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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Résumé de l'article

Cette note porte sur l'exposition A Queer Century 1869-1969, présentée du 1er juin 2019 au 11 septembre 2019 au département des Livres rares et collections spéciales de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Elle décrit les détails de l'exposition en examinant des cas, des oeuvres littéraires remarquables et rares, et des discussions avec les co-commissaires de l'exposition, les docteurs Kyle Frackman et Gregory Mackie.

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Review Essay: *A Queer Century, 1869–1969*

Noah Duranseaud

Abstract

This note focuses on the exhibition *A Queer Century 1869-1969*, which was on display from June 1st 2019 to September 11th, 2019 at University of British Columbia's Rare Books and Special Collections. The note describes the details of the exhibition, going through cases, notable and rare literary works, and discussions with the co-curators of the exhibition, Dr. Kyle Frackman and Dr. Gregory Mackie.

Résumé

Cette note porte sur l'exposition *A Queer Century 1869-1969*, présentée du 1er juin 2019 au 11 septembre 2019 au département des Livres rares et collections spéciales de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Elle décrit les détails de l'exposition en examinant des cas, des œuvres littéraires remarquables et rares, et des discussions avec les co-commissaires de l'exposition, les docteurs Kyle Frackman et Gregory Mackie.

The exhibition *A Queer Century, 1869–1969* celebrated developments in the study of sexuality during the critical years between the emergence of homosexuality as a named concept to the decriminalization of homosexual activity in Canada. On display at the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at the University of British Columbia from 1 June to 12 September 2019, the exhibition coincided with three important commemorations also taking place that year. It marked the 150th anniversary of the introduction of the term "homosexuality" by Karl-Maria Kertbeny, an Austro-Hungarian writer and advocate for the decriminalization of minority sexual practices. It was also the fiftieth anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, a series of violent demonstrations in response to persistent police harassment of queer and trans patrons at New York City's Stonewall Inn. Thirdly, in Canada,

14 May 2019 was the fiftieth anniversary of the third reading and passage of Bill C-150, an omnibus bill introduced by then Justice Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. The bill, which included 120 amendments to Canada's Criminal Code, effectively decriminalized homosexual acts between two consenting men over the age of 21. Trudeau famously defended the bill with his statement to CBC news reporters: "The state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation." The exhibition featured books, artwork, ephemera, and archival materials in English, French, and German selected from UBC's Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC), original correspondence from the University Archives, and materials loaned from private collections. *A Queer Century* is curated by two UBC professors: Dr. Kyle Frackman, Department of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies, and Dr. Gregory Mackie, Department of English Language and Literatures.

Planning for *A Queer Century* began in 2017, when Frackman and Mackie secured funding from the Jane Rule Endowment for the Study of Human Relationships. Funding support from the Faculty of Arts and the UBC Library was used to establish the Queer Collections Project (QCP), a joint interdisciplinary initiative aimed at acquiring new collections to support undergraduate and graduate research on gender and sexuality. The QCP[1] also programs outreach activities to make existing collections more visible. The impetus for *A Queer Century* arose when Frackman and Mackie learned that UBC would host the 2019 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, which would bring some eight thousand participants to campus. The two worked closely with Rare Books and Special Collections librarian Chelsea Shriver to select suitable materials to fill fifteen display cases located within the Learning Centre, each featuring materials selected on a different aspect of queer life and culture from the past century. Topics included sexology, medicine, and the law, the Eulenberg Affair, erotica, queer spaces, gay friendships, queer literature, the Uranians, camp, pulp novels and "queersploitation," as well as the gay liberation movement in Vancouver in the early 1970s. In addition, the display cases featured materials celebrating the contributions of Oscar Wilde, Magnus Hirschfeld, Edward Carpenter, and Jane Rule, among others.

While the exhibition focused primarily on white male homosexuality, Frackman and Mackie made efforts to select materials to explore themes of misogyny, racism, and white supremacy.

[1] See: https://qcp.arts.ubc.ca.

