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0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

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Introduction

Politeness was primarily about the social control of the individual at a time of intense enthusiasm for individual rights and responsibilities.¹

Amongst the affluent and leisured, sexuality thawed out. The libido was liberated and erotic gratification was dissociated from sin and shame.²

The ‘identity’ of eighteenth century England has provoked much debate, with discussion often turning on the relative vibrancy of features displaying ‘modernity’ or the lingering aspects of an ‘ancien regime’.³ The polite vision of Langford and the Enlightened, liberated world seen by Porter share an emphasis on the eighteenth century looking forward. Yet these are contrasting pictures: on the one hand, we see a time of control and restraint; on the other, a time of freedom and licence. The allure and distinctiveness of eighteenth-century erotic culture – centring on erotic texts and images and comprising particular modes of cultural practice – was its ambiguous relationship to both aspects of eighteenth-century England. Erotic culture promised sexual gratification of a kind, but unbridled pleasure flew in the face of eighteenth-century restraint. The tone of eighteenth-century erotic culture, therefore, was not one of reckless sexual frenzy. Instead, producers of erotic material rendered depictions of sex and bodies hazy, and cloaks of metaphor and suspended denouements forged a decorous distance between reader and text. This stylistic temperance was accompanied by embargoes placed on the type of liaison in which characters

¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 5.

² Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 278.

³ J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). The second edition is published as *English Society, 1660–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For accounts emphasizing the ‘modern’ aspects of this society, see, for example, N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa, 1982) and Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London’s Geographies, 1680–1780* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998). Anthony Fletcher sets up a similar contrast between politeness and sexual freedom in the eighteenth century in *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 339–46. His interpretation of this is significantly different from my own. I engage with this issue in chapter one.

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century

engaged: kindly depiction was reserved for potentially reproductive sexual acts. The liberated libido was constrained by consistently demarcated desire. Willy though some of their measures may have been, the producers and consumers of erotic material prided themselves on their resistance to naked, unabashed voluptuousness. The pleasures of eighteenth-century erotic culture certainly indulged the libido, but they also championed individual self-control. At the heart of erotic culture were the many hundred English erotic books and their illustrations, and the saturation of this material with depictions of the female form is testament to the fascination men had with women's bodies. The pleasures of erotic culture were those of 'Merryland', an imaginary place which promised the delights of sex and female bodies.⁴ These depictions carried complex ideas about women and femininity, and in particular about sexual difference. The core of this book explores these understandings of sexual difference in erotic texts and images. But this is framed by placing erotic material in a context, by considering the social and cultural conditions of reading erotica.⁵ In analysing both representations of sexual difference and the reading of sex, this book seeks to explore meaning in context.

In adopting this approach, I want to build on a brand of cultural history that focuses on meaning and culture. Cultural history is often defined by its object of study, and it is true that cultural history is distinguished from art history, literary history and intellectual history in part by a relatively broad and coherent definition of 'culture' inspired by anthropologists.⁶ Perhaps the most influential definition is that of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, for whom culture was 'an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols'.⁷ In this tradition, cultural history is most readily defined as 'a history of representation', juxtaposed against a social history interested in experience.⁸ As Catherine Belsey puts it, '[s]ocial history gives priority to describing practices, while cultural history records meanings'.⁹ However, I contend that the social and cultural context of meaning is critical to our comprehension of meaning, and this book focuses on both the discursive and the material aspects of erotic

⁴ See chapter five for a discussion of the term 'Merryland' and its significance.

⁵ I use the term 'erotica' as a singular noun throughout this book. Although the *OED* records only the plural noun, this seems to be out of step with common usage.

⁶ Peter Burke, 'Overture: The New History, its Past and its Future', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 2; Robert Darnton, 'Intellectual and Cultural History', in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before US: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 347.

⁷ Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in his *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973; London: Fontana, 1993), p. 89.

