



United Kingdom I: The Middle Ages through the Nineteenth Century

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Primarily located on the British Isles off the northwest coast of Europe, the United Kingdom is composed of four distinct countries: England, Wales, and Scotland on the island of Great Britain, as well as Northern Ireland. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are federated with the United Kingdom. Scattered overseas territories, including Bermuda and Gibraltar, constitute the last vestiges of the British Empire.

Excluding overseas territories, the United Kingdom had a population of more than 60.2 million individuals in 2005.

Wales was brought under control of England during the thirteenth century, and the two countries were unified into a single legal jurisdiction by acts of 1536 and 1542. Ruled by the English monarch since 1603, Scotland was formally unified with England and Wales in 1707. Brought under British control by the early seventeenth century, Ireland was officially incorporated into the United Kingdom in 1800. Although most of Ireland gained independence in 1922, the six counties of Ulster, comprising Northern Ireland, remain part of the United Kingdom.

Despite political unification, Scotland and Northern Ireland constitute distinct legal jurisdictions from England and Wales. Significantly for glbtq history, the laws regarding sexual behavior often have been different in each of the jurisdictions.

The United Kingdom has a rich and vibrant legacy of queer cultural expression despite a long history of severe legal sanctions against male-male sexual acts and other manifestations of sexual and gender deviance. In the early twenty-first century, the United Kingdom has become an international leader in the recognition and protection of the rights and freedoms of glbtq individuals. Recent laws affirming the equality of gay and lesbian citizens, however, represent a significant shift in government policies.

Historical Background

As is the case with many other nations, significant gaps remain in our understanding of queer life in the United Kingdom in earlier periods. Before the late nineteenth century, most of the secure documentation is negative in intention, mostly concerning enforcement of criminal penalties against male homosexuals. Thus far, most published studies have focused on male homosexuals, and much less attention has been given to lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender individuals.

As Jeffrey Weeks has emphasized, acts that are considered queer today may have been regarded very differently in other social and historical contexts. For ease of reference, modern terms--including gay, lesbian, homosexual, and queer--are employed throughout this essay, but this usage is not intended to imply that historical constructions of sexuality and gender are identical to those of our era.



Top: Mervyn Touchet, Earl of Castlehaven, was executed in 1631.

Above: Cross-dressers Frederick Park (left) and Ernest Boulton became notorious after their arrest for sodomy in 1869. They were not convicted.

As John Boswell has shown, English manuscripts of the Early Middle Ages contain numerous satirical and condemnatory references to same-sex love. However, a few prominent British clerics, including Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033/4-1109) and Saint Aelred of Rievaulx (ca 1110-1167), celebrated passionate male friendships.

Appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, Anselm prohibited publication of the decree of the Council of London of 1102, which included provisions for the punishment of priests found guilty of sodomy. Anselm's letters to his friends and students appropriate the intensely passionate language of lovers to evoke the fusion of souls in spiritual endeavors. Nevertheless, Anselm strongly supported the ideal of priestly chastity in numerous pronouncements, and there is no evidence that he physically expressed the love that he clearly felt for several of his close associates.

Saint Aelred was unambiguous in his declarations of love for other men. A friend of King David of Scotland and an advisor to Henry II of England, Aelred was one of the most influential ecclesiastics of his generation. While Abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx (1147-1167), Aelred wrote *Spiritual Friendship*, in which he explained that Biblical accounts of David and Jonathan and of Jesus and John the Evangelist established the sanctity of male friendships. In other writings, Aelred openly acknowledged the physical expressions of his love for Simon, a monk who died shortly before 1143. Although celibate in his later years, he never condemned physical manifestations of love and allowed monks to hold hands and otherwise show their love for one another.

Aelred's exuberant valuation of same-sex friendship was exceptional for his era. Because accusations of sodomy were made to discredit rivals, it is necessary to be cautious in accepting references to homosexual activity as accurate. Nevertheless, the consistency of accounts of the love of King Richard I, known as the Lion Hearted (1157-1199), for other men suggests that they may have a basis in fact.

Scholars continue to debate whether the later medieval king Edward II (1284-1327) actually engaged in homosexual activities, but there is little doubt that powerful English barons were unsettled by the exceptional closeness of his relationships with Piers Gaveston (executed 1311) and Hugh Despenser. By 1322, the king had entrusted Despenser with a significant amount of political authority. In 1326, Queen Isabella and her lover, Roger Mortimer, led a successful rebellion against Edward and Despenser, whom they captured and executed in 1327. Edward was killed by having a red-hot poker inserted into his anus, and Hugh's genitals were cut off before he was beheaded.

From Sin to Crime

Homosexual acts were condemned with increasing severity in the later half of the thirteenth century. The two most important English legal codes of the era proscribed death for male-male anal intercourse: burial while still alive, according to *Fleta*, or burning at the stake, according to *Britton* (essentially a translation of *Fleta* into the vernacular). The inadequacy of medieval legal records makes it impossible to determine the extent to which these penalties were enforced. However, pervasive repression and fear are suggested by the virtual disappearance of overt themes of same-sex love from literature and by the fervor with which individuals defended themselves against rumors of sodomy.

In 1533, Henry VIII classified sodomy as a secular felony to be punished by execution by hanging and loss of all material goods. Henry's action can be understood as a maneuver in his war against the Catholic Church because it removed an important legal matter from ecclesiastical control and it was used to discredit clerics who were accused of practicing sodomy. In 1547, the first year of the rule of Edward VI, the sodomy law was repealed, but it was reinstated the following year with provisions intended to ensure more rigorous standards of evidence and to eliminate the financial rewards previously granted to those who reported

incidents of sodomy.

Asserting that sexual offenses were a spiritual offense, Mary Tudor repealed the sodomy law in 1553. Claiming that crimes against nature had increased under Mary, Elizabeth I reclassified sodomy as a secular felony in 1559, and, in 1563, she eliminated the reforms made under Edward in order to achieve her goal of swifter prosecution of supposed offenders.

