

# Sapphism and Sediton: Producing Female Homosexuality in Great War Britain

DEBORAH COHLER  
*San Francisco State University*

IN EARLY 1918, as British military forces were in retreat and the country expected humiliating military defeat at the hands of Germany, two events simultaneously raised rhetorical concern over female sexual representation in Britain. In one instance, a novel by pacifist Rose Allatini was quickly and relatively quietly banned under the Defense of the Realm Act. Written under the pseudonym "A. T. Fitzroy," *Despised and Rejected* recounts the wartime trials of a female homosexual and a pacifist homosexual man. The other event was the far more notorious "trial of the century" in which well-known dancer Maud Allan sued Member of Parliament Noel Pemberton Billing for libel. Allan's attorney claimed that an article in Billing's newspaper headlined "The Cult of the Clitoris" implied that Allan was a lesbian. Spurred by wartime concerns over British masculinity, these two representational and juridical stories together map rapidly transforming relations of gender to sexuality in emergent early-twentieth-century constructions of homosexuality.

By reading *Despised and Rejected* and Maud Allan's trial together and in the context of the Great War's home front, this essay argues that twentieth-century lesbian representations were produced not only through the medical discourse of late-nineteenth-century sexology and female homosocial traditions, as much of modern scholarship has discussed, but also through discourses of xenophobic nationalism and ideological affiliations with homosexual male figures during World War I. Critical attention to

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the intersections of xenophobia, nationalism, and home front homophobia illustrate the intractable relation of the emergence of British lesbian identity to the politics of the nation. It is not simply that discourses of wartime nationalism created the conditions for the interwar emergence of a coherent lesbian subject but also that the cultural anxiety surrounding sexual deviance in turn shaped ideas of the nation itself through debates over women's citizenship, roles, and desires.

This essay seeks to draw together work in the history of sexuality and on women's early-twentieth-century cultural productions with studies of the gendered politics of the Great War. Current scholarship in the history of sexuality generally plots the emergence of lesbian identities in the West a generation after that of male homosexuality. Laura Doan and others have suggested that the obscenity trials of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness* may be analogous to Oscar Wilde's 1895 trials as a benchmark of a newly visible and culturally coherent homosexual identity. Doan writes: "The highly publicized obscenity trial of Hall's novel, which is generally recognized as *the* crystallizing moment in the construction of a visible modern English lesbian subculture, marks a great divide between innocence and deviance, private and public, New Woman and Modern Lesbian."<sup>1</sup> Doan artfully maps the emergence of this "visible modern English lesbian subculture" in the 1920s through detailed attention to literature, legal texts, sexology, and fashion, focusing specifically on their interwar representational impacts. This essay seeks to parse a slightly earlier literary, juridical, and cultural moment in the 1910s that, in an important way, enabled the more legible cultural transformations of the 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

Literary critics such as Angela K. Smith and Claire M. Tylee focus specifically on the impact of women's war writings on the emergence of modernism and the transformation of gender ideologies.<sup>3</sup> Work on the gendered politics of the Great War itself, such as the excellent work of historian Nicoletta Gullace, illustrates the gendered renegotiation of citizenship during the Great

<sup>1</sup>Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), xii–xiii.

<sup>2</sup>This essay focuses on the representational politics of sexual and gendered transformations on the home front. For an essay engaging similar questions on the battle front see Laura Doan's "Topsy-Turvydom: Gender Inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 4 (2006): 517–42. Doan seeks to uncover traces of the wartime "lives and experiences of certain women ambulance drivers" (527), focusing on identity and lived experience through private as well as public documents. Doan's text provides a strong conversational partner to this essay, which takes up the more public politics of home front representation.

<sup>3</sup>Claire M. Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914–64* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism, and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

War.<sup>4</sup> Whereas work in the history of sexuality often takes the category of Englishness for granted or as a stable backdrop against which lesbian identity emerges, and whereas work on the gendered politics of the Great War's home front may elide the politics of women's sexual deviance, it is essential to illustrate the mutually constitutive and rapidly changing discourses of women's sexual and national roles on the home front.

Representations of female homosexuality changed qualitatively during the Great War. In the prewar period, while female homoerotic relationships existed, British culture lacked any coherent narrative of female homosexual identity. Indeed, such a publicly legible identity may be said to not yet exist. This essay illustrates that through discursive associations with male homosexual representation and in opposition to discourses of home front nationalism, varying models of female homosexuality emerged in public discourse during the Great War. On the home front, discourses of nationalism aligned male homosexuality with sedition and femininity at the same time that women were encouraged to illustrate their patriotism by adopting a maternal femininity but also in the expression of masculine cultural attributes.

Rose Allatini's novel illustrates how female homosexuality emerged narratively through the negotiation of effeminate male homosexual pacifism and patriotic female masculinity. Similarly, the rhetoric in Maud Allan's trial following her performance in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* unveils discursive, cultural, and political connections within a triad formed by male homosexual identity, a nationalist rejection of "decadent" and "foreign" art, and the multiple meanings of female sexual deviance in the public sphere. By reading the representational politics of Maud Allan's notorious trial through the banned *Despised and Rejected*, the critical role of wartime nationalism in the production of the modern lesbian subject can be read. Together, these cultural texts evince the interconnected and changing narratives of nationalism, female sexuality, and homosexuality in Great War Britain.

#### "HUNNISH EROTOMANIA"

Previous cultural histories have outlined rhetorical attacks on male homosexuality and connections between charges of sedition and accusations of male homosexuality in England during the last years of the Great War.<sup>5</sup> My readings of Maud Allan's trial and Allatini's novel in the context of Great War Britain's home front culture reinforce this connection and study its implications for representations of female homosexuality. Discourses of

<sup>4</sup>Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>5</sup>For example, see Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990); Michael Kettle, *Salome's Last Veil: The Libel Case of the Century* (London: Granada Publishing, 1977); and Philip Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy, and the Most Outrageous Trial of the Century* (New York: Arcade, 1997).

national degeneration and elite effeminacy were projected not only onto men but onto marginalized women as well, both pacifist women and sexual or national outsiders. The discourse of homosexual male contagion and cultural anxieties over women's involvement in the masculine public sphere enabled a new rhetoric of female homosexuality to emerge on the British home front.

The wartime scapegoating of homosexual men took two forms, one domestic and the other xenophobic. The first form, as documented by Samuel Hynes, was the early-twentieth-century belief that England's elite class had been corrupted and compromised by internal homosexual decadence (in the figure of Oscar Wilde) before the war and had resulted in wartime military and political degeneration. This notion was rendered explicit in extreme conservative writings that took aim at the Liberal Party and its leader, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. A key proponent of this rhetoric was, ironically, Lord Alfred Douglas, years earlier Oscar Wilde's companion but by then a social and political conservative who was keen to renounce all of his prior sexual and cultural associations with Wilde and homosexuality. In June 1915 he wrote for his own occasional journal an article entitled "God's Lovely Lust," asserting that "it is just as important to civilization that Literary England should be cleansed of sex-mongers and peddlers of the perverse, as that Flanders should be cleared of Germans."<sup>6</sup>

The second form, as discussed by Michael Kettle, argued in a more appealing and nationalist way that wartime British male homosexuality had been imported from decadent and tricky Germans. Indeed, as Britain's war against Germany went increasingly poorly, the association of male homosexuality with Germany increased on the British home front. In "Efficiency and Vice," which appeared in the conservative *English Review*, Arnold White claimed that the "efficiency" of Germans led them to a sustained effort to "undermine the stamina of British youth" through a "moral invasion of England." This moral invasion consisted of "the systematic seduction of young British soldiers by the German urnings [male homosexuals] and their agents. . . . The tendency in Germany is to abolish civilization as we know it, to substitute Sodom and Gomorrah for the New Jerusalem, and to infect clean nations with Hunnish erotomania."<sup>7</sup> Here White alleges German use of male homosexuality as a tool against its enemy. This rhetoric served to mitigate any lingering prewar sympathies for Germany and to incite patriotic fervor for the war both at home and abroad with notions of cleansing Britain of its foreign contaminants, protecting both the nation and its allies from further infection.

