VARCHI, BENEDETTO  
(1503–1565)  
Florentine writer and historian. Born in Montevarchi, he is known today above all for his Storia di Firenze (a history of Florence in the period 1527–38). Contemporaries appreciated his poetic and philosophical works; thus the court lady and author Tullia d’Aragona (1508–1556) made him the interlocutor in her Dialogo dell’infinità dell’amore (1547). Today his Petrarchan and neo-Platonic poetry wearies through repetition of the same images, aggravated by a certain overproduction which led to his writing hundreds of sonnets. Varchi also wrote plays, such as La suocera (The Mother in Law, ca. 1557–60), literary commentaries, and works on the Italian language, such as Ercolano (ca. 1560–65).

Varchi’s activity is notable for his outspoken defense, which continued until the last years of his life when he encountered much opposition, of the neo-Platonic idea of Socratic (that is homoerotic) love, as it had been set forth theoretically by Marsilio Ficino.

Varchi’s defense of homosexual love was particularly explicit, and he took little trouble to disguise his same-sex raptures. His sonnets of Socratic love are repiete with open declarations of love, while his Latin compositions amount to real confessions, to the point that his poetic work was denounced as “scandalous” by Scipione Ammirato (1531–1601) in his Opuscoli (published in 1637).

Varchi witnessed the last phase of the descending trajectory of the vogue of Socratic love. His contemporaries were wary of sonnets “inspired by chaste affection,” such as those he wrote for the young Giulio della Stufa. From one letter written by this adolescent we know that his father expressly forbade him to see Varchi. Also several poets, among them Antonio Francesco Grazzini (1503–1584) and Alfonso de’ Pazzi (1509–1555), filled Florence with sonnets that took aim at their rival’s homosexual tastes.

Benedetto Varchi is probably the most significant figure in a generation of Renaissance homosexuals who knew how to devise an instrument of affirmation and defense from neo-Platonic sources. It was in reaction to this boldness that contemporary society found it necessary to heterosexualize the very concept of “Platonic love,” purging it of the homoerotic features that Ficino had preserved.

Particularly audacious, if read with Renaissance eyes, is the conclusion of “Sopra la pittura e la scultura” (On Painting and Sculpture, 1546), in which Varchi provides an extensive commentary on two love sonnets of Michelangelo addressed to Tommaso de’ Cavalieri. Varchi praises at length “all his aspects which are full of Socratic love and Platonic concepts,” that is to say the compositions of love for boys. It is significant that Michelangelo appreciated the text, which had been sent to him, and thanked the author.

Varchi’s “bad reputation” stems in part from an obscure sexual scandal of which we still know little or nothing (it is discussed by Manacorda). As the sonnets targeting him show, however, the main problem arose from his excessive advocacy of a very audacious concept of Socratic love. When society reached the point of identifying this love with sodomy pure and simple, the situation of Varchi as its advocate became indefensible. It was proba-
bly as a result of this development that in
the last years of his life he decided to seek
protection in the church, becoming a priest.

Nonetheless, as late as 1564, in
pronouncing the oration at the funeral of
Michelangelo, the impenitent writer could
not bring himself to omit (however brief
and prudent the mention) of the bonds
that linked the great sculptor to Gherardo Per-
ini and Tommaso de' Cavalieri.

One year later Varchi followed
Michelangelo. His death ended a cycle of
homosexual intellectuals that had started
with Marsilio Ficino and closed with the
imposition of the new rigid climate of the
Counterreformation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Giovanni Dall’Orto,
“Socratic Love as a Disguise for Same-
sex Love,” Journal of Homosexuality, 16
[1988], 33–64; Guido Manacorda,
“Benedetto Varchi: l'uomo, il poeta, il
critico,” ANNALI DELLA R. SCUOLA
NORMALE DI PISA, 17.2 (1903); Luigi Tonelli,
L’amore nella poesia e nel pensiero del
Rinascimento, Florence: Sansoni, 1933.
Giovanni Dall’Orto

VARIANT

This term, used both as adjective
and as noun, enjoyed a limited currency in
the 1940s and 1950s as a synonym of
homophile. It probably owed its origin to
the wish to avoid the unfortunate connota-
tions which such terms as pervert and
deviate had acquired by contamination
from the older moralizing vocabulary, so
that the latter designations were com-
pletely unacceptable to the gay commu-
nity and its sympathizers. Two works that
featured the word in their titles were
George William Henry’s Sex Variants (New
York, 1941), a collection of risqué sexual
biographies of homosexual men and
women assembled by his collaborator
Alfred A. Gross, and Jeannette Foster’s
classic study Sex Variant Women in Lit-
erature (New York, 1956).

While the term could have been
applied to the whole range of departures
from conventional sex expression, in prac-
tice it was limited to the homosexual, the
underlying notion being that homosexu-
ality is a part of the spectrum of normal
sexual activity, not some willful or de-
praved aberration. Hence the usage was an
effort to locate homosexual expression in
the domain of the biological rather than of
the pathological—to guard against the
“medicalization” of the subject. In her
bibliographits Barbara Grier drew a dis-
tinction between overt lesbianism and
“variant” behavior in which the homosexu-
al expression is latent or even denied.
Perhaps because of its blandness and
ambiguity, the term largely faded from the
literature of the 1960s and later as a posi-
tive “gay consciousness” emerged.

Warren Johansson
Ailleurs [Elsewhere, 1889] was hailed as a masterpiece, one of its episodes featuring entwined lesbians and a caricatured androgyne. Yet when Colette Willy performed at the Folies Bergère in a sketch, “Le Rêve d’Egypte” (“The Dream of Egypt,” 1907), in which her sapphic lover, the Marquise de Belbeuf [d. 1844], portrayed a male painter infatuated with his model, the reaction was hissing and scandal.

In the United States, the trade journal Burlesque announced hopefully in 1916, “The days of the... sissy... are over. They have all been worked to death.” This did not prevent their persistence in smart revue, and a generation later one could find Bert Lahr and Ray Bolger camping it up in a parody of Design for Living in Life Begins at 8:40 [by D. Freedman, 1934]. Fannie Brice, one of the great headliners of the Ziegfeld Follies, made no secret that her trusted aide and adviser was the maid-enly Roger Davis.

Most nightclubs catering to a specialized clientele provided some sort of performance: the writer Katherine Mansfield was seen in a one-woman show à la Ruth Draper in a London lesbian club in 1913. Homosexual cabarets in Weimar Berlin were regular tourist attractions. The Eldorado-Diele featured such attractions as the ball-walker Luziana [billed as “Mann oder Frau?,” “Man or Woman?”]; the Alexander-Palast gave Saturday shows starring the best variety performers of the city, including Mieke the female impersonator. But the outstanding and outspoken gay comedian, Wilhelm Bendow [1884–1950], was beloved by straight and gay audiences alike. In the guise of a scatter-brained “fairy,” he insinuated pungent innuendo, blasting politicians and society fads. His fans included the Nazis who allowed him to go on performing until 1943 when the war went sour for them, and he was banned for too much frankness.

Greenwich Village in New York also provided tourist attractions: “during the twenties and thirties, there were many nightclubs in the area which featured homosexuals on public exhibition, either as part of the show or as paid sitters or mixers in the crowd. . . . These deviates drew such crowds that many paid homosexuals were only acting that way for a fee” [Leo Klein, You Are Not Alone, 1959]. Wartime travel restrictions, military and, later, municipal police interference curtailed this type of freak-show. Black clubs in Harlem, tolerated by the authorities as peripheral folk-culture, remained open in advertising the predilections of the performers: Bessie Smith, Gladys Bentley, “Moms” Mabley, Ada “Bricktop” Smith, and others.

After World War II. Post-war revues emphasized glamour drag and the impersonation of female superstars, making an appeal to audiences of either sexual persuasion. But the increase of homosexual consciousness gave rise to comedians such as Michael Greer and Wayland Flowers with his ventriloquial Egeria, Madame; their jokes could best be appreciated by an in-crowd. In England, popular comedy has always displayed a broad streak of camp much appreciated by the mass public, which manages to segregate it mentally from its condemnation of real-life sexual-ity: comedians like Frankie Howerd, Kenneth Williams, and Larry Grayson have exploited this, particularly through double-entendre.

