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Edited by

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Resolve to be thyself; and know that he who finds himself, loses his misery.

Matthew Arnold, 1852

It seems certain that a femininely functioning brain can occupy a male body, and *vice versa*.

Jas G. Kiernan, M.D., 1891

Una nuova coscienza si formò in lui: tutta la tela di un passato mai conosciuto si distese d'innanzi a suoi occhi: delle memorie pure e soavi di cui egli non poteva aver fecondata la sua vita vennero a turbare dolcemente la sua anima. Erano memorie di un primo amore, di una prima colpa; ma di un amore più gentile e più elevato che egli non avesse sentito, di una colpa più dolce e più generosa che egli non avesse commesso. La sua mente spaziava in un mondo di affetti ignorato, percorreva regioni mai viste, evocava dolcezze mai conosciute.

Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, 1869

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

This collection of ten scholarly essays deals, in accordance with its title, with the theme of homosexuality in nineteenth century Italy, or, rather, in the "long" Italian nineteenth century, from 1789 to 1919. The French Revolution initiated the process of the unification of Italy, a long and tormented path that eventually culminated in the Italian victory in 1919, and the extension of the national borders so as to include territories that, since then, belonged first to the Italian Kingdom, and, from 1945, to the Italian Republic.

The unification of Italy was a political process that took place when Italian society, culture, customs, and usages were dramatically changing, under the influence of local and foreign movements. For a long period of time, historiography almost exclusively dealt with the political aspects of the Italian nineteenth century. Over the last decades, however, social, cultural, and intellectual historians have begun to take into account many other facets of a very complex century, a time in which Italian society, apparently "frozen" since time immemorial, rapidly altered. Modernity clashed with tradition(s), and the long, overwhelming presence of Catholicism slowly faded.

Almost inevitably, Italian society in its entirety, in all its components, from peasants to noblemen, from the clergy to the middle class, the emerging "*borghesia*"—especially in the North—had to confront new ideologies, philosophies, fashions and ideals, which eventually brought about a substantial change, and, over a long period, the definitive transformation of Italian society.

The sphere, or realm, of sexuality was not immune from those abrupt and unexpected changes. The century of secularisation also secularised, so to speak, the sexual life of the Italians. Rigid Catholic morality abandoned the scene, and a freer sexuality was enjoyed—beyond the traditional boundaries of the married couple—by larger and larger portions of the Italian population. A revolution in sexuality—certainly still affecting the urban masses more than to the majority of Italian people, who were mostly still farmers—had, as a collateral effect, a multiplication of the genders. Italians, as never before, and rarely afterward, multiplied their sexual identities. The division male/female traditional became outworn, and, in some circles, even went out of fashion. Homosexuals, bisexuals, transvestites,

transgenders, hermaphrodites, and other creatures of uncertain sexual and personal identity, powerfully enter the Italian panorama.

This is, beyond doubt, a global phenomenon. The age of positivism, scientism, psychoanalysis, atheism and secularisation affected the whole world, from the USA to Japan, in an extremely dramatic way. The combination of traditional society, agricultural economy, and social control by the Catholic Church, made Italy both more open to rapid changes, and more reluctant to accept them. This contradiction is only ostensive. More than ever, nineteenth century Italy is a state, or before 1870, a "number of little states", whose citizens cluster in very different mutually exclusive classes, an emerging urban middle class, on the one hand, and, on the other, the relatively immutable mass of farmers. The changes affected the urban, cultivated, learned bourgeoisie. Sexual "perversions," new ways to think about sex and practice it accordingly, new genders, rebellious—as well as outrageous—behaviours and attitudes marked the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the first decades of the following. With the end of WWI, and the advent of Fascism in 1922, an extremely impoverished and destitute country was in desperate need of new values. Fascism meant, above all, and at least initially, a powerful *rappelle à l'ordre*. As such, in a line of thought (and action) which inspired Nazism and other dictatorships, Fascism aimed at "purifying" Italian morality, by getting rid of the burdens of past centuries, from *Dekadenz* to nihilism, from sentimentalism to eroticism. Homosexuality, transvestitism, and other forms of sexual "deviations" met with growing disapproval. Fascism was the apex of social and intellectual trends firmly established in Italy since the early nineteenth century, and more intensively after unification (1861). While a number of intellectuals were in favour of laxity and promiscuity, the official state-driven science, sociology, criminology, anthropology, condemned those new behaviours. In a normally lay- and occasionally even atheist context, scientists endorsed, *nolens volens*, and re-affirmed the "old", traditional Catholic morality. They even reinforced those moral views in that they saw homosexuals, and other "deviants," as a threat to society more than to morality, as powerfully disruptive elements in a social order that had to be preserved by all means.

The storm brought about by the French Revolution and its lay ideology was obviously apparent. Even lay champions of the new secularised state eventually fought a fierce battle against "anomies," irregularities of whatever sort. Social control and a fight for uniformity, once the task of Catholicism, became, almost unaltered, that of laymen defenders of the new

independent—also from the Church, not just from foreign dominations—Italian state.

This collection of essays attempts to shed light on "homosexuality" and forms of less traditional sexuality, by approaching the theme from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary angles, so as to tackle an elusive subject in the most convincing and detailed way, and through a panoramic view.

In the introductory essay, the three editors of this volume, Lorenzo Benadusi, Paolo L. Bernardini, and Paola Guazzo, address general questions related to nineteenth century Italian history and historiography. They also address some revealing, typical cases in the rich and blurred panorama of nineteenth century Italian sexualities. The aim of the introductory essay is to discuss, but above all, to present both new trends in historiography, relevant to the theme of the volume, and the complexity of the subject itself, by showing and commenting upon some particular situations and personalities.

In the first chapter of the volume, Laura Schettini sheds light on the key subject of sexual ambiguity. The essay amply demonstrates the interaction between urban cultures and sub-cultures, in this case related to "low life" and the slums that grew along with the new cities, and individual destinies. Schettini's focus on some criminal cases, in particular that of a certain Giuseppe B., accused of a number of crimes. The new urban scenery, the need for money to survive in dire times and contexts, brings about a true revolution in Europe, but especially in Italy, where urbanisation is a recent phenomenon.

Charlotte Ross, in the second essay of the present collection, deals with the work and ideas of Paolo Mantegazza. Mantegazza (1831-1910), was one of the most famous and appreciated scientists in the age of the Italian unification, and was also a fervent patriot and staunch defender of the political entity born out of the *Risorgimento*. He was one of the most enthusiastic among Italian supporters of Darwin's theories. Mantegazza's positions on same-sex relations, especially lesbian, are extremely ambiguous, and certainly mirror the difficulties that the new science had to face when dealing with new behaviours in a rapidly changing society. In any case, even if Mantegazza tried to explain, more than condemn, the new sexual behaviors, he was a conservative who tried to "educate" and enlighten the new Italian citizens, giving them ample arguments in favour of "traditional" sexuality.

Mantegazza's ambiguous attitudes towards same-sex, lesbian relations, find an echo in the large body of literary works produced in Italy on

homosexual themes, and with gay and lesbian characters, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the advent of Fascism.

In her essay, Maya De Leo examines the literary image, or myth, of the woman-vampire. Lesbian sexuality, in the work of several minor or not-so-minor authors, was connected with vampirism. What at the beginning was an expression of moral condemnation slowly became a way to titillate the imagination, and a true sub-genre of lesbian fiction, for the very interested feminine as well as masculine readership, that was as popular as it was dangerous. It is worth recalling that the nineteenth century saw not only a change and diversification in the number of genders, but also, and primarily, the emergence of new roles and images of woman as such.

The problem of identifying sexual and homosexual identities emerges in the essay of Giovanni Dall'Orto, the fourth in this collection. Dall'Orto examines the complex layers that constitute the real and ideal types of male homosexual. He begins with a discussion of the "Mediterranean model," which recurs so often in our book, in so many instances and forms; later on, Dall'Orto confronts the vast literature on Italian homosexuality so as to debunk common bias, as well as to highlight common grounds and starting points. He finally describes the evolution of the Mediterranean model, subject to the influences of fashions, and cultural twists and turns.

Barbara Pozzo, in her essay—the fifth chapter of this volume—deals with the legal context. Pozzo outlines the guidelines of nineteenth-century legislation on homosexuality, normally within criminal codes, and reconstructs the eighteenth-century background and ideological origins of those legislations. Without the Enlightenment, and the changes in legal attitudes which the movement brought about—thus reflecting the general changes in mentality and attitudes of late modern society, on the eve of the French Revolution—the Italian codes of the nineteenth century would not have been more tolerant towards practices such as homosexuality, as well as suicide. Pozzo shows, however, how difficult the process of Italian legal codification and juridical modernisation, actually was. The same code could have different geographical applications, and, even with respect to homosexual practices, the different Italian legal backgrounds, as well as legal sources—deeply rooted in a long past of mostly foreign dominations—mirror, once again, the different, contrasting, contradictory socio-political realities that, by an act of violence, were forcefully unified from 1859 to 1919.

While a legal context is of paramount importance for understanding the plight and lore of homosexuals and homosexuality in nineteenth-century Italy—as well as everywhere else—it is also necessary to critically analyse

some peculiar places, cities or small towns, that are anthropologically and culturally related to homosexual practices and traditions.

The two subsequent essays in the collection—the sixth and the seventh chapter respectively—deal with two "special places" in the history of Italian, or rather, Mediterranean homosexuality.

Eugenio Zito deals with island of Capri. A sea resort since Roman times, a splendid gem of the Mediterranean, Capri was a playground not only for rich Germans and British looking for sexual adventures; it was also the place where genders were perpetually looking for a definite fixation, or identity. Zito demonstrates well the ambiguity of the local population, vis-à-vis foreigners, and amongst themselves. In this essay, the links between aesthetic and the erotic strongly surface. The same idea of "beauty" has several applications, and as many nuances.

From an anthropological perspective, Mauro Bolognari deals with the Sicilian historical city and sea resort of Taormina. This is the object of the ninth chapter of this book. Taormina presents many similarities, and a number of variations, compared to Capri. Bolognari analyses sexual behaviours in Taormina in relation to the life and activities of Baron von Gloeden, a quite eccentric figure, photographer, and German nobleman born in 1856, who died in Taormina in 1931. How did the locals react to the presence of "Barone Guglielmo"? Was he trying to sexually abuse, or exploit, the young men of Taormina? How is "art," in this case photography, related to sex and sexuality, along with a sort of Orientalism in action? Bolognari undertakes an in-depth investigatigation of the web of social relations in the area, and the relevant historical, as well as cultural framework. The portrait of Taormina which emerges from the essay and the personality of von Gloeden, are fascinating, full of ambiguities, and quite telling of the impact of foreign ideas, techniques, and personality, in a small village of fishermen, later totally transformed by the tourist industry.

The essay that follows this—the eighth chapter of the book—by Ilaria Bohm, deals with the "Italian background" of the famous relationship between Violet Edmonstone and Vita Sackville-West. Once again, places and athmosphere determine a sexual and sentimental relationship. A tale of tormented homoerotic love finds one of its settings in Bordighera. The Italian Riviera, close to the French border, plays a role in shaping sentiments and approaches between the two British women. Life and literature intertwine.

The ninth and final chapter, by Lorenzo Benadusi, deals with the changes, somewhat epochal and definitely substantial, brought about by WWI. Did the fights in trenches, the triumph of masculine prowess, affect

the same notion, and the moral evaluation of homosexuality? Benadusi is very cautious in determining the real bearing of those changes, and keen to establish the actual conditions in which homosexual behaviours emerge, more or less stygmatised by society. Certainly, the First World War caused major turmoil, and strong changes, in Italian society and culture. A new sensibility, new approaches to life and literature, as well as the dramatic economic crisis, not only paved the way for Fascism, but also brought about substantial changes in mentality and attitudes. Those changes, the new dire situation, affected the practice of homosexuality, and the societal, as well as individual attitudes towards it.

This volume might have ended here. However, we decided to include a final essay, not as a chapter, but rather as an appendix. It is a short essay, in Italian, by Antonio Castronuovo. Castronuovo, an established writer and essayist, deals with, or rather debunks the myth of a homosexual Pinocchio. It is a fascinating flight into the mysteries of one of the masterpieces, or rather, of the most read and known works of Italian literature, no less important and famous than *I promessi sposi* by Manzoni, or *Il bel Paese* by Antonio Stoppani, works where homosexuality is strictly banned.

While this collection covers substantially many aspects and facets of the subjects, shedding light on some key ideas and personalities, mentalities, places and settings, much ground is left to be covered. This is true, however, for many themes and subjects in the vast social, anthropological, economic and cultural history of nineteenth century Italy. Shaken and stirred up by the unification process, Italy was, even more than by unity, shattered by social, cultural, and intellectual storms, coming from Protestant culture, atheistic philosophies, literary currents and, from within, from the demographic explosion, its cognate phenomenon of mass migration, and the loss of power suffered by the Church, at least toppled as a centralised power.

New ideas clashed with old traditions that died hard. The new sexualities, the many genders, many more than three—the colours of the Italian flag—that emerged, are both a symbol of modernity and characters in a mighty drama, that counted all the layers as characters, and the two traditional genders, that comprised the traditional backbone of Italian society.

The storm of modernity is still, for better or worse, ravaging Italian society, and the process of modernisation is far from being a foregone acquisition, or a stable advancement.

—L.B., P.L.B, E.B., P.G., October 2016

NOTE ON THE COVER IMAGE

Vincenzo Gemito was one of the most eccentric, tormented, and underrated sculptors of the *Ottocento*. Born in Naples in 1852, since the very beginning of his long career (he died in 1929) he stood up against academic sculpture, and formed a circle of "rebels", which included artists such as a Vincenzo Buonocore, Ettore Ximenes, Giovanni Battista Amendola, Achille D'Orsi. He suffered from mental illness, had a complex personal life, and spent a long time in Capri to recover. He was immensely prolific, and able to depict in the most realistic way not only himself—there is a very great number of self-portraits, with different techniques and styles—but also the society that surrounded him; Neapolitan lower classes, fishermen, gamblers, tramps. Although his works were not meant to titillate homosexual instincts, or to address customers interested in the ideal type of the Mediterranean boy (sexual prey), they can certainly serve this scope too. His "scugnizzi," Neapolitan boys of the lower classes, made him famous all over Europe. In terms of his personal life, we know that early in his life had a special friend, Antonio Mancini, alias Totonno, a boy of his age who probably inspired Gemito when he sculpted his first masterpiece, "Il giocatore di carte" [The Card player] in 1868.

"Il pescatore"—later reproduced in several other sculptures, with a number of variations—was a bronze piece which Gemito sculpted in his new atelier in the Archeological Museum of Naples. Alphonse Goupil, quite an influential critic in Paris, opened the golden doors of the "Salons" to him. At the Salon of 1877 he exhibited his works of 1874-1876, the young fisherman sitting on a rock, holding his catch in his hands; a small fish. The success was enormous. Gemito moved to live in France, with his wife and his friend Totonno, leading a *menage à trois*, quite smoothly, in Poissy.

"Il pescatore" is a masterpiece, combining elements of classical sculpture with free invention, irony, and sensuality. The extreme realism verges on the realms of pure imagination. It comes as no surprise that many authors, including the famous writer Alberto Savinio (*Narrate, uomini, la vostra storia*, 1942) devoted pages to his authors, as an icon of Mediterranean *sensiblerie* and Italian realism, as a great master relating everyday life as "heaven inhabited by devils" (according to Benedetto Croce) that was Naples at that time.

Among several descriptions of the sculpture at the Bargello in Florence—a reproduction is displayed at the Lourdes, too—the short one by American sculptor and artist Kelly Borsheim stands out for clarity, introspection, and the ability to catch, so to speak, the "soul" of this bronze:

> I love the natural gesture of this bronze figure sculpture. I like that the patina is not what my foundry calls "cowboy brown" or worse—shiny. I love the way the boy's toes are gripping the mound he is squatting on. I can remember this feeling of slowly sliding down the side of the muddy river bank, while trying not to.
>
> I love how the fingers of the boy's left hand radiate out from the palm, while he uses his right hand to get a better grip on the slippery fish. I adore his exaggerated downcast eyelashes that catch the light enough to show off the boy's concentrated face. The lips? I cannot decide if they are exhaling with the gripping effort of his hands or if he is inhaling with the thought of "I gotcha!"

If one compares Gemito's works, with, for instance, the frescoes of the "Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn" of Naples, it is possible to begin to reconstruct a universe of (hidden, nuanced, complex) homosexuality, or rather, sexuality, in contemporary Naples. The frescoes, depicting mostly anglers, are the results of the joint efforts of a German homosexual couple, Hans von Marées and Adolf von Hildebrand, and were completed within a few months in 1873 of, in the same year as, Gemito's fisher-boy.

It is very likely that the same creator of the Zoological Station, the scientist, and notable champion of Darwin's theories, Felix Anton Dohrn (1840-1909), had an interest for same-sex relations. In his youth, he extensively roamed sea resorts, and islands, always with male friends. He visited Helgoland with Erst Haeckel, Millport in Scotland with David Robertson, and spent the winter of 1868 in Messina, Sicily, with another friend, the Russian scientist Nicolai Miklukho-Maklai. It was in Messina that they conceived of filling the world with "Zoological Stations"- half hotel, half laboratory, opened to all the scientists of the world interested in proving the truth of Darwin's theory.

The "Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn" is still open and active in Naples.

INTRODUCTION

IN THE SHADOW OF J. J. WINCKELMANN: HOMOSEXUALITY IN ITALY DURING THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

LORENZO BENADUSI
PAOLO L. BERNARDINI
ELISA BIANCO
PAOLA GUAZZO

Aims and structure of the introductory essay

This introduction, written jointly by the three editors of the volume, aims primarily at defining the subject of the present work within the broader context of Italian historiography of the long nineteenth century. By "Italian historiography" of the "long nineteenth century," we mean historiography, written by Italian as well as non-Italian scholars, about Italy before and after its unification; roughly from 1789 to the end of WWI (1919).[1]

Obviously, this volume does not, and cannot, cover all the possible aspects and facets of the several topics related to homosexuality. Even if

[1] This volume was first conceived in May 2013. Since then, the literature on homosexuality in the long nineteenth century, in Italy and elsewhere, grew quite substantially. The editors could not take into account, obviously, all the most recent developments on the subject, as well as in the field in general. Since this introduction, however, was the last piece of the volume to be written, some of the most recent literature on this subject is discussed, or at least hinted at, here. We wish to thank, for their invaluable help in the final stage of the preparation of the manuscript, Prof. Dr. Elisa Bianco and Dr. Francesco Mascellino, both at the University of Insubria (Como, Italy).

we chronologically limit, as we indeed do, the extent of the research, there are so many sub-themes, figures, writings, events and debates related to homosexuality in Italy from 1789-1919, that it would be impossible to address all of them, unless an extensive encyclopedic work were to be compiled. These papers touch upon a good number of subjects, inviting, at the same time, fellow scholars to conduct further research. In this introduction, however, we intend also to offer a rather comprehensive overview of the subject and beyond that, of the implications, and perspectives, of the research on homosexuality; as a practice, and in theory, as a crime, and as a free act after 1889, the year of the new, and quite innovative, Italian Criminal Code.

In so doing, we mention, and briefly discuss, some figures and sub-themes not dealt with extensively (or at all) in the papers of the present collection, or elsewhere in the growing literature on this theme. We understand that this is unusual for an introductory paper, but we also agree with each other that this choice can be regarded as a further research aid, and stimulate discussion, even if we deliberately infringe upon the standard rules of an introduction, turning it, at least partially, into an autonomous essay or paper. This introduction therefore serves the goal of introducing both the subject and the papers, in as much the papers presented cover some of the infinite aspects of the subject.

The "*Ottocento*": Limits and perspectives of traditional historiography

The study of the Italian "*Ottocento*," the long nineteenth century beginning with the French Revolution, in 1789, and ending with the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, has traditionally and what is more, strongly, been oriented toward political and economic history. Contrary to other European states, Britain, France, and Spain, for instance, Italy, along with Germany and Greece and other states (including all the Latin American ones), was created as it is now, as a single unified State, during the long nineteenth century. The French Revolution paved the way for the Napoleonic occupation of Italy, which reshuffled the Italian borders after a long time, giving birth, *inter alia*, to the first, albeit ephemeral, state bearing the name of "*Repubblica Italiana*" (1802-1805). Under various labels, "*Risorgimento*," "*Unificazione nazionale*," "Creation of Italy," the process of state-formation which ended in 1861, when the Kingdom of Savoy was rendered the Kingdom of Italy, to last until 1948, drew almost the exclusive attention of Italian as well as non-Italian historiography. Most historians who dealt with the "*Ottocento*," attended to the unification

process; mainstream, centralist historiography views, and continues to view, this process favourably, while a growing number of historians dissent, and form a "revisionist" school that challenges the ways unification was actually implemented, as well as its immediate and long-term outcomes. The "invention" of Italy, as one of its moderate critics—Roberto Martucci— in a much discussed book, claimed that the unification process occupies the historiographical efforts of those who still deem the unified State, modelled after the first Republic of France, a good and viable political entity. "Dissenters," revisionist historians, on the contrary, by highlighting all the past and present problems of this state, endorse, more or less explicitly, a number of parties and movements aimed at "*re-thinking* Italy."[2]

Some of those movements and small parties are in favour of a federal State, others champion a confederate state, while others still, more radical, are fighting for the independence of Veneto, Sardinia, Lombardy, Sicily, Trentino and Friuli, thus paving the way for a potential, long-term, dissolution of the Italian State created in 1861. All these divergent positions returned to the stage, powerfully, with the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the unification, in 2011. A number of historians began to open the perspectives, by working not only on the "State", but also on the Italian "Nation", notably Alberto Mario Banti, probably the most important Italian historian of the "Risorgimento" active in Italy today.[3]

Beyond the Italian borders, nineteenth-century historians focused on subjects still relevant only to the Italian unification process, including culture and language. The most comprehensive and recent synthesis of the Italian "*Ottocento*", *The Force of Destiny*, by a British historian, Christopher Duggan (2007) (who unfortunately passed away while we were writing this introductory essay, in November 2015, at the age of 58) is still centered upon the political, cultural, social and economic events which eventually caused Italy to become, from a "geographical expression" (like "Scandinavia"), a real State.[4] It is a good example of conservative, traditional historiography, since, after all, the birth of the

[2] See Roberto Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1992).

[3] See Alberto M. Banti, *Sublime madre nostra. La Nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al Fascismo* (Roma: Laterza, 2011); and Banti, *La nazione nel Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore all'origine dell'Italia unita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000).

[4] See Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny. A History of Italy since 1796* (London: Allen Lane, 2007). American edition, 2008.

new Italian state is considered by Duggan something which is actually needed and overall positive.

At the same time, writers and historians, from Veneto to Sicily, once again powerfully challenged the unification process, reaching a wider audience than ever before, as in the case of a best-selling author, Pino Aprile, the author of the best-seller (and long-time seller) *Terroni*, or the journalist Giordano Bruno Guerri.

On the one hand, historiography's intense focus on the political aspects of Italian history in the long nineteenth century has shed light on a variety of events, figures, processes, so that very little territory remains uncovered by books, articles, or symposia. On the other hand, cultural, intellectual, and (for some areas) social history of that period, in spite of a growing number of works, has been marginalised by political history, or, in a number of ways, as only a subject of investigation only because it relates to, and interplays with politics. The Italian "*Ottocento*" was no less rich, in terms of culture, and intellectual life, than, to quote but one example, Victorian England. The latter, however, heir of a well-defined and stable state spanning centuries, and the centre of the most powerful empire in world history along with the Roman Empire, has been the subject of plenty of cultural and intellectual researches. The same for France. The attempt to re-examine even Italian political history of the long nineteenth century by shedding light on hitherto neglected subjects in cultural, social history, and the history of mentalities and ideologies, can be extremely rewarding, both in terms of outcomes, and of methodology.

Suicide, homosexuality, and other "anomies"

This volume is part of a project—undertaken by the Chair in Early Modern and Modern European History at the University of Insubria, Como—that examines "marginal" or apparently less substantial subjects in Italian history of the long nineteenth century. Among the first outcomes of this project, a volume on suicide that precedes this one, and, in a number of ways, deals with a very similar theme.[5]

Suicide and homosexuality, as forms of "anomies," to quote the French sociologist Durkheim, who wrote at the end of the nineteenth century and was powerfully influenced by Italian authors and medical schools, and

[5] See *Voglio Morire! Suicide in Italian Literature, Society and Culture 1789-1919*, eds. Paolo L. Bernardini, Anita Virga (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013).

referred, to be precise, only to "suicide", cognate phenomena. In the context of modern and pre-modern Italy, before and after the unification of 1861, they both powerfully reveal the contradictions, tensions, antagonisms and dead ends of Italian society, at the crossroad of modernity.

Italy, on the eve of unification, and right up to the present day, is a fragile compound torn among a number of different powers. "Unified" ideally centuries ago by the Catholic Church, but, at the same time, also over centuries, divided politically among a number of fiercely competing states, and foreign occupations, during the long nineteenth century she is exposed to strong, pervasive conflicts. The leading, most substantial one, reflecting in itself all—or almost all—the others, is that opposing the State (in-the-making) and the different, existent states, to the Catholic Church. In the shadow of this conflict, a number of others emerge, never definitely resolved.

One crucial contradiction, as stressed in his long career by Gianfranco Miglio, is that between the legal system of the Savoy Kingdom on the one hand, applied, after 1861, to all the little or not so little states incorporated into the newly established Kingdom of Italy, with a number of exceptions—including the decriminalisation vs. criminalisation of homosexuality, as we will see in this volume—and the multiple, various local legal traditions, on the other.

Within this major conflict, however, another stands out. It is the conflict between the Catholic, "traditional" elements (or even "soul," in some cases) of the ancient Italian codes, or legal traditions, and the new French-style of codification. This conflict becomes evident when the Criminal Code of the Savoy Kingdom had to be applied all over Italy. The Savoy Code of 1839 was a very conservative code, very much influenced by Catholic doctrines, and included the criminalisation not only of suicide—decriminalised in a number of European states, including France, a while since—but also of homosexuality. When the Italian state had to extend the validity of this code to the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, conquered and annexed in 1860, legislators—but especially politicians—decided not to apply the articles related to homosexuality to Sicily and Campania. Were the Bourbon laws and customs more "liberal" and tolerant than their Savoy counterparts? When the Zanardelli Code of 1889 simply ignored homosexuality—*de facto* and *de iure*, thus, decriminalising it—can we say what was said when the Greek customs, much more refined than the Romans, overwhelmed the latter, slowly but definitely, i.e.: *Graecia* (or rather: *Magna Graecia*) *ferum victorem cepit*?

This is only one of questions posed, and possibly answered, in this volume. These are crucial problems in the century of unification. While

Catholic morality, more or less reflected in codes, but certainly strongly present and pervasive in society, customs, uses, with different nuances, and occasionally major differences according to geography and local traditions, fought its battle against the emergent state and its twofold drive toward secularisation, other, "foreign" cultural factors and actors enter the Italian scene. This arrival does not simplify, but rather complicates, the panorama. Italy becomes the playground, and battleground, for different modes, ideologies and customs, in the storm caused by the secularisation process and the fiercely ambiguous resistance to it. Is the legal decriminalisation, eventually, both of suicide and homosexuality, a victory of secularisation, and does this mark the end of the fight? In fact, this is not the case.

The end of a juridical process does not mute the social tensions, stigmas and pressures, and if the condemnation does not come from a tribunal, it comes from society. Fascism, in its attitudes both towards suicide, and especially towards homosexuality, as one of the editors of this volume has shown, brings back to the fore all the knots of Italian history, certainly not severed or somehow suppressed by a simple political act, namely of "unifying" Italy.[6]

While the past comes back with a vengeance, with Fascism and its ambiguous, interesting relations with the Church, the Italian scene, in the long nineteenth century, is extremely vivid, for all these conflicts at least have a clear outcome.

There is a variety of extremely interesting positions, events, figures, tragedies, and comedies that take all place under the Mediterranean sun, as far as homosexuality concerned.

The state/church tensions are at a certain point overshadowed by the emergence of Positivism, and the old Catholic and Protestant negative attitudes against suicide, and homosexuality (and a number of other behaviours), are first demolished, and later on analysed, in a lay- and "technical" fashion, by the "new science." The scene is devastatingly fascinating. What happens in Italy, thanks to her dialectical history, her long-term contradictions, her being the unfortunate playground for combatants of different ideological, as well as real, armies, make the peninsula and the Italian islands an exception in a rather dull (if compared) European scenario. Under this perspective, the political events are overshadowed by the "life of the spirit," to quote Hegel. Political events

[6] See Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man. Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

might well influence this "life," but leave ample space for a tensions and ideas, offspring of the former. Our present is still full of this embarrassing inheritance.

To give but three examples: Does the strong homophobia present in southern Italy, even among the youth, come from a reaction to a traditional laxity towards homosexuality, that was at the origins the stereotype of homosexuality as "the Italian vice," or rather the "Mediterranean vice" with reference to central and southern Italy, and some "Northern" exceptions, like Venetian "gondoliers," or the students of the University of Padua?

Or else, does the idea of the "Latin lover," a truly heterosexual performer, originate from the reaction to the identification of the homosexual as "inverted," "*invertito*," born and bred by Italian sociology?

Or, finally, does the idea of the (Italian) Mediterranean as a "place of vice", remotely or less remotely relate to a conception of the "South," bordering Orientalism, as a place of laxity, including legal laxity, for the Bourbon laws did permit homosexuality, and even the Savoy code admitted the exception (thus, respecting the local traditions), when the central government decided not to apply to Sicily, Campania, Calabria, Puglia and Basilicata (and also Sardinia, where the Criminal Code was not extended at all) the articles of the 1839 Criminal Code otherwise applied in northern Italy?

Historiography re-awakens: new trends in Italian historical research

The objective importance of the theme "sexuality-homosexuality," and its vibrant, international, contradictory Italian setting, before and after the unification, inevitably brought historians and critics to the study of this subject. As homosexuals, conceived of as a "minority," all over the world, suffer from discrimination related to homophobia, it is quite natural that a number of writers approached the history of homosexuality from a very "engaged," occasionally polemical, perspective. This is true also of the nineteenth century, although, for a number of reasons, the twentieth, and the current century, are also at the centre of historiography debate. In Italy, we must first mention the immense work carried out most recently by Giovanni Dall'Orto, and, in the past, by Massimo Consoli (1945-2007). Both non-professional historians, they wrote extensively on homosexuality in history, aiming at the broader public and with keen attention to detail, figures, and events. Their form and style of writing, polemically and politically engaged, did not and do not ignore accuracy and offers,

particularly in Giovanni Dall'Orto's last monumental work, a deep and panoramic understanding and overview of homosexuality and homosexuals, gay and lesbian, in Italian history, with a notable focus on the nineteenth century.[7]

Thanks to Consoli and Dall'Orto, we can now approach and study a variety of characters, and events, linked to homosexuality (and its enemies) on Italian soil. To Massimo Consoli, among other things, we owe the reappraisal of such an epoch-making figure in the history of homosexuality as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895). Ulrichs was the classical philologist at the origin of the mysterious concept of "*urning*," considered one of the first champions of the gay rights movements, whose life and legacy is indissolubly bound to Italy, where he spent the final years of his troubled life.

Professional historians follow ideological writers, as often happens in cases of delicate, problematic, and "sensitive" issues—homosexuality is the prime example, while suicide is very close— basing their research on the equally immense traditions of the history of sexuality, where Foucault, whose pioneering works nowadays run the risk of being ignored, still keeps the lion's share.

In more recent years, Chiara Beccalossi paved the way for the research on post-unification homosexuality in Italy, with a monograph (comparing Italy and England) and a very recent edited collection.[8]

The collection, published while this book was in the final stage of preparation, approaches the history of "sexuality" in general, in the long nineteenth century. While our approach focuses exclusively on homosexuality, this collection rightly locates homosexuality within the broader concept of "sexuality", with all the implications relevant to this methodological choice. The first historian to stress the exceptional role played by Italy in the debates on homosexuality in the nineteenth century, is probably the doyen in the field of the history of homosexuality, Australian Professor Robert Aldrich (1954).

In a pioneering work of 1993, Aldrich studies the powerful attraction felt by European intellectuals, writers, and especially painters, for the Mediterranean as a place of sexual freedom, where the old classical, Greek

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[7] See Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'altra storia. L'omosessualità dall'antichità al secondo dopoguerra* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 2015).

[8] See *Italian Sexualities Uncovered*, eds. Valeria P. Babini, Chiara Beccalossi, Lucy Riall, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Chiara Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion. Same-sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, c. 1870-1920* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

and Latin tradition, of tolerance, acceptance, or at least "neutrality" with respect to homosexuality, happily mixed with the current tolerant legislation. A legislation that was preserved even after 1889 when the Zanardelli Code repealed the Savoy Code, and was effectively introduced and applied in the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.[9]

Six years later, Ulrichs died in poverty but with the respect of his contemporaries in L'Aquila, a Bourbon city until 1860, while the "*settentrionale*" (he was from Pavia) and Senator Luigi Pissavini was put on trial for homosexuality by the Italian Senate itself in 1888, one year before the implementation of the Zanardelli Code, that, probably, could have saved him from disgrace.[10]

None of these works, however, is a case study. In-depth studies of homosexual practices are more frequent for the Renaissance or even the Middle Ages, with the unrivalled monograph on Renaissance Florence by Michael Rocke, and many others on the various cities, city-states, republican and small political entities that constituted ancient-regime Italy, before 1861.[11]

In this volume, we tried to discover and assess a number of cases, and discuss a number of problems, issues, even paradoxes. However, ours is above all an invitation to further research. As in the case of suicide, the research on homosexuality is *ex se* interdisciplinary. History of science accompanies history of mentalities, legal history goes together with socio-economic history, and the history of literature and the fine arts. For this reason, it is difficult for a single scientist to cover all the ground. Collective works might help, and this may justify, at least partially, the effort in publishing them.

The fact that a reality like Renaissance Florence (or Venice) allows an in-depth study even of homosexuality, is justified on the basis of historical conditions. Florence is a much smaller, much better defined political entity, not only than Italy (after 1861), but also than most of the Italian states after the end of the Renaissance, and the almost complete occupation of Italy by foreign powers after 1559. Other exceptions constituting well defined political entities were the Florentine and Lucca

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[9] See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean. Writing, Art, and Homosexual Fantasy* (London-New York: Routledge, 1993).

[10] One of the editors of the present volume, Paolo L. Bernardini, is currently working on the first edition of the proceedings of the Pissavini Trial, held in their entirety in the Archives of the Italian Senate, section "Regno."

[11] See Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships. Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Republics, of Venice and, partially, Genoa, and the Papal States, where, however, there are less archival sources available, in contrast to Venice and Genoa. What Rocke unveiled, however, was the fact that homosexuality was so widespread in Florence, so as to interest more than half of a population of 43,000, which very telling, obviously, also for the future of Italy, on the eve of, and after, unification. The fight of the Church against sodomy, homosexuality, and the "sins of the flesh" broadly conceived, in the face of a more lay and tolerant state authority is a long story in the Italian lore. Unification shakes a very unstable terrain; it does not in fact change either action or actors. Whatever is new, Positivism and racism in science, Darwin(ism) and Lombroso, or Romanticism and Positivism in arts and literature is solidly grafted onto an existing path, a path that is complex and tormented, since time immemorial.

The homosexuality of the Saint: the case of Giovanni Bosco (1815-1888)

If there are no major tensions between competing powers (normally, the Church and the state), attempting to gain control over a political entity at the expense one of the other party, there are no major intellectuals backing up, with theories and ideologies, those two parties, and, so to speak, life rolls on smoothly. Unfortunately, Italian history is torn by rivalries, and the one we just mentioned, between Church and state(s), mirrors many others, historically, to quote but one, the violent contrast between those championing the Popes, and those defending the absolute rights of the Emperor.

When a balance is finally, painfully found, as in Renaissance Florence, or in Venice, we witness the strange phenomenon of sodomy from one side extremely widespread as a common practice, and, from the other, condemned in theory, and in tribunals, regularly and saliferously. Renaissance Florence was far from politically stable, and the accusation of homosexuality almost inevitably had a political background, rooted in cruel rivalries among the few families ruling the republic. In case of long, political, painful, twisted, tormented evolutions and changes, no agreement can be established between the competitors; no truce reached. Since, for a number of reasons, Italy is still developing, its century of birth, object of our research, offers a number of instances where the conflict explodes.

If in time of quiet, and truce among the competing powers, homosexual practices in the Church—typical of the all-male, or all-female communities, including the army and the navy, or the schools, the hospitals etc.—go unnoticed, much less than demonic contacts or other

exceptional events, in the case of the less quiet *Ottocento*, historians fiercely dispute between the real, imagined, or alltogether absent homosexuality of Giovanni Bosco, a giant in the rich pantheon of the *Risorgimento* saints.

He died in the same year as Senator Luigi Pissavini, 1888, but while Pissavini fell into complete disgrace for his (alleged) homosexual intercourses, Giovanni Bosco, the founder of the mighty Congregation of the Salesiani, true leaders in education at the global level, was beatified and eventually sanctified.

What is interesting, for historiography, is not to assess whether Giovanni Bosco was homosexual, or occasionally had homosexual intercourse, or not at all. What is immensely interesting, and disquieting, is that his alleged homosexuality can be used, from within the Church, and from radical enemies of the Church too, for ideological purposes. The origins, and the first emergence, of most of the contemporary Italian polemics, to a greater or lesser extent fierce or moderate respectively, related to homosexuality, have to be traced back to the long nineteenth century.

This is true for whatever, or almost whatever, affect the current ideological debate in Italy, and struck, deeply, the Italian political consciousness, both on the individual level, and on the more vague and undetermined "national" one. The problem, and the case of Giovanni Bosco is extremely revealing, is not whether homosexual practices actually took place, along with paedophilia, cognate attitudes and relevant behaviours; it is not even whether Bosco's pedagogical ideals, made explicit in hundreds of publications, imply homosexual practices.

What makes homosexuality "problematic" is its own entry into the polar tension originated in competing ideologies of power, which might use homosexuality as a tool, among many others, to defame and eventually defeat the enemy. This peculiarity brings nearer, once again, suicide to homosexuality. With a major difference: while by killing herself-himself, the subject subtracts her/himself from the battle, homosexuals are alive: they can be brought in front of a tribunal, burnt at the stake. This makes a huge difference.

The immense posthumous fortune of Giovanni Bosco, beatified and sanctified from 1929 to 1934, would have been completely different, had he committed suicide. In the end, his sexual behavior was not so important, at least not for the Church, and went unnoticed for a century or so. The importance of his alleged homosexuality lies elsewhere: thanks to it, whether real or fake, the Church and the believers can legitimately re-open the debate on homosexuality and Catholicism, which has been alive,

occasionally dormant, since time immemorial. The long nineteenth century revamps old quarrels, and, above all, reopens extremely old wounds.

The homosexuality of the improvisor: Tommaso Sgricci (1789-1836)

The case of Tommaso Sgricci reveals a number of other issues (not so different from those related to Don Bosco, if seen with a keen eye). He lived a little longer than Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), whose alleged homosexuality occasionally resurfaces: did the miserable young man fall in love with the brilliant Ranieri; did they have a relationship? The myth of Leopardi's homosexuality is similar to the myth of his suicide. Did he kill himself by eating a disproportionate quantity of ice cream that accelerated the decay of his terribly ill body, also affected by diabetes? They are both myths, not so far from a possible reality. Sgricci and Leopardi both lived in the first half of the nineteenth century. The impulse given by political unification; Positivism and Darwinism; phrenology and dandyism; to the theme and status of homosexuality, is dated from 1861 onward. In a way, pre-1861 Italy is a quasi-perfect extension of the Old Regime. This justifies, *inter alia*, the chronology chosen by Beccalossi for her pioneering work. Next to nothing happens before 1861 (this is partially true also for what concerns "suicide" in practices, theory, and even statistics). Homosexual behaviours, should they not cause scandals, were peaceably tolerated, almost everywhere.

Sgricci is the heir of the *siècle des Lumières*, a poet who loved boys more than girls, a common practice for poets and intellectuals in Venice, for instance Lodoli, who often practiced sodomy (incurring in Baffo's satirical condemnation), and also for one of the greatest intellectuals of the Venetian Enlightenment, Francesco Algarotti. Casanova had maybe one or two homosexual affairs, but he does at least partially deny this in his *Mémoires*.

The case of Sgricci, exiled from Rome for his behaviour, accepted back in Habsburg Tuscany, where he died at 47, is very telling of the difficulty in accepting homosexuality in Italian literary histories (in general, for some portions of Italian society). Notoriously and apparently exclusively gay, and with a life strongly determined by his sexuality, Sgricci enjoys a very questionable reputation even today. When, however, his first biographer Ugo Viviani devoted a lengthy book to him in 1928, he did not even mention his homosexuality. During Fascism, homosexuality was taboo, in a sinister parallelism, both for the Church, and the state. Once again, however, as in the case of suicide, can we legitimately ask

ourselves (and in general): Was homosexuality actually *relevant* to his work (and its interpretations)? Is the suicide of a writer relevant to the *understanding* of his/her works? We do not wish to answer such a question. However, we would like to stress the fact that it is an open question which should be addressed.

The long Italian nineteenth century is of paramount importance for all the questions it raises, more than for the answers it gave, all different and in opposition with the other. What is striking in two homosexuals, Sgricci and Ulrichs, mentioned before, whose lives were profoundly tied up with Italy, her present and particularly her past, is their attention to "language"; the linguistic dimensions of life.

For Sgricci, the rich and lively Italian of the "Commedia dell'Arte" and of "*improvvisazione*," the oldest poetic form of expression dating back to Homer; for Ulrichs, Latin, which he wanted to resurrect as a real, spoken language, when the artificiality of Esperanto, Volapuek and other "invented," artificial and unfortunate languages surface in Europe. They were both looking for a "natural" language, defending two traditional, historical languages, like Italian and Latin, for Ulrichs, the latter to be taken away from the Church monopoly.

No wonder that, deprived of their homosexual "element" (which is certainly a scandalous operation in the case of Ulrichs, so intensively devoted to the depiction and identification of a "third sex" in a number of writings), they are mostly remembered for sexually neutral features. The first was for being the last "*improvvisatore*," the latter on the contrary, for being the champion of the (failed) cause to restore Latin as a commonly spoken language. Did (and if so, how) homosexuality "influence" their intellectual enterprise? Would it be legitimate, once again, to not even mention their sexuality when presenting their personality? Probably not. But other scholars may argue the contrary.

Jumping into modernity: A science for the degenerate, and the war against them

A concept firmly wedged within the intellectual constellation of the French Revolution and, in a broader perspective, in that of secularisation, "degeneration" was to be applied to men, women, races, nations, human and animal breeds, republics and monarchies, and at a certain point—after the concept was forged—circa 1868, also to "homosexuals." The massive intervention of state-driven, often state-revering and state-serving science into the realms of the passions, and of sexuality, was, as in the case of suicide, devastating homosexuality too. In the last miserable years of his

life, Oscar Wilde visited Naples. Matilde Serao (and also, among many others, the Milanese anarchist Paolo Valera) wrote of this visit, an event quite talked about in general, for he was back in public again with his lover Alfred Douglas, causing a notable scandal ("Io tremo al solo pensiero che il flagello wildiano possa dilagare per Napoli," wrote the author of *Il ventre di Napoli, apparently* sincerely alarmed). Not long before Wilde's death, in Paris, on the 30th November 1900, an obscure Neapolitan physician, Pietro Fabiani, published *Il problema dell'omosessualità e di tutte le degenerazioni davanti alla scienza*, in which he strongly condemned "homosexuality," and, considering it a mental as well as "physical" degeneration, conceived the possibility of a cure. Nine years later, he published a book, with "history and ranking", of a number of "*pervertimenti sessuali*," including necrophilia and vampirism. Homosexuality was among them, well positioned in the ranking. Pietro Fabiani was also an expert in sexually transmitted and sexual diseases, and an expert on hysteria.

A fervent defender of Italian patriotism and Italian regeneration after the war, Vito Massarotti- a native of Taranto, wrote *Nel regno di Ulrichs,* in 1913. *Appunti e considerazioni sull'omosessualità maschile*, published in Rome by Lux. His perspective and approach were those of a neuro-psychiatrist. Massarotti's attitudes towards homosexuality, and suicide, are extremely revealing of the new positivist mentality: "to understand in order to cure" is his (and, tragically, *not only his*) ideal motto. While the Church and moralists condemn, the scientist must understand the mental disease, partially individual, partially caused by social influences, which leads to suicide, or to homosexual behaviours. Massarotti is alarmingly candid in his conclusions about homosexuals (who, contrary to the suicides, can still be saved):

> Ancora quindi è necessaria la parola del medico illuminato, ancora necessario il diffondere le vere condizioni di questi esseri anormali, onde ci si difenda sì, ma non con il disprezzarli, bensì con l'aiutarli a superare nel miglior modo possibile gli ostacoli, le lotte che la vita loro preserva; nessuno deve azzardarsi di invelenire e percuotere questi malati di una sfera dell'attività psichica, così importante e grande, che invade tutta la nostra personalità, qual è quella sessuale.

So, the ideal disciple of Richard Krafft-Ebing, and Albert Moll, Vito Massarotti, recently the subject of a vast monograph, theorises about homosexuality as a "congenital disease."[12]

It can be cured, certainly. But this circumstance does not change; on the contrary, it stresses its nature of "disease." Eugenics was at the door. The tragedy of the secularisation of the originally religious concepts of "degeneration" (sin) and "regeneration" (conversion and pure life) is that there are "degenerations" that cannot be the subject of "regeneration." If applied to "races" but, as we now know well, also to individuals, homosexuals, this paves the way to Auschwitz.

The "*Invertito*," "inverted" i.e. the homosexual—and here the Italian School of legal medicine of the nineteenth century gave, with Arrigo Tamassia (1848-1917), who coined the term "sexual inversion" in 1878 (with interesting associations with electricity), positioned itself, at least terminologically, at the forefront of "science"—can often barely be brought back onto the right path, turned literally upside-down, and from "inverted," so to say, *en faute de mieux*, "extraverted."

The order or sequence of the Catholic treatment of sin (that includes repentance, hence "regeneration") is denied by science, for the aim of the latter is first and foremost the wellbeing, health, and advancement, of society (and of course of itself), and not that of the individual (as in the case of Catholicism before the nefarious introduction, with Lamennais, of the post-revolutionary "social doctrine" of the Church).

As in many other cases, the decades 1890-1910 pave the ideological path of Fascism. To Wilde, the case of the process is a sort of *affaire* Dreyfus with sexual connotations. All over Europe, writers and scientists, or pseudo-scientists, discuss the case. Mark-André Raffalovich publishes in Italian and French, in the same months of 1896, respectively: a short book of medical advice against "*uranismo*" (in Italian), and a long treaty: *Uranisme et unisexualité: étude sur differentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel* (in French).

The Harden-Eulenburg scandal, of immense political bearing, spread devastating repercussions in Italy, preparing the ground for treason against Germany and Austria in 1915, at the origins of the Italian intervention in World War I.

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[12] See Elisabetta Tiranini Zanarotti, *Vito Massarotti (1881-1959). Un medico pioniere della psicotecnica nella prima metà del Novecento* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2013).

Guido Podrecca (1865-1923), journalist and politician, wrote a description of the case, that had great success in the aftermath of World War I. *La Tavola Rotonda in Germania* (Rome, 1919), and the satirical drawings related to the scandal published in Podrecca's journal, *L'Asino*, strongly influenced pro-war and anti-German public opinion in Italy. Italy, once home of the "Mediterranean vice" turned his back on gay people by reaffirming its old, Roman, Latin, and Christian straightness. In the vast stock of pro-war propaganda from 1911 to 1915, the theme of degeneration and homosexuality played a certain role, along with "*irrendentismo*," as a cognate theme: true Italians are straight, and live in gay-oriented Germany.The land of sexual tourism—Italy from Venice and Padua to Naples and Sicily—had its male-only brothels closed, and became the land of the "soldier-father", of the restoration of true family values. This immense oscillation could take place only in a country, and a land, first and foremost, of likely immense contradictions, in perpetual search of an identity, for it had too many respectively divergent ones.[13]

In a world of competing "nations", even more than competing "states," to accuse another nation, in its entirety, of being degenerate and perverted, played a part in shaping, *a contrario*, the very same Italian identity. "Degenerated" aliens are roaming Italy's beautiful coasts, with a slight preference for the Costiera Amalfitana and Capri. Capri becomes an island of sin. Rich German industrialist Friedrich Alfred Krupp commits suicide in 1902, after having being accused by a German newspaper of sexual intercourse with local boys. It is a scandal of immense proportions. Pamphlets hit the market, in Italy and Germany alike.[14]

Harden-Eulenburg, Krupp, Wilde. Austrians, Germans and the British are *degenerate*. From right to left, Italian public opinion is exposed to a real campaign to debunk competing nations by exposing "deviated" and "perverted" sexual attitudes of some of their citizens. Furthermore, those citizens are members of the élite, capitalists, industrialists, even writers. An anarchist and socialist, Paola Valera, from Como, but living in Milano,

[13] On the scandal, see now Norman Domeier, *The Eulenburg Affair. A Cultural History of Politics in Imperial Germany* (Rochester: Boydell&Brewer, 2015).

[14] See among others: A. Sper [Hans Rau], *Capri und die Homosexuellen: eine psychologische Studie* (Berlin: Orania s.d. but 1903); Julois Meisbach, *Friedrich Alfred Krupp-wie er lebte und starb* (Köln: Stauff ca. 1903). For a recent reconstruction of the case, s. Enrico Oliari, *L'omo delinquente. Scandali e delitti gay dall'Unità a Giolitti* (Roma: Prospettive, 2006).

is a champion of the anti-Wilde, anti-British, and, as a matter of fact, anti-capitalist propaganda. His pamphlet against Wilde has a great success.[15]

The long shadow of J.J. Winckelmann

In the sexually peaceful and tolerant *siècle des Lumières*, when the Marquis de Sade, one of its best interpreters, happily wrote about the sublime joy of "penetrating a woman while one is penetrated by another man," calling it the best of the best among sexual acts, a tragedy takes place. The founder of the science of Greek antiquity, librarian and philologist, the very intellectual framer of neo-Classicism, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, is killed by a cook and a sex toy, in Trieste, on the 8th June 1768, not even turned 50. It is one of the most impressing events of the century, along with the earthquake in Lisbon, 13 years before. Everything, or almost everything, is now known about the killing, the killer, the trial and the execution of Francesco Arcangeli, born in Pistoia in 1737, who died among terrible torments in Trieste. What is left of Winckelmann's idealised traits of Greek sculpture, the "quiet greatness," the "noble simplicity," in a body torn and twisted by a metallic and wooden wheel, disassembled, literally, in a way that the wheel and the dying body, in excruciating pain, become one and the same, "I loro corpi intessuti vivi fra i raggi di detta ruota," as in the tradition of a death reserved to killers. Nothing remains of the classical, even in a hurried quickie in a hotel room with a Tuscan cook, certainly not the heir of Achilles and Patroklos, nor aware of the very existence of those heroes. No piety for him. The crime is homicide. Not homosexuality. Not "perversion." None, or not so many defend an assassin, and a known thief, who dared to kill the German intellectual, the rising star of their time: probably linked to his fellow-sculptor and friend Bartolomeo Cavaceppi in a homosexual ménage that provoked no scandal, a couple of artists much less talked about than their nineteenth century counterparts, and heirs, Johann Reinhard von Marées, and Adolf von Hildebrand, the gay couple *par excellence* in the constellation of homosexual partnerships that marked the turn of the century in Italy. If you commit this sin Italy, so wrote George Byron in 1820 referring to Sgricci, they (people) laugh (at you and in general), they do not burn you at the stake. A laxity in customs, not too much stigmatised

[15] See Paolo Valera, *I gentiluomini invertiti: echi dello scandalo di Milano: il capo-scuola Oscar Wilde al processo con i suoi giovanotti* (Milano: Tipografia editrice E. M. Floritta, 1909).

by the Church (where many do it…) and grounded on the favourable climate (Montesquieu) and the long shadow of classical antiquity. Was the poor Winckelmann longing for this all? But what did he actually find?

Arcangeli died horribly and Winckelmann in a much less painful way, leaving a troubled heritage. He thought that the original Greek sculptures were white as they are now, and was terribly wrong. The colors, arrestingly present, just faded over the centuries. He thought that the sculpted bodies of heroes and athletes were realist. Once again, he was wrong. No actual "Riace Bronze" could be found in flesh and blood and muscles in ancient Greece. Did he think that the openness to same sex intercourse was the living Mediterranean heritage of classic civilisation?

If he did, he was once again wrong. Sexual tourism is still occasionally driven by such ideas, but, in reality, young people are prone to sell themselves because of the need for money. The "Mediterranean vice" is not that much Mediterranean, nor, as a matter of fact, is it a "vice." Male prostitution follows the same rules as female prostitution, as a rule. Exceptions are always present. In poor, or formerly rich and presently poor societies, the cultural predisposition towards sex can be less of a cultural, than a needs-driven attitude. Finally, the Winckelmann case takes place in a heavily symbolic city, Trieste. At the crossroads of empires and republics, a growing harbour, between "Italy and the South," and "Germany and the North." Is Protestant Germany the place where homosexuality can be theorised, and Catholic Italy the place where one can put the theory into practice? Catholicism is all around Trieste, in Austria, Venice, and Slovenia. The crime of Arcangeli is vastly superior to Winckelmann's vice. The cook and the philosopher, the Mediterranean boy and the Northern gentleman: a stereotype is born, but it is of a sort that will bring a number of problems, and tragedies, until the end of World War I and beyond. And Trieste, even Trieste, will be a tragic place for contending powers, lacking a national identity, but well endowed with a cosmopolitan one.

In a way, a gay city turned extremely sad; became "inverted." The great local writer Giani Stuparich surmised this disquieting condition well in the pages he devoted to Winckelmann and his death.[16]

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[16] See Franco Farina, *Endpunkt Triest. Leiden und Tod von Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Drama in 12 Stationen.* (Stendal: Winckelmann-Gesellschaft, 1992); Mathias Schmoeckel: *Fiat Iustitia! Thema und Variationen über einen Mord in Triest*, (Stendal: Winckelmann-Gesellschaft, 2005). See also *L'assassinio di Winckelmann. Gli atti originali del processo criminale (1768)*, eds. Cesare Pagnini and Eli Bartolini (Milano: Longanesi, 1971).

Lesbianism and "travestitism": Eighteenth century paradigms

As for the history of the lesbians in Italy, the best work, and the most up-to-date, is Christine Ross' monograph.[17] In this volume, Christine Ross deals with Paolo Mantegazza, in an essay derived from her previous work.

There are, however, still several sub-topics, in the macro-topic of Lesbianism, that are in need of re-appraisals, or, even, of ex novo approaches. The first part of the nineteenth century in particular is in need of a fresh look. In the first phase of the Risorgimento, there was a strong feminine presence and involvement in the insurrectional movements. At the same time, the very concept of "Lesbian" took shape, in the complex evolution of cultural, psychological, and sociological paradigms between the end of the *Settecento* and the beginning of the *Ottocento*.

Valery Traub, in her essay *The present future of lesbian historiography* provides a good framework for further inquiry in that matter. Her hypothesis, that of the "cycles of salience," i.e. on the discontinuous emergence of sexuality among women in several complex contexts, that can nevertheless be traced and depicted by historiography, and seen in "modular" recurrences, is very close to our understanding of the subject, and can be fruitfully applied in our time-space limits.[18]

The case of Caterina Vizzani (1718-1743), recently studied by the Italian sociologist Marzio Barbagli, is very revealing.[19] The case of Caterina involves physicians who looked upon her body as pathologically "anomic"—more than one century before the same concept of "anomy" was forged—while the same woman was not only attracted to same-sex creatures, but became also a notorious criminal. It is as if, in this case, the times of Cesare Lombroso were anticipated in the early eighteenth century. Furthermore, Professor Barbagli hints at a major problem, without however developing it further. It is the theme of the masculine representation of the female body, as opposed to the self-representation of

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[17] Christine Ross, *Eccentricity and Sameness. Discourses on Lesbianism and Desire between Women in Italy, 1860's-1930's* (Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang, 2015)

[18] See Valeri Traub, "The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies,* eds. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), Blackwell Reference Online. Accessed 15th June 2016.

[19] See Marzio Barbagli, *Storia di Caterina che per ott'anni vestì abiti da uomo* (Il Mulino: Bologna, 2014).

that same body held by the women themselves. This is a major reference to a core theme in feminist historiography. Giovanni Bianchi, a contemporary physician who analyses Caterina's body, discusses the "pathologies" with some contemporary women in his élite circle. The women offer their own interpretation of the case. Laura Davio Bentivoglio, a noblewoman, wrote: "Io avrei consigliato a questa Giovine di entrare in un monastero di monache ove la sua inclinazione senza pericolo avrebbe potuto soddisfare e soddisfatto avrebbe tant'altre"; "I would have recommended Caterina to enter a feminine cloister; there, her inclinations would have satisfied other nuns as well as herself, with no danger whatsoever." Laura Bassi, a noted scientist, seems to endorse, in her judgement, the principle "hear no evil, speak no evil". Her judgement is however tinted with some ideas of emancipation: "This amazon of our times, she should have used her daring constancy in a much better way"!

Did women form, at the time, a sort of feminine public (and judgemental) opinion? If so, how did women judge other women who loved the same sex? Those questions escaped, so far, the attention of historiography. We need to reconstruct, in a careful way, the feminine networks of the eighteenth century, in as much as they reflected and conveyed an interpretation, and a moral judgement, of feminine homosexuality. Women indeed had their own circles, academies, "cicisbeati" and so on, where they formed, in close contact with each other, their own perceptions of homosexuality, both among women and in general.

Lesbianism in the Nineteenth Century

To a certain extent this is true also of the nineteenth century, although research on this century is much more extensive and analytical regarding homosexuality at least. "Mothers of the Fatherland," such as Cristina Trivulzio di Belgioioso—normally studied within the context of the nationalist Risorgimento, essentially heterosexual—offers ample material for a "different" reconstruction of their personalities and lore. They were part of web of feminine "intimate friendships," and the same Cristina Trivulzio passed from an intense and formative relation with her piano teacher, Ernesta Bisi, to a close friendship with Bianca Milesi. She was also close to the French milieu of Fourier, who, in his *Le Nouveau Monde amoureux* (1816-1821) theorises a world of *saphiennes,* who live in a status of *liberté de perfectibilité*.

Stepping back once again to the eighteenth century, we may note that Caterina Vizza for a long time lived as a transvestite. It would be interesting to draw a line from her individual choice to that of Oliva

Erculei, a Jacobin in the First Roman Republic, "che in Orticoli andava vestita da uomo," thus giving her transvestitism a political dimension. Along with Oliva Erculei, Fulvia Mattei, from Veneto, also used transvestitism: a citizen of Verona and a staunch republican, she was arrested in the same year as Oliva Erculei, 1799. Fulvia was notorious for her vigorous political speeches. We are, here, at the crossroads between Enlightenment and Romanticism, and between the eighteenth and nineteenth century: those feminine behaviours (that, quoting the famous contemporary poet Ugo Foscolo we might label as "*amazzonii*") could be an anticipation of the further recurrence of a "cycle of salience": for this kind of transvestitism seems to anticipate, on a minor scale, that which struck Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. This late nineteenth century revival of transvestitism is the object of Laura Schettini's work, which is also present in this volume with a substantial new contribution.[20]

There are, however, a number of differences between the occurrences in the early *Settecento* and early *Ottocento*, and those that took place at the end of the *Ottocento*, respectively. First and foremost, while documents about the first two periods are very scarce, there is plenty of documentation for the late *Ottocento*.

In a very limited number of years, transvestitism took up a major role in post-unification Italy. It was to be considered, and treated, to be a social problem, an "*emergenza*." It also took up a name, as we discussed before with reference to men; "sexual inversion." At the same time, on a positive note, transvestitism became a practice in the construction of a new identity. "New women," as well as "new men," homosexual, operated—more or less explicitly and self-consciously—as alternative models against the rigid, dominant models of sexuality (and identity). The "*invertiti*" challenged the dominant, static model of sexuality, with a lot of inventiveness, and running a very high number of risks. An ideal of individual, as well as political, emancipation was at the very basis of this new sexual trend.

Once again, there is, also here, an echo of the eighteenth century. Let us recall the web of love friendships of the many Lesbie Cidonie of Arcadia (1690-1800), for instance, the well-known Amarilli Etrusca, who performed poetry and drama in refined salons. Mytilene was their own model:

[20] See Laura Schettini, *Il gioco delle parti. Travestimenti e paure sociali tra Otto e Novecento* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2011).

Sdegna Clorinda a i femminili uffici
Chinar la destra, e sotto l'elmo accoglie
I biondi crini, e con guerriere voglie
Fa del proprio valor pompa a i nimici.

These are four lines of a sonnet written by Fidalma Partenide (1663-1726). We must refer, for this subject, to Tatiana Crivelli's recent work, a book rich with hidden or less hidden references to Lesbian and gender studies.[21]

There is a line of continuity clearly running through the eighteenth century and the late nineteenth, connecting them, even in the element of Fascism (1922-1945). What was a "poetic liaison" in the age of Arcadia, slowly took up political nuances. Arts, passions, sex, all created powerful feminine webs and networks, what we might call "Duse webs" (mentioning the celebrated artist, and one of Gabriele D'Annunzio's lovers). Those "webs" went through the Italian Risorgimento, the "*Unità Nazionale*," via the Belle Époque, the Great War, and eventually Fascism, where the "Donna Nuova" was as important as the "Uomo Nuovo" in the construction of Italian-Fascist identity. Feminism, or rather, in Italy, proto-Feminism, became very close to the Fascist "Avanguardia." Eleonora Duse's "maestra," Giacinta Pezzana, performed in shows "en travesty" for the Italian troops of the second war of independence (1859-1860), while at the same time acting as Hamlet in various theatres. The "Duse web" included, however, many other characters: Gualberta Beccari, Alessandrina Ravizza, Giorgina Saffi and Sibilla Aleramo, who shared with Eleonora the love for Lina Poletti, quite a figure on the *Novecento* scene.

Lesbians and the literary dimension

Did Italian lesbians produce autobiographies, and/or other public writing wherein they talk about themselves? It would be difficult to find, among lesbians, something even slightly comparable (and as explicit) to *Roman d'un inverti-né*.

This is an autobiography written, in French, by a soldier of the Savoy army. It was published, thanks to the intermediation of Zola, in 1896. Even works such as the "Greek détournement" of Luigi Settembrini, *I Neoplatonici* (1858-1859) are rarely, if ever, to be found among lesbians.

In the rich epistolary of Giacinta Pezzana, however, with her friends,

[21] See Tatiana Crivelli, *La Donzelletta che nulla temea. Percorsi alternativi della letteratura italiana tra Settecento e Ottocento* (Iacobelli: Roma, 2014).

as well as in other private correspondence, such as that between Sibilla Aleramo and Lina Poletti, we can perceive very lively elements of female friendship, verging on homosexuality. In Sibilla Aleramo's novel, *Il passaggio* (1919), the main character is an example of a "donna nuova." Her tendencies, and loves, find an unusual path, and solution, under the spell of Zarathustra, or rather of Nietzsche. The "eternal return" and the sublimation of the "will to power" find a perfect environment among Alpine Summer pastures. "Passaggio," passage, the title of Sibilla Aleramo's work, is a true keyword for our theme. Lesbianism if often represented by reference to *Passagenwerke*, in a sort of *art-nouveau* construction of references, hidden or open, and innuendos.

Una tribade, a work published anonymously in 1914, has a very telling subtitle: *Tribadismo, saffismo, clitorismo. Psicologia, fisiologia, pratica moderna.* The long sub-title, as well as the title itself, are references to a number of names and relevant practices, and the text is indeed but an encyclopaedic farrago. Part medical treatise, part correspondence, diary and confession, it deals with prisons, cloisters, salons, *tabarin*, with a number of hidden references to criminals who were worthy of Cesare Lombroso's attention: natural born criminals and vicious noblewomen.

Una tribade opens up questions of paramount importance for historiography, both cultural and social. Did women make love with one another only to stimulate the eyes and senses of the male voyeur, as held true for Charlotte Ross in her works? Is the voyeur a man and only a man? There were certainly also "tribadi italiane," *voyeuses*. We already mentioned Lina Poletti. We could also mention Renata Borgatti, a musician, who was among Baroness Mimi Franchetti's lovers. Romaine Brooks was also among Renata's lovers, and Renata's painting, by Romaine, made Borgatti *ex abrupto* the first Italian lesbian icon (she was depicted playing the piano). Looking desperately for their own identity, the same feminine readers of *La tribade* were the first *voyeuses*, and the very first "tribadi" on the Italian scene.

Aldo Palazzeschi's *Il codice di Perelà* (1911), stands out as one of the best frescoes of Giolitti's Italy. In the novel, the character of Enos Copertino is extremely important in forming an understanding of the milieu and features of such "tribadi."

We should also reflect more on the social milieu of figures such as Lina Poletti or Renata Borgatti. How did their passion develop? What was the "textual" background of those passions? "How did speak Sappho, and her friends speak with oneanother?" "How did it happen that women did talk to oneanother?" Those questions, mentioned, not answered, by Walter Benjamin in his *Metaphysics of Youth* (1913-1914), are of extreme

importance for our research as well, as it is presented in this volume. What happens when the texts, that are by their own nature "con-textual", are written by men, who are looking at, and contemplating, a sort of desire they do not feel, in its own reality?

