



This scene might be entitled, "More Than He Bargained For." A vase-painter teases the erotic conventions of male society in classical Athens by depicting an amorous boy responding more enthusiastically than expected to the overtures of an evidently startled adult suitor. Note, however, that the boy is not portrayed as *sexually* aroused by physical contact with the man whom he wishes to encourage: he is shown without an erection. (The J. Paul Getty Museum, The Carpenter Painter, Attic Red-Figure Kylix, ca. 515-510 B.C., terracotta, diameter of rim: 33.5 cm. 85.AE.25)

# ONE HUNDRED YEARS *of* HOMOSEXUALITY

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AND OTHER ESSAYS ON GREEK LOVE

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tions which future practitioners of classical studies, gay studies, and the history of sexuality may find useful to pursue.

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Many people have contributed to my thinking about the issues discussed below, and I have tried to record their names, along with my gratitude, in the headnotes to the individual essays which have benefited from their criticisms and suggestions. Here I must acknowledge the three most important intellectual influences on my work, without which this book could not have been written. They are K. J. Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), the first modern scholarly study of the subject and a triumph of empirical research; Michel Foucault's *L'usage des plaisirs* (1984; translated into English as *The Use of Pleasure* in 1985), the second volume of his unfinished *History of Sexuality* (Foucault died of AIDS in 1984), notable for the originality of its theoretical approach as well as for the brilliance of its individual insights; and John J. Winkler's *The Constraint of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (1989), a collection of essays whose combination of philological mastery, critical tact, methodological sophistication, intellectual range, and human engagement sets a new standard for the interpretation of ancient cultures. I have had the opportunity to read Jack Winkler's essays as they were being written and revised, as well as the advantage of working closely with their author on a related project—a book of essays, co-edited by us with Froma I. Zeitlin, entitled *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, 1989). Jack has encouraged me in my work on the present volume from the start and, during a period in which he was learning to meet and to master the challenge of living with AIDS, has freely shared with me his knowledge and his enthusiasm. He does not agree with everything in this book, but the work contained in it owes more than I can say to the inspiration of his personal, political, and intellectual example.

The author and publisher of this volume have arranged to donate half of the author's proceeds from its sale to the San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

Stanford, California  
30 June 1988

D.M.H.

## Introduction

“Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks.” With those words, uttered in “a flat toneless voice,” the Dean of a Cambridge college, in the seventh chapter of E. M. Forster's self-suppressed novel, *Maurice* (originally composed in 1913-14 and first released for publication upon the novelist's death in 1970), interrupts a student who has been dutifully translating aloud from the text of an unnamed classical Greek author. After the class is over, one of the other students in it remarks indignantly to a friend that the Dean ought to lose his fellowship for such hypocrisy: they suspect his affectless tone of concealing a personal sympathy for the unspeakable. If their interpretation is correct, the Dean would seem to have succeeded in imparting to his students, along with a knowledge of classical Greek, not only a sense of scholarly decorum—a heightened sensitivity to what one may say and what one may not say when speaking about the ancient Greeks—but also an exemplary model of self-censorship.

The episode takes on additional significance, and greater poignancy, five chapters later, when the reader learns that the finest classical scholar among the students in the Dean's translation class has been drawn to the study of the classics because he considers that the ancient Greeks gave temperate and exquisite expression to homoerotic feelings identical to his own. Study of the Greeks, especially Plato, has enabled this young man gradually to accept himself and his desires as he had never been able to do in the course of his religious upbringing; the Greeks provided an ideological weapon against the condemnatory reflexes of his own Christian conscience, offering him, in its place, “a new guide for life.” Even today, the Greeks continue to perform analogous functions for many of us: as Forster wrote, somewhat guardedly, in a 1934 biography of his mentor at Cambridge, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, “The Greeks—and Plato particularly—understand our political and social confusion, but they are not part of it, and so they can help us.”<sup>1</sup> It is not the purpose of this book to deprive anyone of a potentially meaningful “guide for life.” But if we are ever to discover who “we” really are, it will be necessary to examine more closely the many respects in which