These aggressive wartime discourses of male homosexual panic often elide the critical role of representations of female sexuality in the constructions of home front sexual identities. The position of women within this discourse of

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 223.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Kettle, *Salome's Last Veil*, 5–6.

male homosexual infection is a curious one. At times British women remain an undifferentiated class of mothers, wives, and sisters. In White's diatribe, for example, women are placed opposite male homosexual corruption: "The subjection of women is one of the foundation stones of the German creed, as their violation is a perquisite of their troops. The desirability of legalising unnatural offences is another of the broadstones of the German Empire."<sup>8</sup> Thus the rape of conquered women is associated with a much exaggerated German movement to revoke Paragraph 175, which criminalized male homosexuality in Germany in 1871.<sup>9</sup> In this rhetoric women are a class to be protected from heterosexual violation by the conquering army. This is a familiar rhetorical move in this war that began with British exhortations to "save" the women of Belgium (and the feminized neighboring nation itself) from German militarized rape.<sup>10</sup> As we will see, however, in the rhetoric of the Allan/Billing trial and *Despised and Rejected* women were not limited to the positions of heterosexual victims or staunch British mothers but also generated discourses of homosexual contagion, national degeneration, and masculine citizenship.

At the same time, cultural anxieties surrounding female heterosexuality during wartime suggest that the Great War produced new representational possibilities of female same-sex desire. Public representations of female homosexuality in early-twentieth-century Britain, to be sure, resulted from a combination of medical, legal, historical, and cultural factors. They include an increasing dissemination of sexological texts throughout England; the increasing visibility of working-class passing women; growing cultural discomfort with bourgeois romantic friendships; the notoriety of homosexual male representations after the Wilde trials of 1895; and militant women's violent prewar agitation for women's suffrage. Hitherto ignored in this cultural mixture, though, is the role played by nationalist narratives of wartime patriotism that emerges when we examine the infamous Allan/Billing trial alongside the representations of female sexuality presented by pacifist novelist Rose Allatini. Through a congruence of this nationalist rhetoric with troubled sexual and gendered ideologies on the home front, legible if not coherent emergent narratives of female homosexuality were brought into being, and the rhetoric of national belonging for women in Great War Britain was transformed.

#### DESPISED, REJECTED, AND BANNED

Written by Rose Allatini in 1917, published under the pseudonym "A. T. Fitzroy" in May 1918, and banned under the Defense of the Realm Act

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>9</sup>For a history of Germany's Paragraph 175 see James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (1975; Salem, Mass.: Ayer, 1993).

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed discussion of the representational politics and home front impact of tales of German atrocities in Belgium see Gullace, "*The Blood of Our Sons*," chap. 1.

a few months later, *Despised and Rejected* illustrates the complex relations among home front nationalism, wartime sexual transformations, and pacifist resistance in Great War Britain.<sup>11</sup> The text both documents nascent lesbian representations and provides an example of the pacifist literature of Great War Britain. These two domains—homosexual representation and pacifism—are mutually constituted in the world of the novel. The prewar sections of the novel establish Allatini's sympathy with the sexological and cultural constructions of homosexuality established by socialist and homosexual advocate Edward Carpenter, although the wartime sections complicate Carpenter's models of an exceptional "intermediate type" and reveal the historical specificities of male and female homosexual identity formations, and the novel's conclusion illustrates a more complicated relation of lesbian identity to male homosexual representations.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the novel pacifism is aligned with a feminized male homosexuality and militarism is equated with a brutish heterosexual masculinity in both men and women. Women's gender presentations are mediated by their political as well as their sexual "types" in complex and often contradictory rhetorical moves. A reading of this novel's constructions of male and female masculinity, pacifism, and sexual identity reveals critical cleavages in Great War Britain—cleavages within British national identity, the role of gender and sexual conformity on the home front, and the interdependent yet importantly distinct evolutions of male and female homosexuality in the public imagination in England in the early twentieth century.

*Despised and Rejected* introduces its readers to its central characters, the young Dennis and Antoinette, in the years before the Great War. While Dennis is a "square peg in a round hole," Antoinette initially reports that she "fits in just anywhere" (52). Dennis is written as a congenital sexual invert marked as such from childhood, whereas Antoinette's homosexuality

<sup>11</sup>A. T. Fitzroy [Rose Allatini], *Despised and Rejected* (1917), reprinted in Arno Series on Homosexuality, ed. Jonathan Ned Katz (New York: Arno, 1975). All subsequent quotations from this text are located in the main body of the essay. Rose Allatini (1890–1980) authored thirty-eight novels in her career under a variety of pseudonyms, including A. T. Fitzroy and Eunice Buckley. She married composer Cyril Scott in 1921 and had two children but separated from him in 1941 and lived for many years thereafter in Rye, England, with author Melanie Mills. For biographical information on Allatini see Gay Wachman, *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 115–16; and the Brighton newsletter's short 2005 article "Adored and Accepted," *Ourstory* 16 (Spring 2005), available on the web at <http://www.brightonourstory.co.uk/newsletters/spring05/adored.htm>.

<sup>12</sup>Edward Carpenter (1884–1929) was a leading British social reformer and writer on homosexuality. He wrote widely and "liv[ed] openly as a homosexual in a village outside Sheffield, offering hospitality to like-minded men and women" (Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and the Early Feminists* [New York: New Press, 1995], 263). His best-known work, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (New York: AMS Press, 1983), was first published in 1908 and was often read alongside sexological work by early sexologists Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis.

is inscribed through her history of adolescent crushes on girls and women and then, in a surprising turn, through her love for Dennis. Thus while male homosexuality is represented through a paradigm of medical gender inversion and alienated modernity, female homosexuality lacks medical morbidity and is produced in part through a queer sort of heterosexual desire. This gendered differentiation is critical, as it engages the gap in cultural representations of male and female sexuality in prewar Britain.

Difference has an organic basis within Dennis. As his mother comments apologetically to a new friend, "We could never get Dennis to play with soldiers or steamers or any of the usual toys. His father used to get quite angry. He always wanted his boys to be *manly* boys" (16, emphasis in original). Here a nascent pacifism is aligned with effeminacy: even as a child Dennis does not display appropriately masculine desires for war toys, and these desires, though coded as gender inversion, are also markers of Dennis's other deviance: his pacifism. The moment when Dennis recognizes his multiple alienations as symptoms of homosexual identity illustrates the cultural consequences of male homosexuality while providing an explanatory models for such desires:

He must be for ever an outcast amongst men, shunned by them, despised and mocked by them. He was maddened by fear and horror and loathing of himself.

Abnormal—perverted—against nature—he could hear the epithets that would be hurled against him, and that he would deserve. Yes, but what had nature been about, in giving him the soul of a woman in the body of a man? (107)

For Allatini, male homosexuality produces prolonged self-debasement and is equated with psychic gender inversion as Dennis links his horrific sexual desire for his beloved Alan with the necessary "soul of a woman." Allatini echoes Edward Carpenter's formulation of male homosexuality.<sup>13</sup> Carpenter's "normal type of the Uranian man, . . . while possessing thoroughly masculine powers of mind and body, combines with them the tender and more emotional soul-nature of the woman," and he may "have often a peculiar gift: . . . the artist-nature, with the artist's sensibility and perception. Such an one is often a dreamer, of brooding, reserved habits, often a musician."<sup>14</sup> Thus Dennis's musical inclinations, his distaste for large groups, and his psychological and bodily effeminacy all lead inevitably toward his sexual inversion.

Like Dennis, Antoinette is written as a homosexual, but her trajectory within the novel's plot and her psychic and physical composition differ radically from those drawn of Dennis. Here Allatini diverges from Carpenter's

<sup>13</sup>For more detailed discussion of Edward Carpenter's influence on Allatini's novel see Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 153–55; and Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 105–19.

<sup>14</sup>Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 32–33.

model of the female intermediate type most clearly. These differences reflect the disjunction between cultural representations and conception of male and female sexuality generally and, most specifically, between the divergent ways in which homosexuality could, in 1918, be conceived of for male and female subjects. Unlike Dennis, Antoinette is neither a gender invert nor a social introvert. Her youthful homosexual desires do not imprint innate feelings of isolation or difference, and she initially reflects none of the “special combination of qualities” or inner masculine nature Carpenter assigns “homogenic women.”<sup>15</sup> Rather, Antoinette first views her erotic feelings toward other women as unexceptional predecessors to her eventual love for men or as simply amusing diversions that she requires to keep herself entertained. Indeed, in stark contrast to Dennis, her desires for other women are never depicted as alienating events that precipitate fear, horror, and rejection but as “natural” emotions producing excitement and interest.

Antoinette’s first homoerotic relations spell out the terms of female same-sex erotics in the novel and produce her early homosexuality. In the novel’s first pages Antoinette encounters Hester, an aloof woman with whom she is quickly enamored. Surrounded by families at a summer resort, the solitary Hester is often “armed with a masculine-looking walking stick” (12) and possesses a mysterious sexual secret. Hints and codes can produce a reading of masculine Hester as homosexual. However, Hester’s sexual “secret” is revealed to be a mundane affair with a married man. Hester’s explicitly heterosexual masculinity may prove that gender inversion does not always indicate sexual inversion in this novel, just as other clearly and unambiguously heterosexual women are masculinized during the war in the novel as well as in British home front culture more broadly.<sup>16</sup> Yet whether homosexual or merely adulterous, Hester is the figure through which Allatini first constructs the possibility of Antoinette’s homosexual identity.

