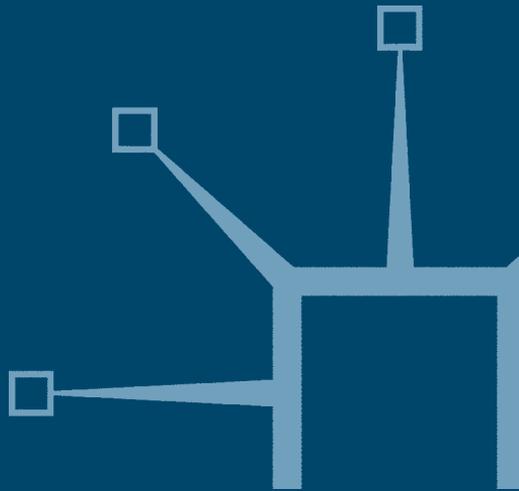


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Children and Sexuality

From the Greeks to the Great War

Edited by
George Rousseau



'*Children and Sexuality* is a courageous and timely book. The authors, who include historians, anthropologists and psychoanalysts, dare to confront one of the most difficult social problems of our time and to view it from a historical and a comparative perspective.' – **Peter Burke**, *Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge, UK*

'At a time when the combined forces of sophisticated technologies and unfettered capitalism objectify children in myriad ways, *Children and Sexuality* takes a fascinating and in-depth look at their sexuality as perceived by adults throughout history, raising important questions about innocence, eroticism, commodification and societal mores. An intriguing, thought-provoking book.' – **Susan Linn**, *Harvard University* and author of *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*

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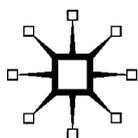
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Editorial matter, selection, introduction, chapters 5 and 6

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‘We shall not always give out a sound like a beaten gong as one sensation strikes and then another. Children, our lives have been gongs striking; clamour boasting; cries of despair; blows on the nape of the neck in gardens.’

(Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, London, The Hogarth Press,
1931, pp. 41–2)

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Preface

Nowadays a book entitled *Children and Sexuality* raises concerns about sexual abuse and other antisocial forms of behaviour contributing to the current malaise – some will say outright hysteria and panic. Little doubt exists that in 2007 westerners find themselves, and perhaps easterners too, in the grip of a moral panic about children: their mental and physical well-being, especially their new levels of obesity, their education, safety, and increasingly dire forms of vulnerability. A systematic book compiling aspects of the history of sexual abuse would be worth attempting, but this book does not do that. We, the contributors, have much to say in these pages about abuse and scandal, past and present, yet our remit in *Children and Sexuality* looks elsewhere: to the conception of childhood, and what it meant to be a child, at a few defined historical moments when we could construct adequate contexts to account for the versions of sexuality found in the lives of these children.

We take the long view: children and their sexualities (both in the plural) from the Ancient Greeks to the Great War. We do so cognizant of, but largely apart from, the totalizing theories of the great system builders of modern child sexuality: the Freuds (Sigmund and Anna), Melanie Klein, Kinsey, Bowlby, John Money and many others, and also apart from the calls for children's rights in this domain amidst crusaders encouraging young people to reclaim their rights. We admire these masterminds and crusaders, but our gaze here looks elsewhere. Instead we work collectively as cultural historians who have selected a very limited number of case histories (perhaps too limited) of intergenerational sexual actions and attachments, each representative – or unrepresentative – of its historical epoch.

For the most part we offer these 'case studies' as 'thick description', in anthropologist Clifford Geertz's sense, whose phrase it is – 'thick description' of the admittedly controversial points we seek to unpack about the curious world of children's bodies and adult minds. And we have found in practice that we need the whole case: full range of personages, places and narratives, and all the voices chiming with their polyphonic stories, to weave contexts sufficiently broad to brave preliminary interpretations about children and their repertoires of sexual expression in history.

