



Theories of Homosexuality as Sources of Bloomsbury's Androgyny

Author(s): Barbara Fassler

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter, 1979), pp. 237-251

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173559>

Accessed: 27/09/2009 03:23

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Signs*.

Theories of Homosexuality as Sources of Bloomsbury's Androgyny

Barbara Fassler

Critics have studiously ignored, hesitantly noted, or firmly denied connections between homosexual behavior and an androgynous theory of character in early twentieth-century Bloomsbury writers and some of their associates.¹ However, theories familiar to Bloomsbury hold homosexuality to be caused by a unique fusion of masculine and feminine elements. Notions about androgyny were closely intertwined with ideas about homosexuality. This study will set out those theories, discuss Bloomsbury's knowledge of them, and explore some implicit and explicit links between homosexuality and androgyny.² It is meant to be a contribution to our understanding both of the history of ideas about sexuality and of the conditions of creativity.

At the turn of the century in Britain, a heavy stone in the average educated person's collection of notions about homosexuality was the belief that the practice had been widespread among the ancient Greeks. Diatribes damned both the sexual practice itself and the Greek "paganism" through which it had allegedly poisoned the modern age.³

1. See, e.g., Carolyn Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), p. 118. Heilbrun qualifies her position in "Further Notes toward a Recognition of Androgyny," in *Women's Studies* 2, no. 2 (1974): 144-45. This particular issue of *Women's Studies*, entitled *The Androgyny Papers* and guest edited by Cynthia Secor, has several other essays that offer theoretical critiques of too close an association of androgyny and homosexuality.

2. Among the historians who have also studied these theories are Stephen Kern, *Anatomy and Destiny* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1975); Viola Klein, *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology* (1946; reprint ed., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement, 1864-1935* (New York: Times Change Press, 1974); Montgomery Hyde, *The Love That Dared Not Speak Its Name: An Historical and Contemporary Survey of Homosexuality in Britain* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970; London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1970, as *The Other Love*).

3. E.g., see the editorial by James Douglas in the *Sunday Express* (August 19, 1928), quoted in Vera Brittain, *Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1968), p. 56.

On the other hand, apologists tried to make popular respect for the glories of Greek civilization extend to Greek homosexual friendships as well. Greek influence appeared in the widespread use of "Uranian," "Sapphic," or "Arcadian" as names for homosexual love. In addition, Greek references within the title of a book sometimes formed, for the knowing, a clue to the contents: for example, John Addington Symonds's *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1896), André Gide's *Corydon*, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson's *After 2000 Years* (1930), or the poetry volumes *Ionicá* (William Cory, 1858) and *Ioläus* (ed. Edward Carpenter, 1902). Booksellers, not misled by this last title, nicknamed it the "Bugger's Bible."⁴ Finally, because Sappho or male friends like Ulysses and Patroclus, Apollo and Hyacinthos, Poseidon and Pelops, Dionysos and Ampelos, Zeus and Ganymede, Hercules and Hylas, were frequently evoked in discussions of homosexuality, the mention of these Greeks even in a general or ambiguous context imparted at least the intimation of homosexuality. Thus, in Strachey's definition of Elizabeth, the Hercules-Hylas image, suggesting homosexuality, is linked to the other complex ways in which Elizabeth combined the masculine and the feminine:

Was she a man? She gazed at the little beings around her, and smiled to think that, though she might be their mistress in one sense, in another it could never be so—that the very reverse might almost be said to be the case. She had read of Hercules and Hylas, and she might have fancied herself, in some half-conscious day-dream, possessed of something of that pagan masculinity. Hylas was a page—he was before her . . .⁵

Plato, recognized as the spokesman for Greek homosexual love, may well have been, for many, their first introduction to homosexuality, as he was for the 16-year-old Virginia Woolf, who "learned all about sodomy" from Plato,⁶ and for the 16-year-old Lytton Strachey, who, after his first reading of the *Symposium*, experienced "surprise, relief, and fear to know that what I feel now [for school friend George Underwood] was felt 2000 years ago in glorious Greece."⁷

4. Timothy D'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English "Uranian" Poets, 1889 to 1930* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 21.

5. Lytton Strachey, *Elizabeth and Essex* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1928), p. 29. For a discussion of the ways in which Strachey creates Elizabeth as the androgyne, see Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, who, however, does not touch on the interrelationship of androgyny and homosexuality in Strachey.

6. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 104.

