

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

MODERNITY AND THE SELF IN THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY

H. G. COCKS

Birkbeck College, University of London

ABSTRACT. *Recent work in the modern history of sexuality, now an established field of inquiry, is characterized by particular approaches to the interpretation of modernity and selfhood. In general, and in contrast to previous approaches, the books under review treat modernity as a localized process with specific effects. Sexual identity is understood in a similar way, as a phenomenon bounded by locality, class, age, nationality, gender, patterns of sociability, and other contextual factors. As such, speaking of sexual identity as a unitary entity, or as something that has historically been structured by an opposition of homosexual/heterosexual, no longer makes sense. In fact, the homo/hetero binary is of much more recent vintage than has been hitherto thought. These histories of sexuality challenge historians of all kinds to rethink the nature of categories like selfhood, identity, and modernity.*

In 2000, David Halperin felt confident enough to announce that the history of sexuality had finally arrived. After its initial difficulties, it was, he declared, finally ‘a respectable academic discipline’. The sign of this widespread acceptance was that its practitioners were no longer obliged to defend such histories from suspicions that they were a palpable absurdity. How, its critics had once asked, could such a natural and apparently unchanging process such as sexuality be amenable to historical analysis? In spite of this initial ridicule, which was compounded by the difficulties of making an institutional bridgehead, by 2000 it seemed that the history of sexuality was no longer the ‘emerging discipline’ identified by the first editors of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* in 1990.¹ By the late 1990s, most historians who had kept abreast of the broad currents of cultural history had accepted the idea that sexuality did have a history and many were going about writing it in industrious and creative ways. According to Halperin, however, this acceptance and industry had its problems. Chief among these was the fact that exciting and troubling theoretical questions, some of which were posed by Michel Foucault, were either turned into part of an eclectic and largely ignored theoretical backdrop, or simply forgotten as most historians resumed their usual habit of archival research and empirically based narrative. The problem with all

School of History, Classics & Archaeology, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX H.Cocks@bbk.ac.uk

¹ David Halperin, *How to do the history of homosexuality* (Chicago, 2002), p. 105. Halperin perhaps overstated his case, since difficulties still surround the teaching of sexuality in humanities departments. His own course on gay identity, provocatively entitled, ‘How to be gay’, which ran at the University of Michigan from 2000, attracted the opposition of the right-wing American Family Association and of opportunistic politicians. On Halperin’s problems see Jay Blotcher, ‘Recipe for recruiting?’, *The Advocate*, 30 Sept. 2003.

this, as Halperin pointed out, was that historians had forgotten to keep asking themselves ‘what *kind* of history sexuality has’.²

There were, and are, a number of answers to this question. The most influential – and the one that has begun to be shamefully neglected according to Halperin – has been that provided by Foucault. For Foucault, ‘sexuality’ is the conceptual, experiential, and institutional apparatus that modernity has built around the body and its erotic pleasures. It is only in the present era, he says, that we can say that we have ‘a sexuality’ as the prime essence of selfhood. This apparatus of knowledge, power, and bodily experience, Foucault says, is the effect of bio-power, defined as the various ways in which states and their agencies have, since the eighteenth century, tried to govern the entirety of natural processes within any population. Birth and death, health and mortality, reproduction and the family, work and productivity have, within modernity, all become objects of rule in new ways. From the eighteenth century onwards, statistics exploring these phenomena were compiled, subjects examined, and problematic groups addressed by a series of social interventions. It was through the rise of this kind of bio-power in its various forms, Foucault suggests, that sexual behaviour came to have a new significance. In particular, experts of all kinds began to generate ideas about the nature of physical and psychological normality. Some of these experts, notably criminologists and psychologists, began to inquire into the case histories of individual ‘perverts’ and sex offenders, and gradually produced the idea that these people were not aberrant, but represented one aspect of sexual behaviour that could be mapped, measured, and understood. The principal sign of this process, Foucault implies, was the alignment of inner psychology or physiology with sexual acts in a new way. The most noticeable result of this way of thinking was the creation of new figures of psycho-pathology: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, and above all the male homosexual who was identified, in Foucault’s famous terms, as ‘a personage, a past, a case history ... and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and a mysterious physiology’.³

Bio-power in this sense not only led to the specification of various perversions, understood now as the result of an individual’s physical or psychological development, but also the placing of heterosexuality along a spectrum of various types of behaviour. The perverse, therefore, was ‘implanted’ within normality, whereas before it was merely a deviation from the natural. What was truly different about modern sexuality, however, was not its delineation of types – this had been done before on a lesser scale – but the fact that it was surrounded by an array of scientific and sociological disciplines that generated pervasive ideas about what were the normal attributes of individuality, psychology, and sexual behaviour. In turn, these forms of knowledge produced powerful regimes of expertise and inspection, ranging from criminology to psychological tests, which were devoted to eternally calibrating the modern subject.

Arguably, Foucault’s argument still overshadows much of what is written on sexuality. This is partly because without him, much less is at stake in these histories. Contrary to the frequent assumption, Foucauldian histories are not primarily about representation, which in a careless reading can be taken as a synonym for discourse. Neither can they be about changing patterns of meaning alone, an assumption that informed much of the writing on sexuality in women’s history and from a Marxist perspective. Instead, Foucault’s work

² Halperin, *How to do*, p. 104.

³ Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, 1: *An introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 43.

suggests that sensibility itself has a history. Different regimes of knowledge do not merely represent a stable, natural entity in different ways, but bring into being new relationships between individuals, new experiences, and new forms of authority and discipline. Sexual desire does not remain essentially the same while its meanings change within a bounded repertoire of stories and acts. Despite the fact that the work of Foucault, and, to a lesser extent, that of immediate predecessors such as William Gagnon and John Simon, Jeffrey Weeks and Mary McIntosh, represented a quantum leap of interpretation, historians disagreed deeply with his (and their) contentions. At the centre of much historical debate was the question of whether something like this modern notion of sexual identity – sex as the core essence of the self and the mainspring of consciousness – could be said to have existed at any time in Western history before the nineteenth century. If it had, Foucault's critics argued, his suggestion that 'sexuality' was a product of bio-power and hence specific to modernity was wrong. This question has a wider relevance for historians. In effect, it is asking whether there is such a thing as a form of selfhood peculiar to modernity. As the debate progressed, it centred on the figure of the male homosexual. If there had been effeminate homosexuals before 1869, when the word was coined, did that not demonstrate that sexual identity could align with some version of inner psychology long before bio-power and sexual science began to promote the same idea? Did it not show, as John Boswell argued, that no matter how sexual behaviour might be described in Western history, it always boiled down to the three categories with which we, just like the diners at Plato's *Symposium*, were familiar: gay, straight, bisexual?⁴

