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**C. R. Leslie, *My Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman* from Sterne's '*Tristram Shandy*', oil on canvas, c.1831. Victoria and Albert Museum.**

# Redefining Sex in Eighteenth-Century England\*

by *Tim Hitchcock*

In 1705 John Cannon, a Somerset farm labourer of 21 years, began 'a love intrigue' with his uncle's servant, Mary Rose. Some forty years later he described this event in his memoir:

. . . our jesting complements began to burn up to a fervent ardour & earnest, she by her sweet singing & syrene notes alured me so that I never for a long time after could think of any other. . . . This beginning accompanied with amorous talks & quaint glances, kissing & toying when together in private . . . brought on by degrees a more close familiarity even to a plane discovery of such matters & concerns wch modesty teaches me to omit. Seldom a night passed but she passing through my bedchamber to her own came to my bedside & after some amorous whisperings we bid each other good night by tender and loving kisses. This I confess to be odd doings & somewhat difficult to be kept long a secret by reason of ye boy my bedfellow although we never acted any other than above mentioned wch might bring us disgrace.<sup>1</sup>

John and Mary continued their liaison for a further twelve years. They never had full penetrative sex, and throughout his memoir Cannon congratulates himself on his studious avoidance of the sins of fornication and adultery. But, he, Mary, and the two other young women John courted at the same time, did have very active sex lives. Mutual masturbation, long-drawn-out sessions of kissing and fondling, and sincere promises of future marriage characterised all these relationships. None of the three women involved became pregnant, and each was, by Cannon's account at least, considered a virgin on marriage. While unusual in being recorded, there is nothing to suggest that the experiences of these people were other than typical of popular sexual activity at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Some eighty or ninety years later, during a period described in Francis Place's autobiography, a very different sexual culture existed, at least among the artisanal classes of London. Place believed that most young people in the 1780s and 90s were having penetrative sex; that lack of sexual probity in this regard was felt to be no barrier to marriage; and that both women and men considered their sexual lives essentially outside of a moral framework. While claiming that 'want of chastity in girls was common', the songs and sayings he quotes leave little doubt as to the penetrative nature of the sexual activity with which he was familiar:

First he niggled her, then he tiggled her  
 Then with his two balls he began to batter her  
 At every thrust, I thought she'd have burst  
 with the terrible size of his Morgan Rattler.<sup>3</sup>

While Place wrote in order to condemn the lack of sexual control he saw around him, contemporary bastardy and pre-nuptial pregnancy figures support his conclusions about the sexual proclivities of his contemporaries.

The experience of these two men, and their partners, fit tremendously well with the evidence adduced by demographic historians. According to the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure there does seem to have been a transition in the prevalence of sexual activity that could lead to pregnancy. The timing and content of this transition also seems to be supported by the work of writers on a range of other eighteenth-century topics. The histories of pornography and the novel, some cultural histories, and perhaps most obviously the histories of the family, all seem to point in the same direction. Indeed, the work of the best known historian of sexuality, Michel Foucault, would likewise suggest an eighteenth-century transition towards greater sexual activity.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time this transition from relative probity to dangerous sexualities is seriously at odds with a range of other historiographies. In particular, the literature concerned with the history of gender and women which charts the rise of a separate spheres ideology, as well as the recently developed histories of the body, suggest that just the opposite transition should have been occurring during this period. The maternalization of women's bodies, the creation of homosocial worlds of home and work, the denial of the existence of the female orgasm and the general increase in the policing of particularly middling sort social interaction all suggest that the barriers to greater sexual activity were growing, just as the demographic evidence for an increase of that sexual activity, in the form of more babies, was becoming more certain.

This paper is an attempt to describe the ways in which these various literatures seem to contradict each other, and to then suggest an alternative way of thinking about sexual behaviour, which, I hope, will allow us to fit these dichotomous perspectives into a single understanding.

