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Homosexual Scandal, Erotic Geography

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# Remapping the Sites of Modern Gay History: Legal Reform, Medico-Legal Thought, Homosexual Scandal, Erotic Geography

*Joseph Bristow*

**E**xactly thirty years ago Jeffrey Weeks published his groundbreaking *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (1977)—an immensely influential history of the British sexual reform movements from the 1870s to the 1970s. Its appearance was followed closely (and in some ways serendipitously) by Robert Hurley’s 1978 English translation of Michel Foucault’s commanding *Introduction* to his projected six-volume *History of Sexuality*. Foucault’s theoretical work dismissed the belief that during the Victorian period “modern Puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, non-existence, and silence” wherever sexuality was concerned.<sup>1</sup> These two remarkable books—if emerging from divergent intellectual contexts—took similar initiatives to explain how the category of the “homosexual” came to define a particular kind of modern sexual identity, one that differed markedly from earlier understandings of the man-loving man as a “sodomite.” Both Weeks’s and Foucault’s studies, though methodologically distinct from each other, advanced well beyond limited

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), 4–5. While Foucault published two more volumes in his *History of Sexuality*, his project remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1984. Much of Foucault’s critique of inquiries that uphold the idea of the “triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence” during the Victorian period has a particular target in mind. He is critical of Steven Marcus’s Freudian study of pornography, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York, 1966). In this study, Marcus discloses how and why Victorian pornography reveals the supposedly repressive sexual climate of the age. Foucault accordingly introduces volume 1 of his *History* with a section titled “We ‘Other Victorians’” (3–13). His point is to demystify the belief that “we continue to be dominated . . . even today” by a repressive “Victorian regime” that produced “our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality” (3).

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earlier scholarship that discussed how homosexuality became a recognizable category in the nineteenth century. Weeks's and Foucault's differing models of historiography helped pave the way for a significant series of homo-affirmative inquiries into British culture that opened our minds to such freshly formulated concepts as "male homosocial desire" (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), "sexual dissidence" (Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield), and Oxford Hellenism (Richard Dellamora and Linda Dowling).<sup>2</sup> Recent work in the field, however, associates Weeks and Foucault with social constructionism of a particularly schematic kind—one which supposedly assumes that powerful medical and legal discourses were largely responsible for the making of the modern homosexual. In this article, I will demonstrate that recent historians have oversimplified Weeks and Foucault in this regard, while assessing what is decisively new in their contributions to understandings of male homosexuality.

In *Coming Out*, Weeks concentrates on the various means through which modern "homosexual consciousness" was forged among radicals in Britain, and, in this way, the emergence of sexology played a crucial role. Weeks, like Foucault, places German doctor Carl Westphal at the head of a genealogy of sexological thought. In 1870, Westphal asserted that "moral insanity" resulted from "congenital reversal of sexual feeling."<sup>3</sup> But, as Weeks observes, in the same genealogy, homophile radicals, including Karl Maria Benkert and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, developed a repertoire of complicated ideas about sexual inversion (e.g., the belief that homosexual desire was expressed by an anatomically male body that contained inner feminine characteristics). Weeks's study, however, ranges expansively beyond what he carefully brackets as "the Medical Model" (which preoccupies much of Foucault's *Introduction*). He explores the work undertaken by the political groupings as well as key individuals who sought to strengthen "homosexual self-expression" and, importantly, "self-definition."<sup>4</sup>

Weeks takes pains to demonstrate how, in the late-Victorian era, the "comparatively recent phenomenon" of "homosexual identity" transpired not only in connection with medical institutions but also in relation to such diverse matters as changes in law, socialist movements, the study of classics, and enthusiasm for Walt Whitman's polemical poetry.<sup>5</sup> Across the course of some eighteen well-documented chapters, Weeks pays close attention to watershed moments such as the Labouchere Amendment of 1885, under which Oscar Wilde was tried some ten years later for committing and procuring acts of "gross indecency." He draws on the previously untapped archive of criminologist George Cecil Ives, who founded the secret homosexual society known as the Order of Chaeronea. Moreover, Weeks discloses

<sup>2</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985); Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford, 1991); Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar and the Queer Moment* (New York, 1994); Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990); and Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, NY, 1994). All of these writings, to varying degrees, engage both respectfully and critically with Weeks's and Foucault's works. Dellamora's *Masculine Desire*, for example, opens by discussing both of these scholars' writings.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1977), 27. A second edition of Weeks's book, which includes a new chapter on the 1980s, appeared from the same publisher in 1990.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

that the landmark campaigning of socialist Edward Carpenter in the 1890s provided sources of inspiration for the British Society of Sex Psychology, with which Carpenter, like Ives, became actively involved after its inception in 1914. *Coming Out* culminates in a sequence of chapters that analyze the Homosexual Law Reform Society (1960), the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (1964), and the Gay Liberation Front (1972). Significantly, Weeks arranges these discussions so that they reveal the breaks, rather than seamless continuities, in the activities of those groups that campaigned for reform. (The mid-1930s, for example, witnessed the winding-up of the radical Sexological Society of Britain. It was also the time when the Nazis dismantled Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science.)

Foucault's thought-provoking, if at times generalized, *Introduction* explores how sex underwent "a whole network of varying, specific, and coercive transpositions into discourse."<sup>6</sup> His innovative study undoubtedly helped scholars to develop theoretical frameworks that could build on Weeks's detailed inquiries into the ways in which "homosexuality" (as well as the kinds of identities grouped around it) became a steadily recognizable modern category in Britain. Yet it is important to note, as Weeks reminds us, that "the revolution in sexual thinking" that motivated *Coming Out* "was already well under way by the time [Foucault] published his introductory essay."<sup>7</sup> The leading lights of this upsurge in "sexual thinking" who inspired Weeks were Mary McIntosh and Dennis Altman, whose writings came to notice when the newly fledged Gay Liberation Front enabled an unapologetic homosexual historiography to emerge.<sup>8</sup> Although Foucault's *Introduction* was not the inspiration for *Coming Out*, Weeks absorbed a number of observations that Foucault made in his earlier *Madness and Civilization* (1967) about the manner in which medical models of sin and disease often propagated social fears of moral contagion.

Foucault argues in his *Introduction* that sexuality was a complex discursive formation in large part precipitated by nineteenth-century medical sciences, whose emergent classifications, among other things, "transposed the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul."<sup>9</sup> On this basis, Foucault concludes that Westphal's famous article on "contrary sexual feelings" shows that by the 1870s one cardinal shift within an emergent *scientia sexualis* was glaringly obvious: where the "sodomite had been a temporary aberration . . . the homosexual was now a species."<sup>10</sup> This memorable formulation soon became something of a slogan in subsequent studies that looked at the making of the modern homosexual. Foucault persuasively claims that one of the prominent techniques that sexology deployed in creating a seemingly true discourse on sex was confession, whose religious conventions helped shape the narrative construction of case histories. Defiantly pitching his observations about the "steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex" against any psychology that would claim that "sex is an autonomous agency which secondarily produces manifold effects of sexuality over the entire length and surface of contact with power," Foucault contends that

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *Introduction*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge, 2000), 8.

<sup>8</sup> See Mary McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role," *Social Problems* 16, no. 2 (1968): 182–91; and Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, *Introduction*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

“sex”—the “anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures”—is nothing more than an “artificial unity” whose ostensible “secret” holds us in its grip.<sup>11</sup> Thus the very idea that it is—to invoke D. H. Lawrence’s seemingly risqué declaration—“our business . . . to realize sex” remains embedded in a nexus of discourses that have made us believe that “sexuality” has a fearful, if not intimidating, capacity to define who and what we are.<sup>12</sup>

Although the present discussion will focus on male homosexuality, it should be noted that Weeks did include three chapters that focus on lesbianism, but some readers took issue with his assumptions. In 1989, Pam Johnson contested his observation that Charlotte Brontë’s passionate letters to Ellen Nussey cannot be analyzed “along the modern polarity of lesbian/heterosexual, because for very few women up till the present century was such a polarity conceivable.”<sup>13</sup> Johnson argues that if such an “argument is taken to its logical conclusion, there can have been no lesbianism before the twentieth century.”<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Martha Vicinus has observed that while Weeks might be correct to state that Victorian beliefs in female sexual passivity may have limited scientific efforts to define lesbianism, it is nonetheless the case that there were widespread debates about “mannish women,” just as there were fathers who remained anxious about their daughters’ unwillingness to marry because of their commitment to female friends.<sup>15</sup>

Weeks presciently observed that by contesting the “repressive hypothesis,” Foucault places so much emphasis on the classificatory authority of sexological discourse to name, and thus know, “homosexuality” that he can give the misleading impression that sexual identity remained largely in the hands of two powerful (and often punitive) institutions: medicine and the law. In a 1982 essay Weeks identifies how Foucault’s interest in shifting our understanding of power away from analyses of oppressive agencies that exercise top-down social control to those of discursive operations that lack a privileged source of power may nevertheless suggest that we are “always, already trapped” by the taxonomies that define us.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, Foucault claims that homosexuals could engage in a “reverse-discourse” that re-signified the sexual category that sought to pathologize them into one that could provide the ground on which an oppressed minority might realize and thus develop strategies of political resistance. Yet Weeks is only too aware that Foucault never makes it clear whether homosexuals can ever dismantle or transcend the “apparatus of sexuality” that has given them the opportunity to inhabit their modern sexual identity.<sup>17</sup>

Criticism of Weeks’s *Coming Out* and Foucault’s *Introduction*, however, has now transmogrified to such a degree that some historians show no hesitation in

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 18, 154–55.

