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Sexual Perversion in History: An Introduction

Julie Peakman

I What is Sexual Perversion?

Sexual perversion as an activity or behaviour has been given definite, albeit, changing definitions throughout history, while simultaneously being seen as something fluid and uncontainable. It also has been seen as a social construction dependent on temporality and geography. Yet, seemingly contrarily, it also has been defined as inherent in nature, as essentially bound up with the individual. Sexual perversion, then, is made up of a complex interweaving of ideas and beliefs in history.

The watershed for this book can be seen to be the arrival of the late nineteenth-century sexologists, a group of sex researchers who were among the first to try and categorize sexual perversion in a ‘scientific’ way. Although this book concentrates on the period pre-sexology, sexology itself is a pertinent starting point since we gain most of our current understanding of sexual perversion from its categorizations. It should be pointed out, that although the sexologists were writing during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is doubtful they had a wide influence on the understanding of sexual perversion during the period under our examination, either in Britain or outside their immediate academic sphere.1

French psychologist Alfred Binet introduced the concept of fetishism (which he described as the sexual admiration of inanimate objects) around the same time Austro-German sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing surfaced.

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1 For this reason, this is not the place for a huge debate about sexology. There are experts who have written about the subject elsewhere. For a more complete overview of the labelling of sexual perversions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see ‘Classifying and Explaining Perversion’, Harry Oosterhuis, Stepchildren of Nature. Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Modern Sexuality (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 43–55; and Gert Hekma, ‘Sexual Perversions’ in Julie Peakman and Tom Laqueur (eds), A Cultural History of Sexuality, Vol. 6 (Oxford, Berg, forthcoming).
Krafft-Ebing was the most comprehensive writer on sexual anomalies in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (published in 1886 in German, in 1892 in English) and it was he who was responsible for labelling all the perversions – sadism, masochism, fetishism, exhibitionism, pederasty, bestiality, nymphomania, flagellation, homosexuality, lesbian love, necrophilia, incest and so on. His study included homosexuality but he had been preceded by other sexologists such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfeld who had focused their minds on that subject. Ulrich’s impact came in his twelve essays on *Research on the Riddle of Male-Male Love* written between 1864 and 1879 in which he coined the phrase ‘urning’ for men desiring other men. Hirschfeld’s pamphlet ‘Sappho and Socrates’ (1896) also explored homosexual love, his theory was much the same as Ulrich’s. Both men believed that homosexuality was inherent, and both campaigned against the criminalization of homosexuals. However, some of these early pioneers, including Krafft-Ebing, although suggesting toleration, also saw the need for ‘treatment’ of homosexuals, and continued to see their behaviour as deviating from a commonly accepted idea of normality.

Havelock Ellis was another ground-breaker with his collection *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897–1928), but these studies were still regarded with some hostility. In the series, British-born Ellis explains sadism, masochism, auto-eroticism, Eonism (cross-dressing, the word taken from the famous eighteenth-century cross-dresser Chevalier D’Eon), and undinism (urinating and sex). *Sexual Inversion* (1897), the first volume in the collection, was written with John Addington Symonds and attempted to explain same-sex love. The first edition came out in German, and then in English in 1897 under joint names but was recalled by Symonds’s family, unwilling to allow the besmirching of his name. The second edition which came out without Symonds’s name in 1898 was proscribed as a work of obscene libel. Because of the suppression of these works, it is unlikely that they had any impact on identification or categorization of ‘perversions’ in Britain until the twentieth century at the earliest. Indeed, Ellis’s work was not available for sale in Britain until 1936.

With the formation of British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology in 1913, psychology was placed firmly on the agenda in an attempt to discuss ‘perversions’ in a more open way. Meanwhile, Sigmund Freud took sexology in a different direction and developed the psycho-analytical school of

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psychology to explain sexual behaviour, seeing the seed of adult sexual desires in childhood experiences. He defined unconscious thoughts in notions about female hysteria, the Oedipal complex and Freudian slips in his *Studies of Hysteria* (1895), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). In his examination of perversions, Freud’s theory sanctioned Krafft-Ebing’s aberrations but placed them in groups – in one group, he placed the inverts, and those who commit bestiality and paedophilia; in another he placed fetishists, voyeurs, exhibitionist, sadists and masochists, and those fixations not caught up with the genital areas or the ‘preliminary’ aim – the aim being ‘the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation. He defined the phenomenon:

Perversions are sexual activities which either a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim’.4

His definition implies a concept of ‘normal’ sexuality, this normality revolving around heterosexual intercourse between men and women. Yet widespread knowledge of sexology, psychology and psychiatry in Britain, did not take off until much later, and definitions of sexual perversions had not sunk firmly into popular culture until a couple of decades into the twentieth century.

By the 1960s and ’70s, philosophers were attempting all-encompassing definitions of sexual perversions. These have proved inadequate as they fail to take into account the mutability of the concept over time. Thomas Nagel in his discussion on sexual perversions outlines three connected areas:

First, if there are any sexual perversions, they will have to be sexual desires or practices that can be plausibly described as in some sense unnatural, though the explanation of this natural/unnatural distinction is of course the main problem. Second, certain practices will be perversions if anything is, such as shoe fetishism, bestiality, and sadism; other practices, such as unadorned sexual intercourse, will not be; about still

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others there is controversy. Third, if there are perversions, they will be unnatural sexual *inclination* rather than merely unnatural practices adopted not from inclination but for other reasons.5

All three assumptions can be undermined or dismissed. In the first (perversions as meaning unnatural), historically there *is* an argument for unnaturalness as a definition in history as I shall show in the following chapter. However, what Nagel is doing here is *assuming* an ahistorical natural aversion to certain practices. Yet there have been arguments by sexologists and psychiatrists that the very fact that we feel such desires means that these feelings must be natural. The second and third claims have to be dismissed outright; in the second Nagel is again making the assumption that we all hold the same understanding – that shoe fetishism, bestiality and sadism are naturally considered perversion, which is simply not true; and his third, he is asserting that, for a perversion to exist, it has to be based on a biological urge rather than on possible influences of nurture or experience which informs a person’s preference; this is without foundation. Rather the opposite has been found, that some sexual preferences which might be considered abnormal, have been caused by external influences. The seeds of these understandings can be seen in Sigmund Freud’s investigations into childhood experiences connecting them to adult behaviour. A further criticism of Nagel is that he argues against any connection between sex and reproduction as it has ‘no bearing on sexual perversion’. As we can see in this book, this is patently not true. Indeed, if anything, the opposite is true – acts considered sexually perverted were nearly always connected to those acts which do not result in procreation.

In another philosophical interpretation, Sara Ruddick has seen perversion as equated with unnaturalness. In this case ‘natural’ may be used synonymously with ‘usual’ or ‘ordinary’, in which case perversion would appear to be entirely culturally relative. She argued that typically, by ‘unnatural’, we mean not just ‘unusual, but something more like contrary to nature’. Donald Levy broadened the debate when he asked what sexual practices can be defined as perversions? ‘(1) First of all, there are the various kinds of homosexuality; (2) next, the several forms of sadism and masochism; (3) then, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and the use of body parts (i.e. other than the genital parts) (4) fetishism, transvestism, and possibly kleptomania; (5) bestiality; and

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(6) finally, necrophilia and paedophilia. We can immediately see how dated some of these definitions are as nowadays fewer people would consider homosexuality a sexual perversion. Some of the notions on naturalness and unnaturalness do adhere to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notions of perversion but we can see just how constructed concepts of both sexual deviance and sexual perversions really are, and how they vary in time. Even within the same era, there is a lack of agreement around the term, as Alan Soble has more recently summed up, ‘Masturbation, homosexual sex, anal sex, oral sex, voyeurism, exhibitionism, fetishism, sadism, masochism, transvestism, bestiality, necrophilia, coprophilia, and urophilia have all been thought perverse, but there is no philosophical or scientific consensus about the nature, origins, or even the genuine existence of sexual perversion.’

One needs only to flick through the British Library catalogue under the term ‘sexual perversion’ to find an array of books on the subject, many rigorously intellectual in their examination of the topic, but nearly all of them are from the psychoanalytical or psychological perspective, and none from a historical perspective pre-sexology. How useful these definitions are to the study of sexual perversions before their ‘invention’ has been a matter of contention.

Arguments about what exactly makes up perversity have oscillated on a dichotomy between the individual and society – whether perversity is an individual act as essentialists claim, or is it a ‘creation’ as a form of power control as social constructionists claim. It has been examined as both an inherent and personal characteristic and, in its broader more political context, as a means by which those in power constrain an unwieldy segment of the population. French philosopher and self-proclaimed historian Michel Foucault had been one of those attempting to introduce the theory of power as an explanation of the concept of perversion. He argued that perversion did not exist until the sexologists came along and labelled them as

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such – it was a figment made up from the discourse of the eighteenth century and consolidated in the nineteenth with the emergence of sexology and psychiatry. The theories around sexuality and its invention (including the notion of perversion) were based around control and power reflected in repressive laws. For Foucault, there was no essentialist or inherent perversion, but its meaning was derived from the transgression of established mechanisms of so-called normalization put in place by those in power.

