7 Be Careful about the Publisher

R. v. *Bedborough*, the 1898 trial in which Britain's first textbook on homosexuality, Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds's *Sexual Inversion* (1897), was labelled an obscene book, is one of the most famous obscenity trials in British history. Like Bradlaugh and Besant's 1877 trial, it became a potent touchstone in critiques of Victorian morality that framed not the free circulation of sexual knowledge but its suppression as indecent. In the eyes of its supporters, the emergent field of sexology fulfilled modern scientists' duty to develop rational understandings of all aspects of human experience. In its indictment of *Sexual Inversion*, the Bedborough trial seemed to expose censorship as a formidable roadblock to this work. By the 1920s, sexology was tightly linked with opposition to restrictions on free sexual discussion by means of the law, institutional policies, and public opinion. As Kate Fisher and Jana Funke have noted, an entire section of the programme for the 1929 London Congress of the World League for Sexual Reform was devoted to the issue.[1]

Sexology certainly operated at the edges of respectable scientific enquiry. Yet, as in the Malthusian context, its supporters' public positions on censorship can give an exaggerated impression of the role that the law played in mediating the distribution of its literature. It was unusual for distributors to be arrested during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and those who were arrested were typically involved in activities that the state was more invested in combating: pornography trafficking and fraud.[2] Even the Bedborough trial was driven

[1] Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, "'Are We to Treat Human Nature as the Early Victorian Lady Treated Telegrams?' British and German Sexual Science, Investigations of Nature and the Fight against Censorship, ca. 1890–1940," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 32, no. 1 (2024): 91.

[2] For the most detailed work on this topic to date, see Phillip Kuhn, "The Sexual Life of Our Time: Medical Censorship in Early-20th-Century England," *History of Psychology* 23, no. 1 (2020): 40–61. See Harry G. Cocks, "Saucy Stories: Pornography, Sexology and the Marketing of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, c. 1918–70," *Social History* 29, no. 4 (2004): 479 for a discussion of cases in 1934 and 1937 involving sexological works in shops that sold pornographic and pulp material. In some cases, officials considered prosecuting publishers or distributors of sexual-scientific material after they received complaints about it, but decided against prosecuting them on the basis that prosecution would only lend this material publicity. For example, see HO 144/1043/183472, TNA, which documents officials' debates about how to respond to a 1910 complaint about Edward Carpenter's *Homogenic Love* (1894).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

not by state concern about *Sexual Inversion*'s effects on readers' morals but by state interest in breaking up a group that Scotland Yard was convinced was a front for anarchist organizing. If the trial illustrated urgent problems for sexology's establishment as a scientific field, those problems lay less with state censorship of its literature than with its queer disciplinary position. Perhaps even more than medicine in the early decades of the Victorian period, and more than Malthusianism in the 1870s, sexology had an identity problem.

At the *fin de siècle*, sexological research was awkwardly situated at the edges of medical and social-scientific enquiry, radical activism, humanist scholarship, literary expression, and erotic print culture.[3] In Britain, and around the world, it was taken up by people with commitments to progressive politics, people who advocated interdisciplinary approaches to research on sexuality, and people who had marginal, or no, training in medicine or science. Sexual-scientific works often drew on literary, artistic, historical, and (auto)biographical sources, and circulated far beyond the medical context, through networks of homophiles, socialists, anarchists, and free-lovers. The pornography trade began to emerge as a fixture in the distribution and, in some cases, production of sexual-scientific literature, and also became imbricated in these networks. Taking *Sexual Inversion*'s vexed publication history as its starting point, this chapter examines sexological literature's unruly circuits of production and distribution and how they destabilized Ellis's initial attempts to frame *Sexual Inversion* as a medical book. It also examines how allegations of obscenity and censorship on the grounds of obscenity emerged as instruments that sexologists and their allies used to define an identity for their emergent field and make a case for sex research.

The case of sexology is a fitting end point for this book because it illustrates how different frameworks for guiding understandings of books, people, and collectives, whose development was explored in earlier chapters, interacted and extended in the Victorian period's twilight years. Ellis sought to frame *Sexual Inversion* as a medical book by adhering to various conventions for writing, publishing, and advertising professional medical literature, whose increasing crystallization was plotted in Chapter 5. Yet, in seeking to make the work accessible to non-medical readers, he followed these conventions imperfectly. This undermined *Sexual Inversion*'s credibility in the eyes of many medical practitioners. Its credibility was further undermined by an

[3] For more on the interdisciplinary character of early sexology, see Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, "'Let Us Leave the Hospital; Let Us Go on a Journey around the World': British and German Sexual Science and the Global Search for Sexual Variation," in *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880–1960*, ed. Veronika Fuechtner, Douglas E. Haynes, and Ryan M. Jones (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 51–69. For a different view, see Ivan Crozier and Heike Bauer, "Sexology, Historiography, Citation, Embodiment: A Review and (Frank) Exchange," *Book Reviews* (blog), *History of the Human Sciences*, June 27, 2017, www.histhum.com/category/book-reviews/.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

issue that presented a persistent problem in the history this book has traced: the cocirculation of medical, radical, and pornographic material. Building on strategies examined in Chapter 6, Ellis and his allies turned to a different method of making sex research respectable. They portrayed sexology as a progressive scientific field unjustly censored by ignorant authorities, and decried pornography as its opposite: the "unnatural" and "inaccurate" product of a culture deprived of the scientific truth about sex.

It is here that we see a myth emerge that would define how people understood the modern history of sexual knowledge through the first half of the twentieth century: the myth of Victorian sexual ignorance. Historians have shown that this myth functioned as a powerful means through which twentieth century sexologists and sex educators authorized their expertise.[4] Accounts of the Victorian "repression," "censorship," and "silencing" of sexual discussion enabled a new generation of self-appointed experts to "disqualify existing practices and knowledge" and frame their own work as scientific, modern, and progressive.[5] Setting this myth's emergence within the longer, wider context of Victorian debates about medical obscenity makes its origins more legible, showing that it reflected a longer pattern of contesting and producing authority by framing sexual knowledge as censored that stretched back to the Victorian period itself. It also emphasizes that the emergence of Victorian sexual ignorance as a framework for understanding the modern history of sexual knowledge was not inevitable. While it certainly owed something to chafing at changes in attitudes toward sex over the course of the nineteenth century, it also owed a great deal to the haphazard ways in which obscenity laws were employed and sexual-scientific authority was contested, and the unruly commercial conditions that influenced them. The myth of Victorian ignorance would blot these conditions from memory.

Making and Unmaking a Medical Book

Although historians are increasingly viewing the development of sexology through a global lens, most histories trace its roots to Continental Europe, where, from the 1860s, psychiatrists sought to investigate sexual aberrations alongside a host of anti-social and criminal practices.[6] Same-sex desire was both the earliest and the largest focus of these investigations, which

[4] Harry Cocks, "Review: The Growing Pains of the History of Sexuality," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 4 (2004): 661. See also Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 66, 384.

[5] Cocks, "Review," 661.

[6] For information about sexology in its broader geographic and disciplinary contexts, see Veronika Fuechtner, Donald E. Haynes, and Ryan M. Jones, eds., *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880–1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017) and Heike Bauer, ed.,

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

increasingly framed what the German journalist Karl-Maria Kertbeny coined "homosexuality" in 1868 as either a congenital or a socially acquired perversion of normal sexuality.[7] Britain developed a tradition of writing on sexuality more slowly, but by the 1890s a small body of work had emerged. Some of this work built on Charles Darwin's theory of sexual selection and primarily focused on reproductive, heterosexual sex,[8] but another strand of British sexual science focused on variant sexualities. Much of this work was overtly interdisciplinary, and deeply influenced by socialist, feminist, and homophile perspectives. It fit into the mould of recognized models of medical enquiry almost as uncomfortably as sexual inverts (a term often used for those who experienced same-sex desire) felt they fit into a culture gripped with anxiety about same-sex sex.

This is evident in the qualifications of those who wrote this work and in how they published it. Authors of influential British works on same-sex desire, including Edward Carpenter, John Addington Symonds, and Richard Burton, made their livings as poets, critics, and translators, not as medical practitioners; and those works, including Burton's 1886 "Terminal Essay" to his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Symonds's *A Problem of Greek Ethics* (1883) and *A Problem of Modern Ethics* (1891), and Carpenter's *Homogenic Love* (1894), were not issued by medical publishers. Instead, their authors had them privately printed in limited numbers under obscure imprints, such as that of the Kama Shastra Society, an outfit primarily set up to issue translations of South Asian and Middle Eastern literature on sexual matters, or no imprint at all.[9] This form of publication enabled discreet exchanges of ideas between small groups of like-minded and often wealthy thinkers. However, it also limited their influence. Private publication severely narrowed the audience of the works involved. It also differentiated them from mainstream medico-scientific publications and the growing cultural authority of the fields with which they were associated.

Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds broke with this tradition when they sought to openly publish a study of sexual inversion. While their goal was not to make a political statement about their right to publish such a book, their motivation for publishing it openly was political: they sought to galvanize opposition to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which had made gross

Sexology and Translation: Cultural and Scientific Encounters across the Modern World (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2015).

[7] Judit Takács, "The Double Life of Kertbeny," in *The Past and Present of Radical Sexual Politics: Working Papers: Fifth Meeting of the Seminar "Socialism and Sexuality," Amsterdam, October 3–4, 2003*, ed. G. Hekma (Amsterdam: Mosse Foundation, 2004), 51–62.

[8] Kimberly A. Hamblin, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women's Rights in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[9] Sean Brady, *John Addington Symonds and Homosexuality: A Critical Edition of Sources* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

indecency – an ambiguous term that was interpreted as including any sexual activity between men, in public or private – punishable by imprisonment for up to two years.[10] Ellis, a social reformer, writer, and trained physician, and Symonds, a literary critic, cultural historian, and self-described invert, were horrified that private, consensual sex between men had been made illegal. In *Sexual Inversion*, they sought to outline a model of sexual behaviour that situated same-sex desire as natural, and therefore defensible. They hoped that the book, which was based on a theoretical model of sexuality developed by Ellis and supplemented with literary and historical evidence from Symonds's scholarship, would persuade medical experts and lay readers alike that the law should be reformed.