7. Lytton Strachey, "The Story of Sir John Snooks, KT, Written by Himself in the Reign of Our Sovereign Queen Elizabeth and in the Year of Our Lord 1586," entry for

Plato's influence upon late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theory about homosexuality was acknowledged by such writers as Otto Weininger.⁸ The concept presented in the *Symposium* is that the original human beings came in three sexes: male, female, and hermaphrodite (i.e., composed of both masculine and feminine elements). Halved by the gods, each human then sought his or her missing half. Any possible facetiousness in Plato's construct tended to be lost, and detached pieces, such as the existence of a "third sex" in nature, or homosexuality as restoration of primal wholeness, appear, like disembodied ghosts, behind the many disparate theories and images of homosexuality popular in Bloomsbury's day.

Turn-of-the-century theorists were keenly aware that homosexuality had been, and in some circles still was, regarded as a moral degeneracy resulting from evil choices (including masturbation) on the part of the criminal/sinner. Against this background, a large group of medical and psychological theorists emphasized that a majority of homosexuals are at least predisposed, and probably compelled, toward their sexual preferences. This group included Richard von Krafft-Ebing,⁹ whose works were specifically described in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. In that novel, Krafft-Ebing's theories form the most likely basis for a father's understanding of his child's homosexuality. Also well known was Karl Heinrich Ulrichs,¹⁰ whose term "Urning" was widely applied to homosexuals and whose work, if not known in its own form, would have been familiar to Bloomsbury and others through the lengthy summary provided by John Addington Symonds.¹¹ Symonds contributed (though his name was excised by friends after his death) to *Sexual Inversion*, published as part of *The Psychology of Sex* (1898–1902) by Havelock Ellis, one of the most important and best known theorists of homosexuality.

November 13, 1896, in *Lytton Strachey by Himself*, ed. Michael Holroyd (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 82.

8. Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character*, authorized trans. from the 6th German ed. (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1906), p. xi.

9. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Conträren Sexualempfindung* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1889); trans. and paraphrased in John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1896; reprinted in Daniel Webster Cory, ed., *Homosexuality: A Cross Cultural Approach* [New York: Julian Press, 1956] [hereafter cited as Cory], pp. 3–100). Notes on theoreticians will list the most important theoretical prose work. For a fuller bibliography, see Smith or Hyde.

10. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *Memnon: Die Geschlechtsnatur des mannliebenden Urnings, Eine Naturwissenschaftliche Darstellung* (Schleiz, 1868), trans. and paraphrased in Symonds.

11. John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) and *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891), first printed in editions of ten and fifteen copies, respectively, and then issued in larger, pirated editions by the clandestine press of Leonard Smithers in 1896 and 1901. Many works on homosexuality have a similar printing history, which accounts for the fact that in modern critical writing one sees various publication dates for the same work. Smith gives specific printing history for many of the works.

By 1918, Ellis was being read and discussed in Lytton Strachey's circle,¹² including Virginia and Vanessa Woolf, as well as Clive Bell, all of whom, since 1908, had known of, and freely talked about, the homosexuality of Lytton and other Bloomsbury members.¹³ Virginia and Leonard Woolf's library contained a number of Ellis's works (though not *Sexual Inversion*), most acquired in 1926.¹⁴ Vita Sackville-West, who was Virginia's close friend from about 1923 until Woolf's death, and for part of that time sexually intimate with Woolf,¹⁵ owned Ellis's *Psychology of Sex* at least by the late 1920s; her son remembers that as a child he was forbidden to read it.¹⁶ Other theorists who emphasized hereditary and congenital factors were Edward Carpenter and his life-long friend Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson.¹⁷ Dickinson's private papers contained very explicit revelations of his theories about homosexuality; surely these were known to E. M. Forster, Dickinson's intimate friend, inheritor of his papers, and biographer.¹⁸ Probably they were also familiar to Forster's friends, including Woolf, Sackville-West, and Strachey. Since such theories removed blame from the homosexual, they were viewed by apologists as a positive advance over earlier theories,¹⁹ and they were useful in attempts to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults.²⁰

12. At a weekend gathering which included Saxon Sidney-Turner and Clive Bell, Noel Olivier was, as Strachey reported, "avidly reading Havelock Ellis on sexual inversion" (quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, rev. ed. [London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1973], p. 739).

13. Virginia Woolf, "Old Bloomsbury" (written 1921–22), in *Moments of Being*, p. 172; see Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 1:128.

14. Washington State University, *Catalogue of Books from the Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf* (Brighton, East Sussex: Holleyman & Treacher, 1975), sec. MH misc.

15. Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1973), p. 207, and personal letter to this author, July 4, 1978. Volume 3 of Nicolson's edition of the Virginia Woolf letters (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979) shows that the sexual intimacy lasted at least three years. For an outline of the stages of the friendship, see my article, "The 'Bond of Love' in the Novels of Victoria Sackville-West" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1976), pp. 42–43.

