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Jonathan E. Coleman

University of Kentucky, jonathan.coleman@uky.edu

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

“SURELY IT DESERVES A NAME:” HOMOSEXUAL DISCOURSE AMONG ELLIS, CARPENTER, AND SYMONDS

This thesis argues that British scholars Havelock Ellis, John Addington Symonds, and Edward Carpenter viewed themselves as somewhat rebellious, attempting to reconstruct norms of sexuality, particularly those concerning homosexuality. To do so, they invoked the well-established constructions of class, gender, and sex. Nevertheless, in spite of their attempts to problematize these constructions, they simultaneously worked within and reinforced them. Ellis, Carpenter and Symonds desired to change widely-held perceptions of homosexuality and while doing so, alter notions of class, gender, and sex. These scholars asserted that homosexual relationships could exist across the divides of the class-system, helping to engender a greater cross-class understanding. Yet at the same time, Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds created a dichotomy of “true” and “degenerate” homosexuality that was determined along class lines. Furthermore, all three men claimed that homosexuals represented a possible third sex that transcended male/female bodies and masculine/feminine gender roles. However, while making such challenges, these men also fortified conventional gender and sex norms in their discourse of sexual difference.

KEYWORDS: homosexuality, Havelock Ellis, John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, inversion

_____Jonathan E. Coleman_____

_____2/7/10_____

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HOMOSEXUAL DISCOURSE AMONG ELLIS, CARPENTER, AND SYMONDS

By

Jonathan E. Coleman

Dr. Philip Harling

Director of Thesis

Dr. David Hamilton

Director of Graduate Studies

1/22/2010

Date

THESIS

Jonathan E. Coleman

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky

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“SURELY IT DESERVES A NAME:”
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THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Jonathan Coleman

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Philip Harling, Professor of History

Lexington, Kentucky

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Introduction

There is a passion, or a perversion of appetite, which, like all human passions, has played a considerable part in the world's history for good or evil; but which has hardly yet received the philosophical attention and the scientific investigation it deserves.¹

So begins John Addington Symonds' unsigned work, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, published in 1896. Herein, Symonds attempts to logically address how sexual inversion was "condemned to pariahdom."² Intolerance, he claimed, based upon religious and social prejudices, was unnecessarily oppressing a small, yet significant, portion of the population. Symonds wanted to change this. Taking up his pen, albeit anonymously, he set to work delineating the history and literature of sexual inversion, calling not only for empathy, but social reform.

A Problem in Modern Ethics is only one of the works on homosexuality that appeared in Great Britain at the turn of the century. Indeed, there was a propagation of writings that questioned long-held pernicious assumptions of homosexual behavior. These works not only criticized such assumptions, but had a significant impact on how the homosexual became characterized, discussed, and identified. This thesis will describe the emerging discourse on homosexuality as it was framed by three pivotal writers: Havelock Ellis, John Addington Symonds, and Edward Carpenter.

This thesis argues that Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter viewed themselves as somewhat rebellious, attempting to reconstruct norms of sexuality, particularly those concerning homosexuality. To do so, they invoked the well established constructions of

¹ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion* (London, 1896, reissued New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1971) 1.

² Ibid.

class, gender, and sex. Nevertheless, in spite of their attempts, they simultaneously worked within and reinforced these same social constructions. Biographer Phyllis Grosskurth states that Ellis believed his research to be “part of a moral revolution” that would allow society to view sexuality in pragmatic, secular, and scientific terms.³ This same sentiment was shared by Carpenter and Symonds. Symonds wrote that “No one dares to speak of [homosexuality], or if they do, they bate their breath, and preface their remarks with maledictions.”⁴ Ellis, Carpenter and Symonds desired to change widely-held perceptions of homosexuality and while doing so, alter notions of class, gender, and sex. These scholars asserted that homosexual relationships could exist across the divides of the class-system, helping to engender a greater cross-class understanding. Yet at the same time, Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds created a dichotomy of “true” and “degenerate” homosexuality that was determined along class lines. Furthermore, all three men claimed that homosexuals represented a possible third sex that transcended male/female bodies and masculine/feminine gender roles. However, while making such challenges, these men also fortified conventional gender and sex norms in their discourse of sexual difference.

This thesis shows how Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter framed homosexuality within discourses with which they were already familiar. Throughout the multiple works of these three men, homosexuality is discussed in terms of class, gender, and sex. These three social constructs were central to the way that Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter understood homosexuality. As Dagmar Herzog states, “Sex can be the site for talking

³ Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 229.

⁴ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 3.

about very many other things besides sex.”⁵ The writings of all three men, intended to convey a more accurate understanding of homosexuality, pass on how class, gender, and sex themselves were constructed in the minds of Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter. By looking beyond sexuality alone, one can better discern these parts of the social milieu that were, in turn, so essential to the way Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter came to understand homosexuality.

This work is divided into two chapters. The first explains how Ellis, Symonds and Carpenter wrote of homosexuality through class. They offered an often contradictory rhetoric regarding the ways homosexuality was shaped by, and helped to shape, ideas of social class. Homosexuality is viewed through Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter’s own class privilege and their understanding of the lower classes. Nevertheless, homosexuality was presented as a way to transcend class. Homoeroticism could lead to greater class consciousness, sustainable cross-class relationships, and could also provide social “uplift.” To Symonds and Carpenter especially, men-loving men could erode class divides.

The second chapter discusses how Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter described homosexuality through gendered and sexed bodies. Once again, the works of these scholars proved contradictory. Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter suggested the existence of a third natural sex based upon homosexual performance, challenging the prevalent two-gender dichotomy. However, they simultaneously viewed gender within this dichotomy of masculine and feminine, and saw such attributes as inherently tied to sexed bodies.

⁵ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 8.

Even in the case of a third-sexed person, gender behavior that did not coincide with bodily sex was castigated by Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter. The normativity of the masculine male and feminine female is never challenged.

The aforementioned chapters share several thematic connections. First, the discussion of class and the discussion of gender and sex astutely demonstrate how Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds constructed their understanding of homosexuality through social constructions with which they were familiar. Class and gender and sex were institutions that these three men were not only aware of, but were ensconced in. They discussed homosexuality in relation to these three social constructions. Second, together these two sections explain how Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds attempted to complicate social constructions. These scholars rejected the idea of irreconcilable social classes by asserting that homosexual relationships could exist despite class difference. Similarly, Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds complicated the simple gender and sex binaries by introducing the possibility of a third sex that transcended gender norms. Third, both sections also highlight how pervasive social constructions can be. Although Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter attempted to alter social perceptions of class, gender, and sex, they themselves worked within and often reinforced these same perceptions.

As this thesis attempts to show, Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds strove to reconstitute the public understanding of homosexuality. While doing so, they simultaneously attributed certain characteristics to the homosexual. These scholars oriented their discourse on homosexuality around social constructions, like class,

gender, and sex, with which they were familiar, and in the process, they left imprints of how these constructions existed within their time.

Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds,

It is important to briefly discuss the personal lives of these men, as the social milieu from which they wrote greatly influenced their work. These men were contemporaries, and all were aware of, and sometimes helped with, the works of the other.

The eldest was John Addington Symonds. Born in 1840, he was raised in a cultivated middle-class family, as were Carpenter and Ellis. Leaving to attend school at Harrow in 1854, Symonds recollected that he was already assured of his “somewhat curious personality.”⁶ At the age of fourteen, he possessed a sense of self which he described as “imperious, antagonistic, unmalleable,” yet he still felt himself to be “incomplete,” referring to his burgeoning sexuality. Symonds was acutely aware that he was different, and he felt ostracized for it.⁷ Symonds went on to study at Oxford, taking a fellowship at Magdalen College in 1862. Two years later, he married Catherine North. While not a disastrous marriage, neither was it warm. In his memoirs, Symonds was quite clear regarding his reasons for marriage, saying, “I desired through marriage to enter into the state of normal manhood.”⁸ This desire for normalcy would be

⁶ John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* Ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984) 84.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 157

frequent in Symonds' quest to "discover" himself and in his subsequent understanding of his sexuality.

Edward Carpenter was also the product of a comfortable middle-class family. Carpenter was raised in Brighton, "a would-be fashionable world" that he "despised." There he attended Brighton College, escaping as often as possible for "intercourse in Nature." Leaving Brighton in 1864, he attended Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he was eventually offered a fellowship. Carpenter remembered his early life as bright and successful. He was living in a world in which he was comfortable, yet not. He felt ostracized, saying "I felt myself an alien, an outcast, a failure, and an object of ridicule." It would be this discomfort, he said, that would urge his eventual disavowal of society. It was also at this time that Carpenter began to become aware of his sexual feelings for men. While reminiscing of his time at Cambridge, Carpenter wrote:

What a curious romance ran through all that life—and yet on the whole, with few exceptions, how strangely unspoken it was and unexpressed! This succession of athletic and even beautiful faces and figures, what a strange magnetism they had for me, and yet all the while how insurmountable for the most part was the barrier between! It was as if a magic flame dwelt within one, burning, burning, which one could not put out, and yet whose existence one might on no account reveal. How the walks under the avenues of trees at night, and by the riversides, were haunted full of visionary forms for which in the actual daylight world there seemed no place!

Carpenter would soon leave his fellowship at Trinity Hall, moving to the northeast of England, in hopes of teaching among the working class. In Derbyshire, he settled down

at the country estate of Millthrope with his same-sex, working-class partner, George Merrill.⁹

The personal history of Havelock Ellis is rather different than that of Symonds or Carpenter. Ellis was considerably younger than the other two, born in 1859 to a well-established family. He also had a less-conventional upbringing. The son of a sea captain, by sixteen he had embarked on his second trip around the world.¹⁰ During this trip, he lived several years in Australia, working as a school-master and tutor. This period was vital to Ellis' development, as he discovered the works of men like James Hinton, a writer and reformer whom he greatly admired. Although self-assured that he would one day study medicine, it was during his time in Australia that he created a lofty life-goal: to be dedicated to "literature, religion, science, art, and thought in their different forms." As he states, he refused to be "a mere 'medical practitioner.'"¹¹ As early as his departure from Australia, he reflected upon his time there in a quasi-sacred way, writing: "These three years I have spent in Australia seem to me like those three years during which Paul was in Arabia; and, like him too, I also have seen and felt unspeakable things."¹² Upon his return, Ellis began to study medicine under Dr. Alfred Carpenter, an eminent private practitioner.

