

# Introduction

## Cambridge to Paris, 1978

In September 1978, at the start of my second year as a graduate student, I set off for Paris to carry out research for my PhD thesis on the economic depression in France during the 1930s. I was armed with two key documents: a letter of introduction to the French politician Pierre Mendès France and a copy of the *Spartacus 1977 International Gay Guide*.

Neither document proved as life-transforming as I had hoped. As one of the rising stars of French politics in the 1930s, Mendès France had been an economic adviser to the French prime minister Léon Blum and was the first French politician to have assimilated the ideas of Keynes. Unfortunately I was too timid to present my letter. Although I regret never meeting Mendès France, I doubt that my thesis suffered as a result. Politicians rarely say much that they have not already written elsewhere, offering a misremembered recollection of their own memoirs rather than an unmediated memory of the events.

A greater burden of expectation, however, rested on the *Spartacus Guide*. I was convinced that this publication, a kind of gay equivalent to the Michelin restaurant guide, with a similarly arcane set of symbols, was going to change my life. I had recently read Christopher Isherwood's 1976 autobiography, *Christopher and His Kind*, which conveyed the sense of excitement of a young Englishman abroad, sloughing off inhibition thanks to the reassuring cocoon of anonymity. I was particularly struck by a passage suggesting that the mere fact of speaking a foreign language could liberate one from the baggage of the past: "for Christopher," writes Isherwood of himself in the third person, "the difference between a table and *ein Tisch* was that a table was the dining table in his mother's house and *ein Tisch* was *ein Tisch* in the Cosy Corner"—the boy bar he had first entered with Wystan Auden in March 1929.<sup>1</sup>

I had no illusions Paris in 1978 would be as exciting as Isherwood's

Berlin, but I still felt it was bound to offer more than my previous haunts, the dowdy Scaramouche in Cambridge or the Stage Club in Oxford—where, in obeisance to obscure British licensing regulations, if one wanted to continue drinking after 11:00 p.m. it was necessary to carry around a plastic plate of sausages and lumpy mashed potatoes. My vision of Paris was one of endless street encounters, seediness, romance, induction into other worlds—a heady mixture of Jean Genet and Richard Cobb.

I was momentarily encouraged when my guide revealed the main gay bars to be situated in the Rue St. Anne only one street away from the Bibliothèque nationale. Unfortunately this turned out to be disappointing. These establishments were off-puttingly smart, populated by impossibly beautiful gigolos, and did not get going until the small hours—whereas the library closed at 8:00 p.m.; worst of all, they were quite beyond a student budget. I had to rethink.

I consulted *Spartacus* again and found the listing of an establishment called “Arcadie,” which seemed to have reasonable opening hours. Its *Spartacus* rating read as follows: B[ar], D[ancing—“usually means two people of the same sex may dance together”], E[legant—“refers to décor, advisable to dress smartly”], G[ay], GLM [Gay & Lesbian Mixed], P[riate—“members club”], S[how—“transvestite or other”], and four stars [the maximum was five]. The club was situated not in the smart central Second Arrondissement but at 61 Rue du Château d’Eau in the Tenth, a district so unfashionable that the historian Richard Cobb once commented that it “possesses no literature and has been sung about by no poet.”<sup>2</sup> One evening I presented myself there. I pressed the buzzer, and after being scrutinized through a small opening, I was admitted and informed that entry required me to join an organization called CLESPALA—the mysterious initials of the Literary and Scientific Club of the Latin Countries (Club littéraire et scientifique des pays latins)—and this gave me the right to receive a monthly review proclaiming itself the organ of the “Homophile Movement of France.” I duly joined and penetrated a corridor into a large hall with a bar, a stage, a dance floor, and balcony. If this venue had been awarded “E,” the editors of the *Spartacus Guide* had clearly not been there for a while, but otherwise the ratings seemed accurate. It was, I subsequently discovered, the former theater where Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* had first been performed in Paris in 1902. The age mix was greater than most gay establishments, the atmosphere friendlier, and the music charmingly old-fashioned.

