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THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF VICTORIAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL WRITING ABOUT THE “RENAISSANCE”

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The “Renaissance” and the “homosexual” are both nineteenth-century inventions. The historiographical concept of the Renaissance — with its overtones of cultural rebirth and the rise of the individual — was first introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century by such Continental writers as Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt and the English writers John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and John Addington Symonds.[1] The term *homosexual* was first used in 1892, and, as Michel Foucault, David Halperin, and others have argued, it was during this period that the term came to be understood as a “personage” or “species” in which “nothing that was part of his being was unaffected by his sexuality.”[2] Although these two roughly concurrent developments might appear to be unrelated, I want to explore some of the ways in which they overlapped.

In what follows, I focus primarily on Victorian historiographical writing about the Renaissance and argue that when this concept was introduced in England, the period was imagined as queer terrain. In *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982), Alan Bray points out that the Renaissance is often imagined as an era where “the dark constraints of the monkish Middle Ages were past” and where “sexual and artistic freedom went hand in hand.”

It was, moreover, supposedly populated by a “glittering array” of “homosexual poets and painters, philosophers and statesmen” like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Marlowe, and Francis Bacon. Bray is quick to add, however, that this popular vision of the epoch is “almost entirely a myth”: he insists

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that "it was brilliant propaganda but it was not sober history."[3] While Bray's critique is certainly valid (and his book provides us with a much more nuanced portrait of early modern homoeroticism), I believe that it is a mistake to dismiss the nineteenth-century historiographical work on the Renaissance as "propaganda." All Victorian writing about the Renaissance was to some extent propaganda. According to J. B. Bullen's *Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, "The historical impulse was [often] conditioned or modified . . . by the erotic impulse"; as a result, "your view of the Renaissance would be substantially colored by whether you felt that what was 'reborn' was healthy or unhealthy"—that is to say, whether you felt the "rebirth" was a "stimulus to culture" or a "return to paganism, godlessness and lasciviousness."[4] Moreover, Bray's decision to call the Victorian historiography of the Renaissance "propaganda" is particularly troubling because it repeats the accusation that is often leveled against *any* type of queer historiography, no matter how "sober."

Thus, instead of simply repudiating the myth that Bray describes, I analyze how it was produced and the kinds of cultural work that it performed.[5] Most important, I believe that the historiographical production of a "queer Renaissance" legitimated the newly emergent notion of the homosexual. It was a way to insist not only that homosexuals had played a vital role in the artistic flowering and cultural rebirth that took place during the Renaissance but also by extension that they had made valuable contributions to society and to the cultural development of the West more generally. This is a powerful argument, and one that still has ideological purchase to this day. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, it had a particular resonance because at that time homosexuality was often described as a form of "degeneration." Writers like Richard von Krafft-Ebing maintained that homosexuality (like criminality and mental illness) was the result of an atavistic return to an earlier state of evolutionary development. The work of Victorian historiographers of the Renaissance implicitly refuted this degeneration theory. The unstated argument of their research was that if homosexuality flourished at one of the high points of western civilization, then it could not possibly be degenerate.

But how was the myth of the queer Renaissance created in the first place? I begin with the writing of John Ruskin. This may seem like a perverse genealogical gesture, since Ruskin was one of the most outspoken critics of the Renaissance. Indeed, he was a proponent of medieval art and architecture, and a leader of the Gothic Revivalism that swept over England in the nineteenth century. Ruskin's denigration of the Renaissance was a counterpart to his valuation of all things medieval. Through a strange twist of fate, however, Ruskin's denunciation of the Renaissance actually helped establish the period as a historiographical concept. According to Bullen's *Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, "Ruskin forced the reputation of the art and culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth century to their lowest point ever, [but] he simultaneously breathed into the Renaissance a life, a potency, and a vitality which it had never before had."[6]

For my purposes, the crucial thing to note is the extent to which Ruskin's distinction between the medieval and the Renaissance was articulated in erotic terms. Throughout *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin envisions the contrast between the two eras as a contrast between the sacred and the profane. He maintains that the coming of the Renaissance occasioned a fall into "decadence" and debauchery, and that this decline was fueled by the Italians' "unscrupulous pursuit of pleasure."[7] The self-indulgent pursuit of pleasure is, for Ruskin, clearly manifest in the art and architecture of early modern Venice. He maintains that the "Christian subjects" of medieval art were "perverted into feeble sensualities," and the new artistic style was "polluted," "prurient," and "besotted." For Ruskin, it is ultimately Venetian architecture that best demonstrates the "perversion" typical of the Renaissance: he describes it as being "unnatural," "base," "unfruitful," and "impious" (227). In addition, he says that the extravagant architectural ornaments of the city's buildings and bridges "embodied the type of the evil spirit to which Venice was abandoned in . . . the last period of the Renaissance": they are, as he puts it, "evidence of a delight in the contemplation of bestial vice" (172). At one point, Ruskin attributes this unnatural architectural style to the influence of Greek and Roman models (with all that that implies), though he later admits that "the history of later Italy, as she sank into pleasure and thence into corruption, would probably have been the same whether she had ever learned again to write pure Latin or not" (16).

By the final pages of *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin goes so far as to compare the coming of the Renaissance to a debauched sexual act. Throughout the text, he personifies Venice as a woman, then recounts how she "became drunk with the wine of her fornication" and how, "by the inner burnings of her own passions, as fatal as the fiery rain of Gomorrah, she was consumed from her place among nations; and her ashes are choking the channels of the dead, salt sea" (177, 195). In this passage, the language that Ruskin uses to describe the "birth" of the Renaissance evokes the discourse of sodomy through the explicit reference to Gomorrah and through the images of barrenness and sterility that are comparable, appropriately enough, to Dante's description of the "burning plain" on the seventh circle of hell (home to the sodomites). But as with the earlier use of adjectives like "unnatural" and "unfruitful," and as with the reference to "bestial vice," sodomy remains a specter that Ruskin implicitly evokes but never explicitly names. This scathing attack on the

Renaissance is important not only because it established the era as a recognizable historiographical concept in England but also because it helped associate it with "unnatural vice" and "perverse" sexuality in the popular imaginary.

John Addington Symonds led the movement to transvalue Ruskin's idea of the Renaissance. A fledgling essay on the subject — written in 1863 while Symonds was still a student at Oxford — briefly alludes to the characterization of the period that had been put forward by his predecessor. Beginning with the question "what was the Renaissance?" Symonds then explains that some people view it as a "deplor[able]" period of "decadence," but he maintains that this is not really the case; instead, it was "the dawning of a brief but glorious day."[8] Symonds would go on to become the first scholar in England to write a full-length history of the Renaissance. His seven-volume *The Renaissance in Italy* began to appear some twelve years after his initial student essay, and with the publication of this important work of scholarship, Symonds became the foremost Renaissance historiographer in England. He is therefore often labeled "the English Burckhardt." According to Wallace K. Ferguson's *Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation*, it was "through [Symonds], more than through any other author, that the . . . Renaissance came to life in the minds of generations of [English] students."[9]

I eventually argue that a queer sexual politics underlies Symonds's seemingly straightforward writing about the Renaissance. Indeed, Symonds was one of the first people in England to argue for the decriminalization of sodomy. Jeffrey Weeks says that *A Problem in Greek Ethics* was "the first serious work on homosexuality published in Britain."[10] Given Symonds's own personal investments, it is not surprising to find that in his hands, the Renaissance became an era of erotic freedom, a utopian moment when the fetters of medieval repression were exuberantly cast off.[11] He argues that the "fixed ideas of medievalism" — which had asserted that "beauty was a snare . . . [and] abstinence and mortification the only safe rules of life" — were "shattered and destroyed" during the Renaissance.[12] In their place, the period witnessed a "resurrection of the human body" (1:12). That is to say, people began to recognize "the delightfulness of physical existence . . . the inalienable rights of natural desire, and . . . the participation of mankind in pleasure held common by us" (1:604). In his account, Symonds stands Ruskin on his head. Instead of talking about the Italians' "unscrupulous pursuit of pleasure," he says that their "participation . . . in pleasure" was an essential part of the cultural moment. It is also significant that he describes the Italians' sense of "the delightfulness of physical existence" as something that is "natural" and universal ("held common by us").

