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Naughty Narrative Nineties: Sex, Scandal, and Representation in the Fin de Siècle

Disorder in the Court: Trials and Sexual Conflict at the Turn of the Century. Edited by NANCY ERBER and GEORGE ROBB. New York: New York University Press, 1999. Pp. vii+253. \$50.00 (cloth).

Victorian Sexual Dissidence. Edited by RICHARD DELLAMORA. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Pp. vii+329. \$50.00 (cloth); \$20.00 (paper).

Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture. By KALI ISRAEL. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. ix+367. \$49.95 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper).

As George Robb and Nancy Erber suggest, the notion of the troubled fin de siècle has long since replaced the golden belle époque in our characterization of western European history in the broad period 1880–1914. This is particularly true when we consider the “sexual anarchy” or the “stew of sexualities,” which Elaine Showalter and Jeffrey Weeks, respectively, have delineated.¹ Such “anarchy” was provoked by a variety of new social forces, which included feminism, social purity, popular journalism, and radical politics. Together they created an atmosphere conducive to the spread of moral regulation. The victims of this climate were seen by an earlier generation of writers as symbolic of the hypocrisy of Victorian morals. On one side were the wronged or unjustly accused: Oscar Wilde, Sir Charles Dilke, Charles Stuart Parnell, Earl Russell, Florence Maybrick, and a host of other unfortunates. On the other were arrayed their egregious accusers: the Marquis of Queensbury, W. T. Stead, Henry Labouchere, and Virginia Crawford, along with various police and legal officials standing in for the anonymity and implacability of the state.²

¹ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York, 1989); Jeffrey Weeks, “The Late Victorian Stew of Sexualities,” *Victorian Studies* 35, no. 4 (1992): 409–15.

² On this, see H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love: An Historical and Contemporary Survey of Homosexuality in Britain* (London, 1970), *Famous Trials: Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth, 1962), *The Cleveland Street Scandal* (London, 1976); Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London, 1987); Roy Jenkins, *Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy* (London, 1958); Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Parnell and His Party* (Oxford, 1957). On Stead, see Raymond L. Shults, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln, Neb., 1972); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 81–134. On Labouchere, see Hesketh Pearson, *Labby: The Life and Character of Henry Labouchere* (London, 1936); F. B. Smith, “Labouchere’s Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Bill,” *Historical Studies* 67, no. 17 (1976): 165–73; G. Weber, “Henry Labouchere, Truth and the New

Recent approaches have sought more than tales of horror and despair in these cases. The series of scandals that punctuated the 1880s and 1890s, together with the emergence of sexology, are frequently seen as providing the background for the emergence of gender and sexual categories that took hold as the twentieth century progressed.³ For Robb and Erber, as for Weeks, Alan Sinfield, and others, the 1890s witnessed the formation of a certain form of gendered modernity that is characterized by the rigid separation of homosexual and heterosexual. Trials and scandals functioned as a means to outline the boundaries of normality and to provide examples of the costs of deviance. At the same time, these authors suggest, sexologists like Havelock Ellis posited that sexuality and gender should align and, in doing so, helped to crystallize the notion that homosexuality was a form of gender inversion. The fate of Wilde, Weeks and Sinfield argue, indelibly associated effeminacy and same-sex desire, with the result that not only did Wilde become *the* figure of male homosexuality in British culture, but his persona became the model for gay identity in the following “Wilde Century.”⁴ In a similar vein, Jonathan Katz has suggested that this period also saw the “invention of heterosexuality” as a response to the adumbration of this homosexual “other.”⁵

Certain trials and scandals, and the narratives that they generated, have thus assumed the status of foundational moments of modernity. Wilde is the prototype, but other cases have been employed to illustrate the point that gender and sexuality increasingly became the object of legal and social investigation toward the end of the nineteenth century. This is the approach employed by many of the contributors to *Disorder in the Court*, who provide evidence not only from Britain, but also key cases from France, Germany, and the British Empire. They not only deal with sexual deviance but also cover obscenity, divorce, spousal murder, restoration of conjugal rights, and divorce. These, the editors argue, are used to show “changing definitions of gender roles, sexual propriety and deviance,” as well as shedding light on the “unexpressed fundamental assumptions of the criminal justice system regarding gender.” Together these things provide “a snapshot of critical moments of social contesta-

Journalism of Late Victorian Britain,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26, no. 1 (1993): 36–43.

