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BEFORE HETEROSEXUALITY

Looking Backward

If the word *heterosexual* did not exist in the United States until 1892, how did Americans talk and think about, and socially organize the sexes' differences and their sexuality? Did they employ equivalent terms, or wield an altogether different language? Is it possible that, before the debut of the term *heterosexual,* nineteenth-century Americans arranged sex-differences, eroticism, and reproduction in ways substantially different from the way we do? Dare we imagine that they constituted a qualitatively distinct sexual system—a society not appropriately described by our modern term *heterosexual*?

From the present, looking back on past eras before the use of the term *heterosexual,* we can, of course, find well-documented examples of different-sex erotic acts and emotions. Yet, from the standpoint of those who lived, loved, and lusted in the past, those same acts and emotions may not have referred in any essential way to the same combination of sex

and gender difference and eroticism that we call heterosexuality. Ways of ordering the sexes, genders, and sexualities have varied radically. That variation challenges our usual assumption that an unchanging, essential heterosexuality takes qualitatively different historical forms. The word *heterosexual,* I propose, itself signifies one timebound historical form—one historically specific way of organizing the sexes and their pleasures.

EARTHLY LOVE AND HEAVENLY LOVE

One example of a nonheterosexual society is ancient Greece, as analyzed by the late French historian Michel Foucault, a discussion that includes his most explicit, extensive comments on heterosexuality.[1]

Foucault repeatedly warns present-day readers of the danger of projecting our heterosexual and homosexual categories on the past. The specific past he refers to is ancient Greece, as represented in those texts that discuss free men's problematic, pleasurable intimacies with women and with boys.

In a passage appraising a famous speech by Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium,* Foucault says that one finds there

> a theory of two loves, the second of which—Urania, the heavenly love—is directed [by free men] exclusively to boys. But the distinction that is made *is not between a heterosexual love and a homosexual love* [emphasis added]. Pausanias draws the dividing line between "the love which the baser sort of men feel"—its object is both women and boys, it only looks to the act itself (*to diaprattesthai*)—and the more ancient, nobler, and more reasonable love that is drawn to what has the most vigor and intelligence, which obviously can only mean [for free men] the male sex.[2]

Pausanias, Foucault stresses, employed a hierarchical distinction between free men's lower, *earthly love,* focused on

acts, and free men's higher, *heavenly love,* defined by a feeling for the beauty of boys, a superior object. That distinction between earthly and heavenly love is substantially different from our contrast between heterosexual and homosexual.

Discussing ancient Greek society, Foucault generalizes, "The notion of homosexuality is plainly inadequate as a means of referring to an experience, forms of valuation, and a system of categorization so different from ours." Our homosexual/heterosexual polarity does not match these ancient Greek men's views. Our distinction is based on sexed difference and sexuality:

> The Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices, two radically different types of behavior. The dividing lines did not follow that kind of boundary.[3]

According to Foucault, ancient Greek writers might sometimes recognize that one man's inclinations usually favored women, another man's, boys. But those emotional tendencies were not embedded within the same social organization of sexed difference and eroticism that gives rise to our own heterosexual/homosexual pair. Neither Greek men's inclination for women, nor their desire for boys, was any "more likely than the other, and the two could easily coexist in the same individual."[4] He asks:

> Were the Greeks bisexual then? Yes, if we mean by this that a Greek [free man] could, simultaneously or in turn, be enamored by a boy or a girl. . . . But if we wish to turn our attention to the way in which they conceived of this dual practice, we need to take note of the fact that they did not recognize two kinds of "desire," two different or competing "drives," each claiming a share of men's hearts or appetites. We can talk about their "bisexuality," thinking of the

> free choice they allowed themselves between the two sexes, but for them this option was not referred to a dual, ambivalent, and "bisexual" structure of desire. To their way of thinking, what made it possible to desire a man or a woman was simply the appetite that nature had implanted in man's heart for "beautiful" human beings, whatever their sex. . . .[5]

We can take a retrospective look at the ancestry of our own society's sexual terms and organization—their "genealogy," Foucault calls it. But we should not, he suggests, employ our terms *bisexuality, homosexuality,* and *heterosexuality,* in a way to suggest that these were the concepts past subjects used.

Foucault fears his readers' projection on the past of their own society's sexual categories and arrangements because such projections unconsciously and unjustifiably affirm the *similarity* of present and past. His readers will thereby be prevented from perceiving *dissimilarity* and *change*—the historically specific character of ancient prescriptions about free men's pleasure, and the historically particular social organization of eroticism that gave rise to them.

