



Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality

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In *Love Stories*, Jonathan Ned Katz presents stories of men's intimacies with men during the nineteenth century—including those of Abraham Lincoln—drawing flesh-and-blood portraits of intimate friendships and the ways in which men struggled to name, define, and defend their sexual feelings for one another. In a world before "gay" and "straight" referred to sexuality, men like Walt Whitman and John Addington Symonds created new ways to name and conceive of their erotic relationships with other men. Katz, diving into history through diaries, letters, newspapers, and poems, offers us a clearer picture than ever before of how men navigated the uncharted territory of male-male desire.

Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality Details

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From Reader Review Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality for online ebook

Gerry Burnie says

Another milestone from the dean of gay history in North America.

See my full review at [Gerry B's Book Reviews](#)

Tyler says

I was surprised by how many of these stories I didn't know. I appreciated the author's carefulness in the way he described the relationships, not placing modern ideas of homosexuality on the men. The writing style might be a little dry for some, but if you're interested in the topic, I'd recommend it.

Melissa says

Pretty good--I've always had an interest in the history of sexuality, and I find homosexuality particularly interesting because it's one of those things that was happening before there were words to express what was happening. I also learned a lot about Walt Whitman.

Kate McMurray says

Really fascinating look at sexuality in the nineteenth century. The book is ostensibly about men desiring sex with men, but it speaks to sexuality more broadly, particularly the disconnect in the minds of many Victorians between sex and love. The book follows a progression from close male friendships with homosocial elements to more explicit sex, but I'm not sure it quite makes it far enough to demonstrate that men in the nineteenth century ever fully connected sex and romantic love in the way we think about it now (although that seems to be the point made in the book's conclusion)—in fact, in many of the examples of letters and prose written by the men analyzed, romantic love seems to exist in an idealized space separated from sex. I thought the book was interesting and particularly enjoyed the explication of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* along with the discussion of how Victorian men searched for words to describe their desires that weren't bogged down by negative connotations (Whitman's "adhesiveness" and "comradeship" vs. sodomy/buggery, etc.).

Keith says

I definitely learned an immense amount from this book about men loving men. Before being assigned the label of Homosexuality and the unfortunate negative connotations that comes with that label.

This book opens up with Abraham Lincoln arrival in Springfield, IL in 1837 who mets Joshua Fry Speed, who offered the new legistator half of his double bed. The 2 shared that bed for more than 3 years, and Speed would later recall that "no 2 men were ever more intimate". Katz in this book presents to the reader stories of men's intimacies with men in the nineteenth century. He draws flesh and blood portraits of the intimate friendships, tracing the way men struggled to name, define, and defend their deep feelings for one another. In a world before 'gay' and 'straight' referred to sexuality, men as you will read in this book like Walt Whitman, John Addington Symonds, James Mill Pierce, Chester "Gavin" Arthur, Edward Carpenter, George Merrill, Edawrd "Ted" Inignan and many more create new, affirmative ways of naming and conceiving their intimacies with other men. Katz quotes diaries, letters, newspapers, and peoms to offer glimpses into and unchartered territory of romance and eros.

The following lines from Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass were by far the nineteenth century's most eloquent public evocation of men loving men. Whitman gives voice in this poem to an emotion he cannot declare directly to a beloved. Men "of earth-born passion" are demanded in one poem. "Passion" is another of the words that Whitman appropriates to name men's intense, sensual feeling for men. He writes: Intimamy eagerly anticipated is recounted by the narrator who awaits the arrival of "my dear friend, my lover". After the arrival, he hears the water and sand (nature) "whispering, to congratulate me, /For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night, / In the stillness, in the autumn moonbeams, his face was inclined toward me, / And his arm lay lightly around my breast - And that night I was happy." After reading this exerpt I was transported and wanted to read more about what Whitman had written about his feeling for his lovers and other men.

Many new books and gay authors have come to light to me from immersing myself in this book. I look forward to reading and learning from these learned authors more about Men Loving Men from the nineteenth century and before.

Susan says

So it's quite apropos that I finished this as the Supreme Court is deliberating on the legality of same-sex marriage. The arguments that marriage consecrates a reproductive union kind of echo Katz's theory that non-reproductive sex was in many ways invisible during the 19th century (except for "the crime that Christians dare not name").