On subsequent visits I came to experience the oddities of Arcadie, for example the “carpet dance” (*danse du tapis*), which is described by an English visitor to the club in 1974:

When I entered the Arcadie club the evening was in full swing. They have an enormous dance floor and I guess about 200 people were dancing when I arrived. I had just finished my second drink when the music changed and everyone formed an enormous circle on the dance-floor, just like a fully-dressed daisy chain. About eight or ten young men were given a small rolled up mat and went with mat in hand into the circle. I had been pulled into the circle and wondered what strange ritual was to take place. Soon it was all too apparent—I was to witness a delightful custom which I would recommend many of our British gay clubs to import. The young men with the mats each walked up to someone they liked, in the circle, and touched the one of their choice with the mat. The pair then went again to the centre and placed his/her right knee on each mat, leaned forward, and kissed someone of his choice whilst the original holder of the mat took a place in the circle. I was flattered to be in the centre as much as I was in the circle, and discovered later that it is also customary for some of the people you have kissed to ask you to dance—slow romantic dances and all done with the grace and charm for which Parisians are famous.<sup>3</sup>

Another peculiarity of Arcadie was that once a month, on Friday evenings, before the dancing commenced, the president of CLESPALA, a middle-aged man named André Baudry, would ascend the stage and launch into a lecture (called the “monthly talk” [*mot du mois*]), often ending in a frenzy of rage directed against homosexuals whose behavior was considered disreputable: he seemed particularly to dislike street demonstrations, eccentric apparel, and nocturnal cruising in the Tuileries Gardens.

This was disconcerting, but I noted that people of my age paid little attention to the “sermon,” as they disrespectfully called it. So Arcadie became my regular haunt because, on the positive side, it was cheap, unthreatening, and welcoming if a little quaint. This was not Isherwood’s Berlin, but it was better than walking around with a sausage on a plastic plate.

After returning to Cambridge at the end of the academic year, I continued to visit Paris regularly. The closed atmosphere of the Rue St. Anne was giving way to the more welcoming bars of the Marais, still Paris’s gay village today. I must have continued to frequent Arcadie occasionally since I possess my copies of its review for subsequent years; then one day in 1982 I read in a newspaper that Arcadie had closed, after twenty-eight years of existence. My life moved on, and I barely gave Arcadie another thought for twenty years until, clearing some papers, I stumbled upon my copies of the review and wondered if anyone had ever written about the organization. I am amazed now how little interest I had shown in its history until then, but I was one of that generation of gays for whom the world had begun around 1970. The most cursory research revealed that Arcadie,

founded in 1954, was one of a number of self-designated “homophile” organizations set up in various countries in the 1950s to defend the rights of homosexuals—groups like Der Kreis in Switzerland, the Mattachine Society in America, and the COC in Holland. All of these have now been studied by historians—but not Arcadie, despite its longevity and its size (over the years it touched the lives of tens of thousands of French homosexuals), making it one of the most important of these organizations.

### “The French Exception”: Gay Historiography in France

Why this historical neglect of Arcadie? One reason is that homosexuality has had more difficulty establishing itself as an academic field of study in France than in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> a situation often explained by France’s tradition of “republican universalism” inherited from the French Revolution. According to this ideology, citizens in the public sphere are treated as equal holders of universally shared rights, while their religious, regional, ethnic, and sexual identities are confined to the private sphere. Having abolished the feudal corporate society of the *ancien régime*, French republicanism, celebrating the Republic One and Indivisible, has always been suspicious of recognizing intermediary groups between the citizen and the state. In the nineteenth century this suspicion was directed against religion—the Catholic Church—and against regional identities to the extent that these impeded the development of modern nationhood. In the twentieth century it has been extended to other forms of particularism, including ethnic or sexual ones.