The language with which Allatini describes Antoinette’s fascination with Hester instead resembles nothing more than that of nineteenth-century women’s “schoolgirl crushes”: “She could have shouted aloud with the joy of being alive, and in love: if Hester would only allow herself to be loved, she would try to make up to her for all of the bitterness and disappointment that might have been in her life. Antoinette was young enough and mad enough at the moment to believe that anything was possible” (50). Antoinette’s love resembles a schoolgirl “rave” more than either mature heterosexual passion or Dennis’s masochistic agonies over Alan. Yet in *Despised and*

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>16</sup>David Trotter highlights Hester’s role as “the novel’s most memorable event” and reads the possibility of homosexuality into the character of Hester against the novel’s narrative: “Some of the book’s first readers would have recognized Hester, I believe, and through Hester the nature of Antoinette’s love, because they had already encountered her like in Newer Women fiction” (“Lesbians before Lesbianism: Sexual Identity in Early Twentieth-Century British Fiction,” in *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870–1930*, ed. Billie Melman [New York: Routledge, 1998], 193–211, quote at 198).



*Rejected* Antoinette's schoolgirl crushes are presented as symptoms of her eventual homosexuality. This narrative runs counter to the diagnosis of such relationships by sexologist Havelock Ellis, who claimed that their transitory nature and association with adolescence rendered them "unpathological," meaning unlikely to lead to permanent homosexual desires.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Allatini establishes both Antoinette's love for Hester and her multiple girlhood crushes as symptoms of her lesbianism. At first, Antoinette views her schoolgirl "flames" as indications of an eventual heterosexual fire: "If already this world of women and girls, narrow though it was, could contain for her such a wealth of thrills and excitement, how much more wonderful must be that other world, the world beyond school, the world of men" (68). Yet rather than being a precursor of "greater" heterosexual things to come, as Ellis (and Antoinette) might predict, Allatini constructs Antoinette's schoolgirl crushes as indicators of an emerging sexual inversion. Like her boyishly short hair, Antoinette's emotional relations with women could be seen as something other than symptoms of lesbianism, yet in Allatini's narrative they not only construct Antoinette in the context of same-sex erotics but also function as its predictors.<sup>18</sup>

These schoolgirl crushes serve two functions. On the one hand, Antoinette is unaware of any morbidity. Because such crushes were so common, they serve to establish Antoinette's desires for women outside the realms of perversion and pathology into which any discussion of male homosexuality seemed inevitably to fall. Relieved that her crush on Hester abates the boredom of "her fruitless search in the world of masculinity," Antoinette is unaware of any possible stigma such a relationship might hold: "*Antoinette was free from the least taint of morbidity*; unaware that there was aught unusual about her attitude—Hester herself had perceived this—she merely felt that she was coming into her own again, and was healthy-minded and joyous in her unquestioning obedience to the dictates of her inmost nature" (69, emphasis added). On

<sup>17</sup>Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 2 vols. (1897–1910; New York: Random House, 1942), Appendix A, esp. at 374, on schoolgirl crushes. Havelock Ellis (1859–1939) stands as perhaps the most important British sexologist of the early twentieth century. *Sexual Inversions*, the first volume of his multivolume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, was first published in 1897 and, along with subsequent volumes, was continually revised for the next thirty years. Neither a doctor nor a scientist by training, Ellis addressed questions such as the decriminalization of male homosexuality and women's emancipation in his writings on sexual psychology and social reform.

<sup>18</sup>Antoinette's physiognomy is not as inverted as Dennis's. The only indications that her body does not conform to a wholly feminine model are recurring references to her "boyish curls." Hair is one of the most culturally mutable body parts. It can be grown out or cut off, whereas thick ankles, to name a frequently cited marker of female sexual inversion in medical literature, cannot be modified. The social markers of Antoinette's sexual inversion are similarly nebulous. This does not demonstrate any "weakness" in her diagnosis as a lesbian but rather shows that in the case of female homosexuality more factors than the sexological and pathological combine in representing an identity predicated on same-sex desire, particularly at this historical moment of transition.

the other hand, the narrator is painfully attuned to homosexuality's morbid possibility. Like Dennis, Antoinette's homosexuality is innate or "inmost"; however, her homosexuality is also distinct and sometimes rhetorically quite distant from the novel's representations of male homosexuality. Laura Doan notes in her discussion of this passage that "in Antoinette Allatini thus creates a well-adjusted female Uranian who is more capable than her fellow Uranian Dennis in coping with a life on the margins of so-called normal society."<sup>19</sup> Taking this point a bit further, it seems to me that female homosexuality, if less troubling than Dennis's inversion, is also more difficult to represent textually. Thus, Antoinette's schoolgirl crush on Hester is necessary to the construction of her homosexual subjectivity, but it is imbued with narrative tension; it can be read as both sexual and asexual, innocent and morbid.

Instead, Antoinette's homosexuality must be verbally revealed to her by the novel's other central homosexual character. Dennis inadvertently informs her of her sexual identity, incorrectly assuming that she already has this self-knowledge. She cannot understand her own homosexuality without assistance. As she traces her homosexual development through her schoolgirl crushes, it is with a wonder that they seem so innocent and natural to her. She asks Dennis how he knew of her "taint":

"My child, the way you looked at that woman [Hester] was quite enough."

. . . Rapidly she cast her mind over those school-girl passions of her early youth. . . . *This, then, was the taint of which he spoke; the taint that they shared, he and she. Only whereas he had always striven against these tendencies in himself; in herself she had never regarded them as abnormal.* It had seemed disappointing, but not in the least unnatural, that all her passionate longings should have been awakened by women, instead of members of the opposite sex. (217–18, emphasis added, first ellipses added, second in original text)

This passage illustrates key differences between the construction of male and female homosexuality while it also demonstrates the continuum or slide from "innocent" romantic schoolgirl crushes to an emergent homosexual identity. It is immediately followed by Antoinette's internal monologue, supplementing this new understanding by including her romantic love for Dennis. It mediates her self-identification as a lesbian through her cross-sex desire for a homosexual man: "A wave of burning tenderness and longing came over her. It was a shame that he should have to suffer so horribly from the consciousness of his abnormality, while her own had never caused her the slightest uneasiness" (218). Antoinette's cross-sex "burning tenderness" serves both to temper her own homosexual revelation and to highlight the difference between a female homosexual identity predicated on ease and a male homosexual identity predicated on morbidity.

<sup>19</sup>Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 154.

As the novel develops, Antoinette's romantic relationship with Dennis increases in intensity. Paradoxically, Antoinette's increasing heterosexual (if still queer) desire for Dennis functions in the novel as a symptom of her true homosexuality. Gay Wachman explains this cross-sex construction:

Since she and Dennis believe that inversion is innate and permanent, it is possible for Antoinette to suffer simultaneously from her unrequited heterosexual love for Dennis and from her "terror and loneliness of the Ishmaelite, outcast among men and women." It is hard not to become impatient at this point in the novel; Allatini permits no glimmer of opposition, or even common sense, to penetrate this fog of ideology.<sup>20</sup>

Wachman refuses to read Antoinette's love for Dennis as homosexual affiliation. Instead, Wachman dismisses its importance in an historical trajectory: "I am inclined to identify aspects of Antoinette's situation with Rose Allatini's."<sup>21</sup> This biographical elision, however, forecloses a more nuanced reading of Antoinette's subjectivity, for the novel itself produces an emergent lesbian identity through Antoinette's affiliation with male homosexuality. After Dennis reveals himself as a homosexual to her, Antoinette first doubts her own homosexuality but then finds it again through her affiliation with Dennis:

She said, "Will you tell me what it means, Dennis, that I should care for you like this?" She really meant: "Doesn't it prove me perfectly normal after all?"

And he understood and answered the unspoken part of her question. "It's only another proof of your abnormality, my poor child. No normal woman could care for me, I'm sure. You only do, because you are what you are, and I am what I am. It's 'like to like,' as I said." (223)

Allatini's "like to like" serves up Antoinette as a full-fledged homosexual woman, no matter how strong her passion for Dennis appears.