Sodomy was classified as treason against the Crown in a court decision of 1607. In the third part of his influential *Institutes of the Laws of England* (completed 1628), the prominent legal authority Sir Edward Coke emphasized the importance of the 1607 decision in establishing sodomy as treason, but he also characterized homosexual acts as heresy and sorcery.

The earliest recorded procedures against a man for homosexual acts under secular law took place in 1541 when the Privy Council brought charges of sodomy against Nicholas Udall, author of one of the earliest English comedies. Although Udall was confined to prison, he was freed after a few months. However, not all men convicted of sodomy were treated as leniently as Udall.

For instance, Mervyn Touchet, Earl of Castlehaven, and two of his servants were executed in 1631 for homosexual acts and for the rape of Lady Castlehaven. Both Charles I and his subjects eagerly followed the lurid testimony given by numerous witnesses at the trial conducted by the House of Lords throughout April and May. The diverse charges brought against Castlehaven and his accomplices indicate the fluidity of sexual categories in the early modern era and the difficulties involved in imposing strict concepts of sexuality on the period.

According to testimony at the trial, the Earl engaged in intercrural sex and masturbation with his servants, but he did not attempt anal intercourse. Departing from legal precedents, the Lords maintained that charges of sodomy could be applied even if penetration did not occur. Their decision generally was not followed by later justices, who usually enforced the death penalty only if anal intercourse had occurred. In 1781, a legal ruling established that men accused of sodomy could be executed only if both anal penetration and internal emission of semen were proven.

Held in 1640 in Cork, the trial of John Atherton, Anglican Bishop of Waterford and Lismore (Ireland) and of his Proctor and supposed lover, John Childe, also attracted national attention. Published shortly after the executions, a sensationalistic pamphlet, *The Life and Death of John Atherton*, featured a woodcut, representing Atherton and Childe hanging from the gallows. Because it shows both men with full beards, the illustration effectively (but probably unintentionally) challenged the widespread stereotype of the sodomite as an older man taking advantage of young boys.

Indictments for sodomy were most frequent in periods of social upheaval, when people were looking for a scapegoat. Thus, for example, the arrest and execution of John Swan and John Lister in Edinburgh in 1570 coincided with social tensions provoked by the Reformation and the return to Scotland of Calvinist exiles. In more tranquil times, indictments were most frequently brought against those who challenged the social order through violent acts, theft, and other crimes against property. At least some accusations of sodomy were linked to racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of prejudice.

Despite the sporadic enforcement of the law, it provided a frightening reminder to men of the potential consequences of homosexual acts. Even when it did not result in conviction, an indictment for homosexual acts must have been a devastating experience.

James I: The Limits of Royal Authority

The history of James I (1566-1625, King of England, from 1603; James VI of Scotland, from 1567) reveals that even monarchs were subject to public condemnation if they disregarded social prohibitions against public displays of same-sex desire. James's impassioned relationships with his male favorites caused him to be censured by the Privy Council, and they almost provoked civil war.

Already at the age of fourteen, James revealed his emotional and sexual preference for other men, when he fell deeply in love with a French courtier, Esmé Stuart. James's longest and most impassioned relationship (1613-25) was with George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. The depth of James's feelings for Buckingham is eloquently revealed in his impassioned letters to him. Aware of the dangers posed by his homoerotic desires, James frequently warned Buckingham that he must never allow anyone else to see their letters.

Many modern scholars have attributed the furor over James's affairs with his courtiers simply to the jealousy on the part of those who did not receive royal preferment. However, displays of same-sex affection directly inspired much of the criticism heaped upon his relationships. For instance, John Oglander, who introduced a motion of censure in the Privy Council in 1617, declared "I never saw any fond husband make so much or so great dalliance over his beautiful spouse as I have seen King James over his favourites, especially the Duke of Buckingham." Defending himself to the Privy Council, James compared his love of Buckingham to Christ's love for his disciple John.

Reconstructing Queer Lives in Renaissance England

In his groundbreaking study on same-sex desire in Renaissance England, Alan Bray reviewed factors that directly shaped the lives of ordinary men who engaged in homosexual acts. Paramount among these was the pervasive otherworldly context of references to sodomites, who generally were discussed in conjunction with monstrous beings. Lacking a legitimate place in the realms of heaven and earth, the homosexual was associated with all manifestations of breakdown of order, including both social chaos and natural catastrophes.

Because homosexuals were thought to resemble fantastic beings, they easily could be overlooked by their neighbors. A reluctance or unwillingness to recognize the existence of sodomy can be noted in much court testimony. For example, in the trial of laborer Matthew Davy (1630), a man who shared a bedroom with him insisted that he did not realize the significance of the sexual acts he witnessed.

While the British seem to have had difficulty recognizing homosexuality in their midst, they had no trouble locating it in other cultures. Accounts of Renaissance era travelers are full of condemnations of sodomy, as practiced by foreigners.

The extravagant and dissipated sodomite was an occasional character in Elizabethan and Jacobean theater. Corresponding with satirical traditions that extend back to the Classical world, this figure can not be regarded as an accurate indicator of how homosexuals appeared to people outside the theater. Nevertheless, some pervasive themes--for example, masters having sex with apprentices--correspond with evidence from other sources, such as legal records.

Cross-dressing

In English theater of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, boys and young men played all the female roles. In *As You Like It* and other plays, Shakespeare utilizes the transvestite conventions of the Elizabethan stage to question the social and sexual conventions of gender. Moreover, in his *Sonnets*, Shakespeare more directly challenges sexual and gender categories, exploring, for example, in Sonnet 20, the passion inspired by a young man he refers to as his "Master Mistris."