<sup>12</sup> D. H. Lawrence, quoted in *ibid.*, 157.

<sup>13</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Pam Johnson, “Edith Simcox and Heterosexism in Biography: A Lesbian-Feminist Exploration,” in *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History, 1840–1985*, ed. Lesbian History Group (London, 1989), 62.

<sup>15</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago, 2004), 32.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, “Discourse, Desire and Sexual Deviance: Some Problems in the History of Homosexuality,” in *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, ed. Kenneth Plummer (London, 1982), 102. See also Weeks, “Foucault for Historians,” *History Workshop Journal* 14 (1982): 106–19.

<sup>17</sup> Weeks, “Discourse, Desire and Sexual Deviance,” 103.

pigeonholing both of these researchers as upholders of an inflexible medico-legal model that assumes that modern homosexuality was exclusively classified, disciplined, and punished by legal and medical agencies. More to the point, recent scholarship has on occasion gone so far as to suggest that Weeks and Foucault—who arguably stand at the beginning of a defiantly unapologetic homosexual historiography—contend that doctors and lawyers, along with parliamentarians and the police, set out purposely to define, survey, and impugn same sex-loving men. In doing so, practitioners of what I will call the new gay history can at times make such foundational works as *Coming Out* and the *Introduction* to the *History of Sexuality* look programmatic, nonreflexive, and even naive.

But, strangely enough, it is in the very process of simplifying these resourceful works from the 1970s that this early twenty-first century generation of scholars often manages to make its own distinctive advances in how we understand the legal, medical, and social regulation of male homosexuality. At its best, this new wave of research constructively reconsiders the relations between the workings of the law and patterns of arrests, the impact that well-known scandals had on perceptions of homosexual men, and the manner in which a frequently stigmatized minority—in the face of considerable oppression—did more than realize their desires solely on the basis of a reverse discourse that contributed to aspects of campaigns for legislative reform. In what follows, I assess the extent to which these scholars, who sometimes indulge in mismanaged revisions of Weeks's and Foucault's work, succeed in remapping the intellectual terrain that their academic forebears began to chart three decades earlier.

### UNEVEN ROADS TO LEGAL REFORM

The new gay history, in H. G. Cocks's view, has challenged the assumption that “forms of homosexuality other than sodomy were only made illegal at the end of the nineteenth century” by the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885.<sup>18</sup> In *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (2003), Cocks aims to correct this prevailing view by showing that “the first half of the century . . . deserves greater attention” than the scandal-ridden fin de siècle.<sup>19</sup> Cocks maintains that the energy historians have expended in researching sexual scandals—such as Vere Street (1810), Cleveland Street (1889–90), and the Wilde trials (1895)—mistakenly implies that “the legal process . . . is episodic, spectacular and sensational.”<sup>20</sup> By contrast, he claims that during the nineteenth century “the workings of justice were sustained, unspectacular, insidious, everyday and even familiar.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, Cocks devotes much of his statistically detailed first chapter to revealing that the notable legal changes that punctuate the century—the 1828 ruling that sodomy comprised anal penetration (not spermatic emission), the 1861 Offences against the Person Act, the 1885

<sup>18</sup> H. G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2003), 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Labouchere Amendment, and the 1898 Vagrancy Act—had little bearing on the pattern of arrests and prosecutions.

From this perspective, the Labouchere Amendment can scarcely be cited as an event that brought about the kind of shift from sexual acts to specific homosexual identities that Foucault associates with the impact of Westphal's sexology. In Cocks's view, historians have tended to attribute a mistaken interpretation to the wording of the punitive 1885 amendment. Since Labouchere's law for the first time explicitly prohibited acts of "gross indecency" (even in private), it may well appear that it marked a decisive break with previous legislation. In other words, the 1885 amendment might suggest that gross indecency was an entirely new category when, in fact, lawyers had defined consenting acts as gross indecency for some time. Likewise, it may well seem that this law—which carried a maximum sentence of two years in solitary confinement with hard labor—differed markedly from earlier legislation (abolished with the 1861 act) that contained the death penalty for sodomy. But, as Cocks observes, when one examines the length of sentences for indecent assault, there is a noticeable increase from an average of 16.05 months in 1844 to twenty-five months in 1887. And when it comes to the 1885 amendment's prohibition of sexual congress between males in private, it remains the case that Labouchere's wording simply inscribed what was already assumed—namely, that private homosexual acts were not legal in England and Wales.

Thus Cocks strongly cautions us against making too much of the supposed novelty of the 1885 law. Where Weeks focuses our minds on the "long-term implications" of legislation that was "directed at preventing the corruption of youth" (the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act for the most part concentrated on protecting young girls by raising the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen), Cocks asserts that homosexual offenses comprised a noticeably "routine aspect of criminal justice."<sup>22</sup> This was a largely "decentralised" criminal justice system that was put into action by private prosecutors of "frequently low social status."<sup>23</sup> Thus Cocks's chapter ends on a note that stresses that the homosexual offenses that regularly preoccupied local magistrates were necessarily rather humdrum affairs dispersed across the nation. There was, as far as Cocks can see, nothing extraordinary in the "nameless offences" that passed—day in, day out—through the courts.

Early in his study *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914* (2003), Matt Cook acknowledges the significance of Cocks's *Nameless Offences* because this inquiry admirably integrates "attentiveness to the representation of homosexuality—especially in the newspapers—with a rigorous analysis of arrest and prosecution patterns across the nineteenth century."<sup>24</sup> A main consequence of Cocks's research is to unearth, in Cook's words, the "complexity of homosexual identity and self-making, something that has tended to be obscured by the attention devoted to Oscar Wilde."<sup>25</sup> There is some truth in this observation. In the past two decades, historians (especially literary ones) have seized on Wilde as the

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>24</sup> Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914* (Cambridge, 2003), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

exemplary victim of what the homophile John Addington Symonds called “Labby’s inexpandable legislation.”<sup>26</sup> Yet, as Cook realizes from his reading of Ives’s *The Continued Extension of the Criminal Law* (1922), the 1898 Vagrancy Act arguably “did more to criminalize a putative homosexual identity than the Labouchere Amendment.”<sup>27</sup> Besides enabling the authorities to harass vagrants, the 1898 provision empowered the police to make arrests not because a crime had been committed but on suspicion of any male individual’s intention to perpetrate one. Thus, in 1912, the actor Alan Horton was sentenced to two weeks in jail for walking with a “wigggle” into a public restroom at midnight. As Cook acknowledges, however, while it is plainly the case that under this legislation the number of convictions for importuning and soliciting rose remarkably (they increased from 1,326 in 1898 to 3,443 in 1912), it nonetheless remains impossible to abstract from the statistics the precise numbers of men who were arrested. Such arrests were not separated from other infringements of the law by persons of either sex in the annual reports presented to parliament.

Cook’s shrewd commentary on the 1898 act helps us to reflect on the figures that he gathers in an appendix where he lists arrests and convictions for “sodomy,” “intent to commit sodomy,” and “indecent between males” between 1880 and 1915. These figures show that arrests under the Labouchere Amendment rose sharply between 1890 and 1894, slowed somewhat in the next five years, increased steadily between 1900 and 1909, and then jumped dramatically through 1915. Having compared the divergent patterns of arrest and conviction under both the Labouchere Amendment and the Vagrancy Act, Cook speculates that it may well have been the case that the 1898 legislation, to use Ives’s word, had a more “poisonous” effect than the 1885 law that, as Weeks reminds us, quickly became known as the “Blackmailer’s Charter.”<sup>28</sup>

Sean Brady, in *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913*, also reexamines the 1885 ban on gross indecency, and his discussion follows Cocks’s influential analysis by stating that Labouchere’s amendment “cannot be viewed as a purposive attempt by the state to construct a pejorative ‘type’ through legislation.”<sup>29</sup> Yet it would be hard to attribute to Weeks, as Brady does, the idea that Labouchere’s last-minute intervention in the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act deliberately set out to create a homosexual “type.” Weeks observes in *Coming Out* that late-Victorian legislation that banned gross indecency and “soliciting” was primarily focused on female prostitution, and the point was—as he comments later in *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (1981)—that this kind of law did “not create” (as Weeks emphasizes it) but “helped shape a new mood” about the “social regulation of sex.”<sup>30</sup> At this juncture, Brady, I suspect, realizes that he might be pushing his thesis too far. Just when it seems likely he will assert that the 1885 amendment was wholly incidental to male ho-

<sup>26</sup> John Addington Symonds, “To Havelock Ellis” (July 1891), in *The Letters of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters, 3 vols. (Detroit, 1967–69), 3:587.

<sup>27</sup> Cook, *London*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913* (Basingstoke, UK, 2005), 93.

