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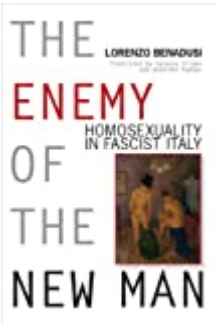

Lorenzo Benadusi. *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy.* Translated by Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012. xxi + 432 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-299-28390-2; ISBN 978-0-299-28394-0.

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Homosexuality in Fascist Italy

There is a wonderfully odd moment in the film adaptation of Patricia Highsmithâs *The Talented Mr Ripley* (dir. Anthony Minghella, 1999) when the protagonist is asked in a police interview if he is homosexual. A friend who is translating the interrogation for Tom Ripley remarks on how foolish it is to be asked such a question in a country that refuses to believe that homosexuality even exists. Set in the late 1950s, the filmâs narrative occurs against the backdrop of a recently post-Fascist Italy. As Lorenzo Benadusiâs book explains, the situation was a good deal more complex than this moment suggests. *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy*, now available to English-speaking readers in the accurate translation by Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney, is a work that investigates Italian cultureâs peculiar, difficult, and silencing relationship to homosexuality. It also ends a long-standing reluctance amongst Italian historians to investigate the history of homosexuality and explores the implications of such a complex historical category.

Throughout the twentieth century totalitarian regimes in Europe have carried out repressive policies against homosexuality, and Fascism was no exception. However, Benadusi warns us against the easy assumption that the Fascist treatment of homosexuality simply applied only to the German Nazi model, and instead he emphasizes the specificity of Fascist attitudes. How does the Italian repression of homosexuality during Fascism differ in comparison to other European totalitarian regimes such as Nazism? How is the Fascist idea of the ânew manâ–a warrior capable of restoring an entire society–related to the rejection of homosexuality? Why has Italy been considered a privileged destination for same-sex desire by men like John Addington Symonds and E. M. Forster? These are only some of the questions Lorenzo Benadusiâs book addresses, and thus it marks the first thorough analysis of Italian homosexuality under Fascism through exhaustive archival research. The study is not limited to the history of homosexuality during the Ventennio but incorporates an inquiry into the years before the regime in order to explain that social and political homophobia was not a Fascist prerogative but was already deeply rooted in Italian culture.

The seven chapters into which the book is divided aim to explain through the use of diverse sources–jurisprudence, science, medicine, religion, and politics–how the history of homosexuality was linked to concepts of virility and masculinity in a project of the regime to regulate and transform Italian people. In the first chapter, Benadusi examines the character of the âNew Manâ as conceptualized by Fascism and elucidates how the body started to be constructed around an idea of a warrior able to embody all the virtues professed by the Fascist ideology. The implications of such a model in the repression of homosexuality constitute the core of the book. In chapter 2, while investigating the ways in which the homosexual body was scrutinized through a new attention to scientific theories, Benadusi also gives an important account on the influence of sexology in Italy, especially through Edward Carpenter and Magnus Hirschfeld. The publication of the journal *Rassegna di Studi Culturali*, edited by Aldo Mieli in the 1920s, witnesses the interest of some Italian intellectuals to understand homosexuality in a time when it shifted from being exclusively a moral and religious issue to one pertaining to science. The journal was closed by the regime that was rather more interested in the regulation of homosexuality than in the knowledge about it.

The book analyzes the politics of homosexuality, giving a systematic account of the juridical changes in Italian legislation up to the elimination of a specific code of regulation in 1930 on the grounds that âthis abominable vice is not so spread among usâ (p. 104). This statement is revealing about the silencing politics often adopted by Italian legislators, with all the consequences for the (mis)understanding of homosexuality in Italy (chapter 3).

Geographical space is one of the axes through which to read homosexuality in Italy. Benadusi surveys the pre-Unification period when each state used different juridical codes, thus creating a system where the legal regulation of homosexuality–and hence the attitude–was differentiated according to the geographical location. The legacy of such understanding remains, according to the book, in the cultural and social perception of homosexuality in Fascism and extends, I add, to contemporary Italy.

Chapter 4 is an examination of how homosexuals were perceived both as a threat to the âinterest of the state,â and damaging to the image of the nation abroad during the Fascist era. Hence the necessity for repression of the âviceâ of homosexuality with the use of *confino*, a form of forced residence, modified on a pre-existing model or the segregation in colonies. Using documented cases, police investigations, letters, interviews, and other documents in different places in Italy, Benadusi analyzes the implications of the absence of a specific code to punish homosexuality, often misinterpreted by European homosexual men looking for sexual liberation as freedom but which in reality meant that it was simply regulated under indecent behavior and solicitation. Courts, Benadusi points out in chapter 5, became the places where masculinity, virility, and moral issues were discussed and defined. The boundaries between crime and sin became blurred, the homosexual was perceived as a âdisturbing factor for moralityâ (p. 186), and judiciary action was used as a tool to prescribe male behavior. Cesare Lombrosoâs theories, according to which homosexuals and criminals shared the same atavistic moral insanity, remained undisputed and for this reason many homosexuals were in jail as police operated to arrest male prostitutes. A strict differentiation between active and passive pederasts reiterated–even in jail–the emphasis on the body and the role in sexual acts. While the passive pederast was believed to be affected by a congenital disorder, the active one was a heterosexual pushed to men only by the urge of sexual activity, reiterating a dichotomy of values. Pederasts were put in isolation or prescribed labor and in some jails the directors required psychological and psychiatric detention. In most cases homosexuals were sent to jail or asylums.

The political use of homosexuality as an accusation and a weapon against whomever did not conform to the prescriptions of the regime in terms of masculinity is the core of chapter 6. Benadusi explains that homosexuality was the marker to disqualify enemies and since private life had a political value, Fascism used mechanisms to control it through a system of spies and informers, some of whom were internal to the homosexual scene. Homosexuals were perceived as a cluster of antifascists; hence the accusation was used against anyone who did not fully adhere to the Fascist ideology. Silence remained the preferred choice for dealing with the issue.

The last chapter is dedicated to bourgeois respectability and Fascist morality and the regimeâs ambivalence towards homosexuality, which ranged between ârepression and laxity in relation to pederastyâ (p. 271). The focus was on visibility and appearance therefore as virility was conceived as an appearance threat; the stigma was on effeminate men and male prostitutes, who were the ones to be punished. This is a fundamental point and one that is still relevant to understanding the perception of the homosexual body in an Italian context. The effeminate man was denigrated regardless of his sexuality, cre-

ating the mode of the contemporary straight-acting gay man. The âNew Manâ as the virile man who embodied military behavior was the ideal every male citizen had to aspire to, and personal needs and interests were to be subordinated to the collective. The ability to fight for the country was fundamental, and was the only way for homosexuals to conform to the model of the New Man.

Benadusiâs book stands in between history and gender studies and because of its hybrid nature it reveals different flaws according to the readerâs perspective. For an historian, as noted by Emilio Gentile in his outstanding foreword in the book, it has the flaw of separating âFascist totalitarian ideologyâ (p. xvi) from concrete policy. For a reader from a gender studies background and with an interest in how homosexuality was lived, the book lacks in giving voice to the victims of such repression and in investigating further the implication in the lives of human beings. Nevertheless, its major contribution is its attempt to begin to fill the gaps in the history of homosexuality and menâs studies. Benadusiâs book is significant reading for anyone interested in many of the areas linked to homosexuality in an Italian context, from politics to sociology, to juridical history and cultural studies.

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