The personal sexual proclivities of Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter are worthy of note. Symonds and Carpenter were both self-proclaimed homosexuals, but these

⁹ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams, being Autobiographical Notes by Edward Carpenter with Portraits and Illustrations* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1916) Chap. 1, 3, The Edward Carpenter Archive, <http://www.edwardcarpenter.net/ecddtite.htm> (accessed November 1, 2008).

¹⁰ He would actually be absent from England and the majority of his family for four years. Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (New York: New York University Press, 1985) 20.

¹¹ As quoted in Phyllis Grosskurth, *Ellis*, 46.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

proclamations were mostly private, circulated only among close associates. As mentioned above, Symonds was a married man, and it was only after his marriage (which he referred to as “the great crime of my life”¹³) that he became a practicing homosexual. His eventual acceptance of his sexual desires relieved him greatly. He even attributes the relative good health of his later years to this belated introduction of homosexuality. This realization of his sexuality becomes a moment of epiphany in Symonds’ quest of self-realization, significantly affecting his work on sexuality, and often leading him to romanticize same-sex attraction.

Carpenter was less discrete about his homosexuality. He never married a woman and lived with George Merrill until the latter’s death in 1928. Carpenter and Merrill largely escaped any scandal surrounding their relationship, perhaps due to the relative privacy of Millthorpe or perhaps the relationship was viewed as another aspect of Carpenter’s generally unconventional lifestyle. In addition to his divergent sexuality, Carpenter was also a leading socialist, a vegetarian, a practitioner of Eastern religion and philosophy, and the first Briton to regularly wear sandals. Merrill’s status as working-class also proved to be a social safe-guard against public hostility. The relationship between Carpenter and Merrill could easily be interpreted, and was, according to Carpenter biographer Shelia Rowbotham, as an affectionate master-servant arrangement.

Ellis, unlike the other two writers, was predominantly heterosexual. However, Ellis did possess what he called a “germ of perversion,” namely urolagnia, a proclivity

¹³ Symonds, *Memoirs* 184.

where sexual excitement is engendered by watching another person urinate.¹⁴ He playfully remarked to Margaret Sanger, a close friend, that he had no objections to her “liquid gold.”¹⁵ He even invented the more romantic term urolagnia to replace the term undinism, which he found too clinical.¹⁶ In fact, Ellis was so intrigued by the topic that it comes up frequently in his own work on sexuality.

The impact of these three writers upon notions of sexuality, particularly homosexuality, has been considerable. They were among the first to write in English on the topic of homosexuality, or sexual inversion, in an objective manner, refusing to “bate their breath, and preface their remarks with maledictions.”¹⁷ Together, they published over twenty works dedicated to the subject, including case histories, essays, poetry, and apologia. According to David E. Greenberg, these writers constituted the “earliest wave of the homosexual emancipation movement” by allowing a more open, freer discourse on an incredibly taboo subject.¹⁸ To Jeffery Weeks, these scholars in particular are responsible for “a much more clearly defined sense of a homosexual identity.”¹⁹

The most widely-read of the works studied in this thesis is Ellis’ *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. First published in several volumes, Ellis’ work covered a wide range of sexual acts, fetishes, and explanations of sexual behavior. The work was almost voyeuristic, as it contained a vast number of case studies collected by Ellis in which

¹⁴ Grosskurth, *Ellis* 227.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 366.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 365.

¹⁷ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 3.

¹⁸ David Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 4.

¹⁹ Jeffery Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981) 111.

people recount their own sexual histories. An entire volume of this work was devoted to a study of “sexual inversion,” Ellis’ preferred term for homosexuality. Just as Ellis differed in his personal history and sexual proclivities, his work on homosexuality was also distinctly different from that of Symonds and Carpenter. First, Ellis’ works, unlike those of Symonds and Carpenter, spanned the whole of human sexuality, not homosexuality alone. The volume on sexual inversion would be the only publication that Ellis devoted singularly to homosexuality. Second, his work is much less argumentative than that of Symonds and Carpenter. Ellis relied upon the persuasiveness of objective medical truth rather than compelling social arguments. He reasoned that a rationalized medical inquiry could bring about the social reform desired by all three men. These differences have impacted the amount of attention shown to Ellis in this thesis. He is the least quoted of the three scholars, as he has the least material that concerns the social constructions discussed. However, it would be a mistake to overlook him completely. In his time, Ellis was the most widely-read author on homosexuality. Furthermore, his inability to work outside of these social constructions, in spite of his attempted objectivity, exemplifies the pervasiveness of class, gender, and sex norms. Ellis clearly promoted the existence of a class-based homosexual dichotomy and frequently noted examples of homosexuality in gendered and sexed terms. In addition, he indulged in limited social commentary similar to that of Symonds and Carpenter as evidenced by his repeated calls for sympathy towards homosexuals and decriminalization of homosexual acts.

Although the most widely-read, Ellis was not the first of these three writers to publish works on homosexuality. Edward Carpenter published a short article titled “Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society” in 1894. He followed this article with a similar chapter on homosexuality in his book, *Love’s Coming of Age*, published in 1896. Symonds published two works on homosexuality, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, which looked at instances of same-sex love in ancient Greece, followed by *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, which explained the current state of same-sex love in the modern Western world. Although written first, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* would not reach a large audience until it was published as an appendix to *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in 1897. *A Problem in Modern Ethics* was privately published shortly before Symonds’ death in 1896.

The work of Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter had significant impact within their own time. Carpenter, Symonds, and Ellis are quoted in the works of such noted sexologists as Magnus Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch, and Otto Weininger. In Hirschfeld’s *The Homosexuality of Men and Women*, first published in 1913, Ellis is cited over thirty times.²⁰ The writings of Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter also had a distinct impact on homosexuals within Great Britain. The noted novelist E. M. Forster was particularly influenced by the work of Edward Carpenter. In fact, Forster credits his novel, *Maurice*, as a product of his visit with the scholar. Having read the works of Carpenter, Forster recounts approaching him “as one approaches a saviour.”²¹ He wrote that it was

²⁰ Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000).

Carpenter's touch that caused him to "conceive" *Maurice*,²² and even the novel's plot, centered on an educated, upper-class gentleman and his working-class lover, is quite reminiscent of Carpenter's own personal life.

Contextual Elements

Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter were writing in a time of great intellectual change. The nineteenth century saw a dramatic increase of empirical research on sexuality. As Jeffery Weeks states, in the nineteenth century the "emergence of sex as an object of study was one of the major features of the social sciences of the period, and stands as a central moment in the constitution of modern concepts of sexuality."²³ Although perhaps more muted in Great Britain than on the continent, the study of sex, or sexology, was making great strides. Most "sexologists" looked to nature as the key to understanding sexual desire, establishing the nexus of sexuality within the body, marking the body. Understanding desire through the science of the body transformed bodies into sexual categories. This "naturalistic fallacy," as Weeks names it, was central, almost inescapable, to the emerging modern conception of not only homosexuality, but sexuality itself.²⁴ And these bodies were not only marked by their sexual performance, but also through pre-existing categories that, in turn, characterized their sexuality. Although these categories are numerous, three of the most evident are class, gender, and sex.

²¹ E. M. Forster, *Maurice: A Novel* (New York: Amereon House, 1989) 249.

²² Ibid.

²³ Weeks, 141.

²⁴ Jeffery Weeks, "The Social Construction of Sexuality" Kathy Peiss, ed. *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002) 4.

This desire to categorize bodies based upon sexual practice was part of a larger movement within the *fin-de-siècle* to objectively characterize bodies, particularly those bodies deemed socially deviant. As Jeffery Weeks notes:

A question posed by this new zeal in defining and categorizing sexuality is why the effort took place at this particular time. It is obviously an aspect of a much wider trend in social sciences, to order, through scientific description, what previously appeared unclassifiable [...] ²⁵

And it is this trend towards classification in explicit scientific terms that begins to appear in numerous forms during the nineteenth century. As Michel Foucault's work has shown, this tendency towards classification not only appeared in studies of sexuality, but was used to characterize the insane, the habitual criminal, and those whom society considered "sick."²⁶ In evidence of this, Martin Wiener shows in *Men of Blood*,²⁷ that violent men, particularly those who committed violence against women, were now characterized as psychotic, demasculinized, perhaps less-evolved, and, almost always, of the poorer class. This characterization turned the "wife-murderer" into a certain type of personage with distinct traits and an identifiable history. This "objective" take on the violent man also made social regulation easier, allowing the "war on violence" to focus on those who were presumed to be the most likely culprits (i.e., working-class men). The same is true for the study of homosexuality during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Homosexuals were viewed as a specific

²⁵ Weeks, 145.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. (New York: Pantheon, 1973); *Discipline and Punishment: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Pantheon, 1977); *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

²⁷ Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

group of people with specific qualities and common experiences. As this thesis will discuss, Havelock Ellis, John Addington Symonds, and Edward Carpenter worked within and contributed to this framework by their characterization of homosexuality.

Chapter 1
"You Mustn't Call Me Sir:"²⁸
Homosexuality and Class

"He fixed and fascinated me," wrote John Addington Symonds. Long, dark hair framed his face. His white teeth glistened under his blond mustache, brilliant against the Venetian gondolier's bronzed skin. His name was Angelo Fusato, and Symonds was in love. In the spring of 1881, while Symonds was sitting in a wine shop on the Lido in Venice, Fusato walked in with a fellow servant of General de Horsey. Although they spoke for only a moment, Symonds could not remove Fusato's image from his mind, returning to his room to write an impressive, lengthy homage to the twenty-four-year-old man. Symonds finished with the line: "The dashing sparkle of this splendor, who looked to me as though the sea waves and the sun had made him in some hour of secret and unquiet rapture, he fixed and fascinated me."²⁹

Symonds would finally obtain this young man, but after much internal struggle to justify his attraction. He found his needed justification in Fusato himself. Because of Fusato's relative poverty, Symonds occupied a position of power from which he could improve the gondolier's life. Symonds celebrated the ability of his homosexual passion to bridge an immense gap created by severe class differences. Symonds saw his oft-denigrated sexuality as the avenue that led to this close, long-term patronage of Fusato. Yet, at the same time, while their sexualized love provided the foundation for this cross-class relationship, they were still incapable of escaping the hierarchy of class. For the

²⁸ E. M. Forster, 195.