The homoeroticism that underlies so much of Symonds's writing comes to the surface in several highly charged descriptions of the men of the Renaissance. "[The] giants of the Renaissance were like boys in their capacity for endurance, [and in] their inordinate appetite for enjoyment. . . . Their fresh and unperverted senses rendered them keenly alive to what was beautiful and natural. . . . Nothing is more remarkable than the fullness of life that throbbed in them" (1:8). These "giants of the Renaissance" appear to have served as an identificatory model for Symonds. But if his statements about them tell us as much about Symonds's own erotic imaginary as they do about the men of the Renaissance themselves, we need to recognize that his descriptions nevertheless played an important role in defining the character of the age. In fact, the adjectives that Symonds uses ("fresh," "unperverted," and "natural") are precisely the opposite of those that Ruskin had used twenty years earlier ("polluted," "perverted," "unnatural"). And even though Symonds radically inverts Ruskin's *evaluation* of the period, he does not appreciably change his *characterization* of it: both writers see the period as an epoch of pleasure, sensualism, and unrestrained sexuality.

The connections between Symonds's interest in the Renaissance and his interest in homosexuality have, for the most part, been overlooked.[13] Arthur Symons—one of Symonds's contemporaries—wrote that Symonds, having never "truly reconciled either with life or with himself, . . . chose the simpler task of writing the History of the Renaissance, rather than the perhaps impossible one of writing the history of his own soul."[14] While there may be some truth to this, I would argue that Symonds was in a sense writing a history of "his own soul" through writing his history of the Renaissance. This is not, however, to negate the cultural work that his research performed. Symonds's history of the Renaissance may have involved some projection, but it had a profound impact on how this newly emergent historiographical period came to be understood. In addition, Symonds's claims about the freedom of erotic expression that existed during the Renaissance implicitly advocated sexual liberation in his own time.

Moreover, Symonds's history of the Renaissance is not as subjective and idiosyncratic as it might at first appear. Many of his central ideas about the period are drawn from prominent Continental historiographers like Michelet and Burckhardt (as well as from Ruskin). Symonds does, however, put his own spin on these ideas. When he adopts Michelet's idea about the Renaissance being associated with the "free play of imagination," for instance, he understands this primarily as the "free play of the *erotic* imagination." In fact, the section of Symonds's book titled "The Element of Fancy in Italian Immorality" establishes a direct correlation between the "imaginative freedom" of the Renaissance and the rise of homoerotic activity: he explains that "it was due again in great measure to their demand for imaginative excitement in all matters of the sense, to their desire for the extravagant and extraordinary as a seasoning of pleasure, that the Italians came to deserve so terrible a name among the nations for unnatural passions" (1:240). Symonds thus modifies Michelet's influential formulation and links "the free play of the imagination" with "unnatural passions." He thereby makes homoeroticism a logical outgrowth of the imaginative energy that flourished in Renaissance Italy.

Symonds puts a similar spin on the ideas of Burckhardt. According to Burckhardt's well-known formulation, the Renaissance witnessed "the birth of the individual." Burckhardt writes that the "Italians knew little of false modesty or hypocrisy in any shape; not one of them was afraid of singularity, of being and seeming unlike his neighbors."[15] Symonds follows Burckhardt in making individualism central: he writes of the "great personalities" of the epoch who "dared to be themselves for good or evil without too much regard for what their neighbors thought of them" (1:336). But again, for Symonds, the notion of individuality is bound up with eroticism. Put simply, Symonds equates individuality with the ability to rise above the moral censure of society and to reject not only the dominant *social* values but, more specifically, the dominant *sexual* values.

Some might say that Symonds "perverts" the ideas of Michelet and Burckhardt, but it would be more accurate to say that he brings out a queer potentiality that is already there. Indeed, Burckhardt himself had noted that individualism could easily slide into immorality, since it can lead to a repudiation of social norms and prescriptions. In a section titled "Morality and Individualism," Burckhardt states that "excessive individualism" was "the fundamental vice of th[e Italian] character" as well as being "a condition of its greatness."[16] With this in mind, it will perhaps be less surprising to find that many of the most idiosyncratic passages from Symonds's study are actually retooled versions of passages from Burckhardt. For instance, the overtly homoerotic description of the "giants of the Renaissance" that I quoted earlier echoes a passage from Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*: "These intellectual giants, these representatives of the Renaissance, show, in respect to religion, a quality which is common in youthful natures. Distinguishing keenly between good and evil, they yet are conscious of no sin. Every disturbance of their inward harmony they feel themselves able to make good out of the plastic resources of their own nature, and therefore they feel no repentance" (313). Here Burckhardt further elucidates how individualism might lead to "sin." Although Symonds ultimately eschews Burckhardt's moralized Christian language and replaces it with a more homoerotic language of men with the "fullness of life throbbing in them," the two men's accounts of the period’s intellectual giants and their “youthful” reliance on their own feelings and their own “nature” are ultimately quite similar to one another. So, in the end, what Symonds has done throughout his book is simply to embrace the queer elements in the work of earlier scholars.

Symonds’s study of the Renaissance was warmly received by the only other English writer to produce a full-length study of the period — Walter Pater. Pater found much to admire in Symonds’s *Renaissance in Italy.* When he reviewed it in 1875 for the *Academy*, he claimed that the book presented “a brilliant picture of its subject,” “a more comprehensive treatment . . . than has yet been offered to English readers.”[17] But Pater also complained that there was “one quality in this book which is singularly absent” — “reserve” (11). If it was, as I suspect, Symonds’s homoerotic reveries about the men from the period that disturbed Pater, this is certainly ironic, since many of Symonds’s comments in this vein were actually anticipated by those of Pater himself (albeit in a more subtle form).

Pater’s own *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* had been published in 1873, two years before Symonds’s *Renaissance in Italy.*[18] Given this temporal proximity and the fact that the two men were colleagues at Oxford, it is not surprising to find that there are strong parallels between the two texts. The most notable are how Pater and Symonds imagine the Renaissance and how they position themselves with regard to other writers on the subject. Ruskin was the most immediate interlocutor for Pater (as he was for Symonds). In fact, Harold Bloom suggests that “Pater’s context begins with his only begetter, Ruskin, whose effect can be read, frequently through negation.”[19] Ruskin’s “effect” on Pater is nowhere more pronounced than in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, and that effect was, as Bloom rightly suggests, almost entirely negative. In fact, Kenneth Daley’s *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin* insists that “Pater’s treatment of the Italian Renaissance is his most conspicuous reversal of Ruskin.”[20] Richard Ellmann makes a similar point, maintaining that although Pater “doesn’t mention Ruskin by name,” he “uses him throughout as an adversary.”[21]

If Pater’s vision of the Renaissance was in many ways antithetical to Ruskin’s, Pater nevertheless describes it in the same terms. According to Wendell V. Harris, both writers recognized “the classical influences, the surging individualism, the explicit pursuit of pleasure, [and] the rise of science.”[22] The two disagreed, however, in exactly the same place that Symonds and Ruskin disagreed — in their *evaluation* of these “influences,” and especially in their opinions about the “value of Grecian models” (175) and “the pursuit of pleasure.” But if contemporary scholars have thus acknowledged that Pater’s Renaissance was, in the words of Ellmann, “Ruskin *inverted*,” they have not necessarily teased out the queer implications of this relationship or spelled out exactly what the quarrel about the “value of Grecian models” meant. For example, many of Pater’s chapters are biographical portraits that have some sort of homoerotic component. Pater includes a discussion of Botticelli that mentions the charges of sodomy against him, and a discussion of Michelangelo that mentions the sonnets that he wrote to one of his male students (and which Symonds, not surprisingly, translated into English).

