fully traces in the zinester rhetoric. “One knowledge system without the other was incomplete,” her father espoused, informing Licona’s reading of knowledge production within zine culture and its uneasy blend of academic and street knowledges. The bridge Licona builds ushers forth from her own borderlands positionality and gathers the voices of the young, queer, women of color zinesters whose work she admires, then situates those voices in conversation with interdisciplinary debates in her fields of expertise. *Zines in Third Space* is ultimately what Sandoval would call a “hermeneutics of love,” as Licona gathers, dwells in, creates, and expresses her embodied coalitional consciousness.

**Note**


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**SEX BEFORE SEXUALITY**

**Kyla Schuller**

*Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America*

Peter Coviello


What registered within the domain of “sex” before the advent of modern sexuality as such at the close of the nineteenth century? What forms did sex take in the preceding decades, which failed to flourish in the new century and we may have since unlearned how to see? How can we develop the tools to hear silence speak its name, without presuming in advance that we already know what queer sexuality might be? In addressing these provocative questions, Peter Coviello’s *Tomorrow’s*
Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America offers a compelling model of what we might call the “unloosening” of historiography, to borrow a term Coviello employs in analyses of the uncodified forms of attachment in the fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett and Nathaniel Hawthorne (86, 88, 162). Set free from the confines of the contemporary meaning of sexuality, Coviello roves among the literature of the 1840s through the dawn of the twentieth century to unearth a variety of forms that sex took before, and aslant of, the debut of “modern” sexual discourse in the United States during the Oscar Wilde trials of 1895 (190).

Modern sexual discourse, Coviello explains, functions as an “almost indefinitely adaptive strategy” for combining desires, behaviors, affects, and traits into a “sexually-rooted, taxonomically specific” attribute of the liberal individualist self (9, 6). Whereas Michel Foucault locates the emergence of institutional discourse on sexuality in the late seventeenth century, Coviello argues that in the US context, the trend toward secularization and the abiding terrors of chattel slavery significantly alter this periodization. Coviello analyzes private letters, journal entries, and published works of fiction, poetry, and prose from Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Henry James and others to demonstrate how modes of nineteenth-century affiliation were both gradually accumulating in ways that would soon materialize as sexuality and dispersing from the realm of the sexual altogether. He argues that these imaginative texts manifest what he calls, borrowing from Christopher Nealon, the “earliness of sexuality,” by which he means “sexuality as a realm of experience and expression as yet uncodified, not yet batten into place by the discourses in which it increasingly found itself located” (12). While acknowledging the pain of marginalization that critics such as Heather Love have emphasized, Coviello seeks to highlight the opportunities of the inchoate, the freedom of play made possible by a desire as yet unscripted (7).

Engaging directly with recent queer theories of temporality, the book proposes that literary study is an important methodological tool for parsing the nineteenth-century meaning of sex, which took shape as “a mode of relation, a style of affiliation, even, for some, a blueprint for sociality” (22). In Coviello’s hands, literary close readings illuminate “competing conceptions of the very domain of sexuality, of its habitable forms and extensions, that to contemporary eyes may seem extravagant, naïve, oblique, or even scarcely legible as ‘sex’” (4). Rather than employ historical methods to illuminate literature by placing it within its larger cultural context, as has been the dominant trend for decades, he demonstrates the value of literary criticism for historical work. Attuned to the intricacies of form and the pleasures of reading, Coviello’s exegesis aims “to provide a richer analytic vocabulary” for parsing sex before sexuality, on the grounds that attention to “texture, rhythm and pulse, accretion and dispersal” is a vital method
for queer historiography (8, 19). Coviello makes a significant contribution to the study of gender and sexuality more broadly, which has struggled with questions of periodization and naming for decades. The book offers an example of writing the history of an identity or social practice before it came to be recognized as such in ways that neither foreclose the strangeness of epochs not our own nor position them as precedents of a future yet to come (13–16).

The book comprises three parts, each with a coda that places the concerns of the two preceding chapters in a larger frame. Part 1, “Lost Futures,” highlights the provocative intimacies of Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson, who envisioned a future sex as “a style of relation” rather than an attribute of the self, a mode that would not come to pass (27, 67). Part 2 examines representations of extramarital intimacies that thrived within a social world seemingly dominated by marriage in Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs*, Joseph Smith’s writings, and Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, as well as the stakes of this state-sanctioned institution raised in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Finally, part 3 explores the “first premonitory impressions” of futures soon to materialize as the modern discourse of sexuality by exploring Hawthorne’s representation of homophobia in *The Blithedale Romance* and James’s portrait of “the inarticulability, the shaming namelessness of same-sex desire” in *The Bostonians* (148, 191).

The first two codas provide compelling examples that suggest both the representativeness of the queer imaginings analyzed in the prior two chapters and the very real constraints imposed on the nonwhite and nonmale that qualifies any easy celebration of the joy of the inchoate. Yet this structure also functions as an additive one that highlights the absence of racialization and gendering in the centerpiece analyses. Instead of animating vectors of power, gender and race become attributes of persons in this treatment, ironically the very dynamic the book so rigorously deconstructs with regard to sexuality. But no book can do it all, and Coviello’s tightly focused project yields great rewards for queer theory, literary studies, and historical practice.

**Note**


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