⁸ Catherine Belsey, 'Reading Cultural History', in Tamsin Spargo (ed.), *Reading the Past: Literature and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 106. See also Lynn Hunt, 'Introduction: History, Culture, and Text', in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 19.

⁹ Belsey, 'Reading Cultural History', p. 107.

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

culture. There are important literary and textual contexts for erotica that are explored here, but there is a social and cultural context of reading that can be reconstructed, and which roots a cultural history of meaning in an experiential world. The later chapters of this book consider the representations of male and female bodies in erotic material, but chapter one presents the context of a gendered model of reading. Sex and gender differences were constructed both in erotic texts and through the reading of erotic texts.

The material, social and spatial contexts of this material are crucial; the broader cultural contexts of the ideas which circulated within erotic culture are also key. We should not view erotica as a marginal or underside feature of the eighteenth century; it was not fenced off from the rest of eighteenth-century culture, but was shaped by and reflected a number of contemporary developments: economic and social (agricultural innovation, enclosure, the acquisition of colonies), cultural (the expansion of the public sphere, the growth of the reading public, the Enlightenment and cosmopolitanism), literary (the lapse of pre-publication censorship in 1695, Grub Street plagiarism and the rise of the novel) and scientific (overseas exploration and the emergence of new bodies of knowledge such as botany). For example, depictions of sex and sexual relations were shaped by geographical knowledge and its modes of expression, as discussed in chapter six. But while these authors drew on modes of geographical knowledge, they also satirized them. In their deployment of geographical modes, those involved in erotic culture played with notions of truth and knowledge, blurring the distinction between empirical knowledge and imaginary knowledge, even calling into question the ideological underpinnings of the Enlightenment.

The degree to which erotic authors were engaged in this lively cultural exchange is striking. Historians have discussed 'shared cultures' for some time, but the cultural processes of selection, exchange, translation and reiteration are rarely explored.¹⁰ In this study, it will emerge that erotic books did not simply transport previously formed ideas into an erotic context. Instead, erotic authors selected ideas about gender and bodies in a strategic way, and these ideas were transformed in the transplantation to erotica. This was very clear in erotic discussions of sexual difference. In their attempts to convey both sexual equivalence and male superiority, erotic authors found existing scientific and medical theories wanting; they therefore combined aspects of apparently conflicting theories in their discussions of how male and female bodies worked, forging a distinct vision of sexual difference. Erotic authors performed many such acts

¹⁰ Quote from Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Introduction', in her *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature* (London: Free Association Books, 1986), p. 17. A rare example of work on processes of cultural exchange is Robert Darnton's study of the clandestine books of revolutionary France. See his *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1995), especially pp. 181–97.

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century

of selective borrowing from several eighteenth-century fiction and non-fiction genres. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of erotica was its absorbency and reflexivity with regard to other genres and contemporary events. This genre was fully embedded in eighteenth-century culture and can therefore tell us much about England between 1700 and 1800.

Gender history

As much of the point of erotica was (and is) sex and desire, this material is particularly useful for thinking about eighteenth-century understandings of bodies and gender. Indeed, eighteenth-century erotic material was a genre very much concerned with gender and bodies at a time when gender relations and ideas about sexual difference allegedly underwent considerable change. In the dominant narrative of pre-twentieth-century women's history, the eighteenth century is a pivotal moment. This narrative might be usefully separated into three distinct but interlinked strands, concerning female gender roles, female sexuality, and understandings of bodies.¹¹ Women's historians have long been arguing that a new middle-class female character appeared on the cultural scene in the eighteenth century. She was a chaste and modest wifely figure, firmly ensconced in a privatized nuclear family.¹² The apogee of a new domesticity, this woman was in part the product of industrial development. Building on well-established narratives of economic history, historians have argued that middle-class women were increasingly associated with home, and pushed out of the world of paid work.¹³ Changes in female gender roles are apparently mirrored in changes in early-modern female sexuality. The key moment was the eighteenth century, when the desiring, appetitive early-modern woman was replaced by her prudish, passive and constrained nineteenth-century successor. Affectionate but asexual, this less lusty woman was a counterpart to the newly domesticated middle-class woman in the home.¹⁴

¹¹ See Karen Harvey, 'The Century of Sex? Gender, Bodies and Sexuality in the Long Eighteenth Century', *The Historical Journal* 45 (2002), pp. 899–916.

