Parting with my sex

Cross-dressing, inversion and sexuality in Australian cultural life

Lucy Chesser

SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PRESS
For my grandparents, Lillian Chester, Jack Chesser, Ray Flood and Margaret Mullavey who passed away before this was finished.

And for my two children, Atty and Rex who were born during the writing.
## Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ vii
Introduction ................................................................................................................... ix

Part I ............................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: “Extraordinary case of concealment of sex”: Edward De Lacy Evans and the management of disruptive knowledge ................................................. 3

Chapter 2: “If he’s a woman he’s a fine ploughman”: public regulation, private tolerance and ‘passing women’ in colonial Australia ............................................. 34

Chapter 3: Mary Rutledge’s mad freak: masquerade, disguise, theatrical impersonation and cross-dressing ................................................................. 56

Chapter 4: “Mere bundles of clothes”: cross-dressing and inversion in colonial cultural expression ............................................................ 96

Chapter 5: ‘She won’t be happy till she wears ‘em’: cross-dressing and sexual politics in the contested 1890s ............................................................. 123

Part II ........................................................................................................................... 145

Chapter 6: “I felt no difference between him and other women”: sexual (mis)representation and cultural anxiety in the 1863 prosecution of John Wilson ............................................................. 147

Chapter 7: Abominable crimes and strange manias: cross-dressing and homosexual transgression, 1863–1900 ......................................................... 172

Chapter 8: “Woman in a suit-of-male”: working women in male ‘disguise’, 1890–1920 ........................................................................................................ 205

Chapter 9: “When two loving hearts beat as one”: same-sex marriage, subjectivity and self-representation in the case of Marion-Bill-Edwards, 1906–1916 .......................................................... 238

Chapter 10: Brazen beauties and erotic males: cross-dressing, sensationalism, sexology and the law, 1902–1920 .................................................. 271

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 318

Index ......................................................................................................................... 341
Acknowledgments

This has been a long project and I have benefitted from the advice and assistance of many people and institutions over the years. Much of the work that appears in this book was originally completed as part of a PhD which was written at La Trobe University in the mid- to late-1990s. I really wish to thank Katie Holmes, who supervised this research and writing for around four years. I have not forgotten the tremendous amount of time and thought she put into her consideration of the project and its component chapters. My warmest thanks are also due to Diane Kirkby, who also played a very important role in this project during a short, but very intense period or supervision as the PhD neared its completion.

The La Trobe University history department has shown me great support over the years. I would like to especially thank Richard Broome who has always shown interest in my work and passed along references he encountered in his own research, and Rhys Isaac for challenging comments he made on several early seminar papers. Marilyn Lake has always encouraged my work and provided valuable supervision and insightful comments on draft chapters during a period of supervision in 1997. La Trobe University’s postgraduate seminars in the 1990s were a very lively environment to share ideas and work in progress with staff and postgraduate students. Many of the postgraduate students I met at La Trobe are now established historians themselves and I would like to acknowledge Cathy Coleborn, Lee-Ann Monk, Helen Gardner, Tanja Luckins, Robert Kenny and especially Ruth Ford, for their support and interest in my work over the years. Other friends, both historians and otherwise, have contributed by reading and commenting on drafts and by offering support and encouragement. I would like to mention Theresa Wyborn, Marina Larssen, Michael Connors, Graham Willett, Melissa Officer, Sam Chesser, Jason Buttigieg, Anna Chapman, Pamela Morrison, Clare Carberry, Donna Buttigieg, Kitty Janssen and my Wangaratta motherhood friends, especially Jessie Gallagher, Fiona Sutton, Kerry Hill, Anne Timms, Bec Schubert, Leah Walker, Michelle Tamaray-Smith, Clare Schultz, Belinda Harrison, and Renee Raknes.
I wish to thank the Commonwealth government for a postgraduate research scholarship and staff at the Borchardt Library, the State Library of Victoria, State Library of New South Wales, the State Library of South Australia, the Baillieu Library, the Victorian Public Records Office and the Archives Office of New South Wales, for the great assistance that has been rendered over the years.

Still it was, I see in retrospect, a rough old manuscript when it was sent to the Sydney University Press and I am very grateful for the input of my publishers, especially for the encouragement to expand the conclusion to take in developments in the 20th century. I would especially like to acknowledge and thank Susan Murray-Smith, Agata Mrva-Montoya and Louise Maral for their important contributions.

I will finish by acknowledging my family, especially my partner, Erin Farnbach, for her love, encouragement and patience over the past nine years, and my parents, Murray and Margaret Chesser, who have always valued writing very highly and supported my work. I hope this makes them proud.