As examples of the association between effeminacy and homosexuality from societies before the nineteenth century began to pile up in historical journals and monographs, it seemed that the 'essentialist' side of the debate would win out. However, the overall picture of identity and selfhood that has emerged from this debate is one of diversity. Instead of suggesting either that there is one kind of sexuality throughout time, or, to the contrary, arguing that it is a specific modern construct, historians have instead begun to speak of diverging modernities which are productive of correspondingly diverse identities and selves. Instead of being an inexorable process that grinds traditional societies, identities, and experiences into the dust and replaces them wholesale with a rationalized bureaucratic system of which subjectivity is the docile and passive product, modernity is now more commonly seen by historians as a localized, partial process. There are, it seems, no more than individual 'sites' of modernity.⁵

A similar pattern of interpretation emerged in the history of sexuality after Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offered a way out of the essentialist–constructionist impasse. She argued that it was wrong to assume that one model of sexuality or identity simply dies out when another is invented, and equally erroneous to argue that these modes of identity merely proceed in chronological sequence.⁶ Evidence of this uncertainty lies in the way that homosexuality, within modernity, is thought to be both the preserve of an identifiable group of people, and something that might be done by anyone in the right circumstances regardless of their 'orientation'. David Halperin – perhaps Foucault's chief defender – now argues that the

⁴ See, for example, John Boswell, 'Revolutions, universals and sexual categories', in George Chauncey, Martin Duberman, and Martha Vicinus, eds., *Hidden from history: reclaiming the gay and lesbian past* (London, 1991).

⁵ See for example, Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of modernity: London's geographies, 1680–1780* (New York, 1998); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: people, streets and images in nineteenth century London* (New Haven, 2000).

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the closet* (Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 85.

definitional incoherence of sexual identity is a result of the continuing persistence of its past. Sexual identity, for him, is a kind of palimpsest that bears the readable traces of ways in which the body and its pleasures were understood and experienced in the past. To use the example of homosexuality again, traditions of intimate friendship that existed in antiquity arguably continue into the present as a constituent aspect of same sex intimacy. They also live alongside other ways of understanding same sex desire that also include effeminacy as well as sexual behaviour that is unrelated to an assumption of a gay/lesbian identity. The same interpretive move has been made in histories of gender with the result that no one seems bothered by the fact that we routinely speak of masculinities and femininities. 'Modern' identity is not only complicated by its particular heritage, but is riven by the familiar myriad categories of difference: class, race, nation, locality, gender, dis/ability, and so on. That is not to say that these models of identity and behaviour exist in a sort of chaotic simultaneity in any society. On the contrary, some are more powerful than others at various times. Different types of sexual identity gain their power from being invented and reinvented, located in institutions or taken up by powerful discourses.

Many of the books under review here deal with this intellectual inheritance by pluralizing or questioning modernity and identity in a similar way. Somewhat to the contrary, however, Thomas Laqueur argues that in the history of masturbation, one finds *the* history of the modern self. Indeed, masturbation, he says, is 'the sexuality of modernity'. Historians of Victorian Britain, which was the golden age of anti-masturbation writing, were the first to address the preoccupation of Western societies with what is essentially a physically harmless act and have proposed various reasons why masturbation might have caused such consternation.⁷ In one view, it was simply an irrational moral panic that grew up as a means to explain social problems, while others have argued that it represented a convenient explanation for disease put forward by an emerging medical profession. It has also been suggested that industrial capitalism, which imposed strict regimes of saving and spending on middle-class households, indirectly produced anxiety over other kinds of emission, thereby generating a pseudo-Galenic 'spermatic economy' within which the vital fluid had to be accumulated and distributed as carefully as its fiscal analogue. Finally, it was noted that in the nineteenth century masturbation was identified as the precursor to homosexual acts, and thereby became disdained as a result.

Although Laqueur accepts the link between homosexuality and masturbation, and even that between commercial credit and self-abuse, his argument is centred on the nature of modernity itself. As he points out, most of the earlier explanations for masturbation panic focus on men, and fail to take into account the fact that masturbating women were frequently the object of concern. In that respect, any focus on a 'spermatic economy' can only be a partial explanation. A broader interpretation is needed therefore, and Laqueur provides one that suggests that masturbation represented the dangerous excesses of modern selfhood taken to a potentially unlimited degree.

First of all, though, Laqueur has to show that masturbation is a problem specific to modernity, which in this case is defined with exact precision to 1712 and the publication of John Marten's *Onania, or the heinous sin of self-pollution*, the common ancestor of all

⁷ See, for instance, G. J. Barker Benfield, 'The spermatic economy: a nineteenth century view of sexuality', *Feminist Studies*, 1 (1972), pp. 45–74; Lesley A. Hall, 'Forbidden by God, despised by men: masturbation, medical warnings, moral panic, and manhood in Great Britain, 1850–1950', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (1992), pp. 365–87.

anti-masturbation tracts.⁸ Before this, Laqueur argues, there was precious little of the modern preoccupation with masturbation as a pathology of selfhood. For the Greeks, masturbation was a sort of tragic-comic mark of grossness or excess, while Onan, usually identified as the prototypical Biblical masturbator, was condemned in Christian and Jewish texts not for self-abuse, but for refusing to impregnate his dead brother's wife. In medieval writings, masturbation is only identified from the seventh century onwards as a form of fornication, and is mixed up with a whole variety of other equivalent sins. Although there were isolated attacks on masturbation from within the church, such as Jean de Gerson's *De confessione mollitiei* written in 1427, gluttony and marital sins, and not self-abuse, were the principal targets of the medieval church.

