



NAMELESS SIN (OR CRIME)

The designation of homosexuality as "the nameless sin" derived from the belief that it was unfit even to be mentioned in Christian society. In 1769, for example, the influential English jurist Sir William Blackstone described the "crime against nature" as "a subject the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature. It will be more eligible to imitate in this respect the delicacy of our English law, which treats it in its very indictments, as a crime not fit to be named, *peccatum illud horribile, inter Christianos non nominandum.*" Blackstone alludes not to the statute of 1533 (see **Sixteenth-Century Legislation**), but probably to a single celebrated case, the arraignment of Lord Castlehaven in 1631, where the indictment speaks (in Latin) of "that detestable and abominable sin . . . 'buggery' [in English in the text] not to be named among Christians." (Similar language occurs in a text of Sir Edward Coke, published in 1644.)

Comparable expressions enjoyed the favor of canonists and authors of confessionals on the European continent; in 1700, for example, Ludovico Sinistrari d'Ameno records the terms *peccatum mutum* ("silent sin"), *vitium nefandum* ("unspeakable vice"), and *vitium innominabile* ("unnameable vice"), all designating the crime against nature or sodomy. A century before, the Andean historian of Peru, Garcilaso de la Vega, claimed that sodomy was so hated by the Incas and their people that the very name was odious to them and they never uttered it; while the Incas were apparently hostile to male homosexuality, Garcilaso's claim that they refused to name it is probably a projection of Christian attitudes. Significantly, Gar-

cilaso also mentions a city that, like Sodom, was destroyed by fire for its addiction to homosexuality. In late antiquity, through a false etymology based upon the Greek form of the place name, Sodom was interpreted as meaning *pecus tacens*, "silent herd," a gloss that may have influenced the later formula *peccatum mutum*. William of Auvergne (ca. 1180–1249) said that it was the "unmentionable vice," noting Gregory the Great's claim that the air itself was corrupted by its mention.

Thus it was against an extensive and varied background of usage that Oscar Wilde was to seek to turn the tables in his eloquent plea during his 1895 trial for the "love that dare not speak its name," taking up a phrase from the poem "Two Loves" by Lord Alfred Douglas (1894). As used by Douglas, the phrase applied allegorically to a pitiful uninvited companion to the true Love, and is called "Shame" by the latter; the poem itself gives little clue as to the nature of this bogus Love. In Wilde's statement under cross-examination, however, the phrase was transformed into "a great affection of an elder for a younger man. . . . It is intellectual. . . . when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him." In subsequent usage, the phrase became synonymous with homoeroticism in general.

In the New Testament Paul remarked mysteriously "For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret." (Ephesians 5:12). Although this passage has been taken to refer to homosexuality, there is no conclusive evidence to pinpoint the sin (or sins) in question. Nonetheless, the words show that the notion of a transgression too horrible to be

named directly was familiar to the early Christians. The Book of Wisdom (14:17) had spoken of "worshipping of idols not to be named." Latin pagan usage supplies *infandus*, "unspeakable, abominable" and *nefandus*, "impious, heinous," both sometimes used of sexual conduct (cf. the later *vitium nefandum*; in some Spanish texts sodomites are curtly termed *nefandarios*). Primitive societies, of course, observe taboos on certain words either because the objects they designate are too dangerous or too numinously sacred to be mentioned outright. In early Christian thought, Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. 500) evolved his "negative (or apophatic) theology," which held that God's attributes are too incomprehensible to limited human reason even to be mentioned. Thus by a curious irony, the Christian Trinity and the sodomites are linked in their ineffability/unspeakability.

In ordinary parlance today, this taboo on naming homosexuality sometimes takes the form of deleting any specific word for it, e.g., "Is he. . . ?" "Is she that way?" or "Could he be one?" (often accompanied by a raising of the eyebrows or the simulation of a limp wrist). One can find numerous instances of it in twentieth-century fiction, film, and lyrics, where oblique references are left as clues but the clear words are missing. With the widespread publicity accompanying the gay liberation movement in the 1970s, however, the taboo seems to have been finally vanquished, its obituary phrased in the apocryphal enhancement: "The love that dared not speak its name . . . now scarcely ever shuts up."

Wayne R. Dynes

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE (1769–1821)

General and Emperor of France. Homosexuality was ascribed to Napoleon by such writers as Sir Richard Burton and Auguste Cabanès, and more recently, though no more convincingly, by Major

General Frank M. Richardson in *Mars without Venus* (Edinburgh, 1981). In particular the Emperor was accused of an erotic liaison with General Duroc, the Grand Marshal of his palace. Duroc, born in 1772, became the adjutant of General Bonaparte in 1796 and was one of his close collaborators until fatally wounded by a grenade splinter at the battle of Wurtzen in 1813. During the height of Napoleon's power Duroc had been the one who attended to all his personal needs, both in France and on his travels, and the one who was privy to all the Emperor's love affairs. The death of such a faithful attendant naturally grieved Napoleon enormously, but there are no grounds for seeing their relationship as a homosexual one. Also, Napoleon never lacked women to gratify his sexual needs and desires, and all the evidence points to the heterosexual character of his passions. The only well-attested trait that would have given rise to the allegation of homosexuality is a somewhat feminine body build that became more pronounced as the Emperor grew older.

However, the personal attitude of Napoleon toward homosexuality needs to be mentioned, as it contrasts markedly with the homophobia of his contemporaries in England, where a virtual paranoia prevailed into the second decade of the nineteenth century. Napoleon selected the homosexual Cambacérès as his Arch-Chancellor, and because of his legal talents entrusted him with the redaction of the Code Napoléon (1810)—not a new document, but a collection of 28 separate codes that embodied all the legal reforms enacted since 1789, including the quiet disappearance of the provisions against sodomy that had been part of the penal law everywhere in Europe under the Old Regime. Hence Napoleon allowed to stand the decision of the Constituent Assembly in 1791 to omit sodomy from the list of sexual offenses—following the line of thought of Enlightenment criticism of the criminal legislation and practice of previ-