Glamour drag made a comeback in the 1970s with La Grande Eugène in Paris, Dizi Croquettes in Rio de Janeiro, and even Zou at the Blue Angel in New York. With gay liberation, “alternative cabaret” became more vocal and evident. In England, Bloomips continued to use outrageous drag, self-aware camp, and outworn variety conventions to make political statements. Three-man operations like the Terry Towel Show and The Insinuendos played in pubs and clubs throughout London, to mixed audiences, with great success in the late 1980s. The West German equivalent was the three
Tornados (Gunther Tews, Holger Klotzbach, and Arnulf Rainer), founded in 1977.

The first gay revues in the United States were flashy commercial enterprises like Fred Silver's *In Gay Company* (1975). But more extreme drag groups like Hot Peaches and "gender-bender" concepts heralded more politically satirical enterprises. Typical is the five-man United Fruit Company, which arose in 1985: its targets included AIDS, gentrification, U.S. interference in Central America, and TV commercials. San Francisco fostered Gay Comedy Nights at the community arts center, the Valencia Rose, from 1981 to 1985; performers who cut their teeth there later constituted *Can't Keep a Straight Face*, a three-man/three-woman revue which resembles traditional cabaret in its reliance on sketches and in its satirical point. In other cities as well, the emergence of the gay audience from underground and its merging with a "with-it" public has encouraged more elaborate entertainments than mere microphone jockeys; for example, Boston's Club Cabaret has begun to sponsor regular musical revues (*The Ten Percent Revue*, 1987; *Disappearing Act*, 1988).

Lesbian Performers. British lesbian comics have often managed to walk the knife-edge between radical statement and commercial success: Karen Parker and Debby Klein were cited as one of the three top cabaret acts in England in 1987. Siren Theatre Company created a parodic Western, *Hotel Destiny* (1988), which simultaneously spoofed stereotypical film roles and illusions of personality. American lesbian performance in the mid-1980s has centered around the WOW cafe in Manhattan's East Village. In a parody of talk-show formats, Alina Troyana would appear both as the outrageously "femme" Carmelita Tropicana and the "butch" Julio Iglesia to send up traditional gender identities within the lesbian community. Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver of the Split Britches Company comprise a doubles act that shifts between these roles. While some stand-up comics, such as Terry Baum, graphically and hilariously depict lesbian sexuality, others, such as Kate Clinton, who began performing at feminist conferences and musical events, have had to tailor their material to more mixed audiences when they moved to comedy clubs. Achieving split focus has not proved a problem for Lily Tomlin, using material by Jane Wagner; having begun as a mainstream comedian, she has become bolder and franker as her particular constituency has grown more conspicuous.

Laurence Senelick

**VASE PAINTING, GREEK**

Introduced during the Neolithic period of prehistory, ceramic pots were the all-purpose containers of the ancient world. They were used for eating and drinking as well as for long-term storage. In order to increase their value, or make the wares inside more attractive, many vases, especially those intended for the upper classes, bore incised or painted decoration.

In Greece during the Mycenaean period in the second millennium, figural decorations appeared on vases, though none is erotic as far as present knowledge goes. In the succeeding "dark age," vase painting became austere geometrical, with schematic animals and human figures appearing only occasionally. A wave of Near Eastern influence enriched this meagre repertoire, heralding the emergence of the full-blown black-figure style featuring an elaborate iconography of mythological and everyday-life scenes. Leading potters and painters, especially at Athens, began to sign their work as a mark of pride. About 530 B.C. a fundamental change occurred in the technique of Greek vase painting, with red figures in reserve against a black ground, a field reversal of the contrast that had been the hallmark of the black-figure mode. Iconographical conventions continued, however, basically unchanged.
In the early sixth century, scenes began to appear in which an older bearded male (the erastes) courts a younger man (the eromenos). In some instances, the intention is signaled by unmistakable body language: the older man extends one hand in entreaty to the youth’s chin, while the other touches his genitals. In other examples the older man brings a gift, such as a live hare or a rooster. These presents suggest a relationship of older hunting customs with pederasty. There are also banqueting scenes (symposia) in which older and younger men recline together on couches. In the 1970s Italian scholars published a monumental fresco of this type found at Paestum, a discovery that suggests that many of the scenes known at present only from vase paintings had their counterparts in large-scale works.

In a few instances copulation occurs, though usually intercurially—that is to say, the older man inserts his erect member between the thighs of the younger. From these scenes Sir Kenneth Dover inferred that anal copulation was rare—a conclusion contradicted by literary evidence. What probably accounts for the discrepancy is that the limited conventions of the artistic language of Greek vase painting permitted only a limited range of depiction, so that one cannot expect the vases to document the full spectrum of ancient sexual conduct.

There are also mythological depictions bearing on homosexuality, the most frequent being those of Zeus’ courtship and abduction of the Phrygian youth Ganymede. In some pieces, the mythological scene is the doublet of one of daily life, suggesting that the homoerotic inclinations of the gods were regarded as warrants for human conduct.

Homoerotic interests were not limited to a small clientele of purchasers, but were evidently prevalent among the painters and the potters themselves, who often adorned the vases with inscriptions indicating that “So-and-so is beautiful.” These kalos inscriptions, which occur even when the imagery of vase is not otherwise homoerotic, have parallels in graffiti, as seen on the island of Thera. Sometimes they are accompanied on the vases by “pinups,” portraits of the beloved youths. Studies of the chronology of the kalos inscriptions indicates that they were allocated among a restricted number of supremely admired sex objects, who were evidently members of the jeunesse dorée; each individual reigned only a few years, yielding to other favorites as his beauty faded.

Study of the male images, which are frequently nude, shows something of the changing fashions in male beauty over the generations. In the sixth century the youths were relatively husky, but as time passed they became more lithe and elegant, possessing what would now be called a swimmer’s body. By the fourth century an almost androgynous ideal prevailed.

Interest in shapely male bodies persisted through Greek art until the end, in sculpture as well as in painting, but popularity of overtly homoerotic scenes began to taper off in the later part of the fifth century B.C. The reasons for this decline are not entirely understood, but it appears to reflect overall changes in the iconography of vase painting, which became relatively impoverished.

While painted pottery is known from many cultures, no body of homoerotic imagery comparable to that of ancient Greece has as yet been identified. This seeming dearth may reflect in part prudery in publishing and exhibiting relevant pieces, rather than any complete absence. Until recently most homoerotic Greek vases were kept locked in museum storerooms, and photographic reproductions, when published at all, were likely to be cropped or altered. Pre-Columbian Peru had a lively production of erotic ceramics in which explicit scenes of copulation are presented sculpturally, a few of the surviving pieces (some were deliberately destroyed after finding) are homosexual.

*See also Beauty Contests.*
VENereal Disease
See Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

VENICE
This northern Italian city, which stands on a series of islands in a lagoon of the upper Adriatic, is world-famous for its wealth of artistic monuments and for its unique and picturesque urban fabric, punctuated by innumerable canals and bridges.

History. Founded in the middle of the fifth century by refugees from a mainland then ravaged by barbarian invaders, the city remained in Byzantine hands, growing as a commercial center and increasing in autonomy, until independence was achieved in 697. In the ninth century Venice’s particular political profile began to emerge: a republic that was at first democratic, then from 1197 on oligarchic. The merchant families who monopolized power [and the title of nobility] made sure that Venice’s policy was directed to the increase and safeguarding of commerce. Expansion in the East and the securing of trading posts there were favored by the Crusades, especially the Fourth (1204), which the republic succeeded in manipulating to its own advantage to create an empire.