obscure Swiss pastor, Heinrich Hössli,<sup>9</sup> who used the prestige of Greek culture in his own day to make the dubious argument that Plato must have had a better grasp than most moderns of what was and was not truly "natural" in matters of love. The following year, 1837, witnessed the publication, in a German encyclopaedia, of a scholarly article by M.-H.-E. Meier exclusively devoted to paederasty in the ancient world; this would seem to have been largely a compilation of the relevant ancient texts, if we can judge by the revised and expanded version prepared a hundred years later by L.-R. de Pogey-Castries.<sup>10</sup> As these various literary productions attest, scholarly and political interests in "Greek love" developed side-by-side, if not exactly hand-in-hand, throughout much of the nineteenth century. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, whose earliest writings date to 1862 and who appears to have been the first political activist for the emancipation of sexual minorities, drew much of his inspiration from classical sources, especially Plato;<sup>11</sup> in the next decade, the first study of "Greek love" in English, by John Addington Symonds, was explicitly designed to promote judicial reform, although many years passed before Symonds's work could be widely circulated: a limited edition of one hundred copies appeared only in 1901—the year Forster completed his studies at Cambridge.<sup>12</sup> The twentieth century has witnessed a veritable explosion of writings on the subject.<sup>13</sup>

A new era in the study of the history of sexuality began in 1978, which would also seem, in retrospect, to have been the high-water mark of the recent political movement for lesbian and gay freedom in the United States. The new era was defined by the appearance of K. J. Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* and by the English publication of the first volume of Foucault's unfinished *History of Sexuality*. Each work deserves an independent description.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance, within the field of classical studies, of Dover's long-awaited monograph on homosexual behavior in ancient Greece. Its author was, and is, an eminent political and intellectual historian, a superb philologist, and a brilliant polemicist. At the time he published *Greek Homosexuality*, Dover was President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford (the book had been written while Dover was Professor of Greek at the University of St. Andrews); he had also been President of the Oxford Philological Society and, a year before *Greek Homosexuality* appeared, he had been knighted for his work in Greek history. He subsequently went on to become President of the British Academy. Dover therefore brought to the study of his controversial subject an incomparable, and well-deserved, academic prestige. No less crucial to the reception of Dover's work than his credentials as a scholar were his credentials as a heterosexual, which were equally above suspicion ("I am fortunate in not experiencing moral shock or disgust at any genital act whatsoever, provided that it is welcome and agreeable to all the participants," Dover coolly remarked in the Preface to his book), and both sets of credentials were celebrated by

reviewers. Whatever the book's other defects—and it did meet with many hostile and unfair reviews, coming from a variety of perspectives—it could be accused of neither faulty scholarship nor special pleading. In this respect, the reception of Dover's work has differed greatly from that of Foucault's.

*Greek Homosexuality* turned out, nonetheless, to be in many ways a maddening book to read. It did not pretend to offer a full survey of its subject. As the first modern, systematic, scholarly student of homosexuality in ancient Greece, Dover maintained that the material on which to base a thematic survey was lacking. And so his book took the form of a series of commentaries on selected documents, bringing in other evidence from the whole of Greek antiquity where relevant. Dover's interpretation of "Greek homosexuality" thus emerges *seriatim* from detailed analyses of individual documents: it is not laid out before the reader in a single motion. Dover's discussion of certain topics, such as the question of whether, to what extent, or in what contexts the Greeks acknowledged or tolerated mutual desire between male sexual partners (a matter on which Dover was attacked by a number of reviewers), has to be pieced together from half a dozen different passages in his book: he never deals fully with the issue in its own right. That is why some reviewers and readers misunderstood him: they remembered what Dover said in one context but not how he qualified or explicated his statement in another. Despite these annoyances and frustrations, however, the great value of Dover's work has become even clearer with time. His book richly repays rereading and close study by specialists. Dover's relentlessly empirical approach succeeded in its main purpose, which was to establish once and for all a few basic facts about "Greek homosexuality" in the face of skepticism on the part of traditional classical scholars. Among Dover's main points were (1) that homosexual behavior among Greek males largely took the form of paederastic relations between a man and a youth; (2) that the classical Greeks considered the desire of adult males for sexual pleasure through contact with handsome youths to be normal and natural; (3) that neither Athenian law nor Athenian custom forbade or penalized the sexual expression of such desire, so long as the lovers observed certain conventional decencies; and (4) that paederastic love-affairs which conformed, at least outwardly, to those conventions were regarded by Athenian society as decent, honorable, and—under certain circumstances—even praiseworthy. John Boswell<sup>14</sup> has questioned (1) and David Cohen<sup>15</sup> has tried to refute (2) and (3), but neither has been able to shake the main results of Dover's research, nor is anyone else likely to do so.