The publication of Marten's *Onania* in 1712 in some ways represents a classic Foucauldian story of bio-power in which religious influence over morality is replaced by new forms of knowledge and authority, in this case medical expertise devoted to identifying novel forms of pathology and individuality. Although *Onania* was published by a quack eager to sell remedies for imaginary diseases masturbation panic spread with remarkable speed via the sponsorship of the Swiss doctor Samuel Tissot, whose own anti-masturbation tract, *L'Onanisme*, was published in 1759. From there hostility to self-abuse was taken up by the leading lights of the Enlightenment, among them Rousseau, Voltaire, and Kant, all of whom decried the asocial and solipsistic nature of the act. A regiment of Victorian doctors pronounced against it and produced fearsome remedies to combat masturbation until Havelock Ellis and Freud attempted to add some sanity to the debate at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, both these efforts merely helped to expand the significance of the 'autoerotic' (a term invented by Ellis), to include all attempts at sexual satisfaction that came from within, including from the mind alone. Although Freud developed a dispassionate view of the matter, he nevertheless added even more importance to the autoerotic by explaining that it was a universally experienced stage on the road to sexual maturity.

What was modern about all these writings, says Laqueur, was that they reflected a post-Enlightenment culture in which the individual was presumed to be autonomous, and in which order and goodness could only be found within the self and not in some externally determined moral or religious hierarchy. In place of this providential system, the eighteenth century provided a new world of sociability, politeness, reading, and commercial credit. This was a world that prized individuality and privacy within sociability, and hence feared that this new modern selfhood could easily degenerate into secrecy, anomie, solipsism, and fantasy. Many of the new phenomena introduced to the eighteenth century via new kinds of civil society, such as print culture, commercial speculation, paper money, and consumerism were by definition 'pleasures of the imagination' that relied in some way on individual fantasy. Within this new world, masturbation represented all the potential drawbacks of the modern self. It was secretive and asocial, and all the more threatening for the fact that it drew on the same mental processes which powered new forms of individualism, print culture, and capitalism. Above everything else, masturbation was a 'pathology of the imagination' and, like the imagination, it was potentially illimitable.⁹

⁸ Stevenson has, however, identified a previous candidate in the anonymous *Letters of advice from two reverend divines to a young gentleman about a weighty case of conscience* & c. (1676); David Stevenson, *The beggar's benison: sex clubs of enlightenment Scotland and their rituals* (East Linton, 2001), pp. 74, 93 n. 6. No place of publication is given and only one copy survives.

⁹ Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary sex: a cultural history of masturbation* (New York, 2003), p. 278.

Masturbation panic was therefore one way of regulating the desires and fantasies that were so crucial to the functioning of a new social order.

By the late twentieth century, the polarity of the debate on masturbation had been reversed. Instead of representing the descent into solipsism, masturbation was now an arena for joyous self-making. Feminism took a leading role in this reversal, claiming that the enjoyment of one's body was crucial to the rejection of patriarchy. In particular, feminist writing since the 1960s has rejected not only the Freudian notion that vaginal rather than clitoral orgasms were to be preferred, but also the corresponding depiction of masturbation as a narcissistic stage on the road to full sexual maturity. The landmark texts in this reclamation of clitoral sexuality were *The sensuous woman* by 'J' (1969), *Our bodies our selves* by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (1971), and Betty Dodson's celebratory series which began in 1974 with *Liberating masturbation: a meditation on self love*, still in print in 1996. With the advent of the internet, masturbatory leisure and 'self love' have become even more central to our culture.

Laqueur concludes that the problematic of masturbation remains much the same as it was in the eighteenth century. Its contemporary function is still to allow us to meditate on the nature of selfhood. Masturbation now is still 'poised between self-discovery and self-absorption, desire and excess, privacy and loneliness, innocence and guilt' in a way unlike any other form of modern sexuality.¹⁰ Laqueur presents this transformation as a new departure in some respects, but is the modern celebration of self-love really that different from its proscription? Where once there was prohibition, now there is obligation and compulsion. The same field of force applies to the self, merely with the poles reversed. Whereas once self-command inhered in resisting importunate fantasy, we are now compelled by experts to enjoy masturbation (and sexuality in general), and to practise it in a certain way in order to be fully human. The story of masturbation continues to be what it, and the modern history of sexuality always was, a story of specifying particular desires and pleasures that they may be scrutinized, organized, deployed, and controlled. The difference is that this is done on a scale far greater and more invasive than anything imagined by Tissot or Marten.

Laqueur's history of masturbation grew out of research for his 1990 book, *Making sex*, in which he argued that the sexed body was a cultural artefact in the same way that gender is usually assumed to be. Karen Harvey's *Reading sex in the eighteenth century* is a commentary on that earlier book and also explores some of the material that may have fuelled the masturbation panics which Laqueur describes in *Solitary sex*. The central contention of *Making sex* was that the early modern idea of the body differed substantially from that which developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Before that point, male and female bodies were seen as homologous, with the latter an inferior, but functionally identical version of the former. In this pseudo-Galenic 'one-sex' model, male humours were hotter and drier, while the female body was colder and wetter. Conception took place when some of this 'heat' was transferred to the woman, whose orgasm represented the 'spark' necessary for generation to take place. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, anatomists began to argue that male and female bodies were fundamentally distinct and were not merely two versions of the same body. In this 'two-sex' model, orgasm was no longer necessary for conception and women were reconceived as sexually passive. This changing view of the body was not powered by scientific or anatomical

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

advances, Laqueur argued, but by political considerations that, in an era of universal human rights, required new justifications for gender inequality and masculine dominance. Hence, the sexed body was shown to be a creation of a certain kind of cultural and political imagination and not the result of scientific observation.

Making sex has been criticized on two main grounds. First, for assuming the universality of an early modern 'one-sex' model and playing down the conflict between ancient and medieval authorities on the point of gender difference, and, secondly, for dealing primarily with anatomical texts and therefore not providing a vision of the ways in which the body was experienced and understood on an everyday level by ordinary people.¹¹ Harvey's book is an attempt to reconstruct such a worldview partly by reading eighteenth-century erotica as a guide to conceptions of the sexed body. Without going into the specifics of early modern anatomical science or academic debates about it, the book also records some of the complexity and conflict over the nature of sexual difference that critics have seen as absent from Laqueur's account. Erotica is particularly valuable in this respect. Harvey defines it as a genre distinct from pornography by virtue of the fact that erotica has none of the realism to which the pornographic aspires. In contrast, erotica is characterized by forms of literary, spatial, and suggestive metaphor that defer or avoid description of the sexual act itself. Instead of dwelling on the mechanics of sex, erotica conjured up images of the female body as a welcoming utopia known as 'Bettyland' or employed a varied repertoire of botanical and agricultural metaphors to refer to genitalia and penetration. Erotica was also an entirely masculine form of reading that was frequently consumed and distributed by groups of men or libertine clubs. While some historians have seen such clubs as the direct opposite of the polite spirit of the age, Harvey instead argues that the homosocial world in which erotic texts circulated was a constituent part of manly sociability. The libertine gathering and the erotic genre were, no less than the coffee house or the newspaper, the arena for wit, politeness, enquiry, and enlightenment.