The configuration of Antoinette's desire for Dennis alongside her desires for women is critical to understanding Allatini's emerging representational model of emerging female homosexuality. First, her affectional "like to like" attraction to Dennis connects male and female subjects and establishes "homosexuality" as an identity based primarily on sexual deviance rather than on gender identification. At the same time, it enables Allatini to construct a homosexual woman without having to create a same-sex erotic desire outside of previous literary models. So the novel's early homoerotic sections can echo "smashing" novels in which girls experience crushes on one another and their teacher. Antoinette can *be* a homosexual without Allatini's having to provide a script for such an emerging identity or to articulate fully the difficult subject of female homosexual desire. Same-sex desire is the subtext

<sup>20</sup>Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 115.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 115.

of Antoinette's homosexual identity, but it is never made as explicit in the novel as male same-sex desire is for Dennis's identity as a homosexual man.

Dennis's sexual deviance within the novel is produced by the Great War and elaborates upon previous medical and legal articulations of male homosexuality by its rhetorical associations with pacifism and modernity. In the novel male homosexuality is structurally equivalent to pacifism, and these two identities reinforce each other. As the novel concludes Dennis is imprisoned and rejected by most of his family for refusing military conscription and not for gross indecencies. Pacifists, like homosexuals, have a "natural bent," one that will not be corrected or erased by imprisonment. From the start of the novel, when Dennis's refusal to play with war toys marks him as unmanly, pacifism stands in for and alongside of male homosexual identity.

The enmeshed relationships among gender, nationalism, and sexual identity are further entangled by men's and women's differing relations to the war. Both pacifism and male homosexuality are aligned with modern "progress" rather than a premodern "instinct" articulated by Dennis's patriotic father, who declares that "if a man's got no fight in him, he's unnatural, that's what I say, unnatural" (194). Dennis, then, is unnatural as much because of his pacifism as because of his other innate and "unnatural" identity as a male homosexual. Dennis, linking pacifism (and implicitly male homosexuality) to modernity and strength rather than the more familiar registers of weakness and degeneration, counters that just as "man" has "conquer[ed] nature with his ships and his railways," so too should the "war-instinct" in men be conquered: "You want progress and the conquest of natural difficulties in every possible direction, and yet you won't admit that a man can conquer *himself*. You're shouted down as 'unnatural,' if you as much speak of overcoming an instinct that is nothing but a hindrance to civilization and progress" (195, emphasis in original). Here Allatini reverses the logic of "instincts" by associating heterosexual aggression with the premodern and the conquering of "man" by "*himself*" as a sign of enlightened modernity. Dennis's father cannot counter his son's logic, and so he dismisses it as the "twaddle" of "you and your artistic friends." Noting Allatini's debt to Edward Carpenter in this matter, Clare Tylee observes that "Allatini links her analysis of 'manliness' to the current cultural debate about the degeneracy of the British race and the decadence of English culture."<sup>22</sup> Lines are firmly drawn in this novel: modernists, pacifists, artists, and homosexuals stand on one side; premodern (also characterized in the novel as "Victorian") middle-class heterosexual men stand on the other.

War produces masculinity in both women and men; rather than uniformly reinforcing conformity to gender codes, however, war brings out the masculine in all warmongers and the feminine in all pacifists. Dennis and his lover,

<sup>22</sup>Tylee, *The Great War*, 124.

Alan, as well as their male heterosexual pacifist compatriots, are feminized. In contrast, Dennis describes women who contribute to the war effort as “khaki-clad females who say they wish they were men, so they could kill a few Huns themselves” (240). Not only do prowar women “wish they were men,” but several take on masculine attitudes and attire: “Lily Hallard, very military in her V.A.D. [Voluntary Aid Detachments] uniform, openly confessed that she didn’t like the prospect of having a shirker for a brother-in-law; and in her loud-voiced aggressive manner tried to convert Dennis to a proper frame of mind” (188). This “conversion,” of course, inevitably fails, as Lily is of the wrong ideological and sexual stripe to sway Dennis.

This congruence between homosexuality and pacifism is replicated outside the world of the novel in its publication history. Published in early 1918, the novel was banned in October of the same year. As Virginia Woolf noted in her diary, it was “burnt by the hangman.”<sup>23</sup> Yet *Despised and Rejected* was not banned for its immoral sexual content; rather, the novel was censored under the wartime Defense of the Realm regulations and was found “likely to prejudice the recruiting, training, and discipline of persons in his Majesty’s forces.”<sup>24</sup> While its homosexual content would undoubtedly have warranted moral if not also legal censure, this novel was removed from circulation not because of its depiction of homosexuality but for its more dangerous twin, its pacifist content. In his ruling Alderman Sir Charles Wakefield noted that “the question whether the book was obscene was not before him, but he did not hesitate to describe it as morally unhealthy and most pernicious.” While Wakefield considered whether or not he should (or could) send the publishers to prison, he satisfied himself by imposing the maximum fine permissible (£100 plus legal costs to each defendant).<sup>25</sup> In this judicial sentence we can trace the construction of sedition through sexual deviance: both are “morally unhealthy and most pernicious.”

The defense in the case argued against the novel’s seditious effects by claiming that while the main character, Dennis, is a pacifist, the novel itself presents all sides of the issue. In fact, the novel’s homosexual content was invoked as a defense against the charge of pacifism: Mr. Whitely, for the defense, argued that “the title . . . referred to the abnormal sexual tendencies of the hero, and not to his pacifist views.” This unsuccessful strategy failed in part because rhetorically, pacifism and homosexuality appear intractably connected to each other and Dennis. On the home front, or at least in this

<sup>23</sup>Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Oliver Bell, 5 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 1:246.

<sup>24</sup>“‘Despised and Rejected’ Publisher of Pacifist Novel Fined,” *Times* (London), 11 October 1918, 5. All subsequent quotations from the trial of *Despised and Rejected* are taken from this account, although the trial was also covered in other newspapers. While the transcript of the trial is no longer available, the contemporary newspaper accounts of it are at least consistent.

<sup>25</sup>For a more detailed discussion of the novel’s censure see Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 117–19.

courtroom, homosexuality could not be extracted from pacifism: they were entwined not only in the text of Allatini's novel but also in its censure.

But what of Antoinette? The legal censure of the novel made no mention of the female homosexuality in the text. Was the figure of Antoinette irrelevant in the legal proceeding because she was exempt from required military service or because there were no legal prohibitions against female homosexuality in Britain? Or was it because it was difficult to talk about her at all, given the limited vocabulary for articulating female homosexuality? Antoinette remains ambiguous. Decidedly *not* the "mannish lesbian" who will proliferate in British letters by the late 1920s, Antoinette is neither a mannish patriot (like Lily Hallard) nor an abjectly feminized pacifist like Dennis or Alan.

Antoinette, nonetheless, provides the key to the novel's representational innovations. Allatini's novel mobilizes familiar tropes of schoolgirl romance and heterosexual desire to establish Antoinette's lesbianism thematically. Yet the novel's end reinforces the necessary connection between Allatini's emergent lesbianism and the Great War. Novels written in the midst of conflict pose a problem for conventional narrative: Who will win? Will this story end in victory or defeat, tragedy or celebration? *Despised and Rejected* demonstrates, however, that indeterminacy and incompleteness were also necessary components to constructing a narrative of lesbianism during the Great War: no "happy ending" could be conceived for Antoinette in which her homosexual orientation remains intact. Laura Doan argues that Antoinette is included in Allatini's way of illustration of Edward Carpenter's vision of a "new race" of sexual intermediates through her reproductive capabilities: "The female Uranian is crucial for she alone can reproduce a race of the highest caliber in her unique capacity to love her male counterpart and in her potential to create pure-bred intermediates. Allatini literally fleshes out Carpenter's idealized vision of the future and positions Antoinette in the forefront of 'the advance-guard of a more enlightened civilization.'"<sup>26</sup>

Yet Allatini does not include Antoinette in Alan and Dennis's homogenic future: she remains instead on the margins, unsure of her role, as the novel ends with Dennis in prison for resisting conscription and Antoinette alone, rejected by her family for her pacifism yet unable to "stand by her man" because, of course, Dennis already has a "man," his lover, Alan, who is also in prison. It is this lack of love from Dennis, not a cross-sex reproductive utopia, that concludes the novel: "Not that she minded being on the unpopular side. She could have enjoyed the rebel-sense of her unofficial right to stand by him, if only he had loved her. But—by his lack of love, he debarred her from this right, just as she had been debarred from official congratulation and condolence. She was an outcast in a double sense" (346). While Antoinette's homosexual *desire* has faded by novel's end (we

<sup>26</sup>Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 155.

hear no more of Hester or other women), her homosexual *identity* has not. Just as Dennis is a “double outsider” as a pacifist and homosexual, so too is Antoinette. Here Allatini’s novel both critiques and supplements Carpenter’s utopian vision of a Uranian future, because this vision (and the prewar culture in which it was conceived) did not yet hold a clear place for the female homosexual.