The prospect of publishing *Sexual Inversion* made both men nervous. The first editions of *A Problem of Greek Ethics* and *A Problem of Modern Ethics* had comprised only ten and fifty copies, giving Symonds considerable control over his audience. Ellis had prior experience with publishing sexually detailed works for the open market. However, he was keenly aware that it could go awry. In 1888, while Ellis was editing unexpurgated editions of Elizabethan dramas for the publisher Henry Vizetelly, Vizetelly was prosecuted by Charles Hastings Collette under the banner of the National Vigilance Association for issuing five- and six-shilling translations of Émile Zola's novels *La Terre* (1887), *Nana* (1880), and *Pot-Bouille* (1883).[11] Vizetelly shrugged off the fine that resulted, and reissued new Zola translations the following year. He was prosecuted again, and saddled with a larger fine and a three-month prison sentence. In the wake of these trials, Ellis translated an unexpurgated edition of Zola's novel *Germinal* (1885) for Leonard Smithers, a publisher equally well known for issuing avant-garde literature and expensive pornography.[12] Ellis was more than willing to write on controversial topics and produce risqué books for others. However, he did not want *Sexual Inversion* to share *La Terre*'s fate.

Some historians have speculated that Ellis earned a medical degree from St. Thomas's Hospital Medical School in 1889 to furnish his writing on sexual matters with the stamp of scientific legitimacy.[13] If this was his aim, it was the

[10] Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42.

[11] Denise Merkle, "When Expurgation Constitutes Ineffective Censorship: The Case of Three Vizetelly Translations of Zola," in *Proceedings of the Maastricht Session of the 3rd International Maastricht-Lodz Duo Colloquium*, ed. B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and M. Thelen (Maastricht: Hogeschool Maastricht, 2001), 285–293. For details about Collette's involvement, see "The Police Courts," *Daily News*, August 11, 1888, 6.

[12] Denise Merkle, "The Lutetian Society," *TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction* 16, no. 2 (2003): 73–101.

[13] Ivan Crozier, "Pillow Talk: Credibility, Trust, and the Sexological Case History," *History of Science* 46, no. 4 (2008): 391.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

first in a series of steps that he, and to a lesser extent Symonds, took to try to ensure that *Sexual Inversion* would be received as a serious medical book by adhering to writing, publishing, and advertising conventions that, by the 1890s, marked a book as a legitimate medical intervention. Although they each contributed to it, the co-authors agreed that Ellis's name would appear first on the title page, emphasizing the contribution of a qualified medical practitioner. As Ivan Crozier has shown, the content was also developed to appear as "scientific" as possible. Unlike either author's previous publications, *Sexual Inversion* is centred on a series of case studies, based on questionnaires that Ellis and Symonds asked friends and friends of friends to fill out. Ellis steered the book more deeply into medico-scientific territory by persuading Symonds to reduce its literary content. After Symonds died in 1893, Ellis edited the manuscript, further marginalizing Symonds's humanist contributions to emphasize the book's focus on "scientific facts" about sexual inversion.[14]

Ellis also seriously considered the effect that the book's publisher, price, and advertisement would have on its medical reception. Symonds proposed publishing *Sexual Inversion* in the Walter Scott Publishing Company's middlebrow Contemporary Science Series, which Ellis edited.[15] At first glance, the series was a good fit. Its mandate was progressive: to publish books that addressed "questions of modern life – the various social and political economical problems of to-day, the most recent researches in the knowledge of man, the past and present experiences of the race, and the nature of the environment."[16] Moreover, several sexual-scientific works on sexuality – works in the tradition that had developed in response to Darwin's theories – had already been published in it. However, Ellis told Symonds that Walter Scott did not want the book (there was "too much at stake to involve the series in any really pioneering experiment") and that, in any case, he worried that some of the books in the series would compromise *Sexual Inversion*'s reception. "Several of the volumes approach various forbidden topics as nearly as is possible," Ellis argued. "From the point of view of the book, alas, I doubt if it would be the wisest mode of publication."[17]

Ellis may have had Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson's *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) in mind, which naturalized traditional gender roles by linking them with binary biological processes and recommended contraception as

[14] Ivan Crozier, "Introduction: Havelock Ellis, John Addington Symonds and the Construction of Sexual Inversion" in *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ivan Crozier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 58–60.

[15] For further information about this series, see Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 30.

[16] "The Contemporary Science Series," *Journal of Mental Science* 36, no. 153 (1890): 265.

[17] Havelock Ellis to John Addington Symonds, July 1, 1892, Havelock Ellis Collection, 1875–1955, HRC.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

a means of shaping evolution. The book was never framed as indecent in medical circles, but it was controversial, and not reviewed in many medical journals until after the medical publisher H. K. Lewis issued a new edition. Ellis was convinced that a publisher "who is both medical and scientific and general," like Macmillan or Smith Elder, would serve their ambitions better.[18] He thought that such a publisher could distribute *Sexual Inversion* beyond medical circles – a key commitment for both authors – even as it lent the book the authority of a house known for issuing conventional medical writing. Unfortunately, Ellis could not get Macmillan, Smith Elder, or a similar publisher interested in *Sexual Inversion*.[19] The medical publisher F. J. Rebman had issued English translations of Continental studies of variant sexualities in 1893 and 1895, and encountered no discernible opposition.[20] In the wake of Oscar Wilde's headline-making trial for "gross indecency" in 1895, however, general publishers apparently did not want to touch a work on same-sex desire aimed at a broader audience.

Ellis published chunks of *Sexual Inversion* in the progressive American medical journal *Alienist and Neurologist*, and then the book itself in German, in 1896, to "pave the way for English publication."[21] The following year, *Sexual Inversion* was finally published in England under the imprint Wilson & Macmillan. Infamously, this was not an imprint of Macmillan, but of the University Press, an outfit run by the radical campaigner and free-love advocate Georg Ferdinand Springmühl von Weissenfeld under the name George Astor Singer.[22] Weissenfeld moved in activist circles that overlapped with Ellis and Symonds's, and would become a notable, if short-lived, publisher of sexual-scientific literature. At the time, though, his was far from the kind of press that Ellis had hoped for – but at least it was a press. At the request of his family, Symonds's literary executor immediately bought up the first English edition of *Sexual Inversion* in exchange for an agreement with Weissenfeld that any new editions omit Symonds's name.[23] A new, revised edition, issued by Weissenfeld

[18] Havelock Ellis to John Addington Symonds, December 21, 1892, Havelock Ellis Collection, 1875–1955, HRC.

[19] Havelock Ellis, "'The Question of Indecent Literature' (Letters to the Editor)," *Lancet*, November 19, 1898, 1344. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any correspondence between Ellis and these publishers.

[20] Richard von Krafft Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock (London: F. J. Rebman, 1893); Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *Therapeutic Suggestion in Psychopathia Sexualis (Pathological Manifestations of the Sexual Sense), with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct*, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock (London: F. J. Rebman, 1895).

[21] Quoted in Kirsten Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany, 1900–1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 43.

[22] Ellis was introduced to Weissenfeld through a mutual friend. See Havelock Ellis, *My Life: The Autobiography of Havelock Ellis* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 351–353.

[23] Crozier, "Introduction," 56.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

under a different imprint, the University Press of Watford, appeared in 1898. The book's high price, at ten shillings, and its limited (though not, as Ellis claimed, nonexistent) advertisement outside medical venues were pitched to evade any charge that *Sexual Inversion* was not a serious medical intervention.[24]

The choice of publisher proved to be a mistake.

Between 1899 and 1902, it gradually came to the attention of the police, and then to the public, that Weissenfeld was a convicted forger and active operator of several swindling schemes; that the University Press was not connected with a university; and that the signatories on its memorandum of association were all aliases of Weissenfeld's.[25] He died in 1902, reportedly of apoplexy, in Cambridge following a raid on his home that unearthed 30,000 allegedly obscene works, most of which appear to have been publications advocating free love and copies of Ellis's books. It was not Weissenfeld's shady business practices, however, but his use of his activist networks to distribute *Sexual Inversion* that brought the book into court in 1898. That year, George Bedborough, the secretary of an organization called the Legitimation League and the editor of its periodical, *The Adult: The Journal of Sex*, which Weissenfeld published, was arrested and charged with eleven counts of distributing obscene material: one for *Sexual Inversion*, one for the writer Orford Northcote's pamphlet "The Outcome of Legitimation," and nine for material in the *Adult*.

Bedborough's arrest had little to do with these works. Just as medical groups prosecuted doctors under obscenity laws with the aim of suppressing "quackery," the police charged Bedborough with the aim of suppressing anarchism. The Legitimation League, formed in 1893 to advocate for the inheritance rights of children born to unmarried parents, had a diverse membership. By 1898, its members included activists connected with the anarchist movement, and Scotland Yard thought it had "good reason to believe that Anarchistic proselytising took place over and over again in connection with [the League's] meetings."[26] One of its detectives, John Sweeney, went undercover to surveil the meetings. He reported that lectures at the meetings were "often of an

[24] Ellis, "The Question of Indecent Literature," 1344. Weissenfeld advertised *Sexual Inversion* in *Academy*, December 4, 1897, 470; *Bookseller*, November 4, 1897, 1157; and *Adult*, April 1898, 3.

[25] Accounts of Weissenfeld's activities, arrest, and death vary slightly. See Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1960), 203; John Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard: Being the Experiences during Twenty-Seven Years Service* (London: Grant Richards, 1904), 195–196; Arthur Calder-Marshall, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London: Hart-Davis, 1959), 157–172; Vincent Brome, *Havelock Ellis: Philosopher of Sex: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 1979), 96–108; Ellis, *My Life*, 370.

[26] Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 178–179. See Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists, and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 253 for further information about anarchists in the Legitimation League.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

entirely innocent and even elevating nature . . . [but] the public discussions after the lecture were mainly supported by Anarchists, and some speeches of a highly incendiary character were occasionally delivered."[27] Convinced that these speeches concealed more robust anarchist organizing, Scotland Yard went looking for ways to break up the League.

