

CHAPTER 4

Representations and Identities

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter investigates the features of German culture that informed people's understanding of same-sex desire, especially the country's strong classical and Romantic traditions in literature and the arts, but also more modern influences. It considers as well the role played by the homosexual press by the 1920s in offering a space to express some of these understandings and identities.

OVERVIEW

Since the publication of the philosopher Michel Foucault's work on sexuality, in the 1970s, historians, sociologists, and queer theorists have considered the emergence of sexual identities. Sociologists and many social historians have tended to emphasize the importance of urbanization and economic transformation in the formation of sexual identity. Others have taken their lead from Foucault by tracing the influence of scientific understanding and medical knowledge about sexuality. Still others have suggested the roles that the middle-class ideal of romantic love, changing gender norms, and even nationalism might play. Most fundamentally, perhaps, queer theory has made us attentive to the multiple ways of understanding and defining sexual identity. What seems clear is that multiple social and cultural forces were at work, forces that both created constraints on how people could behave and generated new opportunities for self-understanding.

As men and women began to develop identities in which deep physical or erotic attachments to members of the same sex played an important role, they found they had much available in their society and culture to work with. This chapter focuses mostly on the efforts of recent historians to broaden our understanding of science's effects and in other ways expand the conversation to include additional factors. It considers the importance of the classical heritage in some detail, but it also examines the significance of the Romantic tradition, ideas about "modernity," and the homosexual press for the articulation of homosexual identity. Special attention is given to the poems of Stefan George, the photographs of Wilhelm von Gloeden, the film *Girls in Uniform*, and novels written by Klaus Mann, John Henry Mackay, and Anna Elisabeth Weirauch.

KEY TERMS

Germany; gay and lesbian identity; Stefan George; Wilhelm von Gloeden; Klaus Mann; *Girls in Uniform* (film)

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NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

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