rationale for homosexuality. The sociobiologists hypothesize that homosexuality contributes to the "inclusive fitness" of a gene pool, by permitting a childless, but energetic individual to devote efforts to the advancement of his or her nieces and nephews. While sociobiology has achieved considerable success in animal studies, its applicability to human beings is hotly contested, and the future of such explanations remains in doubt.

As a final element of caution, it should be recognized that the possible isolation of a body of individuals whose homosexual behavior, exclusive or not, is essentially conditioned by biological-constitutional factors, does not preclude the existence of another body of individuals capable of homosexual response whose modalities are not so determined. That is to say, the range of behavior and character types among individuals of a predominantly homosexual orientation is extremely varied, and one of the elements of variation may be the fact that the larger pool subsumed under the rubric of homosexual represents a confluence of "innate" and environmentally produced streams.

Ward Houser

CONTAGION

The notion of contagion as applied to disease originated only in the Middle Ages, when it was associated with plague and leprosy—both objects of intense dread. Almost from the beginning, however, the notion of moral contamination became attached to the word in the modern languages, so that it could be applied to deviant practices or heretical beliefs that threatened to "infect" society.

Hence the emergence of the medical concept of sexual inversion or homosexuality led to the belief that same-sex conduct could manifest an "infectious disease" and that the "innate homosexual" was a source of contagion who could "spread his perversion" to previously healthy heterosexuals. The term "moral leprosy" (from medieval Latin lepra moralis) applied to homosexuality appears at the beginning of the twentieth century, signaling the rise in homophobic circles of a new mythology that to some extent counteracted the pleas then beginning to be heard for toleration of the "born invert."

Underlying the notion of the contagiousness of homosexuality is the macroevolutionary capacity of human beings for sexual response to members of their own sex—as distinct from an exclusive homosexual orientation which occurs in a small minority at most. Hence the peculiar fear that homosexual activity can "spread like wildfire" if the criminal and social sanctions against it are relaxed "for even a moment." This apprehension figures in much of the twentieth-century polemic (such as that in Nazi Germany) which calls for increased penalties for homosexual conduct in order to forestall so rapid a spread of non-procreative sexuality as to raise the specter of race suicide. The widespread if transient homosexual-ity of adolescence also contributes to this delusion, usually fortified by the claim that unsuspecting adolescents are seduced by the adult homosexual and then "fixated in a lifelong pattern" of exclusive orientation to their own sex. There is also the accusation that homosexuals, since they cannot reproduce, must ceaselessly proselytize for their aberrant lifestyle.

Obviously there is no virus or germ that can account for homosexual response, and a pattern of exclusive homosexual activity that is inborn or acquired in early childhood could hardly be spread to other adults by mere contact, yet the belief that homosexuality is a contagious disease serves to reinforce patterns of legal discrimination and ostracism, all the more as it cannot be proven that the average member of the population is incapable of homosexual activity, even if the preference for such gratification remains confined to a demonstrable minority. The alliance of moral condemnation with the
late-nineteenth-century notion of homo-
sexuality as disease has given the ambigu-
ous notion of contagion a new lease on life
and contributed to the persistence of
homophobic attitudes which the gay
movement has had to work patiently to
dispel—thus far not with entire success.
The recent association of homosexual
activity with the spread of a pathological
and usually fatal condition such as Ac-
quired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
(AIDS) has the side-effect of reviving the
paranoid aspect of this belief system in the
unconscious depths of the mass mind.

Warren Johansson

CONTEST LITERATURE

In Greek literature a subgenre—
sometimes known under the rhetorical
term *syncrises*—developed in which two
characters debate opposing points of view.
Thus in *Aristophanes*’ *Frogs* the charac-
ters Aeschylus and Euripides argue the
merits of their poetry, while his *Clouds*
verbally pits *Just Reasoning* against Un-
just Reasoning. In later Greek writing
several pieces of contest literature appeared
debating the relative merits of boys and
women as love objects. Such a debate is
featured in the novel *Leucippe and Clito-
phon* by Achilles Tatius (perhaps second
century A.D.). An anonymous specimen is
the so-called *Affairs of the Heart* by pseudo-
Lucian.

Together with much else in the
Greek heritage, this tradition of arguing
the merits of pederasty vs. the love of
women passed to Islam, where the first
known example seems to be by al-Jahiz of
the ninth century. A more accessible in-
stance occurs in the *Arabian Nights* (419th
night and following in the Burton transla-
tion). In the mid-seventeenth century a
specimen appeared in Japan, the *Dembu
monogatari* (Story of a Boor), perhaps de-

erived ultimately from an Islamic source.

In the medieval literature of
Western Europe the boy–woman contest
flourished, the most salient instance being

the twelfth-century “Ganymede and He-
len.” In this medieval Latin poem, Helen
offers herself to Ganymede only to find
that he would rather assume the passive
role with another man. A violent quarrel
breaks out, to settle which they appoint
Nature and Reason as arbiters. Traveling
to “the world’s eastern edge, the house of
Nature,” they argue their respective posi-
tions before their judges, who are not
exactly impartial. Ganymede praises love
between man and boy, Helen champions
the passion of man and woman. Although
Ganymede makes several telling points,
in the end he is vanquished by the argu-
ment that intercourse between males is
sterile, that it wastes potential human
lives. “The old heresy is abandoned by the
gods,” and the teaching of the church is
vindicated. Parallels to this literary genre
of debate were the public controversies
between Jewish and Christian theologians
that typically ended in a decision in favor
of the church, and often in woe for the
Jewish communities in the cities where
the debates were staged.

After the church had imposed
obligatory heterosexuality upon the popu-
lation of Western Europe, all debate on the
issue ceased, and it became impossible to
defend male love publicly. But in cultures
where a significant part of the male popu-
lation is actively bisexual and intercourse
with a boy is a viable social option, the
choice is posed in life quite as much as in
literature—and not always to Ganymede’s
disadvantage. With the gradual rehabili-
tation of the homosexual option in today’s
pluralistic world, the notion of victory in
such a contest has become moot.

Wayne R. Dynes

CONTRARY
SEXUAL FEELING

This expression is the English
rendering of the overarching term adopted
by the German physician Karl Friedrich
Otto Westphal (1833–1890) for the condi-
tion that he had abstracted from two case