According to Sweeney, the police asked a public prosecutor to charge Bedborough with distributing obscene material on the basis that the *Adult* was obscene. Although their language was "carefully chosen," its articles could be interpreted as a threat to public morals.[28] The prosecutor refused, arguing that targeting the periodical would give rise to claims that the state was censoring the press. Allegedly, a more acceptable route to prosecuting Bedborough presented itself when a young Liverpool man ordered a pamphlet from the Legitimation League only to be sent a copy of *Sexual Inversion* by mistake, and his parents complained to the police. Sweeney purchased a copy, used it as the basis for a warrant to raid Bedborough's home and office, and arrested him for selling it alongside the other publications.[29]

Debate about *Sexual Inversion* played a prominent role in the trial, where its distribution through Bedborough's office and its publication by a non-medical press were used to justify charges that it was an obscene book. Taking the stand as a witness, Sweeney pondered why, if "his book could be defended," Ellis had not published it with "one of the many high-class publishers of medico-scientific literature," and concluded, "there is nothing whatever in its mode of publication to suggest that it deserved a better fate."[30] The prosecutor followed the same line of reasoning, linking *Sexual Inversion*'s potential effects on readers with how it had been published and distributed: a "medical man might be the author of such a book without it being considered wrong," he argued, "but it was different for another man to publish such a work amongst all sorts of people."[31] In other words – following the logic of the *Hicklin* test – the fact that *Sexual Inversion* had been issued by a press that was not known for issuing medical works and distributed to readers who had no professional qualifications to study sexual inversion made what might otherwise be an acceptable medical publication a threat to public morals.

Ellis was horrified. *A Note on the Bedborough Trial*, the pamphlet that he published with Weissenfeld after a panicked Bedborough pled guilty to the charges, cries that "if the sale of [*Sexual Inversion*] could be regarded as improper under such circumstances, there were practically no circumstances under which it could be regarded as proper."[32] The application of obscenity law

[27] Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 179. [28] Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 179, 182.
[29] Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 179–182. [30] Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 185.
[31] "Charge against a Publisher: Alleged Improper Books," *Daily News*, June 8, 1898. n.p.
[32] Havelock Ellis, *A Note on the Bedborough Trial* (London: University Press, 1898), 5–6. Add. MS.70524.ff.165–177, BL.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

to the distributor of a work like *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis claimed, clearly illustrated that the law needed to be changed in the interest of scientific progress. "The mere expectation of such a prosecution is fatal," he opined. "In submitting to these conditions an author puts his publisher and printer and their agents into an unmerited position of danger; he risks the distortion of his own work while it is in progress; and when he has written a book which is approved by the severest and most competent judges he is tempted to adapt it to the vulgar tastes of the policeman."[33] Like Bradlaugh and Besant in 1877, Ellis suggested that his book's fate was one that might meet any respectable medical work. British medical practitioners did not agree: to the surprise of some of their foreign counterparts, not one major medical figure came out to defend *Sexual Inversion*. In sexual matters, the American physician James Kiernan concluded, "the cant element is stronger in Great Britain than it is in the United States."[34]

Kiernan was right. When it engaged with works on variant sexualities at all, the British medical press was extraordinarily cautious and, their supporters thought, all too eager to find fault with them.[35] In the medical journals that did review *Sexual Inversion* – and many did not – writers frequently objected to its inclusion of literary and historical evidence and the fact that it relied on theories formulated by people who were not medical practitioners, such as the German jurist and self-described *urning* (homosexual) Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. What the medical press took issue with most, though, was Ellis's decision to publish *Sexual Inversion* with the University Press. The *Lancet*'s editors reported that even though the book had "proper claims for discussion" and was written in a "purely dispassionate and scientific style," they decided not to review it because of its "method of publication." Since it was not "published through a house able to take proper measures for introducing it as a scientific book to a scientific audience," the *Lancet* "considered the circumstances attendant on its issue suspicious."[36] "The moral of the story for scientific writers, who must often publish what would be obscene if appearing in doubtful channels or confided to dirty hands, is obvious," the journal concluded. "It is – be careful about the publisher."[37]

It is often suggested that the *Lancet*'s stance illustrates "the conservative and prurient attitude of the official British scientific community in dealing with sexual matters."[38] Homophobia was certainly a major factor in the medical

[33] Ellis, *Note on the Bedborough Trial*, 13.
[34] Quoted in Chiara Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion: Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, c. 1870–1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 187.
[35] Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion*, 189. See also Ivan Crozier, "Nineteenth-Century British Psychiatric Writing about Homosexuality before Havelock Ellis: The Missing Story," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 63, no. 1 (2008): 63.
[36] "The Question of Indecent Literature," *Lancet*, November 19, 1898,1344.
[37] "The Question," *Lancet*, 1345. [38] Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion*, 186.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

response to *Sexual Inversion*. Sympathetic comments in the medical press suggest, however, that while the book's publishing history served the state as a convenient excuse to prosecute Bedborough and throw the Legitimation League into disarray, it genuinely was an impediment to its reception in medical circles. An editorial in the *Journal of Mental Science* argued that Ellis's reputation as a criminal anthropologist offered a "sufficient guarantee" for his motives in writing the book, but scolded, "Mr. Ellis . . . should have exercised more care with regard to the mode of production and sale of his volume."[39] Another supportive writer, for the *British Medical Journal*, noted that Ellis had, at least, not attempted to advertise it or "expose it for sale other than in a technical sense": signs that his heart was in the right place.[40]

In commenting on *Sexual Inversion*'s circumstances of publication and distribution, writers in the medical press were not simply fretting about its potential to fall into the wrong hands. *Fin de siècle* medical practitioners read a constellation of signs surrounding a publication to authorize it as a legitimate contribution to the field, and *Sexual Inversion* did not meet their criteria. *Sexual Inversion*'s use of literary and historical evidence was unconventional, and could be interpreted as pandering to prurient curiosity. The book's unknown publisher was a more urgent warning sign in a field that had embraced increasingly rigid publishing conventions, however, and Ellis knew it. He had sought to place *Sexual Inversion* with an established general publisher that issued medical works as a kind of compromise, hoping that it would be enough to guarantee that medical practitioners would see the book as a credible intervention in the field. That the *Journal of Mental Science* warned other medical writers to issue accounts of sexual inversion carefully, lest they "become part of the stock-in-trade of the pornographic bookseller," highlights an issue that made *Sexual Inversion*'s unknown publisher especially worrisome to medical readers in the 1890s.[41] The pornography trade was an emerging route for traffic in sexual-scientific material, and it was one that the editors of medical journals like the *Lancet* were all too well aware of.

Semi-Scientific Pornography

In early 1897, on the eve of *Sexual Inversion*'s first, unnoticed English publication and just over a year prior to Bedborough's arrest, staff at the *Lancet* had opened a curious package. It had been posted to the journal's London office from Paris, and contained a small book in two volumes, bound in black leather. Both volumes bore the title *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology* in gold writing. The publisher, a Mr. Charles Carrington, described himself as a publisher of

[39] Quoted in Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion*, 189.
[40] "Charge of Publishing and Selling Obscene Literature," *BMJ*, November 5, 1898, 1466.
[41] Quoted in Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion*, 189.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

"medical, folk-lore and scientific works," but the title page did not bear the imprint of any publishing house that the *Lancet* staff had heard of. It was a product of an outfit called the Librairie Des Bibliophiles, based in Montmartre, a bohemian district in Paris known for its raucous cabarets.

The *Lancet* published a scathing review of the book on March 6:

> Mr. Charles Carrington is a person who describes himself as a publisher of medical folk-lore and scientific works. We do not know in which category he would place a book which he has had the insolence to forward us for review, bearing the innocent title of "Untrodden Fields of Anthropology." . . . The book, said to be written by a French army surgeon, is solely a record, and a very badly written record, of garbage from the sewers of human nature. It has no scientific importance whatever. It is of no interest to a student of human nature or natural history. We shall be happy to supply the Paris police with Mr. Carrington's address and to hand over the book to Her Majesty's Postmaster-General, so that he may, if he will, take steps to stay the dissemination of such abominations by the agency of his department.[42]

Carrington was used to being accused of purveying indecent material. Selling it had been his business for nearly two years, and he was already well known to British authorities. Born Paul Ferdinando (1867–1921) to a Jewish tradesman in London's East End, Carrington had run a fraudulent stockbroking firm with two of his brothers, George and Frederick, in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In 1895, after his brothers were indicted in Dublin on nine counts of obtaining money on false pretences, he absconded to Paris, adopted the waspy name Charles Carrington, and set up a publishing business. From Paris, he dominated the British market for luxuriously produced books on sexual subjects, issued in English and French in limited editions. Many of his books were printed in Amsterdam and Brussels and then distributed to British readers through the post or by agents in Carrington's employ.[43]

Carrington modelled his business after those of English publisher-booksellers like Edward Avery, Harry Sidney Nichols, Leonard Smithers, and Charles Hirsch. Inspired by private publishing societies set up by wealthy members of the Cannibal Club earlier in the century, these publishers dealt in expensive, luxuriously produced editions of pornographic, queer, and Decadent literature throughout the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s.[44] Capitalizing on the hazy line between avant-garde and obscene literature, they simultaneously issued open and clandestine catalogues of works for sale. Sexual-scientific works were among the offerings in both. The same edition of the

[42] "A Purveyor of Garbage," *Lancet*, March 6, 1897, 681.

[43] Collette Colligan, *A Publisher's Paradise: Expatriate Literary Culture in Paris, 1890–1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 72–73.

[44] See Colligan, *A Publisher's Paradise*, and James G. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents: Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, Dowson* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), for further information about this publishing culture.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's landmark study *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) that Rebman sold out of his London bookshop was advertised in one of Smithers's openly published catalogues of rare books alongside a luxury edition of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), for instance, and in a clandestine catalogue beside a collection of "Rare Works on Flagellation."[45] Works like *Psychopathia Sexualis* fit in with these publishers' brand of bookselling, which sought to unify the iconoclasm of the avant-garde, the rarefied appeal of the antiquarian, and the thrill of sexual transgression.