¹² Margaret George, 'From "Goodwife" to "Mistress": The Transformation of the Female in Bourgeois Culture', *Science and Society* 37 (1973); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹³ The classic accounts are Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919; London: Routledge, 1992) and Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (1930; London: Virago, 1981). For more recent refinements, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Routledge, 1987) and Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (1989; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). For a critical account of this work, see Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal* 36 (1993), pp. 383–414.

¹⁴ Angus McLaren, 'The Pleasures of Procreation: Traditional and Biomedical Theories of Conception', in W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (eds.), *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-Century*

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Older stories of change about female gender roles and sexuality have been reinvigorated by recent work on the history of the body and sexual difference. The key statement is by Thomas Laqueur in his *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990), described as ‘perhaps the most influential work of medical history published in the last two decades’.¹⁵ Laqueur argued that ‘in or about the late eighteenth century’ there occurred a shift in the way that human bodies were understood.¹⁶ Using elite scientific and medical texts, Laqueur suggested that prior to the eighteenth century men and women were placed on a vertical, hierarchical axis, in which their bodies were seen as two comparable variants of one kind whose bodies were structurally the same. Sexual difference was understood through a ‘one-sex’ model. After the eighteenth century, Laqueur argued, a ‘two-sex’ model achieved hegemony. Women and men were arranged horizontally: anatomical differences were stressed, and their bodies were seen as qualitatively distinct. Modern and opposite sexes were thus born in the eighteenth century. In many accounts, this argument about sexual difference is melded with narratives of gender roles and sexual desire:

In the 1700s and before, women were assumed to resemble men. Even their bodies – though of course less perfect – were thought to resemble men’s. Hence, women were assumed to be sensual and strong, to be nearly as independent after marriage as before. By 1788 this female being who had been defined chiefly as a lesser man had been redefined as a separate and oppositional being, by ‘nature’ chaste and domestic.¹⁷

Work on women’s gender roles, sexuality and, most recently, the body has been compressed to produce a deep and broad narrative of women’s history in which the eighteenth century is key, and this narrative suggests a vision

Medical World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 340. See also Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (London: Wildwood House, 1982); Luisa Accati, ‘The Spirit of Fornication: Virtue of the Soul and Virtue of the Body in Friuli, 1600–1800’, in E. Muir and G. Ruggiero (eds.), *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Kimberly Crouch, ‘The Public Life of Actresses: Prostitutes or Ladies?’, in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (Harlow: Longman, 1997), pp. 58–78; Ruth Perry, ‘Colonising the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England’, in J. C. Fout (ed.), *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Londa Schiebinger, ‘Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy’, in C. Gallagher and T. Laqueur (eds.), *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Londa Schiebinger, ‘Gender and Natural History’, in N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary (eds.), *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 163.

¹⁵ Mark S. R. Jenner and Bertrand O. Taithe, ‘The Historiographical Body’, in R. Cooter and J. Pickstone (eds.), *Medicine in the Twentieth Century* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 2000), p. 191.

¹⁶ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 5.

¹⁷ Janice Farrar Thaddeus, ‘Mary Delany, Model to the Age’, in Beth Fowkes Tobin (ed.), *History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 113.

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century

not simply of changing roles or ideals, but of increased rigidity and closure in the nature of those ideals. As this has variously been described, image-makers were 'defining male/female relations with new exactness', 'greater definitional rigour was imposed on gender roles', and women suffered 'the long march of the empires of gender over the entirety of the person'.¹⁸ Individuals were increasingly saturated with gender.