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The most developed literature on eighteenth-century sex describes itself as being about populations. Demographic historians have demonstrated, to almost everyone's satisfaction, that a number of things changed over the course of the eighteenth century. The age at first marriage dropped significantly. The percentage of bastards born increased three-fold over the course of the century, while the percentage marriages celebrated while the female partner was pregnant grew to a third of the total. And finally, the percentage of the population remaining unmarried (and presumably

celibate) dropped precipitately.<sup>5</sup> The result was, of course, a huge increase in population, and a transition in the nature of the demographic regime. These changes almost necessarily reflect a situation in which more people were having more sex leading to the birth of a child, both inside and outside marriage.<sup>6</sup>

The explanations adduced for this transition have been numerous, but most writers have viewed the transition as a response to economic change. E. A. Wrigley has suggested it resulted from a rise in real wages during the late seventeenth century, while other historians associated with the Cambridge group have examined the roles of proto-industrialisation, urbanisation, the decline in apprenticeship and the changing nature of rural employments. All have suggested that greater economic opportunities encouraged young people to enter courtship, marriage and sexual activity sooner. Wrigley's explanation, however, has fallen on the implausibility of the influence of rising real wages only being felt nearly half a century later, while the others have generally been criticised on the grounds that the perceived changes occurred throughout the country (and indeed, were common to much of Western Europe) and hence cannot be aligned with economic changes which were regional or sectoral in their nature. An excellent article by David Levine concludes, after examining each of the possible explanations put forward, that we really have no good idea of why people started marrying and having children at a greater rate during the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

One set of explanations has come from various family and cultural historians. Writers such as Edward Shorter, Lawrence Stone, and, most recently, Thomas Laqueur and Henry Abelove have examined the content of the transition, with a sharp eye for the rise of 'sentiment' and desire in sexual activity. Edward Shorter, for instance, argued in the mid 1970s that rising fertility and bastardy rates reflected a new attitude towards sex on the part of plebeian women. He suggested that with the growth of urbanisation and the increasing incorporation of young women into the moneyed economy, they chose to participate in penetrative sex more frequently – that, in other words, there was a 'sexual revolution' in female desire which was made possible by economic change. Shorter has been roundly condemned by a number of commentators, and his argument was largely vitiated by the discovery that changes in sexual behaviour were equally apparent in rural and urban areas.<sup>8</sup>

A more measured case was made by Lawrence Stone. He argued that the period between 1660 and 1800 witnessed the rise of a 'companionate' model of marriage in which love and affection became more significant, replacing the more austere puritan family of the previous century. Romance and the rise of the novel, the ability of children to choose their own partners and the influence of the law, in Stone's view, all ensured that a new pattern of marriage would become established.<sup>9</sup> Stone's chronology has been questioned, and the rather unfocused relationship he suggests between these

changes and the demographic transition has been criticised. Likewise, he has been taken to task for concentrating on the experiences of the elite at the expense of the poor majority of the population.<sup>10</sup> But, nevertheless, most historians would accept Stone's view that some form of change in sentiment occurred, even if they cannot agree as to its actual content or timing.

More recently, cultural historians Henry Abelove and Thomas Laqueur have each suggested a link between sentiment and desire, as it relates to sex, and broader cultural and economic shifts which characterised the eighteenth century. While each studiously avoided the reductionism of Edward Shorter, both agreed that there was a change in the fundamental experience of sexual activity which owed its content to changing patterns and discourses of consumption and production. Abelove, for instance, suggested that just as the reality of, or discourses associated with, production grew in cultural force as part of the industrial revolution, so the popularity of penetrative sex grew.<sup>11</sup> In a similar, if more complex way, Laqueur sought to locate the changing pattern of sexual behaviour within a wide variety of eighteenth-century discourses – those about reading, medicine, gender and capitalism in particular; and further hinted that the transition in sexual behaviour must be seen as an integral part of the cultural and production revolutions associated with the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

All of these historians saw a transition moving in essentially the same direction – from a sexual culture characterized by repression and a relative lack of emotion to one in which love, friendship, sexual pleasure, and increased sexual activity all played a growing role. And if we look at another historiography the same developmental line can be drawn. The histories associated with the rise of pornography, the novel, and the enlightenment, derive much of their intellectual vigour from literary criticism, but in many ways reinforce the historical demographers. In the works of Paul-Gabriel Bouce, Roy Porter, G. S. Rousseau, Peter Wagner and Lynn Hunt, we find again a story of change towards greater sexual activity. The libertinism of many Enlightenment figures, as well as the publication of works such as *Fanny Hill*, and more significantly the novels of De Sade, when combined with the activities of popular sex therapists such as James Graham, are all used to suggest that discourses around sex in general were becoming more widely distributed, more explicit, and most importantly, more modern. In this scenario the heroes of the 'sexual revolution' are John Wilkes and his libertine friends, the radical pornographers of the London underworld, and perhaps most importantly, the romantic poets of the early nineteenth century. In apparent agreement with Abelove and Laqueur, they argue that the notion of desire is recreated in the imagination of the population at large, resulting in more sex and more babies. The Enlightenment, therefore, became an intellectual justification for free love, which justification associated sophistication with the power relationships inherent in pornography, and created a taxonomy of sexual pleasure which reified the male orgasm. While this account of the Enlightenment contains some ambivalence, its

