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Harry Oosterhuis. *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Sexual Identity*. University of Chicago Press, 2000. [review]

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## Reviews

Harry Oosterhuis. *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Sexual Identity*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.

In the fin de siècle years of the twentieth century, the discipline of sexology, a product of the late nineteenth century, experienced something of a scholarly revival. The publication of a number of important critical studies in the area, such as Bland/Doan's two volume *Sexology Uncensored* (1999) and the works of Lesley A. Hall, Roy Porter, and Jeffrey Weeks, highlight the significance of the study of sexology for a better understanding of nineteenth century thinking on sexuality. Ideas originated in sexology still permeate many theoretical debates about sexuality, albeit the fact that this often goes unrecognized. Debates about a "gay gene" for instance, echo one of sexology's main concerns, the question whether homosexuality is congenital or acquired behavior. The ongoing search for a better understanding of sexuality appears to have renewed the need to re-visit the "first wave" of organized sexual study. In accordance with the multi-disciplinary nature of sexology itself, its critical assessment has become part of a vast range of scholarly projects, including for example Lesley A. Hall's recent historical edition of the letters of Marie Stopes as well as Judith Halberstam's literary-theoretical engagement with sexological concepts in *Female Masculinity* (1998) when she analyzes Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. Amidst this vibrant bricolage of recent scholarly investigations into sexology, we find a notable gap when it comes to monographs that examine the work of a single sexologist. Since Phyllis Grosskurth's studies of John Addington Symonds (1964) and Havelock Ellis (1985), and Hubert Kennedy's *The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs* (1988), to study the life and works of just one sexologist seems to have become somewhat unfashionable in the critical

world of (post) postmodernism. Harry Oosterhuis's *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing and the Making of Sexual Identity* is an important exception. Oosterhuis rises to the challenge to for the first time chart the changing life and works of one of the most eminent, and perhaps one of the most misunderstood of all the sexologists, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902).

Krafft-Ebing's biographical details have often been obscured. Oosterhuis provides a welcome outline of Krafft-Ebing's background. He was born into an aristocratic family in Mannheim in the Catholic South West of Germany, where he spent the earlier half of his career. He married late, had three children, and showed great devotion to his work. The first and formative stage as a psychiatrist was spent at the Illenau in Achern/Baden, one of the first German psychiatric hospitals to introduce the nonrestraint principle, which had evolved in England. The asylum was famous for its advanced facilities and the humanitarian treatment of its patients, which followed the principle that all mental illness was not just a physical disorder, but, as Oosterhuis puts it, it was considered to be a "disease of the soul" (78). This holistic approach was to remain one of the guiding principles of Krafft-Ebing's work. After Illenau, he spent some years on the move: he briefly had his own practice in Baden-Baden, then served in a military camp in Rastatt during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, before taking over as head of the electrotherapeutic institute in Baden-Baden. This was followed by his move into academia: he spent a year as professor of psychiatry at Strasbourg University before moving to Austria where he was to stay for the remainder of his life, first at Graz University and the nearby Feldhof psychiatric asylum, and later in Vienna, where he held the (at the time) most prestigious chair in psychiatry.

Krafft-Ebing was fascinated with what he perceived to be the myriad of shades of human sexuality, and he gave names to many sexual practices, such as "Sadismus" [sadism] and "Masochismus" [masochism]. His enduring fame rests on the publication of his medico-legal study of sexuality, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The book was first published in 1886, and six years later it was first translated into English. It was an instant success. Its detailed investigation of a plethora of human sexual behavior seemed to hit a nerve not only at the time of its first publication, but up to this day: the latest German edition was published in 1997, the most recent English translation is from 1999. What was so new and original in Krafft-Ebing's work was that for the first time human sexual behavior was not just being theorized in a scientific text, but voice was being given to the stories of people themselves. Many of the sexual case studies in book are based on letters Krafft-Ebing received from people who had heard about his sympathetic attitude towards different sexualities. In fact, it was with the help of these often sexually explicit case studies that Krafft-Ebing developed his new taxonomies. They presented a unique, if nowadays sometimes strangely clumsy, combination of scientific work and sexual sourcebook, which also offered the possibility for the lay reader to identify and to identify with various sexual identities and sexual preferences. This may help to explain why *Psychopathia Sexualis* remained in print.

A look at the publishing history of *Psychopathia Sexualis* shows the popularity of the work. Krafft-Ebing revised it twelfth times between 1886-1902 (some of

the later prints under different editors sometimes significantly modified the original text). Each of Krafft-Ebing's revisions was published by the distinguished Ferdinand Enke publishing house, which was one of the best known of the few German specialist medical publishers of the time. In 1892, the American psychiatrist Charles Gilbert Chaddock (1861-1936) first translated *Psychopathia Sexualis* into English. His translation was based on the seventh German edition. Numerous translations of different editions and by different translators were to follow, published by various publishing houses on both sides of the Atlantic, ranging from the highly regarded medical publisher Physicians and Surgeons Book Company in New York to London's popular Heinemann house. Next to Chaddock, the F. J. (Francis Joseph) Rebman (1852-1946) was the main translator of the work into English.