The French historian's sexual relativity theory points us to a basic "presentist" bias in readers' and scholars' vision of sexualities and pleasures past—that is, we necessarily view them from a particular position in the present.

It's significant that Foucault thought it necessary to provide even fairly sophisticated, intellectual readers with repeated cautions against anachronistic projections—a well-known historical blunder.[6] His and others' reiterated warnings against anachronism in sexual history analysis testify not so much to the primitive level of sex history interpreters, or their readers, as to the continuing, enormous power of our present dominant concepts of sexuality. Without realizing it, usually, we are all deeply embedded in a living, institutionalized heterosexual/homosexual distinction.

MAXIMIZED PROCREATION AND SODOMITICAL SIN

For a second example of a society not ordered along heterosexual lines we can turn to a culture nearer home—the New England colonies in the years 1607 to 1740.[7]

In these formative years, the New England organization of the sexes and their erotic activity was dominated by a reproductive imperative. These fragile, undeveloped agricultural economies were desperate to increase their numbers, and their labor force. So the early colonial mode of procreation was structured to optimize the production of New Englanders. The New England settlers married earlier than Old Englanders, and their ordering of maximized reproduction created a colonial birth rate higher than in England or Europe at the time.

This intensive populating was incited by religious exhortations to multiply, and by legal retributions for acts thought to interfere with procreation (such as sodomy, bestiality, and masturbation) or the dominant reproductive order (such as adultery). In early colonial Boston, after confessing to adultery with twelve men, the eighteen-year-old Mary Latham was hanged with one of her lovers. At least two other early New Englanders were hanged for extramarital acts, thereby serving, according to one historian, "as graphic reminders" of the punishment that could befall those "violating the sexual exclusivity" of marriage. Although all the early New England colonies prescribed death for adultery, very few executions actually occurred under these statutes. (Perhaps, since the crime was "one of the most common," the death penalty would have done more to disrupt the procreative economy than to support it.) But more than three hundred women and men found guilty of adultery in early New England were seriously punished with twenty to thirty-nine lashes. (A married man was severely punished only if he committed adultery with a woman pledged or married to another man. An engaged or married woman was considered to have committed adultery whatever the marital status of her partner.)[8]

Sodomy should be punished by death, declared the Reverend John Rayner, even though it might not involve the same "degree of sinning against the family and posterity" as some other "capital sins of uncleanness." William Plaine deserved death for sodomy in England, and for inciting the youth of Guilford, in the New Haven Colony, to "masturbations," John Winthrop explained. For Plaine's crimes frustrated the marriage ordinance and hindered "the generation of mankind."[9]

The death penalty for sodomy prevailing in all the colonies, and the public execution of a few men for this crime, violently signified the profound sinfulness of any eros thought hostile to reproduction. The operative contrast in this society was between fruitfulness and barrenness, not between different-sex and same-sex eroticism.

Women and men were constituted within this mode of procreation as essentially different and unequal. Specifically, the procreative man was constructed as seminal, a seed source. The procreative woman was constituted as seed holder and ripener, a relatively "weaker vessel." For a man to "waste his seed" in nonprocreative, pleasurable acts was to squander a precious, limited procreative resource, as crucial to community survival as the crops the colonists planted in the earth. Although women were perceived to have "seed," a woman's erotic acts with another woman were not apparently thought of as wasting it, or as squandering her seed-ripening ability. So these were lesser violations of the procreative order.

Men and women were, however, regarded as equal in lust. As the Reverend Thomas Shepard sermonized: "Every natural man and woman is born full of sin," their hearts brimming with "atheism, sodomy, blasphemy, murder, whoredom, adultery, witchcraft, [and] buggery. . . ." As a universal temptation, not a minority impulse, a man's erotic desire for another man did not constitute him as a particular kind of person, a buggerer or sodomite.[10] Individuals might lust consistently toward one sex or another and be recognized, sometimes, as so lusting. But this society did not give rise to a subject defined

essentially by an attraction to a same sex or an appetite for a different sex.

Within the early New England organization of pleasure, carnal desire commonly included the mutual lust of man and woman and the occasional lust of man for man. A dominant colonial figure of speech opposed lust for an earthly "creature" to love for an other-worldly God. In these colonies, erotic desire for members of a same sex was not constructed as deviant because erotic desire for a different sex was not construed as a norm. Even within marriage, no other-sex erotic object was completely legitimate, in and of itself.