If Pater and Ruskin disagree in their opinions of the Renaissance, this is because they have radically different attitudes toward eroticism. Ruskin, as I have shown, associated the Renaissance with “bestial vice” and the “pursuit of pleasure.” Pater also sees sexuality and the “pursuit of pleasure” as central but, in stark contrast with Ruskin, values these things. Pater provides the following definition of the Renaissance on the first page of his book:

> For us the Renaissance is the name of a many-sided but yet united movement, in which the love of things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life, make themselves felt, urging those who experience this desire to search out first one and then another means of intellectual or imaginative enjoyment, and directing them not only to the discovery of old and forgotten sources of enjoyment, but to the divination of fresh sources thereof—new experiences, new subjects of poetry, new forms of art. (1)

For my purposes, the crucial thing to note about this passage is the extent to which the Renaissance is here characterized by what Ruskin calls “the pursuit of pleasure.” Pater says that with the coming of the Renaissance, individuals were “urged” to “search out” different “means of . . . enjoyment” and to discover both old and new “sources of enjoyment.” If, for Ruskin, the problem with such “pursuits” is that they drew attention away from the “Christian subjects” that were the focus of medieval art and culture, for Pater, this is precisely their appeal. He states that “in their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination . . . people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal” (16).[23]

Daley maintains that, for Pater, “the Renaissance embodies a positive ethos of intellectual curiosity and sympathy” rather than “a type of moral degeneration.”[24] But Pater did not simply concentrate, as Daley implies, on the Renaissance’s “ethos of *intellectual* curiosity and sympathy”; he emphasized other, more sensual types of curiosity and sympathy as well. This point can best be understood by looking at how Pater reworks Michelet's formulations. As I have already noted, Michelet maintained that the hallmark of the Renaissance was the "free play of the imagination." Although the opening pages of Pater's book follow in Michelet's footsteps and define the Renaissance as a "movement" in which the love of the "intellect" and "imagination" were paramount, he later allows for the pursuit of more carnal pleasures as well when he says that people from the period sought "after the pleasures *of the senses and the imagination*" (16). Indeed, Pater reworks and amplifies Michelet's thesis in a similar manner at several different points in his text.[25] For instance, he notes that there was a "rebellious element" to the Renaissance, a "sinister claim for *liberty of heart and thought*" (16). Here, Pater implies that it was not just the freedom of thought or the imagination that was crucial but also the "liberty of [the] heart."

If it is thus apparent that Pater was deeply engaged with the work of earlier writers like Ruskin and Michelet, and that he both adopted and transformed some of their most influential ideas, Pater also made a similar intervention with regard to Burckhardt's writing and ideas. Harris comments on Pater's debt to Burckhardt, claiming that "what Pater celebrates in the Renaissance are instances of that assertion of individuality that Burckhardt had already made the essence of the Renaissance spirit" (182). While there are thus strong similarities between Pater and Burckhardt, Pater nevertheless puts a slightly different slant on this idea. For example, Pater often uses the term "rebellion" or "rebelliousness" to refer to what Burckhardt would call "individualism." I have already shown one instance where Pater mentions the rebellious element of the Renaissance, but at another point, he claims that "one of the strongest characteristics of that outbreak of the reason and the imagination, of that assertion of the liberty of the heart, in the middle age, which I have termed the medieval Renaissance, was . . . its spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time" (16). In this passage, Pater's use of terms like "rebellion" and "revolt" effectively emphasizes the socially transgressive aspect of Burckhardtian "individualism."[26] It foregrounds how people (like Abelard) began to move "beyond th[e] prescribed limits of the system" (5).

Thus Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* is an important precursor for Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy*. Indeed, both writers had similar visions of the period, and both intervened in remarkably similar ways with respect to the work of earlier Renaissance historiographers like Ruskin, Michelet, and Burckhardt. However, Symonds sees the Renaissance as a much more narrowly historical phenomenon than Pater does. Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy* is a fairly conventional work of what we would now call cultural history; it focuses on Italian society from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Although Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* also concentrates, for the most part, on figures from this same time period and the same national context, it contains two seemingly incongruous sections. One is on a period that predates the generally accepted temporal boundaries of the Renaissance; the other is on a period that postdates them. First, Pater includes a chapter on several individuals from twelfth- and thirteenth-century France at the beginning of his book. He sees this "medieval Renaissance" as a harbinger of things to come. Even more radically, Pater includes a chapter on the eighteenth-century art historian Johann Winckelmann at the end of his study. As a result of this temporal heterogeneity, one reviewer claimed that the book's title was somewhat "misleading" because "the historical element is precisely that which is most wanting."[27] Pater tacitly accepted this criticism, for when the second edition of the book was released, it was titled simply *The Renaissance* rather than *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. I would argue that by incorporating these seemingly anachronistic sections in his book, Pater began to transform the Renaissance from a temporal period into a zeitgeist—or, in his words, a "spirit"—that could resurface at any historical moment. Indeed, Pater often speaks of the Renaissance in such terms: he calls it, for instance, an "outbreak of the human spirit" (xxxii). Moreover, Pater explains his inclusion of the "essay on Winckelmann" by saying that even though he lived in the eighteenth century, he "really belongs in spirit to an earlier age" (xxxiii).

These two temporally anomalous chapters of Pater's book are also the queerest. Pater mentions the friendship of Amis and Amile in his account of the "medieval Renaissance" alongside heterosexual couples like Abelard and Heloise, and Aucassin and Nicolette. Pater never defines the exact parameters of the relationship between these two men, but the simple fact that he discusses them alongside other famous lovers clearly implies a parallel.[28] The second "anachronistic" chapter—on Winckelmann—is even more overtly homoerotic. Pater describes how Winckelmann "rediscovered" Greek art on a trip to Italy, and as a result, "a new channel of communication with Greek life was opened for him." Earlier he "had handled the words only of Greek poetry, stirred indeed and roused by them," but he still felt "beyond the words some unexpressed pulsation of sensuous life." With his discovery of Greek sculpture, "suddenly, he is in contact with that life, still fervent in the relics of the plastic art" (118). Winckelmann's "awakening" or "rebirth" is, in Pater's account, explicitly homoerotic. First of all, Pater clearly states that Winckelmann was drawn to Greek art because "its supreme beauty is male rather than female" (123). He then describes how Winckelmann was "seduced" by the sensuousness of these ancient art works.[29] Pater imagines

Winckelmann "finger[ing] those pagan marbles with unsinged hands, with no sense of shame or loss" (143). This is because there is a "serenity . . . which characterizes Winckelmann's handling of the sensuous side of Greek art. This serenity is, in great measure, a negative quality: it is the absence of any sense of want, or corruption, or shame" (142). After describing Winckelmann fingering the pagan marbles, Pater then makes it clear that Winckelmann's interest in Greek art and culture led him to search out other, less imaginative, types of pleasure and seduction. Pater writes that Winckelmann's "affinity with Hellenism was not merely intellectual . . . that the subtler threads of his temperament were interwoven in it, is proved by his romantic, fervent friendships with young men" (123). Pater even quotes a letter that Winckelmann wrote to one of these young men, which states that "our intercourse has been short, too short for you and me; but the first time I saw you, the affinity of our spirits was revealed to me . . . and I found in a beautiful body a soul created for nobleness" (123).[30] Statements like these clearly indicate that Winckelmann's study of Greek culture provided him with a model for living his own life and, more specifically, with a model for imagining his relationships with young men. Pater repeats a comment made by Madame de Staël: she supposedly quipped that "no one had . . . made himself [as much] a pagan for the purpose of penetrating antiquity" as Winckelmann (122).