16. Letter from Nigel Nicolson to the author, December 8, 1976.

17. Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908; reprinted in Cory, pp. 139–204); Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, *After 2000 Years* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930); see also Dennis Proctor, ed., *The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson and Other Unpublished Writings* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1973).

18. Forster's biography of Dickinson is tactfully reticent on the subject (E. M. Forster, *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* [New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1934]).

19. Symonds, *Problem in Modern Ethics*, in Cory, pp. 10–11; Carpenter, in Cory, pp. 163–64; Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 3d rev. and enlarged ed. (Philadelphia: Davis Publishing Co. [1901], 1933), vol. 3, *Sexual Inversion*.

20. This struggle, by the time Bloomsbury members reached adulthood, had been successful in France and Italy but not in England, where male homosexuality (not les-

Besides excusing homosexuals from moral responsibility for their sexual preferences, hereditary and congenital theories satisfied a strong urge in early twentieth-century thinkers to apply to the study of human affairs the scientific methods which had transformed other areas of learning. Typical of this emphasis was Edward Westermarck, who in 1906 gave thanks for "the fresh light which the scientific study of the sexual impulse has lately thrown upon the subject of homosexuality."²¹ Especially relevant to the study of homosexuality were scientific hypotheses about the means by which hereditary traits pass from one generation to the next and about the stages through which gender differentiation emerges in the human embryo.²² Accordingly, biological explanations of homosexuality focused upon embryology and heredity. Endocrinology was then too immature to play a large role in explanations of homosexuality, though Ellis did tentatively propose that "internal secretions" might be linked to homosexuality in ways yet unknown.²³

The embryologic aspect was expressed in what I shall call the "trapped soul" concept, common to most theorists except Freudians and recognized by Freud himself, in 1920, as the theory "commonly depicted in popular expositions."²⁴ Edward Carpenter's explanation was typical: In the homosexual, the embryo's "emotional and nervous regions" develop along a masculine line, while the outer body develops along a feminine line, or vice versa.²⁵ This construct appeared not only in Carpenter but also in Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing, Symonds, and many others. It formed the basis for the self-concept of Dickinson, who wrote: "It's a curious thing to have a woman's soul shut up in a man's body but that seems to be my case."²⁶ The trapped soul theory also formed the basis for the self-concept of Radclyffe Hall and of the main character in *The Well of Loneliness*.²⁷ The same image informed the delineation of M. de Charlus by Marcel Proust, whose significance to Bloomsbury members is

bianism) remained, until 1964, a crime punishable by imprisonment. For a history of this struggle, see Lauritsen and Thorstad (n. 2 above).

21. Edward Westermarck, "Homosexual Love," a chapter from *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas* (1906; reprinted in Cory, p. 138).

22. E.g., see Ellis's specific use of these two foci (p. 312).

23. Ibid.

24. Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," first published in *Zeitschrift*, vol. 6 (1920); reprinted in *Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, 5th series (Vienna, n.d.); in *Collected Papers*, trans. Barbara Louw and R. Gabler (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1924; reprint ed., New York: Basic Books, 1959), 2:228, 230.

25. Carpenter, in Cory, p. 169.

26. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, unsent letter of 1902 to Ferdinand Schiller, quoted by Dickinson in his "Recollections," written in 1921, published in Proctor, p. 111.

27. Lovat Dickson, *Radclyffe Hall at the Well of Loneliness: A Sapphic Chronicle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 24.

illustrated by Virginia Woolf's mention of him in *A Room of One's Own* as her single example of a "wholly androgynous" modern writer.²⁸

Varied causes were ascribed to the formation in utero of a trapped soul. Some posited the kind of hereditary predisposition that also causes idiocy and insanity. Others blamed some accident to the embryo. Finally, some maintained that such a fetus is a natural and valid "third sex." The entrapped soul, which had a gender and which was heterosexual, was believed to determine sex-object choice, physical characteristics, and mental traits.

Otto Weininger stated categorically that, "in all cases of sexual inversion, there is invariably an anatomical approximation to the opposite sex."²⁹ Other theorists were willing to admit that a homosexual might not necessarily have the physical appearance of the opposite sex, but most believed it likely, and some wanted to infer that any masculine-looking woman or feminine-looking man must therefore possess at least latent homosexuality. These beliefs bring homosexuality close to hermaphroditism. Homosexuals and theorists of homosexuality not uncommonly used the word "hermaphrodite" to describe their own condition, at least metaphorically, and some of the mythology surrounding the hermaphrodite was very closely associated with homosexuality. A. J. L. Busst has shown how the androgyne-hermaphrodite figure was an optimistic ideal in the early nineteenth century but became, in the late part of that century, a symbol of disillusionment and withdrawal associated with homosexuality as well as with "cerebral lechery, demoniality, onanism, sadism and masochism."³⁰ Lytton Strachey's bedroom fireplace at Ham Spray, where he moved in 1924, was decorated by Boris Anrep with a mosaic of a reclining hermaphrodite.³¹