If we go back to the history of this text, we might try to answer, at least partially, those questions. *Una tribade* was put out of circulation by law in 1914 according to article 339 of the Italian Criminal Code, along with other similar texts. Its publisher, Ettore Cecchi, had to serve three months in prison for selling obscene materials. In the case of Cecchi and his imprisonment we are witnessing a reproduction, in reality, of Proust's Morel. Morel is the equivoque figure that favours hidden encounters among perverts and *jeunes-filles en fleur,* driven by personal interests, though maybe not directly sexual. Are we here faced with, in modern terms, a Lesbian "genderqueer"?

The character of Morel, with its intrinsic moral ambiguity—so different from any moral stigma, so uncertain and open to interpretation—is more or less involuntarily reproduced and imitated all throughout Italian literature between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the *Pascoli lesbico*, according to Cesare Garboli's provocative definition, to Palazzeschi; from Pavese to Gadda; from Pratolini to Brancati; the Proustian Morel is echoed and re-echoed, in several ways. We can even mention a transgender novel *avant la lettre*: *Uno spirito in un lampone* (1869) by Igino Ugo Tarchetti.

Towards new times: The case of Marie Laetitia Studolmina Wyse Bonaparte (1831-1902)

In nineteenth century Europe, only Sweden and Finland issued criminal laws to punish lesbianism, in 1864 and 1894 respectively. In Italy, the Pissavini trial had no parallel for women. There is, however, a case that concerns one of the "Madri della Patria," whose lesbian attitudes surface during a criminal procedure that took place in France in 1891. Marie Laetitia Studolmina Wyse Bonaparte (1831-1902) married, as second wife, one of the Italian founding fathers, Urbano Rattazzi, powerful minister of the Kingdom. Nerina Milletti, a researcher in lesbian studies, describes the case very well; quite revealing for the entire spiritual atmosphere of that time. According to Milletti, the private life of a lady of almost 70, in love with a girl 30 years younger, became the centre of a trial celebrated in Angoulême, in December 1891. The accused is Baron Bouly de Lesdain, accused of having shot and injured his wife Charlotte, and Regis Delbeuf, editor of "Matinées Espagnoles." As a matter of fact, Delbeuf might have

acted either out of jealousy, or on behalf of Princess Rattazzi. It became immediately clear that there was a special bond uniting Madame Rattazzi and Charlotte Mortier Bouly de Lesdain. They lived together for a long time, during which Charlotte performed every possible task for Rattazzi, and they even spent all their nights together. Newspapers speculate on the arrangement. When the two had disagreements, Madame Rattazzi recurred even to the whip, in order to find reconciliation. For the sake of public morality and the image of the family, Charlotte was given a husband in 1886: Bouly de Lesdain. Madame Rattazzi immediately labelled him the "jupillon," someone whose lifestyle is entirely supported by a woman.

Madame Rattazzi hates her lover's husband. She threatens him, but, in spite of all the barriers she tries to raise between him and Charlotte, they are able to conceive two children, both of them bound to die in their infancy.

This *cause célèbre* rendered the issue of same-sex love and passion well known and widely discussed. Scipio Sighele, in 1892, dealt with the case from a medical perspective, in line with the positivist science of that time. Sighele however, did not mention any names. Lombroso was also very judgmental: "È evidente la fusione del pensiero di sangue con quello della lascivia." Even if the general atmosphere is negative, the case is not seen, in the public opinion, as an absolute abomination. It is clear that blood, revenge, hostility and hatred play out a true love, a true passion, between two women. The original letters between the two offers a lurid perspective on a passion enlivened by literature, "Messalina" and "Nanà," by circumstances of power and domination, but also sheer, genuine, and pure love: "E' evidente che ho sperato molte cose che spesso devono averti fatto ridere. Niun dubbio, anche, che io le abbia sinceramente credute e che tu devi averne ben riso. Ma, birichina, io ti amo. Questa parola riassume tutta la mia lettera, tutte le mie idee. Io ti ucciderò, senza dubbio: io ti martirizzerò, è probabile; io ti sventrerò forse in un momento di collera. Ma io ti amo, tutto è detto. Maria."

Provisional conclusions

At the beginning of the third Millennium, an unproblematic acceptance of homosexuality, or elsewhere, of suicide; this tragic couple, is far from a given, or a foregone conclusion. In the nineteenth century, homosexuality becomes a term and a concept, the traditional "sins of the flesh" take up complicated nuances thanks to science, and the ongoing conflict about the jurisdiction on Italian morality and customs, fought out by the Church and the state, with occasional truces, and, often, alliances on single issues, bearing tragic consequences. More than the real practice of homosexuality,

it is its theoretical dimension, its conceptualisation, its criminalisation, and decriminalisation, the elements that cast a lurid light on the complexities and the dilemma of the Italian state in the making. In the centuries of "competing nations," Italians, not properly a nation, are prone to sodomisation by the nations of the North. At the turn of the century, Italians, turned proud of their straightness and more or less identified with an (idealised) "Mediterranean race" (thanks to the effort of Sergi and other racial scientist) accuse, in a reversal of historical fortune, the Germans of being "degenerate." Homosexuality has therefore clearly become something "negative", and peculiar to some "races" in the world. In the realm of Catholicism (of God) if you are homosexual you commit a sin. In the realm of nationalism, by so doing you go against the customs of your own race, and betray the former and the latter. The essays in this volume present some cases in this complex panorama. The shift in the conception of sexuality that took place in Germany, Britain, and, with a number of original positions, in Italy as well, in the late nineteenth century, is at the origin of our conceptions of sexuality, for good or evil. As Harry Oosterhuis pointed out in an essay of 2012:

> The modern notion of sexuality took shape at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in the works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll. This modernisation of sexuality was closely linked to the recognition of sexual diversity, as it was articulated in the medical–psychiatric understanding of what, at that time, was labelled as perversion. From around 1870, psychiatrists shifted the focus from immoral acts, a temporary deviation of the norm, to an innate morbid condition. In the late nineteenth century, several psychiatrists, collecting and publishing more and more case histories, classified and explained the wide range of deviant sexual behaviours they traced. The emergence of medical sexology meant that perversions could be diagnosed and discussed. Against this background both Krafft-Ebing and Moll articulated a new perspective, not only on perversion, but also on sexuality in general. Krafft-Ebing initiated and Moll elaborated a shift from a psychiatric perspective in which deviant sexuality was explained as a derived, episodic and more or less singular symptom of a more fundamental mental disorder, to a consideration of perversion as an integral part of a more general, autonomous and continuous sexual instinct. Before Sigmund Freud and others had expressed similar views, it was primarily through the writings of Krafft-Ebing and Moll that a new understanding of human sexuality emerged.[22]

[22] Harry Oosterhuis, "Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll," *Medical History* 56, 2 (2012): 133-155, 143.

A critical enquiry into homosexuality in nineteenth century Italy is of great importance not only in terms of understanding, and for a scholarly public to approach the theme, but also so as to delve into our common mentality and assumptions, terminology and attitudes, and taboos.

The study of homosexuality, "inversion", lesbianism, and "travestitism" and transsexualism (to use the pair introduced by H. Benjamin in his famous 1966 essay) in the long Italian nineteenth century, shows how the new sciences of state, first and foremost sociology (but also criminology and several related new sciences) helped to construct new categories, and "classes" of individuals, where there had been only individuals with their own more or less orthodox behaviors.

Framed differently: the nineteenth century is the century of the classification of humans, pretty much as in the previous century, the century of the Enlightenment was the age of the classification of animals. The works of Buffon and Linnaeus provided a solid basis for Karl Marx, who turned the animal classification into a classification, with the concept of "class," in fact, of humans in a social and historical context.

Along this path, the nineteenth century invented "homosexuals" as a "class," a close cluster. A freer use of sexuality, in the Middle Ages and the early modern era, excluded any sociological and anthropological label. It is true that Dante places sodomites in hell, but they are not a human and social class, they are only individuals with a certain preference in their sexual behaviors. Furthermore, they are sinners, rather than sick. Their "disease" can be washed away by repentance, forgiveness, and a new lifestyle. If homosexuality is congenital, if there are natural born gays and lesbians, they can be treated, but it is hard to "redeem" and "regenerate" them.

The nineteenth century creates categories that are, for those who are supposed to belong to them, real prisons. Proletarians and capitalists, criminals (natural born criminals) and honest people, homosexuals, "inverted" and straight, replace an old world in which there was maybe just a dualism; that of "civilised" and "wild" men. People who indulge in homosexuality are both terrorised, as well as attracted, by these categorisations. "Races" are born. Before that, still in the eighteenth century, aristocracy was a "race," and farmers were a "race", so the same concept of "race" was deprived, so to say, of truly "racial" features.

If homosexuals are turned into a "category," clustered by scientists and social bias, they become, slowly, a "minority" who can change its unhappy starting point, into a very felicitous condition, claiming for rights and benefits. This is the contemporary heritage of the classification. A systematic, state-driven and state-oriented, blind and cruel classification

process, which took place in the nineteenth century, the most appalling of which is that distinguishing the mentally sane from the mentally insane; "crazy" people. It is the beginning of serial segregation, as Michel Foucault more than once pointed out. It is the beginning of the Shoah, the mass extermination that included sexually "imperfect" people, "degenerates" and homosexuals. More or less consiously, Scientism brought about policies of extermination.

CHAPTER ONE

ROLE PLAYING: GENDER AMBIGUITY, CRIMINOLOGY AND POPULAR CULTURE IN ITALY BETWEEN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY

LAURA SCHETTINI

This article investigates the key part played by gender ambiguities in Italian society between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, it focuses on the intersection between social changes, social fears, "gender mobility" and individual—mainly feminine and homosexual —emancipation.[1] Following a number of cases of cross-dressing, which took place in some of the most important Italian cities (namely Rome and Naples), this study examines the dissemination of such identity practices among the popular classes, the hostility they simultaneously roused in public security, psychiatry and criminology, and the reception they met in some urban environments (mainly in the slums). Focus is placed on the years between 1870 and 1930, which were characterised by growing public interest in gender changes and cross-dressing, and in a series of meaningful transformations in the ways in which gender ambiguities were considered, from a normative, cultural and social point of view.

The starting point of this article is the story of Giuseppe B., also known to the police as "Trastevere's hermaphrodite." During the 1870s, when his "criminal history" began, Trastevere was one of Rome's poorest neighbourhoods, known for its vice and underworld, a maze of narrow streets which the river Tiber separated from the more respectable district

[1] This article is the result of more extensive research I developed in my book *Il gioco delle parti. Travestimenti e paure sociali tra Otto e Novecento* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2011), winner of 2012 Sissco Award for Contemporary History.

"Regola." Giuseppe B., who chose Trastevere as his new "home," was a young migrant from the small town of Frosinone, where he had left his family. Shortly after he arrived in Rome, the police noticed him as someone who lived on the margins of society, lacked a stable job or accommodation, and was a well-known "pederast." In the early 1870s, he was arrested several times because he had failed to comply with some police injunctions (in 1872, for instance, the police ordered him to find a job and a permanent residence), and especially for offence against morality, when he was caught having sex with another man in a public square.[2] After spending 18 months in prison, Giuseppe B. moved back to Trastevere, where he started working as a hairdresser, catering to prostitutes in brothels or in their homes. It was at this time that he began to manipulate his gender identity more openly, catching the attention of the police and triggering the interest of the public at large.

Indeed, on a cold January evening in 1882, Giuseppe B. was arrested once more after he tried to approach a man working as a night doorman in a hotel, while being carefully dressed as a woman, wearing sophisticated make-up.[3] According to the testimony, the porter had not realised a man in disguise was luring him, until the two started kissing and cuddling. At that point, enraged and offended, he began insulting and running after "the fake brunette", who was eventually arrested by two policemen who had intervened. The following day, Giuseppe B., still wearing women's clothing, was taken to trial and gathered a crowd of fascinated onlookers and journalists. News of "the porter's misadventure" was even featured in Rome's largest daily newspaper, *Il Messaggero*, which used mocking expressions to describe the event.[4]

Giuseppe's propensity to dressing as a woman, but also to taking a woman's social identity, was neither temporary nor transient. A few years later, when he was 40 years old, he was once again arrested while wearing women's clothes.[5] In February 1886, Giuseppe was attending a party in a dance hall located in the city centre, along with some prostitutes and two other men, also dressed as women. When two police officers entered the hall to perform a routine check, they immediately recognised Giuseppe B.,

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[2] This information about Giuseppe B. can be found in the archive documents related to the first trials in which he was involved. In particular, see: Archivio di Stato di Roma [State Archives of Rome, hereafter ASR], *Tribunale penale, processi, 1872*, fasc. 898 and ASR, *Tribunale penale, processi, 1873*, fasc. 2632.

[3] See ASR, *Tribunale penale, processi, 1882*, fasc. 24611.

[4] See "L'avventura del portiere," *Il Messaggero*, January 25, 1882.

[5] ASR, *Tribunale penale, processi, 1886*, fasc. 36254.

who, as they stated in their report, they already knew as a pederast. They accused him of upsetting the women who were sitting in front of him, because, according to their version, Giuseppe was dancing on the tables showing his "private parts." They brought him to the police station, where he was questioned and had his accessories and clothes confiscated, under the claim they were *corpus delicti*. The police report detailed his cross-dressing with great accuracy: Giuseppe was wearing two gold necklaces, a pair of earrings with diamonds, ten rings, three petticoats, a dress, a pair of socks, a woollen shawl, a short fur-trimmed jacket, a robe, a wig, a bust, as well as some rags used to simulate the round shapes of breasts and hips. The fate of these objects and clothes is of interest. While some women immediately requested that the jewelery be returned to them, claiming they had lent them to the defendant, it was Giuseppe B. who picked up the clothes directly after spending three months in prison.

Once again, prostitutes played a significant role in Giuseppe's life, as they contributed materially to his cross-dressing. Another incident shows even more clearly the profound relationship between the cross-dresser and the prostitutes. About 15 days after the arrest, the police summoned the women who were sitting at the table on which Giuseppe was dancing. According to Italian criminal law, Giuseppe could be prosecuted for the crime he was accused of ("oltraggio al pudore") only if the women admitted they had been outraged by his behaviour and filed a complaint to the authorities. Contrary to expectation though, the women stated that they did not understand why the police had arrested Giuseppe, who, according to them, was not doing anything illegal or immoral. While they stated it was true that he was dressed as a woman, they claimed he also wore trousers. Furthermore, they declared they knew Giuseppe to be a good person because he was their hairdresser, and refused to file a lawsuit because they did not feel at all outraged. In the end, Giuseppe was convicted of offence to decency, and was imprisoned for three months. After that, no trace of him is to be found on official records.

Giuseppe's story is a particularly interesting one and sheds light on three important aspects of the history of social and juridical dimensions of cross-dressing, which will be analysed in the following pages under: public opinion, the regulatory framework, and the social environment.

Between the 1870s and the 1930s, cross-dressing made its *exploits* in Italian society, and became a public issue which galvanised the attention of the working classes and the popular press, the interest of science and

public security as never before[7], while at the same time embodying the fears and desires of various social actors.

Daily tales of amazing cross-dressing

This section will analyse the ways in which newspapers and magazines considered "cross-dressing" an issue that could be used to achieve resounding success, and to which it was convenient to devote increasingly more space. As mentioned, Rome's most popular newspaper, *Il Messaggero*, featured heavily Giuseppe's transvestitism, while an enthusiastic crowd witnessed his trial. This was only the first of a long series of detailed accounts dedicated to male and female cross-dressers, published in Italian newspapers between the 1870s and 1930s. If one looks through the pages of newspapers and magazines, it is clear that the number of articles and the space devoted to "gender mobility" increased dramatically over the years, reaching its apogee during the 1910s and 1920s.[8] It should be noted that these stories did not form a coherent whole, and were extremely varied. Indeed, their only common characteristic was that the protagonist had "changed gender." The stories were often taken from foreign newspapers and included, for instance, the adventures of Amy, an Australian fraudster who in 1909 presented herself as a man in order to marry a rich heiress[9]; the audacious life of a French soldier who,

[7] Unlike what has happened in other European countries—as in England or in the Netherlands—in Italy even though memoirs of women who lived as men existed, the figure of the cross-dresser not become a public figure, celebrated by the literature or by theatrical plays, until the second half of the nineteenth century. For the relevance that cross-dressing has had in culture and society in England and in The Netherlands, see among many others: R. M. Dekker and L. C. Van De Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestim in Early Modern Europe* (London: MacMillan Press, 1989) and Dianne Dugaw, *Dangerous Examples: Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[8] In particular I have examined alternately the years 1872-1930 of two of the most popular newspapers of the period, *Il Messaggero* and *Roma. Giornale politico quotidiano*.

[9] See "Un'avventuriera australiana. Un Fregoli in gonnella," *Il Messaggero*, 7th August, 1909. Amy Bock was extremely well-known in New Zealand and her life was the subject of keen interest for historians, but she has also been inspiration for plays, books, a television programme, a photographic exhibition, and a musical. An accurate biography of Amy's is J. Coleman's, *Mad or Bad? The Exploits of Amy Bock, 1859-1943* (Otago: Otago University Press, 2010).

after defecting from WWI, had lived for many years as a woman, thus avoiding being arrested;[10] the renowned story of a woman who had pretended for years to be a man to the point of becoming first a notary, then the secretary of the Russian consul in Chicago, marrying three women;[11] the life of Apollonia/Carlo, a man who lived for years as a woman in his hometown near Trieste, supported and accepted by the local community, and whom local authorities considered to be an impostor only after he asked to include his female name in his identity documents.[12]

The articles published in newspapers gave equal importance to very different stories, in which cross-dressing was only temporary and not aimed at acquiring another stable social identity, but rather had a strong symbolic or strategic meaning. For instance, one of them reported the episode of a man who had tried to escape from a prison in central Italy by masquerading as woman.[13] National newspapers regularly wrote articles about the misadventures of jealous wives who, both in Florence and in Rome wore men's clothes to follow their husbands at night.[14] The popular

[10] See "La 'garçonne' muta... sesso," *Il Messaggero*, 10th February, 1925 and the sequel "Una disavventura dell''uomo-donna'," *Il Messaggero*, 22nd February, 1925. Further, the eventful life of Paul Grappe has gained increasing notoriety in France and was recently described in the book by Fabrice Virgili and Danièle Voldman, *La garçonne et l'assassin. Histoire de Louise et de Paul, déserteur travesti, dans le Paris des années folles* (Paris: Payot, 2011). The two historians have investigated mainly the strong relationship between Paul and his wife Louise Landy, his partner in the decennial cross-dressing.

[11] See "Il mistero dell'uomo-donna," *Roma*, 1st January, 1907. This is the story of Nicola De Raylan [or Nikolai Kostantinovitch Raiman, whose birth name was Anna Tarletzki]. Her/His life was also the subject of a great and continuing interest for many years. The woman, originally from Russia, had emigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century under masculine identity. Here, she/he became a notary and then secretary of the Russian consul in Boston, as well as marrying three times with three women. Her "true" sex was discovered only when she died. Her case was reconstructed by the German psychiatrist James Brock, who had worked in St. Petersburg, in his article "Über Tribadie. Als eine Jungfrau Konsulatssekretär," *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft und Sexualpolitik* 15 (1928-1929), 559-571. His translation into Italian, edited by Alessandro Corsi, is available on the website www.omofonie.it. under the title *Sul tribadismo. Una vergine impiegata come segretario consolare*.

[12] See "Un pazzo vestito da donna," *Il Messaggero*, 4th June, 1908.

[13] See "Tenta di evadere dal penitenziario di Ancona vestendosi da donna," *Roma*, 25th-26th March, 1915.

[14] Several of these episodes appeared in the newspapers during the years I have studied. These episodes often ended with an amused or threatening crowd that

press of the late nineteenth century was also titillated by an unusual sequence of murders that occurred in various Italian cities between 1890 and 1910, and labelled those responsible as the "masked avengers." Probably under the influence of some literary characters or of their predecessors, whose stories were widely reported by the press, several young women, who had been "seduced and abandoned", reacted to dishonour by killing or by trying to kill their seducers by dressing in men's clothes.[15]

During the decades examined in this article, newspapers dedicated many articles to another variety of temporary "gender changes": women who disguised themselves as soldiers, a category that deserves attention. This group represented one of the most popular figures of cross-dressers in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Similarly, in Italy female soldiers were one of the first figures of transvestites to appear in the public arena, and undoubtedly the most celebrated one. Starting with

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gathered around the woman in man's clothes, determined to reveal her "true sex." Sometimes the turbulence caused the intervention of public security. However, it cannot be excluded that some women declared that they were disguised to safely follow their husband at night just because this explanation provided a reassuring interpretation of their disguise, avoiding being assaulted or sanctioned. Some articles about this kind of episodes are: "Una donna vestita da uomo, ovverosia le avventure di una moglie gelosa," *Il Messaggero*, 7th September, 1890; "La ragazza vestita da uomo arrestata in via Palermo," *Il Messaggero*, 6th September, 1898; "Veneranda vestita da uomo alla caccia del marito," *Il Messaggero*, 2nd July, 1904; "La donna vestita da uomo fermata in viale del Re," *Il Messaggero*, 18th July, 1908; "Quando si ha una sorella troppo giovane... storia di un travestimento e di un relativo 'fermo'," *Roma*, 5-6th April, 1914.

[15]"La vendetta di una sedotta ed abbandonata," *Roma*, 11th August, 1899; "Tragedia di amore in Sicilia. Una signorina travestita da uomo che spara contro il seduttore," *Il Messaggero*, 17th August, 1901; "Terribile vendetta di due tradite," *Il Messaggero*, 13th September, 1901; "Una donna travestita da uomo che spara all'amante," *Roma*, 18th-19th November, 1906; "Uccide l'amante travestita da uomo," *Roma*, 23th-24th March, 1907; "Una signorina travestita da uomo ammazza il suo amante," *Roma*, 3rd October, 1910. It is significant that among the novels of the popular writer Giovanni Verga there is also *Il bell'Armando*, published in 1887. The novel begins with a scene in which the protagonist, Lena, dressed in men's clothes—we are in the days of carnival—reaches her ex-lover in the public square and shoots him. In the following pages we discover that the man seduced her, and induced her into prostitution and then abandoned her, preferring a respectable woman to marry. See Giovanni Verga, *Le novelle*, ed. Nicola Merola (Milano: Garzanti, 1980), 123-130.

the reportage *Le donne soldati*[16] [The women soldiers], published in 1886 and going forward with articles such as *L'eroina bulgara*[17] [The Bulgarian heroine] or *Le donne guerriere*[18] [The women warriors-modern Amazons] and many others,[19] patriotic women who disguised themselves in order to defend their homeland or their families, received growing attention from an emerging popular press. A few elements should be highlighted. Firstly, until WWI, Italian newspapers only published stories of female soldiers from foreign countries, despite the fact that during the Risorgimento dozens of women dressed in uniform to fight for Italy's independence and unification. Since the heroes of the Risorgimento were not celebrated until many years later, women's experiences appeared only in the 1920s and 1930s.[20] Secondly, the narrative and rhetorical structures of the articles are particularly noteworthy, as they share some key elements: women are always described as moved by a sense of abnegation for their country or their family (often their decision to become soldiers is explained as a result of the need to substitute a family member in poor health); furthemore, after the war they are described as quickly returning to their women's clothing and to their domestic occupations. In other words, newspapers defined women's "intrusion" into a male field of expertise as temporary and reversible, and as a way of better expressing their true nature, characterised by a maternal sense and a spirit of self-denial.

A few general remarks about how the popular press dealt with "gender changes" are necessary. Evidently, publishers assumed that readers would appreciate any story on cross-dressing. Their narratives included both adventurous and romantic elements, the same combination that, just a few

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[16] See "Le donne soldati," *Il Messaggero*, 5th August, 1886.
[17] "Un'eroina bulgara," *Il Messaggero*, 10th March, 1886.
[18] "Donne guerriere," *La Domenica del Corriere*, 13th-20th June, 1915.
[19] A selecton of articles on women soldiers published in Italian newspapers is: "Una giovanetta russa decorata pel suo eroismo," *Roma*, 8th-9th February, 1915; "Un'eroina russa," *Roma*, 3th-4th July, 1915; "Un'eroina russa," *Roma*, 13th-14th September, 1915; "Due signorine francesi travestite da soldati," *Il Messaggero*, 6th February, 1918. See also Mario Perrini and Maria Luisa Solentino, *Donne eroiche italiane decorate al valor militare, 1915-1918* (Roma: Giorgio Berlutti Editore, 1935).
[20] Eugenio Comba, *Donne illustri italiane* (Torino: Paravia, 1934); Raffaello Barbiera, *Italiane gloriose* (Milano: Vallardi, 1923); Francesco Orestano, "Eroine, ispiratrici e donne d'eccezione," *Enciclopedia biografica e bibliografica italiana,* vol. 7*,* ed*.* Almerico Ribera (Milano: Istituto editoriale italiano, 1940); Laura Guidi, "Patriottismo femminile e travestimenti sulla scena risorgimentale," *Studi Storici* 2 (2000): 571-586.

years earlier, had formed the successful formula of *feuilleton*, and had made possible a surge in sales of the popular press.[21] A first consideration, therefore, is that in the second half of the nineteenth century, topics such as cross-dressing gained more space in newspapers because of a more general reorganisation of the publishing industry, at a time when the press was opening up to the popular classes, by devoting more attention to criminal and judicial news, gossip, serial stories, chronicles of odd events, and so on. At the same time, the variety of articles on cross-dressing is also the expression of the acquaintance Italian society had with this practice. It should be noted that the articles dedicated to "gender changes" (sometimes enriched by photographs of the protagonists) greatly contributed to the circulation of these new gender models in Italy. The lives and choices of Giuseppe B. and of the other men who lived as women, along with the many women who dressed as men in the pursuit of a new life,[22] represented examples of different lifestyles. Through newspaper articles, a "tradition of transvestitism" formed in Italy, as it did in other countries, and became a repertoire that could inspire men and women who wanted to manipulate their gender and social identities.

Policing gender ambiguity

Building on the idea that the story of Giuseppe B. can be a useful guide to addressing the key elements that shaped the social and cultural history of cross-dressing in contemporary Italy, this section explores the normative and judicial dimensions of the phenomenon, starting from Giuseppe B.'s legal vicissitudes. His story is particularly well documented: besides newspaper articles there are a number of judicial chronicles, which refer to the several trials that the man suffered during his career as a "pervert," as he was labelled. The kinds of penalties to which he was subjected are a first significant point for analysis. As we have seen, over the years Giuseppe B. was penalised because he did not have stable employment or accommodation; sometimes he was sentenced to several months in prison for violating these warnings or for acts against morality. On each occasion he spent a few months in prison. The high number and the recurrence of

[21] See Dominique Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang: récits de crimes et société à la Belle Époque* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).
[22] This phrase echoes the title of a famous book: Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora Press, 1989).

these repressive measures, besides proving the perseverance of police control against a cross-dresser, quite paradoxically also attest to the opposite, namely the indeterminacy of the regulatory framework relating to gender transgression at the beginning of the period examined in this article. Although Giuseppe B. was known as a "pervert," and mentioned in official documents as "l'ermafrodito di Trastevere" (Trastevere's hermaphrodite), it should be stressed that he was never punished for homosexuality or cross-dressing following accusations.

Let us now turn to another case, namely of a man who used to dress and live as a woman, at the end of the period analysed in this article, approximately 50 years after Giuseppe B.'s vicissitudes. Salvatore M.[23] in 1932 was about 40 years old and lived in Avellino, a small town in southern Italy, with his mother and his two sisters. He had never married and worked as a "laundress," certainly an unusual job for a man at the time. The many official documents concerning him insist on his lengthy criminal record, including a series of convictions for solicitation, indecent exposure, and other offences related to his dubious moral conduct. He was also well known as a "pederast." Furthermore, from his youth, Salvatore was known in his community by the nickname of *Nanninella*, because of his effeminate attitudes and because he had always shown a strong preference for "women's chores." Over the years, Salvatore had begun styling his long hair with hairpins and to flaunt necklaces and other jewellery, as well as "conversing" with young men.

In many ways, his story was similar to that of Giuseppe B. Except that in 1932 Avellino's Court defined Salvatore M. as a "socially dangerous person" and confined him in a special section of Aversa's Criminal Asylum. The injunctive order reported that such a measure was necessary for several reasons, particularly the fact that the man was often seen walking around the city with feminine appearance and clothes, which the Court considered a "very abnormal event." The decree also stated that such a "serious inversion of sensitivity" was a clear sign of "mental confusion," and "pose[d] a social threat" because Salvatore M., feeling and acting like a woman, could easily seduce young men. Therefore, it was especially his propensity to play with gender roles and with his sexual life that posed the greatest threat to the community.

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[23] The story of Salvatore M. and the documents later cited are collected in his medical record kept at the Archivio storico dell'Ospedale psichiatrico giudiziario di Aversa. The archive sorts the records according to the date of death or discharge, Salvatore M. was discharged on 6th October, 1933.

Although, as his medical records highlighted, Salvatore M. always maintained respectable conduct in the Aversa asylum, he only regained his freedom the following year, in October 1933, after the director of the institute finally declared that "during the long stay in this institution no one ever complained about his sexual behaviour, which is the only cause of his social dangerousness." This statement explicitly confirmed the real reasons behind Salvatore M.'s confinement for approximately one year and a half in an asylum which was intended for insane criminals.

Threrefore much had changed in 50 years *vis-à-vis* the ways in which the authorities and ruling classes dealt with the transgression of gender norms. If one compares the two stories, the main difference between the two men is that Salvatore M. was defined as "socially dangerous" and confined in an asylum because of his attitude to dressing, and living as a woman. Most importantly, is should be made clear that by this point, cross-dressing had become the concern of scientists, particularly among psychiatrists and criminologists. At the same time, when cross-dressing became one of the main and most keenly read topics addressed in the popular press, it also excited the attention of positivism. In order to explain the transgressions of sexual and gender codes, psychiatric and forensic journals and treatises used a new nosographic category; that of sexual inversion. Between 1878, when Professor of Forensic Pathology Arrigo Tamassia published his article *Sull'inversione dell'istinto sessuale*[24] (On the inversion of sexual instinct) and 1932, when Salvatore M. was confined to Aversa, "sexual inversion" became a pathology, addressed by the main university textbooks of psychiatry and forensic medicine, and the object of several scientific articles, as well as one of the main topics addressed by journals such as the *Archivio delle psicopatie sessuali* (1896-1898) or *L'Anomalo* (1889-1922).

The reasons behind this prominent scientific interest are numerous. Here, I would like to focus in particular on two questions. On the one hand, the increased attention which cross-dressing received in newspapers and in the public *arena* and, on the other hand, on the connection between scientific interest in sexual and gender transgressions, and the nation-building process. As Alice Kelikian[25] has argued, after the Italian Kingdom was established as a secular state, in contrast with the Papal

[24] Arrigo Tamassia, "Sull'inversione dell'istinto sessuale," *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria e Medicina legale* 4 (1878): 97-117.

[25] See Alice Kelikian, *Science*, "Gender and Moral Ascendency in Liberal Italy," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 3 (1996): 377-389.

states, positivist science—whose advocates were mainly academics, physicians, lawyers, members of Parliament, in other words the nation's ruling classes—was committed to building and organising Italian society. According to its theoretical founding principles, positivist science was responsible, in particular, for enlightening the darkest areas of society, taking on an important role in civilising the population. A fundamental part of this "new mission" was to control sexuality and maintain gender hierarchies, both considered crucial elements for ensuring stability in social organisation. Therefore, when newspapers published articles about men and women who had "changed gender," thus contributing to the creation of a social fact, scientists laid claim to a leading role for themselves in explaining and governing such changes. The psychiatrist Giovanni Selvatico Estense, for instance, explicitly reinforced the assumption that scientific interest in cross-dressing was also based on the exposure given to the topic by newspapers and literature. In a detailed survey of the women who, over the centuries had been living pretending to be men, published in 1904 with the explanatory title *The women-men*,[26] Selvatico Estense admitted that he had begun to study this issue only after reading some articles published in newspapers.[27] Similarly, a few years later, the Deputy Commissioner of Naples' Police Forensic Department asked to carry out a medical-anthropological study of Soccorsa C., a 15-year-old girl who used to dress and act like a boy, after the local press repeatedly published articles about her ventures.

However, I do not intend to dwell on the history of sexual inversion, i.e. the complex of theories and restrictions that nineteenth and twentieth century psychiatry and anthropology developed around "sexual abnormalities." In fact, this topic has already been extensively studied by other historians, partly because of the crucial role which positivism had in

[26] Giovanni B. Selvatico Estense, "Donne-uomini. Contributo allo studio della omosessualità," *Rivista mensile di Psichiatria forense, Antropologia criminale e Scienze affini* 7-8 (1904): 1-12.

[27] Giovanni B. Selvatico Estense was largely influenced by the life of Murray Hall, a well-know exponent of the politic circles of New York, twice married and father of a girl, who was "discovered" as a woman, only in his/her deathbed in 1901. This story had a wide echo both in United States and Europe. See "Murray Hall Fooled many Shrewd Men," The *New York Times*, 19th January, 1901; "Murray Hall's Will Filed. Woman Who Masquerade as a Man Leaves Directions for Headstone for 'Wife's' Grave," *The New York Tribune*, 20th March, 1901. Among the Italian articles see "Audace dissimulazione di sesso," *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, 24th January, 1901.

the emergence of a modern culture of homosexuality. Rather, I wish to explore a specific aspect of the ways in which positivism and the history of sexuality and gender are connected: the activities of the *Scuola superiore di polizia scientifica* [School of Forensic Science], founded in 1902 by Salvatore Ottolenghi, a follower of Cesare Lombroso. My hypothesis is that the School, which was established to introduce the instances and "discoveries" of criminal anthropology into police investigations and in crime prevention, propelled a new approach to the sexual sphere, in which different scientific and policing expertise had to mingle. These practices had long-lasting effects. I wish to argue that the stigma of "socially dangerous person," which was attributed to Salvatore M. in 1932 and to many other cross-dressers and homosexuals, who were exiled or confined during the Fascist period and in postwar Italy, could also be considered the culmination of the policies and practices promoted by the School.

The School's attention to sexual behaviour and sexual characters is recognisable from the very outset, in the many reports and publications it produced, particularly in the field of classification of the various types of the "anomalous" and "criminals," required for the construction of a national signalling system. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Scuola superiore di polizia scientifica* developed a new system of criminal identification, later adopted by all police stations in Italy, which assigned a crucial role to the description of the "cranial-facial" class of the suspect and his/her psychological characteristics.[28] The ten fundamental "cranial-facial" classes also included that of sexual inverts, determined by the presence of secondary sex characteristics of the opposite sex, such as the oval shape of the face, the hairstyle, and the bone structure. Whereas, initially, the invention of the "sexually inverted type" by forensic culture only had the purpose of facilitating communication among the various police offices, in the following years this class of subjects was hit by a shadow of suspicion. Indeed, during the 1920s Giuseppe Falco, a leading exponent of the School and head of the national signalling system, asserted new and more radical ideas in his book *Identità. Metodo scientifico di segnalamento e identificazione*. He suggested that the police should consider the characteristics of the opposite sex in a person, not only as a means of signalling and identifying him/her quickly, but also as evidence of his/her tendency to be a criminal:

[28] Salvatore Ottolenghi, *La Scuola di polizia scientifica. Il servizio di segnalamento in Italia, 1902-1910* (Roma: Tipografia delle Mantellate, 1910), 23.

> Sex anomalies are real sexual degenerations, and those who are affected by such degenerations often concern the police because, either directly or indirectly, they may be related to crime.[29]

The activities of the School introduced significant changes in the ways of perceiving "sexual anomalies" and "gender ambiguities." On the one hand, people's appearance and conduct became part of Italy's identification system, as they came to identify a class of individuals; on the other hand, through its treaties and publications, which were also used to train police officers, the School pushed to increase public surveillance on sexual conduct, which was to be treated with suspicion because they could constitute evidence of promiscuity in the criminal underworld. The institute founded by Ottolenghi expanded the forms of monitoring and recording of "sexual inverts," so that "homosexuals" became one of the classes in which the "Servizio Antropologico-Biografico per i delinquenti, pregiudicati e sospetti," established in 1915, was divided.[30]

To conclude, it is important to keep in mind that, whereas medical and psychiatric interest in homosexuality and cross-dressing played an important part in stigmatising them as a "perversion" and an "abnormality," the inclusion of "sexual inversion" in the field of forensic science and police practices, meant that it was also marked with the stigma of suspicion and social dangerousness, a fact that will have a great influence in Italian society's perception of gender transgressions in the decades to follow.

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[29] "Le anomalie del sesso sono delle vere degenerazioni sessuali ed i soggetti che da tali degenerazioni sono affetti molto spesso interessano la polizia, perché direttamente o indirettamente, possono essere in rapporto con la criminalità," Giuseppe Falco, *Identità. Metodo scientifico di segnalamento e identificazione* (Roma: Maglione e Strini, 1921), 186. On these issues, by the same author: "Sul concetto biologico di identità," *La Riforma medica* 4 (1934): 123-127.

[30]The "Servizio Antropologico-Biografico per i delinquenti, pregiudicati e sospetti" was located at Scuola superiore di Polizia scientifica, according to ana ccount of 1925-1927 it was organised in three categories. The first one, named "Schedario A" was devoted to trafficking in women and children; the second, "Schedario B" was for "Sexual offenders" and including alongside convicted of sexual homicides, for rape and other similar offenses, the homosexuals and cross-dressers; the third, "Schedario C," was the larger, and mainly devoted to political suspects and criminals. See "Servizio antropologico-biografico," *Bollettino della Scuola di polizia scientifica* 15-17 (1926-27), 118-122.

Conclusions

In order to address another key element in the history of cross-dressing, let us return to the life of Giuseppe B. Indeed, the story of "Trastevere's hermaphrodite" allows us to analyse how the association between cross-dressers and specific social contexts, especially urban ones, has contributed to the historical significance earned by cross-dressing in the late nineteenth century.

The *milieu*—to use the words of the theorist of French naturalism Hippolyte Taine—makes its appearance in the rhetorical constructions of that period, and is considered one of the main elements for assessing the degree of dangerousness of cross-dressers. It became the main element that catalysed the anxieties and fears of the establishment at the time. For social theorists and investigators, the *milieu* evoked a collective dimension, sharing of deviant practices and behaviours, the existence of a social network that fortified, welcomed and protected the "degenerate." It also evoked the awareness, which resulted from various fieldwork, that behaviour could potentially spread like an epidemic, following the power of suggestion and the influence "of man by man," as the famous Italian sociologist and criminologist Alfredo Niceforo put it.[31]

To conclude, I wish to posit that the link between "gender changes" and the social environment, made by sociology and criminology at the turn of the nineteenth century, could well explain the sudden prominence that cross-dressing acquired in Italian society and culture in these crucial decades. What differentiated the positivist period from the past was the fact that society was dealing not with a sporadic experience of extravagant cross-dressers, which was never absent hitherto, but with the spread of gender fallacies, particularly in urban spaces and across classes. Indeed, positivist literature—for instance, in surveys on slums, psychiatric studies on specific clinical cases, but also broad-spectrum studies devoted to homosexuality—always described cross-dressing in its collective and social dimension. Or rather, it considered it dangerous only when it embodied deep trends in Italian society. One of the first instances in which the Neapolitan newspaper *Roma* dealt with the adventures of Soccorsa C.—the 15-year old girl described earlier in this essay—it complained of "the audacious invasion of women into men's world"; in other words, the newspaper described her "bizarre obsession" with wearing men's clothing

[31] See Alfredo Niceforo, *Criminologia. Ambiente e delinquenza*, nuova edizione, (Milano-Roma: Fratelli Bocca, 1953), 450.

as rooted in women's growing inclination to occupy spaces and prerogatives, and adopt lifestyles, that were traditionally reserved for men.[32] Similarly, in his 1904 survey devoted to "women-men," psychiatrist Selvatico-Estense—who we also already encountered—stated that the choice made by some women to "become a man" depended on the poor education they received, since women were no longer raised to be women. Furthermore, Scipio Sighele and Alfredo Niceforo, two famous criminologists who at the turn of the nineteenth century wrote a study investigating the slums of Rome, were especially impressed by the fact that, in order to address another key element in the history of cross-dressing, men gussied up and adorned with feminine accessories frequented taverns along with criminals, thieves and prostitutes.

These examples allow us to approach a key question: to what extent were attention to, and alarm for "gender changes", on the one hand, fueled by a crisis in traditional gender roles—which was typical of the late nineteenth century—and, on the other, fuelled by a growing concern for the new urban environments, especially among the middle classes who at the time were leading the new nation? The importance assigned to gender changes had much to do with the sense of urgency attached to processes of nation building, and to the challenge that cross-dressers posed to social stability. In fact, a "woman who became a man," as well as the reverse, was living evidence of the changeability and artificiality of society's sexual division, and thus undermined the very foundations of the patriarchal organisation of the new state. Furthermore, cross-dressers not only exhibited disorderly conduct in terms of morality and sexuality, but in doing so, disrupted the social class structure. In these years, newspapers, physicians and police officers dealt with cross-dressers who were not just eccentric, but isolated characters. They were men and women who lived in slums or in working-class districts, who sometimes shared their lives with prostitutes and criminals, with whom they challenged the anthropological program of bourgeois civilisation.

[32] "La bizzarra mania di una giovanetta, abbandona la gonnella per i calzoni."

CHAPTER TWO

PATHOLOGIES AND EROTICISM: PAOLO MANTEGAZZA'S AMBIGUOUS REFLECTIONS ON FEMALE SAME-SEX SEXUALITY

CHARLOTTE ROSS

Se l'amore greco fa ribrezzo, il tribadismo muove a un grandissimo dispetto o a una infinita compassione.
(Paolo Mantegazza, 1889)[1]

È impossibile segnalare i confini che separano la fisiologia dalla patologia dell'amore. Gli ultimi gradi dell'erotismo possono essere i primi del pervertimento.
(Paolo Mantegazza, 1886)

[1] "Tribadismo" is a term of Greek origin, in circulation in Italy since the sixteenth century and widely used in medical texts to indicate women who were sexually active with other women. Historically, the term was commonly understood to indicate women who gained sexual pleasure by rubbing their genitals together. As Nerina Milletti has observed, the meaning of the term "tribade" shifted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at times referring to women who gained sexual pleasure *without* men, to indicating women who gained sexual pleasure *as if they were* men, who were described as using their clitoris as a substitute penis; see Nerina Milletti, "Analoghe sconcezze. Tribadi, saffiste, invertite e omosessuali: categorie e sistemi sesso/genere nella rivista di antropologia criminale fondata da Cesare Lombroso [1880-1949]," *DWF* 4, 24 (1994): 50-122. In publications in late nineteenth century Italy, the term was used frequently about any women who engaged in sexual practices with other women.

Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910), Professor of Medical Pathology in Pavia and of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, is widely considered to be the founder of Italian anthropology. He published numerous, best-selling works about sexuality for non-specialists, including *Igiene dell'amore*[2] (first published 1878), and *Gli amori degli uomini*[3] (first published 1885), from which the respective citations above are drawn. As is clear from even these brief statements, his views on same-sex practices and so-called "perversions" were often marked by a distinct ambiguity: he expressed both revulsion and compassion for those who transgressed sexual norms of the time; he also cast doubt on the supposed distinction between 'normal' and 'deviant' sexual acts that, for some of his medical contemporaries, seemed so clear and inflexible. As I have argued elsewhere,[4] discourses on female same-sex desires and practices in Italy during this period were multiple and contradictory, and were riddled with ambiguities that make them a rich subject for analysis. Moreover, they sometimes opened up more radical discourses that co-existed alongside the dominant narrative that vilified same-sex practices as "degenerate."[5] Yet amongst medical experts—the early sexologists—Mantegazza's work stands out as particularly inflected with intriguing inconsistencies, and as offering a compelling account of desire between women that veers between fascinated sympathy and brusque condemnation. While his contemporaries' work was also marked by contradictions, they did not blur the lines between "perversion" and legitimate eroticism as he did, calling into question the very categories upon which the new sexual science seemed to depend.

While Mantegazza's oeuvre has recently received some scholarly attention,[6] his approach to female sexuality, and in particular to female

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[2] Paolo Mantegazza, *Igiene dell'amore* (Milano: Treves, 1889 [1878]).

[3] Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini. Saggio di una etnologia dell'amore* (Milano: Paolo Mantegazza editore, 1886 [1885]).

[4] Charlotte Ross, *Eccentricity and Sameness. Discourses on Lesbianism and Desire between Women in Italy, 1860s-1930s* (Bern, New York and London: Peter Lang, 2015).

[5] One striking example of Alfredo Oriani's novel *Al di là* (Firenze: Edarc edizioni, 1877), discussed in C. Ross, *Eccentricity and sameness.*

[6] See for example: Paola Govoni, "Dalla scienza popolare alla divulgazione. Scienziati e pubblico in età liberale," in *Scienze e cultura dell'Italia unita*, eds. Francesco Cassata and Claudio Pogliano, vol. 26 of *Storia d'Italia. Annali* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011), 65-82; Dolores Martìn Moruno, "Love in the Time of Darwinism: Paolo Mantegazza and the Emergence of Sexuality," *Medicina & Storia*, X, 19-20 (2010): 147-164; Luisa Tasca, "Il 'Senatore erotico'. Sesso e matrimonio nell'antropologia di Paolo Mantegazza," in *La mediazione matrimoniale in Europa*

same-sex practices and desires, has not been explored in the detail it merits.[7] Given the wide dissemination of his work, and the problematic legacies of negative sexological theories on female homosexuality, this is a topic that requires detailed critical scrutiny. In an attempt to stimulate more sustained critical investigation of Mantegazza's reflections on both male and female homosexuality, this essay explores his pronouncements on female same-sex sexuality, which are contextualised with reference to contemporary authors such as the positivist criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso. I argue that the contradictions and ambiguities which often characterised Mantegazza's reflections are clearly apparent in his observations on sex between women. Moreover, I suggest that while his overall approach to women's sexuality and social role was problematically conservative, his rhetorical strategies encourage readers to go beyond his ostensible meaning. At times, his observations even open up quite radical discourses, as indicated above: he questions moralistic condemnations of sexual "pathologies"; he seems to partially legitimise sex between women; and, whether consciously or unconsciously, his thought tends to unravel the very categories of sexuality (homo/heterosexuality) that were fast solidifying at the time. I begin by briefly locating Mantegazza in his historical context, before turning first to his views on female sexuality more broadly, and then focussing on his perspectives on sex and desire between women. Finally, I consider the impact of his writing and reflect on how we might engage with his complex, engaging, but also deeply pathologising perspectives, today.

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fra Otto e Novecento, ed. Bruno Wanrooij (Fiesole and Roma: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 2004), 295-322; Monica Boni, *L'erotico senatore. Vita e studi di Paolo Mantegazza* (Genova: Name, 2002).

[7] The topic is barely even mentioned in most analyses of his work, and where it does appear it is often framed uncritically. In her essay introducing a recent re-edition of *Gli amori degli uomini*, Gabriella Armenise makes brief references to "le perversioni sessuali" without any effort to problematise this terminology or engage critically with the implications of Mantegazza's reflections; see Gabriella Armenise, "Conoscenza antropologica de 'il principe degli affetti' e relativa 'alfabetizzazione sentimentale' nell'ottica mantegazziana," in Paolo Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini*, 2 vols*.,* ed. Gabriella Armenise (Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2012), xv-lxi.

Mantegazza and the early Italian sexologists

As Chiara Beccalossi has argued,[8] female same-sex practices provoked particular interest among the early Italian sexologists and by the 1890s had become quite a "fashionable" topic in medical and psychiatric journals. Following arguments expressed by the Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Italian anthropologists, criminologists and medical experts categorised female same-sex desire as deriving from either congenital or contextual factors; [9] either it was an inborn condition, or it occurred in individuals deprived of male contact, for example in prisons or mental institutions. The dominant narratives of the period condemned such desires and acts as "perverted" and "deviant". Invasive attention was devoted to presumed bodily markers of sexual "degeneration", and anxiety grew apace about all-female environments and the spread of tribadismo."

Several scientists with prestigious university posts, including the positivist criminologist, Cesare Lombroso,[10] and the neuropathologist Guglielmo Cantarano,[11] began to publish articles on so-called sexual "perverts" and "tribadi", based on a methodologically-dubious blend of case studies, received wisdom, summaries of scientific work published elsewhere, particularly in France and Germany, and literary and cultural references.[12] Their reflections pathologised all non-normative bodies and

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[8] Chiara Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion. Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, c.1870-1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[9] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. *Contrary Sexual Instinct. A Medico-Legal Study* (London: F.J. Rebman, 1894 [1886]).

[10] Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) founded the influential journal the *Archivio di psichiatria*, *scienze penali ed antropologia criminale* (1880), and enjoyed a distinguished university career, being appointed Chair of Criminal Anthropology at the University of Turin in 1905.

[11] Guglielmo Cantarano (1857-1913), was Professor of Clinical Medicine and Neuropathology in Naples.

[12] See for example Guglielmo Cantarano, "Contribuzione alla casistica dell'inversione dell'istinto sessuale," *La psichiatria, la neuropatologia e le scienze affini* 1, 3 (1883): 201-216; Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (Milano: Edizioni et al., 2009 [1893]). Lombroso and Ferrero refer to Krafft-Ebing (*Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1886) and Parent-Duchâtelet (*De la Prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, 1836), as well as novels by Denis Diderot (*La religieuse*, 1796), and Théophile Gautier (*Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 1835). See: Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 418-19.

desires in extremely problematic ways, and their practices involved sectioning female patients and sometimes performing invasive surgical interventions to cauterise their clitorises or remove their ovaries.[13] While there are certainly inconsistencies in the case studies and discussions by Lombroso and Cantarano,[14] their conclusions remained quite firmly condemnatory and were often expressed in horrified tones.

Mantegazza's reflections provide a contrast not only in their heightened ambiguity but also in their intended audience. While Lombroso and Cantarano were writing in medical journals for a specialised readership, Mantegazza wanted to reach out to a broad swathe of the general public. His works sold hundreds of thousands of copies, were reprinted and updated a great many times and translated into several languages, making him the most widely-disseminated Italian scientific author of the time.[15] He was one of the first scientists to explore sexuality as an aspect of human experience, to be considered alongside the biological, cultural and psychological dimensions of human existance.[16] Moreover, he has even been dubbed "the first sexologist in the modern sense of the word," since he "analyzes and distills vast amounts of historical and ethnological information in order to arrive at some practical sexual philosophy that would benefit the average reader."[17] This goal stood in marked contrast to Lombroso's aims, which seemed to be to

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[13] Cesare Lombroso, "Del tribadismo nei manicomi," *Archivio di psichiatria, scienze penali ed antropologia criminale per servire allo studio dell'uomo alienato e delinquente* 6 (1885), 220; see also the discussions in: Paola Lupo, *Storia dell'omosessualità femminile* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2006), 101 and Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion*, 119, 135.

[14] Charlotte Ross, "Italian Medical and Literary Discourses Around Female Same-Sex Desire, 1877-1906," in *Italian Sexualities Uncovered, 1789-1914,* eds. Valeria Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Riall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[15] Tasca, "Il 'Senatore erotico'," 297-298; Govoni, "Dalla scienza popolare alla divulgazione," 208-209.

[16] Laura Schettini, *Il gioco delle parti. Travestimenti e paure sociali tra Otto e Novecento* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2011).

[17] Edwin J. Haeberle, "Sexology: From Italy to Europe and the World," in *Sessualità e terzo millennio, studi e ricerche in sessuologia clinica*, eds. Chiara Simonelli, Filippo Petruccelli and Veronica Vizzari, vol. 1 of *Sessualità e Terzo millennio* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1997), 13-22. Available online: http://www.sexarchive.info/GESUND/ARCHIV/PAPER2.HTM (accessed 10/08/14).

control and repress any form of sexuality aside from reproductive intercourse within the sanctity of (heterosexual) marriage.

Mantegazza's thought impacted on the evolving sciences of sexology and anthropology beyond Italy; for example, he is cited several times in Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*.[18] At the same time, he was harshly criticised by intellectuals in Italy, and his books, considered by some to be "erotic" texts, were placed on the Church's *Index Librorum Proibitorum*.[19] Critics have noted contradictions in his work, as his arguments often seem to pull in different directions. As Luisa Tasca notes, his texts are at once moral reformist tracts campaigning for better sexual education, ethnographic studies of sexual practices, romantic novels and pornographic texts full of *double entendres*, which led to both their success with the bourgeoisie and their condemnation.[20] The tensions between these diverse styles and semantic levels are particularly notable in his observations on female sexuality.

Perspectives on female sexuality: "…sempre pronta alla copula"

Mantegazza's observations on female sexuality seem to be based on observation and ethnographic research, although he does not include case studies in his publications, as Lombroso and Cantarano did; nor does he explain his methodology clearly. The source of his information is therefore difficult to gauge. Unconventionally for the time, Mantegazza did not openly condemn sexual desire, but spoke of the pleasures of the flesh as natural and legitimate, provided that lustful desires were accompanied by love. In the 1872 study *Fisiologia dell'amore* he pronounces: "Non vi è amore senza voluttà, ma la voluttà da sola non è amore [...] La voluttà senza l'amore è sembre libidine [...] è immorale, anche quando sembra essere igienica. Coll'amore anche la lussuria è virtù."[21]

Here Mantegazza takes a double-edged position: he both confirms traditional beliefs by validating romantic love, and transgresses them, by

[18] See Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Analysis of the Sexual Impulse, Love and Pain, the Sexual Impulse in Women*, Third Edition (London: Random House, 1927); especially vol. 3, 200.
[19] Tasca, "Il 'Senatore erotico'," 316-317; Boni, *L'erotico senatore*, 74, 87.
[20] Tasca, "Il 'Senatore erotico'," 316-317.
[21] Paolo Mantegazza, *Fisiologia dell'amore* (Sesto San Giovanni: Casa Editrice Madella, 1916 [1854]), 96-97.

advocating guilt-free, pleasurable sex. In so doing, he destabilised moralistic arguments about sexual desires as inherently sinful. As critics have noted, Mantegazza was writing at a crucial period in the history of discourses on sexuality, when the *ars amatoria* was shifting into the *scientia sexualis*, which claimed to take a more detached, "objective" view of the processes of sex.[22] Yet love undoubtedly played a crucial part in his thinking about sexuality, in many of his publications; including in his reflections on same-sex practices, as I discuss.

His first work, *Fisiologia del piacere*, published in 1854, has been described as "a quasi-philosophical essay on the many facets of love through the ages and in many cultures, its written and unwritten laws, customs, joys and sorrows."[23] *La fisiologia del piacere* also included some radical assertions about female sexuality. Conventional wisdom at the time judged women as either "good"—sexually passive, and modest—or "bad"—usually prostitutes or "fallen" women, who were sexually desirous and therefore immodest, or even monstrous. This link was reinforced by Lombroso in his 1893 work, authored with Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*, which suggested that "sexuality was the root of female deviancy," embodied by the figure of the prostitute.[24] Specifically, Lombroso and Ferrero argued that a "normal" woman was "naturalmente e organicamente monogama e frigida" and even needed to be convinced to give herself, passively, to her husband.[25] Thus women who demonstrated any degree of libido were suspect. Tradition also dictated that "normal" women's primary motivation and mission was maternity.[26] Women were hailed and pigeonholed as "angels of the hearth"; docile, sweet, attentive and patient.[27] Deviation from these ideals was viewed with suspicion.

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[22] Martìn Moruno, "Love in the Time of Darwinism," 149; Haeberle, "Sexology: From Italy to Europe and the World."

[23] Haeberle, "Sexology: From Italy to Europe and the World."

[24] See Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, eds. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

[25] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 102, 417, 100.

[26] Valeria Babini, Fernanda Minuz and Annamaria Tagliavini, *La donna nelle scienze dell'uomo* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1989), 141.

[27] Antonio Rosmini Serbati, *Filosofia del diritto,* vol. 2*,* (Milano: Boniardi Pogliari, 1843), 456.

As Paola Govoni observes,[28] while Mantegazza spoke of women as equal to men, and advocated women's education and sexual freedom, he took a conservative approach, insisting that women's only aspiration should be to the traditional role of wife and mother, which often required them to be submissive. In the 1893 work *Fisiologia della donna* he stated that:

> La donna [...] vale tanto più quanto più è madre [...] La maternità è il primo titolo d'onore della donna, e quando essa vi rinunzia, scalza dai fondamenti la società umana e cessa di essere donna.[29]

He supported monogamous heterosexuality as the only form of legitimate sexual relation, and his aim was to render sexual relations between spouses more satisfactory to both parties, thus (he reasoned) decreasing adultery and the demand for prostitution.[30] However, his views on female sexual drives were in stark contrast to Lombroso's views and the dominant norms of the period. Mantegazza declared:

> La donna è fisicamente sempre pronta alla copula, mentre l'uomo non lo è che qualche volta [...] Molte donne hanno parecchie polluzioni nel tempo in cui l'uomo non ne compie che una sola [...] La donna è dotata di una sensibilità più squisita dell'uomo [...] L'apparato femmineo destinato ai piaceri del sesso ha una superficie molto più estesa di quello dell'uomo.[31]

Here he asserts that women—not only prostitutes but all women—have a higher sex drive than men, experience sexual arousal and a form of ejaculation more frequently than men, are more sensitive than men and effectively have larger sexual organs than men. While on some level Mantegazza's remarks are infused with problematic notions of women as ever-ready sexual animals, of a baser, more primitive nature than men,[32] his point is to valorise women's capacity for pleasure; indeed, he later asserted that women had a right to the same level of sexual pleasure as men.[33]

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[28] Govoni, "Dalla scienza popolare alla divulgazione," 244, 249.
[29] Paolo Mantegazza, *Fisiologia della donna* (Milano: Bietti, 1945 [1893]), 74.
[30] Tasca, "Il 'Senatore erotico'," 301.
[31] Paolo Mantegazza, *Fisiologia del piacere* (Sesto San Giovanni: Casa Editrice Madella, 1916 [1854]), 34.
[32] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.
[33] Tasca, "Il 'Senatore erotico'," 314-315.

The controversial nature of such statements should not be underestimated. Indeed, Mantegazza's work was attacked and criticised, and he risked being stripped of his professorship and his seat in the Italian Senate.[34] In the later work *Fisiologia dell'amore*, he acknowledges that "molti hanno contraddetto la mia opinione [...] che alla donna sia concessa dalla natura una più larga coppa per bevere all'inesausta fonte della voluttà d'amore."[35] He then went on to soften his original claims, but without retracting his original point; he clarifies that while no one can deny that women may be as "thirsty" for sexual contact as men, such "voluttà" is merely an aspect of the relationship they seek, since they only really crave love. In this passage he simultaneously reinforces the view that women are highly sexually-desirous, whilst employing gendered, metaphorical language that evokes traditional images of women as nurturing wife and mother:

> La donna fisicamente desidera a lungo, a lungo possiede, e della conquista può godere ogni giorno, ogni ora, e farsene una atmosfera calda e profumata, nella quale vive come in un nido; la donna culla nelle sue viscera un angelo che desidero sempre con ardore e che in lei non spegne l'affetto per il compagno [...] Dall'amplesso ardente dell'uomo che ama passa alle carezze dei suoi bambini, né la voluttà la stanca, né l'ardore la dissecca, né la passione l'annoia, essa è tutta quanta dai capelli ai piedi imbevuta d'amore [...] L'amore dell'uomo è fulmine che guizza, romba e trapassa.[36]

Mantegazza's clarifications seem designed to calm the waters stirred by his earlier declarations; women's troubling sexual desire is sublimated before the reader's eyes into an angelic, faithful, tireless love, embodied by a wife and mother who is located in the domestic interior, and who knows her duties and how to fulfil them. Men's presumed sexual dominance is also partially restored through the metaphors of lightning and thunder; yet ambiguities remain, since Mantegazza does not withdraw his previous assertion regarding women's "più larga coppa."

Sex between women: "una passione vera, ardente"

Women's active desire and capacity for pleasure are again evoked in Mantegazza's observations on sexual practices between women, in a

[34] Haeberle, "Sexology: From Italy to Europe and the World."
[35] Mantegazza, *Fisiologia dell'amore*,165.
[36] Ibid.

similarly ambiguous manner. *Fisiologia dell'amore* was the first of a trilogy of books that continued to explore sexuality and desire; the other volumes were *Igiene dell'amore* (1877), and *Gli amori degli uomini* (1885), cited above. In earlier publications, Mantegazza insisted that the most shameful sexual acts were masturbation or prostitution, and barely mentioned homosexuality.[37] In *Igiene dell'amore*, he briefly railed against pederasty, tribadism and sodomy as nauseating "cancrene sessuali" that devour men and women at the lower end of the social scale, but did not go into further detail.[38] In contrast, the third volume in the trilogy, *Gli amori degli uomini*, includes one of Mantegazza's most substantial reflections on male and female homosexuality. Strikingly, while he classifies same-sex acts as "i pervertimenti dell'amore", his observations are not entirely condemnatory.[39] Indeed, he begins this chapter on "sexual perversions" by asserting that the boundaries between "normal" and "abnormal" sexual practices cannot be clearly discerned:

> È impossibile segnalare i confini che separano la fisiologia dalla patologia dell'amore. Gli ultimi gradi dell'erotismo possono essere i primi del pervertimento, e in quell'uragano dei sensi, della passione e della fantasia che ravvolge un uomo e una donna che si desiderano e si posseggono, non sono che i sofisti del casismo che possono distinguere ciò che è bene e ciò che è male. E anche di questo bene e di questo male è diverso il giudizio secondo che si considera il lato igienico o il lato morale del problema. È vero che in una morale più ragionevole e più scientifica che è di là a venire, igiene e etica dovrebbero andare perfettamente d'accordo; ma fino ad ora spesso le due cose fanno ai pugni e si contraddicono; prova che o l'igiene è ignorante o la morale è falsa.[40]

Mantegazza's argument here seems to be deliberately destabilising. He implies that erotic and sexual desires and practices cannot and should not be divided into what is legitimate and what is not, since such distinctions are mere rhetorical devices, based on subjective reasoning. Moreover, he continues, while medical and moral arguments should concur on accepted forms of sexual practice, often they are divergent. Implicitly, moral standards are out of step with science, and should be questioned. Continuing in the same vein, he then launches into a discussion of

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[37] See, for example, Mantegazza, *Elementi di igiene*, 331-2; Mantegazza, *Fisiologia dell'amore*, 213.
[38] See Mantegazza, *Igiene dell'amore*, 138.
[39] Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini*, 131.
[40] Ibid., 131-2.

masturbation that within the space of four lines is qualified as both "spontanea e naturale" and a form of "pervertimento"[41] (1886, 133). Masturbation will lead to suicide, he proclaims; it is much better to engage in sexual coupling than in solitary stimulation: "Cento, mille volte meglio la lussuria dell'amore diviso."[42] Our instinctive desire for sexual satisfaction is cast as a valid need that should be fulfilled, ideally with another individual. This discussion then flows seamlessly into a consideration of mutual female masturbation, framed as a way for women to increase their sexual pleasure, "raddoppiare semplicemente la voluttà."[43] Surely, the text seems to suggest, only a "false morality' could find this 'immoral." How can we draw a line between these practices, and be sure of what is "perverted," what is a physiological need and what is "acceptable" eroticism?

In keeping with his initial suggestion that there are no hard and fast distinctions between sexual practices and categories, Mantegazza then blends this discussion of mutual masturbation into a history of desire between women. He returns to Lesbos, in ancient Greece, and clarifies different terminology and practices, explaining that *l'amore lesbiano* (original emphasis) was practiced by women that he calls "cunnilingui", who pleasured each other with their tongues, while "tribadismo" was performed by women who had "exceptionally" long clitorises, and could "simulate" sexual intercourse. At the time of writing, he explains, the term "tribadismo" is used to denote both these practices.[44] While tribadism is pathologised, it is acknowledged as widespread, and is effectively naturalised, as he observes "[è] un pervertimento, che deve essere nato dovunque erano donne."[45] This discourse continues as he classifies masturbation between Hottentot women as a "vizio naturale."[46] Mantegazza combines reflection on contemporary sexual practices with references to the classical world, tracing *l'amore lesbiano* (original emphasis) from the island of Lesbos to the island of Capri in late nineteenth century Italy.[47] Thus he sketches a form of "lesbian" genealogy,

[41] Ibid., 133.
[42] Ibid.,134.
[43] Ibid.,136.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 138.
[47] Ibid., 133-136.In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Capri was a haven for intellectuals, artists and disgraced or eccentric aristocrats from across Europe and America. The island became the exoticised backdrop for communities

which implicitly argues for the natural, cross-cultural occurrence of desire between women. His attention to different forms of sexuality in multiple cultural contexts also suggests that sexual practices and desires are culturally-determined rather than innate.

Mantegazza's reflections on foreign cultures are in part drawn from observations by others, including Colonel Emile Duhousset, the French military officer and ethnographer.[48] Yet he then begins to insert personal anecdotes, like the following: "ho conosciuto due giovani e belle fanciulle [...] che si amavano ardentemente."[49] There are several points worthy of note here. Firstly, he closes the gap between authoritarian scientist (observer) and "afflicted" case study (observed) seen in other scientists' work,[50] and places himself on the same social level as these women, through the use of the verb "conoscere." Secondly, this encounter is not motivated purely by lust, but is enriched by a shared emotional bond. In a later edition of this text (revised before his death in 1910), this anedocte is edited to read as follows: "io ho conosciuto due amiche che si adoravano e si possedevano a vicenda."[51] In this rendering, the anecdote refers specifically to women who engage in *reciprocal* sexual activity, possessing each other in turn. Thus it breaks down a pervasive model of tribadic sexuality present in the work of his contemporaries such as Lombroso, of an active tribade, with an "exceptionally" long clitoris, who seduces and penetrates a weaker, younger woman.[52]

A further statement reinforces the idea that tribades experienced deep emotional connections, and implies that attachments between women are valid forms of desire that are equivalent to heterosexual love. Mantegazza comments: "qualche volta il tribadismo non è che questione di voluttà fisica [...] ma più spesso alla lussuria si associa una passione vera, ardente, che ha tutte le esigenze, tutte le gelosie dell'amore vero."[53] This distinction between empty lust, and desire accompanied by love recalls his statements in *Fisiologia del piacere*, cited above, which condemned mere

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of international socially-and economically-privileged lesbians, homosexual men, bisexuals and queer sexual dissidents. See Claudio Gargano, *Capri pagana. Uranisti e amazzoni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Napoli: La Conchiglia, 2007).

