Sex Education and the Great War Soldier: A Queer Analysis of the Practice of "Hetero" Sex

Laura Doan

> In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy. Do Your Duty Bravely. (Lord Kitchener)[1]
>
> Now we think/as we fuck. (Essex Hemphill)[2]

In 1917 Joseph Best, a former Pathé newsreel editor, was released from the army to make a sex education film about venereal disease (VD) for the British War Office, entitled "Whatsoever a Man Soweth."[3] With a running time of thirty-eight minutes, this "social document" of "exceptional value" opens with a sequence that tracks the leisurely stroll of a young Canadian soldier named Dick on leave in London, a crowded city abuzz with excitement.[4] Starting in the West End, the impromptu itinerary of this innocent abroad includes several major tourist attractions: the Victoria Monument in front of Buckingham Palace, Piccadilly Circus, and Trafalgar Square. These sights, however, afford little pleasure or delight because the poor soldier is persistently accosted by women interested

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[1] Cited by Sir George Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, 3 vols. (London, 1920), 3:27.

[2] Essex Hemphill, *Conditions* (Washington DC, 1986), cited by Lauren Berlant in "Thinking about Feeling Historical," *Emotion, Space, and Society* 1 (2008): 4–9, esp. 4.

[3] I wish to thank the film historian Kevin Brownlow for providing me with a statement Joseph Best prepared for Rachel Low in January 1949 (hereafter referred to as "Notes by Joseph Best"). "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" (1917) appears in a 2009 British Film Institute (BFI) DVD collection called "The Joy of Sex Education" (which includes a pamphlet with a short statement by Bryony Dixon [16]). Brief discussions of "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" appear in Rachel Low, *The History of the British Film, 1914–1918* (London, 1950), 149–50; Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence: Sex, Violence, Crime, Films in the Silent Era* (Berkeley, 1992), 63–65.

[4] Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence*, 63. Bob Geoghegan of the Archive Film Agency estimates the original running time as about fifty minutes; the first reel of four is now missing (private e-mail correspondence, 24 May 2011).

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in sex. Produced during a time of heightened awareness on the part of public health officials, military authorities, medical doctors, social reformers, feminists, churchmen, and members of the public of what constituted good sex and bad sex, the film documents the increasing fragility of moral norms to police adequately hetero relations outside of marriage. As a result of intense pressure "for more outspoken talk, more instruction, more warning," the advocates of a moral system rooted in Christian values would face a determined challenge by the proponents of a new moral system based on scientific knowledge and eugenicist principles.[5] In short, while all agreed on the need to eradicate VD, some believed it poisoned men's souls, while others thought it poisoned the "race."[6] There is now a significant historiography in First World War studies on VD and prostitution, in particular by gender historians interested in how the dynamics of class and the opportunities to engage in sex outside of marriage contributed to new formations of wartime femininities and unprecedented levels of "free and open" discussion about topics previously off-limits in polite society. Under the spell of "khaki fever," these scholars explain, some young women's behavior was "consistently described as blatant, aggressive, and overt in their harassment of soldiers."[7] I seek to build on this work by adding another layer to terrain well trodden. In what follows I draw on a queer analytical framework to speculate on the peculiar nature of hetero relations, thereby contributing another perspective to the historiography of modern sexuality.

This cinematic portrayal of one soldier's quest to learn about the nature, prevention, and treatment of VD (widely regarded to have reached epidemic proportions) exemplifies how education became crucial in the nation's response to an urgent medical crisis. Even more importantly for the scholar interested in British queer history, the film presents an excellent opportunity to deploy queer methodologies in observing how sex education helped to shape what we now call "modern heterosexuality." Strictly speaking, heterosexuality, a relative latecomer in the evolving nomenclatures of sexual practices, did not exist during the First World War, acquiring its present meaning in Britain only in the interwar years.[8] This is not to say that before the rise of modern heterosexuality there were no

[5] Stephen Paget, *The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases* (London, 1916), 10. For two excellent accounts of these sociocultural shifts, see Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, 2nd ed. (London, 2000); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, 2nd ed. (London, 1989).

[6] As Frank Mort (*Dangerous Sexualities*, 143) explains, "gonorrhea" was "the race poison of the eugenicists."

[7] H. Bryan Donkin, "The Fight against Venereal Infection," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 82 (1917): 587; Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age, and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (1994): 326. There is also a significant body of scholarship that examines, for instance, the regulation of female sexuality in relation to social purity, policing, and the controversies concerning the Contagious Diseases Acts; see, for instance, Lucy Bland, "In the Name of Protection: The Policing of Women in the First World War," in *Women in Law*, ed. Julia Brophy and Carol Smart (London, 1985); Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977); Philippa Levine, "'Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should': Women Police in World War I," *Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 1 (1994): 34–78; Angela Woollacott, "From Moral to Professional Authority: Secularism, Social Work, and Middle-Class Women's Self Construction in World War I," *Journal of Women's History* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 85–111.

[8] For a groundbreaking study of the evolution of the term heterosexuality, see Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York, 1995), esp. 92–94.

alternative expressions for sexual relations between members of the opposite sex. My point is that the distinctive calibrations of wartime hetero relations are lost if we assume an equivalence to a later identity formulation that sexologists, psychologists, and eventually the general public would locate predominantly within a binary logic of normal and abnormal. The heuristic framework that rendered different-sex sexual relations legible and coherent at this time can be glimpsed in Best's sex education film, a genre that, as it claims to guide its viewers in the rules and regulations of legitimate "hetero" conduct, also becomes a site to scrutinize how diverse systems in the governance of different-sex relations vie for dominance. A queer reconceptualization of the fraternization between the soldier and the sexually available woman, and the education of that soldier to think before he acts, not only offers a different angle on the campaign to instruct men about proper and improper "hetero" contact but also represents a new direction in a British queer historiography keenly interested in all aspects of sexuality, within the context of identity and without.

Still, this turn toward queer methodologies in historical analysis is by no means straightforward for at least two reasons. First, the meaning of queer is highly contested and lacks scholarly consensus, its highly abstract and esoteric language making it a difficult theoretical perspective for outsiders to navigate. Second, the handling of queer as a tool or method is varied and uneven, with some historians, for example, treating it as an umbrella term for LGBT communities and politics, and others valuing its association with deviance, oppositional stance toward normativity, or disruption of stable sexual identities.[9] Widely misunderstood as roughly equivalent to the modern homosexual, no other concept in sexuality studies has so vexed and confused as *queer*, which, whether deployed as a verb, noun, or adjective, revels in open-endedness, its playful resistance to definition rarely deterring ongoing speculation about its capabilities and limitations. Jeffrey Weeks wisely begins his account of the term with an apt reminder that queer originally denoted a figure linked with what was odd, twisted, or bent and would later be appropriated by lesbian and gay activists to describe a militant collective sexual politics.[10] With the advent of queer theory in the early 1990s, the term signaled a privileging of dissidence, subversion, and transgression and, above all, a radical critique of sexual identity and an unsettling of the power of the hetero/homo binary.

In the context of modern British history, a good example of work drawing on the queer critique can be seen in Matt Houlbrook's important study of *Queer*

[9] For introductions to queer theory, see Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (Basingstoke, 2003); Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York, 1996); Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh, 2003); William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia, 2000). For edited collections on queer studies, see Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason, eds., *Queer Studies: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology* (New York, 1996); Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi, eds., *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Oxford, 2003); Donald E. Morton, ed. *The Material Queer: A Lesbigay Cultural Studies Reader* (Oxford, 1996). For concise overviews of the queer turn in the history of sexuality, see Margot Canaday, "Thinking Sex in the Transnational Turn: An Introduction," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (December 2009): 1250–57; Dagmar Herzog, "Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (December 2009): 1287–1308.