<sup>30</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, 16, and *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (Harlow, UK, 1981), 103.



mosexual lives, he admits that it had certain “cultural effects,” and he subsequently notes that it “had the effect of breaking the [thirteen-year] silence on the reporting of crimes of sex between men in *The Times*.”<sup>31</sup> If the law was ever involved in a Foucauldian “incitement to discourse,” then this would surely be a case in point.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, if Brady usefully corrects Weeks’s research in any way, it is by showing that the files that Home Office administrators gathered on judges’ opinions about the sentencing of men for sodomy were compiled in 1888—not, as Weeks suggests, prior to 1885. This conclusion indicates that the Labouchere Amendment did not stem from sustained government deliberations on the matter.<sup>33</sup>

In *Queer London: Peril and Pleasure in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (2005), Matt Houlbrook makes far bolder claims than Cocks, Cook, or Brady about the presumed power of the law to regulate male homosexual desire. He turns to the interwar and immediate postwar years that culminated in proposals for partial decriminalization. Houlbrook readily absorbs *Coming Out* in a “Whiggish progressive” narrative that naively traces how the “tragedy suffered by Wilde and countless others culminated in the unprecedented ‘witch hunt’ of the 1950s, that, in turn prompted a backlash leading to the Wolfenden Report of 1957 and the recommendation that the law be reformed.”<sup>34</sup> It is a pity that Houlbrook disparages *Coming Out* in this manner (Weeks’s study, after all, points to discontinuities as well as advances in the reform movement) when he makes many valuable observations about the hazards involved in assuming that the reform organizations necessarily represented the feelings and experience of all male homosexual subjects. One of the greatest strengths of this impressively researched book is his argument that there were “profound antagonisms between queer men” during his chosen period and that these dividing lines become most visible when we recognize how the “respectable ‘homosexual’ subject” was almost always viewed as “the deserving beneficiary of reform.”<sup>35</sup> As Houlbrook sees it, during the decade that intervened between the Wolfenden Report and the Sexual Offences Act (1967) the seeming evolution toward legal reform was carried out successfully at the expense of excluding morally dubious individuals—“the effeminate quean, the man driven by uncontrollable lust into the city’s abject public spaces, the workingman moving between male and female partners, the pedophile”—who did not “fulfill the requirements of respectability.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*, 93–94. Brady notes that the silence in *The Times* was likely precipitated by the overexposure of the scandal featuring cross-dressers Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park in 1870–71. I return to Brady’s and other recent analyses of the arrest, arraignment, and trial of Boulton and Park below.

<sup>32</sup> See Foucault, *Introduction*, 17–35.

<sup>33</sup> Weeks’s comments on the Home Office files appear in *Sex, Politics and Society*, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago, 2005), 242.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 245. All of these observations complement the astute analysis that Frank Mort made in 1980 about the ways in which the 1967 act constructed “a new type of homosexual subject, understood as operating in the private sphere; a subject who in matters of sexuality and morality is defined as consenting, privatised and person-focused.” While Mort recognizes that it is in the interests of sexual minorities to defend the rule of reformist legislation, he also stresses that gay people should not be “‘transfixed’ by its operation.” See Frank Mort, “Sexuality: Regulation and Contestation,” in *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, ed. Gay Left Collective (London, 1980), 43, 41.

Houlbrook argues that the apparent progress made by the Wolfenden Report (and its much-delayed implementation in law ten years later) can be thought of as both “utopian and dystopian.”<sup>37</sup> While reform enabled some men to construct “private or semiprivate social networks in which it was possible to be intimately, discreetly, securely queer,” it was also the case that “alternative social forms, particularly the open, demotic public queer culture that visibly took hold in streets and parks, backstreet cafés and pubs,” were threatened.<sup>38</sup> Houlbrook prefaces these noteworthy remarks by admonishing the tendency of gay-affirmative scholarship to claim the homosexual past as “our” history. The stories of particular men’s lives that he researches in detail here can be, he says, “disturbingly unintelligible” if interpreted through the “categories of identity”—“gay” and “straight,” “homo-” and “heterosexual”—that have been deeply embedded in our critical vocabulary since the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> (Hence, Houlbrook’s preference for using “queer” as the most appropriate adjective and noun for the men whose living and loving, sometimes against the odds, survived this period. For many of his subjects, “queer” was the term during the pre-Wolfenden decades that gave their stigmatized existence greatest intelligibility. At the same time, he is content to apply the anachronistic, post-modern term “homosex” to his subjects’ sexual practices.)<sup>40</sup> On this note, Houlbrook insists that his numerous case studies, many of them working-class men, belong to a long-vanished world, and one senses that he has more than a pang of nostalgia for it.

Throughout *Queer London* Houlbrook draws on an astounding array of sources—statistics regarding arrests, changes in the law, memoirs, newspaper reports, novels, and countless archives—that bear out his leading claim that even if “[b]etween 1917 and 1957 hundreds of men were imprisoned for sexual and public order offences committed in London’s public, commercial, or residential spaces,” it remains the case that the government, courts, and police were not escalating their attacks on queer men during this period.<sup>41</sup> This is, by any account, a counterintuitive and contentious assertion when one looks in particular at the post-1945 period, when the number of arrests increased markedly. As Chris Waters observes, whereas in the 1930s about four hundred men were tried for sexual offenses each year, in 1953 alone 2,166 were tried for such offenses (almost half of whom were found guilty).<sup>42</sup> Little wonder, then, that in 1955 Rupert Croft-Cooke—who was counted among the first historians to write on the modern British homosexual culture—concluded that the vice-purging activities of figures such as Theobald Matthew (who became director of public prosecutions in 1944) and Sir David Maxwell Fyfe (who served as home secretary from 1951 to 1954) led

<sup>37</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 271.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>40</sup> Houlbrook takes “homosex” as “an amalgam” that “indicates sexual activities of various sorts between two males” from John Howard, *Men like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago, 2001), xviii. One trusts that the term might describe participation in all-male group sex as well.

<sup>41</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> These figures appear in Chris Waters, “Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social: Peter Wildeblood and the Making of the Modern Homosexual,” in *Moments of Modernity: Rethinking Britain, 1945–1964*, ed. Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters (London, 1999), 137.

to a period of “sexual McCarthyism.”<sup>43</sup> Houlbrook, however, while fully acknowledging this damaging political climate, still contests the belief that there was a conspiratorial “witch hunt” mobilized by the director of public prosecutions, the home secretary, or the commissioner of police.<sup>44</sup> Instead, Houlbrook views the rise in arrests as a result of operational changes in the police divisions, which enabled some police officers to develop their knowledge of “local queer culture.”<sup>45</sup> On this basis, there was no top-down witch hunt because police surveillance developed from those grassroots constables whose recently restructured patrols extended their acquaintance with queer urban space.<sup>46</sup>

In any case, the view that there was an overarching witch hunt makes no sense to Houlbrook because the diverse body of queer Londoners necessarily had varying relations with the law. Those who were “working-class, young, or married” were most closely in contact with policing, while those who had sufficient wealth could experience the law as a “nebulous, distant presence.”<sup>47</sup> In no respect, then, can the legal system be credited with exercising an all-determining influence on how men-loving men experienced sexual sociability in the metropolis. *Queer London* therefore leaves the impression that legal reform—even at a time when more and more men served time for same-sex activity—came at a serious price, giving dignity to the privileged few while denying it to the disreputable many.

Houlbrook’s skeptical approach to the political consequences of the 1957 report owes much to earlier interventions by Leslie J. Moran, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters.<sup>48</sup> Each of these scholars has written informatively on how, for example, Peter Wildeblood—the *Daily Mail* correspondent who in 1953 suffered eighteen months’ imprisonment for committing indecent acts—made calculated discriminations between different homosexual types before the government-appointed Wolfenden Committee. As Mort observes, Wildeblood marked out three distinctions: the “glandular” type who “regard[ed] themselves as women,” the “pederasts” who lusted after underage males, and the respectable “homosexuals within the strict meaning of the word.”<sup>49</sup> It was certainly Wildeblood’s political intention, as we can see in his autobiographical *Against the Law* (1955), to elevate his identification as a respectable homosexual above the sordid queers whose sexual

<sup>43</sup> Rupert Croft-Cooke, *The Verdict of You All* (London, 1955), 26, 151, reprinted in Waters, “Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social,” 266.

<sup>44</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>46</sup> It is valuable to compare Leslie J. Moran’s comments on how critics might connect the rise in arrests in the years leading up to reform and changes in policing practices, since this topic preoccupied the Wolfenden Committee. As Moran says, “many factors were at play in the statistical representation of homosexuality.” Such factors included “the intensity of the ups and downs of public indignation or public annoyance caused by the behaviour of the offenders” and “the outlook of senior police officers.” See Leslie J. Moran, *The Homosexual(ity) of Law* (London, 1996), 199–20. Moran’s discussion is not confined to the policing of London.

<sup>47</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Moran, *The Homosexual(ity) of Law*, 22–28, 48–59, and 102–17; Waters, “Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social”; and Frank Mort, “Mapping Sexual London: The Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, 1954–1957,” *New Formations* 37 (1999): 92–113.

