

Book Reviews

specific conditions. In this respect, economic and social data on the consumption function, both in relation to Penrith and to London, is exceptionally weak.

Despite its undoubted originality, this is a disappointing study. The further south it moves from the early modern north-west, the less impressive it becomes.

Bill Luckin,
Bolton Institute

Chris White (ed.), *Nineteenth-century writings on homosexuality: a sourcebook*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. xi, 374, £50 (0-415-15305-0).

Same-sex studies are now so advanced that “source books” retrieving their record, like this one, are a boom-industry. The development parallels studies of gender arrangements in the pre-AIDS aftermath of the Wolfenden Act of 1967 which legalized consenting homosexual intercourse in private. Both are nuanced and trustworthy, but White’s is the first compilation in English to document the nineteenth-century heritage, and my use of it for a few months shows it to be a handy vade mecum for which readers should be grateful, despite a few organizational miscalculations and odd choices. Not even its chronological arrangement and pithy headnotes can compensate for these gaps, and its two sets of endnotes—textual endnotes to the primary works and annotative notes to the editor’s sections—distract the reader who tries to use them.

As in all anthologies, the contexts are crucial inasmuch as they determine the state of the art. The word *homosexuality* was first coined in 1869 by Karl Maria Benkert, a medically trained Finnish campaigner for the civic rights of same-sex male relations who also disguised himself in the exotic Hungarian alias Kertbeny. Dozens of

synonyms for what we would call “homosexual” or “gay” or “queer” were coined in English over the next thirty years (1870–1900)—third-sex, urning, uranian, Grecian, invert, pervert—in an attempt to capture the essence of homosexual difference; explicitly, same-sex genital contact as distinct from what postmoderns now call homoerotic desire, which was then not legally culpable. European military and educational institutions had basked in the latter variety for generations, as any reader of pre-1900 novels knows. The former, genital contact and fluid emission, was the offender. Men were safe provided that sperm had not been spilled or the folds of the anus disturbed. As one post-Nietzschean jester quipped, uranism was the Gay Science of the Anus.

Benkert’s “third sex” was male and—paradoxically—not male, although strangely androgynous, routinely visualized and linguistically constructed as male. The androgynous third sex emerged almost straight out of Darwin’s theories and the new Victorian anthropology, and for almost thirty years afterwards—1869–1896—middle-European doctors, sexologists, and forensic experts debated the names of same-sex actions they were trying to understand in relation to the anatomic bodies before them. But all was too fuzzy and soon dwindled into the same positivistic medical and moral reductionism then sweeping civilized Europe. After the passing of a century (1890–1990) it now seems clear enough that the medicalization of homosexuality was basically a Germanic development, implemented in the repressive militaristic Bismarckian state against whose adamant legal grain visionary reformers like Krafft-Ebing and Karl Ulrichs unsuccessfully struggled—until the British psychologist Havelock Ellis confirmed, in 1895–96 across the North Sea, that he had treated “homosexuals” in his practice and introduced his new nomenclature to the English-speaking world. As the clock ticked forward from 1899 to 1900 many

millennially-minded Victorians were persuaded that the new “homosexuality”, or called by whatever other name, was degeneracy *ne plus ultra* despite Ellis’s guarantee that some of these were decent and kind people.

However, even before Ellis’s coinage, the classificatory and definitional dimension was problematic, although diverse types of practitioners—medical, forensic, clerical—seem to have known when they were in the presence of one of these creatures, as some of Dr White’s excerpts reveal. Ponder the later post-1900 semantic confusion in the more recent progression from homosexual to gay to now queer, and one grasps how vast is this dilemma to understand the “gay science” (Nietzsche’s phrase). Throughout the nineteenth century, homosexuals were described by different names, this semantic chaos contributing to the category’s terrific instability. Some terms were explicit (dandies, inverters, sodomites); others referential and rhetorically charged (beasts, degenerates, lechers, profligates, unnatural offenders, wretches); still others nostalgic and xenophobic (Grecians, Arcadians, Plutonians, *le vice anglais*)—all were condemnatory, even incendiary. Scientific discussion before Ellis’s forward leap in 1896–97 normally proceeded by describing the act and its context rather than using accepted classifications, for none existed.

Against this grain were all those trying to make sense out of what they were doing: the Winckelmanns, Whitmans, Wildes and hundreds of unknowns. Dr White’s English-language excerpts—primary writings, not commentaries or interpretations—document this record and include familiar episodes ranging from the Vere Street brothel-trials of 1810 to Oscar Wilde’s more famous trial in 1895. She organizes her excerpts into sections on the law, science, modes of defence, love, and sex. The sub-sections include ‘Modes of defence’, ‘Histories of the homosexual’, ‘Greek love’, ‘Gaveston and Mr W. H.’, and ‘Whitmania’. A final section on ‘Sex’ is

divided into ‘Sodomy and other acts’, ‘Boy-love’, and ‘Tourism’. This last is especially noteworthy as the origin of our Gay “Club Med” Cruise. Oddly, there is a gap in the century’s middle zone: 1840–1880. Why should the material cluster at the century’s extremities? Are there revolutionary reasons from the fallout of 1830 or 1848?

