

## THE LEGACY OF IWAN BLOCH (1872-1922)

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*During the first two decades of this century the German psychologist Iwan Bloch wrote exhaustive treatises on sexual psychopathology, syphilis, prostitution, and moral history. Few of these works have been properly translated into English and Bloch is remembered today chiefly through bowdlerised and pirated editions of his books.*

Considerable information on the history of sex and morals has been gleaned from pornographic writings: it is a respectable academic pursuit nowadays to write *about* pornography as a psychological, social, and literary phenomenon. The biggest headache confronting the would-be pornography historian is the scarcity of original source material. It is only in the last ten years that definitive editions of *My Secret Life*, *The Pearl*, and related arcana have seen cheap and open publication. And still today, the very extensive holdings of the British Museum remain virtually inaccessible to the serious scholar (see Fryer, 1966).

As a consequence of these difficulties few persons manage to get hold of original source materials, allowing them to write from first-hand information. There is a wealth of catchpenny junk—treating morals, sex, and related literature from second and third-hand viewpoints—written by lawyers, university lecturers and such educated folk. Some exceptions include, Pearsall's *The Worm and the Bud* (1969), an admirable exposition of Victorian sexuality, though not without error (cf. *The Boudoir's* publication date given on p.365 *et seq.*); Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (1966), an original interpretation of 19th century pornography, flawed by an over-emphasis on literary psychoanalysis; Legman's *The Horn Book* (1970), another of the few respectable studies of sex in literature.

Examples of the poorer type of study would of necessity include Ginzburg's thoroughly bad *An Unhurried View of Erotica* (1959), Loth's *The Erotic in Literature* (1962), Hyde's *A History of Pornography* (1964), and Hurwood's *The Golden Age of Erotica* (1965). These books are notable for the numerous errors of scholarship they contain (Loth [p.86] makes Edward Sellon and Henry Spencer Ashbee one and the same person), and for the amount of material cribbed from earlier publications (the substance of Hurwood's book is pirated without acknowledgement from Ashbee, 1877, 1879, 1885).

A close examination of these latter works also shows bibliographical reference is invariably made to Ashbee (Pisanus Fraxi) and to Iwan Bloch, while textual references are minimal if present at all. Ashbee (1834-1900) was a wealthy English book collector whose bibliographies are models of erudition. There are ample details available concerning his life and works (e.g., Lee, 1909; Marcus, 1966). Bloch, a German psychologist relatively unknown in contemporary

psychology, was born 100 years ago and died 50 years ago this year. He wrote extensively on sexual-moral history and his writings have suffered—more than any psychologist's—at the hands of literary pirates, unscrupulous publishers, Nazi bookburners, and British magistrates. A curious legacy.

Few biographical details are readily available about Iwan Bloch. In *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (1953) he rates a bare half-dozen sentences. Max Hodann, a contemporary, mentions his partnership with Magnus Hirshfeld and Albert Eulenburg. (And, parenthetically, notes that Bloch had “written a monograph of extreme significance, the first scientific study of the interactions between sex and the sense of smell—*Ospfhresiology*: the book appeared under the pseudonym ‘Hagen’ in 1906 [Hodann, 1937, p.46].” The present writer has been unable to trace further reference to this work; Bloch does not mention it in his *Sexualleben*, 1908 edition. A book entitled *Odoratus Sexualis* put out by the American Anthropological Society [?] in 1933 may well be a pirated reprint.) Bloch also rates but brief mention in the supposedly authoritative *Encyclopaedia of Sexual Behaviour* (1961) where in at least two instances bowdlerised editions of his works are quoted as source material (Ellis and Abarbanel, 1961, pp.596, 978).

