THE SEDUCTION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Mediterranean was the central theme in homoerotic writing and art from the 1750s to the 1950s. Writers and artists delved into classical mythology and history for figures—such as Ganymede, Antinous, Achilles and Patroclus—through which they could portray a sexuality considered by society as a sin, an illness and a crime. Many journeyed to the south of Europe, particularly Italy, to admire the ruins of Antiquity and the paintings of the Renaissance, escape the social censure of their home countries and find sexual partners.

The lives and works of forty writers are examined, from the art historian Winckelmann in the 1700s, through Romantic poets such as Byron and Platen, to their successors drawn to the Mediterranean from across Europe, including Wilde, Isherwood and Forster. Attention is given to the works of such painters as Girodet and von Marées and the photographs of von Gloeden and List.

Robert Aldrich sets the phenomenon of homosexual interest in the Mediterranean in its social and historical context, looking at tourism, economic disparities between northern visitors and southern 'natives' and the sexual mores of southern men. He suggests that different myths replaced that of the homoerotic Mediterranean by the 1960s as gay liberation diminished the need for the legitimation of homosexuality which the classics provided and law reform lessened the need for exile.

This book brings together for the first time a study of seminal figures in homosexual culture and explains the link—fascination with the Mediterranean—which bound them together.

Robert Aldrich is Associate Professor of Economic History at the University of Sydney. His publications include *France and the South Pacific since 1940*(1993), *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture* (edited with Garry Wotherspoon, 1992) and *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (with John Connell, 1992).

THE SEDUCTION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Writing, art and homosexual fantasy

Robert Aldrich

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The Mediterranean obsession

DEATH IN VENICE

Gustav von Aschenbach, searching for 'a new type of hero' with 'an intellectual and virginal manliness', journeys to 'the incomparable, the fabulous, the like-nothing-else-in the world' city of Venice, there to find a 'half-grown lad, a masterpiece from nature's own hand…a tender young god, emerging from the depths of sea and sky'. The hero of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice,* written in 1911, is a distinguished middle-aged German writer, the very model of respectability and achievement. Aschenbach is, however, self-oppressed, 'too busy with tasks imposed upon him by his own ego and the European soul'. The sight of a southerly traveller in a cemetery gives him a 'longing to travel', an 'impulse towards flight'. He decides on Venice, ostensibly to spend a quiet summer on the beach but, in fact, in an attempt to escape the regimen of his work—he admits 'he got no joy of it'—and to break out of his self-imposed solitary existence: Aschenbach's longing for companionship and sexual comfort is hardly apparent even to himself. Venice, with its rich history and mysterious charm and the expanse of the Lido beaches, beckons the staid German.

He travels by ship to Venice, then takes a gondola through the Grand Canal, past the fabulous piazza, the famous lion and the basilica of San Marco, and installs himself at the elegant Hôtel des Bains on the Lido. Among the guests, a cosmopolitan lot, are a wealthy Polish woman, her plain daughters and her beautiful son, Tadzio, whom Aschenbach spies on the beach soon after his arrival. He is instantly lovestruck; in Tadzio, 'he told himself that what he saw was beauty's very essence'. Aschenbach both lusts after him and worships him from afar, not daring to thrust himself upon the blond ephebe. He follows Tadzio, moons over him in the hotel restaurant, tries to concoct reasons to speak to him or his mother, but he remains paralysed by his obsession. So distraught is Aschenbach that he tries to leave Venice, but uses the excuse of misdirected luggage to return, secretly admitting that he is prolonging his stay in order to be near Tadzio. Still he

is unable to act on his feelings, despite regular proximity to Tadzio and the boy's flirtatious smiles. The German idealises his passion, apotheosising Tadzio and seeing an imagined rivalry with Tadzio's handsome playmate for the boy's attention as a competition between classical divinities; as 'at such times it was not Tadzio whom he saw, but Hyacinthus, doomed to die because two gods were rivals for his love'. However, it is Aschenbach who is doomed; unable to fulfil his desire, the writer is driven to pathetic attempts to rejuvenate himself by having his hair dyed and his face made up. Meanwhile, rumours spread about a deadly plague infecting the city; officials deny the existence of an epidemic, but gradually tourists leave the city, and the odd medicinal smells Aschenbach notices suggest all is not well. Finally, someone warns Aschenbach to flee. Powdered and painted, feverish and panic-stricken, Aschenbach learns that the Polish family, too, are departing. He stumbles onto the beach for a last look at his idol. As Tadzio plays with his friends and glances in his direction, Aschenbach settles into a beach-chair and quietly succumbs to the cholera.[1]

In 1971, Luchino Visconti made a film of *Death in Venice;* the script was written by Visconti and Nicola Badalucco and the film starred Dirk Bogarde, Silvana Mangano, Bjørn Andresen and Marisa Berenson. The 65-year-old director was famous for his pioneering neo-realistic films and the lavish historical drama 'The Leopard'. He was well known, too, as a director of plays and opera and for his work with Maria Callas. Visconti adored Mann's writings and felt a personal attachment to the story of *Death in Venice*. As a child Visconti had holidayed on the Lido with his family, and he used autobiographical elements in the film. Tadzio's mother was modelled on Visconti's own beautiful and elegant mother; 'Visconti himself said that seeing Mangano reading on the beach under large hats and parasols, a haughty profile, distant, husbandless, gave him the eerie feeling of watching his mother'. Visconti saw much of himself in Aschenbach, whom he transformed into the composer Gustav Mahler. In so doing, Visconti added his own interpretation to the story. As analysed by the novelist and film critic Alberto Moravia, in Mann's novel Aschenbach was

> a middle-class intellectual of the turn of the century, not a Nietzsche or a Strindberg, and that is why the infatuation for a boy of fourteen brings about the collapse of the man's values. In other words, the drama of Aschenbach is social while Visconti's Aschenbach is intellectual. The difference is to be found in the two authors. Mann was the historian of aesthetic decadence; Visconti was a decadent aesthete who could well figure as a character of Mann's.[2]

Aschenbach is intellectual, while Tadzio is sensual; as Visconti explained, 'Tadzio represents a pole of attraction in Aschenbach's life, the pole of real life—the alternative to and antithesis of the rigidly intellectual world, the

"sublimated" life in which Aschenbach has sealed himself—that ends in death'.[3] Visconti embroidered certain scenes, adding in performances of itinerant musicians, Aschenbach's collapse in the streets of Venice, a flashback to a concert fiasco in Germany. Otherwise, the film follows the novel, and the medium of cinema allowed Visconti to use pictures of Venice to reflect the richness and haunting quality of the story and to foreshadow the fatal ending. Excerpts from Mahler's powerful third and fifth symphonies sustain the atmosphere.

Two years after Visconti's film appeared came the first performance of Benjamin Britten's opera 'Death in Venice', with a libretto by Myfanwy Piper which also followed Mann's novella. The opera, like the story, opens in a cemetery in Munich, as Aschenbach confesses that 'self-discipline [is] my strength, routine the order of my days…. I reject the words called forth by passion.' A traveller, 'from beyond the Alps by his looks', summons Aschenbach to 'Go, travel to the South'. He sets out for the 'ambiguous' city of Venice and arrives in what he perceives as 'a different world…odd, unreal, out of normal focus'. Aschenbach's first glimpse of Tadzio, and his subsequent perceptions, are cast in a classical mould: 'Surely the soul of Greece/Lies in that bright perfection', he sings, and later apostrophises, 'Ah, here comes Eros—his very self, or, again, 'Ah, Tadzio, Eros, Ganymede'. The boy plays Olympian games and the voice of Apollo sings that 'He who loves beauty/Worships me'. Tadzio represents not only an object of desire but, in a Platonic sense, a path towards knowledge and aesthetic appreciation of beauty. Aschenbach is caught in a trap—to possess beauty, the boy, he must effect a conversion from his bookish ways: 'When the mind bows low before beauty…When genius leaves contemplation for the moment of reality,…Then Eros is the word.' Tadzio, for Britten as for Mann and Visconti, represents both a flesh-and-blood object of longing and an idealisation of beauty. The first act of the opera closes as Aschenbach, in private, sings 'I love you'.

The second and final act begins with Aschenbach's monologue bemoaning his fear of speaking with Tadzio. Embarrassed at his 'hackneyed' expression of love, frustrated at the one-sidedness of his feelings for the boy, he is determined to try to reconcile art and life and make the most of the 'chance encounters, painful hopes, silent communions' afforded by Venice. The libretto concentrates on the underside of Venice. Already in the first act, uninviting stereotypes of Italy appear—persistent merchants, pesky beggars, suspect gondoliers, egregious hotel managers, inefficient porters. Now the plague drives away tourists as the opera, literarily and musically, moves to a climax. Dionysus and Apollo sing a dialogue about the merits of beauty versus passion, and Aschenbach cries out, 'What is reason, moral sense, what is art itself, compared to the rewards of chaos?' The opera closes, as does the novella, with Aschenbach's death, as Tadzio enigmatically walks 'far out to sea'.[4]

THE ATTRACTION OF THE SOUTH FOR NORTHERN HOMOSEXUALS

In different media—literature, film and music—the image of the northern European in search of a boy's love in southern Europe is repeated, testifying to perennial interest in Mann's theme of tragic obsession. The homoerotic, or homosexual, nature of the tale is stark in Mann's novella but assumes even greater relief in later renditions. It is a picture of a traditional homosexual dilemma in the period before 'gay liberation'—the yearnings of a man whose desires make him socially deviant and who must flee to some other place to act upon them, who can hope for only momentary and episodic satisfaction and who is condemned to ostracism, criminal conviction or death. *Death in Venice* is a parable about longing and obsession and a *mise-en-scène* of the homosexual condition in a certain historical epoch, even if Aschenbach himself fails to act on his repressed desires and remains only a voyeur.

Of particular significance in the interpretations of the 'Aschenbach phenomenon', if it may be so labelled, are several themes, among them the socially and personally induced dissatisfaction of the main character at home, the flight and the choice of destination, that is, the European South. These works are not perfect portrayals of the magnetic attraction asserted upon latent or self-aware northern European homosexuals by the South and southerners—Tadzio is a blond Pole rather than a swarthy Italian, and his playmate Jaschiu, although also a Pole, more naturally conforms to the stereotype of the seductive Italian boy. However, the theme remains the same, and even the ambivalent relationship between Tadzio and Jaschiu suggests that Slavs as well as Germans may be freed from family and cultural restraints when they venture southwards. Venice, too, has its historical particularities which make the serene city less than a perfect symbol of the whole Mediterranean. Yet the setting and the plot, to which all three media in which the story has been told conform, is the Northern man drawn to (homosexual) romance, companionship or sex in the South. This is a paradigm of homosexual desire and a clear itinerary in European gay history.

The homoerotic aspects of the works of Mann, Visconti and Britten have made them attractive to contemporary gay men and cult items of modern gay culture. But their authors as well are well-known figures in gay history. Britten's longtime liaison with the singer Peter Pears, for example, was public knowledge, although treated with discreet silence during their lifetimes.[5]

Mann based *Death in Venice* on a real meeting with a beautiful boy when he visited the Lido in 1911; when his own children stayed at the same Hôtel des Bains two decades later, Mann wrote to them about the importance of the episode to him and stressed the 'ambiguous' nature of Venice.[6] Mann

admitted to homosexual urges in his diaries, published posthumously, and he employed classical allusions to describe youths he fancied. He commented, for instance, on a 'Hermes-like young dandy who made an impression on me several weeks ago…. In conjunction with his slight, youthful figure, his face has a prettiness and foolishness that amounts to a nearly classical "god-like" look.' Elsewhere in the diaries, Mann wrote about the effects the sight of another young man produced on him:

> Passing the plant nursery I was pleasurably smitten by the sight of a young fellow working there, a brown-haired type with a small cap on his head, very handsome, and bare to the waist. The rapture I felt at the sight of such common, everyday, and natural 'beauty', the contours of his chest, the swell of his biceps, made me reflect afterward on the unreal, illusionary, and aesthetic nature of such an inclination, the goal of which, it would appear, is realized in gazing and 'admiring'. Although erotic, it requires no fulfillment at all, neither intellectually nor physically. This is likely thanks to the influence of the reality principle on the imagination; it allows the rapture, but limits it to just looking.