³ See, e.g., Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London, 1981); Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Oscar Wilde, Effeminacy and the Queer Moment* (London, 1992); Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (New York, 1993); Jonathan N. Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York, 1996). See also William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham, N.C., 1996); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (London, 1984).

⁴ Sinfield, *Wilde Century*, chap. 1.

⁵ Katz, *Invention of Heterosexuality*.

tion during the era that witnessed the emergence of the New Woman, the New Man, and the Third Sex as social constructs."⁶

Narrative is a key concept in the analysis of these cases. Like earlier historians of the interaction between law and society such as Judith Walkowitz, the contributors tend to read the trials for meaning rather than to adjudicate on the veracity of the charges or the justice of the outcome.⁷ Instead of uniformly assuming that trial testimony can provide a direct route to the experiences and practices of the witnesses, most of the contributors focus on the potential work of policing gender that the various stories sought to accomplish. The generation of competing narratives is therefore seen as one of the principal components of the cases, generating struggles for meaning between different social actors.

The essays on working-class divorce by Gail Savage, and on spousal homicide by Annalee Golz, deal with a number of cases across a broad period of time, but the remaining ten contributions tend to focus on a single case and its capacity to generate meaning. Such an approach, however sensitive, has certain drawbacks. In particular, attention to sensational trials tends to take such cases out of their proper context, while at the same time giving these trials a disproportionate importance relative to the many other cases that were taking place at the same time. Cases in which aristocrats, politicians, or artists were arrested for sex offenses or cited in the details of a divorce were relatively rare. In 1889, for instance, the year of the Cleveland Street scandal, there were 127 trials in England and Wales for "unnatural misdemeanours" (sodomy, indecent assault, and soliciting the offense), including the two that resulted from inquiries into Cleveland Street. Similarly, in 1895, 166 men were tried for homosexual offenses in addition to Wilde.⁸ Arguably, these men have a greater claim to represent the everyday business of policing deviance than the glaring scandal that surrounded Wilde or Lord Arthur Somerset.

In addition, interdisciplinary studies of the law, especially individual studies of particular cases, can threaten to become somewhat episodic and isolated if not located in broader trends of criminal justice and policy. If a great deal of power is claimed for the narratives generated by scandalous trials (the power in this case to define some aspect of "modernity"), then they should be shown to have specific effects in this direction. This is always the most difficult part of any such study, both to research and demonstrate. Given the limited space available to each contributor, it is perhaps an excessive demand. Yet a greater acquaintance with the more empirical, and perhaps more prosaic, studies of legal policy and criminal statistics would go some way to satisfying it.

⁶ Nancy Erber and George Robb, "Introduction," in *Disorder in the Court: Trials and Sexual Conflict at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Nancy Erber and George Robb (New York, 1999), pp. 1–11, quote on p. 1.

⁷ See Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*.

⁸ *Parliamentary Papers, 1890*, vol. 50.1, col. 5,882, and *1896*, vol. 94.1, col. 807.

Erber and Robb, for instance, suggest that the fin de siècle can "plausibly be labelled the 'Age of the Trial,'" in which the trial "can be seen as a defining moment of modern culture."⁹ Similarly, others have used the existence of sensational trials for sexual offenses to imply an unprecedented degree of surveillance and control over sexual deviance, leading ultimately to the elaboration of new categories of identity and a countermovement for law reform.¹⁰ Some historians have suggested that such an intensification of surveillance was a key aspect of state formation.¹¹ It is certainly the case that the number of sexual scandals seems to increase and that trials provide important access to social trends and their unstated assumptions. Yet in spite of this, it is the case that the numbers of trials for sexual offenses, in Britain at least, were actually steady or declining slowly in relation to population growth at the end of the nineteenth century.