²⁹ Symonds, *Memoirs*, 271-272.

duration of the relationship, Fusato was an employee in Symonds's service, both in terms of monetary exchange and in his public designation. Symonds possessed the power of financial and cultural capital that made the relationship possible. The only thing Fusato had to offer was his own body. Perhaps the relationship is best summed up by Symonds' biographer, Grosskurth, who writes, "[Fusato] continued to *serve* Symonds until his death."³⁰

Symonds and Fusato's relationship, to which I will later return, provides a fairly accurate anecdote on the complicated, often contradictory, ways that beliefs, concerns, and practices of homosexuality were shaped by, and helped to shape, ideas of social class. Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis continually invoked notions formed from their own class privilege when they disseminated their ideas about same-sex relationships. Yet, simultaneously, Symonds and Carpenter, and Ellis to a lesser extent, saw homosexuality as a way to transcend class. Homoeroticism could lead to greater concern for the lower class, build intimate cross-class relationships, and provide social "uplift" for the poor lovers of wealthier men. To Symonds and Carpenter, men-loving men had the potential to break down problematic class divides.

This chapter navigates the diverse channels which class takes in the writings of Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis. Looking at the historiography of class, how did these three writers emulate, and often uphold, the dominant discourse of class perception, and how did they complicate this discourse?

³⁰ Phyllis Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds: A Biography* (London: Longmans, 1964) 242.

The formation of class within Great Britain during the nineteenth century has been thoroughly investigated by historians. Like E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* and Davidoff and Hall's *Family Fortunes*, numerous monographs dedicated to understanding class development and distinction have been published and widely read. And it is important to understand these over-arching constructions of class within which Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis were working.

"Class," as defined by historian Jurgen Kocka and clarified by Shulamit Volkov, is more than economic income. It is a culture, "widely conceived as a system of norms and values, a 'general and at the same time a specific pattern of meaning and assessments, mentality and culture.'"³¹ To use E.P. Thompson's term, this is "class-consciousness." While dependent upon income, class was truly determined by an intangible sense of "lifestyle," characterized by tangible elements such as occupation, religious practice, education, gender performance, and even geographical space. It is this understanding of class that is used throughout this thesis.

Jose Harris sees class as vital to understanding Great Britain in the late-nineteenth century. Class became "an increasingly powerful and comprehensive category in social structure and organization."³² Many historians see these class divisions becoming even more distinct and disparate as the nineteenth century progressed. Harris writes that "the last quarter of the nineteenth century" becomes "the period in which the tentacles of class became all embracing, in which all other

³¹ Shulamit Volkov, "The 'Verbürgerlichung' of the Jews as a Paradigm" in *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe* ed. Jurgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell (Oxford: Berg, 1993) 370.

³² Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 6.

social and cultural attributes became reducible to class categories.”³³ In this two-model system, the property-owning upper classes, embracing aristocrats, professionals, and industrialists, create a sharp contrast against a mostly property-less working class.

What produced these augmented class distinctions? Gareth Stedman Jones claims, in *Outcast London*, that after 1860 the lower classes became, as a result of industrialization, characterized by political, classed and economic discourses that were negative and explicitly fearful of the laboring class. He writes:

The presence of an unknown number of the casual poor, indistinguishable to many contemporaries from criminals, apparently divorced from all forms of established religion, or ties with their social superiors, inhabiting unknown cities within the capital, constituted a disquieting alien presence in the midst of mid-Victorian plenty.³⁴

Industrial work and housing trends allowed the higher social classes to be far-removed from the working class. Impoverished people became an abstract idea, making the existence of the poor more difficult to justify with middle-class mores. Jones argues that this distancing allowed the middle class to typify the laborer as demoralized, lazy, and dependent upon middle-class charity. To those with power, the working class became problematic.

But is this dichotomous class system completely accurate? G.R. Searle argues that nineteenth-century Britons did see themselves within this two-system model, and that this system is often apparent in political and social tension. “Direct contact between people from dramatically contrasting backgrounds,” writes Searle, “sometimes

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1971) 14.

sparked off a ‘them and us’ attitude.”³⁵ But he goes on to question the completeness of these categories. British society was indeed polarized into this dualistic mode by the emerging labor movement and a perceived widening in respective living standards, but this view fails to acknowledge intra-class difference and cross-class mobility.

Within broad descriptive categories such as “working class” or “middle class” were vastly different lived-experiences. Within the middle class alone existed the extremely wealthy, but non-aristocratic, industrialist to the well-paid professional down to the elementary school teacher making only £154 per annum.³⁶ Even beyond such monetary dissimilarities were deep-seated distinctions in how these groups viewed one another. For example, industrialists were profit-driven and market-dependent, while professionals prided themselves on education and a “service ethic.”³⁷

Sectionalism also existed within the working class. Varying degrees of skill, labor opportunities, and wages created such marked features that Charles Booth’s contemporary study of the London working class described six distinct categories of the working class alone.³⁸ Thus to Searle, “it makes more sense to see the working class as ‘multi-layered.’”³⁹

This “multi-layered” approach appears accurate from the account of Robert Roberts’ memoir, *The Classic Slum*. In Roberts’ recollections of his childhood in the slums of Salford in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the strata within

³⁵ G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War 1886-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 115.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁷ James Albisetti, “Professions and Professionalization,” *Encyclopedia of European Social History* Vol. 3: 57-65.

³⁸ Searle, 96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

the working class are easily evident. Roberts' own family, being shop-keepers, was relatively wealthy compared to the others living on the same street. As he puts it, "Our family was in the slum, but not, they felt, of it: we had 'connections.'"⁴⁰ His family was "better" than the casual workers or manual laborers who surrounded them. These distinctions were apparent enough to provoke Roberts to write, "No view of the English working class in the first quarter of this century would be accurate if that class were shown merely as a great amalgam of artisan and labouring groups united by a common aim and culture. Life in reality was much more complex."⁴¹

Roberts also provides an excellent example of the permeability of class—his own aunts were able to obtain a comfortable middle-class status. This status was achieved by Roberts' grandmother who had her three handsome daughters attend church in a middle-class suburb. There they met and married educated, professional men. Just as the women in Roberts' family used gender as a catalyst for class mobility, Roberts' own father was restricted by his. As a man, Roberts' father was unable to marry into a higher class. Wedded to an orphaned girl from a cotton-mill, Roberts' father "stayed working-class."⁴²

Movement between classes, in both directions, was not only possible but, it appears, even common. Lines between the social strata were often blurry at best and permitted a fluid mobility. The middle class on one end merged to become the working class, with families like Roberts' capable of spanning both designations. On the other

⁴⁰ Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1971) 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

end, the wealthiest of the middle class began intermingling with their betters. Acquiring country homes, joining the right associations, and sending their sons off to public schools provided the wealthy bourgeoisie with access to aristocratic lifestyles and to the aristocracy itself. As Searle notes, by 1900, a quarter of the leading City of London bankers had aristocratic in-laws.⁴³ Yet this class mobility was stifled. It is the most similar portions of differing classes that have the opportunities to intertwine. Barring exceptional cases, it was the wealthiest members of a class who could ascend class lines, and its poorest who teetered between the strata. These classes and the bodies that occupied them were persistently unsettled.

Even though these “difficulties of definition and demarcation” exist, as Searle notes, they do not “deny the reality of class.”⁴⁴ Too much separated most segments of the designated classes. From religious practice, financial capital, and citizenship to occupational choice, education, and even geographical space, the differences were unmistakable. As Gareth Stedman Jones’ argues, one class became an enigma to the other, almost phantasmal. These disparate social and economic circumstances were not easily bridged. As Ross McKibbin relays, many Victorians doubted that a mutually understood dialogue across class barriers was even possible.⁴⁵

It was from this society occupied with class that Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis emerged. As discussed earlier, each writer was securely ensconced within the upper-middle class. Possessing relative wealth, being well-educated, and holding professional

⁴³ Searle, 92.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁵ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 167-196.

occupations, each man easily fits the stereotype of the bourgeois male. It is this bourgeois perspective, derived from their own lived experiences of class, which permeates their works concerning homosexuality. These writers used class to construct the homosexual, and used homosexuality to (de)construct class. To these men, the key was present within homosexuality to dismantle the undemocratic class system present within Great Britain. But this dismantlement of class was in reality an eradication of the problematic lower classes. In essence, what these men proposed for the poor was a “lift” up to the middle-class.

“Eros is a great leveler.”

Symonds and Carpenter, and Ellis to lesser extent, believed that homosexuality had the unique capability to foster relationships between the disparate groups of the British class system. While some Victorians wondered if different classes could even communicate with one another, Symonds and Carpenter hoped that intimate and personal same-sex relationships could diffuse the rigidity of the British class system.

Attempts to cross class barriers by same-sexed sociability were not relegated to homosexual attraction. Several mid-to-late-Victorian movements focused on bringing men from differing classes into the same space. Founded on the intangible notion of “brotherhood,” these upper-class reformers sought to “escape the horrors of urban class warfare.”⁴⁶ The result was a surge in missions, clubs, classes, and publications

⁴⁶ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 229.

organized by upper-class men in hopes for the betterment of the urban-poor male. The most famous of these was the settlement house movement of Toynbee Hall and Oxford House. Bringing young men from the bourgeoisie into the slums of East London, the settlement house movement was not only a classed affair, but a sexed one. With their single-gendered atmosphere, settlement houses became a place to define and shore up notions of masculinity. The settlement house could, in theory, recreate the man, particularly the urban-poor man, in the image of the upper-class ideal.

Yet this conception of the ideal man was being severely challenged. According to John Tosh, British masculinity was centered on male authority, specifically over women and the home. Male authority, in turn, was premised on the fragility of women.⁴⁷ But the burgeoning “new woman” problematized the notion of women’s inherent weakness. The “new woman” of the late-nineteenth century forced men to “reconsider what it meant to be a man in response to women’s experiments with new public and private roles.”⁴⁸ The “new woman” was gaining entrance to the public sphere, with politicized movements for equality in education and employment. In addition, women sought, and often received, greater legal powers. Even the vote was considered an obtainable goal. Although unsuccessful, Parliament considered granting women’s suffrage in 1870 and 1883. While women were entering the public sphere, they were reconstructing the private sphere, as well. The domicile, which Tosh argues was an important stage on which men performed masculinity, was no longer a space in

⁴⁷ John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity in the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)181.

⁴⁸Koven, 229.

which to prove masculine authority. The domicile, increasingly seen as the domain of women, was effeminized. With the decreased influence over the home, men increasingly looked to homosocial spaces. Homosociability, while encouraging cross-class relationships, simultaneously ensured the perpetuation of masculine power. In this turbulent atmosphere, where male authority was under direct threat, all-male spaces, exclusive of women, became a primary way in which masculine authority could be maintained. In these single-sex spaces, the increasing power of women was less apparent. In the company of men, masculine authority remained unchallenged.