Iwan Bloch was born at Delmenhorst on April 8, 1872. He studied at Bonn, Heidelberg, and Berlin, graduating from Wuerzburg University in 1896 with a dissertation concerning the effects of iodine and thyroxine. He practiced as a skin specialist in Berlin before founding, with Hirshfeld, the Berlin *Gesellschaft für Sexualwissenschaft* in 1913. Bloch was in the forefront of the movement which pioneered the rational evaluation and treatment of sexual disorders and which, incidentally, antedated the Kinsey Institute by some 34 years. Bloch's own areas of specialisation included the histories of syphilis, prostitution, and sexual morals, about all of which he wrote copiously. He died at Berlin on November 19, 1922, and so, unlike Hirshfeld, did not live to see the public *autos-da-fé* made of his works in National Socialist Germany.

Apart from scores of learned articles, Bloch wrote nine books of major psychological importance and several others of lesser (psychological) value. Seven of his texts have been translated into English but only one (*The Sexual Life of our Times*, 1908) is remotely faithful to the original; the others are cheeky composites of heavy-handed abridgements and bold mistranslations. Most contemporary “critics” and “historians” of sexual morals who quote Bloch—usually without acknowledgement—do so from one of these bastard translations with a candour born of lazy ignorance.

Bloch's first major published work was *Der Marquis de Sade und seine Zeit* (1899). This had gone through one French and nine German editions by 1927 even though as early as 1908 its author had written, “my former work upon this subject [de Sade] I now regard as inadequate, youthful, and containing numerous errors (Bloch, 1908, transl. by M. Eden Paul, p.558).” In 1904 Bloch published a sort of revocation of this early work, *Neue Forschungen über den Marquis de Sade und seine Zeit*. This included an account of Bloch's acquisition of the manuscript of de Sade's *Les 120*

*Journées de Sodome* which he had published—for the first time—under the false imprint, Paris: Club des Bibliophiles. All three books gave as author-editor one Eugen Dühren. (Pseudonyms and false imprints helped allay some of the public and official wrath directed against German sexologists of the time. Hirshfeld used the *nom de guerre* Numa Praetorius. See Hodann, 1937.) Later scholars of sexual psychopathology and de Sade have shown their indebtedness to Bloch's original research (see, for example, Ellis, 1917; Gorer, 1962; Lély, 1961).

*Neue Forschungen* was one of several of Bloch's works to suffer at the hands of unscrupulous band-waggoners. It appeared in America, 1934, under the fabulously misleading title, *Marquis de Sade's anthropology sexualis of 600 perversions, 120 days of Sodom; or The school for libertinage; and the sex life of the French age of debauchery; from private archives of the French government*. It was published by the Anthropological Press [!] in a private printing of 3000 [30,000?] copies.

*Das Geschlechtsleben in England* was published pseudonymously during 1901-03. This has never been completely translated into English partly because of a prosecution successfully waged against *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit* (the English translation) in 1909 (Craig, 1937). The standard translation of *Geschechtsleben* is that by William H. Forstern first published in London in 1936, reprinted in 1958, 1958, and 1965. An "illustrated edition" was published in America in 1934: *Ethnological and cultural studies of the sex life in England illustrated as revealed in its erotic and obscene literature and art; with nine private cabinets of illustrations by the greatest English masters of erotic art. Privately issued by subscription to cultured adults only*. The publisher, Falstaff Press, was subsequently arraigned on mail fraud charges: advertising books as indecent when in fact they were not.

*Geschlechtsleben* is without question the most widely quoted history of English sexual morals with most present-day writers seemingly content to paraphrase from one of the English-language editions. Thus, while Marcus (1966) and Legman (1970) refer to a German edition, Pearsall (1969), Ginzburg (1959), Hyde (1964), and Hurwood (1965) quote from translations. (It is to be noted that Marcus implies Dühren and Bloch are two different persons. Cf. Marcus, 1966, pp.287-88.) This is bad news, for what is given in the translations often bears little resemblance to original source material. Bloch drew heavily from earlier accounts of English social and moral life (and to this extent his own writing is second-hand); principally those by Archenholz, Taine, Hamilton, and Hill. Material in English, for example, was thus translated into German and thence back into English by Bloch's translators.