The pervasive theatrical and literary uses of cross-dressing did not foster tolerance of gender transgressions on the streets, however. Although Elizabeth occasionally wore items of men's clothing as symbols of power, she instituted sumptuary laws, insuring that dress accorded with one's biological gender and social class.

Despite the legal restrictions, there were widespread reports of women and men who cross-dressed on the streets of London between 1580 and 1620. Most commentators were concerned that cross-dressing would disrupt society and condemned the practice as immoral. For instance, the anonymous author of *Hic Mulier: Or, the Man-Woman* (1620) interpreted the male clothing worn by women as indicators of sexual looseness and availability. However, records of court cases indicate that some women disguised themselves as men in order to secure positions in shipbuilding and other skilled trades.

The Possibility of Queer Identities in the Renaissance Era

Although most people during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras may have preferred to avoid recognizing the implications of their own homosexual acts, a few writers boldly formulated identities that explicitly rebelled against sexual norms. For example, Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) represented homosexual love from a remarkable variety of perspectives. In his poem *Hero and Leander*, he emphasized the equivalence of same-sex and heterosexual love and desire and mocked those who would repress homosexual love. In *Edward II*, Marlowe endowed the homosexual protagonist with the psychological complexity usually associated with heterosexual characters, and he linked Edward's brutal execution by a heated poker to social and political corruption.

In his earliest publication, *The Affectionate Shepherd* (1594), Richard Barnfield (1574-1620?) challenged the heterosexual conventions prevalent in pastoral poetry through his explicit references to male-male intercourse. However, in the preface to his subsequently published *Cynthia*, Barnfield distanced himself from controversy by insisting that the theme of homosexual love resulted from his zealous imitation of Classical works.

Queer Themes in Writings of Renaissance Women

Because sexual acts between women were not criminalized, there are no documents for women equivalent to the court records that have provided so much of the information that we now have about homosexual men. However, scholars have begun to acknowledge queer themes in works by Katherine Philips (1632-1664), Aphra Behn (1640-1689), and other British women authors of the seventeenth century.

Known as the English Sappho, Philips circulated her poems privately during her lifetime; her works were collected and published shortly after her death. By appropriating and transforming male literary conventions, such as the courtly love address to an unspecified beloved subject, Philips articulated her love for other women.

One of the first British women to attempt to earn a living from writing, Behn gained a significant literary reputation as a result of *The Rover* (1677) and other plays. Although conforming in many respects to the perspectives of male libertine aesthetics, these plays critiqued misogyny and foregrounded the experiences of women. In her lyric poetry, Behn occasionally revealed her identity as a woman as she explicitly celebrated her love for other women.

Aristocratic Libertines in the Restoration Era

The ascension to the throne of Charles II (reigned 1660-85), after an era of Puritan repression, initiated a period of unprecedented sexual liberty in court circles. The toleration and even celebration of sexual exploits in literature of the Restoration era accords with the king's own enjoyment of sensual pleasures of all kinds. The emphasis on untrammelled sexual expression also can be related to the tendency of court

writers to describe Charles's authority in phallic terms.

However, sexual libertinism should not be regarded simply as a manifestation of the personality of the king. Indeed, libertinism was often linked to progressive intellectual and social developments, such as religious skepticism and even republican politics.

Current sexual categories do not adequately serve to characterize the fluid sexual behavior of Restoration libertines, whose attitudes are likely to seem contradictory and confusing today. Although libertines generally maintained the appearance of conformity to heterosexual standards, they also openly indulged in sexual escapades with both women and younger men. As Randolph Trumbach has explained, libertines were admired for the bold masculine self-assertion that they demonstrated in their sexual exploits. Because it obviously flaunted predominant social conventions, anal intercourse--whether performed with a male or female partner--was regarded by the libertines as the most daring and exciting sexual act.

Manifesting their indulgence in sensual pleasures, libertines wore lavish clothing and cultivated equally ornate and elegant manners. During the Restoration, effeminacy was not specifically associated with homosexuality; instead, foppish behavior was regarded as an admirable way of displaying both sexual openness and aristocratic standing.

Often considered the archetypal rake of the era, prominent author and courtier John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-1680) challenged prevailing social conventions even more thoroughly than other aristocratic libertines did. Rochester's sexual escapades and his libelous, satirical poetry disturbed the normally tolerant Charles, who repeatedly exiled him from court.

In the poem "Love a Woman? You're an Ass!," Rochester characterizes heterosexual love as a thing "designed for dirty slaves" and contrasts it to rewarding homosocial and homosexual associations. In a world from which women have been banished, drinking and revelry with like-minded men serves to "engender wit." Sex with a "sweet, soft" boy is said to be infinitely more satisfying than intercourse with a woman.

Male couples are depicted as lovers in numerous plays of the Restoration era, including Rochester's *Valentinian* (performed by 1684) and several works by Nathaniel Lee, such as *Rival Queens* (1677). In these plays, satisfying, serious sexual relationships between men co-exist with love for and marriage to women.

Some notably handsome, virile actors, such as the popular Edward Kynaston (1640-1712), specialized in playing rakes who pursue male lovers with relish. The fluid gender categories of the Restoration stage are suggested by the fact that Kynaston initially became famous through his convincing portrayals of female characters.

Despite the mood of general tolerance, the death penalty and harsh prison sentences were still occasionally enforced against men who were proven to have committed sodomy. Yet, it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that systematic and extensive efforts were made to entrap sodomites and to suppress homosexual behavior.

The Emergence of a Distinct Male Homosexual Subculture

In the early eighteenth century, there emerged a new subculture that defined itself in terms of homosexual desire. Paramount among the factors that contributed to this development were the industrialization and urbanization of England, which brought significant numbers of single, working-class men to London and other large cities.

For the general public, cross-dressing and a lack of sexual interest in women were the most obvious

indicators of the new subculture. Thomas Gilbert's poem "A View of the City" and numerous other eighteenth-century literary works suggest that many residents were aware of the nocturnal use of St. James Park and other London public spaces for cruising.