[10] Jeffrey Weeks, "Queer[y]ing the 'Modern Homosexual,'" *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 3 (July 2012), in this issue.

London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis.[11] This project considers men's sexual cultures to rethink available pathways in searching, as scholar Valerie Traub puts it, neither for "a mirror image of ourselves" nor a "past . . . so utterly alien that we will find nothing usable in its fragmentary traces"; a search, that is to say, articulated within an economy of similarity and difference that sustains rather than undermines the workings of identity and identification.[12] With a focus on regulation and policing, Houlbrook's "queer" signifies "all erotic and affective interactions between men and all men who engaged in such interactions," demonstrating subtle use of queer—and feminist—theory to historicize "sexual difference and 'normality'" and the social formations of friendships and sexual desires between men.[13] Houlbrook calls time on earlier accounts of the sexual past as hidden or "emerging from the shadows," a view shared, more recently, by Richard Hornsey, who considers the "new experiences of queer self-creation . . . [that were] becoming available to many men."[14] These studies of urban male sexual cultures do not explore "a *gay* world as we would currently understand it," and that is a good thing insofar as it allows a mapping of same-sex sexualities previously invisible to the eye of the lesbian and gay historian.[15] Queer, in this context, has been most effective in exposing the disconnect between bodily acts and identification. Too often, however, the bid to destabilize the hetero/homo binary juxtaposes a fluid queer against a stable and unchanging hetero, and, consequently, heterosexuality's "widely differing practices, norms, and institutions" are routinely assumed to be self-evident, natural, universal, transcultural, or transhistorical.[16]

A different starting point in a queer historicizing poised to come to terms with the epistemic repercussions of destabilizing not simply the homo but also the hetero—and thus the logic of oppositionality itself—might take its cue from the theorist Lee Edelman, who proposes that "queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one."[17] This suggestion that the power of queerness is methodological rather than ontological seems a far cry from current practices in the history of homosexuality that locate queer in and around same-sex behaviors and desires. More intriguingly, queerness-as-method is not content with merely extending queer analysis to "detailed research into straight men's desires, fantasies, attractions, and gender identifications," as its objectives lie elsewhere.[18] Its analytical efficacy moves beyond the desiring subject to gesture toward a new queer historiographical purpose divested from an identitarian framework. Rather than think about the operations of illicit desire in shaping a sexual identity, the historiographical objective is to pry apart the conceptual apparatus by which sexuality is known, thereby discerning the organization of wartime hetero relations.

[11] Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago, 2005).

[12] Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2002), 32.

[13] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, xiii, 13.

[14] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 91; Richard Quentin Donald Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis, 2010), 200.

[15] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 265.

[16] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 552.

[17] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC, 2004), 17.

[18] Sharon Marcus, "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 1 (2005): 213.

An early example of such work might be glimpsed in the cultural historian James Vernon's excellent article on the extraordinary figure of Colonel Barker, a life claimed variously for inclusion in histories of marginalized peoples, including lesbian history, transgendered history, women's history, and the history of transvestism. By taking seriously the queer imperative to trouble identity, Vernon insists on reading Barker as "indeterminate, undecidable, and unknowable": "It is the very ambiguity of Barker's story that makes it so interesting, for it enables one to shift attention away from the classification of Barker as an object with a 'real' gender and sexuality to be discovered and revealed to a concern with how Barker was understood and made knowable by his own contemporaries."[19] This adumbration of another trajectory in a history of sexuality draws on queer methods to confront not simply the "limited use" of categories of identity "that have often been taken for granted since the 1970s" but the overdetermined structural logic of categorization itself.[20] Queerness-as-method makes visible the epistemological premises of the concept of sexuality that have evolved unevenly, unpredictably, and erratically.[21] Resistance to the constant gravitational pull of identity, underwritten by a logic of oppositionality, allows a conceptual space in which to suspend, even if momentarily, current ways of knowing, so that it becomes possible to understand how, for instance, sex education contributed to the production of modern heterosexuality.

A strategic focus on the tutoring of the Great War soldier in the ways of proper hetero relations works effectively in illuminating certain of the advantages that queer analysis offers to problematize, defamiliarize, and destabilize what it is we think we already know about the sexual past. In this article, I want to consider the rich potential in broadening the scope of a queer history project that has hitherto been concerned with tracing back in time "similarities with and differences from" expressions of same-sex desires, practices, and identities recognizable to us now as modern homosexuality.[22] Reconfiguring the sexual past through queerness as a historical methodology, and thus shaped by the paradox of not knowing as a way of knowing, represents a mobilization of the queer critique to determine how any number of sexual relations and desires have been structured and understood over time. Turning a queer eye to "Whatsoever a Man Soweth"—described as both "the earliest known British sex education film" and the "first government film ever made"[23]—clarifies why queer historicization need not be restricted to one purpose in that sex education "speaks" about what is otherwise unmentionable and, in so doing, gives specific instructions of how to act properly as a good sexual citizen.

[19] James Vernon, "'For Some Queer Reason': The Trials and Tribulations of Colonel Barker's Masquerade in Interwar Britain," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, no. 1 (2000): 38.

[20] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 265.

[21] For a superb account of the "emergence of sexuality" as a concept, see Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), esp. 30–65.

[22] David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, 2002), 108.

[23] Katy McGahan, "Sea, Sailors, and Syphilis: Birds, Bees, and Bunny Rabbits," appears in a pamphlet called *The Joy of Sex Education*, which accompanies the BFI DVD (London, 2009), 1; "Notes by Joseph Best."

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The creator of "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" would later recall the unusual conditions of its production: "I wrote the story in twenty-four hours, had it approved next day, produced, did all the camera work, edited, made the titles, joined them in, and finally projected it myself to the Army Council—a one-man job if ever there was one."[24] Why the urgency? At the time of the film's production, the reign of religious morality was under considerable pressure, its fissures more readily apparent as the war progressed, as historians have shown.[25] Venereal disease—known also as the "hideous scourge," "terrible peril," or "secret plague"—was widely seen as laying waste to "the best manhood of the nation," which, in turn, diminished the nation and empire, and endangered the future of the race.[26] In the year of the film's making, and its distribution (of "some 100 copies") "to all British and Allied fronts for showing to the troops," it was estimated that approximately "55,000 British soldiers were hospitalized by VD."[27] The alarmingly high rates among Canadian soldiers caused their prime minister to complain that "no steps of any reasonable or adequate character" were being taken to protect the fighting man.[28] No one knows the actual number of British civilians or British and Allied forces affected between 1914 and 1918, but one official medical history of the

[24] "Notes by Joseph Best."

[25] "The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," *The Lancet* (11 March 1916). For discussions of the war's impact of British society, see Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London, 1987); Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996); Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999); Nicoletta F. Gullace, *"The Blood of Our Sons": Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York, 2002); Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965), esp. 105–13; George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002).

[26] David Evans, "Tackling the 'Hideous Scourge': The Creation of the Venereal Disease Treatment Centers in Early Twentieth-Century Britain," *Social History of Medicine* 5, no. 3 (1992): 413–33; Thomas Barlow, "Report of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," *Contemporary Review* 109 (1916): 450; Jay Cassel, *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838–1939* (Toronto, 1987); "The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," 583.

[27] "Notes by Joseph Best"; Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 188.