The statement might have been written by Aschenbach, but Mann is rationalising, for it seems that he was interested in more than 'just looking'. In 1927 the 50-year-old writer met Klaus Heuser, the 17-year-old son of the director of the Düsseldorf art academy; Mann developed deep affection for him, invited him to visit Munich and lavished attention on him. Unfortunately, Mann destroyed his diaries from this period, but in 1935 they met again, when Heuser stopped briefly in Zurich to visit Mann. 'Unchanged, or little changed…. Kept looking into his face and saying "My God!" He expected me to kiss him, but I did not do so; I did manage to say something loving to him before he left, however.' This meeting came only a week after Mann had mentioned Heuser in his diary, a recollection sparked by dinner with another handsome young man:

> Thought back on that time [with Heuser] and its passion, the last variation of a love that probably will not flare up again. Strange, the happy and fulfilled man of fifty—and then *finis*. Goethe's erotic life continued into his seventies—'always girls'. But in my case the inhibitions are probably stronger and so one wearies sooner, apart from the differences in vitality.[7]

If Mann's homosexual inclinations were sublimated and embarrassed, Visconti's were more open. Young Visconti, handsome, rich and noble, scion of one of Milan's leading families, was pursued by a number of women unsuccessfully, for his interests lay elsewhere. He had several liaisons with boys in the stables which he kept, then fell deeply in love with a muscular

blond German photographer—an Italian's Teutonic, rather than Mediterranean, passion. Throughout his life Visconti surrounded himself with young men and, according to one biographer, had an 'immense number' of occasional lovers as well as unrequited attachments to various heterosexual actors.[8]

There was a direct personal link between Mann and Visconti. In his early years, Visconti constantly carried with him two specially bound books, one of which was *Death in Venice* (the other was a novel by Gide). In 1951, just as Visconti was working on an opera-ballet of one of Mann's stories, 'Mario and the Magician', he met Mann in Rome. The meeting was cordial, although Visconti was shy with the great writer. Mann recounted seeing an aged, painted homosexual on his way to Venice, a scene from the novella which Visconti later incorporated into the film of *Death in Venice*. Visconti may have also misunderstood Mann during their conversation to refer to Mahler, whom Mann had indeed met, and Aschenbach thus became Mahler in the film.[9]

Homosexual plots or allusions appear in other works by Visconti and Britten. Visconti directed several plays with homosexual situations, such as Marcel Achard's 'Adam'. His controversial production of Harold Pinter's 'Old Times' focused on a lesbian relationship in the play, just as he suggested homosexual themes in 'Salome'. One of Visconti's best known films, 'The Damned', emphasises the homosexual aspect in the massacre of the SA leaders—the SS colonel, incidentally, is named Aschenbach. Britten's opera of Melville's novella *Billy Budd* centres on the links between a sea-captain and a handsome boy, with society condemning the sailor.

In the case of Venice, there is a 'family tree' of homosexual visitors to the city and of works about it with homosexual themes, not restricted to the incarnations of 'Death in Venice'. In the early twentieth century, at the same time as Mann visited Venice, Frederick Rolfe, a homosexual English writer, lived there. Jean Lorrain and Jean Cocteau were among French tourists. In the 1890s, John Addington Symonds, an English man of letters and a homosexual, had visited Venice, admired its architectural beauties and fallen in love with a gondolier. The poet A.E.Housman also had an intimate friendship with a gondolier. In the letter Mann wrote to his children in 1932, he referred to the poet August von Platen, a Romantic homosexual who had written fourteen sonnets on Venice. (As he sails into Venice, Aschenbach thinks about Platen as the 'melancholy and susceptible poet who had once seen the towers and turrets of his dreams rise out of these waves'.)[10] Travellers' accounts dating back to the seventeenth century mention male prostitutes in Venice, just as present-day guidebooks list gay cruising places. Venice has thus long been part of a homosexual geography of the Mediterranean, a position reinforced by works associated with the Aschenbach theme.

CODED REPRESENTATIONS OF DESIRE

Homosexual desire by northerners in the Mediterranean—longing for and sometimes achieving intercourse with a Mediterranean lad—is one of the longer-lasting themes of gay culture.[11] There are others: images of the working-class comrade, the exotic foreigner,[12] the man in uniform, the pubescent male, the muscular athlete. All can be catalogued across national cultures and generations; the hunky homoerotic sailor, for instance, appears in Melville and Conrad, Cocteau and Genet and a stack of porn magazines. That such images permeate various levels of culture and show up in writers, artists or composers of quite different backgrounds is a tantalising point for analysis. Why has the homosexual imagination of the past, and often the present, settled on these particular images and why have they been so common in Western representations of homosexual desire?

Homosexual longing, and the portrayal of it, has been obliged to assume a greater or lesser degree of coding or outright disguise until very recent times. Western society has been uncongenial to homosexuality: for centuries law considered homosexuality a crime (sometimes punishable by life imprisonment or execution), medicine labelled it a disease, religion called it a sin, psychology analysed it as a perversion or personality disorder and general social mores castigated it as disgusting deviance. (Such attitudes have not entirely disappeared.) In these circumstances, open portrayal of homosexuality was proscribed. Even the eroticised male in art and literature conformed to strict norms. Whether for homosexual or heterosexual artists and writers, convention limited opportunities: in the visual arts, possibilities for representing the nude male were usually realised in imitations of classical statuary or paintings of St Sebastian, a loinclothed holy-man pierced by arrows. Not all images of classical gods or Sebastian were homoerotic, let alone homosexual. But in many cases they provided vehicles for paintings evoking homosexual desire, especially since majority social attitudes forbade more direct representations. Similarly, male-bonding, comradeship and intimate friendship were sometimes, though by no means always, examples for both the writer or artist and the viewer or reader of real or latent sexual connections. Often ignored by the general public or by critics, they were certainly recognised by the initiated or interested.

The situations or images so coded were those in which male nudity, male-bonding or intimate friendships could be presented: the camaraderie of all-male boarding schools, ships or military barracks, for example, or places overseas where usual norms of deportment were relaxed or puritanical mores suspended. Displacement was a way to bend the rules, to hide 'deviant' relationships or to excuse misbehaviour. Censorship could thereby be avoided for the writer, anomalous or unconventional activities justified for the heroes. Sometimes these places and situations outlived their necessary usefulness; at the time of Visconti's film or Britten's opera,

society would have reacted less violently against overt homosexuality than at the time of Mann, but the use of old themes was a homage to earlier work and a way of giving a performance wider acceptance than if it carried a more militantly homosexual theme. Critics would applaud an opera or film such as 'Death in Venice', while they might react badly to a more brazen portrayal of pederasty. Yet to label Britten's opera or Visconti's film simply as 'gay' works is reductionist, as meaningless as calling other pieces 'straight' works. They are artistic creations with gay themes, accessible to all publics but holding special meaning for those who empathise most directly with their characters or situations.

THE 'ASCHENBACH PHENOMENON'

What makes the 'Aschenbach phenomenon' of particular interest is that various elements of 'Death in Venice' are common to the whole body of literature and art exemplifying homosexual fascination with the Mediterranean. One is the situation of the aging gentleman who visits the South. In Mann's work, Aschenbach is past his fiftieth birthday. The son of a bourgeois judiciary official, he has received a patent of nobility for his accomplishments as a novelist. Mann underlines the 'strict, decent, sparing lives' of Aschenbach's ancestors, Aschenbach's concern with the moral fibre of his fictional characters, his rigid routine and hard-working habits. Another trait is his family situation: married at a young age, Aschenbach sired a daughter but lost his wife soon afterwards, and has since lacked a partner, whether male or female. He is 'a solitary' unused to other company except for domestic servants. Such a man's sexual impulses presumably are suppressed, find satisfaction clandestinely or are confined to fantasies. Aschenbach's latent homosexual desires are initially unrevealed. Aschenbach lives in 'ignorance of his own real desires', though there are the 'forgotten feelings, precious pangs of his youth'. Some of the characteristics ascribed to him—a solitary life, his being 'not by nature robust', the manifest lack of feminine company—are ones which were often pinned on homosexuals. In short, Aschenbach is 'set up' in the story for some new romantic, emotional or sexual experience. This is a recurrent plot in works by those with homosexual inclinations: the man without a partner or trapped in an unsatisfying marital or sexual relationship summons up the willpower to search for an alternative. The heterosexual usually takes recourse to adultery or prostitutes, while the bisexual or homosexual looks for an illicit affair with another man or boy, often through trespassing over social or geographical frontiers. Novels about (and autobiographies of) gay men generally describe initiation not only into homosexuality but into a subculture; because of social attitudes towards homosexuality, they recount the rejection of expected heterosexual behaviour with whatever consequences this may entail.

A second theme concerns the object of the roving homosexual's obsessions: a young man from a different milieu, a working-class boy, a foreigner or someone encountered outside the hero's usual circles. In *Death in Venice,* the aristocratic Tadzio is on a similar social level with Aschenbach, but he is Polish, not German, and the meeting takes place abroad. He is an adolescent on the cusp of manhood, a direct allusion to classical Greek pederasty: an unequal, but in principle educative and mutually beneficial relationship between adult and ephebe. He is fair of face and body: 'Aschenbach noticed with astonishment the lad's perfect beauty.' The model of beauty is Hellenic: 'His face recalled the noblest moment of Greek sculpture—pale, with a sweet reserve, with clustering honey-coloured ringlets, the brow and nose descending in one line, the winning mouth, the expression of pure and godlike serenity.' Indeed, Aschenbach seems incapable of thinking about Tadzio without the justification of classical allusion: longing and lust must be papered over with culture. Scarcely an extended description of Tadzio passes without a reference to Antiquity. His 'was the head of Eros, with the yellowish bloom of Parian marble'. Even more explicitly, Tadzio emerges from the water 'virginally pure and austere, with dripping locks, beautiful as a tender young god, emerging from the depths of sea and sky, outrunning the element—it conjured up mythologies, it was like a primeval legend, handed down from the beginning of time, of the birth of form, of the origin of the gods'. He is the opposite of the swarthy peasant boy to whom others might be attracted but, in each case, the archetype of beauty is classical, however, and Mediterranean boys are inevitably seen to be descendants of this prototype and the exemplars of ancient standards of beauty. At the same time, the alterity of the foreign boy is a source for his attraction; he is different, exotic, more of an ideal—or perhaps just more accessible. The besotted visitor is enraptured by every trait of his beloved, physical, to be sure, but also moral or cultural: for Mann's Aschenbach, 'Tadzio's foreign birth raised his speech to music'.

Just as the ideal lover is a beautiful young man, so the ideal relationship between man and boy is a replication of the Greek model, posited on the assumption that physical love is the way to spiritual love and that love leads to knowledge. Hence the almost pedantic quotations from Plato in Mann's tale and the elevation of Tadzio above mundane and vulgar beauty to the Platonic *idea* (in the Greek sense): Tadzio is the 'essence' of beauty. The perfect relationship is not necessarily a lifelong monogamous attachment of man and boy, a relationship between equals in age and social status or a homosexual imitation of heterosexual marriage; it is more attuned to the ancient model. (It remains pointedly unclear, however, whether Aschenbach desires casual sex, an affair, long-term commitment or something more ethereal.)

The historical relationship between the northern European and the Mediterranean is necessarily unequal and, often, doomed. Holidays end, voyages conclude and lovers must separate. Linguistic and cultural divides loom. Distinct differences in income and social status appear. A lover is incapable of establishing contact with his beloved; Aschenbach can only play voyeur and yearn chastely for Tadzio, never able to possess him, too afraid even to speak with him, much less seduce him. In other cases, affection and sex are bought, directly or indirectly, with money or gifts. Sexual and social exploitation are sometimes present, and a bargain must be struck between the two parties. There may be much kindness, but frequently there is a measure of brutality. (Aschenbach thinks Tadzio is unhealthy and will not live long, but he does not 'try to account for the pleasure the idea gave him'.) Such relationships could not win the approval of society or measure up to the standards to which heterosexual relationships aspired, or to which moralists said they should. The very fact of homosexuality makes respectability impossible, and the nature of travel or expatriation adds to the inconstancy. At the end lies the spectre of separation when the tour finishes, of dishonour or worse if the liaison is discovered, or (as for Aschenbach) apocalyptic death.

Yet another characteristic is the ambivalent feeling authors held about the South, both its lands and its peoples. In the Venice of Mann's Aschenbach, there are wonderful works of architecture, beautiful beaches, mysterious churches, a 'voluptuousness of sight and sound'. But there is also the 'hateful sultriness in the streets', the sirocco which 'excites and enervates at once', the disorienting confusion of canals and alleyways, the garishness and bad construction of houses, the lowlife, the epidemic. Italians are an unsavoury lot. On the sailing-ship which takes Aschenbach to Venice, the captain is likened to a goat-bearded circus-director and one sailor is hunchbacked; the sanitary inspector, the model of Italian public servants, arrives late to clear the boat. Gondoliers quarrel in 'harsh, incoherent tones'; the boatsman who takes Aschenbach to his hotel is unlicensed, has a brutish face and, the German thinks, could extort or kill him. Another gondolier, 'in league with various lace-makers and glassblowers, did his best to persuade his fare to pause, look, and be tempted to buy'. Fruit-sellers purvey rotten strawberries, the hotel manager is obsequious, the barber 'oily'. Beggars roam everywhere. The minstrel belongs 'to the race of Neapolitan jesters, half bully, half comedian, brutal, blustering, an unpleasant customer, and entertaining to the last degree'. He is snub-nosed, his face shows the stigma of vice and defiance, he is badly dressed, he sings trivial songs, then begs for remuneration, he waves his arms about and makes 'antic gestures'. He, just like all the Venetians ranging from city fathers to hotel servants, lies about the cholera which threatens the city. As the singer departs, he sticks out his tongue at the hotel guests, a symbol of hatred for their wealth and pretension. The portrait of the Italians is negative, and Venice itself gets

mixed reviews. Ethnocentrism and cultural arrogance are underlying motifs in much writing about the Mediterranean, coexisting with admiration, enjoyment and idolisation.