Edward Carpenter was one of the most outspoken proponents of “brotherhood.” He was committed to cross-class male comradeship. Yet, unlike the vast majority of Victorian men involved with these movements, Carpenter openly eroticized cross-class relationships. A renowned socialist, Carpenter energetically tied homosexuality to his idealist notion of classlessness. In Carpenter’s work, *The Intermediate Sex*, he describes the power of homosexual attraction, writing:

Eros is a great leveler. Perhaps the true Democracy rests, more firmly than anywhere else, on a sentiment which easily passes the bounds of class and caste, and unites in the closest affection the most estranged ranks of society. It is noticeable how often Uranians of good position and breeding are drawn to rougher types, as of manual workers, and frequently very permanent alliances grow up in this way, which although not publicly acknowledged have a decided influence on social institutions, customs and political tendencies.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1908) 114-115, The Edward Carpenter Archive, <http://www.edwardcarpenter.net/ecinttit.htm> (accessed August 3, 2009) 114-115.

Carpenter acutely believed that it was characteristic of homosexuality to move beyond established ideas of class. Homosexual relationships were different from their heterosexual counterparts, by bringing “virtues of sympathy with the weak, tenderness of the beautiful, protection for the young, together with corresponding qualities of gratitude, self-devotion, and admiring attachment into play.”⁵⁰ These same-sex relationships, focused on higher ideals and less dependent upon material wealth and continuation of family legacy, allowed participants to seek out partners from differing classes.

Carpenter asserted that homosexual relationship could alter “social institutions, customs, and political tendencies.” Nothing, it appears, was beyond the scope of transformation when open homosexuality was added to the mix. It could even affect the political structure. As quoted above, Carpenter wrote that “true democracy” rested within homosexual sentiment.⁵¹ He argued that Greek democracy and independence was won by “comrades-in-arms and tyrannicides,” whom “fell fighting in defence of his loved one.”⁵² Roman republicanism and the relationship between the Biblical Jonathan and David are listed as examples of progressive leadership influenced by same-sex attraction. Carpenter argued that Polynesian Islanders also ascertained their “traditions of a higher culture” by the “romantic male relationships” practiced there. With this argument, Carpenter revealed his desire for a more socialistic, democratic British state, obtainable, in part, from same-sex passion. Similarly, Symonds saw a direct link

⁵⁰ Edward Carpenter, “Homogenic Love and its Place in Free Society” (Manchester Labour Society, 1894) in *Nineteenth Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook* ed. Chris White (London: Routledge, 1999) 139.

⁵¹ Carpenter, *Intermediate Sex*, 114.

⁵² Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 125.

between homosexuality and a more democratic social structure. Same-sex attraction, he wrote, was “destined to be a leading virtue of democratic nations.”⁵³

Perhaps Carpenter and Symonds’ greatest argument for the cross-class tendency of homosexual relationships resided in their own lived experiences. Both Carpenter and Symonds were practitioners of their beliefs, drawing lovers from the lower classes.

Symonds maintained, even reveled in, cross-class relationships. All the lovers mentioned in his memoir belong to the lower classes, and these attractions began early. As a child, his first erotic desires were towards sailors he saw on the streets of Bristol.⁵⁴ This fascination with the male laborer continued into adulthood. An example is noted in his diary on March 23, 1889. Here he admires a nineteen-year-old peasant, whose “hands hardened with labour, bruised here and there, brown in complexion” he would have kissed and begged to touch.⁵⁵

As mentioned, the great love of Symonds’ life was Angelo Fusato, an impoverished Venetian gondolier. In his memoirs, Symonds reminisces, with much pride, on how the homosexual relationship he shared with Fusato benefited the man in explicit terms of class. Symonds writes, “I can now look back with satisfaction on this intimacy. Though it began in folly and crime, according to the constitution of society, it has benefited him.”⁵⁶ Thanks to his lover’s wealth and influence, Fusato was able to set-up house and marry the mother of his children, making her, as Symonds terms it,

⁵³ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 130.

⁵⁴ Symonds, *Memoirs*, 96.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵⁶ Symonds, *Memoirs*, 276.

“an honest woman.”⁵⁷ Indeed, Symonds even found better employment for Fusato’s father and brother. Although from extremely impoverished conditions, Fusato is capable of experiencing distinct and rapid class mobility. It is the homosexual relationship between Fusato and Symonds that brings Fusato the trappings of middle-class life—a home, family, and successful employment. Symonds’ love for Fusato was able to “lift him into something like prosperity.”⁵⁸ For Symonds, this experience was proof that a same-sex relationship could surpass class differences.

Carpenter also created a home life with his working-class lover, George Merrill. Meeting in 1891, the pair would continue living at Carpenter’s home, Millthorpe, until Carpenter’s death in 1929. To Carpenter, Merrill was ideal. He was working class, completely disregarded the dominant Christian mores of the time, and “possessed a strong sexuality of temperament and habit.”⁵⁹ Merrill, even after Carpenter’s death, was capable of retaining the tropes of middle-classness, remaining at Millthorpe until his own death.

The relationship between Carpenter and Merrill appears in *Maurice*, with the two men thinly veiled as Maurice and Clive. Written by E.M. Forster, an adherent of Carpenter, he credited this novel to his first visit with the scholar. Having read the works of Carpenter, Forster recounted approaching him “as one approaches a saviour.”⁶⁰ He wrote that it was Carpenter’s touch that caused him to “conceive”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Edward Carpenter as quoted in Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2008) 181.

⁶⁰ Forster, 249.

Maurice,⁶¹ and the novel's plot, centered on an educated, upper-class gentleman and his working-class lover, is unquestionably fashioned after Carpenter's own life experiences and beliefs concerning homosexuality and class.

Written in 1913 and unpublished for sixty years, *Maurice* is an excellent example of Carpenter's conviction, via Forster, that homosexuality could transcend class relations. Maurice, the upper-middle class protagonist in Forster's novel, experiences his first sexual encounter with the young, working-class Alec Scudder. In the moments after, lying in bed, Alec asks, "Had I best be going now, sir?"⁶² Maurice replies, "You mustn't call me sir."⁶³ Although Maurice is explicitly aware of his social positioning throughout the novel, it is in this climactic sexual scene that he forgoes the class identity with which he has struggled for some two-hundred pages. This shared sexual experience allows the two to be equals. This relationship is in steep contrast to Maurice's first love, the aristocratic Clive, who refuses to accept the sexual side of their romantic relationship, and the two are forced to part ways in order to perform their class roles. Maurice has to enter his father's financing company; Clive has to fill his familial position of country squire. Maurice achieves a satisfying bond only when he meets the working-class Scudder. And it is this relationship, the sexualized, cross-class relationship, that survives. At the end of the novel, Forster paints the pair as stealing away to the greenwood, forsaking family and fortune. It is the explicit homosexual relationship that allows Maurice and Alec to permanently shed class identity.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

It appears that Symonds and Carpenter (and their adherents, such as Forster) used their individual cross-class relationships as evidence for the class-transcendent power of same-sex love. This is evidenced by how Symonds, carefully chronicled in his memoir, recalled all of his cross-class relationships and how they benefited both parties. This is why it is the class standings of Maurice, Clive, and Alec that take center stage in Forster's novel. If these relationships had achieved a classless state, could not all homosexual relationships? Apparently, Symonds and Carpenter thought so. Their own individual relationships' transcendence was evidence of how homosexual relationships in general could, almost inherently, transcend class.

Of course, such utopian ideas purporting a classless society of male lovers never occurred to any great extent. But did Carpenter and Symonds' utopian visions ring true for themselves? After all, their own personal cross-class relationships included monetary exchange and assumed a position of service for their working-class lovers. While Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis presented homosexuality as a way to escape the strictures of the British class system, simultaneously they used homosexuality as a way to reinforce the same class hierarchies.

Gentlemen's Games

While Symonds and Carpenter explicitly expressed the notion that homosexuality could challenge the dominant class system, the work of all three writers implicitly shores up the same classed notions. Men who occupied the lower classes became objectified as sexualized bodies. Sexuality, and in this case homosexuality, was

regarded as the possession of the three educated elites, and Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis used their status as “experts” to create an inherent homosexuality accessible, for the most part, only to other upper-class men. They created the idea of the “true” homosexual within their own class-based understanding of sexuality. The sexuality of lower-class men became characterized as perverse and criminal.

The working-class body appears within the writings of these three men as sites of pleasure. Symonds idealized the working-class body. He recalled in his memoirs his “strolls out in early morning or late evening along the Serpentine. There I feasted my eyes upon the naked bathers, consumed with a longing for them which was not exactly lust.” There he “indulged” in the “plastic beauty in men.”⁶⁴ In close proximity, Symonds included a paragraph from his journal in which he described the perfect male body. It has “a well-knit frame and a good healthy face.” He goes on to describe “sinewy wrists,” the “showing veins,” and “salience of sinews.” But this is no fictionalized body; it is that of a peasant whose labor Symonds was observing. This working body was the same one that Symonds would have begged to kiss and touch, as discussed above. This is a body to be admired, and even beyond the physical attributes of the body itself. He writes, “How white and wholesome was the flesh of the young man’s body.” The body was “radiating intelligence and the magnetic force of the male adolescent.”⁶⁵ The person occupying this body is wholesome, intelligent, and magnetic, and these attributes are revealed through the body alone. This is reflective of the aesthetic movement to which Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis subscribed. Symonds in

⁶⁴ Symonds, *Memoirs* 191.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 190

particular believed that “beauty was at once the handmaiden and expression of goodness and necessary to social well-being.”⁶⁶ A beautiful body reflected the internal goodness of its inhabitant.

But these were bodies alone. And when these classed bodies exerted a sexuality, they became problematic. A “true” sense of homosexuality belonged to the upper-class male, not the working-class man, even when the working-class man was the former’s lover. Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis created a distinct dichotomy between what they perceived as true versus denigrated forms of homosexuality. Not all homosexual acts were worthy of defense or declared “a leading virtue of democratic nations.” These men advocated the sexual freedom of those whom they considered to be congenitally homosexual, while simultaneously decrying homosexual acts prompted by simple sexual indulgence. And these distinctions were based in class, tying congenital homosexuality to the upper classes while condemning denigrated homosexuality to the poor.