The way this republican model actually functioned in practice has varied considerably over time. It was not always the dominant intellectual influence on an historical profession that in the twentieth century has been characterized by imaginativeness and innovation. Yet it is noticeable how slow French historians were to write about immigration despite France, because of her low population growth, having experienced a significant influx by foreigners since the 1860s. France, however, did not accept American hyphenated national/ethnic identities such as “Italian-Americans.” The census in France excludes questions about ethnic origins since previous identities are expected to have been erased by republican assimilation. It is striking that a pioneer of the history of private life—of birth, death, sex—was an historian of the extreme right, Philippe Ariès, outside the mainstream orthodoxy of the profession.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it is also paradoxically true that many theorists who inspired the development of historical work on gender in America and Britain are in fact French. This suggests that the suspicion of gender history in French academia probably conceals a number of unstated prejudices hiding behind the respect-

able cloak of republican universalism.<sup>6</sup> Those in Britain or America who contest the claims or importance of this kind of history would not usually do so by attacking its practitioners as *communautaristes* (“communalists”), an argument readily used in France.

At the moment when gay and lesbian history was storming the academic citadels of the United States, the “universalist” model received a new lease of life in France as a result of growing fears about North African immigration. These concerns exploded in the famous “scarves” affair of 1989 when three Muslim girls were excluded from school for wearing headscarves.<sup>7</sup> This episode unleashed intense debate, and even many on the left were uneasy about defending minority rights when these conflicted with the secular principles of the Republic. Islam now played the scarecrow role in the republican imagination that the Catholic Church had in the nineteenth century. The debate developed into an abstract opposition between an idealized model of French universalism on the one hand, and “Anglo-Saxon” multicultural *communautarisme* on the other. For the Left, this had the added advantage of offering a new way to be anti-American after the collapse of Marxism as an intellectual force in France. In the 1960s and 1970s, America was depicted as a society of unregulated liberal individualism, then in the 1980s and 1990s as a dystopia of fragmented communities. French universalism was contrasted with “balkanizing” American multiculturalism.<sup>8</sup> These arguments raged in the 1990s, and although they mostly centered around racial minorities, they stoked suspicion of other forms of identity politics, including that of sexual minorities.

As a result, homosexual history in France from the late 1970s to the 1990s was mainly the work of gay activists writing outside the historical profession.<sup>9</sup> Although 1986 did see the establishment of a French network of university researchers (mainly sociologists) calling itself the Group of Research and Study on Homosexuality (GREH), it is significant that its first publication was in English as a special issue of the *Journal of the History of Homosexuality*.<sup>10</sup> The earliest academic historical works were mostly by Anglophone scholars.<sup>11</sup>

The first French book on homosexual history to attract attention in France was, revealingly, not by a professional historian. This was Frédéric Martel’s 1996 *Le rose et le noir: Les homosexuels en France depuis 1968*, a study of contemporary homosexual politics and in particular the impact of AIDS. It excited much controversy because of Martel’s argument that the homosexual community had been culpably slow to recognize the AIDS threat, and also because of a final chapter attacking what he described as gay “communalism.” Although later denying he had ever feared that “French gays were going to leave the republic and transform the Marais district

into a State of Sodom,” Martel’s tone made such allegations plausible.<sup>12</sup> His polemical coda distracted attention from the qualities of his book, which did not deserve all the opprobrium heaped upon it by gay activists, but his success among the general public certainly owed something to his defense of a “universalist” model acceptable to mainstream opinion.

It is a striking illustration of the status, until recently, of homosexual history in France that when Didier Eribon, biographer of Foucault, organized France’s first conference on gay and lesbian studies in 1997, it was held not in a university but at the Centre Pompidou, that most of the participants were American, and that a hysterical article in *Le Monde* (by Martel) voiced alarm about these “communitarian authors and American academics inspired by a propagandist spirit” who wished to “subject the universities and literature to the spirit of the ghetto.”<sup>13</sup> In French bookshops one does not find, as in Britain, sections on gay studies. When in 1999 the publisher Balland allowed the writer Guillaume Dustan to edit a series entitled “The Gay Shelf” (“Le rayon gay”), the series was quickly renamed simply “The Shelf” (“Le rayon”) because bookshops were not keen to stock it.