Our coverage is eclectic: we make no claim whatever for its representativeness. We strive to be vigilant to the cultural specificities of childhood itself and the different constructions of childhood over time – a further reason why each ‘case study’ necessarily reconfigures childhood in its own way. In some instances, as the section on the Middle Ages, the ‘case history’ is textual rather than biographical. Nevertheless, we aim to provide deep detail, as it were, rather than generalize sweepingly from the superficial approach that might have glanced at dozens of texts or lives. In brief, this book does not amount to a panopticon of childhood in the sexual domain but identifies a few selective moments capable of suggesting what some of the issues and problems have been. If *Children and Sexuality* sheds light on the modern dilemma it will be as an added fillip rather than an integral component of our remit.

No doubt exists about the complexity and delicacy of the topic, a further reason why it continues to be eschewed. Childhood sexuality lies on the border of taboo and the frontier of suspicion despite decades of psychiatric investigation from the time of Freud and Melanie Klein; even the ulterior motives of those researching these topics are suspect. Provided the approach is ‘clinical’ (scientific, medical, prescriptive), there has been little impediment to the discussion of childhood sexuality past or present. But as soon as the discussion turns to ethical, moral, legal and legislative aspects, the discourse becomes fraught, sometimes too explosive to pursue calmly.

As historians basing our arguments on archives and documents we take some refuge. But not even the archival ditch can immunize us from the realities of this topic’s moral pitch. We acknowledge them and hope we have approached our materials candidly and honestly, without dwelling on sexuality’s repugnant, sensational, or illegal facets. If, as we are being told at conferences and in journals, the history of childhood is now a burgeoning field with already well-developed tentacles extending in many directions, especially in the media, it cannot claim to be so in the sexual domain. So far sexuality has eluded its grip apart from its pathological dimensions. Even an historian of sexuality as influential as the late Michel Foucault treaded delicately when discussing intergenerational sexual relations in the Ancient world.

Collectively, we aim to show how children have always been complicit in sexual forms of expression; that it is adults who have recently foisted on them their fierce anxieties – even panic – about the terrors of life in our time. This view – that the history of childhood is in large part a history of adult fantasies about their own early lives as projected on to children – is a topic about which we say much in the following

pages. And we hope that by taking the ‘long view’, extending over many centuries, we can offer a cushion of comfort to those readers caught up in the present terror fuelled by the media, especially those awkwardly being told that our time is the first to have been subjected to such a dire state of affairs. It is not so: our times are not without precedent, a claim buttressed by abundant evidence in the following chapters. Our technology merely enables the perpetrators to be detected more swiftly.

Children and Sexuality neither synthesizes a field nor presents a survey of children and sex. Instead, we select one representative case from each major historical epoch – the Greeks, Medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Victorian and Edwardian societies, etc. – from which to probe the intersection of children and sexuality. We propose that each case study represents a microcosm of aspects of this convergence and overlap. And we hope that the range of our cases – their genders and geographies, social and economic class, and political and religious affiliations – demonstrates that childhood’s diverse sexual expression cannot be reduced to a few simple paradigms. The reduction is too simplistic even within a single century.

This task would have been difficult in a short book. We needed amplitude for such a sweep of time and geography, as well as the input of different disciplines: history, literature, classical and modern studies, the social sciences, and especially anthropology from whose demonstrations of cultural relativism we take heart. The anthropologists, above others, have understood how much in sex and sexuality is culturally constructed. The final chapter glancing at the book’s former landscape from an anthropological perspective enriches this book.

Children and Sexuality originated in seminars presented in the Michaelmas term of 2004 at the Oxford University Centre for the History of Childhood, where the editor is a Co-Director. All the chapters, except those by Stefano Evangelista and William G. Naphy, were originally presented there as talks and later reworked into papers. All of us are grateful to the Faculty of History in the University of Oxford, where the Centre is based, and especially to Professor Laurence Brockliss, for assistance during that term and afterwards. Our collective gratitude would run to many pages if we assembled it properly. Instead we acknowledge all our colleagues and friends, in several countries and on several continents, who joined us in these discussions, many of whom are named in the following pages. And we thank the seminar audiences too who asked penetrating questions focusing our minds about this often confusing intersection.

