

Peter Boag: *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

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1 True to its subtitle, Peter Boag's marvelous study, *Same-Sex Affairs*, details the myriad shapes of same-sex relationships in the United States' Pacific Northwest as well as how they developed, became defined, were labeled, and, ultimately, how they were controlled. Clearly a labor of love and certainly a research triumph, Boag's book propels the reader through tantalizingly detailed narratives of male-male desires and public response to them in and around Portland, Oregon, during the early part of the twentieth century. Boag has a special talent for making the lives of his subjects leap from the page and for interweaving complex theories of gender and sexuality with specific historical information so that the reader witnesses as philosophy becomes embodied. Among many fresh ideas for understanding same-sex sexuality during the early decades of the twentieth century, Boag's most compelling arguments include his revision of the implications for working-class transgressive sex acts, his determination that the modern, urban-centered, gay identity grew out of the middle class, and his suggestion that Progressive Era attempts to control homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest lay the groundwork for later assays nationwide.

2 Boag develops these discoveries in the individual sections of *Same-Sex Affairs*, each of which historicizes its thesis. The first section discusses working class same-sex affairs both outside the urban settings, in the Pacific Northwest's transient and seasonal working populations, and within the city. Using studies compiled by contemporary observers of the transient workers' lifestyle, Boag presents evidence of what he determines to be the prototypical male-male relationship within these working communities, that between an adult and a juvenile, and he unveils much about both the nature of such relationships and the physical acts consummated in them. Boag describes how the adult in such relationships, often called the "wolf" or the "jockey," and the youth, called a "punk," may have partnered for any variety of reasons, including survival, the loneliness of isolation, and sincere emotion. Boag contends that given the overwhelming majority of males in the Northwest's population, male-male relationships were commonplace and ordinary even while mainstream society would have seen them as unusual and corrupt. When making his conclusions about the same-sex affairs of the transient workers, Boag astutely separates his work from other historians of sexuality, including George Chauncey, by describing how the transient "punk" differed from the city-centered "fairy" Chauncey describes in Gay New York. In doing so, Boag answers to

his self-asserted need for "increased historical attention to the conditions affecting homosexuality in nonurban settings" (17).

3 Boag describes the lifestyles of migrant workers both to show how the hierarchies and expectations of same-sex relationships would re-emerge in Portland's working-class communities and to emphasize the shift that takes place as the transient lifestyle disappeared and middle-class modes of comprehending same-sex desire and sexual activity were impressed upon the working class. Before this imposition, Boag argues in Chapter 2, surveillance of same-sex affairs by urban police forces occurred not because of any specific sexual identity imputed to the participants, but rather because of their racial or ethnic makeup which, along with commonly-held attitudes about their inferiority, automatically implicated the men in generally transgressive sexual activity. In other words, *Same-Sex Affairs* determines, minority men engaging in male-male relationships were scrutinized as part of assaults against their racial or ethnic status more than against their perceived sexual identities.

4 As Part II details, however, the Rose City's 1912 scandal changed how the middle class would come to see working-class sexual activity, as well as all forms of male-male desires. Though preceding historically the 1913 "Greek Scandal" detailed in chapter 2, the 1912 scandal, centered at Portland's YMCA, involved members of the middle class and embroiled the entire city in discussions of moral propriety and especially of interaction between men and boys. Boag claims that the YMCA scandal was evidence of a developed middle-class system of same-sex relationships enabled by the emergence of corporate capitalism, which provided white-collar workers income, independence, and leisure time. In this theory, he differentiates *Same-Sex Desires* from earlier studies that emphasize the role of formative categories in the development of emergent homosexual subcultures. Another significant effect of the scandal, as Boag outlines in Chapter 4, was to connect definitions of the homosexual in the Pacific Northwest to those being proffered by sexologists, like Havelock Ellis and Kraft-Ebbing, during and in the wake of the Oscar Wilde trials in England in the late nineteenth century. While categorizing homosexuality as inborn "never completely took hold among the general populace" (146), the deputy district attorney charged with prosecuting the participants in the 1912 Scandal, Frank T. Collier, presciently argued for the inclusion of sex acts outside the scope of the trial as a means to establish homosexual identities for the defendants. Boag concludes that the middle class increasingly judged the sexuality of the working class and immigrants on terms solidified in the aftermath of the 1912 scandal, which, as Boag contends in his concluding section, led to harsher punishments for the "Greek Scandal" participants than for those in the 1912 YMCA debacle.