[48] Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini*, 136.

[49] Ibid., 139.

[50] For example G. Cantarano, "Contribuzione alla casistica dell'inversione."

[51] Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini*. *Saggio di una etnologia dell'amore* (Firenze: Marzocco, 1943 [1885]), 87.

[52] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 417.

[53] Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini* (1886), 139.

cravings for flesh but sanctioned these if they were tempered by love. Implicitly, by his own logic, it becomes possible to distinguish between women who have sexual intercourse, who are "immorally" libidinous, and women who are involved in loving sexual relationships with one another, since, perhaps in this case too, "coll'amore anche la lussuria è virtù."[54] Clearly, Mantegazza's perspective still problematically condemns sex for its own sake, whether between heterosexual or female-female couples; however, given the discursive climate of the time, it was very controversial to draw a comparison between tribadism and 'true love', even in a popular science publications.[55]

Perhaps the most radical suggestion that Mantegazza makes in this chapter, however, regards married women who are bored by their husband's performance and who experiment with other women. He brings the phenomenon close to home by alerting his readers: "Anche fra le nostre signore però questo vizio non è raro."[56] While nevertheless condemning tribadism as an "aberrazione," Mantegazza, possibly unwittingly, suggests that sex between women is frequent between middle- and upper-class women, who find it far more satisfying than heterosexual intercourse. He observes that once women have experienced tribadism—and in particular oral sex—"healthy" relations with their husbands prove disappointing: "ogni gioia sana dell'amplesso impallidisce dinanzi agli spasimi convulsivi del tribadismo."[57] As a result, rather ironically, their husbands may be obliged to emulate tribadic sex (i.e. perform oral sex), in order to satisfy their wives.

Strikingly, here Mantegazza criticises heterosexual sexual techniques, and differentiates between congenitally-deviant tribades and sexual acts that give pleasure. Although he condemns cunnilingus as a "tribadic" perversion, he seems to advocate that it is practised in order to ensure sexual harmony between spouses. Despite his use of overtly condemnatory language, the instabilities of his argument in this chapter convey an

[54] Mantegazza, *Fisiologia dell'amore*, 97.

[55] Mantegazza takes a similarly ambiguous approach to male homosexuality, finding it "horrible," particularly anal penetration, but he describes, quite sympathetically, what he calls "la sodomia psichica": desire that does not lead to penetrative sex. He asserts that this is not a vice but a passion, albeit a troubling one. He describes men who kiss and fondle each other's genitals who are driven by an irresistible passion and sensuality. See Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini* (1943), 90, 97.

[56] Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini* (1886), 139-140.

[57] Ibid., 140.

oblique advertisement for tribadism: the promise of more pleasurable sex and the possibility of "amore vero." In addition, his remarks tend to break down models of behaviour or categories of sexual practices that were fast crystallising in scientific texts of this period. For example, although his own observations reveal that the couples he encountered were far more varied, Lombroso repeatedly returns to a particular paradigm of tribade relationships—a more "feminine" woman paired with a "masculine-looking" individual, exemplified by a photograph of a couple that he encountered in a prison.[58] In contrast, Mantegazza does not insist on the "male" identity or physiognomy of either of the individuals involved. Moreover, while Lombroso classified any sexual practices between women as tribadic and "perverted," and spoke of sex between women as if it were a contagious virus,[59] Mantegazza's suggestion that men could perform "tribadic" oral sex cast same-sex practices as techniques available to all, rather than as specifically degenerate acts. Thus he broadened conceptions of heterosexuality through productive contamination by "taboo" sexualities. It appears that heterosexual men needed to improve their technique, and that women had a lot to teach them. Finally, Mantegazza implies that sexual organs like the clitoris develop, or certainly develop sensitivity, as a result of sexual experience; he states that women who have engaged in oral sex for long periods of time will continue to desire this "vice," since "la clitoride, con l'esercizio dei suoi nervi si affina e si sviluppa."[60] This is a striking narrative of the construction of the sexually-responsive body, which proposes a boldly contrasting argument to theories of hereditary genital "abnormalities" as the motivations for female same-sex desire.

Certainly, Mantegazza continues to reiterate that sex between women is an "aberrazione,"[61] but his rhetoric seems contrived to engender doubt in the reader about the solidity of "moral" arguments on sexuality. Mantegazza can be seen to deliberately invite his readership to see beyond his condemnations, and to enlarge their knowledge of, and appetite for a range of sexual practices that may be viewed as sinful, but only according to unreliable and contradictory Sophistry. He is not consciously aiming to validate desire between women, rather to protect the institution of marriage by educating heterosexual couples about love-making techniques

[58] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 420.
[59] Ibid., 421.
[60] Mantegazza, *Gli amori degli uomini* (1886), 140.
[61] Ibid.

that will give pleasure to both parties and prevent either one from falling into "vice," but his words undoubtedly connote more than he intended.

Critical reception and discursive impact

Mantegazza was not the only scientist or intellectual of the period to note how strongly some women desired sexual contact with other women: the lawyer and psychologist Scipio Sighele noted how, in certain circles, no sooner had the topic of same-sex practices been raised, than women wanted to experience it for themselves: "Qualche mantenuta di gran voga, qualche *cocotte* del gran mondo ha udito parlare di questi turpitudini dai suoi amici, dopo una cena ha volute *vedere*, poi ha voluto *provare*."[62] These words were also cited by Lombroso and Ferrero in their influential study *La donna delinquente*.[63] Both Lombroso and Ferrero, and Sighele, seem to blame men for the "outbreak" of Sapphism in European culture: men are absent, and fail to provide stable emotional support, or are aggressive and abusive towards women, causing them to turn to vice in order to escape mistreatment: "vi sono molte donne [...] che vi si danno [al tribadismo] quasi forzate per isfuggire ad oscenità ignominiose e forse peggiori."[64] However their own observations reveal that a key motivation for same-sex practices was women's sexual curiosity and their thirst for experimentation. Of course, Lombroso and Ferrero were convinced that women with strong sexual desires had degenerated to a state of animalistic depravity and needed to be controlled.[65] In contrast, Mantegazza seems to be the only scientist to have devoted attention to women's sexual desire as a valid instinct, and to have explored in any detail the hypothesis that women sought and deserved, fulfilling sexual stimulation.

Responses to Mantegazza's ideas varied. In the 1880s he was criticised as immoral and pornographic, and for inciting readers to vice, particularly by literary intellectuals, including Matilde Serao.[66] Mantegazza responded by writing a defence of his work, "I falsi puritani" which was published in the press (*Corriere di Roma, Corriere di Napoli*) and became the preface to subsequent editions of *Igiene dell'amore* and *Gli amori degli uomini*,

[62] Scipio Sighele. *La coppia criminale. Studio di psicologia morbosa.* (Torino: Bocca, 1893), 107.
[63] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 424.
[64] Sighele. *La coppia criminale*, 107; Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 424.
[65] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 421.
[66] Boni, *L'erotico senatore*, 74.

with the title "Il pudore nella scienza."[67] He claimed that while he discussed explicit issues, his publications were educational; he was attempting to increase knowledge of how to practice healthy sexuality.[68] His books continued to be reissued in numerous editions, but his work did not seem to have a significant influence amongst Italian medical experts. His views were not widely cited by Lombroso, or as widely cited as Lombroso's were, in subsequent scientific publications. Intellectuals writing in the early twentieth century expressed scathing views: for example, Benedetto Croce accused him of abusing science to satisfy "unscientific" curiosity[69] (1957, 55). Discussions of sexuality in early twentieth century cultural journals like *La Voce* recognised Mantegazza's contribution, but sought to move away from his explicit discussions of sexual techniques and pleasure; Giovanni Papini was partially sympathetic to Mantegazza's aim to provide sexual education, but concluded that his libertine side got the better of him, making his work inappropriate.[70]

Beyond Italy, Krafft-Ebing commended Mantegazza for his brilliant discussions, but considered him a persuasive writer, not a scientist.[71] More positevely, Mantegazza's work on female same-sex desire was read and admired by the British explorer, translator and travel writer, Sir Richard Francis Burton who, in his translation of the *Thousand Nights and a Night* declared his agreement with Mantegazza's view that female same-sex practices merited investigation, rather than persecution.[72] However, Burton himself was considered dubious, subversive and not rigorously "scientific" (much like Mantegazza), and his annotations to the Oriental text caused controversies at the time, casting doubt over the validity of such arguments.[73]

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[67] Ibid., 74-75.
[68] Mantegazza, *Igiene dell'amore*, v-ix.
[69] Benedetto Croce. "Scienziati letterati," in Benedetto Croce, *Letteratura della nuova Italia. Saggi critici*, vol. 6 (Bari: Laterza, 1957), 54-57.
[70] Giovanni Papini, "Mantegazza il sessualista," *La Voce* II (9), 10 February 1910, 26
[71] Govoni, "Dalla scienza popolare alla divulgazione," 220.
[72] Richard Francis Burton, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night. A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainment with Introduction and Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay upon the History of the Nights*, 10 vols. (London and Benares: Kama Shastra Society, 1885).
[73] See Silvia Antosa, *Richard Francis Burton. Victorian Explorer and Translator* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012).

The influence of Mantegazza's thoughts on female same-sex desire within Italy can also be seen in some profoundly equivocal publications from the early twentieth century: pseudo-scientific texts that cited from medical publications but then quickly spiralled into erotic anecdotes. In particular, these publications devoted considerable, often rather voyeuristic, attention to same-sex practices between women. The clearest example is the work of Alberto Orsi, who in his *La donna nuda: saggio sul pudore* (1906), echoes Mantegazza's point that women are often left dissatisfied after sexual intercourse with their inept, straining husbands, and eventually seek solace elsewhere.[74]

Orsi recounts the tale of a woman who, disappointed by her snoring husband and young male lover, seeks fulfilment in the arms of another woman, and finds that only she can satisfy her needs. She is not alone in this desire, Orsi notes, since "molti organismi femminili non sanno concepire diversamente il piacere."[75] Orsi's description is far more graphic than Mantegazza's reflections, and validates same-sex practices relatively openly, stating that it would be improper to call this beautiful spectacle "degenerazione"; nevertheless, the phenomenon is comparable to Mantegazza's anecdotal examples in that women, frustrated by disappointing heterosexual intercourse, take the initiative of seeking fulfilment elsewhere, and discover intense pleasure with other women.

Orsi's work was far more dubious in status than even Mantegazza's contested texts but, like Mantegazza's arguments, his writing is ambiguous and contradictory: he evokes scientific essays, but also satirises them; he depicts same-sex practices between women in a sympathetic way, but also frames them as an erotic performance for the (presumed) male reader. Notably, neither of these authors urge, as Lombroso and others did, that women's sexuality should be controlled, but instead are interested in how women might find satisfaction in the variety of sexual practices in which they might engage. Their overall aims differed (Mantegazza sought to educate, Orsi to titillate), but their depictions of women's queer sexual experimentation reveal widespread queer sex at a variety of socio-cultural levels, including amongst the upper-middle classes.

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[74] Alberto Orsi, *La donna nuda. Saggio di psicologia del Pudore* (Torino, Milano, Genova: Renzo Streglio, 1906), 132-135; cited in Lupo, *Storia dell'omosessualità*, 99-100. Mantegazza is also cited in *Una tribade. Tribadismo, saffismo, clitorismo. Psicologia, fisiologia, pratica moderna* (Firenze: Il Pensiero, 1914).

[75] Orsi, *La donna* nuda, 134-135.

Conclusions

While Mantegazza's works provoked a scandal, they continued to be reissued, and new editions and translations of his texts were published as authoritative guides to sexuality for many decades after his death.[76] As far as I have been able to ascertain, Orsi is one of the very few Italian writers to have picked up on his reflections on same-sex practices between women, since medical experts who discussed tribadism focused more on same-sex desire as pathology than on the pleasure it might give. For example, Eugenio Tanzi (1856-1934), Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Clinic for Mental and Nervous Illnesses in Florence, asserted that women who desired women found "coito clitorideo" repugnant and deserving of punishment,[77] presumably offering an argument for homosexuals as afflicted but rightly ashamed, and therefore deserving of sympathy. Even Havelock Ellis, who discussed and largely agreed with Mantegazza's views on women's sexual desire,[78] did not engage with his observations on tribadism. Thus there was no space for the potential radicality of Mantegazza's consciously and unconsciously expressed ideas within "official" sexology; where they were taken up, in erotic texts such as Orsi's, they were swiftly enmeshed with explicit anecdotes and therefore all the more discredited.

Certainly, in considering Mantegazza's work today, we should remain cautious about the claims we make: there is no evidence to suggest that he specifically wished to legitimise desire between women, and continued to condemn same-sex practices as perversions. It is unclear how many women had access to his work, a factor which may have served to limit the impact that his ideas may have had on their understanding and embodiment of their own sexualities.[79] What his texts reveal is a complex

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[76] For example, *Gli amori degli uomini* was republished in 1943. More recent Italian paperback editions are inspired by critical interest in the history of sexuality.

[77] Eugenio Tanzi, *Trattato delle malattie mentali* (Milano: Società Editrice Libraria, 1904), 623.

[78] Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 204.

[79] In "Il pudore nella scienza," Mantegazza recounts how a well-known intellectual had explained that if he had seen *Igiene dell'amore* on the bookshelves of a "Signora," he would not have visited her again. Mantegazza explains that he wrote for men and boys rather than for women (see Mantegazza, *Igiene dell'amore*, v). However, this warning implies that some women were showing an interest in these

tangle of more radical and more conservative ideas,[80] as he grappled with dominant discourses and sought both to requalify and to diverge from them. His thought is both disturbingly pathologising towards queer desire, and—especially in comparsion with his Italian medical contemporaries'—makes more space for it to exist on its own terms than does. Despite their unclear methodology and questionable reliability, his writings also provide some important information about female same-sex practices of the period, which differ from Lombroso and Ferrero's focus on women incarcerated in prisons or mental institutions, and negative narratives of tribades as mentally ill, depraved and emotionally unstable. Mantegazza instead suggests the existence of happy, middle-class, female same-sex couples, and of widespread sexual fluidity amongst women who refused to settle for disappointing sex. Whilst his primary concern remained the preservation of heterosexual marriage, he was less intent on identifying and imposing rigid categories of sexual identity than on exploring what people did in bed and why. As a result, instead of panicking about the apparently viral spread of tribadism, as Lombroso did, he revealed queer, pleasure-seeking practices that challenged the categories of "normal" and "abnormal", "healthy" and "perverted" sexuality.

works and needed, in the views of this intellectual, to be discouraged from reading them.

[80] See Haeberle, "Sexology: From Italy to Europe and the World."

CHAPTER THREE

"MI MORSE LE LABBRA, BEVETTE IL MIO RESPIRO." VAMPIRISM AND LITERARY LESBIANISM IN LIBERAL ITALY

MAYA DE LEO

"They made me out to be some sort of vampire."
"Vampire!"
"You know what I mean. One of those women, neurotic schoolmistresses and so on, who get written about in books."
(Sarah Waters, *The Paying Guests*) [1]

In her last novel, set in 1919 London, the historically accurate novelist Sarah Waters refers to the "lesbian vampire" as a well-popularized figure, a grotesque *persona* that condenses all of the stereotypes associated with lesbianism in the long nineteenth century Europe. Frances, the protagonist of the novel, after her coming out, is understandably anxious to distance herself from such a representation, the only one she can find in books.

Vampire, in this essay, is intended in the broadest meaning, as Frances uses it, depicting a woman with corrupted physiology, able to perform a physical and psychological "vampirisation" on weak men and beautiful women, stealing from them both sexual and intellectual energies, and eventually leading them to death.

Circulated by novels such as Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872)—whose lesbian innuendos are well-known—and especially by the so called penny dreadfuls during nineteenth century Europe, female vampires lost in the turn of the century their supernatural status to become concrete menaces in

[1] Sarah Waters, *The Paying Guests* (London: Virago, 2014), 168.

the flesh: *femmes fatales* whose sexuality was always unnatural ad dangerous, and often explicitly lesbian.

As many authors have pointed out, representations of lesbianism were not completely censored in the nineteenth century western culture, rather they were "confined" to specific areas of usability, first of all specialized literature (psychiatry and criminology books, textbooks, journals). Moreover, lesbianism was an exploited theme both in popular and quality literature, as well as, of course, in pornography.

The vampire becomes in this process the major of a widespread cohort of fictional lesbian characters disseminated in the most obscure zones of the public discourse, all linked each other by mutual influence. In fact, a peculiar dynamic takes place within this new discursive context: thematic and narrative *topoi* of scientific literature come out of their disciplinary boundaries to inform characters and narrations in the erotic and pornographic literature. In turn, scientific literature feeds itself on novels so that in psychiatry textbooks it is common to read clinical cases about actual patients alternating analysis of fictional characters.

In this entangled chain of crossed references stereotypical figures proliferate. Among them, the lesbian vampire is not only the most popular and enduring, but also the most ambiguously charming and strangely—or we should say *queerly*—seductive.

The Italian context is no exception, offering an extensive amount of representations of lesbianism in various fields, ranging from pioneering criminology to quality literature to pornography, and depicting attractive female vampires deeply involved in romantic lesbian relationships and often explicitly enjoying lesbian sex. These alluring representations raise questions about the female and lesbian audiences, which could find there, as we will see, unexpected *loci* of identification.

This essay focuses on these figures, aiming at reconstructing the role they played in nineteenth century Italy in the making of women's modern identity. In a cultural history perspective, different kinds of sources will be examined in order not only to illustrate the Liberal Italy discursive frame, but, above all, to denounce the effects of reality it produced in the long term analysing it from at least three point of view: the reinforcement of the normative nineteenth century femininity, the creation of a powerful lesbian stigma, and the contribution to the modern lesbian identity.

Fiction and science: Vampirism, lesbianism and the conjectural paradigm

In order to fully understand the psychology of relationships in *fin-de-siècle* positivist thought, it is useful to underline the key role it conferred to the power of suggestion. As the well-known criminologist Scipio Sighele explains in his 1893 *La coppia criminale* [The Criminal Couple], in every couple or group, there is a leader who is able to make other people act as he prefers. But there is an important *caveat* in this scenario: women can not be leaders, so they can not actively build significant relationships, unless they are abnormal. The famous Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso got along with this idea in his best-selling *The Female Offender,* also written in 1893 with Guglielmo Ferrero, stating that only "born criminal" and "semi-masculine" women are able to suggestionize other women.[2]

Similarly, lesbian relationships "arise and maintain themselves," as Sighele writes, "due to the power of suggestion one tribade exercises on the other one."[3] Thus, for this to happen, the former must be physically and psychologically masculine and the latter feminine, not only in order to fit the heterosexual scheme of couple but also to explain the corruption of the "normal" woman. "While some women carry this vice by nature, many other assimilate it,"[4] Sighele states, and the *Digesto*, digest of the criminal law, adds: "not all the acts of tribadism imply sexual inversion,"[5] telling apart lunatic from lascivious women. In the same way, Lombroso and Ferrero link *inversion* to physical characteristics, such as hypertrophy of the clitoris, common—as they state—among prostitutes.[6] They also ascribe

[2] Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1895)*,* 204 [Original Italian edition: *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale,* Torino-Roma: Editori L. Roux e C., 1893].
[3] Scipione Sighele, *La coppia criminale. Studio di psicologia morbosa* (Torino: Bocca, 1893), 108.
[4] Ibid.*,*106-07.
[5] Giuseppe Ziino, "Stupro e attentati contro il pudore e il buon costume," in *Il Digesto Italiano. Enciclopedia metodica e alfabetica di legislazione, dottrina e giurisprudenza,* XXII/ 2 (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1899-1902), 993; my translation.
[6] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente,* 331-332.

the increasing amount of "occasional lesbians" to the increasing possibilities for women to freely associate themselves with other women.[7]

Sighele shares the same perspective arguing that lesbianism, originally born inside brothels, was spreading all around Europe, via contacts between women. Then he goes on producing "proofs" of such diffusion by quoting examples from a list of novels he found in Chevalier's *De l'inversion de l'instinct sexuel*,[8] including, among others, authors such as Zola, Gautier, Flaubert, and Balzac.

Sighele adds to Chevalier's list an Italian author, Annibale Butti, referring to his 1892 novel *L'automa* [The Automaton], whose *incipit* coincides with the lines Sighele himself dedicates, in *La coppia criminale,* to the growing diffusion of lesbianism. The specific passage he quotes describes an iconic scene involving two women in a chariot and male passengers pointing at them, murmuring, wondering why they do not get married.[9]

It is interesting to know more about the two women depicted in *L'automa:* reading further, we find that the two, Aline and Lavinia, are involved in a sapphic relationship. Aline, slender and tall, has an androgynous figure and shows masculine dress-code and behavior, with some vampire traits: a very pallid complexion, pale lips and very dark circles under her wet, feverish eyes. She is rather skeletal and causes in Attilio, the male protagonist, a strong sense of repulsion. Still, Attilio fantasizes about sexual encounters between the two women and he visualizes the predatory Alina having Lavinia's body at her own disposal. Attilio, indeed, feels attracted to Lavinia, a little and shapely woman, more *feminine* than Aline but nevertheless unable to hide her own vampire nature: a spoiled pallor marks her face with dark traces, giving her a rotten, corps-like appearance. Moreover, as soon as Attilio notices her "threatening […], excessively grown canines"[10] he can feel immediately a strange sensation, as if they were biting his own flesh. When she finally kisses him, he can feel her sucking away his soul.

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[7] Ibid., 428-429. The entire chapter III—*Sensibilità sesssuale (Tribadismo, psicopatie sessuali)* [Sexual sensitivity (Tribadism, sexual psychopatologies)]—was censored in the English version due to its scabrous content.

[8] Julien Chevalier, *De l'inversion de l'instinct sexuel* (Paris: Doin, 1885).

[9] Enrico Annibale Butti, *L'automa* (Milano: Fratelli Treves,1892) [Bologna: Cappelli, 1968], 152-153 and Scipione Sighele, *La coppia criminale. Studio di psicologia morbosa* (Torino: Bocca, 1893), 107-109.

[10] Butti, *L'automa,* 159.

Formerly vampirized by Aline, Lavinia in turn gradually vampirizes Attilio, ultimately conducting him to a financial and moral fall. Despite—or thanks to—the paucity of the plot and the misogynistic bias of the novel, we can easily find here two recursive *topoi* of the nineteenth century positivist culture.

First of all, the central role conferred by such a culture to the speculative gaze, namely the capacity (which dramatically fails Attilio) to read the *stigmata degenarationis* in women, revealing the "monstrosities" beneath the surface.[11]

Writing on vampirism and homosexuality, Richard Dyer acutely notices:

> In most vampire tales, the fact that a character is a vampire is only gradually discovered—it is a secret that has to be discovered. The analogy with homosexuality as a secret erotic practice works in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, the point about the sexual orientation is that it doesn't "show", you can't tell who is and who isn't just by looking; but on the other hand, there is also a widespread discourse that there are tell-tale signs that someone "is".[12]

In *L'automa* the two monstrosities are overlapping, conducting the reader to recognize the women both as lesbians *and* vampires. The correct interpretation of the tell-tale signs is the key to the psychiatry's new paradigm which links every psychological "abnormality" to physical traces. As a consequence, each "abnormality" turns out to be inscribed in the flesh.

Male vulnerability is the second feature displayed in the book. This is a recursive topic present in many *fin-de-siècle* sociological essays describing the wicked consequences of divorce and women's education. Criminology, in the same time, gives these male anxieties scientific plausibility by stating that female emancipation represents a threat to male progress and wellbeing. In this respect, the scientific topic of female vampirism literally embodies this threat dramatically emphasising its power and dangerousness.

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[11] On this subject see the seminal: Carlo Ginzburg and Anna Davin, "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method," *History Workshop*, 9 (Spring, 1980): 5-36.

[12] Richard Dyer, "Children of the night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism," in *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction*, ed. Susannah Radstone (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 58.

Lombroso and Ferrero, for instance, argue that vampirism is the very peculiar expression of female sadism:

> A neurotic woman did not accept her husband's touch unless she saw wounds on his arms: she sucked on the wound and entered a state of excitement: so his arm was covered with scars; another woman […] did not enjoy the coitus, on the contrary it caused her deep repugnance; but she enjoyed kissing and biting the husband until the blood came out: she would have loved if custom had been to bite each other instead of having sexual intercourse.These women, evidently, could not be considered by criminal law, as well as that girl who enjoyed her surgeon lover coming to her with his blood-spotted gown.[13]

Again, the analogies between lesbianism and vampirism are striking: they are both typical features of men-hating women and both invisible at a first look. Due exactly to the difficulty in reading their tell-tale signs, vampirism and lesbianism escape the rigid legal paradigms of criminal law, remaining *de facto* unpunished.[14]

As already mentioned, in this nineteenth century master narrative, the perceived male decline constitutes at the same time the cause and the effect of lesbianism. This must suggest to present day readers not to underestimate the seriousness of these male authors describing the "lesbian menace," even when they confer it a sort of alluring singularity.

Al di là by Alfredo Oriani: a lesbian happy ending or a male nightmare?

Al di là [Beyond], a novel written in 1877 by the conservative author Alfredo Oriani, collects all the issues we have analysed so far, since it describes the trajectory that leads to happiness two women in love—Elisa and Mimy—in parallel with the moral decline of the male characters, defeated and deserted by them.[15] This text gives rise to many questions.

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[13] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente,* 401-402. My translation (excerpt excluded from the English version, see above note 7).

[14] Although canon laws and criminal laws against homosexuality focused almost exclusively on male homosexuality, lesbianism was not only stigmatised but also prosecutable and punished by means of sodomy laws or other regulations, and its diagnosis, similarly to male homosexuality, could lead to mental institutions.

[15] Alfredo Oriani, *Al di là* (Milano: Galli, 1877) [Bologna: Cappelli, 1934].

Did Oriani describe a lesbian romance or a male tragedy? Did he merely exploited the lesbian eroticism in order to wrap up a soft pornographic novel or did he willingly send a warning message to male readers through the titillating framework he knew they would have appreciated?

First, we need to underline the misogynistic perspective embraced by Alfredo Oriani, author of many books, essays and novels as well. As for our investigation, two interesting works deputed to reinforce the exclusively domestic vocation of the women are worth quoting: *No* (1879), a novel against female education, and *Matrimonio* [Marriage] (1883), a sociological-philosophical thick essay against divorce.

There is no doubt that Elisa and Mimy embody for the author the ruinous politics of emancipation which took women away from male custody. Nevertheless, a strange ambiguity permeates the text, dedicated, as the author writes, to women: to cultivated, refined women resembling Elisa and Mimy, almost suggesting that Oriani considered, or maybe wanted, a female audience for his book.

Since Oriani describes lesbian love and eroticism through the *topos* of vampirism, it is worth quoting here Sue Ellen Case's pioneering essay on vampirism and lesbian desire. Analysing the representations of lesbianism within a heterosexist framework, Case warns:

> This heterosexist configuration of the gaze seems to derive some power for its formulation by careening dangerously close to the abyss of same-sex desire, both invoking and revoking it. […] Nevertheless, the site/sight of the monstrous is invoked and, though horrible, is sometimes negatively accurate and often quite seductive.[16]

Elisa is definitely seductive. She is a beautiful wealthy widower, living in a luxury house where taste compensates extravagance. She combines virile elements—a beautiful forehead "à la Goethe,"[17] a sensual mouth "à la

[16] Sue Ellen Case, "Tracking the Vampire," in *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (New York: Routledge, 2000), 206. Case's essay has stimulated a rich production of researches, among which it is worth-mentioning here Paulina Palmer, "The Lesbian Vampire: Transgressive Sexuality," and Adrienne Antrim Major, "Le Fanu's Carmilla as Lesbian Gothic," in *Horrifying Sex, Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature*, ed. Ruth Bienstock Anolik (Jefferson, NC: Mac Farland, 2007). See also Tania Krzywinska, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci?," in *Queer romance, Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, eds. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 2005).

[17] Oriani, *Al di là,* vol.1, 91.

Byron,"[18] muscular strength and a certain bravado—with a feminine charm expressed by her "poetic sapphic aura,"[19] perfect neck, arms, breast, and little feet. Despite her *harem* of beautiful women—her servants and lovers—she constantly dreams of a woman to love and cherish, a woman "more delicate and noble than her."[20]

Mimy perfectly complies this ideal of beauty: thin and weak, she is essentially feminine and she is constantly compared by the author to nymphs and undines, beautiful and helpless creatures at disposal of cruel satyrs, namely Mimy's husband and lover. While Elisa is intriguing because of her inaccessibility, most of the erotic allure emanated by Mimy comes from her availability, which is primarily due to her physical weakness. The aristocratic Mimy is indeed married against her will to the ugly and common lawyer Carlo, who is unable of love and tenderness. Desperately in love with Elisa, Mimy eventually accepts the attentions of her friend Giorgio, a cynical, sadistic aristocrat. Giorgio finds himself overwhelmingly attracted to Mimy when he sees her ill in bed, completely defenceless and he assaults her. All the disturbing heterosexual sex scenes the novel contains are ultimately rapes Mimy suffers. Nevertheless, after this first encounter the affair goes on, Mimy considering it a degrading substitute for the relationship with Elisa she can not have.

The kind of attraction Mimy feels to the woman is a narcissistic one—Elisa is as beautiful as Mimy herself would like to be—and is related to masturbation: Elisa is as beautiful as "an hour of solitary pleasure."[21]

On the contrary, Elisa feels for Mimy a predatory kind of feeeling. The vampire nature of Elisa is evident at the very first kiss between the two, when Elisa attacks Mimy and seems to suck her breath away, turning pale with pallid lips. Although Mimy is deeply in love with Elisa, she is unable to leave Carlo, so Elisa uses her feminine attractiveness to undermine his strength by seducing him. As female vampires do, she is able to sabotage his career, making him obsessed with her. When he discovers his wife's affair with Giorgio, Elisa asks him to consign her Mimy, promising solemnly but ironically that there will be no more men in his wife's life. He accepts the proposal in exchange of a night with Elisa, but the very same night the two women escape, moving to Paris.

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[18] Ibid., vol. 2, 70.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., vol. 2, 119, my translation.
[21] Ibid., p. 99.

Mimy and Elisa are a clearly asymmetrical and even chromatically complementary couple: Mimy, young and blond, dresses always in white, and Elisa, more mature and brunette, always dresses in black. But as soon as the two women resolve to stay together Mimy undergoes a sudden transformation: uncombed, emaciated, with blue circles under her eyes—though a new lively light is now shining in them—dresses in black for the first time, revealing that Elisa eventually vampirized her.

Oriani is not graphic when it comes to sapphic sex, but he depicts a predatory assault of Elisa on Mimy, recalling the muscular brown haired Venus bending over the young, pale, and blond Psyche in Courbet's painting *Le réveil*,[22] commonly renowned in nineteenth century France for portraying two *gougnottes.* Such image is emblematic of the ambiguity which imbues the book. On the one hand, it refers to a male pornographic exploitation of lesbianism, but, on the other, the lesbian relationship emanates nonetheless a certain allure of mauditisme, an ambiguous appeal derived from the Baudelaire poem, *Femmes damnées,* which inspired Courbet's painting.

The complex communicative dynamics taking place in such heteronormative narration of lesbianism are described in a strikingly appropriate passage of Valerie Traub's essay on lesbianism in 1980s mainstream cinema, which, in my opinion, is perfectly fitting the context of Oriani's novel and thus worth-quoting here:

> The "female spectator" or "lesbian viewer" thus is simultaneously a hypothetical point of address to which the film "speaks" and a subject position ascribed to "real" female audience members. Crucial to such an understanding of spectatorship is the awareness that, as much as "lesbians" independently walk into the theater, they are also constructed within the space the film affords them. That space is precisely a locus of ambiguity—both potential and constraint, affordance and limitation, a space opened for representation and a space denied. […] Ambiguity not only informs this film but constitutes the very possibilities of "lesbian" desire within a predominantly heterosexual (and heterosexist) ideology.[23]

In the queer perspective here adopted, all representations, including the most negative and grotesque ones, play an important role in the

[22] Ibid., vol. 2, 202.

[23] Valerie Traub,"Ambiguity of 'Lesbian' Viewing Pleasure: The (Dis)articulation of Black Widow," in *Body Guards. The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity,* eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 309.

construction of individual and collective identities. However, since discourses constantly undergo resignification, here agency is not denied to audiences and even the image of the female vampire can be used as a nonconforming role model.

Apparently Oriani expected a female audience for his book, but maybe he did not await female writers putting into practice this very process of resignification.

L'eredità di Saffo: mocking science and revisiting pornography on the edge of heteronormativity

As it can be noticed, Traub always places the term *lesbian* within quotation marks when she refers to heterosexist cultural and social contexts. Similarly, in the context of Liberal Italy we can trace women writing on female same-sex relationships, but we can hardly determine the political significance they conferred to these relationships in terms of identity and sense of self. Nevertheless, these women writers played an active role in using representations of lesbianism albeit still inscribed within a heterosexist discursive frame.

In 1908 a woman journalist, Nada Peretti, wrote a pornographic novel, *L'eredità di Saffo* [Sappho's legacy], over the pseudonym of Fede, which is also the name of the protagonist, a young and beautiful woman.[24] Fede is animated by a scientific curiosity about lesbianism due to her experiences in women's boarding schools, where she witnessed many lesbian relationships between students, as well as between students and teachers, without taking part in them. The book contains the results of Fede's survey along with the letters her best (male, heterosexual) friend, Franz, wrote to her on the same topic. Franz, as we come to know, being unable to find a heterosexual woman to marry commits suicide in the end.

The pornographic contents of the novel are such explicit that the author was tried for obscenity; nonetheless the mimicry of the scientific discourse proves once again the interchange between science and fiction suggesting the widespread reading of scientific texts for pornographic purposes.

In these pages we meet again the character of the "neurotic schoolmistress" we started with, namely Miss Ella, whose school is actually a *seraglio*. As for the relationships between students, the most graphic and crude passage of the novel describes the sexual encounter of

[24] Fede (Nada Peretti), *L'eredità di Saffo* (Roma: Bernardo Lux Editore, 1908).

Giulia, the ugly girl with a "vampire mouth"[25] and Gina, the beautiful and submissive former fiancée of Franz. The final scene depicts Giulia drinking the blood caused by deflowering Gina with a crucified Christ.

Vampirism also characterizes the relation between Vera, another former fiancée of Franz, and Magda, a mature married woman met by Vera on holidays. While Vera is young and ingénue, Magda plays the active role: she has a "vampire mouth"[26] and bites Vera's lips drinking her blood in a state of excitement. Vera, in turn, carries the marks of the vampirisation: she feels intoxicated and develops a morbid sensitivity turning pale and emaciated and showing dark circles under her newly vivid eyes.

Fede, the narrator, plays the role of a mere viewer, a self-defined "psychologist"[27] who goes along with the readers, describing them women having sex with women—and sometimes also with men—in a refined, unreal atmosphere of luxury. Though we may presume a vast majority of male readers, the author being a woman we can reasonably conjecture a percentage of female readers, maybe from her own personal circle of friends and coworkers.

The only lesbian relationship Fede entertains, is an epistolary one with a woman she finds by answering personal ads on a newspaper. The two meet once in a park, the other falls in love with Fede, but the latter does not reciprocate her. Here, the author is referring to - and explicitly suggesting - a way women can meet and probably have sex, although chaste Fede after their first and only encounter limits herself to exchanging letters with her date.

Again, the femininity presented in the book is rife with ambiguity: on the one hand, obviously, the women in it are morally corrupt and almost physically deteriorate, on the other hand, though, they are represented as undoubtedly fascinating, beautiful, wealthy and refined. Moreover, they are decisively independent, living in all-women environments, or cheating and abandoning their men. We cannot help but notice, in this regard, that the only male character, Franz, kills himself in the end being alone and defeated.

Completely inscribed in the *fin-de-siècle* discursive frame of the male decline, *L'eredità di Saffo,* at the same time confirms it and makes fun of it, imitating its pretentious language, turned ironically into pornography.

[25] Ibid., 104.
[26] Ibid., 302.
[27] Ibid., 188.

Moreover the novel lures men to reading only to let them discover they are doomed like Franz. Still, the sexuality presented in the book follows and ultimately reinforces heterosexist paradigms, relegating lesbianism once again into unreal, elitist, male oriented fantasies.

Perfidie by Mura: the angst of the "new woman"

In 1919, Maria Volpi Nannipieri, better known as Mura, writes *Perfidie*[28] [Perfidies], a novel which leads her to success. The author, prolific writer of romantic novels and appreciated columnist on women's journals, describes in this book, clearly designed for a female audience, the passionate love story of two women, Sibilla and Nicla.

Sibilla, wealthy and independent, perfectly embodies the post-World War I "new woman," driving luxury cars, reading Wilde and smoking long perfumed cigarettes.[29] Her beauty is in line with the new androgynous standards and her brunette charm is somehow sinister, especially because of her penetrating stare, intensified by the dark circles under her eyes. She has several male lovers, but they all reveal themselves boring and disappointing at last. So, driven by boredom, she conceives an "audacious but lovely plan"[30] while she is on holiday with her friend Nicla.

Nicla extraordinarily resembles Mimy, being unhappy because of a common husband and a rough lover. The two girls are even physically alike—like Mimy, Nicla is pale, thin and blonde—and share the same role of "prey" in the lesbian relationship. Indeed, as the affair takes place, a "new existence" begins for Sibilla, who experiments the "perfect love"[31] which focuses on pleasure and erases all the rest. Nicla, on the contrary, "is nothing in Sibilla's hands", a mere thing she can "beat, bend, caress, kiss" and, of course, "bite."[32] As the affair continues, and the vampirisation goes on, Nicla, pale and exhausted, seems too fragile to stand Sibilla: a "slow death" undermines her beauty which begins to fade. Sibilla, however, is aroused by Nicla's vulnerability and consumption and

[28] Mura (Maria Volpi Nannipieri), *Perfidie* (Milano: Sonzogno, 1919 [2002]).
[29] On the ambiguities of the "new woman" and her relationship with the construction of the modern lesbian identity, see Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," *Signs* 9, 4, (1984): 557-575.
[30] Mura, *Perfidie*, 171.
[31] Ibid., 193.
[32] Ibid., 185.

wants to "destroy" her, driven by a vampire's "ferocious joy."[33] Like Mimy though, Nicla shows a narcissistic personality, a feature that eventually saves her life, since the girl leaves Sibilla in order to preserve her own beauty.

Though the novel ends stating that Sibilla is still waiting for a real man who can make her a real woman the novel itself made quite clear that such a man does not exist. Furthermore, the author overloads her representation of the lesbian relationship with refined allure, describing luxury atmospheres evoked by silk fabrics and oriental carpets and depicting lesbianism, in Mura's words, as the "perfect love," in which complicity leads not only to the peak of pleasure but also to the "real, absolute love."[34]

Certainly, such an intense feeling is not meant for all women, but its elitist nature makes lesbianism only more captivating in this context. Elitism is the very key to understanding all the representations of lesbianism we have encountered so far. By describing lesbianism as a rarity and situating it in an outlandish dimension, on the one hand, the authors are allowed to display sapphic relationships. Nonetheless, on the other, those descriptions ultimately reinforce heterosexism, luring readers with titillating illustrations but warning them about the dangers of lesbian sexuality, implicitly stating that it is deadly to both men and women. In this frame of reference, lesbianism is meant to be experienced only by some peculiar women, whose freakish nature and/or aristocratic status make it possible for them to survive it.

The reception of the lesbian vampire and its legacy

The effects of reality produced by such representations are difficult to determine, since we have not many sources coming from female or lesbian audiences and we do not know much about its reception.

Among Italian women intellectuals, Sibilla Aleramo is the most popular one who writes about her own involvement in a lesbian romance, that is her well-known, troubled relationship with Lina Poletti in 1909.

It is interesting to underline how Aleramo turns exactly to the paradigm of vampirism to describe her love for Lina, and, above all, to explain the anguishing ending of their relationship. Comparing homosexual and heterosexual love, she states that the first is "tragic,

[33] Ibid.,211-212.
[34] Ibid.,194.

desperate and sterile," since it consists in receiving without giving, so that in a lesbian relationship one woman "enhances herself" to the detriment of the other.[35] Moreover, Aleramo situates her love for Lina in a fantastic atmosphere, populated by mythological creatures, and compares it to the love of Cupid and Psyche, as portrayed in Canova's famous sculpture. Although such a representation is aesthetically very appealing, it nevertheless reinforces Aleramo's view of lesbianism, which is, she states, "beyond history" and then "hopeless."[36]

Within the transformed context of the post-World War I era, though, lesbianism seems more a concrete possibility, as proved by Mura becoming popular thanks to her character, Sibilla. The latter is a "new woman" and many readers can identify with her—albeit her luxury car—since she embodies the economic self-efficiency now achieved by a growing number of women, along with a greater sexual freedom and, above all, an increasing number of chances to meet and associate with other women.

Some women historians have recently shed light on this tabooed topic in Italian historiography, collecting and analysing sources produced by lesbian women in 1920s and 1930s Italy (memoirs, letters, journals) along with interviews with lesbian women who witnessed that era.[37] There, many women underline the new freedom they achieved by the end of the First World War: a greater freedom to study, work, travel, live on their own, and, as a consequence, to meet other women. Moreover, dancing clubs, cinema, sport associations and other occasions of entertainment led women to experience and enjoy other women's company. These women describe both short relationships and life-long engagements with other women, most of which experienced in a context of complete invisibility and oppressive secrecy. Nevertheless, lesbianism is described as a fulfilling, concrete possibility, experienced by both lower-class and high-class women, not in an outlandish reign, but in the everyday life.

Fascism encouraged at first female associations, but mainly in order to regiment women, well aware of the ambiguities related to women

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[35] Sibilla Aleramo, *Orsa Minore. Note di taccuino e altre ancora* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002), 150; my translation.
[36] Ibid., 64-65.
[37] Nerina Milletti and Luisa Passerini (eds.), *Fuori della norma. Storie lesbiche nella prima metà del Novecento* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2007) and Paola Guazzo, "Al 'confino' della norma. R/esistenze lesbiche e fascismo," *R/esistenze Lesbiche nell'Europa nazifascista,* eds. Paola Guazzo, Ines Rieder and Vincenza Scuderi (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2010), 104-126.

sociability. In fact, the ambiguity of the "new fascist woman" a role model representing a modern, culturally emancipated and refined woman resembling Sibilla, which was mildly encouraged by the regime in its early phase, was subsequently eclipsed by strikingly different representations of women completely annihilated by their roles of fascist wives and mothers.[38]

Apart from social control, fascist censorship clamped down on representations of non-reproductive and non-straight sexuality. In general, from the late 1920s all over Europe and United States, we can detect a worsening not only of the everyday life LGBT subculture, but also a reinforcement in the censorship on public representations of homosexuality, lesbianism and queer sexualities, included the negative ones.

I am not stating that Liberal Italy was a more tolerant society, neither am I endorsing the vision of it as an indulgent nation in regard to homosexuality, as stated by some authors.[39] On the contrary, the "discursive explosion"[40] taking place in the late nineteenth century on the topic of homosexuality was indeed extremely violent, effective in stigmatising queer sexualities and, moreover, disquietingly rich in eugenic implications. The literary seduction emanated by these discursive constructions did not imply, in fact, acceptance, but, on the contrary, a violent exploitation of feminine sexuality by authors.

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[38] Among the many contributions on this topic, it is worth-quoting the seminal work by Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women, Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[39] Paradoxically, although historical research on homosexuality in contemporary Italy is just in its beginning, many scholars have hurriedly "discharged" Italian past for homophobia. In this respect, Lorenzo Benadusi pointed out how frequently homophobia in Fascism has been reduced to a mere mimicry of nazist politics; see: Lorenzo Benadusi, "Omofobia e repressione dell'omosessualità: il caso dell'Italia fascista," ed. Cirus Rinaldi, *La violenza normalizzata. Omofobie e transfobie negli scenari contemporanei* (Torino: Kaplan, 2013), 58-84. In my opinion, this is only a further example of the historiographically pervasive "myth of the good Italian," already used to minimize antisemitism, racism and colonialism in the Italian recent history, and still effective in the "common sense" understating contemporary Italian xenophobia; see: Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013).

[40] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 17.

At the end of the Liberal era, however, silence, invisibility, and denial become more effective weapons against queer sexualities, preventing the spreading of any process of resignification of their representations.

In this perspective, also the association of lesbianism with vampirism seems to fade, its implicit contents and messages remaining nevertheless unaltered and strikingly effective. Lesbian eroticism remains in facts for a long time linked to deadly passions and physical monstrosities, and the *topos* of vampirisation confirms itself as part of the cultural frame in which lesbian relationships are inscribed.

In the long term, the complex symbolic legacy of the lesbian-vampire seems to split up and compartmentalise so that we witness a sort of division of the symbolic labour among different areas involved in the production of lesbianism's representations. On the one hand the pop culture, cinema above all, seems to inherit the most graphic and explicitly morbid part of the vampire legacy, and, within the transformed context of the 1970s, the figure of the lesbian vampire profusely resurfaces as a cinematographic *topos*, especially in relation to the vast subculture of the B-movies, and continues to be variously reinterpreted and resignified until nowadays.[41] On the other hand, the less intriguing but equally—and *morethreatening* rhetoric of the homophobic and misogynist movements kept on tapping many of its references from the same pool of arguments produced by the end of the nineteenth century within the narrative of the lesbian vampire: from the fear of lesbian contagion to the moral and social decadence of the society menaced by its diffusion, the whole range of topics still displays its effectiveness accompanying us virtually without interruption until present days.

Conclusions

The grotesque "lesbian vampire," born within the late nineteenth century psychiatric debate as a representation *ad deterrendum*, seems to acquire, in the turning of the century, a certain charm due to her distinctiveness. Such a growing allure becomes a *topos* in describing lesbianism, even in sympathetic and female depictions, albeit we can always trace a play back, namely the toxic and deadly nature of the lesbian love. In the post-World

[41] Luki Massa, "Motore > Azione! Tre decenni di regia lesbica," *Il movimento delle lesbiche in Italia,* ed. Paola Guazzo et al. (Milano: Il dito e la luna, 2008), 188. On this topic see the pioneering Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in the Cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992).

War I context these contradictions seem to explode: the ambiguity of the "vampire" seems in fact too intense to handle for a fascist regime in need of more reassuring gender narrations for both Italian men and women. Nonetheless, in the long term, traces of the vampire *topoi* seem to resurface, along with the ambiguities of their grotesque and tragic features, in representations and discourses belonging to different socio-cultural areas. In this respect, a cultural history of these *topoi* can, in my opinion, provide a meaningful contribution for an archaeology of the knowledge on sexualities in modern Italy.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT FAIRIES HAVE TO TELL OUR STORIES[1]

GIOVANNI DALL'ORTO

A Mediterranean model?

The possible existence of a Mediterranean model as per sexuality, having an intercontinental breath and its own discursive expression, indicates an alternative to the Northen-Western identitary paradigm, until now hegemonic in the field of gay and lesbian studies. The possibility of such an alternative has been by now remarked in several works already.[2]

A deeply entrenched historiographical myth

One of the most entrenched myths in contemporary historiography of homosexuality is the purported "modern homosexual", which is said to have been "constructed" in the nineteenth century, by doctors and psychiatrists. This myth has been debunked at least, since Eve Koswoski Sedwick objected that:

> Issues of modern homo/heterosexual definition are structured, not by the supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another,

[1] This paper is based upon chapter 53 of my book: *Tutta un'altra storia. L'omosessualità dall'antichità al secondo dopoguerra* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2015) by kind permission of Edizioni il Saggiatore, Milano.

[2] Francisco Vázquez García and Richard Cleminson, *Los invisibles. Una historia de la homosexualidad masculina en España*, *1850-1915* (Granada: Comares, 2011), 288. I used the Spanish edition, but there exists also an English version of the text: *Los Invisibles: A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1940* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011).

> but instead by the relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models during the times they do coexist.[3]

This clarification notwithstanding, the myth of "one" socially constructed "modern homosexual" is still taken for granted in most historiography of homosexuality.

This paper is aimed, therefore, at contributing to the debate by showing how there existed in the past diverse taxonomies of homosexuality in the history of same-sex love, some of which still flourish today, moving along alternative lines. My aim is to demonstrate that the rigid sequence of "epistemological breaks," which is held true by many historians, is an ideological construction: different taxonomies of "what-the-heck-is-a-man-who-loves-men" coexist throughout history, at any given point. There is no such a thing as a "modern" homosexual, not only for the reason that what we define as "modern" features can be traced back as early as the middle ages or ancient Rome, but especially because there was never *one* taxonomy of homosexuality ruling the world over. Even currently, the vast majority of people who exclusively love and desire other men (in China, India, Africa, Latin America...) live along taxonomies and lifestyles which share nothing with this "homosexual role."

What is pompously called "modern homosexual" is, in short, nothing but the "gay" lifestyle most popular among those white, middle-to-upper-class, affluent, Anglo-Saxon, urban, male, gay people from which the gay movement was (mostly) born in the USA of the 1970s, and who self-proclaimed as both *the* yardstick for any human (gay) history, and *the* living role model for the rest of the world. Whatever did not reach their level, be it gay or, later, queer, was not "modern," as if the majority of the world's population, with their diverse homosexual lifestyles, roles and taxonomies, were not entitled to being "really" modern and, especially, not "really" homosexual.

However Italy, just like many other countries, has a long history of competing homosexual roles[4] which do not match up with the mythical role of the "modern homosexual." Here, the very meaning of the word "homosexual" or "gay" implies different things along geographical, cultural

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[3] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London*:* University of California Press, 2008 [1990]), 47.

[4] The reference being here to the seminal paper by Mary McIntosh, "The homosexual role," *Social problems*, 16, 2 (1968): 182-192, http://lysis.blogsport.de/the-homosexual-role/, the true originator of all social-constructionist narrations.

and class lines. One is not "homosexual" in the same way in Milan or Florence or on mainland Sicily or Sardinia. Yet, for decades, the Italian gay movement managed to keep together such diverse visions of "what a homosexual is," thus showing once more that words are mere labels, which can be plastered onto whatever we like: they are never *essentia rerum*. Words may mean and signify different things in different countries (or social classes, historical moments, contexts, etc.) but they do not, ever, "create" or "socially construe" anything.

"Are you gay?" - "No, I'm a man"

In an interview released in late 2012, Puerto Rican Orlando Cruz, the first professional boxer ever to come out, told *Usa Today Sports* that, when he fought for *Golden Boy Promotions* in 2009, promoter Oscar De La Hoya startled him with a question. "Oscar asked me before the fight, 'Are you going to tell people you are gay?'—Cruz said—. I said to myself, 'Oh, my goodness, (he must know).' I told him, 'No, I'm a man.' I wasn't ready."[5]

The interesting point here is that De La Hoya asked Cruz a question concerning his *sexual orientation*, and Cruz answered referring either to his *gender identity* or to his *gender role*, thus showing that, to his thinking, there was no difference between these aspects. In the taxonomy held true by Cruz you are a man because you have an anatomically masculine body, *therefore* you are sexually oriented towards women. The corollary to this would be that if you have a masculine body and you don't like women, *then* you are not a man.

Sicily, 1939

Such a taxonomy immediately comes to mind when we read the letters from Sicilian "pederasts" who were sentenced to "confinement" (compulsory residence) on a small island in 1939 by the Fascist regime. While asking for pardon, they deny being homosexuals, since they are... "active."[6]

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[5] Jon Saraceno, "Gay boxer Orlando Cruz struggled with coming out," *Usa today*, 18th October, 2012. Online at: http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/boxing/2012/10/18/orlando-cruz-gay-boxer/1642373/

[6] All quotations from this paragraph were originally published at pages 15-16 of: Giovanni Dall'Orto, "Credere, obbedire, non 'battere'," *Babilonia*, 26th May, 1986: 13-17. Online here: http://www.giovannidallorto.com/saggistoria/fascismo/bb/confino2.html.

So does, for instance, Giuseppe S., who denies ever having had sex with men in his life, stating: "I am 100% a man, and I can prove it, if necessary" (sono uomo al cento per cento, capace di darne prova se necessario). Also Salvatore S. (an illitterate goatherd), who is a married father of three, reasons that since he fathered three sons he is active and not passive, and so being 'not passive', he cannot be a "pederast." Vittorio S., aged 20, promises that he will marry as soon as possible to "*prove he is a real man*" (*dare la prova di essere un vero uomo*); therefore not a homosexual. This is exactly the same answer given by Orlando Cruz 75 years later.

These requests for pardon misunderstood the reason for the condemnation: the fascist "Laws for the protection of the Race" (*Leggi razziali*), upon which they are based, were issued in order to protect the Italian "race" from those who could contaminate it, such as Jews and homosexuals, whereas the requests talk about the full virility of the deportees. This had never been the point.

Or had it been, perhaps? Questor Alfonso Molina in Catania, who by deporting 46 *pederasti* contributed single-handedly to more than half of all deportations of homosexual people under the *Leggi razziali*, wrote motivations in which he talked about "the pederast and his admirer" (*il pederasta ed il suo ammiratore*), thus creating a distinction between "pederasts" ("true" homosexuals) and "admirers," i.e. vicious heterosexual people falling prey to their seduction.

With relation to defendant Antonio F., Molina writes that "he confesses his vice and carries it out, creating huge scandal and danger for young men of the other sex" (*Confessa il suo vizio e lo pratica con grave scandalo e pericolo per i giovani dell'altro sesso*). What? "The *other* sex?" Yes: heterosexual youths having sex with pederasts belong to a different sex, or, to put it differently, pederasts who have sex with men are not themselves men. Once more, we recognise the point of view here which held in the above mentioned retort by Cruz.

This is not a slip. Writing about yet another victim of his repression, Molina declares: "He yielded to his vice, submitting himself to the desires of the males" (*si è abbandonato al suo vizio, sottoponendosi ai voleri del maschio*); concerning another detainee Molina says he "adapted himself to take the place of a female" (*si è adattato a farla da femmina*), and writing about yet another he says that "At the beginning he resisted the desires of males, however in the end he gave himself shamelessly to pederasty" (*da principio resistette ai voleri dei maschi, ma poi si dedicò senza ritegno alla pederastia*).

This is not all: Molina labels as "passive pederasts" all homosexuals that he indicts for confinement: "pederast" and "active," in his mentality, do not get along, mean opposite things, to such an extent that no-one is sent to confinement for being an "active pederast." At one point Molina wrote that one of his victims "betrayed his own sex!" (*ha tradito il suo sesso!*).

Things went so far that Francesco I wrote in a pledge, in a huffy tone, that being married and father of one "I gave clear evidence of being a man, and fully active, not passive as the judges said of me" (*ho dato prova certa d'essere uomo e proficuo attivo, e non passivo come la commissione ebbe a dire*). Most remarkably, Francesco does not deny being a homosexual—a concept fully absent from his taxonomy—but of being a "bottom."

Already John A. Symonds (1840-1893), while writing about the gondoliers hustling in Venice at the end of nineteenth century, had reported that they:

> …are so accustomed to these demands that they think little of gratifying the caprice of ephemeral lovers—within certain limits, accurately fixed according to a conventional but rigid code of honour in such matters. There are certain things to which a self-respecting man will not condescend, and any attempt to overstep the line is met by firm resistance.[7]

By refraining from such acts, a gondolier could avoid considering himself a *pederast / fairy*, or whatever else.[8]

Likewise, a mass of "males" with homosexual preferences could claim to have "demonstrated" not being "pederasts" because they had married and fathered children. This done, they could prostitute themselves to other males,[9] or they could pay other males for sex, without considering themselves "homosexuals." A concept, let me stress once again, which was absent from their culture, mindset and taxonomy.

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[7] *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* (London: Hutchinson, 1984). I used the text published in Rictor Norton's website: http://rictornorton.co.uk/symonds/memoirs.htm.

[8] George Chauncey unveiled a similar pattern while researching about late nineteenth century New York in his: *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

[9] George Chauncey in his *Gay New York* documents as also in early twentieth century New York sailors managed to sell their bodies to other men while keeping a fully heterosexual/normal-man identity, by imposing the "passive" role on their clients, which made only the client into a "homosexual/queer/fairy/gay" person.

Once more, it is important to stress that the absence of a word to name a phenomenon does not imply the absence of the phenomenon itself. In fact, although the "mediterranean" conception of homosexuality knows no concept of "sexual orientation" (although it considers heterosexual orientation an innate instinct which goes with the body, determined genetically), on the other hand in Italy the verb *sentire* (to feel) was also used in popular parlance meaning "to feel sexual attraction towards," as it happens in the above mentioned letters from 1939, in which the deportees swear they can "feel the woman." Therefore, it is called *feeling* rather than *orientation*, but the meaning does not change.

"Mediterranean" homosexuality

The expression "Mediterranean homosexuality"[10] has been in use since the 1980s at least, first surfacing (as far as I can discern) in France, where a definition was needed to label that peculiar vision of homosexuality, present in agro-patriarchal societies around the Mediterranean Sea, which did not fit into the definition of "gay" or "homosexual," but was in full swing among many (second-generation) French homosexuals of Maghrebi origin.[11]

The most relevant aspect in this conception is that the definition of "homosexual" comes with the sexual role and/or the gender role (that, as already told, in this taxonomy are but one phenomenon) rather than with a "sexual orientation": "This is a tradition [of] experimenting [in] sex among men in terms of [an] act and not of identity."[12]

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[10] See my "Mediterranean homosexuality," *Encyclopedia of homosexuality*, vol. 2, ed. Wayne Dynes and William Percy (New York: Garland, 1990): 796-798.

[11] The only surviving document of such a debate of which I am currently aware is the special issue of *Masques*: *Mediterranée*, 1983 (18). It dealt with Italy in two papers by Gennaro Carrano and Pino Simonelli about Naples: "Un mariage dans la baie de Naples" and "Naples ville travestie," 106-116.

[12] Francisco Vázquez García and Richard Cleminson, *Los invisibles*, 287. It explains why among the lower classes throughout the twentieth century, when homosexual prostitution was not performed in a "feminine" (i.e. passive) sex role, it was most of the time regarded at as a mere economic matter, which did not imply any "sexual orientation." *The rich* "*were*" *homosexual* (to the point of flaunting their homosexuality as a class privilege), *the poor* "*had sex with*" *homosexuals*. Thus, working-class homosexuals only had access to the identity of *checca* or *ricchione* (fairy), which was based upon a gender role, not upon a sex orientation. Riccardo Peloso told about post WW2 Rome: "The *males* from

This role may be expressed as an intentional display of effeminacy, which can go as far as fully fledged transvestism, which is not, however, necessarily a way to express a gender identity (as it is in the case of transgender people), but can rather be a "work attire" to lure "males." Cross-dressing will often be a useful means to advertise the sexual role to be taken in the intended intercourse, rather than the expression of gender disphoria.

Homosexual subcultures in this context arise among "bottoms" only, since "tops," simply labelled as "males" (as we just saw Molina doing), are perceived as not belonging to the homosexual subculture, as if they were just "passing through" it. Actually, most homosexuals belonging to this kind of subculture are horrified at the idea of a sexual intercourse between two "bottoms", which is often referred to as "lesbianism."

The choice of the term "Mediterranean" is, in my opinion, a bit awkward, since this taxonomy is widespread along Latin America, which of course never touches the Mediterranean Sea:[13] however, when the term was first coined it seemed appropriate, since the discussion dealt with Southern Europe and Northern Africa alone.

This said, rather than with a non existent "mediterraneity" (a purely geographical concept, devoid of any meaning either in historiography or in anthropology), we are dealing here with ideas widespread in patriarchal and homosocial contexts, in which men and women interact very little in everyday life (unless they are relatives), and female virginity is kept in very high esteem, even obsessively so.

For such a reason society can consider a lesser evil (provided that it be completely secretive) a period of "transitional homosexuality" among young men (amongst themselves and with "the homosexuals," who are labelled as such because they only perform the "passive" role), as long as they earn enough money to pay for a prostitute, and/or marry a woman.

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suburbs [*i maschi borgatari*] used to come and ask: "Are you a queer or a fairy?" [*Tu sei frocio o checca?*]. The fairy, being effeminate, was despised, the queer was respected, they felt he was on a level of equality with them" [Andrea Pini, *Quando eravamo froci* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2011), 281]. The same situation resurfaces in between-the-wars New York as sketched by George Chauncey (*Gay New York*, chapters 3 and 4), in which lower-class (unlike middle-class) males did not use the concept of "homosexual," preferring to distinguish between a "*fairy*" (an effeminate gay man), a "*queer*" (a non-effeminate gay man) and a "man" (a male having homosexual intercourse with another male, performing the active role).

[13] Stephen Murray, *Male homosexuality in Central and South America* (New York: Gay Academic Union, 1987).

This is seen as a better solution than risking that boys seduce (or rape) women.

This conception was widespread as late as in the 1970s in Italy, with a greater concentration in the South and among "popular" milieus. Afterwards, "sexual revolution" disrupted this schema in just one generation, as soon as young males found consenting female partners without having to pay them for sex (sometimes prostituting themselves to "homosexuals" in order to get money).[14]

"Pederasts" and "males"

Let's better define this taxonomy so as to say that, despite being widespread in several countries, it has usually been neglected by historians.[15]

The "folk" and "Mediterranean" taxonomy is alternative not only to the purported "medical discourse," but also to the discourse held to be true by homosexual activists for more than a century.[16] In the Mediterranean taxonomy, the words "active" and "male", as well as "male" and "heterosexual" are all synonyms, since, to be a "true" male one is expected to love women. However, the "pederast" does not like women but men,

[14] Most meaningful, are the articles penned in that period by Pier Paolo Pasolini, who went so far as to define *genocide* (towards homosexual people) as such a social change: *Scritti corsari* (Milano: Garzanti, 1981), 120-121, 176-177, 246-249, 257-258. On this matter see also my "Contro Pasolini," in *Desiderio di Pasolini*, ed. Stefano Casi (Torino: Sonda, 1990), 149-182. Online on Academia.edu.

[15] Lorenzo Benadusi, "La storia dell'omosessualità maschile: linee di tendenza, spunti di riflessione e prospettive di ricerca," *Rivista di sessuologia*, 1 (2007): 21-35, even confused the concept of "Mediterranean homosexuality" with that of "Sotadic" sodomy, purportedly caused by climate, devised in 1886 by the British eccentric literate Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890). Burton was not dealing with homosexuality as a cultural phenomenon, such as a taxonomy is, though: he was rather following racist routes, positing that it a non-cultural phenomenon (climate) made the dwellers of certain areas, which included the shores of the Mediterranean Sea but excluded Northern Europe, prone to homosexual tastes.

[16] We should not to overlook the existence of yet another taxonomy; the religious one. Whereas the "mediterranean" taxonomy pivots on the kind of act ("*insertor*" = right, "*insertee"* = wrong) and the activist and medical taxonomy pivots on sexual orientation (which for the religious taxonomy, is nonsense: there is one orientation alone: the right one), religious taxonomies pivot on the quality of the act: with the same sex it is always wrong, with the opposite sex it can either be wrong or legitimate.

just like women do, "therefore," he must be female or, more aptly put, a *"femaloid"* (*femmenella*).

This idea is most clearly stated by Pier Paolo Pasolini while he scolds French homophile activists Daniel and Baudry for a book in which:

> It appears (...), at least implicitly, that a homosexual loves, or makes love, with another homosexual, whereas things are not at all so. A homosexual, as a rule (in the vast majority, at least in Mediterranean countries) loves, and wants to make love with, a heterosexual man available to a homosexual experience, but whose heterosexuality should not be questioned at all. He must be "male."[17]

Therefore, in this taxonomy, the counterpart for the "homosexual" is not the "heterosexual," but the "male" (*maschio*, *macho*) to such an extent that among elderly homosexuals it is not uncommon to hear statements such as: "No, that person is not a homosexual, he is a male! [*maschio*]."[18]

However, it is self-evident that the counterpart for the "male" in any homosexual intercourse cannot be, by definition, a "real" female [*femmina*], hence here comes the creation of a quasi-female, a half-female (*femmenella*, *mezzafemmena*), who being incomplete—a parody—is despicable.

Each of us expresses her/his being homosexual according with conventions and convictions of the culture in which s/he was born and

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[17] "Risulta, implicitamente, che un omosessuale ama, o fa l'amore, con un altro omosessuale. Mentre le cose non stanno affatto così. Un omosessuale, in genere (nell'enorme maggioranza, almeno nei Paesi mediterranei), ama, e vuol far l'amore con un eterosessuale disposto ad un'esperienza omosessuale, ma la cui eterosessualità non sia posta minimamente in discussione. Egli deve essere 'maschio'" (Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Scritti corsari* [Milano: Garzanti, 1981]), 257. A criticism to this mentality is contained in Mario Sigfrido Metalli, "La bramosia del maschio ruspante," *Ompo*, 6 (1980): 60. This mentality, far from disappearing under the blows of the "gay" revolution, merely morphed into something else, at least judging from the appalling quantity of porn movies swearing that the men having sex with other men in front of their cameras are absolutely *straight* (one firm is even named *Broke straight boys*).