overall implication is that sex is good and more sex is better, and that the Enlightenment itself contributed to the creation of more sex.<sup>13</sup>

These various bodies of work seem to provide a coherent analysis of change, but at the same time they are completely at odds with two other equally important historical literatures. From Alice Clark onwards, women's history, and latterly the history of gender, has emphasised an early modern transition from greater openness and possibility for women, to a situation in which women are increasingly controlled by a powerful patriarchal ideology. And while the depiction of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a period of relative gender equality has been replaced by a more nuanced view, most historians would still agree that authority within the household was increasingly transferred to men, while women's ability to participate in the public sphere was increasingly restricted. The apparently easy going heterosocial world of a domestic economy which characterised the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was replaced by more and more homosocial worlds of home and work. Whereas seventeenth-century gender relationships, although marked by a frequently vicious misogyny,<sup>14</sup> have been characterised as generally negotiated within the household, and open to variation depending on personality and situation, by the end of the eighteenth century, those possibilities were slipping away, and greater definitional rigour was imposed on gender roles.<sup>15</sup> The rise of single sex professions and of professional training, the closing down of traditional female occupations, such as midwifery, and the increasing denigration of traditional forms of female knowledge, such as those associated with magic and healing, all contributed to a set of circumstances which undermined the negotiated nature of women's power and position.<sup>16</sup> Davidoff and Hall have described this as an ongoing process of repression starting with the rise of religious dissent in the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> And while some historians, such as Amanda Vickery, have questioned the impact of the discourses Davidoff and Hall describe to affect the intimate lives of individuals, there is little doubt that the nature of the ideological framework within which women acted was changing, and that the expectations contained in advice books and conduct manuals were growing more restrictive.<sup>18</sup>

Unless one stretches one's credulity beyond breaking point, and imagines that this transition was restricted to a tiny middling sort, or that it represented a backlash to the sexual liberalism thought to exist at the end of the eighteenth century, we must accept the apparent contradiction between this literature and that surveyed above.

Indeed, the components of this literature amply confirm this contradiction. One need only think of the extensive literature on the rise of the maternalization of women in the late eighteenth century. Works on breast feeding, child-care, and general social advice, all suggest that women's roles were being increasingly restricted to that of mother and homemaker – increasingly restricting their ability to act as independent social beings, and likewise, tying them physically to the bawling demands of a growing number

of infants. The recent work of Ruth Perry, for instance, has brilliantly laid out the importance and impact of these changes.<sup>19</sup>

At the very least this suggests an apparent contradiction. On the one hand we find more sex, both inside and outside of marriage, and sex which we must assume was largely consensual. On the other we find the greater repression of women. Nor can we ignore the range of subsidiary literatures which support this story of greater gender definition and control. The histories of medicine and the body are cases in point.

Historians of the body Londa Shiebinger, Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur, whose work I have mentioned in a different context, have each suggested that the eighteenth century saw a quite dramatic transition from what they call a 'one-body' model of gender differentiation, to a 'two-body' model. Londa Shiebinger has demonstrated that it was only at the end of the century that anatomists identified different male and female skeletons, while Laqueur has convincingly argued that the same period saw the redefinition of women's genitalia.<sup>20</sup> Up until the eighteenth century, it had been argued that both men and women needed to reach an orgasm in order to conceive, and that the process of generation involved essentially the same process for both sexes. During the course of the century, new theories of generation (not supported by anatomical observation) suggested that women did not ejaculate at orgasm, and that the active element in the process was male sperm.<sup>21</sup> In terms of the definition of gender, this suggested that women could be seen as different to, and it is important to note, less important to reproduction than men. This began a process whereby gender distinctions became 'natural'.<sup>22</sup> At least for those familiar with elite medical discourses it ceased to be the case that men and women were perceived to be on a continuum from hot and dry to wet and cold characteristics as they had been in the seventeenth century, and instead became simply men and women – a distinction which could then be used in both law and usage to debar women from an increasing number of public activities.<sup>23</sup>