Carrington also had overlapping open and clandestine publishing streams.[46] The books that he circulated underground, through mail-order catalogues and behind the counters of shops in Paris and London, were mostly expensive pornographic novels. They included beautifully bound reprints of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English narratives, such as the flagellation fantasy *Venus Schoolmistress* (c. 1808); translations and adaptations of French works, such as *The Double Life of Cuthbert Cockerton* (c. 1898), based on Restif de la Bretonne's *L'Anti-Justine* (1798); piracies of new productions issued by Carrington's competitors; and originals, such as *The Memoirs of Dolly Morton* (1899), a racist flagellation fantasy set in the antebellum United States. Carrington's openly published works were usually less explicit, but they still focused on sexual themes, or were strongly associated with sexual scandal. This list included risqué biographies of aristocrats and celebrities, a number of Oscar Wilde's works after his 1895 trial, translations and imitations of a variety of South Asian and Middle Eastern works on sexuality, and sexual-scientific studies.

The sexual-scientific studies that Carrington sold were quite varied. Half a dozen were volumes in an original book series produced in-house by several writers under the name Jacobus X, the pseudonym of the author of a French travel narrative called *L'Amour aux colonies* (1893) originally issued by the Parisian publisher Isidore Liseaux. This work was the basis for *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology*, the first volume in the series (Figure 7.1). *Untrodden Fields* is an odd book: a cross between an anthropological study and an erotic travelogue. Much of the text is not atypical of late Victorian anthropological writing, which could include lengthy descriptions of "native" bodies and sexual practices. However, Jacobus X's repeated descriptions of sex between indigenous men in the French colonies and leering recollections of his own encounters

[45] See Leonard Smithers, *Catalogue of Rare and Curious Books*, April 1895 (London: Leonard Smithers & Co., 1895), 3, C.193.b.56, BL and Charles Carrington, *Bibliotheca Arcana: Being a Rough List of Curious, Rare and Uncommon Books* (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1899), 19 in *Album 7: A Collection of Prospectuses and Catalogues of Erotic and Obscene Books, Pictures and Instruments, 1889–1929*. Unpublished scrapbook. Cup. 364.g. 48, BL.

[46] For a full list of Carrington's works and reproductions of his catalogues, see Howard Guacamole [pseud.], *Charles Carrington (1867–1921): Bibliographie eines Verlags* (Norderstedt: Ars Amandi in Kommission, 2005).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

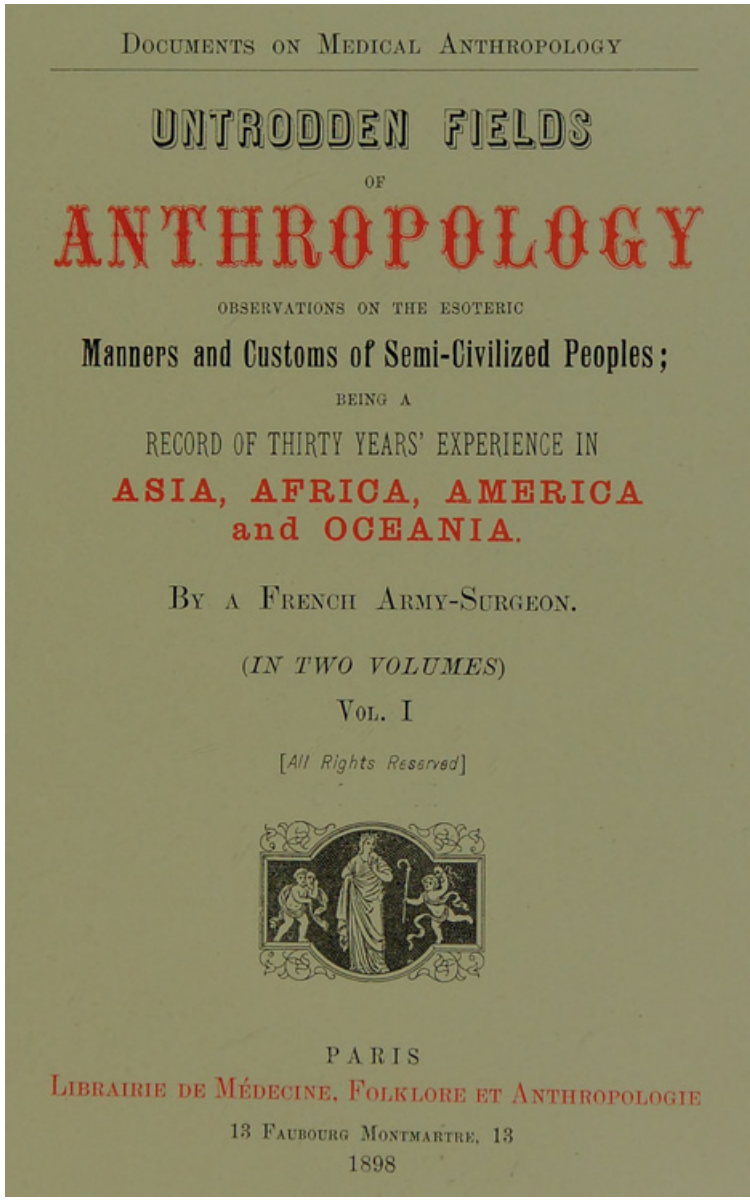


Figure 7.1 Title page, Jacobus X [pseud.], *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology*, 2nd rev. ed. (Paris: Librairie de Médicine, Folklore, et Anthropologie, 1898). Wellcome Collection, CC BY-NC 4.0.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

with indigenous women pushed the envelope even by these standards. Later books in the series were modelled on *Untrodden Fields*'s themes, though not its subject matter. Focused on a variety of supposedly "deviant" sexual practices, these works were cobbled together by drawing on, and in many cases directly translating excerpts from, the work of several Continental sexologists, including Krafft-Ebing and the German psychiatrist Iwan Bloch.[47]

Carrington's broader sexual-scientific catalogue encompassed a spectrum of works, from studies by authors who were widely known and respected in the international scientific community to works whose contributions to scientific debate were questionable in the extreme. He published at least three translations of books by medical authors that the Jacobus X series drew on, including the French physician Charles Samson Féré's *Evolution and Dissolution of the Sexual Instinct* (1904) and the Russian forensic expert Veniamin Mikhaĭlovich Tarnovskiĭ's *The Sexual Instinct and its Morbid Manifestations* (1898). He also sold English and French editions of books written by Krafft-Ebing, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, Albert Moll, and Magnus Hirschfeld.[48] Yet, his output also included original titles so crude in their descriptions of racialized bodies and sexual violence, and so lacking in anything resembling an argument, that it is difficult to imagine them to be serious scholarship. Carrington's *Flagellation in France: Considered from a Medical and Historical Standpoint* (1898), for instance, is a meandering compilation of anecdotes about beatings in French history, mostly clipped from newspapers, while *Human Gorillas: A Medical, Legal and Historical Study of Rape with Violence* (1901) is a racist mish-mash of reports about sexual assault, bulked up with excerpts from forensic medical studies.[49]

Carrington was clearly interested in exploiting curiosity about racialized bodies and "deviant" – and especially homosexual – sex. The advertisements that he placed in a variety of British newspapers and literary periodicals emphasized this subject matter through thinly coded references. One 1898 newspaper advertisement for *Untrodden Fields*, for instance, tells readers that the work contains "some of the most curious information ever published with relation to sexual matters," and stresses that it makes "special reference" to

[47] For more on these titles, see Sarah Bull, "A Purveyor of Garbage? Charles Carrington and the Marketing of Sexual Science in Late-Victorian Britain." *Victorian Review* 38, no. 1 (2012): 69–71.

[48] Benjamin Tarnowsky [Veniamin Mikhaĭlovich Tarnovskiĭ], *The Sexual Instinct and Its Morbid Manifestations from the Double Standpoint of Jurisprudence and Psychiatry*, trans. W. C. Costello and Alfred Allinson (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1898); Charles Féré, *Evolution and Dissolution of the Sexual Instinct* (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1904). See Guacamole, *Charles Carrington* for images and transcriptions of sales catalogues that document Carrington's trade in sexual-scientific works that he did not publish.

[49] Augustin Cabanés, *Flagellation in France: Considered from a Medical and Historical Standpoint* (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1898); Count Roscaud [pseud?], *Human Gorillas: A Medical, Legal and Historical Study of Rape with Violence* (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1901).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

writing by Oscar Wilde, Richard Frances Burton, Cesare Lombroso, Paolo Mantegazza, Krafft-Ebing, and Ellis.[50] These authors were all known to have written about sex between men, or (in Wilde's case) were otherwise associated with it. Carrington promoted the same works in his clandestine sales catalogues, where he framed them in cruder, and sometimes more heterosexual, terms. A description of *Untrodden Fields* in his clandestine catalogue *Forbidden Books* (1902), for instance, declares that a "study of this volume will treat the casual reader as much about the way the women of these countries love and slake their lust as if he had taken a ship and gone out . . . to sample the black and brown lasses."[51]

From the outset, though, Carrington was not solely interested in marketing these works as racy books. He also sought to position himself as a publisher who offered enlightening material on sexual issues for medical practitioners. As the *Lancet*'s response to *Untrodden Fields* suggests, his effort to serve two audiences at once was even less of a success than Ellis's was. Several American medical journals reviewed early books in Carrington's sexual-scientific list, but they found them disappointing. The *Maryland Medical Journal* ventured that *Flagellation in France* was "a curious melange . . . rather amusing and certainly ingenious."[52] The Detroit-based journal *Medicine*, whose editors expressed interest in serious work on flagellation, was harsher, pronouncing *Flagellation in France* "sketchy, discursive, and decidedly 'newspapery'."[53] Carrington's efforts to find a medical audience in Britain were even less fruitful. He claimed to have sent copies of *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology* to six British medical journals in early 1897.[54] The result: one "books received" notice in the *British Medical Journal*, and the review in *The Lancet*.