Although the absolute numbers of trials for such offenses continued to increase, the whole picture is not necessarily one of intensified legal controls. As Howard Taylor's statistical studies have pointed out, the total number of criminal trials in England and Wales remained almost static between about 1850 and the mid-1920s, in spite of all the social upheavals and population changes that happened in between.¹² And the same trend is also apparent for sexual offenses tried summarily by magistrates. Other contenders for the "age of the trial" might plausibly be brought forward, in particular the 60 years between 1780 and 1840 or so in England. During this period of social change and upheaval, comparable with anything that might be claimed for the fin de siècle, the number of trials for all offenses increased dramatically in advance of population mainly because of a new willingness on the part of governments to fund the costs of prosecution. This would suggest that the internal structure of the criminal law and the decisions taken by grey bureaucrats and politicians are every bit as important as changes in the understanding of gender in deciding the progress and volume of justice.

To take the example of male homosexuality, the picture of intensified legal controls is somewhat complicated by examining levels of arrest, committal, and prosecution. It was not the case that Labouchere's amendment introducing the crime of "gross indecency" to England in 1885 had much of an impact on the level of arrests for homosexual offenses, or on the severity of sentencing, as any study of the statistics will bear out. The police and the courts managed well enough under the

⁹ Erber and Robb, "Introduction," p. 1.

¹⁰ Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*; Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*.

¹¹ Richard Price, "Historiography, Narrative and the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of British Studies* 35 (April 1996): 220–56.

¹² Howard Taylor, "Rationing Crime: The Political Economy of Criminal Statistics since the 1850s," *Economic History Review* 51, no. 3 (1998): 569–90, "The Politics of Rising Crime Statistics in England and Wales, 1914–1960," *Crime History and Societies* 1, no. 2 (1998): 5–28.

much older laws against sodomy, which were adapted at the beginning of the century to suit modern requirements. In fact, successive British governments and police commissioners were less than enthusiastic about presiding over prosecutions for homosexual offenses and the ensuing scandals, an unstated policy that was to cause them considerable trouble and anxiety during the Cleveland Street affair (dealt with admirably in *Disorder in the Court* by Morris Kaplan).

None of this is to argue that empirical studies, legal statistics, or Home Office memos somehow represent some higher order of truth, only that they themselves contain compelling narratives of the development of crime, justice, and policy. If studies of gender and the criminal law really are going to become truly interdisciplinary, then statistics must be examined in this way, as a genre with its own rules and conventions, as perhaps the most powerful narrative of all in its ability to motivate policy. In turn, considerations of narrative, gender, discipline, and surveillance might be profitably imported into more empirical studies.

It seems paradoxical that the law should appear to relax just as its operations in control of sexual deviance were beginning to attain such prominence. To recognize this does not serve to contradict the Foucauldian interpretation of the fin de siècle as witnessing the elaboration of new forms of power. Nor does it invalidate the specific contributions made by the writers collected in *Disorder in the Court*. It only complicates the emergence of these modes of governance. Instead of seeing criminal trials as points of rupture, scandals can be seen as parts of a much longer-term process pre- and postdating the fin de siècle, which made sexuality itself (rather than just its outcomes in population and society) an area to be mapped, measured, quantified, and subject to expert knowledge and government intervention.¹³

The emergence of male homosexuality as a public matter was fundamental to this process. It featured not only at the margins of the Maiden Tribute affair and the Dilke-Crawford divorce but was fully present in the Dublin scandals of 1884, the Cleveland Street scandal of 1888–89, the Russell divorce and, of course, the Wilde trial. This centrality, Richard Dellamora notes, has led in part to the “‘gaying’ of critical studies of the late Victorian period,” a process that has been ongoing for the last ten years.¹⁴ As Dellamora points out, many scholars have taken their

cue from Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, which saw this period as central in the emergence of modern forms of power, a process again symbolized by the emergence of the homosexual as a “species.”¹⁵

