made in the essay
But use of examples to support the generalizations
was awkward; the essay must be revised.

This is an effective, clear, readable text.

A

Book Review #2
Homosexuality in Renaissance England

"The figure of the homosexual, either as we see it there in its first and early form among the molly houses or as it is now, after more than two centuries of change, has never been a welcome part of the society... which gave rise to it. But it is its reflection.” So concludes Alan Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, in which several aspects of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English society is revealed within a detailed examination of “the vice not to be named among Christians.” Bray divides his book into four chapters, each of which examines homosexuality from a different viewpoint. Homosexuality's place in the world of myth and symbol, the structure of society, and finally, the England of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, is presented to the reader in an attempt to achieve one of Bray's primary goals, which is “to show by contrast the transformation history [had] in store for [homosexuality].”

*Homosexuality in Renaissance England* begins within a look at the terminology and common symbols associated with homosexuality. The two terms most commonly used were “bugger” and “sodomite.” Homosexuality was only part of what these words represented, however. Buggery and sodomy could also refer to bestiality or other heterosexual sins. These terms were used interchangeably because the notion one was trying to get across was not homosexuality, but the more general notion of debauchery. Debauchery was regarded as something that every human being was subject to. References to homosexuality during the Renaissance were likely to occur in a mythological or other-worldly context. The sodomite was placed in the same category as werewolves, beasts, and sorcerers. A common myth of the time reveals the
sodomite as the result of a witch's union with the Devil. In some writings the Devil himself was ashamed and even fearful of this child, which reveals just what a loathsome thing the sodomite was seen to be. Bray goes on to discuss the issue of sodomy being linked to papists; the Jesuits in particular. Homosexuality was also often blamed for natural disasters.

Bray continues his study of homosexuality with a look at its place in the social setting of the time. The literature of the day reveals the sodomite to be a "young man-about-town, with his mistress on one arm and his 'catamite' on the other; he is indolent, extravagant and debauched." Bray cautions the reader that the satirist's portrayal of homosexuals is not a convincing source for social history, though. Many of their descriptions are inaccurate due to literary influence and political bias. Bray does say, however, that the satires of the time are "most convincing when supported by other evidence unconnected with them" such as poetry and drama, pamphlets and popular ballads, court records, as well as the remarks of historians and theologians of the time. Bray notes that, while such records can be valuable, they can also be misleading. Bray goes on to discuss the places in which homosexuality was institutionalized, the first being the rural household. For an unmarried servant within the household, homosexuality was an advantageous alternative to premarital heterosexual intercourse. It was advantageous in the fact that there was no danger in arousing the interest of the local Justices of the Peace as a result of the birth of illegitimate children. This alternative was made easier by the common practice of male servants sleeping together. Homosexual relations between a master and his servant also seem to have been a widespread institution. Bray also discusses the educational system,
homosexual prostitution, and the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre as other forms of institutionalized homosexuality. Bray notes that what seems to have determined the features of homosexual relationships was not homosexuality itself, but the distribution of power, be it economic or social. Bray also discusses, in some depth, the ways in which some individuals attempted to justify their behavior. One of these ways was to avoid recognizing one’s behavior for what it really was. Avoiding identifying oneself as a sodomite was not very hard, at this time in history, because of the fact that the conventional image of the sodomite was so distant from everyday life. The social forms that homosexuality took were not distinctive of homosexuality. This fact was to change greatly by the end of the century. The transformation that took place is the subject of Bray’s fourth, and final, chapter. In this chapter the author examines, in great detail, the institution of the infamous “molly house.” London was home to many of these private rooms or houses in which “mollies,” or sodomites, met for drinking, dancing, and homosexual relations. What made the molly houses so different from the brothels of the seventeenth century was the way in which the “mollies” became a distinctive subculture. “Mollies” frequently acted in a very effeminate manner and even dressed in drag. They had their own distinctive ways of dressing, talking, and gesturing that distinguished themselves from the rest of society. With the “mollies,” new meanings were being attached to homosexuality. It was more than a sexual act. Homosexuality was now something that could be recognized. The fact that it was so easily seen is what led to its intense persecution, which was carried out, in respect to the molly houses, in a series of raids that dissolved the houses for a time. Bray notes that these new
conceptions of homosexuality is just one example of the striking change in mentality and popular ways of thought that characterized the late seventeenth century.