In this New England, the human body's capacity to function as means of earthly pleasure represented a deeply problematic distraction from a heavenly God, a diversion to which men's and women's bodies were equally prone. Within New England's dominant mode of procreation the body's "private parts" were officially constituted as generative organs, not as hetero pleasure tools.

In a sermon on the "sins of Sodom," the Reverend Samuel Danforth linked "sodomy" and idleness. Using energy in reproductive acts, an important form of production, kept one from wasting energy in unproductive sin. In contrast, since the first quarter of the twentieth century, our society's dominant order of different-sex pleasure has encouraged the use of energy in a variety of heteroerotic activities. This stimulation of hetero pleasures completely apart from procreation constructs a heterosexuality increasingly congruent with homosexuality. In early New England, sodomy stood as perverse paradigm of energy wasted in unproductive pleasure.

The reproductive and erotic acts of New England's women and men were among those productive activities thought of as fundamentally affecting the community's labor force, its security and survival. In contrast, in the twentieth century, the erotic activity of women and men was officially located in the realm of private life, in the separate sphere of dating, courtship, romantic love, marriage, domesticity and family. Until Kate Millett and other feminists questioned this

ideological separation of the sexual and political spheres, heterosexuality was thought to inhabit a private realm of intimacy distinct from the often alienated public world of work.

In early New England the eroticism of women and men was publicly linked to sodomy and bestiality in a realm of tempting sinful pleasures. Colonial lust was located in an arena of judgments, an avowedly moral universe. Heterosexuality is located, supposedly, in the realm of nature, biology, hormones, and genes—a matter of physiological fact, a truth of the flesh. Only secretly is heterosexuality a value and a norm, a matter of morality and taste, of politics and power.

The "traditional values" of early colonial New England, its ordering of the sexes, their eroticism, and their reproduction, provides a nice, quintessentially American example of a society not dominated by a heterosexual/homosexual distinction.

THE EARLY-NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORGANIZATION OF TRUE LOVE

Nineteenth-century America, from about 1820 to 1850, is a third society not organized according to our heterosexual law. Neither, it turns out, was it the prudish society of stereotype. The evidence offered recently by historians challenges the common notion of nineteenth-century middle-class society as sexually repressed. The rise of the pro-heterosexual principle can't be explained, then, simply as a sharp break with an antisexual Victorian past. Though recent historians don't always distinguish adequately between early and late nineteenth-century developments, their analyses can help us understand the social origins of the heterosexual as a historically specific term and relationship.

In early-nineteenth-century America, I'll argue, the urban middle class was still struggling to distinguish itself from the supposedly decadent upper orders and supposedly sensual

lower orders. The middling sort claimed sexual purity as a major distinguishing characteristic. No middle-class sexual ethic then validated different-sex lust apart from men's and women's love and reproduction. Only in the late nineteenth century did the middle class achieve the power and stability that freed it to publicly affirm, in the name of nature, its own "heterosexuality." The making of the middle class and the invention of heterosexuality went hand in hand.[11]

Ellen Rothman, in her *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America,* contests the antisexual Victorian stereotype.[12] She analyzes the diaries, love letters, and reminiscences of 350 white, Protestant, middle-class American women and men living in the settled areas of the North who came of courting age between 1770 and 1920. She concludes that courting couples in the early nineteenth century defined "romantic love so that it included sexual attraction but excluded coitus." That particular courtship custom she names the "invention of petting."[13] This common courting convention, she maintains, allowed the middle class quite a lot of private erotic expression short of intercourse. She stresses: "Couples courting in the 1820s and 1830s were comfortable with a wide range of sexually expressive behavior."[14]

In her book *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America,* Karen Lystra also marshals lots of sexy verbal intercourse from nineteenth-century love letters, arguing forcefully against the twentieth-century stereotype of the Victorians. She analyzes the intimate letters of one hundred middle-class and upper-class white couples, and sexual-advice literature of the 1830s through the 1890s.[15] She demonstrates that, under the powerful legitimizing influence of "love," middle- and upper-class women and men, in their *private* behavior and conversations with each other, affirmed a wide range of erotic feelings and activities—though not usually intercourse before marriage.