In terms of the history of sexuality, this transition resulted in the perception of increasing female passivity. From being perceived as sexually aggressive – hungry for the hot and dry essence they consumed in sex – women became sexually passive, their bodies a receptacle for the newly important sperm. The female orgasm, the belief in aggressive female sexuality and indeed the role of the clitoris, were only recreated in popular texts at the end of the nineteenth century with the rise of sexology and psychoanalysis.<sup>24</sup>

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From the perspective of the historian of sexuality, the question which all of these literatures would seem to ask is whether there was a 'sexual revolution' in the eighteenth century or else a closing down of sexual experience, and a new sexual McCarthyism directed specifically at women? But this strikes me

as an inappropriately dichotomous approach. The questions these literatures address are the result of the extreme polarities of modern gender politics, and as such lead to unilluminating answers. A more appropriate question to ask is what changed about sex that would allow it to create the new demographic regime, to be viewed by some as a liberation, and by others as a denigration?

The answer has to lie in the definition of sex itself. What the demographers are measuring and the historians of the Enlightenment are celebrating is heterosexual penetration and ejaculation. But what the experience of someone like John Cannon and his friends should demonstrate, is that this is only one minor variation in sexual practice. If we think about sex more broadly, if we start the definition at the kiss rather than at the point of mutual genital contact, the way in which these various literatures fit together becomes more apparent.

My suggestion is that sex changed. At the beginning of the century it was an activity characterised by mutual masturbation, much kissing and fondling, and long hours spent in mutual touching, but very little penal/vaginal penetration – at least before marriage. If penetration did occur, *coitus interruptus* was likely to be practised, and if this failed and a pregnancy resulted, there was always recourse to abortion.<sup>25</sup> But the important thing is that there was an equality of emphasis on a wide range of different parts of the body.

By the end of the century sex had become increasingly phallo-centric. Putting a penis in a vagina became the dominant sexual activity – all other forms of sex becoming literally fore-play. Indeed, it is little wonder that use of the word ‘play’ without its prefix, as a term for sexual activity, died out in our period.<sup>26</sup> But, more significantly, it was the penis that became the active member. What the eighteenth century saw was the development of an obsession with the penis, and of an assumption that there was only one thing to do with it.<sup>27</sup>

This transition fits well with the literatures discussed above. Redefining or changing the nature of sex towards penetration would have the effect of increasing the bastardy rate, and indeed the rate of population growth overall, both within and without marriage. And would likewise ensure that the proportion of the population who never married would fall. Pregnancy was a significant cue for marriage. Forms of courting which involved penetrative sex leading to pregnancy were more likely to result in marriage than non-penetrative forms.

The literatures associating sex with productivity and the industrial revolution would likewise be satisfied – after all, the transition to penetrative sex is fundamentally about a change from non-productive, anti-natal to productive, pro-natal, activities. Finally, the literature on the Enlightenment and pornography can be explained. The demands of narrative structure, if nothing else, ensure that, while erotica may be about fondling, pornography is generally about penetration. While the narrator in a work

such as *Fanny Hill* may be female, the action always revolves around putting a penis somewhere. This transition also fits well with the literature on the history of the body. If women were seen to be increasingly passive, then the necessity of sexually satisfying anyone other than the male participant was obviated, and penetration became the quickest way of doing this.

The apparent creation of a phallo-centric sexual economy also fits well the story of change in gender relations and the development of separate spheres. The active male actor on the world stage becomes the active inserter on the petit stage of the bedroom. Forms of sexual activity which dramatically increased the risk of pregnancy generally reflected the interest of men over those of women. Mutual masturbation and anti-natal forms of sex reflected instead a set of gender relations in which women's interests were more likely to be taken into account, and in which negotiation between partners was more equal. This seems to parallel the more open and apparently negotiated relations associated with the seventeenth-century. The increasingly phallo-centric and penetrative sexual culture of the late eighteenth century both encouraged and made possible the denigration of female sexuality and perceived passivity. In the process it also reflected and contributed to women's increasingly restricted role in society as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

What all of this suggests is that there was indeed, as Shorter *et al* have suggested, a 'sexual revolution' in the eighteenth century. It suggests this revolution resulted in more penetrative sex: not more sex overall, but rather a different type of sex. In other words, it resulted in a transition from a form of sex in which the interests of both individuals played a substantive part, to a form where the male orgasm became the all important outcome. In the process two things happened simultaneously. Men, newly concerned about their penises, were in a very restricted sense, liberated; while women, biologically redefined in order to deny them a sexual role, were repressed and their sexual activity was more heavily policed.

