

the Foucauldian pro forma, to fabricate identities. Despite constructivist gestures, McLaren's main concern (as the title implies) is the policing of the boundaries of masculinity, not the production of "normal" or "abnormal" desire. But these are mere theoretical quibbles, and should not distract us from what may be, for some, the narcissistic pleasure of the text.

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Franz X Eder, Lesley A Hall and Gert Hekma (eds), *Sexual cultures in Europe: national histories*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1999, pp. x, 270, £45.00 (hardback 0-7190-5313-7), £15.00 (paperback 0-7190-5314-5).

Franz X Eder, Lesley A Hall and Gert Hekma (eds), *Sexual cultures in Europe: themes in sexuality*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1999, pp. x, 261, £45.00 (hardback 0-7190-5320-X), £15.00 (paperback 0-7190-5321-8).

The history of sexuality has undoubtedly been one of the booming areas in interdisciplinary historical studies in recent years. This two-volume collection of essays attempts to survey the state of the art with reference to different national contexts within Europe and also to explore new themes. The volume subtitled *National histories* offers eight essays on sexual cultures in Britain (by Lesley Hall), Ireland (by Tony Fahey), the Netherlands (by Harry Oosterhuis), France (by Robert Nye), Italy (by Bruno Wanrooij), Germany and Austria (by Franz Eder), Spain (by Richard Cleminson and Efigenio Amezúa) and Russia (by Igor Kon). These are, on the whole, excellent surveys and some, such as the contributions by Nye and Eder, are far more than mere overviews. Certain themes

recur in the essays, regardless of the national context: religion, morals and the frequent disjunction between theoretical prohibitions and practical latitude. By concentrating on matters related essentially to sexual behaviour, the essays, perhaps, miss an opportunity to explore different societies' ideas about the nature of masculinity and femininity and their diverse contexts. Nevertheless, these concise studies would be very useful as teaching texts (especially in courses on general cultural history, where more detailed works on the history of sexuality cannot easily be used) and as points of departure for scholars coming to the history of sexuality for the first time.

The volume is rounded off with a brief history of the World League for Sexual Reform by Ralf Dose and a perceptive essay by Harry Oosterhuis questioning the conventional historical assumption (which, actually, is not quite so common as Oosterhuis seems to imagine) that the medicalization of sexuality in the late nineteenth century signified a top-down imposition of medical ideas and norms. As Oosterhuis argues on the basis of his research on Richard von Krafft-Ebing and as other scholars on the history of homosexuality (such as Vernon Rosario) have demonstrated, ideas on sexuality were medicalized as a result of a complex interplay of medical and broader social and institutional forces: "medical knowledge of sexuality could be successful only because it was embedded in society" (p. 238).

The other volume, *Themes in sexuality*, presents eleven essays based on original research in different areas of the history of sexuality. They address three broad themes: dangerous sexualities, stigmatized sexualities, and the links between sexuality and reproduction. Lutz Sauerteig shows how the impetus toward educating children and youth in sexual matters came from different sources and affected different groups in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany, although an emphasis on

the dangers of untrammelled sexuality was common to both periods, albeit in different ways. Bertrand Taithe demonstrates how one understanding of the nature of syphilitic infection won out over another in mid-nineteenth-century France, not because the victorious idea had more supporting evidence but because the rejected model attempted to dismantle “too many accepted popular and scientific practices and social rules” (p. 48). Roger Davidson’s article on venereal disease control in twentieth-century Scotland shows how the Scottish campaigns were more interventionist than the largely voluntaristic approach in the rest of the United Kingdom and how that interventionism was encouraged and engendered by the moral imperatives of Calvinism.

In the section on “stigmatized sexualities”, Gert Hekma provides a rapid-fire overview of same-sex relations among men in Europe from 1700 to 1990. Although a good, brief synthesis that many students would find very helpful, the complexities of this topic have been explored so exhaustively in recent years that scholars might be forgiven for finding the essay somewhat superficial. Still, one admires the courage to handle such a vast subject in one article more than one laments the resulting oversimplifications and omissions. The next essay in the section by Dorelies Kraakman addresses the evolution of the genre of pornography in Western European culture, arguing that modern pornography, in gaining sharper definition as a literary genre, has lost the artistic and transgressive qualities of the past. It is only in very recent times that the genre is again showing some creative vigour, largely due to the efflorescence of erotic literature produced by gays, lesbians and heterosexual women. This is followed by Angus McLaren’s essay on transvestism, which argues that male transvestism became a serious social, legal, and medical issue only in the late nineteenth century but does not analyse this transformation at any great

depth. In perhaps the most eye-opening contribution to this section, Emily Hamer recounts the history of lesbian doctors in Britain from 1890 to 1950. Hamer argues that contrary to usual assumptions, the life of lesbians in early-twentieth-century Britain was rather good, less “oppressed by psychosexual analyses of their inversion” (p. 140) than in other European countries and in contradistinction to male homosexuals, virtually untouched by legal persecution.

The final section is devoted to the reproductive dimensions of sexuality and commences with Simon Sreter’s comparative overview of European demographic patterns since 1850. He concentrates on changes in national trends in fertility within marriage, changes in marriage patterns, and illegitimacy rates since the mid-nineteenth century. Willem de Blécourt’s essay on cultures of abortion in The Hague tries to analyse on what criteria a defined group of women chose their means of abortion in the early twentieth century. Kate Fisher also addresses the culture of abortion, but in interwar South Wales, and obtains her data from interviews with surviving people from that era. She establishes that there was little opposition to abortion in working-class circles: the greatest anxieties surrounding abortion were neither legal nor moral, but related to questions of health. In the concluding essay, Anne-Marie Sohn shows how French Catholic women became progressively “dechristianized” during the 1930s, largely in reaction to the Church’s injunctions against birth control.

By its very nature, *Themes in sexuality* is a less coherent collection than *National histories* and although most of the essays are individually of high quality, they do not necessarily hang together very naturally. That, of course, is a characteristic of most collections of scholarly essays and, rather than dwell on it, one should be grateful that the twin volume, at least, is so much more than the sum of its parts.

Book Reviews

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Paul Thagard, *How scientists explain disease*, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. xviii, 263, £18.95 (hardback 0-691-00261-4).

In spite of its beguiling title and glowing blurb on the dust jacket, medical historians are likely to find this work remorselessly presentist, historically inaccurate and very hard going. It is the sort of book that gives philosophy of science something worse than a bad name. Besides the roller-coaster ride between technical philosophy and banal simplifications there is an unreconstructed realism here that will not appeal to modern historical sensibilities. Although lots of examples of the search for the causes of disease are given, the focus of the book is a supposed switch from humoralism to germ theory in the nineteenth century and the eventual explanation of peptic ulcer as caused by *Helicobacter pylori*. Thagard's

endeavour is to generate a new, fairly eclectic account of how etiological ideas are produced by welding together writings from authors in the philosophy and sociology of science who would not, intellectually speaking, be seen within a million miles of each other. Beneath the surface of the approach, however, are a number of familiar assumptions. There are, we are told, at least three possible reasons why it is difficult to identify the causes of disease. First "there can be too many possible causes to sort out", as the history of scurvy at sea illustrates. Second is "background causal beliefs". For example "the recognition that beriberi is a nutritional disease was impeded by attempts to find a microbial cause". The third difficulty in identifying the causes of disease "is that many are not directly observable". So bacteria "became observable with the invention of the optical microscope" (p. 130). Even those who wish to write their history on these premises will find this book hard going.

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