Pater includes this portrait of Winckelmann in *The Renaissance* despite the temporal anomaly because he felt that Winckelmann, in a sense, *personified* the period. In other words, Winckelmann went through a kind of personal rebirth that was almost exactly analogous to the cultural rebirth that supposedly took place during the Renaissance.[31] Winckelmann rediscovers Greek art and uses it as a model for his own life. Pater's emphasis on the erotic component of Winckelmann's rebirth suggested that a similar phenomenon was characteristic of the Renaissance.

Moreover, it appears that just as Winckelmann looked to ancient Greek culture for inspiration, Pater looked to the Renaissance (and by extension Winckelmann himself) for a model of how to live in the modern world. Richard Dellamora's *Masculine Desire* highlights the role that Winckelmann plays in Pater's text: Dellamora contends that "Winckelmann is the fulcrum upon which Pater's history of the artistic spirit turns. Having recovered the glories of Greek life and art, Winckelmann simultaneously gives birth to the modern spirit" (65). This movement from past to present is made evident in a single passage from the text. Pater asserts that Winckelmann "reproduces for us the earlier sentiment of the Renaissance. On a sudden the imagination feels itself free. Here, surely, is that more liberal mode of life we have been seeking so long, so near to us all the while" (118). This statement is particularly interesting on account of its temporal slippages. Pater uses those slippages to imply that insofar as Winckelmann, in the eighteenth century, managed to reproduce the "earlier sentiment of the Renaissance" by freeing his imagination, he can provide a model for "that more liberal mode of life" in the modern world. Winckelmann thus becomes, in the words of Bullen, "a conduit for classical culture, translating it from the past into the present" (279).

The rationale for Pater's strategic intervention should by now be apparent. As Pater worked to detach the period from its strictly temporal moorings, he simultaneously stressed the connection between that period and his own. So if Pater is, on the whole, somewhat more restrained than Symonds in his rhetoric and in his references to specific sexual practices, he is also in some ways more radical than Symonds, at least insofar as he emphasizes the relevance that the Renaissance's "more comely way of life" had for his own time and implies that this "spirit" might again be "reborn" in the modern world.

The myth of a "queer" Renaissance was not simply the product of Victorian historiographers like Symonds and Pater. It was also articulated through the sexological writings of people like Havelock Ellis, the most prominent pre-Freudian sexologist. In his 1895 study *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis argues that researchers can learn much about homosexuality by studying the Renaissance, that "in modern Europe we find the strongest evidence of what may fairly be called the true sexual inversion."[32] As evidence, Ellis mentions several historical figures whom he adjudges to have been "homosexuals": Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Marlowe, Francis Bacon, and James I. He explains that "as the Renaissance developed, homosexuality [became] more prominent among distinguished persons" (31).

Ellis provides two reasons for why sexual inversion would be so widespread during the Renaissance. First, he claims that sexual inversion is common in people with artistic temperaments. According to this logic, since the Renaissance witnessed a blossoming of the arts, it would also have witnessed a blossoming of homoerotic practices. Ellis suggests that when "the Renaissance movement [in the arts] was reaching England . . . it brought with it, if not an increase, at all events a rehabilitation and often an idealization of homosexuality" (41). This same association can be found in Oscar Wilde as well. In reviewing Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy*, Wilde claims that "the Renaissance had for its object the development of personalities, the perfect freedom of the temperament in matters of art, [and] the full development of the individual."[33] In this passage, the "full development of the individual" seems to have the same homoerotic overtones that it had in Symonds's work (via Burckhardt). Moreover, Wilde implies that artistic and sexual freedom were associated with one another: people were allowed to pursue not only their artistic impulses but their erotic impulses as well, thus leading to the individual's full development.

The second reason that Ellis gives for the prevalence of sexual inversion during the Renaissance is the resurgence of interest in classical antiquity. In effect, he sees the Renaissance as harking back to the Greek (and to a lesser extent Roman) way. Greek culture was, as Linda Dowling has shown, often associated with homosexuality in this period. Indeed, Dowling maintains that "homosexuality originally entered Anglo-American consciousness through . . . the ideal of Oxford Hellenism."[34] Given these associations, it is hardly surprising to find that Ellis claims that "the influence of antiquity seem[s] to have liberated and fully developed the impulses of those abnormal individuals who would otherwise have found no clear expression, or passed unnoticed."[35]

Ellis did not simply use history and historical figures to support his theories; he was also involved in shaping the very history that he himself drew on. For example, he tried to promote a broader understanding of the Renaissance by editing the Mermaid series of books on "lesser" early modern dramatists, claiming that "although they may sometimes run counter to what is called modern taste, the free and splendid energy of Elizabethan art . . . will not suffer from the frankest representation."[36] His edition of Marlowe's works exemplifies the kinds of intervention he made. In that volume, Ellis clearly (but quietly) worked to present a queer Marlowe. Ideas about Marlowe's supposed "homosexuality" are essentially based on two pieces of information: first his literary writings, and second the Baines document — the testimony that Richard Baines gave at Marlowe's postmortem trial. According to this document, Marlowe made statements that had atheistic or sodomitical overtones: he was supposed to have said, for example, that "all thei that love not Tobacco & Boies are fooles" and that "St John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and . . . that he vsed him as the sinners of Sodoma."[37] In Ellis's edition of Marlowe's works, he tried to reprint the entire Baines document for the first time in conjunction with Marlowe's literary writings. This ultimately proved too controversial for Ellis's publisher, who decided to elide some of the phrases from the Baines document in the middle of the print run after receiving a complaint from a "well-meaning lady" (209). Ellis later complained in a letter that his appendix had been "mutilated."[38]

Finally, I want to suggest that Ellis's 1890 book *The New Spirit* should be viewed in relation to his edition of Marlowe and his volume on sexual inversion. *The New Spirit* is a strange text in which Ellis purports to describe the emerging zeitgeist of the modern world. As he puts it, "I have tried to obtain and present here a faint tracing of the evolution of the modern spirit, as it strikes a contemporary."[39]

As Ellis sketches the contours of the modern spirit in the pages of his book, it becomes clear that that spirit is, above all, socially tolerant and liberatory; its evolution will lead to such things as “the rise of women” (including their “right to education, freedom to work, and political enfranchisement”) and “unrestrained fellowship . . . without distinction of class” (9, 198). Given Ellis’s other interests, it will come as no surprise that he also sees this spirit as eventually bringing erotic liberation: “In religion and politics we have after a great struggle, gained the priceless possibility of liberty and sincerity. But the region of sex is still, like our moral and social life generally, to a large extent unreclaimed; there still exist barbarous traditions which medieval Christianity has helped to perpetuate. . . . Why should not ‘freedom and faith and earnestness’ be introduced here?” (122). It is significant that Ellis here associates Christianity with the medieval, because he had begun the book by invoking the Renaissance. Although *The New Spirit* is thus primarily about the nineteenth-century zeitgeist, it opens with the following passage: “There is a memorable period in the history of Europe which we call the Renaissance. We do well to give preeminence to that large effervescence of latent life, but we forget that sometimes there have been many such new expansions of the human spirit” (1). Ellis thus directly links “the new expansion of the human spirit” with the Renaissance. He associates the progressive social changes that it promises to bring with this “memorable period in the history of Europe.”

