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Giovanni Dall'Orto

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 *Pastorals* 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 their 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 Nicaea 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.

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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