Not only homosexuals' physical but also their personality traits were believed to correspond to the sex of the soul. The popularity of this concept was admitted by Symonds, who, however, denied that it is necessarily so in all cases.³² Ellis's case histories of homosexuals emphasized such characteristics as, for example, a lesbian's mannish walk, love of hunting, or childhood tomboyishness. Ellis could not help noticing that not all homosexuals show such opposite-sex traits; however, he affirmed that such people do indeed have an "organic instinct" for opposite-sex behavior but deliberately avoid acting out such tendencies.³³ Freud,

28. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1927; reprint ed., New York: Random House, 1932), vol. 2, *Cities of the Plain*, p. 13; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; reprint ed., New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1957), p. 107.

29. Weininger (n. 8), p. 45.

30. A. J. L. Busst, "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century," in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), p. 39.

31. Holroyd, *Biography*, p. 867.

32. Symonds, *Problem in Modern Ethics*, in Cory, p. 11.

33. Ellis (n. 19), p. 229, 222.

though his theory of the bisexuality of all persons controverted the trapped soul concept, could not resist, in his case histories, discussing whether, for example, a lesbian possessed masculine physical or mental traits.³⁴

But in the context of such theories about homosexuality, the scholar must recognize that, even when there is no explicit sign of a homosexual orientation, or when the character specifically denies having had a homosexual relationship (as does, e.g., the androgynous Laura in Sackville-West's *No Signposts in the Sea*),³⁵ novelists undoubtedly understood that opposite-sex character traits would almost inevitably carry intimations of homosexuality. In fiction, such intimations would also contribute to the multifaceted combination of masculinity and femininity which occurs in the androgynous character.

The trapped soul theory is linked to another image cluster pervasive and important both within the discussions of homosexuality and within the work of Bloomsbury: the body as clothing for the soul; actual clothing as a disguise, as a symbol of one's true sex, or as a prop to one's role; and masculine or feminine behavior as either a cover for, or a revelation of, the soul's true sex. The link to transvestite dress is obvious, and, indeed, transvestism was, to the theorists, a common mark of homosexuality. Case histories often noted that a homosexual, as a child, had loved to dress in clothes of the opposite sex; Stephen, in *The Well of Loneliness*, dressed in a masculine way; Radclyffe Hall and Vita Sackville-West both assumed masculine garb during periods of their lives.

Vita's transvestism indicates the kind of symbolism that opposite-sex clothing carried, within the context of current theories about homosexuality. It was expedient in Vita's travels with her lover Violet Keppel Trefusis to avoid recognition—so the masculine garb was a disguise, meant to fool the public. However, to Vita it was also a dress which made her feel free, restored to her true self.³⁶ Masculine garb gave her a chance to act out her long-standing wish to be a man so that she could inherit her beloved family estate and enjoy the other privileges society gave to men. Cross dressing as an expression of one's homosexuality and a liberation of one's soul seems to have been especially common among women, but men felt it, too. Lytton Strachey, for example, loved to dress as a woman for party high jinks;³⁷ he expressed at times the wish that he could change sexes back and forth;³⁸ and during the writing of *Elizabeth and Essex* he actually had at times the fantasy that he was a woman.³⁹

34. Freud, "Psychogenesis," pp. 212–13.

35. Vita Sackville-West, *No Signposts in the Sea* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961); see Fassler, pp. 289–90.

36. Nicolson, *Portrait*, p. 16.

37. Holroyd, *Biography*, pp. 538–39.

38. Lytton Strachey, letter to Clive Bell: "What a pity one can't now and then change sexes" (quoted in Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, p. 128).

39. Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, p. 915.

The same clothing and acting images appear in the dramas Bloomsbury members loved to write and perform at their private parties.⁴⁰ The dramas drew heavily upon that Renaissance dramatic tradition of the sex-disguised character Heilbrun has discussed as a literary influence upon Bloomsbury's androgyny, but which I believe also served some of these men and women as a vehicle through which, in the privacy of their own company, they could give frank and witty expression to their homosexuality as a contradictory union of body and soul.

The clothing-acting imagery arose so readily in connection with the trapped soul theory that it occurred to others outside the Bloomsbury circle, even (or perhaps especially) to the tritest of versifiers. For example, in 1928, the year *Well of Loneliness* was tried for obscenity, Jessie B. Heard wrote for Hall a sonnet which begins:

Since Nature clothed her in abnormal dress
Designed and fashioned of complexity
Then she must wedded be to truthfulness
And of pretense be wholly free.⁴¹

The same image cluster appears again and again in the work of Bloomsbury members and their associates. Woolf describes Orlando as a person whose "sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive."⁴² In fact, the whole of *Orlando* is built upon a series of ever more integrative combinations of role playing versus reality, disguise versus revelation, the clothed self versus the naked or inner self.

