

Richard von Krafft-Ebing. / Oosterhuis, Harry. Who's who in gay and lesbian history: From antiquity to World War II. ed. / R Alderich; G Wotherspoon. London [etc.]: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2000. p. 244-246.

Krafft-Ebing, Richard von (1840-1902), German-Austrian psychiatrist and neurologist, professor of psychiatry in Strasbourg (1871-1872), Graz (1872-1889), and Vienna (1889-1902). Although Krafft-Ebing, as one of the most prominent psychiatrists of his time in Central Europe, worked in many fields of psychiatry, he is remembered today as the author of *Psychopathia sexualis* and one of the founding fathers of scientific sexology. The first edition of his much-quoted book appeared in 1886 and it was soon followed by several new and expanded editions – 17 in German between 1886 and 1924 – and translations into several languages. By naming and classifying virtually all non-procreative sexuality, he was one of the first to gather and systematize medical knowledge of what was then labelled as sexual perversion. His interest in the broader aspects of sexual deviance emerged from his interest in forensic psychiatry, of which he was a pioneer and leading expert. *Psychopathia sexualis* was written for lawyers and doctors discussing sexual misconduct in court. Krafft-Ebing's main thrust was that in many cases perversion was not a sin or a crime, but an illness. He stressed that many sexual disorders were inborn and his explanation of sexual deviance bore the stamp of degeneration theory.

From the 1880s, Krafft-Ebing published several articles on homosexuality, containing extensive case histories. The succeeding editions of *Psychopathia sexualis* also included a growing number of case studies and autobiographical accounts. Most of them were about homosexuality, but sadists, masochists and fetishists were also widely represented. They were not only prosecuted moral offenders, for whom he acted as an expert witness in court, and of patients hospitalized in one of the asylums or clinics where he was a medical superintendent. Also represented were an increasing number of individuals who contacted Krafft-Ebing of their own accord as private patients, or who responded to his book and corresponded with him as an informant. Many of Krafft-Ebing's aristocratic and bourgeois patients and correspondents were given ample opportunity to speak for themselves.

Homosexual men were eager to reveal their lives to Krafft-Ebing. Whereas he probably had expected them to be nervous and effeminate 'degenerates', they convincingly indicated that they enjoyed good health and that they were physically indistinguishable from their fellow men. Written by educated and often cosmopolitan men, some of the autobiographies were full of learned and literary references, philosophical and medical speculations as well as detailed self-analysis. The letters also vividly demonstrated a considerable degree of subjective suffering, not so much because of their writers' sexual orientation as such, but because of the social condemnation, the legal situation, the need to disguise their real nature, the fear of blackmail and of losing their social

status. Several men stressed that their sexual behaviour could not be immoral or pathological, because they experienced their sexual desire as 'natural' and as an essential part of their being.

It is clear that Krafft-Ebing's changing views were influenced by his patients and informants. After having published several autobiographies which showed the harmful effects of the German and Austrian laws criminalizing 'unnatural vice' (Paragraphs 175 and 129 respectively), he himself began to favour judicial reform. Krafft-Ebing lent his name to pleas for the abolition of Paragraph 175 and in *Psychopathia sexualis* he added that the book should contribute towards changing the law, thus putting an end to the errors and hardships of many centuries. When homosexuals began to organize lobby movements at the close of the nineteenth century, they referred to Krafft-Ebing as a scientific authority who was on their side, and he indeed supported the homosexual rights organization which was founded in Berlin by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1897. After he signed Hirschfeld's petition advocating the abolition of Paragraph 175, he admitted in his last article on homosexuality, published in Hirschfeld's *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (1901), that the psychiatric conception of homosexuality had been one-sided and that there was truth in the views of many of his homosexual clients. Having referred earlier to the decline of Greece and Rome as warning examples from the past, he was now of the opinion that homosexuality was not incompatible with mental health or even with intellectual superiority. It was not a pathological phenomenon, but a physical and psychological condition that had to be accepted as a more or less deplorable but natural fate. Focusing less on sexual acts and more on the psychological dimension, he also attributed equal moral value to same-sex and heterosexual love.

Psychopathia sexualis was a bestseller and it probably owed its success not only to its scientific merits, but also to its semi-pornographic qualities. Some sexually explicit passages appeared in Latin translation. In addition to scientific descriptions, there were extensive personal accounts of sexual experiences and fantasies, of erotic temptations and amusements in big cities, examples from history and literature, fragments of semi-pornographic writings, candid advertisements and journalistic descriptions of subcultural pursuits and events such as the 'Woman-haters' ball for Urnings in Berlin. By publishing letters and autobiographies and by quoting statements of his patients verbatim, Krafft-Ebing enabled voices to be heard that were usually silenced. Because he distinguished himself as an expert who had made a stand against traditional moral-religious and legal denunciations of sexual deviance, individuals approached him to find understanding, acceptance and support. Obviously, many homosexuals and other 'perverts' viewed Krafft-Ebing not simply as a doctor treating illness; for them he appeared as an ally, embodying an ideal of science as a means of improving their lot.

R. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia sexualis*, Stuttgart, 1886 (and 16 subsequent editions until 1924); Munich, 1984.

H. Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Sexual Identity*, Chicago, 2000.