<sup>49</sup> Mort is quoting Wildeblood’s testimony to the Wolfenden Committee (“Notes of a Meeting,” 24 May 1955, National Archives, Public Record Office, Home Office, 345/13, 1–4), in “Mapping Sexual London,” 109. Waters makes a comparable point about Wildeblood’s disidentification with effeminate queers in *Against the Law* (“Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social,” 146–47).

haunts included the various public lavatories surveyed by plainclothes police officers. Mort remarks that Wildeblood's "aim was to delimit respectable from unrespectable homosexual types partly by the use of a specific social geography."<sup>50</sup> Houlbrook's imposing research (as I explain in more detail below) certainly shows that "social geography" of mid-twentieth-century queer London was far more complicated than the one contained in the sketchy hand-drawn map that Sir John Nott-Bower, commissioner of police for the metropolis, presented to the Wolfenden Committee. (Mort reproduces this document.)<sup>51</sup> More to the point, *Queer London* charts its detailed sexual geography as much from the inside of the homosexual community as from the outside. Houlbrook's inquiries remind us that no matter how determinedly the police employed agents provocateurs who had learned much about such phenomena as the "glory holes" in the partitions between toilet stalls (such revelations were put before the Wolfenden Committee by two knowledgeable constables), there were other—though always changing—sites where differing kinds of homosexual men could enjoy sex beyond the reach of the law.

### SEXOLOGY, HOMOSEXUALITY, MASCULINITY

If the new gay history confounds the belief that the law exercised unbridled power to regulate gay men's lives, then it casts just as much suspicion on sexology's supremacy in minting homosexuality as an identity. Cook rightly points out that ever since Foucault asserted that sexology made the homosexual into a "species," plenty of research has contested this inflated claim. He acknowledges that scholars of the early modern period, especially Alan Bray, have established the idea that several centuries before its categorical designation by sexology there was a recognizable style of "homosexuality . . . associated with peripatetic theatre companies and the court," and thus—by extension—with the city.<sup>52</sup> Cook shows that sexology continued this tradition by associating concepts of homosexuality not so much with definite sexual types as with the metropolitan landscape. He thus offers a digest of those sexological writings (Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Iwan Bloch) and degeneration theory (Cesare Lombroso, Max Nordau) that enjoyed very uneven degrees of influence on British culture. By reviewing these works he can demonstrate, for example, how the case studies in *Psychopathia Sexualis* indicate "a particularly close relationship between the city and homosexuality."<sup>53</sup> Likewise, he points to Ellis's troubled belief that the morally corrupt city would degrade male homosexuals. Cook's concluding turn to "erotic anthropology" in the guise of the Cannibal Club, whose prominent members included Richard Burton, discloses how a London-based elite group, under the cover of an emergent discipline, had little hesitation in "describing extremes of sexual be-

<sup>50</sup> Mort, "Mapping Sexual London," 110.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>52</sup> Cook, *London*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

haviour” among “primitive” peoples.<sup>54</sup> The upshot of his argument is a psychological one. Cook maintains that in London the reaction to a largely foreign sexology (emanating, in particular, from Vienna), together with the anthropological debates in which Burton and his associates engaged, was somewhat defensive, if not paranoid. In other words, there was—even among radicals such as Ellis—a desire to fend off the thought that Continental vices and degrading, “primitive” sexual energies were pulsing their way into the city because it was in fact proving hard to face up to the already widespread phenomenon of male homosexuality.

By comparison, Brady sets forth on a mission to overturn what he sees as the damaging influence that Foucault’s *Introduction* has had on subsequent studies that “promulgate a highly mechanical notion of the ability of a scientific discipline or a legislative body to ‘produce’ the sexualized identities of individuals throughout society.”<sup>55</sup> It is possible, I think, to concur that in the 1980s simplified readings of Foucault’s work led to some rather schematic understandings of how modern homosexuality emerged. But when Brady asserts that “there is little to distinguish Foucault’s analysis of homosexual identity formations from other socio-constructionist arguments” one senses that he is, not uncharacteristically, straining his argument.<sup>56</sup> As David M. Halperin has observed, Foucault’s remark about the shift from acts of sodomy to the homosexual “as a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life” (and so on) has two specific references.<sup>57</sup> On the one hand, Foucault specifies sodomy as “a category of forbidden acts” laid down in “ancient civil or canonical codes.”<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Foucault’s homosexual “species” arose specifically from “the psychological, psychiatric, medical category.”<sup>59</sup> Halperin remarks that Foucault is thus “making a carefully limited point about the differing styles of disqualification applied to male love by premodern legal definitions of sodomy and by nineteenth-century psychiatric conceptualizations of homosexuality, respectively.”<sup>60</sup> It therefore follows, as Halperin puts it, that Foucault is hardly attempting “to describe popular attitudes or private emotions, much less to convey what actually went on in the minds of different historical subjects when they had sex.”<sup>61</sup> Heedless of such caveats, Brady also unhesitatingly recruits *Coming Out* and related essays to an inflexible Foucauldian tradition espoused to a purported “medico-legal” account that credits changes in law, on the one hand, and late-Victorian sexologists, on the other hand, with deliberately constructing “the male homosexual . . . as a species of criminal lunatic.”<sup>62</sup> In his headstrong study, Brady seldom pursues his critique with sufficient watchfulness. As I pointed out earlier, Weeks’s *Coming Out* extends the scope of

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 91. Cook implies that the exclusive Cannibal Club was a feature of the 1880s; by comparison, Dane Kennedy points out that the club was “at its height” in 1865 in *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 170.

<sup>55</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, *Introduction*, 43.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> David M. Halperin, “Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality,” *Representations* 63 (1998): 97.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*, 14.

its inquiries into the making of modern homosexual identities beyond a pathologizing “Medical Model.”

Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (which first appeared in German in 1886 [it was not translated into English until 1892])<sup>63</sup> has often been taken to be the classic example of sexology’s pathologization of homosexuality. But as Weeks observes, the Viennese doctor needs to be regarded as a “transitional figure” whose successively revised editions of his widely circulated book “illustrate very clearly changing concepts” of homosexuality.<sup>64</sup> Whereas in the first edition Krafft-Ebing views male homosexuality as a pathological expression of degeneration, in the much later twelfth edition he comes to the realization that “both the acquired and the congenital arguments” contributed to the development of “perverse sexuality.”<sup>65</sup> Weeks does not view Krafft-Ebing as unbendingly hostile to men’s same-sex desires, since he reminds us that the sexologist supported the campaign against Paragraph 175 in Germany. (After the founding of modern Germany in 1870, Paragraph 175 of the penal code proscribed all homosexual acts apart from mutual masturbation.) In many ways, Weeks’s insights anticipate the comprehensive research of Harry Oosterhuis’s study of Krafft-Ebing’s sexual radicalism.<sup>66</sup>

Weeks meticulously analyzes Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* (1897)—a polemical series of case histories, originally compiled with John Addington Symonds’s help—which first appeared in Germany in 1896, only to be banned in Britain the following year. Weeks maintains that where Krafft-Ebing’s arguments about homosexuality “were biased towards sickness,” Ellis’s were “biased towards health”; as a result, Weeks shows us why Ellis believed that same-sex eroticism was “not a medical problem.”<sup>67</sup> Weeks also discusses the turn-of-the-century activist, Edward Carpenter, who “broke away from the positivistic and biological model that Ellis favoured” and thus subsequently moved toward a morally heartening paradigm of the “Uranian” individual whose higher love could reconcile the inequities between the sexes. Brady describes Weeks as following the medico-legal model of homosexual desire, when in fact *Coming Out* shows how Carpenter’s theorization of “homogenic love” derived from nonmedical sources such as Whitman’s poetry, classical scholarship, feminism, and socialist politics.<sup>68</sup>

By way of attempting his own distinctive view of Carpenter’s achievement, Brady

<sup>63</sup> This was a translation of the seventh German edition undertaken by C. G. Chaddock and published by F. A. Davis & Co., Philadelphia and London.

<sup>64</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to see that Oosterhuis’s study of Krafft-Ebing’s sexual radicalism objects to Weeks’s apparent belief that doctors were “powerful agents in the organisation, and potential control, of the sexual behaviors they sought to regulate” (Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* [Chicago, 2000], 7). What Oosterhuis fails to observe is that in the same sentence that he has quoted from *Sex, Politics and Society*, Weeks takes care to note that the “early sexologists” were “by and large . . . also conscious sex reformers” (145). On this basis, it looks as if Brady has taken on trust Oosterhuis’s somewhat selective criticism of Weeks’s thoroughgoing understanding of how sexologists could both pathologize and affirm homosexual identities.

<sup>67</sup> Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere, Brady finds it convenient to talk loosely about “historians in the Weeks/Foucault tradition” who “argue that ‘homosexual identity’ was constructed by medical and legal classifications of this ‘species’ of abnormal male in the late nineteenth century” (*Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*, 40).

claims that what matters in this sex reformer's attempts at defining "homosexual 'self-making'" was his "own deep discontent with prevailing structures and perception of masculinity in Britain."<sup>69</sup> While it would be hard to claim that the fifteen or so pages that Brady writes about Carpenter mark an advance on the pathbreaking research that Weeks completed in the 1970s, it is worth noting that Brady strives to shift the debate about the formation of male homosexual identity away from self-understandings of eroticism toward perceptions of what it meant to be a proper man. Yet it is precisely when Brady tries to tackle the meaning of masculinity in relation to male homosexuality that he arrives at formulations that are altogether more questionable than his misattribution of a prevailing "medico-legal model" to Weeks.