Criticism has been thrown at Foucault’s theories on sexuality for various reasons. He has been attacked for producing a model which was deterministic, offering a passive model of the body incapable of resisting power. The subject has no agency but is a fiction constructed by some abstract power. Yet the construct of the sexual self is intrinsic to historians of sexuality as much as the culture around it – the how, why and when of how a sexual self came about and how it operates is what we are interested in. Yet Foucault fails to take into account the historical processes through which sex is produced in self. As Carolyn Dean asks, ‘How can historians comprehend a self-professed historian who does not even bother to use representative, empirically sound data?’ Some historians find it difficult to accept Foucault’s ideas on many levels, not least because he never included women in his equations, or considered the application of gender to his own work. Furthermore, although Foucault cites pornography as an example of the overlapping of power and pleasure in the deployment of sex, as Lynn Hunt points out, he says remarkably little about the subject. We might imagine, as pornography developed as a major power house of sexual expression in the eighteenth century, he might have had more to say about it.

Hunt sensibly turned Foucault’s theories around, suggesting (in real historical terms, rather than the ethereal abstract one of Foucault) that the modern sexual self emerged followed by the technologies constructed to discipline it, rather than the other way round. Certainly, in tracing the modern sexual body, we can see how sex was construed in everything within eighteenth-century pornography – in science, medicine, religion, fictional

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utopias and real explorations of the world. Again, against Foucault, we can argue that if we look at those behind the abstract power which he puts forward as responsible for the creation of laws, those who were the real arbitrators of sexual licence/freedom during the eighteenth century were the aristocracy, the very class which harboured that most transgressive of sexual groups, the libertines. If they were responsible for exercising control and making laws, why would they make controls that they so wanted to transgress themselves?

So, does the law necessarily operate in conjunction with an abject power which wishes to deny its people means of enjoyment? As James Penney points out in his book, The World of Perversion, power cannot be purely abstract as Foucault suggests but has to be embodied in a power group. It follows that if we are to believe that the law is created by those with the most power, we have to assume that they are not themselves sexually interested in the subject of their control. In the case of early modern period for example, we would have to assume that the Church Fathers who were following church law were simply not attracted to sodomitical behaviour but found it abhorrent. This is far from the case as we have seen from various studies on homosexuality in the Church. The subjective and active interest in sodomy in cases of certain networks within the Church, as in those cases exposed in the Inquisition of sodomitical coteries, proves that not all church authorities acted collectively, or were necessarily in favour of the law of the Church.

In his examination of the similarities and differences between Freud’s theory of sexual morality and Foucault’s theory on power and their production of normal and abnormal sexualities, Dollimore suggests that perversion can be seen as a transgression against the dominant force while also being part of its inconsistencies. In this sense, perversion acts as an inverse barometer pointing out the inconsistencies of the established norm, a sort of ‘disruptive power’ in which non-reproductive sex undermines the norm.

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16 There are countless cases studies on sodomy within the church. For some examples, see John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981).
17 Jordan points out that the Spanish Inquisition was reluctant to place sodomy on their list of crimes even after the papal assignment as such in 1451. Once implemented, clergy were among many of those found guilty and executed for the crime; Mark D. Jordan, The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 126.
But it seems that some acts were undertaken through opportunity and historically, environment and its change plays an important part. While Foucault’s theory might be able to suggest that it was ‘power’ that defined a certain sexual act as ‘abnormal’, it would be unable to explain why an individual might decide to bugger a cow rather than any other activity. It might be able to explain why this act would be seen as abnormal or a perversion at any one point in time, but not why the individual performed the act in the first place, an act which seems to be a very individual and personal desire, as well as an opportunistic one.

It is the question of why a person might decide on any particular act which fascinates the historian. Why did some of these activities diminish over time (bestiality diminished when rural activities shifted to urban living), or expand (auto asphyxiation has become more widespread today as the word passed around of its link to sexual stimulation) – this is what really broadens our understanding about sex.

Sex tends to find its outlets through its social surroundings and opportunities – bestiality occurs more in rural places than in towns, flagellation occurs where discipline had been inflicted in the past, male sodomy occurs in prisons and at sea, and incest occurs between family members who live in close proximity. How they are interpreted is another matter. Bestiality, for example, was considered to be witchcraft in seventeenth-century Sweden; flagellation was seen as a medical treatment for impotence so an acceptable means of foreplay; incest was seen as a common result of overcrowding in eighteenth-century London, and so on. As the world changes, individual actions change and with it, patterns of sexual behaviour. At some point in history, there comes a pivotal time seen in a sort of ‘acceptability principle’, when a deviant act has been undertaken by enough people for it to become seen as ‘normal’. Homosexuality is a case in point as seen in certain countries in the West.

With the coming of the queer theorists, sexual perversions became no more than labels of non-normative behaviour by which the persons enacting them might be criminalized or victimized. As James Penney points out, ‘queer theory has nonetheless virtually unanimously endorsed the historical reduction of perversion to normative instantations of power.’19 But without considering the individual action in one-off acts in the past, we are unable to understand how some non-normative behaviours increase in numbers, and acceptability, to become the norm; or vice versa. Why does this paradigm shift occur? Homosexuality, considered criminal until only a few decades ago, is now accepted as normal by many and the numbers of visible homosexuals (as opposed to those ‘hidden’ in history) have substan-

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19Penney, pp. 1–2.
ially increased, with same-sex marriages acceptable in some countries. So how many people does it take to be doing a previously consider ‘perverted act’ for it to be considered normal?

Historians rarely now go forth into the history of sexuality or any other field of history, thinking they can unearth the past through the lens of the present. Most have learnt from past anthropological interaction that the best way to understand a culture is to immerse oneself in it and understand it from within. From this standpoint, sexual perversion is a social construction, but this entirely submerges the natural instinct or inherent desires of any individual, and we are back in Foucault’s territory. Similar problems have emerged from the twentieth-century philosophers’ definitions, and the search for an indomitable truth. But the truth in history is not necessarily always retrospective. For a clearer idea of sexual perversion at the time, we need to examine the influences around its perceptions from the time we are examining – perversion is not abstract but rooted in its era. We must look at individual as well as societal perspectives.

In order to explore perversion, we therefore have to look back to its original conceptions, starting with the theologians, the makers and controllers of morality (be they the Church, the state or the community) and the controls from which they emerged. But we also need to look at individual acts. In retracing our steps, it becomes clear that some of the loftier promulgations about what made up sexual deviancy did not always filter down to the masses, nor did those individuals committing such perceived acts bother to heed them. What becomes evident is a persistence of theories of ‘unnaturalness’, and what constitutes abnormal sexual behaviour, rather than any significant changes within this period.

II Sexual Perversion Pre-Sexology

In 1677, a married woman from Cripplegate thought to be between thirty and forty was sentenced to death for her crime. According to the summary of her case brought before the Old Bailey,

not the fear of God before her eyes, nor regarding the order of Nature, on the 23rd of June last, to the disgrace of all womankind, did commit Buggery with a certain Mungril Dog, and wickedly, divellishly, and against nature had venereal and Carnal copulation with him.

Through several holes in the wall between her house and next door, her neighbours had been able to see her in acts of ‘uncleanliness’. The Dog was

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20My thanks to Jad Adams, Sean Brady, Gert Hekma, Rictor Norton, and Marilyn Morris for their reading of this part of the introduction and their helpful suggestions.
brought before the Prisoner, and ‘owned her by wagging his tail, and making motions as it were to kiss her, which ’twas sworn she did do when she made that horrid use of him.’\textsuperscript{21} Only a few such bestiality cases were recorded in England in the seventeenth\textsuperscript{22} and eighteenth centuries,\textsuperscript{23} but bestiality was always condemned as a heinous sin against nature. It was also considered a crime in the eyes of the law.

So why were such cases defined as ‘against nature’, and why were they considered criminal? After all the perpetrator was not hurting anybody and, in this case at least, the dog seemed quite happy. Yet the legal system was only one of the aspects in the wider framework which made up sexual perversion in the early modern world. It emerged from a complicated interwoven understanding of nature, theology, the understanding of man’s evil and the concept of sin. Within this structure, people’s perception of the world at large was based around their comprehension of the social order of things – the natural order of the world was seen to be ordained by God and any act which upset this order was not merely deemed ‘unnatural’, but seen to be against God’s will. Disruption to that social order was regarded with suspicion and dealt with either by the Church, the State or the Community. In other words, in England during the early modern period, the boundaries of acceptable sexual behaviour were set by religion, the law and tradition, the latter two aspects emanating from the rigid framework of the first. Outside of these boundaries, certain sexual behaviours or acts were deemed to be unnatural, and these acts made for ‘perversion’.

The discussion on normative versus non-normative sexuality has been approached from many angles, usually from the premise that ‘non-normal’ has to emerge from its’ opposite, the ‘normal’, and that this normal is nearly always taken to be heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{24} But can this observation be applied historically? Can sexual acts of behaviour considered perversions now be taken to be perversions in the past? The boundaries of acceptability in society have changed over time, as we can see in our attitudes towards homosexuality. The acceptability of male-on-male sex has shifted from being tolerated in Ancient Greece, to outlawed in the early modern period, to being acceptable again in current day Britain. Although much ground has been covered in the study of homosexuality in current scholarship, dis-

\textsuperscript{21}Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 26th December 2008) 11 July 1677 (t16770711-1).
\textsuperscript{22}Keith Thomas, \textit{Man and the Natural World} (London, Allen Lane, 1983).
\textsuperscript{23}See www.oldbaileyonline.org for examples.
Cussions on sexual perversity have not abounded in academia and as a subject, it is still uncharted territory. How far the understanding of the relationships between perversion and non-perversion was different from our current thinking varies depending on the type of perversion involved, although our studies also find on-going similarities.