The tired debate between “communalism” and “universalism” has run its course, and in recent years there has been a shift in the status accorded to the study of homosexuality by French academia. Beginning in 1998 a seminar on the “Sociology of Homosexualities” was introduced at the *École des Hautes Études* by Didier Eribon and Françoise Gaspard; in 2001 the young historian Florence Tamagne published a comparative study of homosexuality in interwar Paris, London, and Berlin that had started life as a doctoral thesis in that bastion of traditionalist historiography, the *Institut des Études Politiques*; and in 2003 two mainstream French publishers produced high-profile encyclopedias on, respectively, homophobia and “gay and lesbian cultures.”<sup>14</sup> This reflects the extent to which issues of sexual politics have become central to public debate in France starting with the passing of the civil partnership (PACS) law in 1999 and continuing with the controversies about gay marriage and gay parenting.<sup>15</sup> Homosexuality is no longer a taboo subject, and French research students can now write dissertations on homosexuality, but most research is by sociologists, jurists, or specialists in literature and only in a few cases by historians.<sup>16</sup> Very few historians of homosexuality hold academic posts in France.

### Arcadie: The Unknown Story

For all these reasons many aspects of France’s homosexual history wait to be explored, and this is certainly the case of Arcadie. The prevailing image of Arcadie continues to be that constructed by gay radicals in the 1970s. Just as American gays of the 1970s viewed the “Stonewall riot” of

1969 as the Bastille Day of homosexuality, as Edmund White once described it, their French equivalents had their own Stonewall in 1971 with the founding of the Homosexual Revolutionary Action Front (FHAR). For this generation 1971 was the Year Zero of homosexuality. They developed their view of the world in opposition to what had gone before. For example, one gay publication in 1974 described Arcadie as the “guard dog of bourgeois morality, trying to keep the homosexual world closed off from the world outside.” It compared Baudry to Franco, Pétain, and Pinochet.<sup>17</sup> Not all attacks were quite so vehement, but there was a generally shared view among gay activists in the 1970s that Arcadie, with its concern for respectability and desire to win social acceptance for homosexuality, was irredeemably reactionary and “accommodationist”—the exemplar of “daddy’s homosexuality” (“l’homosexualité de Papa”). The 1970s moment has long passed, but its characterization of the homosexual reformers of the previous two decades remains dominant—at least in France.

As far as America is concerned, in the last fifteen years a rich historiography has begun to redress this picture. For example, George Chauncey has shown that in New York from the 1890s there existed a gay world of vibrancy and visibility that had by no means internalized the images of homosexuality distilled by the medical press or popular newspapers. His study does suggest, however, beginning from the mid-1930s a growing intolerance toward homosexuality and a retreat into invisibility—or at least discretion—on the part of homosexuals, and the implication is that this lasted into the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Thus even for America, the 1950s endure somewhat as a dark continent needing further exploration. What Chauncey has revealed of his forthcoming sequel on the postwar period indicates that he will offer a more complex account of the 1950s than that to which we have been accustomed—or indeed than that which loomed at the end of his first volume.<sup>19</sup> Already we have several accounts of the Mattachine Society, America’s equivalent of Arcadie, which challenge the view that it was timid, conservative, and “integrationist.”<sup>20</sup>

Recent studies of France in the Belle Époque and the interwar years depict a rich homosexual culture before the Second World War,<sup>21</sup> but the 1950s and 1960s still present a historiographical dark hole, perhaps because it is more difficult to historicize the more immediate than the more remote past. In the particular case of Arcadie there is an additional problem of sources: when Arcadie closed in 1982, it did so because André Baudry, scarred by the attacks of radical gay activists, had had enough. With his Italian partner, Guiseppe Adamo, he went into a kind of self-imposed exile near Naples, and he has only returned once to Paris since then. Suspicious and embittered, he was wary of researchers or journalists—albeit not many were interested enough to approach him.<sup>22</sup> When I

started my research, the first people I contacted were not even sure if he was alive. Rumors circulated that he had taken a hoard of papers with him to Italy, but no one really knew if this was true.