These themes reappear in the life and works of other homosexual figures drawn southwards. The stock-in-trade of both a certain homosexual culture and a homosexual 'lifestyle' of a particular time and milieu serve as artistic tropes and correspond to the exigencies of homosexual life. Certainly each story possesses its idiosyncrasies. Particularly obvious in Mann's work is the theme of longing and death, which those who have taken his book as a point of departure for their own work have not seen fit to reverse into a happy ending. Mann's view of homosexual desire in the story—which may have coincided with his own experience—is a traditional homophobic interpretation. The man's desire for the boy cannot be fulfilled; it turns Aschenbach into a made-up clown, a ridiculous figure spurned by society and solitary in his passion. Desire mingles with fear and sometimes (as in Aschenbach's nightmare late in the story) with an atavistic recrudescence of Dionysian savagery. Aschenbach's repressed passion is linked with crime, vice and pathology; it is sickly and dangerous. Homosexual desire forms part of a wider network of deviance which infects the southern climes from even more decadent regions, spreading like pestilence: 'professional vice was rampant, displaying excesses heretofore unknown and only at home much farther south and in the east.' As well as being a foreign, criminal malady, homosexuality is a sign of degeneracy—some nineteenth-century sexologists argued thus, and Mann's Aschenbach, thinking of his peers, wonders, 'What, indeed, would they have said to his entire life, that varied to the point of degeneracy from theirs?' The portrait of homosexual desire is far from complimentary in Mann's *Death in Venice,* and the homosexual is condemned to sterility in his unrequited passion. Other, later writers and artists were less hard on their characters and on themselves.

THE INFLUENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *DEATH IN VENICE*

The connection between art and life appears clearly in the story of Aschenbach and in the real situations on which Mann based the work—Aschenbach himself proclaims, 'Personally speaking, too, art heightens life'. Mann's encounter in Venice metamorphosed into literature as almost a documentary study of a certain historical homosexuality. That story has become part of the compendium of 'gay literature', transformed into an opera and a film by artists with personal interests in the themes it introduced. The account of painful longing, self-defeating obsession and impossible love has held special resonance in a subculture long marked by social interdiction and, until recent years, self-embarrassment. The appeal of

the sexy young man, handsome as a god, continues to excite the libido as a collectively articulated pattern in the gay psyche. But *Death in Venice* in its various versions also has an important place in general Western culture: it is one of the best-known representations of homosexuality, but the emotions it limns are not limited to a minority. The import of the Aschenbach story into the mainstream of European letters, cinema and opera gives evidence of the capacity of homoerotic or homosexual works to fertilise general culture; surely some of the most familiar contemporary images of Venice come from Mann's novella and Visconti's film. The subculture thus forms an important presence in a wider cultural inheritance.

Mann's *Death in Venice* was published just two years before the outbreak of the First World War. It reflected an era when leisured and cultured Europeans travelled to elegant resorts in the South, sure of their social position, wealth and political privileges. Soon the war, and then other events of the twentieth century, disrupted that life and brought into question those certainties. Within one or two generations, even educated readers would not be conversant with the classical allusions in Mann's work. At the same time, the writings of sexual analysts, notably Freud, articulated new views on the origins and expression of sexual desires. Life did not immediately change for homosexuals—far from it—and the lure of the Mediterranean by no means disappeared. Yet by the mid-twentieth century, the cultural and social context were different. Mann's novel, therefore, came towards the end of a period, stretching back to at least the 1700s, during which a number of European writers and artists had been attracted to the classical and contemporary Mediterranean with mixed motives, both cultural and homosexual; the mixture of these motives provided inspiration for their works. Imbued with the lore of Antiquity, disposing of time and money for travel, they made a circuit around the Greek and Roman monuments, sometimes forayed into the Islamic civilisation of North Africa, and often settled for long sojourns on Capri or Sicily or in Venice or Rome. They made a pilgrimage southwards to find culture; they also wanted to find boys: they usually found both. Many of these writers and artists played a large role in forming general European ideas on such subjects as classical art, Renaissance history and contemporary Italy. Mann's portrayal of Venice and the works which took their inspiration from *Death in Venice* are prime examples of a sexual and literary odyssey.

7

CONTEMPORARY ECHOES

In the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century, homosexual fascination with the Mediterranean reached an apogee which coincided with the heyday of the expatriate homosexual colony on Capri, Gloeden's residence in Taormina and visits to Venice by such writers as Cocteau, Lorrain, Adelswärd-Fersen and Mann. Yet precisely at this time the myth of the homoerotic Mediterranean began to lose its potency. The theory of homosexuals as a 'third sex' developed by Hirschfeld owed little to the Greco-Roman precedent of pederasty, and although Brand tried to revive the classical model of male love, his audience was not so wide as that of Hirschfeld. Furthermore, centres of homosexual subculture were now growing in northern Europe, especially in Paris and Berlin, and homosexuals, despite laws against homosexuality which remained on the statute books (and were frequently enforced) in some countries, did not need to go south to find sexual satisfaction. Even doing so, as the case of Krupp proved, did not preclude opprobrium and its consequences. Those who ventured overseas sometimes now preferred to go further afield, lured by the exoticism of the Levant, the Orient or the colonies. Finally, homosexuals themselves were changing. They began to demand legal rights and social status as the equals of heterosexuals; less often than in the past did they portray themselves as the special and gifted inheritors of ancient Greeks and Romans whose morals were linked to a particular cultural legacy.

Antiquity more generally was losing its aesthetic hold on Europeans. The avant-garde was little interested in the classics and regular reference to ancient poetry and philosophy seemed tiresomely *passéiste* in the era of Cubism, psychoanalysis and relativity theory. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Europe's arbiters of culture were concerned with the Modern, in all its manifestations, rather than the Ancient. Motor-cars and airplanes served as symbols of the new age, not Doric columns and Ionic pediments (although they were mixed in De Chirico's paintings). Mann's aging, bookish Aschenbach might still find inspiration in Venice and the classics, but Forster's Clive, no matter how much his education had imbued

him with these very images, found disappointment in the reality of contemporary Greece.

Fascination with the homoerotic South lingered on in the 1920s—Szymanowski's opera, the pages of *Inversions,* the writings of several homosexual emancipationists in Weimar Germany and the paintings of Kupffer. Herbert List's marvellous photographs succeeded in joining the ancient and the modern in a way that was both technically avant-garde and culturally resonant. He, however, was almost alone and the recollection of the homoerotic South, even brought up to date, was more and more a minority trend within a European homosexual culture attuned to the balls of Paris and the clubs of Berlin.

Nevertheless, the homoerotic Greco-Roman fantasy did not die with the attack of the Moderns, repression of homosexuals by later authoritarian regimes which sometimes appropriated symbols of the homoerotic Mediterranean, or Hitler's sending of homosexuals to concentration camps. In fact, during the late 1940s and 1950s, three of the major authors of novels with homosexual themes—Roger Peyrefitte, Marguerite Yourcenar and Mary Renault—again called on the classical world and modern Italy for their settings, and many homosexuals in the post-war period found in these works positive images of their sexual desires and apologias for their behaviour. The difference with earlier writers was that Peyrefitte was the only male homosexual of the trio and the only one to spend an extended period in the Mediterranean region. Furthermore, all three wrote about Antiquity, other historical periods (in the case of Peyrefitte) or contemporary situations in Britain or France where the classics provided food for thought; none set a homoerotic novel in the contemporary Mediterranean.

PEYREFITTE, YOURCENAR, RENAULT

Born in 1907 into a wealthy and prominent family, Roger Peyrefitte was educated in Jesuit schools and then studied literature and politics at university before joining the French diplomatic corps. He was posted to the French embassy in Athens from 1933 to 1938, then to Paris, but in 1945 was dismissed from the foreign service. (His appeal for reinstatement did not succeed until 1960.) So Peyrefitte became a full-time writer. His first major success was *Les Amitiés particulières,* published in 1945, a story of affections between boys—and the homosexuality of one priest—in a Catholic boarding school. The book, reminiscent of Essebac's *Dédé* of the beginning of the century, is permeated by coy sensuality, a mixture of Christian pomp and circumstance, classical references—allusions to Hadrian and Antinous, Virgil, Ganymede and other figures of Antiquity—and schoolboy crushes. Peyrefitte was fascinated by Greek civilisation; as

he wrote in a preface to a collection of homoerotic poetry which he translated from the Greek:

> Greek Antiquity represents the flowering of civilisation. I love our own time too much to make myself into 'the praiser of the past', which is the proof that one is no longer young. But the finest fountain of youth is indeed classical Greece.[1]

To reinforce his case, Peyrefitte later wrote a multi-volume biography of Alexander the Great which lauds the Macedonian's military, cultural and sexual exploits, including his relationships with male youths.[2]

Peyrefitte was not interested just in the homoerotic Mediterranean of Antiquity. *Les Amours singulières* of 1949 is a dramatised biography of Baron von Gloeden; Peyrefitte must take credit for the rediscovery of the then forgotten German photographer. Ten years later, in *L'Exilé de Capri,* Peyrefitte rediscovered Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen and the homosexual colony on Capri, and the book, thinly disguised fiction, remains the best volume on the expatriates. Peyrefitte's other novels did not focus on the homoerotic Mediterranean, although they continued to discuss homosexuality. Later in life, he published several volumes of gossip about the supposed homosexuality of public figures which did his reputation little good and provoked various law suits. His place in French letters depends on his earlier work, and in *Les Amours singulières* and *L'Exilé de Capri,* as with his translations, Peyrefitte showed himself an early investigator in 'gay studies'; *Les Amitiés particulières* was a pioneeringly straightforward presentation of homosexuality in French literature.

Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–87), the first woman to be elected to the Académie Française, was a Belgian-born novelist, essayist, poet, playwright and translator. She wrote studies of the homosexual authors Constantine Cavafy and Yukio Mishima and published several novels with homosexual themes. Most notable were *L'Oeuvre au noir,* about a homosexual alchemist persecuted by the Inquisition in the 1500s, and *Mémoires d'Hadrien.* Published in 1958, although Yourcenar had drafted several versions in the 1920s, the latter book is written as the first-person memoir of the emperor Hadrian, composed just before his death. Yourcenar's Hadrian speaks about Hellenism and his intention to Hellenise the Roman empire. He writes openly about his love for Antinous, from their meeting in Bithynia to the youth's death on the Nile and apotheosis. Hadrian mentions his affairs with Lucius and other young men and he refers to the pantheon of Greek homoerotic figures. Yourcenar's novel was a major achievement, for she was a first-rate writer and an expert on the ancient world. The work makes Hadrian's homosexuality, particularly his love for Antinous, a vital and integral, but unsensationalised, part of his life. Here was a portrait of one of the most admired Roman emperors with his sexuality detailed without censure or embarrassment.

Yourcenar also wrote short stories about Achilles and Patroclus which touch on homoseuxality. Yet another story, 'Phédon ou le vertige', concerns Socrates and Alcibiades; sexual relations between males are again treated frankly. Youths make love together and Alcibiades hires a handsome young dancer and slave, Phédon, for Socrates. In words which could have come from the pen of Symonds or other nineteenth-century writers, Yourcenar suggests that sex and learning are connected:

> Because, after all, the flesh is the most beautiful garment in which the soul can clothe itself, what would Socrates be without the smile of Alcibiades and the hair of Phédon? Gentle young bodies which he loved taught this old man, whose only knowledge of the world was contained within the suburbs of Athens, not only about the Absolute but also about the Universe.[3]

Another woman writer on male homosexuality in the ancient world was Mary Renault (1905–83), an extremely popular and prolific author of novels which by their solid research and fine style surpass the usual *genre* of historical fiction. Renault wrote openly about homosexuality in one of her first novels to win acclaim, *The Charioteer,* published in 1953, a story of love between two men in England during the Second World War. The lovers discuss Plato's dialogue on friendship, *Phaedrus,* from which the book takes its title—the charioteer tries to control his two steeds, the white and the black horse, representing respectively both the higher love and the more profane love. References to the Sacred Band of Thebes, Harmodius and Aristogeiton and other figures of Antiquity punctuate the text, and the narrative suggests that the two heroes envisage their sexuality in Greek terms: 'He [one of the men] was lifted into a kind of exalted dream, part loyalty, part hero-worship, all romance. Half-remembered images moved in it, the tents of Troy, the columns of Athens.'[4] Those sentences are a fitting summation of homosexual re-creation of the Mediterranean of Antiquity.