Originally referring to a female sex worker, the term "molly" was adopted by some men who engaged in same-sex sexual activities as a form of self-identification by the early eighteenth century. Defiance of gender norms was evidenced by mollies through feminine mannerisms, cross-dressing, the use of female pronouns and names, and other means. These distinctive patterns of behavior were not confined to homosexual meeting places, but they also were sometimes openly displayed by mollies on the streets. Thus, witnesses testifying on behalf of John Cooper during a trial for petty theft (1732) indicated that he was known as Princess Serafina to his working-class neighbors.

Some mollies gathered at taverns and private houses referred to as "molly houses." By the mid-1720s, over twenty molly houses were located throughout London north of the Thames in all sorts of neighborhoods, ranging from slums to wealthy suburbs. Men circulated freely among the molly houses in very different types of neighborhoods. Social fluidity characterized these establishments and other homosexual meeting places in defiance of the rigorous class system that largely structured life in the era.

The best known molly house is the establishment run by Margaret Clap in Field Lane, Holborn, which was raided by police in February 1726. According to court testimony, up to fifty men gathered in Clap's house on busy nights. After talking, kissing, and dancing in the main room, men retreated to a bedchamber for ceremonies, described at the trials as weddings.

Three of the men arrested at Clap's house were hanged in May 1726. Some of the others were fined, and at least one of those arrested died in prison before being brought to trial. Rejecting Clap's plea that she did not know what occurred at her establishment, the jury sentenced her to jail for two years.

The Societies for the Reformation of Manners, a crusading religious organization, claimed credit for the raids on Clap's tavern and numerous other molly houses in 1725 and 1726. The Societies trained agents to target the molly houses and encouraged these men to instigate actions that could be reported to the police.

Systematic efforts to suppress the new subculture can be traced back to at least 1699, when the police raided cruisy public parks in Windsor and London. In 1707, over one hundred men were arrested in a highly publicized series of raids on London parks. A widely distributed broadside, *The Woman Hater's Lament*, featured a woodcut illustration of the suicides of three of the men arrested in 1707.

Although police raids inflicted great suffering on the men who were trapped by them, they also inspired a will to resist infringements on personal freedoms. Thus, William Brown, who had been arrested for having sex with another man on Moorfields (an open space in London), declared at his trial in 1726 that he had the right to do what he wanted with his own body.

Developments in the Later Eighteenth Century

After the series of raids of 1725 and 1726, police did not mount further systematic attacks on homosexual meeting places in London for the rest of the century. For the next fifty years, most indictments for homosexual acts in London occurred as the result of complaints by private citizens rather than police action. Public dissatisfaction with the corruption of the police, as revealed at the trials of sodomites, may have been a factor in the shift of policy.

Although individuals and pairs of men were arrested occasionally for homosexual acts, less than one person

per decade was executed in London for homosexual acts between 1730 and 1800. The difficulty of establishing certain proof of anal penetration may have made many justices reluctant to impose the death sentence. Those who were convicted of sodomy typically were imprisoned (with sentences ranging from a few months to two years or more), fined, and forced to stand in the pillory, where they were often savagely attacked by mobs.

Convictions were most likely in cases involving two consenting adult men of approximately equal age. Virtually all of the men accused of sexual acts with teenagers or young boys were acquitted. Rates of conviction were highest for working-class men; skillful use of appeals by lawyers helped many men of higher social classes avoid punishment.

Despite the decline in arrests after 1726, the possibility of indictment remained a threat for all who were inclined to commit homosexual acts, and many middle- and upper-class men paid blackmail in order to avoid being reported to the police. The gravity of an accusation is vividly revealed by the resoluteness with which Sir Edward Walpole (1706-1784) fought against the charge of sodomy lodged against him in 1750 by John Cather. With the help of his brother, Horace, Sir Edward secured the transfer of the trial from Middlesex magistrates to the King's Bench, where Cather found it impossible to meet the financial requirements. Because Cather never presented his case, the indictment was dismissed.

Following his acquittal, Walpole sought vengeance by securing indictments against Cather and four associates for conspiracy to commit libel. At the conclusion of the highly publicized trials, lasting several months, all men were imprisoned with hard labor, from two to four years. However, because virtually no concrete evidence was produced at the trial to prove the charge of libel, Sir Edward was widely thought to have been guilty of sodomy, and he never recovered his position in society.

A lifelong bachelor, Horace Walpole (1717-1797) managed to avoid the legal difficulties and attendant public scandal that ensnared his older brother, even though he focused his personal life on close relationships with other unmarried men, including the poet Thomas Gray and the architect John Chute. Walpole conducted his friendships with great discretion, and scholars debate whether any of his relationships with other men were consummated sexually. Perhaps learning from Sir Edward's experience, he chose to ignore a derogatory pamphlet published in 1764 by William Guthrie that characterized him as having a female disposition.

Regarded as the first Gothic novel, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) established the horror story as a respectable literary genre and helped to create a taste for the bizarre in all the arts. Purporting to be a transcription of an ancient manuscript, the novel recounts the deeds of a ruthless medieval prince who murders his daughter and torments other members of his family. In *Castle of Otranto*, Walpole seems to be articulating the view of a sexual outsider, as he reveals the abuse and destructiveness that can be contained within a "conventional" family structure.

Walpole is also credited with instituting the Gothic Revival style in architecture and decoration. Collaborating with Chute and other architects, he transformed his family's Palladian mansion at Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, into a fanciful version of a medieval castle. Making asymmetry a guiding principle of his design, he elaborated the original structure with extensions of various shapes and sizes, and he decorated the resulting building with turrets and traceries. Through his playful adaptations of Gothic decorative motifs, he created lavish and playful interior spaces, in which he presided over literary salons.