Can erotica be used to illuminate the transition to the two-sex model that Laqueur describes? Harvey appears to admit defeat on this point, lamenting at one point that erotica appears not to reflect 'the language of models' spoken by anatomists and historians.¹² Moreover the fact that erotica was so varied, combined with the fact that it was not supposed to be logically consistent, means that not all of its various elements told the same story. Yet as Laqueur's critics might argue, this kind of variation is valuable and interesting in itself since it reflected a degree of conflict between rival anatomists whose nostrums were presumably reflected in erotic genres. The result is that erotica tells a variety of stories, some of which confirm the argument of *Making sex*, and others which do not. On the question of conception, for instance, erotica is equivocal. Some texts saw women as receptacles of masculine 'heat' in the manner of the one-sex model, while others, corresponding to later anatomical notions, reduced the role of the female orgasm in conception. In general,

¹¹ See, for example, Katharine Park and Robert Nye, 'Destiny is anatomy', *New Republic*, 7 (18 Feb. 1991), pp. 53–7; Michael Stolberg, 'A woman down to her bones: the anatomy of sexual difference in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries', *Isis*, 2 (June 2003), pp. 274–99; Thomas Laqueur, 'Sex in the flesh', *Isis*, 2 (June 2003), pp. 300–6; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of sex difference in the middle ages: medicine, science and culture* (Cambridge, 1993); Laura Gowing, *Common bodies: women, touch and power in seventeenth century England* (New Haven, 2003), introduction. See also Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and medicine in the middle ages* (Princeton, 1988).

¹² Karen Harvey, *Reading sex in the eighteenth century: bodies and gender in English erotic culture* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 101.

though, the Galenic model of homology battled not with modern two-sex conceptions of anatomy, but with Aristotelian notions that portrayed man as vital spirit and woman as relatively inert matter. Similar complexity can be discerned in erotica's account of genital difference. Although its botanical analogies do draw similarities between the masculine 'Tree of Life' and the feminine 'Frutex Vulvaria', which appears to fit a one-sex model, the Tree and the Frutex are nevertheless differentiated in terms of size, structure, and relative moisture.

The same multiplicity applied to the female body within erotica. While the corollary of the two-sex model was women's sexual passivity, erotica presented women as simultaneously passive and sexually aggressive. The point here is that women's bodies were seen as plural, and not simply as passive objects which bore the traces of declining female fortunes in culture and work. On the one hand, erotica characterized women's bodies by reference to inherent characteristics of flow and moisture, and also by their capacity for sexual pleasure, thus indicating the persistence of one-sex models. On the other, there was a consistent emphasis on distinctive female properties such as fertility and the capacity for motherhood. Genital moisture, pregnancy, and menstruation were also characteristically female, reflecting, Harvey argues, an axiomatic assumption that women's bodies were 'intrinsically and physically different from those of men'.¹³

While the female bodies of erotica were, for the most part, moist, private, and passive, the ideal male body was characterized by phallic vigour, beauty, and size. As Harvey points out, ideas like these were received by a masculine culture of sociability, within which metaphorical descriptions of the female body kept the physical realities of sex at a safe distance and which facilitated a kind of witty civility that did not contradict ruling ideas of manly restraint and politeness. There were many such clubs throughout Britain during the eighteenth century devoted to masculine fellowship, drinking, and sexual discussion. The Scottish branch of one of these, known as the Beggar's Benison, had a continuous existence in the town of Anstruther in Fife between 1732 and 1836 and has been painstakingly investigated by David Stevenson.¹⁴

Although some of the nineteenth-century sources that deal with the club may tell us more about Victorian fascination with imagined Augustan naughtiness than actual events, it is possible to reconstruct some of the Benison rituals. In its early years, the Benison initiates were required to masturbate and ejaculate in the presence of the other club members, although later accounts suggest that they merely had to achieve an erection. For this ceremony, the new member was 'prepared' in a closet by three Benison officials 'causing him to propel his Penis until full erection'.¹⁵ He then emerged to place his genitals on a dish known as the Testing Platter after which the other members did the same in turn, each touching their penis to his. This phallic masculinity was reflected in the other activities of the club, which included classical and scientific lectures about sex, the celebration of Merryland through the reading of erotica, and the display of naked women hired specifically for the purpose of investigating the female body and its genital structure as dispassionately as possible.

Why was masturbation so central to libertine clubs of this kind? Stevenson speculates that the moral inversion which masturbatory libertinism of this kind represented may

¹³ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁴ The name came from a myth in which James V of Scotland was carried across a stream by a beggar lass, who, upon being rewarded, gave him the benison: 'May Prick nor Purse never fail you.' Stevenson, *Beggar's benison*, p. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

have appealed most strongly to marginalized groups like Jacobites or second rank urban elites whose fortunes began to wane after the Act of Union in 1707. Smugglers were also over-represented in membership lists. Libertinism, in this reading, was practised by a discontented former ruling class chafing at the Union, the banishment of the Stuarts, and the imposition of new customs and excise duties. There was certainly a rejection of convention contained in Benison rituals and in the classical motifs attached to the club celebrating that famous public masturbator, Diogenes. Stevenson also suggests that the Benison practised a form of masturbatory nationalist politics, rejecting the panic generated by *Onania* and imported to Scotland from London. At the very least the celebration of what was increasingly regarded as self-abuse was a symbolic rejection of convention and a phallic rejoinder to the nostrums of writers like Marten and Tissot. But perhaps there is something of Tissot in Stevenson's puzzlement at the activities of these 'frustrated masturbators'.¹⁶ Whereas Harvey sees this form of phallic libertinism as central to masculine codes of sociability, for Stevenson the very nature of libertine ritual indicates that its adherents were posturing rebels and discontented failures. It would seem that self-abuse, even in its ritual form, can still suggest futility.