Making Sex has been crucial for historians of gender, not simply offering fresh ways to think about bodies and sexual difference, but for many enabling us to think about them. The groundbreaking nature of the book is reflected in the incorporation of Laqueur's central thesis – that there was a massive change in the way bodies were understood to differ from one another – into many recent works of women's and gender history.¹⁹ Given the dominance of these ideas in accounts of the eighteenth century, we need to ask how widespread and how widely felt were these changes. In part, this book is a lengthy engagement with Laqueur's argument; I want to assess the extent to which understandings of bodies and sexual difference in erotic culture can be understood through the one-sex to two-sex vision of change. In so doing, I will engage with what I see as a series of limitations with the dominant narrative of women's history.

The first problem is with the conceptualization of change. The allure of the dominant narrative is in part its compelling fusion of older economic and political histories with newer fields of inquiry. This serves the important function of resisting the marginalization of the histories of women, gender and bodies. Certainly Laqueur's book is positioned against a backdrop of a number of economic, social and cultural developments, ranging from the rise of Evangelicalism and factories to the French Revolution and the birth of classes. The driving force behind changing understandings of bodies, however, was political. In order to bolster political theorists' use of the language of natural rights, bodies were redefined as opposite sexes: power could only be formally granted to one group (men) and withheld from another (women) if those groups were distinct and incommensurable.²⁰ '[N]atural rights could be countered only by

¹⁸ George, 'From "Goodwife" to "Mistress"', p. 159; Tim Hitchcock, 'Redefining Sex in Eighteenth-Century England', *History Workshop Journal* 41 (1996), p. 77; Denise Riley, 'Am I That Name?': *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 14.

¹⁹ See, for example, Kathleen Brown, '"Changed . . . into the Fashion of a Man": The Politics of Sexual Difference in a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Settlement', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6 (1995), p. 173; Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, pp. 291, 402, 407; Hitchcock, 'Redefining Sex'; Michael McKeon, 'Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660–1760', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (1995), pp. 300–1; Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650–1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), pp. 31–5, 85, 313–14; Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution. Volume I: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 1–11. For a more detailed discussion of the place of the body in work on gender, see the discussion in chapter two. This work is discussed at greater length in Harvey, 'Century of Sex?'

²⁰ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, pp. 194–207.

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

proof of natural inequalities.²¹ Political theory was legitimized by science and medicine.

There are problems in applying older narratives of change to new areas, though, and the fastening of the history of the body to a political narrative has provoked criticism. Discussed more fully in chapter two, these critiques all suggest that the linear chronology of Laqueur is flawed. Similarly, erotic discussions of sexual difference cannot be encapsulated in period-specific models. There was considerable endurance in discussions of sexual difference, combined with short-term shifts in language. Moreover, discussions of female and male seemed subject to distinct forces for change. Representation of female bodies, discussed in chapter three, reveals a considerable degree of persistence; in contrast, as chapter four argues, discussions of male bodies displayed a sharper degree of historical specificity. Clearly, models of change established in one arena cannot necessarily be transplanted into another. But much gender history deals poorly with change, and this arises in part from its roots in cultural history, a field which is strongest in its analysis of the synchronic rather than the diachronic. As Peter Burke said of the culturally inflected 'new history', it has been united, not by a 'narrative of events', but by the 'analysis of structures'.²² But there are ways in which change in culture can be studied without recourse to the established narratives of economic and political development. First, indebted to the *Annales* school and historians of mentalities, cultural historians combine change and persistence, exploring how 'new structures may be superimposed upon old ones'.²³ Second, often emerging from work on transmission and reception, cultural historians can expose change by exploring conflict and difference within cultures, and by analysing how these processes generate new positions.²⁴ This book combines these approaches to change and transformation. It does not seek to replace a story of linear change with one of stasis and continuity; rather, it shows that eighteenth-century understandings of bodies combined the old and the new and that the integration of the new involved debate and the production of new understandings.