Early in his book, Brady turns to the noteworthy research of John Tosh in order to assert that in nineteenth-century Britain "masculinity as a social status was not reducible to class status."<sup>70</sup> Brady adds that what Tosh, after R. W. Connell, calls "hegemonic masculinity" held sway across the classes because it "not only emphasised the authority of the paterfamilias over his wife and family, but also stigmatized masculine traits that undermined this position."<sup>71</sup> On this basis, Brady argues that "the interests of upholding and perpetuating a concept of masculinity as a social status, centred on uxorious sexuality . . . fostered a pervasive social perception of the vilified, effeminate, unmanly sodomite in Britain that was not dependent of the classifications of sex psychology."<sup>72</sup> Even if we agree that such a phenomenon as hegemonic masculinity actually existed, and even if we recognize that its hegemony involved the repudiation of any male behaviors that deviated from what it embodied, then it is hardly a revelation that unmanliness might be attributed to homosexual men even without "medico-legal" intervention. But if we start scrutinizing what hegemonic masculinity is supposed to encompass at this point in history, then any analysis of the ideological components that helped keep this gender formation in the ascendant is likely to run into difficulties. Brady believes that we should put our faith in Tosh's argument in *A Man's Place* (1999) that the contradictory "pulls of home and the homosocial world" remained "central to masculinity as a social status."<sup>73</sup> Yet it can also be argued that those contradictory obligations did not so much support hegemonic masculinity; instead, these competing "pulls" threatened to fracture its formation from within.

Thus it remains vital, as Tosh himself has more recently noted, to recognize that "hegemonic masculinity" is only a "convenient phrase" that "reminds us that masculinity carries a heavy ideological freight."<sup>74</sup> He follows this comment by stating that in a nation whose male population mostly comprised skilled manual workers "loss of masculine self-respect was as much an occupational hazard as loss

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 13, 159.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Tosh, as I mention below, discusses "hegemonic masculinity" in his *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow, UK, 2005), 44, 45. R. W. Connell expounds the concept in *Masculinities* (Berkeley, 1995), 77–78.

<sup>72</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 28. Tosh advances his innovative argument in *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT, 1999).

<sup>74</sup> Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, 44.

of income.”<sup>75</sup> The problem in Tosh’s commentary is that once we admit that hegemonic masculinity was in constant jeopardy of being undermined on such a large demographic scale—“through lack of housing, a shortage of apprenticeships, being thrown out of work”—then its presumed ideological dominance looks like a logical impossibility.<sup>76</sup> To be sure, ideologies are always subject to contestation. But the internal insecurities that Tosh identifies in hegemonic masculinity would seem to be so grave in Victorian Britain that its fractures and failures, rather than its empowering cohesiveness, emerge as its defining characteristics.

Brady claims that the need to maintain hegemonic masculinity explains why *The Times* fell noticeably silent on debates about male homosexuality in the thirteen years that elapsed between the trial of cross-dressers Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park in 1871 and the Labouchere Amendment. But silence, Brady implies, should not be taken as a sign of the press’s ignorance of homosexual behavior. Brady contends that whereas under the long editorship of John Delane (which ended in 1872) *The Times* regularly reported on “abominable offences” in a manner that assumed the readership knew full well the subject matter of each trial, immediately afterward the new editorial team “clearly decided that, in the interests of preserving social and gender stability in Britain, *The Times* should conform to the policies maintained by other newspapers in this period by not reporting on unnatural crime.”<sup>77</sup> Such silence, Brady observes, speaks volumes about the tacit knowledge of the extensiveness of homoerotic crimes and thus “may explain the lack of legislative clarification of Buggery laws in Britain during these years.”<sup>78</sup> Thus to recognize in the press or to debate in the law what Alfred Douglas memorably called “the Love that dare not speak its name” would, in Brady’s view, arouse the “fear of undermining the status of masculinity.”<sup>79</sup> But, in the course of making these antidiscursive arguments, Brady creates an epistemological conundrum. On what grounds can supposed reticence serve as a highly articulate sign of how much the press really knew but refused to acknowledge about male-male intimacy? Nowhere does Brady address the suspect psychologizing that occasionally mars some of the new gay history’s boldest speculations.

### HOMOSEXUAL SCANDALS: BEYOND THE WILDE TRIALS

These new historians of modern homosexual identity also make staunch efforts to show why their precursors prove mistaken in assuming that widely publicized scandals had a decisive impact on the shaping of male same-sex desire. In this regard, these scholars throw considerable doubt on the earlier assumption that the Wilde trials were an epochal event that provided the definitional image of the depraved man-loving man and that initiated “renewed repression and a recession

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*, 81.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 89. Douglas’s famous phrase first appeared in his poem, “Two Loves,” in John Francis Bloxam’s homophile journal *The Chameleon* (Oxford, 1894), reprinted in Brian Reade, ed., *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900* (London, 1970), 162.



in the urban homosexual subculture.”<sup>80</sup> Cook traces this belief back to Holbrook Jackson’s classic 1913 study of the 1890s.<sup>81</sup> He traces the argument forward to Weeks, Sinfield’s *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar and the Queer Moment* (1994), and Dollimore’s *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991). Yet when one turns to *Coming Out* it is not exactly clear where Weeks is supposed to advance any such argument. Certainly, Weeks admits that the “Wilde trial burst the main bubble” of homophile literary production.<sup>82</sup> But he also observes that “the writing went on,” as Timothy d’Arch Smith’s enduringly important discussion of “Uranian” poetry reveals.<sup>83</sup>

Cook reminds us that newspapers reported homosexual offenses with remarkable inconsistency.<sup>84</sup> In Cook’s view, it is revealing that during the Wilde trials the radical *Reynolds’ Newspaper* began giving unprecedented attention to cases involving similar offenses. In April–May 1895, when Wilde endured hard-hitting cross-examination, five such cases preoccupied *Reynolds’ Newspaper*, thus implying—as Cook observes—“the debauchery of the capital.”<sup>85</sup> Yet, as Cook reminds us, “the total number of arrests for sodomy, accepted sodomy and gross indecency for 1895 was only two above the average for the preceding five years (forty-two) and was seven below the average for the period 1895–99 (fifty-one).”<sup>86</sup> Such statistics suggest that by inflating the significance of a well-known scandal, historians are liable to create distortions as serious as those generated by the scandal-mongering New Journalism of the fin de siècle.

As Cocks observes, “historians have tended to assume that no one knew of or saw sodomy in the mid-nineteenth century city and that, as a result, no one knew what to make of cross-dressers like Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park.”<sup>87</sup> In April 1870, the police arrested the irreverent and sassy Boulton and Park, both of whom were in their early twenties, for behaving like female prostitutes at the Strand Theatre. Their arraignment, which involved testimony by doctors about the defendants’ penetrated anuses, threw extremely volatile evidence in the public’s face (much to the unease of some newspaper editors). The fact that Boulton had been cohabiting with Lord Arthur Clinton, a minor aristocrat, intensified the scandal. After what appears to have been an almost unprecedented delay of a more than a year, Boulton and Park were tried in May 1871 along with John Safford Fisk,

<sup>80</sup> Cook, *London*, 5–6.

<sup>81</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1913; repr., London, 1926), 116.

<sup>82</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, 47.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 48. Timothy d’Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English “Uranian” Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London, 1970).

<sup>84</sup> Cook’s position counters the immense amount of scholarship on the Wilde scandal—which began in 1911 with the first purported transcript of the trial, intensified in 1948 with H. Montgomery Hyde’s derivative version of the events, and then flourished when Richard Ellmann published his fine but flawed biography of the Irish author in 1987. While Ellmann’s biography, *Oscar Wilde* (London, 1987), remains the definitive work of its kind; it follows in a long tradition of mythmaking and error-ridden speculative studies of Wilde’s personal and professional life. There are numerous errors of fact in *Oscar Wilde*, as Horst Schroeder has shown in *Additions and Corrections to Richard Ellmann’s Oscar Wilde*, 2nd ed. (Braunschweig, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> Cook, *London*, 52.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 105.

the American consul at Edinburgh, and Louis Hurt, an official at the Post Office. In the end, after many further revelations about such matters as the young men's involvement in semiprofessional theatrical performances, all four defendants were acquitted.<sup>88</sup>

Did Boulton and Parks walk free because a modern homosexual identity was not publicly known at the time? Cocks asserts that "Jeffrey Weeks and Alan Sinfield have suggested that the courts went so far as to celebrate their ignorance of homosexuality. This ignorance prevented conviction, since it could be argued that Boulton and Park were nothing more than foolish young men. . . . For Sinfield and Jeffrey Weeks, the acquittal of Boulton and Park resulted from the fact that homosexuality in its modern form was not yet understood."<sup>89</sup> While Sinfield, in *The Wilde Century*, does explore the validity of such a claim, Cocks misreads Weeks's interpretation in *Sex, Politics and Society*.<sup>90</sup> Before he mentions, very briefly, the Boulton and Park case, Weeks observes that "as late as 1871, concepts of homosexuality were extremely undeveloped both in the Metropolitan Police and in high medical and legal circles, suggesting the absence of any clear notion of a homosexual category or of any social awareness of what a homosexual identity might consist of."<sup>91</sup> In *Coming Out* Weeks comments in two places on Boulton and Park's practice of cross-dressing, together with their subsequent arrest, arraignment, and trial. In the first of these references, he remarks that "indulgence in buggery was assumed to be the characteristic feature of what we would now call a homosexual."<sup>92</sup> In the second, Weeks notes that from the early eighteenth century the "embryonic sub-culture" of homosexual men was "closely associated with transvestism and stereotyped effeminate behaviour," both of which were plainly evident in the Boulton and Park affair. But, he adds, though this "homosexual stereotype" was clear by the 1880s, the "spread and relative maturity of urban society made a more diverse pattern" of homosexual styles of masculinity achievable than had existed before.<sup>93</sup> Thus Weeks fully understands that Boulton's and Park's cross-dressing formed part of an only-too-legible homosexual style. But whether their behavior was widely interpretable in relation to a specific rec-

<sup>88</sup> The Boulton and Park scandal has absorbed a great deal of scholarly energy during the past twenty years. Neil Bartlett was the first to examine in detail the trial transcript held at the Public Record Office (together with press reports) in *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde* (London, 1988). Cook provides a cogent summary of the scandal surrounding the arraignment of Boulton and Park (*London*, 15–18). Morris B. Kaplan, as I clarify below, has recently offered by far the most thoroughly documented account of the scandal to date in *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca, NY, 2005), 19–101.