Defeating its maritime rival Genoa in 1378, Venice expanded its domain in the hinterland. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 and the discovery of America in 1492 ultimately doomed the city to gradual decline as new trade routes opened on the oceans. Yet the strength of the republic remained impressive: although locked in a seemingly endless conflict with the Turks, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice was nonetheless able to conduct a foreign policy that was independent of the great European powers and of the papacy. The descending curve, which was relieved by festive ceremonial and renewed artistic vitality, ended in 1797 with loss of independence. Conquered by Napoleon, the city was ceded to Austria, which kept it until 1866, when Venice joined the new Kingdom of Italy.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries industrialization occurred in the coastal centers of Marghera and Mestre, which are administratively part of Venice. The city on the lagoon, having lost much of its own population, today lives mainly on the receipts from tourism.

Homosexuality in the Renaissance: Research Parameters. Among the various city-states of Renaissance Italy Venice has gained particular attention on the part of historians for its evidence of older patterns of homosexual behavior. The reason for this interest resides not so much in any special quality of homosexual behavior in the republic as in a particular political situation.

A thousand years of political stability, and the city’s freedom from invasion and sacking, permitted it to accumulate one of the fullest historical archives in the Western world. These archives have preserved trial records, sentences, and texts of laws against sodomy from the fifteenth century onwards. The accessibility of this material has made it a precious resource for research—the city’s tangled and peculiar political structure notwithstanding.

The Administrative Framework. Never having been part of the Holy Roman Empire, Venice never accepted the political forms and legislation in force on the mainland. Venice tended to shun an organic code of laws. In practice it often occurred that two courts were called in, so that differences had to be decided pragmatically, case by case. For these reasons, Venetian antisodomy legislation cannot
be studied through one or more laws of a nonexistent code, but through a myriad of parti [decrees] promulgated from time to time to deal with particular transgressions. This legal situation recalls that of the English common law.

Until the fifteenth century the chief Venetian magistrature responsible for the repression of homosexual behavior was that of the "Signori di Notte" [the Lords of the Night], who had the responsibility of patrolling and overseeing the city. In 1407, however, the Lords were guilty of excess of zeal: in a big operation they arrested 35 sodomites, 14 of whom belonged to noble families of the city. For this reason, the Council of Ten, a body responsible for the security of the state, stepped in, checking the authority of the Signori di Notte so as to block the proceedings. Henceforth almost all sodomy trials were handled by the Consiglio dei Dieci, which also promulgated the decrees concerning the repression of homosexual behavior.

After the Council of Trent (1545–66) Venice also had to accept—not without long resistance and open defiance of the pope—the papal Inquisition; it was received, however, only with serious limitations on its jurisdiction. As regards sodomy the Inquisition was competent only for clergy, laity remaining within the jurisdiction of the secular courts. Thus no more than twenty trial records of this sort are preserved among the Inquisition papers.

With the Austrian conquest, Venice received first the penal code of Lombardy-Venetia, and then the Austro-Hungarian code, both of which criminalized sodomy. Annexation to the Kingdom of Italy in 1866 effectively abrogated the sodomy laws.

Social Realities. Recent studies in the Venetian archives [especially those of Ruggiero, Labalme, and Pavan] have brought to light the existence of a flourishing sodomite subculture in the Adriatic city, provided with meeting places minutely listed in the decrees based on careful surveillance] and marked by a certain degree of reciprocal knowledge among the participants. Among the places noted that must be watched were the shops of barbers [who often served as pimps], the establishments of pastry makers, unbuilt land on the edge of the city, and the porches of certain churches.

The pattern of relationships that emerges from the trial records is—like that of Florence and other historic Italian cities—pederastic in character: that of an adult [who plays the role of insertor] and an adolescent [the insertee]. Money almost always played a decisive role in effecting the connection. In general the sodomy trial records reveal a high number of cases of violent assault, which received the death sentence, because these were more likely to be denounced by the victims or their relatives.

The many group trials [for example those of 1407, 1422, 1460, 1464, 1474, 1537, and 1547] show how it was possible, starting with a single arrested person, to find other guilty parties; this was also done through young hustlers who sold their favors to several clients. Yet the traumatic experience of 1407 made sure that no dragnet on a similar scale was attempted afterwards, at least as far as we know. This reflects the usual state of affairs in large cities where the "vice squad" knows the extent of clandestine sexual activity but is also aware that it must not compromise the holders of wealth and power.

Toward the middle of the sixteenth century the trial records also bear witness to taverns in which, with the acquiescence of the proprietor, sodomites could conclude their arrangements in peace and tranquility. The apparent resemblance between this practice and that of the English molly houses of the eighteenth century has not been studied, and must be considered not proven. In a trial of 1537, however, we find the use of a feminine name (Ninfa, "nymph") for one of the accused, foreshadowing the use of femi-
nine names later in the molly houses of London. This period also sees the emergence of more or less organized male prostitution, using barbers, tavern keepers, and procuresses as go-betweens.

The attitude of the Venetian Republic toward homosexual behavior was always severely unfavorable, so that in the middle of the fifteenth century there was discussion as to whether to pass—as had been done in other Italian states—from the penalty of burning at the stake to that of hanging or decapitation followed by burning—scarcely humane alternatives. Yet it was probably the severity of punishment that discouraged the people from systematic denunciations of sodomy. When an accusation would lead almost certainly to the condemnation of the culprit to death it was difficult for a friend, a relative, or even an acquaintance to denounce an “unnatural act” of which he had knowledge. Thus the trial records show a number of cases in which people warned their associates or helped them to flee.

To this understandable reticence there must be added, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, subterranean currents of libertinism thought, for the principal center of this philosophical trend was at the University of Padua, in Venetian territory. The tolerance found among the general population, especially among the educated, explains how it was possible to publish in 1652, probably in Venice itself, Antonio Rocco’s almost legendary defense of pederasty, L’Alcibiade fanciullo a scola.

Later Developments. For the period after the sixteenth century, which has thus far attracted little attention from scholars, there is much to be learned. The persistence or rebirth of a libertinist attitude—one tolerant of homosexual acts—is nonetheless witnessed by such documents as the jovial erotic poems written in Venetian dialect by Giorgio Baffo (1694–1768), which treat homosexual relations with the same unbridled joy as heterosexual ones, and the memoirs of one of the most famous Venetians of the eighteen century, Giacomo (Jacques) Casanova (1725–1798).

After the fall of the Republic Venice became an obligatory stop on the grand tour of the romantic homosexuals of northern Europe in the nineteenth century; here the outstanding names are Count Platen, John Addington Symonds (who tells in his memoirs of his affair with a Venetian gondolier), and Frederick Rolfe, who styled himself “Baron Corvo.” It was not an accident that Thomas Mann chose Venice as the locale for his novella of the homosexual passion of a middle-aged man, Death in Venice.

Until World War II Venice was one of the favored spots of international homosexual tourism, especially in autumn—to the point that such birds of passage (and others mingling with them) were termed settembrini, “those who arrive in September.” The tolerance of the city’s inhabitants made of it a kind of “zone of liberty” for well-healed homosexual visitors.

With the progressive depopulation of the city (from the end of the war to the present the urban nucleus declined from 200,000 to 90,000 inhabitants) and the “clearance” of proletarians to the mainland (Maghera and Mestre) to make room for the mass tourist industry, the city’s role as a magnet for the elite gay traveler has declined.

There remain some notable relics of the past which have been given new life by the revival of the Venetian carnival, which is celebrated throughout the world. There is also the voice of the living poet Mario Stefani (b. 1938), who sings both of Venice and of homosexual love. Still these points cannot disguise the fact that today the city stands apart from the main currents of Italian gay life and from those of international gay tourism.


VERGIL (70–19 B.C.)
Greatest Latin poet. Descended from an equestrian family from Mantua, Publius Vergilius Maro was a propagandist in the employ of the Emperor Augustus’ pederastic and possibly pathic minister of culture Maecenas, to whose circle he introduced the bisexual lyric poet Horace. Vergil created the Aeneid as a Latin epic to correspond, the first half to the Odyssey, the second half to the Iliad of Homer, tracing the descent of the Romans from the Trojan hero Aeneas and the fusion of Trojans and Latins into a single commonwealth. The epic, which embodied the high ideals and heroic destiny of the Romans, became the basic text for the education of their upper-class boys. His poem avoided homoeroticism—except for the heroic lovers Nisus and Euryalus.

