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ARTICLES (PEER REVIEWED)

A Queer Search for Ancestral Legitimacy: English-Language Gay Lists as Historical Memory Before 1969

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This article examines the making of ‘gay lists’—identifying (in)famous historical figures as queer by assembling wide-ranging roll calls—as a longstanding mechanism of historical memory. There is a tendency in the present cultural imagination to conceive of queer history as something new. Not the history of queer people, who may, we are often assured, be identified in all places and all times as a historical constant. But history as told by queer people. Actively *queered* history, one might say, where queering serves as a verb that implies reading with intent to develop a queer connotation.¹ A common assumption is that queer history did not emerge until the zeitgeist of the 1970s codified ‘queer’ as a political identity in America, and consequently any history was constructed in accordance with a newly developing identity politics. When linked with a narrative that uses the Stonewall Uprising to mark the beginning of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement, this sensibility creates an impression of queer lives in the first half of the twentieth century and earlier as universally suppressed, contained or otherwise isolated. The research provided here seeks to demonstrate how prior to the above-delimited timeline, individual English-language writers used their knowledge of the past to contextualise queer subjects and place them within historical narratives.

The application of particular labels ascribing gender and sexuality to figures who lived and died before those labels were introduced is generally considered poor practice. ‘Queer’ is broad enough to draw fewer complaints than, say, homosexual, but it still seems prudent to clarify its use in this article. The term here applies to any individual expressing gender affiliations or sexual desires that noticeably deviated from contemporary societal expectations. It is intentionally broad, and in keeping with norms of the eras examined, considers gender and sexuality as facets of identity that inform each other. Also in keeping with the norms of

the eras examined, certain expressions of gender are highlighted as deviant and privileged with notation in historical sources over others; individuals mentioned are most likely to have been men engaged in same-sex relations or viewed as men engaging in gender-nonconforming dress or expression. While certain lists include women or figures visibly affiliating themselves with a gender other than the one they were assigned by society, most of the people whose names have been preserved can be classified as men, as is the case for most of the field of history.

The question of ‘identity’ is tangential to this article. Various documents examined herein have already been identified as queer by other researchers. There are different arguments on whether it is ahistorical to claim a sense of queer community identity before the late twentieth century. This issue will not be directly addressed here, though to a certain extent the extant data self-select in favor of those people who collected disparate materials to create a sense of community. Said self-selection was often performed in the context or connection with the slowly growing homophile movement that began to flourish in the wake of sexology’s growth as a field, though not all of the documents included can be described as homophile publications. Consequently, though this researcher only set a hard upper bound on the period under examination, the majority of the documents examined in this paper were published after 1900. Research was limited to English-language documents from the outset so the works examined might have the potential to be in conversation with each other. However, this article does not argue that all of these documents are expressing different facets of the same immutable identity that all of the writers shared. All of these documents are in line with what may be considered queer from a modern perspective, and approaching them as a collective offers modern readers the chance to examine the multiplicity of past ideas that are contained in our perspective.

Here I choose to approach queer history *as* history, and not as an area of queer theory to be expanded using the literary analysis techniques that have often featured in the methodological toolbox of queer studies. In addition to materials from the field of queer history, the following analysis considers work on historical theory and historiographical trends. Queer history has not been immune to the evergreen attitude that queer theory is a young field of study, as discussed by Gayle Rubin in her 2003 lecture ‘Geologies of Queer Studies: It’s Deja Vu All Over Again’. In the context of queer history, this prevailing sensibility of the field as eternally just-born means that there has been little specific analysis of overall methodologies, trends and specifics. Where it would not detract from analysis, comparisons to wider historical methodology and trends have been incorporated to see how queer history has followed or defied them. The historiographical emphasis is an area that this author feels is particularly ripe for further analysis, as queer history both requires and offers unique tools and perspectives for historical thinking.

Gay lists are one of the most enduring and under-examined threads of not just queer history but revisionist history in general. ‘Gay’ here is used as a general catch-all term for ‘men and women known to be attracted to other members of their sex’, though the various collections of biographies and collected encyclopedic entries have had their own criteria and focuses, including where the trans* community has joined in on the fun.² These lists are reminiscent of the sort of history that has been described as ‘add women and stir,’ the sense that the most widely known narratives have excluded certain figures and the way to fix it is to chop those figures out of their original context and shove them in. While frequently perpetuated and noticed, the concept has not really been named, and so this article sticks to ‘gay lists’ for ease of referral and in the casual spirit of their use.