After *The Charioteer,* Renault turned her attention to the ancient world. In 1956 she published *The Last of the Wine,* set in classical Greece and bearing a homosexual theme. The book quickly became a classic of modern writing on homosexuality. Homosexuality appears already on the second page of the work, when the narrator's uncle commits suicide in order to die with his plague-stricken lover. A joint memorial stele is erected and yearly sacrifices offered in their honour. The hero of the book, Alexias, is a handsome young Athenian in the time of Pericles and the novel centres on his relationship with Lysis, another handsome and heroic Greek who becomes his lover. They meet when Alexias is 16, Lysis nine years older—the classic partnership between *erastes* and *eromenos*. Lysis courts Alexias with charm and intelligence and the younger man is willingly seduced. The narrative does not go into detail about their sexual activities, except for discreet descriptions of hand-

holding, cuddling and embraces, but hints of intercourse make it plain that Alexias and Lysis' relationship is not just emotional.

Renault's book sketches a fine portrait of daily life in Antiquity, Athenian politics and the Peloponnesian War. The work presents a historically accurate portrayal of social relations: the father's heavy-handed rule, the women's inferior position, the men's practice of frequenting brothels where both male and female prostitutes are available. Sexual relations between men are shown as perfectly normal and socially acceptable aspects of Greek life which do not preclude marriage and the siring of children. (Both Alexias and Lysis have heterosexual affairs from time to time and eventually marry.) The story-line vaunts the merits of 'homosexuals'. The two men are virile and intelligent—Alexias is a student of Socrates and friend of Plato and Xenophon. They suffer plague, war, famine and defeat with courage and honour. Alexias and Lysis fight bravely at each other's side, then join forces in a conspiracy to defeat the tyrants who rule Athens following the city's defeat. At the end of the story, Lysis is killed in battle as he runs to the defence of his lover.

The Last of the Wine, like Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien,* was an extraordinary portrayal of homosexuality to be published in the 1950s, when the church still regarded homosexuality as a sin, physicians and psychologists diagnosed it as an illness and in Britain (although not in France) conviction for a homosexual offence could carry life imprisonment. Public opinion continued to castigate homosexuals as politically suspect, limp-wristed, effeminate men who, at best, might be 'artistic' and, at base, were degenerate deviants, child-molesters and a threat to society. This was the time of the Cold War, the victory of conservative political parties throughout Europe and the climate of McCarthyism emanating from the United States. Yet Yourcenar's and Renault's works were readily accessible novels which portrayed homosexuals as normal, wise, athletic and patriotic. Alexias and Lysis are loyal sons and fine citizens, just as Hadrian is a wise and benevolent ruler. Furthermore, the novels were believable; Yourcenar and Renault appended notes to their works citing their sources and pointing out what was fact and what was fiction in their books. The authors were utterly respectable: Yourcenar was a highly cultured aristocrat and Renault an Oxford-educated classicist and professional nurse.

Although Yourcenar turned to other themes after *Mémoires d'Hadrien,* Renault continued to write historial fiction. Many of her works treat homosexuality, notably *The Persian Boy,* published in 1972, the second in a trilogy about Alexander the Great—the same figure who attracted Peyrefitte's attention. The Persian boy is Bagoas, a youth who sees his father tortured and killed and is himself castrated and sold into slavery. Bagoas ends up at the court of King Darius as the monarch's catamite. When Alexander defeats Darius, Bagoas becomes Alexander's lover and loyal friend

until Alexander's death. The novel is somewhat maudlin, but Renault retains her historical sense and this book, like all Renault's writing, won accolades from loyal readers and critics. Even in the 1970s, many more English-speaking homosexuals had probably read Renault's works in inexpensive paperbacks than had read the works of the new 'gay literature' then arriving in bookshops, and the same was probably true for the French-speaking audience of Yourcenar and Peyrefitte.

OTHER VOICES

There were a few other portrayals of homosexuals in the Mediterranean. One of the most important homosexual novels of the 1950s was James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* of 1956; although set in Paris rather than Italy, it returned to the theme of expatriation and explored the relationship between an American man and his Italian lover. In Francis King's *The Man on the Rock,* published the following year, a repressed homosexual consorts with a destitute and rather unsavoury Greek while on holiday. The Dutch writer Frits Bernard's *Costa Brava,* a paedophile novella published in 1960, switched the scene to Catalonia where a man befriends a Spanish boy during the Civil War; this was a rare example of homoerotic foreign writing about Spain.[5]

In the 1980s, 'gay literature' became a major publishing industry and the European South occasionally made an appearance. For instance, Felice Picano retold the story of Ganymede in *An Asian Minor* so that the youth has sex with several gods before finally agreeing to become Zeus' lover. Guy Hocquenghem, a well-known French gay activist as well as novelist, wrote a story about Alexandria in *Le Gay Voyage* in which the spurned *erastes* of a handsome young man, who has fallen for an Egyptian, sets fire to the city's famous library; the old lover watches the flames as he fellates his new companion. M.Black's *Italian Elegy* of 1989 tells the story of an American and an Italian homosexual who meet in Trento, and Joseph Caldwell's *The Uncle from Rome,* set in Naples, is about an American opera singer who goes to Italy after losing his lover to AIDS and is drawn into intrigues with a transvestite prostitute named Piero.[6] Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time,* which includes a fine passage on the importance of ancient Athens to the homosexual, recounts a visit to Greece by a man and his lover who is dying from AIDS.[7] Edmund White's good short story 'An Oracle' tells about an American who goes to Greece to recover from his grief at the loss of a lover and becomes sexually and emotionally involved with a local man.[8] Historical characters active in the Mediterranean also provided subjects for books, as in Robert Nye's *The Memoirs of Lord Byron,* Christoph Geiser's novel about Caravaggio, *Das geheime Fiebe,* and Neil Bartlett's *Who Was That Man? A*

Present for Mr Oscar Wilde.[9] Meanwhile, larger numbers of books by gay writers from Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean began to appear.[10]

Novels which had been written earlier but suppressed because of their homosexual themes were finally published, including ones with a Mediterranean theme (some written by men from the South). These included Forster's *Maurice,* Jouhandeau's *Tirésias,* Settembrini's *I Neoplatonici* and Saba's *Ernesto*. These tardily published works, not unexpectedly, are more reminiscent of earlier literary styles and arguments than more recent novels, and Antiquity correspondingly plays a greater role, at least in the works of Forster and Settembrini.

By contrast with these literary artefacts, much 'gay literature' took a cavalier attitude towards the South. A few new works with Mediterranean themes had substantial literary merit, but almost always the South provides a venue for a holiday or sexual adventure not the *raison d'être* of the voyage. Some writers, despite their travels or themes, ignored the Mediterranean altogether.[11] Classical references became a pedantic or ornamental recitation rather than historical justification. Picano's *An Asian Minor* represented the most degraded portrayal: Ganymede is little more than an arrogant, pouting slut, the story makes no attempt at historical accuracy and the ridiculous illustrations turn his lovers into mustachioed disco clones and make Ganymede into a blond Anglo-Saxon gym-boy.

DOMINIQUE FERNANDEZ

One French author, Dominique Fernandez, challenged the trend of banalisation. He has written at greater length and more perceptively, both in fiction and in non-fiction, than any other contemporary foreigner on homosexuality in Italy. In doing so, he has analysed the literary and artistic antecedents for a homoeroticised Mediterranean and articulated a theory of homosexual culture.

Fernandez was born in 1929, the son of a writer, and was educated at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, breeding-ground for many of France's intellectuals. He earned a doctorate in Italian literature. In 1957 and 1958, Fernandez taught at the French Institute in Naples, although he was recalled after a lecture on a controversial literary and political figure, Roger Vailland.[12] Fernandez then became literary critic for the newsweekly *L'Express* and a reader for the publishing house Grasset. From 1966 to 1989, he also taught Italian literature at the University of Haute-Bretagne. More recently he has been a regular critic for *Le Nouvel Observateur* and for an opera magazine. Since 1959, Fernandez has published over thirty books, including novels, essays, literary criticism and theory, translations, travel guides and the libretto for an opera. He is one of France's best known men of letters and the recipient of various awards, including the Prix Goncourt, France's most coveted literary prize.

Two themes which dominate the work of Fernandez are homosexuality and Italy. Fernandez' literary career began in 1958 with a study of the modern Italian novel, and he later published a book on Pavese as well as translations of Penna and Goldoni. One of his specialties has been the cultural travelogue, a series of essays, usually richly illustrated with photographs, about art and Italy.[13] In this *genre,* he has published a general book of Italian travels, *Le Promeneur amoureux,* as well as more specific books on Naples, Sicily and Baroque art and architecture. Fernandez published a survey on contemporary Italy as well, a mixture of history, literature and sociology entitled *Mère Méditerranée*. Fernandez' novels often take Italy for their setting—*Signor Giovanni* is a dramatic reconstruction of the death of Winckelmann in Trieste, *Porporino* a novel about the *castrati* of eighteenth-century Naples, *Dans la main de l'ange* a fictionalised biography of Pier Paolo Pasolini; *L'Amour* takes for its subject the Nazarenes, a group of nineteenth-century German artists in Italy, and *L'Ecole du Sud* is the fictionalised biography of a Franco-Sicilian, concentrating on his life in Agrigento and his relations with his French spouse.

Many of Fernandez' subjects are homosexual. *L'Etoile rose,* published in 1978, was a study of a gay man's coming-out, and *Une Fleur de jasmin à l'oreille,* published two years later, concerned a Frenchman who goes to North Africa to recover from the break-up of a gay relationship. *La Gloire du paria* (1987) was one of the first French novels about homosexuals and AIDS. The books on Winckelmann, Pasolini and the Nazarenes have significant gay themes. In *Le Rapt de Ganymède* (1989)—the title is evocative of a whole cultural tradition—Fernandez developed a theory of gay culture in art, literature and music.

Fernandez, therefore, has been more important than any other contemporary writer in exploring the links between homosexuality and culture, often taking Italy as the domain. Almost all of the figures discussed in the present study find a place in Fernandez' work; *Le Rapt de Ganymède,* for instance, contains essays on homoerotic images in neoclassical art, the operas of Britten and the works of Wilde and Yourcenar and passing references to many others. Fernandez' book on Sicily, *Le Radeau de la Gorgone,* includes several pages on Gloeden, while *Le Volcan sous la ville* refers to Wilde, Platen and Andersen, as well as Gloeden. Fernandez has not only looked at the homoerotic Mediterranean but has contributed to the literature which manifests homosexual fascination with Italy.[14]

For Fernandez, homosexual culture was at its most productive and most fertile in the period before 'gay liberation'. In his view, great literature, art or music involves a necessary transgression of social mores; the writer or artist is always a *marginal* and rebel:

> In the case of homosexual creativity, constraints are not only beneficial but they seem to me to be indispensable…. Constraint

> favours genius, although genius inspires, conquers, and saves from despair only the small number of the chosen for whom there exists no sensation more important than the feeling of a strong aesthetic emotion.[15]

If social control is too strong, there can be no homosexual culture, but if social conditions are too permissive, the result is banal, superficial literature or art. The possibility of representing homosexuality in explicit literature, art or cinema has, for Fernandez, done little to improve the quality of such works. Michelangelo's *ignudi* in the Sistine Chapel, the homoerotic statues of Baroque sculptors, the literary tradition of veiled references to homosexuality through classical myths or platonic friendships are more interesting (and erotic) than 'gay' portrayals which leave nothing to the sexual or cultural imagination. The shadows in art and literature, 'the intentional equilibrium between what is said and what is not said', Fernandez comments, make it possible to 'attain the supreme forms of beauty'.[16]

Fernandez' Italy is not the Italy of the classics, or only remotely so. Indeed, he tries to move away from classical references to male beauty:

> I do not disregard either Athens or Rome, and…the great black bronze statues in the National Museum [in Naples] count among the sculptures which touch me the most deeply, but…I love Naples for reasons which have nothing to do with the appreciation I might have for things of the past, for culture, for the 'patrimony of humanity'.[17]

His Italy is not so much the land of marble statues and classical ruins or what Fernandez sees as the frozen beauty of neoclassical art, but the Italy of the Baroque and present-day Italy. Fernandez quotes modern authors such as Sciascia and Verga, Penna and Pirandello rather than the ancients. His works contain scattered references to Greek myth and history generally when they occur in later art and literature, and there is scarcely mention of the Roman empire at all. The Middle Ages and Renaissance get short shrift, too, while Fernandez concentrates on the sensuous beauty of Baroque art and architecture and the no less intriguing society, daily life and beliefs of the contemporary Mezzogiorno.