Influenced by Catullus and the Hellenistic poets, Vergil studied Epicurean philosophy at Naples. As a young man he composed Eclogues partly taken from the Pastoralis by Theocritus. His Georgics were in some ways inspired by Hesiod, but actually more by Callimachus and other Alexandrians. Under the first Roman emperors the rush to imitate the cosmopolitanism of Alexandria and the Hellenistic monarchies helped make pederasty less unacceptable. Of weak constitution, unlike most Roman aristocrats who while teenagers married girls of 12 or 13 as arranged by their respective patresfamilias, Vergil was one of the few distinguished Romans never to marry. A biography composed in late antiquity described him unambiguously as a boy-lover. He sang of pederasty in the Second Eclogue, which treats the unrequited love of the slave Corydon for his master’s favorite, the shepherd Alexis. The Old claim that he was merely parroting Hellenistic pederastic themes, which he did, sometimes closely, sometimes freely, to court favor with his patron Maecenas, is no longer believed to “explain away” his subject matter. Though all his bucolic verses have Greek characters and are often set in Sicily, Vergil infused Italian elements and personal touches into them.

Christians, who claimed with the Emperor Constantine at Nicæa in 325 that Vergil’s fourth and sixth Eclogues, celebrating the birth of a son for Augustus, really was divinely inspired to foretell the birth of Jesus, have long striven to deny that he actually praised, much less practiced pederasty, hence the concoction of the literary convention that he only followed Greek models or the tale that he so wrote to please Maecenas. His description of the love of Corydon for Alexis furnished the title of André Gide’s defense of homosexuality (1924). So if the pederastic theme occupied a minor place in his writing, Vergil remains one of the great homosexual figures of world literature, whose epic poem commemorated the historical destiny of Rome.


VERLAINE, PAUL
(1844–1896)
French symbolist poet. Born in Metz, he published his first book of verse, Poèmes saturniens, in 1866. It belonged to the Parnassian reaction to Romanticism, embodying the virtues of classical order and clarity. A few of the poems, however, revealed that he was more suited to a
suggesive style than one with the classi-
cal rules and the 12-syllable alexandrine. 
He also employed vers impair, with an odd 
number of syllables, together with un-
usual verse forms. His subsequent vol-
umes of verse continued this trend toward 
a distinctive style, transposing into verbal 
music the make-believe atmosphere and 
moonlit settings of the eighteenth-cen-
tury painters popularized by the brothers 
Goncourt.

In the fall of 1871, although he 
had been married for some eighteen 
months, he fell under the spell of the 
personality of the 17-year-old Arthur Rim-
bau. The two of them tried to live as 
lovers in accordance with a new moral 
code, or rather amoral code, in which a 
different world was to be created through 
a different kind of poetry. But the relation-
ship between the two poets was a tortured 
one and ended in a violent quarrel in Brus-
sels in July 1873 when Verlaine shot 
Rimbaud in the wrist. Sentenced to two 
years’ imprisonment during which he 
found the hoped-for reconciliation with 
his wife impossible, he returned to the 
Catholic faith in which he had been raised, 
still trying for years afterward to lead a 
new life. However, caught between the 
aspirations of religious faith and the tem-
pitations of the flesh, he yielded to the latter.

At one of his teaching posts, the 
Collège de Notre-Dame at Bethel, he 
formed a deep homosexual attachment for 
one of his pupils, Lucien Létinois, who 
accompanied him when he returned to 
Paris in July, the two lived near each other 
for a time until the youth died of typhoid 
in April 1883. The loss caused Verlaine an 
emotional shock even more intense than 
is suggested by the poignancy of the poems 
in Amour composed in his memory. His 
mother bought the Létinois’ farm at Cou-
lommenes, and here he lived for two years, 
drinking at local taverns, and carrying on 
questionable affairs with vagabonds and 
boys imported from Paris, so that his scan-
dalous way of life caused the local people 
to despise him. The death of his mother in 
January 1886 left him penniless, and the 
last years of his life were spent half in the 
hospital, half as a destitute man of letters 
on the street. He died in January 1896 at 
the age of fifty-one.

Explicit homosexuality is a mi-
nor theme in Verlaine’s work, notably in 
two collections of verse, Les Amies and 
Hombres. The first was a slender volume 
of six lesbian sonnets entirely in feminine 
rimes (violating the classical rule that 
masculine and feminine rimes must alter-
nate), published by Poulet-Malassis in 
Brussels, where erotic literature had taken 
refuge to escape the repressive regime of 
the Second Empire. In it Verlaine veiled 
his own homoerotic impulses behind 
scenes of lesbian love. For the modern 
reader, the tender and playful “girl-
friends” radiate a lascivious charm but 
can scarcely be called obscene. For these 
sonnets the poet borrowed the vocabulary 
of Baudelaire, especially the “femmes 
darnées” of Les Fleurs du mal. Evident 
also is the influence of the Parnassian 
poets with their chiseled verses on clas-
sical themes, particularly in “Sappho.” But 
in his candid portrayal of supple, young, 
passionate female bodies bathed in a deli-
cate atmosphere, Verlaine was in his day 
striking out into new territory.

Two of the poems in Hombres 
(“Men”) were written by Verlaine and 
Rimbaud in 1871–72 as contributions to 
the Album Zutique, a kind of guest book 
kept by the physician Antoine Cros, who 
invited a group of poets to meet and recite 
their facetious verses. Two more were 
composed in 1887 and 1889, the remainder 
in 1891 when Verlaine was a patient at the 
Hôpital Broussais. The collection appeared 
only after the poet’s death, published clan-
destinely in Paris by Messein in late 1903 
or early 1904.

Together with a set of poems on 
heterosexual themes entitled Femmes, 
the verses form a Trilogie érotique that 
has circulated since 1910 for the most part 
in expensive, quite rare editions often il-
lustrated by well-known artists, but has
been excluded from official editions of the complete works. The poems reflect Verlaine's long history of homosexual attachments and casual encounters, beginning in his teens and reaching its high points in the love affairs with Rimbaud and Lucien Létoinois. The rural lads of "Mille e Tre" may have been inspired by his sexual escapades at Coulommes, while "In This Café" hearkens back to the two bohemian lovers masturbating in public in symbolic defiance of one of society's most stringent taboos. The pieces have their flaws: the sonnets of Les Amies are slightly cloying and a certain repetitiveness (the bane of pornographic literature) afflicts Hombres. Nevertheless, in his poems Verlaine created a strange and compulsive beauty by embracing the whole range of sexuality with a hearty candor that is all the more exceptional since it belongs to a time when the morbid and the effete were deliberately cultivated. The homoerotic poems, though sexually explicit and sometimes obscene in language, transcend pornography and achieve true literary status.

In another poem, "Ces passions," first published in La Cravache of February 2, 1889, and then included in Parallèlement, is Verlaine's boldest exaltation of homosexual love, whose daring contrasts all the more with the regularity of the versification and the faultless composition. At the same time, in the third line of certain stanzas the poet ponderous verses with long words meant to suggest the solemnity of the rites of male bonding which they celebrate, while heterosexual unions are dismissed as trifles, "erotic needs," diversions of couples who are not go beyond the norm.

Verlaine's 1883 sonnet "Langueur," on the fall of the Roman Empire, was credited with launching the Decadent movement. However this may be, his name remains unalterably linked with fin-de-siècle aestheticism. The musical quality that characterizes his best pieces largely disappeared from his poetry and other writings in the last decade of his life, but the totality of his work, so imbued with the unique phonic quality of the French language as to be untranslatable, ranks him with the great masters of French poetry.