Structures of sociability, kinship, and queer fealty which might include libertine clubs, non-familial domesticity or same sex ceremonies of brotherhood have been the focus of renewed attention among historians of sexuality and gender.¹⁷ No doubt this is partly because new opportunities to establish queer families and marriages exist in the present. For whatever reason, the familial idiom is one being taken up by historians of homosexuality. In her account of lesbian self-fashioning in American and Western Europe since the eighteenth century, Martha Vicinus argues that it was the 'metaphoric language of the family', rather than any notion of sexual identity, that was the principal way in which women defined their intimate and erotic friendships. From the late eighteenth century onwards, the most powerful set of relationships experienced by most women were those given by familial roles which usually defined them in relation to men: sister, wife, daughter, or mother. Intimate friendships with women, however, could be a site of experimentation in which such roles could be interchangeable. Passionate friends and lovers understood themselves within the familial idiom that was so powerful in women's lives; their intimacies were rethought as between mother and daughter, aunt and niece, a wife and her husband.

Using this familial model allows Vicinus to distance her story from histories of lesbianism which place sexology at their centre. In the 1980s, sexual science was seen as the great turning point in the history of lesbianism. Before its arrival in the 1890s, it was argued, the supposed sexual passivity of women meant that their intimate friendships with each other could continue untrammelled by the assumption that they might become homoerotic.¹⁸ This enabled a golden age of female same sex intimacy to develop, but one that was generally chaste. This world, it was suggested, was upset by the arrival of sexology, which posited that homosexuality between women was eminently thinkable and that it was characterized by gender inversion and a tendency towards mental instability. Lesbians

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁷ Alan Bray, *The friend* (Chicago, 2003); Katerine O'Donnell and Michael Rourke, eds., *Love, sex, intimacy and friendship between men, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 2003); Michael Hunter and Miri Rubin, eds., *Love, friendship and faith in Europe, 1300–1800* (Basingstoke, 2005).

¹⁸ Martha Vicinus, *Intimate friends: women who loved women, 1778–1928* (Chicago, 2004), p. xxix. Lillian Faderman, *Passing the love of men: romantic friendship and love between women from the renaissance to the present* (London, 1985).

were thereafter indelibly associated with sexual inversion and mannishness, a fact seemingly confirmed by the interwar styles typified by avant-garde types such as Radclyffe Hall. This version of lesbian history has already been substantially revised, partly owing to the discovery in the 1980s of the openly homoerotic diaries of the Regency aristocrat Anne Lister. Vicinus gives it another nudge in the direction of obscurity by showing the variety of same sex intimacies that surrounded the familial idiom long before the advent of sexuality.¹⁹

Genital sexuality and sexual identity take second place here to other types of intimacy and identity. As David Halperin has pointed out, friendship as a model of same sex intimacy has as much, if not more, relevance to histories of homosexuality as sexual union. It is this form of friendship, just as much as family, which is the key term in *Intimate friends*. While the women Vicinus writes about did not use the term lesbian, and may not have had sexual relationships, she identifies instead a different world of women's passion in which genital sex was only one way of expressing an overwhelming intimate connection. While some of the friendships surveyed in the book may have been sexual, many more prized the spiritual above the physical and sought to exclude the latter 'in order to win a higher love'.²⁰ Other women, alarmed at the implications of their own homoerotic desires, did not act on or name them, while still others experienced marriage and serious flirtation with men. It makes no sense, Vicinus suggests, to insist on describing these women as lesbians, or to search for evidence that they had sex with each other. Educated women were wary of such indiscretion. Vicinus wants no part of identifying 'the modern lesbian', in the manner of an older historiography of sexual modernity. Instead she follows Judith Bennett in urging that class, age, gender, and race might be better and more historically accurate categories for understanding same sex intimacy than our own designations which focus primarily on erotic desires and acts.²¹ Vicinus argues that histories that prioritize some presumed notion of sexual orientation limit our understanding and preclude 'more interesting and difficult questions [that] can be asked about friendship, intimacy, sexuality and spirituality'. On the other hand, though, Vicinus does still want to argue that the world of intimacy she describes as emerging sometime during the nineteenth century did create a new kind of 'lesbian-like' identity which was based on 'a sexualized, or at least reasonably eroticised, relationship with another woman'.²²

Women's intimate friendships followed several familial templates, beginning with the husband-wife relationship epitomized by, among others, Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, the famed Ladies of Llangollen. They, like the French artist Rosa Bonheur and her lover Natalie Micas, rejected heterosexual marriage and family while replicating its conventions, roles, and even ceremonies. It took formidable courage, eccentricity, or private wealth to reject social conventions so completely. It was easier to do so when backed up by the kind of female community that developed in Rome between 1852 and 1875 in the circle of the American actress Charlotte Cushman. In this artistic milieu, the paradigmatic relationship was that between Cushman and the sculptor Harriet Hosmer. In this case, Hosmer took on the role of a youthful, playful tomboy – sometimes a husband, sometimes a son – to Cushman's overbearing theatrical mother/wife.

¹⁹ On Lister see Jill Liddington, *Female fortune: land, gender and authority, the Anne Lister diaries and other writings, 1833–1836* (London, 1998); Helena Whitbread, *No priest but love: excerpts from the diaries of Anne Lister, 1824–1826* (Otley, 1992).

²⁰ Vicinus, *Intimate friends*, p. xix.

²¹ Judith M. Bennett, "'Lesbian-like' and the social history of lesbianism", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9 (2000), pp. 1–24.

²² Vicinus, *Intimate friends*, pp. xxiii, xix.

To illustrate her point that sexual passion between women could not always be articulated, and therefore must be seen as somehow displaced on to other kinds of relationship, art, or language, Vicinus turns first to two famous nineteenth-century legal cases. In both the libel case brought by Scottish teachers Marianne Woods and Jane Pirie in 1811 to contest an accusation that their relationship was improper, and in the Codrington Divorce of 1864, lesbian desire was the unspoken centre of the trial.²³ Henry Codrington was alleged to have found his wife, Helen, in bed with the mannish Emily Faithfull, and to have then brought a divorce case against her. He is supposed to have left a document recounting this with his brother, but it was lost, and contemporaries were left to speculate on what lay at the heart of the dispute. Vicinus uses both stories to show that historians should not expect to find some ‘smoking bed’ to indicate the existence of a fully present lesbian desire. On the contrary, they should be aware of the constraints on its articulation. Lacking an explicit vocabulary to describe what had happened between Faithfull and Mrs Codrington, most observers fell back on the former’s gender, indicating that her mannish qualities were more than adequate as an explanation of her passion for the admiral’s wife.