I was able to track down Baudry, and perhaps because I am outside the world of French homosexual activism, and because I had fortuitously been a member of *Arcadie*, he agreed to meet me and be interviewed many times. He also provided introductions to many of his former collaborators, whom I also interviewed. These often elderly men had mostly destroyed their papers relating to *Arcadie*, frequently greeting me with the tantalizing comment that if only I had visited a few years earlier they could have presented me with a treasure trove of material. One former member in Marseilles, a man in his eighties, only discovered when I visited him that many of the relevant papers stored in his basement had been damaged in a flood. Sometimes I have been reminded of the scene in Fellini's film *Roma* where rare frescoes are discovered by workers excavating underground, yet almost as soon as these marvels appear, the workers' breath causes them to fade away. In such circumstances it would almost be preferable not to know that the frescoes had ever existed than see them disappear before one's eyes. Baudry himself also turned out to have destroyed much—including *Arcadie*'s membership lists and most of the tens of thousands of letters he received from homosexuals over the years—but there is material that he has kept: for example, the letters he received when *Arcadie* closed down, the records of the trial of *Arcadie* in 1955, tape recordings of many of his speeches, photographs, and so on.

Perhaps there is some material he has not wanted to show me, but there is certainly no *Arcadie* archive in the sense that cataloged archive collections exist for COC, Der Kreis, the Mattachine Society, or the British Homosexual Law Reform Society. Nonetheless, thanks to my contacts with Baudry and the people he has put me in touch with, it has been possible to reconstruct a lot of documentation. This includes the entire collection of confidential mimeographed circulars (“lettres personnelles”) that were sent to members, the bulletins of some of the regional delegations, and some private correspondence. In addition there are the copies of the monthly review, *Arcadie*, deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale. This was a very dense publication, sometimes running to as much as a hundred pages or more. These sources, combined with some collections of private papers, allow the story of *Arcadie* to be told in some detail for the first time.

## Rethinking *Arcadie*

*Arcadie*, in the words of one former member who broke acrimoniously with Baudry in 1971, is “incontournable” (i.e., “cannot be ignored”). For

fifteen years it was the only homosexual organization in France, and for almost another fifteen it was the biggest, despite by then being also in competition with others. Anyone writing about the history of French homosexuality in the period has to make the obligatory passing reference to Arcadie. Yet if it is “incontournable,” it is also unknown.<sup>23</sup> Writing Arcadie’s history requires constructing a narrative that has not previously existed: unearthing the real identities of individuals who almost all operated under pseudonyms; uncovering early brushes with the law; and showing that in the early days, far from being the pusillanimous bourgeois figure of legend, Baudry was a kind of driven visionary who took extraordinary risks.

The problem for the historian when analyzing this narrative and weighing it against the sketchy interpretations of Arcadie that already exist is that these interpretations rarely go beyond caricature. For example, Martel’s book mentioned above, although far from sympathetic to 1970s radicalism, states that Arcadie advocated “the interiorization of desire and encouraged people to struggle against their sexual selves—to ascetically sublimate their sexual and sentimental orientation”; the ideal was “to live happily, live hidden.”<sup>24</sup> One article devoted to the history of Arcadie claims that the organization was “obsessed by the duty of homosexuals to be discreet.”<sup>25</sup> The recent *Dictionnaire de l’homophobie*, which is a work of militancy but also serious scholarship, mentions Arcadie several times, not always unfavorably, but the organization is also described by one contributor as “timid and moralizing,” and displaying homosexual “self-hatred”; by another Baudry is said to have “produced in his manner a homophobic discourse.”<sup>26</sup> The notion that Arcadie manifested a form of homosexual “self-hatred” has also been implied by the historian Georges Sidéris in his analysis of its discourse on effeminacy.<sup>27</sup> Another common theme is that Arcadie was backward-looking and obsessed by classical Greece: one historian refers to its “bouts of precious classicism,” interest in “high culture and Greek style pederasty,” and “apologetic representations of spiritual friendship.”<sup>28</sup> Another writer refers to its “essentially Catholic bourgeois composition” and its “integrationist and profoundly reactionary ideology” advocating that homosexuals live in clandestinity.<sup>29</sup>

These quotations sum up the prevailing image of Arcadie: that it was a conservative, bourgeois (or “petit bourgeois”), Catholic, semiclandestine organization, inspired by nostalgic images of classical Greece, rejecting political activism, interiorizing society’s disapproval of homosexuality into a form of homosexual self-hatred, and urging its members to live their homosexuality in secret and sublimate their sexual desires into desexualized “friendship.”