In the wake of the *Lancet*'s review, Carrington attempted to make *Untrodden Fields* more appealing to scientific practitioners by publishing a second edition designed to convince them of its scholarly merits.[55] He expanded the volumes' physical size, and added a bibliography, an index, an enthusiastic review allegedly written by a physician, and copious footnotes, appendices, and excurses to the original material. Little of the original text was altered, but Carrington changed its tone by cocooning it with the names and words of

[50] "Books and Magazines," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, February 27, 1898, 2. For earlier examples, see *Academy*, November 28, 1896, 1282; *Athenaeum*, November 21, 1896, 3604.

[51] An Old Bibliophile [Charles Carrington], *Forbidden Books: Notes and Gossip on Tabooed Literature* (Paris: The Author and His Friends [Charles Carrington], 1902), 60.

[52] "Flagellation in France," *Maryland Medical Journal* 39 (1898): 541.

[53] "Book Reviews: Flagellation in France from a Medical and Historical Standpoint," *Medicine: A Monthly Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 4 (1898): 575.

[54] Jacobus X [pseud.], *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology: Observations on the Esoteric Manners and Customs of Semi-Civilized Peoples* [. . .]. (Paris: Librairie de Médecine, Folklore et Anthropologie, 1898), xiii.

[55] See Bull, "A Purveyor of Garbage?," 63–67 for a fuller discussion.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

influential sexologists, criminologists, anthropologists, and historians, including Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, Symonds, Moll, Ulrichs, Lombroso, and Everard Westermarck. In a new preface, Carrington used these changes to suggest that the book's composition had been more scholarly than it was, glossing over the fact that almost all of the works that his 1898 edition cited were never referred to in *L'Amour aux colonies* or the 1896 *Untrodden Fields*, and that some had not even been published until after both works were issued. This editorial work attests to Carrington's understanding that presentation mattered: scholarly formats and citations spoke to a work's credibility as a scientific intervention. Unfortunately for Carrington, the second edition of *Untrodden Fields* had little hope of success with the mainstream medical community because he was the publisher, and by 1898, Carrington was a pariah in the British medical world.

Carrington had inadvertently made a bad impression on many medical men before he sent his books to medical journals for review. He had started mailing British doctors unsolicited advertising circulars toward the end of 1896, taking the addresses from professional directories.[56] The circulars claimed that his publications were written along "strictly scientific lines," but they also implied that readers might be ashamed of purchasing them. For instance, some of the circulars assured readers that Carrington kept their purchases confidential: "we never publish the names of our subscribers," one said.[57] Such phrases may have been reassuring to Carrington's bread-and-butter customers – collectors of expensive pornography – but they alarmed medical men. A month before it reviewed *Untrodden Fields*, the *Lancet* warned its readers that a "man of filth" calling himself Henri Robert of Paris – one of Carrington's agents, though the *Lancet* suspected that Robert was Carrington himself – had been posting circulars that advertised "pornography . . . of a semi-scientific appearance" to British doctors:

> We know that members of the medical profession are not likely to be attracted by the lubricity of any circular . . . [but] the medical writer might be tempted to purchase the books for other than lewd reasons. Let him not give into temptation. Traffic in these books may not be penal in Paris, but it is penal in England. The man Robert's circulars are posted in England. What is to prevent Robert from communicating to his agents in England the names and addresses of his English clients? On such event blackmail would follow. The recipient of these circulars should send a letter to the Postmaster General and ask his Grace the Duke of Norfolk to earn everyone's gratitude by devising some

[56] PRO HO 45/15139/A59329/2, TNA.

[57] For instance, see *The Genital Laws*, prospectus (Paris: Privately Printed for Students of Psychopathia Sexualis, c. 1900) and *The Genital Laws*, prospectus (Paris: Privately Printed for Students of Anthropology and Private Subscribers, c. 1900) in *Bibliotheca Carringtoniensis*, Part 1 (c. 1896–1906), KIL. "Pornographic Literature," *BMJ*, October 27, 1900, 1269 complains about these specific circulars.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

scheme to prevent his Department from being the medium of incentive to vile immorality and even unmentionable crime.[58]

Anxiety about sexual, and especially homosexual, blackmail was rife among medical men in the 1890s. As Angus McLaren has recounted, many believed that the vague language of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which did not define "gross indecency," made it "an incitement to false accusation."[59] There is no evidence that Carrington had any interest in blackmailing his clients. Nevertheless, his obvious interest in profiting from others' desire to read about sex between men, and his obvious understanding that many readers would not want that desire to become public knowledge, aroused concern in the medical community that his real business was extortion.

Carrington was not the only foreign agent posting circulars advertising sexual-scientific books to British readers. While other publishers and booksellers seem to have escaped suspicions of blackmail, their advertising methods did inspire concern for medicine's reputation. If "obscene quackery" had threatened to undermine the medical profession's claims to authority by unveiling its imbrication in the ethically rocky waters of commercial enterprise, these sellers of sexual-scientific material were thought to undermine medicine's authority through what the *British Medical Journal* called a "masquerade of pornography in the guise of science."[60] This masquerade, medical writers suggested, could involve marketing dubious productions like *Flagellation in France* as medical treatises, using the language of science as cover for selling pornography. However, it could also involve marketing books that had scientific merit in ways that seemed to suggest that they should have their "place in the library of the curious as well as in that of the man of science."[61] Such acts pandered to prurient curiosity about sexual-scientific work and debased it by confounding it with pornography.

The Lancet pressed the Post Office to prevent Carrington from mailing circulars, but stopping him was not easy. The Post Office (Protection) Act of 1884 had given postal authorities license to destroy indecent matter sent through the post. However, they did not have the right to open mail, which made using this power difficult. Postal authorities sometimes opened mail anyway. From 1891, the Home Secretary periodically issued confidential "indecent warrants" which authorized the Postmaster General to seize, open, and document mail going to and from certain, mostly foreign, pornographers.[62]

[58] "A Vile Trade," *Lancet*, February 13, 1897, 468.
[59] Angus McLaren, *Sexual Blackmail: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 18.
[60] Review of *Les eunuques a travers les ages*, by Dr. R. Millant, *BMJ*, April 10, 1909, 905.
[61] Review of *Les eunuques*, *BMJ*, 905.
[62] Colligan, *A Publisher's Paradise*, 36–41; Deana Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India, and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87–88.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

Officials often turned a blind eye to the home-grown trade in expensive pornography. However, they were increasingly preoccupied with cracking down on its entry to the British market from abroad, partly, Jamie Stoops has argued, because this allowed them to frame pornography trafficking as a "foreign problem."[63] The information that the Post Office gathered was used to map pornographers' distribution networks. While their packets were seized and searched, their clients were not tracked. Still, authorities feared scandal if it became known that the government was violating citizens' right to privacy, and so postal surveillance under indecent warrants was a haphazard affair.[64]

Turning postal discoveries into successful prosecutions was also difficult. Police officers arrested Henri Robert in the autumn of 1897, but only by a stroke of luck: Robert had tried to post parcels of pornographic novels by registered mail in Folkstone while he was falling-down drunk.[65] Catching bigger, smarter fish required cooperation with foreign authorities. Unfortunately for British officials, publishers like Carrington based their businesses in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands because obscenity laws applied to a narrower range of material in those countries, and prosecutions for distributing obscene material were generally more difficult to bring.[66] An attempt to prosecute one of Carrington's London-based competitors, Harry Sidney Nichols, on the basis that his new, openly published edition of John Joseph Stockdale's 1821 compilation *Kalogynomia, or The Laws of Female Beauty* was obscene failed in 1900 because Nichols fled to Paris. French authorities refused the British government's request that they arrest Nichols because "the book being apparently in the opinion of the French Police of a medical description, the French Government are, in the absence of some more explicit charge, unable to take any proceedings against Mr. Nichols for the sale of an obscene publication."[67]

In this context, there was little that medical men could do to stop such publishers from doing business, though the *British Medical Journal* and the *Lancet* continued to urge the Postmaster General to stop Carrington's "objectionable circulars" along with those of a "sexual quack" who called himself Dr. Bell.[68] The attempted prosecution of Nichols offered Thomas Bond,

[63] Jamie Stoops, *The Thorny Path: Pornography in Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2018), 212. This appears to have been a common strategy. When officials launched a "war on pornography" in Belgium – a major hub of European pornography production – in the 1880s, they focused on preventing its importation from abroad. See Leon Janssens, "Pornography on Rails: Trains and Belgium's "War on Pornography," 1880–1891," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 32, no. 3 (2023): 269–287.

[64] Colligan, *A Publisher's Paradise*, 30, 40–41.

[65] Colligan, *A Publisher's Paradise*, 32.

[66] Colligan, *A Publisher's Paradise*, 20.

[67] Foreign Office to the Marquess of Lansdowne. January 18, 1901. PRO FO 83/2101, TNA.

[68] "The Degradation of the Post-Office," *Lancet*, June 29, 1901, 1843; "Pornographic Literature," *BMJ*, 1269; "The Sexual Quack," *Lancet*, June 16, 1900, 1767.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

a surgeon at Westminster Hospital, a rare opportunity to act by serving as an expert witness. Bond pronounced *Kalogynomia* "obscene and ridiculous."[69] Much of the text, he noted, was compiled from works on anatomy and physiology, and rounded out with "voluptuous" discussions of sexual intercourse.[70] Bond found many of the work's statements "incorrect, medically + scientifically," and its plates "disgusting," though he conceded that he would not consider them obscene had they been published in a different book.[71] After he fled the country, of course, Nichols turned the prosecution to his advantage. He now advertised *Kalogynomia* in his clandestine catalogues, where he framed it as a rare collector's item. "This is one of the works . . . which Scotland Yard tried to suppress," Nichols advised readers. "The above described copy is quite perfect, and contains ALL the plates."[72]

Medical men were familiar with the pornography trade's traffic in sexual science in 1897 and 1898. Carrington's books arrived at the offices of medical journals, where their editors looked in askance at their lurid red-and-black title pages. Doctors received his unsolicited circulars at their offices and homes. Some encountered Carrington's advertisements in the periodicals that they perused on Sunday afternoons, and some probably saw sexual-scientific works advertised in his clandestine sales catalogues, crowded together with listings for pornographic novels and photographs. Looking back on Carrington's trade, it is easier to understand why *Sexual Inversion*, with its unknown publisher with unknown motivations, was initially received with such suspicion by British doctors. Ellis and Symonds set themselves a huge challenge in defending same-sex desire as a normal product of human variation during a decade gripped with homophobia. They had increased the challenge by making their argument in a book that did not solely address a medical or a lay audience, but both at once, and by issuing it with a radical publisher. The queer circuits of sexual science's distribution – and the mixed feelings of fear, shame, and desire that they aroused for medical men – magnified these difficulties. In a field that required certainty in the identity of its print culture, *Sexual Inversion* could not be trusted.