This is, of course, a bald assertion, which while providing a useful way of squaring a range of historical literatures, is hardly open to empirical testing. We simply do not know what most people did with each other at different times. And while one can collect the scattered evidence of diaries and court cases, and in the process trace a balance of change in the direction I have suggested, this hardly provides a demonstrable proof. The hit-or-miss nature of these sources, as well as the fact that most of them come from men, all ensure that any argument made on this basis would be profoundly problematic. Likewise, the demographic record provides few ways forward. It responds only to procreative sex. And while this measure may be significant in determining the timing of change, it gives us no proof of the existence or otherwise of non-procreative sex.<sup>29</sup>

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Perhaps an easier way forward lies in the existence of prescriptive literatures on specific types of sexual activity. These literatures cannot demonstrate the

case, but they are highly suggestive. There are two forms of popular literature which are important here – the widely read anti-masturbation literature, in particular, *Onania* and Tissot's *Onanism*, and the equally popular sex manuals, *Aristotle's Masterpiece* and Venette's *Secrets of Conjugal Love Revealed*. Both of these literatures were increasingly popular over the course of the eighteenth century, and both provide a perspective on what people read, if not direct evidence of what they did.

Up until the beginning of the eighteenth century the sin of Onan was generally associated with *coitus interruptus*. Masturbation, when it was mentioned at all, was considered a lesser sin, and while it was expected to have some ill-effects, was but a sin among many others. As the century progressed there was increasing and vociferous concern about the masturbatory habits of both men and women, and by the end of the eighteenth century male masturbation in particular had been transformed for both elite and popular audiences into a serious medical and social concern, on which many of the social problems of the day could be heaped.

The earliest condemnatory pamphlet was Josiah Woodward's *Rebuke of the Sin of Uncleaness* published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1704.<sup>30</sup> But the popular breakthrough for anti-masturbatory literature came with the publication of the enormously successful, *Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and all its Frightful Consequences in both Sexes, Considered* . . . in 1708.

Anonymously produced, but the work of a clergy-man *cum* quack named Beckers or Bekkers, *Onania* was a pseudo medical account of the horrible consequences of masturbation.<sup>31</sup> Within an essentially Galenic framework, *Onania* warned of the debilitating effects of loss of vigour for both men and women. Merely to list some of the consequences adduced by the author, gives a flavour of the whole volume. Male masturbators could suffer from stunted growth, priapisms, gonorrhoeas, and stranguries. Their seed could become waterish, and they could experience frequent fainting fits. Women might expect hysteria, barrenness, and imbecility and a 'total ineptitude to the Act of Generation itself'.<sup>32</sup> The dangers for both the individual and society were continually stressed, and a course of pills, available from a London publisher by mail-order, was recommended as the surest remedy.

This book went through some nineteen editions and sold almost forty thousand copies, and in the process helped to create what has been described as a 'general neurosis'.<sup>33</sup> What started as a pamphlet of some 60 pages rapidly grew to 194 pages and later received a 142 page supplement – most of the additional material being composed of lurid accounts of the masturbatory habits of various men and women.<sup>34</sup> This was followed in 1758, by the Swiss doctor Samuel Tissot's *L'Onanisme, ou Dissertation physique sur les maladies produites par la masturbation* which was translated into English as *Onanism: or a Treatise upon the Disorders Produced by Masturbation* . . . It remained in print until 1905, and formed the basis

for a respectable medical theory of the debilitating consequences of masturbation.<sup>35</sup>

Tissot's theories were based on the assumption of the importance of sperm, and in many ways stood within a solidly Galenic tradition. What is significant, however, is first, that he places greater emphasis on a spermatic economy of health than previous writers, and second, that his work was and remained so popular. From the publication of *Onanism* onward, it became almost impossible to write a popular health text without roundly condemning the likely consequences of masturbation for both men and women. By the nineteenth century, the process of medicalization had progressed so far that hospital deaths were regularly being ascribed to excessive masturbation.<sup>36</sup>