Despite the lack of a particular term, it would be ludicrous to claim the concept has not been studied at all. Christopher Nealon identifies gay lists as ‘the simple yet enduring practice’ which provides both content for and evidence of Gayle Rubin’s ethnic model of homosexual identity.³ Gerard Koskovich’s pre-history of queer history notes that ‘medical, psychological, and legal publications dealing with sex not infrequently featured historical details...of the supposed prevalence of homosexuality among noted figures of the past.’⁴ Michael Bronski criticizes the modern iterations of the trend, which he calls the ‘family album approach’, as

‘appealing because it provides a sense of identity and history, but... ultimately misleading.’⁵ (He also makes the ‘add one woman and stir’ comparison.) Rictor Norton’s *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, though occasionally descending into disdainful critiques of constructionist theory, spends an entire chapter on ‘The Great Queens of History’ and the people who have named them, in one section collecting lists as evidence for a shared notion of communal identity as far back as the sixteenth century.⁶ He proceeds to trace them even further back in languages other than English, noting that Boccaccio’s *Genealogia Deorum* of 1375 provides a list of homosexual pairs among the gods, and that several twelfth century debates ‘cite the loves of Jupiter and Ganymede, Apollo and Hyacinthus, Silvanus and Cyparissus.’⁷

Norton makes an extensive argument for gay lists as both markers and makers of community, positing the notion that these lists exist to refute a homophobic society’s idea of an inherent queer inferiority as a secondary purpose, behind establishing cultural unity. In the name of cultural unity, his definition of lists draws on citation of both mythological and historical precedent. History and myth do very much blur in queer history, not just in time periods where it is common for mythology to serve as record or precedent, but also in more recent events elevated to mythological status. One example is Oscar Wilde’s infamous speech while being cross-examined during his 1896 trial on the subject of the ‘love that dare not speak its name’, invoking Plato, Michelangelo, Shakespeare and David and Johnathan.⁸ The phrase itself originates from a poem, read as part of the cross-examination, written by Lord Alfred Douglas, the man whose affair with Wilde led Douglas’s father to take Wilde to court. The trial in general and this speech in particular have been the primary sources of Wilde attaining a certain fabulous status in queer discussion.

However, invoking historical and mythical references as the same analytical category is reductive. I have chosen to distinguish the presence of mythological figures in lists and references from the presence of historical figures. The body of available evidence certainly expands when regarding myth as an aspect of history. But to conflate them is to obscure certain variations in the ways icons from each are collected and deployed, in favor of only examining the places where they blur.

Some historical surveys, like the reprinted editorial featured in *Female Mimics* or Wilde’s speech, do principally act as political defense. Others are, as Norton champions, for the sake of building a cultural identity. Sometimes lists are invoked simply for the sake of gravitas, to add to the solemnity of the situation. Often, thanks to the flexibility of interpretation and the communal aspects of building queer identity, they are many things to many readers. Including, because this is the queer community and camp humor is a way of life, something to be questioned and perhaps mocked.

In the first edition of the second volume of ONE magazine, a monthly homophile publication created by a group that split off from the Mattachine society to pursue more radical goals, the editors publish an ‘excerpt from a reply to a letter in which a friend asked for a donation to ONE’. The letter announces:

I’m not sending you a check to help support the magazine you wrote about simply—and I hope I won’t offend you by being quite frank about it—because I can’t see what possible need there is for such a magazine or how it could possibly do any good. I haven’t seen it, to be sure, and so have no real right to form any judgement about it; but I can imagine the kind of articles that will appear in it: a certain percentage of them will drag in various tag ends of Plato and infer, without being able actually to say so, that he advocated homosexuality as an institution; others will point to great artists, writers, and musicians of the past who are known to have been homosexual, and the inference will be: “See! these men were great because they were homosexual!”... It will be a beating of the drum with no one around to hear.⁹

Clearly, gay lists do not provide a universal sense of cultural unity, nor do all members of the queer community perceive them as adequate. Though given that the unquoted portions of this letter took a similarly negative attitude toward potential magazine articles quoting psychologists and went on to defend the writer’s disdain as being principally owed to what they saw as the magazine’s inability to attain

circulation outside the homosexual community, it can hardly be said there was a *particular* enmity towards historical lists. The letter may be read on its own as a wider example of attitudes towards homophile organizing methods of the time.

One thing the letter does make clear regarding gay lists is the sense that they are ubiquitous. If the evocation of past events is understood to qualify as history, they are perhaps the most frequent and widespread examples of engagement with queer history. Both the lists themselves and commentary on them—such as this letter—represent a long conversation full of tension over questions of legacy, inheritance, and validity. This is not a conversation conducted only among identified members of the gay community, or the queer community at large.