The novel thus ends in narrative indeterminacy and ideological undecidability, both about the war and about Antoinette’s place in culture. Yet as unstable as her place in culture is, the figure of Antoinette demonstrates the possibilities that dominant contemporary discourses could produce. Though a clearly defined lesbian subject is still evasive, the narrative structure of the novel’s conclusion places Antoinette beside Dennis in the camp of pacifism, homosexuality, and difference. *Despised and Rejected* establishes a narrative and thematic possibility for emergent lesbian identity through its mapping of sexuality onto the cultural rhetoric of nationalism.

“AN UNPRECEDENTED ORGY OF SCANDAL AND DISORDER”

Like *Despised and Rejected*, the rhetoric of female homosexuality in the Allan/Billing trial depended for its articulation on wartime discourses of nationalism.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the textual strategies of Allatini’s novel, the discourse of lesbianism in the Allan/Billing libel trial drew its ideological and rhetorical force from linking excessive female sexuality generally to female homosexuality specifically. In the rhetoric surrounding Maud Allan’s libel trial, for example, her alleged lesbianism was linked to her sexually provocative dancing career and her knowledge of sexual anatomy. Laura Doan notes that the Allan/Billing trial marks “the beginning of an important shift in the visibility of lesbianism in English legal discourse and in the public arena.”<sup>28</sup> In her analysis of the case, Jodie Medd also argues that “the very *suggestibility* of lesbianism . . . rendered it a particularly powerful vehicle for figuring the war-time problematic of uncertainty, illegibility, and (mis)representation. Not only are sexual secrets considered commensurate with national ones, but the war-time dilemma of unknowability and uncertainty finds an analogy in the highly suggestive but ultimately unknowable notion of female homosexuality.” Yet when read in conjunction with *Despised and Rejected* and its banning, it is clear that Maud Allan’s libel trial does in fact help us to “know” what Medd calls the “ultimately unknowable notion of female homosexuality.”<sup>29</sup> The rhetoric of female sexual desire, deviance, and representation mobilized in this trial by the prosecution (Allan) and

<sup>27</sup>The quotation is taken from “The Old Bailey Shocker,” *New Statesman*, 8 June 1918, 188–89.

<sup>28</sup>Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 32.

<sup>29</sup>Jodie Medd, “‘The Cult of the Clitoris’: Anatomy of a National Scandal,” *Modernism/Modernity* 9, no. 1 (2002): 21–49, at 26.

the defense (Billing) can be understood in part as cementing the bond between an expanding rhetorical power of female homosexuality and British nationalism during World War I.

Excellent studies of this now notorious trial have been published in recent years.<sup>30</sup> My intent here is neither to duplicate these recent studies nor to map a new trajectory of the trial but, rather, to build on the existing work in order to bring critical attention to the role of nationalist and Orientalist discourses in the trial. Read in conjunction with *Despised and Rejected*, this second, far more visible wartime rendering of female sexuality confirms the relationship between modern lesbian representation and racialized wartime nationalism. The daily newspaper reports as well as private correspondence and collateral cultural texts invite not an analysis of a single (and now missing) legal record but a moment of multitextual cultural production.<sup>31</sup> As the Great War appeared ever more bloody and endless, the trial's position in British public culture illustrates how the gendered and sexual politics of the war played out through home front nationalist rhetoric. Discourses of national belonging and betrayal produced new representational possibilities for female sexuality in general and for homosexuality specifically.

In the first months of 1918 Noel Pemberton Billing drew women into the web of homosexual intrigue that other conservative pundits had previously limited to men. A self-described patriot sprung from England's middle class, Billing was elected to the House of Commons on a platform that

<sup>30</sup>See *ibid.*; Lucy Bland, "Trial by Sexology? Maud Allan, *Salome* and the 'Cult of the Clitoris' Case," in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, ed. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 183–98; Jennifer Travis, "Clits in Court: *Salome*, Sodomy, and the Lesbian 'Sadist,'" in *Lesbian Erotics*, ed. Karla Jay (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 147–63; and Judith Walkowitz, "The 'Vision of *Salome*': Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908–1918," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 2 (2003): 336–76. The trial is also discussed by Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*; Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*; and Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup>The official trial transcript for Rex v. Pemberton Billing appears no longer to exist; see Bland, "Trial by Sexology?" Research conducted by Lucy Bland as well as myself has revealed that a few documents relevant to the trial (the Pleas of Justification, Harold Sherwood Spenser's war record, a [mislabelled] evidence file) are stored at the Public Records Office in London, but trial transcripts are not there or, apparently, elsewhere. Previous scholars have relied, as I do, on Noel Pemberton Billing's *Verbatim Report* (from the Vigilante Society Office in London, 1918, now held at the British Library), which alleges to reproduce the trial "verbatim." While most of the language printed in Billing's report is confirmed by the daily newspapers that reported on this case, the *Verbatim Report* cannot and should not be uncritically regarded as a "true" primary source, given Billing's clear stake in the case, the publication of the *Verbatim Report* through his organization, the Vigilante Society, and minor but notable inconsistencies between that report and those of daily newspapers (ranging from the *Times* of London to the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* and more). In this essay I quote primarily from the *Verbatim Report*, as it is the closest we can come to a trial transcript, but I do so with a healthy skepticism and supplementation from other sources when necessary. Two recent "authoritative" accounts of the trial include that of Kettle, *Salome's Last Veil*, which provides an edited transcript of the trial itself, and that of Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*.



combined agitation for military strength through aviation with xenophobic patriotism. Billing attempted, for example, to popularize such notions as “Jewish ghettos and yellow star badges; anti-German and anti-alien strictures.”<sup>32</sup> His anti-German sentiments sat awkwardly with his admiration for German “efficiency” and fascist politics. Beyond his activities in Parliament he advocated for these extremist views through the Vigilante Society, which he founded in June 1917, and its newsletter, first named the *Imperialist* and then renamed the *Vigilante* in February 1918.<sup>33</sup>

Noel Pemberton Billing’s encounters with Maud Allan and the London production of Wilde’s *Salomé* began with two articles published in these newsletters in early 1918. On 26 January 1918 the first article, headlined “As I See It—The First 47,000,” announced the existence of “a book compiled by the Secret Service from reports of German agents who have infested this country for the past 20 years, agents so vile and spreading such debauchery and such lasciviousness as only German minds can conceive and only German bodies execute.”<sup>34</sup> Billing claimed that “the officer who discovered this book while on special service briefly outlined for me its stupefying contents which all decent men thought had perished in Sodom and Lesbia.” This “Black Book” was said to contain a list of 47,000 such corrupted British subjects, men and women, from all professional, social, political, and military ranks: “Wives of men in supreme position were entangled. In lesbian ecstasy the most sacred secrets of State were betrayed. The sexual peculiarities of members of the Peerage were used as a leverage to open fruitful fields for espionage.” The sensationalized language of degeneracy and explicit challenge to the ruling class reinforced fears that the effete British elite would be unable to defeat Germany. Notably, lesbianism appeared here as a national threat alongside male homosexuality (the reference to “wives of men in supreme position” likely was intended as an attack specifically on Margot Asquith, the wife of the recently unseated Liberal prime minister). As Medd notes, “the Billing trial signals the first time the discussion of *female* homosexuality obsessed the British popular press.”<sup>35</sup> Not only does lesbianism emerge in public discourse, but female homosexuality also appears as a correlation to sedition, as had male homosexuality previously.

Billing hoped to elicit a libel trial and thus create a forum beyond the House of Commons in which to air his wild accusations of sedition in the Liberal Party and corruption throughout England’s ruling classes. When no

<sup>32</sup>Hoare, *Oscar Wilde’s Last Stand*, 53.

<sup>33</sup>The remaking of his periodical was concurrent with a financial collapse and reorganization of Billing’s society. Billing refused any advertising in his periodicals, describing it as a “corrupting influence.” Kettle (*Salomé’s Last Veil*, 10) speculates that the change of name was the result of a fight with a principal funder, Lord Beaverbrook, as the first issue of the *Vigilante* contains numerous vicious personal attacks on this previous supporter of the organization.

<sup>34</sup>“As I See It—The First 47,000,” *Imperialist*, 26 January 1918, 3.