Summing up the Victorians' "approval of sex when associated with love," Lystra declares,

> The highest values of individual expression and autonomous self-hood were heaped upon the erotic. Victorians did not denigrate sex; they guarded it.[16]

She emphasizes, "Sex had a place of honor and prominence in Victorian culture."[17] She reiterates: "Victorians reveled in the physicality of sex when they believed that the flesh was an expression of the spirit."[18] The idea of eroticism as "a romantically inspired religious experience, a sacrament of love" was, she says, "perhaps the most culturally significant meaning attached to Victorian sexuality."[19] Her sex-positive view of the Victorians is also borne out, she claims, by research in more than fifty nineteenth-century advice books. Mainstream advisers of that day, she claims, encouraged an active eroticism *as an expression of love.*[20]

For a small group of sexual enthusiasts, the radicals of their day, true love was a free love. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman's *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* describes free lovers daringly justifying erotic expression *even outside of marriage.*[21] Free lovers challenged the respectable idea that legal matrimony was necessary to license the erotic intercourse of the sexes. Free love, free lovers argued—not the church, not the state—freely legitimated conjugal unions. Arch-romantics that they were, however, free lovers did not advocate eros unaccompanied by love. Just as this era's mainstream strongly condemned sensuality detached from legal matrimony and love, so its free lovers condemned sensuality detached from romance.[22]

Steven Seidman, a historically oriented sociologist, qualifies somewhat the revisionist historians' view of nineteenth-century eroticism. A note in his own study, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830–1980,* rejects Lystra's argument that the eroticism of Victorian women and men was unambiguously legitimated as symbol of love.[23] Although "all" nineteenth-century sexual advisors, Seidman admits,

> acknowledged the beneficial role of sex in marriage, love was construed as essentially spiritual. Sex, at best, symbolized a spiritual union or functioned as a

> spiritual act. *In none of these discourses . . . was eroticism ever framed as essential to the meaning of intimacy or as a basis of love* [emphasis added].

Lystra's stress on the Victorians' active appreciation of eroticism is, he thinks, "grossly overstated."[24]

Certainly, an eroticism needing to be sanctified by love was originally unhallowed. Among middle-class Victorians, "sensuality" was a dirty word. Lystra occasionally admits this: "Sex was wholeheartedly approved as an act of love and wholeheartedly condemned by the Victorian mainstream when bodily pleasures were not privileged acts of self-disclosure"—that is, when erotic pleasure was not the expression of love.[25] Lust *not* sanctified by love, she concedes here, was utterly condemned.[26] Her interpretation of nineteenth-century sensuality as legitimized by love does dispel the usual stereotype, though she constructs a counter-myth of erotic Victorians.

In his own book, Seidman usefully stresses the historically specific character of the heterosexual/homosexual opposition. During most of the nineteenth century, he says, "the term *heterosexuality* and what we today take as its natural antithesis, *homosexuality,* were absent" from discourses on gender and eroticism.[27] The heterosexual and homosexual were not thought of "as mutually exclusive categories of desire, identity and love."[28] Only in the early twentieth century did "the concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality" emerge "as the master categories of a sexual regime that defined the individual's sexual and personal identity and normatively regulated intimate desire and behavior."[29]

As noted, the revisionist historians of nineteenth-century American sexuality typically fail to distinguish carefully between early and late developments. A closer look at early-nineteenth-century society clarifies its difference from that late-nineteenth-century order which gave rise to the heterosexual category.

The early nineteenth century prescribed particular ideals

of manhood and womanhood, founding a cult of the true man and true woman. The "Cult of True Womanhood" is said by historian Barbara Welter to mandate "purity"—meaning asexuality—for respectable, middle-class women.[30] More recent historians contest this interpretation of "purity." Karen Lystra, for example, quotes numbers of letters in which women's and men's erotic expression is referred to as "pure" by association—that is, by lust's link with "love." Purifying lust was, in fact, an important function of the middle-class true-love ideal. In this view, the special purity claimed for this era's true women referred not to asexuality but to middle-class women's better control than men over their carnal impulses, often conceived of as weaker than men's. True men, thought to live closer to carnality, and in less control of it, ideally aspired to the same rational regulation of concupiscence as did respectable true women.[31]

The ideal of true men and true women was closely linked to another term, "true love," used repeatedly in this era. Holding strictly to true love was an important way in which the middle class distinguished itself from the allegedly promiscuous upper class and animalistic lower class. Those lust-ridden lower classes included a supposedly vicious foreign element (often Irish, Italian, and Asian) and a supposedly sensual dark-skinned racial group shipped to America from Africa as slaves.[32]

True love was a hierarchical system, topped by an intense spiritual feeling powerful enough to justify marriage, reproduction, and an otherwise unhallowed sensuality. The reigning sexual standard distinguished, not between different- and same-sex eroticism, but between true love and false love—a feeling not sufficiently deep, permanent, and serious enough to justify the usual sensual courtship practices, or the usual well-nigh immutable marriage.