Working within the widely current public belief that heredity determined a large range of both physical and mental traits,⁴³ most theorists believed that homosexuality would be more likely where there was a family history either of homosexuality itself or of hysteria, insanity, imbecility, or criminality.

A variation on this theory held that Greeks (both ancient and modern), Italians, French, Spaniards, Persians, and other southern or oriental peoples were more strongly disposed to homosexuality than in-

40. Between 1924 and 1932, Strachey "would sometimes produce one-act farcical playlets for his guests to perform, in which all the men were women, and all the women men, and the ingenious plots hurried the actors into a bewildering, hermaphroditic confusion" (Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, p. 871); see also *ibid.*, p. 897, on the play *A Son of Heaven*, begun in 1913 and performed in 1925.

41. Brittain (n. 3), p. 80.

42. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928; reprint ed., New York: New American Library, 1960), p. 144.

43. See Donald Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press), p. 12; H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1958), pp. 17, 36-39.

habitants of more northerly and westerly lands. Freud formalized such theories, as did Richard Burton, who in 1886 appended to his *Arabian Nights* an important essay on homosexuality, in which he marked out on the globe certain "sotadic zones," southern and oriental, in which there was the greatest blending of masculine and feminine in the personality and, correspondingly, the greatest homosexuality.⁴⁴ Accordingly, southern or oriental images are rife in explicitly homosexual poetry, as in George Cecil Ives's prose poem of 1897 where homosexuality is termed "a strange plant from a Southern clime alone upon an English field growing."⁴⁵

Within such theories and images, a section of Sackville-West's 1928 poem *The Land* can be understood to deal, not only with dangerous and fascinating heterosexual passion, but also with the lesbian passions which she both gloried in and feared.⁴⁶

Sullen and foreign-looking, the snaky flower,
 Scarfed in dull purple, like Egyptian girls
 Camping among the furze, staining the waste
 With foreign color, sulky-dark and quaint,
 Dangerous, too, as a girl might sidle up,
 An Egyptian girl, with an ancient snaring spell,
 Throwing a net, soft round the limbs and heart,
 Captivity soft and abhorrent, a close-meshed net,
 —See the square web on the murrey flesh of the flower—
 Holding her captive close with her bare brown arms.
 Close to her little breast beneath the silk,
 A gipsy Judith, witch of a ragged tent,
 And I shrank from the English field of fritillaries
 Before it should be too late, before I forgot
 The cherry white in the woods, and the curdled clouds,
 And the lapwings crying free above the plough.⁴⁷

Virginia Woolf, shortly after she found out about her friend Strachey's homosexuality, in a teasing letter pictured him as an "oriental prince" in a flowered dressing gown.⁴⁸ The association of southern or oriental peoples with homosexuality is thus both a formal theory and a popular myth, so common that it crops up in poetry, casual references,

44. Sigmund Freud, "Sexual Aberrations," pt. 1 of *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sexuality* (1901–5), trans. A. A. Brill, in *Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 556; Richard Burton, *Arabian Nights*, reprinted in Cory, p. 209; also quoted in Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, in Cory, p. 57.

45. George Cecil Ives, *Book of Chains*, 91, reprinted in Smith (n. 4), p. 112.

46. Fassler, pp. 24–26.

47. Vita Sackville-West, *The Land* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1928), pp. 49–50.

48. Letter of August 30, 1908, in Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, *Letters*, ed. Leonard Woolf and James Strachey (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1956), p. 15.

and jesting letters. In this context, Woolf subtly gives “Chinese eyes” both to Mrs. Dalloway’s daughter Elizabeth and to Lily Briscoe. In these portraits, as in Strachey’s portrait of Elizabeth, images linked to current theories of homosexuality are used to suggest the combination of masculine and feminine qualities in the androgynous character.

Still another variation within the heredity school was proposed by the Italian criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, whose theories were summarized in Symonds’s *A Problem in Modern Ethics*. Lombroso wrote that criminality (including homosexuality) is caused by inborn savage instincts which are modified by the civilizing process. Thus, these theorists felt that any primitive race or culture will have greater homosexuality.⁴⁹ The sense that homosexuality is a primitive, wild, elemental force appears strongly in Sackville-West, who describes her attraction to her lesbian lover as a “bond” unknowable, perhaps “legendary.”⁵⁰ In her 1934 novel, *The Dark Island*, Sackville-West describes the force uniting the two androgynous⁵¹ lesbian lovers as a “curiously mystical current,” linked to the “blind instinctive force”⁵² in nature.