In a 1913 pamphlet on the subject of ‘Walt Whitman’s Anomaly’, W.C. Rivers—who did not, himself, identify as homosexual—makes an extensive case for Whitman possessing an ‘inverted sexuality.’ His chief subject of analysis is Whitman’s own poetry. But he also makes use of biographical information and excerpts from letters in the spirit of a full examination of Whitman’s life. One inconsistency Rivers addresses, describing it as ‘another thing that cannot quite be accounted for,’ is ‘the absence of any recorded liking for literature of a type similar to his own *Calamus*’—the piece of Whitman’s that Rivers identifies as having the most explicitly gay content.

Yet although he talks about Socrates, and although translations and classical dictionaries must have been within his reach, and although plenty of better-educated friends could have pointed out to him his forerunners, he has nothing to say of Sappho, of the *Banquet*, or of other Greek literature in which the influence of the homosexual may be seen. Several times he descants on Shakespeare, but there is no word (or rather, no word preserved) of the *Sonnets*.¹⁰

This passage is not sufficient evidence of absence concerning Whitman’s own sense of history to analyze what narratives he may have been familiar with—note the awareness of ‘no word preserved’—but it does provide some extremely interesting insights on an outsider’s expectations of queer history. In the foreword of the book, Rivers calls the current common approach towards any literary discussion of sexual behavior ‘dumfounded and nihilistic; in the case of inversion, very markedly so.’¹¹ Rivers goes on to optimistically predict that the advancements in sex study made by the Freudian School will help combat prejudice against examining ‘the human sex-instinct’, and sees himself as filling a void that exists because ‘scientific study of sex’ was not contemporary with Whitman’s writings.¹²

Despite Rivers’s understanding that his undertaking is treading fairly uncharted ground, he is confident in his belief that Whitman, as a gay man, should be interested in reading known gay literature and seeking out his ‘forerunners’. Rivers also assumes his readers will believe this, to the point where they will find his failure to find any evidence of Whitman’s familiarity with a gay literary tradition as a fault in his argument. It is also taken for granted by the author that Shakespeare’s sonnets and the works of Sappho depict homosexual attraction. The idea that these works are emblematic of queer literature is widely accepted today, even as this status is presented as a sign of recent enlightenment where queer acceptance and visibility is concerned.¹³

Rivers’s impulse to assume the drive towards listing is an inherent aspect of homosexuality is perhaps a product of his time. Though the most famous data from the sexologists’ sexuality research primarily focused on psychological causes, Norton sources many of the lists cited throughout the twentieth century to notable sexologist Havelock Ellis’s work *Sexual Inversion*, in particular the chapters where John Symonds assisted.¹⁴ The material for Ellis’s book largely came from Symonds’s own experience as an art historian specializing in the Renaissance and Ancient Greece.¹⁵ One wonders if the preoccupation of queer history (or at least queer mythology) with these periods today is at least partly due to the specialization of a primary practitioner at a time when the field of queer history was far narrower.

Symonds's own book, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, has very little to do with lists. At one point he translates a historical survey composed by French author Dr Paul Moreau in order to rebut his arguments, but speaks of general arguments rather than repeating specific names.¹⁶ In this case, the lack of lists may be attributed to the framing of Symonds's attempt to appeal to doctors and jurists of the present day and rebut several arguments against homosexuality where ethics are concerned. This pattern of multi-disciplinary approaches—turning to questions of psychology, legality and religion—recurs in the homophile magazines of the mid twentieth century.

Another book of the same time period, which features numerous lists, is Edward Prime-Stevenson's *The Intersexes*. It did not attain the reach of Havelock Ellis's book, with its limited printing in Italy of only 125 copies. But there are several compelling reasons for using it as a case study in queer historiography. The first is that it exists, and that its limited printing has made it so far somewhat *under*-examined (the Internet has solved many accessibility issues). The second reason is that the text was assembled as 'a very full, carefully systemized, minutely *complete* History of Homosexuality... reviewing it in every social phase, every relationship to human civilization'.¹⁷ While his success in this endeavor is arguable, the scale of his ambition is compelling. The third reason is that Prime-Stevenson remained in correspondence with several other upper-class 'Uranians'¹⁸ during the writing of the book, sending some of them copies afterwards, and consulted a work annually published in German and edited by Magnus Hirschfeld with numerous contributors.¹⁹ The book may therefore be understood as a document constructed from communal knowledge. If it is not directly linkable to some of the communal queer archives of the late twentieth century, it at least provides an interesting study in contrasts.