<sup>89</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 106.

<sup>90</sup> Sinfield recognizes Weeks's more qualified assertions. When debating Weeks's and Bartlett's reflections on the Boulton and Park trial, he suggests that "it does not follow that the courts were able to recognize this behaviour"—i.e., interpret cross-dressing as a sign of homosexual identity. Importantly, Sinfield concludes that when we read about the trial we are faced with a possible indeterminacy whereby "some people heard same-sex passion loud and clear, whereas others could not conceive of it." Sinfield certainly does not give unqualified support to Bartlett's belief that through the acquittal "the existence of a homosexual subculture was effectively denied." See Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, 7–8; and Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?* 148.

<sup>91</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 101.

<sup>92</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, 14.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

ognition of a homosexual identity is, as Weeks implies, much more open to question.

Meanwhile, Cocks asserts that “Boulton, Park, Fisk and Hurt finally escaped justice, not because of the determined ignorance of those who claimed to be ‘taken in’ by their female characters, but because of the skilful defence and an unusually sympathetic judge.”<sup>94</sup> There are, I believe, somewhat more convincing arguments to be made about the reasons why Boulton and Park were acquitted. In an important essay, Charles Upchurch offers insights into a range of factors that contributed to the acquittal. He notes, for example, that by the time the long-deferred trial took place, the defense brought in a number of distinguished physicians who argued “that there was no scientific consensus over the effects of anal penetration of the body.”<sup>95</sup> Later, Upchurch comments that Boulton’s mother exuded a powerful aura of middle-class respectability when she discussed “her son’s talent for theatrical cross-dressing”—“an ability for female impersonation” that he displayed “at an early age.”<sup>96</sup> The prosecution’s tame cross-examination of this doting parent would appear to have helped greatly in protecting her son’s good name. Thus Upchurch concludes that the acquittal resulted from both the court’s and the press’s strong need to protect middle-class women from the thought that their sons might be sodomites. Like Brady, he assumes that this disavowal of homosexuality marked a resistance to acknowledging a phenomenon that institutions of authority knew only too well. By comparison, in *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (2005), Morris Kaplan advances the plausible view that Boulton and Park were acquitted because the prosecution failed to prove that the two men had made any attempt to solicit strangers: “Although Fanny’s and Stella’s conduct had been ‘as extraordinary as one ever heard of in an almost all the extraordinary scandals from time to time have arisen,’ the Lord Chief Justice nevertheless finds the evidence ‘wanting in proof of the purpose which is alleged in this indictment.’”<sup>97</sup> Taken together, these thoughtful viewpoints suggest that the acquittal was scarcely an attempt to ignore or repress the existence of male-male intimacy in London. Instead, it was the result of an “extraordinary” trial in which male homosexuality had enjoyed in Britain far greater—and altogether more sensational and embarrassing—visibility than ever before.

Elsewhere, other hypotheses have proposed possible reasons for Boulton and Park’s acquittal. William Cohen, in *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (1996), points out—through an informed and balanced analysis—that if any critic makes an unhelpful claim about “the court’s aggressive denial of an increasingly visible subculture” it is Neil Bartlett in *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde* (1988), a semiautobiographical rumination on past and present queer geographies of London.<sup>98</sup> As Cohen says, Weeks supplies a “less conspiratorial argument” than Bartlett does about the “the authorities’ insufficient knowledge” of male homosexuality. In Cohen’s view, the significance of Boulton and Park’s trial lies in how it “provided the public an opportunity to consider and

<sup>94</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 113.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Upchurch, “Forgetting the Unthinkable: Cross-Dressers and British Society in the Case of the Queen vs. Boulton and Others,” *Gender and History* 12, no. 1 (2000): 142.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>97</sup> Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*, 96.

<sup>98</sup> William Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham, NC, 1996), 96.

debate their behavior, however onerous (or in this case innocuous) the result.”<sup>99</sup> Even if, Cohen adds, “the verdict resulted from the crown’s failure to establish a persuasive link between public persona and private criminality, the scandal functioned to the extent that plausible explanations—provisional fictions—could be sustained and proliferated.”<sup>100</sup> On this basis, a debate about whether the cross-dressers could be understood as embodying a specifically modern type of homosexuality is somewhat beside the point. What matters instead is the manifest scandal that the trial produced, a scandal that tested the limits of what could be reasonably reported in the press. Yet, for some reason, Cocks chooses not to engage at this juncture with Cohen’s astute reflections on the 1871 trial.

Cocks, however, mentions Cohen’s evenhanded *Sex Scandal* briefly in a later chapter that examines the “transformation of scandal, slander, blackmail and insinuation of guilt by association, as they moved from tacitly accepted aspects of personal and political life, through criminalisation, to their re-emergence as central tactics of the ‘new journalism’ which developed in the 1880s.”<sup>101</sup> Despite his earlier misgivings about the amount of attention that previous homosexual historiography has paid to the sensational later part of the nineteenth century, Cocks nevertheless devotes much of his ensuing discussion to reporting fairly well-known details about the Dublin Castle and Cleveland Street affairs. His main point is that heralds of the New Journalism, such as William O’Brien’s *United Ireland* and Henry Labouchere’s *Truth*, enjoyed considerable success in flouting the rules of decorum that ensured men of wealth and social privilege could protect their good name in the face of unseemly accusations originating from morally disreputable sources. As Cocks reminds us, O’Brien’s Irish nationalist onslaught against crown officials eventually resulted in a stream of arrests, which began with Gustavus Cornwall, the chief secretary of the Post Office in Ireland, and ended with two Dubliners, Robert Fowler and Daniel Considine, charged with keeping an improper house. The unremitting scandal fueled by O’Brien’s *United Ireland* proved too sensitive to warrant extensive coverage in W. T. Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette*, the London evening paper that would gain notoriety for its July 1885 exposés of the “White Slave Traffic,” which inspired the reforms of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

As a consequence, Cocks maintains that O’Brien’s triumphant pursuit of scandal in Dublin set the stage for Labouchere who, some five years later, would make similarly outrageous allegations in London against a state cover-up of homosexual corruption. In *Truth*, Labouchere, himself a Radical MP, declared that the government sought to protect the reputations of aristocrats (in particular, Lord Arthur Somerset and the earl of Euston) who, in the summer of 1889, were discovered to have enjoyed sexual relations with telegraph messenger boys at a male brothel housed at 19 Cleveland Street, located close to the nearby Post Office off the Tottenham Court Road. Cocks observes the confidence with which the New Journalists could mount what would have previously been seen as indiscriminate attacks on public officials and high-ranking individuals without thoroughly jeopardizing their own authority. Moreover, he remarks that the increasing admissibility of discussing unrespectable sexual matters in public toward the end of the century

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 116.

meant that “it almost became acceptable to rely on blackmailers themselves for evidence of secret crime” (a point that has long been noted in studies of the Wilde trials).<sup>102</sup>

Unlike Cocks, Cook, and Brady, Kaplan has no critical axes to grind in his discussion of Boulton and Park, Wilde, the Cleveland Street affair, and the lives of two exceptional pupils who were taught by controversial Eton masters Oscar Browning and William Johnson Cory. In Kaplan’s readable study, practically all of the preceding historiography is relegated to a brief section at the end of the book, “Further Reading.” He has chosen to draw on his expertise as a onetime trial lawyer (he later became a professor of philosophy) in sifting the holdings of archives held at the Public Record Office and the unrivaled newspaper collections of the British Library at Colindale. Kaplan’s method of presenting his findings comes by way of that unfortunately ambiguous term “thick description,” an approach (one that, of course, comes courtesy of Clifford Geertz) that ensures he keeps his “own interpretations to a minimum.”<sup>103</sup> Thus he permits his cast of characters (their names and roles appear as “*dramatis personae*” at the start of each case study) “to speak for themselves as much as possible.”<sup>104</sup> As a consequence, we are invited to sit back and absorb the eminently fluent prose of a gifted chronicler. In a way, Kaplan’s at times passive attitude toward his materials comes as a relief after the tendentiousness of some of the new gay history. But his unwillingness to intervene analytically in much of his captivating storytelling is also, on occasion, frustrating.