A finite definition of sexual perversion has proved near impossible, although some nineteenth-century sexologists and twentieth-century philosophers have tried. However, most of these definitions are of little relevance in connection with the period under discussion, as they fail to take account of the mutability of the concept, and the behaviours considered perverted in the twenty-first century are not necessarily the same as those so defined previously. If we are to understand sexual behaviour in history, it has to be on its own terms. How did the ordinary person differentiate between those sorts of sexual behaviour considered perversions in the early modern period, and those which were not? If we are to understand sexual perversion in the world of pre-sexology, we need to turn to contemporaneous influences for an explanation.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary ‘perversion’ technically meant ‘The actions of perverting or condition of being perverted, turning the wrong way; turning aside from truth or right; diversion to an improper use; corruption, distortion’. Yet there was also a conception of perversion as ‘evil’ or incorrect, a stray from religion or nature, notably in early modern Britain. Wycliffe spoke of ‘perversion of soule’ as early as 1388: Caxton spoke of ‘perverse’ in 1484 meaning wickedness calling it, ‘The deception and flatterye of the perverse and evyile folke’. More specifically, it can be applied in religious terms as ‘change to error in religious belief (opposite of conversion)’, as seen in its application to the Protestants who became ‘perverted’ or converted to the Catholic faith. This was then reflected in Protestant attacks on the ‘perverse’ sexual behaviour of the Catholic nuns and priests. Apart from the religious sense, although closely connected with it, there was also a sense of perverse in nature. Clock-maker William Derham described the workings of nature in his *Physico-Theology, Or a Demonstration of the being and attributes of God from his works of creation, 1711–1712* (1713): God had created nature and everything in the universe had a natural order to it. A perversion of nature would mean a disruption or inversion of this perceived natural hierarchy. In the natural order of things, men were thought superior to women, and as such, were natural rulers. They were thought better equipped to make decisions therefore women should obey them. Yet women were considered naturally unruly, and in need of discipline by their husbands. Exceptions to this rule were found in

25See Introduction, Part I.
the topsy-turvy world of theatre where unruly effeminate men and cross-dressing women could be found, as seen in Chapter 2 and 3 (also see below on Topsy-Turvy World of Dress).26

The origins of the norms of the eighteenth century belonged to the realms of religious doctrine which had laid down the rules over two thousand years previously.27 Religion was one of the main definers of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour, reinforced by communities under the guise of ‘morality’, and sanctioned by first the church courts, and then the magistrates’ courts. Sex was considered licit only between a man and a woman within the realms of marriage – and then too, for procreative purposes only. Although of course, not everyone adhered to this practice, this was the basic rule of permissible sex. All abnormal sex took place outside these confines, although not all the sexual acts outside of the rule were deemed perverted.

Understandings of perversion were closely bound up with the Bible and what it deemed unnatural or against God, this in turn producing social morality and the law, both methods of control. Although Foucault has been widely criticized in his survey of sexuality in history,28 he at least recognized that perversion from the fourteenth century onwards served to legislate moral correctness through the concept of sin and the confessional. Although the use of the confessional did not apply in the late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Protestant Britain, the Judeo-Christian ethic and the concept of sin were deeply engrained. Originally, the Bible had been responsible for determining which crimes were unnatural, and theologians were therefore in charge of deciding what was perverse sexual behaviour. Same-sex behaviour was particularly castigated, as follows:

Leviticus 20:13 If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.
Romans 1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:
Romans 1:27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the

26Similar was to be found in French Culture, see Natalie Zemon Davies, ‘Women on Top’, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Sanford University Press, 1965), pp. 124–51, p. 136.
27John Boswell has argued that negative views on homosexuality did not emerge until the thirteenth century which means that the influences of the Judeo-Christian ethic are not constant throughout the whole of the period. This may well be true of other behaviours thought of as deviant over the last 2000 years but, as yet, not enough work has been undertaken in this area. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1980).
28See Introduction, Part I.
woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly...

There was, therefore, a definite understanding of sexual behaviour pre-sexology which was considered either deviant or 'abnormal'. This behaviour was most commonly seen as that which was 'against nature'.

As Thomas Laqueur has identified, ‘perverted sex was the sign of perverted social relations.’ The morality of the immediate community would therefore act to induce shame on people deviating from what was considered unnatural or sinful behaviour and played a major role in the control of an individual’s behaviour. The community would also be a factor in delineating the ‘good’ sexual behaviour from the ‘bad’ and this would be manifested in a communal form of social control such as sexual slander, rough music and ‘skimmington rides’. The unnaturalness of an act was based on the extent of how far it deviated from procreative sex between man and wife. The concept of what was natural or unnatural was not only part of the biblical interpretation but was an application to the world in general. The early modern world saw itself as based on nature, and the whole interpretation of the natural order of things was based around it.

As Pierre Hurteau sums up, ‘Moral conduct was dictated by objective rules derived from natural law, which reflected the order of God’s creation.’ This application of perversions as defined in the Bible, nature and morality was, in turn, incorporated into criminal law.

Sodomy as perversion ‘against nature’

The phrase ‘against nature’ was most quickly applied in cases of sodomy. Although nowadays, we take this to mean buggery between men, during

29 Although Jeffrey Weeks used the title for his book Against Nature (1991) to examine homosexuality, the phrase was frequently applied to other perceived sexual deviations.


32 See Julie Peakman on science and nature in her Mighty Lewd Books (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2003), pp. 67–92.

the early modern period it covered three main types of act – that of anal intercourse between men; sexual intercourse with a beast, or bestiality; and all other types of immodest or abnormal intercourse which might include anal sex between a man and a woman, or in fewer instances, penetration with a dildo of one woman by another. According to Jesuit Martin Bonacina (1585–1631) who wrote pages on the subject, sodomy meant anal intercourse between men and ‘Emission of sperm was not required to apply, and penetration was sufficient’\(^{34}\) for sodomy to have taken place, although this was not the case in British law. Since the buggery law of 1533, both penetration and ejaculation were necessary for a prosecution to be secured up until 1828 when the law changed to make conviction for sodomy easier and only proof of penetration was needed.\(^{35}\) The law, however, was not always as consistent in the matter as it should have been, as shown by the case of the second Earl of Castlehaven in 1631 where only proof of ejaculation was needed for his conviction.\(^{36}\) As seen in this case, political manoeuvrings could also influence action or non-action against a person or act.

Generally though, the concept of unnaturalness as stated in the Bible was reflected in criminal law. Men or women who were brought before the magistrates courts for committing sodomitical acts, were described as committing acts ‘against nature’. When Thomas Burrows was brought before the Old Bailey on 4th December, 1776 for sodomy, he was indicted ‘for feloniously assaulting one William Brooks on the 28th of November, and that he feloniously, diabolically, and \textit{against the order of nature}, had a venereal affair with the said William, and carnally knew him, and did commit and perpetrate with the said William that detestable and abominable crime (\textit{among Christians} not to be named) called buggary’.\(^{37}\) By the end of the eighteenth century, the crime had become so disgraceful in public perception, that the court decided to suppress reporting the crimes publicly, possibly thinking that the more the subject was aired, the more men might be likely to try it. On 15th February, 1797, William Winklin was indicted for

\(^{34}\)Quoted in Hurteau, p. 10.

\(^{35}\)As Sean Brady points out, there was a cascade of new legislation introduced in the nineteenth century but the Buggery Act remained the basis for legislation in prohibited sex between men right up until its repeal in 1967. Despite the introduction of new laws in 1823, 1861 and 1885, the laws remained highly ambivalent; Brady, p. 51.


\(^{37}\)Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 26th Dec 2008), Dec 1776, Thomas Burrows (t17970215-46).
‘an unnatural crime’ but the evidence on the trial ‘being extremely indecent, the Court ordered the publication of it to be suppressed’.38

Theologians also considered ‘sexual intercourse between two women’ to be sodomy,39 but the matter was made more complicated by the difficulty of determining exactly what it entailed. Although the Bible condemned women having sex with other women, various European cases were divided on their treatment. The Florentine inquisitional records between 1619 and 1623 show that the Church took relatively mild action against their two lesbian nuns, Benedetta Carlini and Bartolomea Crivelli, and merely separated them, presumably to prevent any chance of a scandal. According to the Prussian Secret Archives, the case of Catherina Margaretha Linck and her female lover was taken much more seriously and Linck was beheaded in 1721. In the 1740s case of Catherina Viazzi, she was shot by an agent of her lover’s uncle after she and her female lover had eloped so the problem was resolved by the immediate community.40 In each case therefore, different approaches were made to a perceived problem of lesbian sex. The law in Britain was somewhat tentative in attending to women having sex together. Indeed, it has been questioned whether the concept of lesbianism was taken seriously at all.41

Punishment tended to be inflicted only when a woman had been seen to be penetrated by another with the use of a dildo; in other words, if they were aping a man’s position. This happened in cases where women had married other women pretending to be men. Mary Hamilton, who supposedly married a total of fourteen women, was sentenced in 1746 to a public whipping and imprisoned for six months. But culturally in England, lesbian behaviour tended to be considered less harshly than other sexual ‘crimes’. Women were considered less of a threat than men since it was considered peculiar for men wanting to take up the socially inferior role of women

38Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 26th Dec 2008), Feb 1797, William Winklin (t17761204-2).
39Hurteau, p. 11.
(again, considered ‘against nature’). Women tended to be convicted when implications of another non-sexual crime came up, most often fraud. In these cases, women had usually dressed as men in order to marry richer women and defraud them of their money. Typically, one such woman was convicted at Guildhall Westminster for having married three different women and defrauded them of their clothes and money, and was sent to the pillory at Charing Cross and imprisoned for six months.42

