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English Sexualities, 1700–1800

Tim Hitchcock

*Senior Lecturer in Early Modern History
University of North London*

Macmillan Education

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Dedicated with love and respect to
Jim and Florence Hitchcock

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This is a synthetic book which attempts to bring together and make accessible a complex historiography. In the process it does come to conclusions which are new, and does add the results of original research to the work of others. But fundamentally, this book seeks to comprehend the rapidly growing and changing literature on eighteenth-century sexualities. In this, of course, it cannot be entirely successful. Indeed, as it goes to press, new and exciting work on sexuality is appearing almost every month which modifies the conclusions developed here. Similarly, it cannot fully succeed because the topic is possessed of few known boundaries. Some readers will look in vain for topics which I have excluded, and others will be confounded by the inclusion of those I have chosen to discuss. I have excluded, for example, any extended analysis of religious discourses around sex and sexuality. Similarly, I have avoided any conclusion about the relative pleasure derived from sex in different historical circumstances. At the same time, I have included discussions of the history of medicine and social policy. The limitations these choices reflect are inevitable in a book of this sort, and to that extent do not warrant an authorial apology. But they do indicate that this work can be little more than a very selective introduction to a much broader topic – the ramifications of which can be seen in almost every aspect of social and cultural history.

Even in the process of writing a book of this length the number of debts one accumulates is large. First, I would like to thank Jeremy Black. I can think of no greater privilege than to be asked to write a book on a subject of one's own choosing. I would also like to thank Kelly Boyd, Rohan McWilliam, John Tosh, Tim Wales, Laura Gowing, John Broad, Robert Shoemaker, Pamela Sharpe and John Kortum for commenting on the manuscript. Their advice has made this a much better book. I would also like to thank Tim Wales and Mary Fissell for suggesting, quite independently of each other, that John Cannon's autobiography would be of interest to me. My greatest debt, however, is to Professor Penelope Corfield whose support and advice have been invaluable. Beyond these, I would like to thank Richard Dunn, John Black, Anthony Henderson, Kathy Castle, Sheila McElligott, Arthur

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