

In the eighth to tenth centuries Jewish slave dealers transported Slavic captives from Itil and Kiev in Khazaria to the slave markets of Moorish Spain, but en route at Verdun the males were castrated, with the result that in Arabic the word *saqaliba* meant not just "Slavs" but "eunuchs," who had their own special role in the sexual economy of the time. The eunuchs were employed as harem guards and as part of the military force of the Moorish rulers, but a feminized eunuch could also be the passive partner in a homosexual relationship. The Arab world preserved vestiges of slavery down to the twentieth century, and only international pressure and intervention have terminated the practice in quite recent times.

Relatively little study has been made of homosexual activity among the black slaves of the New World. In the seventeenth century Portuguese sources show, however, that homosexuality was common among the peoples of Angola, from which many Brazilian slaves were recruited. Inquisition reports beginning at the same time show considerable interracial sodomy, in most cases involving free white men and black slaves. There is also evidence of direct transfer of the social forms, including transvestism, documented in Angolan homosexuality to the slave population of Brazil.

Conclusion. In various cultural contexts, slavery augmented the element of dominance and submission implicit in many traditional homosexual relationships, and also enhanced the economic value of offspring in societies where parents could for mere financial gain sell a child into slavery knowing full well that it was destined for a brothel in some distant city. Even today the "sexual paradises" of Western tourists in Southeast Asia continue practices such as these that have survived from pre-modern societies, so that the champions of "sexual freedom" are profoundly wrong in imagining them as utopias of any sort. Rather they perpetuate a legacy of sexual exploitation and bond-

age that is incompatible with modern notions of liberty and self-determination.

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SMYTH, ETHEL, DAME (1858-1944)

British composer and memoirist. The daughter of a Frenchwoman and a British general, Smyth obtained her musical training in Germany. She also spent some time in the multisexual foreign colony in Florence, where she came under the influence of Henry Brewster, who wrote the librettos for some of her compositions. From him she derived a quasi-mystical Neoplatonic philosophy. Her symphonic choral work *The Prison* (1930) bears the epigraph: "I am striving to release that which is divine within us, and to merge it in the universally divine." Her first major work, the *Mass in D Major* (1893), was hailed for its expansive construction, robust enunciation, and rich orchestration—all qualities that were then unexpected in a woman composer. From 1898 to 1925 she wrote and produced six operas. She also composed choral and orchestral works, chamber music, and songs.

An extroverted and even flamboyant personality, Smyth made a significant contribution to the British movement for women's suffrage. For this cause she wrote a "March of the Women," which was much used in demonstrations. Her opera *The Boatswain's Mate* (1916) revolves around a strong female personality, that of the landlady. She battled for equal treatment of women as artists, tirelessly canvassing conductors and executives, and staging grand scenes of temperament when her exacting performance requirements were not met. Smyth also cultivated roy-

alty and golf. In 1922 she was made a Dame of the British Empire.

She fell in love with a number of women, most notably with Virginia Woolf, whom Ethel Smyth met when she was seventy-one. "I don't think I have ever cared for anyone more profoundly," she noted in her diary. "For eighteen months I have thought of little else." By this time she was suffering from deafness, and had to stop composing. She shifted her energy to her autobiographical volumes, which became renowned for their frankness and excellent prose style. Always forthright, she declared in 1935: "I am the most interesting person I know, and I don't care if anyone else thinks so." Her own summation of the three reasons for her remaining undefeated was: "An iron constitution, a fair share of fighting spirit, and, most important of all, a small but independent income."

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SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION APPROACH

In the 1980s a seemingly new approach to the study of homosexual behavior arose, which its advocates termed social construction. Denying the existence of any "transhistorical" definition of same-sex behavior, the social constructionist scholars hold that sexual behavior is, in all significant aspects, a product of cultural conditioning, rather than of biological and constitutional factors. Thus same-sex behavior would have an entirely different meaning, say, in ancient Egypt or Tang China from what it would have in nineteenth-century Europe. In the view of some proponents of this approach, the "modern homosexual" is *sui generis*, having come into existence in Europe and North America only about 1880; hence it is vain to conduct comparative research on earlier eras or non-Western societies.

The social constructionists contrast their own approach with that of the "essentialists" (a term of their own devising), who ostensibly believe in an eternal and unchanging homosexuality. Yet most critics of social construction are not essentialists, and to label them as such amounts to a caricature that has proved tactically useful for polemical purposes but has advanced understanding very little. One should also bear in mind that the discussion is not current in the gay/lesbian community as a whole, but is confined to scholars.

Strengths and Weaknesses. What is valuable about the social construction approach is the fact that it alerts researchers to the dangers of anachronism. It makes no sense, for example, to refer to such ancient Greek figures as Socrates and Alexander the Great as gay without noting that their erotic life was conducted in a framework in which pederasty, the love of an adult man for an adolescent boy, was the rule, and not the androphilia—male adult-adult relationship—that is dominant today.

Granting this point, social construction errs too far on the side of difference in denying any commonality whatever among same-sex love in ancient Greece, in the Middle Ages, and in contemporary Western society. This denial of commonality and continuity would deprive scholars of the fruits of cross-cultural study of same-sex behavior. Another consequence of social construction orthodoxy is to exclude biological factors from any role in the shaping of sexual desire. Some extreme adherents claim that the body itself is a mere social construct—implying a rejection of material reality itself.

Sources. It has been suggested that the conflict between social construction and its opponents is another version of the old debate about nature versus nurture, between those who believe that human conduct is largely conditioned by biological forces and those who attribute the