While, as Lillian Faderman has pointed out, such silences are sometimes a guarantee of impunity, in other circles the unspeakable nature of same sex desire meant that women who experienced it turned to a whole array of cultural resources in order to both express and displace it. Chief among these was the language of spirituality. Vicinus sees this operation at work in the relationships of Mary Benson and Charlotte Mary Bassett, the extravagant Catholicism of Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper, both of whom wrote poetry under the collective pseudonym ‘Michael Field’, and in the writings of Vernon Lee and Eliza Lynn Linton. In Linton’s case, her psychic conflict over her fascination with younger women was expressed through the writing of fiction. In these novels, Linton – one of the first women to enter the louche masculine world of late Victorian journalism – recreated a family drama of sisterly conflict and suppressed fascination for lesbian desire that was only too familiar from her own life. Yet even while attacking gender deviance in her writings, Linton betrays her fascination with the power of same sex desire, creating attractive and powerful lesbian villains. Lee, on the other hand, embraced Edward Carpenter’s notion of a higher ‘third sex’, and styled herself as such an elevated type complete with the commitment to social reform that Carpenter stressed was the particular talent of the invert.

These varied traditions of feminine intimacy became more circumscribed with the arrival of modernism, and with the possibility of both directly naming lesbian desire and living according to a recognized style of sexual identity. While the Paris salon of Natalie Barney has usually been celebrated as central to lesbian history, Vicinus presents it as a move away from the reforming commitments of a writer like Vernon Lee and towards a celebration of self-contained community. Similarly, although novelists like Clemence Dane and Radclyffe Hall made a plea for the authenticity of lesbian selfhood using, respectively, the resources of the school story and sexual science, they nevertheless fixed the image of the lesbian as a *femme damnée* in the popular mind. For a writer like Dane, and for many others who participated in the intimate, quasi-sexual friendships that Vicinus describes, sexuality exerted a negative influence by insisting on the ultimately sexual character of all forms of same sex intimacy.

The arrival of sexual psychology and modernity, Vicinus says, rendered obsolete the tradition and the roles she describes. By the 1920s, mass consumption, leisure, and

²³ This case was the subject of Lillian Faderman, *Scotch verdict: Miss Pirie and Miss Woods v. Dame Cumming Gordon* (London, 1983).

an altogether more democratic age had rendered the middle-class familial metaphor redundant as a template for feminine intimacy. In the age of the bachelor girl and a more assertive female sexuality, the eccentric aristocrat, the maternal spinster, the masculine friend, and the mother–daughter or husband–wife bond all became archaic and out-moded. For Vicinus, this tradition, which historians have tended to misrecognize as the simple absence of same sex desire because it was not articulated in recognizably ‘lesbian’ terms, ended with modernism and modernity. For writers like Virginia Woolf, intimate friendship could never be innocent of psychosexual implications.

As I indicated above, the model of change implied in *Intimate friends*, within which modes of sexual behaviour and identity give way to one another in a chronological sequence frequently determined by the arrival of modernity, has been the subject of extensive critique by Halperin and others seeking a more flexible account of modern identity. In his terms, present homosexuality, with its variety of identities, ways of being, and sexual preferences, simply testifies to the traces of its past. For Halperin, what we now call ‘homosexuality’ is a capacious rather than a precise category, the perceived internal diversity of which results from the fact that it has incorporated earlier ways of understanding sexual desire by a process of historical ‘accumulation, accretion and overlay’.²⁴ Halperin proposes that male homosexuality, at least, has been structured historically by four different models of desire and selfhood. These are age-differentiated, for example the institutionalized pederasty of ancient Greece; role-specific, in which the ‘effeminate’ sexual partner is the one penetrated and in which the active partner retains his masculinity; gender crossing, that is effeminacy and all forms of gender deviance; and homosexual, or the modern assumption that sexual acts and inner psychology always align and within the ‘specious unity’ of which all these other ideas shelter.²⁵ Each of these ideas has come to the fore at various times in Western history but without fully displacing the others.

In this reading, there is no such thing as a unitary history of homosexuality, sexuality, or of the self, a fact that Matt Houlbrook’s *Queer London* is keen to demonstrate. Histories of male homosexuality, Houlbrook complains, have tended to be of a kind that foreground the ‘making of the modern homosexual’ as a unitary type. In this account, associated with the work of John D’Emilio, the city, with its dissolution of traditional ties of family and community, free market for labour and myriad sites of mass leisure, is the natural home of this modern figure.²⁶ The city, then, provided the conditions in which homosexuality as it was known in the twentieth century could emerge as a distinct entity. *Queer London*, however, sets out to complicate this story by demonstrating the inescapable fact that cities and modernity are productive of difference, as well as identity. The most obvious source of difference within the modern history of homosexuality, Houlbrook says, is that of social class. Up to the 1960s, queer life in London was lived in large part by working-class men who neither identified themselves as homosexual nor thought of themselves as possessing a deviant identity. The principal line of division was not the fact of sexual object choice, but the question of gender and the ostensible manner in which homosexual acts were performed and with whom. In this respect, Houlbrook’s queer London is not unlike George Chauncey’s *Gay New York* (1995).²⁷ In interwar and wartime London,

²⁴ Halperin, *How to do*, p. 106.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁶ John D’Emilio, *Sexual politics, sexual communities: the making of a homosexual minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago, 1983).

²⁷ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: gender, urban culture and the making of the gay male world, 1890–1940* (New York, 1995).

just as in New York at the same time, there was a shifting population of young working men who were willing to have sex with other men, as long as they usually retained the active part in the act and assumed a wider masculine role in any relationship or sexual transaction. These men, known dismissively by their middle-class suitors as 'trade', or 'to be had', therefore retained their 'normality' and masculinity within a culture in which queer sex (here understood as all same sex intimacies, regardless of whether they were attached to a claim of homosexual identity) was a simple fact of working-class life.