[28] Proceedings of the Imperial War Conference, 13th Day (19 July 1918), 4, The National Archives (TNA): PRO WO 32/11404. For a thorough discussion of the tensions between the Canadian military and British government, see Suzann Buckley, "The Failure to Resolve the Problem of Venereal Disease among the Troops in Britain during World War I," in *War and Society: A Yearbook of Military History*, ed. Brian Bond and Ian Roy (London, 1977). For further discussions of venereal disease in wartime Britain, see: Edward H. Beardsley, "Allied against Sin: American and British Responses to Venereal Diseases in World War I," *Medical History* 20, no. 2 (April 1976): 189–202; Lesley Hall, *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900–1950* (Cambridge, 1991) and "'War Always Brings It On': War, STDs, the Military, and the Civilian Population in Britain, 1850–1950," in *Medicine and Modern Warfare*, ed. Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison, and Steve Sturdy (Amsterdam, 2000); Mark Harrison, "The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt during the First World War," *Medical History* 39, no. 2 (April 1995): 133–58; Lutz D. H. Sauerteig, "Sex, Medicine, and Morality during the First World War," in *War, Medicine, and Modernity, 1860–1945*, ed. Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison, and Steve Sturdy (Stroud, 1996), 167–88.

war published in the immediate aftermath identified venereal disease as the cause of "the greatest amount of constant inefficiency in the home commands."[29]

Of critical importance was the publication of the 1916 *Final Report* of the Royal Commission of Venereal Diseases (a state-supported body established in 1913), which stated unequivocally that "action should be taken without delay" and "no time should be lost" because "the total of infected persons has increased."[30] To achieve victory in the battle against VD, the report examined every facet of the government's response. It recommended a host of radical changes: first, to overhaul systems in monitoring incidences of the disease and maintain scrupulous records of the numbers and location of patients treated; second, to ensure that patients had access to voluntary treatment centers where they could benefit from the most technologically advanced methods of detection and care at an affordable cost; and third, to strengthen the lines of communication between local authorities, medical specialists, and hospitals. In addition to measures designed to better coordinate the efforts of multiple organizations and authorities, the report provided an up-to-date, thorough, and authoritative account of the several manifestations of VD as well as its treatment and prevention. A major component of the commissioners' action plan was the development of a public health education campaign in elementary schools, training colleges, factories, workshops, and the armed forces, with information centrally controlled by the National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases (NCCVD)—education, therefore, became a privileged site in tackling a disease that carried a "moral stigma."[31]

The "special character" of venereal disease stymied progress in confronting the problem in Britain because, of all the warring nations, opinion was deeply divided about how to proceed. Historians typically frame these wartime debates as an ideological struggle between moralists and modernizers, a necessary if risky strategy since identifying broad alignments tends to overstate the unity and cohesion of a diverse spectrum of views.[32] For the moralists, the sexually available woman constituted a threat to marriage and the family, while the modernizers were more concerned that she was a vessel for disease. Moralists were loath to abandon the

[29] Sir William Grant Macpherson and Thomas John Mitchell, *Medical Services: General History*, 4 vols. (London, 1921), 1:201. Magnus Hirschfeld suggests a ratio of 173.8 per 1,000 in England, while Sir Andrew Macphail put the number of Canadian soldiers affected at 158 per 1,000; see Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Sexual History of the World War* (Honolulu, 2006), 93; Sir Andrew Macphail, *The Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War; the Medical Services* (Ottawa, 1921), 293. Historian Jay Cassel (*The Secret Plague*, 123) writes that of the "418,052 Canadian troops [who] were sent overseas" the number of men infected with VD was recorded as 66,083. Cassel further argues that accurate numbers are difficult to ascertain because, among other reasons, relapses were erroneously counted twice; in any case, "there was no avoiding the conclusion that a great many Canadians were infected while on military service."

[30] "The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," 583. Infection rates in the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders between 1914 and 1918, and the problem of underreporting, is discussed by Harrison, "The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt during the First World War," 145.

[31] "The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," 582.

[32] Ibid. For discussions of the VD debates during the First World War, see Mark Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford, 2010); S. M. Tomkins, "Palmitate or Permanganate: The Venereal Prophylaxis Debate in Britain, 1916–1926," *Medical History* 37, no. 4 (April 1993): 382–98; Bridget A. Towers, "Health Education Policy 1916–1926: Venereal Disease and the Prophylaxis Dilemma," *Medical History* 24, no. 1 (January 1980): 70–87.

"appeal to conscience and honor," even though—as the modernizers argued—"innocent persons and children" were suffering from "the terrible effects of the diseases."[33] If, as some moralists worried, the virtue of self-discipline was not sufficient to restrain the sex instinct, then what was the point of the war? Prophylactic devices such as the sheath ("an obvious safeguard against infection") were thought to encourage "immorality" and lead to a breakdown of the moral fiber of the nation.[34] Modernizers, meanwhile, countered that the sexual health of the armed forces was being put at risk in deference to outmoded moral imperatives. What for one side represented the latest in scientific advancements (such as chemical prophylaxis) or modern programs of sex education represented to others the compromising of the high ideals of a "civilized community," allowing, in effect, the triumph of depravity and "primitive conditions."[35] Modernizers believed "healthy and responsible parenthood" would best be achieved through social hygiene.[36]

With troop strength as the nation's top priority, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Britain's so-called moralists—in a country the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld characterized as a "classical land of sexual hypocrisy"—to maintain "puritanical" values.[37] Charged with the task "to inquire into the prevalence of venereal diseases in the United Kingdom, the effects of such diseases on the common health, and the means by which those effects can be alleviated or prevented," the *Final Report* regretted that the "moral aspect" could not be "included," even as it asserted that "such instruction should be based on moral principles and spiritual considerations, and should not be based only on the physical consequences of immoral conduct."[38] Such provisos belie the fact that this document facilitated an accelerated dissemination of sex education interested in marginalizing an older moral discourse and thereby mobilize a national debate on how to talk about sex and organize different-sex sexuality as a knowledge practice within a new system of morality. It is difficult now to imagine the extent of sexual ignorance that prevailed at this time, but the special character of VD meant that neither the disease nor sexuality itself could remain unspeakable, taboo subjects "hidden away, or darkened by equivocal and misleading terms."[39] Attributing the spread of the disease to a "lack of control, ignorance, and inexperience," the report acknowledged the need for the public "to have fuller knowledge of these grave evils and their effects on the life of the nation," emphasizing the "great importance" of delivering "careful instruction" to "every man on joining the Navy or Army."[40] The War Office encouraged the distribution of pamphlets and instructed officers to lecture their men and also sponsored alternative means to heighten

[33] Captain Douglas White, *Synopsis of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases* (London, 1916), 59.

[34] Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 188.

[35] Sybil Gotto, "The Changing Moral Standard," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 84 (1918): 718.

[36] Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 146.

[37] Hirschfeld, *The Sexual History of the World War*, 191–92.

[38] "The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," 581–82.

[39] Donkin, "The Fight against Venereal Infection," 587. For a good overview of the state of sex education in twentieth-century Britain, see Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800–1975* (Oxford, 2004), esp. 165–206.

[40] White, *Synopsis of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases*, 52; "The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," 582.

awareness about VD, such as the noncommercial sex education film "Whatsoever a Man Soweth," to be screened exclusively to the armed forces.[41] Exempt from censorship restrictions imposed on public cinemas, the film depicts VD's ravaging effects on the human body in graphic detail—this explicitness the result of a hard-won struggle in the sometimes fiercely acrimonious exchanges on the home front.[42]

The film historian Kevin Brownlow speculates that since "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" remains "disturbing, even today . . . its effect on soldiers [then]. . . must have been electrifying," although soldiers returning from the front would have been accustomed to maimed and wounded bodies.[43] Shot in and around the West End, with additional footage in army barracks and military hospitals in Richmond Park, the city teems with uniformed soldiers and sailors of all nationalities. In the silent era it was not uncommon for newsreel footage to include passersby (as opposed to paid extras), their reactions of curiosity or bemusement becoming part of the action. Best's experience as a newsreel editor helps in giving the film a sense of immediacy and authenticity, and several bystanders glance surreptitiously or stare directly at the camera. In pausing to observe the street entertainment, spectators would have seen more than they bargained for, with the film's staging of different-sex solicitation in broad daylight. The simple narrative structure highlights three themes: temptation, the acquisition of sexual knowledge, and, depending on a soldier's sexual conduct, the fate awaiting him and his family on his return home.

