

## Gabriella Romano. The Pathologisation of Homosexuality in Fascist Italy: The Case of 'G'

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of the ruling class, according to Bosisio. A cadre of poets were maintained at the court, as was Leonardo da Vinci who provided machines and scenery for theatrical productions. The image of the nurturing and protective *moro*, or mulberry tree, was Ludovico's response to Lorenzo's *lauro*. Niccolò Da Carreggio spent 6 years in Milan (1491–1497), and his *Fabula de Cefalo* inspired works in which the wise, powerful and beneficent Ludovico is credited with the renewal of joy and a happy ending, either as a character on the stage or indirectly. We witness this reweaving of ancient mythology into the court's celebration of itself in Bellincioni's *Egloga o vero Pastorale*, Sanvitale's *Mosso da grande amor verso te movomi*, Taccone's *Atteone* and *Comedia di Danae*, and Visconti's *Pasitea*.

In Mantua, the least successful of the three courts in maintaining a coterie of renowned writers, there was the same interest in Italian versions of Roman comedies that inspired theater in Ferrara. Several tragedies were also composed there.

An introduction to a field of study, Bosisio has made an expert choice of texts and his commentary supports his vision of the function and vitality of theater in the period. The volume will promote further study of the creativity and talent expressed in theater, and closely related cultural forms like opera.

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**Gabriella Romano. *The Pathologisation of Homosexuality in Fascist Italy: The Case of 'G'*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. Pp. xiii + 110. ISBN 9783030009939.**

This brief study makes an important contribution to the history of gay men and lesbians in fascist Italy. Romano tells the story of G, otherwise unidentified, who was committed to the mental asylum in Collegno, near Turin, in 1928, after being identified as a homosexual. Central to her account is a remarkable document, a lengthy letter that G penned in anticipation of his arrest and incarceration, that discloses the lurid back-story of what would be his eventual institutionalization. His account is jaw-dropping, and I would not want to spoil it for eventual readers. Suffice to say that the letter discloses a very ugly family drama with financial implications, and it impugns the motives of a relative whose animus leads to an unpleasant conclusion for G. This is not a family one would happily join.

Elements of the letter do deserve attention here, however. Principal among them is G's assertion that his homosexuality was situational, practiced almost out of necessity during a lengthy period of youthful confinement in a seminary. Contemporary theories of homosexuality distinguished between the more forgivable situational type and the more problematic congenital manifestation. Whether G's self-assessment is true, however, remains unclear. It certainly accrues to his legal advantage to make such a statement, though it is not clear whether it has any impact on his fate, since in any event authorities pursued the accusations in order to confine him and impose treatment.

Romano tells G's story in the context of the history of homosexuality under fascism, detailing the medical and social theories that informed treatment of gay people. Eugenics figures prominently here, and in Italy it took the form of a policy aimed at transforming those deemed socially unfit into something more consistent with an ideal type. This theory dovetailed with the fascist social theories, which marginalized homosexuals along with other groups whose behavior was judged inconsistent with the fascist ideal. In the case of male homosexuals, their inclinations and behaviors contradicted fascist notions of masculinity, which prized not just marriage but prolific reproduction. Institutionalization was one solution to the problem of homosexuality, and another was internal exile; eventually some gay men suffered deportation and were lost.

Romano complements the story of G with fascinating details about the history of fascist asylums and how the inmates lived. Attitudes toward homosexuals, particularly as expressed in the medical literature that Romano reviews, had hardened considerably since Freud. In G's case, though, even his monitors in the asylum seem to have recognized that his behavior was not manifestly anti-social and treated him leniently. More drastic solutions to the "problem" of homosexuality involved a variety of approaches, including testicular transplants aimed at suppressing homosexual urges. These details offer a sobering reminder of the extent to which the state, and not just the authoritarian one, can claim control of the body under the rubric of mental health.

At the core of Romano's analysis lies the compelling argument that G's confinement had nothing to do with his homosexuality *per se*, but rather with his refusal, like that of other marginalized types, to conform to the social norms promulgated by the fascist regime. The "disease," was always that of exceptionality, and in its aversion to that fascism revealed the insecurity that lay at the core of its identity.

Romano is not a native speaker of English, so there are a few syntactical bumps on the road of her prose, and one worries occasionally about the accuracy of her translations. Sadly, the book does not include the Italian originals of her citations from G's letter. Nevertheless, it remains a fascinating, compassionate, and at times rightly indignant account of one man's life, and of policies and practices that he resisted with courage and wisdom. In his refusal to surrender his own dignity G exposed the true limits of state power, paving a path that many more gay men and women would follow in the decades to come.

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**Damiano Acciarino, ed. *Paradigms of Renaissance Grotesques*. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2019. Pp. xiii + 597. ISBN 9780772721952.**

La riscoperta delle decorazioni “a grottesca”, ovvero le decorazioni parietali pittoriche, caratteristiche della *Domus Aurea* e di diversi edifici di Roma antica, riscoperte alla fine del Quattrocento e nel tempo diventate un fenomeno artistico di degno rilievo e genere pittorico ben definito, sono il soggetto di questo volume curato da Damiano Acciarino ed edito per le edizioni del CRRS della University of Toronto. Ben organizzato dal punto di vista editoriale, è strutturato in una *Introduction* (29–56) a firma del curatore (in cui si discute delle grottesche all'interno del dibattito europeo sulle immagini e sul loro uso soprattutto nel campo religioso) e tre parti ben distinte: la prima in prospettiva teoretica, la seconda interessante le questioni pratiche di imitazione e riuso e una terza (*Appendix*) che raccoglie, opportunamente tradotti, alcuni tra i testi più significativi sulla funzione e ricezione artistica (Ulisse Aldrovandi tradotto da Thomas DePasquale, Pirro Ligorio da John Garton, Giambattista Bombelli, Egnazio Danti, Federico Pendasio ed Alfonso Chacòn da Sylvia Gaspari). Il libro, dunque, si presenta come completo e rappresentativo delle diverse correnti metodologiche interessanti lo studio delle grottesche, declinate nei loro sviluppi anche sconosciuti, quali le forme imitative sviluppatesi nel Nuovo Mondo nel XVII secolo.

La prima sezione raccoglie testi, come detto, che si occupano di tracciare, in una prospettiva diacronica, i principi estetici e le forme teoriche di riflessione sul tema a partire da Raffaello. Nel primo intervento, “Grotesque and the Antique.