Warren Johansson

VIAU, THÉOPHILE DE
(1590–1626)

French poet and libertine thinker. Théophile de Viau was the most talented poet of his generation, which belonged to the first half of the reign of Louis XIII. His militant atheism and stormy, unconventional existence made him the idol of the youth, but his own passion was for Jacques Vallée des Barreaux, nine years his junior, strikingly handsome and intelligent, and gifted with a poetic talent all his own. The master and the disciple went everywhere together, and when they were separated, they exchanged letters that bear witness to a genuine love.

Allowed to return to Paris in March 1620 after less than a year of exile, Théophile was associated with a scandalous publication, a particularly obscene collection of poems entitled Le Parnasse satyrique that appeared in November 1622 and was followed by a decree of Parlement in July 1623 ordering his arrest. The poet fled Paris, but a month later was in absentia sentenced to death by burning at the stake. On the frontier of Picardy Théophile was arrested and brought in captivity to Paris, where an undercover agent of the Jesuits named Louis Sagoet denounced him for divine lèse-majesté and sodomy—which in those days were one and the same crime. There followed two years of imprisonment under conditions of suffering and outright torture that nearly broke his spirit, but worst of all was the infidelity of
Théophile de Viau is the spiritual forbear of later generations of poets of the European gay counterculture.


Warren Johansson

VICTIMLESS CRIMES

The concept of “crimes without victims” has played a major role in the legal and sociological debates of the 1960s and later, when the first serious efforts were mounted to urge repeal of the archaic laws against homosexual acts. It was especially promoted by the work of the American sociologist Edwin M. Schur, Crimes Without Victims: Deviant Behavior and Public Policy (1965), which addressed the issues of abortion, homosexuality, and drug addiction.

Basic Features of the Concept. Crimes without victims are the willing exchange by adults of strongly demanded but legally proscribed goods or services, or the commission of acts proscribed by law in which no third party is directly harmed or involved. A characteristic feature of such laws is that since no third party is harmed, there is no one who has an immediate interest in complaining to the police and presenting evidence against the culprits. Also, such offenses typically have a low visibility; they are committed as far from public view as the participants can manage, and it is only as a result of prearranged police surveillance or even entrapment that the crimes can be detected at all.

Schur’s argument starts from the premise that “criminal laws do not always effectively curb the behavior they proscribe,” but that “laws which are highly ineffective from the standpoint of sheer deterrence” may yet “have pronounced impact. . . . Indeed, it is precisely the criminal laws which fail to deter which may be of greatest interest to the sociolo-
gist." The author goes on to say that the "types of deviance examined in this book illustrate a type of unenforceable law that has also created some special interest" because the attempt to repress such behavior by criminal law "seems particularly likely to create secondary deviance and to set the stage for police corruption and demoralization."

In the section on homosexuality Schur concludes that "neither present policy nor a stiffer enforcement of that policy can significantly curb homosexual behavior, and echoes the Wolfenden Committee's proposals for "partial legalization of homosexuality." The most evident results of the laws are the heightening of the homosexual's vulnerability to blackmail and other forms of police corruption and repressive enforcement procedures; the secondary results are the alienation of the homosexual from society and the discrimination inflicted upon him, as well as the demoralizing and humiliating behavior in which he must engage.

Historical Precedents. All this had been said earlier, though never exactly in the language quoted. It was, strictly speaking, never asserted that homosexual behavior harmed anyone engaging in it, but rather—as the critics of victimless crime largely overlook—that the behavior in question was an offense ("abomination" in the language of the Old Testament) to the deity, and that any community tolerating such practices in its midst would be the object of divine wrath and retribution. The Lutheran jurist Benedict Carpzov (1595–1666) even declared in his treatise on the criminal law of the Kingdom of Saxony that "Often for the crime of a single individual God punishes an entire nation." Early medieval criminal law knew a distinction between tortious and sacral offenses; the former were crimes in which the wronged party, or his kinsmen and supporters, had the task of bringing the charge before the courts, the latter infringed the divinely ordained laws of the community. Only when centuries of Christian moral teaching had made sodomy a wrongful and heinous act were laws prescribing the death penalty for "unnatural vice" placed on the statute books of every European country. There they remained until the eighteenth century, when they began to disappear as the Enlightenment critique of the penal legislation of the Old Regime rejected them as relics of medieval superstition and barbarism.

Resistance to the Concept. In the English-speaking world the influence of the Enlightenment in this area of the law was severely limited by the fact that the right of the state to punish "immorality" in general, and sexual immorality in particular, went virtually unquestioned. Indeed there was a tacit agreement that the state had a duty to punish such behavior in the interest of society. Only with the rise of public criticism of the existing statutes has there come an erosion of consensus as to the validity or purpose of the law. Those who continue to defend the criminalization of homosexual behavior argue that the criminal law keeps homosexuality in hiding where it belongs. In this view the demonstrations and propaganda of gay liberation groups encourage teenagers to experiment with homosexual activity and drift into homosexual lifestyles. The undisguised homosexual subculture of the large metropolitan cities spawns prostitution and gay bars and meeting places that further all types of sexual deviance. Then too, homosexuality leads to the moral decay of the family that would ultimately destroy the very fabric of society. Finally, homosexuals are mentally ill and in need of psychiatric treatment, and decent, law-abiding members of society need to be protected from them. Such is the neo-traditionalist response.

Social Policy Questions. The concept of "victimless crimes" poses more sharply than any other the question: To what extent should the criminal law be an instrument of social policy? Even if the behavior in question harms no one else directly, there may be larger interests of
society that need to be protected or furthered by criminal legislation, and in the eyes of conservatives the upholding of moral standards is one of those vital interests. The underlying assumption of Christian sexual morality is that erotic pleasure experienced outside the bounds of Christian marriage is immoral and wrongful, and in Christian countries the state should have the task of punishing such behavior by criminal sanctions. Where freedom of conscience and separation of state and church are formalized in the Constitution, as they have been in the United States since 1791, no rational ground can be offered for imposing such a moral standard on the entire community, indeed such an attempt violates the liberty and privacy of the individual citizen. On the other hand, a law that punishes an individual who knowingly infects another with a sexually transmitted disease falls wholly outside the category of “victimless crime,” since the infected party is clearly the victim, and society has an undeniable interest in preventing the spread of syphilis and gonorrhea, not to speak of AIDS, which is frequently fatal to those who contract it by sexual intercourse.

Conclusion. The application of the notion of “victimless crime” to homosexual behavior is essentially a restatement of the Enlightenment argument against the laws that prescribed the death penalty for sodomy: namely, that the crime infringes the rights of no other human being, and that in punishing private consensual behavior between adults the state is overstepping its duty to protect the life, liberty, and property of its citizens, while offenses against religion and morality, belonging as they do to the sphere of private conscience, are matters for religious confession and atonement. But given the diffusion of the concept in contemporary sociology, future debates on public policy in regard to homosexuality are likely to see extensive use of the term “crimes without victims.”


Warren Johansson

VIDEO

The video-art movement, which emerged in the 1970s, uses tape to produce audio-visual works with their own aesthetic, which is sometimes abstract, sometimes more naturalistic in the manner of cinéma vérité. Museums and galleries of contemporary art have given some attention to video, but have slighted gay and lesbian examples.

One exception to this neglect was a presentation of thirteen video tapes at New York’s New Museum of Contemporary Art under the title “Homo Video: Where We Are in the 1980s” from December 1986 to February 1987. The videos shown were heavily influenced by the television documentary model, presenting images and information relevant to AIDS and to problems of discrimination, with considerable political awareness, though none of them were conventional documentaries with the standard voice-over narrative. In nearly all cases, these reflected attempts to make videos accessible to a mass audience, or capable of being aired over broadcast television, rather than to present idiosyncratic “pure art” videos.

There was also at least one regularly scheduled cable program featuring gay videos, Rick Schur’s “The Closet Case Show,” which had a long run in a weekly format during the mid-eighties in New York City. This show included less didactic videos, such as the 30-minute parody “How to Seduce a Preppy,” and may have
been more representative of a wider cross-
section of gay video as then practiced than
the New Museum selection, which was
intended to point new directions.

See also Television.