A fourth reason to study the book, and one that applies most directly to the other materials examined in this paper, is that it was assembled in direct response to Prime-Stevenson's experience that there were very few English-language texts about homosexuality available for perusal. His motivations extend beyond merely making information more accessible to English-speaking readers. The author uses 'Anglo-Saxon' to both succinctly describe the Anglophone world and integrate eugenic and racial ranking ideology, sometimes falling into and sometimes arguing with the common scientific thinking of the time that viewed sex habits as a subset of racial differences. Symonds called out the inconsistency of these same arguments in his *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, insisting 'it is illogical to treat sexual inversion among the modern European races as a malady, when you refer its prevalence among Oriental peoples and the ancient Hellenes to custom'.²⁰

Both Symonds and Prime-Stevenson are in conversation with racialized ideas of sex and ideas of the exotic, and addressing this topic in full would be the work of another complete paper. The exchange of ideas among eugenicists and sexologists deserves extensive study. While lacking the space to explore it extensively, this analysis works to remain conscious of its influence. Some places the racist influence is very obvious, such as Prime-Stevenson's comparison of 'savage' and 'refined civilizations' as he catalogs the appearance of homosexuality across 'the Brute World; in Primitive, Barbarous, and Semi-Civilized Man'.²¹ The most obvious influence is his tendency to list figures from European history and only glance at general societal trends from anywhere else.

The book's lists appear for different purposes. Often they are broad catalogues to illustrate a larger point, such as the one filling out the section on 'Degrees of Uranianism in Men' (reproduced on page seven in full).²² In the opening chapter, Prime-Stevenson lists out several famous examples of close friendships between men that have shaped the course of history to demonstrate the necessity of a history of what he refers to as 'similosexual' (homosexual) attraction. His analysis of 'the types of great "friendships", of passionate intimacy, between two men of sensitive mutuality' makes the bold argument that 'however displeasing to the reader, let it be affirmed that all real friendships between men have a sexual germ'.²³ This claim is especially fascinating and delightful to those historians and literature analysts commonly chastised for projecting homosexual implications onto male friendships.

Chapter eight provides the categories of ‘The Uranian and the Uraniad in the Military and Naval Careers; in the Athletic Professions: and in Royal, Political and Aristocratic Social Life: Types and Biographies’, sorting out several examples of (in)famous men and women he identifies as connected to his definition of ‘similisexuality’.²⁴ As the book is 640 pages long, historiographic analysis will focus largely on this one chapter in the name of conciseness.

Prime-Stevenson distinguishes the female ‘Uraniad’ from the male ‘Uranian’, and spends separate chapters on the ‘General Physical and Psychological Diagnosis’ of each.²⁵ Thereafter, he lists both men and women in chapters grouped by topic, spending the last eleven pages of chapter eight (seventy pages long) on topics such as ‘The Royal Uraniad’, ‘The Soldier-Uraniad’, Catalina de Eraso, Angela Postovoitow and ‘The Uraniad as a Sailor’.²⁶ He is interested less in confirmed same-sex attraction, and more in evidence of gender-nonconforming behavior, providing some interesting examples—such as a catalogue of numerous female sailors, including nearly three thousand on the Brittany coast of France alone.²⁷ His inclusion and criteria raise interesting points about the connection of women’s sexuality to their social roles and the overlap of marginalized histories.

Prime-Stevenson’s broad categories of lists allow him to make specific arguments with each section, in addition to providing an organizing schema. Chapter eight opens by pushing back against ‘the notion that the man-loving man is always effeminate in body and temper’, and goes on to argue that the army and navy are actually *more* likely to contain men and women inclined towards same-sex attraction.²⁸ In this argument, there is initially a brief listing of names—Vasco de Gama, Cornelis van Tromp, Magellan, Domingo Magalhaes, and ‘[o]ne of the most eminent of English naval commanders of the century just closed’, whose involvement in a homosexual scandal was apparently suppressed vigorously—before expanding into general analysis of British naval life.²⁹ The general analysis draws from specific letters to describe contemporary reports of homosexual activity in the British navy, but cites a novel, *Roderick Random*, to make the case ‘[t]hat the British navy long ago was remarked for homosexual cultures’.³⁰ Prime-Stevenson continues using fiction to bolster his historical evidence, relating specific reports in the form of recopied or translated news articles with names redacted or synopses of particular novels and operas, as well as making general reference to sexuality-related scandals by mentioning that ‘several such dramas may be fresh in the minds of reader of this study’.³¹

Since Prime-Stevenson’s book had such a limited printing, and therefore a limited effect on which figures recurred on gay lists throughout the twentieth century, some of his lists are often a surprising mix of familiar names and what today seem to be outrageous claims. There is certainly something to be said for establishing a historical figure as gay through dint of repetition. The list of male friendships he claims as homosexual relationships, for example, contains the familiar figures of Alexander the Great and Hephaestion, and the much less familiar figures of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, Horace Walpole and Sir Henry Conway, and General Gordon and Lord Arthur Hamilton.³²