There is no question that Kaplan deserves our gratitude for the thoroughness with which he describes the colorful Boulton and Park affair. By the time Kaplan, more thoroughly than anyone else to date, recounts the story of the Cleveland Street scandal, one fears that the deliberate descriptivism that animates his supple prose will proceed to “tell it as it is” just for the sake of doing so. Yet in the midst of his intensely detailed narrative, Kaplan at times expands our understanding of precisely those key episodes—such as the Labouchere Amendment—that have been the source of such evident wrangling among historians. Kaplan helpfully points out that Labouchere’s intervention and the Cleveland Street scandal need to be related to the ways in which initiatives for moral reform divided radical and liberal circles in the 1880s. He mentions, for example, how Stead’s 1886 campaign against Sir Charles Dilke, who had the reasonable expectation of leading the Liberal Party, focused on the respected MP’s infidelity, thus seriously damaging Dilke’s aspirations. At the same time, editors such as Frank Harris—a rather reckless journalist who had close contact with Wilde—objected to the “forces of religious prudishness and nonconformity” that were holding, in Kaplan’s words, “public figures accountable to puritanical standards in the conduct of their private lives.”<sup>105</sup>

Altogether less illuminating is Kaplan’s shorter (and very familiar) account of the Wilde trials. In his “Epilogue,” however, he draws attention to a significant—but noticeably neglected—source of commentary on the courtroom events that

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>103</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 3–32; Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*, 265, 7.

<sup>104</sup> Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*, 6.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 182. Kaplan is quoting Frank Harris *My Life and Loves* (1922–27; repr., New York, 1991), 640.

culminated in Wilde's imprisonment. Kaplan shows how for a number of weeks in the spring of 1895 *Reynolds's Newspaper* conducted a searching debate about the degree to which Wilde or his puritanical adversaries should be condemned for the upsurge of public interest in sexual immorality. This is a welcome addition to our developing knowledge of those maverick commentators, including Robert Buchanan (a figure who made a career out of courting literary controversies), who voiced objections to the brutal manner in which the attorney general took the unprecedented step of prosecuting Wilde for committing acts of gross indecency on the basis of evidence that had been brought before the court in relation to the Irish writer's failed legal action against the marquess of Queensberry. Kaplan helpfully shows that some contributors to the press saw only too clearly that in its prosecution of Wilde the court remained unwise "to treat with contempt a human passion that survived the rigour of most ruthless laws."<sup>106</sup>

### HOMOSEXUAL GEOGRAPHIES: METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL

The greatest achievement of much of the new gay historiography is its focus on the sexualization of urban space. By his own admission, Cook's book-length study takes many of its cues from post-*Coming Out* analyses of urban gay identity, beginning with Bartlett's impassioned (if rather mannered) meditation on the homosexual landscape of London, *Who Was That Man?* Other crucial histories of urban sexual subcultures—notably Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982), Rictor Norton's *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture of England* (1992), and George Chauncey's *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (1995)—enable Cook to comprehend how "London's homoerotic geography" produced "dissonant and overlapping images" of male-male desire and identity.<sup>107</sup>

Cook's long first chapter, "London and the Cities of the Plain," begins with an overview of the homosexual metropolis from 1700 to 1885, although most of the materials he discusses in any depth pertain to the post-1860 period. Cook cites the pamphlet titled *The Lives of Boulton and Park* (1870), which declares indignantly that London "outvie[s] the Cities of the Plain and ancient Rome."<sup>108</sup> More sustained, however, is Cook's exploration of the pornographic novel, *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (1881), which purports to draw on the memoirs of Irish sex worker Jack Saul—a figure who came into the public eye when he impugned Lord Euston as one of his clients in the Cleveland Street trial of 1890. Cook charts the paths taken by three main protagonists—prostitute Saul, ex-guardsmen Fred Jones, and their friend George Brown—as they migrate through a city of many contrasting locations: "spaces of justice, aristocracy, defence and royalty" as well as "hotels, shopping areas, expensive private houses and streets notorious for

<sup>106</sup> Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*, 259.

<sup>107</sup> Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London, 1982); Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture of England* (London, 1992); and George Chauncey, *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York, 1994). Cook acknowledges the significance of these studies (*London*, 5).

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Cook, *London*, 17.

prostitution.”<sup>109</sup> Cook’s thoughtful reading of what, by any account, is a very scrappily written novel (it does not have the literary quality evident in many other pornographic narratives of the time) results in a persuasive observation that “Saul, Jones and Brown are differentiated from the other characters [mostly their clients] by being principally identified with the city and homosexual activity rather than with a particular class.”<sup>110</sup> As a consequence, these characters prove to be “much more mobile than the men with whom they have sex,” and thus they appear not so much to inhabit the city as embody it.<sup>111</sup>

The remainder of the chapter, subtitled “Rebuilding the Cities of the Plain,” draws on a broader number of sources in order to explore, in much fuller detail, how homosexuality in the West End of London was “woven into the fabric of urban culture” between 1885 and 1914.<sup>112</sup> Roger Casement’s and George Ives’s respective diaries provide plenty of information about the precise locations where homosexual men could make sexual contacts. Such places include Piccadilly Circus, which expanded considerably in size during the late 1880s; the iron urinals in the public toilets established from the 1860s onward; the Knightsbridge Skating Rink and Earls Court Exhibition Hall (which opened in 1887); and Hyde Park, where guardsmen from the nearby barracks were known to offer their services. Cook’s richly textured map reveals that there were other settings, many of them in restaurants and clubs, where men-loving men could congregate.

To this mix, Cook adds information about newly opened hotels, such as the Victoria on Northumberland Avenue. Soho, too, was the location of pornographic vendors, such as the “Foreign Books” store run by Charles Hirsch, who, if he is to be believed, sold Wilde a copy of *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*.<sup>113</sup> Cook’s critical peregrinations lead from Hirsch’s Soho store—where it appears that the manuscript of the multiauthored homoerotic novel *Teleny, or the Reverse of the Medal* (1893) was deposited and collected by Wilde and his friends—to the theaters where the Irish author, according to a much-touted but probably mistaken legend, sported green carnations (the symbol, so the story goes, that Parisian homosexuals used to signal their erotic preference).<sup>114</sup> Meanwhile, there were homosocial spaces—some of the gentlemen’s clubs, new bachelor apartments (such as the Albany, where Ives moved in 1894), and the Turkish baths on Jermyn Street—where homosexual men could enjoy some visibility. Cook enriches this account by revealing the importance of the classical statue galleries in the British Museum to “contemporary discourse on homosexuality,” such as we find, covertly, in A. E. Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) and, explicitly, in E. M. Forster’s *Maurice* (composed 1913).<sup>115</sup> The Hellenic ethos, which previous scholarship has tended

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>113</sup> Hirsch’s memoir of this episode, which first appeared in his 1934 French edition of the supposedly “correct” edition of *Teleny, or the Reverse of the Medal*, which had been published in England (and, according to Hirsch, in radically edited form) in 1893 by Leonard Smithers, has been translated by Peter Mendes (*Clandestine Erotic Fiction in English, 1800–1930: A Bibliographical Study* [Aldershot, 1993], 447–49).

<sup>114</sup> On the myths surrounding the green carnation, see Karl Beckson, *The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia* (New York, 1998), 122–24.

<sup>115</sup> Cook, *London*, 33.

to affiliate almost exclusively with Benjamin Jowett's and Walter Pater's Oxford of the 1860s and 1870s, was central to Ives's London-based Order of Chaeronea.

Yet, for all its teeming diversity, Cook's homosexual London is a somewhat one-sided city. If an objection were to be raised to his selected sites of homosexual sociability, then it would focus on how his metropolis makes little room for the East End—the dimly lit locale to which the protagonist of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, revised 1891) travels in order to take opium, outrage prostitutes, and wrestle with sailors. To be sure, Cook fills in some details about Casement's sexual slumming in the docklands. But he only gestures toward the settlement movement that began, in the 1880s, with the help of Oxford liberals such as Arnold Toynbee. The settlements were, of course, philanthropic institutions that enabled the bourgeoisie, as Diana Maltz nicely puts it, to create “beauty for the people” (sometimes in a deeply paternalistic mode).<sup>116</sup> As Cook reminds us, Carpenter believed that it was in such places that middle-class men of “the intermediate sex” might have a special value. It is, however, disappointing to learn that Cook only notes in passing a revealing comment made in *Reynolds' News* after the Wilde trials. A correspondent claimed that there had been a cover-up of a “grave scandal” about a settlement that served as “a place of assignation for some few of the philanthropic undergraduates.”<sup>117</sup> Such observations would seem to build on well-established fears that the East End had for some time been a site of unnatural sexuality. In this context, Seth Koven's comprehensive account of James Greenwood's *A Night in the Workhouse* (1866) comes to mind because he shows how a talented journalist's ventures into the East End disclosed that the male casual wards of the workhouses “not only harbored dirty bodies but also the dirtiest and most unnatural form of male sexuality—sodomy.”<sup>118</sup> Koven's inquiries help us ascertain the loathing that informed the amendment to the 1898 Vagrancy Act, which sought to regulate those destitute rogues and vagabonds who “importuned” or “solicited” for sex with other men.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, in discussing “The Decadent City,” Cook shows that the Parisian setting of J.-K. Huysmans's *A rebours* (1884)—the antirealist novel that features the sickly hedonist Duc Jean des Esseintes indulging in every type of sensory pleasure—informs the urban sexual escapades in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Teleny*.