Sexual Science and Sexual Ignorance

The circumstances surrounding the Bedborough trial inspire a sense of déjà vu. The state's use of the *Hicklin* definition of obscenity to advance interests that had little to do with concern for readers of *Sexual Inversion* and medics' fears about being damaged by association with an immoral and potentially

[69] Metropolitan Police Division, *Examination of Charles Arrow*, 28. PRO CRIM 12/116/ 06/ 04, TNA.
[70] *Examination of Charles Arrow*, 22–23. [71] *Examination of Charles Arrow*, 24, 29–30.
[72] See no. 34, "Catalogue of Books" in *Album 7*.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

extortionate trade are sequels to episodes that we have already visited. The Bedborough trial's portrayal in radical circles and its effect on trade in sexual knowledge also mirror the Knowlton trial and its aftermath in two respects. The right to publish and distribute sex research was immediately framed as a free speech issue in radical communities; and rather than depressing trade in sexual-scientific literature, the controversy around the trial encouraged it. However, the strategies that sexual scientists and their allies developed to distance themselves from damaging associations with disreputable publishers and products, to articulate an identity for sexology, and to justify its existence are worth lingering on, for they differed from strategies examined in the previous chapter in some important ways. Most significantly, they hinged on the promotion of a myth that came to serve as a powerful and remarkably durable rationale for sex research, education, and liberation: the myth of Victorian sexual ignorance.

On Bedborough's arrest, sex radicals hoisted up the banner of free speech. The leftist *Reynolds's Newspaper*, whose editor W. M. Thompson was active in social protest circles, called it a "scandalous" attack on scientific enquiry, while a leading column in the *Adult* cried, "To the Breach, Freemen! . . . An Attack upon the freedom of the press has been made . . . Mr. Bedborough has an unquestionable right to sell such a book."[73] Carrington must not have been able to believe his luck. Free-love advocates were seen as a promising market for sexual material. Throughout 1897, one of Carrington's competitors, Aimé Duringe, had advertised in the *Adult*, placing notices for "books, rare and curious, dealing with subjects not available at English booksellers" by post or in person at his Paris bookshop, which he styled the Cosmos Library.[74] Amid his failing effort to win over medical men, Carrington had started to court the same audience. He sent early volumes in his sexual-scientific catalogue to *Reynolds's Newspaper* for review from 1897, and began to advertise in the *Adult* in February 1898, offering readers discounts.[75] In return, the *Adult* and *Reynolds's Newspaper* published glowing reviews of Carrington's books.

These reviews rapidly came to function as platforms for both periodicals to decry what their editors saw as British sexual conservatism, and, after May 1898, Bedborough's arrest for selling *Sexual Inversion*. A review of Carrington's edition of Tarnovskiĭ's *Sexual Instinct*, published in *Reynolds's Newspaper* in October 1898, for instance, told readers:

> The subject with which this book deals is one of increasing interest. The physicians of other countries have devoted much more study of it than those of our own, yet the

[73] "Booksellers and Erotic Literature: Astounding Revelations," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, June 12, 1898, 3; "To the Breach," *Adult*, July 1898, 159.

[74] See "Cosmos Library," *Adult*, September 1897, 32. For information about Duringe, see Colette Colligan, "Digital Discovery and Fake Imprints: Unmasking Turn-of-the-Century Pornographers in Paris," *Book History* 22, no. 1 (2019): 249–279.

[75] See advertisements in *The Adult*, February 1898, 2; May 1898, 2; October, 1898.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

morbid manifestations of the passions, both from the view of psychiatry and of jurisprudence are becoming of ever-growing importance. The conservative tendencies of our own people are curiously illustrated by the circumstance that a work dealing with similar topics by the distinguished author, Dr. Havelock Ellis, is now the subject of prosecution. We shall learn in a fortnight's time whether or not England is the only country which regards as a crime the investigation of the inclinations of that creature which, we are told, God made in His own image.[76]

Even Carrington's more dubious productions were praised in these venues for shedding light on "suppressed" topics. A paragraph in the *Adult* on his gossipy chronicle of sexual scandals *Curious By-Paths of History* (1898) called it "well worth reading, if only because of the great pains invariably taken to suppress these things."[77] Carrington's second edition of *Untrodden Fields* was celebrated for affording "a long-sought opportunity of noticing practices and customs which interest all mankind, and which 'Society' would not hear mentioned."[78]

Obscenity trials – and reviews like these – sold books. Carrington immediately capitalized on the situation. First, he donated money to the Free Press Defence Committee, a group set up to fund Bedborough's defence at trial.[79] Then he began to re-use excerpts from the reviews in advertisements, even as he set about expanding his sexual-scientific catalogue at a rapid clip. He reprinted part of *Reynolds's* review of Tarnovskiĭ's *Sexual Instinct*, for example, in a circular appended to the back of pages of his 1899 volume in the Jacobus X series, *The Ethnology of the Six Sense*, using it to align both works with *Sexual Inversion* and frame himself as a "defender of truth."[80] Carrington thus neatly associated new productions, including blatant piracies and dubious compilations, with the works of authors who had gained respect in the international scientific community. He represented himself and his books as defenders of free speech in sexual matters, even as he banked on their appeal as containers of "forbidden" knowledge.

Weissenfeld also expanded his trade in sexual-scientific literature.[81] Over the next four years, he sold translations of Continental sexology issued by Rebman, Walter Scott, and Carrington in London and the surrounding area; published his own translations of books by Féré and Joanny Roux; and issued

[76] "Books Received: *The Sexual Instinct*," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, October 16, 1898, 2.
[77] "Books Received: *Curious By-Paths of History*," *Adult*, April 1898, 88–89.
[78] "Books Received: *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology*," *Adult*, September 1898, 250–252.
[79] "The Free Press Defence Committee: The Bedborough Case Balance Sheet" ([London?]: The Executive of the Free Press Defence Committee, 1899), 4.
[80] "List of Mr. Carrington's New and Forthcoming Works in English and French," 425, appended to Jacobus X [pseud.], *The Ethnology of the Six Sense* (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1899), CUP.364.c.92, BL.
[81] For a fuller account of Weissenfeld's publishing activities, see Ross Brooks, "Bad Sexology: The Scientific Publications of the University Press (Watford and London), 1897–1901," *Social History of Medicine* 36, no. 4 (2023): 615-641.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

a new edition of *Sexual Inversion* allegedly printed in Leipzig. He also issued several home-grown productions, such as Walter Gallichan's *Chapters on Human Love* (1898), that aimed to popularize ideas in Continental sexology. Like Carrington's, Weissenfeld's marketing for this material heavily emphasized its "suppressed" status. The first page of his 1901 *Catalogue of Scientific Works on the Psychology and Pathology of Sex* features the headline "The Corruption of the Morals of Her Majesty's Subjects." Below this headline, Weissenfeld published a dramatic account of a police raid on his home in Watford, where, he reported, copies of Gallichan's *Chapters* and volumes in Ellis's *Psychology of Sex* series were seized and carted away. "The Bench . . . ordered THE DESTRUCTION BY FIRE of indicted books," the account finishes. Weissenfeld framed his books as martyrs for free speech, sanctified in fires lit by "prudes on the prowl."[82]

Rebman issued increasing numbers of sexual-scientific publications too, though the Bedborough trial does seem to have concerned him. The preface to his tenth edition of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, published a year after the Bedborough trial, is appended with a notice that advises readers that the "sale of this book is rigidly restricted to members of the medical and legal professions."[83] There is evidence that some booksellers restricted sales of *Psychopathia Sexualis* and other sexual-scientific works for decades after the Bedborough trial. However, as Phillip Kuhn has argued, it is doubtful that they were restricted as much as this disclaimer suggests: reportedly, Rebman's 1899 edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* sold in large numbers.[84]

Did Rebman advertise restrictions on the work because he worried that he might be prosecuted for selling it? Or did he want to perform respectability for his medical customers in the wake of the Bedborough trial? If the former, his fears were eventually realized: in 1909, following a complaint lodged at the Home Office, the police seized copies of Rebman's 1908 English edition of Iwan Bloch's *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seinen Beziehungen zur modernen Kultur* (1906), *The Sexual Life of our Time in its Relations to Modern Civilization*, which was framed as a comprehensive encyclopedia of the sexual sciences. In the end, the magistrate ordered the books impounded rather than destroyed as he agreed that Bloch's work was scientific, and Rebman resumed selling them three months later. Kuhn speculates that Rebman and the Home Office cut a deal: if Bloch's book carried a disclaimer, Rebman could sell it. "It

[82] *A Catalogue of Scientific Works on the Psychology and Pathology of Sex* (London: University Press, c. 1901), 258776 f.4, Bodleian Library.

[83] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock [1892] (London: F. J. Rebman, 1899), unpaginated publisher's preface.