Viewers first meet the boyish Canadian soldier-protagonist as one of several servicemen entering and leaving a YMCA hut. In the midst of crowds Dick stands out, not only because he wears his service cap tilted slightly back and invariably swings a stick but also because, in his smart tunic and jodhpurs, he exudes a jaunty air of self-confidence. Still, first impressions can be misleading, and Dick takes only a few paces before he halts and looks to his right and left, unsure about where he is headed. Clutching a piece of paper that, presumably, contains details about his destination (revealed in the next scene as a YMCA club for Australian soldiers at the Aldwych Theatre), Dick stands at the crossroads. At the start, he might easily have taken a wrong turn but instead sets himself on the right track by reentering the hut to seek guidance and direction. With a great economy of style, Dick is portrayed as a man who possesses the courage to admit to what he does not know—a quality that will stand him in good stead in comparison with two other soldiers in the film, Dick's brother Tom and friend Harry, who become, first, the victims of both thieving prostitutes and quacks selling bogus potions and, second, for Tom, the conduit of a disease that brings misery and despair to his wife and child.

These men are less individual personalities than representative types the British military authorities associated with white Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand troops, thought to be "younger, less liable to be married, and unable to return home while on leave," unlike their British counterparts.[44] No character in this

[41] For an excellent study of public exhibition of cinema during the First World War, see Michael Hammond, *The Big Show: British Cinema Culture in the Great War, 1914–1918* (Exeter, 2006).

[42] Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence*, 64.

[43] Ibid., 63.

[44] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Chicago, 1996), 156.

drama is cast as a straightforward hero or villain—the men are ordinary soldiers killing time before being shipped off to the front, drawn to women more out of boredom and ignorance than by some uncontrollable sexual instinct of a lustful, "primitive," or animal-like nature.[45] According to the essayist M. H. Mason, "many of the Overseas soldiers" were "mere children of from 16 or 17 to 19" and hailed from "isolated farms or small settlements" where they had "no experience of the snares of large towns."[46] These naive "heterosexual" lads, in other words, were out to sow wild oats and, consequently, were the likely targets of a different army—women available for sex with men, whose exact numbers were anyone's guess, although the figure of 60,000 (in the County of London in 1917) was frequently circulated and, of these, 40,000 estimated to be of "alien birth," mostly French and Belgian refugees.[47] As the top destination of Allied forces in transit, London was a city in which abnormal conditions prevailed, its imperial grandeur a backdrop for its becoming a "great center of prostitution . . . [a] hot-bed of venereal infection for both officers and men of other ranks on leave."[48] Writing in 1919, one medical officer who lectured on VD, Colonel L. W. Harrison, noted that the "attraction of the street" was "greater" in the capital—and, therefore, the "incidence of venereal disease has always been very high, the highest of all, in fact."[49] Soldiers were most at risk when left to their own devices; hence, when one of Dick's sexual encounters is interrupted by two women police officers, he is escorted safely to a YMCA hut.

KEEP STRAIGHT!

Lonely and unfamiliar with metropolitan ways, Dick's initial encounter with a "loose" woman triggers a haunting memory of his mother's "parting words": "Dick, you are going to fight for honor and principle; never forget it, dear, wherever you may be—do nothing of which you would be ashamed to tell your sister or mother," an appeal resonant of middle-class respectability and the stable bonds of strong kinship networks.[50] The disjunction of the crosscutting between the innocence of the dutiful son and the experience of the worldly soldier could not be starker. In one shot, Dick kneels, head bowed, before his elderly and dignified mother in a comfortable, well-furnished parlor—while in the next, he pushes away a haggard slattern grasping at his arm. A few minutes later, on a quiet residential street, the swift approach of another, more fashionably dressed woman—her veiled face perhaps a sign of widowhood—prompts a different flashback in which Dick walks in a secluded private garden with Jane, the girl he left back home. In a

[45] Donkin, "The Fight against Venereal Infection," 586.

[46] M. H. Mason, "Public Morality: Some Constructive Suggestions," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 82 (1917): 187.

[47] *The Cinema: Its Present Position and Future Possibilities* (Being the Report of and Chief Evidence taken by the Cinema Commission of Inquiry Instituted by the National Council of Public Morals) (1917), 84, http://www.archive.org.

[48] Colonel J. G. Adami, "The Policy of the Ostrich," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 9, no. 4 (1919): 294.

[49] Brevet-Colonel L. W. Harrison, *Medical Practitioners and the Management of Venereal Diseases in the Civil Community* (London, 1919), 11.

[50] Subsequent references to intertitles from the film appear without citation.

Figure 1—Dick's rescue from solicitation, "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" (1917); still reproduced with permission, Bob Geoghegan, Archive Film Agency.

gesture of protective care, Dick gently places his arm around her, as this interlude shifts the register from the domestic sphere of family pride to the rituals of courtship and different-sex intimacy—the only right and proper desire between individuals of the opposite sex. The young man's recollection of a tender moment of romantic love brings him to his senses, and, for the second time, the temptation of succumbing to illicit sexual activity is forestalled until, just steps away from the stately columns of the National Gallery, a third, more aggressive, female predator again offers companionship (fig. 1). Caught in the net of a determined seductress tugging insistently at his sleeve, Dick's willpower visibly waivers. More fortunate than Tom or Harry (men shown later consorting with two of the women Dick has shunned), this last danger is averted when a tall and erect officer, Lieutenant Williams, intervenes, his stern bearing conveying the gravity of the situation. The officer's role is not to admonish the younger man for a momentary weakness but to caution him about the "risks" involved "in associating with such women." Armed with the officer's hastily scribbled card directing him to a medical specialist named Dr. Burns, Dick departs to discover the terrible consequences of VD, brushing aside a fourth temptress on his way, his resolve to "keep straight" rekindled.

Repeatedly propositioned, Dick tolerates the women's verbal harangues and manhandling with impressive equanimity, in perfect compliance with Kitchener's order to treat "all women with perfect courtesy": "these boys," one Londoner observed, "most of them quite young," did not "encourage these women, and suffered their approaches only because they were too courteous to repulse any woman, no matter of what sort."[51] Expressions of disapproval toward "flappers"

[51] Mason, "Public Morality," 187.

were common—such women demeaned men by seizing them "by the arm as they passed."[52] One writer claimed to have seen "some young Colonials running for their very lives to escape from a little company of girls" and offered effusive praise for the tolerance of "soldiers, khaki and blue."[53] Another witnessed first hand the spectacle of such women's "bad" behavior in Westminster in 1917: "far from welcoming the advances of disreputable women and girls," the soldiers were actually "greatly annoyed by them."[54] Voicing indignation that the would-be defenders of the "Empire" and "'Mother' Country" would find themselves in an "impossible" situation, this writer locates innocence and experience not in relation to gender but rather to nationality and age.[55]

"Whatsoever a Man Soweth" reinforces the popular perception that the numbers of such women were rapidly increasing and that "moral laxity" demanded urgent attention; the men, however, are not depicted as the victims of "sexual freelances [*sic*]" stalking "the land, vampires upon the nation's health, distributing and perpetuating among our young manhood diseases which institute a national calamity."[56] Dick, it is important to remember, wobbles on the verge of corruption before he is rescued, and his friends Tom and Harry pay for sex, which complicates the caricature of male innocence popularized by writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, who, in a February 1917 letter to *The Times*, expressed fury and indignation that "lonely" soldier-heroes were being chased by "vile" women or "harpies" who would intoxicate the men "and finally inoculate them, as likely as not, with one or other of those diseases."[57] In the army instructional film, the fighting soldier is pursued, but he also possesses the agency to succumb or acquiesce and, ultimately, will not be saved by old-fashioned moral scruples: ignorance is the enemy—not the diseased women swarming over the men like flies. Education empowers by enabling self-mastery over animal lust not to achieve personal salvation but to safeguard the health of the soldier, whose duty is to the nation and to his loved ones back home.