It often seems as if “the Renaissance” is more of a mentality for Ellis than a specific historical moment. His treatment of the period is thus reminiscent of Pater’s treatment of it, for, as I have shown, Pater had already begun to transform “the Renaissance” into a “spirit.” Indeed, Pater often refers to the Renaissance using the same terminology that Ellis himself would later adopt. He frequently describes the period as “that outbreak of the human spirit” (xxxii). Ellis’s *New Spirit* might therefore be seen as a kind of sequel to Pater’s *Renaissance* that makes the implied social and political arguments of the earlier text explicit. So whereas Pater’s *Renaissance* was a historical study with a social message, Ellis’s *New Spirit* is a social treatise rooted in historiography. But whatever Ellis’s actual debt to Pater, both texts would certainly have helped further cement the image of the Renaissance as a period of social and sexual toleration.

Interestingly, Symonds used the title “The New Spirit” for his final essay on the Italian Renaissance — the 1893 work called “The New Spirit: An Analysis of the Emancipation of the Intellect in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries.”[40] Symonds’s appropriation of the moniker was undoubtedly meant to emphasize the socially progressive spirit of the Renaissance and to emphasize its (potential) connection with the present. In the essay Symonds returns to his old ideas and themes and is, if anything, even less "reserved" about the radical nature of the period. He says that there were three factors needed for the formation of the new spirit of the Renaissance: (1) "moral and religious indifference, an attitude of not ungenial toleration towards believers and unbelievers, saints and sinners"; (2) "intellectual indifference, interest in thoughts without regard for the sources whence they came or the particular shade of opinion they denoted"; and (3) "sensuous indifference, an attitude of sympathetic observation toward everything in nature, without false shame or loathing, an openness of sensibility toward all impressions" (438). Despite the fact that the subtitle emphasizes the "intellectual" emancipation that occurred in the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, Symonds spends much of his time discussing the "sensuous indifference" that was also characteristic of the period. In his analysis of Renaissance humanism and art, Symonds claims that "by emphasizing the sensuous elements of life, [the Italians] created a fine aesthetic atmosphere, in which the emancipated personality of the modern man moved freely, feeling at liberty to sport with natural inclinations. Vices and passions had been frequent enough in the medieval period; but then they were recognized as sins and contradictions of the dominant ideal. Now they assumed forms of elegance and beauty, claiming condonation on the score of polite culture" (438).

In other passages of this final essay, Symonds does not simply articulate his vision of the Renaissance as a period of tolerance, he also spells out more clearly his belief that the ethos of the Renaissance will eventually prevail in his own time or in the future. He writes that the "struggle" between "the New Spirit" and "dogmatic theology" may "continue, perhaps for centuries, until the New Spirit shall have thoroughly imbued the modern mind" (444). Although Symonds thus comes to this conclusion through a very different process from Ellis and Pater, the endpoint of all three writers is ultimately quite similar.

If we have begun to appreciate the extent to which these three Victorian writers helped produce the historiographical period of the Renaissance as an epoch of sexual license, we also need to note the complex (and troubling) gendered dynamic involved in its construction. In Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, Venice is personified in feminine terms and described as having become "drunk with the wine of her fornication" and "by the burning of her own passions." Ruskin does not exactly blame the "degeneracy" of the Renaissance on women's sexuality (his description of the cultural shift that took place in the Renaissance is sketched primarily in terms of impersonal forces and is largely devoid of any human figures), but he associates the Renaissance with a distinctly feminine type of sexual depravity through his personification of Venice as a *cortigiana*.

While Symonds rehabilitates the Renaissance in part by focusing on men and hence erasing Ruskin's overt misogyny, he does not really counter that misogyny. In fact, Symonds ends up displacing women's sexuality almost entirely from his portrait of the period. He mentions the "profligacy of the convents" only in passing and dwells only slightly longer on the large number of public prostitutes in Rome during the late fifteenth century. The lack of attention paid to women's sexuality becomes even more striking if we consider that Symonds does include a fairly detailed discussion of female homoeroticism in his writing about ancient Greek culture. Indeed, he makes the potentially radical claim that "Greek logic admitted the homosexual female to equal rights with the homosexual male, and both to the same natural freedom as heterosexual individuals of either species."[41] Symonds's discussion of Italian Renaissance culture does not contain anything analogous to this. His failure to discuss unauthorized female sexuality during the Renaissance is particularly problematic, given Ruskin's prior condemnation of it. Thus, whereas he works to "rehabilitate" male homoeroticism along with his revaluation of the period itself, he does not perform a similar maneuver for women's sexuality.

Ellis follows Symonds in virtually ignoring "female inversion." In fact, his entire historical section on sexual inversion in women is much less thoroughgoing than his section on men. He describes only one prominent figure from the Renaissance in his list: Queen Christina of Sweden. Stating what is perhaps Symonds's unmentioned presumption, he maintains that "in the revival of the classical spirit at the Renaissance it was still chiefly in male adolescents . . . that the homosexual ideal found expression" (198). Ellis's omission becomes all the more troubling in light of his comments about his Marlowe volume, where he condescendingly notes that it was "a well-meaning lady" who caused the "mutilation" of his "appendix." This woman thus comes to stand as a figure for Victorian prudery.

It would thus appear that while writers like Symonds and Ellis attempted to articulate a liberationist ideal through their references to the Renaissance, they failed to counter the misogynist gendered dynamic that Ruskin had promulgated. So while we need to recognize the interventions they made in their own cultural moment, we also need to be aware of how their virtual omission of women helped create a gendered imbalance that has unfortunately persisted to this day.

The main thing that I have tried to suggest in this essay is that there was a complex relationship between the historiographical writing about the Renaissance and the sexological writing that attempted to define and categorize the homosexual. Understanding how these two seemingly distinct cultural projects overlapped is worthwhile for several reasons. First, it helps us put the recent critical efforts to queer the Renaissance in their proper historical perspective. It is not simply the case, as Jonathan Goldberg claims, that "the process of queering the Renaissance has been under way for some time"; rather, it would be more accurate to say that the Renaissance was queered from its very inception.[42]

Scholars have begun to acknowledge the significance of Victorian historiographers like Symonds and Pater. James Saslow, for instance, insists that these two men were "conceptual pioneers of what is now termed gay studies."[43] Likewise, Alan Stewart claims that the Renaissance has been the focus of "disproportionate attention" by historians of sexuality "from John Addington Symonds to A. L. Rowse to Michel Foucault to the current generation of literary critics" and that for many of these writers, "studying the Renaissance" is a means of "self-affirmation."[44] Like Stewart and Saslow, I believe that recognizing the contributions of nineteenth-century writers like Symonds and Pater will help us see that the recent research on early modern homoeroticism is part of long scholarly trajectory. However, the cultural work performed by these writers is not exactly the same as that performed by scholars in "what is now termed gay studies." This is mostly because gay identity did not exist in the same way at the end of the nineteenth century as it does today. Thus to think of Symonds and Pater as gay men who endeavored to affirm their own identity by projecting it onto individuals from the Renaissance is potentially misleading. It would make just as much sense to say that they were trying to understand and formulate what it meant to be gay through their historical research and writing. Moreover, the research of Symonds and Pater was more than simply self-affirmation; it was part of the broader cultural project of forging and validating a collective "homosexual" identity.[45] As George Chauncey puts it, a "central purpose" of the "gay historical reclamation project" is to constitute a "community . . . by constructing a history that provides its members with a shared tradition and collective ancestors."[46]