Walpole championed the work of his friend Thomas Gray (1716-71), whom he initially met at Eton and with whom he journeyed to Italy from 1739 to 1741. Although they quarreled for an unknown reason in 1741, Walpole and Gray reconciled after the death of their mutual close friend, Richard West, in 1742. In "Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West," Gray expressed the intensity of his emotional attachment to his friend.

Through his private press, Walpole later issued many of Gray's poems, including the famous "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (published 1751), which reveals his longing for an intimate companion.

When Gray was in his fifties, he openly declared his love to Charles-Victor de Bonstettin, a young man who had come to Cambridge to study with him. However, Bonstettin did not reciprocate Gray's feelings and returned to his native Switzerland. This rejection disconcerted Gray and intensified the melancholy of his later years.

The isolation and disgrace that an open acknowledgment of homosexual feelings could bring are eloquently indicated by the case of William Beckford (1760-1844), who chose to live in self-imposed exile in Portugal between 1784 and 1794 after newspapers reported his impassioned affair with his younger cousin, William Courtenay. Although he gained recognition for his Gothic fiction, Beckford was not received in polite society after he returned to England in 1794. Utilizing his exceptional wealth, he built Fonthill Abbey on his estate in Hampshire, surrounded by high walls. This immense, fanciful pseudo-Gothic mansion effectively served as a sublime stage set for an alternative lifestyle. He decorated this home with an impressive collection of over five hundred paintings by Titian, Rembrandt, and other leading "Old Masters."

Challenging the prevailing homophobia of the time, leading moral philosopher and legal reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) strongly advocated the decriminalization of homosexual acts in several unpublished writings. In accord with his utilitarian principles, he insisted that the punishment of sodomy was irrational and that it caused much unnecessary suffering. Although Bentham's extensive writings on homosexuality remained largely unknown until the later nineteenth century, they provide a notable precedent to protest writings of the twentieth century.

Queer Perspectives on the Lives of Women in Britain during the Eighteenth Century

Emma Donoghue has proposed that many eighteenth-century texts demonstrate an awareness of lifestyles that would be classified today as lesbian or bisexual.

Several medical and archaeological texts provided a pseudoscientific explanation for sexual acts between women, claiming that these were characteristic of female hermaphrodites. *A Treatise on Hermaphrodites* (1718, attributed to Giles Jacob) posited that a female hermaphrodite could give a woman great sexual satisfaction through the skillful use of her "member."

In her popular *Midwives Book* (first published in 1671; reprinted four times by 1725), Jane Sharp argued that most women regarded as hermaphrodites simply had enlarged clitorises, but she suggested that they had a propensity to sexual deviance. In 1741, Dr. James Parsons recommended that an enlarged clitoris be reduced surgically if it provoked "unnatural lust."

Although most historians have maintained that romantic friendships between eighteenth-century women were chaste, Donoghue and other recent queer historians have suggested that these relationships may have had sexual aspects. Among the numerous writers who celebrated romantic friendships, Elizabeth Hands is particularly interesting because her working-class origins gave her a distinctive perspective.

Undoubtedly, the most famous female partners of the era were Eleanor Butler (1737-1829) and Sarah Ponsonby (1755-1831), known as the Ladies of Llangollen. Although their families initially tried to suppress their relationship, they were allowed to settle, by 1780, in a small house, Plas Newydd, in Llangollen Vale, Wales, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Despite the fact that they are known to have shared a bed, scholars continue to debate whether they had a physical relationship. Their idiosyncratic lifestyle was revealed in their attire, a combination of male and female clothing.

Eighteenth-century prison lists in London contain numerous references to working-class women arrested for marrying other women. Throughout the century, magazine articles about "female husbands" attest to a popular fascination with this phenomenon. The series published in *London Chronicle* in 1755 presented the theme of two female partners with an unusual degree of sympathy.

In a bestselling pamphlet entitled *Female Husband*, published anonymously in November 1746, Henry Fielding presented a highly fictionalized account of the experiences of Mary Hamilton, arrested two months earlier for attempting to dupe other women into marriage. Although Fielding emphasized the sincerity of Hamilton's love for other women, he endorsed the severe punishments that she received, including a series of four public whippings that permanently scarred her flesh.

Female cross-dressing enjoyed great popularity on the stage; women played "breeches parts" in approximately one-fourth of the plays produced in Britain during the eighteenth century. One of the best-known actresses specializing in these roles, Charlotte Charke (1713-1766), claimed that she had worked at various male occupations before taking up acting.

Enforcement of Sexual Laws in the Early Nineteenth Century

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was renewed commitment to enforce the law against sodomy rigorously and to secure severe penalties for homosexual acts. Scholars have speculated upon the reasons for the harsh enforcement of the law, but they have not reached a consensus. Among the factors most often cited is the increasingly imperialistic disposition of British society, which encouraged suppression of any types of behavior (such as displays of affection) that might be identified as feminine or weak. It is interesting that the change in enforcement patterns occurred simultaneously with the growth of institutions, such as boarding schools and clubs, that fostered male bonding.

By 1810, eighty percent of men convicted of sodomy were executed, compared with fewer than fifteen percent of those found guilty of other capital offenses, including murder. Police began to employ undercover agents in a systematic effort to locate and entrap homosexuals, and they made raids on establishments frequented by these men.

For example, in 1810, the police arrested almost thirty men in a raid of the White Swan (nicknamed the Vere Street Club), a popular London tavern that functioned as a meeting place for sexual outsiders, primarily men who engaged in same-sex sexual activities, but also female sex workers and their clients. At the conclusion of the widely reported trial, six men were found guilty of "attempted sodomy," a charge used for homosexual acts when penetration could not be established.

All of those convicted were imprisoned for terms of one to three years and forced to stand in the pillory at the Haymarket. Lamenting that these men could not be hanged, newspapers encouraged readers to hurl objects at them while they stood in the pillory. Referring to another case in September 1810, the *General Evening Post* celebrated the deaths of several sodomites from similar mistreatment.