[18] Interesting examples of this mentality are on display in the interviews collected by Andrea Pini in *Quando eravamo froci*. Even the title ("When we used to be fairies") refers to the taxonomy favoured by several interviewees, making a distinction between "*froci*" (fairies, queers) and "*maschi*" (males), who would allow *froci* to have sex with them, but who considered themselves "normal" males. As usual, the further south the origin of the interviewee, the stronger this distinction, with Rome standing roughly as the border area between the two taxonomies.

according to the opportunity offered her/him. So, facing the social option between being either a "male" (married, living a secret "queer" life) or a "femmenella," most of our ancestors picked the first option, but some of them (especially those who had a transgender identity), went for the second one.

Lamentably, the (mostly illiterate) lower classes of this period were not able to leave texts documenting their point of view, however a few traces of this mentality survived, as we shall see. This excused historians of middle-class homosexuality from wasting huge efforts in the vain search for the Holy Grail of the birth of the "first" homosexual, always forgetting to research when the first *frocio, finocchio, cupio, recchione, arruso, busone* (in English: queer, fag, poofter, fairy) was born... that is to say, when those "homosexual roles" which were familiar to the crushing majority of the population were born. Of course these were in their turn socially constructed roles, but they go unnoticed on "social constructionist" radars, that are interested in the ruling classes only.

This gap between "medical discourse" and "popular discourse" might be the reason behind the neat difference in narrations noted by Laura Schettini while studying Italian lesbian women at the beginning of the twentieth century:

> We find two ways for speaking about the same biography that are sharply different. Newspapers and scientific literature [...] wrote about love among women using different wordings.[19]

Among the stories resurrected by Schettini, the most interesting one proves to be the story of Soccorsa Cassone, a teenage girl from Naples who repeatedly made headlines in the newspapers for her "stubbornness" in cross-dressing, a female equivalent to *femmenellas*.[20]

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[19] Laura Schettini, "Scritture variabili. L'amore tra donne nella stampa popolare e nella letteratura scientifica durante i primi decenni del Novecento," in *Fuori dalla norma. Storie lesbiche nell'Italia del primo Novecento*, eds. Nerina Milletti and Luisa Passerini (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2007) , 199.

[20] Anonimo, "La bizzarra mania d'una giovanetta che si ostina ad indossare abiti maschili. Il chiasso di ieri al Salone Margherita," *Roma*, 1st December, 1911, in Schettini, "Scritture variabili," 197-199, and "La napolitanella quindicenne vestita da chauffeur arrestata in piazza san Silvestro," *Il messaggero*, 6th April, 1912, in Schettini, "Scritture variabili," 170, which also shows the clipping of the article and a photo of the girl.

Also deserving of more attention, in my opinion, is the "sbraia" from Calabria, a social role existing in the past in rural communities: she was a "sworn virgin" who adopted male behaviour and wore male clothes, acting socially as a male, to the point of choosing another woman as her companion in life.[21]

Even among prostitutes in this period the scholars record lesbian relationships built along the binarism male-female,[22] which patently looked so "natural" aesthetically, for those belonging to the lower classes that it was re-enacted, inadequately, in homosexual relationships as well.

'O spusarizio masculino

The explicit and public acceptance of the sex role of the opposite sex among males was recorded in 1897 in a book written by an anthropologist, Abele De Blasio (1858-1945), *Usi e costumi dei camorristi*, which describes *'O spusarizio masculino* (marriage between two men) in Naples as follows:

> Professional passive pederasts are defined in the underworld with nicknames such as *femminelle, ricchioni* or *vasetti* [...].
> When the *ricchioni* reach the dawn of puberty, they feel the need to be... enjoyed; and, as soon they found the *ommo 'e mmerda*[23] (active pederast), they love him [...] in a true, burning passion, showing all the need, all the jealousies of a real love. The *vasetto*, happy with his conquest, showers in caresses his lover, then tries and puts together enough money to prepare the altar on which he willingly will offer himself as the... holocaust.
>
> The place for the sacrifice is almost always a dirty tavern, in which on a prearranged day and hour will arrive the lover, some players of street

[21] Researched by Nerina Milletti in "Calavrisella mia, facimmu 'amuri? La storia delle lesbiche contadine italiane attraverso le tradizioni orali," *Quir: mensile fiorentino di cultura e vita lesbica e gay, e non solo*, 11 (1994): 23-26. Online on www.culturagay.it.

[22] See Antonino Cutrera, *I ricottari: la mala vita di Palermo. Contributo di sociologia criminale* (Palermo: Vena, 1896), which I consulted in the reprint: *La mala vita di Palermo* (Palermo: Reber, 1900), 30-31 (online on the Internet Archive). Further reprints (Palermo: Il Vespro, 1979) reverted to the original title.

[23] "Man of shit." The presence of an insult for the "active" member too, shows here that the perfect equivalence between the "male having intercourse with females" and the "male having intercourse with femmenellas" belongs more to theory than to actual reality. Being active with males was *not* equivalent to being active with females.

organ and guitar, plus a swarm of *ricchioni*, surrounding the shy... maid. After an erotic ballet, the most skilled in the... matter wishes goodnight to the happy couple, but the bride, before her guests leave, presents them with tarallucci and wine, as it is the tradition to do. The day after, *'o ricchione anziano* (senior *ricchione*), together with a street seller of coffee, brings the couple some milk and coffee and pays a visit to scrutinise the bridal bed to check whether the sacrifice was accomplished according with the rules.[24]

After the honeymoon, which does not last more than 24 hours, in the evening the victim of the sacrifice begins his twisting along the richest parts of the town in order to find, as prostitutes do, some clients who are brought to the tavern owned by Don Luigi Caprinolo, dubbed *'o capo tammuro* (chief drum), or, if the person is "clean" (a gentleman), in the "private house" [brothel] owned by donna Benedetta *'a turrese*. And while the active wallows in that "place where light never enters," another rascal, hidden beneath the bed, steals from his clothes the wallet or some other valuables. Our *femminelle* during the day behave as housewifes, as women do, then at an appointed hour they go to the window and wait for their lovers. Many *vasetti*, in order to become more attractive, wear makeup, others put make-up on their eyes, others get a tattoo with a beauty spot and many of them, using cotton, try and enhance their back parts and make their breast more bulging. Someone also gets a female name as well. Whatever they earn from their despicable job they give to their kept men.[25]

"Andropornii"[26]

On 12th April, 1904 the police rang the bell of a clandestine brothel in the neighbourhood of Vasto in Naples, run by a person dubbed "la Signora" (the Lady), who employed "a swarm of pimps encharged with wandering near hotels or cafes, searching for the 'tops' (*l'elemento attivo*)":[27]

Although the *maison* owned by *la Signor*a was open to anyone, to enter it one had to show a card which was a *cart-de-visite* of hers that, in place of the coats of arms, bore a conventional mark, which changed day by day,

[24] This is a parody of the inspection of the bridal bed, which used to be performed in the past, looking for blood from the deflowering, which would prove against future disputes that the bride was a virgin indeed.

[25] Abele De Blasio, *Usi e costumi dei camorristi* (Napoli: Gambella, 1897), 153-158 The book was reprinted by Edizioni del Delfino (Napoli: 1973).

[26] This word was coined by De Blasio from two Greek words meaning "male brothels."

[27] Abele De Blasio, "Andropornio," *Archivio di psichiatria, antropologia criminale e scienze penali*, 27 (1906): 288-292, 288.

> and, as if this were not enough, in order for the door to open the client had to ring the electric bell thrice (…). [Within the brothel the police found] some youths, dressed as women, who were exchanging caresses with their lovers and clients. [...] Each dressing table was encumbered with knick-knacks containing perfumes, face powder, rouge and eyeliners. A wardrobe contained very luxurious male clothes to be used to mock the celebration of a marriage, during their parties. This happened when some boy submitted to his first carnal conjunction, in such an occasion the... shy girl did not forget to wear a long bridal vest and to adorn herself with jewels and orange blooms. Among abundant sweets and liquors it was not forgotten the bag with the traditional sugared almonds used in weddings. While the police were writing the report, other passive pederasts arrived, who after the usual conventional signs were welcomed by the agents and arrested. No less that twenty were sent to trial, and they shared, amongst them, several years of jail.[28]

The author of these lines, once again De Blasio, devotes the rest of the paper to discussing his surprise at the fact that some men (and even a few women) may find passive sodomy pleasurable, concluding:

> However I would like to call attention to the fact that several of the people examined by me, from an anatomical point of view really had something feminine, such as the way they were developed their hips, or in their breasts, a naturally feminine voice, the secretion of milk, and so on. This given, rather than considering such individuals as abject, it would be better to include them in the huge legion of anomalous[29] people, therefore here contempt should yield to pity.[30]

In these statements De Blasio gives us a nice example of how it was possible (and even easy) to manipulate the purported "medical discourse" for those *subjects* historians consistently refer to today as passive *objects* in the purported "medical construction of homosexuality" (which, by the way, in this instance would more appropriately be defined as *transgenderism*). The manipulation is particularly patent in an article in which our anthropologist gives full credit to any fantasies of so-called

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[28] De Blasio, "Andropornio," 288-292, 288-289.

[29] The writer is using this word in his "scientific" interpretation of "alienate." Chiara Beccalossi wrote a first-rate account of the study of homosexuality as seen by nineteenth century alienists in both Italy and Great Britain: *Female Sexual Inversion. Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, c. 1870-1920* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[30] De Blasio, "Andropornio," 288-292, 292.

"passive objects" of his research,[31] who claimed they had breasts that were so perfectly feminine that they even experienced secretion of milk:[32]

> When I asked them about it, they responded that their breasts were not, until the age of 13, unlike those of all men, but when at that age they allowed the lips of their lovers to suck them, they began first to swell, and after one year, roughly, of this sucking, they started secreting milk. Their nipples were most sensitive and well developed, surrounded by a brownish areola. The youngest among them had only to pass a hand on his chest in order to have him to fall prey of the utmost degree of sexual appetite, which reverberated towards the anus.[33]

Eventually, in 1917, once more De Blasio told the case of B. Al. (arrested while he was prostituting himself along Corso Umberto dressed as a woman), whose story he summarised as follows:

> As he became a teenager he began to have a filthy relationship with a Boc..., with whom he emigrated to America, where he dressed as a woman and worked as a... gay woman. In time the spouses (I wrote "spouses" since B. owns a document stating he is Antonio Boc.'s... legitimate wife)

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[31] Remarkably, everything upon hearsay: "From the answers given me by my subjects, I inferred that several other among their colleagues experienced, out of the sucking of their tits, mammal hyperplasia going with, most of the times, secretion of milk" (ibid., 151). Now, the fact that one or two *femmenelle* were so unlucky back in 1904 so as to simultaneously develop a cancer that caused *galactorrhea*, is quite possible. However, by stating that milk secretion occurred "most of the time" in *femmenelle*, we enter the field of mythomania. I can only imagine how much the *femmenelle* amused themselves by making fun of the researcher.

[32] Nowadays, unlike in 1904, we know that lactation is made possible by a hormone, prolactin, whose production is promoted by pregnancy. However, male bodies, who by definition cannot experience pregnancy, may suffer from so-called *galactorrhea*, which may be one of the consequences of either a hypophysis cancer or of hyperthyroidism; sucking a male nipple, on the other hand, has no consequences on the level of prolactin hormone in the subject's body. All that can be caused by intense sucking of male nipples is bleeding.

[33] Abele De Blasio, "La secrezione lattea nei pederasti passivi," *Archivio di psichiatria, antropologia criminale e scienze penali*, 25 (1904), 152-154. Thanks to the details scrupulously annotated by the researcher, we can almost see the scene of this "scientific examination," with De Blasio palpating the tits and his "subject" theatrically moaning in pleasure, explaining ecstatically that the pleasure had gone straight from his tit to his ass: "Duttò,'o vulije m'è scise rà zizza fin'à dint'ò culo!". And De Blasio, taking note of everything...

> quarreled out of jealousy, and so shaken was their family life that they decided to part bodies and regions. In fact this invert dressed as a woman left America and came back to us to spread the seeds of his filth.[34]

Most interestingly, De Blasio gives us evidence about the presence of the "mediterranean" vision of homosexuality in Argentina,[35] which in the late nineteenth century was hit by of a huge wave of immigrants from Italy and Spain, by telling us about the experience of an Italian orphan boy in 1893; he had emigrated to Buenos Aires, where it was explained to him that his beauty could have allowed him to earn a living as a prostitute. He accepted the "proposal" and the day after, was introduced to a meeting place called *la Frescura* where, thanks to his comeliness, he was unanimously accepted as *adventicio* (provisional member). In Buenos Aires there were so many sexual inverts that, in order to make their... rights heard, they created *clubs* governed by special statutes. Their meetings aim at feminising their associates, by having them take a female name, dressing and making-up as a woman, hustling flirtatiously on the road, and learning how to get clients or, in case they could find none, running everybody and everything down, quite as women do when they attend any mundane congregation[36].

The convict could recall just two rules from these statutes:

1. All members of the *Frescura* must detest female prostitutes and women at large. Any display of affection with them will be severly punished.

2. Those clients of the *Frescura* who are not satisfied by any subject are kindly asked to inform the board about it, which shall adopt the appropriate measures.[37]

Evolution of Mediterranean homosexuality

[34] Abele De Blasio, "Superstiti di andropornii americani," *Archivio di antropologia criminale*, 38 (1917): 211-214, 213. I put among parentheses a footnote.

[35] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: gender, urban culture, and the making of the gay male world, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books 1995), 73-83, deals with the explosion of the subculture of Italian *finocchi* (sic, 73) along late nineteenth- and early twentieth century New York, concluding: "it seems likely that an important part of the homosexual culture of fairies and their sex partners visible in turn-of-the-century New York represented the flowering in this country of a transplanted Mediterranean sexual culture" (74-75).

[36] De Blasio, "Superstiti di andropornii americani," 213.

[37] De Blasio, "Superstiti...," 214.

This is how things went in the past. However, everything evolves. In 2013, an article by Brazilian psychologist Gilmaro Nogueira dealt with the problem of the shift that took place in Brazil in the 1980s from a "Mediterranean" taxonomy of homosexuality, towards one which is defined by him as "European":

> It is important to keep in mind that, in Brasil, according to anthropological studies, until the Eighties men were divided into "machos" and "bichas," the *macho* being the one who penetrated other men, and the *bichas* the subjects being penetrated. The man who penetrated other men did not lose his status of *macho*, in some situations this fact was rather evidence of his virility. Beginning with the Eighties, when scientific discourses from Europe were popularized, in Brasil a new conception of sexuality become widespread, in whch subjects are no longer divided into machos and bichas, but rather between heterosexuals and homosexuals, heterosexuals being those who desire and have sexual intercrouse with the opposite sex, whereas homosexuals do it with the same sex. One conception did not take the place of the other one, and, although the second one is going to get the upper hand, both keep being used in Brasil.[38]

Nogueira thinks in fact that the grafting between these distinct role models gives birth to yet another, rather surprising category, the "passive heterosexual," i.e. a self-styled *heterosexual* man who enjoys being anally penetrated by other *men*.

This phenomenon illuminates how wrong it would be to reason as if in our past there existed just one way of categorising same-sex behaviours at once (first, "the" sodomite, then "the" purported "modern homosexual," then "the" gay[39], and eventually "the" *queer*). By Nogueira's reasoning, for instance, it comes out that in 2013 at least *three* role models were struggling for the same conceptual space in Brasil.[40]

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[38] Gilmaro Nogueira, "Hétero-passivo é tendência!," http://www.ibahia.com/a/blogs/sexualidade/2013/04/08/hetero-passivo-e-tendencia-2/, 8th April 2013.

[39] With the definite article "the," as if there was just one way of being gay, such as in the title of the book by Paolo Zanotti, *Il gay. Dove si racconta come è stata inventata l'identità sessuale* (Roma: Fazi, 2005).

[40] Three, in our culture, but the number can easily rise by taking into consideration non-western taxonomies. See for an example the criticism towards Western "homonormativity" (which arrogantly takes for granted the urban lifestyle in the Usa as "the" only conceivable homosexual lifestyle: whatever does not fit into it, then cannot be defined as "homosexual") contained in: Peter Jackson, "Thai research on male homosexuality and transgenderism and the cultural limits of

Francisco Vázquez García reached the same conclusion after researching on Spain from 1850 through 1936, where:

> We did not find any traces of the substitution of the sodomite with the homosexual. We rather found out the co-existence of deeply ambiguous categories. The brand new concepts from Germanic or French psychiatry ("urning," "sex invert," "homosexual") live side by side with the old taxonomies (active / passive sodomy, *contra naturam / secundum naturam*, pure acts / dirty or impure acts). […] We noticed the appearance of five categories (active sodomy, sexual inversion, effeminacy, homosexuality and homosociality) whose distribution through history does not happen as a sequence, quite the reverse, they can be traced simultaneously on all levels of the temporal ladder. We should therefore welcome, in this history of homosexuality, the coexistence of multiplicity. [...] We should admit that old taxonomies do not disappear, all of a sudden leaving room for emerging headings. They can go on existing in a relationship of instable cohabitation with the new categories or they can even be "resignified," that is to say redefined through the most recent notions. [...] This perspective excludes any possibility to counter an age of homosexuality with an age of sodomy. We need to capture the logic of the coexistence among a real multiplicity of figures.[41]

I am not interested in disputing here the possibility that one or another among these taxonomies is "right" or "wrong," here I am only interested in noting how co-existence among mutually exclusive taxonomies in the past was not only unthinkable, but that we are actually living in the very same situation, even here and now.

The essence of what I wish to convey is that there is no single path for history, not even for political action. Iñaki Tofiño noticed that Spain obtained "gay rights" along a route which is opposite to the tribal and

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foucaultian analysis," in *Journal of the history of sexuality*, 8 (1997): 52-85. Furthermore, Amara Das Wilhelm, "A third sex around the World," published in the hindu site *Galva* (http://www.galva108.org/index.html) claims that all forms of homosexuality and transexuality in history should be lumped together as "third sex," a concept which is dealt with as if it were a "natural," biological reality, as hindu culture always knew, and Western capitalism and colonisation dismissed. Not everything that goes under the banner of "anti-colonialism" makes sense, however, here is yet another taxonomy.

[41] "La réception du concept d'homosexualité. Généalogie d'un object savant en Espagne," in *Normes, déviances, insertion*, ed. Gérard Mauger et al. (Zürich: Seismo, 2008), 114-126, 118-119. Quoted from p118.

"comunitaristic" hyper-fragmentation that anglo-saxon lgbt activists see as the inevitable apex of any queer struggle:

> Spain presents a paradox because it is a Mediterranean country that has followed a political evolution closer to the identity politics model found in the Northern countries. [...] However, I find quite suspect the attempt by some people to oppose this concept to an Anglo-Saxon "gay identity" model to explain the peculiarities of homosexual identities in Spain. [...]. The lack of a gay public identity and a gay community in Spain has been seen as a problem by outsiders; but I wonder if these elements have been necessary in Spain. The strategy here has been quite a different one and, as we can see from its legal outcome, it has proven to be quite successful. This strategy has been the pursuit of legal reform within the larger context of democratization, and the creation of personal spaces within given territorial or linguistic identities.[42]

Here I stop: we already abandoned the field of history and entered one of politcal analysis. I shall therefore be content in calling attention to how the historical study of nineteenth century Italy, far from relating how a purported "premodern sodomite" linearily morphs into a "modern homosexual" through the "medical construction," rather displays the continual co-existence of discrete visions of homosexualities (plural) according with different and competing taxonomies, in a chaos which never ended, and goes on even in our times.

One amongst these taxonomies, the one I breifly examined here might even prove to have had historical roots that go much deeper than we assume, even if the total lack of any historical research in Italy prevents us from drawing a conclusion.

Still, I shall shift the focus to how—as ealy as 1586—Giovan Battista Della Porta (1535-1615) wrote:

> On the island of Sicily there are many effeminates, and I saw one of them in Naples who had little or no facial hair; a small mouth, delicate and straight eyelashes, shameful eye, like a woman, his weak and thin voice could not endure a big effort, his neck was not firm, he was whitish in complexion and he used to bite his lips; in short, he had body and acts like a female. He liked to stay at home and he always wore coat tails, as a

[42] Iñaki Tofiño, "Spain and the Mediterranean model," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Wordlwide*, 1st May, 2003, available online at the following address: http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Spain+and+the+'Mediterranean+Model'.+%28Essay%29.-a0100727465

> woman he attended to cooking and to spinning, he avoided consorting with men and he liked to talk with females, and sleeping in bed with them, he was more a female than the very females were;[43] he talked as if he were a female and he talked about himself in the female gender: *trista me, amara me*;[44] and the worst aspect was, that he endured the Nefarious Venus [sodomy] worse than a female.[45]

Can we define this person simply as a "transgender," or should we rather speak about a precursor to the *femmenelle*, already?

And what about the 1640 case in Venice, where the Council of the Ten decided to take proceedings against a:

> Ser Giulio da Canal son of ser Polo, accused of keeping for a long time in his house a youth, who is currently imprisoned, who led a dissolute, scandalous an whorish life, and who was universally considered as such by everybody, keeping him to sleep in his bed, and acting with him in such ways that undoubtely revealed a vicious intimacy, and the use of his body;[46] and having spent several times money for him to buy bracelets, a gold chain, and female dresses, made thus evident the [de]pravity of his mores; which he did creating a scandal for everybody who watched him, being a very bad example, and offence of our Lord God, against divine and human laws.[47]

Was this a couple in which a partner was a transgender person, or was it something else?

Only further research on the topic will enable us to resolve these doubts.

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[43] I.e. s/he had no "male" thoughts when sharing a bed with a "female" person.

[44] "Poor me," "sorry me," which in Italian should rather sound as "*tristo me*" and "*amaro me*" when referred to a male person.

[45] Giovan Battista Dalla Porta, *Della fisionomia dell'uomo* (Milano: Longanesi, Milano 1971), 813.

[46] "et passato seco ad atti, che ben dichiaravano vitiosa conversatione, et uso di sua persona."

[47] Archivio di Stato, Venezia, *Consiglio dei Dieci al Criminal*, Registro 57, folios 88v-89r. On 28th January (ibid., ff. 95r-v) Giulio da Canal, defaulter, was sentenced into perpetual exile and, in case he be apprehended, to beheading and to burning at the stake of his corpse. Unfortunately, since the sentence does not record the name of the "youth," I was not able to find out about his fate.

CHAPTER FIVE

MALE HOMOSEXUALITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ITALY: A JURIDICAL VIEW

BARBARA POZZO

Introduction

The nineteenth-century legal definition of sexual acts carried out between persons of the same sex may be considered as significant in more than one respect. First, this century appears to be the time when the law definitively changed its position as regards sexual relations between persons of the same sex, which until that time had been considered in the same light as magic, witchery and heresy, with the law giving greater consideration to the new medical and scientific theories that were emerging at that time.[1] The cultural representation of homosexuality at that time was considerably affected by the elaboration of these medical theories, which had a knock-on effect on legal knowledge.[2]

In another sense, the influence in Italy of various foreign normative models, such as the Napoleonic system on the one hand and the Austria and German system on the other, turned Italy into a place in which competing conceptualisation and attitudes engaged with one another with regard to the legislative choices concerning the more or less explicit repression of homosexual behaviour. In this respect it is interesting to establish which models were taken into consideration at the time when the

[1] See on this issue Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (1961), eds. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London-New York: Routledge, 2006).

[2] For a general overview of homosexuality in the nineteenth century, see Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Picador, 2003).

Italian state was being created and the reasons why it was chosen to follow one approach rather than another.

It was ultimately a period marked by important developments in customs and the legal mentality, in which homosexuality transformed itself from an *abominable offence*[3] punishable by burning at the stake into a private act with which the law no longer interfered.

The Enlightenment and the eighteenth-century debate about the offence of sodomy in Europe

In contrast to the ancient model,[4] from the mediaeval period onwards[5] any sexual relationship not aimed at procreation and *in vase indebito* was designated within Christian theology with the term of sodomy and subject to prosecution,[6] generally resulting in punishment of burning at the stake.[7] In Benedict Carpzov's[8] *Practica Nova* published in 1669,[9] which had influenced the criminal law within the main European countries during the pre-Enlightenment period, sodomy was still listed under the *atrociora delicta* and was punished by death, which could be preceded by torture.[10] It was only in the eighteenth Century that focus of attention with regard to the issue of relations between persons of the same sex started to change

[3] Until 1700, sodomy was included in the list of *atrociora delicta* discussed by Carpzov (see below).

[4] Eva Cantarella, *Secondo natura. La bisessualità nel mondo antico* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1988).

[5] For the evolution which occurred during the mediaeval period, see Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'altra storia, L'omosessualità dall'antichità al secondo dopoguerra* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2015), 126ff.

[6] Ibid., 144.

[7] Ibid., 177.

[8] On the work by Carpzov, a judge in Leipzig and author of *Practica Nova Imperialis Saxonica rerum criminalium* (1635), which exerted a major influence on criminal legislation at the time and on philosophical and legal reflections over the course of the following centuries, see Sergio Moccia, *Carpzov e Grozio. Dalla concezione teocratica alla concezione laica del diritto penale* (Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica,1988), 11ff.

[9] Benedict Carpzov, *Practica nova imperialis Saxonica rerum criminalium* (Leipzig: Gottfried Suevus, 1669). Carpzov's book has been digitalised and may be consulted online on the website of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek: http://reader.digitalesammlungen.de/en/fs1/object/display/bsb10393944_00001.html.

[10] Carpzov, *Practica nova, Quaestio CXXV, De Torturae effectu*, 382.

and different positions were adopted in relation to their punishment.[11] A comparative analysis of European codifications completed within the second half of the eighteenth century has shown how the influence of the Enlightenment had already resulted in a substantial decriminalisation of the so-called *lewd offences against nature*.[12]

The influence of Cesare Beccaria,[13] whose work *Dei delitti e delle pene*[14] was translated very quickly into various languages,[15] had a strong impact throughout European legal culture,[16] which resulted in him being

[11] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'altra storia*, 416ff.

[12] Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2006), 501ff.

[13] On the influence of Cesare Beccaria not only in Italy but more generally on the reforms of criminal law of the time see Marcello T. Maestro, *Cesare Beccaria and the Origins of Penal Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973).

[14] The book, which was published for the first time in Italian in 1764, was translated into French by Abbé Morellet as early as 1766 (*Des délits et des peines*). At the same time, the *Commentaire sur des délits et des peines* was published in France, a commentary by Voltaire on the work by Beccaria in which the renowned French Enlightenment scholar supported the views of the Italian author on the abolition of torture and the death penalty. An initial translation into English was published in London by J. Almon in 1767, entitled *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments translated from the Italian; With a Commentary attributed to Mons. De Voltaire translated from the French.* The first translations into German (*Von den Verbrechen und von den Strafen*) were those by Albrecht Wittenberg (Hamburg: 1766), Jakob Schultes (Ulm: 1767), Philipp Jakob Flathe with annotations by Karl Ferdinand Hommel (Breslau:1778; 2nd edn. 1788), Johann Adam Bergk (Leipzig: 1798, new edition of 1817), Julius Glaser (Vienna: 1851; 2nd edn. 1876) and M. Waldeck (Berlin: 1870). In Spanish, the first edition was dated 1774 and entitled *Tratado de los delitos y de las penas,* by D. Juan Antonio de las Casas (Madrid: Ed. D. Joachin Ibarra). Thanks to the translation into French by Morellet, Beccaria's work started to circulate also in Russia shortly after it was published. Translations into Russian however arrived soon after and, since then, *Dei delitti e delle pene* enjoyed major success in Russia, as is demonstrated by the at least twelve different translations, five of which remained in manuscript form; on this last aspect see Ettore Gherbezza, *Dei delitti e delle pene nella traduzione di Michail M. Ščerbatov* (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2007).

[15] Francis Edward Devine, "Cesare Beccaria and the Theoretical Foundation of Modern Penal KiJurisprudence," *New England Journal of Prison* 7 (1981): 8-21.

[16] Mario A. Cattaneo, "Cesare Beccaria e l'Illumismo giuridico europeo," in *Cesare Beccaria tra Milano e l'Europa* (Bari: Cariplo-Laterza, 1990), 196-224. See also Maria Rosa Di Simone, *Percorsi del diritto tra Austria e Italia, secoli XVII-XX* (Milano: Giuffrè, 2006), 125.

considered, along with Voltaire, as one of the great reformers of criminal law of the eighteenth century.[17] Beccaria in particular considers the offence of sodomy within Chapter XXXI *crimes of difficult proof*, which describes them as follows:

> Vi sono alcuni delitti che sono nel medesimo tempo frequenti nella società e difficili a provarsi, e in questi la difficoltà della prova tien luogo della probabilità dell'innocenza, ed il danno dell'impunità essendo tanto meno valutabile quanto la frequenza di questi delitti dipende da principii diversi dal pericolo dell'impunità, il tempo dell'esame e il tempo della prescrizione devono diminuirsi egualmente. E pure gli adulterii, la greca libidine, che sono delitti di difficile prova, sono quelli che secondo i principii ricevuti ammettono le tiranniche presunzioni, le quasi-prove, le semi-prove (quasi che un uomo potesse essere semi-innocente o semi-reo, cioè semi-punibile e semi-assolvibile), dove la tortura esercita il crudele suo impero nella persona dell'accusato, nei testimoni, e persino in tutta la famiglia di un infelice, come con iniqua freddezza insegnano alcuni dottori che si danno ai giudici per norma e per legge.

Within Beccaria's work, the crime of sodomy is thus classified under offences that are difficult to prove, along with adultery and infanticide, taking the name of *greca libidine* (Greek desire) or *attica venere* (Attic love), which is described as follows:

> L'attica venere così severamente punita dalle leggi e così facilmente sottoposta ai tormenti vincitori dell'innocenza, ha meno i suoi fondamenti sui bisogni dell'uomo isolato e libero che sulle passioni dell'uomo sociabile e schiavo. Essa prende la sua forza non tanto dalla sazietà dei piaceri, quanto da quella educazione che comincia a render gli uomini inutili a se stessi per fargli utili ad altri, in quelle case dove si condensa l'ardente gioventù, dove essendovi un argine insormontabile ad ogni altro commercio, tutto il vigore della natura che si sviluppa si consuma inutilmente per l'umanità, anzi ne anticipa la vecchiaia.

Beccaria thus adopts an understanding stance in relation to this crime, relating it not so much with a "satiety of pleasures" as rather with life "as the vigour of nature blooms" and thus with colleges and educational institutions where, since there is an exclusion "from all commerce with the

[17] *Beccaria et la culture juridique des Lumière*s. *Actes du colloque européen de Genève, 25-26 novembre 1995*, ed. Michel Porret (Geneva: Droz, 1997); Marcello T. Maestro, *Voltaire and Beccaria as Reformers of Criminal Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

other sex," i.e. segregation based on sex, it appears natural to develop these forms of affection. Beccaria's approach thus appears to be preventive rather than afflictive, and he concludes in this regard that

> Io non pretendo diminuire il giusto orrore che meritano questi delitti; ma, indicandone le sorgenti, mi credo in diritto di cavarne una conseguenza generale, cioè che non si può chiamare precisamente giusta (il che vuol dire necessaria) una pena di un delitto, finché la legge non ha adoperato il miglior mezzo possibile nelle date circostanze d'una nazione per prevenirlo.

In the wake of this new approach, the Enlightenment legislation from the end of the eighteenth century inverted the trend compared to the previous rules, distancing itself from the vision of Carpzov.[18] Within the Hapsburg Empire this reversal manifested itself in the promulgation by Emperor Joseph II of the *Legge generale sui delitti e le loro pene* (*Allgemeines Gesetz über Verbrechen und derselben Bestrafung*) in 1787, which abolished the death penalty and torture for all crimes, with the exception of sedition to which the death penalty still applied,[19] thereby creating a far-reaching innovation on the previous normative system laid down in the *Constitutio Criminalis Theresiana* of 1768.[20]

Whilst drawing on Enlightenment ideals,[21] Austrian legislation would continue to provide for the criminalisation of acts against nature both under the Code promulgated by Joseph[22] and also under the subsequent

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[18] See above.

[19] Maria Rosa Di Simone, "Le riforme del Settecento," in *Profilo di storia del diritto penale dal Medioevo alla Restaurazione*, eds. Alessandro Dani et al., (Torino: Giappichelli, 2012), 64-65.

[20] Hans-Peter Weingand, " '…daß dieses Laster mehr eine Religions Sache seye'. Gleichgeschlechtliche sexuelle Handlungen und Strafrecht in Österreich 1781–1852," *Invertito. Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten,* 6 (2014): 10.

[21] On the actual reception of Enlightenment ideas into the Austrian Criminal Code of 1803 see Mario A. Cattaneo, "Il codice penale austriaco tra illuminismo e reazione," in *Il Codice Penale Universale Austriaco (1803),* ed. Sergio Vinciguerra (Padova: CEDAM, 1997), xxxix.

[22] In the *Josephinisches Strafgesetzbuch* of 1787 the offence was classified under political crimes in § 71: "Wer die Menschheit in dem Grade abwürdiget, um sich mit einem Viehe, oder mit seinem eigenen Geschlechte fleischlich zu vergehen, macht sich eines politischen Verbrechens schuldig." Per le sanzioni, il successivo § 72 disponeva: "Ist das Verbrechen so begangen worden, daß dasselbe öffentliches Aergerniß erreget hat, so ist zur Strafe Züchtigung mit Streichen, und zeitliche

Austrian Criminal Codes of 1803[23] and 1852,[24] which remained in force in Lombardy and Veneto until the legislation enacted after the unification of Italy came into force.[25] The change was even more radical in Prussia.[26] In 1725 Frederick William I issued an edict stipulating that gypsies found within his kingdom were to be strangled and any person committing sodomy to be burned at the stake without trial.[27] In the 1794 codification, the *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten*[28] desired by Frederick II (the Great), an enlightened figure and great admirer of Voltaire, the ability to punish sodomy was heavily limited,[29] with

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öffentliche Arbeit bestimmt. Ist aber dasselbe nur weniger bekannt geworden, so ist der Täter mit zeitlichen strengeren Gefängnisse zu belegen, so durch Fasten, und Züchtigung mit Streichen zu verschärfen ist. Auch soll der Thäter von dem Orte, wo er öffentlich Aergernis gegeben hat, abgeschafft werden."

[23] In particular, § 113 and 114 regulate lewd crimes against nature *(Unzucht wider die Natur)* and incest (*Blutschande*): "§ 113. Als Verbrechen werden auch nachstehende Arten der Unzucht bestraft: I. Unzucht wider die Natur: II. Blutschande, welche zwischen Verwandten in auf- und absteigender Linie, ihre Verwandtschaft mag von ehelicher, oder unehelicher Geburt herrühren, begangen wird. § 114. Die Strafe ist Kerker zwischen sechs Monaten, und einem Jahre)."

[24] In the Austrian Code of 1852 the legislation on lewd crimes against nature was separated from the provisions on incest and laid down in § 129: "Als Verbrechen werden auch nachstehende Arten der Unzucht bestraft: I. Unzucht wider die Natur, das ist a) mit Thieren; b) mit Personen desselben Geschlechts."

[25] In particular, the Sardinian-Piedmontese Code of 1859 was extended to the Lombard provinces in 1860. See on this issue Alberto Aquarone, *L'unificazione legislativa e i codici del 1865* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1960), 115ff.

[26] Mario A. Cattaneo, *Aufklärung und Strafrecht. Beiträge zur deutschen Strafrechtsphilosophie des 18. Jahrhundert* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998).

[27] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 504.

[28] Klaus Berndl, "Die Aufhebung der Todesstrafe für 'unnatürliche Sünden' in Preußen, 1794," *Invertito, Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten,* 9 (2007): 8ff..; James D. Steakley, "Sodomy in Enlightenment Prussia: from Execution to Suicide," *Journal of Homosexuality* 16, 1-2 (1989).

[29] The paragraphs from the *Allgemeines Landrecht* concerning the offence of sodomy were in particular §§ 1069-1072: "§1069: Sodomiterey und andere dergleichen unnatürliche Sünden, welche wegene ihrer Abscheulichkeit nich genannt werden können, erfordern eine gänzliche Vertilgung des Andenkens; §1070: Es soll daher ein solcher Verbrecher, nachdem er ein- oder merhjährige Zuchthausstrafe mit Willkommen und Abschied ausgestanden hat, aus dem Orte seines Aufenthalts, wo sein Laster bekannt geworden ist, auf immer verdammt, und das etwa gemißbrauchte Thier getödtet, oder heimlich aus der Gegend entfernt

prosecution only being possible following an objection by the other party, and punishment amounting only to a few years in prison.[30] Similarly, in the same years in France the constituent National Assembly which held office between 1789 and 1791 explicitly repealed the provisions on *mœurs contre nature* in 1791. The previous French law, as with other European legislation, had stipulated death by burning at the stake as an appropriate punishment for acts of pederasty and sodomy, which were defined as *abominable*.[31] Michel Foucault in fact recalls that, as late as the start of the eighteenth century, the crime of sodomy in France would result in sentencing to burning at the stake in public*:*

> On 24 March 1726, the Liuetenant of Police Herault, assisted by the judges who presided over the Châtelet in Paris, madepublic ajudgement whose terms stated that: "Etienne Benjamin Deschauffours is declared guilted as charged of commiting the crimes of sodomy mentioned in the trial. In reparation for this and other actions, Deschauffours is sentenced to be burnt alive in the Place de Grève, his ashes are to be scattered to the winds, and his goods and worldly possessions confiscating by the King." The execution was carried out the same day.[32]

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werden; § 1071: Wer jemanden zu dergleichen unnatürlichen Lastern verführt und missbraucht, der ist doppelter Strafe schuldig"; "§1072: Machen sich Aeltern, Vormünder, Lehrer oder Erzieher dieses Verbrechens schuldig: so soll gegen dieselben vier- bis achtjährige Zuchthausstrafe mit Willkommen und Abschied stattfinden."

[30] Christian Schäfer, "*Widernatürliche Unzucht*" *(§175, 175a, 175b, 182 a.F. StGB), Reformdiskussion und Gesetzgebung seit 1945* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006), 25: "In Preußen beschränkte im Jahre 1794 das ALR in § 1069 und §1070 die Strafbarkeit für unnatürliche Sünden im Strafmaß auf ein- oder mehrjährige Zuchthausstrafe."

[31] In his contribution entitled *Les bûchers de Sodome* (*The stakes of sodomy*) the historian Maurice Lever notes that, within the revival sparked off by the new ideas characteristic of the end of the eighteenth century, the punishment of homosexuality was regarded as an anachronism inherited from the absolutist monarchy. See Maurice Lever, *Les bûchers de Sodome* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 397. See also Thierry Pastorello, "L'abolition du crime de sodomie en 1791: un long processus social*,* répressif et pénal," *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique* 112-113 (2010): 197-208; Michel Rey, "Police et sodomie à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: du péché au désordre," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 29,1 (1982): 121.

[32] Foucault, *History of Madness*, 87

Following the Revolution this practice became entirely obsolete, and the *Code pénal* of 1791 did not even mention the so-called *mœurs contre nature*. The same stance was subsequently reiterated in the *Code Pénal* of 1810, which came into force under Napoleon and would later exert a strong influence throughout Europe, including in particular in Italy.[33] From that time onwards, the criminalisation of homosexuality in Europe followed two tracks. Whilst in France and Italy the criminalisation of homosexuality was abolished at the time of the Zanardelli Code, with the offence not subsequently being reintroduced, the same cannot be said for other legal systems. Although the offence of sodomy had been abolished in several pre-unification German states, in line with the French example,[34] in Bismarck's Germany it was introduced in 1871 by § 175 of the StGB (*Strafgesetzbuch*: Criminal Code) and remained in force until 1969, when the scope of the provision creating the offence was limited, only being abolished in 1994 after reunification.[35] Similarly, in the United Kingdom the punishment of homosexual acts was only removed with the *Sexual Offences Act* 1967.[36]

Some Italian events within the European context

In Italy the starting point for an account of the events of interest here must be the *Riforma della legislazione criminale toscana* of 30th November

[33] Sergio Vinciguerra, "L'influence du Code de 1810 en Italie," *Les colloques du Sénat. Les actes. Bicentenaire du code pénal (1810-2010)*, *Paris, 25-26 November 2010* (Paris: Senate of France, 2010), 113 [http://hdl.handle.net/10807/2651].

[34] The offence of sodomy was abolished in Bavaria in 1813; in Württemberg it was still punishable, though only pursuant to a complaint, from 1839. See Jens Dobler, "Wie öffentliche Moral gemacht wird. Die Einführung des §175 in das Strafgesetzbuch 1871," *Queer Lectures* 7, ed. Bruno Gammerl (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2014).

[35] See Dobler, "Wie öffentliche Moral gemacht wird."

[36] However, it should be noted that the Sexual Offences Act 1967 only applied in England and Wales. The decriminalisation of homosexuality required specific legislation for Scotland (Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980). Also for Northern Ireland it was necessary to issue subsequent legislation to this effect: the Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 1982. It is also important to recall the renowned judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the Dudgeon case, which held that the criminalisation of sodomy amounted to an interference by the state in the private sphere of the individual, and thus to a violation of Article 8 ECHR. On this point see Giuseppe Riccardi, "Omofobia e legge penale, Possibilità e limiti dell'intervento penale," *Diritto penale contemporaneo* 3 (2013): 84ff.

1786,[37] desired by Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine,[38] which for the first time abolished the death penalty in line with Beccaria's writings. The *Leopoldine Code*[39] was recognised as a new departure within the underlying ideas that inspired it: the abolition of the death penalty and the elimination of torture, whilst maintaining very severe penalties for sodomy. In particular, it stipulated as follows with regard to the crime of sodomy in § XCVI:

> XCVI. L'adulterio, la bigamia, la sodomia, la bestialità si puniranno negli uomini coll'ultimo supplizio, e nelle donne coll'ergastolo per vent'anni. L'incesto se sarà tra padre, e madre, e figli, fratelli, e sorelle, cognati, e cognate, suocero, nuora, e generi la pena sarà per gli uomini dei pubblici lavori per dieci anni, e per le donne dell'ergastolo per anni cinque, se tra zio, e nipoti, o cugini in primo grado rilasciamo la pena all'arbitrio del giudice, purché sia sempre minore dei lavori pubblici. […] C. Per gli altri atti impudici quantunque del genere degli aborriti dalla natura saranno castigati i colpevoli con la frusta privata. / La violenza usata nel ratto come in ogni altra specie di delitto di carne, qualunque siasi, se il delitto sarà consumato, lo renderà sempre meritevole dell'ultimo supplizio, e solo nel ratto avrà il giudice l'arbitrio di minorare una tal pena, qualora vi fosse intervenuto il libero consenso della rapita, onde l'ingiuria percuotesse piuttosto i genitori e i consanguinei, o i tutori e curatori della medesima. / Non essendo poi seguito l'effetto se chi ha patito la violenza avrà riportato qualche grave ferita, o altra offesa parimente grave nella persona, la pena non sarà mai minore di dieci anni di pubblici lavori; fuori del detto caso l'attentato sarà punito ad arbitrio del giudice.

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[37] *La* "*Leopoldina*" *nel diritto e nella giustizia in Toscana,* eds. Luigi Berlinguer and Floriana Colao, vol. 5 (Milano: Giuffrè, 1989).

[38] The younger brother of Austrian Emperor Joseph II became the Grand Duke of Tuscany under the name Leopold I of Tuscany from 1765 until 1790 and subsequently—following the death of his brother—the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of Hungary and Bohemia from 1790 until 1792.

[39] Mario Da Passano, "'Leopoldina': il progetto del Granduca," *Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica* 15, 2 (1985): 301ff.; Da Passano, "La 'Leopoldina è un codice moderno?," *Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica* 17, 2 (1987): 469ff.; Da Passano, *Dalla* "*mitigazione delle pene*" *alla* "*protezione che esige l'ordine pubblico*." *Il diritto penale Toscano dai Lorena ai Borbone (1786-1807)* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1988), x; Da Passano, "La pena di morte nel granducato di Toscana (1786-1860)," *Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica* 26, 1 (1996): 39ff; Dario Zuliani, *La riforma penale di Pietro Leopoldo. Presentazione storica e indice delle edizioni della Legge Toscana del 30 novembre 1786*, vol. 1 (Milano: Giuffrè, 1995).

As far as the penalty was concerned, which was to involve the "*ultimate torture*," the Leopoldine code stipulated as follows in § LV on punishment:

> la pena dei pubblici lavori avrà congiunto il cartello, in cui sarà espresso il titolo del delitto, e da dieci anni in su e per i recidivi di fuga potrà il giudice secondo la qualità dei casi aggiungervi l'anello tondo al piede. Ed essendo a vita, pena riservata per i delitti capitali, avrà il condannato oltre l'anello tondo, e una doppia catena, l'abito di colore e taglio che lo distingua da tutti i forzati, piedi nudi, sarà impiegato nei travagli più duri e faticosi, e porterà scritto nel cartello esprimente il titolo del suo delitto: ultimo supplizio.

The penalty was therefore humiliating in nature and was closely related to social reprobation of the convicted person.

Various legislative initiatives were subsequently enacted in the area of criminal law, such as the *Organic Laws* of the Cisalpine Republic in 1797[40] and the *Italic Law* of 1804 *on murders, injuries and thefts*,[41] which were followed by the enactment of the first Italian codes: in 1797 in Verona, in 1807 in Lucca, in 1808 in Piombino and – again in the same year – in Naples.[42] It has been demonstrated that numerous efforts were

[40] *Leggi Organiche giudiciarie della Repubblica Cisalpina*, (Milano, Bologna: per le stampe dei Sassi, anno VI repubblicano, 1797-1798).

[41] The law of 25th February 1804 was entitled "Sugli omicidi, le ferite, e li furti, e sulle prove, e sull'applicazione delle pene tanto ne' delitti suddetti, quanto in tutti gli altri delitti," *Bollettino delle leggi della Repubblica italiana*, I (Milan: 1804), 86-112. The 1804 law stipulated that, for six offences defined as highly atrocious (parricide, poisoning, treacherous killing, murder, murder associated with robbery or swindling; see Article 4, 88), death must be particular exemplary, followed by removal of the head, which must subsequently be displayed "on a post with a sign indicating the name, surname and place of origin of the guilty person; the title of the offence, and its status as parricide, swindling or any other aspect that rendered the murder most atrocious, which head must remain on display for the remaining hours of the day." See in this regard Loredana Garlati, "La macchina del flagello. Romagnosi alla ricerca della pena perfetta," *Italian Review of Legal History* 1, 7 (2015): 1-23. See also Gianfrancesco Vanzelli, "Il primo progetto di codice penale per la Lombardia napoleonica (1801-1802)," eds. Adriano Cavanna and Gianfrancesco Vanzelli, *Il primo progetto di Codice penale per la Lombardia napoleonica (1801-1802)* (Padova: CEDAM, 2000), 59.

[42] See Vinciguerra, "L'influence du Code de 1810 en Italie," 114.

made during those years by leading personalities such as Giuseppe Luosi[43] and Gian Domenico Romagnosi[44] to preserve the "*Italian*" character of the codifications that would enter into force over the following years in the various pre-unification states, adopting various positions in relation to Napoleonic imperialism.[45]

In fact, the French Criminal Code of 1810 was introduced into the Kingdom of Italy on 1st January 1811[46] and remained in force throughout all territories directly or indirectly subject to the French Empire until 1815. However, the force of the French-Napoleonic model must also be understood in the light of the codes proposed, which covered entire areas of the law: the Criminal Code of 1810 was in fact complemented not only by the *Code d'instruction criminelle* (the Code of Criminal Procedure in force since 1808), but also by the more widely known *Code civil* (1804), the *Code de procedure civile* (1806), and the *Code de commerce* (1807).

[43]Adriano Cavanna, "Codificazione del diritto italiano e imperialismo giuridico francese nella Milano napoleonica. Giuseppe Luosi e il diritto penale," in *Ius Mediolani: Studi di storia del diritto milanese offerti dagli allievi a Giulio Vismara* (Milano: 1996), 699; see also *Giuseppe Luosi, giurista italiano ed europeo. Traduzioni, tradizioni e tradimenti della codificazione. A 200 anni dalla traduzione in italiano del Code Napoléon (1806-2006), Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi* (Mirandola-Modena: 19-20 October 2006), ed. Elio Tavilla (Modena: Archivio storico, Comune di Modena, Assessorato alla cultura, 2009).

[44] On the contribution by Romagnosi to the promulgation of the Code of Criminal Procedure, see Ettore Dezza, *Il codice di procedura penale del Regno Italico (1807): storia di un decennio di elaborazione* legislativa (Padova: CEDAM, 1983).

[45]See Garlati, "La macchina del flagello. Romagnosi alla ricerca della pena perfetta," 2, where the author recalls: "Gian Domenico Romagnosi, protagonista di rilievo della cultura giuridica sette-ottocentesca, lega in particolare il suo nome al Codice di procedura penale del 1807, l'unico testo 'nazionale' entrato in vigore negli anni in cui l'imperialismo napoleonico si imponeva in Italia con le armi e con le leggi." On the same aspect see also Vinciguerra, "L'influence du Code de 1810 en Italie," who asserts as follows regarding the codes that entered into force during those years: "Il s'agit en général d'œuvres dans lesquelles la culture pénaliste nationale se manifeste par des accents d'originalité et d'autonomie parfois plus importants que ceux qui sont présent dans les codifications postérieures qui, comme nous verrons, seront influencées, parfois de façon considérable, par des modèles extérieurs, en particulier par le code français."

[46] Following the "Decreto con cui viene approvata la traduzione del codice penale dell'impero francese, ed ordinato che lo stesso codice sia posto in attività nel regno d'Italia pel 1° gennajo 1811," signed by Napoleon in Fontainebleau on 12th November 1810, *Bollettino delle leggi del Regno d'Italia. Parte III. Dal 1° ottobre al 31 dicembre 1810* (Milano: Dalla reale stamperia, 1810).

Within the respective areas of the law, the Napoleonic codes offered a fundamental model not only for the pre-unification Italian states, but also for Europe as a whole,[47] providing inspiration also for several non-European systems.[48]

As far as Italy is concerned, the overall body of Napoleonic codification entered into force during the imperial period when the territory of the peninsula was either fully incorporated into France (as was the case in Piedmont, Liguria, Tuscany and Lazio) or was formed into the various states that were in any case politically related to France (starting with the Kingdom of Italy). As regards in particular the Criminal Code of 1810, this remained in force within the part of peninsular Italy the territories of which were incorporated into the Empire or that formed part of the Kingdom of Italy (1805-1814), or the Kingdom of Naples, where Joachim Murat succeeded Joseph Bonaparte. Only Sicily, which had remained in the hands of the Bourbons, and Sardinia, to which the Savoy dynasty had retreated, were not affected by the 1810 Code.

The crime of sodomy between the Napoleonic model and pre-unification Italian models[49]

Within this context, which is so strongly characterised by the influence of the French codes, the provisions governing sexual offences and sodomy in

[47] Consider the influence of the *Code civil* in Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Portugal. For an overview, see Konrad Zweigert and Hein Kötz, *Einführung in die Rechtsvergleichung auf dem Gebiete des Privatrechts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984, 1996): *Introduzione al diritto comparato*, eds. Adolfo Di Majo and Antonio Gambaro, It. trans. by Barbara Pozzo (Milano: Giuffrè, 1994).

[48] The Napoleonic codes, and above all the *Code civil*, provided a valid reference model for codifications in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Mexico. The *Code civil* also had an important influence in Indochina and Japan during the Meji era. See *Il diritto dell'Asia orientale*, in *Trattato di diritto comparato*, eds. Gianmaria Ajani et. al. (Torino: Utet, 2007).

[49] The texts of all pre-unification codes are available on the website of the Ministry of Grace and Justice at the following address:
https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_22_4_3_2.wp. A bibliography which gives close consideration to the relevance of homosexuality within pre-unification legislation may be found in Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Codici penali italiani preunitari e omosessualità: bibliografia (1803-1888)*, available online:
http://www.giovannidallorto.com/saggistoria/tollera/codici.html.

Italy could be subdivided into two classes. The first, which was inspired by the Napoleonic model, did not take account of specific circumstances unless these were significant, such as rape or sexual acts committed through violence. On the other hand, the second class was characterised by separate provision for sodomy or an explicit rule aimed at extending the general rules to sexual acts between persons of the same sex.

The provisions of the first type included the Criminal Code of the Principality of Lucca of 1807.[50] Article 124 of that Code provided for the offence of rape,[51] whilst the following articles went on to stipulate specific aggravating circumstances for that offence. Article 125 provided in particular for a punishment of twelve years behind bars if the victim was a "girl" under fourteen, or if the rape had been committed with the involvement of accomplices. The offence thus appears to assume a female victim, and no reference was made by the legislation to the possibility that the offence might be committed against a person of the same sex.

The same line of legislation also included the *Legge sui delitti e sulle pene* (no. 143) of 20th May 1808[52] for the Kingdom of Naples, which was enacted by Joseph Bonaparte, at the time the King of Naples.[53] The provisions on sexual offences within this Law are contained in section III, dedicated to "Crimes of lust", of Title I, which in turn was entitled "Crimes against individuals", and included the offences of rape, procuring and "illegitimate intercourse" such as abduction with sexual intent, adultery, bigamy and crimes of indecency. According to the Napoleonic tradition, there was no mention of the crime of sodomy.

Rape in particular was defined as an act of violence committed "*sopra persone o di diverso, o del medesimo sesso*." Questo delitto è punito "*co' ferri in terzo grado*." The laws of Naples thus appeared to adopt a very neutral stance as regards the victim of the offence, who could be a man or a woman, subject solely to the limit that the payment of damages was only recognised under Neapolitan law "*to the violated girl or widow*."

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[50] *Codice Penale per il Principato Di Lucca*, ed. Sergio Viciguerra (Padova: CEDAM, 1999), 187.

[51] Article 124, located in the section entitled "*Delitti e attentati contro le persone*," stipulated as follows: "Lo stupro violento è punito con sei anni di ferri."

[52] These may be found in the volume entitled *Le leggi penali di Giuseppe Bonaparte per il Regno di Napoli (1808)*, ed. Sergio Vinciguerra ed. (Padova: CEDAM, 1998), 301.

[53] For a commentary on the laws of 1808 see Mario Da Passano, "La codificazione del diritto penale a Napoli nel periodo francese," *Le leggi penali di Giuseppe Bonaparte per il Regno di Napoli (1808)*, clxiii.

Similar considerations may be made in relation to the Criminal Code of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies of 1819.[54] Also in this case, the offence of sodomy disappears and, as for the *Neapolitan laws* analysed above, rape could be committed both against persons of the same sex and against persons of the opposite sex. Article 333 of that Code provided that "*lo stupro violento consumato sopra individui dell'uno o dell'alto sesso sarà punito con la reclusione*." It was perhaps possible to take certain acts into consideration under the terms of another provision contained in Article 345, which punished "*ogni altro atto turpe o sregolato d'incontinenza che offenda il pudore pubblico*," without providing any further specification in relation to acts between homosexuals.[55]

The rules falling into the second class by contrast include the *Codice penale veronese* of 1797,[56] which was rooted in the mental frameworks predating the French Revolution[57] and, placing particular emphasis on acts that violated the legal interest in "proper morals," contemplated offences against God, religion and the Catholic Church, which were treated together with traditional sexual offences. Chapter XIII, which was dedicated to "*delitti contrarj al buon costume, o che ne inducono la corruttela,*" started with Article 1 to the effect that:

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[54] *Codice per lo Regno delle Due Sicilie (1819). Parte seconda. Leggi penali* (Padova: CEDAM, 1996), 82. Within the Code for the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies the issue of sexual offences was governed by Articles 333 et seq. In particular, Article 333 covered rape, Articles 334 and 335 inchoate and attempted rape, Articles 336-338 abduction with sexual intent; Article 339 regulated the presumption of violence within rape, Article 340 laid down certain aggravating circumstances for persons guilty of rape on the basis of their specific personal characteristics; Articles 341 and 342 laid down a list of aggravating circumstances for rape on the grounds of commission with accomplices, the use of arms, the causing of injury to or the death of the victim; Article 343 stipulated mitigating circumstances in the event that the rape victim was "publicly known as a prostitute"; Article 344 punished the corruption of minors; it is not indicated whether this last provision could also be applied.

[55] Article 345 provided in particular: "Ogni altro atto turpe o sregolamento d'incontinenza che offenda il pubblico costume, egualmente che ogni oltraggio al pudore pubblico, sarà punito col primo al secondo grado di prigionia. Può il giudice, secondo le circostanze, discendere al confino o all'esilio correzionale nello stesso grado."

[56] *Codice penale veronese (1797)*, ed. Sergio Vinciguerra (Padova: CEDAM, 1995).

[57] Alberto Cadoppi, "L'Illuminismo 'maltemperato' del codice penale veronese," in *Il Codice penale veronese (1797)*, CXV-CXXXVII.

> Dalla onestà della vita, e del costume si conosce il buon Cittadino. Lo Scandaloso d'irreligione, e d'impurità, il Bestemmiatore, l'Adultero, l'Incestuoso, lo Stupratore, il Rapitore violento di vergini, o di altre oneste donne, il Poligamo, il Sodomita, il Ruffiano, certamente non sono i caratteri del buon Cittadino, ma dovranno sempre stare, come lo sono, nella classe di que' delitti, che inducenti corruttela morale, e di fatto, direttamente oppongono alla base più sostenitrice del Governo, la quale consiste nel buon costume, e nella onestà della vita, e carattere di Cittadini.[58]

A cultural framework rooted in the past may also be found in the Article dedicated specifically to the offence of sodomy, for which the death penalty was stipulated for reoffenders. Article 8 in fact provided that:

> La Sodomia, ed altre nefande impurità pur troppo intese sotto il titolo di Venere mostruosa, come quelle, che sovvertendo l'uso degli organi dalla natura costrutti, oppure bestialmente operando, e peggio ancora delle bestie stesse offendono le leggi naturali dell'uomo con scandalosa sozzura la più nefanda, meriterebbero il rigore della Giustizia. Questo abbominevole delitto però sarà sempre punito con pena non minore di anni dieci, o de' pubblici lavori, o di carcere all'oscuro, da starvi solo il delinquente; e se consumata questa pena, fosse ancora recidivo, sarà condannato a morte.[59]

However, whilst ultimately including features of transitory legislation between the *Ancien Régime* and the new Enlightenment Age,[60] the Verona code only remained in force for a few months covering the end of 1797 and the first part of 1798.

It is also necessary to mention amongst the codes that explicitly punished sexual acts committed between men the draft *Codice penale per la Lombardia Napoleonica* drawn up under the auspices of Giuseppe Luosi, which however never entered into force.[61] It is in any case interesting to note that this draft contained a dedicated paragraph punishing intercourse with animals, in the same manner as relations with another person of the same sex. In fact, § 356 provided that

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[58] *Codice penale veronese (1797)*, CCXV-CCXVI.
[59] *Codice penale veronese (1797)*, CCXX-CCXXI.
[60] Sergio Vinciguerra, "Il codice penale veronese del 1797 nel passaggio fra due età. Presentazione di un ritrovamento e d'una analisi," in *Il Codice penale veronese* (1797), IX-XXIII.
[61] *Il primo progetto di codice penale per la Lombardia napoleonica (1801-1802)*, eds. Adriano Cavanna and Gianfrancesco Vanzelli (Padova: CEDAM, 2000).

> Chi degradando l'umanità, s'induce a peccare carnalmente con una bestia, o col sesso suo simile, se il misfatto avrà dato pubblico scandalo sarà punito con una detenzione non maggiore di venti mesi, né minore di cinque; ma se sarà venuto a notizia di pochi la pena sarà non maggiore di un anno, né minore di tre mesi di detenzione.[62]

The same approach was adopted by the Criminal Code of the Principality of Piombino of 1808,[63] the Criminal Regulations of Pope Gregory XVI for the Papal States of 1832[64] in addition to the Austrian Criminal Code, to which reference has already been made.[65]

A special comment should be dedicated to the Tuscan Criminal Code of 1853,[66] which set itself apart from the other criminal codes in force at the time by the fact that it distanced itself from the French models,[67] rather

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[62] *Il primo progetto di codice penale per la Lombardia napoleonica (1801-1802),* 314-315.

[63] *Codice penale per il Principato di Piombino (1808)*, ed. Sergio Vinciguerra, (Padova: CEDAM, 2001), in particular 107ff., Article CCXXXVIII governing the offence of rape, situated in the section entitled *Dei delitti che offendono principalmente la sicurezza generale e la pubblica tranquillità*, provided that also such offences committed against a person of the same sex should be regarded as violent.

[64] *I regolamenti penali di papa Gregorio XVI per lo Stato pontificio (1832)*, ed. Sergio Vinciguerra (Padova: CEDAM, 2000), in particular 100ff. This legislation inflicted very severe punishment for sexual behaviour against nature providing for *la galera perpetua* for the perpetrator (Article CLXXVIII).

[65] See above.

[66] C*odice penale pel Granducato di Toscana (1853)*, eds. Mario Da Passano et al. (Padova: CEDAM, 1995).

[67] On the origins and history of the Tuscan Criminal Code see the numerous writings of Mario Da Passano, including: "Il primo progetto di codice penale toscano (1824)," *Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica* 22 (1992): 41-64; "La storia esterna del codice penale toscano (1814-1860)," in *Istituzioni e società in Toscana nell'età moderna, Atti delle giornate di studio dedicate a Giuseppe Pansini (Firenze, 4-5 dicembre 1992)*, vol. II (Roma: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i Beni archivistici, 1994), 564-589; "La codificazione penale nel Granducato di Toscana (1814-1860)," *Codice Penale pel Granducato di Toscana (1853)*, eds. Sergio Vinciguerra and Mario Da Passano (Padova: CEDAM, 1993), XXIX-CLVIII; "La formazione del codice penale toscano," in *Codice Penale pel Granducato di Toscana (1853)*, ed. Sergio Vinciguerra (Padova: CEDAM 1995), VII-CXXVI; "I tentativi di codificazione penale nel Granducato di Toscana. Il progetto di Giuseppe Puccioni (1838)," *Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica* 26 (1996): 319-357.

drawing inspiration from the Criminal Code of Baden.[68]

In the same way as its German model, the Tuscan Criminal Code provided for one single offence of rape within the Title dedicated to "*Dei delitti contro il pudore, e contro l'ordine delle famiglie*"[69]. Stabiliva infatti l'art. 280: "*Chiunque, mediante violenza, abusa, per libidine, di una persona dell'uno o dell'altro sesso, commette il delitto di violenza carnale*." However, the Tuscan code went on to stipulate specific aggravating circumstances when the victim was male in Article 281:

> La violenza carnale si punisce con la casa di forza: a) da quattro ad otto anni, se in femmina libera; b) da cinque a dieci anni, se in femmina coniugata, o con voti solenni dedicata a Dio; e c) da sei a dodici anni, se in maschio.

It is also necessary to mention the Albertine Criminal Code due to the influence that it would subsequently exert on the process of Italian national codification. With regard to that codification, it must be recalled that Charles Albert had already adopted a first criminal code in 1839, which was subsequently re-proposed in 1859 with several amendments by Victor Emanuel II.[70] This Code remained in force in the newly created Kingdom of Italy until the adoption of the Italian Criminal Code in 1889, subject to a whole range of territorial limitations, which will be examined below.

The Albertine Code of 1839 expressly considered sexual acts contrary to nature in Article 439, which distinguished between various cases with a view to imposing different sentences depending upon the seriousness of the offences:

> Qualunque atto di libidine contro natura, se sarà commesso con violenza, nei modi e nelle circostanze contemplate negli articoli 530 e 531, sarà

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[68] On this issue see Annette J. Baldes, *Die Entstehung des Strafgesetzbuches für das Grossherzogtum Baden von 1845 mit Blick auf die badische Verfassungsgeschichte und die an der Strafgesetzgebung beteiligten Personen,* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 1999).

[69] See: https://www.giustizia.it/resources/cms/documents/Codice_Penale_Toscano_1853_ridotto.pdf.

[70] Sergio Vinciguerra, "I codici penali sardo-piemontesi del 1839 e del 1859," in *Diritto penale dell'Ottocento. I codici preunitari e il codice Zanardelli*, ed. Sergio Vinciguerra (Padova: CEDAM, 1999) 350ff.; Mario Da Passano, "L'estensione del codice penale albertino alla Sardegna", in *Codice penale per gli Stati di S. M. il re di Sardegna (1839)* (Padova: CEDAM, 1992), XXIX.

> punito colla reclusione non minore di anni sette estensibile ai lavori forzati a tempo; se non vi sarà stata violenza, ma vi sarà intervenuto scandalo o vi sarà stata querela, sarà punito colla reclusione, e potrà la pena anche estendersi ai lavori forzati per anni dieci, a seconda dei casi.

A substantially identical provision would then be found in Article 425 of the 1839 Code.[71]

Observers were confronted with this fragmented panorama at the time when the process of legislative unification was launched in the area of criminal law in the wake of the creation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

The debate surrounding pederasty within the process of national codification

At the time the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed, the initial project was to extend the Savoy code of 1859 to the rest of Italy.

However, for the following 30 years criminal law continued to be characterised by a lively source of legal particularism, involving the continuing application of three different regimes: the Sardinian-Piedmontese code of 1859 in the centre and north, the Tuscan Criminal Code of 1853, whilst in the south a question had arisen regarding the adaptation of the Sardinian-Piedmontese Code of 1859 to the special circumstances of the Neapolitan provinces, and accordingly the Piedmontese code had been subject to several significant changes, including in relation to sexual offences.[72]

The fundamental reasons why it was not possible to extend the Piedmontese Code to the rest of Italy may be summarised as follows.