Dover was concerned, first and foremost, with establishing the facts of the matter and with getting them right. He worked within a tradition of empirical research whose aims and methods he was prepared to justify, but he was not concerned primarily with theoretical questions. That dimension of the history of sexuality was taken up, with characteristic brilliance and



matchless penetration, by the late French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. Foucault's own field was modern history; he specialized in studying how the various régimes of knowledge and institutional practice had shifted from the end of the Renaissance to the present day. By the time he began his inquiry into the history of sexuality, Foucault had already traced the genealogy of a number of modern institutions (the medical clinic, the insane asylum, the prison, the sciences) along with the systems of knowledge and power that supported them and that were, in turn, constituted by them, plus the human subjects and objects they produced. He initially set out to do the same thing for "sexuality," to trace the evolution of the régimes of power and knowledge that constituted human beings as the conscious subjects of their "sexuality"—and that did so, moreover, by (among other means) requiring them to *speak* about their sexual experiences. Foucault intended to follow this evolution in the institutions and experiences of sexuality from the Christian confessional to the psychoanalyst's couch to the EST weekend seminar. He discovered, however, that he could not pick up the threads of this story in the Renaissance without taking for granted too many aspects of "sexuality" whose specific conditions of emergence needed to be established. So he abandoned his project as he had initially conceived it and devoted himself to the study of Greek and Roman antiquity.

Basing himself on Dover's work, as well as on that of many classical scholars, Foucault produced an analytic interpretation of the formation of sexual experience in the ancient world that stands in marked contrast to Dover's achievement: it is holistic, systematic, comprehensive (in its own, highly specialized, terms), and general. As such, it dramatizes the interpretative perils that Dover, by confining himself to scholarly commentary on the available documents, wisely avoided. Unlike Dover's work, Foucault's is admittedly schematic; it also contains a number of elementary scholarly errors. For all those reasons, it has proved vulnerable to attack from specialists: Foucault-bashing now seems to have become, since the man's death in 1984, the favorite indoor sport of a host of lesser intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic. For all that, the interpretative gains which Foucault's work on sex in antiquity represents cannot be exaggerated. Foucault's analysis has, in effect, thrown open a window on the articulation of sexual morality in ancient Greece, providing a clear and economical analysis of its basic structure. He thereby allows us to see what, perhaps, we "always" knew but never expressed to ourselves in such simple and elegant terms before; he fits scattered pieces of knowledge into a new and lucid pattern, and he thereby reorients our basic outlook on the material. I shall have a good deal to say about Foucault's approach to the Greek evidence in "Two Views of Greek Love," included in this volume, so I shall limit myself here to the following observation.

The distinctive contribution which the English publication in 1978 of the

first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* made to subsequent work can be simply, if baldly, put: Foucault did for "sexuality" what feminist critics had done for "gender."<sup>16</sup> That is, Foucault detached "sexuality" from the physical and biological sciences (just as feminists had detached "gender" from the facts of anatomical sex, of somatic dimorphism) and treated it, instead, as "the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment" of "a complex political technology."<sup>17</sup> He divorced "sexuality" from "nature" and interpreted it, instead, as a cultural production. He thereby made possible an extremely profitable alliance between certain radical elements in philosophy and anthropology.