From such a description one would not know

1. That Arcadie, far from proposing some desexualized model of homosexuality, in 1956 arranged, at some risk, a rare showing of Genet's erotic and highly sexual film *Chant d'Amour*, or that in the early 1970s it screened an early example of gay pornographic cinema made by the American Pat Rocco; that on one occasion it organized a lecture on sadomasochism and homosexuality; that it constantly informed its members about matters of sexual health; or that within a year of its founding, it had sent its members an extraordinarily detailed questionnaire intended to pull together an accurate picture of the sexual practices of the homosexual population.

2. That although Arcadie was exercised by the concerns that Catholicism posed to its religious members, Baudry's closest aide, and the person who contributed the largest number of articles to the review *Arcadie*, was a committed atheist, had no time for religious scruples, and made no secret of this. He was far from being the only leading member of Arcadie to hold such opinions.

3. That far from advocating secrecy, Baudry never wrote under a pseudonym or hid his identity (something still done by gay activists in the 1970s), and from the 1950s denounced clandestinity in the most vigorous terms; that the motto of Arcadie's 1973 congress was "live openly" ("vivre à visage découvert"), and this injunction became a constant theme of the organization throughout the 1970s.

4. That despite the classically inspired name Arcadie, the organization, far from being obsessed by timeless images of ancient Greece, paid little attention to the classical past and was more attentive to popular culture (the first lecture delivered at its club in 1957 took as its subject James Dean).

5. That far from being indifferent to politics, Arcadie (especially after 1969) regularly lobbied politicians to repeal discriminatory laws.

6. That far from being "timid," it carried many articles devoted to such incendiary issues as pedophilia.

7. That far from being bourgeois or "petit bourgeois," it was (unless these words are considered to represent a state of mind rather than a social category) certainly more socially diverse than any other homosexual group that has existed in France.

8. That in its second year *Arcadie* published a long article on the "luck to be homosexual," rendering the word "self-hatred" peculiarly inappropriate to describe its outlook.

The standard view of Arcadie was not entirely unfounded. Caricatures usually have some basis in reality, and the way Baudry talked about homosexuality rings curiously to modern ears. All homophile movements

of this period emphasized respectability and expressed suspicions of promiscuity and flamboyance, but it is undeniable that Baudry's moralism was more pronounced than others and betrays the imprint of a religious vocation that he had abandoned without entirely abandoning its values. This can be demonstrated by taking more or less at random three quotations from Baudry over the three decades of Arcadie's existence:

1955: Arcadians, WE HAVE DUTIES, and perhaps, above all, it is necessary to caution certain among us: "HOLIDAYS = RELAXATION." Yet *watch the way you dress*, watch how you behave. This does not mean bourgeois conformism . . . but it does mean self-respect and respect of others and above all it means a terrible responsibility toward all other homophiles. . . . If you need to appear in eccentric apparel or display inappropriate behavior, I pity you.

1965: If you are looking immediately for adventure, encounters in bed, ABSTAIN. Don't behave like a boor. . . . How vulgar, nasty, low, inhuman, bestial people can be. . . . Alone in your little provincial town, with no one to talk to . . . obsessed by sex . . . yes it is important . . . but it is not everything.

1976: Why do you homophiles always and everywhere give such an image of yourselves? . . . Why are you only known by your worst aspects? Why do people only know your excesses, your delirium, your outrageousness, your eccentricities, your obsession with sex and nothing but sex?<sup>30</sup>

This is not the language expected today from someone defending the rights of homosexuals, but it is part of Arcadie's story and cannot be wished away. The interest of history is to show the strangeness of the past rather than require it to conform to our values and expectations. Having said that, this book aims to show how, despite the moralism of its founder, Arcadie was a more complex and interesting organization than its detractors claimed. The interpretations offered in this study to back up this claim are underpinned by a number of assumptions and arguments that can be summarized at the outset although they run throughout the book:

1. Although Arcadie was dominated by one individual—André Baudry—to an extent not true of the comparable organizations elsewhere, its history is more than the story of one man. Beginning as a small group of isolated individuals meeting in Baudry's Paris apartment in 1952, Arcadie ended as the largest homosexual organization that has ever existed in France. Throughout this time Baudry remained indisputably in charge and held unwaveringly to a vision of homosexuality that came to seem dated, but insofar as other members of the organization did not deviate too egre-

giously from this vision or challenge it too overtly, there was space for the expression of other sensibilities. Baudry's culture was Catholic, classical, and conservative, but one can find other contributors to his review invoking Marcuse, Reich, and Foucault. If one reads the thousands of articles published in *Arcadie* over twenty-eight years, and reads them with a minimum of good faith and open-mindedness, what emerges is a more complicated picture than the caricatures. If a single label were required, the ideology of *Arcadie* could be more properly described as liberal humanist than Catholic conservative.

2. Any judgments made about *Arcadie* must take account of the historical context, both national and international. *Arcadie* was part of a shared moment in the history of homosexuality in which many organizations throughout the West defended a common vision of homosexuality. *Arcadie* was part of the West's "homophile moment," and not some curious French aberration. All these movements were operating in the 1950s and early 1960s in a repressive cultural and political climate. Nowhere was this more true than in the United States where McCarthyite persecution targeted homosexuals even more severely than alleged communists.<sup>31</sup> But the French context was hardly more favorable, and whereas in the United States the climate became more tolerant from the early 1960s, in France the reverse was true. If Paris looked to some outsiders like a sort of homosexual Mecca—not least because unlike in Germany, Britain, or America, homosexuality was not illegal—cultural norms were extraordinarily hostile to homosexual visibility or homosexual activism. This context inevitably shaped the first fifteen years of *Arcadie*'s existence, and it never quite shed the habits formed at that time.

3. *Arcadie* was more than just its highbrow monthly review. Many ordinary members—"Arcadians" as they were called—hardly bothered to read it at all. To write the history of *Arcadie*, we need to probe what the organization meant to these people—look at what *Arcadie* *did* for its members as much as what it *said*. As well as publishing a review, *Arcadie* ran for twenty-five years (from 1957 to 1982) a club in Paris and established a network of regional delegates. Offering many practical services to its members, it was about sociability as much as ideology or politics. Recovering this aspect of *Arcadie*'s existence is not easy: one way is to read the typed circulars inserted in the review, providing information on the activities of the club. Beginning in 1961, subscribers to the review could also take out an extra subscription to so-called "personal letters" ("lettres personnelles"), mimeographed sheets appearing about five times a year. These printed some correspondence and broached subjects considered too delicate to be discussed in the review. I have been able to reconstitute a complete collection of these letters and circulars, and they provide a dif-

ferent perspective on Arcadie than the review alone does. While Baudry may have propagated an intensely moral vision of homosexuality, his organization also provided Arcadians with the knowledge—for example, about medical and legal matters—that empowered them to lead their lives very differently from his injunctions. Another way of understanding what Arcadie meant to its members is to ask them, and I have carried out about thirty interviews with former Arcadians, some who were there from the beginning. The picture that emerges is not one of self-hating individuals frightened of their own shadows despite the repressive climate of the times.

4. When reading the circulars and “lettres personnelles,” and listening to what Arcadie’s survivors have to tell us, one must avoid doing so through the prism of the present. We need to escape from a teleological reading of homosexual history—to liberate ourselves from gay liberation. This is not simply a matter of saying that there was sex before Stonewall. It requires paying attention to, and respecting, the ways of thinking about homosexuality of the pre-Stonewall generations—rescuing “homophilia” from the “enormous condescension of posterity,” to borrow E. P. Thompson’s phrase. The 1970s generation challenged the assumptions of their predecessors by breaking down boundaries between public and private, personal and political, arguing indeed that the personal was political, urging the necessity to “come out,” and inventing the notion of the “closet.” Yet we must not “naturalize” the discourse of “coming out.” While the homophile generation believed one *could* be happy in the closet, gay liberation argued that one *should not* be happy in the closet. It would be wrong to pillory those who did not share this view as having somehow interiorized homosexual guilt. If gay liberation certainly offered new ways to be happy, it also created new ways to be unhappy. To some, the injunction to openness was exciting and liberating; to others, threatening and disconcerting. Wearing a suit and tie is not in itself a badge of self-oppression. Living a double life seemed to some in the 1950s to be an exhilarating, exciting, and even empowering condition, not a shameful one.