Fernandez' interest in Italy focuses on the richly sensual tradition of the country and its architecture, opera and art, particularly in the South—Fernandez even discusses at some length the delights of Neapolitan pastries—and the openness of Italians to varied sexual desires and experiences, notwithstanding bourgeois and clerical condemnation. For instance, Fernandez discerns an Italian fascination with androgynous sexuality from the time of the classical myths transported to Magna Grecia through the androgynous angels of Baroque sculpture to the *castrati* of Neapolitan opera, and the *femminielli,* the transvestites of contemporary Naples.[18] Furthermore, Italian mores permit sexual experimentation, just as

is the case elsewhere in the Mediterranean: 'In Mediterranean countries,… people turn a blind eye to juvenile pederasty, so long as it does not last and eventually gives way to more mature and more "virile" behaviour.'[19] Some individuals pay the price of fantasies which do not take into account the social context of homosexuality—foreigners deceived or disappointed by lovers, Winckelmann and Pasolini killed by hustlers. Yet Italy, until (and even despite) the imposition of modern bourgeois morals, remained the place where a joyful, sensuous exuberance, including sexual play, could bloom. Fernandez implies that this heritage was bequeathed to peasant Italy by Antiquity: 'In Greece one can but admire in silence the remains of a civilisation which is well and truly dead; in Sicily, by contrast, it seems that everything that was said about the ancients remains present.'[20] Fernandez argues that, despite displays of public piety, Catholicism never really took root in Sicily, as much as it was adapted to local habits, superstitions and behaviours; in Sicily, 'in each scene of daily life' one sees 'the reflection of Hellenism or the earliest period of Christianity'.[21]

This residue of Antiquity has been one of the attractions of Italy for writers such as Winckelmann and painters like the Nazarenes. *L'Amour* is a good example of Fernandez' writing about homosexual attraction to Italy among artists in the past and the inspiration this phenomenon provides for the modern author. Half a dozen Romantic artists travel to Italy to study and work; the characters are modelled on real German artists, led by Friedrich Overbeck, son of the mayor of Lübeck, and Franz Pforr, from Frankfurt. In Fernandez' rendition, Overbeck falls in love with Pforr, who reluctantly agrees to have sex with him, first in Vienna and then regularly while they live in Rome; their relationship comes to an end with Pforr's early death. The outline of the novel is historically correct, although no conclusive evidence remains of a sexual relationship between Overbeck and Pforr. The two, however, did enjoy intimate friendship, and Overbeck was plunged into depression and spiritual crisis by his friend's death.[22]

Early in their stay in Italy, Overbeck and Pforr decide to seal their friendship by doing paintings for each other: representations of friendship as two women holding hands in a garden, Pforr's 'Shulamit and Maria' and Overbeck's 'Italia and Germania'. As the title of Overbeck's work indicates, this scene formed an allegory of the union of Germanic and Mediterranean culture and art. (The influence on Marées is evident.) In Fernandez' interpretation, the two figures symbolise Overbeck and Pforr themselves, disguised as women embodying the two countries.

Italy, in *L'Amour,* does not produce a supply of sexual partners; rather it provides the venue in which Overbeck can briefly realise his love for Pforr. Italy also provides artistic inspiration. Fernandez' novel, written in a style intentionally reminiscent of nineteeth-century literature, complete with sentimentality, interprets and recaptures the Romantics' passion for Italy:

> The view of cupolas, towers, crosses, colonnades, basilicas, crumbling red walls, great parasol-pines perching on the hillside, these emblems of past glory, these monuments of eternal beauty, filled us with a child-like exaltation. Did I myself not know that the letters of ROMA could be scrambled to make AMOR? Painting certainly was the ostensible pretext for my trip, but this magnificent anagram pointed to my secret goal. What would be my destiny in this city which no one has ever entered without the feeling of being reborn to a new life?

The narrator goes on to elaborate on Overbeck's secret desires:

> To travel with Franz to continue their art studies! Finally to find the way to satisfy their artistic ambitions! In reality, as he now understood, an unconscious calculation had slipped into his project. He has counted on *dépaysement* to change the relations in their private life and, if need be, to overcome the scruples of his friend and his own timidity—the rule was that young people committed their first transgressions far from home in a country where people did not speak the language of their fathers and mothers.

L'Amour paints that fascination as an interlude; Pforr dies and Overbeck returns to Germany to marry a fiancée whom he had left. Overbeck writes to her, 'It is good to have come to this side of the Alps when one was young; but one must not wait too long to return'.[23]

The more modern face of homosexuality in Italy appears in Fernandez' book on Pasolini. In *Dans la main de l'ange,* the great cinematographer, poet and novelist struggles to combine sex and art, and that tension provides the inspiration and anger which pervade Pasolini's work. For Fernandez, Pasolini does not have to look to the classics or peasant Italy for sexual, political or cultural satisfaction; his politics is more confrontational, inspired by Marx and Gramsci and developed in his observation of the rough Roman neighbourhoods where he found his sexual partners. Pasolini is not interested in the idealised sexual unions represented in the nineteenth century, although he is as much a bourgeois intellectual as Pater or Symonds; he picks up rough hustlers outside Rome's train station and one of these street-boys murders him. But Fernandez says that Pasolini's death is really voluntary, a suicide he has sought or provoked—perhaps just as did Caravaggio or Winckelmann—as a solution to his existential problems.

From the homoerotic statues of Antiquity which figure in his studies of the Baroque[24] to the flesh-and-blood world of Pasolini's Italy of the 1960s and 1970s, Fernandez charts the history of male sexual desire in Italy. Fernandez' Italy remains a country of warm emotion and charged sexual passion, natural beauty and cultural inspiration—these go hand-in-hand and contrast with the cold, prim logic of the North.[25] Fernandez shows the underside of Italy—the poverty of the Mezzogiorno, lack of attention by public authorities to the

delapidation of monuments, the rapacity and bad taste of *nouveaux riches,* the spoiling of Italy by uncontrolled tourism. But Italy, especially the south, remains one of his ideal destinations; Fernandez fantasises that perfect places in which to have lived would have been Vienna or Naples from 1730 to 1780.[26]

Sexuality (especially homosexuality), culture and Italy are joined in the work of Fernandez. As in the case of many other writers with a similar profile, they are also fused with his life. In *Le Rapt de Ganymède,* Fernandez recalls how when he was 12 years old: 'I created my own personal mythology, well before the beginning of any sexual practice, well before I suspected that the seeds planted in my imagination by my reading and my visits to the Louvre would determine my sexual orientation.' He was drawn to Girodet's painting of Endymion and Flandrin's picture of a naked young man sitting on a rock near the sea, and he guessed:

> (1) I would grow up differently from others, interested by things which I could not talk about with anyone around me; (2) this situation would be a source of infinite torment; (3) but it would also be the sign of a secret and marvellous vocation.

His pantheon was peopled by Winckelmann, Pasolini and Overbeck and the heroes of his as-yet-unwritten novels *Porporino* and *La Gloire du paria:*

> Long before telling their story, I was myself Porporino, Winckelmann, Pier Paolo [Pasolini], Friedrich [Overbeck], Bernard [the main character in *La Gloire du paria*]: characters torn between the 'legitimate' desire for the human happiness, security and 'normality' in which millions of people live, and the certainty of finding no salvation or pleasure without descending into the hell of the pariahs.[27]

Fernandez recounts how he turned from his earlier scholarly work on Italian literature and 'straight' novels to other topics just as he came to terms with his own homosexuality. *L'Etoile rose* of 1978 marked the turning point, when Fernandez began to focus on homosexuality and history. He was less interested in the new, freer gay culture which emerged in France than in the cultural and psychological dimensions of homosexual desire at those times in the past when boundaries had to be crossed and transgressions committed:[28]

> *L'Etoile rose* had the look of both an apologia and a confession, even though this book was no more autobiographical than my others. The novels which followed brought to centre-stage 'historical' heroes; it was necessary in order to avoid the gay triumphalism which was then fashionable to return to Germany in 1809 [in *L'Amour*], Italy in the 1950s [in *Dans la main de l'ange*] and even, with *Signor Giovanni,* the eighteenth century, where society chose heretics for banishment.

Homosexuality and marginality came together with Italy. Before 'coming out' as a homosexual, says Fernandez, 'I found a way out in writing about Italy'. '"Italy's charm is related to that of love", said Stendhal. Celebrating Italy, its shores and hills, music and operas, its statues of angels and saints was for me an evocation of that which could not speak its name through socially accepted interests.' Fernandez could not be content just with celebration 'without feeling myself reduced to the rank of an aesthete or a coward', whence his concern with history and social trangression.[29] His summation about his works on writers, musicians and artists—often homosexual—is that 'the glory of the pariah, that is, the dark halo which glorifies that which is forbidden, has been the subject of all my novels over the past thirty years'.[30]

Fernandez' writing on the Mediterranean is as autobiographical as that of Winckelmann, Platen and Symonds; in fact, it is more openly and avowedly so. A major difference is that the earlier writers were constrained by social pressure to camouflage their sexual interests in descriptions of classical statues, sonnets about Venice or essays on aesthetics, whereas Fernandez freely chooses to look at Baroque art, Neapolitan *castrati* and a contemporary film-maker without disguising his personal or literary motives. At the same time, he can write 'gay' novels on themes such as coming-out, the break-up of homosexual relationships and AIDS. Earlier writers tried in many cases, successfully or not, to hide their sexuality, while Fernandez has been labelled by some critics and readers (unjustifiably) as primarily a 'gay writer'. One of the most interesting aspects of his work is that Fernandez has intentionally historicised the phenomenon of homosexual interest in the Mediterranean for the reasons outlined in *Le Rapt de Ganymède*.

Fernandez represents the most intellectual present-day writer to treat the homoerotic fascination of the Mediterranean, perhaps the last of a long line since the 1750s. However, there has been a contrary movement as well, represented by writers who discard classical, Renaissance and modern historical references, display little interest in the Mediterranean and who return disenchanted from their sojourns in the South. Some of E.M. Forster's works—though not all, as his attraction to and repulsion from the Mediterranean coexisted—foreshadow this view, but it achieves greater expression in the writings of Christopher Isherwood, Michael Davidson and Renaud Camus. In the *Journal romain* of the last of these writers, it turns into condemnation.

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

In 1962, Christopher Isherwood published *Down There on a Visit*. Isherwood, then a 58-year-old British expatriate in the United States, was best known for *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin,* published in the 1930s,

which recounted his life and times in decadent Berlin just before Hitler's takeover; the books had been made into a stage play and musical and would later become a hit movie, as 'Cabaret'. *Down There on a Visit* took up a plot from Isherwood's earlier works: an educated, middle-class English homosexual, balking at English philistinism and puritanism, travels abroad with a desire to experience an exciting foreign culture and to find a satisfactory sex life. However, the hero goes to Germany—country of Bauhaus architecture and expressionist painting, socialist activism and sexual licence—not to the Mediterranean.

Down There on a Visit is composed of four episodes. In the first, the narrator, Christopher, arrives in Hamburg in 1928 to visit a tedious and prudish English businessman who is a relation of a family member; his host trumpets the merits of study of the classics, but Christopher is uninterested. He meets and, it is implied, has an affair with a handsome young German, Waldemar. The second episode, set in Greece in 1933, follows Christopher and Waldemar on a holiday made expedient by the political situation in Germany. They land on an island, called St Gregory, to join another English homosexual, named Ambrose, and his friend Hans. Part three finds Christopher in California in 1940—the others have disappeared from the story—and describes his life with the fickle but handsome Paul, a former hustler; the two attain sexual satisfaction in each other's arms and religious enlightenment through Zen Buddhism. The final section recounts Christopher's return to Europe after the war, and after a rift with his lover, to search for traces of Paul, who has died in Paris from drug addiction, and Waldemar, who now lives in East Berlin with his wife and child (named Christoph after his old companion).

Isherwood's novel presents a panoply of sexual and cultural diversity—bisexual Waldemar, Baudelairean Paul and Wildean Ambrose. For Christopher, Utopia is decadent modern Berlin or mellow warm California. His voyage to Greece, and the impressions of the Mediterranean elsewhere in the book, reveal the decline in fascination with the European South and its homoerotic history. Christopher recognises the magnetism of the South for his British and German friends: 'Everything in his [Waldemar's] German soul responds to the pull of this traditional Nordic wander-lust: to go South—that, for a North German, is the only real adventure.' But on the boat to Athens, Christopher has second thoughts: 'Unlike Waldemar, I am not looking towards the southern city at our journey's end but back towards the northern city we have just left.' Christopher rejects the South, its culture and its past. Already in his earlier voyage to Hamburg, he complains about travel books, including the most famous story of travel in Greece:

> I knew with sudden intense force, just how awful the Odyssey and the voyage of the Pequod [in Melville's *Moby Dick*] must have

> been… and that I would have sooner or later jumped overboard rather than listen to either of these ghastly sea-bores, Ulysses and Ahab.

