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KARL HEINRICH ULRICHS: PIONEER OF THE MODERN GAY MOVEMENT [E-BOOK]. Hubert Kennedy. *San Francisco: Peremptory Publications, 2002; expanded and revised from Boston: Alyson, 1988.*

KARL HEINRICH ULRICHS: LEBEN UND WERK [2ND EDITION]. Hubert Kennedy [Wolfram Setz, editor]. *Berlin: MännerschwarmSkript, 2001; expanded and revised from 1990 (Menso Folkerts, trans.)*

A funny thing happened along the way to “gay history.” The nineteenth-century Hannoverian jurist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, arguably *the* first modern theorist of sexual orientation and advocate for equality before the law for sexual minorities, almost ended up a footnote in an alternate version of heteronormative history. In his lifetime Ulrichs suffered many injustices and indignities, perhaps the most offensive being the man who planted in the mind of Karl Westphal, the earliest homophobic sexologist, the idea that homosexuals are a breed—a defective, degenerate breed—apart. Magnus Hirschfeld rescued Ulrichs name and ideas from the dust heap of history and himself drew inspiration from Ulrichs in founding the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the first fully realized organization for the study of homosexuality and the emancipation of homosexual men and women. Only recently, since the original publication of Kennedy’s Ulrichs biography, has it come to light that the iconographic film clip of the Nazi book burning was in fact the burning of the library of Hirschfeld’s institute.

Thanks to Hitler and Nazi Germany, the first blossoming of gay history and culture was forgotten for three generations or more. More distressingly, this epoch sowed the seeds in the United States to separate and collectively forget the German roots whence the fruit-laden vines of American culture and society has, in no small part, grown from. It behooves American G/L/B/T and “queer” historians, therefore, all the more to better remember and appreciate that the heritage of theorizing sexuality and gender did not begin with Foucault, but with Ulrichs. Ulrichs was an historical actor in the very period

Foucault theorized about; and Ulrichs, as right- and wrong-headed as Foucault, Sedgwick, Butler, and everyone else who has played the theorizing game, was the first to invent, through politicizing and medicalizing, sexual identity (namely, the *Urning* “personality”). For better *and* worse, Ulrichs transformed Western thinking from “an art of erotics” to “a science of sexuality.”

Hubert Kennedy, a professor emeritus of mathematics and scholar of nineteenth-century German free thinkers and anarchists, has lovingly and painstakingly brought forth closely explicated and updated revisions to his 1988 English-language (German translation, 1990) political biography of Ulrichs, with newly uncovered information first in the revised German edition of 2001, and more exhaustively in his 2002 English-language e-book. Kennedy’s latest release includes opening and closing commentary consolidating his understanding of Ulrichs after many years of study, numerous supplemental visual materials, the ability for the reader to conduct independent word-search and, in the tradition of another of Kennedy’s paradigmatic thinkers, John Henry Mackay, makes of his labor of love a gift to the world, available free of charge for the downloading.

Born in East Friesland, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs recalled a happy childhood in the far northwest corner of the Kingdom of Hannover, near the North Sea coast. He came from a propertied middle-class family, and was raised by middle-aged parents. Ulrichs father died when Karl was only ten, leaving the immediate family somewhat adrift in a staunchly patriarchal culture. Ulrichs went on to university at Göttingen to study law, under the likely influence of his maternal grandfather, an alumnus of Göttingen himself.

Three characteristics which would shape Ulrichs life emerged during his student years. The dominant characteristic, his penchant for meticulous detail, was expressed in his choice of law and legal reasoning as his academic discipline, and in his life-long devotion to the study, use, and attempts to revive Latin as a living language. A remnant of medieval Christian Europe, Latin remained a language used liberally in the German legal system of the day, especially when the subject matter was of an indelicate matter (especially sexual transgressions). Ulrichs often composed verse in Latin and, in his

twilight years, would withdraw into a monkish existence in Italy and devoted himself to his pursuits of Latin.

Secondly, Ulrichs' sexual interest was in men, a desire he began acting upon in his teen years. This led to an almost immediate career, very nearly a "vocation," of being at odds with the law—he experienced blackmail, entrapment, character assassination by rumor, and, most grievous burden of all, persecution at the hands of the Hannoverian authorities. This latter typically took the form of denying Ulrichs legally issued certificates attesting to his good moral character—a prerequisite to hold public office or to gain entry into the elite circles in nineteenth-century German society. His career was destroyed at an early age, and the collapse of family financial liquidity forced him into a nomadic life of catch-as-catch-can, or to paraphrase Oscar Wilde's later epitaph, by "depending upon the kindness of strangers" (who often turned out to be secretly enemies). No sooner was Ulrichs set to begin a promising bourgeois legal career than his sexual proclivities returned to haunt and undermine his every step. For the contemporary American reader, the closest parallel might be the US military's selective application of their "don't ask, don't tell" policy: regardless of the legal wording, no one is ever safe from anti-gay persecution and prosecution.