While *Psychopathia Sexualis* was ostensibly written for use by the medical profession and as a reference guide for the proceedings in the courtroom, Oosterhuis makes clear that its popularity was far more widespread (perhaps not least because of its detailed sexual descriptions). Had Krafft-Ebing's attitude towards homosexuality, which he called sexual inversion, initially been rather negative, his position clearly shifted towards the promotion of tolerance for the phenomenon of homosexuality. When he investigated the stories of more and more inverts, he came to see homosexuality as part of nature, akin to, say, differences in eye color. Perhaps, Oosterhuis could have made this key development more tangible. Oosterhuis pays relatively little attention to the fact that Krafft-Ebing actively supported the decriminalization of homosexuality when in 1899 he joined the campaign of the founder of the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin, Magnus Hirschfeld, and signed a petition presented to the Reichstag to obtain the revocation of the infamous paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, which made homosexuality illegal.

*Psychopathia Sexualis* was, of course, only one amidst the gargantuan number of Krafft-Ebing's publications. In all he published more than 140 articles, reviews, and notes, all of which are listed in Oosterhuis's excellent bibliography of primary texts. The list of secondary literature Oosterhuis supplies is of equally good standing. Seeing that Oosterhuis's book is published in English, it would perhaps have been useful to provide a note regarding the English translations of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which (apart from an article on hypnotism) is the only work that had actually been translated into English, and which is certainly the best known piece of Krafft-Ebing's writing. The publishing history of the translations is intricate and confusing, and it would have been interesting to see how and if Krafft-Ebing engaged with the quality of the translations. On the whole, however, Oosterhuis's remarkable study certainly does justice to the productive Krafft-Ebing. Oosterhuis offers a complete picture of Krafft-Ebing that takes into account more than his famous engagement with homosexuality. He carefully portrays Krafft-Ebing's pioneering role in the making of modern psychiatry. Throughout his career Krafft-Ebing fought for change, attempting to replace the de-humanized medicalization of the mentally ill with a more humane approach that took account of the individual. In five meticulously researched parts comprising eighteen chapters, Oosterhuis presents a large body of material, which hugely profits from the fact that he had gained access to the Krafft-Ebing family archives. Oosterhuis, himself Dutch, reads Ger-

man and was thus able to check Krafft-Ebing's original writings. This enables him to clear many of the false assumptions about Krafft-Ebing that circulate in the academic world to this day. He discovered many flaws in the translations of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, including the 1999 English version edited by Brian King, pointing out that Krafft-Ebing was neither a raging homophobe nor a blind, progress orientated scientist. This alone proves to be invaluable information to follow up for anyone interested in the history of sexuality.

Oosterhuis successfully embeds his study of Krafft-Ebing into wider nineteenth century concerns around medical issues. He provides succinct glimpses at the historical-cultural context in which Krafft-Ebing was working. The first chapter on "The Emergence of Sexual Science" and the last chapter on the "Pressure-Cooker Vienna" supply an appropriate and useful frame, which successfully illuminates the *zeitgeist* of the late nineteenth century. The thoroughness of Oosterhuis's scholarship is one of the strongest points of the book. He provides dates and details of even the most minor figures he mentions, thus providing almost *en passant* a resourceful guide to nineteenth century sexologists from a range of different disciplines.

The one bugbear in Oosterhuis's important work lies in the way he organizes his material. To present a comprehensive, fully contextualized account of such a productive and varied character as Krafft-Ebing is a highly ambitious project. The dangers of amassing great familiarity with such an amount of information are twofold. One is the problem of assuming too much and thus leaving out vital information, and the second is the urge to always say everything. Oosterhuis, albeit occasionally, falls into the latter trap. There are a number of repetitions throughout the book, and one cannot help the impression that perhaps some of the material had been presented in the form of different papers, and the overlaps between them had not been edited out from the final book. At times the relationship between the chapter headings and content also appears somewhat fuzzy. For example, the third part of the book is entitled "Articulate Sufferers: Perversion and Autobiography"; however, the chapter on "Autobiography and Sexual Identity" can be found in the following fourth part, which is entitled "Psychiatry and Sexual Identity in Fin de Siècle Culture." I would have liked to see a more rigid (and obvious) distinction between the different parts and chapters.

However, these grievances are negligible in view of Oosterhuis's achievements with this book. *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Sexual Identity* is a timely (re)assessment of one of the key figures of nineteenth century sexology. Oosterhuis successfully manages to produce a study of one of the key figures of German sexology that at the same time provides deeper insights into the discipline as a whole. *Stepchildren of Nature* should be compulsory reading for any scholar of sexuality.

—Heike Bauer, Birkbeck College, University of London