As far as the Tuscan Criminal Code of 1853 is concerned, this continued to apply after national unification mainly on account of the political difficulty associated with the reintroduction of the death penalty:

> Estendere la pena di morte a una provincia che ha dato chiara prova di non volerne e non averne mestiere, e che ne dà prova tuttodì quantunque sbrigliata da ogni buona legge di polizia, sarebbe una flagrante ingiustizia: per tacere del brutto ricambio che ciò farebbe all'affratellamento spontaneo che unisce al Regno la provincia toscana.[73]

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[71] *Codice Penale per gli Stati di S. M. il Re di Sardegna*, 111.
[72] Vinciguerra, "I codici penali sardo-piemontesi del 1839 e del 1859," 350ff.
[73] *Codice penale pel Granducato di Toscana (1853)*, CLXXIX.

As regards the Bourbon code of 1819 on the other hand, it must be remembered that this could be considered in various senses to be much more modern than the Piedmontese code, in particular in the area of sexual offences. In fact, when a dedicated Governor's decree was adopted[74] in 1861 resulting in the partial reform of the Sardinian-Piedmontese code for the *Neapolitan provinces*,[75] Article 425 on *lewd offences against nature* was included amongst the provisions that would not apply within these territories.[76] At the same time, the literal provision of Article 489 was amended in such a manner that the offence of *violent rape* also covered homosexual acts carried out with violence.[77]

In order to understand these deep-seated distinctions between the conceptualisation of offences with a homosexual element between the south and the north, it is however important not to limit the analysis to the

[74] With regard to the individuals involved it should be recalled that Victor Emanuel II had appointed Prince Eugenio of Savoja-Carignano as Governor General of the Neapolitan provinces. In addition, the renowned jurist Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, who had already been involved since 1865 in the Commission on Amendments and Coordination of the Civil Code of the Kingdom of Italy, was appointed as Advisor to the Governor and drew up a *Memorandum sulla Situazione delle province napolitane. Errori e rimedi*, which was published on 2 January 1861. On the contribution by Mancini to the process of codification in general see Erik Jayme, *Pasquale Stanislao Mancini. Il diritto internazionale privato tra Risorgimento e attività forense*, trans. by Antonio Ruini (Padova: CEDAM, 1988), in particular 99. See also Alfonso M. Stile, "Il codice penale delle Due Sicilie," in *I codici preunitari e il codice Zanardelli* ed. Sergio Vinciguerra (Padova: CEDAM, 1993), 193ff.

[75] The Criminal Code for the Neapolitan provinces, adopted by Governor's decree determining amendments compared to the Albertine model, is available on the website of the Italian Ministry of Justice at the following address: https://www.giustizia.it/resources/cms/documents/Codice_penale_ProvNA_1861_ridotto.pdf.

[76] Article 1 of the 1861 Decree stipulated that: "Dal 1° luglio 1861 avrà vigore nelle Provincie Napoletane il Codice Penale del 20 novembre 1859 attualmente in osservanza negli antichi Stati di S. M. ed in altre provincie del Regno Italiano, con le modificazioni che si contengono negli articoli seguenti." The art. 2 declared that "Non avranno vigore in queste provincie, la 2.a parte dell'articolo 95, gli articoli 99, 182, 374, 425, 481, 530, il n.2 dell'articolo 533, gli articoli 536 e 692."

[77] Accordingly, the definitive version of Article 489 which entered into force in the Neapolitan provinces was worded as follows: "Lo stupro violento sopra individui dell'uno o dell'altro sesso sarà punibile con la relegazione estensibile ad anni dieci secondo la maggiore o minore gravità delle circostanze."

legislative level: it is rather necessary to analyse the underlying social reasons that gave rise to these differences in treatment.

Within this perspective, it is important to analyse the understanding of homosexuality within the patriarchal and peasant societies of the Mediterranean basin.[78] As has been recalled by Giovanni dall'Orto, these are

> di concezioni legate a contesti patriarcali e omosociali, in cui donne e uomini si mescolano poco nella vita quotidiana, e in cui la verginità femminile è tenuta in grande stima, fino all'ossessione. Per tale ragione è considerata un male minore (a patto che sia condotta in segreto) una fase di "omosessualità di compensazione" dei giovani (fra loro o con gli "omosessuali", questi ultimi rigorosamente nel ruolo "passivo") fino a quando non abbiano un reddito sufficiente per pagare le prostitute.[79]

According to this view, the non-applicability of Article 425 of the Piedmontese code in the south resulted from the particular structure of the patriarchal, peasant society which was still widespread in the south in the second half of the nineteenth century, where women were closely controlled and kept apart from other people until marriage. Against this backdrop, it is also understandable how a whole range of legislative provisions focused on the value of family honour, which was closely linked to the requirement of female virginity at marriage,[80] remained important above all in the southern regions—even through to more recent times. This was the case in particular for the offence of *seduction with the promise of marriage*,[81] *crimes of honour*[82] and *restorative marriage*,[83] all

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[78] For this analysis see Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'altra storia*, 486. See also by the same author "Mediterranean Homosexuality," *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, eds. Wayne R. Dynes and William Percy (New York: Garland Press, 1990), 796ff.; available online: http://williamapercy.com/wiki/images/Mediterranean.pdf.

[79] See Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'altra storia*, 487.

[80] See in this regard my own "Masculinity Italian Style," *Nevada Law Journal* 13 (Winter 2013): 585ff.

[81] The offence provided for under the Tuscan code from 1853 was not transposed into the Zanardelli Code, but was subsequently introduced by the Rocco Code of 1930. Provision was made to this effect in Article 526, entitled *Seduzione con promessa di matrimonio commessa da persona coniugata*: *"Chiunque, con promessa di matrimonio, seduce una donna minore di età, inducendola in errore sul proprio stato di persona coniugata, è punito con la reclusione da tre mesi a due anni. Vi è seduzione quando vi è stata congiunzione carnale*." The provision was only repealed by Law no. 66 of 15.02.1996. The case law had concluded in

legal figures which were expunged from Italian law only in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

The unification of substantive criminal law within the Kingdom of Italy

Over the long process that would result in the unification of substantive criminal law throughout the country, attempts were made to achieve that objective by striking a compromise on the basis of the 1859 Code in the light of the Governor's decree of 1861 for the Neapolitan provinces. The thirty-year gestation of the Italian Criminal Code must certainly be understood in the light of the different Ministers of Justice appointed

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relation to Article 2043 a corresponding tort, which was applied until the mid-1990s. On this issue see Barbara Pozzo, "In tema di seduzione e di illecito," *Giurisprudenza italiana* 6 (1992): 1109-1112.

[82] The Zanardelli Code already provided in Article 377 that if the murder was committed "dal conjuge, ovvero da un ascendente, o dal fratello o dalla sorella, sopra la persona del conjuge, della discendente, della sorella o del correo o di entrambi, nell'atto in cui li sorprenda in flagrante adulterio o illegittimo concubito, la pena è ridotta a meno di un sesto, sostituita alla reclusione la detenzione, e all'ergastolo è sostituita la detenzione da uno a cinque anni", the offence was then transposed into Article 587 of the 1930 Criminal Code, which stipulated: "Chiunque cagiona la morte del coniuge, della figlia o della sorella, nell'atto in cui ne scopre la illegittima relazione carnale e nello stato d'ira determinato dall'offesa recata all'onor suo o della famiglia, è punito con la reclusione da tre a sette anni. Alla stessa pena soggiace chi, nelle dette circostanze, cagiona la morte della persona che sia in illegittima relazione carnale col coniuge, con la figlia o con la sorella." This article was repealed by Article 1 of Law no. 442 of 5 August 1981, which removed the reason of honour from the Italian legal system. On the differences between the various Italian regions regarding the significance of crimes of honour, see Luciano Cafagna, *Il Nord nella storia d'Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1962), 701, where the author recalls that "si deve anche rilevare che i meridionali portano con sé, lungo le strade dell'esodo rurale, la barbara tendenza ai ridicoli 'delitti d'onore' che giustamente offendono e indignano l'opinione pubblica…"

[83] Offence provided for under Article 544 of the 1930 Code, which provided: "Per i delitti preveduti dal capo primo e dall'articolo 530, il matrimonio, che l'autore del reato contragga con la persona offesa, estingue il reato, anche riguardo a coloro che sono concorsi nel reato medesimo; e, se vi è stata condanna, ne cessano l'esecuzione e gli effetti penali." This Article was repealed by Law no. 442 of 5 August 1981.

during those years, in addition to the debate surrounding the question of the death penalty.

In this regard it is noted that, at the time the capital was transferred from Turin to Florence in 1865, Pasquale Stanislao Mancini proposed that the death penalty be abolished throughout the country[84] and that the 1859 Code, as amended for the Neapolitan provinces, be extended to the entire Kingdom.[85]

As far as the definition of acts between homosexuals was concerned, the emergence of two opposing views soon became clear within debate in the Chamber of Deputies:[86] the first sought to extend the changes to the 1859 Criminal Code adopted for the Neapolitan provinces to the entire country, whilst the other called for the repeal of the changes even within the areas where they had been introduced.

In order to break the deadlock the committee chaired by Giuseppe Pisanelli drew up a compromise proposal which provided for the extension to Tuscany of the Sardinian-Piedmontese code, as amended for the south of Italy, whilst at the same time abolishing the death penalty throughout the country.[87]

However, the Senate rejected the draft approved by the Chamber of Deputies, and the Central Office[88] tabled a different proposal which was even more deeply rooted in moralising conceptions in relation both to the death penalty and to sexual offences.

As regards Article 425 of the 1859 Code, which it may be recalled was not applied in the south, the proposal made by the Office stipulated that

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[84] On the abolition of the death penalty in Italy, see Italo Mereu, *La morte come pena. Si può fermare per sempre la mano del boia? Saggio sulla violenza legale* (Roma: Donzelli, 2007).

[85] Enrico Pessina, "Il diritto penale italiano da Cesare Beccaria sino alla promulgazione del Codice penale vigente (1764-1890)," in *Enciclopedia del diritto penale italiano,* vol. II, ed. Enrico Pessina (Milano: Società Editrice Libraria, 1906), 613-623, 648-649.

[86] *Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati del Regno d'Italia, Discussioni,* proceedings of 17 November 1864, 6705.

[87] *Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, Discussioni*, proceedings of 15 March 1865, 8725ff.

[88] The designation "Central Office" was used to refer to the Senate body responsible for the examination of draft legislation in accordance with the Senate Rules of 1850, along with those adopted in 1861. See on this issue Fabrizio Rossi, *I regolamenti del Senato Regio (1848-1900). Storia, norme e prassi* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2013).

> anche questo articolo invece di essere interamente soppresso debba essere emendato in modo a limitarne la disposizione al caso che vi sia pubblico scandalo, o la querela nei casi e per parte delle persone indicate nel suenunciato articolo [103] del Codice di procedura penale, esclusa sempre quella della parte stessa e salve pei casi di violenza [carnale] le disposizioni degli articoli 489 e seguenti.[89]

The Senate's view thus appeared to draw on old conceptual frameworks in relation to the offence of sodomy, reviving the model contained in the Albertine Code which—as noted above—provided for the involvement of the public authorities *on their own initiative* not only in cases involving sexual violence but also in situations involving *scandal*.[90]

The subsequent development of the debate was heavily influenced by a development within society which no longer perceived homosexual acts as such as criminal: according to an albeit partial examination of the case law from Milan between 1860 and 1890, it is clear that even the courts in the northern regions issued convictions only in cases in which the homosexual act could be classified as rape or corruption of a minor.[91]

Judicial practice had—*de facto*—decriminalised acts between consenting adults throughout a large part of Italy even before a reform to that effect had been formalised within the future Italian Criminal Code.

The course of the long debate within Parliament accompanying the drafting of the Zanardelli Code featured opposing points of view which were defended rigorously, once again reflecting the different mentalities of nineteenth century jurists.

It must certainly be mentioned in this regard how Italian lawyers were becoming increasingly influenced during the second half of the nineteenth century by the German model,[92]under which § 175 of the Criminal Code, the *Strafgesetzbuch* (StGB) of 1871, explicitly punished homosexual acts committed in any form or circumstance.[93] It will thus be no surprise that,

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[89] *Atti parlamentari, Senato, Documenti*, 8th legislature, 2nd session, no. 196 bis, 49.

[90] See above note 4.

[91] See further Dall'Orto*, Tutta un'altra storia*, 459.

[92] On the influence of Pandectist thinking in Italy, see Antonio Gambaro and Rodolfo Sacco, *Sistemi giuridici comparati* (Torino: UTET, 3rd edn., 2008); Giovanni Tarello, *Storia della cultura giuridica moderna. Assolutismo e codificazione del diritto* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976).

[93] The provision laid down in §175 of the German Criminal Code of 1871 stipulated as follows: "Homosexuelle Handlungen: (1) Ein Mann über achtzehn Jahre, der sexuelle Handlungen an einem Mann unter achtzehn Jahren vornimmt

within the Italian parliamentary debate, several of the proponents of the inclusion of a specific criminal provision distinct from the offence of rape in general invoked the German system as a model to be followed also in Italy.[94]

In addition, others considered that the punishment only of violent acts ran contrary to the morals of the time, whether homosexual or heterosexual, and thus called for the retention of different provisions for rape, such that it could only be committed against a woman, and for homosexual acts as such, criminalising also non-violent acts.[95]

A compromise formula was thus achieved which, whilst laying down a generic formulation of the offence of rape, stipulated specific aggravating circumstances in cases involving acts contrary to nature.[96] However, the draft was not enacted.

A new phase within the parliamentary debate subsequently opened up with the appointment of a new government in 1876 in which Pasquale Stanislao Mancini was appointed Minister of Justice.

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oder von einem Mann unter achtzehn Jahren an sich vornehmen läßt, wird mit Freiheitsstrafe bis zu fünf Jahren oder mit Geldstrafe bestraft. (2) Das Gericht kann von einer Bestrafung nach dieser Vorschrift absehen, wenn 1. der Täter zur Zeit der Tat noch nicht einundzwanzig Jahre alt war oder 2. bei Berücksichtigung des Verhaltens desjenigen, gegen den sich die Tat richtet, das Unrecht der Tat gering ist."

[94] See *Atti parlamentari, Senato, Discussioni*, proceedings of 14 April 1875, 1010-1011, and the assertions made by Maggiorani with explicit reference to the German *Strafgesetzbuch* of 1871: "… Mi appoggiavo anche all'autorità dei migliori Codici moderni, fra i quali il germanico che divide completamente l'atto carnale, compiuto su una donna senza il di lei assenso, dagli atti contro natura."

[95] This was for example the position adopted by Vitelleschi, *Atti parlamentari, Senato, Discussioni*, proceedings of 14 April 1875, 1015: "Io quindi domando agli onorevoli signori Commissario Regio e Relatore, se non ci sarebbe modo di dividere in due articoli i due casi; cioè di lasciare l'articolo 329 per quello che si chiama più propriamente ed ordinariamente lo stupro […]; e se invece nell'articolo 330 con quel linguaggio che sarà creduto conveniente da discreti e prudenti legislatori, non possa trattarsi il secondo caso ossia l'altro reato, il reato contro le leggi di natura nell'articolo susseguente […]. Sarebbe dunque a mio avviso desiderabile che in omaggio del senso morale si facesse una distinzione marcata fra i due delitti, negli articoli 329 e 330."

[96] The aggravating circumstance in the Vigliani draft was formulated as follows*:* "È applicato il massimo della pena stabilita negli articoli precedenti se il reato è stato commesso contro natura, e non può essere applicato il minimo se il reato è stato commesso a danno di persona che non abbia compiuto i quattordici anni, o in danno dell'ospite."

The new Mancini draft allowed for the possibility that the offence of rape could be committed also against a man,[97] whilst however eliminating the specific aggravating circumstances of sexual violence associated with an act against nature.[98]

The Chamber of Deputies discussed the draft legislation tabled by Minister Mancini in February 1877. In December of that year the first book of that draft legislation was finally voted on and approved in which, in stark contrast to the views expressed until that time in the Senate, provision was made for the abolition of the death penalty.

However, also within this context, following the appointment of a new Minister of Justice, Minister Conforti, who succeeded Mancini, the parliamentary process was prolonged yet further.

It was only with the appointment of Giuseppe Zanardelli as Minister of Justice in 1881 that work on the Code could resume.

The approach adopted at this stage in the preparation of the final text was to privilege a clear separation between law and morals. As is stated in the Report on the Criminal Code:

> Nel determinare i fatti da comprendersi nel presente Titolo, il Progetto attuale, in conformità ai precedenti, si ispira a questo concetto fondamentale che, se occorre da un lato reprimere severamente i fatti dai quali può derivare alle famiglie un danno evidente ed apprezzabile o che sono contrarii alla pubblica decenza, d'altra parte occorre altresì che il legislatore non invada il campo della morale. In conseguenza, le sanzioni penali del Progetto non colpiscono tutti indistintamente i fatti che offendono il buon costume e l'ordine delle famiglie, ma quelli soltanto che si estrinsecano coi caratteri della violenza, dell'ingiuria, della frode o dello scandalo, la repressione dei quali è più vivamente reclamata nell'interesse sociale. Quindi non sono incriminate le azioni che non hanno quei

[97] The draft revised by Mancini stipulated as follows in Article 335: "§ 1. È colpevole di stupro violento chiunque con violenza costringe una persona dell'uno o dell'altro sesso a congiunzione carnale. § 2. Il colpevole di stupro è punito col primo grado di reclusione."

[98] The formulation of aggravating circumstances according to the Mancini draft was by contrast transformed as follows: "È applicato il massimo delle pene stabilite degli articoli precedenti, se il reato è stato commesso a danno di persona che non aveva compiuto gli anni quindici, o in danno dell'ospite"; see Martino Speciale, *Progetti comparati del Codice penale del Regno d'Italia* (Roma: Tipografia del Senato di Forzani e compagno, 1878), 453-455.

> caratteri, e le indagine delle quali farebbe trascendere oltre i suoi giusti confini l'opera legislativa.[99]

Any reference to acts between homosexuals and their punishability was completely removed from the Criminal Code.[100]

[99] Chamber of Deputies, *Progetto del Codice penale per il Regno d'Italia e disegno di legge che ne autorizza la pubblicazione*..., vol. I: Relazione ministeriale (Roma: Stamperia Reale, 1887), 213-214 (proceedings of 22 November 1887).

[100] Title VIII dedicated to "delitti contro il buon costume e l'ordine della famiglia" contains within Chapter I entitled "Violenza carnale, alla corruzione di minorenni e all'oltraggio al pudore," Article 331, which provides in general terms that: "Chiunque, con violenza o minaccia, costringe una persona dell'uno o dell'altro sesso a congiunzione carnale è punito con la reclusione da tre a dieci anni. Alla stessa pena soggiace chi si congiunge carnalmente con persona dell'uno o dell'altro sesso, la quale al momento del fatto: 1° non abbia compiuto gli anni dodici; 2° non abbia compiuto gli anni quindici, se il colpevole ne sia l'ascendente, il tutore o l'institutore; 3° essendo arrestata, o condannata, sia affidata al colpevole per ragioni di trasporto o di custodia; 4° non sia in grado di resistere, per malattia di mente o di corpo o per altra causa indipendente dal fatto del colpevole ovvero per effetto di mezzi fraudolenti da esso adoperati."

Chapter Six

"Amori et Dolori Sacrum": Canons, Differences, and Figures of Gender Identity in the Cultural Panorama of Travellers in Capri between the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Century

Eugenio Zito

… First, you will come
To the Sirens, who bewitch all men
Who come near. Anyone who approaches
Unaware and hears their voice will never again
Be welcomed home by wife and children
Dancing with joy at his return.
(Homer, *Odyssey* XII, 40-45)

Still darting alongside the three
Cyclops,
and sparkling,
is the blue she-lizard born at your
birth, o Capri.
Sacred in time, she is a sorceress,
queen
of the blue-green spell.
(Ada Negri, *Songs of the Island*, 1924)

Capri and not-Capri-anymore

Capri is a beauty of stone, sea and light; it is a space of ancient charm and a living place of differences. In the landscape of the Gulf of Naples it is geologically different from the other two islands,[1] Ischia and Procida, and from the Neapolitan land, all forged by Campi Flegrei and Vesuvius' fire. In comparison, the cliffs of the Jump of Tiberius, mount Solaro's calcareous rocks, the rough landscape, the delightful, but not abundant, vegetation and the lack of spring waters highlight its remote tectonic-origin, when it was expelled from the bosom of the earth by the earthquakes that also generated the Apennines. "At the beginning Capri was not just Capri but was one with the mainland."[2] The island boasts the biological exclusivity of the blue lizard,[3] present on the Faraglioni, and other singularities of flora and sea fauna, in a singular bio-ecological niche. Capri is, in the eyes of the whole world, a myth, an effect of a multi-millennial narrative which, by means of a symbolic transfiguration, re-establishes a representation full of meaning and sense, and projects it in a sacred space, that is separated and remote, and in an outdated time, that is intangible and not present. These are key structural points where culture and all the island beauties' features were distilled. However, it is a myth of a remote space and of an outdated time that, while interacting with the historical spaces, re-inserts itself into contemporaneity. Born of the look of the traveller and from the words of those who tell of it,[4] this myth is nourished within the historical spaces themselves and in their continuity in order to be always new. For this reason, Capri's isolation, its physical characteristics, its atmospheres,[5] its ruins,[6] the signs of its Graecism, which are constant over time, gain that variability of meanings that offers to visitors what they are looking for, what they need; a fulfilling and forgetful dwelling for the soul, an hermitage where it is possible to fully

[1] See Norman Douglas, *Summer Islands: Ischia and Ponza* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1931).
[2] Amedeo Maiuri, *Breviario di Capri* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1988), 106.
[3] Ignazio Cerio, a naturalist native of Capri, described it in 1870, see Edwin Cerio, "La lucertola dei faraglioni," *Le Pagine dell'isola* (August 1922), 1-2.
[4] See Stefanie Sonnentag, *Guida letterara di Capri* (Napoli: L'ancora del Mediterraneo, 2005).
[5] See Edwin Cerio, *Aria di Capri* (Napoli: Soncino, 1991).
[6] For the archeological sites of Capri see Salvatore Borà, *Itinerari storici e monumentali di Capri e Anacapri* (Capri: La Conchiglia, 2002).

enjoy the beauty that Capri holds.[7] This is what its anthropological value as a *place*[8] and its cultural power of seduction comprise. They have both manifested themselves for a long time, despite what Capri has represented in the last few decades, in terms of tourism, high society and international *glamour.* Therefore, La Capria wrote: "Here I am in Capri and not-Capri-anymore, this malaise I am feeling is due to this impression that everything is not anymore, everything is lost day after day."[9]

Whenever one wants to make a cultural discourse about the prodigy island, its mythography—even a brief one—cannot be avoided, especially if one wants to relate, even fragmentarily, how and why from the '20s of the nineteenth century to World War I the island attracted, from all over Europe, a lot of travellers such as writers, artists, scientists, intellectuals, politicians and revolutionaries. The latter often chose the island as their own abode, making of it a centre of cosmopolitanism. Many decided to embrace the Mediterranean way of life by joining a sort of pagan naturalism made up of multiple expressions, even sexual ones. In this unique anthropological context some of the permanent features of nineteenth-twentieth century European art and culture and a variegated crowd of "uranians" and "amazons" found their space.[10]

Capri's mythography

The quotations in the epigraph can be assumed as clues for this brief mythography. According to Ada Negri's poetic description[11] (1924) the lizard of Faraglioni, a biological anomaly of the island, is "…a sorceress, queen of the blue-green spell." Ascribed to the island's same physical origins, the lizard has a multiple mythic value: it is a manifestation of an exclusivity, a symbol of an early naturalistic vitalism, a metaphor of Capri's beauty signified by the colour blue. Therefore, an object scientifically observed can be connected to the features that constitute the myth. But at the beginning there was Homer (8th century B.C.). The

[7] See Norman Douglas, *Capri: Materials for a Description of the Island* (Florence: G. Orioli, 1930).
[8] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London-New York: Verso, 1995).
[9] Raffaele La Capria, *Capri e non più Capri* (Milano: Mondadori, 1991), 147.
[10] See Claudio Gargano, *Capri pagana. Uranisti ed amazzoni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Capri: La Conchiglia, 2007).
[11] Italian poetess (1870-1945) inspired by Capri to write *Songs of the Island* (1924), including "The Blue Curse" from which the quoted lines have been taken.

episode of Ulysses' encounter with the Sirens is, literally, the most ancient. In the *Odyssey*, the myth's primitive features reveal the enchanted beautiful beaches of a remote island, inhabited by charming Sirens. The figurative expression of this charm is a very sweet chant that fatally attracts the sailor, even though the bones scattered all over the beach warn him that if he arrives on the island he might risk death and never get back home again. Why is the Sirens' call so attractive? It is well-known that in the process of seduction, the voice exerts a strong appeal. It is a piece of heritage from bio-physics regarding the function of verbal communication within the primary relation with the caregiver.[12] Furthermore, the seductive action of this voice is able to enchain the victims, as it raises their desire but does not satisfy it. This wait and promise of an infinite satisfaction give seduction an air of numinous experience, becoming part of the register of eroticism[13] as expression of pure desire. It is a light and mysterious impulse, which attracts one being towards the other due to original human nature that justifies both heterosexual and homosexual tendencies, as stated in the Platonic myth of the *Symposium*. When Ulysses meets the Sirens he also experiences an even deeper form of desire, which consists of a reversion to the mother's uterus. It is a backwards decline, which leads to a rebirth after one having been immersed into an undifferentiated state. Homer evokes an island whose sea is the object of fabulous stories, a means of contact and knowledge, but also insidious and lethal. Thus the island is a symbol of uncertainty and intelligence, of acting and thinking, and becomes mythic when mingled with the myth of the Sirens. Many of the *Odyssey*'s ancient reviewers[14] identified Capri as the Sirens' island, thus ascribing to it the connotation of Homer's myth of a remote place characterised by an inexhaustible desire. Here, every reader will be able to imagine and each visitor will be able to meet the traces of a legendary Mediterranean cosmos and surprising, dual-natured creatures—cross-breeding of human and animal features—whose beauty and knowledge are extraordinary (*Odyssey* XII, 191, 199). With its Sirens—result of a fantastic metamorphic cross-breeding—Capri signifies an encounter with diversities, a crossing of a

[12] See John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vol.1 (New York: Basic Books, 1969).
[13] See Aldo Carotenuto, *Riti e miti della seduzione* (Milano: Bompiani, 1994), 18-20.
[14] See Johann Gottfried Stallbaum (eds.), *Eustazio*, *Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam* (Lipsiae: 1825), vol. II, 5, and Alessio Aurelio Pelliccia, *Raccolta di varie croniche*, *diari del Regno di Napoli*, tomo V (Napoli: Bernardo Perger, 1782), 83-84.

duality of thought, but also, the embodiment of a mysterious, fascinating, dangerous and ambivalent charm. Sirens of Capri represent the first mythic canon: the double. Eyes on Capri will always try to perceive within it an inner duplicity as ambiguous fusion of opposites.

Virgil (1st century B.C.) referred to Homer's ancient legend (*Aeneid*, V, 864-865), but represented Capri during *Aeneas*' time when the island was a territory inhabited by the legendary *Teleboans* (*Aeneid*, VII, 733 and 735), who mingled with the italic race. The siren's twist of the morphological cross-breeding with the ethnic one includes new meanings in the ancient myth. Reporting on the presence of Augustus and Tiberius in Capri, Tacitus (1st - 2nd century A.D.) talked about the legendary *Teleboans*, the first Greek people to arrive on the island. He framed the event in the context that saw other Greek settlers travelling all over the Neapolitan Gulf, as they gradually founded Pithecusa (Ischia), Cuma and Partenope (Naples). He then represented Capri as an anthropised microcosm, being topographically part of the Gulf of Naples, but separated from the mainland, because the latter was generally owned by Greek people, while the island was inhabited by the *Teleboans* (*Annals* 4, 67). Being ascribed to a Greek cultural specificity—the *Teleboans*' one—besides its own ethnical cross-breeding, Capri is also introduced with an accompanying anthropologically-distinctive trait. The island gains the mythic canon of Graecism and of the openness-closure paradox: openness to the world outside the Gulf, and closure to the world inside the Gulf.

The presence in Capri of the two emperors, Augustus and Tiberius, reported also by Suetonius (1st - 2nd century A.D.), transformed the little and arduous rocky island to the capital of the Roman Empire. Capri is anomalous, separated and remote, but no less visible and important due to that, thanks to its being in competition with Rome and Naples. Suetonius explained that Augustus chose it for its Graecism and how he imagined a city of *Apragopolis*; that is of sweet idleness and some factories of *Palazzo a Mare*, which was the first unit of further constructions Tiberius would have made. The latter sought refuge in Capri, looking for that peace and solitude that only the island's inaccessibility, characterised by high rocks and by a very deep sea, could offer him. Exile and isolation contributed to the creation of Tiberius' myth, the one of his secret obscenities and cruelties carried out in several places of the island and in the 12 villas he built. The biggest was *Villa Jovis*, erected on a high cliff from which his victims fell. In the wake of its Graecism, Capri has within its imagery a particular space of inclusion and exclusion, in which the qualities of essence and role are inverted: a duplicity where the capital becomes separated and remote, and the island more visible and present. It

is the mythic canon of Tiberius' island: separation, power and transgression.

After Tiberius, it was no longer an imperial residence and divided itself from its continental context, even though it was already separated by virtue of being a rock in the sea. Capri progressively drifted into obscurity, a black hole within history, and was kept apart from the great route and cultural itineraries of the Mediterranean Sea for more than ten centuries. Reduced to a hard and poor place on the margin of the capital,[15] Naples, Capri was for a long time, even from a moral point of view, considered "the wicked rock of the Tiberius' monstrosities, worse than bestial."[16]

Capri was still, within the mythic canon of the island, considered absent, behind the times and corrupted by old depravations, until modern European culture discovered it by means of the *Grand Tour*.[17] The latter was conceived as an educational journey for young aristocrats and as proof of the new rationality that progressively drew the attention of ever more travellers towards the island.

In the seventeenth century the Englishman George Sandys (1610) and the Frenchman Jean-Jacques Bouchard (1632) arrived on the island. During the eighteenth century, travellers were mostly attracted there by a form of exoticism. "Tourists" were not only young, but they were often not even aristocrats and the *tour* was considered an experience of the memories studied in books and a pleasure trip, more than an educational one. These travellers approached the island with an attitude of superiority. In fact, they considered it a primitive place, inhabited by islanders with folkloric habits and traditions, and where Tiberius' splendours and obscenities still echoed. As a matter of fact, Capri was still isolated because of its trecherous sea path, being perceived as a rocky theatrical scene; pretty desolate, with uncomfortable reception facilities and with a greedy population. Goethe avoided what he defined as a dangerous rocky island in his *Italian Journey* (1787), reporting instead the sinister memory of when he ran the risk of shipwreck under Tiberius' rock. He appreciated, though, the beauty of Capri from the ship during his journey to Sicily. Capri became then the exotic island- an image of both beauty and danger.

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[15] See Giuseppe Galasso, *Una periferia insulare…Capri insula e dintorni* (Capri: La Conchiglia, 2004).

[16] Daniello Bartoli, *Le Morali* (Roma: Stamperia del Varese, 1684), 483.

[17] The expression *Grand Tour* appeared in 1670 in the English book *The Voyage of Italy* by Richard Lassels (1603-1668).

Capri and the Long Nineteenth Century

The real myth of Capri took shape in modern times and began during the long nineteenth century,[18] a few decades later than its conventional beginning in 1789. It can be stated that during the nine decades that led to World War I its development is culturally parallel to *Romanticism, Positivism* and to *Decadence.*

The Blue Island

In 1826, the writer August Kopisch was in Capri and he succeeded in exploring a beautiful sea grotto that a fearful superstition had, for a number of centuries, kept in isolation. Kopisch earned a reputation for being the discoverer of a place that local fishermen knew very well. It was, actually, a re-discovery. In the map of the seventeenth century the geographer Coronelli called the grotto "Grotta Gradola."[19] For the archaeologist Maiuri (1988, 203) "Romans knew that cavern and thanks to them it is possible to easily access it." Kopisch took note of the event on 17th February, 1826, but published an account of it only in 1838. He was the first educated and coeval traveller to announce, especially in continental Europe, the existence of the fateful sea cavern. He called it *Blue Grotto* and drew attention to Capri, becoming one of the most important proponents of the island's relaunch and of its international fortune. Kopisch's narrative frames the rediscovery by means of the observation of local life and its popular daily routine, expressed with sensibility and conveyed with an intense manner. Places and nature are described with interest and attention, sometimes with magical effects, being influenced by the island's ancient mythical knowledge, which ranged from Sirens to Tiberius' presumed brutalities.[20] From this perspective, it seems to the reader that the ancient legends naturally mingle with the "new" splendour of Capri. Actually, in 1835 the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen had already spread information about the grotto and its name, nourishing its notoriety with the novel *The Improviser*, whose main subject was that of the "Outsider" who fights in order to be

[18] See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).
[19] See Vincenzo Coronelli, *Isolario dell'Atlante Veneto* (Venezia: 1696).
[20] August Kopisch, *The Discovery of The Blue Grotto* (Napoli: Intra Moenia, 2016).

accepted. In this novel the writer did not respect the rule of the travel journal, projected himself into a made-up character and added to it the memory of his travels in southern Italy. Indeed, he described places, and among these the *Blue Grotto*, with fascinating precision and charm, which is typical of those areas. He often opened up a fabulous view where it seemed like underneath natural phenomena, a comforting magic could always be revealed. For example, there is the strange shipwreck that saves the main character from a, perhaps, lethal duel, which leads him to a false demise and to resurrection in a magic cavern, that is the *Blue Grotto*. Thanks to the success of the book, which anticipated his *Fairytales* and *Short Stories*, and thanks to the multiple meanings that it conveyed, Capri became visible again and was introduced to the nineteenth century furnished with a new role. The famous *Blue Grotto* became the object of desire for several romantic travellers, primarily through recalling the very fairy tales and Kopisch's book. This is the canon of the romantic and blue island. From that moment on, the "completed" myth of Capri began, an era of articulated and extended notoriety, all contemporary, which introduced a period of great fame that attracted a huge number of visitors. From this perspective Capri is a nineteenth century myth that, in the dimension of its natural beauty, symbolised by the *Blue Grotto*, absorbed and assimilated all previous representations, and added new representations, symbols and meanings. To that kind of exoticism inherited by the *Grand Tours*' travellers, moved by the strong engine of intellectual curiosity, was added a form of treatment for melancholy or the feeling of the miraculous power of travel. All of this is new compared to an existentialist condition of uncertainty during a period of historic revolution from both the political and social point of view: the age of bourgeois revolutions was coming to an end, the middle-class proceeded towards victory and the social question started to take shape.[21] But this exoticism found, at least at the origins, its correspondence in romantic artists' sentimental inspiration, who visited Capri. They were fascinated by its intact nature, by its panoramas rising steeply from the sea, by the evocative power of its old ruins and by the simplicity with which the few inhabitants conducted their lives. Archaeological research also began. The Bourbons, the most recent ruling dynasty, started, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an archaeological program on the ruins of ancient roman buildings. Many Europeans became more interested in Capri, as a part of a growing interest

[21] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. Europe: 1789-1848* (London: Weindefeld and Nicolson, 1962).

that for five decades had manifested itself in the archaeological area of Vesuvius. Ship transport improved; Capri became more accessible and more hospitable, too. The inhabitants of Capri started to organise lodgings and the first rudimentary hotels. But the representation of Capri around the middle of the nineteenth century turned towards new horizons. It must be contextualised in a very complex phenomenon where art, science and literature are linked to one another. The romantic atmosphere connected with scientific commitment.

The Island and The Sciences

During the age of *Positivism,* Capri became an open-air laboratory for the natural sciences, specifically between 1860 and 1900. It was a new Capri, a meeting place for scientists and researchers such as the botanist Julius Huethe, the geologists Paul Oppenheim and Johann Walther, the zoologists Theodor Eimer and Anthon Dohrn and the climatologist Vincenzo Cuomo. This strong commitment to conducting new research produced an island profile strong in scientific perspective. This exalted some of its characteristics and defined it as a place with a changeable and fickle geography that utterly broke the steady relation with the continental horizon. It is the historical significance of a remote past to determine, by means of scientific hypothesis, the image of Capri in its "newly" recognised central geological importance. It is the reality of an island, but its "island feature" seems to originally characterise itself as an estrangement, a depiction of a destiny deeply and surprisingly detached from the earth. Imagining Capri thus means getting into the representation of an insular/isolated *far away place.* From a scientific perspective the island is, before a real place, a place of memory that draws upon several levels of reality, from science to history: ultimately, a place that lives in a dynamic open space, subjected to transformations, but that assumes distance. This makes it both an exclusive and excluded island. This detachment can become, however, a chance for new encounters. Moreover, thanks to these continuous transformations it is possible to emphasise a subversive ability that, under the eyes of the visitor, symbolically represents an island for which every transformation is possible not only from a naturalistic point of view, but also from a symbolic one. Science confirmed Capri's image then, as the right place for a naturalistic vitalism. The island recalled European culture along with the cultured sentimental atmosphere of the romantic spirit; that of a naturalistic paradise, which even maintains a pagan and Mediterranean archaism, the signs of which emerged from archaeological sites. On the island, the beauty and sensuality of its nature

and population, and the historical and aesthetic splendour of its classical antiquity can easily hold a homoerotic[22] value. The latter was reinforced by the stereotype of the European world that believed the Mediterranean universe to be characterised by the most uninhibited eroticism, despite the existence of Christianity, and less influenced by severe division between male and female in the sexual field and from gender identity[23] distinction between man and woman.[24]

Furthermore, in the rest of Europe, starting with the *Enlightenment,* the homoerotic sexuality—"sodomy" referring to men and generic witchcraft referring to women—received specific attention and was reconsidered by the new rationality. Little by little, it became culturally separated from its sinful meaning, but within bourgeois society it maintained its assumed and dreaded subversive potential. It was then morally subjected to sanctions and legally prosecuted. As *Positivism* spread during the second half of the nineteenth century, the matter of homoerotic sexuality drew the attention of medicine. Sexuality thus became the object of the power-knowledge of medicine. While acts of sodomy had received attention earlier, from the second half of the nineteenth century homosexuals became the new focus of medicine. They started to be analysed and studied, in order to identify their psychopathology and to "cure" them. Sodomy-sin (that offends God) was never again discussed- the new focus was homosexuality (that offends society). The new word, *homosexualität,* was used for the first time by Karl-Maria Kertbeny (1869)—Hungarian writer, translator and poet—in a letter to Ulrichs, as a neuter word, which could be applied both to men and women. Psychiatrist Kraff-Ebing (1886) used that word in his essay entitled *Psychopathia Sexualis,* rendering it a commonly used term.

[22] Ferenczi (1914) with this term highlights the value of psychological sensibility compared to the biological and behavioural dimension.

[23] Regarding the concepts of sex and gender, gender identity and sexual orientation see Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: a Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: William Morrow, 1949); Robert J. Stoller, *Sex and Gender, the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968), Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (London: Routledge, 2012), Paolo Valerio and Eugenio Zito, "Genesi dei transessualismi maschili: crocevia delle identità nella letteratura psicoanalitica," in *Dilemmi dell'identità: chi sono? Saggi psicoanalitici sul genere e dintorni*, eds. A. Nunziante Cesàro and P. Valerio (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006), 87-129.

[24] Eugenio Zito and Paolo Valerio, "Le identità sessuali tra discorso clinico e discorso sociale", in *Sesso e genere. Uno sguardo tra storia e nuove prospettive*, eds. R. Vitelli and P. Valerio (Napoli: Liguori, 2012), 153-169.

According to Foucault, introducing sexuality among individuals of the same sex into the medical sphere necessitates the existence of a new category, namely that of homosexuals: "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."[25] While the sodomite hid his behaviour, because he was afraid of being burnt alive, the homosexual hid himself to avoid scandal and attention from the medical world. The latter might have tried to classify him, for example, as the bearer of backwards sexual feelings[26] or categorising his behaviour among abnormal[27] psychologies. Therefore the discourse on homosexuality, produced by science[28] during that time, was interiorised by the very homosexuals who started to consider themselves abnormal and scandalous creatures. However, as a result of the *reverse discourse*,[29] homosexuals started to feel part of a community, using those categories that accused them: it is the start of what was later called *homosexual identity*. Later, the homosexual's new anthropological profile became the focus of positivistic medicine and of psychiatry, and also had consequences in the legal field. Homosexuals, convinced they were affected by an illness, started to pursue the abolishment of the laws that condemned them. Starting from their personal experiences, some of them laid claim to the naturalness of their sexual tendency. From the individual protests of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Karl-Maria Kertbeny against paragraph 143 of the Prussian code—which then became paragraph 175 of the German code—to the foundation of the *Wissenschaftlich-humaniäres Komitee* in Berlin in 1897, by the German sexologist Magnus Hirchfeld, also linked to the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*. The task of the *Institut* was that of mobilising public opinion against paragraph 175 of the German code, which referred to the so-called "sexuality against nature" as a crime and punished it with detention. Furthermore, Ulrichs had already tried a systematic approach to

[25] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1978), 43.
[26] See Westphal's famous article "Contrary Sexual Felling" published in 1870.
[27] This assumed abnormality was considered part of their bodies and souls, natural and understandable by means of medical discourses and criminal anthropology, represented in Italy by Cesare Lombroso's theories (1835-1909).
[28] Many forensic scientists contributed to the origin of the nineteenth century homosexual type and among these the German Ludwig Casper (1856) and the Italian Arrigo Tamassia (1878), who coined the expression "sexual inversion."
[29] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 101.

this issue in order to give a solid foundation to his claims[30]. Linking with the androgyne—Platonic myth of the *Symposium*—from an hermeneutic perspective, Ulrichs (1867) developed the *Dritte Geschlecht* (*third sex*) theory, that is an intermediate biologically-specific sex between male and female. A feminine soul within a male body. He introduced the word *Urningtum* (Uranism) to refer to this condition, and created similar words in order to define subjects with different sexual tendencies, such as *urning* (uranian), *urninds* (lesbian), *uranodionings* (bisexual) and *zwitter* (hermaphrodite). The legal status of homosexuality in the German empire was emblematic of the whole of continental Europe, where the so-called "sexuality against nature" was similarly punished. In Italy the situation was partially different, particularly in Capri. Here, the territory of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies applied legislation which did not punish a sexual relationship among consenting people of the same sex, unless it caused public disorder or violence. At the time of Italy's unification, it was necessary to also unify the criminal jurisdiction (1861). However, in the south, the same legal regime was maintained in order to respect local habits, which for centuries had considered homoeroticism as an almost natural manifestation in everyday life. In the rest of Italy the old legislation of the house of Savoy, which considered homosexuality a crime and punished it with severe sentences, was maintained: "Any act of lust against nature…" (art. 425, penal code of the Kingdom of Sardinia, book II, title VII). The legal regime that was in force, only in southern Italy at first, was later extended to the whole kingdom under Zanardelli's penal code in 1889. In the field of jurisdiction, the Italian government abandoned its control over homosexuality, which became only morally and religiously indictable. Surprisingly, homosexuality in Italy was not a crime but nor did it bring about debates and claims. Everywhere else in Europe it was the opposite. It could be assumed that the gender stereotypes derived from *heteronormativity*[31] might have followed the same path of power- that is, the same path as modernity and industrialisation: it went towards northern areas of the continent leaving—in the areas where European culture originated—a substratum of outdated ideas about love, sexuality and gender definition. Male chauvinism and women's disadvantaged status in southern cultures might have been a manneristic

[30] See Hubert Kennedy, *The Life and the Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson, 1988).
[31] See Michael Warner, "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet," *Social Text* 29 (1991): 3-17.

front to hide the flexibility actually used while identifying people in predetermined patterns. This system might have constituted a way to set the degree of tolerance (in some cases a sacralisation, too) towards "difference." The cult of the androgyne, which translates into the status of the Neapolitan *femminiello*—effeminate man—,[32] the respect for women's circles, the phenomenon of *bizzochismo*,[33] the very man's honour—that allows him to keep his virility only if he has an active role in the relationships with individuals of the same sex—were all clues that showed the greater complexity of gender and sexuality compared to the conventional schematic opposition, believed to be typical of southern Italy, between the headmaster and the submissive woman.

The Extraordinary and Dandy Island

When the homoerotic issue, mainly related to men, emerged in continental Europe, the myth of Capri became significant because the island stood out as a beautiful place that functioned both as a refuge and to assure visibility, in the context of a tacit social tolerance and relative legal safety. Aristocratic or upper-middle class families, which had some "irregular" or "inadequate" cases at home, encouraged them to go abroad; common destinations were the south of the European continent and the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. It is the "warm countries'" cover, with their climates fit for nursing several disturbances or mental diseases. But above all they were symbolic countries, potentially tolerant places where there were particular links between the theme of space and gender issues.[34]

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[32] See Eugenio Zito and Paolo Valerio, *Corpi sull'uscio, identità possibili. Il fenomeno dei femminelli a Napoli* (Napoli: Filema, 2010), and *Genere: femminelli. Esplorazioni antropologiche e psicologiche*, eds. E. Zito and P. Valerio (Napoli: Edizioni Libreria Dante & Descartes, 2013).

[33] This word refers to a phenomenon, in southern Italy between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of women opting out of the typical female lifestyle. It manifested itself in their decision to remain unmarried, using the cloak of religion to comfort themselves, escape society or to find gratification. See Giuseppe Galasso and Adriana Valerio, *Donne e religione a Napoli*, *Secoli XVI-XVIII* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001), 35-36.

[34] Recent studies on travel experiences from a gender perspective, attentive to late nineteenth century male homosexuality, show how Europeans, travelling for tourism in the Mediterranean area and for work in colonial territories, had the opportunity to experience a whole set of inter-men relationships. These included homosocial, homoerotic and homosexual relationships, and were inconceivable in

Capri, along with some localities of Sicily such as Taormina, became the most significant touristic destination where out-and-out communities such as "uranians" and "amazons"[35]—using the old terminology—had established: it was not only an emotional and individual space, but also a place where a new anthropological experience was possible. Within its borders a different way of living manifested itself and made sense in a tolerant society. The latter welcomed differences but did not confine them—a geographical border, which did not exile or isolate people from society. For example, Naples had for a long time been the anthropological city/place of *femminielli*.[36]

Between the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the next, a new sensibility in literature and art and a different spirit that influenced ideas and life styles stood out in Europe: *Decadence*. This new slant was an expression of an excess of civilization, a proud claim of the pragmatism of artifice and of sophistication, typical of declining eras, and, at the same time, of a willingness to turn upside down—at least from an aesthetic point of view—all the rules of middle-class culture and of the declining Victorian conformism. *Decadence* refused a world that drifted toward optimism but that started to deal with social tensions, with the introduction of new political subjects, with infant nationalisms and with the problems derived from ongoing colonialism. In this context, many intellectuals, who felt the need to fulfil moral and civil responsibilities, used their own writings to denounce this unwanted world and its values, and make others think. But the typical figure of the *dandy* emerged too. The latter is a particular kind of eccentric intellectual who is different from others because of his provocative attitudes and actions, and

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their own countries. See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean. Writings, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[35] "Uranian" is a word reclaimed by Ulrich (1867) and it was used, at that time, in order to refer to male homosexuals; "amazon," derived from Greek mythological tradition, is a word used to refer to independent women, who prefer to live with other women, whose attitudes and inclinations are considered improper, cross-dressed or not, with or without sexual implications and thus homosocial, homophilic, homoerotic and homosexual.

[36] See Eugenio Zito, "Disciplinary crossings and methodological contaminations in gender research: A psycho-anthropological survey on Neapolitan femminielli," *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches* 7 (2013): 204-217, and Zito, "Femmin-ielli. C'era una volta a Napoli?," in *La Tarantina e la sua "dolce vita". Racconto autobiografico di un femminiello napoletano*, ed. G. Romano (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2013), 79-107.

because of his way of dressing [up] and living. He openly displayed such "difference," which was his very nature, even though it was perceived as a "diversity."[37] The most important Irish writer, Oscar Wilde, was a *dandy*: a typical exponent of English *Decadence,* who combined art and life as the only way out from vulgarity. Thanks to his elegant eccentricity he conquered London and achieved his literary success, until 1895 when, because of a scandal that outraged Europe, he was condemned to forced labour after having been accused of sodomy. It was the most famous among the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' clamorous trials. It resulted—as stated by Butler[38] on the basis of Foucault and Nietzsche—in defining a homosexual figure that was an example of how political and juridical systems of power "produced" subjects that they would eventually represent. These events identified homosexuality, in that society, as "the love that dare not speak its name". Wilde got out of jail in 1897, arrived in Naples[39] and then with Bosie[40] he went to Capri. In Naples he was also attacked by the local press: with a middle-class mentality, Matilde Serao described him as "the elegant aesthete—I mean elegant his way! I protest in the name of good people…"[41] He had a short- but at the same time rough, sojourn in Capri. There, he entered with Bosie in the dining room

[37] The word "difference," ethimologically, means what is distinct and unlike by nature from something it is compared to. Thus, it is something which has a unique quality. It is distinct from "diversity" as the latter refers to a direct change or to something which is not natural or is not in accordance with ordinary opinion. "Difference" in current philosphical discourse has a theoretical and pragmatic value uneasy with the default universalism of the Western philosphical tradition. In the expressions "differential ontology" and "ethic of difference," the word has social, political and cultural consequences which make it grist to the mill for practitioners of contemporary *gender* and *cultural studies*. It it especially significant in the jurisdictional field because, by attesting to the existance of a plurality—which produces multiple identities, it puts it up to the law. See Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967) (London-New York: Routledge, 2001), Françoise Héritier, *Masculin, Féminin. La pensée de la difference* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1996) e Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[38] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 4.

[39] On Wilde's sojourn in Naples see Oscar Wilde, *Verso il sole: cronaca del soggiorno napoletano*, ed. Renato Miracco (Napoli: Colonnese, 1981).

[40] Pseudonym of Alfred Douglas, a young English aristocrat and Oscar Wilde's lover.

[41] *Il Mattino*, 7th October, 1897.

of the *Grand Hotel Quisisana*, where the orthodox English commensals recognised him, and succeeded in turning them away. Even though he did not write much about Capri, his short stay on the island, and the intolerance he faced, intertwined his personal and love drama with the myth of Capri, thus drawing again the world's attention to the island. He had by then survived in the field of literature, and had gained the social stigma of the sexual pervert. Actually, even by means of his works, Wilde had shown he was aware that his homosexuality was the manifestation of a difference, not of a diversity, as explained by Mark Andrè Raffalovich.[42]

A few years earlier (1895) three more English *dandies* arrived in Capri, William Somerset Maugham, Edward Frederick Benson and John Ellingham Brooks. According to Money (1986) they were attracted by the island's reputation for being liberal towards relationships among men, and by the utopia, later failed, of the possibility to live together on the basis of male friendship and of their shared love of art. The relationship between Maugham and Brooks was strong but conflicting. Brooks was older and was responsible for bringing out Maugham's sexuality, who felt guilty about it. This explains why Maugham felt resentful towards Brooks: he expressed negative judgements about his skills both as a writer and as a man, and transposed his figure in loser characters such as *Hayward* in *Of Human Bondage* (1915). Thus, Maugham felt his homosexuality as an unravelled knot. He considered Capri a fascinating place with strange people who all seem rather immoral to him, although fortunately less boring than moralists; a place where there was a clear assertion of diversity based less on ethics than on aesthetics. Brooks married the American painter Romaine Goddard, who was well integrated in the amazons' community.[43] It was probably the painter's ephebic look that attracted Brooks, together with the possibility of sharing some common

[42] He differentiated homosexuality from the heterosexual scheme. He thought that the superior invert loves his counterpart. The manly man loves another manly man and knows how to control his instincts. The superior homosexual does not have any kind of physical and psychic deformity; he is not effeminate, he is not "féminiphile," see Mark André Raffalovich, *L'uranisme. Inversion sexuelle congénitale, Observations et conseils* (Lyon: Storck, 1895). This theory is not too far away from Walt Whitman's loving comeradeship (1860), that Raffalovich deeply admired, and from Edward Carpenter's "homogenic" love (1896). These are all attempts to free homosexuality from the presumed connection between sexuality and gender.

[43] Ciro Sandomenico, *Romaine Brooks. La cinerina di D'Annunzio* (Napoli: Liguori, 2014).

interests with her, without being forced to persuade her. They were actually an unsuited couple: one did not tolerate to play the part of the "wife's boy" the other one could not stand her husband's "English gentleman guise."[44] Benson's profile is quite different as he came from the Anglican-clerical environment, studied humanities and archaeology. While living with the other two people he always manifested intolerance, which was the main cause for the interruption of his stay. He was a prolific writer of romantic novels and this bothered the less ambitious Brooks. Benson felt a total repulsion towards women. Moreover, his misogyny could be perceived in his works. He was perhaps homosexual but actually never clearly showed it, except to his circle of acquaintances, and for the *camp*[45] humour he used within his novels.

In 1904 the rich and young baron Jaques Fersen, born in 1880, an elegant *dandy*, traveller and writer, arrived in Capri fleeing from Paris because of some legal misadventures due to sexual crimes. He was not, in fact, attracted to male adults but to young boys, and so preferred pederast relationships which at that time in France were considered a crime. He lived in Capri in the *Villa Lysis*, built not too far away from the ruins of *Villa Jovis,* until his death in 1923, except for short travels to other destinations, especially to the east where he adopted the habit of taking drugs.[46] In his novel set in Capri *And the fire was smothered by the sea…* written in 1909, one finds virtually all the features of *Decadence*, woven into a depiction of Capri at that time, with the characters that made it a *Babel* of languages, types and sexual expressions. On the title-page of the novel there is a quote which contains two dedications. The quote belongs to Boecklin,[47] author of the painting *Isle of the dead* (1883): "gloomy and bloomed Capri/Capri oriental pearl..."[48] From this description Capri looks like a copy of a painting that represents an oarsman and a white-clad figure on a small boat while crossing deep waters and directed to a rocky island. There are some essential elements used by the painter in this picture, in order to refer to something else: sea, rocks, cypresses and a boat, real elements through which Boecklin evoked silence, remote stillness and its beauty. The picture suggests a dream as a separation from reality, place of a symbolic death experienced with existential pain, in

[44] Ted Morgan, *Maugham: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).
[45] According to aesthetic sensibility, *camp* means manifesting what characterises homosexuals.
[46] Jacques Fersen, *Oppio. Poesie scelte* (Napoli: Alessandra Carola Editrice, 1990).
[47] Romantic symbolist painter (1827-1901).
[48] Jacques Fersen, *E il fuoco si spense sul mare…* (Capri: La Conchiglia, 2005), 11.

order to live in the charm of an absolutely beautiful island with a sensual and overly-refined iconography. The aesthetic canon overwhelmed the island of Capri: once again it is a place where beauty resolves any adversity and difference. The theme of death, as much an anaesthetic as is beauty, was used by many decadent authors and it was a *topos* that accompanied the homosexual imagery of that time. The novel is "kindly dedicated to the ladies Wolcott-Perry,"[49] a couple of American "amazons", generally known as sisters, even though they were not. They arrived in 1897 and decided to stay there, extending a little house which became *Villa Torricella* in 1902*,* a cultural gathering of the intellectual elite of Capri and where there was a vast array of rituals of the island's homosexual community. They were advocates of a different love and in the eyes of Fersen they embodied the female side of friendship—this is the meaning of his dedication. They were a contemporary innovation compared to *Liside,* the young and pure lily, which in the Platonic dialogue of the same name,[50] embodies the object of the ideal Greek male friendship as a relation among good men, similar in virtue, ambition and in the practice of beauty. Such a concept of friendship exemplifies and ennobles ancient Greece's meaning of *paideia*. This educational practice became an exclusive relationship between the teacher and the student, and had an initiatory value in both love and sexuality. Using actual categories[51] the relationship did not imply gender and sex distinctions but a sexual distinction between a reproduction act, socially significant on the level of the symbolic patriarchal order, and a sexual act, psychically significant within an interpersonal relationship. Men could then indiscriminately love men and women as Greek people looked for beauty in love, without making gender distinctions. Losing control of one's instincts was morally and socially punishable, without discerning between boys and women.[52] With this background the dedication represents a male homosexual

[49] Ibid., 13.

[50] The dialogue is aporetical, but it provides exhaustive indications compared to other of Plato's works, see Thomas A. Szlezàk, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie. Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen* (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1985).

[51] See Victoria Clarke, Sonja J. Ellis, Elizabeth Peel and Damien W. Riggs, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Psychology. An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[52] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1985); Flaminio Boni, *La pederastia nell'antica Grecia* (Roma: Fabio Croce Editore, 2002).

coming out which also recognises and ennobles the female one, considering both homosexual forms as an expression of one interpretative category: friendship. In the eyes of the reader, the very island of Capri is involved, too. During those years, above all during *Fascism*, in the eyes of conformists, Capri reflected the image of a sexually ambiguous and culturally corrupted mermaid, which needed to be brought back to the value of roman virility[53] even though it was still considered a natural place made of beauty and physical health.[54] The second dedication is addressed to Capri itself, and emphasised its mythic landscape "You are the island of the light…you are also the siren…"[55] It underlines its mysterious and ambiguous characteristics, transferred into an image, which wants to catch Mediterranean cultures in their entirety, in the bipolarity of an "androgynous sphinx." It is also a way to recall the subject of Paganism in which the main character, the sculptor *Maleine,* recognises the lost paradise of happiness and beauty, both opposed to pain, sin and to the guilt preached by Christianity. Still Capri, the island of dizziness, appears to the main character as one of the centres of this Paganism, where it is possible to create beauty through suffering. Women are the main cause of this suffering because of their lies and stupidity. Fersen manifests, through the main character, misogyny, or using contemporary terminology, assigns to the contemporary woman an anti-femminist position by bringing her dignity back to the "string, classic and fecund" past centuries when "the woman's role was that of being a mother and she was respected for this reason"[56]. This pushes the sculptor-main character to recover, beyond love, also from an aesthetic perspective, the ephebe—that is a beautiful and effeminate boy—whose modelled nudity aims at recreating the ideal androgyne image;[57] the synthesis of both male and female features. Since

[53] Marcella Leone De Andreis, *Capri 1939* (Roma: IN-EDIT-A, 2002), 198.
[54] In Capri, in fact, in 1928 the fascist regime launched the first summer camp for children in order to strengthen the Italic race through invigorating sea and sun-bathing, see Marcella Leone De Andreis, *Capri 1939* (Roma: IN-EDIT-A, 2002), 140, 198.
[55] Fersen, *E il fuoco*, 15.
[56] Ibid., 165.
[57] During those years Guglielmo Plüschow (see Marina Miraglia, "Guglielmo Plüschow alla ricerca del bello ideale," *Archivio Fotografico Toscano* IV (July 1988), 62-67) and Wilhelm von Gloeden's nude images circulated, see Mario Bolognari, *I ragazzi di von Gloeden. Poetiche omosessuali e rappresentazioni dell'erotismo siciliano tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Reggio Calabria: Città del sole, 2012).

even the art that should exalt reality fails, the novel ends with the main character's suicide, through a crescendo where the author concentrates all the themes of disillusion, Capri included. He cast an insult against Capri: "Oh island, you will disappear. Fire, you will smother by the sea!"[58] *Maleine*-Fersen identifies Capri, which is fire, and this is the last mythical nickname assigned to the island, the last canon as a sort of mirror of hypocrisy of the middle-class society that condemned his life, with his aspiration to reach absolute beauty beyond social conventions and morality. Tones and style pinch this tragic event from its intrinsic plausibility. They make it a mere literary representation, but no less striking and disquieting, considering that, 15 years later, as Capri changed and started to be culturally bridled in the cage of the fascist regime, Fersen killed himself with an aesthetic ritual.

Even the Scottish writer Norman Douglas (1868-1952) took refuge in Italy, this time because of a sexist scandal. In 1896 he ran away from Saint Petersburg "where, having impregnated a lady… [he] took off for Naples".[59] Two years later Douglas got married and then had two sons but his tastes changed to such an extent that he left his family to take up residence with a young farmer. They were still together in 1908 when he wrote one of his most famous books, *Siren Land*.[60] From 1904 he split his time between Capri and other places. Two permanent features of his Italian experience, and of his entire life since then, were love towards boys and the writing of travel books, which are, moreover, two intimately interconnected elements as stated by Harold Acton: "he told me that each of his books had ripened under the warm rays of some temporary attachment..."[61] The gender configuration weaves through multiple links, in the author's work and existence, to the idea of spatiality. When he became aware of his erotic tendencies, Italy was his country of choice and Capri his favourite place. Having realised his homosexuality, preferring to have intercourse with partners much younger than him, and after having decided to actively live out his inclinations, he had to find the right place to express them. A place where the traditional Greek love, the one between *erastès* (lover) and *eròmenon* (the loved one), never completely faded away. Southern Italy was the place where such tradition was, somehow, still alive. But Douglas' passions were partly satisfied and, to a large

[58] Fersen, *E il fuoco*, 171.
[59] Paul Fussel, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 121.
[60] Norman Douglas, *Siren Land* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1911).
[61] Paul Fussell, *Abroad*, 120.

extent, sublimated within his writings, which only alluded to his personal erotic ethic and drew attention to the description and narrative of the spaces. His writing is the result of his educational travels and of his existential experience. Born out of a geographical itinerary, his writing speaks a lot about certain places and their characteristics, about the ideas that were born there and that remained there, symbolised by the ruins of the past. Thus, the space of freedom, according to Douglas, is the traveller's one, who only uses his feet and gets in contact with both regular and unique individuals, met throughout Italy, the Mediterranean coasts and Capri. But it is also the secret and empty space of scholarship where he looks for the truth through memories of a past time, rather different from the present one, that is, the time of modernity and industrialisation. Such truth, in a modern Capri, allows the author to live his Paganism. Capri offered a cosmopolitan community, full of foreign visitors and adorable and weird characters. A much more seductive stratified cultural dimension where he could cultivate his passion for naturalistic studies but that, above all, corresponded to his epicureanism-soaked philosophy of life and to his pagan sentiment of *otium.*As a *homo mediterraneus*, his attitude to loving young boys, in the classical meaning of the term, does not lie as much in an aesthetic dimension, often only literally conceived and evoked, but rather in a moral practice whose aim is happiness. The latter must be interpreted in the epicurean way, as the achievement of free will, through the promotion of individual freedom and the performing of mutual actions and relationship. This way, his *paideia* renews his classical understanding of Socratic love as it introduces the firm belief that the oldest can learn from the youngest. As far as the representation of homosexuality is concerned, all of this highlights innovative characteristics, which signalled the beginning of the end of the predominance of the cultural registers of modernity. Despite being in a reference frame still linked to Greek classical antiquity as source and origin of European culture, homosexuality regains an instinctive vitalism where physicality, in its biological and physical sense, and its lifestyle, alter the structure of universal ethical models. Nietzsche's lesson in *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1885) is put into practice in real life by keeping madness and individualism within the boundaries of mutual respect. Douglas never hid his tendencies, his desires or taste, but always got respect and affection from the people he related to. From the boys to the local people, he received appreciation, respect and kindness. Basically, the understanding and acceptance of himself were the main reasons for his ability to deeply understand others. His attitude was, however, quite different from that of his Scottish compatriot, Compton Mackenzie, who started to frequent Capri from 1913 thanks to the magic

conversations they had.[62] Mackenzie, a prolific writer who moved from one island to another all his life, inspired Lawrence to write the tale *The Man Who Loved Islands* in 1926. He dedicated to Capri two texts, *Vestal Fire* (1927) and *Extraordinary Women* (1928) in which he reproduced the life of the foreign community between 1902 and 1924 by talking about the *Belle Epoque* of Capri and about its decline because of World War I. He specifically described the homosexuality of the island, especially the female one, with a scanty register, typical of anecdotes and gossip, not aiming to indulge in it but to describe the sunset of a certain Capri, that of the first foreign inhabitants, those who found welcome, tolerance towards differences and eccentricity, and the start of a new Capri where new rich people's vulgarity and mass conformism—which aimed at gaining respectability—prevailed. Moreover, anti-conventional and "respectable" is the Mackenzie-Stone couple. Faith Stone was his wife, an actress and pianist. Both were bisexual and opened to free erotic experiences. In *Extraordinary Women* each character can be identified with a real person of that time. But in the novel World War I experience is opposed to the lightness and care-freeness with which the represented women dealt with life. This attitude is believed to be the main cause behind the spread of *sapphism*[63] in that uncontaminated land. Love among women seemed to the inhabitants of the island something similar to love towards men; that they contented themselves with in the absence of "better food." War took men way from their homes, families and women. The latter, in order to fill the emptiness left by their husbands or lovers, used to devote themselves to little and frivolous love affairs. These women seemed to be devoted to *flirts* rather than to danger. However, in this apparent schematisation, the author knew the differences between certain women and other women and identifies in homosexuality a sort of sequence, which with continuity, goes from one gender to another, beyond any biological connotation. That is among the first novels of the twentieth century in which female homosexuality is gleefully described, without false moralism and without rigid gender schemes. The author, in the framework of a brilliant social satire, describes the community of the "amazons", which made of the island its destination where "amazons" could live their love affairs. He tries to depict, having had direct knowledge of most of the narrated events,

[62] Compton MacKenzie, *Extraordinary Women* (New York: Macy-Masius, 1928), 5.
[63] This word is used because the author, in accordance with the taste of the previous century, put coeval female homosexuality in a classic context of ancient *allure* and linking it, according to a stereotype, to the poet Sappho's ancient Greek tradition.

the characteristics of *sapphic* love just as it was experienced in Capri and essentially identifies three of them: its passionate nature, its volubility, the superiority complex that it inspires.

