

Stories Told, Truth Silenced

By Lee Harding

It would be hard to think of a period in human history where social attitudes have changed at the dizzying speed which they are doing so today. In the past few decades, traditional sexual mores have been severely eroded, long-established concepts of marriage declared to be bigoted, basic conceptions of male and female repudiated, and gender identities fragmented into outright fluidity. To this end, Frontier Centre's coverage of Culture Wars takes a critical look at the ideas, means, and history behind this transformation.

It would surprise most people to know the term "homosexual," and for that matter, "heterosexual," are recent inventions. They were coined just 150 years ago in a German letter written by Karl Maria Kertbeny to Karl Heinrich Ulrich. The correspondence between Kertbeny and Ulrich proves that the purpose of declaring homosexuality as an orientation was to legitimize it, and thereby remove its social stigma and legal censure. Such ideas were advanced by the bogus studies of Alfred Kinsey 70 years ago to become the dominant medical, then public, opinion. Ironically, Kertbeny was fickle about his historic ideas, and quietly thought they might jeopardize his pretentious goals.

It was May 6, 1868 when Kertbeny, a Hungarian-born travel writer with German as his mother tongue, coined the term "homosexual" in a letter to Ulrich. Ulrich was a German judge who had declared his love for men in 1862. He borrowed the term "Urnings" from Plato's Symposium to describe those of his bent and argued, "We make up a third sex. ... We are women in spirit." Ulrich divorced sexual identity from sexual biology to create orientation and gender identity based on spirit, all to argue the legalization of homosexuality.

Kertbeny came to share Ulrich's goal and advanced similar arguments in his famous letter. Current observers might note some irony in one of Kertbeny's musings found in his diaries: "How did I, a normally sexed individual, ever stumble onto the existence of homosexuality and its slaves, who, up to that point, I had no idea were present in human society?"¹ Here, Kertbeny, arguably the conceptualizer of sexual orientation, equates heterosexuality with normal sexuality. He identifies as just such a person, yet it is apparent that by the age of 40 he was a practicing homosexual.

Jason Salamone documents Kertbeny as a "writer who had associations and friendships with pederasts (adult men who are attracted to post-pubescent teen males)."² In her work, "The Double

¹ Judit Takács, "The Double Life of Kertbeny," in *Past and Present of Radical Sexual Politics*, 2004, 26–40, <http://policy.hu/takacs/pdf-lib/TheDoubleLifeOfKertbeny.pdf>.

² Jason Salamone, "Change: Scientific Data and Testimonies 'Gay' Activists Won't Tell You About," *BarbWire*, February 16, 2015, <https://barbwire.com/change-therapy-scientific-testimony-data-gay-activists-dont-tell/>.

Life of Kertbeny,”³ Judit Takacs all but states that Kertbeny became one himself. His diaries are full of ink blots that reflect self-censorship in evident fear he would be discovered. (He also records that he burned other papers). Even so, he frequently recounts his affection for males and their appearance, ones he describes as “boy” or “lad.” He also complained of bouts of gonorrhea, and his sympathy for the “boy” of his affection, named Jansci, who shared them. Kertbeny feared that a lieutenant would discover “dangerous games” he played with Jansci during the mornings and that everything could be heard in the next room. At one point, police came to his door and seized his list of 150 “urnings” who lived in Berlin.

Thus, Kertbeny’s fight for homosexual rights was not merely guided by empathy and political philosophy, but by a vital quest to enjoy his sexual indulgences without fear, ostracism, or imprisonment. In the view of Takacs, “the main issue was not whether same-sex attraction be innate or not, but that people ought to have the right to be left alone by the state in their intimate lives. The word homosexuality was introduced in the struggle for homosexuals’ rights.... Kertbeny did not seek biological arguments...instead he made the point that the modern state should extend the principle of not intervening in the private lives of citizens to cover homosexuals too.”

Kertbeny’s letter identifies four sexual orientations. Here heterosexuals and homosexuals had the counterparts of “monosexuals” (masturbators) and “heterogenists” (bestialists). It is interesting to note that he equated heterosexuals with “normal sexuals.” He also had four sub-categories of homosexuals, including “platonism” which historian Judit Takacs explains is the “love of older men directed towards younger boys, without any sexual practice and dirty thoughts.”

Kertbeny knew if he could make heterosexuals appear as guilty of sexual taboos as those with other orientations, it would be difficult to argue why those living out their orientations should be imprisoned. This required the unfounded argument that heterosexuals had a much stronger sex drive than those of the other categories, but simultaneously practiced as much sexual deviance as other groups. This argument is problematic since it acknowledges that people do sex acts outside of their orientation, meaning orientation equals nothing more than personal wanton desire. Nevertheless, in his letter, Kertbeny claimed heterosexuals participated.

...in so-called natural [procreative] as well as unnatural [non-procreative] coitus. They were also capable of giving themselves over to same-sex excesses. Additionally, normally-sexed individuals were no less likely to engage in self-defilement [masturbation] if there was insufficient opportunity to satisfy their sex drive. And they were equally likely to assault male but especially female minors . . . ; to indulge in incest; to engage in bestiality . . . ; and even to behave depravedly with corpses if their moral self-control does not control their lust. And it is only amongst the normally-sexed that the special breed of so-called “bleeders” occurs, those who, thirsting for blood, can only satisfy their passion by wounding and torturing.⁴

These arguments, baseless in fact, and rich in contradiction, seem to have been arguments of convenience. If they worked, great. Privately, Kertbeny wasn’t sure they should. In yet another irony, he penned a separate letter on the same day (recipient unknown, but perhaps also Ulrich) where he explains why even if they could prove the unproven (that there actually was an inherent sexual orientation), it should not directly lead to changes in the law.

To prove the innate nature [of homosexuality] is not at all useful, especially not quickly, what’s more it cuts both ways, let it be a very interesting riddle of nature from the anthropological point of view. The legislation does not examine whether this inclination is innate or not, it merely focuses on the personal and social dangers of it, on its relation to society. There are, for example, people who are bloodthirsty, pyromaniac, monomaniacal etc. from birth, but they are not allowed to act out their inclinations, even if these are medically proven ones... they

³ Takács, “The Double Life of Kertbenny.”

⁴ Ibid.

are still isolated, and in this way their extremes are isolated from society. Thus we wouldn't win anything by proving innateness. Rather we should convince our opponents that exactly according to their legal notions they do not have anything to do with this inclination, let it be innate or voluntary, because the state does not have the right to intervene in what is happening between two consenting people aged over 14, excluding publicity, not hurting the rights of any third party.⁵

Bad arguments or not, Kertbeny changed history. In 1886, his term "normal sexuality" was first adopted in the medical journal *Psychopatia Sexualis*. Alfred Kinsey published enormously skewed and flawed research that backed Kertbeny's claims: mainstream heterosexuals were as guilty of sexual taboos as anyone. From there, activists herded psychological perspectives, popular opinion, and legal jurisprudence to all the ends until all Kertbeny envisioned were manifested. His biased self-interest, lack of evidence, contradictory argumentation, and self-refutations were left to dark, dusty corners, nearly invisible against the blinding light of his victories. It's just one more reason to believe the Mark Twain adage, "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story."

About the Author

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⁵ Ibid.