

evidence of continuity in family and community oversight of married couples, countering the notion that “modern” ideas about marital privacy gained currency during this period. Sievens reintroduces new “ideals of domestic privacy” to explain the increasingly formulaic nature of elopement notices by 1830, but taken together these books suggest that the concept needs to be used with care in any setting (Sievens, 120). Their overall effect is to reinforce Nancy Cott’s recent arguments about the enduring public character of marriage (Cott, *Public Vows*, 2000). Foyster raises the intriguing possibility that the late nineteenth century saw a shift in the nature of public responsibility for marital breakdown, rather than a new concept of privacy. The rise of institutional and professional resources addressing the problem of marital violence made neighbors and other community members less likely to intervene. “When marital violence became somebody’s problem, in terms of it lying within their professional expertise,” Foyster argues, “it ceased to be everybody’s problem” (233).

Foyster’s and Sieven’s books call attention to geographic as well as chronological continuities in the legal and extra-legal practices regulating marriage. Despite the comparative ease with which early national New Englanders could obtain divorce, they closely resembled the English couples documented by Foyster in their preference for alternative means of mediating marital conflict, and in the behavioral standards by which they judged husbands and wives. The parallels suggest the need for more explicitly comparative work on the relationship between customary forms of household justice, popular beliefs about marriage and family, and legal change. The dramatic modifications in family law that have occurred on both sides of the Atlantic over the past two centuries cannot be understood solely in terms of national narratives, however much they have hinged on national politics and played into debates about national identity.

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Morris B. Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Pp. 314. \$35 (ISBN 0-801-43678-8).

Cross-dressers named Fanny and Stella; working-class telegraph delivery boys; Podge, the defamed son of a duke; Eton schoolboys Chat and Regy; a beloved teacher and poet Cory; Lord Arthur Pelham Clinton; Labby; Bosie; and a professional sodomite John Saul. Nineteenth-century characters? Yes. From a Charles Dickens novel? No. These real-life people take center stage in the fascinating stories that Morris B. Kaplan tells in his book that explores the “conditions of life for men who loved men and attitudes toward same-sex desire” (2) in late Victorian Britain. While a book with this focus can hardly avoid the 1895 Oscar Wilde trials, and Kaplan does ultimately turn to these proceedings, Kaplan’s major contribution with this study is his thick descriptions of the legal and cultural contexts of homoerotic desire *before* what many have considered to be the defining events of the Wilde trials.

Kaplan identifies his book as a “return to storytelling” (7) and, quoting at length from primary sources such as court records, newspaper editorials, and private journals, he presents much of the material in narrative form. The book includes four major parts, as well as an introduction, prologue, epilogue, and conclusion. The first part examines the 1870–71 legal proceedings involving Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park, two upper middle-class men who frequently and flagrantly paraded the streets of London’s West End dressed stunningly (as the wonderful photographs included in the book show) as “Stella” and “Fanny.” Kaplan has excavated a wealth of material from the trial records, including rather shocking details about the invasive medical examinations that the defendants were subjected to in an attempt to prove that they had committed the felony of sodomy. Kaplan also analyzes the press coverage of this case, effectively demonstrating the self-defeating aspects of this prosecution that itself became “a spectacular performance” (22).

The second part of Kaplan’s study shifts to the exploration of homoerotic desire in the context of English private schools. The long-term relationships among William Johnson Cory, a teacher at Eton who resigned in 1872 under suspicion of inappropriate relationships with his students, and two of his former students Reginald Brett and Charles Williamson are featured in this section of the book. Part three returns to the attempted regulation of same-sex desire in the law courts, focusing primarily on the 1889 scandal known as the Cleveland Street affair. When it came to light that many telegraph delivery boys were supplementing their government pay by moonlighting as prostitutes for highly placed gentlemen at a Cleveland Street male brothel, “an ethic of middle-class respectability was used to condemn both upper-class decadence and lower-class brutishness” (205). This case was the first to involve alleged homosexual conduct since passage of the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which criminalized “gross indecency with another male person.” As Kaplan explains, this Amendment greatly extended the reach of the law, “effectively defining all erotic conduct *between men* as criminal” (187). Finally, part four presents select details from the Wilde trials, with the emphasis being on the connections between this well-known story and the lesser-known foregoing narratives. A very interesting aspect of this part is the role that Wilde’s own crafted narratives, particularly his novel *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, played in his conviction.

Throughout the tellings in this book, Kaplan points out ways in which these different stories intersect, while also weaving in aspects of a privately published 1881 pornographic novel, as well as the life and works of John Addington Symonds. Unlike a Dickens novel, however, Kaplan’s book does not conclude with all of the relationships among the characters exposed and the plots integrated. Instead, Kaplan questions what interests are served by comprehensive schemes of categorization and explains that he has used narratives as a challenge to “theoretical resolution” (269). He celebrates the nuances and ambiguities in the narratives that, he argues, perhaps “may capture more of the flavor of erotic life” and “remain more faithful to the piecemeal and often inconclusive character of historical evidence” (270).

That said, more of Kaplan’s insights into some of the fascinating theoretical questions that he himself raises in his concluding comments only would have enhanced the benefits of his valuable research. For example, while Kaplan does

integrate an analysis of the role of social class throughout his book, much less is said about the intersections of sexuality and gender and how these categories “mutually inflect each other in specific situations” (265). Also, these materials bring to the forefront compelling questions about the roles that law and legal discourse play in the shaping of tales of same-sex desire. For example, when it is a crime “to conspire to commit sodomy,” what are the implications with respect to the performance of an identity? Of course, the reason this reviewer is left wanting more is because Kaplan has compiled so much rich and thought-provoking material and presented it in a way to create such desire in his readers.

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J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement*, London: Routledge, 2004. Pp. xii + 204. \$150.00 (ISBN 0-415-32905-1).

This book is the product of an impressive and energetic intelligence. The extent to which it will be admired by readers, however, is liable to depend upon which modes of historical writing and analysis are most to their taste. Those with an enthusiastic predisposition toward the invocation, exploration, and deployment of theoretical perspectives will find much to enjoy and admire here. Others, who view such approaches more sceptically, may find themselves longing for oases of incident and evidence in the deserts of abstraction. Readers of each persuasion will know who they are and treat this review accordingly.

Almost half of Wood’s text is given over to detailed discussion of historiography and theory—especially that of Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias (15–20 et al.)—in an effort to articulate a usable model of analysis for the subject at hand. It is a shame that such time and energy is devoted to prolix and often repetitive theoretical exegeses, because it may have distracted from the exploration of other interesting and important questions. One of these concerns the primary source material consulted: a selected range of materials relating only to London and the south-east, and indeed, only that to be derived from the National Archives and not the (in all probability) far richer resources of summary proceedings and quarter sessions housed in the region’s local archives. The completeness and coherence, as well as the temporal and geographical representativeness of this material—the sorts of questions that historians routinely consider—must inevitably provoke concerns about how persuasively either the evidence presented or the larger national scenes actually bear out the theoretical perspective. The striking comparison here is with such recent works as Carolyn Conley’s *Melancholy Accidents* (Lanham, Md., 1999) and Martin Wiener’s *Men of Blood* (Cambridge, 2004), studies that incorporate the essential insights of Foucault and Elias without losing sight of the richness and complexity of the stories to be derived from their broad archival bases.

I suspect that the determination to find a coherent blend of theory to account for the assertions and behavior of Victorians may also have deflected Wood from