

tamental texts repeat and amplify the Biblical injunctions against homosexual behavior, even in the neighborhood of host peoples who tolerated such activity and knew no religious taboo against it. While the exclusiveness of the Jews and their disdain for the polytheism of the other peoples of the Hellenistic world precluded general adoption of their laws, Christianity was to retain the sexual provisions of the Mosaic code after it seceded from Judaism in a bid to become the universal religion of the Greco-Roman world.

Warren Johansson

INVENTOR LEGENDS

In some traditions, the introduction of homosexual conduct to human society has been ascribed to a single individual. Some Greek writers held that same-sex relations among men had been devised and spread by **Orpheus**, perhaps as a result of his disappointment over the loss of Eurydice. In this story homosexual behavior is not regarded as a misfortune, but as a gift on a par with Orpheus' celebrated musical accomplishments. **Pederasty** in fact had a divine archetype in Zeus' love for **Ganymede**. Other Greek sources attribute the invention of human homosexuality to King **Laius**, who kidnapped **Chrysippus**, the beautiful son of his host **Pelops**, during his exile from Thebes. It was this outrage that set in motion the tragic fate of his son **Oedipus**, a fact rarely cited by interpreters of Sophocles' trilogy or by those who adhere to the psychoanalytic construct known as the "Oedipus complex." The **Chrysippus** story was the subject of a lost play by **Euripides**. **Apollo** ascribes pederasty to yet another figure, the singer **Thamyris**.

Among the Arabs a curious reversal occurred in that **Lot**, urged by God in the Hebrew Bible to flee **Sodom** because of its devotion to vice (*Genesis 19*), was actually made responsible for the practice itself, so that in Arabic homosexuals may be called *ahl Lūt*, "the people of Lot."

Did homosexuality, as an aspect of human culture, in fact have an inventor, or at least a phase of introduction to human society? Any answer to this question, like that of the appearance of human language, would have to be hypothetical. To the extent that homosexuality is found among animals, it would not seem to be a human discovery at all. Yet historical sequences show that homosexual behavior has undergone changes in social organization—as from the Greeks to the Romans, through the Middle Ages, and down to modern times. Where these changes can be monitored, as in this sequence, they seem to be the result of the gradual shift of ideological, economic, familial, and other factors, which could not readily respond to the suggestion of any single individuals. Thus while the inventor question is useful to raise social elements in the origins of particular forms of homosexual behavior, in its literal sense it seems to be a false quest.

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INVERSION

Since the end of the nineteenth century some medical and other writers have equated homosexuality with inversion. For some, the term meant simply the reversal of the current of attraction from the opposite to one's own sex. Others believed that inversion entails also an adoption of patterns of thinking, feeling, and action that are characteristic of the other sex. In this broader sense it amounts to **effeminacy** in the male, and **viraginousness** in the female, but it would not include the majority of male homosexuals and lesbians who do not show these traits. Studies of **androgyny** have also suggested that there is a continuum rather than a sharp separation between the two poles of male and female, so that inversion in the sense of a complete volte-face does not seem to occur. In any event, the terms *inversion* and *invert* have acquired a negative, clinical aura, and for this reason they are less commonly used today.

An examination of the history of these terms is helpful in understanding the connotations they carry today. In 1878, in a professional article in the *Rivista di freniatria, di psichiatria e di medicina legale*, the Italian alienist Arrigo Tamassia introduced the term *inversione*, which was quickly adopted into other languages as well as Italian to render the cumbersome German expression *die conträre Sexualempfindung* which Karl Westphal had used in 1869. The new coinage owed its success not only to its grammatical malleability—yielding the noun *invert* and the adjective *inverted*—but also to the fact that while the word itself was new, the ideas on which it drew were deeply rooted in Western consciousness.

The byways of the history of ideas reveal many episodes of the use of the spatial metaphors of “backwards-to-forwards” and “upside down” to symbolize social abnormality. Sometimes the inversion procedure is temporal rather than spatial, as in reciting the alphabet or some ritual formula backwards to produce a magical spell.

In Euripides’ play *Medea* (fifth century B.C.), the social disturbance of role reversal catalyzed by the heroine’s assumption of masculine qualities is evoked by the image of rivers running backwards in their course. And *Orpheus*, who according to some Greek sources invented pederasty, was supposed to have made wild oaks migrate from their mountain habitat to the seashore, and to reduce savage beasts to lamb-like docility, thus altering the natural order by switching things to their opposites. In Hellenistic times, the poet Sotades (third century B.C.) invented a kind of verse which was innocuous when read forwards, but obscene backwards.

The sexual predilections of the Romans for the “posterior Venus” (anal receptivity) were held to be revealed in the very name *Roma*, which is a backwards spelling for *amor* (“love”). In the Koran, God turns the sinful cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* literally upside down. Medie-

val texts, such as the *Roman de la rose*, speak of sodomites doing things *à rebours* (“in reverse”), an expression that served Joris-Karl Huysmans in 1884 as the title for his novel of aristocratic perversion. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe witnessed the popularity of a genre of popular prints known as *Le Monde à l’Envers* or *The World Upside Down*, whereby alongside such outlandish things as fish nesting in trees and men plowing the sea, we find the wife going out to hunt while the husband stays home to mind the baby, and similar instances of sex-role reversal.

As used by late nineteenth-century writers, the word inversion often had an application that went beyond sexual orientation. The medical authorities who studied “inversion” were fascinated by gender-role reversal—masculine women and feminine men—positing such purportedly biological tendencies as the root cause of “inverted” sexual object choice, rather than vice versa. Certain writers preferred to restrict the term to the narrower meaning of the reversal of the secondary sexual characters as distinct from the sexual orientation proper; thus only the effeminate homosexual and the viraginous lesbian were “inverts” in this sense.

The idea was used in a number of creative ways by Marcel Proust in his great novel sequence *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27) which shows that it need not always be negative. One of his homosexual characters, Robert de Saint-Loup, seeks out danger in battle instead of fleeing it, while Baron Charlus becomes more pro-German rather than less so as war nears. In a larger sense the novel’s goal—the gradual recovery of more and more layers of memory—is a process of inversion or retrogression. This great enterprise is mirrored in Proust’s fascination with musical techniques, including the device of melodic inversion.

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