“In *Unmaking Sex*, Anne E. Linton shines expert light on the enormous commotion – epistemological, medical, legal, narrative – occasioned by ambiguously sexed bodies in nineteenth-century France. Her analysis, at once scholarly and humane, gives a more detailed picture of the lives of intersex people in this period than we have ever had before, and offers a new understanding of the importance of ambiguous sex as a concept in post-revolutionary France – unmaking along the way a number of received scholarly hypotheses about how the nineteenth century understood sex. A must-read for all scholars of French history and culture, as for all historians of gender and sexuality.”

Andrew J. Counter, author of *The Amorous Restoration* (University of Oxford)

“*Unmaking Sex* is an impeccably researched and original study of the intersex phenomenon in medical and literary discourses of nineteenth-century France. Through expert synthesis of archival research into over 200 medical cases, Linton provides a cultural prehistory to today’s widely debated topic of gender boundaries. This truly interdisciplinary project succeeds in reconstructing a vast and complex network of myth, medicine, anatomy, and rhetoric in relation to the binary-unsettling realities of indeterminate sex. It will become a must-read for serious scholars of gender and the nineteenth century.”

Andrea Goulet, author of *Optiques*, and *Legacies of the Rue Morgue* (University of Pennsylvania)

“Linton’s truly original achievement is to have repositioned nineteenth-century French culture, in its archival breadth as well as in the depth of its literary close readings, within a new critical space. This space is located in the vital tension between Foucault’s history of sexuality and contemporary transgender criticism which underpins questions of identity in our own age.”

Nicholas White, author of *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (University of Cambridge)

“Linton offers massive and largely new archival evidence for the struggles of nineteenth-century doctors to determine ‘true sex’ in ambiguous cases, which she mobilizes to offer brilliant readings of a wide range of canonical and little-known fiction. This book is a model of historically grounded literary criticism and a major revisionist interpretation of how sex was understood in the nineteenth century. Foucault was not quite right about the famous Herculine Barbin case; and *Making Sex* was not quite what I thought it was.”

Thomas W. Laqueur, author of *Making Sex* (Helen Fawcett Distinguished Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley)
“This very smart book examines a wide range of accounts of those who defied the gender binary in nineteenth-century France. By combining literary and medical histories, *Unmaking Sex* offers an expansive and dynamic view of the centrality of debates over sexual difference and gender boundaries in nearly every sphere of life. The book challenges longstanding views of the emergence and acceptance of the concept of ‘true sex.’ An important and fascinating read!”

Jen Manion, author of *Female Husbands* (Amherst College)

“Anne E. Linton has written the first account of a growing fascination with gender-ambiguous embodiment in nineteenth-century France. Literary and scientific texts on what was then called ‘hermaphroditism’ made sex and gender ambiguity into mysteries to be solved. Linton investigates this widespread interest and comes up with a truly compelling history of gender and sexuality.”

Jack Halberstam, author of *Female Masculinity* and *Trans* (Columbia University)

“Anne E. Linton has opened up medical archives to telling effect, finding many a pathetic case become tragic in medical treatment. But her deeper commitment lies in showing us that the novelists, however limited by conventions, generally were out in front of the doctors in exploring the delicate terrain of intersex – hermaphroditism in nineteenth-century parlance. It’s the novelists who were groping toward understanding the limits to binary thinking about gender and sex. The result is a book of high interest.”

Peter Brooks, author of *Balzac’s Lives* (Sterling Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, Yale University)
During the nineteenth century, words like “intersex” and “trans” had not yet been invented to describe individuals whose bodies, or senses of self, challenged binary sex. But that does not mean that such people did not exist. In nineteenth-century France, case studies filled medical journals, high-profile trials captured headlines, and doctors staked their reputations on sex determinations only to have them later reversed by colleagues. While medical experts fought over what separated a man from a woman, novelists began to explore debates about binary sex and describe the experiences of gender-ambiguous characters. Anne Linton discusses over 200 newly uncovered case studies while offering fresh readings of literature by several famous writers of the period, as well as long-overlooked popular fiction. This landmark contribution to the history of sexuality is the first book to examine intersex in both medicine and literature, sensitively relating historical “hermaphroditism” to contemporary intersex activism and scholarship.

Anne E. Linton is Associate Professor of French at San Francisco State University. Her research interests and publications span a wide range of interdisciplinary topics in nineteenth-century cultural studies, including gender studies, science, and medicine.
UNMAKING SEX

The Gender Outlaws of Nineteenth-Century France

ANNE E. LINTON

San Francisco State University
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td></td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td></td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the Text</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Gender Revolution Before Intersex or Transgender</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I: A Cultural Prehistory of Intersex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Prescribed Fictions: Stories of “Hermaphrodism” vs. “True Sex”</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Outlaws from Birth: “Doubtful Sex” and the Civil Code</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II: Contextualizing High and Low Literary Narratives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Is She or Isn’t He? Plotting Ambiguous Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Inheriting “Hermaphrodism”: How Degeneration Theory Changed Literature and Medicine</td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue: The Nineteenth-Century Roots of Contemporary Resistance to “True Sex”</td>
<td></td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td></td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures

0.1 The Genital Organs of Heppner’s “True Hermaphrodite” page 19 (1872), from Charles Debierre, *L’hermaphrodisme; structure, fonctions, état psychologique et mental, état civil et mariage, dangers et remèdes* (1891). Collection of the author.


1.2 Louis Hainault (1752), from Jean Moreau, *Garçon et fille hermaphrodites […]* (1773). Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.


Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the support of a number of fellowships in the completion of this project, including generous funding from San Francisco State University, Yale University, and from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. I have been fortunate to work with a talented team of editors at Cambridge University Press from whom I have learned much. Bethany Thomas and Natasha Burton have been enormously helpful and efficient editors. I am grateful to Rose Bell, my copyeditor, for her keen eye and deft touch.

I wish to acknowledge the many friends, colleagues, research librarians, and archivists who assisted, advised, and provided feedback on my research and writing efforts over the years. Especially, I must express my deepest appreciation to Ora Avni, David Bell, Dorian Bell, R. Howard Bloch, Patrick Bray, Peter Brooks, Jonathan Cayer, Edwin Duval, Andrea Goulet, Thomas Kavanagh, Bettina Lerner, Jann Matlock, Rachel Mesch, Kevin Newmark, Sara Pappas, Raisa Rexer, Brian J. Reilly, the late Lawrence Schehr, Nicholas White, and T. Chapman Wing. Most of all, I am indebted to Maurice Samuels, who is as brilliant a mentor as he is a scholar, for adroitly guiding this project from its earliest stages and for his astute readings, sage advice, and generous encouragement along the way.

Deepest gratitude to my family who lived with this book for many years and without whose support it could not have been completed.
Note on the Text

Because medical photography of intersex has often caused trauma, I have chosen not to reproduce those images in this book, nor the ubiquitous close-up illustrations of external intersex genitalia. Owing to their volume, and often lengthy, redundant titles in French, primary medical sources are cited in the text using author-date. Full references are provided in Works Cited. French titles are translated only when relevant to the argument at hand.