[84] Kuhn, "Sexual Life," 48.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

must be clearly understood that this is a work belonging to the category of 'adult literature'," the preface of a new edition states.[85]

Kuhn argues that Rebman found himself in this situation because sex research had gained more acceptance by 1909.[86] Medical journals reviewed sexual-scientific studies more regularly and generously. Prior to the police raid, Rebman had dropped disclaimers from his translations of Continental studies, and was advertising them in mainstream periodicals. His translation of Bloch's book had been favourably reviewed in a variety of British newspapers in 1908.[87] The fact that a complaint was lodged against the book was less a sign that efforts to make sexology respectable had failed than it was a sign of their mounting success: sex research now enjoyed the kind of visibility that made a complaint to the Home Office possible in the first place. Some of this acceptance was probably linked to the outcry against the Bedborough trial, in which foreign scientists joined British social protestors in arguing that the trial was an attack on free speech and scientific progress. However, as Fisher and Funke have shown, sexologists and their allies were also working to cultivate acceptance through a more complex version of that argument, one that relied on two claims to authorize sexology as a scientific field and distance it from associations that threatened it. One of these claims was that sexual expression and discussion were "natural" and "healthy." The other was that both had been suppressed, and that their suppression had destroyed people's natural relationship with sex.[88]

Aspects of this argument can be traced all the way back to Richard Carlile, who opined that sex was "natural, wholesome, and clean" and that religious opposition to non-marital sex was a "perverted" form of vice, but it evolved alongside free-speech arguments for sexual causes from the 1880s and was further elaborated by sex reformers and sexual scientists after 1898.[89] Havelock Ellis's 1922 essay "The Revaluation of Obscenity" is emblematic of the argument in its fully fledged form. In the essay, Ellis pleads with readers to cast off outmoded ideas about the dangers of frank sexual discussion and abolish laws that would impede it for their own good. Although obscenity was defined in British law as that which had the tendency to deprave and corrupt,

[85] Kuhn, "Sexual Life," 50–54. Considering their earlier attitude toward defences of sexual content in medical books, it is interesting that medical reviewers seem to have approved of disclaimers in this context. See "Sexual Psychology," *BMJ*, April 10, 1909, 904.

[86] Kuhn, "Sexual Life," 54.

[87] Kuhn, "Sexual Life," 49–50.

[88] Fisher and Funke, "Are We to Treat," 85–91.

[89] Quoted in M. L. Bush, *What Is Love? Richard Carlile's Philosophy of Sex* (London: Verso, 1998), 19; Fisher and Funke, "Are We to Treat," 90. Writers of modernist literature, whose circles overlapped with Ellis's, made a version of the same argument to justify sexual details in literary works. For instance, see D. H. Lawrence, *Pornography and Obscenity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929); Virginia Woolf, "The Censorship of Books," *Nineteenth Century and After* 105 (1929): 446–447; E. M. Forster, "The Censorship of Books," *Nineteenth Century and After* 105 (1929): 444–445.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

Ellis argues that most works labelled obscene merely expressed "the naturalistic aspect of sexual processes."[90] Framing obscenity as a permanent element in human life across all cultures and classes, Ellis maintains that it presented no danger to its viewers. Indeed, for Ellis, obscenity was a beautifully "open and wholesome" mode of expression.[91]

Spinning a kind of narrative that Michel Foucault would parody half a century later in his foundational *History of Sexuality*, Ellis then argues that while obscenity circulated freely in England during the early modern period – the "Golden Age of British history" – and remained a feature of "primitive" societies, "Victorianism" stole it from his own society by depriving sexual representations of "all naturalistic character" and bathing them in "a vague and frequently quite impenetrable mist."[92] Victorian censorship, Ellis suggests in this essay, and other sexologists argued elsewhere, fostered fear and ignorance of sex. Yet, it was sexual ignorance that presented the real danger to society: sexual ignorance led people away from their natural relationship with sexuality, leading to "years of heartache and blind questioning," and even "abnormal" sexual behaviour.[93]

Even as sexologists and their allies defended sex and its "obscene" expression in art, literature, and science as "natural," they decried the existence, and even advocated the suppression, of pornography – a media form that they rarely attempted to define but chronically cast as inaccurate, immoral, and, most of all, "unnatural."[94] This side of the argument elaborated on hostile stances that many sex radicals, from Carlile on, had taken toward sexual entertainment, and "The Revaluation of Obscenity," again, offers a pretty good illustration of it. In the essay, Ellis goes to pains to distinguish "naturalistic" obscenity from pornography through an extended anecdote about a book that he purchased on holiday in Seville, which he claims to have found "pathetically crude and unpleasant," a "vulgar, disgusting, and stupid" piece of work.[95] According to Ellis, it was the suppression of naturalistic forms of sexual expression that made such works "attractive and profitable": in the absence of censorship, interest in pornography would disappear.[96] As H. G. Cocks has shown, some sex reformers went further than Ellis, advocating the destruction of pornography on the grounds that it was "unhealthy."[97]

[90] Havelock Ellis, "The Revaluation of Obscenity," in *On Life and Sex*, ed. Havelock Ellis (London: W.M. Heinemann, 1948), 207.
[91] Ellis, "Revaluation of Obscenity," 212.
[92] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978; repr., New York: Random House, 1990), 3–5; Ellis, "Revaluation of Obscenity," 206, 209, 216.
[93] Fisher and Funke, "Are We to Treat," 90–91. [94] Cocks, "Saucy Stories," 472–473.
[95] Ellis, "Revaluation of Obscenity," 224. [96] Ellis, "Revaluation of Obscenity," 221–223.
[97] Cocks, "Saucy Stories," 474.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

Decrying the censorship of "naturalistic" sexual discussion on the grounds that it led to sexual ignorance and condemning pornography as an "unnatural" perversion of wholesome sexual expression enabled sexologists and their allies to accomplish two things. First, as Fisher and Funke emphasize, it made the case for their own work. According to this narrative, Victorian censorship had damaged personal well-being and public morality by making people ignorant of sex. Sex researchers could heroically repair the damage by bringing the truth of sex "into the pure air" of the dawning twentieth century.[98] At the same time, by identifying pornography as a grotesque product of their grandparents' era, sexologists bounded sexual knowledge, distancing their literature from a media form that often met with disgust at a time when sexual science and sexual entertainment continued to overlap in the book trade. Through the first half of the twentieth century, booksellers continued to sell sexual-scientific literature by Ellis, Bloch, and others alongside pornographic, pulp, and fetish material, and publishers increasingly incorporated sexual-scientific language into this material to justify its existence and try to circumvent censorship themselves.[99] The argument outlined here repudiated this troublesome boundary-blurring.

It was a neat argument. However, it was not without its contradictions. One contradiction, which Fisher and Funke explore in more detail, was that it was founded on the idea "that natural sexual impulses needed guiding, since the sexual instinct was a volatile and changeable force that could easily be influenced and even corrupted by external influences."[100] This idea justified sex research and the circulation of its findings beyond scientific communities. However, it also led sexologists to become censors themselves. Sexual knowledge, they agreed, was a powerful thing. It needed to reach the right readers in the right ways, lest their natural instincts be led astray. Even as some sexologists complained that their works had limited circulation in public libraries and called for reforms to the law so that they might write and publish without fear of restriction, they not only supported restrictions on trade in sexual entertainment but also restricted access to sexual-scientific knowledge. In addition to censoring their own writing (Ellis, for example, admitted to omitting "any crude + repellent details which did not seem . . . necessary to the comprehension of the matter at hand" in his publications), sexual-scientific authors embraced the kinds of disclaimers that Rebman had appended to Krafft-Ebing's *Scientia Sexualis*, underscoring that their publications were intended for professional or adult readers only.[101] Organizers restricted admission to events like the 1929 World Congress of the International Society for Sex Research, where delegates delivered

[98] Havelock Ellis to Bronislaw Malinowski, December 26, 1923, MALINOWSKI 29/4, LSE.
[99] Cocks, "Saucy Stories," 475–481. [100] Fisher and Funke, "Are We to Treat," 81.
[101] Havelock Ellis to Bronislaw Malinowski, January 10, 1924, MALINOWSKI 29/4, LSE; Fisher and Funke, "Are We to Treat," 95.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

impassioned speeches against the scourge of censorship, to "serious students of this field of science."[102]

This argument also elided sexology's debts to pornography. The most dangerous aspects of sexology for its image as a scientific field lay with its reliance on social networks and ways of knowing that could raise questions about its objectivity, its motivations, its identity as science. Pornographers' relationship with sexual science was more complicated than the editors of the *Lancet* assumed. As I suggested earlier, the pornography trade played a role in sexology's development by circulating its literature. By bringing sexual-scientific books across borders, pornographers enabled exchanges between sex researchers, and even introduced new works into the sexological canon. Havelock Ellis, Iwan Bloch, Albert Moll, Ferdinand Karsch-Haack, and Georg Merzbach all cited editions of studies published by Carrington, including volumes in his Jacobus X series, which they took far more seriously than the *Lancet*'s editors.[103] More problematically for sexology's image, however, early sexologists also engaged with pulp and pornographic literary works to various degrees as they sought out new sources of insight into the workings of sexual nature. This engagement brought sexual-scientific and pornographic print cultures closer together, and in some cases collapsed distinctions between them altogether. While their vague use of the terms meant that they were open to interpretation, the distinctions between "obscenity" and "pornography" that figures like Ellis made in their public writing were rather misleading.

Erotic literature's influence on early sexology seems to be related to its practitioners' interest in adapting methods used in earlier antiquarian and anthropological studies of ancient and foreign sexuality, and is clearest in Continental sexology.[104] Scholarship on erotic literature and sex research overlapped in the practices of figures like Paul Englisch, who wrote

[102] Quoted in Fisher and Funke, "Are We to Treat," 95.

[103] Ferdinand Karsch-Haack, *Das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker* (München: E. Reinhardt, 1911), 551, 632, 682; Georg Merzbach, *Die krankhaften Erscheinungen des Geschlechtssinnes* (Wien: Hölder, 1909), 461. Iwan Bloch, *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seinen Beziehungen zur modernen Kultur* (Berlin: L. Marcus, 1919), 644; Albert Moll, *Das Sexualleben des Kindes* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1908), 135; Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: The Sexual Impulse* (Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis, 1904), 38, 83–84. These works may have been purchased through third-party dealers, as suggested in Havelock Ellis to Edward Carpenter, November 12, 1916, ADD MS 70536, BL.