Actually, both Douglas and Mackenzie represented a changing Capri: the presentation of war, war itself, and then *Fascism* took the myth of the island into a completely different direction. Douglas recalled southern places,[64] among these Naples and the islands of its Gulf, presenting them for what they were at that time and what they had been before then. Beyond any written fantasy, he described places in terms of living as local people do, without traces of exoticism, following the rhythm of a natural life without religious chagrins, or metaphysical cages and mass moralism. Douglas in *South wind* (1917) sets the story in *Nepenthe*[65]: a fantastic Mediterranean island described with all the characteristics and details of all the author's beloved islands, from Ponza to Ischia, from Lipari to Capri. He described some glimpses of Capri, the little square, grottos, precipices, and represented its mythic dimension of elusiveness. Along with the name, this is enough to stimulate in the reader the idea that *Nepenthe* is Capri. In *Nepenthe* the sirocco, which drives people who live there to distraction, dominates. Such madness causes a terrible homicide. Such homicide becomes justifiable, admirable and finally insignificant in the eyes of the bishop *Heard*, who lived on the island in order to cure his tiredness. Thanks to reflections and dialogues, which instilled a sense of doubt in the bishop's mind, his conformism progressively crumbled, resulting in him changing his moral judgement and upsetting his values. The bishop thus recovered his individualism and his ethical autonomy by becoming "Mediterraneanised" (metaphorical influence of the sirocco), which became a theoretical and practical factor in reacting to the ongoing crisis. Mackenzie, instead, while observing with a sharp eye that big group of "extraordinary" and frontier-less women—among which la *femme fatale* stood out and adventurous wife, Faith—conducted anthropological research in which he revealed the ways and the reasons of certain life choices, those of dangerous women. The latter are, above all, the expression of the independence of the "female world" and of its re-evaluation in terms of difference and equality, even though this happened in a world and in a particular context made up of people devoted to art and living in privileged social conditions. Thus, while in Capri's homosexual

[64] See Norman Douglas, *Summer Islands*.

[65] *Nepenthe*, from the IV book of the *Odyssey*, refers to a medicine that eased pain and anger.

community the female universe of *dandyism* stood out, similarly to the island of "uranians," that gave visibility to the island of the "amazons," and seemed to project itself *ante litteram* in the postmodern debates on sexual identities (Simon, 1996).[66]

Conclusions

The island of Capri is beauty, anomaly and myth in a circular twist in which its emblematic character and its cultural value actualise themselves as an expression of an absolute charm. It is myth not only as a pre-established place, which is evocative of an abstractly objective beauty, or as a trend followed by collective imagination, but above all as crossed, composed or disordered narratives and representations of its complex reality compared to the meaning of life. In this way Capri is a myth whose constitutive elements are other myths, real factors and events poetically conveyed; transfigured from what has been projected by the observer's eye, as it is a dynamic expression and a production of culture.[67] Thus, beauty, anomaly and myth conform to several levels of existence, the first one to the level of aesthetic qualities, the second one to the level of objective reality and the third to the level of subjective representation. They all connect and interlace with one another. In fact, while representing the first and the second one, the third can be fostered, and the myth, perceived as the element that produces the difference, can become a source of symbolic beauty and objectify itself as a distinctive anomaly.

Ultimately, Capri, in Douglas' and Mackenzie's representations, still embodies a valuable beauty, because in its aesthetic value it includes an anthropological dimension and involves a morality which tolerates "difference" in people's behaviour and nature. This is the implicit and involuntary response to the "useless beauty,"[68] an expression with which Ada Negri wrote off Fersen's aestheticism and possibly, due to her moral reservations, Capri itself, which is beautiful, mysterious and fascinating aesthetically speaking, but morally ambiguous and dangerous, for single individuals and with respect to a pre-established social and political order.

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[66] See William Simon, *Postmodern Sexualities* (New York-London: Routledge, 1996).

[67] See Giovanni Basile, *Il Mito. Uno strumento per la conoscenza del mondo* (Milano: Mimesis, 2013) and Joseph Campbell, with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

[68] It is the title of the obit that Negri wrote for Fersen on the first page of the Milan newspaper *L'Ambrosiano* dated December 15, 1923.

This is what Negri thought about Capri, when she felt the illusion, during her few months stay on the island, where she met Fersen himself, to have discovered a paradise on earth and to have solved the problem of her interiority. Almost born again, and even exalting herself in *Songs of the Island* (1924), she poetically reproduced Capri's tangible magic and the twinkling of its invisible reality, but with a surprising lucidity and a disenchanted look, and using an a-historical perspective, she also revealed its danger. It seemed to her that Fersen's failure was the proof that relying on beauty as the only reason for which to live cannot make any sense of, or lend meaning to, life itself. Neither can it help during the personal and collective pain and suffering process. However, on the cultural, coeval horizon, since the end of the nineteenth century, Capri gained that mythical dimension, which, through the representation of male homosexuality, and acting upon tolerance, comprehension and the acknowledgement of differences, indicated the path that masses and individuals should have followed. Not at random did Savinio, pseudonym of Andrea de Chirico, create a new name for Capri, *Hermafrodita*.[69] A double hybrid nature, that is the island, which, in the coexistence of opposites, escapes the one truth principle and reverses any judgemental perspective, as stated by Foucault who said that "Homosexuality—social theory of the nineteenth century—appears as one of the forms of sexuality, when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul."[70] Moreover, by representing itself as a "Mediterraneanised" homosexuality, Capri was important in the formation of the contemporary male stereotype, paradoxically contributing both to the birth of the male model and to its definition in contrast with the elements of homosexual culture, by means of the so-called "counter-type" process.[71] It is surprising that during Fascism, Capri was called *Vi-ri-lis-si-ma*—the most masculine—[72] and with this slogan was launched a crusade against the *omosex* community of the island.[73]

Therefore, the myth of Capri, thanks to the several travellers' depictions with regard to the themes of gender and sexual orientation, constructed normative ideals and produced new identities of the coeval European society when, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

[69] Alberto Savinio, *Capri* (Milano: Adelphi, 1988).
[70] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 43.
[71] See George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[72] See Filippo T. Marinetti, "Aria di Capri," *La fiera letteraria* 3 (1927): 1.
[73] Marcella Leone De Andreis, *Capri 1939*, 198.

the issue of homosexuality intersected its fundamental themes: laicisation of laws, extension of individual rights and personal freedoms, formal boundary between the public and private sphere, and acknowledgment and defence of "minorities", which were subjected to discrimination and/or persecution. Its myth also contributes to that perspective of the discourse on homosexuality, which is important in revealing the implementation of cultural and social practices concerning the control of sexuality itself. As Foucault highlighted, these practices were manifested through different and concomitant apparatus: family, school, church, court and nursing practice by means of the *microphysics of power*.[74]

Capri is a magic place and becomes the space of differences, "amori et dolori sacrum,"[75] that is, a sacred place reserved for cultivating love and to placate suffering. It constantly changes itself as a thin projection of an interior, intricate and vital space, in which, at every moment, each individual breaks and re-elaborates the meaning of his own existence and of his own acts.

[74] Michel Foucault, *Microfisica del potere: interventi politici*, eds. Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino (Torino: Einaudi, 1977).

[75] It is the epigraph on the entrance of *Villa Lysis*, borrowed from the title of the Symbolist writer Maurice Barrés' book of 1903, reused on the rococo façade of Santa Maria della Passione church, in Milan.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TAORMINA AND THE STRANGE CASE OF BARON VON GLOEDEN

MARIO BOLOGNARI

In 1878 Wilhelm von Gloeden, a young descendant of an aristocratic German family, arrived in Sicily. He chose to stay in Taormina until his death, which caught him in 1931, aged 75. It was an intense and passionate half century, until the Great War broke out, changing many things, including the success that the art photography of Gloeden had hitherto enjoyed. He studied Arts in Germany, and once in Sicily he discovered the great potentialities of photography to which, in turn, he made a contribution that is, to this day, acknowledged and remembered.

His popularity is, nonetheless, intimately connected to the content of what he produced: the images of nude males blatantly revealing a homosexual taste, which are still viewed as provocative material by moral conformists, but at their time they represented a real revolution of the gaze and of the esthetic sense. Many years have gone by since the golden age of the Gloeden's photography, and many studies about the work of the artist have since been carried out and published, whereas the social and cultural observation of his work and its social and political implications remains scanty.

The gap between the studies focusing on Gloeden's art and those focusing on the socio-anthropological dimension of his work is not to be attributed to chance, but to a specific, historical reason related to the life of the community where the experiences of the German baron took place, in Taormina and Sicily. He was welcomed by the local people as the mythical creator of golden fantasies. Being poor and uneducated, they were unable to positively represent themselves. Thus, the charisma of a rich and educated man resulted in an unprecedented representation, portraying them as heirs of Greek-Roman classical culture with Arab-Norman cultural borrowings and genetic inheritance. This was a new

image which replaced the less gratifying stereotype of the analphabet peasant-shepherd-fisherman, living at the edge of Europe.

However, after the initial romance with Gloeden faded, following the First World War, the local community discovered its potential in tourism, learning to master the essential instruments of socio-economic development, from the valorisation of cultural heritage to the supply of tourism services. The representation of the happy world, where homosexuality could be freely expressed, was then no longer necessary. Indeed, it could also represent an obstacle, even more so in relation to the advent of Fascism. Consequently, both the baron's character and his work fell into oblivion. Following the Second World War, a sort of collective shame emerged, transforming the story of von Gloeden's boys into a mere tale of art and nice shapes, while deleting the homosexual content which informed Sicilian culture, society and moral history in the period 1878-1913.

Even outside of the local context, journalists and scholars ended up sharing this strategy of denial, conforming to the narrative officially accepted by the community. It was only in the last decades of the twentieth century that the veil obscuring this phenomenon was lifted, although reticence and mystery remain. It is only in the 2000s that we witness the emergence of enlightening research on the sociological and anthropological nature of the Baron's work and his young models.

The notion of cultural intimacy as defined by Herzfeld[1] has played a pivotal role in the history of Taormina in the period of 1880-1913. This is an essential turning point in the local culture, without which the whole phenomenon is likely to appear trivial. To mutate from a place of fishermen, shepherds and peasants to an international touristic place, the town had to discover itself, developing a strong awareness of its past. Nevertheless, as it reflected upon itself, the town changed. It abandoned its past, adhering to it only instrumentally in order to please the foreign market searching for what this market considered to be traditional, picturesque and folkloric. In a complex way, the transformation meant that reality got closer to the ideal model—the model that foreigners imagined and longed for even before their arrival to Sicily. Foreigners, influenced by the studies of Romanticism and Classicism, sought a touristic product corresponding to this education. Consequently, the members of the local community had to be able to tailor this product. They could rely on objects, sounds, images, and any other tangible and intangible goods, and

[1] Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy. Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, (New York-London: Routledge 1997).

all they had to do was convert them into a Romantic cultural heritage. Concurrently, they started to value monuments which described the Classical Antiquity, the Ancient Theatre, the Naumachie, and the Odeon, thus satisfying the quest for classical culture.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the tourism demand also included a product of a sexual nature, both heterosexual and homosexual. The local community was expected to supply sex, as were other Italian localities. It was hard to ignore this demand, because it was believed that refusing would compromise broader economic benefits. Above all, it would scale back the processes of cultural adjustment, mimesis and the plasticity of tradition that the locals had to enact at the highest level. The people from Taormina had, indeed, soon realised that the international tourism market demanded products (persons included) and services (including the services to people) appearing sufficiently compliant within a transnational context, so that their standards could be evaluated according to global taxonomic criteria; at the same time, products and services had to be recognizable as exotic, picturesque and alternative to the North-European and North-American ones.

Having to play a double identity—traditional and acquired—the local population was forced to constantly challenge both tradition and contemporaneity, for it had to represent itself as the residual memory of a Classic and Romantic past as well as the living example of a different, extravagant and exotic present. The result, still visible nowadays, was a paroxistic relativism. Thus, Taormina's current rhetorics endorse this kind of relativism, according to which anything is conceivable because all is relative. Moral principles, political evaluations and social rules are valid, while, at the same time useless; they have to be contemporaneously respected and transgressed; and they are source of both cohesion and conflict.

Gloeden's photographic work was a masterpiece of communication and marketing strategy. The enchanting landscape, the gravity of the monuments, and the perception of silence conveyed by his photos enabled the tourism product called "Taormina" to be evaluated according to transnational parameters. However, the photos also showcased elements that tickled the curiosity of potential tourists: children's poverty, the challenging look of some boys, their feet, the display of genitalia, the malformation of a hermaphrodite. If the two elements of the photos had remained separated, as it was the case for various artists, the message would have not hit the mark. The first kind of representation would have remained a mere oleographic image, the second would have simply remained a genre of photography or pornography. Instead, the combination

of the two parts resulted in a modern and effective tool to promote the local product of tourism. Gloeden did not create Taormina's tourism, but he advertised it well.

With the passing of time, Sicilians developed a strong sense of pride towards these transnational and exotic elements. They actually built and still build a bridge to foreigners, an opportunity for intercultural dialogue. The discursive registers that enabled locals to communicate with foreigners are made of irony, disapproval, backbiting as well as a celebration of their own unique characteristics. Locals have realised that their vices and virtues are exactly what non-locals expect: to make them explicit and parading them becomes art of welcoming, an instrument of propaganda and a form of self-acknowledgement.

Locals know well this double register of meanings and employ it in their intimate conversations, as a challenge, to express complicity, or for fun. The critical attitude expressed within the social group is rarely manifested in front of foreigners, who are, supposedly, unable to catch such subtle nuances of meaning. For example, when it comes to voice opinions about the moral behaviors of a community member, they argue strongly for their contrasting points of view. Yet, when confronting a foreigner, locals soften their stances to avoid invasions of their cultural intimacy. Although homophobes and male chauvinists (including women with similar ideas) might be very hard upon local or foreign homosexuals, they can appropriate the stereotype of homosexuality as part of their collective identity in front of an interlocutor external to the community. They embrace this identity as members of a town with a special history, through a process of historical and cultural identification elaborated, idealised and incorporated even by homophobic people.

This apparently contradictory attitude conceals a cultural strategy to dismiss the suspicion of homosexuality. The locals' overt awareness that they might be attributed a homosexual identity—as members of a community identified along these lines—is already a proof of not being homosexual. Showing tolerance for homosexuals removes the suspicion, circumscribes the identity, and clarifies the positioning. Instead, when the game is played at home, these external representations mean exactly the contrary, unless the context is playful.

Another element that has remained over time in the local identity is narration. The historical reconstruction of the biographical and artistic experiences of von Gloeden are always affected by narrative modalities that do not allow an exact distinction between what has actually happened and what is said to have happened. From the first attempt of Roger Peyrefitte (1949) to the several stories that can be found on the internet,

the life, the thinking and the work of the German photographer are a collection of suppositions, if not inventions, that make them adjustable to any kind of interpretation. This is what allowed the homosexual profile of the local actors involved in the matter to disappear for years, as if it were a secondary element, or even something non-existent. As I have recently demonstrated,[2] when we examine a mass of artistic, historical and literary works,[3]we come across a big quantity of contradictory information. Now, albeit this corpus of work is unreliable in historical terms, from the anthropological point of view it suggests a continuous narrative, which is seemingly about Gloeden, but is instead about the community recognising, mirroring, characterising and delimiting itself, breaking down, and hence defining its relation with the *Other*'s presence. Furthermore, these narratives have often been realised by external observers, who have, subsequently, interpreted the relation between the community and the *Foreigner*. In all this, Gloeden becomes a sort of archetype of the *Other*, the *Foreigne*r, the *Migrant* or what in Taormina is simply called the "forestiero," while the local community becomes the prototype of the new community in contemporary society—changing, mixed-race, contaminated, open and non-closed.

In these narratives all the parts that were deemed ignominious—and thus to be silenced—were omitted, occurring since the beginning. The local community had an ambivalent response to the presence of homosexual

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[2] Mario Bolognari, *I ragazzi di von Gloeden. Poetiche omosessuali e rappresentazione dell'erotismo siciliano tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Reggio Calabria: Città del Sole 2012).

[3] See Pietro Nicolosi, *I baroni di Taormina* (Palermo: Flaccovio 1959); Charles Leslie, *Wilhelm von Gloeden Photographer. A Brief Introduction to His Life and Work* (New York: Soho Photographic Publishers, 1977); Piero Becchetti, "Taormina dei fotografi," in *J. Wolfgang Goethe. Bicentenario del viaggio in Sicilia (1787-1987)* (Roma: De Luca, 1987), 5-10; Ulrich Pohlmann, *Wilhelm von Gloeden. Sehnsucht nach Arkadien* (Berlin: Nishen, 1987); Gaetano Saglimbeni, *I peccati e gli amori di Taormina* (Messina: P & M 1990); Toto Roccuzzo, *Taormina, l'isola nel cielo. Come Taormina divenne "Taormina"* (Catania: Maimone, 1995); Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean. Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993); Dino Papale, *Taormina segreta. La Belle Epoque, 1876-1914* (Messina: P&M, 1995); *Wilhelm von Gloeden. Fotografie ritrovate dell'Istituto Statale d'arte di Firenze, 1899-1902*, ed. Annarita Caputo (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2000); Luciano Mirone, *L'antiquario di Greta Garbo. Taormina, l'ultima "dolce vita" siciliana* (Acireale-Roma: Bonanno, 2008); Diego Mormorio, *La lunga vacanza del barone Gloeden* (Roma: Peliti associati, 2002).

foreigners. On the one hand, adolescent homosexuality was traditionally tolerated as a prevention strategy as well as a form of anticipatory knowledge about the "unknown female universe,"[4] as it occurred in many areas of the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the new rules of power and commerce introduced by foreigners caused concern, because they channeled the sexual energy of a generation of young men and teenagers into explicit modalities, which generated envy, misunderstanding and tension.

Von Gloeden himself pointed to a way out hinting to Classical antiquity and the primacy of art. Hence, the narratives did not have to appear as reactions, but rather enable a discreet and cautious management of the situation, which would allow locals to avoid a blatant conflict, maintaining the status quo. Indeed, once they grew up, most of the young men that had established ties with von Gloeden and the other foreign homosexuals nonchalantly distanced themselves from him. They got married, had children and led a life abiding by the norms of the community, whose rules, behavior and values they continued to retain. Gossip, which of course did exist, and tolerance, which eventually triumphed, were not opposing phenomena, but instead faces of the same medallion. In fact, those who maliciously gossiped incorporated the phenomenon of homosexuality in the areas of community life, and unconsciously elaborated a strategy to assimilate the transgression within the community norms with the expression "cose da ragazzi" (kid's stuff).

In the Sicilian male chauvinist culture of the time the homosexual experience as an adolescent was not conceived of as an alternative to the heterosexual one, but, on the contrary, as preparatory, complementary and—although it might seem a paradox—an expression of virility. Instead, in the aristocratic European culture the homosexual rhetoric and practice were, already an explicit expression of seduction, an exercise of the power and the charm of those who were stronger and older, with all the commercial implications ensuing from that (money, favors exchange, life in common, etc). In sum, we have two worlds that only accidentally met, and had to elaborate a new representation of themselves in order to justify their conduct; not because a moral and absolute need existed, but because it was necessary to maintain the balance in each of the two worlds.

Sicilian families gradually created a representation of themselves and their age, which has generated a mythological narration. They could not

[4] Francesco Faeta, "Wilhelm von Gloeden: per una lettura antropologica delle immagini," *Fotologia* 9, May 1988: 88-104.

bluntly state that sexual tourism in Sicily originated with von Gloeden, for it was, besides, generated by the hunger of local low classes. They thus engaged in the cultural construction of a self-absolving representation, made of choices of freedom, art and happiness. Money made the violence of history acceptable, shifting the frontiers of traditional morality through refined cultural operations. On the other hand, von Gloeden and the foreigners of the time never stated that in Sicily, or in other similar Italian areas, it was possible to find easily and at lower prices what, in Northern Europe, would be rare and expensive. They rather erected a protective "wall" made of untainted historical-artistic aims, being aware that Europeans considered artists to be beyond moral judgment, and that everything was allowed to them.

The stylistic hallmark of von Gloeden's art photography supports this interpretation. He unclothed, dressed up and molded his models. He deprived them of their social and historical identity, and imposed on them tunics and little flower crowns evoking Arcadian scenes. The nakedness was, therefore, de-historicised and naturalised through Art.

These manipulations suggest a colonial interpretation of the foreigners' presence in Sicily at the end of the nineteenth century, where educated and undoubtedly charming rich men were exploiting a poor, naïve and marginal local population. From a more thorough study of the relations existing between the two cultures we can, instead, infer that the relation of domination was much more complex, manifesting on parallel levels: economic, affective, emotional, cultural, social and sexual.[5] In this sense, the analysis of a new emergent social character during those years—the waiter—is very useful. The waiter was a totally unknown role in old Sicilian society. It merged together the functions of the "massaro" and those of the governess of the ancient noble families living in the city or the feuds. The case of the so-called Moro—domestic servant at von Gloeden's house—is famous, but a whole multitude of men serving foreigners emerged. Foreigners on whom they depended, but on whom they exerted indubitable power.

In Sicily, the woman managed the household, with the interior of the house being limited to the circulation of women. Men would only be outdoors. A male figure charged with the management of the house was illogical, defying the then dominant social norms. The English character of the butler was unknown. Within this context, von Gloeden introduced a

[5] Bolognari, *I ragazzi di von Gloeden*; Berardino Palumbo, "Orientalismo e turismo culturale in Sicilia," *Illuminazioni* 9 (July-September 2009): 14-44.

revolution. This innovation did not elude Peyrefitte, who imagined von Gloeden remembering this phenomenon:

> In Taormina I also started another initiative, which was equally fruitful: I introduced the happy category of the waiter… Initially, women would take care of my household, but later, with a bit more coherence, I replaced them with their sons.[6]

This new figure, appeared thanks to the residential tourism of rich foreigners, has undergone an interesting evolution throughout the twentieth century. It was enriched by other roles, such as the driver or gardener; roles previously performed by others. The professionalism achieved by these men was particularly high, having added some traits of personality—sensibility, loyalty and discretion—to the techniques of the profession, such as organisational ability, pragmatism and availability. But they had to be, above all, trustworthy. They achieved a position based upon the total trust of their employer, who was aware he would have to rely on this figure to introduce himself in the local context. A balance of powers and affections would develop between the two men—the result of a constant negotiation of roles and identities.

The foreigner delegated the waiter to deal with locals and confirm the economical abilities of his employer, legitimising his presence in Sicily; the waiter had to constantly keep the relationship balanced, avoiding the mistake of mixing the role of employee with the one of lover.

As tourism developed, the job of the waiter became more common. The worker who would get in contact with the foreigner was always male, whether he served at the table, cooked or cleaned hotel rooms. A male-female role emerged as those services consolidated over time. Thanks to tourism, the role of the waiter became more rationally defined and better organised, other besides being better paid. Nevertheless, the syndrome of the waiter has become part of daily life, a way of being also partaken by the citizens who never before practiced this profession. For instance, there is a strong tendency to maintain the house and the garden. Obsessive care about details, a rustic fantasy, and a creative combination of different styles are some of the characteristics which make Taormina's houses a special world. Many houses are decorated partly trying to respect the somewhat folkloric Sicilian taste (ceramics, *pupi* [marionettes telling the stories of the Carolingian age], mural decorations, forged iron, etc.), partly

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[6] Roger Peyrefitte, *Special Frienships*, trans. Felix Giovannelli (New York: Vanguard Pree, 1958), 125; first French edition: *Les amitiés particulières* (1944).

with an Anglo-Saxon taste, the result of the imitation of rich foreigners residing in Sicily. Gardens represent a very important element of the externalisation of this tendency, along the lines of the good examples of English gardens out of England, such as *Villa Falconara* of Nelson heirs, *Casa Cuseni* of Robert Kitson, and the now public garden of Florence Trevelyan. This is what led Ezra Pound to state, "Taormina, a British borough in a splendid position."[7] All this is finalised to make the house welcoming, hospitable, and open to foreigners, with the addition of a range of hospitality rituals usually consisting in big meals.

An aspect that has been silenced for more than a century is the strong reaction that some factions of Sicilian society at the time had towards von Gloeden and his circle of friends. In order to tell the whole story in sweetened terms and carelessly, dissent had to be silenced, for it would have made clear that it had not been a neat artistic event and it had instead included a conflict. Some Protestants residing in Sicily, along with the highest representatives of the Catholic Church, the local section of the nation's Socialist Party, and some regional press associations spoke out harshly against the sexual abuse towards adolescents, the exploitation of prostitution and a general system of moral corruption. Of course, these voices used homophobic sentiments of that time period to their advantage, so that their arguments today appear reactionary and outdated. Nonetheless, they were ahead of their time, insofar as they condemned the pedophilic nature of some relationships, which rested on the extreme poverty of local families. Today it is interesting to observe that not only did these voices go unheard, but they were also silenced by a pro von Gloeden campaign, which, rather than defending von Gloeden and his art or the guys involved, defended the honor of the community. Reconstructing the events through unedited documents, I identified the years 1902-1910 as the main period of this conflict. It was no accident that those were the years that determined the touristic development model of the town.

The critical wing came out essentially defeated from a confrontation not between distinct ideologies and moral registers, but between different ways of conceiving economic development. Patiently, the modernising wing ended up winning. Not because they were right, but because at that time it was more convenient to silent the critical voices, and not hinder the flourishing of tourism. Time completed the process, for the more

[7] Ezra Pound, *Lettere dalla Sicilia e due frammenti ritrovati* (Valverde: Il Girasole 1997).

scandalous aspects of the phenomenon sank into oblivion, while the community found its balance again and overcame internal divisions, above all, following the First World War However, a new adversary of von Gloeden and his art emerged: fascism. The position of the fascist regime towards homosexuality is renowned. It seems, therefore, strange that even during those years—up to von Gloeden's death in 1931—he was allowed to practice his profession and sell his photos without consequences. Only after his death, Police intervened on two occasions in support of public decency, in 1933 and 1939. In 1941 the Tribunal of Messina issued a definitive ruling that acquitted the Moro, Von Gloeden's artistic heir, who also held the collection of the original photographic plates left by the photographer. To some extent, we could state that the myth of von Gloeden impacted on the decision of the Tribunal judges.

From the moment he arrived in Italy, von Gloeden viewed the local population of Eastern and Northern-African culture as illiterate, lacking moral rigor, and having an animalistic sexuality. Folk religious sensitivity was considered to be a pagan reminiscence imbued with magic-religious rituals. In addition, the South was even more relegated to the bottom of the evolutionary scale, the archaic or primitive survival of a culture represented as the *Other*, unmanageable and savage. His photos of nude males, which were very popular at that time, epitomize quite well such a stereotype. It is not by chance that photography became the main instrument to promote Italy and Sicily in the Euro-American tourism market. Of course, it included landscapes, urban milieus, genre scenes, but also naked or semi-naked young men. Replacing painting and literature, photography became very rapidly involved in the process of conveying a message for the commercialization of the tourism product, becoming a tourism commodity itself. What had been achieved with great effort by the literature and paintings of the great travelers during the previous century, could now be achieved by photography in a more efficient way, without extreme ideological interpretations, yet becoming ideology itself.

As Pennacini observed "colonialism reaches its apogee in the same years when photography gains the upper hand over other techniques to portray reality,"[8] and maybe this is another reason why it will be heavily used in the "European representations of the Other, which it was progressively

[8] Cecilia Pennaccini, *La ricerca di campo in antropologia. Oggetti e metodi* (Roma: Carocci, 2010), 201.

conquering." The strategy of political and cognitive control now went through visual representation, as argued by Edwards.[9]

Von Gloeden chose Sicily because a German painter that he met in Berlin told him by chance about it. It was Otto Geleng, a few years older than von Gloeden. A friendship founded on the common desire to discover and highlight a far-away land developed between the two; what they shared was painting, viewed as the artistic instrument to read, describe and interpret local contexts. When von Gloeden embraced photography, their paths took different directions because of moral divergences as well as a distinct notion of development. The Taormina's citizens that had invested in tourism and commerce decided to take sides with photography (Gloeden) rather than painting (Geleng). Their choice was not dictated by moral principles, political choices or friendship, but by an estimate of the efficacy of the two instruments to produce something positive in economic terms. The success of the youngest between the two was the consequence of the bigger power of photography in promoting the city.

In Von Gloeden's photos the ideological choice, which dictates an arcadic and intellectualistic perception of reality, is prevailing. He portrayed a reality that was not appreciated the way it was and had, therefore, to be artistically reinterpreted. From this point of view, the Gloedenian art tells us about a big colonial operation, whereby a dominant cultural model is imposed upon a society and a territory which are poor, peasant and marginal. The German baron, more or less consciously, played the role of mediator, politically oriented towards the emergent and hegemonic classes. His images were charged with strong symbolic meanings, and were thus transposed into spaces of conquest, open areas, hybrid territories. He made a world previously obscure, hostile and primitive accessible to the European world. He did not record facts, things and people, but was rather an interpreter, an *ethno-photo-graph,* whose subjectivity prevailed over the object of his exploration. That made him very powerful and accountable. As argued by Faeta "the manipulators of images, those men who mediate between men, and between human and meta-historical or meta-physical instances […] hold […] a big power."[10]

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[9] Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography. 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[10] Francesco Faeta, "Introduzione" to the Conference *Feste, immagini, poteri. Poetiche e politiche della rappresentazione*, Taormina 27-30 September 2001, manuscript.

Many of the boys who modeled for von Gloeden, as he himself stated, were fishermen, shepherds or peasants. Children of families whose social collocation was subaltern, and who had limited economical capacity and no political power. Yet, these families had thus far lived in a local context that was relatively homogenous and informed by solidarity, attenuating the perception of violence and the dramatic nature of their condition.

The arrival of foreigners between 1880 and the beginning of the First World War tore the closed structure apart, starting a more complex phase. Within a few years, the community, particularly the youth, was forced to face a new dimension, which confined them to an even more subaltern role than the one they previously has vis-à-vis the local dominant classes, and now showed similar characteristics to the situation in colonial areas. Taormina turned into a hyper-place, a context where different dimensions of daily existence co-exist.

There occurred a change in the friendly and affective relations, where foreigners sneaked in adopting a strategy unknown to the local population. Foreigners were richer, more educated, better informed, and, consequently, more charismatic, more charming. They even looked more beautiful, where beauty was determined by style of dress, coiffures and bodily care which even the more well-off Sicilian classes ignored.

To the young people, shifting to a wider complexity meant to enter into a new scheme of feelings and connections, which in the past would only consist of the family, kin or friendship dimensions and would be known, shared and managed through traditional strategies.

The boys carried the signs of their social belonging on their face and their body, which made them exotic, and for this reason, attractive. Exoticism was the magnifying glass in the hands of foreigners that they used to observe traits deemed to be savage, natural and primitive. Hence, the attraction was determined by a stereotyped image, which depicted those boys as representatives of an archaic world. Still, because it stemmed from a stereotype, their charm could not spring from them the way they were. Their image had to be reconsidered within the aesthetic canons typical of the European culture at the time. The desire to spiritually and physically own the southern populations and the scorn towards their social and civilian condition were two faces of the same medal.

The transition from scorn to love had to be managed, and the narrative and linguistic registers had to be modified. Von Gloeden accomplished this operation of *maquillage*. Little ribbons on the heads, white tunics, flowery ornaments on their hair and theatrical poses all aimed to uproot that youth from its social context and situate them in a mythical time and

space. This determined an ambiguity of identity that announced the ambiguity of the eroticism that the photos were meant to express.

The photos of von Gloeden's boys are the tragic representation of a culture that, in order to be sold to tourists, masked itself with the costumes of a mythical Greek-Roman past, obscure to those guys, but appreciated by foreigners. Notwithstanding that the disguise turned the young men into commodities, their commodification enabled them to interact with foreigners, engage in exchange, and insert themselves in a transnational context. This tension between local and transnational levels was felt by the whole population, as suggested by several modernisation initiatives (introduction of electric energy, the construction of a cable car, the building of big hotels, etc.), which most citizens coveted. Taormina undertook a sweeping change, and unequivocally sanctioned the cultural victory of modernisation over conservation.

To the Northern-Europeans homosexuals, Sicily was a more welcoming land, foreign to the rigid Victorian education. In addition, rigidity was the moral and normative answer to the decline of the birthrate—the latter a consequence of the industrialisation and urbanisation processes, as argued by Marvin Harris,[11] who insisted on the nexus between the imperative to procreate and homophobia.

The less industrialised and urbanised Mediterranean countries maintained high birthrate levels. At the turn of the twentieth century, the increasing numbers of the population was counterbalanced by emigration and persistently high child mortality. The pro-creationist imperative did not have any bearing on them, only because people kept procreating copiously without the need of moral encouragement. Furthermore, since the woman remained pigeonholed into behavioural principles whereby she belonged to a world separated from the men's'—and the emphasis on pre-wedding virginity, fidelity and the role of the mother which ensued from it—relegated masculine sexuality within the married couple, or within the social and working universe of the young men, from promiscuity within men to one with beasts. Masturbation had, moreover, a positive function, because it prevented and discouraged the relations between boys and girls.

This deep historical-social difference—rather than the allegedly different morality (and even less, religion)—underpinned the Mediterranean's (partial) tolerance for generational and temporary homosexuality, as long as it did not become exclusive and permanent.

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[11] Marvin Harris, *America now. Anthropology of Changing Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

On the one hand, the differences between Northern-European men and Southern men stirred a reciprocal passion, on the other it generated a series of misunderstandings and imbalances. An essential diversity between locals and foreigners actually persisted, while an aesthetic and emotional assonance, which we could call *common sense of friendship,* developed. This new form of relations was foreign both to the local culture and the foreign culture. The latter could not actually establish friendly relations with similar characteristics in their own countries, to the extent that rather than being practices they were, above all, ideals, upheld in literature and art.[12] Hence, the adjustment concerned both parties, even if the gap in terms of social conditions and intellectual instruments made the relationship despotic in one direction only. Both had to adapt, but would also fall in love, which consisted of the same thing; the two parts were attracted to one another and cultural diversity was at the core of such attraction; flexibility was necessary to maintain such attraction over time.

Distinct demands and expectations clashed in the friendship relations that were developing. The local youth discovered to have some virtue and, maybe for the first time, they felt admired and desired. It was a gratification that made them more self-confident and stronger. Some contracted the syndrome of dependence on this form of gratification, which drove them, for a period of time, to replicate what they interpreted as a transgression. Overcome the initial worries, the practice become easier, maybe followed by the usual goal "not to make it anymore." The complicit secrecy that foreigners assured as well as the convenience of silence for the local community made this practice compatible with a life viewed as socially "normal" and heterosexual, with a wife and children, or with a fiancé.

In many cases foreigners tended to create a privileged relationship with one partner. This had corollaries of jealousy, obsessive attachment, and expectation to have an exclusive relation, which all suggested a very strong dependence in terms of affection and passion. Initially, power was only in the hands of the foreigners, the rich, the old and the dominant, who, amongst other things, had the right to choose. Instead, the relationship would later evolve into the opposite direction, with affective supremacy shifting onto the young lover. What remained of the power of

[12] For instance, the novel of Robert S. Hichens, *The Call of the Blood* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1906), on which two movies, mostly filmed in Taormina, were based, tells about the relation of love and friendship between an English gentleman and one of the local young men. The spark that makes attraction explode is—as suggested by the title—the call of the blood.

the foreigners was a structural element, which is the value attributed to the partner, a value of exchange (with money or something equivalent) dependent on the function (the performance).

An intercultural circle of friends was thus set up, where the single affiliates would become members or quit without a binding commitment. Everybody performed one of the sentimental, emotional, intellectual, ethnic or sexual tasks expected; sometimes one at the time, sometimes all together. In order to access such circle or to keep being part of it, the local youth had to handle a web of relationships, whose rules were all to be defined. But foreigners went on by attempts too, and were not always able to totally be in control of the web. In any case, the local young men were the ones who had to bear the biggest burden, because the web was, after all, regulated by the laws of the market: the more they aroused fascination, the more their body and their soul would be bought and consumed. Paradoxically, the more beautiful and sensual they were, the more they would become commodities, and, as such, subaltern.

In the game of manipulating young people, according to Palumbo, we can read a very interesting dynamic, for

> even though they are sometimes reluctant, the young lower class men of Taormina comply with the aesthetic imaginary of von Gloeden, thus ending up adhering to—through incorporation and incarnation—the stereotypical models, where the discursive regimes of the modern European classical period wanted them to be placed.[13]

But this clear subaltern condition of the young Sicilians vis-a-vis the manipulative photographer did not exclude

> the game of reciprocal representations, classifications, stereotypizations, manipulations and the opening of spaces of action that we seem to catch—beyond the images—between photographer and models, as well as the implicit power connotations that seem to lead it.[14]

Nonetheless, Palumbo hypothesises that next to, or as a response to, the power afforded to the body and to physical appearances there has been an attempt by the models to subvert the power relationship, at least at the imaginative level:

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[13] Palumbo, "Orientalismo e turismo culturale in Sicilia," 36.
[14] Ibid., 38.

> To play an active and male role within the homoerotic relation, assigning to the other the female role, which the "orientalist" and "classical" model instead loves to assign to the weakest element of the relation […] The boys seem to carve out a last space of resistance, within which they maintain the control of the meaning of those interactions as well as the control of the body interaction […] It is them … the active protagonists of the relationship, the actors of the last scene in the theatre of the (homoerotic) classical age. It is them the winners at the end of the story, able to go back to the sphere of "normal" sexuality at the end of adolescence […] Their body and their sexuality, apparently malleable instruments of the neoclassic molding, seem —or anyways they are (stereotypically) imagined—able to resist, subverting the relationship of dominance where they had been trapped at the level of the erotic relationship.[15]

The network of relationships between comrades of different cultural groups engendered some consequences for the Sicilian community. It undermined the strength of ancient plots between men and women. Still, at the same time, it opened up to new frontiers never previously explored. In some cases the homosexual foreign adults would bring their young partners to their own country or in their travels around the Mediterranean. In these circumstances, the contractual power of the young men diminished, even though this gesture indicated that the boys had acquired a certain clout amongst their protectors. Nevertheless, the main stage where such a web of relationships developed was the same Taormina, which had become an elected place and a "real paradise."[16] From this point of view, Taormina globalised, and included a multiple and contradictory universe within a restricted space.

Regarding the social issues that arose from the presence of homosexual foreigners, a local observer commented:

> We had the tourism boom after the 40's war, which, in my opinion, acted as a turning point without questioning the merit of the Misters and Ladies and the Europeans with a title, who conferred so much prestige and fame to Taormina, making it known all around the world.
> We do not have to forget that they did greatly benefit half of Taormina, but they concurrently monopolized Taormina and its inhabitants even though manybut not so many—became rich thanks to the famous network.

[15] Ibid., 39-40.
[16] Peyrefitte, *Special Friendships*.

> They demanded to be be called lords, but they fed half of Taormina between gardeners, cooks, waiters and porters, even though the other half kept cutting hunger with the knife.[17]

To the mind of a simple worker who had always experienced events from the bottom of society, the plot of passions was also the source of the new richness. Rapisardi is, moreover, one of the few who voiced surprise to the female nude. Indeed, the latter has been quite neglected and never socially analysed, for the right reason that it would disavow most of the justifications attributed to the male nude. The explanation provided by Rapisardi is the only one that works: money changed morals.

Siding with the foreigners, Charles Leslie thus describes the ties that formed in Taormina between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries:

> Many-a-young-man who consorted intimately with a foreign gentleman retained a special relationship with that man until his dying day. […] With very few notable exceptions the most common scenario was of a young Sicilian developinlg an intimate attachment to a foreign "gentleman," eventually marrying and raising a family (always with significant assistance from the older friend) but never abandoning a special relationship with that friend. If it finally ended in sexual and monetary terms it rarely broke ties that bound them in what can only be called a familial sense. And yet, the relationship always retained something "special," clearly "different," and surprisingly widely known. It was just not talked about by the Sicilians. Indeed that rule of silence on the subject still obtains in Sicily at the end of the twentieth century![18]

But what about them, the boys from Taormina; who were they, what were they doing and what happened to them? The only one who provided some answers is Pietro Nicolosi.[19] According to Mirone, F.R. was a former model of Gloeden too, whose name did not appear amongst those cited by Nicolosi because he was particularly jealous of that period of his life. "When he happened to find a photo with his portrait, Francesco Raja would get it, tear it apart and throw it in the bin… He detested those

[17] Salvatore Rapisardi, *Taormina. Aneddoti, personaggi tipici, curiosità* (Catania: Greco, 1993).
[18] Charles Leslie, *Wilhelm von Gloeden, 1856-1931. A Memory of Taormina*, 1985, available online at https://www.leslielohman.org/permanent-collection/wilhelm-von-gloeden.html.
[19] Nicolosi, *I baroni di Taormina*.

photos where he was the protagonist, but deeply loved the others."[20] The reactions of Raja, collector and seller, showed the contradictions of that world. The experience he lived as a boy must have marked his life, if what was stated by an informant of mine who knew him very well is true. Although married and respectable, as an old man "he was a pedophile, and when he returned from the trips that he took as part of his work as a collector, he would show me the photos that he had taken while travelling which often portrayed naked children."

Other names are mentioned in town, sometimes reluctantly, remembering the name but forgetting the surname, or above all citing their nickname, as if they wanted to protect the identity of the family and their honor. This way of facing the past reveals strong resistance to dealing with the Gloeden affair, its consequences and its corollaries.

> Gloeden had some favorites whom he took photos of during their adolescence and up to their adult age—revealed to me by Nino M.—I will show you one that appears throughout years in his photos, but I do not know who is. The others were occasional models, whom he would not touch.
>
> A model, who appears several times, also had pronounced breasts. He was a sort of hermaphrodite that he also used as a woman, showing the uncovered breast and hiding the rest. I have also identified two models, certainly women, from the family M., who posed with clothes on for Gloeden, one of them is with don Pasqualino.

This is a denial strategy whereby local communities exert collective control on the past, in order to negate it or falsify it. In Taormina, testimonies are contradictory. Some claim that nothing bad would happen, whereas some swear that many turpitudes occurred. Someone even avails the two opposite visions, without noticing, in his very personal interpretation, that the two realities obviously collide. Alternative truths, all terribly true and all terribly false. This was a representation of the Sicilian poetics that would suit Pirandello. Is it *omertà* (*a megghiu parola è chidda ca non si dici*)[21] or the desire of oblivion? As don Fabrizio said to Chevalley, "our sensuality is desire of oblivion."[22]

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[20] Mirone, *L'antiquario di Greta Garbo*,33.
[21] The best word is the unsaid one.
[22] Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1958), 121.

Peyrefitte equally reveals some names, in the same way as Faeta identifies S. N., born in Roccalumera in 1911, and V.L.P., born in Taormina in 1910, "who was a lover of von Gloeden for two years, during his early adolescence."[23]

Following the Second World War neither Simili (1947) nor Nicolosi tackle the topic of homosexuality. Throughout his book Simili never mentions Gloeden, whereas he devotes a few pages to the Stempel Baron, who had been a friend of the German photographer, and whose testimony is likely to have inspired Peyrefitte to write Gloeden's biography**.** Simili thus describes Stempel: "He is a round, neat small man; serious like a Vienna's diplomat, fair like a young man from Eton."[24] Later, he tells that Stempel once dragged with him a boy from Taormina—"whom he was fond of"—with him to Lithuania (in reality it was Latvia), where the young man discovered how rich that man was.[25]

Nicolosi did not write of infamous dealings either. On the contrary, to deny them, he mentioned "those sporadic anecdotes that this or that man goes around divulging, in the mood for narrating hot facts and things."[26] Nicolosi defined the homosexuality of Gloeden in pudic terms: "Gloeden particularly preferred men as companions; men who were sensitive to mundane pleasures; more often men who wanted to explore and enjoy some specific aspects of life."[27] Nicolosi also tells that when the Gloeden family fell into disgrace and the baron found himself bereft of financial support, "only the good people of the place, who were to view Gloeden as a gentleman and an essentially honest person remained close to him.[28]

Nicolosi wanted to validate the thesis of portraying Gloeden as a refined artist, who launched Taormina in the European intellectual and tourist firmament thanks to his photos:

> It was like a miracle. And portraits of fauns and satyrs, bacchants, imperators, mythological deities, and women in such classical attitudes that they would evoke memory Phidia's sculptures, started to emerge from the study of the Baron-photographer.

[23] Faeta,"Wilhelm von Gloeden," 104.
[24] Massimo Simili, *I pazzi a Taormina* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1947), 44.
[25] Ibid., 45.
[26] Nicolosi, *I Baroni di Taormina*, 41.
[27] Ibid., 45.
[28] Ibid., 47-48.

Who inspired this interpretation? It is said that the source was the Baron Stempel, but it is easy to imagine others were too, such as Pancrazio, known as il Moro. He was still alive during Nicolosi's investigation, and the pages about Gloeden corresponded to the way the friends of the Baron would describe him. Another source was certainly Raja, another "insider." In Nicolosi's pages there is no lie, but the representation is full of linguistic and narrative elements that act as a screen for the most scandalous part of the affair.

Now, the majority of the production of stories, journalistic accounts and photographic catalogues telling about Taormina and its (alleged) golden era share this positioning. The already mentioned Mirone devotes two pages to Gloeden, quoting a source that says, "the German aristocrat, although being homosexual, had never dared to trespass the limits of respect and decency."[29] Even the Foundation Alinari, who acquired part of the original photographic heritage of the German photographer, is searching for a Gloeden who is an artist rather than a sinner, if anything, to guard the commercial value of the pieces against moralistic waves like the ones that could be unleashed, for instance, by an allegation of pedophilia and pedo-pornography. In the 2000 brochure produced by the foundation Alinari we can read:

> In his homosexual proselytism, Roger Peyrefitte turned Wilhelm von Gloeden into a sort of aristocratic and perverse animator of a Club Méditerranée, not to mention director of a brothel for men in Taormina. This version is false and daft. For those who made the effort to seriously investigate it, the baron never made the headlines of local news, and, on the contrary, he obtained the approval of the parish. I personally interviewed […] the daughter of Salvatore Bambara, who bought the property [of Gloeden's house]. In this way, I found out that von Gloeden… was never deemed scandalous… Neighbor of the San Domenico convent, where his guests would stay, friend of Castelmola parish priest… the baron never organized orgies.[30]

This being about defending the indefensible, amongst other things instrumentally, is evident in that it contains historical fakes: the Dominican convent had by then been closed for thirty years. In 1896 the convent became a deluxe hotel hosting the best buyers of Gloeden's

[29] Mirone, *L'antiquario di Greta Garbo*, 33.

[30] Charles-Henri Favrod, "L'innocenza di Eros e di Dioniso," in *Von Gloeden, fotografie: capolavori dalle collezioni Alinari*, exhibition catalog, ed. Maria Possenti (Firenze: Alinari, 2000), 8.

photos; the siege of their transgressive meetings was not San Domenico square, but the so-called "red house" of Monte Ziretto, whereof Peyrefitte often talks, and which is also cited by Simili and Hichens (1905); the parish, particularly Reverend Marziani (1908) was quite critical towards von Gloeden.

It has, then, been possible to reconstruct the facts regarding the Gloedenian story as disdaining historical truth—which, on the other hand, nobody seriously searched for—because it was much more important to represent moral values which had been manipulated to suit the local readers, in order to reassure them about their past and their current social behavior. These representations became popular even amongst non-Taorminesi readers, who were fascinated by the eccentricity of what occurred in this fantastic world.

Malambrì rubs salt in the wound when stating:

> I met the ephebes of Gloeden (by now all dead) from whom I learnt about details that disavow some books about the German artist. According to what some books claim, it is not true that the Baron had come to Taormina to treat his tuberculosis. Gloeden came here because he was gay. And this was a scandal for the high spheres of the German court, since his father was the Kaiser's advisor … His illness was the excuse to send him away.[31]

The volumes Malambrì refers to have been influenced by the (few) statements of Gloeden himself, or of his (many) friends and supporters. Moreover, but the same statements have been uncritically reported by scholars and journalists who copied what others had already written without further verification, presenting what were, instead, cultural representations of the circle as objective reality.

Thus, all the books about Taormina and Gloeden contain the same anecdotes, maybe with some insignificant variations, or without the indication of the sources where information was gathered. Only seldom do they mention the oral source, who re-elaborated facts, circumstances and judgments in search of sensationalism, and who was credited as an authentic source so as to cover any responsibility and conceal disturbing practices. In some instances, some of these sources claim to be direct witnesses of facts that they heard from others or had even previously read. All this material can be examined as rhetorical representation of an imagined and dreamed *Taorminesità* (Taormina identity).

[31] Mirone, *L'antiquario di Greta Garbo*, 33-34.

Going back to our models and their families, Dall'Orto writes[32]: "but did Gloeden also go to bed with these guys, or did he only take a photo of them?" His answer to this question is useful for a cultural analysis. "We answer—Dall'Orto writes—without beating around the bush: no-one has ever expressed doubts about the fact that he would go to bed with them. Never."

According to Dall'Orto, the problem is the following:

Gloeden having undergone a long period of oblivion in Taormina (which ironically coincided with the period of his international re-discovery and valorisation) was due to the fact that his models' grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren understandably removed those memories from their memory, for they wished to forever archive the memory of the period when their grandparents, and great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents had been forced to compromise with very strict Sicilian moral standards because of economic lack. This period of denial caused the unconceivable dispersion of what was left from Gloeden in Taormina possible. Even the photographic plates of the surviving negatives ended up in Florence, after remaining for decades under a bed in Taormina, without any local authority showing the least interest in buying them, not even the photos that did not include nudes: all were erased from memory.

In 1951, twenty years after Gloeden's death, Cocteau felt that a sense of shame troubled Taormina:

> Taormina tries to live against a bad reputation, which is much harder than living up to a good reputation. I told Somerset (Maugham) the story of a forty-year-old fisherman, furious at a boutique in the historical centre because it showcased photos of his grandfather completely naked with a crown of roses. The Tahitian-style Taormina does no longer exist. On the contrary, it disgusts the new generations that look askance at tourists, believing that they only think of making advances at them.[33]

On another occasion Cocteau re-asserts:

> Taormina tries to survive against its ancient fame, but it does not make it. What remains to the city is the "landscape" and some postcards of young

[32] Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Inseguendo von Gloeden. Biografia per immagini di un fotografo e della sua città*, available online at:
http://www.giovannidallorto.com/gloeden/casa/casa.html.

[33] Jena Cocteau, *Lettere a Jean Marais* (Milano: Archinto, 1988), 441.

> men with rose crowns, who are the grandparents of the current youth which, amongst other things, are now ashamed of them.[34]

During the '50s Taormina's inhabitants knew everything, but were ashamed of it in the same way as at the beginning of the century; they knew but they preferred to be silent. They silenced a social practice which had generated big and controversial issues within the community life, starting from the relation between the public official discourse and private behaviors. Some biographers claimed that Gloeden was never scandalous: "No protest ever evolved into a formal denunciation"[35]; "Gloeden had never caused any scandal."[36] Still nowadays, one of my informants says: "At that time young men used to go around naked, used to swim, it was not scandalous. There was not all the chaos people have later talked about." Even if following that, as if to partially revise his judgment, he adds: "The boy in the photo with a fish in his hand makes one wonder…"

In any case, as I documented,[37] there were some complaints and some press campaigns, which demonstrate how the negationist thesis is at least questionable. But the main issue is that objections and complaints were mostly put forward or suggested by people who were foreign to the local context. They were mainly foreign men and women as well as priests, politicians and syndicalists foreign to the community. If we exclude some exceptions, such as Dr. Famà, a socialist, and Monsignor Marziani, parish priest of the Dome, people within the local context not only did not react, but even greeted any criticism with irritation, viewing it as a way to throw dishonor upon the community.

Irritation did not arise from a weaker moral standard, and not even from common people condescending the phenomenon. It was connected to the necessity of having to publicly and explicitly face a topic that locals preferred to deal with in an intimate, maybe malicious way, with insinuations and allusions. We herein witness that peculiar response of jealous reserve, which usually characterizes the situations where one or more members of the communities are involved in embarrassing, officially

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[34] Ibid., 239.
[35] Michele Falzone Barbarò, "Il barone di Taormina," in *Le fotografie di von Gloeden*, eds. Michele Falzone Barbarò, Marina Miraglia and Italo Mussa (Milano: Longanesi, 1980), 25.
[36] Vincenzo Mirisola and Giuseppe Manzella, *Sicilia mitica Arcadia: Von Gloeden e la "Scuola" di Taormina* (Palermo: Gente di fotografia, 2004), 9.
[37] Bolognari, *I ragazzi di von Gloeden*, 219-276.

deplored, episodes.[38] Albeit foreign to the family and kin, the guilty individuals are still known people, and this suggests that locals should never degenerate into explicitly and publicly condemning them. The reason for this cautiousness stems from the anxiety that someone close, maybe a family member, might, sooner or later, be concerned.

The community could accept the homosexuality of the Gloedenian world, because it was temporary and exclusive. Those boys would sooner or later go back to socially-accepted sexuality. Then, why would they blow the case open? Talking about this topic in a formal and serious way, as the critics did at that time, aroused the opposition of the community, which did not want its cultural intimacy to be violated.

Making public comments, judges and condemnation of a non-accepted cultural practice was allowed, but only within the community. Indeed, this case was handled through repetitive and conventional ways, which the community members clearly understood and also controlled. Even a hot topic, like the endemic homosexuality, could be handled as a possible scenario within Sicilian society at that time. But foreigners expressing an opinion on that topic generated irritation, hostility and denial. The fact that others would know, comment upon and judge behaviors adopted within the community was perceived as a grave violation of their intimate sphere.

The defense strategy worked. There was no serious violation of their intimate sphere, except at a level (newspapers, tribunals) distant from the one where people lived their daily life (the street, the working place, home). The most extraordinary weapon—that of silence—was part of the very same strategy. It was the social awareness that any form of violation of the intimacy would provoke glaring and resentful reactions; whoever trespassed the borders of intimacy would be promptly accused of injuring the dignity of the whole population and wishing bad upon the community.

This is a frequent strategy of collective response—above all in small communities—functional, able to involve many people, and usually effective. The logic is to overturn reality and turn into enemies of the community not those whose behaviors undermine everybody's honor, but those who denounce facts and responsibilities. These are force tests where the community puts its credibility at stake and assesses its values from within and outside. What is at stake is not a single and temporary event, but a value which is (considered) eternal: honor. Eternal because it is primordial, a-historical, non-verifiable. In these circumstances we frequently

[38] Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

observe the phenomenon already observed by some anthropologists[39] whereby the people considered morally reprehensible appropriate "a multiplicity of registers peculiar to ordinary discourses." These people themselves become the most rigorous interpreters of common sense, the most obstinate defenders of traditional prejudices, the divulgators of the most simplistic conformism, in order to better defend behaviors which are considered anomic, innovative and anti-conformist.

On the other hand, cultures are set in such a way as to represent themselves as positive worlds. As a part of social reality, scandalous practices can be managed, denied, silenced, as long as people do not talk about them. If no-one talks about them, the blame will fall completely and solely on the subjects that transgress the social norm. But, if people publicly speak out against the scandalous practices, the blame will be on the whole community, which will, in some sense, assume the paternity of such practices. This is the reason why in these cases we witness a determined response from the community. After all, it is defending itself. The gap existing between moral standards and anomic behavior can be controlled, provided it remains circumscribed to an individual or a small group. If, on the contrary, the gap involves the whole community, once facts are publicly exposed antinomy erupts and must be faced accordingly.[40]

Now, the real distance between the moral norms and anomic behavior did not concern homosexual practice or pederasty. It concerned the economic and social use of sexuality and feelings so as to subvert the material conditions of those boys and their families. Saglimbeni writes: "During those years, several young Taorminesi became rich, earning life-long alimonies and shares in banks and oil wells, and inheriting their fabulous villas once their old and very generous friends passed away."[41] This was the scandal. The distribution of wealth, political hierarchies and the order of power were jeopardised and could be overturned by a new and uncontrollable phenomenon. As I have pointed out,[42] during those same years other young men were immigrating to America, causing a cultural and demographic upheaval, right while others stayed in Sicily. Which

[39] George E. Marcus, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork," *Representations* 59 (Summer 1997): 85-108.
[40] See Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).
[41] Saglimbeni, *I peccati e gli amori di Taormina*, 54.
[42] Mario Bolognari, "Falsi miti di *Belle Epoque*. Ai tempi 'felici' del fotografo Wilhelm von Gloeden la Taormina dei poveri emigrava in America," *Illuminazioni* 16 (April-June 2011): 13-63.

image did they elaborate about one another? Many young men were actually encouraged to leave by their own families, who wanted to avoid their involvement in the circle of available young men. A deep and dramatic gap that affected the social fabric.

In Baron's biography published online[43] we can read:

> Gloeden paid his many models well and even opened bank accounts for them, which often enabled them to start up their own economic activity. It is said that there are still, today, families that owe their property, other than their professional pursuits, to the earnings generated by a great-grandfather who had modeled for the Baron.

Some portray those years of change like a sort of entry into modernity, attributing a decisive role to tradition. This reading sounds ideological, tending to provide an interpretation in line with specific political interests, connected to the development of tourism, the exploitation of tourism, and the enriching of a restricted number of families, which re-organised themselves to take advantage of new opportunities.

During those years, the mayor and the city council were mainly busy with procedures concerning applications for a grant of public land, the closing of roads for private use, the opening of doors and windows overlooking public spaces and licenses to build constructions for touristic use. In this context, which highlights the attempt of private interests to appropriate public goods, the process of construction of the first big hotels is emblematic. For instance, the year 1902 was characterised by the polemics surrounding the edification of a hotel obstructing the landscape and occupying a public road. The then mayor opposed the project, but that autumn the owner, who was the chief of the opposition, won the elections, becoming the new mayor. Accordingly, the big hotel was constructed up to the fourth floor.

Taormina was actually entering a new era and had to articulate new forms of representing itself, targeting the entrepreneurial interest, tourists' expectations and the value of money. However, old modes of controlling public speech survived alongside this new rhetoric, particularly a sort of moral duplicity, a well-known instrument that the community recycled for new needs.

People at that time were less stupid and less naive than they are portrayed by today's historians. Having chosen not to see does not imply being blind. It only means having decided that it was preferable not to

[43] http://vongloedengayhistory.free.fr/bio.html.

notice certain things, only to then gossip about Gloeden and his models for decades.[44]

The good citizens of Taormina chose not to see. This is a historical interpretation which is equally useful from an anthropological point of view, for it allows a serious analysis coherent both with yesterday and today's reality:

> The benign moral indifference of the *Taorminesi* at that time is simply a myth recently created. Everybody actually knew what the homosexual tourists wanted from the local boys; it was particularly clear to the local boys, who were expected to become fathers in a few years time, for the tourists asked what they wanted in an open way. Society thus knew; it only demanded that things be done discreetly, a request that was usually satisfied, including by the good Gloeden.[45]

If we look at the story from another point of view, appointing some boys to fight this new battle for survival, which looked full of unknown variables, was maybe a way to protect the rest of the community from further and more difficult consequences. The advent of tourism, the economic imbalance between locals and foreigners and the development of activities in the service sector raised the question about the fate of women. A woman dedicated to the role of daughter, wife and mother, and always depending on a man, did no longer work in the new economic and social scenario. Women had to necessarily and usefully go to work in hotels (waitress, kitchen, ironer etc), although it was a subaltern position, they were less exposed to contact with tourists. The consequences of this social mutation also entailed a change in the ideas that men had about women, besides to the self-perception of women themselves. The control of female sexuality, previously in the hands of husbands and fathers, risked falling under the jurisdiction of other subjects (hotel directors, colleagues and, maybe, well-off and handsome foreign tourists). It was such a high risk for the men at that time that it engendered new coping strategies for families and couples. The reasoning must have been the following: if for economic development we have to pay a social and cultural price; then we chose the lower price. As Dell'Orto:

> Considering that young men would do certain things amongst themselves for free anyway, they might as well be the ones who would enable the rich

[44] Dall'Orto, *Inseguendo von Gloeden*.
[45] Ibid.

> and generous *furasteri* [foreigners] express their instincts rather than their sisters, since the boys would not get pregnant, and, therefore, would not "dishonor" their families, contrary to their sisters… To do things in a "moral" way, *li fimmini* [women] had to aim for marriage, but the risk of being seduced and abandoned, that is "dishonored", was enormous […]. On the contrary, the boys could devote a few years to exchange his sexual impetuosity with capital, which is useful to get married and start a business, and then, once he had become officially an adult, forget everything and leave their place for the following generation. The agreement worked well for everyone, for the rich homosexuals, for the boys (mostly "heterosexual that were nonetheless keen on that"), on their families, their co-citizens, and it worked until the city was not promoted enough from the touristic point of view, so that it would no longer need homosexual tourism. Indeed, around the 30's, this tourism started to look for other and more exotic destinations.[46]

The tolerance towards homosexuality, and more generally towards all sexual behaviors, that Taormina has shown all along its successive touristic history does not derive from a natural inclination, but is the cultural result of this story from the late nineteenth century. Once tourism had taken off, the city could value homosexuality without anguish and with more relaxed complacency than any other Southern locality. It was a brand according to non-local others, and an antidote according to the locals.

Yes, an antidote. The generations of the post-Second War era expressed a nonchalant heterosexual identity, favored by that same tourism, which, in the meanwhile, evolved into Summer and mass-tourism and encouraged the arrival of many foreign women. In the 50s and 60s many young men would spend their days trying to sexually conquer foreign women, whom they treated with tenderness and wisdom, notwithstanding that their main aim was more prosaic. Many of those women fell madly in love with their Sicilian lover, falling into a tragic sentimental misunderstanding. I *fimminari* (latin lovers) were the updated version of Gloeden's boys. In their own way, they equally preserved the honour of their own women, who remained within a closed domestic and working space, whereas foreign women, who were the object of prejudice, were meant to enhance the self-esteem of local men. To emphasise, the application of a double morality enabled men to do somewhere else—a cultural somewhere else created by foreigners—what they were not allowed to do with their women in Sicily. Towards the end of the twentieth century this system of

[46] Ibid.

relations between men and women changed, too, and the figure of the "seducer of foreign women" has become nearly extinct, at least in its original version.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VIOLET EDMONSTONE AND VITA SACKVILLE-WEST: ITALY'S BACKSTAGE ROLE IN A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SADISTIC LESBIAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

ILARIA E. M. BORJIGID BOHM

Violet Edmonstone

I offer here a brief analysis of the love affair between Violet Keppel (later Trefusis) and Vita Sackville-West ending in 1921.

In this chapter, as a political choice, I choose to call Violet Keppel by her mother's family name "Edmonstone," because Violet, in many respects like her mother, never succumbed to the submitted role of the wife. In view of her emotional and intellectual independence from the male dimension—really quite extraordinary for her times—it seems terribly unfair that such a wholehearted, courageous and talented woman who so deeply rejected and was so profoundly damaged by marriage and social conventions, should be remembered by the name of a man (Trefusis) whom she never loved and whom she referred to as her jailor.[1] Equally absurd it appears that she should be known by the name of Alice's

[1] "I told him I merely looked upon him as my jailor, and that my ambition was to get away from him—I hate him, *I hate him*" wrote Violet in February 1920 after the forced separation from Vita. Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita: The Letters of Violet Trefusis to Vita Sackville-West, 1910-21* (London: Mandarin Paperbacks,1991), 181.

husband, Mr Keppel, who comes across as a mere shadow in Alice's household, where she most certainly was the undisputed Mistress.[2] Vita Sackville-West told Philippe Julian, Violet's first biographer, that Violet's father was probably William Beckett, "senior partner in the family bank Beckett & Company of Leeds, member of the Parliament of Whitby."[3] Violet however, in her exquisite megalomania, greatly fantasised about her father being the King himself.[4]

Her mother too (born Alice Edmonstone, later George Keppel), was very much mistress of her own life. However, the King, her lover,[5] called her in his letters "my dear Mrs George,"[6] for it was still the custom in England to call a woman by her husband's name and surname. Thus, without going as far as looking for the matrilineal lineage of Violet's family, for the sake of this argument it will symbolically suffice to call Alice and Violet by Alice's maiden's name, Edmonstone.

Overview of Italy's Role

Backstage as it might have been, Italy had an unmistakable influence on Violet Edmonstone and Vita Sackville-West's relationship. As well as randomly appearing throughout the years in their epistolary correspondence, Italy is foremost the place that fatally sealed the beginning of their love and, in more than one way, the end.

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[2] Diana Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 15, 21.
[3] Ibid., 21.
[4] Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, 15. Growing up "roll[ing] her hoop with a sceptre" as Jean Cocteau put it [Trefusis Keppel, *Violet to Vita*, 6], Violet Edmonstone did have manias of royal splendour curiously mixed up with revolutionary thoughts of freedom and *bohémien* aspirations. "In her old age, Violet often turned to her legitimate ancestors as though to seek respite from her mythical origins. She found them 'much more chic than those fat Hanovers.' Through them too she could claim descendant from the Stuarts; through the Stuarts, from the Bourbons; and through the Bourbons, from the Medicis." Philippe Jullian and John Phillips, *Violet Trefusis, a Biography. Including Correspondence with Vita Sackville West* (London: A Methuen Paperback, 1986), 11.
[5] Or to say it in more diplomatic terms: for whom Alice was "La Favorita" for over ten years up to his death in 1910. Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, 3-14, 47, 25-95.
[6] Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, 51.