Both trade and their partners lived in a world in which what we might recognize as our own priorities of sexuality existed in an inverse relation. In queer London, Houlbrook argues, it was gender identity rather than any understanding of sexual 'orientation' that was the primary determinant of sexual preference and the line along which that preference was organized. The 'quean' or 'West End Poof', a powdered and painted, sexually passive effeminate, was both the most recognizable figure of interwar homosexuality, and the visible embodiment of this gender order. The working-class quean's sexual preferences, just as much as his campness, resulted from the apparent fact of his gender inversion, and were by definition womanly, since to desire a man was inherently feminine. In this schema, masculine trade figured simply as the object of desire, and could not therefore lay claim to a sexual 'identity' without adopting the signs of femininity that lay beyond the boundaries of his gender.

Queer London also adumbrates a largely forgotten social world of leisure and public sex outside of which queerness could only be articulated with difficulty. Interaction between poofs, queans, and trade happened within an alternative geography of the city in which queer sites of leisure and assignation took the place of more conventional landmarks. A network of pubs, clubs, and restaurants, cafes, theatre bars, and bath houses spread across central London in a manner which, Houlbrook suggests, was much more diverse and chaotic than the current confinement of major gay venues to Soho and its environs. Typical of this neighbourhood-level queer sociability was the Edgware Road, hardly synonymous today with gay men, but which nevertheless boasted a number of famous queer venues at its southern end in the decade after 1918. Similarly, pubs in working-class areas like Brixton or Whitechapel were known throughout queer London to be discreet and sympathetic. Residential districts in which larger properties were divided into flats and bedsits were also key locations of homosexual domesticity. As one former West London resident put it, the Notting Hill of the late 1950s was like 'a gigantic homosexual party'.²⁸ The queer map of London also featured a series of sites known for public sex, chief among which were the metal urinals which dotted West End streets, certain sections of the royal parks where soldiers could be picked up, and numerous other streets, cinemas, theatres, rooming houses, and pub toilets.

For Houlbrook, queer London, with its characteristic integration of homosexuality into the patterns of working-class life, its poofs, queans, trade, and readily available public sex, is emphatically a world we have lost. Where, then, did it go? One of the reasons why young 'normal' working-class men were willing to have sex with other men, usually for money or some other kind of reward, was that before the war many of them faced a life of poverty, uncertain prospects, and late marriage. The organization of pre-war leisure

²⁸ Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: perils and pleasures in the sexual metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago, 2005), p. 118.

also meant that poofs and trade mixed promiscuously in a bachelor culture that inhabited the pubs, clubs, and restaurants of central London. By the 1950s, however, rising levels of affluence, a declining age of marriage, the arrival of much wider heterosexual promiscuity, and the increasing influence of a heterosexually-minded youth culture meant that not only did this bachelor culture cease to exist in the same way, but also that young men had less need for the rewards, financial, emotional, or otherwise, of a hasty encounter with a middle-class queer. The spaces of leisure that made up queer London were also increasingly regulated, first by the police, and then by owners and managers under pressure from magistrates. The flamboyant behaviour of queans became a decreasingly familiar sight in many of these places, Houlbrook says, while gay venues themselves were increasingly ghettoized into the area around Soho. A corresponding legislative effort at privatizing the world of public sex, both heterosexual and homosexual, also began in 1959 with the Street Offences Act. This trend continued with the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 which, although abolishing many of the laws against homosexual sex, made sure that it was only legal between two people in private. A symptom of the much more intense policing of public indecency and age of consent boundaries after 1967 was the fact that even in the early 1990s, more homosexual offences were prosecuted than had been in the late 1960s under the old laws.

Ironically, it was the queers themselves who, Houlbrook argues, assisted in this process of privatization. In making a modern homosexual subject, one who could be represented as the bearer of certain rights (not least the ability to have sex legally, although only in private), and for whom the Wolfenden Report and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act could be passed, middle-class homosexuals deliberately distanced themselves from the chaotic and criminal world of queer London. The new homosexual subject of this legislation would, Houlbrook argues, consciously correspond to the patterns of middle-class queer life. He would be discreet, private, 'normal' in every other aspect of his life. He would repudiate homosexual 'vice' just as he would reject heterosexual promiscuity. As a political subject, the homosexual was made, therefore, by accommodating queerness to private, domestic bourgeois standards. The result was, Houlbrook says, that from a diffuse and indeterminate queer world, the male homosexual, confined by his sexual object choice and his discretion, was extracted and presented to the public as the acceptable face of deviance. The result in the long term was a narrowing of homosexual life not just to a tightly confined geographical area, but also to a form of identity which tried, with bad faith, to pass over the conditions of its own production.

Not least of the many virtues of *Queer London*, and one that means that the book promises to redraw completely the map of twentieth-century Britain, is that it shows how homosexuality affects a wide variety of cultural forms. In fact it challenges us to rethink completely the history of not only of class, gender, the city, and mass leisure, but also of heterosexuality. If, as Houlbrook argues, sexual identity based on object choice is only a creation of the last decades of the twentieth century, then we should rewrite our histories of heterosexuality to take account of this fact. Heterosexuality – and especially heterosexual masculinity – might then be subject to a queer gaze that could, in the manner of *Queer London*, specify its transient features and its forgotten patterns of sociability. A 'queer history of heterosexuality' might start from the proposition that the prime foundation of morality and the social order is not always an opposition of hetero to homo. Instead, at least in European history, marital sex has often been opposed to promiscuous sex of all kinds; 'healthy' or 'natural' sexual encounters to those in which fantasy – usually signified by the presence of pornography – is the prime

element; and public sex has been policed in order better to protect private, marital intimacy.²⁹

Marcus Collins's *Modern love* promises an 'intimate history of men and women' in the same period but does not recognize the degree of sexual fluidity claimed by *Queer London*. For Collins, heterosexuality in the twentieth century was dominated by one aspiration: the notion, originating with the Edwardian socialist Edward Carpenter, that intimate relations could be reformed as a free and equal partnership devoid of the Victorian taste for female subordination and sexual ignorance. Collins calls this idea 'mutualism' and sees it as the common theme within all forms of middle-class sex radicalism between the 1920s and the 1960s, uniting voices as varied as sexologist Havelock Ellis, eugencists like Walter Gallichan, birth control advocates F. W. Stella Browne and Marie Stopes, and Christian 'social hygienists' such as Maud Royden and Alison Neilans.