William Olander

VIOLENCE

The relationship between vio-
ence and homosexuality, both funda-
mental to social relations, but with quite
different historical and cultural forms, is a
very complex one. Most of the research
has suffered from a lack of general perspec-
tive. The most relevant topics are male
initiation, persecution and social repres-
sion of homosexuality, rape, queer-bash-
ing, homosexual murder, internalization
of negative social norms by homosexuals,
the esthetization of cruelty by homosex-
ual artists, and homosexual sadomaso-
chism.

Initiation and Male Rape. The
initiation of youths into adult styles of
masculinity has a long history in which
homosexual behavior, sometimes rape,
plays a prominent role. The anthropolo-
gist Gilbert Herdt has documented rituals
of manhood in Melanesia where the oral or
anal transmission of semen, and so homo-
sexual behavior, is central. These rituals
are at the same time cruel: the entry into
the world of adult males is a liminal, tra-
numatic experience for the initiates. The
enforced submission seems to enhance
the youngsters' loyalty to adult males and
their affective participation in the latter's
secrets. These initiations are an extreme
form of such rituals, which exist in other
cultures as well. Chinese pirates of the
eighteenth century used anal rape to initi-
ate captives into their new career as out-
laws. The hazing and ragging in boarding
schools, in student fraternities, and in
sports are modern survivals of these initia-
tions where violence and homosexual
penetration occasionally occur.

Male rape in jails, especially in
America, seems to be fundamental for the
prison hierarchy, which wardens often
tolerate because of its functionality in
maintaining order in prison. Donald
Tucker published in Male Rape an insight-
ful essay on his experiences with involun-
tary homosexual behavior in jails. The so-
ciologists Wayne Wooden and Jay Parker
have written a book on prison sexuality
that has much to say on the same topic.

In the myths of Egypt and the
history of Assyria, and in the armies of
ancient Rome rape of males served as an
official form of punishment. The Turks
raped Greeks and Armenians whom they
captured. During the 1980s the Panaman-
ian authorities used male rape as a form
of punishment for political dissent.

Rape of males "in the commu-
nity" and by gangs is far more common
than usually supposed, but according to
researchers both the assailant and the
victim are usually heterosexual, and the
motivation seems to be the acting out of
a superior power position on the part of
the aggressor and the humiliation of the
victim.

Murder. A special case of vio-
ence with regard to homosexuality is that
of homosexual lust murderers. It seems
that especially in places and times where
emancipation and discrimination against
homosexuality are much discussed and
youth move freely, cases of homosexual
serial murder happen as expressions of the
strained relations of homosexuals with heterossexuals: Germany in the twenties
(Haarmann), the United States in the sev-
teenties (Cort, Gacy).

Anti-gay Violence. The most
common type of violence homosexual
men and lesbian women encounter is the
violence connected with legal and social
discrimination against homosexuality.
At a very general level, many of them ex-
perience psychological and physical violence when coming out—from their families,
peers, instructors, and colleagues. As the
degree of hostility toward homosexuality
differs strongly according to historic peri-
ods and to national, ethnic, and social
backdrops, the level of violence also varies. The same applies to harassment by queer-bashers, which also seems to have become a rather typical reaction against homosexuals and homosexual emancipation in western countries, as in the assault on Magnus Hirschfeld in Vienna in 1921. In a “tolerant” country such as the Netherlands, reportedly half the homosexuals have experienced violence from queer-bashers. Because of the legally sanctioned oppression of homosexuals, which prevailed in many countries until recent times, the level of unofficial harassment in former periods is not well documented, but seems to have been less widespread than nowadays. A special case of violence against homosexuals is the murder of older gay men by boys and younger men in situations of prostitution [J. J. Winckelmann, Gustav Gründgens, Marc Blitzstein, Pier Paolo Pasolini].

Violence against homosexuals from law-enforcement and police authorities is still common in many countries such as Great Britain and the United States, as well as in Eastern Europe and the Third World. In Western Europe, from the Middle Ages until the eighteenth century and in England until the nineteenth, capital punishment for sodomy was carried out with some frequency, though mostly in a haphazard way. Several hundred executions have been documented by historians, and several thousand were probably executed, though one can merely speculate on the number of cases of “lynch justice” in which the victim was secretly killed to avoid scandalizing the community. The Inquisition more systematically attempted to terrorize potential offenders by parading the few at autos-da-fé to burn them. Thousands more fled prosecution as exiles and émigrés. Official violence was most vehement under Nazism in Germany (1933–1945), when many thousands of homosexuals died in concentration camps; this aspect of the Holocaust has been all too often obscured. The legal prosecution of homosexual behavior, in itself the outcome of Christian condemnation of non-procreative sexuality since the Middle Ages, served to rationalize the social oppression of homosexuality which nationalism with its measures toward conformity reinvigorated.

Internalization of Violence. External repression has been internalized by its many victims. In the early modern period, most sodomites did not dare oppose the condemnation of sodomy, and some, often after torture or out of fear, even cooperated with the authorities to prosecute their partners. With the individualization and psychologization of sexual preferences, which can be attested since the eighteenth century, confusion about sexual and gender roles and fear of being contaminated by “wrong” sexual predilections led men to extreme resolutions such as suicide. Heinrich von Kleist, the German writer, is the first known case of suicide because of individualized homosexuality. Spectacular examples were the Dutch law reformer J. E. Reuvenis and the English political leader Lord Castlereagh, both of whom committed suicide, in 1816 and 1822 respectively, after having been blackmailed for alleged homosexual relations with unlikely partners. This phenomenon probably peaked in Nazi Germany. Recent sociological literature attests that homosexual men and lesbian women are much more prone to attempt or commit suicide than their heterosexual counterparts. For a long time this way of death provided a common ending for gay and lesbian novels.

Literary Treatment. Many homosexual writers transformed violence with regard to homosexual behavior into an aesthetics of cruelty. The Marquis de Sade was the first to develop an aesthetics and philosophy of violence and sodomy. Many others followed suit: in the orbit of the decadent movement (Rimbaud and Verlaine, Lautréamont, Wilde, Couperus); later Proust and authors with a surrealist background (Crevel, Jahn, Arnold Bronnen); in the postwar era it became a
general trend: Genet, Tournier, Guyotat, Revc, Bowles, Purdy, Burroughs, Warhol, Pasolini, Fassbinder, Fichte. Could their esthetics be understood as a transposition of the feeling of "living dangerously" which was widely shared by homosexuals in those times? In the post-Stonewall generation comparable esthetics of cruelty and male love make a new breakthrough, as in the work of such writers as Tony Duvert, Hervé Guibert, Dennis Cooper, and Josef Winkler.

One of the refined forms of violence which have become more visible since the sixties, gay sadomasochism, shows that many desire a semblance of cruelty in a situation of mutual consent. This has given birth to a new and innovative variation within gay and lesbian culture.

Conclusions. The widespread connection between male homosexuality and various forms of violence requires some explanation; unfortunately because little has been provided or seriously studied, one is left with speculative suggestions. The comparative dearth of violence in lesbian relationships suggests that there may be a factor of maleness—the absence of the inhibiting influence of females—in the frequency with which violence is associated with male homosexuality. Reported instances of violence among lesbian couples, however, reveal that this may not be the whole story.

The perceived casting off of general social inhibitions against the expression of homosexuality since the Stonewall Rebellion [1969] may also carry with it a partial discarding of general social inhibitions against violence. Once the taboo is broken in one area, it may be hard to re impose it in another. Both homosexuality and violent aggression are secretive, condemned, and suppressed. According to neuroscientists, both are intimately connected with physiological processes, arising in the same areas of the brain (the ancient "reptilian brain"). What cannot be dealt with openly and verbally becomes relegated to the furtive and the physical, whether in favor or opposition.

Because so many cultures associate homosexuality with a deficiency of masculinity, equating aggressive sexuality and aggressive violence with masculinity, there may be an interplay at work which calls forth the latter to confront the perceived failings of the former. In such phenomena as queer-bashing, male rape, and police violence, aggressive violence seems to be used as a kind of shield to ward off the contaminating, taboed homosexuality, as if its mere presence constituted such a threat to one's male self-image that the other reservoir of maleness, violence, must be summoned to stanch the wound, as in Nazism and Fascism.