In transplanting one narrative of change to another area we are essentially interpreting one body of evidence through the conclusions drawn from another. The influential tripartite vision of women's history encompasses a wide range of evidence. The claim that bodies, gender and sexuality were redefined because of debates in political theory subsumes a wide range of genres under only

²¹ Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 143. See also Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 216.

²² Burke, 'Overture', p. 4.

²³ Patrick H. Hutton, 'The History of Mentalities: The New Map of Cultural History', *History and Theory* 20 (1981), p. 258.

²⁴ For example, see Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, passim; Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century

one. It implies that novels, sermons and other didactic material, plays, legal records, philosophy, scientific tracts and medical books were all simultaneously saturated with the motivations of political writers. This implies an understanding of culture as undifferentiated, a second limitation of much work on women and gender. The idea that change in one genre led to simultaneous and comparable changes in others relies on a model of culture as monolithic; it obscures the ways in which different types of material might have drawn on a range of resources and performed different functions. In this analysis of erotica, I discuss the cultural resources that erotic culture drew on, and consider both the similarities and differences between erotic and non-erotic sources. As eighteenth-century culture was not a monolith, so discreet genres – or even single texts – were rarely one-dimensional. For example, erotica presented male and female bodies as having many different qualities. Male bodies were violent and powerful, but also soft and vulnerable; female bodies were both passive and devouring. The multi-vocal nature of texts shifts our understanding of change and transformation: a plurality of female bodies complicates the argument that one type of early-modern female body was replaced by one type of modern female body at some point during the eighteenth century.

A third limitation of much work on women arises from the use of evidence, and in particular from the approach to the relationship between representation and experience. Often based on texts regarded as ‘fictional’ or ‘prescriptive’, much of this work assumes that this evidence enjoyed predictable contemporary responses, and that there is a knowable and predictable relationship between representation and practice. Precisely how this material affected individuals remains murky, but we assume the connections are straightforward enough for historians to use representation as an index to people’s experience of the past. In examining representations of gender roles, authors claim, ‘we find the greater repression of women’.²⁵ The problems with this approach become particularly acute when dealing with the history of the body. Despite pleas for physical bodies to be brought into our accounts of the past, the object of research for historians of the body remains emphatically ‘discursively constituted’ – created through and located in image and text.²⁶ This work has been profoundly

²⁵ Hitchcock, ‘Redefining Sex’, pp. 77, 78.

²⁶ Quote from Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 15. See Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 21, 17, for discussion of the physical body. In contrast to historians, cultural anthropologists make attempts to grapple with the physicality of bodies. See, for example, Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (eds.), *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), especially p. 47; Bruce M. Knauft, ‘Bodily Images in Melanesia: Cultural Substances and Natural Metaphors’, in M. Feher (ed.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body: Part Three* (New York: Zone, 1989), p. 201; Françoise Héritier-Augé, ‘Semen and Blood: Some Ancient Theories Concerning their Genesis and Relationship’, in Feher (ed.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, p. 160.

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

9

influenced by Michel Foucault's prioritization of discursive over non-discursive practices and his claim that sexuality was 'the correlative' of the 'discursive practice' of sexual science.²⁷ In Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1976), 'the body' emerged as a screen onto which non-discursive power projected effects.²⁸ A related view has been given by Judith Butler, who regards gender as 'the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "pre-discursive", prior to culture'.²⁹ Historians of the body generally argue that bodies are discursive products of political forces; however, historians of women and gender have embedded understandings about bodies in their accounts of women's and men's lives.³⁰

We need to be cautious about over-simplifying the relationship between texts and their readers; texts were never mere tools of influence that produced predictable behaviour.³¹ Representations need to be understood as effects with complicated relationships to both the groups which produced them and those who consumed them. For example, erotic tales sometimes depicted men as sexually violent towards women, and incipient violence was expressed in gendered patterns of movement – women were stationary and men were mobile. While there is evidence that some actual readers of erotica adopted these patterns of movement in practice, erotica is not evidence of men's behaviour towards women. Erotic material is not an index of past experience, of being a body (embodiment) or of sexual activity in the eighteenth century; erotic culture celebrated the autonomy of the reader and this suggests that readers of