<sup>35</sup>Medd, “The Cult of the Clitoris,” 24, emphasis in original.

one rose to the bait of his Black Book report, he seized an opportunity to reignite this spark of controversy. The occasion was the private performance of Oscar Wilde's long-banned play *Salomé*, starring Maud Allan in the title role. On 16 February 1918 Billing published a short paragraph in the *Vigilante* headlined "The Cult of the Clitoris." The notice's entire text reads: "To be a member of Maud Allan's private performances on Oscar Wilde's *Salome* one has to apply to a Miss Caletta of 9, Duke Street, Adelphi, W.C. If Scotland Yard were to seize the list of these members I have no doubt they would secure the names of several of the first 47,000."<sup>36</sup> This headline finally yielded for Billing the publicity he had been courting: on 8 March 1918 Maud Allan and the show's producer, Jack Grein, began proceedings to charge Billing with criminal libel. Indeed, these two plaintiffs fit perfectly with Billing's paranoid fantasies of a compromised and corrupted Britain. Grein was a "foreigner," born in Amsterdam, although naturalized as an English citizen in 1895, and his foreign birth was clearly a concern to his lawyer, Travers Humphreys. Humphreys made a point of describing Grein in the pretrial hearing as "a gentleman who has been a British subject by naturalization for some twenty-three years."<sup>37</sup> Grein was, according to Hoare, "an ardent suffragist who dressed like a dandy, [so that] his whole demeanor would have shrieked decadence to Billing."<sup>38</sup> Maud Allan also "shrieked decadence" in her own way: she can be likened to Isadora Duncan and Mata Hari in her "challenge of Victorian concepts of femininity."<sup>39</sup> Maud Allan was born in Canada but raised in San Francisco, and she had studied and performed in Germany and elsewhere in Europe before moving to England and, after some success onstage, eventually performing in Grein's production of *Salomé*.<sup>40</sup> When Billing targeted Grein and Allan, then, he chose two subjects already suspect to his rightist companions.

Thus began "the trial of the century" and the war's most public interrogation of female sexuality. The trial, which ran from 29 May through 4 June 1918, was covered by dozens of British and European newspapers. In the course of those seven days, witnesses, lawyers, and the presiding judge debated the relationship between medical terminology and popular understandings of female sexuality. Throughout the trial the importance of the "German" origins of sexology played directly into nationalist hysteria, and the status of female homosexuality was challenged, questioned, refined, and brought into a public light in a simultaneously shrouded and

<sup>36</sup>"The Cult of the Clitoris," *Vigilante*, 16 February 1918, 1.

<sup>37</sup>*Verbatim Report*, 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>38</sup>Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*, 60.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 70. Allan's career consisted primarily of middle-brow dance, emulating Duncan but privileging overt sexual expression (and very minimal costuming) over avant-gardism. For an important and detailed discussion of Allan's dancing career and its relation to "a double-edged cosmopolitanism" see Walkowitz, "The 'Vision of Salome.'"

<sup>40</sup>For a more detailed biography of Allan's early years see Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*, chap. 4.

yet incessantly repeated fashion. Female homosexuality was variously defined as hyperfemininity, as masculinity, as a perversion like sadism, and as a symptom of sedition. Billing, who chose to represent himself without other legal counsel, argued all sides of this issue, illuminating the dramatic flexibility of this emergent identity of “the lesbian” in 1918. Allan’s own lawyer similarly defended her against charges of sexual impropriety and inferences of female homosexuality by mobilizing multiple models of homosexuality, nationalist loyalty, and femininity. The rhetoric of the trial illustrates wartime cultural, medical, and legal definitions of female homosexuality, contemporary understandings of deviant female sexuality in particular and gender construction overall, the imbrication of Wilde’s play with such understandings, and, finally, the emergence of a language of lesbianism in increasingly public capacities in the final years of the Great War.

The Black Book was the missing material object around which this trial revolved. This mysterious tome carried within it—or so Billing and his supporters claimed—the confirmation of the German plot to weaken England by homosexual contamination.<sup>41</sup> The discussion of the Black Book and its 47,000 traitors yokes the rhetoric of patriotism and anti-German sentiment to a homophobic discourse of infiltration and contagion. Billing’s case brings together powerful fears of a well-established male homosexual subjectivity with that of a more nebulous and far less familiar specter of female homosexuality. Male homosexuality was already easily grasped and its “degenerative” qualities well documented. But what of female homosexuality? Billing linked the two together through his rhetoric of “Sodom and Lesbia.”

The accusation of homosexual libel is located most specifically in the headline “The Cult of the Clitoris.” The origin of this scandalous headline points to the general confusion regarding the anatomical term and was central to Maud Allan’s claims of libel. Noel Pemberton Billing was not, as it turned out, the author of the infamous paragraph and its headline, but, as the publisher of the newspaper, he took responsibility for text written by Harold Sherwood Spencer, an American who had been dismissed from both the U.S. and British armies for mental instability. Spencer was the source of the Black Book story, and it was shortly after he met Billing that the first article appeared. Spencer first testified to the existence of the Black Book, expanding on his beliefs that German soldiers were deliberately corrupting English men and women by means of homosexual acts:

<sup>41</sup>The Black Book is so mysterious, in fact, that scholars disagree as to whether it ever existed. Hoare and Hynes dispute its existence, Hynes calling it Billing’s “undocumented fantasy” (*A War Imagined*, 227), but Kettle assumes its existence. The volume was often referred to but never actually produced in Billing’s trial, and all those who had allegedly seen it (with the exception of Billing’s mistress and the mentally ill Spencer) were conveniently dead, all having patriotically died in the war. At the Public Records Office in June 2004 a file labeled “Black Book” contained various Home Office documents tracking Billing in the years surrounding the trial. This serves to confirm further, to me, the nonexistence of such a document (insofar as one can ever prove a negative).

- Billing* Have you received information as to the kind of vices catered for by German agents, say yes or no?
- Spencer* Yes.
- Billing* Is sodomy one of them?
- Spencer* Yes.
- Billing* Is Lesbianism another?
- Spencer* Yes.
- Billing* Have you read the play “Salome”?
- Spencer* Yes. (185)

Billing connected Wilde’s *Salomé* to lesbianism and German vice by association as he led Spencer through an exposition of the contents of the Black Book. Spencer later resisted any clear meaning of lesbianism by noting, “I think the Germans were very clever in advocating this as a means of corrupting people by means of Sadism as they have” (188). Spencer also admitted to conflating lesbianism with hypersexuality in general as he described how he came up with a headline that “would only be understood by those whom it should be understood by.” He testified that he had telephoned his village doctor, asked him for “an anatomical term,” and been told about the clitoris. In other words, Spencer first appealed to medical science to provide an exclusive language that would not corrupt innocent readers and would thus contain the danger of disseminating information about female sexuality too broadly. At the same time, Spencer produced a universalized meaning for clitoris that alluded to *all* women’s potentially dangerous sexuality as much as it was an accusation against a specific woman, Maud Allan: “When unduly excited or over-developed, [it] possessed the most dreadful influence on *any* woman” (188, emphasis added).

Whereas Spencer testified to the universal threat of the clitoris, another one of Billing’s witnesses explicitly linked the term “clitoris” with a more specific deviant female sexuality: lesbianism. During the trial Billing asked Dr. J. H. Clarke, a medical doctor and Billing’s close friend, if any term other than “clitoris” could have been used, “having regard to the fact that it was necessary to arrest the attention of the sophisticated and to avoid affronting the unsophisticated.” Dr. Clarke replied, “I cannot think of another title except the term ‘Lesbianism,’ and that word would be equally well known to the initiated, and equally unintelligible to the uninitiated” (317–18). Clarke regarded “clitoris” and “Lesbianism” as synonyms, then, both representing an unnatural obscenity that could be known only by “the initiated”—a nebulous group that can mean anyone from medical students to practicing perverts. The anatomical clitoris functioned metonymically as an equivalent to lesbianism. This equivalence prevailed throughout much of the trial; it conflicted, however, with other concurrent mass cultural understandings of the clitoris. For example, in the same year, 1918, feminist sex reformer Marie Stopes published her popular sex manual, *Married Love*, in which she outlined in explicit and normalizing detail the physiological

functions of the clitoris.<sup>42</sup> Medd argues that the concurrent publication of Stopes's handbook with the trial indicates that the trial "contributes to a revolutionary moment in the knowledge of female body parts and the configurations of female sexuality."<sup>43</sup> Yet in contrast to the medically sound and discursively coherent discussion of clitoral function in Stopes's handbook, the "clitoris" in the Allan/Billing suit becomes an incoherent and contradictory code for perversion. It both indicates homosexuality and yet is also a part of anatomy found on all women: simultaneously universal and particular, normal and unnatural, dangerous to all women but "excited" only on the bodies of perverts.