The heredity-congenital theories were joined by another major, if contradictory, position on homosexuality. It held that all human beings are innately bisexual, that they contain propensities for both masculine and feminine behavior and for both heterosexual and homosexual love.⁵³ The underlying assumption is that masculinity and femininity are in some sense objective absolutes, and that all or much of human behavior can be labeled masculine or feminine. Freud is identified with the theory of universal bisexuality, but others wrote about it as well. The popularity of Weininger’s *Sex and Character*, for example, with homosexuals is attested to by J. R. Ackerley. As a young homosexual during World War I, he was advised by his more experienced friend Arnold Lunn to read “Otto Weininger, Edward Carpenter, Plutarch.”⁵⁴ Later, in 1929, in a radio debate on marriage, Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson specifically credited Weininger with the theory that all persons contain both masculine and feminine principles.⁵⁵ In 1933, Sackville-West relied on Weininger again in writing an essay about the new woman.⁵⁶ Noting that a single love object can satisfy for the lover both homosexual and

49. Symonds, *Problem in Modern Ethics*, in Cory, pp. 43–46.

50. Nicolson, *Portrait*, p. 24.

51. See Fassler, pp. 146, 167.

52. Vita Sackville-West, *The Dark Island* (1934; reprint ed., New York: Doubleday & Co., 1936), p. 279.

53. See, e.g., Ellis’s definition (n. 19), p. 88.

54. Joe R. Ackerley, *My Father and Myself* (London: Bodley Head, Ltd., 1968), pp. 117–18.

55. Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, “Marriage,” *Listener* 1 (June 26, 1929): 899–900; see Weininger (n. 8), p. 48.

56. Vita Sackville-West, “Our Future Beckons,” *Pictorial Review* (November 1933), p. 40.

heterosexual desires, Freud, for example, emphasized the immense complexity of sexual feelings, a complexity which "should warn us not to form too simple a conception of the nature and genesis of inversion [i.e., homosexuality], and to keep in mind the extensive influence of the bisexuality of mankind."⁵⁷ Strachey and other Bloomsbury friends probably knew Freud's theories of homosexuality in the late 1910s, or at least by 1920 when James and Alix Strachey became associated with him. In 1923 Lytton Strachey specifically discussed Freudian theory and treatment of homosexuality.⁵⁸

Much in both the heredity-congenital theories and in the universal bisexuality theories would lead the homosexual toward an unfavorable self image. The heredity-congenital theories released the homosexual from the label of sinner but still pictured the invert as a genetic accident, kin to imbeciles and mad persons. More happily, the universal bisexuality theories released the homosexual from being an accident. In fact, the concept of universal bisexuality, with all humans located on a continuum and the homosexual merely a person whose personality traits were mid-way and whose sexual preferences swung rather more to one side than to the other, was extremely useful for Bloomsbury.

However, Freud went on to say that, though all human beings contain both homosexual and heterosexual propensities, the adult who remains homosexual has been arrested at an immature stage of sexuality. Further, Freudians tended to link homosexuality with other neuroses caused by early childhood sexual traumas. So, although one escaped the label of a genetic mistake, one was now termed a neurotic. In addition, there was a partial swing back to the old concept of homosexuals as somehow responsible for their own condition, since the neurotic might be cured by seeking the proper treatment and cooperating with the analyst. Wilhelm Stekel increased this responsibility by denying all influence of heredity (thereby outdistancing Freud).⁵⁹ Lytton Strachey satirically protested against Freudian attempts to cure homosexual neurosis: "Psychoanalysis is a ludicrous fraud. . . . The Sackville-West youth [Eddy, cousin of Vita] was [at Freiburg] to be cured of homosexuality. After four months and an expenditure of £200, he found he could just bear the thought of going to bed with a woman. No more. Several other wretched undergraduates have been through the same 'treatment.'"⁶⁰

Both types of theories imposed yet another burden in their attitudes

57. Freud, "Psychogenesis," p. 214.

58. Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, p. 856.

59. Wilhelm Stekel, "Is Homosexuality Curable?" *Psychoanalytic Review* 17 (1930): 443-51; see Stekel's *The Homosexual Neurosis*, trans. James S. Van Tieslaar (Boston: Gorham Press, 1922).