In the third section of "One Hundred Years of Homosexuality" I shall argue that Foucault's understanding of "sexuality" is not only helpful as a way of thinking about sex in history and society but is also supported by the ancient evidence. My reason for dwelling on Foucault here is to describe the enormous impetus that Foucault's work gave to anthropological tendencies within the humanities and, specifically, to research into sexuality in all areas of the human sciences. For so long as sexuality, like sex, was thought to be rooted in nature, historians and anthropologists guided by that assumption were bound to unearth merely different "attitudes" to or "expressions" of sexuality—historically or culturally variant responses to the universal "fact" of sexuality, local improvisations on nature's unchanging theme; that theme, moreover, regularly turned out on inspection to be a remarkably familiar one, uncannily recapitulating (and thereby reaffirming) traditional categories and experiences. Thus, historians might show that this or that historical figure was "a homosexual" (Plato, for example) or "a bisexual" (Shakespeare); at a less rudimentary level, historians might measure the social "toleration" of homosexuality or anthropologists note the presence or absence of homosexual behavior in a culture. That some people might not have a sexuality to express, or might have sexual experiences unassimilable to modern sexual categories, was seldom a practicable conclusion to draw from the evidence uncovered in the course of research. But with the appearance of Foucault's work, the pressing questions now became, "How was sexual experience constituted in a given culture?" "In what terms was sexual experience constructed?" "How was sexual experience distinguished from and related to other sorts of experience, and how were the boundaries between these various kinds of experience articulated?" "Were sexual pleasures and desires configured differently for different members of a given society and, if so, according to what principles?" "How did the terms employed by the various members of human living-groups to organize their sexual experiences operate, conceptually and institutionally, so as to constitute human beings as the subjects of sexual experience? What other areas of life were implicated in their operation?" "How did the constitution of sexual subjects relate to the constitution of other social forms? of power? of knowledge?"



Under the impetus provided by Foucault, by feminism, and by the preceding decade or more of empirical research into the history of sexuality, progress in this field since 1978 has been rapid and scholarly activity has been intense. In a period, in other words, when much of western Europe and America seems to have sunk into a reactionary torpor, embracing with a hollow and cynical enthusiasm the comforts of conventional pieties and rushing to rediscover the demagogic possibilities of a self-serving obscurantism, intellectual ferment within the universities has been quietly but inexorably proceeding at an accelerating rate, and research has made great strides. One of the considerable pleasures I have had in the course of writing and revising the essays contained in this book has been that of acquainting myself with the enormous scope and variety of recent work, much of it highly sophisticated and enlightening, in the history of sexuality. One of the purposes of this book, accordingly, is to take stock of our scholarly progress, to consolidate its gains, and to issue an interim report—however spotty and incomplete—on the results of it. If some readers may find my citations of other scholars and my references to their work to be excessive in quantity or complexity, I can only plead my eagerness to tell the scholarly world the good news—to show something of the breadth, scope, and diversity of work that has been carried out in the history of sexuality over the last ten years or so in half a dozen countries. And, in any case, I have tried to restrict those scholarly citations to the notes, lodged at the back of this volume out of the way of the non-scholarly reader, to whom I hope to have something amusing and compelling to say.

From all this recent work on the history of sexuality a certain picture is starting to emerge. Its details are extremely sketchy, and there are large gaps on its surface, some of which perhaps will never be filled in. But let me attempt to convey my impression of it. Homosexuality and heterosexuality, as we currently understand them, are modern, Western, bourgeois productions. Nothing resembling them can be found in classical antiquity. A certain identification of the self with the sexual self began in late antiquity; it was strengthened by the Christian confessional. Only in the high middle ages did certain kinds of sexual acts start to get identified with certain specifically sexual types of person: a "sodomite" begins to name not merely the person who commits an act of sodomy but one distinguished by a certain type of specifically sexual subjectivity which inclines such a person to commit those acts; nonetheless, sodomy remains a sinful act which any person, given sufficient temptation, may be induced to commit. In London and Paris, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there appear—evidently for the first time, and in conjunction with the rise of companionate marriage—social gathering-places for persons of the same sex with the same socially deviant attitudes to sex and gender who wish to socialize and to have sex with one another. In London, these are the so-called molly-houses, where