Katz's focus on trying to understand the Victorian mindset without putting current sensibilities into play reminded me of *Women of the Mito Domain*. Yamakawa, writing less than a century later about her great-grandmother and grandmother, has to illuminate a bygone world for her readers: many people had multiple marriages due to death or divorce; girls were not informed about the political world around them; bushi women spent much of their time spinning and weaving just to clothe the family. Industrialization and opening to the outside world changed things radically in a short time.

So perhaps we can be hopeful that Walt Whitman's* vision of a world where all love is accepted will come to pass--even if he did ignore the woman-loving ladies.

*apparently *the* most influential 19th century man-lover

Aidan says

While some of the historical details in this book are fascinating, the author's writing is dry and tedious, and he is repetitive more often than not. At times there are gaps, as if he had already explained something, but really hadn't even broached the subject, and you are left wondering at the discontinuity and confusion between characters and events in the book. And then he keeps repeating himself on other things that he had already previously mentioned, on several occasions even, as if that was the first time he talked about them. It is an incoherent and messy text as such.

The book also has another very huge flaw -- Katz's obsession with Whitman. It is not a biography on Whitman, but the author treats him as a central figure in this book. It does not make an interesting read. Most of it is useless ramblings on Whitman's thoughts and points-of-view, that have no use to the overall topic at hand and are distracting more than anything else. In the process, it paints a rather negative impression on Whitman and the author himself, unfortunately.

Karky says

Great insight on how men-loving men struggled for wording to properly express their desires and emotions in a more positive light than society would allow at the time. Katz was careful to stress the difference of what was acceptable in society then and now when it came to the affection between men and/or their behavior. It served as a helpful reminder of what these men were saying in their original context rather than how it may sound in respect to today's thinking. I very much appreciated his care of adding a disclaimer to any speculations offered when interpreting letters and other such written works of the subjects of his study.

sage says

The scholarship is somewhat less than awesome, and he's terribly long-winded about his argument, but the real value of Katz's book is in the collection of 19th century primary source material (letters, news articles, testimony, etc.) on/from/between people he terms "men-loving men" (as homosexuality as the sociological construct we understand today didn't exist yet). I kind of wish the book were more about 19th century male/male eros and less about linguistics issues (i.e. the freedom to name an unspeakable act), but that lack of freedom to do so makes finding primary sources near impossible...so yeah, catch-22. Definitely a fascinating look at 19th century m/m love.

* The poetry tag is included due to over half the book focusing on Walt Whitman, his work, his letters, and his sex life. (Walt's archives are huge.)

Rodrigo says

Interesting... So interesting that it should have a disclaimer stating that it is much more an academical text than a just-interesting reading. And more: the title should change too. It is not just "Love Stories" nor "Sex between men...", but most accurately "Walt Whitman's love stories: sex between him and others", since almost half of the book is dedicated to Walt's affaires and "comrades", and even on the few pages where

Katz condescends to talk about somebody else, he relates no-matter-who's story with Whitman's life, text or thoughts. I know: the book (should I say academical essay?) is about men's quest to find adequate words to speak about men's love for other men, and undoubtedly Whitman and his work have helped a lot, giving names to feelings, emotions and even acts related to love and sex between men but still... I'm sorry: I ended up completely fed up of Whitman... and Katz.

Dan says

The product of careful and exhaustive research and documentation, this is a well written history that is insightful and highly readable without being pedantic. Most enjoyable.

Gabe says

Beautiful. Heartbreaking. Eye-Opening. PICK-THIS-UP....Lincoln lovers will be in for a real treat!

Joey Diamond says

Damn this is a well researched and written piece o history. So different to the usual ahistorical gay history stuff. Katz writes a lot about why people shouldn't be "reclaimed" by gay history, they should be researched and appreciated in their own historic context.

I learned a shit tonne about 19th Century ideas about love and sex and how extremely different they are to our own. Solid support for my dislike of people projecting homosexuality and other 20th C ideas backwards.

There is a bit too much about Walt Whitman in here for my liking (about half of the 350 pages? maybe) but that could be cos I'm not American and don't see his influence everywhere.

There is genius bits and pieces dug up from newspapers, letters, court reports and such like.. stories of old sailors tenderly caring for their "chickens," tales of effeminate "rouged men" selling sex and a million other great little details that will stay with me.