The value that such historical knowledge might have had in the nineteenth century becomes evident when we look at the lives of people from the period. Take Anne Lister as an example. Although she lived in the first part of the century, she is nevertheless of interest here because she consistently used queer historical figures and texts to negotiate her relationships with other women. In a diary entry for 1823, she notes that "Miss Pickford has read the Sixth Satyr of Juvenal [a text that contains descriptions of both male and female homoeroticism]. She understands these matters well enough." At another point she makes a reference to Tiresias having "tried both sexes" and asks her friend if "she remembered the story?"[47] Similarly, in 1824, when Lister was staying in a boardinghouse in Paris, she was acquainted with a woman named Mrs. Barlow, who "began talking of that one of the things of which Marie Antoinette was accused of was being too fond of women."[48] This seems to have been a ploy on Barlow's part to gauge Lister's interest, and we know that the two women eventually went on to have a sexual relationship. Finally, later in 1824, Anne received a note from a woman named Miss Mackenzie that asked: "Êtes-vous Achilles?" This question is probably meant to imply a comparison between Lister and the cross-dressed Achilles in the court of Lycomedes, but Mackenzie may also be alluding to the homoerotic passion that Achilles had for Patroclus. Whatever the exact meaning, Lister responded by saying that this was "exceedingly well put," and her friend then commented that Lister "was the only one in the house to whom she could have written it, because the only one who would have so soon understood it, that is, who would have understood the allusion to take it that way."[49] These "allusions" are particularly fascinating for their references to both male and female historical figures. It would thus appear that knowledge about male homoeroticism could provide a means of negotiating relationships between women as well as knowledge about female homoeroticism.

What is most striking about the interactions of Lister and her acquaintances is the central role that "queer" history played for them. This is what connects them with figures like Symonds and Pater. Indeed, these examples indicate how historical research about "queer" figures might help foster the creation of same-sex relationships. However, this historical knowledge was useful not only because it enabled queer exchanges but also because it helped provide a sense of individual and collective identity. It is the historiographical equivalent of the slogan "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it." But in this case, the "we" is something being called into being, in part, through identifying queer figures from the past. This type of historiography was not new to the nineteenth century; it can be traced back at least as far as the Renaissance itself. In Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, for instance, there is a scene in which Neptune "explains" his desire for Leander by invoking the homoerotic pastoral tradition paradigmatically expressed in Theocritus's *Idylls* and Virgil's *Eclogues*. He "smiles" and tells "a tale / How a shepherd, sitting in a vail, / Played with a boy so fair and kind / As for his love both heaven and earth pined."[50] This particular explanation is ultimately not unlike the arguments implicitly made by Symonds and Pater in their writings about the Renaissance, or by Ellis in his more "scientific" work. As I noted earlier, the first volume of Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* suggests the historical persistence of homoerotic relations by cataloging supposed homosexuals or inverts from earlier moments in time.

These examples all demonstrate the cultural importance of queer historiography. And while I don't mean to downplay the problems inherent in identifying homosexuals from the past (and conflating, for instance, modern homosexuals with ancient pederasts), I nevertheless want to stress that there is a sense in which, as Halperin puts it, "identification gets at something . . . important: it picks out resemblances, connections, echo effects."[51] This was certainly part of what Symonds, Pater, and Ellis were doing. There are, however, two important things to note about this process. First, their focus on figures from the Renaissance is significant because this historical period was coming to be seen as a high point of Western civilization. Both its cultural prestige and its queerness were accentuated by the fact that the period was figured as the rebirth of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Thus writers like Symonds, Pater, and Ellis were highlighting not just the existence of homoerotic relationships and behavior in earlier eras but their existence in an era that was widely revered for its cultural sophistication. This had the effect of associating homosexuality with civilization itself. I will return to this point later, but for now I simply want to emphasize that this was more than just a way to excuse or legitimate homoerotic relations. It was a way to valorize them. As one early-twentieth-century observer claimed, "Most of the world's genius can be traced directly to the homosexual." Another man who had read Ellis's volume on *Sexual Inversion* said: "I had a feeling I belonged to the elect. I didn't see any reason for being hypocritical about it."[52]

It is also significant that writers like Symonds and Pater focused on the Renaissance because this period was, as I noted at the outset of this essay, in the process of being created. Thus Symonds and Pater were not projecting their ideas onto a preexisting historiographical period but were instead helping articulate what the Renaissance was. The specificity of their intervention will perhaps become clearer if it is contrasted with Victorian historical writing about ancient Greece. As I noted earlier, Dowling has powerfully demonstrated that "Greek studies operated as a 'homosexual code'" in late-nineteenth-century England.[53] If "Renaissance studies" likewise operated as a "homosexual code," there was also a difference in that "Hellenism" was a long-standing historiographical concept dating back at least as far as the seventeenth century, whereas the Renaissance was new and was still being defined.[54]

Although the focus of this essay has been on the queering of the Renaissance by Victorian writers and sexologists, I want to acknowledge that this had an important impact on queer identity. That is to say, the emergent sexological notion of the homosexual was also marked by its association with the Renaissance. Indeed, this may help explain why it is that (male) inverts were frequently characterized as being highly artistic and cultured individuals. Ellis writes that "there cannot be the slightest doubts that intellectual and artistic abilities of the highest orders have frequently been associated with a congenitally inverted sexual temperament." He concludes that the "artistic aptitudes of inverts may . . . be regarded as part of their organic tendencies" and quotes an "American correspondent" (probably Whitman) who explains that "the temperament of every invert seems to strive to find artistic expression."[55] Similar descriptions appear in the writing of other sexologists. For instance, Edward Carpenter paints a portrait of the typical invert, or "Uranian man," in *The Intermediate Sex* (1912). He says that the Uranian is, foremost, an artist: "There is no doubt that . . . a large number of the artist class, musical, literary or pictoral, belong to this description." This is because "the delicate and subtle sympathy . . . which makes the artist possible is also the very characteristic of the Uranian . . . and makes it easy or natural for the Uranian man to become an artist."[56] Ideas about the artistic abilities of homosexuals were not simply propounded by sexologists and people who wanted to validate same-sex desire and relationships. The hostile press headlines that appeared after the trial of Oscar Wilde demonstrate that the notion was much more widespread than that: they read, "So this is what art makes of a man! We thought as much!"[57] In the aggregate, these texts suggest one way in which the notion of the Renaissance (known, of course, as a period of artistic flowering and cultural rebirth) might have helped shape late-nineteenth-century ideas about homosexuality.

Although the notion that homosexuals are drawn to the arts persists to this day, it had a different ideological valence in Victorian England. Indeed, this characterization implicitly worked to counter the degenerative theories of homosexuality popular at the time. Degeneration was an idea rooted in evolution and was essentially a way to explain the existence of all "deviant" persons and behaviors. It was first introduced in the 1850s and was championed by writers like Philippe Buchez, Benedict Auguste Morel, and J. J. Moreau de Tours in France, Cesare Lombroso in Italy, and Max Nordau in Germany. The central tenet of degeneration theory, according to Daniel Pick, was that phenomena like homosexuality, criminality, and mental illness were caused by atavistic reversion to an earlier stage of human development.[58] The theory is predicated on two fundamentally flawed assumptions about evolution, both of which were quite common in the nineteenth century (and continue to have currency today). The first is that evolution follows a path of progressive improvement that leads to greater and greater perfection in the species. The second is that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: all embryos or human beings, in their growth and maturation, recapitulate the evolutionary stages of the species itself. Working from these flawed assumptions, degeneration theorists posited that at any one point in time, certain "deficient" individuals could regress to (or get stuck in) an earlier, retrograde period of development. Moreover, the argument was that although primitive societies might have tolerated such degenerate persons and behaviors, they needed to be eliminated if modern society was to progress and evolve.