Within the studies of Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds, the homosexual as an individual, aware of his or her sexuality is the foundation of a distinct, “true,” homosexual. All three men explained, often in great detail, that there was a distinct group of people who were born with an inherent inclination towards persons of their own gender. In the Ellis case studies, one finds subjects who were aware, at a relatively early age, of their “abnormal” attraction. In Symonds’ closing summary of *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, he propounds that “it has been shown that abnormal inclinations are

⁶⁶ Koven, 230.

congenital, natural and ineradicable in a large percentage of individuals.”⁶⁷ Carpenter referred to such people as Urnings, a term invented by the German writer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. He writes:

To Men or Women thus affected with an innate homosexual bias, Ulrichs gave the name of Urning [...] In the case of [Urnings, homogenic love] is, as said, so deeply rooted and twined with the mental and emotional life that the person concerned has difficulty in imagining himself affected otherwise than he is; and to him at least the homogenic love appears healthy and natural, and indeed necessary to the concretion of his individuality.⁶⁸

To Carpenter, those with innate same-sex proclivities deserved a nomenclature that highlighted their essential difference.

Those with an inherent, intrinsic predisposition to homosexuality deserved sympathy and freedom of sexual expression. Symonds, Carpenter, and, to a degree, Ellis, argued that such individuals are relatively normal. Indeed, Carpenter goes on to argue that such individuals are particularly responsible for numerous examples of valuable social work, ranging from the arts to military ingenuity. He writes

Whatever differing views there may be on the many problems which the Intermediate sexes present—and however difficult of solution some of the questions involved—there is one thing which appears to me incontestable: namely that a vast number of intermediates do actually perform most valuable social work, and that they do so partly on account and by reason of their special temperament.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 135.

⁶⁸ Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 18.

⁶⁹ Carpenter, *Intermediate Sex*, Chap. 5.

To Carpenter, it was simply part of the sexual invert's "character" to be a good contributor to society.⁷⁰ Carpenter implored:

While at any rate not presuming to speak with authority on so difficult a subject, [homosexuals, or what he calls the intermediate sex] I plead for the necessity of a patient consideration of it, for the due recognition of the types of character concerned, and for some endeavour to give them their fitting place and sphere of usefulness in the general scheme of society.⁷¹

He argued that congenital homosexuals deserved a place in society, despite their inherent sexuality. Ellis also argued that congenital homosexuals were relatively normal, and over the course of his study discovered, to his surprise, "that several persons for whom [he] felt respect and admiration" were in fact "the congenital subjects of this abnormality."⁷²

And this group of "true" inverts, for the most part, consisted of members of the middle-to-upper classes. Ellis' selected case studies focus almost singularly on men and women of the higher classes. Although class standing is not directly indicated, the tropes of upper-classness are implied. The men and women are educated, literate, and possess the finances and time to communicate with Ellis. These are figures who can express control over their own sexuality, in relative privacy. If a sense of the individual is central to the construction of the upper classes, it is rarely more apparent than in the lengthy, sexual autobiographies that subjects submitted for Ellis' case studies.⁷³ A true

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., Chap. 1.

⁷² Ellis, "Sexual Inversion," v.

⁷³ Harris, 11-16.

homosexual is a subject aware of him/herself as an individual with a sense of individual sexuality, which he/she should be free to express.

Even the ways in which one discovered he or she was a “true” homosexual denotes class standing. Ellis’ case studies show that one’s true sexuality is often discovered during sex-segregated schooling. Typical of the case studies, study number IV recalled his homosexual desires beginning during puberty, and first practiced at school and university.⁷⁴ This scenario is repeated over and over again within the case studies, and was true in the personal experiences of Symonds and Carpenter, as well.

Access to and understanding of specific literature was another important classed attribute of the true homosexual. An extension of one’s education, the reading of Greek classics and an introduction to Greek love was paramount in the formation of a homosexual identity and, consequently, how one spoke of it. Symonds, in his case study submitted for Ellis’ work, is explicit on the impact of Greek literature:

Here in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*—in the myth of the Soul and speeches of Pausanias Agathon and Diotima—I discovered the true *liber amoris* at last, the revelation I had been waiting for, the consecration of a long-cherished idealism. It was just as though the voice of my own soul spoke to me through Plato, as though in some antenatal experience I had lived the life of [a] philosophical Greek lover. I had touched solid ground.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ellis, “Sexual Inversion,” 95.

⁷⁵ Symonds, *Memoirs*, 99.

Greek literature, with its references and symbolism, became an acceptable form in which to express homosexual desire. Like Symonds, the true homosexual had his identity “lodged in ancient Hellas.”⁷⁶

The writings of Walt Whitman were also central to constructing a “true,” desirable, homosexuality. Whitman’s celebration of the “love of comrades” permeates the writings of both Symonds and Carpenter. A noble homosexuality rested on the ideas of fraternity and appreciation of the lover, who was often a working-class man. Symonds wrote that “The dominance of [Whitman’s ideal of comradeship] contributed greatly to shape my emotional tendencies. It taught me to apprehend the value of fraternity, and to appreciate the working classes.”⁷⁷ In *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, Symonds devoted an entire chapter to Whitman, writing that Whitman “recognizes among the sacred emotions and social virtues, destined to regenerate political life and to cement nations, an intense, jealous, throbbing, sensitive, expectant love of man for man.”⁷⁸ Carpenter in his published lecture, *Some Friends of Walt Whitman*, spoke of Whitman’s “love-nature” as “grand and noble,” and used Whitman’s term of comradeship almost universally in his writings on homosexuality.⁷⁹ These specific literary references would be available only to those with the educational means to understand them, limiting their accessibility to the upper class. Working-class men would not be able to express their sexuality in the language of Whitman’s *Calamus* or to lodge their identities in “ancient Hellas.” A sense of individual sexuality, couched in

⁷⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 191.

⁷⁸ Symonds, *Modern Ethics* 123.

⁷⁹ Edward Carpenter, *Some Friends of Walt Whitman: A Study in Sex-Psychology* (London: J.E. Francis, 1924) 3.

specific language derived from sources like the Greek classics or Whitman's poetry, which were only obtainable to the educated, became the foundation of inherent homosexuality.

This general acceptance of inherent homosexual desire contrasts sharply with what Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis saw as homosexual experiences based on denigrated sexual indulgence. "True inversion" was an inborn disposition to be celebrated in the upper-class language of "comradeship" and "Greek love." Working-class men did not possess, in themselves, a true homosexual nature. Their homosexual practices were reactionary, dependent on outward catalysts. Ellis exemplified this when he reported that, in Russia, "all pederasts are agreed that the common people are tolerably indifferent to their sexual advances, which they call 'gentlemen's games.'"⁸⁰ Indeed, Ellis records that men of lower class were flattered and pleased by the attentions of men of higher class, although not themselves inverted. They were "capable of corresponding" to such "appreciation,"⁸¹ but it did not alter their "own instincts and appetites for the female."⁸² These Russian men were responding to the advances of wealthier men; they were not acting out of their own sexual nature.

The majority of homosexual practices of working-class men were viewed simply as prostitution. These sexual acts were not derived, as in true homosexuals, from innate desires, but for material gain. It is this form of working-class homosexual

⁸⁰ Ellis, "Sexual Inversion" 23.

⁸¹ Symonds, *Memoirs* 278.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 278.

practice that is degraded. For Symonds, the prostitution of working-class men conjured strong notions of disgust. Symonds wrote:

I came away from the male brothel with a strong conviction that this was not the proper ground in which to plant the seeds of irresistible emotion. It raised disgust, and I left it shaking the dust and degradation of the locality off my feet.⁸³

Symonds considered sexual relationships based on money as “mean and base,” and not the foundation of a true comradeship.⁸⁴ Yet Symonds’ relationship with Fusato, which Symonds considered ideal, incorporated monetary exchange. How, then, did Symonds’ relationship differ from prostitution? Symonds gave money to Fusato out of the sense of obligation that the relationship fostered between the two men. Symonds felt responsible for his lover’s well-being. Although Symonds and Fusato’s “true” homosexual relationship included monetary exchange, it was acceptable as it occurred within an invested relationship. Prostitution, on the other hand, consisted of working-class men performing sexual acts for monetary exchange alone. Symonds deemed this behavior as degenerate.

Beyond prostitution, working-class examples of homosexuality are also derived from criminality. Ellis placed degenerate homosexuality as a common practice among the criminally minded, writing “but there can be little doubt that that tendency, or else a tendency to sexual indifference or bisexuality, is a radical character of a very large number of criminals.”⁸⁵ Criminals are simply less-evolved and thus more likely to

⁸³ Ibid., 255.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 254.

indulge in sexual excess. And in addition to the criminal's predisposition to sexual excess, Ellis presumes that the seclusion of men in prison excites more criminals to homosexual practice. He remarks that "Homosexual practices everywhere flourish and abound in prisons,"⁸⁶ and that "Prison life develops and fosters the homosexual tendency of criminals."⁸⁷ Who were considered criminals? In *Men of Blood*, Martin Wiener shows that, in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, criminals were characterized as almost always of the poorer classes. Tendencies towards classification turns the "criminal" into a certain type of personage with distinct traits and an identifiable locus in society, creating likely culprits—working-class men.

These instances of depraved homosexuality were damaging to calls of reform for the "true" homosexual. Ellis, Carpenter, and Symonds condemned the men and women whom they considered degenerate, and castigated them as another obstacle that stood in the way of "true inverts." Clear distinctions between the two had to be made. As Carpenter wrote:

Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the distinction between these born lovers of their own sex, and that class of persons with whom they are so often confused, who out of mere carnal curiosity or extravagance of desire, or from the dearth of opportunities for a more normal satisfaction (as in schools, barracks, &c.) adopt some homosexual practices. In the case of these latter the attraction towards their own sex is merely superficial and temptational, so to speak, and is generally felt by those concerned to be in some degree morbid.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁸ Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 18.

Congenital homosexuals, to Carpenter, represented a true constitution, one that was “deeply rooted and twined.” And to a congenital homosexual, such relationships were “healthy and natural, and indeed necessary to the concretion of his individuality.”⁸⁹ Degenerate persons who partook in homosexual activity became the “licentious few,” responsible for damaging the reputation of the “respectable and valuable class” of congenital homosexuals.⁹⁰ As Carpenter explained, “Much of the current misunderstanding with regard to the character and habits of the Uring arises from his confusion with the ordinary *roué* who, though of normal temperament, contracts homosexual habits out of curiosity and so forth.”⁹¹ Symonds also blamed such sexual immoderation on the “curious seeking after novel pleasure” and “wantonness”⁹² He described such persons as:

[...] individuals who amuse themselves with experiments in sensual pleasure, men jaded with ordinary sexual indulgence, and indifferent voluptuaries. It is possible that something morbid or abnormal usually marks this class.⁹³

It was not the homosexual acts themselves that were potentially problematic, but the impulses that led to them. Congenital homosexuals were being true to their inherent sexuality. Their passions were not born out of monetary desires or criminality, but were “natural and healthy,” and thus acceptable for expression.