One aspect of his writing more useful to a study of history than historiography are the parts where Prime-Stevenson applies a critical lens to certain ethical problems that persist within ‘Uranian’ circles thanks to the refusal of polite society to address or acknowledge homosexuality. Some of them, like the threat of blackmail, are familiar and expected to a twenty-first-century reader. Others are unusual and convey a much more practical and complex view than is generally assumed of the subculture of homosexuality at the end of the nineteenth century. For example, Prime-Stevenson devotes several pages to analyzing the phenomenon of the ‘Soldier-Prostitute’, and the issues that arise when soldiers are viewed by wealthy men as preferred sexual partners because the livelihood of a soldier or sailor is dependent on the liaison not becoming public.³³ He also discusses the potential for abuse within the chain of command, exacerbated by a need to maintain silence, something that remains an issue within various militaries today.³⁴

One particular list on degrees of Uranianism in men on pages 77-78, referenced earlier in this paper and reproduced below in full, brings both the issues of complexity and of unexpected names to the forefront. After providing the list, Prime-Stevenson proceeds to sort some of these figures into either complete Uranians, with 'sexual desire *only* towards the male', or those with 'a strongly masculine sexualism... mixed, illogically, with powerful similisexual instincts... the individuality seems to be fairly split into two', that is, men who are recorded as sometimes being gender non-conforming, or finally those 'examples of almost complete and normal manliness of sex-instinct'.³⁵ Prime-Stevenson states that the classification of 'minuter grades' are a staple of other contemporary sexological texts—given that *The Intersexes* is confirmed as one of numerous books on sexology acquired by Alfred Kinsey for his sex research, we can reasonably trace the threads of this classification theory down to Kinsey's more famous scale of sexual attraction.³⁶

The... man out of any sort of similisexual tendency, usually is termed Dionian, Dionid, or Dionist. Hence the use of such qualifying phrases in speaking of modified Uranians... minuter grades can be dismissed by the average reader as needlessly precise. The complete Uranian, the Dionian-Uranian, and the (similar) Uranian-Dionian cover all essential grades between intersex and entire masculinity. They take in all the degrees of similisexual love and its physical expression, in hundreds of instances of complete or partial expression. Such types are Alexander the Great, Martial, Beethoven, Raffaello, Oscar Wilde, Robespierre, William Rufus, Nero, Lord Byron, Sir Isaac Newton, Gilles de Rais, David, Jonathan, Pope Alexander VI, General Tilly, Prince Eugene of Savoy, Henri III, Shakespeare, Platen, Cellini, Heliogabalus, Jérôme Duquesnoy, St. Augustine, Molière, Frederick the Great, Michel-Angelo, Charles XII of Sweden, Peter the Great, Montaigne, Pausanias, Beza, Tschaikevsky, Grillparzer, Erasmus, Bishop Atherton of Waterford, Winkelmann, Servetus, Gonsalvo de Cordova, Socrates, Hfilderlin, Abu Nuwas, Hadrian, the Caesars, Alexander I of Russia; innumerable other indisputable instances of the emotion among, especially, notable minds and men; met under all environments, in all professions and social standings.³⁷

Some of these names are familiar evocations in the context of queerness to a modern reader. Others are more obscure. Others are familiar, but for reasons far removed from queerness—most notably, Robespierre and Gilles de Rais. Prime-Stevenson provides evidence for all of them.

The inclusion of Robespierre and Gilles de Rais—most famous for the lives they took—raises an instinct to protest. In the pages following this list, Prime-Stevenson devotes a section to 'The Uranian's Widely-Graded Moral Nature'.³⁸ This adds a certain unexpected complexity to his lists, given that list-making operates as any history must in a complex and often hostile political climate and those compiling lists today popularly choose to laud famous names with a demonstrable positive influence.³⁹ Coming from a time when same-sex attraction was far more closely associated with degeneracy, it seems strange that he would yield any ground on the subject of morality. He does state directly: 'There is no truth in the idea that the similisexual⁴⁰ is necessarily morally bad', but perhaps even more important for his argument as a whole is the statement preceding that one that the ethical nature of 'similisexuals' ranges from the finest moral and spiritual feelings and practices to the feeblest sense of morals of any kind; much as is the case with the Dionian man.⁴¹ From there, the argument does fall back into reductive contemporary patterns that link promiscuity and morality, but as a whole, it encapsulates the book's argument for complexity.