In this public staging of wartime London as a site of perverse hetero relations, anonymous sex between the unmarried is devoid of erotic frisson, the sexual actors reduced to their functional roles of predators and prey. In the absence too of nuanced characterization, the soldiers—interchangeable and underdeveloped—quite literally, might be a Tom, Dick, or Harry. The sexually available woman merits even less interest, her past as obscure and sketchy as her motivations to engage in sex with strange men. Released at the height of the moral panic around the "overnight" phenomenon of the "amateur prostitute" (understood as a woman more interested in sexual pleasure or gifts than monetary payment), the film ignores debates that

[52] Edith Sellers, "Boy and Girl War-Products: Their Reconstruction," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 84 (1918): 704.

[53] Ibid., 704–3.

[54] Mason, "Public Morality," 186–87.

[55] Ibid., 186.

[56] Gotto, "The Changing Moral Standard," 724; *The Times* (December 1917), as cited in Lucy Bland and Frank Mort, "Look Out for the 'Good Time' Girl: Dangerous Sexualities as a Threat to National Health," in Formations Editorial Collective, *Formations of Nation and People* (London, 1984), 140.

[57] Arthur Conan Doyle, letter to *The Times* (February 6, 1917), as cited by Philippa Levine, "Battle Colors: Race, Sex, and Colonial Soldiery in World War I," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 4 (1998): 108.

raged elsewhere among commentators confounded by young women whose sexual appetites were thought on par with "the 'normal man,'" whoever he might be.[58] "Drawn from all classes" and "younger than most professionals," the sexually active woman dubbed the "amateur" threw the gendered codes of feminine modesty and passivity into disarray and, in actively chasing men who sometimes struggled to escape her unwanted advances, reversed the rules of sexual pursuit.[59] In the context of a national health crisis, the experience and knowledge of the professional would hold a different value in the sexual economy than that of the inexperienced amateur, whose motives were either unintelligible or thought to upset the binary relations of pure and impure, clean and unclean, on which the regulatory systems of sexual morality had long been based.

The class transgressions of the "well-dressed" amateur were especially disturbing in the jarring dissonance between her "respectable" "appearance" and unrespectable "manners."[60] The "tigresses" on the prowl in Best's film represent women from across the class spectrum, and all appear older than Dick (one nearly twice his age), an age difference that sharply contrasts with the depiction of the importunate woman by contemporary commentators, who emphasized her extreme youth.[61] The dominant system of taxonomizing women as amateur or professional is unimportant in the film: whether shabbily dressed and working the streets for financial survival or elegantly attired and out for a good time, all sexually available women must be avoided; as an intertitle adamantly asserts: "There is no such thing as a 'safe' prostitute. They are practically all diseased—'some of them all the time and all of them some of the time.' The man who has illicit relations with any woman offering herself, exposes himself to disease, and a single exposure may mean a lifetime affliction." This advice echoed that given by Colonel Harrison, who asserted that the "safest plan in dealing with professional prostitutes" was to assume that "all" were "diseased."[62]

The sexually available woman signifies because she posed an immediate threat to troop strength and, at war's end, the pestilence contained in her body would endanger the health and stability of the family and, above all, the child. Even Dick, a man who has not forgotten his mother and sweetheart, veers perilously close to accepting an offer of comfort, worn down by the constant pestering that erodes moral will. Such men become infected by VD, the film constantly reiterates, because they "took a chance." Moreover, Dick is spared the awful fate of Tom and Harry not by his own actions to save himself—redemption is a matter of pure luck

[58] Bland and Mort, "Look Out for the 'Good Time' Girl," 140; Gotto, "The Changing Moral Standard," Look Out. In a pioneering essay on the feminist response to VD around the time of the First World War, with a particular focus on the interplay between "moral prevention and medical treatment," see Lucy Bland, "'Cleansing the Portals of Life': The Venereal Disease Campaign in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Crises in the British State 1880–1930*, ed. Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz (London, 1985), 206.

[59] Bland and Mort, "Look Out for the 'Good Time' Girl," 140.

[60] Sellers, "Boy and Girl War-Products," 704.

[61] Ibid., 704. In his brief statement on aspects of the film's production, Joseph Best makes no mention of casting. Presumably, the film's graphic depiction of female solicitation precluded the use of women under the age of consent. The greater sexual danger in "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" comes from the professional prostitute, who is known for receiving payment for her services.

[62] Harrison, *Medical Practitioners and the Management of Venereal Diseases in the Civil Community*, 11.

(implausibly, it transpires that Lieutenant Williams is Jane's brother). The lieutenant's intervention sends a message to the ordinary soldier that all women—regardless of their class, motivation, or intention—are off-limits, if a soldier's wartime aim is to fight at the front, return home clean, and produce healthy children. "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" neither judges nor condemns men such as Dick or women whose violations of prewar systems of morality and gender generate anxieties elsewhere. Situating the legitimacy of hetero relations within the framework of science and medicine, Best's film subverts the VD propaganda genre "in which a cure (wrought by science) and salvation (wrought by God) are conflated."[63] In the medico-scientific value system of the army instructional film, the regulation of human action and different-sex desire is based on the ethical consequences to the nation and family rather than on an understanding of personal responsibility as governed by moral goodness, which means that the soldier must thoroughly understand the nature of venereal disease and its effects on the body.

EVERY STAGE OF SUFFERING

In the film's second section, the Canadian soldier explores this very terrain in the company of an expert physician scientist. Leaving the crowded streets of London behind, Dick enters the bustling ward of a military hospital to observe the bodies of men in "every stage of suffering" as a result of sexual intercourse with "diseased" women "out of wedlock," men who were apparently unable to master their "desire to commit the sex act when they should not."[64] Empathy is conspicuously absent in this sequence firmly grounded in the realm of the medical. There are no intertitles suggesting that patients have brought their afflictions on themselves by willfully violating a "moral code" that judges men as sinners deserving of "punishment for sexual irresponsibility."[65] The world of Dr. Burns and his colleagues is that of science, a culture that eschews emotional response and cultivates scientific detachment.

For reasons unexplained, Dr. Burns accepts Dick as a worthy acolyte, grants him exclusive access to all parts of the facility, and gives him an extensive private tutorial on VD. In return, Dick—pleasant and bright but otherwise unremarkable—adopts the demeanor of a medical professional, expressing neither horror nor fear of the disease itself or its gruesome effects on the patients, no matter how ghastly or revolting. The fact that Dick possesses no special qualifications in preparation for his education indicates that any soldier with a capacity to listen and learn can undertake a rigorous course in sex education. Dick establishes an instant rapport with his master teacher; whether strolling through the ward or sitting side by side studying together, the pair appear absorbed in their thoughtful exchanges.

[63] Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality, 1909–1925* (London, 1988), 104. Kuhn offers excellent close readings of several commercial films produced in the United States, including "Damaged Goods" (1915), "The End of the Road" (1918), and "Fit to Fight" (1918).

[64] Harrison, *Medical Practitioners and the Management of Venereal Diseases in the Civil Community*, 12; Marie Stopes, *Truth about Venereal Disease: A Practical Handbook on a Subject of Most Urgent National Importance* (London, 1921), 46.

[65] Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet : A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York, 1987), 5.