5 In his final section, Boag turns to describing the controlling forces directed at homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest as a result of the Rose City's blemish. In Chapter 5, *Same-Sex Affairs* establishes how much of the outrage generated following the scandal's disclosure resulted from the politicization of animosity between supporters of the working class and Portland's business elite, many of whom initially defended the YMCA, if not the scandal participants. Working class newspapers identified, in eugenicists' terms, the scandal as evidence of the degeneracy of the middle class. Boag delineates how in an attempt to prevent future recurrences of male-male sexual relationships, especially those involving men and boys, Progressives called for reforms involving sexual education, hygiene, and abolishing the Victorian double standard demanding chastity of women but not of men. Boag reminds readers in Chapter 6 of the positive legacy of Progressive era reformers, perhaps to blunt their intimation in persecution of homosexuals. The historical record as he presents it, however, speaks for itself, and *Same-Sex Affairs* catalogues the intriguing ways in which juridical adjustments accounted for newly identified categories of sexual activity while simultaneously reducing punishment for heterosexual activities now viewed as less deviant. In so doing, Boag elegantly demonstrates the efficacy of French philosopher Michel Foucault's theories outlining how the dominant discourse continually assimilates changes in public definitions of deviancy and the norm.

6 Peter Boag completes his study with a short epilogue in which he draws parallels between reactions to Portland's 1912 scandals and 1950s witch-hunts for homosexuals, and in so implying, he succeeds in laying informational groundwork for the histories chronicled in Neil Miller's *Sex Crime Panic* and John Gerassi's *The Boys of Boise*. *Same-Sex Affairs*, then, provides a vital look at the early development of categories of same-sex desires in the United States and proves insightful reading for scholars of the history of sexuality.

7 The most problematic aspect of *Same-Sex Desires* involves the sense of confusion created by discussing the 1913 "Greek Scandal" *before* the 1912 YMCA scandal. As described initially, the mode of prosecuting the "Greek Scandal" does not appear to demonstrate Boag's thesis about changes in commonly held perceptions of sexuality in the working classes *after* the 1912 scandal, as the first section argues that the Greek arrests were ethnically driven. Only in the third section of the book do readers discern that while outrage was more extreme in 1912, punishments were more severe in 1913 as a result of increased surveillance of acts linked to homosexuality. Also in terms of organization, readers unaccustomed to rhetorical methods of historical writing might find the book's introductions and summaries to chapters needlessly repetitious. In terms of style, frequent misplaced

modifiers encumber some passages.

8 The content of *Same-Sex Affairs* is certainly provocative in its ability to coalesce theories of gender and sexuality with their specific manifestation in the Pacific Northwest. But scholars well versed in those theories may find Boag's summaries of them somewhat repetitive, as *Same-Sex Affairs* demonstrates rather than extends previous work in general sexuality studies with the notable exception of his new theories for the Pacific Northwest. For this reader, the importance of details involving how personages in Portland utilized the 1912 scandal to their own ends subordinated an interest in the more intimate particulars concerning how relationships formed in both the working and middle classes or how word spread about their communities and lifestyles. But these weaknesses, if they may be called such, do not detract from readers' amazement at the vagaries of desire the text presents, their delight in learning about politics and sex in the past, and their acquiescence to Boag's lucid portrayal of a bygone era.