The military regarded sodomy as a more serious crime than mutiny or desertion. In 1811, members of the royal family were among the many witnesses of the elaborately staged execution of Ensign John Hepburn and drummer Thomas White, convicted of sodomy. After a highly publicized naval scandal, four crew members of the *Africaine* were hanged in February 1816 for this crime. If penetration could not be proven, sailors suspected of homosexual acts were routinely punished by 1,000 lashes.

Responding to public outrage about the difficulty of imposing the death penalty on homosexuals, Home Secretary Robert Peel in 1826 proposed that the requirements for evidence in the law against sodomy be modified. In accord with his ideas, the Offenses against the Person Act of 1828 stated that it was not necessary to prove internal emission and that "carnal knowledge" would be established simply if anal penetration had been attempted.

However, the death penalty was not applied after the 1830s in sodomy cases. In 1861, the sodomy law for England and Wales was revised, and the death penalty was replaced by prison sentences, ranging from a minimum of ten years to life.

Byron

Lord George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) embodied the Romantic ideal of the courageous and handsome hero. Despite the adulation he received, he abandoned his native country because he could not abide the sexual constraints that dominated British society of his era.

With the exception of a small group of intimate friends, his contemporaries did not realize that he was bisexual and that his homosexual relationships often predominated over his heterosexual commitments. While at school, Byron developed strong attachments to other students, notably John Edleston, to whom he dedicated "Cornelian" and other poems. Distressed by Edleston's death, he commemorated his friend in "To Thyrsa" (1811), though he disguised the identity of the subject by utilizing female pronouns.

On his first trip to Greece in 1809, Byron enjoyed numerous homosexual liaisons and established an intense relationship with Nicolo Giraud, whom he made his heir when he returned home.

The initial publication of *Childe Harold* in 1812 established Byron's reputation as a poet, and he was immediately lionized by British society. Thereupon, he undertook a series of tumultuous affairs with women, including Lady Caroline Lamb and his married half-sister, Annabella Leigh. In 1815, he married Anna Milbanke, who sought a separation from him in less than year. Compounding the scandal produced by the collapse of the marriage, Lady Caroline spread rumors about Byron's homosexuality.

Shunned by society and publicly insulted, Byron left England permanently in April 1816. Settling in Venice in 1819, he wrote *Don Juan*, which satirized British prudery. In 1823, he traveled to Greece, where he met and fell deeply in love with the fifteen-year-old Lukas Chalandrousanos. In poems written during the final months of his life, Byron lamented the circumstance that the person whom he loved did not reciprocate his feelings, and he declared his intention to devote his energies to the liberation of Greece. Contracting a fever on Missolonghi, Byron died there in 1824.

Cambridge Apostles

Founded in 1820, the Cambridge Conversazione Society provided an intellectual and social refuge from the pervasive homophobia of nineteenth-century Britain. Founded by twelve evangelical students, the secret society generally has been known by the nickname Cambridge Apostles.

Initially, the society was intended to foster discussion of topics that were overlooked by the Cambridge curriculum, and it quickly became an important forum for the consideration of progressive and controversial ideas. Meetings involved presentation of a paper, followed by intensive discussion.

Members, who were selected by secret ballot, included many individuals who went on to make significant contributions in a wide range of fields, including literature, politics, sciences, and economics. Among the numerous gay members of the organization during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were Oscar Browning, Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, John Maynard Keynes, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

The society was not explicitly or solely homosexual, but it created an environment in which homoeroticism could flourish for a variety of reasons. Until 1970, the organization excluded women. The goals and activities of the society often were described in terms derived from Plato; thus, the emotional and

intellectual fellowship of the members was characterized as "Higher Sodomy." Within the rarefied environment of the society, many members came to believe that they possessed a superior morality, distinct from that of the rest of British society. This belief, combined with the intimacy of the society, could encourage sexual experimentation among the members.

Because proceedings of the meetings were kept secret, members felt empowered to present papers on homosexual love and other potentially controversial themes. Among the members who are known to have presented notable essays defending same-sex love were Arthur Hallam (1831), J. M. E. McTaggart (1885), and Lytton Strachey (1901, 1904).

The election of Strachey to the society has been credited with initiating an era of open, even aggressive homosexuality in the society. Strachey, Forster, and Keynes were among the numerous Apostles who became part of the Bloomsbury circle, which shared the society's commitment to friendship, honesty, and intellectual inquiry.

Between 1979 and 1982, it was revealed that Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, and several other Apostles had been members of a Communist spy ring. In the ensuing scandal, the Apostles were denounced as a sort of homosexual mafia. Nevertheless, the society is still in existence, although little is known about its current activities.

Legal Developments in the Later Nineteenth Century

In the intensely homophobic atmosphere of the nineteenth century, any indications of deviance from heterosexist gender expression or sexual behavior could lead to police harassment and even an indictment for sodomy. On the basis of their cross-dressing, Ernest Boulton and Frederick William Park, for example, were arrested in 1870 for sodomy. Denied bail because they supposedly constituted a threat to society, they were held in jail for several months before finally being tried in May 1871. Although the prosecution attempted to utilize affectionate letters to other men as "evidence," they were unable to establish that Boulton and Park committed any homosexual acts.

The scope of the law regarding homosexual acts was significantly expanded through Section II of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, usually called the "Labouchère amendment." In a late night session in Parliament on August 6, Henry Labouchère (1831-1912) proposed this addendum to the Act, which was otherwise concerned with the suppression of prostitution by young girls.

According to his proposal, any act of "gross indecency," committed in public or private between two males of any age, would be subject to punishment by imprisonment for one year with or without hard labor. On the following day, Sir Henry James, the Attorney General, accepted the amendment but extended imprisonment to two years. Passed with virtually no discussion, the Labouchère amendment greatly worsened the legal situation of homosexual men in Britain because it made practically any expression of same-sex desire illegal. Further, the amendment established the principle that homosexuals did not have a right to full private enjoyment of their own residence.