Just as little interest was shown in the sexually available woman as an individual, so too is the patient a representation of disease. Never greeted or acknowledged as a human being, the several actual patients filmed in the ward are mere specimens, their faces obscured from the camera. Dick's role is to scrutinize every wound and open sore he is shown. When a mustachioed medic removes the bedcovers to expose the swollen legs of one patient, or lifts the hand of another in an attempt to pry apart the stiff and crooked fingers, a largely expressionless Dick shows a meticulous interest in the deformities caused by the deadly germs. In a lengthy medium close-up, the camera lingers on an actual soldier-patient's painfully gnarled fingers and hideously twisted and blackened toes ("rotted legs and hands," according to an intertitle). Faces averted, the men are poked and prodded as living illustrations of the effects of disease, touched out of scientific curiosity rather than for comfort or reassurance.

Following this engrossing survey of the bodies of soldiers who "took a chance" by engaging in premarital or extramarital sex, the film turns to the question of how syphilis is detected via a demonstration of the Wassermann test performed on an anonymous soldier "to ascertain if the dreaded spirochetes are present in the blood." Now in thick rubber gloves and white apron, Dr. Burns applies a tourniquet to an outstretched arm, fist clenched, and then inserts a huge needle to extract blood. Transfixed by the diagnostic procedure, Dick watches the doctor's every move—and, seconds later, in film time, the results are known. In a makeshift laboratory filled with medical paraphernalia, the mysteries of interpreting the serological test are revealed: "negative (germs absent) if clear; positive (germs present) if dark"; equally black and white is the film's unquestioning faith in the reliability of a method that was "not always accurate."[66]

"Whatsoever" constructs scientific investigation as founded on empirical observation, operating in a realm of logic and rational truth, but it goes further in suggesting how science might be viewed as a new religion, in a startling two-shot sequence that represents medical technology as a miracle not unlike a spiritual transformation. The first shot shows the physician suspending two test tubes before his student (samples of a positive and negative result)—Dick's eyes, however, are hidden from the spectator, curiously masked by the crossbars of a tall instrument on the laboratory table. By contrast, in the second shot, Dick's face is bathed in luminosity, the test tubes inches away from his eyes, uncannily resonant of a conversion experience (fig. 2). The obscuring of Dick's eyes in the first shot might simply have been the result of directorial clumsiness or haste, but the second, if not a parodic simulation of seeing the light, nonetheless draws on the visual language of spiritual mysticism, ascribing to science an aura hitherto the preserve of religion. Staring intensely at the clear and dark liquids in the sacred vessels held in the hands of the physician-priest, the initiate is guided down the proper path toward sexual enlightenment—and away from darkness—by scientific knowledge, not moral principle. Yet the soldier's understanding is still incomplete—the test

[66] Cassel (*The Secret Plague*, 32–33) explains that "some of Wassermann's basic assumptions were actually untenable, and what he thought he was looking for was not what he found. Moreover, the initial experimental results could not be reproduced." Hans Neefs also argues that the Wassermann test was "cumbersome, theoretically ambiguous and neither very sensitive nor very specific"; see Hans Neefs, "The Introduction of Diagnostic and Treatment Innovations for Syphilis in Postwar VD Policy: 'L'expérience Belge,'" *Dynamis* 24 (2004): 93–118, esp. 99.

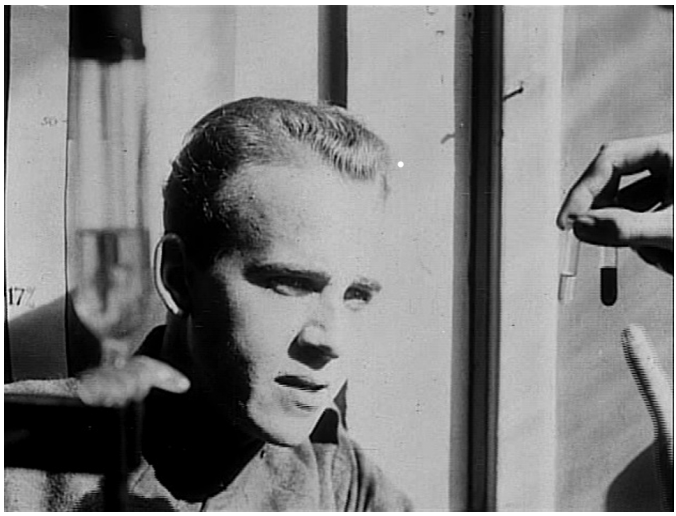

Figure 2—Dick's conversion, "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" (1917); still reproduced with permission, Bob Geoghegan, Archive Film Agency.

tube does not embody truth but is the catalyst to attain a "fuller knowledge" of "grave evils and their effects on the life of the nation" found in the relevant passages of the 1916 *Synopsis of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases*—a document revered in the film as a scripture of the modern age.[67] Depicting the title page of a marked and well-worn copy, the film intercuts lengthy excerpts and statistics on hereditary syphilis and gonorrhea, among other topics, while the student and teacher pore over its pages, the physician tracing each line with his finger.

Reading books and pamphlets that bear the imprimatur of the NCCVD is one key pathway to attaining proper sex education, as is the experience of a field trip to observe the consequences of unsafe sex.[68] Nonetheless, belief in the contagion's existence without visible proof requires a leap of faith that a scientific sex education cannot allow. An experienced teacher before turning to educational filmmaking, Best was also an innovator in using novel optical effects in which "microscopic organisms . . . would seem to provide an empirical foundation to the discourse of contagion."[69] Peering into the microscope (fig. 3), Dick sees what is invisible to the naked eye, the mesmerizingly rhythmic pulsations of "thin thread-like bodies" that attack "healthy corpuscles" (fig. 4). Appropriating for educational purposes the "radical possibilities" of the "cinema of attractions," the film exploits the "unique power" and "excitement" of early cinema's "ability to *show* something"

[67] White, *Synopsis of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases*, 52.

[68] "The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases," 582.

[69] Kirsten Ostherr, *Cinematic Prophylaxis: Globalization and Contagion in the Discourse of World Health* (Durham, NC, 2005), 54.

Figure 3—Dick at the microscope, "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" (1917); still reproduced with permission, Bob Geoghegan, Archive Film Agency.

of technological wonder.[70] This sensational sequence dazzles and inspires marvel—first-rate entertainment that no soldier-spectator would soon forget. These haunting images of magnified contagion, unlike the intangible religious values espoused by the moralizers, mobilize a sense of duty to the family, community, nation, and empire in ways that cannot easily be ignored, defied, or rejected.

A ghoulish microscopic shot of a syphilitic sore "seething with spirochetes" transforms the abstract idea of infection into the reality of a living organism, a biological phenomenon that cannot be disavowed. The next shot shows the tiny body of an infected infant with a misshaped head and "widely gaping hare-lip," telltale signs of syphilitic deformity.[71] The abrupt shift from the astonishing microscopic entertainment to the wrenching and painful sight of an innocent "victim of venereal disease" shocks and distresses—bordering on an emotional response in violation of the rules of scientific research. In reinscribing—rather than overturning—the shaming impulses of religious morality, sexual regulation is exposed as a cultural process of accretion: for the moralist and modernizer alike, the child is a freak destined to be shunned as a social outcast for no other reason than the fact that his father did not think before he acted. Departing the laboratory, Dick dutifully obeys his teacher's instructions to visit a school for the blind. With his back to the camera, Dick inspects the children in the "house of darkness" in a slow pan of a large group, an intertitle giving a numerical breakdown of the numbers afflicted: "Of 1100 children in the London County Council schools for the blind, the cause of blindness in 268 cases or 24 per cent was found to be

[70] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert and Toby Miller Stam (Malden, MA, 2000), 229 and 30.

[71] Hubert Armstrong, "On Some Clinical Manifestations of Congenital Syphilis," *British Medical Journal* (2 May 1914): 958.