Class notions are central to understanding how Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis constructed their individual discourses on homosexuality. Simultaneously these men

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁹¹ Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, Chap. 5.

⁹² Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 126.

⁹³ Ibid.

were trying to break down class constraints but were incapable of transcending them. Homosexuality could, in theory, bring about intimate, cross-class, relationships furthering romanticized ideas about class harmony and democracy. But at the same time, working-class men are never described as equals with their upper-class counterparts. They become only bodies on which the desires of upper-class men are played out. To Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter, homosexual practices diverged into two distinct forms: the true homosexuality available to the upper class and a denigrated homosexuality based upon perceived depravity among the working class.

Chapter 2
“A Different Type of Individual:”
Homosexuality, Gender, and Sex

My hope has always been that eventually a new chivalry, i.e. a second elevated form of human love, will emerge and take its place for the service of mankind by the side of that other which was wrought out in the Middle Ages. It will be complementary, by no means prejudicial to the elder and more commonly acceptable. It will engage *a different type of individual in different spheres of energy.*⁹⁴

In one of the few surviving letters between John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter, Symonds intimated toward the existence of a new form of individual that practiced a new form of love. He is conscious of his obliqueness. As he admits, he cannot “write freely on the topic,” but looks forward to discussing the “facts” in person.⁹⁵ So who was this new individual? Even Symonds was unsure. This new individual would act as a blank slate on which Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis could write their notions of gender and sexual practices. These three men would, to a degree, create a challenge to the dichotomous two-sex system prevalent by the end of the nineteenth century in Western Europe. Their challenge would be the proposed designation of a third sex characterized by the individual’s attraction to persons with similarly sexed bodies. This “intermediate” sex would be a new creature, natural yet abnormal, defined primarily by sexual practice.

The creation of a third sex is only the most radical gender commentary present within the works of Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis. These writers, while toying with the

⁹⁴ John Addington Symonds’ letter to Edward Carpenter, 29 December 1892 in *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook* ed. Chris White (London: Routledge, 1999) 94.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

notion of a separate sex based upon homosexual performance, also reveal the characteristics of the highly dichotomous gender system in which they were ensconced. To these writers, masculinity and femininity are believed to be opposing, inherent traits best tied to male or female sexed bodies. The normativity of the masculine male and feminine female was never truly challenged, neither by Symonds, Carpenter, nor Ellis.

Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis worked in a time when the stability of gender norms was being effectively challenged. Traditional forms of masculinity, especially, seemed to be in danger, as established sites of masculine display were diminishing and as the roles of women were radically changing. Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis reflected an emphasis on the masculine by their own focus on masculinity coupled, with a relative absence of discussion on femininity, with the exception of the femininity associated with homosexual males.

To understand these writers and their comprehension of gender performance, particularly of masculinity, it is imperative to delineate the characteristics of gender roles in nineteenth-century Britain. This proves difficult for several reasons. First, the “manliness” of Britain’s male-sexed subjects and what constituted that masculinity was never static. British masculinity in the Victorian era was rife with confusion, conflict, and change. As Thomas Carlyle expounded, “the old idea of Manhood has grown obsolete, and the new is still invisible to us, and we grope after it in darkness, one clutching this phantom, another that.”⁹⁶ As he notes, masculinity was a structure in flux, reinventing itself, constantly shifting directions. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine

⁹⁶ Thomas Carlyle, “Characteristics.” As quoted in Adams’ *Dandies and Desert Saints*, 1.

Hall explain in their seminal work on British gender, *Family Fortunes*, gender identities are “continually being forged, contested, reworked, and reaffirmed.”⁹⁷ Considering this, it impossible to create a concise definition of what constituted the Victorian idea of masculinity.

As gender roles were never clearly delineated, neither were they universal. Constructions of gender varied widely among the British classes. As discussed in the previous chapter, class was “an increasingly powerful and comprehensive category in social structure and organization” during the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ This is evident in gender expectations, as well. Many of the assumed characteristics of manliness in middle-class Britain were unable to bridge the chasm of class in Victorian society. In some instances, these constructions of masculinity were in direct conflict. According to Stephen Heathorn’s work, “How Stiff were their Upper Lips?,” men of the working class centered their masculinity on respectable employment and physical labor.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, the elite classes were “representing intellectual vocations as affirmations of masculine identity.”¹⁰⁰

The differences between classes and their views of masculinity can also be seen within the working-class man’s place within his own domicile. The Middle-class envisioned domestic authority as essential to masculinity, but to working-class families,

⁹⁷ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002) 29.

⁹⁸ Harris, 6.

⁹⁹ Stephen Heathorn, “How Stiff were their Upper Lips? Research on Late-Victorian and Edwardian Masculinity” *History Compass* 2 (2004) 2.

¹⁰⁰ James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) 2.

the “husband’s authority in their households was a wobbly feature.”¹⁰¹ As Ellen Ross explains in *Love and Toil*, often a working-class father’s “claims to competence and mastery in the home were a joke.”¹⁰² His ability to provide was often compromised, by low wages or unemployment, allowing the family to deny him deference. Furthermore, Heathorn argues “the working class father was practically removed from the household economy: his wages were usually turned over to his wife, and his possessions pawned when necessity dictated.”¹⁰³ This prompted working-class men to seek other avenues in which to prove their masculinity, like the display of their brute strength in physical labor or their ability to successfully hold employment. Although ideas of masculinity must have passed between these two classes, it is evident that bourgeois ideas of masculinity based upon the domicile and intellectual labor were not, for the most part, representative of how the working class characterized the masculine.

Despite these difficulties, it is still possible to sketch middle-class characteristics of what was considered central to gender performance, particularly masculinity. Vital to the middle-class Victorian sense of masculinity was the sphere of the domestic. Masterfully delineated by John Tosh in *A Man’s Place* is the idea that throughout the Victorian era, masculinity was demonstrated in relation to the household, at first appearing within the domicile, and eventually within one’s distance from the domestic. As Tosh states in his introduction, “Never before or since has domesticity been held to

¹⁰¹ Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 56.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰³ Heathorn, 2.

be so central to masculinity.”¹⁰⁴ The separation of work and home constructed a new paradigm of the domicile within the Victorian psyche. As Deborah Cohen comments in her book, *Household Gods*, the home “came to define what it meant to be British.”¹⁰⁵ Home became a refuge for the man, allowing him an escape from the supposed bleakness of outside, industrial life.

As the home became more central to one’s identity, it thus became the arena in which a man could display and cultivate his masculinity. Domesticity became the platform for the “‘natural’ forms of authority and deference”¹⁰⁶ that every male Briton should exercise. Masculine status was achieved by acquiring a domicile and, more importantly, by the relationships a man developed between himself and the occupants of that domicile, namely his wife and children. As Tosh explains:

The domestic sphere, then, is integral to masculinity. To establish a home, to protect it, to provide for it, to control it, and to train its young aspirants to manhood, have usually been essential to a man’s good standing with his peers.¹⁰⁷

Yet the domestic sphere became a scene of conflict. One of the most pronounced changes in gender performance occurred with the middle class man’s “flight from domesticity.” This flight was a result of the perceived increase of feminine authority within the domicile. Homes became the exclusive responsibility of the wife, and the wife herself began to be perceived as increasingly controlling. “The homage which men were expected to pay in the home, like other expressions of chivalry, was

¹⁰⁴ Tosh, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) ix.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 4.

premised on the fragility of the weaker sex.”¹⁰⁸ But women were becoming less fragile, both in the home and even within the legal system. Women were given more equality with the restructuring of divorce laws and with the passing of the Married Women’s Property Acts. In addition to this, parliament proposed the Women’s (Parliamentary) Suffrage Bill in 1870 and 1883, although it was defeated both times.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the protection and provision of the female sex, which made the domicile so appealing in that it gave a place for men to accomplish these more established traits of masculinity, was being seriously compromised as women were becoming considerably more influential. As Tosh relates:

The early Victorian model of domesticity had rested on an implied contract of master and protector in relation to the dependent subordinate. Fifty years later that contract no longer seemed to hold. The husband still had the undivided duty of maintaining and protecting the home, but his domestic power and prestige were wilting; the ‘weaker’ sex, it seemed, was discovering its own strength.¹¹⁰

The domicile was no longer as secure in its role of conferring masculinity. The deference and control that men once sought to gain from the home became more difficult to achieve as women increased their authority. And this augmented power of women within the domicile began to awaken fears that the domicile would instill effeminacy in those men who were “dancing to the tune of the wife or hostess.”¹¹¹ In regard to this, Paul Deslandes writes:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 181.

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 234.

¹¹⁰ Tosh, 182.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the demands of empire, the dynamics of international competition, and worries about the health of the superior British “race” prompted the rise of an exaggerated masculine culture in which militarism was valorized, imperial adventure (represented not only in colonial conquest and administration but also in activities like big-game hunting and mountain climbing) was elevated to near religious significance, and the virtues of physical fitness and athleticism were extolled.¹¹²

Because the domicile no longer provided a masculine status, late-Victorian men began to find other avenues, outside of the home, in which to establish their manhood.

One emerging avenue critical to this study is the assertion of gender through sexual performance. During the late-nineteenth century, scholars see the development of stronger ties between gender and sexuality. Sexuality was previously implied in mid-Victorian ideas of the masculine through the importance of marriage and procreation. As Sussman notes, “normative bourgeois masculinity enforces compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory matrimony.”¹¹³ However, it is never articulated as such. The influence of evangelical Christianity and its imposed morality greatly inhibited any discourse on sexuality. At best, as Tosh notes, “in retrospect the sexuality implied in late Victorian manliness seems decidedly ambivalent.”¹¹⁴ Sexuality, in virtually all forms, remained in silence.

Though discourse on sexuality remained relegated to the furthest recesses, Alan Sinfield states that this ambivalence starts to shift as effeminacy assumes a new role,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 181.

¹¹² Paul Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) 5.

¹¹³ Sussman, 5.