Viewers were encouraged to think critically about the time period in which the materials were created and how they reflect the ways in which gay identity has been constructed through narratives of masculinity and whiteness. One display case, for example, is dedicated to materials produced by and about Uranians. The term *Uranian*, derived from the ancient Greek word *urania* (Οὐρανία—of or relating to the sky, celestial, heavenly), was first published by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in 1864, just five years prior to the first public use of the term "homosexual." "Uranian" was used throughout the nineteenth century to describe men who were gender-variant—members of a third sex, who lived with female psyches in male bodies.[2] Men who adopted the term—including English poets Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds, as well as playwright Oscar Wilde and visual artists Henry Scott Tuke and Wilhelm von Gloeden—used it to describe a kind of deep and emancipatory fraternal love. Self-identified Uranians fixated on virile, masculinist models of male homosexuality, often aimed at younger men and adolescents. By the turn of the century, the term had been taken up by a small group of English poets who idealized the history of ancient Greece and continued a maudlin infatuation with the bodily perfection of young boys. As suggested by the exhibition, Uranian artists and public figures could be described as proto-fascist, racist, and sexist effeminophobes who believed that their particular expression of love was so powerful that it might actually bring about true democracy in society. The exhibition materials demonstrated how ideas about sexuality and gender sometimes have complicated legacies.

A Queer Century includes a number of rare first editions of monographs of significance to the history of the study of sexuality. One display case, titled "Queer Secrets, Queer Spaces," showcased materials exploring the multiple ways in which queer people communicated with one another in secret prior to the emergence of more public queer spaces in the 1970s and 1980s. This case included one of two known copies of *Vardi the Palary* (ca. 1937), the first dictionary of Polari, a mixture of Romance languages (Italian or Mediterranean Lingua Franca), Romani, cockney rhyming and sailor slang, and thieves' cant. Polari was commonly used throughout London by members of the criminal underworld, which included homosexuals

[2] See: Sebastian Matzner, "From Uranians to Homosexuals: Philhellenism, Greek Homoeroticism and Gay Emancipation in Germany 1835–1915," *Classical Receptions Journal* 2, no. 1 (2010): 60–91.

and gender-variant individuals. In another display case themed around sexology, medicine, and the law, curators included a rare copy of *Sexual Inversion*, the first English medical textbook on the subject of homosexuality. First published in German in 1896 and translated into English the following year, the book was written by physician and sexologist Havelock Ellis and co-authored with his colleague John Addington Symonds. Ellis and Symonds collaborated to collect thirty-three original case studies of homosexual men and women—known then as "sexual inverts"—with the intention of arguing that homosexuality should be treated as a natural expression of human sexuality.[3] The copy on display is from the first English edition, an incredibly rare monograph, as most copies were purchased and destroyed by Symonds's literary executor and biographer in an effort to distance his client from sexology altogether.

In addition to textbooks, Frackman and Mackie also selected a number of works of literary fiction. In a display case titled "Queer Literature," the curators included *Norma Trist; or Pure Carbon: A Story of the Inversion of the Sexes*, one of three fictional works inspired by the true story of Alice Mitchell, who murdered her lover, Freda Ward, in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1892.[4] Written by John Wesley Carhart and published in 1895, *Norma Trist* is widely recognized as the first novel published in the United States to feature a lesbian relationship. According to historian Jonathan Ned Katz, the book is also the most "affirmative, assertive defense of genital-orgasmic love relations between women published in English in the 19th century."[5] Frackman and Mackie also included a rare first edition of *Teleny*, or *The Reverse of the Medal*, among a selection of materials in a display case themed on erotica. The case was designed to demonstrate the ways in which erotica has changed over the past century through increased visibility of queer people, commercialization of certain erotic tastes, and relaxation of censorship rules. Published anonymously in 1893 and rumoured to have been written by Oscar Wilde, *Teleny* was more likely the result of a collaboration of a close-knit group of queer men. The book is an early pornographic novel set in *fin-de-siècle*