Although women together were treated less harshly than their male counterparts, their behaviour was still perceived as unnatural. In his book, *The Female Husband* (1746) based on Mary Hamilton, Henry Fielding described Hamilton’s desires as ‘unnatural affections’;43 John Cleland in his translation of *The True History and Adventures of Catherine Vizzani* (1755) perceived her to have committed ‘so unnatural a Vice’ in her behaviour with other women, while diarist Hester Thrale described Sapphists as ‘a Set of Monsters’.44 This concept of the unnaturalness of sex between women (and hence its immorality) was therefore ingrained in society at large. Generally though, community reaction was less harsh regarding two women living together and they could easily escape serious repercussions as did the Llangollen Ladies, Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler who lived together relatively unscathed.45

The last case of sodomy, that of bestiality, we might think would be considered the worst of crimes within this category, if we are to consider it as an act ‘against nature’, and for the eighteenth century, this holds true. The theological condemnation was again already present in the Bible: Leviticus 20, 15 states, ‘A man who has sexual intercourse with any beast shall be put to death, and you shall kill the beast.’ Women who had committed sex with animals were condemned to the same treatment. Yet compared to cases of sodomy between men, relatively few people were brought to court for sex with animals in Britain. Christopher Saunders was indicted at the Old Bailey on March 10th, 1776, for that ‘he (against the order of nature) had a certain venereal affair with a certain beast called a cow, and feloniously and wickedly against the order of nature did carnally know the said beast called a

42The Annual Register, 5 July 1777, pp. 191–2.
45The Llangollen Ladies, Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler were frequently visited by writers, artists and visitors from London and were accepted as a couple. They were therefore upset when the newspaper *General Evening Post* ran an article on them in 1790 insinuating lesbianism, but their friend Edmund Burke, advised them against suing for libel. Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen* (London, Penguin, 1973); also see the case of Anne Lister, Helena Whitbread (ed.), ‘I Know My Heart’ *The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791–1840* (New York, New York University Press, 1992).
cow, and with the said beast called a cow did feloniously and wickedly and against the order of nature commit and perpetrate the detestable and abominable crime, not to be named among Christians, called Buggery’. As seen in the case of woman from Cripplegate, women were also convicted of bestiality, but they were more often caught with dogs than with cattle. In both cases, the perpetrator was sentenced to death. From legal action taken against them, it would appear that sodomy between a person and an animal was taken more seriously than cases of sodomy between men, since men caught were usually sentenced to the pillory, a fine and a stint in prison (usually between six months and two years). The lack of bestiality cases in court indicates that such acts were either less detectable, or less common.

So why was it considered such a heinous act? From his study of bestiality in Sweden in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Liliequist has found that it was an act which was considered not only against nature but potentially evil, and therefore frightening. Copulation with animals was associated with witchcraft and association with Satan and had greater implications for one’s soul and the community. In tracing the antecedents of perversion and its historical context, the conception of sin emerges as either an evil deposited on a person by connections with the Devil or an inherent evil. The dichotomy of the correct and the perverse, the normal and the abnormal, becomes the parallel between good and evil. During the seventeenth century, French mathematician and philosopher Balise Pascal in his Pensées (‘Thoughts’, 1660) examined the link between perversity, concupiscence and sin and its inescapability in moral life. He saw man’s inherent perversity of desire as man’s deviation from Good. Knowledge of the natural world was inextricably bound up with a positive knowledge of God. Guilt was part of the process of self constraint, a parallel which Freud would find some two hundred and fifty years later. Similarly, in Britain witchcraft also figured in incest cases; in Rabillac Redivivus, Being the Narrative of the late Tryal of Mr. James Mitchell (1678), accusations against Major Thomas Weir were not merely of adultery, incest and bestiality but he was also accused of consorting with the devil and his crimes associated with magic and witchcraft. Yet the act of bestiality continued to be classed with sodomy, at least

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46Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 26th Dec 2008), Match 1776, Christopher Saunders (t17760417-28).
in Sweden, right into the twentieth century. In his article, Rydström makes the case that bestiality, seen as the most problematic type of sodomy, was overtaken by homosexuality as the most cause for concern. This shift has taken place with the shift from rural living to city dwelling as ‘older religious categories were replaced by new scientific ones, the “sinner” gave way to the “pervert”’.

Although some people saw sexual deviations as acts of sin, temptations laid before the sinner, another aspect of perversion was where the evil was considered to be inherent in a person. James Penney in his book, The World of Perversion offers us an example of the inherently evil person in the medieval sodomite Gilles de Rais. He left his personal and subjective testimony to his crimes, now preserved in the Nantes archives. Although he was famous as a nobleman and warrior fighting alongside Joan of Arc during the Hundred Years War, he was responsible for the kidnapping and erotic torture of preadolescent boys, whom he then decapitated and dismembered. As Penney correctly points out, the Church needed its heretics to reinforce its own dominance. There is little point having Good, if Evil cannot be detected and exposed. This example is useful in considerations of early modern thought on perversion as it is so neatly aligned with the medieval notion of sexual perversion as moral and spiritual corruption. The church saw his crimes enacted as a result of diabolical desire, an inversion of moral consciousness rather than a negation of moral law. This was in fact, seen as a form of radical evil, different from the concept of original sin.

Topsy-turvy world of dress

Cross-dressing was seen as a further perversion of the world, a topsy-turvy inversion of the sexes, although reasons as to why men and women cross-dressed, and reaction to it, were gendered. Again, the Bible had already laid down rules on the subject in Deuteronomy Chapter 22, Verse 5: ‘The women shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God’. Seventeenth-century theologian William Perkins was quick to point out, ‘The use of attire, stands by the very ordinance of God: who Hath not sorted all men to all places, so he will have men to fitle themselves and their attire, to the qualitie of their proper places, to put a differ-

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50Penney, p. 55.
ence between themselves and others... By which it appereas, that many in these daies do greatly offend...\footnote{William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist: His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: ‘A Discourse of Conscience’ and ‘The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience’ edited with an introduction by Thomas F. Merrill (1966), quoted by Dollimore, p. 288.}

Although the church was quite clear on the matter, the reaction of the public shows a clear distinction in the way they viewed known cases of sodomy and mere cross-dressing, for not all men or women who cross-dressed were condemned as sodomites. In the case of men, they have been frequently associated with cross-dressing as part of their homosexuality but for women reasons have often been given as a means of entrance into a man’s world – for economic opportunities, or to go to war or sea.\footnote{Nadezhda Durova, The Cavalry Maiden. Journals of a Female Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars (London, Angel Books, 1988); Julie Wheelwright, Amazons and Military Maids (London, Pandora Press, 1989); Suzanne J. Stark, Female Tars. Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail (Maryland, Naval Institute Press, 1996), pp. 102–7.} Tales of women dressing up as men to go off to join the army and the navy were both plentiful and popular; as such, they were an accepted cultural tradition in which women were seen as hearty lasses, much in the style of the modern day female Principal Boys in tights and boots. Rarely were these women thought to be lesbians or as having sex with each other, although some authors included lesbian innuendos to titillate the public,\footnote{For example see, Anon, Lives and Adventures of a German Princess, Mary Read, Anne Bonny, Joan Phillips...etc (London, M. Cooper, 1755).} but even then, these women were rarely portrayed as threatening.\footnote{Although Faderman has argued that female transvestism was perceived as threatening, others have found the opposite in cases of mere cross-dressing, where no sex was involved. Peakman, Donoghue and Friedli have found a friendly support for the women in such tales of cross-dressing. Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men (London, Junction Books, 1982); Peakman, Lascivious Bodies, pp. 214–35; Emma Donoghue, Passions Between Women (London, Scarlet Press, 1993), pp. 87–108; and Lynne Friedli, ‘Passing Women, a study of gender boundaries in the Eighteenth Century’, G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter Sexual Underworld of the Enlightenment (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987).} In other cases, it also becomes obvious that women had been blamed for masculinizing themselves through their dress and mannerisms, and this was seen as distasteful by the public. Women who caused most concern were those seen to be penetrating their female lovers, or marrying them as men as seen above. Both these actions were seen to be usurping the male role, and as such, attracted greater punishment. Penetration was also connected to the act of sodomy thus making it a greater sin and potentially opening up the actions to broader condemnation.

Men who cross-dressed were most often associated with sodomites and, as such, more of a threat to social order. Examples of these can be seen in the men caught in Mother Clap’s Molly House in the 1720s. Some of
the men, called ‘mollies’, would dress in female clothes, especially during drag balls and what they called ‘festival nights’, and would act out female parts in role play involving marriages and giving birth to giant cheeses or wooden jointed dolls. The crime was not so much the cross-dressing as the sodomitical acts taking place between the men, and the fact that they had reduced themselves to being women, thereby undermining their assertive masculine role. Their cross-dressing was considered a perversion in that it subverted the order of nature, by inverting the ‘proper’ gender roles in a hierarchy in which men dominated women.

Yet, men with airy ways might be thought fops, and would not necessarily have their sexual relationships scrutinized, particularly if aristocratic. Lord Hervey was one such eighteenth-century character who held good grace and an influential career at court while carrying on a relationship with his lover Stephen Fox, brother of the famous radical opposed to Pitt, Charles Fox. Effeminate men, although not always persecuted, frequently had slurs attached to their characters. Historically these perversions of the feminized man and the masculinized woman can be seen in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 9.