It is in Italy, in 1908, that Violet will first declare her love to Vita and gift her with a Venetian ring, which had belonged to a fifteenth century Venetian Doge.[7]

Italian is also one of the languages, along with French and Romanian, that formed Violet and Vita's *own* intimate language. As French was probably chosen for its stereotyped romance and class-related clichés, and Romanian for Gypsy stereotyped fantasies of bohemian freedom, Italian may have been chosen for the classical Mediterranean beauty attributed to Italy; as the language of a country of Art and Beauty, immortalised in past public imagination by literary figures of the Italian Renaissance and classical Humanism, and by nineteenth and twentieth exponents of Romanticism and Decadentism, with which cultured young English women from Miss Wolff's School for Girls in South Audley street would certainly have been familiar. Violet once wrote: "Florence will be always city of the soul."[8]

Italy was also the backdrop of the final gruelling and exhausting shilly-shally of their psychologically sadomasochistic relationship—or I should say *sadistic*, for what is masochism if not first and foremost a form of self-sadism? On 14th February 1920, after the very poor attempt at eloping for good, discussed further on, Violet left for Montercarlo with Denys Trefusis, as Vita returned to England with Harold Nicolson.

From Montecarlo Violet soon went to Bordighera to stay with her friend Margaret Dansey (Pat) and her partner Joan. In their company she spent the last holiday with Vita, which involved arguing in Venezia,[9] as they were both too poisoned by the sense of betrayal they each felt towards one another for different reasons, after the failed attempt at escaping together without return. Vita, who was the one to decide to leave, wrote:

> Then at San Remo I lost my head and said I would stay, and for a few days we were happy. We went on to Venice, but I don't really look back on that journey with much pleasure. She was ill, with a touch of jaundice, a most unromantic complaint, and I could do nothing with her, especially as I had gone back on what I said at San Remo.[10]

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[7] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita,* 11.
[8] Jullian and Phillips, *Violet Trefusis*, 26
[9] For political reasons concerning linguistic and cultural identity, the ridiculous habit of turning the names of Italian cities into English names, is here rejected.
[10] Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage* (New York, Atheneum, 1973), 130.

Italy and the beginning

William Beckett, probably Violet's father, owned a large villa in Ravello."[11] This is the first hint at Italy in Violet's biography, perhaps an omen of the role Italy will play in her life, second only to France where she also lived with Denys after permanently leaving England.

The disquieting love tale, however, began in 1900 in London, when Violet, aged six, was taken by her mother to the shop of an art dealer called Sir Joseph Duveen on Bond Street.[12] There, she was offered to choose any present she might like, with clear reference however, to Victorian dolls continually mentioned in conversation with Alice Edmonstone. Violet ignored the dolls and chose the ring of a Doge[13] from Venezia, the city that bore witness to the crucial decline of Violet's and Vita's love, as well as somehow being, through that symbolic ring, in the background of its beginning. This event so early on in Violet's life, may be read as "fatally" charged with her reckless emotional destiny, wasted[14] over a woman that was never able to fully return the unconditional emotional investment Violet granted her for a great part of her life.[15]

In May 1908, Violet accompanied Vita and her friend Rosamund Grosvenor, with their respective governesses, to Pisa, Milano and Firenze. Rosamund was profoundly in love with Vita and very jealous, yet it was during this holiday that Violet first declared her love.[16]

> That summer both went to Florence to improve their Italian. Violet and Moiselle [Violet's governess] stayed at a pension in the Via Venezia, Vita and her French governess in the Villa Pestellini. They went to the Uffizi and saw Botticelli's *Primavera*, to Fiesole—"it was very hot, but the view one gets to the top"—to the church of the convent of San Sacramento "where the nuns sing too beautifully." The nights, in recollection, "were lit by fireflies and serenaded by frogs."
> They had a farewell tea together when Vita left. Violet cried and gave her the doge's lava ring (..). Vita kept it on a piece of lapis lazuli. "I don't think I was ever more sorry to leave any place," she told her mother.

[11] Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, 21.
[12] Jullian and Phillips, *Violet Trefusis*, 16.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 21.
[15] The part in which, to put it in Violet's words, "for once only are we perfectly equipped for loving," (Leaska and Phillips, *Violet to Vita*, 294).
[16] Ibid., 11.

> "Violet Keppel seemed very sorry to say goodbye to me; at least she cried very much."[17]

About this, Vita wrote in her diaries:

> There were other happenings in those years. I went to Italy, to Florence. Violet was there, in fact I went to join her. (See how she comes in again immediately!) That was the first time I had been anywhere except to Paris, and it opened my eyes thoroughly. And Violet—how well did I know her then? My dates are so uncertain and I have no papers to guide me. I must have known her very well—it is coming back to me by degrees—for I had learnt Italian with her in London, and we had been together in Paris, and had acted part of a play I wrote in French in five Alexandrine acts, about the Man in the Iron Mask, and in those days we rather ostentatiously talked to one another in French in order to tutor one another and so show what great friends we were. (…) Before she went away to Florence, she told me she loved me, and I, finding myself expected to rise to the occasion, stumbled out an unfamiliar "darling." Oh God to remember that first avowal, that first endearment! Then we didn't meet till Florence, and she gave me a ring there—I have it now, of course I have it, just as I have her, and I should bury my face in my hands with shame to remember our childish passion for each other (which was too fierce, even then, to be sentimental), were it not for the justification of the the present. (…)
> I feel I am doing this part very badly, very confusedly; it is very difficult to do, because I am afraid of taking too seriously what would, normally, have begun and ended as the kind of rather hysterical friendship one conceives in adolescence, but which had in it, I protest, far stronger elements than mere unwholesome hysteria.[18] There is a bond which unites me to Violet, Violet to me: it united us no less than it unites us now, but what that bond is God alone knows; sometimes I feel it as something legendary. Violet is *mine*, she always has been, it is inescapable. I knew it then, albeit only through my obscurely but quite obstinately proprietary attitude; she knew it too, less obscurely, and took all the active measures to make me realize it. That I left them unseconded, yet without any fear of losing her, proud and mettlesome as she was, only goes to prove how certain I was of my hold upon her. She was *mine*—I can't express it more emphatically or more

[17] Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, 86-87.

[18] At the time, and for many years yet to come, lesbianism was considered a mental illness and referred to as female hysteria. It is interesting to note in these comments Vita made, her own homophobia which led her to the choices discussed further on with regard to the psychologically sadistic dynamics enacted in this particular relationship.

> accurately than that, nor do I want to dress up an elemental fact in any circumlocution of words.[19]

At Colombo, in 1911 Violet almost 17 and her sister Sonia aged ten, bid farewell to their mother who was sailing for China with their uncle Sir Archibald Edmonstone and went to San Remo where they met George Keppel for a few days[20]. Here Violet saw Vita who was still at the Monte Carlo Villa.[21]

Vita wrote:

> Had I gone to Ceylon with her, my life would probably have turned out very differently. But oh Lord" What's my miserable life? It only bulks large because these pages covered with pencil happen to be a history of it.[22] (…) Violet retuned from Ceylon in the spring, bringing me rubies, and we spent a day or two at San Remo. She also came to see me at our villa. How little we thought, as we stood under the olive-trees in the wild part of the garden (I remember admiring to myself the thick plait of her really beautiful hair), how little we thought of it the next time we were together in that same place! When I went to her at San Remo, we saw an acrobat with no arms or legs. We had written to each other copiously during the whole winter, and now when she went to live in Munich, we continued to write and she kept urging me to go and stay with her there, but I never did.[23]

Vita had dedicated her historical novel "The City of the Lily,"[24] to Firenze at age 14, whereas Milano was present in the memorable Scottish holiday shared by the two girls later that autumn, where they acted in Vita's play *The Viper of Milan*, along with walking together in the rain, dressing up, chasing each other with a dagger and listening to owls all night long. This was at the Keppel's Castle in Duntreath.[25]

Italy was also of one of Vita's favourite holiday destinations, recurring throughout her diaries in *Portrait of a Marriage*, and one of the two destinations chosen by Violet as the ideal place to which to escape with

[19] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 27-28.
[20] Ibid., 101.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 32.
[23] Ibid., 37.
[24] Jullian and Phillips, *Violet Trefusis*, 26.
[25] Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, 87.

Vita, where they would live freely without hiding their love any longer. On 16th August 1918 she wrote:

> My ideal is this, Mitya: to live far, far away in Greece for preference, Sicily, failing Greece—to live in the woods, on the mountain slopes, by streams and rivers—never to see anyone, save perhaps an occasional shepherd, and to live there with Mitya, in the spring, only it would have to be always spring! Mitya in his convolvulus wreath—or, no, Mitya with a faun-skin thrown over his shoulder, with little gilded hoofs, its head clothing Mitya's head within—Bacchus "sweet upon the mountains." I quote Euripides (…).[26]

With regards to Vita's sadism soon to be discussed, predictably enough, Italy is also one of the places where she spent her honeymoon with Harold Nicolson, in 1913.[27] Speaking of 1912 she wrote:

> In October, she [Rosamund], Harold and I, all three, went to Italy, travelling as as far as Bologna together, and there Harold left us to go on to Constantinople by the Orient Express, while Rosamund and I went on to Florence.
> I hate writing this, but I must, I must. When I began this I swore I would shirk nothing, and no more I will. So here is the truth; I was never so much in love with Rosamund as during those weeks in Italy and the months that followed. It may seem that I should have missed Harold more. I admit everything, to my shame, but I have never pretended to have anything other than a base and despicable character. [28]

And then about her wedding and honeymoon:

> (…) When we came back to Knole's life became a jumble of letters, wedding-presents, and clothes, the whole being plentifully watered by Rosamund's tears. I have seldom seen anyone in such despair, but it didn't touch me. Mother lavished jewels on me. Harold and I grudged an hour spent away from one another. I hurry over this part, because it is the same for everybody. (…) That was my wedding. We went away for three days to the country, and then came back to London for one night, which I spent with Mother and Dada while Harold went to his parents. I saw Rosamund, couldn't live up to the level of her emotion. Next morning early Harold came to fetch me in a motor and we left for Florence, where we lived in the

[26] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 85
[27] Souhami, *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, 110,112,
[28] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 39.

> little cottage I had shared with Rosamund eighteen months before. That is one of the things I am most ashamed of in my life. It was horrible of me. Besides being disloyal to Rosamund, it was a dreadful manque de delicatesse. [29]

A Pattern

I have outlined here the psychological dynamic between Vita and Violet by dividing it into different phases, for the sake of simplifying the discussion thereof. I have used the present simple tense in doing so to evidence how this dynamic seems to be somewhat universal in its pattern and still contemporarily relevant. It could also be proved, easily enough, to find a reflection in many past and present psychologically abusive lesbian relationships, if room could be dedicated to a study of psychosociology to analyse such parallelisms across time, and the various social layers. In such a case, the period I would indicate as more closely reflecting this somewhat stereotypical pattern is roughly from the eighteenth century up to sexual "liberation."[30]

I use the term 'stereotypical' because usually, largely in response to the difficulties that follow the necessity to hide and suffocate the relationship socially, two typical responses from the two women involved very often emerge. In the interests of clarity I choose here to define their roles as either "*pursuer*" or "*pursued*."

The following phases (here roughly outlined and numbered for clarity) can thus be observed in the Vita and Violet's relationship:[31]

1) *First* "*Enamorment*:" Blooming of a very intense, *adolescent* friendship between the two girls. This friendship is initially well accepted by the respective families of the two—as they belong to the same social class and there is no social antagonism between them.

In this highly romantic and sentimental friendship, the two girls find finally a chance to be—in a somewhat unfiltered manner—their true selves; to break free from their emotional, psychological, and physical segregation. It was a segregation which, in turn, gave birth to overly active

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[29] Ibid., 41-42.

[30] I use quotation marks because this definition for that particular historical period is rather debatable, but the argument is avoided altogether here as well beyond the scope of the work.

[31] The limits of the present chapter do not allow letters directly relevant to the psychologically violent dynamic for each phase to be cited; I have however quoted pages from the letters and diaries where these can be identified.

imaginations, unusual cleverness and creativity, as well as a "rare"[32] sensitivity. In her reflective recollections Violet recorded:

> One day I allowed myself to be dragged at a tea party at Lady Kilmorey's. There I met a girl older than myself, but, apparently, every bit unsociable. She was tall for her age, gawky, most unsuitably dressed in what appeared to be her mother's old clothes. I do not remember who made the first step. Anyhow, much to my family's gratification I asked if I might have her to tea. She came. We were both consummate snobs, and talked, chiefly, as far as I can remember, about our ancestors. I essayed a few superior allusions to Paris. She was not impressed, her tastes seemed to lie in another direction. She digressed in her magnificent home in the country, her dogs, her rabbits. I thought her nice but rather childish (I was then ten). We separated however with mutual esteem. The repressions of my short life found out in voluminous correspondence. I bombarded the poor girl with letters which became more exacting as hers tended to become more and more of the "yesterday-my-pet-rabbit-had-six-babies" type."[33]

Conversely, Vita wrote:

> I, who was the worst person in the world at making friends, closed instantaneously in friendship (…) with Violet. I was thirteen, she was two years younger, but in every instinct she might have been six years my senior. It seems to me so significant now that I should remember with such distinctiveness my first sight of her. (…) We sat in a darkened room, and talked about our ancestors, of all strange topics – and in the hall as I left she kissed me. I made up a little song that evening, "I've got a friend!." I remember so well. I sang it in my bath.[34]

2) *Recognition*. The two friends, in a mutual, adoring admiration, seem to finally find the human warmth that had eluded them, feel appreciated, listened to and *seen*. In this sense of mutual recognition, they also feel like blessed, unearthly creatures living a dream rather than reality. This is reinforced by the fact that—like all lovers, close siblings and kindred spirits—they develop their own special language which goes far beyond words (at times invented), creating a complicity which draws them closer and closer, letting out the rest of the world, which in any case would not understand or appreciate their kind of enamorment. Thus, the two friends

[32] Quotation marks ironically express relativity.
[33] Violet Keppel Trefusis [Edmonstone], *Don't Look Around* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), 41.
[34] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 26.

feel and make each other feel, special in a way no one else has acknowledged before, sharing some high ideal seen beyond the socially constructed mask that has been imposed upon them. Usually it is an ideal that transcends and transfigures the reality in which they live, making it somehow more beautiful and yet more dramatic.

Violet for instance, who up to the very end remained firm and steady in Vita's adoration, strongly believed that in life "the only two things that matter are love and beauty."[35] In 1918 she once wrote to Vita: "think of the life we could live together, exclusively devoted to the pursuit of Beauty."[36] She was imagining how they could have lived together happily and freely in Italy or Spain. "They've forced you to sleep beneath a self-respecting roof with no chinks to let the stars through—but I, Mitya, they haven't caught *me* yet. I snap my fingers in their faces."[37]

> Well, you ask me pointblank why I love you… I love you Vita, because I fought so hard to win you… I love you Vita because you never gave me back my ring. I love you because you've never yielded in anything; I love you because you never capitulate. I love you for your wonderful intelligence, for your literary aspirations, for your unconscious (?) coquetry. I love you because you have the air of doubting nothing. (…) I love you Vita because I've seen your soul…[38]

This was Violet again, aged 16, to which it seems appropriate to juxtapose Vita's words:

> I long to stop over Violet—to tell how much I secretly admired her, and how proud I was of the friendship of this brilliant, this extraordinary, this almost unearthly creature, but how I treated her with unvarying scorn, my one piece of really able handling, which kept her to me as no proof of devotion would have kept her—but I am going to tell other things first, because all the present is filled with Violet, and during the past she appears constantly too.[39]

3) *Blooming*. The friendship lasts for years, with ups and downs and long periods of distance, reaching increasing intensity, until the boundaries

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[35] Philippe Jullian, JohnPhillips, *Violet Trefusis, Life and Letters* (London: Hamilton, 1976), 156.
[36] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 93.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 61.
[39] Nicolson, *Protrait of a Marriage*, 26-27.

between love and friendship become too blurred to keep up. Passion ensues and turns into an intense, emotionally and erotically overwhelming love. "Vita's friendship with Rosamund Grosvernor had faded over these years, while Violet's passion continued to smoulder, awaiting the opportune moment to erupt. This happened on 13th April 1918, when Violet went to visit Vita alone at Long Barn," wrote Violet's biographers John Phillips and Leaska.[40] Vita gave a rather lovely account of it:

> She was far more skilful than I. I might have been a boy of eighteen, and she a woman of thirty-five. She was infinitely clever—she didn't scare me, she didn't rush me, she didn't allow me to see where I was going; it was all conscious on her part, but on mine it was simply the drunkenness of liberation—the liberation of half my personality. She opened up to me a new sphere. And for her of course, it meant the supreme effort to conquer the love of the person she had always wanted who had always repulsed her (when things seemed to be going too far), out of a sort of fear, and of whom she was madly jealous—a fact I had not realized, so adept was she at concealment, and so obtuse was I at her psychology.
> She lay on the sofa, I sat plunged in the armchair; she took my hands, and parted my fingers to count the points as she told me why she loved me. I hadn't dreamt of such an art of love. Such things had been direct for me always; I had known no love possessed of that Latin artistry (whether instinctive or acquired). I was infinitely troubled by the softness of her touch and the murmur of her lovely voice. She appealed to my unawakened sense; she wore, I remember, a dress of red velvet, that was exactly the colour of a red rose, and that made of her the most seductive being. She pulled me down until I kissed her—I had not done so for so many years. Then she was wise enough to get up and go to bed; but I kissed her again in the dark after I had blown out our solitary lamp. She let herself go entirely limp and passive in my arms."[41]

And then again:

> I felt like a person translated, or re-born; it was like beginning one's life again in a different capacity. We were very miserable to come away, but we were constantly together during the whole of the summer months following.[42]

[40] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 73.
[41] Nicolson, *Protrait of a Marriage*, 106.
[42] Ibid., 109.

4) *Chase and Obsession*. The outer world (family, friends, society) takes notice, initially ridicules the relationship,[43] then begins to pressure the two women to fulfil the roles assigned to them by patriarchy, namely marrying and having children.

Vita chose to take it lightly as some sort of a game and chose (wittingly or unwittingly, we shall never know) the homosexual Harold. Violet on the other hand did not marry until it seemed to her the only option to "make things easier" for her and Vita. The only way (or so she thought) as initially mentioned, to be claimed by the woman she loved. It was June 1919.[44] Vita wrote:

> I could have prevented the engagement by very few words but I thought that would be too outrageously selfish; there was Violet's mother, a demon of a woman, longing to get her safely married, and having told all London that she was going to marry Denys. She had already so bad a reputation for breaking engagements that this would have been the last straw. Besides, we both thought she would gain more liberty by marrying, and Denys was prepared to marry her on her own terms—that is, merely brotherly relations.
> I was absolutely miserable. I went to Brighton, alone, in a great empty dust-sheeted house, and all night I used to lie awake, and all day I used to wonder whether I wouldn't throw myself over the cliffs.[45] Everyone questioned me as to why I looked so ill. On the fifth day Violet's engagement was announced in the papers; I bought the paper at Brighton station and nearly fainted as I read it (…).[46]

During the previous year the secret relationship had gone on, with Violet's demands for recognition and tests of affection versus Vita's moments of surrender alternated to others of rejection, escalating into dynamic ever more obsessive and out of control. Society was lived as kind of game for Vita[47] (empowered by the pursuer) and became increasingly suffocating

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[43] It has been said that during the years of distance before 1918, Violet and Vita occasionally saw each other at parties, and that on these occasions when running into each other unawares, the colour drained from Violet's face. Lord Sackville, as a joke, when Vita mentioned seeing Violet, would say: "Did she turn pale?" Souhami, *Mrs Keppel and her Daughter*, 87.

[44] I believe she used Denys as a lever to make me do so [taking her away for good]. Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 112.

[45] See point 7 in the sado-masochistic dynamic outlined below.

[46] Ibid., 113.

[47] Relating to the years between 1914 to spring 1918, Leaska and Phillips write for instance: "During this time Vita remained happily married. She had returned to

for the pursuer, who inevitably is—being more wholehearted—more socially dysfunctional in any highly conventional society, which can but stigmatise her love[48] This was perhaps even truer in pre-women's liberation society, where being wholehearted and true to oneself was not really an option for women, particularly if one did not manage in any way to fit the patriarchal heterosexual models to imposed on them.

> Living permanently with me had become an obsession in her mind. I don't absolutely remember the process in detail, but I know that I ended by consenting. After that we were both less unhappy; I could afford to see her ostensibly engaged to Denys when I knew that instead of marrying him she was coming away with me. I really intended to take her; we had every plan made. We were to go the day before her wedding (…).[49]

Obsession, however, did not only affect Violet. Vita was victim of her own half-unconscious sadism and inability to make a definite step towards freedom nearly as much as Violet was, though in a different manner. After breaking the promise to run away with Violet (the day before her wedding) she wrote:

> I saw Violet twice more; once in my own house in London; she looked ill and changed; and once in the early morning at her mother's house, where I went to say goodbye to her on my way to the station. (…) Then I went to Paris, alone. That is one of the worst days I remember. While I was in the train going to Folkestone I still felt I could change my mind and go back If I wanted to, for she had told me she would wait for me up to the very last minute, and would come straight away if I appeared, or telephoned for her. At Folkestone I felt it becoming more irrevocable, and tried to get off the boat again, but they were moving the gangway and pushed me back. I had Harold's letters with me, and kept reading them until they almost lost sense. The journey had never seemed so slow; it remains with me simply as a nightmare. I couldn't eat, and tears kept running down my face.
> (…) The next day (…) he stayed with me all day. By then I had got such a reaction that I was feverishly cheerful, and he might have thought nothing was the matter. I gave him the book I was writing [*Challenge*], because I knew Violet would hate me to do that, as it was all about her. I was awake

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England in June 1914 and on 6th August 1914 gave birth to her first son Benedict." Leaska & Philips eds., *Violet to Vita*, 73

[48] "Julian [a male name for Vita] doesn't write and I can't—except through you—write to him. It is awful to be completely cut off."

[49] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 113. Vita finally decided not to go through with the plan because of Harold's pleading letters. Ibid., 113-114.

> nearly all that night. Next day was Monday, 16 June [1919]; Harold had to go into Paris, and I sat quite dazed in my room holding my watch in my hand and watching the hands tick past the hour of Violet's wedding. All the time I knew, she was expecting a pre-arranged message from me, which I never sent.
> I was so stunned by all this at the time that I could not even think; it is only since then that I have realized how much every minute has burnt itself into me.
> On Tuesday night Violet and Denys came to Paris. On Wednesday I went to see her, at the Ritz. She was wearing clothes I had never seen before, but no wedding ring. I can't describe how terrible it all was—that meeting, and everything. It makes me physically ill to write about it and think about it, and my cheeks are burning. It was dreadful, dreadful. By then (…) I was living alone in a small hotel. I took her there, I treated her savagely, I made love to her, I had her, I didn't care, I only wanted to hurt Denys, even though he didn't know of it. I make no excuse, except that I had suffered too much during the past week and was really scarcely responsible (…).[50]

5) *Torture versus Incommunicability*. As the relationship continues in spite of the continuous breakages of trust enacted by the pursued[51] it becomes clearer and clearer that the one to have lost "control" is the pursued. She will inflict pain, whilst the pursuer will receive it and put up with all kinds of mistreatment to get any "cake's crumbs" but never quite an actual "slice," let alone the "cake" itself.

> Sadomasochism is about power and control. In every relationship, there is a minimizer and a maximizer. The minimizer tends to be more subdued within the context of the relationship, while the maximizer tends to be more evocative. When this delicate balance turns into a game of "Who Has the Power?" then minimizing and maximizing turns into submission and dominance, but not necessarily in the way that you'd expect. Typically, the minimizer becomes dominant, and the maximizer becomes submissive. In a relationship driven by power and control, rather than compassion and cooperation, one partner becomes "parentalized" and the other "infantilized." Most often, the maximizer, being more emotional, tends to become infantilized and submissive for fear of angering or disappointing their partner. The minimizer, being more contained, tends to gather the

[50] Ibid., 115.
[51] To which the pursuer responded with manipulative and deceptive behaviours and a few "white" lies, poor attempts to mould the reality towards which she felt powerless.

> power in the relationship, whether by intention or default, and, in this way, becomes parentalized.[52]

Once the psychologically sado-masochistic dynamic is formed, and daily, the pursued manages to win the game she *is bound to win*, the pursuer is asked to recognise her defeat socially, though unfortunately this is very rarely truly conscious in either parties. It is a sort of pledge or the price of submission asked by the pursued of the pursuer as proof of actual *understanding* of *her own extremely difficult* position. It may be that the pursuer is asked to be maid of honour at the wedding of her beloved (as Rosamund Grosvenor was for Vita, or Ellen Nussey for Charlotte Brontë, and here—if we could use less famous examples—the list would be endless), or something of the kind. Violet for instance did not go to Vita's wedding but at Vita's "sarcastic request, was one of the godmothers"[53] for her children. Violet masochistically accepted in the submitted spirit of accepting any crumbs that came from her beloved.

Once the pursuer has accepted such subordinate roles and various other increasing forms of social and self-humiliation, the interest of the pursuer towards the pursued starts slowly to fade (as what loses power loses mystery and desirability). Any underlying genuine feeling is damaged and contaminated by various forms of resentment which are usually expressed against the pursuer through the use of obvious pretexts under which to believe to be evading the real problem.[54]

It is easy to see how Violet's attitude in this dynamic was completely unveiled:

> Men tilich, it was Hell leaving you today. God how I adore you and want you. You can't know how much…Last night was perfection. …I am so proud of you, my sweet, I revel in your beauty, your beauty of form and feature. I exult in my surrender.[55]

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[52] Michael J. Formica, http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/enlightened-living/200806/sadomasochism-in-everyday-relationships, posted 13th June, 2008, accessed 1st June, 2014. "She wanted to remain abroad by herself, but I couldn't allow that—she is as helpless as a child and would have happily entrusted her passport, her ticket, her jewels and her money to the first person who offered to relieve her from the responsibility of looking after them." Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 130.

[53] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 73

[54] This is very visibile in the letters from Bordighera cited below.

[55] Leaska and Philips eds., *Violet to Vita*, 80.

And more:

> Mitya I miss you so—I don't care what I say—I love belonging to you—I glory in it, that you alone… have bent me to your will, shattered my self-possession, robbed me of my mystery, made me yours, yours, do that away from you I am nothing but a useless puppet! An empty husk. Alushka need not have been ashamed of being Dimitri's[56] mistress … on the contrary! ... (…) BURN THIS! *Promise*.[57]

This was written on 30th June 1918, not much longer after the blooming of the mutual feelings the two friends had guarded for/from each other.

Whilst this letter is charged with a very strong note of surrender, these lines, do not only reflect, somehow, the typically sexist roles of man and woman, in a society in which the woman was considered weak and dependant, where she belonged first to the father and then to her husband. These lines also reflect Violet's relationship with her mother, who, in place of a father "owned" her—before and after marriage for that matter—as she was always the one to make decisions for both Violet and even Denys Trefusis.

Furthermore, it should be noted that only for a close family member, and particularly for a mother, can one feel—as a child—deprived of mystery.

Here, the exposure of all the most vulnerable sides (however desirable, perhaps, to achieve with a partner) sealed the gradual degradation of the relationship, as the relationship wasn't truly mature enough to make the two partners able to continue seeing mystery in each other in spite of their respective vulnerable sides.

As Violet exposed herself in all her vulnerability, as her feelings grew and lent all the power to Vita, respect towards Violet kept falling in Vita, in an inversely proportional manner—as Violet let herself be taken for granted. This is clear in Violet's every letter nearly, but most of all perhaps in these lines written by Vita herself:

> I will stop only to say that from the beginning I was utterly sure of her; she might be elusive, she might be baffling, she might even be faithless, but under everything I had the rather insolent (but justified) certainty of her keeping to me. I listened to stories about her with a superior and proprietary smile. I would have remained for ten years without hearing a

[56] Dimitri is one of the names Violet uses for Vita.
[57] Leaska and Phillips eds., *Violet to Vita*, 80.

> word from her, and at the end of those ten years I would have held the same undamaged confidence that we must inevitably re-unite. There isn't a word of exaggeration in these statements—nothing, for that matter, in the whole of this writing is to be exaggerated or 'arranged'; its only merit will be truth, but truth as bleak as I can make it.
> (My writing has been broken here by Violet telephoning to me; I scarcely knew whether it was the Violet of fifteen years ago, or my passionate, stormy Violet of today, speaking to me in that same lovely voice).[58]

Thus the quality of feeling declines as the genuine love subsides, substituted by a more or less conscious, increasing sense of mutual- and self-alienation, resignation and lack of (self-) respect, though it is obvious that the pursuer felt more undignified than the pursued. "I'm losing every atom of self respect I ever possessed," wrote Violet in March 1919.[59]

The wearing "shilly-shally" goes on for three years; years in which the pursuer predictably undergoes all kinds of unpredictably sophisticated sadistic treatments and both parties take pleasure and pain in them.

Vita and Violet were repeating maternal traumas and humiliations undergone at a young age; Vita enacting them and Violet receiving. It must be noted that both Violet and Vita had extremely controlling (and seductive) mothers, who used affection and the administration of it, as a means of control).[60] As the pursuer's "ancestral" wound opened deeper and deeper, there was greater pleasure each time, in every reconciliation. Yet this was only a momentary—if deliriously pleasurable—relief, before the next trauma was again re-enacted by the two women who were by now

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[58] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 130.

[59] Leaska and Phillips eds., *Violet to Vita,* 117

[60] "Vita lived in the shadow of this imperious and power-hungry woman, who simultaneously wounded and fascinated her." Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 8. No matter how much abuse and pain her mother inflicted, Vita, humiliated and impotent as she might be, never faltered in her adoration. "Thus dominated by a tyrannical and erratic mother, Vita soon learned that if she was to find anything resembling coherence, she would have to create it herself, and this she did through writing." Ibid., 9. Conversely, in regard to Violet's relationship with her mother, these lines seem particularly exemplary: "O Mitya it is so horrible, so monstrous, so criminal to be with someone one doesn't care for when your whole being cries out for the person you do love and do belong to. In all my life I have never done anything as wrong as this. How can I get out of it? (…) What is this hideous farce I'm playing?" Yet, Souhami rightly comments: "Hell or not, Mrs Keppel when determined was a formidable opponent. Violet did not have the courage to resist her. She depended on her and craved her love." Souhami, A*lice Keppel and her Daughter*, 151.

playing a (winner or loser) role in each others' most painful childhood wounds, usually those related to rejection, humiliation, emotional abuse. This process climaxed in Amiens, where Vita made her grand choice and basically gave up the relationship, even though the final break only happened the following year.

As the relationship went on in an escalating power game with the "knife's handle" in the hand of the pursued, increasingly obsessive thoughts (and/or threats) of self-annihilation or suicide become ever stronger, as the climax drew closer.[61]

This is present as an underlying current in many letters written by Violet, though it comes across somewhat more powerfully in Vita's diary filtered by her own impressions of the situation. About her departure from Amiens she wrote: "I was shivering all over. (…) I remember saying over and over 'You mustn't ask me to think; I've been stunned and haven't recovered.' She was very urgent and desperate and said that if I cast her off altogether she would throw herself in the river, and I'm sure this was true."[62] Whereas on 28th March 1921 Vita wrote:

> I am writing in the light of later events, and writing in the midst of great unhappiness which I try to conceal from poor Harold, who is an angel upon earth. It is possible that I may never see Violet again, or that I may see her once again before we are parted, or that we may meet in future years as strangers; it is also possible that she may not choose to live; in any case it has come about indirectly owing to me, while I remain safe, secure and undamaged save in my heart. The injustice and misfortune of the whole thing oppresses me hourly; it gives me an awful sense of doom—Violet's doom, which she herself has consistently predicted.[63]

It is also to be noted that as the "game" goes on past the climax, and becomes ever more painful for the pursuer, the pursued becomes less and less sensitive to the pain inflicted upon the pursuer,[64] gaining less pleasure

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[61] See above.

[62] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 128.

[63] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 132-133.

[64] See above. It is interesting to note here Vita's reaction to Rosamund's pain: "I separate my loves into two halves: Harold, who is unalterable, perennial, and *best*, there has never been anything but absolute purity in my love for Harold, just as there has never been anything but absolute bright purity in his nature. And on the other hand stands my perverted nature, which loved and tyrannized over Rosamund and ended by deserting her without one heart-pang, and which now is linked irremediably with Violet, I have here a scrap of paper on which Violet,

at each reunion. The point at which everything seems unbearable for the pursuer occurs over and over again in the escalating "rollercoaster" in which she becomes ever more "tied" and the pursued ever more distant, until she is able to cut off the relationship altogether, a choice that the pursuer no longer has the inner strength to make. It is the pursued alone who can end the psychological torture by either giving in and fully acknowledging the relationship—risking everything socially; or definitively closing it and regaining social status. Vita obviously chose the second.

6) *Breaking point and Responsibilities*. The dynamic struggles to reach an end, and when it does it is usually after several abusive years. "Once violence starts, it just goes from bad to worse," has been noted by a counsellor for battered women in Brooklyn. "Violence begets violence. It always escalates, becoming in some cases a life threat."[65] This is certainly the same whether it is about physical or psychological violence.

It is not at all possible here to estimate how many women who have experienced this kind of sadistic lesbian relationship have committed, attempted or merely contemplated suicide. Firstly because the subject—being a twofold social taboo—has gone largely undocumented, and because a separate study from a psycho-sociological perspective would be necessary. Thus, these stories remain locked in the private history of the women in question, often ignored even by their family and closest friends, in the total ignorance of these forms of invisible violence. Secondly, not all women who have experienced suicidal instincts in such (or other, for

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intuitive psychologist, has scribbled, 'The upper half of your face is so pure and grave—almost childlike. And the lower half is so domineering, sensual, almost brutal—it is the most absurd contrast, and extraordinarily symbolical of your Dr Jekyll and Mrs Hyde personality.' That is the whole crux of the matter, and I see now that my whole curse has been a duality with which I was too weak and too self-indulgent to struggle." Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 39-40. And then again talking of her marriage: "Mother said we could be engaged and married in the autumn, so it was announced. Rosamund was miserable. She used to cry all night and every night, as I very well knew, because her bedroom was next door to mine at Knole, but as I had ceased to care for her and thought only of Harold, I was only exasperated by her tears and tried to stop them by getting angry, not by being sympathetic. I was cold as ice to her, and I see now what a beast I was, and how pathetic she was, because she really did adore me, and added to the misery of knowing that I cared for someone else, she must have felt that she had no one who cared two straws for her—except an obscure sailor whom she didn't like." Ibid., 41

[65]Mary Haviland, http://www.psywww.com/intropsych/ch16_sfl/psychological_sadism_in_immature_relationships.html. Accessed 2nd June 2014.

that matter) circumstances have acted upon them, and when they have, they may have been rescued.

Between Violet and Vita, the dynamic went on in such a way until it was no longer bearable, neither for one nor the other. Vita at some point chose to give in, giving up everything to be with Violet, and perhaps the abuse would have stopped, as all the occasions in which the two women were together uninterruptedly are described as radiant, unclouded and enchanting.[66] Yet apparently Vita's choice was not wholehearted, otherwise she would have gone through with it and would *not* have left plenty of cues on her trail[67] as if she had to make sure society (husband, family etc.) would intervene so as to make it impossible for her to leave, for she wasn't capable of taking full responsibility for her choices.[68] In fact, to avoid responsibility in the destruction of a feeling in itself probably

[66] About the holiday in Polperro in 1918 Vita wrote: "And sometimes we loved each other so much that we became inarticulate, content only to probe each others' eyes for the secret that was secret no longer." Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 153. And about the four-month holiday in France Vita wrote: "I shall never forget the evenings when we walked back slowly to our flat through the streets of Paris. I, personally, had never felt so free in my life. Perhaps we have never been so happy since. Significantly, about the return in England thereafter she wrote: "I felt like suicide after those four radiant months." Ibid., 112.

[67] In the same spirit as when Violet got married and she was to rescue her: "Then about five days before her weeding I suddenly got by the same post three miserable letters from Harold, who had scented danger, because, in order to break it to him more or less gently (and also because I was in a dreadful state of mind myself during all that time), I had been writing him letter full of hints." When Vita receives the imploring letters which attempt (successfully) at making her feel guilty, we see the role of the patriarchal authority that dictates the direction in which a woman must place her "soft feelings," that is towards her husband, not towards a woman like herself, who in this case happens to be her partner, her childhood friend and lover: "When I read those letters something snapped in my mind. I saw Harold, all sweet and gentle and dependent upon me. Violet was there. She was terrified. I remember saying, 'It's no god, I can't take you away.' She implored me by everything she could think of, but I was obdurate.' We went up to London together, Violet nearly off her head, and me repeating to myself phrases out of Harold's letters to give myself strength. (…) I had only one idea, to fly as quickly as I could and to put distance between me and temptation." From these lines Vita's homophobia can be observed in total clarity, how she condemned as evil "temptation" her love for a woman, and as right and *rightful* her affection for her husband.

[68] This attitude may also be compared the way in which Vita made Harold be with her in Paris when Violet got married on 16th June 1919 (ibid., 115).

felt as precious, Vita did all she could to make Violet the only one responsible for her choice. She did this by twisting in her own mind the once idealised image she had of her lover before she assumed a static pursuer's role. This is particularly apparent in the letters from France and Italy following Vita and Violet's separation reported below, and in those after Violet's marriage.[69]

About the separation itself, Vita wrote: "The upshot of it was that we refused to leave each other, and Harold said we should be starved out by having someone always with us till we gave way—it was all undignified and noisy to a degree, and I hated it."[70] However, as discussed, she finally managed to make Violet responsible for everything, taking the first available pretext so as to be able to hate and lose faith in her rather than hating Harold for forcing her to give up her love.

7) *Slander and Stigma*. Violet was always made into a dishonest and deceitful woman, someone not to be trusted by anyone in general either, of those who surrounded them, simply because she was shameless in the natural pursuit of the fulfilment of her love and desires. "The injustice of this is eating into my soul- for pity's sake commit some theft and then perchance you will be caught and allowed to share my cell, for you are as guilty as I am", wrote Violet as she realised this.[71]

Yet by reading her letters one by one, one can't but see her amazing honesty. She was unshakable in her love for so many years and did everything she could to obtain it. Her white lies and manipulations are banal things to make one smile, and appear merely as a sheer survival strategy to conquer what was vital for her in order to live, in spite of a society that deplored her kind of love, and would under no condition accept that a woman could ever place herself and her own desires before conventions and morals. There is a sentence which, more than any other, expresses her, afterall, basic simplicity, despite all nuances of her perhaps complex personality:

> O Beloved, and that night we slept in each other arms… I feel it is so dreadfully wrong of us to attempt to conceal it, for me not to tell. There would never be a particle of happiness in my life (provided it continued?) away from you, …[72]

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[69] See Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 135-205 and 15-20.
[70] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 125.
[71] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 275. See 275-292, in which the slandering and stigmatisation process Violet underwent is particularly clear.
[72] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 112.

This was just one of her endless attempts to make Vita stop regarding their "affair" as something trivial and wrong, to be hidden and disrespected.

The denigration and dehumanisation of the pursuer is amplified by the slander enacted by society towards her. The rawness of Violet's need, stark naked before everyone's eyes at the breaking point of the relationship, was stigmatised and turned—in society's eyes—into a sort of insanity, and she, as the pursuer, was regarded as someone ill, both by the pursued's family and friends and by her own family, as clearly visible, amongst other things, in the final, insincere position adopted by Pat Dansey. Violet, as a pursuer who did not want to give up her deepest need and desire, was slandered by society and by Vita herself, whilst Vita managed to keep her role of power within it by adopting the role of pursued and keeping a foot in both camps. Having Violet adopt a position that, from a societal point of view, had always been seen as loser, even her friend Pat betrayed her during the most painful period of her life arriving to take Vita's side, so to take distance from Violet's stigma and gain the power of the pursued, of the "winner."

> *Pat Dansey to Vita] 1a Lower Grovesnor Street,* 8th May 1920
>
> (…) I tried all I could to persuade Violet to go back to England because I realized how cruelly hard it was for you to be nagged at to break your word to everyone who had been good and understanding for you. My dear, I worry for you as much as for Violet, more perhaps for you than for her. I wanted so much to talk to you when we were in Venice but did not like to—it's so difficult and I was so dreadfully afraid my intentions might be misinterpreted.
> I think you so wonderful to Violet—but, oh, Vita, think sometimes of your own happiness—not only of Violet's. She, as I have told her over and over again, will always come out "top." (…) She must prove herself stable, faithful and loyal before she can demand you to throw all away. We can never change the child's character, and we must accept the fact that to gain her point of the moment, she will say and do anything, but, dear me, she rarely takes me in. I am in future going to take as much trouble that you shan't suffer and be made unhappy as I would for Violet, and if the day comes when I give you warning you are going to suffer, you will know my motive is genuine.[73]

[73] Ibid., 212.

The break-up and Italy

After years of tortuous "shilly-shally," Violet and Vita decided to leave together for good. They had saved money to buy a house and were to meet in Amiens, where Violet was to arrive a day earlier than Vita, so as to avoid attracting further public attention. Unfortunately Vita allowed (or could not prevent, we shall never know) Denys to follow her on the ferry to France,[74] never to return."[75] Delirious and somewhat joyful was apparently the trip through the sea-storm and the first night in France, which saw the three of them reunited: Violet, Vita and Denys. The latter however, did finally give in and left the two women to return to England.[76]

Unfortunately Violet's mother urged him to go right back immediately by helicopter with Harold Nicolson.[77] The pathetic scene that ensued on 14th February 1920 in Amiens gave Vita an excuse to leave Violet for good with the first pretext to hand. Namely Vita chose to believe Denys' declaration to have actually had some sort of sexual contact with Violet.[78]

It is most likely, that *if* Violet did to some extent give in to some kind of sexual contact with Denys, it was not sought by her, as her repulsion to men was absolutely clear.[79] Violet's faithfulness towards Vita is clear and constant in each and every letter of hers, and so is her plain disinterest in men:[80]

> …Mytia, you don't know to what a pitch I have brought my truthfulness with Loge.[81] This is the sort of conversation that takes place constantly:
>
> L: What are you thinking about?
> Me: Vita.
> L: Do you wish Vita were here?
> Me: Yes.
> L: (…) You don't care much about being with men, do you?
> Me: No, I infinitely prefer women.
> L: You are strange, aren't you?
> Me: Stranger than you have any idea of.[82]

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[74] Nicolson, *Protrait of a Marriage*, 119-121.
[75] Ibid., 169.
[76] Ibid., 121.
[77] Ibid., 173.
[78] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 172.
[79] See above.
[80] See above.
[81] Denys.
[82] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 149.

Vita and Harold

At this point it feels necessary to open a small parenthesis on Vita and Harold's relationship, though space and topic limitations do not allow for an in-depth analysis.

> I got a rather sad letter from Harold this morning. As a rule he does not allow me to see when he is depressed. His sadness never fails to touch me to the quick. He is the only person of whom I think with consistent tenderness. I can say with truth that I have never, never cherished a harsh thought about him; at the most I have been irritated, but then he has always known it. I would not allow myself to be irritated against him while he remained unconscious, or when he was not there. I can say this with absolute truth. He has complete power over my heart, though not over my spirit. It is real tenderness I feel for him, it is a constant sense of "Tread gently for you tread upon my dreams." I think with tenderness of Dan [Benedict] sometimes, of Basil [Nigel] very rarely, of Chloe [Violet Trefusis] never. I am so harsh to her that I could put almost any strain of suffering upon her without feeling a qualm of pity—could, and have. All this makes the whole thing so agonizing and so puzzling.[83]

Firstly, the complexity and deceitfulness of Vita's relationship with her husband[84] is to be noted. She told him she loved him and he too loved her, though he had sex with men, small affairs which could not in any way compare (neither in depth nor duration) to Vita and Violet's relationship. "You play a very strange and important role in my life. You have grown up with me. We have been children together: consequently you have always been there,"[85] Violet had once written in an attempt to make Vita see the preciousness of their relationship, and somehow the priority which she felt it should have.

Vita on the other hand depicted her love for Harold as the only thing good and simple in her life, beyond drama; an anchor.[86] Yet it seems impossible to believe either of them truly loved each other in the way they professed, and displayed or flaunted. Harold wanted Vita to leave Violet though she was aware this would shatter her. More than once he

[83] See above. Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 19.
[84] Grotesquely idealised in *Portrait of a Marriage* by their son Nigel in his chiefly homophobic interpretation of his mother's diaries, which it is pointless to discuss here.
[85] Ibid., 81
[86] Ibid., 145, 156, 162.

empathised with Denys, stating that Vita and Violet had no right to ruin two men's lives. He was apparently oblivious of the fact the two women loved each and would have to ruin their own lives so not to ruin his and Denys', who on no account could truly be made happy by two women who wanted to be elsewhere anyway. It's hard to see where love fits into this.

What really does come through seems to be a rather dysfunctional relationship of mutual dependency, in which Vita sought protection from social stigma and the liberty to keep her power in every aspect of life, least but not last social status. From Harold's sickening letters to Vita, one senses a very strong form of emotional manipulation, which used a forgiving, often submissive, attitude to control Vita by allowing her some degree of freedom and then making her feel guilty for it.[87]

In response, Vita seemed to manipulate him by feigning exaggerated devotion so as to keep him being "forgiving" and keep herself free to have a foot in both camps.[88] By reading certain letters in particular, it seems certain that she either lied to him or to Violet,[89] for the clash between her two selves was so dramatic.

In this inner clash between heart and mind, typical of women awakening to the awareness of their raw desires in still strongly patriarchal societies, it is immediately clear that Violet represented the heart, with its leaps that sometimes carried Vita away to the point of almost leaving all security just so as to live life. On the other hand Harold personified the mind.

In spite of Harold's triumph, or of the fact her letters were burned by Denys[90] and in spite of her violence against Violet, it was Violet whom Vita loved to "desperation,"[91] what her heart would have chosen had society's restrictions been less severe—or her courage greater.

The Italian letters

I have now selected some letters Violet wrote to Vita from Bordighera after their failed attempt to elope, an event which was to signal, more or

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[87] Nigel Nicolson, ed., *Vita and Harold: The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, 1910–1962* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992).
[88] Ibid., 3-43, 103-133.
[89] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 99, 133, 145-146.
[90] Just as (curiously enough) Charlotte Brontë's husband burned the letters she received from her "friend" Ellen Nussey. Cleia March, ed., *Letters to Charlotte: The Letters from Ellen Nussey to Charlotte Bronte* (London: Pink Press, 2010).
[91] Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 129.

less, the decline and end of their relationship. These will be analysed in view of the various phases of the psychological dynamic outlined above, with particular reference to phase five and six, here most relevant.[92]

Bordighera, 2nd March 1920
Men cheringue, how *could* you send me that telegram? Have you no pity, no understanding? Have you never received any of my letters? Pat is simply tearing her hair out with despair. You have never answered any of her telegrams. She says she sent you three – surely you might have answered them? (…) I do think you might have taken some notice of them? As for me, I really don't know what to think, you are so utterly unkind and unreasonable. You completely ignored what I said about coming to you for always if you still wanted me?[93]
How do you suppose I got Denys to consent to our being here now, except by agreeing to go away with him for a time? Do you suppose I want to go with him? *Fool, fool, fool*! Besides which, as I said before, short of going away with you for good, which I would rather do than anything, and which you very well know, my mother absolutely insists on my being with Denys; if I were with anyone else, say Bagnold (Pat and Joan are shortly going to Venice and don't want me), they would start the same persecution all over again—to put it bluntly, whatever woman I were with! For mercy's sake, try to understand.[94] If you want me… say so and D. will clear out.[95]
Mitya I *implore* you, be a little kind and pitiful. … Now listen carefully: Denys has to go to England on business as soon as the trains are running from the Riviera (or he may go via Switzerland). Shall I get him to take me with him, surreptitiously, which would mean my being in England about a week at the outside (I should have to conceal the fact from my mother) and then returning, with him, or shall I contrive to stay in Italy for 3 weeks?
I can only be here till the 15th, and if you have not come by then, he is going to Venice—and I shall have to go too. I could come to you for a frew days from Venice to Milan or Florence, or whatever you suggested. I know he would consent to this without my asking him (he is at Menton today).
Mitya, I implore you to be sensible and realize that my being with him till May is my mother's arrangement. It can only be avoided in one way, that is if I tell him on the 15th of March that I wish for complete independence, and that I am going to join you, in which case we must see our family, and have it out with them.

[92] I have underlined in the footnotes to which phases of the Violet and Vita's dynamic each part of these letters may belong.
[93] See above, Phase 5.
[94] See above, Phase 7.
[95] See above, Phase 6.

Otherwise, I will either come to England (against my mother's wish, but I don't care") or you must meet me somewhere in Italy within the next three weeks (...).
If you bring me to England, darling, I shall look for something better than a few minutes snatched in Grosvenor Street or a hotel. I mean, I should either have to come to Long Barn, or we could go somewhere else in the country together. All I implore is, send me a telegram on receiving this letter telling me which you have decided upon…[96]

Boridighera, 2nd March 1920
I am in absolute despair: you don't seem to have grasped anything. Either you have never got my letters, or you deliberately choose to ignore them – which is it?[97] In the letters I wrote you from Toulon I told you that my mother had first said I must go around the world with D. She then relented and said I must go to Jamaica for 4 months. Finally, I got her to say (by tears and supplication) that if I was abroad till *May*, it would suffice. All this I told you in my letters.
She then wrote (or wired) to the Laverys and said she wished me to got to Tangier with D. She said that I couldn't stay there for very long, and D. told her he wanted to take me to Ragusa, which she jumped at. You suggest my coming to England. … Even supposing I came, I could only stay at a hotel in London; if Mama found out I was at Grosvenor Street, she would certainly come after me—moreover, I could only stay a week.[98] You would have to come up from Long Barn to see me for a few snatched hours. Instead of which, if you are willing, you can come to me now and stay at Genoa or anywhere you like, alone and unmolested till the 15th! D. is going to be in England all that time, and is very anxious to know what day you are coming. Your fruitless and endless discussions by telegram and letter are simply driving me mad with fury—God knows, the time is short enough, yet, you still persist in wasting it.
Why on earth did you go to England all that time, when you were so much more easily 'got at' in Paris? You must be mad. … If you knew how Pat and I have worked at this! She has been an absolute angel, only she says she is at her wits' end. As you were *always* going to Florence and as Harold has never raised any objection to your going, why can't you go a little sooner? …
No, if you don't come, it will be simply because you don't want to. When I was in Paris, you told me you were going to Florence in a few days. I know there aren't any strikes on all the railways in France (…) If you don't come—and my heart is leaden with despair at the thought—*you won't see*

[96] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita,* 190-1. See above, Phase 5.
[97] See above, Phase 5.
[98] See above, Phase 7.

me till May—that is to say, nearly three months since I saw you in Paris, which was on the 14th of February. It is tantamount to saying you never want to see me again. In one of your letters you say how delicious it would be to spend a few days in Italy together! …
Mitya you will have broken my heart if you don't come. (…)[99]

Bordighera, 3rd March 1920
Sometimes it seems so impossible that you shouldn't be coming, that I should be doomed to yet another failure.
… I want you so, Mitya. I lie awake for hours at night, longing for you hungrily, hopelessly. … If you ceased to care for me, I should cease to live. … Never say I don't love you, if I have to travel across Europe sitting bolt upright, to England which I detest, braving the fury of my mother, merely to catch a glimps of you! *Je t'adore.* …[100]

Bordighera, 3rd March 1920
It is almost unbelievably hot. I have climbed up here by myself, and feel exhausted. I am stitting in the shade of the olive groves on top of a hill. I can't begin to describe how lovely it is; there is a mosaic of wildflowers winding amongst the olive trees and peach blossom everywhere. On the high peaks the snows are melting, leaving only white coronets. The Mediterranean is wrapped in a blue haze and without a ripple. O Mitya, to have you here! … If you can't come I shall get back to England by hook or crook. …
How little I want to see England. How intensely I hate the North!
Damn it all. My great grandmother was a Greek! We don't belong to the North I still less than you.[101]

[Telegram] 3rd March 1920
AM FORBIDDEN TO GO TO ENGLAND TILL MAY BY MY MOTHER EVERY THING SATISFACTORILY ARRANGED WITH DENYS TANGIER PUT OFF TILL FIFTEEN SO I CAN BE WITH YOU HAVE MOVED HEAVEN AND EARTH IT IS OUR LAST CHANCE OF SEEING EACH OTHER TILL MAY YOUR FAULT IF FAILS THOUGH IN DESPAIR CAN'T DO MORE.[102]

[99] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita,* 192. See above, Phase 5.
[100] Ibid., 194. See above, Phase 5.
[101] Ibid., 192-193. See above, Phase 7.
[102] Ibid., 194. See above, Phase 7 and 5.

[Telegram] Bordighera, 3rd March 1920
IF YOU WONT COME TO ME I MUST COME TO YOU FOR FEW DAYS IF CAN GET PLACE IN TRAIN TANT PIS IF MOTHER FINDS ME OUT STRIKES OVER.[103]

Bordighera, 5th March 1920
…Surely I am sufficiently unhappy already without your taunting me with vulgar 'reprisals' at the Casino de Paris!—And reprisals for what?
I wrote to you always twice a day, if not three times before I came here. I have not written to you here, because you were so remarkably obtuse about my question. You say, Mitya, that you are 'not in a fit state to consider anything now' as if you were barely convalescent from a very serious illness, I daresay, but it's rubbish, all the same. If you don't choose o consider anything now, you will not see me for two months from the 10th of March. That is to say, nearly ten weeks from now. I shall have to go to Tangier with Denys, and after that, wherever he likes—probably Jamaica.
…One dreary day limps after another dreary day—if you don't come back to me, there will be no love for me, Mitya—ever. (…) If you want me you can have me, if you don't want me, say so. *Je ne t'ennuirai plus*. (…) darling, *please* write to me; I shall die if you don't.[104]

Bordighera, 5th March 1920
Men tiliche, how could you think that, whatever Mama said, I would give you up? You can dismiss that theory for ever. …[105]
It infuriates me not to know where you are. I got about 4 contradictory telegrams from you yesterday, some saying you were going to England, other saying you were not.
Why the devil are you going to England? I hope Harold has to go and is dragging you with him. And why Long Barn? It can't be business then? "Pour revivre le passé"? O God, I am in such a Hell of jealousy and uncertainty about you.
I have sent you a telegram—in fact two—asking you to come here. Pat has also sent you one. (…) She and Joan seem flawlessly happy to-gether. … I simply can't tell you how I envy them—alone, independent, unmolested. O Mitya, why can't *we* have a house together?
I am so relieved to have got away from Denys. (…)
On the 10th I should either have to go to Tangier with Denys, or I shall regain my complete liberty. It depends entirely on what you propose to do.
O to have you here, my beautiful beloved! … [106]

[103] Ibid., 195. See above, Phase 5.
[104] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 195-196. See above, Phase 5.
[105] See above, Phase 7.
[106] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 196-197. See above, Phase 5.

Bordighera, 6th March 1920
… Darling, how can you be so unkind as neither to write nor answer my telegrams? What is there for you to be angry about? I am quite alone here; I suppose Denys will reach England tomorrow. I am not going to Tangier with him, or anywhere else. I am merely waiting for your 'orders'. Moreover I am completely free and independent. …
I am so unhappy because I never hear from you, darling. Perhaps you will get this on your birthday (the 8th) which I had planned you should spend in the South with me.
I have got you rather a nice present, but nothing is ever nice enough. …
If your decision holds good, I shall try and get a place in the train at the end of the week.
Forgive squalor, but I must wait till I'm all right again. *I have got a pain this morning.*
Poor Pat gave a cry of genuine disappointment when I said you wouldn't come here. "Oh why won't she come to Italy?" she said. "You two poor children could be so happy." She and Joan are going to Venice. They want us to go too? I should so love to see Venice. I have never been there. Contrast Venice with Grosvenor Street! …
Sonia and Mama have either gone or are just going to Spain for an indefinite period. She won't have anything to do with me, and barely shook my hand when I saw her.[107]

[Telegram] Bordighera. 8th March 1920
NOT GOING TO TANGIER NOT THE END A NEW BEGINNING AM ALONE AND FREE CAN MEET MEN TILICHE ANYWHERE UNDER THE SUN YOUR LETTER WORLDS WORST RUBBISH.[108]
Bordighera, 8th March 1920
(…) I lost ten thousand francs at Monte Carlo, because I felt absolutely desperate, and gambling is the only thing which makes one forget for the moment.
O my sweet, what frightfully silly notions you have got into your head! I could afford to laugh at them! For instance, the one that I was demented with jealousy about Nancy Cunard whom I *implored* D.T. to go and console himself with!
Darling, it's too absurd! I wish you could ask him about it? (…)[109]
What can have happened to all the letters I have written to you from here? I know the post office is hopeless; it is a private concern owned by the family, and you can buy the whole place for three thousand lire! The people say that letters sent from here seldom arrive, and no more do

[107] Ibid., 197. See above, Phase 5.
[108] Ibid., 198. See above, Phase 5.
[109] Ibid., 200. See above, Phase 5.

telegrams, or else they arrive so distorted that no one can make head or tail of them. If I were to stay here much longer, I should certainly buy the post office.
And now to business: I can't live any longer without seeing you: that's flat. If you won't come to Italy—and God knows you won't—I shall return to England the moment you let me know definitely. If it wasn't for you, I would not go back for ages—perhaps never—I worship the South, and my freedom. I revel in the thought of having no house, no possessions, no ties, no plans, and very little money. …
I live only for the sight of you again. As I said tonight in my telegram, it is not the end, it is a new beginning. It is the end if you insist on its being the end, and if you insist, you will kill me. …If you told me to meet you in Biskra, I would meet you there! Shall we both go to Ragusa, Mitya? Ragusa is as wild and uncivilized as you like—or Corfu or Cyprus—or merely Florence?[110]

8th March, Your birthday
Darling, why *won't* you come to Italy? Can't you tear yourself away from Long Barn? Aren't you a little inconsistent? You have told me all along how you hated my being with D.T. and now you are deliberately suggesting I should return to him! As long as I am abroad, I am *free*; there is *no date fixed for my return*; I can remain abroad *indefinitely*. There is a sort of vague idea that I may go back at the beginning of the summer, but there would be no fuss made if I didn't. I really don't understand, Mitya, darling. Why did you say you were going to go to Florence if you didn't intend to. …I suppose Harold has persuaded you not to go? What about your professed craving for solitude? If you are still adamant about England, I *will come,* but apart from seeing you, *it is completely against my will*. I know you will understand how I loathe giving up my beloved freedom, and returning to that loathsome Grosvenor Street. I don't do you the injustice of thinking you would drag me back for the pleasure of occasionally spending a day with me in London. *No, Mitya, it must be clearly understood; if I come back, you go with me to somewhere like Ploperro for at least a week, AND AT ONCE.*
Besides, it is really a legitimate request—you will have been with Harold for a month by the time I come back. You can spare me a week. …

I made a mistake. Your Birthday is today.[111]

Bordighera, 8th March 1920
(…) O Mitya, don't you mind any more? What is it?...

[110] Ibid. See above, Phase 5.
[111] Ibid., 201. See above, Phase 5.

I am really just as cut off from my family now as I would have been, had I run away with you! I think they have washed their hands of me! Save for that time I met my mother by accident at the Casino at Monte Carlo, she has neither written, nor taken the smallest notice of me, and though she is only 23 miles away, she has never asked me to go and see her, or suggested coming to see me. The time I saw her in the Casino, she said she didn't care a damn what I did, provided that D. was in London to look after her money

At first I was a little hurt, but now *I* don't care a damn! (I think my sister's behaviour hurt me most.) But after all, those are unessential things, things that I have learnt to brush aside like crumbs off a dinner table—There are only two essential ones: You and Freedom.
Life has become strangely simplified. … [112]

[Telegram] Bordighera, 10th March 1920
DO YOU REALIZE SHALL HAVE TO BE IN GROSVENOR STREET WITH DENYS NOTHING WOULD INDUCE ME TO RETURN EXCEPT TO SEE YOU BY RETURNING SHALL LOSE MY LIBERTY WHY DON'T YOU GO FLORENCE AS ORIGINALLY INTENDED CONSIDER WELL AND WIRE FINALLY.[113]

Bordighera, 10th March 1920
My darling precious love, I have just got two letters from you, but *no telegram*? You can't *possibly* be angry with me for not wanting to go back to captivity? It is so tiresome, not hearing, as I want to get my wagon-lit, if I am going back to England.
… I was so wretched all today; I went and lost another 5000 francs at Monte Carlo, in order to drown the miserable convinction that you no longer cared whether you saw me or not.
Mitya, at lunch they played the Serenade from the Les Millions D'Arlequin —I nearly burst into tears. The last time I heard it was at the Hotel de Paris, and you went out and left me, do you remember? Monte Carlo is us; it is ours, that lovely coastline, that limpid sea. I am keeping it for you, Mitya, …You remember that dowdy little dressmaker whom I used to talk to? … I talk to her by the hour, but she already *guessed*! She thinks you are lovely. I asked her to lunch on the strength of that, and the next time I go in we are going to lunch together—bless the poor kind squalid people in the Casino. I love them—I have no use for 'ladies and gentlemen', Mitya. They are the only people, Mitya, the poor, the struggling, the unsuccessful, the infinitely kind-hearted. *I hate success*. (…)[114]

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[112] Ibid. See above, Phase 7.
[113] Ibid., 202. See above, Phase 5.
[114] Ibid. See above, Phase 5 and 7.

Bordighera, 10th March 1920
Mitya, you would try the patience of a saint!
I am positively tired out with explaining things to you! You are up to your old game of answering neither yes nor no. …It's no use your pretending you don't get my telegrams, because you *do*!
Especially the ones I send you from Monte Carlo. I sent you one on Monday from M. C.; it *couldn't* have been more explicit—"Shall have to be Grosvenor Street with Denys; shall lose my liberty by returning, nothing would induce me to return except to see you! Why not go to Florence as originally intended? Consider well and wire finally."
You have chosen to ignore this one completely. Very well, to please you, I shall drag myself back to that poisonous Grosvenor Street, that hated and "watched" and restricted existence. I will put on my cast-off shackles—for you, in order to see you. I will make this sacrifice, but, if ever you dare say one word of jealousy, or attempt one single row with me, because, *owning to your own silly fault*, I am with Denys, I will clear out of that pestilential country and you shan't set eyes on me again. …
Except for the week I took motoring here, I have never slept under the same roof as Denys. When he was on the Riviera, he wasn't, as you always seem to think, *here*, but at Monte Carlo. He occasionally spent the night at a hotel at Bordighera, but he never came here, except at my request, and I only sent for him twice in order to discuss plans, and to tell him I was going to see you. He promised me he would not come and he didn't.
All this time I have never bothered you about being with Harold, when you told me in Paris you wanted to be alone. You have been with him *consistently* since February 14th, except, perhaps, for two days when he preceded you to England. …
No, Mitya, You have played me a dirty trick.[115]
O Mitya, I can no longer write my book—our book—I can't, you know, when I'm unhappy, and if it never gets finished, you will have killed it.
Don't pay too much attention to what your mother says—since when has she become a competent judge of literature? As to its maligning me in any way—I could not be more maligned and shunned than I am at present, partly, thanks to our mother, who wrote to someone I know who was staying at Monte Carlo, saying "that arch-fiend, Violet has been trying to upset the Nicolson's marriage, etc. etc." I don't care, as you know, but she has made things pretty hot for me in London, which is rather a bore if I have to return there, especially as I don't want to be perpetually *en tete* with D. T. and, if no one will come near me, that is bound to happen. People have told my mother that she has gone about telling everyone she met (people I have seen at Monte Carlo have cut me dead) and making the most frightful mischief—*Moi je m'en fiche*, but an uninterrupted solitude

[115] Ibid., 203-204. See above, Phase 5 and 7.

with D.T. will be the result, if I do go back. … I would commit suicide (seriously) if I had to stay in Grosvenor Street alone. …If I deliberately step into my hated cage again, you must at least feed me through the bars! …

Darling, this is England: Grosvenor Street	
	ugliness
	shackles
	detestable people
	conventions
	restrictions
	watery sun
and the South is:	liberty
	la branche,[116] as a substitute for G. St.
	no conventions
	no restrictions
	no detestable people
	sun
	heat
alas England for you is:	strange, unknown, accessible countries
	adventure
	Long Barn
	your books
	your garden
	Knole
	your father
	people you like (…)[117]

Victim or victimised?

In the title I have chosen to define psychological *sadomasochistic* lesbian relationships merely as psychologically "sadistic" lesbian relationships, to take away the element of victimisation of the object of violence, for the reason that the "victim" of violence too is enacting a form of sadism. Even though it is against herself rather than against the partner, this does not make her any less responsible for the violence enacted and permitted in the relationship. This dynamic seems so obvious from the outside whilst reading Violet's letters to Vita up to 1921, Vita's to Violet from World War II onwards, Vita's diaries and Violet's *Don't Look Around* as well as

[116] Editors' note: "literally, the branch of a bough (of a tree)." See above, Phase 5 and 7.
[117] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita,* 200. See above, Phase 5, 6 and 7.

when watching the BBC film adaptation of *Portrait of a Marriage*.[118] I have chosen not to use Vita's *Challeng*e because the romantic filter Vita placed over it makes it far too complex for the purposes of interpretation, when space is so limited.