Given the powerful legitimating influence of true love, many of the letter writers quoted by Lystra, Rothman, and the other revisionists spend much energy trying to prove the true-

ness of their love. Assuring one's beloved of love's truth was, in fact, a major function of these letters.[33]

In this era, the human body was thought of as directly constituting the true man and true woman, and their feelings. No distinction was made between biologically given sex and socially constructed masculinity and femininity. Under true love's dominion, the human body was perceived as means of love's expression. Under the early-nineteenth-century rule of reproduction (as in early New England), penis and vagina were means of procreation—"generative organs"—not pleasure parts. Only after marriage could they mesh as love parts.

Human energy, thought of as a closed and severely limited system subject to exhaustion, was to be used in work, in producing children, and in sustaining love and family, not wasted on unproductive, libidinous pleasures.

The location of love's labors, the site of engendering and procreating and feeling, was the sacred sanctum of early-nineteenth-century true love, the home of the true man and true woman. This temple of pure, spiritual love was threatened *from within* by the monster masturbator, that archetypal early Victorian cult figure of illicit-because-loveless, nonprocreative lust.[34]

The home front was threatened *from without* by the female prostitute, another archetypal figure of lust divorced from love. (Men who slept with men for money do not seem to have been common, stock figures of the early- nineteenth-century middle-class imagination, probably because there weren't many of them, and they weren't thought of as a major threat to the love of men and women.)[35]

Only rarely was reference made to those other illicit erotic figures, the "sodomite" and "sapphist" (unlike the later "homosexual," these were persons with no "heterosexual" opposite, terms with no antonyms). State sodomy laws defined a particular, obscure act, referred to in a limited legalese, not a common criminal, medical, or psychological type of person, not a personal, self-defined "identity" and, until the nineteenth century's end, not a particular sexual group.[36]

Because the early-nineteenth-century middle-class mind was not commonly focused on dreams of legitimate different-sex pleasures, neither was it haunted by nightmares of perverted same-sex satisfactions. The sexual pervert did not emerge as an obsession of society's new-born, fledgling normal sexuals until the nineteenth century's last decades. Though the early-nineteenth century middle-class might be worried by erotic thoughts unhitched from love, this group was not yet preoccupied by an ideal of an essential, normal, different-sex sexuality.

In early-nineteenth-century America no universal eros was thought to constitute the fundamental nucleus of all passionate intimacies. In this pre-Freudian world, love did not imply eros. So respectable Victorian women and men referred often and explicitly to their "passionate" feelings with little thought that those intense emotions were a close relation of sensuality. Proper middle-class women might often speak of their intense "passion" for each other without feeling compromised by eroticism.[37] Unlike post-Freudian passion, early-nineteenth-century passion inhabited a universe separate and distinct from the hot-house world of sensuality.

Given the early-nineteenth-century distinction between the moral character of passionate love and the immoral character of sensual lust, intense, passion-filled romantic friendships could flourish erotically between members of the same sex without great fear that they bordered on the sodomitical or sapphic. Those terms' rare use suggests the lack of any public link between sensuality and same-sex passion. Same-sex romantic friendships might even enjoy an uncomplicated existence unknown to many different-sex relations—haunted as these might be by the very gender difference that constituted the sexes as opposite—therefore as potential love and marriage objects for each other, therefore as potential sensual partners. "Until the 1880s," say the historians of American sexuality, John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, most same-sex "romantic friendships were thought to be devoid of sexual content." The "modern terms *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality*

do not apply to an era that had not yet articulated these distinctions."[38]

Spiritual love and passion inhabited an abode far from the earthly, earthy home of sexuality. True love was enacted legitimately only within marriage, the legal mode of proper procreation. Intercourse, as sign of love's "consummation," held a special, deep significance. The intercourse of penis and vagina, men and women commonly agreed, was the one move they could not make before marriage and still remain respectable. Intercourse distinguished the true and virtuous woman from the fallen. Refraining from intercourse was the final test of the true man's manliness, his status as genteel, Christian gentleman.

The early-nineteenth-century middle-class fixation on penis-vagina coitus implied that numerous pleasurable acts *not* involving the "penetration" of this specific female part by this specific male part were *not* thought of as prohibited, or even as "sexual." Quite a lot of erotic activity then passed as permissible in a love relationship precisely because it wasn't "intercourse."

This cult of intercourse was formulated most clearly by the more restrictionist ideologists of sex, as discussed by Lystra: the promoters of a procreative ethic. But they were waging a losing battle. The number of "legitimate" births per middle-class family shows a continuous sharp decline during the nineteenth century.[39] By the late nineteenth century the old true-love standard was giving way to a new, different-sex erotic ideal termed *normal* and *heterosexual.* A close look at that late-nineteenth-century era suggests how it came to terms.