We particularly thank the team at Palgrave Macmillan and the three outside readers it selected to help us strengthen the chapters while they

were under review. We have tried to take all their suggestions on board. In Basingstoke we found a remarkable team – especially in Michael Strang, Tim Kapp, Ruth Ireland and Nick Brock – who did everything possible to ensure that this book would be published in 2007.

GEORGE ROUSSEAU
Oxford England
December 2006

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Dr Thomas Betteridge is a Reader in early modern English Literature at Oxford Brookes University. He is the author of a number of works on early modern English history and literature including *Literature and Politics in the English Reformation* (2004) and editor of *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe* (2002).

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Daphne Nash Briggs is a Child Psychotherapist and an Honorary Research Associate at the School of Archaeology at Oxford University. She is an independent scholar with expertise in ancient numismatics and in the history and archaeology of Europe in the first millennium BC.

Richard Dellamora teaches in the Departments of English and Cultural Studies at Trent University in Canada and is the author of *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (1990), *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending* (1995) and *Friendship's Bonds: Democracy and the Novel in Victorian England* (2004) as well as editor of *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (1999).

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Stefano Evangelista is a Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford. He has published research on the Victorians, especially the circle of late Victorians, including John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater.

Lawrence Gasquet is Senior Lecturer at the University Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III (France). She is particularly interested in the interrelations of text and image. Her publications include *Lewis Carroll & les mythologies de l'enfance* (2005), *L'Eblouissement de la peinture: Ruskin sur Turner* (2006), *L'Art de Plaire* (2007), and several articles on Lewis Carroll, Julia Margaret Cameron and Peter Greenaway.

Mark Harrison is Professor of the History of Medicine and Director of the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine in the University of Oxford. He has written widely on aspects of health and medicine in relation to the history of imperialism and war.

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Josephine Crawley Quinn is Fellow and Tutor in Ancient History at Worcester College, Oxford. She works on imperialism and culture in ancient North Africa and the Mediterranean.

George Rousseau's books include (with Marjorie Hope Nicolson) *This Long Disease, my Life: Alexander Pope and the Sciences* (1968); *The Languages of Psyche* (1990); a trilogy of *Pre- and Post-Modern Discourses: Medical, Scientific, Anthropological* (1991); (with Roy Porter) *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (1998); *Framing and Imagining Disease in Cultural History* (2003); *Nervous Acts* (2004), and a biography of Marguerite Yourcenar (2004). He was Regius Professor of English at King's College, Aberdeen, and is a Co-Director of the Centre for the History of Childhood in the University of Oxford.

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Michael Vickers is Professor of Archaeology in the University of Oxford, a Senior Research Fellow in Classical Studies at Jesus College, Oxford, and a Senior Assistant Keeper in the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

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1

Introduction

George Rousseau

Contraband: aesthetes, pornographers and paedophiles

These days a book entitled *Children and Sexuality* rings alarm bells. Is it another call to whip up the flames demanding an end to sexual abuse and other forms of behaviour that contribute to the current malaise – some will say outright hysteria and panic? Or is it something else? No doubt exists that in the early twenty-first century many Westerners, and perhaps Easterners too, find themselves in the midst of a moral crisis about children: their mental and physical well-being, especially their safety and new levels of obesity; their legal rights in systems of law currently in rapid transition; the state's sense that childrens' rights must be protected and policed; as well as concerns about their education, access to the Internet and other forms of vulnerability. On grey days, when the media lurch out about the decay of our children, it seems as if we dwell in the land of *The Color Purple*.

A book attempting to compile the history of sexual abuse might repay the effort but this book does not do that.¹ We the contributors say much in these pages about scandal and abuse, past and present, yet our remit in *Children and Sexuality* takes us elsewhere: to the evolving concepts of childhood and, concurrently, to forms of sexual expression among both children and adults at defined historical moments when we could construct adequate contexts.² Our attention here is more specifically focused on the versions of sexuality found in the lives of these children or the adults with whom they interacted.

We take the long view: children and their sexualities (both in the plural) from the Ancient Greeks to the Great War and we do so largely apart from the theories of the great system-builders of modern child sexuality. We work collectively as cultural historians who have selected