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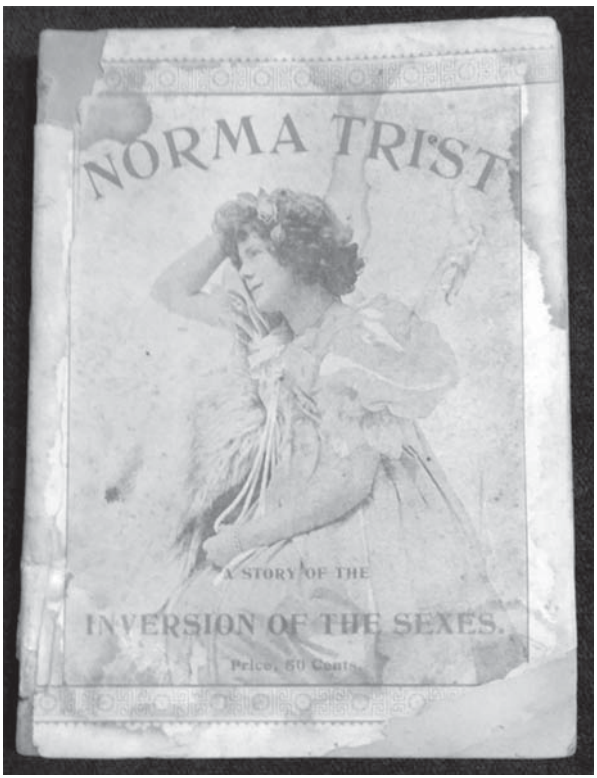
[3] See also: Ivan Crozier, ed., *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition: Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds (1897)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[4] The two other works are Mary Wilkins Freeman's short story "The Long Arm" and Mary R. P. Hatch's novel *The Strange Disappearance of Eugene Comstock*. See: Jonathan Ned Katz, introduction to *Norma Trist*, Outhistory.org, http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/norma/introtonorma (accessed 16 August 2019).

[5] Katz, introduction.

Paris, and describes a tragic love affair between a young man named de Grieux and the Hungarian pianist René Teleny.



Norma Trist: A Story of the Inversion of the Sexes (1895), by J. W. Carhart, was the first lesbian novel in English. Source: Rare Books and Special Collections, UBC Library, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, https://qcp.arts.ubc.ca/archives/2508.

Another rare edition exhibited in *A Queer Century* was *Maximin. Ein Gedenkbuch* (A Memorial Book), an exquisitely produced Art Nouveau disquisition of grief, published in 1907 by German poet Stefan George. Dedicated to the memory of fellow poet Maximilian Kronberger, who died after contracting meningitis, the book is one of only two hundred numbered copies. In it, George transforms Kronberger into a heroic, god-like figure, heralding him as a "representative of an almighty youth that we have dreamed of …

a youth that could take our legacy and conquer new realms." At the time of its publication, George and his so-called "George Circle" of elitist aesthetes rejected modernist notions of art emerging at the turn of the century. Frackman and Mackie included this book in a display case titled "Queer Culture: Classicism, Youth, and Body Culture," which focused on the appreciation and evocation of Greco-Roman antiquity as a both a code and a socially acceptable means for expressing homosexual desire. The display also explored the connection between the emergence of homosexuality as a concept and the revival and reification of ancient Greco-Roman notions of sexuality in, for example, Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex*. According to David M. Halperin, the rediscovery of same-sex sexuality in antiquity has helped to poke holes in the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal and natural expression of human desire.[6]

Title page of *Maximin. Ein Gedenkbuch* (A Memorial Book), by Stefan George (1907). Source: Rare Books and Special Collections, UBC Library, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, https://qcp.arts.ubc.ca/archives/2434/img_0662.

Two display cases focused specifically on Canadian themes. The first, featuring materials by and about author and activist Jane Rule, drew heavily from Rule's personal papers held at the UBC Archives.

