



University of Victoria

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Writing Identity

Sexologists, Authors and Lesbians in Britain and Germany in the Early 20th Century

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Figure 1. Wall displaying Hirschfeld's Theory of Sexual Intermediaries in his Berlin Institute

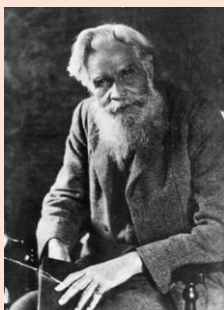


Figure 2. The Sexologist Havelock Ellis

What is Sexology?

- Sexology is a field that focuses on sexual science and created new categories for understanding sexuality. It began in the late nineteenth century and remained relevant until the mid-twentieth century.
- Some sexologists, like the German Magnus Hirschfeld and the British Havelock Ellis, believed that non-normative sexuality was completely natural, and they pushed back against the theories that it was due to degeneration of the human species.
- Sexologists initially created categories like "invert" which denoted a person in the body of one gender whose internal self was that of the 'other' gender.
- This categorization evolved into a belief of potential intermediaries between the sexes, as seen in the photo above (Figure 1).
- Eventually, sexology shifted towards using the terms homosexual or lesbian and theorized that sexuality was not always tied to specific gender expression. Essentially, one could be lesbian and not be masculine presenting or feel like a man internally.

Overview

This research explores the extent to which early twentieth century sexology and popular literature informed lesbian identity in Germany and Britain. It also explores the ways in which these ideas and books functioned transnationally: how they extended beyond borders to create a shared conception of lesbian identity. By examining works of sexology, two novels, and the popular reception of those novels through magazines and letters, this research has revealed the way women in Britain and Germany connected to categories of sexuality and to each other, forming an identity that continues to resonate today.



Figure 3. Cover of Der Skorpion



Figure 4. Hall (right) and Troubridge (left), 1923

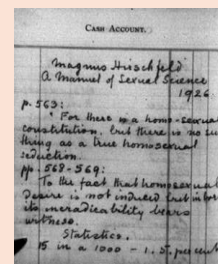


Figure 5. Una Troubridge 1928 diary with notes on Hirschfeld

Literary Engagement

- Many elites and upper-middle class people in England and Germany read sexology texts, including authors such as Virginia Woolf, Vicki Baum, Radclyffe Hall and Anna Elisabet Weirauch.
- Anna Elisabet Weirauch wrote *Der Skorpion* (*The Scorpion*) in 1921, and the woman main character of the novel falls in love with a masculine woman (or invert) but she herself does not embrace that terminology, veering more towards the later sexological understandings of lesbianism.
- The author Radclyffe Hall and her long-term partner Una Troubridge were close contacts of the sexologist Havelock Ellis and read many of Magnus Hirschfeld's works.
- Radclyffe Hall wrote *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 which is about a character who self identifies as an invert after she reads sexological books. The novel included a preface written by Havelock Ellis emphasizing its "psychological and sociological significance."

Identity Formation

- Der Skorpion* and *The Well of Loneliness* were each eventually published in both German and English.
- Both books were advertised in magazines like *Die Freundin* (Girlfriend), which catered to a lesbian audience. Some magazines featured stories of women who found their sexual identity and community through reading the novels.
- Una Troubridge, the partner of the author of *The Well of Loneliness* recorded in her letters that she and Hall received "literally thousands of letters" from people who felt the book allowed them to understand themselves better. These letters are in the Uvic Special Collections and have not been published on extensively.
- One woman claimed that reading *Der Skorpion* was "a revelation" because she saw herself in the lesbian protagonist.
- Through reading these books many non-elite women were able to access sexological ideas and claim identity for themselves. Those claims supported the formation of a distinct lesbian subculture and identity which extended across national borders.



Figure 6. 1929 German Magazine that advertised *Der Skorpion* and *The Well*

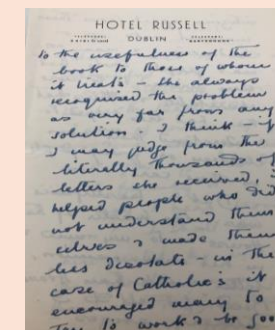


Figure 7. Una Troubridge 1958 letter recalling fan-mail for *The Well*

Bibliography: *Die Freundin*. 1929, iss. 13. Forum Queeres Archiv Munchen.
Weirauch, Anna Elisabet. *The Scorpion*. Translated by Whittaker Chambers. London: Olympia Press, 2007.
Ellis, Havelock. Commentary to *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1928.
Troubridge, Una. Letter to Father Brocard Sewell, 20. IV. 58. Brocard Sewell Fonds, University of Victoria Archives.
Marhoefer, Laurie. "The Book Was a Revelation, I Recognized Myself in It": Lesbian Sexuality, Censorship, and the Queer Press in Weimar-Era Germany." *Journal of Women's History* 27, no. 2 (2015): 62-86. doi:10.1353/jowh.2015.0016.

Images: Figure 1: "Detail from the photo-wall 'Sexual Transitions' at the Institute of Sexual Science," 1928 in "Institute for Sexual Science 1919-1933: Online-Exhibition by the Magnus-Hirschfeld Society," magnus-hirschfeld.de.
Figure 2: "Deeply Troubled in Maturity" from Havelock Ellis, *Philosopher of Sex: A Biography* by Vincent Brome. Abingdon: Routledge, 1979.
Figure 3: "Der Skorpion: Third Volume," 1931. Digitales Deutsches Frauenarchiv.
Figure 4: "Una and John at Crufts, 1932" in *Our Three Selves: A life of Radclyffe Hall* by Michael Baker. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985.
Figure 5: "Una Troubridge Diaries." 1928. Lovat Dickson Papers, H-1197, Vol. 2, Image 656, Library and Archives Canada. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/ocid:hm.lac_reel_h1197/656.
Figure 6: *Die Freundin*. 1929, iss. 13. Forum Queeres Archiv Munchen.
Figure 7: Troubridge, Una. Letter to Father Brocard Sewell, 20. IV. 58. Brocard Sewell Fonds, University of Victoria Archives.