



History of Homosexuality in Europe: Berlin, London, Paris 1919-1939 Volume 1

Florence Tamagne

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The period between the two world wars was crucial in the history of homosexuality in Europe. It was then that homosexuality first came out into the light of day. Charting the early days of the homosexual and lesbian scene, Florence Tamagne traces the different trends in Germany, England and France in the period leading up to the cataclysm of World War II and provides important background to any understanding of the later events. In this 2-volume scholarly treatise the author weaves together cultural references from literature, songs and theater, news stories and private correspondence, police and government documents to give a rounded picture of the evolving scene.

Tolerance for homosexuality followed different trends in Germany, England and France in the period leading up to the war. Tamagne's work outlines the long and arduous journey from the shadows toward acceptability as the homosexual and lesbian community finds a new legitimacy at various levels of society.

Volume I introduces the first glimmerings of that new openness and explores the scenes in three very different cities. Berlin became the capital of the new culture and the center of a political movement seeking rights and protections for what we now call gays and lesbians. In England, the struggle was brisk to undermine the structures and strictures of Victorianism; whereas in France (which was more tolerant, overall), homosexuality remained more subtle and nonmilitant.

Volume I introduces the first glimmerings of tolerance for homosexuality around the turn of the last century, quickly squelched by the trial of Oscar Wilde which sent a chill throughout the cosmopolitan centers of the world. Just crawling out from under the Victorian blanket, Europe was devastated by a gruesome war that consumed the flower of its youth.

Then, in the aftermath of World War I, a variety of factors came together to forge a climate that was more permissive and open. Tamagne dissects the strands of euphoria, rebellion, exploration, nostalgia and yearning, and the bonds forged at school and on the battlefield. The Roaring Twenties are sometimes seen, in retrospect, as having been a golden age for homosexuals and lesbians; and the literary output of the era shows why.

However, the social and political backlash soon became apparent, first of all in Germany. (Volume 2, ISBN 0-87586-278-0, focuses on the decline, and the counter-trend, from 1933 to 1939.) Repression arrested the evolution of the new mores, and it was not until the 1960s that the wave of liberation could once again sweep the continent.

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