6 David M. Halperin, "Is There a History of Sexuality?", *History and Theory* 28, no. 3 (1989): 257–74.

Rule taught at the university in the 1950s and 1960s, and in 1964 published the ground-breaking *Desert of the Heart*. The novel, which tells the story of two women who fall in love with each other, solidified Rule's status as a public intellectual. She received a flood of letters from lesbian women across Canada and the United States, who had suddenly had their experiences reflected to them in a work of fiction. Rule also received a deluge of virulent homophobic hate mail. The publicity resulted in Rule becoming highly sought-after in the Canadian media, which later prompted her to claim that she had become, "for the media, the only lesbian in Canada," a role that she "gradually and very reluctantly accepted and used to educate people [about homosexuality]."[7] Rule used this attention to advocate for free speech and gay rights, and, perhaps surprisingly, came out against same-sex marriage, which she perceived as being "forced back into the heterosexual cage of coupledom … and into state-imposed definitions of relationship."[8] In 1976, Rule moved to Galiano Island, where she lived with her partner, Helen Sonthoff, until her death in 2007 from complications due to liver cancer. A first-edition copy of *Desert of the Heart* was displayed as part of *A Queer Century*, as well as the first page of the original manuscript. Correspondence and other materials from Rule's fonds were also included.

A second display case featuring Canadian content focused on the gay liberation movement in Vancouver in the 1970s. As Frackman and Mackie noted in their didactic panels, the Stonewall Uprising and the partial decriminalization of homosexuality in Canada were not inaugural events in the gay rights movement, but rather parts of a movement already underway. These events did, however, introduce greater visibility for gays and lesbians, which resulted in major community-building efforts throughout the 1970s. At the time, Vancouver became a hotspot for gay rights activism in Canada, frequently compared to San Francisco for its laid-back, liberal culture and its opportunities for queer expression. Frackman and Mackie's display captured the energy of this period in gay liberation history by bringing together a selection of materials from its early organizers. These included Roedy Green's self-published 1971 pamphlet *A Guide for the Naïve Homosexual*, containing advice on various topics ranging from bar etiquette to dealing with homophobic harassment.

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[7] Jane Rule, quoted in Sandra Martin, "Jane Rule, 76," *Globe and Mail*, 28 November 2007.

[8] Ibid.

In addition, Frackman and Mackie included materials documenting Vancouver's activist scene, such as the first issue of the newspaper of the Gay Alliance Toward Equality (GATE), published in 1972, which featured the emblematic image of a figure emerging from a closet. Also included were GATE's pamphlets *Gateway to Homosexuality* and *How the Criminal Code Discriminates Against Gays*, both offering advice on how to deal with continued homophobic oppression and discrimination despite decriminalization. A 1973 newspaper, *Gay Tide*, was among the first to celebrate the idea of gay pride as a positive alternative to shame, fear, and legally sanctioned hate. Lastly, the case included the founding statement Gay People of UBC, published in 1972, along with a brochure from the group.

In a conversation with Frackman for the purpose of writing this article, Frackman noted that, "it is important to both of us to show the historical nature of the themes and questions that the exhibition and the QCP bring to the fore. Subjects that arise in the exhibition (e.g., trans* identities, political activism, eroticism, racial exoticism) also regularly appear in the media or are matters of great public debate or interest. It is instructive to remember that these questions have been present for a long time." Mackie responded as well, stating, "the exhibition means a lot to me, both personally and professionally. I think it's important, too, with ever-greater visibility and affirmation for queer people in our culture, it's essential that we understand our history. That's not to downplay the extraordinary advances that have taken place over the last fifty years—to say nothing of the last ten!—but we also need to be mindful of the fact that queer culture has always existed, however sometimes alienating or strange the forms it once took might be to today's population." The LGBTQ+ community has often been either misrepresented or not represented at all by institutional archives and libraries—institutions, for instance, such as UBC Rare Books and Special Collections. Showcasing materials from the past century shows the viewer the vast extent of positive change that LGBTQ+ activists have fought to bring about, as well as the richness of LGBTQ+ collections at UBC RBSC. Of course, *A Queer Century* is just the tip of the iceberg; both Frackman and Mackie remain committed to adding new materials to the RBSC via the QCP. At the same time, they continue to uncover new inspiration in the existing collection. An Oscar Wilde scholar, Mackie frequently mines UBC's large Victorian collection. Just recently, he discovered an unpublished and unknown lesbian love poem dedicated to the Victorian writer Vernon Lee. What *A Queer Century* taught

us is that the history of queer people was documented in personal correspondence, small-edition books and monographs, and the writings of authors and poets both known and unknown. Much of this history is still waiting to be uncovered.

Author Biography

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