men dress as women and assume women's names. This phenomenon contributes to the formation of the great nineteenth-century experience of "sexual inversion," or sex-role reversal, in which some forms of sexual deviance are interpreted as, or conflated with, gender deviance. The emergence of homosexuality out of inversion, the formation of a sexual orientation independent of relative degrees of masculinity and femininity, takes place during the latter part of the nineteenth century and comes into its own only in the twentieth. Its highest expression is the "straight-acting and -appearing gay male," a man distinct from other men in absolutely no other respect besides that of his "sexuality." Although this personality type may have been a cherished ideal in earlier periods—as a fantasy image it is memorably realized in the title character of E. M. Forster's *Maurice*, for example—it is the distinctive creation of the period after the Second World War, and as I write it may already be on the wane.

This collection of essays is divided into two parts. Part One is largely theoretical, and the essays contained in it address a number of issues that have to do with scholarly method and current critical practice. Part Two contains examples of practical literary criticism and historical analysis which apply some of the principles argued for in the earlier essays to a series of concrete problems in the interpretation of Greek culture. The six essays are intended to be read as a sequence, but they may be read in any order, although a good deal of what is said in the title essay of the collection is taken for granted in the subsequent essays, and so the reader is encouraged to have a look at it first.

"One Hundred Years of Homosexuality" sounds many of the major themes heard elsewhere in this volume. It represents my best attempt to show not only that our own cultural assumptions are inappropriate to the interpretation of sexual life in ancient Greece but, more importantly, that a radical reinterpretation of sexual life in ancient Greece has the potential to transform our own cultural and sexual self-understanding. In particular, I argue that the study of sexual life in antiquity reveals homosexuality, heterosexuality, and even sexuality itself to be relatively recent and highly culture-specific forms of erotic life—not the basic building-blocks of sexual identity for all human beings in all times and places, but peculiar and indeed exceptional ways of conceptualizing as well as *experiencing* sexual desire. I appeal to the Greek documentary record for evidence that sexual experiences and forms of erotic life are culturally specific, that they are not universal but historical, and I contend that it may be possible to recover some of the indigenous meanings attached to sexual experiences in ancient Greece if only we do not insist on viewing the ancient documents through the prism of modern social and sexual categories. In the latter part of the essay, I provide



a sketch of the distinctive ways in which sexual experience was articulated and organized in the ancient Greek world.

It has been my experience, in the course of lecturing to different audiences around the United States, that the thesis I propound in the title essay tends to elicit—quite understandably—a certain amount of skepticism and resistance. The second item in this volume, “‘Homosexuality’: A Cultural Construct,” takes the form of an interview with the sociologist Richard Schneider; it represents an attempt to answer some of the questions that are typically asked in response to my arguments. I realize that it may not be possible to anticipate all the objections that may be raised to one’s line of thinking, and I know it is impossible to state one’s own position so clearly and unambiguously that it cannot be misunderstood. My goal in this interview, then, is not to eliminate all misapprehension but rather to make more explicit some of the assumptions and guiding principles that have shaped my work. In the process, I have also tried to make the best theoretical case I can imagine for “constructionism”—for the proposition, that is, that sexual identities are not “given” by nature but are culturally constituted or produced.