Research on the connection between homosexuality and violence is much needed. If violence (symbolic, attenuated, or expressed without restraints) is indeed fundamental in social relations, the gay and lesbian communities should not ignore it, but find constructive social, perhaps ritual, forms of expressing it. The theatre of cruelty, as Antonin Artaud imagined it, sadomasochism, contact sports, and erotic play-violence offer possibilities for experimentation. Perhaps violence, too, will have to come out of the closet.


Gert Hekma
Visconti, Luchino (1906–1976)

Italian director of films, theatre, and opera. On his father’s side Visconti was descended from ancient Milanese nobility, while his mother inherited great wealth from her industrialist father. The belle époque luxury of his homelife and performances in the family’s private theatre were to be utilized in his later directing career. When Visconti was nine his parents were divorced, a step brought on in part by his father’s “hobby” of having affairs with young men.

In his twenties, Visconti lived the life of a playboy, his only passion being horses. This interest, however, led him to Paris which he found stimulating both for its intellectual circles and for its sexual freedom. In 1934 he had his first serious affair with a man, the anti-Nazi German photographer Horst Horst. This liaison awakened his interest in film, and he served for a time as an assistant to the great director Jean Renoir. Visconti was also influenced by the poetic cinema of Jean Cocteau, who lived openly with his leading actor, Jean Marais.

Visconti’s first major feature, Ossessione (1942), which was based on the novel The Postman Always Rings Twice by James M. Cain, heralded the neo-realist school of Italian cinema. During the war years in Rome Visconti took an active part in the resistance, which led to his joining the Italian Communist Party. Although the party used him as one of its leading intellectuals, major Communist leaders stayed clear of any direct contact with Visconti because of his homosexuality. In the 1940s and 1950s he directed many foreign plays, which had the effect of a revelation in an Italy that had been culturally isolated by twenty years of fascist dictatorship. He also began to direct operas at Milan’s La Scala, which had fascinated him from the age of seven when the house was under the control of Arturo Toscanini. In the view of some critics, the melodrama and artificiality of grand opera spilled over into his films, and not to their advantage.

Visconti made one more major neo-realist film, La Terra Tremata (1948), a story of Sicilian fishermen in which he used untrained local actors. He first achieved major international acclaim, however, with Rocco and His Brothers (1960), a story of the disintegration of a southern Italian family which had settled in Milan. Visconti thus took his place beside Federico Fellini and his former collaborator, Michelangelo Antonioni, as a standard bearer of the Italian “new wave.” Four years later he released The Leopard, a loving creation of Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s novel of the life of a Sicilian aristocrat. During this period Visconti was intimate with Helmut Berger, a handsome but green young German, whom he groomed as a major actor. In The Damned (1969), a recreation of the “Night of the Long Knives” in which Hitler’s agents murdered Captain Ernst Röhm and his homosexual associates, Berger made a striking appearance in a transvestite parody of Marlene Dietrich. Death in Venice (1971) starred Dirk Bogarde in an almost spectral rendering of one of Visconti’s favorite works, the Thomas Mann novella of the same name, while Ludwig (1973), in which Berger returned, portrayed the mad homosexual king of Bavaria, Ludwig II.

With this trio of great films that openly treated homosexuality, Visconti found a place in the select company of such major contemporary directors as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, John Schlesinger, and Franco Zeffirelli, who not only have been openly gay, but insisted on treating the orientation honestly in their films. At the same time, his loving evocations of European aristocratic life before 1914, the world of Proust and Mann, Mahler and Klimt, made him a link to the manners and sentiments of a vanished world—that of the belle époque.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Alain Sanzio and Paul-Louis Thirard, Luchino Visconti cinéaste, Paris. Persona, 1984; Caia

Wayne R. Dynes

VISUAL ART
See Art, Visual; Photography.

VIVIEN, RENEE
(1877–1909)
Anglo-French poet and novelist. Born in London of an English father and an American mother as Pauline Mary Tarn, Vivien was taken to Paris when she was one year old. There she mainly educated herself by reading French books. Her first love was a neighbor, Violet Silleto, whom she was later to recall in her writings. After her mother removed her again to London, Vivien finally achieved her independence, which was cushioned by a substantial inheritance.

In 1899 she met Natalie Clifford Barney in Paris and began a relationship that is chronicled in Un femme m’apparut (1904). Although both women had achieved success in their writings in the French language, Barney recognized that Vivien had a real vocation, while her own works were more adjuncts to her opulent life and public persona. It is a mark of Vivien’s seriousness that in the last ten years of her life she wrote nine volumes of poetry, two novels, and two books of short stories. Her first poems were published under the name of R. Vivien, and critics who had hailed the “young man’s” passionate poetry to women were dismayed when Vivien went public with her real identity as a woman. In fact her work became increasingly gynecocentric, addressing women as a group apart from men.

The relationship with Barney was a stormy one. Both women had affairs with others, Vivien with the colorful Baroness Hélène de Zuylen de Nyvelt, who also wrote novels. Vivien and Barney visited the island of Lesbos together; the impressions gained here in Vivien’s company were probably responsible for Barney’s founding of her Academy of Women many years later. Vivien’s work was always concerned with death and in her last years she gradually starved herself to death, a victim of anorexia, which was not recognized as a disease at the time. In the 1970s her work was revived by both French- and English-speaking feminists and lesbians, and today it forms part of what appears almost as a golden age of lesbian creativity in Paris in the early decades of the twentieth century.


Evelyne Gettone

VOGEL, BRUNO
(1895–1987)
German writer. The details of Bruno Vogel’s biography are obscure; the little that is known comes mainly from an autobiographical sketch by the author himself and conversations that he had with Wolfgang U. Schutte and Manfred Herzer and others in the last years of his life. Vogel belongs to the comparatively few authors, at least in the German-speaking world, whose treatment of homosexuality is not only explicit and overt, but also clearly positive. Moreover, in Vogel this stance melds with his socialist–anarchist politics. After his first volume of stories, Es lebe der Krieg! (1924), antimilitarist and gay themes ran to some extent parallel in Ein Gulash (1928). Vogel gained a reputation with his short novel Alf; first published in 1929 and reprinted in 1977 in its third edition, in which a critique of the horrors of war combines with a critique of a society that will not grant young men the appropriate form of friendship, tenderness, and sexuality: Alf becomes a victim of the war, because as a victim of incomprehension and of his own confusion in regard to the impossibility of his feelings he has sought out the war as a volunteer.

In Alf, Vogel makes one of the protagonists, Alf’s young friend Felix,
express an almost uncritically positive judgment on psychoanalysis, which is celebrated as “something enormous and grand” because it unmasksthe sexualmorality propagated by state and church.

In the interwar period Vogel was close to the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (he was briefly an officer) and a member of Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science. He left Germany in 1931, and via Switzerland, Paris, and Norway he reached South Africa in 1937. There he did exactly what Felix praised his deceased friend for having done at the end of the novel: he fought against “baseness and stupidity,” this time against apartheid. So in the early 1950s it was time to turn his back on South Africa. He settled in London, where—not even noticed by the Exile-PEN club residing there—he led a hand-to-mouth existence. In 1987 his work *Ein junger Rebell—Erzählungen und Skizzen aus der Weimarer Republik* was published in East Germany.


*Marita Keilson-Lauritz*

---

**Voltaire, François-Marie Arouet, Known as (1694–1778)**

French philosopher, dramatist, essayist, and critic.