In a similar vein, queer theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have sought to recognize the centrality of sexual deviance to modern ways of knowing.¹⁶ Homosexuality, Sedgwick argues, not only haunts the progenitors of literary modernism but is also central to the understanding of Western epistemology. In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1989), Sedgwick suggested that the necessity of determining the boundaries of homosexuality and heterosexuality (what she calls “homo/heterosexual definition”) dates from the late Victorian period. This dichotomy has been of “primary importance for all modern Western identity and social organization,” and of equal importance to the more visible boundaries of gender, class, and race. In fact, the language of sexuality, Sedgwick suggests, has intersected with other ways of knowing to the degree that almost all forms of knowledge are marked by their relation to sex.¹⁷

Hence, although Dellamora’s volume is entitled *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, the majority of contributions (which come mainly from literary studies) place their emphasis unashamedly on the writers and artists of the fin de siècle. Many of the essays broadly accept the Foucauldian reading of the 1890s propounded by Sinfield and others that only after Wilde did the figure of the effeminate homosexual become crystallized in opposition to healthy heterosexuality. They therefore propose readings of Vernon Lee, Henry James, George Santayana, George Du Maurier, Henry Scott Tuke, and the nature of effeminacy itself, which foreground the sense of pre-Wildean sexual indeterminacy surrounding comradeship and aestheticism. Yopie Prins suggests also that this open, indeterminate character of homosexuality can also be found in lesbian desire. It is important, she argues, not to “limit this discussion of Victorian sexual dissidence to a binary opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality, since such categories were more interestingly mobile at the end of the nineteenth century than they are at the end of our own.”¹⁸

In order to register this mobility, Dellamora uses the term “sexual dissidence,” which is taken from Jonathan Dollimore’s book of the same name.¹⁹ This frames the essays and their subjects as a wider and more diverse range of deviant subjectivities than can be accounted for using the simple homo/hetero binary. In addition, sexual dissidence represented, in

¹³ On the rise of the social, see Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Paul Miller (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), pp. 87–104; Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley (London, 1977); Nicholas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 98–136; Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1994); Denise Riley, “Am I That Name?”: *Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History* (London, 1988); Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (Paris, 1983).

¹⁴ Richard Dellamora, “Introduction,” in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago, 1999), p. 1.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 43.

¹⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), *Epistemology of the Closet* (New York, 1989); D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley, 1988).

¹⁷ Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Yopie Prins, “Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters,” in Dellamora, ed., pp. 43–82, quote on p. 71.

¹⁹ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford, 1991).

Dollimore's terms, both a challenge to the stable self of bourgeois ideology and to the modernist assertion that sexuality is the truth of one's being. For Dollimore, sexual dissidence was the register of Wilde's self-presentation, in which he parodied, disrupted, and inverted the characteristics deemed requisite for stable selfhood.²⁰ The "sexually dissident" writers dealt with in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* therefore add up, Dellamora suggests, to a lost queer history of a modernism that might have been more relaxed about sexuality, less defensive about sexual dissidence, and above all "less liable to represent sexual desire in ontological terms."²¹ Thus, for Dellamora and his contributors, the very fate of naturalness was at stake in late-Victorian debates on sex and gender. Unfortunately, this alternative was more or less brought to an end by the "discursive construction of homosexuality" in the thirty or so years that followed the Wilde trial.²²

Although the essays in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* explore the diversity of "deviance," there is a tendency to represent heterosexuality in as monolithic a form as possible. While homosexuality is presented as a varied and sophisticated phenomenon, little attempt is made to face the question of whether heterosexuality can be read as equally diverse and as also in some way "dissident." Queer readings of this kind tend to gloss over the fact that heterosexuality was also the object of legal, scientific, and political interventions.