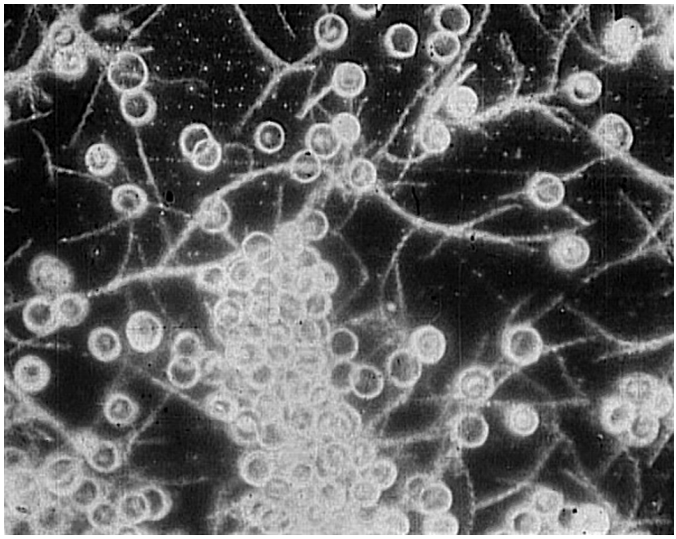

Figure 4—Microscopic organisms, "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" (1917); still reproduced with permission, Bob Geoghegan, Archive Film Agency.

gonorrhea and in 374 cases or 34 per cent the cause was syphilis. The total percentage attributable to venereal disease was certainly between 56 and 58 per cent." To reinforce the disturbing statistics, dozens upon dozens of the blind march past the camera arms linked in a parade of pathos ("58 out of every 100 cases of blindness are due to venereal disease")—a legion of sufferers for the simple reason that "Daddy took the chance," a phrase repeated like a mantra. The sequence concludes with two close-ups of a young girl and then a boy, a final reminder that any man responsible for such trauma must be held accountable for his actions. "Whatsoever" recognizes the futility of telling—the sex education film narrativizes and visualizes, visiting the hospital ward and laboratory to witness a succession of repellent images. A correct sex education entails gazing at rotting limbs, sickening wounds, deformed infants, and the incurably blind, with a dispassion borne of scientific curiosity, without recoiling or reacting with shock or dismay. The absence of sexual knowledge endangers bodily health and threatens reproductive futurity.[72] Yet crucially—for the historian of sexuality interested in the complex layering of governance structures in the social regulation of sexuality—Best's decision to include a prolonged shot of a damaged child or an episode at a school for the blind shows the persistence of the residual elements of an older regulatory system in wartime eugenicist concerns about hereditary taint.[73]

Once demobilized and back in Canada, the soldiers—Tom, Harry, and Dick—reunite with their loved ones, sweethearts, wives, and children in a de-

[72] For a discussion of "reproductive futurism" in the context of queer critique, see Edelman, *No Future*, esp. 2–4.

[73] See Daniel J. Kevies, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 39.

nouement that depicts the unhappy consequences of errant behavior and the rewards of following a better path. The treatment Tom sought from Dr. Quack proved a temporary cure, and, with the disease latent in his body, his unknowing wife is infected with syphilis and, subsequently, gives birth to a deformed and blind infant. Thus the unlucky Tom becomes the "antisocial other" whose inability to "transcend or repudiate 'sex' for the good of the greater community" fills him with shame, grief, and remorse—the emotive registers of a religious discourse that cannot save him, however sincere his belated repentance.[74] Harry suffers too when his girlfriend spurns his advances, her feminine intuition sensing his unfaithfulness, leaving Dick as the only member of the trio to reap the benefits of returning home clean. Transgressors are not sinners who merit punishment for their wrong and thoughtless actions: Tom and Harry suffer because they lack Dick's sexual knowledge. The sex education film—a narrative of a journey toward scientific enlightenment—dismisses "sin" as "the great Victorian aphrodisiac and lynch-pin of [a] now decaying social system."[75] In accordance with the laws of an emergent system of sexual governance, described by the writer Douglas Goldring as the "new morality" (ostensibly "new" in its estrangement from the precepts of religion), the individual transmitter of venereal disease merits social censure for "mere selfish indulgence."[76] All three men, when left to their natural inclinations, would have compromised the reproductive futurity of the race—Dick unreconstructed was no angel. From the perspective of an older moral system, no matter what degree of scientific enlightenment, Dick would have remained a sinner, since—like thousands of other soldiers—he visibly wavered "on the brink of promiscuity," and, were it not for a chance encounter with Williams (pure luck, in other words), he would have been as equally reckless in sowing his seed; a predicament one commanding officer found deeply frustrating in that he could not keep his men "straight" through verbal warnings alone.[77] Besieged by sexual opportunity at every turn no young colonial, far from home and in unfamiliar surroundings, can resist "the strongest feeling in the human race" without proper sex education and the will to follow its edicts.[78]

NOW WE THINK

According to "Whatsoever a Man Soweth," old-fashioned moral compunction cannot curb sexual promiscuity, a proposition bound to discomfit moralists such as Francis Champneys, an outspoken supporter of conjoining what was "morally right" with what was "hygienically right" in the fight against venereal disease.[79] In privileging "medical teaching" over "spiritual teaching," this example of "cin-

[74] Lee Edelman, "Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 470.

[75] Douglas Goldring, *The Nineteen Twenties: A General Survey and Some Personal Memories* (London, 1945), 58.

[76] Ibid., 60.

[77] Sir Archdall Reid, *New Statesman* (15 November 1919), cited by Stopes, *Truth about Venereal Disease*, 47.

[78] Gotto, "The Changing Moral Standard," 718.

[79] Francis Champneys, "The Fight against Venereal Disease: A Reply to Sir Bryan Donkin," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 82 (1917): 1052.

ematic prophylaxis" reveals in compelling ways how the policing mechanisms of proper and legitimate hetero relations were in flux and in crisis during the First World War, less deeply anchored in the demands of a prewar morality rooted in the God-given rule of the natural than in the demands of a modern ethical sexual citizenship premised on what was "normal and inevitable," unconcerned with the strictures of "losing its soul," a precondition in the formation of modern heterosexuality.[80] The seeds of a "scientific" configuration of hetero relations outside the sanctified union of marriage seem to have been unwittingly sown by the champions of sexual continence in differentiating between two forms of sexual intercourse: regular (sexual activity between "well-brought-up and respectable men" in a marital union with their female partners) and "irregular" (premarital and extramarital sexual activity between a man and woman).[81] This 1917 articulation of coitus as "regular" and "irregular" seems distant from the discursive realm of a moral system that associated sexual transgression with "abomination, depravity, pollution . . . debauchery and licentiousness."[82] By the late 1920s modern sexuality becomes a normativizing discourse—the normal (which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "a type or standard; regular, usual, typical; ordinary, conventional") being a conceptual prerequisite in the making of modern heterosexual practices positioned as oppositional to homosexuality.

Thinking about "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" as "essentially a straight sermon," to borrow a phrase from the British Film Institute pamphlet, both clarifies and obscures the ideological work it performs.[83] Pointing to the title's biblical allusion, the commentator Bryony Dixon believes the film presents its "target audience" with warnings that soldiers "would have found familiar both from church at home and during their military service."[84] A queer analysis problematizes this reading by showing that Best's project is more a sermon on straightness than a straight sermon and should instead be seen as an incisive attack, deftly delivered, on the familiar values of church and home, its valorization of medical knowledge and technology through the magic of the microscope and motion picture camera as unfamiliar to the soldier-spectator as to the moralist who strenuously argued that men's souls did not have to be put at risk at the expense of their bodies. In recognizing "that fear of disease is no sufficient deterrent," the film drags the "skeletons" of sexual misconduct and venereal disease "out of cupboards into the light of day" by exhibiting the suffering it causes to the men and their families, making "one not pharisaically disgusted with the sufferers but intensely sad," as Champneys puts it in a discussion of the national effort to fight VD.[85] How soldier-spectators of any nation responded to Best's effort remains an open question and a topic for further research, but what can be established is this: during the First World War some observers (wrongly, as this analysis shows) worried the War Office had approved a film that "completely" split the "moral problem . . . from the

[80] Paget, *The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases*, 10; Ostherr, *Cinematic Prophylaxis*; Champneys, "The Fight against Venereal Disease," 1052.