White offers no clues and instead revisits the peaks and troughs of nineteenth-century same-sex love, reiterating that German science and law then decreed its edicts unopposed; that in Germany the 1871 paragraph 175 revealed an implacable Reichstag aiming to criminalize homosexual acts; and that the long nineteenth century demonstrated a gradual stranglehold which pathologized and outlawed the homosexual (not hersexual). English-language imaginative literature is slighted, as are its covert means of coping with these conceits and restraints: specifically the wide literature of consolation (Tennyson and Hallam are included), neo-Latin love letters (still widely exchanged between Victorian school boys), and the vast realm of travel literature cultivated by millionaire William Beckford in the early nineteenth century, down to the Victorian John Addington Symonds, who is also included and who fled to Davos, Switzerland, for his weak lungs, and from his outpost there co-ordinated what resembles the first pan-European gay dating service. White also excerpts passages by Symonds, Edward Carpenter, and Walt Whitman, who loom large and whose writing is widely known. It might have been instructive to have had more material such as Roden Noel’s “Whitmanian” musings, Frederic Faber’s poems, and the jottings of the little known Eagle Street College in Bolton, where members gathered in the 1880s to exchange ideas about same-sex love.

The section on women in love is proportionally slender, perhaps because less of it exists. Represented more fully it could have deepened our sense of the nineteenth-century love that “dared not speak its name”. But there was then no interdiction against

Book Reviews

female love, it being thought that women were destined to love each other anyway and passively lie in each other's arms, as pictured in dozens of illustrated Victorian calendars showing fair maidens intertwined in the meadow or caressing by the brook under a tree. White includes only a few female voices before the 1870s: Charlotte Brontë in a letter of 1837 to Ellen Nussey, and Adah Isaacs Mencken, a friend of Swinburne and Georges Sand. Brontë's letter conveys the same-sex affection commonly found down through the nineteenth century from Jane Austen to the young Virginia Woolf. Adah Mencken's poems treat of crass, uncaring men. Her own sexual orientation is far from clear. It might have been shrewder to print more of Michael Fields (the pseudonym of two women conflated into a fictional man) and Amy Levy, a precocious Jew who attended Newnham College, Cambridge, and later savaged English Jewry in *Reuben Sachs* (1888) for semitic intolerance of same-sex intimacy. After going to London, Levy attached herself to Oscar Wilde before committing suicide at twenty-seven in September 1889. A headnote providing information about Levy's GP would have been useful: what did he think of his Cantabridgian's pathetic suicide? If one takes the view that physicians should interest themselves in their patients' suicides, then this anthology ought to find some small niche within the history of medicine. In the nineteenth century, self-murder as the result of the inability to consummate same-sex love was becoming a recognized cause of suicide. In the twentieth?

G S Rousseau,
De Montfort University

À l'ombre d'Avicenne. Le médecine au temps des califes. Exposition présentée du 18 novembre 1996 au 2 mars 1997, Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, and Gand,

Snoek-Ducaju & Zoon, 1996, pp. 329, illus., (hardback 2-906062-94-4; paperback 90-5349-227-5).

The four-month Paris exhibition which opened in November 1996 on medieval Islamic medicine sponsored by the Institut du monde arabe and the Bibliothèque nationale was a major event for the field. While materials relevant to the subject have been on view in numerous museums and libraries throughout the world, never before had such an ambitious exhibition been mounted in either the West or the Middle East. A wide range of professional expertise, led by a scientific committee comprising some of the best French scholars on the subject, was enlisted to identify and solicit material for display, and the exhibits, many on view for the first time, came from public and private collections across Europe and the Middle East.

À l'ombre d'Avicenne is the exhibition catalogue and displays the same ambitious conception and execution. Separate chapters cover 1) the emergence and efflorescence of the Arabic medical tradition, 2) therapy, materia medica and surgery, 3) the preservation of health, 4) medicine and society, and 5) the diffusion of the Islamic humoral tradition and its influence in other lands. Each chapter is further divided into sections in which illustrations are accompanied by brief but informative sketches written by leading authorities in the various topics covered, each with a short bibliography for further reading. The work as a whole has clearly been carefully edited and cross-referenced, and surprisingly few inconsistencies and misprints can be found.

The broad scope of the work can be seen throughout. In the chapter on the preservation of health, for example, one is unsurprised to find a sketch on the Galenic non-naturals; but this is followed by discussions and illustrations bearing on cuisine, the *ḥammām* (bath), and