¹¹⁴ Tosh, 189.

that of signifier of sexual deviance, particularly homosexuality. As Jeffery Weeks notes when discussing the Boulton and Park scandal of 1871, the notion of homosexuality itself was “extremely underdeveloped.”¹¹⁵ It follows, then, that any ties homosexuality may have had with effeminacy were also underdeveloped. In *The Wilde Century*, Sinfield traces the idea of male-sexed effeminacy as identified with “leisure, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism,”¹¹⁶ but not with sexuality. He uses the criminal trials of Oscar Wilde to denote the turning point in which gender identity became almost synonymous with sexual identity. After the spectacular downfall of Oscar Wilde, a man known for his effeminate dandyism became the preeminent representation of the homosexual. In summation, Sinfield writes, “The image of the queer cohered at the moment when the leisured, effeminate, aesthetic dandy was discovered in same-sex practices.”¹¹⁷

The newly formed sexual binary of heterosexual/homosexual converged with the masculine/feminine binary. “And it became harder still to envisage same-sex practices beyond a masculine/feminine matrix.”¹¹⁸ In post-Wilde Britain, the idea emerged that to be effeminate was to be homosexual, and thus to be masculine was to be heterosexual. As Deslandes explains:

Furthermore, an increased awareness of the destabilizing dangers of homosexuality prompted discussions in which same-sex desire was feminized and the “boundaries of

¹¹⁵ Jeffery Weeks, 101.

¹¹⁶ Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

masculinity,” as Angus McLaren has noted, were vigilantly policed.¹¹⁹

As Deslandes states, this destabilization caused by homosexuality placed new importance on achieving and policing masculinity, for effeminacy now suggested sexual deviance.

Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis wrote within the midst of these changes in gender norms. They were aware that gender performance for men and women was changing, and they too tied gender performance to sexual behavior. Indeed, they explicitly acknowledged that this change in gender roles was readily apparent. In 1896, Carpenter wrote:

In late years (and since the arrival of the New Woman amongst us) many things in the relation of men and women to each other have altered, or at any rate become clearer. The growing sense of equality in habits and customs—university studies, art, music, politics, the bicycle, etc.—all these things have brought about a rapprochement between the sexes. If the modern woman is a little more masculine in some ways than her predecessor, the modern man (it is to be hoped), while by no means effeminate, is a little more sensitive in temperament and artistic in feeling than the original John Bull.¹²⁰

A new fluidity between gender roles was evident, and these writers used this as a space in which to place the homosexual, the homosexual male in particular. The homosexual represented a combination of both genders. Yet, if gender was tied to the sexed body, then the homosexual complicated this by having the body of one sex and the sexualized

¹¹⁹Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men*, 6.

¹²⁰Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age*, 120.

gender role of the other. In encompassing aspects of both genders, the homosexual could be neither sex; the homosexual was relegated to a third, intermediate, sex.

“On the Dividing Line”

Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis were not the first to introduce the notion of the “intermediate sex.” As they noted in their work, the first to do so was a German jurist by the name of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. Ulrichs proffered his theories in a series of pamphlets that he produced between 1864 and 1870. These pamphlets, which Symonds listed as “polemical, analytical, theoretical and apologetical,” argued for the decriminalization of homosexual acts in the German state of Hanover.¹²¹ More important to this study, the pamphlets also outlined the existence of what Ulrichs called the Urning. Carpenter lists Ulrichs’ work as “important, because it was the first in modern times, to recognize the existence of what might be called an Intermediate Sex.”¹²² Carpenter often referred to homosexuals as Urnings within his own works. As early as 1894, Carpenter wrote, “To Men or Women thus affected with an innate homosexual bias, Ulrichs gave the name of Urning.”¹²³

In *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, Symonds devotes an entire chapter to Ulrichs’ theory of the Urning. According to Symonds, Ulrichs divided most males¹²⁴ into two categories, the Dioning and the Urning. The Dioning is described as the “normal man”

¹²¹ John Addington Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 84.

¹²² Carpenter, *Love’s Coming*, 123-124.

¹²³ Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: The Labour Press Society Ltd., 1894) 18.

¹²⁴ Symonds mentions only males. Nonetheless, in some references to women within Symonds’ work, it appears that females follow similar categorization.

or “men proper” as opposed to the Urning, the “abnormal man.”¹²⁵ Within these categories are subcategories defining specific sexual inclinations. One such subcategory included men who preferred effeminate males. Such men were “christened by the name of Mannling.”¹²⁶ These subcategories are so extensive that Symonds was prompted to include a chart. On this chart, both the Dioning and the Urning are listed under the category of “The Human Male,” but the Dioning is listed as “Man or Dioning” while the Urning is not.¹²⁷

Symonds conceived Ulrichs’ Urning as a third sex. He summarizes Ulrichs as saying:

Man, Woman, and Urning—the third being either a male or a female in whom we observe a real and inborn, not an acquired or a spurious, inversion of appetite—are consequently regarded by him [Ulrichs] as the three main divisions of humanity viewed from the point of sex.¹²⁸

Carpenter too saw Ulrich’s Urning as a third sex. He wrote:

[Ulrichs] pointed out that there were people born in such a position—as it were on the dividing line between the sexes—that while belonging distinctly to one sex as far as their bodies were concerned they may be said to belong *mentally or emotionally* to the other.¹²⁹

Central to Symonds’ and Carpenter’s interest in the Urning was Ulrichs’ theory of the Urning’s origins. Ulrichs argued, according to these writers, that the Urning resulted from physiology; he was a natural anomaly. Symonds wrote:

¹²⁵ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 87-88.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹²⁹ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming*, 123.

Nature does not complete her work regularly and in every instance. Having succeeded in differentiating a male with full-formed sexual organs from the undecided fetus, she does not always effect the proper differentiation of that portion of the psychical being in which resides the sexual appetite. There remains a female soul in a male body.¹³⁰

Ellis makes mention of the same “congenital” argument. Ulrichs was, to Ellis, the first scholar who “regarded uranism, or homosexual love, as a congenital abnormality by which a female soul had become united with a male body.”¹³¹ To Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis, the attraction that the Urning felt for a person of the same bodily sex was an intrinsic drive. And this sense of naturalness becomes central to Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis’ argument for the decriminalization of same-sex sexuality.

How then did Symonds, Carpenter, and to some extent, Ellis, characterize the Urning or Intermediate? They did so by describing the tenuous gendered state of the Urning by using gender notions of the effeminate and the masculine. They argued that the homosexual male is, physically, not inherently feminine. On the contrary, the homosexual male is completely masculine in his physical body. However, emotionally and sexually, these men argued, homosexual males demonstrated essentially female characteristics. Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis assumed that a physical and emotional attraction to a male was a feminine attribute, supporting Seinfeld’s argument that sexual attraction and performance was becoming more highly gendered. But this does not become a universal claim. Symonds argues for the inherent effeminacy in same-sex sexual attraction while Carpenter tries to separate the Urning from any sexuality.

¹³⁰ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 90.

¹³¹ Ellis, 68.

Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis emphatically argue that the homosexual male is, for the most part, masculine in his physical body. Homosexual males are unquestionably male, or have a “marked masculine organization,” as Symonds phrased it.¹³² Carpenter wrote that they are “fine, healthy specimens of their sex, muscular and well-developed in body,” and they possess “thoroughly masculine powers” of the body.¹³³ To this end he wrote:

As indicated then already, in bodily structure there is, as a rule, nothing to distinguish the subjects of our discussion from ordinary men and women. [...] Such men, as said, are often muscular and well-built, and not distinguishable in exterior structure and the carriage of body from others of their own sex.¹³⁴

Only in rare cases of “hermaphroditism” did the sexed bodies of homosexual men appear to be abnormal. In the opinion of Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis, homosexual males clearly occupied a masculine body.

However, Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis purported that one’s gender performance could be separate from one’s sexed body. Ellis clearly noted the “prevalence among inverts” of “feminism in men and masculinism in women.”¹³⁵

Carpenter wrote:

If now we come to what may be called the more normal type of the Uranian man, we find a man who, while possessing thoroughly masculine powers of mind and body, combines with them the tenderer and more emotional soul-nature of the women—and sometimes to a remarkable degree.¹³⁶

¹³² Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 86.

¹³³ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming*, 126, 135.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 130, 135.

¹³⁵ Ellis, 291.

Symonds was particularly clear in his suggestion that the two were separate:

The body of a male is visible to the eyes, is measurable and ponderable, is clearly marked in its specific organs. But what we call his soul—his passions, inclinations, sensibilities, emotional characteristics, sexual desires—eludes the observation of the senses.¹³⁷

These emotional and sexual aptitudes of the homosexual male, although hosted in a masculine body, were considered to be essentially feminine.

Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis listed characteristics that they considered to be effeminate and common among homosexual men. For example, Carpenter lists the tendencies “like women’s” as “tender, sensitive, pitiful, and loving.” Homosexual men possessed a more well-developed intuition, similar to that found in women. They can “like women, read characters at a glance, and know, without knowing how, what is passing in the minds of others.”¹³⁸ Carpenter saw this “double nature” as a potential positive, giving the Urning a “command of life in all its phases, and a certain freemasonry of the secrets of the two sexes which may well favor their function as reconciler and interpreter.”¹³⁹

Despite their similar descriptions of the third sex, there was also an intriguing contestation between Symonds and Carpenter over the sexuality of the third sex. Symonds listed sexual attraction towards men itself as essentially feminine. He writes:

¹³⁶ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming*, 135.

¹³⁷ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 92.

¹³⁸ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming*, 135.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

And when I find that the soul, this element of instinct and emotion and desire existing in a male, had been directed in its sexual appetite from earliest boyhood towards persons of the male sex, I have the right to qualify it with the attribute of femininity.¹⁴⁰

On the other hand, Carpenter, while acknowledging the femininity of the homosexual male's "emotionality," attempted to distance the Urning from any sense of "morbid" sexuality. An effeminate male did not necessarily denote a divergent sexuality. And Carpenter was careful to distinguish between same-sex love and same-sex sexuality. In *Homogenic Love and its Free Place in Society*, Carpenter stated that the "physical side" of homosexual love "can never find expression quite so freely and perfectly" and therefore has a "natural tendency to run rather more along emotional channels."¹⁴¹ In *Love's Coming of Age*, which was written for a less-sympathetic audience, Carpenter was more explicit in expurgating sexuality from the Urning. He wrote:

It would be a great mistake to suppose that their attachments are necessarily sexual, or connected with sexual acts. On the contrary (as abundant evidence shows), they are often purely emotional in their character; and to confuse Uranians (as is often done) with libertines having no law but curiosity in self-indulgence is to do them a great wrong.¹⁴²

As the above discussion shows, the Intermediate Sex was a contested space, even among scholars with similar arguments. Symonds explicitly saw the Urning as a sex with an inherently feminine sexuality, which supports Seinfeld's argument that sexuality and gender were becoming more closely associated. Nonetheless, Carpenter

¹⁴⁰ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 93.