Cross-dressing in recent sex studies has been connected with sexual arousal although most current day investigations into heterosexual (as opposed to homosexual) transvestites have found that the majority of men who cross-dress deny that they do it for sexual purposes. One study found that although the core groups denied this association – that dressing as women aroused them sexually, when tested in a controlled environment, heterosexual cross-dressers responded with penile tumescence (blood rushing to the penis causing erection) to written fantasies of cross-dressing. The conclusion of the study found that heterosexual cross-dressing was directly related to sexual fetishism. This then adds to the dilemma of how to

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57See Chapter 2 and 6.
understand heterosexual male cross-dressers of the past, although so few cases have been uncovered and, as yet, we have little to examine.

In England, at least, there seemed to be ambivalence towards the subject of male cross-dressing. Although there was an antagonism towards sodomites who cross-dressed, those of status were less likely to be condemned. One case to cause a stir in London in the 1770s because of his cross-dressing was that of Frenchman Chevalier D'Eon (Fig. 1.1 & 1.2); the London Evening Post for 11–14 May 1771 went so far as to declare ‘that a celebrated Chevalier [D’Eon] has with a few weeks past, been discovered to be of a different sex’.59

D’Eon is difficult to fathom as, unlike the mollies, he claimed to be asexual, yet obviously took delight in silk dresses, offering detailed accounts of them in his memoirs.60 D’Eon never mentions a lover of either sex, but does confess to living with a woman at the latter end of his life, although he claims it was a purely domestic arrangement. It was possibly the fact that D’Eon did not outwardly display signs of desiring either sex, and that he was living with a woman as a woman, which alleviated him from persecution by British authorities. The fact that he came from an aristocratic background and had high social standing in society also meant that he was less liable for persecution than were unruly plebeians. Although he was not regarded as sexually perverted since his associations did not appear to be sexual, he was regarded as an oddity. His case was high profile, covered in the news, and he was the subject of various bets and raucous debates.

In her examination of the cases of both D’Eon and Madame Du Coudray (a female man-midwife working in obstetrics), Lisa Cody has argued that there was a self-fashioning through bending their own genders, following Vern and Bonnie Bullough who contended that ‘cross-dressing...allows an individual to express a different facet of his or her persona’.61 For John Dollimore, this transgression can be seen as a quest for authenticity and individualism – in defying a progressive order, we can be true to ourselves. Transvestism is a mode of transgression which finds its expression in inversion. Dress is important not just in defining gender, but in defining class; but dress confusion could be seen by contemporaries as symptomatic of

59On D’Eon, see Peakman, Lascivious Bodies, pp. 211–18.
Fig. 1.1. Chevalier D’Eon as a Woman
Fig. 1.2. Chevalier D'Eon as a Man
impending social collapse. In the theatre, we can see a mirror image of the world; it can transgress the natural order of things and confuse distinctions. In comic plays, this confusion might have a social function (see Chapter 2). Of course, cross-dressing characters in a play would not necessarily be seen as sexually perverted, but they would have been seen to transgress the natural order of the world, or to be flaunting it, or making a mockery of it.

If we examine dress fetishism more closely, in a broader sense rather than mere cross-dressing, we can do no better than to look at David Kunzle’s definition in his book *Fashion and Fetishism*. He asserts ‘Fetishism may be defined as the individual displacement of private erotic feeling onto a non-genital part of the body, or onto a particular article of clothing by association with a part of the body, or onto an article of clothing in conjunction with its effect on the body.’ In his book, *The Sex Life of the Foot and the Shoe* (1976) William Rossi describes a fetish as ‘where the sexual desire chooses as its exclusive and sufficient object some part of the body (e.g. feet) or some article of clothing (e.g. shoes).’ He asserts ‘The foot is an erotic organ and the shoe its sexual covering’. He suggests that shoes became a subject of fetishism because of their importance for the female form. He explains, ‘the voluptuous architecture of the body, owes much of its sensuous character to the foot, which was responsible for the upright posture and gait that altered the entire anatomy’. The shoe has thus been connected to female sexuality in history in the Cinderella myths, with a small foot an example of perfection. Kunzle suggests that foot fetishism was a result of the need for male possession; he asserts, ‘the expressed Chinese ideal of a foot small enough to fit inside a man’s mouth probably reflect an oral-genital fantasy’; in the West, this was altered to a small foot should ideally fit into a man’s hand. What was seen to be a perversion in one country, however, would not necessarily be seen as such in another; although the British saw the type of foot obsession displayed by the Chinese as perverted, the Chinese obviously did not feel the same, as seen in Chapter 10.

In any case, the British displayed a liking for feet of their own. For many in the eighteenth century, a lady’s pretty foot was something to be admired.

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62 Dollimore, pp. 284–5, 290.
65 Rossi, p. 1.
66 Kunzle quoting Rossi, p. 15.
67 Rossi, pp. 158–70.
Lord Jersey, beau to courtesan Harriette Wilson, carried her shoe in his pocket in the hope of finding her a new pair. She declared, ‘His Lordship really loved me, and, above all, he loved my foot.... he used to go about town with one of my shoes in his pockets, as a pattern to guide him in his constant search after pretty shoes for me.’\(^{68}\) Even more obsessive was that of a Marquis who wooed a friend of Irish madame, Mrs Leeson. Her friend related to her how the Marquis used to love to pick and wash her toes, yet declared that he ‘never was even rude enough to give me a kiss’.\(^{69}\) None of this foot fetishism seems to have been a matter of concern for eighteenth-century commentators, nor was it considered abnormal. Indeed, pretty feet appear to have been a source of joy amongst men and women alike. Why on earth such a liking for pretty feet furnished the eighteenth-century fashion is hard to say, except the possibility that as a part of the body seductively peeping out from under long dresses, feet carried mysterious appeal. Neither can we tell how widespread it was until the end of the nineteenth century when Krafft-Ebing expressed his belief that foot or shoe fetishes were the most common kind.

The word fetish carried different connotations in the eighteenth century. Fetishing was seen as ‘to adorn oneself, dress up’.\(^{70}\) Atkins in his *Voyage to Guinea* (1735) commented, ‘The women are fondest of what they call Fetishing, setting themselves out to attract the good Graces of the Men’. This fascination with dressing up would be displayed in eighteenth-century plays,\(^{71}\) in memoirs,\(^{72}\) in erotica and gentlemen’s magazines. In the erotic books and magazines such as *Exhibition of Female Flagellants* (1777) and *Bon Ton* magazine, the female dominatrix was depicted as a governess, or a mother figure. The wearing of both huge nose-gays and purple gloves is combined in an exploration of flagellation.\(^{73}\) Far from being seen as abnormal, flagellation was recognized as a stimulant, a means to an end, an act which culminated in heterosexual ‘normative’ vaginal sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. The nose-gays and purple gloves here were seen as less of a fetishism than a signifier of female flagellants.

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\(^{70}\) OED.

\(^{71}\) For example see George Etherege’s play *Man of the Mode. Sir Fopling Flutter*, Chapter 2.

\(^{72}\) Both Chevalliers De Choissy and D’Eon and left their memoirs. See R.H.F. Scott (ed.), *The Transvestite Memoirs of The Abbé De Choisy* (London, Peter Owen, 1973); and footnote above on D’Eon.

Pornography as perversion?

How far can we use pornography as evident of perversion? Having looked at some of the perceptions of deviant sexual behaviour in religion and how morality and the law controlled it, I want to turn to the sphere of pornography to see if it can tell us more about thoughts on what was considered to be perverted, sinful, immoral or against the natural order. Although pornography can go some way in helping investigations of perversions in the past, and defining what was considered perverse or not, we have to be careful in its reading as in some cases, pornography turns society’s normal values on their head, and what is considered perverted in society, is normalized in pornography. Although the type of acceptable behaviour (and the amount of its violation) might well have been contained by religious beliefs, the law and morality in real life (and it is impossible to gauge exactly how much systems of control worked since transgression occurred nonetheless), the range and scope of sexual perversity in pornography was limited only by the erotic imagination and this, to some extent, was dictated by class. Erotica was more easily obtained by the richer readers, so therefore they would have been more familiar with different types of fanciful sexual activities, having read about them. Aristocrats also had more time and money to indulge their fantasies, and therefore were often seen as more debauched. This did not necessarily mean their behaviour was considered perverted.

Increased privacy for many people during the eighteenth century meant that opportunities arose not only for private reading but for sexual experimentation. As Patricia Meyer Spacks has pointed out, ‘eighteenth-century men and women simultaneously experienced heightened eagerness to penetrate the privacy of others...as soon as privacy exists, it challenges the desire for knowledge.’

Personal curiosity and the need for novelty combined with this new privacy was reflected in pornographic developments as texts tried out more innovative methods of sex, some of them deviating from the sanctioned missionary position promulgated by the theologians. With new developments in printing techniques, pornography became increasingly available in eighteenth-century England. From the mid-century onwards, its textual style began to develop in terms of exploring sexual perversion.

De Sade has been shown as the exemplar of perversion in his various biographies and examination of his works. Foucault highlights the point that central to the sex of de Sade is a lack of a norm, a sex with laws known only unto itself. This, in itself, would serve as a contradiction of Foucault’s

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theory – it would mean that de Sade’s sexual world is therefore outside of Foucault’s power mechanism. Leaving this aside, can we use de Sade as an example of a catch-all European version of eighteenth-century perversions?