The degenerationist theory of homosexuality was propounded by Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). As Harry Oosterhuis puts it, Krafft-Ebing was “deeply influenced by the French psychiatrist Benedict Auguste Morel” and believed that “while reproductive heterosexuality was the result of evolutionary progress, sexual disorders [such as inversion] showed that the natural process could also move backwards in a process of devolution.”[59] Thus Krafft-Ebing thought that “the underlying causes of all perversions remained degeneration and heredity” (61), and “as the leading apostle of degeneration theory in central Europe, he [continued to] stress . . . the role of heredity in the etiology of mental illness until the end of his career” (103). That Krafft-Ebing saw homosexuality as a kind of degeneration or devolution is clearly signaled by the title of the essay that would eventually develop into his magnum opus *Psychopathia Sexualis*: “On certain anomalies of the moral drive and the clinical forensic evaluation of them as probable functional sign of degeneration of the central nervous system.” Krafft-Ebing’s explanation of inversion continued to be influential well into the twentieth century, even though it had been discredited. As late as 1921, Carpenter felt compelled to explain that while much of the early writing by sexologists had “assumed that . . . the leaning of the love-sentiment towards one of the same sex was always associated with degeneracy or disease,” this notion had “been abandoned” (59).[60]

Viewed in this light, claims about inverts’ “natural” artistic aptitudes seem to be a way to identify the positive contribution that these individuals make to society and, thus, to argue implicitly that they are not “degenerate.” The historiographical work on the Renaissance serves a similar ideological function. Writers like Symonds, Pater, and Ellis didn’t just highlight the existence of queer individuals in the past. They highlighted the existence of those individuals in earlier eras that were understood to be the high points of Western civilization. Thus they implicitly argued that since homosexuality had flourished in one of the most artistically advanced and culturally refined moments in Western history, it couldn’t possibly be degenerate.

This line of reasoning wasn’t expressly stated in the texts that I’ve analyzed here, but it certainly seems to underlie the projects themselves. Both Symonds and Ellis grappled with the degenerationists’ theories of inversion at other places in their work. Symonds’s memoirs, for instance, indicate that he read and engaged with the ideas of Krafft-Ebing and Lombroso. At one point, Symonds laments what he sees as their "attempt to refer all cases of sexual inversion to a neurotic disorder."[61] Interestingly, Symonds does not reject this explanation entirely. Instead, he claims that inverts do "exhibit . . . some nervous abnormalities" but also that "poets, men of letters, [and] painters" exhibit these same "nervous abnormalities," and so it is therefore "dangerous" to classify all of these people "with the subjects of hereditary disease" (65). Symonds goes on to say that inversion is best explained as one of the many "variet[ies] of type exhibited by nature" (65). This formulation is significant because it evokes the Darwinian concept of natural selection and implies that inversion is simply one of the many variations (or "varieties") of the human species that are produced by nature and are necessary for natural selection to be successful.[62] Like Symonds, Ellis grappled with the degenerationist theory of inversion. In a section of his book titled "Relation of Inversion to Degeneration," he acknowledges that "in France especially, since the days of Morel, the stigmata of degeneration are much spoken of [and] . . . sexual inversion is frequently regarded as one of them," but Ellis insists that inversion is really only a "diffused minor abnormality" and that "little is gained by calling these modifications 'stigmata of degeneration' " (136). Like Symonds, Ellis explicitly imagines his explanation of inversion as a corrective to the degenerationist explanation, though, unlike Symonds, he does not offer an alternate evolutionary rationale for its existence.

Clearly, history was an important ideological tool in Victorian culture for legitimating same-sex relationships. And history continues to serve a similar function in twenty-first-century American culture. The 2003 Supreme Court decision overturning *Bowers v. Hardwick*, for instance, drew heavily on the history of sexuality. Writing the majority opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy noted that "there are fundamental criticisms of the historical premises relied upon by the majority . . . opinion . . . in *Bowers*."[63] He goes on to explain that although the original *Bowers* decision claimed that there was a "longstanding history in this country of laws directed at homosexual conduct . . . early American sodomy laws were not [actually] directed at homosexuals as such but instead sought to prohibit nonprocreative sexual activity more generally, whether between men and women or men and men" (2). If the *Bowers* decision indicates that historical research continues to provide useful information for the fight for queer rights, it also suggests that queer historiography has to adapt itself to changing cultural and political contexts. Whereas the "queer" historiography of the nineteenth-century was, as I have shown, engaged in contesting the degenerationist theories of inversion popular at the time, the queer history written today must do a different kind of cultural work. In the end, I hope that this essay will encourage scholars and activists to pay more attention to understanding what that cultural work might be.

Notes

I have benefited greatly in the writing of this essay from the comments and advice of several individuals. Margreta de Grazia's work on Renaissance periodization is what first opened my eyes to this subject. I am deeply indebted to her not only for the conceptual framework that underlies this essay but also for her help in refining my ideas. I also want to thank Valerie Traub for inviting me to present a version of this essay at an MLA panel titled "Historicizing Queerness." I also thank both Peter Stallybrass and Phyllis Rackin for their usual incisive reading and comments. Finally, there are a number of other people who have contributed in their own ways to the writing process, especially Julie Crawford, David DeLaura, Mario DiGangi, Eliane Glaser, Nick Radel, and Alan Stewart.

1. For explorations of the nineteenth-century invention of the Renaissance, see, for example, J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). For influential early writing on the subject of Renaissance historiography, see Lucien Febvre, "How Jules Michelet Invented the Renaissance," in *A New Kind of History and Other Essays*, ed. Peter Burke (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); and Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1948).
2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1990). See also David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 51.
3. Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), 1.
4. Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 2.
5. Although the present essay focuses on the work of Ruskin, Symonds, Pater, and Havelock Ellis, there are many other writers who helped create the period's vision. Symonds and Pater form the backbone of this essay because they were the only English writers to produce book-length studies of the Renaissance. I have included Ruskin because he was an important precursor for both of them. Ellis, for his part, was the most well-known English sexologist of the period. A more thorough treatment of this subject would include discussions of Wilde, Arnold, Swinburne, and Rossetti, all of whom were important. Wilde's *Portrait of Mr. W. H.* is particularly relevant. None of these other writers, however, produced a sustained, book-length commentary about the Renaissance.
6. Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 124.
7. *The Stones of Venice*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903), 11:135. Hereafter cited in the text.