The third remarkable quality of Ulrichs' personality was his quixotic, visionary nature, dedicated to a pursuit to understand himself, his fellow *Urning* (his term, which predates the invention of "homosexual"), his desire to reach a scientific understanding of *Urningthum* ("homosexuality"), to agitate for decriminalization and destigmatization of this sexual difference, to understand and define "the *Urning* personality," and, in a less programmatic fashion, to seek equality before the law for all, including women (the "second sex"), "third-sexers" (his attempt at a scientific categorization of homosexuals), regardless of social class, in a sharply stratified class-based society.

Ulrichs' devotion to equality among the classes seems, in part, to have arisen from his personal (and a common phenomenon of the time among homosexual men) sexual desire, as a member from a higher class, for common soldiers and sailors. (English-speaking readers encounter the British equivalent of this phenomenon in E.M. Forster's posthumously published novel *Maurice*.) His dedication to the equality of the sexes

seems to stem from his particular theory of *Urningthum*, namely of “gay men” actually being women’s souls born into men’s bodies, and vice versa. In spite of Ulrichs’ own apparent relative gender conformity, he felt his desire for “manly men” (or “real” [heterosexual] men, called *Dioningen*) logically made him, in spirit or soul, a woman.

Most remarkable of all about Ulrichs is his saint-like devotion to pursuing his dream, of adhering to his principles, helping his fellow *Urningen*, and seeking to found an organization to develop and support an *Urning* culture—all the while as it led his down a path to poverty, homelessness, repeated incarceration and social impotence before the legal magistrates, and ultimately a monkish withdraw in his twilight years to a mountain town in Italy; there he lived in rags, subsisted on a simple diet, and took delight in the slightest of life’s pleasures. Because Ulrichs rarely backed down, but rather was publicly confrontative with the authorities, he was able to make little progress in realizing his dreams. Magnus Hirschfeld, who championed Ulrichs’ political agenda (if not Ulrichs’ sexual theories), succeeded where Ulrichs had failed, by his amelioratory (“assimilationist”) tone and professional manner, of “proper decorum” in approaching hostile authorities.

While Kennedy lays out his subject matter in chronological order, he explicates simultaneously three intertwined threads of Ulrichs’ life. What may be most deceptive for the reader is how programmatic Ulrichs’ life appears in retrospect (and through Kennedy’s organization of his material), given that Ulrichs himself apparently experienced his life as one of constant destabilization, and even chaos. The small, particularist states of Germany were undergoing a very bumpy transition to unification (another cause Ulrichs championed) in the mid 1800s. There was an enormous setback in the crisis year of 1848 (when German liberals attempted a version of the French Revolution); later destabilization occurred as a result of the Franco-Prussian War; all the while the smaller states scrambled as they were forced to align with one or the other of the German-speaking superpowers of the day—Prussia or Austria. Once every lazy corner of the newly unified Germany has fallen under the umbrella anti-homosexual legislation, Ulrichs would flee to the relative security of Italy.

The three strands Kennedy delineates are: (1) Ulrich as theorist and scientific researcher into *Urningthum*, (2) Ulrich as legal champion of equal rights for *Urningen* before the law, and (3) Ulrichs' personal experience and documentation of himself (and others) as an “*Urning* personality.” Ulrichs emerges clearly as *the* seminal, prototypical historical gay male personage—the forerunner to the twentieth-century homosexual as individual, the forerunner to imagining a culture, a community, and a social infrastructure created by and for G/L/B/T people, the forerunner to the heated political turf war between medical and legal specialists over a post-Christian “queer” identity, the forerunner to the anthropological model of participant observer studies, and, last but not least, the initiator of the theorizing games of contemporary sex and gender studies.

Of particular note, and emblematic of Ulrichs' personal fortunes, is how his ideas, presented indiscriminately to anyone he felt should hear them, inadvertently played directly and blindly into the hands of those who would rapidly become his enemies. As noted above, Westphal was the first to seize upon *Urningthum* as a psychopathology, which he discussed at length in his studies on the “contrary sexual sensibilities” (*die conträre Sexualempfindungen*), and shortly thereafter became canonized in Krafft-Ebing's encyclopedic cataloging of every sexual itch or urge as “sexual pathologies” in his *Psychopathia sexualis*. (What is often overlooked is the appropriation of the term “heterosexuality” by various sexologists to describe a loosely defined range of sexual psychopathologies, namely a sexual desire for members of both sexes, a desire for non-procreative sex between man and woman, or another “other”-oriented sexual fetish.)

The irony in Ulrichs' efforts to seek tolerance, destigmatization, and normalization of homosexuality is how it was so rapidly and broadly embraced. And turned on its head, by self-proclaimed sexological authorities, the original keepers of the gates of heteronormativity. The most common method of marginalizing Ulrichs was to dismiss his (assuredly faulty) science as muddled and subjective poppycock. As we well know today, the science of Ulrichs' detractors was no less muddled and subjective poppycock. Sadly, as Ulrichs preternaturally understood, the tyranny of majoritarian rule has continued to dominate in society at large, as well as among key branches of the sciences, in insisting that sexual diversity is—or *ought* to be—a sin, a crime, or an illness. Societal attempts at

the soul-murdering of Ulrichs, the Nazis' successful undoing of Hirschfeld's work, and the scurrilous arguments still informing legal and moral judgment today remain as sharp reminders of how fragile the hard-won gains of queer folk truly remain.

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