Historians have treated the popularity of *Onania* and Tissot's *Onanism* in a number of different ways. *Onania* has been seen largely in the context of the development of eighteenth-century pornography, while Tissot's emphasis on the spermatic economy has been associated with mercantilism. The eighteenth century emphasis on masturbation in general has been associated with the redefinition of childhood identified by Philippe Aries, and the search for new 'scientific' explanations for madness during an age of growing rationality.<sup>37</sup>

All of these analyses provide useful perspectives on the rise of a literature of masturbation. But, the importance of this material in the context of the history of sexuality is its role in policing heterosexual, penetrative and procreative sex. Here we have a literature which is specifically and explicitly opposed to forms of sexual behaviour which can be satisfying and non-penetrative. It seems to me that by denigrating perhaps the single most common sexual practice, this literature valorises a crude, phallo-centric emphasis on penetration, over all else. One way in which to view this material is to see it as a strongly didactic literature concerned to ensure that penetrative, heterosexual sex became increasingly the only form of sexual activity which could be countenanced. And while this literature is not, for the most part, directed at courting couples, its pro-natal and penetrative lessons would be equally applicable to them, as to individual masturbators.

A similar role in the regulation of popular sexual activity can be ascribed to the popular sex manuals of the eighteenth-century. The most common was *Aristotle's Master-piece: or, the Secrets of Generation Displayed in all the Parts Thereof*. First published 1684 the anonymous *Masterpiece* went through at least 43 editions by 1800, and became, if anything, more popular during the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Its popularity was rivalled only by Dr Nicholas Venette's *Tableau de l'amour conjugal* (1696) which was first published in an English translation in 1703 as the *Mysteries of Conjugal Love Revealed*. It too went through numerous editions, and was still in print in the 1950s.<sup>39</sup>

What has emerged from the growing body of historical literature on this genre, is the sheer confusion, and the *ad hoc* nature of much of this writing.

The content of these manuals changes from edition to edition, apparently depending on the energy, or lack of it, of the particular compiler or publisher. They mix, in what at first sight seems almost a random order, magical and Galenic understandings of sexual processes, juxtaposing apparently commonsensical advice with detailed directions on appropriate sexual positions and the course of foetal development. Roy Porter has described the content of the *Masterpiece* as a 'codification of sexual folklore' directed at the readers of ballads and almanacs.<sup>40</sup> But, more significantly, what the analysis of these works has revealed is their pro-natalist content.

In a series of articles Roy Porter has argued that these works were guides to having babies, rather than to having good sex. He argues that they were predicated on the assumption that having babies was a good thing and that the boundaries these works created were those between reproductive and sterile forms of sex. Hence, the sexual positions recommended by both the *Masterpiece* and Nicholas Vinette were those thought to produce conception, with what would later be dubbed the missionary position being the most highly recommended. Variations from this recommendation were only allowed where factors such as obesity made them imperative. The time of the month during which sex was most appropriate, and the diet of both the hopeful parents and the pregnant mother, were all matters these works felt it reasonable to comment upon, as was the frequency of sexual activity in marriage.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time they were concerned with sexual dysfunction. Dietary advice designed to encourage greater sexual appetite in men was provided, as were discussions of love sickness and infertility. In *Aristotle's Masterpiece* in particular, it was generation rather than sexual technique which formed the fundamental focus of the work.

What these works most certainly did not include were instructions on how to have non-penetrative sex. While sexual pleasure, and the necessity of 'fore-play' were certainly emphasised, penetration and procreation were the defining characteristics of the sex these manuals advocated, while fondling and mutual masturbation as ends in themselves were entirely absent.

In the late seventeenth century most sexual knowledge would have been transmitted through word of mouth. John Cannon, along with a group of his school fellows, for example, learned how to masturbate from a 17-year old cousin. As literacy and urbanisation progressed over the course of the century, the availability of the ever popular eighteenth-century sex manual grew as well. If these manuals emphasised putting penises in vaginas, it would be little wonder if a larger and larger proportion of young people followed their advice.

Both of these literatures, in their different ways, spoke to the same concern – the creation of a body of sexual knowledge in which the point of sex was penetration. In the process, they equally emphasised the penis as the all-important organ of generation, and together created and reflected a profound shift in sexual practice.