This means that when writing the history of homosexual politics, one should be wary of identifying certain positions as intrinsically “radical” or intrinsically “reactionary.” Gay politics, like all politics, is contingent, and the meaning of political positions should be contextualized. One example of this is the debate about “queens” (*folles*) and “effeminacy.”<sup>32</sup> Arcadie was obsessed with distinguishing “respectable” homosexuals from the *folles* and transvestites who were presumed to discredit homosexuals in the eyes of the public. To 1970s gay radicals, and to contemporary “queer” sensibilities, such an exclusionary discourse was “self-hating” and reactionary, but in the 1950s it was not necessarily “conservative” to

argue against sensationalized, stereotypical, and negative portrayals of homosexuality popularized in the press. Even today gay activists (to the extent they exist) walk a tightrope between rejecting stereotypical representation of homosexuality while wanting not to exclude those whose transgressive behavior might shock the majority.

5. The idea that the politics of homosexuality is contingent leads to a final point: that the homophile movements and those radical movements that succeeded them were less different from each other than they believed. Both articulated their own notions of homosexual “authenticity” that put them at odds with the developing commercial world of homosexual sociability—what both described as the homosexual “ghetto.” Reading the critiques of the “ghetto” by the radicals of the 1970s and the “homophiles” of *Arcadie*, the similarities are as striking as the differences. What many gay radicals sought in the politics of the 1970s was an alternative space of sociability to that available in what they called the “*ghetto sauvage*” of parks and toilets or the “*ghetto marchand*” (“commercial ghetto”)—which is exactly what the founders of *Arcadie* were looking for a generation earlier.

These are some of the propositions that this book hopes to demonstrate, and it is offered as a contribution, through the French case, to rethinking homosexuality in the West from the 1950s to the 1970s. It is necessary, finally, to say what this book is not, and what the reader should not expect to find. First, although *Arcadie* existed outside Paris, it did not really have a very active presence outside the capital, and there will be much more here about Paris than the rest of France.

Second, there is little about the experiences of women. The role that women played in homophile movements varied from country to country. In America the Mattachine Society was flanked by a separate organization called the Daughters of Bilitis; the Swiss movement *Der Kreis* paid no attention to women at all, and there was no other movement to play this role; most German homophile publications of the 1950s were totally centered on men. *Arcadie* was in fact different by being open to both sexes, and made some efforts to encourage women’s participation. One feminist activist who did take part in some of *Arcadie*’s events toward the end of its life remembered later that she had done so because although “*Arcadie* understood absolutely nothing about women nor lesbians, . . . it made an effort to understand.”<sup>33</sup> This is true. Once *Arcadie* had achieved a certain status, Baudry was sometimes invited to present his case on television; on one occasion, in January 1977, he chose to appear with two other members, one of whom was a woman.<sup>34</sup> *Arcadie* also had an intermittent women’s group. That being said, the truth is that the proportion

of women members was tiny, and even fewer participated actively. Few articles in the review were by women or about them. When Arcadie attempted a survey of the life of its provincial members in 1977, 500 men replied and only 12 women. It was one of Baudry's constant refrains that if he did not publish more articles by women it was because he did not receive them.<sup>35</sup>

Third, although exact membership figures for Arcadie no longer exist, it certainly never represented more than a tiny minority of France's male homosexual population, and the same is true of equivalent movements in all other countries. This book does not therefore claim to be a complete sociocultural history of homosexuality in France after the Liberation—of patterns of sociability, of changing sexual identities, of policing, of medical attitudes, and so on—even if these themes enter my story. Essentially this is a book about ways of thinking and talking about being homosexual in France from the Liberation until the arrival of AIDS (which is coincidentally the moment when Arcadie ceased to exist). It is the study of a moment in the history of homosexual self-definition, and if it is a moment that seems quite remote, my conclusion will suggest that the questions raised by Arcadie have not entirely lost their interest and relevance to the way we lead our lives today. It is about our past but about our present too.