8. John Addington Symonds, "The New Spirit: An Analysis of the Emancipation of the Intellect in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries," *Fortnightly Review* 53 (1893): 428.
9. Ferguson, *Renaissance in Historical Thought*, 204–5.
10. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 51.
11. Ferguson notes that "the moral chaos of the age . . . is an ever-recurrent theme" (*Renaissance in Historical Thought*, 203) in *The Renaissance in Italy*.
12. John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Modern Library, 1935), 1:9. Hereafter cited in the text.
13. Ferguson has suggested that "the lusty sinners of the Renaissance appealed to [Symonds]" (*Renaissance in Historical Thought*, 203).
14. Arthur Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse* (New York: Dutton, 1922), 93.
15. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (New York: Penguin, 1990), 283.
16. Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 289.
17. Walter Pater, *Uncollected Essays by Walter Pater* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Press, 1903), 9, 3.
18. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Hereafter cited in the text.
19. "The Crystal Man," in *Selected Writings of Walter Pater*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press), x.
20. Kenneth Daley, *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 11. Daley also notes that "only a handful of critics . . . have addressed the subject beyond isolated observations and general reflections."
21. Richard Ellmann, "Overtures to Wilde's *Salomé*," *TriQuarterly* 15 (1969): 54.
22. Wendell V. Harris, "Ruskin and Pater—Hebrew and Hellene—Explore the Renaissance," *Clio* 17, no. 2 (1988): 175. Hereafter cited in the text.
23. Pater's rearticulation of Ruskin's ideas therefore prefigures Symonds's treatment of Ruskin in *Renaissance in Italy*. For example, whereas Pater claims that it was the "search after pleasures of the senses and the imagination" that "impelled" people "beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal" (16), Symonds would later claim, as I have already shown, that it was the "demand for imaginative excitement" and "extravagant" forms of "pleasure" that gave the Italians "so terrible a name among the nations for unnatural passions" (1:240). These formulations are ultimately quite similar to one another, with the primary difference being that Symonds specifies exactly the type of "unchristian" behavior he is referring to. It may well be on account of statements such as this that Pater felt that Symonds's book lacked "reserve."
24. Daley, *Rescue of Romanticism*, 59. He also notes that Pater "self-consciously uses and transforms Ruskin to distinguish his own moral, aesthetic, and sociopolitical values" (13); in particular, Pater "tries to establish homosexuality as a positive social identity" (6).

25. Bullen notes that "Pater's Renaissance myth derives from those of his predecessors, particularly the French" (*Myth of the Renaissance*, 273).
26. It is worth saying that this passage also continues Pater's reformulation of Michelet insofar as Pater characterizes the Renaissance as involving both the "outbreak of reason and the imagination" and the "assertion of the liberty of the heart" (16).
27. Emilia Pattison, "Unsigned Review in the *Westminster Review*," in *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1980), 71.
28. My point here is somewhat similar to the one made by John Boswell. He writes that although there is "no hint of sexual interest between the knights," their "love for each other explicitly takes precedence over every other commitment" (quoted in Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990], 150). Dellamora claims that Pater "suggests the sexual connotation in the male friendship" (151). This seems to me to be overstating the situation. Pater does not, however, completely avoid the issue of sexual relations between men, as the section on Winckelmann makes clear. Indeed, Pater sets up a kind of trajectory between the male friendship of Amis and Amile, and Winckelmann's more explicitly homoerotic relationships.
29. In this section of the book, Pater contrasts Winckelmann's responses to sculpture and architecture and thereby continues his implicit critique of Ruskin. If Ruskin preferred the latter over the former, Pater reverses this evaluation. He approvingly states that Winckelmann preferred sculpture because it deals "immediately with man" and with "the human form" (136), whereas architecture is "not really sensuous at all" (135).
30. The letter goes on to discuss explicitly the sexual nature of their relationship.
31. Dellamora states that "Winckelmann himself embodies the Renaissance spirit" (*Masculine Desire*, 65).
32. Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: Davis, ca. 1901), 30.
33. Quoted in Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 2.
34. Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), xiii.
35. Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 30. I believe that the assertion here is somewhat guarded because Ellis does not want to appear to be advocating the abolition of the study of Greek literature and art. He qualifies this statement by saying that the study of the classics does not necessarily produce an inverted sexuality but that "the subject of congenital sexual inversion is attracted to the study of Greek antiquity because he finds there the explanation and the apotheosis of his own obscure impulses" (35).
36. This quotation appears in an advertisement for the series at the back of the volume on Marlowe (*Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Havelock Ellis, with a general introduction by J. A. Symonds [London: Unwin, 1887]).
37. *Baines Note*, BL Harley MS.6848 ff. 185–86.
38. Havelock Ellis, *My Life: Autobiography of Havelock Ellis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 209.

39. Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (Washington, DC: National Home Library, 1935), 30.
40. Symonds, “New Spirit,” 427–44.
41. John Addington Symonds, *Male Love: A Problem in Greek Ethics and Other Writing*, ed. John Lauritsen (New York: Pagan, 1983), 70. It must be said, however, that despite Symonds’s claim for a kind of parity between these two modes of homoeroticism, he himself does not spend nearly as much time on descriptions of women’s sexuality. As a justification, he explains that “sexual inversion among Greek women offers more difficulties than we met with in the study of paiderastia. This is due, not to the absence of the phenomenon, but to the fact that feminine homosexual passions were never worked into the social system, never became educational and military agents” (70).
42. Jonathan Goldberg, ed., *Queering the Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 1.
43. James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 14.
44. Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xii–xiv.
45. In addition to reinscribing a hierarchical gender bias, these writings may also have reinscribed a normative vision of homosexuality. On the related topic of Ellis’s heteronormativity, see Nick Radel, “Havelock Ellis’s Literary Criticism: Canon Formation and the Heterosexual Shakespeare,” unpublished manuscript. I thank Nick for sharing his work with me.
46. George Chauncey Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 286.
47. Anne Lister, *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister (1791–1840)*, ed. Helena Whitbread (London: Virago, 1988), 268, 235–36.
48. Anne Lister, *No Priest but Love: Excerpts from the Diaries of Anne Lister, 1824–1826*, ed. Helena Whitbread (Otley, UK: Smith Settle, 1992), 31.
49. Lister, *No Priest but Love*, 26.
50. Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (London, 1598), Er.
51. David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 15.
52. While these comments make the psychic value of these historical characterizations quite evident, they also usher in a kind of elitism. Both statements are mentioned in Chauncey’s *Gay New York*, 285.
53. Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality*.
54. This dichotomy becomes apparent if we look at the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s entries for these terms. The word *Renaissance* did not enter into the English language until the 1840s, whereas *Hellenic*—defined as “of or pertaining to the Hellenes or Greeks”—can be traced all the way back to John Milton. However, it seems as if the

historiographical notion of Hellenism may nevertheless have undergone an important period of formation or crystallization in the middle years of the nineteenth century. The research on this topic has not, to my knowledge, been done yet.

55. Ellis, *My Life*, 295.
56. Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (New York: Kennerley, 1921), 102.
57. This headline is quoted by Louis Auchincloss in "Pater and Wilde: Aestheticism and Homosexuality," *New Criterion* 10, no. 2 (1991): 79. For a broader discussion of how aestheticism itself served as a coded term for homosexuality in late-nineteenth-century England, see Dellamora's *Masculine Desire*. What I am trying to suggest here is that these more general associations may have been colored by the emergent notion of the Renaissance.
58. Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848–c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
59. Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 52.
60. In *The Intermediate Sex*, Carpenter provides a brief sketch of the history of queer passions that focuses mostly on artists (from Theocritus and Sappho to Michelangelo and Shakespeare, and finally to Tennyson and Whitman), stating that he hopes this "may suffice to give the reader some idea of the place and position in the world of the particular sentiment which we are discussing: nor can it fail to impress him . . . with a sense of the dignity and solidity of the sentiment, at any rate as handled by some of the world's greatest men" (46). He focuses primarily on classical antiquity and the Renaissance; he avers that it is "with the Renaissance in Italy and the Elizabethan period in England [that the love of comrades] once more comes to evidence in a burst of poetic utterance" (43).
61. *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 64.
62. See Oliver S. Buckton's discussion of Symonds's memoirs in *Secret Selves: Confession and Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), esp. 70–71. Joseph Bristow also mentions in passing that Symonds resisted the idea that inversion was a type of "degeneracy": he writes, "Symonds refused to believe, *pace* Krafft-Ebing, that the Urnings were necessarily degenerate." See Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 135.
63. U.S. Supreme Court, *Lawrence et al. v. Texas*, No. 02–102 (2003), 7. The entire decision has been published at www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/02pdf/02–102.pdf (accessed August 9, 2007).