Intensifying the legal and social penalties that made it so difficult to lead an openly homosexual life, the amendment also helped to strengthen the already flourishing market for prostitution. By the mid-nineteenth century, court records indicate the spread of an underground homosexual subculture in major cities, which apparently included brothels in London and Dublin. Most of the homosexual sex trade involved working-class youths and guardsmen, who casually engaged in sex for money.

Serving to impress the public with the supposed gravity of the homosexual sex trade was the Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889-90, which concerned a male brothel, patronized by aristocrats and other leading

citizens. In the course of an investigation of theft at the Central Telegraph Office, police learned that telegraph boys had been earning extra money by providing occasional services at the house. The man who ran the house and several of the youths in his employ were imprisoned, but the police made little attempt to pursue the clients, who included such distinguished aristocrats as Lord Arthur Somerset, equerry to the Prince of Wales. The scandal created the impression of a conspiracy of upper-class homosexuals who used their status to corrupt unwary working-class youth.

Responding to public outcry about this supposed exploitation, the 1898 Vagrancy Act mandated that any man who solicited another for "immoral purposes" was deemed a vagabond. Although, in theory the law also applied to solicitation on behalf of female sex workers, it was in reality enforced almost exclusively against homosexual men.

Medical and Humanistic Evaluations of Homosexuality

Occurring simultaneously with the rigorous legal supervision of homosexual acts, the systematic medical categorization of sexual deviants established the principle that homosexuality, generally conceived as an inversion of biological gender, was characteristic of a specific class of individual. Continental medical scientists and theorists, such as Auguste Ambroise Tardieu (1818-1879), argued that "degenerates" would be more effectively reformed by medical treatment than legally sanctioned punishment. In his 1870 trial, the defense argued that Henry Park could not be held responsible for actions because of the "moral imbecility" resulting from his degenerate medical condition. As a result, Park was acquitted by the jury, despite exceptionally detailed evidence of anal intercourse.

By the 1880s, prominent British physicians were publishing articles in scientific journals, speculating upon the best medical cures for sexual perversion. In his *Memoirs*, John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) discussed the varied treatments offered to him, which ranged from cauterization of the urethra to cohabitation with a woman. Ironically, medical classification was among the factors that contributed to the emergence of a distinctive homosexual subculture because it fostered among men who engaged in homosexual acts a perception that they constituted a distinctive class of like-minded individuals.

Symonds, who survived the attempts to cure him, became one of the most important early historians of male homosexuality. In the privately printed *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891), he explicitly reviewed a wide range of historical and cultural issues relevant to homosexuality. In publicly printed works, including the seven-volume *Renaissance in Italy* (1875-1886), he employed coded language but made clear his convictions that love of men for other men had been an important aspect of many periods of European cultural history.

Near the end of his life, Symonds had begun working with pioneering sexologist and writer Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) on *Sexual Inversion*, conceived as a systematic psychological and historical analysis of homosexuality. In 1897, the publication of the first volume, with excerpts from Symonds's writings, led to a legal suit by the executors of his estate. In 1898, the decision in the case brought against the bookseller who sold the revised edition (with Symonds's contributions omitted) made it illegal to sell *Sexual Inversion* in the United Kingdom. Later volumes in the series were published in the United States. Although heterosexual, Ellis strongly supported homosexual rights; he had an "open marriage" with a woman who was predominantly lesbian.

A political visionary and social reformer, Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) linked his strong advocacy of homosexual rights with other causes to which he was dedicated, including socialism and feminism. Issued in 1894, his *Homogenic Love* was the first emphatic defense of homosexuality by a British author to be published in the United Kingdom. Defying the fear generated by the Wilde trials of 1895, he published another tract defending homosexual rights in 1897.

Carpenter unified his political and personal ideals in his impassioned relationship with his partner, George Merrill, a younger working-class man whom he initially encountered on a train in the winter of 1889-1890. Against the advice of their friends and associates, Merrill moved into Carpenter's house in 1898, and they lived happily together until Carpenter's death.

Emergence of a Male Homosexual Subculture in the Nineteenth Century

At the end of the nineteenth century, most homosexual men, including such prominent figures as Symonds and Oscar Wilde, were married to women. The very real possibility of arrest encouraged furtiveness, and most homosexual encounters in parks, public latrines, and other cruising areas remained anonymous. Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, a significant number of homosexual men established a coterie of like-minded associates, although very few were able to lead openly homosexual lives, as realized by Merrill and Carpenter.

The development of a supportive, but secretive, working-class homosexual subculture was manifested in the emergence by the late nineteenth century of a specific homosexual slang, known as Polari. Ultimately derived from slang of the theatrical and circus worlds and also incorporating Old English and foreign words, Polari provided a means for men to recognize one another and to discuss details of their personal lives without being understood by others. As is the case with any living language, Polari evolved, but many words lasted over time, including "troll" (take a walk), "vada" (look), "omi" (man), and "omi-palone" (gay man). Polari continued to be spoken in homosexual circles until the 1960s, when it largely fell out of use, although there are indications of a revival among younger queer men.

In upper-class British circles at the end of the nineteenth century, homosexuality was often embodied in the exquisitely refined figure of the dandy, associated with the Aesthetic movement. William Rothenstein's portrait of Charles Conder (1892, The Toledo [Ohio] Museum of Art), his intimate friend (and likely partner), is an archetypal image of the dandy; clad in long grey coat and tall top hat, Conder is depicted in the midst of an elegant spiral that evokes the pirouette. Although not visible in this portrait, a green carnation was often worn in the lapel by dandies, as a coded affirmation of sexual preference.

Oscar Wilde

In both his persona and his writings, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) helped to create wide public fascination with the dandy.