In fact, the sexually dissident fin de siècle could now be said to be suffering somewhat from overdetermination. It is currently bearing a huge historical weight as the foundational moment of a number of different kinds of modernity and, in some ways, forming its own subcanon of texts and writers, three of whom (Ellis, John Addington Symonds, and Wilde) appear in Dellamora's volume. Although this canon is handled sensitively in both *Disorder in the Court* and *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, the Foucauldian framework of both books does have its problems. As Mary Poovey has pointed out, an attention to historical discontinuity (inspired by Foucault) can foster a new teleology in which all events simply lead up to or away from some moment of modernity. The result is that Foucauldian readings can "create the impression of origins and teleology when they insist that certain practices or events constitute ruptures."²³

The other difficulty is the problem of revisiting the same canonical texts and events. Victorian sexual dissidence did not begin in 1880, so there are surely some earlier, "other" Victorians who might be suscep-

²⁰ Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, quoted in Dellamora, "Introduction," pp. 10–11.

²¹ Dellamora, "Introduction," p. 12.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago, 1998), p. 17.

tible to the queer readings employed in the Dellamora volume. As I indicated above, the visible quantity of sexual deviance in early- to mid-Victorian Britain (at least glimpsed through criminal statistics) was often greater than that claimed for the 1880s and 1890s. Studies of this phenomenon would perhaps lead to a reconsideration of the "moments of modernity" thesis but also provide useful contexts for the scandals of the later period.

Kali Israel revisits this earlier period in her life of Emilia Dilke, *Names and Stories*. She also employs queer theory, but in this case to relatively unpromising material (of which more later). Her biography also raises similar questions about the use of narrative to those brought out by the Robb and Erber volume, although here the method is more avowedly poststructuralist. Whereas the assumption that there is no experience prior to discourse is embedded rather than made explicit in the other books under review, Israel foregrounds this as a key feature of her analysis. The usual method of biography, she suggests, relies on the idea that the biographer's subject is fully present and knowable to the author, and can be presented as a stable self, whose development can be emplotted by a careful interpreter. Israel forgoes this method, which she sees as an implicitly conservative epistemological comforter in a world of post-modern uncertainty, and instead seeks to use Dilke as "a site for analysis of nineteenth century Britain."²⁴ Rather than reading through the various representations of Emilia Dilke to the "real" woman, Israel instead presents the competing stories of her subject, including (among other things) Dilke's own short stories, her art criticism and letters, and Sir Charles Dilke's memoir of her. Using this method, Israel sees Dilke as "a point of entry into a range of historical and contemporary issues," as well as a means of developing a work of interdisciplinary history.²⁵ As a result of these readings, Israel presents a series of meditations on Victorian society. She explores, through Dilke, the worlds of Victorian art study and criticism, the nature of marriage and sex within it, self-presentation for a middle class woman, the politics of scandal, and the late-Victorian meeting of the women's rights and labor movements.

Narrative here is not only a set of stories about Emilia Dilke. Instead it allows Israel to see Emilia Dilke as occupying a number of different subject positions. Emilia Dilke was forever being positioned by the stories of other people. She was probably the model for George Eliot's Dorothea Casaubon, as well as appearing in Rhoda Broughton's novel *Belinda* (1883). In addition, she is the silent partner of Sir Charles Dilke during his fall from grace in 1886 as a result of his being named as a correspondent in the Crawford divorce. Her place in these stories, which

²⁴ Kali Israel, *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture* (New York, 1999), p. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

were not her own, gives Israel her theme of the power of narrative, while Dilke's various changes of name through her life and marriages symbolize the various discontinuous "selves" that Israel is concerned to examine. Her family name, Francis Strong, denotes an early career as a feisty art student in London, while marriage to the Casaubon-like Mark Pattison changed her into Francis Pattison, the initially dutiful but later independent Oxford wife. Similarly, the writing of art history was conducted in the gender-neutral manner of E. F. S. Pattison, while the final estrangement from her first marriage (in particular its conjugal obligations) is signified by her assumption of her original first name Emilia, to which Dilke was later added after her second marriage.