60. Lytton Strachey, letter to Dora Carrington, June 3, 1923, quoted in Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, pp. 856-57.

toward the female. Virtually all theorists were male, and they wrote primarily about male homosexuality. Female homosexuals were either not mentioned at all or were assumed to be parallel to males. In addition, the theorists devalued the female principle. The heredity-congenital position declared that, in the development of the human embryo, the female is the first and lower stage; the male, a higher development both for the soul and for the body. Thus, Ulrichs, for example, pictures lesbians as males whose souls have achieved the intended maturity but whose bodies have unfortunately been arrested at a lower stage; male homosexuals the converse.⁶¹ Within the theories of universal bisexuality, Weininger, a strong misogynist, termed the female principle, "nothing more than sexuality." The male principle, however, is "sexual and something more." That something is the rational, ethical, philosophical, and outreaching faculty of the human spirit. Thus, though a lesbian may, by virtue of the strong dash of masculinity in her character, possess artistic gifts or high intelligence, she can never be a genius. The true genius is the womanly man, his basic masculinity just nicely spiked with feminine sensitivity.⁶²

A final negative element was the intimation that the masculine and feminine in the homosexual interact in what Sackville-West called "alternate preponderance": they war with one another, rather than uniting. Weininger, for example, maintained that, since a person can be only one sex at a time, the homosexual would swing wildly between masculinity and femininity.⁶³ Similarly, Ellis and Freud emphasized that metabolic change, the onset of puberty, or certain life experiences can activate a previously buried sexual preference.⁶⁴ In 1920, the 28-year-old Sackville-West used such a construct to explain her own nature. In her autobiographical sketch of that year, she traced the alternating stages in her own life: after a very tomboyish childhood and an adolescent lesbian relationship, her marriage to Harold Nicolson "brought out all the feminine" in her. She took pains with her appearance, socialized as the charming young diplomat's wife, and had two children.⁶⁵ Then, one day in 1918, when Harold was away, some newly ordered breeches came for Vita in the mail. Donning this unaccustomed clothing, she ran over the fields in glorious abandon. That day she and her friend Violet Keppel began a passionate love affair. Vita looked upon that day as the emergence of the long-buried *masculine* side of her character, referring to the "well-known theory" that there are some persons "in whom masculine and feminine elements alternately preponderate."⁶⁶ She felt

61. E.g., see Ulrichs in Symonds, *Problem in Modern Ethics*, in Cory, p. 61.

62. Weininger, pp. 91, 120.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

64. Ellis (n. 19), pp. 80–84; Freud, "Psychogenesis," p. 215, and "Sexual Aberration," p. 555.

65. Nicolson, *Portrait*, p. 104.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

trapped in an eternal, destructive seesaw of her opposing masculine and feminine sides.

Another believer in "alternate preponderance" was Lowes Dickinson, who wrote that the feminine part of him wanted to "lose herself" and "expiate and abandon herself," but "the man knows jolly well he's got to have a life of his own, if the whole thing isn't to go to pot, and so he ups and flogs the woman, and so it goes on."⁶⁷ Here is Weininger's concept that the feminine principle consists of sexuality and abandonment to personal relationships while the masculine principle is "something more." Here, too, the relationship between the two genders merely repeats, within the unfortunate homosexual's psyche, the traditional war of the sexes. In her novel *Challenge*, written during her affair with Violet Keppel, Sackville-West spins a yarn (set in Grecian islands—one of Burton's sotadic zones) in which the totally feminine woman, by her absorption in love and her inability to achieve autonomous selfhood, destroys both herself and the young man she loves. The novel is an exploration of masculinity and femininity both in the individual psyche and in homosexual and heterosexual love.⁶⁸

But the theories also contained more positive bases, upon which the homosexual could be viewed as very special and valuable, and upon which writers could draw for a positive concept of the androgyne. First was the belief that suffering and sublimation create a noble personality. Suffering, of course, was every homosexual's daily portion in a nation with the most repressive laws and the most hostile public opinion in Europe. Sublimation, too, was a strong current in the ethic and life-style of many homosexuals. Some, like Lytton Strachey, were joyously, even mischievously open, but a good many quietly anguished souls—because of guilt, desire to protect their beloved, or fear of exposure, disenchantment, and sordidness—followed an ethic of devotion, loyalty, romantic sentiment, and abstention from overt sexual acts. The diaries and letters of Lowes Dickinson provide a good example. Dickinson was always "in love," yet relationships with the men he loved were delicate, controlled, sublimated; they primarily consisted of small gestures infinitely precious, long remembered, and deliciously relived in fantasy.⁶⁹

The second basis for belief in the nobility of the homosexual was the proposition, found in Carpenter, for example, that homosexual unions are wonderfully free of the considerations of wealth, property, and custom which sully heterosexual marriages. "Uranian people," Carpenter wrote, "may be destined to form the advance guard of that great movement which will one day transform the common life by substituting the bond of personal affection and compassion for the monetary, legal and other external ties which now control and confine society."⁷⁰ To early

67. Dickinson, letter to Ferdinand Schiller, in Proctor (n. 26), p. 111.

68. See Fassler, pp. 101-2.

69. Dickinson, in Proctor, p. 111.

70. Carpenter, in Cory, p. 196.

twentieth-century homosexuals, Walt Whitman was the seer who expressed, in his so-called Calamus passage, the saving qualities of homosexual friendship, both for the individual and for the nation. Whitman's denial, in a personal letter to Symonds, of any intent to include homosexual friendships in his Calamus passage hardly dampened the idolization of Whitman by British homosexuals.⁷¹

The third contribution to the glorification of the homosexual was the concept that the tension between male and female in the homosexual is exceptionally vital, creative, and integrative—an idea which echoes the *Symposium's* Agathon, who links the homosexual lover with the poet, since both seek restoration of primal harmony.

