again underlines the occult influences upon his protagonist, as well as his non-normativity. Huysmans's text represents Decadent occultism *par excellence*, atavistically bringing the Medieval to the Modern, while Gilles de Rais' involvement in the occult, child murders, and rapes all serve to bring forth the Decadent fascination with death, decay, and perversion.⁷⁰ However, this reverie galvanizes Fréneuse into action, and making his choice between the two men, he kills Ethal by forcing him to ingest his own poison. This act, I suggest, completes Fréneuse's initiation into the witch-cult and fulfils the expectations of the Sabbatic sacrifice. Indeed, it would seem that the protagonist has taken on a new identity after the incident, one presented in the language of rebirth.

On exiting Ethal's workshop we are told that he 'ouvri[t] la porte de l'antichambre et descendi[t] l'escalier' [opened the door of the antechamber and went down the stairs] (276). This exit is evocative of a yonic image of a child's passage from the womb along the vaginal canal

during birth. He goes on to say that ‘je ne me reconnais plus’ [I do not recognize myself anymore] (280), and it is significant that the protagonist is never again referred to as the duc de Fréneuse but as the eponymous Monsieur de Phocas after the murder. This ‘rebaptism’ is confirmed in the publisher’s office at the beginning of the novel (which takes an epistolary form following this expository episode) where the protagonist tells us that ‘le duc de Fréneuse est mort, il n’y a plus que M. de Phocas’ [the duc de Fréneuse is dead, there is only M. de Phocas] (53). This echoes the Jesuit del Río’s assertion that witches were rebaptized by the Devil during the Sabbat.⁷¹

Conclusion

This article has shown that occult and marginalized sexual identities and behaviours can be considered non-normative and inherently interlinked due to their shared marginality, both in historical texts as well as in the works of Jean Lorrain. I have suggested that Lorrain’s engagement not only in non-heteronormative behaviours in *Monsieur de Phocas*, but also the underlying imagery of occultism – through the transgressive and iconoclastic lens of Decadence – helps to queer the dominant discourse as per Urban’s exploration of challenges to established social orders. As such, the occult can be considered to inhabit a position ‘outside’ of Rubin’s ‘Charmed Circle’ of sexual behaviours and identities, which in the case of the novel ensures that the protagonist is ‘doubly’ transgressive due to his engagement with non-normative sexuality and the occult. For this reason, he is allowed a further route to authority via multiple methods of subverting the status quo. The result is that the protagonist’s engagement with non-normative religious modes effectively triggers a rebirth within him and allows him ‘vivre sa vie’ [to live his life] as commanded by Welcôme.

The imagery of witchcraft offers a further method of subverting the status quo, turning the gendered expectations of the witch on their heads while engaging with Decadent tropes of apostasy and rebellion. Men were also historically accused of witchcraft, which had implications

for their masculinity as, by being associated with witchcraft, they were necessarily feminized.⁷² As Elizabeth Kent puts it, ‘male witches were masculine others, whose poor practice of patriarchy cut across paradigmatic idealization of masculine virtue’.⁷³ This article has revealed that witchcraft and Decadence intersect in the work of Lorrain through engagement with marginality and ‘otherness’ in order to highlight the struggle of non-normative masculinity at the *fin de siècle*. Following Georges Bataille’s conception of transgression as the construction and subsequent overstepping of laws⁷⁴ as well as historical links between illicit sexuality and religious apostasy, Lorrain empowers a peripheral, transgressive protagonist. He subverts the status quo, permitting him avenues to power, and ultimately readdressing the balance of power between heteronormative masculinity and non-normative, subordinate masculinity.

¹ Arthur Evans, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (Boston: Fag Rag Books, 1978), p. 155.

² A. E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p. 16.

³ Robert Ziegler, *Asymptote: An Approach to Decadent Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 177.

⁴ Jean Lorrain, *La Nostalgie de la beauté: pensées choisies et précédée d'une introduction par Jean Bouscatel* (Paris: E. Sansot et Cie, 1930), p. 85. All translations in this article, unless stated otherwise, are my own.

⁵ Rachilde, ‘Jean Lorrain, le fanfaron de vices’, in *Portraits d'hommes* (Paris: Mornay, 1929), pp. 49-58.

⁶ Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 123.

⁷ Robert Ziegler, ‘Decadence as Poison: The Dynamics of Literary Circulation in Jean Lorrain’, *Neophilologus*, 79 (1995), 25-32 (p. 25).

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