Writing about Christopher in the third person, the narrator remarks, uncompromisingly, 'Even more than the future, he dreads the Past'—Christopher is a modernist, not a classicist. Christopher agrees with a friend that Greek 'is the most hideous of all languages!' He decides to go to Greece because Hitler has made Berlin unbearable, but also on the simple grounds of economy: 'So why shouldn't I go to Greece? It was said to be cheap, there.' He grudgingly visits the sites in Athens, which fail to impress him, and he complains about the vulgar Greeks who haggle about selling land to Ambrose. Ambrose's factotum Aleko is only an 'obscene little paramour' who once tries to kill Hans, and the young Greek fishermen with whom Waldemar occasionally has orgies (when he is not sleeping with Christopher or an exotic woman who turns up on the island) are cruel boys who torture animals and rape a chicken. A heterosexual who frequents the tourists sums up travel to Greece with disdain: 'I don't know what brought you to this filthy country.' In his own rejection of Greece and its heritage, Christopher confesses:

> These seas and shores can't have changed very much in the past two thousand years. A classical Greek, looking out from the olive groves and seeing me in the middle distance, couldn't possibly suspect that I wasn't his time-fellow. This is a thought which ought to be thrilling, but which actually isn't, in the least. I couldn't care less, here, about Classical Greece; I feel far more remote from it than I ever do in Northern Europe.[31]

No stronger statement could be made to contradict a two-centuries-old tradition of homosexual fascination with the Mediterranean.[32] Christopher has no use for Socrates and Alcibiades, Corydon and Alexis, Hadrian and Antinous, and he has precious little time for their heirs. The South is simply a place to get away from it all, to escape Nazism, England and winter. Certainly boys are available in Greece, but so they were, or had been, in Germany, and German men, not Mediterranean ephebes, set Chrisopher's heart aflame. The theme of exile, so strong in homosexual literature, reappears in *Down There on a Visit* but Christopher's Ithaca is not found in the Mediterranean.

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

Michael Davidson was a British journalist who reported from Germany in the 1930s and Morocco in the 1940s; he then covered colonial independence movements in Malaya and Cyprus. His autobiography, *The World, The Flesh*

and Myself, published in 1962, begins: 'This is the life-history of a lover of boys', and the book details Davidson's pederasty as he travels the world on newspaper assignments. Davidson was once imprisoned for his paedophilia, but continued to practise boy-love and record his adventures. In 1970, he wrote a series of portraits of his young friends, *Some Boys,* set primarily in Africa and Asia; however, four are descriptions of Italy and Italians. They provide more explicit detail, and a thoughtful explanation of homosexual relations in Italy seen with a journalist's cynical eye, than hitherto available.

Naples was the haunt of the *lazzaroni,* 'cohorts of lighthearted vagabonds who lived in the gutters and gaily performed every kind of outrage and obscenity' in the 1700s. Their wily descendants populated the city when Davidson visited it in 1952 and again several years later: 'It may well be that the naughty population of Naples is greater in proportion to her virtuous population than that of any other great city not particularly noted for puritanism.' Twice Davidson is taken in by Neapolitan duplicity. The first time, a dishonest blackmarket money-changer spins a fine story about himself and swindles the Briton. The second episode is sexual. Davidson picks up 'a pretty boy of about fifteen with brownish fair hair and the apple cheeks and blue eyes of some far-off Northern ancestry'. He returns to Davidson's house for the evening; Davidson gives him a thousand lire after they have sex. They meet again the following night. On the third night, just as they enter the journalist's apartment, three companions of the youth burst in. Claiming to be the boy's brothers, they abuse Davidson for dishonouring him, slap around the boy as well and rob the foreigner. As they leave, the youth who has been Davidson's bed-partner 'turned for a moment to display on his sweet face a mocking mixture of a sneer and a leer. It was a sneer I certainly deserved.'[33]

Davidson lived on Ischia, in the village of Foria, in 1952 and 1953. He finds the island beautiful and blessedly bereft of the tourist trade of nearby Capri. (On Capri, 'at that time the great invasion by cackling cohorts of international queerdom hadn't yet begun'—the earlier variety of homosexual expatriate is presumably a rare species in the early 1950s.) Visitors

> were blond and pink-skinned; they'd come from their puritanical North, either coupled off in quest of a cosy honeymoon in the sun or else bursting to let their hair down in the most egregiously un-Nordic behaviour. Those not already paired off came seeking whom they could devour among the Forian youth.

Youths cluster around the boats as foreigners arrive and offer to perform diverse services. Davidson is among the potential clients, 'because I was a foreign visitor and therefore must be expected to want to meet boys'. Indeed Davidson makes friends with a boy named Gianni—'Gianni's head was perfection: the classic boyish skull; the black wavy cropped hair; the ears and

nape whose perfect fittingness caught one's breath'—and with Franco who, accompanied by a younger boy, has lunch with Davidson each day (at Davidson's invitation and expense). He eventually ends up in the Englishman's bed. Gianni returns to Davidson's house each afternoon, regular as clockwork for a full year, until the writer's departure.[34]

In Rome, sex is rather less idyllic. Davidson frequented two types of venue. One of the *stabilimenti balneari,* Italian versions of swimming pools, on the Tiber had been a boy brothel. Within sight of the Castel Sant'Angelo, Signor Barese rented cabins to clients and the fetching youths who displayed themselves on the boardwalk. In 1954, on Davidson's second visit, the proprietor was no longer accommodating, but men and boys could go to the forest along the shore to have sex in the bushes. The alternative is the cinema, and Davidson lists dingy movie-houses in the Campo dei Fiori and a street near the Trevi fountain which are hotbeds of homosexual activity in the auditorium, toilets and aisles. Most sex takes place between men and youths, who receive remuneration:

> They were mostly ordinary lower-class boys, at school or at work or looking for work; and, to them, what they did in the cinema was as ordinary a way of picking up a little pocket-money as running errands, and more pleasant.[35]

In Catania in 1958, handsome adolescents sunned themselves on secluded rocks overlooking the beach and casually masturbated. 'They came simply to amuse themselves in the pleasantest and most natural way known to them, when it was too hot for the cinema and anyhow they had no money.' They are happy among themselves in their teenage abandon but not immune to the attentions of foreigners. Yet, as Davidson admits, pleasure has its price and deeper relations are impossible: 'I made no friends while I was in Catania: only two or three acquaintances, whose specious cordiality generally was intertwined with financial requirements that weren't fun at all. It didn't strike me as a good town for friends; but it was a wonderful place for sights to see.'[36]

Davidson notes that in homosexual encounters money generally changed hands and he laments that the naturalness of sex was being corrupted by profit-making: 'The circumstances of their [the youths'] doing it implanted in their minds the notion that sex *was* prostitution, that what they had between their legs was a form of cash.' This, he adds, is not quite yet prostitution in the English sense, even if it is in the process of becoming so. *Ragazzi* simply earn spending money doing things which cause no harm and are undoubtedly pleasurable. Davidson says that sex is no more than that; there exists no deep philosophical or ethnographical fount for their behaviour, no poetic inspiration. On Ischia, he admits, 'It was at once obvious that in Foria there lived a tradition, one might almost call it Greek,

of paedophilia', but, in Rome, Davidson is more cynical. Boy-love is business, and his willingness to take advantage of it is sexual tourism, albeit with historical precedents:

> Small wonder if there's a smouldering belief in Italy that tourists as a species are sexual marauders: people who regard Italy as an easy field for their erotic eccentricities. The pursuit of boys got the name in the eighteenth century of the *vizio inglese*.... Nowadays all Englishmen, Americans and Nordics generally are expected to go for the boys until they've shown that they don't want to. The reason for this is simple: boy-lovers from abroad are apt to arrive with two ideas in their heads—that all young Italians are to be had for the paying, and that it doesn't matter what you do because you're 'abroad'.[37]

Davidson does not dispute this conclusion, nor does he claim to be exempt from the charges. The situation leaves him physically but not emotionally satisfied; sex serves as a substitute for romance:

> I found Rome, through the year I lived there, a city where affection is hard to come by, though there was sexual blandishment round every corner. Human feeling, one fancied, had been soaked up by history and the architectural telling of it: there was none left for the hearts of simple people—one felt that love had been left out of Rome's platinum atmosphere. In none of the brief friendships I hoped I was making there did I find any desire for constancy; none lasted longer than the moment when the last extra hundred lire had been wheedled or blustered forth. Roman protestations of love, like gas-fires worked through a meter, go out unless the slot is constantly re-fed. Rome, I suppose, has always been a city of whores.... John Addington Symonds...wrote in the last century: 'Instead of love, lust was the deity of the boy-lover on the shore of Tiber.' It still is.[38]

Davidson, writing about the 1940s and 1950s, sums up the end of an era, the same period treated in Malaparte's and Patroni-Griffi's works, before the effects of the 'economic miracle', increased prosperity, the extension of Americanised lifestyles to Italy and the 'sexual revolution' which destroyed a more traditional kind of sexual behaviour. He, like Pasolini and Arbasino, regretted the end of that era of a free and natural male sexuality and, its complement, the availability of boys for the modest sum of a few hundred lire. Davidson's portraits also symbolise an attitude different from that of earlier homosexual visitors: his pederasty is 'Greek love' only in name, his bed-partners are simply attractive virile adolescents not reincarnations of Antinous or Ganymede. His sexual exploits are not platonic in any sense of the word.

RENAUD CAMUS

In 1987 was published what is probably the most sexually explicit book about Italy written by a homosexual foreigner. More than the works of Isherwood or Davidson, it marked whole-hearted rejection of the romanticisation of Italian homoeroticism, past and present. The author of *Journal romain, 1985–1986* was a 40-year-old professional writer and teacher named Renaud Camus. Camus was best known for a 1981 book, *Tricks,* a diary of his multiple and varied homosexual encounters. Camus had received a prestigious grant from the French Academy in Rome to spend a year writing an account of his life in the Eternal City. He produced a text of 567 pages (plus thirty-five pages of index) chronicling his sexual and cultural activities and, occasionally, commenting on political and social events in Italy, France or the world at large.

Camus' book makes allusion to many earlier writers on Italy—Stendhal is his most regular literary companion—although not to Platen, the author whose diaries his work most closely recalls. Like Platen, Camus spends his daylight hours visiting museums, galleries, historical sites and churches and he discusses the paintings and sculptures he views, his artistic likes and dislikes. Camus also talks about the concerts he hears, particularly operas, for (like Fernandez) he is an opera fan. As in Platen's diaries, there are reports of trips around Italy, particularly to artistic centres. He mentions many of the people he meets, including celebrities, French dignitaries and other writers.

Many things in Rome please Camus—the Campidoglio is the most beautiful *piazza* in the world, the Piazza Navona one of the most successful ensembles of urban architecture. The view from his apartment at the Villa Médicis across the Borghese Gardens and down the Spanish Steps is incredible. Rome provides a place for innumerable 'delightful promenades'; and, 'Each time that I cross the city, a new detail strikes me or seduces me'.[39]

Camus likes Rome but has an intense dislike for the Romans. He lists their demerits. They are hopelessly rude, pushing, shoving and showing absolutely no regard for others. Most are ill-bred and vulgar. They talk constantly during concerts or films, chattering just to hear their own voices. They have no sense of civic pride and no qualms about littering. They drive aggressively. They have no appreciation of the 'civilisation of the table': diners' food is badly served by hostile waiters. They totally lack manners. They are no better than provincial. They are too puritanical to take delight in pleasure. For the foreigner, everything is difficult, inconvenient and corrupt in Italy. 'Altogether reliable indicators prove that I am not entirely mad when I have the feeling of living among savages', he rants.[40]

Camus heaps particular scorn on gay life in Rome, which he thinks concentrates all the bad qualities of Italians. The 'spectacle of Roman gay life is not brilliant'. The few gay bars which exist are expensive, prissy and

unwelcoming; Rome has not successfully developed a gay subculture. Camus does not lack for sex—his book recounts in explicit detail almost countless episodes of fellatio, sodomy, masturbation and other sexual acts, often with men he meets in the gardens of the Campidoglio, the busiest cruising area in the city. But few encounters satisfy Camus. Italian men are uninterested in kissing, carressing and sexual foreplay; they are, he writes in English, too much 'to the point' about sex and are 'terribly genito-anally' obsessed. They search out quick and usually furtive encounters and in bars make no attempt to attract the attention of other men but haughtily wait to be approached. Furthermore, they have no notion of safe sex—Camus was writing as AIDS had reached epidemic proportions.

Camus argues that Italians are no more civilised in heterosexual behaviour than in homosexual relationships. This he links to Italian notions of masculine virility and domination:

> The Latin male by his up-bringing, the tastes he has been given, the image of himself which has been inculcated, has no regard for women, and least of all his own. He lives in the sombre silence or the empty tumult of emphatic virility. From among the few things which can interest him—sport, automobiles, perhaps politics—women are excluded. He converses only with his workmates and his friends. With his wife, he seems to be in exile from real life. These too-manly males, with their aberrant idea of virility, are not satisfying lovers. They are egotistical and hurried, thinking only about the animal satisfaction of their desires. Giving their women sexual pleasure must surely be for most of them the least of their concerns—and indeed must seem to them indecent.

Far from benefitting homosexuals, the cult of virility and male comradeship means that Italian men are terrified of being seen as homosexual, fearful and unresponsive in their rendezvous, too serious about reaching orgasm as quickly as possible and inattentive to their partners' desires. In sex, they want only to be fellated by their partners or proceed rapidly to 'active' anal intercourse. They are not only ill-mannered and 'closeted' but possess an unattractive notion of sexuality in general:

> One senses a stupid cult of virility tied to power, domination, even the humiliation of the other person…. Just as for the Romans of Antiquity, homosexuality is acceptable only when it is 'active', that is, as a confirmation of strength, vanity and superiority. There is no gentleness, no humour, no generosity.