Marquis de Sade explored virtually every vice known to man – flagellation, blood lust, sadism, masochism, sodomy – in his work as well as in his personal life. In 1772, at the age of thirty-two de Sade was condemned to death at Aix for his cruelty and unnatural sexual practices. He later ended up, via the Bastille, in Charenton lunatic asylum where he was kept incarcerated until his death in 1844. He supposedly developed his taste for perversion in the army, and gave his life up to dissipation after the death of his sister-in-law who he idealized in his novel *Juliette*. One of his worst crimes was the forcible and indecent flagellation of thirty-six year old Rosa Keller. He tied her to a bed and whipped her with a birch, made various incisions in her flesh with a small knife and dropped wax into the wounds. Some years later he took part in an orgy of prostitution and flagellation with several whores to whom he had administered an aphrodisiac. They complained to the court that it had been so powerful that it had made them quite ill. De Sade believed that ‘every man wants to be a tyrant when he fornicates’.76

De Sade’s contribution to sexual perversion came in the form of pornographic books such as *Les 120 Journées de Sodome* (1785), *Justine, ou les Malheureux de la Vertu* (1791), *Le Philosophie dans le Boudoir* (1795) and *Juliette* (1797), However, as Henry Spencer Ashbee, the notorious Victorian bibliographer of erotica stated, in De Sade’s pornography, bloodthirstiness was usually connected with insulting virtue and making it ridiculous. In eighteenth-century English pornography, this is not necessarily so, sometimes even the opposite. In *Female Flagellants*, for example, virtue is not mocked but exalted.77 According to Ashbee, de Sade’s influence becomes evident in British erotica by the 1830s in such books as *The Inutility of Virtue* (1830), with similar sordidness and ridiculing of virtue seen in *The Seducing Cardinals* (1830). Humiliation is certainly an affect which increased in direct proportion with the violence. *The Experimental Lecture* by ‘Colonel Spanker’ (1836) contains the whole philosophy which was argued to exhaustion in de Sade, bloody orgies, vivisection and torture.

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But how far de Sade was available in England, or indeed in English, is difficult to access. A clumsy English translation of *Justine* was published in 1899 by Isidore Liseux imprinted by The Erotika Biblion Society for private distribution only – fifty copies were made for its members under the title *A Philosophical Romance*. But translations were not available in England *en masse* until the Olympia Press publications in the 1950s, although a few select British readers and producers of pornography read him in the original. In any case, it is unlikely that de Sade had much influence on ordinary British people’s view of perversion, even if the richer eighteenth-century libertine managed to obtain copies of his works. Even then, the perverse world of de Sade was not necessarily the same as the perverse world of the British pornographer.

Theoretically speaking, pornography should have been seen as perverse as it was seen through transgressive eyes – the intention of most pornography is to break taboos. However, the transgressive nature of pornography had been overplayed, and the more important point about British eighteenth-century pornography was its incorporative, and even conservative, nature – how it fed on, and feeds back into, the normative cultural world around it. Thus what we learn from British pornography in particular, is not necessary the perverse world itself, as in, say, de Sade, but what the normal world finds perverse. This can therefore act as a ‘way in’ to finding out what was considered sexual perversion in the eighteenth-century mind – or at least what the minds of the British writers and readers of pornography thought of as sexually perverse.

As forerunners of pornography, Britain looked to seventeenth-century French writers to begin the exploration of sex and its various derivations. Many of the story-lines were based on the introduction of young virgins to sex by an older woman, which would then lead to vaginal penetrative sex with a man. Although lesbian interludes were seen as a normal part of a woman’s introduction to sex, the ‘main’ act would be heterosexual. Yet sex between women was not regarded as unusual or threatening but a natural progression in a young woman’s sexual initiation. Although overspilling fluids (tears, blood, semen, female ejaculations) were frequently used in erotica to convey excess, they were often seen as normal manifestations of an otherwise wayward body.

Diderot, whose philosophical influence was arguably more profound on British people than de Sade during the eighteenth century, saw the body as

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central to understanding man and wrote constantly about the body and its image. His friendship and correspondence with John Wilkes after they had met at a Parisian salon showed his influences stretched to English libertines. Conlin has argued that, ‘It was Diderot’s analysis that sexual licence, if treated as a function of liberty, could erode civilisation and cause chaos.’

This would, if true, demonstrate an eighteenth-century belief that sex without constraints leads to the downfall of society. Yet Diderot delighted in descriptions of fleshy uncontrol and the precariousness of the body. In this way, he saw the body as acting directly rather than merely being representative as an external force in society. He rejected many of the constraints placed on the body and he thought that curbing its instinct was pointless.

This is evident in his writings on incest as discussed in Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville (1772); and in La Religieuse (1760) in which we see scenes of Suzanne’s copious tears, her nosebleeds and Mother Superior foaming at the mouth while she reaches a climax. Both narratives point to the impossibility of containing excess bodily fluids in relation to sexual outpourings as bodily transgressions. This bodily overflow was typically early modern manifestations of the body, seen in literature, medicine and erotica.

This all points to an eighteenth-century belief that the body would go its own way, despite any constraints placed upon it. It would follow that any act made outside of ‘normal constraints’ would be considered unavoidable. Thus certain acts of nymphomania, bestiality, even sodomy might be seen as outside the control of an individual which is why connections with the devil were often invoked, Satan having control of those sexually depraved bodies.

Sexual desire for children is another area of investigation which has recently opened up. Phillippe Ariès argued that the invention of the notion of a separate childhood evolved only in the seventeenth century and with it came the theory of child innocence. From this, it was recognized that children needed to be protected and laws evolved to deal with this issue. By the late Victorian period, there was an the emergence of a definition of childhood as specifically a time in which sex with the person is forbidden, which in itself, attracted attention to the forbidden act. Further more, by the end of the nineteenth century, the question of the innocence of the child was

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subjected to sustained critique in sex abuse cases. Running simultaneously with this, was the emergence of a historically specific love of young girls which precluded sex and insisted on maintenance of ‘innocence’ up to and beyond the onset of sexual puberty. Although much of the investigation has concentrated on the nineteenth century so far, George S. Rousseau has broadened out the debate in his recent collection in *Child Sexuality. From the Greeks to the Great War*.

In pornography, although it was on the erotic horizon in the 1770s, paeophilia was not part of the scene in terms of sexual perversion. Within the scenes, the potential for the lust for children was presented but was never fully realized. From the way that the flagellator (who was nearly always female in eighteenth-century erotica) is revered in the narration, the sexual interest is centred on her, rather than on the children; if anything, the child would stand as substitute for the reader watching the scenario unfold; only in the nineteenth century did pornography develop into full penetrative sex between guardians and their charges, sisters and brothers, and uncles and nephews and nieces as seen in *The Romance of Chastisement* (1866), *The Quintessence of Birch Discipline* (‘1870’, 1883) and *The Romance of Lust* (1876). Not only are the relationships in the later period made closer, but they are now between older men and young women. The ‘gentler’ form of lesbianism was overtaken by men’s violent attacks on young girls thus opening up a new world of sadism. By the nineteenth century, a pornographic technique, evident as early as John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, had been honed to perfection – gradations of sexual perversity followed on from each other in a logical progression, ending with the most perverse. Thus we can detect in the pornographic mind, what was perceived as the most perverted form of sex as it would be at the end of the book. Furthermore, as Lisa Sigel has pointed out, the scenes in nineteenth-century pornography became increasingly littered with swear words which

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86George Rousseau (ed.), *Child Sexuality. From the Greeks to the Great War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2007).
87Although a book entitled *The Quintessence of Birch Discipline* is mentioned in the PRO in a prosecution case for the eighteenth century, I have been unable to trace an eighteenth-century edition. The nineteenth-century edition is probably an extended and more advanced and explicit version of the earlier one.
were used in a more cruel way; there was also a move from use of the word such as ‘fuck’ in bawdy terms, to its use as meaning polluted.88

Graphic stories of monks and nuns utilized the religious as sites of sexual perversion. The violent sexual flagellant theme had already infiltrated England in the form of French imports such as Dom Bourge, ou Portiers Des Chartreux (1741) (Fig. 1.3) and Therese Philosophe (1748). Real life case such as the cases of Father de Rues and Father Girard (Fig. 1.4) provided much glee for the irreverent English reading public in a variety of books and pamphlets on the affairs.89 Both had been accused of seducing female penitents. These books merely served to fire the imagination of the British authors while confirming Protestant suspicion of inveigling French Priests. In reality though, in England flagellation was never seen as a perversity, more of a divergence, and this was because it resulted, and even facilitated, vaginal copulation between a man and a woman. It had already been recognized as a cure for impotency. Flagellation assisted reproduction in that it encouraged erection which allowed for coition. Corruption of young virgins by serpent-like priests would, however, be seen as a form of perversion.

Flagellation as self-mortification had long been a favourite penance of the Catholics, and as such, was acceptable in the wider society (Fig. 1.5). With the coming of Protestantism, both the confessional and self-flagellation were rejected as part of the Popish religion and instead, became butts of Protestant jokes. More seriously, Protestants saw the confessional as a potential area of seduction of their wives and daughters, a place where the usually vigilant father and husband had no control over his female kin. Wives and daughters were perceived as becoming religiously perverted while being sexually exploited by lecherous priests. In this context, religious perversion became closely linked to sexual corruption, particularly of the innocent.90 This perception of Catholicism and its connection to sex was carried right thought to the nineteenth century as seen in Chapter 8. Rape scenes and necrophilia were also to feature in nineteenth-century pornography becoming more violent as the century went on. Furthermore, the perverting of the female form by applying negative attributes to them – in showing women to be nymphomaniacs, prostitutes and full of venereal disease – was often part of the pornographic tradition as seen in Chapter 5.