Both sides of the case—and, by the conclusion of the case, the judge as well—used the two terms "clitoris" and "lesbian" as best suited them, often changing their definitions from day to day as well as from witness to witness. Clearly the terms of the discussion had not yet jelled in public discourse. At the same time, the Allan/Billing trial rendered lesbian identity explicitly sexual in a way that Allatini's novel never did: by associating lesbianism with the clitoris and with other sexual perversions, female homosexuality was articulated as part of female erotics as well as in emotional attachments between women.

Further complicating any relationship between anatomy, identity, and perversity, *knowledge* of sexual perversion itself came to stand as proof of a seditious perversity. At the trial Billing questioned Allan about the headline itself and about her understanding of Wilde's *Salomé*. On both topics Billing attempted to implicate Allan through her knowledge of perversion:

- Billing* Did you understand the title [of the paragraph] at first sight?  
*Miss Allan* Yes.  
*Billing* Are you a medical student?  
*Miss Allan* I am not an actual medical student, but I have read many medical books. (67)

Billing attempted to incriminate Allan again through association by asking if her "friends" knew what the headline meant and, leadingly, whether they were medical students or experts in some other capacity. He then tied Allan's alleged perversion to her prewar professional travels to Germany and her minimal costuming in these German performances (68–69). Having established that she was a German-loving, indecent, and hypersexual woman, Billing elicited an interpretation of *Salomé* from Allan, hoping to

<sup>42</sup>Marie Stopes, *Married Love* (New York: Truth Publishing Company, 1918), 87. Stopes was an advocate of birth control, sexual pleasure for women within marriage, and sexual education for men and women prior to marriage. For more on Stopes see Lesley A. Hall, *Outspoken Women: An Anthology of Women's Writing on Sex, 1870–1969* (London: Routledge, 2005), 95–96; and Karen Chow, "Popular Sexual Knowledge and Women's Agency in 1920s England: Marie Stopes's *Married Love* and E. M. Hull's *The Sheik*," *Feminist Review* 63 (1999): 64–87.

<sup>43</sup>Medd, "The Cult of the Clitoris," 48 n. 42.

force her to admit the erotic nature of the play, a charge that she steadily avoided by describing it as “Art” and as depicting “spiritual longing” rather than sexual perversion. Billing then tried to get Allan’s admission that the play depicted sadism, drawing fully upon the German associations of such sexological classifications. She refused to see this vice in the play, though she confessed to knowing the meaning of the word. Billing then asked if she had read the works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Iwan Bloch, two of the pioneering German sexologists, to which she replied, “I do not know the names” (74–75). Billing’s questions equated knowledge of perversion with perversity itself and association with Germany as seditio.

Allan responded to Billing’s attack by seeking to neutralize both the seditious German associations and the erotics of *Salomé* through a register of Orientalism. When Billing associated her performance with sadism, hypersexuality, and indecency, she responded by reclassifying the text as an Eastern curio, as “Oriental thought” (98), and by asserting her cosmopolitan fluency in contrast to the provincial ignorance of her inquisitor: “It is quite uncustomary for a Westerner to understand the imagery of the Oriental people” (100). Here, Orientalist fetish both elevated Allan’s cosmopolitan knowledge and protected her against both seditious and homosexual (here equated with perverse) accusations. Allan’s Orientalist projections may have failed to convince the judge, because in her attempt to distance herself from German sexology and homosexual knowledge she further distanced herself from British patriotism and heterosexual propriety.

Billing continued to exploit the relation between the play, its author, and deviant sexuality in his examination of Lord Alfred Bruce “Bosie” Douglas, one of his own witnesses as well as Oscar Wilde’s former lover and the original translator of *Salomé*. Countering Allan’s interpretation of the play, Douglas testified that Wilde “intended the play to be an exhibition of perverted sexual passion excited in a young girl . . . [and that] there is one passage which is sodomitic” (286). At Billing’s prompting, Douglas testified that Wilde was reading Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* as he was writing *Salomé* and that “I know of my own knowledge that this book was written after a study of Krafft-Ebing. . . . Normal healthy-minded people would be disgusted and revolted by [*Salomé*] . . . [and sexual perverts] would revel in it. That is just what they like” (288). In direct contradiction to Allan’s interpretation of the play’s “soulful” meanings, Douglas testified that “it is nothing to do with her soul at all,” though Wilde would have called the play’s perversion and sadism “spiritual. That was part of the jargon” (294). This discussion continued:

*Judge* He would call spiritual what you would call sadism?

*Douglas* Yes. With those sorts of people evil is their good; everything is topsy turvy; physical is spiritual; spiritual is physical, and so on; it is a perversion, an inversion, of everything. Wilde was a man who made evil his good all through his life. That was the gospel he preached. (295)

Renouncing both Wilde and the play, Douglas called Allan's interpretation of *Salome* into question and even successfully (if vitriolically) handled his cross-examination, during which an infamous 1895 letter from Wilde was brought into the courtroom.<sup>44</sup> The harking back to earlier courtroom moments involving Douglas and Wilde served to link this trial further with homosexuality as it linked Maud Allan to Wilde. Finally, when Billing asked Douglas, "Is the idea in this book rather more German *kultur* than British ideal?" Douglas replied, "Yes, decidedly" (290).

Thus homosexuality occupies several different positions within this judicial spectacle simultaneously. On the one hand, Billing's witnesses describe homosexuality as a German disease that has contaminated Britain, and Allan's witnesses defend themselves against such charges. On the other hand, homosexuality is the result of a weakened Britain, of decadence, and of the British legacy of the "evil" Oscar Wilde. Female homosexuality is understood as much by association (with Wilde or with Krafft-Ebing, with Germany or with the Far East) as by means of anatomy (the clitoris).

The conclusion of the trial proved to be as messy as the various definitions of perversion found within it. After calling witness upon witness to link Allan with German homosexual contagion, sexological knowledge, and indecency, Billing denied that his libel ever contained an implication of female homosexuality. Like the indeterminate status of lesbian identity at the conclusion of *Despised and Rejected*, the discursive status of lesbianism was thrown into confusion at the trial's end and indicates the still indeterminate and incoherent nature of lesbian subjectivity in the British public sphere during the Great War. The cleavage of the "clitoris" to "Lesbianism" broke down at the conclusion of the trial, and, as a result of the judge's pointed instructions, after only eighty-five minutes of deliberation the jury returned a verdict of not guilty in favor of Billing.

This "trial of the century" and its attendant cultural meanings drew together contemporary British fears of losing the war to Germany and losing the nation's morals to perversion. That a crisis prompted by such "political" and traditionally masculine concerns was played out on the body of a woman through a play by the dead Oscar Wilde cannot surprise. In fact, it seems almost necessary that, as England struggled against what seemed to be a certain military defeat, a woman should appear to carry the weight of her only recently conferred citizenship. The discourse surrounding Maud Allan established female homosexuality as a concept for public consumption, one that stood in relation to yet was independent from male homosexuality. The

<sup>44</sup>Two letters in fact do great damage to Douglas's testimony. The first is a love letter from Wilde to Douglas that Douglas's father had used to prosecute Wilde. The second, dated 9 June 1895, is from Douglas in response to a newspaper editorialist; in it the young Douglas passionately defends homosexual acts through references to Krafft-Ebing and allusions to their widespread practice among men of the professional and ruling classes. For a more detailed discussion of the 1895 Wilde/Douglas correspondence under discussion here see Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*, 156–59.

verdict in this trial did not determine if Maud Allan herself was a lesbian or the priestess of a perverse cult, but it did find that female homosexuality, twisted and confused as it was in the public mind, had a place in that mind and that it was a place of confusion, fear, and indeterminacy. Just as *Despised and Rejected* ended necessarily in an oblique and undecidable state, so too did this judicial story: the war remained unresolved, and the mysterious Black Book with its 47,000 names never appeared. The threat of female sexuality was too potent when combined with a threat of German infiltration. We can see now that Maud Allan *had* to lose her case.

“NO ONE HERE SPEAKS OR THINKS OF ANYTHING  
BUT THE BILLING CASE”

The impact of the trial beyond the courtroom walls was complicated and contradictory.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, it had an enormous impact: even leaving aside all of the many men and women who were slandered during the proceedings because they were named as members of the 47,000 or as friends and lovers of others, newspapers carried daily reports on the proceedings. On the other hand, if we examine the trial’s impact from historical distance, we can see that recent scholarship on the trial has, at times, overestimated the ubiquity of Noel Pemberton Billing’s conceptions of German homosexual corruption and vice in wartime England. If we briefly contextualize and compare the contemporary reports of the Billing trial with other wartime journalistic discussions of sedition, vice, and pacifism, it seems clear that the discourse of the Billing trial emerged as one important voice among many in Great War Britain, but it was not a dominant one. This does not diminish the discursive power of the Sapphic sedition but rather allows us to see this wartime emergence of female homosexuality in a broader context of emergent lesbian representations. Like the representational possibilities that emerged in Allatini’s novel, it is the presence of a language of Sapphic sedition that indicates an important cultural shift. The rhetoric within the trial and the media frenzy surrounding it indicate the discursive power of Billing’s accusation, whether widely accepted, debated, or dismissed in the early summer of 1918.