I want to end this paper with a brief examination of two bodies of historical literature – those on male homosexuality and lesbianism. The rise of urban gay subcultures in eighteenth-century Europe is now well attested. While the Netherlands had the greatest numbers of prosecutions, there is little doubt that London had one of the largest and most organised communities.<sup>42</sup> What the historians of this community have noted is both an increasingly homo-phobic attitude on the part of the population as a whole, and an increasing association of gay men with effeminacy. At least two historians, Randolph Trumbach and Antony Simpson, have suggested that these changes reflect a profound shift in the construction of masculinity, a shift in which penetrative, heterosexual sex became increasingly significant as a talisman of normal, *i.e.* heterosexual, masculinity.<sup>43</sup> The decline of male kissing, and physical signs of affection, and the apparently increasing desire on the part of both the courts and the crowds that surrounded the pillories, to vilify sodomites as both a social danger and an ‘other’ are used to suggest the development of a well defined and phallo-centric masculine identity shared by both urban working people and the middling sort.<sup>44</sup> The use of female clothing and forms of speech by many gay men within the London subculture is likewise used to suggest the existence of an increasingly strident heterosexual identity, against which these men are reacting.

What this literature implies is that men increasingly felt the need to participate in penetrative, heterosexual sex in order to demonstrate their ‘normality’. Simply to fondle and masturbate, even in a heterosexual context, could increasingly cast doubt on the heterosexual identity of courting men. And while women were not under the same pressures, they likewise must have played a role in ensuring (if only to satisfy themselves about a prospective partner) that men towed the line in this regard. All of which suggests, again, the existence of a profound shift in sexual attitudes and forms of sexual behaviour.

Similarly, if one looks at the history of lesbianism what appears to be a marked transition can be identified. Recent historians of eighteenth-century lesbian culture, most notably Emma Donaghue, have argued for the existence of a series of essentially unchanging identities, but the decline in female cross-dressing at the end of the eighteenth century, when combined with the rise of romantic friendship around the middle of century argues for the existence of a developmental process intimately intertwined with the history of heterosexuality.<sup>45</sup> Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol have convincingly argued that in many cases when women took on a male guise as part of a lesbian relationship, they likewise adopted a male personae as a way of legitimising and imagining love between two women. While strap-on dildos and penetration of various sorts formed an element of the behavioural pattern associated with cross-dressing, its popularity as a lesbian strategy must likewise reflect the extent to which heterosexual behaviour in the first half of the eighteenth century comprised a wide enough variety of activities to form a reasonable model for women who loved other women.<sup>46</sup>

The rise of romantic friendship from mid-century can likewise be seen as part of the process of redefining all forms of sex. As heterosexuality became more and more dominated by the phallus, new and different definitions and categories were needed to accommodate lesbian love. In part the rise of romantic friendship simply reflects the development of a new ideology of femininity. Emotional sensitivity and a separate sphere of homosocial relationships are characteristics shared between a broader female culture, and the elements of that culture which can be described as lesbian.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps ironically the development of lesbian culture seems to suggest a transition from the occasional use of penetrative sexual activities to more mutual masturbation, but the timing and changing categories of lesbian identity available to eighteenth century women, likewise reflect, affect and are intertwined with the story of changing heterosexualities. And while there are certainly more identities available to eighteenth-century lesbians than that of cross-dresser or romantic friend the changing nature of the social perception of these two most common lesbian strategies is highly indicative.

What we are left with is, in Edward Shorter's term, a 'sexual revolution'. What I hope I have suggested is that sexual practice changed, and that in a heterosexual context people increasingly restricted their behaviour to forms of phallo-centric, penetrative sex which could be countenanced as procreative. In the process the definitions of both masculinity and femininity changed. Both men and women were created as 'naturally' and biologically sexed, with an increasing onus, and this was particularly true for men, to find the other and now 'opposite' sex attractive. What occurred was not a liberation. For women it heralded a period of intense patriarchal oppression, but for men as well, it reflected an increasingly restrictive form of masculinity, which was policed by a highly effective public and print culture.

## NOTES

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1 Somerset Record Office, MS DD/SAS C/1193/4, 'Memoirs of the Birth, Education, Life and Death of: Mr John Cannon. Sometime Officer of the Excise & Writing Master at Mere Glastenbury & West Lydford in the County of Somerset', p. 57.