Alan Bray's analysis of homosexuality during England's Renaissance is extremely informative and highly effective. As Bray states in his introduction, one of his primary goals in the writing of this book is to show the transformation that homosexuality had undergone by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Bray's goal was to accomplish this task by means of contrast. In my opinion Bray is successful in achieving this goal. Chapter four goes into great detail regarding the profound changes that took place amongst homosexuals. The ways in which the "mollies" became their own subculture was discussed at length. Bray interspersed these new revelations with constant reminders of what the institution of homosexuality had formerly been. This contrasting served to emphasize the incredible transformation that had taken place in the span of only fifty years. The fact that Bray had already done such a wonderful job in clearly and coherently presenting the aspects of homosexuality, in the earlier part of the century, only served to further emphasize the changes.

The author's use of resource materials is amazing and, from what is written, one can tell that his research was obviously very extensive. Though the book is not very long, Bray does an incredible job in touching upon all relevant areas. For each type of resource material, it seems, he discusses not only the ways in which they are helpful in a study such as his, but also the ways in which the material could possibly be misleading. For example, in his discussion of the use of court records as a resource, Bray does not jump to any hasty conclusions based on the minimal amount of evidence he has before him. Instead Bray reveals to the reader the problems that can arise when
using such a resource, and sites reasons why "any statistical analysis is out of the question," as a result of the fragmentary nature of the records. Bray then goes on to discuss the ways in which such a resource can be made useful, in spite of its problems, and the ways in which he, as a researcher, must read such documents in order to extract the most out of them. In this way he is not only making his claims more credible but he is also dispensing, to the reader, some valuable pointers in regard to research.

Another element of Bray's writing style that is greatly appreciated is the fact that throughout the book he is constantly anticipating the questions that a reader may have. He asks them in his writing and then proceeds to answer. He points out any discrepancies in his resources and addresses them immediately. An example of this can be found in Bray's discussion of molly houses in chapter four. Bray claims that the episodes of intense persecution and destruction of the molly houses are interspersed with long periods of relative calm during which they re-flourished. Bray notes that the explanation given for this was that during this time the molly houses were hidden and when they were discovered they "cleaned up." Bray, in light of his earlier claims of a highly extensive network of molly houses and their extravagant culture, raises the point that it is "highly improbable" that the molly houses "could have managed to remain hidden for so many years." He then asks himself, "How could such a thing have been hidden?" Bray anticipates this as a logical question that a reader may ask, and he proceeds to answer it. In such ways Bray reveals to the reader that he has been paying attention and has considered the implications of his claims. Bray tries to point out any possible contradictions in his information and then address them in a manner that makes the reader more clear. It is in such ways that the author makes his claims more
readily believable by the reader. One is given the sense that the author has really "done his homework" and can therefore be trusted.

Bray incorporates a handful of illustrations in his book. These illustrations are taken from books and pamphlets of the seventeenth and eighteenth century that directly correspond with what the author is discussing. As with any book, it is helpful to have a visual depiction of what is being discussed. These images, and their captions, greatly enhance one's reading experience.

Another important aspect of Bray's book is the inclusion of thorough endnotes. Though most of these are merely source citations, there are also many that supply the reader with a great deal of extra information. Some of these notes provide some extra information on a certain author whose works Bray refers to. In others Bray includes some more poetry and further explanation. Some of the end notes are quite extensive. For example, a note in the fourth chapter consists of nearly three pages of extra information, including the details of an opposing point of view. Such thoroughly detailed endnotes serve the purpose of making certain points and claims clearer for the reader. I found these notes to be of great value in that they made more sense out of certain issues or claims that were touched upon only briefly.

Alan Bray's book was a very thorough treatment of the subject of homosexuality in Renaissance England. There is nothing I can think of that, by eliminating or adding, would improve upon the author's work. Bray's main points are presented and explained in a way that is clear and logical. His arguments are meticulously supported in a way that leaves the reader convinced of his accuracy. All aspects of Bray's analysis combine to make for an enjoyable and informative read.