Narrative is seen to position Emilia Dilke within various discourses of womanhood, marriage, and scandal but also to provide resources for self-creation. For this to take place, in the life as in the biography, the various stories of Emilia Dilke must remain independent of any "deeper" truth. Stories, Israel argues, remain productive because they resist resolution and enable the constant repositioning of subjectivity. A good story must therefore remain ultimately mysterious.

Israel also bravely attempts to move queer reading away from its usual locus in the canonical works of the fin de siècle. She does this by reading accounts of Emilia Dilke during her first marriage to Mark Pattison as emphasizing the theatrical aspects of her persona and its "highly aestheticized femininity."²⁶ These stories present Dilke as distancing herself from the stultifying atmosphere of Oxford and its culture through "extravagant performances of femininity, aristocracy, and Frenchness."²⁷ Employing Judith Butler's analysis of the enacted quality of gender, Israel suggests that such enactments might be read as a parodic critique of Dilke's own confinement within Victorian notions of femininity and marriage.²⁸

In addition, Dilke's art-historical writing is used to signal an affinity between her own self-presentation and the emergence of a homosexual aestheticism. As Israel notes, Dilke wrote critical studies of the art of the Renaissance at the same time and in the same place as men like Walter Pater and Symonds, who were using such work as a terrain "on which male homoerotic discourses and styles were elaborated." This means that in spite of potential anachronisms of which Israel is sensitively aware, "theories of camp produce resonant readings" of Dilke's Oxford persona.²⁹ Just as Symonds and Pater "sometimes radically travestied femininity, claiming artificiality, performance, excess, and differ-

²⁶ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 163.

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990).

²⁹ Israel, *Names and Stories*, p. 175.

ence from (prescribed) bourgeois masculinity, constructing what became camp in their texts and sometimes in performances," so Dilke's writing on the Renaissance, as well as "her figure in the texts of contemporaries, thematizes femininity, display, unnaturalness, and undecidability."³⁰

This display of intellectual imagination reinvigorates queer theory at the same time as flattening out differences between men like Symonds and women like Dilke. Israel's suggestion that the history of transgressive aesthetics represented by Pater and his contemporaries should not be confined to men is welcome. She might have added that neither is this an exclusive preserve of the sexually "deviant." However, to claim Symonds as an originator of camp is to stretch a point, since in his writings on his own sexuality he is wholly accepting of the "modernist" notion that his sexuality represented the "truth of his being." Symonds represents the authenticity of the self just as Wilde represents its artificiality. He was not really a "sexual dissident" in the terms outlined by Dollimore and Dellamora.

The vexed matter of narrative is also once again at issue in *Names and Stories*. In concentrating on representations of Emilia Dilke and refusing to enter into discussions of the "real" woman beneath, a consideration of the material effects of such narratives is largely foregone. Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is not only representation but also a network comprising action, the practice of individuals, and the techniques of institutions.³¹ In order for the "struggles for meaning" outlined in all three volumes to represent the "modernities" that are claimed for them, their material effects must be demonstrated beyond their influence on one trial, text, novel, or person. Too often the generation of trial narratives or scandals is simply assumed to have some "normalizing" effect by providing tales of horrific comeuppance for wrongdoers and deviants. Yet, as I indicated above, if legal policy and levels of policing do not change markedly, and no new techniques or institutions come into being, then it still remains to determine on what terrain these normalizing effects take place. This is not to reinscribe the difference between representation and reality, or to suggest that these effects can somehow be quantified by simply abstracting criminal statistics, but to argue for the materiality of narrative and discourse.

In spite of this, all three books do offer the promise of new beginnings and a more nuanced approach to the "anarchy" and "modernity" of the fin de siècle. *Disorder in the Court* suggests new avenues for research in the criminal justice of the British Empire, while *Names and Stories* proposes new candidates for queer readings. *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* also invites further work on lesbianism and its relation to the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See, on this, Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London, 1972), pp. 48–49.

“canonical” figures of the period. However, only by retaining the material effects of narrative and providing a context that highlights their conditions of production will interdisciplinary studies like these continue to be productive.

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