During the trial itself British papers, ranging from the *Times* of London to the *Manchester Guardian* to the *Daily Telegraph*, carried daily and detailed coverage of the proceedings, often quoting long sections of testimony and debate verbatim.<sup>46</sup> Printed alongside reports from the war, accounts of the so-called trial of the century were both a distraction from the reports of

<sup>45</sup>The quotation is taken from Artemis Cooper, *A Durable Fire: The Letters of Duff and Diana Cooper, 1913–1950* (London: Collins, 1983), 67.

<sup>46</sup>Not only did British papers carry reports of the trial daily, but the foreign press did also, though it was wartime. For an account of some of the French coverage see Carolyn J. Dean, “Claude Cahun’s Double,” *Yale French Studies* 90 (1996): 71–92.



increasing casualties on the front lines and a part of the “battle” for the home front. The case’s notoriety was also not limited to a home front audience: even in the trenches in France the news of *the trial* was received with varying degrees of alarm and amusement. Homosexual poet, officer, and pacifist Siegfried Sassoon wrote in his wartime diary: “The papers are full of this foul ‘Billing Case.’ Makes one glad to be away from ‘normal conditions.’ And the Germans are on the Marne and claim 4500 more prisoners. The world is stark staring mad.”<sup>47</sup> Duff Cooper wrote to his fiancée, Diana, from the front lines that “no one here speaks or thinks of anything but the Billing case.”<sup>48</sup> She responded by reporting on conversations she had had about the case: first, that a mutual friend “mentioned incidentally—and true to her school—that she did not believe in vice among women,” and then a story about “Lord Albermarle [who] is said to have walked into the Turf [Club] and said, ‘I’ve never heard of this Greek chap *Clitoris* they are all talking of.’”<sup>49</sup> These anecdotes and the broad journalistic coverage demonstrate together that the Billing case generated talk, including talk about female homosexuality, more generally; that “sapphism” was simultaneously very much discussed if not widely accepted as part of elite British culture; and that, at the same time, lesbianism was such an unformed concept as to have no consistent, clear, or acceptable terminology with which to describe it.

Scholars have assumed a widespread concurrence in British mass culture with the fears and ideas expressed by Billing and his cohort. Samuel Hynes, for example, draws a powerful picture of rampant hysteria on the home front by citing Arnold White and Lord Alfred Douglas’s claims to “Hunnish erotomania,” described earlier in this essay. Yet additional archival research calls into question some of these scholarly assumptions about the cultural ubiquity of Billing’s conflation of homosexuality and German-sponsored espionage. Almost all of the wartime pieces cited by Hynes, Medd, and others were either published or republished in Billing’s own journal. Indeed, with few exceptions, all the authors of these texts also gave testimony, or were supposed to have given testimony, in Billing’s defense at trial.<sup>50</sup> Thus, while mobilization of lesbian discourses in the service of nationalism marks a clear discursive shift in the history of sexual representation, one must be cautious in overemphasizing the widespread influence of Billing’s, Spencer’s, and Douglas’s views of German homosexual contagion on the home front to a broad English public. Following the trial, for example, a report appeared in newspapers condemning the verdict and bemoaning its interpretation abroad. “Some idea of the regrettable effects produced abroad by the recent Old Bailey trial may be gathered from the fact that so

<sup>47</sup>Quoted in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 232.

<sup>48</sup>Quoted in Cooper, *A Durable Fire*, 67.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>50</sup>For example, “The Rossiad” by Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas was reprinted in full on page 2 of the 20 April 1918 edition of the *Vigilante*, as was Arnold White’s “Efficiency and Vice” on page 4.

reputable and influential a newspaper as the ‘Corriere della Sera’ of Milan, is apparently prepared to accept as well-founded all the unsavoury ‘revelations’ made during the hearing of the case, and fails to appreciate the light in which they are regarded by responsible people in this country.”<sup>51</sup> This article from the *Daily News* (15 June 1918) voiced regret that the Italian press read Billing’s accusations as unquestionable facts while implying that “no one” in Britain did.

Similarly, there is no mention of the Billing trial where one might otherwise expect extensive coverage. In socialist feminist Sylvia Pankhurst’s staunchly pacifist *Worker’s Dreadnought* (formerly named *Women’s Dreadnought*), for example, the trial is studiously ignored. There is absolutely no mention of Maud Allan, Noel Pemberton Billing, or the case in the *Dreadnought*. Pankhurst covers a wide range of legal trials and public debates over questions of sedition. In the first issue of the *Dreadnought* she published Siegfried Sassoon’s widely reprinted statement against the war. Subsequently, the paper printed letters regarding Sassoon’s statement, including one that critiqued the “effete” House of Commons.<sup>52</sup> Given the journal’s extensive coverage of such related issues, one would expect to see at least some discussion, whether as a news report, editorial, or letter, of the apparently much discussed Billing trial that evoked similar themes of the “effete” leadership of the nation, sedition, and legal censure on the grounds of nationalism.<sup>53</sup> Thus we must be careful, as we consider the importance of emergent discourses of female homosexuality brought forward in Billing’s case, not to globalize the trial’s ideological impact or to overstate the fears of German homosexual contagion on the home front. At the same time, the emergence of this homophobic nationalist rhetoric is in itself significant and discursively powerful, however widespread or limited its political impact at the time.

CONCLUSION: “TWO FILTHY FOGS BLOT OUT [ENGLAND’S] LIGHT:  
THE GERMAN AND THE SODOMITE”

Studies of home front ideologies often consider how the effects of war propaganda, through individual and cultural dislocation, fear, and loss, produce shifts in subjectivity.<sup>54</sup> In early-twentieth-century Britain such representational shifts occurred in public conceptions of female same-sex

<sup>51</sup>File WO 339/41960 6036755, Public Records Office. This file is Harold Sherwood Spencer’s war file but contains various clippings and items related to the Billing case.

<sup>52</sup>Letter to the editor by Cedar Paul, “The Sassoon Case,” *Worker’s Dreadnought*, 11 August 1917, 826.

<sup>53</sup>One possible explanation for this lack of coverage might be Pankhurst’s own lack of interest in parliamentary politics by 1918. Mary Davis notes that this disenchantment also caused Pankhurst to ignore the 1918 election, in which some women were first allowed to vote (*Sylvia Pankhurst: A Life in Radical Politics* [London: Pluto Press, 1999], 61).

<sup>54</sup>The quotation is a line from Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas’s poem “The Rossiad,” published in January 1916, quoted in Kettle, *Salome’s Last Veil*, 15.

sexual practices. By reading closely two home front narratives—Allatini's quietly and quickly banned novel and the public spectacle of Maud Allan's libel trial—the deep interconnections of representations of sexual deviance with definitions of citizenship and national inclusion are revealed.

Whereas prior to the Great War narratives of female homosexuality were largely illegible, the public trial of Maud Allan and Allatini's *Despised and Rejected* produced emergent rhetorics of female homosexuality. Though these wartime figures were not associated with defined social positions or sexual practices, a lesbian subject position emerged in public discourse. The political, cultural, and gendered conditions of the home front enabled new representations of female same-sex desire.

These representational possibilities emerged in part through an interdependence of female and male homosexuality. Modern male homosexual and lesbian identities cannot be theorized identically, but their representational (as well as associative and historical) relations must be read. The two were linked in *Despised and Rejected*. Without Dennis's internal awareness of his perversion he would not have articulated their shared taint to Antoinette, and her homosocial relations would not have become representable as homoerotic. Likewise, the two were linked in the Allan/Billing libel trial. Without the public outrage and discursive explosion of the Wilde trials a generation earlier Noel Pemberton Billing would have been far harder pressed to read Allan's performances of Wilde's *Salomé* as homosexual.

Finally, without the rhetorical need to construct national outsiders through discursive sexual abjection, mid-twentieth-century public culture might not have seen the rapid increase and consolidation of coherent lesbian identities. That such "domestic" concerns as sexual deviance are produced through rhetorics of xenophobic nationalism or defiant pacifism illustrates the ongoing and compelling need to read sexual politics through geopolitics and to parse the ideological and material consequences for citizenship and nationalism of modern queer identity formations.