*Life.* Born in Paris as the son of a well-to-do notary, Voltaire, as he came to be known from the very beginning of the French Enlightenment, was educated by the Jesuits of the Collège de Clermont, then became a member of the libertine society of the Temple and devoted himself to the study of jurisprudence. Some disrespectful verses directed at the Regent, Philippe d’Orléans, and a quarrel with the Chevalier de Rohan-Chabot led to his imprisonment (1716–18, 1726), followed by exile in England. In a country whose language and literature were still little known on the continent, Voltaire was influenced by the empiricism of Locke, Newtonian physics, and English deism, which had virtually replaced Christianity among the educated classes. Upon his return to France in 1729, Voltaire criticized the literature of the day in *Le Temple du goût* (1732), polemicized against the notion of divine goodness (*Epître à Uranie*), and without authorization published the *Lettres philosophiques* (1734), to which he added the *Remarques sur les “Pensées” de Pascal*. This criticism of the regime in France led to criminal proceedings which he escaped by taking refuge on the estate of the Marquise du Châtelet in Lorraine (1734–49). Here he composed most of the fifty comedies and tragedies that founded his literary reputation, and in 1746 he was named historiographer of the king and a member of the French Academy.

On the death of Madame du Châtelet, Voltaire accepted the invitation of Frederick II of Prussia, with whom he had corresponded since 1736, to reside at the court of Potsdam. Here he pursued his literary, historical, and philosophical work, but quarrels with Maupertuis, president of the Berlin Academy, and with Frederick himself made him seek refuge in Geneva, where he began his collaboration on the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert (1755). But his writings scandalized the Calvinist theologians of Geneva as much as they had the Catholics. In 1759, while writing the novel *Candide*, directed in part against the optimism of Leibnitz and Pope, Voltaire found his definitive retreat at Ferney (1760–78). During this period, the intellectual and political elites of European society maintained close relations with Voltaire, whose influence grew steadily thanks to his many writings, for which—because of the risks which their challenge to the established order entailed—he employed 160 different pseudo-
nyms. In addition to the many thousands of letters from Voltaire to his numerous correspondents, among them the “enlightened despots” of the late eighteenth century, he wrote satires, philosophical tales, and pamphlets against political, clerical, and legal abuses. In the Paris that had received him in triumph for the performance of his last tragedy, Irène, Voltaire died on May 30, 1778. Refused burial by the hatred of the Catholic clergy, his body was transported to the Abbey of Scellières, near Troyes. The French Revolution, recognizing in him one of its immortal predecessors, thirteen years later gave him the honors of the Pantheon.

Outlook. Voltaire’s attitude toward homosexuality was complex and nuanced by the vicissitudes of his lifetime. There is no evidence that he ever had any homosexual experiences, even in adolescence; his judgment of the homosexuals whom he encountered during his long career was colored mainly by his estimate of their character and by their conduct in his regard. The ambivalence of his attitude may be gauged from the fact that his slogan “Écrasez l’infâme,” aimed at the Church and its penumbra of influence under the Old Regime, employed the very word which in the dossiers of the French police designated those given to “unnatural vice,” les infâmes. His hatred of the Catholic Church and of the superstition and intolerance which it had fostered was countered by his firm rejection of atheism, so that by leaving the sphere of private morality to the church he therefore allowed the intolerance of homosexuality on ascetic grounds—and with it the social ostracism of homosexuals—to be perpetuated for two full centuries after the legal sanctions had been stricken from the books. But he is rightly remembered as one of the foremost enemies of the Church, as one whose eloquent voice sounded the call for toleration in the spirit of the Enlightenment.

Works. In 1714 Voltaire wrote a poem entitled L’Anti-Giton for the purpose of persuading his friend, the Marquis de Crouillon, to “sacrifice to the true love.” If the Marquis was a “heretic in the flesh,” he was a brave soldier without the slightest trace of effeminacy; wounded twice at the battle of Malplaquet, he endured the amputation of his leg from the thigh downward while laughing and joking with those around him. The “philosophical sin” did not seem hateful to Voltaire if “it has taken the features of a handsome marquis.” On the other hand, the long established notion of homosexuality as a moral failing of the Catholic clergy fueled his hatred, in later life, for the clerical foes whom he despised as sodomites: the ex-Jesuit Desfontaines, the Abbe Larcher and the Reverend Father Poly-carpe, a barefoot Carmelite. Their vice then struck him as a consequence of clerical celibacy, and friend of toleration that Voltaire was, he became fanatical in his opposition to it.

Voltaire’s friendship with Frederick the Great was decidedly influenced by the feelings of both in regard to homosexuality. It began with a correspondence in which each flattered the other, comparing him to the great thinkers of Greece and Rome. Then after visiting Frederick at Potsdam in 1740 and observing him on his home turf, Voltaire began to write to him in explicitly sexual terms in addition to the usual courtly language, but Frederick was never able to overcome the affection which Voltaire cherished for Emilie du Châtelet, his mistress—and therefore was bitterly jealous of her. Both men acted manipulatively, Voltaire more so, because he hoped that by obtaining from Frederick information that he could relay to French intelligence he could ingratiate himself with Louis XV, while Frederick did everything in his power to lure Voltaire to his court. When he did settle in Potsdam, the authoritarian, militaristic, and unbviously homoerotic atmosphere proved not to his liking. Moreover, when Voltaire left Prussia, he took with him a copy of a tiny, privately printed edition of Frederick’s poems in French, including Le Palladion,
with its defense of homosexuality. Alarm-
ed by the potential for harm which disclo-
sure of the book might bring, Frederick at-
tempts to retrieve it by having the Prus-
sian resident in Frankfurt am Main stop
Voltaire and search his luggage as he pas-
ted through that city. The incident de-
veloped into a comic-opera affair before it
ended. Voltaire retaliated by publishing
anonymously a little book entitled The
Private Life of the King of Prussia, in
which with his inimitable wit he exposed
the erotic side of Frederick’s personali-

The Dictionnaire philosophique
portatif (1764), the fruit of twelve years of
reflection and a by-product of his work on
the Encyclopédie, was an alphabetically
arranged series of essays in free thought
aimed at the beliefs and superstitions of
Christianity. It included an article entitled
“Amour nommé Socratique” (So-called
Socratic Love), which shows Voltaire in-
clined to skepticism in regard to the sup-
posed toleration which the ancients ac-
corded to the “vice.” He begins by asking:
“How is it that a vice destructive of the
human race if it became universal, that an
infamous crime against nature is never-
theless so natural? It appears to be the last
degree of premeditated corruption, yet it is
ordinarily the lot of those who have not yet
had the time to be corrupted.” Later he
explains that “often a young boy by the
freshness of his looks, by the glow of his
skin color, and by the softness of his eyes
for two or three years resembles a beauti-
ful girl; if he is loved, it is because nature
has made the mistake” of bestowing femi-
nine beauty on a youth. Nowhere in the
article did Voltaire mention the Judeo-
Christian origins of the taboo on homosexu-
al expression, yet in a footnote added in
1769 he alluded to how narrowly the Abbé
Desfontaines had escaped burning at the
stake, and said that Deschaufours was
executed in his place, but only because the
word bougre in the Établissements de Saint
Louis had been misinterpreted as “sodo-
mite” and not as “heretic,” the meaning
which it had in the fifteenth century.

At this time Voltaire took up the
campaign for reform of the criminal law
that had been launched by Cesare Beccaria
with the publication of Dei delitti e delle
pene (1764). His own contribution to the-
ory was not great, and the essential ideas
did not come from him. Rather he sup-
pported and vigorously publicized Beccaria’s
principles, and used all his polemic talent
to call the attention of European society to
the features of the existing law and prac-
tice that had become intolerable. Only
with the French Revolution of 1789 did
arguments of the two reformers triumph,
because they had convinced the vast ma-

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Susan W. Henderson,
“Frederick the Great of Prussia: A
Homophile Perspective,” Gai Saber, 1
(1977), 46–54; Marcello T. Maestro,
Voltaire and Beccaria as Reformers of
Criminal Law, New York: Columbia
University Press, 1942; Roger Peyrefitte,
Voltaire, sa jeunesse et son temps, 2
vols., Paris: Albin Michel, 1985; Ernest
Raynaud, “Voltaire et les fiches de
police,” Mercure de France, 199
(December 1, 1927), 536–56.

Warren Johansson