“Two Views of Greek Love” is a report on and a critique of current trends in classical scholarship that bear on the study of paederasty in ancient Greece. I look specifically at the work of the German classicist Harald Patzer as well as at that of Michel Foucault. Patzer and Foucault, I find, exhibit contrasting intellectual styles and methods, and so they help to define some of the very different contemporary tendencies in the study of the history of sexuality. In particular, Patzer’s approach begins from the assumption that classical Greek paederasty must not be interpreted in the light of modern sexual categories: in that respect, it is highly congenial to my own approach. But it sharply diverges from my interpretation in highlighting the ritual element in Greek paederasty. That emphasis on ritual reflects, moreover, what is now perhaps the dominant intellectual orientation among those classicists who treat paederasty in the light of Dover’s evidence for the wide distribution of homosexual behaviors in ancient Greece. Patzer also makes use of some of the same ethnographic data to which I appeal in my exchange with Dr. Schneider and in my concluding essay on the figure of Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*. Thus, by confronting Patzer’s work, I am able both to clarify further my own position on the place of comparative ethnographies in the ongoing debate over the cultural articulation of sexual categories and to criticize what has looked for some time to be the emerging orthodoxy about the meaning of paederasty in classical Greece (an orthodoxy, by the way, to which Sir Kenneth Dover himself does not adhere, as he has lately made plain).<sup>18</sup> And by comparing Patzer’s interpretative tactics to Foucault’s, I hope to demonstrate to classicists, who have been slow to embrace Foucault’s methods and insights, some of the advantages of Foucault’s approach over

that of traditional philology, which Patzer—despite his anthropological interests—largely exemplifies.

“Heroes and their Pals,” in Part Two, is a comparative study of three narrative traditions, each of which features a close friendship between two male warriors: the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, the Books of Samuel in the Old Testament of the Bible, and Homer’s *Iliad*. I examine each of these friendships in order to gauge the extent of the structural and thematic correspondences between them as well as to identify some of the distinctive meanings that cluster about each friendship as it is represented in the different literary traditions. The ultimate purpose of my comparison is to define more precisely the peculiar form of erotic life common to the three friendships and to distinguish it from later Greek paederasty as well as from modern homosexuality.

In “The Democratic Body” I attempt to document the existence and to reconstruct the meaning of male prostitution in classical Athens. In particular, I ask why it was that any male of Athenian parents who had been a prostitute in his youth was subsequently debarred from participating in the communal life of the city. Under what conception of prostitution would prostitution represent a disqualification for citizenship? And under what conception of citizenship would prostitution constitute a violation of civic duty? Treating prostitution and citizenship as complementary functions in the code used to articulate the ideology of social life in classical Athens, I seek an answer to these questions by examining shifts in the cultural definition of manhood in Athens, for it was in that half-articulated definition that social and political practices were often rooted. I try to show that “citizenship,” for free Athenian males, was a sexual and gendered concept as well as a political and social one—and, hence, that the boundary between “private” and “public” life was drawn in a radically different way from the way it is drawn now: indeed, it is not even clear whether the Greek distinction between *oikos* and *polis*, between household and community, brought into play anything like the modern notions of “private” and “public,” “civil society” and “state.”

When I originally set out to write the essay on Diotima, I had intended to establish the extent to which Plato might be considered a “feminist” in comparison to his fellow Athenians. By employing a woman, the prophetess Diotima, to articulate the central tenets of his erotic theory in the *Symposium*, and by casting those tenets in a “feminocentric” form, Plato, I thought, was implicitly criticizing the sexual ethos of his male contemporaries. While I still believe that some version of this thesis is plausible, I became more interested, in the course of writing the paper, in the politics of gender and the politics of representation implicit in Plato’s decision to enunciate, in the voice of a woman, what is (in the first instance at least) a doctrine of male



homoerotic desire. My thinking led me to inquire into the role of "the feminine" in the social reproduction of male culture and to analyze the characteristic male strategy of speaking *about* women by speaking *for* women. But once I put the problem in those terms, I saw that my own discourse about Plato's Diotima represented an instance of exactly the phenomenon I had set out to expose and to criticize. Moreover, there appeared to be no way that I could escape from that paradox, no "politically correct" stance that I could assume, for the project as a whole was obviously implicated in the same politics of gender and the same politics of representation as Plato's (far more interesting) text: no amount of discursive acrobatics could enable me to talk or write my way out of it. In discussing Plato, then, I found myself condemned to reproduce the very structures of domination that I had set about to make visible in Plato. In my essay on Diotima, therefore, I have attempted to dramatize this paradox and to suggest how the contradictions inherent in it might themselves create further opportunities for a feminist critique.

## PART I