THE LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUAL INSTINCT

Each of the revisionist historians of nineteenth-century sexuality presents one or several memorable examples of lust-loving, male-female couples. The most enthusiastic sensualists

they offer typically date to the late nineteenth century, though often serving generalizations about "Victorian" sexuality or "nineteenth-century" eroticism.

One of Ellen Rothman's featured couples is Lester Ward and Lizzie Vought. In 1860, in Myersburg, Pennsylvania, the nineteen-year-old Lester (later, a well-known sociologist) began keeping a diary of his and Lizzie's courtship. This record suggests that Lizzie was as active in the couple's sexual explorations as her diarist boyfriend.[40]

In 1861, when Lester and "the girl" (as he called her) were often separated, his diary indicates that Lizzie made sure that, when they could, the two got together in private. After a Saturday spent with the girl and friends, Lester stayed on to spend "a happy night" with Lizzie:

> Closely held in loving arms we lay, embraced, and kissed all night (not going to bed until five in the morning). We have never acted in such a way before. All that we did I shall not tell here, but it was all very sweet and loving and nothing infamous.[41]

Lester's "I shall not tell here," his refusal to put into words all of the couple's erotic doings, and his defensive "nothing infamous," are telling. Even this easygoing enthusiast of bodily love evidently felt the judgmental power of a strict standard of sexual propriety.

Six months later the still-courting couple first "tasted the joys of love and happiness which only belong to a married life." The phrasing suggests that their initial coupling was perceived as breaking a well-known intercourse ban.

About a year later, in 1862, Lester and Lizzie married. Lester Ward's diary, says Rothman, suggests that this couple experienced little emotional conflict over their sexual explorations, even their atypical premarital intercourse.[42] Lester and Lizzie stand in Rothman's text for a revised vision of Victorians as privately erotic, publicly reticent.

In 1860, the same year that Lester Ward began his diary,

an eloquent, embattled exponent of the new male-female lustiness, Walt Whitman, was publishing his third edition of *Leaves of Grass.* That year's version first included a section, "Children of Adam," publicly evoking and promoting the procreational-erotic intercourse of men and women. As a pioneering sex radical, Whitman broke with the early-nineteenth-century idea that women's passion for motherhood included no eros. Whitman's poems publicly proclaimed women's lusty, enthusiastic participation with men in the act of conceiving robust babies. Another of Whitman's new sections, "Calamus," vividly detailed acts of erotic communion between men.

As research by Michael Lynch stresses, Whitman borrowed terms from his day's pop psychologists, the phrenologists, naming and evoking hot "amative" relations between men and women, and sizzling "adhesive" intimacies between men.[43] In the perspective of heterosexual history, Whitman's titling of these amative and adhesive intimacies was an attempt to position male-female and male-male eroticisms together as a "natural," "healthy" division of human erotic responses. (Along with most other writers of the time, Whitman almost completely ignored eros between women—a powerful indication of phallic rule: erotic acts not involving a penis were insignificant.) Though now perhaps better known as man-lover, Whitman is also a late-Victorian trailblazer of a publicly silenced, often vilified lust between the sexes.[44]

Historian Peter Gay's first two hefty volumes on *The Bourgeois Experience* in nineteenth-century Western Europe and the U.S. constitute a mammoth defense—980 pages of text and notes—of the middle class, its *Education of the Senses* and its *Tender Passion* (as these volumes are subtitled). Gay sets out to restore the Victorian middle class's erotic reputation, so often characterized as "repressed" or "hypocritical."

Personalizing Gay's presentation of the Victorians as ardent champions of eros (even sex athletes) is his discussion of the "Erotic Record" documenting the 1877 courtship, later marriage and enthusiastic adultery of Mabel Loomis and David Todd. The story of Mabel and her men is, significantly, a

late-nineteenth-century tale, though Gay doesn't emphasize this point.