One may feel impelled to shake the two women out of their pathetic role-play, out of the unchangeable roles in their disturbing power game, which for both of them somehow started out as a more or less conscious survival strategy[119] but ended up ruining their lives. Or at least it ruined Violet's, who by choosing to be (but was it a conscious choice?) wholehearted, naked and overexposed in the whole affair, stood such little chance with the pathologically controlling, manipulative, elusive and incurably sadistic Vita. What chances did Violet stand, other than playing the pursuer-victim role or some farce—predictable as it was dangerous (too predictable to be truly manipulative)—simply to try and get Vita to struggle for their love as she herself did for so many years? They were children when it all started and Violet, precocious as she was *made* to be, was only ten years old and even then the pursuer. Vita repeatedly described her as more "skilled" and mature than herself. Violet's only weapons to get by on were apparently those historically "feminine" ones, those her mother had allowed her to have—or should we say *forced upon* her?[120]

What option did Violet have, other than to use her "feminine" weapons, save for giving in and *up*, or getting out of Vita's life as soon as she possibly could? Sadly the latter never happened, as even when she did give in, she never truly let go. This comes accross in her letters to Vita during WWII and after, not only from earlier letters up to 1921, here cited, in which she declares she never will:

> (…) You make the mistake of your life if you think that 'having striven', 'I'm giving up the strife – I'*m NOT* and I'm damned if I ever will. I'll

[118] Which Diana Souhami rightly noticed, should have rather been called "Portrait of a lesbian relationship." Souhami, *Alice Keppel and her Daughter*, xiii.

[119] Violet's totalitarian approach to love and Vita's incapacity to go for it and take responsibility for her choices may in fact both be seen as two survival strategies, however opposed and complementary.

[120] "I was twelve and she was two years younger but in every instinct she might have been six years my senior." Nicolson, *Protrait of a Marriage*, 26. "I might have been a boy of eighteen, and she a woman of thirty-five." Nicolson, *Protrait of a Marriage*, 106.

> battle for you as long as I've got breath left in my body – I don't care if you think it futile-
> You damned silly fool. If I had given up the hope of ever being with you, don't you know I would have put a bullet through my brain long ago? You wait and see—it may take years, but you wait and see—if I can't have you, I'll have my revenge.[121]

It is 1st May, 1919; a year to the end. Here, as in many other moments of sheer honesty randomly mixed up with other elements of her usual masochistic and self-destructive role, Violet is fully revealing her cards. Later in the day she confesses:

> (…) How often must I remind you that I'm not intellectual and that I exult in the fact! May I quote Oscar Wilde without being intellectual? "Where an intellectual expression begins, all beauty ceases"—not that there is any beauty in the stuff I write you—It's sheer undiluted mental anguish, that's what it is-
> I love you so.[122]

And then again "I shall love you till I die, whatever you do", on 2nd July 1920.[123] On this note she goes on and on, letter after letter throughout the years of their intermittent relationship.

Violet wasted her life loving Vita, or perhaps—more than Vita—on an elusive goal, deception, an attachment to pain and self-victimisation. Even though she became at some level aware, at least of the waste, she too, not unlike Vita, avoided responsibility for her choices, or more specifically in her case, for what she allowed in her life. She did not realise (perhaps she had no instruments to do so) that what truly played a great part in her "immutable love" for Vita was probably a projection, a self-reflection, which seems to have been something intermingled on so many levels with an ancestral wound of hers, connected with maternal abandonment and emotional neglect, perhaps because she knew that her mother would always place society and appearance way above her, as was largely proven during and after her separation from Vita.[124]

"My life is empty and futile and wasted", Violet wrote to her friend Pat Dansey on 9th June 1921.[125] And even more clearly, two years earlier, in

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[121] Leaska and Phillips, *Violet to Vita*, 126.
[122] Ibid., 127.
[123] Ibid., 221.
[124] See above, letter from 8th March 1920 for instance.
[125] Leaska and Phillips, *Violet to Vita*, 284

1919: "Across my life only one word will be written: "Waste—Waste of love, waste of talent, waste of enterprise." [126]

Again here it is almost as though, mixed up with anger at herself and self-blame, she was writing that Vita was the cause of her wasted life, *not simply* that Vita wasted her love. This "*doglike devotion*",[127] as she herself termed it, was the crucial trait which allowed the sadistic role-play to kick in.

The moment the pursued is so responsible for the pursuer's happiness, as to be responsible for her whole life (and whether or not it is wasted), it is obvious that the pursued will find it difficult to deal with the excess of power now in her hands. It is also likely that, at a loss as to *what to do* with all that power, she may take advantage of it rather than leaving it with those to whom it belongs.

Violet invested Vita with a "Goddess-like" power, too closely resembling that which a child gives to a mother and yet typical of those women who treat their lovers as spoiled children: "We have been children together: consequently you are always there. You have always been 'there'. You are as immutable as the mountains, as reliable as the seasons!"[128] And again December 1920: "You were so radiantly, so primitively beautiful, so free, so omnipotent, Dionysius, any woman would have willingly given her life and her soul to satisfy the most fugitive of your caprices!"[129]

The repetition/emulation at some level of the mother-child relationship (and all associated traumas) seem obvious, but to this several other roles are added too (namely that of lover, life-partner and friend), as if the object of desire must become the "Omnipotent" means to fill every emptiness, every hunger.[130]

"You will probably become bored with the doglike devotion of a lifetime", wrote Violet.[131] This great power reflects the power to create and destroy, attributed to immanent pre-Olympian goddesses somehow surviving in the more capricious Olympian deities to whom Violet often referred, as belonging to the part of her education dictated by classical patrimony.[132]

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[126] Ibid., 242.
[127] "You will probably become bored with 'the doglike devotion of a lifetime." Ibid., 5th September 1919, 159.
[128] Ibid., 81
[129] Ibid.,264
[130] Ibid.,48-49.
[131] Ibid.,159.
[132] Sonia Keppel, *Edwardian Daughter* (London: Hamish Halminton, 1958), 113.

From the moment at which the pursued is not able to embody the (*Great*) Mother's role as unconditionally a goddess, and therefore inevitably abuses the power she is invested with, there can be no escape from the sadomasochistic lesbian dynamic described above and still common today, probably for the reason that when loving a woman it has always been so difficult for those who have a totalistic approach to romantic involvements, to fully discern the she-lover as fulfiller of certain desires, from the mother as fulfiller of *every* desire, for the mother is truly the first and most totalitarian form of love that a child experiences.[133]

However, it is interesting to note in Violet's process of victimisation, how still relatively early on, in 1910—probably already sensing the pain that was coming from the difficulty of *trying to conquer* Vita's love, she attempted to reverse the role, as testified by this disquieting letter written when she was just 16.

> *16, Grosvenor Street, 31st October 1910*
> Tonight I'm crazy … I want to hurt someone: if you were here I should make you sit down. I should put my two hands on your shoulders and press … I should dig my nails into your flesh, my hands would contract, I should crush your sleeves, your bones.
> I should like to tear you up, to mutilate you, to make you unrecognizable … But since you are not with me, I shall be content with little … You've come, haven't you, with the clear intent of making me appreciate at all costs the dangers to which I shall expose myself if I break fate with you?
> (…) It is obvious from my quiet behaviour that your speech impressed me profoundly and that consequently new resolutions began to dawn in my mind. Certainly you could see it sufficiently! And if only your imagination could take it in, you were holding so to speak my soul in your hands, you could mould it any way you like.[134]

In view of the phases outlined above and of the letters from Bordighera showing the final outcome of the psychologically violent relationship, I have selected a few citations which show in an escalation the increasing pain of Violet up to the culminating point in 1920 after their separation in Amiens.

> Do you think, are you misguided enough to think that *I* want you to become great and famous as the wife of Harold Nicolson? […] The

[133] One of the very few points on which it is very hard to disagree with Freud.
[134] Leaska and Phillips, eds., *Violet to Vita*, 64.

beautiful and accomplished […] wife of one of our promising young diplomats. My God Mitya, if I could kill you I would.
… You write me literary, beautifully polished letters, with melodious, flawlessly turned sentences. Why don't you curse and rant and rave? Why don't you curse the blasted fate that has taken you from me? Why don't you curse the malignant fate that keeps me awake crying for you night after night? [135]

[*March 1919*] They have taken you back to your old life, you who are so prone to *take fakes for the genuine article.* […] You don't *know* the genuine when you see it. […] you think I'm clever, and *I know I'm not*, but had you come to me, *I would have had genius*.[136]

6th June 1919
[…] you've gone and left me to go to somebody else. Just the one day I would give anything not to be alone!—You must admit it is the cruellest day to be alone; to have no one to talk to!—oh Mitya!
You will have to make me very happy, darling, to atone for all the misery I have suffered on your behalf. I know it isn't your fault, but it so frightful, just today, to have no one to speak to![137]

2nd July
Don't toy with me like a cat with the mouse. It is so infinitely crueller than any *coup de grâce* could possibly be. [138]

31st December 1920
You don't know what the human heart can suffer. You were so stiff on the telephone.[139]

17th March 1921
Je t'amairai quoi que tu fasses, *toujours, toujours, toujours. Seulement, ça me degoute tu comprends*.[140]

18th March 1921
I can no longer put my despair and unhappiness into words.[141]

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[135] Ibid., 113.
[136] Ibid., 117.
[137] Ibid., 138.
[138] Ibid., 119.
[139] Ibid., 267.
[140] Ibid., 271. [I will love you whatever you do, always, always, always. However, this disgusts me, you understand].
[141] Ibid., 272.

Paris, 14th February 1920
My darling beloved, I'm simply dazed and sodden with pain; it seems incredible that I should go on living—
My God, and happiness was so near. … What is perfectly *awful* to me is the feeling that our separation is partially due to a misunderstanding. There has NEVER never never in my life been any attempt at what you thought from that person. *Never*—he said that his pride wouldn't allow him to say more, and he particularly doesn't want anyone to know, but O Mytia, I do swear—may I die tonight—that there has never been anything of that nature and scarcely anything of the other. I loathe having to write this, but what I told you this evening is exactly true down to the minutest detail.[142]

Gien, February 1920
My beloved, I am writing to you in a filthy little 'bouge' in a village called Gien. I'm dead tired, thank God! My only idea is to travel till I drop. (…) There is a great, smooth, oily river, which I suppose to be the Loire. Shall I throw myself into it? It would save much trouble and much pain …
Denys is ill: (…) he nearly fainted near Fontainebleau (…) he looks like a ghost. I have hardly spoken to him (…).
O Mytia, my being torn away from you has made me harder than any granite. In case you don't understand, the wire that Harold had from Denys referred to my unwillingness—but aren't I being punished sufficiently?
It would kill Denys if I stayed with him; he says this is far far worse than anything. I am hard … hard … I can't feel, I hardly know what I'm saying. If you left me forever you would have killed us both. How can you say you were so sure of my love?
Denys burst into tears in the middle of dinner. (…)
My beloved, this is a nightmare. Denys is half delirious nextdoor and the chaffeur has been tearing back and forward from the chemist's getting him quinine and aspirin. Whenever I went in he had a sort of paroxysm and kept on gibbering: "Go away, go away, you say you hate me; it is on your face, I can see it, go away!" (…) O my God Mytia why did you leave me? I said the truth when I said I could only be decent to him as long as I was with you. I am inhuman now. Tonight I told him he must get his sister to look after him if he was going to be ill as I couldn't. I know I shall kill him if I stay with him. O Mytia come back to me, come back before it's too late—
Mytia *I CAN'T* live without you. I am simply crazed with pain.
If I had committed any crime under the sun, none were bad enough to merit this punishment. (…)[143]

[142] Ibid., 174.
[143] Ibid.,175-176.

16th February 1920
I came here this morning after having vainly tried to speak to you on the telephone. Denys is a wreck; he does nothing but cry and whimper: it fills me with repulsion, and I can't conceal it. My obsession is to get away from him *coûte que coûte*. It is horrible and disgusting. (…) My promise holds good, but *not* for two months, I couldn't, oh my darling, I couldn't![144]
Denys is a little better today but he can scarcely walk, he's so weak. I loathe being with him and he knows it. All the former pity I had for him has turned to disgust. … It is hideous, nightmarish. (…) Denys has ceased being anything but my jailor, and I look at him and think: yes if it wasn't for you. … Prisoners aren't afraid of their jailor, Mytia, and something terrible and inexorable is taking hold of my heart. (…)
Oh my darling, this afternoon I passed a little stall like the one at Amiens, full of mimosa; it went through me like a knife to see it. Mitya, how can you imagine that I could live through two months of this? You might as well have said two years!
My love, come back to me—you must! Whatever you had done or not done, I could never bring myself to banish you for two months. …
Mitya, at least *shorten* your sentence. The supremely ironical thing is that my having wanted to go with you so unbearably is responsible for this.
…This time it may be indirectly my fault, but I don't deserve to be parted from you for two months. It is as though every time you saw a tree covered with buds ready to open, you plucked them all off one by one. Surely a day would come when the tree got tired of trying to flower, and just withered away.[145]

I have never actually *belonged* (not in any sort of way) to him any more than I have to Andrea (I only use Andrea illustratively). If only you would realize that I am speaking the truth, and yet you are surprised that I loathe men incorrigibly and look upon them merely as animals. … If only I could have told you more fully in Paris, or better still, if he had.[146]

Moulins (Allier), 17th February 1920
(…) O Mytia I am tortured with longing for you. (…)
I am going mad with longing for you, Mitya. Denys is ill again. He has had to go and lie down. He has scarcely spoken all day. I suppose if I go to him I shall find him in floods of tears.

[144] Editors' note: "Vita had said she could not bear to see Violet for two months on the evening of the Amiens's crisis two days earlier." Ibid., 177
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid, 177

I if he goes on like this, he will certainly kill himself. I can't do anything, I am frozen. Nothing touches me any more. (…)[147]

17th February 1920, Monday night
My beloved, I can hardly bring myself to write you tonight. You are really breaking my heart, Mytia. Do you think I deserve it? You know *au fond* I don't. God have mercy upon me, Mitya. I shall die if you won't come back to me for two months. I have hardly eaten and hardly splet since I left Amiens. … Two months, and what then? (…)
O my sweet, and I have still got the money that was to have been for *our* house. I nearly threw it away when Denys gave it to me. How *could* you give it back to him? It kills me to see it in my purse. …
I found one of the lozenges you disliked… and your lip salve… It was silly, but I sobbed myself sick. How can you doubt for a minute that I should kill myself if I thought I was never going to see you again (…)[148]

16th February 1920
(…) O my darling, my darling, you mustn't call me faithless, you mustn't—*it's not* that. Oh my God, if only I could tell you the circumstances very fully of that horrible evening. … It was a sort of price to pay; I don't know, but I think he looked upon it as such too; he was *never* like that before, and O Mitya, it *wasn't* consummated—I know how awful it is for me to tell you all this, but the reality was so very far from you—what you shrink from—if only he could have brought himself to tell you more, namely he desisted.[149]
Sunday morning
Mitya, what am I to do? I spent hours imploring Denys to divorce me last night. He said he'd let me know this morning what he had decided. (…) This morning he said he had decided to annul the marriage. My mother sent for him, and told him that if he did, she would have nothing more to do with me, and that she refused to give me anything to live on. I rushed down to Mama (…) I went down on my knees to her, I told her he filled me with repulsion, and always had done. I told her I would even go away with Duckrus anywhere she liked, if only Mama would let me be divorced. He had said to her apparently that it would be on the grounds of "undue influence"—I mean the annulment, and she told me about the medical examination. She is inhuman, Mitya, they all are, but I will kill myself rather than stay with Denys whom I loathe and abominate.

[147] Ibid, 178.
[148] Ibid, 179.
[149] Ibid, 180.

I have just been into him, and he says he is going to annul it whatever she may tell me. I said I would rather starve than stay with him. […][150]

24th February 1920
Today, my darling love, I am going to Bordighera, but I shan't be able to do it in the day as it is nearly 400 kilmetres (…). It wiil be too awful if have got to stop the night at Nice, which is about half way. …
The post hasn't come yet, if it brings no letter from you (you haven't written for days) I shal draw only one conclusion, namely that what I feared most in regrd with your relation to Harld has happened. I feel quite sick with apprehension. That would be the end. Are you going to stay for two months with Harold? What about your going to Italy by yourself? Not a word about that or what I asked you particularly to tell me? Are you so happy in Paris with Harold? […][151]

Nice, 24th February 1920
(…) We are invited to Happiness, and we don't answer the invitation. Our places will be filled up. …
Denys no longer stands in our way. He said that from yesteday I was free to do as I choose. He is only accompanying me to Bordighera to save me from my mother. But I shan't see him while I am there—[152]

24th February 1920
[…] If […] you care for Harold as much as for me, you have but to say so. You will never see or hear from me again. *Please wire your answer to this.*

Conclusions

It appears all the above describe sadism against a lover and self-sadism as two complementary forms of fear to live love in its most unfettered, genuine form. Fear for Vita of going against society and leap into life, which would have fulfilled her true self and her true desires, the self in which she felt happiest. Fear for Violet of not being able to love again, as "for once only are we perfectly equipped for loving."[153]

Vita left Violet at that very "crossroad" where the genuine feeling that still existed between them (and which in fact survived in the affection of their letters later on in life) could have perhaps overtaken and healed the sadistic dynamic which really mainly consisted in Vita's inability to be

[150] Ibid., 186.
[151] Ibid.,188.
[152] Ibid.,189.
[153] Sohuami, *Mrs Keppel and her daughter*, 294.

consistently wholehearted with Violet, in spite of the patriarchal society she lived in, and in Violet- inability to let her go in spite of this. The dynamic may have died out the moment at which the pursued stopped evading and the pursuer realised there was no longer any need to chase for the beloved was finally there at long last.

It is hard to know if and which historical lesbian couples may have experienced this kind of dynamic and to what degree,[154] and if any of them ever managed to heal it without losing their relationship altogether.

However, in this respect it seems worth listing here a few names of women who have been known to have had really long term lesbian relationships since the nineteenth and early twentieth century, somehow defeating the patriarchal society which made it so difficult for lesbians to live happy and fulfilling relationships, in the past as well as today. I have placed parentheses around the years in which the mentioned couples were together where the relationship was particularly long, not as form of "price assignation," but simply out of sheer astonishment, and why not, a slight note of cheerful triumph over patriarchal models despite the times in which these women lived:

Annie Field and Sarah Jewett; Jane Addams and Mary Rozet Smith (40 years); Mary Emma Woolley and Jenette March (55 years!); Willa Cather with Isabelle McClung and later with Edith Lewis; Radclyffe Hall with Mabel Batten and Una Troubridge (28 years); Katherine Lee Bates and Katherine Coman; Anne Lister and Anne Walker (first nineteenth century lesbian marriage in a church in York, England!); Joan and Pat Dansey; Phyllis Ann Lyon and Dorothy Louise Taliaferro "Del" Martin; Laurel Hester and Stacie Andree; Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahausen.

[154] Except perhaps those lesbian affairs kept secret (hence easy to "suspect") such as in the case of Eleanor Roosevelt whose family attempted to keep secret her lesbianism by destroying her letters (see Russell Freedman, *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery* (New York: Clarion Books, 1993) or ì that Billie Jean King had with her secretary, publicly identified as a lesbian affair in 1981 thanks to a trial which caught public attention: Carles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*. (New York: Publishers Gropu West, 2008).

CHAPTER NINE

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE "THIRD SEX"? FEAR OF EFFEMINACY AND THE REDISCOVERY OF VIRILE HOMOSEXUALITY DURING THE GREAT WAR

LORENZO BENADUSI

Within the enormous body of research on the history of homosexuality, its etiology is probably the most studied aspect. Research on the origins of homosexuality, which is not merely chronological in nature, has also had many implications for questions of gender and sexual identity. Foucault is of course the first to have drawn attention to the issue. In his *Will to Knowledge* he observes that homosexuality was an invention of the late nineteenth century, a result of homosexuals being categorised as an abnormal species, rather than just individuals practicing uncommon behaviour.

> We must not forget—Foucault writes—that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relation than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[1]

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1978), 43.

Foucault's categorical affirmation, as open as it may be to criticism, inaugurated a lively debate. In some cases the conversation has focused on chronologically pinpointing the establishment of homosexuality as a particular human-type or attempted to geographically situate this change. Other discussions have considered factors outside and beyond the medical world that had fostered this important development.[2] In this context, some scholars, after having observed that various, modern forms of homosexuality also existed in antiquity, have begun to question the overly rigid juxtaposition between identity and actions.[3] In addition, the medical-legal sphere's tendency of characterising the acquisition of sexual identity with a sort of taxonomical or pathological classification has also been called into question. In his criticism of "inventionist" narratives, Giovanni Dall'Orto has noted for example, that "in every given historical moment different categorisations of homosexuals coexist, often in contradiction or contrast with one another."[4] Nevertheless, the coexistence of old and new categorisations creates a multiplicity of identities which must in turn be investigated alongside one another in order to identify those characteristics which are both shared and specific. And while Dall'Orto has criticised queer theory's over-overemphasis on subjective uncertainty, his own individualistic approach also risks resulting in a level of subjectivism that undermines its interpretative strength.

On the other hand, the attempt to analyse the construction of homosexuality from below rather than from above has been very effective; not just as a reaction to Foucault's overly rigid definition of the relationship between doctor and patient, but also in relation to the subculture developed by homosexuals themselves—not without difficulty—which in turn both

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[2] See David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988); David M. Halperin, *San Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Helmut Puff, "After the History of (Male) Homosexuality," in *After the History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault*, eds. Scott Spector, Helmut Puff and Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 17-31; Robert A. Nye, "Michel Foucault's Sexuality and the History of Homosexuality in France," in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, eds. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 225-243; R. Beachy, *Gay Berlin. Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Knopf, 2014).

[3] See Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[4] Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'altra storia. L'omosessualità dall'antichità al secondo dopoguerra* (Milano: il Saggiatore, 2015), 16.

influences and interacts with dominant culture.[5] All subjects on whom the knowledge apparatus exercises influence have the possibility of refusing, changing or reshaping the discourse expressed about them or may choose to pretend to have interiorised it in order to safeguard their anti-conformism. This sort of "ironic imitation" or mimicry begins as an attempt to recreate behaviours imposed from above, but ends up creating new hybrid identities; constituting a case in which assimilation does not involve a loss of self.[6] Moreover, according to Harry Cocks, there are gaps between the knots of the normative net which allow one to experience his/her homosexuality without concern for medical/legal classifications and impositions.[7] Indeed the private sphere is not subject to the gaze of the public, providing a safe haven for forms of behavioural autonomy that are difficult to identify and classify precisely because they are hidden, or *in the closet.* Of course, homosexuals clearly exist before they are defined as such, and they exist precisely because they themselves observe their individuality.

Though homosexuality was certainly not an invention of the nineteenth century, it is true that perceptions and ideas about homosexuality have transformed over the course of history. By investigating the Great War as a turning point for the history of sexuality, above all for the impact it had on ideas of masculinity, and the way in which homoerotic relationships were understood, this article will attempt to understand those changes that most characterised how homosexuals perceived themselves and their way of being between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Further, it will attempt to establish to what extent eighteenth century ideas about homosexuality changed in the aftermath of the war. The war was characterised by a heightened emphasis on the values of heterosexuality and a need to assuage homosexual panic by adopting an increasingly harsh and intolerant attitude of homophobia. Indeed, historians speak of the invention of heterosexuality with regard to this period in order to underline the moment in which the classifications homo- and heterosexual superseded less rigid forms of expressing one's sexual orientation.[8] Cocks notes how, during the

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[5] On the criminalisation of homosexuality as a crucial element for identity formation, see Jeffrey R. Weeks, *Against Nature. Essays on History, Sexuality and Identity* (London: Rivers Oram, 1991).

[6] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[7] Harry G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences. Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Taurus, 2003).

[8] Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Victorian age, since bourgeois respectability served as the criteria for judging behavior, a homosexual who was strong and virile, successful and respected might not be punished for his personal sexual preferences, which were considered in some way "as an, albeit liminal, form of masculinity, in a spectrum of possibilities in the period."[9] According to Cocks, the change came with patriarchal society—based on marriage and the importance of the sexual relationship between couples—which tended to consider any type of homosexual as effeminate, depraved and immoral. From this perspective, homosexuality in the twentieth century seems less tied to gender identity and the demonstration of one's masculinity, and more dependent on one's sexual preferences, i.e. not focused solely on the absence of virility but rather on the desire to have relations with people of the same sex. In a time in which characteristics of masculinity were increasingly tied to having a job, a wife and a family, it could not extend to include sexual relationships between men.

The idea that the birth of a homosexual identity was tied to knowledge production, "the will to know," of the medical and legal community does not explain the prevalent desire at the beginning of the century *not* to talk about so-called perverse behaviours.[10] Indeed, there was a contradictory dialectical relationship between the epistemological vocation of medical doctors and scientists, and the fear that uncovering immorality might promote its diffusion. Concerned that speaking publicly about "perverse" behaviours might in some way legitimise them, a strategy of ignorance was adopted in order to avoid publicising homosexuality. Understanding this obsession with "indecent discourse," with taboos whose very mention contaminates, is of great importance for historically contextualising the

[9] In Sean Brady, *Masculinity and male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 21. "There was a pervasive and tacit awareness of sex between men and the concept of the effeminate, exclusive sodomite served to socially control men to contain their sexuality to the uxorious ideal" (24).

[10] Anthony Giddens correctly observes how during the eighteenth- and the beginning of the nineteenth century, a period in which there was a high level of illiteracy, the circumscription of the conversation on sexuality to scientific publications represented a form of censorship which delimited its diffusion in mass culture. On his critiques of Foucault's theory of sexuality, see *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 18-48.

way in which homosexuality was treated.[11] Though Foucault was correct in maintaining that the polymorphous intersection of power, knowledge and sexuality not only produces forms of repression, prohibition and denial, but also truth, science and knowledge, he undervalued the importance of this sort of self-censorship. Yet, it is still unclear how the positive and negative aspects weighed up against one another. In the Italian context at least, the negative aspects (denial, negation) seem to have outweighed the more positive (knowledge producing and emancipating) ones. Of course, in the long term, the sciences can be said to have been responsible for transferring sexuality from the private to the public sphere, making its dissemination possible and initiating all the liberating consequences that would follow. Nevertheless, it's true that in Italy from the postwar period up until the 1960s, the will to suppress what was considered to be "the vile abomination of the pederast" prevailed over the will to knowledge. The same dilemma that afflicted Tardieu, who confessed to having hesitated at length before deciding to write about "such a sad argument" by including "the revolting profile of the pederast"[12] in his study on sexual crimes, continued to vex scientists, jurists and health professionals—not to mention the police and public officials—well into the twentieth century. The scenario was the same in England after the Oscar Wilde scandal when the reluctance to speak about homosexuality reached such a point that the topic was avoided all together, including in scientific scholarship. As such "the entire matter of sex between males remained a phenomenon the state preferred to ignore."[13] The sections that follow will investigate the reasons for this wave of homophobia in order to understand how the First World War's impact on masculinity also affected masculine homosexuality and the value ascribed to ties of virility.

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[11] See Lorenzo Benadusi, "Il lecito e l'illecito. Nascita della sessuologia e invenzione delle perversioni nell'Italia tra Otto e Novecento," *Zapruder* 6 (January-April 2005): 28-43.

[12] The citations of Tardieu from his *Étude médico-legale sur les attentats aux moeurs* [1857] are taken from Jean P. Aron, Roger Kempf, *Il pene e la demoralizzazione dell'occidente* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1979).

[13] Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*, 217; see also Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994).

The Great War—a trial of virility

The close association between masculinity and military prowess was reinforced during the First World War. The conflict was seen as a test capable of both physically and mentally molding adolescent boys into mature men. At war, all of the characteristics of virility were indispensable: courage, strength, sacrifice and bravery. As such, for many bourgeois men, bored by the monotonous repetitiveness of civilian life, taking up arms was a way of demonstrating their virility, both to themselves and others. It was seen as the great adventure par excellence, especially for those young men who had come of age under the influence of the cults of heroism, militarism and sport.[14] To them it seemed that the mortar shells of the new warriors of the twentieth century might just be capable of destroying what they considered to be a hedonistic and emasculating society. As has been correctly observed, "war, in all its manifestations, served as an antidote to the crisis of masculinity, the fear of being perceived as effeminate, the plague of luxury and materialism, the changes brought about by industrialism, and the feminisation of society."[15] Before Italy's intervention, it was widely believed that war could reinvigorate masculinity, which was believed to have been weakened by years of peace and the accelerated pace of modernity. Therefore, it was not just patriotism and a sense of duty that inspired many bourgeois men to enlist in August 1914, but also the allure of the uniform and the cult of martial masculinity. In many cases, however, these dreams came to an abrupt end as early as the summer when it became clear that war was not at all the romantic adventure they had imagined from their desks at school.

Recent historiography has investigated the consequences of the First World War on gender relations and masculinity, underlining its ambivalent impact. The war both consolidated, and simultaneously subverted, the image of the virile soldier, tiredness confusion and depression often leaving their mark on the bodies and minds of combatants. Therefore, during the war, the hegemonic ideal of masculinity was both reinforced in

[14] See Michael C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[15] Mark H. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 143.

its aggressive attributes but also weakened by the danger of a progressive emasculation and depletion of the spirit of bellicose heroism that was present before the war.[16] Indeed a vision of the war as a catalyst and corroborator of the masculine stereotype, capable of melding together masculinity and militarism, does not consider the perceived loss of virility and fragility of the body experienced during battle. At times it was precisely the harshness of life at the front which softened the virile traits of combatants, increasing the threat of a progressive deterioration and subsequent feminisation of the soldier.[17] The trauma of the conflict created anxieties and fears, all clear signs of weakness and even a new way of expressing emotions that sometimes resulted in the loss of self-control; all factors that inevitably called into question the hypervirile model of the solider based on stoicism and heroism. The crippled and maimed took on even more evident feminine characteristics: passivity, dependence on others (almost always on women), vulnerability, a predisposition for feminine activities such as sewing, gardening, and basket weaving, the regression to an infantile state, taking pleasure in holding a teddy bear or crafting children's toys. But it was above all the loss of mobility, of strength and action (indispensable traits of the soldier) which created a terrible shock and complicated the relationship with one's gender identity.[18]

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[16] On the coexistence of both transgressive and traditional, archaic and modern, traits of masculinity during the war, and on the transformation of the prewar canon of virility, see Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality, and German Soldiers in the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2014); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996); Kate Hunter, "More than an Archive of War: Intimacy and Manliness in the Letters of a Great War Soldier to the Woman He Loved, 1915-1919," *Gender & History* 2 (2013), 339-354; Anthony Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness," *History. The Journal of the Historical Association* 99 (January 2014): 40-72.

[17] See Paola Di Cori, "Il doppio sguardo. Visibilità dei generi sessuali nella rappresentazione fotografica (1908-1918)," in *La Grande Guerra. Esperienza, memoria, immagini*, eds. Diego Leoni, Camillo Zadra (Bologna: il Mulino, 1986), 765-799.

[18] See Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sabine Kienitz, "Body Damage. War Disability and Constructions of Masculinity in the Weimar Germany," in *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth Century Germany*, eds. Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 181-204.

The war seemed to have undermined the foundations of the civilian archetype of virility, revealing the fragility of its ideal embodiment: the combatant male. In the trenches, young men at the height of their strength experienced physical exhaustion and depletion, but above all the values they attached to the ideal of masculinity came under attack: courage, sense of duty, self-control and discipline. The time to be heroes was over because in front of the total arbitrariness of death presented by the war almost all occasions for valor were lost. If success in combat was no longer dependent on individual merit, military virtues ceased to be connected with virile bravery, but rather with the ability to resist and obey. Indeed, not surprisingly, historians are now giving greater attention to the emasculating effects of the war, approaching the conflict as an evident moment of crisis for the link between virility and masculinity.[19] Indeed, the expectations were so high—the code of masculinity so centered on courage and prowess in combat—that many soldiers were afraid they would not pass the test. Elaine Showalter has demonstrated how shell shock represented a form of escape from this overly rigid model of virility.[20] Since soldiers were not allowed to show weakness and vulnerability, expressing one's fear was tantamount to rejecting not only the war but the very concept of masculinity. In addition, the body of soldiers suffering from shell shock represented a tangible expression of the fragility of male identity: their posture was not straight, their gait was uncertain, their expression was dazed and they were not in control of their gestures.[21] If the war was supposed to have been a test of virility, these

[19] See Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, "La Grande Guerre et l'histoire de la virilité," in *Le triomphe de la virilité. Le 19. siècle*, ed. Alain Corbin, vol. 2, *Histoire de la virilité* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 403-411.

[20] Elaine Showaler, "Rivers and Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World* Wars, eds. Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 61-69.

[21] See David H.J. Morgan, "Theater of War: Combat, the Military and Masculinities," in *Theorizing Masculinities*, eds. Harry Brod, Michael Kaufman, (London: Sage, 1994), 165-82; Julia Barbara Köhne, "Visualizing 'War Hysterics': Strategies of Feminization and Re-Masculinization in Scientific Cinematography, 1916-1918," in *Gender and the First World War*, eds. Christa Hämmerle, Oswald Überegger and Birgitta Bader Zaar, (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 72-88; Paul Frederick Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain, 1914-1930* (London: Continuum, 2010).

men seemed to have failed, showing themselves in someway to have been unfit as soldiers, too weak and craven, too effeminate.

From this perspective, the theme of combat neuroses has been analysed in relation to virility, its fragility and performative quality, and above all its stark rigidity, which enters into crisis at the first signs of doubt. Through the study of medical files, scholars have shown how the traumas caused by the conflict-provoked hysteria, impotence and loss of virility, and also how "for some soldiers, the experience of combat and loss may have brought to the surface powerful and disturbing feelings of love for other men."[22] Here love is understood as a strong and lasting bond of affection, and does not necessarily carry sexual implications.

Homoeroticism

Homoeroticism has been considered an inevitable, essential and not accidental, consequence of the exasperated camaraderie of military combat and the circumscription of a community of men so intimately tied to one another and so impermeable to the outside, especially to the feminine world. According to Paul Fussell, the First World War is characterised by just this type of homoeroticism, understood as a "sublimated (i.e. chaste) form of temporary homosexuality," while "of the active, unsublimated form there was very little at the front. What we find rather, especially in the attitude of young officers to their men, is something more like the 'idealistic,' passionate but non-physical 'crushes' which most of the officers had experienced at public school."[23] These relationships represented particular friendships based on compassion and comprehension. Living in daily close contact with death, so much strengthened those ties which were so close that they provoked painful psychological trauma in the event of the death of one of the pair.[24] At the front the shared experience was so total and the relationship so intense that it mimicked marriage in some ways: men washed each other, danced together, ate together, went to battle together, slept next to one another, shared the same blanket, listened to, helped and comforted one another. At times the friendship was so exclusive that it became a sort of "fraternal misanthropy" outwardly

[22] Elaine Showaler, "Rivers and Sassoon," 64.
[23] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 272.
[24] See Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

ridiculed but secretly envied by everyone.[25] In the case of Italy it should be remembered that the violent, exasperated, and misogynistoc Jünger-style camaraderie was a "rarity or, if you like, a circumscribed and unforeseen exception."[26] In the majority of cases more delicate forms of expressing friendship were mixed with the rougher form of male homosociality; thanks to camaraderie, it has been observed, "the soldiers created an imagined universe where they could temporarily live a fantasy of escaping male gender norms and experiment with 'feminine' emotions," without, however, wanting to destroy traditional gender dichotomies.[27] Therefore, affection, tenderness and intimacy became fundamental elements which could be intermixed with strength, brutality and coarseness. Wartime masculinity took on softer forms which were entirely compatible with the camaraderie that was proposed as an ideal relationship model precisely because it itself was founded on altruism, self-denial, reciprocal care and protection, unselfish love, understanding and loyalty. Mutual support between fellow soldiers was considered the crucial factor for surviving at the front; it was something that extended beyond camaraderie even: a national trait to uphold with pride, as in the case of the Australian idea of *mateship*.[28]

Intimacy between men acquired new meanings within the restricted space of the trenches where everyone was forced into close physical contact with no privacy; a space in which the most basic physical needs were shared and men were mutually exposed to one another's nudity. Giovanni Comisso's description of the bodies of young soldiers who attempt to bathe in the river Natisone is just one of many examples of the homoerotic component of camaraderie:

> Some ran nude through the fields followed by the barking of dogs, others kneeled by the barracks intent on washing their clothes or walked in the middle of the river […] Others could be heard laughing while they

[25] Carlo Salsa, *Trincee. Confidenze di un fante* (Milano: Mursia, 2007), 86.
[26] Emilio Franzina, *Casini di guerra. Il tempo libero dalla trincea e i postriboli militari nel primo conflitto mondiale* (Udine: Gaspari, 1999), 98.
[27] Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*, 8; see also Thomas Kühne, "Comradeship: Gender Confusion and Gender Order in the German Military, 1918-1945," in *Home/Front*, 233-254.
[28] Nick Dyrenfurth, *Mateship. A Very Australian History* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2015).

> undressed behind a bush before coming out aflame with the fancies of love.[29]

The collective experience of corporeity also allowed soldiers to reaffirm their gender identity thanks to their relationship with persons of the same sex; not surprisingly, trips to the bordello became a fundamental moment for demonstrating one's virility to fellow comrades. Waiting in line out in the street or sitting on the stairs, eager to hastily consume a few minutes of love, young soldiers joked with one another, "they hit and pinched each other, one grabbed another between the legs and teased "let's see if you still have it." They laughed and embraced one another and others had fun making big misshapen and obscene drawings of nude women on the walls."[30]

The history of emotions has begun to investigate the impact of these ties. For example, according to Santanu Das, at the front "a new world of largely non-genital tactile tenderness was opening up in which pity, thrill, affection and eroticism are fused and confused depending on the circumstances, degrees of knowledge, normative practices and sexual orientations, as well as available models of male-male relationships."[31] As they grew in intensity and intimacy, relationships inevitably ended up reshaping the image of masculinity and redefining the modalities in which relationships between men were expressed; Foucault investigated, in his study on the theme of friendship as a "way of life," the polymorphous ties that were created between combatants of the First World War. In his description, however, Foucault sought to avoid attributing such relationships exclusively to homosexuality:

> I don't mean that it was because the [soldiers] were each other's lovers that they continued to fight; but honor, courage, not losing face, sacrifice, leaving the trench with the captain – all that implied a very intense emotional tie. It's not to say: "Ah, there you have homosexuality!" I detest that kind of reasoning. But no doubt you have there one of the conditions, not the only one, that has permitted this infernal life where for weeks guys

[29] Giovanni Comisso, *Giorni di guerra* (Milano: Longanesi, 2015), 83.
[30] Ibid., 75.
[31] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114. On these intimate ties between soldiers, see also Brian Joseph Martin, *Napoleonic Friendship. Military Fraternity, Intimacy & Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011).

> floundered in the mud and shit, among corpses, starving for food, and were drunk the morning of the assault.[32]

War could foster the legitimisation, or at least the free expression, of homoerotic behaviours which were previously condemned as reprehensible and deviant. It was important, however, to obscure the possible sexual implications of homoeroticism. From this point of view it is significant that the army, an institution completely centered on relationships between men, adopted the most repressive attitude in reaction to the erotic expression of this relationship, confirming Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's thesis that there is a relationship of interdependence between "homosexual desire" and "homosexual panic" which seems to protect male chauvinism.[33] That military virility was not always expressed in sublimated and chaste forms is revealed by the Eulenburg affair: the court of Wilhelm II was the setting of a scandalous trial on the homosexuality of a group of people tied to one of the emperor's closest friends, Count Phillip Eulenberg. Books and satirical cartoons even characterised the Prussian army and General Moltke as homosexuals.[34] For foreign observers of the scandal, it represented a clear example of how an excess of virility and militarism united with the cult of brute destructive force inevitably leading to such a

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[32] Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (London: Penguin Press, 1997), 139.

[33] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). On the coexistence of strong male ties along with an entrenched attitude of homophobia, see John C. Fout, "Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Male Gender Crisis, Moral Purity, and Homophobia," in *Forbidden History: The State, Society and Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed. John C. Fout (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

[34] See Norman Domeier, *The Eulenburg Affair. A Cultural History of Politics in the German Empire* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015); Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II 188-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Patricia McDonnell, "'Essentially Masculine'. Marsden Hartley, Gay Identity, and the Wilhelmine German Military," *Art Journal* 2 (1997): 62-68. For a detailed analysis of the satirical cartoons produced in the international press on the Eulenburg case, see James D. Steakley, "Iconography of a scandal; political cartoons and the Eulenburg affair in wilhelmian Germany," in *Hidden from History*, eds. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey jr. (London: Penguin, 1991), 233-263.

degree of contempt for the "mildness, delicacy and weaknesses of femininity" so as to cause an "erotic daltonism" between men.[35]

The existence of a possible tie between homoeroticism and homosexuality at war can be observed through an analysis of the lives and literary production of the three most important English poets of war, Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen.[36] While their diaries contain many explicit references to homosexuality, traces of these references only appear indirectly or can be read between the lines of their poetic verses. The sexual dimension of these relationships was purposefully left unclear, and could not have been otherwise given the context. Their self-censorship was so great that homoeroticism always had to be expressed in sublimated forms; in an extreme example, Sassoon transforms the paradisiacal kiss of one his comrades into the kiss of death in his collection *War Poems* (1919). Homosexuality could not be openly expressed and above all, it could not threaten the virile ideal of masculinity.

War and Homosexuality

Magnus Hirschfeld was among the first scholars to investigate the relationship between war and homosexuality. He was also an outspoken proponent of the elimination of Section 175. In the aftermath of the war, the German sexologist launched a campaign to collect the written correspondence of homosexual soldiers. He later included and commented on some of the thousands of letters he gathered in his work *The Sexual History of the First World War*. The war sought to demonstrate with scientific proof that "the libidinous components" of many of the relationships between soldiers and the sexual implications of camaraderie "penetrated beyond the outer limits of the homoerotic."[37] According to Hirschfeld, prolonged life at war without women and in close contact with men favours the emergence of "pseudo-homosexuality" in heterosexual soldiers. In addition, camaraderie allowed "proclaimed" homosexuals to

[35] Giuseppe Senizza, *Corruzione sessuale e crudeltà germanica* (Firenze: Istituto Editoriale "Il Pensiero," 1917).
[36] Adrian Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality and the War Poets: Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Max Egremont, *Siegfried Sassoon: A life* (New York: Ferrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).
[37] Magnus Hirschfeld, "Homosexuality and Transvestitism in the Trenches," in *The Sexual History of the World War* (New York: Cadillac, 1930), 116-117.

freely express their sexual orientation, and above all, the massive dimensions of the conflict facilitated their research for a partner. The loss of the inhibitory brakes in the strong impulsive upheaval provoked by the war served to weaken the repressive power of bourgeois sexual morality, with negative repercussions in the majority of cases, but largely positive with regard to homosexuality. As Hirschfeld notes "all the sexual effects of the war, the greater openness about homosexuality and the feeling among many men that it was a normal response to conditions, including stress and fear, were the most benign and natural sexual effects of the war." Therefore, the increased tolerance present at the front created the appropriate conditions for living one's homosexuality more serenely and openly.

Hirschfeld also attempted to debunk the established stereotype that inevitably connected homosexuality with effeminacy; a stereotype that was not only conditioned by the shared public imagination but also the scientific and pseudoscientific literature on what was known as the 'third sex'.[38] Carl Heinrich Ulrich's idea of a female soul inside of a male body had laid the foundation for the association between homosexuality and sexual inversion, intensifying the dichotomy between active and passive, virile and effeminate, dominant and submissive.[39] Hirschfeld, however, used the letters he collected to demonstrate the heroism and patriotism of homosexuals, showing them as strong and courageous rather than weak and craven. His hypermasculine characterisation was intended to legitimise homosexuals in the eyes of the public: those valourous soldiers could not all of the sudden return to being considered 'non-virile' men, who were scorned and marginalised by society.

From this point of view, while the war had allowed heterosexual men to experiment with new gender roles, giving them the possibility to adopt

[38] On virile homosexuality, see Max Katte [pseud. of Karl Friedrich Jordan], "Die Virilen Homosexuellen," *Jahrbuch für Sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 1 (1905): 85-106.
[39] See Gert Hekma, "'A Female Soul in a Male Body': Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Sexology," in *Third Sex, Third Gender*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 213-240; Hubert Kennedy, *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson, 1988); Giovanni Dall'Orto, "Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895): il nonno del movimento gay," in *C'era una volta un secolo fa*, supplement of *Babilonia* 135 (July-August 1995): 41-46. On the influence of Ulrichs on the Italian scholars, see Vito Massarotti, *Nel regno di Ulrichs. Appunti e considerazioni sull'omosessualità maschile* (Roma: Bernardo Lux Editore, 1913); G.M. Patellini, *Il terzo sesso* (Milano: Modernissima, 1920).

behavioural models that were more commonly associated with those of women, the opposite happened for homosexuals, who had assumed the belligerent and virile traits that were necessary in order to integrate into the male community. Entry into the band of brothers required just three simple actions according to Paolo Monelli: cutting one's hair, growing out your beard, and drinking wine."[40] Consequently, in the Army homosexuals found a much longed for opportunity to integrate themselves and demonstrate their worth. The ability to prove one's strength in combat, one's courage, sense of duty and loyalty to the unit were considered more important than one's sexual orientation. The observations that Emma Vickers makes in her work on homosexual British soldiers during the Second World War can also be applied to the First World War. In both cases, gay men found the opportunity to be considered "good fellows" if they adhered to a soldierly image in which they did a good job and did not display their homosexuality, or at least did not appear effeminate in a way that threatened their comrades: "In this sense gays and lesbians were not the victims of a tyrannical military regime. On the contrary, they were able to navigate around military law."[41] Therefore, included among the many accepted forms of military masculinity was also the virile homosexuality of rough, military men who, with the exception of their sexual identity, were no different than their companions.[42] It was a sort of reiteration of the classic warrior pairs, comrades in arms united by such a strong emotional bond that they were ready to die for their fraternal companion, like Castor and Pollux, Achilles and Patroclus, Nisus and Euryalus, Orestes and Pylades, Athis and Lycabas.[43] The importance of this type of relationship, however, should not be misinterpreted, making the First World War into a sort of undisputed realm of virile and combatant homosexuality. For example, it seems like a stretch to claim that the "exclusively heterosexual paradigm of masculinity was not entirely hegemonic" because "heterosexual love had become obsolete in the trench environment, and

[40] Paolo Monelli, *Le scarpe al sole* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1994), 24.
[41] Emma Vickers, "'The Good Fellow': Negotiation, Remembrance and Recollection—Homosexuality in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945," in *Brutality and Desire*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 129.
[42] On this idea that there exists not just one uniform model of masculinity in the Armed Forces, see Paul Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (London: Praeger, 2003).
[43] Luigi F. Pizzolato, *L'idea di amicizia nel mondo antico classico e cristiano* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993).

that homosexual love was more suited to modern war."[44] At the same time, love between men was by no means accepted across all spheres of society in every country. While for example, in Germany, experience of war ended up favouring the rapid development of a homosexual emancipation movement, the same did not happen in Italy.[45] One should also consider that for the military and civil authorities it was precisely those virile homosexuals that caused concern since they were easily able to veil their sexual orientation; from the perspective of the authorities, the inversion model was preferable and reassuring since it meant that homosexuals were quickly identifiable. Fears that the traditional definition of homosexuality based on gendered behaviour might be replaced by one centered on sexual preferences augmented a climate of homophobia. However, the distinction between passive and active partners was so well-established that it left little room for the new dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Actions, rather than identity, still established one's homosexuality. So, from this point of view, virile soldiers who assumed the active role in their sexual relationships continued to be considered "normal."[46] Nevertheless, an analysis of cases in which soldiers were accused of "pederasty" provides us with a more complex picture, independent of gender norms and the passive and active juxtaposition. Indeed, homosexuality was condemned during wartime not so much because it was thought to weaken the military prowess of those 'afflicted,' but because it undermined the army's unity.

Homosexuality on Trial

In Italy, the first study on the question of homosexuals in the army was carried out by a student of Lombroso, Leone Lattes, a captain and professor of Medical Law. Thanks to his position as director of the neuropsychiatric ward of the 7th Division, Lattes had ample opportunity to observe various subjects exhibiting "abnormal" sexual behaviors. According to Lattes, even the catamites and inverts with a "feminine type

[44] Jason Crouthamel, "Love in the Trenches: German Solider's Conceptions of Sexual Deviance and Hegemonic Masculinity in the First World War," in *Gender and the First World War*, 68, 53.

[45] See Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy, eds., *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[46] See George Chauncey Jr., "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era," *Journal of Social History* 2 (1985): 189-211.

masculinity" were fit for military service, both physically and psychologically. What's more, because not all of them would have to be sent to the front line. Moreover, Lattes observed that the connection between passivity and effeminacy was unfounded, since "in many couples of pederasts, the passive partner is often the strapping and robust man with the more evidently virile somatic traits."[47] Instead, for Lattes, homosexuals should be subdivided into two categories, congenital or occasional, the latter being distinguishable according to whether or not they had heterosexual tendencies. The reason for excluding homosexuals from the army was not based on their lack of military prowess, but stemmed rather from the fear that their behaviour might have a negative effect on their fellow soldiers. In order to avoid "contagion" within a community of men, it was thought best to keep them far from the front and to reform them.

As such, those suspected of homosexuality were sent to disciplinary companies while those caught carrying out compromising activities were put on trial. Archival materials allow us to reconstruct the legal proceedings for officers, while there is less documentation on cases regarding soldiers since the military courts tended not to specify the charge. The number of cases regarding officers is small but they give us a clear idea of the intense climate of machismo and homophobia that permeated the military, but also how such behaviour was not as rare as might have been perceived from the outside. The legal debates on the argument give us a glimpse into a world made up of secret meeting places for "indecorous relations" between military and civilian "pederasts" who were engaged in their "vile practices." Regardless of the active or passive role they had had in the relationship, the virile ideal of the military man was inverted by his very involvement in such a story, something which is illustrated by the feminine nicknames they were given: Lieutenant "Tenentina," Corporal "La Biondina," the soldiers "Fernanda," "La Romana," "La Gemma," "La Milanese." In the case of officer "Tenentina," the court tempered its severe judgment in light of what it considered to be a temporary state of diminished capacity.[48] The war was almost always considered as a factor capable of momentarily diminishing the mental faculties of the soldier, leaving them less aware of and responsible for

[47] Leone Lattes, *Gli omosessuali nell'esercito* (Roma: Voghera, 1917), 5.

[48] Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Guerra, Comando Supremo, Ufficio Giustizia Militare, Tribunale di guerra, Procedimenti contro ufficiali, b. 17, f. 1606. In the English army there were also many cases of officers court-martialed for homosexuality, see *Raymond Asquith: Life and Letters*, ed. John Joliffe (London: Collins, 1980), 292.

their immoral behaviour. Other grounds for lessening the punishment—which could reach up to three years and involve a demotion—included cases where the soldier had earned medals of honour, had enrolled voluntarily, or was without any previous record.[49] The case of the aspiring officer Salvatore Oddo gives us an idea of how dishonorable the charge of homosexuality could be. Oddo, a Sicilian, was sentenced in May 1917 to a year of reclusion for the charge of insubordination, having slapped his superior in order to bring an end "to the serious persecution of his colleagues who (to his mind) had imagined him to be a passive pederast." His violent reaction was that of a man exasperated by the "special treatment" that he had been given because of the rumors: from continuous offers of sweets and cigarettes to ambiguous phrases whispered in his ear, gestural allusions, and even explicit propositions from some colleagues.[50] So, in order to erase any doubt about his sexuality it was necessary to demonstrate his strength and virility.

Also in the case of lieutenant Anglo Borelli it is evident that the accused was less concerned with the actual penalty than with the shame, dishonour and contempt he would suffer as a result. According to the doctor assigned to carry out a psychiatric evaluation of him, the poor man demonstrated all of the signs of anxiety and depression: insomnia, lack of appetite, stress, lightheadedness, tremors, mood swings, emotional instability, mutism, episodes of weeping and desperation just imagining the derision and humiliation he would have suffered from his companions.[51] That homosexuality was considered reprehensible is proven by the fact that mere speculations about acts carried out in private were enough to generate great scandal and bring about a charge. Moreover, sexual intercourse did not need to take place for a criminal trial to be opened—simple kisses or gestures were enough. The law stated:

> Crimes of lust against nature are defined as any act in which one directs their lack of self-restraint against the will and objectives of nature. That the subject in question is the passive partner does not change this fact.[52]

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[49] Section 237 of the Army's penal code prescribed three years for libidinous acts against nature which were committed with violence or scandal, or were accompanied by a private prosecution.

[50] Ibid., b. 9, f. 825.

[51] Ibid., b. 3, f. 221.

[52] Ibid., b. 11, f. 1034. The original Italian reads: "Il reato di atti di libidine contro natura è sempre perfetto con qualsiasi fatto con cui si tenda a sfogare la propria

Often, the ranking of the accused person could influence how the case was treated. There are many cases in which officers accused of sexual relations with their attendants were able to write off the charges as slander circulated by subordinates. For the attendant on the other hand, it was important to prove that he had been forced into the relationship and had acted out of "referential motives and not because of a base, lascivious inclination toward sexual degeneracy." [53] Nevertheless, one also notes how these relationships became ever more commensurate, both in terms of emotional involvement and sexual roles.[54]

The archives also demonstrate how the military authorities adopted a long series of milder expedients to end the relationship before resorting to a criminal trial. The quickest way to end the whole affair was to hush everything up, especially if the facts had not yet been made public. For example, if it were a first offense the behaviour might be explained as the result of a nocturnal fit following a particularly passionate dream.[55] In practice, military trials were resorted to only in cases of repeated pederasty, especially if they were corroborated by colleagues, the testimonies of whom often reiterated the age-old clichés about homosexuals whom they portrayed as effeminate men who "do not smoke, don't drink wine, and in contrast with what young men usually do, they do not talk about women and even seem against the very idea, just as they are to talking about marriage."[56] The war, though it had offered new possibilities for reconfiguring gender roles, had not rendered this stereotype obsolete. Indeed, in the aftermath of the war, it was actually reinforced by those who, having seen how fragile the hegemonic model of masculinity was, sought to reaffirm it, by giving even greater emphasis to the juxtaposition of active and passive, effeminate and virile. Not all of the changes to the

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incontinenza contrariamente al voto ed allo scopo della natura. Né cambia il fatto che nel caso in esame chi pone in essere gli atti di esecuzione è il passivo."

[53] Ibid., b. 23, f. 2253.

[54] At times the establishment of a relationship of coequality between an officer and his subordinate arose suspicion, especially if the officer "sat next to the soldier as if they were equals, entered his room to joke with him and spent long periods of time there with him, offered him money, exchanged photographs with him" (ibid., b. 4, f. 402).

[55] Ibid., b. 18, f. 1783.

[56] Ibid., b. 12, f. 1179.

image of masculinity—nor those to femininity for that matter[57]—could be accepted, especially if they involved sexual orientation.

[57] See Deborah Cohler, "Sapphism and Sedition: Producing Female Homosexuality in Great War Britain," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (2007): 69-94.

APPENDIX

L'INCONSISTENTE OMOSESSUALITÀ DI PINOCCHIO

ANTONIO CASTRONUOVO

Il grande racconto italiano dedicato alle *Avventure di Pinocchio* (1883)—celebre protagonista del romanzo di Carlo Lorenzini, alias Carlo Collodi (1826-1890)—ha nel mondo tirature editoriali che si avvicinano a quelle della Bibbia: inevitabile che un'opera così diffusa sia sottoposta a una molteplicità di analisi e interpretazioni, tra le quali non è mancata quella di un Pinocchio giudicato personaggio omosessuale. Ad oggi, non esiste una interpretazione in tal senso che possa dirsi rigorosa, storicamente e filologicamente fondata: l'aspetto e i comportamenti del famoso burattino possono dare adito a sospetti e ambiguità, ma a nessuna certezza che possa dirsi originata da elementi certi presenti nel testo.

Nella rete di questa interpretazione è caduto lo stesso autore Collodi, il cui pseudonimo deriva dalla frazione del comune di Pescia, nei pressi di Pistoia, dove era nata la madre. Ci si è chiesti se egli era omosessuale, ma tutto ciò sulla base di elementi di grande fragilità: che fu da piccolo avviato alla carriera sacerdotale e che tale rito fosse un comune passaggio per numerosi gay dell'epoca, che non si sposò, che la sua attività narrativa fu limitata in maniera quasi esclusiva a racconti per ragazzi: *Giannettino* (1875), *Minuzzolo* (1877), *Occhi e nasi* (1881), *Storie Allegre* (1881). La biografia di Collodi non contiene elementi di sospetto, eppure la tesi che egli fosse omosessuale, e che lo fosse anche il suo famoso personaggio, ha circolato.

Le prime allusioni sorsero in forma di sparsi cenni giornalistici italiani che, lungo gli anni Settanta, utilizzarono come argomenti utili a quella tesi la torbida compagnia di Lucignolo, un Paese dei Balocchi che sembra un falansterio affollato solo da ragazzi maschi, ma anche, e non di meno, il nome stesso di Pinocchio. Si tratta di una parola familiare che richiama un gran numero di associazioni, perché "la sua configurazione fonica, accanto a quella semantica, rende la parola ricca di riferimenti. Composta da pino e

occhio, ricorda dal punto di vista fonetico parole quali *pidocchio*, *ginocchio* o *finocchio*, che non designa solo un ortaggio, ma nella lingua parlata significa anche 'omosessuale'."[1] È infatti sufficiente aggiungere a quel nome una "h" (*Phinocchio*) per trasformare la pronuncia del nome in *finocchio*, termine ambiguo e perspicuo ad un tempo.

Di uso più tipico nell'Italia settentrionale, il termine ha un impiego equivoco che avrebbe la propria origine in una scherzosa reinterpretazione paretimologica della voce, intesa come "occhio fino", cioè "occhio più piccolo", ma c'è chi afferma che la voce deriva dall'omonima maschera popolare della Commedia dell'Arte, personaggio che incarnava il servo sciocco ma astuto, dai modi effeminati.[2] Esiste poi un'interpretazione narrativa e scientificamente debole: pare che gli osti di un tempo servissero sulle tavole dei finocchi crudi da mangiare al "pinzimonio," intingendoli cioè in una ciotola con olio, sale e pepe; ciò permetteva agli avventori di non bere a stomaco vuoto e non solo: sembra che il sapore del vegetale modifichi l'aroma alcolico del vino, per cui anche un pessimo prodotto sembra gradevole. In tal modo gli avventori venivano "infinocchiati" e il concetto di "ingannare qualcuno facendogli credere ciò che non è vero" pare sia passato a indicare un maschio che si fa passare per donna.[3]

Molto probabilmente Collodi non pensò a nessuna di queste radici linguistiche, ma semplicemente—essendo Pinocchio originato da un ciocco di pino—al prodotto della pigna. Il termine "pinocchio" è infatti utilizzato da Machiavelli per indicare il pinolo: viene ripetuto più d'una volta nel canto carnascialesco *Di uomini che vendono le pine*, apparendo già nel primo verso: "Ah, queste pine che hanno bei pinocchi."[4] L'ipotesi che Collodi abbia voluto introdurre nel nome del personaggio un riferimento osceno diventa fragile.

Non si può nemmeno affermare che Collodi avesse una qualche ragione di frenarsi nell'allusione, essendo il suo Pinocchio un personaggio

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[1] Dieter Richter, *Pinocchio o il romanzo d'infanzia* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2002), 55.

[2] Alberto Menarini, "Finocchio in senso osceno," *Lingua nostra* 24 (1963): 57-58.

[3] Per le varie interpretazioni del termine si veda Valter Boggione e Giovanni Casalegno, *Dizionario storico del lessico erotico italiano* (Milano: Longanesi, 1996), 556-557 e 591.

[4] Il canto di Niccolò Machiavelli si può leggere in *Tutte le opere*, a cura di M. Martelli (Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1971), 992, e in *Trionfi e canti carnascialeschi toscani del Rinascimento*, a cura di R. Bruscagli (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1986), vol. I, 35-36.

totalmente laico, figlio di una cultura borghese e massonica, quella propria in cui l'autore era maturato. Non a caso manca dal romanzo ogni dimensione religiosa e trascendente. I termini "chiesa," "religione," "sacramento"—per citarne alcuni—non vi appaiono mai; anzi, è evidente che i miti e alcuni dogmi cristiani vi siano irrisi e anche profondamente dissacrati.

Ma che dei cenni a un'interpretazione omosessuale del personaggio circolassero lo riassunse Federico Canale, che il 24 marzo 1977 pubblicò sul "Secolo XIX" di Genova l'articolo *Chi cerca il sesso del burattino. Pinocchio era omosessuale?*. L'articolo è rimasto a segnare una sorta di momento negativo della critica letteraria sul romanzo di Collodi, come se Canale avesse sviluppato nel proprio elzeviro un rapporto certo tra Pinocchio e l'omosessualità. È vero il contrario: molto critico verso quelle allusioni, Canale è infatti turbato dal "voler guastare tutto e tutti, perfino Pinocchio. Viene da pensare che non siamo progrediti o che lo siamo troppo. In tal caso è da notare che tra le varie società umane, quelle che si professano più progredite e colte si distinguono per l'odio che portano a ciò che conservano ancora di profondamente puro ed onesto." Si può dissentire dal fatto che *Le avventure di Pinocchio* siano un prodotto letterario "profondamente puro ed onesto," è comunque evidente che le ragioni della contrarietà di Canale erano morali: Collodi non esercitò nel romanzo alcuna "tenebrosa finalità," e le allusioni a un Pinocchio deviante sono frutto del fertile terreno delle voci presuntuose e modeste che recano violenti attacchi e sfasciano tutto.

Ciò non toglie che Collodi sia riuscito—consapevolmente o meno—a riempire le sue pagine di situazioni, simboli e metafore che possono indurre al sospetto.

In primo luogo, il romanzo è tipicamente "maschile." Così come vi regna una pura economia laica (l'anarchia, la cuccagna), le sue pagine sono anche attraversate da una pura economia maschile, non solo nel senso che è una tipica storia al cui centro sta, freudianamente, una relazione padre-figlio. La prima metà del romanzo presenta praticamente tutti personaggi di sesso maschile, anche quelli secondari. Se ne scorriamo l'elenco il dato emerge lampante: maschi sono i due anziani artigiani celibi mastro Ciliegia e Geppetto; maschi sono il Grillo parlante e il carabiniere che acciuffa Pinocchio; maschi il vecchietto cui Pinocchio allunga un po' di pane e il rivenditore di panni usati che gli compera l'Abbecedario; maschi Arlecchino, Pulcinella e il burattinaio Mangiafoco che Pinocchio incontra nel teatrino delle marionette. La sola presenza femminile è la Volpe che fa coppia col Gatto, ma quando questi due personaggi si presentano mascherati si definiscono, con una allusione maschile, "signori

assassini." Lo stesso Pinocchio è il frutto di una androgenesi, vale a dire di una nascita che esclude un concorso femminile e materno. Non a caso questa ferra linea maschile indusse il fascismo a mettere in atto un tentativo (fallito) di profilare un Pinocchio fascista, da contrapporre a Topolino, creatura del taylorismo e dunque repellente.[5]

Nella seconda parte appare la sola figura femminile del romanzo, la fatina dai capelli turchini, che si trasforma anche nella bambina morta dal viso cereo. Dunque l'apparizione della donna avviene nella forma di un simbolo: l'impossibilità di possederla. Si tratta forse della sola figura che ha in sé qualcosa di religioso: una giovane asessuata e angelicata, una specie di affettuosa ma intoccabile Madonna. Anche i colori con cui ella appare alludono all'inviolabilità: il bianco della morte e della purezza, il turchino della freddezza, del distacco e del diniego. La sua stessa casa, con le pareti di madreperla, è un luogo surreale, lucido, che ha qualcosa di ospedaliero. Il solo personaggio femminile incarna dunque i caratteri di una madre/sorella dominante che pratica sul burattino di legno una pietà educativa. Quando Pinocchio, dopo l'incarnazione nel cane Melampo, tornerà dalla fatina troverà soltanto la mesta lapide: "Qui giace la bambina dai capelli turchini, morta di dolore per essere stata abbandonata dal suo fratellino Pinocchio." Iscrizione espressiva di un grande ma controllato amore, che esclude ogni sessualità incestuosa.

La parte finale del romanzo ristabilisce la relazione maschile: torna in scena il padre; il bambino deve farsi adulto per essere "la consolazione e il bastone" di un uomo che entra nella vecchiaia. Resta il fatto che il rapporto tra Geppetto e Pinocchio, contiene qualcosa di ambiguo, che qualcuno ha percepito come vincolo al limite della pedofilia.[6]

A rinfocolare la tesi di un aleggiare di sessualità nel romanzo (ma anche adesso, non di omosessualità) sta l'allusione fallica del naso che si allunga; ma il naso lungo è condiviso da Pinocchio con vari personaggi dei racconti popolari, nei quali quel carattere fenotipico segna sempre lo

[5] Cfr. Ennio Caretto, "Il mito fallito del Pinocchio fascista," *Corriere della Sera*, 15 aprile 2006. Da notare che gli album di Topolino continuarono a essere molto letti e il cartone fu tolto dalla circolazione d'autorità nel febbraio del 1942, quando l'Italia dichiarò guerra agli Stati Uniti.

[6] Sui temi del maschile e del femminile nel romanzo, oltre alle belle pagine di Dieter Richter, *Pinocchio o il romanzo d'infanzia*, 81-89, si veda anche Rita Mascialino, *Pinocchio. Analisi e interpretazione* (Padova: CLEUP Editrice, 2004), specialmente i capitoli XX (*Pinocchio, il femminile e la Fata turchina*) e XXI (*Pinocchio e il maschile*).

spirito della rivolta anarchica, il farsi beffe—mediante quell'escrescenza—della "normalità" del mondo circostante.

L'analisi del testo smonta pertanto la tesi che Pinocchio (e specularmente l'autore Collodi) sia figura dell'omosessualità, anche se quella tesi resta all'orizzonte, come sottofondo non dichiarato. E ciò, giocando nell'area dell'ambiguità, concorre a disegnare l'assoluta bellezza di uno dei più grandi romanzi dell'Ottocento italiano.

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(International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches, 2013), *Capri Hermafrodita, un esperimento culturale oltre l'eteronormatività* (AG-About Gender, 2015).

INDEX OF NAMES