¹⁴¹ Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 9.

¹⁴² Carpenter, *Love's Coming*, 128-129.

failed to associate this effeminacy with sexual performance. Indeed, he tried to deny the Urning of any sexuality.

Despite the differences in regard to the sexuality of homosexual men, Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis introduced to the English-speaking world a new creature, the Urning, or the intermediate sex. This creature confounded the established gender norms of the larger public. The homosexual male, belonging to this third sex, possessed a fluidity of gender. He could be masculine in his body and temperament while simultaneously feminine in his emotional attributes and sexual performance. However, the fluidity that Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis presented as a possibility also had its limitations.

“Extreme Specimens”

While Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis allowed for a certain degree of non-normative gender behavior in homosexuals, they were unable to separate their work from prevalent gender norms. They castigated behaviors and persons whom they considered extreme examples of gender nonconformity. While these scholars tolerated some deviance, or, as in the case of Carpenter, celebrated it, particularly effeminate men were shown little sympathy. Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis made the assumption, based upon social beliefs about gender, that masculinity, in some essential way, was better than femininity.

The extremely effeminate male is the most widely discussed subject of concern for Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis. Symonds argued that especially effeminate males

were marked from boyhood by exhibiting a “disinclination for the games of their schoolfellows, and preferred to consort with girls.” And in adulthood they “call themselves by names of women, avoided the society of normal comrades, hated sport and physical exercise.”¹⁴³ Carpenter considers such men as “not particularly attractive, sometimes quite the reverse.”¹⁴⁴ He characterized effeminate males by writing:

In the first place, then, the extreme specimens [...] are not particularly attractive, sometimes quite the reverse. In the male of this kind we have a distinctly effeminate type, sentimental, lackadaisical, mincing in gait and manners, something of a chatterbox. [...] His affection too is often feminine in character, clinging, dependent and jealous, as of one desiring to be loved almost more than to love.¹⁴⁵

Carpenter then listed Henry III of France as an example of this type.

Ellis argued that such effeminate males were marked in their bodies. Their genitals are “small and undeveloped, with small and flabby testes,”¹⁴⁶ with broad hips and “arms rounded.”¹⁴⁷ In some cases their breasts were “well-developed” and would swell and become red. He even noted one case in which an especially effeminate male experienced a “‘menstrual’ phenomenon, physical and psychic, recurring every four weeks.”¹⁴⁸ Carpenter, too, argued that such effeminacy could be seen within the physical body: “[...] his figure not unfrequently betraying a tendency towards the

¹⁴³ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 58.

¹⁴⁴ Carpenter, *Love's Coming*, 132.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Ellis, 289.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

feminine, large at hips, supple, not muscular, the face wanting in hair, the voice inclined to be high-pitched, etc.”¹⁴⁹

These scholars were quick to assert that men who demonstrated such exaggerated forms of effeminacy were less desirable and rare among homosexual men. As noted above, Carpenter referred to such individuals as “extreme specimens.” Elsewhere he wrote that they are the “extreme and exaggerated types of the race” as opposed to the “more normal and perfect types.”¹⁵⁰ Symonds wrote that, by far, “a large majority [of homosexual males] felt like men.”¹⁵¹ Ellis quoted an effeminate male subject as saying “We are all women; that we do not deny.” Ellis dismissed this statement, writing, “He put the matter in too extreme of form. The feminine traits of the homosexual are not usually of a conspicuous character.” To Ellis, “inverts of a plainly feminine nature are rare exceptions.”¹⁵²

This castigation of effeminate males has little to do with the sexed bodies of the subjects and more to do with Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis’ own valuation of the dichotomous gender system of which they were a part. Within this system, Masculinity is prized while femininity is undervalued, especially in males. The inherent superiority of masculinity is evidenced by these scholars’ differentiation of effeminate males and masculine females. Noticeably effeminate males are degraded while masculine women seem relatively tolerated. And it is only through exhibiting masculine attributes that these women are mentioned at all. The women discussed, like the men, are

¹⁴⁹ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming*, 133.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁵¹ Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 57.

¹⁵² Ellis, 288.

characterized by Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis as extreme examples of a sexed body—female in this case—taking on the inappropriate masculine gender performance. Yet the conversation on these masculine women was not couched in terms of exaggeration and unattractiveness, nor do the characteristics listed carry negative connotations such as “lackadaisical,” “sentimental,” or “chatterbox.” This is juxtaposed against Carpenter’s descriptions of such women as “a rather markedly aggressive person, of strong passions, masculine manners and movements, practical in the conduct of life.”¹⁵³ Similarly, he stated that these women practice a love that “is often a sort of furor, similar to the ordinary masculine love, and at times almost uncontrollable.” This is strikingly different from the effeminate male, who is “clinging” and “jealous.” It is also revealing to note the absences in these scholars’ discussion of masculine women. Neither Ellis nor Carpenter list any bodily aberrations in these women like they noted among effeminate males. In fact, the only mention of unusual physical attributes among masculine women occurred when Carpenter mentioned a common muscular figure and rather low-pitched voice.¹⁵⁴

The valuation of masculinity is most clear in Symonds’ discussion of the evolution of the embryo. While trying to explain why a female soul could be found in the male body, Symonds suggested that “a male is a more advanced product of sexual evolution than the female. The male instinct of sex is a more advanced product than the female instinct.”¹⁵⁵ He is quick to state that the Urning is not “arrested at a certain point of

¹⁵³ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming*, 133.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

development,” but does conclude that masculinity is a more evolved type of gender performance and thus more difficult to obtain than femininity.¹⁵⁶

Discussions of gender are pervasive in Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis’ work, and provide an arena in which these scholars contested ingrained beliefs. By the introduction and scholarly acceptance of a third sex, Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis argued that one’s gender performance could be separated from one’s sexed body. The Urning, intermediate sex, or homosexual male, could possess some attributes of the feminine, and according to Carpenter this could even be beneficial. But, for the most part, the homosexual male was also typically masculine. When the homosexual male was noticeably unmasculine, that is to say feminine, he problematized the gender hierarchy constructed from Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis’ high valuation of masculinity. These scholars were part of a society which prized masculinity, and this societal norm is never challenged within the works of Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis. Not only do they never challenge this norm, but they support it with their relative toleration of masculinity when performed by female sexed bodies. And Symonds goes even further, suggesting that masculinity is a more evolved state than femininity.

¹⁵⁵ Symonds, 91.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that a peculiar amount of ignorance exists regarding the subject of sexual inversion.¹⁵⁷

Havelock Ellis, John Addington Symonds, and Edward Carpenter possessed an intricate understanding of homosexuality that was dependent upon their often contradictory perceptions of class, gender, and sex. Although they attempted to alleviate the proscriptions that resulted from these constructions, Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter were unable to work outside of, and sometimes even reinforced, certain facets of class, gender, and sex they had hoped to transcend.

Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter were, as we all are, inhabitants of their own time. Because they composed most of their work during the *fin-de-siècle*, they exemplified the period's increased interest in the objective categorization of bodies. Sexual performance proved to be a particularly intriguing and useful way to categorize bodies. Sexologists, as researchers of sexuality were often called, sought to understand the nature of the body via sexual acts. This purportedly objective understanding transformed bodies into sexual categories. But as this thesis has shown, these characterizations were rarely objective. Bodies already existed within established social constructions, such as class, gender, and sex, and these influenced how the sexuality of individual bodies was viewed.

Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter were aware, to a degree, that class, gender, and sex affected how bodies were categorized, and as such, sought to transcend these

¹⁵⁷ Ellis, v.

constructions. They saw homosexuality as an avenue to accomplish this. To Symonds and Carpenter, homosexual relationships could thrive across classes, and they used their own personal relationships as evidence of the benefits to be garnered from cross-class erotic interactions. They believed homoeroticism engendered intimate relationships regardless of class and encouraged greater concern for the lower classes. This, in turn, could provide upward social mobility for the poor lovers of wealthier men. These scholars also brought into question the binaries of gender and sex. They proffered the existence of an individual that moved beyond the assumptions of a universal male/female body and the masculine/feminine gender. This individual was characterized by his/her homosexual behavior.

While Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter complicated these constructions of class, gender and sex, they also fortified them. These men constructed a dichotomy of homosexuality in which bodies were divided into “true” and “degenerate” homosexuals based upon their classed location. Those who were securely within the upper classes were privileged with a “true” homosexuality, worthy of expression and tolerance. “True” homosexuality required a sense of a distinct, individual sexuality and a specific language in which to express it. These characteristics were available, for the most part, only to the upper classes. “Degenerate” homosexuality was reactionary and not inherent. It was characterized by homosexual acts for material gain alone (i.e. prostitution), and was associated with criminality and the working class. Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter also reasserted the social norms of gender and sex. While they allowed for the transcendence of gender and sex in the theory of the Urning, this transcendence

was limited. These scholars approved of the homosexual male who remained within the ascribed gender roles of the male body. Conversely, they castigated and attempted to disentangle the homosexual male from the effeminate male. In essence, Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter, valued the masculine homosexual male more than the effeminate one. This reinforced the notion that gender is inextricably tied to the sex of the body and reasserted the preferred status of masculinity over femininity.

Havelock Ellis, John Addington Symonds, and Edward Carpenter attempted to shape their society, and they were somewhat successful. In their works, they complicated pervasive assumptions about class, gender, sex, and particularly homosexuality. Their ideas were appropriated by others, like Forster and Hirschfeld, and were widely disseminated. Yet at the same time, all three men were never able to shed these social constructions themselves. In doing so, Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter revealed the pervasive and persistent nature of social constructions.

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VITA

Jonathan E. Coleman

Date and Place of Birth:

08 February 1983. South Williamson, Kentucky

Educational Institutions Attended and Degrees Awarded:

Pikeville College (2001-2005), B.S.

University of Kentucky (2007-present), M.A. in progress

Professional Positions Held:

Docent, Mary Todd Lincoln House (February 2009-Present)

Admissions Counselor, Pikeville College (July 2006-August 2007)

High School History Teacher, Regional Christian School (June 2005-July 2006)

Gender and Women's Studies Graduate Student Union, Founder and President
(2009-Present)

History Graduate Student Association, Treasurer (2009-Present)

Scholastic and Professional Honors:

James Still Fellow at the University of Kentucky

Bonnie Jean Cox Research Award in Gender and Women's Studies

Trustee's Academic Scholarship

Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship

Berger London Study Scholarship to Imperial College, London

The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars Award

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Research Grant Recipient