This end-of-the-century story includes Mabel's thirteen-year, graphically detailed, doubly adulterous affair with Austin Dickinson (Emily's married brother) in Amherst, the outwardly staid, inwardly steaming New England college town.[45] Peter Gay employs the tale of Mabel and David and Austin to counter the typecasting of Victorians as prudes. Like other revisionists, he insists that the nineteenth century middle class was secretly sexual, though publicly prudish.[46]

Evidence offered by Gay and the other revisionists suggests that, as the nineteenth century went on, the private pleasure practices of the middle class were diverging more and more from the public ideal of true love. By the end of the century, as the middle class secured its social place, its members felt less need to distinguish their class's sexual purity from the eroticism of the rich and the sensuality of the poor, the colored, and the foreign.[47] In the late nineteenth century, as the white Protestant middle class pursued its earthly happiness, its attitude toward work shifted in favor of pleasurable consumption. By century's end the ideal of true love conflicted more and more with middle-class sensuous activity. Lust was bustin' out all over.

Peter Gay mentions Mabel Loomis Todd's need "to find expressive equivalents for her erotic emotions, manifested by her diary keeping."[48] That need of Mabel's was, I think, typical of her class. In the late nineteenth century, Mabel's personal letters and diaries provided a private place for putting into words and justifying—literally, coming to terms with—middle-class practices which could not be talked of publicly without censure. Like Mabel, the late-nineteenth-century middle class needed to name and justify the private erotic practices that were growing more prevalent, and more open, by century's end. That class's special interest would find expression in the proclamation of a universal heterosexuality. The invention of heterosexuality publicly named, scientifically nor-

malized, and ethically justified the middle-class practice of different-sex pleasure.[49]

COMING TO TERMS

The heterosexual and homosexual did not appear out of the blue in 1892. Those two sex-differentiated, erotic categories were in the making from the 1860s to the end of the century. In late-nineteenth-century Germany, England, France, and Italy, and in America, our modern, historically specific idea of the heterosexual began to be constructed; the experience of a proper, middle-class, different-sex lust began to be publicly named and documented.

In the initial strand of the heterosexual category's history we may be surprised to discover the prominent part played by early theorists and defenders of same-sex love. In 1862 in Germany, one of these pioneers, the writer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, began to produce new sexual names and theories defending the love of the man who loved men, the *Uranier* (or "Urning"). The Urning's opposite, the true man (the man who loved women), he called a *Dionäer* (or "Dioning"). His theory later included the *Urninde,* the woman "with a masculine love-drive"—his phrase for the woman with male feelings—that is, the woman who loved women.

The Urning's erotic desire for a true man, Ulrichs argued, was as natural as the "Dioning-love" of true man and true woman. His Dioning and Urning are the foreparents of the heterosexual and homosexual. Starting in 1864, Ulrichs presented his theories in twelve books with the collective title *Researches on the Riddle of Love Between Men,* written and printed at his own expense.[50]

In Ulrichs's eroticized update of the early Victorian true man, the real man possessed a male body and a male sex-love for women. The Urning was a true man with the feelings of a true woman. The Urning posssessed a male body and the female's sex-love for men.

As we've seen, the Victorian concept of the "true" me-

chanically linked biology with psychology. Feelings were thought of as female or male in exactly the same sense as penis or clitoris: anatomy equaled psychology, sex physiology determined the sex of feelings. Sex-love for a female was a male feeling, sex-love for a male was a female feeling. A female sex-love could inhabit a male body, a male sex-love could inhabit a female body.

According to this theory there existed only *one* sexual desire, focused on the other sex. (In today's terms, there was only one different-sex "sexual orientation," not two distinct "heterosexual" and "homosexual" desires.) Within this conceptual system, a (male) Urning felt a woman's erotic love for men, a (female) Urninde experienced a man's attraction to women. In each case, the desire for a different-sex was felt by a person of the "wrong" sex. Their desire was therefore "contrary" to the one, normative "sexual instinct." Ulrichs accepted this one-instinct idea, but argued that the emotions of Urnings were biologically inborn, therefore natural for them, and so their acts should not be punished by any law against "unnatural fornication."

In a letter to Ulrichs on May 6, 1868, another early sex-law reformer, the writer Karl Maria Kertbeny, is first known to have privately used four new terms he had coined: *"Monosexual; Homosexual; Heterosexual; und Heterogenit"*—the debut of homosexual and heterosexual, and two now forgotten terms.[51] Though Kertbeny's letter did not define his foursome, his other writings indicate that "Monosexual" refers to masturbation, practiced by both sexes. "Heterogenit" refers to erotic acts of human beings with animals. "Homosexual" refers to erotic acts performed by men with men and women with women. And "Heterosexual" refers to erotic acts of men and women, as did another of his new terms, "Normalsexualität," normal sexuality.

Heterosexuality and normal sexuality he defined as the innate form of sexual satisfaction of the majority of the population. That emphasis on numbers as the foundation of the

normal marks a historic break with the old qualitative, procreative standard.