The historical lists of *The Intersexes* serve two purposes: offering evidence that 'many lofty types of all philosophies, all creeds, too many respected officials and model private citizens have lived and died uranistic' and attempting to integrate historical examples of Uranians and Uraniads so closely with accepted historical narratives that those alive today *must* be accepted on their own terms.⁴² Whether those terms are good or bad is positioned squarely on the individual, not on any deficiency of character linked to same-sex attraction. Arguing *only* for the inclusion of admirable individuals or ignoring any unique consequences of the gay

lifestyle—such as military prostitution—is recognized as being as false of a narrative as the inverse, of using weaponized accusations of homosexuality to disparage and discredit people.

The defining quality of a gay list is its biographical emphasis, which is both a weakness and a strength as a mechanism of memory. One aspect of the weakness of these lists as a primary form of queer history was identified by Gordon Rattray Taylor in his chapter contributed to a 1965 book, *Sexual Inversion* (no tangible relation to Ellis's book of the same name). Taylor notes that for the medieval period in England 'direct evidence [of homosexuality] is almost nonexistent', and instead of assuming homosexuality itself was nonexistent, points out that 'it is only when eminent persons displayed overtly homosexual traits that history recorded the fact.'⁴³ Lists are often, as a consequence, a Greatest Hits of the most obvious, visible signs of homosexuality in already prominent figures.

Moreover, given that historians of queerness often look for histories of prosecution, they contain primarily visible signs of homosexuality that were unfavorably looked upon. Therefore, behavior that was seen as excusable, normal, or insignificant, even if it might indicate queer experiences, is likely to have passed without comment and therefore remain overlooked. Taylor points out that many female saints and holy women in the early Christian church dressed in men's attire and lived as men with Church approval, citing

The Acta Sanctorum includes accounts of 'Brother Marinos', whom the other monks supposed to be a eunuch from his voice and beardlessness, who was even accused of seducing a local girl and who turned out at death to be female; of *frater Pelagius monachus et eunuchus*, also a girl; or Marina, Margarita, and others. Other instances noted by Delcourt (1961) include Athanasia of Antioch, Eugenia of Alexandria, Apollinaria, Papula of Gaul, and Hildegonde of Neuss. Hagiography includes such stories of girls dressing as men as those of Thekla and Glaphyra. An especially striking instance is that of Joan of Arc; her refusal to resume female attire was the primary cause of her condemnation to death.

The story of the monk only outed upon death suggests a reminder of figures like Dr. James Barry, Billy Tipton and Charley Parkhurst, who had all socially transitioned fully at the time of their respective deaths to the point that they were only outed as trans* post-mortem when their bodies were examined.⁴⁴ And yet, today, despite a movement for greater awareness of transgender history, the most well-known figure from Taylor's list remains Joan of Arc, cited in the title of Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors*. She remains 'especially striking' for being put to death for cross-dressing, which perhaps illustrates a tendency of trans* history to expand on looking for prosecution, as mentioned above, to the extent that violence against trans* bodies becomes in itself a search criteria for trans* history.

The acceptance of Brother Marinos into a male space as an assumed eunuch provokes an interesting question in trans* history, though Taylor does not follow this thread. If there is an acceptable way to explain failures in social gender presentation, how may deliberate transgression be folded into the fabric of society? Though Piotr O. Schulz points out that castrati and eunuchs are not necessarily the same thing, he also documents how the practice of ritual castration has appeared in several different societies with different but specific roles and duties attached to the position of the eunuch in each one.⁴⁵ Eunuchs are perhaps one of the best-documented examples of gender transgression and complication throughout time, and one of the least-examined. What other room has been made for gender flexibility using their context that we are not aware enough to recognize today?

Taylor directly links the lack of evidence for homosexuality with the lack of sources as a whole, pointing out that 'the kind of source material we really need... diaries and travel books in which the social scene is reported frankly and in detail' are not available until the seventeenth century.⁴⁶ This lack of sources brings us to the enduring popularity of lists as a form of queer history, and their strength—biographical practice is one of the most wide-reaching and accessible forms of history as a whole. One could not reasonably outline the culture of the average Macedonian soldier without extensive archaeological research and extrapolation,

much less discuss associated dynamics of sexuality and relationships. Alexander the Great, however, lived a life whose particulars are well-documented, including his relationship with Haephestion. Another item that differentiates the fantastical evocation of ancient societies and myth from the collection of historical figures in queer discourse is that cultural differences ultimately draw a clear distinction between the life of modern fantasizer reaching for antiquity and the object of fantasy. To see oneself in a mythic era requires a removal from the present day—effectively, a severing of continuity even as one feeds a sense of connection. Lists do not, by themselves, carry this same distinction between then and now. They simply require the person collecting or repeating names to find some kind of resonance with those subjects; some sense that even separated by the centuries, there are parts of this historical figure's life that allow for connection and solidarity.