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* (1976; London: Allen Lane, 1979), pp. 68, 127. On Foucault's prioritization of non-discursive practices, see Andrew Thacker, 'Foucault and the Writing of History', in Moya Lloyd and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Impact of Michel Foucault on the Social Sciences and the Humanities* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 43; Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (London: Polity Press, 1992), p. 27.

²⁸ On Foucault's general approach to the body, see McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, pp. 28, 38–40.

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 7. In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Butler failed to offer even a speculative model of the role of this matter in the production of identities and categories. 'Matter' was a process through which the '"materiality" of sex . . . is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony' (p. 15).

³⁰ Even Laqueur, who rarely comments on practice, remarks 'my sense is that doctors, lay writers, and men and women in their beds shared a broad view on how the body worked in matters of reproduction'. *Making Sex*, p. 68.

³¹ One particularly influential approach is Michel de Certeau's view of readers as poachers and active consumers. See his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (1984; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). A helpful case study is Anna Clark's consideration of Anne Lister, which presents a picture of an active and selective reader. See Anna Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7 (1996), pp. 23–50. Clark regards cultural representations as just one of three resources available on which past individuals might draw in constructing their sexual identity. The other two are 'their own temperaments and drives', and 'their material circumstances' (*ibid.*, p. 27). See chapter one for a discussion of active readers.

Cambridge University Press

0521822351 - Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture

Karen Harvey

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century

eighteenth-century erotica neither copied erotic depictions of sex nor internalized statements about bodies. Instead, representations of bodies should be seen as both products of cultural, social and political debate and screens onto which cultural, social and political concerns were projected. Erotica was fantasy. And, as such, it is saturated with beliefs, desires and fears about sex and gender. Emphatically, this does not mean that such representations have no relevance for an understanding of social relations. Chapter six reveals the striking similarities between erotic representations of rape and reports of such assaults in court: the languages we find in erotica were part of a wider discourse which shaped individuals' understanding – and therefore experience – of such critical events.

If erotica can be related to the practice of any group in the eighteenth century, then it relates to groups of men. This book trains the light not solely on female bodies, but also on male bodies, and places all these in the context of masculinity. Work on masculinity is much less developed than work on women. Rather than engaging with change over the long term, most research tends to take place within limited periods. However, some sense of change over time is emerging. When aligned, published work suggests a move from a distinctively seventeenth-century honourable manhood resting on control over women's sexuality, through a polite and civil eighteenth-century masculinity, to a later-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century man of distinctively English plain and often unpolished taciturnity.³² The move from the rough and ready man, who will defend his honour and patriarchal authority through violence, to the polite gentleman engaging in sociable conversation is built in part on claims about changes in bodies. The shift from a one-sex to a two-sex model of sexual difference, and the redefinition of women as 'domesticated' and 'sexually passive', has been used to explain the reorientation of manhood away from honour grounded in the control of wives' sexuality, and towards an emphasis on restraint in social settings. Desexualized women in the home were no threat to men; instead sexual dangers lay outside marriage and outside the home, in '[m]asturbation, pornography, sex with prostitutes, and sex with other men'.³³ Indeed, the history of changing masculine sexualities tells a story of an

³² Compare Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (Harlow: Longman, 1999); Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society: Britain 1660–1800* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); and Michèle Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French', in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities, 1660–1800* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp. 44–61.

³³ Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, pp. 212, 213–14. A similar case has been made by Randolph Trumbach. See his 'Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2 (1991), pp. 186–203; and 'The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture, 1660–1750', in M. B. Duberman, M. Vicinus and G. Chauncey (eds.), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989).