In many respects, Houlbrook's mapping of queer London takes off where Cook's study terminates. His richly informative chapters venture into the multiple locales of erotic pleasure and danger that homosexual men could and did explore. In his often dazzling inquiries into the geographies of public sex, he intermixes well-known autobiographies and diaries (by, e.g., Tom Driberg and Kenneth Williams) that contain lively accounts of cruising London's open spaces and public conveniences with what may well count as London's “first queer city guide”—Thomas Burke's *For Your Convenience: A Learned Dialogue Instructive to All Londoners and London Visitors*, issued by Routledge in 1937—which amazingly provides an illustrated map of those West End urinals that homosexual men fre-

<sup>116</sup> On Toynbee Hall, see Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870–1900: Beauty for the People* (Basingstoke, UK, 2006), 67–97.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Cook, *London*, 38.

<sup>118</sup> Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 63.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.



quoted.<sup>120</sup> Houlbrook gives both range and balance to the information he culls from published memoirs by introducing previously untapped details from the London Metropolitan Archive about the class status and ethnicity of the men—many of them clerks—who were arrested both in central and suburban London. In subsequent chapters, Houlbrook shifts his focus to the private clubs (such as Billie’s on Little Denmark Street), the cafés (such as Lyons Corner House on Coventry Street), and public houses (such as the Grenadier on Wilton Place) where queer men could experience varying degrees of visibility. It is hard to emphasize sufficiently the sheer wealth of illuminating documentation that Houlbrook brings to his discussion of the queer sociability that flourished prior to the death knell he hears in the Wolfenden Report.

A major consequence of Houlbrook’s research is that he persuades himself to believe that the rise of the “commercial closet” during the 1960s—the decade that consolidated modern gay club culture—was *both* “liberating *and* exclusionary.”<sup>121</sup> His point is that before the clubs had a premium on privatizing gay men’s social lives, there was greater possibility to enjoy the “public sites of urinal, street, and park.”<sup>122</sup> While one might concur with Houlbrook that the post-Wolfenden club scene in some respects narrowed gay men’s access to public visibility at a time when the respectability associated with sexual reform was on the rise, it remains hard to fathom the idea that “queer lives moved slowly away” from public sex.<sup>123</sup> London, to this day, affords all sorts of opportunities for men who wish to interact erotically with other men in public spaces, and I am sure it would be possible for someone to produce an updated version of Burke’s map, which would include not only quite a number of celebrated public lavatories but also back alleys, canal basins, cemeteries, open areas such as Hampstead Heath, parking lots, and railway stations.

Kaplan’s study broadens the geographical scope of modern gay history in a chapter that shifts away from London and travels along the Thames to the prestigious location of Eton, based some thirty miles west of the metropolis. In the most original of his four studies, Kaplan examines how Cory’s and Browning’s teaching at and subsequent departures from Eton College (in 1872 and 1875, respectively) affected two lifelong buddies, Charles Williamson (known as Chat) and Reginald Brett (known as Regy). The absorbing letters that circulated between the teachers and pupils both during and after their college days not only illuminate the extent to which men of this privileged class could communicate their social and sexual intimacy with one another, but they reveal how the homosocial bonds of friendship that they learned to idealize would undergo certain changes when Cory, two years after he left Eton, decided to marry, as would Regy in 1879. But a successful marriage hardly terminated Regy’s love for other men. Long after leaving Eton, Regy (who went on to mentor a number of younger graduates from his school) and Chat (who at last separated from the Catholic order he joined in 1876) remained alert to decisive developments in legal and intellectual outlooks on male-male desire. One of the many useful insights that emerge from Kaplan’s

<sup>120</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 51.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

account of Regy's and Chat's lives and loves points to the far-reaching effects of the Labouchere Amendment on queer men during the Wilde trials. Regy, we learn instructively, pondered the correspondence in *Reynolds' News* and confided to his old Eton boyfriend Chat that the debate about the Irish author's sexuality "may do some good," though he doubts anyone would have "the courage to undo the Labouchere clause except Labby himself."<sup>124</sup>

Meanwhile, Kaplan's careful tracking of Regy's letters to Chat shows how these men's shared passion for their own sex could at times set them at odds. This was particularly the case when the married Regy sustained the homosexual passion he enjoyed at Eton by cultivating the company of his "boy," the fifteen-year-old Etonian Edward Seymour. In his letters to Chat, now living in Italy with a younger man named Salvatore, Regy remarks of "Teddie": "You can imagine the pleasure of having him quite to myself all day."<sup>125</sup> In return, Chat sent his old lover photographs of his new Italian boyfriend along with ones of other boys and young men (these were seemingly like Baron von Gloeden's pictures of scantily clad Sicilian youths). But, as Kaplan reveals, the forms of homosexual boy-loving intimacy that structured Regy and Chat's friendship from their Eton days eventually underwent strain, since Regy's increasing attachment to his teenage lover aroused Chat's jealousy. Yet with time the two men managed to overcome their differences and exchange views about the work of Symonds—especially *In the Key of Blue* (1893), a volume including an outspoken essay on "The Dantesque and Platonic Ideals of Love" that was particularly resonant for these friends. Of this volume, Regy remarked to Chat that he found it "extraordinarily audacious."<sup>126</sup> Kaplan surmises that Chat, who moved in Italian circles similar to those of the expatriate Symonds, had some knowledge of the pioneering homophile tract that the gon-dolier-loving English author published privately under the title *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891). As Kaplan notes, Regy not only was eager to preserve Chat's letters to him by binding them in two treasured blue-morocco volumes, but he also suggested to Chat that his friend's correspondence would provide "a curious autobiography" that should be published for the benefit of future generations.<sup>127</sup> Yet, as Kaplan observes, after Regy's death in 1930, Chat arranged to have all of the aforementioned letters removed from Brett's voluminous papers. Even if Regy recognized that this intense, complicated erotic friendship that began at Eton held exceptional significance for posterity, it remained the case that Chat had serious misgivings about safeguarding evidence that showed—as he told Regy's son—why "my love for your father was inexpressible."<sup>128</sup>

In *Nameless Offences*, Cocks travels much further afield than Kaplan in order to show how the sexual metropolis was not the only geographical site of queer conviviality. In his concluding chapter, he focuses on fascinating letters and diaries left by a remarkable group of late-Victorian men based in Bolton, Lancashire, who shared a love of Whitman's controversial "Calamus" poems, especially the forms of social intimacy or "comrade love" that the American poet celebrated between

<sup>124</sup> Quoted in Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*, 260.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

males. Cocks sets out to show that the documents written by these men-loving men reveal, as he points out in earlier chapters, that “knowledge of homosexuality was structured by its unnameable quality.”<sup>129</sup> He reveals how these inhabitants of Bolton experienced a kind of spiritual erotic intimacy with one another in terms and words that derived not only from their attentive interpretation of Whitman’s works but also from one of the poet’s greatest English proponents, the sexual reformer Edward Carpenter. There was, Cocks insists, nothing hidden, disavowed, or repressed in their exchanges, even though “they lacked the post-Freudian imperative to act on one’s desires.”<sup>130</sup>

While much of Cocks’s discussion adds immeasurably to our knowledge of what might be called the English Whitman, he fails to provide sufficient evidence from the poet’s experimental writings to support a number of important insights into the spiritualized readings of “Calamus” produced by J. W. Wallace, the figurehead of the Eagle Street College where the Bolton men convened. In this part of *Nameless Offences*, quotations from *Leaves of Grass* are in short supply. Likewise, little is said of the long history of adverse criticism toward Whitman’s morality that began in the English press when the first edition of his ever-expanding magnum opus appeared in 1855. Thus Cocks makes assertions about the “obscurity” of *Leaves of Grass* without showing in adequate detail where such abstruseness (especially in relation to homoeroticism) in the poetry might lie. Cocks’s commentary is more convincing when he discusses why the Bolton Whitmanites proved highly responsive to the teachings of Richard Maurice Bucke, a Canadian-trained doctor whose theories of “cosmic consciousness”—evident in Whitman’s perception of “comrade love”—proved highly attractive to Carpenter. According to Bucke, Whitman was the harbinger of what Cocks calls an “enhanced appreciation of the order and oneness of the universe.”<sup>131</sup> This was, at the same time, a higher mode of perception that few people currently possessed but that would flourish in time through processes of natural selection. To be sure, this chapter reinforces our knowledge of the extraordinary extent to which Carpenter’s idealized “homogenic love” affected many contemporaries who were exploring feelings of tenderness for members of their own sex. But it is worth noting that Cocks does not anywhere acknowledge the book from which we derive much of our modern understanding of Carpenter’s distinctive achievements: *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (1977), a study that Weeks coauthored with Sheila Rowbotham.

In sum, even if the new gay history does occasional disservice to Weeks, Foucault, and some of their more notable followers, it certainly succeeds in exposing any misapprehension scholars might have had about the apparently all-consuming power of the law and medicine to construct, as if in seamless fashion, modern homosexual identity. At its strongest, this fresh generation of research heightens our awareness of the disjunction between ostensibly significant legal changes and the impact such changes had on queer men’s lives. Likewise, this new crop of studies urges us not to attribute too much authority to sexology (especially in its extremely specialized, Continental forms) in shaping the terms through which

<sup>129</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 160.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

same-sex male desire was perceived at the time. Moreover, these up-and-coming historians take productive issue with the belief that homosexual scandals represent decisive shifts in how the public understood a man's attraction to his own sex. But more than anything else, their inquiries are at their most innovative when they shift their disputatious findings onto the physical territory that queer men made their own. One can only hope that their scholarly achievements will be remembered more accurately than they have at times chosen to recall those intellectual ancestors on whose work they still rely.