Italian men are lousy lovers, in short, and Camus concludes: 'Italians, including homosexuals, hate homosexuality more than any other people in Europe.'[41]

Camus admits that Italian homosexual behaviour may have something to do with notions of sexuality that predate 'gay' lifestyles, and he hears stories about the abandon of boys and men to all sorts of liaisons in the past. He finds little of this in Rome in the 1980s and misses the gay subculture of Paris. Camus also fears that perhaps he is not physically attractive to Italians—though the number of his casual encounters seems to contradict that view and he makes more attempts to find lovers than to make friends. Nevertheless, he says that a stay in Italy has given him 'Italophobia', and he wishes, 'My God,…keep me from hating the Italians'.[42]

Like almost every other traveller in Italy, Camus is inspired to draw a comparison between North and South on the basis of daily life, art and architecture and, in his case, gay sex. The South's once powerful sexual attraction has faded and proximity breeds contempt:

> Until the age of twenty, under my family's influence, I had loved only the North. I tried to learn Swedish, spent my holidays in Scotland adventuring in the Shetlands, and dreamed about Iceland. Sexual desire brusquely made me change directions. Now I loved only dark boys, preferably hairy and mustachioed and not too tall. Cultural preferences and the enjoyment of fine weather confirmed this conversion. Painting and, above all, architecture, but also music (though less so) and bodily pleasures all directed me towards the South, particularly towards Italy. But there remained in me something of the Northerner—resistant, indignant, exasperated: it was a taste for orderliness, respect for the law, faithfulness to an agreement.

He adds: 'The most beneficial effect the stay in Rome had on me was to enhance infinitely the charms of Paris to my eyes.'[43]

Camus' *Journal romain* is a mordant portrait of Rome, reflecting as much on the author's preoccupations as on Rome. The book is a product of the age of gay liberation, gay pride and unabashed hedonism rather than one of shame, clandestinity and illegality. The book reverberates with the same praise for Italy's artisitic highlights which have enchanted tourists since the times of Winckelmann. But—and here lies the great difference from earlier homosexual writers—Camus disdains the Italians' attitudes and sexual views and behaviour. Camus contentedly remarks on the politeness of a Swede he meets, the charm of the English—he was a student in Oxford and retains a fondness for the British—and the fun to be found in the gay nightspots of Paris. Gay Rome by contrast is detestable and the Romans intolerable.

Camus' work is remarkable because it discusses sex in Italy so explicitly and because its view is so unremittingly negative. Camus looks for erotic satisfaction in flesh-and-blood Italians and they do not measure up. Almost two hundred and fifty years of sexual longing for Italy, mixed with, hidden

behind and justified through aesthetic yearning comes to an end with Camus' diary. The demythologisation of homoerotic Italy foreshadowed by Forster and sustained by Isherwood and Davidson comes to a culmination with Camus—although he is a contemporary of the Italophile Fernandez.[44]

Ironically, Camus' sexual dissatisfaction in Italy occurred after so-called 'sexual liberation' and 'gay pride' should have given birth to an even more vibrant homosexuality than ever before. But the failure of Italy to develop a northern-style 'gay' subculture combined with the destruction of the old sexual culture. Malaparte in the 1940s and Patroni-Griffi in the 1950s, as well as Davidson, remarked on the heightened commercialisation of sex and the disappearance of traditional sexuality. Camus in the 1980s was not looking for the type of homosexual relationships enjoyed by Symonds or Adelswärd-Fersen, although none of his 'sociological' comments disprove what they, and other observers, have said about Italian sexuality. But Camus cannot find fulfilling new gay relationships. The sexual symbiosis between foreigner and Italian had been ruptured. The sort of sexual satisfaction savoured by foreigners in the 1700s and 1800s could not survive—for Italians or visitors—without the philosophical and aesthetic edifice and the socioeconomic conditions necessary to support it.

CONTEMPORARY ART

Have the visual arts followed the same trajectory as literature in their treatment of the homoerotic Mediterranean? Paintings of the Mediterranean with a clearly homoerotic aspect are relatively rare in European art after the 1920s and 1930s. Few prominent artists were openly homosexual and, although modern art continued to reflect sexual interests, homosexual images seldom appear in the works of top artists except occasionally in those of Dalí—there is no homosexual equivalent of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. The philosophical heritage of the Mediterranean lost its centrality as a cultural referent, so portrayals of gods and myths are not often seen. Artists who produced homoerotic works were tempted by other archetypes, such as Cocteau's sailors or Hockney's California boys. Certainly some paintings or drawings made vague reference to a banal sort of Mediterranean—the 'classical' profiles of figures in Duncan Grant's scenes of bathers or wrestlers, for instance—but the context and the allusions were missing.[45]

Among the exceptions was the English artist John Minton, who painted homoerotic works based on themes taken from Greek tragedy, while John Craxton found inspiration in Crete and other rural areas of Greece for pictures of youths. In the 1980s Mario Dubsky picked up on ancient myth in 'Pan by Moonlight', which shows a man reaching around the kneeling body (or a statue) of Pan to grasp his outsized erect penis. Duane Michals,

a photographer, has been inspired by the classical Greeks, as well as by Michelangelo, in his pictures of naked men. Delmas Howe transformed the ancient gods into American cowboys in paintings called 'Atlas', 'Hermes and Apollo' and 'Theseus and Perithous'—only the Greek names remain in Howe's visual argument that cowboys are the modern equivalent to the gods of the Pantheon.[46] David Ligare transports a sensually naked Greek god to a Californian setting in 'Hermes and the Cattle of Apollo'.[47] Some other paintings and photographs incorporated classical or Renaissance motifs; Davies and Starr's 1984 photo of Michael Clark portrays a young man standing naked on a pedestal, his crotch and thighs covered by a superimposed photograph of the crotch and thighs of Michelangelo's 'David'.[48] In other works, the classical reference is less obvious: one art photograph which shows a handsome, bare-chested man with a large snake wrapped around his neck and shoulders may be an allusion to the classical Laocoön group discussed by Winckelmann.

At another level, classical—or more properly pseudo-classical—motifs have been employed in advertising, 'skin magazines' and pornography. The 1940s and 1950s saw a vogue for body-building inspired by Charles Atlas. Connected to this fad was the publication of 'muscle magazines', with photographs of bulky weightlifters, such as 'Mr. Universe'. These constituted, according to one magazine cover, a 'pictorial display of the world's best built men'. On another cover, a nude man with muscles pumped up and oiled, but sexual organs hidden, sits atop a Doric column. Numerous periodicals pictured similar muscle-men in 'classical' poses or with 'classical' props. Such publications appealed to gym-buffs, but were particularly popular among homosexuals; *Physique, Men and Art* and *Physique Artistry* were among the only publications where homosexuals could see pictures of naked or near-naked men.[49] As sexual attitudes became more tolerant in the 1960s and 1970s, more flesh appeared in publications, occasionally including pictures with classical flourishes; a 1987 calendar, with 'butch' naked athletes photographed against classical ruins, was entitled 'Olympia—A Tribute to the Ancient Games'.[50] Homoerotic images of the classical world, without the baggage of aesthetics and philosophy, were reduced to a marketing gimmick and soft pornography.

On an even more carnal level, present-day erotic magazines cater to specific fantasies, for instance, the gay 'porn' magazine *Blueboy* and its 1980 issue on 'The Italians'.[51] The cover promises '23 Color Pages of Latin Lovers', 'A Sensuous Tour of Venice by Night' and 'Italian-American Studs'. The main portfolio displays a selection of virile models, photos obviously taken in a studio, juxtaposed with tourist photos of Rome, Florence, Venice and Milan (including homoerotic classical statues and Michelangelo's Adam from the Sistine Chapel). The models, given Italian names, might or might not be Italians, but the *impaginazzione* is intended to reinforce ideas about the sexual appeal of Italian men and the cultural continuity of homoeroticism

from Antiquity through the Renaissance to the present. Another feature, 'Venice by Night', presents rather pleasant amateur photos of Venice (with no human figures) complemented by a short narrative poem—not unlike Symonds' poem on Venice in *In The Key of Blue,* although more explicit and less accomplished—about an evening meeting between two men at the Pitti Palace followed by a night of love and a dawn walk on the Piazza San Marco. Here the pictures of erotic men are left to the reader's imagination, and the publisher obviously also counts on his not being too concerned that the poet has relocated Florence's Pitti Palace in Venice.

TONY PATRIOLI

Two contemporary European figures stand out for their links with the artistic tradition of a homoerotic Mediterranean. Tony Patrioli is a contemporary Italian whose works are entirely homoerotic and Mediterranean. Many would consider his albums of photos of adolescent boys soft-core porn, but they are no more nor less pornographic than those of Gloeden. Indeed, they update Gloeden's pictures; two photos are titled 'Homage to von Gloeden'. One shows a dark-haired boy standing naked in front of a palm tree; the other is Patrioli's rendition of the Flandrin-Gloeden image of the naked boy on a rock. In Patrioli's version, the boy faces in a different direction and his adolescent body is held in a slightly more rigid position than in the earlier studies; his genitals are not visible. In the distance lies an island, but the slightly blurry focus makes sky and sea almost indistinguishable.[52]

Patrioli's debt to Gloeden is obvious in many photos, even to the point that some seem caricatures of Gloeden's sentimental voyeurism. The boys in Patrioli's photographs are the sorts of adolescents with pretty faces and good bodies whom Gloeden photographed a century previously. Only the tunics and statues, wreaths and headbands which figure in Gloeden's work are absent. Patrioli's models wear bright swimsuits, while the 'tan line' shows up on the naked ones. A number are clothed in the modern youth uniform of jeans and tennis shoes, a few wear neck chains, rings or leather jackets, an article of clothing closely connected to gay fashion. The youths themselves look different from those of late-nineteenth-century Taormina, reflecting the prosperity of contemporary Italy: they are healthy and well-groomed and some sport designer haircuts. (Some, too, sport hairy chests, a feature which never appealed to Gloeden.) A number of Patrioli's models, unlike Gloeden's, proudly display erect penises for the camera; Patrioli's decision to photograph boys with erect (and usually large) penises focuses attention on the genitals and obviously suggests sexual readiness and desire. His photographs show no sex scenes, only the occasional shot of a boy with his arm around a companion. Patrioli, like Gloeden, is undoubtedly aware

of the legal and commercial difference between hard-core and soft-core erotic photographs.

Ivan Teobaldelli, in an introduction to one of Patrioli's collections, links Gloeden and Patrioli and points to the changes in Europe since the German's time:

> Only fifty years have passed [since the death of Gloeden], yet the gods no longer inhabit the Mediterranean…. On the horizon appear not Ganymede or Helen, but the menacing silhouette of an American cruiser anchored at Mergellina, keeping Psyche's bust under aim.

Teobaldelli nevertheless points to a certain unspecified particularity in Italian society which allows Patrioli to meet and photograph naked boys and to publish his works:

> How unthinkable such complicity would be in our [homo-] sexual ghettoes! It has its roots in that infancy of Mediterranean culture where the disrespectful and implacable force of Eros justifies the actions of both mortals and immortals. In these days of video-films and mass production, Patrioli's photos resemble strange wild flowers, archaeological memories which spring up among the ruins and advertising posters, between shells and cigarette butts. Yet however much abased and tacky the setting, an invisible event remains: the camera has caught the malicious laughter of the god.[53]

A telling difference between Patrioli and Gloeden is that the former is Italian, not a German expatriate. But the big difference between Patrioli and his predecessors is that his pictures are gay rather than homosexual or homoerotic, a question of blatancy and identity. Patrioli's albums are published by an Italian gay monthly and marketed in gay bookshops; his photographs feature in gay magazines. They are no doubt intended as artistic works but are unabashedly erotic photos designed to provoke masturbatory fantasies. Patrioli specialises in *ragazzi* to the exclusion of other subjects, unlike List or Gloeden, and his photographs lack the *mise-en-scène* of earlier photographers,[54] set-ups which generally camouflaged or justified outright erotic intentions: this is no longer necessary. They are sexual photographs and little else. The idea underlying them is not the perfection of classical beauty, in flesh or sculpture, the nobility of 'Greek love' or the culture of Antiquity, but purely and simply the sex appeal of Italian boys and the carnal pleasures which they offer: sex, not love; orgasm, not philosophy; a fuck, not aesthetics. This is post-gay-liberation artwork at its most fundamental, with the Mediterranean as setting, not justification. Nevertheless, Patrioli relies on his photos to arouse general feelings about Latin sexual attraction and the tourist pleasures of Italy, just as producers of other sorts of erotica draw on reservoirs of different cultural memories and sexual stereotypes.