[81] Champneys, "The Fight against Venereal Disease," 1045.

[82] Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 30.

[83] Dixon, BFI pamphlet, 16.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Champneys, "The Fight against Venereal Disease," 1048, 53.

medical."[86] Anxieties on the part of moralists concerning the displacement of the moral dimension fueled controversy in some quarters, which perhaps accounts for the decision to cast the soldiers as Canadian rather than British. The modernizers, meanwhile, expressed an animus toward the religious sensibilities of a prewar morality; its title notwithstanding, hostility simmers beneath the surface in the final intertitle, which quotes lines from "The Price He Paid" by the American poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox: "And the child she bore me was blind/And stricken and weak and ill/And the mother was left a wreck/It was they who paid the bill."[87] Best eschews some of Wilcox's harsher and angrier lines ("religion is rot, and the laws of the world are nil"), but the proposition that sex outside of marriage signals poor judgment is hardly a message soldiers would have heard from a church pulpit. In actuality, these regulatory systems—traditional moral values and scientific discourse—need to be seen as imbricated and distinct, the values of one haunting the other. Traditional morality and the new morality were equally committed to self-control, warned the family and nation of consequences, and relied on guilt and shame.

The film's ideological stance would be reiterated in the war's immediate aftermath by another leading campaigner of sex education, the feminist writer Marie Stopes, who argued that in an ideal world "It is the duty of the Churches to win the people by moral precepts and teaching to a right view of life and pure living; it is the duty of the doctor to see that people are decently clean; it is the duty of the reformer to see that people *know* facts essential to their life and progress. . . . [T]he moralist and the doctor have essentially the same message to teach."[88] In this respect, the message taught by the sex educator was no different than the message taught by the moralist—all believed in restricting the "sex union" to the married.[89] Best and Stopes were less pleased to see churchmen as the arbiters of sexual conduct, since they regarded moralists as "ostriches hiding their heads in the sand while they profess to believe that disease *is being conquered* by purely moral means. It *should be* conquered in this way, but it is *not*."[90] Sexual relations between a man and a woman, for Best and Stopes, were—unsurprisingly—reserved for the married to reduce "the scattering of the germs," thus affirming a governance apparatus with links to the past in its vision of a future that privileged the "neutral" values of science.

As a project that relates dialogically with the *Final Report* of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases and public concerns about a "grave national plague," "Whatsoever a Man Soweth" endeavors to construct the fighting man as a thinking man controlled not by the coercive religious dictates of an outmoded morality but by methods of persuasion based on correct scientific teaching.[91] Yet scrutiny of the film's affective investments in the power of shame suggests its conceptual intertwining with a prior regime. When presented with a "clear and accurate

[86] Ibid., 1048.

[87] These lines appear in a slightly different version as "The Price He Paid," in Ella Wilcox Wheeler, *Poems of Problems* (London, 1914), 27–29.

[88] Stopes, *Truth about Venereal Disease*, 52.

[89] Ibid., 47.

[90] Ibid., 48.

[91] P.P. 1916, Cd. 8189, Royal Commission on Venereal Disease: *Final Report of the Commissioners*; Donkin, "The Fight against Venereal Infection," 593.

knowledge of these diseases," the film implies, the responsible soldier comes to terms with the potential consequences of his actions and makes sound ethical sexual choices.[92] The older moral system may have swept the "truth" under the carpet, but scientific discourse too found guilt and shame useful in motivating soldiers to serve their country and protect their wives and children, a paradox the queer critique is superbly well equipped to anatomize.[93] Largely neglected by historians of early cinema, historians of sexuality, and specialists in First World War studies, Best's pioneering work demonstrates how the format of the dramatized propaganda film could be mobilized to challenge the viability of "unmarried chastity" as a reasonable response to the problem of VD.[94] Moreover, the film's attempt to undermine the moral imperative and ground a new system in the discourse of social hygiene marks a significant intervention in reconfiguring modern marriage as an institution more successfully controlled by science and technology.

Historians of modern Britain have given good accounts of the ways in which the First World War brought late nineteenth-century discussions of licit and illicit hetero relations to a head and accelerated the pace of changing social attitudes concerning sexuality's regulation. Situating these gradual cultural shifts within the context of a British queer history might not strike some readers as an obvious framework within which to consider the waning of an older moral system against the ascendance of a new regime and the national response to the VD crisis. Yet a queer perspective on debates hitherto characterized as oppositional—between moralists and modernizers—complicates historical understanding of an evolving sexual practice subject to multiple, sometimes contradictory, systems of governance. Moreover, queer methodologies disinterested either in the individual sexual subject's "desires, fantasies, attractions, and gender identifications" or in articulations of ontologies as queer or straight gets a new critical purchase on the discursive preconditions of modern heterosexuality.[95] The objective is not to determine whether the sexual practices of the VD sufferer were akin to those of the modern heterosexual; rather the task is to grapple with the "irreducible definitional uncertainty" about hetero relations as subject to an interplay of regulatory regimes, each claiming the right to set boundaries on acceptable and unacceptable practices in different-sex sexual encounters.[96] Furthermore, bringing queer studies into productive exchange with the history of sexuality demonstrates how elucidations of queerness as "the name of a certain unsettling in relation to heteronormativity" must take into account the historicity of a structure that "normalizes heterosex-

[92] Harrison, *Medical Practitioners and the Management of Venereal Diseases in the Civil Community*, 10.

[93] Donkin, "The Fight against Venereal Infection," 585. A thorough discussion of the queer engagement with sexual shame is beyond the scope of this article; important work includes: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC, 2003); David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago, 2009).

[94] Champneys, "The Fight against Venereal Disease," 1052. Numerous scholars have examined social constructions of manliness and sexual self-control. See, for instance, Lesley Hall's examination of the literature from nineteenth-century social purity movements that believed in limiting sexual expression to the married; see Lesley Hall, "Forbidden by God, Despised by Men: Masturbation, Medical Warnings, Moral Panic and Manhood in Great Britain, 1850–1950," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 3 (January 1992): 365–87.

[95] Marcus, "Queer Theory for Everyone," 213.

[96] Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 105.

uality" by rendering it "unremarkable and everyday, in relation to which non-heterosex is queer, odd, to be commented on and policed."[97]

Queerness-as-method invites scrutiny about what is queer in all sexual practices but also invites history's intervention as a corrective to the queer faith in heteronormativity as a universal or transhistorical value. Indeed, I would argue that the daunting task of writing a queer history of heterosexuality is vital in exposing how heteronormativity "is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education."[98] For decades heterosexuality has existed and flourished outside and beyond the heuristics of sexological classification, as if beyond history itself. Pervasive yet nowhere, dominant yet invisible, heterosexuality is only ever "dimly perceived" and, to varying degrees, secures its status as all-powerful by eluding historicization, which is why unravelling its operations and logics has proven difficult.[99] Undoing the hetero/homo binary calls for queering the heterosexual as well as queering the homosexual—and this project, in turn, means that queer historical work will need to be stretched beyond its comfort zone of same-sex dissidence.[100] A queer historicization of this VD sex education film denaturalizes a practice linked metonymically with the biological, the essential, or the innate, revealing heterosexuality as a practice no more stable or coherent than any other.

[97] Carla Freccero, "Queer Times," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 485; Janet R. Jakobsen, "Queer Is? Queer Does? Normativity and the Problem of Resistance," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 4 (1998): 518.

[98] Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," 554.

[99] Ibid., 552.

[100] For a longer discussion of these methodological difficulties, see Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago, forthcoming).