Rape and necrophilia

Rape was essentially a crime against property, the woman being a chattel of her father and later, her husband. For this reason, until recently, married

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89See Peakman, Mighty Lewd Books, pp. 141–6.
90Ibid., pp. 126–60.
Fig. 1.3. Anon, *Dom Bourge, ou Portiers Des Chartreux* (1741)
Fig. 1.4. Anon, Seduction of Marie-Catherine Cadière by Jean-Baptiste Girard. From: *Histoire du Père Jean-Baptiste Girard, Jésuite & Recteur du collège de la Marine à Toulon, et de Danoiselle Marie Catherine* (1735)
Fig. 1.5. Charles Monnet (1732–1808) *The Flagellation of the Penitents*. Engraved by d’Ambrun
men could not be prosecuted for raping their wives. Although nowadays, we talk loosely of rapists as perverts, was rape considered a perversion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? As Joanna Bourke points out, perverts were only labelled as such in 1883, before that, it was the act rather than the person which was imbued with the crime. She also points out how rape myths abound in history at the expense of successful prosecutions of the crime. The understanding of rape in the past has been further muddled, as rape has been seen as different things – as abduction, as seduction, and as a means of exerting power. There is still no proper consensus on what rape entails. So how do we place rape in history?

Sylvana Tomaselli has argued that there is lack of a history of rape, but more recently Barbara Baines has argued that the reluctance to acknowledge the reality of rape is the history of rape. She examines the literary world of rape in which ‘Rape never primarily signifies the loss and suffering of the woman’, In the past, women were not compensated for rape, rather their ‘owners’ were. In the Bible, Deuteronomy advises that when an unmarried virgin was raped, the offender had an option to pay the father of his victim fifty shekels or marry her. During the medieval and renaissance period, rape carried a meaning of abduction – ‘the act of carrying away a person, especially a woman, by force’, as well as being seen as stealing another man’s property. By the late eighteenth century, this connection between woman as property and abduction would continue to be made in certain elopement cases; when the sister of courtesan Harriette Wilson, Sophia, ran off with Lord Deerhurst against her parents’ wishes, the only avenue available to them was to sue him for loss of domestic services.

An eighteenth-century understanding of seduction often meant ‘accompanied with force’, since any self-respecting maiden would not give up her maidenhead unless under pressure. As Anna Clark argues, violence was seen as an acceptable form of seduction. Because of its public image, the British had a hard time seeing heterosexual rape as particularly perverse or

\[94\] OED.
'against nature' although where it was proven, it was treated harshly by the courts as a capital crime. Rape was a deviance but with acceptable misogynistic overtones, as Roy Porter sums up Susan Brownmiller's argument, rape 'is not a sickness of perverts, but the sickness of patriarchy'.  

The debased female body was conveyed in submissive terminology in mainstream literature and in pornography as part of this discourse as seen in Chapter 6. Rape and violent seduction went hand in hand. Neither was considered a perversion, but part of normative discourse. Violent seduction pervaded erotic fantasies in mainstream literature such as *Clarissa* (albeit off-side); as Laura Hinton points out, 'In *Clarissa*, it does not take great powers of speculation to see that what is at the bottom of the pit is the subjected female body'. The whole book centres around Clarissa's rape giving the overall effect of a 'prettification of violence'. We can see how, from Ovid to Cleland, misogyny has pervaded the history of imagery of rape in pornographic texts, and more often than not seduction was seen as an attack. Rape featured in common defloration fantasies in pornographic literature blurring the boundaries between rape and seduction. The impression given is that women feign defence but want to be overcome; for example, in *The Petit Maître* (1749), women are conveyed as enjoying a struggle, 'This is the plain Reason, why most Women refuse to surrender upon Treaty, and why they delight so much in being storm’d.'

Yet Roy Porter believes that, in reality, the silence on rape by social moralists of the day indicates that rape was not 'the scandal of the day'. However the realities and perception of eighteenth-century rape cases were muddled and high profile cases coloured the perceptions of the public's understanding of the rape law and the process of prosecution. Few rapes were successfully prosecuted, because they were construed and understood in terms of seduction with pressure. There has been a history of difficulty in obtaining convictions for accused rapists; for example, between 1805 and 1818, only 76 men were convicted of rape. Despite rape being a capital

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offence only 47 out of these 76 men went to the gallows. There were not
only difficulties in securing a conviction, but many rapes went unreported.
During the same period, only 17% of rapists were prosecuted, compared
to 63% conviction of all crimes overall; a much higher rate of men were
acquitted for rape than other crimes.\textsuperscript{103} Earlier statistics show a similar tale.\textsuperscript{104}
Seventeenth-century judge Mathew Hale is quoted as saying ‘though rape is a
detestable crime, it is an accusation easily made, and hard to be proved’.\textsuperscript{105}
Worse still, prosecutors, whether successful or not, had to pay the costs them-
selves, making the process virtually impossible for the poor single girl. Even
men who had been convicted of rape did not necessarily have their reputation
or career affected.

The rape of young children was taken extremely seriously and death sen-
tences ensued in cases where prosecution was successful. In one unusual case,
a woman was found guilty of assisting in a rape of under-age children. Alice
Gray of the Parish of St. Giles’s in the Fields, was found guilty of rape,
on 23\textsuperscript{rd} April, 1707\textsuperscript{106} after aiding and abetting Thomas Smith of raping ten-
year-old Catherine Masters. The child, ‘awaking about 2 a Clock in Morning,
[she] found a Man in Bed with them, that as she was endeavouring to get
away, the Prisoner pull’d her back again, and held her down in the Bed, and
stopt her Mouth (that she could not cry out) while the Man gain’d the perfect
knowledge of her Body.’ A further proof no doubt helped in securing a con-
viction in this case; after inspection, it was obvious not only had the child
been abused, but Smith had given her the pox. Both Smith and Gray were
sentenced to death. Pederasty in relation to men and boys would fit into the
category of sodomy, and similarly attract a capital punishment.

Published reports of violence against children, beatings of domestic servants
and molestation of dead bodies serves as a cultural witness to people’s under-
standing of the subject matter. Sadomasochistic reports of abused children fre-
quently circulated in penny dreadfuls during the early nineteenth century,
a prime example seen in \textit{A Full and Particular Account of the Trial Sentence
and execution of Esther Hibner senior for the Murder of Frances Colpotts, a young
girl, by ill-usage and starvation} (1829). The child was taken in from the work-
house, forced to work all hours of the day, often from 3 in the morning
till 11 at night, and was made to sleep on the floor of the workshop. ‘She
was frequently beaten for not doing her work, sometimes all the prisoners
beat her together, either with a rod, a cane or a slipper. The younger Hibner,
at one time, took the deceased up by the heels, and dropped her in a pail of water intended for the washing."

Rape, murder and sodomy cases were similarly reported elsewhere. Burke and Hare type stories proliferated; one described the body of Carlo Ferrari who was found when a hospital porter at St Guy’s hospital saw his leg poking out of a hole in a sack; John Bishop had murdered him and was selling the body. Another reported the case of a porter at Bartholomew’s Hospital who was said to have raped the corpse of a fifteen-year-old girl in front of medical students. Dr Robert Knox, when confronted with the beautiful body of Mary Paterson, which grave robber and murderer William Burke had given him, could not bring himself to hand her over to his students for dissection. Instead he brought in an artist to draw her and kept her in a tub of whisky for three months in order to preserve her. This interest in rape, violence, and dead bodies found its sexual outlet in necrophilia as examined in Chapter 7. Traditionally necrophilia involves men lusting after female bodies rather than vice versa as Elisabeth Bronfen’s work states in her Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic, ‘the feminine body as death turns the women into an object of sight’, the gaze on sex and death are invariably connected to women and her sexuality. This connection has also been associated with male violence as Beverley Clack has pointed out, ‘Any discussion of death is invariably associated with male violence and destruction’. In this connection between women, sex and death, there has also been a development of a macabre exoticism created in the juxtaposition of love and death. Lisa Downing has pointed out that definitions of necrophilia traditionally focus on the actual activities of the necrophile, obsessed with the act of intercourse with a corpse ‘the repeated focus of penetration of the corpse implicitly relegates necrophilia to the realms of male perversion’. According to Dr. Jonathan Rosman and Dr. Phillip

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107 Anon, The Trial and Lamentation of Patrick Duffy for a Rape, sentenced to be hung at Oakham Gallows (Nottingham, Sutton and Son, 1826); The Trial and Execution of the Burkers for Murdering an Italian Boy (J. Catnach, Monmouth Court, 7 Dials, n.d.); Particulars and Execution of Charles Cluttoon…for Sodomy (Freeman, Printer, 1824).
111 Jolene Zigarovich (ed.), Sex and Death in C18th (University of Delaware Press, forthcoming).
Resnick who reviewed 122 cases of necrophilia in 1989, there are three basic types of ‘true’ necrophilia:¹¹³ necrophilic homicide, which is murder to obtain a corpse; regular necrophilia, the use of corpses already dead for sexual pleasure; necrophilic fantasy, envisioning the acts but not acting on them. In his Psychopathia Sexualis (1894), Krafft-Ebing called necrophilia a horrible manifestation of sadism.