Historical lists in the queer community are, ultimately, a search for ancestors. Despite the claims of dozens of studies there is no gay gene; queer identity is not hereditary, queer genealogies cannot be proved through a DNA test. Unlike many other minority identities, a biographical tradition cannot be traced through a family tree. A queer genealogy must be constructed through identification with archived materials. Recently, the conversation around queer archives is shifting to center the possibilities of data inherent in mess, chaos, space, and other unconventional spaces that record information.⁴⁷ Queer archives, whether modern or identified from materials of the past, are deeply built on emotional affect. As, in fact, is most queer studies, which is fundamentally and constantly circling questions of identity, resonance, impact, emotional attachment, and political power or lack of it as a motivating factor. Consequentially, lists demonstrate an attachment to a very particular kind of Euro-American great man—or, to steal a phrase from Norton, 'great queens'—theory.

David Halperin makes the point in *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* that identification with historical figures is not driven by accurately describing the identity of the figures in question as much as it is by the historian's own desire serving as a form of cognition, recognition of the self through recognition of the past.⁴⁸ Consequently, the desire to identify with the potential for greatness that has shaped the 'great man' structure of history is further compounded within queer history's sphere. At the end of the nineteenth century, white, European upper-class men of leisure who had the resources to undertake historical searches most often found themselves accumulating more examples of white European upper-class men of leisure. As these lists are passed down, through repetition, they are transmitted through a cycle of curators and re-curators hungry for good presentations of people they can resonate with in the pages of official history written by power.

Lists are at once the very simple desire for ancestors whose chosen contents are shaped by the very complicated factors that shape the rest of the world—colonialism, patriarchy, classism, classicism, inheritance. They are a very simple presentation of names that allows each generation to return to the complex remaining evidence of particular lives and re-examine endlessly relevant questions of self, of gender, of sexuality, of love, of identity. They offer a chance for definition through redefinition, and an argument against the concept of the unnatural or degenerate—if a large enough catalog of greatness is assembled, surely it will be impossible to argue with. Lists also require no extensive historical training to read and repeat and claim, so they have a very low barrier of access. At the same time, gay lists are reductive, easy to remember, easy to spout, easy to flinch from. Who after all *wants* to be identified with someone remembered for murder? They are much more comfortable as historical mechanisms of valorizing, which is how most listicles use them today.

Despite certain structural weaknesses of gay lists, and despite the conflicting sentiments influencing how communities relate to them, it seems unlikely that they will go away if only the serious historians ignore them long enough. Gay lists feed a compelling, enduring desire for legitimacy within the queer community; legitimacy here used deliberately, as in, to be someone's legitimate child. Historian and theorist Alan Munslow argues that histories should be understood as 'desiring-mechanisms... the means by which

historians give voice to their future needs, their present dreams as well as their aspirations of the past'.⁴⁹ The introduction to this paper mentioned the unique tools and perspectives queer history offers the field of historiography. The phenomenon of gay lists exists as both a tool for articulating a desire for continuity within the queer community, and a perspective on the past that is not a failure or glossing-over of historical rigor but a long-standing folk methodology in its own right.

