

find no place within the "natural" polarity of human categories (male and female) and that create an artificial third category.

All this does not mean that the *ricchione* thinks of himself as a woman. His awareness of being different both from men and from women (that is to say, of being simply a *ricchione*) is strong and clear, and it expresses itself in a very **camp** manner. Nonetheless, the absence of a clear boundary between the condition of *ricchione* and that of the woman favors in some the acquisition of a feminine identity and, as an ultimate step, of transsexuality. In fact change of sex permits one to bring to completion the process of normalization and social integration that began with the acceptance of the *ricchione* role.

*Present Status and Prospects of Mediterranean Homosexuality.* Today Mediterranean homosexuality is slowly retreating, at least in the industrialized countries of the West. This decline is not due to the struggles of the gay movement (which is always weak where homosexuals reject the figure of the "gay" as aberrant), nor does it result from the theories of physicians and psychiatrists (who have little resonance among the uneducated, who are the bulwark of this paradigm of sexual behavior). The reasons for the retreat must rather be sought in the fading of peasant patriarchal society, in the impossibility of continuing to seclude women, and in the spread of the "sexual revolution." These factors are inexorably eroding the ranks of "macho men" who are disposed to have relations with *ricchioni*.

A part is certainly played by the concept of the **homosexual** that is rooted in the culture of northern and central Europe and diffused by the mass media—a concept which melds in a single category the (homosexual) "men" and the *ricchioni*. The acceptance of this model is hampered by Catholic propaganda, which denies the existence of homosexual individuals, claiming that there exist only homosexual *acts* but no persons as such. Finally, AIDS

has had a certain impact, making the "men" shy away from contact with those known to be exclusively homosexual.

However, what is occurring is not the disappearance of the paradigm but its adaptive transformation. It is not a matter of an "old" concept simply yielding to a "new" one. What is observable today in such countries as Italy and Spain is the mingling of two different models, though the model of the "gay man" seems to be gaining the upper hand.

The lingering substratum of the Mediterranean paradigm probably accounts for the slight success in Latin countries of the **clone** subculture, the persistence of a certain camp taste in the gay movements of the countries in question, the greater difficulty experienced by homosexuals in gaining self-acceptance, reduced hostility toward transvestites, as well as a continuing gay enthusiasm for sexual contacts with "heterosexual males."

Curiously, while the transformation of Mediterranean homosexuality is taking place, one also finds its glorification in literary works of high quality, such as *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* by Manuel Puig. In the book, though not in the film, the hero is a *teresita*, the Argentine equivalent of the *ricchione*.

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## MELANESIA

See **Pacific Cultures**.

## MELVILLE, HERMAN (1819–1891)

American novelist and short story writer. Born in New York City of Boston Calvinist and New York Dutch ancestry, Melville grew up in an educated and

comfortable environment that ended when his father went bankrupt and then died insane. In 1839 Melville became a ship's cabin boy and was exposed to menial squalor and brutal vice both at sea and in Liverpool. After further adventures, first on a whaling ship in the South Pacific, then in Hawaii, he returned to Boston in 1844. Extensive reading and research reinforced his experience at sea and underlies the series of novels that he wrote, beginning with *Typee* in 1846 and followed by *Redburn* (1849) and *White Jacket* (1850). But his greatest work is *Moby-Dick* (1851), the classic novel that combines seafaring and allegory into one of the masterpieces of American literature. *Moby-Dick* proved too difficult for both critics and public at the time, and his next novel, *Pierre* (1852), was inaccessible because of its psychological complexity and elaborate prose. Despite the lack of appreciation of his work, Melville continued to write prose and poetry until his death. He left *Billy Budd, Sailor: An Inside Story* in manuscript. By that time his literary reputation had nearly vanished, and only in the twentieth century, beginning in the 1930s, was the greatness of his accomplishment realized.

The homoerotic component of Melville's writing is subtle, pervasive, and rich in symbolic overtones. It was Leslie Fiedler, in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, who first glimpsed this element in the work. The Hero, the ego-persona of the author, is caught between two opposing forces. One is the Captain, the superego authority figure, who represents the moral demands of Western civilization and the imperative of obedience; the other is the Dark Stranger—or later, the Handsome Sailor—who personifies a state of innocence or of uninhibited nature, replicating the myth of Tahiti inherited from the travel literature of the eighteenth century. As part of a primitive culture free of the restraints of Christian morality, the Dark Stranger embodies the allure of primitive sensuality and eroticism. The novels depict the hero's psycho-

logical progress toward opting for the Dark Stranger and rebelling against the Captain. The fulfillment of homoerotic longing is thus contingent upon rejecting the dictates of Western civilization.

Melville's work is imbued with intense sexual awareness, but couched in terms that betrayed nothing to the prudish nineteenth-century reader. There is much phallic imagery, but also a blatant association of sexuality with **friendship** and the assumption that male friendship is subversive to the social order. The masculinity of Melville's heroes is their endearing quality; it is a celebration of male bonding in its classic form, to the exclusion of the feminine. Within the American society of his time overt male homosexuality had no place; it had to be relegated to the margin of consciousness or to an exotic setting, with partners of another race and culture. The implicit sexual politics of the novels is a rejection of the norms of nineteenth-century America and an affirmation of an erotic fraternity, an alternate style of relationship between males that takes the form of a democratic union of equals.

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## MERCHANT MARINE

See Seafaring.

## MESOPOTAMIA

Named the "land between the two rivers," the Tigris and the Euphrates, Mesopotamia was the cradle of the earliest human civilization, where the art of writing began shortly before 3000 B.C. Here Sumer and Akkad created a culture that was already old when the golden age of Greece was just beginning. Its literary languages, Sumerian and Akkadian (Se-