As yet, little investigation has been undertaken into necrophilia in the eighteenth century¹¹⁴ probably because of the difficulty in finding reports of such cases. We know about thirty-six year old Samuel Pepys who staged his own show for visiting cousins when he violated the corpse of Katherine of France, long since dead, even if it was only ‘a fondle and a kiss.’¹¹⁵ George Selwyn’s love of dead bodies was evident, not only in his enthusiasm for watching public hangings, but in his excitement on visiting his dying friends. More serious medical non-fictional examinations of corpse profanation can be seen in Johan George Simonis’s mention of it in Brevis Delineato Empotentia Conjugalis (1665) and Martin Schurig’s Gynaecologia (1730); both mention copulation with corpses,¹¹⁶ but these are unusual for their time; also both were written in Latin and aimed at the medical profession.

Although real life cases are hard to uncover, an eighteenth-century interest in necrophilia was evident,¹¹⁷ no doubt a reflection of a time when public hangings were a common spectacle, and medical dissections were increasingly on display, both in the surgeon’s dissecting room and in art, as in Hogarth’s ‘The Reward of Cruelty’ (Fig. 1.6). Jonathan Sawday, Ruth Richardson and Timothy Marshall have shown how dissection was inextricably linked to, and had an effect on, other areas of eighteenth-century life such as culture, art and literature.¹¹⁸ Death and sex were increasingly juxtaposed in Gothic literature such as Horace Walpole’s Castle of Otranto (1764) and Matthew Lewis’s

¹¹⁴But see Jolene Zigarovich, Sex and Death in C18th (Delaware, University of Delaware Press, forthcoming).
Fig. 1.6. William Hogarth, ‘The Reward of Cruelty’, *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, Plate IV (1751)
The Monk (1796). Necrophilia as the rape of dead bodies was in some ways an extension of the imagery which permeated eighteenth-century society in the image of seduction of the submissive female body – necrophilia was the height of this submission. Pornography also saw fictional depictions of girls being sedated, or raped while unconscious, linking scenes of rape to necrophilia as seen in The Lascivious Hypocrite (1790).\footnote{A copy of the The Lascivious Hypocrite (1790) is in the Dawes Bequest at the BL; Ashbee cites the book entitled La Tartufe (sic) Libertin ou Le Triomphe du Vice (Par Le Marquis DE SADE) En Holland Chez Les Libraires Associes 1789 (Fraxis, Centuria, Vol. II, pp. 267–8).} Although this purports to be a translation of La Tartufe Libertine,\footnote{Translations announcing themselves as ‘true and accurate’ were frequently freely altered, if not completely spurious.} it has been substantially reworked and was probably published about forty years later than it states. The aggressiveness of the narration suggests sado-masochism as the protagonist Valentine St. Geraud (a reference to the scandal of French priest Father Girard mentioned above) slips Eugenie a sleeping draught, renders her unconscious, and rapes her. Thus we see a shift in the way these images were presented with these earlier loving scenes between couples, in which ‘surrenders’ were a common theme being increasingly overtaken by scenarios which highlighted violence, brutal rape and pain.

We can perhaps see a retrospective connection between the sexologists and the time period covered by this book in Krafft-Ebing’s definition of what sexual perversion was not; he believed that the purpose of sexual desire was procreation, and any form of desire that did not go towards that ultimate goal was a perversion.\footnote{For his categorizations of sexual anomalies see, Kraft-Ebbing, Psychopathia Sexualis (1886, English trans. 1892).} Rape, for instance, was an aberrant act, but not a perversion, since pregnancy could result. Any sexual act which evaded procreation was seen to be perverse and anything which might result in procreation was deemed to be acceptable.

Creation of the perverse ‘Other’

The development of imperialism gave rise to a new measure for deviancy. European colonialist, eager to create and maintain a distance between themselves and their conquered peoples, registered their own sexuality as wholesome, human and natural but classed native sexuality as abhorrent, bestial or somehow perverse. Historians have classed this colonialist perception of natives as ‘The Other’, a perception of the native as a lower person or animalistic – in essence meaning a people other than British. This creation of ‘The British’ as the standard norm by which to judge
foreigners helped to establish the perverted ‘other’ as seen in Chapters 9 and 10.122

Nationalism became part of the history of sexuality and, with the onslaught of respectability, came the need for self-control. Philippa Levine has examined how ingrained prejudices of the sexual practices of colonized people had a direct effect on how new colonial laws penetrated and reinforced the distinction between the colonized and the colonizer.123 As George L. Mosse declares ‘nationalism not only helped to control sexuality, to reinforce what society considered normal, but it also provided the means through which changing sexual attitudes could be absorbed and tamed into respectability’.124

‘Sinners’ increasingly became the preserve of science and it now lay with the medical fraternity rather than the clerics to save morality. One example is Ambroise Tardieu’s Crimes Against Morals from the Viewpoint of Forensic Medicine (1857) listing the inward and outward signs of pederasty in order to both help the law, and to ensure the state’s better control over private morality – the ‘feminized’ appearance of these men was criticized. The concept of ‘degeneration’ was introduced by Bénedict Augustin Morel as early as 1852, to be crystallized by Max Nordau in a book of the same name in 1892 and used to exemplify the difference between normalcy and non-normalcy. Mosse asserts that ‘At the end of the nineteenth century, Darwinism and degeneration had sharpened public attitudes towards the abnormal which had existed for over a century.’

Even prior to this, from the beginning of our period and earlier, we see a belief in most travellers that the foreigners they encountered were bestial, savages, or at the very least, below themselves in terms of human specimens.125 As the British Empire stretched its rule, so did the notion of superiority of the British herald itself as never before. The encounters by soldiers, missionaries and explorers often give us our first views of the natives of other countries and with it came the biases and racism which

122Hyman believes the erosion of respect of other races of the British Empire took place between 1790s and 1840s, and the growth of prejudice against them took place between mid-1850s and the late 1860s, although I have found lack of respect and prejudice from much earlier explorations. Ronald Hyman, Empire and Sexuality. The British Experience (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1900); Julie Peakman, Civilising Sex. Two Thousand years of History (London, forthcoming).
125Ibid.
infused sexual attitudes for the next three hundred years. Reaction against
foreigners most often came in the form of attacks on their sexuality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that sexual perversion manifested itself both
as a crime ‘against nature’ and religion, and was regulated through
the moralist attitude of the local community and through legal attempts
to control it. The acts which fit into that category had been defined in
the Bible and were buttressed by centuries of theological interpretation, the
worst being sodomy (whether with beasts, anal sex between a man and a
woman, or sex between two men). Female cross-dressing was not generally
regarded as perverse although male cross-dressing was when it was associ-
ated with sodomy. Likewise, female to female penetration was regarded as
against nature but less was mentioned about these activities, and they
caused less concern. Flagellation was seen merely as curious diversions,
while foot fetishism seems to have been a celebrated activity.

Apart from finding sexual perversion in the past by examining delineations
of religion and in the classification ‘against nature’, another ‘way in’ to
finding sexual perversion in history can be seen through the lens of porno-
graphy. What was considered ‘against nature’, or what was considered perves-
se in pornography, does not necessarily adhere to what we see as sexually
perversion now. Therefore ‘normality’ is not a given, nor is it a concept set
in time but it changes and mutates, it varies between classes, and genders.
Perversion can therefore be seen to be set against the norm, and in turn, this
also changes in time. However, that change has been relatively slow
and piecemeal. From the Restoration through the Enlightenment to the
Victorian period we find a concept of perversity that was fairly constant
and consistent, although this argument might be nuanced with further
investigations. It included certain sexual acts considered deviant or diver-
gent from what was perceived as ‘normal’ or natural – the further away
from the perceived ‘normal’, the more perverse that sexual behaviour was
seen to be.126

Although religion and ensuing moralities played a major part in influencing
and overseeing people’s sexual behaviour and the creation of perceptions of
perversion, lofty values of the literary or moral world of eighteenth-century

126 The concept of normality as ‘constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differ-
ing from the common type of standard’ and the term ‘abnormal as ‘deriving from
the ordinary rule or type, contrary to the rule or system’, appears only to have
became common from the 1830s or 40s onwards; as did its opposite abnormal ‘devi-
ating from the ordinary rule or type; contrary to the rule or system; irregular unusual
aberrant’.
French (or even English) philosophers are unlikely to have deeply affected the perception of the ordinary man on the street (or in the field) of either his sexual perversion, or that of others. S/he was more likely to be indirectly influenced by the writings of the Church Fathers as it filtered down through lectures from the pulpit. Social control and community action would also have played a large part in expunging deviant behaviour, but this effect would have declined as rural communities dispersed. As people redeployed into the cities, family networks broke down – spies were now the neighbours next door who resorted to the law for retribution.

Perceptions of behavioural types and acts were gradually recategorized as new scientific methods and appraisals came into view. The old religious connections of ‘perversion’ to sin, witchcraft, and association with the devil were slowly being replaced with condemnation of deviant behaviour through medical and scientific models of classification or ‘treatment’. Although these breakdowns and delinkings were taking place over the nineteenth century, only with the coming of the new sexologist models was sexual perversion defined as specific medical categories. Nonetheless, there was a continued link between an impressed knowledge of ‘correct’, or good way of doing things, and a ‘bad’ or incorrect way, with the old theological thinking of the individual moral consciousness being linked to the new ideas of the sexologists and psychiatrists such as Freud. In sexology and psychiatry, perversion continued to reinforce the notion of sexual normality through its inversion but in a new language.

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