Such concepts joined those mythic traditions of Western culture which looked upon the physical hermaphrodite (Tiresias, e.g.) as a prophet, magician, or wizard.⁷² The result was a common belief that to be artistic one must have the unique combination of masculine and feminine elements found in hermaphrodites and homosexuals. For example, Rilke, who was known and read by Bloomsbury members, called to God to perfect him as an artist by making him a hermaphrodite.⁷³

Freud blended the view that homosexuals might often possess unusual intelligence, spiritual insight, or artistic gifts with the concept of the homosexual as noble sufferer; he maintained that homosexuals of both sexes often have constitutions which allow them to sublimate frustrated sexuality into artistic expression.⁷⁴ Ellis, as well as a number of others, noted that homosexuals of both sexes frequently display high intelligence and artistic capability.⁷⁵ Carpenter based his exaltation of homosexuals upon their potential as mediators. Since the "intermediate sex" combined both masculine and feminine elements in "swift and constant"⁷⁶ interaction, such persons could communicate with both sexes, helping them to understand one another. Carpenter's construct, as Wilfred Stone has noted, "is deeply implied in the work of Dickinson and Forster (especially before 1914) and is involved in nearly everything they say about the act of mediation called Art."⁷⁷

71. Brian Reade, ed., *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 22.

72. E.g., see Westermarck, in Cory, p. 114.

73. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. M. D. Herter (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1934), p. 38; see Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 134.

74. Sigmund Freud, "Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness," first published in *Sexual Problems*, new issue of the periodical *Mutterschutz*, vol. 4 (1908); reprinted in *Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, 2d ser. (Vienna, n.d.); in *Collected Papers*, trans. E. B. Hesford and E. Colburn Mayne (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1924; reprint ed., New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 85.

75. Ellis (n. 19), p. 199.

76. Carpenter, in Cory, p. 192.

77. Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E. M. Forster* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 88.

A fourth basis for a positive view of the homosexual is the concept of the "mannish woman" and the "womanish man," fusing and integrating masculine and feminine elements into a new whole within the personality. Sackville-West and Nicolson, in their 1929 radio debate, set forth as an ideal for a good marriage that the man should develop his womanly qualities and the woman her manly qualities.⁷⁸ Sackville-West, in her own life, was able to overcome the sense that she was doomed to swing wildly between feminine and masculine periods. She came to see herself as a "manly woman" and dealing with her homosexuality on that basis was, I believe, a key step in her development of the ideal of androgyny.

A final reason for celebration of the homosexual was the increasing recognition that many great artists had been homosexuals. Joyfully, apologists for homosexuality searched records to uncover the homosexuality of universally renowned literary figures; mischievously, they asked each other whether the world was ready to learn, for example, that Christopher Marlowe or Michelangelo had been "buggers." The Renaissance was a particularly attractive era, and its great beacon was Shakespeare, who had been construed as a homosexual since at least the 1840s. He and Plato are frequently mentioned, in sources as varied as diaries and newspaper editorials, as the two writers who gave literary and philosophical expression to homosexuality. Lowes Dickinson, for example, called Plato and Shakespeare "the only two people [who] have given expression to the [homosexual] experiences which to me are intimate and profound."⁷⁹ Within such a context, it is significant that Orlando begins her existence in the Renaissance, and that Woolf, for her example of the androgyne in *A Room of One's Own*, used Shakespeare. In choosing Shakespeare and his sister, Woolf includes an intimation of homosexuality in her portrait of androgyny and draws upon current theories of the homosexual as a person who uniquely combines both masculine and feminine qualities to achieve artistic creativity and personal integration.

I hope this outline of theories of homosexuality, and these few initial suggestions of their influence upon Bloomsbury members and their associates, will provide a foundation for further study of the ways in which early twentieth-century artists worked out their concept of the androgyne and of love, art, and personhood.

*Department of English
Central College*

78. Sackville-West and Nicolson, "Marriage," pp. 899-900.

79. Dickinson, letter to Ferdinand Schiller, in Proctor, p. 111.