[104] There are striking overlaps between methods and perspectives that sexual scientists brought to working with pornographic literature and bibliography (a field with roots in antiquarianism) and the methods and perspectives that they brought to working with erotic artefacts, building on earlier work by antiquarians and, later, anthropologists. See Jana Funke, Kate Fisher, Jen Grove, and Rebecca Langlands, "Illustrating Phallic Worship: Uses of Material Objects and the Production of Sexual Knowledge in Eighteenth-Century Antiquarianism and Early Twentieth-Century Sexual Science," *Word & Image* 33, no. 3 (2017): 324–337 and Helen Wickstead, "Sex in the Secret Museum: Photographs from the British Museum's Witt Scrapbooks," *Photography and Culture* 11, no. 3 (2018): 351–366.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

a substantial history of erotic literature in the 1930s, and Iwan Bloch, the discoverer of the Marquis de Sade's lost novel *Les 120 journées de Sodome* (*The 120 Days of Sodom*).[105] A number of sexologists also drew directly on pulp and pornographic representations of sexual behaviour and desire to formulate theories about sexual perversions. Krafft-Ebing famously drew on the writings of Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, author of the explicit novel *Venus im Pelz* (*Venus in Furs*) (1870), to frame the pathologies of sadism and masochism, for instance, while the French psychologist Alfred Binet cited Jules Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly's erotically charged novels *Les diaboliques* (*The She-Devils*) (1874) and *Une vieille maîtresse* (*An Old Mistress*) (1851) in his study *Le fétichisme dans l'amour* (*Fetishism in Love*) (1897).[106]

As Birgit Lang has emphasized, these researchers' understandings of how literary representations of desire functioned as evidence of sexual phenomena differed, and changed over time.[107] Krafft-Ebing initially recognized his patients' identification with literary characters and scenes, but only gradually came to believe that they reflected real-life desires.[108] Binet had no trouble seeing literature as a source of insight into human sexuality, but felt the need to establish the accuracy of its representations, and would question authors about the basis of their descriptions.[109] Bloch took the concept of the literary author as observer of sexual nature further still, arguing that sexually explicit literature could be a form of sexual science in its own right. His prime example was Sade's work: in Bloch's view, Sade's attempt to catalogue sexual perversions in *Les 120 journées de Sodome* made him a pioneering "Sexualphilosoph" (sexual philosopher).[110]

During a period in which bibliographers were framing bibliography as a science – one that, like botany or anthropology, relied on specialized knowledge and involved systematic observation and classification – bibliographies could also be thought of as sexual-scientific studies.[111] Bloch's belief that bibliographies of erotic books like those of the British collector Henry Spencer Ashbee recorded observations of sexual culture led him to transform a work of bibliography that was a fixture of the pornography trade into a work of sexual science, subsuming it into

[105] Sarah L. Leonard, "Pornography and Obscenity," in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, ed. H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 184; Neil Schaeffer, *The Marquis de Sade: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 383.

[106] Anna Katherina Schaffner, "Fiction as Evidence: On the Uses of Literature in Nineteenth-Century Sexological Discourse," *Comparative Literature Studies* 48, no. 2 (2011): 165.

[107] Schaffner, "'Fiction as Evidence,'" 169–182; Birgit Lang, "The Shifting Case of Masochism: Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz* (1870)," in *A History of the Case Study: Sexology, Psychoanalysis, Literature*, ed. Birgit Lang, Joy Damousi, and Alison Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 23–26.

[108] Lang, "Shifting Case," 23–26. [109] Schaffner, "Fiction as Evidence," 169–175, 190.

[110] Schaffner, "Fiction as Evidence," 190.

[111] Thomas G. Tanselle, "Bibliography and Science," *Studies in Bibliography* 27 (1974): 55–89.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

the discipline. His three-volume study *Das Geschlechtsleben in England* (*Sexual Life in England*) (1901–3), published under the pseudonym Eugène Dühren, drew heavily on Ashbee's three bibliographies, *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (1877), *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum* (1879), and *Catena Librorum Tacendorum* (1885), which contain lengthy excerpts from Ashbee's gossipy, opinion-filled commentary on a wide range of pornographic productions. Ashbee's name never appears in *Das Geschlechtsleben in England*. Bloch promised that he would only cite Ashbee using the pseudonym that he used to publish the bibliographies, Pisanus Fraxi.[112] However, Ashbee's pseudonym, his readings of erotic literature, and his views about what it reveals about human sexuality dominate the study.

In addition to citing Ashbee as an authority on subjects ranging from the idea that "passive flagellation plays a great part as a simple preliminary to intercourse" in England to the notion that the pornographic novel *Letters from Laura and Eveline* (1883) provides a valuable illustration of sex between "hermaphrodites," Bloch paraphrases from the bibliographies at length. Even the theoretical basis for Bloch's study – that impressions of a foreign sexual culture "may best be tested for correctness by examining its most blatant expression in erotic literature" – seems to be modelled on Ashbee's justification for compiling his bibliographies:[113]

> Erotic Novels. . . "hold the mirror up to nature" more certainly than do those of any other description . . . [T]heir authors have, in most instances, been eyewitnesses of the scenes they have described . . . themselves enacted, in part, what they have portrayed. Immoral and amatory fiction . . . must unfortunately be acknowledged to contain . . . a reflection of the manners and vices of the times – of vices to be avoided, guarded against, reformed, but which unquestionably exist, and of which an exact estimate is needful to enable us to cope with them.[114]

As Heike Bauer has shown, sexologists frequently translated and adapted sexual-scientific studies for new audiences and new cultural contexts.[115] In this light, *Das Geschlechtsleben in England* can be thought of as a translation,

[112] Ian Gibson, *The Erotomaniac: The Secret Life of Henry Spencer Ashbee* (Boston, MA: Da Capo, 2001), 141. For another letter between Ashbee and Bloch, see Iwan Bloch to Henry Spencer Ashbee, July 20, 1900, Bloch Collection, Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft.

[113] Iwan Bloch, *Sexual Life in England, Past and Present*, trans. W. H. Forstern (London: Francis Aldor, 1938), 499. The untranslated passage reads: "Dieses allgemeine Urteil über die Bedeutung des Erotischen in der Poesie und Prosa der Völker lässt sich auf seine Richtigkeit am besten prüfen, wenn man den krassesten Ausdruck des Erotischen, wie er in der sogenannten „erotischen" Litteratur im engeren Sinne sichtbar wird." Eugène Dühren, *Das Geschlechtsleben in England, mit besonderer Beziehung auf London*, vol. 4 (Berlin: M. Lilienthal, 1903), 320.

[114] Pisanus Fraxi [Henry Spencer Ashbee], *Catena Librorum Prohibitorum: Bio-Biblio-Iconographical and Critical Notes on Curious, Uncommon, and Erotic Books* (London: Privately Printed, 1885), xxxv–li.

[115] Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860–1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 15–16.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

one that not only renders parts of Ashbee's English bibliographies into German but also reinscribes erotic bibliography as sexual science.

It is more difficult to trace pornography's influence on British sex research. Overt engagements with pornography as source material were absent here; yet, some sexologists do seem to have been interested in its potential as source material. Ellis – the self-professed hater of pornographic novels – collected erotic artwork, and reportedly "cheap sado-masochistic semi-pornography of the kind published in Paris by the [erotic book publisher] 'Select Bibliothèque'."[116] Like Bloch and Englisch, Ellis was also deeply familiar with bibliographies of erotic literature, including Ashbee's works (which he viewed at the British Museum Library); Guillaume Apollinaire, Fernand Fleuret, and Louis Perceau's *L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque nationale* (1913); and Hugo Hayn and Alfred Gotendorf's eight-volume *Bibliotheca Germanorum Erotica et Curiosa* (1912–14).[117] His familiarity with these bibliographies was well known to his colleagues: those interested in translating or reprinting them, or in writing their own, approached him for assistance.[118]

Yet, Ellis was loath to make his interest in erotic material public. He refused an invitation from the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski to write the introduction to the bibliographer Alfred Rose's bibliography of erotic books *Registrum Librorum Eroticorum* (1936), even though Malinowski was convinced that the work had great "importance for the students of the psychology of sex" and felt he would agree.[119] And he was incredibly defensive about his collection of erotic artwork, even in private correspondence. In 1936, Ellis wrote to the binder Mills Whitman, asking Whitman to prepare some books from his collection for sale. At the outset, he warned Whitman that he might find one of them "rather alarming! I have for years possessed, in ten parts, a famous work which is no doubt the best collection of erotic works of art there is – copies of paintings, drawings, etc. by famous artists." Then he added, "a serious work of course, not 'pornographic' or I would not possess it. But from the police & magisterial point of view it is definitely 'obscene'."[120]

Ellis's decision to underline the word "serious" in this private letter, straining to distance himself on the page from that which might call his credibility into question, is an apt metonym for the trajectory of the history that this chapter,

[116] Gershon Legman, "The Lure of the Forbidden," in *Libraries, Erotica, and Pornography*, ed. Martha Cornog (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1991), 55.
[117] Patrick Kearney, *The Private Case: An Annotated Bibliography of the Private Case Erotica Collection in the British (Museum) Library* (London: J. Landesman, 1989), 356–357.
[118] Havelock Ellis, Letter to Montague Summers, December 28, 1926, typescript insert in Kearney, *The Private Case*, 356 in RAR 808.803, BL.
[119] Bronislaw Malinowski to Havelock Ellis, May 8, 1934, MS, Archives and Manuscripts, ADD MS 70539, BL.
[120] Havelock Ellis to Mills Whitman, August 8, [19]36, WMS 4, MS 8106/55, WL.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008

and this book, has traced. The nineteenth century witnessed the consolidation of new businesses, movements, and institutions that claimed authority over sexual knowledge. Their agents were united in their representation of sexual knowledge as something that they had, and that other people lacked. Where they departed was in their beliefs about how that knowledge should be used, not least by those who put it into circulation. Above all, regular medical practitioners, sex reformers, and sexual scientists desired to be taken seriously during an era in which rationality and restraint were prized. They wanted to be – and to be seen as – agents who were working for the common good, above the profit-making and pleasure-seeking that their sometime competitors, sometime collaborators openly embraced. Through the precarious narratives that they created to frame sexual knowledge, and claim it for themselves, sexual knowledge's production and distribution were situated as enterprises of vital social importance, *serious* enterprises untainted by the pleasures of desire and the messy, morally compromised affinities of the market.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 06:29:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009578103.008