CARLO MARIA MARIANI

One artist has revived a homoerotic myth of the Mediterranean and, in so doing, makes explicit reference both to ancient art and to the neoclassical movement of the eighteenth century. His paintings provide an apt parallel to the writings of Fernandez. Carlo Maria Mariani is a leading post-modern European painter of the school which Charles Jencks calls 'canonic' or 'metaphysical' classicism.[55] A Roman, the son of a writer, Mariani studied art and began exhibiting in the 1970s. He cites his earliest influences as Tintoretto and Caravaggio. Later, Mariani turned to the Enlightenment, reading 'much literature of the period, especially Winckelmann', and setting for himself 'an attempt at the aesthetics of beauty'. His works 'are suggested to me by fantasy or by certain Classical iconography, especially Greek statuary'. The twin influences in his more recent works have been classical art and subsequent literary and pictorial interpretations of Antiquity, such as the paintings of Winckelmann's friend Raphael Anton Mengs—Winckelmann's 'ideas for me were extremely contemporary and I actually tried to become Mengs'.[56] Mariani's art is admittedly intellectual and referential; one work of two seated statue-like figures painting each other bears the revealing title 'The Hand Submits to the Intellect'. Mariani also confesses to artistic nostalgia:

> I felt that those artists [of the neoclassical period], just like myself, worked primarily with their mind, not their hands. I also felt very closely their identification and competition with great art of the past, as well as their deep, latent melancholy at the thought of never being able to reach the splendour of the past.[57]

Mariani's work, according to one critic, 'is embedded in the past (and vice versa) through complex layers of allusion which are in effect a summation of Western art history'. Mariani alludes to both classical and Renaissance art, and even more intensely to neoclassical art, as well as to painting of the early twentieth century; his most recently exhibited works quote Duchamp, Brancusi and Calder. Yet his work is more than 'quotational art', because it is a 'dialogue with history', a debate between the beautiful and the sublime; it is philosophical as well as historical art.[58]

Many of Mariani's works are a reworking of older paintings or themes.[59] 'The Constellation of the Lion (The School of Rome)' (1980–1) takes as its model Raphael's 'Parnassus' and Mengs's version of that painting. Mariani puts himself at the centre of the work, as a blue-robed master surrounded by various other artists dressed in classical garb—including Cy Twombly, Franceso Clemente, Sandro Chia and Yannis Kounellis, as well as several prominent art dealers (one portrayed as a turtle). A handsome, rather androgynous figure lies naked and prone in the foreground; above hover Ganymede (with the face of a real Italian performance artist) and Zeus in

the usual form of an eagle. Goethe's famous design for a monument formed of a sphere atop a square pedestal appears next to a figure wearing Goethe's trademark hat (from the Tischbein portrait of Goethe).[60] Other distinct references to neoclassical works abound in Mariani's *oeuvre*. A portrait of Angelica Kauffmann shows Goethe's friend and fellow artist in Rome wearing his hat. The sphere and pedestal monument, separated to become seats for the two painters, reappears in 'The Hand Submits to the Intellect'. 'Le Pelletier' reinterprets David's study of the assassinated body of the French revolutionary Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau. Two paintings entitled 'Gigantic Head', according to Mariani, 'stem from Winckelmann's definition of Beauty as that which it is impossible to define'.[61]

Mariani's own sexual interests are not discussed in published critiques of his works, but many of his paintings are extremely homoerotic. 'Victorious Athlete' (1979–80) is a portrait of a classically handsome sportsman, holding a spear and a palm frond and posed between Grecian columns. 'It is Forbidden to Doubt the Gods' shows a *putto* nestling against a sleeping male artist, who holds a bundle of paintbrushes in a phallic position atop his crotch. 'Poseidon' shows another handsome youth lying on his back with his arms raised in fright as a giant foot presses against his belly in what becomes a scene of sexual seduction or violence.

'This is Not a Young Man Suiciding' features a young man clad only in a Phrygian bonnet, holding in one hand an upside down pipe pointed at his temple—the quotation from Magritte is obvious—and, in the other, a rubber dildo, the top of which is bent over as if melting. The use of the dildo is very suggestive: in the hands of a man it implies homosexual pleasure, but its limpness pokes fun at the idea of male phallic potency. The pipe/gun aimed at the model's head seems a sly joke, repeating King George V's oft-quoted remark about homosexuals—men like that usually shoot themselves. Mariani's painting is reassuring: neither homosexuality nor impotence are grounds for suicide. The Phrygian cap, a symbol from both Antiquity and the French Revolution, the classical and neoclassical ages, represents emancipation from psychological fears and social constraints.[62]

In his various renditions of the myth of Zeus and Ganymede, painted in the 1970s, the homoerotic message in Mariani's art is clearest. Zeus and Ganymede appear in 'Constellation' as part of the background. In 'Ganymede' it forms the subject of a scene of the god's enjoyment of his triumph. Ganymede sits on a rock (naked except for a classical-style helmet) against an Arcadian landscape of trees and a lake. He raises a chalice in a salute to or as a service performed for Zeus, who, as eagle, sits next to him with a wing spread around the ephebe's shoulder. The youth looks submissive and resigned, while the eagle's eye shows domination and possession. 'Rape of Ganymede' moves the action back a step earlier in the story and makes the kidnapping less romantic, if more dramatic. The eagle now has an old and godlike bearded face; flying above Ganymede, he sinks

his claws into the boy's thighs, pulling his legs apart, raising his buttocks and tearing away the cloth which presumably covered his genitals. Ganymede stretches his arms above his head, offering no resistance but displaying no particular joy at being taken to the heavens. The lighting carefully illuminates the boy's perfect face and body but keeps the eagle partly in shadow. The painting is a powerful representation of sexual power and sexual submission, coitus between god and mortal as the pederastic conquest of a youth by a deity. In the placement of the figures, the picture holds a frank implication of the sexual foreplay leading to anal intercourse. Finally, the painting is an artistic quotation from Michelangelo. Mariani has in this picture taken the myth of Ganymede 'as a subject and rework[ed] it as part of a current mythology…. The postures and juxtapositions of incongruous figures make this not a hackneyed illustration of Greek mythology but a surreal "remythification" of the homosexual world.'[63]

A NOTE ON FILM

One new art form of the twentieth century has been cinematography. Homoeroticised images of the Mediterranean and homoerotic references to classics have not been common in film. Homosexuals have been represented disparagingly by the cinema in general; the collaborative nature of movie-making, involving directors, actors, writers and technical specialists and until recent years the structures of censorship, have further limited treatment of homosexual issues.[64] Some references do appear, however, even in the earliest decades of cinema. For instance, Greek-style homoerotic athleticism was the central theme in the German 'Weg zu Kraft und Schönheit' ('The Road to Strength and Beauty') of the 1920s. As described by Richard Dyer, the film had evident homoerotic aspects: 'Set in a re-creation of a Greek arena, its gay appeal lay not only in the sight of multitudes of muscular young men clad in thongs and jock-straps, but in its whole ambience.' In the opening sequence, the viewer sees handsome men wrestling, sitting at the feet of a Socratic master or simply watching the action in the arena. The camera dwells on the physiques of the men, one of whom has his arm around another. Dyer continues:

> The framing of the scene…gives the display of the male body male-identified gay inflections: the single figures suggest the ideals of classical beauty, the two young men are in an attitude of friendship, the Socratic group points to the notion of 'pedagogic eros'.[65]

Later films made little explicit reference to classical norms of homosexuality. The 'Latin lover', however, was a popular pin-up actor and generally played a macho heartbreaker. Rudolph Valentino, Ramon

Novarro, Gérard Philippe and Montgomery Cliff conformed to the stereotype of dark male beauty and heroic roles. All were, in fact, homosexual, although few of their films had strongly identifiable homosexual characters or situations, let alone ones with classical resonance. Homosexuals who were open about their sexuality in writing were more reticent to make films on homosexuality—Genet was an exception, and his 'Chant d'Amour' of 1950 was a blatantly homosexual film. Well-known professional cinematographers who were homosexual, such as Eisenstein, were usually not forthcoming about their sexual interests.

Less well-known film-makers occasionally ventured onto the terrain, one at least with a Mediterranean interest. Gregory Markopoulos, in the late 1940s, made a trilogy of films in French entitled 'Du sang, de la volupté et de la mort' ('Blood, Voluptuousness and Death'). Two of them, 'Lysis' and 'Charmides', took their names from Plato's dialogues about friendship and pictured 'artistic' men, only vaguely disguised practising homosexuals and much male-bonding. Another film by Markopoulos, 'Twice a Man' (1962–3), included scenes of gay men visiting a museum of Greek sculptures, unsubtly suggesting connections between ancient and modern sexuality.[66]

By the 1960s and 1970s there was a growing number of underground homosexual films, a few with vaguely Mediterranean themes or scenes. 'Pink Narcissus'—'underground, kitsch and softporn', according to Dyer—included a scene of the handsome hero as a Roman slave. 'Sebastiane' portrayed, in distinctly homoerotic terms, the martyrdom of St Sebastian under the Roman empire, always a favourite episode for artists and photographers to show male nudity. The gay documentary 'Race d'Ep', made in 1977 by Lionel Soukaz and Guy Hocquenghem, included a sequence on Gloeden.[67]

Mainstream films set in the Mediterranean world, though not homosexual, reinforced notions of classical beauty and sexual licence for general audiences, and homosexual viewers could read into them a relatively laudatory appreciation of the classical world and, as well, appreciate the bodies of the stars. 'Ben Hur', filmed in 1926 with Francis X.Bushman and Ramon Novarro and remade in 1959 with Stephen Boyd and Charlton Heston, and 'Spartacus', a 1960 film starring Tony Curtis and Laurence Olivier, were two of the best known of numerous movies about ancient Rome to feature handsome bare-chested actors. The whole *genre* of gladiator movies was a popularised rendition of the ancient world filled with hunky warriors. Films about Caligula and other notorious emperors portrayed the decadence that was supposed to have contributed to the fall of Rome (but, to some viewers, may have looked rather enticing). 'Action-packed' adventures hardly aspired to project a considered version of ancient aesthetics, philosophy or sexuality but may have underlined some of the opinions and prejudices (or fantasies) held by the audience.

Pier Paolo Pasolini presented a more intellectual and often controversial version of various epochs in his films. Pasolini's historical films are replete with sexual themes, including homosexual episodes; 'The Decameron', 'The Thousand and One Nights', 'The Canterbury Tales' and 'Salo' all show Pasolini's taste for periods of historical change, societies sometimes considered decadent and ribald situations. Implicitly, Pasolini's films suggest that such periods were more tolerant of sexual diversities than modern bourgeois society. The films feature handsome actors, young men possessed of the sort of classical features, perfect physiques and dark good looks which would have pleased Winckelmann or Gloeden; some of the actors were Pasolini's lovers. But, with the exception of 'Medea' and 'Oedipus Rex', Pasolini did not set his films in a homoerotically Mediterranean setting.

By the time it became socially acceptable (although only just so) and financially possible to make movies with openly gay themes, in the 1980s, the Mediterranean reference to homosexuality was no longer in vogue. Cinematographers seldom made films set in Antiquity and films which referred to homosexuality in the Mediterranean were themselves historical films about different periods. Often, too, they were dramatisations of books, such as 'Maurice' and 'A Room with a View', based on Forster's novels. In 'Brideshead Revisited', a television series based on Evelyn Waugh's book of the same name, British undergraduates are bound by a close male friendship; in one sequence they go for a holiday in Venice. Aschenbach goes to his rendezvous with death in Venice in Visconti's film of Thomas Mann's novella. More recently, the openly gay British film-director Derek Jarman has made a film with a homoerotically Italian theme, 'Caravaggio'. Jarman portrays Caravaggio as a brilliant painter, lusty boy-lover and something of a lout; the models and scenes used by Jarman bring to life Caravaggio's paintings and bring virile ephebes to the screen. The low-budget movie was entirely filmed in a London warehouse, however, so Italy, even as a landscape, never appears. All of these films achieved great popularity and each became a gay cult favourite. But they are strictly historical pieces evocative of different ages which romanticised the homoerotic Mediterranean. In other films, Italy provides decor and decoration, or at most a historical plot, rather than the resting-place for a classical culture which alone can justify and exalt love between men.

PAST AND PRESENT

Winckelmann reintroduced notions of a homoerotic Antiquity and a homoerotic Italy to Europe in the 1700s; his views gained general credence in the 1800s and survived until the middle of the 1900s. They have since fallen out of fashion, but it is fitting that the two figures who have so consciously returned to them—Fernandez in literature, Mariani in painting

—have acknowledged Winckelmann's influence. Fernandez and Mariani look to history for inspiration, just as do Derek Jarman in film and Tony Patrioli and a host of 'porn' photographers. The Greco-Roman fantasy has proved its staying-power over two and a half centuries in various 'noble' examples of serious art and literature. When popularised to become advertisements, gladiator movies, magazines sold in plastic wrappers and trashy novels, the images consecrated by Winckelmann's and Pater's aesthetics, Platen's sentiments, Gloeden's and List's photography and Symonds' history seem to have come a long way—perhaps in a downward spiral. But it is just possible that Winckelmann, with heart palpitating in ecstasy before the statue of Apollo, or Gloeden, busily taking thousands of photographs of naked boys, would have been amused or excited as they either read about their interests in contemporary novels or looked at recent Mediterranean porn.