While at Oxford between 1874 and 1878, where he was strongly influenced by aesthetic theorist Walter Pater, Wilde had become associated with the Oxford Movement, a group of men who sought to infuse the Anglican Church with the rich ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church and who emphasized the importance of art. Having absorbed a wide variety of theories about art, he sought to establish himself in London as an arbiter of advanced taste. Both his exquisitely refined persona and his reviews on current art exhibitions quickly established Wilde's reputation.

Satirized by Gilbert and Sullivan in *Patience*, he was invited in 1881 to tour North America in conjunction with performances of that operetta. During his tour in America in 1882, he gained increasing confidence as a speaker, and he returned to England as an international celebrity. In his lectures in America, he devised highly original aesthetic ideas and largely freed himself from dependence on earlier theorists.

After returning to England, Wilde began a two-year courtship of Constance Lloyd, whom he married in 1884. Over the next two years, the couple produced two sons. Between 1884 and 1888, Wilde was supported largely by his wife's income as he undertook a career as a journalist, assuming editorship of *The Lady's World* in 1887.

The publication in 1888 of *The Happy Prince*, a collection of fairy tales, secured his literary reputation, and, during the next seven years, he produced a variety of significant and popular works, including the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890); a political treatise, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*; a collection of dialogues and anecdotes, *Intentions* (1891); two collections of short stories; and five plays (among them *Lady Windermere's Fan* [1892], and *A Woman of No Importance* [1893]).

His final play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, was first produced shortly before the trials that were to change his life. With camp humor, this play mocks the prejudices of British society and subtly evokes the double life of the homosexual through the "Bunburying" of the central character. Although not explicitly stated, the homosexual theme of the play undoubtedly was recognized by the many men who sported green carnations in their lapels at the premiere.

Wilde's downfall was the result of his association with Lord Alfred Douglas, with whom he had been involved since mid-1891. Although Douglas probably introduced Wilde to the homosexual subculture of London, his father, the Marquis of Queensbury, blamed Wilde for his son's decadence. On February 28, 1895, Queensbury delivered to Wilde at his club an insulting note, accusing him of being a sodomite. Encouraged by Douglas, Wilde brought a libel charge against Queensbury on March 1, and the trial for this began on April 3. Two days later, the jury acquitted Queensbury.

Also on April 5, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Wilde on charges of gross indecency, as result of information that had come to light at the Queensbury trial. Wilde's first trial ended on April 26 without a decisive verdict, and many of Wilde's associates encouraged him to flee the country before he could be retried. Encouraged by Douglas and his mother, he became convinced he would be acquitted in the second trial. However, Wilde's hopes were misplaced, and he was convicted and sentenced to the maximum penalty of two years hard labor on May 25.

Throughout both trials, newspapers eagerly reported salacious details of testimony concerning prostitution and other aspects of the homosexual subculture in which Wilde and other Londoners participated. At the conclusion of the second trial, newspapers praised the verdict as a warning to those who would lead British youth astray. Wilde's name became anathema, and countless sermons were preached against him during the next several years in both Britain and America.

Because Wilde had been such a popular and prominent figure, his conviction created a climate of great fear among homosexual men, many of whom fled England for more tolerant climes. Following his trial, gay men distanced themselves from the dandy subculture and sought to adopt more conventional masculine public images. Ironically, the renewed awareness of the dangers posed by expressions of homosexual desire probably increased the market for male prostitution and other aspects of the hidden subculture that had provoked so much scandal at the trial. Yet, despite the immediate devastating impact of the trials, shock and resentment at the decision ultimately may have helped foster the emergence of a homosexual identity in opposition to mainstream values, as Havelock Ellis recognized at the time.

Lives of Queer Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain

The pervasive ideology of separate spheres for both men and women made it feasible for some women to maintain close relationships with other women without threatening patriarchal authority. Yet, although women's interactions were not subject to the types of legal penalties applied to men, increasing efforts were made to regulate them towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Many handbooks, offering advice to middle-class women, stressed that women should not become absorbed in one another to the exclusion of their family responsibilities and that they should avoid unbecoming physical expressions of feeling for one another.

As Martha Vicinus has shown, romantic "crushes," called "raves," permeated English boarding schools and may have helped to establish lifelong patterns for many women. Generally, the "raves" developed in ways that reinforced institutional hierarchies: younger girls falling in love with older ones; students adoring teachers; and teachers focusing upon the headmistress. Conforming to the emphasis placed upon moral responsibility, individuals of higher status (that is, older students and teachers) were encouraged to exploit the crushes as a means to inspire commitment to higher spiritual ideals. Yet, while sexual feelings probably were sublimated in most cases, there are indications that they sometimes were given physical expression.

For economic and various other reasons, nineteenth-century women who felt committed to one another generally found it difficult to establish households together, but private papers reveal longings for alternative possibilities. Thus, for example, in over 500 letters to her lifelong friend Ellen Nussey, Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) lamented that they could not live together and cherish one another forever. However, in some of her letters, she claimed that she found consolation by focusing upon religious beliefs condemning "unnatural love."

Written in code to protect them from prying eyes, the diaries of Anne Lister (1791-1840) feature an unusually explicit treatment of sexual adventures. By 1832, when she established a partnership with a wealthy heiress, Lister had adopted a male persona, "Gentleman Jack."

Many of the women involved in the feminist movement towards the end of the nineteenth century found encouragement for their political endeavors in close relationships with other women. For instance, Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904), who campaigned tirelessly for women's rights as a writer, educator, and political activist, lived for over thirty years with Welsh painter Mary Lloyd (d. between 1894 and 1898).

By the end of the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom, gay male and (to a much lesser extent) lesbian subcultures had become visible. A consequence of this new visibility was that many expressions of same-sex affection that had been regarded as benign were now viewed with suspicion. At the same time, however, the new self-consciousness of sexual identity gave impetus to a movement toward liberation that, despite many setbacks, would mature in the twentieth century.

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