A rather silly example of what happened: Bloch wrote; "The actor Garrick made fun of this last fashion when he once, dressed as a woman, appeared on the stage in a coiffure built-up of every sort of vegetable, in which the beetroot was particularly conspicuous (1936, transl. by Forstern, p.477)." The original passage from which these lines were taken read, "Garrick did his best to vindicate these head-dresses out of existence by appearing one day on the stage dressed as a woman with a head-dress composed of all kinds of

vegetables, in which carrots were particularly conspicuous (Hill, 1893, p.38).” Some more serious quarrels: On p.536 (Forstern translation), referring to *Fanny Hill*, “first part” should have read “second part”. On p.416, referring to the Boulton and Park affair, “1887” should have read “1870”. References to Hill on p.473 *et seq.* are to *A History of English Dress* (1893), not, as the footnotes imply, to *Women in English Life* (1896). And so on. The credibility of writers who write about sexual-moral history and who quote from translations of Bloch must be seriously doubted.

*Der Ursprung der Syphilis* (2 vols.) appeared in 1901 and 1911; *Beiträge zur Aetiologie der Psychopathia Sexualis* (2 vols.) in 1902 and 1903; *Das erste Auftreten der Syphilis (Lustseuche) in der Europäischen Kulturwelt*, in 1904. (Bloch promulgated the theory that syphilis was brought to Europe by Columbus’s men.) Both volumes of *Beiträge* turned-up translated in the United States in the mid-30s, the second under the pseudoscientific catch-title, *Anthropological and ethnological studies in the strangest sex acts in modes of love of all races illustrated, oriental, occidental, savage, civilized*. The publisher was the ubiquitous Falstaff Press. Bloch’s most translated work first appeared in 1907: *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seinen Beziehungen zur Modernen Kultur* had seen 12 German, one Hungarian, six English, one Italian, and two Spanish editions by 1928. His last major work was *Die Prostitution* (1912).

Bloch had one or two unusual, mildly irrational thoughts about pornography: “These obscene writings may be compared with natural poisons, which must also be carefully studied, but which can be entrusted only to those who are fully acquainted with their dangerous effects, who know how to control and counteract these effects, and who regard them as an object of natural research by means of which they will be enabled to obtain an understanding of other phenomena (Bloch, 1908, transl. by M. Eden Paul, p.734).” And again: “All measures calculated to keep away from children and immature persons books which might serve to give rise to sexual stimulation are worthy of support; and it must be remembered that for children and immature persons scientific books, religious writings—as, for example, the unexpurgated Bible—and also illustrated comic papers, etc., may be dangerous (Bloch, 1908, transl. by M. Eden Paul, pp.737-38).” On the other hand, his definition of obscenity was and is a lot easier to follow than the many legal definitions tried since 1868 (see Gerber, 1965): “A book can justly be called obscene only when it has been composed simply, solely, and exclusively for the purpose of producing sexual excitement—when its contents aim at inducing in its readers a condition of coarse and brutish sensuality (Bloch, 1908, transl. by M. Eden Paul, p.731).” But pornography was, for Bloch, one facet of the study of sexual and moral history.

No authoritative English translations have yet been made of *Der Ursprung der Syphilis*, *Geschlechtsleben*, *Beiträge*, *Neue Forschungen*, and *Die Prostitution*; a lamentable state of affairs considering the degree to which shoddy translations of Bloch’s works have been quoted. Having regard to the man’s enormous and varied output and the important place he occupied in German clinical psychology at the turn of this century, he has been miserably dealt with. An optimistic hope is that in this centenary year an enterprising publisher will give us definitive translations of Bloch’s most important writings. One

possible effect of this would be to make his works as accessible today, as those of Havelock Ellis, Ashbee, and de Sade. It might help put out of business the literary scallywags who write about what Bloch wrote about sexual-moral history.

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<sup>1</sup> A bibliography of Bloch's works, their editions and translations, may be obtained from the author.