2 For a discussion of early modern courtship see John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 11–54.

3 British Library, Add. MS 27825, fs. 165. Quoted in Mary Thale (ed.), *The Autobiography of Francis Place (1771–1854)*, Cambridge, 1972, p. 59.

4 Foucault argues in his *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, London, 1979, that the eighteenth century witnessed a growing discourse around sexuality, and that while much of this was condemnatory, the very existence of more discussion was itself the significant transition. For a recent critique of Foucault's approach see Roy Porter, 'Is Foucault Useful for Understanding Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Sexuality', *Contention* 1 (1991), 61–82.

5 For material on eighteenth century demography see Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen and Richard Smith (eds), *Bastardy and Its Comparative History*, London, 1980; David Levine,

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6 It has been pointed out that many of the phenomenon mentioned here can be found at different times in English history. The bastardy rate, for instance, reached similar levels around 1600. But the collective impact of all the changes noticed in the eighteenth century does suggest a fundamental transition. Also, to say that more people are having penetrative sex in 1750 than they were in 1700, does not preclude the existence of a higher rate of penetrative sex in 1600 than in 1700.

7 Levine, "For Their Own Reasons", 255–64.

8 Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family*, New York, 1975; for critiques of Shorter's analysis see Cissie Fairchild, 'Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* No. 4, Spring 1978, 627–67; Peter Laslett, 'Introduction: Comparing Illegitimacy Over Time and Between Cultures' in Laslett, Oosterveen and Smith (eds), *Bastardy and Its Comparative History*, pp. 26–9.

9 See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*, first edition, London, 1977; for a more recent rendition of Stone's views see Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England, 1530–1887*, Oxford, 1990.

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12 Thomas Laqueur, 'Sex and Desire in the Industrial Revolution' in Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault (eds), *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 100–23.

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*Europe*, London, 1994. Roper argues that too much emphasis has been placed on the role of discourses surrounding the body, and insufficient allowance made for the shared experience of inhabiting a physical form.

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34 Wagner, 'The Veil of Medicine', p. 179–84.

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41 For material on this topic in general see Otho T. Beall, Jr, 'Aristotle's *Masterpiece* in America: a Landmark in the Folklore of Medicine', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 20 (1963),

207–22; Patricia Crawford, 'Sexual Knowledge in England, 1500–1750' in Porter and Teich (eds), *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science*, pp. 82–106; Mary Fissel, 'Readers, Texts and Contexts: Vernacular Medical Works in Early Modern England' in Roy Porter (ed.), *The Popularization of Medicine, 1650–1850*, London, 1992, pp. 72–96; Roy Porter, '"The Secrets of Generation Display'd": Aristotle's Masterpiece in Eighteenth-Century England' in Robert P. Maccubbin (ed.), *'Tis Natures Fault: Unauthorized Sexualities During the Enlightenment*, New York, 1985, pp. 1–21; Roy Porter, 'The Sexual Politics of James Graham', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 5: 2, 1982, 199–206; Porter, 'Sexual Advice before 1800'; Roy Porter, 'Love, Sex and Medicine: Nicolas Venette and his *Tableau de l'Amour Conjugal*' in Peter Wagner (ed.), *Erotica and the Enlightenment*, Frankfurt, 1990, pp. 90–122; Porter, 'Spreading Carnal Knowledge'; Roy Porter, '"The Whole Secret of Health": Mind, Body and Medicine in *Tristram Shandy*' in John Christie and Sally Shuttleworth (eds), *Nature Transfigured*, Manchester, 1989, pp. 61–84. Roy Porter has recently synthesized much of his earlier work on this topic in Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950*, New Haven, Conn., 1995.

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43 See Simpson, 'Masculinity and Control'; Trumbach, 'Sodomitical Subcultures, Sodomitical Roles'; Trumbach, 'London's Sodomites'; Trumbach, 'Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture'; Trumbach, 'The Birth of the Queen'; Trumbach, 'Sodomitical Assaults, Gender Roles, and Sexual Development'. For a recent piece which clearly lays out Trumbach's views and which is particularly valuable for its emphasis on the relationship between the development of the homosexual sub-culture and the broader creation of new forms of gender definition see Randolph Trumbach, 'Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England' in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The Invention of Pornography*, New York, 1993, pp. 253–82.

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