But Kertbeny's heterosexual, and his normal sexual, are by no means normative. Both the heterosexual and normal sexual are characterized by their "unfettered capacity for degeneracy"—he who coins the terms loads the dice.[52] The sex "drive" of normal sexuals is said to be stronger than that of masturbators, bestialists, or homosexuals, and this explains normal sexuals' laxity, license, and "unfetteredness." Kertbeny's heterosexual men and women participate with each other

> in so-called natural [procreative] as well as unnatural [nonprocreative] coitus. They are also capable of giving themselves over to same-sex excesses. Additionally, normally-sexed individuals are no less likely to engage in self-defilement [masturbation] if there is insufficient opportunity to satisfy one's sex drive. And they are equally likely to assault male but especially female minors . . . ; to indulge in incest; to engage in bestiality . . . ; and even to behave depravedly with corpses if their moral self-control does not control their lust. And it is only amongst the normally-sexed that the special breed of so-called "bleeders" occurs, those who, thirsting for blood, can only satisfy their passion by wounding and torturing.[53]

Kertbeny's heterosexuals and normal sexuals are certainly no paragons of virtue. Considering psychiatrists' later cooptation of the term *heterosexual* to affirm the superiority of different-sex eroticism, Kertbeny's coinage of *heterosexual* in the service of homosexual emancipation is one of sex history's grand ironies.

Kertbeny first publicly used his new term *homosexuality* in the fall of 1869, in an anonymous leaflet against the adoption of the "unnatural fornication" law throughout a united Germany.[54] The public proclamation of the homosexual's exis-

tence preceded the public unveiling of the heterosexual. The first public use of Kertbeny's word *heterosexual* occurred in Germany in 1880, in a published defense of homosexuality, in a book by a zoologist on *The Discovery of the Soul.*[55] *Heterosexual* next made four public appearances in 1889, all in the fourth German edition of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis.*[56] Via Krafft-Ebing, *heterosexual* passed in three years into English, as I've noted, first reaching America in 1892. That year, Dr. Kiernan's article on "Sexual Perversion" spoke of Krafft-Ebing's "heterosexuals," associating them with nonprocreative perversion.[57]

Influenced, partly, by Ulrichs's years of public agitation for sodomy-law reform and the rights of Urnings, in 1869 psychiatrists began to play their own distinct role in the public naming and theorizing of sexual normality and abnormality. Although medical-legal articles on sexual crime appeared in the 1850s, only at the end of the 1860s did medical professionals begin to assert a new proprietary claim to a special expertise on sex-difference and eroticism, and begin to name the object of their concern. A mini-history of the psychiatric labeling of "abnormal sexuality" suggests how these doctors' explicit specifying of "sexual perversion" furthered their implicit theorizing of "normal sexuality."[58]

In August 1869, a German medical journal published an article by Dr. K.F.O. Westphal that first named an emotion he called "Die conträre Sexualempfindung" ("contrary sexual feeling"). That emotion was "contrary" to the proper, procreative "sexual feeling" of men and women.[59] Westphal's contrary sexual feeling was the first, and became one of the best known, contenders in the late-nineteenth-century name-that-perversion contest.

In 1871, an anonymous review of Westphal's essay in the London *Journal of Mental Science* first translated the German *contrary sexual feeling* into English as "inverted sexual proclivity." That urge inverted the proper, procreative "sexual proclivity" of men and women.[60]

In 1878, an article in an Italian medical review, by a Dr.

Tamassia, first used the phrase "inversione sessuale." Translated into English, "sexual inversion" became a second prominent contender in the fin de siècle aberration-labeling sweepstakes.[61]

In 1897, the medically trained Havelock Ellis first used "sexual inversion" in a publicly printed English work. As liberal sex reformer, Ellis tried to appropriate medical terms and concepts for the cause of sexual expression.[62]

Before the invention of "heterosexuality," the term "contrary sexual feeling" presupposed the existence of a noncontrary "sexual feeling," the term "sexual inversion" presupposed a noninverted sexual desire. From the start of this medicalizing, "contrary" and "inverted" sexuality were problematized, "sexual feeling" was taken for granted. This inaugurated a hundred-year tradition in which the abnormal and the homosexual were posed as riddle, the normal and heterosexual were assumed.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the new term *heterosexual* moved into the world, sometimes linked with nonprocreative "perversion," sometimes with "normal," procreative, different-sex eroticism. The theorizing of Sigmund Freud played an influential role in stabilizing, publicizing, and normalizing the new heterosexual ideal.