Endnotes

- 1 For an example of queering in practice, see Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, 'Queering History', *PMLA*, vol 120, no 5, 2005, pp1608–1617. <https://doi.org/10.1632/003081205X73443>
- 2 See, among others, Dell Richards, *Lesbian Lists: A Look at Lesbian Culture, History, and Personalities*, 1st ed, LGBT Thought and Culture, Alyson Publications, Boston MA, 1990; Leigh Rutledge, *The Gay Book of Lists, 3rd Edition*, 3rd edition, Alyson Books, Los Angeles, 2003; Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1996.
- 3 Christopher S. Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall*, Series Q, Duke University Press, Durham, 2001, p5.
- 4 Gerard Koskovich, *The History of Queer History: One Hundred Years of the Search for Shared Heritage*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1850gww.7>
- 5 Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, Revisioning American History, Beacon Press, Boston, 2011, pxiv.
- 6 Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity*, Cassell, London and Washington, 1997, p220.
- 7 *ibid*, p220.
- 8 'Testimony of Oscar Wilde', accessed February 6, 2021, <https://famous-trials.com/wilde/342-wildetestimony>.
- 9 'Letters', *ONE*, January 1954, p23. Emphasis in original.
- 10 W. C. (Walter Courtenay) Rivers, *Walt Whitman's Anomaly*, George Allen & Co, London, 1913, pp60–61.
- 11 *ibid*, p2.
- 12 *ibid*, p3.
- 13 Roisin O'Connor, 'William Shakespeare Was Undeniably Bisexual, Researchers Claim', *The Independent*, 23 August 2020, sec Culture, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/shakespeare-bisexual-sexuality-evidence-plays-a9684056.html>.
- 14 Norton, *op cit*, p218.
- 15 *ibid*.
- 16 John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics: Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion, Addressed Especially to Medical Psychologists and Jurists*, London, 1896, p30.
- 17 James Gifford, 'What Became of the Intersexes?', *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, October 2011, p25 and Edward Prime-Stevenson, *The Intersexes: A History of Similosexualism as a Problem in Social Life*, 1908, pxi.
- 18 'Uranian' is a then-contemporary term for a man attracted largely or exclusively to other men, a term coined by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in booklets published from 1864–65. Despite the book's title referring to 'similosexualism', Prime-Stevenson seems only to have used this term for the concept of same-sex attraction as a whole, and not as an identifier.
- 19 Gifford, *op cit*, p27.
- 20 Symonds, *op cit*, p35.
- 21 Prime-Stevenson, *op cit*, p39.
- 22 Uranianism being another contemporary term for homosexuality.
- 23 Prime-Stevenson, *op cit*, pp33; 35.
- 24 *ibid*, p184.
- 25 *ibid*, pp72; 123.
- 26 *ibid*, pp243–245; 251–253.
- 27 *ibid*, p253.
- 28 *ibid*, p184.

- 29 *ibid*, p185. The eminent English naval commander in question was most likely Horatio Nelson.
- 30 *ibid*, pp185-186.
- 31 *ibid*, p194.
- 32 *ibid*, pp33-34.
- 33 *Ibid*, pp212-226.
- 34 *Ibid*, p222.
- 35 *ibid*, p78. Emphasis in original.
- 36 Gifford, *op cit*, p27.
- 37 *ibid*, pp77-78.
- 38 Prime-Stevenson, *op cit*, p81.
- 39 Adam Schubak, Redbook. '26 Famous Gay People in History – LGBTQ Rights Movement Facts for Pride Month', accessed 10 August 2022, <https://www.redbookmag.com/life/g21288608/famous-gay-lgbtq-people-in-history/?slide=1>, 'Famous Gay People', accessed 10 August 2022, <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/gays.php>, 'Famous Gay People – History's Most Influential LGBT People', accessed 10 August 2022, <https://www.out.com/famous-gay-people>; Biography Online, 'Famous Gay People', accessed 10 August 2022. <https://www.biographyonline.net/people/famous/gay.html>; Chris Flynn, 'The Richest 10 of the Most Powerful Gay Men of All Time', 19 October 2015, <https://www.therichest.com/most-influential/10-of-the-most-powerful-gay-men-in-history/>. While search engines are algorithmic and influenced by many factors, including individual search history, it is still worth noting that these were all in the top ten results when I searched 'gay people history' on DuckDuckGo on 10 August 2022.
- 40 'Similixual' being Prime-Stevenson's seemingly preferred term for people experiencing same-sex attraction.
- 41 Prime-Stevenson, *op cit*, p81.
- 42 *ibid*, pp81-82.
- 43 Gordon Rattray Taylor, 'Historical and Mythological Aspects of Homosexuality', in Judd Marmor (ed), *Sexual Inversion: the Multiple Roots of Homosexuality*, Basic Books, New York, 1965, pp140-164.
- 44 Irvine Loudon, 'Scanty Particulars: The Strange Life and Astonishing Secret of Victorian Adventurer and Pioneer Surgeon James Barry', *British Medical Journal*, vol 324, no 7349, 1 June 2002, p1341; Diane Middlebrook, 'The Double Life of Billy Tipton', *Allegro*, vol 113, no 4, 11 April 2013, <https://www.local802afm.org/allegro/articles/the-double-life-of-billy-tipton/>; 'Thirty Years in Disguise: A Noted Old Californian Stage-Driver Discovered. After Death. To Be a Woman', *New York Times*, 9 January 1880, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1880/01/09/98876579.pdf>.
- 45 Piotr O. Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History*, trans. John A. Broadwin and Shelly L. Frish, Princeton, c2001, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106016665173>.
- 46 Taylor, *op cit*, p141.
- 47 Anjali Arondekar et al, 'Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion', *Radical History Review*, no 122, May 2015, pp211–231. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2849630>
- 48 David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, p15.
- 49 Alun Munslow, *A History of History*, Routledge, New York, 2012, p81. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203102565>