The programme of the mutualists after 1918 followed the original Carpenterian ideals of freer mixing between the sexes, companionate marriage, and a better informed and therefore healthier sexuality. The first of these was a qualified success, as mixed clubs took off enormously in the 1940s in response to wartime delinquency, only to fizzle out in the face of boys' domination and the rise of a more attractive and unsupervised youth culture. Marriage, the post-war dominance of which Houlbrook presents rather unproblematically in *Queer London*, was in Collins's reading a long way from the ideal of the mutualists. This was especially true for working-class men, who generally maintained a traditional attitude to patriarchal authority. Middle-class couples, on the other hand, found it difficult to live up to the companionate ideal. The old mutualist idea that marital and sex difficulties could be solved simply by education and enlightenment foundered on the discovery that even when both partners were well informed and eager to learn, they still encountered the inevitable snags which resulted from the assumption that marriage should be the highest form of intimacy.

Collins suggests that women's sexual agency – a mutualist ideal – was embraced by men in the 1960s, if the new pornography of that period is any guide. Unlike its grubby predecessors, in which women were the objects of male lust and brutality, British pornography which imported the lifestyle formula of *Playboy* in the mid-1960s imagined women as strongly sexual and emancipated. However, the rise of women's liberation, in which mutualism was portrayed as merely a cover for masculine dominance, sexual aggression, and marital drudgery, turned back the tide which had dominated British intellectual life since 1918. Trends in feminism also began to be negatively reflected in pornography, as male writers reacted with alarm to women's protests. From the late 1960s, women portrayed in the new pornography became less like a mutualist fantasy and more like the easily dominated sex object which she had been before mutualism's brief triumph. The present, in which men are from Mars and women from Venus, represents the final paradox of mutualism and the consequence of feminist revolt against it.³⁰ Men and women are more separate than ever, Collins suggests, but even more dependent on each other for mutual recognition and gratification.

²⁹ For the beginnings of such a project, see H. G. Cocks, 'Sporty girls and artistic boys: friendship, illicit sex and the British companionship advertisement, 1913–1928,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11 (2002), pp. 457–82, and 'Saucy stories: pornography, sexology and the marketing of sexual knowledge in Britain, c. 1918–1970', *Social History*, 29 (2004), pp. 465–87.

³⁰ John Gray, *Men are from Mars, women are from Venus: a practical guide for getting what you want from your relationships* (2nd edn, London, 1997).

Historians of gender and sexuality used to be far more sanguine about the present. Collins's story is the decline of a noble ideal that, he argues, once represented a common aspiration, while Houlbrook's queer London is designed to be more appealing than the uniform and commercialized present, almost to the point of nostalgia. The pre-Stonewall queer past in particular has undergone such a thorough resurrection that what was once considered a dark age of persecution is now presented in texts as varied as Sarah Waters's Victorian novels and Chauncey's *Gay New York* as a period in which opportunity and play preceded the straitjacket of identity and knowledge.³¹ The straightforward liberal story of gradual enlightenment and freedom has also long passed its sell-by date. Although Lesley Hall's thorough survey *Sex, gender and social change in Britain since 1880* belongs more to the optimistic school that was once common in women's history, she too suggests that any gains are qualified. Hall's story is one of the gradual dismantling of a primarily religious Victorian morality and its replacement with the competing cacophony of intellectual elites, medical expertise, marriage guidance, the state, the media, and disorderly popular culture. While this is presented as an essentially liberal story of increasing freedom and a movement away from older ideals of discretion, constraint, privacy, and patriarchy, Hall maintains that these gains of 'liberation' were nevertheless 'ambiguous', in that they brought conflict, commercialization, and a conservative backlash from those who felt discomfited by them.³²

Even essentially optimistic historians like Hall have long since learned to be critical of 'sexual liberation' and its supposed advance during the twentieth century. This critique has helped to create scepticism not only about apparent sexual freedoms, but also about the usefulness of current notions of sexual identity – understood as that which is derived primarily from object choice – as a category of historical analysis. This is a significant departure from an older historiography that sought to pinpoint the moment when certain recognizable features of the present, such as the link between sexual acts and inner psychology, began to cohere. This was most visible in the history of homosexuality, which tended to suppose that there was a point at which the 'birth of the queen', the arrival of the mannish lesbian or the start of the 'Wilde century' could be discerned.³³ In that historiography, there was generally one 'homosexual role' or queer persona that historians projected back into the past from a more or less certain idea of what present sexual categories were like. This story also presumed a particular account of modernity, especially in its urban form, some of which remains in Thomas Laqueur's *Solitary sex*. To the contrary, Houlbrook, Vicinus, and to a lesser extent Harvey are all suggesting that modernity, sexuality identity, and the notions of selfhood that revolve around them are localized phenomena dependent on specific practices of class and the structure of life in a particular

³¹ See, for instance, Sarah Waters, *Tipping the velvet* (London, 1998), and, more particularly, the BBC adaptation of the same name directed by Geoffrey Sax (2002). For a more mixed view of the gay past see Matt Cook, *London and the culture of homosexuality* (London, 2003); H. G. Cocks, *Nameless offences: homosexual desire in the nineteenth century* (London, 2003); Morris Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: sex, love and scandal in Wilde times* (Ithaca, 2005) and Rebecca Jennings, *Tomboys and bachelor girls: narrating the lesbian in post-war Britain* (Manchester, forthcoming, 2006).

³² Lesley Hall, *Sex, gender and social change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 184.

³³ See on this, Randolph Trumbach, 'The birth of the queen: sodomy and the emergence of gender equality', in Chauncey, Duberman, and Vicinus, eds., *Hidden from history*, pp. 129–40; Esther Newton, 'The mythic mannish lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the new woman', in Estelle B. Freedman, et al., eds., *The lesbian issue: essays from Signs* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 7–26; Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde century: Oscar Wilde, effeminacy and the queer moment* (London, 1994).

time and place. These histories then, challenge us to rethink what modern selfhood might be, and also make us wary of projecting contemporary notions of identity back into the past. What emerges most clearly here is that identity, in the contemporary meaning which connects it to psychological depth, sexuality, and more or less consciously enacted social and sexual roles, is clearly a word which only really has a contemporary relevance and that it cannot be applied without complication to past societies. Although many historians in other fields write modishly about identity in the same way that, a few years ago, books would always contain a seemingly obligatory chapter on women or gender, it seems that in the history of sexuality identity has already been transcended.